

THE GRATEFUL DEAD'S BOB WEIR (1947-2026)

# GUITAR WORLD

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**THE ULTIMATE**

# JOE PERRY

BY  
THE MAN  
HIMSELF

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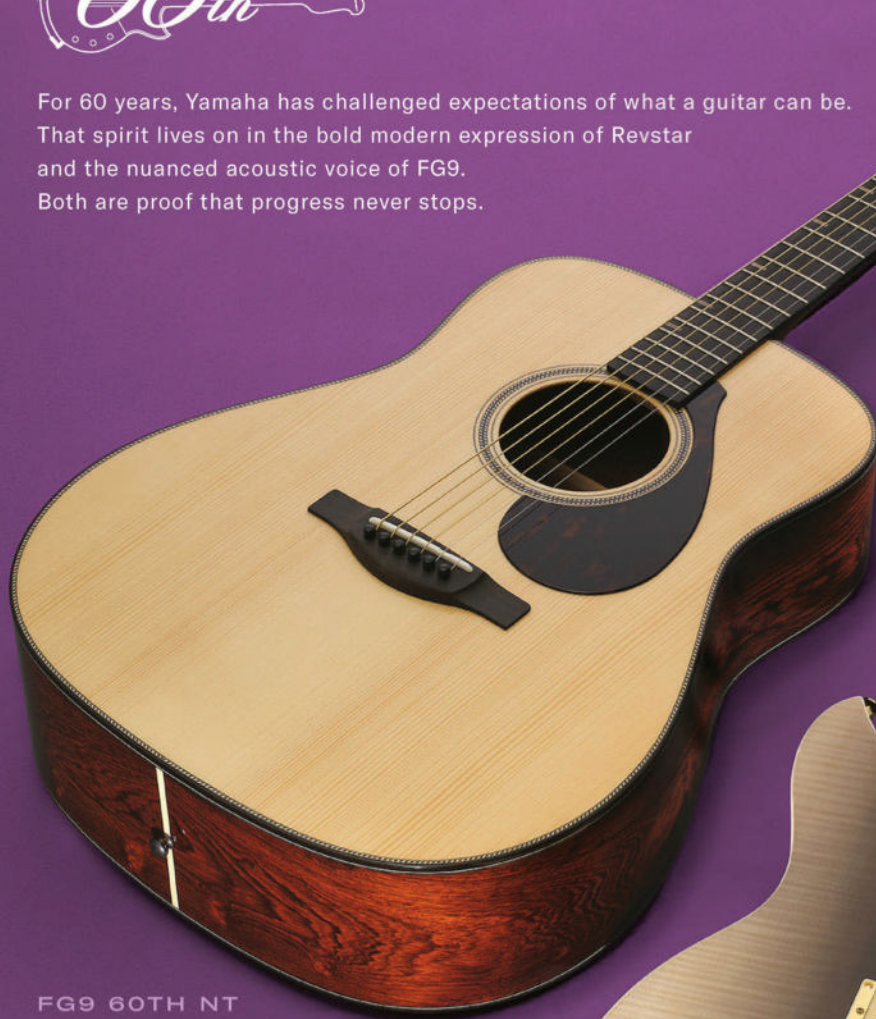
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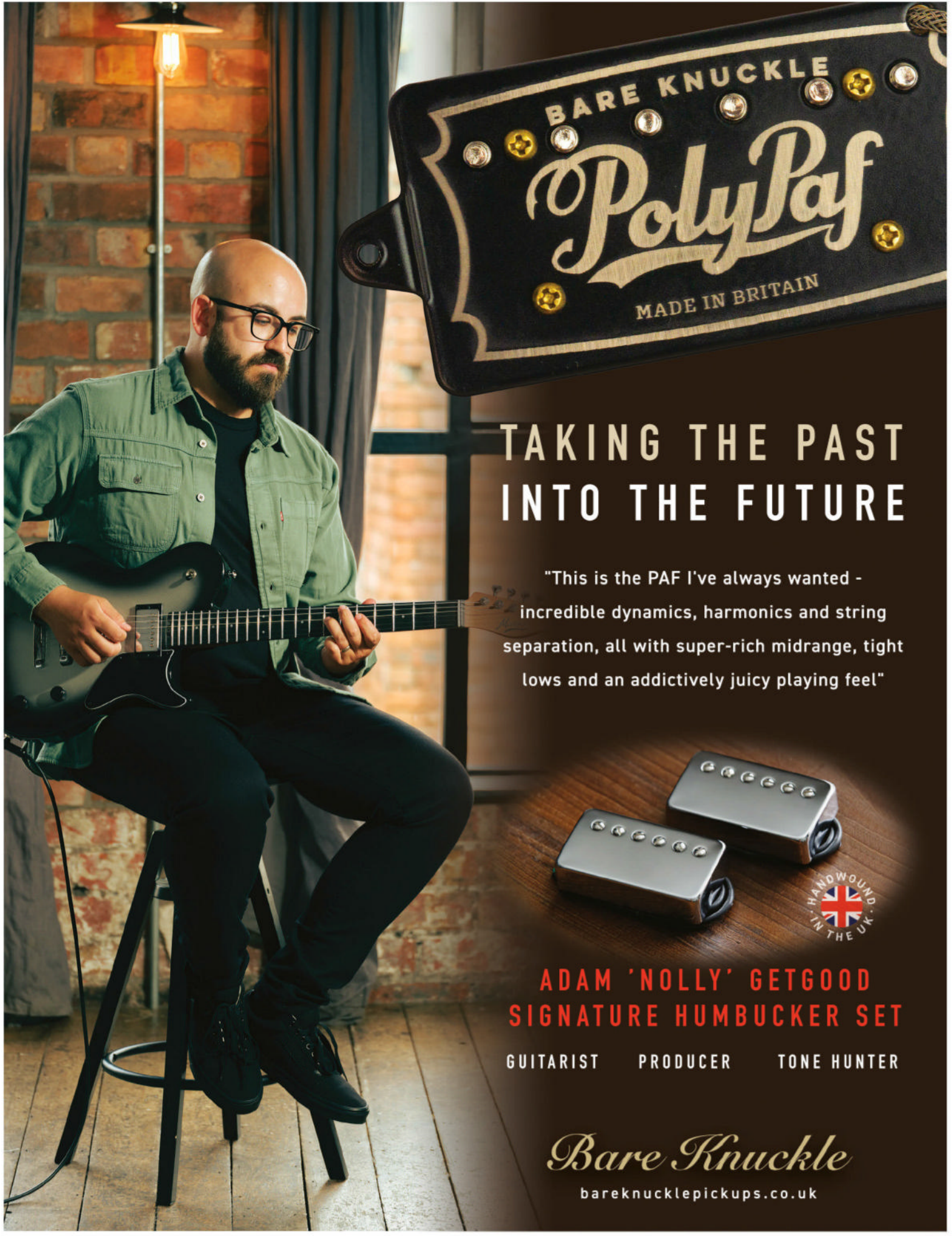
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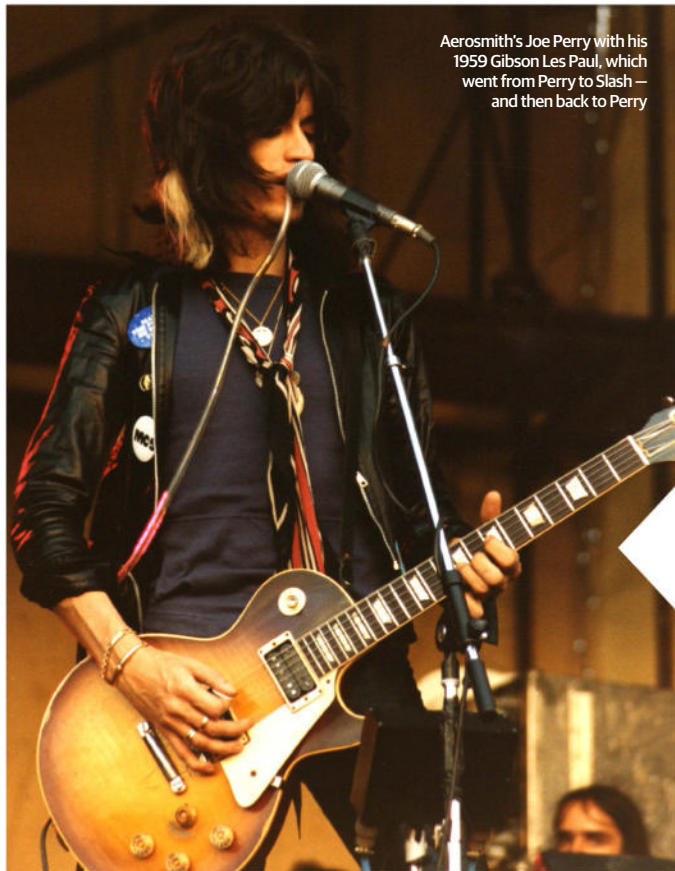
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COVER PHOTO: ROSS HALFIN

PETE STILL/REDFERNS

# Woodshed

VOL. 47 | NO. 4 | APRIL 2026

## NAMM, Joe Perry and other reasons to focus on the positive

**▶ ANOTHER ISSUE, ANOTHER** sad loss in guitar land. This time it's Dead & Company's Bob Weir, who was on our cover with John Mayer a mere 12 issues ago. And around here, "12 issues ago" feels like 10 seconds ago. But you know what? I wrote about similar "sad losses" in the last issue (there've been so many of them lately), so I'm not gonna do it again today. Let me just say that Mr. Weir will be sorely missed; be sure to check out Alan Paul's excellent Weir tribute on page 30. Instead, I'll focus on a few positives, namely:

+ As I write this, the 2026 NAMM Show is just a few days away. It's always been an annual highlight for me, a chance to hang out with my *Guitar World*, *Guitar Player* and *Guitarist* amigos, to catch up with the people behind the gear and – best of all – to get my hands on all the new-for-2026 stuff. As editor-in-chief, I don't get to try out as much new gear as you'd think, but that all changes for a few days in late January. Along those lines, I've recently been obsessed with budget multi-effects units. One of my bands plays at a Shore bar that's literally wall to wall with beer-drippin' college kids, so I need something that can get stepped on without kicking off a conniption or two. And, hey, that \$229.99 Boss GX-1 on page 72 is looking pretty good at the moment...

+ This issue's Soundcheck section is a page longer than usual – 11 instead of 10.

+ In this issue, we're introducing not one, but two new *Guitar World* columnists – Corey Congilio (page 83) and Spiritbox's Mike Stringer (page 80).

+ Last but not least, there's cover star Joe Perry's palpable excitement over gear. I mean, this guy has been buying guitars and playing music since Dickie Goodman's "Energy Crisis '74" was a Top 40 hit, but it's obvious that there are few things as important or exciting to him as a new guitar, a new amp, a new pedal, a new guitar strap. It makes me wonder if other rock veterans of his ilk still get excited about new ear. You know – people like Keith Richards. Hopefully, we'll be finding out soon... Anyway, enjoy this issue! Catch you in four weeks.



**DAMIAN FANELLI**

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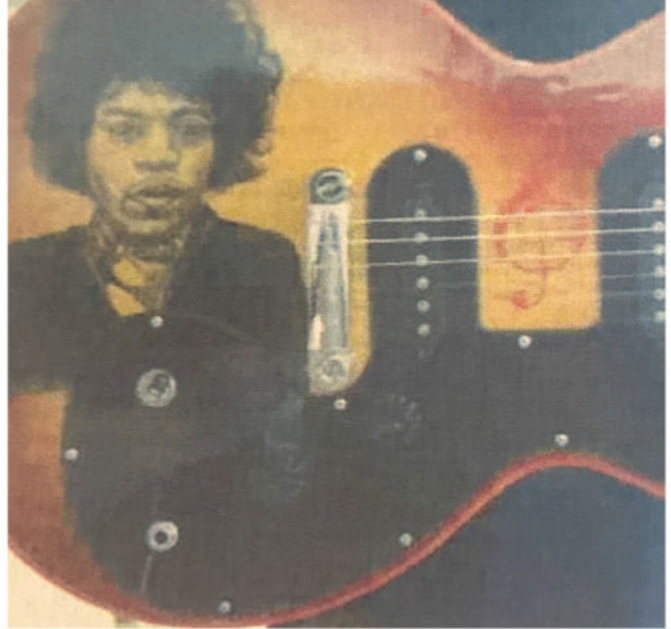
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## READER ART OF THE MONTH

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!



**TIM HENSON**  
BY MONTANA HIGHTOWER



**JIMI HENDRIX**  
BY JAMES LITTLE JR. (SUBMITTED BY ROBERT SHERMAN)

## DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



### Andrew Ciraulo

AGE: 34

HOMETOWN: Old Bridge, NJ

GUITARS: 1979 Gibson Explorer E2, 2001 Gibson Explorer Gothic, 1979 Fender Stratocaster Hardtail – honestly too many others to count!

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Coheed and Cambria "Welcome Home," Blue Öyster Cult "(Don't Fear) The Reaper"

GEAR I WANT MOST: A big ol' Orange amp from the Seventies!



### Anthony O'Neill

AGE: 57

LOCATION: London, UK

GUITARS: Fender 1968 Paisley Telecaster, Fender G5 Stratocaster, Roland G-707, Fender Aerodyne Jazz, Fender Bass VI, Variax 700, PRS Custom 24, Joe Doe Punkaster, Ovation acoustic

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING (APART FROM MY OWN): Pink Floyd "Dogs," Steve Vai "Sisters," Weather Report "A Remark You Made," Fairport Convention "Autopsy"



### Will Harper

AGE: 54

HOMETOWN: Florence, SC

GUITARS: D'Angelico Excel ELX-1, 1982 Fender Stratocaster, Taylor Nylon Series acoustic, Danelectro 12-string  
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Pat Metheny "The Search" and "New Chautauqua," Wes Montgomery "D-Natural Blues" and some of my own stuff!

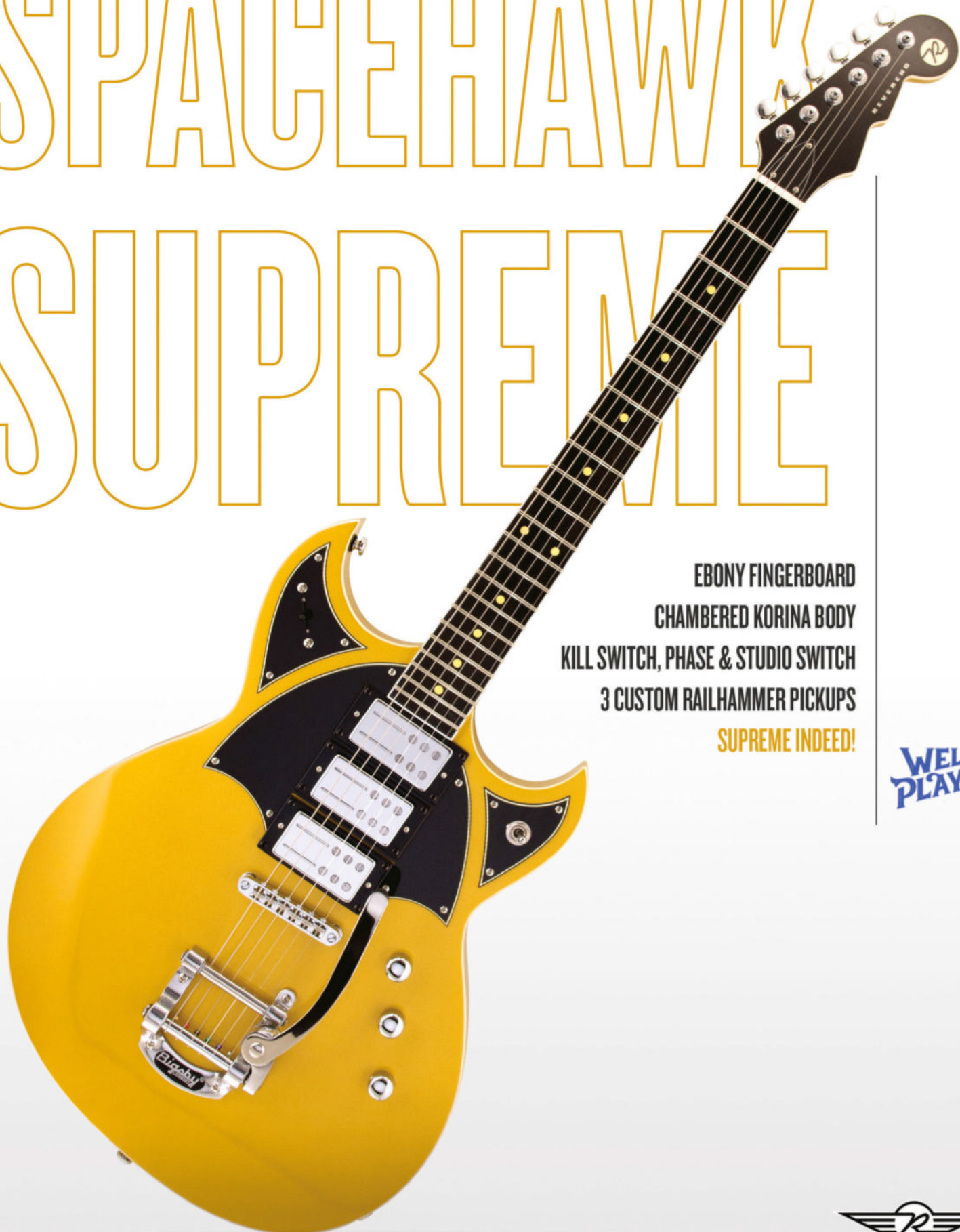
GEAR I WANT MOST: Fender Bass VI, Danelectro Electric Sitar

### 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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THE COLLECT POND

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"I melded into more of a Strat player," says Haim's Danielle Haim

## Haim Time

Haim's Danielle Haim on 2025's *I Quit*, the value of classic rock covers and who she considers an outright genius

BY JANELLE BORG

**▶ YOU COULD SAY** Danielle Haim and her sisters – Alana and Este – were born and raised to be rock stars. "I was around 10 when we started our 'band,' which was us just learning songs and playing them in our living room," Danielle says. "Our first gig was in fifth grade."

The Haim women have been on quite a journey since their living-room days at the turn of the millennium. A couple of years later, their first gig as a trio took place at a Jewish deli in Hollywood. Their debut EP, *Forever*, released in 2012, set them on a path that continues to redefine what a contemporary rock band – not to mention modern guitar heroes – sound and look like, with the subsequent genre-blending records, *Days Are Gone* (2013), *Something to Tell You* (2017), *Women in Music Pt. III* (2020) and 2025's *I Quit* taking as much from hip-hop, Destiny's Child and TLC as they do from conventional rock. **▶**

[from left] Alana, Danielle and Este Haim in action in Barcelona, June 6, 2025



Danielle's guitar playing is no different. The multi-instrumentalist seamlessly shifts between percussive rhythm parts and searing rock- and blues-tinged solos — a style partly acquired from her background as a touring guitarist and gun for hire, but mostly from her abilities as a drummer.

"I approach guitar playing as a percussive instrument," she says. "I love muted jabs and more rhythmic playing. [Dr. Dre's] 2001 [also known as The Chronic 2001] was huge for me. The way Outkast utilized guitar on *The Love Below* was huge, like on 'Prototype' and 'Hey Ya!' All those kinds of muted guitar lines were super influential."

**In what ways did playing classic rock covers with your family band, Rockinhaim, shape your playing?**

I played guitar, and so did my mom, who played more rhythm. I'd play a lot of blues and pentatonic stuff, but learning classic rock songs really informed my guitar playing and songwriting. It was an incredible way to learn about music and learn what sounds good with a band and where to fit in.

**How impactful were your touring days with Jenny Lewis and Julian Casablancas?**

It was incredible. I was around 19, and they were my favorite artists. I snuck into so

many Strokes and Rylo Kiley concerts, so it was crazy when I got the opportunity to work with both of them. When it comes to guitar playing, I love the Strokes' guitar parts so much. I learned so much about guitar through those songs. I played their song "Hard to Explain" at Coachella with Julian Casablancas, and I couldn't believe my life.

**Who are your biggest influences?**

I love Tom Verlaine's playing with Television. "Marquee Moon" has one of my favorite guitar solos of all time; I can sing it from memory. I'm a huge Mike Campbell fan; he's also a rhythmic genius. Bonnie Raitt is the most incredible. Every time I watch videos of her playing, I just melt on the floor. I think she's one of the most genius guitar players. I'm also a huge Joe Walsh fan. George Michael is always an inspiration, as is Prince; I think he's the most underrated guitar player. Keith Richards' playing is always an inspiration, and so is U2's the Edge. We tracked down the Edge's effect pedal for "Numb" [Haim used a sample from U2's 1993 song "Numb" in "Now It's Time" from I Quit].

**What's your go-to guitar nowadays?**

I started on a Gibson Melody Maker that my dad bought me, and when it came time to graduate to my next guitar, I picked the

SG because it was so light. It turned into my favorite guitar, so I continued with it for a long time, and then Rostam [Batmanglij, ex-Vampire Weekend and one of Haim's collaborators] bought a really nice Strat from the Fifties, and it's the most fun guitar to play, so we used that a lot on the last two albums [Women in Music Pt. III and I Quit], and I melded into more of a Strat player.

**Haim made history when you were the first "all-female" rock band ever to earn a Grammy nod for Album of the Year. You made history again this year when you were nominated in the Rock Album category for next year's Grammys. Have these nominations changed the way the industry views Haim and, more broadly, how it views women in rock?**

We're so honored to be nominated in the rock category. Growing up, my favorite artists were women. When I think about Stevie Nicks, the Pretenders, Heart, the Go-Go's, the Bangles — all these incredible women who were in rock bands — those are the artists I looked up to. All we want is to inspire women to pick up guitars and drums. As far as being recognized, we were so honored to be nominated for Best Rock Album. Part of the reason I love what we do is that people have had a hard time putting us in a box; maybe there was confusion about what box we fit into. But what's amazing is, over the last few years, we've just kind of kept doing what we've always done — and to be recognized in this way is really, really special. [GW](#)

**"All we want is to inspire women to pick up the guitar and drums"**

DANIELLE HAIM



The Collect Pond's Danny Moffat [left] and Ben Bonadies do their thing

# The Collect Pond

A New Zealand jangle-pop-inspired Boston post-punk band that shares its name with a putrid body of water in 19th-century Lower Manhattan? What's not to love!

BY JOE BOSSO

▶ **NINETIES MUSIC JOURNALISTS** coined the term "shoegaze" as a pejorative to describe bands such as Ride and My Bloody Valentine whose members were overly fixated on their effects pedals. Nowadays, musicians wear the tag proudly, perhaps none so much as singer-guitarist Danny Moffat, who leads the shoegazey-as-hell Boston-based outfit the Collect Pond.

"To me, 'shoegaze' means you have an aggressive wall of sound and you're being very creative with layers of guitars, all of which is good," Moffat says. "Plus, we tend to mix the vocals a little low, which is a shoegaze hallmark. We're influenced by the whole scene, and we're influencing it right back."

Moffat and company (guitarist-bassist Ben Bonadies, keyboardist Roger Maranan and drummer Chris Anthony) have concocted something of a lo-fi masterpiece with their third album, *Absence of Something*. There's thrashy rave-ups ("Modern Con," "Cemetery Man"), jangle and jagged gems ("Every Little Thing Is the Same," "Net 30 Invoice") and even a couple of whacked tone poems ("You Could Murder

**"I tend to write about very personal things, like unfortunate roommate situations"**

**DANNY MOFFAT**

## AXOLOGY

### Guitars

Fender Jaguar, Telecaster and Stratocaster

### Amps

Marshall JCM900, Egnator Tourmaster 4100

### Effects

Boss DS-1 Distortion, BF-3 flanger, MXR Phase 90, Way Huge Swollen Pickle

Again," "Revolution"), all set to Moffat's introspective lyrics. "I tend to write about very personal things, like unfortunate roommate situations," he says.

Moffat pens the tunes, but he marvels at the unexpected ways his bandmates can improve the material. "I showed them 'Every Little Thing Is the Same,' and I played it down-up, down-up on the guitar," he says. "I don't think Ben can play upstrokes. He plays down-down-down like Johnny Ramone. But it was the perfect thing for that song; it sounded way better that way."

Born with a rare spinal condition called spina bifida, Moffat has faced his share of challenges. "I'm often in pain, so I can't play heavy guitars or stand for long periods of time," he says. Even playing typical barre chords has proved to be painful; pressure on his arm or wrist shoots right to his spine. Then one day a friend showed him how Jimi Hendrix would stretch his thumb around the neck of the guitar to play bass notes on the sixth string. "That changed everything for me," Moffat says. "I was like, 'It doesn't hurt. I could play like this all day long. And it sounds great!'" **GW**



Working on *Hiding in Plain Sight* helped provide closure for Chris Herin

## Chris Herin

The Tiles guitarist returns with *Hiding in Plain Sight*, a star-packed album (Alex Lifeson, Martin Barre) that should give us all pause for thought

BY JON WIEDERHORN

**▶ WHEN DETROIT PROG** rock band Tiles went on indefinite hiatus in 2018, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Chris Herin started writing new songs to keep himself busy. At first, Herin had no intention of recording a solo album, but as months turned to years and Herin's catalog of new songs grew, he began working with longtime collaborator and producer Terry Brown. Over several years of on-and-off work, the two assembled *Hiding in Plain Sight*, a musically

diverse record based on the battle Herin's father underwent with dementia before he died. "I wanted the music to trace the path my father took from the point where his behavior started getting odd and all the way through the trajectory of the disease," Herin says.

**"We wanted the music to offset some of the more depressing content and bring more dimensions to the album"**



For years, Herin didn't even want to think about his father's disease, let alone write songs about it. With time, the memories became less painful, and working on *Hiding in Plain Sight* helped provide closure. To provide contrast to the sobering subject matter, Herin wrote in a variety of styles, including Eighties power rock, pop, country-folk, classic rock and, yes, prog. "I like that there's an odd inconsistency between the music and lyrics," Herin says. "We wanted the music to offset some of the more depressing content and bring more dimensions to the album."

To enhance their enjoyment of the creative process, Herin and Brown recruited more than two dozen guest musicians, including Peter Dinklage, Alex Lifeson, Martin Barre (ex-Jethro Tull), Randy McStine (Porcupine Tree), Kim Mitchell (Max Webster) and Jeff Kollman (Alan Parsons Live Project). While all of the soloists met or exceeded Herin's expectations, two went above and beyond. Lifeson radically reworked the stripped-down "Second Ending" into a melancholy mélange of sparse plucked notes, effected guitar swells and weeping strings. "He's not doing any of the lead work he's known for," Herin says. "He came up with 10 tracks of textures and atmospheres that all could have worked, and Terry integrated them all into the song, which was amazing."

Similarly, Barre turned "The Darkest Hour" from a basic prog song into a layered, musically ornate folk-imbued number. "I had just asked him for a quick solo," Herin says. "Not only did he do an incredible solo that interlocks with everything, but he added extra guitar that's orchestral on its own — and then he recorded flute and mandolin, which takes the song to a completely different place."

Proceeds from *Hiding in Plain Sight* will be donated to Alzheimer's charities. **GW**



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ABBA's Björn Ulvæus [far right] with his Malmberg star guitar in Germany in 1974

## Star Power

When Björn Ulvæus of ABBA walked on the Eurovision stage in 1974, all eyes were on his legendary star-shaped guitar. Meet the maker of the ultimate glam-rock ax

BY JOE MATERA

**▶ WHEN THE SWEDISH** pop icons ABBA took to the stage for their appearance at the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton, England, to perform "Waterloo," guitarist Björn Ulvæus was sporting a silver, 13-pointed, star-shaped guitar. That instrument — along with the group's dazzling satin attire and none-more-Seventies platform boots — gave them a visual impact that has become synonymous with the aesthetic of the decade. ABBA would go on to win with their performance, beginning their ascent to the pop stratosphere shortly afterwards. Ulvæus used this guitar on subsequent promotional TV appearances and on their first European tour in late 1974, before retiring it.

While we don't know where the inspiration for this uniquely shaped guitar came from, we can

speculate that it lay with the English glam-rock group the Glitter Band, who were riding high in the charts around the time of ABBA's Eurovision performance. They eventually scored major hits in the U.K. with "Goodbye My Love" and "The Tears I Cried," with the group's lead guitarist, Gerry Shephard, wielding a similarly shaped instrument. Although his ax was a more traditional five-pointed star, Glitter Band bassist and vocalist John Springate believes Ulvæus may well have been inspired by it.

"The Glitter Band did a tour of Sweden, and this band came to see us play; they told us they really liked our music and that it was really good," Springate told me in 2021. "Then, three weeks later, we saw them on Eurovision, dressed like us, with a star guitar, and that was ABBA!"

Regardless of his inspiration, it proved to be a clever decision on Ulvæus' part to have an instrument made that fit so perfectly with his group's image, and his choice of luthier was equally inspired.

For many years, the star guitar was mistakenly reported to have been built by Hagström, a Swedish company whose guitars Ulvæus often played. However, this one-off instrument was actually built by Göran Malmberg, a long-time guitar and sports car enthusiast, who first began building guitars in 1964 in his hometown of Stockholm. Over the years, several internationally



renowned artists began using his guitars and speakers during their tours of Sweden. Led Zeppelin used Malmberg 4x12 cabs in Sweden in 1969, and guitarists such as Eric Clapton engaged Malmberg for his services.

In preparation for ABBA's 1974 Eurovision performance, Malmberg was hired by Ulvæus to build him a truly attention-grabbing guitar. "Björn and I met and discussed what it could look like," Malmberg says today. "It had to be shiny and sparkling, so a star shape was suggested. We decided I would draw some drafts of the guitar and then show them to him. Björn approved one of them, but there was only six weeks left until Eurovision!"

Fortunately, the instrument's spec was quickly agreed. "The neck of a Stratocaster was determined to be used," Malmberg says, "and the body had to have the correct weight balance so that the guitar would remain in position, even if Björn released his grip on the neck. Furthermore, the tips of the star





Göran Malmberg works on a limited run of star guitars in 2014, one of which can be seen below

shape could not be in the way when he was using it."

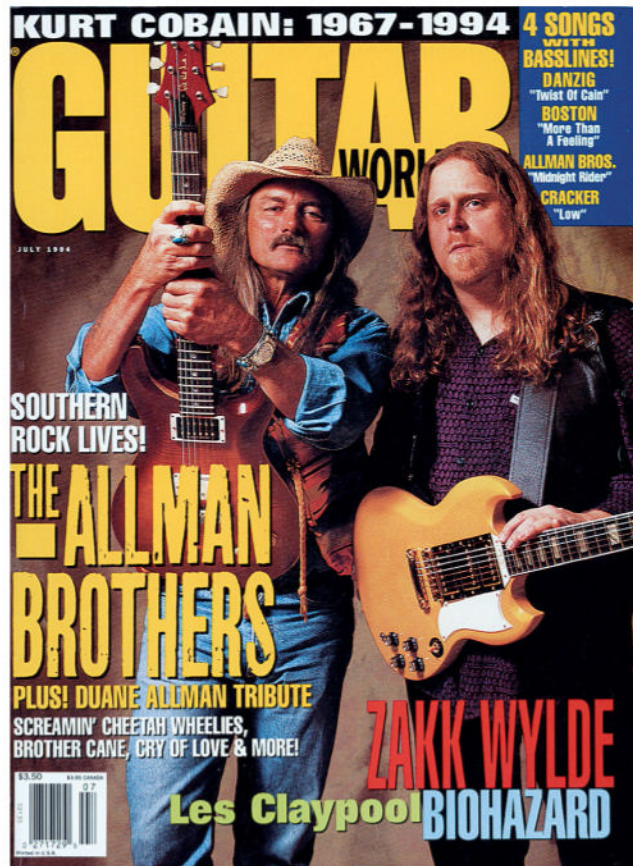
As players of extravagantly shaped guitars already know, a major challenge was to make the points strong enough for practical use, recalls the luthier: "The guitar's body was made of several layers of plywood glued together so that the tips of the horns wouldn't break. The outermost layers were 1mm birch plywood, so-called 'airplane plywood,' so that the varnish wouldn't suffer any surface cracks."

To ensure the correct balance, Malmberg experimented with the pickups' position. "I mounted the humbuckers, especially the treble pickup, further from the bridge to get a slightly darker sound, suitable for rhythm guitar playing, and the placement of the control knobs and the cutaway horns helped to counter the weight, too," he says. "The extra-long horn provided the balance for the attachment of the shoulder strap, and there were two horns on each side of the guitar's body. The guitar was lacquered with metal stain on a silver base, and 20 layers of clear lacquer were used."

At some point after Ulvaeus retired the guitar from the road and placed it into storage, it went missing; its whereabouts were unknown for decades. When the ABBA museum in Stockholm was established in 2013, Malmberg was hired to build a second star guitar for display purposes. However, a few days before the museum opened, a German guitar collector came forward with the original instrument; both the original and the replica were subsequently exhibited.

In 2014, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of ABBA's win at Eurovision, Malmberg was asked to build a high-quality limited-edition run of 50 star guitars, individually numbered and signed by him and Ulvaeus. In January 2017, at their show in Stockholm, Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong borrowed the original guitar from the ABBA museum after he had visited it earlier in the day, and he used it during Green Day's performance later that evening. Evidence, if any were needed, of the instrument's star status. [GW](#)

## COVER MODELS



GUITARIST: WARREN HAYNES GUITAR: EARLY NINETIES GIBSON '61 SG REISSUE

GW COVER DATE: JULY 1994 THIS INTERVIEW: JUNE 2025 PHOTOGRAPHER: DANNY CLINCH

### How did you acquire this guitar?

I got it from Gibson. I was looking for a guitar to play in Gov't Mule as an alternative to my [Gibson] Les Paul [*the guitar he used often with the Allman Brothers Band*]. I wanted something a little brighter and less thick, sonically speaking, to play to get a different tone for certain songs.

### Did you modify this guitar or use it with an updated rig?

I left it stock. At that time, I was playing through my modified Soldano SLO-100 through a PRS 4x12 cabinet that's the size of a 4x10 enclosure with custom Celestion [*speakers*] made for PRS.

### Why was this guitar perfect for you at the time?

I actually didn't play it as much in the Allman Brothers Band as I did in Gov't Mule. The SG sound is a very unique one, and, as with any sound, it forces you to play to what you're hearing.

### Did you use this guitar on any notable recordings or tours?

I used it a lot during the first couple of years of Gov't Mule and some on our first recordings, which came out years later as *The Tel-Star Sessions* [2016]. At some point, we had made the decision to tune down a half-step for certain songs, which for me seemed better with [Gibson] Firebirds, so I retired the SG as they don't do as well tuned down.

### Why did you choose this guitar for this particular GW cover shoot?

It was a new guitar for me at that time, plus it looks cool. Also, the photographer — Danny Clinch — might have brought up doing some shots with that guitar from a visual standpoint. There were other shots with my Les Paul as well.

### Do you still have this guitar?

Yes. It's in the Big House, the Allman Brothers' museum in Macon, Georgia. [GW](#)

— Andrew Daly



## LOST CLASSICS

## ZZ Top

Billy Gibbons discusses the making of 1981's *El Loco*, the "bridge" album from the Texas legends' feral days to their slicker, mid-Eighties sound

BY ANDREW DALY

**▶ IN THE MID-EIGHTIES**, ZZ Top went from being a group of Texas-bred blues bangers to a chart-topping powerhouse on the strength of albums like 1983's *Eliminator* and 1985's *Afterburner*. But neither of those now-classic albums could've happened without the "bridge album" that preceded them, 1981's *El Loco*.

"The band, in the midst of the ongoing roadshows, returned to take advantage of some rare, non-performing days with re-entry into the studio in the early Eighties," says ZZ Top guitarist Billy Gibbons (via email) when looking back on this tweener period. He adds that the band's aim was simple: "To make loud noise in Las Vegas, Memphis, Houston and back home in Los Angeles."

Songs like "Pearl Necklace," "Tube Snake Bookie" and "Groovy Little Hippie Pad" did a fine job of reflecting ZZ Top's past. More importantly, they showed signs of what they'd eventually do so well on later hits like "Sharp Dressed Man," "Legs" and "Gimme All Your Lovin'!"

"We were writing new material and recording the sounds the band is known for," Gibbons says. "Following a wrap with sessions, it was us trippin' into the desert surrounds back out in West Texas to capture the band in the shifting sands near their haunts at the Tex-Mex border. Tortillas and hot sauce meet rock 'n' roll, as always."



ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons in action in 1981

If that sounds roundabout – yet oddly encapsulating – that's because it is. Gibbons has a particular way of viewing the world, which he filters through a quasi-poetic sense of humor that runs on through his guitar and out from his amps. So, if you really want to understand the vibe and feel of *El Loco* – or of any ZZ Top album – it's best to just sit back, listen and take it in.

"All it requires is having a glance at the desert setting, which takes one directly into ZZ Top's Texas heritage," Gibbons says. "It's that Lone Star State of mind making its 'separate country' status so mysterious. The poetry from song to song says it all quite succinctly."

**Q** How did the reception for the album that preceded *El Loco*, 1979's *Degüello*, impact your outlook on ZZ Top as the band rolled into the Eighties?

The great American art form of the blues,

which we continued attempting to interpret, flavored the album's content. One of the favored tracks, the fine composition with Sam & Dave's Stax recording of "I Thank You," allowed the initial leanings toward taking a move with sounds of R&B. Those new angles tempered new waves of experimentation for the band to move ahead and toward the future.

**Q** *El Loco* is interesting as it precedes *Eliminator* and *Afterburner*, ZZ Top's Eighties explosion albums, but it came after the Seventies blues period, which you mentioned. It's kind of an in-between record.

This is true! Then again, there was a landslide of inspiration and creative energies surrounding some insane scenes erupting everywhere. As the ZZ Top cornerstone of standing within our 12-bar circle expanded, the inventive

impact from far and wide was instrumental in igniting a vibrancy from then to now.

**Q What were the first songs the band wrote for *El Loco*, and did you have the new sounds of the Eighties in mind?**

The many tracks included from the period, like “So Cold,” “Instantly” and “Mark My Word,” were just a few good ones as extra tracks that still exist following the more familiar numbers that landed in 12-inch vinyl upon the release. The interesting challenge loomed large, having to hand-pick a scant few titles from the assembly that stacked up during the sessions.

**Q You started *El Loco* at Sunset Sound in L.A. but moved to Ardent Studios in Memphis. How did that impact you in terms of tracking guitars?**

Sunset Sound opened the doors to twist knobs on a lot of unusual features with their unreal stacks of compressors limiters and mic preamps surrounding the console... all favoring great response going to tape. As the tour moved along, we returned to our home away from home back in midtown Memphis, where Ardent Studios held Studio B on reserve for lighting the fuse for new ZZ Top songs to complete the wrap.

**Q Why did you choose Bill Ham as producer?**

The title of “producer” was actually more in line as keeper of the flame. Here were three wayward and unruly guys [Gibbons, Dusty Hill and Frank Beard] that most likely would have stayed in the badlands. We were unaware of the job of maintaining the value of the group and rallying the gang to focus on defining what we were doing and refining the content. We simply kept it raucous and raw and pressed on with loudness. An unabashed element was the constant ferociousness of the guitar tone coming from our trusted Pearly Gates [Gibbons’ 1959 Gibson Les Paul]. The sound out of that instrument actually made the signal stand up and bark.

**Q Linden Hudson was also involved as a pre-producer.**

Yes – a great guy with great insight with what makes for great sounds. That appreciative alliance emerged stridently with solid input on a creative level.

**Q Linden was the engineer for “Groovy Little Hippy Pad” but wasn’t credited. How did he impact that track?**

There was a constant openness to taking on fresh ideas with smiling support. Good times made it into the groove – an undeniable reality, front and center, with positive suggestions and exacting expertise.

Dusty Hill [left] and Gibbons perform in Detroit during ZZ Top’s *El Loco-Motion* tour, June 13, 1981



**“There was a landslide of inspiration and creative energies surrounding some insane scenes erupting everywhere”**

BILLY GIBBONS

**Q Besides Pearly Gates, what guitars did you bring into the studio, and how did you shape your tone?**

The style for making the kind of sound we were chasing fell right off the stage when the Jeff Beck Group delivered those smoking nights of great grind and grit. Standing behind a Fifties sunburst Les Paul, supported by a Fender Telecaster bass, said it all. Pushing it through those early Marshall 100s did the trick. From that point forward, Jeff [Beck] arranged delivery with Marshall’s first factory arrival into the States, loading ZZ Top’s stage with stacks standing high. It solidified the initial offerings from the band’s newly formed “ZZ” sound without question.

**Q What are the stories behind “Pearl Necklace” and “Tube Snake Boogie?”**

During a hang with a long-standing pal, one of our friends appeared exiting his ride, making a fast clip to his front door, whereupon the question of “How was last night?” provided a quick and to-the-point response of a single word: “Necklace.” One only needs a slight imagination to put it into proper perspective. “Tube Snake Boogie” emerged as a song having overheard a reference at a notorious

surf spot from a shaper calling some new boards making the scene as “tube snakes.” A perfect title.

**Q Terry Manning mixed *El Loco*. How important was he to ZZ Top’s sound?**

Terry Manning – yes! We met Terry when he was working in a studio at Ardent in Memphis with Led Zeppelin. He accepted the invitation to take a stab at mixing the tracks later to reach success with the release entitled *Tres Hombres*. On that record, the best move was the accidental slip of the splicing knife mashing together two numbers – “Waiting’ On the Bus” and “Jesus Just Left Chicago” – suddenly becoming the classic coupling, forever playing as a streamlined duo with a recognizable and most desirable effect.

**Q What were your thoughts on *El Loco* the first time you heard it?**

I thought “Groovy Little Hippy Pad” and “Party on the Patio” fit the times in a remarkable and cohesive manner. They’re still performed in concert with a speedy tempo, keeping the pulse beating with smoothness. Even now it maintains that stepped-up, accelerated sound. **GW**

## MY LIFE IN THREE GUITARS

## Steve Rothery

The trio of axes that have meant the most the longtime Marillion guitarist

BY ANDREW DALY

▶ **WHILE PROMOTING HIS** latest record, 2025's *Gentō* – a collaborative effort with Tangerine Dream's Thorsten Quaeschning (released under the Bioscope moniker) – Marillion's Steve Rothery took a moment to dial in with *Guitar World* to reflect upon his three most important guitars. And yes, Marillion fans – Rothery's '99 tobacco burst Blade RH-4 is on the list. In fact, Rothery says it's the guitar he'd rush in to save if the building – whatever building that might be – were burning down. "I've got maybe eight or nine Blade guitars," he says. "Not one of them is the same as that one."

Rothery also sings the praises of his well-worn 1985 MIJ Squier Stratand early Nineties custom Steinberger M-Series doubleneck.

But, as beloved as those three curios are, he's open to new possibilities. That said, there's a caveat.

"I don't think there'd be any guitar that would supersede them," he says. "But I'm still buying guitars. It's about the classic line, 'How many more guitars do you need?' The answer is always, 'Just one more!' [Laughs] I tend to [sell] anything I'm not playing, so, ultimately, you do the best with what you've got. Then again, if you're working and can afford it – or if you're just passionate about guitars as things of beauty, why not? [Laughs] I know some people who have more guitars than chords they're able to play. They have them because they love them and love owning a piece of craftsmanship and a work of art." **GW**

### 1 MIJ Squier Stratocaster SQ (1985)

**I BOUGHT THIS** black Squier Strat in 1985. It's got EMG pickups, a mid-boost and a Kahler locking tremolo. It's the guitar I used on Marillion's albums from 1987's *Clutching at Straws* up until 1999, so it's been important for me and defined the way I play to a certain extent. I often used it with a Roland JC-120 and, for solo sounds, with an Analog Man [modded Boss] DS-1 [distortion] and some delay. It does everything I want it to do. It's very resonant – it kind of chimes. And I love Kahlers; even now, I find them to be the most expressive of all tremolo units. It's a trade-off where maybe you lose a bit of sustain, but they're incredibly expressive. This guitar has been on albums that sold probably eight or nine million copies, and I bought it for about \$200! I've never been a snob about guitars; it's about the quality of the wood. And in that period of time, the mid-Eighties, a lot of great guitars came out of Japan from that particular factory. So it's just whatever works. Ultimately, whatever the transfer says on the headstock doesn't affect the tone whatsoever.

### 2 Blade Steve Rothery RH-4 (1999)

**THE SQUIER WAS** my main guitar until '99, when I started using the Blade, which has two Lindy Fralin single-coils and the Blade humbucker. It's a passive guitar, but it's got a mid-boost you can switch in, along with a maple neck. It's the most versatile guitar I've ever played, and it seems impossible to get a bad sound out of it.

It's all about the combination of a guitar and amp that work well together. For instance, the Squier with the EMGs – that guitar worked well with the JC-120 and



JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



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performed well with Marshalls, so I'd use it for grungier stuff. But the Blade works so well with the Groove Tubes Trio, which is a three-channel preamp. So a combination of those two elements makes the Blade incredibly versatile. I can put it on the humbucker and kick in the mid-boost, and it really sort of sings through on Trio. That's a fantastic lead sound without using any pedals – well, maybe just a bit of delay. It's a classic sound, so I suppose I started using a more traditional sort of valve amp with the Blade. It kind of lent itself to that approach.

### 3 Custom Steinberger Doubleneck M Series (1990-1991)

**THIS WAS BUILT** for me in the early Nineties. I had it done before Marillion's *Holidays in Eden* [1991], I think. That's a really unusual guitar; I don't think I've really seen another one like it in the world with three single-coil pickups and a transposing trem on the six-string like that.

It's a very different-sounding guitar. It's bright, chimey and versatile. I've used it on some of our most important tracks, especially on Marillion's *Afraid of Sunlight* album [1995]. I used it on the opening track, "Gazpacho." There's another track on that album called "Cannibal Surf Babe"; I used the transposing trem to make the E string go all the way down to a low B, so it's really down there. And I used it on a track called "Beautiful," which was a hit in South America. It's just got a lot of clarity, and it's a lot easier to play than a lot of electric 12-string guitars like Rickenbackers, which usually have quite narrow necks. It also has more tonal versatility. [GW](#)

3



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*Bare Knuckle*



[from left] The Wedding Present's Rachael Wood, David Gedge and Stuart Hastings

## Present and Accounted For

A sprawling new box set, a disarming new EP and a "darker, rockier" new guitarist prove there's much more to U.K. cult heroes the Wedding Present than David Gedge's pummeling right hand

BY HENRY YATES

▶ **IT WAS ONCE** written of the Wedding Present that they are a band "whose world you either buy into fully or not at all." Founder-frontman David Gedge takes a beat to consider this, then smiles at the idea. While British alt-rock's cultest heroes have at times skirted the mainstream – 1989's major-label *Bizarro* and 1991's Steve Albini-produced *Seamonsters* were staples of college radio – it's been entirely possible to avoid ever hearing a note of their output, especially on this side of the Atlantic.

On the flipside, playing for a tighter but fiercely loyal fanbase has allowed the Leeds-born band to follow its natural trajectory. From the warp-speed charge of the early years (with Gedge's right hand pumping like a locomotive piston) through their turn-of-the-millennium dissolution and reunion,

that journey is forensically tracked by *The Wedding Present 40* box set, a four-LP cinder block gathering singles, curveballs and curios. For completists, it's the final word. But for a capsule-sized introduction to the band, there's new EP *Maxi*, spiced with the wide-screen pedal textures of incoming guitarist Rachael Wood.

"I know bands always say this about their latest release," Gedge says, "but I'm really pleased with this EP. It's big, exciting, rocky and varied. We had a lineup change and that always helps, because you get people coming in with new ideas..."

**We associate the Wedding Present with blistering speed. But EP opener "Scream, If You Want to Go Faster" begins slow and mellow.**

**DAVID GEDGE:** Yeah, it's quite an odd start for a record. I wouldn't start a concert like that. But then, other songs like "Hot Wheels" and "Two for the Road" are very Wedding Present, you know? Since 1985, that super-fast, energetic playing has always been our backbone. When we first started, it was all just a hundred miles an hour. Over the years, we've incorporated more textures, tempos and dynamics. But I still don't think we're a studio band. Every record is basically us trying to capture the sound we've got live.

**What are your own favorite guitar parts on *Maxi*?**

**RACHAEL WOOD:** There's a moment in "Interceptor" where it suddenly becomes a huge, heavy riff. I was using a Les Paul and we added a baritone to make it really

fat. I love the tremolo line on "Scream, If You Want to Go Faster." It's so lush and sweet and not very Wedding Present-y. We did layering with EBows, which is always a favorite moment for me.

**GEDGE:** It sounds a bit like Sigur Rós, that ethereal quality. It's like a little orchestra.

**How has Rachael's arrival broadened the band's horizons?**

**GEDGE:** Somebody said on our social media that Rachael was born to be in the Wedding Present. Which is ironic, because she was born at about the same time as the Wedding Present. A lot of this band's sound is jangly indie pop, but we can be darker and rockier, and Rachael comes more from that side.

**WOOD:** I don't think I intentionally did that, but I do play quite aggressively live. I love Sonic Youth – so hitting a Telecaster hard is something I really like. We're complete opposites as players. I have a guitar degree. Whereas David's always teasing us, saying, "I never bothered learning scales." He clearly has an excellent ear and his right-hand technique – that speedy playing – is so exciting to play off. So that might be why I'm digging in.

**David, can you talk us through your rig and how it's evolved?**

**GEDGE:** When they asked me, "Do you want to speak to *Guitar World*?" I had to say, "I don't know anything about guitars." To me, a guitar is like a screwdriver, just a tool to write songs. If someone said, "We haven't got a Strat for you today, you'll have to use a Tele," I'd be like, "Yeah, alright."

So my setup is pretty simple. I started off with an Ibanez Artist semi-acoustic. And I used those until 15 years ago, when another guitarist said, "Epiphone do one [*the Sheraton II*] that's cheaper, easier to play and has a nicer sound." I also have a U.S. Strat, with the bottom three strings all tuned to E for drone stuff.

I started off with HH amps, because I'd seen pictures of the Buzzcocks with them. Now I use a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe. In the very early days, it was just a clean semi-acoustic into an amp. Eventually, I bought a Yamaha OD-10MII, and that's the only pedal I've ever used. The only thing I've added is an Electro-Harmonix Nano POG Polyphonic Octave Generator.

**How about your setup, Rachael?**

**WOOD:** I recorded with a 2000 Les Paul Custom and a '71 ES-335, which I wouldn't use live on this gig because it's slightly fragile. I used a '74 Tele a lot as well, and I acquired a new American Standard Jazzmaster just ahead of working on the songs, so there's a little more trem, slightly surf-sounding



[from left] Gedge, Hastings and Wood with drummer Chris Hardwick

in areas. There was a Fender Vibroverb that made a lot of appearances. And David used an Orange head for clean sounds, whereas I'd use that for dirty sounds.

**The new EP sounds like more effects are involved.**

**GEDGE:** Because Rachael plays with other bands, she's got a board about the size of this table. And she told me, "That's my small board." So I made her slim it down a bit. On tour with us, it's pointless, because you're probably using a third of it.

**WOOD:** David thinks I'm a master of pedals because he hasn't got that many! I really like the Strymon Flint and BigSky... and everyone has to use a [*Pro Co*] Rat in this band.



**Who were your founding influences as guitarists?**

**WOOD:** My dad turned me onto blues stuff, so Peter Green is my favorite guitarist for his feel. Blur's Graham Coxon, too – such inventive parts. I went through a shredding phase – Steve Vai and all that – which you wouldn't really think now.

**GEDGE:** For me, it was the Velvet Underground – Lou Reed and Sterling Morrison. But I don't know anything about guitar. Rachael, Stuart [*Hastings, bass*] and Chris [*Hardwick, drums*] are all better guitarists than me. They're in the dressing room talking about blues guitarists. And I'm like, "Who are these people?" I've just not been influenced like that. I might be influenced by the sound of Metallica, but I wouldn't know anything about the guitar player.

**What was your founding vision for the Wedding Present?**

**GEDGE:** I was interested – to the point of obsession – with pop and rock music. So the Wedding Present was an amalgamation of all my influences growing up, from Sixties pop and Seventies punk to John Peel's radio show and alternative music. I hated mainstream music in the Eighties, all those gated-reverb drums and terrible synths. But there were a lot of likeminded, punky bands like us who operated in this different world.

**What was it like starting a band in Leeds?**

**GEDGE:** Leeds had a big goth scene. We didn't fit into that and it was a struggle getting

JOHN EVANS

gigs until we released a single called "Go Out and Get 'Em, Boy!" John Peel played it about 10 times on his show and at that point, my life changed. Even then, for the first few years, at radio sessions, the engineers would be like, "The guitars are too loud, it's no good." But what's "good"? Our sound is really guitar-heavy, to the point where sometimes people say, "I can't hear the vocals." But that's the Wedding Present sound.

#### How did the Wedding Present start playing so insanely fast?

**GEDGE:** We had this drummer called Shaun Charman who was instrumental in speeding up the songs. When we hit on that, it was really exciting. Playing like that felt like almost driving off the edge of a cliff. There's a live recording of "What Goes On" by the Velvet Underground where they're just strumming away, and I think we were influenced by that — but playing it twice as fast, like you've put the LP on at 45 rpm instead of 33 rpm.

But it is difficult to play guitar like that. I'm not a great guitarist when it comes to riffs and plucking and all that. But I can play rhythm guitar in time, very quickly. That's probably my chief contribution to the world of guitar. [Laughs] It's funny; this guy came up after a gig recently and said he was a specialist in

## "Our sound is guitar-heavy to the point where people can't hear the vocals"

DAVID GEDGE

repetitive strain injuries. He told me, 'What you're doing there is exactly what we tell people not to do!'

#### Rachael, what's it like working with a rhythm player that fast?

**WOOD:** When I joined this band, I had to work a lot on my right-hand technique, because some of it is so quick. And live, they're even quicker. I can't believe David hasn't had tendonitis. It's mad that he's been playing that way for 40 years.

#### Have you broken a lot of strings, David?

**GEDGE:** Back in the old days, all the time. The poor roadie. Sometimes, both guitarists would break a string in the same song, and he'd be like, "Argh, whose guitar do I change first?" I don't seem to break strings as much these days. I think it's the advent of in-ears, because I can hear things clearer. When it was just wedges onstage, I used to hit it harder.

#### Did your hands look pretty wrecked by the end of a tour?

**GEDGE:** They still are! There's cuts all over them. Before our last tour, we did a production rehearsal, and on the last song, I slammed my guitar and caught my thumb. So playing was quite painful. And not only playing. It's painful to turn on your electric toothbrush. One injury from one aggressive strum, and every night on that tour, I was like... [Winces]

#### You've never tried super glue, like Stevie Ray Vaughan?

**GEDGE:** No, because I heard about a guitarist who super-glued their cuts and he ended up in the hospital with blood poisoning. I guess it doesn't make sense to be putting those chemicals into your bloodstream, does it?

#### Do you think Maxi will surprise long-standing fans?

**GEDGE:** No, because we've already played all these songs live. And yes, it is a different-sounding Wedding Present, but they're used to us moving on. They might be surprised by the first track and ask, 'Why is it so quiet?' That might throw a few people. But hopefully they'll get into it. **GW**

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# The Other One

A salute to Grateful Dead original Bob Weir, who – in the last 30 years of his life – stepped out from Jerry Garcia's considerable shadow to emerge as a guitar hero in his own right

BY ALAN PAUL

**T**HE ANNOUNCEMENT OF Bob Weir's death on January 10 sent shock waves of sadness and grief through the Grateful Dead community. Coming just over a year after the passing of bassist Phil Lesh, it seemed to signal a real, definitive end to a 60-plus-year era. Lesh and Weir carried the torch high and mighty, together and separately, since Jerry Garcia's 1995 death, giving the Grateful Dead a robust after-life that was hard to imagine when Garcia "left this mortal coil," to use Weir's preferred term.

Weir's final performances were with Dead & Company last July before massive crowds at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, celebrating the Grateful Dead's 60th anniversary. Dead & Company, originally featuring Weir and GD drummers Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart, along with guitarist John Mayer, bassist Oteil Burbridge and keyboardist Jeff Chimenti, had a 10-year run from 2015 to 2025 that surpassed all expectations, playing before millions of fans and filling stadiums and 48 nights at Las Vegas' 20,000-capacity Sphere. (Kreutzmann stopped performing with the group in 2023.)

Weir's contributions in the 30 years after Garcia's death created a new generation of collaborators who have never stopped singing his praises and cemented his central role in the band. While Weir's playing was often misunderstood and under-appreciated while the Grateful Dead was active, the simple fact that Garcia chose Weir as his three-decade wing man speaks for itself. Weir dedicated his musical life to forging a distinct style of

rhythm playing that was essential to the Dead's sound. Rather than playing repetitive chords, his approach was based around counterpoint, riffs, inversions and partial chords, filling the musical gaps between the band's drummers and Lesh's similarly unconventional bass playing.

"He's an extraordinarily original player in a world full of people who sound like each other," Garcia said of Weir in a 1982 interview. "I don't know anyone else who plays guitar the way he does... That in itself is really a score, considering how derivative almost all electric guitar playing is."

Weir explained the development of his unique style simply; instead of trying to duplicate other guitarists, he tried to mimic jazz pianists, specifically McCoy Tyner of the John Coltrane Quartet.

"I just loved what he did underneath Coltrane's work, so I sat with that stuff for a long time and tried to absorb it starting when I was 17," Weir said. "I got further toward it. I've never had much of an idea of what I'm up to, but I have always been there to serve the music and believed that if you do that, your role will present itself to you. Then it's just a matter of finding the perfect place to play that perfect role, and I'm very

**"Bob's unique chord shapes and rhythmic patterns pushed you to play outside of yourself"**

WARREN HAYNES

fortunate this happened to me at a very young age."

Weir described his dedication to complementary guitar playing as "putting my shoulder to the wheel," but bassist Don Was, who played with Weir in Bobby and the Wolf Brothers from 2018 to 2025, says the style is so unique that he hesitates to even call it "rhythm guitar."

"There is not another guitarist in the world who plays like him," Was says. "He never played the same thing remotely the same way twice in a row and will alternate between being as raw as John Lee Hooker to as sophisticated as Andrés Segovia from one phrase to another. I've worked with a lot of folks, and there's no one like Bob Weir. He's a brilliant artist."

The unusual choices the guitarist made pushed soloists toward making more interesting choices – and the ensemble toward full band improvisation, traits that astounded and delighted all the younger players who performed with him since '95.

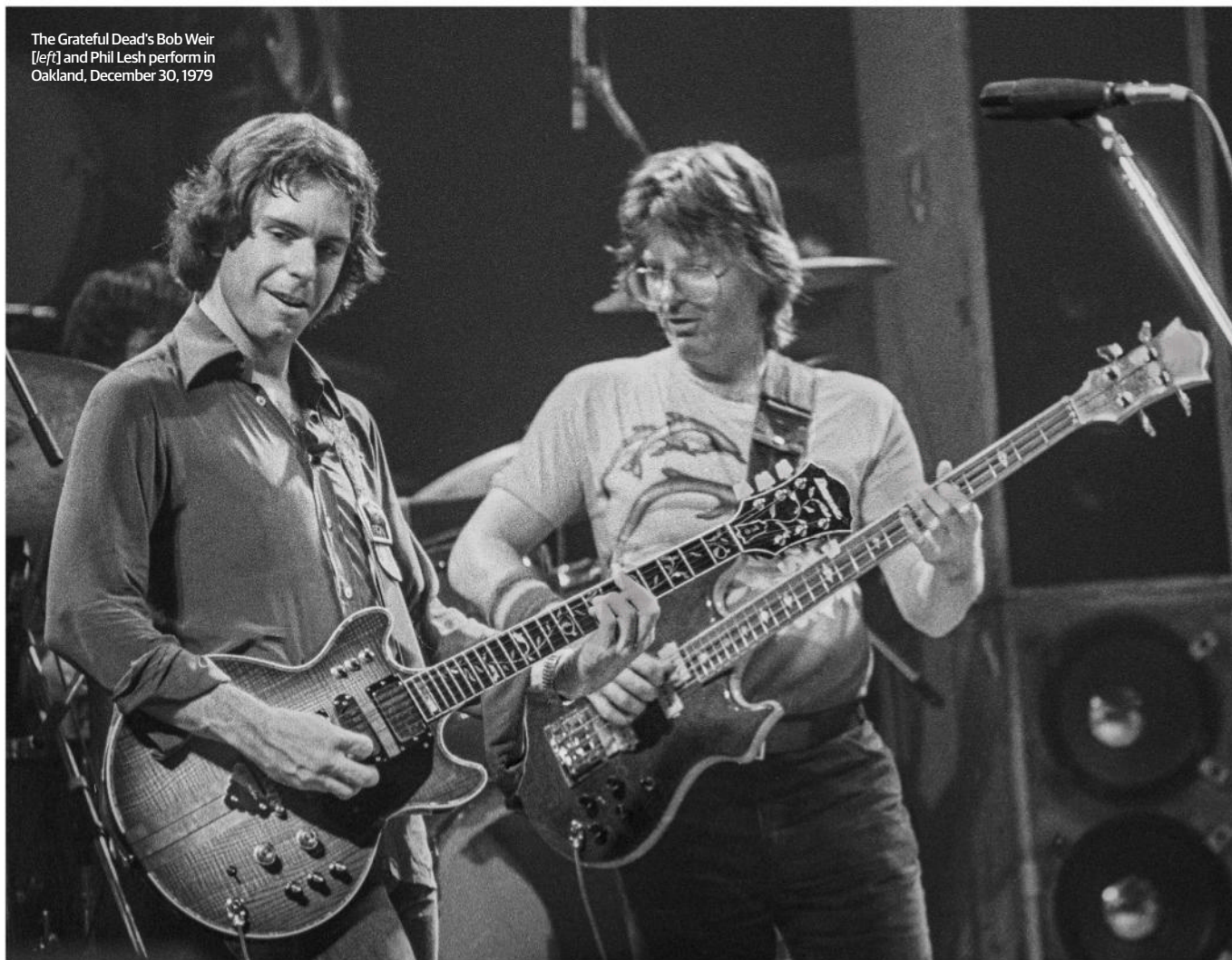
"Bob's very unique chord shapes and rhythmic patterns pushed you to play differently and outside of yourself," says Warren Haynes, who played frequently with Weir, including two stints in the Dead. "He very naturally led you into a lot of bobbing and weaving, counterpoint, call and response. And he had this wonderful sense of not needing to compare this moment to any other moment. He approached every song, every performance, with a fresh outlook. It's an intangible thing, but it was so crucial to everything he did."

**Bob Weir (1947-2026)**

Bob Weir  
photographed  
in Hollywood,  
January 28, 2025



The Grateful Dead's Bob Weir [left] and Phil Lesh perform in Oakland, December 30, 1979



Weir's singular approach extended to his songwriting. Many of his compositions, notably "The Other One," employed time signatures that are unusual in Western music, but common in Indian music, from which he took a lot of inspiration.

He chalked that up to the "explosion of Northern Indian classical music in American popular culture" after the Beatles studied with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation. As with all things, Weir approached this intently, immersing himself in the music of sitarist Ravi Shankar and sarod player Ali Akbar Khan. He went beyond the Indian flourishes or riffs that many of his peers were employing, working in foreign time signatures that are common in Indian classical music.

"To even begin to appreciate their music, you have to be able to count in their time signatures," Weir told me.

Weir was with the Dead since the very beginning. The first step of the Grateful Dead's long, strange trip was taken in Palo Alto, California, on New Year's Eve, 1963. A 16-year-

old Weir and some friends were walking through an alley behind Dana Morgan's Music Shop on their way to a coffeehouse when they heard banjo music coming out of the store. They stopped in to explore.

"We knew damn well it was Jerry, who was a local hero, playing banjo with the Black Mountain Boys, a really hot bluegrass band," Weir said. "He was sitting there waiting for his students. I said, 'This is New Year's Eve, I don't think you'll be seeing anyone.' He wasn't quite ready to give up the ghost, so he said, 'Do you guys play? I have the key to the instrument room.' He got some guitars, and we ended up playing well into the evening and had enough fun to think about doing something together. The next week we had a jug band."

**"At the acid tests, you could be a free spirit. That encouraged us to experiment and play"**

**BILL KREUTZMANN**

Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, featuring a mix of traditional and homemade instruments, quickly garnered a strong local following. Members came and went, including future Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter. Garcia and Weir were constants and were soon joined by Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, a singer/harmonica player who possessed an outgoing stage presence with a love for the blues. A young drummer named Bill Kreutzmann sat front and center at one Palo Alto show, mesmerized by what he was watching.

"Jerry was so charismatic, just bigger than life, and the first time I saw him play, I thought, 'I'll follow this guy forever,'" Kreutzmann says. "You could say I was the first Deadhead."

About three weeks later, Garcia called Kreutzmann and asked if he wanted to join a band. Pigpen was pushing to go electric, and Jerry was growing frustrated with the limitations inherent in the jug band and decided it was time to move in a new direction. The new group was now called the Warlocks. Bass



[above] Weir starred on *Guitar World's* December 2016 cover. [right] Weir in soundcheck mode at the Hollywood Bowl, September 15, 1967

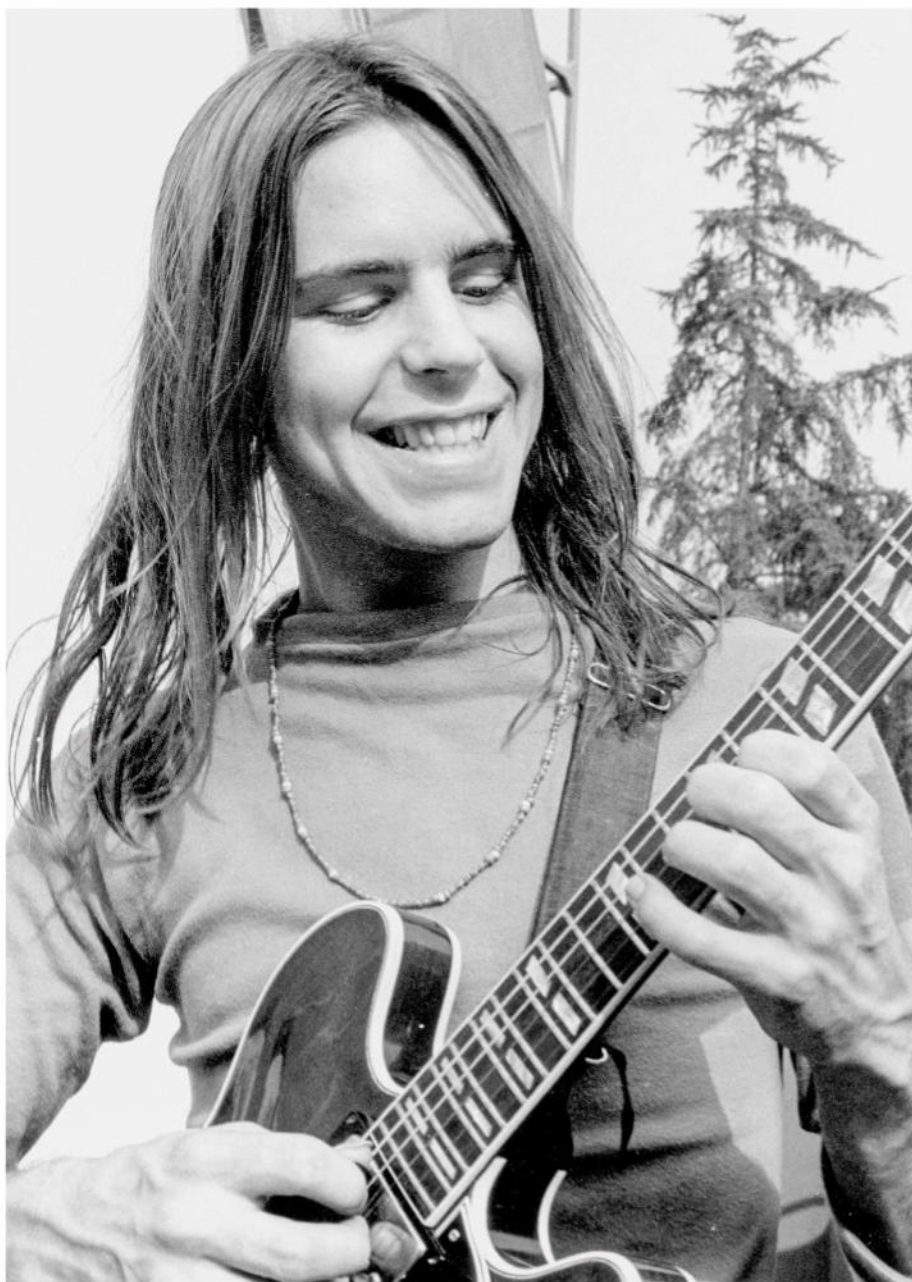
was handled by the son of music store owner Dana Morgan, which provided the band with free instruments and rehearsal space. Their first gig was at Magoo's Pizza in Menlo Park in May 1965, and they were a standard dance rock band of the day, playing blues patterned after the Rolling Stones' versions as well as adapting some of the old-time tunes from their jug band.

After one show, Garcia enlisted Phil Lesh, a casual friend, to become their new bassist, even though he had never touched a bass. On the surface it made very little sense, but the ever-perceptive guitarist saw Lesh's potential. A classically trained trumpeter and composer, Lesh was a brilliant musician with a wide-open mind. He embraced the avant garde and had a newfound interest in rock 'n' roll, thanks to Bob Dylan and the Beatles. Given his freewheelin' background, it was no surprise he quickly discarded any preconceived notion of the bass's role.

"I've always wanted to avoid exact repetition, and that put me against the grain of rock bass, which at the time was tied to the root of the chord or followed the bass drum," Lesh said.

He played his first gig about two weeks later, and — while he had learned the rudiments — he was still an inexperienced player who would learn on the job. However, with his extensive musical background and curious intellect, it didn't take long for him to carve out a unique style and become an integral part of the band's developing sound.

"It's okay to repeat an idea once, but then I like to do something different, like displacing the rhythm by half a beat or not playing a root in a melodic section," Lesh said. "The basis of my style revolves out of the more melodic function of the bassline in classical music."



Lesh's non-traditional style also demanded that Weir find a new approach to rhythm guitar, and he was immediately searching to do so, even as he, too, was learning his way around the instrument. The group honed their sound in small clubs, becoming more involved in San Francisco's emerging psychedelic music scene. Then they hooked up with author Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, who had been throwing events where the participants dropped acid. The newly named Grateful Dead became the house band for

these "acid tests," which were soon fueled by the work of chemist Owsley "Bear" Stanley, who would become the band's soundman and patron, essentially supporting the group with the proceeds of his LSD sales.

"There were no rules at the acid tests," Kreutzmann says. "It was a place where you could take acid — or not — and play music — or not. No one was judging if you looked right or were playing a song right. You could be a total free spirit, and that encouraged us to experiment and to just play." □

**"Anything that came within pissing distance of us would be incorporated into our music"**

**BOB WEIR**

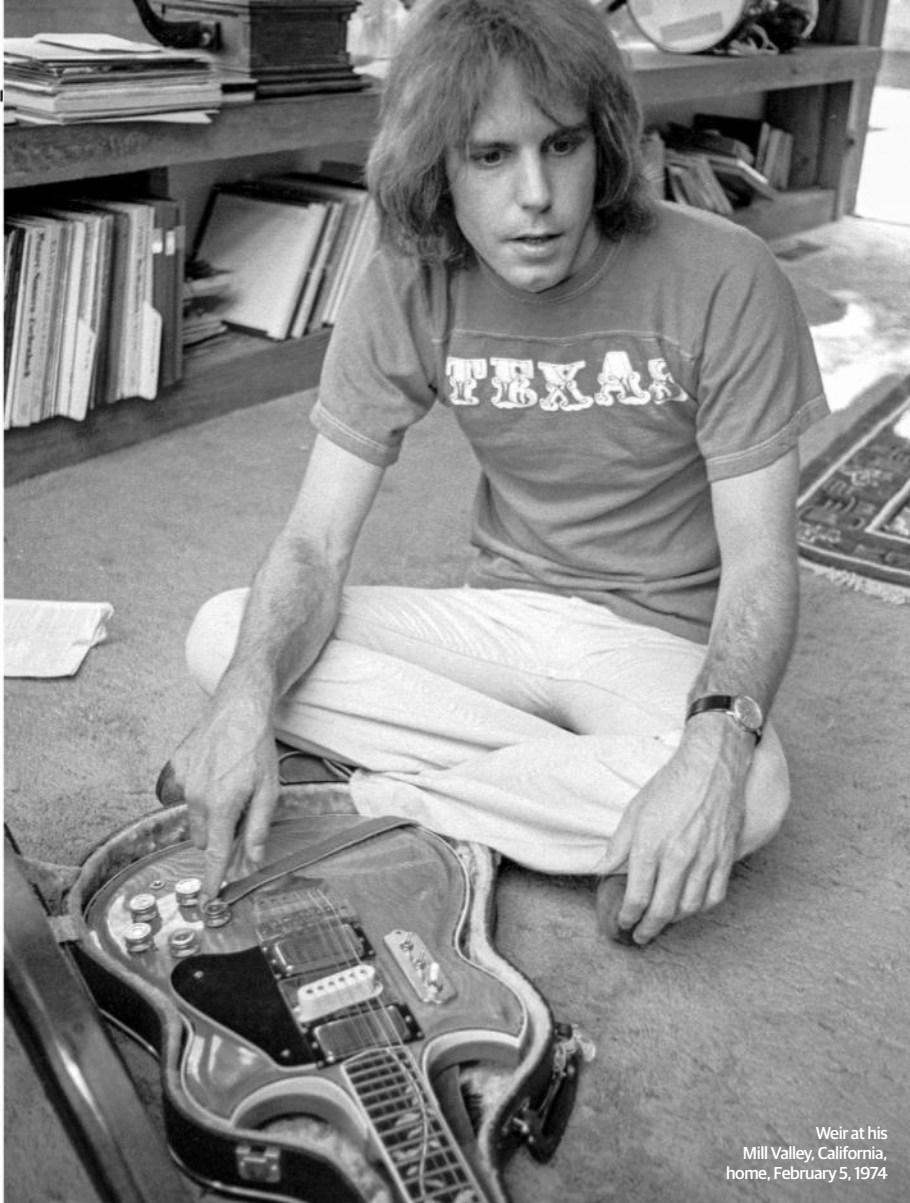
The group signed with Warner Bros. in early 1967 and released two albums that were mostly just pushed into debt. The year 1969 was epic in all respects for the Dead, however. They released two primo psychedelic recordings, the labored studio effort *Aoxomoxoa* and the free-flowing *Live/Dead*. They played a poor set at Woodstock – bad enough that they refused to appear in the album or movie, eliminating their presence from popular memory. They also played a central role in planning a free concert at California's Altamont Raceway that was to feature them, Santana, Crosby, Stills Nash & Young, the Jefferson Airplane and the Rolling Stones. About 300,000 fans arrived to find insufficient facilities and growing bedlam. The Dead never actually performed, taking off in helicopters when they saw the chaos descending. An audience member was stabbed to death by a member of the Hell's Angels during the Stones' set.

In the wake of such a tumultuous year, the Dead looked to scale back, turn inward and make more intimate music. With the band ready for a change of direction as a new decade dawned, Garcia proposed making a quick and easy album, a work he suggested approaching "like a country record" with "simple songs that aren't going to take us forever to learn?"

Their back-to-their-roots approach was in sync with the wider world of popular music. Country and roots music was impacting rock from Woodstock, where the Band's music was infused with rustic Americana, to Los Angeles, where the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers were making waves, even influencing the Rolling Stones. Bob Dylan had recorded *Nashville Skyline*. The Allman Brothers Band's first two albums were out. Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett and their gospel-infused good-time blues were drawing George Harrison and Eric Clapton on the road as band members.

"We were certainly well aware of those people, and we were influenced by anything that came our way," Weir said. "Anything that came within pissing distance of us would be sucked up and incorporated into our music. We osmoted it right up through our systems, and it came out of our pores and into those songs."

The Dead had already been trending rootier over the ensuing year. Garcia had picked up pedal steel guitar, which he was playing in the New Riders of the Purple Sage and the acoustic-based music impacted Garcia's overall outlook and his songwriting with Hunter. The lyricist's work had also taken a new direction, with mythic Americana imagery becoming more commonplace. By the end of the year, the Dead introduced country songs like Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried" – sung by



Weir at his Mill Valley, California, home, February 5, 1974

Weir – and debuted new material like "Dire Wolf," "Casey Jones," "Cumberland Blues" and "Uncle John's Band."

They had also become friendly with Crosby, Stills & Nash, who were frequent guests at Mickey Hart's Marin County ranch. Garcia played the beautiful pedal steel guitar on "Teach Your Children." CSN's gorgeous vocal harmonies had a profound impact on the Dead, who received instructions on stacking vocals from the masters.

True to Garcia's vision of a quick and easy album, they finished work on their fifth album in less than a month, and it represented a stark change in direction. From the opening strummed acoustic guitar and well-executed three-part vocal harmonies of "Uncle John's Band" to the last notes of "Casey Jones,"

**"As soon as we stopped taking psychedelics, our love of American music took back over"**

**BOB WEIR**

*Workingman's Dead* was a mature collection of hummable songs that pulled listeners into an intimate communion. The songs harkened back to the band's roots in traditional music, even as lyricist Robert Hunter painted modernist lyrical pictures of a mythical American West, evoking a past that never existed.

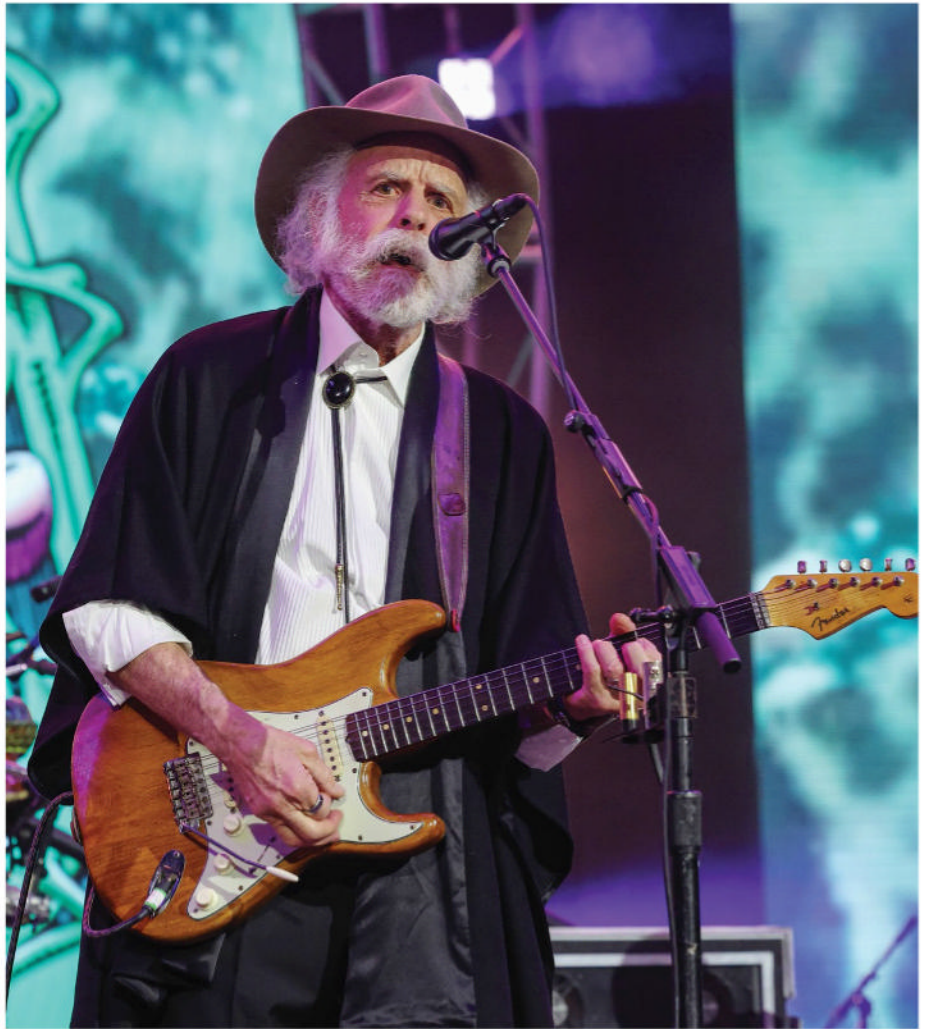
The next year, Garcia told *Guitar Player* that these different methods of recording were all part of the learning process. "We'd been experimenting with how to make a record," he said. Elaborating, Garcia referred to the studio experimentation of *Anthem of the Sun* and *Aoxomoxoa* as "going in and making a record with nothing at all."

For *Workingman's Dead*, they took a very different approach, rehearsing the material rigorously for a month before they got near a studio. "It works really good," Garcia said. "Everybody stays alert, and happy, and bright-eyed, and nobody gets bogged down."

The band took the *Workingman's Dead* concepts even further when they returned to the studio in September 1970, to record what became *American Beauty*. The album is almost fully acoustic, with the only electric



[above] Weir and John Mayer appeared on *Guitar World's* May 2025 cover. [right] Weir performs with Dead & Company in Los Angeles, January 31, 2025



guitar solo played by the New Riders' David Nelson on "Box of Rain." Garcia plays his beloved pedal steel on "Candyman" and "Sugar Magnolia," and most of the other songs don't have instrumental breaks. The focus was purely on the songs and the singing – and what a collection of tunes they had.

As the recording sessions began, Weir had recently lost both his parents, Lesh and Garcia's mothers were terminally ill and Pigpen's health was faltering. The sense of mortality lent the proceedings not darkness so much as depth. Songs like "Ripple" and Lesh's "Box of Rain" grappled with life and death, with philosophical profundity that has had them sung and read at countless weddings and funerals for decades.

The album also contained a trio of the band's most upbeat, commercial tunes – "Truckin'," "Friend of the Devil" and "Sugar Magnolia." Weir wrote the latter, inspired by extensive jamming with Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett and their band members, including bassist Kenny Gradney, who went on to be a member of Little Feat, on the Trans Canada Festival Express. That moving festival involved a train packed with musicians, also including Janis Joplin, the Band and Buddy Guy, rolling across Canada.

Weir explained that "Sugar Magnolia" was his "take on Southern rock."

"I loved the way Delaney played rhythm guitar, doing things like sliding into A chords, which I picked up on, and you can also hear in 'Monkey See, Monkey Do,'" he said. "At the same time, there was an outbreak of Cajun fiddle music with guys like Doug Kershaw. What I tried to do was a straight overlay of the two. The chorus uses a simple trick all the Cajun fiddle songs do, where you go to the

## "The music gets me past myself as soon as it starts, because what I'm doing is not about me"

**BOB WEIR**

IV chord, then walk to its IV chord and back. We were trying to do a rock and roll version of a Cajun fiddle tune – and I must say that it worked! The song fit right in with what Jerry and Hunter were doing."

The final album of the band's more stripped-down trilogy was the untitled live album released in 1971 and commonly called *Skull and Roses* – after the distinctive cover imagery – or *Skullfuck*, the title Warner Bros. rejected. With Hart temporarily out of the band and no keyboardist other than a fading Pigpen, the album mostly presents the group as a lean five-piece.

"We sort of forgot our roots during our psychedelic era, but as soon as we stopped taking psychedelics with absurd regularity and put our feet back on the ground, our love

of American music took back over and those albums resulted," Weir said.

Pigpen, in failing health, performed his final show with the band on June 17, 1972, and died the following March. He had already been supplemented by pianist Keith Godchaux, who now became the sole keyboardist. The change helped push the Dead in a more polished, musically adventurous direction, tinged at times with prog-rock influences. That became evident with the 1973 release of *Wake of the Flood*, the first of a series of strong, more produced studio albums. That recording included "Weather Report Suite," another greatly ambitious Weir-penned track (in collaboration with several others). More would follow on albums to come, including "The Music Never Stopped" (*Blues for Allab*, 1975) and "Estimated Prophet" (*Terrapin Station*, 1977).

All these complex and inarguably beautiful songs became Grateful Dead catalog cornerstones, as did a trio of his songs from 1980's *Go to Heaven* – the simmering, funky "Feel Like a Stranger" and the conjoined "Lost Sailor" and "Saint of Circumstance." ▣

By 1986, the Grateful Dead had not recorded a studio album in six years, and there wasn't much reason to expect one anytime soon. One 1984 attempt was aborted despite some strong new songs. Garcia had grown badly overweight and concern for his health proved prescient, when he fell into a diabetic coma on July 10, 1986. He woke up after five days but had to learn to play guitar almost from scratch. No one knew if the Grateful Dead would ever play together again — which made the smashing success of 1987's *In the Dark* and its hit single, "Touch of Grey," even more improbable.

The band entered a new era of mass popularity, which brought its own problems, as Lesh described to me in 2000 in *Guitar World*. "The effects were dramatic," he said, "It brought in young people who didn't really have a feel for the scene and the ethos surrounding it, which was considerable after two decades. We were thrilled with the interest in the band, but it just stood everything on its head. More people wanted to see us, so we had to play larger venues. Playing in front of larger crowds resulted in a loss of intimacy, and for me, the experience was all downhill from there. Of course, the decline might have happened anyhow, because after [so many] years we were struggling creatively. We were

just out there hacking away at it, and the new success made it easier to keep going, because it gave us more resources."

Still, the band soldiered on, with some excellent tours, before Garcia played his final show on July 9, 1995, at Chicago's Soldier Field. He died August 9, and the future of his band and its beloved catalog became an unknown. It took some time to come together, but the surviving members, joined by a variety of guitarists, including Warren Haynes, Jimmy Herring and Trey Anastasio, continued to perform in a variety of groups including the Dead, Furthur, the Other Ones and ultimately Dead & Company.

Weir never stopped performing, seemingly on stage somewhere every night in some configuration. In addition to the bands with his former Dead mates, he fronted Ratdog from 1995 to 2014 and the Wolf Brothers from 2018 to 2025. He sat in with everyone from the Allman Brothers Band to Paul

McCartney. He performed solo and duo acoustic gigs. Remarkably, given that he probably performed in front of more people than anyone ever, Weir said he never got over "horrendous stage fright," insisting that "those last few steps onto stage are like walking into a torture chamber every time."

He told me that he overcame it by leaving his ego behind and giving himself over to the characters in the songs. Great instrumentalists often speak of themselves as vessels for a higher power. Weir felt the same way about the characters he seemed to regard as dear old friends.

"The music gets me past myself as soon as it starts, because what I'm doing is not about me," he said. "I give my body to those characters so that they can tell their stories. The more I give myself to them, the less I'm there to experience the stage fright, and it goes away."

As for why he never slowed down and stopped to smell the roses, Weir was surprised at the question. Why slow down when he finally felt in control of his craft?

"After putting in a lifetime of work, stuff is opening up to me that I just can't walk away from," he said. "Opportunities are arriving that make life worth living, so I got to go for them. Retiring is not an option." **GW**

**"Opportunities are arriving that make life worth living. Retiring is not an option"**

**BOB WEIR**

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# LIVING AFTER MIDNIGHT

Tailgunner's new album, *Midnight Blitz*, is a love letter to the New Wave of British Heavy Metal movement of the Eighties. Hell, it's even produced by ex-Judas Priest man K.K. Downing. Meet young guns Rhea Thompson and Zach Salvini

WORDS BY AMIT SHARMA PORTRAITS BY TUNDE VALISZKA

**H**EAVY METAL HAS evolved a great deal since four young musicians in Birmingham, England, saw a crowd gather across the street from their rehearsal room, lining up for an opportunity to get terrified by 1963 Italian horror film *Black Sabbath*. Since then, the movement has expanded into countless sub-genres, each offering its own unique take on the sound. And while it feels like recent years have seen the pendulum swing toward more futuristic and progressive interpretations of sonic heaviness, there are still bands that look firmly to the past for inspiration.

Tailgunner's second album, *Midnight Blitz*, is a love letter to the New Wave of British Heavy Metal movement of the Eighties, as well as elements of the European power metal and American hard rock scenes from the same decade. For Rhea Thompson and Zach Salvini, who share lead and rhythm guitar duties, this band is their chance to show how vintage shred heroes like Yngwie Malmsteen and Marty Friedman are still very much

relevant to younger generations of guitarists. In Tailgunner, they're paying tribute to a style of music they believe never went out of fashion — partly due to the fact it never tried to be in fashion.

They've also been given a seal of approval from ex-Judas Priest legend K.K. Downing, who produced *Midnight Blitz* after being impressed by their performances supporting his band, KK's Priest, on tour. Naturally, having one of the most important guitarists in metal history on board is something that meant a lot to the young up-and-comers, with

**This band is a chance to show how vintage shred heroes like Yngwie are still relevant to younger generations of guitarists**

the veteran being able to provide endless pearls of wisdom.

"One thing I learned from K.K. is to challenge everything," Salvini says. "We gave him our demos and he challenged every element of it and was very analytical. He'd throw curveballs our way on things like song structures and parts. Often as an artist, you can be deadset in your ways. You'll write a demo and then refuse to be flexible or consider any alternatives. It was great working with someone who was so open-minded and didn't rule out any possibilities."

For Thompson, the opportunity to sit next to one of her biggest heroes and hear his creative suggestions was very much a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"He'd suggest little changes to the songs that really brought them to life," she says. "He encouraged us to use more dive-bombs, squeals and random noises. It was a pretty crazy experience given that we grew up listening to Judas Priest. He's been so lovely to us. We were really lucky to have him involved." □



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## Interview Tailgunner

[from left] Tailgunner's Bones, Rhea Thompson, Craig Cairns, Zach Salvini and Eddie Mariotti



**You're going for a very classic metal approach at a time when a lot of younger bands are trying to sound more techy and hypermodern...**

**RHEA THOMPSON:** It's funny you mention that, because it's become a bit of an in-joke between us. We'll play festivals and watch other groups telling everyone that they're the proper metal band on the bill, but they're all using eight-string guitars. We have a modern production, but we're very old-school in terms of influences. A lot of my solos are inspired by Yngwie Malmsteen's *Rising Force* album, especially with things like the octave jumps between the arpeggio shapes.

**ZACH SALVINI:** We live in the now, so we choose to treat our music in a more modern way. But it's definitely written with a vintage feel. And like Rhea was saying, there's something really special about those old Yngwie albums and even some of his later stuff. I was learning his song "Vengeance" [from 1995's *Magnum Opus*] the other day, and I'd forgotten how good some of the mid-Nineties tracks are.

**What other players shaped you into the musicians you are today?**

**THOMPSON:** My biggest influence growing up was Slash, because Guns N' Roses were my favorite band. I remember learning all of his solos and parts when I was young. Then I started to delve into the Yngwie-influenced neoclassical side, which is where all those arpeggios come from.

**SALVINI:** For me, it was Angus Young to start with. Those AC/DC riffs sounded so cool when I was young, and still do. Then, like Rhea, I started listening to faster players. Jason Becker is probably my favorite guitarist of all time, along with Marty Friedman. It's also impossible not to love the twin leads on classic Iron Maiden and Judas Priest records.

**Where on the album would you say these influences are most prevalent?**

**THOMPSON:** On the title track, my solo is the more neoclassical of the two, especially with the Yngwie ascending diminished sweeping lick. I'd say it's the hardest solo I've ever come up with. I wanted to write something that really pushed me as a player. And then there's the harmonized sweeping runs on the closing track, "Eulogy," which were fun to play but a challenge to get tight and clean.

**SALVINI:** It's a five-string sweep idea.

Originally it was just going to be one guitar, but K.K. suggested adding the harmony. It's awesome to play live because it looks impressive when we're standing together front and center. And that diminished shape Rhea plays on the title track is such a classic. It's a very easy scale to harmonize with, because you can look at the neck in groups of three and play the same shape anywhere divisible by that number. On the title track, my solo begins with some tapped arpeggios in E minor that are reminiscent of what Kirk Hammett did on "One" as well as Randy Rhoads' double-taps on "Crazy Train."

**You take a lot of inspiration from twin-guitar bands. How do you go about balancing everything out?**

**SALVINI:** We have quite similar skills, but we're still able to balance each other well. You can hear how the solos contrast on a song like "Midnight Blitz," each one has a different sense of melody. We want people to be able to tell us apart, because that's an attractive prospect as a band. You want people to get excited about what each solo and player brings, almost as if they're pitching us against each other.

Tailgunner's Zach Salvini [left] and Rhea Thompson with producer K.K. Downing



## POINT OF ENTRY

**K.K. Downing explains how he ended up working with British metal's rising stars. BY AMIT SHARMA**

**WHEN EX-JUDAS PRIEST** veteran K.K. Downing first saw Tailgunner in action, he could tell they had a wow factor he hadn't heard in years.

"They have an unashamed appreciation for what came before them," Downing says. "There was the original New Wave of British Heavy Metal — bands like Priest, Maiden, Saxon, Def Leppard, Venom and Diamond Head — but after punk, things changed. Tailgunner definitely have that NWOBHM sound; if they were around in 1983, they would have been very popular."

He also felt that with his expertise he could give them a better shot at the success they clearly deserved.

"Every new band needs some kind of mentorship or guidance," he says. "That whole 'Come this way and things will be better' type of thing. So I decided to offer up the knowledge I've accrued over the years, and now everything seems to be going in the right direction. Production-wise, I knew it would be fairly straightforward. I didn't want to fix anything that wasn't broken. They sound and play great, so it was just a case of polishing it up a bit. That's how you get it across to the masses."

After so many game-changing years at the very forefront of metal evolution, Downing is rightly proud to still have younger musicians looking up to him. It's been a lot of hard work, he tells us, and he's glad it doesn't go unnoticed.

"Today's musicians know I've got a lot of miles on the clock," he says. "They can see how many albums I've made, how many songs I've written and how many gigs I've played. It might look like I'm looking from the future toward the past, but there's plenty of good stuff still to come from me."

**"I decided to offer up the knowledge I've accrued over the years, and now everything seems to be going in the right direction"**

**K.K. DOWNING**

**THOMPSON:** Having slightly different flavors makes it more interesting to listen to. I think two similar-sounding solos built out of neoclassical runs wouldn't be as exciting. So if one of us does that and the other does something else, people get to enjoy different sides of the same coin.

**So what kind of exercises were paramount in developing your technical skills?**

**THOMPSON:** I started around nine years old, learning things I couldn't play, but I persevered until I could play them well. I didn't sit down and practice any specific drills for hours and hours. I mainly learned Avenged Sevenfold solos, which is how I learned how to sweep pick. Obviously I started off pretty sloppy, but I got better as the months went by. A lot of my playing comes from Synyster Gates. My favorite solo of his would probably be from the song "Beast and the Harlot." I also really love the arpeggio section from "Bat Country," which is alternate-picked rather than sweep-picked. I've noticed a lot of people play it slightly wrong.

**SALVINI:** I think it was Shawn Lane who said playing something and attempting it at full speed is actually good practice. It will sound sloppy to start off with, but the trick is to continue until it gets cleaner. Another thing

that helped was working on my up-picking against a metronome. Sometimes I might even be watching television and I'll just sit there trying to up-pick as fast as possible. Through doing that, I've trained my muscles for the motion, and it's important because it accounts for half of your alternate picking.

**Talk us through the gear we are hearing.**

**THOMPSON:** I use Jackson guitars. They seem to work best for me, and a lot of it comes down to the flat neck profile. We use the amp simulators built into the [Neural DSP] Quad Cortex [Digital Amp Modeling and Multi-Effects

Floorboard] and run them direct. You can see Marshall cabs behind us when we play live, but they're just dummies.

**SALVINI:** I recorded the album with a mixture of guitars. There's a white Jackson that's my favorite, and I also have a white Aria guitar with active pickups that worked better for some solos. The Quad Cortex made everything so quick and easy. You can set it up and instantly have great-sounding tones. The patch I use is based on the EVH 5150 with a Tube Screamer in front of it. I guess it's a bog-standard, go-to metal kind of sound.

**Are you both using the 5150 emulator on the Quad Cortex?**

**THOMPSON:** My sound is also based on the 5150, but I changed the EQ slightly to create a bit more contrast. I would say my sound is a bit more harsh, with more high end than Zach's. It fills out our sound better in terms of how the guitars sit.

**SALVINI:** Mine is pretty scooped. The IR is a Mesa cab from 2005 that I got from [Sylosis guitarist] Josh Middleton. The best thing about this kind of technology is how reliable it is. It's always the same. What I hear in my room is exactly what I give to the front of house. It's guaranteed — and I like having that level of certainty. **EW**



# Take It to the Bridge

When it came to tracking their new album, Alter Bridge found themselves in a truly inspirational environment – L.A.'s 5150 Studios, the late Eddie Van Halen's legendary creative space

BY GREGORY ADAMS



CHRISTIAN BARZ



**T**WO DECADES AND eight albums into Alter Bridge's lauded career, the hard rockers are pulling off a first in 2026 – they're embracing the definitiveness of a self-titled album. While you could argue 2010's *AB III* almost did this – at least typographically – there's a to-the-point toughness behind the band's new, eponymous 12-song statement that fully fortifies what Myles Kennedy and Mark Tremonti have been working on together since 2004. And it all comes down to the sickness of the riff.

"The essence of the band has always been to build the song on a good, solid, heavy riff and then balance it with a certain melodic sense and a certain depth of the lyrics," vocalist-guitarist Kennedy says of the Alter Bridge aesthetic. "But from record to record, we kind of lean one way or the other – like maybe we incorporate some Eighties synths as a texture."

He reiterates of *Alter Bridge*, though: "You're not going to have any keyboard extravaganzas on this. This is a straight-ahead hard-rock record. So it felt appropriate – as far as the self-titled approach goes."

Sure enough, *Alter Bridge* delivers tunefully brawny anthems by the boatload. Close to four years on from their seventh album, *Pawns & Kings* – and following Tremonti's recent arena-conquering Creed reunion tours, as well as albums from his eponymous metal outfit and Kennedy's solo project – the band broke a long silence last summer with the release of their deep, D-chunking "Silent Divide." Beyond its infectiously swampy groove, the single features solo sections that contrast Kennedy's kinetic vibrato skills with Tremonti's famous fretboard dexterity.

Both players explain that they brought their A-game to L.A.'s iconic 5150 Studios, where they recorded the album at the behest of longtime friend, collaborator and tourmate Wolfgang Van Halen. Kennedy and Tremonti were wowed by the magnitude of making music within the hallowed walls of Eddie Van Halen's home studio. Inspired by the room's rich history – and with the help of one in-house EVH 5150 III head – Alter Bridge put their all into the album's hard-swung screechers ("What Lies Within") and gloom-crested arpeggio attacks ("Scales Are Falling").

"It made us want to be better musicians and take advantage of the moment we had," Tremonti says of the setting. "When you have your guitar in your hand and you're playing in that studio in the same spot those guys played in, there's no slop coming out. It's got to be on point. You've got to man up, you know? You've got to band up when you're in that situation." ▣

Alter Bridge's PRS-fortified Myles Kennedy [left] and Mark Tremonti perform in Edinburgh, Scotland, June 6, 2023



**In “Silent Divide,” Myles, you’ve got these really decadent string slides coming out of the second chorus, right before Mark switches into that galloping bridge.**

**MYLES KENNEDY:** That’s something that I got from — rest his soul — John Sykes. He was a big influence for me, and he was the master of the string slide. When we’re recording, [producer] Elvis [Baskette] always says, “Do more of that string-sliding stuff,” and I don’t really think anything of it. It’s just been in my DNA for 30 years. But we leaned in for “Silent Divide.” Like, let’s be unapologetic about it!

**There’s a lot of dynamism between your and Mark’s respective approaches to soloing; the two leads you bring to “Silent Divide” reflect this. How do you see your respective styles complementing the other’s?**

**KENNEDY:** I always try to sing the guitar

solos. I’m generally singing along with them as I’m playing them. I don’t know if you’re familiar with Oscar Peterson, the piano player, but that was something I used to love on those old jazz records. You could hear Oscar singing every note. I like to incorporate certain techniques and punctuate things with a flurry of notes, but I really lean into the melodic thing. Mark loves learning new tricks and runs. I think that’s the main difference, and that’s maybe why we complement each other; we have enough of a different approach where you can kind of tell who’s who.

**MARK TREMONTI:** I think Myles has a very soothing way of playing. Some of my favorite vibrato I’ve ever heard is Myles on the guitar. I grew up more on the speed metal side of things. He listened to metal, but early on he dove deeper into jazz, which really helped his playing. He’s very good at improvisation. He has a lot of moments where he writes

beforehand, but he also has a lot of moments where he’s just improvising in the studio, whereas I like to come in fully prepared with a written solo.

**How did you come to record this album at 5150?**

**KENNEDY:** Wolf was incredibly kind enough to bring that offer up with our manager. We were like, “Really?” We knew the history of all the incredible music that had been made there. Just the fact that he trusted us enough to come in and not totally ruin the legacy really meant a lot. When we all showed up, we were very cognizant of that, and we wanted to honor the situation. If you know you’re going into this sacred ground where all these incredible riffs have been constructed and recorded, the last thing you want to do is show up empty-handed. It was definitely fuel for the creative fire.

**Did Wolf have any stipulations for you coming into 5150? Like, “You can come in here, so long as you punch a werewolf in the face in my music video,” as you did in Mammoth’s “The End” music video?**

**KENNEDY:** Right? [Laughs] “Yeah, you can record here, but you have to sit in a makeup

**“We weren’t tracking with Frankenstein. Have I held Frankenstein? Yes. Was it a total, Excalibur-level experience? I don’t even know how to articulate that...”**

**MYLES KENNEDY**

chair for two hours and turn into a zombie." Getting to do that was awesome. So much fun. But yeah, I think the only thing was "Please, don't play 'Eruption.'" He didn't say that, but I wasn't going to do that.

#### Was all the gear at 5150 at your disposal?

**KENNEDY:** There were pieces of gear there they had set out, but nothing super iconic. We weren't tracking with Frankenstein. Have I held Frankenstein? Yes. Was it a total, Excalibur-level experience? I don't even know how to articulate that, but I got emotional — that was a pretty special moment. But as far as amps and whatnot, there was a 50-watt 5150 III that we used when we were doing pre-production, so I plugged into that. I had it set up because I couldn't fly out my Diezels. I fell in love with that amp, and it became a big part of the sound. I ended up marrying it with the [Diezel] VH4 when I was actually tracking.

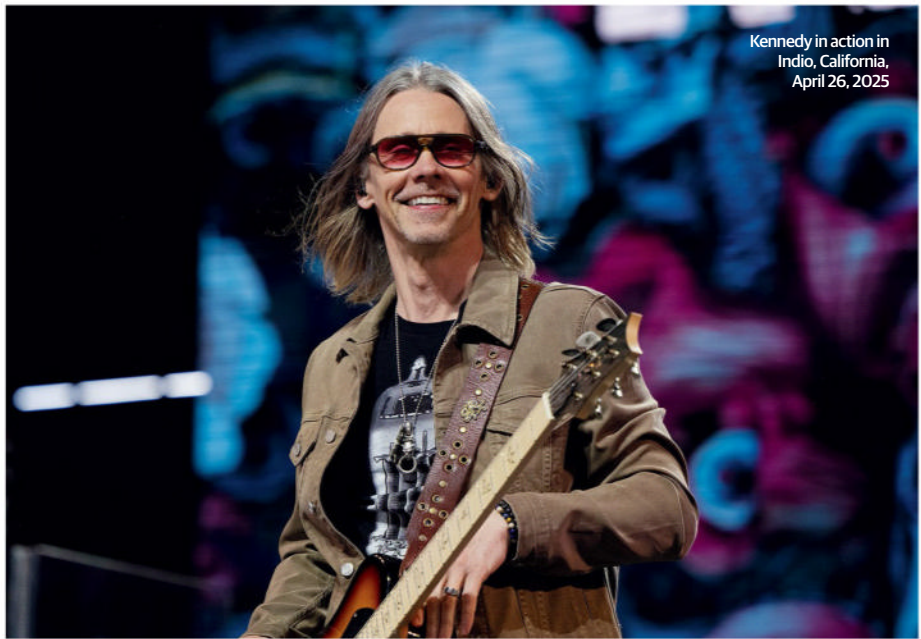
**TREMONTI:** I thought [*the 5150 III*] sounded so good, especially mixed with what I was using, which was my signature PRS head. I loved it so much that I got one; they were nice enough to give me one, and I took it on the last tour we did. So now it's a part of my sound. It's given me a new appreciation for 50-watt heads. As long as I've been playing guitar, and as long as I've collected amplifiers, I don't think I've ever owned a 50-watt head — maybe a single 1x12 combo that was 50 watts. I never appreciated how aggressive a 50-watt head is. When you pair it with 100-watt heads, it's got a certain character — a bite that cuts through the mix. But it's not harsh.

#### Did any Van Halen vibes seep into these songs?

**KENNEDY:** Without a doubt. The riff for "Silent Divide" has definitely got an Eighties vibe. Mark kept comparing it to an old Judas Priest riff, but with the way I keep coming back to that chugging on the low D, I think of a riff like "Unchained." Those were such important riffs for me. Does it sound like "Unchained"? No, but there's definitely that element there.

**TREMONTI:** I try to explain to people that 5150 Studios isn't some sterile environment where they're cleaning up for the next band to come in. It was pretty much left the way [*Van Halen*] used it last. Wolfie has a great Neve console in there now, but it's pretty much the same letters on the kitchen fridge; there's the 5150 necklace hanging over the door — all the cool stuff that was there when those guys were there. We by no means sound like Van Halen in any way or form. But you can feel the spirit of the band and Eddie in that room.

**One characteristic to your solos on this record, Mark — whether on "Rue the Day," "Silent Divide" or "Power Down" — is that**



Kennedy in action in Indio, California, April 26, 2025

**heavy, wah-filtered tonality. When we spoke with you around your last Tremonti record, *The End Will Show You How*, you were prototyping your own line of pedals behind the scenes, including wahs. Are any of those on the record?**

**TREMONTI:** No, that's the Morley wah. I'm still dabbling with trying to get some stuff together. It's going to be called Tremonti Audio Company, but there's such great stuff out there [*already*]. I'm a picky guy, so I gotta make sure it's right before we do it.

#### Pardon the pun, but what else lies within this record, gear-wise?

**KENNEDY:** Guitar-wise, I'm just using my signature models. On this record, there were probably two or three, depending on what the tuning was, that were just off the rack. No changes, just stock MK signatures from PRS, and they worked out great.

**TREMONTI:** I just used my signature model. PRS always gives us a handful of guitars we can play in the studio, and then fans can buy

the actual studio-recorded guitars. But there was one that they sent over that I really loved and I kept. There's also a baritone we used on "Rue the Day."

#### Getting back to the heavy riff, how did you come about the doom-waltzing feel of "What Lies Within"?

**TREMONTI:** That's in open D5, which is one of my favorite alternate tunings. I had that riff and chorus sitting around. I put the demo together with all those parts on there and left the melodies in the verses up to Myles' interpretation.

**KENNEDY:** I came up with a little alternate melody, a little octave part. The way we marry those two concepts has really become a thing since the record we put out about 10 years ago, [*2016's*] *The Last Hero*, where he'll have this kind of chugging, driving riff and then I'll put on an octave thing in an eighth- or 16-note pattern, just to move it along.

**You're both prolific workers and writers. To paraphrase Myles' lyrics on "Power Down," you don't necessarily slow the overall pace, but you're not always at it with Alter Bridge, specifically. What are the things you notice about each other once you get back together?**

**TREMONTI:** Just how much of a powerful singer Myles is. When we play in these multiple bands, it keeps it all fresh. I couldn't imagine being in one band now. I think it would start getting stale, and you would kind of take it for granted. So, when you come back to playing these songs you haven't done in three years, it's like, "Oh yeah, I love playing this!" and you see the smiles on everybody's faces. I think that's why we've had a 20-year-plus



career with the same members, because we're all open-minded enough to go out and do other projects before coming back together.

**KENNEDY:** It seems like the longer we do it, the more that dynamic is solidified – there's this level of comfort. It's the same way I look at why we continue to use Elvis as our producer, where you know how it's going to play out and you trust everybody's instincts. With Mark and me, part of the reason it's really worked since day one is because we realize we're kindred spirits who are obsessed with writing music. You never feel like you're having to pull someone along.

**Are you ever able to fully power down?**

**TREMONTI:** I love to do this. When I want to power down, what's better than sitting around and playing guitar? It's not relaxing to practice sweep arpeggios or that kind of thing, but sitting down with a guitar and writing and improvising – that's relaxing. I don't power down in the typical sense of, "I'm going to sit on the couch and watch TV." I like going to bed at night thinking, "I did something today. I wrote this part or practiced this or that." That makes me feel good. If I go to bed going, "I just wasted a day," it bugs me.

**KENNEDY:** "Power Down" is written from the perspective of, "Take some time to stop

and smell the roses." Given what we've been talking about, that's something I've really been working at the last few years. It got to a point where I was never home. I realized life was just passing me by. Though the life I was living was all music and touring the world – and I don't want to sound like I'm complaining – there are other responsibilities I have as a partner, family member and dog owner. I wanted to be around more and take this all in, because this side of life is great.

**Referring back to the chorus of "Power Down," how would you describe the Alter Bridge experience these days?**

**"5150 Studios isn't some sterile environment where they're cleaning up for the next band to come in. It was pretty much left the way [Van Halen] used it last"**

**MARK TREMONTI**

**KENNEDY:** It couldn't be better. I'm at this stage in life where I feel like all the boxes have been checked. I'm very grateful for that. At this point, it really is just a matter of continuing to revel in what this has all turned into and just savor and enjoy it. When I was younger, that wasn't the mindset. I was hungry and sometimes frustrated and kind of lost in my own head and ego. I feel there's been this shift, and it really is beautiful. I love it. I recommend it. Gratitude is the attitude.

**TREMONTI:** I couldn't ask for anything else. First and foremost, I've got a family that is the best, and the most supportive circle of friends. I spent a lot of time in the beginning of my career worrying that I wouldn't amount to anything. You're just dying to be a musician, then once you become a professional, you're worrying it's going to end. People are telling you you're going to be a one-hit wonder, and then people are telling you you're going to have a sophomore slump, or that tastes in the music scene are changing and you're no longer relevant – you hear these things every day in the music business. But halfway through the Alter Bridge records, I was finally at peace with my career. Like, as long as I keep on writing – not just phoning it in, but putting all my heart and soul into this – I can do this as long as I want. I get to do what I love! **GW**

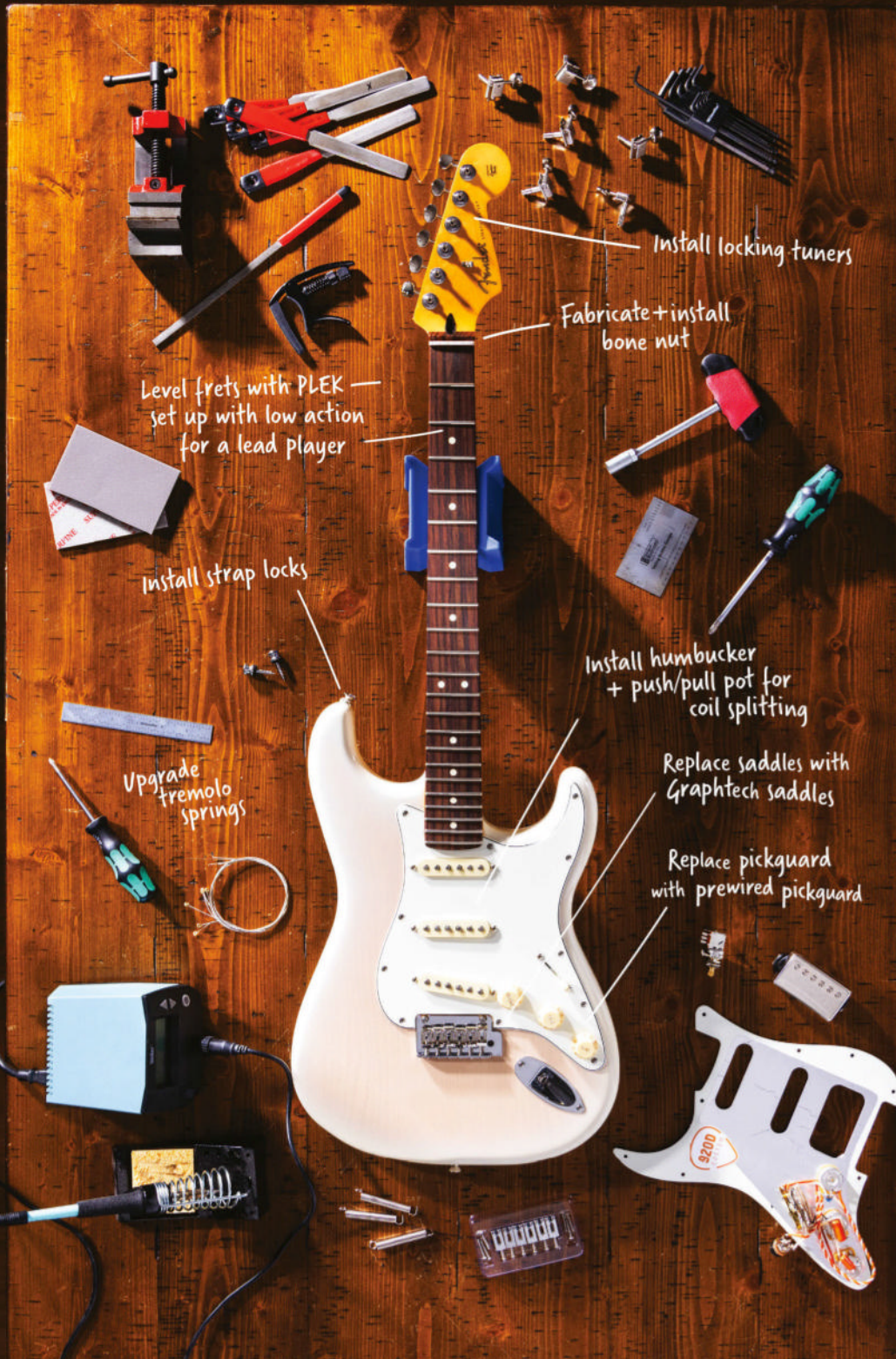


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BY LINDY FRALIN

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# TWOYS IN THE AWAY

From a Blade Runner to a B.C. Rich to a nearly forgotten Black Burst, Aerosmith's Joe Perry reveals the stories behind nine standouts from his impressive guitar collection – and nominates the coolest pointy ax of all time

BY ANDREW DALY

**SINCE HIS EARLIEST** days with Aerosmith, Joe Perry has been the epitome of guitar-related cool. Sure, he's got the licks, the songs and the solos, but he's also got a massive cache of iconic, quirky and downright badass guitars.

Asked what drives him to accumulate guitars for which most players would give up their firstborn child, Perry tells *Guitar World*, "When you really boil it down, you sometimes play a guitar because it looks absolutely cool. [Laughs] And you can love the way it looks, but it has to inspire you when you play it. There are other times where you don't care how it looks – just that it plays amazingly. Some guitars are meant to be."

Perry should know. His arsenal has everything from sought-after '59 bursts to straight-up mongrels he's built himself. Of course, Perry understands that values can vary, but he's more interested in versatility.

"There are no bad sounds – there are just sounds," he says. "You want sounds you can put in your catalog of paint colors, so to speak." This is why, despite the volume of guitars in his stable, Perry insists he's not a collector. "You never know when something might turn up," he says of his insatiable thirst for new tones. "That's why half the guitars in my collection are oddballs."

Perry's mindset stems back to his early days, when your guitar was your livelihood, and whatever it gave you was all you had. "There were collectors out there who were buying stuff left and right," he says. "And there were other guys who had a [single] guitar, and if you wanted something else, you sold the one you had – or you traded up, down or sideways."

Despite his open-minded nature, Perry does have a few guitars that have become attached to his leather-clad hip. Guitars like

his '59 Les Paul, B.C. Rich Bich, Billie Guitar and his beloved Burned Strat are just a few of these, all of which – along with a few others – we'll touch on soon.

Ever the tone hound, Perry is still searching, tinkering and building. Lately, he's been working on custom guitars with Florida-based independent guitar maker Dazzle. Beyond that, like the rest of us, he peruses the Internet, thumbs through guitar mags and pays one too many visits to Reverb.

"There's just a lot of great guitars out there," Perry says. "I've got plenty of things on my list. It's about build quality, which can be hard to find if you're talking about guys building them in their garages. [Laughs] But those can be great too, and there's great stuff coming from Gibson, Fender and PRS. Some aren't to my taste, but the workmanship is amazing, so if you're willing to look, there's a lot of great stuff out there." □

# 1959 GIBSON LES PAUL

**Let's start off with this iconic guitar.**

I bought that guitar... I guess it had been around Boston. Different people had it and sold it, and then I came across it – and for a good price! I can't remember what I paid for it, but it was around \$2,500.

**It was your main Les Paul in the Seventies, but you sold it after you left Aerosmith in 1979.**

Yeah – I had a few extras, but I wasn't really into collecting guitars. If I needed a guitar, I'd just go down to the music store and buy one, usually a new one. After I left Aerosmith, I needed money for Christmas, and I remember selling it for \$4,500.

**Do you remember who you sold it to?**

I'm not sure, but once it left my hands, I lost track of it. That had to be 1980 or so.

**At some point, you tried to track it down but had trouble finding it.**

After Aerosmith got back together [*in 1984*], we owed the record company a lot of money and had to buy our way out of our old record deal. That's how low we'd sunk as far as the business end of things. It wasn't until we signed to Geffen Records that we started to have a little money, and I thought, "It would be great if I could track down some of the guitars I lost." I started making calls and talking to some of my techs, and it seemed like every six months, the dollar signs in front of those '59s were going up. But I really wanted to try and get back some of the guitars I'd had, and I remember calling everybody.

**It was Aerosmith's Brad Whitford who told you that Slash had it, right?**

Yes. I told Brad, and he said, "I know where it is." I said, "Really? Where?" He opened up *Guitar Player*, I think, and there was a spread of Slash's guitar collection, and right in the middle of it was my

'59 Les Paul – right there in the magazine.

**Is it true that Slash wasn't really into selling you the guitar?**

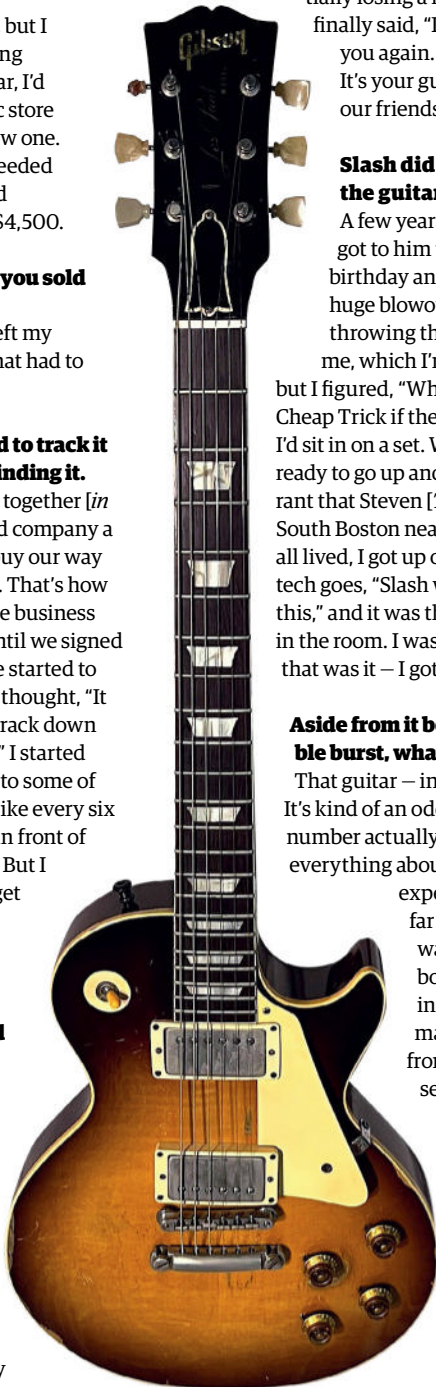
Right. We'd gotten to be friends, and when I asked him, he went, "Oh, man... don't ask me that." I said, "I'll buy it back and pay whatever you want." But he said, "Don't ask me, please!" He didn't want to let go of it, but I'd call him every once in a while and say, "What do you think? Have you changed your mind?" It got to the point where he wouldn't take my calls because he knew I was gonna ask him. He hated saying no, and I realized I was potentially losing a friend over this thing. I finally said, "Listen, I'm not gonna ask you again. It's not even an issue. It's your guitar. This is fucking up our friendship, so no more."

**Slash did end up giving you the guitar back, years later.**

A few years went by, and word got to him that it was my 50th birthday and we were having a huge blowout. My wife, Billie, was throwing this incredible party for me, which I'm not usually big on, but I figured, "Why not? I'm 50!" I asked Cheap Trick if they'd come and play and I'd sit in on a set. When we were getting ready to go up and do the set at a restaurant that Steven [*Tyler*] and I owned in South Boston near the Cape, where we all lived, I got up on stage, and my guitar tech goes, "Slash wanted me to give you this," and it was the '59. It was dead silent in the room. I was just blown away. But that was it – I got it back.

**Aside from it being a highly desirable burst, what makes it so special?**

That guitar – in my hands – is special. It's kind of an oddball, because the serial number actually says it's a 1960, but everything about the guitar that the experts can deduce – as far as the finish, and the way the neck meets the body – says it was built in 1959. It was probably made with parts left over from 1959, but it has a 1960 serial number. It doesn't matter – it is what it is. It's got the PAFs, and if '59 or '60 affects the value, I'm not really concerned with that. Maybe it's an issue for the insurance company, but whatever. [*Laughs*]



# LATE-SEVENTIES B.C. RICH BICH 10 SUPREME

**What's the story behind your 10-string B.C. Rich?**

When I started my relationship with B.C. Rich, they were different-looking guitars, but you could tell they were built really well. The neck went all the way through the body, and they had all these touches, and it sounded incredible. I thought B.C. Rich was definitely top-notch as far as workmanship. The only thing that bothered me about them was that they had all these switches and, like, three boosts, which was kind of overkill because they had some pretty good PAF reproductions in there. You didn't need three boosts, so there was a lot going on. After one of mine was stolen, I didn't have time to go to the factory and talk to them, so they just kind of handed me the next guitar, which was this 10-string.

**What did you think of it?**

I guessed the theory was that if you set it up with the right strings, you could play it with more attitude than a regular guitar. You could get vibrato off the strings and do things you normally wouldn't do – and experiment. It really worked for some things because as soon as you bend the strings, they don't bend in tune, so there are certain places where it works and others where it doesn't.

**Did you eventually get comfortable with the onboard electronics?**

There was a period where I unhooked all the electronics except for the volume and one tone knob. I kept hitting all the other switches and knocking the boost on when I already had a fuzz pedal on, so I thought, "Maybe I'll cut that stuff out and the guitar will breathe a little more." But I eventually put it back to the original specs. Also, for a short period of time, I took off the extra four strings and played it like a normal six-string, but that kinda defeated the purpose.

**You used it with Aerosmith, but it was one of your main guitars after you launched the Joe Perry Project in the Eighties.**

I played it on a few Aerosmith songs in the studio when I first got it, and I played it live a bit. But it was kind of near the end before I left, so it was funny that it ended up in the photo on the *Live! Bootleg* album. I was surprised, considering how [*infrequently*] I played that guitar, but it became one of the top three guitars associated with me. [*Laughs*] I still work it into a couple of songs in the set because nothing else sounds like it. □

COURTESY OF JOE PERRY, AARON PERRY



"I guessed the theory was that if you set it up with the right strings, you could play it with more attitude than a regular guitar," Perry says

"When I left the band, I put most of my Aerosmith guitars aside and basically put this guitar together out of Warmoth parts"



## FENDER/WARMOTH "BURNED STRAT" (AKA THE "RAT GUITAR")

**Speaking of guitars you regularly work into your sets, you seem to be attached to a mongrel dubbed the "Burned Strat." It's been altered a lot over the years.**

It's kind of a work in progress. The inspiration for putting it together was when I left the band, I put most of my Aerosmith guitars aside and basically put this guitar together out of Warmoth parts. I was going back to playing clubs and theaters, just cruising the country in a van with a band and playing. In a way, that guitar fit in with my philosophy of leaving the Aerosmith thing to the side and playing this one guitar that I'd put together. You can tell it was played a lot because I did a lot of shows back then, and there's just a sound and a feel to it. It had a left-handed neck and body, and it was my go-to guitar for those three years. When it was time to start going back on the road with Aerosmith, I thought, "Well, I'll pull that one out" because it symbolized so much of me; it had a sound and felt really comfortable.

**That guitar was the inspiration for the current Burned Strat, right?**

Yeah. I didn't want to take a chance on the

original guitar being lost, so somewhere around 2001, me and my tech put another one together with the same philosophy – just bits and pieces, you know?

**What does that guitar actually consist of?**

It's the same guitar as far as the Fender body and Warmoth neck. It's kind of a relic; I've changed the pickups, the vibrato bar and the bridge. I carved off more of the body to make it comfortable, and I even put it in the freezer overnight and then took a blowtorch to it so the finish would crackle, which gave it a jump-start to the way it would look over the years. I've taken a Dremel to it for different reasons, just to make it a little more of this or that. [Laughs] There's a company called Vega-Trem, which did the tremolo; it's basically a refined version of the bridge Leo Fender designed, but it's machined a little better. So I can divebomb on it and use it as another musical tool – but I also can get the classic vibrato sound.

**Based on a few photos, it appears you swapped the pickups fairly recently for a pair of Seymour Duncan P-Rails. How**

**do you like them?**

They're great. Each one has a P90 and a Strat-style pickup in it; those two sit in a humbucker slot [Seymour Duncan's website describes P-Rails as "versatile humbucker pickups that combine a Hot Rails coil with a Vintage P90"]. We went from three pickups to two, but with those pickups, there are really four positions, and you can switch them with the microswitches we added.

I can have the pickups separate or together, and the toggle lets me pick which one I want and when. I can pretty much do anything on that guitar.

**You played that guitar at the MTV Video Music Awards with Steven Tyler and Yungblud last year. Did you also use it on the recent *One More Time* EP?**

Absolutely. On the EP we did with Yungblud, everything you hear I did with that guitar and just a few foot pedals. I think that shows the variety of tones you can get out of it. It's got fat frets, and I use a hybrid set of strings with it because it has that vibrato; it's like a light set of .09's on the top, and then a set of .08's on the bottom. That way, I can bend notes the way I want, and it also saves my hands because the arthritis is starting to kick in, but it's nothing I can't play through. At this point, it is and will continue to be my "desert island guitar," but you never know. [Laughs]

## GIBSON B.B. KING LUCILLE CUSTOM "BILLIE GUITAR"

### There's also the one you've dubbed the "Billie Guitar" because it has a picture of your wife, Billie, on the body.

I got that in the Nineties. The main reason for that guitar is that I love history, and I was looking back and fascinated by what they call "nose art." Pilots would have artwork on the nose of their planes in World Wars I and II, and it would be pictures of their favorite movie starlet or their wife, and they'd name the plane after them. I thought, "Why not do that with my guitar?" That was the main reason I picked that body style – the B.B. King Lucille body. It doesn't have F-holes; I wanted something with plenty of room for the artwork.

### Who did the artwork?

[*Aerosmith drummer*] Joey Kramer's drum tech, John Douglas. He's also a painter, and his artwork is online so you can look it up

[ *johndouglas.com*]. I took some pictures of Billie with a Polaroid and got the guitar from Gibson, who were in on the plot. I had them paint it pearl white but without the final touches so that John could paint it. There's a picture on the front of the guitar and on the back, and I picked white because I thought the artwork would stand out. Again, I was driven by the visuals. [*Laughs*] After John painted it, it went back to Gibson, and they put the neck and their touches on it and finished it with the electronics and this and that. That happened in Nashville, where I got to go to the factory and check out the stuff at the Custom Shop.

### What did Billie think of it when she saw it?

She had no idea this was going on. [*Laughs*] Billie just stood there for a second, and they came out with this guitar case and said, "Close your eyes." We opened it up, and she turned beet red. Long story short, she wouldn't come

out when I'd put the guitar on; she'd kind of leave the side of the stage because she was so embarrassed about it. She's not somebody who looks for the spotlight, but she got used to it. Sometimes I would stand out at the end of the ramp, and the girls in the crowd would point to the picture on the guitar and want to know who it was. I'd point to my wedding ring, and they would melt. [*Laughs*] They thought it was so romantic!

### It's become a staple of your arsenal when you play "Cryin'," so it must be solid.

It turned out that the guitar sounded great. Having the minimum amount of electronics in there, and the pickups, which are hot-rodged Seymour Duncan JBs, really worked. There's just something about it; that guitar has some magic to it. It's one of my top touring guitars, and I've used it in the studio a lot, too. ▶



"We opened it up, and Billie turned beet red. Long story short, she wouldn't come out when I'd put the guitar on"

## AMPEG-ERA DAN ARMSTRONG

**Your see-through Dan Armstrong is pretty rare. They're going for big bucks these days.**

I think they reissued those. Well, maybe they're bootleg Chinese ones, because I see them pop up every now and then. I figured somebody had to be out there making them, but they didn't make many in the beginning.

**What led you to pick up that guitar?**

I remember being in a music store in, like, 1971, and because the Rolling Stones were using all Ampeg stuff, and I'd seen pictures of Keith Richards playing it, I figured I'd try one out. As it turned out, it's solid as a rock. The neck doesn't move, and it stays in tune, so

it's been a really good slide guitar for me. It's actually my go-to for slide.

**Did you modify it?**

With the clear-body one, if you could get the right pickup in there – because some of the pickups they came with weren't great – it was good. I had somebody build a little thing so I could put a Seymour Duncan in there, but now it's straight-up original with the original pickups, which sound really good. I use that guitar when I play in open A or open G. They have a great feel and a flatter neck radius, which really lends itself to slide. They are great, cool-looking guitars, so it checks both boxes.

"I'd seen pictures of Keith Richards playing it; I figured I'd try one out"



## EARLY-NINETIES GIBSON CUSTOM SHOP LES PAUL BLACK BURST

**A guitar you played a lot around the *Get a Grip* and *Nine Lives* eras – but that doesn't get talked about much these days – is your Black Burst, which started out as a Custom Shop build and later inspired your first signature guitar.**

That's right. After I'd had the guitar, Gibson approached me to do a signature since there were a fair amount of pictures of me playing a black Les Paul. I had some horses at a farm in Vermont, and I fell in love with this breed called a Friesian, which are solid black, from Holland. They're pretty rare. I'd go to horse shows, and I managed to find a farm that had one or two, but what stood out about them was that they have long manes, and

## MID-EIGHTIES GUILD X-100 BLADE RUNNER

**I've always wondered about the Guild X-100 Blade Runner, which you used in the "Walk This Way" video with Run-D.M.C. in 1986.**

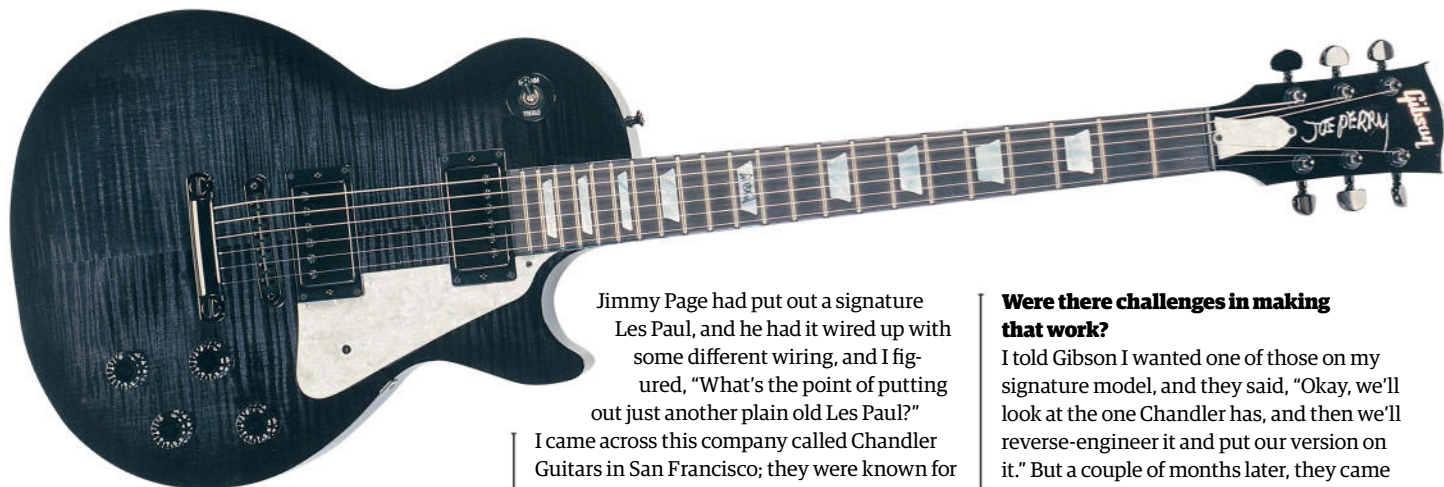
That one falls under the category of, "Holy shit, this is too cool looking to believe." [Laughs] It has EMG pickups; I'm not a big fan of those, but I get the philosophy behind them, and they are really cool. That's just what came in there, and even though I'm not into EMGs, there isn't a piece of equipment I can put down, because you just never know.

**Your philosophy of "there are no wrong tones" comes to mind.**

There are no wrong sounds. Even if you put a patch cord in and it's crackling, you never know! That crackling sound could turn into a rhythm track, so my philosophy, as you said, is that there are no wrong sounds or tones. And with the X-100, I played it because it sounded cool, and there was just something about it. And for certain sounds, man, those EMGs are great. I can get a great heavy sound out of them, and I tried different versions of them, and for what they are, they're great.

**How did you get the Guild, and what led you to use it in the Run-D.M.C. video?**

AARON PERRY, NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS



the manes are curly and just look beautiful. I wanted to kind of get that look on a guitar, which called for a really good maple top and a relatively light burst.

**What's noteworthy about your signature Les Paul is that it felt classic but looked very modern, complete with some interesting onboard effects.**

Jimmy Page had put out a signature Les Paul, and he had it wired up with some different wiring, and I figured, "What's the point of putting out just another plain old Les Paul?"

I came across this company called Chandler Guitars in San Francisco; they were known for collecting linoleum, oyster shells from Europe and even tortoise shells with amazing colors and patterns. This stuff was incredible. But another thing they'd perfected was a push/pull knob for the tone control, where you'd be able to put on a wah effect when it was popped out. You could set it and hold the note, and then bend up and pop that thing on and get the wah-wah effect when it was time to cut a solo. It was just another taste, really.

**Were there challenges in making that work?**

I told Gibson I wanted one of those on my signature model, and they said, "Okay, we'll look at the one Chandler has, and then we'll reverse-engineer it and put our version on it." But a couple of months later, they came back and said, "We really can't get it right," though I'm not sure they put enough time into it. But who knows? They said, "We really can't reproduce it the way Chandler does," so they went to Chandler and bought all of the ones they had in stock, which I've heard was anywhere from 100 to 250. So the first run of those guitars have that in it. If you can get one that has that, which they call the Tonex, the push/pull knob for the wah, that's gold. ■

We were doing *Done with Mirrors* [1985] when we were getting back together, and Guild was trying to make a comeback. The Guild rep would come by our rehearsal space and show me a few pieces. And as soon as I saw the Blade Runner, I said, "That's mine. I gotta have that." I mean, it's too cool. It's the ultimate pointy guitar. [Laughs] That's why I used it in the video. It's an iconic shape, and it's kind of light. They cut the wood all away, and it's full of holes, so it's comfortable to play.

I was actually trying to find a spare, but when I looked around, I couldn't find another original one, so I had a company build me an exact copy of mine. I wanted one I could bring on the road and not be afraid of getting it stolen. That's another one that checks all the boxes. For certain sounds and songs, you can't beat it, and for looks, it's amazing.



"I was trying to find a spare, but when I looked around, I couldn't find another original one, so I had a company build an exact copy of mine"

# FIFTIES GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR

## What's the story behind your black Gibson Junior double-cutaway with the hard-to-miss pearl inlay?

I'm pretty sure it's a '56. It's one of those Juniors that started off with cherry stain, but it wasn't a burst — it was just a cherry stain. It's got one P90. I actually had two of them in the mid-Seventies, like the ones Johnny Thunders and Leslie West played. They're killer guitars. It's just volume, tone and a P90, and it screams. I was lucky enough to get two of them.

## You broke one of those guitars while on stage, correct?

Yeah. We were doing a show at a festival and I threw this thing up in the air at the end of a song. This was before wireless, so it went to the end of the patch cord and came down on the neck — and the headstock snapped off. I remember thinking as it was going up in the air, "Wow, I can't believe it. That looks so cool." And then, on the way down, I was thinking, "Holy shit, what did I do?" [Laughs] After it came down and was broken, Steven grabbed it and wanted to throw it out into the audience, so I had to wrestle him for it. [Laughs] I knew we could fix it, you know? I got it back and gave the pieces to my guy, and the show went on.

## Did you add the pearl inlay after you repaired the headstock?

I had some marble gargoyles in the backyard of the house I was living in, and I took some Polaroid photos of them and sent them to Gruhn Guitars in Nashville to see if we could incorporate them. A lot of people think the picture on there is a decal, but it's all mother-of-pearl inlay work, and it's still a killer guitar. It sounds great, and it's one that comes to the studio with me as well as on the road.

I still have its brother, and that one is all original except for the chrome Grovers that pretty much everybody put on their Fifties and Sixties Gibsons if the tuning pegs started to rot, which they did quite a bit.

## We've covered eight guitars, but you've got hundreds. Given your love for tinkering and open-mindedness regarding tones, do you think you'll ever find one guitar to rule them all?

My rat guitar, the Burned Strat, pretty much checks all of the boxes. It takes a guitar a while to settle in because they're not designed to play with really light strings. I'm making generalizations here, but Strats and Les Pauls were designed to have heavier-gauge strings. I bet when you took a Tele out of the box in the Fifties, it had flatwound

strings on it. [Laughs] I'm sure Joe Bonamassa could tell you more about that than I could, but they were designed to have heavier strings — and not really roundwound. But over the years, we've managed to adapt and deal with that, so it takes a while if you're gonna use the vibrato bar, and not just to divebomb. It takes a while for the guitar to settle in.

## Have you found that since you've gone to lighter strings and the Vega-Trem that the Burned Strat has come into its own?

Yeah. The lighter the strings, the harder it is to get that to work. When you get a Strat-style guitar with that type of bridge, it takes a while for things to settle in. I don't know... maybe that's part of the voodoo, if you want to put it that way. So, with that guitar, if I'm doing a show, I can do things where I can trust it and count on it. I know it's gonna stay in tune. Of course, you never know if you're gonna break a string, and with a floating bridge, when that happens, you're fucked. [Laughs] It's a roll of the dice, but I trust that guitar. I would use that one, even when I have access to all of my stuff.

## At the end of the day, when it comes to "desert island guitars," it's a matter of taste. It's not one-size-fits-all.

Right. It's about what you're looking for as far as the song. I'm driven by the song, you know? I have a couple of hardcore rules, like when you're playing live, you follow the singer. And if the song starts to sound like a trainwreck because somebody fucked up, just follow the singer and it'll be less noticeable. Hopefully, there's a certain amount of charm to having a trainwreck onstage. [Laughs] If anything, it proves we're not playing to a tape.

The other thing is, like I said before, there are no wrong sounds. There might be a wrong sound for a particular song, but you keep searching until you find the right one. I have guitars that I paid \$100 for, and they're on some of our biggest hits. They worked in that particular situation.

## Has anything new, gear-wise, caught your ear or eye?

I get guitar magazines all the time. I get *Guitar World*, and I look at the back pages for new pedals and whatever else, just messing around with different speakers and things. They all go down in the book, you know, in the back of my mind. I'm not organized enough to actually have everything in files on a computer, but I know where to get a particular sound or feel. It's all built around what works for the song.



KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

"Steven Tyler grabbed it and wanted to throw it out into the audience, so I had to wrestle him for it"

## DAZZLE GUITARS

### How about the custom guitars you've recently built with Dazzle?

I've got a couple. I was introduced to a guy named Cody Henderson, who builds guitars and owns Dazzle. If you've seen any of the shows Aerosmith did in Las Vegas or at Fenway Park in Boston, I played a guitar that basically looked like plexiglass but was milky in color, and it lit up with what looked like Christmas lights on the inside of it wherever there was space on the face of the body. That one was opaque plastic, and the lights were powered by a battery pack and a transformer. With all that shit taped to the guitar, it would last only a few minutes, so I would only use it for one song. But Cody also had regular ones without all that, and those look really cool. They've got a double cutaway, so it's a different look. It doesn't look like a Les Paul or a Strat — but it doesn't look too wacky, either.

### How do they play?

They play great! You can get to every fret, so it's like an SG in that way, and he put the Vega-Trem vibrato on there. Since we've stopped touring, I've had a chance to play them, and I'm really impressed with the build quality. Cody is a player and has his own band, so he knows what it's like to have an electric guitar in his hands. He knows what it's like to stand in front of an audience and that you need to make sure everything works. They're just really cool guitars.

### Is there an off-the-beaten-path guitar you've always thought was underrated?

I'm not a guitar snob. I don't care if it just came off the bench yesterday. If it feels right, sounds right and checks the boxes, I'll play it. But I've always liked Vox teardrop [*Mark series*] guitars because they're cool-looking. I remember pictures of Brian Jones playing one back when Vox was handing out equipment left and right, when they started out. I've played a couple, and they're not hot, output-wise, but they definitely have their own sound. I've got a couple of them, but I'm not gonna take a Sixties Vox and start cutting it up; you can't do that. [*Laughs*] There were people in the Seventies, me included, who were doing pretty stupid things like that.

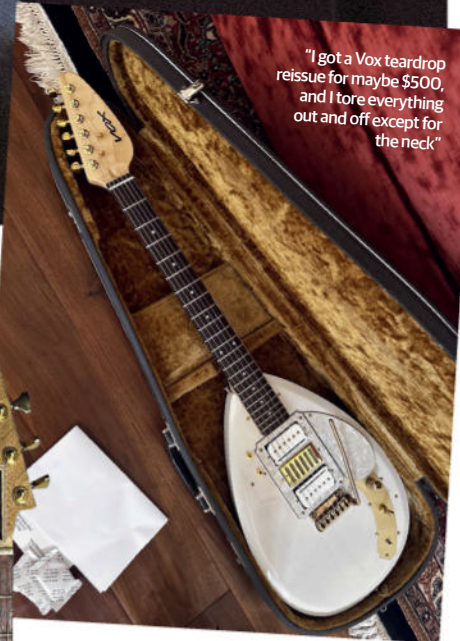
### Can you reveal some of those atrocities?

Things like getting a goldtop and scraping off the gold, only to find a very plain piece of maple underneath. If we had thought it through, we would have realized, "Well, they know this is gonna get painted over, so why would they put a beautiful maple top on this?" But you

"They've got a double cutaway, so it's a different look. It doesn't look like a Les Paul or a Strat — but it doesn't look too wacky, either"



"I got a Vox teardrop reissue for maybe \$500, and I tore everything out and off except for the neck"



hear these stories of someone scraping off the gold, and there was a great piece of maple underneath, although I don't personally know of anyone who had that happen. And we'd change pickups out a lot — things like taking out a PAF and putting in a hotter Seymour Duncan.

**In your defense, these guitars weren't considered halcyon in the way they are now. Time has done that.**

Looking back, it's one thing to do that with a "parts" guitar; that's why I like having the Rat guitar, the Burned Strat. If the Dremel slips and I put a gouge in it, it's no big deal. But you're not gonna take a '57 Strat and start mucking around with it and then totally wreck it, you know? I guess if you're not gonna play it, and something is holding it up, you can change it. You don't know how much that'll knock off the value of the guitar, but you'll get to play it, so maybe it's worth doing. It's one of those conundrums. But I got a Vox teardrop reissue for maybe

[above and right — also seen on page 48] Creations by Florida-based guitar maker Dazzle. "Since we've stopped touring, I've had a chance to play them, and I'm really impressed with the build quality," Perry says

\$500, and I tore everything out and off except for the neck. Me and Cody put a Vega-Trem vibrato arm and trem on it and some P-Rail pickups, and we experimented by putting a boost on it — built-in. It didn't work out well. [Laughs]

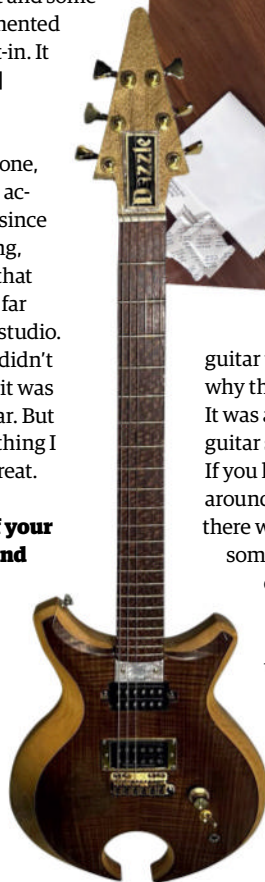
**Why is that?**

We were losing too much tone, so we decided against it. It actually plays really well, but since Aerosmith has stopped touring, my opportunities to pull out that guitar and play it are few and far between, so it's sitting in my studio. I play it quite a bit, and if you didn't know any better, you'd think it was an average Vox teardrop guitar. But the whammy bar does everything I want it to do, and it sounds great.

**If you didn't have any of your noteworthy guitars and just picked up something random, would that inherent know-how guide you?**

I'm not a technique guy. I play

guitar to play the song. That's it. That's why the guitar really exploded, you know? It was a lot of fun to go into mom-and-pop guitar stores and find them in every city. If you had a family shop that had been around for decades for a generation or two, there was always something in the back, some weird thing. God knows there's enough custom stuff out there, but sometimes you'll see something you haven't seen before. Those are the kinds of things I look for. There might be that guitar or amp you find, and you might use it on a track when you're looking for a particular sound. You just never know! **GW**





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# TOYS IN THE ATTIC

A decade-by-decade guide to Joe Perry's amps – and exactly where he stands on modeling


BY ANDREW DALY

**SOME GUITAR GREATS** are historically associated with one guitar and one amp. For instance, you've got your Brian May (Red Special into a Vox AC30), your Angus Young (Gibson SG into a Marshall) and your Eddie Van Halen (Frankenstein into a 5150).

But Joe Perry is not one of those guitar greats. This guy plugs a host of iconic guitars into all sorts of amps; well, let's make that all sorts of tube amps. Beyond that, he likes to play the field.

"I'm not an amp snob," he says. "I won't say I can't use this or that amp. I'm gonna give everything a try. You never know what you're gonna discover. Some of the oddest guitars and amps I have are ones I've used on some of my favorite songs. You just don't know."

It's that philosophy that has kept Perry merrily bouncing from amp to amp. Be it Ampeg, Music Man, Fender or Alessandro, he has tried – and loved (to varying degrees) – them all. Still, as amp-curious as he is, he always seems to come home to Marshall.

"You can put Marshall down for every decade," he says, foreshadowing the list below. "There'd be times in the studio or for a one-off gig, and you'd have to rent something, and it was usually a Marshall. Back in the day, it'd be a roll of the dice because you didn't know if they were taken care of. But if you were lucky, and you got a good one, they were great." 

PART 2  
AMPS

"You can put Marshall down for every decade," Perry says

AARON PERRY



Marshall

JCM 800  
LEAD SERIES  
JOE PERRY MODEL

JCM 800  
Vox

5

Marshall

Marshall

FRIEDMAN

FRIEDMAN

## 1970s

**FOR THE FIRST** Aerosmith album [1973's Aerosmith], I used an Ampeg V4. I probably used that for the first couple of tours, too. I didn't want to sound like everybody else, and everyone was using Gibson Les Pauls and Fender Strats with Marshalls, so I used the Ampeg because you were pretty much in the same range, but it sounded a little different. But it really comes down to how you play. Everybody sounds a little different, and the go-to amps for the kind of music we were playing were [meant] to give you a little more, to reference *This Is Spinal Tap*, "11"! [Laughs] But I always liked that early rig because it wasn't too distorted or too loud. When that happens, you lose the tone of the guitar.

We had Marshalls, too, but in the late Seventies, the longest-tenured amps we had for touring were some of the first Music Mans. Leo Fender had basically sold Fender, and he started Music Man. He put out an amp that was about the size of a [Fender] Twin, and it was a 100-watt head. We got lucky and had a couple of the first ones, and they were pretty loud. For at least a year's worth of touring, we were pretty much using only those Music Man amps and heads [HD-130 heads



**"I didn't want to sound like everybody else, and the Ampeg sounded a little different"**

**JOE PERRY**

customized by Andy Topeka]. We had them made with LED lights – a string of them – so the harder you'd hit the amp, the more the lights would light up. It was kind of cool. And we had the Aerosmith logo on them; we still have a couple of them around.

## 1980s

**I OFTEN HAD** vintage Marshalls, like 100-watt plexis and Super Leads. Everyone was tweaking them, just trying to get a little bit more out of them to get what they were looking for. So my go-to studio amps were always some sort of Marshall or Fender. Then Fender started reissuing older stuff, and I got some of that, which I still use. When we started playing bigger places, I was really surprised by how loud the audience was. In some buildings, the audience would be cheering – and sometimes it was louder than the band! [Laughs] It was kind of about a balance of finding the right sound on stage and needing to hear the vocals, and everybody had a different way of dealing with it. But just about everybody was using Marshalls in hard-rock land.

I was trying everything. Someone would come out with something new, and I'd get

RON POWNALL/GETTY IMAGES

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Perry on stage in Chicago in 1980 with four modified Music Man HD-130 heads

one and try it – especially in the studio. You never know when you're gonna come across some kind of sound that would fit. For example, there was a song called "The Movie" on *Permanent Vacation* [1987], and I found a sound on the Roland synth you can hear on the song. It sounds like bubbles coming up in the instrumental.

## 1990s

**AGAIN, I TRIED** just about everything, including transistor amps. Whenever they would come out with something, I'd give it a try. In the early Nineties, Fender put out these dark gray amps with red knobs. I know guys who worked with them, and they made it work, but I never liked them. Some of that stuff with transistors, as soon as you turned them up, they started to sound like aluminum foil. [Laughs] So I tried a lot of this stuff but would never use it. I still have some of it because you never know if there's a sound you can get out of it; there might be a place for it on a recording. We'd go off to record an album, and we'd bring a little bit of everything back then, because you just didn't know what you were gonna use. But the bottom line is, if I was doing basic tracks, chances are I'd be using a Fender or a Marshall – something high-wattage.

## 2000s-present

**THE CHOICES ARE** pretty much infinite

now. People used to think that to make a record sound big, you had to have a full-on stack. But it's really hard to do a record like that because of the volume; you'll blow out the microphones. So I like to try a lot of boutique amps. One of the standouts is Alessandro [High-End Products]. George Alessandro consistently hits the nail on the head. Someone told me that they were backstage checking out David Gilmour's latest rig, and Gilmour had an Alessandro amp; it was kind of the core of his rig! Boutique amps are great because you can find something that gives you a different tone or feel, and it's refreshing. You wanna keep changing things up because you can get bored, but then you swing back around to the old standards, which is mostly some vintage Fender stuff – Vibroverbs, Twins and [Band] Masters – and Marshalls, like the JCM800, which is at the top of the list.

And then, with modeling, I know guys who swear by it. There's a lot going for it, and you can get a lot of different sounds, and they're easy to transport, but I don't know. I guess if I were in a jam and had to do a gig, I'd figure out how to make one work, but if I had the choice, I'm gonna use my tube stuff.

Anyway, here's an example of me following my ear. A while ago, my guitar tech sent me a Fender Champ-size speaker cab with an old Jensen 10" and an Orange Terror Stamp pedal-size amp. It has 12ax7 tubes and transistor power. It's a great low-volume practice amp. Since all my bigger "choice, vintage studio stuff" is up in Boston, I've been messing with small Alessandro, Supro and Zinky boutique



David Gilmour's Alessandro Redbone Special

stuff with vintage speakers. But the Orange was sounding pretty cool, so I used it on the first Aerosmith/Yungblud stuff.

Also, because my backline gear was in a truck going from gig to gig and I couldn't get to my Alessandro and other stuff, one thing led to another. During the last four months, jumping from studio to studio, I just brought the Terror Stamp with me and used whatever 10" speaker cab I could plug into. By the time we were finished, I had used the Orange on every track on the new Aerosmith/Yungblud EP, *One More Time*. I used that along with – say, at Johnny Depp's studio – one of his vintage Fender amps. And at NRG Studios [Los Angeles], it was just the Orange. For the [2025] Video Music Awards, I used a Fender Vibroverb and the Orange. I used the same rig for the Bad Company induction ceremony at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in November. Who knew?

Back when Aerosmith would pack all our "good stuff" to send to the studio at the start of a record, we'd still rehearse but with some of the "not so A-list" gear. After a week of playing through that stuff, I'd be nailing some great sounds out of the "B list." It was good stuff to the point of saying, "I've gotta bring this too," and that would end up being the startup rig when the tape started rolling. If it sounds good, that's all that matters – no matter what the logo says. That's probably why it was so hard to give a simple answer to what amps I use, decade by decade! **GW**



# TOYS IN THE ATTIC

Joe Perry walks us through his at-home pedalboard – and his pedalboard methodology

BY ANDREW DALY



**What pedals are you using these days?**

It's really just my pedals strung together on the floor, but you'll get the idea of what my show board is like. The show board is packed away with all the touring gear. But whenever I can get doubles, I do. Obviously, this isn't possible with the old stuff. For instance, I have

an old Electro-Harmonix Queen Triggered Wah – a unique-sounding pedal. It took me years to find a second one.

**Do you have all your vintage pedals at home?**

Most of my vintage pedals are up at the

Aerosmith warehouse. I mostly use that stuff in the studio because very few have direct bypass, though some pieces have been updated with that feature. I'm able to find relatively new stuff that can do the job. I have a pristine Echoplex, but Fulltone makes a copy [*Custom Shop Tube Tape Echo*] that can't be beat. It's the best tape echo out there. They even interchange the tape cartridges with Echoplexes. I have five of them!

**Why do you feel the Fulltone comes closest?**

The Fulltone's preamp acts like a boost pedal but also adds true tape warmth. Set it with one repeat and almost no delay, and it thickens your sound and adds a little "it"! For that style of playing, it's a killer setup.

**What mistakes do you see other players make with pedals?**

There's a big difference between a distortion and a boost pedal. If your amp doesn't have a master volume and gain control, you might



Perry's Strymon Zuma power supply – and one of his Klon Centaurs



Fulltone Fulltone MDV-3 Deja Vibe



Prescription Electronics Experience fuzz/octave

COURTESY OF JOE PERRY

need a boost pedal to get some hair on the sound. Most pedals are a combination of boost/distortion, so you can add distortion as an effect and just a boost. But most modern amps distort if you turn them up. If they have a master volume, you should be able to get your basic sound without help from a pedal – and certainly not from a boost pedal.

**Why is that?**

The boost is meant to kick the amp's preamp into distortion. If you're looking for a saturated sound, ala Eddie Van Halen and the shredders, you might use a couple of pedals to get that sound. But that's what you need to accommodate that style of playing. For that, the actual tone of the guitar doesn't matter. You could use a '59 PAF, a new Seymour Duncan JB, or anything in between.

**What if you don't want that?**

If you really want to hear the tone of your guitar – your Strat, Tele, Les Paul Junior with P90s – you set your amp to a really "right on the edge of breakup," cleanish sound, so that you hear your guitar tone. Then add a pedal for your "more" sound. Too many people use too many drive/distortion pedals and wonder, "Where's my tone?"

**How do you control that with minimal pedals?**

You should be able to use your guitar's volume knob to control your sound rather than having the volume knob all the way up. Because as soon as you drop it a bit, your sound goes away. You should be able to drop the guitar's volume and get a real usable, tone-rich sound. Of course, that's assuming you have a high-quality volume knob; I've had volume knobs that act almost like an on/off switch, which is junk. *[Laughs]* In my world, less is more as far as boost and distortion pedals, but it's up to you *[in terms of]* what works for you.

**Do you have a personal methodology in terms of setting up your pedalboard?**

I don't know what the general rule on this is, but I like to put reverb and delay pedals closest to the amp. In terms of my "always on" pedals, like compression, my guitar goes there first. The rest is trial and error. You might find that when you use a fuzz, it works better after your flanger. It might add harmonics and sustain that turns the flanger into a different beast. So, aside from the compressor first and the reverb and delay, I try different orders. But I recently got a replica of an old British fuzz; ■



Fulltone Custom Shop Tube Tape Echo



Warm Audio Warm Bender



**KEELEY**  
RKFX.COM

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it was recommended [to be placed] before a compressor. I tried it, but it didn't work for me. Something to think about.

**Is there another pedal you always have on your board?**

A Warm Audio Jet Phaser. It has a flange and a fuzz built in, but it also needs a volume boost. When it's on, the volume drops, so – depending on the song – I might put a clean boost right after it. I might hit the boost pedal when I hit the Jet Phaser.

**Do you have any other staple, "gotta have it" pedals?**

I have an original Klon – three or four of them – and I can't go anywhere without it. I've got a Fulltone [MDV-3 *Deja*] Vibe. It's kind of like the original. I have an original, but I like having them both. And getting to what I "have to have," there's the Fulltone version of the Echoplex. I had it tweaked by the guys at Fulltone, and it sounds as good as or better than the original – without all the fuss.

I've also got a Prescription Electronics Experience fuzz/octave. It's kind of like the Jimi Hendrix thing. I've also got a modified EHX POG [Polyphonic Octave Generator] with an expression pedal that I use to bring it from bass to treble with my foot. I have a real Tone Bender fuzz, but I've been using the Warm Audio Warm Bender Fuzz with true bypass. I've also got an Xotic Effects XW-1 Wah modified with a short throw, so it goes from bass to treble. It's just a great-sounding wah. **GW**



Modified Electro-Harmonix POG (Polyphonic Octave Generator)



Warm Audio Jet Phaser

COURTESY OF JOE PERRY

THE REVEREND  
*Charger*  
290



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# Gretsch Limited Edition Abbey Road RS201 Studiomatic

Gretsch packs the legendary studio magic of Abbey Road Studios into a guitar that's also pleasantly playable and competitively priced

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

**▶ FOR THE FIRST** time ever, legendary London recording studio Abbey Road has partnered with a guitar maker, and the result is an instrument that promises to deliver studio-grade sound before your signal even hits a single pedal, amp or audio interface.

The centerpiece is an all-new electronic circuit inspired by EMI's legendary Rumble filter, originally designed in the 1950s to eliminate unwanted low-end rumble from historic recordings. Now, that filtering power is at your fingertips, giving players unprecedented control to sculpt a polished, record-ready tone straight out of the guitar.

From the moment you lay eyes on the Gretsch Abbey Road Studiomatic, it's clear this is a guitar with presence and prestige. The visually striking

burgundy case not only offers robust protection, but also sets the tone for what's inside, channeling the storied atmosphere of Abbey Road itself; think of it as your own ticket to ride into musical history. The attention to detail is immediately apparent, with the case's light-blue lining nodding to the underpaint of those legendary Abbey Road doors.

Once you open the case, the guitar itself makes a stunning first impression. The classic Walnut finish is deep, rich and beautifully applied, highlighting the wood grain and shimmering under studio spotlights. Pair that with the bound ebony

**A love letter to one of the most famous recording studios of all time**

fingerboard and gilded gold hardware, and you've got a guitar dripping with vintage mojo.

More importantly, the build quality lives up to the impressive visuals. The guitar arrives impeccably set up, with low, buzz-free action and spot-on intonation. Hardware feels solid and reassuring, from the Bigsby vibrato to the strap locks, and the parallel-braced maple body is both resonant and sturdy.

Thankfully, the Gretsch Abbey Road Studiomatic doesn't just look the part; it absolutely delivers when it comes to playability. One of the first things you notice when picking it up is the exceptionally comfortable neck. Gretsch opted for a classic C-profile that feels just right in the hand – not too chunky for fast lead lines, but substantial enough to anchor big chords and complex fingerings.

The smooth-bound ebony fingerboard and well-dressed frets add to the premium feel, gliding under your fingers whether you're



MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE





playing up high or digging in for rhythm work.

At the heart of the Studiomatic's sonic identity lies its groundbreaking rumble circuit, inspired by the EMI-designed low-frequency filter used at Abbey Road since the 1950s. Originally developed to eliminate unwanted subsonic noise from classic recordings – consider the rumble from London's underground trains or the thump of heavy footsteps on studio floors – this circuit has been reimagined for guitar, giving players direct access to Abbey Road's signature clarity and polish.

The rumble circuit is more than a mere high-pass filter. It's a dual-mode system, selectable via an elegant

rotary switch on the upper bout. Each mode subtly reshapes the instrument's low-frequency response, allowing you to tailor your tone, whether you're after vintage jangle, focused punch or full-bodied warmth.

With the circuit bypassed, the sound is completely open and natural. Here, the Studiomatic's custom Filter'Tron pickups shine, delivering classic Gretsch chime and bite with a vibrant midrange and crisp top end and an almost boomy low end. This setting is full of dynamic response, the kind of sound that lets your picking nuances and fingerstyle details ring out, perfect for everything from Beatles-style clean arpeggios to more modern, articulate lead work.

**MANUFACTURER:** Gretsch, [gretschguitars.com](http://gretschguitars.com)

**STREET PRICE:** \$1,579

**PROS**

- ✦ Stunning looks
- ✦ Studio-ready tone straight from the guitar
- ✦ Comes with a unique case

**CONS**

- The second setting on the Rumble Filter might be too thin-sounding for many players
- Bigsby takes a while to settle in

**VERDICT:** This guitar is a love letter to one of the most famous recording studios of all time. Every detail feels thoughtfully designed, and thankfully, it has the playability and sound to match. Okay, most people won't need the more extreme setting of the onboard Rumble circuit, but it will certainly come in handy for some.

Switch to the second mode, and the rumble circuit engages Abbey Road's famous 100Hz high-pass filter. This is where the magic really happens. The low end tightens up, eliminating any muddiness and pushing your sound forward in a mix. Chords become more defined, bass frequencies are controlled, and every note retains clarity. It is particularly evident when it was introduced to our favorite Big Muff fuzz pedal. It's the secret weapon for recording guitar tracks that sit perfectly in a dense mix, just like the studio greats did. You'll notice how this mode lets your playing cut through, with a sense of air and detail.

The custom-wound Filter'Tron pickups are remarkable in their own right. Voiced in collaboration with Abbey Road's engineers, they possess a lively attack and a sweet, singing sustain. Clean tones are glassy and three-dimensional, with just enough bite to stay present without ever sounding too harsh. Roll back the volume or tone controls, and the sound mellows beautifully.

Add some overdrive, and the Studiomatic roars to life. The pickups retain their character, never becoming muddy or thumpy, while the rumble circuit keeps your low end in check. We'd say this is a guitar that's equally at home on jangly pop, bluesy riffing, or even harder rock. **GW**



MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE



# Yamaha JR1

Is this pint-sized dreadnought Yamaha's ultimate beginner acoustic?

BY ROSS HOLDER

**▶ THE YAMAHA JR1** is a half-sized, miniature dreadnought-style acoustic guitar, and this little strummer provides plenty of bang for its buck. Yamaha invented the JR, or Junior, range to target two players: the typically small beginner and the travel guitarist. By being an affordable half-sized guitar, it checks both of those boxes with aplomb.

Many affordable guitars for kids often look anemic, unfinished and almost like they need a dose of vitamin D – but not the JR1. With a tinted gloss top, rosewood bridge and tortoise-style pickguard, this guitar looks very handsome. Far from being an afterthought, Yamaha has acknowledged that even beginners want a good-looking acoustic, so this puppy gets top points from us.

In terms of build quality, the JR1 feels very Yamaha: solid, reliable and designed to be genuinely usable. Our

review model is spotless. It's set up well out of the box, feels durable in the hands and is even in tune. The neck is pleasantly smooth, with what feels like a standard C-shaped profile and either a rosewood or walnut fingerboard (depending on what Yamaha had in the factory that day).

Attention to detail is often where affordable guitars fall short. Sharp fret ends are a bugbear, so it's one of the first things we look for, and the JR1 passed respectably. There is a bit of fret overhang, but nothing too crazy; it's well within acceptable parameters at this price point. Tuning machines can also disappoint on beginner guitars, but when we finally had to tune this guitar, the vintage-style covered chrome machines were smooth and accurate and didn't slip.

Playing some simple cowboy chords, the type a beginner will learn early on, the JR1 proved a comfortable

companion. Its slim neck profile will be a great platform for small hands to learn on, and the smooth finish won't get sticky or uncomfortable.

Having a 21.25" scale length with a small nut, the string spacing is quite tight for bigger hands. However, if you're buying this for a young beginner or have smaller hands yourself, it shouldn't be a problem. The frets aren't full-sized, so bear that in mind if you're looking for a travel guitar and have larger hands. Although a bit cramped, it does make chord stretches much easier.

The miniature dreadnought-style body is well balanced, and we foresee a very comfortable playing experience for learners, as the lower bout doesn't dig into your right arm the way some full-sized dreadnoughts do.

Of course, a guitar this size will lean toward the boxier side in terms of sound character, and the mid-range is definitely prominent, but Yamaha's trademark clarity and brightness are alive and well in the JR1. There's plenty of note separation, with encouraging sustain and articulation that will make beginners and travel guitarists very happy. We do miss a bit of low-end oomph with a miniature body, but having that expectation is unreasonable. If you banish the desire for any real bass thump, there's a lot of enjoyment to be had in the sounds you can coax out of this thing. **GW**

**MANUFACTURER:** Yamaha, [yamahaguitargroup.com](http://yamahaguitargroup.com)

**STREET PRICE:** \$179

## PROS

- ✦ Comfortable slim neck that's great for small hands
- ✦ Well-balanced miniature dreadnought body
- ✦ Reliable Yamaha build quality and hardware
- ✦ Included gig bag for lessons or road trips

## CONS

- The tone can be a bit boxy
- Tight string spacing may feel cramped for larger hands

**VERDICT:** Affordable, well-built and far more playable than its half-size frame suggests, the Yamaha JR1 is a brilliant option for young beginners and travel-minded players.

**Many affordable guitars for kids often look anemic and unfinished – but not the JR1**

# Boss GX-1

A multi-effects unit with pro-level features on a bedroom budget

BY MATT MCCRACKEN

**MULTI-EFFECTS PEDALS** HAVE come a long way in the last 10 years, and we're just now starting to see the more advanced tech trickling down into the beginner market. Budget multi-effects have typically been a shadow of the full-fledged amp-modeling beasts at the other end of the spectrum, but the new Boss GX-1 proves you can get a hell of a lot for your money these days.

The GX-1 couldn't be further from the plasticky units of yesteryear, and even compared to more modern competition, it trumps the rest with

its outstanding build quality. It builds hugely on the previous iteration in the GT-1, adding a full-color LCD screen, metal footswitches with color strips, an onboard looper and the ability to load 3rd-party impulse responses. Versus other offerings like the Zoom G2X and Nu-X MG-400, it confidently faces competition.

The GX-1 packs in 23 amp models that are a mixture of Boss originals and classic amp recreations, 38 effects with variations based on a myriad of classic Boss stompboxes, plus seven cabinets and eight slots for third-party



impulse responses. The 99 memory slots give you plenty of space to save your tonal machinations, making it a very complete offering indeed.

The expression pedal is compact but has a nice, even travel. In the heel-down position, it automatically brings up the onboard tuner, which utilizes the eight hexagonal signal chain buttons to give you a great view of the pitch of your string. It's a neat, feature that you'd expect to find on a unit twice the price.

Despite containing so many features, the GX-1 casts a surprisingly

**A well-built rig that will take you from the bedroom to your first gigs**



slight silhouette. It's small enough to fit in a backpack and lightweight enough for younger players to carry around with ease, but it's no less durable for the streamlined design. That tried-and-tested Boss build quality is very much present and accounted for in the sparkly black design that's incredibly slick.

Unusually, the GX-1 can be powered in three different ways: you can use four AA batteries, a 9V power supply or USB-C to power the unit. When using battery power, the unit is turned on or off via the input jack, which makes it very flexible. Batteries are included in the box, but there's no power supply, which feels like it'll be a miss for beginner players getting their first pedal.

Using the unit is remarkably intuitive, thanks to the eight hexagonal buttons that dictate the

signal chain. Each lights up a different color, and all it takes is a long press to access the deeper settings on offer. Navigation takes place via a mix of the up and down buttons and three endless encoders at the center of the unit, making it a breeze to dive in and quickly edit your settings.

You'll need to do some editing to get the best out of it, too, because many of the presets leave a lot to be desired in the amp department. For beginner users, they'll suffice, but for more experienced players looking for a budget multi-effects, they don't cut it against stiff competition from the likes of Positive Grid, Line 6, and IK Multimedia. We found the presets to be very hit and miss, with many of them needing deeper editing, no matter what guitar we used.

The effects, on the other hand, are absolutely phenomenal, which is no

#### MANUFACTURER:

Boss, [boss.info](http://boss.info)

**STREET PRICE:** \$229.99

#### PROS

- ✦ Great selection of amps and effects
- ✦ Lightweight yet robust
- ✦ Intuitive to dive in and start editing
- ✦ Can be powered by batteries or USB-C

#### CONS

- Amp models are hit and miss
- No power supply included

**VERDICT:** The amp models won't please experienced guitarists, but for beginners, the Boss GX-1 is an all-encompassing choice.

surprise considering Boss's heritage in the field. Sounds are pulled from all corners of the Boss ecosystem, from classics like the SD-1 overdrive and DD-3 delay to more esoteric offerings like the PS-6 Harmonist and MO-2 Overtone. They deliver a raft of inspiring tones that will give beginner guitarists the perfect palette to paint their own sonic masterpieces.

The combo of less-than-stellar amp modeling with excellent effects probably won't bother the amateur guitarist, but for more experienced players looking for a cheap multi-effects unit, it feels like a limiting factor. That said, if you're new to guitar and looking for a well-built, all-encompassing rig that will take you from the bedroom to your first gigs, it's hard to look past the Boss GX-1 as an excellent value-for-money option. **GW**



## PRS Fiore HH Satin

PRS's under-the-radar Fiore, the signature guitar of Mark Lettieri, gets a dual-humbucking makeover and packs serious punch

BY DAVE BURRLUCK

**▶ DESPITE HAVING LAUNCHED** a ton of new products in 2025, the company's 40th-anniversary year, PRS's signature artists were barely featured in terms of new models. There were no new guitars for long-time devotees like Carlos Santana or Mark Tremonti or poster boy John Mayer; the only all-new signature guitar was the Chleo for DragonForce's Herman Li, quite a departure from PRS-style with its Floyd Rose vibrato, Fishman Fluence active pickups and a completely new shape.

Just as the celebrations were concluding, however, PRS did announce a cracking all-mahogany SE DGT Standard for David Grissom and possibly one of the smartest electric guitars we've played all year, the new Fiore HH for Mark Lettieri, a five-time Grammy winner known for his work with Snarky Puppy and plenty more.

Mark's first signature guitar, the HSS Fiore, was unveiled four years ago, the second signature bolt-on PRS after John Mayer's Silver Sky. But unlike that re-tooled, or derivative, version of the Fender Stratocaster,

the Fiore aims at the classic super-S formula.

In terms of outline, it's pretty similar to the Silver Sky, although there's more of a chamfer inside the upper horn while the hallmark scoop in the treble cutaway looks slightly larger. Clearly visible through the light satin-nitro "open pore" finish is the center-joined two-piece swamp ash body. But if this satin style isn't for you, the new guitar is also offered in three gloss colors for a small uplift in price.

In either finish style, however, there's no scratchplate; the pickups, like the first model, direct-mount to the body, while the controls are rear-mounted. It certainly gives the Fiore an uncluttered, modern style.

Again, like the Silver Sky, the Fiore uses the standard Fender-

## Light in weight, unshowy and hard to put down – a real player's piece

### MANUFACTURER:

PRS, prsguitars.com

**STREET PRICE:** \$2,649

### PROS

- Typically crisp and detailed build
- Light weight
- Versatile series and parallel humbucking sounds

### CONS

- PRS already has a lot of twin-humbucking guitars with vibratos
- HH super-S styles are pretty niche

**VERDICT:** In this new twin-humbucking format, with rosewood fingerboard only, there's a bit more beef on the bone, but still with those stellar hum-canceling parallel options. A class act.

PRS's Pattern Thin, slightly narrower at the well-cut bone nut, and pretty close to the Silver Sky's early-Sixties, Fender-inspired profile that fills out nicely by the 12th fret.

It's superbly shaped, with relaxed shoulders and a hint of a V in lower positions, and it's one of those guitars that just about plays itself.

The fretwork, set-up and a very in-tune, stable vibrato, are all first-class – it's a really fit-for-purpose, pro-level tool.

The voicing here certainly reflects the build with plenty of "Fender" in what we hear, but typically for PRS, the humbuckers are balanced and well-behaved with a pretty classic output.

The bridge has poke and good thickness but remains clear and defined, while the new neck pickup adds beautiful thickness that's really creamy with a little tone roll-off.

In parallel mode, the humbuckers do a good single-coil impersonation: cleaner than the series voice, and little smoother than a coil-split, and for the working musician add hum-canceling insurance.

A treble-bleed on the volume control, placed close to the bridge, keeps a little clarity as you wind it back, too. Overall, there's considerable breadth for funkier and snappier voicings – a superb clean machine – while those series humbucker tones provide kick, thickness and lift when you need.

As well as being a very inspirational player, Lettieri's guitar choice is equally sophisticated. This new HH model, as well as adding a rosewood fingerboard, gives us that well-voiced humbucker at neck with series/parallel switching for both pickups independently. These are classy sounds with no danger of single-coil hum, and the Fiore HH comes across as a near-perfect function-gig guitar, not least if you prefer the longer Fender scale length.

Yes, there's no shortage of twin-humbucking guitars with vibratos in PRS's expansive range, but this is light in weight, unshowy and a guitar that's hard to put down. A real player's piece. **GW**



scale length. The bolt-on neck is slab-sawn maple with a near-invisible headstock splice and the fingerboard swamps from maple to rosewood.

The hardware follows the original too with vintage-style top-locking tuners and a two-post vibrato that looks like the one used on the SE Silver Sky and the posts are actually bolts that thread into collars inset into the body. The top-plate, pressed saddles and deep-drilled block are all steel here, too.

There's a slight change to the control set up to accommodate the new neck humbucker: along with the three-way lever pickup selector and master volume, both pickup tone controls have pull-switches which change the standard series wiring to parallel for a lighter more

single-coil-like voice that remains hum-canceling.

There's a lovely trim weight to our 7.04 lb. sample, and everything just feels perfectly dialed in. The neck shape isn't a million miles away from





# Neural DSP

## Archetype: John Mayer X

John Mayer teams up with Neural DSP to bring guitar tones from a modern icon to the masses

BY PETE EMERY

**▶ WHILE JOHN MAYER** has been spotted with a Quad Cortex, Kemper and Axe-Fx in the wild in recent years, he is still primarily known for a discerning collection of boutique and vintage amps. So, having someone this high profile diving in the deep end with a plugin is a real vote of confidence in terms of Neural's digital modeling technology.

The Archetype: John Mayer X, then, is a meeting of two leaders in their respective fields that should yield some heavenly guitar tones. To achieve this, the plugin models three of Mayer's favorite amps – the Vibrato channel of his 1964 Fender Vibroverb, the Dumble Steel String Singer #002 and the Two Rock John Mayer Signature Prototype "Signature #83." You can use these individually or a blend of all three at once, and they

all come with matching cabs and an array of microphones that can be swapped and moved.

Then, modeled after his actual rig, we have a collection of overdrive pedals featuring a recreation of the infamous Klon, as well as a Tube Screamer and a Blues Breaker. Other effects include an EQ and a compressor he uses in the studio, a harmonic tremolo, spring reverb and a Studio Verb that can mimic either a hall or plate reverb. And we have the usual global features in Neural's Archetype plugins – a Noise Gate, Transpose function and Doubler.

As you will have gathered, there is a lot here to get stuck into, and

**From ambient cleans to bluesy crunch, it covers the gamut of Mayer's tones**

thankfully, it's made accessible via Neural's tried and tested interface. It's highly visual, with the signal chain (Pre FX, Verb and Trem, Amp, Cab, EQ and Comp, Post FX) displayed at the top and the three amps plus the Three-In-One mode, situated at the bottom.

Just below that signal chain sit the global functions. All of this is represented via handy icons or easily understood text, which makes it a breeze to jump in and start playing.

Furthering this is the fact that the plugin can run standalone. No need to fire up a DAW to fiddle around with some tones, just open the plugin app and go. When it comes to saving your tones, however, they all go into the same folder named "User" with no easy way to organize them from the plugin.



John Mayer performs in Franklin, Tennessee, September 28, 2025



**MANUFACTURER:** Neural DSP, [neuraldsp.com](http://neuraldsp.com)  
**PRICE:** \$169

- PROS**
- + Three of John Mayer's sought-after amplifiers
  - + Great sounding, touch-responsive digital modeling
  - + A full rig of models of pedals and effects used by the man himself

- CONS**
- Limited tweaking in the compressor and the Three-In-One amp
  - The signal chain cannot be moved around
  - Headroom Hero and Signature 83 amps don't have the full suite of controls that the real versions do

**VERDICT:** From ambient cleans, bluesy crunch and mid-forward saturated leads, the John Mayer Archetype X covers the gamut of Mayer's tones. It's the perfect plugin for fans and provides endless fun for guitarists in that bluesy/pop/rock realm.

the breadth on offer with this modeled rig.

The highlight of the plugin for us is using Mayer's favored effects with the "Three-In-One" amp, which blends all three amps together, recreating the setup he uses live and in the studio. The amplifier's different EQs complement each other nicely, resulting in a well-balanced nature that lends itself to clean and edge-of-breakup sounds.

Turning the gain up here yields an old-school type of bitey overdrive. As we go to change settings on each amp, to find that we can't. Similarly, the cab section is disabled too, meaning we cannot tweak any of the mic settings. In this mode, the three amps and cabs are set to John's preferences, with the idea that the user is able to blend in each amp to taste and adjust drive via an overall Gain control, and some reverb through a Room Send.

Though we would have liked a bit more tweakability in the compressor (the only controls are Input and Output), ability to change settings in the Three-In-One mode, and more flexibility in ordering the signal chain, the flip side of having these set to Mayer's preferences is that it points you squarely at his tone, which makes sense given that this is a signature plugin. And it excels at that. **GW**

Given that we have a collection of presets from Mayer himself, we're going to start making some noise with those, then go from there. Lacking a PRS Silver Sky (Mayer's signature PRS), we grab our Fender Elite Stratocaster and get stuck in. Immediately, the problem with the presets is a good one; we don't want to stop playing them and evaluate the rest of this plugin!

The highlights for us are the Gravity Clean and Lead 2 Live Room presets. The former offers a glassy, clean sound, featuring plenty of low end, but also a healthy amount of

high — all on the edge of breakup so that it compresses nicely, reflects picking dynamics, and cleans up beautifully on the volume control with our Strat's fourth-generation Noiseless pickups.

The latter is a smooth, mid-forward lead, with a ton of compression and sustain, making it feel incredibly easy to play. There is a smattering of reverb to create some space, all of which makes it an absorbing tone. There are also presets from a large selection of other renowned artists such as Cory Wong, John Petrucci and Joey Landreth that really showcase



# Universal Audio Paradise Guitar Studio

UA's debut multi-amp plugin offers effortless, world-class sound with some of the most iconic amps of all time

BY MATT MCCrackEN

**BEING NO STRANGERS** to the world of guitar plugins, Universal Audio has thus far stuck with modeling individual amplifiers for its plugin offerings. Paradise Guitar Studio builds on that foundation, offering a modeling experience that, in Senior Product Designer James Satiago's words, will "make any guitarist feel like they're playing in a dream studio."

That means 11 vintage and modified tube amps, 35 cab and microphone options and 25 effects, including some of UA's studio staples like the 1176 compressor, Lexicon-style reverb and tape delay. There's now a built-in guitar tuner, which was notably absent from their previous offerings, and 300 presets that cover indie, blues, metal and much more.

Although the headline number is 11 amplifiers, in reality it's actually six core sounds, five of which have been represented in UA's individual plugins and one which is new to the software

world, the Enigmatic '82. Each amp has several variations, as well as the ability to make deeper changes to the circuits themselves via changing tone stacks, bright caps, or just utilizing the different channels each amplifier has. The basic amp controls are also always visible at the bottom of the window if you need to do quick edits.

Your signal chain is presented just below the preset name, in a block format that will be familiar to most guitarists. The input stage features a dedicated gate, and a volume knob to set your incoming signal. You then have the option for five different blocks in the pre-amplifier section, the entirety of which can be deactivated by clicking the circular button in the top left, and it has its own dedicated volume control.

Next up is the amplifier section, which features a single block for amp and cab each, again with the ability to deactivate and an individual volume control. There's no option to run

**MANUFACTURER:**  
Universal Audio,  
uaudio.com

**STREET PRICE:** \$199

**PROS**

- ✦ Models all of the classic guitar amplifiers from rock guitar history
- ✦ UI is very user-friendly and easy to navigate
- ✦ Lots of great preset options that will cover nearly every style and sound

**CONS**

- You can't make many tweaks to the cabinets
- Other plugins have a lot more amp and effects options

**VERDICT:** Some of the finest modeled amp tones you'll find in a plugin anywhere right now, and some superb effects and studio tools, too. But if you're a tweaker on the IR side or looking for heavier sounds, you may be left frustrated.

a dual amp setup within the software, but you can easily achieve this effect by running two tracks in your DAW. Finally, we get to the post-amp effects section, which again has five blocks where you can place effect modules. The output features another dedicated volume knob and a limiter.

The cab models are set in stone, however, so there aren't tons of tweaks you can make. The mic choice is pre-ordained for each cabinet, with the only real change you can make to this portion being the amount of room sound you hear. That might be a dealbreaker for some, but you can also remove the cab entirely if you want to use your cab loader of choice or another software with third-party impulse responses.

Where UA excels here is the sounds — the Marshall Plexi modeling is especially top tier. Paradise Guitar Studio delivers a utopia of modeled tones that will suit pretty much any guitarist, whether playing clean or piling on the saturation. It won't offer tone tweakers much in terms of the cabinets, but if you want record-ready guitar tones at the click of your mouse, it's got them in spades. **GW**

**It delivers a utopia of modeled tones that will suit pretty much any guitarist**

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**TALES FROM NERDVILLE**  
BY JOE BONAMASSA

# Love Is Blues

Celebrating B.B. King's late-Eighties collaboration with U2

**ONE OF THE** standout tracks from my new album, *B.B. King: Blues Summit 100*, is a cover of the iconic tune “When Love Comes to Town,” which is a song King had recorded with U2 in 1988, an unlikely pairing that worked out phenomenally well and became very popular when it was released the following year. Bono had written the song specifically with B.B. in mind, and they recorded it together at Sun Studios in Memphis. B.B. would subsequently perform the song live with U2 nearly 50 times.

There are many really cool guitar parts in this song, not only from B.B. but also from the Edge, who played a solo, which was delightfully surprising, as it is very unusual to hear him play in this type of blues context. The Edge's solo has his signature ethereal sound, so in approximating it, we plugged in a TC Electronic 2290, an AMS reverb – using anything we could find from that era at Sunset Sound in L.A. – and the results are sonically appropriate.

Using that sound, I played a solo in his style, along the lines of **FIGURE 1**. The solo is based on simple combinations of quarter and eighth notes, incorporating the open low and high E strings and the open B string, as well as a strummed E5 chord, with all notes allowed to ring into each other.

When it's B.B.'s turn to solo, he gets right to classic B.B.-style phrasing, like **FIGURE 2**. Played in the “B.B. box,” the fret-hand is rooted in 5th position, starting with a big vibrato on an E root note and followed by succinct phrases that draw notes from both E major pentatonic (E, F#, G#, B, C#) and E minor pentatonic (E, G, A, B, D).

**FIGURES 3 and 4** are based on the same approach, this time moving from the tonic chord, E, to the IV (four) chord, A, without changing positions. All of these

**FIG. 1** (E7)

**FIG. 2** (E7)

**FIG. 3** (E7)

**FIG. 4**

**FIG. 5** (E7)

improvised melodies are played in the same 5th-position box.

The original track offers a great lesson in the power of simplicity in the parts of both guitarists. The Edge played in his style and B.B. played in his, and the two work so well together.

When we set about to record our version of the song, we invited Slash, Miles Kennedy and Shemekia Copeland to contribute their talents, and they all did a fantastic job, putting their own stamp on this classic song.

There are many approaches Slash could have taken for his solo, and I thought it was cool that he did his own thing, utilizing his

signature “rock” approach along the lines of **FIGURE 5**. In this example, the first three bars are based on E minor pentatonic in 12th position, shifting in bar 4 up to 15th position then back to 12th position heading into bar 5. Moving into bar 6, the lines shift up to 17th position then back down to 5th position at the end of the bar.

The beauty of soloing over this song's progression is you can stick with E-scale riffs the entire time, moving simply between the I and IV chords, as the tune never goes to the V (five) chord. I encourage you to make it your own, which is the approach Slash took quite effectively here. [GW](#)

JEFF FASANO/GUITAR WORLD

For video of this lesson, go to [guitarworld.com/april2026](http://guitarworld.com/april2026)

Joe Bonamassa is one of the world's most popular blues-rock guitarists — not to mention a top producer and *de facto* ambassador of the blues. His latest albums are 2025's *Breakthrough* and 2026's *B.B. King: Blues Summit 100*. For more information, head to [jbonamassa.com](http://jbonamassa.com).



**WORKIN' MAN**  
BY CHARLIE STARR

# Fender Benders

## More B-bender-style licks

**WHEN I WAS** about 12, my friend's dad was hipping me to all kinds of incredible music. He gave me the 1974 Gram Parsons album *Grievous Angel*, which includes "Ooh Las Vegas," a song that features some really cool pedal steel guitar licks that can be replicated with a Parsons/White B-bender-equipped Fender Telecaster, which I talked about last month. In this month's column, I'd like to share what I learned from all this.

The track kicks off with a lick played in the key of E, along the lines of **FIGURE 1**. Here, I begin with a slide up to B on my G string's 4th fret, followed by a C#-to-D hammer-on the B string then the open high E string. I hybrid pick this lick, flatpicking the G string and fingerpicking the notes on the top two strings, and allow the notes to ring together as much as possible.

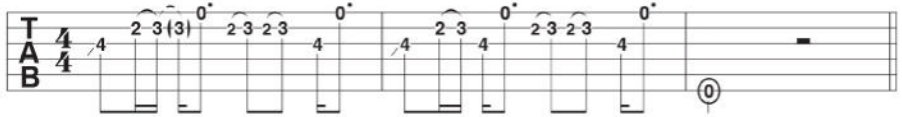
There's another part of the song, also performed with hybrid picking, along the lines of **FIGURE 2**. Here, the open low E string repeatedly alternates against E-to-D pull-offs on the D string, followed by a double pull-off at the end of bar 2, C#-B-A. What I didn't know at the time was that that particular lick was not played on a conventional guitar, but rather on a pedal steel, by Al Perkins. I had assumed it was played by James Burton on his Telecaster.

The tone of the pedal steel on this track is so clear, clean and bright and sounded to me like a Tele! **FIGURE 3** is played in the style of this solo, kicking off in bar 1 with a quick ascending lick based on the E major pentatonic scale (E, F#, G#, B, C#) and followed in bars 2-4 with a phrase based on oblique bends.

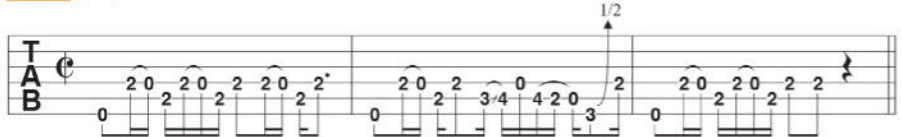
An oblique bend is performed by combining bent and unbent strings. Here, the G string is bent up a whole step while notes on the top two strings remain stationary. Essential to

**FIG. 1** (E7)

w/hybrid picking, let ring

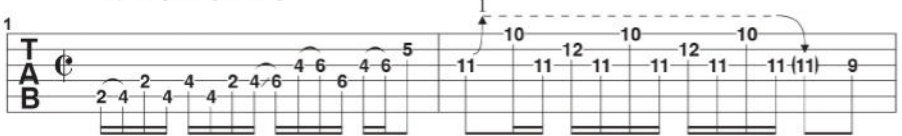


**FIG. 2** (E7)

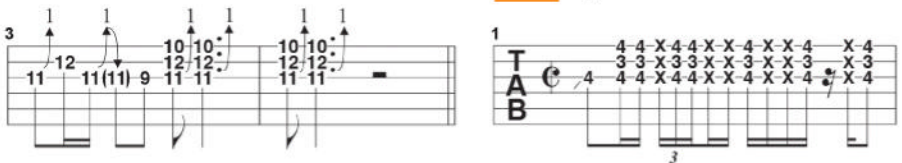


**FIG. 3** (E)

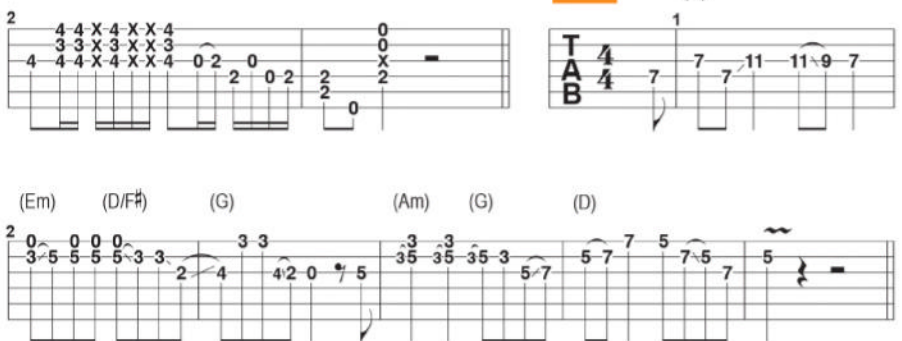
w/hybrid picking, let ring



**FIG. 4** E7



**FIG. 5** (D)



playing this lick is the use of hybrid picking, as the notes on the top two strings repeatedly alternate with the bent G string. What makes the lick challenging to execute is the note on the high E string is at the 10th fret, while the note on the B string is at the 12th fret. At first, I thought, "Is the guitar in open G tuning?" But I soon discovered that it wasn't a standard guitar at all – it was the pedal steel. And this was the beginning of my journey of trying to replicate pedal steel licks on Telecasters.

At the end of the tune, James comes in with a funky chordal lick based on an E7 voicing, not unlike **FIGURE 4**.

When I got a hold of a B-bender guitar, I started to write songs with it, such as "Pretty

Little Lie" [from *The Whippoorwill*]. **FIGURE 5** replicates the opening B-bender lick on standard guitar; many of the slide and hammer-on articulations here were actually sounded by pulling down on the B-bender. Our song "Lonesome for a Living" features both B-bender guitar and pedal steel.

If you want to hear some great B-bender playing by Clarence White, check out the Byrds' *Live at the Fillmore – February 1969* and *Dr. Byrds & Mr. Hyde*. White's guitar now belongs to the great Marty Stuart, who has taken the art of B-bender playing even further. And for a B-bender masterclass, listen to Albert Lee's playing on Dave Edmunds' "Sweet Little Lisa." **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to [guitarworld.com/april2026](http://guitarworld.com/april2026)

Charlie Starr is the frontman and lead guitarist for Blackberry Smoke, an Atlanta band that's been country-rocking its way around the universe since 2001. Their latest albums are 2024's *Be Right Here* and 2025's *Rattle, Ramble & Roll: The Best of Blackberry Smoke, Volume 1*.



**BLUES EXPANSIONS**  
BY COREY CONGILIO

# Hybrid Thinking

Ways to use pick-and-fingers technique

**HELLO, AND WELCOME** to my new column for *Guitar World*! Over the course of these lessons, I will be sharing many of the techniques and approaches I use for creating effective melodies and rhythm guitar parts for both recording sessions and live performances. I'd like to kick things off with a look at some of the ways in which I incorporate the technique of hybrid picking into my playing. As you may know, hybrid picking combines flatpicking with fingerpicking and can be used to create and perform otherwise impossible sounds and techniques.

Hybrid picking is a big part of country guitar playing, and I've studied a lot of country players, but I'm primarily a blues-rock/Americana player, along with R&B and jazz. I've developed an approach to hybrid picking that I think you will be able to apply fairly quickly to what you're already comfortable with.

A good place to start is with chords, as demonstrated in **FIGURE 1**. For each chord – Dm, A and C – the low root note is flatpicked with a downstroke while the higher three notes are picked upward with the bare middle and ring fingers and pinkie. This produces a piano-like simultaneous note attack and a different sound than a strum, which is an arpeggiation, no matter how quickly you perform it.

For single-note playing, a great way to practice hybrid picking is to play a simple A minor pentatonic scale (A, C, D, E, G) and alternate between the pick and a finger repeatedly. In **FIGURE 2**, all of the notes that fall on the downbeats are flatpicked and all the notes on the upbeats are picked with the middle finger. My goal here is to achieve

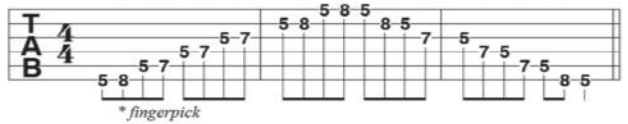
All examples are performed w/hybrid picking (pick and fingers technique).

m= middle finger; a= ring finger.

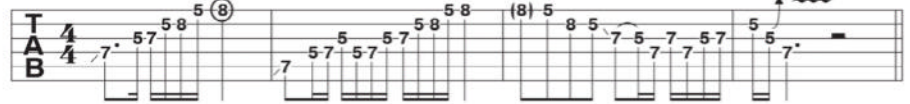
**FIG. 1** Dm A C



**FIG. 2**



**FIG. 3**



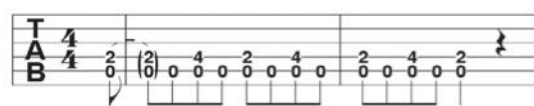
**FIG. 4** (A7)



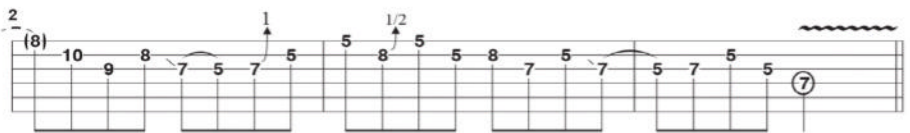
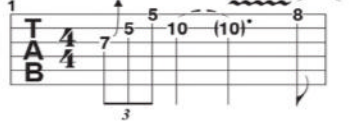
**FIG. 5**



**FIG. 6** A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5



**FIG. 7**



**FIG. 8**



**FIG. 9**



a smooth, uniform note attack, so that there's almost no difference between the sound of the flatpicked and fingerpicked notes.

In **FIGURE 3**, I demonstrate how I can get some speed with hybrid picking. Alternating between the pick and a finger in this way can be at least as fast as straight flatpicking, if not faster, and also easier to do.

My incorporation of hybrid picking started when I was about 15 years old. I'd been emulating Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan with licks like **FIGURE 4**, using only a pick. I then switched to using fingerpicking on the top two strings, with my middle and ring fingers, respectively, as shown in **FIGURE 5**.

I find hybrid picking especially useful for faster tempos, such as the country/rock-type

riff shown in **FIGURE 6**. As I play the solo line in **FIGURE 7**, I articulate the notes on the lower strings with the pick and the notes on the higher strings with my available fingers.

Hybrid picking also works very well with double-stops (two-note chords), especially if I want the sound to be very pinpoint and accurate. In **FIGURE 8**, I fingerpick the double-stops on the B and G strings and flatpick the single notes on the D string. In **FIGURE 9**, I move more freely between flatpicking and fingerpicking, which I think yields an expressive sound.

This is a great way to get started with hybrid picking; move from scales into more inventive lines, and you will discover many great sounds that this technique will facilitate. [GW](#)

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B6AMAG

# HOW TO PLAY THIS MONTH'S SONGS

BY JIMMY BROWN

## TURNSTILE

### "TLC (Turnstile Love Connection)"



#### THIS FAST, HARD-HITTING

modern punk song by this popular young band features pummeling power chord riffs, performed with

bright, high-gain, bridge humbucker tones by guitarists Brady Ebert and Pat McCrory.

The guitarists stick to their bottom three strings throughout, mostly fretting conventional root-5th-root voicings with individual fingertips. But during the chorus (section C), they play *inverted power chords*, voiced 5th-root-5th, with the root on the A string and the 5th on the low E string, barred with the index finger. These chord grips are easy and comfortable to fret, but shifting the hand up and down the neck quickly and cleanly at this fast tempo is challenging and necessitates precise, relaxed fretting. Also, note that Ebert and McCrory switch back to the standard root-5th-root shape at the end of bar 15, moving from an inverted G5 voicing to C5.

The guitarists use inverted power chord voicings again during the song's breakdown riff (sections E and F), economically toggling back and forth between B5 and F5 at the 7th and 8th frets with minimal motion during the last two beats of bars 28 and 32.

Regarding the pick hand, both guitarists use mostly downstrokes but employ down-up strums for all the 16th-note pairs and "quads," which would otherwise be extremely difficult to downpick at this tempo... unless your name is James Hetfield.

The repeating whammy bar dips at section D can be tricky to perform in the even eighth-note rhythm indicated. You'll need to time them to occur right before each strum, to create the desired scooping effect.

Notice how, at section F, the feel suddenly changes from "wide open" to tight and punctuated, as the guitarists apply palm-muting (P.M.) to their bottom two strings during certain strums. This creates a cool-sounding rhythm within a rhythm.

We've adapted the keyboard synth parts at the beginning and end of the track for guitar, with an indication to employ a prominent, time-synced delay effect for bars 1-3 in the intro and a clean electric tone for the surprisingly jazz/r&b-flavored chords in the outro.

## BILLY STRINGS

### "Escanaba"



#### BLUEGRASS SENSATION

Billy Strings is admired for both his virtuosic acoustic flatpicking and artistry as a singer-songwriter

and improviser. The guitarist continues to expand the genre's horizons with his eclectic borrowing of elements from other musical styles, such as blues-rock, jam-band and jazz.

This sprightly, fusion-tinged instrumental showcases Billy's musical depth and grasp of harmonic colors that are more sophisticated than the basic triadic harmony of most bluegrass music. The tune's instrumental theme that begins at section B (bar 18) has the guitarist briskly ascending a darkly cool-sounding Dm9 arpeggio (D, F, A, C, E) across two octaves. He then does a similar thing in bar 22 with a brighter and equally cool-sounding B $\flat$ maj9 arpeggio (B $\flat$ , D, F, A, C), which he caps off with a soulful, bittersweet E note, which is the ♯11, or ♭5, of B $\flat$ , creating an ethereal B $\flat$  Lydian sound (B $\flat$ , C, D, E, F, G, A).

### This fusion-tinged instrumental showcases Billy's sophistication...

These arpeggios are challenging to pick cleanly, with all the string-crossing involved. While it may seem that Billy might employ some economy picking, the guitarist deliberately alternate picks every note that he doesn't hammer-on, pull-off or slide into.

To conserve energy and minimize muscular tension when playing these long lines and the dozens of others that follow, keep your picking movements small, efficient and close to the strings. Pick any note that falls on a downbeat with a downstroke and any note that falls on an eighth-note upbeat with an upstroke.

Part of the artistry of flatpicking is seeking out fretboard paths that help make your phrases easier to articulate, such as being able to pick a downstroke before crossing to a higher string, or an upstroke before moving to a lower string — what's known as "outside the strings" alternate picking.

## ATLANTA RHYTHM SECTION

### "Spooky"



#### WITH THEIR INSPIRED

cover of this late-Sixties soul-jazz-pop song, ARS crafted an extended jam band-style arrangement that

added new, exciting musical elements, such as punchy intro and outro riffs, a modulation (key change), multiple improvised solos and a climactic, tastefully melodic Allman Brothers Band-style harmony leads section.

Throughout the track, guitarists Barry Bailey and J.R. Cobb contribute supportive rhythm guitar comping, pretty much doubling Dean Daughtry's electric piano chords, which along with Paul Goddard's nimble bass line, dominates the accompaniment. Note the limited amount of overdrive the guitarists used for their rhythm parts, so as to not muddy up the complex chord voicings.

The opening chord accents (which bring to mind both "Pick Up the Pieces" by the Average White Band and Steely Dan's "Kid Charlemagne") are hybrid picked, with the pick and middle and ring fingers attacking the strings at the same time, resulting in a keyboard-like simultaneous articulation of the notes. Most of the rhythm guitar parts that follow are also performed this way, again mirroring the tight attack of the keyboard chords. The only exception is during the 3rd verse (section G), where, after the first guitar solo, the groove intensifies and the guitarists revert to strumming denser rhythms with some percussive fret-hand-muted accents.

For his first and second solos (sections F and I), Bailey cranks up the volume on his goldtop Gibson Les Paul's bridge pickup, driving his Marshall tube amp into creamy, harmonically rich distortion. The guitarist builds most of his lines by drawing notes from the F Dorian mode (F, G, A $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , C, D, E $\flat$ ) and the trusty F minor pentatonic scale (F, A $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , C, E $\flat$ ) and generously uses string bends, vibratos, hammer-ons, pull-offs, finger slides and pinch harmonics (P.H.) to make his instrument sing.

A few bars into his second solo, at the end of bar 77, Bailey begins a very cool and unusual repetition lick, for which he cycles a descending five-note sequence, based on the F blues scale (F, A $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , B, C, E $\flat$ ) in 16th notes, resulting in an oddly playful-sounding series of shifting accents through the next few bars. **GW**

# TURNSTILE

## "T.L.C. (Turnstile Love Connection)"

AS HEARD ON **GLOW ON**

WORDS AND MUSIC BY **BRENDAN YATES, DANIEL FANG, FRANZ LYONS AND PAT MCCRORY**

TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**

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

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

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

**A** Intro (0:00)

Fast ♩ = 180

1. I want to

N.C.

Synth arr. for gtr. w/delay effect\*

**GTR.1** B5 D#5 D5

**GTR.2** Gtrs. 1 and 2 (elec. w/dist.)

P.M.

\*Use 83 ms delay with 50/50 dry-to-wet mix ratio to help replicate the sound of sequenced 16th-note rhythms heard on the recording.

**B** Verses (0:05, 0:21)

(w/double-time feel)

(1.) touch a level up Want more connection and that's enough A little  
 (2.) trust Less loneliness A little charm A constant rush A little

B5 D#5 D5 B5 D#5 D5 B5 D#5 D5 B5 D#5 D5 A#5  
 (repeat previous bar)

"T.L.C. (TURNSTILE LOVE CONNECTION)" WORDS AND MUSIC BY BRENDAN YATES, DANIEL FANG, FRANZ LYONS AND PAT MCCRORY. COPYRIGHT © 2021 TURNSTILE BAND PUBLISHING, AMERICAN SONGS BETA AND THESE ARE PULSE SONGS ALL RIGHTS ADMINISTERED BY CONCORD COPYRIGHTS C/O CONCORD MUSIC PUBLISHING. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USED BY PERMISSION. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF HAL LEONARD LLC.



# TRANSCRIPTIONS

Boom boom boom

Oh

B5

A#5

B5

A#5

GTR.1

Gr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 19)

GTR.2

Gr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1a twice (see bar 19)

21 Bass

**E** (0:52)

yeah

Oh

I want to

B5

A#5

B5

F5 B5 F5

25 Gtrs. 1 and 2

(play 3 times)

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass

**F** Breakdown (1:07)

thank you for letting me see myself I want to  
 thank you for letting me be myself I want to  
 thank you for letting me see myself I want to thank you for letting me be myself I want to

B5

A#5

B5

F5 B5 F5

29 P.M. - - - - -

P.M. - - - - -

P.M. - - - - -

P.M. - - - - - (play 3 times)

P.M. - - - - -

P.M. - - - - -

P.M. - - - - -

P.M. - - - - -

GTR.1

GTR.2

**G** Outro (1:21)

(Thank you for letting me see myself I want to thank you for letting me be myself I want to

Dmaj7

D7

Bm7

Bm6

33 (Keyboard arr. for clean guitar)

thank you for letting me see myself I want to thank you for letting me be myself I want to

Gmaj7

D/F#

Em9

# BILLY STRINGS

## "Escanaba"

AS HEARD ON **HIGHWAY PRAYERS**  
 WRITTEN BY **WILLIAM APOSTOL**  
 TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**

Chord diagrams for the following chords:

- Dm: 2 3 1
- F: 1 3 4 2 1 1
- C: 3 2 1
- A: 1 1 1
- Bm7 $\flat$ 5: 1 3 2 4
- B $\flat$ maj7: 1 3 2 4
- Dm9: 2 1 3 3 3
- B $\flat$  $_9$ (no3): 2 1 1 3
- B $\flat$ 6: 1 3 4
- B $\flat$ 6: 2 1 4 3
- C/B $\flat$ : 2 1 1 1
- D5: 1 3
- A7: 1 2
- G5: 2 3 4

**A** Intro (0:00)  
 Moderately Fast  $\text{♩} = 126$

1 N.C. Dm F A

Gtr. 1 (acous.)

**GTR. 1**

Upright bass arr. for elec. bass

*\*Chord symbols implied by bass gtr.*

*Bass Fig. 1*

6 B $\flat$  G5 C/E Dm

**GTR. 1**

*end Bass Fig. 1*

12 F A B $\flat$

**GTR. 1**

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# TRANSCRIPTIONS

**GTR.1**

Dm F A

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 first time (see bar 2)

**GTR.1**

B $\flat$  G5 C/E Dm

**GTR.1**

F A B $\flat$  A

\*Play notes on lower strings, second time. \*\*Play notes on highest strings, second time.

## C Pre-Chorus Theme (0:31, 0:59)

**GTR.1**

Dm C/E F A B $\flat$  A

(Bass plays repeat simile)

**GTR.1**

Dm F B $\flat$  A





**GTR.1**

**GTR.1**

A Dm C/E F A B $\flat$ 6(no3)

**H** Banjo Solo (2:16)

**GTR.1**

A Dm F B $\flat$ 6

**GTR.1**

A Dm

end Bass Fig. 4

**GTR.1**

B $\flat$ 6

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 simile (see bar 91)

# TRANSCRIPTIONS

**GTR.1** 125 Dm B $\flat$ 6

**GTR.1** 131 A Dm C/E F B $\flat$ 6

**GTR.1** 137 A Dm F

**GTR.1** 141 B $\flat$ 6 A

**I Interlude (2:47)**

**GTR.1** 145 Dm F B $\flat$

**Bass**

**GTR.1** 151 Dm

**J Bass Solo (3:01)**

**GTR.1** 157 B $\flat$  Dm9

**GTR.1** 163

B $\flat$ 6

**GTR.1** 169

Dm9 B $\flat$ 6

**K** Fiddle Solo (3:16)

**GTR.1** 175

C/B $\flat$  Dm9

**GTR.1** 181

B $\flat$ 6 Dm9

**GTR.1** 187

B $\flat$ 6

# TRANSCRIPTIONS

193 **GTR.1**

Dm9 B♭6

199 **GTR.1**

Dm9 B♭6

**L** (3:45) (♩ = 134)

205 **GTR.1**

Dm D5

*\*Chord symbol reflect overall harmony.*

211 **GTR.1**

B♭6 D5

216 **GTR.1**

B♭6

D5

**GTR. 1** 221

**M** Chorus Theme Reprise (4:00) (♩ = 132)

**GTR. 1** 225

Dm F C

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 simile (see bar 50)

**GTR. 1** 231

A Dm F

**GTR. 1** 237

C A5 F

**GTR. 1** 243

C F A

**GTR. 1** 249

Dm Bm7b5 Bbmaj7 A7

Bass

**GTR. 1** 255

G5 Bb A Dm

# ATLANTA RHYTHM SECTION

## "Spooky"

AS HEARD ON UNDERDOG

WORDS AND MUSIC BY J.R. COBB, BUDDY BUIE, HARRY MIDDLEBROOKS AND MIKE SHAPIRO

TRANSCRIBED BY JEFF PERRIN

Chord diagrams for the following chords:

- Bm7 (7fr.)
- Em7 (7fr.)
- A13 (5fr.)
- Bbdim7 (6fr.)
- Em7 (7fr.)
- A6 (5fr.)
- Cm7 (8fr.)
- Fm7 (8fr.)
- Bb6 (6fr.)
- Bdim7 (7fr.)
- Fm7 (8fr.)
- Bb7 (8fr.)
- Fm7 (8fr.)
- Eb/Bb (8fr.)
- Bb6 (6fr.)
- Bb (6fr.)
- Bb13 (6fr.)

**A** Intro (0:00)

Moderately ♩ = 107

Bm7

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/light overdrive)  
(pick w/fingers)

GTR.1

Gtr. 2 (clean elec.)

GTR.2

Bass

(0:09)

In the

Em7

A13

Em7

A13

GTR.1

Bass

Bass Fig. 1

end Bass Fig. 1

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**B** 1st Verse (0:18)

cool of the evening when everything is gettin' kind of groovy

1

GTR.1

Em7 A13 Em7 A13

9 Gtr. 1 let (5) ring - - - -

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice simile (see bar 5)

call you up and ask you if you'd like to go with me and see a movie

GTR.1

Em7 A13 Em7 A13

13 (repeat previous four bars)

4

**C** 1st Chorus (0:36)

First you say no you've got some plans for the night and then you stop and say all right Love

GTR.1

Em7 A13 Bbdim7

17 Gtr. 1

Bass  
Bass Fig. 2

end Bass Fig. 2

is kinda crazy with a spooky little girl like you

You

GTR.1

Em7 A13 Em7 Bm7

21 let (5) ring - - - -

**D** 2nd Verse (0:54)

always keep me guessin' I never seem to know what you are thinkin'

And if a

GTR.1

Em7 A6 Em7 A6

25 Gtr. 1 let (5) ring - - - -

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice simile (see bar 5)

# TRANSCRIPTIONS

fella looks at you It's for sure your little eye will be - a winkin'

Em7 A6 Em7 A6

GTR.1

29

## E 2nd Chorus (1:11) (♩ = 108)

I get confused 'cause I dont know where I stand and then you smile and hold my hand Love

Em7 A13 B dim7

GTR.1

33

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 simile (see bar 17)

is kinda crazy with a spooky little girl like you Spooky Spooky yeah

Em7 A6 Em7 Bm7 Cm7

GTR.3 Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

GTR.1

37

## F 1st Guitar Solo (1:31) (♩ = 109)

yeah

Fm7 Bb6 Fm7 Bb6

GTR.3

42

GTR.1

Bass Fig. 3

Fm7 Bb6 Fm7 Bb6

GTR.1 Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 42)

GTR.3

46

16-13-16 16-13 15 (15) 13 15-13-15 15 (15) 13 15-13 15 13 (13) X X 15 (15) 13 15-15-13 15 13 X 15

pitch: G#

Bass

8 8 8 8 7-7 6 6 5 6 7-8 6 8 8 8 8 7-7 6 6 5 (5) 6 7-8 0

Fm7 Bb6 Bdim7

GTR.3

50

15-15(15)13 15-13 16 (16)13 15-15-13 15 13 15 13 13 15 17 15-15 18 15-15(15) 15 17 17-15 17 15 17 (6)

GTR.1

Rhy. Fig. 2

let (5) ring - - -

Bass

Bass Fig. 4

Fm7 Bb6 Fm7 Cm7

GTR.3

54

13 13 16 15-13 15-13 11-12 15 13-14 15 15-13 15 13 13 1 13-16 (16) 13

GTR.1

let (5) ring - -

let (5) ring - -

end Rhy. Fig. 2

end Bass Fig. 4



**I** 2nd Guitar Solo (2:41)

Fm7 B $\flat$ 6 Fm7 B $\flat$ 6

**GTR. 1** Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 eight times (see bar 42)

Gtr. 3

**GTR. 3**

70

slight P.H. 1/4 1/4 P.H.

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 eight times (see bar 42) pitch: F

Fm7 B $\flat$ 6 Fm7 B $\flat$ 6

**GTR. 3**

74

1/2 1/2 1/2 1/2

Fm7 B $\flat$ 6

**GTR. 3**

78

Fm7 B $\flat$ 6

**GTR. 3**

80

V - - -

Fm7 B $\flat$ 6 slight P.H. Fm7

**GTR. 3**

82

slight P.H.

B $\flat$ 6 Fm7 **GTR. 1** Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 50)

**GTR. 3**

85

1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 (see bar 50)

B $\flat$ 6 B dim7 Fm7

**GTR. 3**

88

1/2

B $\flat$ 6 Fm7 Cm7

**GTR. 3**

91

P.H. P.H. P.H. tr

pitch: F

# TRANSCRIPTIONS

## J Keyboard Solo (3:34)

94 **GTR. 3** Fm7 B $\flat$ 13 Fm7 B $\flat$ 13

Gtr. 3 16 (16)

**GTR. 1** Gtr. 1 let (5) ring

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 twice (see bar 42)

98 **GTR. 1** Fm7 B $\flat$ 13 Bdim7

Gtr. 1

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 (see bar 50)

102 **GTR. 3** Fm7 B $\flat$ 13 Fm7 Cm7

Gtr. 3

**GTR. 1** Gtr. 1

## K 3rd Guitar Solo (4:09)

**GTR. 1** Fm7 B $\flat$ 7 Fm7 B $\flat$ 7

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 3 four times (see bar 58)

Gtr. 3

106 **GTR. 3**

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 four times simile (see bar 42)

110 **GTR. 3** Fm7 B $\flat$ 7 Fm7 B $\flat$ 7

Gtr. 3

**GTR. 4** Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.)



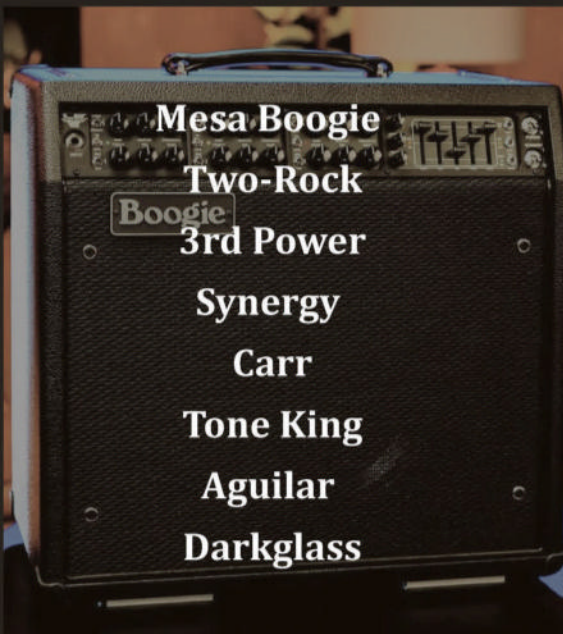


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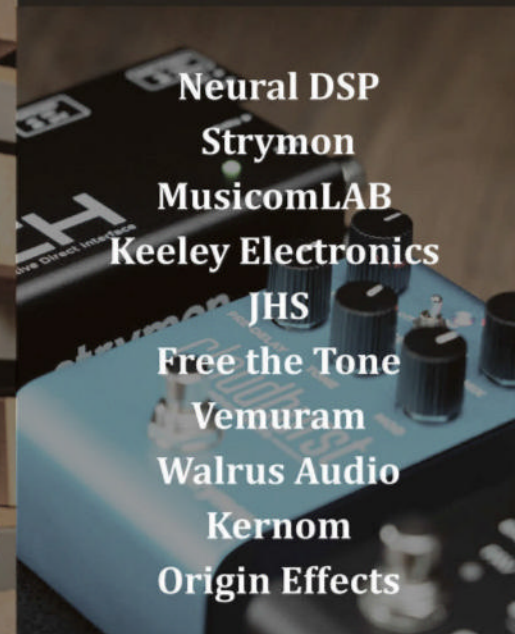
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**SERIES A**

# POWER TOOLS

## Diezel VH4

### 1992-PRESENT

CATEGORY AMPLIFIER HEAD



**▶ FOR FANS OF** high-gain amps, 1992 was a breakthrough year unlike any other (previously or since). This period saw the introduction of the Peavey 5150, Mesa Boogie Dual Rectifier, Bogner Ecstasy, VHT Pitbull Ultra Lead and other contenders, along with the Engl Savage 120 arriving in early 1993. All of these were game-changing models that still play a major role in the sound of rock and metal guitar.

Perhaps the most outlandish amp to make its bow during 1992 was the Diezel VH4 – a 100-watt beast driven by four EL34 or KT77 power tubes and featuring four truly independent channels, each with its own preamp section and 12AX7 preamp tubes (a total of seven). With its individually voiced Clean, Crunch, Mega and Lead channels, each with its own set of gain, volume, treble, middle and bass controls and send/return inserts, the VH4 essentially offers four preamps in a single package. These are housed along with a power amp with its own master volume, presence (centered at 4kHz) and deep (centered at 90kHz) controls, plus serial and parallel effect loops, the latter with a front-mounted volume knob as well.

One of the more complicated features of the VH4's design is that a MIDI controller is essential for live performance channel switching, but the inclusion of MIDI In and Thru jacks also allowed guitarists to easily incorporate the amp in a sophisticated rig with other MIDI devices like preamps and effects, or even other amps.

The genius of the VH4's overall design was how it provided relatively simple, no-nonsense operation that

**John Fogerty uses the Clean channel of a Diezel VH4 to replicate the sounds of his old Kustom amps when performing CCR classics**

#### SUGGESTED SETTINGS TOOL DEEP RHYTHM

**MEGA CHANNEL**  
GAIN: 4.5  
VOLUME: 5.5  
TREBLE: 8.5  
MIDDLE: 10  
BASS: 8

#### CREEDENCE CLEAN

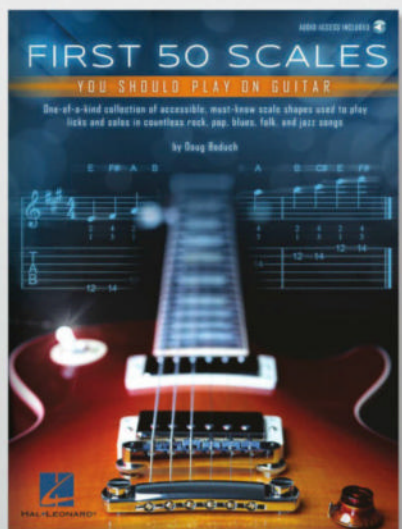
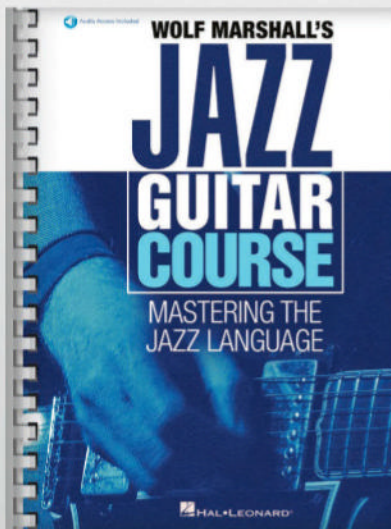
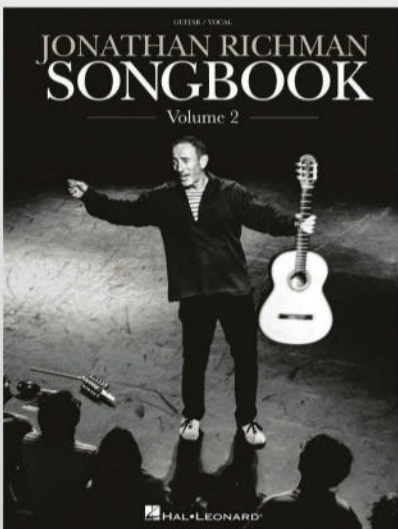
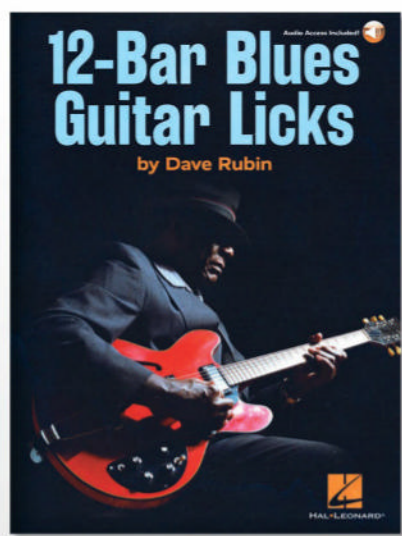
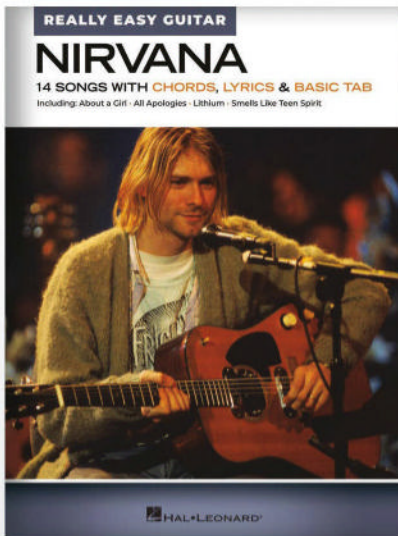
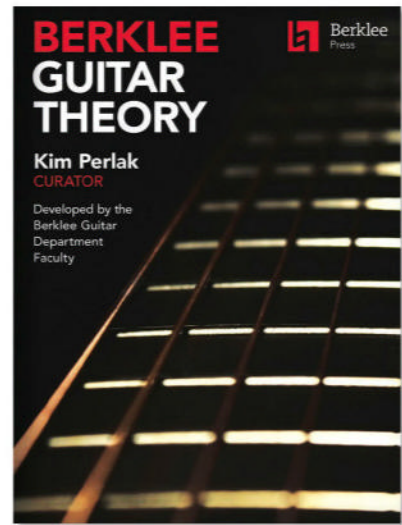
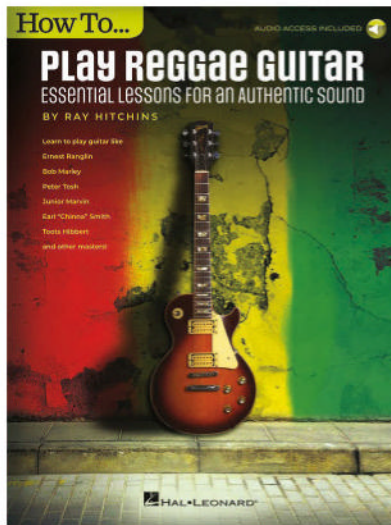
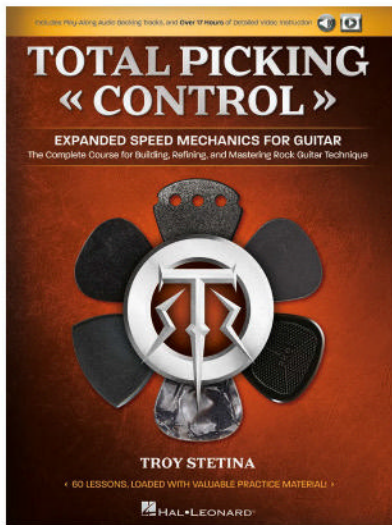
**CLEAN CHANNEL**  
GAIN: 6  
VOLUME: 5  
TREBLE: 6  
MIDDLE: 5  
BASS: 5

made it easy for any guitarist to dial in desired sounds while delivering instant access to four very distinct tones. The slanted configuration of each channel's control knobs is eye-catching but also functional, helping to avoid confusion when dialing in tones for each channel. However, the VH4 was not the typical "everyman" chameleon amp that many multi-channel amps aspire to be. It has its own unique tonal character and textures that never attempt to emulate popular Fender and Marshall sounds, but rather improve upon them or go beyond them.

The Mega channel, in particular, has played a major role in heavy guitar tones since the early Nineties with its huge, focused bass, lower midrange punch and searing treble. This is the channel that players like James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett, Muse's Matt Bellamy, Tool's Adam Jones, Dave Mustaine and Korn's Munky and Head have frequently relied on to craft thick, harmonically complex rhythm guitar tones, particularly when using down-tuned guitars. Eighties shredders like Warren DeMartini, Chris Impellitteri and George Lynch have also turned to the Diezel VH4 for modernized rhythm tones and sustaining leads, often preferring the smooth, compressed high-gain textures of its Lead channel.

Unlike many high-gain amps, the VH4 also delivers bluesy overdrive and crisp clean tones. In fact, John Fogerty uses the Clean channel of a Diezel VH4 on stage to replicate the crystalline sounds of his old Kustom K200A amps when performing Creedence Clearwater Revival classics. [GW](#)

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