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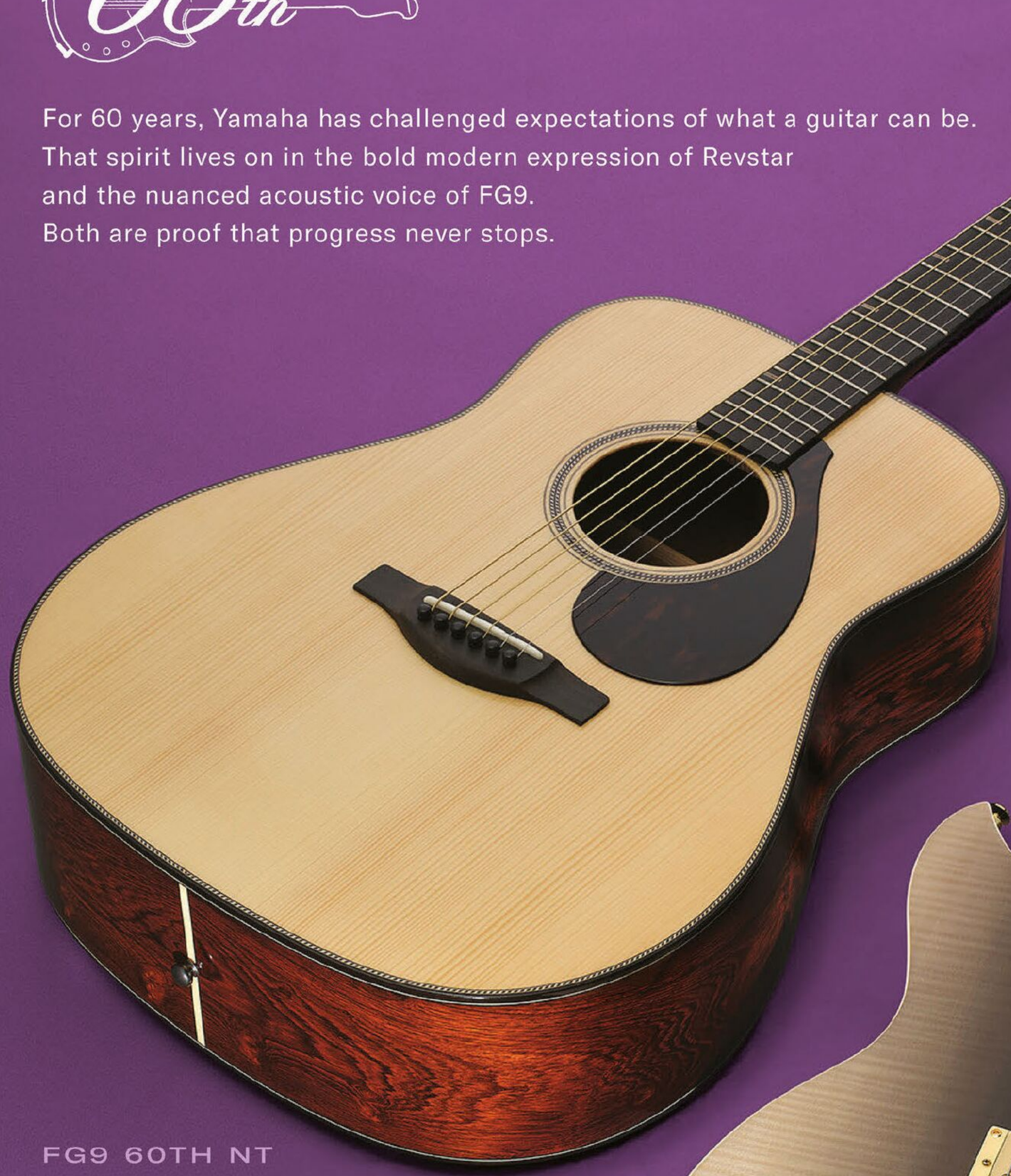
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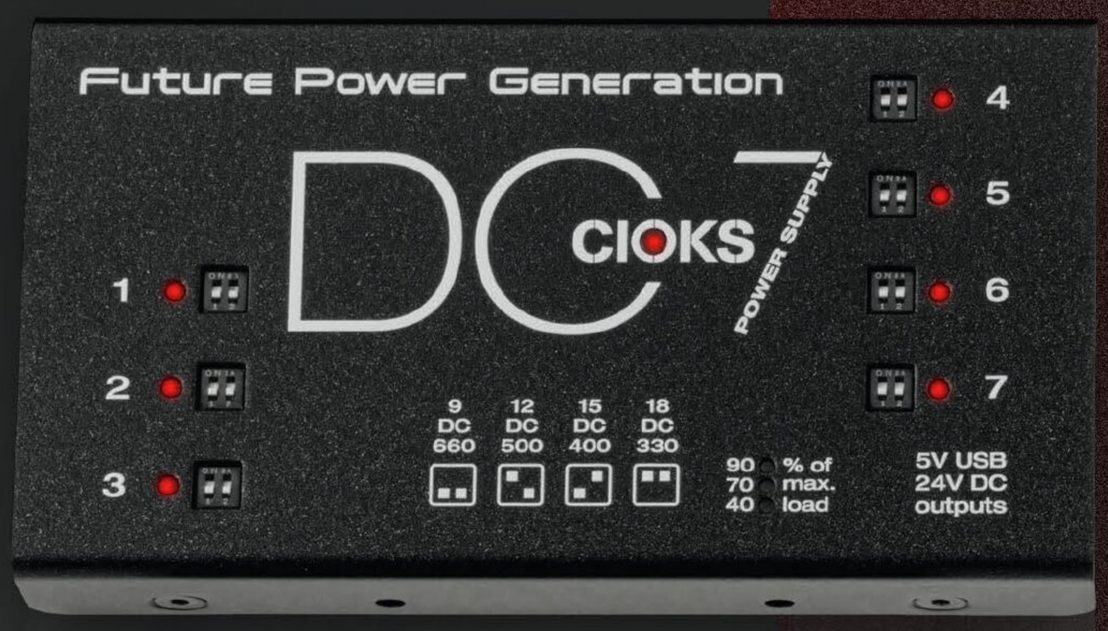
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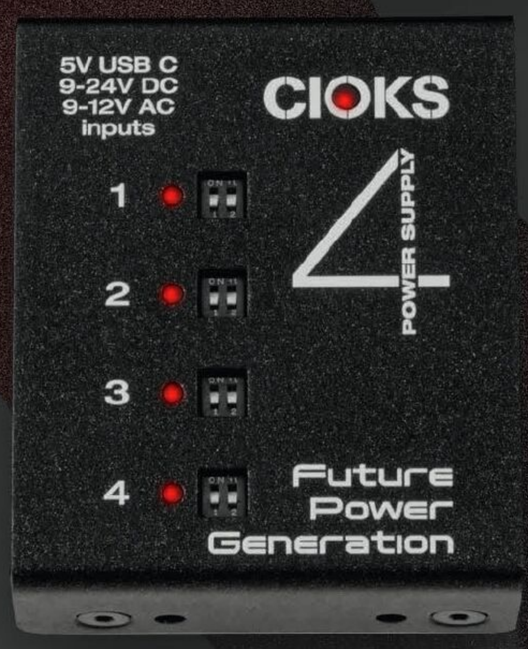
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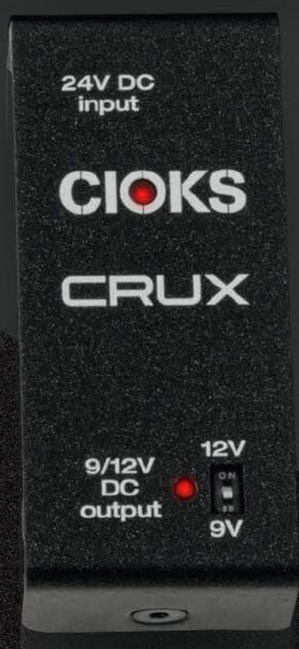
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Integrated circuit technology advanced at such a rapid pace during the late Seventies and early Eighties that only seven years passed between the introduction of the first analog delay pedals in 1976 and the debut of the world's first compact digital delay pedal — the Boss DD-2.

COVER PHOTO: KEVIN MAZUR

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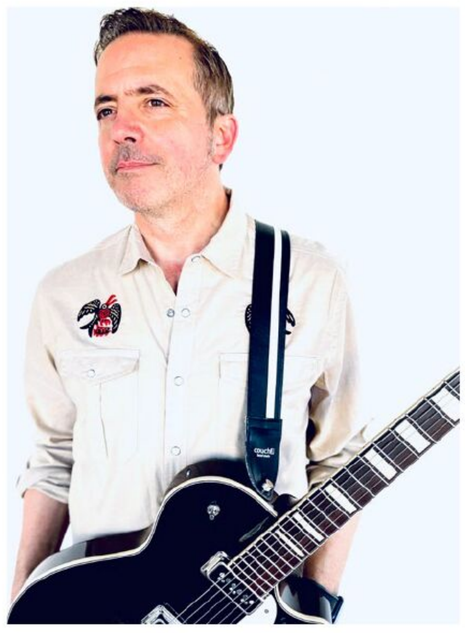
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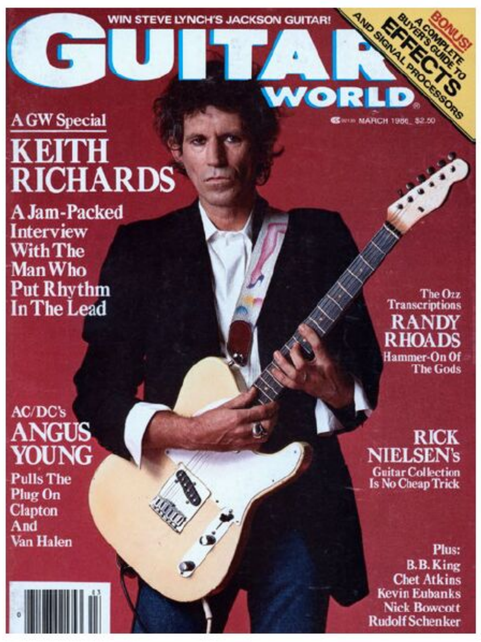
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Sometimes, a Keith Richards cover story is just meant to be

WHEN I GOT the initial email that led to this issue's Keith Richards cover story, I had just edited an interview with the Guess Who's Randy Bachman. That story (coming soon to *GW*, BTW!) literally starts off with Bachman describing a Richards/Ronnie Wood interview he'd just seen on TV. Anyway, in the process of putting together this issue — which includes two Richards features — we noticed that the Black Crowes' Chris Robinson is wearing a Keith Richards T-shirt in the Ross Halfin photo on page 57. And sure, we literally chose the Getty Images photo on page 58 (where he's wearing the same shirt), but we definitely didn't tell Robinson what to wear when he and his bro posed for Halfin. And then along came Zakk Wylde, who dropped no fewer than three Richards/Stones references in our Black Label Society feature, including, on page 47, "It's like when people ask Keith Richards, 'When are you ever gonna retire?' And he goes, 'Retire from what?!'" and, on page 44, "Even the Stones played little gigs to begin with — and look at them now!" But I guess the unexpected icing on the cake was Exodus guitarist Greg Holt's page-51 reference to his band's "anything's possible" cover of the Stones' "Bitch." What's my point? I guess it's that I've always loved when weird little things like this happen, editorially speaking. It's kinda like the far, far, far less annoying version of, like, when you're talking about buying a new refrigerator, and suddenly you're bombarded with online refrigerator ads. I do not love that.

DAMIAN FANELLI





CYNTHIA MOORHEAD/GUITAR WORLD, FUTURE (MARCH 1986 GW)

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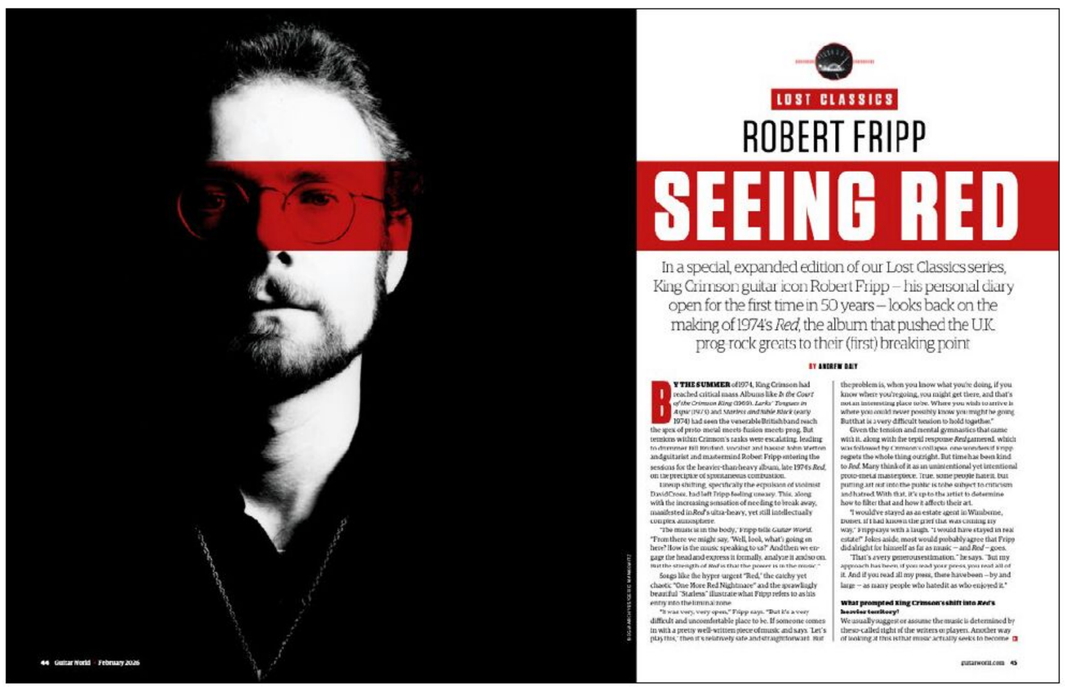
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The economics of Frippertronics

ROBERT FRIPP [*FEBRUARY 2026*] needed a new guitar, but because he was only 17, his father refused to sign until he had a £100 deposit, which he earned from digging holes at night. This is a far cry from kids today that I see in Defenders of the Faith who, by the time they're 11, have a PRS Custom, a Les Paul and a USA Fender Stratocaster that I'm betting they didn't dig holes for. This is a microcosm of society today where kids are entitled and just handed gear by Dad and don't learn value because they just ask and get. It's likely one reason Robert Fripp turned out the way he did.

JERRY FREESE

The late, great Ace deserved the cover

THANK YOU FOR honoring Ace Frehley in the January 2026 issue, but I have to say he should've been on the cover! He deserves it. Maybe a lot of people don't remember, but he inspired more people to play the guitar than almost anyone. He had the coolest stage persona and great, fiery solos. He's a very under-rated player and was wonderful all the times I got to meet him. I just think somebody should step up and dedicate a cover to him, and I was hoping it would be you guys as you've had him on the cover in the past. Ace and Eddie Van Halen, my favorite players, are gone now and I just think Ace deserved a cover. Best...

WENDELL

On expanding the world of *Guitar World*

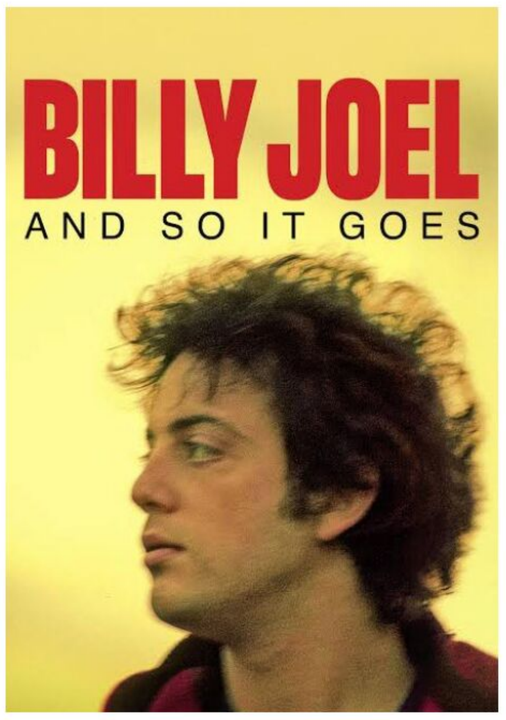
I THINK IT'S about a year ago that the guitar-publication world suddenly blew up. A number of great magazines, all owned by Future, strangely vanished. *Guitar Player*, *Guitar Techniques* and *Total Guitar* vanished into the ether. Like many people, my *GP* subscription morphed into *Guitar World*. I was a *GP* reader and subscriber for something like 30 or 40 years. Maybe longer. I wanted to write to say that I appreciate you trying to make *GW* a more well-rounded magazine. It had been primarily a metal/shred mag for a long time. It needs to continue to move toward appealing to all forms of guitar music.

While, for me, there are still too many features on metal or hardcore (to me, they're the same thing), I've enjoyed the features on players like Marcus King, Lenny Kravitz and even Kevin Jonas. I hope to see the mag continue to move toward all guitarists. Let's face it, the guitar "world" includes blues, funk, rock, jazz, country, acoustic and so much more. (BTW, I do listen to the music from the various, um, artists you feature out of curiosity. Car Bomb have a somewhat normal name, not like some Elven name from *The Lord of the Rings*. Then I listened to some of their new recordings on Apple Music. WTF? Not my cup of tea. Is that really even music?). Enough venting. Thanks again for improving your publication. I look forward to future issues. Best...

BILL KING

Let's hear from Billy Joel's guitarist

I APPRECIATE THE lesser-known underrated guitarists you've been featuring lately, such as Quicksilver Messenger Service's John Cipollina [*Holiday 2020*]. With the success of the recent Billy Joel documentary [*2025's* Billy Joel: And So It Goes], now would be a great time to do a feature/interview with Billy's longtime guitarist/musical



director, Tommy Byrnes. He's a very tasteful player. I'd also like to see a feature on the criminally overlooked Climax Blues Band. How about tabs for "I Love You"? There's some really cool guitar work on that one. Cheers...

DONALD TAYLOR, LOS ANGELES (LOYAL READER SINCE 1983)

This lefty might be right

I HAD A brilliant idea because I'm left-handed – and many others are, too. How about indicating our hands as "fret hand" and "picking hand" instead of "left" or "right"? Every time I read something, I have to think, "They said left; that means right. They said right; that means left." I constantly have to flip the equation. But if you just typed it as "fret hand" and "picking hand," it applies equally and ambidextrously – without confusing anyone. Just a thought! It's not like I'm asking for left-handed chord diagrams. Thanks...

AARON

Like Yngwie always says, more is more

PLEASE GET BACK to the good old days when there were five or six songs tabbed out and great columnists. The less there is of this content, the more generic the magazine becomes. Thanks...

DAN



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READER ART OF THE MONTH

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



Jerry Garcia
BY WARD STARRETT



Custom-painted Iron Maiden jacket
BY RALEIGH HILT

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



David Meyers

AGE: 41
HOMETOWN: Woodbury, NJ
GUITARS: Ibanez Gio GRX, Ibanez SoundGear SR300,
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Testament "D.N.R.," Metallica "King Nothing," Alice In Chains "Them Bones" and originals with my band, Dark Moon Spirit
GEAR I WANT MOST: Schecter C-1 Silver Mountain



Jerry Sommer

AGE: 60
HOMETOWN: Butler, WI
GUITARS: A few Gibsons and Fenders, along with ones I've collected or built; my main guitar is my "Junkcaster"
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Lenny Kravitz "Are You Gonna Go My Way," Jimi Hendrix "All Along the Watchtower," Led Zeppelin "Whole Lotta Love"
WHAT I WANT MOST: Time to build guitars!

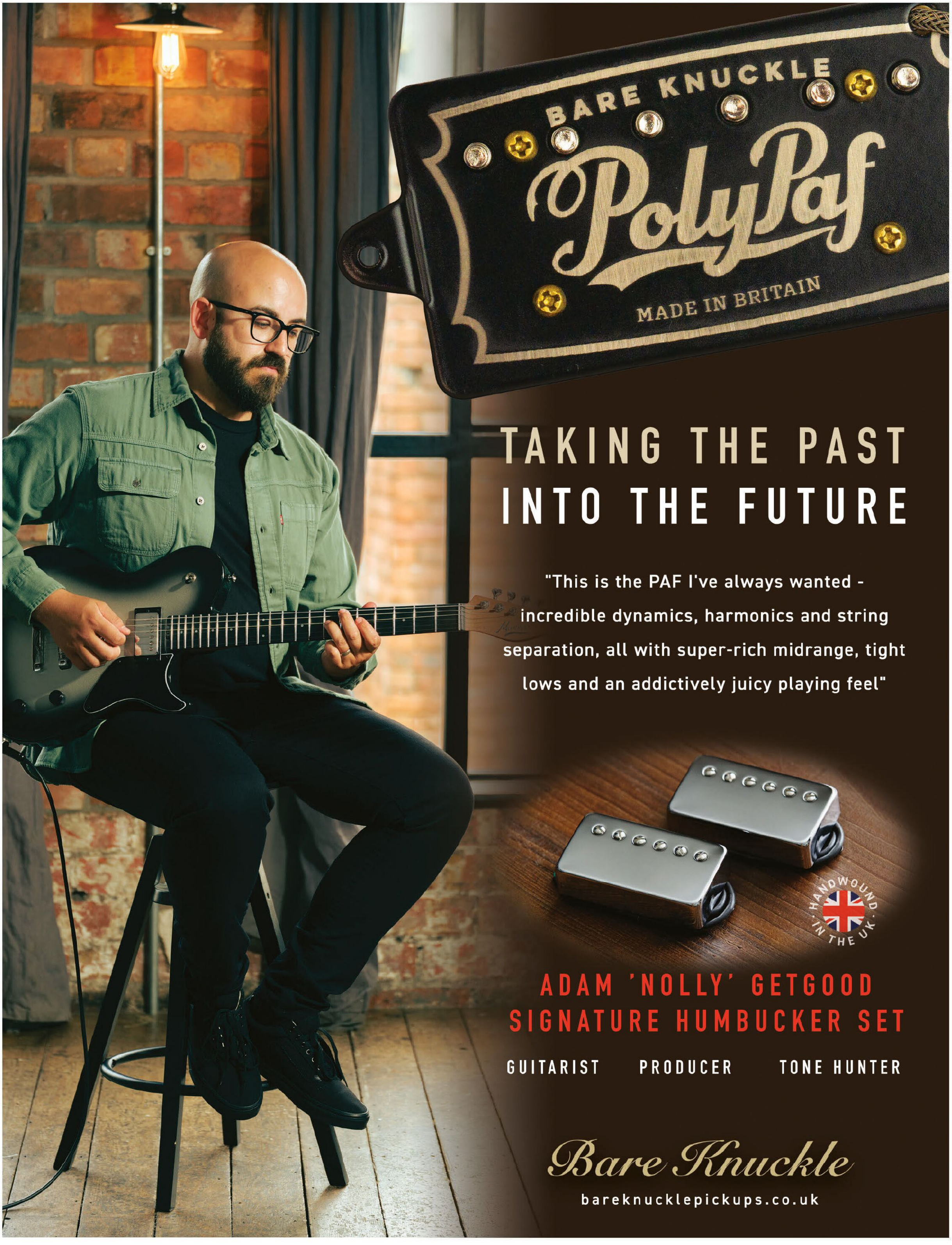


Brad Chinn

AGE: 59
GUITARS: EVH Wolfgang Standard, Epiphone Les Paul Studio, Fender Mustang GTX50
SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Black Sabbath "Paranoid," Cheap Trick "Surrender," Tom Petty "Honey Bee," Cream "Sunshine of Your Love"
GEAR I WANT MOST: EVH 5150 Iconic, EVH Striped Series White with Black Stripes

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Right-Hand Man

How the Dirty Nil's Luke Bentham serves up a vulgar display of power

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

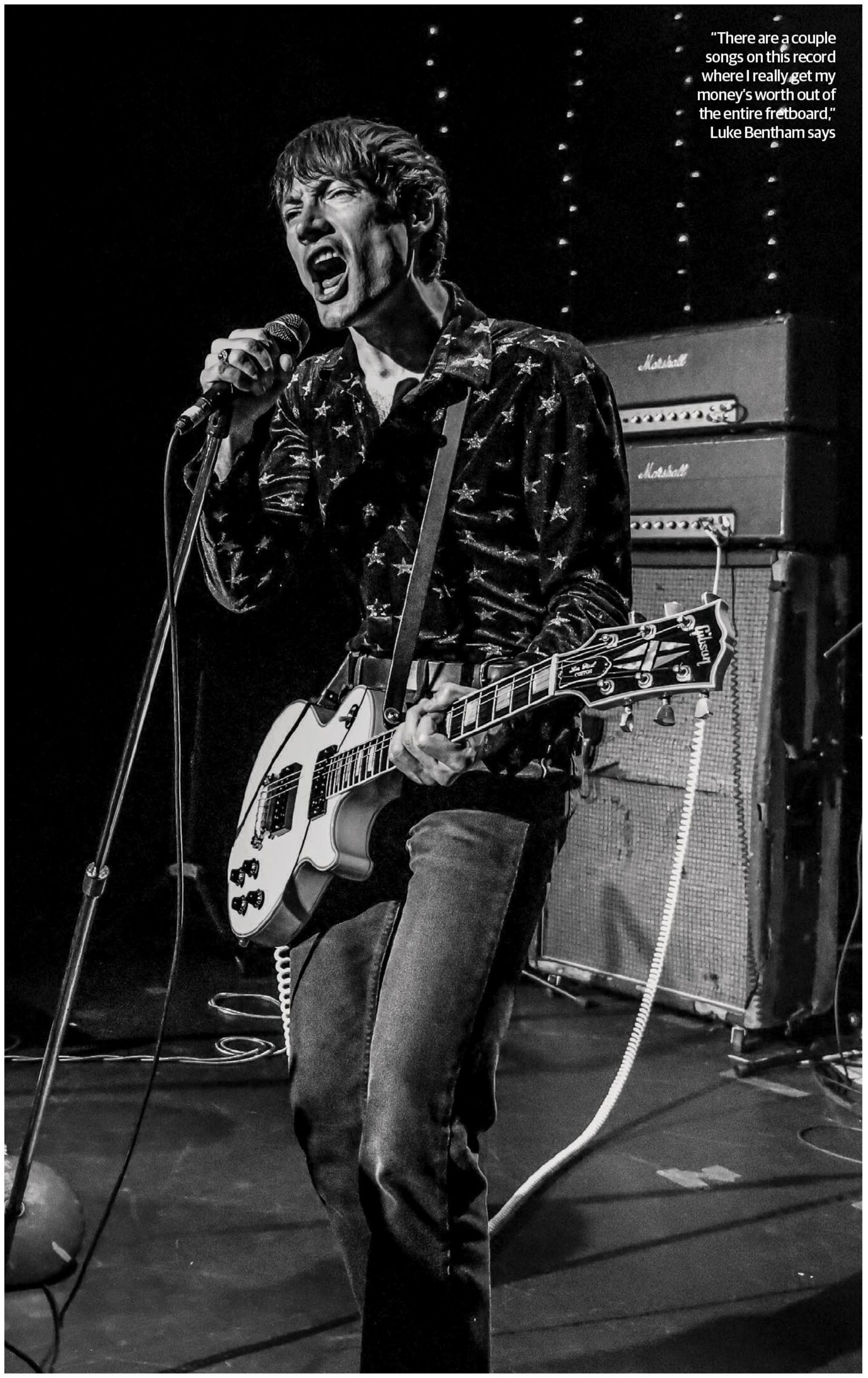
THE LAST THING Luke Bentham ever expected to find in his mailbox was a piece of Vatican stationary. But as he and his bandmates in the Dirty Nil prepared their sixth album, 2025's blistering *The Lash*, the Holy See served them with a cease-and-desist letter.

Guitarist/vocalist Bentham and the boys weren't looking for trouble — only for cover artwork vicious enough to represent the high-gain hard rock on their latest long player. So when the Vatican rejected their use of a snapshot he took of a bronze relief sculpture known as "the Horrors of War," though, the band enlisted an illustrator to realize their vision instead.

"Their lawyers are pretty serious," Bentham says with a laugh. "I think that's a career highlight for me."

Fortunately, the brutal riffs and stark arrangements on *The Lash* survived the Vatican's inquest. Recorded quickly and without agonizing over multiple takes or overwrought production ideas, Bentham, who carries the band's guitar-and-melody engine, found himself in a rare place of momentum and freedom. "This one just felt different," he says. "It's the most fun I've had in the studio."

Bentham says he was "on a heater," bringing in riffs with a gnarlier edge than he'd leaned into before. The band was listening to a lot of the Jesus Lizard, and he immersed himself in Duane Denison's thorny guitar playing. Songs came together during hours-long jams where time evaporated. The music for opener "Gallop of the Hounds" materialized so quickly he had to circle back to write lyrics only after the arrangement



"There are a couple songs on this record where I really get my money's worth out of the entire fretboard," Luke Bentham says

DREW THOMSON

had already hardened. It was the opposite of their old process, where they stoked acoustic sketches into full-on ragers. This time, if a song was quiet, like "Spiders" or "This Is Me Warning Ya," they left it quiet. If it felt punishing, they pushed it into the red.

Part of the shift was Bentham's evolving philosophy of what a guitar should do in a rock band. "There's not a ton of shredding on this one," he notes. Instead, the band focused on building "apocalyptic, cacophonous moments" together as a unit. That doesn't mean he denied himself all the primal pyrotechnics he's known for. "Rest assured," he says, "there are a couple songs on this record where I really get my money's worth out of the entire fretboard."

His influences map neatly onto this approach. Bentham's north star is Pete Townshend, and he considers the Who's seminal *Live at Leeds* as the gold standard of electric guitar playing. There's plenty of Townshend swagger in his style, but his emotional center belongs to James Williamson on *Raw Power*, whose riffs he calls his all-time favorites. Bentham gravitates toward bands that sound like they're "just about to fall apart," citing the Stooges and the Replacements as models.

"Pretty much anything that absolutely peels the paint, I'm in," he says, "particularly anything with a really gnarly right hand in the guitar playing. That's the stuff for me. The guitar players barely holding onto control as they go into the corners at top speed are my favorite players."

That love dates at least to his early twenties, when he fell for *Raw Power*, the aptly named 1973 album from Iggy and the Stooges. "I became completely obsessed," he says. "I was like, I'm buying a Les Paul Custom, and that's going to be the only guitar I play for the rest of my life," he says. "And so far, so good. It's been about 14 years of just playing a Les Paul Custom and enjoying every fucking second of it."



Luke Bentham's Gibson-and-Marshall rig includes a Les Paul Custom [*left*], SG Junior and Seventies 8x10 cabinet



"It's been about 14 years of just playing a Les Paul Custom" Bentham says

"I was playing the ProCo Rats as much as I was playing the guitar"

AXOLOGY

Guitars
1975 Gibson Les Paul Custom (main), 2011 Gibson Les Paul Black Beauty, 2022 Gibson Les Paul Custom, Gibson ES-335

Amps
Marshall 1959 Super Lead plexi 100W head, Marshall 8x10 cab

The rest of Bentham's rig is just as straightforward. He's a full-blown evangelist of the ProCo Rat stomp box, to the point of keeping a bag of LM308 chips on hand to mod new pedals for more output, less gain and a wider filter sweep. He sets the distortion low and lets the volume knob do most of the work. "There's so much potential clarity in a Rat," he says. It's not the fuzzed-out chaos most players want from the pedal. He's after a sort of barbed articulation cranked to stadium volume.

For *The Lash*, Bentham ran his Les Paul through an A/B box, splitting the signal between his Marshall plexi rig (without the Bright cap on the Treble side) in the live room and a 5-watt Supro in the control room with a Rat in front of it. He sat next to the smaller amp, coaxing feedback with the precision of a welder guiding a flame. "I was playing the Rats as much as I was playing the guitar," he says.

Unlike his heroes, whose inter-band conflicts arguably fueled their biggest creative achievements, Bentham finds inspiration for the Dirty Nil in the simple pleasures of rocking out with friends. "I'm not a big believer in the idea that tension makes good rock records," he says. "I think that when you're not thinking and you're just doing it is the best stuff. I still get the same thrill when I bring in a riff that I can't wait to show Kyle [*Fisher, drummer*], and we'll just blast away." GW

DREW THOMSON

Laura Cox

From screen to stage: How a garage-blues prodigy took her music to the masses

BY JOE BOSSO



Laura Cox with her Gibson Billie Joe Armstrong Les Paul Junior

LAURA COX ADMITS she didn't have much of a goal in mind when she started posting her classic rock covers on this new thing called YouTube back in 2006. "I was a teenager, so the whole thing was just fun," she says. "Pretty soon I was getting millions of views — it was crazy. I think what people liked was that I didn't take things so seriously. I was just enjoying myself and sharing music I loved."

By her mid-twenties, however, the Anglo-French guitarist and singer got serious and formed an eponymous band, with which she released a series of albums (2017's *Hard Blues Shot*, 2019's *Burning Bright* and 2023's *Head Above Water*) that highlighted her gutsy singing and playing — she's a southpaw who plays righty — along with her rapidly maturing songwriting skills. "My heroes are people like Joe Bonamassa, Mark Knopfler and Angus Young," she says, "I think you can hear those influences across those records."

For her new album, *Trouble Coming*, Cox sidelined her live band in the studio and recorded with the No Money Kids, a duo she describes as "the French Black Keys." The result is an album that sounds and feels like something of a breakthrough. Blazing tracks like "No Need to Try Harder" and the aptly named "Do I Have Your Attention" are still rooted in blues rock, but they have a lo-fi garage edginess not found in previous efforts. Cox tosses out the rulebook on the bluesy, tension-filled mood piece title track, eschewing standard verse-chorus-bridge songcraft, on which she bags lead solos in favor of swampy, distorted vamping and atmospheric slide work.

"I felt confident in the song and realized that it didn't need a solo," she says. "I still love playing guitar more than anything, but it was important for me to grow as a songwriter and all-around artist, and that meant I had to do things differently." She laughs. "For the first time, I'm actually enjoying listening to myself. I play the record in my car, my bedroom, even in the kitchen. It's like I'm listening to somebody else's record. That's the biggest success I could ask for. I'm really happy about this music." GW

"For the first time, I'm enjoying listening to myself. That's the biggest success I could ask for"

AXOLOGY

Guitars
Gibson Billie Joe Armstrong Les Paul Junior, Gibson SG Standard '61

Amps
Two Marshall Studio Vintage 20s with matching cabs

Effects
SoloDallas Schaffer Replica Storm Boost, SoloDallas SVDS Boost, EarthQuaker Devices Bit Commander, Cry Baby wah

LI RODA-GIL

Michael Hampton

The P-Funk veteran takes us inside his latest life stage, a much more mellow place than the frenzied funk days of his past

BY ANDREW DALY

MICHAEL HAMPTON, WHOSE legacy resides firmly within the structure of the house that George Clinton built, aka Parliament-Funkadelic, hasn't released a lot of music lately. At 69, he's settled into a calmer life, albeit a life that still includes plenty of guitar playing and occasionally hitting the road with P-Funk. In fact, Hampton joined Clinton and company for a seven-date tour at the end of 2025 into early 2026. Does this, along with a new album titled *Into the Public Domain* signal a change of course for the generally relaxed six-stringer? Time will tell.

"It started with a lot of guys getting together and kicking it in the studio," Hampton tells *Guitar World*. "There've been sessions on and off, and I had Joe Nicolo [*James Taylor, Jazzy Jeff, the Fugees, Lauryn Hill*] producing, so it was great."

If you're assuming *Into the Public Domain* will be a strict P-Funk offshoot, think again. The nine-song EP features an interesting cast of characters, including Shooter Jennings, who played keys and did some co-production work at Sunset Studios in Los Angeles.

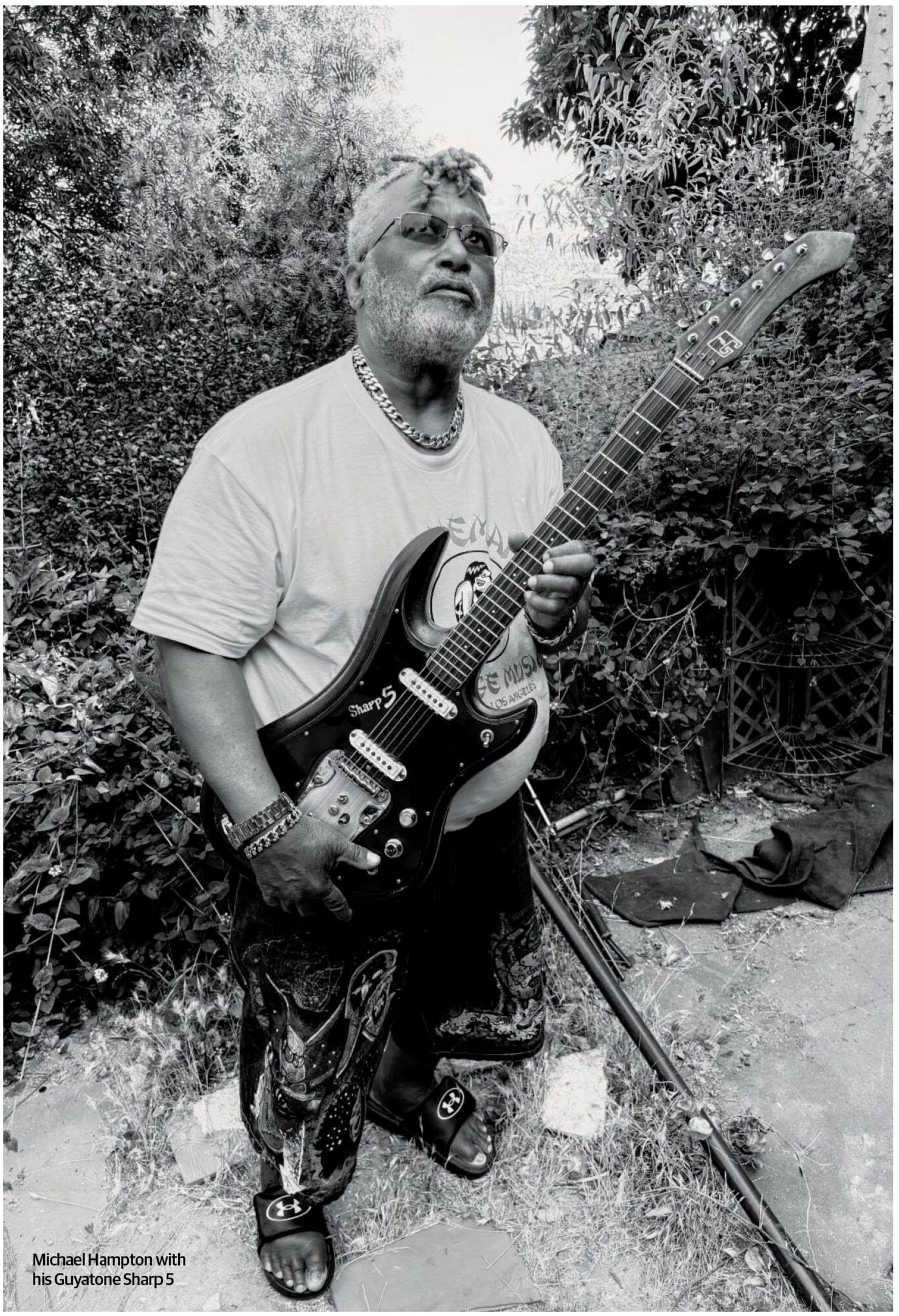
"The idea of being a solo artist, man — it's been going fast," Hampton says. "I just tried to record things as they came to me and hand it over to Joe, who picked out the good stuff and made a good mix. It was about respecting what everybody does and just working on it."

Cuts like "Fight or Flight" show Hampton's pop-rock side, and then there's the title track, which explodes with the sort of funky fury that made Hampton famous with P-Funk in the Seventies. "I've got so many varied tastes," Hampton says. "I just have them all involved, and whatever surfaces is what goes out."

Equally varied are Hampton's gear choices. "It's really about whatever I had lying around," he says. "I have a Japanese Guyatone Sharp 5 that I used a lot, plus an old PRS and a Gibson Flying V I've had since the P-Funk days."

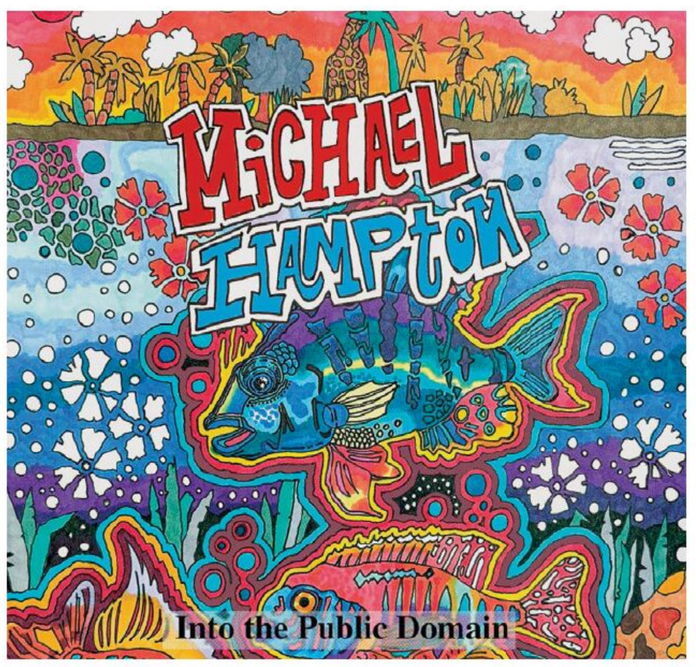
Hampton is excited for fans to hear his new EP. In the meantime, he's listening to all sorts of sounds, with an eye toward hearing — and making — more.

"I've been listening to a lot of Kamasi Washington," he says. "He takes me somewhere. But I get into drone and meditative sleep stuff, too. I like classical, gospel, Bruno Mars, the Killers and the Weeknd. And I always go back to David Gilmour! It's crazy; I don't find one thing to settle on. If it doesn't suck, I probably listen to it." [*Laughs*] GW



Michael Hampton with his Guyatone Sharp 5

"I've got so many tastes. I have them all involved, and whatever surfaces is what goes out"

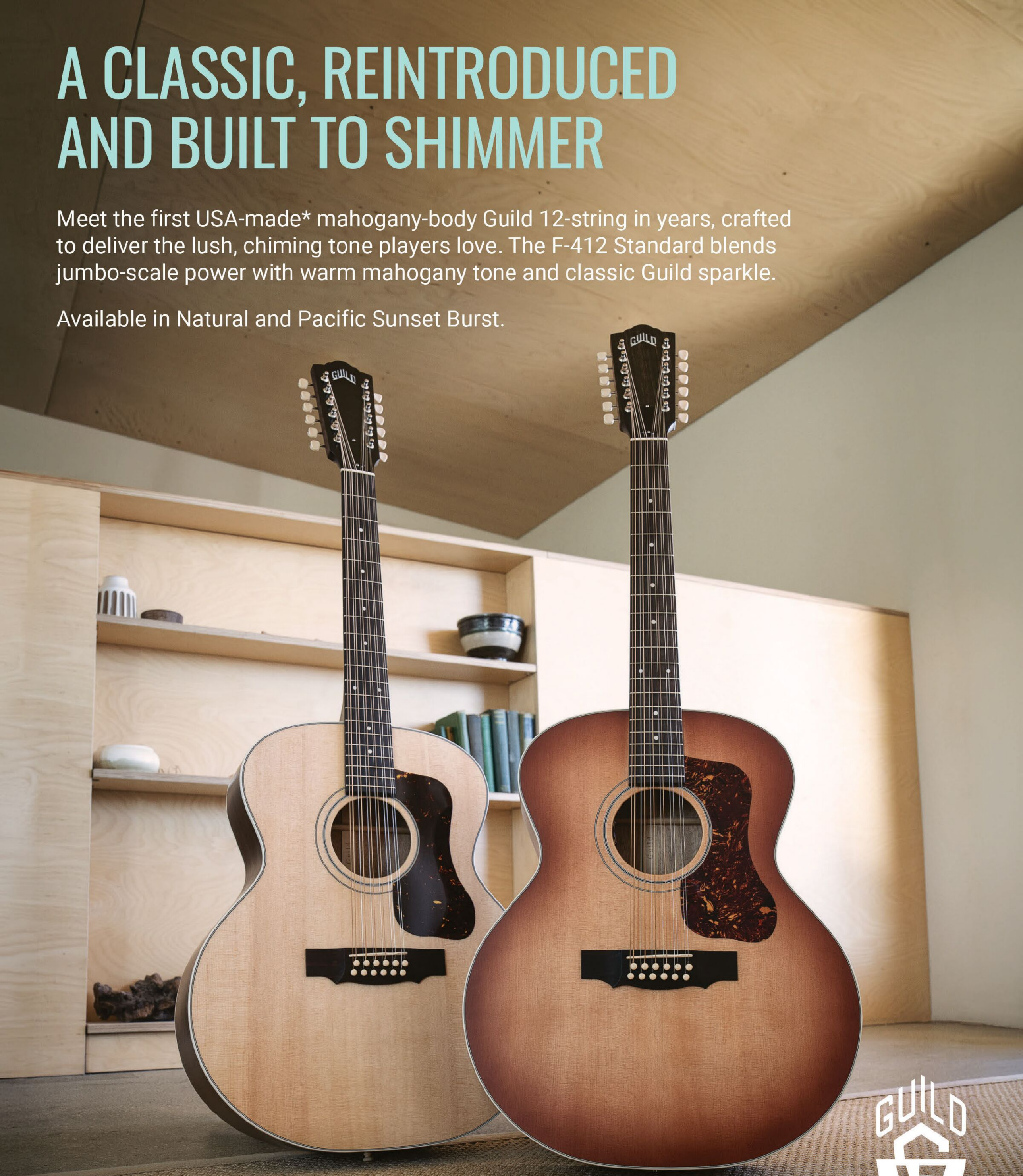


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[*from left*] Tony Rogers, Tim Burgess, Martin Blunt and Mark Collins

Northern Lights

In a modern world, Britrock survivors the Charlatans tell us they still believe in albums, studios, amps and moving air

BY **HENRY YATES**

MARK COLLINS IS out of context. Far from the smoke-blackened, rain-lashed skies of Manchester — the northern British city where he planted his flag in the late Eighties — we find the Charlatans guitarist looking out over paradise from the window of his Portugal home. "Sun's out," he beams. "I'm not complaining."

While the reborn Oasis have swung the spotlight onto Manchester of late, things have moved a little slower for the city's other adopted sons. Technically, the Charlatans hail from the West Midlands, although Collins is a born-and-bred Mancunian, and the band's loose-limbed grooves fit the brief.

"It's been a long time coming," admits the 60-year-old of his new album, *We Are Love*. "It took us seven years, accidentally. We didn't plan it like that. We started talking about it in 2019. But then a pandemic got in the way."

By happy accident, however, the timing of *We Are Love* couldn't be better. This 14th studio album has not only dropped into a world that's suddenly sweet on Nineties-era jangle-crunch Britrock, but kicks against the socio-political backdrop with its love-thy-neighbor vibes.

"We're not trying to make political statements," points out Collins, "but we don't agree with the rise of the right. That's in the feel of this record..."

In the age of the Spotify playlist, do you still believe in the album format?

Maybe it's an old-fashioned way of thinking, but we like to have a selection of songs that go somewhere, rather than just, "single, single, single," you know? This feels like a proper album. It has ups, it has downs, it has cohesion. There's a good feel about it.

What do you remember about the early sessions?

It was a nightmare! When we first went to Rockfield Studios, we didn't really know what we were doing. We thought we just wanted to make a demo, to get the ball rolling. And obviously, going to Rockfield is an expensive way of making a demo. The first session wasn't entirely a success, but there was something about it. We thought, "OK, the stone isn't actually rolling, but we've given it a nudge."

Next session, we had the title track and then we started gathering momentum. We probably did seven sessions over 14 months. But in between, we did two tours of America. In the Nineties, we'd spend four months straight in the studio. But back then, we were young and carefree. We didn't have mortgages and loads of kids. But now we do. There are divorces, ex-wives...

Do you still think the studio has something that you lose if you're just sitting in front of a laptop?

Yeah, of course it has. We don't have to worry about waking our parents up, so we enjoy being in a studio. We hadn't been to Rockfield since '96 or '97. We felt it was time to go and revisit it.

Given the band's history, Rockfield must hold mixed memories for you?

Yeah, we lost our keyboard player Rob [*Collins*] in a car crash there in 1996, when he was driving back to the studio. After that, we didn't go back. Not for a long time. But Tim

CAT STEVENS



[*Burgess, singer*] was doing a solo record just before Covid and I went to play some guitar for him. I got back there and I thought, "This is OK. I don't feel weird about it." Enough water had passed under the bridge to enjoy the positives and not be saddened by Rob's accident.

What are your own favorite guitar parts?
I'm pleased with the title track. That one came together really quickly around a Wurlitzer piano. Maybe it was something I'd had in my head for 30 years, but I had that part within about 30 seconds.

Is it better to just let the riffs roll off your fingers without being too academic?
That's the only way. You have to listen. Sometimes the riff comes straight away, other times it might come four weeks later. I enjoy a certain way of playing and I've got to fit in around a lot of growling keyboards. They occupy the same frequencies, a Hammond organ and a guitar, so you've got to work around each other. I think there's still a wealth of stuff that's hardly been scratched, you know?

What was your setup on *We Are Love*?
My Jaguar featured on most of the tunes – it's a '62 or a '63 – but I used loads of guitars. I had a mid-Sixties Gibson ES-330. A late-Sixties Gibson Firebird came out; I haven't used that for ages. All the Gibsons I used had P90s, and there was an SG Junior as well. Amps? I had a Marshall JTM45, a Fender Twin Reverb, a Vox AC15 and a Fender Princeton, which is the one I used on nearly everything. That's not too old – maybe 20 years. I'm still a big fan of amps, of moving air before it hits the microphone. I also used a Strymon Mobius, which is quite tasty, a bit of an Eighties vibe. It's good for dialing in rotary sounds, although the rotary sounds I used, I ended up playing through Tony [*Rogers, keys*]'s Leslie.

How well do the Charlatans behave in the studio now, compared to the Nineties?
Compared to the Nineties, we're practically saints! GW

COVER MODELS



GUITARIST GEORGE LYNCH **GUITAR** 1990 ESP CUSTOM HAJI/WICKED SENSATION
***GW* DATE** NOVEMBER 1990 **THIS INTERVIEW** DECEMBER 2025 **PHOTOGRAPHER** JONNIE MILES

Where did you get this guitar?
ESP and I collaborated on the Haji guitar around 1990. The graphic was designed by artist John Taylor Dismukes, who did a lot of famous album-cover artwork for the Grateful Dead and other big bands at the time [*including Steppenwolf, Foreigner, Y&T and more.*]

Did you modify the Haji?
I installed an onboard Sustainiac pickup at one point and then removed it. I've also swapped the pickups out on it numerous times.

Did this guitar coax anything special out of you? Why was it perfect for you?
The first Haji had a mahogany body, so it's a warm, dark-sounding guitar. The neck was my usual 45 mm 16-inch radius with what I called and modified UC profile with extra jumbo nickel frets. It had a real rosewood fretboard as well. It's probably my favorite neck of all time! It's very, very comfortable and inspiring to play.

Did you use the Haji on any notable recordings or tours?
I've used it on so many records and tours. I honestly can't remember exactly when, where and on what albums, but it's been in my arsenal for decades. I've used it throughout my entire career.

Why did you choose this guitar for your *GW* cover shoot?
That cover shoot was done to promote Lynch Mob's *Wicked Sensation* album [*1990*], which had the same artwork as the guitar – so it made sense to play that guitar for the shoot.

Do you still have this guitar? If not, what became of it?
I do, but I really don't take it out because it's valuable and I'd hate for something to happen to it. GW

– Andrew Daly



"The more you go inward and try to really know yourself, the more your music develops along with that," Sammy Boller says

Sammy Boller

The Detroit instrumental phenom enters spiritual territory with a new, deeply personal EP

BY GREGORY ADAMS

A HIGHLIGHT OF Sammy Boller's 2025 was the last-minute fill-in position he took on Goo Goo Dolls' amphitheater tour, after lead guitarist Brad Fernquist came down with a shoulder injury. Playing iconic anthems like "Iris" made it the "summer of a lifetime" for Boller. By fall, though, the solo instrumentalist was ready to re-route listeners into the lush and immersive plains of his *Midnight Garden* EP.

Boller strolls through "Spellbound" with dizzying, speaker-panning arpeggios and hammered-on accents. "The Mapmaker" merges R&B drum production with playful pizzicato. The record's "Rama Bhakti" spotlights a multi-finger approach to tapping, at least until Boller propels himself toward a busier triple-time motif and some backend shred.

"I've been doing the melodic tapping stuff for a while now," he says. "I just love it because it reminds me of playing a piano, where you can play the accompaniment with the left hand and then the melody with the right hand."

Midnight Garden marks Boller's first major solo release since 2020's *Kingdom of the Sun*. Working alongside producer Nick Sampson at a trio of Michigan-area studios, he mainly dialed things in with a go-to Les Paul — though he also brought out a Freidman Noho 24 — and aggressively thickened up the rhythms with an eight-string Ibanez loaned to Sampson by Polyphia's Tim Henson. "In my instrumental music, I like when it goes from super clean to super heavy," Boller sums up of the dynamic shifts across the EP.

Another contrast-heavy *Midnight Garden*

"I've been melodic tapping for a while now. I love it because it reminds me of playing a piano"

moment is bonus cut "Mother Light," a heartfelt piece that ushers itself in with yearning piano chords but concludes with Boller's soul-glowing bends and wails.

"I wrote that for my mom. I never thought about releasing it, but she passed away last year, so I thought it would be a nice tribute to her. She was an amazing musician, herself," he says, explaining she'd sung in a band called Atlantis with his dad, and was likewise a talented comedian.

Midnight Garden also reflects Boller's spiritualism with songs like "Rama Bhakti" inspired by Hindu gods such as Hanuman. He says his interest in those figures arose as he began writing instrumental music, and that his understanding of their teachings are tied to his personal and artistic growth.

"The spiritual search is about knowing who you are at the end of the day," he says, adding, "The more you go inward and try to really know yourself, the more your music develops along with that." GW

JACOB MULKA



[*from left*] John McEntire, Dan Bitney, Jeff Parker, Douglas McCombs and John Hernon

Tortoise

Douglas McCombs and Jeff Parker make long-awaited contact with their luxurious new album, *Touch*

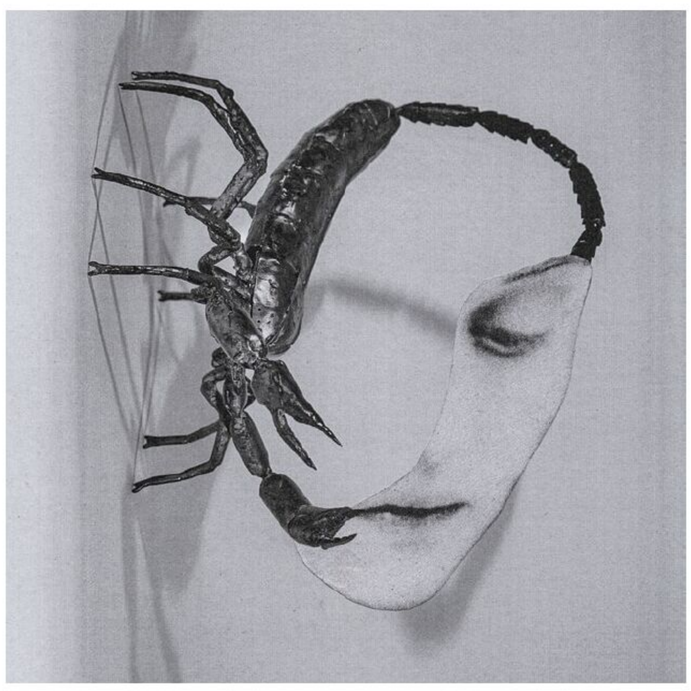
BY **ADAM KOVAC**

MAYBE IT'S TRITE to say that a band called Tortoise needs to go slow to win the race, but there's a good reason for it; nine years passed between the last two releases for the post-rock pioneers. Fortunately, fans' patience was rewarded with last year's *Touch*, which had all the band's hallmark sounds — the textured guitar melodies, the occasionally jazzy chord work, the little riffs that reveal increasing complexity on repeat listens.

It's the result of a methodical recording schedule that kicked off in late 2021 with a session in Portland. The quintet, whose members dabble in numerous side and solo projects, would meet up every six months or so there, in Los Angeles, or in Chicago, laying down new ideas until they felt they had a coherent record. To achieve that cohesion, the instrumental band focused on its ability to generate memorable, if unconventional, melodies.

"Sometimes we start with only a melody, without any specific chordal structure," guitarist/bassist Douglas McCombs says. "I personally write a lot of things like that; I start with the melody, and then I start sketching what the chord structure would be underneath that melody. That's where the interesting things in Tortoise happen, because somebody else's idea of what the structure of the song might be could be drastically different and more interesting."

For McCombs' part, he turned to his usual staples to generate his sonic contributions. He's long been associated with both the Fender Jazzmaster and Bass VI, as well as the Precision Bass. But this time he also messed around with some new toys, including a Templo Devices pedal he describes as "the preamp section of a Dictaphone tape recorder-type thing."



YUSUKE NAGATA

"It's got that quality I've always admired," he says. "We used to do that a lot in mixing with Tortoise; we had this recorder thing for dictation, and we'd basically run different tracks through it occasionally to whatever that quality is. I don't want to call it lo-fi, because that's a dumb term."

There's plenty of interesting guitar playing on the album, courtesy of McCombs and Jeff Parker. As thousands of guitarists stuck in a pentatonic rut can tell you, after decades of playing it can be hard not to fall back into a comfort zone. In Tortoise, avoiding the usual guitar sounds and riffs is key to making the whole thing work.

"Jeff and I have developed things we're comfortable doing. His [*method*] is more based on a deep knowledge of harmony and melody, and trying to move away from certain clichés of guitar playing. My thing is more intuitive and about struggling to play something interesting yet also not cliché."

The guitarists' methodical work has paid off, resulting in music that is anything but over-familiar. Maybe their slow pace is the key to that success, after all. GW



LOST CLASSICS

The Sisters of Mercy

Guitarists Wayne Hussey and Gary Marx look back at the U.K. rockers' darkly compelling 1985 debut, *First and Last and Always*

BY JOEL MCIVER



Wayne Hussey in action with the Sisters of Mercy in 1984

LIKE THEIR COUNTERPARTS in the grunge movement, every goth band denies being a goth band. In the case of the Sisters of Mercy, the masters of doom who first came up with the somber, post-punk template that has fuelled a thousand goth bands since the Eighties, that denial is complete — at least if you ask their leader, Andrew Eldritch. When *GW* sits down with the British band's former guitarists Wayne Hussey and Gary Marx, however, they're a bit more relaxed about the goth tag: for them, the sole album that they made with Eldritch is simply a guitar-loaded classic.

Recorded in 1984 in the English cities of Manchester and Reading by Hussey and Marx plus vocalist Eldritch, bassist Craig Adams and a drum machine nicknamed Doktor Avalanche, *First and Last and Always* was plagued with logistical difficulties. Eldritch suffered from ill-health during the sessions and was even hospitalized at one point; he was unable to come up with lyrics until long after the backing tracks were recorded; and his habit of working at night while the others recorded by day led to conflict, too. Certain band members' enthusiastic consumption of amphetamines didn't help matters, either.

Still, the album was eventually released by the Warner subsidiary WEA on March 11, 1985, reaching Number 14 in the U.K. and doing moderately well in Europe. The singles "Walk Away," "No Time to Cry" and a U.S. radio release of "Black Planet" all did decent business, too. The none-more-atmospheric anthem "Marian (Version)" and the title cut are still essential listens for fans of mid-Eighties rock, but the album remains of cult rather than widespread appeal due to its introspective, relatively lo-fi vibe.

This lineup of the Sisters of Mercy split in 1985, with Hussey and Adams going on to form the Mission and Marx to establish Ghost Dance, leaving Eldritch to lead a version of the Sisters to this day: his relationship with his band's alumni is mostly cordial, if distant. The albums the Sisters have subsequently recorded — *Floodland* (1987) and *Vision Thing* (1990) — sounded markedly more polished than their brilliant but raw debut. *First and Last and Always* is still many goth purists' favorite LP for that reason.

What gear did you use on the album?

WAYNE HUSSEY: All I used at the time was a Roland JC-60 Jazz Chorus, an Aria 12-string, a Fender Telecaster and a Fender acoustic. That was it. I had some Boss pedals — a phaser, a compressor and a distortion — plus an old Electro-Harmonix Memory Man Deluxe.

GARY MARX: A lot of my guitars were battered after being played live, and they didn't

CBW/ALAMY, IMAGO / FUTURE IMAGE



[*from left*] Andrew Eldritch, Craig Adams, Wayne Hussey and Gary Marx at WEA Records in London

IMAGO / FUTURE IMAGE

have the best intonation, so I hired a Fender Telecaster. Pretty much everything I played, I played clean, straight into the desk, and whatever was done to the tones afterwards was just left to the producer, Dave Allen.

HUSSEY: I also used an autoharp on a few tracks, doubling the guitar riffs to give them an extra, bell-like shimmer. When we went to one of the studios to do some mixing, they had a Leslie speaker there, so I thought, "I'm going to try this." I played through it on "Amphetamine Logic" — all those big, choppy chords went through a Leslie.

How did you split up the guitar parts?

HUSSEY: Whoever came up with the basic tune of a song would base it around a guitar riff or bass line. You would do a little four-track demo and take it to everybody else, and they would learn the parts, and if they had any ideas, they would add them.

MARX: The way the album turned out was that Wayne wrote all of the first side and I wrote the other, more or less.

HUSSEY: Gary wrote half of the album and I wrote half of the album. It was unusual for Eldritch to allow that, because he'd previously written pretty much everything in the Sisters.

"I'm not a chugger; I like arpeggios. If I can't think of anything good to play, then I'll leave space"
WAYNE HUSSEY

The Aria 12-string gave the album a very specific character. Was anyone else playing 12-strings in rock at the time?

HUSSEY: Very few. I was aware of the Byrds, of course, and maybe Will Sergeant of Echo & the Bunnymen had a 12-string. It brought a bigger jangle and shininess. You approach playing guitar differently with a 12-string. I'm not a chugger; I like arpeggios. If I can't think of anything good to play, then I'll leave space. That's something a lot of guitarists can't do, I think.

Why did you choose an Aria?

HUSSEY: I couldn't afford a Rickenbacker or a Fender. I've got a nice 1966 Fender 12-string now, but I played the Aria back then because it was decent and cheap. It looked pretty horrible, so I stuck duct tape all over it, with slogans on it. One thing I will say about that guitar is that the amount of different tones you can get with it is amazing, because it's got three toggle switches. I have a beautiful signature Schecter 12-string [*Corsair-12*], which Michael Ciravolo, Schecter's president, suggested when the Mission were getting back together in 2011 for 25th-anniversary shows. I'd been using a Gretsch White Falcon on stage before that, so when I retired it, Michael and I came up with the idea of my signature 12-string with lipstick pickups and coil taps.

We're told that *First and Last and Always* was slow and difficult to record.

MARX: Yes, but not at first; getting the music down was good fun. There was a real feeling of creativity, and most of the tunes were already written, although Wayne did write a couple in the studio.

HUSSEY: I can't speak for Eldritch, but it's well known that he was having some problems at the time.

MARX: What became difficult very quickly was that there wasn't a vocal to give us the full shape of the songs, so we were tinkering a little bit with the backing tracks, putting things in which we wouldn't have done if a vocal had been there.

Still, the guitar parts complement each other really well.

MARX: It's because Wayne was so savvy, and I wasn't! Each of his songs was built around his idea of which effects he was going to use. Maybe he was going to put his 12-string on it, or add acoustic on the chorus, and all these kinds of things — whereas I just threw bits that I liked on top of each track. If I'd been left to my own devices, the whole album would have been a wall of fuzz guitars.

HUSSEY: I think Gary would agree, and probably Dave Allen, too, that I was the Sisters' best musician, simply because I'd had a lot more experience than the rest of them, so I brought more color to the music. Their songs were kind of monochrome before I joined — and some of the Sisters' early records sound really great for that reason — but I know Eldritch wanted to be broader in appeal.

MARX: I was still quite green as a guitar player, so I didn't always like the studio because it exposed your playing. In the early days when we just got in a room together and played live, we kicked up a real wall of noise because there was a lot more distortion involved. I was a little bit hidden, and I enjoyed that. Once we were tracking, though, you could put the fader up and could hear exactly what you were playing. I didn't really like that, and I was a little bit intimidated by the process.



"I was still quite green as a guitar player, so I didn't always like the studio because it exposed your playing," Gary Marx says

The only real chorus on the record is in the title track. Did you write that in a commercial frame of mind, Gary?

MARX: No, the word "commercial" was never in my mind when we were making music. It's just that some parts would suggest themselves as being more catchy than others.

ON THE FADERS

Legendary producer David Allen, who has also worked with the Cure, Depeche Mode, the Human League and Neneh Cherry, looks back on *First and Last and Always*

What was your objective with *First and Last and Always*?

This may sound deluded, but I thought at the time that it was a completely seminal record. In my mind, I was making something like the fucking Velvet Underground — something no one had heard before — partly because I was probably one of the most experienced people in Britain with drum machines.

Why was this album so difficult to make?

It would have all been all right if we hadn't all been sitting around and fucking about, waiting for the lyrics. I'd come in at noon and Wayne would have already put down some drum tracks and some bass and was doing guitars. I'd spend the afternoon working on those, and he'd leave at 7 p.m. and we'd be saying, "What a great, productive day!" But then Eldritch pops up and goes, "No, I don't like it; it's shit." It wasn't helpful. He'd criticize the way Gary played guitar, and be running everybody down.

How did you balance the two guitarists?

Wayne's a bit more of a noise merchant, with all the pedals. It's just classic, isn't it? You've got two guitarists and you want them to play different guitars and go through different amps, so you'd land on Gibson and Marshall down one side and Fender down the other.

How does the album stand up to you now?

No one really knew what the fuck they were doing on this album, but it's great because it's imperfect. You can hear all sorts of mistakes in the songs that make you think, "How did that get under the radar?" But that's what's great about it. There's a tension there between the shitness and the gloriousness that is what it's all about.

— Joel McIver

IMAGO / FUTURE IMAGE

"First and Last and Always" was an example of that; it always had that catchy kind of anthemic thing about it.

You both quit the Sisters in 1985. Why?

MARX: I'll be frank, we had a lot of problems going in; my relationship with Eldritch was already pretty strained. I still wanted this album to be great, though, even if it might prove to be the end for me.

HUSSEY: It was a constant intellectual tussle, and in the end I couldn't be bothered. What we were getting out of it wasn't worth it, and I don't mean that in terms of monetary recompense; I mean in terms of artistic fulfillment. I wrote a bunch of tunes for the second Sisters album, but nearly all of them ended up on the first Mission album, because Eldritch didn't want to use any of them. It's not that he didn't like them. I think it was a reaction to him not doing anything apart from writing lyrics on *First and Last and Always*, and I think with the second album, he wanted to do it all himself, like he'd done before I joined.

Was the split amicable?

HUSSEY: It was at first. He asked me if I would play on the next record and I said, "Yeah, of course." But it all went a bit sour and a bit nasty. Eldritch likes a battle; he thrives on confrontation. Mind you, I went to see the Sisters around 1991, and at the aftershow he told me I was the best guitarist he'd ever worked with, which was nice of him. I've seen him a few times after that, but not in the last 20 years or so.

MARX: I expect Eldritch is a better man nowadays than he was back then, and that he would admit he was a bit out of control in 1985.

How does the album sound to you today?

MARX: I would love it if someone remixed the damn thing, rather than messing about with a remaster. I don't think the mix is great, because it fell in between what Eldritch might have wanted and what Dave was trying to get, and neither of them were satisfied.

HUSSEY: The album is good for its time. I don't think there's a weak song on it. It definitely captures something, even though it was quite stressful to make.

Which of the songs stand out to you?

HUSSEY: With "Marian (Version)," there was some alchemy at work there, for sure. I listen to it now and those guitar sounds chime beautifully – they were very special. I don't know how, because that song was completely off the cuff.

Tell us how Billy Corgan reintroduced you to the album.

HUSSEY: Billy is a big fan of the Sisters and also a big fan of my guitar playing, I think, as much as anything else. He got in touch and asked if I'd played *First and Last and Always* recently. I said I hadn't played it in years, and he said, "You need to play it again." I put the CD on in the car and I was pleasantly surprised. After this much time, I'd forgotten all the trouble and strife that surrounded it.

You also played the songs with Billy, didn't you?

HUSSEY: Yes, when he invited me and Craig up to his house in Chicago for a week. The day we arrived was the day David Bowie died [*January 10, 2016*]. Billy wanted to play those early songs, and he had all the gear. I asked for a Roland JC-60 and a Roland GP8 multi-effects, and Craig got an Ampeg, and there was even the right drum machine. We started playing and said, "Yeah, that's it – that's the sound of *First and Last and Always*"!

First and Last and Always: 40th Anniversary Edition *is out now. Hussey tours with the Mission (themissionukband.com). Marx's albums,* Green Ginger Jive *and* Sad Songs for Anthony, *are out now*. GW



MY LIFE IN THREE GUITARS

Larry McCray

The three guitars the Michigan blues master couldn't, can't and won't go without

BY MARK MCSTEA

LARRY MCCRAY RELEASED his debut album, *Ambition*, way back in 1990, heralding the arrival of a new force in modern blues guitar. He not only had great songs – mixing elements of soul and funk with his powerhouse blues originals – but every one was packed with explosive guitar fills and solos that were mini masterclasses in intensity and phrasing. On top of that heady package, McCray possessed a fantastically expressive voice, one that was able to deliver everything from a whisper to a scream with complete conviction.

Drawing from the influence of the three Kings – Albert, Freddie and B.B. – with a little Albert Collins thrown in, McCray added his own unique mojo to the pot, utilizing a searing sustain and the kind of chops usually reserved for the shred arena. Following a string of successful albums in the Nineties, it looked like McCray was set to become part of the blues establishment, but his career got waylaid by personal issues.

Enter Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith in 2022, responding to a query from McCray. They worked with Larry to produce what was, effectively, his comeback album, *Blues Without You*, released in 2022 on Bonamassa's KTBA label. The overwhelmingly positive response the record received led to the release of *Heartbreak City* in 2025, which was only McCray's 10th album in a 35-year career. On the plus side, every album is an essential McCray purchase, the cliché "all killer, no filler."

This year should see McCray build on the success of recent years to rightfully claim his place as one of the most important names on the blues scene. He has tentative plans to record an album with his brothers, Steve on drums and Paul on bass. "We started off as the McCray Brothers, so it would be full circle for me," he says. McCray is also delighted to be taking his son, Bleau Otis of the Bleau Otis Band, on the road with him.

A lifelong guitar nerd, McCray was also excited to talk to *Guitar World* about why the following three (or so) guitars are the most important in his career.



PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES, STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES, HERITAGE GUITARS

1 Gibson Flying V (1967)

In the Eighties, I was playing in clubs, working for General Motors and playing a Strat. My first professional tour was in 1990 as part of Gary Moore's *Still Got the Blues* tour, which kicked off in the U.K. When I first arrived and saw his rig and heard the sounds he was getting from a humbucker compared to my single-coils, it really made me think. As soon as I got home, I started looking for something with humbuckers. I had no experience of playing Les Pauls, etc., at that time. A lot of blues guys were playing ES-335s, but I wanted something different. I saw the caramel-colored Flying V reissue in the store and – bearing in mind that I was a huge Albert King fan – I decided to go for the V, which ended up being my favorite guitar. I paid less than $1,000 for it, which works out pretty cheap after all these years of constant use.

I loved the way you had such easy access to the upper register; you could get all the way up to the top of the neck. It had a real fast neck, a great sound and it was a little bit different. It definitely affected the way that I played, with having so much sustain from those pickups. I very rarely modify any guitars, but for this one I had some double-wound humbuckers with a splitter fitted to give me even more options. I still take this guitar on the road. I play everything; I always say when I die someone else will be playing them anyway, so I might as well get as much time with them as I can while I'm still here.

Gary was the first person I ever saw with a Soldano amp, so when I got home I got one of those as well. On that first tour, Gary and I had a great rapport, and at the end of the tour he gave me a gold-finish custom shop '57 Strat reissue with a special plate on the back that said "To Larry, from Gary." I still have that guitar. My first good guitar was a '61 ES-330 that my brother-in-law, who worked at GM, bought from a co-worker. It got stolen, which really pained me because I loved that guitar, but I haven't had too much bad luck on the road with guitars.

2 Gibson Les Paul 1959 Goldtop reissue

I reached a point by the 2000s when I was feeling a little unsure about my sound. I had a rethink about what worked best for me. I think my friendship with Warren Haynes around that time made me reassess the worth of a Les Paul. I happened to run into Jimmy Archey, the customer-relations rep for Gibson, in New York City. I went to their offices and they gave me a fantastic Les Paul Custom '58 reissue in white. It had a thick, baseball-bat neck. I'd been playing it and talking to them about how great it was, and they asked me if I wanted it. You can imagine how amazing that was. Not only that, but they also gave me a black Blueshawk, which was another great guitar. They were the first guitars I ever got directly from a manufacturer; once I signed with Pointblank Records in the Nineties, all kinds of opportunities opened up.

"I paid less than $1,000 for the Flying V, which works out pretty cheap after all these years of use"

Once I realized how much I liked the white '58, a couple of years later I came across the '59 goldtop, which was a little lighter. I was reaching the point where the weight of a regular Les Paul was becoming uncomfortable on stage, so I appreciated the difference. I was heavily favoring the goldtop once I got that. At that time, I was probably taking about eight guitars into the studio, including the Gary Moore Strat, the Blueshawk and a Gibson Nighthawk. I was also using a prototype 336 that I got from Gibson; I was the first artist to play that prototype, which I had for about a year. One night I was playing at a place called Manny's Car Wash in NYC, and Jimmy Archey asked me to bring the prototype to the show; they took it back and gave me one of the very first production models. That must have been one of the first they produced.

3 Heritage Artisan Aged 1215 Build H-150

Heritage Guitars is based where I live – in Michigan. This guitar is based on a Les Paul, but – very importantly for me – it's chambered, which relieves a lot of the weight. I'm always hunting for lighter guitars, and it's the







guitar I've been playing the most since I got it. This is a standard model that they produce that anyone can buy. The quality is amazing, but I'm also working with them on something with some custom specs. I'd always wanted to give Heritage a try but couldn't seem to get around to it as they don't have them in a lot of stores, so I went to their factory.

A friend put me in touch with Pete Farmer, master luthier at Heritage, and he invited me to come over and try something. He had picked what he thought would be the ideal guitar for me. As soon as he put it in my hands I said, "What do I need to do to get this guitar?" It feels like a vintage guitar; the finish is called Dirty Lemon Burst. The pickups are their own custom shop humbuckers. I believe the body is made from ultra-light mahogany with the curly maple top, and the neck is rosewood. It's finished in nitrocellulose, so it's got the feel of a premium vintage guitar. I guess it's going to be all over my next record; it's a long way from my first guitar, which was a Silvertone 335-styled model. When I'm just sitting around bored at home, I reach for my 1960 Harmony H160. It belonged to my older brother, James, who passed away in 2019. As a tribute to him, I had it fixed; it sounds great and I use it all the time. He drew — on the guitar — an image of a guy with dark glasses and an Afro smoking a cigarette, and he called it Daddy Kool, so when I'm sitting around, that's what I reach for — Daddy Kool.

I should also mention the Guild Polara S-100 I played a lot on my last album. It's got a unique mix of Gibson and Fender. I like it so much that I asked Guild about maybe doing some kind of signature model, but I've had no luck so far. I think it's hard for blues artists to get endorsement deals in the current market, but hey, if someone at Guild is reading this, give me a call! [*Laughs*]. GW



Anthony Pirog with a Fender Jazzmastert Ohana Festival in Dana Point, California, September 28, 2019

The Messthetics

How Anthony Pirog explores uncharted sonic territories

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

WHEN ANTHONY PIROG describes what changes when saxophonist James Brandon Lewis joins his avant-noise-jazz trio the Messthetics onstage, he talks about space. "It gives me the ability to stop playing, which is huge," the guitarist says. With Lewis carrying a melodic line, Pirog can let the guitar drift into texture as bassist Joe Lally and drummer Brendan Canty — the rhythmic core of punk icons Fugazi — navigate the twists and turns.

That sensitivity to space runs through Pirog's playing more broadly. Based in Washington, D.C., he's spent years moving through punk, jazz, noise and free improvisation without settling into a single lane. What connects those projects is a curiosity for what lies beyond the familiar. "It's always about knowing where the comfort zone is and pushing just beyond that," he says.

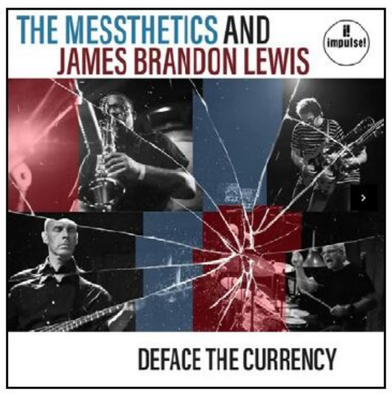
Blues and rock music filled his family's house when he was young, but the early Nineties grunge scene brought experimental guitar sounds into daily rotation. Seeing Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and hearing the rough edges of Kurt Cobain's solos made unfamiliar textures feel natural. But by growing up in an era that downplayed virtuosity, Pirog didn't fully engage with advanced technical study until his twenties.

But in the Messthetics, Pirog has free reign to indulge all sides of his artistry. On the band's self-titled 2018 debut and its 2019 follow-up, *Anthropocosmic Nest*, his playing veers from the asymmetrical brilliance of J. Robbins, another D.C. scene veteran, to feedback-laden dissonance. Partnering with Lewis and his energetic sax lines on 2024's *The Messthetics and James Brandon Lewis* provided new melodic avenues, a collaboration they continue on *Deface the Currency*, released in February.

"When we play with James, that changes the textures available to us," he says. "The weight of what I do increases instead of being normalized throughout a set."

Pirog leans on fuzz and Octavia-style circuits that allow the guitar to sit inside the band's sound rather than cut across it. Distortion becomes a way to blend timbres, flattening the edges between instruments. Delays, harmonizers, and ambient effects serve a similar role, shifting the guitar's function within a groove instead of drawing attention to it.

Pirog is also creating new sonic landscapes with his wife, cellist Janel Leppin, in their duo Janel and Anthony as well as the band Skullcap, which released *Snakes of Albuquerque* in 2025. As Messthetics album number four takes shape, Pirog avoids thinking about the destination. "It's one thing to think about it and try to plan it," he says, "but the way we play together is something you can't really calculate." GW



AXOLOGY

Guitars
Abernethy Sonic Empress, 1962 Fender Jazzmaster

Amps
Benson Vincent

JIM BENNETT/FILMMAGIC

eXP2000dr
CLEAN / DRIVE

Sugar Blues
AUTO WAH

Sculpt Every Nuance.
Define Your Signature Sound.

BIXONIC

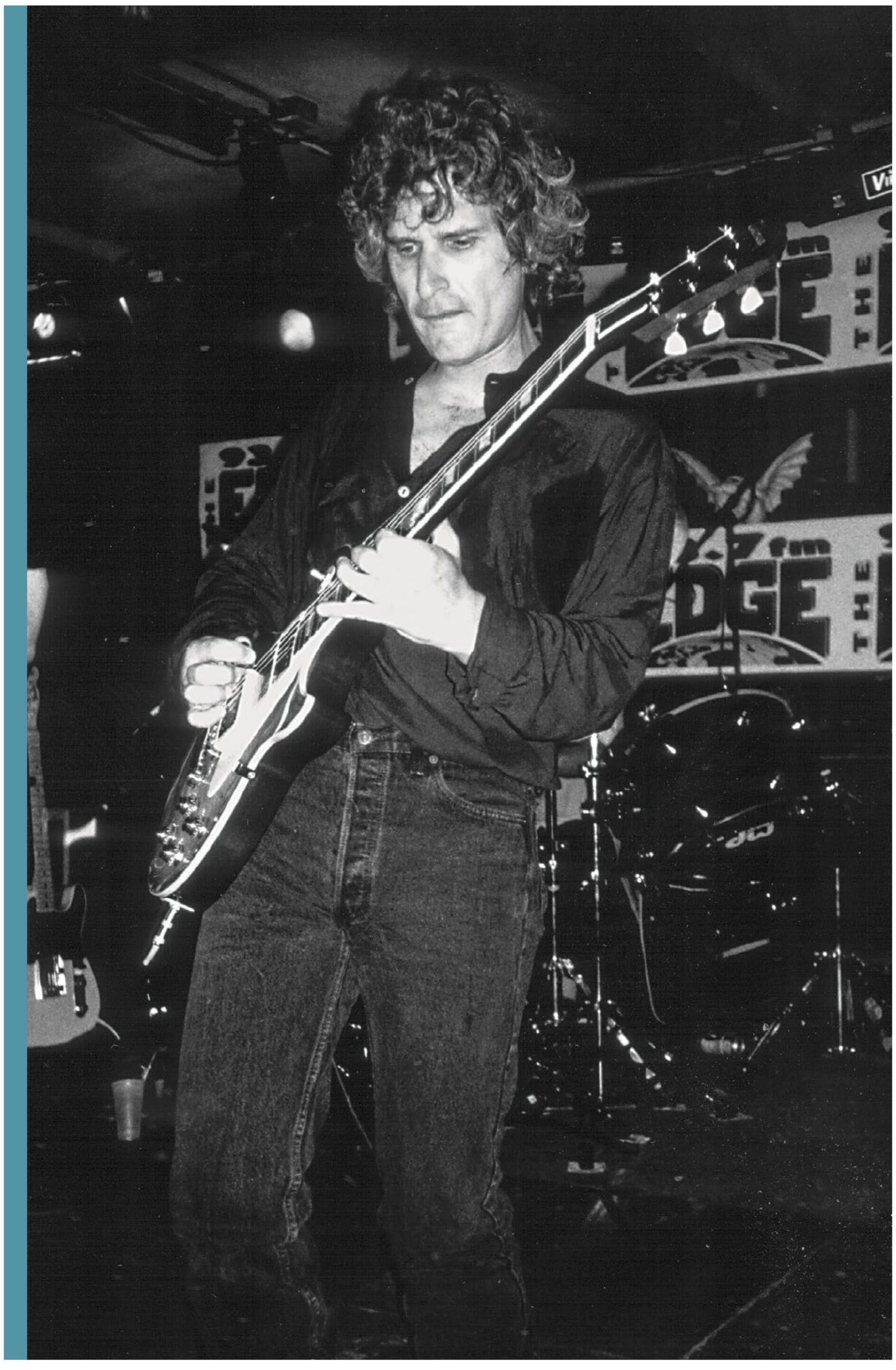
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PERSONALITIES

Berton Averre

GW catches up with the man behind the brilliant guitar solo on the Knack's "My Sharona"

BY JOE BOSSO



JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

FOR THE LAST six months of the 1970s, the Knack had it made. The Los Angeles-based power pop quartet consisting of singer-guitarist Doug Fieger, lead guitarist Berton Averre, bassist Prescott Niles and drummer Bruce Gary saw their debut album, *Get the Knack*, blast to the top of the charts, thanks to its high-energy, irresistibly catchy lead single, "My Sharona." The speed of which it all happened took the record industry by surprise. At the time of the album's release in June 1979, few people outside of L.A. had heard of the band; within months, *Get the Knack* was selling 300,000 copies a week, becoming Capitol Records' fastest-selling debut album since 1964's *Meet the Beatles!*

"We had the right song at the right time with 'My Sharona,'" Averre says. "All over the radio, it went to Number 1 — Cincinnati, Detroit, Cleveland, Tampa, everywhere. We were getting gold records from countries around the world. I had a DJ tell me that when he put the song on for the first time, the phones lit up after 20 seconds. It was crazy."

He laughs. "Mind you, I didn't think we would fail, but I certainly didn't think it would go that big. I couldn't have dreamed it."

If anybody could have dreamed it, it was Doug Fieger. "He had the ambition it took to make it," Averre says. "I met Doug when we played together in a pickup band. He had already been a bandleader in Detroit, and he'd had some success. He liked the way I played and said he was looking for somebody to write songs with. Our skill sets fit perfectly; Doug was strong on lyrics, and I would come up with musical ideas. We formed a really good partnership."

Very quickly, Averre realized Fieger had it all mapped out. "He had a vision for where he wanted to go," he says. "I won't say he saw us as the Beatles, but he used the Beatles as a template like, 'This is how good we can be.' He was just so driven. Doug was the kind of guy who would knock down doors."

Capitol's brilliant and aggressive marketing campaign portrayed the Knack as New Wave updates of the Beatles (*Get the Knack*'s black-and-white front cover echoed *Meet the Beatles!*, while the album's back cover was a not-so-subtle nod to the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*). It all worked like a charm... until it didn't.

"WE HAD THE RIGHT SONG AT THE RIGHT TIME. WE WERE

The albums' bright and bouncy second single, "Good Girls Don't," reached a respectable Number 11 on *Billboard*'s Hot 100, but by the fall of 1979, critics, already at odds with the band's overtly sexual lyrics, had grown weary of the hype, to say nothing of Fieger's increasingly cocky, combative behavior. A San Francisco-based "Knuke the Knack" campaign took off nationwide, and by the time the group rush-released their second album, 1980's *...But the Little Girls Understand*, the tide had already turned.

"We crashed and burned after that second album," Averre says. "It was just a snowball effect because Doug had alienated a certain number of people, and he just gave them the ammunition to shoot back at us."

The band took over a year off, hoping that the dust had settled and that their musically rich third album, 1981's *Round Trip*, would be judged on its merits. The record failed to chart, and just months after its release, the group broke up. Over the years, there were reunions and a series of albums that featured Fieger, Averre and Niles — Bruce Gary was now an in-demand session and touring drummer — but nothing came close to matching the heyday of 1979. Any chances of a full-fledged reunion of the original Knack ended in 2006 when Gary died of Non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Four years later, Fieger passed away after a long battle with cancer.

Today, Averre is of the mind that the Knack have finally earned something they sorely craved for so long — respect. "People remember 'My Sharona,' of course, but there are many fans who remember a lot of the other songs, too," he says. "There are these reaction videos on YouTube — the people who make them weren't even born when 'My Sharona' came out, and the song isn't in their wheelhouse. On a lot of the videos they play the whole solo, and the people are freaking out, like, 'Damn, this is good!'" He laughs. "Of course, they get my name wrong. They go, 'It's this Berton Avery guy.' That's okay."



OPPOSITE PAGE Berton Averre performs with the Knack in Minneapolis, June 2, 1994
ABOVE The Knack in Toronto in 1979; [*from left*] Bruce Gary, Berton Averre, Doug Fieger and Prescott Niles



THE KNACK'S FIRST
GET THE KNACK
(1979)



THE KNACK'S LAST
NORMAL AS THE NEXT GUY
(2001)

Knack songs always had great riffs. Who came up with them — Doug or you?
I was the riff guy. Occasionally Doug would come up with kind of a riff, a rhythmic chord progression or something like that, but I was the riff guy. I would work out the harmonies and bring in more complicated chord progressions instead of straight-ahead things. I was enamored with what we call the "Carole King chord." It's A over B — you play the A chord but add a B on the bass. You can hear that on "Lucinda."

Riff-wise, it doesn't get any better than "My Sharona." That was yours?
Yeah. My favorite [*song*] at the time was Elvis Costello's "Pump It Up," that staccato start-and-stop and that pent-up energy. It really moved me. One day I picked up a guitar and started playing that octave riff. It was simple and staccato. I played the riff and the chord breaks, and I thought, "This is good."

I brought it into rehearsal — this was really early in the band — and I started playing the riff. I told Bruce, "This isn't like straight-time, hi-hat, snare and kick. It's more about following the riff on the toms and snare." I gave him that general description, and he came up with this great drum pattern.

While Bruce did that, Prescott started playing the riff with me. Doug went, "Whoa, that's great," and he started scat singing over it. After a while, we stopped playing and Doug said, "Let's go home and write it." We wrote the song the way you always write a song; we came up with the opening statement of the verse, and then it had to go somewhere. Doug looked at me like, "Where's a different place to go?" I went up a third and then up with a fourth, then brought it down to the root. Basically, I added suspension to chords instead of playing straight chords.

Did Doug immediately write it about the girl who wasn't yet his girlfriend but whom he was enamored with — Sharona Alperin?
He instinctively started singing that. It came into his head, "It's this kind of a song." The thing is, he was singing "my Sharona" while he's cohabitating with his girlfriend in this apartment. She was in the next room!

Did he say that his then girlfriend's name wouldn't fit the rhythm of the song?
No, no. He just grabbed Sharona [*the name*], and that was the end of it. It sounded great, so we went with it.

What was it like the first time you played the song live?
The first time we played it, we put it last in the set. Huge reaction; we never got that kind of reaction before.

You guys created quite a stir pretty quickly. Celebrities like Bruce Springsteen came on stage and jammed with you.

PETER NOBLE/REDFERNS

GETTING GOLD RECORDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD"



Bruce was the first celebrity to jam with us. Ray Manzarek from the Doors played with us. So did Stephen Stills and Eddie Money. It only took a few months for that stuff to happen. It was surreal.

Did the band spark a bidding war among record labels?
It wasn't a bidding war, but labels were interested in us. Warner was asking about us, and so was CBS — the big labels. Capitol wasn't a mega label at the time, but they had a young A&R guy who loved the band and showed up as a fan. We related to Capitol because of that personal connection. It was also a pragmatic decision. With big, big labels like CBS and Warners, they've got a roster as long as your arm. I don't care how much of a young phenom band you are, if they've got the biggest names in the business, you are going to be, at best, their seventh or eighth consideration.

Mike Chapman was already a hot producer in 1979. Did you decide to work with him on his reputation alone?
A lot of serious producers were interested in us. We had this big rehearsal room that had a stage. Roy Thomas Baker would come to see us play, and on his way out he would pass another big producer who was coming in. Mike Chapman came to see us, and what he said was music to our ears: "My idea is to get you in the studio, turn on the mics, and you play like you're in a club." He knew we didn't need a lot of overdubs.

ABOVE [*from left*] Fieger, Niles, Gary and Averre in action in Chicago, September 29, 1979

But you did overdub some parts.
We overdubbed the lead singing and the background [*vocals*], and there were a couple harmony guitar parts we added. Other than those things, there were damn few overdubs.

You played a Les Paul throughout, correct?
I was always a Les Paul guy. Doug played a Strat. I always liked that blend, the humbucker and the single-coil.

"My Sharona" has a pretty long guitar solo. Did anybody say, "Maybe we should cut that"?
There was an edit for the Top 40 stations. I still have fans who go, "I just hated that edit." They would listen for the long solo. I get a lot of recognition for it. It's hard to think of big hit songs that have extended solos. The only one that comes to mind is "Stairway to Heaven."

"IT ONLY TOOK A FEW MONTHS FOR CELEBRITIES TO START JAMMING WITH US. IT WAS SURREAL"

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

I assume you had the solo plotted out when you recorded it.
We were so well rehearsed that I knew — well, I didn't know exactly what I was going to play, but I had a template. I had basically thought, "It goes from here to this part to this kind of thing." I knew there would be a big build and I'd do the triplet figures. Bruce was so amazing. If you listen, he's doing it with me.

There was a distinct "new Beatles" angle to the way the band was marketed. Did that make you uncomfortable?
Only when people started to gripe about it and make a big thing out of it. If anything, it was all very tongue in cheek. If there was a statement at all, it was, "Can you imagine how stupid a band would be to try to act like they're the Beatles?" From the beginning, there were detractors — for some reason, some people didn't like us. The critic from the *Los Angeles Times* would find the most pejorative way of saying we were good. He described our set as "playing with military precision..."

But the crowds ate it up.
Crowds don't care about critics.

***Get the Knack* was a tough act to follow.**
There weren't that many new songs written for the second album. Doug was just grabbing up everything we'd already written that didn't make the first album. We should have taken time off to write, but Doug thought we had to rush a second album out. He came up with 'Baby Talks Dirty,' and I did my best to play along with it and come up with parts. In my opinion, the material just wasn't there.

Doug's hubris started to turn people against the band. Did anybody in the band take him aside and ask him to tone it down?
Doug wasn't good with criticism, and at one point he actually said, "We're going to take everything they hate about us and do it twice as much. Jam it down their throats and make 'em like it." That's not a good approach. He wasn't a person who would hear reason if he believed something was right. It was a control thing. If you challenged him, you'd end up dragged along with the tide...

The third album, *Round Trip*, was really solid. By then, though, the pendulum had swung the other way.
Some of our best songs are on that album. It's the record we should have made after *Get the Knack*. There's a truism in this business — what your fans like when they're 17 they might not like when they're 19. They feel differently, they mature. Our second record should have had "Africa" on it or any of the great songs on *Round Trip*. My favorite Doug song is "Sweet Dreams," this creepy little thing. I ended up playing marimba on it.

The band broke up soon after, and a decade later you reformed for *Serious Fun*. Did you think you had a chance to recapture the glory of '79?
Doug got in touch with me and basically did as close to a mea culpa as he could. I thought, "Okay, if he means it, yeah." We got the band together again, but worldly success we did not have after that first album.

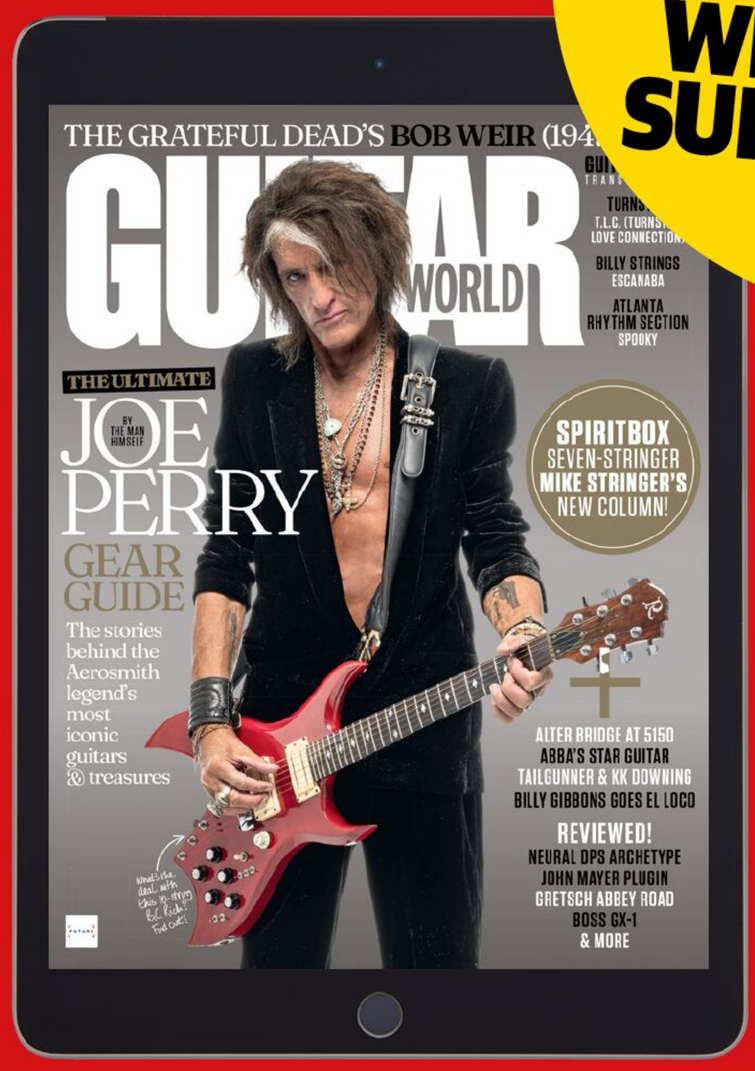
There were a few more Knack albums until Doug fell ill. Had he made peace with things in his final months?
He had a brave, dignified passing.

That's good to hear. It seems as if he was the type of guy who couldn't always enjoy his success.
Oh, in our heyday, he enjoyed the hell out of it. But at the end... [*he pauses*] I'm sorry, I'm getting choked up. The last time I saw him, he said to me, "Berty, we did a great thing." GW



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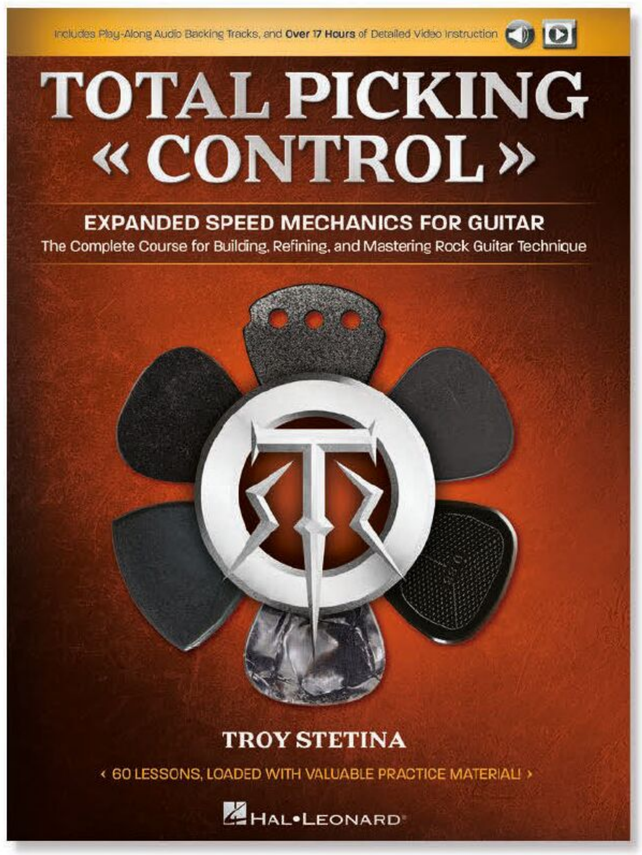
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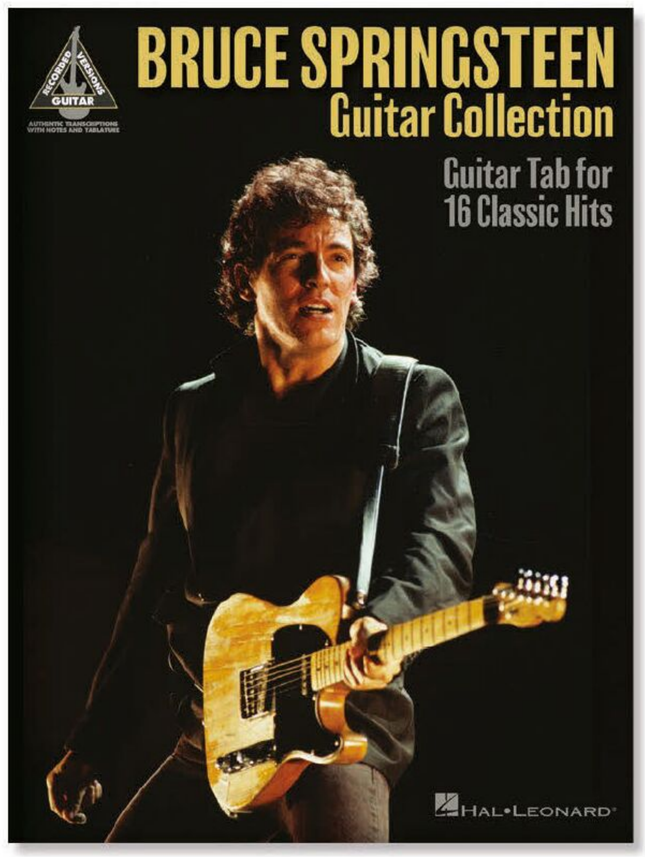
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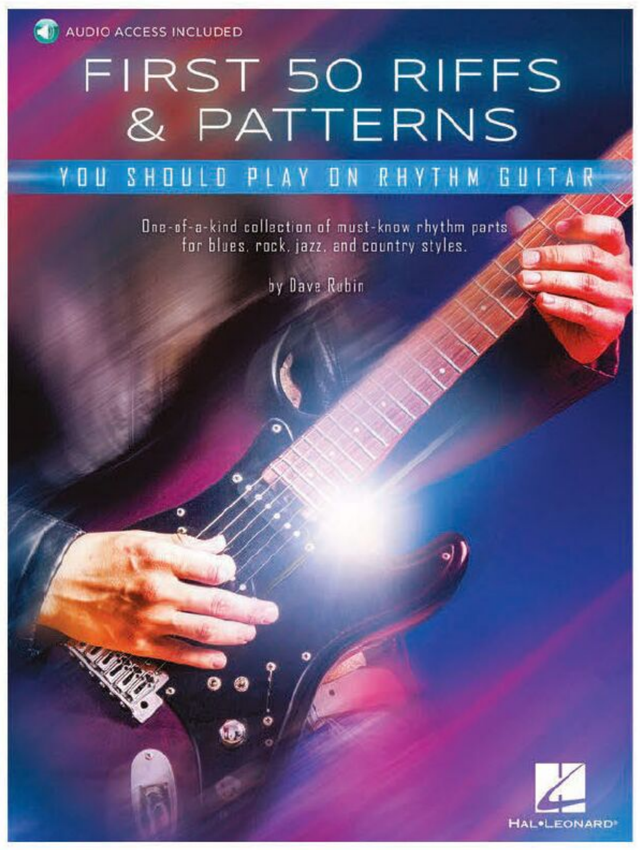
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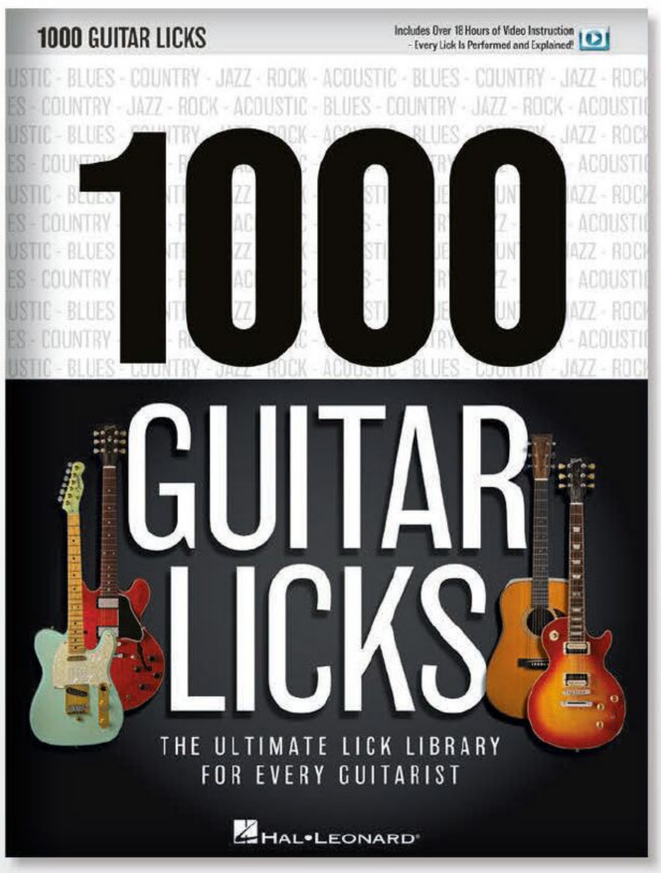
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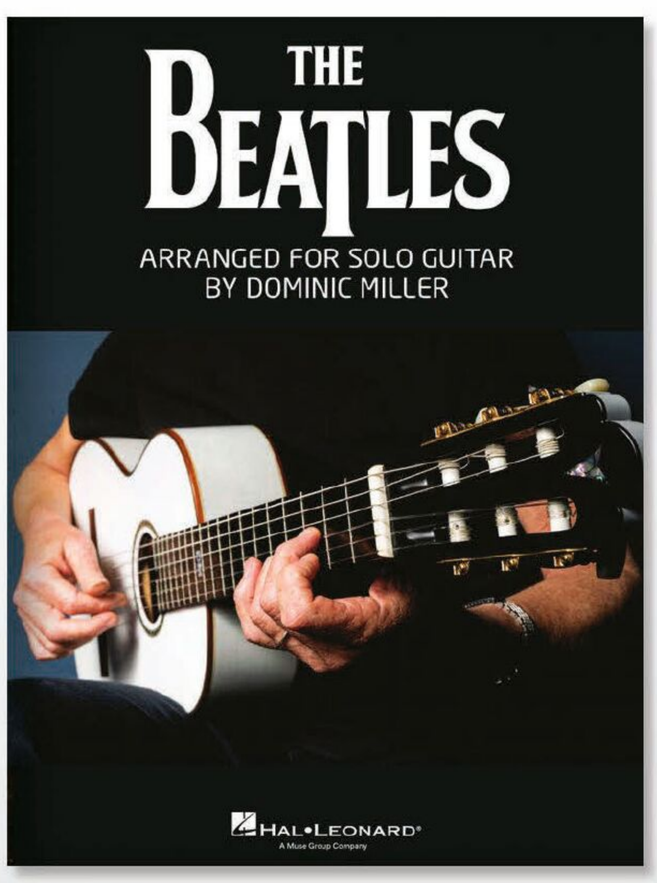
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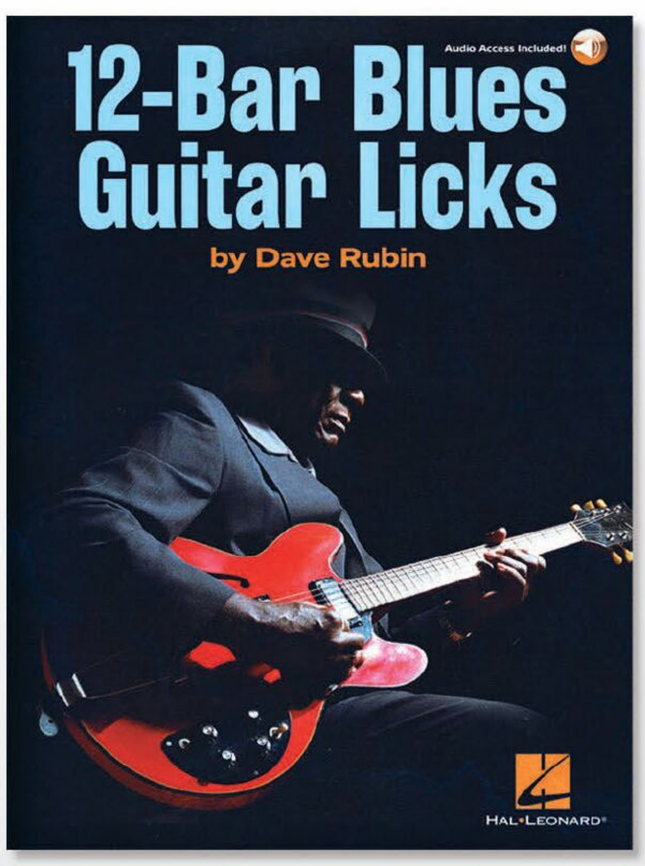


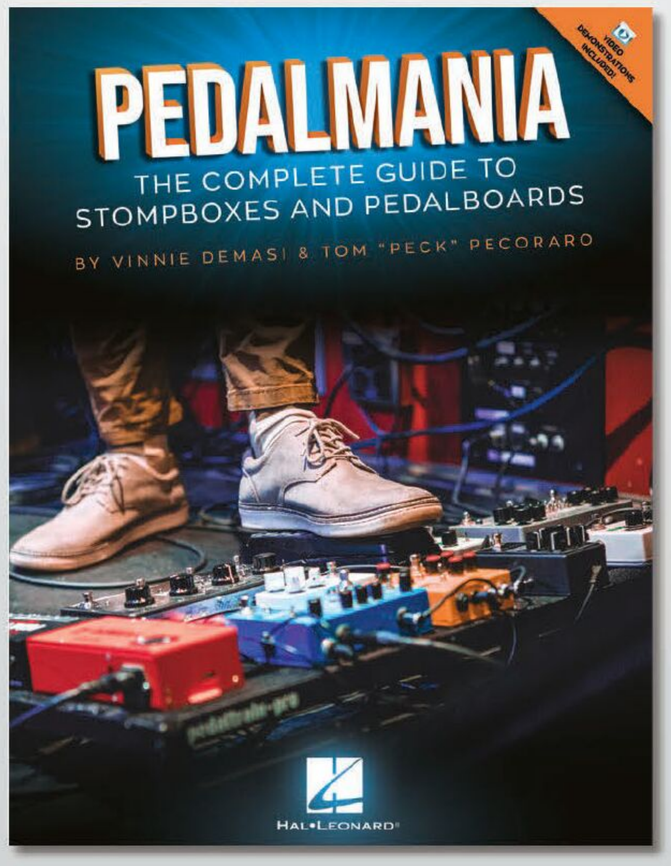


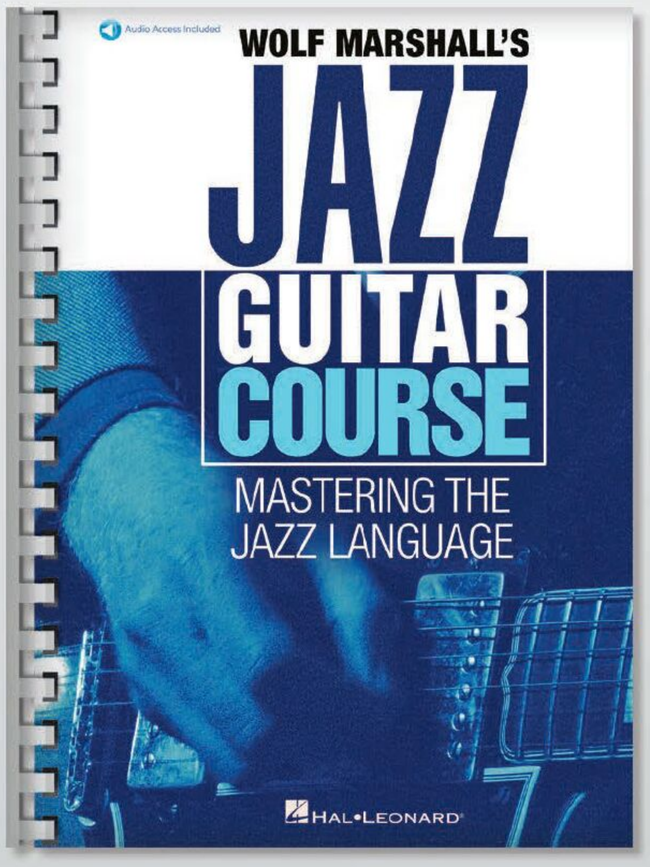


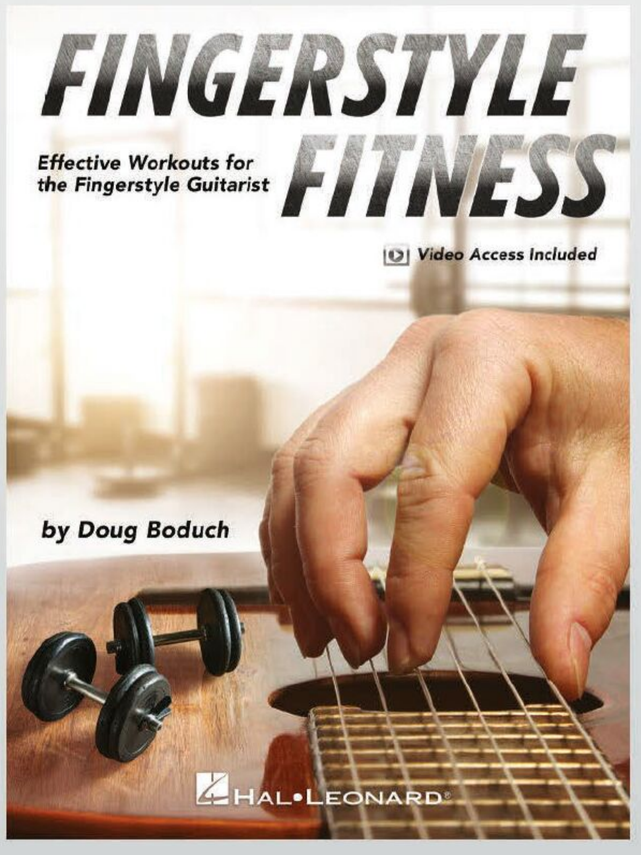












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MARCH METAL MADNESS!





JOEY WHARTON

LAMB OF GOD

How **Mark Morton** and **Willie Adler** revisited past chaos to behold the future

BY JON WIEDERHORN

THEY'VE NEVER BEEN the kinds of artists that go through the motions. Almost all of Lamb of God's songs are examined, refined and redefined before they make it to the final recording sessions. Historically, that has left the band battling deadlines, demons and even each other, pushed by the pressure, unearthing the elemental chaos in their sound.

Now, 32 years into their career (including a five-year pre-Lamb stint as Burn the Priest), they've earned the right to take their time, they're all clean and sober, and they're getting along better than ever. But all that positive stuff won't stop them from making music for the apocalypse or swinging for the fences every time they step up to the plate. And if they don't knock it out of the park right away, they'll readjust their batting stances, re-examine the situation, and try again.

"A lot of our best songs have come from us having about half a song written and not really knowing where we want to go next," says Adler, sitting in his car in a parking lot a half mile from his country home in the hills of Virginia. "So, we'll mix the two demos together and build it from there. When we're done, it often doesn't sound anything like either of the songs we started with, but it's better than both."

Refusing to compromise can be frustrating and time-consuming. It's even harder when you're working on your 10th album, are intent on continuing a career arc of musical development yet have already been heralded as a legacy act with a characteristic New American Metal sound. Having discovered their niche long ago, Lamb of God initially had trouble finding a direction for their new album, *Into Oblivion*. Then, for a show on the 2023 Headbangers Boat cruise, the band played its 2004 album, *Ashes of the Wake*, in its entirety and everything clicked. Revisiting the past opened new doors for further progress.

"We'd been playing a lot of the album for years, but we had never done some of it live before," says Morton, sitting at his kitchen table and looking out the window overlooking his spacious, woodsy backyard. "Going back and learning those songs made me go, Hey, where was my head at back then? What was I trying to reference 20 years ago? And that carried over to the new record."

The follow-up to 2022's *Omens, Into Oblivion* isn't exactly a reinvention. It's more of a rediscovery of a time when every new adventure was a revelation and the band's lack of experience fueled their chaotic invention.

"Back when we did the second Lamb record, *As the Palaces Burn*, and then *Ashes*, we didn't have any box that we would adhere to," Adler says. "We just took riffs we liked and attached them together without thinking about conventional structure. We just went, 'Okay, let's see where this goes.' So, this time, we tried to get back to doing what we thought



Willie Adler [*left*] with his signature ESP Warbird and Mark Morton with his new signature Gibson Modern Quilt Les Paul

sounded super-cool regardless of whether it went verse, chorus, verse, chorus."

Into Oblivion isn't just structurally solid; it's Lamb of God's most musically diverse release in more than a decade. There's the proggy, off-kilter, riff-saturated tech-thrash of "The Killing Floor," the speedy hardcore exorcism of "Parasocial Christ," the barreling, churn-n-burn ferocity of "St. Catherine's Wheel," and the mournful, melodic "El Vacio." From start to finish, *Into Oblivion* is a blazing retrospective of Lamb of God's catalog, meticulously crafted to provide diversity and balance.

"At this point, I think it's hard to add to our body of work without thinking about the body of work," Morton says. "With every addition we make at this point, we're aware and respectful of what we've done before, and hoping it lives up to whatever level we previously achieved. This album does just that."

During separate Zoom interviews, Morton and Adler discuss the paths of invention that led to *Into Oblivion*, the serenity of ripping metal, the advantages of recording at home, and how they finally made peace with being a legacy band.

You aren't exactly living in oblivion right now. You're both in rural Virginia in spacious homes and big yards.

WILLIE ADLER: Three years ago, my wife and I found 10 acres out in the sticks and built a house here. We wanted a place where we could grow a garden, have animals, get an ATV and create our own trails.

How isolated are you?

ADLER: I'm out in the woods and I literally have no cell service. I have to drive 15 to 20 minutes down the road to talk on the phone.

Are you pulled over by the side of the road right now?

ADLER: I'm in my Jeep Rubicon parked in the lot of a sandwich shop my wife and I own.

"I wanted to get back to the reasons we started doing this band"
MARK MORTON

Right after this interview, I'll go in there and get to work. My wife's parents opened the place in 1981; she bought it from them about 15 years ago. We make any sandwich you can think of and we're famous for our limeade.

Lamb of God aren't exactly struggling. Why work in a sandwich shop?

ADLER: I enjoy working there alongside my wife. I wouldn't necessarily say it keeps me grounded, but I like to stay busy and it's a nice change of pace.

What about you, Mark? Where are you living?

MARK MORTON: We've got seven and a half acres in the woods. There are coyotes, but we don't see them much, and there are bald eagles and all the local snakes. And then we have chickens and dogs.

Do those chickens provide your eggs?

MORTON: Yes. I've got some friends down the road who raise birds for meat, but we don't kill ours. They're probably the happiest chickens on earth. The worst thing that happens to them is they get chased a bit by one of my dogs. But he just likes to scare them.

Does living in the woods provide escape from modern society? Is it a calming respite while we head into oblivion, to quote the title of the new album?

MORTON: To me, the album title has more of a psychological thriller vibe to it. I was thinking about the things that follow us around that are unseen, but they traumatize us, whether it's mental illness, addiction or some event we feel shame about. At some point, we're all haunted or possessed by these things.

Do current events fan your creative flames and inspire you to write brutal stuff? Is it therapeutic to make this wildly expressive and technical music?

ADLER: It certainly is therapeutic to have a breakthrough and write riffs you love after being stuck for a while. But I don't know if that relates to everything in the news.

MORTON: Maybe it's just survival, man. I've had to pay less attention to what's happening out there because if I turn the screens off and look outside the window, I see the real world. Not that any of that other stuff isn't real, but I can't constantly be barraged by it. Some might say I'm not living in the real world, but I'm not sure the converse isn't true as well. When I turn off the screens and look out the front door or go for a walk in the woods, somehow it's not quite as bad.

Were you unsure where you wanted to go musically with *Into Oblivion* before you

JOEY WHARTON



Morton in Chula Vista, California, in 2023. "It wasn't too hard for me to play like we used to," he says. "My playing style hasn't changed that much"

DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

played *Ashes of the Wake* on the Headbangers Boat cruise?

MORTON: Before we started, I said that if we're gonna make another Lamb of God record, it's really gotta be worthy of being in the catalog we've created. That sets the bar high. Then, after I went back to listen to *Ashes* again, I started thinking even further back to what was going on when we did *Palaces*. Then I went back and started listening to bands I discovered back then, like At the Gates, In Flames, Meshuggah and some of the Virginia bands I used to see and was inspired by. I guess I wanted to take a look back at the songwriter I was when I wasn't at all guided by the music industry or whatever commercial success might come and just get back to the reasons we started doing this band.

ADLER: We wanted it to be a scream of old-school Armageddon, but also to be fresh and modern. A good way to do that, we agreed, was to create a cross-section of everything we've done.

What was the first indication that you were on the right track?

MORTON: We wrote "Sepsis," which was very much a reference to a local Nineties hardcore band in Virginia called Slang Laos that were a big influence on us. There's also a bit of the rhythmic pulse of Jesus Lizard in there. We knew that song was a different kind of thing for us.

ADLER: It was one of the first songs we really jumped into when we started writing, and that immediately set the tone for the record. I realized, okay, this is our record. We can do whatever we want. It's funny because it's the first song we dropped because we wanted to see how it was received, and it made some people worry. They went, "Huh. What is this?" But at the same time, a lot of people got it.

"Sepsis" has some of the rhythmic turbulence of Meshuggah, another great Swedish metal band.

ADLER: I haven't listened to Meshuggah in a long time, but back in the day they were a huge inspiration as the originators of those crazy, mathy, off-time-but-on-time riffs. If you listen to our early records, a lot of the breakdowns have a Meshuggah vibe. On the new album, the whole breakdown of "The Killing Floor" is like that. So that probably crept back in there.

There's no shortage of fast, technically complex songs, and many seem to staple various riffs together before you get to a chorus — if you even get there.

ADLER: "Parasocial Christ" is very much like that. The chorus only happens once, and it doesn't kick in until near the end of the song. It was so fun to do stuff like that again.

MORTON: In its first incarnation, the song was very proggy, with crazy time signatures. We tussled back and forth with it to find a balance. We subtracted a few things, and it wound up being almost like a hardcore song.

You said you wanted to get back into the mindframe you had when early in your career when you were making crazy music just to make it. At the time, you were all partying like rock stars. Was it hard to revisit those skewed architecture years later as wiser, more sober musicians?

ADLER: When we first played those kinds of songs, we were all buzzed up and just having a good time. We weren't concerned about nailing them, and that, in and of itself, probably allowed us to get them right easier because we weren't over-thinking anything.



BAND: Lamb of God
ALBUM: *Into Oblivion*
RELEASED: March 13

When we went back and relearned *Ashes of the Wake*, it was scary. I had to psych myself back up and be like, "Man, you wrote it and did it for the album, so just play it." But it involved wrestling with my mind to turn off any doubts that I had.

MORTON: Thinking back to when I first got sober, writing was a bit of a challenge because I didn't know how to self-edit. I couldn't tell what I should be excited about and what wasn't as good because my whole working process had been rooted in drugs and alcohol. So when I took that away, I didn't necessarily recognize things the same way. But that was years ago and I learned how to make music sober. It wasn't too hard for me to play like we used to. My playing style hasn't changed that much.

You're both bringing piles of riffs to the table and figuring out what to use and what to discard. Do the two of you often argue?

MORTON: We sometimes disagree. But I've learned over the years that if you've got five guys and a producer in the room, and you're trying to make everybody happy, you're going to wind up diluting a piece of music to the point where it's not going to have an identity. Somebody's got to be willing to say, "I'm not directing this one." And when that's me, I fall back and let the people who are the most motivated and the most excited about that particular song steer it. When I stopped trying to be in control of everything, I realized the strongest opinion in the room is often the right opinion. If I disagree with Willie about something, but he's so dead set on doing it his way because he thinks it's



Adler at the same Chula Vista show. "It certainly is therapeutic to have a breakthrough and write riffs you love after being stuck for a while," he says

way better, then I will defer to him, and vice versa. Conversely, if somebody's clinging to something but everyone else thinks it's the wrong thing, sometimes you've got to have that conversation and go, "You know what, man? The whole rest of the room disagrees with you so maybe you should just step away."

ADLER: Mark and I have such a long history together that we've learned how to read each other and work together. We feed off each other to such an extent that I'd feel very lost going into a writing session or writing songs without Mark. I'd be nervous and uncomfortable. I can fuck up around Mark. I can woodshed something and sound terrible, but it's alright because I know I'm going to get there. And Mark knows I'm going to get there. There's a comfort level between us.

Did you alter your styles to be able to play some of the new riffs?

ADLER: To a degree. When we did *Palaces*, I used a lot of alternate picking and string-skipping on the technical stuff, so I had to go back in my brain and pretend I was 25 again. The older you get, the more you naturally want to slow down. But we certainly did not let ourselves do that.

MORTON: I haven't changed technique in a long time. I've been more focused on songwriting. About 15 years ago, I realized everything needs to be about the song. If we've gotta play something technical, I'll do it until I get it right. But it's more important for me to determine if the song is saying something. Is it a guitar clinic or a song?

"El Vacio" is ominous and atmospheric, and it builds from a whisper to a roar. It's more subtle than most of your songs.

MORTON: I wrote that at the request of Josh [*Wilbur, producer*] and Randy [*Blythe, vocalist*]. We got to a point where we had seven or eight songs, and we thought, What's missing? What does this batch of songs need for balance? We already had "Sepsis," which was abstract, and we had technical stuff, thrash and hardcore. We wanted something else that stood out as different and added a new character to the record. I went upstairs to my studio and put together "El Vacio." It was one of those things where I'm surprised that a piece I write gets used. I thought it was an interesting piece of music, and they loved it.

"The older you get, the more you want to naturally slow down. We did not do that"

WILLIE ADLER

There are several screeching tremolo solos on the album that resemble vintage Slayer. There are also evil Slayer-esque riffs in "Bully" and "Blunt Force Blues."

ADLER: That's probably a testament to the amount of times we've toured with them. I grew up with Slayer, so they permanently take up residence in my brain somewhere. But we were not thinking about Slayer when we worked on this.

MORTON: Our producer Josh had just been working with Kerry King, and every time I went to do a lead, he wanted me to use a tremolo. And I'm like, "Dude, the Kerry record is great, but this is a Lamb record." He still wanted me to use a tremolo on a lot of the leads. It's a different kind of spice for us. We haven't done a ton of that before.

Did you face any major obstacles while working on *Into Oblivion*?

MORTON: I don't have any conflict-and-resolution stories for you. I don't want to minimize the woes of the world. There are plenty. But back here in my little place, we got the chickens and the dogs, and there's a fresh pot of coffee on. We're laughing and writing songs with old friends, and there are guitars lying around. We're all having fun. So let's go make a heavy metal record, man. GW

DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES

BLACK LABEL SOCIETY

MARCH METAL MADNESS!

Zakk Wylde waxes lyrical about songwriting, recording, his approach to soloing and "Ozzy's Song," a poignant track from the band's new album

BY NICK BOWCOTT



JUSTIN REICH

[*from left*] John DeServio, Jeff Fabb, Zakk Wylde and Dario Lorina

IN THE VAST domain of rock guitar, there are few players with a resume or work ethic as impressive as Zakk Wylde's. The man literally never seems to stop. From Black Label Society to the recent Pantera Celebration tours, plus Zakk Sabbath; Experience Hendrix; teaching online courses; maintaining a guitar brand (Wylde Audio), a couple of pedal lines (MXR Wylde Audio and Dunlop Wylde Audio) and a line of guitar strings (Dunlop Zakk Wylde String Lab), the man is far beyond relentless. And we haven't even mentioned the Berzerkus Festival, nonstop social media and a coffee brand (Valhalla Java Odinforce Blend, in partnership with Death Wish Coffee)!

With the release of Black Label Society's latest album, *Engines of Demolition*, blazing on the horizon, Wylde took time out of his insane schedule to chat with *Guitar World*.

***Engines of Demolition* is the 12th album in Black Label Society's 25-year history. When you first got the BLS ball rolling, did you think it'd roll for this long — and just keep on growing?**



Wylde with a Wylde Audio Barbarian in Los Angeles in 2022. "You've got to play what makes you happy because that's the only way you're gonna thrive," he says

Without a doubt. When we first started doing Black Label, I figured this is the last stop — let's do this. Then we just kept building it and building it one gig at a time. When we started, it was three people watching us in a bar and grill, and two of them were working behind the bar! That's what I always tell kids when they say they want to start a band — view it as your own mom-and-pop store, and then build on it. You might start with a hotdog stand on the corner and then you build it and build it, and it becomes a food truck — and then another one, and then another one and so on. Then, when you look back on it, it was never work because you were doing what you loved. No matter if you're all crammed in a van or in a car, you're doing what you dig doing. That's the advice I give to younger musicians — just do it! Go for it and be relentless.

I remember seeing BLS on your first tour. You played a hole-in-the-wall bar in Port Jefferson, New York, and you were literally setting up the merch table and moving gear around. You played to fewer than 100 people, but the gig was phenomenal and your passion was palpable.

I think it's the same for any band that's starting off, whether it's Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath or the Beatles. They started off jamming in that little bar in Liverpool, the Cavern Club, and ended up selling out Shea Stadium. It's just a matter of sticking with it. We all start at pretty much the same spot. Of course, there are gonna be tough times, regardless of who you are; even the Stones played little gigs to begin with — and look at them now! You've just gotta keep putting another brick on the empire, every single day. It's the same with bodybuilding. Dorian Yates [*retired British bodybuilder*] didn't turn into Dorian Yates overnight!

***Doom Crew Inc.* was released in late 2021, and you've been busy since then with Pantera, Zakk Sabbath, Experience Hendrix and so much more. What drives you to work so hard?**

I have a good time with the stuff I'm doing. It's no different than when we were 15 and starting a band. You practice as if your life depends on it, because it does. [*Laughs*] You save up lawn-mowing money so you can buy your first Marshall, and you put up fliers to let everybody know you're playing a keg party. You have fun with it because you're doing what you love. That's my drive; do what you want to do. It's simple.

"I love twin-lead guitar bands where the guys go back and forth but had such distinctive sounds"

You've got to play what makes you happy because that's the only way you're gonna thrive. You'll only thrive if you're playing what you love because that's what creates the passion. Why would you be in a band if you can't stand the music you're playing? I understand the business aspect of it — "If you sounded more like this, it'd be an easier sell." But to me, the thing that naturally comes out of you is what you should be doing — because you're not even thinking about it, you're just doing it. JD [*John DeServio, BLS bassist*] and I were just talking about when we were playing in Zyris when we were kids. One night we were playing the Stone Pony [*a legendary Asbury Park, New Jersey, club*] and they wanted us to do another 10 minutes after we got done with our set. We ended up playing "Rock and Roll" by Led Zeppelin, and I remember we were all looking at each other because we were having a blast playing it. I was like, "Why don't our songs move me like this? This is super-cool shit, but the stuff we're playing is contrived and not what we love." That was a moment of clarity. The band was trying to get signed, so we were playing what was popular at the time. I realized right then

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES



Lorina with a Wylde Audio Blood Eagle in 2022. "Zakk was a huge inspiration before I knew him, and he's still a huge inspiration," he says

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

ZAKK'S SINISTER DOUBLE

Guitarist **Dario Lorina** has become an integral part of BLS, not just on rhythm but as a fellow soloist

BY NICK BOWCOTT

How would you compare *Engines of Demolition* to its predecessor?
I think it's a continuation of *Doom Crew Inc.* in terms of Zakk and me soloing back and forth. Zakk writes all the songs, and I'm really psyched about them.

How do you work together on those back-and-forth lead sections?
When a song is pretty much done, Zakk sends me the ProTools sessions and says, "Here's your blank section to write a solo too." Whenever there's a harmony section, he sends me a video of him playing it; he also sends me a video of anything he wants me to double. Watch, learn, record, send back!

Do you ad-lib or compose solos?
A bit of both, but the majority [*of them are*] improvised.

How hard is it to double Zakk?
It's always a challenge to double another guitar player, because everyone has their own touch, feel and vibrato. Zakk was a big influence when I was coming up, so that wheelhouse of guitar playing is ingrained in my DNA. We have a similar wide, aggressive vibrato, but Zakk's is definitely its own thing, so I focus on that a lot to make sure I match his width and aggression.

You've now been in BLS for more than a decade. Is it surreal when you're standing next to him, swapping solos?
I'm grateful for this every single day, and I mean that. Zakk was a huge inspiration before I knew him, and he's still a huge inspiration. It's been an amazing ride.

What have you learned from or about Zakk since joining BLS in 2014?
You often don't realize just how much you're absorbing, but if I can narrow it down to just two things, they'd be his work ethic and creativity. His work ethic is bar none, and his creativity is awe-inspiring. **GW**

that wasn't the way it really works. Labels don't sign bands like that; you've gotta be true to yourself, not to a trend. A lot of that experience was Business 101 on how not to do it! Guns N' Roses got signed because they were playing the music they liked playing; people gravitated toward it because they enjoyed it too. And when there's a line around the building, that's when promoters, managers and labels want to get involved. You've got to create your own success and situation, and that's not really "work." You can sit on the couch complaining or you could say, "Let's go do this" and take action.

How would you compare *Engines of Demolition* to *Doom Crew Inc.*? Would you say it's a natural evolution?
Of all the albums Black Label has made, this is one of them! And to be more specific, this is the next one! Let's put it this way, if *Doom Crew Inc.* was Tuesday's album, this one is Wednesday's. Actually, all joking aside, the writing process on this one was definitely

"This album is a musical ride through the peaks and valleys of the last four years"

different. Usually, it's a bit of an implosion. I get told, "Zakk, you've got a month before the guys come out," so I'll write every day and get a bunch of cool riffs I'm happy with to work on with the fellas. But on this one, we took our time. We started work on it in late 2022, but there was no point putting it out while the Pantera Celebration was going on because all the focus was on that. So we waited. In the end, only two or three of the original ideas made it onto the record because I kept on writing and working with the guys. It's a musical ride through the peaks and valleys of the last four years — hitting some of the highest highs and lowest lows, plus everything in between.



"If you enjoy drinking coffee while reading a good book, are you gonna retire from that? Music is the same," Wylde says

Song titles such as "Better Days and Wiser Times," "Broken and Blind," "Above and Below" and "Name in Blood," suggest that, too. And speaking of "Broken and Blind" and "Name in Blood," you did a nice job of teasing this album release via a slow but steady stream of singles and videos.
Yeah, I think "Gallows" came out over a year and a half ago, right when we did the Berzerkus Fest [*September 2024*]. Since then, we've put another one out pretty much every four months or so — "Lord Humungus," "Broken and Blind" and then "Name in Blood." Doing it this way is great; you put out a single, people digest it and watch the video. Then you do another one.

A song that's obviously going to garner a lot of attention is "Ozzy's Song."
I already had the music and the melody idea sitting around. Then, after Ozzy passed away and we'd laid him to rest [*July 2025*], I wrote the lyrics. As for the title, originally it had a title that was basically the chorus, but after it was recorded, [*my wife*] Barb would always say, "Put on the Ozzy song — the one you wrote for him." That's why I renamed it "Ozzy's Song." It makes sense; I mean, we've always called "In This River," "Dime's Song."

How different was your guitar setup in the studio compared to your live rig?
It's the same exact thing; there's no need to change it. That said, I only use the chorus pedal [*MXR Wylde Audio Chorus*] in the studio for certain things because double tracking the guitars creates a natural chorus sound anyway. For certain dive-bomb things, though, I'll put the chorus pedal on, double it and it just gets huge sounding. Like at the start of "Suicide Messiah," for example.

Are your solos on *Engines of Demolition* composed, improvised or a bit of both?



BAND: Black Label Society
ALBUM: *Engines of Demolition*
RELEASED: March 27

I always sit down and come up with what I like. They're all composed, unless it's an outro jam, in which case I'll invariably improvise. It's almost like the Saint [*Randy*] Rhoads school of thought — or Neal Schon where you have a melody thing and then maybe put the afterburners on near the end. They're all pieces of music.

When you're composing a solo, is it something you hear in your head or something you find and like when you're jamming?
I can hear it in my head, especially when coming up with a melody. I'll just sit down and work with what I call a homework tape of the backing track I'm soloing over.

As usual, the lead interplay between you and Dario [*Lorina, BSL guitarist*] is fantastic.
I love that kinda stuff. With Night Ranger you always had Brad [*Gillis*] and Jeff [*Watson*] shredding, which I thought was awesome. And then there's all the other twin-lead guitar bands — whether it was Lynyrd Skynyrd or the Allman Brothers Band — where the guys would go back and forth and you could always hear who was playing what because they had such distinctive sounds and styles.

There are also certain lead parts where Dario doubles you or plays a harmony.
If I've written out something specific, that's what we'll do. Otherwise, I'll just leave gaps and tell him, "Father D., just play whatever you want there." After all, that's the whole point — to let him do his own thing. For "Name in Blood," I pretty much had it all written out so I was like, "Dario, why don't you double this part and then we'll do the harmonies at the end? You do the high part and I'll go low." Most of the time, though, he's free to do whatever he wants.

Of the 13 songs on *Engines of Demolition*, are there any solos that stand out, or are they all your children and you love them all?
I obviously like them all. I'm really happy with the way the one in "Ozzy's Song" came out, and I'm also digging the solo in "Name in Blood" — and it's pretty lengthy, too. They're all pieces of music, and like any piece of music it all depends on what mood you're in at the time.

The upcoming BLS tour with Dark Chapel and Zakk Sabbath opening is unique in that all members will be pulling double-duty; Dario will kick off the show with Dark Chapel; then you, JD and Jeff Fabb will do a Zakk Sabbath set. Then you'll take a quick break before all four of

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

you hit the stage together for BLS. That's some heavy lifting. Looking forward to it?
Yeah. The only thing I'm worried about are the Diana Ross clothing options for the tour; that's my main concern! Will we have enough makeup and wardrobe cases? If I don't change my costume in between sets, the audience will think it's the same guy up there for both bands. They'll see right through it!

You've become renowned for finishing a show and then heading straight to the bus to do a workout. Does double duty with Zakk Sabbath and BLS mean two workouts every show day?
I guess it just means I can eat an extra Reece's in between sets and then burn it off during the Black Label show before hitting the weights! [*Laughs*]

You've been pretty much nonstop for the past few years. Are you ever gonna take a vacation?
No. I just love doing it. I've never been like, "I can't wait to go home; I don't wanna do this anymore." When you're on the road, that's the very reason you're doing it. That's the reason you had pictures of Jimmy Page, Tony Iommi, Saint Randy and all the guys

"Don't complicate things. If you enjoy it and it's moving you, that's what you should be doing"

on your bedroom wall when you were a kid. When you look at our musician friends – if they're lifers, then it's just part of what they do. I've got friends who still play at bars purely because they love playing with their buddies; it's not a financial thing. It's the same with bands like the Stones; they definitely don't need the money. They're still out there doing it because that's what they love to do.

I saw the Alive Cooper and Judas Priest co-headline tour last year, and during the show it dawned on me that the combined ages of Alice and Rob added up to more than 150 years. Both guys are clearly still doing it purely out of their love for music, not the almighty dollar.
Exactly. That's what I'm saying. Alice doesn't need to do it. If he wanted to retire, chill and play golf, he would. He likes going out on the road and hanging out with the band and crew because they're his family and they always have a great time. Why wouldn't you do that? It's like when people ask Keith Richards, "When are you ever gonna retire?" And he goes, "Retire from what?!" I mean, if you enjoy drinking coffee while reading a good book, are you gonna retire from that? Music is the same. For sports, I get it; if you can't perform at the same level, you say, "I'm done." But then you move into coaching, managing, commentating or whatever, like Dana White [*CEO and president of the Ultimate Fighting Championship*]. That way you're still around the thing you love. It's like brushing your teeth; it's something you automatically do every day – except when you're out with Black Label, of course!

You've already offered some guidance, but if you had a couple of sentences of advice to give to someone who's just starting out, what would they be?
Play the music that moves you. Play what you love. That's that – it's the truth. People are always going, "It can't be that simple," but it is. Don't complicate things. If you enjoy it and it's moving you, that's what you should be doing. Why would you be playing anything else? That would be like telling Joe Pass, "You need to be doing more pop stuff." And he'd just go, "I play what I love!" GW

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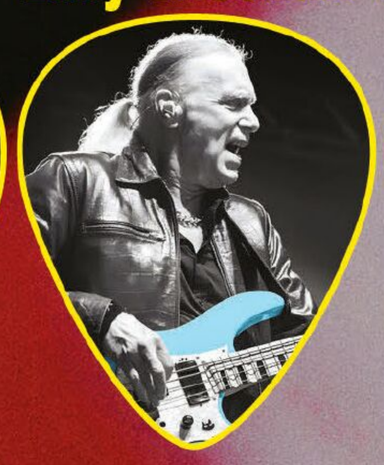
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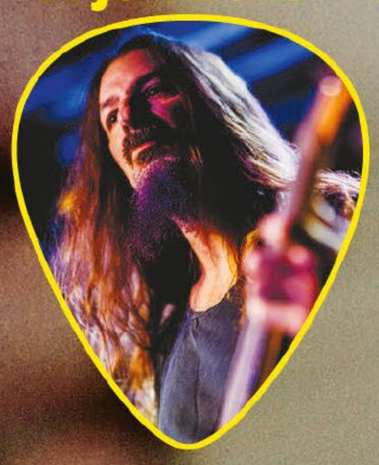
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EXODUS

MARCH METAL MADNESS!

Why **Gary Holt** and **Lee Altus** refuse to turn their venerable thrash collective into just another legacy act

BY JON WIEDERHORN

THEY WERE AMONG the pioneers who sparked the fire under the thrash metal scene in the early Eighties, and now it looks like Exodus will be among the genre's last original men standing. Megadeth's Dave Mustaine made it clear there'll be no more studio albums, and Slayer — with whom Exodus guitarist and songwriter Gary Holt has played for a decade — are done making albums and will do only one-off gigs. In contrast, Exodus aren't just releasing new music; they're on a tear, writing and touring obsessively, cranking out new music not as a means to an end, but as their sole objective — their very *raison d'être*.

"I have to keep doing this," Holt says from the office of his rural California home, glancing out the window where a bunch of wild turkeys just scampered across his back lawn. "I'll be in the studio eight hours during the day, then go back to the house, have dinner, pick up the guitar and write more. It's what I love to do."

That kind of passion and dedication has always separated Exodus from the pack, even when navigating lineup snafus, drug problems and shifting trends. From the violent urgency of their first album, 1985's *Bonded by Blood*, to the aggression, diversity and scalpel-sharp musicianship of their brand-new release, *Goliath*, Exodus have never compromised, coasted or half-assed it.

"We could never write something just to meet a deadline," says second guitarist Lee Altus, who joined in 2005, replacing Rick Hunolt. "Everybody always does their best. Sometimes magic happens, sometimes it doesn't, but it's never for lack of trying our hardest."

Holt and Altus started writing new music in late 2023. Then, in the summer and fall of 2025, Exodus rented a vacation home and worked there with producer Mark Lewis.



Gary Holt with his ESP guitars. "They'll build me anything," he says

JIM LOUVAU



"One of my all-time favorite bands is ABBA," Lee Altus says

It was similar to the way they recorded 2021's *Personal Non Grata*.

"I had four or five songs done going in, and we did the rest there," Holt says. "It's like how Queen and Deep Purple recorded. They sequestered themselves and started working together. We like doing that because we enjoy each other's company. We have a great time hanging out. We call it Camp Crunch."

Many bands that try to work in such a casual environment are easily distracted. That wasn't a problem for Exodus, who powered through one song after another, captivated by their own sonic firestorms, driven by a passion for playing together and the challenge to continually evolve.

"I still love doing fast stuff, but I also love trying new things," Holt says. "We want to do music that excites us. But if every song is just full throttle, it blurs together. You need moments where it breathes or gets weird."

Goliath ticks all the boxes. A dense, sprawling record that alternates between Bay Area savagery and slower, doomier passages, the album captures Exodus at their most inspired, unleashing new songs that showcase their talents as songwriters and players, illuminating a beast that has never lost its hunger or edge. Tracks like "Hostis Humani Generis" and "2 Minutes Hate" prove Exodus slam as hard as ever, while "3111," "The Changing Me" and "Violence Works" reveal a band as forward-thinking as it is powerful, drawing from a well of ominous textures, infectious hooks and quirky licks. It's a career-defining statement, but definitely not the final blow. When they were done mixing and mastering *Goliath*, Exodus had eight fully recorded tracks left that will appear on their next record.

"We will not go silently into the world of legacy acts who don't make records or don't make records that count," Holt says. "We're an album band. We're not going to suddenly start releasing two songs at a time and then tour on that. And we're not going anywhere. I'm going to do this until the day I die."

You recorded 18 songs during your sessions with Mark Lewis. Did you choose the cream of the crop for *Goliath*?

GARY HOLT: We chose the songs that made the strongest record right now. The other stuff isn't weak. The songs are just as good. They just belong on the next one.

LEE ALTUS: The hardest part was deciding which songs would make this album and which to save. You don't want to front-load one album and make the other one feel like leftovers. We argued — in a good way. Everybody had opinions about which songs belonged where, and that reinforced for me that we all believed in the songs and the material was strong.

Did you write together?

HOLT: No, Lee didn't stay in the rental. He worked on his songs at home. I wouldn't even listen to his songs until they were done. At one point he goes, "What, you haven't listened yet?" And I'm like, "No, I'm working on other stuff. You have carte blanche. I trust you. Go for it!"

ALTUS: That trust is huge. When I send something to Gary, I'm not worried if he'll want me to redo something or whether it fits. Once it's done, it sounds like Exodus. I was a huge Exodus fan before I joined the band and he and I share many of the same influences.

Do you have different approaches to songwriting?

ALTUS: I always say Gary writes like he makes moonshine, and I write like I make wine. Gary pumps out riffs nonstop. He amazes me. I reject riff after riff. It takes me a long time to find one I'm happy with. Sometimes, I'm too picky. Gary will say, "When are you going to be done with this song?" And I'm like, "It's not good enough yet." Every time, I'm terrified, and then eventually I calm down and start writing again.

HOLT: I just think Lee's stuff ferments longer, but he brings an amazing sense of melody that adds another voice to the music. On this album, "The Changing Me" was all him and it's killer. And so was "3111."

"3111" starts with an ominous intro before turning into full-on thrash. How did that come together?

ALTUS: I was sitting around jamming and I came up with this slow, eerie part that reminded me of Black Sabbath. I went with it, but then I didn't know where it was going to go. It could have been its own song. I kept working on it, and it developed into its own

JIM LOUVAU



[*from left*] Jack Gibson, Lee Altus, Rob Dukes, Gary Holt and Tom Hunting

thing almost on its own. It showed me what it wanted to be.

"Goliath" is murky and doomy and uncoils like a prehistoric snake as it progresses through a cavern of intertwining licks and gut-churning bends.

HOLT: I wrote the opening riff, the verse riff and Jack's bassline in 1999. We were spun out on meth at the time. I'd go to the rehearsal room, crank everything insanely loud and just jam on it. It was originally in drop A. We always called it "The Creepy Song." I tried to finish it on every album since [*2004's*] *Tempo of the Damned*. But every time I picked it up, I couldn't separate it from that drug-addled mindset, and I'd get stuck.

What unlocked it?

HOLT: Maybe I was finally far enough away from who I was back then. Maybe I stopped overthinking it. I sat down with a laptop in the trailer I have on my property, and I pulled up the right [*Toontrack*] EZdrummer beat. After all that time, it just flowed — chorus, harmonies, everything. I finished it in one afternoon. I sent the demo to Tom, and the first thing he said was, "You did it!" That was the most triumphant feeling. It's my favorite song on the album. It's dark, sinister and sorrowful — beautiful and depressing at the same time.

It's augmented by mournful strings that play over a fast, precise guitar part.

HOLT: While we were tracking, I kept hearing violins in the middle section. We brought in a local violinist just to see if the idea worked. It wasn't usable, so we sent it to our friend Katie Jacoby, who toured with the Who. I told her, "Give me maximum sadness." She sent back 18 tracks of strings and they were perfect. It sounded like something [*composer*] Michael Kamen would've done. It elevated the song beyond anything I expected.

When you released *Bonded by Blood* in 1985, could you have imagined hiring a violinist for the Who to play on your record?

HOLT: I don't know. We used horns [*on our cover of the Rolling Stones' "Bitch" for* Force of Habit *in 1992*]. Anything's possible.

Lee, you played an EBow on that song.

ALTUS: I'm an EBow freak. People think it's keyboards, but it's guitar. I ran it clean — no overdrive. Just pure sustain. You can distort it, but I wanted sweetness and melody — something creeping around in the background.

There's a strong, melodic backbone throughout the album, even when it's punishing.

"We will not go silently into the world of legacy acts"
GARY HOLT

ALTUS: I've always gravitated toward melody, no matter how heavy the music is. That's what grabs me. If it doesn't have that, it doesn't stick.

HOLT: Molotov cocktail riffs are easy. Anybody can do that. The stuff that stays with you is what matters.

Exodus are pioneers of thrash, but do you sit around listening to metal or follow the scene?

HOLT: All I listen to is Adele. If you ask me what my five favorite musicians are right now, they're all Adele. She's one of the greatest voices ever, and if you listen to her records, outside of the hits, there's world-class piano playing. Most of it is just her and the piano, and I love listening to piano.

ALTUS: Good music is good music. I'm not sitting around listening to metal all the time either. One of my all-time favorite bands is ABBA. I grew up on Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Thin Lizzy, Judas Priest, Scorpions, Iron Maiden. That stuff is still what I go back to, but I love lots of other things.

Do you think the experimentation in your sound and your willingness to step outside the box comes from your appreciation of genres outside metal?

HOLT: Maybe. I don't sit there listening to Adele thinking, I'm going to put pop music into thrash metal. But I've always liked pop. I was listening to Madonna on the Exodus

JIM LOUVAU



Altus [*left*] and Holt do their thing in San Francisco, September 18, 2018

tour in the Eighties with Venom. Prince is my hero. There's probably more Prince influence in Exodus than anyone would ever notice. Listen to "Violence Works." Until the riff comes in, it sounds like we've lost our minds and have done a disco song. To me, "Promise You" sounds like Blackfoot meets Discharge. There's never a rhyme or reason to why it all happens. We just follow the riff.

***Goliath* exhibits a hungry band going for the throat while striving to be innovative. Was something in particular driving you?**

HOLT: We just wanted to make songs we liked. We didn't go in thinking about how to top *Persona Non Grata*, and we never go in and say, "Okay, what's next?" We go in thinking, "Does this excite us right now?" If it doesn't, there's no point.

ALTUS: Also, we're not young anymore. We've lost a lot of heroes and we're aware anything could happen at any time. That's just the reality. You just give it everything you've got left in the tank and put it into the record. There's no reason not to.

Your lead styles are distinct yet complementary.

ALTUS: I like a little bit more of a sweet tone, so I use a bit more chorus and delay. Gary likes it a little bit drier and in your face. He always jokes that he's got three licks and he milks them back and forth. But Gary comes out and shreds. I'm more about melody. That's why it works; you don't want two guitar players sounding the same. He's the whammy-bar guy. I come from more of a classical background so I think my solos might be a little more melodic than Gary's. We used to joke and call him "Gary Bar" because he was so good with the whammy. He's the Jimi Hendrix of metal.

HOLT: I did strangled-cat whammy solos on "3111" and "Hosti Humani Generis." When I realized they were back-to-back in the running order, I went back and redid one so they wouldn't feel the same.

Do you think playing for Slayer rubbed off on *Goliath*?

HOLT: I've probably absorbed some of that subconsciously. But when I was learning Slayer songs, there were plenty of parts where I thought, "That's a very Exodus-y riff." I guess we've always influenced each other. It just happened organically and we both went with it without thinking anything of it.



BAND: Exodus
ALBUM: *Goliath*
RELEASED: March 20

Could you picture Slayer recording together again?

HOLT: No. Slayer's done recording and touring. But everybody's enjoying each other's company and having fun at these occasional shows. And the world's a big place. Slayer can pop up in a lot of different places for many years and never be in the same spot twice. That's all up to [*vocalist and bassist*] Tom Araya and Kerry King. I don't make those calls. But when they call, I show up.

Gary, You've talked about writing on GarageBand. That's kinda primitive.

HOLT: I love GarageBand. It's easy and I know what I'm doing, so it's great for demos. I've got my own plugins and I'll use one EZ Drummer beat through the whole song and never change it. Sometimes it freaks Tom out because it's six minutes at 230 bpm. I'm like, "Relax — this part's halftime." I'm just too lazy to program the changes. I'll let you know where they go."

ALTUS: I was also kind of a dinosaur. Until this album, I wrote everything on a four-track. People kept telling me, "Never mind the 21st century — you need to move into the 20th." I loved my four-track, but I was constantly bouncing, and by the time I sent the demos the quality was terrible. This time, I tried going digital. I used Cakewalk and learned the basics pretty fast. I thought, "If I had this earlier, I probably would have written another 10 albums by now."

What was your amp setup like in the studio?

HOLT: We tried a bunch of amps, then we rolled in my touring Marshall Jubilee, plugged it in, and that was it. For rhythms, it was just like *Persona Non Grata*. I used a 1984 Yamaha SPG-3000 — perfect intonation, killer guitar. For leads, my ESP Custom Shop Eclipse, and for whammy stuff, the old Jackson Strat from the "Toxic Waltz" days. For the harmony section of "Goliath," I played my Brian May BMG Super with Tri-Sonic pickups, which sounded awesome.

You're both endorsed by ESP.

HOLT: They're awesome. They made me a couple of Vs that I use all the time. They'll build me anything. I send them ideas. I'll say, "Okay, I want a cop badge on the body of this one and I want all the inlays to be bullet shells that I'm going to send you." At first, they didn't think they could import them into Japan — even spent shells. But I said, "No, they have to be the ones I send you." I selected shells that were .50 caliber down to .22. And they made it work.

MIIKKA SKAFFARI/GETTY IMAGES

ALTUS: I was with Jackson to begin with, but I switched to ESPs in the Nineties and I've been with them ever since. I have two ESPs. I love them because they're great for metal but they're versatile. Some of the ESP Eclipses I play are better than Gibson Les Pauls. James [*Hetfield*] sent me a couple of his ESP Snakebytes to try, and they play great, too. He was like, "Why don't you make your own model?" I'm like, "How am I going to top this one?" Somebody else did it for me.

Lee, you play with a Quad Cortex modeler onstage.

ALTUS: I was going through Marshall amps to Diezel amps to my Mesa Boogie. But now I'm using the Mesa tones on the Quad full time. We A/B'd it against real amps, and live, you can't tell the difference. The convenience wins, especially when you're flying to South America and don't know what backline you're getting.

HOLT: I still tour with my amps when I can, but I use the Quad as a preamp on fly dates. I feed it into the effects return of rental amps.

Exodus still tour quite a bit, which bands have to do since no one's going multi-platinum anymore. But as musicians age, playing wild, high-energy shows isn't as easy as it used to be.

HOLT: Physically, this kind of music isn't easy anymore. I blew my neck out headbanging at the Blue Ridge Rock Fest a few years ago. I couldn't turn my head for six months. But I still do it. I have a chip on my shoulder that drives me.

What inspires that chip, and does it make you bitter?

HOLT: I'm well-adjusted and super-happy in life. But Exodus as a band, we're like, "Why does Testament get this and some other band gets that? We stomp all those bands live." The bigger the chip on the shoulder gets, the harder we push ourselves. It's a positive force. It's why we still kill it onstage. It's why we still bang our heads the way we do. It's bad for me, but I almost can't help it.

Have you had neck surgery like Dave Mustaine, Tom Araya and others?

HOLT: I had clinical-grade whiplash from the Blue Ridge show; I thought I blew a disc. They gave me an MRI and said it looked like I'd been in a car crash. But no surgery. I dodged a bullet. The problem was, we hadn't done a show for six months and then I went out there and acted like I always do.

"I'm an EBow freak. People think it's keys, but it's guitar"
LEE ALTUS

After 40 years, what keeps this exciting?

ALTUS: Those little moments in the studio when someone finally gets it and everyone high-fives. The fact that we still care — that's the win.

HOLT: If we're lucky, other people like it too. But first, we have to love it. I still love playing shows. I just don't like hurting my neck.

With Slayer and Megadeth retired from recording, would you like to think of Exodus as Big Four studio survivors, along with Metallica, Anthrax and maybe Testament?

HOLT: I've never concerned myself with the Big Four. I always felt like we're the holders of the torch anyway. People ask, "Do you feel upset you were left out?" And my answer is always the same. I know where I was when this was invented. And I know where other people weren't. That's enough for me. I don't need someone else to rewrite history because I was part of it. GW



SIBLING REVELRY

Black Crowes co-founder Rich Robinson explains why he and his brother Chris – a pair of siblings whose relationship went way beyond bickering – are on the creative streak of a lifetime

BY AMIT SHARMA

ROSS HALFIN

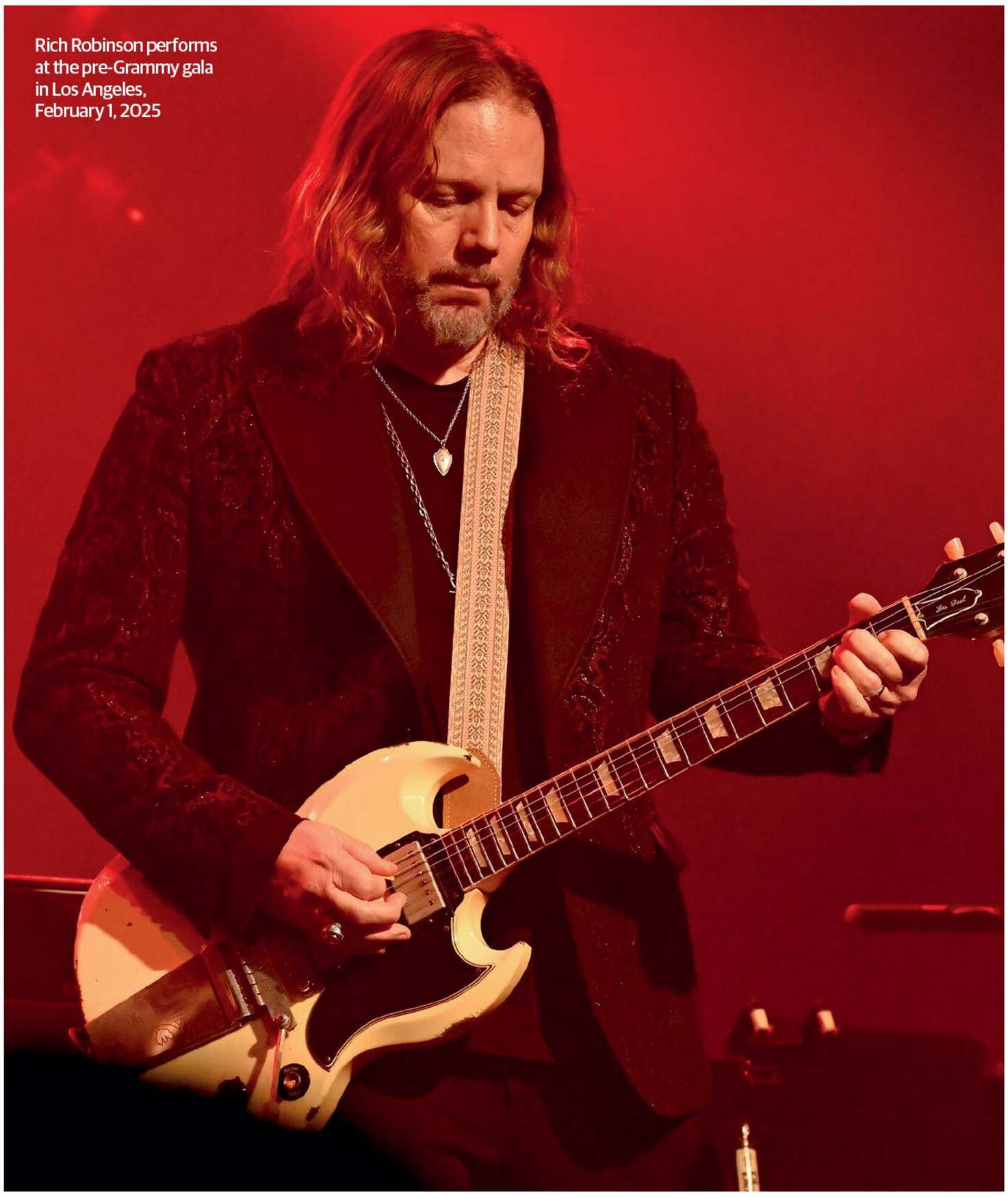
THE BLACK CROWES are making up for lost time. Thanks to disagreements over ownership, which led to a public feud, there was a mighty 15-year gap between 2009's *Before the Frost...Until the Freeze* and their next album of new material, 2024's *Happiness Bastards*. Now, not even a full two years later, the Crowes have returned with *A Pound of Feathers*. Founding singer Chris Robinson and his guitarist brother, Rich, are obviously choosing to strike while the iron is hot, having lost precious time in the heat of bickering so fervent that even Oasis's formerly feuding Gallagher brothers once deemed it "intense."

Despite not having a huge amount in common musically – the Black Crowes best known as Southern rock revivalists and Oasis embodying the essence of Britrock – the two bands famously hit the road together in 2001. With the disputes now firmly put to bed in both camps, one could say the era of sibling rivalry is over and it's goodwill from here on out.

"It's the season of brotherly love," Rich Robinson says with a smile while on a video call with *Guitar World* from his home studio. "That co-headline run with Oasis was great and actually ended up being one of my favorite tours. Those guys are amazing. Noel comes down to our shows sometimes when we play. Chris went to see them on this reunion tour in New York not long ago and said they sounded great. All of the guys in the band are really cool, from Noel and Liam to Gem Archer and Andy Bell. They're good people."

While there's been no word of new music from Oasis just yet, the Black Crowes have been careful in making sure their creative reunion looks to the future as much as it reflects on their storied past. The overwhelmingly warm reaction to *Happiness Bastards* certainly put wind in their sails, with Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Grammy recognition helping the brothers realize they were always going to be stronger together.

"I think the success was a bit surprising for us," Rich says. "We had a long time to write that record. There was a lot to choose from. We took our time, and it was a good statement to come back with after not being in the studio for however many years. We couldn't have been happier with the response."



Rich Robinson performs at the pre-Grammy gala in Los Angeles, February 1, 2025

And now you're back with *A Pound of Feathers*. It definitely feels like all systems go.
Yeah. Time can shape a record — with the last one, it was nice to take our time, write stuff and be cool. But there's also an excitement and instinctual element when you're moving faster, like we were for this one. I have a studio in my house, so I sent Chris a bunch of stuff. I wrote most of it while I was at home after a big tour. We eventually decided it would work better to use a studio as a writing place instead. I had sketches, ideas and riffs — just basic arrangements of songs — so we went into this studio and got two or three songs done a day. The whole record was finished in about 10 days.

You've told me before that you almost always write on acoustic guitar. Is that still the case?
I actually wrote quite a bit on electric this time round. I used the tones to help write the songs. The sound of things can inspire me. An acoustic sound will pull something out and an electric might find something else. This record definitely had a different approach, though we did work with [*producer*] Jay Joyce again. He's someone we love and have a great working relationship with. But as for the writing, I was just in my studio, messing around, playing with amps, finding sounds and experimenting with tones. That had a lot to do with the overall feeling of the record.

Is there anything on the album that feels new for you as a guitarist?
I used a lot more standard tuning on this record. It's just something I was feeling, though I still used my go-to open tunings in places. Sometimes I have an urge to try something I don't try that often, which might be why a lot of the songs were in standard. "Blood Red Regrets" is in DADGAD, which is a new tuning for me. I actually found it hard because all the other tunings have a similar chord structure and pattern. DADGAD presented a challenge, which I got around and overcame. The way the strings ring under the notes you're pressing gives it a specific sound. I'm really proud of how that song came out. It has this middle section that goes acoustic. I was playing this Mellotron pedal over my acoustic part, and then I added a 12-string acoustic on top, plus some bass. It ended up being a really cool tune.

"The whole purpose of rock 'n' roll is to play with abandon. It could go off the rails at any time"

Maybe the tuning helped give it even more of a Led Zeppelin feel.
For sure. That song ended up being my homage to Jimmy Page, especially with that middle section. The riff came out really cool because of the timing; that's what I really like about it. Because of the tuning, the chord structure is all different for me. The chord shapes ring out and have this really cool timbre. There's this Celtic thing that we were tapping into. Like the Bert Jansch recording "Blackwaterside," which Jimmy covered with Led Zeppelin as "Black Mountain Side." DADGAD is such a cool tuning. It pulls these strange things out of me. And then there are all the other people who use that tuning, like Stephen Stills.

It feels like your acoustics are more prominent on this record.
There are definitely more areas of acoustic on this one. It can be quite textural, if you throw in acoustic stuff to create a bigger sound. When recorded properly, acoustics can blend really well with electrics. On "Pharmacy Chronicles" you're hearing my 1964 Gibson J-200. I bought a couple of them. One is blonde and has the nylon bridge pieces, while the other has nickel. The nickel seems to project a little bit more, so that's probably what we used, but they both sound great. It was my first time using J-200s because I've always tended to go with Martin dreadnaughts. When I heard these ones, I couldn't believe how much bottom-end they had, but they also covered all the other frequencies really well. Throw that in there with good mics, a great engineer and producer who know what they are doing and you'll hear everything it can be.

What kind of electrics did you end up using?
I used a bunch of different guitars. I bought a 1967 Guild Starfire, which is kinda cool. It's the same model you see on the cover of that Kinks record [*1965's* The Kink Kontroversy].

LESTER COHEN/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE RECORDING ACADEMY



Chris [*left*] and Rich Robinson. Did Chris know Keith Richards was gonna be on this issue's cover?

ROSS HALFIN

It's a single-cutaway in a cherry-stain finish; I ended up putting different pickups inside. I also played my Gibson ES-335s and my 1956 Les Paul Special on some stuff. When it came to amps, I used my 1968 Marshall Bluesbreaker a bunch. I brought back my Harry Joyce amps back; he's the guy who made the original Hiwatts. I used those on a couple of tracks. I also had this small single-speaker Fifties tweed Fender Vibrolux, which was really ratty-sounding. There's another one Fender made called the White amp [*Fifties-era tube amp by the Fullerton-based White Instrument Co.*], a junior model they originally designed for students — but it sounds fuckin' great. I was able to get a bunch of different tones using all of that.

You used that 1968 Bluesbreaker as a reference point for your own line of Muswell amps, which you launched in 2023. Are those on the record?

I used my main Muswell on about four songs. It's a great-sounding amp. We found these custom transformers made by some guy in the U.S. I have six Muswells, but this one has the different transformer while others might have different tubes. We mismatched a lot of stuff trying to find the best tone. I guess Muswell is more of a boutique brand. People will call in and order one, and then it takes a while to build. Right now there's no infrastructure; it's just one guy building everything. I have a couple of people that want in, so we're getting to a place where we can expand, but I've been so busy playing. There hasn't been a massive launch or any big push with Muswell. I like doing them one at a time.

You've built up a sizable collection of vintage guitars. Which are the most rare?

That's hard to say. I still have my dad's Martin, which they made the signature out of — a 1953 D-28. I have that TV Yellow 1956 Les Paul Special and a 1959 TV Les Paul Junior. I have my ES-335s from 1961, 1962 and 1968, which have very different tones. I have a 1964 Rickenbacker Rose Morris with the f-hole instead of the check; it's the one Pete Townshend used to play, which is pretty rare, apparently. I have quite a few from this period.

The opening track, "Profane Prophecy," kicks off with some of the classic Rolling Stones triads heard on "Start Me Up" and "Brown Sugar."

The excitement of that intro really got me going when I wrote it. I think it just has this cool, instantaneous sound that grabs you. When I write, I'll typically have more of a solid foundation for a song before I send it to Chris. But this time was different. We pushed the ideas quite a bit. "Profane Prophecy" started out a bit different, and then Chris was hearing it the other way around. He'd be like, "I hear this as the chorus," and I'd say "No, that's the verse." Then he'd say, "But this is the verse," and I'd say "No, that's the chorus!" We had to work it out together. It was a combination of a couple of songs. I had the opening part and the middle bridge in a different song, but I realized it would work better like this. It was pieced together.

"Cruel Streak" has a standout riff with its mixture of ringing open strings and walking chromatics.

There's a bunch of stuff in there. Again, that one took a journey. I had it as this thing, and then it evolved. It's so funny to hear how much it changed. A lot of times when I write these things, I'll have a pretty specific idea of where I think it's going to go, and then sometimes it might take this complete left turn. That was really cool. We changed up the drumbeat and the arrangement, because the chorus was originally a bridge, but it was too cool to be just a bridge. It made a lot of sense in the end. But I'm very proud of that main riff and how it sits with the drums, alongside what Chris was bringing to the table.



The Robinson brothers in action in Las Vegas, November 7, 2025. There's that Keith Richards T-shirt again...

Another big guitar moment is how you bring down your dynamics and use fingerstyle to interact with the keys on "Eros Blues," creating what feels like an improvised conversation between the two instruments.

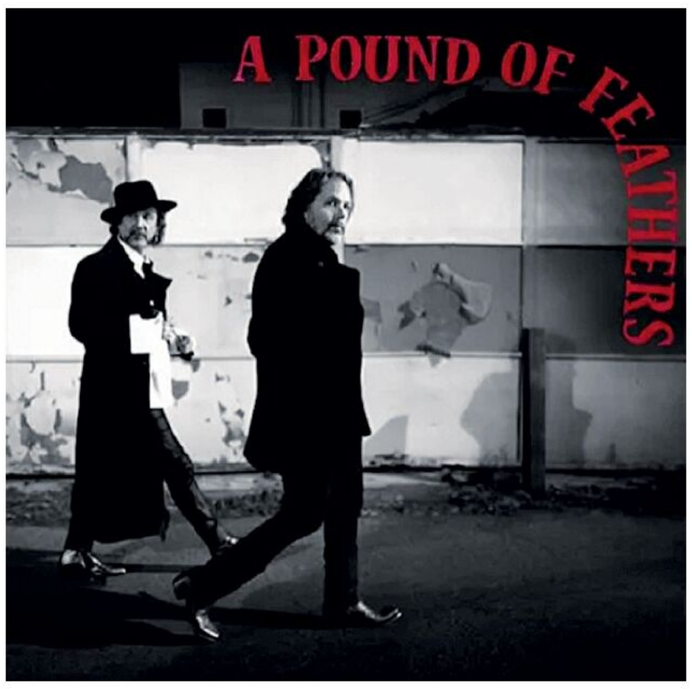
That was another case of two songs being put together. I had the bridge section and was trying to figure out where to use it. Chris had the idea of changing the dynamic in the verses. When it gets to that chorus section, it's pretty amazing. That song is almost like a journey. You start with this one kind of thing and then get into this whole other realm. It's floaty and ethereal, and then all of a sudden that chorus hook kicks in. I love the juxtaposition.

What's your favorite solo on the album?

There's a song called "Do the Parasite!" with this middle section that's almost like an AC/DC breakdown. I love the solo I played. There's the solo I played at the end of "Profane Prophecy"; I love how it tied everything in. But I'm happy with all of it. We were going to bring everyone in, but we had about 10 days of working just me, Chris and Cully [*Symington*], our drummer, just to get the songs to a place. Sometimes, when it's all working and very organic, it's best just to carry on as is. Chris would say, "Throw a bass on there and some more guitars here," and then I'd do it. Before we knew it, the take would be done. Trying to deconstruct that and bring in more people would've been overdoing it. Sometimes when you capture something, when you try to recapture that thing, it doesn't work. Most of the time, it won't work.

Maybe that's why it almost feels more like a jam record in places.

It was a really cool way to make a record. Everything sounds like we're excited. With all of that, you get drawn in and that all translates into what you are doing. A lot of these songs were played two or three times and that's it. I haven't actually played them since, so I'll have to relearn a lot of it before we start rehearsing just to figure out which parts I'm going to play and which parts our other guitarist, Nico [*Bereciartua*], is going to play. On the album I played everything, all of the acoustics, electrics and slide, but then again I've played slide on pretty much every record I've made. Our intention was to bring everyone in, but once you start and find yourself with eight or nine songs done in a week, it feels great and you know everything is working well. We didn't want to fuck with that.



There's a lot to be said for the chemistry between you and Nico on stage. But for some fans, what you had with Marc Ford was also very special. Could you ever work with him again?

I don't think so; I'd say that time is done. It just went south again. When Marc and I started playing again [in the Magpie Salute], everybody was cool and it was all purposeful. But the same patterns came back and it took a wrong turn. I didn't want to deal with that anymore, which was a bummer because I liked our band and everyone else was cool. It got to a point where I was like, "Why should I deal with this?" Nico and I have a great relationship.

What made him fit into the band so easily?

He loves the Black Crowes, including how Marc Ford played, and that's a good thing. His parts are very true stylistically to what we're doing. Even though he's from Argentina, he grew up loving the same stuff. We'll talk to each other about songs from *I've Got My Own Album to Do* by Ronnie Wood or old Small Faces and Rolling Stones riffs. We have very

BRYAN STEFFY/GETTY IMAGES

similar musical tastes, so it's a combination of that with his love for the Crowes that helps us play and weave together so well. It's an artform, having two guitar players get up there and share the stage.

The heavy dose of reverb and tremolo on "Doomsday Doggerel" could make it one of the most atmospheric tracks you've ever recorded.

I was getting a tone for something else and playing this random riff, just to mess with the tremolo. Chris was like, "What's that?" and I told him it was nothing, I was just making it up. Then he asked me to write a song around it. He loved what I came up with right away. Originally I was playing my big Gretsch, the signature Magpie Blue model [*Gretsch G6136T-RR Rich Robinson Magpie*]. I put a ton of reverb on it, and the part was going to sit in the background. I kept playing it over and over, and it turned into a song. And you're right, it's definitely different, I've never done anything like that before. It almost reminds me of the B-52s' early stuff. That guitar player [*Ricky Wilson*] was far out, man. He played such cool stuff on an old Mosrite that, I think, only had four strings on it. His approach to chords was really out there, especially on songs like "52 Girls" or "Dance This Mess Around" from their debut record. He had this really cool thing going on, it was so interesting. People don't talk about how good he was.

"As for pedals... a lot of my solos on the album were just the amp turned up to 10"

Where did the tremolo and other effects come from?

The only pedals I can remember using were the Guyatone Flip VT-X Vintage Tremolo and the Electro-Harmonix Mel9. I have some Strymon stuff, too. A lot of my solos were just the amp turned up to 10.

Your sound has always been very pure and honest. Even with digital gear getting better and better, we can't imagine you plugging into a laptop.

They're getting close, but you can never account for the physics of a room. What's the humidity like? What's the oxygen level like? Are you at high altitude or low altitude? What's the shape of the room? Where is the microphone being placed? All of these things can have a big effect on your sound. Your tone that comes out will always be what it is, but everything else needs to be taken into consideration. Then there's the feeling aspect. You have this symbiotic relationship with your amp. You're literally connected to it. You're plugged in and feeling that. It's vibrating the floor and you're hearing it, feeling it and playing with it. I think that's when it becomes like this big oscillation. You're in it.

And if you didn't have that, you'd end up playing differently.

Exactly. Personally, I just can't stand computers. To be able to stand in front of amps and hear the rest of the band play is exciting. The whole purpose of rock 'n' roll is to [*play with*] abandon. It could go off the rails at any time. If everybody is on a computer listening to a click track playing their music around the light show rather than the actual songs, there's no chance of greatness or failure. But when you plug in, there's always a fine line that you are driving toward. That's the exciting part. You are stretching, like, "Oh shit, I'm gonna go over here and try this!" Sometimes you fail, but if you can pull it off, it's magic. I think computers suck that out of everyday life. There's nothing more boring than sitting at a computer. GW



KEVIN MAZUR



Stone Free

One drops everything when offered an out-of-the-blue interview with Keith Richards. One also picks up pearls of wisdom about his new ES-355, "ornery" Chuck Berry and what can only be described as, um, guitar lust

BY JOEL MCIVER

"**THIS IS KEITH"** is a pretty mundane phrase, but when you answer your phone and you hear those three simple words growled at you by the most distinguished rhythm guitarist of all time, they make a lasting impression. The 30-minute interview that follows is no less impactful. Even at 82 years old, Keith Richards is in devilish form, prone to laughing hysterically at his own jokes, dropping clusters of F-bombs, mocking some of *GW*'s more naive questions and generally behaving like the snaggle-toothed Captain Jack Sparrow caricature that all Rolling Stones fans recognize and appreciate. Talking to him, you don't feel like you're in the company of some godlike rock star; you feel like you're backstage at a Stones show, laughing it up over life's more surreal and stupid moments.

Still, Richards, who was infamously labeled "mad, bad and dangerous to know" more than half a century ago — and with good reason (you already know the coke, heroin and switchblade anecdotes) — is a mellower character these days than the terrifying Glimmer Twin persona of decades past. He's a well-spoken fellow; you can still hear traces of the suburban London accent that he shares with his fellow Stone Mick Jagger as he talks enthusiastically and at length about all things guitar. He's a committed lover of his instrument — almost literally, by the sound of it — and is especially keen to discuss his latest signature model, the Gibson Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector's Edition.

Built by hand at Gibson's custom shop in Nashville and available in a limited run of 150 units, 50 of which are signed on the F-hole label and headstock and 100 on the label only, this guitar comes in at a marriage-destroying $29,999 and $19,999 respectively, in other words too expensive for you and me; well, maybe you but definitely me.

The point of the new ES-355 model is that Richards' original, which has been 3D-scanned by Gibson to make the new version a millimetrically-identical copy,



The Stones in 1978. "There's something between us," Richards says of Ronnie Wood [*left*]. "It was the same with me and Mick Taylor and with Brian Jones"

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

occupies a rare spot in guitar history; he used it (among other guitars) to record the Stones' seminal *Sticky Fingers* and *Exile On Main St.* albums in 1971 and '72, and has used it on every Stones tour since 1997. If you ever get your hands on one, count yourself lucky.

The same adjective applies to Richards himself. He's still in pretty good shape despite an early-career adherence to the rock 'n' roll lifestyle that few could possibly survive; he's an acknowledged legend in his own lifetime; and he still wants to be better at what he does. I was expecting him to be pretty jaded at the prospect of yet another guitar-related interview, but the opposite turned out to be true. You'll enjoy the chat that follows, even if your relationship with your instrument isn't quite as intimate as his.

Hello, Keith. Are you at home in Connecticut?

I am, yes. We're absolutely snowed in. Nobody can get here except a man with a snowplow. He's working away right now. I quite like it, because it means I can't get out.

This new Gibson ES-355 of yours is pretty tasty, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah! What a surprise, and what a fuckin' honor. I tell you, when they came at me with this one, I was like, "How can I refuse?" It was a shock to me at first, because when I started, the idea of even owning a Gibson was pretty much out of the picture.

There are only 150 of them. How many of them are Gibson giving you?

Oh look, I have enough guitars already.

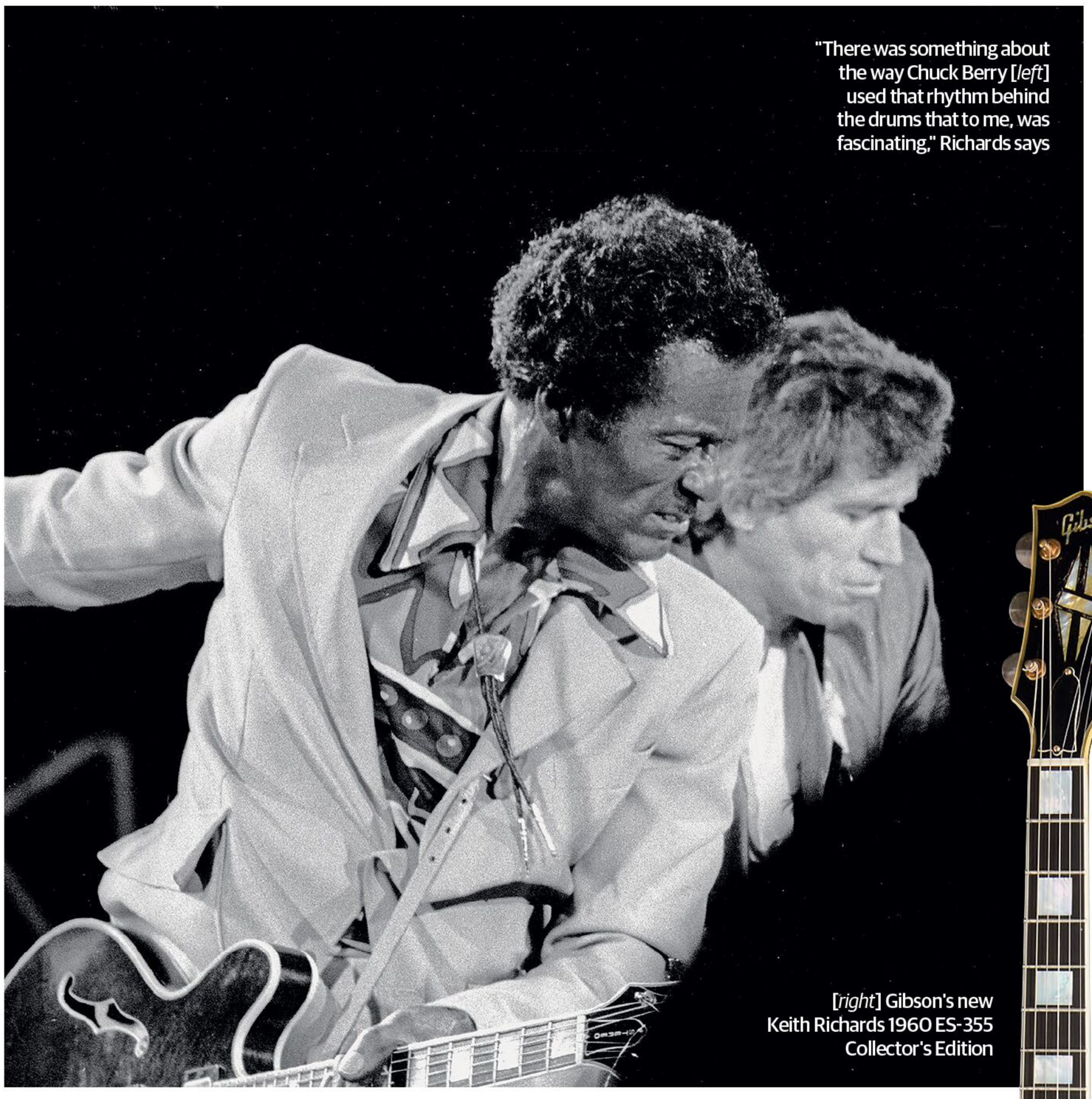
> "When I started playing, the idea of even owning a Gibson was pretty much out of the picture"

Is it true you have 3,000 guitars in your personal collection?

It's something like that. You can call my guitar man, Pierre de Beauport, if you want the exact number, but it's around there. But it's not like I go around buying them or anything; a lot of these guitars have been given to me. I've never seen them all. I actually only use about... well, the working number is about 15 guitars in the rack, for different sounds and whatever. But the other 2,900, I don't know. They're taken care of, though. I mean, this is a prime collection.

You're known for putting groove into your playing and hanging back behind the beat.

It's actually nothing you can put into words, because it's just the way I feel the rhythm. I always say that I can only do this because I've been blessed with the best drummers in the world. I have the luxury of knowing that the guy knows what he's doing, you know.



"There was something about the way Chuck Berry [*left*] used that rhythm behind the drums that to me, was fascinating," Richards says

[*right*] Gibson's new Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector's Edition

JAMES FRAHER/REDFERNS, GIBSON

Were you the first guitar player to bring that swing to rock music?
Well, if you think about it, it's the other way around. Rock music came out of swing music. You listen to any of the old Thirties and Forties big bands; they're playing as much rock 'n' roll as Bill Haley or Little Richard. The essence of a lot of it was in those big bands and their rhythm sections.

You played with Chuck Berry in the Eighties. What was he like?
Chuck, as a person, was an ornery old fucker — a *lovable*, ornery old fucker.

Why do you admire his guitar playing?
The same thing you're talking about; there was something about the way he used that rhythm behind the drums that, to me, was fascinating. He said to me, "I was just playing with the right guys, [*bassist*] Willie Dixon and [*pianist*] Johnnie Johnson." And that's the way I feel about the way I play — lucky to play with the right guys. We're talking about a mysterious thing, a thing called feel, a thing called groove. Luckily you can't put your finger on it, you know. But I try! [*Laughs*]

Is the way you weave lead and rhythm parts playing with Ronnie Wood an unspoken thing?
Oh, absolutely. There's something between us. It was the same with me and with Mick Taylor, and also with Brian Jones, back at the beginning. You'd meet the right guys and automatically they knew that "You take over here, I'll come in underneath," and there was a beautiful little ballet going on. That's amazing, and that's what makes it worth doing, you know — this interconnection between musicians.

When it works, it seems almost telepathic.
Yeah, it is kinda telepathic, in a way. I suppose. You can put that word on it. [*Shouts*] Ronnie! [*Laughs*] And it's something you don't wanna fuck with. Once it's there, you don't talk about it amongst yourselves. It's an unspoken reliance upon each other, which is a beautiful thing.

"I very rarely play with stiffs! I've been lucky to play with the best. Little Richard, Scotty Moore... Should I go on?"

You mentioned Brian Jones, who we rarely discuss as a guitarist. What was his playing like?
Personally, he was the first steel slide player I heard. His middle name could have been Elmore, because he used to just play Elmore James stuff. He was really, really in front of that game, and that's what I really admired about him when we first started playing together. This band was started by a piano player, Ian Stewart, and he had Brian with him. Once I heard Brian playing Elmore James, I thought, "I've found a guy here who I can mess with," and then we got into Jimmy Reed stuff and, of course, Muddy Waters, all of that... I wouldn't call it a university education. [*Laughs*]

Have you ever played with a guitarist who couldn't groove?
I very rarely play with stiffs! I've been lucky to play with the best. Listen, I've played with the guys I grew up listening to. Little Richard, Scotty Moore. Jesus Christ, should I go on? [*Laughs*]

Did you know John Mayall?
I had great admiration for John. He was such a scholarly guy about it. John was sort of a shadowy figure. A lot of those guys came out of the folk music scene, as it was known at the time, because for some weird reason in those early years, there were hierarchies between traditional jazz and folk music. You know, people got fussy about shit. Anyway, it was amazing to me that these guys were dying to play music that comes from thousands of miles away and that it resonated with them. Therefore the resonation continues; music is about resonation.



Richards on acoustic in 1984. "You can't become an electric guitar player without knowing where the damn thing comes from," he says

Did you like the British folk guitarists?
Yeah, I did listen to them, and they were good pickers, you know. Wizz Jones used to come round to my house and hang out for a few free cigarettes and show you a lick or two. Do you remember Wizz Jones? He was an incredible guy. I really actually admired those guys. Bert Jansch was fuckin' amazing. And unrecognized, really, for how great they were.

When you got into open-G tuning on five strings, it seemed to change your whole view of guitar playing.
It did, actually, and anybody that tries to get into it, it changes their fucking mind, too. [*Laughs*] Because it is a really strange setup, especially if you're used to six-string guitars. You have to reconfigure everything, and you realize you've restricted yourself to five strings and three open notes [*GDGBD*], you know. You have to learn to play the chords. I figured it out. It's still fascinating. I'm still rambling around in there, looking for stuff.

Is the objective of the partial chords you often play to strip the music down?
Yeah, basically, because with five strings in open G, your bottom string is a G, so you're immediately stripping away a whole load of possibilities of being Jimi Hendrix. [*Laughs*] Also, if you get into it, you find a million other things people haven't explored before, or at least, very few of us have. For me, it started off as an interesting sort of experiment and then I suddenly found that, hey, this is the stuff.

You mentioned Hendrix. Did you ever want to be a virtuoso soloist yourself?
No, I have never really wanted to go down that path. I mean, with solos, I admire the virtuoso and the technique and the nimbleness, but at the end of the day, what are you soloing over? You're the icing on the cake. And I'm the cake!

So what did you think of the Sunset Strip shredders that got big in the Eighties?
[*Laughs*] I laughed my fuckin' head off! Like, "Oh my God, what have we spawned?"

They were skilled players, though.
Yeah, they were good pickers, and they had a hit record here and there, but that's pop music. Look, as long as you've got something to solo over, then go. But that never appealed to me. What appeals to me is what's going on underneath. What I really do love is two or three guitars playing together, because that's what fascinates me. Just one guy soloing means nothing much to me. Right?

> "With solos, at the end of the day, what are you soloing over? You're the icing on the cake. And I'm the cake!"

Do you play fewer notes these days?
Yes, I do, because I'm not as fast as I used to be. [*Laughs*] I tell you what, at my age, what I find most interesting about the guitar is you can compensate for certain disabilities and nimbleness and find other ways of getting around the problem, and it still teaches you another thing – you never stop learning with the damn thing. I love it and it's my friend forever. If I had to, I'd fuck it.

Noted. Are your hands holding up OK at age 82?
Well, I do have arthritis and very large knuckles. They don't hurt, but it does get in the way sometimes. I'm going for a wider fingerboard for that reason.

Do you warm your hands up before a show?
I sit on 'em. No, I do have one of those hand pumps, you know. I'm really lax, quite

LUCIANO VITI/GETTY IMAGES



Richards' signature on the headstock of a new Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector's Edition



Richards playing his original Gibson ES-355 in 2013

SIMONE JOYNER/GETTY IMAGES, GIBSON

honestly. I just look at my hands and my hands look at me, and we say, "Well, let's see what we can do today." And that's the way I play guitar. I look at it and I say, "We've got nothing else to do. Come here. I love you!" [*Laughs*]

What's your favorite song ever?
What, just one? Oh man, you're sticking me against the wall. You're killing me here.

It's what we do.
Yeah! I gotta go with Robert Johnson's "Come On in My Kitchen." It's all there — originality, everything. It's fantastic.

And if you could only play one guitar for the rest of your life, which would it be?
Whoa... you're a firing squad, ain't ya? I have a little black Gibson looking at me right now, a 1936 acoustic, broken, battered. I'd keep that one with me.

You've often said acoustic playing is at the heart of what you do.
Well, you can't become an electric guitar player without knowing where the damn thing comes from. If you don't get the basics, where do you think you're going to end up? [*Laughs*]

Are you still learning as a guitar player?
Who isn't? That's the beauty of the thing. My teacher never stops teaching. I've been at it for years now and he still knows more than me.

Have you got any advice for our younger readers about guitar playing?
I cannot give you any advice, kids. If you love the thing and feel like playing it, just dig in and find out yourself. It's a great pal, and when there's nothing else around, there's always a guitar. It becomes a friend, a real deep friend, and also a challenge. It looks at you across the room and leers at you. [*Laughs*] "Come on, you ain't got nothing out of me yet."

It's been 11 years since your last solo album. Will you do another one?
I'm thinking about it. I never plan these things. [*Rolling Stones drummer*] Steve Jordan and I were having a chat about it the other day, and usually you start by just saying, "Let's go in and cut a track or two." Sometimes that's what happens, and other times you say, "Hey, here's another one, and here's another one." So I'm not counting it out.

Are you still inspired to write songs?
Oh, God, long may they come. They come out of nowhere. They come out of babies' mouths, they come out of a car crash; you never know. Everything's a song.

They say the best songs come when you're feeling anger and frustration. Is that true in your experience?
Anger and frustration help for a while, but you'll never make a living at it.

What makes you happy these days?
Well, breathing. [*Laughs*] No, this winter my grandkids have been around. They're all ones and twos and threes; it's fascinating to watch. I'm starting to get the hang of it, you know. Over this winter, they've been my inspiration.

What are your goals at this point?
To make it to the next winter! GW

Keith Richards: A Life in Guitars

Micawber, Malcolm, Sonny – in the world of Keith Richards, even his guitars are characters. But there's more to his collection than these famous Teles. Thousands more...

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

WHEN CONSIDERING "KEITH Richards the guitar player," what's the first guitar you think of? For many of us, it might just be a Fender Telecaster, perhaps "Micawber," Richards' Number 1, the 1953 Blackguard with five strings and a Frankenstein spec, a battered Butterscotch Blonde forever slung at a 45-degree angle from Richards' hip. Or perhaps it's "Malcolm," a '54 model in natural finish that has similarly been augmented, five-strings, left in open tunings. Then there's the black 1975 Fender Telecaster Custom, which made its debut – as did Keith's latest foil, the Faces' Ronnie Wood – on the Stones' Tour of the Americas '75, or Sonny, his '67 Sunburst Tele. But let's dial it back to the beginning because these Teles tell only a small part of the Keith Richards story.

EARLY DAYS: 1960-'64

The population of Richards' guitar collection is estimated to range between 1,000 and 3,000, but – just like the rest of us – he had to start somewhere. His mother got him a Rosetti acoustic when he was around 13. 10 pounds was a good amount of money in 1959, but it proved a shrewd investment. Richards was confronted with traditional Spanish number "Malagueña" early on; taught by his grandfather, it was the first song Richards learned. Thus the acoustic would become key, not only to Richards' playing style but his entire guitar philosophy. He often speaks of the acoustic's purity. Learn to work it, and only then can you appreciate what it takes to use the electric.

As Richards says, "The electric guitar? All they did was put a phone in it. But it was the right phone at the right time." For a band with an electric pulse, it is remarkable that so many occasions have called for the acoustic guitar.

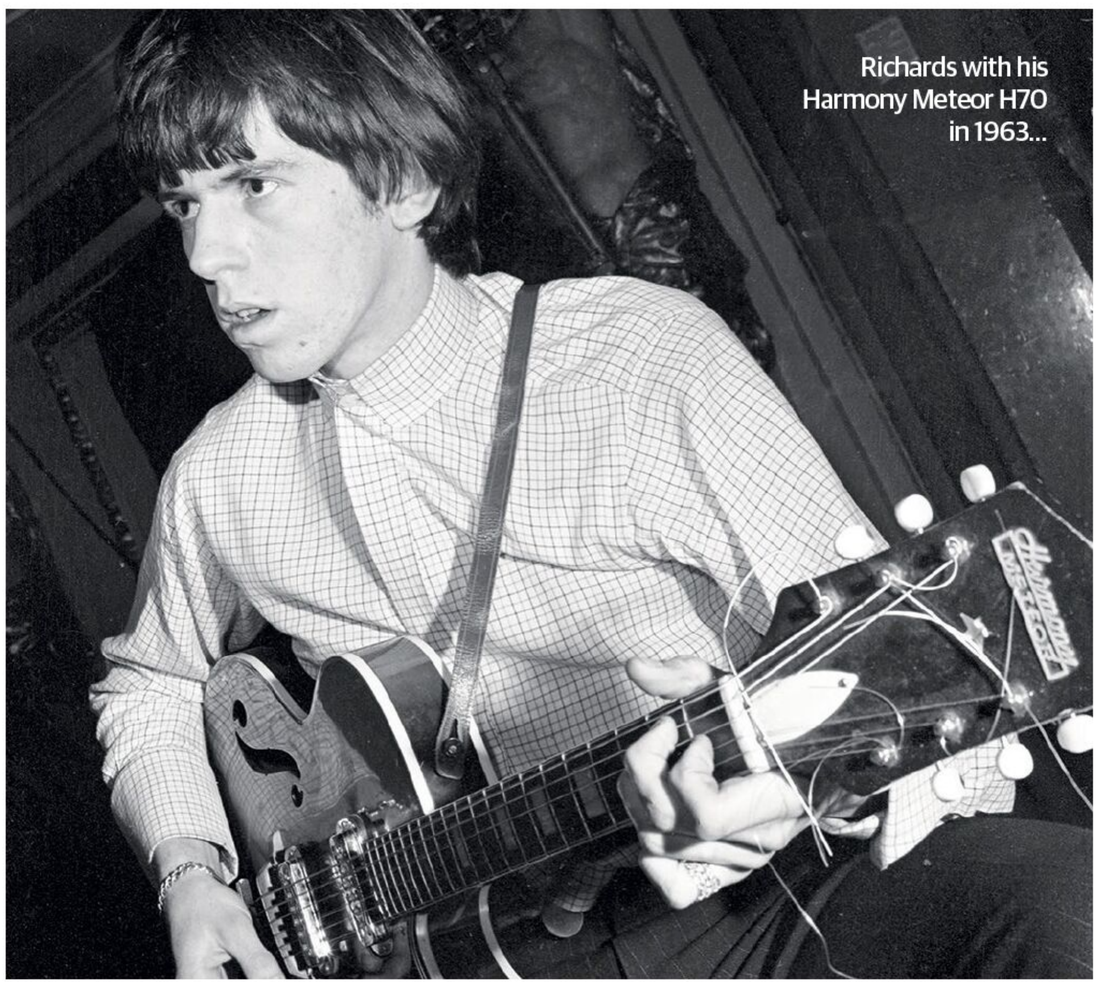
When the Rolling Stones parked themselves in London's Regent Street Studios in January 1964 to record their debut album, Richards' electric of choice was a Harmony Meteor H70 he had bought the previous year.

> "Most people used open tuning basically just for slide. But I wanted to use it for rhythm guitar"

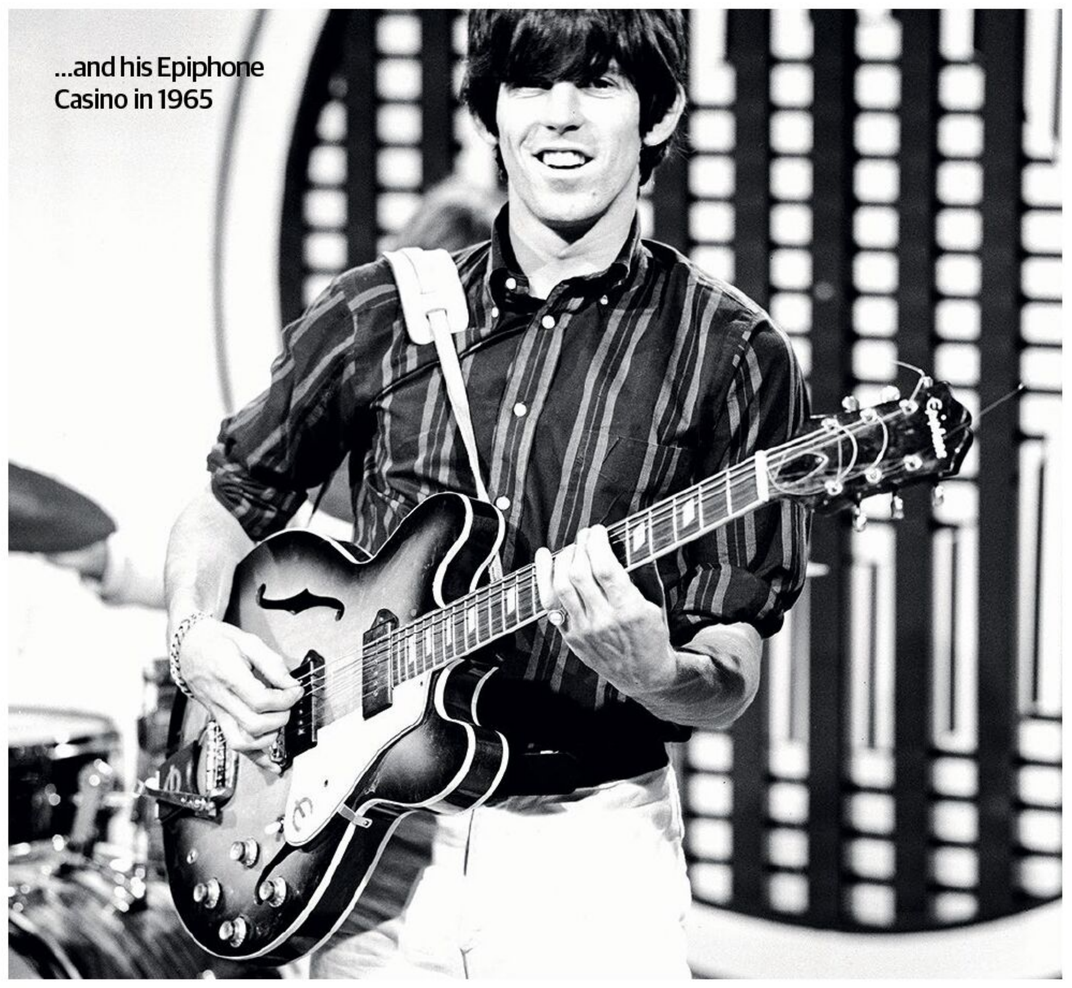
The Meteor had a thin, hollow, arch-top body of spruce and maple and a short-scale length of 24 inches. A pair of gold-foil DeArmond pickups gave the Meteor a raw tone that would become part of the soundtrack to the Sixties. The Kinks' Dave Davies is playing one on "You Really Got Me."

The Stones' self-titled debut showcased the Meteor, but it was his 1963 Harmony H1270 12-string acoustic on "Tell Me (You're Coming Back)" that suggested the Stones weren't just another beat combo. A 12-string jumbo, the H1270 was an early studio star for the Stones. Richards used it on "Not Fade Away," "Good Times, Bad Times" and "Play with Fire." On "Tell Me (You're Coming Back)," Richards let the 12-string and vocals bleed into one mic. Using as little separation as possible would become a leitmotif of the Stones' future recording sessions. As would the 12-string; its woozy, chorusing quality would jive just as well on the Stones' more psychedelic jams as it did on the bone-dry directness of "Not Fade Away."

In 2004, Richards' H1270 was sold at auction for $33,460, but if you scour the internet you could pick up a vintage Sixties model with an aftermarket L.R. Baggs pickup for



Richards with his Harmony Meteor H70 in 1963...



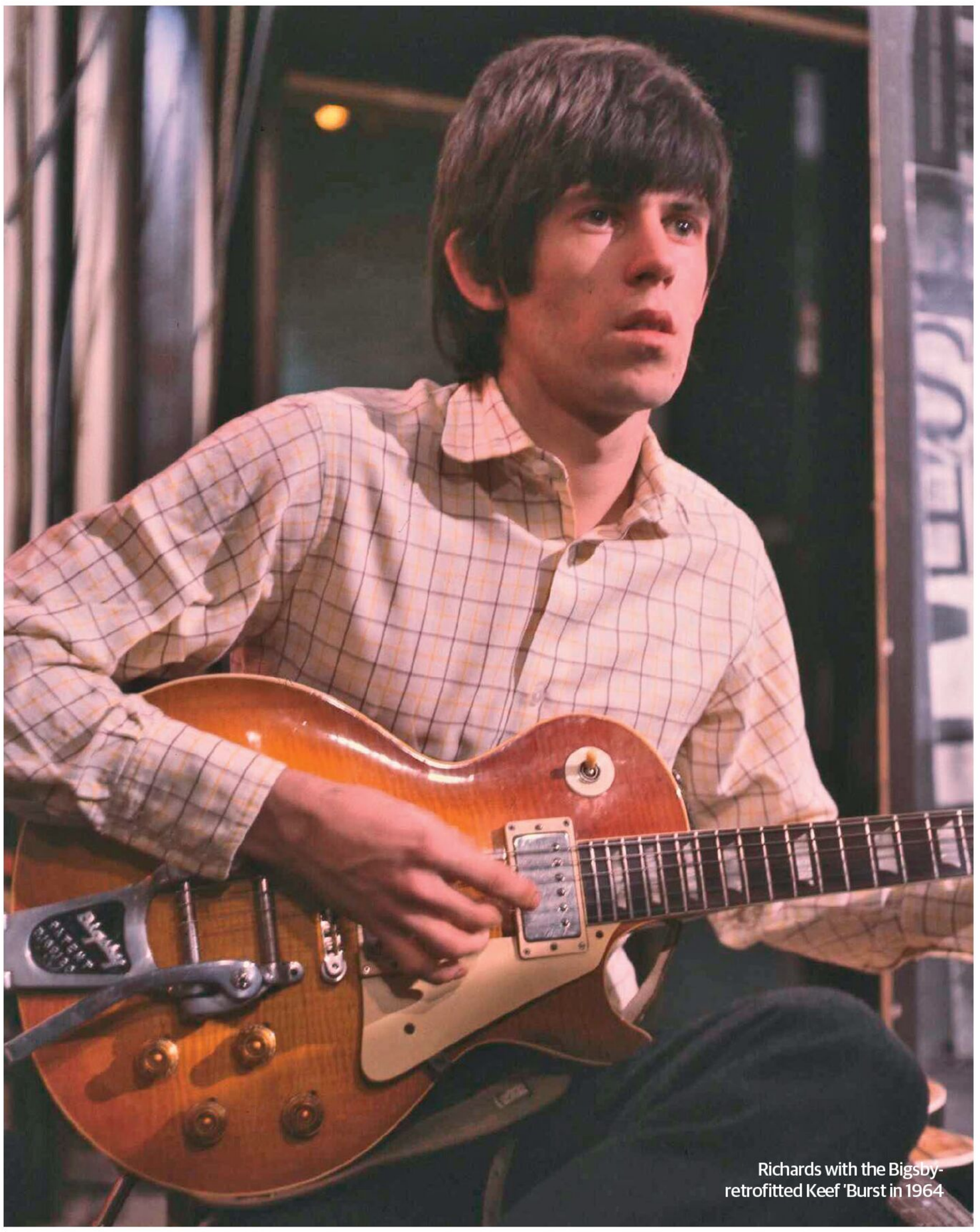
...and his Epiphone Casino in 1965

around $600. Richards' Meteor was joined by a Kalamazoo-era 1962 Epiphone Casino as the Stones' career took off. The doublecut archtop had a fully hollow build of laminate maple and birch and featured a pair of P90s and a tune-o-matic bridge. If the first two albums were handled by hollow-bodies, Richards would turn to a heavyweight when it came to recording *Out of Our Heads*.

THE KEEF 'BURST, "SATISFACTION" AND THE ROAD TO '69

The 1959 Les Paul Standard is the Holy Grail for Gibson aficionados – and it's priced accordingly in six-figures on the vintage market. The Keef Burst, which Richards took receipt of some time in '64, was retro-fitted with a Bigsby vibrato. He sold it to Mick Taylor in 1967, only for it to return to the band when Taylor replaced Brian Jones in 1969. Its final destination is shrouded in mystery, with a collector rumored to have paid more than a million dollars for it, but we do know that the late 'Burst maven Bernie Marsden once owned it, telling *Guitarist* magazine, "You know the famous one I let go because it wasn't as good as the Beast? That was the Keith Richards one! It's not that it was bad. I already had one – the Beast – and I got offered double the money I'd paid for the Keith 'Burst in 1974. I didn't know it would become a million-dollar guitar."

The Keef 'Burst ushered in a changing of the guard for Richards' recording guitars. It first made an appearance on the Stones' '64 tour, popping up on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Richards leaned on it heavily for the *Out of Our Heads* sessions, which assumed huge cultural significance as soon as Richards pressed one of Gibson's new-fangled



Richards with the Bigsby-retrofitted Keef 'Burst in 1964

JEFF HOCHBERG/GETTY IMAGES, STANLEY BIELECKI/ASP/GETTY IMAGES TV TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone pedals into action for the "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" riff. He had always maintained it was a horn part, and kismet played its part with the arrival of the fuzz pedal.

"The way Otis Redding ended up doing it is probably closer to my original conception for the song," he told *Guitar World*. "It's an obvious horn riff. And when this new Fuzz Tone pedal arrived in the studio from the local dealership or something, I said, "This is good. It's got a bit of sustain, so I can use it to sketch out the horn line."

If the band had hitherto mined American R&B, blues and early rock 'n' roll for inspiration, 1966 saw the release of *Aftermath*, the Stones' first album of all-original material.



The Ampeg Dan Armstrong in 1968

There was now a sense of danger about the band. Richards was enjoying an open relationship with his guitars, pursuing new sounds. An electric 12-string appeared on "Mother's Little Helper," some "gashed-up job" that he played slide on. Richards also was pictured on the cover of the April 1966 issue of *Beat Instrumental* with a Guild M-65 Freshman, a lightweight hollowbody with a bound maple top and mahogany back and sides.

While a spruce-topped Gibson Heritage had been a regular companion on TV spots, come the mid-Sixties, Gibson's most brightly feathered dreadnought, the Hummingbird, flew in through his window and left its mark on wax, most notably on "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Street Fighting Man."

"On 'Street Fighting Man,' there's one six-string and one five-string acoustic," Richards told *Guitar World*. "They're both in open tunings, but then there's a lot of capo work." The Stones at their most propulsive, "Jumpin' Jack Flash" was recorded with a Hummingbird sharing the mix with another acoustic in Nashville tuning. Richards used his Phillips or Norelco cassette recorders to compress them, changing their character; it was as though the acoustics were resisting their physical limitations.

"I played a Gibson Hummingbird tuned to either open E or open D with a capo," Richards said. "I added another guitar over the top, but tuned to Nashville tuning."

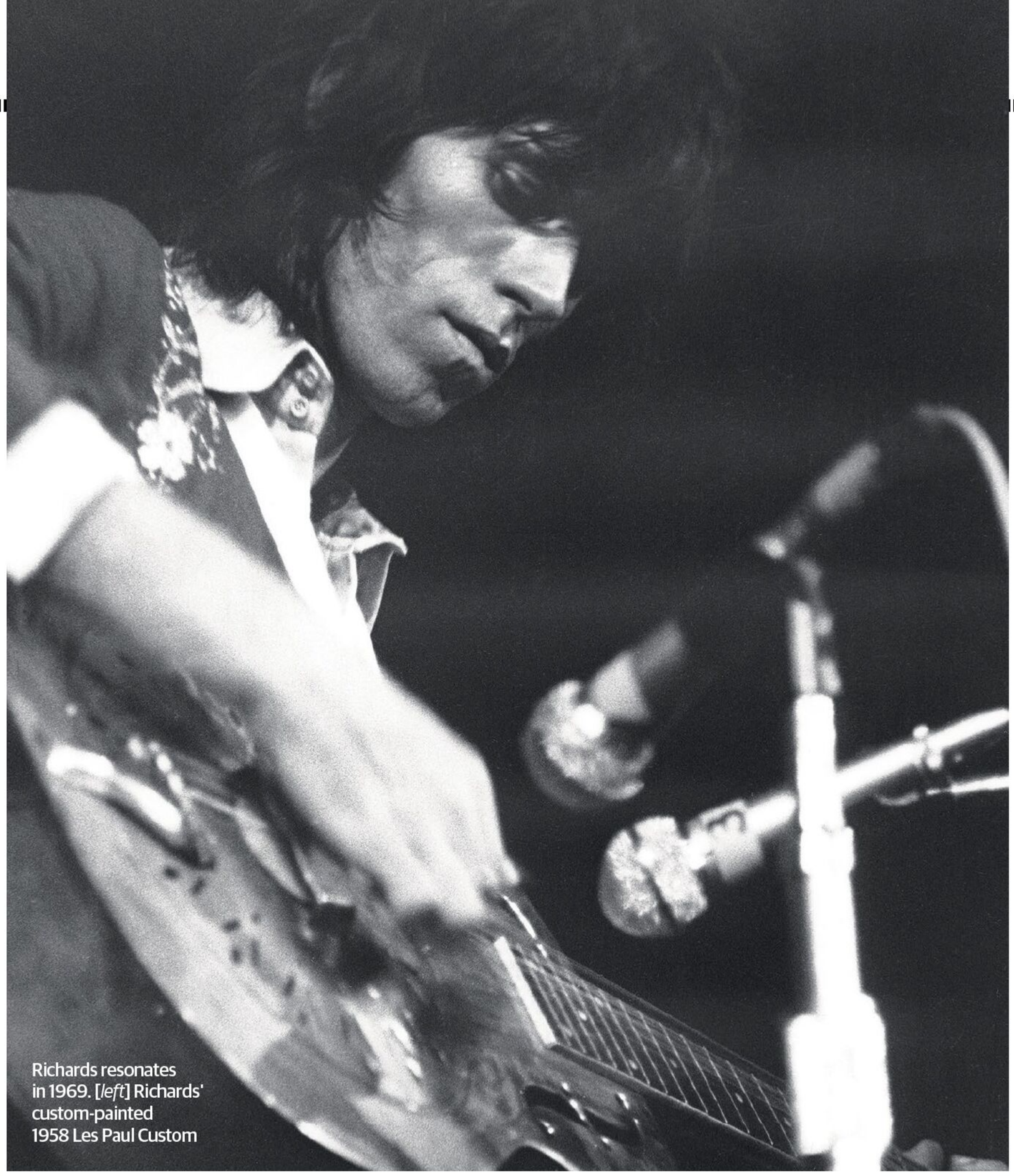
On occasion, he'd play a Gibson Firebird and had started playing a 1958 Les Paul Custom with a custom graphic. This, after all, was the Sixties, and they were gathering pace. By the time the band were to hit the U.S. for the 1969 tour, which resulted in controversy, craziness, bloodshed at Altamont and one of the finest live recordings in rock history, Richards had a lot to choose from.

Live, the see-through but super-heavy Ampeg Dan Armstrong Plexi entered rotation, as did a newly acquired 1969 Gibson ES-355TD-SV stereo. Also live, Richards used a 1930s National Style O



MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS, NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS





Richards resonates in 1969. [*left*] Richards' custom-painted 1958 Les Paul Custom

resonator on "Prodigal Son" and "You Gotta Move," and a Martin D12-20 12-string with a DeArmond pickup in the soundhole. He'd use a korina Gibson Flying V at the free Hyde Park show, but that would soon disappear.

In 1969, there was a sense that oblivion was on their trail, but somehow they held it together. The guitars? Not so much. When tracking "Gimme Shelter" during the *Let It Bleed* sessions, Richards used a borrowed Maton Supreme Electric 777, an ES-150-style electric, and it would turn out to be the last act in its story.

"At the very last note of the take, the whole neck fell off," Richards told *Guitar World*. "You can hear it on the original track. That guitar had just that one little quality for that specific thing. In a way, it was quite poetic that it died at the end of the track."

FENDER "MICAWBER" TELE: KEEF'S NUMBER ONE

Everyone would like to, and many have tried, but nobody plays the Telecaster quite like Keith Richards. He made the blackguard Tele the coolest guitar on the planet. But, if the Telecaster is the ultimate rock 'n' roll guitar, perhaps it was inevitable it would find its way into Richards' hands.

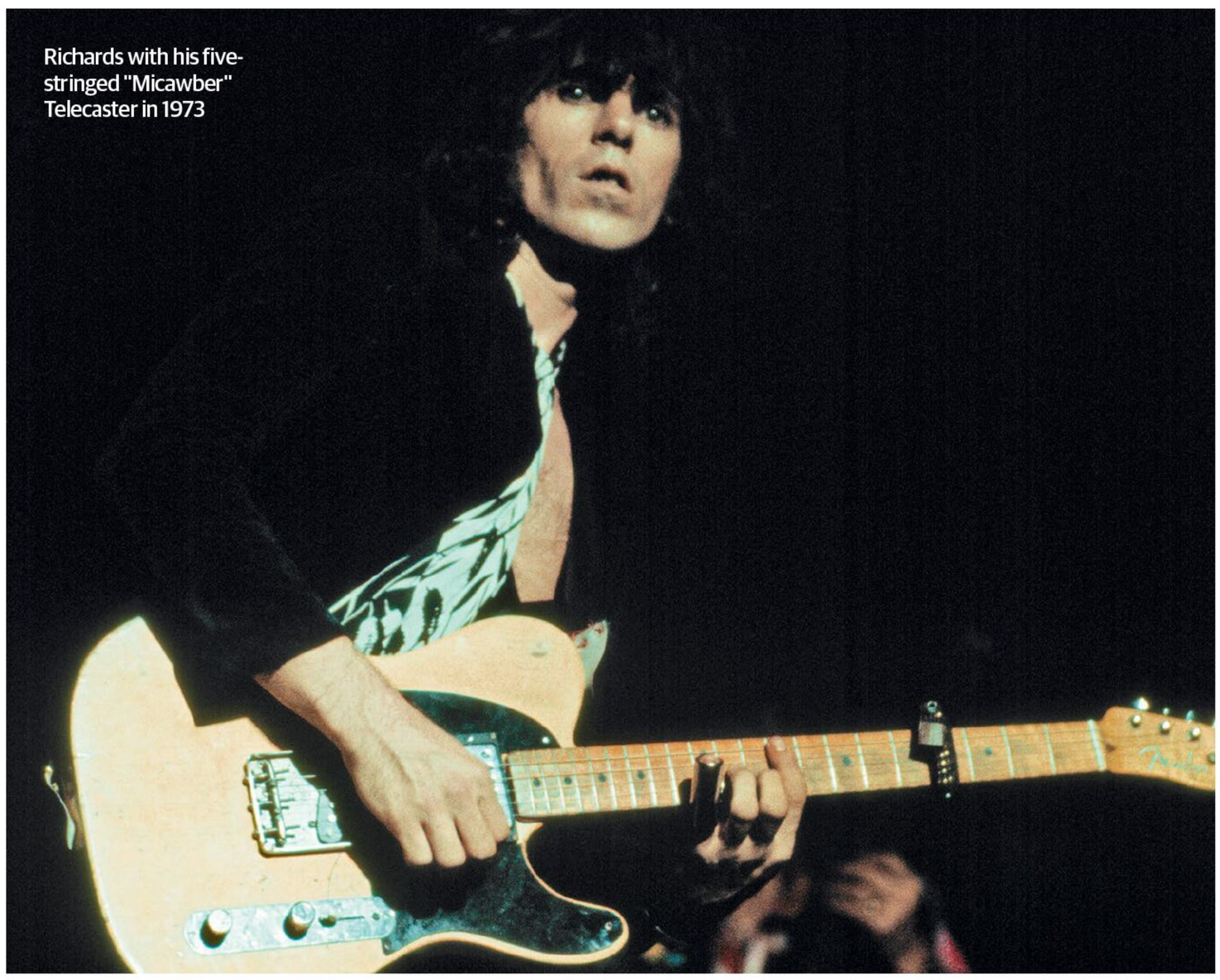
"Around the same time I was getting into Telecasters, I was experimenting with open tunings," Richards told *Guitar World* in 2002. "I don't know why. Maybe it was because around that time, 1967, we started having time off that we didn't know what to do with. So I started to experiment with tunings.

"Most people used open tuning basically just for slide. Nobody used it for anything else. But I wanted to use it for rhythm guitar... Of all the guitars, the Telecaster really lent itself well to a dry, rhythm, five-string drone thing. In a way, that tuning kept me developing as a guitarist."

Micawber is his most-famous Telecaster. A 1950s Tele in Butterscotch Blonde, it was a 27th birthday present from Eric Clapton and soon found itself decamped to Nellcôte as the Stones took shelter from the U.K. taxman under the hot sun in the South of France. *Exile on Main St.* was brewing, and Micawber was there from the ground up. That's when the toolbox came out. The low E string was removed as Richards continued his exploration into open-G tunings. Further modifications changed the menu.

A Gibson PAF humbucker was installed at the neck, a pedal-steel pickup at the bridge. Fundamentally a '54 Tele with a '52 Esquire neck, Micawber (which takes its name from Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*) is a triumph of Richards' "whatever works" ethos, but it arguably kick-started the aftermarket for Fender modifications.

"On 'Street Fighting Man,' there's one six-string and one five-string acoustic, both in open tunings"



Richards with his five-stringed "Micawber" Telecaster in 1973

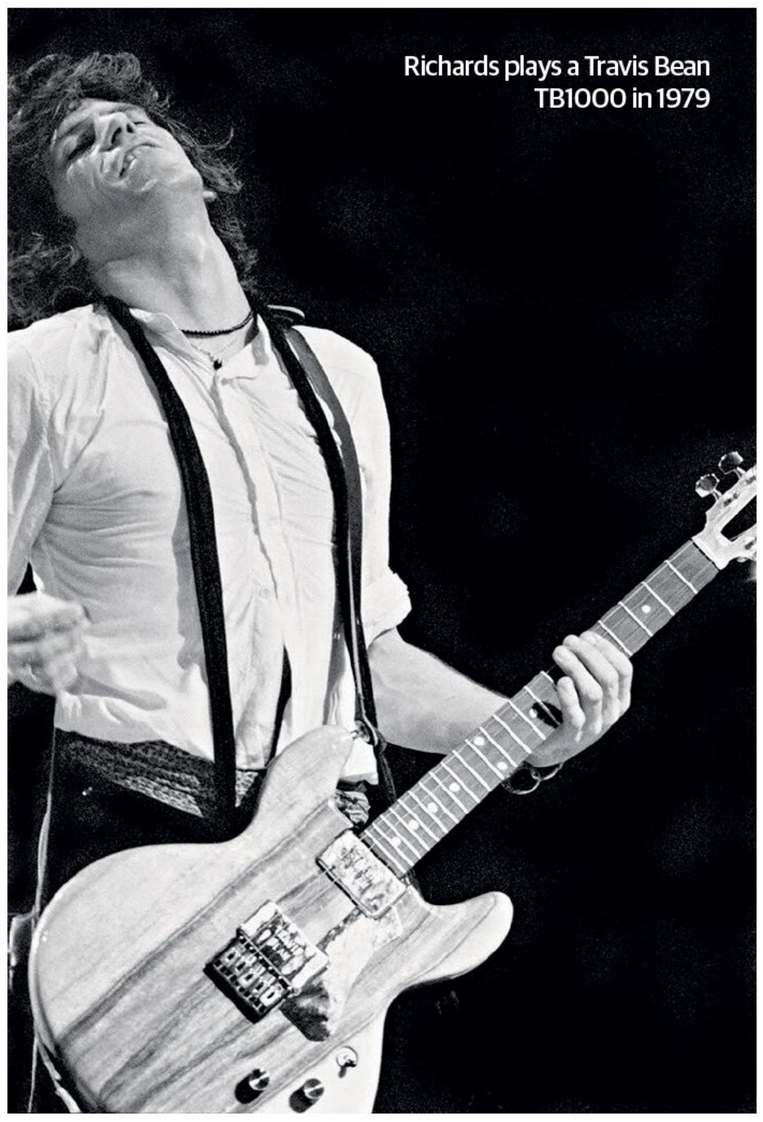
TOM COPI/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

In the Eighties, Richards' tech, Alan Morgan, sourced a brass bridge plate and saddles to make it more roadworthy. With no saddle for the sixth string, Richards' number one Telecaster is a specialist instrument tuned GDGBD for songs such as "Brown Sugar," "Honky Tonk Women" and "Can't You Hear Me Knocking."

THE 1970S AND THE ERA OF MODIFICATION

Turning 27, a cursed age for any musician of the era, deserved some celebration. It was Eric Clapton who did the honors, gifting Richards the 1953 Fender Tele that would be retooled and renamed as Micawber. Others soon followed. Richards sought out new ways of articulating rock 'n' roll in the electric guitar's most primitive dialects. Take the Gibson Les Paul Junior, aka "Dice." Finished in TV Yellow, this primordial doublecut would become a regular onstage by the decade's end, using it notably on "Midnight Rambler," a live highlight that was often previously performed with the Dan Armstrong.

He'd later play a Junior with a Tele when recording "Start Me Up" in 1981. Travis Bean guitars, with their aluminium necks, caught Richards' attention. If you don't suffer from motion sickness, you can check out the promo video for "She's So Cold" to see Richards with a black TB500 (one of 351 produced).



Richards plays a Travis Bean TB1000 in 1979

ED PERLSTEIN/REDFERNS

In 1974, he started using a singlecut Zemaitis with skull-and-bone graphics. As with the Telecasters, Richards nixed the low E. The Zemaitis, aka "Macabre," housed a single PAF humbucker at the bridge and, again, offered Richards the simple pleasures of an electric guitar with nothing in the way.

Richards has never been a big Strat player, but he does own a Mary Kaye Strat, and through the Eighties and Nineties played the next best thing, a Music Man Silhouette. Some of Richards' guitars rarely see the light of day, such as his Gibson ES-350, a big-boned jazz-box with a natural finish and with the all-important Chuck Berry connection. "I'd be too afraid to take it onstage," he said during an Ask Keith Q&A from 2003. "I'd be afraid of breaking it by making a silly move, and it's a big guitar. I love it for the studio and in the dressing room. It has such a beautiful sound."

The ES-350 makes rare public appearances, and was used in 1990 to record "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atom Bomb on Me" with Watts, Bobby Keys, Bernard Fowler, Chuck Leavell and the Uptown Horns, a track that turned up on the Charles Mingus tribute, *Weird Nightmare*.

Looking at Micawber, Malcolm and Sonny, and seeing the road miles on them, it's understandable that some of that good stuff is saved for the studio. A Rolling Stones show is not the place for tender mercies. GW





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Cort Space G6TR

Cort's well-spec'd and affordable Strandberg rival capitalizes on the headless guitar renaissance

BY PHIL WELLER

HAVING BEEN BUILDING guitars for Strandberg since 2017, South Korea's Cort-Tek is well positioned to bolster the malnourished, more affordable end of the headless guitar market.

The popularity of sans-headstock guitars has changed dramatically since Cort produced its maiden headstock model in 1984. Today, headless guitars are more popular than ever, enticing Ibanez to resurrect its Q series and for Schecter to decapitate its electrics for the first time. But apart from Strandberg's $1,000 Boden Essential, comparatively affordable models have been exclusively pedaled by smaller manufacturers. Cort is looking to turn that tide.

Alongside the hardtail G6M6, Cort's Space series sees the G6TR separating itself from the competition with a Floyd Rose-style tremolo system and a more atypical HSS pickup configuration, while the series-wide Ergo V neck promises uncompromised comfort.

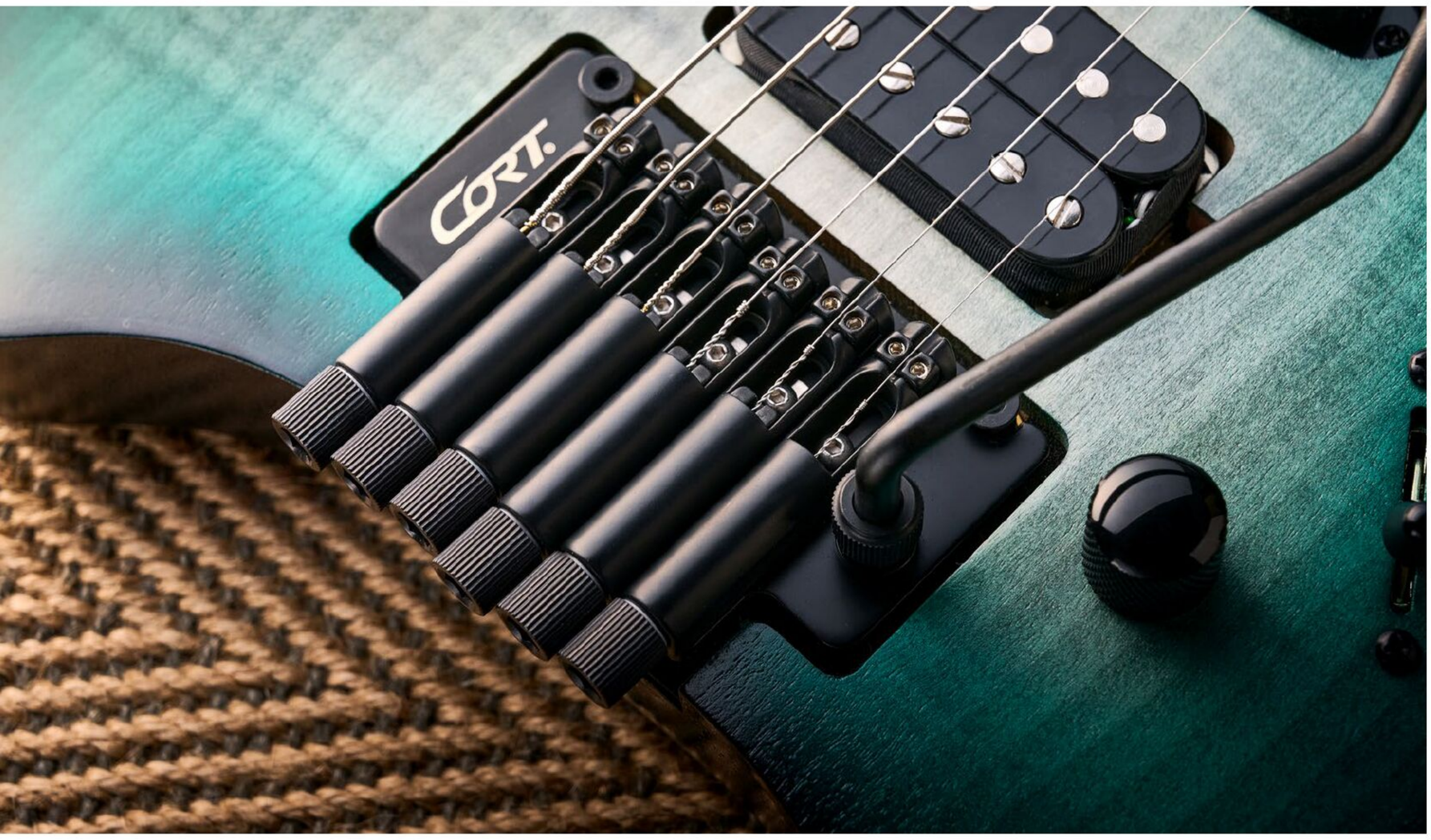
Broadly speaking, the craftsmanship here is on a high level, but we have some bugbears. One is something we experienced with the G6MS review, which you can read on GuitarWorld.com, but it's actually more troublesome here. When turning the tuning knobs, there's a pitch-wavering that causes chaos with our tuner. Not only does it struggle to hold the pitch as it's being adjusted, but the floating trem is so touch-sensitive that it's hard not to move it while tuning, due to the proximity of the adjusters at the bridge end, which further exacerbates the issue.

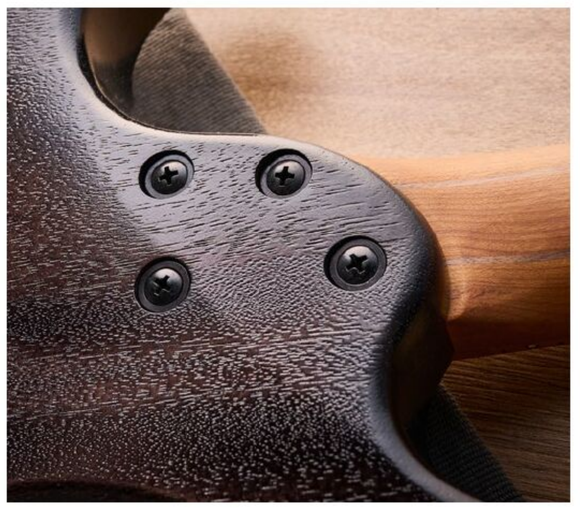
Some guitars feel like they're made for a single niche; the G6TR doesn't

The trem performs like a Floyd Rose in that there's a lot of maneuverability with the whammy bar, but we found that using it quickly displaces the tuning on this test guitar, and changing tunings altogether, like with a Floyd Rose, can require a lot of patience due to some required hardware spring adjustments.

However, the open-pore finish on the back and sides is really lovely, and we quite like the semi-gloss Lagoon finish (it's also available in Lava), although we're not such fans of the carved-in Cort logo. We also appreciated that the control knobs are well away from our hand's swing space, and the glow-in-the-dark side dots are a pleasant surprise for the price. Plus, the truss rod wheel is easily accessible, and, unlike Strandbergs, the Cort Space G6TR can stand up on the floor without a stand – and without a funky lean.

The finely crafted Ergo V neck really impressed for playability. The neck carve is smooth and feels natural in our hands. There's no resistance; it wants to be played fast, but its sustain encourages slower,







LUCY ROBINSON/FUTURE



moodier playing, too. Some guitars feel like they're made for a single niche; this doesn't. We've had a lot of fun playing this instrument.

The Cort bridge pickup is the same VTH77 as the G6MS – a guitar we found tonally limited in comparison because here the HSS setup maximizes its versatility, and the middle position of the five-way switch, especially, is wonderful with cleaner tones. There's a balance to it that stops highs becoming too trebly, and lows getting too muddy.

The humbucker and VTS63 single-coil pickups here are, however, pretty low output, so you really need to boot them up the rear end if you're chasing cut and thrust. Thankfully, their inherent neutrality means it's pretty easy to manipulate your amps and pedals to get the most out of the guitar. With the twin humbucker spec of the G6MS, we struggled more to find the best pickup positions for certain tonal choices, whereas here, each position excels at the things it should, meaning that, lack of output aside, we can play with confidence knowing the guitar won't let us down.

Sure, the fourth pickup position isn't too dissimilar from the fifth; that's a minor blot on an otherwise clean rap sheet, but it has sustain for days, and the pickups are certainly dynamic. They respond to our pick attack surprisingly well.

Given that, as of early 2026, while Strandberg is still tweaking its own tremolo recipe, it's easy to see why the Floyd Rose-like trem on this guitar is what lets it down somewhat. The G6FR plays incredibly well, has great versatility with its atypical HSS configuration – at least for modern headless guitars – and glow-in-the-dark side dots and stainless steel frets also belie its price.

Those assets conspire to make the bridge issues we found on this review guitar look even more glaring. The quality on the whole is high, but when an issue like we found with this test guitar impedes day-to-day playing, it's going to be an ongoing frustration unless a tech with experience can give it attention. GW



LUCY ROBINSON/FUTURE

MANUFACTURER: Cort, cortguitars.com

STREET PRICE: $879.99

PROS

+ Easy to play
+ Neutral lower output pickups see it pair well with all types of amps and pedals
+ Really versatile

CONS

– Bridge tuning issues on our test guitar undermined the playing experience
– Some may find the low pickup output an issue

VERDICT: With smooth playing, plenty of tonal scope and a pleasingly compact real estate, the G6TR gets a lot right. Tuning and tuning stability issues we experienced with the bridge on our test guitar need attention, though, and, as a result, it falls short of blowing us away.



Martin 0-10E Retro Jason Isbell

A characterful Americana workhorse at a sensible price — with a vibey artist tie-in

BY JAMIE DICKSON

IF YOU'VE BEEN living in a shack in the woods, you might not be aware that Jason Isbell is one of modern Americana's biggest stars — yet ironically, his signature Martin 0-10E might be just the kind of acoustic guitar for backwoods living.

Isbell's third Martin signature guitar (there's an 0-17 and a D-18 to his name, too) is, Martin tells us, inspired by the 1940 0-17 he used to record his 2025 solo album, *Foxes in the Snow*. For the uninitiated, the letters in a Martin model name (in this case, a single "0") denote the body shape and size, while the number after the dash indicates the "Style" — typically the woods used in its construction and level of ornamentation.

Style 17 guitars with a mahogany top, back and sides and no binding date from the 1930s, and this 0-10E outwardly resembles that classic look, featuring solid mahogany back, sides and top — not the less expensive sapele wood that's been used on similar Road Series instruments in the past.

Martin has, however, made 0-10E's neck from "select hardwoods," a catch-all term for mahogany-like tonewoods such as Spanish cedar, sapele and sipo, which Martin sometimes uses in place of true mahogany to keep costs down. Whichever has been used here, it certainly looks the part, with no jarring grain mismatch with the body.

Meanwhile, the slender Performing Artist profile of the 14-fret neck — with just a faint suggestion of a V — feels slinky and comfortable, especially with its silky satin finish. East Indian rosewood looks and feels a great fit for the fingerboard and bridge here. Rounding out the package is Martin's E-1 pickup system with built-in tuner, its display tucked discreetly just inside the soundhole.

Taking the 0-10E out of its attractively plush gigbag, we're struck by the tactile charm of the body's satin finish, thin enough to subtly reveal the grain pores but liquid smooth. At 3.7 lbs./ 1.7 kg. the guitar is strikingly light, and the lap-friendly ergonomics of this compact guitar are as comfortable today as they were a century ago. The 20 smallish frets are tidy and inobtrusive, and the



PHIL BARKER/FUTURE

If old-school country or fingerstyle blues is your thing, you'll like this a lot

MANUFACTURER: Martin, martinguitar.com

STREET PRICE: $1,049

PROS

+ Excellent build quality
+ Characterful folk-roots voice
+ Ready to gig with an onboard pickup system

CONS

– Not really a do-it-all acoustic guitar

VERDICT: At this price, the 0-10E is a bit of a steal. The use of solid mahogany for the body is a tidy upgrade over sapele, and the build quality is impressive. The 0-10E is light, comfortable in the lap and performs well when amplified.

open-gear nickel tuners undertake their role smoothly and effectively. Inside the body we find very clean kerfing and bracing work, with no glue dobs or smears at all.

The 0-10E has a relatively short scale-length of 24.9 inches, which should offer a slightly looser action than longer-scale acoustic guitars. In practice, the 0-10E still has that hallmark Martin feel — slightly stiff but precise — that rewards good technique but exposes untidy playing. As you might expect for a guitar that aims to sound like a vintage 0-17, there's plenty of midrange punch and woody twang on offer here. It isn't the broadest of voices, in terms of frequency range, but it is very characterful and it cuts through like a charm.

If old-school country or fingerstyle blues is your thing, you'll like this — a lot. If you play softly, its sustain and sweetness blooms — but hit it hard and its immediate attack snaps into focus, making this a dynamic, exciting guitar.

Plugged in, Martin's E1 system yields a pretty faithful acoustic tone and with our Boss acoustic combo's EQ set flat, we found we only to add a touch of bass and treble to de-emphasise the midrange to achieve an amplified sound that was warm and naturally expressive rather than being a mojo killer. GW

Fender Studio Pro 8

Is this the DAW every guitarist has been waiting for?

BY PHIL WELLER

ALTHOUGH IT HAS owned PreSonus since 2021, Fender's consolidation of the affordable gear and software firm — rebranding its DAW, PreSonus Studio One Pro, as Fender Studio Pro 8 — marks the Big F's boldest statement of intent yet.

Following the October 2024 launch of Studio One 7, which introduced AI-powered tools like stem separation, Global Transpose and tempo detection, Fender Studio Pro 8 gets a clean aesthetic and workflow refresh, along with other key features, including Studio Verb, a reverb effect with different room modes and a spectral display. Biggest of all? Amp and effects models drawn from Fender's Tone Master Pro.

There's also a great consideration for how the software (available for MacOS and Windows) will be used with every session. Chord Assistant is another new tool, recommending chords to users as they thrash out ideas, which will be welcome news to those with second-rate theory knowledge, and an AI conversion tool for turning audio files (be they recorded or imported) into editable MIDI notes, and notation software making for a powerful one-stop shop.

There's a lot to explore, and we found the bar to be high wherever we tinkered

Fender's modus operandi with Studio Pro 8 is for a DAW ecosystem that puts the guitar at its heart, and so pretty much every detail is built with that in mind. The general workflow leverages a signal chain-like system, with its new Channel Overview panel, giving a snapshot of what's going on.

The quickest way to get set up working on a project from an external source is by dropping a MIDI track into the project's ruler, which then provides the relevant tempo/signature information and populates tracks as they were named elsewhere.

Another great feature is Replace within the Mustang and Rumble amp and effects suite. If we've picked our amp and now want to shoot out a range of fuzz pedals to go before it, clicking Replace when the pedal is selected allows us to then cycle through the range of options, making it really easy to find the fuzz.

Fender Pro Studio comes with a lot of free instruments and plugins, but it's the guitar amp suite that draws us in. After a quick trawl through its pretty vast collection of amps — which is far from exclusive to Fenders — it's clear that what we get here is a hefty sample of the Tone Master Pro's sonic delights, and there's a lot to love.

The Fender Twin combo is, unsurprisingly, a wonderful pedal platform, its clean, neutral tones easily mouldable to being a shimmering ambient tone with smatterings of delay, reverb and chorus, or kicked into gear with an overdrive; we particularly like the Tube OD for having switchable 12AX7 and 12AT7 tube sims. Other classic Fender flavors, from a Princeton to the vintage grit of a '59 Bassman, are pretty convincing, but not the best amp sims we've ever heard.





FENDER



FENDER

For us, the most fun was had messing with the surprise additions, and they were all very responsive to our pick attack. Among them is the Excelsior, the wacky-looking, retro-futuristic combo Fender brought out in 2012 as part of its "Pawn Shop Special," and its caked in Fifties edge-of-breakup, bright, spanky, but not without a bit of balls kind of tones. We went from zero to Dave Davies on a Charvel San Dimas, even with its Fishman Fluence humbuckers set on the modern voicing. Cranking the gain also gives that "cracked speaker" sound.

Upon discovering there were both a Vox AC30 and a Rangemaster-style treble booster, our excitement peaked, and dialing in a tone akin to Rory Gallagher's "Shadow Play" was quick, easy, and made pinch harmonics an utter delight.

What we did find was that the metal offerings, from its takes on the 5150 and Bogner Uberschall, were a little *cliché*; they're geared for classic rather than modern metal. They had gain galore, it was hard to dial that in for rhythm without getting too fluffy. The Friedman BE-100 was the pick of the bunch for us here, and we had some success pushing a rockier amp like an Eighties Marshall, but if you're used to getting your core amp sounds from the likes of Universal Audio and Neural DSP, you might not be tempted to drop them yet.

Effects-wise, there is so much to get lost in, with our highlights including the presence of a Big Muff, Memory Man Delay and an EG7 Graphic EQ, in lieu of the amps having EQs as standard. We'd also like to give a quick shout-out to the Studio Verb plugin, which brings incredible, immersive reverbs to the fore, offering a little more Pink Floyd etherealness to whatever tones we dial in.

There's a lot to explore, and we found the bar to be high wherever we tinkered. There aren't any bad amps, pedals or cabs per se, and even if there aren't mic sim options for the cabs like on a lot of competitor plugins, there is plenty of scope for pretty much all genres we could think of. GW

MANUFACTURER:
Fender, fender.com

STREET PRICE:
$199.99 (perpetual licence); $19.99 (monthly)

PROS
+ Really easy to use
+ Built-in plugins are great quality
+ Recordings to MIDI conversion is a next-level tool for creativity

CONS
– Search features within the Mustang and Rumble amp sims would be great
– Customizable parameters on the Channel Overview would also help workflow

VERDICT: At long last, a DAW puts the guitar at the heart of its operations while packing it with versatile, high-quality amps and effects, plus a swathe of songwriting and band-life-assisting features built for the creative guitarist's everyday needs.



MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE

JBL BandBox Trio

JBL's debut amp combines room-shaking volume with the ability to dismantle your favorite tracks in real time

BY MATT MCCRACKEN

AI IS IN everything these days, from your car and your fridge to your amps and AI-powered pedals. It's quickly becoming two letters slapped onto pretty much anything to make it sound more enticing. The JBL BandBox Trio is yet another guitar product that's leveraging the power of AI to offer musicians a better practice tool — but it comes with a headline-grabbing USP. At its core, it's a mashup of a smart practice amp and a PA speaker, plus (drumroll, please) it can separate and isolate a song's bass, guitar, drums and vocals in real time — and all from streamed audio. It's a potential game-changer for learning songs, and that's just part of the BandBox's bigger picture.

The Trio (there's also a smaller Solo model) offers four channels, microphone connectivity and a companion phone app with which you can access a myriad of practice tools like a pitch shifter, looper and metronome. Outputting a hefty 135W RMS via a 1x 6.5-inch woofer and 2 x 25mm silk dome tweeters, the Trio boasts a frequency response of 50 Hz to 20 kHz, so it'll sound great playing your favorite tracks at volume. A built-in battery allows you to play it on the go, with a charge time of around three hours and a playtime of up to 10 hours, depending on what you're doing. You also can run it with a traditional IEC cable.

The BandBox's top panel is dominated by an LCD screen with five rotary encoders below. In the middle is a channel and mixer select menu — and a dedicated button for "stem AI." To the right is a large master encoder and the power-on button. On the back, from right to left, we have two combo-XLR inputs with switches for mic or line level sources, an instrument input, a Bluetooth button for connecting devices, an aux and USB-C input and, finally, an output section with a 1/4-inch direct out and a 1/8-inch headphone output.

After a pain-free connection to our phone via Bluetooth, pressing the "channel 3" button brings up a selection of guitar presets with 22 models, each with controls for drive, bass, mid, treble and volume available to select. Turning the large encoder runs the gamut of sounds from compressed clean to industrial metal, so there's plenty of flexibility. There are then two acoustic guitar sounds and two bass guitar presets, with the final and 27th sound being a bypassed setting, allowing you to plug in an amp modeler or another line-level instrument.

Hitting the orange-encircled "stem AI" button brings up a new menu, with a button to adjust whether it's on or off, with settings for drum volume, vocal volume, "others" and a pitch-shift option that goes from -5 to +5 — which is useful for vocalists finding a key they're comfortable in.

We start by playing a song from our phone, going for Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" because it's a complex mix with a lot going on, and therefore hopefully a challenge for the onboard stem splitter.

It does well, but it's not perfect. It's great at removing the drums, because most of their information is transient rather than tonal, but it finds it hard to distinguish between melodic elements that occupy the same space. That means vocals, guitars, synths and sometimes the bass can get taken out or occasionally pop back in when you're not expecting. The same with elements further back in the mix, like backing vocals or additional percussion.

If you want to practice guitar, however, it's amazing. Dialing down the "other" knob, which removes melodic, non-vocal information, we can play along using the built-in amp models quickly and easily. It works well for a variety of tracks, so we try our hand at Turnstile's "Real Thing" and CCR's "Ramble Tamble." It's immediately easy to see just how powerful stem splitting can be for the guitarist who wants to practice, especially as you can stream pretty much any song from your phone.

An unexpected but successful venture into the world of guitar amp simulation for JBL

The quality isn't good enough to record or play live with — unless you're using a song with a simple arrangement. But for jamming along and practicing at home, players who are filling in with other bands or guitarists playing in cover bands, it's an invaluable tool for honing skills and learning songs quickly.

The amp models are surprisingly good too, considering that JBL isn't known for modeling amps. The Brit Crunch preset does a fantastic Marshall-style tone, and we enjoyed the Feathered Blue preset, which is a low-gain model that's great for blues and country. They're not all gold, but considering JBL's relative newness to this field, it's an impressive offering if you don't already have a modeler to use.

When jamming along with some stem AI'd tracks, the extra low end of some amp models here really helped us feel the groove. The more "hi-fi" feel of the streamed music, combined with the more regular tones we're used to hearing out of an amp, blends nicely and easily into a cohesive whole. GW



MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE

MANUFACTURER: JBL, jbl.com

STREET PRICE: $599.95

PROS

+ Offers plenty of volume for guitar players
+ Surprisingly good onboard amp and effects models
+ AI stem splitting tool is incredibly useful for home practice
+ Plenty of connectivity options and USB recording out

CONS

– Very bass-heavy for a guitar amp; you'll need to tweak
– The companion app felt a little clunky, and the tuner wasn't great

VERDICT: One of the best AI practice tools we've ever used in the stem-splitting function. It's an unexpected but successful venture into the world of guitar amp simulation for JBL, and very much the equal of the smart-amp establishment. Great as it is, its use might be limited for guitarists, who might be better off with the Solo model.



Epiphone Explorer 80s EMG

Is this the ultimate unofficial guitar tribute for Metallica fans?

BY MATT MCCRACKEN

THE IMAGE OF James Hetfield donning his all-white Explorer, carved with the words "So what," is an iconic one in metal history – and the 1984 model was largely used to record Metallica's second album, *Ride the Lightning*, that same year. It was a favorite of Hetfield's until he got his ESP endorsement in 1987. Despite this, there's never actually been an official Gibson Explorer made bearing Papa Het's moniker, and that remains the case with this Epiphone Explorer 80s EMG. Some might feel this is a Hetfield Explorer in all but name; however, Hetfield is not a Gibson signature artist like his bandmate Kirk Hammett. This is more of a firm nod fans will very much appreciate, ourselves included.
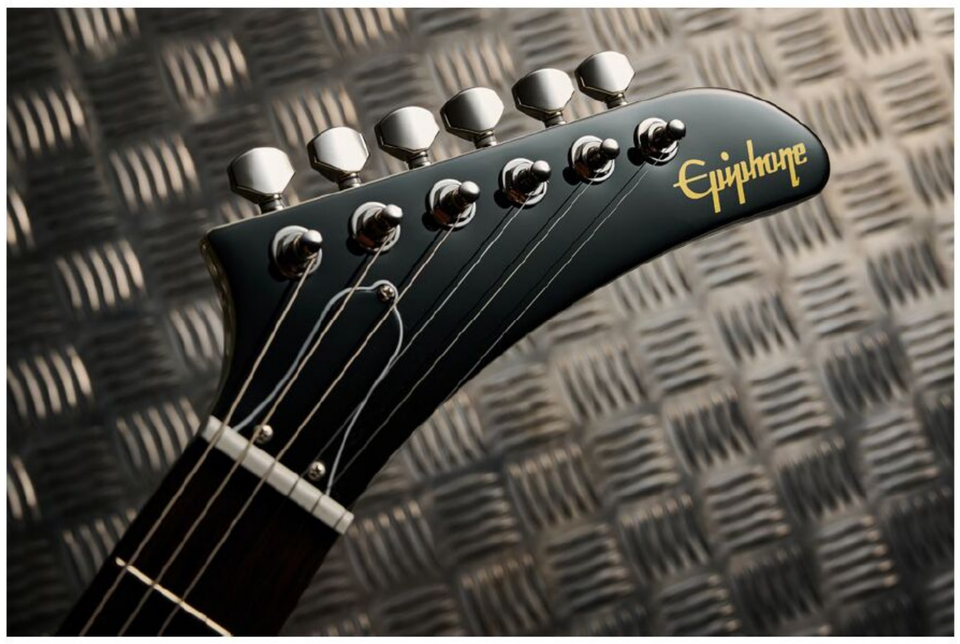
It features a rosewood fingerboard and all-mahogany body and neck construction with the usual set neck, and a SlimTaper '60s neck profile. Mini die-cast tuners adorn a hockey stick-style headstock with a LockTone tune-o-matic bridge with LockTone stop bar at the opposing end.

The control layout is different from your typical Explorer guitar, giving you a master volume for each pickup and a single master tone knob. The 3-way pickup selector is also next to the tone knobs, whereas typically on Explorers it's located at the upper bout, giving you control over a pair of EMG 81/60s humbuckers – Hetfield used Gibson Dirty Fingers humbuckers in his 'So what' model until around the ...*And Justice for All* era.

Taking the Explorer 80s EMG out of the Epiphone premium softcase, it's a nice weight at just shy of 5kg/11lb., and although the Classic White finish isn't quite as yellow as Hetfield's original guitar (which is fair enough considering this isn't a signature model), there are no immediately obvious blemishes or bits of dirt in it. On closer examination, we do spot a very faint crack in the finish where the cutaway meets the neck, which is a common issue with Explorer-style guitars and others with set necks. It's absolutely tiny, though, and you'd be hard-pressed to spot it unless you were going over it with a fine tooth comb like we did.

After fitting a 9-volt battery for the active EMG pickups (it doesn't come with one) we excitedly sat down with it to start immediately downpicking palm muted power chord riffs. The '60s SlimTaper neck still feels quite chunky in our hand, certainly not what you'd expect to find on any "shred guitar," but the 24.75" scale makes it feel decidedly quick in hand, with no time passing before we're jamming Hetfield's solo part from "Master of Puppets."

Tuning stability feels rock solid once it's settled, and despite abusing it with some hefty bends, we find we seldom have to retune after the first half an hour or so. We do find the stock 10-46 strings are a bit light for our, ahem, heavy-handed playing style, and we can imagine a lot of metal players would swap these for something a bit heavier. We also used it to track in the studio, and it held up take after take, which is certainly reassuring.





MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE

Whether you want to carve your own lewd slogans into it or just pick up a distinctive-looking guitar, it's a great choice

MANUFACTURER: Epiphone, gibson.com

STREET PRICE: $899

PROS

+ Perfect for all types of heavy guitar playing
+ Neck profile is thick but still feels comfortable
+ EMG pickups deliver incredible sustain and surgical tone for metal
+ Despite the large size it's surprisingly well balanced on a strap

CONS

– The EMGs make it quite a one-trick pony, but it's a great trick!

VERDICT: If you want a guitar to play all kinds of heavy music, the Epiphone Explorer 80s EMG is one that'll let you do it with aplomb. It's a great guitar for laying down precision metal rhythms and searing lead licks. It's not subtle, but it's not trying to be.

Plugging the Explorer into a Neural DSP Quad Cortex, we feel obliged to start with a JCM800 model, and boy does it sound good. The EMG active humbuckers – the classic Hetfield preference of a standard 81 model in the bridge and 60 in the neck before they were refined further with his signature set – are an iconic metal tone, and their surgical precision is perfect for chugging power chords. We find there's a much lighter touch required than the passive pickups we're used to, and the sustain is absolutely incredible.

EMG newcomers, be warned; there's a downside to the precise nature of the pickups. When we switch to a Fender Twin, the clinical nature of the EMGs makes them feel very inorganic. The decreased dynamic range makes arpeggios of open chords quite nice, as everything is very even with the naturally compressed tone, but when trying to play more dynamic pieces, we find there's a lack of subtlety with them.

For Hetfield fans, though, this guitar is a no-brainer. It delivers the look and playability, and all for a very good price. Whether you want to carve your own lewd slogans into it or just pick up a distinctive-looking guitar, it's a great choice. Don't expect to be playing dynamic blues licks or jazz. If you're all about precision metal tones, though, you can't go wrong with such iconic humbuckers. GW

EarthQuaker Devices ZEQD Pre-Tube Preamp Pedal



This collaboration is exactly what the doctor ordered for modern guitarists suffering from a serious case of digital fatigue

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

WHEN TWO OHIO-BASED guitar companies get together, good things tend to happen. Case in point: the ZEQD-Pre is a collaboration between EarthQuaker Devices and Dr. Z Amplification, aiming to bring genuine tube tone to your pedalboard in a surprisingly versatile package. This stomp is the latest bit of guitar gear that's taking aim at the slew of digital devices that seem to have become part and parcel of being a guitarist in 2026.

The result is something a bit different from your typical preamp pedal. Built around an EF86 tube, this stomp promises the high headroom and pristine cleans Dr. Z is known for. The ZEQD-Pre is an all-analog design that can serve as a clean boost, a direct recording solution, a headphone practice amp or all three at once. All pretty impressive considering there isn't a lick of digital trickery in sight.

At its core, the pedal is refreshingly straightforward, with very little in the way of dials or switches. There's a passive three-band EQ, volume control, and a boost switch that bypasses the EQ entirely to really let the tube do its thing. Where things get interesting is the I/O. With a standard output for your amp, a balanced XLR for direct recording or going ampless on stage, and a headphone jack with built-in analog cabinet simulation, the ZEQD-Pre is ready for just about any scenario you can throw at it. Even better, all outputs work simultaneously, making it a genuinely useful studio tool.

There's a three-dimensional quality to the sound; a sense of space and clarity

Like anything from Ohio pedal titans EarthQuaker Devices, the ZEQD-Pre feels robust and rugged; there's a real heft to this unit that we appreciate. It's no mini enclosure, but it's still smaller than a vintage Big Muff, and you need that real estate to pack in all the technological wizardry happening under the hood.

This unit is ridiculously easy to use, too. No digital menus to navigate, no hidden functions requiring a PhD to unlock, just grab your favorite guitar, plug in and you're off to the races. Whether you're setting up for practice, tracking in the studio or heading to a gig, the EQD ZEQD-Pre adapts without any fuss. The beauty of this setup is its versatility. One minute you're woodshedding at home, the next you're in the studio running that same signal straight into the interface via XLR, then you're hitting the stage for a three-hour set with the same setup. No reconfiguring, no menu diving; just grab and go.

Big, loud and pristine — that's what's on offer with the ZEQD-Pre. The EF86 tube is often described as hi-fi, and honestly, that's the perfect way to describe what's coming out of this thing. As Dr. Z himself puts it, "You hit this pedal on, and your amp just becomes huge," and he's not kidding. There's a three-dimensional quality to the sound, a sense of space and clarity that makes everything feel more present and alive.

This pedal more than delivers that touch sensitivity we look for. Its frequency response means harmonic richness without sacrificing definition, giving you that full-spectrum clarity from deep lows to sparkling highs that Dr. Z amps are famous for. GW

MANUFACTURER: EarthQuaker Devices, earthquakerdevices.com

PRICE: $399

PROS
+ Versatile I/O arrangement
+ Massive amount of headroom
+ Convincing all-analog cab sim
+ Can really take pedals well

CONS
– The boost can be a little bass-heavy
– May be too clean for some users

VERDICT: Simple to use, built like a tank and, thankfully, with the tone to boot, both Dr. Z and EarthQuaker Devices should be proud of this fantastic little pedal. We can easily see this stomp becoming the beating heart of the rig of guitarists tired of the digital age.

MATT LINCOLN/FUTURE

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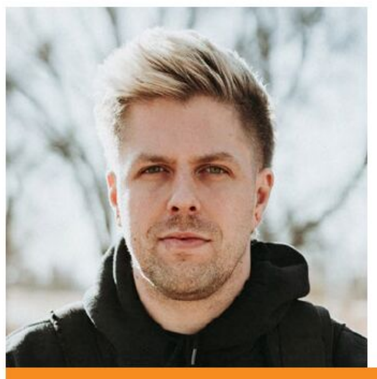
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THE DEEP END
BY MIKE STRINGER

Syncopated Bending

Nailing the rhythmic string bends in "Holy Roller"

A KEY ELEMENT in many of the riffs I write is *rhythmic string bending*. A good example of this can be found in the main riff to "Holy Roller," which I recorded with Spiritbox for our 2021 album, *Eternal Blue*. As was the case last month with "Jaded," I perform this song on a seven-string guitar tuned to drop-F♯ (low to high: F♯, C♯, F♯, B, E, G♯, C♯), which is drop-A tuning transposed down a minor 3rd, or one and one half steps, so everything sounds a minor 3rd lower.

FIGURE 1 illustrates the main riff to "Holy Roller," which I play during the intro and outro. The first six bars are performed entirely on the 7th string and feature repeating pull-down bends and releases. I begin in bar 1 with two unbent eighth notes at the 12th and 9th frets, followed in beats 2 and 3 by two quick ¾-step bends and releases at the 13th fret, phrased in a 16th-note rhythm. The bar ends with a return to the unbent notes.

Syncopation (emphasizing the upbeats, or "weak" parts of the beat) comes into play in bar 2, where, on beat 3, I bend the 9th-fret note up a half step and hold the bend into beat 4. The final note in bar 2 is tied (held over) to the beat 1 of bar 3, which creates more syncopation, then bent up a half step. Bars 3 and 4 mostly replicate bars 1 and 2, but bar 4 ends with a pair of palm-muted eighth notes on an open A5 chord.

Bars 5 and 6 essentially restate bars 1 and 2, after which I play a big F♯sus2 barre chord across all seven strings, which I shift up and down the neck in a syncopated dotted-eighth rhythm, holding each chord for one and one half beats, which, when done in succession like this, creates a jarring effect. The riff ends with another pair of palm-muted open A5 chords, followed by high natural harmonics (N.H.) chords on the top three strings, strummed as 16th notes with alternate (down-up) strumming. To sound the harmonics, lightly rest your fret-hand pinkie across the top three strings at the "3.2" location indicated, which is a little ways past the 3rd fret.

As is the case with many of the riffs I write, without the added bends, this riff would sound a little stale and boring. When performing the 13th-fret bends here, strive to consistently raise the pitch 3/4 of a step, which is midway between a half step (equal to one fret) and a whole step (equal to two frets).

FIGURE 2 shows the song's breakdown verse riff, which is built from a two-note F/A chord played on the bottom two strings and strummed in a syncopated rhythm with palm-muting (P.M.). I use all downstrokes here, except for the pairs of 16th notes, which are strummed down-up. The syncopation is created by accentuating certain eighth-note upbeats (the "and" counts) and holding the chord into the following downbeat. To properly feel and internalize the phrasing, play through the figure while tapping your foot squarely on each beat. Start out slowly then gradually ramp up the tempo to that of the recording.

In bar 8, I play "3.2" natural harmonics again, this time across the top six strings. I strum the harmonics with upstrokes on each eighth-note upbeat. The key to getting the desired sharp pick attack here is to get a little bit of the flesh of your thumb into the strum. Doing so will also help bring out the harmonics. GW

Seven-string guitar in drop-A tuning, down one and one half steps (low to high, F♯, C♯, F♯, B, E, G♯, C♯).
All notes and chords sound a minor 3rd (one and one half steps) lower than written.

FIG. 1

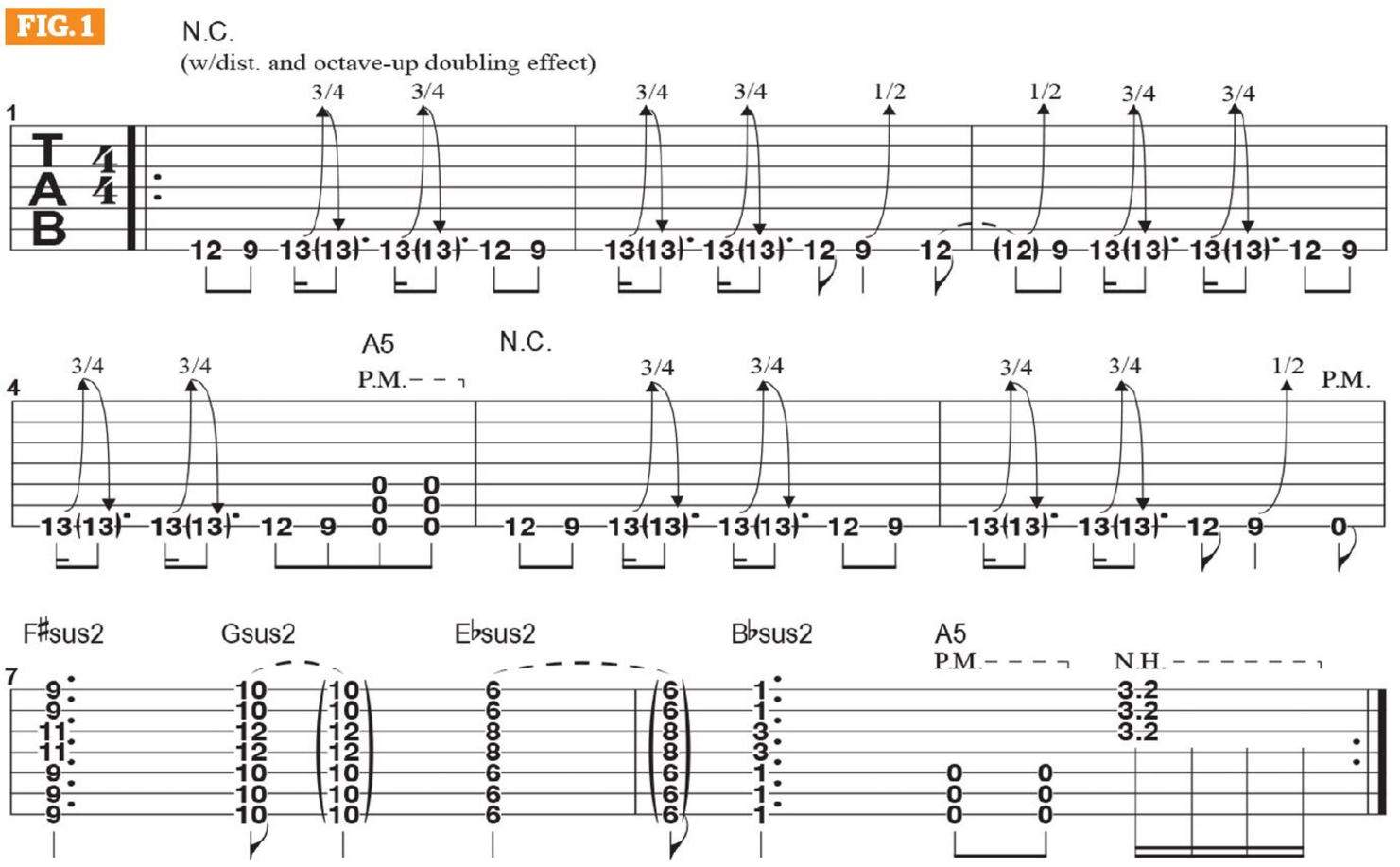
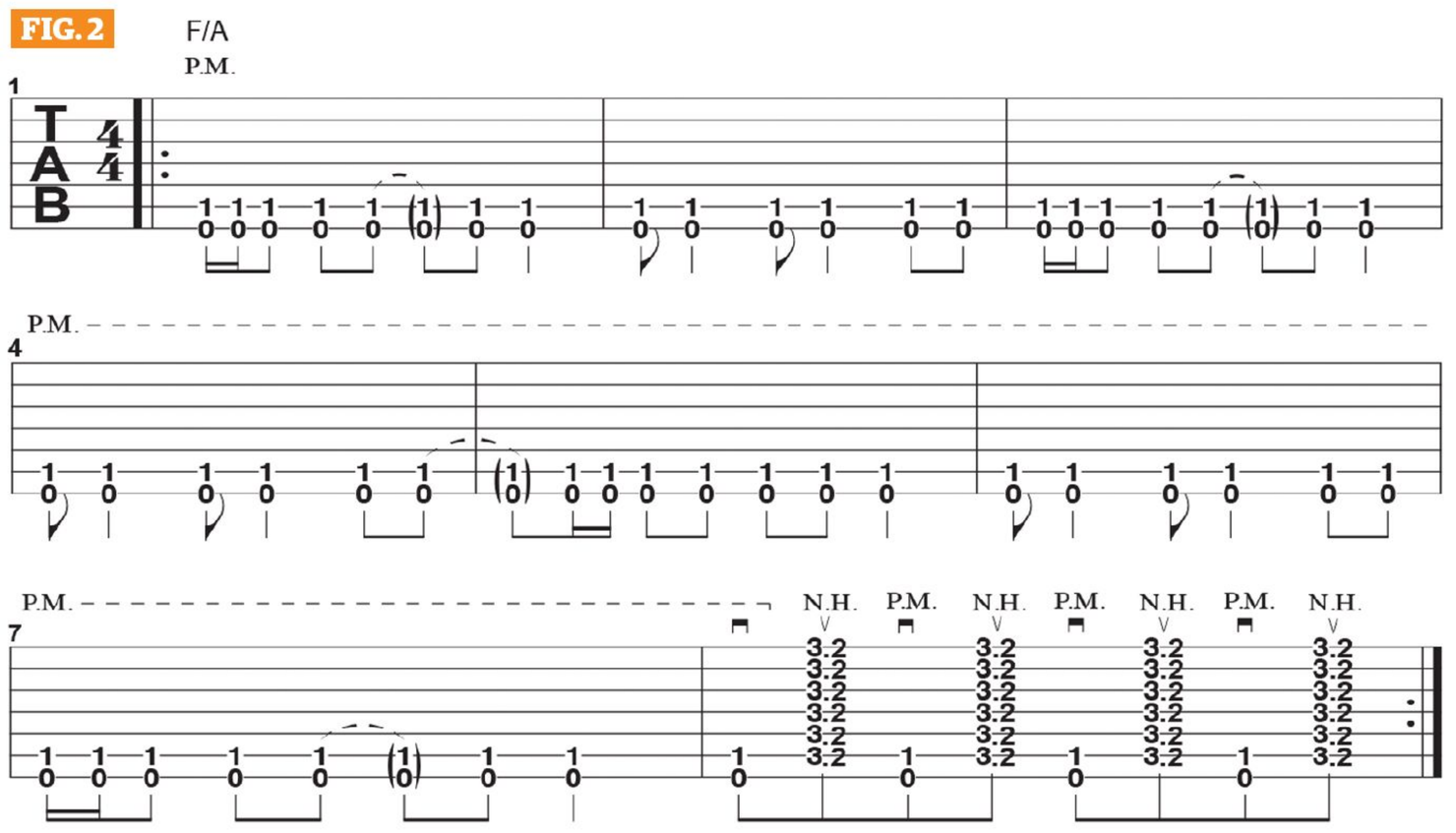


FIG. 2



KYLE JOINSON

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/may2026

Mike Stringer is the guitarist for Grammy-winning Canadian metallers Spiritbox. Their latest album is 2025's *Tsunami Sea*. For more information, check out spiritbox.com.



TALES FROM NERDVILLE
BY JOE BONAMASSA

Pickup Lines

Comparing PAF humbuckers to single-coil P90s

A TOPIC THAT that's near and dear to guitar players everywhere is pickups — what to use, what we love about them, and how to set them up for optimal performance. For our discussion, I'll be using two examples of what is essentially the same guitar — a 1958 goldtop Gibson Les Paul Standard with PAF humbucking pickups and a 1956 goldtop Les Paul Standard with P90 pickups.

Let's first talk about setting up the pickups. I like the pickup height to be close to the strings, especially the bridge pickup. This results in the most output and brightness, which is the kind of attack I like to hear.

Pickup height is adjusted by using a screwdriver to turn the mounting screws clockwise or counterclockwise. With humbuckers, I like the front, or neck, pickup to be "wooly" — fat sounding and with some distortion — but clear. Be careful, however, not to raise it too close to the strings, as the magnets can start to interfere with the strings' vibrations and cause notes to sound out of tune.

FIGURE 1 is an E minor pentatonic-based phrase played with the neck humbucker. When I switch to the bridge pickup, as I do in **FIGURE 2**, I like the output to be balanced with that of the neck pickup, so that the only thing changing is an increase in the amount of high end, which serves as a sort of solo boost.

In **FIGURE 3**, bars 1-5, I have both pickups on, which produces a nice blend between the fatness of the neck pickup and the "cut" of the bridge pickup. This example is played in the key of A, with lines based on the A minor pentatonic scale (A, C, D, E, G), with the inclusion of the major 3rd, C♯, alluding to an A7 chord. In bar 5, I switch to the bridge pickup only.

FIG. 1 Neck Humbucker

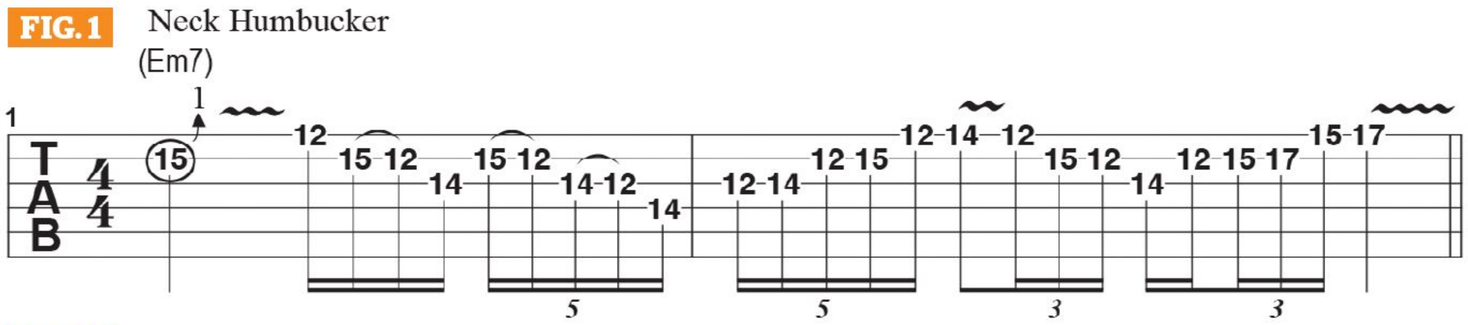


FIG. 2 Bridge Humbucker

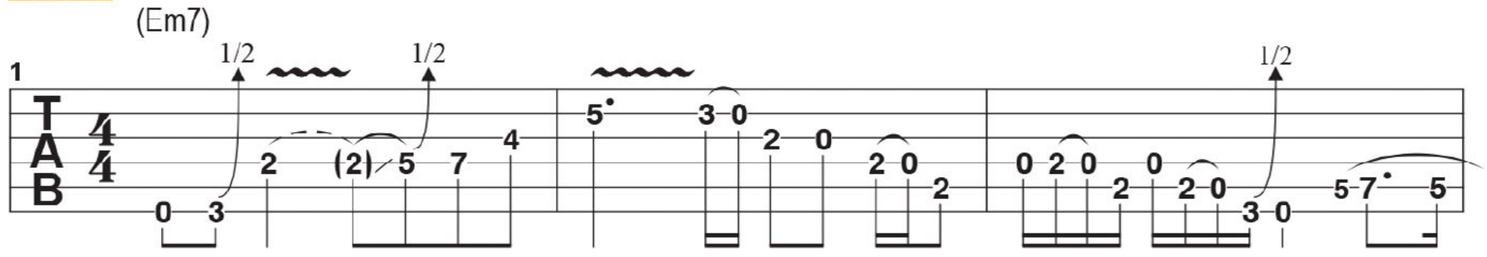


FIG. 3 Both Humbuckers

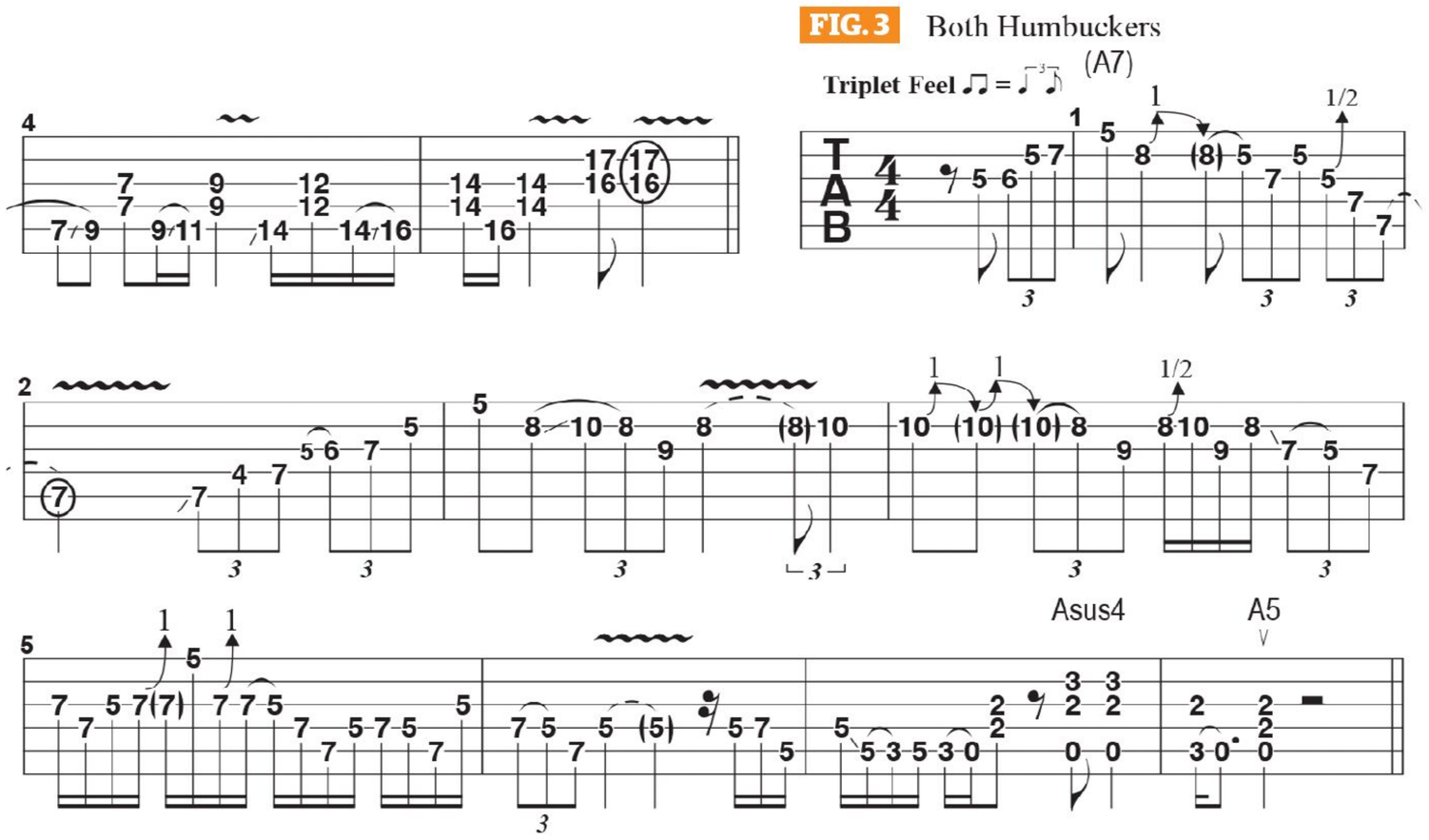


FIG. 4 Neck P90

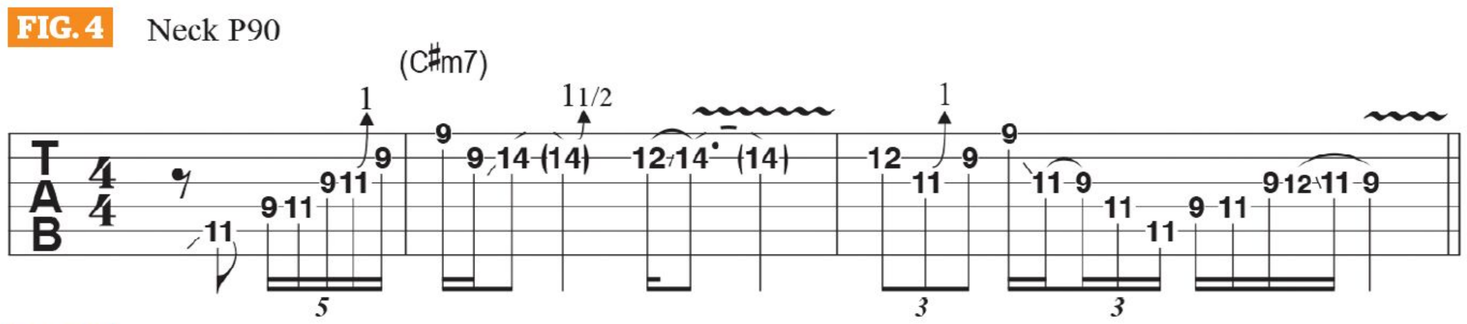
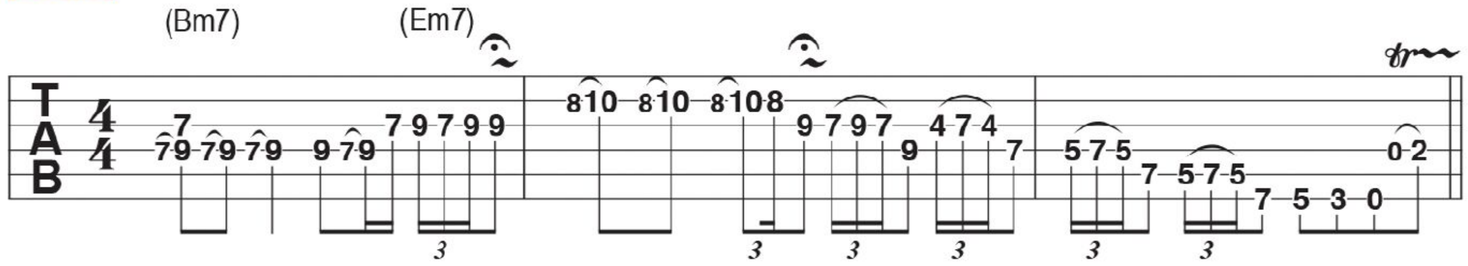


FIG. 5 Bridge P90



With some P90-equipped guitars, the neck pickup is too close to the strings and the bridge pickup is too far away. If you were to leave it that way, the instrument will never sound sonically balanced, so follow the same height adjustment guidance given for humbuckers.

P90s are single-coil pickups, so their overall sound is more sparkly and clear than that of humbuckers, especially with a clean tone. But when overdriven, they will deliver a fat sound that's killer. Being single-coil pickups, however, they can be prone to noise and hum, so you have to try and address that.

FIGURE 4 is played with the neck P90, featuring lines based on the C♯ minor pentatonic scale (C♯, E, F♯, G,♯ B). In **FIGURE 5**, I switch to the bridge pickup, and move from B7 to E7 with lines based on E minor pentatonic.

Both humbuckers and P90s have their ideal applications, and for many players, including me, the variations in sound, feel and texture are indispensable. GW

JEFF FASANO/GUITAR WORLD

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/may2026

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.



WORKIN' MAN
BY CHARLIE STARR

Hand Picked

A guide to fingerpicking techniques

I CONSIDER FINGERPICKING to be essential to my playing, as it's a technique I have utilized in a variety of ways for many years. When recording, I often use my 1945 Gibson J-45 acoustic guitar. If you're familiar with this instrument, you know how wonderful it is to play and how great it sounds.

FIGURE 1 illustrates a very basic fingerpicked pattern: while holding an E chord, my pick-hand thumb basically alternates between the 6th and 4th strings while the index, middle and ring fingers pick the higher strings. The open low E bass note alternates with the higher notes in an eight-note rhythm. Note that the thumb often catches the next higher string, as demonstrated here.

Years ago, a friend of my dad's came over and played some beautiful fingerpicking on a Martin D-28 acoustic, and I was blown away. He said, "That's Mississippi John Hurt." So I thought, well, I need to listen to more of that!

When I got hipped to this music, I discovered that the patterns were rooted in alternating bass notes sounded by the thumb while melodic patterns were fingerpicked on the higher strings in a syncopated rhythm.

FIGURE 2 offers an example of this style: bars 1 and 2 establish an eighth-note thumbpicking pattern, and in bars 3 and 4 a fingerpicked melody is introduced on the top three strings. As shown in **FIGURE 3**, the thumb always keeps the rhythm of the bass line going, in this case in the key of G.

It will take dedicated practice to get the coordination together to execute the low-string/high-string syncopations properly, so start out slowly and focus on how the two parts work together.

The Blackberry Smoke song "Ain't Got the Blues," from our 2012 album, *The Whippoorwill*, is built from this style of fingerpicking. As shown in **FIGURE 4**, bar 1 establishes an alternating bass pattern on the tonic G chord, and in bar 2 I introduce a melody played on the G and B strings.

In bar 4, I move to C, the IV (four) chord, and the melody is transposed up a 4th and played on the top two strings. In bars 7 and 8, the pattern is played over the V (five) chord, D, and in bars 9 and 10 I return to the tonic, G.

Another good example of this style of fingerpicking is a section I play in our song "Holding All the Roses," which is in drop-D tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, E).

FIGURE 5 illustrates the similar manner in which this is played.

I asked my dad's friend where guitarists like Mississippi John Hurt got the idea to play in this way, and he said. "I think they're trying to imitate the sound of a player piano on a riverboat." I think that's a good theory, because the type of fingerpicking you hear from the great "Piedmont"-style players, like Blind Blake, Blind Willie McTell and Reverend Gary Davis, does work in the same way as stride piano, with consistently alternating bass notes driving the rhythm and joined by syncopated melodies in a higher octave. GW

All examples are performed fingerstyle.

FIG. 1 E

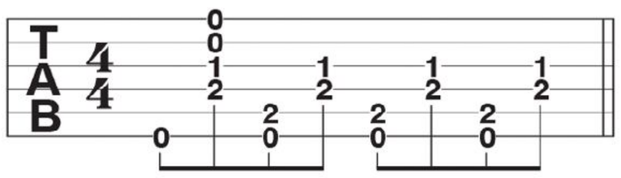
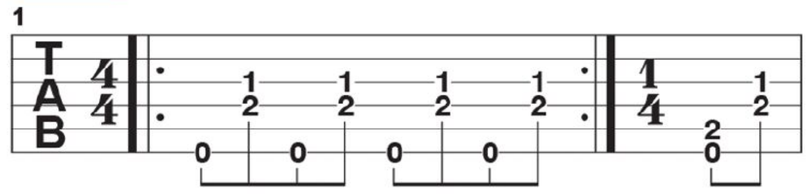


FIG. 2 E



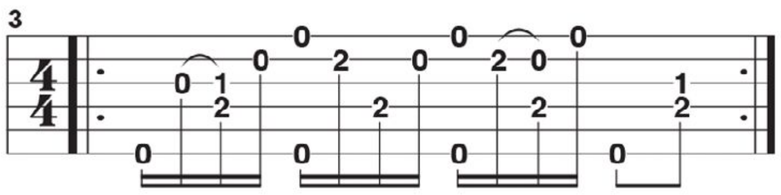


FIG. 3 (G) *w/thumb only*

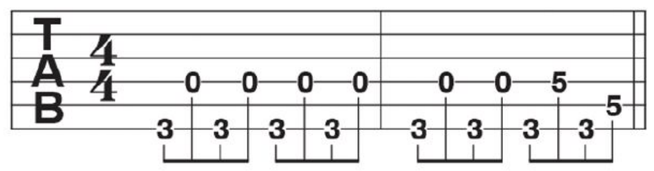
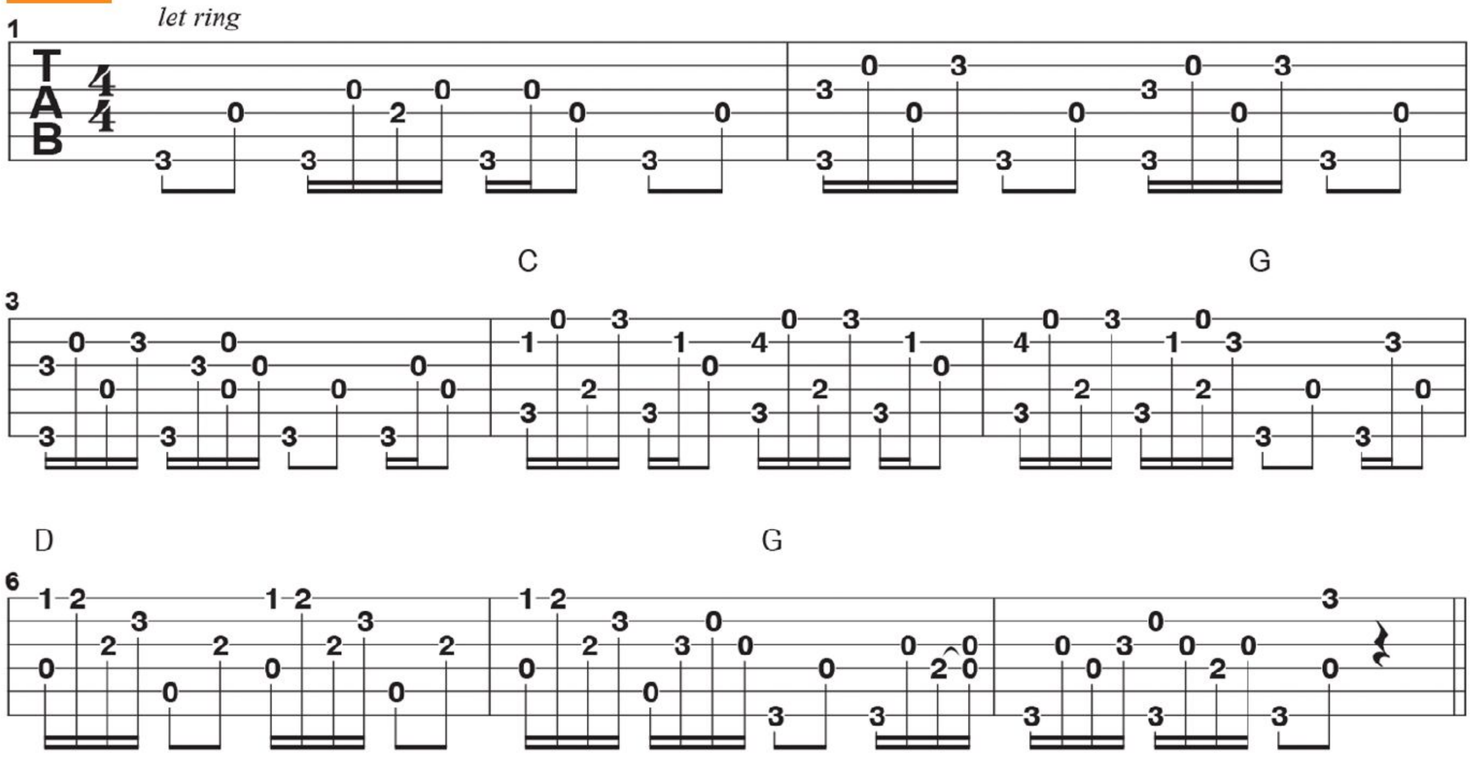
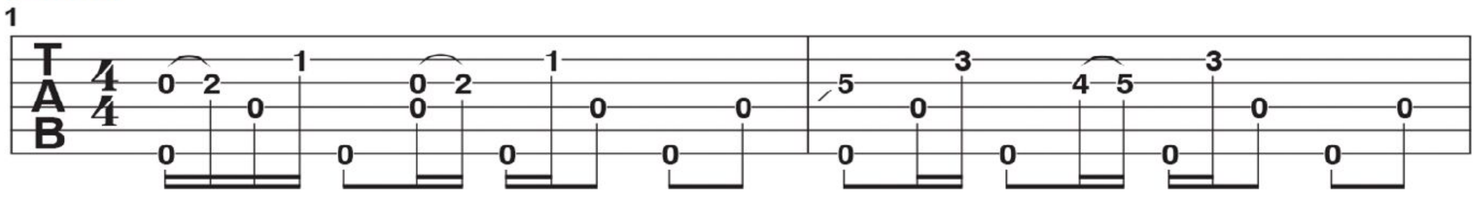


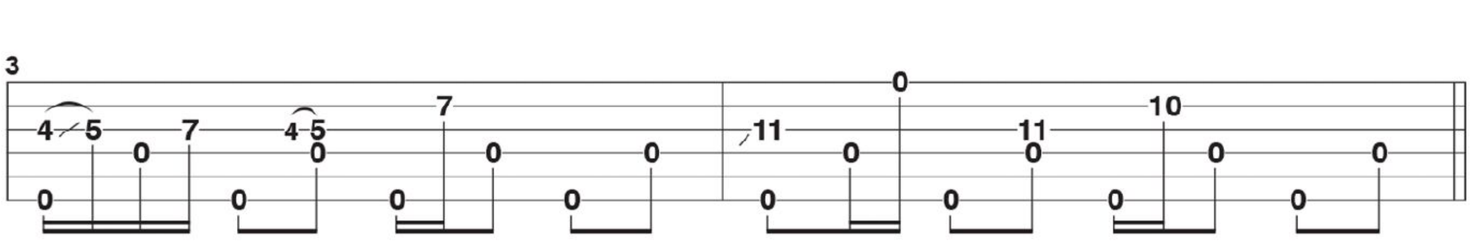
FIG. 4 G *let ring*



Drop-D tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, E)

FIG. 5 D7





For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/may2026

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.*

JOBY SESSIONS/FUTURE



BLUES EXPANSIONS
BY COREY CONGILIO

Dominant Strategies

Using dominant 7 arpeggios in a guitar solo

A GREAT WAY to break away from the typical blues soloing sound of pentatonic scales is to incorporate dominant 7 arpeggios into your improvised lines. As the name implies, a dominant 7 arpeggio is sounded by playing the notes of a dominant 7 chord, such as G7, C7 or D7, individually and in succession.

Let's use the key of G as our point of reference: in **FIGURE 1**, a G7 chord is shown in 3rd position, followed by a G minor pentatonic scale (G, B♭, C, D, F) played in the same position. What I often like to do, in order to create more interesting solo lines, is combine the notes of the minor pentatonic scale with those of a dominant 7 arpeggio, which, as you'll notice, share three notes – the root, 5th and minor, of "flat" 7th.

FIGURE 2 illustrates a G7 arpeggio, built from the notes G, B, D and F. The first three notes give us a G major triad, and F is the minor, or "flatted," 7th, which provides the dominant 7 sound. **FIGURE 3** shows the same notes played in a descending manner on the lower strings.

Articulation devices like finger slides and string bends offer great ways to incorporate the dominant 7 pitches into phrases. For example, **FIGURE 4** begins with a series of slides into the notes G, B, D and F, all from a half step below, after which I finish the phrase with more typical blues lines based on the G blues scale (G, B♭, C, D♭, D, F).

A great way to practice improvising with dominant 7 arpeggios is to loop a rhythm part then solo over it. **FIGURE 5** shows a simple shuffle-based rhythm part that sits on a G7 chord. **FIGURE 6** sounds the notes of a G7 arpeggio played over the loop, first ascending then descending. To some people, this is more of a "jazzy" sound; the reason for this is, as is often the case in jazz, the chord tones are emphasized when playing arpeggios. The inclusion of B, the major 3rd, in addition to F, the minor, or "flatted," 7th, builds a strong connection to the harmony of the G7 chord.

FIGURE 7 offers a longer example of how to combine phrases built from the G minor pentatonic and G blues scales with G7 arpeggio shapes. Bars 1 and 2 emphasize the G blues scale, followed in bars 3 and 4 with emphasis on the major 3rd, B, which brings in the dominant 7 arpeggio sound.

In bars 5-8, I move back and forth between straight G minor pentatonic and blues scale phrases and the inclusion of the major 3rd, B, in order to bring the arpeggio sound back to the forefront. Throughout the remainder of the example, I move freely between the two approaches, striving for musicality in the way the different elements work together.

As you work with this dualistic approach, think of it as an ongoing hand-off between scales and arpeggios. Use your ears to discern the differences in the musical effects created and to inform your note choices. GW

FIG. 1 G7 G minor pentatonic scale

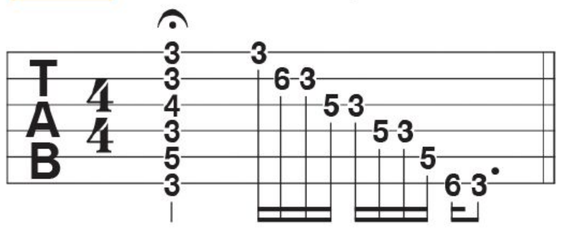


FIG. 2 G7 arpeggio

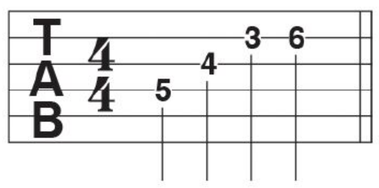


FIG. 3 G7 arpeggio

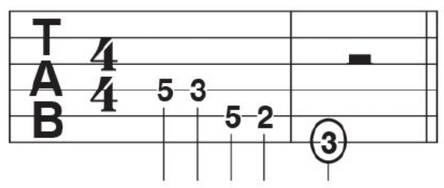


FIG. 4 (G7)

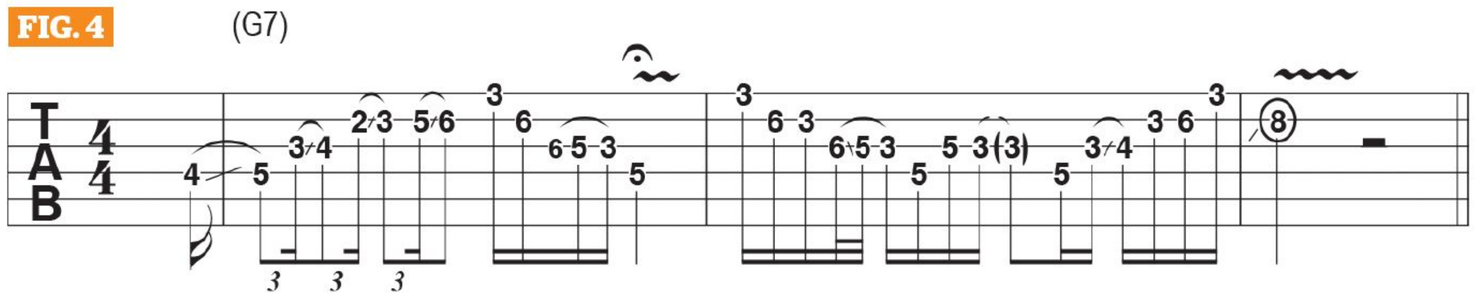


FIG. 5 G13-9

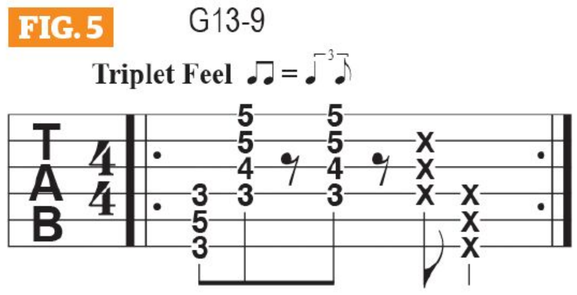


FIG. 6 (G7)

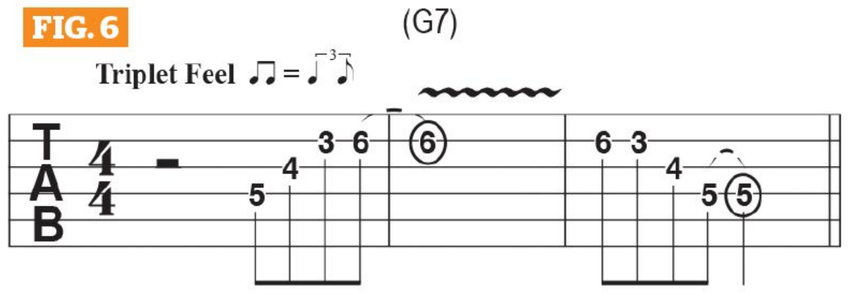
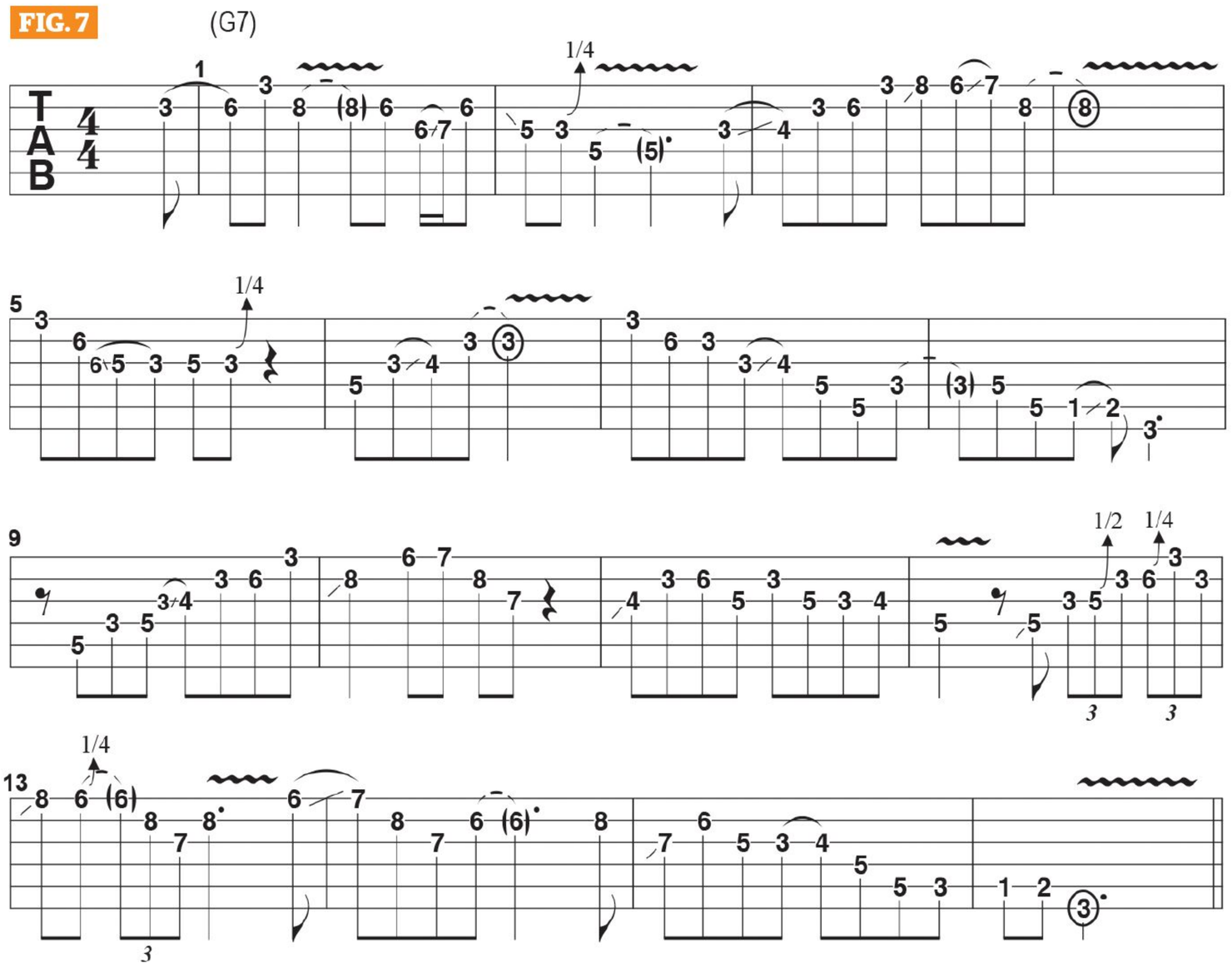


FIG. 7 (G7)



JAMIE GLASGOW

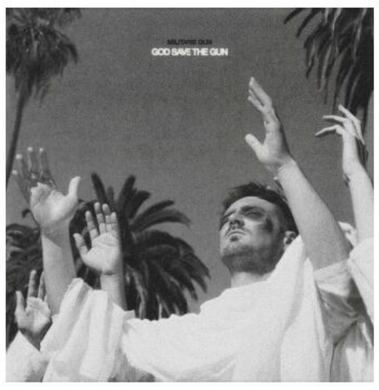
For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/may2026

Corey Congilio is recognized as a top-tier touring guitarist, session musician and educator, creating content for his lesson website, workingclassguitar.com. Find out more at coreycongilio.com.

HOW TO PLAY THIS MONTH'S SONGS

BY JIMMY BROWN

MILITARIE GUN
"Thought You Were Waving"



BUILT AROUND A repeating major-scale-based chord progression and descending bass line "drop" that brings to mind the Beatles classics "A Day in the Life" and "For No One," as well as "Forever" by the Beach Boys and "Welcome to the Black Parade" by My Chemical Romance, this well-written modern rock song has guitarists William Acuña and Kevin Kiley laying down overdriven electric guitar parts with two- and three-note chord voicings that effectively convey rich harmony without sounding muddy, which is an artform unto itself.

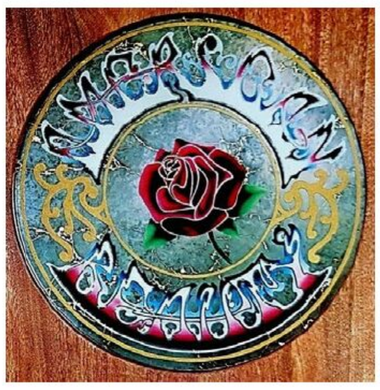
The intro and verses begin with two bars of ringing arpeggios followed by pairs of eighth-note chord punches separated by quarter-note rests, or "holes of silence," which creates an effective textural contrast to the previous two bars. When playing the arpeggios, try to allow the notes to ring together as much as possible, keeping in mind that the guitar tone is totally dry here. And be sure to completely mute the strings during the rests in bars 3, 4, 11, 12, 15 and 16.

These bars feature a descending voice on the A string, sandwiched between the open low E note and a fretted G♯ on the D string, which function as *surrounding pedal tones*. The Emaj7 voicing is dissonant, due to its low register, but the effect is musically compelling, as the chord is preceded and followed by rests and more consonant-sounding chords. The E chord in bars 4, 8, 12 and 16 requires a wide stretch, between the 2nd and 6th frets. Allow your wrist to twist as needed.

At the chorus (section C), the guitarists switch to strumming the same eight chords in steady eighth notes, providing another textural variation that works well for this part of the song. For the second verse (section E), both guitarists aggressively down-strum 16th notes with palm-muting (P.M.), creating a powerful, pummelling sound. Notice that Guitars 1 and 2 alternate between palm-muting and not muting on each beat, again providing an effective musical contrast.

The icing on the cake here is the lyrical lead guitar countermelody that sits behind the vocals during the song's choruses at section C. Notice that it's played almost entirely on the B string, resulting in timbral consistency.

THE GRATEFUL DEAD
"Truckin'"



THIS BLUES-ROCK CLASSIC, inspired by the Grateful Dead's gypsy lifestyle and interesting, sometimes even harrowing experiences out on the road, is built around a triplet-based shuffle groove and "boogie-riff" vamp in the key of E.

Note that our transcription is presented in $\frac{12}{8}$ meter, which is the same as eighth-note triplets in $\frac{4}{4}$, with four primary beats. You could either count "*one*-two-three, *four*-five-six, *sev*-eight-nine, *ten*-lev-twelve" throughout, or, alternatively, "*one*-trip-let, *two*-trip-let, *three*-trip-let, *four*-triplet." Or, if thinking in terms of swing eighth notes, just count "*one*-and, *two*-and, *three*-and, *four*-and."

The song's driving force is its Chuck Berry-style boogie

Throughout the arrangement, guitarists Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir tastefully layered acoustic and electric guitars, creating a rich accompaniment to Weir's lead vocals and providing engaging melodic content between the verses, with lead fills from Garcia.

The song's driving force is its Chuck-Berry-style root-5th, root-6th boogie rhythm figures, which are built around an open E5 chord — E5 to E6. When combined with the shuffle feel, this back-and-forth motion creates a catchy rhythm and harmonic flow.

For the choruses, the guitarists move the E chord shapes up five frets to A, then up two more frets to B, then back to A. Notice how they apply the same kinds of riff embellishments to all three chords. Be sure to acquaint yourself with the frames shown at the beginning of the transcription, as this will help you visualize how Weir and Garcia approach embellishing the foundational E, A and B chords.

Also note the occasional use of palm-muting (P.M.) in some of the electric rhythm parts (Gtr. 3), where ringing notes would take up more sonic space than if played on acoustic guitar, with its less midrange-y timbre. The palm-muting helps keep the groove tight, preventing it from becoming a wash, which is important when there's busy singing.

AC/DC
"Let There Be Rock"



ONE OF THE band's finest, most exciting songs from their golden late-Seventies era with original lead singer Bon Scott, this uptempo rock and roll anthem is like "Johnny B. Goode" on steroids.

With their Gibson SG Standard and Gretsch G1631 Jet Firebird guitars set to their bridge pickups and plugged straight into their cranked-up 100-watt Marshall amps, guitarists Angus and Malcolm Young create punchy tube-overdriven tones with which they use to play huge, roaring riffs built around 1st- and 2nd-position E, A and B chords. In signature fashion, the two guitarists exploit the rich, bold timbre of open strings and notes fretted within the first four frets.

In the song's Intro, Angus and Malcolm lay down complimentary chord riffs, both built around the downpicked open low E string, with upstroke stabs on G and A power chords on the middle strings. Note how Malcolm (Gtr. 1) plays intense eighth-note strums here, with palm-muted downstrokes on his open low E string, which is quite demanding to do at this quick tempo, while Angus (Gtr. 2) plays simpler rhythms here, allowing his chords to ring.

Both guitarists catch a much-welcomed break during the verses, where they lay out and let the bass, drums and vocals carry the show until the bridge (section C), where they come back in on an open A chord punctuated with muted-string accents. Be sure to completely silence the strings on beat 2 of each of these bars (15-18), using your fret-hand fingers to choke the strings.

Angus' first and third solos (sections D and H) are adrenaline-fueled fury. In characteristic fashion, the guitarist lays down Chuck Berry-approved minor pentatonic licks and digs into the strings hard, so as to coax as much tone as possible from his instrument. To this end, the guitarist employs mostly down-strokes, aggressively jabbing the strings while palm muting the unused bottom two strings, to prevent them from ringing in sympathy.

Starting in bar 94, Angus builds the song to a compelling climactic ending by tremolo strumming a long series of major and minor 3rd dyads on his G and B strings. Again, take care to mute your idle low strings when playing this part, to suppress unwanted sounds. GW

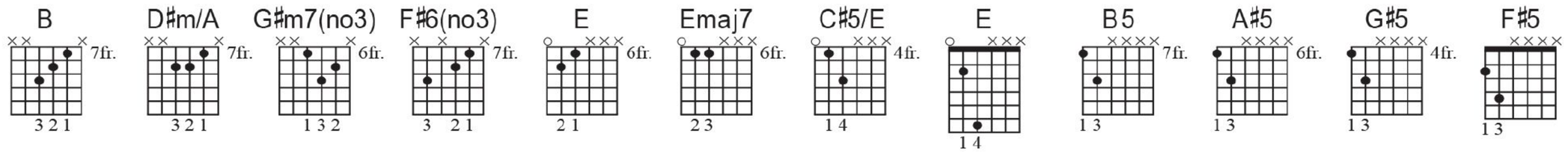
MILITARIE GUN

"Thought You Were Waving"

AS HEARD ON **GOD SAVE THE GUN**

WORDS AND MUSIC BY **IAN SHELTON** AND **PHILIP ODOM**

TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderately Slow ♩ = 75

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

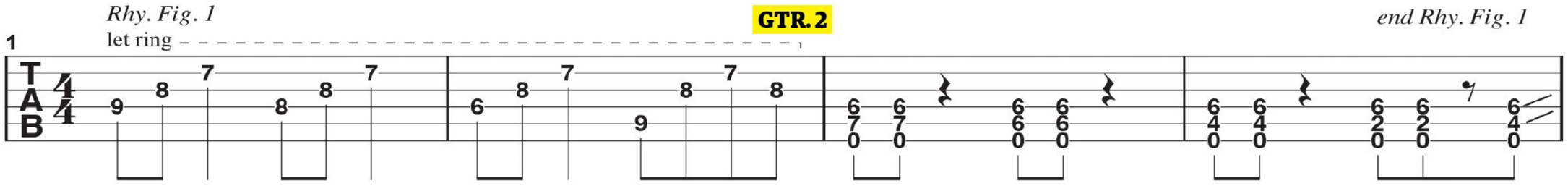
Rhy. Fig. 1

let ring

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

GTR. 2

end Rhy. Fig. 1



Hey

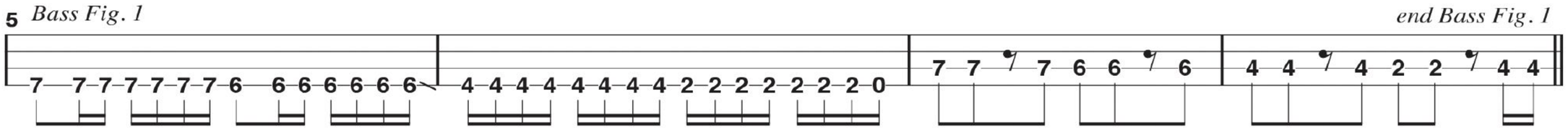
B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

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

Bass

Bass Fig. 1

end Bass Fig. 1

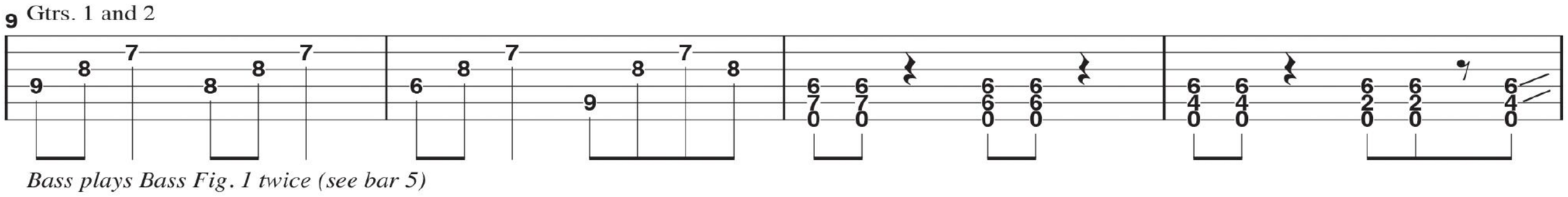


B **1st Verse** (0:25)

I was taking on water trying to get back to land I froze I froze I froze

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

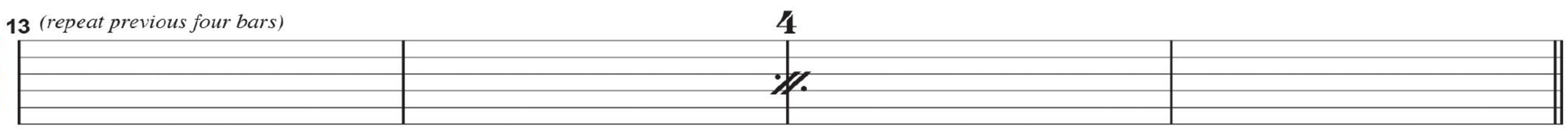
Gtrs. 1 and 2



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

To busy trying to keep myself out of trouble I just didn't understand I froze I froze I froze

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

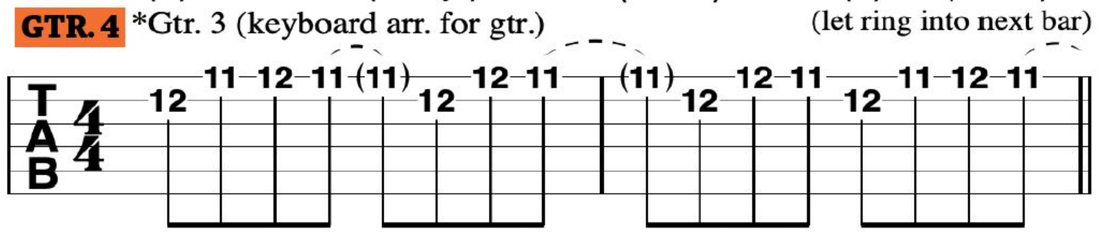


Fill 1 (0:57, 1:10)

(E) (Emaj7) (C♯5/E) (E) (C♯5/E)

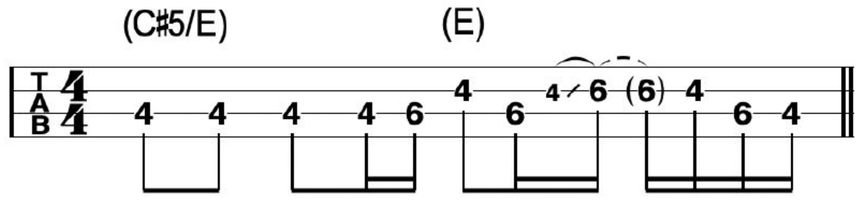
GTR. 4 *Gtr. 3 (keyboard arr. for gtr.)

(let ring into next bar)



Bass Fill 1 (2:43)

(C♯5/E) (E)



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C Chorus (0:51, 1:49, 2:20)

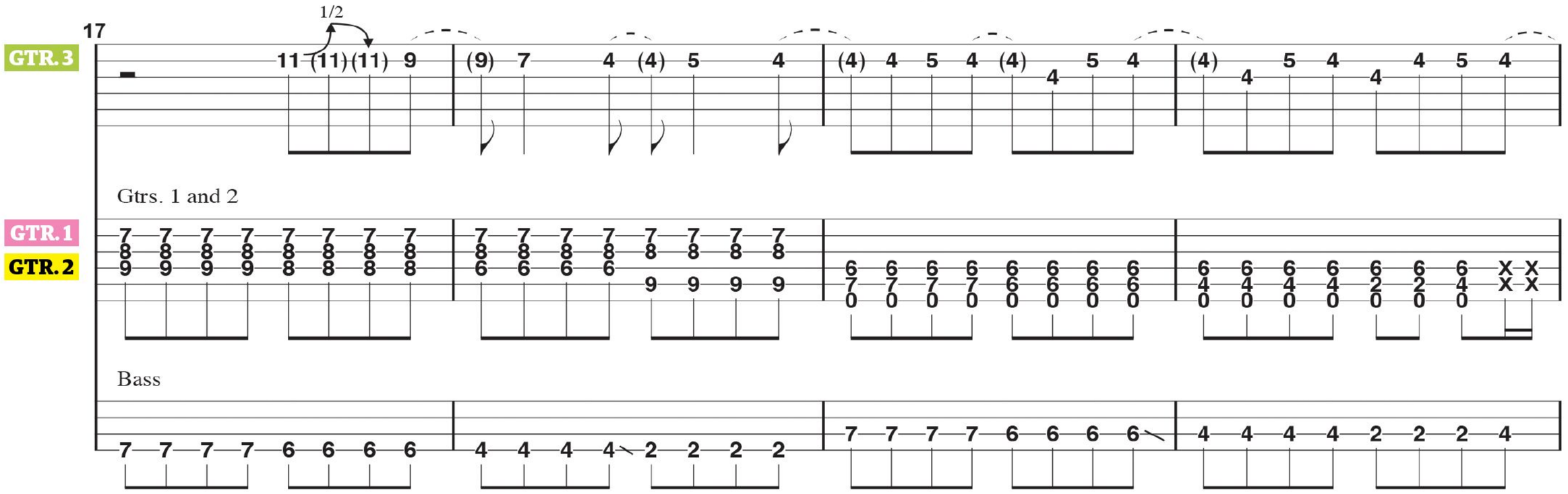
I thought you were waving turns out you were drowning Really wish I could read your mind

3rd time: (I saw you through the window of another burning house I just thought you lived there so I went and shut my mouth I froze I froze I froze Well now)

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

Gtr. 4 plays Fill 1 (see below bar 13)



3rd time, skip ahead to F *Outro (bar 32)*

I thought you were waving turns out you were drowning Pull me down just save me next time

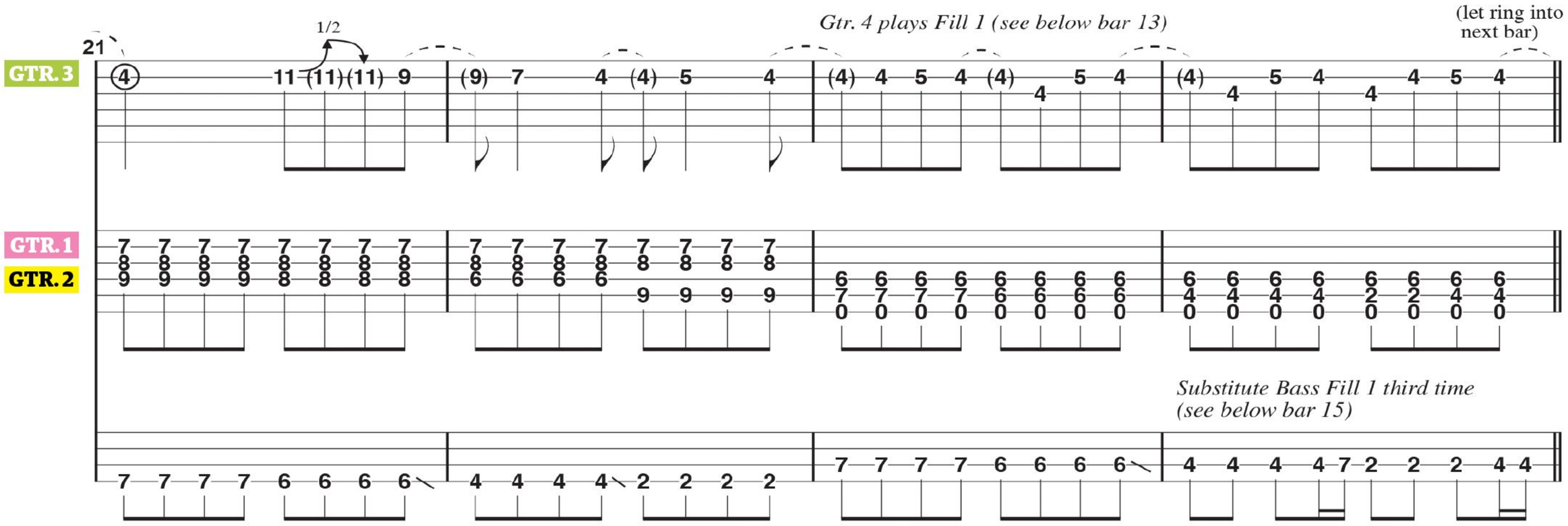
(I Hanging off a cliff so you reach for my hand You keep giving signals that I don't understand I froze I froze I froze)

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

Gtr. 4 plays Fill 1 (see below bar 13)

(let ring into next bar)

Substitute Bass Fill 1 third time (see below bar 15)



D (1:17, 2:14)

2nd time, go back to C *Chorus (bar 17)*

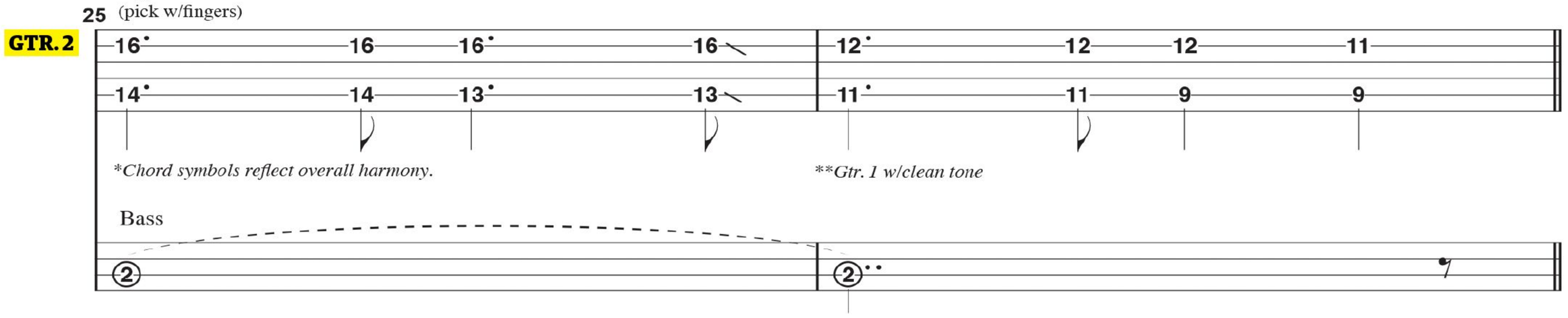
Well now

*B D♯m(no3)/A♯ G♯m F♯sus4 F♯

Gtr. 2

Riff A (pick w/fingers)

GTR. 1 GTR. 2 **Gtrs. 1 and 2



*Chord symbols reflect overall harmony.

**Gtr. 1 w/clean tone

E **2nd Verse** (1:23)

(on repeat, skip ahead to bar 31)

I saw you through the window of another burning house I just thought you lived there so I went and shut my mouth I froze I froze
Hanging off a cliff so you reach for my hand You keep giving signals that I don't understand I froze I froze

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7

Gtrs. 1 and 2
Rhy. Fig. 2

27 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

B5 A♯5 G♯5 F♯5

Gtr. 3

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR. 3

Bass

1. *(go back to bar 27)*

2. *Go back to* **C** *Chorus (bar 17)*

I froze I froze

C♯5/E E C♯5/E C♯5/E E

Gtrs. 1 and 2

30 P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass

F **Outro** (2:46)

If you've been waiting and waiting and waiting Pull me down just save me next time

B D♯m/A♯ G♯m7(no3) F♯6(no3) E Emaj7 C♯5/E E C♯5/E

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 27)
Gtr. 3 plays Riff A (see bar 25)
Gtr. 2

GTR. 1 GTR. 2
Gtrs. 1 and 2

32 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR. 2

Bass

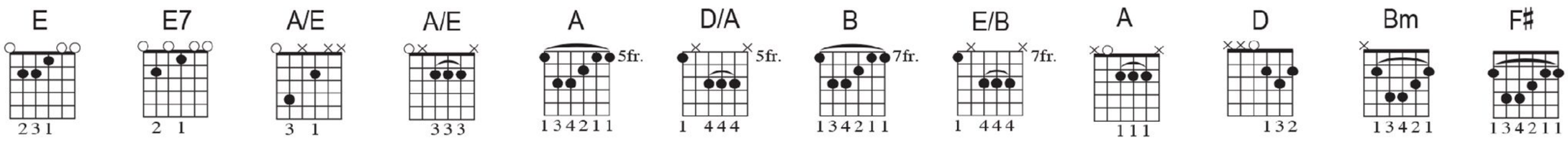
THE GRATEFUL DEAD

"Truckin'"

AS HEARD ON **AMERICAN BEAUTY**

WORDS BY **ROBERT HUNTER** MUSIC BY **JERRY GARCIA**, **PHIL LESH** AND **BOB WEIR**

TRANSCRIBED BY **ANDY ALEDORT**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderate Shuffle ♩. = 126

N.C.(E7) E5

Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.)

GTR. 4

Gtr. 1 (acous.)

let ring throughout

Rhy. Fig. 1

GTR. 1

Gtr. 2 (acous.)

GTR. 2

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

P.M.

GTR. 3

Bass

w/pick

Gtrs. 1, 2 and 3 play Rhy. Fig. 1 three times (see bar 3)

Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

Bass

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B **1st Chorus** (0:13)

Truckin' Got my chips cashed in Keep truckin' like the Doo-dah Man To-

E A D/A A

Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

Gtrs. 1 and 2
Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR. 1

Bass
Bass Fig. 1

gether more or less in line Just keep truckin' on

E/B B E/B A D/A A D/A E

GTR. 4

GTR. 1

E

Gtr. 3

Riff A

P.M.

GTR. 3

Gtrs. 1 and 2

let ring

end Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass

end Bass Fig. 1 *Bass Fig. 2* *(repeat previous bar)*

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

1, 2, 3. | 4.

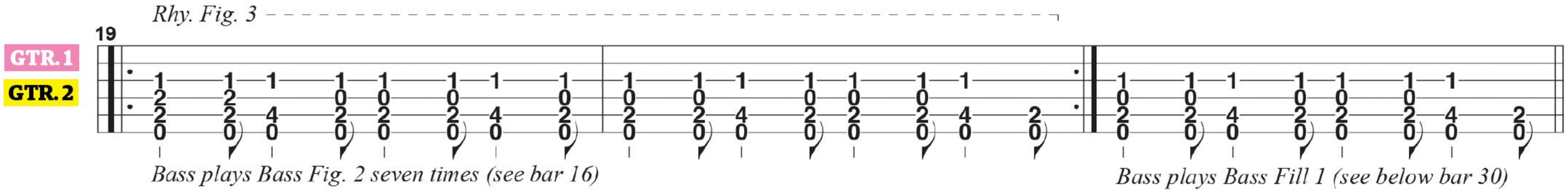
Arrows of neon and flashing marquees out on Main Street Chi-
cago New York Detroit and it's all on the same street Your
typical city involved in a typical daydream
Hang it up and see what tomorrow brings

E(7)

Gtr. 3 plays Riff A four times simile (see bar 17)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

Rhy. Fig. 3



Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 seven times (see bar 16)

Bass plays Bass Fill 1 (see below bar 30)

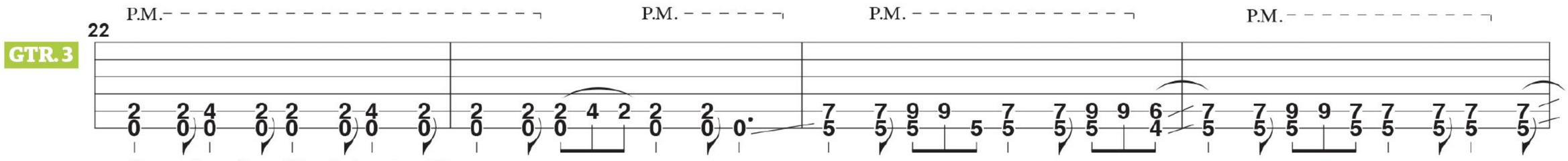
D **2nd and 4th Choruses** (0:52, 2:39)

(2.) Dallas got a soft machine Houston too close to New Orleans
(4.) Truckin' up to Buffalo I been thinkin' you got to mellow slow It

E A

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 7)

Gtr. 3

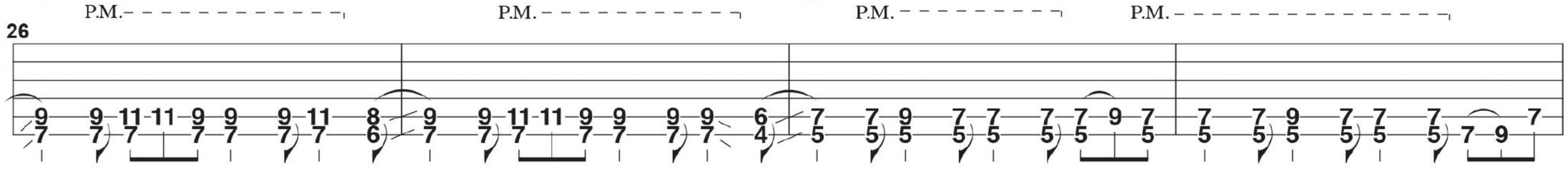


Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 7)

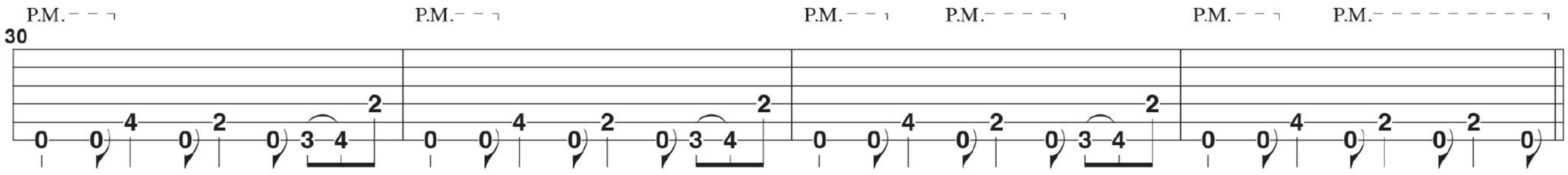
2nd time, skip ahead to **I** *(bar 75)*

New York got the ways and means and just won't let you be
takes time You pick a place to go and just keep truckin' on

B A



E



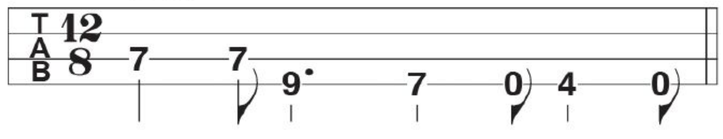
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 twice (see bar 16)

Bass plays Bass Fill 2 (see below)

Bass Fill 1 (0:50, 1:28)

(E)

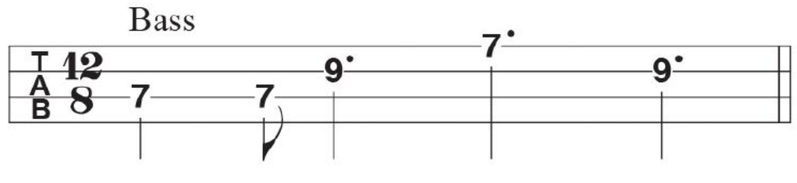
Bass



Bass Fill 2 (1:13)

(E)

Bass



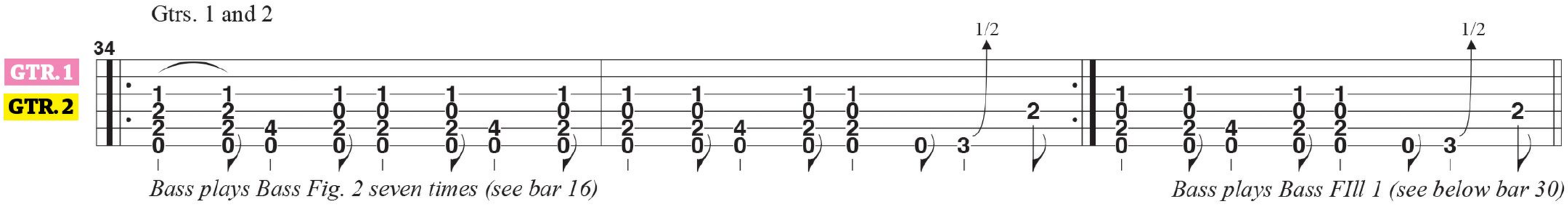
E **2nd Verse** (1:15)

1, 2, 3. | 4.

Most of the cats that you meet on the street speak of true love
Most of the time they're sittin' and cryin' at home
One of these days they know they gotta get goin'
Out of the door and down the street all a- lone

E

Gtrs. 1 and 2



Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 seven times (see bar 16)

Bass plays Bass FIll 1 (see below bar 30)

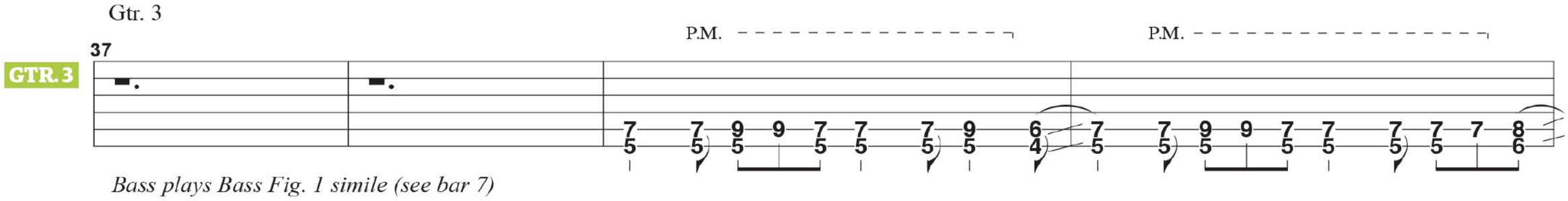
F **3rd Chorus** (1:30)

Truckin' like the Doo - dah Man once told me you got to play your hand

E A

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 simile (see bar 7)

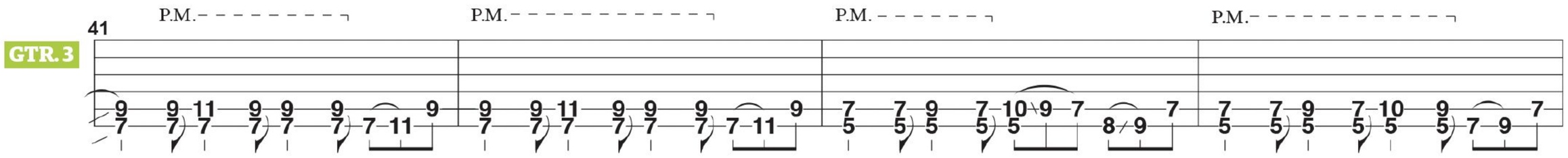
Gtr. 3



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see bar 7)

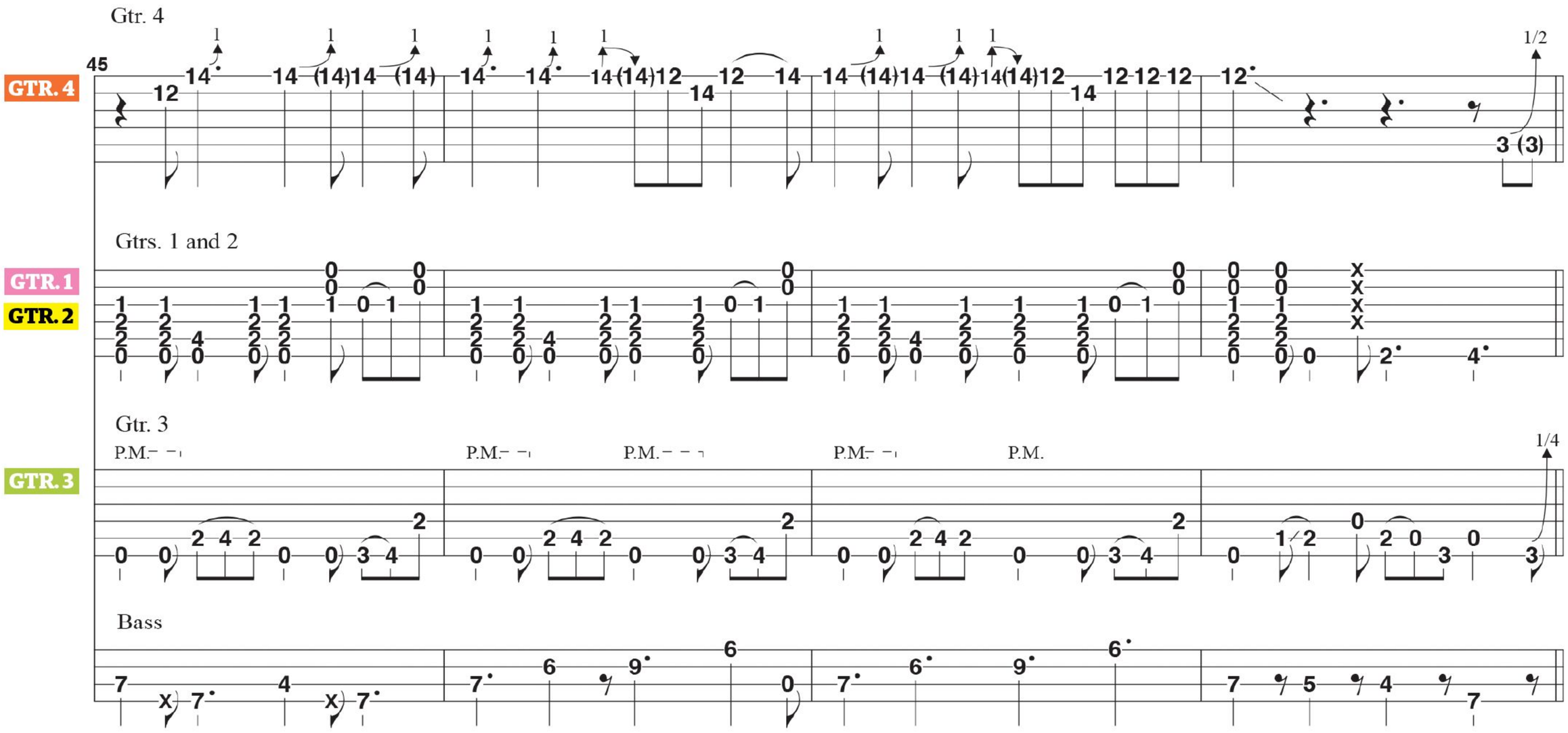
Sometimes the cards ain't worth a dime if you don't lay 'em down

B A



E

Gtr. 4



G Bridge (1:53, 3:54)

Sometimes the light's all shinin' on me

A N.C.(G) (F♯m) (A)

Gtr. 4

49

GTR. 4

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Gtr. 3

P.M.

GTR. 3

Bass

Other times I can barely see

A D A N.C.(G) (F♯m) (A)

53

GTR. 4

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

P.M.

GTR. 3

Lately it occurs to me what a

D Bm F♯ Bm F♯

57

GTR. 4

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

GTR. 3

3rd time, skip ahead to **M** *(bar 99)*

long strange trip it's been

A E7

Gtr. 4

61

GTR. 4

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

Bass

E A/E E

Gtr. 4

64

GTR. 4

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

Bass

H **3rd Verse** (2:24)

What in the world ever became of Sweet Jane She lost her sparkle You know she isn't the same

E

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 3 four times simile (see bar 19)

Gtr. 4

67

GTR. 4

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 four times (see bar 16)

Go back to **D** *4th Chorus (bar 24)*

Livin' on reds vitamin C and cocaine All a friend can say is "Ain't it a shame"

Gtr. 4

71

GTR. 4

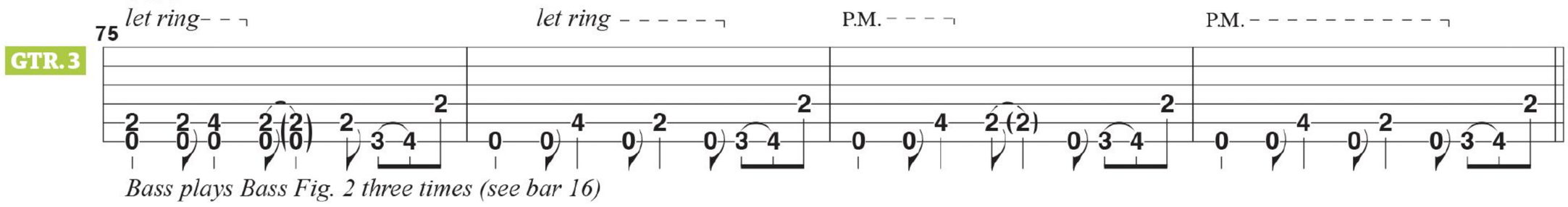
Bass

I (2:54)

E

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 four times simile (see bar 3)

Gtr. 3



Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 three times (see bar 16)

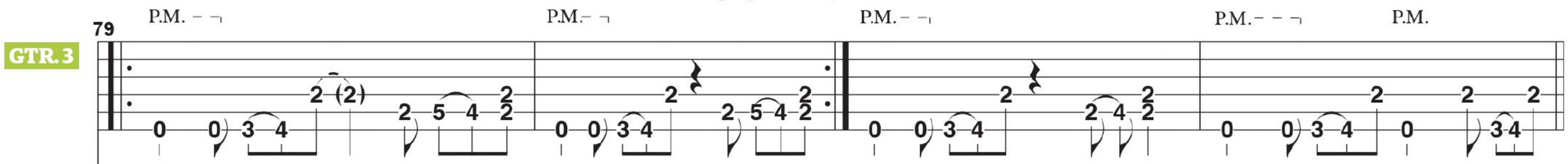
J **4th Verse** (3:02)

Sittin' and starin' out of the hotel window
Got a tip, they're gonna kick in the door again I'd
like to get some sleep before I travel But if you got a warrant I guess you're gonna come in

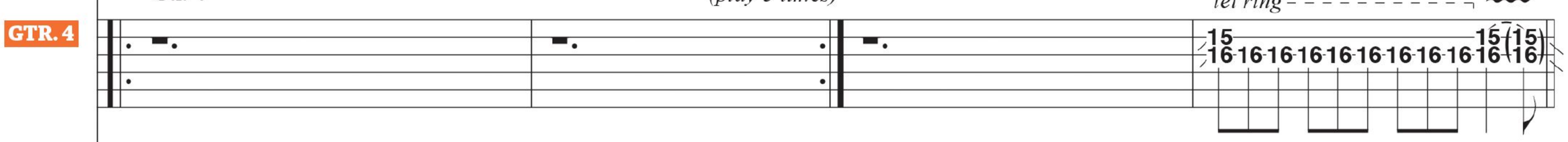
E

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 3 four times simile (see bar 19)

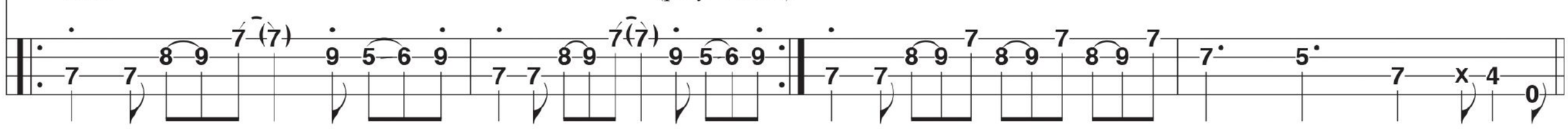
Gtr. 3 *(play 3 times)*



Gtr. 4 *(play 3 times)*



Bass *(play 3 times)*
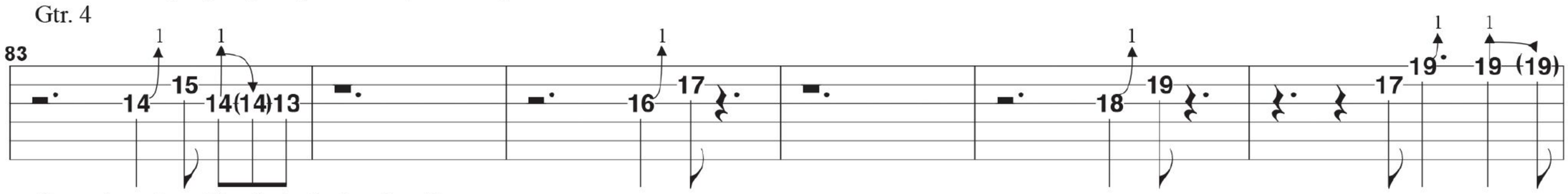


K **5th Chorus** (3:17)

Busted down on Bourbon Street Set up like a bowlin' pin Knocked down It gets to wearin' thin They

E A B

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 simile (see bar 7)

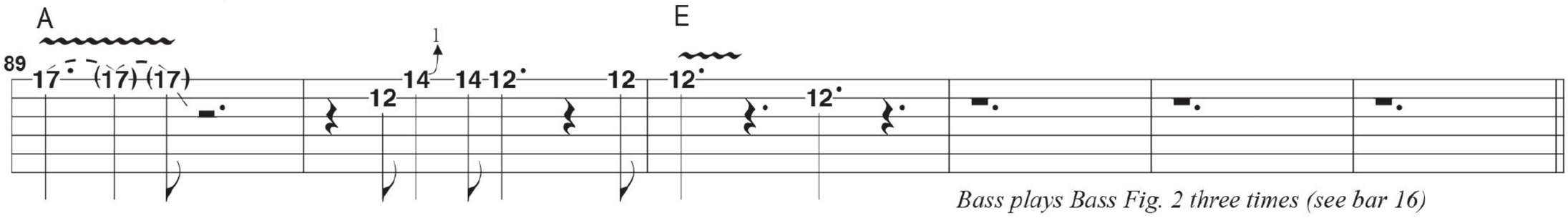
Gtr. 4



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see bar 7)

just won't let you be

A E



Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 three times (see bar 16)

Go back to **G** *Bridge (bar 49)*

L **5th Verse** (3:39)

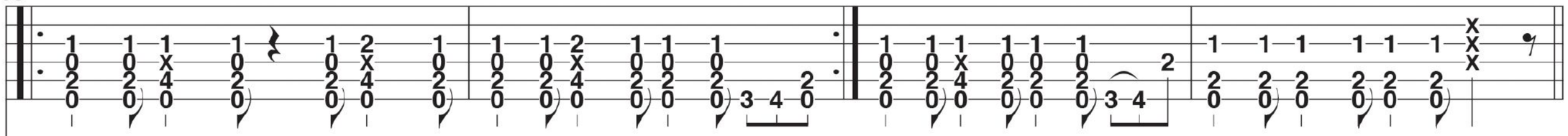
You're sick of hangin' around and you'd like to travel Get
tired of travelin' and you want to settle down I
guess they can't revoke your soul for tryin' Get out the door and light out look all around

E7 A/E E A/E E

Gtrs. 1 and 2 *(play 3 times)*

95

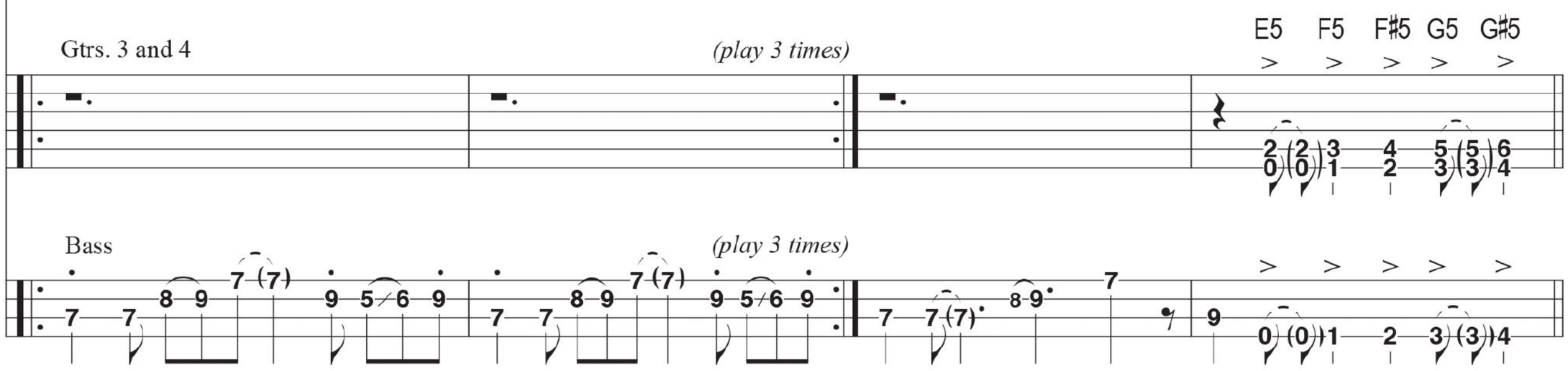
GTR. 1
GTR. 2



Gtrs. 3 and 4 *(play 3 times)*

E5 F5 F♯5 G5 G♯5

GTR. 3
GTR. 4



Bass *(play 3 times)*

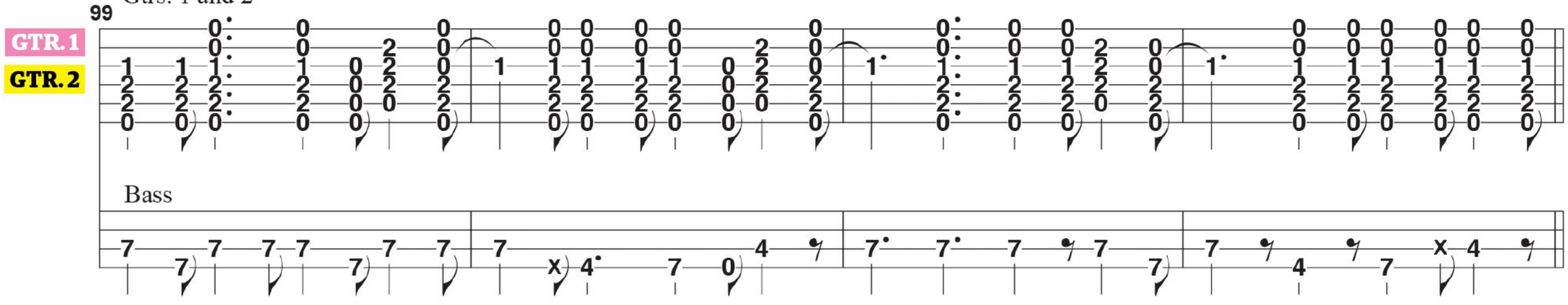
M (4:18)

E A/E E A/E E A/E E

Gtrs. 1 and 2

99

GTR. 1
GTR. 2



Bass

N **6th Chorus** (4:25)

Truckin' I'm a goin' home Whoa whoa baby back where I belong

E A

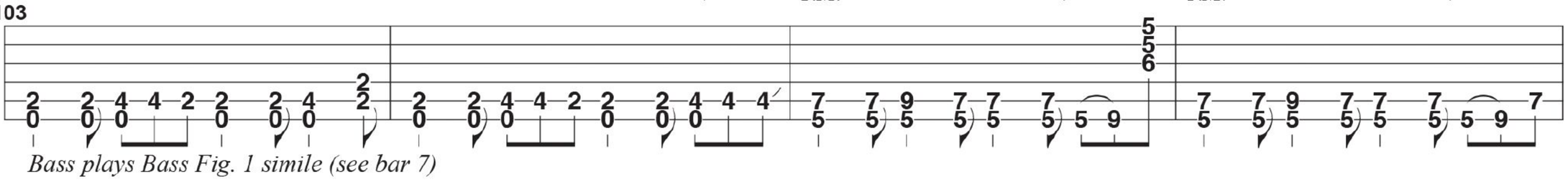
Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 simile (see bar 7)

Gtr. 3

P.M. P.M. P.M.

103

GTR. 3



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see bar 7)

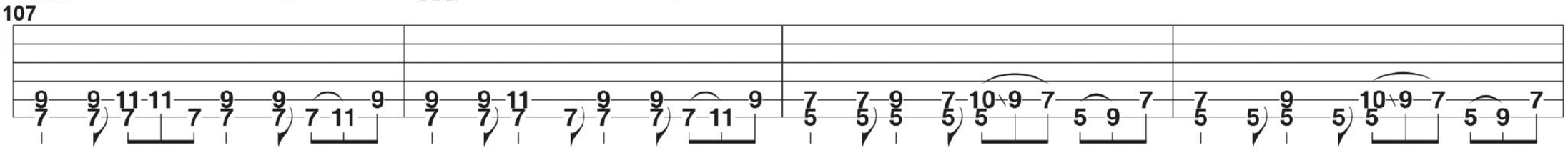
Back home sit down and patch my bones and get back truckin' on

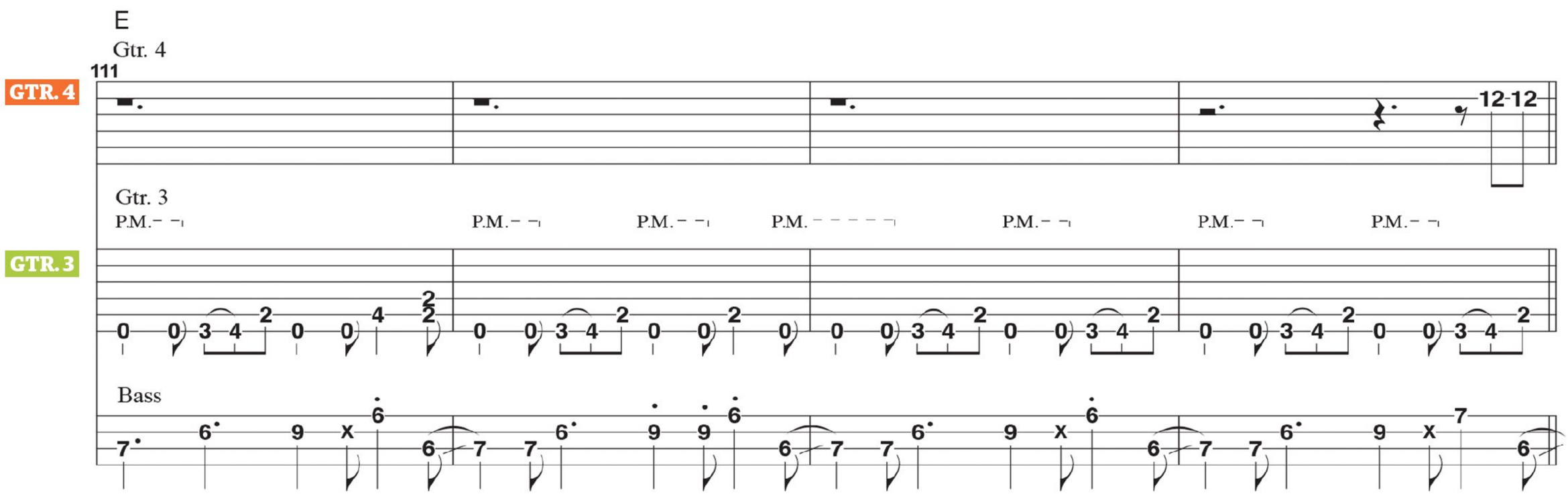
B A

P.M. P.M.
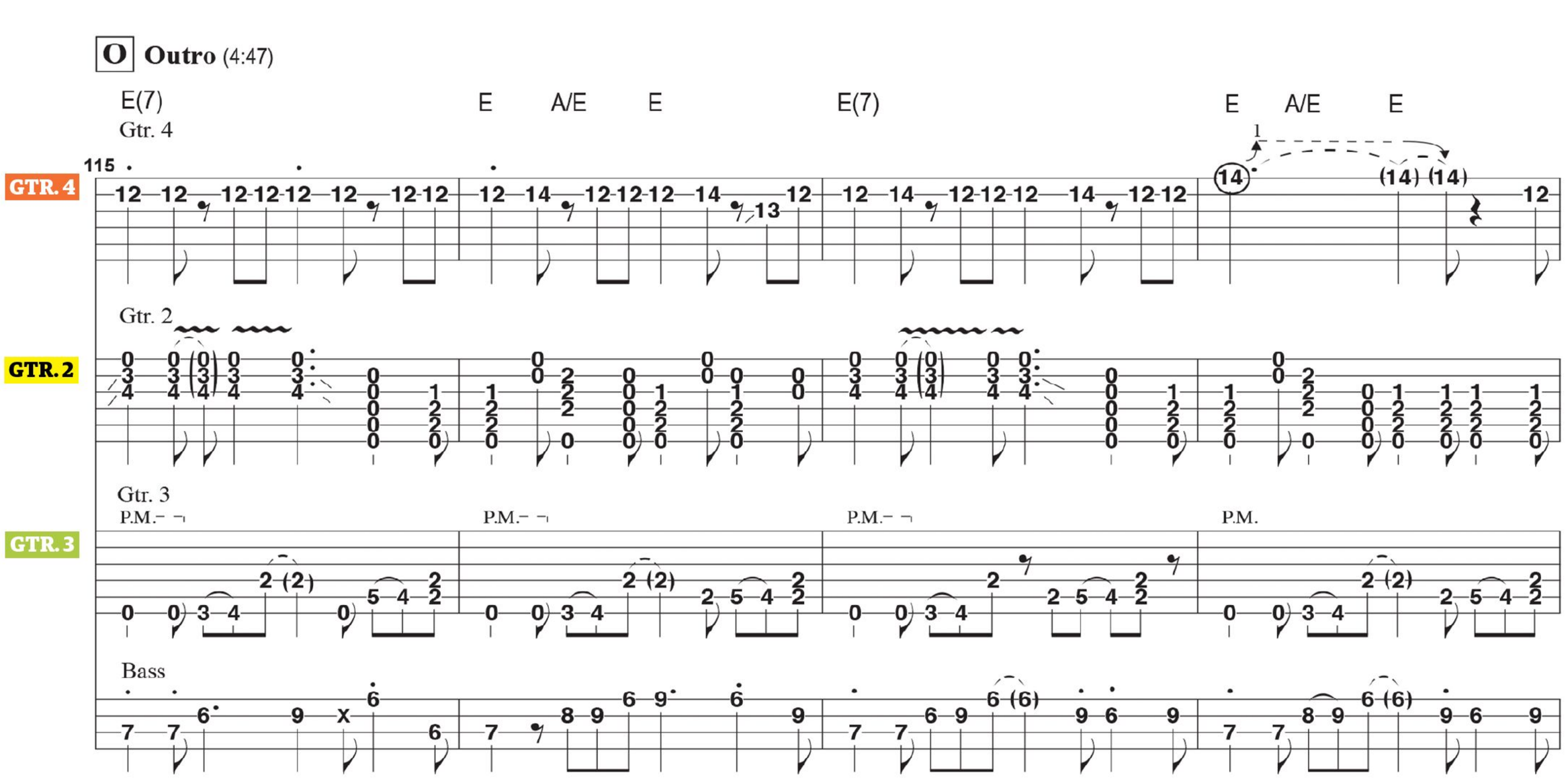
107

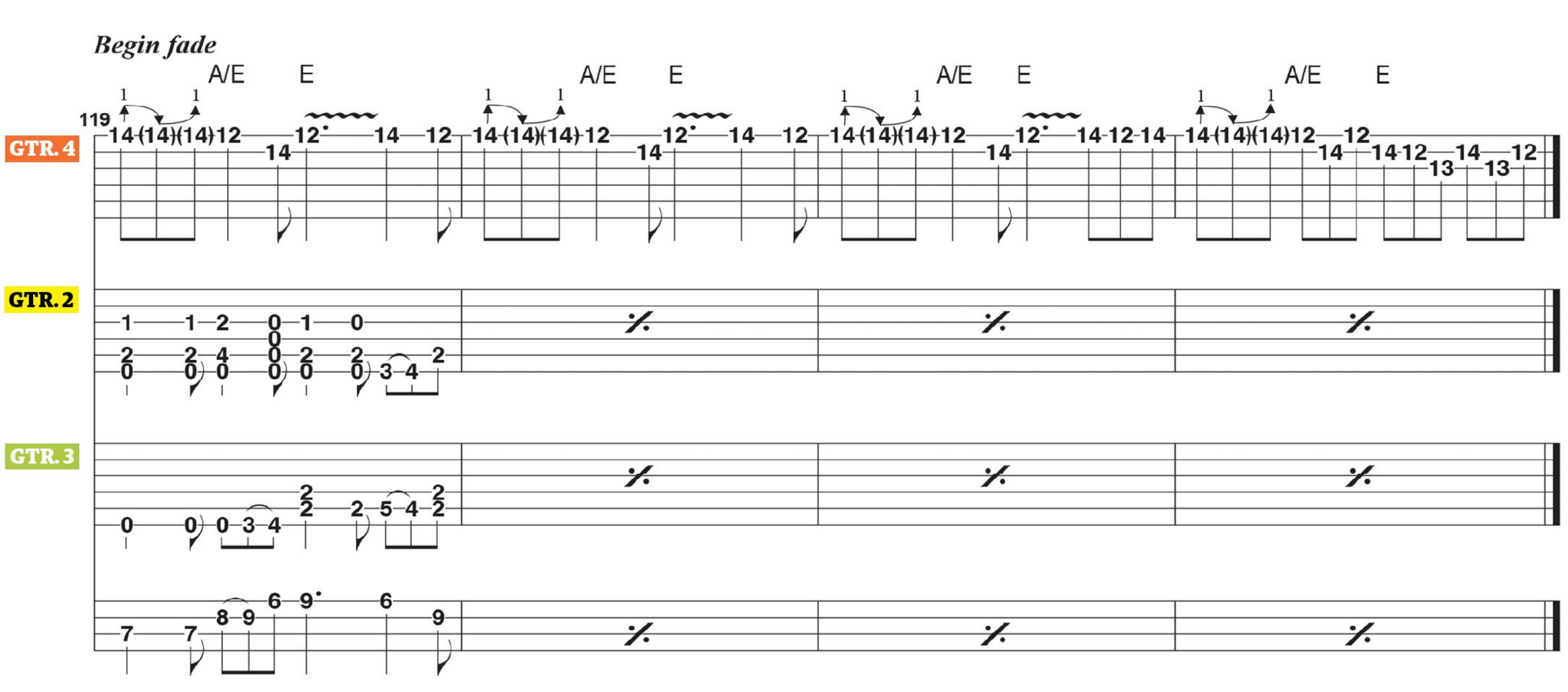
GTR. 3




E
Gtr. 4
111
GTR. 4
Gtr. 3
P.M.
GTR. 3
Bass

O **Outro** (4:47)


E(7)
E
A/E
E
E(7)
E
A/E
E
Gtr. 4
115
GTR. 4
Gtr. 2
GTR. 2
Gtr. 3
P.M.
GTR. 3
Bass


Begin fade
A/E
E
119
GTR. 4
GTR. 2
GTR. 3

AC/DC

"Let There Be Rock"

AS HEARD ON **LET THERE BE ROCK**

WORDS AND MUSIC BY **ANGUS YOUNG, MALCOLM YOUNG** AND **BON SCOTT**

TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**

Bass is in drop-D tuning (low to high: D A D G).
To play along with the recording, tune all instruments slightly flat.



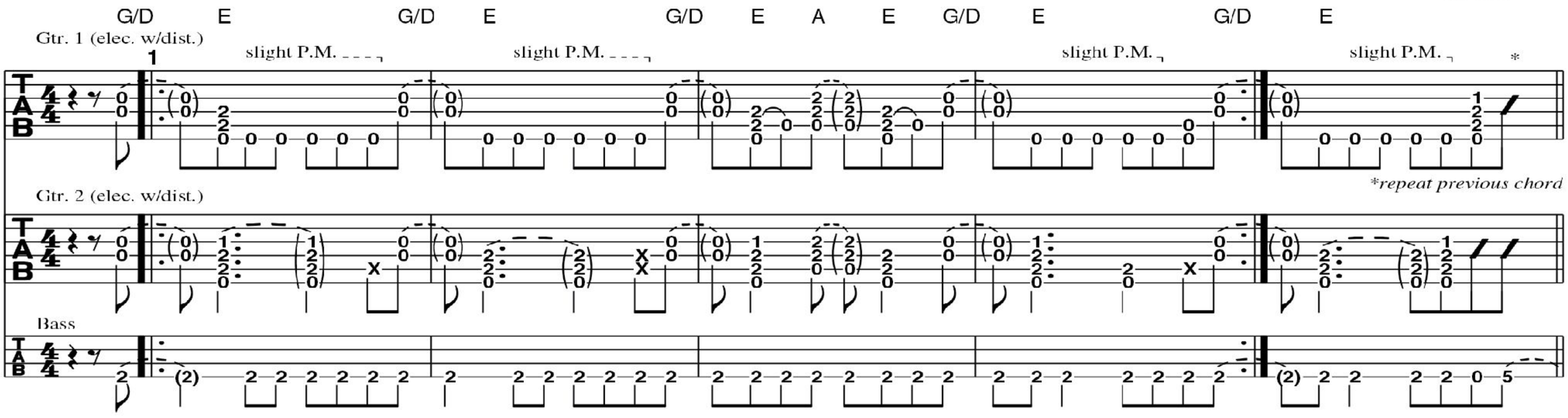
A Intro (0:00, 1:47, 3:34)

Fast ♩ = 184

1., 2., 3. | 4.

(3rd time) skip ahead to **F** *3rd Verse*

1. In the be-
3. One

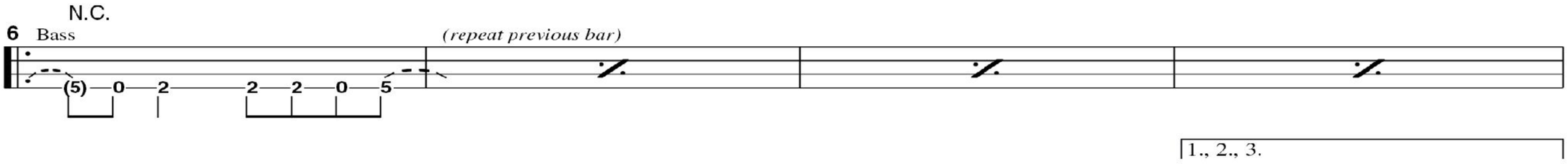


B 1st and 2nd Verses (0:21, 2:08)

(1.) ginning white man had the schmaltz back in nineteen fifty-five man
and there was The sound black man had the blues
there was drums
"Let there be light"
"Let there be guitar"

2. And it came to pass that rock and roll was born and all across
guitar man got famous the businessman got rich and in
fifty million fingers learning how to play and you could
sound
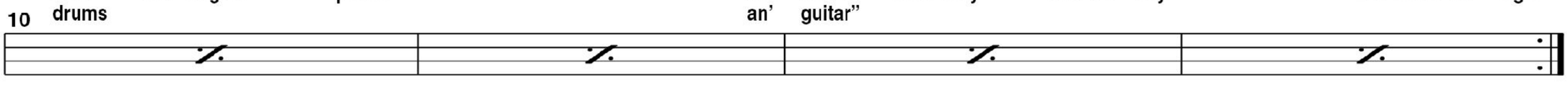
N.C.



1., 2., 3.

(1.) didn't know about a rock and roll show and all that jive The
No one knew what they was gonna do but Tchaikowsky had the news He said "Let there be sound"
and there was light "Let there be drums"
there was guitar

(2.) the land every rockin' band was blowin' up a storm And the
every bar there was a superstar with a seven-year itch There were
hear the fingers pickin' and this is what they had to say "Let there be light
drums an' guitar"
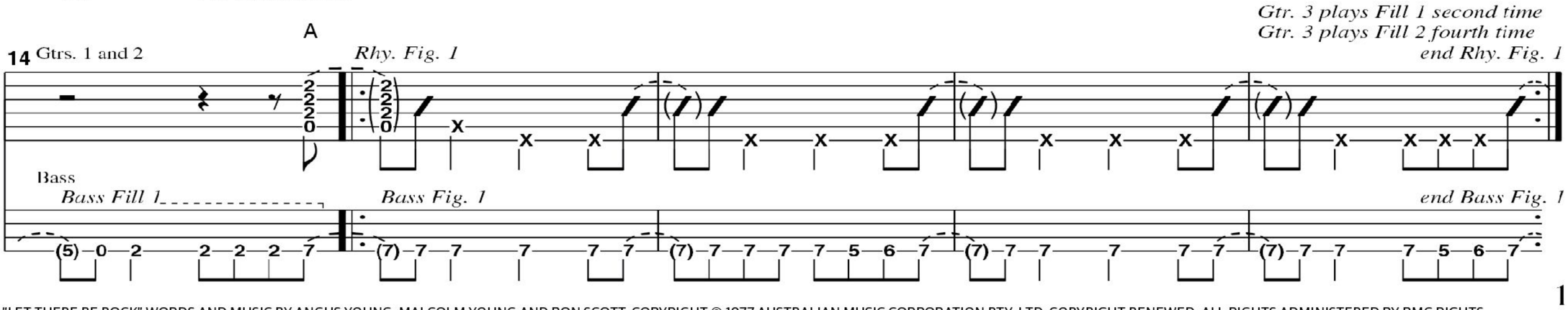


4. **C Bridge** (1:02, 2:50)

Ow Let there be rock

(2nd time on 2nd Bridge) skip ahead to **E** *2nd Guitar Solo*

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 second time
Gtr. 3 plays Fill 2 fourth time
end Rhy. Fig. 1



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D 1st Guitar Solo (1:13)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 15)

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

GTR. 3

full

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice (see bar 15)

Whoa

23

GTR. 3

Gtr. 3

27

GTR. 3

Gtrs. 1 and 2

Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Bass

Bass Fig. 2

A

full

31

GTR. 3

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Freely

go back to A *Intro*

35

GTR. 3

G/D

fdbk.

**tap w/pick*

pitch: E

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

end Bass Fig. 2

E **2nd Guitar Solo** (3:01)

A

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 15) *(play 7 times)* *Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 27)* *(on repeat)* B5

40 Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

Bass play Bass Fig. 1 twice (see bar 15) *Bass play Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 27)*

44 B5 P.M. A

GTR. 3

go back to **A** *Intro*

Freely

let ring

fdbk.

48

GTR. 3

*tap and trill w/pick

F **3rd Verse** (3:55)

night in a club called the Shakin' Hand there was a
was good and the music was loud And the

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

53 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass

Bass Fig. 3 *end Bass Fig. 3*

forty-two-decibel rockin' band
singer turned and he said to the crowd

1. And the music 2. "Let there be rock"

57 Gtrs. 1 and 2 G/D E A E G/D E E5 A

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass plays Bass Fill 1 (see bar 14)

G (4:16)

A

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 five times simile (see bar 15)

62 Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

Bass play Bass Fig. 1 five times simile (see bar 15)

H **3rd Guitar Solo** (4:21)

66 A

GTR. 3

Fill 1 (1:12)

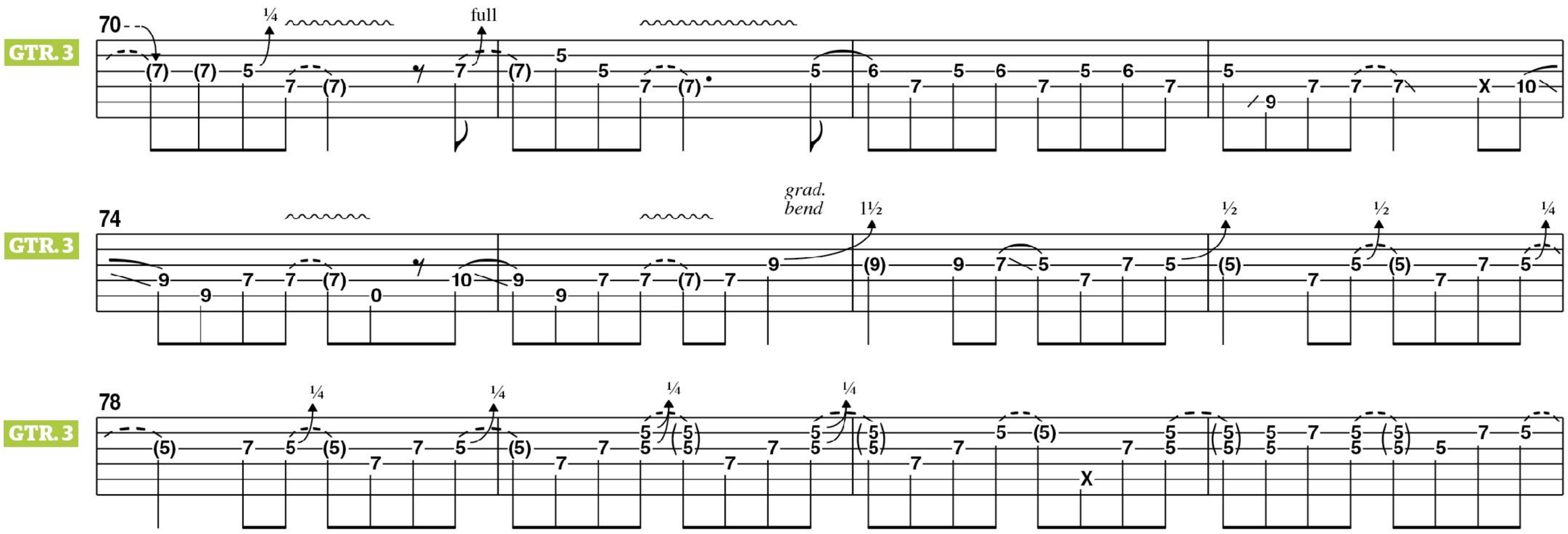
GTR. 3 Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

*pick scrape (hammer on w/fretting hand)

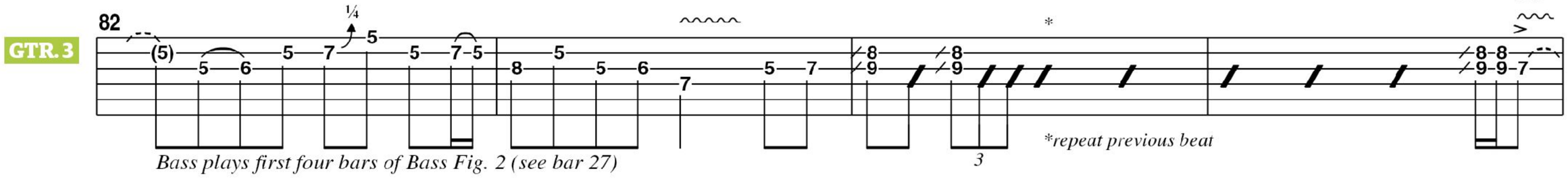
*Bounce pick along string while scraping.

Fill 2 (3:00)

GTR. 3 Gtr. 3

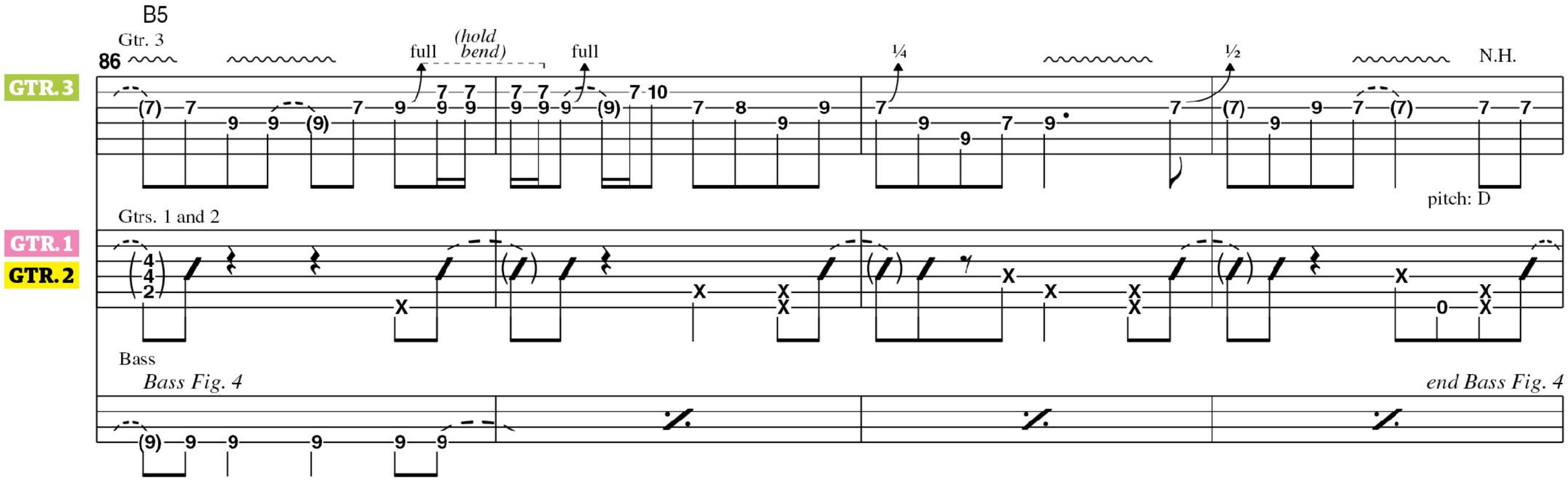


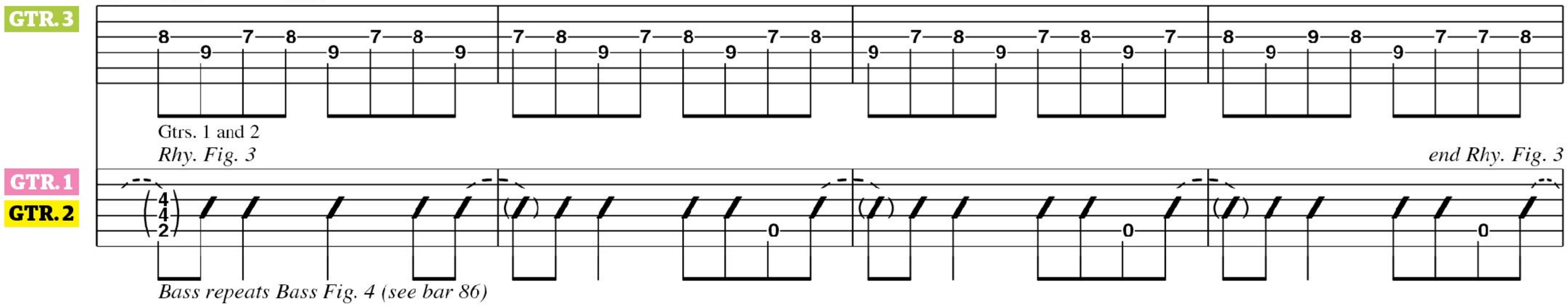
Gtrs. 1 and 2 play first four bars of Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 27)



Bass plays first four bars of Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 27)

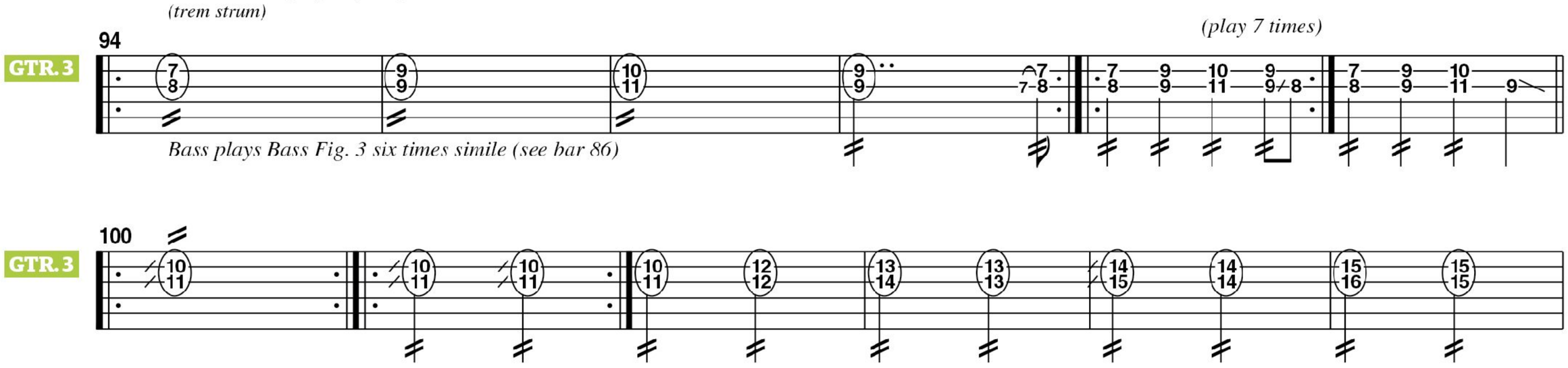
Gtr. 3





Bass repeats Bass Fig. 4 (see bar 86)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 3 six times (see bar 90)
(trem strum)



Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 six times simile (see bar 86)

Gtr. 3

106

GTR. 3

Gtrs. 1 and 2 *(repeat previous bar)*

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass

B

110

GTR. 3

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

let there be ring

I **Outro** (5:43)

Freely

B5

114

GTR. 3

let ring

E

*3

**Open G string is unintentionally sounded by bend.*

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

B5

B

118

GTR. 3

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

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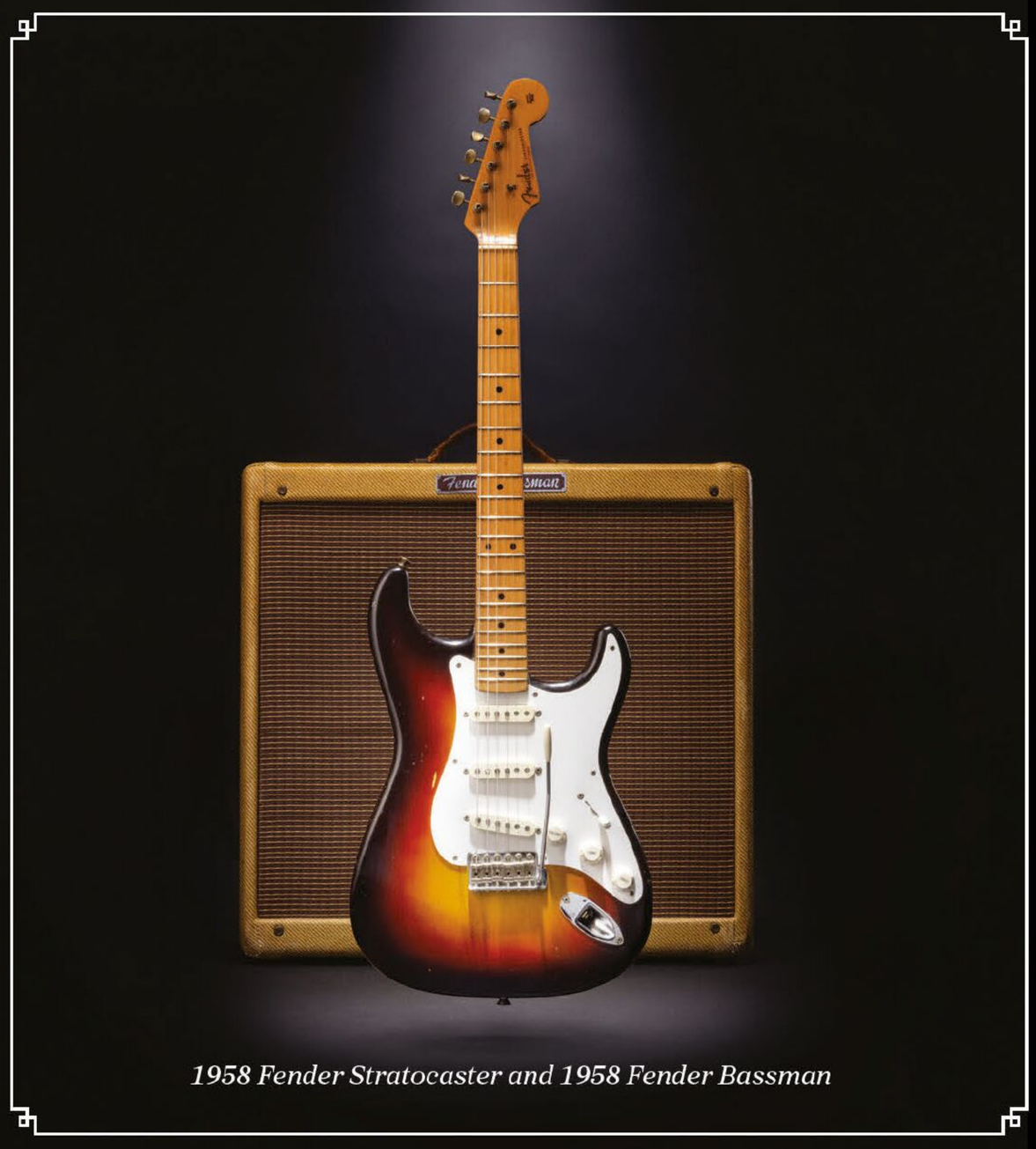
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POWER TOOLS

Boss DD-2/DD-3 Digital Delay

1983–2019

CATEGORY: DIGITAL DELAY PEDAL

BY CHRIS GILL

INTEGRATED CIRCUIT TECHNOLOGY advanced at such a rapid pace during the late Seventies and early Eighties that only seven years passed between the introduction of the first analog delay pedals in 1976 and the debut of the world's first compact digital delay pedal – the Boss DD-2 Digital Delay – in 1983. The Boss DD-2 was sort of a spin-off product of the larger and more expensive SDE-3000 rack-unit professional digital delay introduced that same year. But although the DD-2 contained the same 63H101 CMOS gate array IC "long chip" as the SDE-3000, the pedal version was not an SDE-3000 in a stomp box like some have claimed, as the DD-2 lacked the 3000's modulation section and had a shorter maximum delay time and lower frequency response of 10Hz to 8kHz (compared to the 3000's 17kHz upper range), amongst several other feature differences.

Regardless of its spec deficits compared to its big brother rack unit, the DD-2 still sounded superb, with its exceptionally impressive low noise performance and longer delay times (12.5 to 800 milliseconds) than those offered by analog delay pedals. Many guitarists also preferred the warmer sound of the DD-2's delayed signal over that of the SDE-3000 thanks to the stompbox's rolled off high frequencies above 8kHz. With only four knobs on its front panel (effect level, feedback, delay time, delay mode), the DD-2 made it easy for guitarists to dial in delay settings. When the Hold mode was selected, the pedal would infinitely repeat a short section as long as the footswitch was held down, providing a primitive looper function. The DD-2 also included a pair of output jacks for a stereo setup where the stereo (right) jack output the original dry signal while the mono (left) jack automatically switched from a mixed output to the delayed signal only.

When the cost of the 63H101 chip dropped significantly, Boss changed the pedal's name to DD-3 and reduced the list price, even though the DD-2 and DD-3 were otherwise completely identical. The decision was mainly a PR move to avoid upsetting DD-2 buyers who paid a lot more for the same thing. Sometime during the very late Eighties the DD-3's 63H101 chip was replaced by a smaller square IC that also offered improved bandwidth and audio specs. Further chip upgrades appeared in later iterations of the DD-3 up through 2014. However, many guitarists feel that the darker, warmer qualities of the more "lo-fi" 63H101 chip sound more musical, so long chip versions of the DD-3 (identifiable by a cutout section on the bottom housing for mounting the old-style large power supply jack) now sell for premium prices.



Brad Paisley – shown here in 2024 – keeps an original Boss DD-2 on his pedalboard; [*below*] a Boss DD-3 photographed in 2010

It seems almost everyone who is anyone has used one at some point in their careers

SUGGESTED SETTINGS
LEAD GUITAR "REVERB"
EFFECT LEVEL: 3
FEEDBACK: 2
DELAY TIME: 5.5
MODE: Long/800ms (Delay effect is only noticeable on short, staccato notes and chords, otherwise the effect is reverb-like ambience and depth.)

ROCKABILLY SLAPBACK
EFFECT LEVEL: 5
FEEDBACK: 0.5
DELAY TIME: 3
MODE: Long/800ms

Despite the fact that digital delay technology continues to expand and improve, many discriminating players like Joe Bonamassa, Nels Cline, Billy Duffy, David Gilmour, Eric Johnson, Tom Morello and Brad Paisley still keep their original DD-2 or long chip DD-3 delays on their pedalboards. While most guitarists have moved on to more modern digital delay boxes (including the Boss DD-8 and upgraded DD-3T), it seems almost everyone who is anyone has used a DD-2 or DD-3 at some point in their careers. It's a perennial pedal that simply sounds good and works for anything from rambunctious rockabilly slapback and crisp Edge-style dotted eighth note rhythms to trippy long repeating echoes. GW

MICHAEL CAMPANELLA/REDFERNS, JESSE WILD/FUTURE

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