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GUITAR WORLD

GUITAR & BASS

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GONE!**

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A full-page photograph of Ed Sheeran, a man with short, light brown hair and a light beard, wearing a white t-shirt and black pants. He is holding a PRS Hollowbody I Piezo Baritone guitar, which has a vibrant orange-to-red gradient finish and two f-holes. The guitar has a dark fretboard with white bird inlays and a black headstock with the PRS logo. He is standing against a solid teal background.

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COVER PHOTO (DAVID BOWIE WITH A HAGSTROM KENT): GJJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

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VOL. 47 | NO. 9 | SEPTEMBER 2026

In appreciation of David Bowie, the Ozzy of glam and art rock



I'M NOT SURE if you remember, but 2016 was a particularly terrible year in terms of celebrity deaths. To be more precise, it was really just the first four months — January to April — that were super weird. In that short span, we lost Prince, Glenn Frey, Gene Wilder, Greg Lake, Muhammad Ali, Sir George Martin, Garry Shandling, Arnold Palmer, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Carrie Fisher, Harper Lee and Robert Stigwood. But the death that really jump-started the exodus was that of David Bowie, who shockingly passed away on January 10, 2016, at age 69. Interestingly, Bowie is one of those people who's never been within 100 yards of the *Guitar World* cover, but — in these days of disappearing guitar magazines — we feel well beyond comfortable

re-evaluating that criteria. Bowie was — just like the late Ozzy Osbourne, who actually appeared on *GW*'s cover even before Tony Iommi did — a champion for guitarists, someone who could spot talent from 100 yards (just to stick with the football-stadium-sized metaphor). He's kinda the guy who gave us Stevie Ray Vaughan, the guy brought in Robert Fripp during a time when Fripp didn't even see himself "as a working player." And then there's the RMS Carpathia-sized lifeboat Bowie sent to Peter Frampton during an awkward time in Frampton's career (the late Eighties). As Frampton told me in 2013, "While we were in Switzerland, where David was living at the time, he asked me if I'd join him for the Glass Spider tour. That was a great gift he gave me, because my career had faltered. David was doing extremely well and could command stadium-size audiences. It took me around the world and reintroduced me as Peter Frampton the guitar player, not the pin-up pop guy, which is where the perception had gone, wrongly. I've always been very thankful that David chose me to do that."

THE RETURN OF SHOP TALK: Some of you might remember our Shop Talk features where we profiled a brick-and-mortar guitar shop in each issue. They just kinda disappeared sometime around 2018 or 2019 — but they're back. Rejoice!

DAMIAN FANELLI

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READER ART OF THE MONTH

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



Keith Richards

BY MICHAEL KLEIN, NORTH FORT MYERS, FLORIDA



Grateful Dead

BY NANCY ELHALLAK, GRAFFITI-GARAGE.COM

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



Roy Heinrich

AGE: 72

HOMETOWN: Buda, TX

GUITARS: 2007 American Tele Deluxe, 2007 American Strat, 2004 MIM Tele, Gibson J-185 acoustic, G&L bass

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Johnny Cash "Ring of Fire," Johnny Horton "Honky Tonk Man" and lots of originals

GEAR I WANT MOST: Blue American Tele



Liam Murphy

AGE: 46

HOMETOWN: Eastchester, NY

GUITARS: Music Man Majesty 7, Gibson ES-335, Gibson '59 Goldtop Les Paul, Ibanez S

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Originals from my band's (emilyXliam) EP, Aerosmith "Last Child," Ozzy Osbourne "Goodbye to Romance," Pantera "Rise"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Kiesel Custom



Richard Silletto

AGE: 72

HOMETOWN: San Ramon, CA

GUITARS: Guild A150, '73 Fender Strat, '56 Les Paul Historic, Gibson J-200, Rickenbacker 660/12, Fender '52 Tele reissue

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Duke Ellington "Take the A Train," Thelonious Monk "Well You Needn't," Miles Davis "Freddie Freeloader," War "All Day Music," Charlie Christian "Airmail Special"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Gibson ES-175

ARE YOU A DEFENDER OF THE FAITH?

Send a photo, along with your answers to the questions above, to GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com. And pray!

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DESCENDENTS



Ziggy Marley with his favorite Strat and a vintage Silvertone 1448

Ziggy Plays Guitar

Grammy-winning bandleader Ziggy Marley on developing a groove, the status of his father's famous Les Paul Special and — best of all? — the “higher vibrations” of recording at 432Hz

BY HENRY YATES

▶ FOR ALL HIS globe-shaking musical legacy, socio-political ripples and afterlife as a dorm-room poster, when Bob Marley passed over in May 1981 — aged just 36 — there was a maddening sense of a mission not yet accomplished. Four decades later, one suspects Marley would be fiercely proud of how his eldest son, Ziggy, ran with the baton. Not quite a teenager when the Jamaican superstar left him fatherless, the 57-year-old has since built on that hallowed family name

with his Grammy-winning catalog, and done immeasurable good with his U.R.G.E. charitable foundation. Now, Marley's ninth solo album, *Brightside*, distills both sides of his life's work, fusing a joyous Strat-driven chop with lyrics that look the modern world square in the eye.

Are you pleased with *Brightside*?

I'm very pleased. I like listening to it myself. It's the unapologetic me. When should people

play it? You know my answer to that is going to be “all the time” [Laughs]. Tough times, good times — because it's all in there. “Why Let the World,” “Brightside,” “Many Mourn for Bob,” “Sweet Divine” — those songs were therapy for me. I wrote “Sweet Divine” after my nephew passed away suddenly. I was in England at the time, on the set of the Bob Marley movie, and that song is what came out of me. “Racism Is a Killa” went through phases. Early on, it was just the straightforward idea that racism is a literal killer. Then it took a more artistic form and developed into racism as a virus.

How does the guitar dynamic work on the album?

We have Adam Zimmon, Justin Stanley and me. We have a good rapport and the guitars play a dominant role. They do a lot

of licks. They have an edge, but everything fit nice. My favorite moments are when we playback and listen to the conversation the guitars are having. I'm mostly holding the rhythm, which is what my father played. I'm the foundation, and the other guys, them explore and experiment. It's a free flow.

Do you have aspirations to play solos, or are you happy handling the rhythm?

No, man, I have big aspirations. I want to play solos. At some times, I do play solos, when I'm in rehearsals. And my solos are unique, because when you're not so good, you have to be really creative to make it sound interesting. I'm good at making simple things sound very creative, y'know?

What qualities do you need to be a good reggae guitar player?

[pointedly] Well, not a reggae guitar player, just a good guitar player – because we can't put the guitars in a box. Guitar is just guitar. We play all types of guitars in my music – ukuleles, too. You hear them [on *"Make It Paradise"*]. And I like rock music, too. I like some distortion for my guitar.

How do songs usually come to you?

In different ways. But usually it starts with my acoustic guitar. We're not writing "reggae songs" or whatever – we're just writing songs. So when I play my guitar, you're just hearing an acoustic guitar strumming. You're not hearing, like, "Oh, that's a reggae song" or "That's a hip-hop song." You just hear the music.

How did you develop such a good groove?

It started from watching my father. That's why my rhythm guitar emulates his. Because his rhythm guitar was wicked. Like, when I listen back to the multi-tracks and his guitar sound, that rhythm, like "chunk" – he has a sound. I take some of the tightness from him. But his sound is deeper, more chunky. My sound is a little bit more high/mid-ish, y'know?

It's not the first thing people talk about when it comes to your father, but he was a brilliant player.

It's true. Man, he was dangerous. He had some licks.

It's said that he gave you lessons?

You can look on "lessons" in many ways. Being around him was a lesson. Watching him play – and listening – is lessons. But not, like, "guitar lessons." I went to some teachers,



Marley on stage in L.A. in April; [below] the cover art for his new album, *Brightside*



and then I bought some books. And I'm still learning.

How about your gear on this album?

It's my Strat, mostly. The same one I've had for years. How old is it? Getting old. It's gonna be vintage in a few years [2014]. I like the Strat for its versatility. I like to experiment. Some nights I might play on one setting. Some nights I might switch it. It depends how I feel. But I have to talk about my Steinberger [featured in 1988's *"Tomorrow People"* music video]. That's the oldest one I have. I want to use it more. It reminds me of those days.

Do you still use physical amps?

Yeah, man. Everything on this album was physical. That was one of our mantras. We're

not just going from guitar straight into digital. Everything has to go through the board. Everything has to go through something physical. So it sounds like human beings playing music. I used my Fender '65 Super Reverb [reissue]. The same amp I'm going to tour with. Pedals? We use the Dunlop Slash Cry Baby, Boss PH-3, Demeter Compulator and TC Electronic June-60v2 chorus. And I've got a little fuzzbox – the Mad Professor Sweet Honey Overdrive – for when I want something a little dirty.

Your father was known for playing a modded brown Les Paul Special. Were you ever tempted to use the same model?

I played that Les Paul, too, for a couple of years after my father passed away. I like Les Pauls, but for certain things. For me, it's not as versatile or as free as my Strat.

Where's that famous Special now?

It's around, but it's being taken care of properly. We can't let anything happen to it. I have a picture of me playing it back in the Eighties. It's a beautiful sounding guitar. I remember, when I was younger and I used to pick it up, it felt so heavy. It's a heavy piece of wood!

In the video for "Many Mourn for Bob," you're playing a Hummingbird. What can you tell us about that?

When I tour, sometime I buy guitars. I picked that up in Canada, and that's the guitar on the track, actually. I didn't buy it with any expectation, but it turned out really sounding good. If a guitar feels good, it might inspire something else in me. It might give me another point of view. The guitar is one of them instruments that speaks to you.

And it feels good to physically hold a guitar, right?

Yeah. It can be a weapon too, y'know?

Why did you choose to record at 432Hz, instead of the standard 440?

Because it's standard. We don't want anything standard. We don't want to follow anybody's rules. We were always searching for the higher musical vibration that can connect more to people. So 432Hz came up and I tried it for some shows and rehearsals, and it sounded good. From my point of view, I can see a different connection with the audience at that frequency. And that frequency probably changed me too, how it vibrates with me, and how I relate it back to the crowd. I think the whole world should change to 432Hz now. You can put that in the headline!

Was "Many Mourn for Bob" a hard song to record emotionally?

"One of our mantras was that everything has to go through something physical, so it sounds like human beings playing music"

I wouldn't say hard, but it was deep. Like, something that you feel deep down inside of you. I feel like my father's spirit is a part of that song. It could have been his song. He could have sung it. He was telling his story too. It's not just me. The sample at the start? That's from an interview with a U.S. journalist. He says, "If them kill me tomorrow..."

2024's *Bob Marley: One Love* biopic was a big success. How did you ensure the music felt authentic?

They built a Bob Marley Gibson guitar, a replica, and actually, that one sounded really good. Everybody in the movie was a musician. We even had the son of Family Man [*Aston Barrett*], he's the bass player. Obviously, you have a give-and-take, because it's a movie. You cannot replicate Bob Marley. There's no such thing. So you give a version of that spirit and personality. We made sure all the pieces were represented, from his spirituality to the tough side he had too, to get a wider point of view than just the "legend" story, what people think them know.

You were in the Wailers' inner-circle from childhood. What are your memories?

I remember going to where the records were printed. I remember going to Harry J Studios. I remember sleeping under the desk. Multiple memories, y'know? Carly [*Carlton Barrett, drummer*] and the original guys, they know me from when I'm a baby. To play with them and learn from them as a teenager, that was more special than anything else. Family Man is still one of my biggest inspirations. When I'm playing my basslines, y'know, I'm taking spaces from him.

Do you have favorite guitar moments from your father's records?

The live version of "No Woman, No Cry." That's an iconic solo.

You're about to go out on the road. Are you a different guitar player live?

In the studio, I'm more focused on guitar. Live, I'm just doing it, y'know? I trust the process. So we rehearse a lot, and once I get up onstage, if I did enough rehearsal then it's gonna just happen automatically. Like reflexes, y'know?

You've written socially charged music for years. Can it make a difference?

It can make the world better, and it can make the world worse. We know music have power. Music is one of the most powerful things on Earth. If popular music could be where we tell the people a message of love, unity and togetherness, then the world would be better. It's not just music alone, but that's a big part of the remedy, y'know? **GW**



Cut Worms' Max Clarke in St. Charles, Iowa, August 6, 2021

Cut Worms

Max Clarke on surrendering control — and trying not to smash Jeff Tweedy's most expensive guitar

BY JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

▶ IN THE IMMORTAL words of 38 Special, "Just hold on loosely, but don't let go. If you cling too tightly, you're gonna lose control."

Those are the lyrics I offer to Cut Worms' Max Clarke as he describes relinquishing control of his music to Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, who took on the role of producer for Cut Worms' latest LP, *Transmitter*. The indie singer/songwriter, who lifted his band name from William Blake's *Proverbs of Hell* — "The cut worm forgives the plow" — stares blankly back at me through our Zoom meeting, completely bemused by my callback to one of classic rock's great wordsmiths.

"Yeah, that's a good one," he manages.

Even if he was silently judging my taste in music, at least his internet connection wasn't mysteriously interrupted. The cut worm forgave the reference.

"Historically, I've white knuckled it through other people's playing," Clarke says. "I had a very specific idea of what I wanted, and I did it all myself a lot of the time. I had a stranglehold on the thing. This time, I trusted that somebody else could bring something to the music that I couldn't. He pretty much got what I was going for right away."

If you're going to enlist an outsider to bring a fresh perspective to a song — and

"Tweedy wasn't precious about his expensive guitars — they are meant to be played"

maybe an expensive guitar or two — Tweedy and The Loft is not a bad choice. Since Tweedy records at The Loft on a near-daily basis, Clarke spent virtually no time setting things up or getting sounds.

"If you wanted to use an instrument, you just picked it up and used it," he says. "At one point, when we were sitting there in the control room area, I reached for an acoustic guitar to idly play or strum. Jeff's like, 'That's the most expensive guitar in this building.' He wasn't taken aback, but it was like, 'Just so you know: I didn't ask how much it was. I was just like, 'Get it away from me.' It's good to know that Tweedy's on-stage, chill dad persona translates to the studio. "He had 15 original Rickenbackers from the Sixties," Clarke says. "Even though there was all this really cool old gear and things that could be in museums, Jeff wasn't precious about any of it. The instruments are meant to be played." **GW**



[from left] Henry James, Andrew Espantman, Robert Jon Burrisson and Warren Murrel

Robert Jon & the Wreck

All aboard the time machine with California's self-confessed "Seventies rock nerds," channeling giants from the Allmans to Van Halen

BY ALAN PAUL

▶ ROBERT JON & the Wreck hail from Orange County, California, but sound like they just rolled out of Georgia or Florida circa '82. The band, which proudly wears its Allmans and Skynyrd influences on its sleeve, features a charismatic frontman, surging Hammond organ, multi-part vocal harmonies and plenty of hot licks and biting slide guitar by Henry James.

Their most recent album, *Heartbreaks & Last Goodbyes*, was produced by Dave Cobb, who has worked with Marcus King, Chris Stapleton, Brandi Carlile and John Prine. James says Cobb helped the band structure the material and gave them sonic ideas, including playing them classic Seventies albums by Free and the Faces. That was music to the ears of James, who calls himself "the Seventies rock nerd, the guy that knows what year this album was recorded and who played on it."

"Our influences are all over the place, which I think is actually a strength since we all influence each other and play one another

our favorite albums, which are completely different," he says. "I'm very well versed in my influences and my players, specifically from that generation. Ninety percent of what I listen to is Sixties and Seventies rock, as well as R&B, jazz, funk and country from that time."

James is a true-blue guitar guy who grew up reading *Guitar World*, so you know he's

got taste! For more proof, his favorite players include Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix, Duane Allman, Dickey Betts, Ritchie Blackmore, Eddie Van Halen and Steve Howe. "I'm a guitar guy who obsesses about pedals and pickups and amps," James says. "But I also know that all my favorite players were focused on the music first, and that's what we all try to do."

For all that wide range of influences, the Wreck are distinctly a California band, and James says that he thinks it can be heard in their music in a variety of ways.

"I think there's a subtle slickness to what we do," he says. "We love session guys and have respect for Toto and the Wrecking Crew and these musicians who laid down tracks on so many great L.A. records. That's in our DNA, as is the California country thing from the Flying Burrito Brothers to the Eagles. Some of the guys are big fans of the Bakersfield country sound and, I'm a Van Halen fan, too. They exemplify California hard rock."

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers are another influence on the band, right down to the structure of their name. They are, says James, very much a band, not a backing group.

"It's very democratic. We make decisions as a group," he says. "That takes a lot of the load off any one person and we try to lean into everybody's different strengths, which helps the sum be greater than the parts." **GW**



JEFF HAHNE/GETTY IMAGES

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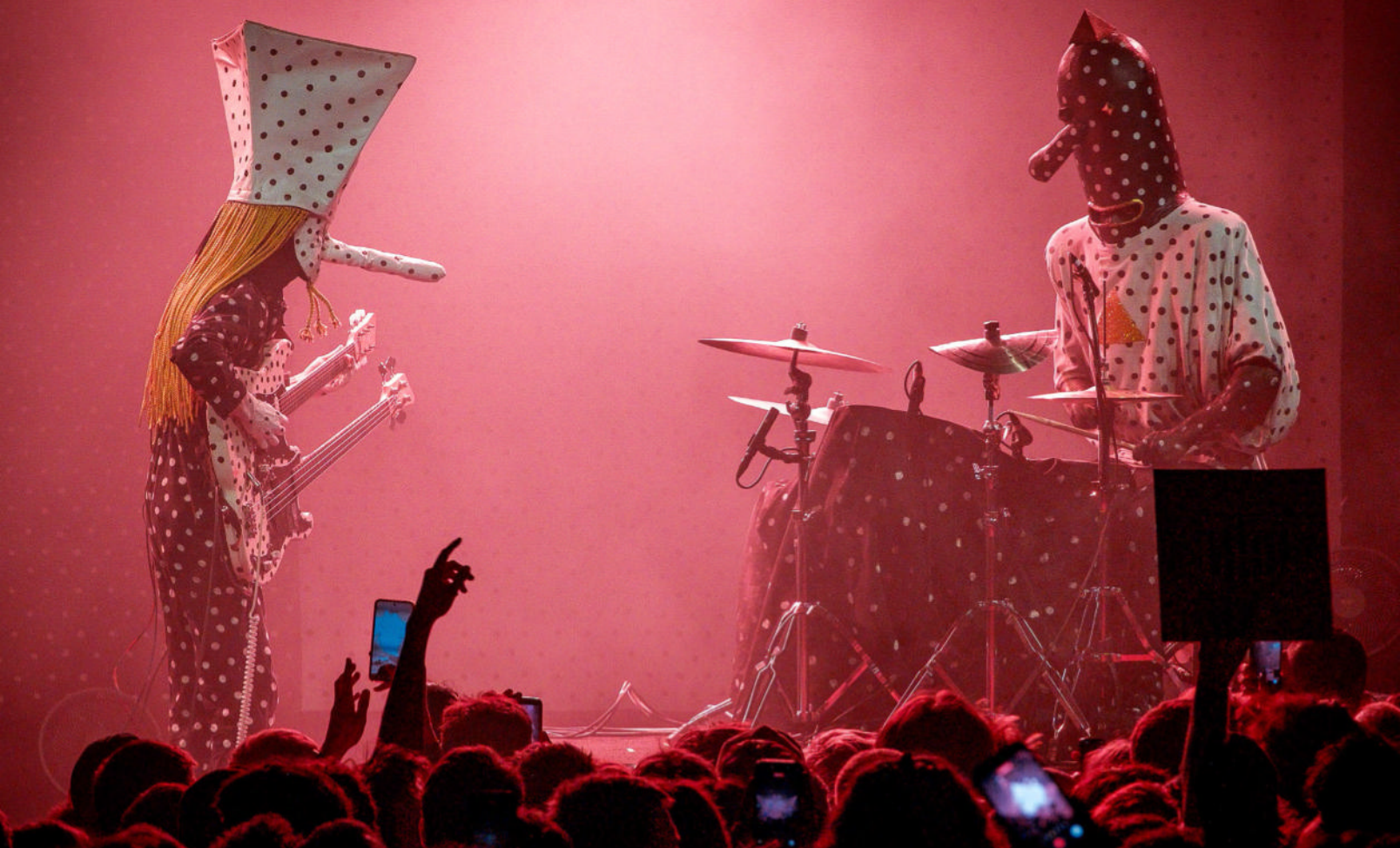
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Angine de Poitrine
in action at Strange Brew
in Bristol, England, May 12



Thrown for a Loop

I saw Angine de Poitrine live — and witnessed the greatest polka-dot guitar hero since Buddy Guy and Randy Rhoads

BY MICHAEL ASTLEY-BROWN

▶ YOU CANNOT ESCAPE Angine de Poitrine. You see polka dots every time you scroll. All your muso pals have sent you their KEXP session multiple times over (current view count: 15 million). You see the drummer's nose in your nightmares.

The Quebec-via-outer-space duo are one of the most talked-about bands on the planet. Accordingly, their debut U.K. shows are completely sold out. On May 12, desperate fans are camped outside, scrounging for spare tickets as stage time approaches at Bristol, England's 330-max Strange Brew. It is, quite frankly, an unreasonable amount of hype for a microtonal looping duo that isn't even on the accessible side of math rock.

But when Khn de Poitrine (guitarist/bassist) and Klek de Poitrine (drummer) wobble onstage, papier-mâché heads flashing, a giddiness sweeps over the crowd. It's like a children's TV show come to life. But with 7/8 time signatures. And a double-neck guitar/bass that gets carted from show to show in a sleeping bag.

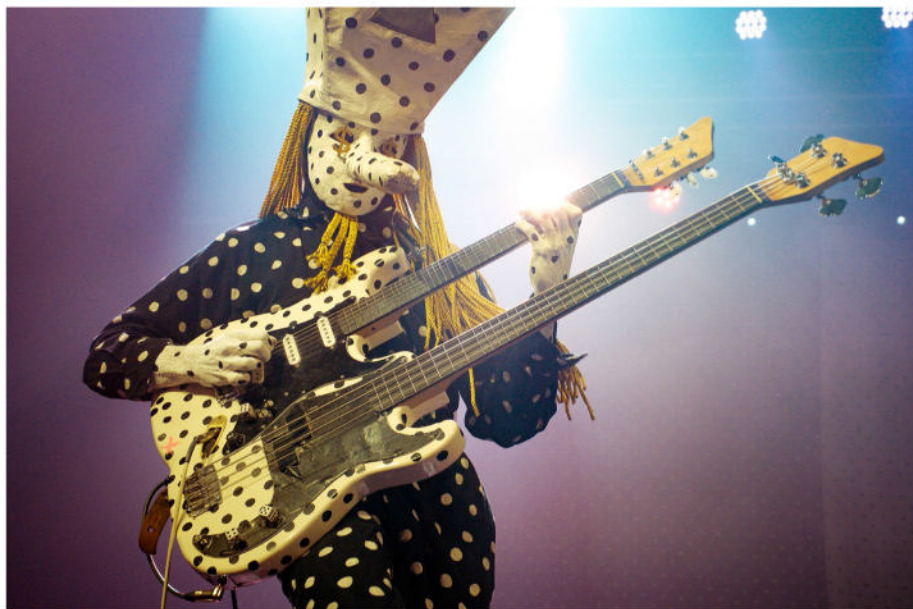
The duo's songs hit different live — not least because the PA volume is absolutely cranked in Bristol. Opening with slow-burning *Vol. II* closer Angor, Khn builds his loops with the dexterity of a surgeon (albeit not one you'd trust with your triple-bypass surgery). It's a thrill to watch someone deliver such precision-engineered weirdness

with the difficulty level ramped up to 10: ridiculous costume, double-neck and bare feet? That's brave.

But Angine de Poitrine are virtuosos of the weird. The microtonal loops that slither throughout tracks like "Mata Zyklek" are gloriously wonky. In between songs, the pair communicate via head-mounted mics that transmit their clicks and yelps in Muppet-like fashion. I laughed every single time. It breaks up the pummeling grooves and slippery riffs. Most importantly, it makes complicated music fun.

Angine de Poitrine lore dictates that Khn and Klek are not in fact Quebecois buddies who have been jamming together since

BRAD WERRETT



they were teenagers. They are 333-year-old time-traveling aliens. But, honestly, to deliver these songs to this level for 70 minutes straight, they may well have had to play together that long.

There are some dangerous loop manoeuvres on display — Ed Sheeran strumming four chords on an acoustic guitar, this is not. And while loops can be limiting — it's harder to launch into a whole new section on a dime — they are also the band's greatest strength; you hear each layer individually as it builds, and that repetition makes the complex guitar lines digestible. The fact it's locked to a grid means there's a constant pulse to groove to. And there are enough half-time pentatonic riffs to get the metalheads banging.

With this tour, Khn has established himself as the greatest polka-dot guitar hero since Randy Rhoads and Buddy Guy. The guy has legit jazz chops, and his fluid microchromatic runs, tapping bursts and head-spinning riffs turn guitar tropes on their heads.

You can pick out influences. The extended solos of "Ababa Hotel," built over the most bone-headed loops of the night, are especially John Scofield-coded (the band have named Scof rock-jazz fusion classic *Überjam* as one of their primary influences). Spasmodic thrash bop "Utzp" could be an *...And Justice for All*-era Metallica cut — the two-hand tapping in Khn's solo even nods to Kirk Hammett's "One" leads. The guy can shred — but he's flat-out refusing to pick any of the notes you would expect.

For all the alien back story, you could buy most of Khn's pedals from a Guitar Center (presumably an intergalactic branch). He makes deft use of glitchy short delays (Boss DD-8), pitch doubling (MXR Bass Octave Deluxe) and — that most difficult of effects to



actually use in a song — ring modulator. He even uses the Behringer Moogerfooger clone, for chrissakes.

Certain corners of the internet have dismissed Angine de Poitrine as a gimmick, but tonight's performance proves their musicianship is no joke. The costumes are a Trojan horse. They are a gateway to the weirder corners of the guitar universe — math-rock, freeform jazz, noise rock. We need gateway

**Khn de Poitrine
can shred, but he's
refusing to pick the
notes you expect**

bands. It's how genres grow and the next generations of musicians are inspired. There hasn't been this much buzz about an instrumental band since Polyphia, and that is good news for guitar (and, presumably, sales of double-necks). Angine de Poitrine's sudden, unlikely success may be the direct result of social media culture, where the thumbnail is everything, but they have the ability and the songs to back it up.

There's a big question mark over how you follow up such a life-changing groundswell of hype. Collaborations? Comic books? Vegas residency? Whatever happens, Angine de Poitrine have made the guitar world a weirder place. They're the 333-year-old time-traveling aliens we never knew we needed. [GW](#)



LOST CLASSICS

The Pretenders

Shattered by drugs and reeling from loss, 1984's *Learning to Crawl* saw the Pretenders come back swinging. Robbie McIntosh reflects on a modern classic that saw him cast as "the guy who ruined the band"

BY JOE BOSSO

THE START OF the 1980s saw the dazzling rise of the Pretenders. Led by American expat Chrissie Hynde, the dynamic British rock 'n' roll quartet issued a one-two punch of albums, *Pretenders* (1980) and *Pretenders II* (1981), that featured memorable hits such as "Stop Your Sobbing," "Brass in Pocket," "Kid" and "Talk of the Town." A former rock critic, Hynde quickly established herself as a crafty songwriter and a captivating singer, and she was aided by an ace band that included drummer Martin Chambers, bassist Pete Farndon and the immensely gifted guitarist, James Honeyman-Scott.

The band's rapid ascent came to a crashing halt in June 1982. First came the firing of Farndon (his increasing drug use had fractured relations within the group), and two days later, Honeyman-Scott died of heart failure caused by a cocaine overdose (a year later, Farndon succumbed to a heroin overdose as well).

"I was good friends with Jimmy, and his death was such a shock," says guitarist Robbie McIntosh. "I met him before he joined the Pretenders, and we had stayed in touch. He

had actually talked to me about playing with the band. The idea was to flesh things out as the band was evolving. I hadn't said I'd definitely do it, but it would have been great. It's a shame it didn't happen that way."

Hynde and Chambers channeled their grief by recording a smashing double hit single, "Back on the Chain Gang" and "My City Was Gone," utilizing ex-Rockpile guitarist Billy Bremner and Big Country bassist Tony Butler. Because of his commitments to Big Country, Butler was unable to join the Pretenders, and in the case of Bremner, McIntosh says, "I don't think Chrissie saw him as the right fit. He's a great player, obviously, but he was more of a rockabilly guy."

McIntosh, who had played various bands throughout the late Seventies and early Eighties, shared Honeyman-Scott's musical tastes. "We were rock and pop guys," McIntosh says. "We loved Pete Townshend, the Kinks, the Beach Boys, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. That might be a reason I got called up to audition for the band."

By the end of 1982, McIntosh was asked to join a new Pretenders lineup, which would also include bassist Malcolm Foster. Much

was expected of the band — could they match the power and tunefulness of the first two albums? — and they came through like champs with 1984's *Learning to Crawl*. The record featured "Back on the Chain Gang" and "My City Was Gone," but it also packed forceful rockers like "Time the Avengers" and "Watching the Clothes," along with two tracks that demonstrated Hynde's softer side, "Show Me" and the shimmering Christmas ballad "2000 Miles." The album burst out of the gate with the seismic single "Middle of the Road," on which McIntosh burned through a breakneck solo that ranks as a masterclass in kinetic excitement.

"I'm extremely proud of the album," says McIntosh, who stayed with the Pretenders until 1987. "It was a big jump for me, working with a famous band and with Chris Thomas, an established producer." He laughs. "I did get some bad reviews, though. Some people called me 'the guy who ruined the Pretenders.' But you can't take reviews seriously — good or bad ones. The album did extremely well; it went double platinum in America, so there was that. I was young and confident, so I just plowed on."

[from left] The Pretenders' Malcolm Foster, Chrissie Hynde, Robbie McIntosh and Martin Chambers in May 1984



Being that James Honeyman-Scott was a friend, did you have mixed feelings about auditioning?

Yeah, although I felt very lucky in one respect that I had been his friend. The fact that I did an audition meant I didn't walk straight into the gig. I mean, the band might not have liked what I did, but as it turned out, they did. For the first few songs we did, I thought things worked out pretty well.

Did you have any interactions with Chrissie Hynde before the audition?

No, I met her at the audition. That was the first time, and then she rang me a few days later and said, "Do you want to join the band?" Obviously, I said yes.

What did the audition entail? Were you given a list of songs to prepare?

No, we just jammed. I played for maybe 20 minutes with another guitar player, Mick Green, who I was sort of in awe of, and a bass player whose name I can't remember. Martin was playing drums. Chrissie and Dave Hill, the manager, sat in front of the stage. A few days later, I got the call from Chrissie and she said she wanted me in the band. I didn't have a clue that I'd passed the audition. The great thing about the Pretenders is that Chrissie is kind of garagey and punk — she's a great songwriter and lyricist, and she's got an individual voice — but it was embellished by Jimmy's musical style. He wasn't into punk at all, and neither was I.

What was it like the first time you played in rehearsal with Chrissie?

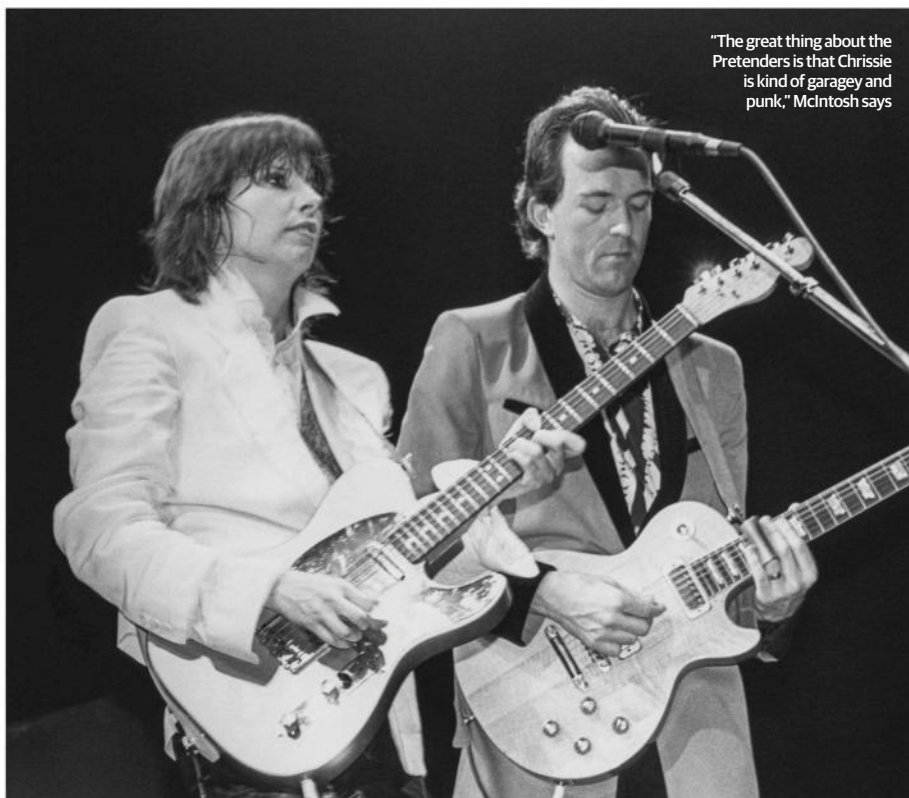
I remember she played quite loud, but that didn't worry me. I was more concerned with how I could complement her and play off what she did. I can't remember whether the first thing we did was "2000 Miles" or "Middle of the Road." I think it was "Middle of the Road."

Okay, dude... that solo, I mean, come on. It's so electrifying and beautifully composed. How long did it take you to work it out?

Thanks so much. But no, I didn't work it out. Chrissie had the chords, kind of a Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels thing, and I came up with some ideas. I remember there was a growing riff part — I came up with that, and it seemed to work. In the studio I did maybe three or four solos, all different kinds of things, and Chris Thomas said, "I like that bit. We'll keep the first half." I think I dropped in the really fast bit on its own, and I did that thing with the delay at the end of the solo. We worked on it for maybe half an hour.

Which guitar did you use for that track?

My 1977 Fender Telecaster, which I still own.



"The great thing about the Pretenders is that Chrissie is kind of garagey and punk," McIntosh says

"Chrissie Hynde played loud, but that didn't worry me. I was more concerned with how I could play off what she did"

ROBBIE MCINTOSH

And my amp was a Marshall 20 head into a 2x10 cabinet. I had Marshall 100s as well, so maybe there was a bit of that in there. But the body of the sound was the Marshall 20, which is my favorite amp.

If Chrissie had any doubts about hiring you, they were put to rest with that solo.

[Laughs] It was a bit more aggressive and flashy than what Jimmy would've done. People always ask me about the picking on that solo. I just used my fingers, and the pick was inside my hand. Then if I needed the pick, I'd just pull it out. Chris Thomas always complimented me on the guitar playing on the album. I saw him a couple of years ago and he said the same thing. He said what a great time he had making that album. I was quite chuffed.

You mentioned "2000 Miles." Chrissie later said that she should have given you songwriting credit because of the riff you came up with.

Yeah, it was the same with "Middle of the Road," actually. Chrissie would come up with a very basic accompaniment, and then I'd come up with riffs that went over the top.

It was the same later on with "Don't Get Me Wrong." That guitar part is very distinctive.

Did Chrissie demo anything, or did she just play what she had right in the room?

It was all done in rehearsal, and we just remembered it. It was old-school. We never recorded anything. If you came up with something great, you just hoped you'd remember it.

How much leeway did Chrissie give you in terms of coming up with guitar parts?

The big thing with Chrissie was, she would say, "Don't be too smooth." I mean, Larry Carlton never would have fit in her band, and I say that as someone who loves Larry Carlton. I hate to use the expression "dumb it down," but, to a certain degree, playing with Chrissie is about doing just that. She was into Mitch Ryder, Question Mark and the Mysterians and the Ramones, while I was into the Beatles and Bad Company. But you know, Chrissie is a great songwriter, and a lot of the greats, apart from people like Jimmy Webb, don't really have a clue about the mechanics and the rudiments of music. That's what makes them so good or so unique. [GW](#)



Ariel Posen at Fender HQ last year

Fender Bender

Tearing up the blueprint with modded controls and renegade pickups, nothing is sacred on Ariel Posen's new signature Strat. "It made me rethink myself," he tells us

BY MARK MCSTEAD

▶ WITH THE DOUBLE-WHAMMY combo of killer slide chops and an ultra-heavyweight sonic signature — largely courtesy of the distinctive charms of the baritone guitar — Canadian virtuoso Ariel Posen has found a unique niche for himself with his trademark mix of Americana, blues

and memorable songs that capture elements of the Beatles' strong melodic sensibilities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Posen originally made his bones as a top sideman, serving his time with a number of artists working the Americana side of the tracks, including hooking up with the Bros. Landreth in 2013.

"Baritone guitars really complement my vocal approach and fill a lot of sonic space in a three-piece band"

However, by 2019, Posen had branched out on his own, releasing *How Long*, his debut solo album.

Posen's new album, *Bannatyne*, delivers his most satisfying release to date, with his softer vocals offset by layers of grinding guitars and textured washes of sound, to deliver a career highlight. Posen is also, understandably, excited about the arrival of the Fender Limited Edition Ariel Posen Stratocaster.

Getting a signature Fender Strat must have been a "pinch yourself" moment.

Absolutely. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that was something that would've been on the table. I'm incredibly grateful, and it is a really great guitar. For a record like *Bannatyne*, which featured a lot of different guitars during the recording, the signature model does a great job of replicating that wide array of tones in the live arena. A Strat with a P90 at the bridge and a Jazzmaster pickup at the neck isn't going to sound like anything else Fender makes; they're actually called AP-90s on the official spec and look quite different from the pickups they're based on.

There's something very cool about the way it looks with just those two pickups.

I think so too. I've definitely been inspired by guitars like the Mule [*Posen's guitar of choice for many years*], which I still play, of course, although there are significant structural differences. The Mule is made by Mule Resophonic Guitars. It's a baritone with a Strat-style body, but it's thick like a Telecaster. More significantly, the body is made from steel and is hollow. The new Fender signature model made me rethink myself as I wasn't really a Strat guy before, but this is something else.

Obviously, as a Custom Shop model, it might be more expensive than a production-line Strat. Are there any plans for a more budget-priced version?

That is 100 percent the goal; I really hope we can do that. It's an extremely versatile instrument.

There are amazing tones throughout the new album. What were the main amps?

Live and in the studio, my main amp for about 10 years has been a Two Rock Traditional Clean, though I did also use various combinations of smaller amps to try to give me a broader tonal palette. I like to mix smaller combos with amps with high output and a lot of headroom. For this record, notable mentions go to the Magic Amp Vibro Prince, SL Amps New Drive, a 1963 Fender Deluxe Reverb, a 1961 Fender Concert and a Benson Chimera.

There are some songs, particularly "Accept That," where it sounds like the amps are on the verge of total destruction. I'm guessing that's an illusion.

Absolutely. You're right — it's nowhere near as loud as you might think. On that one I was playing a Rivolta Baritone into the Traditional Clean and the Concert. The pedals were working some magic, a Chase Bliss Lossy and a Chase Bliss Thermae — a pitch-shifting delay that gives the illusion of the speaker flapping against the cab.

Among the various textures and layers of guitar tracks, it sounds like there's some backwards guitar in there.

That's right. I don't know if people are using it much these days; I guess I'm not hearing it much myself. It's the sort of thing that occurred to me in post-production; it creates some interesting textures. I'm a huge Beatles fan — I'm inspired by the way they'd always come up with cool production things.

You use a lot of manipulation of the volume control on your guitar, which is something else guitarists don't seem to do so much these days.

Jeff Beck is one of my big influences, and he was a master of the volume-control swell. When I saw how much sound and expression he got from just his hands and the instrument, it really made me want to explore all the ways I could use the instrument to the greatest effect. That's one of the reasons that I had the 'cupcake' knobs installed on my custom model, to ensure an easier grip.

One of the things that defines your music is the contrast between the thick, dark, grinding tones of the guitars, which are offset by a much lighter vocal approach. It creates a distinctive contrast.

That's an interesting take. I definitely don't have as much flexibility in my voice as I do on guitar. I'm not an aggressive singer; we actually ran the vocals through a Fender Princeton and a Leslie to try to add a bit more grit on "Future Present Tense," "No Way Out," "Surrender" and "Meridien."

You're also known for your extensive use of baritone guitars. Where did that come from?

When I did my first album, I was looking for interesting sounds. I got a cheap old Teisco in a pawn shop, tuned it all to B standard — and the rest is history. It really complements my vocal approach, and it also fills a lot of sonic space in a three-piece band. I guess it's become one of my signature sounds that has helped me carve out my own territory, which is a good thing in such a crowded marketplace. **GW**



High Fade

They've terrorized Nashville — now the Scottish funk-rockers are taking second album *Twice As Nice* to the streets

BY HENRY YATES

▶ IF YOU WALKED through downtown Edinburgh in February — and stopped to tip the three buskers funk-ing it up in sub-zero temperatures — then you'll already know High Fade's *Twice As Nice*. "There's people who probably unsuspectingly heard three-quarters of the new album," reflects frontman/guitarist Harry Valentino. "Busking is still our secret weapon, and Scotland is the best place to do it. It's freezing. None of these people have bought a ticket. They have zero investment. But the video of us busking the first single, 'Swamp,' got almost a million views."

If the Scottish trio's street-level work ethic hasn't changed since we met them on debut album *Life's Too Fast*, their musical modus operandi certainly has. Back then, in 2024, High Fade felt like a band grabbing at genres as they pelted by in a shopping cart (a dash of Primus and Chili Peppers funk, spliced with Phish's epic jams and Rush-sized ambition). "It would take you an entire week, all day, 24/7," agrees the frontman, "to actually listen through one of my Spotify playlists."

Now, Valentino says, he, Oliver Sentance (bass) and Heath Campbell (drums) have streamlined their sound. "Don't get me wrong; I love *Life's Too Fast*, but the songs were trying to be 10 different things at once. Some people have said this one is more punk-funk. I'm singing

a lot more on this album too, whereas before, vocals were an afterthought."

Tracking last December, Nashville's East Iris Studios didn't know what had hit it. "We were the loudest thing recorded there in a while," beams Valentino of the hell he raised with his Suhr Modern T, Marshall JMP and Hughes & Kettner Grandmeister Deluxe 40. "Graeme [Young], our engineer, is very Scottish. He'd give us proper abuse through the talkback mic: 'Lads, go for a cigarette. It's not getting any better.' You know, straight-up savagery. 'That was the worst take I've ever heard.' But for us, it works. We cut nine songs in two days."

Of these, Valentino cites warp-speed wig-out "The Fly" as the most challenging ("I'll watch a video back and I'm like, 'Jesus, that was rapid...,'" and "Sick of Myself" as the wildest tone. "We plugged a Zakk Wylde MXR Overdrive, Wampler Ego Compressor and TC Electronic Sub 'N' Up into a Neve preamp, then DI'd it straight into the desk and turned it up full. It sounds outrageous. We were falling about the studio floor laughing when I was playing. People started coming into the control room, like, 'What is going on with these guys? It's an absolute racket!'"

Luxury studios might be a nice vacation, but High Fade know where they belong. Keep an eye out for this funk-punk juggernaut, coming to a rain-lashed street near you. **GW**

Man of Steel

Rescued from the vaults, this lost interview with Elliott Randall sheds new light on the “craziness” of Steely Dan’s first sessions — and the disaster behind his classic “Reelin’ In the Years” solo

BY JOE MATERA

▶ **“I’D NEVER SAY** they were difficult to work with, because we had a really good understanding of each other,” Elliott Randall told me during a recently rediscovered — and previously unpublished — 2003 interview. He was talking about working with Steely Dan’s co-founders, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen.

“Everybody’s got their own brand of craziness,” Randall said. “With Donald, Walter and me, we just realized we were a bunch of nutty guys, and — as long as we could get together on a level that we felt happy when creating music — what more could you ask for? Nobody could be more meticulous than those two. They were absolutely the top of the bill.”

Prior to working with Becker and Fagen on their Steely Dan outings, Randall first met the pair when they were doing time on the road as part of Jay and the Americans’ backing band and later while working on early pre-Steely Dan demos.

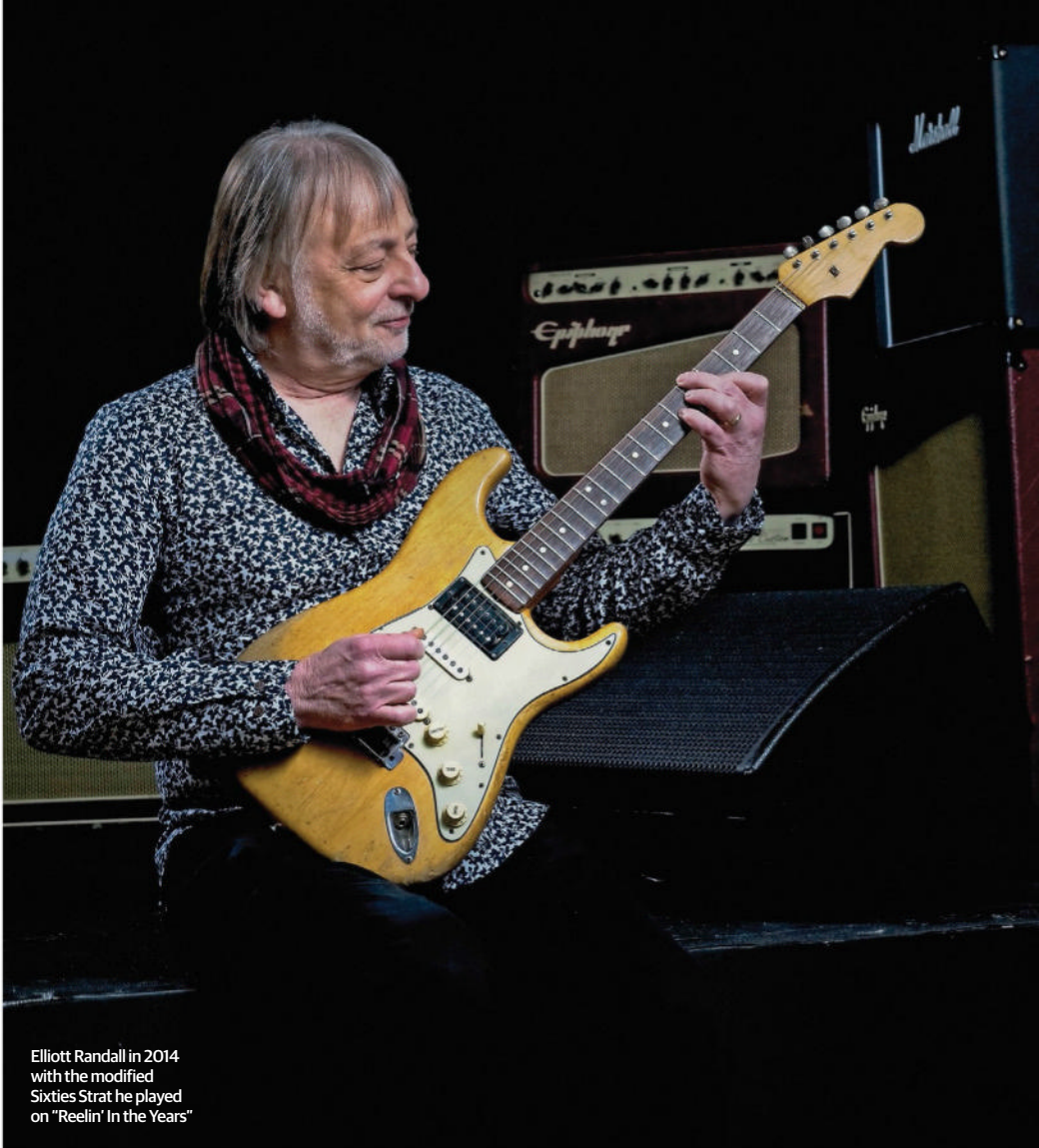
“We’d been friendly acquaintances for quite a while, and I was asked to do a bunch of their demos when they were trying to

get themselves a deal in New York,” Randall said. “This was way before they got signed to ABC. Then in 1972, they moved to California. I moved there too [from New York], sort of part time to test the waters and see if I liked it.

At that point they asked me to join the group, but I had a funny feeling that I’d be better off just being friendly with the guys. I said, ‘I don’t want to join the group, but I’d be happy to make records with you. If you want me to come and do personal appearances, that’d be fine, but I don’t want to be a full-time member of a group at this point in my life.’ That was met with a little bit of eyebrow raising.”

When Becker and Fagen finally began working on Steely Dan’s debut album, 1972’s *Can’t Buy a Thrill*, they asked Randall to contribute guitar to two tracks, “Kings” and “Reelin’ In the Years,” the latter of which would secure Randall’s reputation as one of the group’s go-to guitarists. His blistering solo is nothing short of iconic.

“That solo actually was the first thing that happened when they hit the red button,” Randall said. “I listened to it a couple of times and said, ‘Let’s roll the tape — let’s record.’ I just wacked it off from the very beginning to the very end, but it turned out that the tape operator hadn’t pressed the ‘record’ button. So we wound up doing another one, which is the one you hear on the record. [Because of] that incident, producer Gary Katz introduced a policy of where the minute somebody starts



Elliott Randall in 2014 with the modified Sixties Strat he played on “Reelin’ In the Years”



Randall [far right] at a Pat Benatar session in 1978

ROB MONK · BOBBY BANK/WIREIMAGE

“The ‘Reelin’ In the Years’ solo was the first thing that happened when they hit the red button”

doing anything, he made sure you hit the red button so everything was recorded. You never know when you’ll get an accidental piece of music.”

Randall used his usual workhorse, a Sixties Fender Strat, on the track. “I bought it in 1965, though it was two years old at the time,” he says. “It cost me a whopping \$175. While the body is ‘63, the neck is ‘65 [because] I had put it in the trunk of a friend’s sports car on the way to a gig. When we got there, the case had wiggled around so much that the neck got broken. But I was able to get a new neck right away. The guitar has been basically that ever since. It’s souped up in terms of the pickups and electronics. The front pickup is a Gibson PAF humbucker I [installed] in 1969.

There’s a wonderful guitarist from Toronto, Dominic Troyano. He had a Telecaster with two humbucking pickups, and I loved the sound of it. He said, ‘If you love it, let me take you to my friends, Barney Kessel’s Music World in L.A., and they’ll put one in for you.’ They totally warmed up the instrument. It’s really big and fat and very un-Strat-like.”

And then there’s that fiery, unrestrained solo on “Kings.”

“It’s a really out-to-lunch solo that goes from being very sort of within the changes to being dissonant and wacky,” Randall said. “It actually kind of spoke from my head state at the time. I was going through some serious life changes. I had a failed marriage — we just didn’t understand each other — and I was in the process of getting a divorce. I just played out my nuttiness in that song.”

The obscure lyrical content to Steely Dan’s music has confounded many fans, yet Becker and Fagen have consistently refrained from revealing much behind the songs’ meaning, preferring the subject matter to remain enigmatic.

“They were into combining elements of good literature along with their sophisticated musical knowledge,” Randall said. “They’d write a song like ‘Rikki Don’t Lose That Number,’ and there’d be a story behind it, but you play it for 10 different people and 10 different people will find 10 different stories. That’s the beauty of it. It’s almost like looking at certain kinds of paintings and how they will evoke different thoughts from different people. You can span the entire spectrum, and nobody’s wrong. And the painter’s having a good time because everybody’s enjoying the work in their own way.” **GW**



[from left] Barry Johnson
[also below], Chase Knobbe
and Matt Ebert

Joyce Manor

Killing the gain made the emo-punks’ new album kick harder than ever; now they’re hijacking the *Billboard* charts on their own terms

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

▶ SOUTH BAY L.A.’S Joyce Manor have built a reputation for crafting short, spirited blasts of emo-punk, but there’s something different about their latest LP, *I Used to Go to This Bar*. And producer Brett Gurewitz has as much to do with it as the band themselves, according to frontman Barry Johnson.

For the first time, they didn’t double track the rhythm guitars, and they also eighty-sixed the high-gain amps. But instead of trashing the band’s energetic sound, the simplified production leveled up their performances and the guitar interplay between Johnson and co-guitarist Chase Knobbe.

“The perceived increased fidelity is just more intentional guitar sounds,” Johnson says, while Knobbe adds that Bad Religion guitarist and Epitaph label head Gurewitz didn’t labor much over guitar sounds — he simply knew

what’d work. Most of the tones on the album came from a Fifties Les Paul Junior through a vintage Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Mesa Boogie cab, with an occasional assist from a Vox AC30 and a Gibson ES-330. “We’d get it to where the amp was on the edge of

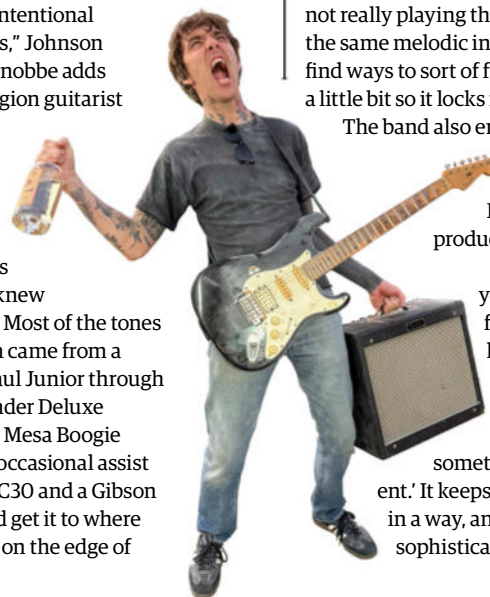
breaking up,” he says. “It sounded too clean to me, honestly, but when I heard it with everything else, it was amazing.”

That straightforward approach serves the songs well. The chord inversions on “All My Friends Are So Depressed,” which gave them their first *Billboard* hit seven albums in, wouldn’t work as well behind a wall of gain. Even barn-burner “I Know Where Mark Chen Lives” benefits from the restraint as Johnson and Knobbe build the tension before detonating a powder-keg on the chorus.

“The parts on this record are written very specifically,” Knobbe says. “We’ve gotten pretty obsessed with making the guitar parts kind of weave, where we’re not really playing the same parts. It’s all the same melodic information, but you find ways to sort of fuck up the rhythm a little bit so it locks in.”

The band also employed a “trick” they learned from producer Rob Schnapf, who produced 2016’s *Cody*.

“He’s like, ‘When you do everything four times, the listener begins to expect what you did previously. On the second verse, do something slightly different.’ It keeps the song interesting in a way, and it’s just a bit more sophisticated.” **GW**



DAN MONICK, JARED SHAVELSON



My Pedalboard: Kiki Wong

What the Smashing Pumpkins shredder sees when she looks down

BY ANDREW DALY

▶ **"SINCE I'M RELATIVELY** new to pedals, I took an open stance on how to approach fusing my style with the Smashing Pumpkins' sound. I wanted to find a series of pedals that allowed me to add those shoegazey-style twinkles and reverb while retaining my super-heavy metal roots. It's a pedalboard that serves a variety of styles, but it's not too complex.

"Before I joined the Smashing Pumpkins, I really only used distortion straight from the amp head, and maybe a wah once in a while. Rarely did I play on clean. In my previous band, Vigil of War, we ran through Kempers, so many of our effects were pre-programmed as well. Now, I feel like I've been exposed to a new — yet old-school — world of sound design."

"I feel like I've been exposed to a new — yet old-school — world of sound design"

I love analog pedals and how tactile it is to adjust your settings on the fly, though doing the "pedal dance" on the downbeat can be tricky for the more complex Pumpkins songs. It's allowed me to tap into my creativity and expand my songwriting with a wider arsenal of sounds.

"I wouldn't know a fraction of what I know without being in the Pumpkins. Billy Corgan has been an incredible mentor and showed me the ropes of how to dial in tone. It's helped me learn to choose sounds that balance frequencies and add balance to songs and play harmoniously with other band members, rather than just tones that sound cool sitting at home with a library on my computer, which I love to do, but is definitely a different vibe.

"Though I've spent the last year-plus dialing in pedals, I have so much to learn.

If I had to choose only one pedal for a show:

"The Interstellar Audio Octonaut [*overdrive*]. One, it looks incredible. Two, I love the distortion I get from it. It mixes well with my clean channel and works well as a boost."

I know it'll be a forever learning process, changing with time as my own creativity changes. It'll probably never be perfect, but that's the beauty of it. I don't think there's a wrong way to do things with pedals. If you have a sound that works for how you want to voice something, run with it. It's about getting to the end result at the end of the day, and if that's routing your pedal board differently than others, but it fits your sound and music, then run with it! No judgment.

"My pedalboard is powered by Voodoo Labs Pedal Power 3+, and the channel switching is done via MIDI to Revv Generator 120 Head signal chain into amp input. I've got a Mogami guitar cable with Neutrik gold right-angle silent ends, and then, on the board, I've got a Dunlop 95Q wah and an Interstellar Audio Octonaut Hyperdrive [*overdrive*].

"Then I've got a Chase Tone Fuzz Fella [*fuzz*], an Electro-Harmonix Pitch Fork [*pitch shifter*], which is controlled by the Dunlop Volume X Pedal [*second from right*], an Axxess Electronic Comp/A [*Input*] Buffer and an AnalogMan Mini Chorus, and that inputs into the amp. Then there's the signal flow in the FX loop. Starting with the amp send, there's the Dunlop Volume X Pedal, the Boss TU-3S [*Chromatic Tuner*], the Walrus Audio Lore [*Reverse Soundscape Generator*] pedal and the MXR Joshua [*Ambient*] Echo pedal with tap control. Then I've got another Axxess Electronic Comp/A Buffer, with an amp return." **GW**

COURTESY OF KIKI WONG

Descendents' Stephen Egerton (left) and Milo Aukerman do their thing at Coachella in Indio, California, April 13, 2013



Descendents: Caught Speeding

Downpicking like demons on all six strings, the Descendents tore through L.A.'s Eighties underground and launched a thousand punks-in-waiting. We caught up with guitarist Stephen Egerton

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

IN 1982, AMERICAN punk rock was evolving at a pace matched only by the blistering bpm's pounded out by defining East Coast hardcore bands like Minor Threat, Bad Brains and Misfits.

Down in the South Bay area of Los Angeles, though, a crew of four teenagers calling themselves the Descendents were perfecting a new take on the genre. Stacked with speedy odes to decidedly adolescent concerns — unrequited love, greasy food and the specter of adulthood — the band unleashed their massively influential debut LP, *Milo Goes to College*, onto a scene saturated with aggression.

Clocking 15 songs in just 22 minutes, *Milo* landed like a sugar buzz as L.A.'s second wave of punk was cresting on the shoulders of Black Flag and Circle Jerks. Unlike their more confrontational and controversial neighbors, the Descendents made melody

and irreverent fun their focus. And behind bluntly declarative lyrical blasts ("I'm Not a Loser," "I'm Not a Punk"), the choreographed interplay between guitarist Frank Navetta and bassist Tony Lombardo established a new template for punk music.

"They were different in that the guitar held a role much more similar to what a bass player does in so many rock bands," says Stephen Egerton, who took over as guitarist for the Descendents in 1987 and remains in the band today. "The bass carries a large part of the melody."

"Frank avoided anything outside of just straight chords, all downstrokes"

STEPHEN EGERTON

That much is evident from the album's opening salvo, "Myage," a jittery punk anthem built around Lombardo's relentless eighth-note runs. Both Lombardo and Navetta play all downstrokes — a signature approach they deployed to give every song urgency — while Navetta somehow manages to bring all six strings into play, a quirk that set his playing, and thus the Descendents, apart from their power-chording peers.

"Frank was like, 'I'm going to play every single thing that I do as a downstroke with all six strings,' and there was no middle ground," Egerton says. "It was like, 'I'm going to do this weird thing and commit 100 percent to it.' He was just an extreme person."

Navetta's contributions to punk rock didn't end with how he played his Yamaha SG1000 — he also penned some of the band's most iconic songs. "I'm Not a Loser" and "Parents," both Navetta compositions, contain similar

chord progressions rooted in I-IV-V, which later pop-punk bands like Blink-182 and Green Day have used to great effect. He also composed on an acoustic guitar, affording use of “a broad range of open chords,” Egerton says, while the band worked the songs up from mid tempos to their much faster final versions over time.

“He very deliberately avoided anything that would have been outside of just straight chords, all downstrokes, which I love,” Egerton says. “I try to honor his approach and play it as best as I can.”

Navetta’s ideas and inspiration are at the core of the Descendents’ identity, but frontman Milo Aukerman wrote their debut album’s most enduring and covered song, “Hope.” For many fans, “Hope” was the gateway to discovering the Descendents and the roots of pop punk — Sublime included their version on 1992’s *40 oz. to Freedom*, while Blink-182 has covered the song live regularly.

Fans who turned out to see Blink-182’s 2025 tour with Alkaline Trio, fronted by singer and guitarist Matt Skiba, who filled Tom DeLonge’s spot in Blink-182 from 2015 to 2022, not only heard their version of “Hope,” but also got to see Egerton play the song with them on a handful of dates. The entire *Milo* album is so important to the band’s sound

“You will not meet a punk rock songwriter who doesn’t love the Descendents”

MATT SKIBA

that DeLonge has stated Blink-182 wouldn’t exist without it.

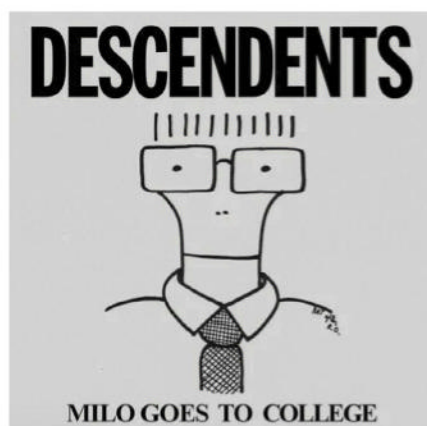
That sentiment tracks for more mainstream pop artists who draw on the stylings of pop-punk as well. “I think, with Blink, the influence of that album is still prevalent,” Skiba says, “and even for some of the more pop stuff, like Machine Gun Kelly or Avril Lavigne. I couldn’t name any of their

songs, but they’re singing about relationships and breakups on these tough-sounding tunes about heartfelt things. The Descendents were the seminal band to do that.”

Navetta, who left the Descendents in 1983 and died in 2008, reunited with his former bandmates on a handful of occasions, contributing the song “Doghouse” to the band’s 1996 comeback album, *Everything Sucks*. In 2002, Navetta and Lombardo regrouped with drummer Bill Stevenson to record songs they wrote between 1977 and 1980. The resulting 18-song album, *9th & Walnut*, finally saw release in 2021.

As the crown jewel in the Descendents’ discography, *Milo Goes to College* was reissued in 2025 alongside the band’s 1985 LP, *I Don’t Want to Grow Up*. The album’s status as a punk classic keeps more than half of its tracklist in Descendents’ live shows to this day.

“*Milo Goes to College* was one of my first loves,” Skiba says. “You will not meet a punk rock songwriter who doesn’t love the Descendents. They’re responsible for what’s so popular today.” **GW**



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SHOP TALK Russo Music

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BY ERIC T. FELDMAN

▶ FOR MORE THAN six decades, Russo Music has been a cornerstone of New Jersey's music community. The family-founded business began humbly in 1960 as a home-based lesson studio before growing into one of the region's most respected independent guitar shops. Built on a foundation of expertise with a deep connection to players, the company expanded from its longtime Hamilton roots to a second location in Asbury Park in 2010, and most recently into Philadelphia in 2021.

Today, Russo Music's identity is shaped not just by its history, but by the people who carry it forward. At the heart of every location are managers who didn't just join the company — they grew up with it, shopped at its stores and became part of its story. To better understand how Russo Music continues to evolve while staying true to its roots, we connected with three of those key voices — Mike Burt

(Hamilton), Mike Linardi (Asbury Park) and Greg Karlowitsch (Philadelphia).

How many instruments are in the shop right now?

GREG KARLOWITSCH: 308 guitars, 35 bass guitars, two drum kits and a bunch of keyboards and synths.

MIKE BURT: About 300 guitars and basses, plus synthesizers and drum sets.

MIKE LINARDI: 267 guitars, 44 basses, about a hundred amps and a rotating cast of synths, drums and pedals.

Coolest instrument in the shop right now?

BURT: A 1957 Gibson ES-175 with a first-year PAF humbucker.

What's your favorite instrument you've ever had in the shop?

KARLOWITSCH: There was a 1965 Fender

Precision Bass in factory Lake Placid Blue that made me rethink every piece of gear I had.

BURT: When I was in sales at the Asbury Park store, Pete Steinkopf from the Bouncing Souls consigned his vintage Wine Red Gibson Les Paul Custom. It ultimately ended up with Tom May from the Menzingers.

What's the most expensive instrument you've ever sold?

LINARDI: A 1920 Martin, but pretty much anything that has Brazilian rosewood back and sides hits that mark.

And the most sought-after instrument by customers?

BURT: Used Les Pauls. Anytime we get one, they go so quickly.

What detail separates a good guitar from a great one?

RUSSO MUSIC



KARLOWITSCH: A guitar is really special if it pulls a piece of music out of me that I didn't know I could play. If I pick up a guitar and play the same song on it every time, it's a normal guitar. If I do things on the instrument that I didn't know were in me, it's got something that's different and hard to quantify.

Favorite celebrity encounter?

KARLOWITSCH: I'm a big fan of Thin Lizzy, so when Midge Ure came into the shop a few years ago, that was a pretty surreal moment.

When someone walks in for the first time, what do you hope they feel?

BURT: Welcomed. There's nothing worse than walking into a store where no one greets you or even acknowledges you. We want people to feel comfortable right away and know they're free to check anything out, ask questions and just enjoy being here.

What is one fact everyone should know about your shops?

BURT: Each of our shops has an in-store guitar technician. They do so much to keep all our guitars playing their best in our shops or before getting shipped out.

How have your shops shaped or played a part toward your local music community?

LINARDI: Whether we're supporting a local initiative for the Asbury Park Music Foundation or helping any player get the best advice, tips and service on their instrument,

"There's nothing worse than walking into a store where no one greets you"

MIKE BURT

I like to think we keep music in motion in Asbury Park.

Strangest request from a customer?

BURT: Guitars with signatures. I've had a few people ask if anything was signed by someone famous. I usually have to tell them that's not what we do, but we actually have a guitar signed by Dimebag Darrell in the shop right now.

What's the best part about operating a guitar shop?

KARLOWITSCH: I get to have relationships with every guitar in the building. I get to be three feet away from a guitar at all times of my life, except when I'm in my car. No day at Russo Music is a bad day.

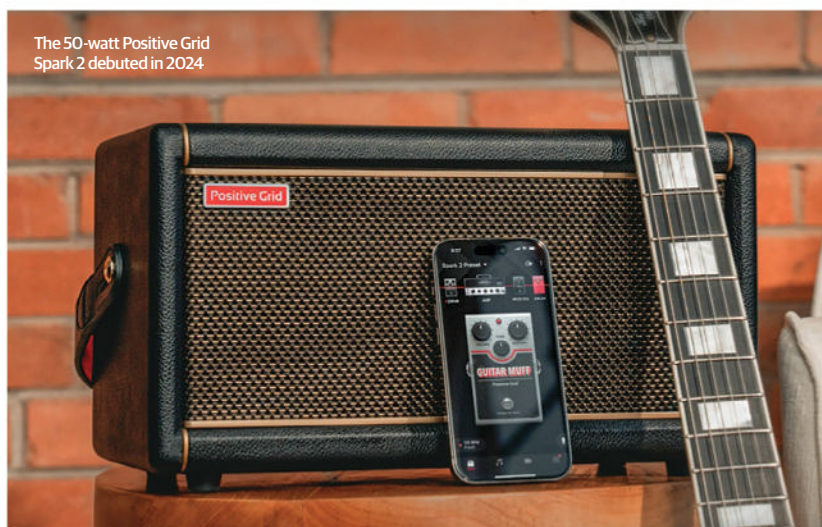
*Eric T. Feldman is the founder of guitarshoptees.com. **GW***

THE GEAR HUNTER

Positive Grid

From lightbulb moments to the Amp Intelligence tech that turns cellphone snaps into sound, the Californian amp-builders tell *GW* about their wild 15-year ride

BY AMIT SHARMA



The 50-watt Positive Grid Spark 2 debuted in 2024

▶ SINCE LAUNCHING 15 years ago, Positive Grid has become one of the biggest success stories in the industry. It all began with software products like the JamUp and BIAS line, designed specifically to make studio-quality tones accessible to players everywhere. A few years later, the company moved into the hardware market with the BIAS head and rack, bringing that tech into the physical world.

But some might say the biggest game-changer came in late 2019 with the arrival of their Spark amp — a revolutionary 40-watt smart desktop workhorse that outperformed its competitors in terms of features, connectability and ingenuity. Smart Jam, for example, was created to instantly generate authentic bass and drums to accompany guitarists in real time, essentially serving as a virtual band that never keeps you waiting, while Auto Chords was designed to display shapes in real time, allowing users to slow down or loop difficult sections in order to learn.

Then came the Spark MINI, the even more down-sized Spark GO, the Spark LINK wireless system, plus an array of cabs, footswitches and audio interfaces. For the world premiere of the 50-watt Spark 2 in 2024, hosted by *GW*'s Paul Riario, Nuno Bettencourt took a central role in sharing his enthusiasm for the new release, describing it as “like taking Madison Square Garden wherever you go.” Around the same time, Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert and Zakk Wylde were signing up to promote their own signature Sparks, putting stamps of approval on the company's ingenuity alongside custom presets

“When giants like Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert and Zakk Wylde connect with your work, it shows you’re doing something right”

to nail their iconic tones. Below, Product Manager Mike Lee and Senior Vice President of Marketing Laura Whitmore tell *GW* about Positive Grid's journey so far and what we can expect to see down the road.

What was the mission statement early on?

LAURA WHITMORE: The idea was to make playing guitar feel effortless. We wanted to remove friction. Traditional gear can be complex and expensive. You usually need a whole rig to get you where you want to go. We saw a chance to change that. It was about packing more features and value into one unit to give players great tone, instant control and tools they'd actually use.

For decades, amps followed a familiar path — better tone, more channels, incremental upgrades. Instead of complicating things, we streamlined the amp concept into something more powerful and immediate — a single product you could fire up for everything from practice to writing sessions. It's not about adding in features for the sake of it. It's about those “A-ha!” moments, like when you plug in and instantly find a tone that works.

What was the thinking behind your first products, and what were the challenges in terms of delivery?

MIKE LEE: The early products came out of fairly simple observations about what guitar players actually needed. JamUp was a mobile app built around a familiar pedalboard interface. The goal was to give players something that sounded good, felt natural on a phone or tablet and was approachable enough that you didn't have to think about it. It worked just as well as a daily practice companion as it did for setting up chains and switching between them on stage. BIAS built on that by letting players go a step deeper — swap components, adjust the details, design their own amp voicing. For a lot of people, that was the first time amp design felt accessible. You didn't need a workshop or a collection of vintage heads, just an idea and curiosity. Who were we making this for? Players like the ones on our team. People who cared about tone but didn't want the cost, the complexity or the isolation that often came with it. The hardest part was keeping things simple. Real amp modeling, component-level control, a community layer — under the hood, there's a lot going on. But if it doesn't feel easy to the player, none of it matters.

Spark took the desktop-amp world by storm. How did you go about creating such a game-changing practice tool?

WHITMORE: The success of BIAS got us thinking:

could we put that software inside a physical product? And that led to Spark. Instead of a traditional practice amp, our team took everything they'd learned about how players work — and the tones they're after — to build a self-contained product you'd want to plug in and play. But what really made it fly was the Spark app and its features, like automatic chord recognition, intelligent jamming and seamless tone discovery; players really hadn't interacted with an amp like that before. It shifted expectations because this was no longer just about sound output. Instead of just dialing in settings, you had a creative tool. There were moments early on where it wasn't clear if the idea would fully land, and there were even talks about us going in a different direction. But the positive response from players drove us on. They were using it to get inspired, chase down ideas, freshen up practice sessions and more.

The Spark NEO is the latest addition to the Spark line, including AI features. What did you learn from redeveloping the amps into a headphone format?

LEE: Spark NEO was one of the more ambitious things we've taken on, and it came down to a simple question: could we move the full Spark experience into a pair of headphones? Getting there meant solving three very different kinds of problems at once — the sound, the trust and the feel of wearing them, so that people can put them on and focus on playing. Our team framed it well early on; the biggest challenge wasn't the size, it was the physics. An amp moves air in a room. A headphone seals sound against your ear. That difference shaped everything. We had to rethink driver design and acoustic tuning to recreate that amp-in-the-room feel inside your head, rather than just shrinking a tone into a pair of headphones. NEO was our first product where human ergonomics became a central part of the design. Headphones sit on your head for hours, and we wanted NEO to hold up through real, long practice sessions.

Which of your products has been the bestseller, and why do you think that is?

WHITMORE: The original Spark launched during Covid, when people were looking for creative outlets and ways to stay connected. People began to see that amp as a companion, a way to start playing, keep improving and stay active when the rest of the music scene shut down. Aside from the tone, the built-in smart features and the ToneCloud community made people feel less isolated; they shared videos, traded tones and bounced ideas off each other. Each new Spark product found an audience while staying true to that core idea. Spark MINI hits a sweet spot. Steve Vai loves it so much he collaborated with us on a signature edition. Spark GO made the whole Spark experience even more portable and accessible.

What names are you most proud to have affiliated with Positive Grid?

WHITMORE: The Spark MINI collaborations with Vai, Paul Gilbert and Zakk Wylde were special. When giants like



Steve Vai with his signature Spark MINI

"It's not just about making great gear, but finding new ways to inspire guitarists"

"Headphones sit on your head for hours, and we wanted Spark NEO to hold up through real, long practice sessions," Mike Lee says

that connect with your work, it shows you're doing something right. Beyond formal collaborations, seeing someone like Elliot Easton embrace Spark felt like a huge endorsement. We've also worked with Jake Bowen from Periphery, Jeff Loomis and Dustin Davidson from August Burns Red. Nuno Bettencourt played a key role in the launch of Spark 2.

What can we expect from Positive Grid over the next year or so?

LEE: The biggest thing for us right now is Reactor, which we've just launched. It's a combo amp, 50 or 100 watts, and it represents a different way of thinking about tone. What makes it different is the technology inside — we call it Amp Intelligence. It's a sound engine that doesn't just model existing amps; it builds tone from scratch based on what the player asks for. You can describe a sound in your own words, upload a recording or snap a photo of something that inspires you, and the amp builds a complete tone for you in seconds. You also can use it to design amp voices that don't exist anywhere else and save them as your own. The question wasn't "How do we add the latest technology to an amp?" It was "What would an amp look like if it actually understood what a player is trying to create, and how can new technology help them do that?" That's the direction we've been working toward; Reactor is the first product where it all comes together. What it means for musicians, day to day, is less time fighting with menus or hunting for the right preset, and more time playing. The amp listens to what you want and meets you there.

Would you consider making an all-tube guitar amp, or is that not really an area of concern for PG?

WHITMORE: An all-tube amp isn't in our plans, but, as they say, "never say never!" If we did make an all-tube amp, it'd include a new twist that combines the best of the classic experience with something players haven't seen. So again, it's not just about making great gear, but finding new ways to inspire guitarists. **GW**



NINE LIVES

Brian Setzer feared he might never play again after a crippling autoimmune disease. Now, the restored Stray Cats frontman tells us about trading his Gretsch for a Flying V, the abuse of supporting SRV — and why shredders need the blues

BY JOE BOSSO

BRIAN SETZER IS looking forward to a summer full of motorcycle riding, and when he's not on his bike he's amped up to hit the road with the Stray Cats. While that might not sound exactly newsworthy, it was only a few months ago that the 67-year-old guitarist couldn't even tie his shoe, much less work a throttle or a vibrato bar.

Last October, Setzer was forced to cancel the Stray Cats' fall U.S. tour as a result of a debilitating autoimmune disease that left him unable to play guitar — or do much else. "It was the strangest thing," he says. "It started about two years ago, around the end of 2024, and before you knew it I was having trouble holding a toothbrush, a fork. I couldn't button my pants. There was no

pain, but my hands just wouldn't work. Of course, there was no way I could play the guitar, which was pretty scary."

The three-time Grammy-winning guitarist sought treatment at the Mayo Clinic — a block away from his home in Rochester, Minnesota. "When my doctor diagnosed my condition, he told me there was no real cure, so it wasn't a slam-dunk that I would see results," Setzer says. "But his plan A was to get me playing again."

As for plans B and C, he laughs and says, "I don't know what they were. I'm just glad plan A worked."

Treatment for Setzer's condition took nearly a year, during which time he received infusions at the Mayo Clinic. "It's easy to feel bad about yourself, but I remember lying in bed at the hospital and right next

to me is a guy with cancer," he says. "At that moment, you realize how lucky you are, and you become pretty grateful. I didn't have anything that bad. At least what I had was thought to be treatable."

Little by little, Setzer made progress, and his ability to play came back — so much so that he gave the go-ahead for the fall tour. Sober 14 years, he was curious about an energy drink called kratom that he saw in a smoke shop, so he tried one... and another. "Big mistake," he says. "I got hooked on it. They advertise it as safe, and yeah, it gives you a lot of energy. You feel like mowing the lawn that you've been putting off. But it totally messed up my immune disorder, and my hands went back to the bad state they were in. I was in a tailspin. I messed myself up and had to clean up."

SUZIE KAPLAN



[from left] Stray Cats' Slim Jim Phantom, Brian Setzer and Lee Rocker



He entered Minnesota's Hazelton Betty Ford Clinic and underwent a 30-day rehab program. "It's one of the best places around," he says. "If there's anybody out there dealing with similar problems, I recommend it. So I took care of that demon, cleared everything out, and then fortunately the AI [autoimmune] went into remission. I feel 98 percent now. I don't want to say 100 percent because the darn autoimmune thing could strike again, but right now I'm feeling really good, and I'm playing as well as ever."

He laughs. "So let's talk about some other things!"

Ahead of the Stray Cats tour, the band is issuing a new single, "Stampede," and a cover of Eddie Cochran's "Teenage Heaven." When did you record those?

About three or four months ago. In this day and age, I think you need to go out on tour with a new song or two. Making albums now is hardly worthwhile; you're only making records for your fans and yourself.

Plenty of artists have already decided they're done making albums.

Yes. I can feel that way sometimes because when you're making a record, I mean, it's not

"Except for me, I don't know anybody else who plays a Gretsch through a Bassman. That sound is unique"

for free, let's face it. So when you're just about break even paying it back, it's frustrating. It absolutely is. So I feel the only time to really make a record is to accompany a tour.

I love what you did with "Stampede." It's like a revved-up Bo Diddley.

Yeah! It's from an instrumental song by a band called the Scarlets. I heard the song and thought the guitarist was so good. I said, "I want to play that!" There wasn't enough of a song there, but I loved the riff, so I basically wrote a song around it. And the B-side is "Teenage Heaven," an older song by Eddie Cochran that's been covered a lot.

Your soloing on that song sounds just as fluid as ever.

I appreciate that. Thank you so much. ▶



Let's talk about the band. You guys formed in the Seventies, and you kind of seemed like a real gang. What's it like being with the same guys as mature men in your 60s?

That's pretty interesting, and you're absolutely right. It starts off as a gang; you're all three hanging out, and you're in the back of the van and you're looking for cool threads to wear. All of that changes. You grow up, you get married, you have children and you move apart. I think what it is now is just a longing, not to recapture the past, but to just keep the sound we have alive.

I'm telling you, when I get on stage and I hear that guitar sound no one else really plays... Except for me, I don't know anybody else who plays a Gretsch through a Fender

Bassman. That sound is so unique, and I want to keep it alive. And then I turn around and I look at [drummer] Slim Jim Phantom over there, and he brightens my day. You know what I mean? It really makes the whole thing worthwhile, but at the same time, it changes.

The band had a pretty notable breakup in the 1980s. Are all the troubles you guys had water under the bridge?

Oh, gosh, yeah. I mean, the kinds of things you go through in a band – it's like being in any kind of relationship. You have to learn how to deal with other people, and that takes time. Any rows we might have had are long gone. It could have been from drinking too much alcohol one night – who knows? There are so many things people fight over. They

fight over nothing! So you learn to talk things out and get over it. The music is so good, and that's what's important.

You mentioned your Gretsch guitars. If you were somehow banned from using Gretsch 6120s, what would you play?

That's a great question because I want to segue to this... I recently bought a '59 Flying V and a '59 Les Paul. I bought them because, fortunately, I had the money saved up, and I wanted to see what the fuss was all about. Now, the Les Paul is a beautifully built guitar, and it plays beautifully. I cannot fault it. The only thing is, it's not my tone. It's not my particular sound. I couldn't bring it on stage or even record with it. It's just not me, even though it's a joy to play.

But let me tell you about the Flying V. It sounds like the Gretsch. I kid you not, man! I played a Gretsch and then played the '59 Flying V, and I couldn't tell the difference. The only other guitar that could take the place of the Gretsch would be an older Flying V. It sounded so similar – I couldn't believe it. It had the balls, it had that twang. The Les Paul doesn't have it, but the old Flying V does. It's the weirdest thing.

No chance you're going to take the V on tour with you though, right?

I'm afraid to take it out. It's worth so much money.

Is there any new gear that has impressed you recently?

You know, I'm of the mind that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The Bassmans have worked over the years so darn well. The only thing I do now is, I turn the cabinet around because I want the band to be the same volume. The Bassman is so loud. A lot of the tweed amps from the Fifties are too mushy sounding for me. When I fingerpick or do something complex, it just gets lost in the mush. But the Bassmans from the early Sixties, they've got those rectifier tubes, and they really tighten up the sound.

I do have a new echo unit that I'm really impressed with. It's an Echo Fix [EF-P2 Spring Reverb pedal]. The people who make these have copied the Roland Space Echo, so you can bring it out on tour without worrying about it breaking down. I'm really impressed with it, because they're copying a piece of machinery that actually worked.

Here's something I haven't seen you talk about. In 1989, the Stray Cats were on tour with Stevie Ray Vaughan. What do you recall about that experience?

I recall that the crowds hated us. [Laughs] They hated us! They were only there to see Stevie Ray, and they didn't give us a chance.

It wasn't an easy tour for us, I can tell you that. I loved listening to him. I remember thinking, "How does he get that sound?" Only he get could get a Strat to sound like that. One night he called me on stage, and he handed me a Strat and put it over me. I thought, "Oh, great! I'm finally going to see what this is all about." There were rumors that he had amps underneath the stage and he had them miked up in the basement — all sorts of stuff.

So I played it... and it sounded like me. I didn't sound like Stevie Ray. I mean, his guitar even felt like mine. The action was the same, the volume he played at, the amp he played through. I was like, "Well, this is interesting. Stevie sounds like he does because it's all in his hands." He was phenomenal. He was so fluid, and he played the blues differently every night. Besides us getting booed off the stage, it was a great show.

Did he ever come backstage and talk to you about the crowd reaction?

Not exactly, but I used to go back and see him all the time. I remember he flew in different kinds of exotic foods he liked. He was going through the throes of alcoholism, trying to keep off the booze. I know what that's like. It was a tough time for him, but he was a great guy and a great guitar player.

"I don't laugh at shredders, but putting on a blues record wouldn't kill 'em!"

Are there any new, young guitar players you've noticed in the last couple years? Anybody in the rockabilly world who's impressed you lately?

Who's rockabilly? I don't even know! I mean, rockabilly is really only alive for us. Where would you even go to hear rockabilly? There's not much around, right? You know how I hear new players? I go on YouTube and the Carter Vintage Guitars page. There's a guy named RJ Ronquillo. Fantastic player. Marcus King is another. Great player. He's a rockabilly guy.

It's interesting how the Stray Cats have dominated the rockabilly market all these years. Years ago, during the height of punk and new wave, did your friends and families think you guys were crazy to seek fame and fortune in England?

Oh, sure, especially when you consider that we were getting really popular around New York. My dad and Jim's dad came to a show

and they said, "You want to go where? Why would you leave this?" We had the whole thing. We'd go into these towns, and we had girls coming to the shows. We were making money.

Going to the U.K. was our real break. The music scene and the people we encountered understood what we were doing. I always said the British musicians wanted to be the American guys, and the American guys wanted to be British guys. In England, the guys want to be me. They want to be Scotty Moore. They want to be Cliff Gallup. Here in America, guitarists want to be Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. It's just how it is.

Where does Jimi Hendrix fit into all this?

Oh, he's a unicorn. Jimi Hendrix is from Mars. He doesn't figure into any of these battles.

In a recent *Guitar World* interview, Keith Richards said he "laughed his head off" at the Sunset Strip shred guitarists. What did you think of them?

I don't laugh at any guitar player. I mean, I have very varied tastes, and I like all styles of music. So no, I don't laugh at shredders, but it would be good for them to step outside the box and put on a blues record. It wouldn't kill 'em! **GW**

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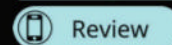
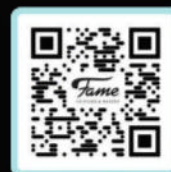
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GUITAR IN THE KEY OF NYC

Gooseberry's
Asa Daniels

New York City's guitar scene ain't dead — it was just hungover on the J train. *GW* takes its hometown's pulse with 15 on-the-rise (and/or already-risen) artists who prove there's life after CBGB

INTRO DAMIAN FANELLI PROFILES & INTERVIEWS JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

NASHVILLE, LOS ANGELES, Atlanta, Detroit and Austin definitely have their moments, but there's no other American music city like New York. NYC — the home of *Guitar World* magazine since 1980 — was the cradle of punk and hip-hop, a preferred hub for jazz, new wave and post-punk and the petri dish that spawned a relentless outbreak of gritty, guitar-forward bands, from the Velvet Underground to Sonic Youth, Blondie

to Interpol, New York Dolls to the Ramones, Chic to Kiss, Mink DeVille to the Senders, White Lion to Parquet Courts, Television to TV on the Radio. You get the idea.

And while it's reasonable to argue that NYC, like those other cities, only has its "moments" of greatness (for instance, the punk explosion of the Seventies and the "Class of 2001" with its Strokes and Yeah Yeah Yeahs), it's safe to say that — based on actionable intel and the new music we're

gloriously subjected to on a near-daily basis — it's having a genuine moment right now. Just ask anyone who's been baffled, bowled over and converted by a Geese, Horsegirl or Castle Rat riff, music video or show.

As the following 15 artists will attest, guitar is alive and well in every corner of the city (OK, mostly in Brooklyn, but who can afford Manhattan?). And speaking of Parquet Courts, when the hell are we getting a new album? But I digress...



GOOSEBERRY

IT'S A FRIGID spring morning and, due to a poorly timed pot of coffee, I'm late to my Zoom call with Asa Daniels, the singer/guitarist/sometimes day-to-day manager — the Chief Warrior Officer, if you will — of Brooklyn rock 'n' roll band Gooseberry. Fortunately, Daniels is an affable guy, and, not sweating my tardiness, he's happy to delve into some of the band's war stories.

"At 1 a.m., we'll get invited out to the owner of some bar's ranch and they'll invite the townies," he says. "Then, all of a sudden we're playing darts — using bows and arrows — in a barn. Those are the types of situations we find ourselves in."

Other situations Gooseberry find themselves in is writing riffs in 11/8 and songs in 7/4, largely because of Daniels' deep jazz roots. He was given *At Carnegie Hall* by the Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane when he was 5, and it changed his life.

"There is a jazz foundation that's happening there," he says. "People will come up after the show and be like, 'You're playing some weird fucking chords up there, man!' Really, what they're just describing is playing, like, a ninth. It's nothing crazy, but those influences do come out, even if there's heavy distortion on the guitar."

THE THING

WHEN I MEET the Thing over Zoom, guitarist Michael Carter is proudly wielding a B.C. Rich Bich, a far cry from the white Ovation Breadwinner he typically plays. The guitar belongs to the Macks, who the Thing are

staying with for a few nights while they play some West Coast shows. "The Macks fucking rip," Carter says. But the Thing fucking rip, too. Having played more than 300 shows worldwide, the band is tighter than your pants on Thanksgiving, and when they play, they turn their amps up loud.

"There's a lot of people that are going in the other direction now," guitarist Jack Bradley says. He's referring to bands that lean on modelers, which might seem practical in a tightly packed city like New York, but the Thing proudly lug their amps to every gig.

"Sound is fickle," he says. "When it's going through different tubes, speakers or preamps, it all adds to the character."

While we're on the topic of cumbersome equipment, what about capos? "If you think capos are bad, you watch too much YouTube," Carter says. "Get out of your room and play in a band."



SHOWER CURTAIN

IT DIDN'T TAKE Victoria Winter — Shower Curtain's primary songwriter — very long to start writing songs after she first picked up the guitar.

"I think the lack of classical training just made me write my own music as a way to play guitar," Winter says. "I never really took guitar lessons. At first it was just, like, learning covers; then I just started writing my own music on the guitar, and it just kind of developed as that type of relationship."

The result is the development of Winter's unique voice on guitar, one that communicates the vulnerability and sensitivity of similar shoegaze bands like Fleeting Joys. "I take in from people a lot," she says. "If someone's watching me, I want an exchange in a very emotional way. For me, music is much more connection-based than a solo or inward experience."

HORSEGIRL

THE THING ABOUT getting old is that you don't really realize it until one day, you're 38 and you join a Zoom call where a band of twenty-somethings have to explain an Instagram post to you. For me, that band is the Chicago-bred/NYC-based Horsegirl, and the post has something to do with an old meme.

"It's like, 'grown ass man got his finger stuck at Chipotle,'" bassist Penelope Lowenstein says. "It's from our childhood."

That easily-remembered moniker — Horsegirl — came to Lowenstein in a dream when she was a teenager. That iteration of the band was much noisier than the version I'm speaking with today. "We had a lot of distortion going on," guitarist Nora Cheng says. Modern Horsegirl draw on bands like the Velvet Underground, Cheng's open tunings and Lowenstein's Fender Bass VI for their minimalistic sound.



"I love, love this instrument. I'd never play regular bass in a trio," Lowenstein says. "On the higher strings, you can almost play a voicing as if you're playing a riff on the lower strings of a guitar. It gives us a ton of flexibility."

CASTLE RAT

WHILE IT'S TRUE that Castle Rat are technically based in the Large Apple, what's more important is where vocalist-guitarist Riley Pinkerton (aka the Rat Queen), lead guitarist Franco Vittore (aka the Count) and the rest of the chainmail-wearing, sword-swingin' metal warriors are trying to take you through their fantastically brimstone-and-Strymon-Sunset-scented stoniness – an enigmatic artistic plane they call "The Realm."

"The idea behind it is a feeling of collective connectedness, in a way that is flexible across space and time to include everyone," Pinkerton says. "My goal behind it is to create a place for anyone who's ever felt like they

"Playing guitar in Geese is an exercise in shape shifting. There's not one set thing that we do"

EMILY GREEN

don't belong, which is something I struggled with growing up. Usually my way of coping with it was going off into a fantasy world, or making up a game and getting other kids on the playground to be a part of the world. I'm just doing the same shit at 30 years old."

Last year's *The Bestiary* holds dominion through Pinkerton's swaggering trad-metal chunking, Vittore's livewire Mixolydian flourishes and wizard-friendly lyricism. The album just got a wider re-release through Loma Vista, and the band recently hit a big-time metal tour with Dethklok and Amon Amarth. In other words, more fans are heading into "The Realm" than ever before.

PASQUALE GRASSO

DURING OUR CALL, jazz guitarist Pasquale Grasso described to me how he hit the ground running when he moved from Naples, Italy, to NYC in 2009.

"This is a place where there's space for anybody if you want to do anything," he says. "If you wait for the phone to ring, that's never gonna happen. You can go out and hear somebody almost every single night. That's how you meet people."

He was inspired to make the move by his teacher, legendary jazz pianist Barry Harris. "I've known him since I was about 9," Grasso says. "He always talked about New York. Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Elmo Hope – all those guys are from the City. A friend of mine – a great bass clarinet player, Stefano



PASQUALE GRASSO

Doglioni; we have a band together – was coming to New York in 2009. He asked me and my brother if we wanted to come. I was 19. We went to see a show at Smalls Jazz Club – it was the great piano player, Sacha Perry – and when I was there, I thought that was my home."

GEESE

"PLAYING GUITAR IN Geese is an exercise in shape shifting. There's not one set thing that we do," says Emily Green, lead guitarist in Geese. The hype that surrounded the Brooklynites' late-2025 record, *Getting Killed*, was palpable, and for good reason. It's a dynamic, relentless, guitar-driven rock record with echoes of the Velvet Underground and Television. Endorsements from Patti Smith, Nick Cave and Julian Casablancas have added fuel to extravagant press statements that Geese are here to reanimate rock's corpse.

When the band passed through Detroit last year, Green told me about the first guitar she bought with her own money, the blue-and-silver Reverend Double Agent she still uses. "The Reverend is a precision machine," she says. "There's a lot of good note separation and clarity. I worked a two-week internship at a headphone company called Master & Dynamic. Inventory and admin stuff. I took the money from that to buy the Reverend. I also learned in those two weeks that if I had to work a desk job, I'd really prefer not to because it is mind-numbingly boring."



CASTLE RAT



GEESE

What about the job she has now, playing guitar in one of rock's most exciting bands? "Most jobs are boring, except for this one. This one's pretty good," she says.

EMANUEL CASABLANCA

"I DIDN'T CHOOSE the blues," Brooklyn native Emanuel Casablanca says. "It kind of chose me." He's wary that this idea could come off as cheesy, but when you're a kid who wants to play guitar and the only lessons you can afford are the free ones from the guy down the street who plays guitar on his porch —

and that guy only knows the blues — it's hard to argue with Casablanca's logic.

"I wanted to get better, so I just asked him, 'Can I play with you sometime? Can you show me some stuff?'" he says.

You never get a yes to a question you don't ask. It's this philosophy that led Casablanca to not only developing his chops, but also meeting Ron Wood, getting a gig playing with Lauryn Hill and getting a record deal.

"These people were all where I wanted to be," he says. "My father always said a closed mouth doesn't get fed. I can not say

something and not get there, or I can say something and actually have a shot."

TELESCREENS

"I'VE JUST BEEN chasing rock 'n' roll forever. That's been my entire life."

I'm talking with Telescreens' singer and guitarist Jackson Hamm. He's telling me about his version of the scene in *Almost Famous*, when William Miller is given his sister's old record collection. In Hamm's case, it was his mom's friend's boyfriend trying to impress his mom's friend, and instead of records like the Rolling Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* and Joni Mitchell's *Blue*, Hamm was gifted records like Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Stadium Arcadium* and Nirvana's *Nevermind*.

"What kicked it off was probably Kurt Cobain," Hamm says. "He plays with his whole body. He's just pushing this energy. I feel like his guitar playing is actually amazing. It gets overlooked because it's not Eddie Van Halen shred, but it's definitely powerful and incredibly creative."

As a guitar player, Hamm's North Stars are Cobain, Joey Santiago and John Frusciante. "When it comes to playing, it's much more about how I'm feeling than the amount of notes that I'm going to play," he says. "It's just more about what kind of energy is being emitted than how fast or impressive the part is."

Why the Lights Flicker is out now.

THE LEMON TWIGS

THE LEMON TWIGS achieve their mid-Sixties garage pop sound — best heard on the just-released *Look for Your Mind!* — by keeping things simple. "We don't really use effects," guitarist Michael D'Addario says. "I don't even have a boost; I just use the volume. The only pedal Brian really uses is a JangleBox, which is sort of like a compressor."

Beyond the simplicity helping to add authenticity to their sound, D'Addario says there's a practicality involved as well. "We just like the idea that we can do a show with whatever," he says.

"It really does come in handy a lot of the time," adds Brian D'Addario, Michael's brother and the band's other guitarist. "There've been times when we had problems with the van and had to do a show with backline unexpectedly, and it's really nice to not be very reliant on equipment."

So what does that mean for troubleshooting equipment problems on the road?

"Usually it's a problem with tubes or a cable," Michael says. "We still manage to have problems just because we're so shoddy about prepping our stuff before we go on the road."

BTW, if you wonder where the brothers got at least some of their inspiration, head to Spotify or Apple Music and check out pretty much anything by their Manhattan-born-

EMANUEL CASABLANCA



CHRISTOPHER POLK/BILLBOARD VIA GETTY IMAGES, NATALIA BUBALO



TELESCREENS



WENDY EISENBERG



THE LEMON TWIGS



MEI SEMONES

and-bred father, Ronnie D'Addario. The lemon didn't fall far from the tree (Sorry, had to say it).

WENDY EISENBERG

WHEN WENDY EISENBERG plays guitar, the virtuoso folk-jazz guitarist and composition teacher at the New School in Manhattan isn't showing off.

"If it sounds like showing off, I've not done my job correctly," the guitarist says. "I play this complicated stuff for two real reasons. One is that it's incredibly fun to play guitar, and everybody should try to find their own voice on it, because it's like finding your whole voice in the world. The second reason I play like this is because I believe that writing and letting the guitar be your collaborator is like speaking to somebody."

Eisenberg says that when you finally find that interlocutor, it's far easier to understand what it is you're trying to convey. "That's my relationship to the guitar," Eisenberg says.

"It only sounds dense — or kind of impressive or whatever — because I just wanted to ask it what it thinks a lot."

MEI SEMONES

MEI SEMONES' SONGS start innocently enough — a shy falsetto on top of absent-minded strumming. That is, until her hand takes off up and down the fretboard as effortlessly and intricately as a spider weaves a web.

The virtuosic jazz-indie fusion guitarist was inspired to pick up the guitar after seeing *Back to the Future* for the first time.

"I don't care whether a solo sounds hard. It just needs to be moving and compelling"

HARRY SPRINGER

It was the scene where Marty McFly covers Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" at the Enchantment Under the Sea dance in 1955.

"I saw that when I was in middle school and thought it was really cool," the guitarist says. "I was already playing piano, but I wasn't feeling very connected to it. I felt a connection to the guitar."

So how do you get from Marty McFly's rootsy riff in B to jazz fusion?

"It wasn't really an interest in the genre, but more so that I just wanted to be able to play the instrument more," she says. "There was a jazz program at my high school, and I actually really ended up liking it. Especially coming from playing rock, it was a different way of thinking about music. From there, I just wanted to keep doing it." ■

GUITAR IN THE KEY OF NYC



SKORTS

SKORTS

THE SKORTS (TYPICALLY stylized in all-caps) story begins at a vintage guitar shop in the East Village, when singer Alli Walls came in looking for a pedal.

"I showed her some stuff," guitarist Char Smith says. "What she was playing on guitar was really cool. It was in some drop tuning. She had just moved to New York and said she was looking to start a band."

The eventual result of that encounter is Skorts' debut LP, *Incompletement*, a refreshing rock record that places as much emphasis on its soaring Eighties pop melodies as it does on its carefully crafted guitar tones. "And then you run for days/And you run for miles/In the vacant night," sings Walls

on "R4DR4M," with a hook that rivals Belinda Carlisle.

"[Alli's] voice is big enough to be in that environment with a big guitar already," Smith says. "That's a lot of the synergy between Alli and me. She likes starting songs that way. We both like a big swing."

QUARTERS

ROCK HISTORY IS littered with fantastical stories of bands emerging triumphantly from the rubble of adversity with their debut LP or demo tape in hand, and NYC's Quarters are no exception. Guitarist Jasper Gee Harris tells us a story about a particularly intense mixing session during the making of their debut that saw the band get creative when nature called.



QUARTERS



MOON WALKER

"The story has sounded more ridiculous as time has gone on," he says. The band recorded their debut at the Beacon School, their old high school near Times Square. "We'd often stay way past closing time," he says. "There were security guards walking around, and we had to make sure they didn't see us. So the bottle had to do!"

Since then, the band has moved on from their alma mater's studio and into their own spaces to record, affording them modern advantages like indoor plumbing.

"I produced the last record — *I Hope This Isn't the End of the World* — myself," Harris says. "I went to Attila's [Anrather, drums] place and got a beat, then I'd go back to my place, edit it and then play all the bass and guitars over it myself. I'm super proud of it."

MOON WALKER

"OH MY GOD, you haven't broken out of the construct!"

Harry Springer, aka Moon Walker, is describing guitar players who prioritize technique and flash over something listenable, which, to Springer, is plaguing rock 'n' roll.

"It makes you cringe, almost," he says. "If there's going to be a solo, it should just be a part of the song. A guitar can move you in a way that a lot of voices can't. It can really scream. It's a great tool to use to reach a point of extreme catharsis."

There are several cathartic guitar moments on Moon Walker's latest record, *Wasteland Country*, but none quite as moving as the guitar solo on the album's finale, "Everybody Goes to Heaven."

"I literally do not care whether a solo sounds hard. It just needs to be moving and compelling. That's the moment where the melody can really be ingrained in your head, you know?" **GW**

Gregory Adams contributed to this story.

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SCHOOL'S OUT

Not just any 22-year-old could fill Nita Strauss's shoes in Alice Cooper's band. In this three-way *GW* exclusive, Coop's longtime sidemen reveal how wonderkid **Anna Cara** scored shock-rock's biggest gig

BY ANDREW DALY



VICTOR CHALFANT



Alice Cooper [left, obviously] with Anna Cara at CoopStock 2026 in Mesa, Arizona

FOR ANNA CARA, a 22-year-old guitarist from Newcastle, England, replacing Nita Strauss in the Alice Cooper Band is daunting. But that's not all, as the music Cara covers with Cooper was laid down by greats like Dick Wagner, Steve Hunter, Kane Roberts, Vinnie Moore, Orianthi and, of course, Strauss, making the gig even weightier.

But Cara isn't alone. She has help in the form of guitarists Ryan Roxie — who has played with Cooper since 1996 — and Tommy Henriksen, who joined Cooper's ranks in 2012. That experience, along with their collective forays beside Slash, Joe Perry and more, makes them the perfect partners in guitar-related crime for Cara, who has watched the band's antics all her life.

"I really loved Orianthi and Nita," Cara says. "I used to play along to their videos as a kid, so I can't even describe the feeling of this. It's so crazy."

"You've got to be adept at learning a whole spectrum of music," Roxie says. "When I heard Anna play, I knew right from the get-go that she's cut from a different cloth. She can play mechanical shredder stuff with ease but also can slip into classic-rock mode at the drop of a hat."

Henriksen, who discovered Cara and justifiably likens her tone, vibrato and versatility to that of Gary Moore, agrees. "I kept telling Ryan, 'You've got to see this

kid play, man,'" he says. "She's got that thing. I can't explain it. There's not many people who have it, but she's got it."

Humble as Cara is, when pressed, she's able to describe what that thing is. "I like playing with feel and emotion," she says. "I enjoy shredding, but the main thing for me is feel and emotion. That's what I enjoy, and that's what's kept me playing."

Cara is on tour with Cooper, a place where there are no tricks, gimmicks or safety nets. "Nothing you hear is on tape," Roxie says. "If it's a bad night, you'll hear it. That's rock 'n' roll. Real guitars, scratchy voices. It's the real deal."

"There's a lot to learn," Cara says. "I never think I've done it, or that this is my level of guitar. I don't think that way. I think about how I can get to the next level and push myself to be better. But it's hard to put into words. I couldn't ask for more from life because this is one of my biggest dreams. I'm still processing it. I look over at Alice, and he'll point to me during these songs, and it's just unreal."

"Anna's got that thing. There's not many people who have, but she's got it"

TOMMY HENRIKSEN

But Roxie, who has been around the merry-go-round many times, advises Cara to embrace her new reality. "If you stick with it, you'll get your shot. Tommy and me got our shot years ago, and we're still trying to make the most of it. Now Anna has her shot, and the world is her oyster."

Tommy, Anna came into Alice Cooper's orbit through you, right?

TOMMY HENRIKSEN: I found Anna for [my band] Crossbone Skulls. I'm always looking on Instagram and YouTube for musicians, and when I was putting Skulls together, I was like, "I wanna put a bunch of [bedroom guitarists] together and get them out there."

What appealed to you about Anna's guitar playing?

HENRIKSEN: She never showed her face, just her playing guitar. She wasn't doing all that stupid stuff — not posing or anything. I sent her a message and said, "I love what you're doing. You've got great vibrato and feel. Can I call you and your parents?" I didn't know how old she was. [Laughs] I FaceTimed with them and said, "I like your daughter's playing. She's a natural. She plays like Gary Moore. She's got the vibrato of a 55-year-old man." I'd never heard a girl — and don't take that the wrong way! — play with that type of vibrato other than Orianthi. I asked who showed her that, and she said, "My dad!"



[from left] Tommy Henriksen, Ryan Roxie and Cara. "She plays like Gary Moore," Henriksen says

Eventually, Anna joined Crossbone Skully. What led to that?

HENRIKSEN: I said, "I'm putting together a band. I'm going to call you. Be show-ready. You're going to be going on a plane to L.A." Months later, I called her and said, "Are you ready to come to L.A.? We're going to make a few videos. I'll pick you up at the airport." I picked her up, and the first place I drove her to was Johnny Depp's house, where the studio is. This kid has never been out of Newcastle, and now she's at Johnny Depp's house. Johnny goes, "Let her play any guitar she wants," so I handed her Johnny's guitar. That's how she wound up working with me.

Eventually, Nita gave Alice notice that she'd be leaving the band for a bit, leading to Anna taking her place. Anna, this all must have been a whirlwind.

ANNA CARA: When I was discovered by Tommy in 2022, I was 19. Since then, there have been years of development, and I've become a better musician and live player. I'm still in disbelief because I used to watch

Alice Cooper's live videos when I was 14 and play along with them.

Ryan, you've been with Alice the longest and have been in the band with a lot of great guitarists. What did you think of Anna after first hearing her, and did you get the sense she'd be a good cultural fit?

RYAN ROXIE: Absolutely. Fitting into any gig is just as important, if not more so, than musicianship. You have to have a high level of musicianship, but in this band you wear a lot of hats and share a lot of things. You have to be adept at learning a whole spectrum of music. When I heard Anna play, I thought, "How the hell is that sound coming out of a 22-year-old's fingers?" Usually, to get a tone like that, it comes from years of playing. You've heard the stories about smokey bars and how you get experience, but she got it from many years of woodshedding in her room and putting out videos.

Tommy, was it you who first presented the idea of Anna taking Nita's place to Alice?

HENRIKSEN: Alice was looking for a guitar

player, and I said, "Do you want a girl or a guy? I've got either/or." But the first thing I did was send Anna's stuff to Ryan because I wanted him to see her. Ryan heard her play and said, "I see it. I hear it." And that was it. Alice was into it, too. Next thing you know, he's like, "Let's bring her to Vegas to watch the show and get her familiar with everything."

Anna, can you put your finger on that thing that Tommy is alluding to? Is it inherent to you, or is it learned?

CARA: When I started, I learned a few things from my dad. We used to play together, but it was more of a hobby to him. When he showed me songs, the things he always focused on were vibrato and rhythm. He said, "Nail that before trying to do any fast shred stuff." From there, I was watching Tony Iommi, Eddie Van Halen and Gary Moore. I liked players with the right feel and tone.

ROXIE: The crazy thing is that I'm 60 and she's 22, but we have the same influences. That might have something to do with the way she plays — old-school influences. It reflects in her playing.



Cara in Topeka, Kansas, with her Ibanez X Series on April 17

What's the division of guitar-related labor like, and has it changed compared to when Nita was in the band?

ROXIE: Alice loves lead guitar, so there's usually a minimum of two, if not three, solos per song. Everybody gets to get their ya-ya's out. [Laughs] The catalog sort of dictates itself, where, depending on the genre, you can tell who is going to be featured for the solo. If it's an Eighties Kane Roberts thing, Anna is going to take that. If it's more classic rock and chunky, Tommy's got that. If it's somewhere in the middle, I kind of float around in all those areas. We're trying to carry the spirit of the original songs.

HENRIKSEN: Most of the time, I prefer playing rhythm. I can do a solo, but I'm

Malcolm Young, bro. [Laughs] If I've got a solo, I have a couple of licks, like three of them, and I just put them in a different order.

ROXIE: Yeah, but I've said this to Tommy many times; he's the most-improved guitar player I've ever played with in the history of this band. He was a bass player by trade, but he started taking guitar seriously when he joined. He's progressed every year and has

"It's called the Alice Cooper Band, but he wants everybody to have their moment"

RYAN ROXIE

taken it seriously.

CARA: It comes down to the trio thing; everyone has a certain thing they're good at. When we're rehearsing, we'll come up with really cool harmonies and things like that.

Can you pick out a favorite Alice Cooper song to tackle on guitar?

HENRIKSEN: "Caught in a Dream" because of the rhythm. It's not easy like everybody thinks. Also "Cold Machines" because we've never played it before. It's in drop D and has that industrial metal vibe.

CARA: "Feed My Frankenstein." The rhythm and solo, the duo-solo Ryan and I do, is just so much fun. "Poison," too. I love the harmony solos.

ROXIE: The challenging stuff is the fun part. We're doing a song called "Chasing Rainbows," which is from the Forties, I think [Ed. note: Harry Carroll's *"I'm Always Chasing Rainbows"* was first published in 1917], but Alice covered it on 1976's *Goes to Hell*. There's piano on that, and one of the funnest things I've ever done is transposing that into a piece for us to play live with the whole band.

What gear are you using these days?

HENRIKSEN: I'm pretty much playing B.C. Rich stuff. One day, I was on a hunt, and really, because Joe Perry is the coolest guy to ever be in a band and has the coolest guitars, and I remembered seeing him with his B.C. Rich on *Live! Bootleg*. I thought, "I want to get a B.C. Rich." I got a Bich and a Mockingbird from a guy from my old neighborhood. I paid five grand for both, and it was from the original owner, who got them in 1980. After that, I said, "I'm just playing B.C. Rich right now." Then I went out and found an Eighties Warlock. Aside from that, I use whatever built-in effects we have.

ROXIE: I grew up on Gibsons, and I've always tried to represent those classic, iconic shapes. It's not just for tones, but I'll play a Flying V for Eighties stuff, an Explorer for industrial stuff and a Les Paul for Seventies songs.

But I'm not working with Gibson anymore as a clinician, so now I get to play whatever I want, and I'm kind of like a kid in a candy store. [Laughs] What I've grabbed onto lately is Rock N Roll Relics, Billy Rowe's company. It's a great boutique company, and he has a bunch of killer shapes. Beyond that, I have a custom effect coming out with Citadel. We're calling it the Pin Sound. It's a cool, sort of Van Halen boost, like a micro amp with a noise gate. Look for that to come out by the end of the year. Oh, and for acoustic stuff, Alvarez has been very gracious to us, and they sound great.

CARA: We're all using Kempers live. I've got to give Tommy credit for the tones on that. For guitars, I'm using Ibanez's X Series. I'm thank-

ful to Ibanez for sorting that out because they feel amazing. With the X Series, Tommy sent me a picture and was like, "Check this one out!" I have this nickname, Blackthorn, and when we saw the guitar, we were like, "Oh! It looks like a thorn," so it made perfect sense to have that guitar. But I've also got a Les Paul because I grew up playing Gibson. I love SGs too, but I got my Les Paul from Alice's son, Dash Cooper. He's letting me use it for this run, and it's been fun to have that classic sound.

What's the key to locking in together within a three-guitar band?

ROXIE: It's easy in this band. We know whose name is on the marquee, and it ain't mine, it ain't Tommy's and it ain't Anna's. [Laughs] That keeps us in check. But we're lucky to have a boss who, although it's called the Alice Cooper Band, wants everybody to shine, have their moment and make the most of it. Alice is confident and secure with his iconic status, and his ego is in check. That makes us all aware of our own egos, too.

HENRIKSEN: The whole thing is about rhythm. It's about timing and feel. When you lock it in, dude, it just sounds like a wall of guitars. It's cool to have that. We're all playing something different – and on different parts

of the neck – so that makes it fun.

CARA: The music is timeless. It's such a range of genres. I don't just gravitate toward one type of music, and I don't listen to modern stuff because I love the Seventies and Eighties. With the guitar playing, along with what Ryan and Tommy said, I just get into it. That type of playing is big for me.

It seems being a guitarist with Alice is all about balancing individuality with the needs of the collective.

HENRIKSEN: I'm always on Instagram, watching every kid, and they're just amazing. I'm trying to learn new licks all the time, dude. But everyone has a different approach, and I'm just out there trying to figure shit out. [Laughs] But it's so cool when you see stuff that inspires you, because I'm always trying to get better.

ROXIE: Anna's journey is just beginning, but for Tommy and me, we don't want our journey to end. It's that simple. Once you're in this game, if you're good at it and still love doing it, why quit? As long as the wheels are going, we want to keep going. We are individuals, but that doesn't mean shit unless the collective comes across as something sincere. Night after night, our performance speaks for itself. It's not perfect, and no one

ever claims it is, but that's rock 'n' roll. It ain't supposed to be perfect. We all miss notes, but the collective is so strong that we cover for each other.

Tommy and Ryan are well established. But for you, Anna, joining Alice represents being recognized on a large scale for the first time. What do you want the guitar world to understand about you, first and foremost?

CARA: One thing that was really nice for me, and I can't recall his name, so apologies, but he said, "It's so inspiring to see someone your age up there doing it." And, you know, it's hard work, so you've just got to keep trying. I kept posting on social media all the time. I'd do that because I wanted to be seen. I could have just stopped; I could have not uploaded the blues cover that Tommy saw. I could have given up and said, "You know what? Not today. I'm not going to put anything out today." That would've had a butterfly effect. If I'd done that, I wouldn't have been seen by Tommy and none of this would have happened. Just keep trying. Work hard and do it because you love it. A lot of people just want to learn the next lick or scale and enjoy it. Enjoy the feel of the music. That's the main thing for me; enjoy playing every day. **GW**



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THE PURPLE RAIN GUITAR
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ZIGGY

He also got a lot of amazing guitarists to play alongside him. Ten years after David Bowie left us, we ask Adrian Belew, Peter Frampton, Carlos Alomar, Eric Schermerhorn and other guitar-slinging comrades-in-arms to recall their high times alongside the master

BY JOEL MCIVER

PLAYED

DAVID BOWIE, WHO left us on January 10, 2016, was a highly accomplished singer, songwriter, performer and actor, and a fine musician too, although he knew his limitations when it came to musical virtuosity. As he told *Guitar Player's* Joe Gore in 1997, "My guitar playing hasn't moved with the times at all. I use the same chords as always, but I do know a lot of them, and I'm able to put them together in interesting juxtapositions. Any time I did spend being disciplined was learning how chords work together."

Make no mistake, Bowie knew his way around a fretboard, as a number of stellar

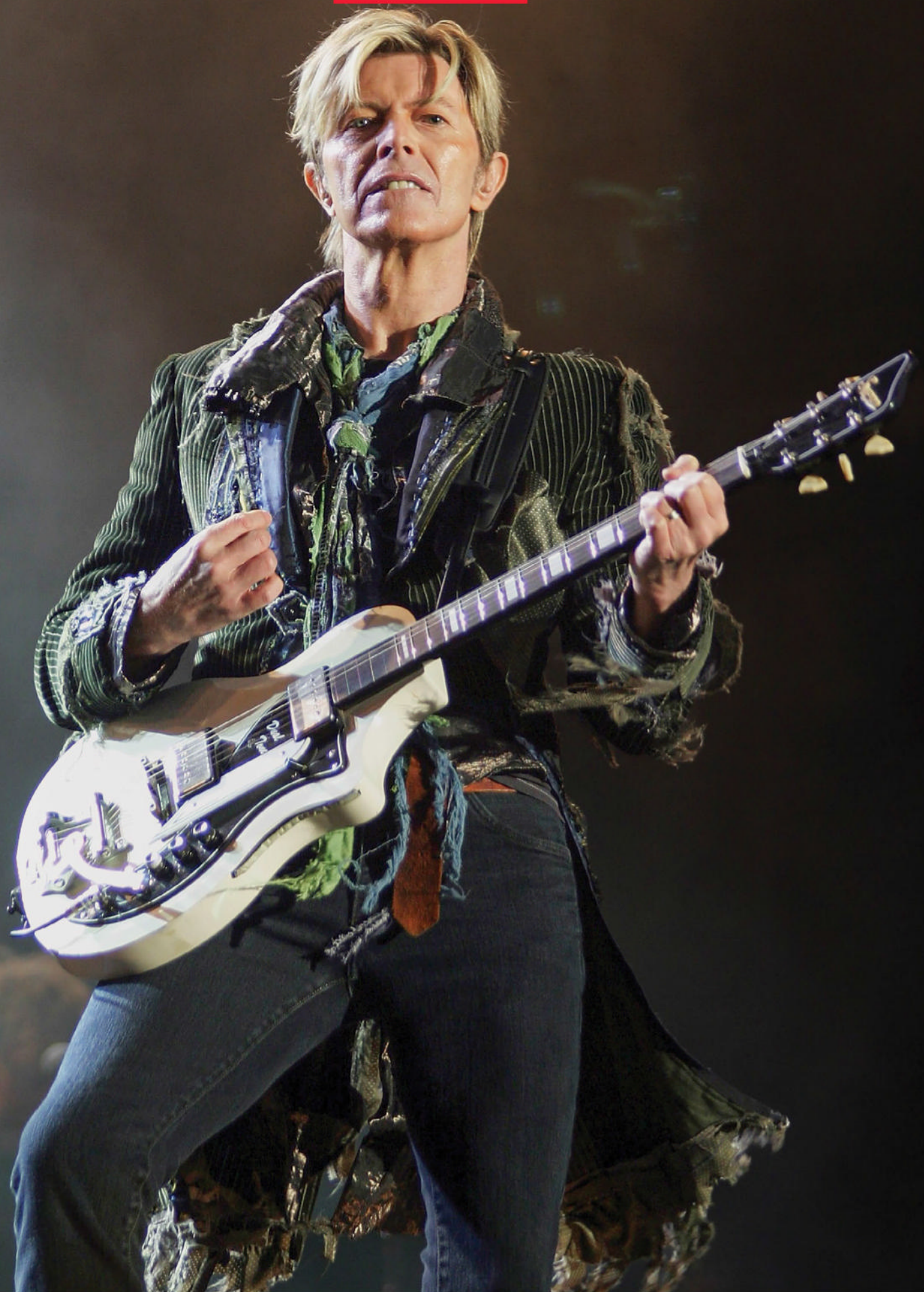
guitarists explain to us below — but he had bigger goals in mind than being a virtuoso axeman. In his 54 years as a recording and performing artist, he managed to redefine the role of the theatrical musician, refining the art of the alter-ego, touring the world in several incarnations and making an impact on the worlds of cinema and finance (remember those 1990s Bowie Bonds?) along the way. To help him achieve those objectives, he recruited some of the most fiendishly talented guitar players in the world.

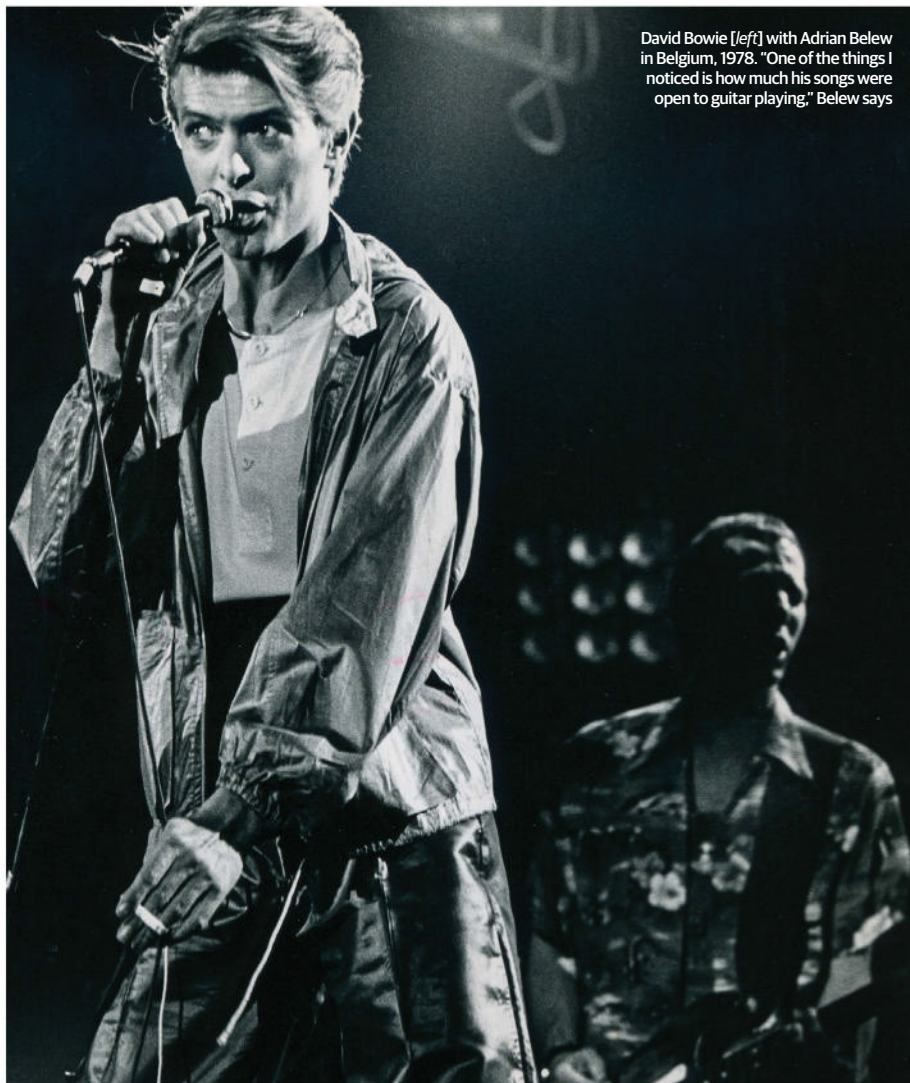
You'll already know most, if not all, of the names on the roster. For his first three years as a bona fide star, after he blew the minds of

a generation with 1970's *The Man Who Sold the World*, Bowie's guitar partner was **Mick Ronson**, who also played so memorably on *Hunky Dory* (1971), *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972), *Aladdin Sane* and *Pin Ups* (both 1973), as well as performing on the Ziggy Stardust World Tour. Listen to the metallic solo on "The Width of a Circle," from *The Man...*, the acoustic textures on "Oh! You Pretty Things" from *Hunky Dory*, and the all-out wall of sound on "Suffragette City" for a taste of Ronson's magical approach. Sadly, he died in 1993 at age 46, or we'd be talking to him today about that unmatched early catalog. ▶

GUITAR

DAVID BOWIE





David Bowie [left] with Adrian Belew in Belgium, 1978. "One of the things I noticed is how much his songs were open to guitar playing," Belew says

After the unsung session hero **Alan Parker** helped out on 1974's *Diamond Dogs*, assisting Bowie on the unforgettable main riff of "Rebel Rebel," **Earl Slick** and **Carlos Alomar**, the latter Bowie's longest-serving guitarist by some distance, stepped up to the plate for his next five and 13 studio albums respectively. Both men recorded away from Bowie in extended breaks from his band, but they're the most prolific of his sidemen by a long shot. Where to start? Check Slick's performance on 1975's *Young Americans* and Alomar's sterling work on Bowie's Berlin-recorded landmark, *Low* (1977), which also featured the late **Ricky Gardiner**, or any of the early-2000s albums that kept Bowie in the millennial bloodstream.

Let's not forget the guitarists who played with Bowie's live band, of course, even if they didn't record album sessions; these include **Stacy Heydon**, who held it down on the Isolar Tour 1976; the great **Adrian Belew**, who graduated from Frank Zappa's band in time for the *Stage* live album in 1978 and returned 12 years later as musical director of the Sound + Vision Tour; and the equally

great **Peter Frampton**, who came alive on the Glass Spider Tour in '87.

It says much about Bowie that many of his guitar players were superstars themselves. Take King Crimson's **Robert Fripp**, who recorded Bowie's best-known lead line on "Heroes" in 1977; **Stevie Ray Vaughan**, who guested on *Let's Dance* in 1983; and **Nile Rodgers** of Chic, who played on and co-produced the same album. Lesser-known session stalwarts played their part, too, notably **Chuck Hammer**, who played guitar synth on *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)* in 1980. That album also featured a notable guest slot by **Pete Townshend** of the Who.

In 1988 Bowie took a four-year sidestep off the main drag with Tin Machine, the heavy rock quartet in which **Reeves Gabrels**

"David had a kind of caveman instinct with the guitar, and he could play a mean riff, too"

GERRY LEONARD

carried most of the weight, guitar-wise. Live, he was assisted by **Eric Schermerhorn**, who went on to work with Iggy Pop after Tin Machine called it quits; Gabrels later played on *Outside* (1995), *Earthling* (1997) and *Hours...* (1999). In the 2000s, **Gerry Leonard** played textural guitar on *Heathen* (2002) and *Reality* (2003) and on the accompanying tours, joined on those albums by **Mark Plati**, also an acclaimed producer and multi-instrumentalist who had previously worked with Prince. Slick, Leonard, **David Torn**, producer **Tony Visconti** and Bowie himself recorded guitar for *The Next Day* in 2013, and for his valiant, multifaceted final curtain, 2016's still-astonishing *Blackstar*, jazz guitarist **Ben Monder** was recruited.

So what memories do these musicians have of their late employer — and what did they think of Bowie as a guitar player? Let's find out. Belew, Schermerhorn, Leonard, Plati, Frampton and Alomar are grilled on that subject below, and Fripp gave us such an expansive interview that we've given him his own feature on page 60. As for the much-missed Vaughan and Ronson, they've been jamming away in the sky since 1990 and 1993, respectively, but we'll raise our glasses to them in salute.

Was David Bowie a good guy to be around, generally speaking?

ADRIAN BELEW: Absolutely. David wasn't a person to say bad things. That would be left to someone around him. To me, he was always upbeat. He loved me, we loved each other, and we had a great time together, so there was nothing to be critical about. It was simple. If he didn't like something, he'd simply say, "I don't know about that," and that was as far as it would go. I never saw him angry. He was too sophisticated. He had so much interest in so many different things. That's one of the things I loved about him. He would always discover a new subject matter to start reading about. Once he got into something, man, he knew everything about it. That's what made him such an interesting person to be with.

ERIC SCHERMERHORN: His bunk was above mine on the bus, and he read books non-stop. I remember talking to him about Philip K. Dick. The best thing David did for me, which really shows his character, was after we played the Budokan at the end of the tour in 1992. I talked to him and he said, "We're done. The gig's over. What would you like to do in the future?" I heard Chrissie Hynde was looking for a guitar player, so I was like, "Well, Chrissie Hynde would be fun." I get back to New York, and two weeks later, his manager calls me and goes, "Chrissie wants to meet you in London." I went to London, hung out with her all day at her house, and she was great. She said, "David says you're really good.

I need a guitar player." I had already sent Iggy Pop a tape, and he said, "Let's do something," and I said yes because he lived in New York, but I look back sometimes and think, "I could have moved to London in 1992, and that would have been fun."

GERRY LEONARD: David was very perceptive and insightful – and he had this gift for reading a room. Everybody that was in his band was there for a very specific reason that he had in his mind. He had this knack of figuring out people's strengths and really leaning into those strengths. He was very good at pulling together all of those seemingly disparate elements into making art.

MARK PLATI: Aside from what a lot of people say about his curious nature, and how he was always trying to stretch his own musical and visual boundaries, he just really enjoyed doing it. He loved the process and had a lot of fun with it, and that was contagious to anybody in the room, which made these experiences a really wonderful adventure. Sometimes you didn't know where you were going, but boy, you had a good time getting there.

How did you first meet him?

BELEW: We first met when he appeared at a concert in Berlin, when I was playing with Frank Zappa. Two nights before that, Brian Eno had come to the show in Cologne, and Brian knew David was looking for a fresh guitar player, so he told him, "We've got to go see this guy that's with Zappa." There was a part of the show where Frank took an extended 10-minute solo, leaving just Terry Bozzio and Patrick O'Hearn on stage, and the rest of us were supposed to walk off the stage at that point. As I was doing that, I looked over at the monitor guy, and there was David Bowie and Iggy Pop standing there. So I walked over and shook David's hand and said, "I just want to really thank you for all your music. You've really inspired me. You've done so much amazing stuff." I didn't even have time to say anything to Iggy before David said, "Well, good. How'd you like to be in my band?" It was an amazing moment. It gave me shivers. Two weeks later, I was in David's rehearsal.

SCHERMERHORN: I met Reeves Gabrels in Boston in 1979. We played in different bands together, and we worked at the same music store. We were just guitar buddies, and we were into Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew as well as older guys like Jimi Hendrix. His wife, Sarah, worked for David as his publicist, so he got the Tin Machine gig around 1988 after she said to him, "Hey David, my husband's a guitar player" and gave him a cassette. When I was in Boston I was in a band called East Of Eden. We were on Capitol and we did a record with Roy Thomas Baker, opened for the Psychedelic Furs for a tour and then we



"Bowie had a fascination for guitar players. Songs like 'Heroes' are custom made for guitar"

ADRIAN BELEW

broke up. I moved to New York in 1990, and Reeves calls me around April or May of 1991 and says, "Hey, do you want to come out to L.A. and audition? We need a guitar player for Tin Machine." I was like, "Whoa... this is life-changing!" So I learned the records in every key, because you never know when you go to an audition; flew out to L.A. and played a couple of songs with the band. It was great, and at the end Reeves goes, "Hey, Eric, play [Jimi Hendrix's] 'Little Wing' for David," because he knew I could play that shit. So I did that, and as we're packing up, David comes up to me right there, shakes my hand, and goes, "I'm really looking forward to working with you."

LEONARD: David was intrigued by my playing. I think. He came and saw me play live and then asked me to be part of it. I think he wanted somebody to cover the stuff Fripp had done, or Belew had done, or Eno had done, and that was right up my street, because I was a big fan of all those guys. I didn't study Fripp or anything, but people would tell me, "You sound like Fripp," and I would deliberately not listen to him when I heard that, because I didn't want to be a copyist. Of course, I've listened to Fripp since, and he's got a beautiful tone and a unique style.

PLATI: I worked with Prince before I worked with Bowie, which I guess is kind of an odd combo in that you don't expect one to follow the other in sequence, but that's David. I can think of a lot of other artists who would have been like, "He worked with Prince – that's really not up my street." Not David. If anything, he'd be like, "Wow, what's this guy about?" because he had an eternally curious nature.

Were you a fan of his music before you played with him?

SCHERMERHORN: Absolutely. I bought *Low* and "Heroes" in high school. Those records were so powerful. When I met David, I said to him, "Those records changed my life," and he said, "They changed my life, too!"

PLATI: My first experience with Bowie's music was "Space Oddity." I most likely heard that on the radio when I was, maybe, 12. If you were a musically aware teenager in the early Seventies, you got to grow with David's music and with his guitar players. *Station to Station* was the first big Bowie record for me that I was aware of as an album and on FM radio. All those tunes were on the radio, and the guitar playing from Carlos and Slick really stuck with me.

How did you approach the task of being Bowie's guitar player?

BELEW: He really had a fascination for guitar players, and one of the things I noticed is how much his songs were open to guitar playing. Songs like "Stay" or "Heroes" are custom made for guitar. I was his musical director in 1990, and that was a whole other level; it took me months of preparation. One of the main difficulties was that he wanted just a four-piece band, and yet he was doing a retrospective of all his career. So you had symphonies, you had saxophone sections, you had everything in there. Fortunately, this coincided with the first sampler coming out. Roland had the first couple of samplers and they sent them to me, so me and my engineer and the keyboard player Rick Fox sat for hours and tried to sample all this stuff. We kept buying more samplers, so in the end we had two huge racks of samplers. Most of the stuff was played live, but anything that was beyond our ability was Rick Fox just pressing a sampler button, and the stage would fill with beautiful orchestral sounds.

LEONARD: I tried not to be too intimidated by the lineage that had gone before me, 

Gerry Leonard with
a Supro David Bowie
Dual Tone in 2018



because hats off, those guys are incredible voices on the guitar. But, you know, that was David's thing, too: he was very generous in that way, validating you when you couldn't do it for yourself. We need that as artists: at times, we need someone to say "Keep doing what you're doing, because it's going somewhere."

PLATI: When I met him, he was writing with Reeves Gabrels, and while they would both play guitar when they were composing, Reeves would go off and record the parts, and David was perfectly fine with that because he was always about the people he would bring into the story. He was always about letting them do what they do best.

CARLOS ALOMAR: I'm just fine all over the place, playing what we call rhythm-lead. Because in my world, there's no lead guitar player. You play a part, I play a part, and we switch off. And if I want to, I'll play your part too if I need to.

Did Bowie have specific requirements, or was he more about, "Hit me with what you've got"?

PETER FRAMPTON: He never said a word apart from, "Just come and be you." It was such an honor and a relief that he trusted me, you know, and got me there because of what I do. So I wasn't on "Let's Dance," and I didn't sound like Stevie Ray Vaughan, but I quoted Stevie and all the other great guitar players. It was a thrill to be able to do that.

"He never said a word apart from 'Just be you.' It was such an honor that he trusted me"

PETER FRAMPTON

BELEW: I had just come from working with Frank Zappa for a year, and Frank was very directive. He wanted you to play consistently and correctly, and he really didn't need you to come up with much of anything. The music was the way he already wanted it to be. David was entirely the opposite. He was just thrilled to have someone who could play wild and run around on stage with him. At one point he said, "You can be my Keith Richards!" He never really directed me about anything. He was a supporter more than anything else. He just got so excited if you did something really cool. There's a video of me playing "Stay" on the German television show *Musikladen*, and I launch into the first section where I can play a solo. He's standing across the stage with his arms crossed, with this big grin, looking at me

the whole time. He's got this look on his face like, "That's my boy!"

SCHERMERHORN: I think his genius, probably like Miles Davis, was to ask himself, "Who do I have around me?" Even if he had a guy who could only play two chords, then he'd write something using those two chords. His genius was hearing what you could do.

ALOMAR: I always say this: if you had Jimi Hendrix as your guitar player, would you tell him what to play? Fuck no. I tried to be inspiring, and I tried to give him what my best was. We always asked ourselves, "What if?" like, "What if we take the amplifier and we put it in the hallway?" One time, Tony Visconti found a chandelier and threw a rope over it and then hoisted a microphone up there. These types of outlandish ideas, and that curiosity, will keep you young forever.

What did you think of Bowie as a guitar player?

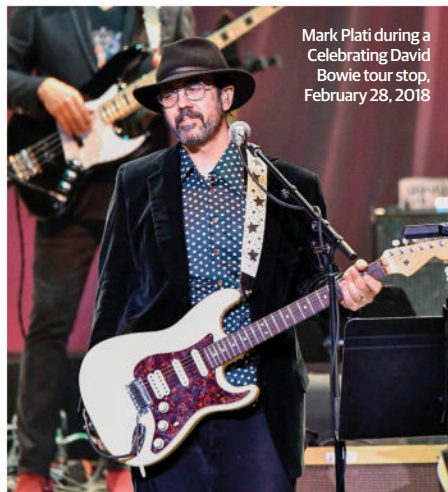
BELEW: This is an interesting thing. All the time I worked with David, I actually never saw him play much of anything. Not piano, not guitar. When I was his musical director in 1990, I just about managed to talk him into playing saxophone for one song, just because I thought it would be a cool look for David. All those years I never thought about it, but when I ask myself when he sat down and wrote all these great songs, I don't know the answer. He must have done it privately.

SCHERMERHORN: I thought what was cool was he never did barre chords. He did the E shape and slid that up and down the neck. He was letting the other strings ring on the 12-string. That's how I remember him playing, and his timing was great.

LEONARD: David wasn't virtuosic or anything like that. He didn't have any aspirations in those ways. He had a kind of caveman



Bowie [left] on stage
in France with
Carlos Alomar, 1983



Mark Plati during a Celebrating David Bowie tour stop, February 28, 2018

instinct with the guitar of what he wanted to do in a broad sense. For instance, when we did *The Next Day*, he'd say, almost apologetically, "Do you mind playing this part?" And he'd play me a part from the demo, which was a stabbing chord or something like that. It was great, so raw and punk rock. He'd say, "Take it and do what you want with it," so sometimes I would modify it, but I would always be very careful to try and keep the intention. So he got people to do the things that he wasn't able to do himself, but he had good instincts; he could write on the guitar and he could play a mean riff, too.

PLATI: In the Spiders, he was basically the second guitarist for a while and he had chops, but once he started incorporating two guitar players in the band, then he didn't have to be that any more; he became more of a frontperson.

ALOMAR: Bowie, like John Lennon, was a great rhythm, acoustic guitar player. Basically, they played triads, and they could play chords, but they couldn't play chords and bass-lines together in opposition, so the bass couldn't go down when the chord was going up. You always have to hit the root: you never hit an inversion. It's what we call metronome playing. They could keep the rhythm down for the whole song.

FRAMPTON: David played the riff on "Rebel Rebel," so we know he was a great guitarist, but I think he used guitar and keyboard in order to write. He was like me in the sense that I can play piano enough to write a song, but I'm not a piano player, whereas I am a guitar player.

When were you last face to face with Bowie?

BELEW: A long time ago. I don't know. He called me several times, though. One time he called and asked, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm out in my garden." He said, "You've got a garden?" I said, "Yeah, I've got a garden. You could have a garden, too, if you want. You're David Bowie!"

SCHERMERHORN: I ran into him a few times in

New York, and he was always so nice to me.

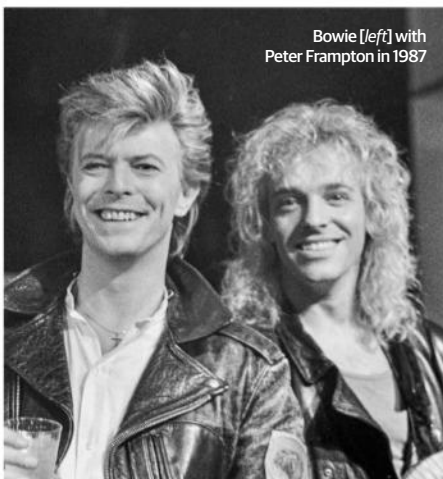
ALOMAR: About a year or so before he died. It was Tony Visconti's birthday, and he was there. I didn't know he was sick. He seemed a little pale and rather frail, but it was mostly just about renewing old times, tying up loose ends, and rededicating our passion and love for each other as well as celebrating Tony's good fortune and health. Later on, I found that it was more of a pleasant goodbye. But one of the things that we have in Buddhism is that we don't look at death as being death. It's like when you call somebody after a long period of time. You're just calling to see how they are, to make sure that they know that you remember them and cherish them. As a Buddhist, I feel that if I don't make that phone call to check up on you, then you're still having a good old time. I know you're fine.

What is your best memory of him?

BELEW: Oh, man. There were so many. I feel like I have my own private film in my mind of everything that went on. Maybe the Sound + Vision tour. That was 108 shows, and it went for a year, and we played in 26 countries. That's when I really got to know David and befriend him. I got to experience a side of him that few other people did, because I spent time with him at night in his room, just talking about things, or having dinners or whatever. We were pals, so everything comes out. All kinds of joyful things happen.

LEONARD: The whole experience was life changing, and I feel very lucky. It was a little bit of "right place, right time" for me.

ALOMAR: I love the *Scary Monsters...* album. We had this period where we were so locked in. We could do anything; we were flipping beats and doing split-rhythms, and it was just amazing. When we got together, our intent matched the level of our efficiency, so satisfaction was guaranteed. As a traveler in time, every one of us has that moment where you can hitch a ride to a star, and I think Bowie did a pretty good job of that. **GW**



Bowie [left] with Peter Frampton in 1987

MODERN LOVE MACHINES

IN 2016, THE STARS TOLD GUITAR PLAYER MAGAZINE'S MIKE MOLENDABOY ABOUT THE GEAR THEY USED WITH MR. B.

ERIC SCHERMERHORN

1971 50-watt Marshall, black panel Fender Twin Reverb with vintage Celestion speakers, Fender Stratocaster with Telecaster neck, Bowie's Takamine 12-string

ADRIAN BELEW (1978 TOUR)

MXR Dyna Comp, A/DA Flanger, Electro-Harmonix Echo Flanger, Electro-Harmonix Big Muff run through an MXR 10-band graphic EQ, Electro-Harmonix Graphic Fuzz, Roland DC-30 Analog Chorus/Echo, Roland JC-120 amp, Fender Stratocaster

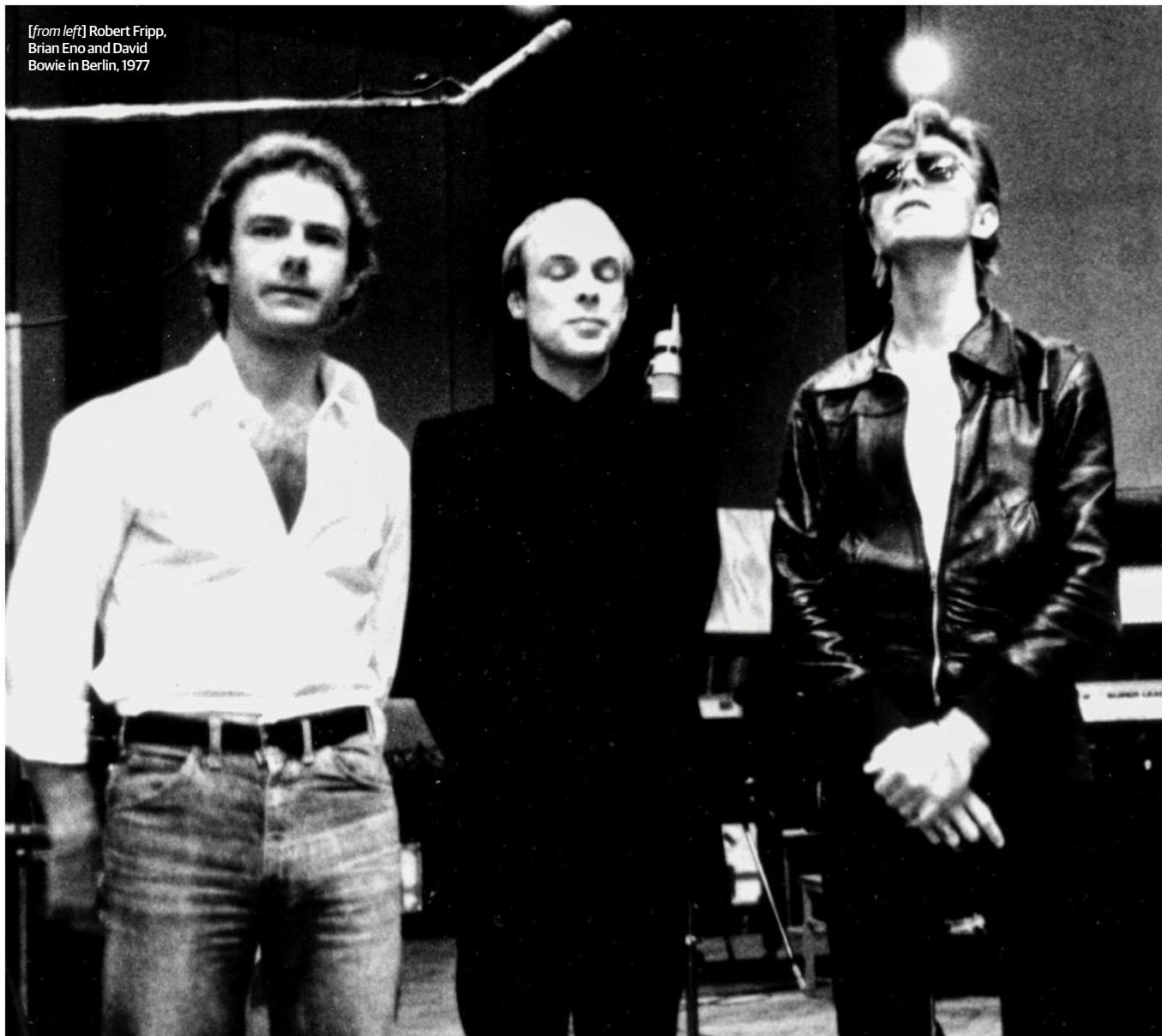
CARLOS ALOMAR Stereo Alembic "Maverick" guitar

EARL SLICK 1965 Gibson SG Junior, MXR Phase 45, late-Sixties Marshall half-stack, 1968 Gibson J-45

GERRY LEONARD 1969 Gibson SG Custom, 1965 Gibson Firebird II, PRS Hollowbody II, Mesa Boogie Lonestar, Mesa Boogie TA30, TC G Force, Eventide H3000, Boss OD2, Lovetone Doppelganger, Lovetone Big Cheese, EMS Synthi Hi-Fi

BEN MONDER Ibanez AS-50 semi-hollowbody, Fernandes Strat with ESP neck and pre-CBS Fender pickups, 1965 Fender Deluxe Amp, 1967 Fender Princeton modded with a larger transformer, 6L6s and a 12" Electro-Voice speaker, Audio Upgrades-modded Lexicon LXP-1 reverb, MXR Carbon Copy Analog Delay, Ernie Ball volume pedal, Keeley-modified RAT, Walrus Mayflower overdrive, Walrus Deep Six compressor, Fulltone Deja Vibe, Strymon BlueSky reverb.

[from left] Robert Fripp,
Brian Eno and David
Bowie in Berlin, 1977



DR. ROBERT

When David Bowie needed a unique guitar voice for "Heroes," he called Robert Fripp. Below, the King Crimson founder recalls those heady days "by the Wall"

BY JOEL McIVER

I MET DAVID socially in 1972 a couple of times. When we played the first King Crimson show at the Speakeasy in London in April 1969, I was told afterwards that David and [his then-wife] Angie Bowie were jiving. I also saw the Ziggy Stardust show at the Rainbow Theatre in Finchley when Roxy Music were in support.

I was very impressed with the Ziggy show. It was one of the finest rock concerts I'd been to, which I mentioned to David in Berlin during "Heroes." His comment was something like, 'You saw what we were doing. You saw what was going on. You got it.' It was a perfect show.

"When I got the phone call for the "Heroes" session in 1977, I was in New York. I didn't

view myself as a working player at that time, having just been in retreat for 10 months with no intention of going back to anything like that, so when David asked me to provide guitar, I said, 'Well, I don't know, but if you're prepared to take a chance, so am I.' I packed my Les Paul and a pedalboard by Pete Cornish, which had a volume pedal, wah and

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

fuzz box, and flew to Frankfurt, where I was transferring to Berlin. It was the first time I had flown first class, which was wonderful. Those were the days of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist gang, so going through German immigration and customs with this box of wires and wood was difficult. They had to go through all the pedals to make sure they worked and that everything was legitimate before I flew to Berlin.

"The person who was supposed to meet me at the airport didn't arrive, so I caught a cab to the hotel and then to Hansa Studios. I arrived about half past six in the evening, plugged in my guitar and we were away. One, two, three, four, and off we went. I don't remember any direction from anyone on 'Heroes,' although I'm not saying it didn't take place. The recording lasted three days, I believe, and it was very 'in the moment,' because it was spontaneous and really without thought. It was about immediacy, play and laughter, which are ideal working conditions for an improvising, creative person.

"At the same time, we were in a liminal zone, by which I mean an in-between space, whether in time, in people or in places. We were in a liminal space geographically within Berlin; although we were technically in West Berlin, it was an in-between zone between

"I asked David, 'Any suggestions?' He said, 'Think Ritchie Blackmore.' I didn't expect that, but I understood what he meant"

East and West Germany. In David's life, too, it was a time between what was happening and what was coming next, and as for me, I had just moved to New York, so it was a liminal period in my life. With Brian Eno, I think he was in between as well, because he was out of Roxy Music but not quite the Brian that we know today. So it was a liminal zone in time and place and persons.

"David was in New York toward the end of '77, and he invited me to his hotel, so I went along. He asked me to go on tour as his live guitarist, and I said, 'No. I've just come off the road after six years of touring.' He was very charismatic. That's the first word I'd use to describe him, but it wasn't right for me at the time. Would I have been a good live guitarist for David? I don't know. I think his live guitarist probably did a far better job of covering his catalog than I would have ever done.

"In 1980, I was invited to play on *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*, and now I was on the other side of the liminal zone, so I was a working player and ready to go. I was a focused rock player and I recorded for two

nights, beginning at midnight, at Trident Studio at St. Anne's Court in London. I only had chord sheets, and the advantage of that is that you don't have to sit down with a manuscript book and listen through the songs a few times until you have the map. You have the map in broad outlines and you just go.

"I remember I asked David, 'Any suggestions?' because there's any number of ways you can go. He said, 'Think Ritchie Blackmore.' I didn't expect that, but I understood what he meant. Did I sound like Ritchie Blackmore? No. But I'd seen Ritchie in the Outlaws in Poole when I was 17, and his playing was phenomenal. He had all the moves. So I'd seen Ritchie, I'd heard Ritchie, and I wasn't going to play like Ritchie would, but I knew what David meant.

"How should we remember David Bowie? Simply as we knew him. Some people knew him personally, other people knew him through his work, and still other people will remember David as the person who said to them very directly, 'You have permission to be who you are.'" **GW**

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Stevie Ray Vaughan goes wild in October 1983, six months after Bowie's *Let's Dance*

Nine not entirely obvious — yet definitely essential — David Bowie guitar tracks

ZIGS & ZAGS



"THE WIDTH OF A CIRCLE" THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD, 1970

With an ostensibly Buddhism-inspired, labyrinthine lyric that combines self-analysis with the occult, Nietzsche with Kahlil Gibran, surrealistic Lewis Carroll whimsy with evocative Dylan imagery, "The Width of a Circle" was originally meant to be an acoustic piece until guitarist Mick Ronson got hold of it and turned it into Bowie's most unashamedly heavy recording of the Seventies — even bordering on metal. But it was in the live arena that it always took flight. During the Ziggy Stardust era, Bowie would disappear offstage for a cigarette break and costume change while Ronson would wig out, Jeff Beck style, for up to 15 minutes. At the dawn of the Seventies, everybody boogied, and Bowie was no exception. And no, we can't move past *The Man Who Sold the World* without mentioning its fuzzed-out title track, the one that Nirvana's Kurt Cobain would re-introduce to a new generation 24 years later. Ronson's insistent motif, swaying in its brilliant weirdness, fuels Bowie's mysterious lyrics, resulting in a perfect theme song for that secret noir film in your head.

HENRY YATES



"MOONAGE DAYDREAM" THE RISE AND FALL OF ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS, 1972

Pure glam swagger from the mythical age of guitar gods, a time when now-legendary names — Beck, Page, Allman, Blackmore, Winter, Iommi, Felder — were trying to outdo each other with each new release. And they succeeded. As *Guitar World* wrote about this song 10 years ago, Mick Ronson's deafening bar-chord intro ("I'm an alligator...") announces the introduction of Bowie's most iconic creation. The song's coda — a.k.a. its thrilling "freak out" — is supplied by an echo-drenched monolith of Ronson's deeply emotive bends, proving that he was indeed Hull's answer to Jeff Beck. As L.A. Guns' Phil Lewis told us a few years back, "Ronson's wailing guitar solo at the end of that song? It still gives me chills just thinking about it. The guy was a genius."

DAMIAN FANELLI

"FAME" YOUNG AMERICANS, 1976

We'll let Carlos Alomar take this one (from our 2024 interview): "The riff I came up with became the backbone of the song. It was about creating something catchy



GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY IMAGES

yet intricate and continuing to follow the templates of funk. John Lennon laid down a simple guitar part; he was accommodating and didn't try to disturb the groove. Then David asked me if I wanted to go to dinner with them! I had a big "dilemma" moment; I was hearing certain [musical] things in my head, so I didn't wanna start talking to John and David and lose myself in the drinks or conversation. I decided to exclude myself and return to my guitar parts. When they came back, David heard what I did and was impressed that I'd done so much in such a short time. He said, "Let me just put down this one little guitar part." It was a perfect Bowie part, this distorted guitar that cut through all that funky clarity."

ANDREW DALY

"HEROES" "HEROES", 1977

It could be Bowie's crowning achievement, but "Heroes" wouldn't reach such lofty heights without Robert Fripp's subtle, yet essential, guitar work. Compared to the ornate Frippertronics or rapid-fire picking that define much of his catalog, the two-note phrase at this song's core might seem pedestrian by comparison. But it's hard to imagine a guitarist drawing out more emotion from those two notes — sustained bursts of tone that are as famous as Bowie's own vocal melody. And it's not like Fripp just tossed off his cameo; as producer Tony Visconti told *Sound on Sound*, he used a "fine science" to craft his part, measuring the distance between his guitar and the speaker to create a perfect feedback for each note he played.

RYAN REED



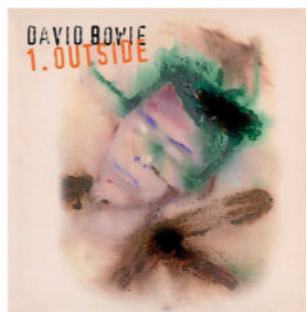
"SCARY MONSTERS (AND SUPER CREEPS)" SCARY MONSTERS (AND SUPER CREEPS), 1980

Briefly readopting the caricature cockney of his earliest Anthony Newley-inflected vocal incarnation, Bowie recounts the tale of a woman whose eyes "were blue but nobody home," touched by an insanity that manifests itself in "a horror of rooms." So far, so Dave. But what nudges *Scary Monsters'* title track from greatness to true genius is Fripp's truly astounding atonal guitar work, mirroring the lyric's madness, set against a bass riff that pumps along with Visconti's era-defining gated bass drum beat.

HENRY YATES

"CAT PEOPLE (PUTTING OUT THE FIRE)" LET'S DANCE, 1983

Let's Dance served as the world's introduction to Stevie Ray Vaughan, who, with Bowie, invented something new by adding Strat-fueled Texas swagger to contemporary, dance-based pop — raising eyebrows, expectations and bank accounts for everyone involved. Vaughan plays on several tracks, including "Let's Dance" and "China Girl," but the song that truly kicks collective ass is the far



less-celebrated "Cat People." Basically, it's got the album's healthiest serving of SRV; he solos in the middle, adds Albert King-style bends throughout and solos near the closeout. Bowie recorded two versions of this song in the early Eighties; just be sure to seek out the *Let's Dance* version. Of course, we'd be remiss to not suggest that you give SRV's dramatic "China Girl" solo another spin. Talk about a perfect introduction to his style.

DAMIAN FANELLI

"HALLO SPACEBOY" OUTSIDE, 1995

With the spirit of Tin Machine proving hard to exorcise entirely, Bowie rekindled his relationship with old compatriot Brian Eno set to work with *Tin Machine!* *Outside* guitarist Reeves Gabrels on the latter's "Moondust," a hitherto instrumental composition that rapidly mutated into a pounding "this chaos is killing me" sound collage of wildly panning guitars, punishing drums and claustrophobic industrial-rock devices. On the U.S. leg of 1995's *Outside* tour, Bowie and his band would share the stage with Nine Inch Nails for "Hallo Spaceboy." As if his of-the-moment approximation of "the metal Doors" didn't sound cutting-edge enough, he then gave it to Neil Tennant for a Pet Shop Boys remix.

HENRY YATES

"THE PRETTY THINGS ARE GOING TO HELL" HOURS, 1999

This track is thematically pessimistic and, tragically, probably more pertinent to our unfolding future than it was at the dawn of the millennium. The pretty things of the song's



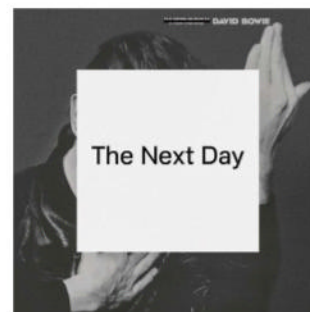
title are the spiritual progeny of Evelyn Waugh's "bright young things": carefree youth, the likes of which Bowie celebrated on *Hunky Dory*, yet that he now imagined were facing extinction in the "tough times" of the contemporary zeitgeist. Allied to an engaging Reeves Gabrels guitar hook and a propulsive, driving chug, "Pretty Things" sounds less like a requiem for doomed young dudes and more a brooding rock monster.

HENRY YATES

"DANCING OUT IN SPACE" THE NEXT DAY, 2013

Guitarist David Torn first performed on Bowie's 2003 album, *Reality*, where he was teamed up with Earl Slick. He was also featured on 2013's *The Next Day*, where he added ambient guitar work that, at times, recalled the lush wash of sound created by Fripp on "Heroes." "[Torn] comes with huge amounts of equipment... He creates these aural landscapes," Visconti said of Torn in a *Rolling Stone* interview about *The Next Day*. "He uses them in a rock context with all that ambient sound, and he's bending his tremolo arm and all that. It's just crazy, completely crazy sound on that track."

CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI



"These days, everybody expects you to record at home and engineer it yourself," Earl Slick says



STARMEN

"It's not a David Bowie tribute" — Earl Slick and Rob Fleming talk KillerStar, a killer band of (mostly) Bowie veterans who are most definitely doing their own thing

BY JOE BOSSO

OVER THE PAST decade, Earl Slick has been approached to play on numerous David Bowie-related projects, and he's turned down most of them. He did take part in a *Station to Station* tour in 2016, during which he and Rolling Stones backing vocalist Bernard Fowler performed the singer's epochal album to celebrate its 40th anniversary, but he agreed to it before Bowie's death. And even then, he checked in with the man he called "boss."

"I spoke with David about it the October before he died. I didn't know he was sick, but I wanted to give him the courtesy," Slick says. "I said, 'Boss, I want to do this.' The only thing he asked me was who was singing. He didn't want a Brit Bowie-copy guy. I said, 'No

problem there, because I got Bernard Fowler.' He was quite happy with that."

The venerable guitarist, who has the distinction as Bowie's longest-serving axeman, starting in 1974 for the *Diamond Dogs* tour and returning for multiple albums and tours over the next four decades, was thrilled when he was asked to join a new band, KillerStar, led by the U.K.-based duo of singer-guitarist Rob Fleming and drummer James Sledge,

"It's got Robert's flavor, and I had to learn some of his weird chords when we recorded"

EARL SLICK

that would also feature a group of Thin White Duke alumni (guitarist Mark Plati, pianist Mike Garson, backing vocalist Emm Gryner, saxophonist Donny McCaslin and bassists Gail Ann Dorsey and Tim Lefebvre). But what prompted him to sign on had as much to do with what the outfit was as what it wasn't.

"It's not a David Bowie tribute," he says, "though it's hard for people not to think of us as that, because look who we have. We're not doing David Bowie songs. We're doing Robert's stuff, which isn't Bowie. It's got Robert's flavor, and trust me, I had to learn some of his weird chords when we recorded. The [Bowie] stigma is there, whether we fucking like it or not. It's not a bad thing."

"It's more like flavors of Bowie," Fleming says. "He's one of many influences we have."

COURTESY OF EARL SLICK

Rob Fleming performs with KillerStar at the Cutting Room in NYC



The group issued a self-titled full-length album in 2024 that blended atmospheric art rock and gritty classic rock-tinged tunes. There were no attempts at cloning the likes of “Heroes” or “Sufragette City,” but one could easily conjure a Bowie aura floating over the proceedings. “You never know how something’s going to land, but we were really happy with the reviews and feedback,” Fleming says. “People from the Bowie community dug it, but there were quite a lot of people who got into it who aren’t Bowie fans.”

Buoyed by the response, Fleming and Sledge got the gang back together to record a follow-up. Well, most of them – bassists Dorsey and Lefebvre have been replaced by Plati. “Mark slotted in well when we did shows,” Fleming says. “He joined the band for gigs in New York and London, and he played bass on those shows. It was natural to ask him to play bass on the new album.”

Slick laid down his parts for the debut album remotely, but for the new record, titled *The Afterglow*, the New York-based guitarist recorded the majority of his tracks at London’s RAK Studios with Fleming and Sledge overseeing. He prefers it old-school, saying, “These days, everybody expects you to record at home and engineer it yourself.

But I’m a guitar player. I can run Pro Tools well enough to do an overdub, but while I’m pissing around with a machine, all the vibe goes away.”

The two guitarists didn’t play together live in the studio, but Fleming, who recorded basics with Sledge before Slick came to the studio, says their parts seemed to bond in the most surprising ways. “That’s why I love Earl. That’s the magic dust,” he says. “The structure of the songs didn’t change from the demos in terms of basic patterns and chords, but certain things change when Earl gets involved and adds melody parts. There are some songs we’re both playing lead on, but Earl added things so unexpected, and they blended magically with what I already had.”

The new album punches harder than its predecessor. “So Easy,” driven by a simple yet spikey guitar riff, recalls glam rock’s glory days, and “Proud” is a mean and muscular

piece of business with a surreal edge. Slick’s echo-drenched slide playing dominates the ambient gem “There Has to Be a Reason,” and, as he notes, it was all done in a moment of spontaneous splendor. “I didn’t have any notion of playing slide on the song,” he says. “Robert didn’t even put a guide vocal on it. So I just decided to do whatever. I just picked up the slide and did it in one take. If you’ve done this long enough, you know where the verses and choruses are going to be.”

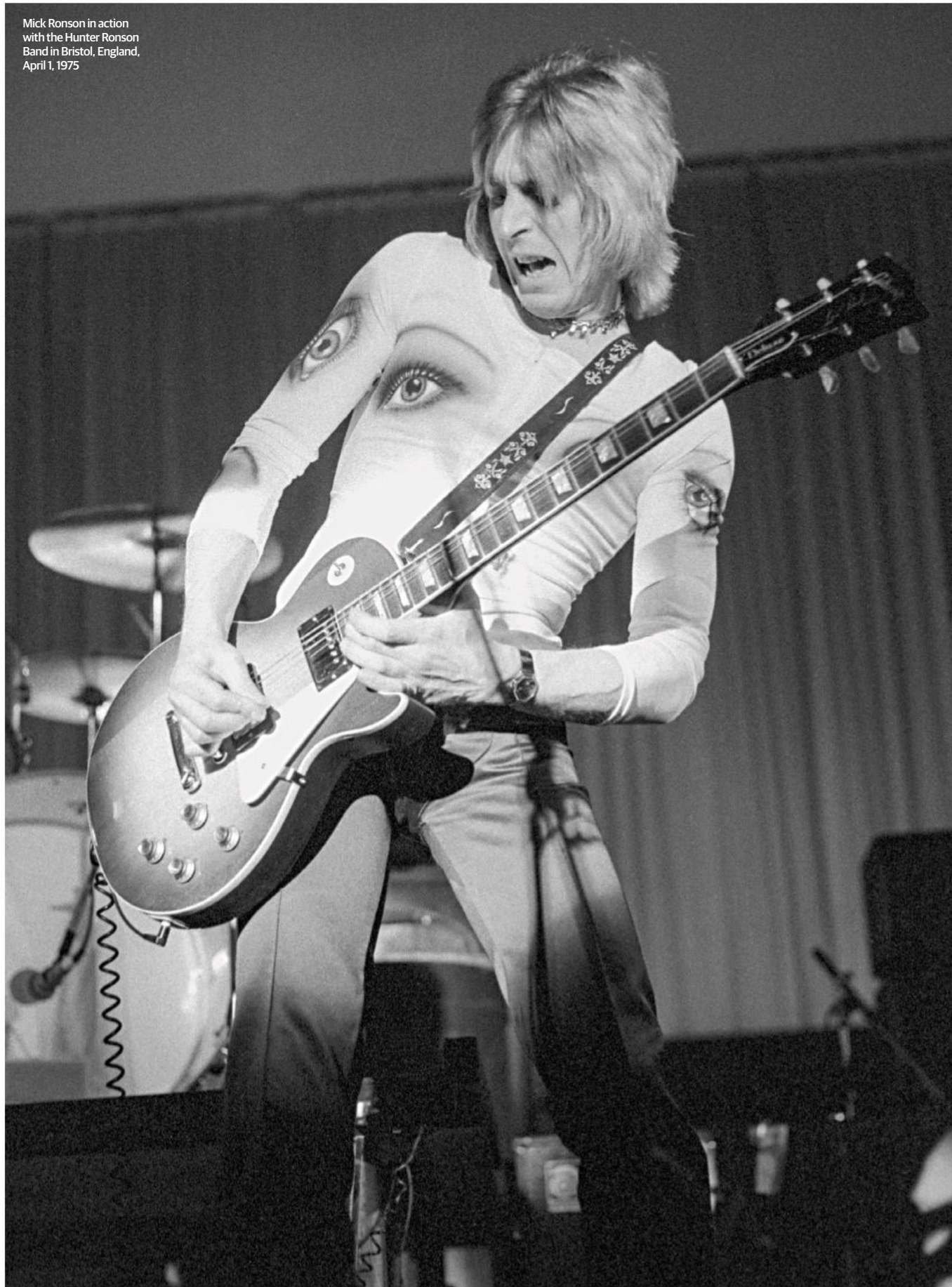
On their first go-round, KillerStar played three sold-out shows at London’s 100 Club, and (as of this writing) they’re booked to return to the venue to celebrate the release of *The Afterglow*. As to the possibility of playing more gigs, Fleming says the challenge lies in the logistics of getting the group together. “We just focused on getting this album out the door to see how people like it first,” he says. “I’m sure there will be more shows.”

For his part, Slick is gung-ho to play. He’s especially keen to perform in the U.K. “I wouldn’t mind playing the 100 Club and then maybe the Arts Centre in Norwich and a gig in Liverpool,” he says. “I spend more time there than most of the other guys. I’m more than available to go there all the time. If I were younger, I’d be buying a place there.” **GW**

“There are songs we’re both playing lead on, but Earl added things so unexpected”

ROB FLEMING

Mick Ronson in action
with the Hunter Ronson
Band in Bristol, England,
April 1, 1975



IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS

THE RISE AND FALL OF MICK RONSON

In 1970, Mick Ronson changed the career of David Bowie and went on to work with Lou Reed, Bob Dylan, John Mellencamp, Morrissey and more. Meet rock 'n' roll's most quietly spoken guitar hero

BY MAX BELL

IN 1970, MICK Ronson changed the musical fortunes of David Bowie, a struggling singer-songwriter with two novelty hits behind him. Together, and with their band the Spiders from Mars, they reinvented Bowie musically and created some of glam-rock's best-loved albums: *Hunky Dory*, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, *Aladdin Sane* and *Pin Ups*. Afterward, Ronson struggled to match that initial success, despite a catalog of collaborations that included some of rock's biggest names: Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Ian Hunter, Roger McGuinn, Morrissey, John Mellencamp and many others.

Although Ronson's career was defined by his time with Bowie, there was a significant before and after. In the 1960s, he played in various groups from his hometown of Hull, England, including the Mariners, who were advised by the Rolling Stones' Bill Wyman to change their name to the King Bees around the time Bowie was fronting a group called Davie Jones and the King Bees. He was also a member of the Rats, whose main claim to fame was the 1967 single "The Rise and Fall of Bernie Gripplestone."

"Mick was the best guitarist in Hull, so when he left to head down south and join Bowie, I was pretty upset," recalled Benny Marshall, the Rats' lead singer and a close friend of Ronson's. "John Cambridge, our drummer, had played with Bowie on *Space*

Oddity [his second album, a.k.a. David Bowie]. He was the bloke who went back to Hull in January 1970 with the brief to find Ronson and bring him to London. He found Mick marking out the lines on the municipal football pitch."

Cambridge did as instructed, and Bowie and Ronson were introduced at the Marquee club, where Bowie was playing on February 3, 1970. Two days later, Ronson had learned the riffs and song arrangements well enough to back Bowie, Cambridge and bassist/producer Tony Visconti for a John Peel Radio 1 show live in concert at the Paris Theatre in London's Lower Regent Street. They played 15 songs, including a new number, "The Width of a Circle," and plenty of material from Bowie's recently released self-titled second album. Reaction was positive, and Ronson moved into Bowie's Haddon Hall apartment on Southend Road in Beckenham in South East London, becoming part of the family. The timing of his arrival was perfect; Bowie wanted to make a hard-rock album. As Visconti said later, "We respected groups

"We knew he'd fit in, but we had no idea what was coming until he picked up his Les Paul and played"

TONY VISCONTI

like Cream, but we didn't have that in us. We needed someone to be [that] important element, and that somebody was Mick Ronson."

In terms of his personality, Ronson was a good fit. Everyone loved Ronson's laconic Northern humor too, especially Bowie, whose father and mother came from Yorkshire and Lancashire, respectively. He'd tease Ronson and get just as good back. But it was, of course, his guitar playing that stunned them.

"He floored us," Visconti said. "When David and I met him, we knew he'd fit in looks-wise, but we had no idea what was coming until he picked up his Les Paul and played for us. He really didn't have to be taught the few songs we'd already worked up with John Cambridge. Mick watched our hands on the guitar and bass necks, and he just knew what to play, but he didn't say much. We thought he was just a cool, silent type. Later we found out that our apartment in Beckenham was very 'big time' for him, and he was simply overwhelmed."

Visconti insists Ronson came to Trident Studio in September 1969, when the *David Bowie/Space Oddity* album was being finalized. "Mick came to the mix of 'Wild-Eyed Boy from Freecloud' and was persuaded to play a little guitar line in the middle part and joined in the handclaps on the same section," he said. But if he did, he isn't credited. Ronson's first recorded work with Bowie was on the remade and rocked-out single

"Memory of a Free Festival Part 1/Part 2," recorded in September 1969 and released to zero chart success in June 1970.

In April, sessions began for *The Man Who Sold the World*, featuring the core band of Bowie, Ronson, Visconti and former Rats drummer Mick "Woody" Woodmansey. It was a brilliant album, full of Ronson's crunching heavy-metal attack allied to arcane Wagnerian, dystopian lyrics. His contributions to Bowie tracks such as "She Shook Me Cold," "Running Gun Blues" and the epic "The Width of a Circle" cemented his place in Bowie's orbit, leading the singer to call him, with a smug smile, "my Jeff Beck."

As it happened, both Bowie and Ronson were huge fans of Beck's *Truth* album. Marshall said, "[Mick] knew all the licks, except 'Beck's Boogie,' which he dissected but couldn't master. It infuriated him. In 1968, the Rats had supported Beck at the Cat Ballou in Grantham, and afterward Ronson asked him to show him the fast run at the beginning. So Beck plays it, and Mick says, 'No, play it slower.' Beck said, 'If I play it any slower, I'll stop!' But he was patient, and Mick learned that riff."

The Man Who Sold the World had not been a commercial breakthrough, but it added to Ronson's confidence. Visconti and Ronson

had masterminded the sound and dashed off the arrangements, while Bowie canoodled with his new bride, Angie. "She Shook Me Cold," the dirtiest song he ever wrote, was directly about Mrs. Bowie, but it was Ronson who provided the Jimi Hendrix-style intro and the power-trio setting *à la* Cream. Later, Angie lamented the fact that Ronson didn't receive the publishing he deserved. "In terms of kudos and feeling that one is valued, it would have been nice for Mick Ronson to have had publishing credits," she said.

Visconti's departure from the group saw the arrival of bassist Trevor Bolder. It also gave Ronson his in. "[Visconti had] done all the string and piano arrangements, so it was my chance to fill the gap," Ronson said. "I'd never done it before, but I could read and write music, and I'd watched Tony at Haddon Hall, writing in the basement, saw how he did the charts, and I'd help out."

Ronson had already written a mini-score

"Mick's influence on *Transformer*, my best-produced album, was stronger than Bowie's"

LOU REED

for four recorders, used in the break of "All the Madmen." It was a start. "I thought, Well, if you can do that then so can I," he said. "I went out for dinner with [singer] Dana Gillespie, who had tracks that needed strings, and David said, 'Oh, Mick'll do that!' [Like Bowie and Ronson, Gillespie was managed by Tony Defries' MainMan company.] I never had, but it was great. David pushed me forward. That was his thing. He made stuff happen."

With Visconti gone, Bowie was now reliant on Ronson. His next album, 1971's *Hunky Dory*, saw the emergence of his new quartet, featuring Ronson, Bolder and Woodmansey, a taut group that gave his folkie tunes their strong rock underpinnings. Ronson finally got his credit as the arranger of its songs "Changes," "Life on Mars?," "Kooks," "Quicksand" and the Biff Rose cover "Fill Your Heart," which was copied virtually note for note from the original. In retrospect, many have noticed how similar the sound of *Hunky Dory* is to Michael Chapman's *Fully Qualified Survivor*, the 1970 album on which Ronson had made his debut.

Ronson's burgeoning role extended to instructing hired gun Rick Wakeman for his now iconic piano parts on "Life on Mars?" The Royal College of Music-trained keyboardist (and future Yes member) didn't mind the

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input. "He was a tremendous human being, with oodles of talent," Wakeman said.

Bowie producer/engineer Ken Scott pointed to "the great orchestral versions that Ronson put together. [They're] even more brilliant when you consider he had this habit of running out of time. I remember him rushing in 10 minutes before the session, running up to the bathroom and locking himself in so he could find the privacy to finish writing. He'd come out with a huge grin and a stack of charts."

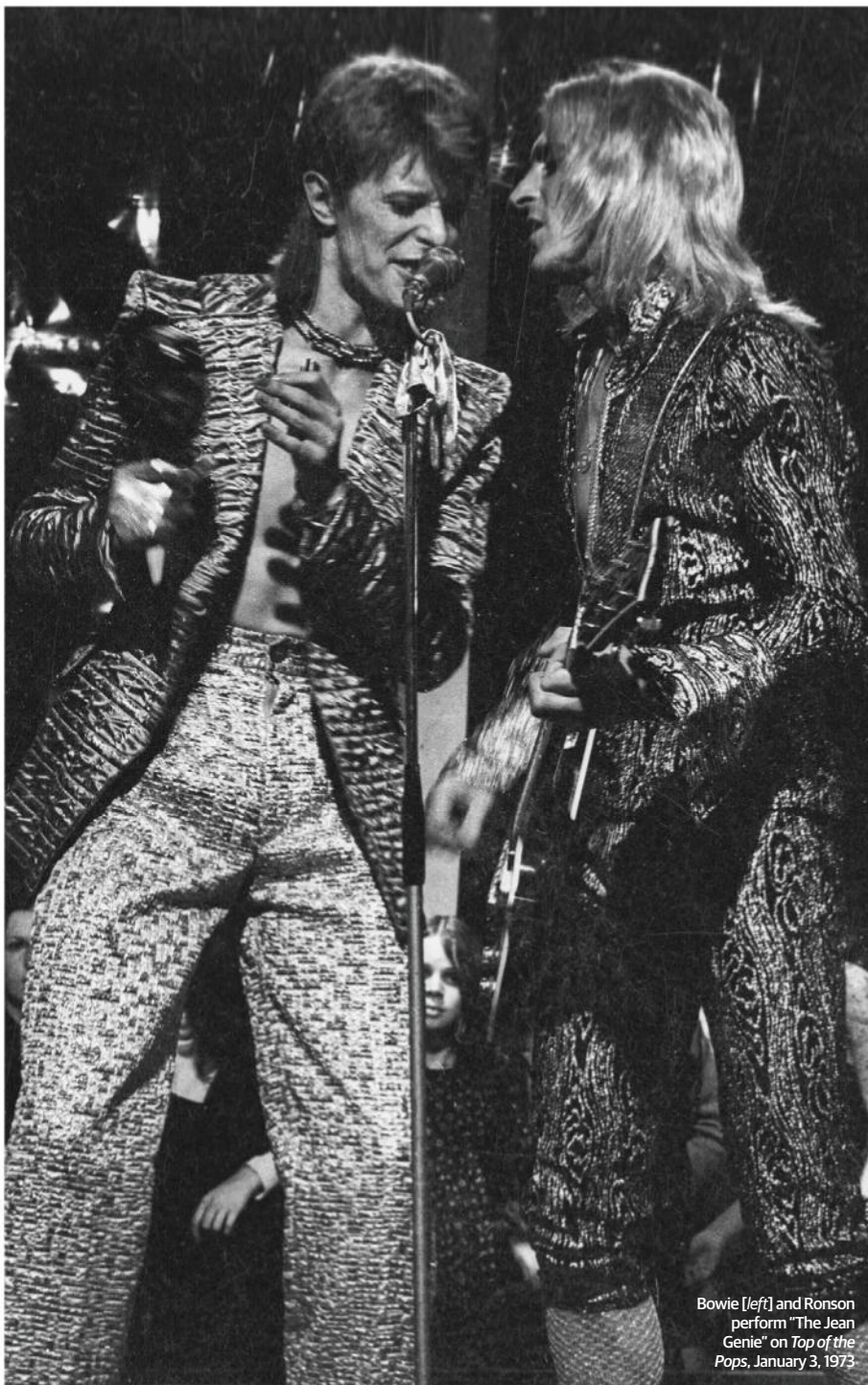
By the time the band assembled for the follow-up, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, Ronson's talents were in full bloom. On the epic "Five Years," his string section whipped up the hysteria, while on "Suffragette City," it was Ronson who came up with the funky, lurching ARP synthesizer sound that many mistake for saxophones.

But working with Bowie had its challenges for Ronson, a now-25-year-old who, until recently, had been a practicing Mormon. In January 1972, shortly before the Ziggy Stardust sessions were complete, Bowie told *Melody Maker* he was gay, or, more accurately, bisexual. Ronson admitted he found it hard to deal with at first. "It embarrassed me," he said. "I wondered what people would say about me. I knew my family in Hull would get flak. I gave dad a car when I left for London, and people threw red paint over it." Aside from his own feelings about it, Ronson understood Bowie was playing with his image as a way to keep the media engaged. "Personally, it was a bit of a shock," he admitted, "but Bowie manipulated the media again and again."

Overall, Ronson approached the *Ziggy Stardust* project with slight suspicion. The explicitness of "Suffragette City" and the discarded track "Sweet Head" concerned him. "He worried about the lyrics," Angie said. "I told him, 'Look, all these people are waving their arms in freedom thanks to you. It may not be what you're used to in Hull, but accept it.' Then he'd simmer down and be happy."

If *Ziggy Stardust* was a Ronson *tour de force*, the follow-up, *Aladdin Sane*, was a mixed blessing for him. His contributions were immense, but so were those of recently arrived pianist Mike Garson, whom Ronson had auditioned and later advised to "make yourself indispensable. That's what David likes. Don't just be a session man."

Ronson lived up that credo. His work on Lou Reed's *Transformer*, produced with Bowie the August after *Ziggy Stardust*, effectively rescued Reed's career after his debut solo album had bombed. "It was a good experience for me," Ronson said. "Lou's guitar was always out of tune, so I'd kneel in front of him and tune it properly. He didn't care, 'cause he was so laid-back." Without his contribution, *Transformer* might never have gotten off the



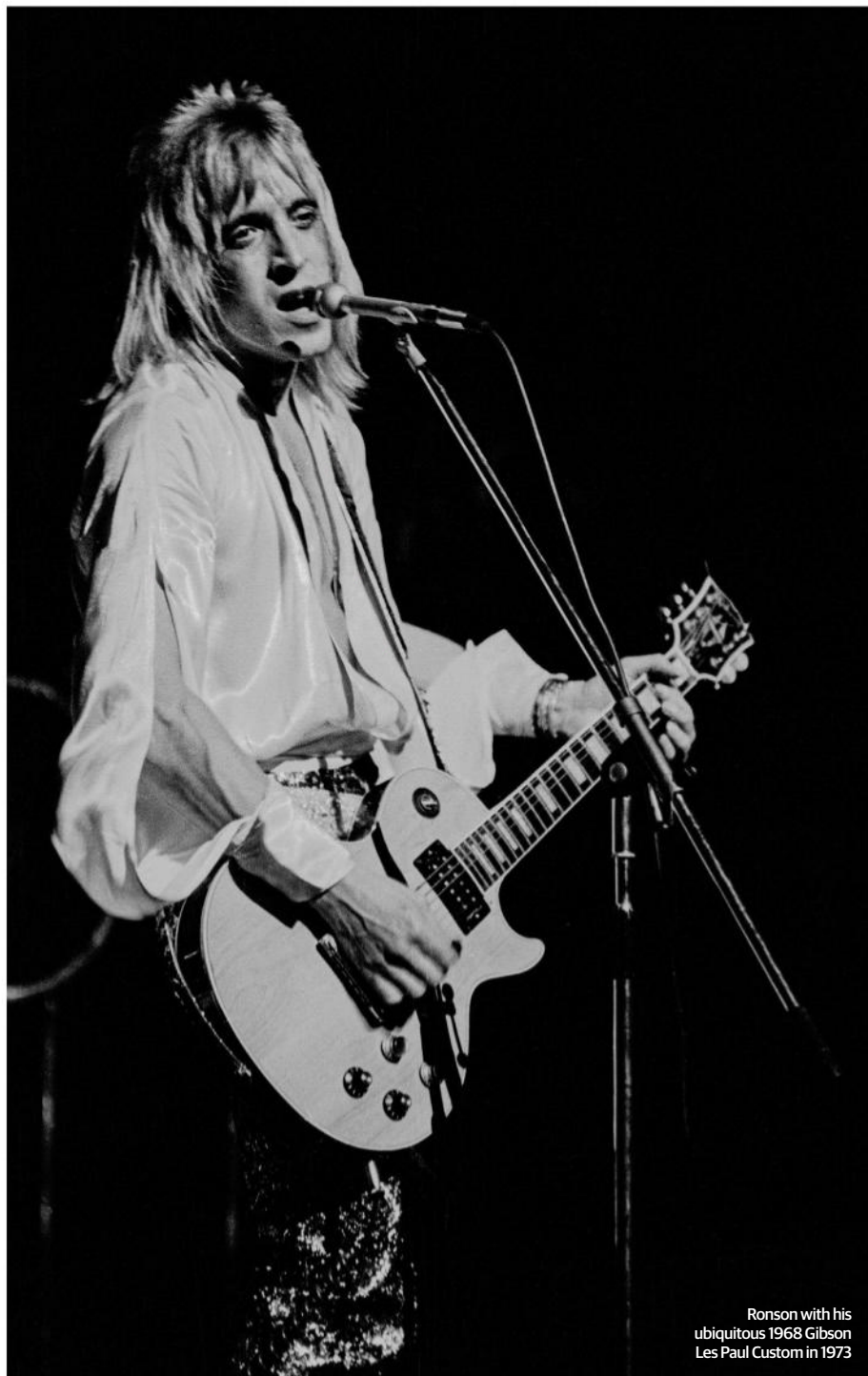
Bowie [left] and Ronson perform "The Jean Genie" on *Top of the Pops*, January 3, 1973

ground. "It came out pretty well," Ronson said. "Though I didn't know what the hell Lou was talking about half the time. He'd say stuff like, 'Can you make it sound a bit more gray?'"

Fortunately the album was a success. "*Transformer* is easily my best-produced album," Reed said. "That has a lot to do with Mick Ronson. His influence was stronger than David's, but together, as a team, they're terrific."

By 1973, though, it seemed that Ronson had become dispensable, along with Woody Woodmansey and Trevor Bolder, both of

whom had been dropped for having the gall to protest when they discovered that new arrival Garson was making 10 times their salary. The guitarist's relations with Bowie were frosty when, on October 20, 1973, Ronson played with Bowie onstage for the last time in that decade. Only 200 people saw the appearance in the flesh, shot for NBC's *The Midnight Special*. Dubbed "The 1980 Floor Show," the concert featured Bowie serenading French singer/actress/model Amanda Lear with "Sorrow," a 1966 hit for the Merseys that Bowie would record for 1973's *Pin Ups*. He and



Ronson with his ubiquitous 1968 Gibson Les Paul Custom in 1973

singer Marianne Faithfull also duetted on Sonny & Cher's "I Got You Babe." But Bowie hated the end result, which he derided as "shot abysmally." This was the night Ziggy Stardust truly left the building, which might explain why a smiling Bowie ended each song with an affectionate pat on Ronson's white satin-clad back.

As the wingman was increasingly sidelined, MainMan, his and Bowie's mutual management company, promised him the earth. He was to be the next superstar off the production line, said manager Tony Defries.

In the summer of '73, having finished his sessions for *Pin Ups*, most of which he'd arranged, as usual, Ronson returned to the Château d'Hérouville studios outside Paris and made his solo debut album, *Slaughter on 10th Avenue*. Bowie chipped in from a distance, gifting the songs "Growing Up and I'm Fine," "Pleasure Man/Hey Ma, Get Papa" and "Music Is Lethal." RCA wasn't overjoyed with what it heard, and the album's release date was put back more than six months, to 1974.

Within months, Ronson was in another band, joining Mott the Hoople for what

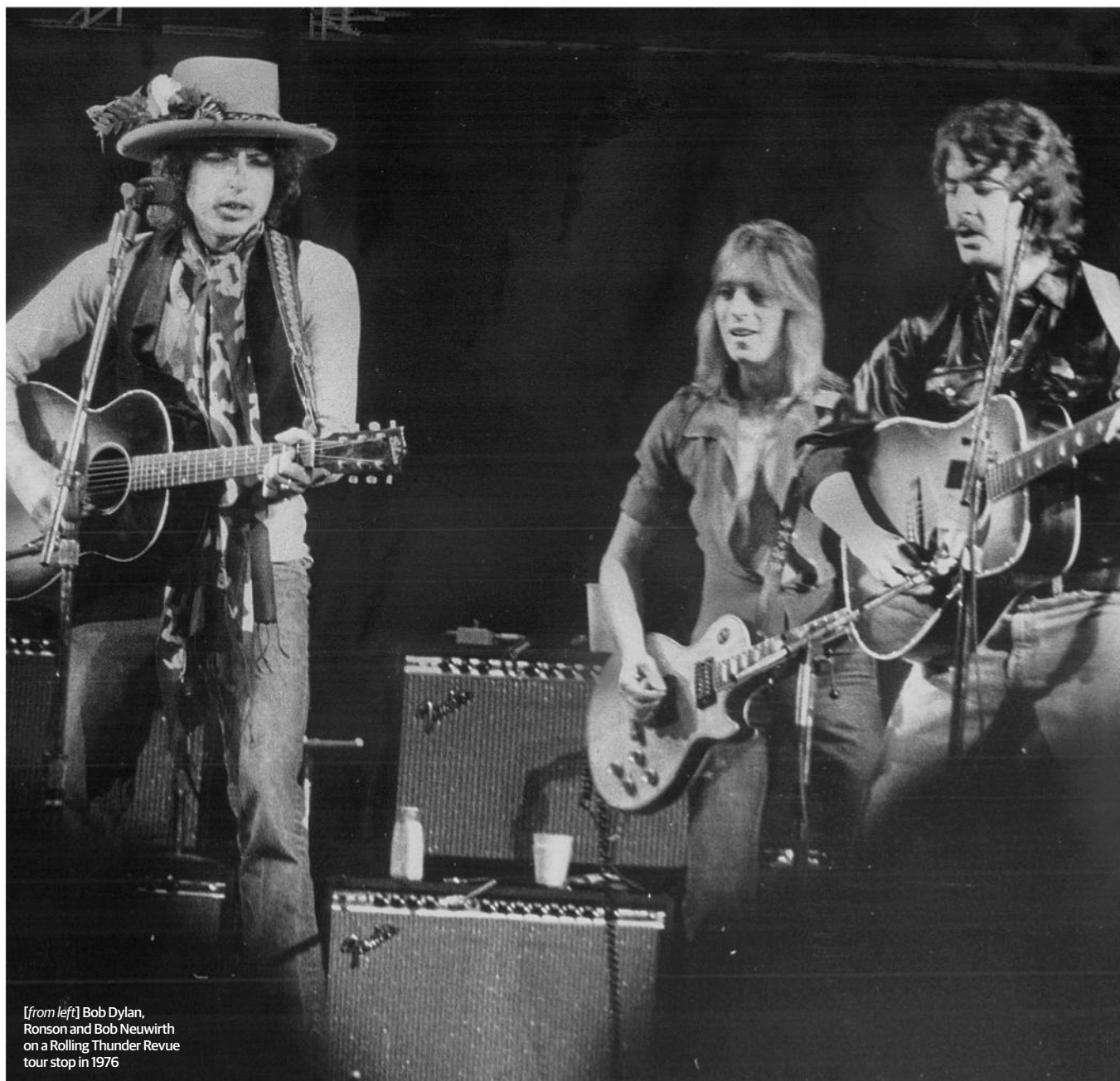
would be their final single, "Saturday Gigs." Ronson and frontman Ian Hunter had bonded back when Mick had knocked out a string arrangement for Mott's "Sea Diver," but the other band members resented the arrival of this "rock star" in their midst, with MainMan and RCA sending limos for their boy while Mott traveled together in a bus. Tired of the conflict, Hunter split the band.

Ronson went back to his solo career. Bowie didn't take part in the follow-up album, *Play Don't Worry*, but he allowed Ronson to use the backing track from their cover of the Velvet Underground's "White Light/White Heat," which had been recorded for an American attempt at a *Pin Ups* album that was discarded soon after. *Play Don't Worry* was excellent in parts. Although he wasn't a natural songwriter, Ronson did himself proud on "Billy Porter," "Empty Bed" and versions of two songs by Pure Prairie League, whose 1972 album *Bustin' Out* featured his guitar and string arrangements.

While *Slaughter on 10th Avenue* was being mixed, Ronson returned to the studio with Bowie to create demos for the future *Diamond Dogs* tracks "1984" and "Dodo." His work wouldn't appear on the finished album, a creepy, avant-garde affair, but his trademark guitar style did in the shape of "Rebel Rebel," almost a *Spiders from Mars* pastiche riff, played now by Bowie. According to Ronson's wife, Suzi, "When Mick heard *Diamond Dogs*, he wasn't exactly depressed. He just thought, Oh, that's Dave going out on a limb. But he would have done that record like a shot."

Instead Ronson embarked on a brief solo tour, including a show at London's Rainbow Theatre in February 1974, where he had strings and woodwind sections and, on backing vocals, the Thunderhighs — Karen Friedman, Dari Lalou and Casey Synge — who appeared on Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" and Mott the Hoople's "Roll Away the Stone." Cast into the spotlight, Ronson didn't appear confident. The ultimate sideman was too modest to carry this off. Bowie watched on from the wings and offered words of encouragement during the intermission, but he decided against making a guest appearance.

After Bowie, where does one go? Ronson produced and played on Ian Hunter's self-titled 1975 debut solo album. That same year, he moved to New York City, rented a place on Hudson Street near the Meatpacking District and enjoyed NYC with his best friend, Hunter, who had provided safe haven via Mott the Hoople, Mott and the Hunter Ronson Band. This is where they met Bob Dylan, who invited Ronson to join his band of gypsies, the Rolling Thunder Revue, after a meet engineered by Dylan's main fixer, Bob Neuwirth. That evening began at the Bitter End on Bleecker Street.



[from left] Bob Dylan, Ronson and Bob Neuwirth on a Rolling Thunder Revue tour stop in 1976

"We weren't Dylan fans at all," Suzi Ronson said. "Mick thought he sounded like Yogi Berra. But Ian took us anyway, and Dylan played [his 1976] *Desire* album, and he was mesmerizing, better than David. Then we went to the Bottom Line, where Mick got thrown out three times for being drunk and disorderly."

Back at the Bitter End, Hunter recalled "the whole place going insane 'cause Dylan was singing with Neuwirth and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. And Neuwirth [sees] Mick and says to Dylan, 'Go and ask him!'" In Ronson's version, "[Neuwirth] was with this guy," he recalled. "And I looked at this bloke he was with and thought, Wait a minute, I know you! Of course, it was Dylan. We talked, and he said, 'We're going on the road. Why don't

you come with us?' I honestly thought it was a hoax. Then Dylan phoned me, said the tour was going to happen and would I be there? Like a shot!"

"That tour rescued Mick's professional life," Suzi said.

Ronson was soon back with Hunter, appearing on *You're Never Alone with a Schizophrenic* and *Welcome to the Club*. With his solo career on hold, he became

"He was so overlooked, and still is. He was by nature extremely humble — just happy to be there"

MORRISSEY

a full-time producer. He worked with Van Morrison, John Mellencamp, Roger McGuinn and Meat Loaf backup singer Ellen Foley. He even contributed guitar to the title track from David Cassidy's 1976 album, *Getting It in the Street*. Despite his signature guitar style and tone, Ronson became engrossed in writing string arrangements.

"He lapsed into the language of strings," Hunter says, "but he was a bit lazy, 'cause if it was interesting he'd do it using 15 tracks and one guitar track. He wrote arrangements on Marlboro Light [cigarette] packets. But he could be persnickety and picky if he was involved. He could have matured into a world-famous musician again, but he'd meet people on the street and, next thing, he's doing a Mexican punk band."

"But he was great with fans. He'd invite them back for tea, he'd return their phone calls. Sometimes he could be the big guy and show off, so he wasn't perfect, gorgeous as he was. I considered him like family, so there were arguments. One time he disappeared to Sweden for a project when we were in the middle of something, so I had a go. And he just said, 'Look, I've done Bowie and I've done you, so I'm allowed to fuck up,' and we just collapsed into laughter."

In the late Eighties, Ronson's health began to cause concern. He was diagnosed with liver cancer, something he neither made a secret of nor chose to acknowledge as a serious threat. Instead, he threw himself into engaging projects such as Morrissey's heralded 1992 album, *Your Arsenal*. Speaking with *Classic Rock*, Morrissey said, "Mick told me that he alone wrote the main guitar hooks for 'Starman,' 'The Man Who Sold the World' and others — not just hooks, really, but grand choruses in themselves — but a share of publishing wasn't ever on offer for him. When you consider his guitar solos in 'Time' and 'Moonage Daydream,' then you can guess they were his own creations."

A fan of Ronson and Bowie, Morrissey was intrigued by letters Bowie sent to his old guitarist chum during the making of

Your Arsenal. "One day at breakfast, I asked Mick why Bowie wrote so often," Morrissey recalled, "and he said, 'He keeps asking me what you're like in the studio,' and then he exploded with laughter. I have no idea why this was so hilarious. I think Bowie had interest in Mick only as much as it was in his nature to like anyone."

Certainly, Bowie was impressed by *Your Arsenal* enough that he invited Ronson to work with him on his 1993 studio album, *Black Tie White Noise*. He also kicked off a fine version of "All the Young Dudes" with Bowie and Hunter at the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert at Wembley Stadium on Easter Monday, 1992, which was the last time his fans saw him onstage. One year later, on April 29, 1993, Ronson died of liver cancer at age 46. He spent his last hours in the company of Hunter, Suzi and sister Maggi at Tony Defries' house on Hasker Street in West London.

Ronson didn't die penniless, but he wasn't

"He was the perfect foil for the Ziggy character. As a rock duo, we were as good as Mick and Keith"

DAVID BOWIE

wealthy by rock-star standards. "He bought the house in Woodstock on Glasco Turnpike [Ulster County, New York] because he made money out of my records and Ellen Foley's *Night Out*," Hunter said. "His car was an old Toyota Corolla that sounded like a hair dryer."

Hunter summed up the gloomy finale in his Ronson elegy "Michael Picasso," from 1997's *The Artful Dodger*: "You turned into a ghost surrounded by your pain/And the thing that I liked the least was sitting round Hasker Street, lying about the future."

"What is remarkable is that he was so overlooked, and he still is," Morrissey said of Ronson. "Has Mick ever been on the cover of a major British music magazine? Even when he died? He was by nature extremely humble. He was just happy to be there."

Though he was the first of many great guitarists Bowie would adopt, champion and cast aside, Ronson continued to hold a place in his heart after their split, perhaps more than any other who followed him. "Mick was the perfect foil for the Ziggy character," Bowie admitted years afterward. "He was very much a salt-of-the-earth type, the blunt northerner with a defiantly masculine personality, so what you got was the old-fashioned yin-and-yang thing. As a rock duo, I thought we were as good as Mick and Keith." **GW**

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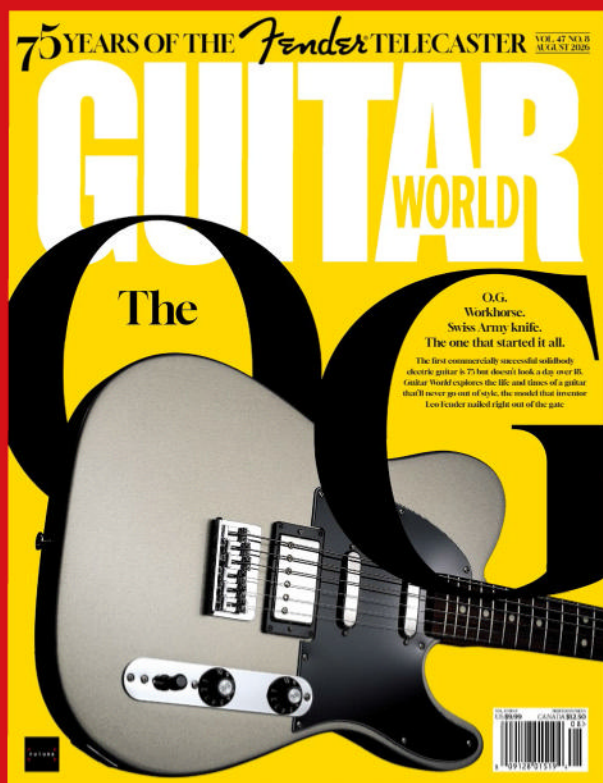
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B6AMAG

Fender John Osborne Telecaster

The country-rock star's Tele tears up the template — and could be your fastest ticket to B-bender mayhem

BY DAMIAN FANELLI

▶ ALMOST ACROSS THE board, Fender's Artist Signature series Telecasters are unique creations that are truly deserving of their "signature" honorific. Take the psychedelic Jimmy Page Tele, the everything-but-the-kitchen-sink Brent Mason Tele or — to really drive home the point — the super-unconventional, "Huh!?!?"-inducing Jack White Triplecaster. These are definitely not your father's — or your uncle's, niece's or cousin's — Telecasters. Unless you have Thanksgiving dinner at Jack White's house.

Anyway, it's safe to say that, with its new John Osborne Telecaster, Fender has stayed true to form; there is no mistaking this guitar — a faithful reproduction of Brothers Osborne's heavily modified 1968 Tele — for someone else's signature model or, for that matter, any other Tele. Besides the unique visual appointments, which we'll get to soon enough, this puppy comes with a B-bender.

For those who need a refresher, a B-bender is a contraption that —

with a downward push on the guitar's neck — literally pulls your guitar's B string up a perfect whole step. So, a B note suddenly becomes a C# (or a shaky C if you don't pull the string all the way). Some people say it makes a guitar sound like a pedal steel guitar, but that's a bit much. It makes your guitar sound like a guitar with a B-bender, and that's a truly magical thing to have in your arsenal. Anyone who's ever bent their way from a 3rd-position Csus2 chord on the top three strings — voiced C, D, G — to a perfectly in-tune C major triad (C, E, G) knows what we're talking about.

No, this is not the first B-bender to appear on a mass-produced Fender Tele. It is, however, the first Fender B-bender to be designed in-house; it has lovingly been named the "Fender B String Bender."

As soon as we opened the Osborne's black hardshell case, our

Sings its ass off and has off-the-charts stage presence, like the duo that inspired it

eyeballs didn't know where to go first. But — who are we kidding? — it's got to be the custom black pickguard that covers most of the body, making the guitar look like an obscure Cold War-era comic book hero who's about to get their own Marvel franchise. It's held on tight with 13 screws; the only part that isn't snug to the body is the thin, descending piece near the control panel, a place where it'd be impossible to fit a 14th screw. It doesn't get in the way, but we could see it getting knocked off during a particularly nasty roadhouse-gig rumble. Hey, it happens!

The neck pickup's exposed magnets — which give it a look similar to creations by Lollar, Fralin, Porter or TV Jones — lend the guitar a custom, aftermarket-enhanced look. Meanwhile, the dark, hand-oiled maple neck (especially the headstock) is stunning. It's like a stained — and now perfectly faded — piece of ancient living-room furniture that gets passed down from generation to generation.

The three-way toggle, which is more like what you'd find on a Jazzmaster or Les Paul, is nice and tight and devoid of wobbles and shakes; the same goes for the volume and tone knobs, which is a good sign. Speaking of knobs, Fender has turned an unassuming volume/tone knob into an important part of the bender mechanism. It sits to the right of the bridge (from the POV of the noodling guitarist), and — when you engage the bender with your fretting hand — you can watch as the repurposed knob swivels to the right, literally pulling the B string toward the bridge.

When you flip the guitar over, you can see the guts of the bender, thanks to a recessed, clear-plastic cover. It's like when you visited that chocolate factory on your fourth-grade class trip, and they suddenly took you







into the kitchen to see how the chocolate is made. The bender looks, well, like a bender – similar to, yet completely different from the Gene Parsons-installed bender in our Palir Titan T-style. Hey, an Egyptian mongoose and a common dwarf mongoose look different from each other, but they both look like mongooses.

The body has your typical Road Worn finish with plenty of tiny craters here and there and a nice chunk of exposed wood right where your picking arm meets the body. Feel free to add your own.

The John Osborne Tele's "1968 C" neck feels particularly comfy. Fender could probably get away with calling it a "1968 U," although it also reminds us of the "Soft V" neck on our Jimmie Vaughan Tex-Mex Strat. Regardless of which uppercase letter you want to stick with, this neck melts into your hands. Its light, hand-oiled finish makes it easy to feel "at one with" the guitar. Corny but true.

The action on our test model was on the high side, but we lowered the bridge saddles a bit and were ready to

go, even testing it over the course of a few gigs at the New Jersey Shore – a legendary Telecaster proving ground since the E Street Band were regulars at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park.

The B-bender functions, well, like a B-bender. That said, compared to other benders in our collection, we'd say this one has a shorter stroke, meaning there's not a lot of travel time (and/or space) between an unbent B note and a bent/pulled C#. It gets you where you want to go, but – as Parsons explained to me a decade ago, long-stroke benders give you that – and I'm totally paraphrasing here – "sweet" Clarence White effect.

Despite a night's worth of bending (every fifth song or so), the B string stayed in tune after a few first-set adjustments. Which reminds us: all B-benders have a fine-tuning mechanism, and this one lives just below the all-important upper strap button, the one that moves up and down when you push down on the Tele's neck. The fine-tuning is done with a supplied $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Allen wrench, which happens to be a common size in case you lose it, which we did.

MANUFACTURER:
Fender, fender.com

STREET PRICE:
\$2,199.99

PROS

- + Fantastic value for a guitar with a pre-installed B-bender
- + Unique, custom, "aftermarket" looks
- + Extra-bright, lively and present pickups

CONS

- Its looks might be a step too far for traditionalists
- Middle position can get "lost" in a live setting

VERDICT: If you've spent years (or hours) listening to Clarence White, Albert Lee, Brent Mason, Marty Stuart, Jimmy Page, Brad Paisley, Glenn Tilbrook and John Osborne pull magic out of their B-benders – and you've decided it's time to dip your toes into the B-bender wading pool – the Ensenada-built John Osborne Telecaster is an attractive, cost-effective way to get the job done. It's the Laphroaig 10 (a well-priced, "gateway" peated Islay single-malt) of B-benders.

The John Osborne Tele is as nicely balanced as any standard Tele – and the 7.9 lb. weight is reasonable too. We can hear you now: Given the added B-bender, how is this possible? Well, just think about the amount of wood that had to be removed from the body to make room for the bender.

At the aforementioned gigs, our setup with the John Osborne Tele shared the stage with an amplified acoustic guitar, an electric bass, drums and keyboards. We were plugged into our trusty Fender Tone Master Deluxe Reverb. With nothing but a touch of reverb courtesy of a J. Rockett Boing pedal, plus delay from a TC Electronic Plethora X5, we had zero trouble cutting through the mix.

The bridge pickup is super bright, articulate and chimy, with what we'd swear is a touch of extra snap. The neck pickup is equally commanding, with what feels like an extra serving of fatness, just right for those moments when the band veers into Stevie Ray Vaughan territory.

That said, the middle position – where we usually feel most at home, even when soloing – faded a bit too easily into the mix. That familiar "quack" is still there, but, sadly, the middle position was relegated to rhythm at these gigs. On the bright side, this actually can be helpful when we need to sit back and let other people do their thing – like that eternally loud keyboard guy!

Back home, now running the guitar through a tiny Vox MV50 Clean head and matching 1x12 Vox cab, followed by a Supro 1624T DualTone, we were finally able to appreciate the richness of the middle position. There's a distinctive ring to it, something you hear from chambered or semi-hollow Teles like the Fender American Elite Telecaster Thinline.

Meanwhile, the bridge pickup sounds exceedingly present and lively – obviously perfect for in-your-face country music, but also just right for classic rock, blues and pretty much anything else. Using the neck pickup with the tone rolled way down opened the door to some convincing jazz tones, just with a slight quack or twang. Picture Charlie Christian in a cowboy hat.

To put it simply, this guitar sings its ass off and has off-the-charts stage presence, kinda like the country-rock duo that inspired it. **GW**

LUCY ROBINSON





Dunlop Cry Baby BB535 Reissue

Dunlop has crafted a wah-shaped love letter to the guitar gods that made this expressive effect popular in the Nineties

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

FROM KIRK HAMMETT'S wah-drenched Black Album leads to Jerry Cantrell's searing, vocal-like phrasing, Tom Morello's riotous riffage and, of course, Slash's sweet harmonic minor licks, the wah pedal was most definitely "back" in the Nineties, and it meant business.

This is where the original Cry Baby 535Q comes in. Dunlop launched it in 1994, aiming it squarely at the guitar slingers who rekindled interest in the Cry Baby, dragging it into the grunge era. This could be considered the first commercially available "modded" wah, sporting a frequency selector, a built-in boost and a custom inductor tuned for a more throaty tone. While the original had four voice modes, by 1999 it had adding two more vintage options to the mix, making it Dunlop's most versatile wah to date.

It is this 1999 version that Dunlop has decided to relaunch in 2026. Painstakingly recreating the original's circuit, it even features the proper inductor supplied by the original manufacturer – meaning it should sound like a vintage example.

The six wah voicings are the heart of what makes the BB535 such a versatile beast. With a simple twist, you can jump from a bright, vintage-style quack to a deep, throaty growl and so much more.

The onboard boost is a highlight, too. We've always loved the boost switch on these pedals – taken from the beloved MXR Micro Amp. It's very easy to push on and off, perfectly placed for heel operation, letting you kick in up to +12dB of gain when you need to cut through the mix.

However, we kicked things off with the boost disengaged, wanting to hear the pedal in its purest form. Even without any extra push, the BB535 delivers a wide range of voices. The first position, which has a frequency range of 444 to 2117 Hz, is all about that classic "wacka-wacka" sound. It's funky and pretty expressive, but you do lose a fair bit of your low-end.

The second position moves the frequency band down a little, cutting a little of the sharp highs, and introduces more mids, at 385 to 1888 Hz. Notching over to the third

MANUFACTURER:
Dunlop, jimdunlop.com

STREET PRICE: \$229

PROS

- + Wildly versatile
- + Usual excellent Cry Baby build
- + Contains the original inductor

CONS

- The indicator lights are hard to see past your foot
- Takes up a fair amount of pedalboard real estate

VERDICT: The new BB535 Cry Baby nails that iconic Nineties wah attitude with a killer range of tones that'll make anyone understand the wah boom of the Nineties, but the indicator LEDs, while certainly practical, feel awkwardly placed, especially if you have big feet.

position, and we're into classic Cry Baby territory, at 300 to 1468 Hz. This is the closest setting to the quintessential Cry Baby tone, for us. The sound is nasal, mid-forward, but not too bright, and ideal for classic rock solos and beyond.

The fourth setting quickly became our favorite. At 248 to 1217 Hz, it feels slightly rounder, more vocal-like and fuller in general. It's perfect for those Cantrell detuned riffs, when you don't want to lose too much bass.

Fifth position is where things start to get really throaty and aggressive, at 214 to 1050 Hz, the highs are noticeably notched out, and the low-mids are fat and full-on; you can really hear that "wow" sound when you sweep through the full range of the treadle. Lastly, we have the sixth position, which at 173 to 847 Hz is the deepest and tubbiest of the six.

What really surprised us was how musical every mode is. There's a lot of sonic ground covered in this pedal. With the boost engaged, the pedal takes on a whole new personality. That extra 12dB of gain doesn't just make you louder, it adds meat and presence, making your solos pop out of the mix without getting brittle or boxy. It's especially fun with big, saturated amp settings. **GW**

There's a lot of sonic ground covered, and with the boost engaged, it takes on a whole new personality



Kemper Profiler Head MK 2

Can the amp-capture trailblazers lead the competition?

BY PETE EMERY

▶ EVERY NOW AND then, a piece of technology comes along that changes the landscape of how we do things. It's no exaggeration to say that, in the digital guitar amplifier world, the Kemper Profiler MK1 is one such technology. Its revolutionary approach to digital guitar amplification gained the company a legion of followers in both the professional and serious hobbyist realms.

So, it's to more than a little excitement that Kemper released the most recent iteration of the Profiler Head – the Kemper Profiler Head MK 2.

For the uninitiated, the Kemper Profiler Head “profiles” an amplifier by playing a selection of other-worldly sounds through the amp that are picked up via a microphone and then processed by the Profiler. Capturing the amp in its current settings and allowing players to use sounds created from individual examples of real amplifiers.

This MK 2 version, to quote Kemper, provides “more power, more flexibility, more of everything you love from the Profiler.”

What this translates to are faster boot times, an extra seven effects slots (20 audio blocks in total), a lighter chassis, eight-channel USB audio, an increased maximum loop time from one minute to two minutes and the ability to run and create Profile 2.0 profiles. It's a much-needed update given today's increased competition.

The immediate thing that sets the Kemper apart from its rivals is its looks. To some, it's a retro impression of future chic, to others, it's a space-age toaster. We can't help but enjoy its rather brave aesthetic, with the exception of the large section of unpainted metal at the back, which makes the reverse feel a little less than premium.

However, the 2.7-inch mono-chrome LCD screen, although functional, doesn't feel as modern as the color alternatives of other pieces of digital gear from the likes of Neural, Line 6 or Fractal.

In terms of longevity, all the buttons and rotary knobs have a resistance that provides confidence that they will last, and the hard-wearing aluminum chassis rounds off a bit of gear that will survive all but the most unreasonable of abuse.

In use, the Kemper Profiler Head MK 2 might appear intimidating at first glance, but it is not as complex as that initial impression suggests.

The buttons across the top provide access to the signal chain, just below that are some rotary controls to provide quick editing to some effect parameters, and most of the rest are dedicated to providing quick browsing through the different menus and functions, or line up neatly with the LCD screen for editing.

There is a learning curve, but despite a few quirks like new Fixed Effects not being accessible from the signal chain section, once you've gone through it, it makes a lot of sense. Admittedly, this is somewhat offset for us by a bit of a delay between turning a rotary knob and the associated parameter change, which makes things feel a little clunky.

So you may want to set up a rig on Kemper's Rig Manager app and save the front panel for minor changes at gigs or rehearsals. Thankfully, the app is easy to use and provides a convenient way to get hold of extra profiles and rigs, too.

Speaking of, the Kemper Profiler MK 2 comes preloaded with over 300 mostly stellar-sounding rigs from experts like Michael Britt, with plenty more available through curated and free packs that are easily accessible from the Rig Manager.

Comparing the new Profile 2.0 tech to the “Classic” profiles, we created a profile of a Fender 30th Anniversary Hot Rod Deluxe using both processes

We can't help but enjoy the Kemper's retro, rather brave aesthetic



MANUFACTURER:

Kemper,
kemper-amps.com

LAUNCH PRICE: \$1,635

PROS

- More processing power than the MK1
- Accurate, and amp-like profiles
- Excellent selection of effects
- Liquid profiling combines digital and profiling tech for increased versatility

CONS

- Interface feels a little dated
- Aesthetically divisive
- Like all capture technology, the quality of the profile depends on how well it's captured

VERDICT: The improved profiling, with its accurate amp-like feel, is the crux of what makes the Kemper Profiler MK 2 a worthwhile consideration.

for direct comparison, and also got stuck into a 2.0 Rig Pack from Thomas Dill.

The 2.0 was just a little clearer in the low mids and, as a result, felt more open. Additionally, the 2.0 was slightly more reactive under the fingers, increasing its amp-like nature. When it came to accuracy, the Profile 2.0 was closest to our ears, if a little brighter than the recorded version of the Hot Rod Deluxe.

These differences are subtle, but they are there. The Kemper was already an impressive piece of tech – now it is even more so.

It's not all about the profiling, however, as we have a healthy selection of effects that cover all the drives, modulations, delays, and reverbs that a guitarist may need.

These range from good to great, with standouts including the Green Scream with its impressive imitation of a Tube Screamer, and the Natural Reverb, which tastefully encapsulates the guitar without getting in the way.

It may take a little time to get the head around, but spending that time with the Profiler Head Mk 2 is worth it, as looking past the dated interface will reveal some killer tones. **GW**

Epiphone Futura RD Custom

Epiphone drags a Seventies cult classic kicking and screaming into the 21st century with a tight modern build

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

IT'S FAIR TO say that the RD stands out as an odd duck among its more traditional Gibson electric-guitar siblings. With its quirky silhouette, which looks like someone tried to draw a Firebird or Explorer from memory, the RD made its debut in 1977, eventually catching the eyes of everyone from Jimmy Page to Dave Grohl and the Nameless Ghoulies of Ghost. Over the decades, this off-kilter Gibson has earned cult status, but it has only recently made its way back into the Gibson lineup – this time with a modern twist as part of the Custom Series.

The RD's comeback was a hit, so much so that it even lured the Foo Fighters' frontman back to the shape after years away. No surprise, then, that Epiphone wanted to get in on the action, even if the Futura version heads down a contemporary path.

It rocks a 25.5-inch-scale mahogany neck with a super-fast Modern C profile and a compound-radius ebony fingerboard that shifts from 10 to 14 inches as you climb up for those high notes. Decked out with 22 stainless steel medium-jumbo frets and split-block inlays, lifted straight from the top-tier Gibson Super 400, the neck is crowned with a Kalamazoo headstock and Grover Rotomatic locking tuners.

The entire guitar is wrapped in a rather eye-catching Chromashift finish that morphs through different hues depending on the light. Our review model arrived in the dazzling Twilight Shift, which glistens from deep navy blue to metallic purple as you move the guitar – something the listing pics online can't do justice to.

We're happy to report that our test example is seriously well put together, too. The finish is flawless, the stainless steel frets are expertly installed and polished to a mirror shine, with the ends rounded off so there's not a sharp edge in sight.

This RD is no lightweight; we're talking beefy Les Paul territory, tipping the scales at around 9 lbs. Compared to the Firebird and Explorer models we've encountered, it's got a lot more heft, but that's the deal with a solid slab of mahogany and a body this size. Even so, it's even heavier than some vintage RDs we've played.

Despite the body being rather big, the sculpted back and rounded edges do their part to keep things comfortable; the upper-fret access is pretty excellent. Thanks to the deep cutaway and small heel, hitting the 17th fret and beyond is a total breeze.

As for the neck itself, we think Epiphone's Modern C profile will be

a real winner for the vast majority of players. It's slim enough for fast runs and complex chord shapes but still has enough meat to anchor your thumb for big bends. The compound radius fingerboard (10 to 14 inches) is fairly subtle but noticeable enough to let you know this is a modern build, especially if you're jumping between rhythm and lead parts.

Pickups here are Epiphone's new ProBucker Ignite humbuckers. In keeping with this guitar's modern sensibilities, these pickups are designed with higher-gain amps in mind, promising more output and a sculpted frequency response ideal for face-melting riffage.

There's plenty of muscle in these pickups, but they aren't so hot that they'll turn off all those traditional PAF lovers. The sound is tight and focused, with a slightly hollowed-out mid-range that pairs really well with a cooking amp. The bottom end is noticeably tamed and taut, making the guitar sound polished and controlled, even when playing de-tuned open chugs with enough gain to level a small city.

Flip to the neck pickup, and the character shifts. Suddenly, we found a flood of low-end for a creamier, more rounded tone. Thankfully, it holds onto enough clarity that the notes never sound bloated.

Moving from a Soldano SLO 100 to a JC120-style amp model, a quick pull on the volume control engaged the RD's coil split, and while it certainly thinned out the tone somewhat, it didn't quite have the spank and dynamic response of a Strat.

The phase switch was a different story; we think it's genuinely useful. Flip the selector to the middle position, pull up on the tone knob and you're instantly in Peter Green territory. The tone becomes mid-focused and nasal, with a cutting quality that's perfect for slicing through a mix or adding character to a solo. It's one of those features you might not use all the time, but it's a handy secret weapon when you need a totally different sound. **GW**

MANUFACTURER:
Epiphone, gibson.com

STREET PRICE: \$899

PROS

- Build quality is a real showcase of Epiphone value
- ProBucker Ignite pickups impress
- The finish looks better and better the more you stare at it

CONS

- Pretty heavy
- The Posi-Strap buttons look cool, but don't really give you extra security
- The coil-split sounds aren't the best

VERDICT: Gorgeously finished, flawlessly built and loaded with punchy pickups and player-friendly features, this contemporary take on the RD is perfect for those who crave something offbeat and inspiring. It's hefty and a bit quirky, but if you're looking for a six-string that stands out, this modern take on RD is the one.



NEW

SOUNDCHECK



Charvel Standard Series San Dimas Style 2 SD2 HH HT

Charvel takes on the lower end of the market with an Indonesian-built T-type that has some very intriguing specifications

BY MATT McCRACKEN

THIS NEW CHARVEL represents a bit of a departure from the norm for the company. Typically, the home of high-end, hot-rodded guitars, the new Charvel Standard Series San Dimas Style 2 SD2 HH HT has the potential to bring the brand to a totally new audience, thanks to its price point hitting just above the \$550 mark.

It's interesting that the company, owned by Fender, is looking to enter the incredibly busy \$500 to \$750 price point. But there are some very appealing specs here; rolled fingerboard edges, a compound-radius fretboard, locking tuners and a heel-mounted truss rod adjustment, all of which are found on the company's higher-end guitars. It also has a 25.1" scale length, closer to a PRS than a Fender or Gibson.

There's something else that screamed out as soon as we unboxed the Standard Series San Dimas, and it's the amaranth (also known as purpleheart) fretboard. It's decidedly red/purple on our test model, and a far cry from the typical dark woods or light maple we're used to seeing.

The other side of the nyatoh neck is interesting, too. It's an oiled finish, which felt very dry at first. Running our hand up and down the neck, we could feel the texture of the wood grain; it's a very slight feeling, but noticeable coming straight from our regular Telecaster neck with its satin urethane finish.

Sitting down to play, the neck immediately felt ready for fast playing thanks to the slim, "Speed Neck" profile and the very flat feeling 12-inch radius, which evolves to 16 inches as we go up the fretboard. Despite the weird color of the fretboard, it didn't feel any different from any dark wood 'board we've played, and naturally we were drawn to speedy licks and chunky power chords thanks to the overall feel.

In the rehearsal room, we played a set front to back twice in a row, and used our normal Player Plus Tele for one and the Standard Series San Dimas Style 2 for the second playthrough. The neck dive when we put our 6.39 lb. test model on a strap was even more noticeable than when we had it in our lap, with it diving as

MANUFACTURER:
Charvel, charvel.com

STREET PRICE: \$569.99

PROS

- ✦ Neck is super playable and excels at technical playing
- ✦ Humbuckers deliver very high output tones, great for heavier genres
- ✦ This Satin Gray option (Gloss Black also available) oozes stylish minimalism
- ✦ It's a very good spec for the money

CONS

- ✦ Oiled, nyatoh neck feels weird at first
- ✦ Some nut slot cut issues with D string on our test guitar
- ✦ Lightweight body means neck dives on a strap and in your lap

VERDICT: Overall, we think this is a good guitar for the money. Stick some better pickups in it and give it a good setup, and you could definitely have something on your hands that competes with guitars in the \$1,000-plus range. It's a little one-dimensional in terms of tone, but the playability is the real standout.



soon as we took our hands off the guitar. It could probably benefit from a leather strap.

But the overall playing experience is really positive. Everything from chugging power chords to measured lead playing felt easy, and after we'd played in the neck a bit, that raw feeling was gone, leaving a very fast playing instrument in its wake. We wanted to write it off after seeing the fretboard and feeling the back of the neck initially, but it won us over with its overall phenomenal playability.

During the rehearsal, we played the Standard Series San Dimas through our pedalboard and Orange

LUCY ROBINSON



Rocker 32 tube amp, and there was a noticeable jump in volume from the Noiseless single coil pickups on our Fender, so much so that we have to drop the master volume on our amp a touch. The Charvel “Custom” set are seriously high-output humbuckers.

The bridge humbucker dealt with oodles of gain via multi-stacked overdrive pedals and still remained articulate, even when we started adding in a phase-shifted overdrive, as well as some tube echo and spring reverb via our HX Stomp. We do find it lacked a bit of sophistication during a clean interlude, though, sounding a little bit sterile and dull versus

our usual, sparkly single-coils, particularly as we moved higher up the neck.

There’s a bit of bite to the neck position when we start digging in, unlocking some warm, round tones in the lower registers when striking the strings more gently. It’s a much more pleasing sound as we get higher up the neck versus the bridge position, taming a bit of that harshness.

Moving back to the overdrive channel, it’s not quite sludgy doom territory with the neck humbucker, but for single note riffing it offers a very satisfying, thick tone. It’s a guitar that definitely excels more

in high-gain stuff, sounding great with metalcore riffs and ripping leads. When we try to do some more soft-touch, bluesy stuff, it just lacks the sophistication, sounding a bit brittle at times.

We were pretty excited when Charvel announced these guitars. The idea of more high-end inspired instruments at a lower price is definitely something that will appeal to a lot of players, and in terms of playability, the Charvel Standard Series San Dimas Style 2 delivers. The rolled fingerboard edges, compound radius fretboard and oiled neck make for a heavenly playing experience. **GW**

Hotone Verbera NC-200

The Chinese brand raises the bar for its effects output with this ambitious reverb pedal

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

IT'S FAIR TO say DSP in pedals is both more powerful and more accessible than ever before. And as such, we've seen a boom in do-it-all digital reverb units that bring studio-quality convolution and algorithmic verbs to the mainstream.

The latest entry is the new Hotone Verbera. The Hunan, China-based pedal makers have their sights firmly set on the reverb titans Strymon and Eventide, with this convolution reverb pedal that's packed with instant IR loading, incredible tweakability and a comparatively reasonable price tag.

This is a genuinely satisfying pedal to dial in, and the twin footswitches are pleasantly light and soft under-foot, but we have to mention the perplexing placement of the MIDI jacks at the bottom of the pedal, directly beneath the footswitches. These cables being so close to our feet make us uncomfortable in a live situation. With ample space on the sides, it's strange that Hotone didn't place the jacks there.

Loaded with 120 impulse responses sampled from iconic spaces, like symphony halls, cathedrals and even aerospace facilities, as well as vintage springs and plates, it's a pretty packed little unit. Its unique dual-engine architecture lets you blend realistic IR reverbs with Hotone's XR algorithmic reverbs, unlocking lush soundscapes at the push of a button. There's also instant IR loading, up to 1,024 user

Right out of the box, the dual footswitches make preset navigation easy



IR slots and companion software for managing presets and custom IRs.

With such a deep feature set, you might expect a steep learning curve, but we found this stomp to be very intuitive indeed. Right out of the box, the dual footswitches make preset navigation easy. The right pedal cycles forward, and the left backward. Press both together to switch to traditional stompbox mode, with one footswitch toggling the effect and the other activating a Freeze function, which holds your reverb tail for ambient layering.

With two styles of reverb in one pedal, Hotone uses color coding to make it super clear as to what reverb you are adjusting. When the pedal shines in an eye-catching amber hue, you're in the realm of IR reverb; switch to blue, and you're exploring the algorithmic reverb options.

Tonally, this pedal sounds massive. The blend of realistic room sounds

MANUFACTURER:
Hotone Audio, hotone.com

STREET PRICE: \$299.99

PROS

- Super versatile and lush reverb sounds
- You can combine IR and algorithmic reverbs
- A great-looking pedal with a build to match

CONS

- Placement of MIDI input on the bottom of the pedal is impractical
- There are better options if you're into spring-style reverb

VERDICT: There's not a lot to dislike about this pedal. Sure, the location of the MIDI sockets is downright bizarre, but it's easy to overlook that when it sounds this good.

from the IRs and the wild, modulated tones of the algorithmic verbs is genuinely breathtaking when you dial it in just right. Yes, it's super easy to go overboard and end up with a tone that can only be described as "shoegaze down a well," but if you find that sweet spot of lush, long trails while keeping just enough attack to hear the initial note, you could easily lose yourself in this pedal.

The Freeze function is pretty fun, too. It's perfect for ambient swells or layering leads over atmospheric beds. If we're being a bit nitpicky, we'd say the spring settings aren't up to much, and they come off a touch bright for our liking. That said, they're easily tamed with the tone control, and, honestly, you're not really buying this pedal for those sounds.

All told, this is a fantastic pedal. We've tested a load of stomps for reviews, and it's not often we come across one that feels this inspiring. **GW**

MATT LINCOLN



TALES FROM NERDVILLE

BY JOE BONAMASSA

The Low Down

Exploring drop-D tuning

IN THIS COLUMN I'd like to talk about the oft-used drop-D tuning, wherein the guitar's low E string is tuned down a whole step to D (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, E). Drop-D tuning creates the opportunity for all kinds of otherwise inaccessible riffs and chords, plus it's a great and easy way to expand the instrument's low range into new subsonic territory.

I play the song "Trigger Finger," from 2025's *Breakthrough*, in drop-D. What I find most useful about the tuning is that it simply presents more options to me as a guitarist. For example, as shown in **FIGURE 1**, I can play the song's main riff in 8th-10th position in standard tuning, but as you'll notice, I sneak in the open low D root note in bar 3 on the upbeat of beat 2.

Another option is to tune all six strings down a whole step, to D standard (low to high: D, G, C, F, A, D). But only dropping the 6th string down a whole step gives you the best of both worlds — you've got your low D note while the other five strings are tuned normally.

FIGURE 2 illustrates the main riff as I play it on the track. Performed mostly in 3rd position, it's based on the D blues scale (D, F, G, A $\flat$, A, C) with the inclusion of the major 3rd, F $\sharp$. Notice how I utilize the open low D note, bouncing off it for rhythm and sonic emphasis in a few spots.

One of my favorite purveyors of drop-D riffing is the late, great Chris Whitley, whose playing I love, especially on his 1998 album *Dirt Floor*. My band and I opened up for Chris in 2000, at a place called the Patio in Indianapolis. I'd heard of him but didn't know his music or his playing. In all honesty, his solo performance blew us off the stage! He was a brilliant player, and I recommend you check out *Dirt Floor*, as well as his many other albums.

All examples are performed in drop-D tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, E).

FIG. 1 N.C.(D)

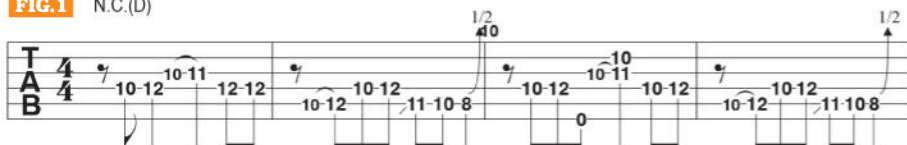


FIG. 2 N.C.(D)

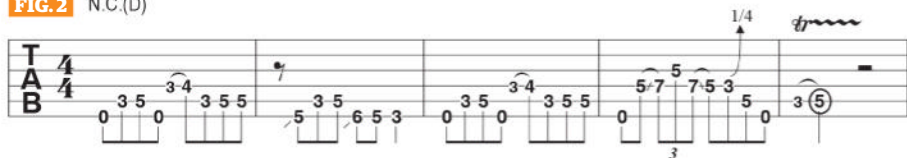


FIG. 3 N.C.(D)
w/fingerpicking

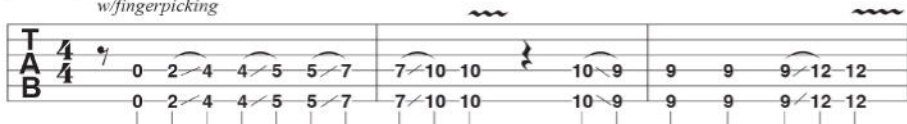
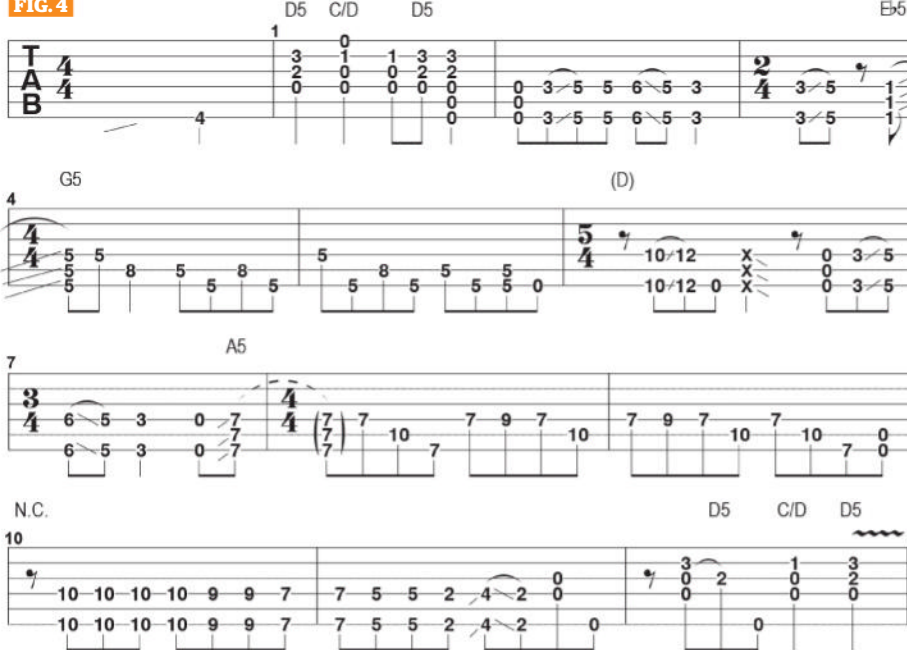


FIG. 4 N.C.(D)



Chris used drop-D to play some fantastic octave figures, fretted on the 6th and 4th strings. In drop-D tuning, each note of the octave is located at the same fret.

FIGURES 3 and **4** present Whitley-esque passages. In **FIGURE 3**, the phrase moves up and down the fretboard in the aforementioned octave shapes.

In **FIGURE 4**, I combine these octave-based phrases with shifting power chord licks in bars 4, 8 and 9. In bars 8 and 9, I barre my index finger across all of the strings at the 7th fret while playing a single-note melodic line on the 5th and 4th strings. This is along the lines of Whitley's approach to using drop-D

tuning. As you play the figure, you'll notice how unusual the rhythmic patterns are. Chris would play in this type of "choppy" style, and he blew me away when I saw him perform. His standard guitars of choice were both a National steel acoustic and an electric Les Paul Junior in "TV" yellow.

If you really want to get adventurous, try dropping both your low and high E strings down to D, what's called double drop-D tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, D). This will get you into some CSN&Y territory, as both Neil Young and Stephen Stills have explored this tuning to great effect, as has Jimmy Page on Led Zeppelin's "Going to California." **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/september2026

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 2026's *B.B. King: Blues Summit 100* and *The Spirit of Rory Live from Cork*. For more information, head to jbonamassa.com.



WORKIN' MAN

BY CHARLIE STARR

The Simple Truth

The acoustic guitar in songwriting

WHEN I WAS a kid, my dad played acoustic guitar and sang around the house, and he played everything from bluesgrass to old folk and gospel songs. I was fascinated watching one man do that. It was just a guy and his guitar doing a troubadour kind of thing.

This really informed my initial understanding that music could be just a person and a guitar. He could hold my attention for as long as he wanted to! He could do it with just the combination of rhythm, musicality, melody and lyrics. He liked to sing a song to me called "The Wreck of the Old 97," which was about a train crash. It had adventure, speed, death, and there's a woman involved too. Everything that you need in one song!

As I got older, I realized that what I really wanted to do, other than to play the guitar, was to create songs: to get an acoustic guitar and do exactly what my dad did. I ended up falling in love with the music of Hank Williams, Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Billy Joe Shaver, Steve Earle — so many masters of this craft. These are all guys that could put a guitar on their back, drive from town to town and stand on the sidewalk and entertain you. This can be said for Barbeque Bob — Robert Hicks — Curly Weaver, Buddy Moss and Blind Willie McTell, who played in front of a barbeque place in Atlanta called Pig n' Chick. The list goes on and on.

Fast forward to me writing my own songs and having writing sessions with others. It was awkward at first, but one day I met Travis Meadows, and within two days we wrote two songs, "Pretty Little Lie" and "One Horse Town," which has gone on to be a big song for my band, Blackberry Smoke.

FIG. 1 Em D/F# G5 Am G5

1 TAB 4/4

* = downstroke V = upstroke

4 D5 Em D/F# G5

7 Am G5 D5

FIG. 2 Em C/G

1 TAB 4/4

G5 D Em C/G G5

3 TAB 4/4

FIG. 3 Am C (repeat prev. bar)

1 TAB 4/4

FIG. 4 Dm F/C F#sus2/C F/C C/G

1 TAB 4/4

G5 Dm F/C F#sus2/C F/C C/G

4 TAB 4/4

FIGURE 1 illustrates the verse section of "Pretty Little Lie." While strumming in a steady eighth-note rhythm, the progression is a stream of nice minor-to-major chordal resolutions, one that I was able to weave a story around with some very direct lyrics.

I realized I could take that kind of feeling, with just an acoustic guitar and my voice, and play and sing that to anybody for the rest of my life. And then you have the enjoyable option to take it to four other musicians, turn it up to 10, hit the drums really hard and put background and harmony vocals on it, to make it a big production. But when you boil it all down, it goes back to one guitar and one voice.

FIGURE 2 shows the chorus section, which combines different minor-to-major

resolutions with lyrics that move the story forward.

The very next day, we were back in a minor mood, and, as shown in **FIGURE 3**, the intro features a single-note line and then moves from Am to C. Travis and I are both from very small southeastern towns, and this is how "One Horse Town" was born.

For the verse, what better place to go than another minor chord! So, as illustrated in **FIGURE 4**, the verse starts on Dm and then weaves its way through to F/C, C then G. This is a perfect example of a lyrical idea carrying and inspiring the day.

The possibilities are endless when it comes to strumming chords and singing a melody. It's a beautiful thing to create songs and make other people happy, just like my dad did. **GW**



BLUES EXPANSIONS

BY COREY CONGILIO

Super Charged

Exploring the "super arpeggio"

IN THIS MONTH'S column, I'd like to demonstrate a really cool technique that I learned from the great Larry Carlton that's commonly referred to as the "super arpeggio." It's based on stacking major and minor triads on top of a chord, yielding much longer arpeggios that move through different triadic forms and sounds.

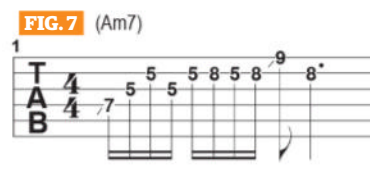
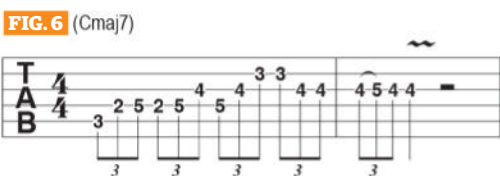
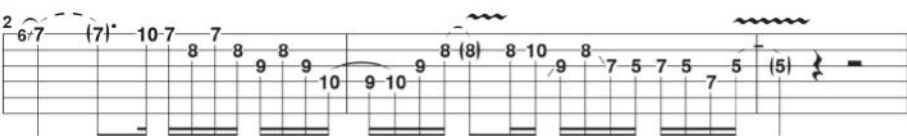
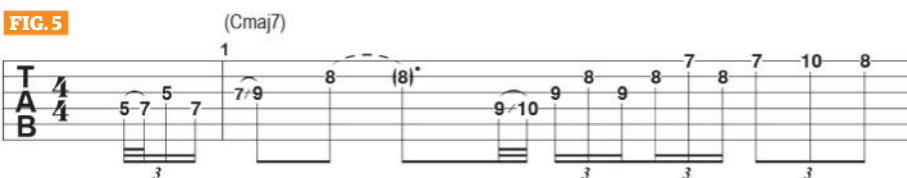
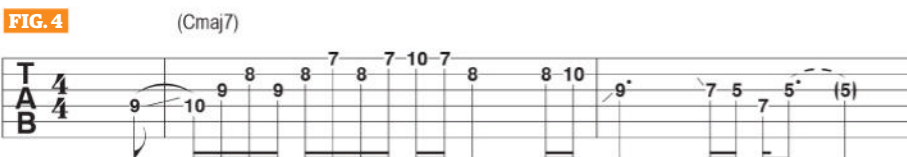
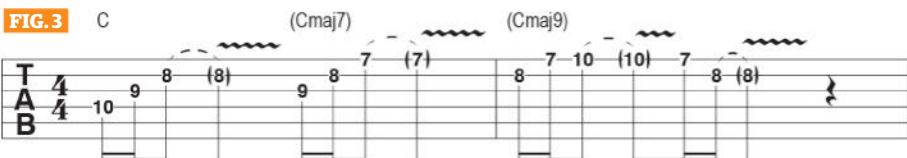
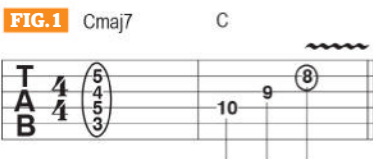
Let's start with a Cmaj7 chord, as shown in **FIGURE 1**. The most natural triad to play over this chord is C major, which consists of the notes C, E and G.

The "super arpeggio" concept is based on forming successive triads off the second note of each triad. As shown in **FIGURE 2**, we start with a C triad and then play a triad based on the second note, E; this yields an E minor triad formed by the notes E, G and B. We then form a triad from G, the second note of Em, which yields a G major triad with the notes G, B and D.

In **FIGURE 3**, I play over a static vamp on a Cmaj7 chord by outlining the C major, E minor and G major triads. In **FIGURE 4**, I use this approach to play a solo-type line, moving from C major to E minor to G major in steady 16th notes before resolving the line with a lick based on the C major pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A).

FIGURE 5 offers an example of "bookending" the three triadic shapes with lines based on C major pentatonic at the beginning and end of the improvised melody.

It's useful to be aware of what intervals each triad includes: a C major triad consists of the C root note, the major 3rd, E and the 5th, G. Relative to C, the E minor triad gives us the major 3rd, E, the 5th, G, and the major 7th, B. Superimposing a G major triad over a C root gives us the 5th, G, major 7th, B, and the 9th, D. All together that gives us a Cmaj9 arpeggio (C, E, G, B, D).



These triads can and should be played everywhere on the fretboard. In **FIGURE 6**, the three triadic forms are moved down to 2nd/3rd position.

A great place to go from here is to apply this concept to a minor chord. The relative minor of C major is A minor, so many of the same notes will appear but within the triadic forms built from A minor.

If I were to play a static Am vamp, I can play lines based on the triadic forms of Am (A, C, E), C (C, E, G), and Em (E, G, B). In **FIGURE 7**, I move through all three of these triadic forms with an improvised line played in a rhythm

of 16th notes and 16th-note triplets. Notice that I end the phrase with a lick based on A minor pentatonic (A, C, D, E, G). You'll find that combining the progression of triads with minor pentatonic lines will sound very musical and also offer many different options for improvisation.

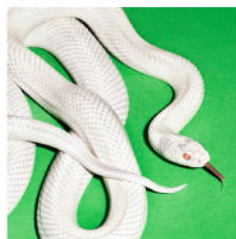
This will be the last installment of Blues Expansions for now, so I hope you have enjoyed these columns and that the concepts presented have been useful to you in your soloing endeavors. Thanks for reading, and please check out more of my lessons at coreycongilio.com. **GW**

HOW TO PLAY THIS MONTH'S SONGS

BY JIMMY BROWN

DEFTONES

"My Mind Is a Mountain"



IN SIGNATURE FASHION, this dramatically powerful new song by this veteran, highly influential American metal band is built

around a handful of simple but heavy-sounding stacked power chords. Guitarist Stephen Carpenter plays an 8-string here and tunes its low F# string down a whole step to E (low to high: E, B, E, A, D, G, B, E). This drop-E tuning enables him to conveniently and comfortably fret "drop-D-style" one-finger root-5th-octave power chords by simply barring his index finger across the bottom three strings at any given fret. And as he has done on many other Deftones songs over the years, the guitarist adds his ring finger two frets higher on the next higher string – which in this case is the A string – additionally doubling the 5th of the chord an octave higher. The result is a massive-sounding root-5-root-5 interval stack, low to high.

For those who don't own an 8-string guitar, the chord voicings Carpenter plays here can be faithfully recreated on a 7-string. Simply tune your low B string down to A, what's known as drop-A tuning (low to high A, E, A, D, G, B, E). You would then play each chord five frets lower, using the same shapes on your bottom four strings. So E $\flat$ 5 would be rooted at the 6th fret, F5 at the 8th fret and C5 at the 3rd fret.

If you only have a standard or baritone 6-string guitar, you could still attain these same low, heavy voicings with decent clarity and good intonation, by doing what bassist Fred Sablan does and tuning to drop-D down one whole step, also known as drop-C tuning (low to high: C, G, C, F, A, D). You would then play the stacked E $\flat$ 5 shape at the 3rd fret, F5 at the 5th fret and C5 open, with the 3rd string fretted at the 2nd fret. You'll get the best results if you use a set of .011-gauge strings or heavier.

If performing the song without another guitarist, you could incorporate the single F notes played by Gtr. 3 in bars 5-8, which is the 9th of E $\flat$, into the stacked E $\flat$ 5 power chord voicing, transforming it into a root-5-9, or sus2, chord. To do this, move the octave E $\flat$ note up two frets, fretting that string at the same fret as the note on the next higher string. You would then use your ring finger and pinkie to fret the top two notes while barring the bottom two.

DAVID BOWIE

"Rebel Rebel"



THIS ICONIC ROCK anthem from 1974 is built around a two-bar riff, written by David Bowie himself on a richly overdriven Gibson Les Paul and

recorded by guest guitarist Alan Parker. The riff alternates between open Dsus2 and E shapes, with certain strings selectively picked while others are carefully avoided and/or muted. Compare this to the supporting acoustic guitar part (see Gtr. 2), which strums full, ringing open D and E chords in a flowing eighth-note rhythm with down-up-down-up strumming.

Note the muted string rake at the beginning of bar 1, indicated by the grace-note Xs. Form an open D5 chord shape but without pressing the strings down to touch the frets and do a quick upstroke strum, dragging the pick across the B, G and open D strings.

The main riff that repeats throughout most of the song (see *Rhy. Fig. 1*, bars 3 and 4) may be picked entirely with downstrokes, as the rhythms aren't fast or technically difficult to pick or strum this way. But up-pick each open high E note for a sharper, more biting attack.

As the verse section gets under way at section B (bar 13), you'll see that Parker often catches the fretted D note along with the open high E, which provides evidence of the upstroke, as the E note sounds a fraction of a second before the D and sonically dominates. The three-note E chords on the eighth-note upbeats are also up-strummed, which accentuates the high strings.

Up-pick the open high E notes for a sharp, biting attack

Another key element here is the eighth rests between the E chord strums. Use both hands to briefly dampen the strings and create the desired "holes of silence."

Another important thing to do when playing the main riff is to "choke" the open low E string with your pick-hand palm immediately after picking it, before performing the pull-off on the B string. You don't want that open E note to ring beyond its brief eighth-note duration. Think of this technique as "palm-muting after the fact."

GREG KOCH

"Spank It"



SIX-STRING SUPERHERO

GREG KOCH celebrates his hot country side in this rousing, uptempo instrumental barnburner,

a tune he wrote in his youth and regularly performs live, wowing audiences around the world with his twangy, T-style chicken pickin' and musical artistry. Performed in the guitar-friendly key of A, it's kind of like a country version of "Crossroads" on steroids.

Greg performs the tune's main theme, which is built around a repeating two-bar phrase (see *Riff A*, bar 1) fingerstyle, using his thumb with palm muting (P.M.) to pick the open A string on the beat 1 of the first bar. As indicated, he then fingerpicks an A5 dyad (two-note chord voicing) at the 2nd fret with his 1st and 2nd fingers. The guitarist follows this with a pitchless, percussive fret-hand-ring-finger slap on the bottom two strings on the "and" (eighth-note upbeat) of beat 2, notated with a pair of vertical X's. He follows this with a pitchless "ghost note" on beat 3 (indicated by a single X), which he thumbpicks while muting the string with one or more fret-hand fingers. The guitarist then fingerpicks his open D and G strings and hammers-on a dyad at the 4th and 5th frets. In bar 2, he performs more dyad hammer-ons with thumbpicked single notes in between.

The phrasing of the repeating two-bar phrase can be tricky to wrap your head around and coordinate the required sequence of left- and right-hand movements. The key to getting it down is to start out slowly and tap your foot squarely on beats 1 and 3 as you play, which will help you feel the rhythm better and tie everything together. As the sequence falls into place with repetition, work on gradually increasing the tempo. Greg posted a helpful and entertaining video on YouTube, in which he breaks down exactly how he plays this riff. Note that, while fingerpicking, the guitarist clasps his plectrum between his 1st and 2nd fingers, keeping it ready to retrieve quickly for some hybrid picking later on.

At section C (bar 29), Greg settles into a simpler, more streamlined version of the main riff pattern in A, which he then applies, with variation, to the IV (four) chord, D, in bars 37-40, using similar techniques. **GW**

DEFTONES

"My Mind Is a Mountain"

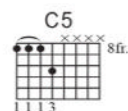
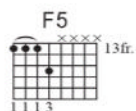
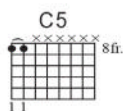
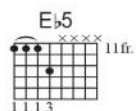
AS HEARD ON **PRIVATE MUSIC** WORDS AND MUSIC BY **CHINO MORENO, CHI CHENG, ABE CUNNINGHAM** AND **STEPHEN CARPENTER**

TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**

All guitars are 8-string guitars in drop-E tuning (low to high: E, B, E, A, D, G, B, E).

Bass is in drop-D tuning, down one whole step (low to high: C, G, C, F).

All music for bass guitar sounds in the key of C minor; one whole step lower than written.



A Intro (0:00)

Moderately Fast ♩. = 108

1 Eb5 C5 Eb5 C5 Eb5 C5 Eb5 C5
Gtrs. 1 and 2 (elec. w/dist.) P.M. ----- P.M. ----- P.M. ----- P.M. -----

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

*Chord symbols in brackets reflect harmony as transposed for bass guitar tuning.

5 Eb5 C5 Eb5 C5 Eb5 C5 Eb5 F5
Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist. and reverb effect)

GTR. 3

Gtrs. 1 and 2

P.M. ----- P.M. ----- P.M. -----

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

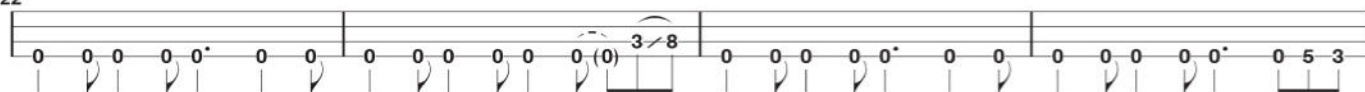
"MY MIND IS A MOUNTAIN" WORDS AND MUSIC BY CHINO MORENO, CHI CHENG, ABE CUNNINGHAM AND STEPHEN CARPENTER. © 2025 SON OF STELLA MUSIC, WARNER-TAMERLANE PUBLISHING CORP., MY RIB IS BROKE AND WC MUSIC CORP. ALL RIGHTS FOR SON OF STELLA MUSIC ADMINISTERED BY WARNER-TAMERLANE PUBLISHING CORP. ALL RIGHTS FOR MY RIB IS BROKE ADMINISTERED BY WC MUSIC CORP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USED BY PERMISSION. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF HAL LEONARD LLC.

TRANSCRIPTIONS

We've been waiting here patiently locked in this state clocking our time
We display it in our patience locked in this state plotting our time

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 18)

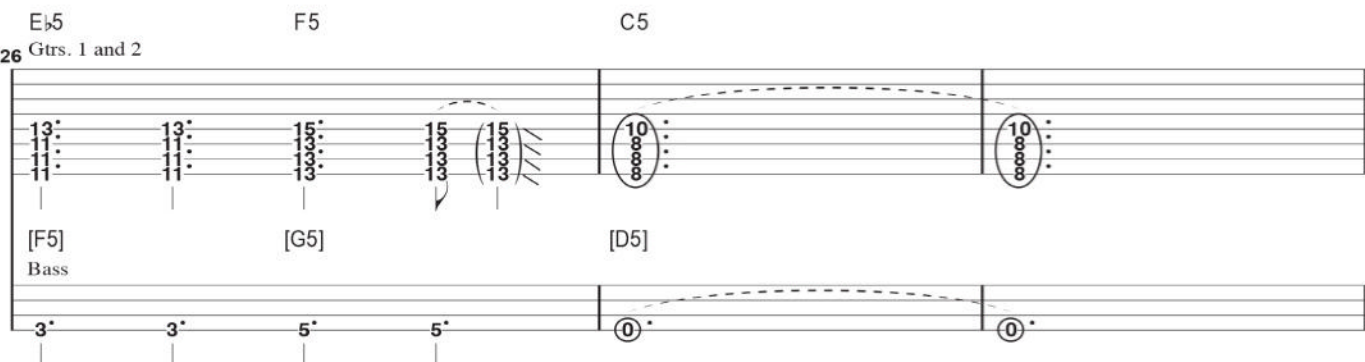
22 Bass



2nd time, skip ahead to [E] Chorus (bar 32)

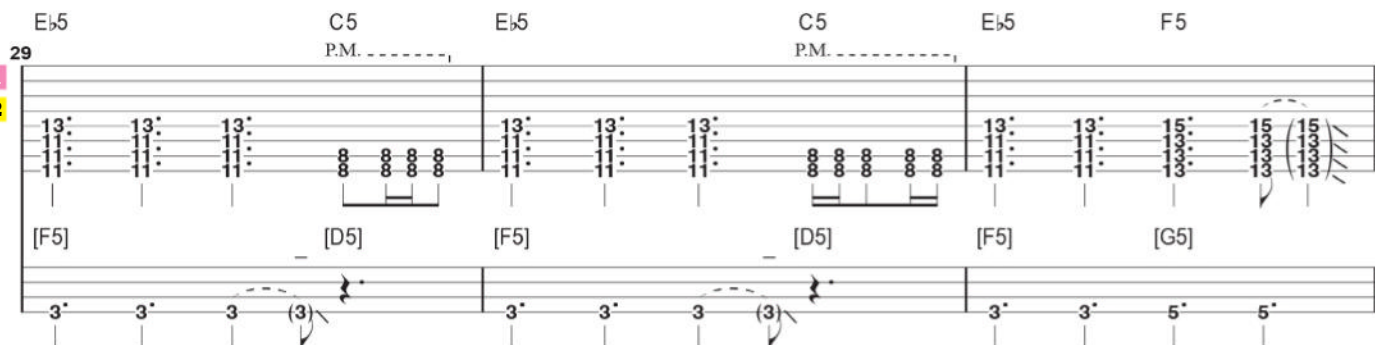
26 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1
GTR. 2



[D] (1:02) (♩. = 108)

Go back to [B] 2nd Verse (bar 9)



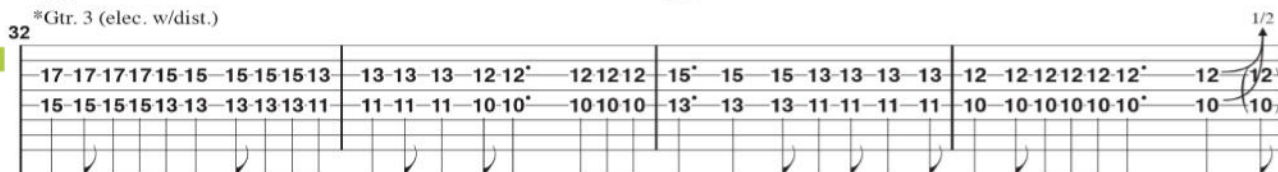
[E] Chorus (1:49) (♩. = 112)

Now we sail (into)

C5 Eb5

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

GTR. 3

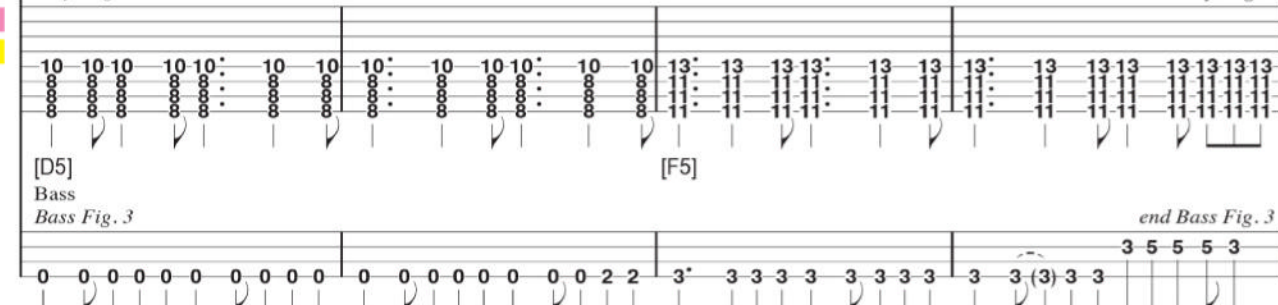


*Two gtrs. arr. for one part.

Gtrs. 1 and 2
Rhy. Fig. 2

end Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR. 1
GTR. 2



end Bass Fig. 3

The storm implodes (around)

C5

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 three times (see bar 32)

E_b5

36 Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

17°	17	17	15	15°	15	15	15	13	13	13	13	13	12°	12	12	12	13°	13	13	13	12°	12	12	12	10°	10	10	12°	12	12	
15°	15	15	13	13°	13	13	13	11	11	11	11	11	10°	10	10	10	11°	11	11	11	11	10°	10	10	10	8°	8	8	10°	10	10

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 three times w/ad lib variation (see bar 32)

Exploring your fate Now we

C5

GTR. 3

40 C5 $\frac{1}{4}$ Eb5 $\frac{1}{2}$

17-17-17-17-17-15-15-15-13 13-13-13-13-15-15-15-15-13 15-15-15-13-13-13-13 17-17-17-12-12-12-10-10 17-17-17-12-12-12-10-10

sail	starting	now	Behold
------	----------	-----	--------

C5

GTR.3

14

C5

E♭5

17-17-17-17-15-15 15-15-13 13-13-13-13-12-12 12-12-12-12 15-15-15-15-15-15 19-19-19-19-19-19 15-15-15-15-13-13 13-13-11 11-11-11-11-10-10 10-10-10-10 13-13-13-13-13-13 17-17-17-17-17-17

F **Outro** (2:23) (♩. = 108)

Negative space in cycles
Destroying our mental

E65

F5

N.C. (C5)

48 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR. 2

[illegible]

Bass plays Bass Fill 1 (see bar 8)

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 18)

Remains in our conscious Constant

(E-5)

w/random string
noise overdubs

Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

51 *Gtr. 3*

20° 20 20 20° 20 20 20° 20° 20 20 (20) 20 20 20° 20 20 20° 20 20 (22)° (22)°
18° 18 18 18° 18 18 18° 18° 18 18 (18) 18 18 18° 18 18 18° 18 18 (20)° (20)°

Gtrs. 1 and 2

light P.M.

light P.M.

 w/fdbk.

GTR.1

GTR.2

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It features two staves: a top staff for guitar and a bottom staff for bass. The guitar staff includes fret numbers (e.g., 8, 11, 13) and chord diagrams (e.g., 8/11, 13/11). The bass staff includes fret numbers (e.g., 0, 5, 8) and a chord diagram (8). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, and the guitar part includes a double bar line at the end of the first measure. The bass part includes a double bar line at the end of the first measure. The guitar part includes a double bar line at the end of the first measure. The bass part includes a double bar line at the end of the first measure.

DAVID BOWIE

"Rebel Rebel"

AS HEARD ON **DIAMOND DOGS** WORDS AND MUSIC BY **DAVID BOWIE**TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN** AND **MICHAEL DUCLOS**

Dsus2



D5



D



A



A



E



Bm



E7

**A** Intro (0:00)

Moderately ♩ = 124

Dsus2

(A) E

Dsus2

(A) E

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

Rhy. Fig. 1

GTR.1



Doo doo doo doot

(A) E

doo doo doo doo

Dsus2

(A) E

Gtr. 1

GTR.1



Bass (fretless)



(0:16)

Doo doo doo doot

(A) E

doo doo doo doo

D

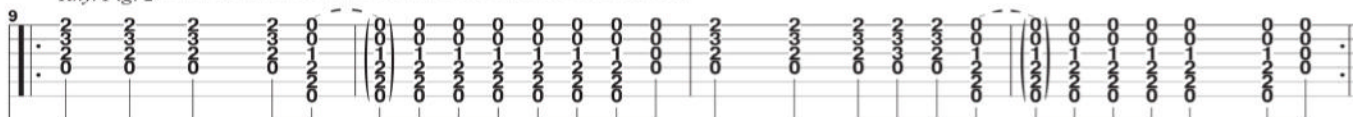
E

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice (see bar 3)

Gtr. 2 (acous.)

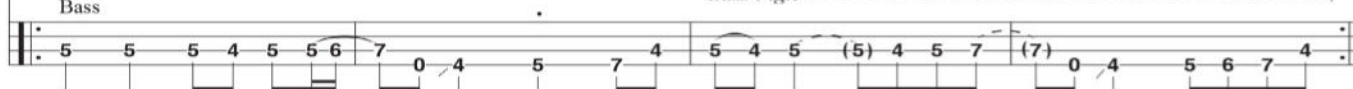
Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR.2



Bass

Bass Fig. 1

**B** Verses (0:31, 1:39)

1. You've got your mother

in a whirl

She's not

sure if you're a

boy or a girl

You like me and I

like it all

We like

dancing and we

look divine

2. You've got your mother

in a whirl

'cause she's

not

sure if you're a

boy or a girl

You like me and I

like it all

We like

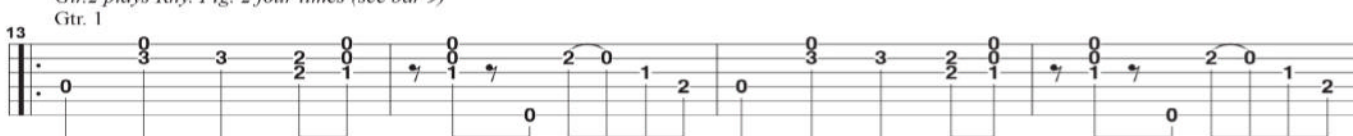
dancing and we

look divine

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 four times (see bar 9)

Gtr. 1

GTR.1



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 four times simile (see bar 11)

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Take 1st and 2nd endings
on both verses.

- (1.) Hey babe your hair's alright Hey babe let's go out tonight
You love bands when they're playin' hard You want more and you want it fast
- (2.) Hey babe your hair's alright Hey babe let's stay out tonight
You love bands when they're playin' hard You want more and you want it fast

GTR.1

C Bridge (1:01, 2:10)

They put you down They say I'm wrong You tacky thing you put them on

A D Bm E7

Gr. 1 substitutes Rhy. Fill 1 second time (see below)

Gr. 1

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass

D Chorus (1:09, 2:17, 2:48)

Rebel Rebel you've torn your dress Rebel Rebel your face is a mess

D E D E

Gr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 twice simile (see bar 9)

Gr. 1

GTR.1

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice simile (see bar 11)

Rhy. Fill 1 (2:10)

A D Bm E E7

Gr. 1

GTR.1

TRANSCRIPTIONS

GTR.1

GTR.2

E Intro Reprise (1:24, 2:32, 3:03)

(1.) Don't-cha
(2.) Don't-cha

F *Outro Chorus (bar 42)*

Oh
(3.) You've

GTR.1

B 2nd Verse (bar 13)

2nd time, go back to
D Chorus (bar 26)

GTR.1

F Outro Chorus (3:10)

- (1.) torn your dress Your face is a mess You can't get enough but enough ain't the test (You've got your)
 (2.) be there when they count up the dudes And I love your dress You're a
 (3.) how could they know I said how could they know So what you know
 (4.) do for you Looks like you've been there too Because you've torn your dress And your
 (5.) how could they know How could they know

Dsus2

E

Dsus2

E

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 19 times simile (see bar 9)

Gtr. 1

GTR.1 42

Bass

1, 2, 3, 4.

- (1.) transmission and a live wire You've got your cue line and a handful of ludes You want to
 (2.) juvenile success Because your face is a mess So
 (3.) want to know Calamity's child chi-child chi-child Where'd you wanna go What can I
 (4.) face is a mess Ooh Your face is a mess Ooh Ooh So

D

E

D

E

Gtr. 1

GTR.1 46

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice simile (see bar 11)

5.

Quick fade-out

D

Gtr. 1

GTR.1 50

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

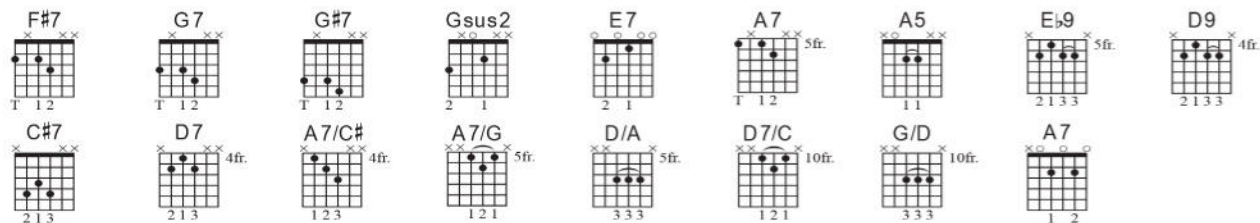
Bass

GREG KOCH

"Spank It"

AS HEARD ON THE GRIP! MUSIC BY GREG KOCH

TRANSCRIBED BY JEFF PERRIN



A Intro (0:00)

Fast $\text{♩} = 158$

*A7

Gtr. 1 (clean elec. w/slapback delay effect)

Riff A -

w/fingers

P.M. **

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/overdrive pedal and slapback delay effect)

GTR.2

w/fingers

P.M. **

GTR.1

1

TAB

fret-hand fingering: T 1 2 3 T 1 2 T 1 2 T 1 2 cont.

*Chord symbols reflect overall harmony.
**Slap strings w/fret-hand ring finger.

5-string Bass

TAB

5

B Main Theme (0:03, 0:21, 2:29)

A7

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Riff A four times (see bar 1)

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/overdrive pedal)

Riff B

w/fingers

GTR.3

5

TAB

Bass

Bass Fig. 1

(play repeats simile)

GTR.3

9

TAB

D7

13 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

Gtr. 3

GTR.3

Bass

A7

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Riff A twice (see bar 1)

17 Gtr. 3

GTR.3

Bass

E7

F#7

G7

G#7

Gtrs. 1 and 2

21 P.M.

GTR.1

GTR.2

Gtr. 3

GTR.3

Bass

TRANSCRIPTIONS

3rd time, skip ahead to **I** (bar 173)

A7 N.C.

Gsus2

The image shows musical notation for Riff B and Bass Fig. 1. Riff B is a four-measure sequence for guitar, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various fret numbers (e.g., 8, 9, 10, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 0) and techniques like bends (indicated by a curved arrow) and vibrato (indicated by a wavy line). The bass line for Riff B is shown on a separate staff, starting with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. It includes a double bar line and a repeat sign. Bass Fig. 1 is a four-measure sequence for bass, starting with a bass clef and a key signature of one sharp. It includes a double bar line and a repeat sign. The notation for Bass Fig. 1 includes a double bar line and a repeat sign.

C (0:40)

A7

Gtr. 3 plays Riff B (see bar 5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

29 P.M. * P.M.

*Slap bottom two strings w/fret-hand ring finger throughout (as in Riff A).

Bass

33 P.M.

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

Guitar tablature for GTR. 1 and GTR. 2. GTR. 1 is a standard six-string guitar with fret numbers and 'x' marks for harmonics. GTR. 2 is a five-string guitar with fret numbers and a capo on the first fret.

D7

37

Exercise 37 is written on a grand staff. The treble staff contains a sequence of notes and rests, with fingerings indicated by numbers 7, 9, 10, and 4. The bass staff contains a sequence of notes and rests, with fingerings indicated by numbers 5, 8, 7, and 6. The exercise is divided into four measures by bar lines.

A7

41

GTR.1
GTR.2

E7

Gtr. 1

let ring—

F#7

let ring—

G7

Gtr. 4 (elec. w/overdrive pedal)

G#7

GTR.4

45

GTR.1

GTR.2

A7

Gtr. 4

w/pick and fingers

Gsus2

49

GTR.4

GTR.1

GTR.2

D 1st Guitar Solo (0:58)

GTR. 4

GTR.1

GTR. 4

GTR.1

GTR. 4

GTR.1

E7 F#7 G7 G#7

GTR. 4 69 5 8 7 5 8 7 5 7 7 5 7 9 7 9 7 9 9 10 9 7 9 7 9 11

P.M. let ring 0 1 (1) 0 0 0 0 2 (3 2) (4 3) (5 4)

A7 N.C. Gsus2 73 9 0 11 8 0 10 7 0 9 6 0 7 4 0 5 0 4 2 0 4 0 3 2 0 (3) (3) 2

GTR. 1 6 5 5 2 0 3

end Rhy. Fig. 1

E 2nd Guitar Solo (1:16)

A7

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see bar 53)

Gtr. 5 (elec. w/overdrive pedal)

w/pick and fingers

GTR. 5 77 5 7 9 5 7 9 5 7 9 5 7 9 5 7 9 5 7 8 5 7 7 5 7 5 x 7 1/2

Gtr. 4 2 0

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

Gtr. 5 81 7 5 8 5 7 (7) 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5 10 x x 10 1/4

D7 85 10 7 10 7 10 10 8 7 (7) 10 8 7 (7) 10 8 7 (7) 10 8 7 (7) 9 7 9 8 7 9 1/2 1/2 1/2 1/2

A7 89 7 (7) (7) (7) 10 7 10 9 7 9 9 9 7 9 7 (7) 9 7 9 (9) 7 9 7 (7) 4 13 1/2

TRANSCRIPTIONS

E7

F#7

G7

G#7

GTR. 5

93

A7

N.C.

Gsus2

GTR. 4

97 Gtr. 4

GTR. 5

Gtr. 5

F 3rd Guitar Solo (1:34)

A7

Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

101

GTR. 5

Gtr. 5

GTR. 1

Gtr. 1

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

GTR. 4

105

GTR. 1

Gtr. 1

[illegible]

A7

The image shows a musical score for a guitar exercise. It consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'GTR. 4' in an orange box and the bottom staff is labeled 'GTR. 1' in a pink box. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The progression is for an A7 chord. The top staff (GTR. 4) has a measure starting with a barre at the 11th fret (labeled '113' and '7/11'), followed by a sequence of notes: 10, 11, 12 (circled), 10, 12, 10, 12, 10, 12, 10, 12, 10, 11, 12, 11, 10, 12, 14, 12, x, 14, x. The bottom staff (GTR. 1) has a measure starting with a barre at the 0th fret (labeled '0'), followed by a sequence of notes: 5, 4, 5, 5, 0, 0, 0, 0, 5, 7, 7, 5, 7, 7, 5, 5, 5. The notes are connected by lines indicating they are played together or in sequence. The '113' and '7/11' are likely fret numbers and a slash indicating a barre. The 'x' marks indicate natural harmonics.

E7 F#7 G7 G#7
 117 15 14 12 16 15 (15) 13 14 15 14 13 (13) 14 13 14 12 14 14 12 (12) 14 12
 GTR. 4
 P.M. let ring ———— let ring ————
 GTR. 1
 0 0 1 (1) 3 0 0 2 (3 2) (4 3 3) (5 4 4)

121

A7 N.C. Gsus2 (clean tone)

Gtr. 5

Gtr. 4

Gtr. 1

14 14 12 12-x 9 10 7 9\7 5 7 7 5/6 7 4 5 2 4 1 3 0 7\5 3 5 5 3 4

5 5 5 3

G 4th Guitar Solo (1:53)

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see bar 53)
Gtr. 5

GTR.5

GTR. 4

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

GTR.5

GTR.5

GTR.5

GTR.5

GTR. 4

GTR.5

*Push down on string behind nut or w/B Bender.

GTR. 4

149 *+1 (hold bend)* *+1* *+1* *1* *1/2*

GTR.5

The first staff of music shows the beginning of the piece. It starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F4, then a quarter note E4, and finally a quarter note D4. A slur covers the first four notes, with a '3' underneath indicating a triplet. The staff is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

GTR.1

[illegible]

Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

GTR. 4

157 Gtr. 4

7/9 7 10 (7) 1

let ring

10 (10) 10 X 9 (9) 1/2 (9)

GTR.1

The first system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' consists of three measures. The first measure contains a quarter note with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a time signature of 4/4. The note is labeled with the number 10. The second measure contains a quarter note with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a time signature of 4/4. The note is labeled with the number 11. The third measure contains a quarter note with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a time signature of 4/4. The note is labeled with the number 12. The system ends with a double bar line.

Gtr. 4

GTR. 4

Gr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 simile (see bar 149)
Grtr. 4

161 13/14 12-14/16 14-15/17 17-17 16-16 16-16 14-17 17-17 17-14 17-14 17-17 14-14 17-17 14-14 17-17 14-14 17-17 14-14 17-17 14-14

TRANSCRIPTIONS

GTR. 4

Gsus2

GTR. 4

J **Outro** (2:47)

Freely

GTR.1

GTR.2**GTR.3**

Bass

GTR.1

GTR. 2

GTR.3

(trem. pick)

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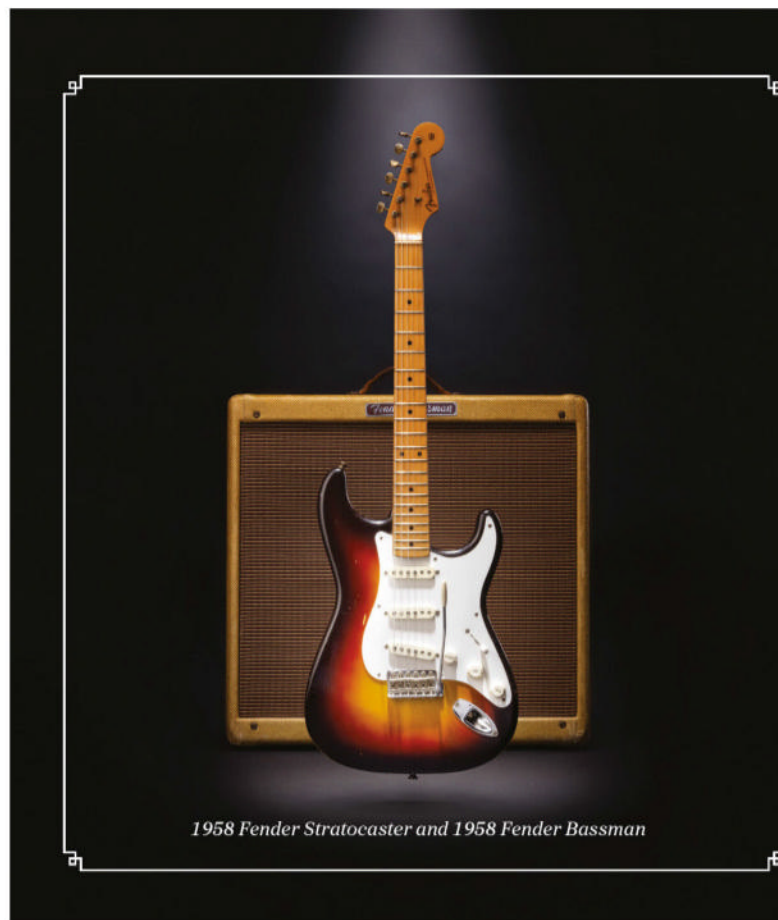


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POWER TOOLS

DeArmond

Tremolo Control

1946 through circa mid-1960s

CATEGORY: TREMOLO EFFECT

BY CHRIS GILL

 **THE ELECTRIC GUITAR** was still in its infancy when guitarists and electrical engineers sought new ways to make the instrument sound different than an acoustic guitar ever could. Only a few years after the first guitar amps emerged, foot pedals appeared that allowed players to manually adjust volume and tone settings while performing. However, the very first outboard device that provided a truly new sound effect was the DeArmond Model 60 Tremolo Control unit and its big brother, the Model 800 Trem-Trol volume/tremolo pedal, which DeArmond introduced during the late Forties. DeArmond actually planned on introducing the Tremolo Control as far back as 1941 as an effect device for electric organs and early electric pianos, but parts and materials shortages during World War II delayed its debut.

Even though tremolo became a built-in feature of many combo amps (usually on models designed for accordion players) shortly after these DeArmond effects came out, the Model 60 and Model 800 both enjoyed a pretty long and successful lifespan until the late Fifties, mainly thanks to guitarists who were more enthusiastic about the device than keyboard or accordion players. During the early Sixties, DeArmond replaced the Model 60 with the 60B, which was enclosed in a less-costly plastic housing and featured push-button on/off switches for selecting the straight instrument signal or the tremolo effect.

The most fascinating element of the DeArmond unit's design is that the tremolo effect (volume/amplitude modulation) is created

Billy Gibbons often plays through two at once for a psychedelic stereo effect



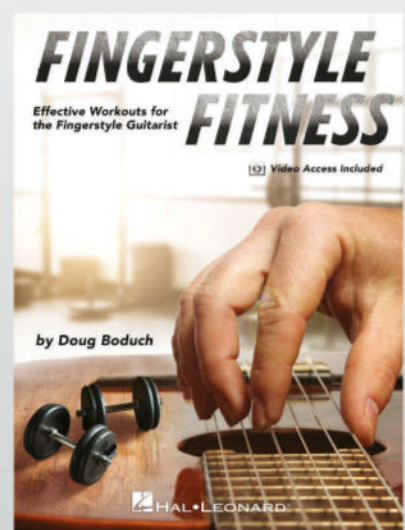
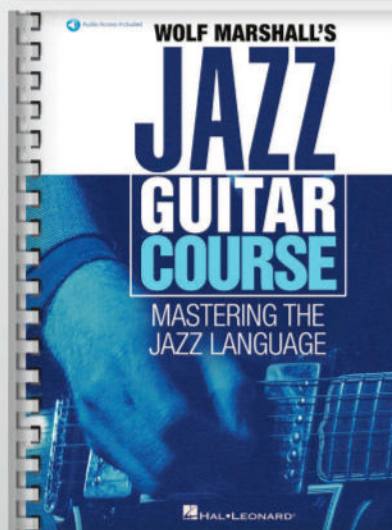
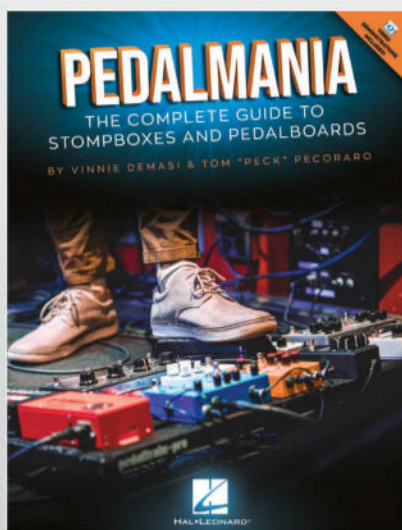
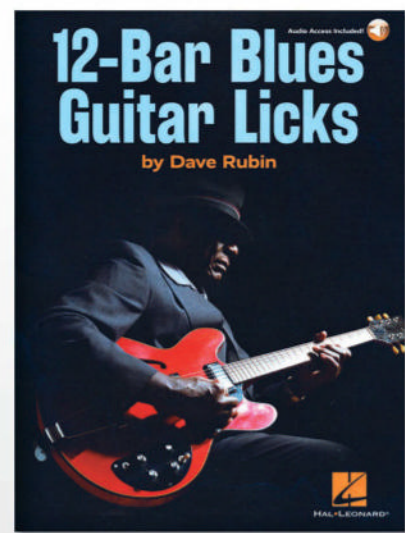
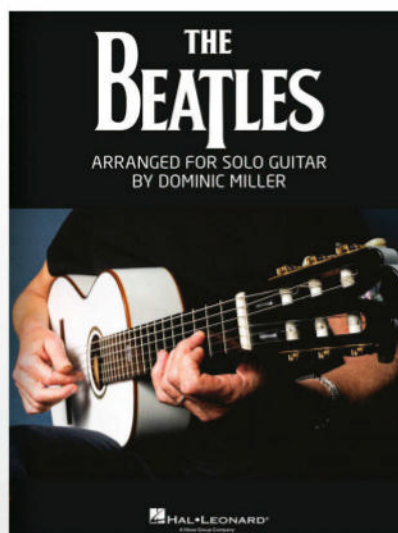
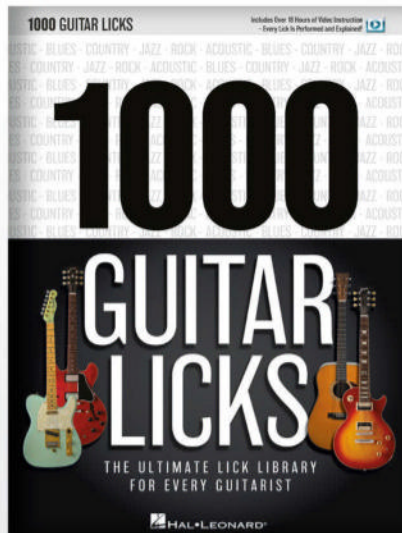
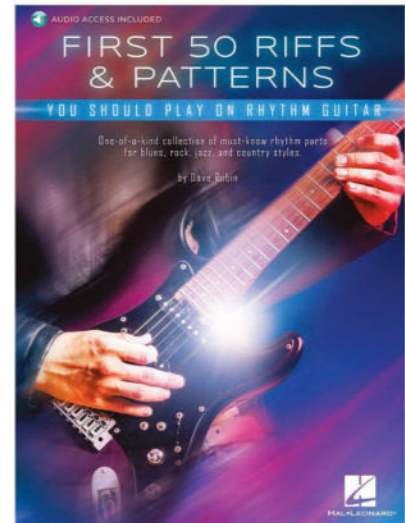
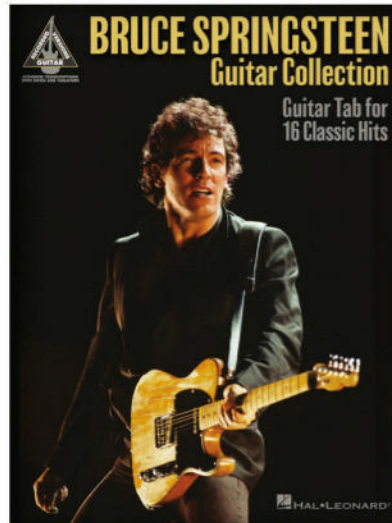
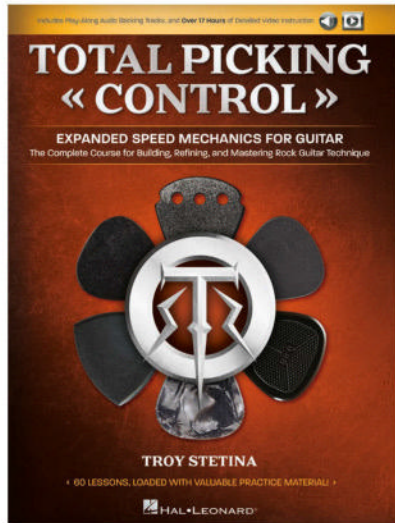
purely by electro-mechanical means instead of an electrical circuit. The interior components are a steampunk wonderland of spindles, rubber flywheels, a motor, pendulum arm and a small canister filled with conductive electrolytic liquid (Windex is an ideal substitute for replacing the original fluid that has evaporated). The motor shakes the canister back and forth causing the amount of signal reaching the output to fluctuate, creating a very organic-sounding tremolo effect. The flywheel and gears allow users to adjust the effect's speed via the Rate/Speed control, and a separate control potentiometer adjusts the effect's depth/intensity.

The shark-shaped Model 800, which is longer and bulkier than an average wah pedal, is probably the most "pedalboard friendly" model of the three variations, although the only way to bypass the tremolo effect is via a slider switch on the side. Modern players who want a stomp box-style means of experiencing the vintage mojo of the Model 60 or 60B can incorporate these units in their rigs via a loop switcher.

Only a handful of classic recordings featuring the DeArmond Tremolo can be verified, but they are quite influential. The first known instance is Muddy Waters 1953 Chess recording of "Flood." Later, during the mid-to-late-Fifties, Bo Diddley and Duane Eddy used their DeArmond Tremolo effects frequently, including on the hit singles "Bo Diddley" and "Rebel Rouser," respectively. A gray 60B unit made a notable appearance during the late Sixties on stage with Canned Heat at the Woodstock Festival ("Rollin' Blues" and "On the Road Again").

Although the DeArmond Tremolo became forgotten by the Seventies after it was discontinued, players like Ry Cooder and Billy Gibbons revived its cult status during the Eighties and Nineties, respectively. Gibbons has used his DeArmond Tremolo effects frequently on ZZ Top albums starting with *Rhythmeen* in 1996, and he often plays through two at once for a psychedelic, unsynchronized stereo tremolo effect on stage. **GW**

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