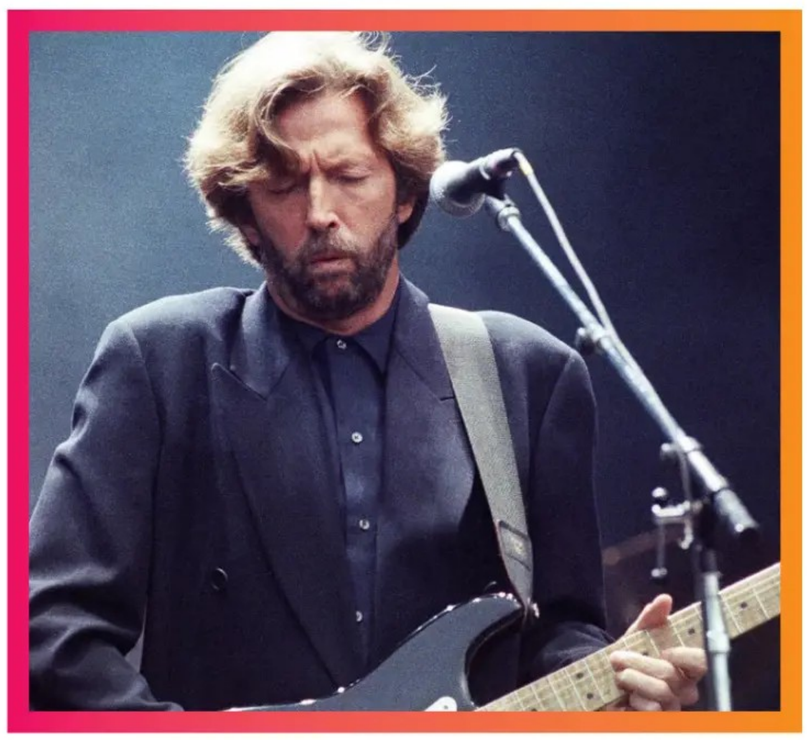
RIFF ROYALTY, SUPERSTAR SHREDDERS AND TONE TITANS!

GUITAR WORLD ICONS







FEATURING

ERIC CLAPTON PAUL MCCARTNEY
TONY IOMMI DAVID BOWIE PRINCE
SANTANA RITCHIE BLACKMORE
MARC BOLAN SRV SLASH
EDDIE VAN HALEN JOAN JETT
DIMEBAG DARRELL POISON IVY
STEVE VAI TOM MORELLO & MORE











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FUTURE
FIRST EDITION



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Welcome

WHAT MAKES A *GW* icon? Inside this special-edition bookazine, we explore the iconic artists, works and gear that have shaped the guitar world. Celebrate innovative game-changers who re-wrote the rules, from amplified blues pioneers to heavy metal masters and superstar shredders. Examine influential virtuosos who inspired and nurtured new talent. Probe into players who took risks and revolutionized the riff and delve deep into their creative processes, signature sounds and soloing secrets. And, if that's not enough, we provide you with step-by-step lessons so you can learn how to emulate the guitar greats, from Paul McCartney's two finger technique (p19) and Eddie Van Halen's speed-shredding secrets (p58) to Steve Vai's Lydian licks (p60) and the best of Dimebag Darrell's legendary *GW* column, Riffer Madness. But it's not just the guitarists that remain icons in our realm, and it wouldn't be *GW* without paying tribute to the instruments themselves. We take a deep dive into the origins and evolution of Eddie Van Halen's legendary Frankenstein (p100), investigate Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page's shared 1959 Fender Telecaster (p120), salute the mighty Gibson SG (p124) and pay homage to its predecessor, the Les Paul Standard – one of which we help Slash search for at the amazing Norman's Rare Guitars in Tarzana, California (p110). Enjoy!

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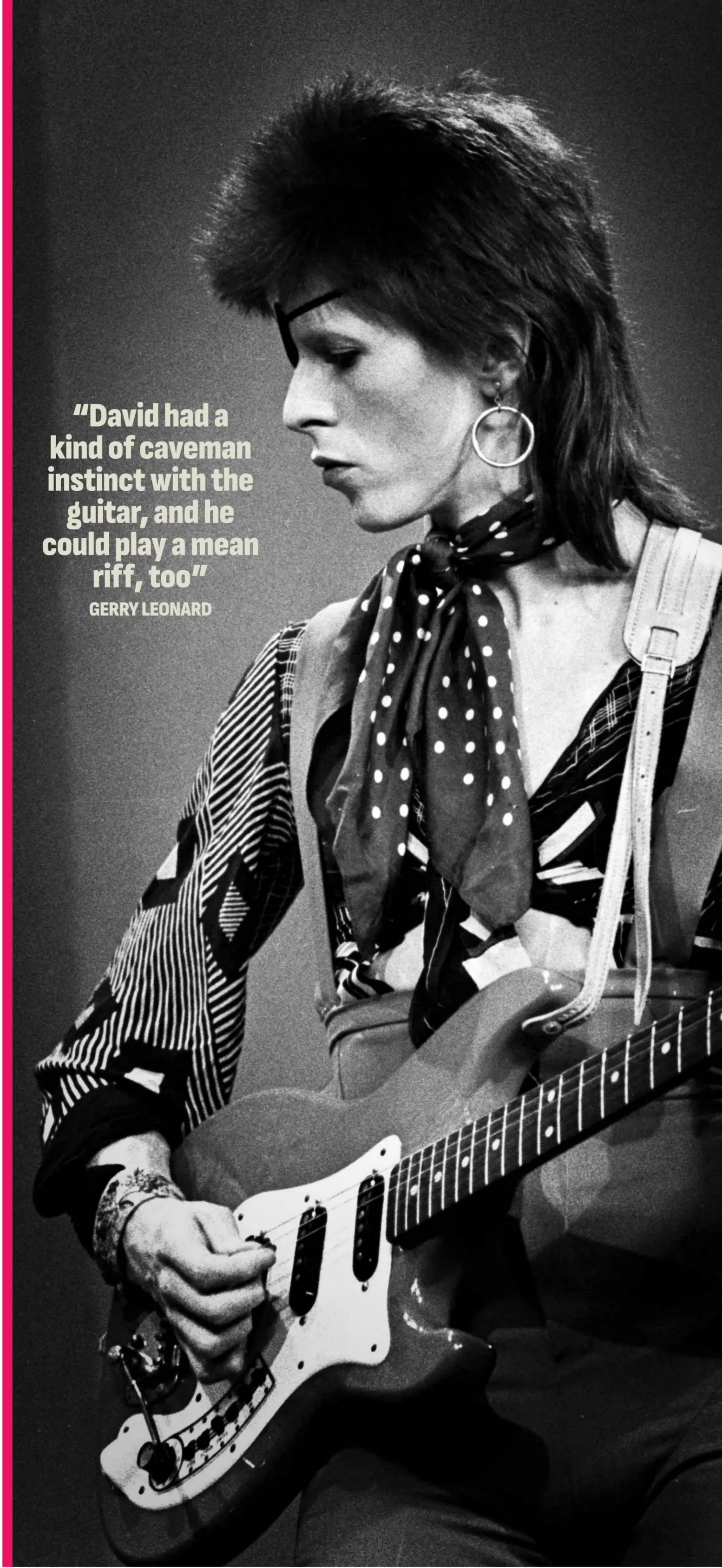

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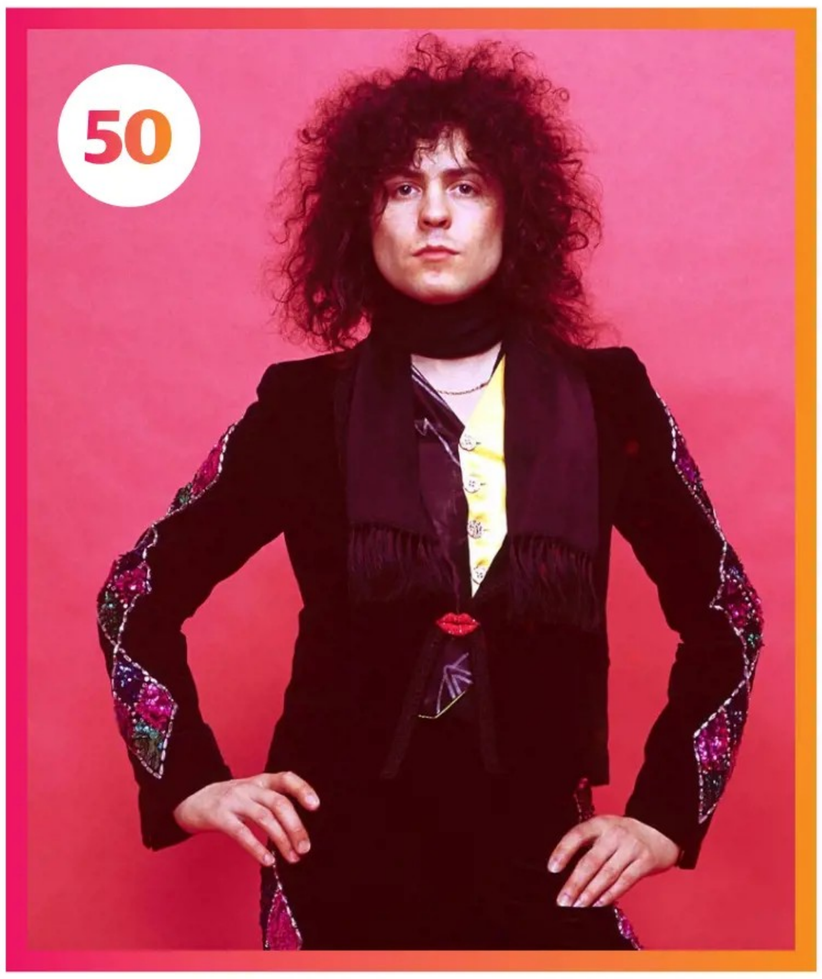
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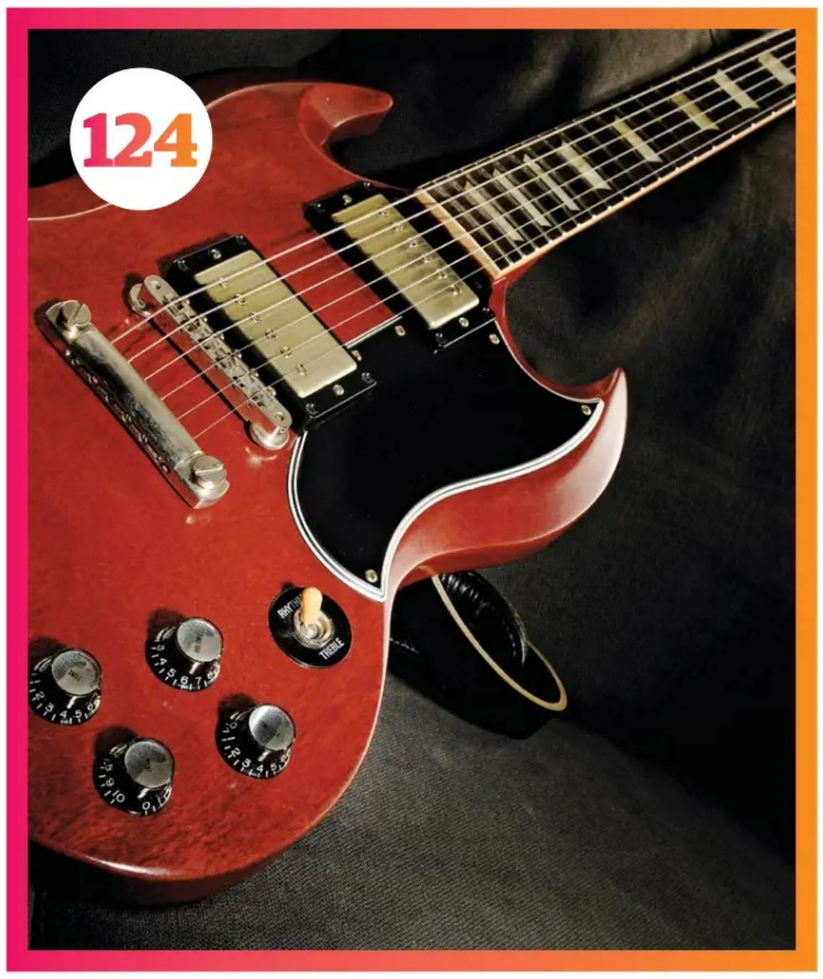
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A 'BURST OF ENERGY

Eric Clapton

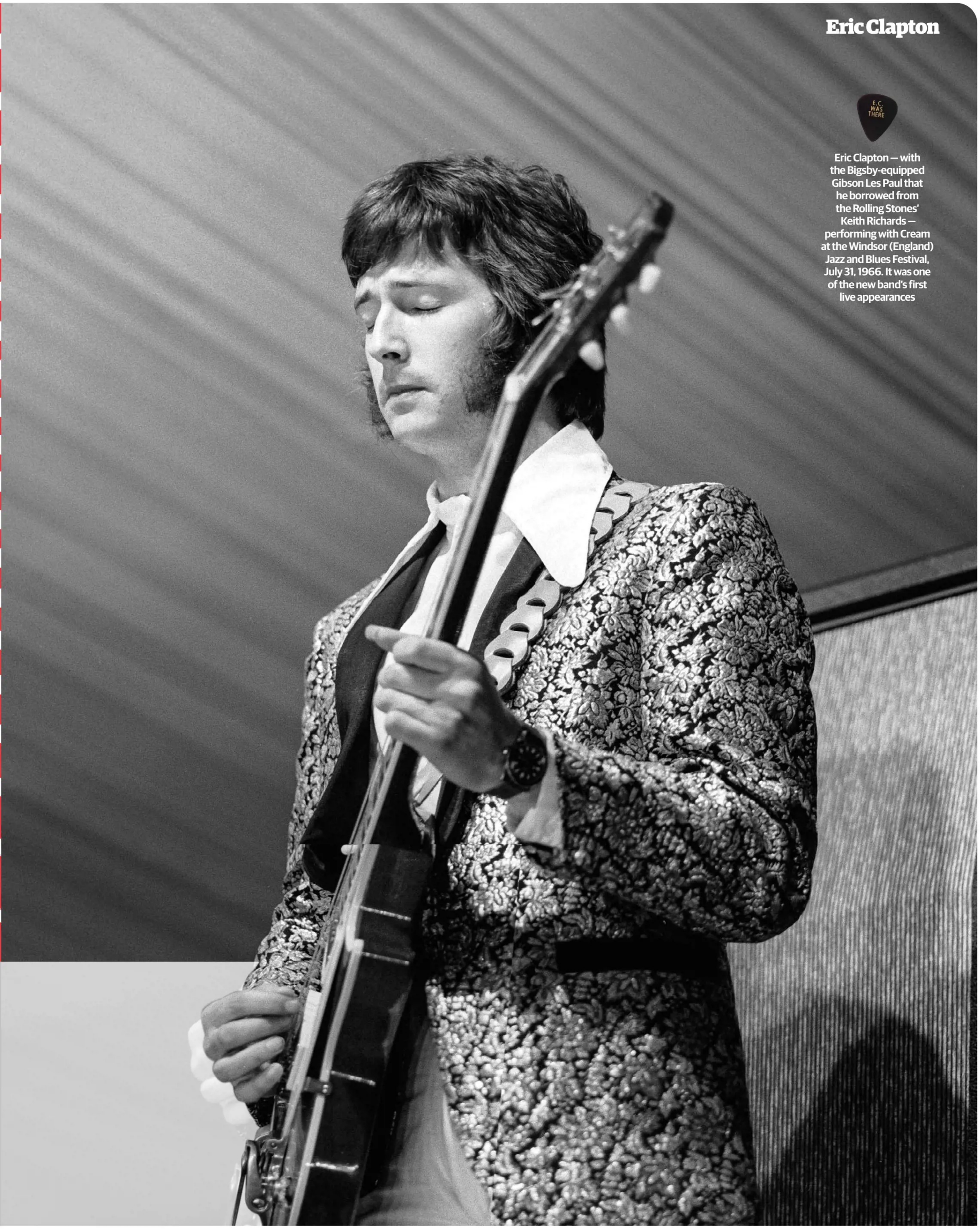
INVENTS THE MODERN ELECTRIC GUITAR SOUND AND FOREVER CHANGES HOW WE ALL PLAY GUITAR

By DAVID SINCLAIR

IT IS DIFFICULT, in retrospect, to convey the impact that Eric Clapton had on the world of electric guitar playing in 1966. For one thing, Clapton himself has spent most of his career since 1970 in denial about his achievements in revolutionizing the sound and status of the instrument, and he has been only too happy to let the spotlight fall instead on those who followed in his footsteps, including Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page and too many others to count. But even allowing for Clapton's latter-day reticence, it takes a supreme effort of either memory or imagination to fully appreciate how different the state and sound of electric guitar playing was prior to the release of John Mayall's *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton* in 1966.

The prototype guitar heroes of the Fifties and early Sixties were either moody types such as Link Wray and Duane Eddy, or bands like the Ventures and, in the U.K., the Shadows, whose guitar star was the clean-cut Hank Marvin. What they shared was a guitar sound that seemed to have been recorded at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Layers of echo and reverb were added to a precise plectrum and fingering style that placed the ability to conjure a haunting melody cloaked in a deep, twanging tone above all other considerations. Clear enunciation of individual notes played cleanly in tandem with a deft tremolo bar technique was central to the sound of records ranging from

DAVID REDFERN/ REDFERNS



Eric Clapton — with the Bigsby-equipped Gibson Les Paul that he borrowed from the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards — performing with Cream at the Windsor (England) Jazz and Blues Festival, July 31, 1966. It was one of the new band's first live appearances



On May 17, 1964, the Yardbirds unexpectantly showed up at Lord Willis' house in Kent, England, for reasons that must have mattered to someone a very long time ago; [from left] Eric Clapton — with his pre-John Mayall Fender-and-Vox setup, Lady Willis, Yardbirds drummer Jim McCarty and guitarist Chris Dreja, wh0's sitting on his own Vox AC30

TOMMY LEA/DAILY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY IMAGES



Wray's "Rumble" to any number of Shadows hits, from "Apache" to "Man of Mystery."

As the new wave of beat groups got into their stride, particularly in the U.K., guitarists became emboldened and started to take a more unfettered approach, often informed by the stylings of the original American blues guitarists. Brian Jones supplied a loud, super-aggressive slide guitar part to the front of the Rolling Stones' "I Wanna Be Your Man." Dave Davies offered a raw, runaway solo on the Kinks' first hit, "You Really Got Me." Pete Townshend introduced some startling feedback effects on the Who's "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere." Jeff Beck layered experimental, Eastern-sounding, psychedelic solos across the Yardbirds hit "Shapes of Things" and its B-side, "You're a Better Man Than I." But none of these early outliers had truly captured what a full-blown, modern electric guitar sound could be — or was about to become.

Clapton, meanwhile, had been not-so-quietly working up to his *piece de resistance* for some time. As the guitarist in the Yardbirds from 1963 to 1965, he gained a cult following that was out of proportion to the traditional status of a non-frontman musician in a band. This was thanks in part to his cool fashion sense and stage presence, but in even larger part to his incendiary soloing skills. The band's debut album, *Five Live Yardbirds*, released in the U.K. in December 1964, was both a blueprint and a harbinger of what was to come.

A raw, scrappy, low-budget production, *Five Live Yardbirds* was recorded without fuss or fanfare at one of the band's regular shows at the Marquee Club in London on March 20, 1964. It was notable for many things; the incredible energy of the performance was evident from the opening surge of Chuck Berry's "Too Much Monkey Business," in which Clapton and bass player Paul Samwell-Smith engage in a whirling, skirling, insanely propulsive blast of soloing that had a foretaste of the punk aesthetic about it. Clapton's developing skill as a soloist was clearly on display throughout numbers such as Eddie Boyd's slow blues "Five Long Years" and a rip-roaring take on John Lee Hooker's "Louise."

ONE THING *FIVE LIVE YARDBIRDS* DID NOT POSSESS WAS ANYTHING REMOTELY RESEMBLING A MODERN LEAD GUITAR SOUND. THAT WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE...





The recording also captured several extended improvised passages — what the band referred to as their "rave-ups" — in songs such as Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightning" and a ragged version of Bo Diddley's call-and-response epic "Here 'Tis," in which Samwell-Smith and Clapton performed a high-speed duel amid a closing sequence of indistinct aural mayhem from band and audience alike. These rave-ups were quite unlike anything that any other "pop" or beat bands of the pre-rock era had committed to tape and were a precursor of the working practices that Clapton would later pursue with monumental results in Cream.

What *Five Live Yardbirds* did *not* possess was anything remotely resembling a modern lead guitar sound. Throughout his tenure with the Yardbirds, Clapton mostly played a red Fender Telecaster through a Vox AC30. The sound this produced, although perfectly acceptable for the period, was comparatively thin and trebly with virtually no sustain. Clapton continued to use the Telecaster when he initially joined John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in April 1965. But the following month he bought a sunburst 1960 Gibson Les Paul Standard with humbucking pickups, which turned out to be a game-changer. This instrument, which became known as "the Beano Burst" after the nickname of the album he recorded with the Bluesbreakers the following year (Clapton is reading a *Beano* comic in the cover photo), has acquired a mythical status in the guitar world — not least because it was stolen soon after Clapton joined Cream in 1966 and has since vanished into a swirling mist of rumors as to its whereabouts, rumors that continue to surface to this day.

"The Les Paul has two pickups, one at the end of the neck, giving the guitar a kind of round jazz sound, and the other next to the bridge giving you the treble," Clapton explained in his 2007 autobiography. "What I would do was use the bridge pickup with all of the bass turned up, so the sound was very thick and on the edge of distortion. I also used amps that would overload. I would have the amp on full and I would have the volume on the guitar also turned up full, so everything was on full volume and overloading. I would hit a note, hold it and give it some vibrato with my fingers until it sustained and then the distortion would turn into feedback. It was all of these things, plus the distortion, that created what I suppose you could call 'my sound.'"

While the heavy, humbucking resonance of the Les Paul was key to the overall sound, so too was the new Marshall amplification that Clapton also bought into at this time. A small, innovative business run by Jim Marshall, an ex-drummer, the company was at that time based in Hanwell, West London, from where Clapton acquired a Marshall model 1962 2x12 combo based on the JTM45 design. This new setup produced a much fuller, more powerful sound than his Tele-and-Vox combo, and even before the release of the *Beano* album, it was clear something special was in the air.

Mayall's Bluesbreakers didn't tour, exactly; they simply played six or seven nights a week as a matter of course. "We were paid £35 a week," Clapton recalled. "It was a set wage no matter how much work you did. The idea was that you would play a gig, and when you were done you might have to play again that night. A not un-typical night might involve travelling up to Sheffield to play the evening gig at eight o'clock, then heading off to Manchester to play the all-nighter, followed by driving back to London and being dropped off at Charing Cross station at six in the morning."

It is not altogether clear when the graffiti proclaiming that "Clapton is God" started to appear on the streets of London. But the equipment overhaul and the intense gigging schedule had clearly elevated the guitarist into an exalted zone as a performer. There is a live recording of the Bluesbreakers playing "Call It Stormy Monday" at the Flamingo Club on March 17, 1966 — two weeks before Clapton's 21st birthday and a month before the *Beano* album was recorded — that has been hailed by several commentators as one of the best blues guitar solos ever. Clapton's tone, along with the outrageous timing and aggressive phrasing on this recording, is little short of supernatural. Nashville guitar great Kenny Vaughan [*Marty Stuart & His Fabu-*

lous Superlatives] spoke for many when he called it "just the most wicked-ass... frantic, most intense guitar solo you ever heard on a blues in your life."

It sounds phenomenal in every department — even today. But imagine how it must have sounded to the guy who had just wandered into the bohemian neighborhood of nightclubs, strip joints and coffee bars on Wardour Street in 1966 and happened to hear that solo. It must have been like hearing music from another planet.

Against the odds, the *Beano* album caught something of the thrill of that moment in time, making it one of the most successful exercises in the art of capturing lightning in a bottle yet undertaken in the modern recording era.

"We went into the Decca studios in West Hampstead for three days in April [*1966*] and played exactly the set we did on stage, with the addition of a horn section on some of the tracks," Clapton said. "Because the album was recorded so quickly, it had a raw, edgy quality about it which made it special. It was almost like a live performance. I insisted on having the mic exactly where I wanted it to be during the recording, which was not too close to my amplifier, so that I could play through it and get the same sound as I had on stage."

That was all very well for Clapton. But for producer Mike Vernon and engineer Gus Dudgeon, it wasn't quite that simple, as Mayall recounted in his 2019 autobiography. "I recall that the engineer, Gus Dudgeon, was horrified that Eric was intending to play through his Marshall amp at full volume," Mayall said. "This simply wasn't the acceptable way to do things in 1966. However, Eric stood his ground, refusing to turn his amp down. Mike Vernon had to mediate in order for us to start."

"It took a while to get a sound that everybody was happy with, especially Eric, but everybody had to take on board that we were going into an unknown era," Vernon told Harry Shapiro in 2011. "Nobody in Decca studios had ever witnessed somebody coming into the studio, setting up their guitar and amp and playing at that volume. People in the canteen behind the studio were complaining about the noise. Normally they'd never hear it, but this was travelling around the studio complex. People were saying, 'What the bloody hell is that?!' and coming to see what was going on."

The resulting album — *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton* by John Mayall — marked Year Zero for the modern electric guitar sound. Clapton's tone was nothing short of revolutionary and, harnessed to the skill and visceral emotional quality of his solos (especially on slow numbers "Have You Heard" and "Double Crossing Time"), produced an effect of a different magnitude to anything that had gone before. Kudos to Mayall for assembling a great collection of new and traditional blues songs and stamping his singular English mark on them. And respect to the fine rhythm section of John McVie (bass) and Hughie Flint (drums). But this album was all about Clapton using his Gibson/Marshall setup to redefine the sonic and technical norms of electric guitar playing.

Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton ushered in a new era, not just in the playing of music but also the marketing of it. It was released July 22, 1966, with little fanfare and promptly rose to Number 6 in the U.K. albums chart. This was unheard of for an act that had enjoyed no previous success in the singles chart whatsoever, and its unexpected yet emphatic progress was a key moment in the process whereby albums started to take over from singles as the barometer of a band's success.

With its revolutionary guitar sound and compelling spiritual vigor derived largely from the musicians' deep love and knowledge of American blues forms, the impact of the album was nothing short of seismic on many levels. A generation of guitarists received the wake-up call of their careers, and within a year the British Blues Boom would be in full swing. More than that, it was effectively the first "rock" album.

"When we heard the *Beano* album, that was like... Nobody had ever heard a guitar sound like that," Kenny Vaughan said. "Johnny 'Guitar' Watson records from the 1950s had some wicked-ass sounds. And, of course, Guitar Slim and Earl King — they both had great sounds. And Link Wray had a brash, rude sound. But they weren't like that. Nobody had that Eric Clapton sound on that record."

Nobody had it — and now everybody wanted it. Unfortunately for Mayall, by the time the *Beano* album was released, Clapton had already left the group. Ever the pragmatist, Mayall immediately recruited Peter Green to replace him and continued his eight-days-a-week schedule playing to ever-expanding audiences. Clapton, meanwhile, had embarked on another project that would further define the role of the modern guitar hero and redraw the boundaries of the rock genre he had already done so much to invent.

Cream were the first power/guitar trio and the first group of any kind to bring a flamboyantly virtuoso musical technique to bear on the traditionally basic structures of popular music. Drummer Ginger Baker and bass player/vocalist/harmonica man Jack Bruce were highly evolved musicians with backgrounds in jazz, where the impulse to experiment and improvise at length was taken as part of the basic motivation for performing. To play with musicians like these gave Clapton an opportunity to deploy his technique to its full extent and explore musical avenues that took him far beyond the confines of performing in a regular band. Cream were a short-lived and volatile combination of individuals, but it's worth remembering the spirit of optimism that brought the group together. "Musically we are idealistic," Clapton told music journalist Penny Valentine in July 1967. "When I first met Ginger and Jack I realized they were the only two musicians I could ever play with."

A GENERATION OF GUITARISTS RECEIVED THE WAKE-UP CALL OF THEIR CAREERS, AND WITHIN A YEAR, THE BRITISH BLUES BOOM WOULD BE IN FULL SWING





Cream played their first gig at the Twisted Wheel in Manchester on July 29, 1966, the night before England won the World Cup, and the trio's first album, *Fresh Cream*, was released just five months later on December 9. The chronology of the 1960s gets a bit hazy after all this time, but it is worth noting that Jimi Hendrix released his first single, "Hey Joe," one week *after Fresh Cream*. Indeed, when Hendrix's manager Chas Chandler was trying to persuade Hendrix to move from New York to London, one of Chandler's key bargaining chips was to promise that once they were in London, he would arrange for Hendrix to see his hero, Eric Clapton, playing with Cream. It was perhaps no coincidence that Hendrix also elected to form a trio as opposed to a conventional four-man band on his arrival in London.

With *Fresh Cream*, Clapton further extended the range of sounds

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS



Cream perform "I Feel Free," a Fresh Cream track, on Top of the Pops in London, January 25, 1967; [from left] Jack Bruce (playing a Fender Bass VI), Ginger Baker and Clapton (playing what is commonly called the Fresh Cream 'Burst)

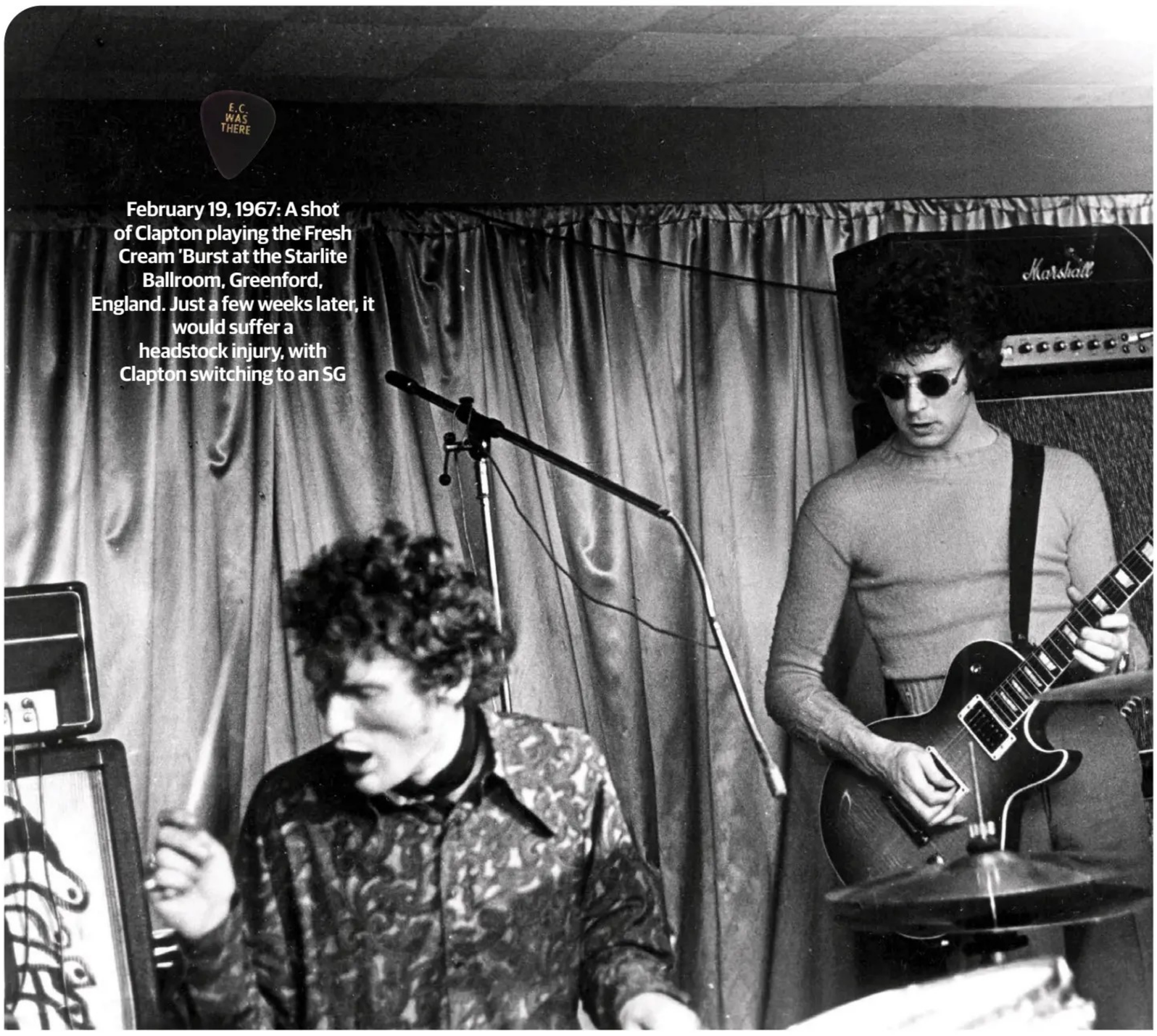
and musical sensibilities available to the modern guitar hero. On "Sweet Wine," he constructed a latticework of interlocking guitar lines — some of them little more than wails of feedback, others hauntingly melodic — to create a passage that was more of a soundscape than a guitar solo. He developed an extraordinary sense of narrative in his solos — which even on the extemporized blues rumble of "Spoonful" or the two-chord chant of "I'm So Glad" seemed to hang together as if they were totally spontaneous and carefully structured at the same time.

As they toured America, the trio's facility for improvising around a commonly understood framework became ever more finely developed. They played many times at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, where promoter Bill Graham gave them *carte blanche* to play for as long and as loud as they liked, even if the show went on until the crack of dawn the next day.

"It was very liberating," Clapton recalled. "We'd go off in our own directions, but sometimes we would hit these coincidental points... and we would jam on it for a little while and then go back into our own thing. I had never experienced anything like it. It was nothing to do with lyrics or ideas; it was much deeper, something purely musical. We were at our peak during that period."

This semi-improvised approach led to one of the most celebrated guitar solos of all time, in the shape of the comparatively concise and structured live version of "Crossroads" recorded on March 10, 1968, on a mobile studio parked outside the group's gig at the 5,400-capacity Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco, and first presented to the wider world as the opening track on the live disc of the double-album *Wheels of Fire*, released on August 9 of that year in the U.K. (June 14 in the U.S.).

Clapton's phrasing, timing and choice of notes on this version was sensational, as he started in a low register and gradually climbed



February 19, 1967: A shot of Clapton playing the Fresh Cream 'Burst at the Starlite Ballroom, Greenford, England. Just a few weeks later, it would suffer a headstock injury, with Clapton switching to an SG

over two verses building tension and excitement. After another verse of vocals ("Going down to Rosedale..."), he came back in for a second stretch of solos, doubling the intensity in all departments for another three verses. Never repeating himself or losing his way through the intense three-way wrestling match going on between the guitar, bass and drums, he pulled out a succession of soaring blues licks and double-stop bends to create a thrilling climax that was both super-aggressive and intensely focused. In the many polls, lists and tabulations of Clapton's greatest guitar solos, this is the one that invariably comes out at the top.

Surprisingly, by modern standards, all the sound of the guitar (and the bass, for that matter) at Cream's shows was generated from the back line. None of the speakers for the instruments was miked up and put through the PA, even in venues of 5,000 capacity or more. The PA systems of the time were still unbelievably rudimentary; a couple of WEM columns or a Marshall 200-watt system for the vocal mics and maybe a couple of overhead mics for the drums was considered sufficient for a gig at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

The incredible sound that Clapton got with Cream (as with Mayall before that) was a function of the outrageous volume at which he played his Gibsons, which were usually either the 1964 SG Standard affectionately known as "The Fool," a '63/'65 one-pickup Firebird 1 or a '64 ES-335. He generally used two 100-watt Marshall stacks, each comprising a model 1959 100-watt head, a model 1960 angled 4x12 cabinet and a model 1960B flat-fronted 4x12 cabinet. "I set them full on everything," Clapton told *Rolling Stone* in 1967. "Full treble, full bass and full presence, same with the controls on the guitar. If you've got the amp and guitar full, there is so much volume that you can get it 100 miles away and it's going to feedback — the sustaining effect — and anywhere in the vicinity it's going to feedback."

Clapton gradually introduced various pedals into his setup. He was the first "name" guitarist to release a track featuring a wah pedal — the Vox V846 (later reissued as the Clyde McCoy) — which he used on "Tales of Brave Ulysses," released as a U.K. B-side to "Strange Brew" in June 1967. Although Hendrix ultimately made much more extensive use of the wah and did far more to popularize it, his first use of the pedal wasn't heard on record until "Burning of the Midnight Lamp," a U.K. single released in August 1967. Clapton also used a Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face, notably to beef up the iconic riff of "Sunshine of Your Love" and to add extra saturation and sustain to his sound on "White Room" and others. He used other pedals and effects — including the revolving (Leslie) speaker sound heard on "Badge" — but often his amp and guitar settings, combined with his extraordinary touch, were all it took to generate a specific sound, such as the high, pure "woman" tone he conjured on "Outside Woman Blues" and others.

The huge popularity and acclaim that greeted Clapton and Cream inspired a transformation in popular music on many levels. The sheer volume at which they played and the heavy, riff-based style of songwriting they developed paved the way for Black Sabbath and Deep Purple — both founded in 1968 — and the subsequent birth of heavy metal. And Cream's fondness for improvising unleashed a tsunami of extended jamming among the heroes of the heavy rock genre they had done so much to create. It's hardly an exaggeration to say that by their example Cream transformed a concert and record industry previously dominated by the three- or four-minute song structure into a world where long-form improvisation and instrumental free-for-alls became commonplace, if not the norm.

Hendrix certainly took it as the model for his live performances, as did Led Zeppelin — who, of course, started life as the New Yardbirds and thereby carried forward the legacy of the original Clapton rave-ups that got the ball rolling in the first place. And over the next few years bands such as Ten Years After (at Woodstock), Mountain, Humble Pie and many others piled in with ever more extravagant performances that trod an increasingly erratic line between grand musical visions and wanton grandiloquence. In 1968 Canned Heat filled two sides of their double-album *Living the Blues* with one track, "Refried Boogie," a 40-minute epic of non-stop noodling and nebulosity.

"CLAPTON WAS THE FIRST "NAME" GUITARIST TO RELEASE A TRACK FEATURING A WAH PEDAL — THE VOX V846 — WHICH HE USED ON "TALES OF BRAVE ULYSSES"





MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT) MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT)

It all got to be a bit too much for Clapton. He was particularly affected by a negative review of a Cream show in *Rolling Stone* by Jon Landau, who described the band as "three virtuosos romping through their bag... always in a one-dimensional style" and Clapton as "a master of the blues clichés of all of the post-World War II blues guitarists."

"And it was true!" Clapton said later. "The ring of truth just knocked me backward."

By that point, Clapton had been performing for many years at a level of intensity that had become impossible to maintain. There was an emotional cost to digging so deep into his reserves of musical creativity night after night, not to mention the physical toll of doing so at such punishingly high volumes.

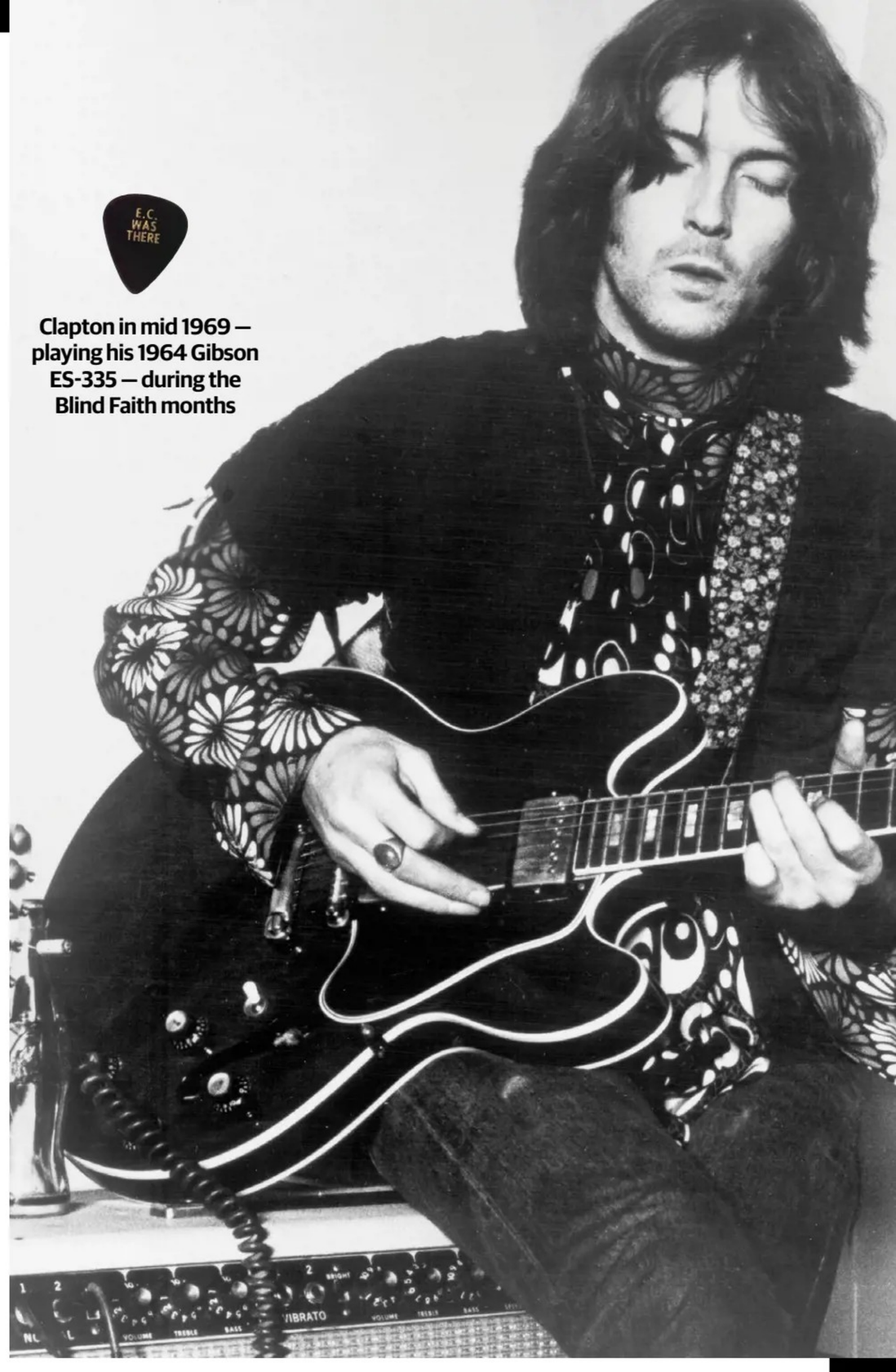
"When you're in your mid-20s you've got something that you lose," Clapton reflected in an interview with *Q* magazine in 1986. "If I was a sportsman I would have retired by now. You've just got a certain amount of dynamism that you lose when you turn 30. You have to accept that otherwise you're chasing a dream."

Looking back on that period much later, he recalled that, "There were times too when, playing to audiences who were only too happy to worship us, complacency set in. I began to be quite ashamed of being in Cream, because I thought it was a con. Musically I was fed up with the virtuoso thing. Our gigs had become nothing more than an excuse for us to show off as individuals, and any sense of unity we might have had when we started out seemed to have gone out of the window."

Clapton made one last roll of the guitar hero dice with the ill-fated supergroup Blind Faith, which came into being, recorded and released a U.S. and U.K. chart-topping album, headlined a massive show in Hyde Park, toured in Scandinavia and America and then split up — all between January and August 1969.

"I think just playing the guitar isn't enough," Clapton told *Rolling Stone* the following year. "If I was a great songwriter or a great singer, then I wouldn't be so humble about it. I wouldn't be shy."

So saying, Clapton very firmly stepped down from the pedestal onto which he had been reluctantly placed and turned his back on the world of rock virtuoso superstars he had been instrumental in creating. He (along with George Harrison) instead joined forces with Delaney & Bonnie Bramlett, a husband-and-wife duo from Los Angeles whose loose-knit band had supported Blind Faith on their tour of America. Delaney & Bonnie's soulful blend of Southern rock, blues and gospel music was a soothing balm to Clapton's troubled spirit.



Clapton in mid 1969 — playing his 1964 Gibson ES-335 — during the Blind Faith months

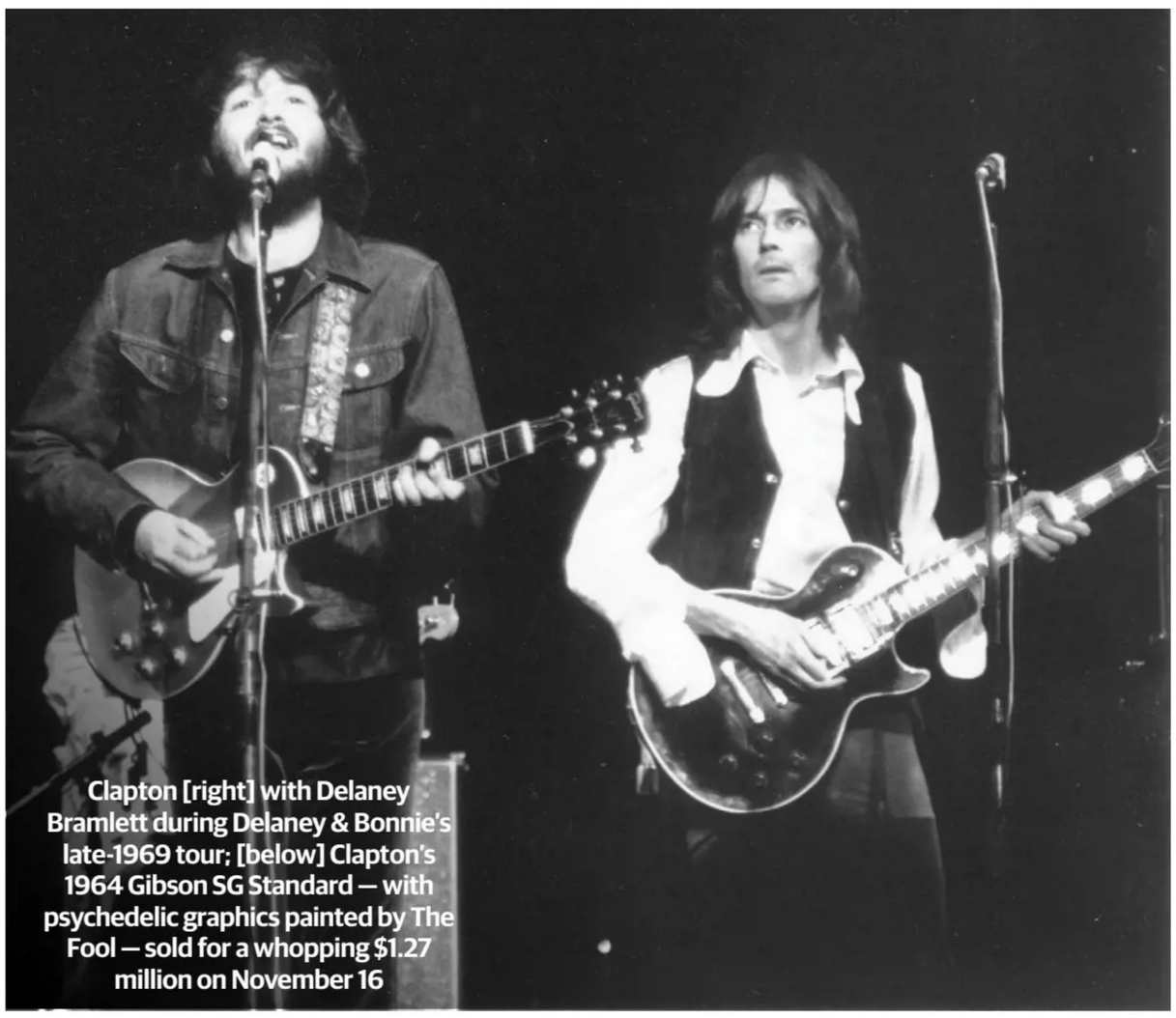
"You really have to start singing, and you ought to be leading your own band," Delaney told Clapton. "God has given you this gift, and if you don't use it he will take it away." Clapton took Delaney's advice to heart, and his subsequent campaign since the 1970s to reinvent himself has been so successful that as far as many casual observers of the rock world today are concerned, he is now regarded as a singer who also plays a bit of guitar.

And yet the influence that Clapton had, whether directly or indirectly, on just about every electric guitarist who followed him is undeniable. Just listen to Mick Taylor playing "Snowy Wood" on the Bluesbreakers' 1967 album *Crusade*. Or check out the incredible off-the-cuff recording of Eddie Van Halen conjuring a note-perfect recreation of Clapton's solo from "Crossroads" during a 1984 radio show called *The Inside Track*.

Then there's John Mayer's emotionally charged playing (and soulful singing) on "Gravity." Mayer once described Eric Clapton as his "musical father" and has often performed "Crossroads" in his live shows, while many latter-day guitarists ranging from Joe Bonamassa to Gary Clark Jr. have testified to Clapton's towering influence on their playing.

"Cream explored the outer reaches that three players could accomplish," said Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, another trio that emerged from under the long shadow of Clapton, Bruce and Baker. Gibbons nominated *Fresh Cream* as one of the albums that changed his life, no less, delivering his verdict on the group's sound with a typical Texas flourish: "Killer tones."

With thanks to Geoff Peel, London.



Clapton [right] with Delaney Bramlett during Delaney & Bonnie's late-1969 tour; [below] Clapton's 1964 Gibson SG Standard — with psychedelic graphics painted by The Fool — sold for a whopping $1.27 million on November 16

McCartney on Six Strings

He's one of the most celebrated bassists in rock history. But throughout the Beatles years, the guitar remained Paul McCartney's secret obsession

JOHN LENNON ONCE called the Beatles' "Ticket to Ride" "one of the earliest heavy metal records made." Try to imagine that song pumping through the house speakers before a Morbid Angel show, and you might conclude that Lennon's statement was a bit of a stretch. Still, the song's lumbering groove and droning riff were unusually heavy for 1965, especially within a pop landscape dominated by tracks like "Wooly Bully" and "Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter."

"Ticket to Ride" was groundbreaking for another reason, though; It was the first Beatles record to feature Paul McCartney on lead guitar. He'd quietly slipped some gentle acoustic strumming into "I'll Follow the Sun" the previous year, but "Ticket to Ride" was different. His electric leads enthusiastically leaped across the divides between the song's bridges and verses, then returned to playfully bob and weave throughout the outro, introducing listeners to a side of McCartney most fans barely realized existed.

"I guess I think of myself as a guitar player, really," he said in 1990. "If I couldn't have any other instrument, I would have to have an acoustic guitar."

To the general public, McCartney is, of course, all about that bass. Publications from *Rolling Stone* to *Bass Player* have routinely ranked him as one of the greatest bassists ever, and four-string giants like Flea, Geddy Lee, John Paul Jones, Chris Squire and Sting have extolled his inventive, melodic approach to the instrument.

So why in Mother Mary's name does he primarily identify as a guitarist? To answer that question, we need to head back to 1950s Liverpool, to the modest home on Forthlin Road where a teenage Paul McCartney's six-string obsession began.

Paul McCartney with a left-handed Fender Telecaster in 1982

CAMERA PRESS / CLIVE ARROWSMITH



McCartney with a most-likely borrowed nylon-string guitar in London in 1967

Home to Us

Music filled the McCartney household long before Paul ever touched a guitar. His father James was a skilled trumpeter and pianist who led Jim Mac's Jazz Band in the 1920s. An old photo of that group would eventually inspire the concept of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Family sing-alongs were common in the McCartney home, with Jim providing piano accompaniment as Paul's aunties grew progressively tipsier. "My dad was very musical, and I used to listen to a lot of what he did," the former Beatle told Steven Colbert. "I always think of it like my computer got loaded with a lot of data from all the songs I heard, and so when I finally came to write, I kind of printed it all out."

In the front room of the McCartney homestead stood an upright piano that Jim bought from a shop owned by the father of the Beatles' future manager, Brian Epstein. Jim initially encouraged Paul to take piano lessons, but like his dad, McCartney the Younger preferred learning by ear. He famously never learned music theory or note reading.

Paul's first guitar was a Framus Zenith 17 acoustic — a right-handed model that posed obvious problems for the left-handed teenager. Then he spotted a photo of country singer Slim Whitman playing a restrung guitar upside down. Following his example, McCartney reversed the strings on his instrument. Having already learned a few basic guitar chords from his school buddy Ian James, he set about teaching himself to play by slowing down records and copying what he heard.

When McCartney's mother Mary died of breast cancer in 1956, music became his sanctuary. In *The Macs*, his brother Mike remembered that when Paul picked up a guitar, "he would get lost in another world. It was useless talking to him. In fact, I had better conversations with brick walls around this period."

According to *The Beatles: All These Years*, McCartney often disappeared into the bathroom with his guitar. "The fine acoustics of the toilet area was always very appealing to me," he recalled. "Dad would shout, 'Paul, get off that toilet!' And I'd say, 'I'm practicing!'"

Rock Minors

The seeds of a worldwide musical revolution were sown inside a Liverpool school bus. There, two youngsters with guitars on their minds — McCartney and George Harrison — bonded over their shared love of rock 'n' roll.

"Eventually we made a guitar together," Paul later told *Uncut*. "It turned out more like a Hawaiian guitar."

The Future Fabs progressed as musicians by studying chord charts together and, as Harrison stated in *The Beatles: The Authorised Biography*, "pinching anything from any other lad who could do better." At one point, they even traveled by bus across Liverpool to meet a man who knew how to play a B7 chord.

"I think of myself as a guitar player, really. If I couldn't have any other instrument, I'd have a guitar"

Like Harrison, McCartney found inspiration in guitarists like Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and Carl Perkins. Outside of rock 'n' roll, country music virtuoso Chet Atkins sparked his interest in fingerpicking, while skiffle and folk players helped shape his rhythm guitar style.

"I was a bit of a magpie, really, picking up various styles and gradually assimilating them," McCartney told *Guitar World Acoustic* in 2007.

At age 15, McCartney impressed a 16-year-old John Lennon with his performances of Eddie Cochran's "Twenty Flight Rock," Gene Vincent's "Be-Bop-a-Lula" and a Little Richard medley. "He could obviously play the guitar," Lennon later said. "I half thought to myself, 'He's as good as me.'"

Before inviting McCartney to be the lead guitarist in his group, the Quarrymen, Lennon was playing banjo chords he'd learned from his mother Julia. As a lefty, McCartney provided a mirror image to Lennon while teaching him proper guitar chords. "It's funny; John learned upside down, too, because of me — because mine was the only other guitar around for him if he broke a string or he didn't have his," he told *Guitar Player*.

Even after persuading Lennon to make Harrison a member of the Quarrymen, McCartney continued to play guitar in the group until 1961. At that time, he and his bandmates, now known collectively as the Beatles, were putting in their proverbial 10,000 hours in Hamburg, Germany. When original bassist Stu Sutcliffe left the fold, it fell on Paul, the most versatile instrumentalist of the bunch, to fill the void.

"None of us wanted to be the bass player," he later admitted. "In our minds, it was the fat guy in the group who nearly always played the bass, and he stood at the back."

McCartney's background as a guitarist informed his bass playing, particularly as he and the band evolved. Rather than merely anchoring the rhythm, he chose notes — and, on occasion, bass chords — that complemented the vocals and guitars with melody and counterpoint, almost using the bass as a second lead instrument.

Still, even as the bass became his calling card and Beatlemania swept the planet, his love affair with the guitar was far from over.

Playing the Casino Card

Cut to late 1964, when a happy accident — or kismet — launched a wave of glorious feedback from John Lennon's amp at Abbey Road Studios. The Beatles, now the biggest band in the world, knew an epiphany when they heard it. The wasp-in-a-sitar buzz at the start of "I Feel Fine" became the first known recording of guitar feedback being deliberately harnessed in rock music.

MARK HAYWARD ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

Smitten with the sound, McCartney quickly purchased an ax that would yield maximum howl — a 1962 Epiphone Casino ES-230TD with a sunburst finish and Bigsby tremolo. It would prove to be his go-to electric guitar throughout his run with the Beatles and beyond.

Paul's new Epiphone made its studio debut on "Ticket to Ride," released as a single in April 1965. A few months later, that song reappeared on the hook-packed *Help!* album, which arguably marked the first phase of the *Wizard of Oz*-like transition of the Beatles' music from black and white to color. Elsewhere on *Help!*, McCartney threaded electric guitar leads throughout "Another Girl" and doubled George's notes an octave up on the solo to "The Night Before."

The *Help!* sessions also gave Paul the chance to break in a right-handed Epiphone Texan FT-79 acoustic he'd recently bought. He cut "I've Just Seen a Face" and "Yesterday" on the same day, June 14, 1965. The latter tune exemplifies his unique fingerpicking style, also heard on later compositions like "Blackbird" and "Mother Nature's Son." As he explained to *Guitar World Acoustic*, "I just hit the bass string [*with my thumb*] and sort of flick the high strings... It's my own goofball version of fingerpicking."



The Beatles at Abbey Road Studios in 1967 with John Lennon's Epiphone Casino in the foreground; everyone in the band (except Ringo) owned a Casino

Laying Rubber

Four scant months after the release of *Help*!, the Beatles dropped *Rubber Soul*, underscoring both the band's light-speed evolution and its freakish ability to crank out brilliant music in *A Hard Day's Night*-style fast-forward motion. The British version of *Rubber Soul* opened with "Drive My Car," a bouncy, Stax/Motown-inspired number equipped with an infectious guitar solo courtesy of Mr. McCartney.

The acoustic-based "Michelle" revealed another side of Paul's guitar playing. He has often recounted how, as a teen, he "enigmatically" sat at parties in a black, collar-necked shirt, singing French-sounding nonsense words while fingerpicking this chic little guitar part. As he bluntly told Conan O'Brien, he did this in the hopes that the ladies "would think I was a French person and would want me to go to bed with them."

Sadly, his Pepé Le Pew act never quite worked out the way he wanted. On the bright side, it eventually yielded a gem of a song. As McCartney recounted to *Guitar World Acoustic*, "Years later, John said, 'Remember that French thing you used to do? We should stick some words on that.'" Thus, "Michelle" was born, authentic French phrases and all.

While that song's vocal originated from Paul's attempts to pass himself off as a Frenchman, its guitar part was an emulation of a man as American as spray cheese on chicken-fried steak: Mister Guitar, aka Chet Atkins.

> "John learned upside down, too, because mine was the only other guitar around if he didn't have his"

"There is a song he did called 'Trambone' with a repetitive top line, and he played a bass line whilst playing a melody," McCartney explained in *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now*. "This was an innovation for us; even though classical guitarists had played it, no rock 'n' roll guitarists had... I wanted to write something with a melody and a bass line on it, so I did."

Atkins would bring things full circle in 1966 with his album *Chet Atkins Picks on the Beatles*, which included an inspired cover of "Michelle." Guitar enthusiasts are encouraged to check it out, along with "Trambone." If that should lead anyone down a Chet Atkins rabbit hole, don't say we didn't warn you.

McCartney told *Guitar World Acoustic* that he learned the F7♯9 chord in "Michelle" from a Liverpool music shop salesman named Jim Gretty. "All the guys who worked in that store were jazz guys; they had to play jazz well if they wanted to hold down their jobs."

He recalled being in the guitar shop with George Harrison when Gretty struck an F7♯9. "We said, 'Wow! What was that, man?' And he answered, 'It's just basically an F, but you barre the top two strings at the fourth fret with your little finger.'"

History snuck in through the bathroom window that day; 7♯9 chords would later surface in the Fab Four's covers of "Till There Was You" and "Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby," then in originals like "The Word," "Taxman" and "Sexy Sadie." After getting the Beatles bump, the 7♯9 would help define Jimi Hendrix's sound, and successive generations of rock players would deploy it as they shot to thrill and raged against the machine.

Backwards to the Future

By 1966, the sound of McCartney's guitar was becoming a familiar presence on Beatles records. He laid down the ballsy, overdriven "Paperback Writer" riff just a few days after he and his bandmates recorded "Got to Get You into My Life," whose end section contains a guitar passage that shares some DNA with that riff.

In "And Your Bird Can Sing," Paul and George's playful, crisp-toned leads darted around like twin stunt flyers locked in tandem. Up to that point, harmonized dual-guitar leads were unheard-of in mainstream rock music. Soon after, groups like the

MARK HAYWARD ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Allman Brothers Band, Queen and Thin Lizzy began following the Beatles' lead. Flash forward to the early Eighties and Iron Maiden and Judas Priest would send intermeshing guitar leads flying like eagles from their amps.

No less innovative was "I'm Only Sleeping," widely regarded as the first recorded example of backwards guitar in popular music. As audio engineer Geoff Emerick has written, after Harrison played the main solo, McCartney "joined him to play the backwards outro in a bizarre duet." This led the charge for Hendrix, the Byrds, Jimmy Page and other artists who would ornament their music with reversed guitar sounds.

Backwards leads aside, McCartney's most celebrated guitar work from this period was markedly straightforward. Besides playing rhythm guitar on the stunning "Here, There and Everywhere," he delivered what many consider his finest guitar solo in "Taxman." "It was the early Jimi Hendrix days, and I was trying to persuade George to do something like that, feedback-y and crazy," he told *Rolling Stone*. "And I was showing him what I wanted, and he said, 'Well, you do it.'"

Besides Hendrix, Paul's raucous lead guitar on "Taxman" nodded to blues guitarists like Eric Clapton, B.B. King, Buddy Guy and Albert King. Author Ian MacDonald (as well as one or two *Guitar World* writers over the years) has also named Jeff Beck's solo in the Yardbirds' "Shapes of Things" as "the probable inspiration" for McCartney's performance.

Played on the Casino through an overdriven Vox, the "Taxman" solo is a Day-Glo splatter-paint pastiche of blues, rock and Indian styles. It is rumored to have reincarnated in backwards form on the one-chord, 500-microgram mind-melter "Tomorrow Never Knows."

Seasoning *Pepper*

A brief, jagged interjection at the end of "Strawberry Fields Forever" was the last emission the public would hear from Paul's Casino for a short while. His guitar of choice on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was an instrument he had acquired during the *Revolver* sessions, a single-pickup 1964 Esquire with a sunburst finish and rosewood fretboard.

On *Sgt. Pepper*'s title cut, he paired the Esquire with a Vox Conqueror. His playing, while simple, was indispensable to the song. After welcoming the audience to the show with his sharp leads in the intro, he bolstered the first verse with punchy fifth-chord stabs on the upper strings. When the chorus arrived, his meaty power chords added heft and grit to the song's explosive lift. Then he stitched a series of inverted arpeggios into the second verse, creating a secondary melody that was, and is, sheer magic.



McCartney runs through his "Step Inside Love" — on guitar — with Cilla Black in January 1968

Paul used the Esquire again on "Good Morning Good Morning." To this day, his solo is as much a wake-up call as the alarm clock that breaks the reverie in *Sgt. Pepper*'s closer, "A Day in the Life." Its Eastern-tinged legato licks hearken back to his work on "Taxman," hitting like a splash of cold water at dawn.

According to Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn, McCartney played the Esquire through a Selmer amp on his spacey guitar solo in "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!" Paul's lead was recorded at half-speed and sped up to capture that inhaling-nitrous-oxide-at-the-fairgrounds feel.

Bach Bird, Fly

Some sources credit George Harrison with all the guitar work on *Magical Mystery Tour*'s "Flying." Others maintain that he and Paul both played guitar on the track. Supporting the latter claim, a fingerpicked run that begins approximately 21 seconds into the song sounds curiously similar to the intro of McCartney's later composition "Goodbye," a hit for Mary Hopkin in 1969.

Besides playing lead guitar on cuts like "Back in the U.S.S.R.," "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" and "Helter Skelter," McCartney made profuse use of his freshly purchased Martin D-28 acoustic on 1968's *The Beatles* (informally known as the White Album). Its warm resonance enriched tracks like "Rocky Raccoon," "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," "Mother Nature's Son," "Wild Honey Pie," the criminally underappreciated "I Will" and the ad-libbed "Can You Take Me Back?" section of "Cry Baby Cry."

"I was showing George what I wanted, something feedback-y and crazy, and he said, 'Well, you do it'"

And then there's "Blackbird," whose roots lie in a Bach piece that McCartney and Harrison wrestled with as schoolboys: "Bourrée in E Minor" [*see the sidebar lesson on page 41*]. They never got past the first few measures, but the composer's use of contrary motion made a lasting enough impression on Paul to give rise to one of his most beloved works. McCartney's intuitive use of compound thirds and chromatic voice leading makes for a beautiful and unforgettable guitar part. "Blackbird" has become a favorite among guitar players of every generation... and the bane of guitar shop employees condemned to hear it on endless repeat.

It's Getting Very Near the End

As he did in the band's early days, Macca increasingly focused on bass rather than guitar during the Beatles' final stage. He did, however, play acoustic and electric guitar on "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," and his Martin helped shape the sound of "Two of Us," "Maggie Mae" and "Her Majesty."

Though 1970's *Let It Be* was released after the band's dissolution, 1969's *Abbey Road* was the last album the Beatles recorded together. Its parting shot, "The End," was the only song to feature solos from all four Beatles. In the three-guitarist relay race near the song's end, McCartney took the first, fourth and seventh lead breaks, often jumping across intervals rather than playing consecutive scalar notes.

After saying their individual farewells via their instruments, the group left the world with a pithy couplet: "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make." The song's final moments conjure images of the musicians rising into the clouds as one, singing a final angelic harmony as they wave goodbye in slow motion. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more perfect closing statement from a band.

In one last pioneering act, the Beatles inadvertently capped off *Abbey Road* with history's first hidden album track, not counting the sound collage in the run-out groove of the *Sgt. Pepper* record. The inclusion of "Her Majesty" was the result of an editing error, but in retrospect, it can be heard as almost deliberately anticlimactic. It's as though after the band members have taken their bows and left the stage, McCartney has poked his head out from behind the curtain to amicably stick his tongue out at us, reminding us that things aren't so serious after all. Life goes on, and in the end, a band is just a band... even if it happens to be the most pivotal rock band ever to walk the Earth. GW

LARRY ELLIS/DAILY EXPRESS/EXPRESS/GETTY IMAGES

Take This Pair of Strings and Learn to Fly

Examining Paul McCartney's "two-finger" magic as heard in the Beatles' "Blackbird"

BY **DALE TURNER**

THOUGH CREDITED TO John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "Blackbird" is solely a McCartney composition, recorded as a solo performance (Macca accompanying his own voice, plucking his Martin D-28) and released on 1968's *The Beatles*. Guitaristically speaking, the song's roots/inspiration trace back to McCartney's early experimentation with a well-known piece from J.S. Bach's Lute Suite, titled "Bourée in E Minor," which McCartney woodshedded in his youth (A transcription of "Bourée in E Minor" appears in our February 2026 issue). Lyrically, the song was written in reaction to the unfortunate escalating racial tension present in the U.S. during the late Sixties. To this day, "Blackbird" is one of the most commonly requested songs (from student to teacher) of fledgling fingerstyle acoustic guitarists.

Throughout "Blackbird," McCartney uses his pick-hand thumb (p) and index finger (i) to pick his strings, while fretting only two notes (mostly on the A and B strings) and plucking the open G string on the eighth-note upbeats.

For the basics, have a look at **FIGURE 1**. Begin by fretting C (A string, 3rd fret) and E (B string, 5th fret) with your index finger and pinkie, respectively. Pick the two strings together with your pick-hand thumb and index finger. These two notes form what's called a major 10th interval, which is a major 3rd plus an octave, and imply a C major chord (C, E, G). As the figure unfolds, this shape, fretted with the same two fingers, is shifted up the neck, with the notes' spacing modified slightly to accommodate the asymmetric intervallic structure of the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B), with a sequence of major and minor 10ths, as you would have when harmonizing the scale in 3rds — major, minor, minor, major, major, minor, minor. Thumbpick the open G string in between each successive shape.

When he's not playing parts similar to the previous example, McCartney plays passages not unlike **FIGURE 2**. In this "busier" groove, as your thumb alternates between the A and G strings, your pick hand's index finger strikes notes on the B string between thumbpicked notes.

FIG. 1 C major scale in "10ths" intervals

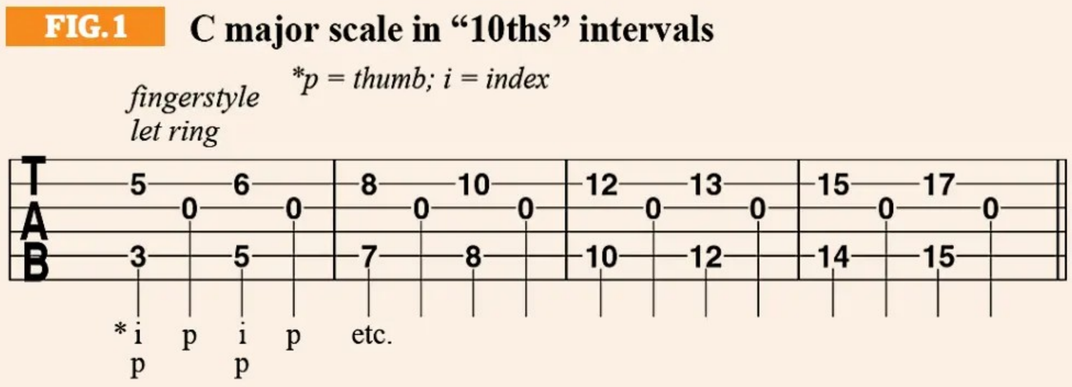


FIG. 2

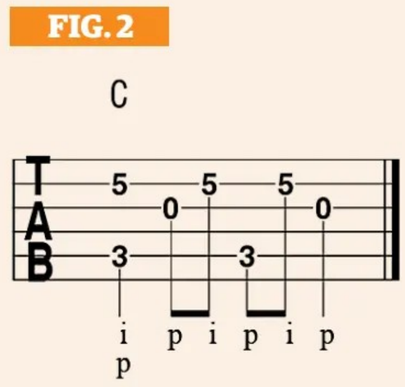


FIG. 3

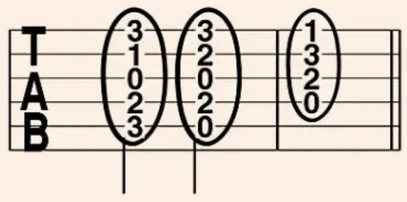


FIG. 4

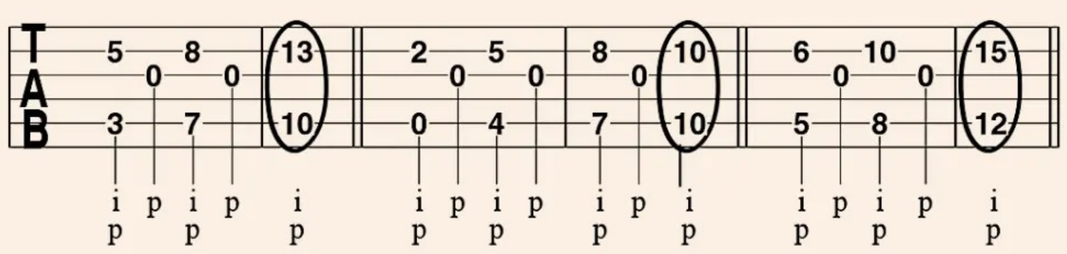
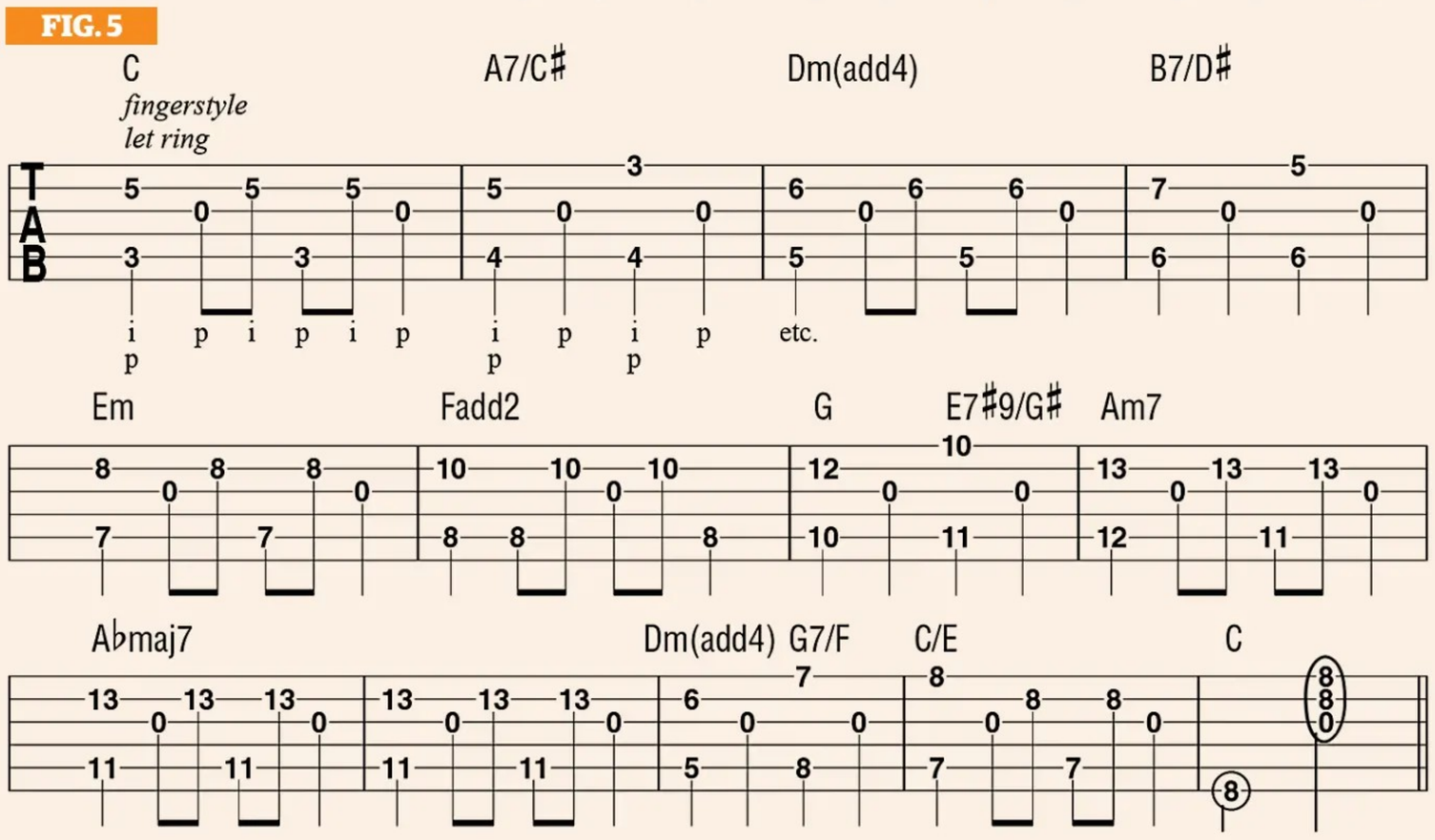
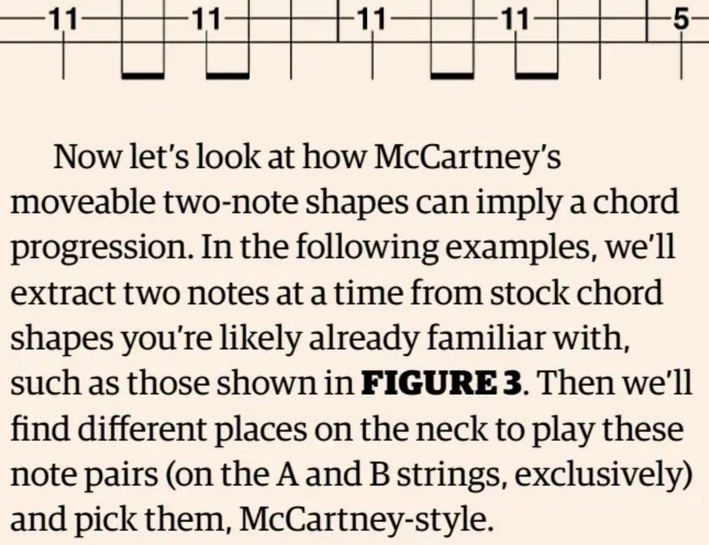


FIG. 5



Now let's look at how McCartney's moveable two-note shapes can imply a chord progression. In the following examples, we'll extract two notes at a time from stock chord shapes you're likely already familiar with, such as those shown in **FIGURE 3**. Then we'll find different places on the neck to play these note pairs (on the A and B strings, exclusively) and pick them, McCartney-style.

To illustrate, in **FIGURE 4a**, three different pairs of chord tones from C (C, E, G) are fretted along these two strings, picked in conjunction with the open G string; fret the notes with your outer fingers — 1 and 4. A7 (A, C♯, E, G) gets a similar treatment in **FIGURE 4b**. Note that this chord comprises four different notes, yielding an extra shape at the end of the example: G (5th string, 10th fret,) and A (2nd string, 10th fret), fretted with the ring finger and pinkie. For Dm (D, F, A), after you locate its chord tones on the 5th and 2nd strings, pick its three resultant shapes in **FIGURE 4c**.



JEFFREY BLACKLER/ALAMY

Once you learn the note names in your favorite chords and can find them on the neck, as long as the open G string tonally 'agrees with' the chord or key you're playing in, you can experiment reshaping any progression — whether it's your own song or a cover — using McCartney's resourceful technique and approach. **FIGURE 5** does this in an expanded progression incorporating a variety of chords. Notice the new shape, involving notes on the 1st string, introduced in bars 2, 4, 7 and 10 (on beat 2). For these, fret the 5th- and 1st-string notes with your middle and index fingers, respectively. The passage ends with an interesting C voicing, the result of shifting the physical shape of a common open G chord five frets up the neck to imply C.

For a video of this lesson, visit guitarworld.com/october2026 GW

IOMMI

LORD OF THIS WORLD

WORDS BY
AMIT SHARMA

PHOTOS BY
OLLY CURTIS

In a career now stretching close to six decades, BLACK SABBATH mastermind **TONY IOMMI** has laid down the groundwork for all kinds of heavy sounds, ultimately changing the world one riff at a time. He sat down with GW in 2024 to take us through the unimpeachable majesty heard on Sabbath's first six records




Gibson
“AS FAR AS NEW GEAR GOES, THE KEMPER HAS BEEN WORKING VERY WELL FOR ME IN THE STUDIO”

HE'S BEEN GIVEN MANY NAMES OVER THE YEARS.

Some call him the Iron Man. Others see him as the Master of Reality or the Hand of Doom. One thing everyone seems to agree on, however, is that heavy metal was first conceived in the mind of Anthony Frank Iommi — the man who famously lost two fretting hand fingertips while working at a sheet-metal factory in Birmingham, England, and decided to carry on after hearing about gypsy jazz pioneer Django Reinhardt's road to recovery.

Iommi's innovations in Black Sabbath would not only prove to be influential on the sound of the genre in its most classic form, but would also spawn many of its offshoots and subgenres, from the doomy discordance of the self-titled track that opened their debut to the groove-metal thunder heard on the chromatic riffs of "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath" and the proto thrash of "Symptom of the Universe."

Then there's the more progressive side of his playing, exquisitely documented by lesser-known deep cuts like "Megalomania," "Spiral Architect" and "The Writ," where the bold stream of consciousness seemed to laugh in the face of musical boundaries and choose to follow no calling but its own. In that sense, his stature as the original and definitive metal riff lord often can feel like a double-edged sword; a well-intended acknowledgement doesn't quite do justice to the wide breadth of his genius in full. To put it bluntly, Iommi's influence on guitar playing and wider culture as a whole goes far beyond the obvious.

There's a famous quote attributed to punk rock icon Henry Rollins: "You can only trust yourself and the first six Sabbath albums." Some say the comment was made about the first four records (not the first six), but either way, there's a comforting truth in such a notion. The Ronnie James Dio-fronted years were mesmerizing in their own way, and there were certainly creative victories on later conquests with Tony Martin, and an honorable mention definitely goes to *13* — the 2013 Ozzy Osbourne comeback that would serve as their artistic farewell — though between 1970 and 1975, Black Sabbath were quite simply untouchable. Iommi and his bandmates changed the face of music forever, to the point where even 56 years after their formation, you'd be hard pressed to find a heavy metal band that doesn't owe them a colossal sense of debt.

Let's go back to the beginning. You were 17 when you lost two fretting-hand fingertips in a factory accident and got told you wouldn't play again. That is undoubtedly every guitarist's worst nightmare.

Oh, it was awful. I just couldn't believe it, particularly as it happened on the day I was going to leave the job, which is insane. I'd given my notice to leave so I could join a band and go to Germany. It was a good opportunity. I went in on the last day and that's what happened. It shocked me. I never had any idea something like that was going to happen. I was truly devastated.

Tony Iommi, photographed at The Lygon Arms, a hotel in Worcestershire, England, January 7, 2020. "I still feel like I'm experimenting and trying out new things," he says

And then somebody told you about Django Reinhardt, which must have felt like a ray of light given how much he accomplished after his injuries.

It really felt like that. It was actually the foreman at the factory I worked at. He came over to see me afterwards. He knew I had the accident and also knew the machine was wobbly and faulty. I shouldn't have been on it, really. So he came over with a Django record and said, "Have a listen to this." I was down at the time and didn't want to listen to anything, but he got me to put it on and I went, "Yeah, it's brilliant." Then he told me the story [*Reinhardt suffered extensive burns over half his body — including the ring and little fingers of his left hand — in late 1928*], and I must admit it really did help and inspire me to work on a way to play with what I had left.

You were briefly a member of Jethro Tull. What did you learn from them?

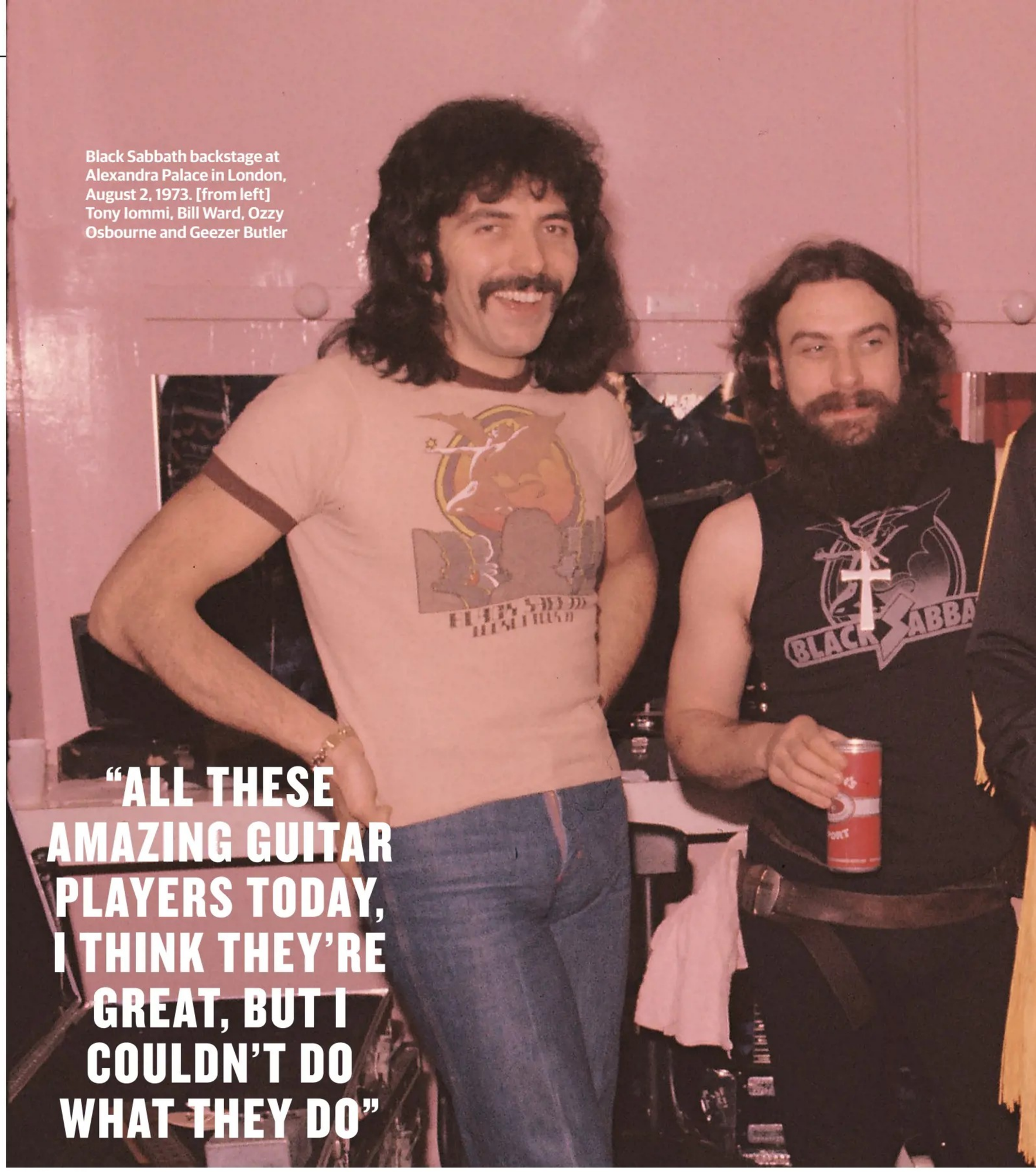
That was a strange meeting. We did a gig with Jethro Tull and it was the night Mick Abrahams was either fired or left — I don't know what happened there. I saw them passing notes to each other on stage and thought it was weird. After the show, they asked if I'd be interested in joining, which was really surprising. On the way home in the van, I said to the other guys, "Tull asked if I wanted to join them," and they all told me to go for it. Then I had to come down to London and audition, because there were so many guitar players interested. I walked in and saw all these musicians waiting in line and thought, "Oh no, forget it." But one of the crew saw me and told me to go and sit in a cafe across the road. They fetched me when everyone was gone. I played and they told me I'd got the job. It was quite a different thing for me. A big step in them days. It was a big deal for me to even get out of Birmingham. That's how it all happened. And it certainly was a good experience for me, because I learned a lot about

how they worked and how [*founding frontman*] Ian Anderson would run the band.

And how was that, exactly?
They would rehearse at a strict time every morning at nine o' clock or whatever it was and then break for lunch. It was a bit like going to work, really. In Black Sabbath, we never did that. We'd get together whenever, probably after midday. Those early morning starts were a bit of a shock. It was good to learn about how other people work. If you want a career in music, you've got to take it seriously. That's what I spoke to my guys about. After a couple of things with Tull, including *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*, I left and said to the Sabbath guys, "Let's get back together — but we've got to work at it and put everything we've got into it." They agreed.

You've said Hank Marvin and Eric Clapton were your main influences early on. Was there anyone else?
I might have picked up other influences, but I didn't tend to realize them. As you say, Hank Marvin was the original one, but his playing was worlds apart from what I would go on to do. That was the start for me, though. The Shadows were an instrumental band and I learned to play through their music. Then I went from there to Eric Clapton's take on the blues and the John Mayall stuff, all of which I really liked. It kickstarted a whole genre of heavy blues players. Mayall put forward a lot of guitar legends, from Peter Green to Clapton to Mick Taylor. After that, I never thought much about influences. You get into the habit of doing it yourself. Everybody starts off by copying their favorite players and learning from them, and then you do your own thing and venture out. Well, some people. Others are happy copying things perfectly and exactly, because that's what feels good for them.

Jeff Beck was another one of the early British blues heroes. Were you a fan of his work?
Oh yeah, Jeff was great. I met Jeff early on because we had the same manager. He was so different and unique. A truly great player who was just doing his own thing that was 100 percent him. It's true what they said; nobody could play quite like Jeff.



Black Sabbath backstage at Alexandra Palace in London, August 2, 1973. [from left] Tony Iommi, Bill Ward, Ozzy Osbourne and Geezer Butler

"Black Sabbath" was born out of your fascination with the macabre. Much of its eeriness stems from that tritone interval. When did you first become aware of tritones — and how did you come up with that riff?
I've always been interested in horror films and that type of music. I'm into anything dramatic. We went into rehearsal one day, and Geezer [*Butler, bass*] was just playing around doing some [*English classical composer*] Gustav Holst stuff on his bass. I came up with this riff made out of three notes, the second being the same as the first but an octave up. But I didn't know anything about the last note being a tritone. I didn't know what the term even represented, though I knew I liked the sound of it and the feel we got from it. The mood was like what you'd experience watching a horror film. That's what I related it to while putting the song together.

The faster palm-muted riff toward the end is built off the Aeolian scale. How much were you aware of the modes at this point?
I knew nothing about the modes. I never read music and don't know anything about that side of it. For me, it's all about feel and what I come up with at the time. When we did that section, just like everything I've ever done, I started playing something and thought, "Oh, I like that." If I like what I hear, I use it, and if I don't like it, I won't. That's how "Black Sabbath" came about. I knew I wanted the end section to lift up into this galloping idea. I like tempo changes and felt it needed to go somewhere else. For some reason, that's something that's just embedded in me. One riff will take me so far, and then I will think about going into a chorus or another riff. It's what I've been doing the whole time.

That galloping rhythm is associated with a lot of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal bands that followed.
Yeah! I can hear how the up-tempo stuff like the end of



WATAL ASANUMA/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

"Black Sabbath" and "Children of the Grave" affected what came next. It's almost like this throbbing sort of rhythm. A lot of the bands that came after ended up looking up to Sabbath as an influence, because there were very few of us doing that in those early days. It was just Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and ourselves. The heavy groups that came after went back to the three of us and learned things.

"Sleeping Village" doesn't get talked about enough. From the nylon-string intro to the meaty Dorian blues riffs and up-tempo layered solos, it's very experimental — despite your all being very young at the time.

I like mixing different moods and styles. If you have a heavy song, it makes sense to have a bit of a rest and go into something more laid-back, like "Sleeping Village" or whatever. And then go back into something heavy again, just to give it a bit of light and shade. It's more interesting than having an album stay heavy the whole way through. I like to mix these elements on the albums but also within actual songs, like "Sleeping Village" or "Die Young," where we drop down to a quieter part. It's an important part of the way I write.

From what you've told us in the past, that first album was made with your backup SG into a Laney LA100BL and a Dallas Arbiter Rangemaster boost. But "Wicked World" was recorded with your Strat, which had a pickup failure during the sessions.

That's correct. When the Strat went, I couldn't bloody well believe it. I'd worked on that guitar myself for a long time, getting the fretboard right, the frets down and the feel just how I like it. I needed to do all of that because of my accident. So we went in to make our first album and the guitar pickup went right at the beginning of the process. In those days, it was a big fiasco getting a pickup changed or fixed. It wasn't like how it is now, where you can go into any guitar shop and someone will be able to swap it. Not only that; we only had two days to make the album, one of which was for recording. I had to use my SG, which was the backup I kept on the side. I hadn't owned it long, so I'd never really used it. When the Strat pickup went, I had to pick up the SG. From that day on, I never looked back. I stuck with the SGs. But at the time, I'd only used my Strat in combination with my booster and the Laney. That's what I'd been using to create my sound, so it was quite scary having to improvise with something else.

As you say, you ended up sticking with SGs for your entire career. Why that instead of, say, a Les Paul?

I've always felt the SG is a comfortable guitar to hold. I really like the look of a Les Paul, but with my injuries from the accident, I always felt I couldn't get up to the top frets, almost like my fingers weren't long enough. It didn't feel as comfortable as the SG and it's very important as a player to feel comfortable. I did have a Les Paul later on but I never played it much. They look great and I love the sound other people have gotten with their Les Pauls, but the SG seemed to suit me best, so I stuck with it.

Have you ever been tempted to try out an ES-335, a Tele or maybe even a superstrat?

I think I tried a 335 at some point. But the problem was you couldn't get left-handed ones. I had to get a regular one and turn it upside down, playing it that way. But I never used them much. It was always back to the SG. The only other guitar I really liked was that original Strat, which I wish I'd kept. I can't believe I got rid of it. This was before I knew you could easily change pickups and things. I just thought the guitar had completely had it, so it was time to get rid of it. A big mistake.

How many guitars do you own in total, and which would you say are the most collectable?

I don't really know, but the figure is probably around 70. I've gotten rid of quite a few. Some have gone to the Hard Rock Cafe and places like that, or auctions that are raising money for charity. So in terms of what's left,

it's probably around 70 or 80. I only use so many, to be honest. You can have all these guitars but you don't use them. Some might get pulled out now and again, but I tend to stick to about three or four that I use all the time. That's the Gibson SG, which is a replica of my original, and the Jaydees, which were great instruments built by John Diggins. He's passed on now, but he made me a guitar just before that happened, which was a great honor. I have the last guitar he ever made.

The Monkey Gibson SG is probably the guitar you're most associated with. Is that still with the Hard Rock Cafe?

Yeah. I did try and get it back, to be honest. The guy who used to buy memorabilia for the Hard Rock came to England and visited me. He wanted to buy some stuff and I said it should be fine. I'd retired the Monkey SG because it was too valuable to me; I didn't want to take it on the road and risk it getting damaged. He offered to buy it and it seemed like a good idea because the guitar could be displayed for people to see and kept safe, instead of sitting in a case somewhere in my storage. But the deal was if I ever wanted it back, I could let him know and buy it back for the same price. It seemed fair enough, a good deal. Anyway, he passed away, so that was it. We tried to get in touch with Hard Rock to get it back and they knew nothing about the deal. But they allowed Gibson to go in and take the guitar in order to copy it exactly. They made the replicas; I think we did about 50 of them and I own two of those. I have to say they are exactly like that one I owned and they are what I use in the studio. They have the same knocks and bumps as the original, plus the little monkey sticker. It's the same guitar, basically.

The second album is loaded with hits. Even the lesser-known cuts like "Hand of Doom" and "Electric Funeral" are firm fan favorites. What are you most proud of from that album?

It's hard to pinpoint because I don't really think like that. Certainly, as far as riffs are concerned, there's a lot to like about "Iron Man." I'm proud of how all the different changes piece together in that song. To be honest, I'm very proud of *Paranoid* as a whole. There are a lot of good tracks on that.

The "Iron Man" riff uses power chords built off the natural minor scale. But perhaps the real magic lies in the drag of the tempo you chose to play it in. Maybe it wouldn't have had the same effect sped up.

Funnily enough, when we used to play live, we'd slow it down even more. When we went into the studio to do that album, we were so hyped up we were actually playing it a little faster. Then you end up sticking to that tempo because that's what everyone hears on the album. But as we carried on playing it live over the years, it got slower and slower, just to give it more depth and power. That's what you do as a live band. And other songs would end up being faster when we played live. Bill [*Ward, drums*] would get carried away with the tempo — or I would.

The E Dorian runs in "Planet Caravan" are responsible for getting a lot of metalheads into jazz. How did you go about attacking that one, and what influences were you thinking of?

I've always listened to jazz and would say Joe Pass was one of my favorite players from that style. There's some blues stuff in the mix too. I was listening to the chord movement and thinking to myself, "What does this need and what leads would fit best?" And I'd still happily play in a jazzy style now if the song calls for it. I've always liked jazz. In fact, for some of the live shows in the past we used to do a bit of a jazzy bit. Bill really loved jazz drumming, so we'd incorporated some of that into our show. Even the debut album, "Wicked World" had a lot of jazz going on.

You've mainly stuck with the boost and wah over the years, but the "Paranoid" solo famously features a ring modulator effect.

I remember trying it out and thinking, "Oh, that could work here!" It's so easy to fall into the trap of not experimenting. It's nice to try things out and surprise yourself. If it works, I keep it.

Early songs like "Iron Man," "N.I.B." and "Fairies Wear Boots" have these really melodic vocal-like guitar leads higher up the neck.

I like that stuff because I don't see myself as a technically great player. I prefer to focus on the feel. All these amazing guitar players today, I think they're great, but I couldn't do what they do. It's just not my style. I like to improvise and feel it. What I play might not be technically that hard, but it's the sound I'm going for.

Who was the last guitarist that impressed you on a technical level?

The first one was Eddie Van Halen. When they toured with us early on in their career, I thought he was really good and had come up with something very different for its time. Nowadays you can see how all the technical players have learned from Eddie. The funny thing about him was, much like me, he didn't read music or anything. It was all from feel. He was inventing stuff just using his ears. Some of the guitar playing I hear these days is too technical. You have to be precise on this note or that





Iommi in 2020 with a Gibson Custom Shop clone of his "Monkey" 1964 SG Special. "I love the sound other people have gotten with their Les Pauls, but the SG seemed to suit me best, so I stuck with it," he says

note. I can't do that — if I do a solo on a record, it's never the same live. I can't reproduce what I did in the studio. I'll do something similar but not exact.

The respect was mutual. Eddie once said heavy metal wouldn't exist without you. It must've been incredible to see him so early on in his career, witnessing the changing of the guard first-hand.

He was great. We became really close friends on that tour, because we went out for eight months or something like that. He used to come round to my room in the hotel, because we'd often be staying at the same one, and we'd stay up for hours talking. It was lovely, and we stayed friends through the years until he passed. He was a great friend, such a nice guy who did so much for us guitar players. I really liked Eddie.

Did you ever get to jam together?

Yes, we did. Van Halen came over to play in England, so he got in touch with me. He was in Birmingham and wanted to meet, but we were rehearsing that day so I didn't think we'd get together. Then I suggested he came to rehearsal and he said he'd love to. So that's what he did. I picked him up at the hotel and we went by the guitar shop so he could bring one along and have a play. It was good. The other guys couldn't believe it — at the time it was the [Cross Purposes, *1994*] lineup with Tony Martin, Bobby Rondinelli and Geezer. I turned up with Eddie and they were like, "What's going on?" We all ended up having a play together and it was a lot of fun.

Henry Rollins once described your tone on *Master of Reality* as like "hearing lava." You started tuning down to C# to get more of a sludgy feel, which in turn gave birth to a whole movement of stoner and doom metal.

It did! Again, it came out of experimentation. I've never gone by the book, thinking I have to do things a certain way. I always go with what I feel is right, and quite often that might involve stepping out of the regular thing I'm known to do. I've had such an ordeal with gear following my accident. I made up my own set of guitar strings because the regular sets were too heavy for me. So I got some banjo strings for the first and second, and then dropped the gauge down on a regular set in order to make it lighter for me. That way it wouldn't be so hard for me to press down. And then I went to companies asking if they could make me a light gauge set of strings, and they told me "Oh no, that will never sell — they won't be good and they won't work!" And I argued, "Well, they do work — I use them!" Of course, years later, you'd have things like [*Ernie Ball*] Super Slinkys and all sorts of stuff. It's peculiar, because when I first approached these companies in the early days, they really didn't want to know. It's been the same all round for me, even with guitars.

How so?

I went to a company years ago and asked if they could make me a 24-fret guitar and got told they wouldn't because nobody would use it. That's why I invested in John Birch's company. He was from Birmingham and had done a couple of repairs for me. When I asked him about making a 24-fret guitar, he said, "Let's have a go!" You have to jump out of the box and try stuff. I used that 24-fret guitar for years and then, of course, what

happens? Later on guitar companies started making them. That's what it's all about, though. You have to come out of the box, experiment and try things.

It's funny you say that; it was around this period that you started introducing more acoustics and cleaner tracks like "Embryo," "Orchid" and "Solitude."
People were telling me you can't put an acoustic track on a Black Sabbath album. And I would say, "Why not?" It's like there was a law against it. The same people told me I couldn't tune down on *Master of Reality* — but why? The reactions were very peculiar in those days. The only way to prove it was to do it, and then it would become acceptable later.

"After Forever" encapsulates the fantastic chemistry shared between you and Geezer, especially when he plays up high.
That's the thing with myself and Geezer. We could always lock in together. It's amazing how quickly he could pick onto stuff. I'd play him things and straight away he'd put something to it. I never ever questioned what Geezer did because I know he'd always play the right thing. He always knew how to accompany me, it's almost like he knows what I'm going to play before I play it. I guess that came from us being together so long and creating that sound together.

"Wheels of Confusion" kicks off *Vol. 4* with some heavy blues that sounds like Eric Clapton on steroids — arguably some of the best tones you've ever recorded.
It's interesting — my rig never changed much. I'd always go in with my booster. To go back, I started off in the Sixties with this Rangemaster. I lived up in Carlisle with Bill, we'd joined a band up there [*the Rest*]. There was a guy who lived nearby that worked in electronics and he came up to me one day saying he could make my treble booster sound better. I said, "Oh, can you?" and he told me to hand it over and he'd bring it back in a couple of days. So he took it away, brought it back and I really liked what he'd done and how it worked in combination with the guitar and amp. I used the same booster right up to the [1980] *Heaven and Hell* album.

Then there was a guy who came to work for me who used to do Ritchie Blackmore's stuff. We'd ordered six Marshall amps, and he said he'd put an extra valve stage in them. We had a house in Miami back then and gave him his own room. He started rebuilding these amps for me and did a great job. One day I went in and asked, "Where's my booster, by the way?" and he said, "What booster?" When I told him which box it was, he said he'd thrown it away ages ago. I couldn't believe it and never saw that pedal again. Annoyingly, nobody ever saw what resistors or transistors or whatever else was in it, which means nobody has ever been able to reproduce it exactly for me, though we have tried. The guy who built it passed away. But I've stuck with the same concept for my gear since forever — the SG into a Laney via a booster.

You chose to bring in a major third harmony to add color to the opening riff of "Supernaut."
I realized what might work well there just through trying stuff. You have to remember, some things don't work out. But that one did, and it really added something to the riff.

"Sabbath Bloody Sabbath" could be your heaviest riff of them all, using power chords that snake their way around the second, third and fourth frets.
Before making that album, we went to L.A. to record and it never worked out. I got writer's block and just couldn't think of anything. I was a bit like, "Oh, shit!" Then we came back to England and had a couple of weeks off. I'd never had a creative block like that before. I was really worried because I just couldn't think of anything. So we decided to create a bit of atmosphere and hired Clearwell Castle. We set our gear up in the dungeons. Bloody hell, straight away the first riff I came up with was that one from "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath." I knew I really liked the sound of it, and then we built it up from there. It ultimately comes down to the mood you're in, where you are, the atmosphere there and what you can create. Being in the dungeons of a castle clearly had the right effect on me.

The closing track on that album, "Spiral Architect," is like a love letter to progressive rock in terms of how it builds from a reverberated acoustic into the full band against an orchestral score. How'd that one come together?
It's another example of us trying out different approaches. People used to say we couldn't use orchestration in a band like Black Sabbath. But why not? Also in those days, the orchestras and classical musicians didn't look on us favorably. They looked down on bands like us. To have some people [*the Phantom Fiddlers*] come and accompany us was great. The fact that they enjoyed it was even better.

"Don't Start Too Late" is a solo performance where you use an acoustic with loud repeats. Brian May, Nuno Bettencourt, Yngwie Malmsteen and Joe Bonamassa have done similar things with delay in the time since.
There are definitely a lot of similarities between Brian May and myself. We've been very close since the Seventies. It's funny, we've both been using the Rangemaster since early on. Mine were going into Laneys and his were into Vox AC30s. But it's the same principle. I used to rely on Brian a lot because I'd constantly have problems with people saying there was too much interference coming through my booster. And I'd have to explain, "I know, but that's part of my sound!" In them days, you'd pick up bloody taxis and everything. There was no isolation. Brian would back me up and say, "That's the sound — don't change it." Sometimes you'd get some boffin come along telling me, "I can get rid of that for you," and I'd say, "Oh, can you?" But it would always change the sound and I didn't want my sound to change. The only person who understood how I felt in those days was Brian, because he had the same problem. We both had a bit of noise but were ultimately getting the sound we wanted.

"Symptom of the Universe" would directly influence the thrash metal bands that arrived the following decade.
And it was nice to hear those thrash bands paying tribute to us. It's great how they were able to push it forward into something new and turn it into their own thing. I was just coming





Iommi in action (with Monkey) circa 1975

up with things I liked. So it was brilliant to hear about other musicians liking what I’d done, taking the same kind of idea and improving on it, evolving it into their own sound. Like Metallica, for instance, who probably learned things from us as well as other people. What they did with the metal sound, turning it into thrash, was fantastic. They’ve always been respectful toward us and they’re lovely guys. I love their attitude toward things, the way they write and everything. It reminds us a lot of how we were — everyone in one room rehearsing together and taking it seriously.

“The Writ” and “Megalomania” are up there with the most leftfield tracks you’ve composed.

I have no idea how I came up with ideas like that, but I agree. To be honest, I’m still doing it now. I’ve got hundreds of riffs at home. I’ll put something down and then move onto something else, start working on that and something else comes up. It’s always been that way. I seem to be able to come up with lots of riffs. It’s probably the only thing I can do!

What kind of exercises helped you most on your guitar journey?

There weren’t really any exercises. For me, the main thing was getting used to playing with thimbles. That was the difficult bit, that was the exercise, I guess, trying to move my fingers and hit the notes. And it’s probably why I ended up using a lot of trills. Early on, I couldn’t bend the strings that hard because it would hurt my fingers, so I came up with the idea of using trills. I do that a lot and it’s probably become a bit of a trademark.

You are well-versed in the art of the blues. What’s the secret to playing with heart, soul and authority?

I can only speak for my own playing, but I love the sound of blues because it’s from the heart. It’s about how you feel at that moment in time. Like I said earlier, I can’t read music or play the same thing twice. It’s all about how I feel right there and then, which is where the blues comes from, when you think about it. You have to believe in what you’re doing and play it like you mean it, as opposed to performing the fastest guitar solo in the world or something exactly note-for-note. The guitar should be a part of you. By doing it more and more, you learn from yourself. If I sat down now and watched a video of someone shredding, I’d probably turn it off. I can’t do that stuff, it’s not how I play.

I remember doing an instructional video years ago, one of the first ones when they started doing those things. I was in L.A., and they were asking me to play my solos from the records — but slower. It wasn’t natural for me. I can’t play the same solo; it would always be slightly different. If someone’s learning guitar, my best advice would be to use your ears and feel it in your heart. Sure, some people watch videos and copy things, and that’s great. The technical players these days are brilliant. Even really young kids in their bedrooms are doing incredible things. But I always go back to the roots of the blues, looking deep inside myself and telling the truth. I don’t think about what can impress people or break speed limits. The only thing that matters in my mind is how it sounds to me. GW

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

ZIGGY PLAYED GUITAR

He also got a lot of amazing guitarists to play alongside him. Ten years after David Bowie left us, we asked 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

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."

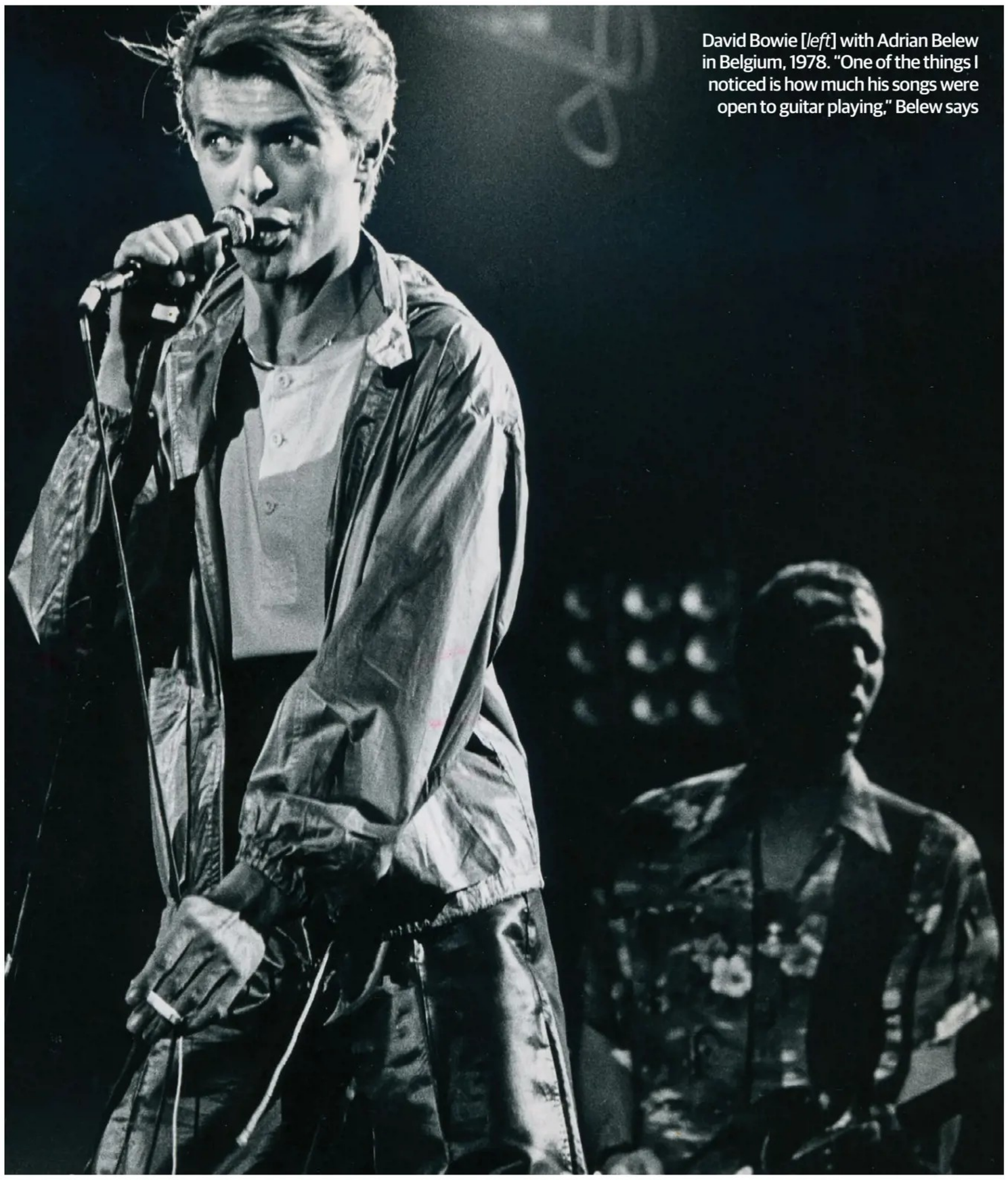
Make no mistake, Bowie knew his way around a fretboard, as a number of stellar guitarists explain to us below – but he had bigger goals in mind than being a virtuoso axeman. In his 54 years as a recording and performing artist, he managed to redefine the role of the theatrical musician, refining the 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.

DAVID BOWIE



LOUISE WILSON/GETTY IMAGES



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** 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. 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.

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

GERRY LEONARD

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,

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES

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.



Tin Machine at Brixton Academy in 1991; [*from left*] Tony Sales, Eric Schermerhorn, Bowie and Reeves Gabrels

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 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

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

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

ADRIAN BELEW

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 before playing 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 Slicky 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.



Gerry Leonard with a Supro David Bowie Dual Tone in 2018

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

CHRIS MCKAY/GETTY IMAGES


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.

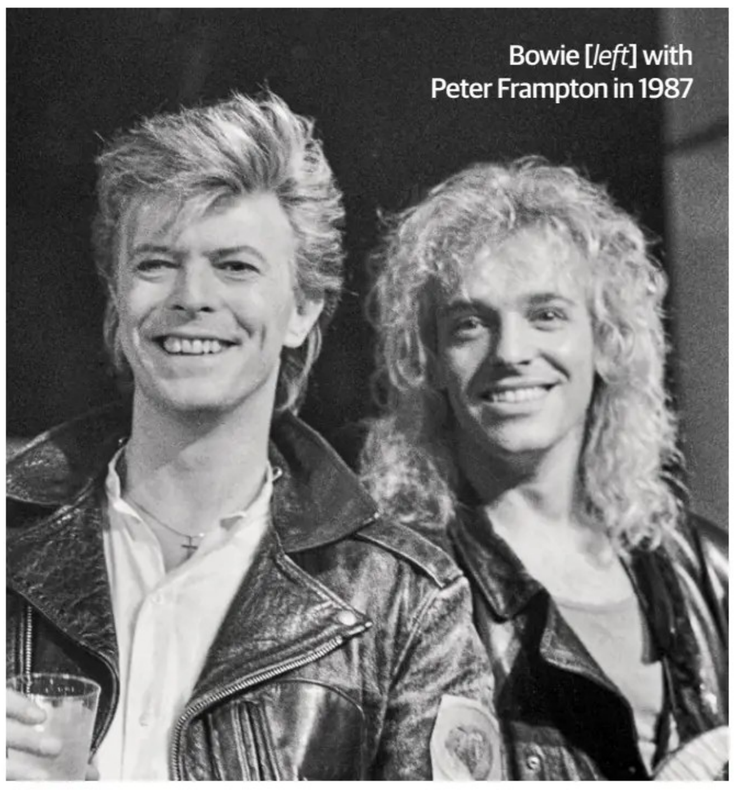
ALOMAR: About a year or so before he died. It was Tony Visconti's birthday, and he was there. I didn't know he was sick. He seemed a little pale and rather frail, but it was mostly just about renewing old times, tying up loose ends, and rededicating our passion and love for each other as well as celebrating 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

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES, GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY IMAGES

MODERN LOVE MACHINES

IN 2016, THE STARS TOLD *GUITAR PLAYER* MAGAZINE'S MIKE MOLENDA 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 Doppleganger, Lovetone Big Cheese, EMS Synthi Hi-Fli

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.

ALAMY

Still Supernatural



Six decades into his career, Carlos Santana remains excited by the very thought of having a guitar in his hands. Below, he looks back on the music and gear that's soundtracked his one-of-a-kind life

BY AMIT SHARMA

THERE ARE VARYING degrees of guitar hero, but Carlos Santana is a name you'd expect to find near the top of any list. Like Jimi Hendrix, Brian May or Slash, Santana has transcended guitar music and permeated his way into popular culture, immortalizing his name into legend on every corner of the globe. Of course, he's a tremendous player, but it goes way beyond that; he's a highly prolific composer and collaborator, the type of musician who can thrive in just about any musical environment, drawing from an impressively wide pool of influences to make his guitar speak to any kind of audience or listener.

His latest album, *Sentient*, serves as yet another reminder of these universal talents. It consists of 11 tracks, three of which were unreleased until now, and the rest reimagining some of his most famous partnerships over a storied career, from a moving live version of Michael Jackson's "Stranger in Moscow" to classic cuts alongside Miles Davis and Smokey Robinson. It's an impressive body of work that captures the breadth of his sound and imagination while taking the listener on an unforgettable journey that defies all notions of boundary or genre. And, as the chart-topping veteran explains to *GW*, it's mainly because his approach to music is a profoundly holistic one.



The struggle (with guitars) can be real and often that's a positive, says Carlos Santana, referencing how players like Clapton, Hendrix and Beck use it to their advantage

You're one of the most prominent faces for PRS, but you've played all kinds of guitars throughout the years.
Guitars are like crayons to me. Life is the canvas, and guitars are the colors you use to express your soul, your spirit, your heart, your passion and emotions. Those are the ingredients to create beauty, and guitars are the tools.

How many guitars do you own these days?
I don't know, but probably not more than 100 and not fewer than 75. I guess the Fender Strats and Gibson Les Pauls would be the oldest models in my collection. I've got Strats from 1954; some of my Les Pauls go all the way back to 1959.

You even had a Yamaha signature model in the Eighties.
That's right. I had a good time with Yamaha. I learned from each one of the guitar companies. They all have their own sound, texture and feel. But I always go back to my PRS models. Paul Reed Smith has mastered creating an instrument that behaves. No matter what the weather is like, it will stay in tune and always give you that great tone. I'm very grateful to Paul. He came up with his own vision to create a different tone and feel. I'm grateful he did that because his designs suited my personality when it came to self-expression. We've had a relationship since the late Seventies. He convinced me to come on board. Back then, there were only three companies I knew of — Gibson, Fender and Gretsch. There were others, but those three were the main ones.

"I like being squirted in the face by music because it makes me feel alive"

The PRS signature you call "Salmon" is the guitar you're most associated with lately. What makes it so special?
I also think of it as my "Supernatural" guitar, because that's what I used for 99 percent of that album [*1999's* Supernatural]. As for what's special about it, I think it's the most fluid. It's the easiest instrument for me to materialize my inner-vision, thoughts and emotions. There's not much struggle translating myself onto that guitar. But sometimes that struggle is nice, you know? Some people struggle with playing Stratocasters. It's not easy to play a Strat and get really nice tones without pedals, because some people use pedals for extra sustain. But when you play loud enough like Jimi Hendrix going straight into Marshall stacks, they can become a whole other canvas. That's why players like Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Buddy Guy stuck with Stratocasters.

PRS has continued to evolve through the years with models like the Silver Sky. Have you ever tried one?
A bit here and there. I thought they were pretty close to the original design it had been clearly inspired by.

The company's SE models are also pretty well known for being some of the best guitars you can find for that kind of money.
That's right! From guitars to food or whatever, there are two words that are important for any business — impeccable integrity. When people put love and attention into what they make, it stands out. When my guitars arrive from Paul Reed Smith, they are always perfectly in tune. I'm not making it up! They come to me set up perfectly because somebody at the factory is doing that final check. A lot of companies don't do that.

You play PRS singlecut models, too. What kind of situations call for that over a doublecut?
It's like wine. You've got choices like burgundy, merlot and cabernet sauvignon. The singlecut is more like a merlot, it's a more



Santana [*left*] with Buddy Guy in 2004. "We all took a lot from Buddy. He put the turbo inside the blues"

robust sound. When you play a doublecut, the sound changes dramatically and you get more treble. So in situations where I want more of a rounder sound, I will go for the singlecut. Both have their uses for different sounds and songs.

On your new retrospective album, you turned your guitar into a voice for an instrumental version of Michael Jackson's "Stranger in Moscow." Not many players can make their instruments talk like that.

There are components to articulating. It's a bit like how a chef thinks about ingredients, from flavors to nutrients. To cook a delicious meal, you need more than salt and pepper. Nothing is closer to the heart than the voice. To make a guitar speak to people, it's more than just volume and control. You need to put your soul into each note; when you do that, it changes the sound. There are a lot of people who play music that's more mental, which has a different type of feel. It's okay for certain things, but I prefer the sound of someone playing from their heart because of players like Wes Montgomery and Otis Rush. They made you feel what you hear.

Which singers helped you most with your phrasing?

If I sang, I'd want to sound like Marvin Gaye. If I were female, I'd want to sound like Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston or Billie Holiday. That's what I'm thinking of when I play guitar — how to articulate. I've spent a lot of time taking my fingers for a walk with Smokey Robinson, so when I play my guitar, I become the voice through my fingers on the fretboard. It's the same way I approached "Stranger in Moscow." I had to morph myself and get into a character, almost like an actor. When you see Robert De Niro on a talk show and he's not in character, sometimes he can be a little boring. But when he turns into the guy from *Heat, Taxi Driver* or *The Godfather*, he's incredible. It's a frame of mind. When I'm playing "Stranger in Moscow," you're hearing a different Carlos, because I'm thinking of Michael Jackson and phrasing everything differently — even if it's still got my own fingerprint.

On a technical level, what were you doing to sound like the original vocal?

I chose to play more relaxed and behind the beat, choosing my notes carefully. It's like putting your fingers in water and sprinkling someone's face with water, or if you take a spoon to grapefruit and it squirts. Those are the good notes. A lot of people don't know how to squirt their best notes! I learned this stuff from Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Albert King and Freddie King. If you don't know how to squirt, everything is contained, and it can get boring after a while. I like being squirted in the face by music because it makes me feel alive. The goal of any guitar player, whatever the style may be — from funk and flamenco to heavy metal — is to make the listener feel alive. A good guitar solo should sound like an orgasm. I can hear it in Eddie Van Halen's playing, and the same goes for Jimi Hendrix. I live for the juicy notes.

There's almost a Jeff Beck approach to your improvisation on that track. You knew each other and famously played together on *The Nagano Sessions* [*with Steve Lukather*] in 1986. What do you remember most about Jeff?

Jeff Beck took guitar way beyond. His approach was like letting the hamster out of the cage. I was a big fan of Jeff from the second I heard him play. What I loved most was his imagination and passion. He was a very untraditional player, even though he had learned the traditional approach to blues to start with. I remember hearing *Truth* [*Beck's first solo album from 1968*] a long time ago and loving it, but I think the first song I heard by him was "Over Under Sideways Down" by the Yardbirds. He had this fuzz sound that was very special. You could also tell he'd been listening to people like Ravi Shankar or Ali Akbar Khan. He was a multi-dimensional player in that sense, the opposite of a one-trick pony. He learned from Roy Buchanan and Buddy Guy — I mean, we all took a lot from Buddy — because he put the turbo inside the blues. Like Jeff, I learned how to take a deep breath and trust my fingers almost like a child going down a water slide.

Is it because in situations like that, it's more about heart and soul than technicality?

Anybody can practice scales up and down. But there's something about coming down a water slide. You don't know how you're going to land; it might be on your head or on your feet.

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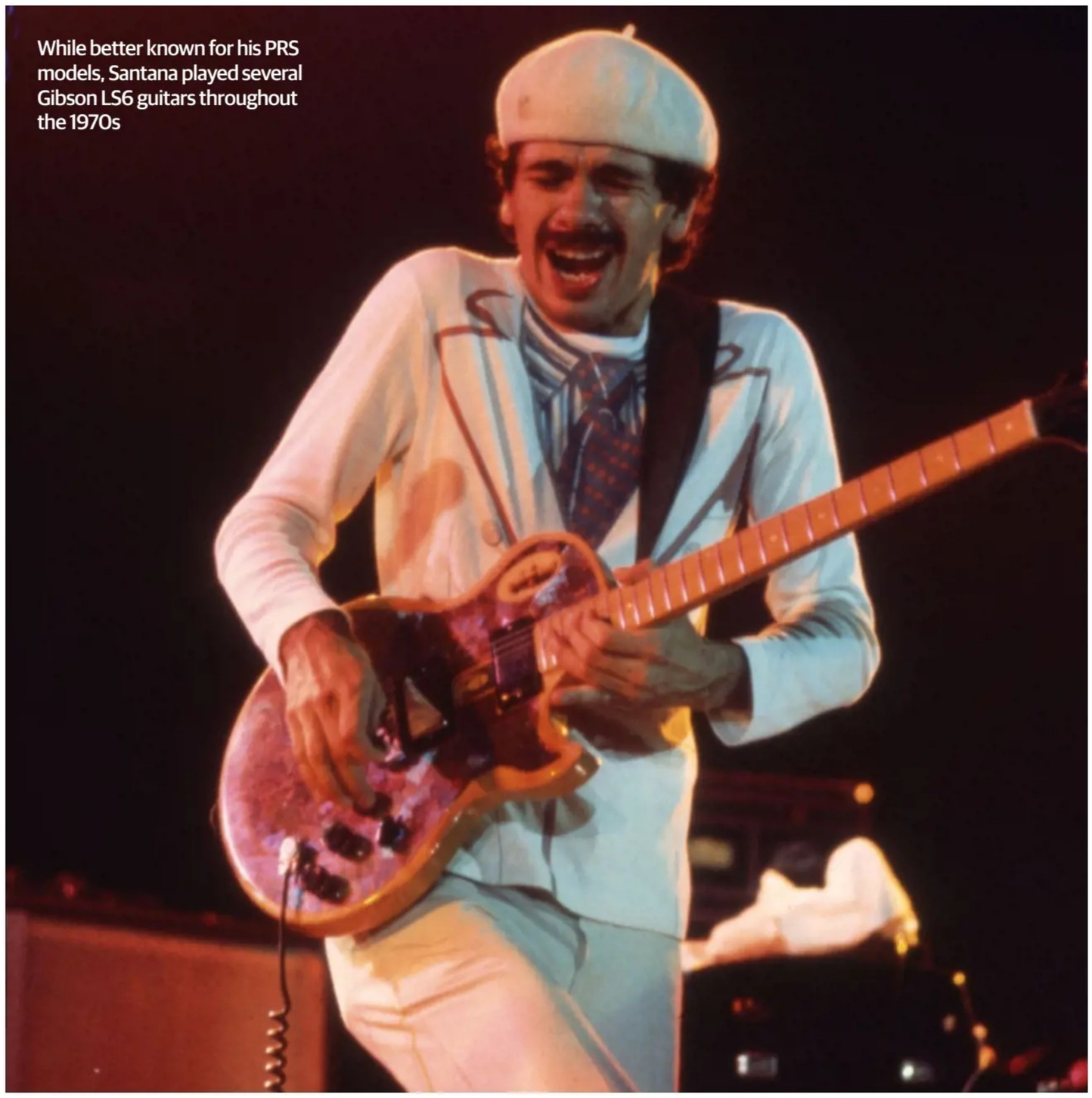


While better known for his PRS models, Santana played several Gibson LS6 guitars throughout the 1970s

That's what happens when you deviate from the melody. John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter taught me a lot. It's the art of improvisation, entering the unknown. People would ask Wayne how he practices, and he'd tell them, "We don't know what we are going to play; how do you practice the unknown?" I learned improvisation from Coltrane. I learned cosmic music from Sun Ra. I learned down-to-earth music from the Grateful Dead because they were heavily immersed in the folk and bluegrass worlds. And don't dismiss the guitar playing of Bob Dylan. He played a lot of great guitar, which worked beautifully with his vocals. I've learned from many musicians, especially the incredible women I mentioned earlier.

Playing along to soul singers is something nearly every guitar player could learn something from.

I don't care who you are, whether you are Al Di Meola or not, I'd recommend this to any guitar player. If you spend even one day learning how to play and phrase like those lady soul singers, you will become a better musician. This is the truth. This is genuinely the most important part of the interview — right now. The only thing people will remember about your music is how you made them feel.

"Don't lose the magic of self-discovery"

They are not going to remember all the fast scales and "Look at what I can do!" moments. But they will remember those three notes that made the hairs stand on the back of the neck and tears come out of their eyes, even if they don't know why. That's a whole other element, one I call spirit. Some people don't know how to play with spirit, heart and soul. Those are three very important ingredients.

Music isn't a sport at the end of the day — especially for the listener.

If you just practice all day and night going really fast, after a while, it's a bit like going to the gym and seeing somebody flexing their muscles. Big deal. So what? Playing with spirit is like giving someone a hug that lasts for infinity. Time stops.

Are there any songs that you think demonstrates this best?

There's a note Jimi Hendrix plays in "All Along the Watchtower" that makes you feel like you are entering eternity. It's like being from Kansas and having only seen the Pacific Ocean on a postcard, then going to Hawaii and putting your feet in the water. That's when you understand the totality and absoluteness of an ocean. A lot of musicians don't understand how to play like that, but Chick Corea can. You have to learn how to dive into infinity through one note. It's like learning how to French kiss correctly — to be fully alive with all your senses but no guilt, shame or embarrassment. Take the inhibitions and all that stuff out. You will see how beautiful it is to interact so intimately. That's what a guitar player is. The guitar is a very naked and sensuous instrument. That's just the way it is.

The other Michael Jackson track on the album, "Whatever Happens," has some harmonic minor lines, but on nylon acoustic. Where'd you learn to use that sound?

I got a lot of it from my father because he played violin. It's funny; when I started, people would say I was using a Dorian scale. But the only Dorian I knew was a girl who went to my junior high school. She invited me to go over to her house when her mom was working. I had a good time with Dorian. They also said I was using tonic scales, but the only tonic I knew was in gin and tonic. I don't know, nor do I want to know, about scales because that will get in my way. I would rather feel like a blind man touching someone's face. They are memorizing something in a completely different way to how someone else would see it. I'm not saying ignorance is bliss; I'm saying that if you learn everything, you can take some of the magic away. Don't lose the magic of self-discovery. There's something so beautiful about purity and innocence. Again, it's like that first kiss.

The Smokey Robinson track, "Please Don't Take Your Love," has a distinct, lively blues tone. What were you using?

That sound is a combination of three things. The guitar was a really old white Stratocaster going straight into a Dumble amplifier that was lent to me by Alexander Dumble. The tone of that Strat with the Dumble is something magical. You stop playing notes, sounds and vibrations, and it all becomes a living sensation. How many players can say they play with a living sensation? Manitas De Plata, Paco De Lucía, John McLaughlin and Sonny Sharrock. The main ingredients for me are spirituality and sensuality. Without those two things, I wouldn't play guitar like this. I wouldn't want to be on this planet.

"Get On" is an interesting piece of music. Do you play differently knowing someone like Miles Davis is on the same track?

I'm almost 80. I've learned how to diversify my portfolio and my Rolodex of expression,

"The main ingredients for me are spirituality and sensuality"

tones and vibration. When I first heard this song with Miles, I had to trust that I knew enough about what he was doing. Certain music comes from Africa, and that went on to influence stuff played by Cubans and Puerto Ricans, all this sensual music like guahira, bolero, charanga. If you listen to the African band Kékélé, you will hear a lot of Santana in there. I have to give credit to the musicians because they knew how to make music feel like it's alive. It's not just notes and clever inversions. I always go back to something physical. You have to make people feel. They can't take it or leave it. The song has to speak to them. They will stop all conversations because they are enthralled and captivated. The sound is making love to them. And it takes trust. If there's no trust, you won't get the goods. With music, you gotta give the goods, man. Otherwise it's just too clever and intellectual, and that stuff is boring.

You've said Stevie Ray Vaughan once came to you in a dream and told you to use his Dumble Steel String Singer amp for a performance at Madison Square Garden. Not many people can say that.

I call them visitations. I get visitations from Miles Davis sometimes, as well as B.B. King. You don't have to be dead to visit me. Sometimes a dream is not a dream; someone has come back to communicate with you. I had a dream about Miles where I went to his concert and someone said, "Miles knows you are here and wants to see you in his dressing room." He asked how I was doing and started writing on a bit of paper, which he then gave to me. And just as I was about to read it, I woke up. I have to analyze what he was trying to tell me. It's like that with Stevie Ray and Jaco Pastorius. I feel very honored that these people come to me. Sometimes I feel like I'm like [*John F. Kennedy International Airport*] and all these musicians are landing on me and sharing things. I have to figure out what it all means.

What exactly did Stevie tell you?

With Stevie, he was saying, "Carlos, where I am, I don't have any fingers; I am only spirit." He missed putting his fingers on a guitar and making the speakers push air. He told me to call his brother Jimmie [*Vaughan*] and ask him to lend me his amp, the #007 Dumble, and then play it with a Strat so he could feel it through me. You know that *Ghost* movie with Whoopi Goldberg? There's a part where a ghost comes into her body so he can feel. That's what Stevie was doing. He wanted to utilize my body and hands because he missed playing guitar. Jimmie wasn't sure at first. Fortunately, Stevie's tech, René Martinez, had the same dream and called Jimmie, which is how we convinced him to lend me the amplifier. The last person to borrow it was John Mayer. Let's just say Jimmie doesn't loan that thing out very easily.





Rightly so. For those of us waiting in vain for Jimmie Vaughan to give us the green light on the Dumble, how would you describe the sound of that amp?

It sounded like everything I love about Peter Green when he played a certain kind of heavenly blues. My mom once asked me, "Mijo, do you like Whitney Houston?" and I said "of course." She then told me that when Whitney sang, her voice would become a legion of angels. I think my mom knew what she was talking about. Sometimes when you play, you channel things. One person I haven't mentioned too much is Michael Bloomfield. I miss him a lot. He was a great player who knew how to tap into things. Those Paul Butterfield Blues Band albums, like the [*self-titled*] debut and *East-West*, are incredible, with songs like "Born in Chicago." And the stuff he played with Bob Dylan, forget about it. Michael Bloomfield was a hero beyond heroes to me. But the guy who got me out of all that stuff was [*Hungarian jazz, pop and rock guitarist*] Gábor Szabó. The way he could play ballads was amazing. Listen to his album *Spellbinder* [*1966*] and you will hear a lot of Santana in there. Anyone reading this should listen to Hungarian gypsy music. There is nothing more romantic than hearing that stuff. It really pulled me out of the blues, which is something we all need from time to time. GW



Left: Carlos Santana in New York, 2021

ALAMY

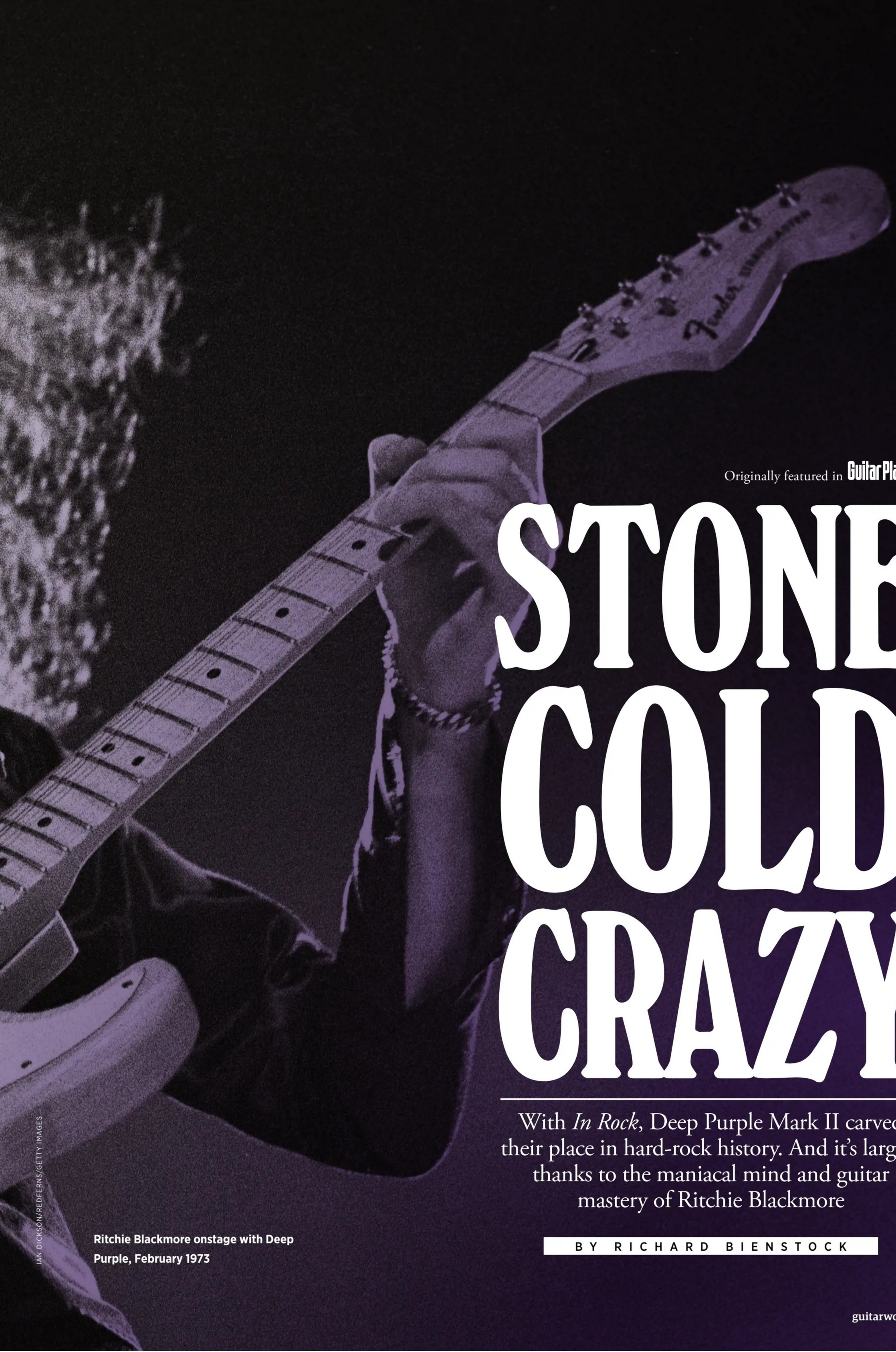


Originally featured in Guitar Player

STONE COLD CRAZY

With *In Rock*, Deep Purple Mark II carved their place in hard-rock history. And it's largely thanks to the maniacal mind and guitar mastery of Ritchie Blackmore

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK



IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Ritchie Blackmore onstage with Deep Purple, February 1973

DEEP PURPLE IN ROCK is many things, but subtle is not one of them. Within literally seconds of listening to it, you're blasted by Ian Paice's frantic, slippery drums, Jon Lord's braying organ and, of course, Ritchie Blackmore's indelible guitar riffing and loopy tremolo flourishes. Along the way, singer Ian Gillan references and rearranges rock's DNA ("'Good golly!' said little Miss Molly / When she was rocking in the house of blue light!"), punctuating his Little Richard and Elvis Presley–inspired lyrics with ridiculously piercing and forceful shrieks and wails. For that matter, the frenzied rhythm, developed by bassist Roger Glover, emulates Jimi Hendrix's "Fire." From there, through two verses and choruses. we're on to bearing witness to a classic Lord–Blackmore organ-guitar battle. And we're only a minute into the record.

The song we're listening to is called "Speed King," and it's a wild and breathless launch to *In Rock*. It's also completely in line with what ensues over the next 40 minutes or so. From the snaky, metallized grind of "Bloodsucker" to the breakneck gallop of "Flight of the Rat," the monolithic guitar-organ groove of "Into the Fire" and the thundering "Hard Lovin' Man," the album is a relentless sonic juggernaut, its massive and over-the-top sound reflected in both the album title and the Mount Rushmore–aping cover art. In fact, the only moment where Purple drive the music with anything less than the pedal fully floored is the 10-minute epic "Child in Time." And given the fact that Gillan refuses to sing this one onstage anymore due to the practically inhuman vocal demands (there's also an explosive, elongated Blackmore solo that many consider one of his best), this might be the most intense track of all.

"If it's not dramatic or exciting, it has no place on this album," Blackmore once said of *In Rock*, and we'd be loath to disagree. There's nary a moment on the record that isn't a full-on white-knuckled experience. But we'd add the word *heavy* to the first part of Blackmore's statement. Because even today, over 50 years since its original release, *In Rock* is a testament to just how intense (and dramatic and exciting) guitar music can be. Half a century ago? It sounded positively revolutionary.

The album arrived at a turning point in popular music culture. The '60s were, chronologically and spiritually, over. Woodstock had given way to Altamont, the Beatles were on the brink of breakup, and free love and the hippie dream had morphed into something darker and less idealized. There were heavy bands, but many of them — Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Vanilla Fudge, Blue Cheer — were either dissolved or on their last legs.

Into this moment stepped three British acts — Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple — that would push hard rock to new extremes and influence generations of bands that followed. By 1970, Zeppelin had established themselves as the preeminent hard-rock outfit, with two blockbuster albums under its belt and a third brewing that would delve more deeply into folk and acoustic roots. Meanwhile, Black Sabbath were crafting a doomy and downtuned sound that, paired with Ozzy Osbourne's desperate wail and an overall atmosphere of evil, established the template for heavy metal going forward.

And then there was Purple. By 1970, they were already, by the relatively brief lifespan of rock bands at the time, something of a veteran act. They had released three albums — 1968's *Shades of Deep Purple* and *The Book of Taliesyn* and the following year's *Deep Purple* — and scored hits (at least in the U.S., where they were bigger than in their native U.K.) with covers of Neil Diamond's "Kentucky Woman," Ike & Tina Turner's "River Deep — Mountain High" and, most notably, Joe South's "Hush," which climbed to Number Four in the U.S. in the summer of '68.

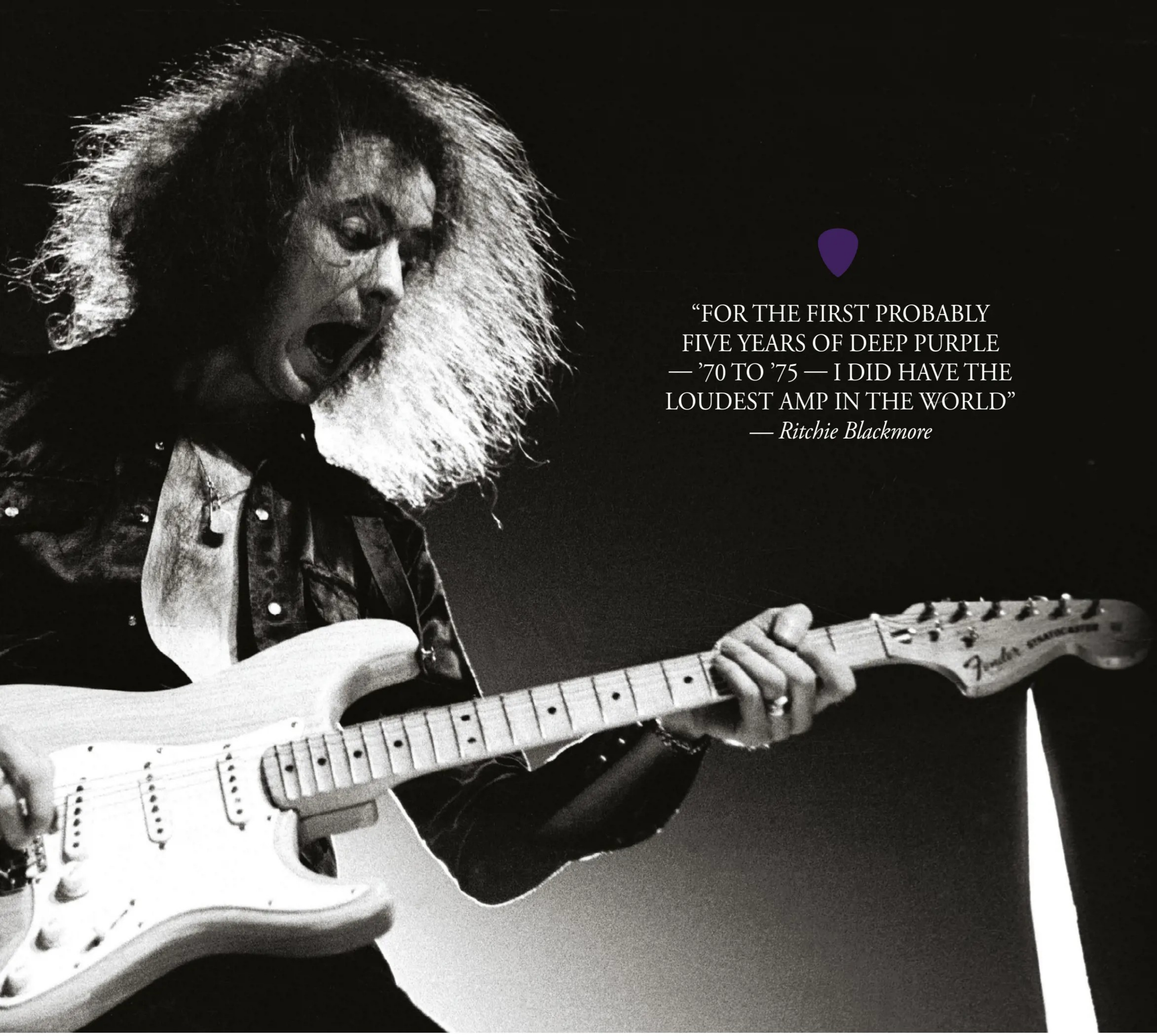


IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

> "I USED TO HAVE QUARTER-INCH [*VIBRATO*] BARS MADE FOR ME BECAUSE I'D KEEP SNAPPING THE NORMAL KIND"
> — *Ritchie Blackmore*

Of course, while that band was very much Deep Purple, it was not the decibel-defying, instrument-destroying, amp-exploding act that laid waste to arena and festival stages throughout the early and mid '70s. Nor was the Ritchie Blackmore of this Deep Purple the wild-eyed-but-cool-as-ice Fender Stratocaster–wielding, neoclassical-guitar-pioneering, whammy-bar-abusing six-string hero he would come to be praised as. That all began, unequivocally, with *In Rock*.

Back in 1968, however, Deep Purple were a fledging act led by Blackmore and Lord, the latter a classically trained pianist who had already logged years of recording,



"FOR THE FIRST PROBABLY FIVE YEARS OF DEEP PURPLE — '70 TO '75 — I DID HAVE THE LOUDEST AMP IN THE WORLD"
— *Ritchie Blackmore*

performing and session work (he claimed to have played organ on the Kinks' 1964 hit single "You Really Got Me"). Blackmore, for his part, had spent time with a variety of acts, including the Outlaws, Neil Christian and the outrageous "horror-rocker" Screaming Lord Sutch. He also worked as a session guitarist around London and had, in his younger days, taken lessons from British session ace Big Jim Sullivan, who lived near Blackmore and was at one point in the mid '60s considered the top session man on the circuit alongside the likes of Jimmy Page. "He was teaching me classical — Bach, and things like that — and he was teaching me to read better than I was," Blackmore said of Sullivan.

Like Page and many other British guitarists of the time, Blackmore cut his teeth on a wide variety of sounds and musical styles. He once called 1950s British teen idol and skiffle player Tommy Steele his "first hero." Steele was a regular guest on the BBC's rock and roll television show *Six Five Special*. Seeing the performer on screen, Blackmore recalled saying to himself, "That's what I want to do: I want to jump around with a guitar like Tommy Steele does. I don't want to play it, necessarily. I just want to jump around with it, like he did."

From there, Blackmore dove deep into guitar, immersing himself both in classical forms as well as in the playing of Hank Marvin, Les Paul, Django Reinhardt, Wes Montgomery, Scotty Moore and Cliff Gallup. His style, he said, "developed through sheer practice. When I was attending school, I was constantly practicing mentally. Then I would rush home and practice until the early hours. I would practice about five hours a day. I was obsessed with playing."

By 1967 Blackmore, with his ever-present Gibson ES-335, had made a name for himself around London both as a performer (Screaming Lord Sutch, he

said, “pulled me out front and demanded I jump around and act stupid”) and session man (“It was funny sometimes to hear yourself on perhaps eight out of 10 records being played on the radio”). He was doing an extended stint gigging in Hamburg when he received a call to come back to England to audition for a burgeoning project conceived by British drummer Chris Curtis named Roundabout, which also included Jon Lord among its ranks. Curtis soon exited the project, and the band was rebuilt around Blackmore and Lord, who had found common ground upon meeting. “Jon and I both had classical leanings,” Blackmore said. “He more so than I, so we had something in common immediately.” Eventually they added bassist Nick Simper and, after some musical chairs, singer Rod Evans and drummer Ian Paice, who had played together in a band called the Maze.

It is this lineup that began gigging as Roundabout, and, soon enough, as Deep Purple, after Blackmore suggested they rename the band after his grandmother’s favorite song, a 1930s-era standard that had been covered by various big-band and pop artists over the decades. But there was also another consideration: “There were lots of ‘color’ bands around — Moody Blues, Pink Floyd, et cetera,” Blackmore explained. “Colors were in!”

By the summer of ’68, the new band had released its debut, *Shades of Deep Purple*, on EMI in the U.K. and Tetragrammaton Records (a brand-new label co-founded by comedian Bill Cosby) in the U.S., and notched a quick hit in the latter region with their organ-forward version of “Hush.” Over the course of *Shades* and their next two records, Purple veered between pop, blues, rock, psychedelia, ballads and baroque elements, without quite managing to carve out a distinct sound. Blackmore has acknowledged as much. “I’m not particularly proud of the first three records,” he admitted. “They seem to be meandering all over the place. We didn’t really have a niche and we didn’t quite know where we were going.”

Unsure of their musical footing, facing declining sales after “Hush” and dealing with the demise of Tetragram-maton, which went broke and folded soon after the release of *Deep Purple*, the group knew a change was in order. Inspired in part by the mighty Led Zeppelin, Blackmore and Lord opted to take Purple in a heavier, more hard-rocking direction, and got Paice onboard with the idea. Their singer and bassist were less agreeable. “We thought that Rod and Nick had gone about as far as they could,” Paice said. “We decided that if it was going to be a break, it was going to be a substantial one to refocus the band to look forward, to break this feeling of stagnation.”

Which is exactly what they with the addition of leather-lunged vocalist Ian Gillan and bassist Roger Glover, both of whom hailed from British band Episode Six. Like Purple, Episode Six had struggled to break through to a wider audience. And like their soon-to-be bandmates, Gillan and Glover had grown tired of waiting for it to happen.

Thus, the classic Purple lineup, henceforth known as Deep Purple Mark II, was born. And while the intention all along had been to go in a heavier direction, ironically, the first fruits of their labors — the rather tame 1969 single “Hallelujah,” followed by the Jon Lord–spearheaded live classical album *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* — were quite the opposite. Blackmore, for one, was not amused. In the wake of *Concerto*, “The split between the musical side of Jon and the harder side of Ritchie came to a head,” Paice said.

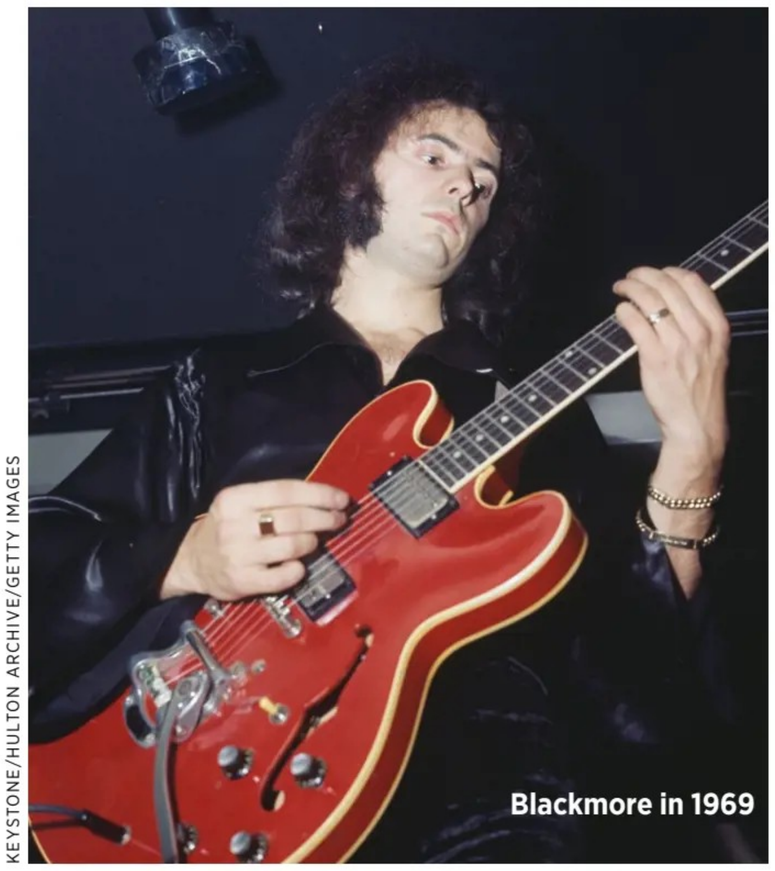


FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



RON HOWARD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Deep Purple on *Top of the Pops* in 1971. (from left) Jon Lord, Ian Gillan, Blackmore, Ian Paice and Roger Glover



KEYSTONE/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Blackmore in 1969

"*Concerto for Group and Orchestra* was Jon Lord's baby," Glover observed. "People were confused about what kind of band we were. Subsequently, Blackmore firmly stepped up and changed the band's identity into a jamming, hard-rocking force."

The result of that step-up was *In Rock*. "That record was sort of a response to the one we did with the orchestra," Blackmore said. "I wanted to do a loud, hard-rock record. And I was thinking, This record better make it, because I was afraid that if it didn't we were going to be stuck playing with orchestras for the rest of our lives."

With *In Rock*, Blackmore recalled, "Ian Gillan and Roger Glover had come in, so that gave us new blood. I found my niche being much heavier music and playing with more sustain on the amplifier — that sort of thing. We consciously sat down and said, 'Let's have a go at being really heavy.'"

But before the heavy new Purple hit the studio, they hit the road. Much of the material that would feature on *In Rock* was worked up onstage by the nascent lineup. A bootleg from an August 1969 gig at Amsterdam's Paradiso — only the band's seventh gig with Gillan and Glover — shows early versions of "Speed King" (then titled "Kneel and Pray") and "Child in Time" were already in the set. A review of the gig described the chaos of those formative days, noting that, during the former song, "the whole stage seems to be in a state of general mayhem."

But the stage was also paramount to the development and eventual sound of *In Rock*. Said Gillan, "If you're going to write about *In Rock*, you've got to combine the making of the album with the live performances. They were so much more important than the actual making of the record. Making records is almost an inconvenience, because you have to compromise in the studio."

And while the combination of new members sparked a surge in writing — Gillan once remarked that he didn't even know how "Speed King" happened — Glover also singled out Blackmore for being particularly inspired at the time. "Ritchie wasn't just the guitar player," the bassist said. "He was a brilliant innovator. Things he wrote defy description. He was a magnetic, dynamic writer. I don't think he could have done it in a vacuum by himself; it did require the rest of us. But I'll certainly give him his due. He was the motivating character in the band."

> "IT DID REQUIRE THE REST OF US, BUT I'LL GIVE RITCHIE HIS DUE. HE WAS THE MOTIVATING CHARACTER IN THE BAND"
> — *Roger Glover*

While *In Rock* serves as a showcase for every member of Deep Purple, it is without a doubt Blackmore who makes the biggest impression. While his riffing and rhythm playing is rock solid and infused with plenty of attitude and aggression ("Bloodsucker" practically verges on heavy metal), it is in his lead work that the guitarist truly shines, mixing classical-tinged technique (the explosive triplet pattern that caps the dramatic "Child in Time" solo), deft, intricate runs ("Flight of the Rat"), insane whammy-bar warbles and plunges ("Bloodsucker") and barely controlled noise ("Hard Lovin' Man") into an approach that manages to sound both studiously technical and completely unhinged.

Blackmore was clearly, as intended, taking his playing in a harder-edged direction. But there was more to his stylistic shift on *In Rock* than merely changing up his approach. Just as significantly, he also overhauled his gear. Around this time, the guitarist traded his stalwart ES-335 for a new number-one guitar, a Fender Stratocaster. "I liked the way Hendrix's Strat looked," he explained. "A Strat has got that rock kind of look. So the visual thing attracted me first, even though it was an upside-down Strat in Hendrix's case. I thought, I must try one of those someday."

As for where he got his first Strat? "I knew Eric Clapton's roadie. He was a friend of ours. And I think Eric had given him one of his Strats as a present. Probably because Eric didn't want it. I think it had a slightly bowed neck, which was making the action pretty high. [*The roadie*] said, 'I'll sell it to you for £60.' So Eric Clapton's throwaway Strat came in handy for me."

Blackmore used both the Fender and the Gibson on *In Rock* — "Child in

Time” and “Flight of the Rat,” at least, are Blackmore on the ES-335. But it is the Strat, and in particular the guitar’s tremolo, that would come to dominate his sound. “I changed to a Stratocaster because the sound had an edge to it that I really liked. But it was much harder to get used to,” he said, noting, “when you’re playing a humbucking pickup, you’ve got that fat sound, and it’s quite forgiving. But when you play with Fender pickups, they are so thin and mean and edgy and hard. And every note counts; you can’t fake a note.”

While the Strat didn’t allow Blackmore room to “fake a note,” it did make it possible for him to bend, bow, wobble and whammy the heck out of them. Which, of course, Blackmore did, making extreme trem abuse a cornerstone of his playing beginning on *In Rock*, and then throughout the rest of his ’70s work with Purple. To be sure, Blackmore was hardly polite in his approach to the whammy bar. Rather, he said, “I went crazy with it. I used to have quarter-inch [*vibrato*] bars made for me because I’d keep snapping the normal kind. My repairman would look at me strangely and say, ‘What are you doing to these tremolo bars?’ Finally, he gave me this gigantic tremolo arm made of half an inch of solid iron and said, ‘Here. If you break this thing, I don’t wanna know about it!’

“About three weeks later,” Blackmore continued, “I went back. He looked at me and said, ‘No — you haven’t.’ And I said, ‘Yes I have.’ In graphic detail, I explained to him how I would twirl the guitar around the bar, throw it to the floor, put my foot on it and pull the bar off with two hands. He was a bit of a purist, so he wasn’t amused.”

Blackmore’s whammy bar makes itself known less than 20 seconds into *In Rock*, with a loopy dip signaling the first chorus (and every subsequent one) of “Speed King.” But he really leans into the bar on tracks like “Bloodsucker” and, in particular, the tour de force finale, “Hard Lovin’ Man,” which closes with roughly a minute and a half of pure six-string guitar mayhem, with Blackmore unleashing shredding licks as he pummels his tremolo, violently scrapes his strings and conjures all manner of screaming feedback. His bandmates, seemingly unable to keep up, eventually drop out of the mix, then return and drop out again, leaving Blackmore to finish the song — and the record — on his own, going out in a hail of guitar screeches and moans and white noise. It is a literally show-stopping end to the record, and stands as arguably one of the most beautifully unhinged recorded guitar moments of the era.

“One of the engineers who originally worked on that album was this stuffy bloke who didn’t like rock and roll music,” Blackmore recalled. “While I was recording the solo on that song, I got this urge and started rubbing the guitar up and down the doorway of the control room to get all that wild guitar noise. So this bloke looks at me, and he’s got this expression on his face as if I’d lost my mind.”

Of course, Blackmore could also be subtle and nimble when neccessary. Take the long break in “Child in Time,” which sees him building a composition within a composition, his solo beginning with round-toned, bluesy phrases accented with moaning note bends, before gradually picking up speed, taking on a biting, snarling sound and exploding in a flurry of classical arpeggios. It’s one of his most celebrated and complex solos. What’s more, Blackmore said years later, he would sometimes play it much faster onstage. The only problem, he admitted, “was coming into that part at the end of the guitar solo that the band would do in unison. You can only play that so fast — unless you start tapping, which I don’t do, out of principle. It’s just an A minor arpeggio, but it’s all downstrokes. You try and play that really fast after you’ve had 10 scotches!”

Then there’s “Living Wreck,” where he constructs his solo almost entirely of long, vibratoed notes played in phrases that slowly make their way up the fretboard to reach a climactic end. The result is a passage that sounds violin-like in tone and texture, contrasting with the distorted organ bleats that otherwise characterize the song.



FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

> “HEARING *IN ROCK* WAS LIKE TAKING A BRICK AND JUST SHOVING IT RIGHT IN YOUR HEAD. IT’S TIMELESS. IT’S RIDICULOUS!”
> *— Yngwie Malmsteen*



JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT) FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (CENTER AND RIGHT)

That push and pull between Lord's organ and Blackmore's guitar, it's worth noting, would become a key component of Purple's sound. And once again, it all began on *In Rock*. As Roger Glover once explained, "Jon played the blues when he was young, and that gave him a solid foundation, because when he played hard in Deep Purple, he was able to match Blackmore's massive guitar sound and transform the organ from a polite instrument and stand toe-to-toe with a guitarist as overpowering as Blackmore."

One way Lord did that, Glover continued, was by "abusing his instrument and sticking it through a Marshall instead of a Leslie to make it scream." Which was useful, as Blackmore tended to play loud. "I've always played every amp I've ever had full up, because rock and roll is supposed to be played loud," he told *Guitar Player* in 1973. "Also, keeping the amp up is how you get your sustain. I turn down on the guitar for dynamics."

Blackmore has always been a bit cagey when it comes to discussing his amp setup back in the day, though it is wel that in the early '70s he was fond of both Vox and Marshall units. Eventually, he moved on to Marshall Majors, which he had modded with an extra output stage to give the amp "a fatter sound, a bit more distorted," he said. "This extra output stage basically made the 200-watt into a 280-watt. So for the first probably five years of Deep Purple — '70 to '75 — I did have the loudest amp in the world."

No matter what amp he was using, however, a mainstay of Blackmore's rig in those days was the Hornby-Skewes treble booster. "That is the sound I always used, coupled with the Vox or the Marshall," he said. "For a while, Jon Lord used the Hornby-Skewes and Marshall for his organ as well. We were looking for a distorted organ sound and I said, 'Why don't we plug your organ through my Hornby-Skewes and into my amp and see how an organ sounds like that?' So we did it, and of course he loved the sound."

And what's not to love, really? The massive sound that Deep Purple forged on *In Rock*, and then carried through on subsequent early '70s masterpieces like *Fireball* and *Machine Head*, would inspire and spawn literally generations of hard-rock and heavy-metal bands. One future guitar hero who found it impossible to look away from Blackmore was virtuoso neoclassical shredder Yngwie Malmsteen, who is clearly indebted to the Purple man in terms of sound, style and even choice of instrument. In a call with *Guitar Player*, he was eager to testify to the greatness of Blackmore and the band on *In Rock*. As a child growing up in Sweden, Malmsteen said, "Hearing *In Rock* was like taking a brick and just shoving it right in your head. It's heavy, it's fast, it's technical, it's sick. It's a really, really aggressive sound. 'Flight of the Rat,' 'Child in Time,' 'Into the Fire'... It's timeless. It's ridiculous."

Following *In Rock*, Deep Purple, of course, went on to experience greater highs (there's that little *Machine Head* ditty "Smoke on the Water" for one), and also incredible lows. To the latter point, there is the rift that has lasted for decades between Blackmore — who now focuses primarily on acoustic Renaissance music, as well as occasionally playing with his reunited post-Purple act, Rainbow — and his former bandmates. In fact, when Purple were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Blackmore, depending on who is telling the story, either declined or was prevented from standing alongside them to accept the honor. As Glover said in a 2018 interview, "He can be difficult to work with, but he is even more difficult to live with. Blackmore is a very unique character, and in the early days we had fantastic times and wrote great songs."

Indeed they did, and many of Purple's greatest are collected on *In Rock*, which, 50 years on, is still as alluring, mesmerizing and flat-out overwhelming as ever. It's the album, as Blackmore has said, where "everything clicked" for Deep Purple.

Or, as Malmsteen says, "It's the one where they go full out the most. Everybody talks about Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, and I love those bands, too. But *In Rock* is heavier and more metal than any of the other guys. It was just, 'Turn everything up and play as fast and as loud and as much as you can!'" He laughs. "I was eight years old when I heard it, and it messed with my head forever. Because I still do that!"

T. Rex's Marc Bolan in the early 70s. “Marc is criminally underrated as a guitarist,” says Tony Visconti. “All rock ’n’ rollers love T. Rex, and there’s a little bit of T. Rex in every rock ’n’ roll band”

JURASSIC CLASSIC

ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF *ELECTRIC WARRIOR*, PRODUCER TONY VISCONTI DISCUSSED THE GENIUS OF **T. REX** GUITARIST **MARC BOLAN**

BY MARK McSTEA

IN A YEAR OF NOTABLE ANNIVERSARIES, 2021 saw the 50th anniversary of the release of *Electric Warrior* in 1971, for many the ultimate T. Rex album and the perfect encapsulation of Marc Bolan's genius. Having spent years toiling away on the club and festival circuit with his acoustic duo, Tyrannosaurus Rex, Bolan fully embraced the sound of electric guitar and the spirit of rock 'n' roll to score his first hit with "Ride a White Swan" in 1970. Its massive success turned Bolan into a global superstar, with incredible hit singles appearing every three months for the next three years. Most of the planet was in the grip of T. Rextasy, likened at the time to the fevered devotion of Beatlemania.

While the world was swooning over Bolan's pin-up looks and killer hooks, the U.S. was strangely resistant, with Bolan's only notable success being "Bang a Gong" in 1971. Bolan's run of hits started to dry up in the mid Seventies as the punk era dawned in the U.K., but his influence was immense, to the point that he was one of the few acts that wasn't subject to the "year zero"-style condemnation of so much that had preceded punk.

Electric Warrior, like most of Bolan's best albums, was produced by Tony Visconti, who was also working closely with David Bowie around the same period. Visconti's role in the success of T. Rex can't be overstated; his string arrangements were a key element of the distinctive T. Rex sound, and he knew how to get the very best out of Bolan in the studio. His memories of working with Bolan make for fascinating reading. [His interview in the December 2020 issue of *Guitar World* — about working with Bowie and Mick Ronson on the making of *The Man Who Sold the World* — is a perfect companion to this feature.]

Bolan's career was tragically cut short in 1977, when he died in a car crash while riding in the passenger seat of the car his girlfriend, Gloria Jones, was driving. While it is impossible to know how his career would've panned out, he was undergoing a critical and artistic reassessment at the time of his passing. What can be said with certainty is that he left behind a body of work that sounds as fresh and relevant now as it ever did. There are few thrills as visceral as turning the music player of your choice up to max and letting the intro to "Bang a Gong" transport you back to the golden age of glam rock 'n' roll.

How much demoing did Bolan do prior to recording? Did he bring in basic demos or fully formed ideas?

He was very secretive about his demos. He never brought a demo to the studio; he would teach everyone the song on the spot. Marc was terrified of being ripped off; he would have

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never handed demos out to anybody. Everything you hear on a T. Rex record was a live recording; nothing was replaced later on. His session guitar was the one on the left speaker, and his overdub — done about 15 minutes after we'd decided a track was a keeper — was on the right speaker.

Electric Warrior is packed with great moments. The guitar solo on "Mambo Sun" is classic Bolan, perfectly constructed and economical. Did he tend to come prepared or just work out his solos in the studio?

He did both. Some were made up in the studio, and if you saw him play live, he could really improvise; he had no problem playing a 20-minute solo. [*Laughs*] He was a smart lad. "Mambo" was worked out at home, including the double-tracked part that was an octave lower.

Bolan was very hip to the roots of rock 'n' roll and rockabilly. "Jeepster" owes a huge debt to Howlin' Wolf's "You'll Be Mine," and "We Love to Boogie" borrows heavily from Webb Pierce's "Teenage Boogie," even lifting the solo. Who was influencing him?

He was more of a blues guy than me. He listened to the early blues players a lot. We both loved R&B and Little Richard. Little Richard was a *huge* inspiration to Marc. Marc turned me on to James Burton, those great solos on the Ricky Nelson singles. I'd always loved those records but I'd never known the guitarist's name. Marc was definitely very knowledgeable.

Your string arrangements are an essential component of the T. Rex sound. The strings on "Cosmic Dancer" are a great piece of music in their own right. What was the collaborative process?

Marc recognized my string writing early in the Tyrannosaurus Rex days and that was my domain exclusively; he wouldn't question anything or have any suggestions. What he loved was that I would pick up on his riffs and some of his solos and use some of those ideas in the arrangements. For "Cosmic Dancer" I had about 25 string players. We had the budget because we had the hit, of course. I was trained classically; I'm a classical guitarist and I studied some writing at school, but I was largely self-taught. I'd have a reel-to-reel and fiddle around with my classical guitar and work the parts out then write them down. It took me ages to write those parts. Now I could do the arrangement for "Cosmic Dancer" in about three hours; at that time it might have taken three days.

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"ONE THING HE DID THAT WAS REALLY WEIRD WAS HE MIGHT BE SOLOING IN THE KEY OF E, BUT THEN HE'D SLIDE UP THREE FRETS **AND BE PLAYING SOLOS OUT OF THE G BLUES BOX"**





MARC BOLAN'S ELECTRIC WARRIORS

THE MAIN GUITARS Bolan used for recording *Electric Warrior* were a Fifties Les Paul Standard, purchased in a customized, semi-opaque orange finish, and a white Sixties Strat. The Les Paul was stolen after a rehearsal in 1977 and has never been recovered; the white Strat was smashed beyond repair by Bolan while onstage. Bolan used Vampower 100W amps and 4x12 cabs, made by now-defunct U.K. manufacturer Vamp. His effects setup was very simple, as it was for most guitarists at that time, comprising a Dallas Rangemaster treble booster, a Wem Copicat [tape echo] and a wah pedal.

Special thanks to Danielz of T. Rextasy, the world's only official Marc Bolan and T. Rex tribute band.

Marc Bolan [*left*], a Gibson Les Paul and T. Rex drummer Mickey Finn

The strings set the T. Rex hits apart from their contemporaries, acts like Slade, Roxy Music and Bowie. They were almost a signature sound for T. Rex.

We realized early on that it *was* a signature sound, as you say. "Bang a Gong" didn't have a written string part. Marc wanted to go without the strings, but I said that as we'd had a few hits with strings already, maybe we should add some to this one, because, as you say, it was identifiable as his sound. This discussion was taking place while the string players were sitting in their seats. Marc looked slightly terrified at that remark. He said, "Well, what can we do?" I simply asked the string players to all play the root note of the three chords in the chorus — G, A and E. It was so simple but it was very effective.

Bolan's solo on "Lean Woman Blues" is one of his strongest. His vibrato is very distinctive and reminds me of his vocal vibrato. He always seemed very confident in his abilities as a guitarist. Was that a fair assessment or was it bluff?

He was unique; he was not bluffing. His technical knowledge guitar-wise was not great at all. He knew a handful of chords, the right ones, of course, for rock 'n' roll. He invented his own technique with that very fast vibrato — he had very strong hands. I think you're right in that it probably did go hand-in-hand with his fast vocal vibrato. He did actually woodshed for hours to get that good. One thing that he did that was really weird was that he might be soloing in the key of E, but then he'd slide up three frets and be playing solos out of the G blues box. Some of those notes are modally not the correct notes but he just played with abandon. I think that explains some of his unusual note choices. Sometimes he'd perhaps even slide up another fret from the G position. It gave him almost a Hendrix sensibility; he really loved Hendrix. I suspect Hendrix was more aware of what he was doing than Marc was in terms of modality, I think because Hendrix understood jazz. Eric Clapton was another player Marc loved. June [Bolan's wife] was Eric's girlfriend before she met Marc. She took him to Clapton's house for a weekend and Marc told me that he sat on the floor and watched Clapton play for the whole weekend. He said to me, "I sat at the feet of the master." He copped a lot of blues techniques from watching Clapton. He was a very quick learner.

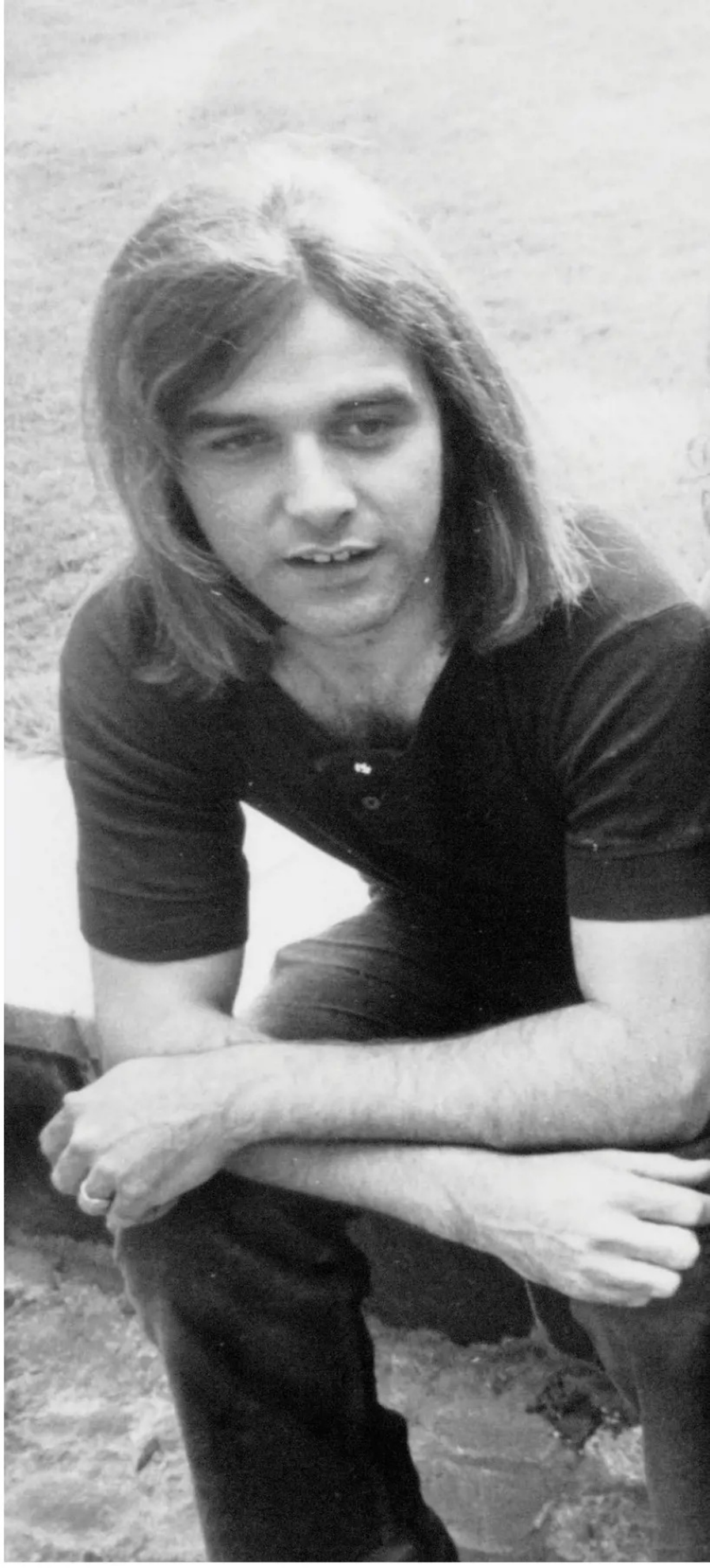
The groove of "Bang a Gong" is irresistible. Something often overlooked on this oft-covered song is the importance of the backing vocals.

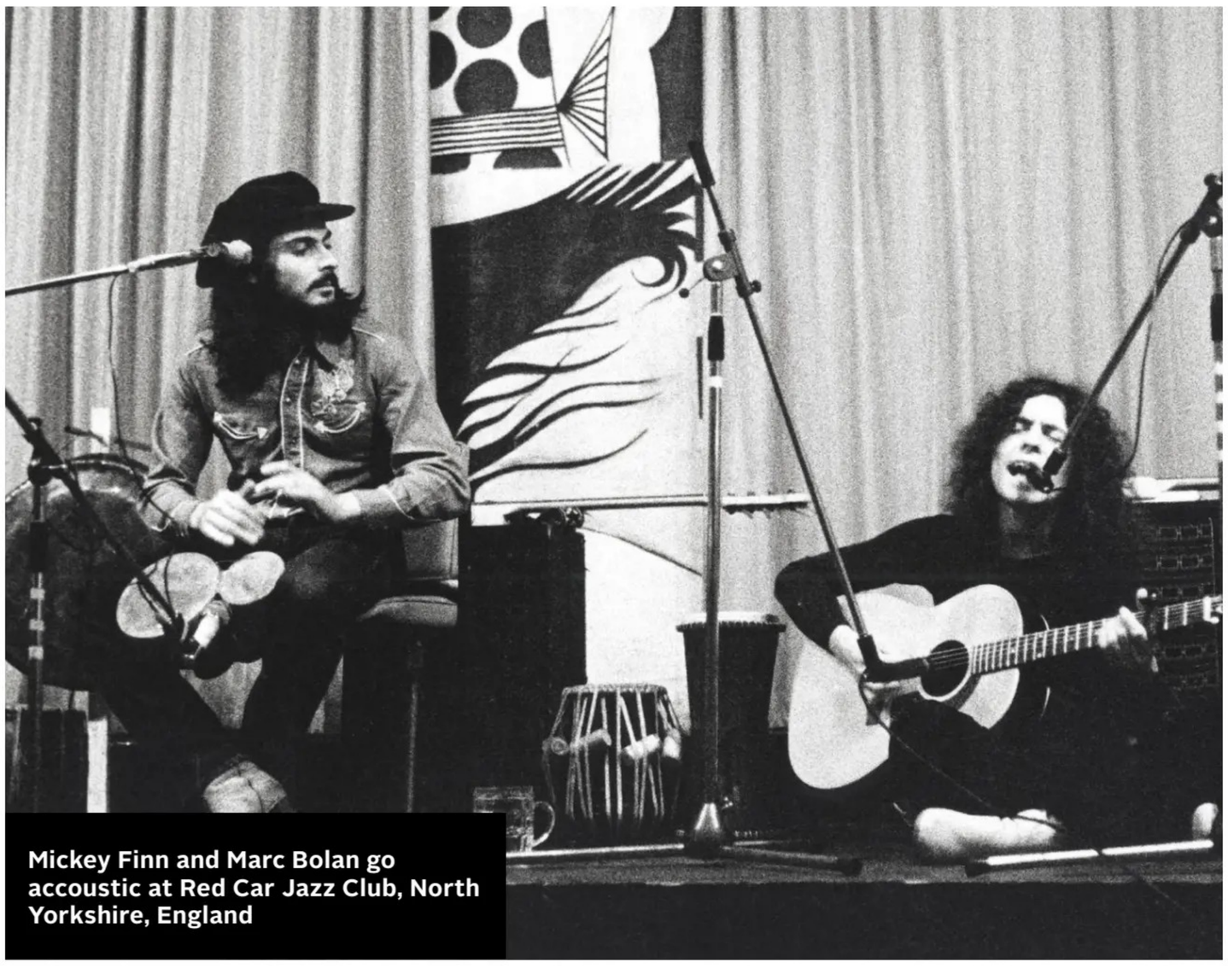
We all had a go at the backing vocals. Marc had the idea for Flo and Eddie to sing the chorus an octave higher. They cooked up that arrangement between the three of them. They were alumni of Zappa, and I think some of the oohs on the chorus may have come from their time with Frank. Marc and I loved old doo wop, as did Zappa.

You've worked with many great guitarists over the years. How would you rate Marc in comparison?

This is where Marc is different from all of the classic rock guitarists. He was cut from a different cloth; he invented himself. He had his own thing. To compare him to Ronson and Fripp and others I've worked with is difficult as his recording career was too narrow. Ronson worked with loads of other people so you get an idea of where he stood and how he could adapt his style. We can't make that comparison for Marc because he never really played with other artists. Marc is criminally underrated as a guitarist. All rock 'n' rollers love T. Rex, and there's a little bit of T. Rex in every rock 'n' roll band.

I would argue that the most important thing for a guitarist to be is "effective," to have the ability to deliver exactly what the song requires, regardless of how easy it might be to play. A prime example would be the solo on "Ride a White Swan," Bolan's breakthrough hit. He certainly knew when to self-edit, didn't he?





Mickey Finn and Marc Bolan go accoustic at Red Car Jazz Club, North Yorkshire, England



Tyrannosaurus Rex in 1971 [*left to right*]: Bill Legend, Marc Bolan, Mickey Finn and Steve Currie

Yes. We all knew he could play really fast and accurately and get a great tone out of whatever he played, but what he was doing was exactly the right thing for "Swan." The hooky part was the key to its success and why it broke him through into the major leagues. The riff and solo is almost a Burton/Chet Atkins idea. "Swan" used a capo at the 4th fret so he could play those open string licks. He also played the bass part on my Precision and he again used the capo at the 4th fret as well.

The band members are often overlooked when T. Rex are discussed. Bass player Steve Currie never plays the obvious, predictable lines. His bass lines are a key element to the propulsive nature of the rhythm section. Was much time spent working on those ideas in the studio?

He was basically left to his own devices. I loved his playing. It was amazing. I can see where his jazz sensibilities came out. Steve would go to places where an average rock player would never venture and often made some simple music sound very complicated. He was one of the secret weapons of the T. Rex sound.

You've produced many iconic albums. Where do you rate *Electric Warrior*?

I think *Electric Warrior* is my favorite T. Rex album, partly because of the different ways we recorded and how we worked in a lot of studios — New York, LA and several in London. Marc was on tour so I had to catch him on the road to record. All the strings and mixing were done at Trident Studios in London. It took a lot of work to put the whole album together. I think it was a masterpiece, but I also like the following two albums, *The Slider* and *Tanx*, very much.

Fans will argue that Bolan was undergoing a creative revival at the time of his death. Had he not tragically lost his life, do you think he could've gone on to revitalise himself in terms of creativity and ideas?

I agree with everyone who says he died too young. In the last couple of years of his life, I think his image was very important to him; he wanted to appeal to the fans that he had who had been teenyboppers, but who were now older. Had he lived I think he would have found someone like myself, or we'd have gotten together again. We did speak to each other after we stopped working together and it was always big hugs and talking about our kids. It was in the cards that we'd do something else.

What are your fondest memories of working with Marc?

I loved that the sessions were very live. I also loved the fact that he dressed to record. He wore his stage gear and his platform shoes. He'd be jumping up and down like he was on stage; everything was really great fun. We also invited friends to the sessions, so he liked to see maybe five or six people bouncing about in the control room. He always loved an audience. GW

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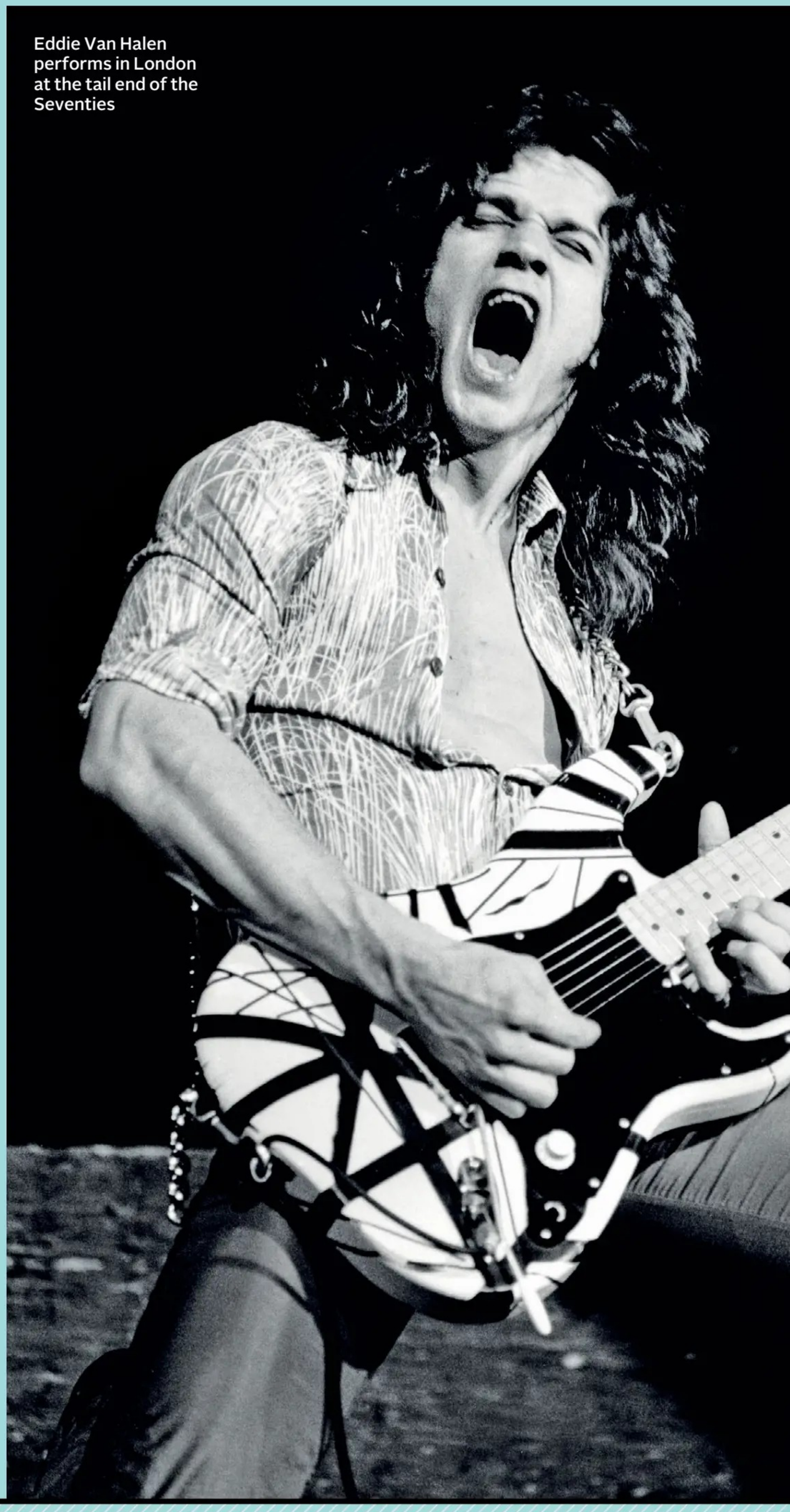
GUITARISTS WHO CHANGED OUR WORLD SINCE 1980

BY JEFF KITTS AND GUITAR WORLD STAFF

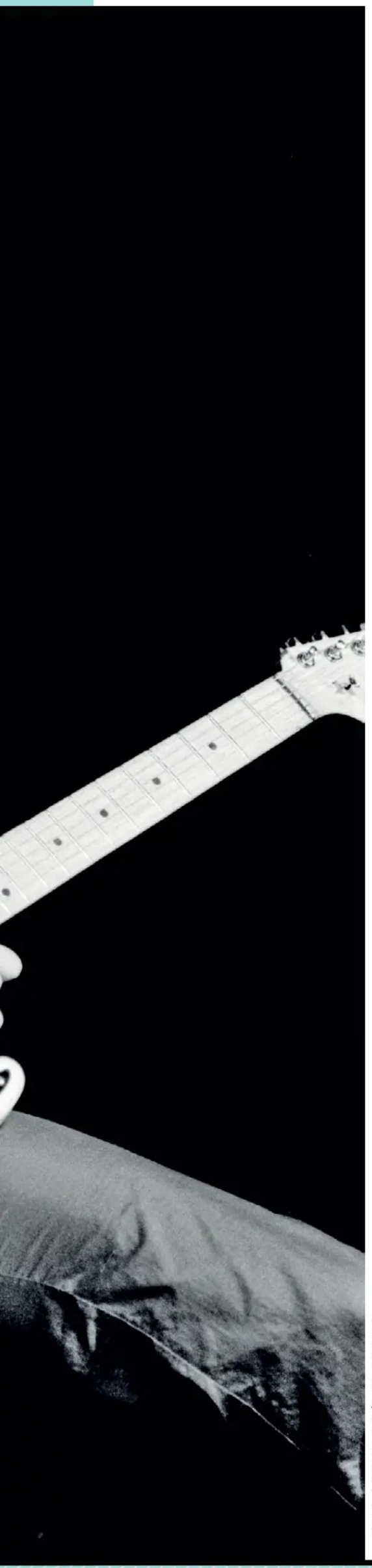


Eddie Van Halen performs in London at the tail end of the Seventies

EVER SINCE *GUITAR WORLD* BURST ONTO THE SCENE OVER 45 YEARS AGO — WITH OUR JOHNNY WINTER-FRONTED JULY 1980 ISSUE — WE'VE KEPT READERS UP TO DATE ABOUT THE GUITAR COMMUNITY'S MANY TRENDS, FADS AND FLAVORS OF THE MONTH.

But we've also covered those seminal, magical, groundbreaking moments that made us realize our world would never be the same again.

Examples? The birth of new musical genres and subgenres, the conjuring of savory new tones and mind-melting techniques, the release of game-changing songs, albums and music videos, the resurgence of long-dormant disciplines and so much more.



GUS STEWART/REDFERNS

In honor of *GW*'s 40th-anniversary celebration in 2020, we decided to sit back, put our feet up and reflect on the past four decades — particularly in the context of the guitarists who've made an undeniable impact on our universe. We made a list of around 85 names, added a few more, and — in our efforts to narrow them down to an even 40 — put it to a vote on GuitarWorld.com. Below you'll find the results of that poll, with one or two surprises thrown in, not to mention several "in the style of" licks with audio. There are so many other names that could be on this list — Shawn Lane, Danny Gatton, Lita Ford, Vernon Reid, Carrie Brownstein, Chuck Schuldiner and Gary Moore come to mind, and that's just for starters — but we humbly offer up these 40 (Actually, as a nod to our old GuitarWorld.com "bonus" lists, there are more than 40!). Be aware that these guitarists are not ranked or presented in any particular order; this list is simply a celebration of talent, impact and/or influence.

As always,

ENJOY!

EDDIE VAN HALEN



WHAT HE DID: Like Jimi Hendrix a decade earlier, Van Halen caused guitarists to look at their instruments in an entirely new way, and, arguably, no single guitarist has had such universal impact since.

"Playing together without having to compromise our sound was a dream come true" — Eddie Van Halen

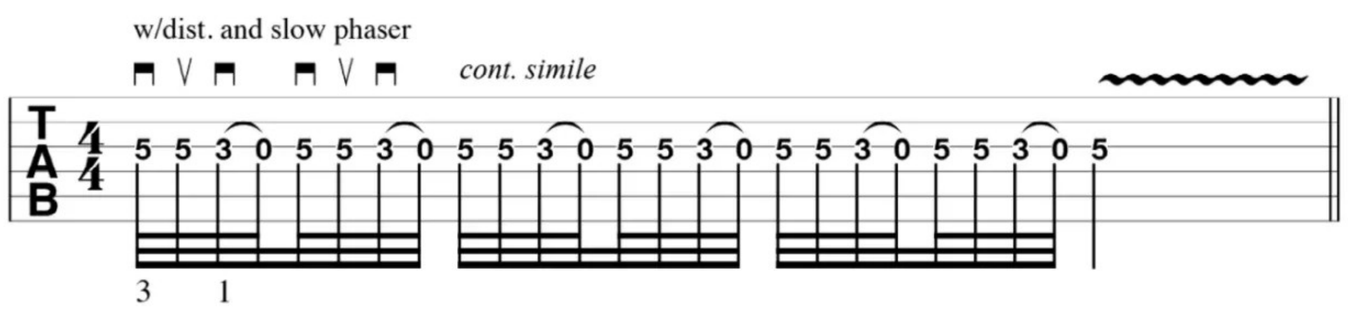
"ERUPTION" CHANGED EVERYTHING. Sure, it clocked in at less than two minutes and never came close to being a hit. As presented on the first Van Halen album in 1978, it seemed like an instrumental introduction to "You Really Got Me," the band's debut single. But it was obvious to anyone who heard the Eddie Van Halen masterpiece that the world of rock guitar had changed dramatically. As author Robert Walser wrote in his 1993 scholarly examination of heavy metal, *Running with the Devil*: "In 1978, Edward Van Halen redefined virtuosity on the electric guitar." Frank Zappa put it more simply: he thanked Van Halen for "reinventing the electric guitar." That was 42 years ago, and guitarists are still reeling from the impact. Before Van Halen, guitar heroes were known mainly for their mastery of the blues and ability to pull a rich, vocal tone from their axes. Some, such as Jimi Hendrix or Jeff Beck, were worshipped for their mastery of feedback and effects; others, particularly fusion players such as John McLaughlin and Al Di Meola, were celebrated for their speed.

With "Eruption," Eddie Van Halen set new standards on both fronts. He not only ripped through demisemiquavers with a speed and clarity that made McLaughlin seem splay-fingered; his mastery of feedback, tremolo and pinged harmonics made his guitar sound as fluid as a synthesizer. And when he used his two-handed hammer-on/pull-off technique to unleash a cascade of sextuplets at the end of his solos, you could almost hear jaws drop in amazement. Nobody had ever done that on a guitar before. No one even imagined it could be done.

Edward knew he was onto something big even before his band made its recorded debut. "I was playing this way when we were playing clubs, and I remember what I used to do. I'd turn around," he said in 1982. "I didn't want anyone to see how I was doing it." Wise move. Edward's two-handed style was the most widely imitated guitar technique of the Eighties — especially after his quicksilver guest solo put the snarl into Michael Jackson's "Beat It" in 1982. Simply put, his playing was the foundation for shred.

EVH AND THE ILLUSION OF SPEED

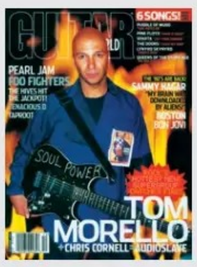
One of Eddie's shredding secrets is using a combination of picking and pull-offs to create the illusion of really fast picking. Practice this lick slowly, ensuring a good "snap" on your pull-offs, and you'll get a sound similar to picking with only half the effort.





Morello in 2019

TOM MORELLO



WHAT HE DID: In the Seventies, Jimmy Page was the most influential guitarist in hard rock. In the Eighties, Eddie Van Halen was the most imitated stylist. And in the Nineties, it was Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello who rewrote the Book of Hot Licks.

"When Rage Against the Machine formed, I was basically the band's DJ, so it fell on me to create the textures and soundscapes found in kinds of music that traditionally don't even have a guitar player, and that got me thinking outside the box" — Tom Morello

THEY CAME OUT of L.A. at the dawn of the Nineties. The aptly named Rage Against the Machine combined the ghetto anger of hip-hop and the testosterone fury of metal with a keenly felt political mandate to champion the oppressed and fight the abuses of privilege and power. It was a new and exciting concept back then, and what really drove the point home was the fiercely disruptive guitar work of a Harvard educated young Marxist named Tom Morello. The napalm cry of exploding bombs, the jagged rhythm of strafing machine guns — Morello wrought seemingly impossible sounds with his ax and became an innovative and radical force in metal.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN



WHAT HE DID: From the moment his debut, *Texas Flood*, hit the streets in 1983, Vaughan made the world safe again for old-school blues-based rock while also taking the music he loved into the future. His impassioned yet highly technical style, which has been often imitated but never duplicated (although Jesse Davey does a damn fine job), altered the perceived parameters of virtuoso guitar playing.

"I was gifted with music for a reason, and it wasn't just to get famous"
— Stevie Ray Vaughan

WHEN STEVIE RAY Vaughan emerged from deep in the heart of Texas waving his battered Strat, it was hardly the best of times for gritty roadhouse rock and blues. The year was 1983 and Vaughan's debut album, *Texas Flood*, was released into a musical world that seemed eager to leave its past behind. Many thought guitars passé, with futurists proclaiming that the venerable instrument would be permanently transformed by MIDI applications and replaced as rock's dominant instrument by the synthesizer. Even many guitar loyalists thought the old, classic sounds were no longer adequate, transforming their instruments by running them through racks of elaborate, high-tech gear to create heavily processed sounds. Odd-shaped, brightly colored axes were all the rage.

Stevie Ray, on the other hand, was profoundly old-school in almost every respect. His gear seemed obsolete — just his trusty old Stratocaster, a couple of archaic stomp boxes and a crusty old tube amp. When he plugged in and started wailing, he was backed only by Double Trouble, his hard-driving, two-man rhythm section of Tommy Shannon and Chris "Whipper" Layton. Their moves weren't choreographed and they certainly never wore the mascara or sculpted coiffures favored by the burgeoning MTV. They were just three guys playing old-fashioned, rocked-up blues with passion and skill.

A reasonable betting man would have wagered his house that Vaughan would fail to register on the popular culture's radar screen. But the normal rules of engagement clearly did not apply to this 29-year-old guitar firebrand. *Texas Flood* blew down the locked, barricaded doors of popular music and proclaimed in no uncertain terms that blues could actually be a potent commercial force. The album not only quickly put the unknown Texan on the map, but it also signaled that uncompromised, from-the-gut guitar music was not dead as a commercial and artistic force, and that good old Strats and tube amps still had a hell of a lot of life left in them.

SLASH & IZZY STRADLIN (GUNS N' ROSES)



WHAT THEY DID: Rock music has produced some memorable tandem guitar teams: Keef and Ronnie, Angus and Malcolm, Tipton and Downing. But Slash and Izzy Stradlin, with the original lineup of Guns N' Roses, surely has to go down as one of the coolest duos ever.

"All the other bands in the mid Eighties were trying to have Top 40 hits — even bands like Mötley Crüe. We didn't care about that. We just wanted to kick some ass" — Slash

GUTTER RATS SLASH and Izzy had just enough yin and yang going on to provide color and contrast that made them more than the ordinary lead and rhythm guitar team. Both loved similar bands, like Aerosmith and Led Zeppelin, but Izzy's tastes leaned more toward groove-oriented bands like the Rolling Stones and the Doors, with a healthy dose of punk rock thrown in, while Slash loved guitar heroes like Michael Schenker and Jeff Beck. The combination of Slash's rough-edged pyrotechnic solos and Izzy's raw power chords and off-kilter rhythms resulted in an unusual mish-mash with massive crossover appeal that metalheads, punks, glam poseurs, pop fans and classic rockers loved alike.

Slash and Izzy also made vintage guitars cool again, strapping on Gibson Les Pauls, Telecasters and ES-175 hollowbodies when most guitarists were playing DayGlo superstrats, pointy metal weapons or minimalist headstock-less Stein-bortions. Balding guitar players also have Slash and Izzy to thank for making hats fashionable rocker attire during a time when big hair was all the rage.

STANLEY JORDAN

WHAT HE DID: This modern jazz master made a major splash in guitar circles back in the Eighties, in large part because of his innovative "touch" tapping technique and unusual all-fourths tuning. And then there's that late-Eighties video of him playing "Stairway to Heaven" on two guitars at once...

"I still feel a little limited because it's not an easy technique. As you're slamming your fingers into metal, it's harder on the hands than conventional technique, so I have to make sure I'm relaxed" — Stanley Jordan

SIMPLY PUT, BACK in the wild Eighties, the Chicago-born, California-raised Stanley Jordan developed a dramatic new way to play the guitar. Jordan's "touch" technique was — and still is — an advanced form of two-handed tapping that allowed him to play melody and chords simultaneously. It also became possible, as we've hinted above, to play on two different guitars simultaneously. If you love daredevil guitar videos and have access to YouTube in 2020, you might be used to two-handed exploits, but Jordan was doing it in the Eighties (and better).

"I've loved classical music ever since I was a kid," he said in 1987, "and that was the influence — the sound — that I had in mind when I played guitar. I really wanted to hear all that counterpoint, with all kinds of independent lines weaving around each other." He's also said that he's always on a crusade to promote his technique, the technique is "a means to an end. Having said that, there is something important about the technique as it brings new possibilities."

Jordan plays in all-fourths tuning, as in EADGCF from bass to treble (all in perfect fourths, as on a bass guitar). The reason? He finds that it simplifies the fretboard, making it more logical.

JOBY SESSIONS/FUTURE

"WHEN RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE FORMED, I WAS BASICALLY THE BAND'S DJ, SO IT FELL ON ME TO CREATE THE TEXTURES AND SOUNDSCAPES FOUND IN KINDS OF MUSIC THAT TRADITIONALLY DON'T EVEN HAVE A GUITAR PLAYER, AND THAT GOT ME THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX"

TOM MORELLO

STEVE VAI


Vai in 2010...

STEVE VAI

WHAT HE DID: Since launching his career in the Eighties, Vai has amassed a formidable body of solo work that has made him a demigod of metal and shred, but his virtuosity transcends all such categories.

"I'm very honored to be considered an accomplished player. I wear that badge very proudly" — Steve Vai

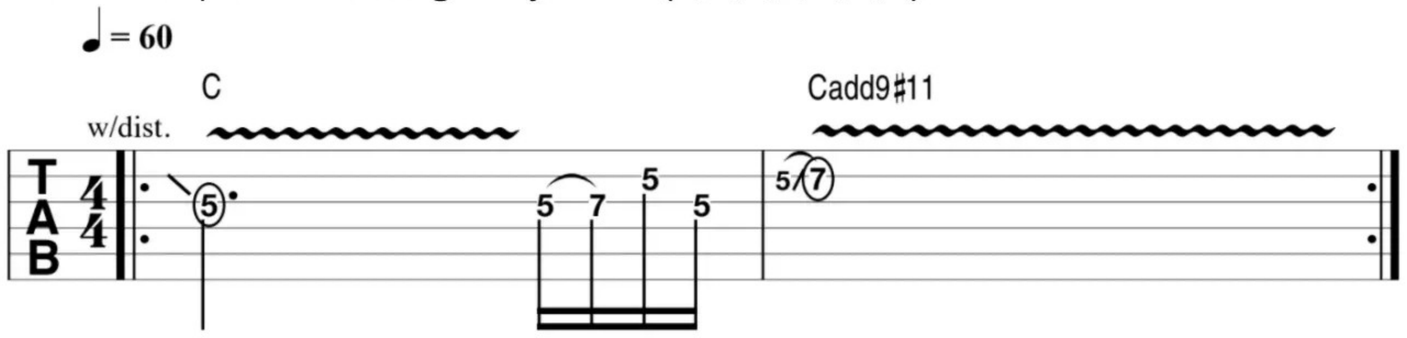
STEVE VAI CAN do things with a sustainer and twang bar that surely ain't natural and certainly indicate a high tantric mastery of all documented and undocumented alien love secrets. Discovered by Frank Zappa and fostered by David Lee Roth and Whitesnake, Vai emerged in the Nineties as a solo artist and guitar hero of major stature. His astounding technique defies categorization. In his graceful hands, the guitar becomes a cosmic antenna, channeling other dimensions and parallel universes. His best work combines the swagger of a lifelong rock and roller with the romantic soul of a poet. As if this weren't enough, he's also a first-rate composer and has great cheekbones.

His seemingly limitless ability is matched only by his boundless imagination. Unusual scales, complex melodies and rhythms and jaw-dropping speed are all hallmarks of Vai's approach, while his pioneering development of the seven-string guitar, use of harmonizers and other tone processors, and patented whammy bar–manipulated "talking-guitar" techniques have continually pushed rock playing into new and uncharted waters.

Lydian flavors are at the heart of the Vai sound; his song "The Riddle," from his 1990 breakthrough album *Passion and Warfare*, for example, features an excellent example of Lydian soloing. "The most important thing to remember when you're playing modally is what the atmosphere of the mode feels like to you. What it sounds like is one thing, but what it feels like — the quality of that mode, that's when you're owning that mode. Look at it as an open field. One thing I like to do in Lydian is play every note in the scale except that raised 4th until the last note or close to! That will change the whole atmosphere."

VAI-STYLE LYDIAN LICK

Bringing in the C Lydian mode's (C, D, E, F♯, G, A, B) ♯4, F♯, at the end of the tabbed phrase below adds an exotic, emotional quality to it. Until you hit this atmospheric note, you could, in theory, still be in the plainer-sounding C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B).



THE EDGE



WHAT HE DID: For 40 years, his droning, echo-laden guitar tone has been the backbone of U2's distinctive sound.

"I don't feel that attached to my instruments. It's almost like I'm going to dominate them in some sort of way. I don't feel like they're part of me; they stand between me and something new" — The Edge

FEW PLAYERS HAVE done more than U2's the Edge to define the post-modern guitar style. The Edge — born David Evans in 1961 — showed how textures and rhythms, rather than riffs or chord progressions, could provide the main guitar interest in a song. Nothing short of a master of contrast, he often juxtaposed scratchy rhythms against ringing open chords that resonate with Celtic grandeur.

The Edge exploited the Eighties avalanche of guitar effects to maximum artistic advantage, developing a signature style built on rhythms generated by a digital delay unit and creating a universe of soaring, echoing reverb timbres.

On a series of dizzyingly iconic albums, the Edge created a new language for the instrument, one of harmonic squalls and ringing ostinatos, by turns space-age and rural. Nothing seemed beyond his reach. Even while jamming with the redoubtable B.B. King on "When Love Comes to Town," from U2's 1988 album *Rattle and Hum*, he was no apprentice, dispensing pure sound (and fewer notes than B.B.) with an exactitude and delight still unsurpassed by any other guitarist.

ALEX LIFESON

WHAT HE DID: With virtuoso skills and a keen sense of songcraft, Lifeson has been the sole guitar force behind Rush for more than 45 years.

"Soloing shouldn't be about how fast or how many notes you can play, or how much 'better' you can play than the next guy. It's got to really relate to the song or be a reflection of something in your character" — Alex Lifeson

IN THE YEARS since Rush's 1974 debut album, Alex Lifeson evolved from being a heavy rocker in the classic Seventies power chord/pentatonic scale tradition to his role as rock's preeminent texturalist that lasted well into the 2000s.



...Lifeson in 2013...



...and Remler in 1990

As Rush's compositional sophistication grew in the late Seventies and Eighties, so did Lifeson's guitar work — his favored use of suspended chords (played with plenty of chorus and delay) instead of triads defined the ethereal, instantly recognizable and often-imitated Rush sound.

Lifeson developed his signature sound by using arpeggios as harmonic pads underneath Geddy Lee's vocals to counterbalance the band's driving, odd-metered riffs. Other Lifeson stylistic approaches include using notes on the top strings as common tones above a moving arpeggiated bass line ("Fly by Night"), incorporating open strings in arpeggiated sequences ("Closer to the Heart") and sustaining open strings over moving power chord shapes ("Jacob's Ladder").

KURT COBAIN

WHAT HE DID: He was the premier icon of grunge, the raw, guitar-heavy, blunt-spoken style that will stand for all time as a signifier of the Nineties.

"I wouldn't have been surprised if they had voted me Most Likely to Kill Everyone at a High School Dance" — Kurt Cobain

ALTHOUGH IT'S TEMPTING to imagine Kurt Cobain as just a symbol of alterna-rock angst, the power and ingenuity of his actual playing proves that there was more than "teen spirit" at work in his music. The Nirvana frontman grew up in Aberdeen, Washington, where his initial points of reference were hard rock staples like AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, Kiss and Cheap Trick. In 1980, he discovered punk, and his musical course was set.

Never a technical player, Cobain rarely relied on flash, preferring to make his point through dynamics instead, fleshing out his songs with judicious use of distortion and feedback. Even his "solos" tended to be self-effacing in the extreme; the guitar break in "Teen Spirit," for example, merely reprised the vocal line. But Cobain's deft use of harmony and lean, tuneful sense of line more than made up for any lack of chops, shoring up the songs so exquisitely that it was easy to overlook how elegant his playing was.

EMILY REMLER

WHAT SHE DID: Pardon the cliché, but Emily Remler, a young guitarist from Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey (the same town where Rudy Van Gelder helmed scores of classic jazz albums in the Fifties and Sixties), took the jazz world by storm from the late Seventies until her death in 1990. No less a jazz giant than Herb Ellis once called her "the new superstar of guitar."

"I may look like a nice Jewish girl from New Jersey, but inside I'm a 50-year-old, heavy-set black man with a big thumb, like Wes Montgomery" — Emily Remler

THINGS TOOK OFF for the 21-year-old Remler when Herb Ellis got her an engagement at California's Concord Jazz Festival on a bill called "Guitar Explosion" that also featured jazz legends Barney Kessel and Tal Farlow. Once that happened, there was pretty much no stopping her; in fact, Remler, who had a notably loose, laid back but hard-swinging playing style, tended to outshine and outplay a goodly portion of the other — more established — guitarists with whom she shared future bills. She even won Guitarist of the Year in *Down Beat* magazine's 1985 international poll. By the late Eighties, Remler was experimenting with guitar synth and Brazilian and African rhythms.

Remler died of heart failure in 1990 at age 32. Since then, several peers and admirers have written and recorded tributes to her, including *Just Friends: A Gathering in Tribute to Emily Remler, Volume 1* [1990] and *Volume 2* [1991]. Skip Heller even wrote a song called "Emily Remler" in her memory.

JAMES HETFIELD & KIRK HAMMETT (METALLICA)



WHAT THEY DID: In the 37 years since Metallica's explosive 1983 debut, *Kill 'Em All*, Hammett and Hetfield have established themselves as metal's

> "SOLOING SHOULDN'T BE ABOUT HOW FAST OR HOW MANY NOTES YOU CAN PLAY, OR HOW MUCH 'BETTER' YOU CAN PLAY THAN THE NEXT GUY. IT'S GOT TO REALLY RELATE TO THE SONG OR BE A REFLECTION OF SOMETHING IN YOUR CHARACTER"
>
> **ALEX LIFESON**

LIFESON: FUTURE REMLER: GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES


Metallica's Hammett and Hetfield in 2015

quintessential guitar alliance. To this day, the titans of thrash continue to develop as artists, showing an uncommon ability to continually reinvent themselves in a genre where evolution is rarely evident.

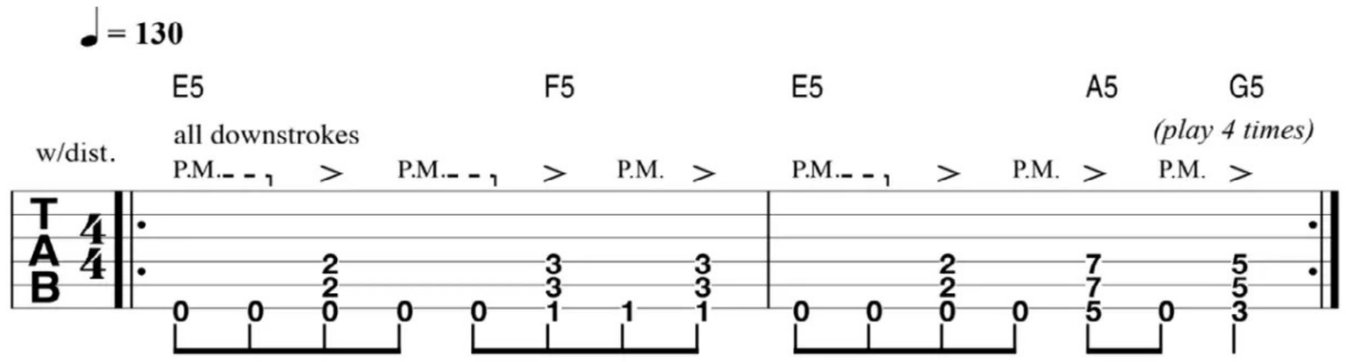
"I don't care how much technology ever exists — nothing can duplicate the sheer power and feel you get from standing in front of your amp and bashing on your guitar" — James Hetfield

ESCHEWING SPANDEX, HAIRSPRAY and other trappings of Eighties hair metal, Metallica scored a direct connection to its testosterone-ravaged audience with albums like 1983's *Kill 'Em All* and 1984's *Ride the Lightning*. Nothing about the group seemed phony — neither its look, ideology nor, more important, sound. Hetfield played buzz-saw guitar like a disgruntled logger jacked on Jägermeister. And although Hammett's internecine solos seemed, at times, to have been beamed from Mars, the point was clear: a Metallica that played together nicely would be a lie.

When they became a hit on the metal scene in the mid Eighties with *Master of Puppets* (1986) and *...And Justice for All* (1988), they literally changed the course of hard rock. We would dare to say there isn't a modern metal or punk band that hasn't been influenced in some way by Hetfield's revolutionary rapid-fire rhythm guitar or Hammett's modally inspired guitar solos. Hetfield's lyrics were also a massive game changer, demonstrating that metal could take on socially relevant issues without diminishing its tremendous power.

MASTER OF RHYTHM

Hetfield's down-picking technique has become the stuff of legend. Get some of the Metallica man's magic down with this riff that's designed to hone your down-picking and palm muting. Make sure to momentarily release the palm mutes during the accented chords, as indicated.



ADAM GASSON/FUTURE

JOE SATRIANI



WHAT HE DID: Shred was born on October 15, 1987, the day Joe Satriani released *Surfing with the Alien*. Satch took all the rock guitar virtuosity that had gone before — Hendrix, Van Halen, Randy Rhoads, etc. — and brought it all a giant step further, adding a few new tricks to the lexicon of hot guitar moves and upping the land speed record for notes-per-nanosecond.

" 'Original' is a weighty word, because you may think, Clapton did this, Hendrix did that, Van Halen did this, Vai did that... so what's left? Your story — that's what's left" — Joe Satriani

THE COURSE OF rock guitar history was dramatically altered in 1987 by a nice Italian-American boy from the sleepy New York suburb of Carle Place, Long Island. Joe Satriani had given guitar lessons to Steve Vai and Kirk Hammett. He'd tried — and failed — to break into the big time with a new wave band called the Squares. It was only then that he turned his attention to recording instrumental guitar rock. In 1986 he released a self-titled EP and full-length debut album, *Not of This Earth*, which garnered favorable attention in the guitar community but the record didn't exactly set the world on fire.

That wouldn't happen until Satriani's third release, *Surfing with the Alien*, came out the following year. The record became the first rock guitar instrumental album to reach *Billboard*'s Top 200 Albums chart, achieving Platinum sales. The disc became the central manifesto of the then-nascent shred revolution. Now-classic tracks like "Satch Boogie," "Surfing with the Alien" and the Grammy-nominated "Always with Me, Always with You," set a new benchmark for blinding virtuosity, but also demonstrated how extreme technique could be deployed in the service of melodic integrity and solid compositional inventiveness. In this regard, *Surfing with the Alien* has never been topped.


Wylde in 2011...

ZAKK WYLDE

WHAT HE DID: With his bell bottoms, eye-catching bullseye guitars and screeching shit-kicker licks, Wylde was a fresh face on the guitar scene when he joined Ozzy Osbourne's band in 1987 — a grungy, unbridled combination of Randy Rhoads' skill and Jake E. Lee's flashiness, yet clearly his own player.

"I was clean shaven, 20 years old, weighed about a buck-fifty. I was the closest thing those guys were gonna see to Farrah Fawcett" — Zakk Wylde

AFTER THE DEATH of Randy Rhoads in 1982, Ozzy Osbourne went through a string of guitarists but was unable to find one who could serve as a long-term bandmate. What he needed wasn't just some G.I.T. machine; he needed a *partner*. From the outset, nothing about Zakk Wylde made any sense: not his birthplace (New Jersey), his bellbottoms, his allegiance to Lynyrd Skynyrd nor his full-time gig as quality control for the Miller Brewing Company (we kid — Wylde actually worked in a gas station before turning pro rocker). But it all came together in his playing, a ferocious blend of seismic metal, dizzying runs and even some Southern boogie when Ozzy wasn't looking. Following the release of *No Rest for the Wicked* in 1988, Wylde would go on to serve as Osbourne's right-hand man for many years to come and grow into one of the most dynamic, influential and respected guitar players in modern hard rock and metal.


...Petrucci in 2014...

JOHN PETRUCCI



WHAT HE DID: His deep dedication to guitar mastery enabled him to defy the notion that prog-rock died out with wide lapels, daisy appliqués and other artifacts of the Seventies. He launched Dream Theater in 1985, and the band has since become the standard bearer of the prog-metal scene.

"The way I challenge myself to grow and stay fresh is by intentionally constructing things that I can't play when we do an album" — John Petrucci

THERE ARE THOSE who swear that prog-metal pioneer John Petrucci has a few extra fingers on both hands that he craftily keeps hidden during photo shoots. How else can one explain the man's ability to make six- and seven-string electric guitars generate quantum-shifted note clusters exceeding the speed of light? Maybe it's the six daily hours of practice he put in during his formative years, and his rigorous studies at Berklee, where he mastered the intricacies of sweep and alternate picking — regardless of how it happened, few players can switch from Zeppelin übercrunch to Al Di Meola–style muted picking with such finesse. Petrucci's guitar work with Dream Theater, Liquid Tension Experiment and as a solo artist exemplify the present-day ideal of extreme guitar discipline.



...and Slayer's Hanneman and King in 2010

KERRY KING & JEFF HANNEMAN (SLAYER)

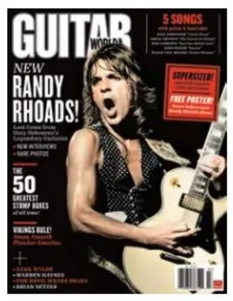
WHAT THEY DID: In 1982, while most L.A. metal bands were spending as much time on hair care as music, Slayer guitarists Hanneman and King perfected a style of hyperspeed, muted double picking and catchy minor-key riffing that remains hugely influential nearly 40 years later.

"We didn't go out of our way to sound particularly different, except that it was us writing it, I guess." — Kerry King

SLAYER GUITARIST KERRY King says that when the group went into the studio to make what would become its thrash masterpiece, 1986's *Reign in Blood*, they were "just a bunch of angry punks making a record we thought was cool." What they didn't realize was just *how* cool it would turn out to be. "We were kids, like 22 years old," says King. "We thought we made a real good record, and that we'd outdone our last one. That's all it was about back then."

But *Reign in Blood* did far more. With its leaden rhythms, King and Hanneman's bludgeoning riffery and some of the most morbid images this side of *Friday the 13th* films, the album raised the bar for thrash, announcing loudly — and proudly — that Slayer had arrived as a leader of the form, on par with the more highly touted metal peers such as Metallica, Megadeth and Anthrax.

RANDY RHOADS



WHAT HE DID: Rhoads infused the explosive, fleet-fingered, yet largely blues-based guitar style of Eddie Van Halen with classical music–inspired melodies and runs and an advanced knowledge of music theory. His playing on *Blizzard of Ozz* classics like "Crazy Train," "Mr. Crowley" and "I Don't Know" raised the bar for guitar shredders in the Eighties and beyond.

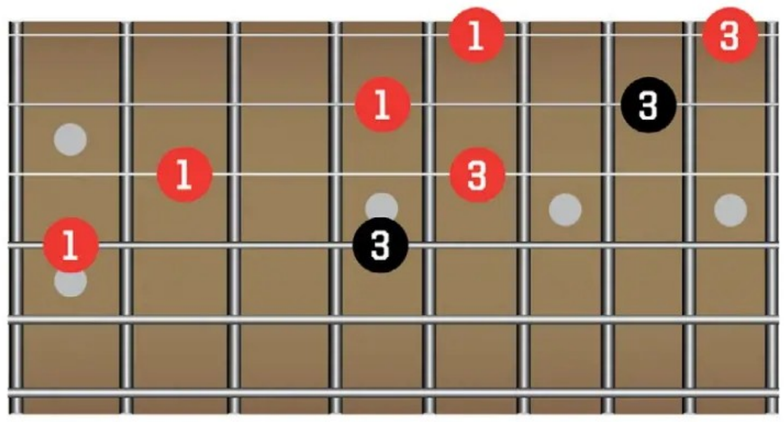
"I was really young, around 12 or 13, when I started playing rock — and where I came from, the big thing was playing parties. There were a lot of bands where I lived, and they all played parties. I loved it — I couldn't wait until the weekend so I could go out and play" — Randy Rhoads

METAL GUITAR'S GOLDEN-haired innocent, Rhoads' brief career is the stuff of legend. The studious schoolboy who came out of Quiet Riot and the Hollywood hair-band scene and ultimately hitched a ride on Ozzy Osbourne's crazy train, Rhoads brought a new level of virtuosity to metal guitar before his untimely death in a plane crash at the age of 26. Carefully trained by his music teacher mom, Rhoads had a flair for modal improvisation, tapped arpeggios and meticulously doubled leads, and set the stage for the Eighties shred boom.

"Most heavy metal is not very melodic in nature," Rhoads told *GW* in 1982. "It's often minor in tone so you can use a lot of minor thirds in your lead breaks. That automatically sounds classical. Leslie West was one of my favorites because he used classical ideas with feeling. He was melodic but mean."

FEELING RANDY?

Rhoads came from a classical guitar background and loved the sound of runs based on arpeggios and scales. Use these fingerings for this diagonal diminished 7 arpeggio pattern and it's fairly easy to play. Use the wrong fingers and they may "trip over" each other.



FUTURE

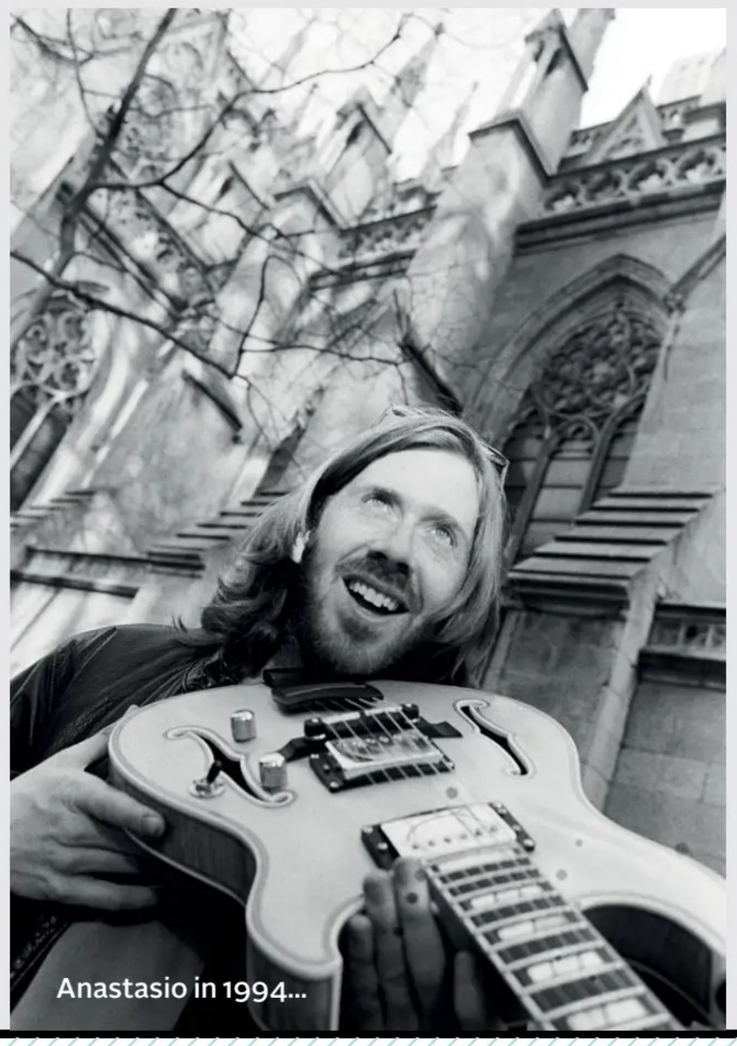
TREY ANASTASIO



WHAT HE DID: In many ways, Phish picked up where the Grateful Dead left off following Jerry Garcia's death in 1995, building a huge and rabidly dedicated following through hard touring, word of mouth and fanatical tape trading. Since then, Phish frontman Anastasio has been smack dab in the middle of some of the most exploratory rock and roll played in modern times.

"Music is like this portal into another world — the world of truth" — Trey Anastasio

TREY ANASTASIO AND his Phish bandmates picked up the tradition of psychedelic jam-oriented bands like the Grateful Dead and combined it with progressive rock to create their own potent brew. Despite protestations that he's not into playing solos, Anastasio is, in fact, a certified guitar hero, one who succeeds at filling arenas and festival lawns with jam-band aficionados who greet Mixolydian licks with screams of glee. In the process, he has turned a whole generation of listeners onto the ecstasy that is available to those who know how to play really well and simply to wail with focused purpose.



Anastasio in 1994...

ANASTASIO: CATHERINE MCGANN/GETTY IMAGES SETZER: TONY NELSON/FUTURE JETT: SUE ASHCROFT



...Setzer in 2019...

BRIAN SETZER

WHAT HE DID: He used his Gretsch 6120 to revitalize rockabilly with the Stray Cats in the Eighties and revive swing with the Brian Setzer Orchestra in the Nineties. That paved the way for the surf-rock resurgence from circa-1997 through the 2000s.

"Rockabilly music paralleled punk's energy and feeling, but the players were much better" — Brian Setzer

IN THE EARLY Eighties, when synth-dominated music ruled the airwaves, Brian Setzer and the Stray Cats spearheaded an unlikely rockabilly revival that rocketed the Long Island band to the top of the charts. Taking the music of Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent and Buddy Holly and injecting it with a punk attitude and burning guitar solos that made even metalheads take notice, the Stray Cats resuscitated a genre that had been dormant since the late Fifties. No mere revivalist, Setzer played with a sophistication and technique that rivaled that of the most esteemed rock guitar virtuosos. His solos are distinguished by fluent jazz chops, intricate fingerpicked arpeggios and runs, and raunchy double stops, while his rhythm work reveals his deep knowledge of chord melody. Setzer's impact on the guitar community has spanned across multiple genres: if any musician in 2020 slicks their hair back and plays rockabilly, surf or full-on roots-rock, it's because of what Setzer did in the Eighties and beyond. And did we mention he helped bring swing and jump-blues back in the late Nineties?



...Jett in 2011...

JOAN JETT



WHAT SHE DID: Served as the founding guitarist of legendary Seventies teen girl group the Runaways and rose to stardom in the Eighties fronting the long-running rock act the Blackhearts.

"You have to be really dedicated to this as a lifestyle. It's hard to live a double life and hold down a nine-to-five job and be in a touring band. You've gotta choose, at least for a few years, if you wanna give your rock and roll dream a shot" — Joan Jett

"I'M A BARRE-chord basher," says Joan Jett. "That's pretty much what I do." It's what she's been doing since 1975, when a teenaged Jett, an East Coast native transplanted to Los Angeles, formed the seminal hard rock outfit the Runaways. The band, which included co-guitarist Lita Ford, drummer Sandy West and corseted sexpot singer Cherie Currie, released four studio albums over the course of their brief career (with Jett assuming lead vocals for the last two), and racked up one enduring hit, the Jett-penned "Cherry Bomb," from their self-titled 1976 debut.



...Iron Maiden's Murray, Smith (and Steve Harris) in 2013...

While the Runaways' punky glam pop failed to garner them substantial State-side fame, they have since come to be regarded as rock and roll trailblazers of a sort, as well as been credited as a significant influence on new generations of female guitar-based acts. Following the Runaways' dissolution in a mess of drugs, ego clashes and mismanagement, Jett, in characteristic form, continued to bash her way through the largely male-dominated rock landscape. She launched a solo career, founded her own record label, Blackheart (a word she also appropriated for the name of her band, Joan Jett & the Blackhearts) and proceeded to rack up single successes like 1981's "Bad Reputation," 1988's "I Hate Myself for Loving You" and 1982's "I Love Rock 'n Roll," her smash hit cover of the 1975 Arrows original. Interestingly, two years before recording "I Love Rock 'n Roll" with the Blackhearts, Jett cut a version of the song with a band that included ex–Sex Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook.

DAVE MURRAY & ADRIAN SMITH (IRON MAIDEN)

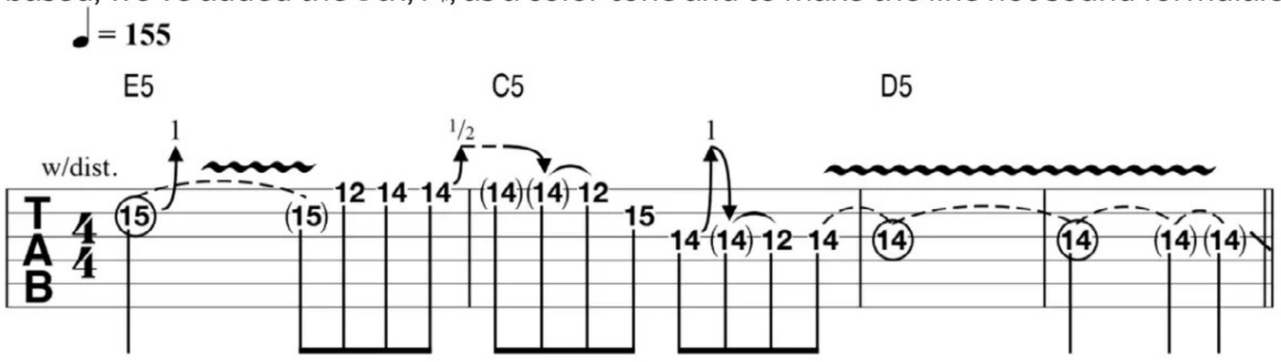
WHAT THEY DID: For the past 40 years, the guitar tandem of Dave Murray and Adrian Smith has been synonymous with Iron Maiden's galloping riffs, dueling leads and three-part harmonies.

"There was this chemistry between me and Adrian that went beyond the music. You could take the two best guitarists in the world and put them in the same band and it wouldn't happen. There has to be something more, and Adrian and I had that" — Dave Murray

ALONG WITH JUDAS Priest's Glenn Tipton and K.K. Downing, who worked a similar twin-lead attack, the duo of Murray and Smith was considered the top British metal guitar tandem of the Eighties. First pairing off for 1981's blistering *Killers*, Murray and Smith quickly proved that they could play harmony leads and interlocking riffs as if linked by one brain, and do it with a speed and aggression that put most punk bands of the era to shame.

MAIDEN VOYAGE

It's all too easy to burn up the fretboard with your most fiery licks and neglect the melodic side of soloing. To sound tuneful, in a very Maiden-esque way, for this lick we've used a couple of held notes with vibrato added, which makes them really sing. And while the phrase is mainly E minor-pentatonic based, we've added the 9th, F♯, as a color tone and to make the line not sound formulaic.





...and King in 2008

KAKI KING

WHAT SHE DID: This acoustic trailblazer took her Preston Reed influences to otherworldly new places in the early to mid 2000s — and he hasn't stopped evolving since. King, who was one of only a handful of women in the dude-dominated guitar scene at the time, is one of the main influences behind the incredible recent rise in population of female guitarists.

"I don't have a memory of not knowing how to play guitar, and now my career is completely associated with this instrument and it becomes a question of self-identity. If we just took the present and erased all the guitar out of my life — what would I be?" — Kaki King

IN LATE 2007, Foo Fighter Dave Grohl famously announced, "There are some guitar players that are good and there are some guitar players that are really fucking good. And then there's Kaki King." It's that very aspect of King being "a thing unto herself" — fans often say she invented her very own genre — that makes her so unique, so revered. Since her debut album, 2003's *Everybody Loves You,* her delicate finger-style approach, effortless tap-style polyrhythms and wild open tunings have been turning heads around the world. "I think the main challenge for me was exploring some new tunings," she said in 2012. "I've always used a lot of open tunings [including CGDGAD and DADGAD], but it becomes the kind of thing where you get familiar with them. It becomes too easy to improvise with them. But when I started using open D minor tuning, that immediately opened some new doors for me."

As for that Dave Grohl quote? "That was a pretty funny and amazing thing," she said, recalling the onstage props. "By that point, I kind of knew Dave, so it was a lovely, fun, typically over-the-top comment from a friend. It wasn't like this rock god deemed me brilliant, but at the same time, it was a sincere compliment from a really nice guy. I was very touched."

KING: JESSE WILD/FUTURE

MAIDEN: KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE



BILLY CORGAN

WHAT HE DID: A one-man guitar-and-bass army responsible for some of the Nineties' most iconic rock songs, including "1979," "Disarm," "Tonight, Tonight" and "Bullet with Butterfly Wings."

"There are so many records with loud guitar. I'm trying to figure out how to take the instrument and have it still sound like a guitar, but put you in a different universe" — Billy Corgan

NINETIES' ROCK GUITAR began with a tug-of-war between shred and grunge, but Billy Corgan found a unique solution to the conflict. The hulking Smashing Pumpkins frontman and chief songwriter dabbled in both styles, and then some. Corgan created guitar armadas, placing up to 40 guitar overdubs on a single track. These stuck out in an alternative scene that was competing to make the most lo-fi album. The Pumpkins' defiantly massive orchestrations were inspired by the shoegaze scene and unfashionable pomp rockers like Queen and Boston. He fully harnessed the Big Muff fuzz's potential to create a wall of noise, and like his heroes Cheap Trick, created a sound that was equal parts rock fury and pop magic. When metal was a dirty word, Corgan embraced Sabbath and Van Halen, revealing an artist always unafraid to be himself.


Corgan in 2018...

CORGAN AND GIBBONS: JEN ROSENSTEIN/FUTURE TRUCKS: JOBY SESSIONS/FUTURE MOORE: ADAM GASSON/FUTURE


...Trucks in 2009...

DEREK TRUCKS

WHAT HE DID: Slide-guitar prodigy whose skills are stunning, and stunningly diverse. Through his playing with the Allman Brothers Band, the Derek Trucks Band and the Tedeschi Trucks Band, the group he shares with his wife Susan Tedeschi, Trucks has consistently proven to be a fountain of effortlessly fluid, microtonal-specked lines that glide and soar with vocal-like grace and an inspiration to slide guitarists everywhere.

"No one's ever taken slide guitar all the way, which is why I was drawn to it. Duane Allman was heading there, but he never had a chance to fulfill his destiny. I want to see where slide guitar can go, and it's a great vehicle for expression because of the way it can mimic the human voice, wavering on one note and playing melodies on one string" — Derek Trucks

DEREK TRUCKS' REPUTATION as a slide guitar master should be without question to anyone who has been watching his very public development for the better part of three decades. The Florida native has been touring since he was 11 years old, released his first album when he was just 17 and joined the Allman Brothers Band in 1999, when he was 19. Now in his late 40s, Trucks is an endlessly inspired and crafty guitarist, equally capable of playing tasty, minimalist fills or extended improvised solos that never fail to surprise. Always tuned to open E and never using a pick, Trucks has established a wholly individual sound, incorporating Indian classical music, "sacred steel" gospel and jazz into a more classic, blues-rock base.


...and Moore in 2014

THURSTON MOORE & LEE RANALDO (SONIC YOUTH)

WHAT THEY DID: Their unusual tunings, bold harmonic experimentation and pioneering application of noise and textures made Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore the godfathers of alternative guitar.

"We felt very liberated in the early Eighties because suddenly it was okay to be interested in anything — 20th-century composition, avant-garde jazz — rather than having to have that 'punk rules, everything else sucks' mentality" — Thurston Moore

SONIC YOUTH SET the pattern for how an Eighties indie band could grow in popularity without losing credibility. Co-guitarists Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo combined punk rock attitude and song structure with open tuning techniques developed by downtown Manhattan avant-garde guitar composers Glenn Branca and Rys Chatham, and invented one of the most radical approaches to guitar in the history of rock. They reawakened interest in Fender Jaguars and Jazzmasters and motivated guitarists of every stripe to venture beyond standard tuning, profoundly affecting the sound of rock in the Nineties.



BILLY GIBBONS

WHAT HE DID: With ZZ Top, Gibbons stole the blues back from British rockers with a vengeance during the Seventies and in the mid Eighties combined his nitro-fueled guitar playing with danceable drum-machine beats and pulsing synth bass lines, beating like-minded industrial artists to the dance floor by several years.

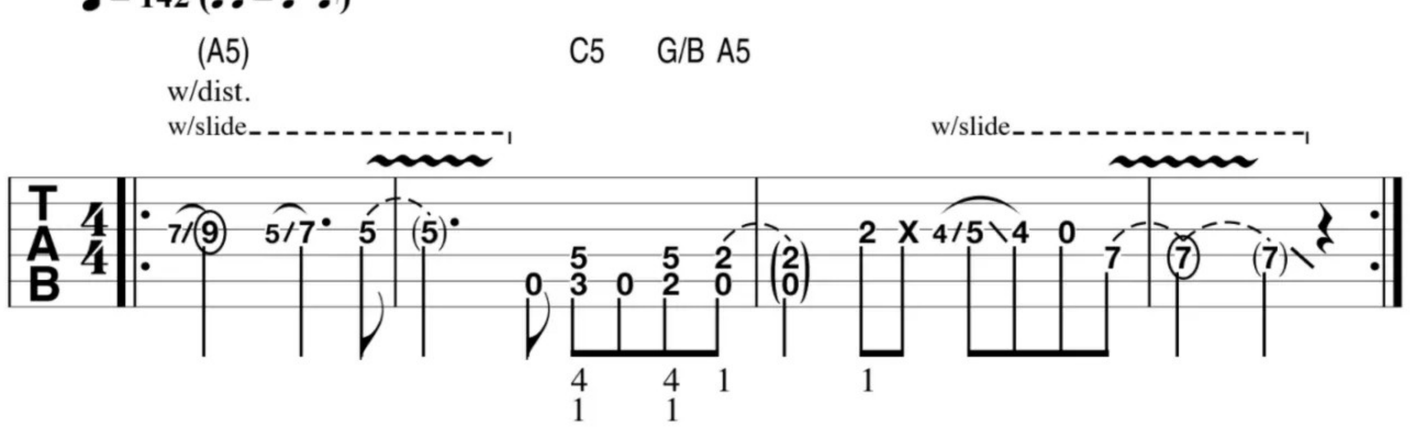
"The blues deals with the highest of highs, the lowest of lows and all points in between" — Billy Gibbons

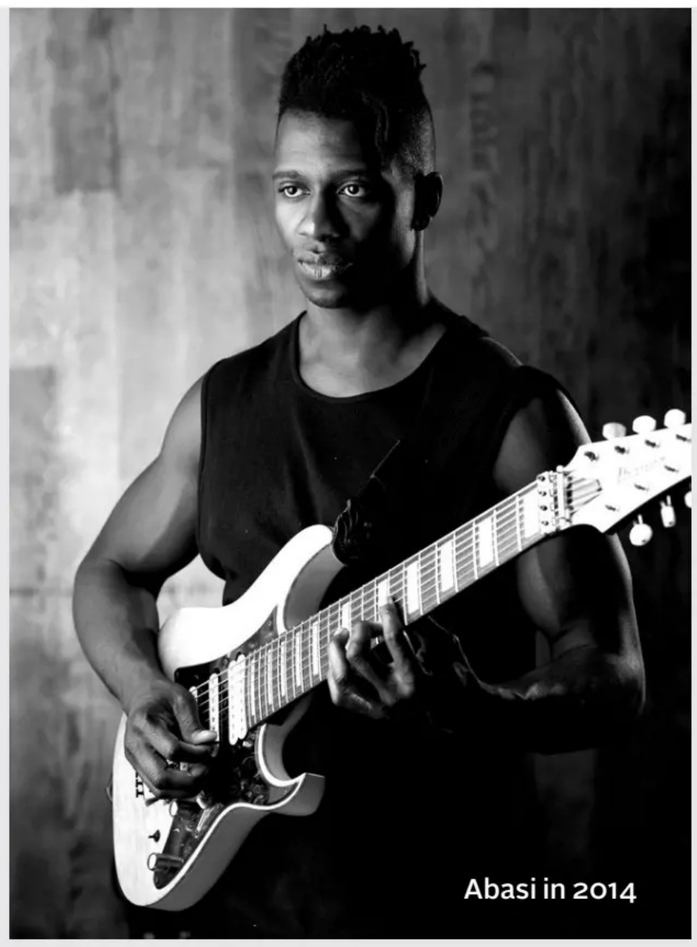
BY 1983, ZZ Top had long since established themselves as the greatest little blues rock trio ever to come out of Texas, as well as men who would go to great lengths to cultivate their facial hair. But with the Eighties' new wave booming, guitarist and conceptualist Billy F. Gibbons reinvented the trio as a blues band from outer space, and one with unabashed pop leanings. *Eliminator* classics "Gimmie All Your Lovin'," "Sharp Dressed Man" and "Legs" combined savvy songcraft with a paint-peeling guitar tone, reportedly recorded direct through a tiny Rockman preamp.

When it comes to using a slide, the eccentric Texan says, "I've managed to learn to hold the slide with my middle finger. A lot of players believe it belongs on the pinkie or the ring finger. I prefer the middle, it leaves the other three digits free to do what you want. You can even play chords that way. The main thing is training to only follow where you get the proper pitch. You can't play in between the frets, you need to actually be on them. That's a critical move. If you go between the lines, you're actually going out of pitch."

BILLY'S TOP-DRAWER PLAYING

This Gibbons-style example necessitates wearing the slide on your 2nd finger, leaving the others free to fret the A5, C5 and G/B chords. Use your pick hand's palm and fingers to mute unplayed strings in bars 1, 3 and 4 and prevent unwanted notes from sounding.




Abasi in 2014

TOSIN ABASI

WHAT HE DID: With his eight-string guitar and virtuoso shred abilities, the Animals as Leaders guitarist has been at metalcore's cutting edge since 2009.

"For me, the eight-string and its almost alien quality started to produce new musical ideas because it was un-guitar-like in a lot of ways. I like that, because of this idea of evolution and pushing things forward" — Tosin Abasi

ANIMALS AS LEADERS' widely hailed self-titled 2009 debut was a dazzling instrumental showcase that featured Tosin Abasi's innovative seven- and eight-string guitar playing. Packed with wickedly fast soloing, beautiful jazz-influenced chord voicings and tricky polyrhythms, *Animals as Leaders* put Abasi on the short list of post-millennial shredders that really matter.

Abasi's eight-string guitars — formerly his Ibanez signature models, and now his own Abasi Larada guitars — have become his stock in trade, sleek-bodied instruments with broad, massive necks that carry the heft and menace of weaponry. And indeed Abasi uses these guitars to devastating effect on the four albums he's recorded as the mastermind of Animals as Leaders, post-thrash, prog-metal exponents of a brawny, blindingly virtuosic style of instrumental guitar rock called djent. The genre name is an onomatopoetic nod to the sound of a palm-muted downstroke on ultralow, hyperdistorted guitar strings. And nobody lays that sound down quite like Abasi.

JACK WHITE



WHAT HE DID: Spearheaded the garage rock revival of the 2000s with his band the White Stripes and raucous rock hits like "Fell in Love with a Girl," "Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground" and "Seven Nation Army."

"Rock and roll isn't really known for its great examples of human decency" — Jack White

THE YOUNGEST OF 10 children, Jack White — born Jack Gillis in 1975 — grew up in a gritty Detroit, Michigan, neighborhood and worked as an assistant upholsterer after graduating high school. It was during this rather humble period that White got serious about his music. He immersed himself in the primitive sounds of the Detroit garage rock revival, playing drums and guitar in several bands while privately forming a very focused musical aesthetic. The turning point came in 1996 when he married Meg White and began teaching her how to play drums.

"We were just messing around, kind of as a joke, but it ended up being perfect. She played like such a child," White says of Meg, who is now his ex-wife, "and the sound was something fresh."

And so the concept of the White Stripes was born, inspired in equal parts by the unvarnished music of the Delta blues, Dutch minimalist art and Meg's naïve drumming. The results were so original and uncompromising that soon the whole alternative rock world stood up and took notice for much of the early 2000s.

"Seven Nation Army," one of the biggest songs of that period, saw White's guitar tuned to open A. You can play the mega-easy verse riff in any tuning, really — it's in the chorus where open A comes into its own. Those slide guitar lines wouldn't be possible in standard tuning.



...Mustaine in 2010...

DAVE MUSTAINE

WHAT HE DID: For 35 years, Mustaine's ferocious playing and unflagging commitment to metallic excellence has consistently kept Megadeth on the cutting edge of thrash, even while various lineup, management, physical injury and substance abuse difficulties threatened to capsize the band.

"I don't care what anybody says; they can talk shit about me all they want. I've accomplished more in my career than most people can do in two or three lifetimes" — Dave Mustaine

FEW SURNAMES IN metal carry as much weight — not to mention equal parts love and contempt — year after year, decade after decade. But for all the conflicting opinions out there on Dave Mustaine — a man who never misses an opportunity to shoot from the lip no matter the consequences — few could argue against his importance as one of the all-time great contributors to the art of metal. If nothing else, the man commands respect for an incredible legacy of music — and for being the ultimate warrior.

Even after getting himself kicked out of Metallica before anyone really knew his name — an epic failure that would have surely relegated just about anyone else to mere common-man status for the rest of his nondescript life — Mustaine came back with a vengeance soon after with 1985's *Killing Is My Business... And Business Is Good!*, the debut offering from his new band Megadeth. Suddenly, everyone knew the name Mustaine — and realized that he was a force to be reckoned with.

Throughout the years Mustaine has survived battles with substance abuse, a debilitating nerve injury to his left arm, inter-band lawsuits, a revolving door of lineup changes and generally serving as a target for both fans and musical peers quick to take potshots at his character. Yet through all of it, Mustaine keeps soldiering on, consistently remaining at the forefront of the thrash metal scene with a body of work that, in terms of album production, outnumbers the studio output of almost all his headbanging brethren, including Metallica, Slayer and Anthrax.

GLENN TIPTON & K.K. DOWNING (JUDAS PRIEST)

WHAT THEY DID: From 1974 to 2011, the team of Tipton and band co-founder Downing led the heavy metal brigade, introducing a twin-guitar attack to the

genre, defining a sound rooted in power chords, palm muting and back-and-forth lead breaks that inspired generations of groups, from Iron Maiden to Slayer.

"I don't ever want to compromise Judas Priest. It's too big a part of my life" — Glenn Tipton

FOR 37 YEARS, Glenn Tipton and K.K. Downing were the Judas Priest members that were primarily responsible for forging the band's sound, playing together so fluidly that the phrase "the patented twin-guitar leads of Tipton and Downing" has long been seared across the frontal lobes of rock scribes everywhere. Their partnership began in 1974 in Birmingham, England, when Judas Priest (then consisting of Halford, Downing, bassist Ian Hill and drummer John Hinch) decided to add a guitarist on the eve of recording their first album, *Rocka Rolla*.

"I was in the Flying Hat Band," Tipton told *Guitar World*. "We were sort of in slight competition with Priest at the time; it was a sort of local band rivalry. Priest picked up a record contract with Gull Records, and they felt inclined to give the band more strength. I think they'd considered a keyboard player, but they approached me and asked would I be interested in joining. My group had had a few problems with management and things, so I thought, I'll join Priest for a bit until I can do something else." He laughs. "But once I joined, it didn't take me more than a millisecond to realize the potential of the band."

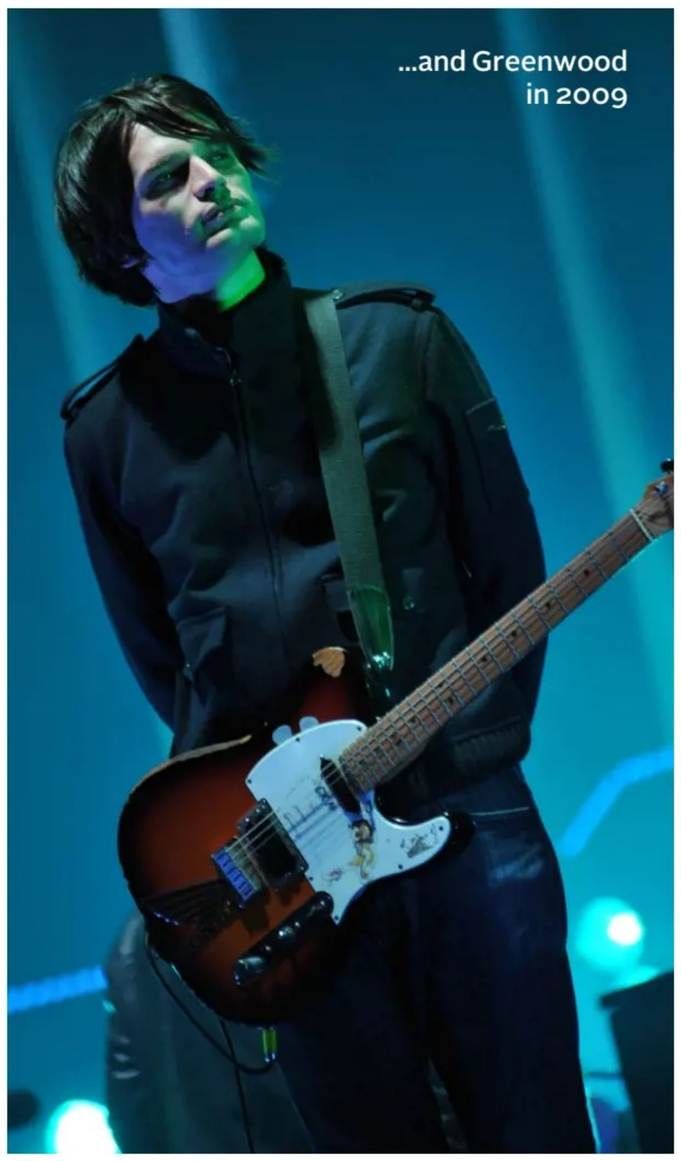
Judas Priest spent the rest of the Seventies issuing various records in a frenetic charge to capture the heavy metal crown, and finally broke through in the U.S. in 1980 with the release of *British Steel*. With its perfect blend of crunching, scalpel-sharp riffs and bracing leads that are part hummable melody, part blazing forest fire, *British Steel* is a textbook example of the sound that defined the New Wave of British Heavy Metal — a subgenre that balances savage aggression with tight, memorable riffs. Many consider it to be Judas Priest's defining moment. It also awakened a new generation of musicians to the creative potential of crushing guitar riffs and gritty melodies. For example, when Slayer started out in 1981, they performed countless Judas Priest covers before creating their own sound by combining Priest's firepower with the tempos of Motörhead and the attitude of hardcore. Pantera, for their part, crossed the full-fisted crunch of *British Steel*-era Priest with the groove of ZZ Top, the flair of Van Halen and the speed of Metallica. "Judas Priest are the originators of the molten metal, two-guitar arsenal," Pantera guitarist Dimebag Darrell told *Guitar World* back in 2001. "Those guys were ahead of the game way back when, and their old albums are still heavier than 99 percent of what's out there."

THOM YORKE, JONNY GREENWOOD & ED O'BRIEN (RADIOHEAD)

WHAT THEY DID: The fire and skill of Radiohead's three-guitar frontline first drew major attention on 1995's album *The Bends*. Two years later, these Brits upped the ante with *OK Computer*, creating a captivating brand of space rock.

"Our ears get bored very quickly. Sometimes a guitar plugged into an amplifier isn't really enough. So you hear sounds in your head, or on a record, and you say, 'I want it to sound like this.' And sometimes it won't — I can't play the trumpet, so it's not going to sound like Miles Davis. But we aim for these things and end up with our own garbled version" — Jonny Greenwood

COUNTLESS BANDS HAVE imitated elements of *OK Computer*'s revolutionary sound — from Thom Yorke's haunted vocal emotions to Jonny Greenwood's adventurous guitar textures — but no one, not even Radiohead, have duplicated its intoxicating overall effect in the 23 years since its release. While Yorke handled the rhythm guitar parts, Greenwood took on the more "traditional" lead work (those freakazoid solos on the epic "Paranoid Android" are his doing) and Ed O'Brien specialized in wacky noises (that's him pushing an AMS digital delay to its breaking point at the end of "Karma Police"). Lauded by critics, musicians and fans alike, *OK Computer* is arguably the most influential rock guitar album of the 90s.



...and Greenwood in 2009

ABASI: ADAM GASSON/FUTURE

STRAUSS: JEREMY SAFFER/FUTURE

MICHAEL HEDGES

WHAT HE DID: Acoustic fingerstylist renowned for his multitude of techniques and tunings (typically applied to a 1971 Martin D-28) as well as his breathtaking musicality and captivating performance style.

"A good guitarist sees the original nature of the mind and channels it through the heart. The inspired guitarist adds some guts and makes you want to dance. A truly great guitarist forgets all this, and takes a chance" — Michael Hedges

THE 1981 RELEASE of Michael Hedges' debut album, *Breakfast in the Field*, announced the arrival on the fingerpicking scene of a genuine iconoclast, a fabulous new voice among the herds of alternating thumb- and finger-specialists. Hedges, who died in a car accident in 1997, discovered that far beyond the metronomic regularity of Travis picking and even the classical-derived counterpoint playing of the Anglo-traditionalists, there existed a brave, new acoustic world.

By banging and tapping on the face of his guitar and across the strings, Hedges created ghostly harmonic effects in compositions that rely on pure sound as much as melody for their effect. Hedges has been an idol smasher in other areas, as well: he has often played the harp guitar, an instrument long considered obsolete, and finds his musical heroes among modern composers like Béla Bartók.

None of this is to say, of course, that Hedges totally eschewed melody, spits at Chet Atkins and laughed at traditional picking techniques. Even his "straight" playing is seriously spiced by his percussive patting, two-hand tapping and willful dissonances.

Hedges, whose albums on Windham Hill are generally categorized as "New Age," was, at least, a new wave guitarist who found inspiration in unlikely sources and was unafraid to augment tradition with unusual inspiration.

DIMEBAG DARRELL



WHAT HE DID: An unapologetic shredder who kept the art of the guitar solo alive and well throughout the Nineties — when grunge, alternative rock and hip-hop-inspired, rhythm-based "nu-metal" dominated the charts — Dimebag provided welcome relief for players who wanted to push the boundaries instead of wallow in mediocrity.

"Heavy metal is what I'm into. Shit that moves you. Shit that has heart and soul" — Dimebag Darrell

DIMEBAG WAS ONE of the most influential metal guitarists of the past 30 years, with a sound, style and look as outsized as his legendary personality. His ferocious lead technique on such albums as 1990's *Cowboys from Hell* and 1992's *Vulgar Display of Power* was a full-frontal assault that drew as heavily on blues as heavy metal. His penchant for the lead work of rock and metal giants such as Eddie Van Halen and Randy Rhoads was combined with his own unique take on the humble pentatonic scale. Although favoring extreme techniques such as wide, aggressive vibrato, whammy bar antics and huge squealing harmonics, Dimebag was always in control of his sound; no mean feat when dealing with large amounts of distortion and boosted treble.

He initially favored tuning to an "in between" point roughly 0.6 of a semitone below standard tuning. Later on, he used D standard (DGCFAD) and drop C (CGCFA), which allowed wider bends and more aggressive vibrato in his lead playing. We've opted for DGCFAD for our lick below.

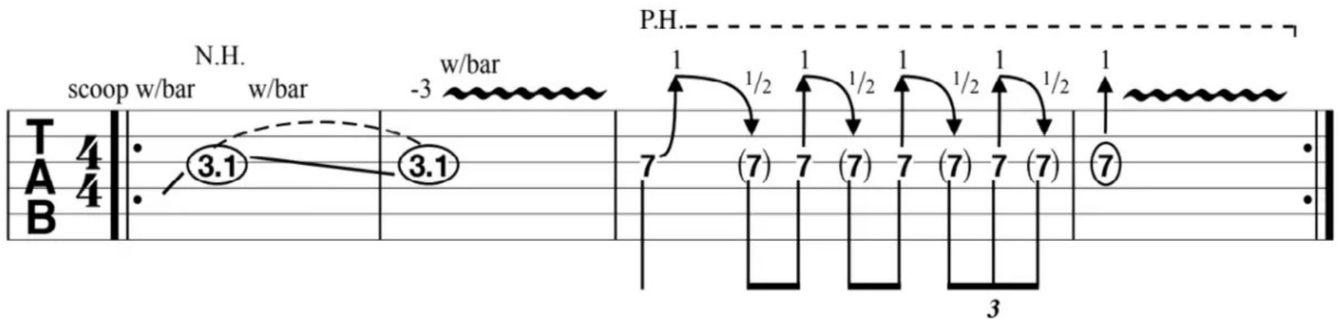

Dimebag in 1994...

DIMEBAG: MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS MUSTAINE AND GREENWOOD: KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE

PITCHED PINCHED HARMONICS

Dimebag's legendary squeals were usually skillfully pitched according to the key, so learning the harmonic positions and "sweet spots" is vital. The natural harmonic (N.H.) in bar 1 and the first pinch harmonic (P.H.) in bar 3 should be the same pitch. The whammy bar dive going into bar 2 is a three-semitone dip.

Tune down one whole step (low to high: D, G, C, F, A, D)



IAN MacKAYE

WHAT HE DID: As the leader of the hardcore quartet Minor Threat in the early Eighties and later Fugazi, MacKaye brought a sense of honor to the Washington, D.C., punk scene with his strident sociopolitical lyrics and embrace of the straight-edge lifestyle.

"Music is a form of communication that predates language and is completely important and necessary in the life of human beings. It doesn't need to be classified, explained or rationalized" — Ian MacKaye

IGNITING HARDCORE PUNK and post-hardcore with his Gibson SG, Ian MacKaye has also been one of the movement's chief socio-political ideologues. In the Eighties and Nineties, with his groups Minor Threat and Fugazi, he carried punk rock's original D.I.Y. philosophy to its logical conclusion, steadfastly refusing to sign with major record labels, charge too much money for shows or do interviews with corporate media outlets. In writing the 1981 Minor Threat song "Straight Edge" he launched the drug and alcohol-free straight edge movement, which also advocates responsible sexuality. Anti-war, vegan and feminist, his clearly reasoned political positions have played a key role in setting the latter-day punk agenda.

KIM THAYIL

WHAT HE DID: The Soundgarden guitarist's sludgy, down-tuned power chords were the perfect foil for frontman Chris Cornell's high-pitched wail, and his spiraling, mind-bending solos proved to a whole new generation of listeners that it was possible to be psychedelic without being cheesy.

"Your lack of technique can be part of your style. The thing about style is that it's more entertaining, more important and hopefully more intel-


Thayil in 2014...

lectual than technique" — Kim Thayil

WHEN SOUNDGARDEN SET out in 1991 to record the pivotal *Badmotorfinger*, the last thing on Kim Thayil's mind was creating a stylized tone that would become one of the most imitated guitar sounds of the Nineties. "I was trying to get a low, heavy sound while at the same time getting it to cut through," said Thayil. "I was into Metallica's sound back then, the Melvins, too, and wanted to achieve that same overwhelming heaviness."

He succeeded. With his beloved "Spider-man" Guild S-1 (customized with a sticker Kim found in a cereal box) pumped through his mainstay Peavey VTM setup, Thayil instinctively zeroed in on the earth-plowing sound by employing the now-famous dropped-D tuning and adjusting the amplifier's bottom end. "The VTMs have this circuitry where you can boost the lows," he said. "I had it cranked. That sound has a good feel to it and good boom, which is great for muting. It also has a nice, full lead tone and a warm low end that is good for vibrato."

YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

WHAT HE DID: When Yngwie Malmsteen released his debut solo album, *Rising Force*, in 1984, he unleashed the fury on guitarists who were already having enough trouble keeping up with Eddie Van Halen. Malmsteen's all-encompassing mastery of speed techniques like sweep-picked arpeggios, tremolo picking, legato, string skipping, tapping and more inspired guitarists to either woodshed or use their guitars as firewood.



"In my early teens, I was already fusing classical and metal together. So from an early age, I had a strong vision of where I was going" — Yngwie Malmsteen

GROWING UP IN Sweden, Yngwie Malmsteen worshipped at the altar of Ritchie Blackmore. But being a notoriously impatient fellow, he quickly tired of the usual rock guitar influences and turned instead to baroque and classical virtuosi/composers like Mozart, Vivaldi and classical violinist Niccolò Paganini for inspiration. In doing so, Malmsteen significantly altered the course of metal guitar playing, igniting the Eighties neoclassical boom.

"I've always wondered why anyone would need to practice exercises that were clearly technical in nature when one can get the same benefits from playing real music," Malmsteen said. "I mean, why run mindless patterns up and down the neck when you can play musical masterpieces by Johann Sebastian Bach or Paganini? I can't imagine a better workout for technique than Paganini's 24 Caprices — particularly Numbers 5, 6 and 24. And since they're also great compositions, they not only help a player's technique but also expand his melodic and harmonic awareness."

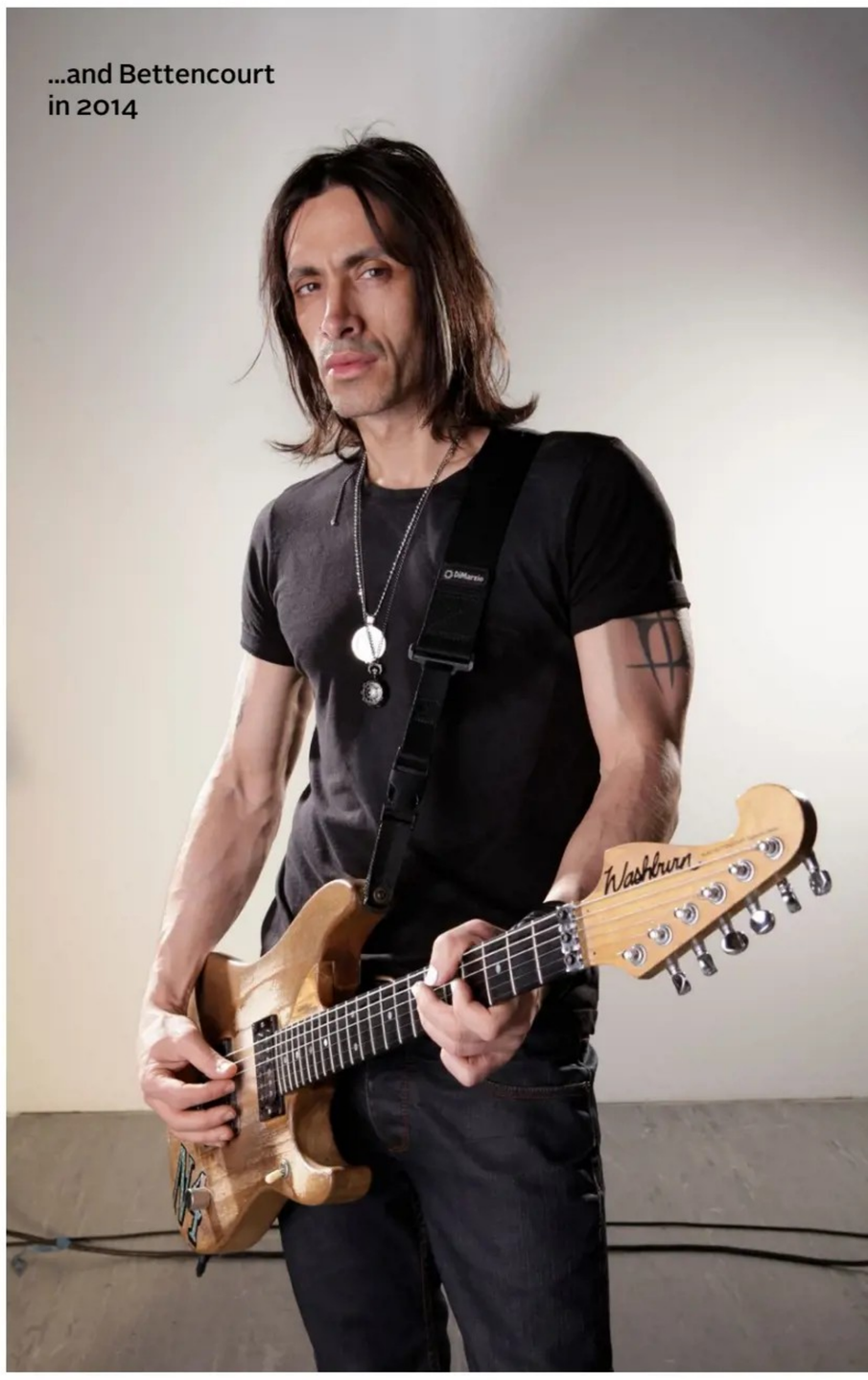
NUNO BETTENCOURT

WHAT HE DID: While others imitated Eddie Van Halen, Nuno took his ideas to new places. His devastating syncopation gave Extreme funk where their peers had none.



"The solo is the fun part. But you've gotta have the riffs and melodies too — that other three-and-a-half minutes of the song are just as important" — Nuno Bettencourt

A LATE ARRIVAL on the Eighties metal scene, Boston's Extreme stood out from the rest of the poodle-haired pack primarily because of Bettencourt, their guitarist and musical director. In an age of generic, cookie-cutter shredders, Bettencourt showed impressive stylistic range, deftly incorporating elements of disparate guitarists and musical styles — everyone from Eddie Van Halen to Brian May and James Brown to the Beatles — into his tasty playing, while still managing to put his own melodic stamp on the band's material.

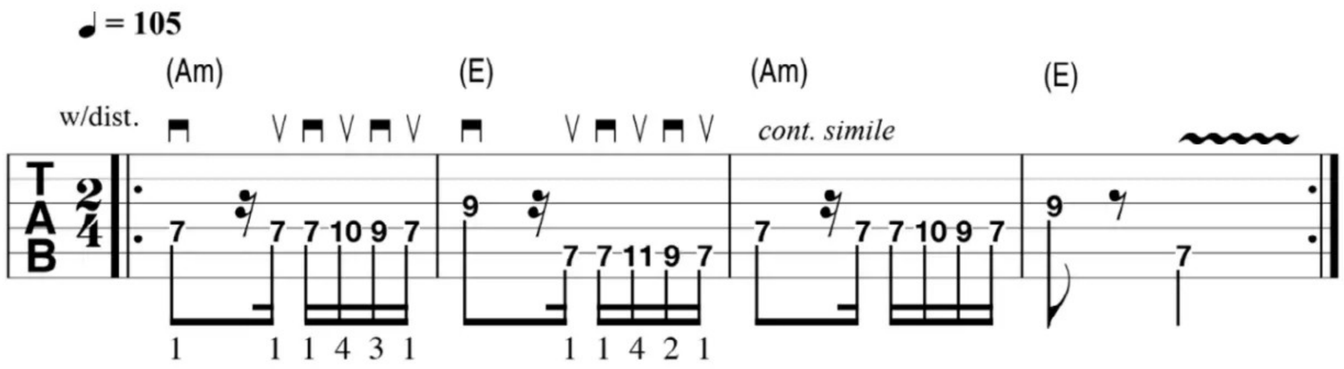


...and Bettencourt in 2014


...Malmsteen in 2012...

CAPRICE NO. 24 LICK

In keeping with Malmsteen's passion for classical composers and compositions, have a go at our contemporary prog-metal take on Paganini's Caprice No. 24. Note the spread-out fingering in bar 2.



ANGUS & MALCOLM YOUNG (AC/DC)

WHAT THEY DID: The brothers Young are renowned for forging distinct, hard-driving guitar parts that weave together in a seamless, complimentary manner, as heard on such classic AC/DC songs as "You Shook Me All Night Long," "Back in Black," "Hells Bells" and many others.

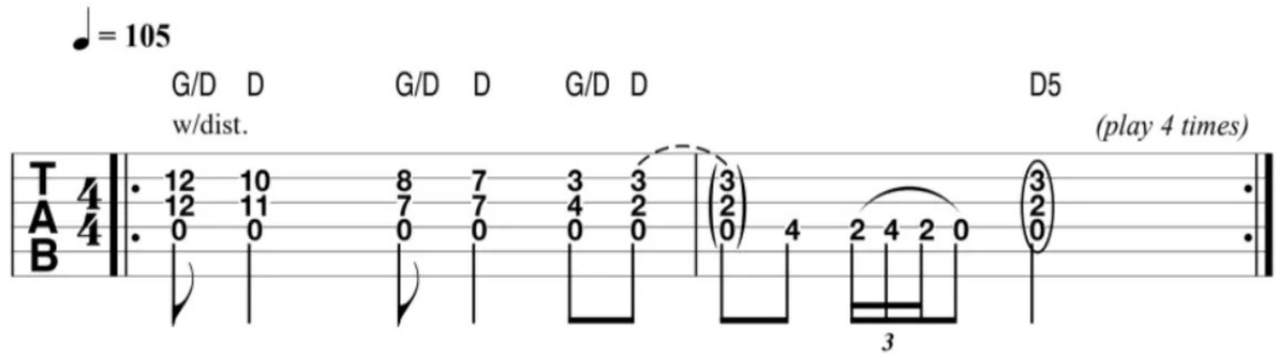
"Malcolm makes the band sound so full, and it's hard to get a big ego if you play in a band with your brother — it keeps your head on earth" — Angus Young

MALCOLM AND ANGUS Young's uncanny sibling telepathy was the secret weapon that made AC/DC the ultimate "raise your plastic beer cup and bellow along" arena experience from the time of their 1979 breakthrough album *Highway to Hell* all the way up to Malcolm's retirement from performing in 2014 due to illness. Since AC/DC's beginnings in 1973, Malcolm's massive rhythm guitar style provided a foundation so solid that drums and bass were almost superfluous. Angus' hook-happy leads were concise epiphanies of rock guitar cool, while his schoolboy shtick exorcised metal's tendency to take itself way too seriously. Undeniably the toughest one-two punch in hard rock up until the elder Young succumbed to the effects of dementia in 2017.



AC/DC-STYLE PEDAL-TONE RIFF

To play this AC/DC-style pedal-tone riff, keep the D string open and ringing as you play the series of descending dyads in bar 1. Finger the D chord at the end of bar 1 with your first two fingers and you'll be all set to perform the melodic fill that follows in bar 2 with your 1st and 3rd fingers.



JASON BECKER

WHAT HE DID: A titan of neoclassical shredding, Jason Becker's astounding arpeggios made him a youthful champion of the Shrapnel Records stable in the late Eighties. He went on to play with David Lee Roth but was stricken with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease) while working on Roth's 1991 album, *A Little Ain't Enough*. The condition has left him almost completely paralyzed and unable to speak, but his courage, determination and continued creativity in the face of extreme difficulty are every bit as inspiring as the dazzling virtuosity of his youthful guitar work.

"Not being able to play guitar any more has made me focus more on beautiful melodies and soul-stirring stuff. Those qualities were always in my music, but there was also a desire to kick your ass and blow your mind. Now I want people to feel something so deep that they can't help but reflect and make positive changes in themselves" — Jason Becker

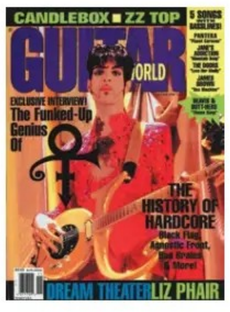
JASON BECKER NEVER had an album go Platinum or got his picture on the cover of a mainstream music magazine; he probably never even got to throw a TV out of a hotel window. But back in the days when he could still hold a guitar, Becker was a monster of a player. He made a name for himself among the shred crowd back in the Eighties when playing fast, smoking guitar was still cool. Just a teenager at the time, Becker (working with future Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman) recorded four albums of searing neo-classical shred guitar for Mike Varney's Shrapnel label, forever earning himself a place in the shred Hall of Fame. By his 20th birthday, Becker had landed the plum guitar spot in David Lee Roth's band. Given that Diamond Dave's last two ax men had been a couple of hotshot guitarists named Eddie Van Halen and Steve Vai, it was a high-profile gig for an aspiring shredder.

For Becker, it was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream that began when he picked up the guitar at the age of five. Unfortunately, just as Becker was poised to become a major guitar hero, his guitar playing career came to an abrupt halt. A week after acing his audition with Roth, Becker was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis — better known as Lou Gehrig's disease — a terminal illness that gradually destroys the neurons that control movement. As the motor neurons die, patients steadily lose their ability to move. The brain, however, remains unaffected,

and patients become trapped in a body that no longer works.

"In 1989, my doctors told me I would probably die in three to five years," said Becker, now 51 and still very much alive. Confined to a wheelchair, he eats and breathes through a tube, receiving care and sustenance from his family and friends. While ALS has left him not only motionless but speechless, Becker is able to communicate by a system of rapid eye movements developed by his father, Gary. Amazingly, Jason Becker's spirit in today remains as vital and positive as ever.

PRINCE



WHAT HE DID: Possessed of flash, funk, finesse and fury, he could dance like a goddamned genius, compose ballads that would break your heart, reinvent the popscape and perform entire albums by himself. But mainly — and above all — Prince could shred.

"In some ways* Purple Rain *scared me. It was too successful, and no matter what I do I'll never top it. It's my albatross and it'll be hanging around my neck as long as I'm making music" — Prince

AFTER SPENDING THE late Seventies and early Eighties releasing albums that appealed primarily to R&B and funk audiences, Prince exploded into the American mainstream in 1982 with his fifth studio album, *1999*. The record, fueled by such hits as "Little Red Corvette" and the mechanized dance-stomp of the title track, introduced a purple, polished, trenchcoat-clad whirling sex demon — who also happened to be a highly gifted musician, producer and songwriter — to MTV and households across the country.

Prince's 1984 follow-up album, *Purple Rain*, a guitar-rock masterpiece as deserving of study as any album released that year, was swaddled in sexy synths and futuristic dance beats and cemented the Minneapolis native as a bona-fide rock god. To even the most casual listener, there's no denying that Prince's speedier licks on *Purple Rain* tracks like "Let's Go Crazy" or "When Doves Cry" could put a hair-metal extrovert to shame. But a deeper dive into the artist's extensive body of work yields a wealth of material that should be acknowledged by anyone with a true appreciation for guitar mastery, some of which is only now being discovered by the masses, thanks to YouTube. One shining example is the extended outro solo that the Minneapolis native, playing his Hohner T-style, unleashed at a 2004 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame ceremony alongside Tom Petty, Jeff Lynne, Steve Winwood and others. The clip, a truly glorious moment that showcases the great one's magnificent live blend of taste and heroics, has now been viewed 88 million times, and with good reason. When Prince went off on a pentatonic rock solo, it was pure emotional expression being mined with a Santana-level vibrato (Prince was a huge admirer of the early Santana records in particular), and he understood the power of holding one sustained note for the emotive shot to the heart. But his energetic improvisation was always anchored in the hooks reflected in his approach to vocal melody construction.

"Guitarists should listen to singers for solo ideas — especially women singers," he told *Guitar Player* in 2004. "Women haven't had a chance to run the world yet, so you still hear the blues in their singing. Try to play one of the runs that Beyoncé or Ella Fitzgerald does and you will surely learn something."

The virtuosic multi-instrumentalist, born Prince Rogers Nelson in 1958, died of an accidental overdose on April 21, 2016, at his Paisley Park home and recording studio in Chanhassen, Minnesota.

JOHN FRUSCIANTE



WHAT HE DID: The Nineties master of the Jimi Hendrix/R&B style of rhythm guitar served as the primary writing force behind many of the Red Hot Chili Peppers' biggest hits: "Under the Bridge," "Give It Away," "Scar Tissue" and "Californication."

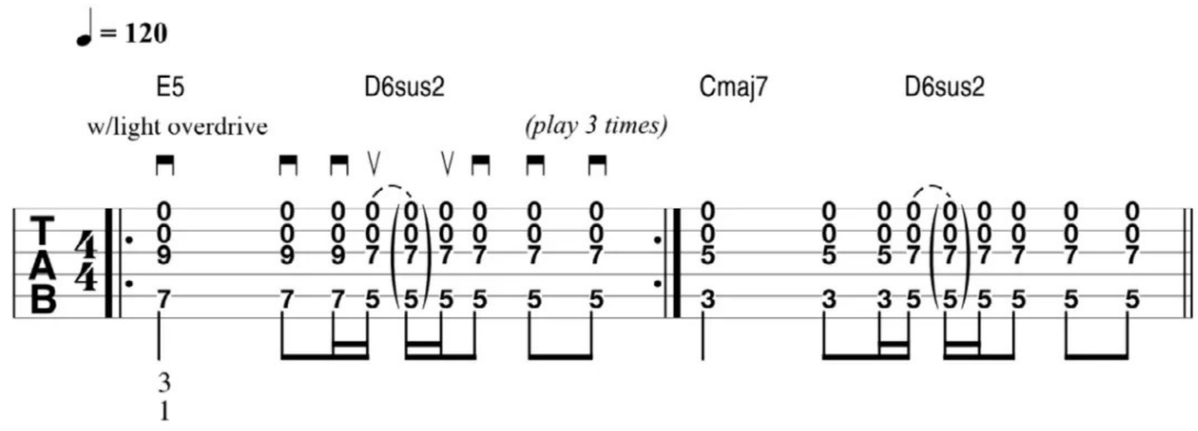
"Remember, there's an endless supply of creativity in the universe; it's never going to run out. Explore the possibilities and don't make too much of an agenda about blowing people away" — John Frusciante

DRAFTED INTO THE Red Hot Chili Peppers — his favorite band — at the age of 18, John Frusciante brought with him an economical playing style that was the perfect tonic to Flea's slap-bass excess. It turned the group's 1989 effort, *Mother's Milk*, from frat rock into something vital and genuinely potent. Behind the incendiary gigs and creative sock wearing, however, a storm was brewing, and after casually knocking out the guitar album of the Nineties — one that helped launch the Lollapalooza generation — with the wah-drenched, funky *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, Frusciante embarked on what might well be described as a descent into hell. He quit the Chili Peppers in 1992 and spent five years as a heroin addict. He came perilously close to dying many times, barely escaping with his life after setting fire to his home in the Hollywood Hills on one occasion and suffering severe burns.

The drugs and the near-death experiences brought him into intimate contact, he says, with realms beyond this life.

FRESH FRUSCIANTE

For this John Frusciante-style example, dial in a moderately gain-y tone, use a hardy strum and let those open B and high E strings ring freely as you move the strummed octave shape around. Burt be sure to mute the unused D and low E strings with the side and tip of your fret-hand index finger, respectively.




John Frusciante in 1999

He describes the period as a fight for control of his mind, an intense battle between friendly and hostile spirits — manifestations of the voices in his head he'd heard since childhood but which became vividly tangible.

Miraculously, though, Frusciante rose again from the dead. He returned to the land of the living, kicked his addictions and rejoined the Chili Peppers to make the Grammy-winning 1999 album *Californication*. It was the start of an upward trend for Frusciante and the Chili Peppers. *Californication*, *By the Way* (2002) and *Stadium Arcadium* (2006) form a trilogy that traces Frusciante's musical evolution and his profound impact on the band. His plaintively dramatic chordal sensibility is the key ingredient in many of the band's greatest hits. His keen arrangement and production skills have burnished the three albums with the deep golden glow of timelessness.

The Chili Peppers may have started out as Eighties punk funk pranksters, but they've long since grown to the stature of a classic band. Frusciante — who quit the band again in the summer of 2009 and rejoined in December 2019 after releasing a string of solo albums — has been a prime mover in that transubstantiation.

POISON IVY RORSCHACH

WHAT SHE DID: Long before Goth, there was Poison Ivy of punk rock innovators the Cramps, whose spiky, reverb-drenched riffs explored the scariest reaches of the human mind.

"There's kind of a scarcity of guitar players, at least any that have a primitive, strong style. That's what I like — I'm not impressed by speed or technique. I like somebody that's got just a really frightening, violent style" — Poison Ivy Rorschach

EQUALLY INSPIRED BY crazed old rockabilly masters, voodoo rhythms and acid trips, Poison Ivy Rorschach — born Kristy Wallace in 1953 — was a vision in leather at the Cramps' legendary live shows during the late Seventies and Eighties, playing off the insane writhing of ghoulish frontman Lux Interior. Interior slapped an audacious sneer onto the band's lewd, rude rhythms, while Rorschach — who became known as the queen of psychobilly punk — coaxed unsettling, almost human noises out of her instrument. Together, they crafted the nefarious surf sound at the core of the Cramps' primitive rock and roll.

JOE BONAMASSA

WHAT HE DID: Joe Bonamassa picked up a guitar at age four, could cop SRV and Hendrix licks note-for-note by age seven, and was discovered by B.B. King while still in his pre-teens. Now 43, Joe Bonamassa is known for his awe-inspiring electric work, consisting of lethal licks and fist-pumping riffs. He's hugely responsible for today's blues-rock popularity.

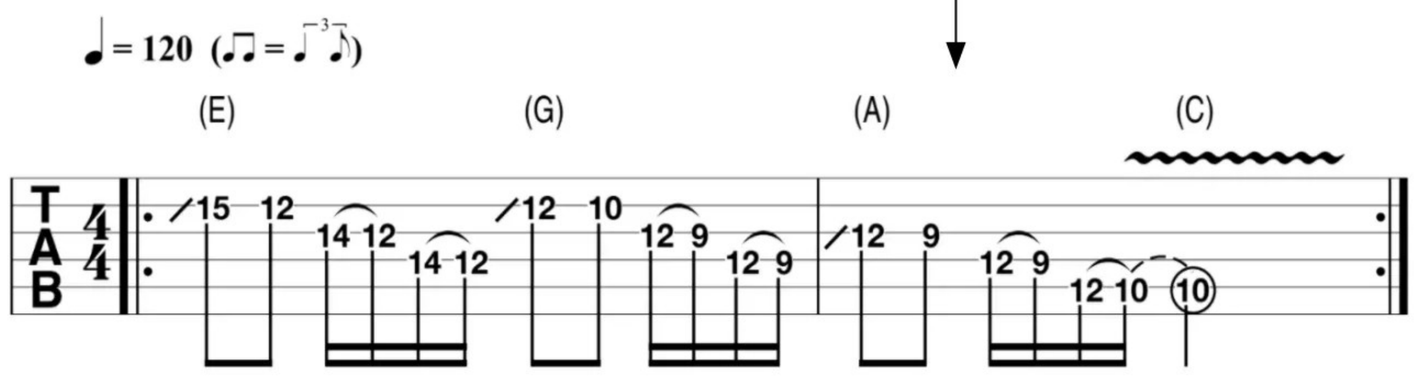
"I was thrust into an adult world very quickly, and that can make anyone somewhat socially maladjusted to dealing with people your own age. But I wouldn't trade any of it. It makes me who I am today" — Joe Bonamassa

JOE BONAMASSA HAS been a professional musician for three-quarters of his life. When he was 12, the kid from Utica, New York, was appearing with the likes of B.B. King. By 14, "Smokin' Joe" was signed to EMI Records as a member of Bloodline, a band whose nucleus consisted of the sons of musical greats like Miles Davis and the Doors' Robby Krieger. Bonamassa was a blues guitar virtuoso years before Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Jonny Lang or Gary Clark Jr. appeared on the scene and, like them, the former virtuoso whiz kid has grown up to become one of the most influential blues guitarists of his day thanks to his studio and live recordings as a solo artist, his work with singer-songwriter Beth Hart and as a member of rock act Black Country Communion. GW


Joe Bonamassa in 2025

JOE'S TRICK: SLOW THEN FAST

This lick is pure Bonamassa gold. The notes are E minor pentatonic-based (E, G, A, B, D), but it's all about the rhythm. Switching between swung eighth notes and even 16ths is the trick here, creating a sense of accelerating then pulling back. Try applying this phrasing scheme to any other pentatonic scale or shape.



GETTY

Mark Knopfler with his Steinberger GL2T at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, September 10, 1985

Strait Talker

As *Brothers in Arms* marked its 40th anniversary in 2025, Mark Knopfler broke his silence on the songs that ate the Eighties. From his lucky '83 Les Paul and Fleetwood Mac-inspired soloing to "getting away with murder" at the sessions, this is the Dire Straits legend at his most open in years

BY **HENRY YATES**

BEHIND AN UNMARKED door in a nondescript West London street, you'll find the recording studio of the world's most reluctant rock god. Do this job long enough and you'll learn to spot the artists who project a carefully cultivated aura of false modesty, often blended with a phoney man-of-the-people vibe. With Mark Knopfler, you can tell, it's absolutely genuine. Over the course of our interview at the British Grove facility he founded two decades ago, the 75-year-old former leader of Dire Straits will tell us, with unblinking sincerity, that he considers himself a mediocre player who struggled among more capable studio musicians and squirmed every time he was anointed as a guitar hero.

We must respectfully disagree with our host, of course. Anyone who followed his band from the South London ratholes of the late Seventies to the stadiums of the mid-Eighties would agree that Knopfler is a contender for the most beautiful, lyrical, shiver-and-tingle guitarist that Britain ever produced, the sound of his bare fingers dancing on the neck of his preferred '61 Strat one of the era's most magical sounds.

The evidence for his brilliance is writ large across a five-decade catalog, from the bob-and-weave outro of 1978's "Sultans of Swing" to the metallic resonator pluck of 1980's "Romeo and Juliet" and all over a 10-album-strong solo career that makes his peers look sluggish with its breadth and quality.

But if a Knopfler fan were to pick his or her desert island album, it would surely be 1985's *Brothers in Arms*. Flowing from the Synclavier quack of "So Far Away" to the stormy title track's molten solo — via the zydeco tootle of "Walk of Life" and the hairy-backed riff of "Money for Nothing" — this is Knopfler's masterpiece. Riding the CD boom to sell 30 million copies, it made Dire Straits the biggest band on the planet, but it also drove the guitarist to overload and exhaustion.

"The world is bursting with fabulous players. Writing a good song is what counts to me"

These days, Knopfler doesn't do much press — and he talks even less about Dire Straits. But with a new 40th Anniversary Edition of *Brothers in Arms* presenting these classic tracks alongside a dynamite full-length 1985 concert from San Antonio, he'll make an exception. And if you offer him the right questions, this modest, self-effacing man speaks with all the eloquence of his fabled guitar parts.

You must have been thinking about *Brothers in Arms* a lot recently because of this reissue. How does it feel to revisit a piece of music you recorded 40 years ago?

Well, it's tempting just to say, "Oh, it's nothing" and downplay it, but thinking about *Brothers in Arms* now, it seems like that record meant so much to so many people. I mean, that's why we're sitting here now. I think it was a combination of luck and events crashing into each other. We were so lucky to have intersected with Neil Dorfsman, who was such a great engineer. The record came out and we had a bunch of hits in America — that makes a hell of a difference. The CD had just been invented and they

CHRIS WALTER/GETTY IMAGES

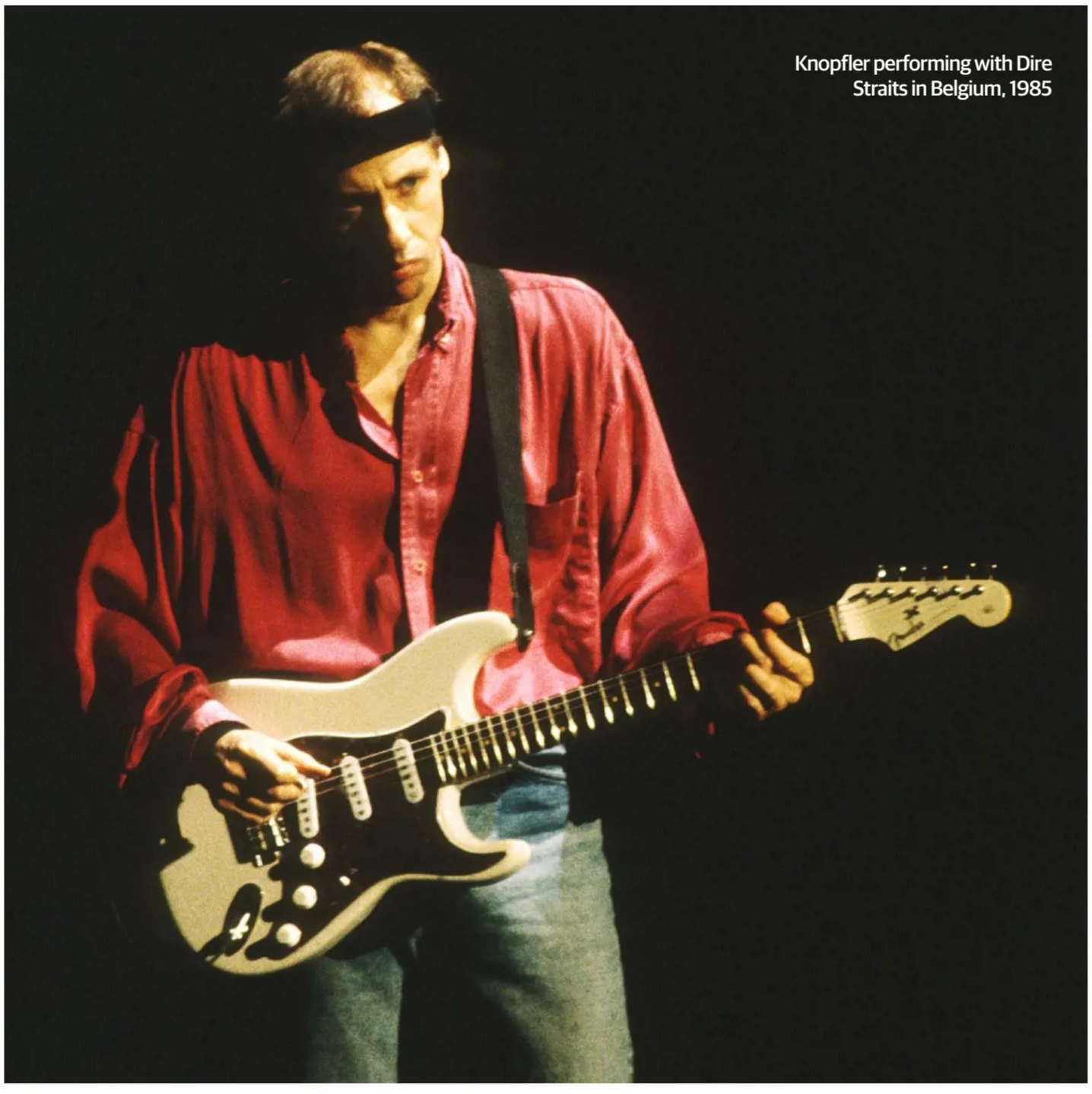
Dire Straits pose with their awards for the best-selling CD in Holland, May 25, 1985; [*from left*] guitarist Jack Sonni, Alan Clark, Chris White, Terry Williams, Guy Fletcher, Mark Knopfler and John Illsley

decided it would be a super idea to push *Brothers in Arms* in hi-fi shops. That's where a lot of people first heard it. Then the singles made it in different countries and it became a worldwide thing. Next thing you know, you're in the eye of the storm.

You say in the sleevenotes that you only just had enough material for *Brothers in Arms*.
Probably, yeah. Because we were touring so much. I would have been writing a lot on the road, in hotel rooms. And you got used to doing that. If you saw me walking up a hotel corridor holding a chair that had no arms, that was so I could play guitar on it.

What do you remember about writing the key tracks?
"Walk of Life" came from a big spell of listening to Cajun music – that's the accordion lick, played on a keyboard by Guy Fletcher – combined with a rockabilly guitar

"'Money for Nothing' comes from that clawhammer style. I was listening to a lot of ZZ Top"



Knopfler performing with Dire Straits in Belgium, 1985

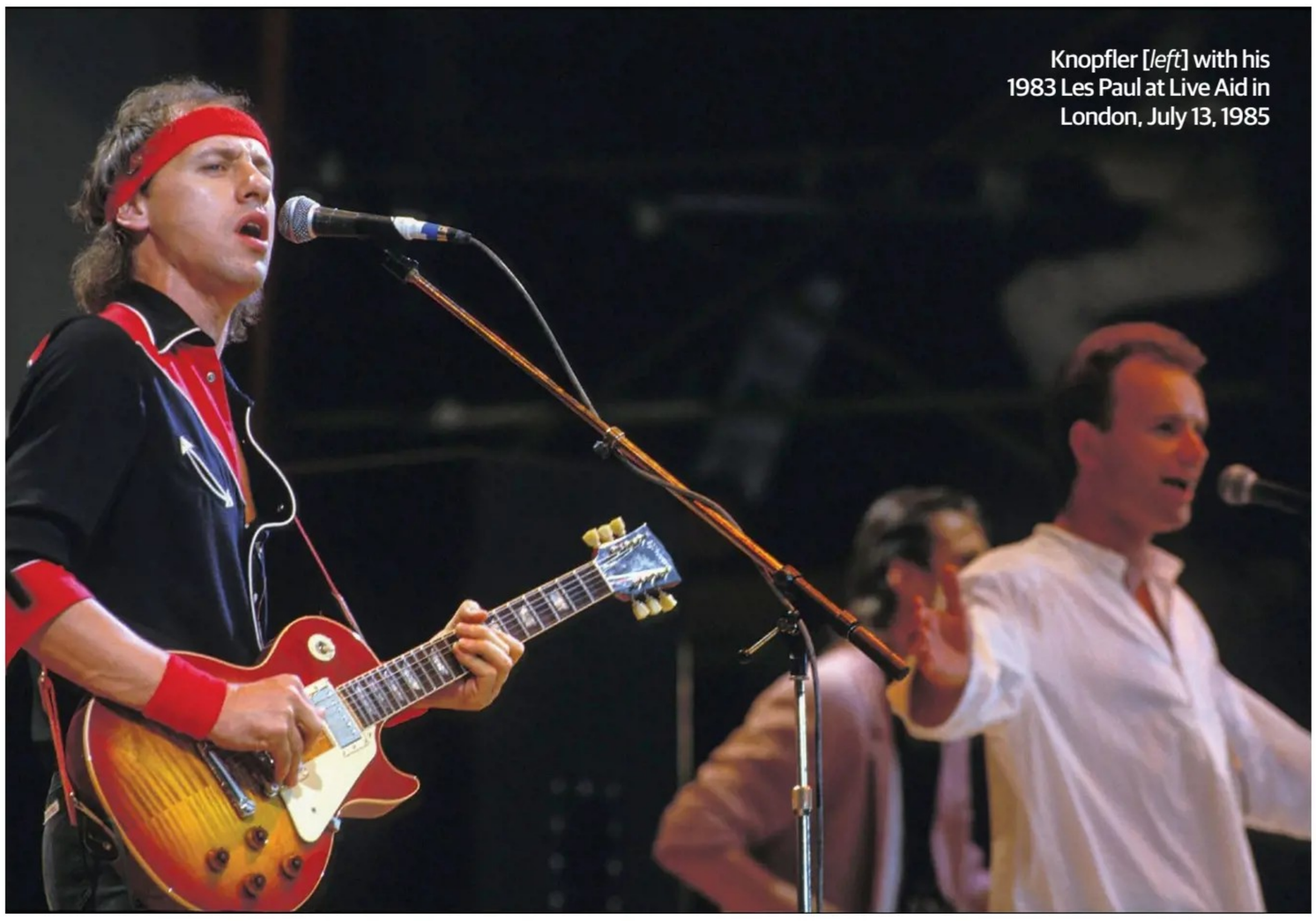
ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS

rhythm. That would have been played on my red '83 Schecter Telecaster.

"Money for Nothing" was my '83 Les Paul, and it comes from that clawhammer style. It's just picking that pattern, and you mask off a lot of the notes, try to play the right ones. With that song, I was listening to a lot of ZZ Top, things like "Gimme All Your Lovin'." That boogie they played was right up my alley. I still love it. That's what it's all about for me. Boogie is a big part of where I'm from. You know, it almost comes from a fingerstyle perspective, just cranked up a little bit and smokin' along. Boogie doesn't really have an overplayed vibe, it just rocks.

It's very interesting to me, the furniture of the title track on *Brothers in Arms*. If you think about the first four notes I play on guitar — I've tried doing other intros live, and they just don't work. People have bought tickets and you can see them thinking, "That's not 'Brothers in Arms'." That's not to say you have to play the guitar part the same way every time. Once I've played those four notes, then I can start to improvise.

In the early days, you were known for single-coil sounds, but your 1983 Les Paul '59 reissue played such a major role on *Brothers in Arms*. Did you always covet a Gibson?



Knopfler [*left*] with his 1983 Les Paul at Live Aid in London, July 13, 1985

GEORGES DE KEERLE/GETTY IMAGES, ANGEL MARCHINI/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

"You develop lazy techniques. Nothing I do would make a guitar teacher happy"

That's putting it mildly! That moment of looking through the windows in Denmark Street — there was all of that. Every cliché. Why did I choose to play the title track on the '83 Les Paul? Maybe it was from listening to "Need Your Love So Bad" by Peter Green [*with Fleetwood Mac*]. He was a beautiful guitar player. What a shame that he deteriorated. And that wasn't a distorted guitar sound, but it was so powerful.

My gear got more expensive as Dire Straits got bigger, but it still took a long time before I could get to a '58 Les Paul. That was a bit later on, when I realized just how good they were. When Gibson made a bunch of repro '58s, they took my '58 and did a great job recreating it. They made about 55, and they're fabulous. The tooling is so accurate — they even copied the scratches from my belt buckle.

What other gear was central to *Brothers*?

My '61 Strat would have been in the mix. I know there was my roadie Ronnie Eve's Marshall JTM45 that I've still got [*Eve confirmed via email that the head was run into a Laney 4x12 belonging to AIR Studios in Monserrat*]. My 1937 National resonator from the *Brothers in Arms* record sleeve — that would be on "The Man's Too Strong." Debbie Feingold, she was the photographer for that sleeve, and she'd marked that shot with lipstick saying, "I love this." And I remember saying, "I love it too." How could you not? It was such a great shot. That National looked like a spaceship, up against the sky like that. And that was Montserrat light, too. Spending so much time in AIR Studios, that taught me a lot about what kind of gear to get for British Grove.



Knopfler on stage in Toronto in August 2019. "My gear got more expensive as Dire Straits got bigger," he says



Knopfler's guitars went under the hammer in early 2024; some of the models on hand at Christie's in London were [*from left*] a 1970 Dan Armstrong bass, a 1966 Fender Electric XII, his 1983 Les Paul (a '59 reissue) and a 1985 Custom Shop Les Paul

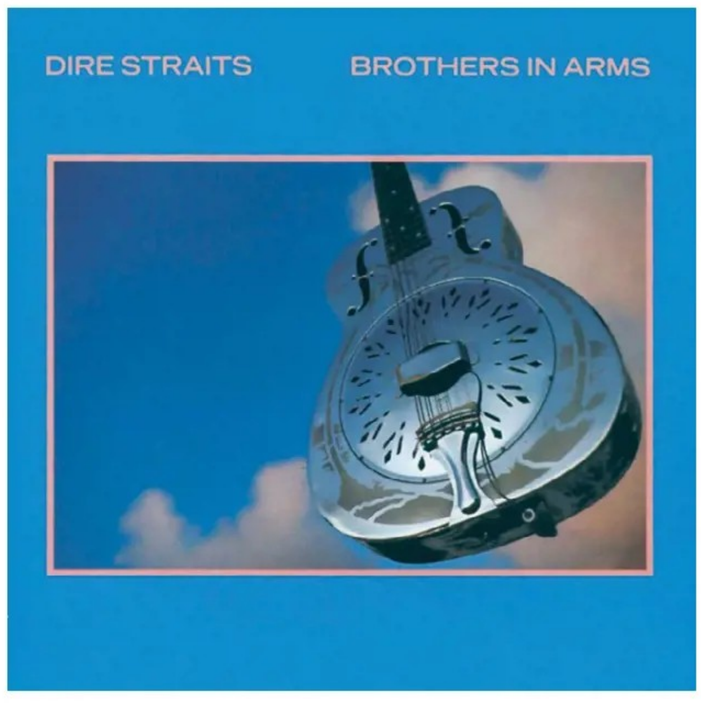
Did you enjoy being called a guitar hero in that period?

No, that was just awkward. The world is bursting with fabulous players. Whether I've written a good song or not, that's what counts to me. I gave up trying to be a great guitar player. I have enough to get by in the studio – that's how I see myself as a guitar player. Not much more than that. But I can get away with it. If you're the one who wrote the songs, you're kind of allowed to be crap. Well, not to be crap, but you're given some leeway because you wrote the thing. The other guys are there, really standing by their instruments: "I play piano," "I play bass." Like, "I'm good at this and that's why I'm here" – and boy, they are. I got away with murder. But the guys that really know their business – the session guys, making a living with their instruments – that's a whole other kettle of fish. I remember, in the solo band one day, I said, "Oh, I'm sorry about the [*mistake*] in so and so'. And Richard [*Bennett, guitar*] said, "Well, the singer is always right!"

How many takes did you need to nail the *Brothers in Arms* guitar parts?

I was getting a little bit better. I was still learning how to play in time, after years of working in studios with engineers who would say, "You're rushing there." And you'd say, "No I'm not." And they'd say, "Yes, you are." Because you didn't recognize it. You didn't know it yet. You think you're playing in time – but you're not. You have to learn that. It takes a long time, especially if you're playing 8th and 16th notes with your thumb and fingers. That's just part of the journey. Some of the very finest musicians have told me they had to learn the same thing. Glenn Worf [*bassist*] was just the same. There was a guy in his band who told him, "You're not playing in time." And he said, "The hell I am!"

The solos on *Brothers in Arms* are very different from, say, "Sultans of Swing."



You seem to really let each note breathe. Do you think your philosophy to lead work was changing?

It probably was. You start to realize how much real estate there is in a bar – where you can put the notes or, if you have a band of that quality, where you can lean on the timing a little bit. But there wasn't really time to think about it. You're just moving on. The band had developed. It was a lot louder and more powerful, with keyboards becoming more important. That then makes you think in a different way – more inversions, perhaps. But I didn't force it. I didn't stop picking on country tunes. I was still doing rootsy things.

In the wake of *Brothers in Arms*, some of the guitar world's most respected figures wanted to play with you.

I remember, Chet Atkins gave me a [call]. Because we were both pickers in that sense – but, of course, Chet was otherworldly. I used to go round to his office and hang out, and I'll never forget, we once played and sang the song "Kentucky" all morning. Chet had such facility and knowledge, and yet what he wanted to do was play "Kentucky" – which has two chords – all morning long. He'd say to me, "You're pretty good, but you're no Mark Knopfler."

WIKTOR SZYMANOWICZ/FUTURE

He always had good jokes. You know, you'd get to the end of something and he'd go, "Very educational." And then he'd say, "A little below above average." Or something like that. Very dry.

I only remember him being slightly put-out once, when John Fahey said he'd been double-tracking. Chet was not pleased by that. And he wrote to whatever magazine it was and said, "You can learn to do this with your own two hands; you don't need double-tracking." I mean, Chet liked multi-tracking too, of course, but only if he was doing something even more complicated. But he could play "Yankee Doodle" and "Battle Hymn of the Republic" at the same time.



Knopfler on stage with Dire Straits at Wembley Arena in 1985

What do you remember about the hysteria that set in after *Brothers in Arms*?

I remember doing the Mandela show [*Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute, June 1988*]. We were walking up to the stage — Eric Clapton was playing with us that night — and somebody said, "Oh, there's 650 million people watching." And I thought, "Oh, what have I done?" I heard our sound man's voice from the desk and he's going, "I can't hear a fucking thing!" I thought, "Oh shit, there's been a breakdown, he's lost his sound." But what he was talking about was the noise in the stadium before we went on.

Much of the *Brothers in Arms* gear was sold in the charity guitar auction you held in 2024. Did it hurt to see it go?

Yeah, of course, when you're saying goodbye to that '83 Les Paul and that Schecter Tele. But it's fine. You're not going to sit and play all those guitars. It's time to thin it out a bit. Give them another home. Let them be played by other people.

What are some of the real treasures still left in your collection?

Tony Joe White gave me his blonde Gibson 330 that he used for "Rainy Night in Georgia." We'd become pals and Tony had switched to a Strat, and I was 'round at his house playing one day. I'd given him an acoustic guitar as a present. And he reached under the sofa and he pulled out this dusty old case. And he says, "Mark, I want you to have this guitar. I don't play it anymore."

I opened up the case and the fingerboard is so sweat-pitted it's got shell shapes between all the frets. And I said, "I can't take this, Tony." And he said, "Hell, take it; I don't want the damn thing." So I put a new fingerboard on it and I'm never without that on a recording session. If I was recording now, that 330 would be here. I love that guitar. And actually, in a lot of ways, I'd rather have a 330 than a 335 because the P90s are such wonderful pickups."

If you were tracking *Brothers in Arms* today, would you play differently?

I probably wouldn't be able to play [the parts] so well now. But I'm hoping to put my head down and really get back into some proper playing in the near future. Covid slowed me down a lot. I've had it three times. And then, if you're away from the guitar for a while, your pads get softer and you lose your facility a little bit. So I'm really looking forward to improving. I think what happens is, you develop lazy techniques. I'm forever doing that. You know, half-chords, these little semi-shapes. It wouldn't make a teacher very happy. I mean, nothing I do would make a guitar teacher happy.

Do you think guitarists can keep improving all the way through their lives?

I don't know about "improve." I think you just find new things to inspire you. Because there's just no end to it. It's really all there for you, if you just want to sit down and be bothered to learn it.

If you were to look in a guitar shop window today, would you be as excited as when you were a young man?

Absolutely. I'll still walk across the road to look at motorbikes. And it's the same with guitars. What's wrong with me? I'm stuck in my childhood. But I think you need to have that semi-obsessional point of view. It doesn't matter what it is. I mean, how could you succeed in football if you didn't love the game, even if you were earning a quarter-of-a-million pounds a week? If you didn't love the game, it would show. It has to border on obsession. And I think people like to be around that. Just to see these maniacs.

Finally, do you think *Brothers in Arms* is Dire Straits' best record?

I never think in terms of "best." You absolutely can't. You might as well be asking, "What's your favorite cheese?" GW



Stevie Ray Vaughan performs September 2, 1989, in Houston

BE MY GUEST!

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN'S TOP FIVE STUDIO GUEST APPEARANCES

BY DAMIAN FANELLI

PHOTOS BY TRACY ANNE HART

FOR SOMEONE WHO spent a mere eight years in the spotlight, the late **STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN** left behind an impressive amount of recorded material. He released four studio albums, a double live album and a Vaughan Brothers disc (recorded with his big brother, Jimmie Vaughan), not to mention enough extra live and studio material to fill several posthumous albums and a box set or two.



tracy anne hart/www.theheightsgallery.com

Vaughan performs June 20, 1983, at Fitzgerald's in Houston

He even found time to perform on albums by several other artists — from Teena Marie to Stevie Wonder to Don Johnson to Lonnie Mack — always with fiery results.

With that in mind, here are Vaughan's top five guitar performances as a guest or session guitarist during his "famous" years, 1983 to 1990. We'll discuss his pre-fame session work at another time.

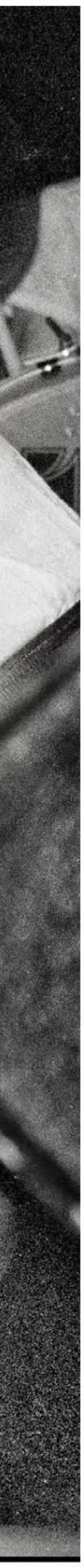
And just so all you Vaughanophiles are clear, this list does not take into account Vaughan's live recordings, his 1983 Canadian TV studio appearance with Albert King — or anything recorded in a TV studio, a radio studio or a studio apartment. It also doesn't include his 1987 recording of "Pipeline" with Dick Dale because that track is credited to the duo, so neither guitarist is the other's "guest." Enjoy!

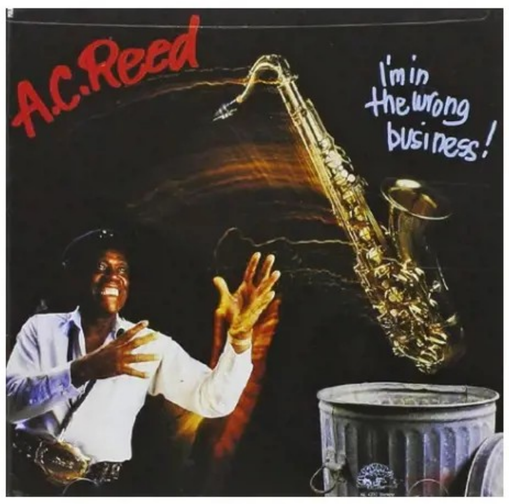
A.C. REED, "MIAMI STRUT," FROM *I'M IN THE WRONG BUSINESS!* (1987)

A.C. Reed was a respected Chicago-based sideman who started his lengthy career in the Forties and worked with a host of big names, including Magic Sam, Son Seals, Albert Collins and Buddy Guy. "Miami Strut" is a funky instrumental that features Vaughan playing a Strat through a Leslie cabinet, its revolving speaker providing an exceptionally "wet" sound. Note how he plays around Reed's catchy tenor sax riffs, making his guitar an integral part of the track. Vaughan's guitar solo starts around 1:22.

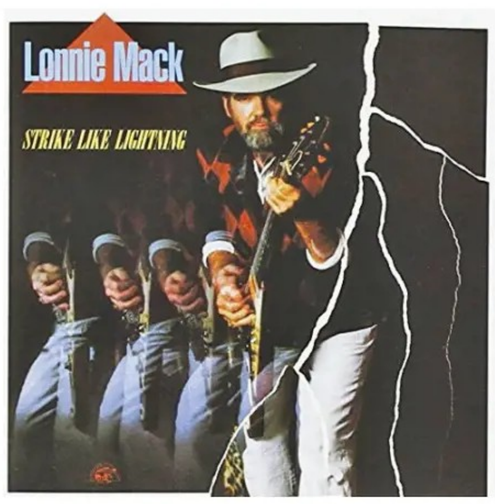
Because the album, which also features Bonnie Raitt, was released in 1987, it represents a lost period in Vaughan's discography, since *Soul to Soul* was released in 1985 and *In Step* came out in 1989.

WHILE YOU'RE AT IT: Check out "These Blues Is Killing Me" from the same album. Vaughan's guitar solo starts around 2:06. That's Reed on vocals.











BENNIE WALLACE, "ALL NIGHT DANCE,"
FROM ***TWILIGHT TIME*** (1985)
Here's Vaughan guesting with another sax player — this time Bennie Wallace (with Dr. John) — on another blues-based instrumental, a lengthy shuffle called "All Night Dance" from Wallace's 1985 *Twilight Time* album. The song also was featured on the *Bull Durham* soundtrack album in 1988 (Good luck finding it for less than $60 on Amazon Marketplace or eBay!).

Stevie's guitar solo starts around 3:24, and he really pours it on, dialing up his *Soul to Soul* sound and including several signature SRV motifs and bends. Like a great songwriter who sometimes relegates jaw-dropping tunes to the cutting-room floor or non-album B-sides, Vaughan recorded this brilliant guitar solo one random day in his career — and then just moved on to the next gig, never really looking back.

JOHNNY COPELAND, "DON'T STOP BY THE CREEK, SON," FROM ***TEXAS TWISTER*** (1984)
Texas blues guitarist and singer Johnny Copeland invited Vaughan to play on two tracks on his *Texas Twister* album. On "Don't Stop by the Creek, Son," Copeland, a fine player in his own right, stepped aside to let Vaughan handle the lead work.

Although Vaughan's Strat was mixed a little too low in the original vinyl mix (It had to compete with Copeland's way-too-loud acoustic guitar), "Creek" is a fun, engaging, upbeat track with a catchy melody and some nifty guitar work from start to finish.

It's worth noting that the original 1984 *Black and Blues* version of *Texas Twister* featured two tracks with Vaughan on guitar — "Don't Stop by the Creek, Son" and "When the Rain Stops Fallin'." However, when the album was reissued by Rounder Records in 1986, "When the Rain Stops Fallin'" was gone — and it's still gone. iTunes sells the 1986 version of the album.

LONNIE MACK, "IF YOU HAVE TO KNOW,"
FROM ***STRIKE LIKE LIGHTNING*** (1985)
Vaughan fans got a nice little bonus in 1985: Alligator Records released Lonnie Mack's masterful *Strike Like Lightning* album, which was co-produced by Vaughan and Mack, one of SRV's many guitar idols (Be sure to check out Mack's classic 1964 album, *The Wham of That Memphis Man*!).

Vaughan plays on several songs on the album, but he actually plays and sings on "If You Have to Know," making it the closest thing to a full-on bonus SRV track.
WHILE YOU'RE AT IT: From the same album, be sure to get a taste of "Oreo Cookie Blues," which features Vaughan on acoustic guitar, a rarity that predates "Life By the Drop" and his *Unplugged* appearance by five years. And don't forget "Double Whammy" (a new recording of Mack's early Sixties instrumental hit "Wham!" featuring Vaughan and Mack duking it out in E), plus "Hound Dog Man" and "Satisfy Suzie."

DAVID BOWIE, "CAT PEOPLE (PUTTING OUT FIRE),"
FROM ***LET'S DANCE*** (1983)
Come on, you knew something from David Bowie's *Let's Dance* album had to top this list. *Let's Dance* served as the world's introduction to Vaughan, who, with Bowie, invented something new by adding Texas-style blues guitar to contemporary pop music — raising eyebrows, expectations and bank accounts for all involved.

Vaughan plays lead guitar on several tracks, including two of the album's many mega-hits ("Let's Dance" and "China Girl"), but guitar-wise, the song that truly kicks collective ass is the less-famous "Cat People (Putting Out Fire)." It's also got the album's healthiest serving of SRV; he solos in the middle, adds Albert King-style bends throughout and then solos near the end of the song.

Note that Bowie recorded two studio versions of this song in the early-Eighties; be sure to seek out the *Let's Dance* version (not that there's anything wrong with the other one).
WHILE YOU'RE AT IT: It just feels wrong to leave out the album's title track — which millions of people can credit as the first time they heard Stevie Ray Vaughan.

LET US NOT FORGET...
Here are two bonus tunes that feature Vaughan as the guest guitarist, each one interesting in its own way. Note that we also wanted to include "Bumble Bee Blues" from Brian Slawson's 1988 album, *Distant Drums*, but it's not available on YouTube (There's a newer version of the song online, but it most certainly does not feature SRV on guitar). You can always track down the original CD on eBay for about $5.

STEVIE WONDER, "COME LET ME MAKE YOUR LOVE COME DOWN," FROM ***CHARACTERS*** (1987)
While this song's Vaughan-heavy YouTube video is very promising, it's also a bit misleading. Sadly, the official studio recording of this 1987 Stevie Wonder track features much less of Vaughan's playing, although he can be heard near the end of the song, going head to head with B.B. King.

DON JOHNSON, "LOVE ROULETTE,"
FROM ***HEARTBEAT*** (1986)
What's interesting about this one? First of all, *Miami Vice* star Don Johnson released an album in 1986. Second of all, he got Vaughan to play on it. Third of all, the album reached No. 17 on *Billboard*'s Hot 100. The album, *Heartbeat*, was a star-studded affair that also featured Dickey Betts, Ronnie Wood and Dweezil Zappa. Vaughan's solo on "Love Roulette" starts around 2:51. GW

The photos in this feature are taken from Tracy Anne Hart's book, Seeing Stevie Ray Vaughan: A Photographer's Impressions of a Texas Icon, *published in 2019 by Texas A&M Press.*
Guitar World *editor-in-chief Damian Fanelli wrote the liner notes for Stevie Ray Vaughan's 2014 box set,* The Complete Epic Recordings Collection.

QUEEN OF THE STONE AGE

"CRAMPS "CRAMPS

POISON IVY RORSCHACH WAS THE GUITARIST, SONGWRITER AND PRODUCER OF THE CRAMPS.

She never got the credit she deserved — but maybe it's not too late. In this interview, she looks back over decades of hoodlum music...



THEY CAME OUTTA Sacramento, California, and Akron, Ohio, their heads full of B-movie violence, cut-throat rock 'n' roll and fetish-mag filth. They were the Cramps. The men looked like creeps and killers. The woman, Poison Ivy, looked like a high priestess or a Fifties movie queen. In a flip of the usual showbiz dynamic, the singer wore high heels and ended almost every gig naked while his partner — the woman — ran the show. She produced, managed, wrote the music, played the guitar and frequently reached over to tune the guitars of her bandmates.

They might have seemed deviant, but the Cramps nevertheless played all-American music — the kind of music that had rocked the country before the British Invasion — a Frankenstein's monster stitched together out of the blues, doo-wop, rockabilly, country, R&B, exotica, garage rock, psychedelia, instro-surf and more. The Cramps were rock 'n' roll as remodeled by Roger Corman, Russ Meyer and John Waters. Their sound — and that of the music they popularized and reintroduced — echoes in the movies of Quentin Tarantino and haunts the soundtracks of Angelo Badalamenti.

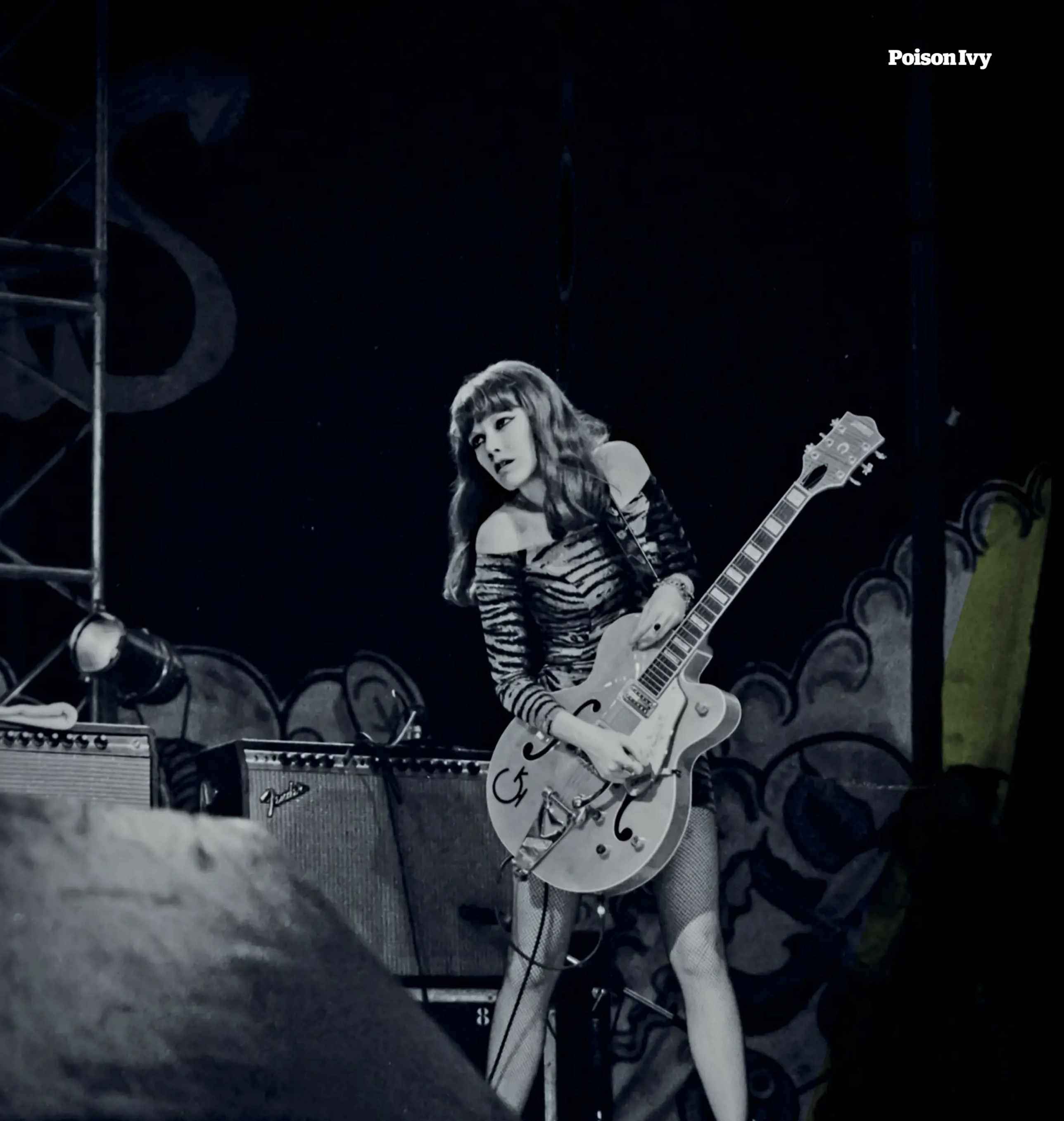
They hung out with the Ramones and toured with the Police. The White Stripes owe them. Queens of the Stone Age covered them. Nick Cave nicked two of their band members. My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields told *Guitar World* that he formed a band because of Cave's the Birthday Party and the Cramps. Fugazi/Minor Threat's Ian MacKaye once claimed that a Cramps gig kick-started the D.C. hardcore scene.

They were an influence on grunge, pioneered psychobilly and they spilled over into goth. They made other rock 'n' roll revivalists — with their songs about drive-ins and hot rods — look lame. The Cramps, you see, were born bad and stayed sick. Their songs were about drugs and sex, monsters and perverts.

They were dangerous, yeah. But, man, they were funny.

And at their heart was a couple. For all the drugs, deviance and delirium, the story of the Cramps is a *love story* — the story of Lux Interior (vocals, words) and Poison Ivy Rorschach (guitars, music). Lux took the vocal tics of rock 'n' roll and exaggerated and amplified them: stuttering, hiccupping, yelping and gulping for air. Equally, Ivy made her guitar squawk like a chicken or buzz like a fly. She took the mannerisms of Duane Eddy, Link Wray and Dick Dale and turned them up a notch. She took reverb, tremolo, sustain and fuzz — those bad, bad boys — and whipped 'em into shape, handcuffing them to licks sharper than stilettos. Other band members came and went. It didn't matter: Lux and Ivy *were* the Cramps.

WORDS BY SCOTT ROWLEY | PHOTO BY DEMED L'HER



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Poison Ivy (playing her Gretsch 6120) on stage with the Cramps at Festival Tamaris in Morlaix, France, July 18, 1992

When Lux died suddenly in 2009 (from aortic dissection — his heart literally burst) the story ended. Ivy went underground — and *still* doesn't get the credit she's due. I interviewed her in 2003 for the guitar magazine I worked on at the time. I got a new job weeks later and the interview was never used. Until now.

"Nobody ever talks to me about music or guitar," she once said. "I'm the queen of rock 'n' roll, and for this not to be recognized is pure sexism."

Bow down before your queen.

IN THE BEGINNING, there was The Chord.

"Link Wray is all about The Chord," Ivy says. "A monumental chord and the *drama* of it. It's very haunting, stark. He had that thing I call 'the grind' — that really fast, grinding, dead strumming. With Link Wray it's about the chords and the drama. It sounds dangerous to me, it sounds *spooky*."

And alongside The Chord comes The Note.

"With Duane Eddy, it's all about The Note," she says. "A single note, just the ultimate twang. Duane Eddy also sounds spooky. They both have drama. He had those backing vocals that sound like they're ghosts, y'know, from hell. They just sound like they're dead to me. I always pictured it like they'd been on a chicken run or something and got killed and now there they are, howling away on Duane Eddy records. His early stuff like 'Ramrod' and 'Stalkin'' was just rough, dangerous hoodlum music. That's who bought that stuff."

And once you've got The Note and The Chord, the final ingredient in this hoodlum gumbo is... aggression?

"Another guitarist I love is Ike Turner," she says. "He produced a lot, and he considered himself more of a piano player, but his guitar playing was totally unique. He musta got a Stratocaster the day it came out and he went nuts with the vibrato bar. It's insane. If you see pictures, he has these really long fingers and huge hands wrapped around a skinny Stratocaster neck."

A fascination with Jack Nitzsche's 1963 hit "The Lonely Surfer" led Ivy — or Kristy Marlana Wallace, as she was known then — to pester her older brother Jerry into showing her the basics of guitar playing. "Then when I was a teenager, I got even more interested," she says. "I had boyfriends that played guitar, and I was more interested in the guitar than I was in them. I would trick them into teaching me things."

Her life changed on Valentine's Day 1970 — the day she went to the Sacramento Memorial Auditorium to see Quicksilver Messenger Service, supported by Eric Burdon's War and Bo Diddley. It was a light-bulb moment. Diddley had long included a female guitar player in his band. From 1957 to 1962 he had Lady Bo, aka Peggy Jones — aka "the Queen Mother of Guitar" — who played on classic singles like "Hey! Bo Diddley," "Mona" and "Road Runner."

When Jones left to go solo, Bo replaced her with another female player, the Duchess, aka Norma-Jean Wofford. Norma-Jean lasted until 1966. Bo apparently replaced her with a series of women he called the Duchess, but it's possible that the woman Ivy saw that night in Sacramento was actually Lady Bo, who had returned to the touring band that year.

Whoever she saw, the powerful woman onstage playing rock 'n' roll and oozing sex and style made an impact. "That did it," Ivy later told an interviewer. "They did all this synchronized box-step dancing, and she was in gold lamé. That just burned through my brain permanently."

By the time she met Lux, then called Erick Lee Purkhiser, she was an outsider and confirmed rock 'n' roll obsessive. (Was it Ivy's outsider status that led her to guitar playing? "Maybe it was," she says. "I didn't even think of that 'til you said it, but maybe that made it easier for me to consider playing guitar because I was such a misfit anyway. Maybe it's harder for someone who fits in to do that. For me, anything was fair game.") In Erick she had met her match. He was as batshit crazy about rock 'n' roll as she was, and they set about forming the Cramps.

In an age when band names were getting more abstract — Iron Butterfly, Aerosmith, Grand Funk Railroad — they wanted an old-school name like the Kinks, and they came up with one that referenced menstrual cramps. Kristy had already become Poison Ivy in 1973. The name came from the Leiber and Stoller-penned 1959 Coasters hit. "She's pretty as a daisy," go the "Poison Ivy" lyrics, "but look out, man, she's crazy / She'll really do you in / If you let her get under your skin." Seemingly about a dangerous female, and therefore befitting Poison Ivy's tough-gal schtick, Jerry Lieber later admitted the song was "a metaphor for a sexually transmitted disease — the clap."

Her band was named after period pains — and she was named after VD. Sex and danger were there from the beginning. "Lux and Ivy were rock 'n' roll names," she says. "We were 24-hours-a-day rock 'n' rollers."

IN A METHOD that prefigured sampling, throughout their career the Cramps borrowed bits and pieces from obscure tracks to make their own material. On their first single, "Human Fly," Ivy makes her guitar sound like the buzzing of a fly, in the same manner as the Tune Rockers' 1958 novelty hit "The Green Mosquito." The Riptides' "Machine Gun" and Bo Diddley's "Dancing Girl" went through the blender and were squirted out as "Call of the Wighat." Ivy borrowed the intro chords of the Instrumentals' "Chop Suey Rock" (and Lux rewired the lyrics from Dall Raney and the Umbrellas' 1964 single "Can Your Hossie Do the Dog") for their far more salacious "Can Your Pussy Do the Dog?"

They did blistering covers of lost rock 'n' roll, garage and country classics — the Sparkles' "Hipsville 29 B.C.," Macy Skipper's "Bop Pills," Charlie Feathers' "Can't Hardly Stand It," Jack Scott's "The Way I Walk," the Trashmen's "Surfin' Bird" and Roy Orbison's "A Cat Called Domino." Sometimes the songs were so wild, and so perfectly welded to the Cramps' aesthetic, that you couldn't believe they *were* covers; take the Novas' "The

"Maybe [being an outsider] made it easier for me to consider playing guitar — **BECAUSE I WAS SUCH A MISFIT ANYWAY.** Maybe it's harder for someone who fits in to do that"



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[*left*] Bo Diddley band guitarist the Duchess (aka Norma-Jean Wofford) with a Gretsch Cadillac in the late Fifties. [*above*] The Cramps' Lux Interior and Poison Ivy in action in Belgium, March 8, 1990

Crusher" — a twisted "dance" record that instructs you to eye-gouge and "squeeze your partner's head until she's blue in the face." Or Ronnie Cook and the Gaylads' 1962 novelty song "Goo Goo Muck," transformed into a sinister Duane Eddy-eque nightmare for the Cramps' second album, *Psychedelic Jungle* (The lyric "I'm the night headhunter looking for a head" changed to "looking for *some* head"). It turns out that American music in the Fifties and Sixties was some sick shit.

Ironically, this musical archeology was inspired by the British Invasion. "The first Led Zeppelin album came out when I was a kid," she says. "I played it to death. It's interesting to me now that bands that are influenced by Led Zeppelin don't go back to the things that Led Zeppelin and the Yardbirds would've been influenced by. They only go back to Zeppelin and Aerosmith. With us, we'd take it right back.

"My favorite Rolling Stones period is the early Sixties. That's what got us into all the things the Rolling Stones were into — Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson and all that. Everyone we knew did that. Everybody who was into the Kinks and the Rolling Stones was also buying all those blues records."

The Cramps guitar sound came naturally. "I had one thing as a kind of criteria," she says. "We loved Chuck Berry, but we had a rule that we wouldn't do Chuck Berry licks. All rock 'n' roll from the Sixties, going into the Seventies, was based on Chuck Berry, at the exclusion of any other influence. So even though we loved Chuck, we decided to do all we could to not have that influence. There was too much, y'know?"

Even the Sex Pistols had their fair share of Chuck Berry licks.

"Yeah. And it's astounding; you never would hear Link Wray influences or Duane Eddy. We couldn't figure it out because it was pure rock 'n' roll. It's as monumental as Chuck Berry, and for it to be ignored seemed strange. So to this day, it's a rule: we will not throw in a Chuck Berry riff."

Do you have any other rules like that?

"Uh, yeah. But I don't know if I want to say 'em."



Lux Interior and Poison Ivy storm the Palace in Hollywood, January 27, 1995; "I had boyfriends that played guitar... I would trick them into teaching me things," Ivy says

Oh, go on.

"No," she laughs. "They're fetishes, mainly. Just pure fetish. But we're in a position to demand our fetishes and get them. No one ever complains. People say, 'If you join their band you'll be a slave to their whims.' But what's so bad about that? We have really *good* whims, so what's wrong with being a slave to that? I would have loved that opportunity."

For the early part of their career, Ivy played a Bill Lewis guitar — made in Vancouver, and perhaps most famous as the guitar David Gilmour used on much of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* — that was broken after a security guard fell down some stairs with it after a gig in Paris. From the mid Eighties onwards, she played a 1958 Gretsch 6120, with patent-applied-for Filter'Tron pickups and a Bigsby. Her standby guitar was a reissue Gretsch 6120 Junior with TV Jones pickups. Both are strung with D'Addario XL115 strings, .011-.049.

Some people say Gretsch guitars don't stay in tune. Not Ivy; she insists that she has always had an *understanding* with hers. "Yeah, it's uncanny how much mine *does* stay in tune," she says.

"People say they can't believe it. I think it's a psychic relationship I have with it. An agreement. Sometimes it's hard to keep in tune if it's cold, and studios are cold, unfortunately, so I get tuning problems there. We did a show at London's Brixton Academy once and I couldn't stay in tune through one song because it was *freezing*. But if it's warm enough, that guitar will just work with me. And, uh [*stern voice*], it'd *better*. We have an understanding."

Live, she used a Blackface Fender Twin Reverb. "But in the studio I like to record with small amps, just totally cranked." It was something she learned from British guitarist Chris Spedding, who produced the band's first demos. "It's not really good to fill the room with sound leaking," she says. "It's better to have a small amp with a good sound. I have this beautiful-sounding Valco amp. Valco made National and Supro, evolved out of Chicago. Just one 10-inch speaker, beautiful reverb and tremolo, and I've been using that at least since [1990's] *Stay Sick!*"

THE CRAMPS MADE eight studio albums and one classic live album (1983's *Smell of Female*), but their career was dogged by record company politics. 1986's career high point *A Date with Elvis* — a delirious, hilarious album on which Ivy played all the guitars and bass, and produced it too — didn't come out in the US until 1990. *Flamejob* [1994] came out on Creation Records and was buried as founder Alan McGee had a drugs-induced breakdown and their new signings, Oasis, went stratospheric. ("Creation crapped on us," Ivy says. In what way? "In *every* way.")

Early co-guitarists like Bryan Gregory and Kid Congo Powers got more credit than they were due, even though Gregory was really employed for his looks; he couldn't tune his guitar and would wander over to Ivy's side of the stage for her to help out. "Bryan was mainly more of a visual thing. It's hard to say what he brought, guitar-wise. I had to do a lot of his parts on the albums, simply because he wouldn't even show up.

"Kid Congo had a unique style," she says. "On that first Gun Club album [*Editor's Note: The Cramps poached Kid Congo from Cramps-inspired LA rockers the Gun Club*], Ward Dotson's the guitarist, and he's so good, but the parts he's playing were parts that the Kid was doing in the Gun Club. But again he was someone who couldn't tune his guitar."

The album that turned out to be their last — 2003's *Fiends of Dope Island* — featured a classic sign-off from Lux that was borne out of the two of them at home watching a music-awards show. "The big rock awards / Crowned a brand-new king," go the lyrics. "It shoulda been me instead / Don't they know that I'm Elvis Fucking Christ?"

"We were watching some awards show and Lux was like, 'Aw, you're kidding! If those guys are the kings of rock 'n' roll then I must be Elvis fucking Christ!'"

He was, too. The guy could eat up a stage.

"It goes back to the rock 'n' roll tradition of boasting — like Bo Diddley and Howlin' Wolf," she says.

"It's a blues tradition to boast about yourself that *you're* the king, with the biggest dick, the biggest queen, whatever."

The king might be dead, but the Queen of Rock 'n' Roll is still out there somewhere. Ma'am, we salute you. GW

Getty images, Alamy



Poison Ivy onstage at the Town & Country Club, London, 1990

Brian May on stage with Queen + Adam Lambert in Detroit, October 10, 2023

Scott Legato/Getty Images

THE LIFE OF BRIAN

BRIAN MAY SAT DOWN WITH ***GW*** IN 2024 TO DISCUSS HIS RECENT **GIBSON GARAGE** VISIT, HIS BELOVED RED SPECIAL, AMP MODELERS, NUNO BETTENCOURT AND QUEEN'S GUITAR-FORWARD ALBUM, ***THE WORKS***, WHICH CELEBRATED ITS 40TH BIRTHDAY

WORDS BY ANDREW DALY

HIS TONE IS unmistakable, his solos are breathtaking and his influence is boundless. Even if somehow, some way, you've managed to make it this far without knowing his name, undoubtedly, Brian May's music — most likely with Queen — has been a part of your life. With his trusty, self-built Red Special guitar in hand and a sixpence pick between his fingers, May — beside Freddie Mercury, his partner in crime — charged through soaring guitar solos and melodic riffs soaked through cuts like "We Will Rock You," "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "Hammer to Fall."

Mercury has been gone since 1991, but that hasn't stopped May from championing the music that Queen created. Since 2011, he's toured the world as Queen + Adam Lambert with Queen's original drummer, Roger Taylor, plus vocalist Adam Lambert, the 2009 *American Idol* runner-up who was tasked with upholding a legacy that was impossible to replicate.

"Freddie would love it," May says. "I often wish Freddie was around and could share the joy of putting these shows together. But Freddie is with us; he makes little appearances in the shows. So he's always in there, and I think it should be that way. He's part of what we built together all those years and will always be massively important."

Having just finished another slate of mega-shows, you'd assume May would opt for some downtime, but in February 2024 — to the surprise of many — he turned up at the grand opening of the Gibson Garage London (aka, "The Ultimate Guitar Experience," a place where visitors can "try out a guitar, take a lesson, learn about Gibson's history or see a live show"). Why, you ask? At the very least, for some hobnobbing with fellow legends Jimmy Page and Tony Iommi; beyond that, May partnered with Gibson to release a stunning limited-edition SJ-200 12-String in early 2025.

Anyway, mega-tours, top-notch hobnobbing and Gibson collaborations are great, but after more than 50 years in the business, the thing that really brings a smile to May's face is family. "I've just had a Red Special made for a dear relative," he says. "When I got it and I opened the box, I thought, 'Oh, geez, I really don't want to give this away. I want to keep this.' But I will give it away. I don't think I'm ruining the surprise by saying this, but my grandson said he wanted a Brian May guitar for his birthday. He knew the exact specifications he wanted, so I got our guys to make him something super special.

"He's taken the bit between his teeth and really wants it," he adds. "He's marching down that road without being pushed by anyone. It's great to see that passion coming out in somebody so young who has got my blood in his veins."

You were at the grand opening of the Gibson Garage London with Jimmy Page and Tony Iommi. What are your thoughts on that event?

It was great. It was a really nice opportunity to socialize because none of us do much socializing. You might imagine we do, but we kind of have separate lives. It was good to see them, and the Gibson Garage is great. Some people were saying, "Well, what the hell are you doing at Gibson? You've got your own guitar company." But actually, I have a great relationship with [*Gibson*] now.

I think a lot of people were thinking you might do something with the Red Special associated with the Custom Shop or the Murphy Lab.

It's not out of the question. We have spoken about such things, and it would be lovely to have an edition of the Brian May guitar based in the States. After all, that's where I started with Guild. Guild made the first Brian May models, and then I went with Burns in [*the U.K.*]. And then things changed, and I just wanted to do it myself. Now we have our own Brian May Guitars company here, but to have the facility to have some made in the States would be wonderful.

People will always associate you with the Red Special, but as I recall, you did use a Flying V and a Les Paul Deluxe as backups in the Eighties.

I was thinking everybody had forgotten that. But you haven't! [*Laughs*] I had a Les Paul Deluxe for a long time; it's a long story, but sort of a rich sugar daddy of a fan gave it to me. I used it for a while. It was a beautiful instrument, but it was never quite right for my gear. So eventually, [*since*] I always felt I wasn't deserving of having been the recipient of it for nothing, and having received it for nothing, I gave it away. It now has a nice home, a secret home with somebody else.

Did you use those guitars on any notable recordings?

No, I don't think I've ever used anything but my own, with one exception — the Telecaster I used for the solo on "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," which is really a James Burton tribute. [*The Red Special*] makes that kind of sound, you know? With all the switching I invented for the guitar, you can have any combination of pickups, and there's one combination that really sounds like a Telecaster. So we were in the studio [*Musicland Studios*] with [*Reinhold*] Mack in Munich, and I'm about to do this solo, which I hear in my head as James Burton.





And I said, "You know, I can make this guitar sound like a Telecaster," and Mack, being a very "doer" German producer, says, "If you want it to sound like a Telecaster, why don't you use a Telecaster?"
And I went, "Fair point." Roger [*Taylor*] just happened to have one, so I used Roger's Tele, which was a very early Telecaster. I think that's the only time I've used anything but my electric.

You mentioned the Guild and Burns renditions of the Red Special, and now you've got the ones you make yourself. Of all the reproductions, which do you feel is the most faithful to your original guitar?

The ultimate you can get now is what we call the [*BMG*] Super. It's all made by hand, and it costs a lot more because of that. But on this model, you get everything I put on mine, including my self-designed tremolo. Usually, we use other people's tremolos, which are really good these days, but the one I designed is a bit special. With the Super, you get that same design of trem, which rocks on a knife edge, which at that time was revolutionary. Everything else is done custom; my neck is thicker than normal, so you get everything. It's an exact replica of my guitar, [*and it's*] as close as you could possibly get. If I close my eyes with the Super, I don't know that it's not my guitar.

Going back to the Seventies, as the Red Special has ridden along with you, what were some of the things you've had to do to keep it up to par?

It's been surprisingly resilient; I've never re-fretted it, which everyone is shocked to hear. The only fret I've ever replaced is the zero fret. And it was designed to be replaced because I knew it was going to wear. That's where the strings rub when the term's working, so I think I've replaced that twice in its whole history. But not a single fret has been replaced.

There's been a little bit of a touch-up to the black surface of the fingerboard. And it's not an ebony fingerboard; it's because I couldn't find ebony when I was building the guitar. I wanted it to be ebony, but it's multi-layers of Rustins Plastic Coating. Some of those wore through at certain points, so we've touched those up. We have touched up the body, and it's mainly Andrew Guyton who's done that. Although the first repairs were done by Greg Fryer; he also made three replicas, which are fabulous. I still have two of them. Unfortunately, the other one's gone somewhere; I don't know where that is. We called them George, Paul and John. [*Laughs*]

Which of the two do you still have?

I have George and Paul. John is out there someplace, I think, because that's the one Greg kept. So, the neck of the guitar, I've never touched; it has lots of layers of plastic coating on [*it*], and it's the same as it always was. There's matchsticks in there with stain on them to fill up the worm holes because it had some dead wood worm in it. But it's never been touched since the day I finished it. It's worn incredibly well. The tremolo is exactly as it was, with no replacements ever. I replaced a few little rollers; that was an invention of mine. Nobody had really dealt with the fact that when you work a tremolo up and down, it scrapes the strings over the bridge. I think somebody had designed a loose bridge, but really, you want each string to be able to move separately because they all move different amounts.

What did the process of coming up with that look like?

I made this little assembly — with grooves in the top — out of a piece of mild steel. Then I machined the shiny little rollers to sit in the grooves so the strings could go over the rollers. I think a few people have done that since, but everybody says, "Why didn't you patent it?" And I go, "Well, life's too short." Patents are a pain in the neck. If you take out a patent, it costs money and takes a lot of time and effort. Then you've got to protect your patent, go around the world policing it, and it's a real pain in the neck. I've tried it elsewhere. It's really not the way you want to spend your life. All my inventions in the guitar are out there for everybody to enjoy.

You undeniably have one of the most idiosyncratic guitar tones of all time.

Oh, well, that's very kind of you to say.

Some of it is the Red Special, but surely a lot comes from the fingers. What did the evolution of your gear look like in terms of harnessing that tone?

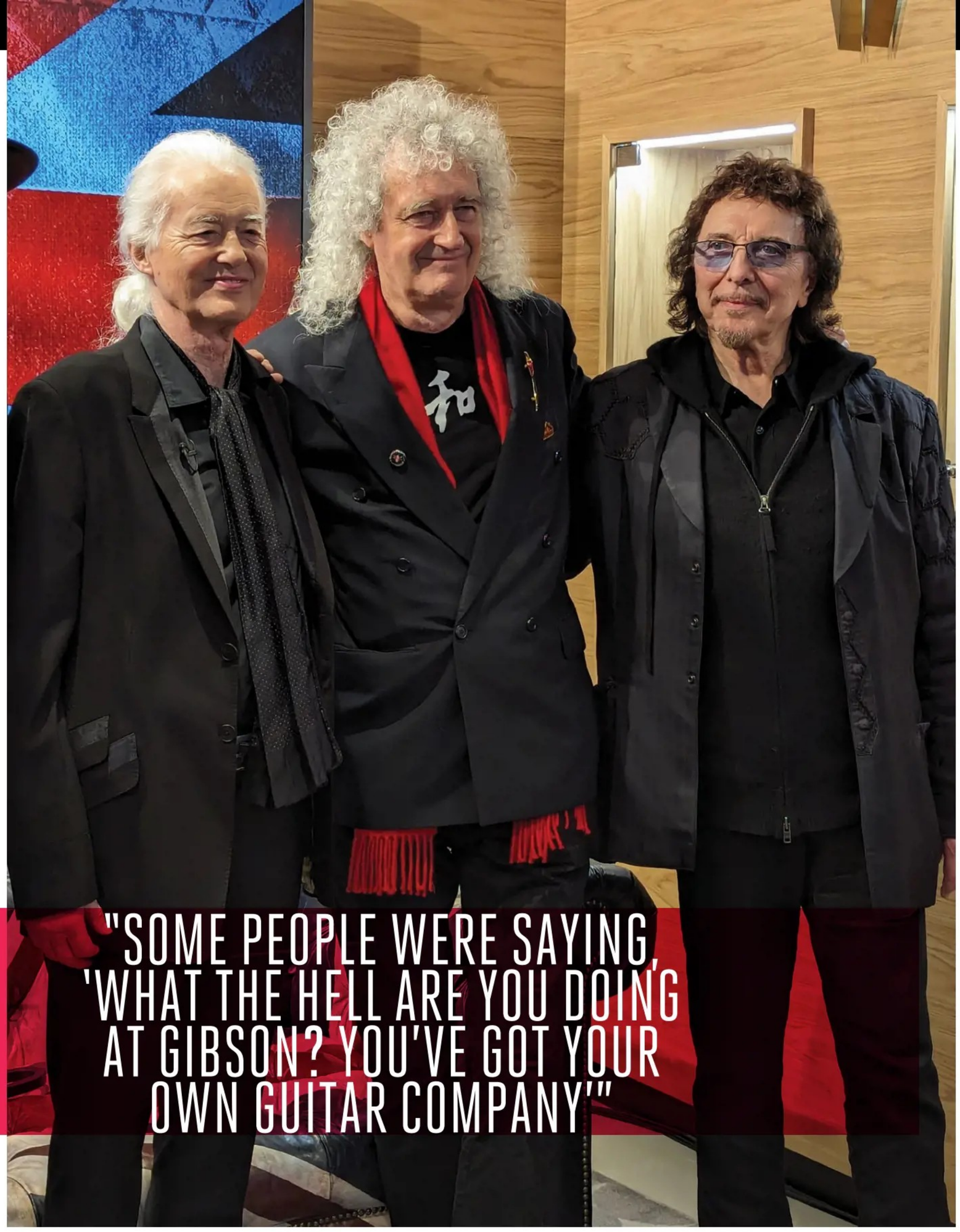
The truth is, it hasn't changed very much — except to make it more robust. Talking about amps, I love the [*Vox*] AC30 sound; to me, it's perfect. The moment I first plugged into an AC30 with a treble booster, I knew that was me. That was my voice. That was my sound. The only problem with them has been that they're not very road-worthy, so you have to keep on top of them, maintenance-wise.

How do you go about keeping up with them?

The ones I use now have been completely rebuilt. They started off as classic; they come from the Seventies, but they've been rebuilt inside, or hard-wired, and [*are*] very robust and [*have*] a lot of ventilation. You have to ventilate the valves, or they get too hot, and then performance suffers and eventually they peg out. The guy who does it for me now is a genius. He's really rebuilt all my

[*Left*] Brian May playing his backup guitar — a Gibson Flying V — in 1982. "I was thinking everybody had forgotten that," May says. "But you haven't!"

Steve Jennings/Wirelmage



"SOME PEOPLE WERE SAYING, 'WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING AT GIBSON? YOU'VE GOT YOUR OWN GUITAR COMPANY'"

AC30s, so they have all the original character, but I think you could probably drop them from a plane and they'd still work. [*Laughs*]

Have you gotten much into effect pedals, or is it mostly just the Red Special into the AC30?

It's very simple, my rig, except that I've always had a stereo chorus built in. That was sort of, again, a dream from when I was a young boy; I realized that if you get a chorus, and you get this lovely, broad effect, if you turn it up, the components of the chorus, the pitch-shifted ones, interfere with the original signal, and it all becomes distortion and you lose your breadth.

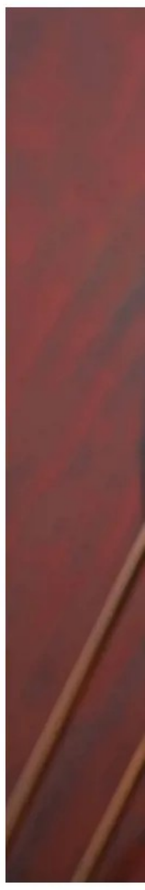
Very early on in our career, I found a machine that provides those phase shifts, and it has two separate outputs. One I put to the left side, one to the right side. And those separate outputs have separate amps, so if they go into distortion, they're completely separate. They don't interfere with each other; you don't get the inter-modulation effect, which is so ugly.

[*Above from left*] Jimmy Page, Brian May and Tony Iommi at Gibson Garage London in February. "It was a really nice opportunity to socialize," May says

So, you get your breadth; in fact, the breadth gets more and more as you go into distortions. And that's just kind of my sound, the stereo sound. The middle is straight through, the left is one pitch shift, and the right is the other pitch shift. It's a very gentle pitch shift, but just enough to give it breadth. That's how I hear my guitar in my head; it's always stereo, and it maintains its width when you turn it up full.

As a tube amp devotee, would you ever consider using a modeler?

I've tried modelers, and there are some very good ones now. There's a great simulator; it's a pedal [*Catalinbread Galileo*] that really does a very good job of simulating my sound. But, of course, there's nothing quite like the original when it comes down to it. In the heat of the battle, all those tiny little peculiarities count, and when I'm at top level and top volume, there's nothing quite like those amps. They have a personality of their own, and I couldn't swap it for anything. And I wouldn't like to be on stage with the amps someplace else; I need my amps to interact with my guitar — physically, in the air — and interact with me because I feel it in my body as well. I don't think I could do the modeling thing live on stage.



Many people's introductions to the tone we've been talking about came through *The Works*, Queen's 1984 album, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. It was a bit more guitar-forward than Queen's early Eighties albums.

With me, it always starts off with a burst of activity, belief and inspiration. And thinking, "Ah, this is gonna change the world." And it's usually followed by a period of complete insecurity, thinking, "Oh, no, this is rubbish. This is never gonna work. Everyone's gonna, you know, my band's gonna hate it." And then working through it.

Was it that way for a track like "Hammer to Fall," for example?

I think that's true of "Hammer to Fall" because I came upon this riff, [*and*] I thought, "This is great. I can do anything with this; this is just what I want to hear when I put my guitar on. This is what the audience is gonna want to hear..." And then I got into the studio and played it to the guys, and they went, "Yeah, okay." It wasn't like, "We love it!" And then I got back in and worked on the song. That one came fairly easily; I had the idea for the lyric pretty early on, but I had to build it up and build it up to the point where I could play it to them as an almost-finished song. And then they got it; they went, "Oh, yeah. Okay, we like this. This is going to be great." It takes a bit of belief, I think, to get from the first riff to the point where you're happy with the result.

Oscillating between confidence and discomfort is something I think a lot of creative people can relate to.

I think it's common to a lot of people — that moment when you spring it on your people around you, and you're looking at their faces, and you feel very insecure in the moment.







A few closeups of May's Red Special (photographed in 2014), including [*from left*] the bridge and Burns Tri-Sonic pickups; one of the knobs that May built on a lathe just before Queen formed, circa 1970; the neck, made from a piece of mahogany cut from the remains of a century-old fireplace, still mirror-smooth after decades of use. "It's been surprisingly resilient," May says. "I've never re-fretted it, which everyone is shocked to hear"

When I sing a song to someone, it's always nerve-racking for me, no matter who it is. If they've never heard it before, I get all kinds of insecure. You just have to get over that.

Freddie [*Mercury*] was always great. I used to sing stuff to him, and he was always very encouraging. Of course, I was generally writing for him. I was conscious that I had to write something that would work for him, not just for me. And generally, he would take hold of it very quickly. In many cases, I'd say, "Oh, yes, yes, yes, I can do this, darling. Just give me a chance; just put me in there, and I'll do this." [*Freddie*] was always very upfront; he had an amazing amount of drive, optimism and energy. He was very helpful with my insecurities — and he kind of chose me as his guitarist in the early days.

Even when Freddie was nothing and nobody, he was Jimi Hendrix in his mind. And I enabled him to have that at his fingertips. He always said, "You can do anything anyone can do, Brian. You can do this for me." That sounds like I'm making him out as big-headed, but he wasn't; it was just this enthusiasm of, "We can do this together. We can be the best thing in the world."

Freddie's voice is iconic, but your guitars were like a second vocalist because your distinctive tone.

I always saw my guitar as a voice. I was looking for that voice in the early days; I was inspired by those people who first made the guitar speak, like James Burton and, of course, Hendrix and Steve Cropper. Those guys, to me, are still the bedrock. They're the beginning of that kind of expressive playing that comes from country, blues and something inside, which was new. I've just had the pleasure of working on a record for Steve Cropper. Do you want to hear the story?

Let's hear it!

My old friend [*composer/producer*] Jon Tiven has loads of Grammys; I mean... my mantelpiece is not decorated with Grammys, but his is. He's produced lots of really nice blues records, and he has a very instinctive, light touch. He said I needed to make a guest appearance on the Steve Cropper record. I went, "I'd love to. Steve Cropper's a hero of mine, but I'm incredibly busy. I'm not feeling very energetic, and I'm too stressed. Too much stress. Apologies, but I don't think I can do it right now." That was my email to Jon. Jon emailed me back and said, "Okay, I've used your email to write the song, and it's called 'Too Much Stress.' So now, you have to play on this." I just smiled and went, "Okay."

He wrote all the lyrics from my email, and his singer, Roger, sang it and very graciously said, "Let's split the vocals." So, I sing it as a duet with him and play some guitar on it. Billy Gibbons also played some guitar on it, so we shared the soloing. It's become an inspiring project from something that started off as just a whisper. That's the kind of stuff I love in my life — when things just grow out of a momentary conversation.

You've just given us some insight into what piques your interest, inspiration-wise. But since you've been at it for so long and have an established sound, it is difficult to keep from feeling repetitive.

If you do a lot of touring, it's incredibly productive in some ways, but it can hold you back from having that freedom. I have been feeling that a little bit. I'm not 35 anymore; I'm 76, and you have a certain amount of energy. If you use it all up by touring, your spontaneous creation side tends to suffer. I have been feeling that. This project came as a welcomed beacon to me like, "Okay, this stuff is still here. You can still go in the studio and create spontaneously; it still happens." I found that influential in the way I feel right now.

You still seem filled with energy and have done an incredible job of keeping Queen's legacy alive.

I am when I'm on stage. I can do it, and I have the physical capability. I train; I work on that. And I take my training seriously now physically. I think Roger and I are playing together probably better than ever, which is great. We don't always get on, but we always play together great. [*Laughs*] We've both grown up and mellowed over the years, so we don't fight as much as we used to, but there's definitely that chemistry.

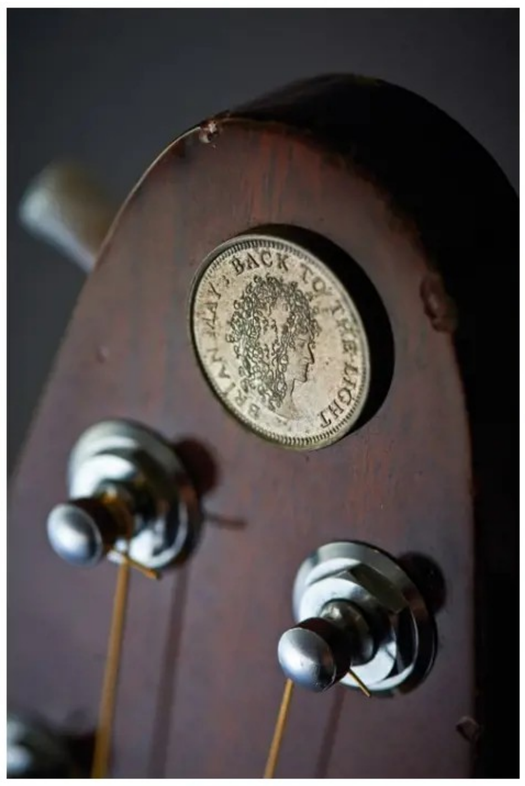
I've been proud of the way we're playing, but I'm wary of it becoming too much of a formula. I'm always aware of that. I like the freedom to evolve, and sometimes, I've been questioning whether we still have that. But yeah, I've been proud of the shows — especially production; I think our team is amazing. Those shows are way beyond anything we could do in the early days.

Which of your classic solos are the most difficult to undertake on stage?

It's all difficult, really! I think it's all difficult when you think about tread-

Joseph Branston/Future, Michael Astley-Brown/Future







[*Above, from left*] May's first guitar, an Egmond acoustic, had a zero fret, so he adapted the idea for the Red Special; May stuck this sixpence, one of thousands made to promote his first solo album, 1992's *Back to the Light*, to the Red Special's headstock circa 1998; the guitar's switching system provides May with as many tonal options as possible. "With all the switching I invented for the guitar, you can have any combination of pickups," he says

ing that fine line between giving people what they want to hear in terms of recognizability and keeping it fresh. So, the little changes that you make consciously and unconsciously need to be there or you become a fossil. [*Laughs*] I'm always treading that line.

Do some songs require more nuance than others?

Some of them have to be reproduced pretty closely, like the "Bohemian Rhapsody" solo. That isn't particularly difficult for me, [*but*] strangely enough, the riffs in that song are quite difficult. They're not the kind of places your fingers naturally go to play those riffs in B♭ and A♭, which are the keys that Freddie liked to play in. That stuff never gets easier for me, playing the heavy-riffing thing in "Bohemian Rhapsody." You have to keep the energy going; you can't get too studied about it. But at the same time, you have to hit the right notes, and, as I say, [*they*] don't fall naturally under the fingers. I've got to keep a watch on that.

There are all sorts of things that might not be the things you expect. You know, on "Another One Bites the Dust," I didn't play the rhythm; John [*Deacon*] played that. He played it on a Stratocaster, I think. He was very much influenced by the punk guitarists, which I'm not so much. So for me to get the feel he got on the record is quite hard.

How do you approach something like that?

I approach it from different directions, with different pickup combinations. And with a pick, without the pick, but it's never quite what John did. I'm always conscious of that, so I told myself, "I can't be John. I can just be me, and I'll be me [*in*] the best way I can." But that's not easy. It's not an easy groove for me to hit, especially as you have to hit the ground at 100 mph, do it for three minutes and then stop. It's not something I can organically fit into my playing. People might be surprised; they might think that's the easy bit, but it's really not [*easy*] to do that rhythm. I find it takes an application of mind and body.

Are there any young players out there today who have caught your ear?

The young people to me are people like Nuno [*Bettencourt*]. [*Laughs*] I know he's not young anymore, but boy, he's beyond belief. I know he's influenced by me; he's kind enough to say so, but he's very influenced by Eddie Van Halen, as should be the case. He always pays wonderful tributes to Ed, and he has that magic in his fingers that Ed had, I think. Nuno, to me, is just stratospheric in the way he plays. These are the people I adore, really. And if I were that kind of person, I would be deeply jealous because I can't do that shit. [*Laughs*] But I'm not, because I just love it; I love seeing him do it... I'm awestruck by all sorts of people I see on the internet. I'm on Instagram and there's so many kids out there that are just beyond belief in terms of technique. They start where we left off, and I couldn't even go there. I couldn't even begin to emulate the stuff they do... Ah, and I should mention my friend Arielle.

She's incredible.

She's an extraordinary technician who doesn't let technique hold her down. She's very expressive, very free and old-school in many ways. She loves analog recording; she loves the old tubes and stuff. She's a beautiful player. Her tone is magnificent. And there's still this thing in every business where women are slightly undervalued. It's changing, thank God, but she's experienced people not quite taking her as seriously as they would have. But she's an awesome player.

Speaking of players, do you have any other old favorites?

For me, my favorites are still, I suppose... I think the generation that kind of follows mine is other people who moved me the most. That's why I'm so into Nuno. Steve Lukather is an awesome player, beyond belief. I look at him and think, "How do you do that?" He has so many influences. His ability when he moves into the jazz area is phenomenal. But he's a rock player through and through, and his technique is indescribable. I don't know if he's on people's list of the world's greatest guitarists, but to me, he's unforgettable and a model of what a guitar player should be. I should also mention Paul Crook. He took such loving care of our dear friend Meat Loaf. I have great admiration for Paul, not only for his amazing fireworks guitars but also for taking over the production of those albums and absolutely maximizing whatever power Meat had left, who was fighting a hard battle.

What's a parting piece of advice for young guitarists?

Believe more. Smile, be confident and don't apologize for anything. Just be proud of being yourself, the best you can be. I spent too much time being nervous, uncertain and worried that I wasn't good enough. Be confident, even if you don't feel it right down in the deepest part of your soul. Play as if it's there; build on that belief that you put inside yourself that you are good enough — that wherever you are, you're what it takes. GW

Joseph Branston/Future, Getty Images

"I CAME UPON THIS RIFF ['HAMMER TO FALL'] AND THOUGHT, '"I CAN DO ANYTHING WITH THIS"

GUITAR WORLD

PERFECTLY FRANK

THE TRUE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF EDDIE VAN HALEN'S LEGENDARY FRANKENSTEIN GUITAR

WRITTEN BY

CHRIS GILL



FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS





It's alive! The first known photo of Frankenstein, shot February 18, 1977, at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium. Note the unfinished body and rosewood neck from Ed's 1961 Strat

> **THE LEGEND OF EDDIE VAN HALEN'S FRANKENSTEIN** guitar is almost biblical: "In the beginning, Eddie Van Halen went to Charvel and bought a Boogie Bodies neck and body. He installed thereupon a PAF humbucker and Stratocaster tremolo, then cut by hand a pickguard from blackest vinyl and painted the body with black and white stripes, representing the forces of darkness and light. He plugged the magnificent creation into his Marshall plexi amp, and proclaimed 'Let there be rock!' And it was good."

However — to paraphrase "Runnin' with the Devil" — the simple things aren't so simple. As Brad Tolinski and I were working on our upcoming book, *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen* (Hachette Books), we dug deep into research and fact-checking to answer and verify numerous questions, such as when Ed started tapping, what exact date did Ted Templeman discover the band and, particularly, when exactly did Ed build the Frankenstein guitar. I personally searched for every available early photo I could find to stitch together a plausible timeline, dug through old newspapers and fanzines and sought credible witnesses. Along the way, I visited numerous online forums and sifted through various theories, assumptions, certainties, myths and arguments to extract the facts and decipher the most logical explanations.

One of the most puzzling but fascinating photos I found was a lo-res black-and-white image that I, amongst many other Van Halen guitar fanatics, first viewed when it appeared on a handful of forums in 2014. The photo shows Ed playing a guitar with an unfinished Strat-style body, rosewood neck, "zebra" bobbin humbucking pickup and two control knobs. Inserted in the image is "A younger Eddie shreddin' at the Whiskey (sic) A Go-Go 1977" and "courtesy of inertia graphics ©2001." The stage lights in the background are consistent with those of the Whisky at the time, and, since Van Halen's very first gig at the Whisky took place on December 3, 1976, the 1977 date seems accurate, albeit frustratingly vague.

The most convincing detail that suggested that the guitar body in the photo was Ed's Frankenstein was the black pickguard. Directly below the volume knob is a notch that's identical in shape and placement to the notch seen in numerous photos of the Frankenstein when it had the black-and-white striped finish. Although the photo is not particularly sharp,



close examination of the body's wood grain also reveals features consistent with those of a factory second, which is an attribute that Ed and others consistently mentioned about the body he bought from Charvel.

My efforts to track down the person behind Inertia Graphics to see if he or she could remember a more precise date or provide a hi-res version of the photo (or additional photos) were a dead end. However, as I searched for more details about that photo, I came across a YouTube video posted May 2020 by Johnny B Guitars titled "Bare Body Frankenstrat Mysteries Revealed" that led me far deeper down the rabbit hole than I could have dreamed.

In addition to the 1977 Whisky photo, the video also featured photos taken by Bo Shannon in 1977 of Ed playing the bare body guitar. Shannon's photos showed several angles of the guitar in much sharper focus and detail. After viewing the video, I searched for more of Shannon's Van Halen photos online and came across a handful of additional images that show Ed playing a white Stratocaster with a humbucking pickup at the bridge. This was the beginning of my own personal revelation (which several other online sleuths discovered before me) as Shannon's photos and the dates he provided helped me answer numerous questions about when and how Eddie Van Halen's Frankenstein came into existence. The puzzle pieces were all there, and everything started to make perfect sense.

I would like to extend a warm thank you to Bo Shannon for making his photos available and providing fascinating details about them. John Burgess of Johnny B Guitars also deserves kudos for his outstanding research and excellent YouTube videos, which also include highly recommended "How Eddie Van Halen painted the Frankenstrat" and "Black Frankenstrat?! 1977 Whisky A Go Go." *Guitar World* readers may already recognize Burgess as the builder of the hockey stick and stop sign guitars featured in the "It Might Get Weird" column back in 2013 and 2016. His meticulous, scholarly research and fastidious analysis are truly commendable, and he has proven to be an excellent resource for those of us seeking the truth and facts.

What follows is the background, development and evolution of Ed's Frankenstein guitar up until and including the period just after he applied red paint to it in 1979. After that period, Ed frequently swapped necks, pickups and hardware in his ongoing quest to build the perfect beast and stay several steps ahead of his imitators. As the catalyst and prototype for the "super Strat," the most popular electric guitar design to emerge since the Gibson Les Paul and Fender Stratocaster and Telecaster designs of the Fifties, Eddie Van Halen's Frankenstein was indeed a monster of a guitar.

©BO SHANNON

THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

The origin of the Frankenstein guitar arguably begins in August 1969, when Ed and his brother Alex went with their father, Jan Van Halen, to Music for Everyone in Sierra Madre, California. Jan made a $143 down payment consisting of a $20 bill and $123 in trade-in credit for a Bundy flute and Ed's Univox Custom 12-string guitar to purchase a $200 Cooper drum kit for Alex and a brand-new $400 goldtop Gibson Les Paul Standard for Ed.

Although Ed finally had a professional-quality instrument in his hands, he soon discovered that the '69 Les Paul's single-coil P90 soapbar pickups didn't deliver the same fat, harmonically rich tone as the humbucker-equipped Les Paul and SG guitars played by his hero Eric Clapton on Eddie's favorite Bluesbreakers and Cream albums. Instead of buying yet another guitar, Ed acquired a spare humbucking pickup, chiseled out a larger cavity at the Les Paul's bridge position and installed the humbucker.

A few years later during the mid Seventies after Ed graduated from high school, he further modified the Les Paul by painting it black, probably in either late 1974 or '75. The Les Paul was stolen around this time, and it appears that Ed bought a brand-new Ibanez model 2387 Flying V copy to replace it. A photo taken during this period shows Ed playing the V at a gig with its stock dual cream-bobbin Hi-Power humbucker at the neck position and a replacement nickel- or chrome-cover Gibson-style humbucker installed at the bridge.

Unfortunately, the V was stolen as well, but the replacement he bought during the second half of 1975 was an even better upgrade — a 1975 Ibanez Destroyer with Super 70 pickups. Ed finally found a guitar that satisfied his ever-discriminating taste for tone, and over the next two years he made only minor modifications to it, including refinishing it in white and swapping the control knobs and bridge.

Ed acquired two other important guitars around this time: a circa 1963-65 Gibson ES-335 and a 1958 Fender Stratocaster. The only known photo of Ed playing the 335 appeared in the 1975-76 yearbook for Don Bosco Tech high school. The photo quality isn't the greatest, but details like the block inlays, vibrato tailpiece and sharper cutaway horns all confirm that the 335 is a 1963 or later model.

"It had one of those Maestro Vibrola wiggle sticks with the bent metal tailpiece, like you find on an SG," Ed said. "I liked it, but it wouldn't stay in tune. I sawed the bent metal spring in half, figuring I could make the E, A and D strings solid and just have the high three strings affected by the wiggle stick. I did all kinds of crazy shit to that 335. I took a belt sander to it when I wanted to repaint the guitar white, but I ended up sanding a big hole through the wood."

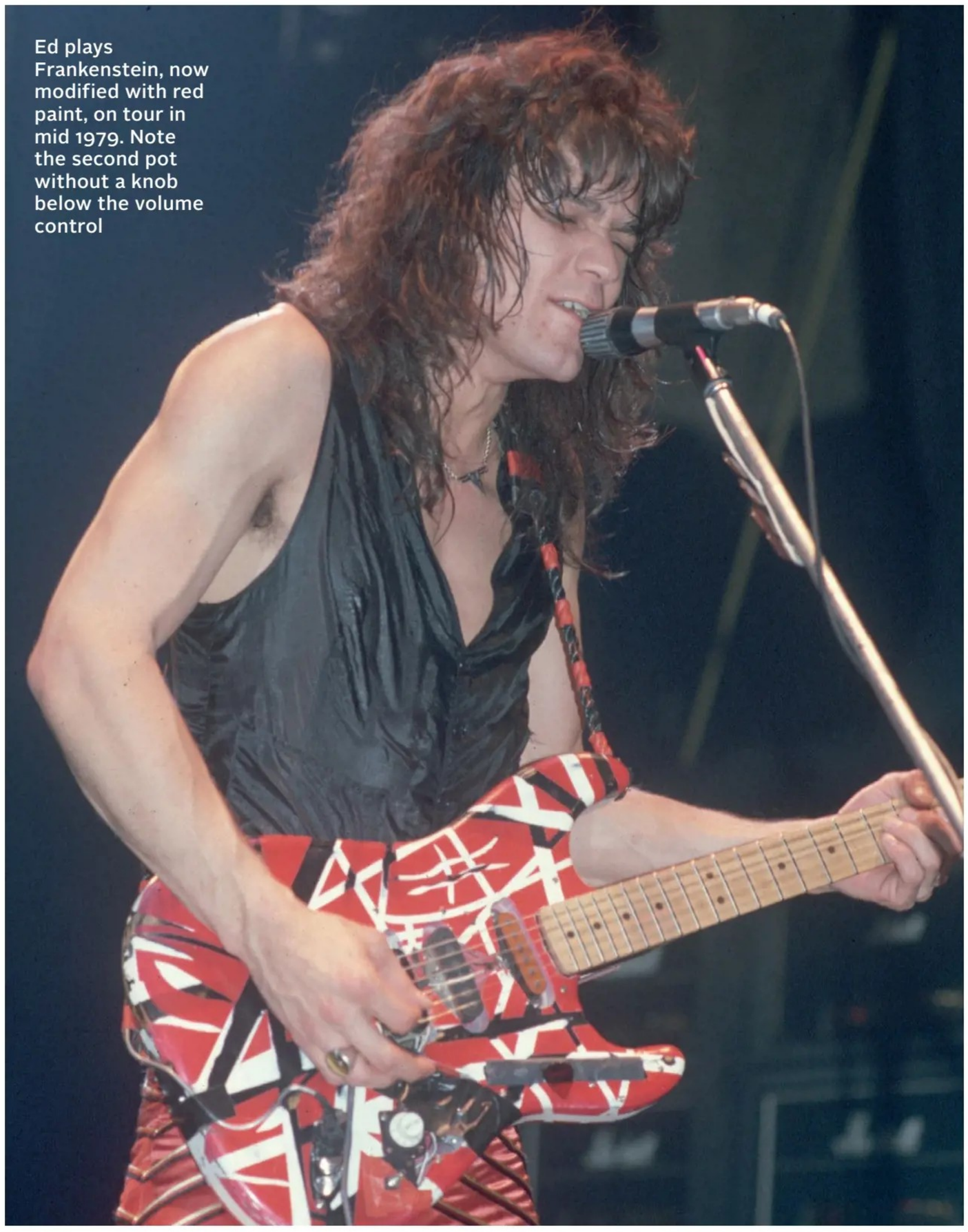
Ed's fascination with the vibrato bar probably led him to the '58 Strat next, but he quickly got rid of it after his bandmates complained about the thin sound of its single-coil pickups. Although his bandmates hated the Strat's tone, Ed loved how he could perform deep dives with its vibrato bar and keep the vibrato reasonably in tune with a few custom tweaks.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

In early 1976, Ed had reached a crossroads. While he loved the fat, aggressive tone of his Ibanez Destroyer, which was then his main guitar, he also loved the creative, expressive potential of a Strat's vibrato. The guitarist imagined two different ways he could combine the best features of both — either install a Strat vibrato on his beloved Destroyer, which would require a costly, invasive routing job, or install a humbucking pickup on a Stratocaster. The latter was the easier and cheaper solution.

During mid to late 1976, Ed was photographed at the Starwood (where Van Halen first played in May 1976) and Whisky A Go Go (where they performed their first gig on December 3, 1976) nightclubs playing both his white Ibanez Destroyer and a sunburst Fender Stratocaster. Ed had recently started spending time at Wayne Charvel's repair shop in Azusa, California, where he bought replacement parts for his guitars and absorbed tips about guitar construction and modifications. Wayne probably sold the Stratocaster to Ed during one of those visits. The Strat was an alder-body 1961 model, confirmed by its slab rosewood fretboard, small pre-CBS headstock, wide 12th fret dot inlay spacing, screw placement for the mint-green three-layer pickguard, three-color sunburst finish and other distinguishing features. Interestingly, the stamped serial number on the neck plate found on Ed's Frankenstein guitar — 61071 — is also consistent with a 1961 Fender, so it apparently came from this guitar.

One notable feature of Ed's '61 Strat was the peculiar placement of a 1967-era Fender decal in the center of the headstock, instead of along the lower edge. The theory is that Wayne probably refinished the neck and hastily applied a New Old Stock decal from a stash he acquired while he was employed



Ed plays Frankenstein, now modified with red paint, on tour in mid 1979. Note the second pot without a knob below the volume control

by Fender. This anomaly provided a fortuitous "fingerprint" for Ed's later experiments, although it also has thrown a few sleuths off the track. More on that later.

The earliest photos of Ed with the '61 Strat show a black-and-white zebra bobbin humbucker (probably a Mighty Mite 1300 or 1400, which was a replacement pickup that Charvel sold in addition to DiMarzio pickups) placed a generous distance from the bridge, with the humbucker at the same angle as a Strat bridge pickup and the lower coil in about the same location as the Strat bridge pickup. The Strat had only two control knobs (the knob at standard volume position is missing), and the pickup selector switch was taped in the center position. This guitar is essentially "the dad of Frankenstein."

It's impossible to determine if Ed chiseled out the larger cavity to install the humbucker or whether Charvel routed the cavity for him. The missing volume knob and taped pickup switch suggest that Ed installed the pickup himself and did the wiring, which is consistent with his frequent statements about not knowing how to wire the extra pickups. Ed didn't use them anyway, so why should he bother? Perhaps Ed wired the humbucker to the switch so it only worked in the center position, which could explain why it was taped in place.

Later in 1976, a humbucker with dual cream bobbins — most likely a DiMarzio Super Distortion — appeared in the bridge position, this time positioned slightly closer to the bridge and at a shallower angle. Ed switched the control knobs from stock Strat knobs to white speed knobs, with the Strat knobs now appearing on Ed's Destroyer. The pickup switch was usually seen set to the neck position, but it probably was completely disconnected when the new humbucker was installed after Ed realized that he didn't need the switch at all.

The humbucker-equipped '61 Strat remained in the same configuration throughout most, and possibly the remainder, of 1976. This can be confirmed by Marvin Rinnig's photos shot at the Whisky A Go Go. As I mentioned earlier, Van Halen's first gig at the Whisky took place on December 3, 1976. Rinnig confirmed that he shot Van Halen at both the Starwood and Whisky, and his Whisky shots can be identified by several details, including the stage lighting configuration (the Whisky's rear stage lights were PAR fixtures directed in different directions while the Starwood's rear lights were a straight bank). In Rinnig's Whisky photos, the Strat still had a sunburst finish.

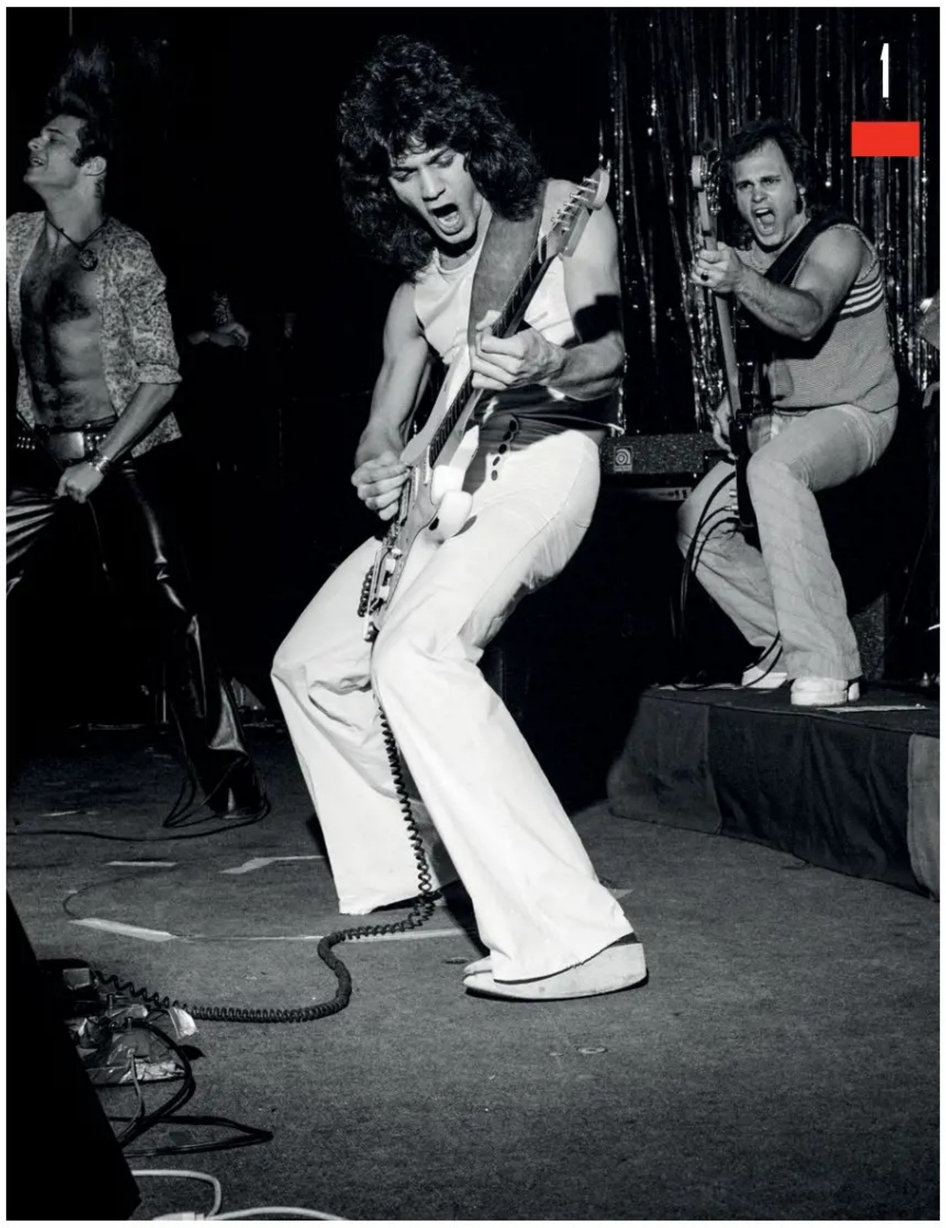
Sometime between Van Halen's first gigs at the Whisky and mid January 1977, Ed painted the '61 Strat white. Apparently he just sprayed the white paint over the original sunburst finish, as photos taken by Bo Shannon at the Starwood in mid-January show several finish chips that expose much darker paint underneath. An undated set of fan photos that appear to be taken at the Whisky show Ed also playing the white Strat. If the venue is indeed the Whisky, the photos could have been taken either previously (as late as December 22) or afterwards (as early as January 27). Either way, the white '61 Strat existed for only a very brief period.

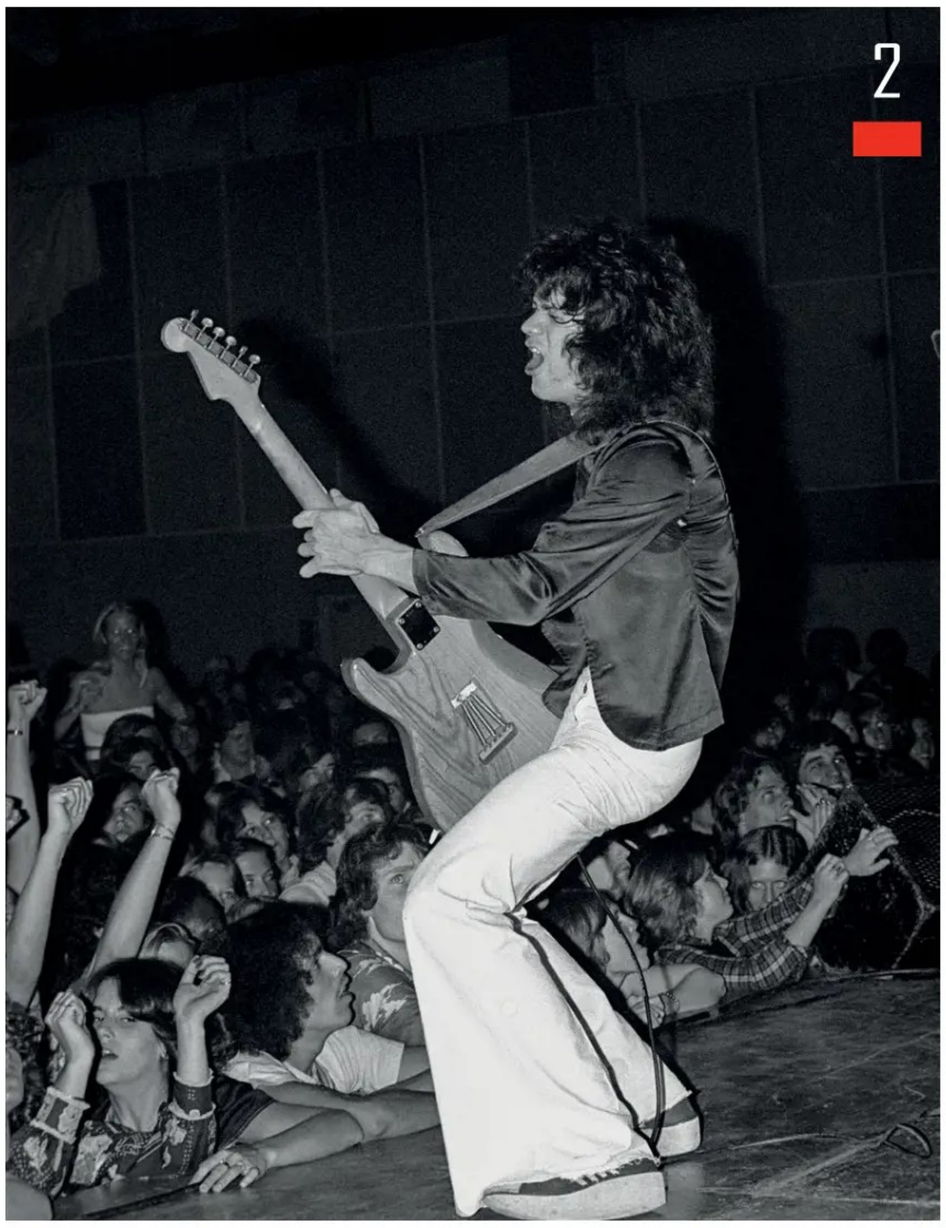
IT'S A MONSTER

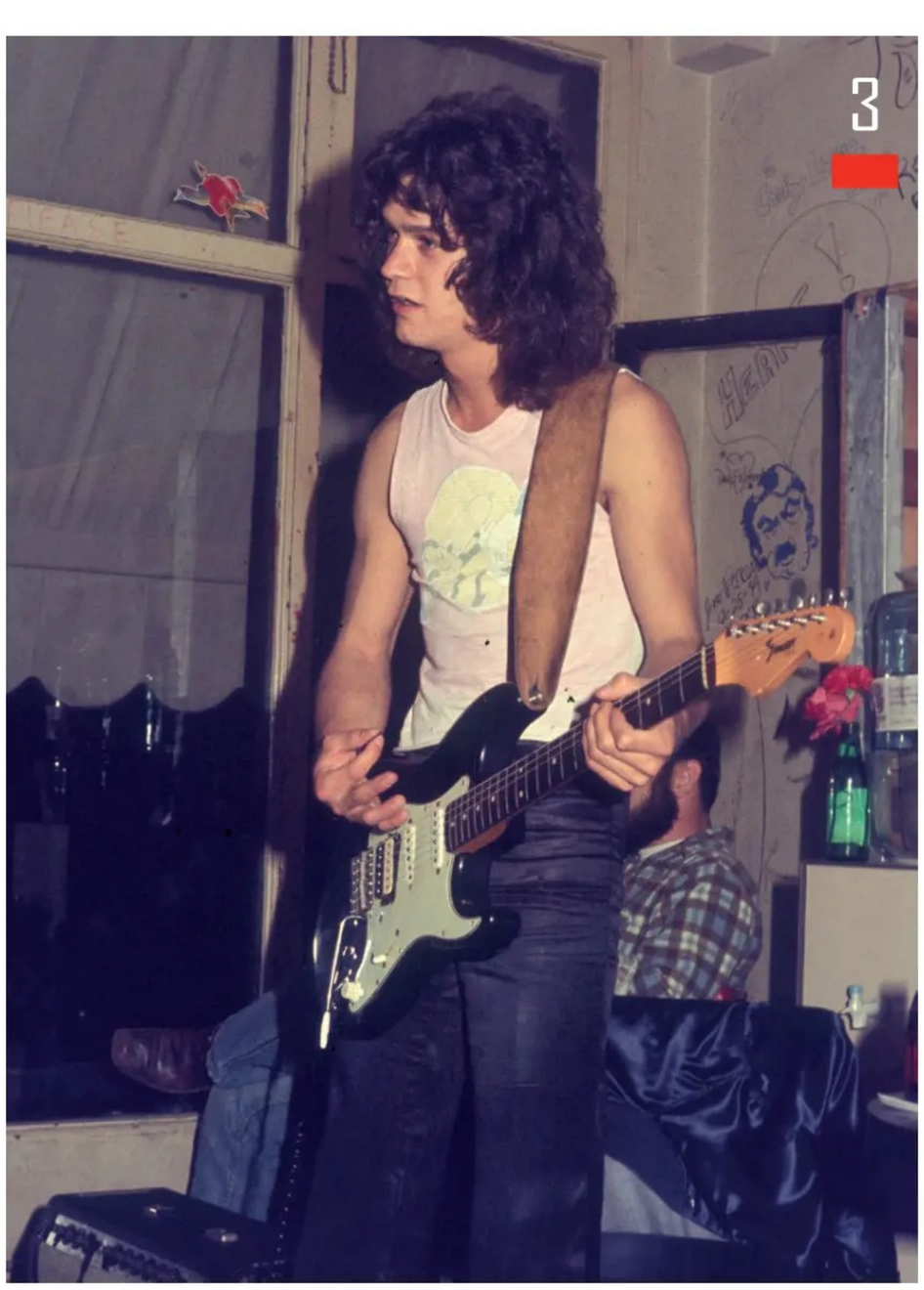
Considering that Ed took the time to strip the parts off of his '61 Strat, spray it white and put it back together again, he apparently still favored that guitar as one of his main stage instruments as late as mid January 1977. However, about a month later he was photographed playing a guitar with a bare, unfinished ash body, black pickguard and single Mighty Mite humbucker with zebra bobbins. The guitar also had the same rosewood fingerboard neck (with odd headstock decal placement), vibrato tailpiece and 61071 serial number neck plate from his '61 Strat, so the white '61 Strat was now obviously disassembled.

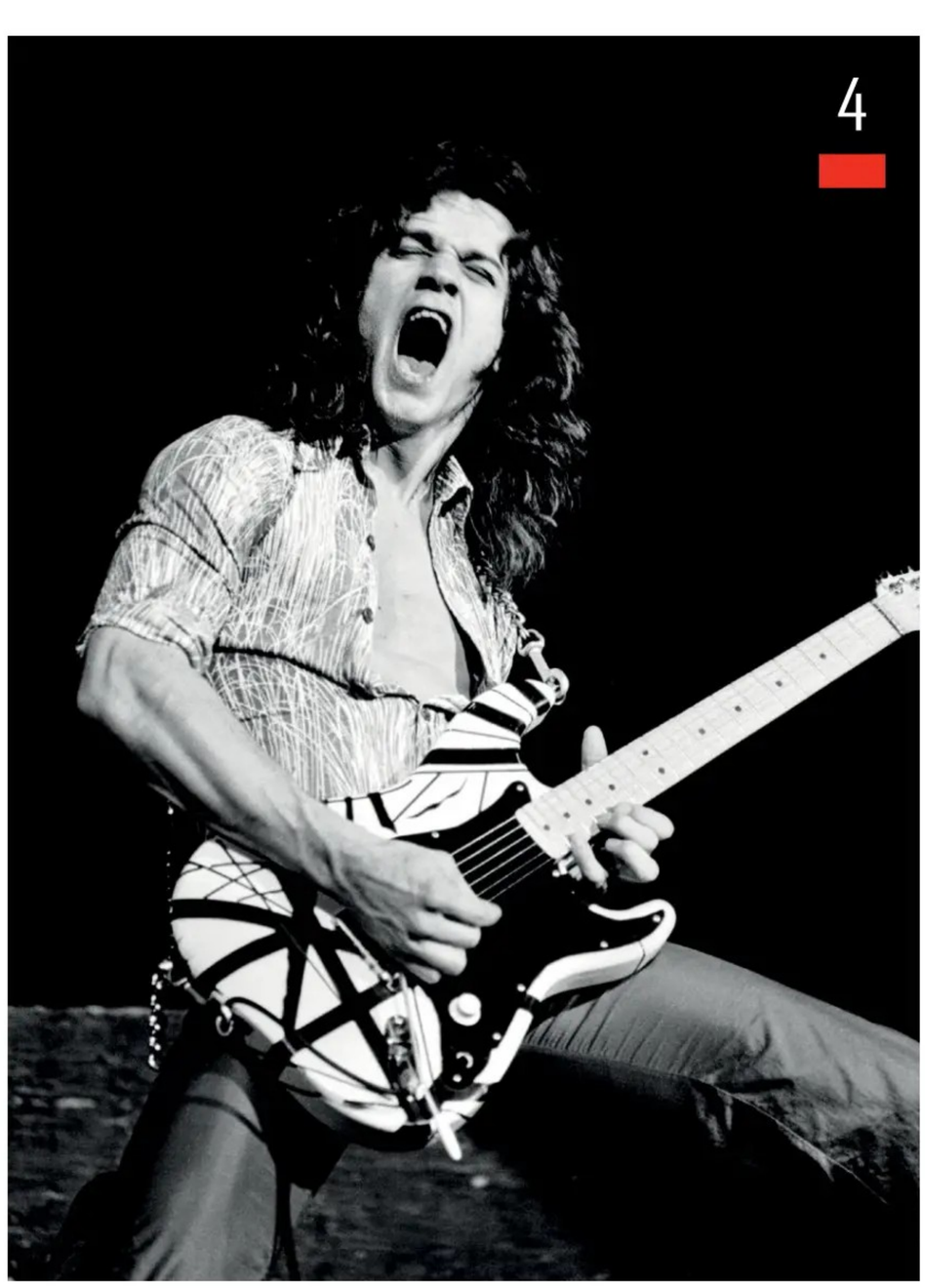
The earliest photo of the bare body guitar with a confirmed date was taken on February 18, 1977, at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium by Bo Shannon, who shot photos and wrote concert reviews for the Fullerton Daily News Tribune. The aforementioned Inertia Graphics/Whisky bare body photo could have been taken soon before or after, but the exact date is unknown.

The unfinished body is what Ed frequently described as the famous factory second Boogie Bodies body that he purchased from Charvel for $50. It is definitely not the alder '61 Strat body with the finish stripped, as the grain pat-









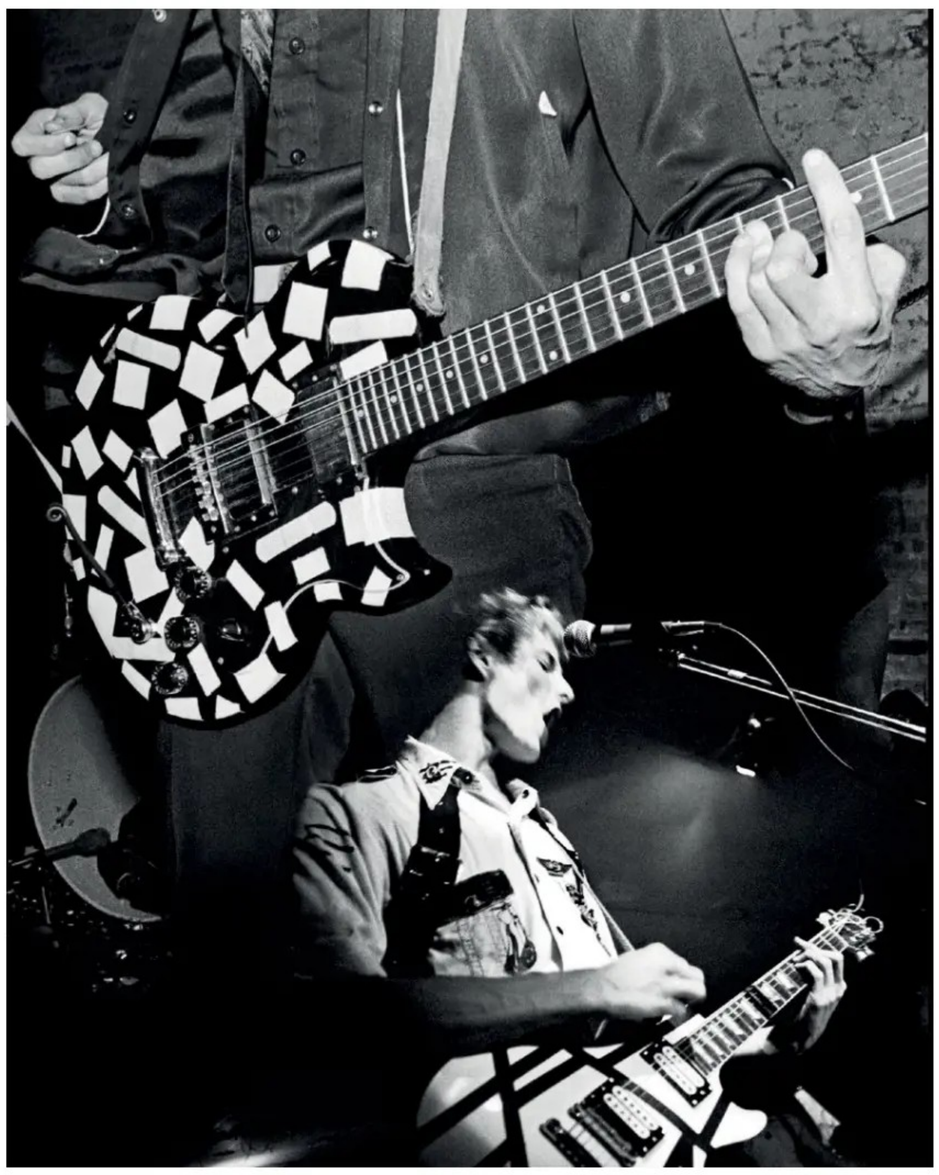
1: ©BO SHANNON 2: ©BO SHANNON 3: PHOTO CREDIT ESTRADA/LENS ARCHIVES 4: GUS STEWART/REDFERNS

1. Ed plays his '61 Strat, refinished white, at the Starwood nightclub in mid January 1977

2. This rearview shot from February 18, 1977, shows the Frankenstein body's grain pattern

3. Backstage at the Whisky, May 29, 1977. The Frankenstein body is now black

4. Ed with Frankenstein in its full black-and-white glory, May 27, 1978, Lewisham, England



[*left*] A Les Paul (bottom photo in the collage) played by Chip Kinman of the Dils may have influenced Ed's stripe design

[*right*] Frankenstein with the pinstripes removed, shortly before Ed added layers of red paint, at rehearsals for Van Halen's 1979 tour

DILS GUITARIST CHIP KINMAN RECALLS SEEING VAN HALEN AT SEVERAL OF THE DILS' GIGS AT THE WHISKY AND TELLING HIS BANDMATES, "THE HIPPIES ARE HERE AGAIN"

terns visible in the sunburst finish photos do not match. The photos of the unfinished body reveal several details that identify it as a second, including mismatched grain patterns, an angled center seam, a knot in the treble cutaway pocket and more (explained in impressive detail in the Johnny B Guitars "Bare Body Frankenstrat" YouTube video). More importantly, the grain patterns also match the sections of grain still visible on the Frankenstein guitar's body in its current state.

Thanks to Shannon's photos, we can date the origin of Ed's Frankenstein guitar (as a playable instrument and not unassembled parts) to sometime between Shannon's mid-January Starwood photos and the February 18, 1977, Pasadena Civic photo. Although Ed had stated that he built the guitar in either 1974 or '75, and even New York's Metropolitan Museum took his word and attributed 1975 as the Frankenstein's date when the original guitar was displayed at the "Play It Loud" exhibit in 2019, Charvel did not start stocking and selling Boogie Bodies parts until late 1976.

In 2006, Chip Ellis of FMIC's Jackson/Charvel Custom Shop told me that he saw a Boogie Bodies stamp in the neck pocket of the original Frankenstein guitar when he was making the EVH Frankenstein Tribute model. However, Wayne Charvel has said on numerous occasions that he sold Ed "an older body that I had constructed in my shop," and several researchers have made convincing arguments that the body may indeed have been made by Charvel and his employee Dave Schecter, and not by Lynn Ellsworth/Boogie Bodies as previously assumed. Regardless of who actually built the body, it was made sometime in 1976 before Ed bought it, so Ed couldn't have built the Frankenstein any earlier than then.

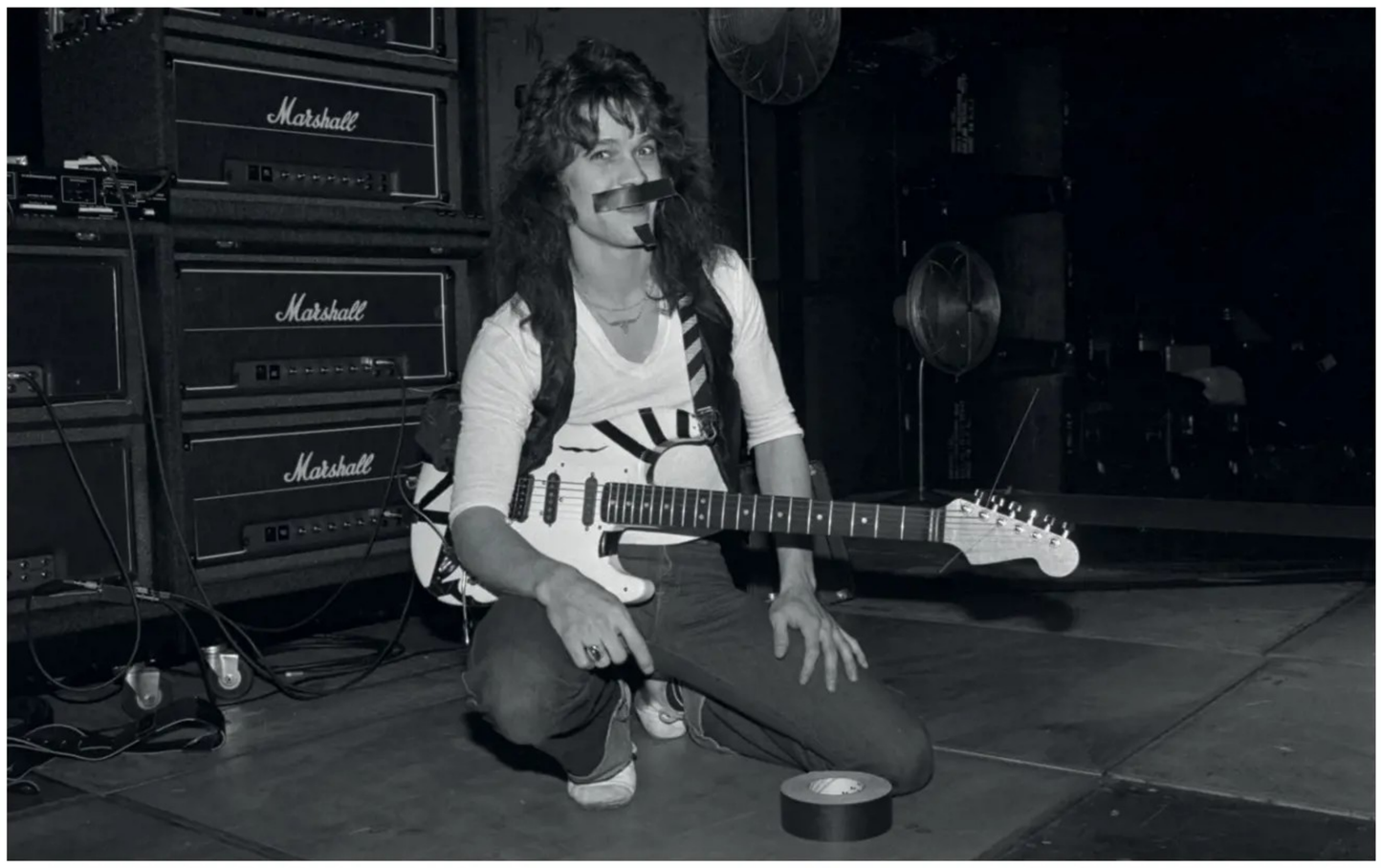
Ed started playing the Frankenstein during a very important time in Van Halen's career. Producer Ted Templeman first saw the band at the Starwood on February 2, 1977, and two days later Van Halen signed a letter of intent (an agreement preceding a more formal recording contract) with Warner Bros. It's possible the Ed could have played the guitar with the Frankenstein body at the first shows that Templeman witnessed. Perhaps this humble slab of wood, rescued from the scrap heap by Ed, was the guitarist's talisman, enchanting him with good fortune that led to his fame, success and acclaim from that point onward.

The next widely available and accurately dated photos of Ed playing guitar were taken at the Whisky A Go Go on May 29, 1977, by Kevin Estrada and Jenny Lens. Ed was now playing a guitar with a Strat-style body, black finish, mint/white pickguard, zebra humbucker and two single-coil pickups, single control knob and the rosewood '61 Strat neck. The pickguard, single-coil pickups and particularly the distinctive '61 neck led many to assume that this was the '61 Strat refinished black, but closer examination confirms that the guitar actually has the Boogie Bodies/Charvel/Frankenstein body. John Burgess's "Black Frankenstrat" video provides definitive proof, including the cutaway pocket knot, paint drips that match those on later iterations of the Frankenstein, identically placed screw holes from both the homemade black and '61 mint green pickguards and other details. The black finish later provided the base for Ed's black and white striped graphic design, which he created by taping sections of the black body, spraying several layers of white paint and removing the tape.

This leads to an important question: When exactly did Ed paint Frankenstein's iconic black and white striped finish? Amateur fan photos reportedly taken at the Whisky July 15, 1977, by Kat Hanes and possibly at the same show by another anonymous fan show the guitar with the striped finish. If the date is correct, these are the first known shots of the black and white Frankenstein. The black pickguard is also back, and the anonymous fan's photo clearly shows that a black-bobbin humbucker (probably salvaged from Ed's wrecked circa 1963-65 Gibson ES-335) replaced the zebra Mighty Mite. A very fascinating detail is the presence of two white Strat control knobs. Was the circuit wired with a volume and tone control or possibly two volume controls, or was one extra knob just there for looks?

The next inevitable question is: Where was the famous Boogie Bodies neck? Ed and Wayne Charvel's statements led many to believe that Ed purchased the body and Boogie Bodies neck at the same time, but the neck does not appear until those same July 15, 1977 Whisky photos shot by Hanes and an unknown source. The most likely explanations are that Ed either bought the neck during a later visit to Charvel, or he custom-ordered the neck and it took a few months for Ellsworth to complete and deliver it. Ed's neck was consistent with the

LEFT: RUBY RAY/GETTY IMAGES RIGHT: LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES



custom specs listed in Charvel's 1977 catalog for a Style C "flatter-wider Gibson-style" fretboard with standard jumbo frets, and the $89.95 price is close to the $80 that Ed said he spent for the neck.

The Frankenstein looks identical in a pair of photos that Kat Hanes took one month later on August 15, 1977, at the Magic Mountain amusement park in Valencia, California. Unfortunately, the pickup is very hard to see in clear detail. Ed's white Ibanez Destroyer, with its body still fully intact (Ed made the "shark" modifications after recording Van Halen's debut album), is also seen in the background. Considering that the Magic Mountain photos were taken exactly two weeks before Van Halen started recording their debut album at Sunset Sound on August 29, it's highly probable that the Frankenstein still had two control knobs and the Gibson pickup during the debut album sessions.

The October/November 1977 #4 issue of the hard rock fanzine *Raw Power* features yet another early photo of Eddie playing the striped Frankenstein with two control knobs (a PDF of the issue can be downloaded from scott-stephens.com). Here the pickup is difficult to see as well, but both bobbins appear to be black. The photo was likely taken either August 19-20 or September 16-17 at the Whisky, either shortly before or right after Van Halen's debut album sessions. The accompanying interview with David Lee Roth suggests that the album was already recorded, so the September date seems more plausible. This also supports the likelihood that the black-bobbin, patent-pending decal ES-335 humbucker was in the Frankenstein during the sessions — technically not a PAF as Ed stated, although the patent decal version is very similar to many PAFs with the exception of its slightly smaller Alnico 5 magnet.

The August 1977 issue of the punk fanzine Slash provides fascinating clues that support a possible inspiration for Ed's signature striped guitar finish. A review of several consecutive punk shows at the Whisky from June 20-22, 1977, appears on pages 19 and 20. The review for the second night states, "Van Halen paraded around in what they had been led to believe were the latest punk outfits," and a photo of Roth and the Van Halen brothers in those outfits is on the issue's rear cover.

The review section covers two shows by the Dils at the Whisky — one on June 22 and a gig at a later date. The review is accompanied by a photo on page 20 of Dils guitarist Chip Kinman playing a white Les Paul Custom copy adorned with black electrical tape at criss-crossing angles. It looks uncannily similar to, albeit much cruder than, Ed's black and white Frankenstein design. Van Halen attended numerous punk shows at the Whisky during the summer of 1977 in the downtime between recording their demos and the album. During this timeframe they even wrote several new songs ("Ain't Talkin' Bout Love," "Loss of Control" and "Atomic Punk") that were Van Halen's unique interpretation of punk. It's plausible that Ed saw at least one Dils gig at the Whisky in June or early July. Kinman recalls seeing Van Halen at several of the Dils' gigs at the Whisky and telling his bandmates, "the hippies are here again."

By the time Van Halen performed on New Year's Eve 1977 at the Whisky A Go Go, the Frankenstein's second control knob was gone. One other short-lived but immortal change was captured during the photo session by Elliot Gilbert for the debut album cover images, where Ed replaced the '61 Strat vibrato with a brass Mighty Mite vibrato tailpiece. The '61 Strat vibrato was back on Franky in early 1978 when Van Halen returned to the Whisky for one last time to film promotional videos for "Eruption/You Really Got Me," "Jamie's Cryin'" and "Runnin' with the Devil."

RED DAWN

Ed's Frankenstein guitar remained unchanged throughout Van Halen's entire 1978 tour and the December sessions for *Van Halen II*. The Frankenstein's next modifications were seen in photos taken during Van Halen's rehearsals for their 1979 tour. Ed removed the thin automotive pinstripe tape that embellished the wider painted stripes, and reinstalled the white '61 pickguard, this time featuring a red Mighty Mite single-coil pickup at the neck and a Telecaster pickup in the middle, which were both disconnected and only installed for show. The maple Boogie Bodies neck was also swapped out for a Charvel Strat replacement neck with a rosewood fingerboard.

This modification was very short-lived, as Eddie was in the process of stripping down the guitar's body in order to apply an additional layer of red paint. With the start of the tour quickly approaching, Ed hastily ripped strips from a roll of gaffer tape, laid out a new striped pattern and sprayed the Frankenstein during a rainy day in March 1979.

The earliest known photos of Ed with the red, white and black Frankenstein were taken on March 31, 1979, during Van Halen's concert in Logan, Utah. The photos are black and white, but they show the Frankenstein guitar without any pickguard whatsoever, the gaping control cavity filled with a tangle of wires and the volume control perched on a Les Paul output jack plate screwed to the top. The original maple Boogie Bodies neck is also back again. From that point onwards, Ed made numerous and frequent changes, swapping a dizzying variety of necks and pickups, temporarily adding a second potentiometer (without a knob), installing a variety of different Floyd Rose vibrato systems and more.

"What trips me out is that when I painted the Frankenstein red that made it more famous," Ed said in 2013. "A lot of people still don't know that it's the same guitar as the black and white guitar on the cover of the first Van Halen album. I kept changing it because I was tired of people copying my guitar, but I also never stopped searching for ways to improve its tone. That guitar went through a lot of phases and changes." GW

Slash — surrounded by possibilities — at Norman's Rare Guitars

GUITAR SHOPPING WITH SLASH

THAT TIME **SLASH** AND *GW*'S **RICHARD BIENSTOCK** SPENT A LOVELY AFTERNOON BROWSING—AND BUYING!—AT NORMAN'S RARE GUITARS IN TARZANA, CALIFORNIA

STORY BY **RICHARD BIENSTOCK** PHOTOS BY **AUSTIN NELSON**

[*clockwise from above*] Slash — at Norman's Rare Guitars — with a 1963 Gibson J-45; with Richard Bienstock (and a pair of Les Paul Standards); and with Norman Harris, owner of Norman's Rare Guitars

"YOU GO IN LOOKING FOR ONE THING, AND THEN YOU SEE SOMETHING ELSE THAT YOU DON'T NECESSARILY NEED, BUT YOU HAVE TO HAVE IT"

WALKING INTO NORMAN'S RARE GUITARS ON A SUNNY afternoon, Slash is a man on a mission. Specifically, that mission is to find a '59 Gibson Les Paul. And not just any '59 Gibson Les Paul. He's on the hunt for a tobacco burst — a rare and coveted finish on what is already a rare and coveted guitar model. "There's only two that I know of," Slash says.

One of the two, he used to own — it's the famous model he uses to rip the solo outside a church in Guns N' Roses' "November Rain" video. "But it was Joe [*Perry*]'s and I gave it back to him," he says.

Slash still has three 1959 examples in his possession — "One's basically a lemon burst, and the other two are faded cherry sunbursts," he says. But he calls the tobacco burst his favorite finish. "So I figured I should put the word out there. Because it's not going to just come walking up to my door."

Which is why Slash has come walking through Norman's door. Because if anybody in L.A. can find a rare guitar, it's Norman Harris, who has been dealing vintage instruments for more than 50 years, and whose Tarzana, California, shop is a go-to destination for artists, collectors and everyday guitar fans alike.





Harris, who greets Slash on this day, doesn't have a tobacco burst '59 on hand ("That's a tall order," he acknowledges), but he assures Slash he'll put some feelers out. In the meantime, he has plenty of other vintage beauties for us to look at.

As for Slash, he admits he's a guitarist who doesn't really frequent guitar stores. "They're overwhelming," he says. "It's like going to a restaurant where the menu's 30 pages long." That said, he's been friendly with Harris for decades, and when he wants to shop, Norman's is his spot. "I've known Norman for a long time, and he's got one of the most comprehensive guitar stores around," Slash says, then laughs. "I live in the vicinity, and when I moved here I thought, fuck, this is dangerous..."

And with that, we have a look around.

As Slash walks alongside the rows of premium new and vintage models, Harris points him toward a few choice items, including a rare Stromberg with a $40,000 price tag and a 1930s Larson Brothers Mauer, "one of the fanciest acoustics you'll see," Harris says. He also highlights a prototype of Epiphone's Joe Bonamassa 1958 "Amos" Korina Flying-V, which leads Slash to reminisce about the first Epiphone he ever owned, which he says was also his first "good" acoustic.

"It was a 1930s Epiphone dreadnought," he tells us. "When I was 15 I would do some babysitting, and at this one house they had it hanging on the wall next to a mandolin. I said to the parents, 'Can I play it when the kid's asleep?' I was still playing it when they came home, and they actually ended up giving it to me. And I still have it — the fucking tailpiece is coming out of the body, but it's hanging on."

Despite Slash's previous assertion that he's not much of a guitar-store fan, he has a rich history with them. "When I was 17 or 18 I used to work in one — Hollywood Music Store, on Fairfax and Melrose," he tells *Guitar World* as we walk the perimeter of Norman's. "It was owned by Hiro [*Misawa*], a Japanese businessman who I think had a music store in Tokyo and then came over to the States. If I remember correctly, it was the only authorized B.C. Rich dealer in town. And that was my first good electric guitar, a B.C. Rich Mockingbird that I got there. Before that, I think I bought an Explorer for a hundred bucks and I took it back and traded it for a Les Paul. But those were just copies."

There's one other piece of Slash history attached to the Hollywood Music Store — it's where he first met Izzy Stradlin. "Izzy came in one day because he had seen a drawing I had done of Aerosmith, and he was looking for the guy who made it," Slash recalls. "That was the first time we ever met. And then later on we hooked up and he played me his demo [*of pre-Guns N' Roses band Hollywood Rose*]. That was the first time I heard Axl."

As for whether he was a good employee?

"All things considered, yeah, I was," Slash says. "Although there's a 'commission salesman' mentality that was hard for me to wrap my head around. Like, 'If you sell this, you're going to get paid this percentage on it.' I remember one of the guys I used to work with, his name was Phil, he was an older guy and he had been a Guitar Center commissioned salesman. He came down to Hollywood Music Store and started working there, and he was great at it. He was from Texas, and he had this real cool kind of demeanor — cowboy boots, plaid shirts, mustache..." Slash laughs. "He tried to show me the ropes. And I tried my damnedest to do a good job."

During his days at the store, Slash recalls, "all these guys used to come in while I'd be working, pick up guitars and play their latest Randy Rhoads stuff for two hours, just sitting on an amp. It was crazy. I was never that guy." Despite the fact that he regularly plays on some of the biggest stages in the world, and to tens of thousands of fans at a clip, he maintains that he's "never liked playing in front of people in a store. So when I did go to a store, I was always looking for something specific. Then I'd tinker with it for a second and put it down, because I felt very self-conscious if anybody else was there. I'm still like that."

And anyway, Slash continues, "I don't buy guitars just to have guitars. It has to be something I'll actually use. I do have a couple guitars that are outside of my normal thing that you're used to seeing me with, but I find that they only interest me for a second, because they sound like 'that.' Whatever it is they are, that's what they sound like. Which is not really

what I'm going for. I'm trying to sound like me. So I end up not buying anything too crazy."

Of course, Slash is still, like all of us, a guitar lover. And that means that even if he tends to be specific about what it is he's looking for, he's also susceptible to making spur-of-the-moment purchases. "And that's why guitar stores can be dangerous," he says. "You go in looking for one thing, and then you see something else that you don't necessarily need, but you feel you have to have it... and you end up buying it."

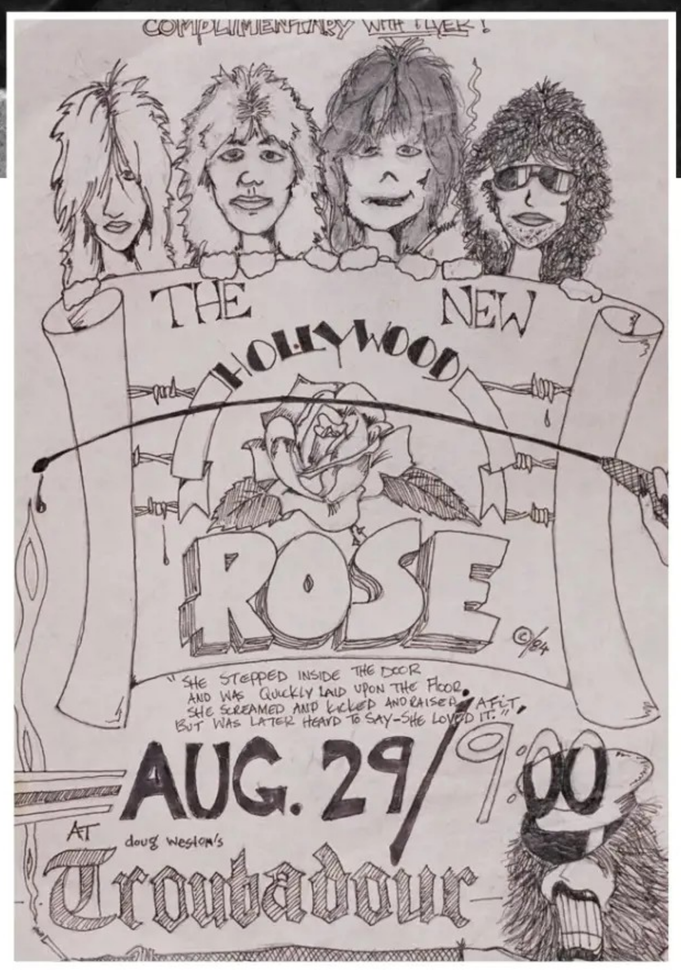
Over the course of the pandemic, Slash popped into Norman's to purchase a few very particular items, including a '56 Les Paul Goldtop, some Fender Deluxe amps and a mid-Sixties six-string bass, "which is killer, and which I actually needed," he says. For his visit today Harris has pulled aside some choice instruments, and so we make our way beyond the store's showroom floor to a narrow, tightly packed corridor in the back to check them out.

"We call this room our 'secret stash,' Norman says. "It's for good friends of the store and people who know what this stuff is."

First up? A 1963 Gibson J-45 that Norman calls "pretty stunning." The acoustic, he says, "has been sitting in my warehouse, where I have maybe a few hundred guitars, for probably 25 years. It's hardly played, and it's about as good an example as you'll ever see." Slash picks up the instrument, rests it on his knee and spools out some chords and bluesy single-note lines before playing a series of arpeggios up the neck. A smile creeps across his face. "See?," he says. "Dangerous."

From there, Harris pulls out a pristine 1923 Gibson F-5 Lloyd Loar, which he calls the "sunburst Les Paul of mandolins."

"Some of these had a Virzi Tone Producer, which a lot of people don't like,"



[*top*] Hollywood Rose at Madame Wong's East in Los Angeles, August 29, 1984: [*from left*] Steve Darrow, Axl Rose, Steven Adler and Slash, playing a B.C. Rich Warlock. [*above*] A 1984 Hollywood Rose gig flyer that Slash designed and drew

marc s canter/michael ochs archives/getty images (both photos)

“I DON’T BUY GUITARS JUST TO HAVE GUITARS. IT HAS TO BE SOMETHING I’LL ACTUALLY USE”

Slash with Gibson Les Paul and [*below*] a 1941 Gibson Super 400P in the guitar-packed corners of Norman’s Rare Guitars



Harris says. “This one is what they call a ‘pre-Virzi.’ So it’s like the very top of the line when it comes to mandolins.”

Finally, Harris eyes a row of black hard cases crammed on a high shelf and reaches up to pull out one case in particular. “Since we’re talking Gibson, this is an L-4C from the Fifties,” he says, opening the case to reveal a stunning blonde archtop. “It’s got flatwounds on it and it’s in almost-new condition. It’s one of those guitars that’s almost like a time machine.”

The blonde finish, Harris continues, is especially choice. “The thing about blonde guitars is that they had to use the best wood for them, because if there were any imperfections in the wood, it would show. Whereas if it was, say, a sunburst finish, they could just fade around it. And that’s why when guitars were priced, the blondes were always more. Because they couldn’t use imperfect wood.”

Harris returns the L-4C to its case and we head back out to the main showroom. But not before Slash comments, rather, um, dangerously, “I may want to check out that J-45 one more time...”

Given that we’ve already killed the better part of an afternoon at Norman’s, it’s about time to head out. But not before we make one more stop — the wall of Les Pauls, of course. We each grab a Standard — Slash a rich cherry sunburst, ours more a lemony hue — and spend a few minutes playing. Rest assured — no Randy Rhoads licks were attempted.

Afterwards, guitars are returned to the wall and Slash packs up to leave. At the front desk, however, there’s something waiting for him — that 1963 Gibson J-45 from the “secret stash” room. Slash signs the invoice, puts the acoustic in its case and heads for the door. He turns around to give one final wave to Harris, and then makes his way into the L.A. afternoon sun, his newest Gibson companion by his side. GW

THE BEST OF RIFFER MADNESS

Select highlights from Dimebag Darrell's legendary *Guitar World* column, all of which focus on the as-important-as-ever arts of riffing and rhythm work

BY DIMEBAG DARRELL

BUT FIRST, A brief backstory by Nick Bowcott! Back in 1993, *GW*'s editors decided to run with an idea that would become a mainstay of the magazine to this day — monthly artist columns. Two bona fide guitar heroes, Kirk Hammett and Eric Johnson, agreed to do six installments each, but the editors wanted to enlist one more columnist, ideally an up-and-coming player. Because I had been commissioned to work with said artists on putting together their columns, I was asked if I had any suggestions. My answer was instantaneous — "Diamond Darrell of Pantera. He's the one!" I had previously interviewed the guitarist for a one-off lesson article for the magazine and was blown away by his playing, personality, passion and unique and colorful way of explaining things, which the guys at *GW* and I came to lovingly refer to as "Dimebonics." He and I had also become good friends, so I knew working with him would be a blast. Editor-in-Chief Brad Tolinski agreed and, thankfully, so did the Texan Tornado. And so Diamond Darrell's "Riffer Madness" column was born.

NOTE: Up to and including Pantera's pivotal sophomore major-label album, 1992's *Vulgar Display of Power*, Abbott's nickname was "Diamond Darrell." But when *Far Beyond Driven* was released in 1994, his name was instead listed as "Dimebag Darrell." Said album reached Number 1 on the *Billboard* 200 chart, and the rest is history.

As mentioned, the initial plan for Riffer Madness was a six-issue run. But due to the enthusiastic reader response, he was asked if he'd like to continue the column. Thanks to all the positive feedback he was getting, plus the fact that he genuinely enjoyed writing the column, he agreed. As a result, that first run of monthly columns totalled 28, all bearing his Diamond Darrell name. Then, in 2000, the celebrated guitarist-turned-columnist returned with another 14 installments, this time as Dimebag Darrell. His plan was to return for a third run in 2005, but, tragically, that never happened.

To celebrate the amazing 42 Riffer Madness episodes that Darrell selflessly gifted us with, here's a collection of column highlights that focus on the all-important arts of riffing and rhythm work. So, as Dime stated when Riffer Madness debuted in the April 1993 issue of *Guitar World*, "Let's plug in and start wailin'!"

Without further ado, I hand the pen over to Mr. Abbott.

RIFF RAP

To me and my band, guitar riffs are what it's all about. We know that every time we jam on a great riff, we've got a fighting chance of writing a great song. You don't have to go to G.I.T. or know a bunch of weird-assed chords and scales to come up with killer shit, Jack. But, you've gotta be totally into what you're doing. Check out Judas Priest's *British Steel* if you don't believe me. It's packed full of god-like riffs, and most of them aren't hard to play. If you don't already own this album, buy it — it's essential shit, man! Here are a couple of ideas that might help you get the most out of a good, heavy riff.

OCTAVE REPEATS

One of our audience's favorite riffs is the main one in "Cowboys from Hell." It's a pretty easy one to play 'cause it's made up of one of the first rock scales we all learn — the E minor blues scale (see **FIGURES 1** and **2**). The first time you hear this riff is in the intro, where I play it an octave higher than I do during the rest of the track. Hearing it an octave higher is like an appetizer — it introduces you to the riff and makes you hungry for more. It also makes the full-blown version sound really heavy when it kicks in. I guess you could say the intro is the "body blow" and the main riff is the "knockout punch."

My buddy Jerry Cantrell from Alice In Chains does the same sort of thing on "Would?" [*from* Dirt]. He starts off by playing the verse riff in a higher register then slams you in the teeth when the vocals hit by playing it an octave lower. To give the main "Cowboys" riff even more power, I play open-string root-5th power chords on the E and A notes (**FIGURES 3** and **4**) instead of just playing single notes, as I do in the intro. I also add some low-end "chunk" to the riff by applying some heavy-duty palm muting (P.M.). I use the idea of repeating a riff in different octaves during the bridge of "Cowboys," too. This definitely makes that part sound cooler than if I had just played that [*descending*] run in the same register twice."

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Dime also often used this compositional technique of repeating a musical motif an octave higher or lower when playing lead, like at the start of his epic solo in the aforementioned "Cowboys from Hell" and also the one in "Psycho Holiday" (Cowboys from Hell)*, to name but two. Check them out. It's an idea well worth embracing!]*

TEXAS-STYLE HALF-STEP BENDS

Using string bends instead of just playing regular, unbent notes can definitely help give certain riffs a cooler, heavier vibe. Take the opening riff to "Walk," for example. I guess you could play the notes "straight" without the "greasy" string bend-and-release (**FIGURE 5** illustrates said "straight" approach), but the "real way" sounds way

FOR AUDIO OF THIS LESSON, GO TO GUITARWORLD.COM/FEBRUARY2025

better to me, man! It's much heavier and nastier, and that's what we're looking for, bud — weak riffs are out!

I do the same kinda thing on the opening riff to "Revolution Is My Name" (*Reinventing the Steel*). Here's the twist I put on it... I call it "Texas style!" What I do is scoot back a fret from the notes I heard in my head and then bend up to each one from a half step below while also adding a pick squeal (**FIGURES 6a** and **6b**). When I was jerking around with the original riff idea, I figured it would sound way more interesting if I did a slow, deliberate half-step bend up to each one, because as soon as each bend starts, your ear wants to hear the note come up to pitch.

Some people do this sorta thing a lot when they're playing lead, but most of 'em don't bother to do it at all when they're riffing out on the low strings. For some reason, a lot of guitarists who can play killer leads get real sterile on their rhythm stuff; they don't bend notes, and they're all too careful about playing their chords dead straight. Then, when they cut to lead, they start bending notes and adding vibrato all over the place.

LEAD RHYTHM & BENDING CHORDS

The way I've always looked at my rhythm playing is almost like I'm playing lead on the big strings anyway. Because of this I use vibrato and bends on the big strings as well as one the little ones... and not just on single-note stuff, either. Sometimes throwing down a bend or some vibrato on a power chord is cool, too! For example, let's take a fairly mediocre riff like **FIGURE 7a**. To make it more evil and interesting sounding, try this: instead of using a regular G5 power chord, bend an F♯5 shape up to G5, like in **FIGURE 7b**. Bending two different notes up exactly half-a-step at exactly the same time is kinda difficult at first, but stick with it 'cause it sounds great when you get it down. You can hear me doing this at the end of "Hollow" (*Vulgar Display of Power*).

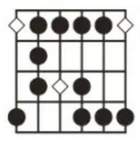
DON'T SKITZ — HANG TOUGH!

The breakdown riff at 2:05 in "We'll Grind that Axe for a Long Time" (*Reinventing the Steel*) has got some [*root/5th power*] chord bends happening, too, and they're actually whole-step bends. To do each bend, I pull the low E string (which is tuned down to D) with my index finger and the A string (tuned to G) with my pinkie, with some help from my ring finger (**FIGURE 8a**). The bend raises the pitch of the chord the same as if you were to slide it two frets up the neck (**FIGURE 8b**), but it's smoother sounding. That's why I chose to go with the bend instead of the slide. Half the trick of this move is trying to keep the chord decently in tune while you're bending it. If your 1st finger bends more than your pinkie, then the chord is gonna go sour. Don't get me wrong — it's cool to get a little out of whack, but at the same time you're trying to hold the chord in tune as much as possible while the bend is going on. It's a total ear/feel thing — your ear is wanting to hear something and is telling you where to go while your fingers are feeling and controlling the bend.

Don't spaz if you can't nail these chord bends right away. Just keep hanging with it and it'll come. Because you're bending the big strings here, you might have to do it a few times to build up some strength in ➜

FIG. 1

E minor blues scale, 12th position



◇ = root note

FIG. 2

E minor blues scale, open position

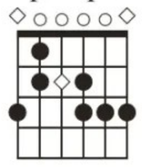


FIG. 3

open E5 power chord

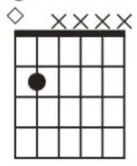
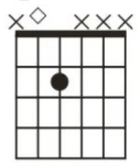


FIG. 4

open A5 power chord



FIGS. 5-13: Guitar is tuned down one whole step (low to high, D G C F A D).

FIG. 5

Walking a "straight" line

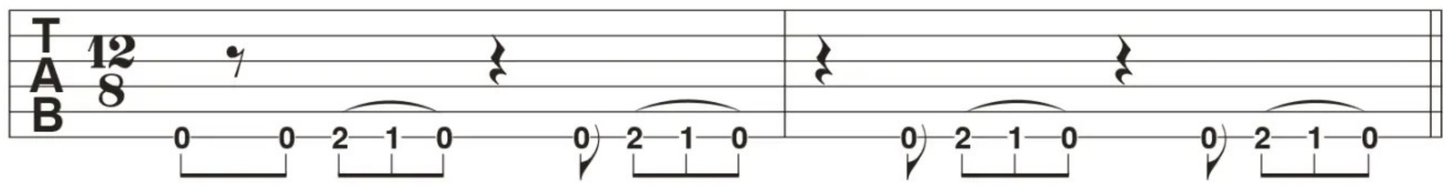
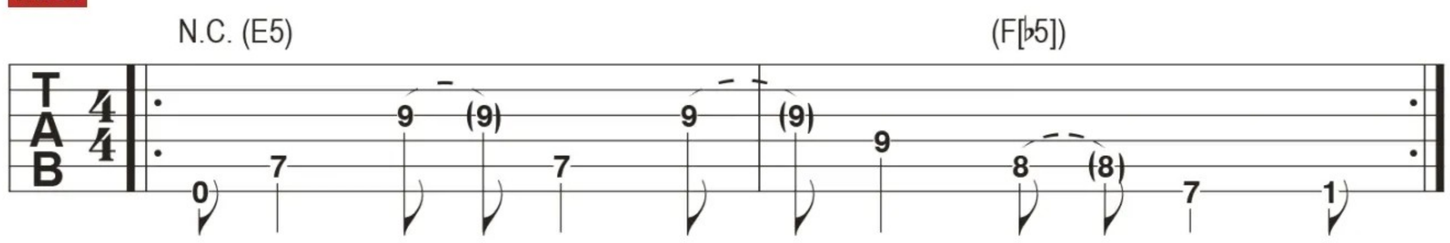


FIG. 6a



Same riff, played "Texas style"

FIG. 6b

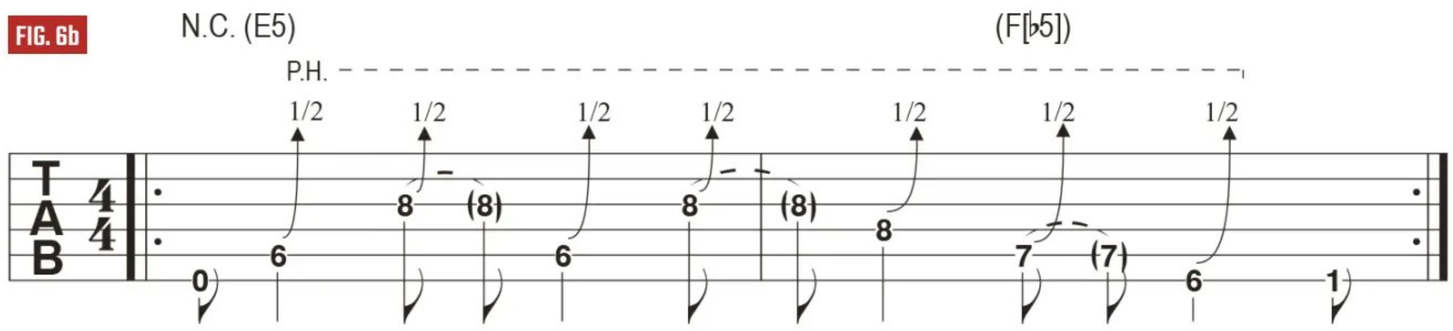


FIG. 7a

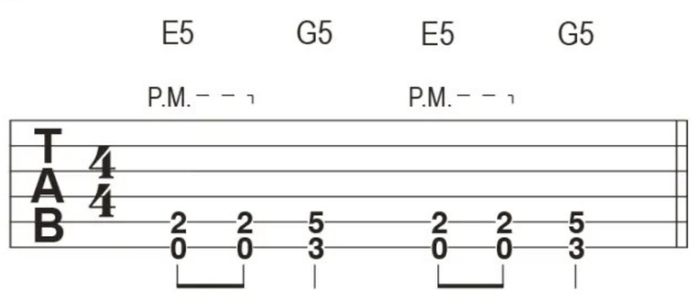


FIG. 7b

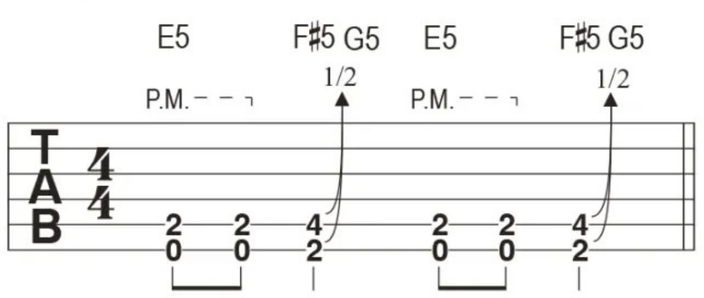


FIG. 8a

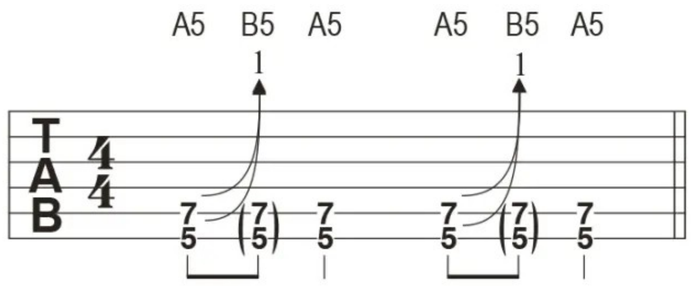
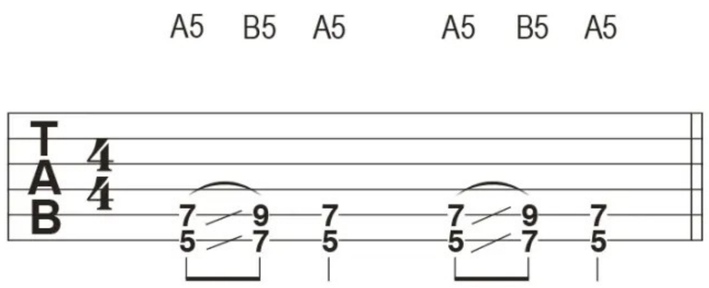


FIG. 8b





Vinnie Paul [*left*] and Dimebag, circa 1997

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

your fingers, if you're not used to doing it. There's a lot more mass down there, compared to the thinner strings! Also, you obviously have to bend the low strings by pulling them into your palm rather than pushing them upwards, like you normally do with the little strings, so that might take some getting used to, as well. The fact that my guitar is always tuned down a hair lower than a quarter step below concert pitch, plus down an additional whole step in this case, helps with the looseness of the strings. But it's still a pretty big bend. It doesn't have to be perfect, though. So just catch a vibe and roll with it.

UNIQUE TUNING OFFSET

Editor's Note: Per Darrell's renowned, long-time guitar tech, Grady "Dragon" Champion, here's the scoop on Dime's unusual guitar tuning offset: Whether it's down a half step (E♭ standard), drop-D, drop-C♯ or some other variant, it was always an additional 60 cents flat of concert pitch (slightly lower than a quarter tone, which is 50 cents). Says Grady: "To us, E is really D♯ plus 40 cents. Likewise, A is really G♯ plus 40 cents, D is really C♯ plus 40 cents, and so on." Now you know why it's so hard to tune to a lot of Pantera songs.

SINISTER SLIDES

Sliding from one power chord to another can also help make a riff sound more sinister. I got the idea from listening to Tony Iommi in Black Sabbath, and I do it a lot. For example, check out "Mouth for War" (*Vulgar Display of Power*). So, if I wanted to make a riff like **FIGURE 9a** sound nastier, I'd probably throw in a chord-slide and maybe a chord-bend too (**FIGURE 9b**). Which one sounds better? C'mon, there's no contest! **FIGURE 9b** kicks **FIGURE 9a**'s sorry ass! Like I've said before, sometimes even the simplest shit can be really bad-assed... as long as it's played aggressively. It's all about attitude, man — meaning playing it like you mean it!

LONG, SINGLE-NOTE SLIDES

There are two things you have to remember when doing really long slides that don't have a set starting place, like this one, "from nowhere in particular" to the 10th fret on the 6th string (**FIGURE 10**), which is along the lines of what I do in the verse riff of "Goddamn Electric" (*Reinventing the Steel*). First, you've gotta let off the strings a tad with your fret hand and just let them slide under your fingers. If you press too hard on the strings when you're doing a long slide up or down the neck, it probably won't come out right.

IT'S ABOUT THE DESTINATION, NOT THE JOURNEY!

The other thing to remember when you're sliding a long way is this: it's the destination that's important, man. It doesn't really matter how you get there or where you start the slide. The trick is knowing where to stop and making sure that you don't get there too early or too late. So, keep your fret hand loose, use your ears and eyes and, with a bit of practice, you'll be nailing long assed-slides like the ones in the "Goddamn Electric" verse every time.

RULES? THERE ARE NO RULES!

My musical knowledge is pretty limited, scale-wise. I know the major scale, the minor scale, the pentatonic blues scale and the chromatic scale, but that's about it, man! If I can learn a new scale somewhere I'm definitely open to it. I'm not down on scales, it's just that I'm more into riffing and jamming as opposed to book-school theory reading. "Be raw" — that's what I always say. I'm always experimenting with new note ideas because in my style there are no rules. Always remember this, and never be afraid to cut loose. Hell, if you find yourself hanging on a bad note, you can always tighten it up by bending, sliding it, or dumping or yanking your whammy bar... don't skitz on this though, just keep an open mind and experiment. Whatever the song calls for and whatever you're hearing is fair game.

CHROMATIC MAN

In case you don't know what chromatic means, let me explain: it means every goddamned note! So, to play chromatically, all you do is move up or down a string one fret at a time. Simple shit, but it can sound really cool. I use chromatic movement a lot in my riffs because it adds a pushing/pulling kinda tension. It almost reminds me of running up and down a flight of stairs, one step at a time — 12 steps to the top, and 12 steps to the bottom. A chromatic passage can add mood and aggression to a part. If you've never dicked around with this idea, then check this out. Say you have a simple riff like **FIGURE 11**. Instead of just going from E to G and then back to E, try moving between them chromatically, like in **FIGURE 12**. You can do this between any chords or notes. It just depends on what you wanna create. This is a simple idea, but it kicks ass. Scope it out and then take it further. Good examples of riffs based on chromatic thinking are the main one in "A New Level" (*Vulgar Display of Power*), the pre-chorus of "Cowboys...", the first bridge riff of "This Love" and pretty much all of the riffs in "We'll Grind That Axe for a Long Time." That last cut is big-time chromatic.

Hopefully this will inspire you to jam out some cool chromatic-based riffs of your own. Keep shredding ass and hang raw!

FOR AUDIO OF THIS LESSON, GO TO GUITARWORLD.COM/FEBRUARY2025

PALM MUTING TIPS

Palm-muting a note or power chord by resting the heel of your picking hand on the strings as they go over the bridge is a pretty basic and essential metal guitar playing technique that, if done correctly, can add a shitload of ballsy chunk to a riff. But there are a couple of things you have to watch out for when doing this:

For me, the best place to palm-mute the strings is right where they go over the bridge or just a hair in front of that. If you go too far forward though, you'll choke the string so much it'll just be dead sounding and will make a racket rather than a note. Also, you don't want to go too far back the other way either, otherwise you'll end up muting jack shit. So, dick around until you find the sweet spot that hums — you'll definitely know when you find it.

Don't be too heavy handed when palm-muting, especially if you're using light strings and you've got your action set low. Some nights when we're playing live, I'll be really fired up and will be playing so super-hard that I won't even be aware that I'm just crunching down on my muting so hard that it doesn't even sound like I'm playing notes anymore. This happens because I'm pushing the strings down so far that they start kinda hitting the frets and making a weird, clanking noise. Whenever this happens, I'll walk back to my rig and my tech Grady [*Champion*] will go, "Ease up, son; you're killing it!"

Seeing as guitar playing is either muscle or finesse, if you're gonna strangle it then use heavy-assed strings with an action that's set high enough, so you have more room to lean into the strings. If you choose to go this route, you'll be able to pretty much mute as hard as you want. Keep in mind though, that setting your guitar up this way will also make it much more difficult to play.

If your ax has a whammy system, like a Floyd Rose, and it is set up to be "floating," so that you can pull notes up as well as push them down, that's another trick you've got to master. With a floating bridge, you have to be real careful when palm muting because, if you rest your hand too far back on the bridge, then you're gonna push the back of it down and make your strings go sharp. Of course, this isn't a problem if your guitar has a fixed bridge or a non-floating tremolo setup.

CHOKING UP ON YOUR PICK

Another thing to watch out for when you're chunking on a fast riff is not to stick your pick too far into the strings. Think about it. You can't really haul ass if you're pulling a big piece of the pick across the strings, can you? Also, doing this can make the string start flapping too much and, if you're not careful, that starts messing up the pitch of the note. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that you pitter around and play wimpy. I'm just saying that it's a good idea to "choke up" a little bit on your pick, clasping it a little bit closer to its pointy tip, so that too much if it isn't sticking out past your fingers.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF PICKING

To make sure I get maximum chunk happening on the palm muted low-string sections of a riff, like the pre-verse riff of "Revolution Is My Name" (*Reinventing the Steel*), I play 'em using downstrokes only. Actually, that first bar, which is eighth-note triplets played at around 140 beats per minute, as in **FIGURE 13**, is pretty close to my breaking point. If it were any faster, I'd probably switch to alternate (down-up) picking. I'd imagine that's true for most people... unless, of course, you're James Hetfield! That dude is the king of down picking, no question about it. As I've said a lot of times in interviews, I don't necessarily try to play everything using just down picking as a rule anyway, because I do a lot of up picking in songs like "Cowboys..." and whatnot. Although downstrokes are more consistent, mechanical and machine-gun like. But sometimes I feel I can get more chunk and grind by using upstrokes too, so I'll alternate pick. Upstrokes definitely have a different attack than downstrokes, and this can suit certain riffs better.

One of the cool things about upstrokes is, when you're doing them on your low E string, you can dig in deep with your pick and hit the string real hard without having to worry about hitting another string. Also, the way I do upstrokes is almost like I'm doing a pick scrape. As opposed to just picking straight across the string, I kinda →

FIG. 9a

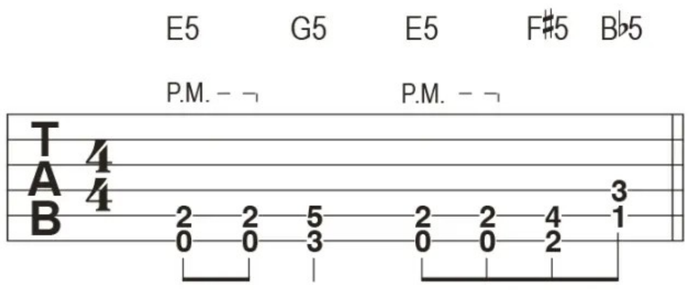


FIG. 9b

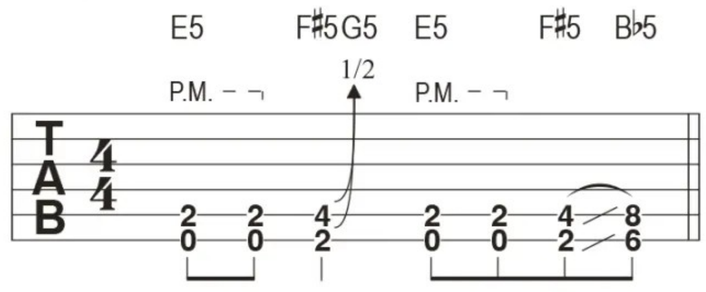


FIG. 10

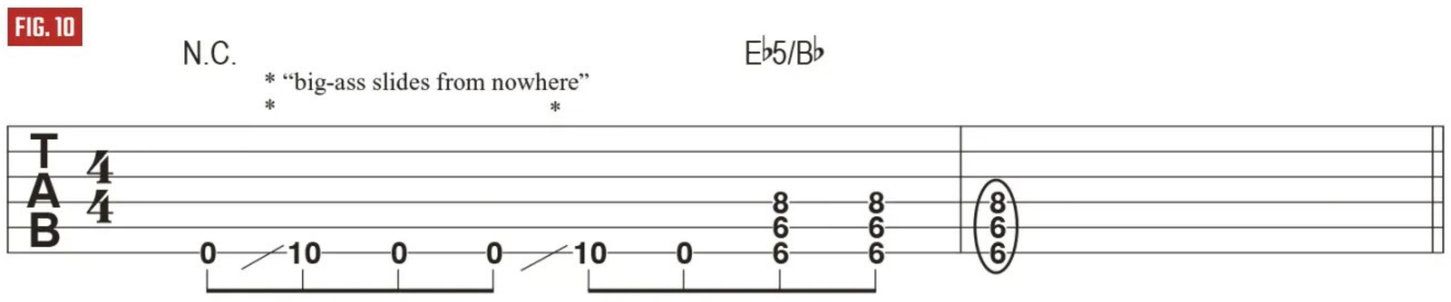


FIG. 11

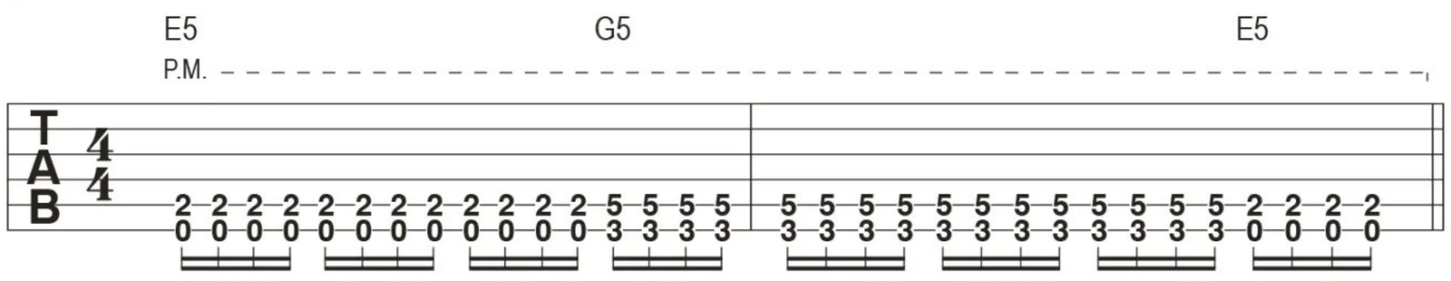


FIG. 12

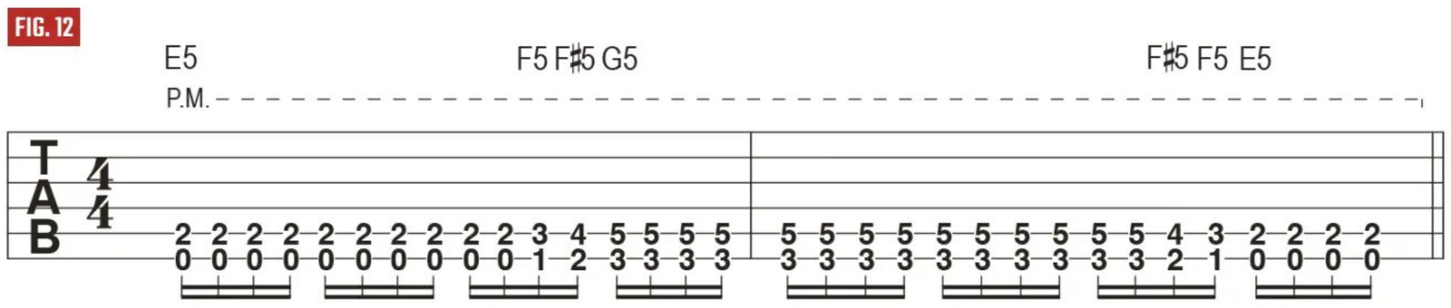


FIG. 13

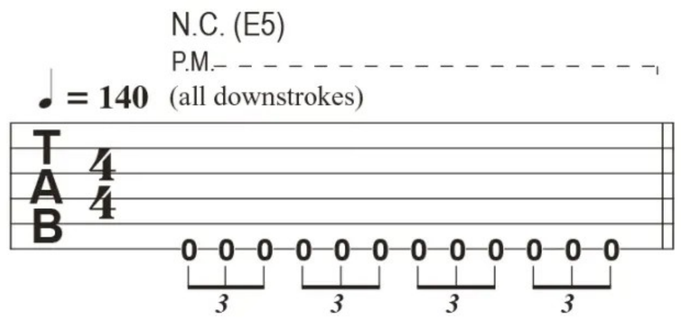


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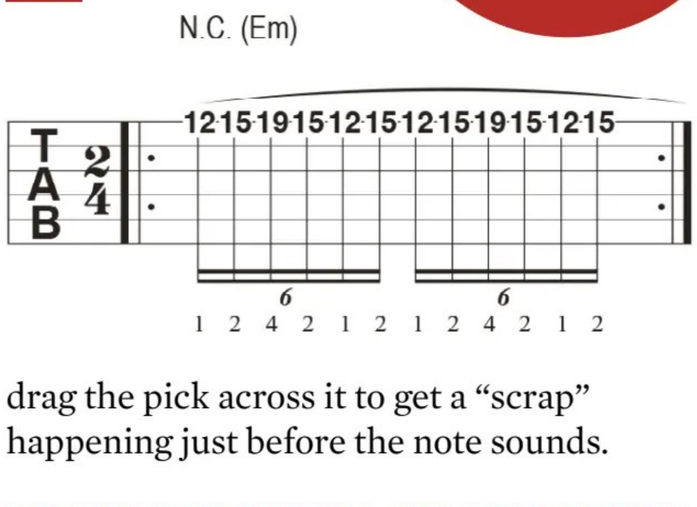
FIG. 14



drag the pick across it to get a "scrap" happening just before the note sounds.

PICK SCRATCHING, NOT SCRAPING

When I play live, I jump around like an idiot for 90 minutes under a lighting rig that's hotter than hell. This makes me sweat like a pig and makes it really hard to keep a firm grip on my picks, even those that are supposed to be non-slip. Losing control of your pick on stage sucks, so either I or Grady scratch some deep Xs into both sides of my pick (see **PHOTO A**) with something sharp like a dart. Doing this makes your picks look like shit, but at least you won't look like a nincompoop when you drop one in the middle of a solo!

LEARNING FROM OTHERS BY LISTENING

Some folks tend to get really intimidated when they come across someone who really rips on guitar. But not me, pops. I get inspired! As far as I'm concerned, playing is not a competition. Hearing someone smoke always lights my fire and makes me try out new ideas and learn new shit. I don't sit down with a pile of records and try to cop licks, though. What I'm into is checking out the player's overall vibe and approach and learning from that. Use your ears and learn all you can from anything. Listen!

PINKIE POWER & EVH

When I first started playing guitar, one of my biggest influences was Eddie Van Halen. I kept seeing pictures of him doing big-assed left-hand stretches, and that inspired me to start dicking around with some wide-stretch ideas of my own, like the two E minor licks in **FIGURES 14** and **15**. Another thing I learned from studying those pictures was the importance of my little finger. It's there, so use it! It definitely gives you more reach!

AWKWARDLY COOL SYMMETRICAL RUNS

As I got to know my guitar neck better, I realized that there was an E note at the 19th fret on the A string — HOW 'BOUT THAT! Then, when I was jamming around one day, I thought to myself: "Hey I know some wide-stretch E minor licks (like the one in **FIGURE 15**) that also use the 19th fret,

FIG. 15

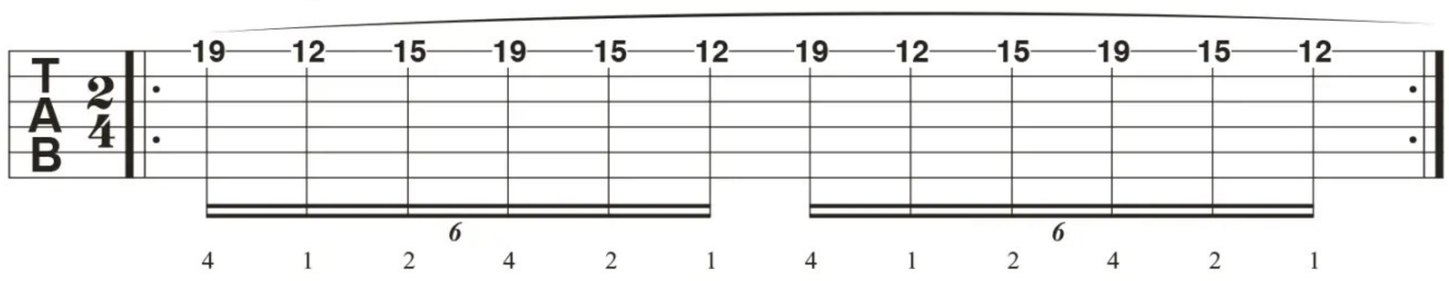


FIG. 16

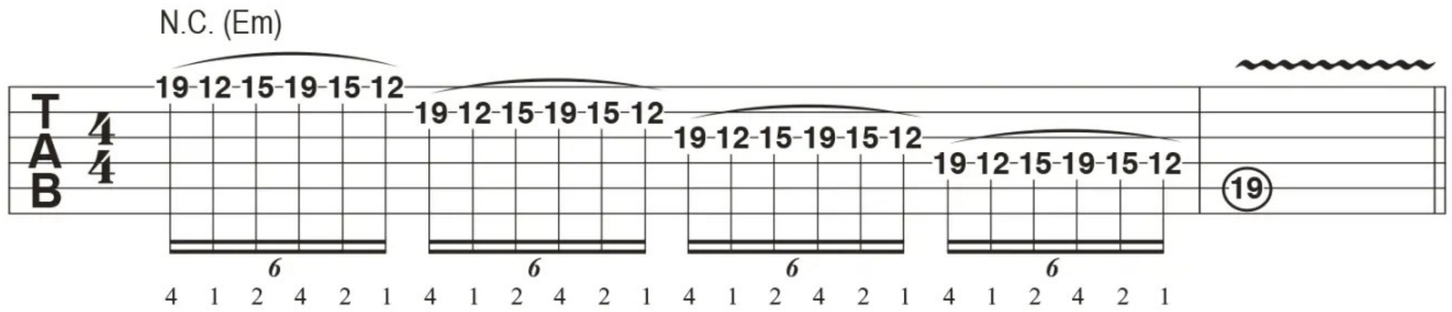
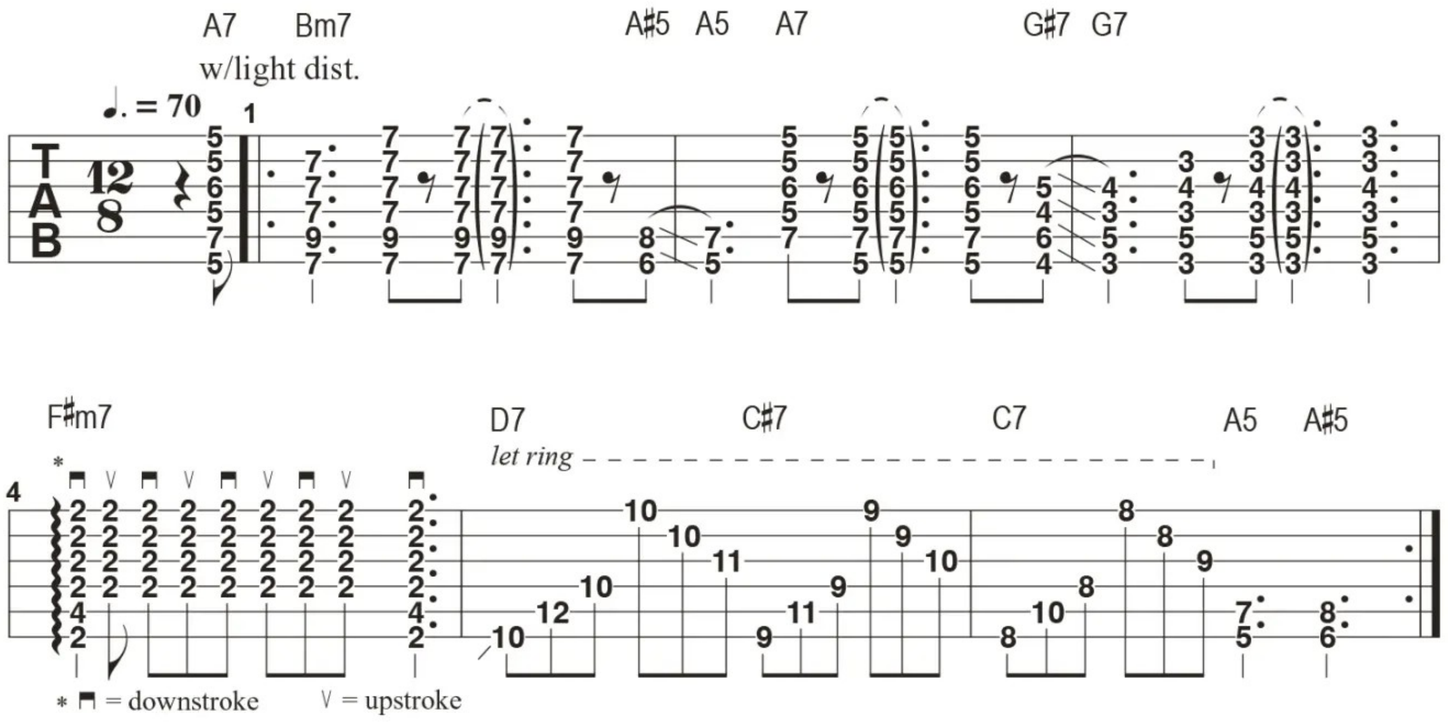


FIG. 17



why don't I try moving that fingering pattern idea across each string, from high to low, until I finish up on the E note at the 19th fret of the A string (**FIGURE 16**)?"

Since the fingering pattern in **FIGURE 16** is exactly the same on each string, a lot of guys call this kind of thing a symmetrical run. It's simple, but cool. To be honest,

PHOTO A



MATTHEW OWEN (PICKS) FUTURE (FACING PAGE)

I have no idea what the hell scales this run uses because I'm not a cat that's heavy on theory. All I know is it sounds awkwardly cool in the key of E minor, and that's all that matters. Listen closely and let your ears decide what notes are right or wrong! Anyway, because this idea worked, that's how I got into futzing around with symmetrical runs in a major way.

RUT BUSTING

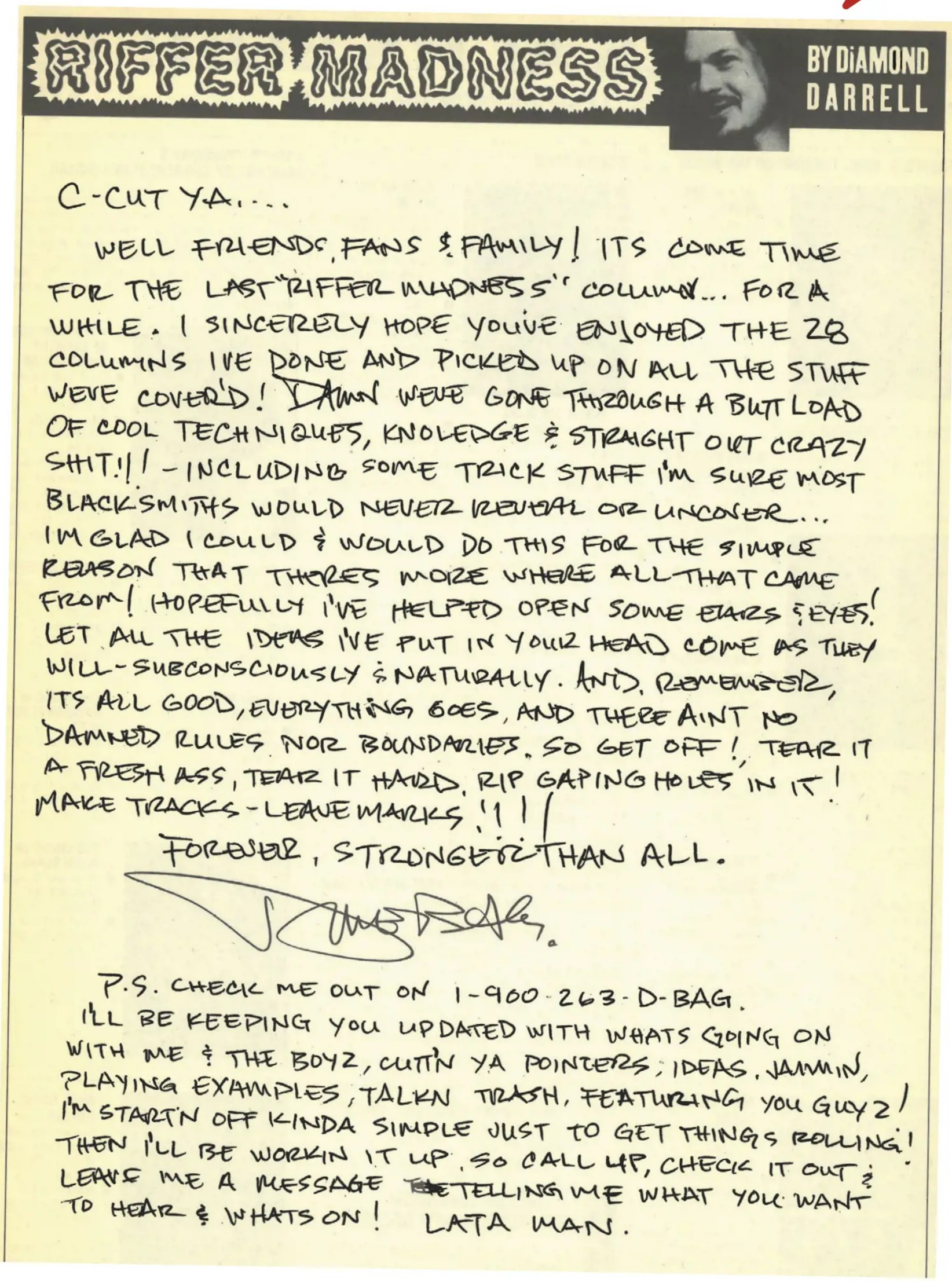
Whenever you feel like you're stuck in a playing rut, always try and remember two things: One, you ain't the only player that gets hit with this shit; we all go through it from time to time. And two, you're not always gonna be stuck there, so don't freak out! The only way that'll happen is if you let it. So don't get bummed out and go, "Fuck it, I quit!" That's a dumb-assed, loser attitude. Instead, get to work, man. If you want to get out of a rut bad enough, you will. But it's up to you. No one else is ever gonna do it for you.

FATHERLY ADVICE

One day, when I was learning to play guitar, I was stomping around the house all pissed off because my playing was in a bit of a rut. My dad, who's a great guitarist, said something that I've always remembered. He asked me, "can you learn a new lick today?" I said, "of course I can." Then he said, "well son, if you decided to learn just one new lick a day, how many would you have at the end of the year?" Think about it, man! The possibilities are staggering. Shit! If I knew a lick for every beer or Black Tooth I've had, I can't even imagine how much extra knowledge I'd have!

THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHERS

To me, a sure-fire way to get into a rut is to sit around and play by yourself all the time. You've gotta get out there and jam! You don't have to necessarily be in a band. All you need is a couple of buddies who play. And they don't have to be guitarists either, jamming with a bassist or a drummer is cool. Jamming with other people creates energy and excitement. You can feed off that, and it will help push you to do things you'd never dream of by yourself.


RIFFER MADNESS

BY DIAMOND DARRELL

C-CUT YA....

WELL FRIENDS, FANS & FAMILY! ITS COME TIME FOR THE LAST "RIFFER MADNESS" COLUMN... FOR A WHILE. I SINCERELY HOPE YOU'VE ENJOYED THE 28 COLUMNS I'VE DONE AND PICKED UP ON ALL THE STUFF WE'VE COVER'D! DAMN WE'VE GONE THROUGH A BUTT LOAD OF COOL TECHNIQUES, KNOLEDGE & STRAIGHT OUT CRAZY SHIT!!! - INCLUDING SOME TRICK STUFF I'M SURE MOST BLACKSMITHS WOULD NEVER REVEAL OR UNCOVER... I'M GLAD I COULD & WOULD DO THIS FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT THERE'S MORE WHERE ALL THAT CAME FROM! HOPEFULLY I'VE HELPED OPEN SOME EARS & EYES! LET ALL THE IDEAS I'VE PUT IN YOUR HEAD COME AS THEY WILL - SUBCONSCIOUSLY & NATURALLY. AND, REMEMBER, IT'S ALL GOOD, EVERYTHING GOES, AND THERE AIN'T NO DAMNED RULES NOR BOUNDARIES. SO GET OFF!, TEAR IT A FRESH ASS, TEAR IT HARD, RIP GAPING HOLES IN IT! MAKE TRACKS - LEAVE MARKS!!!

FOREVER, STRONGER THAN ALL.

P.S. CHECK ME OUT ON 1-900-263-D-BAG. I'LL BE KEEPING YOU UPDATED WITH WHATS GOING ON WITH ME & THE BOYZ, CUTTIN' YA POINTERS, IDEAS, JAMMIN, PLAYING EXAMPLES, TALKN TRASH, FEATURING YOU GUYZ! I'M STARTIN OFF KINDA SIMPLE JUST TO GET THINGS ROLLING! THEN I'LL BE WORKIN IT UP. SO CALL UP, CHECK IT OUT & LEAVE ME A MESSAGE ~~THE~~ TELLING ME WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR & WHATS ON! LATA MAN.

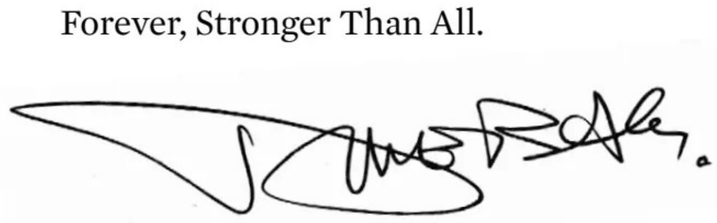
BE YOURSELF, BY YOURSELF

If you have no buds to jam with, you can always record a rhythm part yourself and then wail a lead over it. I used to do that all the time. Don't always jam over the same sort of stuff though, or you could fall into a rut. Whenever I'd get tired of soloing over heavy riffs in E, I'd come up with something in a completely different key that had a completely different feel to it. Sometimes a change of mood and key can help you find fresh lead ideas. This laid-back, bluesy B minor riff in **FIGURE 17** is a good example of what I'm talking about here.

SIGNING OFF

Hopefully I've helped open some ears and eyes! Let all the ideas I've put in your heads come as they will — subconsciously and naturally. And remember. It's all good; everything goes; and there ain't no damned rules nor boundaries. So, get off! Tear it a fresh ass. Tear it hard. Rip gaping holes in it. Make tracks — leave marks!!!

Forever, Stronger Than All.



TWICE-TOLD TELES

How a humble **1959 Fender Telecaster** became an everlasting icon in the hands of legends **Jeff Beck** and **Jimmy Page**

BY CHRIS GILL

ICONIC GUITARS AREN'T necessarily dime-a-dozen (as proven by the results of Christie's recent Jim Irsay Auction where several instruments sold for astonishing prices that beat previous records), but they are relatively plentiful as almost every player of note is associated with a particular famous guitar, or several. However, instances where two or more legendary guitarists are associated with one single guitar are much rarer, with the 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard that once belonged to Peter Green and Gary Moore (and is currently owned by Kirk Hammett) and the red "Lucy" Les Paul that passed from John Sebastian to Rick Derringer to Eric Clapton to George Harrison being notable examples.

A certain 1959 Fender Telecaster also enjoys legendary "two-timer" status for the roles it played in the early careers of Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page — two titans of the highly influential Sixties British blues-rock triumvirate, which also included fellow Yardbirds alumnus Eric Clapton. This was the guitar that Beck played as he rose through the ranks of London's burgeoning blues-rock/R&B club scene during the early Sixties through his beginnings with the Yardbirds and that later became Page's main instrument on Led Zeppelin's 1969 debut album and was featured on select later recordings, including the solo for "Stairway to Heaven."

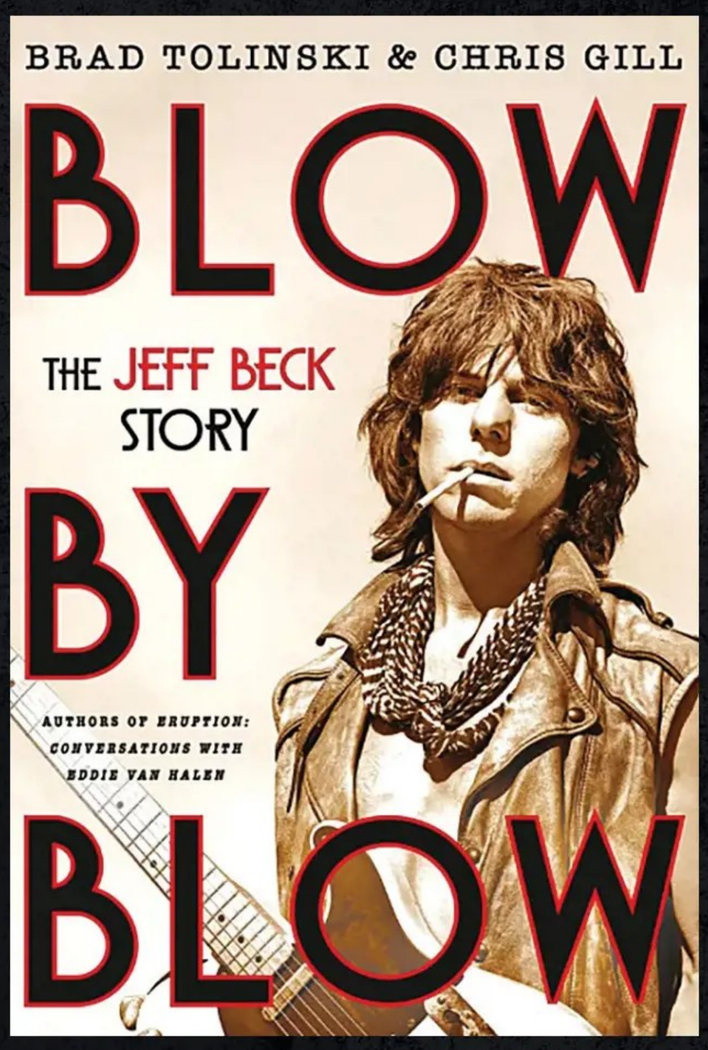
How or when this particular 1959 Telecaster ended up in England is unknown, but its earliest known history can be traced to sometime in late 1960 or early 1961 when John Owen purchased it as a used instrument for £107. This was a late-1959 example, featuring a slab rosewood neck, white eight-screw pickguard, light blonde finish that looked almost white and an ashtray bridge with six holes for top-loading the strings (a short-lived, poorly conceived feature), although the late-'59 model also had holes for anchoring strings through the body.

Owen was a good friend of Jeff Beck during their teenage years, and when Beck got an offer to join a band called the Deltones he accepted only under the condition that they also hire Owen on rhythm guitar. It was a bold move, but Beck's loyalty ran deep. Owen had been one of his biggest supporters, often lifting his spirits during moments of self-doubt. And then there was a more self-serving reason: Beck coveted Owen's '59 Tele.

During his tenure with the Deltones, Beck experimented with several different instruments, including a Hofner Futurama III and a 1960 sunburst Fender Stratocaster, the latter purchased in 1961 with his mother's reluctant help as a guarantor. Although both were solid, professional-quality instruments, he gravitated toward Owen's Tele, borrowing it so frequently that it became less of a loan and more of a permanent arrangement. Eventually, Beck convinced Owen to part with it for good, most likely shortly after Beck traded his Strat for a 1953 Ford Zephyr in late 1962 or early '63.

The '59 Telecaster remained Beck's trusty companion as he joined various bands during the early Sixties, including the Nightshift and the Tridents. "When I first heard Beck, I just thought, 'What the fuck was that?'" Tridents lead guitarist Mike Jopp, who Beck replaced, later recalled. "There was this guy with a Telecaster and a Binson Echorec, and the notes were flying everywhere. Nobody at that point was doing anything like it. He was incredibly flashy, pressing the strings behind the nut, detuning them, making sounds that were just otherworldly. He was on a whole different level."

At some point, Beck swapped the Tele's original white single-layer pickguard for a black pickguard. Beck idolized the early Fifties black-guard Esquires he first saw as an





Jeff Beck [*second from left*] with his '59 Telecaster (and the rest of the Yardbirds) in action on *Ready Steady Go!*, March 19, 1965

DA CAPO, JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS

impressionable 13-year-old in the hands of the guitarists in Little Richard and Gene Vincent's bands in the film *The Girl Can't Help It*. This simple cosmetic modification brought the Tele closer to those guitars of his dreams.

The Telecaster remained in this state when Beck replaced Clapton as the lead guitarist for the Yardbirds in March 1965. The guitar appeared in Beck's highly capable hands in his early television appearances with the Yardbirds on shows like *Ready Steady Go!* and *Top of the Pops*. It also appeared in a promotional film shot on June 16, 1965, for American television where the band campily mimicked a performance of "For Your Love" while dressed in Renaissance Faire regalia. Beck played the Tele on his earliest recordings with the Yardbirds, including the seminal raga-rock hit "Heart Full of Soul."

When the Yardbirds returned from Paris, where they opened shows for the Beatles on June 20, 1965, the Telecaster temporarily went missing. While on a previous tour with the Walker Brothers, Beck noticed a 1954 Fender Esquire that belonged to Walker Brothers guitarist John Maus. The Esquire had a blond maple neck — a feature rarely seen on Fender guitars imported to Britain as most Fenders that made their way to U.K. shores were later models with rosewood fingerboards. Needing a quick replacement for the lost Tele, Beck made a beeline to Maus and bought the Esquire for £75. When Beck later replaced the white pickguard for a black one, he finally had an Esquire that cosmetically matched the ones he lusted after in *The Girl Can't Help It*.

"Jeff Beck gave me his '59 Tele as thanks for getting him in the Yardbirds"
JIMMY PAGE

When the '59 Telecaster was eventually recovered, Beck lost interest in it in favor of his new ax. That interest waned even further when Beck bought a 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard in early 1966 and the Les Paul became his main guitar. When the Yardbirds' newly hired manager, Simon Napier-Bell, distributed funds from a large advance he negotiated for the band from EMI Records, Jeff bought a 1963 Corvette Stingray. The next day he drove it to his good friend Jimmy Page's house along with the '59 Telecaster.

"I was still living with my parents at the time in Epsom," Page said. "And I heard this car come roaring up. I looked out the window and I saw this blue Stingray outside... and Jeff's coming out and he's holding this guitar. [*I thought*] 'Oh, he's come to have a play.'



Jimmy Page onstage with the Yardbirds in January 1967. The '59 Tele is in its "mirror" phase

"He knocked on the door and explained that [*the Yardbirds*] had just done a new deal and he bought the Stingray with it. Then he said, 'Here, this is yours' and gave me his 1959 Telecaster. He said, 'This is yours for getting me in the Yardbirds.' Well, obviously, I was really moved, you know, because there was a lot of love in that gesture of giving it to me."

When Beck gave Page the Tele, Jeff had restored it to its original cosmetic appearance by replacing the black pickguard with either its original white pickguard or one he made himself. Later, when Page joined Beck in the Yardbirds — first on bass and soon as a second lead guitarist — he played the Tele with the band. Page perfected his signature use of the violin bow on this guitar while performing alongside Beck.

The '59 Tele got the first of two significant cosmetic modifications Page performed to the guitar shortly after Beck left the Yardbirds in late 1966. First, Page acquired eight small circular mirrors and glued them to the guitar's top on the upper bout and below the bridge as well as to the pickguard.

"After Jeff left, I started to think much more about my visual image with the band," Page wrote in *Jimmy Page: The Anthology* (Genesis Publications, 2020). "I wanted there to be more to the Telecaster than just the sound it made. I thought that maybe I could do something with light, maybe reflecting light from the guitar onto the audience to make a kind of kinetic sculpture. It started to become an art piece in its own right."

Eventually, Page decided to make a second, even more dramatic modification to the Tele's appearance by stripping off its finish, installing a custom reflective pickguard that displayed changing colors under bright spotlights and painting a multi-colored dragon image on the body.

"I painted it in one go over the course of an evening, finishing it the next day," Page recalled in *The Anthology*. "The pattern took on the imagery of a dragon. I was quite happy with the way it ended up. Now it was the 'Dragoncaster.' I played it on the last Yardbirds recordings at the Anderson Theater in New York and on *Led Zeppelin*. Once it was created and painted it became like the legendary Excalibur as it traveled from the Yardbirds to Led Zeppelin."

The "Dragoncaster" became a familiar sight at Led Zeppelin's early shows up until April 1969 when Page bought a Les Paul Standard from Joe Walsh while the band was on tour in the United States. The Les Paul promptly became Page's main guitar,

"I painted it over the course of an evening. Now it was the 'Dragoncaster'"
JIMMY PAGE

BOB KING/REDFERNS, DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES



Page — now part of Led Zeppelin — with the "Dragoncaster" in Copenhagen, March 1969

[*facing page*] The Fender Custom Shop's Limited Edition Jimmy Page Dragon Tele, photographed at the 2019 NAMM Show in Anaheim, California

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS

and he left the '59 Telecaster behind at his home after Led Zeppelin returned to England in June 1969.

Led Zeppelin's North American tour resumed during July and August 1969, and when Page came back home in September he was greeted with an unwelcome surprise from his house sitter. "It's a tragic story," Page told *Guitar World* in 1998. "When I got back, a friend of mine had kindly painted over my paint job. He said, 'I've got a present for you.' He thought he had done me a real favor. As you can guess, I wasn't real happy about that. His paint job totally screwed up the sound and the wiring, so only the neck pickup worked."

In despair, Page stripped off the paint once again. He managed to repair the wiring and used the Tele for one last hurrah in 1970 when he recorded his solo for "Stairway to Heaven." "I salvaged the neck and put it on my brown (string bender) Tele that I used in the Firm," he told *GW* in 1998. "As for the body, it will never be seen again!"

That statement led many guitar fans to believe that the guitar had joined the list of legendary "lost Teles," a rumor that still persists to this day. Fortunately, Page broke his controversial promise in 2019, not only by resurrecting the Tele but also by painstakingly reproducing his original dragon artwork from detailed photos and his own memory.

"It was the Met (the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City) wanting to include this guitar in the Play It Loud exhibition that gave me the motivation to get it repainted," Page wrote in *The Anthology*. "I'd been meaning to do it at some point but had had so many projects to do and now was the time."

Later that year, Fender released signature models based on the "mirrored" and "dragon" versions of this legendary 1959 Telecaster, each offered as both a production model and as a limited-edition Custom Shop release. The Fender Jimmy Page Dragon and Mirror Telecasters were long-overdue tributes to a truly iconic guitar that played a massive role in the historic British blues-rock movement during the Sixties by inspiring the development of hard rock and heavy metal, which made the electric guitar the leading voice of rebellion and free expression ever since. GW



Solid Gold

In 1965, Eric Clapton and Michael Bloomfield unwittingly saved the archetypal **Les Paul Standard** from total extinction. The market was the would-be killer, but the murder weapon was the guitar you see before you. Join us as we chart the rise — and rise — of the **Gibson SG**

By Mick Taylor

YOU COULDN'T MAKE it up. Take a trip to 1960, and sit at a table in Kalamazoo, Michigan. You work for Gibson and you're looking at — or at least talking about — what will turn out to be the Holy Grail of electric guitars, the 1958-1960 sunburst Les Paul Standard. Honduras mahogany, big leaf maple, Brazilian rosewood, PAF pickups — timeless, aching beauty.

But the financial picture for this guitar isn't so pretty. You revived it in 1957 with humbucking pickups, again in '58 with the sunburst finish. Sales peaked in 1959, but you've shipped fewer than 1,800 bursts in total. Your biggest-selling guitars are the lower-priced, slab-bodied Les Paul Junior and Melody Maker. What's more, you're doubling the size of your factory and you need to get it working to capacity. The next decision taken by your boss, Ted McCarty — with some help from Bloomfield and Clapton — ensures firstly that those original bursts will sell for a million dollars one day, and more importantly, it creates yet another legendary Gibson solidbody.

SG Origins

MCCARTY WAS GIBSON'S president between 1950 and 1966 and was ultimately responsible for the most important electric guitar designs in the company's history. The SG's development was part of a wider restructure in the electric guitar line through the late 1950s and early 1960s. With hindsight, the decision to radically morph the Les Paul Standard into what we now know as the SG might look like madness. At the time, and in the context of what was happening in the market, however, it was the obvious move. Gibson's legacy of high-craft, archtop instruments was getting new electric life via the hollowbody ES-175 and revolutionary ES-335 thinline semi of 1958. Meanwhile the trend for more modern-minded, feedback-busting solidbody electrics for younger rock 'n' roll players got a shot in the arm with the Flying V and Explorer of the same year — well ahead of their time and selling poorly as a result. Less radical but just as important, in 1958 came Gibson's first double-cutaway solidbody, the Les Paul Junior, which would prove pivotal in the SG's genesis.

For 1961, then, McCarty took the single-cutaway Les Paul Standard's 60mm thick body and slimmed it considerably, did away with the carved maple top and left a simple slab mahogany body already popularised by the Junior and Melody Maker. The shape was resculpted to a more aggressive, modernist outline, offering twin-cutaways and unrestricted access to the very last of its 22 frets. With the chunk of wood gone between the 16th and 21st/22nd frets on the bass side, the neck would also prove more unstable; "flappy" or "whippy" and very easy to bend in and out of tune, perhaps the SG's most notable idiosyncrasy, loved and loathed equally. Indeed, the neck itself was slimmer than the 1960 Les Paul model.

Retained from the previous models was most of the hardware and electronics complement — the first models shipped with the distinctly odd, sideways action "Gibson Deluxe Vibrato" — and the overall effect on tone was a brighter, harder-edged sound with less apparent low end response.

"A guy could kill himself on those sharp horns. It was too thin, and they had moved the front pickup away from the fingerboard so they could fit my name there. The neck was too skinny... So I called Gibson and asked them to take my name off the thing. It wasn't my design"

LES PAUL, FROM *AMERICAN GUITARS: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY*

It was certainly different — evidence, assuming more were needed, that McCarty was moving forward fearlessly.

Losing Les

LES PAUL, BY all accounts, wasn't enamoured with his new signature guitar. As Tony Bacon explains in his book *50 Years of the Gibson Les Paul*, and indeed Walter Carter in *The Gibson Electric Guitar Book* (both Backbeat Books), the superstar's contract with Gibson was up for renewal in 1962 or 1963, depending on who's telling the story. Waning popularity in the charts, Les's impending divorce with Mary Ford and his general dissatisfaction with the new design meant that by 1963 the contract hadn't been renewed and Les Paul, almost unthinkably in hindsight, was no longer officially associated with the Gibson company. As it turned out, he wouldn't be affiliated with the brand again until 1968 when Gibson reintroduced the original Les Paul shape, having realized that a handful of world-changing players were lusting after those old bursts. The new guitar, meanwhile, became the SG — Solid Guitar — and so it would remain for ever more.

Over the years, the SG has been subject to plenty of revisions, changes and tweaks. Like Fender's celebrated Stratocaster, Telecaster and indeed the very guitar from which it was spawned, it has survived mid-Sixties stylistic tinkering, 1970s corporate meltdown and 1980s metal-driven excesses. What prevails in the hearts of most guitar enthusiasts is that '61-'63 classic spec; the Cherry Standard, Juniors and Specials and the white three-pickup Custom that we'll forever associate with a man named Jimi Hendrix.

Happy Mistake

WHO COULD HAVE guessed that such a potentially colossal mistake — evolving the super-plush single-cut Les Paul Standard into a stripped-down, twin-horn rocker — would net the most desirable electric guitar in history for Gibson, right alongside its rebellious, outlandish sibling? Exciting, visceral and thoroughly modern, players who saw it first couldn't help but be seduced by its sharp lines and unbridled playing potential. In the hands of Angus Young through Tony Iommi to Frank Zappa and beyond, the SG has come to hold a unique place, both tonally and visually, in rock 'n' roll history. Long live the Solid Guitar. May you never grow up!

The First SGs

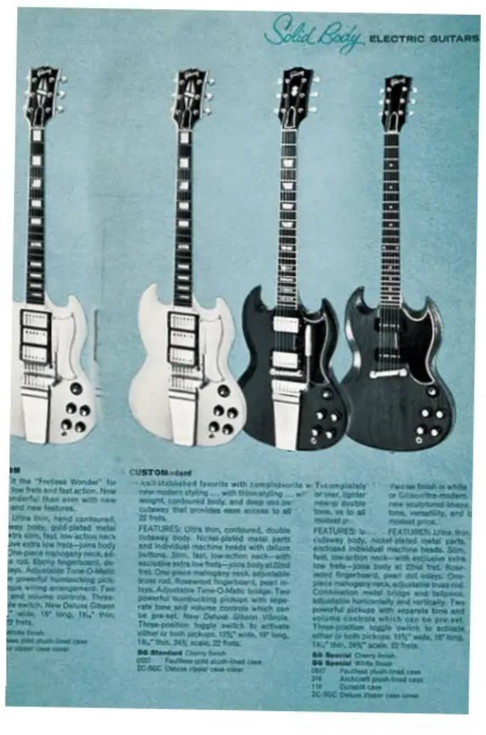
The Standard, Custom and Junior models

WHEN THE SG/LES Paul first appeared in 1961, there were two models. The Standard ($265) had a pair of humbuckers, two controls per pickup, crown inlays in a bound rosewood 'board and sideways-action vibrato. The Custom ($395) was the top of the line, with gold hardware, three humbuckers, a bound ebony fingerboard and a bound headstock.

Later that year, the Junior ($147.50, single-pickup) and Special ($210, dual-pickup) were added, featuring a one-piece wrap-around bridge/tailpiece and P90 pickups. They had unbound rosewood fingerboards with dot inlays.

Gibson tweaked the design over the years, most notably adding the enlarged pickguard on the Custom and Standard in 1966, which held the pickups, rather than them being mounted directly to the body.

— Mick Taylor



"With an SG, I can let out my visceral, animalistic side as a player. Honestly, that's difficult for me to attain with anything else... Seeing those British Invasion guys up there playing an SG made me want to be that guy. I knew it was what I wanted to do."

JAKE KISZKA, SEPTEMBER 2023 *GUITAR WORLD*

Making the (Double) Cut

A handy guide to the 12 (or so) greatest players ever to make a Gibson SG sing

By Mick Taylor with Joel McIver

Angus Young

AC/DC'S LEAD GUITARIST — yes indeed, the gentleman on this issue's cover — favors the Gibson SG for its light weight — useful for high-voltage guitar heroics — and also because his vintage SG Standard (with its Lyre vibrato removed) has an uncommonly thin neck. But regardless of the exact reasons behind it, Young is truly dedicated to the SG.

"The guitar I consistently use has always been the same guitar, the Gibson SG," Young told us in 2020, the last time we had a full-fledged chat. "Everyone always asks me what year [*the guitar*] is. You know, I've heard somebody say, 'It's a 1970s Gibson.' Then other people say, 'It's a bit earlier than that.' I don't know what year it is, but it couldn't have been [*from*] past 1970, because that's when I got it! [*Laughs*] And I've got a few other guitars. One is a black SG — I think there's a photo of it from *Back in Black*. I have another SG that's maybe a '68 or '69 that I used on *Highway to Hell*. But the main, most consistent one is the one I've always had. It's got lightning bolts on the fretboard that, I don't know, it was getting repaired and some guy put them in. I said, 'What the hell is that?' And I didn't have time to go, 'Can you put it back the way it was?'" [*Laughs*]

On stage, Young's sound is the archetypal roar of vintage pickups through Marshall stacks, without a pedal in sight. Angus in full flow remains one of the premier sonic experiences in all the classic rock kingdom, as proven by footage from any of their 2025 shows.

HEAR IT HERE: "Shot in the Dark" (AC/DC, *Power Up*, 2020)



ROSS GILMORE/REDFERNS

George Harrison

IN 1966, AROUND the same time John Lennon and George Harrison were following Paul McCartney's lead and adopting the Epiphone Casino, George also took delivery of a 1964 SG Standard [*pictured in 2004*]. It was his main guitar on *Revolver*, featured on some later recordings and was used sporadically for live work in 1966, before he gave it to Pete Ham of Badfinger circa 1969. Guitar-playing Beatles fans who want to recreate Harrison's circa-'66 mojo should check out one of Gibson's current offerings, the SG Standard '61 Faded Maestro Vibrola Vintage Cherry.

HEAR IT HERE: "Hey Bulldog" (The Beatles, *Yellow Submarine*, 1969)





Derek Trucks

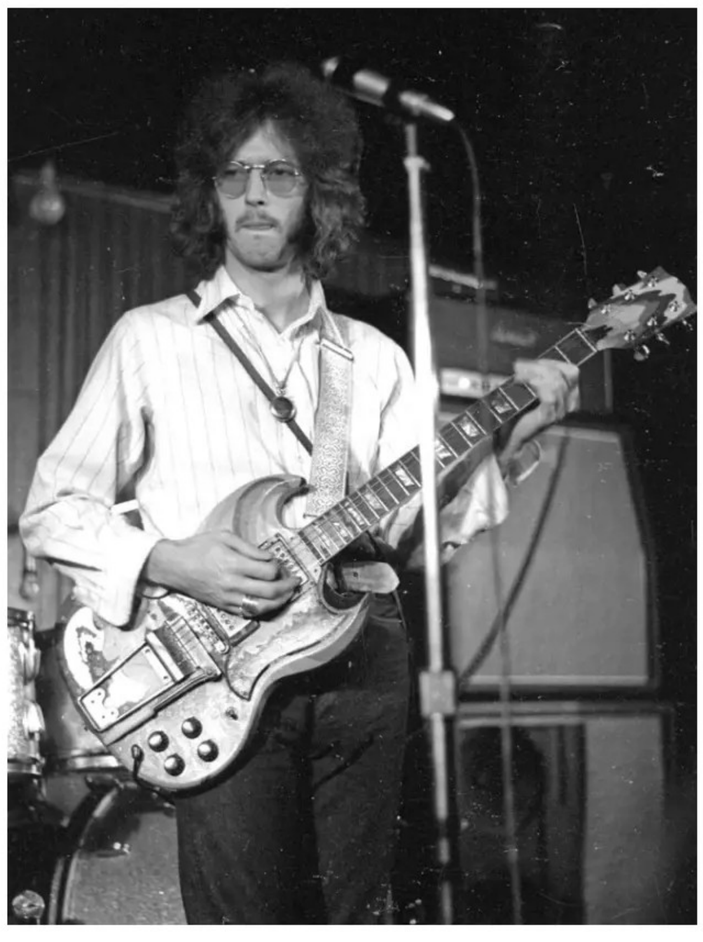
THE SLIDE SUPREMO is synonymous with his 1961 Custom Reissue SG, which was built in 2000. He chose the model because when he was gigging at the tender age of nine, he found a Les Paul to be too heavy. "I also saw a picture of Duane Allman with an SG, and that look has always stuck with me," he told the gang over at Gibson's website.

HEAR IT HERE: "Down Don't Bother Me" (The Derek Trucks Band, *Already Free*, 2009)

Eric Clapton

DURING THE TRIUMPHANT Cream era, between 1967 and the band's demise in late 1968, Clapton brandished and recorded with a 1964 SG Standard that was to become one of the most iconic guitars in history. Inspired by the work they'd done for the Beatles, Clapton commissioned Simon Posthuma and Marijke Koger, known as Dutch artist collective and band the Fool, to "psychedelicize" the SG prior to the band's 1967 U.S. tour. The following year, either Clapton or George Harrison loaned it to Apple Records recording artist Jackie Lomax, who sold it to Todd Rundgren in 1972 for a bargain $500. Rundgren renamed it "Sunny" and eventually auctioned it in 2000 for $150,000.

HEAR IT HERE: "Sunshine of Your Love" (Cream, *Disraeli Gears*, 1967)





Pete Townshend

THE WHO'S PETE Townshend favored (in terms of smashing them to smithereens) Cherry SG Specials with P90s into enormous Hiwatt Custom 100 DR 103 amps between late 1968 and 1971 — the era that included the classic *Live at Leeds*, one of the greatest live albums of all time. He first played an SG Special live in July 1968 and bought his first one from Manny's Music on West 48th Street in New York City.

HEAR IT HERE: "Young Man Blues" (The Who, *Live at Leeds*, 1970)



Sister Rosetta Tharpe

PERFORMING FROM AGE four onwards, "Little Rosetta Nubin, the singing and guitar playing miracle" was a gospel sensation. A conduit for jazz, blues and all the music she was exposed to during her showbiz upbringing, she became a huge star in the late 1930s. Her style was an influence on many of the pioneers of rock 'n' roll, and footage of her on Chicago's 1962 *TV Gospel Time* show proves why. Clutching an immaculate-looking Polar White 1961 Les Paul/SG Custom and peeling off dextrous picked bends and doublestops through a cranked Gibson GA-8 Discoverer amp, her performance is testament to an unearthly talent.

HEAR IT HERE: "Up Above My Head" (*TV Gospel Time* performance)

ALESSANDRO ABBONIZIO/GETTY IMAGES, JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE, KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES, TONY EVANS/TIMELAPSE LIBRARY LTD.

Robby Krieger

IF YOU HAVEN'T heard them in a while, listen to the Doors — who are celebrating their 60th anniversary this year — and pay attention to Robby Krieger's sinuous blending of diverse blues, jazz, rock, exotic flamenco and Indian styles. Also notice his unusual fingerpicking-only technique; and, of course, the fluid tones he wrangled from his 1964 SG Special with P90s, mostly through Fender Twins.

HEAR IT HERE: "Peace Frog" (The Doors, *Morrison Hotel*, 1970 — transcribed in this issue)





Frank Marino

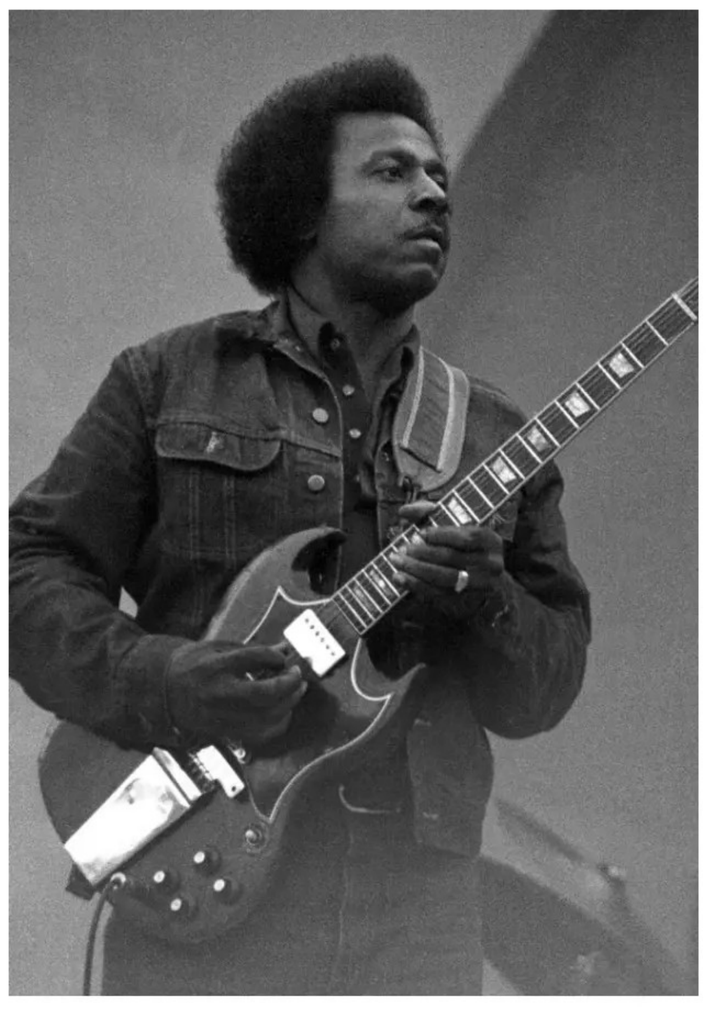
THE MAHOGANY RUSH main man is a true "guitarist's guitar player" who is rarely afforded the respect his powerful tone and superb Hendrix-influenced lead playing deserve. He's been widely renowned for tonehound tendencies, modding amps and pedals (which he also builds over at Frank Marino Audio) and sporting gargantuan pedalboards — but his beloved 1961 Les Paul SG has always been the essential link in the signal chain.

HEAR IT HERE: "Land of 1,000 Nights" (Mahogany Rush, *Strange Universe*, 1975)

Lonnie Brooks

THE LATE BLUES maestro Lee Baker Jr. didn't nickname himself "Guitar Jr." for nothing. A 30-year solo artist under his other stage name, Lonnie Brooks, he combined Chicago and Louisiana blues with R&B, wielding a chestnut-brown SG (among other models over the decades) to create a slick, energetic sound that his devotees labeled "voodoo blues." He found success in Europe as well as with domestic audiences; a career high point came when he jammed with Eric Clapton in Chicago in 1993. Brooks also co-wrote the *Blues for Dummies* book in 1998 and appeared in films such as *Blues Brothers 2000*. In his later years, he played a truly sumptuous white Custom Shop SG with gold hardware.

HEAR IT HERE: "TV Mama" (Lonnie Brooks, *Turn On the Night*, 1981)

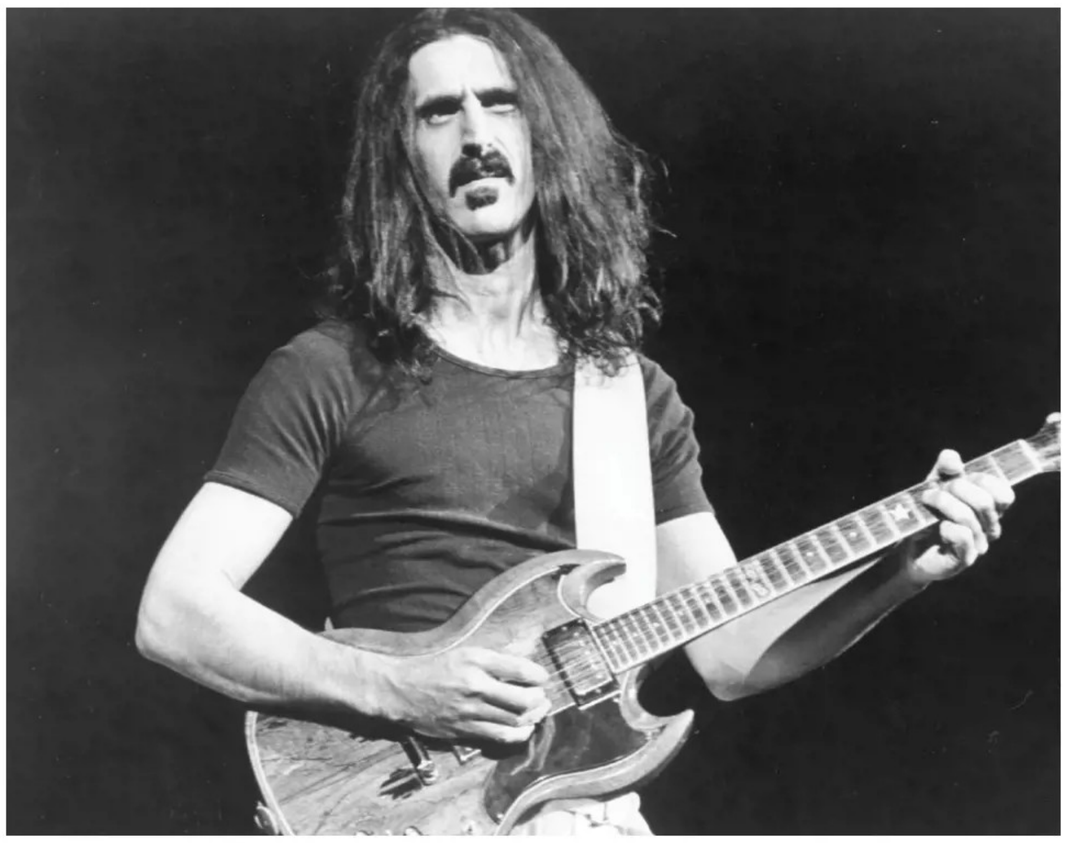


CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE, GUS STEWART/REDFERNS, AL PEREIRA/GETTY IMAGES,



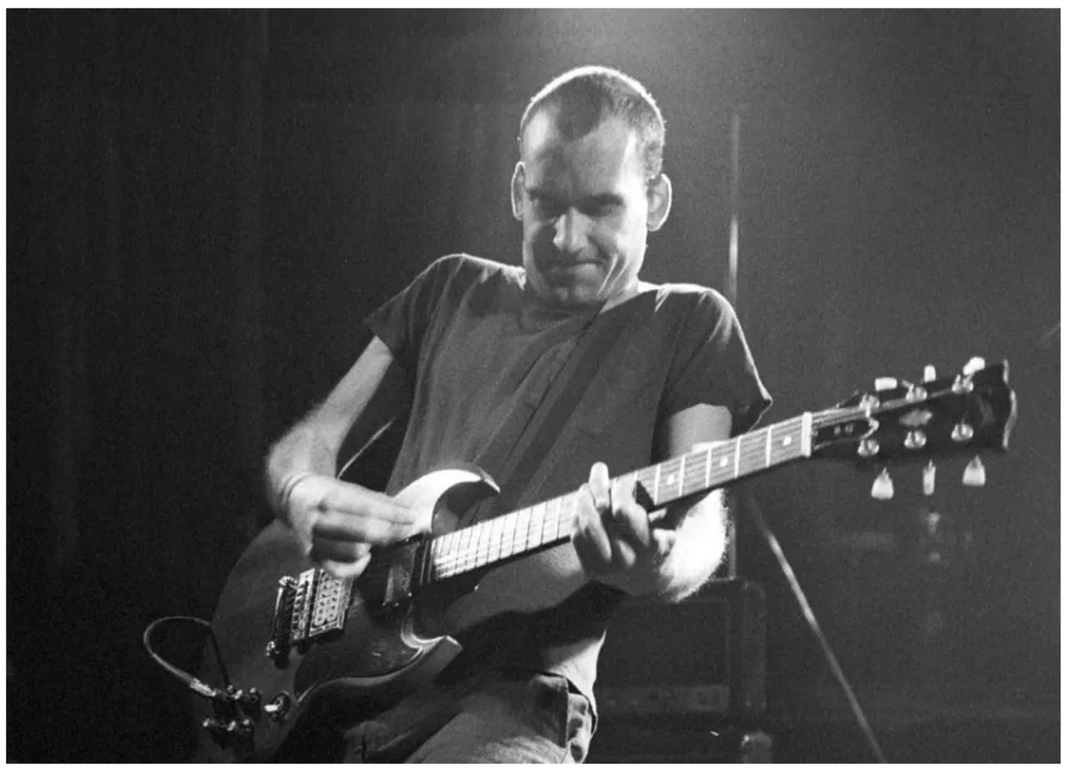
Tony Iommi

SG SIGNATURE ARTIST Tony Iommi's red 1965 SG Special with P90s, named "Monkey," was drafted in as a replacement for his Strat, which developed a faulty neck pickup during the recording sessions for Black Sabbath's eponymous debut. He replaced the pickups with lower-powered specimens, filed the frets down, raised the action, down-tuned the strings, cranked his Laneys and *voilà* — heavy metal was summoned forth from the void.
HEAR IT HERE: "Paranoid" (Black Sabbath, *Paranoid*, 1970)



Frank Zappa

ZAPPA USED TWO main SGs during the Seventies — an SG with a black full-body pickguard and stripped headstock nicknamed "Roxy" and a walnut mongrel nicknamed "Baby Snakes." Both were heavily modified; Baby Snakes had a non-Gibson neck, a built-in preamp, coil taps, phase selectors and an onboard Dan Armstrong Green Ringer fuzz/octaver. According to legend, at one point he used .007-gauge E strings and incredibly low action.
HEAR IT HERE: "Baby Snakes" (*Baby Snakes* soundtrack, 1977)



Ian MacKaye

"I THINK I probably should have been a horn player. It's all horns for me," Fugazi and Minor Threat main-man Ian MacKaye told *GW* in 2020. "I always hear horns, these melodic lines, and I try to do them with a guitar. It's hard." MacKaye has frequently attempted this tricky task on a pair of SGs, one with a natural finish and one in sparkling Alpine White, both bought in the mid Eighties and repaired after onstage breakages. As Mackaye told us, he asked expert luthier Steve Melkisethian to replace the DiMarzio Super Distortion pickups at the treble position with PRS Chainsaw pickups, after his sweat from his performances caused the DiMarzios to malfunction.
HEAR IT HERE: "Waiting Room" (Fugazi, *Fugazi*, 1988)

KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS

And let us not forget...

The legacy of the SG is intact in the hands of these three guitarists, who've risen to the top over the past decade



Samantha Fish

"MY MAIN GUITAR is a Gibson SG," Kansas City singer-songwriter Samantha Fish told *GW*. "I find it's really versatile, and it's something I feel very comfortable playing." Her choice of instrument is perfect for her musical approach, which blends rootsy rock with blues elements, a sound packed into a dozen live, studio, solo and collaborative albums to date. Check out her phenomenal slide playing, delivered on an Arctic White SG with a standard action height so that Fish can play regular picked solos without switching instruments.

HEAR IT HERE: "Fire" (Live) on YouTube



Jake Kiszka

GRETA VAN FLEET and Mirador guitarist Jake Kiszka doesn't just play his SG: he practically inhabits it. "With an SG, I can let out my visceral, animalistic side as a player," he told *GW* in 2023. "Honestly, that's difficult for me to attain with anything else." First introduced to the sleek looks and chunky tones of the SG through British guitar heroes of the 1960s, Kiszka was eager to deploy the same instrument on his classic rock-inspired band's three albums to date. "Seeing those British Invasion guys up there playing an SG made me want to be that guy," he said. "I knew it was what I wanted to do."

HEAR IT HERE: "Highway Tune" (Live) on YouTube



Grace Bowers

"I HAVE THREE SGs," Nashville's award-winning guitarist Grace Bowers told *GW*, adding that her 1961 model is her favorite. "At first, I started playing SGs because they look cool and they're lightweight," she adds. "Then I discovered how I had full access to the neck, which I didn't have on a Les Paul." Although she's only 18 as we write this, Bowers has already played her '61 alongside Dolly Parton, Tyler Childers, Lainey Wilson, Susan Tedeschi and Christone "Kingfish" Ingram. Her debut album, *Wine On Venus*, by Grace Bowers & the Hodge Podge, drew praise for its earthy but technique-heavy playing, a promising hint at continued success to come.

HEAR IT HERE: "Tell Me Why U Do That" (Live) on YouTube GW

Richard Bienstock contributed to this story.

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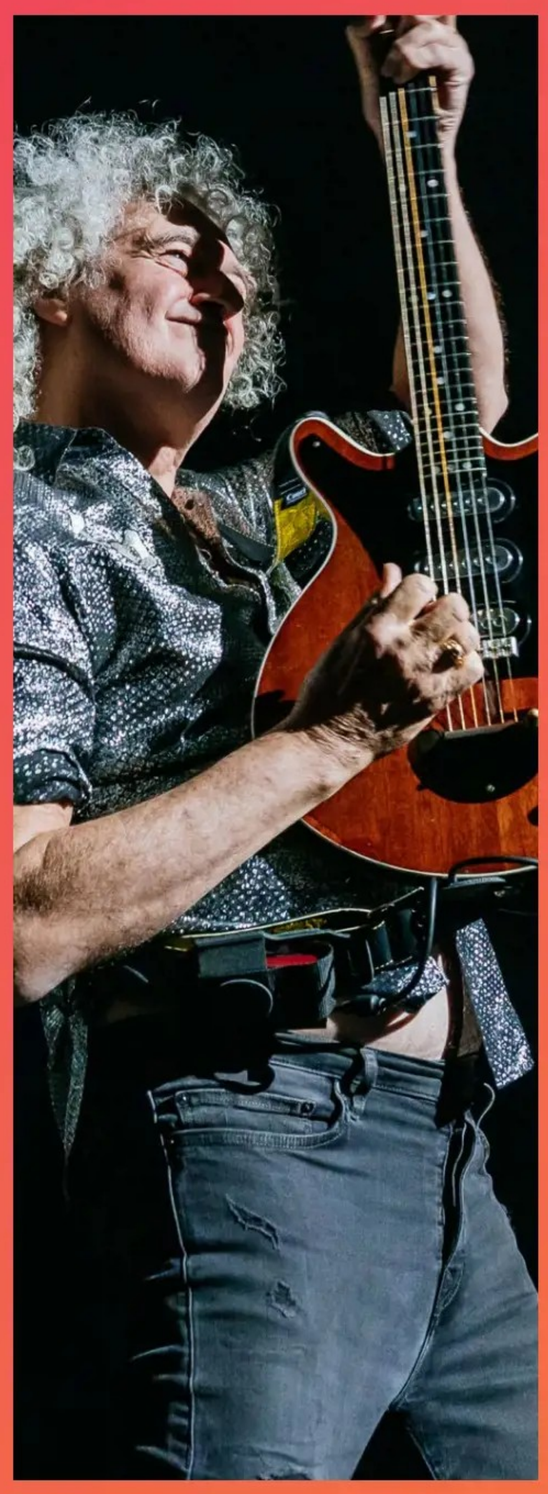



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