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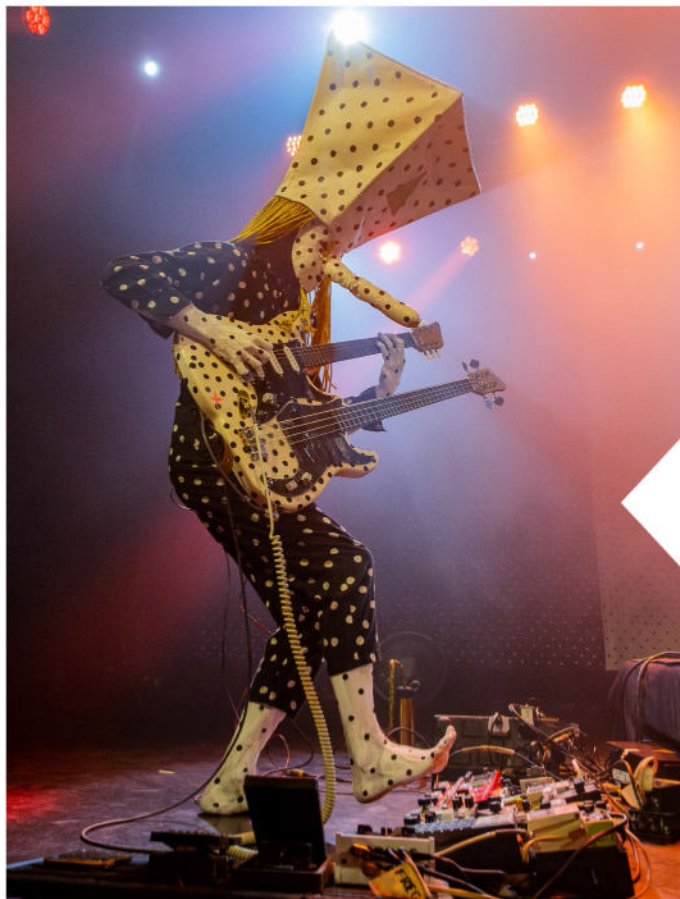
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COVER PHOTO (PAUL McCARTNEY WITH A DAN ARMSTRONG IN 1982): CLIVE ARROWSMITH/CAMERA PRESS

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Was Paul McCartney the Beatles' greatest guitar hero?



IN MY PAST life as *Guitar World's* online editor (2011 to 2016, more or less), I'd periodically post stories, opinions or lists associated with George Harrison, John Lennon and Paul McCartney. The George stories were tolerated. The John stories did well (because, *of course*, John has gone down in history as the "cool" Beatle), but the Paul stuff was essentially ignored or not taken seriously. And that's pretty comical because — sorry, folks — some of the very best Beatles guitar solos and most forward-thinking guitar parts were played by Paul. I'll just say "Taxman," "Blackbird" and "Good Morning Good Morning" as I drop the mic and walk away. (Wait, ignore that; I still have to write the rest of this column!) As we'll see throughout

this issue, Paul's connection to the guitar continued into the solo years — that nearly six-decade-long chunk of time that we're all still experiencing in 2026, courtesy of his new album, *The Boys of Dungeon Lane*. For instant proof, check out 1970's *McCartney*, 1980's *McCartney II* and 2020's *McCartney III*, albums on which every note, chord and pick scrape is played by Señor McCartney. But, beyond all that obvious "He's a talented guitarist" stuff, McCartney also fostered young guitar talent during the Seventies, Eighties and early Nineties, much like Ozzy Osbourne, John Mayall and last month's cover star, David Bowie. Basically, anyone who's witnessed a draw-dropping solo acoustic show by Laurence Juber has McCartney to thank. McCartney is experiencing a bit of a pop-culture moment right now, which is a funny thing to say, considering that his whole life is a pop-culture moment. There's the Andrew Watt-produced new album (Top 10 in the U.S., Number 1 in the U.K.), a film — *Paul McCartney: Man on the Run* — that came out earlier this year and — best of all? — this issue of *Guitar World*!

TWO NEW COLUMNISTS: Please welcome Eric Gales and Alex Skolnick to the back-of-the-magazine gang! Anyone out there with Marilu Henner-like memory will recall that Skolnick was a *GW* columnist just over 30 years ago.

DAMIAN FANELLI

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READER ART OF THE MONTH

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



Queen

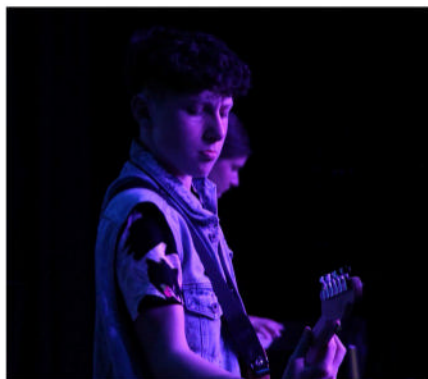
BY KEVIN WHITE



Jack Wilkins

BY PASQUALE ANTONACCI

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



Theodore Alac

AGE: 14

LOCATION: Waterloo, ON, Canada

GUITARS: Fender Squier Telecaster Affinity Series
Left-Handed, Epiphone FT-145 Texan Left-Handed

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Red Hot Chili Peppers "Can't
Stop," Neil Young "Heart of Gold," Lenny Kravitz "Fly Away"

GEAR I WANT MOST: MXR Dookie Drive Pedal



Matthew Ludwig

AGE: 47

HOMETOWN: Tampa, FL

GUITARS: Customized Epiphone SG, Epiphone Les Paul
Prophecy, Dean ML Select Transparent Brazilia

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: The Allman Brothers Band
"Whipping Post," plus originals from my band, Swamp Tooth

GEAR I WANT MOST: ENGL Powerball MKI,
Marshall 1960A cabinet



Angel Gonzalez

AGE: 46

HOMETOWN: Princeton, NJ

GUITARS: Charvel Jake E. Lee blue burst, ESP KH-2,
Jeff Beck Artist Series Strat

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Ozzy Osbourne "Never,"
"Fool Like You" and "Lightning Strikes"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Marshall JCM800, Mesa Boogie
Dual Rectifier

ARE YOU A DEFENDER OF THE FAITH?

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

THINGS ARE HEATING UP



**YOU'LL WANT TO SEE WHAT'S NEXT
FROM THE ENGINEERS AT KEELEY ELECTRONICS**



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"I had PRS build me a 30-inch guitar, and I used it for a bunch of the record," Mark Holcomb says

Peripheral Vision

After burning the playbook and facing his demons on Periphery's jet-black new concept album, Mark Holcomb tells us he owes a big apology to his guitar tech

BY JOE BOSSO

▶ **THERE COMES A** point in every long-running band's career when the unpredictable becomes, well, predictable. For progressive metal titans Periphery, who over the past decade and a half have defined modern djent through a series of records bearing Roman numerals (*Periphery I* through *V*), that moment arrived when the group's members began plotting their newest album.

"We were on tour in Europe, and we all started saying we didn't want to do another numbered record," guitarist Mark Holcomb says. "That's what we've always done —

Periphery I, II, III, IV, V. It became our shtick, and there was nothing less exciting to us than making *Periphery VI.*"

Holcomb and his bandmates — fellow guitarists Misha Mansoor and Jake Bowen, drummer Matt Halpern and singer Spencer Sotelo — tossed out fanciful ideas: three EPs released on subsequent weeks, conceptual double albums. Nothing felt right until Halpern said, "Why don't we write an album about loneliness?" Oddly enough, it was the one idea everybody could get behind.

"It's such a unique concept for an album," Holcomb says. "At the same time, it's a univer-

sal feeling, because no matter how happy you are in life, no matter how dissatisfied you may be or anything in between, the experience of feeling lonely, whether it's embraced or resented, plays a large role in anybody's life."

As one might expect, *A Pale White Dot* isn't the party record of the year. Songs like "Mr. God," "Obsession," "Subhuman" — all of them disturbing, dramatic and ultimately astonishing, full of sophisticated musical crosscurrents and blitzing guitar playing — were born from what Holcomb describes as "band therapy sessions, but not in the Metallica sense." Throughout the

Periphery's Misha Mansoor on stage in Milan, January 27, 2024



album, the band explores the darker side of emotional responses and conditions – there's depression, OCD, anxiety and isolation – and on the record's best number, "Everyone Dies Alone," Holcomb recalls the grief he felt following the recent death of his father. "It's imagery that I wish I could somehow burn out of my brain, but I know it'll live with me forever," he says.

When the band decided to make a concept album, did you reference any of the genre's biggies? In terms of loneliness and alienation, of course there's *The Wall*.

I wouldn't say we directly referenced them, but as prog nerds we all grew up inhaling concept albums. I'm a big Devin Townsend fan – it feels like most of his records are concept albums. Of course, Dream Theater has made amazing concept albums, as has Opeth and Rush. It's part of our DNA.

We wanted to stick to a framework but not overthink it. At first glance, or at first listen, if the album sounds down and dark and a little bit dire, it kind of is, because loneliness can be that for most people – not to say that there aren't moments where it kind of gets turned around and looked at in a positive way. But

yeah, it's a concept record in as much as we can apply that loose term to it.

Not to sound glib, but did the band intentionally restrict themselves to songs that sounded gloomy? What would have happened if you wrote an awesome tune that was a bit on the happier side?

That was a situation we ran into many times, actually. I had some ideas that sounded a little more positive, a bit more note-y and verbose, as did some of the other guys, but at the end of the day those tunes didn't match the tone of the record. The fallback was always, "Let's just store that one." We have what we call the Riff Graveyard, where we let riffs and ideas sit in a dropbox that's shared by our whole band. We table all of these ideas for our next record or our next-next record, so we always know we've got a sizable stockpile of things to pull from in the future.

I understand you guys used 30-inch scale six-string baritone guitars on the album. Where did that come from?

We typically mix things up – songs with six-string guitars, seven-strings, eight-strings. On this album, Misha acquired a 30-inch Jackson

Surfcaster baritone guitar with six strings, and he made a 30-second demo of what became "Mr. God." He let me play it, and I was like, "Man, it's like playing a new instrument." It doesn't feel like a guitar. The frets were so wide, so you don't feel inclined to play leads. Instantly, I was playing patterns that were sparse and didn't have so many notes, but they had a lot more power.

We tuned the low string down to a B flat, and the fifth string is an octave up, so you get this droning double B flat on the very bottom. When you chug those two low notes, it's hypnotic. You sit back in your chair and you're like, "Wow, that's really heavy." I had PRS build me a 30-inch guitar, and I used it for a bunch of the record.

So there's still guitars with seven and eight strings?

"Obsession" is on a seven-string. "Talk" is on a six string in drop C, but the sixth string is tuned down to A. On "Subhuman," it's an eight-string tuned to F standard. We use the eight string on a "A Pale White Dot," the acoustic tune at the end of the record – it's tuned to open Cadd9. We mix it up, man.

Do you guys just tell your guitar techs, "I'm sorry"?

[Laughs] We feel bad constantly. We do say we're sorry profusely, and I feel horrible for making our guitar techs' lives miserable. **GW**

"We tell our guitar techs we're sorry profusely. I feel horrible for making their lives miserable"

COVER MODELS**GUITARIST** PAGE HAMILTON**GUITAR** 1989 ESP HORIZON CUSTOM**GW COVER DATE** MARCH 1993**THIS INTERVIEW** MAY 2026**PHOTOGRAPHER** LORINDA SULLIVAN

BY ANDREW DALY

Where and when did you get this cover image guitar?

I got it at ESP when the company was four guys upstairs above 48th Street Custom Guitars in New York City. Baker Rorick was the sales guy back then and was acquainted with then-Helmet bassist Henry Bogdan. He said he worked for this pretty new-to-the-U.S. guitar company and asked, "Would Page be interested in talking to them?" I went by, and they had maybe 50 to 75 guitars on wooden shelves. I started pulling guitars down with the ESP guitar tech, the late, great Paul Skelton, and found my Horizon Custom with a Floyd Rose bridge and reverse headstock. It was super cool looking and very uncool in an indie rock world – the Lower East Side, New York City scene.

Why was it applicable to your music and style of playing?

This guitar was meant to be with me. It felt right. I don't remember if it was the first, second, or third guitar I played. ESP is so damn consistent, they build really great guitars and basses, but every piece of wood is different. I could feel the connection immediately. It reacts great with my Fryette amps and any number of the hundreds of pedals I've used, but it did not factor into why I chose it. I knew it would sound great when played acoustically. It's a very light alder body with a maple neck-through and ebony fretboard; it resonates beautifully and has amazing sustain.

What notable recordings is it used on?

It's on every Helmet album from *Meantime*.

"It was super cool looking and very uncool in an indie rock world – the Lower East Side"

**Have you made any modifications to it? If so, why?**

I had the neck pickup, toggle and tone knob removed. ESP put wood plugs in the holes, and a tech put a photo of the fat guy in one of the windows from the cover of Led Zeppelin's *Physical Graffiti* on top of one plug. The building on the album cover is on St. Marks Place between 1st Avenue and Avenue A in Manhattan. I used to eat at Mogador across the street a couple of times a week after tours. I love seeing that building and obviously love that album. "Kashmir" might have burned the polyrhythm stuff into my brain. Drums

in 4, guitar groove in 3 or 6, etc. As a 15-, 16- or 17-year-old, I listened to two entire Zep albums almost every day.

Why did you choose this guitar for your GW cover shoot way back in late 1992?

I honestly don't remember the shoot!

Obviously, you still have your ESP. What about it makes it so special?

With that guitar, it's hard to say... I've always trusted my ears. If something sounds great, I'll feel inspired. If it sounds like crap, I'll move on. **GW**

Loathe

Liverpool's heavy mob on recording their new album while burning rubber — and regretting the magic guitar that didn't make the sessions

BY GREGORY ADAMS

IF ERIK BICKERSTAFFE'S gargantuan groove through Loathe's "Revenant" sounds especially reckless — as if threatening to barrel-roll itself off a cliff — that's because the guitarist tracked the baritone-driven boom tune as he and the rest of the U.K. act were rumbling down the highway in their RV. It's one of the many "throw-it-up-and-just-go" moments he says they experienced while self-recording, producing and mixing their eagerly anticipated fourth album, *A Stranger to You*.

"I was in this fold-out chair — the kind you'd have at a barbecue — and I'm proper sunken into it," Bickerstaffe recalls of the road-roaring session, adding that bassist Feisal El-Khazragi was monitoring the take on a laptop mounted to the motorhome's kitchen counter. "The DI was so terrible, because it was going through some generator. Once we re-amped it, it added to the character. It is a mental, messy part, anyway."

Also recorded in Airbnbs, Bickerstaffe's shed and — in the case of the drums — Peter Gabriel's Real World studios, the Liverpoolian quartet's latest album harnesses a percussive dissonance akin to 2020's *I Let It In and Took Everything*, even doubling-down on the intensity through sub-sonic crushers like "Revenant" and "Gemini." Yet Bickerstaffe also calls their *Stranger* a more "up-to-date" look at the band's evolving tastes, further exploring previously hinted-at elements of prog, fusion and shoegaze — the guitarist citing influence from Pat Metheny, Eric Johnson and David Gilmour, as well as Meshuggah.

"Harder to Pretend," written by drummer Sean Radcliffe, conjures cluster-chorded city pop sophistication, albeit amped up to 11. The nearly eight-minute "Gifted Every Strength" rattles the room with grotesquely swung heaviness before shimmering through Bickerstaffe's smooth-jazzed vibrato solo and

"I recorded 'Revenant' in a moving RV on a fold-out chair, like you'd have at a barbecue"



For their new album, Loathe's Erik Bickerstaffe cites influence from Pat Metheny and Meshuggah

a meadow-set acoustic finale. This all speaks to an ever-growing dynamism that's pushed Loathe well beyond early goals of "being as loud and as abrasive as possible."

The guitarist explored tones both explosive and demure through his silverface Bassman, as well as several Universal Audio and Neural plugins. He gripped out riffs with Teles, Strats, a Lothario baritone and more. While he recently powered through a play-through of "Revenant" to promote Gretsch's

newest line of Electromatic CVT and Jet baritones — his first ad for the guitarmakers — he didn't get those in time to make the LP.

"It would have been awesome, because they sound absolutely class," he says, adding with a jesting twinge of regret, "After I'd finished re-recording [for Gretsch], I'd sent it to Ed Al-Shakarchi — who mixed the album with us — and we were both, like, 'Fuck... this sounds loads better.'"

Bickerstaffe laughs. "It is what it is!" **GW**

GABE BECERRA

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"From crushingly heavy tones
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Mike Campbell in action with the Dirty Knobs in Toronto last year



Ace of Hearts

Mike Campbell — the late Tom Petty's right-hand man and a former Fleetwood Mac hired gun — tells us about channeling the Beach Boys, snatching songs from his dreams and chasing joy over dollars

BY ANDREW DALY

AFTER TOM PETTY unexpectedly left us at age 66 in late 2017, Mike Campbell — Petty's longtime partner in guitar and songwriting — found himself at a loss. But since then, he's picked up the pieces and leaned heavily into his own band, the Dirty Knobs.

"I miss the Heartbreakers, and I miss my brother; that was very sad when that happened," Campbell says. "But I'd always had it in the back of my mind that if the Heartbreakers ever retired, I'd focus on the Dirty Knobs and make that my purpose."

Campbell continues to expand on that purpose with the Dirty Knobs' fourth album, *Mission of Mercy*. "I named the record that because I feel as though the Dirty Knobs are on a mission of mercy," he says. "We're trying

to bring a little relief from the wicked world we all live in."

Songs like "I Remember," "Vicious Hangover" and the title track do exactly that. But Campbell isn't reinventing the wheel. "I stick with what I'm comfortable with," he says. "I'll try a new guitar or amp, but if I'm recording and working on a record, I don't want to be bothered with too many choices. I want to focus on the song and the performance."

For the most part, as he did with the Heartbreakers, Campbell leans on his Fender Broadcaster and his goldtop Gibson Les Paul, with a hint of Rickenbacker 12-string thrown in. "It's whatever inspires you," he says. "I'll look at a guitar, and I'll think, 'I wonder what this chord would sound like on that guitar.'"

Gear aside, when it comes down to it, Campbell is grateful to still be out there doing what he loves. "The Dirty Knobs play these theaters; we have some rock 'n' roll soul healing together," he says. "That's the only way to get that in your life, you know? It has to be through that. That's what I live for, and that's what makes me happy. I'm very grateful to be where I am. I survived [Petty's] death, moved on, and I keep making music."

Do you still always write on guitar?

It used to always start on guitar, but lately, since I've been writing on my own, sometimes it'll start with piano, or no instrument at all, and just in my head with some lyrics. I'll hear something, and it'll trigger something I heard in the Sixties or whatever. Next thing you know, I'm writing a song.

The first single, "I Remember," was written on piano, right?

Yes. That's an example of not writing on guitar. I'm not good at piano, but I can find chords. That song was just chords; on piano, you can have a bass line and then the melodies on top, so it's a little fuller than just

COREY KELLY

a guitar chord. And then I wrote the rest of the song over that.

How did "Let Me Back in My Dream" come together?

I like that song a lot. I kind of dreamed that song up — no pun intended. [Laughs] A lot of times, you can have a dream, and it might be a really good dream, and then you wake up, and you want to remember the dream and go back into it because you were enjoying it! But it just vaporizes, and it's gone if you don't grab the idea right away. So, that's what inspired that. The music was just quickly written, probably, within five minutes. It's just some loud chords and unique chord changes in the verse. It's mysterious.

How about the title track?

I had that song in my head for a while in my tape library. I'd forgotten about it and never pursued it because I thought it wasn't rock 'n' roll enough. It's a real homage to Brian Wilson. And so, when I was writing that song, it was with him in mind with those chord changes and the background vocals.

Is that style of music more ingrained in your songwriting than people realize?

I don't know what people realize, but it's certainly buried in my history of listening to music. I grew up on that stuff, but I like new music, too. I'm occasionally inspired by new music, but mostly I get frustrated with it because it all sounds computerized, and there's no magic in the songs like there was in the Sixties.

Is that to say that when it comes to your music, you're all analog?

No, I'm not all analog. I use Pro Tools, which I've used for a long time, or at least since they got the sounds together. With that, it's hard to tell if you're on tape or digital if you record it properly. But I don't do a lot of technical stuff with Pro Tools; I just use it to record, rewind, and play, like a tape recorder.

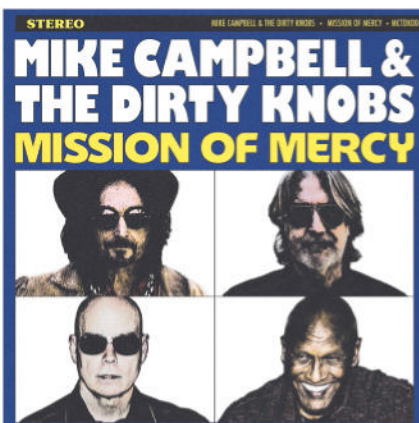
One of the more fun songs on the record is "Vicious Hangover."

That's a perfect example of spontaneity. The band was coming over that day, and right before they got into the studio, I thought of this idea, which was just real simple, and I threw the chords together with rock 'n' roll energy. But I didn't have it sussed out, so they came in, we changed the chords around and we were able to capture it in one take.

Chris Holt plays the song on that song, right?

Yeah, he did. It was all live, and the first time we played it through, I said, "Just go for it." He's that good and has just been a breath of

Campbell with his namesake Fender Stories Collection Red Dog Telecaster



fresh air for the band. He's so talented and brings amazing harmonies, doubles my voice, and can play strings and keyboards, too. He's also really easy to get along with.

What's your key to finding guitar tones?

Good question! I don't spend a lot of time looking for tones. I get an amp setup that I like, starting off with the gain that's right for the song, and then I try a couple of guitars. So, whichever guitar seems to fit, I start with that, and then if I get to a point where it needs to be beefed up, I might try a boost pedal or a wah. But I don't do a lot of pedals. I like to get the tone from the guitar and amp if I can.

What was your main rig for this record?

For this record — and the last couple of records — I've reconnected with an old amp that

I used early in the Heartbreakers, an Ampeg Rocket. I used it for the whole album, and Chris used a Fender Princeton. For guitars, I gravitate toward my [Fender] Broadcaster, my [Gibson] Les Paul and occasionally, a Rickenbacker 12-string.

What led you to reconnect with the Ampeg now?

It was just in my closet, and one day I pulled it out, turned it on and thought, "Wow, this is a sound I've been missing." It sounded really good, and I sort of stumbled back into the room, and there it was. [Laughs]

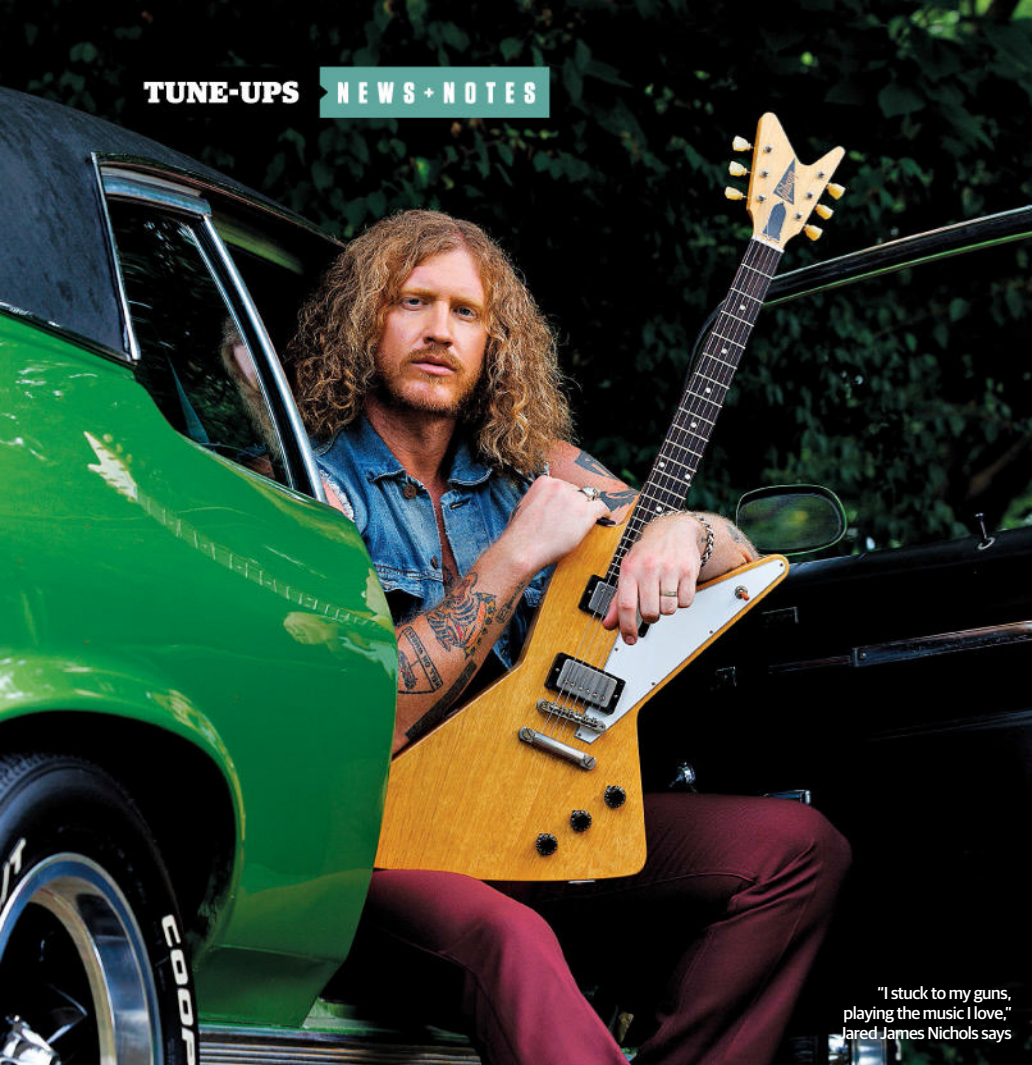
Do you put much stock into the so-called "connection" with a particular guitar or amp, or can you write on any guitar?

That's a deep question. If you get in touch with your instrument, and it speaks to you, it will tell you what it wants to play. If you're doodling around, there will just be certain things that sound good on this guitar, and you'll go back to it, and it will become a direction for a song. A lot of times, the instrument — if you really get in tune with it — will speak to you.

Considering the years you spent with the Heartbreakers, what does the positive reception toward the Dirty Knobs mean to you?

Well, it's my life. It means a lot. The good thing about the Dirty Knobs is that we started out playing in little bars, and now that we've done relatively well, we can play theaters. That was my goal, and we've gotten there. It's not a money-making thing, like the Heartbreakers, which was a big financial success. With this, I'm doing okay, but I'm doing what I love. Nothing makes me happier than taking this band into a theater with a group of people and having a moment. **GW**

"If you get in touch with your instrument, it will tell you what it wants to play"



"I stuck to my guns, playing the music I love," Jared James Nichols says

Young Man Blues

Raiding the Foo's gear vault and jamming with the ghost of Gary Moore, roots master Jared James Nichols presents the rip-it-up new record that "I never had the guts to do before"

BY AMIT SHARMA

▶ **WHEN GUITAR PLAYERS** hear the words "blues power," they'll usually cast their minds back to the late Sixties and early Seventies, when Albert King and Eric Clapton were using such terms to convey the emotional gravitas as well as the historic and humanistic weight within the music. All these years later, out of the younger generation, it's Jared James Nichols who is carrying on that legacy, telling stories and hitting people in the heart with every strum and bend. The singer/guitarist's latest album, *Louder Than Fate*, carries many of his trademarks, while also surprising listeners by exploring new sonic ground that crosses the line past Southern rock into country.

That's not the only way Nichols has stepped things up. Part of the album was recorded at Studio 606, the creative hub owned by Foo Fighters, with super producer Jay Ruston (Corey Taylor, Anthrax, Steel Panther) bringing his years of expertise

behind the desk. Then there are the external producers and songwriters that Nichols enlisted to help avoid the common pitfalls faced by almost every modern blues player. The result is a musical journey unlike anything he's taken us on before.

What did you learn from working with writers and producers like Roger Alan Nichols and Skip Black?

Brad Paisley said how guitar players often cater their songs toward the solos or riff. It's a hard habit to break, because you make a structure then play the shit out of it. I've

"I'm still that same kid in a Sabbath Bloody Sabbath T-shirt holding a Les Paul"

been trying to prove myself constantly, because when you get billed as some hotshot, people stand in front of you with their arms crossed as if to say, "Prove it". This time, I was rubbing elbows with people who worked with the world's greatest musicians. These people just want to write songs. They'd be like, "Oh yeah, another guitar player." They didn't care. Walking into those rooms gave me a completely different mindset.

This record feels like something of a learning curve for you.

Dude, I did a huge chunk of it at Studio 606. Our drummer was using Taylor Hawkins' kits. I was playing through Dave Grohl's cabinets. We were going through the Sound City board. There was such a vibe in there. I felt like I was getting schooled the whole time. One thing I learned is that you don't need as much gain as you think for riffing. I started playing with my gain decked, but when I walked into the control room, Jay was like, "Have you got a pedal on?" and told me to turn it off. I was a little scared at first, but when I did, I could hear more of an old-school vibe. If you listen to the classic stuff from the Sixties and Seventies, those plexis aren't as gainy as you might think. The tones are defined and muscular but not washed out with overdrive and reverb.

How did all that affect how you play?

I remember working on "Looks Like That Felt Good." Roger was the producer for that one; he kept hitting the spacebar, telling me to stop sliding into everything. Sometimes there are these things we do as players — sliding makes things sound slurred and bluesy, but some riffs need to hit straight. He told me to stop that and lose the vibrato. Again, I was unsure, but, lo and behold, his advice made sense. You learn things that go deeper than the big licks. It's the little stylistic elements that fly under the radar, but when you pay attention, you'll be glad you did.

"Bending Or Breaking," "Killing Time" and "Show Me" showcase a whole different side to you.

That's the thing about being in a room with people who aren't into what you're into. You learn more. It ended up being the perfect sauce. As an artist there comes a point where you have to let go of your insecurities. I did a lot of that on this record. It was like showing a whole other side of music that I love but never had the guts to do. Those dudes exist big-time in the country world and pushed me into finding my footing in stuff I wouldn't have taken on without them. We've been playing these songs in the set and it's great to see the change of pace. People have been like, "Damn, Jared's not just ripping my head off for 80 minutes."

But there are moments where you still do. "Let's Go" has some Richie Kotzen-style barred pentatonic ideas.

I love Richie's playing. I was lucky enough to tour with him in the Winery Dogs, and we ended up hanging out. I remember listening to him when I was 20 and thinking, "What the fuck?!" It's the same with Paul Gilbert or Michael Schenker. When I tour with people like that, some of their licks end up in my playing. I can't help it. Even John 5, who I've done over 100 shows with, ended up creeping into my playing because it was like we were drinking the same water.

Which new solos are you most proud of?

Nothing was contrived; it was all still from a shoot-from-the-hip mindset. But "Killing Time" was a first pass. I was listening to the backing track the night before — it's this crescendo build in E minor. I started humming ideas that felt more like David Gilmour territory. In the end, I played it through a 1969 plexi with my Klon, using my Dorothy guitar, my really old goldtop from 1952. The Klon was on with zero gain, but I turned the amp volume all the way up. I love solos that have some composition, these little waves of writing, but also feel improvised. That's where this one lives. It has the fiery spitball of, "C'mon guys, let's play," but you can still hear how it follows the changes.

You tend to be minimal when it comes to gear...

It's not a long list beyond the cable. [Laughs] I had the plexi and this special amp from Blackstar that's a one-of-one, point-to-point handwired Series One. They'd made it for Jeff Beck but never got it to him. It's more aggressive than the plexi, like an old JCM800. I used my Tube Screamer and for "Runnin' Hot" I borrowed this [Electro-Harmonix Small Stone] big box phaser from the early Eighties. It gave some rhythms a bit more movement. The main guitars were Dorothy and this Korina Futura for all the big-ass humbucker parts.



I didn't have to search when it came to tone. It's funny; I remember doing this track with Joe Bonamassa, and he brought his whole rig over, saying to use whatever I needed. I brought my Marshall head, Dorothy and my Klon and started testing out tones with my stuff before asking him what I should try. His answer was, "I think you should stay there." That was it. I try not to overcomplicate things.

You recently went to Joe's house to film a video on Gary Moore's 1989 Soldano SLO-100 head, which he'd recently acquired...

Joe must have balls of steel because the amp hadn't been serviced or even turned on. It literally just showed up in a shipping crate. It was like finding a classic muscle car, sticking some gas in and firing it up. Joe was cranking it right away with a 1959 Les Paul. In the video you can see the power sizzle down, shut off, then come back. It did that a few times. It's like we were feeling Gary Moore's spirit in the room. I feel pretty spoiled when I think about all the cool shit I get to be around. I also did a video on Gary's JTM45 Bluesbreaker, which another friend got at auction. I own

Gary's original Guv'nor pedal, so we used that with a 1959 Les Paul. Here's the crazy shit — the power went out four times, which has never happened before. Then this horrible rainstorm came. I got the chills and remember saying, "Dude, I think Gary Moore's here."

You recently posted a photo of yourself as a teen gunslinger wearing a Sabbath Bloody Sabbath shirt. That kid has come a long way.

I wouldn't change a thing. Every time I screwed up or took a wrong turn, from bands breaking up to me getting depressed, it all led to this path of understanding. I'm still that kid in a Sabbath Bloody Sabbath shirt holding the Les Paul. If I was able to put in the work and get to where I am today, so can anyone. There were times I was crashing on floors, living on 10 bucks a week with no gigs booked. I'd walk around streets late at night listening out for bands to see if I could jam with them. It's easy to get discouraged. But it just comes down to how bad you want it. Are you prepared to go through all of the shit to come out the other side? I stuck to my guns, playing the music I love. **GW**



AARON PERRY



The José Way

José Arredondo modified amps for some of guitar's biggest stars. The Friedman Jose amp pays tribute to this elusive legend and makes his formerly secret mods available to everyone

BY DAVID KONOW

▶ **JOSÉ ARREDONDO MIGHT** not be a household name, but to generations of guitar players, his name was synonymous with great tone. During the Eighties and early Nineties, numerous players beat a path to his workshop in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley after Eddie Van Halen dropped his name in guitar magazine interviews. Arredondo modded Marshalls for James Hetfield (who played through a José-modified Marshall on *Kill 'Em All* and said it was his favorite amp), John Sykes (who used a José-modded Marshall on the best-selling 1987 *Whitesnake* album), Mick Mars (Mötley Crüe's *Dr. Feelgood*), Steve Vai (David Lee Roth's *Eat 'Em and Smile*), Peter Dinklage, Steve Lukather, Steve Stevens, Akira Takasaki and countless others.

For many years, biographical information on Arredondo and details of his work were a mystery, which only made his urban legend grow. Other than a brief profile that appeared in the August 1988 issue of *Guitar Player* magazine, articles about him were scarce.

As Dave Friedman started becoming a great amp wizard in his own right, he chased down examples of José's modified amps and researched info about his high-gain designs and technical nuances. Eventually Friedman became somewhat of a José-ologist. His knowledge recently culminated in the Friedman/Arredondo Jose amplifier, which

he developed with the Arredondo family's blessing. The Jose amp combines several of Arredondo's acclaimed innovations in one amp. A wonderful tribute to the man and his tones, it's also the closest one can get to a José-modified Marshall in modern times without spending a small fortune.

We spoke with Friedman about how a humble, elusive man from Chile became the amp tech to the stars, what made his mods special and how his innovations changed amp design forever.

IN THE EIGHTIES, nightclubs lining West Hollywood's Sunset Strip attracted countless kids who wanted to make it in the rock music biz. Numerous "hair metal" bands competed for major label deals and great guitar playing ruled as guitarists studied at GIT (Guitar Institute of Technology) by day and played gigs at night. In 1987, Dave Friedman arrived in L.A. as an 18-year-old aspiring guitarist chasing rock star dreams.

Over the Hollywood Hills in the nearby San Fernando Valley, a variety of amp techs like Arredondo, Lee Jackson, Paul Rivera and others were performing hot-rodged high-gain modifications on amps from their workshops to meet the needs of this new generation of metal players. Arredondo was already an experienced amp tech and designer well

before he launched his own business. During the mid Sixties, Arredondo worked for Thomas Organ, where he reportedly helped develop the Vox Super Beatle amp. Later, he also did work for Ampeg as a Service Manager, which led to him working on amps for the Rolling Stones and going on tour with them in 1969.

Most players first learned about Arredondo from guitar magazines. When Eddie Van Halen cryptically mentioned "José, an old guy from Argentina (sic) who knows a lot of tricks and does stuff for me" in his April 1980 *Guitar Player* magazine cover story, curious guitarists started seeking this mysterious tech. When Ed eventually confirmed Arredondo's identity in the mid-Eighties, the tech's business went through the roof.

So many customers flocked to Arredondo's Arrco Electronics shop on Van Nuys Boulevard in Sherman Oaks that he relocated his business to the three-car garage at his home to maintain a more private profile and select clientele. Visitors recall seeing stacks of amps with names like Yngwie Malmsteen, George Lynch, Jake E. Lee and Adrian Vandenberg on the service tags.

"Everybody talked about José," Friedman says. "Eddie, Mick Mars, George Lynch. He was a pioneer of what are now considered modern-style amps and modern-style gain, and he was definitely the best amp tech in Hollywood at the time."

Shortly after Friedman arrived in L.A., he landed a job with Andy Brauer Studio Rentals, which catered to the top studio musicians and pros. Here he became acquainted with leading techs like rack guru Bob Bradshaw and amp wizards that included Reinhold Bogner, Bruce Egnater, Steven Fryette and Mike Soldano. Arredondo also did some repair, maintenance and occasional modification work for Brauer, and Andy gave Dave José's phone number.

Although amps with master volume controls became increasingly common during the Eighties, the holy grail was to get the heavy, overdriven sound of a fully cranked non-master volume Marshall with its power tubes blazing, but at a lower volume. "My favorite kind of sound is a cranked-up, old Lead-spec plexi," Friedman says. "I was always going after that sound, I just wanted to find a way to do it with a master volume and get that sound at a lower volume."

When Friedman first met José, he brought over a 100-watt Marshall J.T.M. "black flag" plexi — a rare and valuable 1967 model. Arredondo installed his three-in-one mod, which Friedman says "added a gain stage with three distinct structures in the front, like boosting a four-input Marshall, but with a regular JCM100-style (Marshall Model 2555 Silver Jubilee) master volume added between the EQ and power amp." Friedman also had

Arredondo put an extra gain knob in the back of the amp so it'd look stock from the front.

"That was his basic mod, and frankly, that was enough gain," Friedman continues, noting that Arredondo generally didn't do modern-style high-gain mods, even though his modded Marshalls have produced some very heavy tones, like those heard on *Kill 'Em All* and *Dr. Feelgood*. "He only did a few higher-gain mods. People have gotten way out of hand with gain, but most pros that other players are emulating actually use settings where the gain is backed way off."

Adding to José's legend and mystery was the fact that many guitar players tried to keep their gear specs top secret. A few boutique amp builders (most notably Howard "Alexander" Dumble) and pedal designers (like Bill Finnegan of Klon Centaur overdrive fame) were equally secretive, covering their circuits with black epoxy so nobody could reverse engineer or copy their work. Friedman recalled José "never covered anything up," but at the time Friedman was still new to amp technology, and he wouldn't have known what José was doing anyway.

Eddie Van Halen was the player most closely associated with José. The two first met way back in the early Seventies when Ed's father drove him to Arredondo's shop to have José repair the guitarist's 1968 Marshall Super Lead amp. However, there's some debate over whether José actually modified Ed's amps or simply repaired and maintained them. Ed eventually admitted that it was the latter.

"I told people that José Arredondo modified my amp to throw him a bone and help him out," Van Halen told Chris Gill, author of *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen*, in 2007. "José made most of his money by doing modifications to people's amps, but he never did anything to my amps other than re-tube them, set the bias and replace things that blew, like the transformers. For years people thought that I had my amps hot-rodded, but they were stock. My Marshall had no line output or master volume. In a funny way I feel a bit guilty about telling people about José's mods because I lied, but a lot of people dug them. I don't own any of those modified amps. All of my Marshalls are stock 100-watt heads."

Friedman, who has seen the inside of numerous Marshall amps that Van Halen owned, including the guitarist's "number one" 1968 100-watt model 1959 Super Lead, confirmed that Van Halen's Marshalls were basically stock, "Eddie didn't really have modded amps. José serviced and tweaked them. He would change the impedance selectors to heavy-duty selectors that improved reliability. He made some slight tweaks in the circuit and would set the bias a certain way

for the Variac Ed used so he wouldn't blow up the output transformers. He provided Ed with matched sets of tubes so the amps would operate more efficiently, and a variety of other things like that."

In 1989, while they were recording the "Black album", Metallica guitarists James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett, along with producer Bob Rock, hired Arredondo to modify some Marshall heads. Hetfield was already a big fan of Arredondo's work — his favorite amp was a José-modded Marshall that he used to record *Kill 'Em All*, and he was crushed when that amp was stolen in 1983. The theft of that amp inspired the song "Fade to Black."

It's hard to estimate how many amps José modified. If you can find an original, it won't come cheap

Unfortunately, Hetfield was lukewarm about his modified 1973 Super Lead, feeling that it sounded nowhere near as good as Rock's José-modded Marshall (Hammett never received his amp back from Arredondo, who died before the work was completed). Hetfield tried to use the amp on several subsequent Metallica albums but never bonded with it. When working on Metallica's latest album, *72 Seasons*, producer Greg Fidelman hired Friedman to work on Hetfield's José-modded amp, which Friedman says, "needed a lot of love. Once I fixed it, they liked it so much they used it on the album."



José Arredondo fan
Eddie Van Halen with
a Les Paul in May 1980



It's hard to estimate how many amps José modified. If you can find an original, it won't come cheap. They rarely come up for sale, and a street-price guesstimate starts between \$15,000 and \$20,000, with celebrity-associated amps going for considerably more. Richard Fortus owned the José amp that Mick Mars used on *Dr. Feelgood*, and he reportedly sold it recently for \$45,000.

With Friedman's Jose amp, you can get a Marshall-style amp loaded with faithful reconstructions of Arredondo's innovations for \$3,799. Friedman conceived his José tribute amp many years ago, but he wanted the family's endorsement before he went ahead with production. Eventually he was introduced to José's daughter Marisol, who gave the project her blessing. Once Marisol gave the okay, it took Friedman about 34 months to finalize the amp's design and bring it to market.

The Jose model is a 100-watt head with four EL34 tubes featuring several of Arredondo's most iconic mods in one amp. Details include a three-way "Gain Style" switch, a Fat switch and two switchable global Presence controls, which provide a choice of vintage or modern presence tones.

"It's a loving tribute to José, who never made a production amp, so I've made it for him now," Friedman says. In the mid-Eighties, Arredondo and Van Halen planned to go into business to manufacture an amp designed by José. A few prototypes were allegedly built, but Van Halen eventually opted to develop the 5150 with Peavey instead. "I didn't reinvent the wheel with this amp. I made it as a tribute to the man and his sounds."

Arredondo passed away September 16, 1994, nine days before his 71st birthday.

Although José was a private character who never sought fortune and fame, he probably would've been pleased to know that his innovations and tones have lived on. "I would hope it would bring a big smile to his face because he had such a great smile," Friedman says. "He was a warm, friendly, wonderful individual once you got to know him." **GW**



A pre-*Tell the Truth*
Billy Squier on
stage in 1991

Squier's Hard Truth

Buried by his "malevolent" record label in '93, *Tell the Truth* is the lost classic that Billy Squier hopes could bring him back from the dead

BY JOE MATERA

▶ **"I CALL THIS** record 'the best Billy Squier record you've never heard,' because it's the record most people haven't heard," says Billy Squier, one of the Eighties' biggest rock stars, from his New York City home. "Capitol did put it out, but they did nothing to promote it, and the president of the label told me they were going to bury it."

Squier first broke through on a mass scale in 1981 with his second album, *Don't Say No*, and its signature track, "The Stroke," before going on to enjoy continued success throughout the decade. In the early Nineties, as grunge began infiltrating the musical landscape, Squier's guitar-driven style of melodic hard rock had seemingly become old hat. Yet Squier had just handed his label the best record of his career, *Tell the Truth*, a record that would re-establish his brand of rock as a force to be reckoned within the grunge-soaked climate. Sadly, Capitol Records, Squier's label at the time, had other ideas.

"I felt what Capitol label head Gary Gersh did was malevolent and almost vindictive," says Squier today. "If he didn't want me on the label, there were better ways to go about it. We could have sat down and he might have said, 'The label's going in a different direction. What can we do about it?' We could have sorted it out in an honorable way, but he couldn't be bothered. He just fucking kicked me to the curb. I never expected to be sabotaged by the industry I'd come to think of as family, so my gut reaction was, 'I don't think this is a place I want to be anymore. I don't want to be anywhere near this bullshit.' So I walked."

In 1993, soon after his showdown with Capitol, Squier exited the music industry for good. Apart from releasing an acoustic blues album in the form of 1998's *Happy Blue* and embarking on sporadic live appearances, including two stints in Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band in the later part of the

2000s, he has mostly remained out of the public eye.

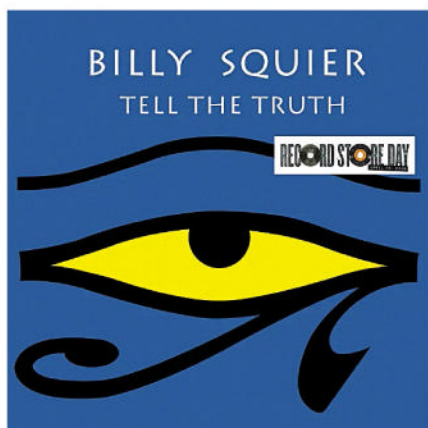
Last year, though, after years of silence, he tested the waters by releasing a new single, "Harder on a Woman," and this July sees a reissue of *Tell the Truth* on vinyl. Finally, fans will get to hear what they weren't able to hear upon its initial release in 1993.

"I've owned *Tell the Truth* outright ever since leaving Capitol, but I didn't want to go out and peddle it," he says. "I didn't feel I could simply hop to another label and be accepted with open arms. Capitol had put me in a position where I was suddenly on the outside looking in, where I couldn't just take the record and go wherever I wanted and put it out and it was going to be great. So I just sat with it for a long while and waited for the right time."

"Then, about a year ago, I got an email from a guy I'd never run into before. He said he worked for a small boutique label and they

**"There was this
aura of discovery.
Everything
was fresh
and exciting"**

JOHN ATASHIAN/GETTY IMAGES



were really interested in doing a project with me, and was there anything I might want to do? A light went off in my head. I said, 'I want to do a vinyl release of *Tell the Truth*.' He freaked out when I told him because he worked at Capitol when *Truth* first came out and he loved the record. He was young and just getting into the business, and he told me no one at The Tower could figure out what the label was doing with the record."

For *Tell the Truth*, Squier brought in uber-producer Mike Chapman. "Mike was great to work with," Squier says. "He came with his own engineer, Kevin Shirley. Between the two of them, they had the production end of it in really good shape. Mike came from a songwriting background, so he was able to comment insightfully on the songs I was bringing in. We shared a high level of mutual respect; at one point he actually told me I was the best songwriter he ever worked with, which I took to be a huge compliment."

To flesh out his core band, Squier wanted to approach the recording of *Tell the Truth* with a more expansive perspective. "I had this idea of bringing in some of the other players I'd come to know over the years and put together different ensembles for each particular song," he says. "That really worked out quite well. The sessions got a lot more exciting; cats were playing together who didn't normally play together. Everybody was on their toes and there was this aura of discovery. Everything was fresh and exciting."

For the record, Squier utilized a number of vintage guitars, depending on what each song required. "Different songs call for different sounds," Squier says. "I used a '59 burst and a '56 Junior, a '51 Fender Nocaster and a '62 Strat, a Gretsch White Falcon, a Martin D-18 acoustic, and a '65 Rick-12. My amp of choice was a Marshall Super Lead 100 half-stack that I hot-wired in the mid-Seventies."

How does Squier feel about *Tell the Truth*, today? "Much the same as I did about *Don't Say No* — you work your whole life to make records like these. I'm very proud of it." **GW**



"The idea of singing absolutely freaks me out," Laura Chavez says

Laura Chavez

Playing renegade roots on a beat-to-hell Strat, the Californian sessioner is demanding her rightful place in the spotlight

BY DAMON ORION

▶ AS A SUPPORTING guitarist for acts like the Mannish Boys, Lara Price and the late Candy Kane, Laura Chavez has always deliberately avoided outshining the musicians she backs. That hasn't stopped aficionados from taking notice of her skills, though: *Guitar Player* magazine has counted her as one of "50 Sensational Female Guitarists," and in 2023, she became the first-ever female winner in the Instrumentalist — Guitar category at the Blues Music Awards.

Chavez's debut solo album, the all-instrumental *My Voice*, finds the California native taking a variety of styles to the fitting room. While there's plenty of her stock-in-trade Texas and Chicago blues to be found, she and her band also tackle genres like funk, soul and R&B. Thrown into the mix are reimaginings of tunes like CCR's "Born on the Bayou," Booker T. and the M.G.s' "Chinese Checkers" and the Mexican folk songs "El Cascabel" and "La Llorona."

"Stylistically, I feel like there's something on the album for everyone," the guitarist notes. "It's kind of all-over-the-place, because I am also."

Chavez hopes *My Voice*'s musical diversity might influence young

guitarists to stay open to different genres. "When I was young, if I didn't think [certain music] was 'blues' enough, [I decided] 'I'm not going to listen to that.'" She adds that perhaps the new album's array of styles will encourage listeners "not to do the same thing I did back then."

As for the title *My Voice*, Chavez explains, "The idea of singing absolutely freaks me out. I hate speaking in public or speaking on the microphone. For my whole life, in so many ways, the guitar has been how I express myself."

A key element of Chavez's voice as a guitarist is her hybrid picking technique, which she says is "partly how I'm able to get certain melody lines and keep the rhythm and the chords going at the same time."

Another defining characteristic of her sound is her use of the bridge pickup on her go-to instrument, a Fiesta Red 1960 Stratocaster Relic issued in 1996. "It's the one guitar that I pick up, and I don't have to think when I play. I can always dial it in somehow to make it sound appropriate to whatever gig I'm doing, even if it's a jazz gig. It's very distressed at this point. All of the relic-ing is authentic!" **GW**

"I hate speaking through a microphone. The guitar is how I express myself"

"This is what I do, and I only have so much time — so I'm gonna do it," Duane Betts says



Blood on the Tracks

Saluting his fallen father — while surrendering his bag of tricks to producer Dave Cobb — Duane Betts' new album reclaims that famous surname for himself

BY ALAN PAUL

▶ **DUANE BETTS' NEW** album, *Isle of Hope*, is his most intimate, personal work to date. After almost a decade as an established solo artist, Betts leans into Americana songwriting on the recording, which is produced by Dave Cobb, known for his work with Sturgill Simpson, John Prine, Marcus King and many others.

"I wanted to show my life's experiences," says Betts, who co-wrote most of the songs. "All that I've been through, and that I aspire to be. I want to create music that is a sanctuary for people during anxious times."

Betts recorded the album shortly after the 2024 death of his father and mentor, Dickey Betts, the melodic genius behind so much of the Allman Brothers Band's sound. Duane is a terrific lead guitarist, as he has shown throughout his career — touring with his father's Great Southern; performing with Dawes; on his debut solo album, 2023 *Wild &*

Precious Life; and on multiple albums with the Allman Betts Band, alongside Devon Allman. On *Isle of Hope*, however, Betts leans more into the songs while also sharing the guitar spotlight with Johnny Stachela and J.D. Simo.

"I certainly wanted a few guitar spotlights, but the album isn't about my playing," Betts says. "I like the fact there are solos I could have done that could have gone on forever, but don't. There's plenty of room to jam live."

You've come a long way in the last decade since you started stepping out as a solo

"I'm so fortunate to be part of a legacy. It's an honor that my dad named me after Duane Allman"

artist, but one constant has been working with Johnny Stachela. What do you value so much about your partnership?

I just really enjoy playing with him. We have been playing together regularly for almost 15 years, and I just think we complement each other very well. Johnny has good taste, and we share a lot of the same musical and aesthetic interests, we're good friends and he's just a fantastic player. I also like having a right-hand man and somebody that can play slide. I'm not really a slide player and now have no push to work on it because he's so good.

Last year, you put together a tribute to your father in Macon, Georgia, that included Warren Haynes, Derek Trucks, Oteil Burbridge, Chuck Leavell, Charlie Starr and others. How do you remember that night?

That event was quite the undertaking. The playing part was stressful, but it was so rewarding. It was deeply personal and it was something that had to be done, and it had to be done by me. I look back with a lot of pride on what we were able to do that night, and the love showed for my dad and his music both on the stage and in the audience was great. I'm just grateful it went off without a hitch.

BOBBY RICH

Isle of Hope has a different sound than your previous work. How did working with Dave Cobb at his studio in Savannah affect the recording?

Dave had a huge impact. He elevates the material and brings everything to its maximum potential. He makes calls that pushed me to go against some of my ingrained instincts. Some of it was as simple as adding a descending line or having more movement in the chord structure, and some was subtraction to make something hit harder by making it simpler. These are things that producers are supposed to do, but he's so good at it, and has such impeccable taste and great instincts that it's easy to have faith.

I learned a lot about song structure from him and some of it went against my instinct to jam. "Reckless" was the perfect example. I wanted to put the solo in the middle over the chorus structure, then have it go into the chorus. Dave didn't want it to go back to those chords until the chorus, which would make it hit harder, then put the solo at the end with a whole new section. It worked out really well, and I had Johnny play the solo because it just sounded right when he did. Dave's records have such a style and character, and you can definitely hear that.

Was it hard to relinquish control of the songs like that, especially since a lot of them seem so personal, starting with "Heartache"?

No, because what he was doing was making the songs better and helping me deliver them to people. "Heartache" is my favorite song that I've ever been a part of writing. It means so much to me, and I am so excited for other people to hear it. Losing somebody you love is a universal feeling we can all relate to. It was written shortly after dad passed, but I realized it's not just about him. It's about some of my friends I've lost. It's about everything.

In terms of it being the first track, we wanted to commit to that. Before I had even finished the song I had the idea that I wanted to start the record out with a quieter song, not a barn burner. I was thinking about how much I liked how Beck started the *Sea Change* album with the beautiful, quiet "The Golden Age." Then, once we brought the songs in and started thinking about the track order, Dave was adamant that he wanted "Heartache" to be the first song, so we were in line, and I am very proud to come out of the gate with something so emotional. It's hard being that vulnerable, but I'm really proud of the song.

It reminds me of how the Allman Brothers Band started *Eat a Peach* with "Ain't Wastin' Time No More," which Gregg wrote after Duane passed away, and it's Dickey's first recorded slide part.



It's answering the question "How are we going to survive without Duane?" on the very first track.

Wow, yeah. That's such a powerful, soulful song, but you just turned on a light bulb in my head by putting it in that perspective. That was so gutsy. That's a strong statement and, yes, there's a common thread between those two conceptually, but it wasn't conscious and it only occurred to me when you mentioned it!

Has your famous name ever been a challenge to your career as a musician? Your first and last names are so evocative.

I'm so fortunate to be able to play music, do what I love and be part of a beloved, highly respected musical legacy. It's an honor that my dad named me after Duane. I realize people will always associate me with that lineage — because that is my lineage. It's who I am. But I just want people to listen to my songs, check what I'm doing now and consider that maybe there's more to it. And most folks do. I just try to create my own art, and if I feel that I'm doing really good

work and I'm proud of something, then that usually supersedes any negative feelings that I possibly could have.

The whole point of what we do is to share the art with people and hopefully put a little joy in their lives and give them a reprieve from their daily stresses. My dad used to say that the three hours people come to the show is the little sanctuary we create for them to forget about their daily troubles. They get to escape with us, and we want to give them a little peace of mind. And that's what the concept of the record basically is — an isle of hope.

A great metaphor.

The crazy thing is the title is both a metaphor, and a real place. Going to the studio every day I would pass over a little bridge with this sign that said something like "Now entering Isle of Hope." A couple more turns, and there was the studio. I mentioned this to my wife Lisa, then to Dave and everyone agreed it was a great title. I thought it was also appropriate for these times when there's a lot of anxiety. This is your little place to stand on safe ground. This is your isle of hope.

How does the reality that it's now hard to make money from recordings impact your approach? Is it still vital to keep writing and producing new music?

Yes. You write songs, put them out and hope that people listen and like them. You might not get the money back, but the hope is that a song reaches across that line and brings more awareness to your music, then they come to your shows, and it grows to doing more and bigger shows. The dream is to have a lot of people connect with your song and you can't give up on that. I think of it like an investment into my life. This is what I do, and I only have so much time — so I'm gonna do it! [GW](#)



Micki Free in Hollywood,
Florida, October 22, 2010



INQUIRER

Micki Free

From “annoying” first riffs and teenage stage-fails to the boutique electric he’d save from a fire, the Grammy-winning veteran opens his heart and gigbag

BY JOE MATERA

What was your first guitar?

I made it out of a Cheer detergent box! I cut a hole in it and used a ruler as a neck and rubber bands as strings. I’d imitate Jimi Hendrix. Then one day, my Uncle Frank says to my mom, “You’ve got to buy Micki a guitar because he’s driving me crazy with that Cheer box!” So, he finally got me a guitar. It was an acoustic; I don’t remember what kind it was.

What was the first song you learned how to play?

“Secret Agent Man” by the Ventures because I loved them too. I played that as much as I could play it, and my mom would be like, “Would you shut up with that?” It was annoying because that’s all I could play – but I could play it well.

What was your first gig?

In the early 1970s, we had moved back from

Germany to the Midwest. I had a little band there that I was playing with that had started in school. At the time, Grand Funk Railroad was my favorite band, so I thought I was Mark Farner. I even had really long hair. The first gig was playing in the school gym for a dance when I was 16.

Have you ever had an embarrassing moment on stage?

When I was younger, the most embarrassing moment of all I had was when I was trying to look cool onstage as I was playing my guitar.

“What guitar would I save from a burning building? That’s too hard. Can I take three?”

I fell off the freaking stage! They had to help me get back on – and that was pretty embarrassing. After that, I started to get my footing, so I never did that again, thank God!

What’s your favorite piece of gear?

Since I dig Hendrix and Cream, I’m a Marshall purist because that’s what I grew up on. My go-to amp is my 18-watt Marshall 1974X with a 12-inch speaker. It’s like the Bluesbreaker amp. They have a fantastic sound because their impedance is low, and, because it’s 18 watts, when you crank it up, it breaks up at the best time. It’s like money in the bank. *[I can get]* the tone I like to get, which is kind of like a cross between Hendrix and Eric Clapton.

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

That’s too hard. Can I take three? If it has to be one, it’d be my Tey guitar with the turquoise inlays. It’s so versatile. I can get sounds that are close enough to a Strat and to a Les Paul – and if you back it off a little bit, you can get anything you want with it. It has something called a Mojo button on it, and I can select the kind of vibe I want. It’s amazing. I love it so much.

When was the last time you practiced, and what did you play?

I don’t practice a lot. I’m not that kind of a guy that goes, “I’ve got to play my scales.” I pick it up when I feel like it. Billy Gibbons once told me, “Play the stuff you want to play, like, the stuff you hear,” and I got what he meant by that. So, when I’m practicing, I’ll play some Jimi, I’ll play some ZZ Top, I’ll play some funky stuff, some Santana. That’s how I practice. It’s not like a schedule.

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

I’d like to know more about the scales since I’m mostly a blues-rock player. Technically I’d like to really get into scales and see how they do arpeggios and stuff like that, because that’s not in my lane. I play more like Billy Gibbons. Hendrix didn’t play scales either – and I learned everything from those guys. But as I listen to current players, there are some where I’ll go, “Wow, that sounds good.” Maybe I should investigate that, widen my style and go to some places where I’d normally not go.

What guitar-centric advice would you give your younger self if you could?

I’d tell myself to practice more and widen my range of music besides the greats, like Clapton, Hendrix and Jeff Beck. When I was young, I only listened to blues-rock. I’d tell myself to open my mind a little more. **GW**

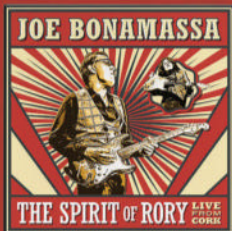
JOE BONAMASSA

THE SPIRIT OF RORY **LIVE FROM CORK**

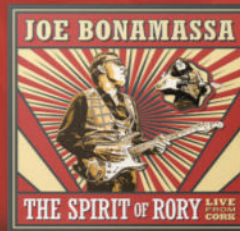


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SHOP TALK

Well Strung Guitars

330 CONKLIN ST. ■ FARMINGDALE, NEW YORK
ESTABLISHED 2019 ■ WELLSTRUNGUITARS.COM

BY ERIC T. FELDMAN

DAVIDSON'S WELL STRUNG Guitars was founded in 2019 by Paige and David Davidson. Prior to Well Strung, David was a co-owner of We Buy Guitars alongside Richard Friedman, as well as the curator at Songbirds Guitar Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Paige has a business and marketing background, serving as the social media director for Songbirds Guitar Museum, where she fell in love with the rich history that surrounds vintage guitars and their brands. Following the museum's closure during the pandemic, David and Paige decided to take their small store and turn it into one of the world's largest vintage-exclusive shops, specializing in Fender, Gibson, Gretsch and Rickenbacker. We'll let Paige take it from here.

How many instruments are in your shop right now?

We're home to more than 500 vintage instruments, all of which are available for sale!

What's the coolest guitar in the shop?

Tough question. Cool is subjective, but the coolest piece right now is a 1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom in Cherry. Only about six of these were produced, making this guitar truly special.

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

A 1963 Fender Strat in Olympic White with gold hardware and a tortoiseshell pickguard. The combination was something I hadn't seen before. It was the most fantastic-sounding, perfectly worn-in guitar. Plus, who doesn't love gold hardware?

What's the most sought-after model by customers, generally speaking?

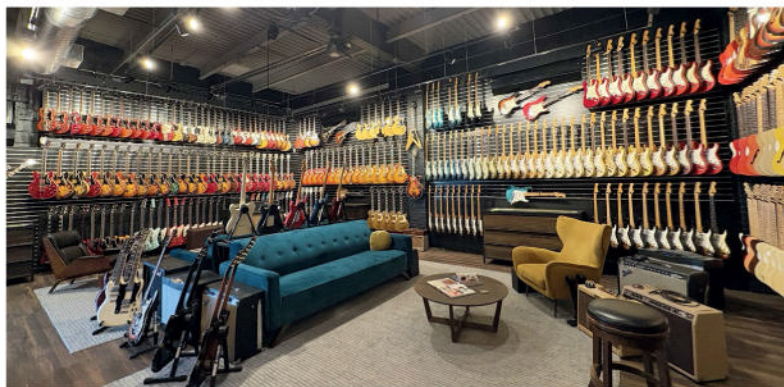
This changes from week to week, but at the moment, we've been fielding the most calls about 1958 to 1960 Gibson Les Pauls in Sunburst, more commonly referred to as "bursts." A close second is Blackguard Telecasters from the Fifties.

What separates good and great guitars?

Some players are looking for specific tonal qualities while others are focused on pickup output or neck thickness. I think you just need to love what you play. Jack Pearson gigs with a \$199 Squier Strat, so...

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

Like they are in the comfort of their home, just surrounded by some of the most iconic instruments of our time. We like to keep our environment one that feels like a cozy, well-stocked living room. We want you to feel like



you've been coming here for years, even if it's the first time we've met.

What is one thing everyone should know about your shop?

That any player can come in and play any guitar. How can you know if it's the one for you if you can't play it? I've never been a fan of a shop that doesn't let you play the good stuff.

What's your best advice for someone looking to buy their next guitar?

Go into the shop with an open mind. You might have always wanted a Gibson Firebird, but the sound from an ES-335 resonated more with you. Listen to your gut. When you're

connected to your guitar in a real way, the music you make is the proof.

What's the best part about owning and running a guitar shop?

Being able to pair someone with the perfect guitar. You'd be shocked at what people do and don't know from what they've seen on the internet. Being able to physically put the narrow-nut width SG into someone's hands that they swore they wouldn't like, and watching that "aha" moment, is such a cool experience. Having someone find "the one" in your shop is the best feeling.

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



"I've never been a fan of a shop that doesn't let you play the good stuff"





Still Showing Us the Way

Fifty years after *Frampton Comes Alive!* and 16 since his last studio album, Peter Frampton returns with *Carry the Light*

BY JOEL McIVER

PEOPLE SAY, 'YOU get great guitar sounds' and I say, 'Thank you very much,' because if you give me a bad guitar sound, I sound like a beginner," says Peter Frampton on a video call from his home in Nashville. The 76-year-old musician knows what he's talking about, of course, having blown our minds with his guitar prowess for the last six decades – and that experience is audible on *Carry the Light*, his first studio album in 16 years.

Loaded with guitar textures, Frampton's 19th album ranges from sweet acoustic mellowness to the extravagant but controlled soloing for which he became known in his early band, Humble Pie – and even more so after the impact of his talkbox-heavy, eight-times-platinum solo album *Frampton Comes Alive!* in 1976. He tells us that his objective with the solos this time was to sound "sweet and just on the edge of distortion," delivering the goods via the famous "Phenix" Les Paul, a black 1954 Custom model that was lost in 1980 and returned 31 years later (you'll know it from the cover of *Frampton Comes Alive!*).

Elsewhere on the new album, Frampton and a cast of guests including Tom Morello, Sheryl Crow and H.E.R. (aka singer Gabriella Wilson), run through slow-building blues, understated balladry and all-out rock, the latter heard most clearly on "Lions at the Gate," which features Morello's signature choppy riffing. The long outro of "Islamorada" is another highlight, featuring a blistering solo outro from Frampton, and yet another is "Breaking the Mold," a subtle acoustic piece featuring Crow.

In *GW*'s chat with the affable veteran we cover a lot of territory, from the abuse of power, via the unlikely strength of an 18-watt amp, to the experience of playing at *Star Wars* HQ. We also discuss Frampton's ongoing struggle with inclusion body myositis, a muscle-wasting disease that may or may not prevent him touring the new album – but never fear, he's not planning to retire any time soon.

***Carry the Light* is a hell of a record.**

Oh, thank you very much. After not releasing any new material for the last 16 years, I knew it had to be good. I'm not as prolific as the next guy, maybe, so it took me at least six years to find all these songs, and my son Julian and I completed them all in the last year.

There's a stellar cast of guests on the album. How did you meet H.E.R.?

We met when I played George Lucas' 80th birthday in 2024 at his place up in California, Skywalker Ranch. Basically it's a winery, right in the middle of hundreds of acres of wine. It's just gorgeous. Lucky bastard! But 



he deserves it... Anyway, H.E.R. was playing first, and then it was us, and then Don Felder played, and I sat in. It was weird looking out and seeing Harrison Ford, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas looking back at us.

What's your connection with Tom Morello?

I've known Tom for a while now — I keep bumping into him. We're managed by the same person, and I've been a huge fan of Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave, and — rest in peace — Chris Cornell. I'm a big fan of his. So a couple of years ago, I said to Tom, "If I had a song, would you..." and he said "Yes!" I didn't even get the question out. It was wonderful, and he said some lovely things about *Frampton Comes Alive!* and how it affected him.

He guests on "Lions at the Gate." What's that song about?

It's basically about having too much power and money, which come together. It's about the billionaires and their power and their influence. I didn't realize it would be so topical, but the first verse is about sending our kids off to war. The title comes from the first time I went to Los Angeles, which was probably in the late Sixties. We said, "Let's go to Beverly Hills and look around," and you'd see all these big mansions with huge lions on their gateposts. To me, that always made me feel like they were showing off their power. Basically it's a protest song, saying that we've got to stick together. There's safety in numbers, and we're a band of brothers, and we've got to fight this.

Your son Julian was your co-writer and also the album's co-producer.

Yeah. The thing is, Julian knows me so well, that it's like one person writing, which is so cool. I'll write a song, and then he'll come in

and help if I need a line, or he'll write a song and I'll come in and do the same, or we'll write a song 50-50.

"I'm Sorry Elle" is an acoustic showcase, for both rhythm guitar and solos.

That was the first song I wrote for the album. That one's all me. A lot of the inspiration came from Covid and my daughter giving birth in the middle of Manhattan and barely being able to see her husband because of the restrictions in the hospital. I didn't see her for four or five months because of the travel thing.

"Islamorada" has an incredible solo section.

Thank you. My son wrote that one. He wrote the verses and brought them here to Nashville because he lives in Los Angeles, and we'd spend three weeks at a time, and then he'd have to go back. He also brought in the melody and the chords, which I really love, but he said, "I need a chorus," so we wrote a chorus that same day — and that was it.

Does the Phenix make an appearance on this record?

Oh yes — on nearly all the solos, I think. When I got it back from Gibson in 2011, they had just made it playable. I said, "Don't take any of the scars on the body away; just make it playable." *CBS Sunday Morning News* came down to the concert that night because they wanted to see it, so I didn't play it for the whole show, and then right at the end, just before "Do You

"I love, love, love to play so much. Until the last second I'm going to be playing solos and rhythm parts on people's records"

Feel Like We Do," it all went dark. I pulled out the guitar and put it on the stage, and all the lights hit it. The whole audience stood up and went berserk. I was thinking, "What about me?" [Laughs] No, the guitar was more important than me that night, because everyone knew it had been gone for 31 years. It was an amazing night. I only played it for "Do You Feel..." for a while, and then I gradually started bringing it back into the set, and I hardly play anything else live now.

Do you still have the Penta-Suhr you played on David Bowie's Glass Spider Tour in 1987?

The one I played with David went in a major flood here in 2010, but John Suhr is making me another one, which is very similar. I love his work. Nearly all the solos and all the rhythm sounds on the new album come from a Suhr Badger, which is an 18-watt amp.

Only 18 watts?

Yeah! It's amazing when you think of those huge sounds, isn't it? I mean, some of them are really huge, but it's just that amp with a 1x12 cabinet and Neumann and Shure mics, both the same distance from the speaker. That's the sound, plus a couple of room mics and some pedals that I had laying around.

What about acoustic guitars?

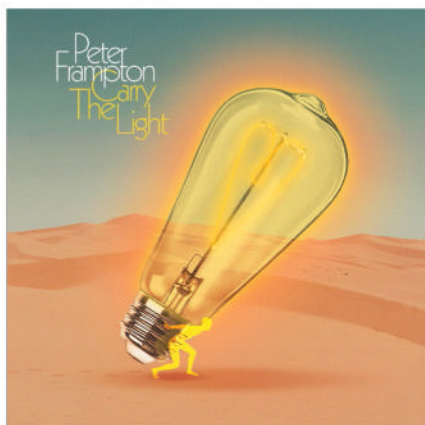
I used quite a few. There were three different Matons, including the Tommy Emmanuel model and a small travel one, which I've recorded with before and is so good. There's my old Epiphone, and of course I have my own Martin D-42 Peter Frampton model from the Nineties: that's a long time ago. I think that's it. Martin, Matons and Epiphone, basically.

Will you be playing live, or does the myositis prevent that?

It's making it more difficult. I'm not saying there won't be some dates, but right now we don't have anything on the cards. I wish there were, but I just have to wait and see how I do. Because the condition comes and goes? Well, we call it "progression or plateau." It'll progress for a bit and then it'll plateau, and right now I'm in a plateau. It is what it is, you know. I'm fully aware of where it's going, and it's not great, but I've always been the most positive person. It mainly affects my legs, but it's affecting my hands too.

How do you manage that?

In October, we did a little three-week tour, and I was going, "Okay, finger number two ain't going to make it there in time: finger number three, you're up!" I hate thinking when I play, but in this situation, I have to. It's just a case of changing the way I play a little bit. I can't play at the speed I once could. Not that I've ever been a shredder, you know.



It's always been more about melody, for me. There's definitely some shredding going on in Humble Pie and *Comes Alive!* and some of the other albums, but I tell you right now, it's less notes, more feel.

You look well, though, and the solos on the record sound as dexterous as ever.

Thank you. Long may that continue. I have some great friends who are making music, and if I don't have anything of my own to work on, I tell all of them, "Send me tracks, because I want to play every day." So right now I'm working on three different tracks: that's what keeps me going. I love, love, love to play so much, and I'm not going to let it go. Until the last second I'm going to be playing solos and rhythm parts on people's records.

What inspires you these days?

I listen to everybody for inspiration, like this guy. [*Holds up Miles Davis' Kind of Blue*] Oh, my God. I've vocally learned the opening cut of *Kind of Blue*, "So What," and then I'm going to learn it on guitar. I've seen a woman online who sings Miles' solos from that record, and it's incredible, so that's why I started doing it myself. I said, "If I can learn to sing it, then I'll be able to sit down and learn to play it."

Is it true that when you played with Bowie, you used an electric sitar that once belonged to Jimi Hendrix?

Yes, I did. In 1977 I was finishing *I'm in You* at Electric Lady in New York, which was Jimi's studio, and as we were leaving on the last night, the studio manager came out with a guitar case and said, "We've really appreciated you being here, I hope you had a good time. We have something here that we think Jimi might have wanted you to have." I was expecting it to be a Strat, but they opened it up and showed me this electric sitar, and I went, "Oh, my God." Jimi's road manager Gerry Stickells once wrote, "Jimi had three electric sitars. I know where two are, but I can't find the other one." [*Laughs*] I've got it here! **GW**

LIGHTS, CAMERA, FRAMPTON! How Frampton documentary director Rob Arthur helped the iconic guitarist come alive on the big screen

BY HENRY YATES

RELEASED ON THE heels of *Carry the Light, Frampton* — a new film that premiered June 4 at New York City's Tribeca Film Festival — began as a career retrospective but rapidly evolved into a candid, funny and at times wrenchingly honest character study. *Guitar World* asked director — and Frampton's long-time bandleader — Rob Arthur about putting the great guitarist on the big screen.

What was the spark for Frampton?

I've been his bandleader for 20 years. I've heard thousands of bus stories. He'll suddenly say, "I just remembered this thing I did with Bill Wyman back in 1960-whatever." I'm always like, "I've never heard you talk about that in interviews." And he's like, "They always ask me the same five questions!" So the original goal was a career retrospective, but it ended up being much more. He'd been the subject of a [VH1] *Behind the Music* episode, and, nothing against those people, but every story is kinda the same, and his life wasn't that. The more we filmed, the more we talked, it became so personal.

What's your favorite scene?

When we were at Abbey Road Studios in London, we were there to film him and producer Chris Kimsey at the console going through the original recordings of [*Frampton's 1972 album*] *Wind of Change*, which had just been discovered. That was our goal, so all we booked was the one studio to film that. While we were there, Peter was like, "Down there in Studio One was where I did George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*." I said, "Yeah, we weren't able to book that." But I met the studio owner, and he was super cool. I said, "You know, Peter played on the Harrison record. Is there any way...?" He says, "Go ahead and film down there." He just let us go into the place where Peter recorded *All Things Must Pass*. In the film, you can see the emotion on Peter's face — of being right there where he had this experience with George Harrison and Phil Spector.

What were the hardest subjects to talk about?

Peter was extremely let down by his manager during *Frampton Comes Alive!* The guy pretty much ripped him off of so much money. To get Peter to talk about that, it's not his favorite topic. He said, "I understand we have to," but it was very painful. He was broke just a few years after putting out one of the biggest-selling albums of all time. And that

story of him borrowing money from [*Atlantic Records co-founder*] Ahmet Ertegun... first of all, it says a lot about [*Ahmet's kindness*]. And for Peter to admit in the film, "This is how low it got" — it's the real story. I don't think he's ever talked about that in an interview.

Did Peter seem to have any regrets?

I'd say some of his choices post-*Frampton Comes Alive!*, like the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* film [*1978*] and rushing out the follow-up album, *I'm in You* [*1977*]. But as Sheryl Crow says in the film, "When you're number one, there's only one way to go. It's gonna happen; it's about how you recover from that." I think Peter would probably say all this stuff happened for a reason.

Obviously, Peter has some serious health issues. How did you approach that?

He wanted to be totally transparent. He said, "The more open I am about my struggles, the more it helps people who are going through this disease." We see him throughout the film with a cane, you know, struggling to get up stairs. But his attitude of how to persevere and survive this is a huge part of his character. We have his doctor from Johns Hopkins University in the film. She calls Peter her model patient because he's doing everything he possibly can to fight the muscle degeneration.

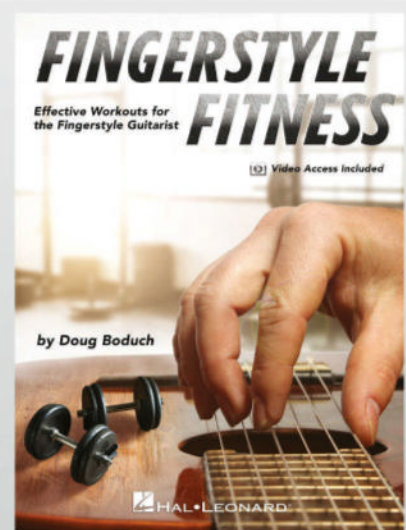
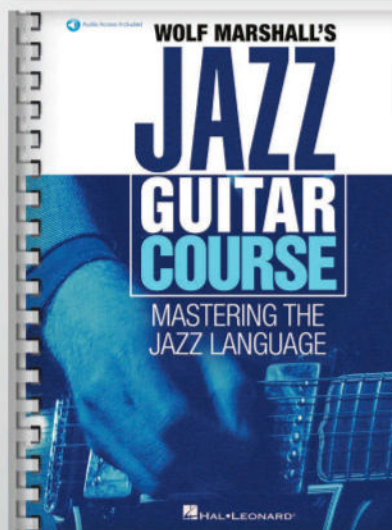
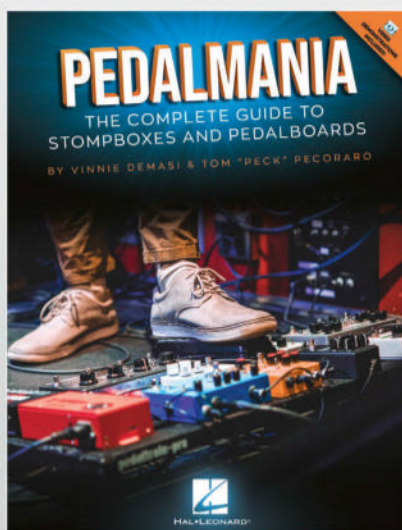
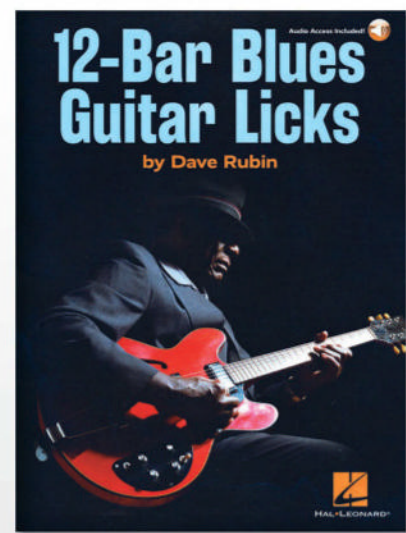
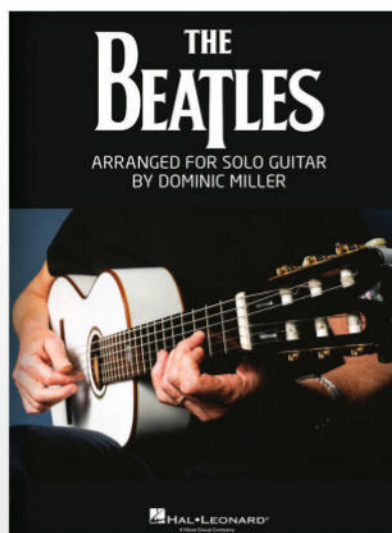
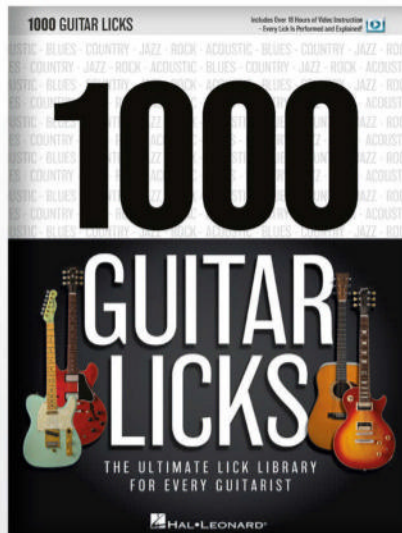
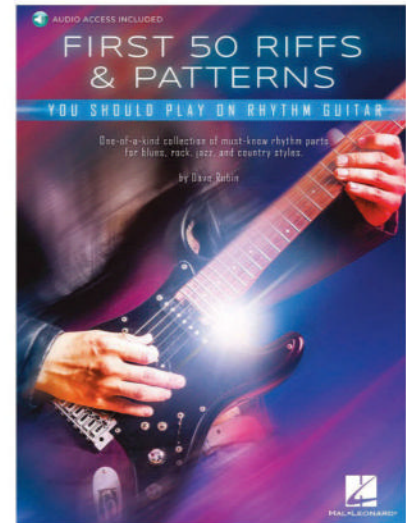
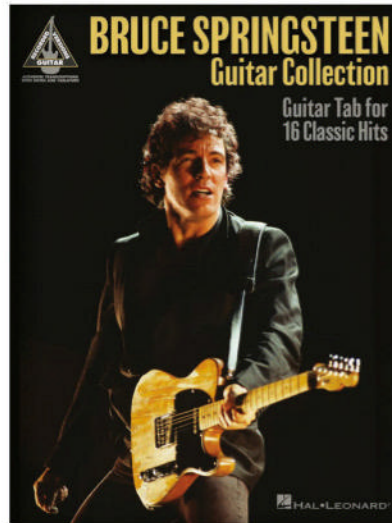
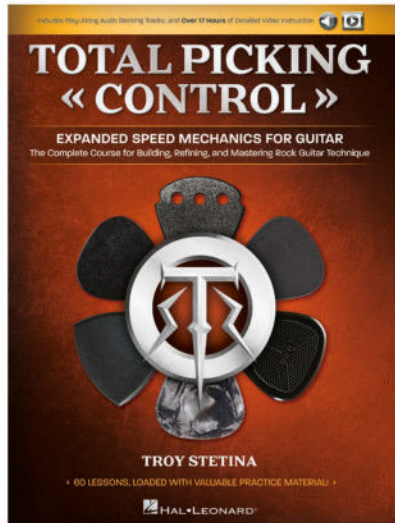
Why do you think this documentary will appeal to guitarists?

A huge thing I wanted to cover and tell right was Peter's approach to playing. He's got this unique style, and where does that come from? So we talk about his roots. Django Reinhardt and the Shadows is where Peter learned his basics. Which is different from, let's say, Eric Clapton or Keith Richards, which is more blues-based. Peter is not blues-based. He loves the blues, but he has this other vocabulary, which is jazz, Django Reinhardt, Miles Davis and Jaco Pastorius. All this stuff is in Peter's playing, but it's served up through this kind of accessible rock lens.

Do you think we'll see more tours from Peter?

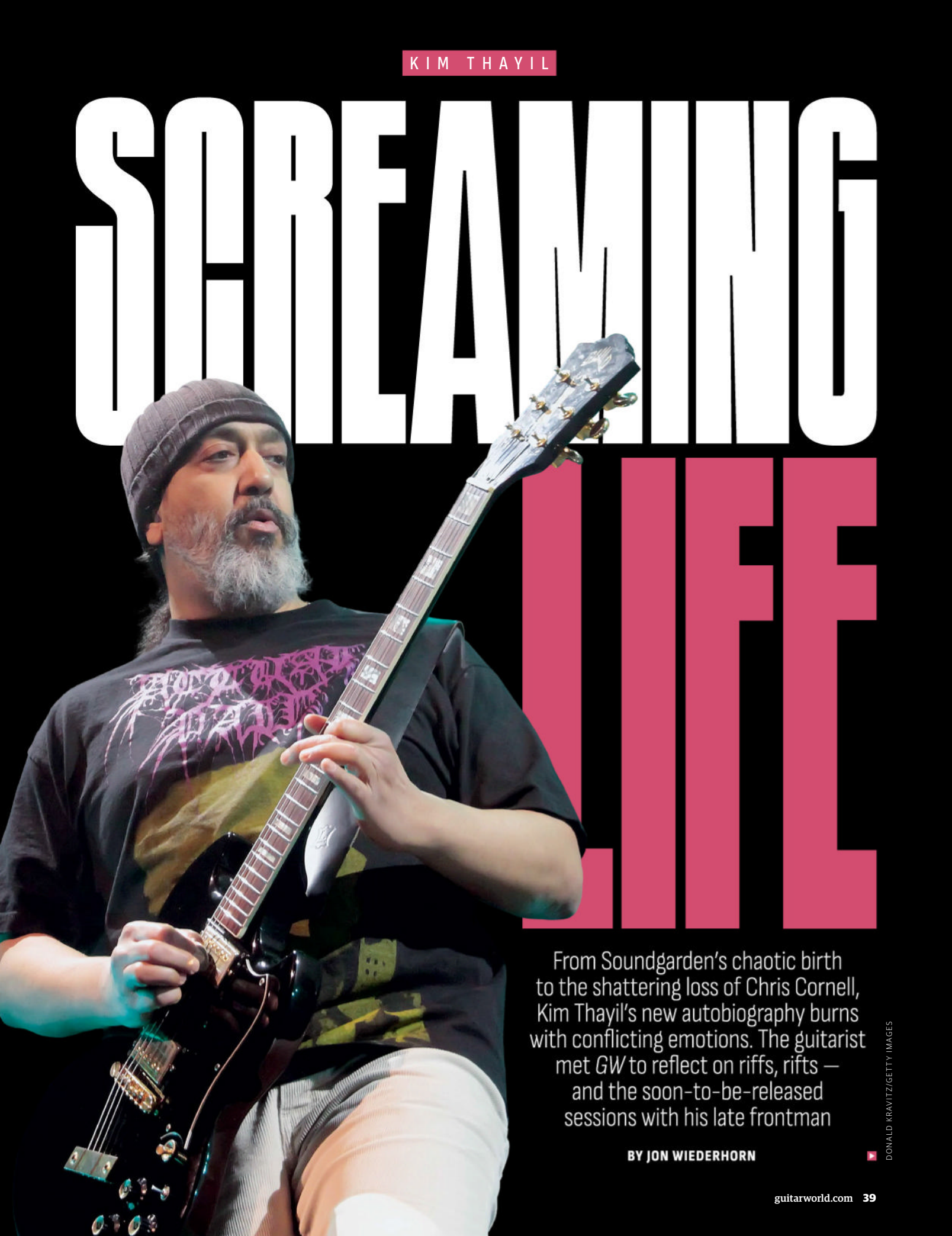
It's hard to say. As he deals with the disease — and it is progressive — it's getting harder for him to get in and out of tour buses and venues. So the issue about any upcoming tours is how physically hard it would be for him to just get around. That's it. He still sings great. And he's playing his ass off.

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A photograph of Kim Thayil, the guitarist of the band Soundgarden. He is wearing a dark beanie, has a grey beard, and is wearing a black t-shirt with a pink and yellow graphic. He is playing a black electric guitar. The background is dark with large, stylized text.

KIM THAYIL

SCREAMING

LIFE

From Soundgarden's chaotic birth to the shattering loss of Chris Cornell, Kim Thayil's new autobiography burns with conflicting emotions. The guitarist met *GW* to reflect on riffs, rifts — and the soon-to-be-released sessions with his late frontman

BY JON WIEDERHORN

WHEN CHRIS CORNELL took his life at age 52 in May 2017, the music world mourned the death of the Seattle music pioneer and frontman of Soundgarden, which Cornell co-formed with guitarist Kim Thayil and bassist Hiro Yamamoto in 1984. The tragedy was all the more trenchant since Soundgarden were on tour and working on the follow-up to their 2012 comeback album, *King Animal*.

"Strange is probably the best way to describe how I felt after Chris passed," writes guitarist Kim Thayil in his upcoming autobiography, *A Screaming Life: Into the Superunknown with Soundgarden and Beyond*, which came out June 9. "Everything turned dark when the band ended so suddenly, taking with it a creative partnership I hadn't fully understood until it was gone. Losing that left me in a constant, grim melancholy. It was a despondency so deep, it felt almost sublime. I wasn't just feeling it — I was watching myself feel it."

Thayil processed Cornell's death in private and avoided the press for 18 months. When he started talking to promote an MC5 50th-anniversary tour (for which he was playing guitar), he revealed that Soundgarden had started working on the follow-up to *King Animal* before Cornell died, and that there were unreleased multi-track demos that featured Cornell's vocals. Soon after, the band started working on a new album, including a song Thayil wrote tentatively called "X-Mas," which he says might have been the last thing Cornell ever recorded.

"I was thrilled, but it was also bittersweet," Thayil writes. "Hearing Chris's voice again, singing things I'd never heard before, was both joyful and emotional. It was like he was speaking to me from the past, reminding me of our work together. There was another surprise, too — an unheard alternate version of a song we had previously worked on, musically distinct from what he'd shared with us earlier. It was amazing."

To plug the book, Thayil sat down with *Guitar World* and talked about the Seattle music scene, how he altered his approach to guitar throughout the band's career, his unconventional leads, the sources of tension that led to Soundgarden's breakup in 1997 and the status of the band's swan song.

You were categorized as a metal band before "grunge" became part of the vernacular. Did you feel like a fish out of water?

Yeah, because we were navigating popular culture and rock themes, but we were giving them context in a way that didn't feel like metal. There were political and social aspects to our music that seemed closely aligned with underground punk rock.



Kim Thayil (left) and Chris Cornell in an outtake from *GW*'s May 1994 cover shoot

After Nirvana's *Nevermind* topped the charts, most major labels eliminated their metal departments, dumped their hair bands and entered a mad dash to sign any loud alternative groups that might belong in the same universe as Nirvana, Pearl Jam or Alice in Chains.

To be clear, they weren't dropping Metallica or Megadeth. They were dropping these glam-metal bands, but some of them were really damn good and wrote cool songs. It was unfortunate that record companies thought they had to stop promoting them and drop them. It's also unfortunate that the record labels were motivated by caprice and fads.

What kind of guitar tone were you after when you started out?

Everybody talks about guitar tone now, but it wasn't much of a topic then. We were just

going with a power chord sound. I wanted to be loud. Tone wasn't an objective.

What was your criteria for the guitars you played in the studio and on tour?

I just had to have a guitar that felt comfortable and did what I wanted. It's like, I want to play songs like the Ramones, and I want to play songs like Black Sabbath. Can this guitar do that? It can. Okay, cool. Being visceral was important to me. I wanted a guitar that felt responsive and a sound that leaped from the amp when I played. The way I approached the instrument always seemed more important than what actually came out. If I wanted to play a solo that was slashing and manic, I beat up the guitar like I'm filled with that mania. On the song "Haunted Down" on *Screaming Life*, I wanted to be loose and wild and feel

this careening sound. On other songs, I'd want a more mellow, warm, bluesy sound, so I'd hang onto the notes and play triplets I learned from listening to Rush and Kiss.

Did you have a go-to guitar in Soundgarden?

The Guild S100 was very versatile. I use a lot of other guitars – Gibsons, Fenders and Gretsches – but that Guild was a big part of the Soundgarden sound, especially for noise.

You often played a sturdy meat-and-potatoes riff and then countered it with an atonal, noisy lick or an interesting effect.

I didn't want to follow any particular scales, so I played whatever sounded right to me, whether it was crazy or kind of trippy. The pickups on that guitar were somewhat microphonic, so I could blow on the strings and it would feed back. I did that at the beginning of "Flower." But it wasn't a shrill, out-of-control noise. It was a weird hum. And the way I set my amps and used a chorus pedal gave me feedback that grew slowly and swirled around in a psychedelic way.

Can you trace your arc of evolution as a guitarist?

A lot of it was informed by whatever I was listening to. When I was young, I liked Kiss, Black Sabbath and Aerosmith, so I learned pentatonic scales. But I didn't like them. I was like, Oh, that's only five notes. What about the other two? Over time, my playing became a mish-mash of everything I loved, including MC5, Gang of Four, the no-wave compilation *No New York*, Ramones, Black Sabbath, Sun Ra, Ornette Coleman, Frank Zappa and Pere Ubu.

Dropped tunings figured largely into your songs as well as those of Nirvana, Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam. When did you discover the technique?

I was in my young twenties and hanging out with Buzz Osborne from the Melvins. We started talking about Black Sabbath, and Buzz goes, "You know they did this thing called drop D." We said, "What's that?" And Buzz says, "You tune the E string down to D, and it sounds heavier." When I got home, I grabbed my guitar, tuned it down and immediately realized it was much easier to play chords, so I could play faster.

What was the first song you wrote in drop D?

"Nothing to Say." I showed it to everyone at practice and explained the drop D sound and they loved it. The next song I did in drop D was "Flower," and then Chris wrote "Beyond the Wheel." When [bassist] Ben Shepherd joined us, he brought in other tunings, and [drummer] Matt Cameron does a drop D in G, which we called "digga digga." He wrote "Birth Ritual" with that. It was cool because

we were all songwriters and always tried to turn each other on to new stuff and impress each other. Suddenly we didn't feel limited by the intervals in which we tuned the guitar. We could do whatever we wanted.

Chris started out as a drummer and didn't take the stage with his guitar until after 1989. Did having him onstage change the way you played?

"Everybody talks about tone now, but it wasn't much of a topic then. I just wanted to be loud"

Yeah, and at first I was resistant to it. If I wanted to solo on songs like "Incessant Mace" or "Beyond the Wheel," having just the bass and drums behind me freed me up. But if Chris was playing chords, it framed the parameters in which I could play, which felt limiting. Also, I liked playing riffs on my bridge pickup and solos on my neck pickup. I liked the warm sound of that, which is the opposite of what most players do. When Chris was also playing, I couldn't cut through, so I had to move to the bridge pickup.

Was that frustrating?

It was annoying, and he didn't know it at the time, but when he switched from a Les Paul

Thayil at the 2025 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Los Angeles



with humbuckers to a Fender Stratocaster or Telecaster, I had to adjust my playing again because his single-coil pickups were brighter than the Les Paul pickups. That's when I started using the wah-wah.

In addition to cutting through the mix, the wah added a psychedelic splash to the songs.

It was a good addition to the sound. I wouldn't do a regular wah-wah sweep because that's been done to death. I wanted to be noisy, so I'd kick on the distortion and step on the wah. It was screechy and screamy, so now I've got this weird feedback and noise, and I can do some slashing stuff.

Did you get an equipment upgrade when you signed with A&M for *Louder Than Love*?

We got an endorsement deal with Peavey, and they gave us a bunch of cabinets and amps, which built up our stage gear for touring. A few years after that, we did a deal with Mesa Boogie. But each time we did a new deal, I'd get new heads and have to learn about their different features. The Mesa Boogie Rectifier had settings for "modern," "classic" and "standard." Some were bright and percussive, which would be great if you're playing like Metallica, but I had to scramble to set everything to "standard" or "classic" and try to make the amp sound warmer and more like an old Fender Tweed.

***Badmotorfinger* (1991) was more musically complex than *Louder Than Love*, yet "Jesus Christ Pose," "Outshined" and "Rusty Cage" were some of your biggest hits.**

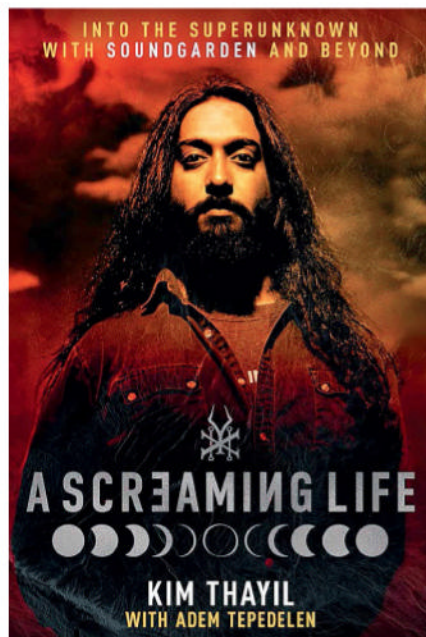
Chris was brilliant at taking what might seem like conventional formats and breaking them up in odd ways. "Outshined" is mostly in 7/4, but it was built around a great riff and had a memorable vocal line. And "Rusty Cage" was in drop B. The detuned string is a little looser, so it has a slightly different sound and little overtones. It sounded heavy and incredible. So, we kept going with that. On *Superunknown* [1994], "The Day I Tried to Live" is built on descending half steps, and it's in 7/4. And "Spoonman" switches between 7/4 and 4/4.

Was becoming a multi-platinum band a double-edged sword?

No, because being famous was never a goal, and we could always sleep at night knowing our songs were still weird. But being in the position we were in was definitely strange, and you don't know what it's going to be like until you're there.

You described the last album you did before your breakup, 1996's *Down on the Upside*, as somewhat similar to the Beatles' *White Album*, for which band members came to the table with

Thayil on stage with Soundgarden in Atlanta, May 3, 2017, 15 days before Chris Cornell's death



finished songs that were recorded without much collaboration.

We were always coming in with our own ideas, but when we did that album, some people wanted their songs to sound just like their demos. It was like, "Well, we're not making four solo albums here, we're making a Soundgarden record." It bothered me a little because I write with Chris and Ben in mind, and I thought they should write with me in mind. That wasn't happening – partly because of success and partly because of arrogance.

Was *Down on the Upside* a misstep?

When you've got a number of cooks in the kitchen, there's always going to be a little friction. But I love the album. Every song on the record is there because the band wanted to learn it and perform it.

Were tensions mounting in the band before Ben stormed offstage during a show in

Honolulu in 1997?

There were frustrations, but we were still moving forward. There have always been times when one of us might have a bad gig. We all just thought, 'Okay, now we'll get back on track and do the next show.'

Some have viewed that moment as the beginning of the end.

The narrative that's out there is incorrect. It was just a fucked-up show, and it happened to be the last show of the tour. We all thought we'd wait until the next tour and everything would be fine. Then, months later, Chris decided to quit the band.

Is there a general misconception about Soundgarden among people who only know you for "Spoonman" and "Black Hole Sun"?

Thematically, Soundgarden dealt with pretty big things. We didn't write about parties or cars, and we didn't write he said/she said love songs. They were slightly grander and more psychedelic. They were about identity and orienting oneself in a creative, spiritual and social world.

You had a tremendous comeback with your reunion tour in 2011 and the studio album that followed, *King Animal*, in 2012. As you've

documented in your book, Soundgarden were firing on all cylinders when Chris took his own life on May 18, 2017. In 2023, Chris's widow agreed to give you the vocal tracks he recorded between 2015 and 2017 for songs you were all working on. Matt Cameron has said you've already got eight songs for a new album. Is it difficult to work with recordings Chris made before he died?

It's emotionally draining and there are things about it that are sad and melancholic. But at the same time, it's exciting to finish the work that we started with Chris. It's a tribute to Soundgarden and a tribute to Chris. To not do this would be a great disservice to everyone, including the fans who knew we were in a writing cycle while we were touring.

Will fans recognize the album as Soundgarden?

I made an aphorism earlier about having too many cooks in the kitchen. Well, now we have one less. But we have these

"I didn't want to follow any particular scales, so I played whatever sounded right to me, whether it was crazy or kind of trippy"

recordings Chris is on, and we all have a strong understanding of Chris' identity within the band, so we are going to honor that completely, even though Chris isn't there to throw in his two cents. So, yes, it will definitely sound like Soundgarden and I'm going to sound like me.

Do you have a release date in mind?

It's too early to say. We're not making this with any set deadline, and we all have other things we're doing, so we're fitting it into our schedules when we can. The whole process is a little sideways and backward. We're not starting from scratch, we're rebuilding. It's forensic. We're taking things apart and seeing what we've got in there and what we need to add to flesh everything out. And we're planning to take our time with it.

Has age brought you wisdom or inner-peace?

Yeah, and with wisdom can come things like patience. But there was never any real major internal conflict. That wouldn't have worked. We wouldn't have made the records we did over a long period if it was no fun. We probably wouldn't have even stuck it out through [1987's] *Screaming Life*. We did something untraditional because it was fun, not because it was lucrative. **GW**

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THEY ARE THE BUZZ BAND OF 2026 — A PERFECT STORM OF WACKY AND WEIRD, WITH A CREATIVE AND TECHNICAL FLAIR THAT NEEDS TO BE SEEN TO BE BELIEVED. IT'S **ANGINE DE POITRINE'S** WORLD; WE'RE JUST LIVING IN IT.

BY AMIT SHARMA

TALL STARTED with a video uploaded onto YouTube on February 5, which set off a chain of events nobody — not even Nostradamus himself — could have predicted. Within the space of just a few months, mysterious Canadian unknowns Angine de Poitrine had somehow become the most talked-about band on the planet — the ultimate gateway drug into the weird and wonderful world of microtonal math rock.

As fate would have it, Seattle radio station KEXP were the ones responsible for documenting and sharing the duo's now-legendary live session, which took place in December 2025 as part of the annual Trans Musicales festival in the French city of Rennes. The band were showcasing a handful of tracks from their then-upcoming

second studio album, 2026's *Vol. II*, alongside a choice offering from their 2024 debut. Once public, the footage quickly took the world by storm, dominating headlines, chat rooms and comment sections across the globe.

Here was a band who looked like they'd arrived from outer space, thanks to their oversized *papier-mâché* masks, oversized noses and polka dot costumes, drawing heavily from avant-garde and surrealist-adjacent art movements like absurdism and Dadaism. They even communicate like extra-terrestrials, as evidenced by their appearance on Canadian TV show *Tout Le Monde En Parle*, where the pair spoke in bleeps, grunts and gargles — noises that were carefully translated by subtitles and by their manager, Sébastien Collin, who sat next to them.

There is, of course, an interesting backstory here. The group — Khn on guitar/bass and Klek on drums — half-jokingly claim to be 333-year-old time travelers inspired by the Nasal Quartet, a solemn choir of proboscis monkeys from the island of Borneo, who the duo once described as “the undisputed musical pinnacle of the galaxy.”

Another big talking point has been the double-neck bass/guitar hybrid in Khn's hands, fitted with extra frets to help facilitate their microtonal musings — providing access to notes and intervals outside the usual 12-tone equal temperament typically used in Western music. With seemingly endless opportunities for new sonic textures, harmonies and melodies, the usage of this tuning system has been hugely advantageous for the duo. ▣

Khn gets down to business at Strange Brew in Bristol, England, May 12



helping them stand out from the norm and genuinely push the boundaries of creativity in the modern age. They're by no means the first musicians to attempt this – Radiohead, King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard, Steve Vai and Jacob Collier are just a handful of the names who have experimented in such a manner – though at a time when accusations of AI slop and industry plants are rife, Angine de Poitrine have been rightfully described by many as a breath of fresh air.

None of this would mean a thing, however, if they didn't have the music or panache to back it up. Gimmicks are OK, but – without substance – things become subject to ridicule. This is not something Khn and Klek need to worry about; their largely instrumental music is infectious and played impossibly well, with layer upon layer added in real time live on stage. It's the kind of scenario that would make a lot of musicians crumble in fear, even without the visual impairment that comes from wearing masks.

Stylistically, there's a lot at play, from the funky grooves of "Sarniezz" and the Eastern mysticism at the heart of "Mata Zyklek" to the math rock madness of "Sherpa." Some of it might remind you of the cosmos-cruising psychedelic exploits typified by artists like King Crimson, Frank Zappa and Gentle Giant, while other parts are more dissonant, jagged and angular, reminiscent of Voivod, Primus and Gong. In any case, this is not radio-friendly or crowd-pleasing music, at least not through intention. They even named themselves after the pain that comes from the heart not receiving enough oxygen-rich blood, officially termed by medical professionals as angina pectoris, or just plain ol' angina. In severe cases, this tightness and pressure can lead to a heart attack.

Perhaps it's the sheer audacity of it all – from the mystery surrounding their identities to the imagery and music – that's made them crash land into the zeitgeist as 2026's unlikely success story, winning them

friends in high places such as Dave Grohl and Lars Ulrich. There were even accusations of a copycat band selling themselves as the real deal in Russia, and an unofficial inspired-by signature model, the Microtonal Doubleneck 4/6 by Eastwood that got launched in May. Whatever they're doing, it's working.

In this exclusive interview (which took place via email), Khn talks us through his musical roots and the gear he relies on and offers advice on how to sound bigger when it's just the two of you.

Which musicians taught you the most, and exactly what did you learn from them?

The most important stuff came from a teacher I was studying with at the end of my high school years. The music school in town had this little venue called Le Ménestrel, where I'd go to watch concerts by students. I'd see these hedonist teenagers who were part of this stoner-speed-freak social microcosm known for its alcohol-induced-misdeeds. I eventually

built a poetic narrative about how those guys were leaning selflessly into this high-effort, low-payoff deal where you have to master technically difficult pieces on an unforgiving instrument – something that sounds pretty thin and would be of no interest to the vast majority of people.

That's an interesting way of looking at it.

The whole idea actually seemed appealing to me, so for my last high school year, I switched to the classical-guitar course and signed up for a program where you start school earlier in the morning in order to attend music lessons every afternoon. This meant getting a new guitar teacher – the kind of teacher a lot of kids would be a bit scared of. Someone who always looked mad and had quirky habits like keeping his tuner in an old Ziploc bag.

What was your first lesson like?

This short and highly strung man in cowboy boots lit a hand-rolled smoke in a little room, asking me to play something. He stopped me after 15 seconds, visibly irritated and disgusted by my shit, before grabbing my hand and filing down my nails to a good angle. He then proceeded to install an old taped-up metal ring to keep my right hand's pinky close to its neighbor. He made me play a variety of finger-picking patterns on open strings while heavy-handedly correcting my posture and bombarding me with information. I came out of that class with a strong feeling of mediocrity, which pushed me to practice a lot. Eventually, we had a very pleasant relationship. Those kinds of teachers will kick the living crap out of your ego if they feel like you don't push yourself, because they feel strongly about music. But when it becomes obvious that you're putting in the work and applying the principles being taught, they become the most generous teachers ever.

He sounds like an interesting character.

What was his story?

That guy had toured all over Quebec playing bass in blues bands and was a huge Frank Zappa fan. He made simple arrangements of songs like "King Kong," "Son of Mr. Green Genes" and "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama" and had us form bands to play those songs live in front of our parents. He made us improvise noisy, chaotic, atonal transitions between the songs, directing with hand signals. Someone passing down knowledge and sharing a passion with such generosity would be my definition of a guitar hero. He'd invite touring musicians to give masterclasses and booked our Zappa tribute to open for other bands or play in restaurants downtown. He told us stories about life on the road in the Seventies. Outside of his school duties, he pushed us into our first gigs where we were



"There are no pre-recorded guitar or bass lines. Every line has to be played live," Khn says

getting paid to play to a real audience. It made us feel proud, but also self-conscious, opening for 50-year-old fellas with experience. I keep strong memories of those years.

There's a big prog- and math-rock influence in your music. Are bands like Rush and King Crimson relevant to the sound you make?

They were never really part of my day-to-day music consumption, except for a couple of King Crimson albums here and there. Klek and I did listen to a lot of old Seventies prog, though, just not much modern stuff. I grew up in a rural area with little to no internet connection, so I'd listen to whatever I could find, mostly in thrift shops or from the public library. I'd listen to the same records six million times. My first encounter with odd time signatures was the intro to "Zomby Woof" on Frank Zappa's *Cheap Thrills*. I remember the clerk at the record store being enthusiastic about a teenager buying that record. I still love that riff. Klek and myself were also huge Gentle Giant fans when we were young. I would go to his mother's place and we'd spend our time watching old Soft Machine, King Crimson, Genesis and Zappa videos on the Internet, but Gentle Giant had most of our attention.

They're definitely one of the more curious names from the Seventies British prog scene. What about them did you find so inspiring?

We liked the fact that their whole proposi-

tion was kind of awkward and geeky. We thought it was hilarious, while also genuinely enjoying all the improbable and beautiful musical ideas in there. "Just the Same" would be a good example of how they'd keep things groovy in odd times. The guitar part and punches just before the two-minute mark, and the way that whole subsequent bridge comes along, sounds very tasty to me.

What are your three favorite guitar riffs of all time and why?

Everything in "Legs" by Massacre is like candy for my brain. It's the chord sequence and melody on top, plus the bass lines and tones. I would also say "Reptilia" by the Strokes. I've always had a thing for the sound of energetically strummed 10ths on an electric guitar. I'll also say the guitars in "Pin It Down" by Madison Cunningham. I've been massively enjoying her albums. I really like the tones, low tuning and subtlety of it all. You've gotta love anything that makes a bit of a chromatic enclosure around the major third. You gotta love a chorus with a seven feel that starts with a minor second wobbling in your ear like "vwoubvwoubvwoub." Do it justice – don't listen to it in your car while chatting with your buddy. Listen to it loud – it's great stuff.

How much do you think in terms of theory and scales when writing for Angine de Poitrine?

I think in terms of scales all the time. Or rather, intervals in a context. But it's just a harmless piece of information that sits there in the consciousness. A lot of people get this idea of someone playing robotically with a straight face, thinking, "Now I should play this note, for this reason." Even among musicians, there is this myth of how knowledge might somehow end up hurting ▣

"We always struggle and laugh at how ridiculous it all is. But it's a band. It's an act to make people smile"

Khn [left] and Klek in May. "I have always dreamed of jamming with monkeys," Khn says



your creativity. If I say, "I think in terms of scales all the time," it does not mean, "the things that should be done according to a given set of rules will dictate all of my choices." It's not like I will only act creatively in a sterile and conscious effort to create only using these tools.

That's a very balanced way of looking at it.

When I wander in that space, I have a compass and a map in my pocket. Some areas remain blurry to me since my knowledge is limited, but I can recognize and name some of the sounds and phenomena that I love. I can use them by choice if I'm looking for a specific taste, but I can also let things happen and analyze as I go or even after. Terminology matters to me. When someone uses the inappropriate term in a conversation, I become insanely irritated. I make a conscious effort not to bother people too much with that stuff, though. But when you play chords, intervals, melodies in a harmonic and rhythmic context, every aspect of what is happening has a name. Why on earth would someone make a point out of not knowing the names of things? Terminology is our only hope at humanity. Without it, chaos awaits. Value terminology. Worship terminology. Or be a monkey.

That being said, I have always dreamed of jamming with monkeys. [Laughs]

What about the odd-time signatures?

As far as time signatures go, rhythm tends to happen naturally. But for that reflex to happen, odd-time signatures had to become a natural part of my vocabulary at a certain point in my youth. I was driven by curiosity and forced that rhythmic vocabulary upon myself. Eventually that stuff becomes integrated and you can play it without much thought. We still use that stuff in a very square, classic rock 'n' roll kind of way.

We heard it was Quebec luthier Raphaël Le Breton who built the double-neck guitar you use — although Klek made your first microtonal instrument.

Klek made the first microtonal guitar we used. It was a single-neck electric, a cheap random Strat ripoff that he refretted and put

"For me, having the looper stop working is the equivalent of that classic nightmare where one goes to school naked"

together with parts scattered here and there. It was a personal project born out of curiosity. When he made me try it, it worked well. I fell in love with the new territory it opened, but I don't think I would've ever set foot in there if he hadn't brought that thing over. With the first double-neck guitar, the one I'm using at the moment, I had a hard time finding someone to build it. After failed attempts asking companies to customize existing double-neck models, I started buying parts. I had two Warmoth necks built, just slotted with no frets, so I asked a luthier back home to modify and fret the necks into quarter tones. Basically, I dumped a bunch of parts at his place and he was nice enough to do the strange project without judging. [Laughs] I had him cut and glue two cheap Chinese Strat and P-Bass bodies together, and he did a beautiful job with the fretting.

How do the extra frets allow you to create more freely?

I wouldn't say they bring more freedom. Arguably, it's quite the opposite. But they open the door to possibilities that are new to me, which feels refreshing. I've also always had a thing for chromaticism and dissonance. Double the notes in an octave give you a lot of chromaticism and friction opportunities,

BRAD MERRETT

which is great. I guess with time, a lot of companies are going to start offering microtonal guitar options because there's a bit of a growing trend with that sound in popular occidental music. I was actually surprised by how hard it was to get my hands on a professionally built microtonal neck in 2023.

Are there any other guitars in the Angine de Poitrine arsenal, and would you ever sign with a big guitar company?

There are no other guitars yet, but there might be something in the making.

Is it hard covering bass and guitar at the same time, especially given how many times you need to change tones or loop with your feet?

I play both but never at the same time. The double-neck just serves a purpose of facilitating frequent and quick switches between bass and guitar to loop short phrases. The looper pedal tap-dance, constant saturation level and volume management between the different guitar layers and overall physical handicap is what makes the activity very challenging as a whole. All the lines are rather playable, if you ask me.

Even with the masks?

Well, when you have this excellent idea of playing these lines in the dark with lights flashing in your face, no peripheral vision, dollar store acrylic paint all over your fingers, while having a heat stroke just for kicks, sure, it's very hard. We always struggle and laugh at how ridiculous it all is. But it's a band. It's an act to make people smile, to make people laugh, possibly while dancing. It wouldn't make much sense to do that if show business was strictly about music as [just sound].

Almost everything gets recorded into your Boss RC-600 looper. How do you make sure it all locks in with Klek?

Like with any looper, the length of a given loop will be dependent on the length of the first recorded loop, meaning it will be able to be of equal length, or double, triple or four times the length of that initial loop in a given song. With pretty much any standard looper, two layers or tracks will not be able to shift and become offset from one another. Meaning that if you want to use polyrhythmic effects, you'll have to loop a phrase long enough for that whole cycle to happen where two phrases shift apart from one another until both their beginnings meet again. Which means that if you play like crap, the looper is going to play that crap back to the audience as is.

Performing everything on the fly like that looks like risky business.

There are no pre-recorded guitar or bass lines.



"It took me nearly a decade of playing before I bought my first pedal," Khn says

Every line has to be played live; it's what this freak show is all about — making it ridiculous, hard and painful for the musicians, thus fun for the audience. If I start using one, two, three pre-recorded lines, where do I draw the line between that and putting the whole pre-recorded set on there? I would ditch the guitar, tweak on filters and effects, making it a DJ set. Which would be something else.

What happens when things don't go according to plan?

When I mess something up, I have to erase it before it plays back, while keeping on playing that phrase, while trying to physically signal to Klek that we have to stagnate for another block of four, eight or whatever bars into a given section before moving forward. For him that means holding back on a buildup and staying alert for that signal that says, "Okay, I got myself out of my mess — I'm ready to move forward." It's dangerous, it's imperfect, and I'm guessing if it somehow becomes easy for us, we'll find a way to make it fun again.

What are the limitations of playing in a two-piece band, and what advice do you have for duos trying to sound bigger?

Obviously, playing in a duo imposes big limitations arrangement-wise, which can be frustrating. But it's not like you wake up in the morning and think, "Hey, let's start a duo." It just happens. There you are, playing with someone because you get along musically. No one else is around, so you adapt. Then the years go by, and time doesn't make it easier to find a perfect candidate to bring in, even if you ask yourself, "Wouldn't it be great to have a bass or saxophone doing this or that?" You get used to your workflow as a tight-knit unit. There's something pretty intimate about the creative space between two people, especially after 20-something years. It's not only about the music, but also sharing a common sense of humor and artistic vision. At some point, I guess you become scared of shaking and disturbing that space. We're a fossilized duo.

Splitting the signal must be imperative to create a deeper and richer wall of sound as a duo. It has worked well for bands like Royal Blood and Death from Above 1979.

For a thicker and fuller sound in this kind of duo context, yes, the obvious strategy is splitting the signal for two different amps with an ABY switch. But when doing so, I place

INTERVIEW

a lot of importance on the following principle: drive, fuzz or any kind of distorted sounds should get chained after the splitter. That gets sent to a guitar amp dealing with all the rich mid- and high-frequency harmonic content, thus keeping the other channel to send into a clean or almost clean bass amp, making for a very percussive, snappy and powerful sound when blended with good taste. With heavy music, it's tempting to drown all your sounds in heavy saturation, but that kills the snappiness and prevents finding common ground with the drums. It's good to use heavy-gauge strings at the bottom for high tension, then lighter-gauge strings at the top if you want to put some natural vibrato and a bit of expressiveness in there. But I don't apply that recipe at all with Angine at all, since I have the electric bass.

Let's talk about the rig. Usually there aren't any amps on stage behind you.

I work with no amps on stage most of the time. We run the signals through DIs and rely entirely on simulators. It's convenient for our backs and van space, but it also reacts properly to the stacking of multiple layers and

the obvious crescendo that happens in the process. I've never been much of a gearhead. As far as amps go, I've always used simple solid-state amps. Any Peavey rip-off bass amp from the early Eighties, paired with a Roland JC-120, has been my go-to for the past decade.

What pedals can't you live without?

The looper, definitely. I always carry a spare one that's kept on stage. For me, having the looper stop working entirely is the equivalent of that classic nightmare where one goes to school naked. Our music depends on the use of that system. But the answer is very project-specific. The funny thing is it took me nearly a decade of playing before I bought my first pedal, which was the Unpleasant Surprise fuzz/gate by Fairfield Circuitry. I bought it to make scratch-like effects

"Ultimately we're saying, 'You have the right to let your brain snap out of it for an hour — have a hotdog and go crazy'"

with a live band playing rock renditions of electronic compositions.

Finally, there can be no doubt you are the music industry's biggest success story of 2026. Why do you think that is?

It would be presumptuous to think that it's only about the music. Because, while we make an honest effort to create fun and original tunes, there's also an endless flow of amazing music being put out every day by people whose virtuosity knocks me out of my chair. Has the success of any rock band ever been only about the music? The music needs to be catchy, but it's also about how people relate to it. Angine confusingly celebrating while also satirizing some of rock 'n' roll's clichés — all in good fun — might be what a lot of people needed. In times where communication technologies bring a constant smell of fear and conflict, Angine invites everyone to knee-bend dance to weird, wonky rock 'n' roll, putting forward no specific message about human affairs. Ultimately we're saying, "You have the right to let your brain snap out of it for an hour — have a hotdog and go crazy." 🌭



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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.

BY DAMON ORION

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 McC

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 aunts 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.

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."

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 *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 *Pépé 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



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

chicken-fried steak: Mister Guitar, aka Chet Atkins.

"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

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 harken 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

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

"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."

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**

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

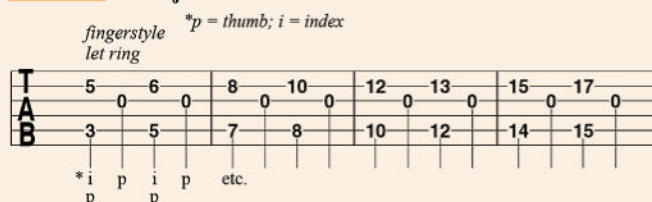


FIG. 2

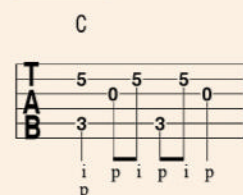


FIG. 3

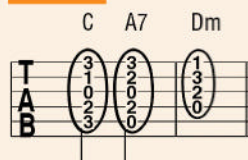


FIG. 4

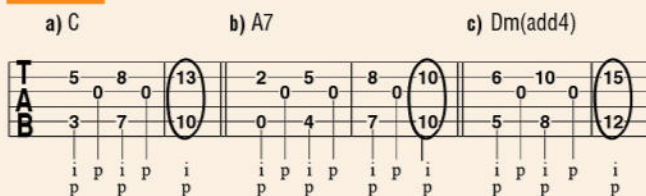
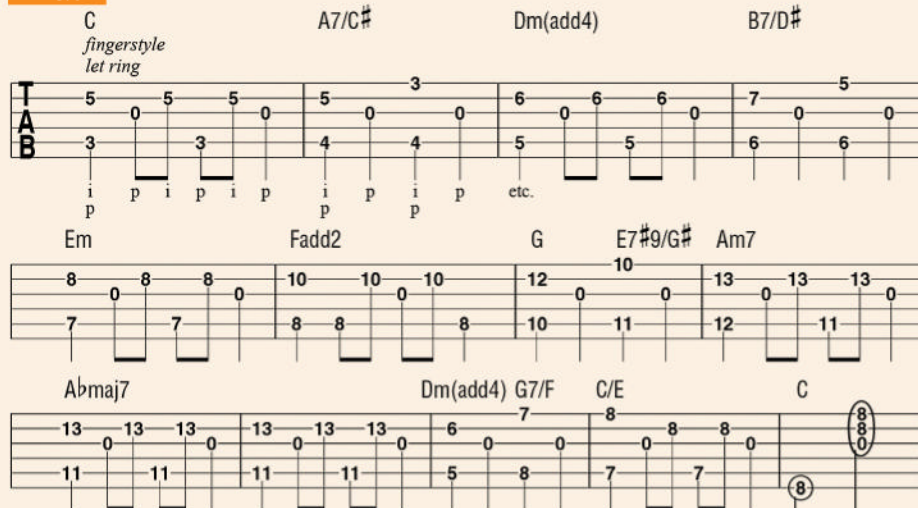


FIG. 5



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**.

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**

McCartney with a
Martin D-28 in 1984



ROBERT R. MCELROY/GETTY IMAGES

Earning Your Wings

Need a crash course in guitar badassery? Welcome to McCartney University. Behold the best and brightest six-string performances from Sir Paul's entire post-Beatles studio catalog (starring a McCartney, a McCullough, a McCulloch and a McIntosh).

BY DAMON ORION

YOU'D BE MORE likely to see a mosh pit at a Dave Matthews concert than a list of all-time greatest bassists that didn't include Paul McCartney. With all the recognition McCartney gets for his bass chops – not to mention his songwriting genius – it's easy to forget that he started his journey with the Beatles as a guitarist. Only when Stu Sutcliffe stepped down as the band's bassist in 1961 did the 19-year-old, baby-faced Paul reluctantly trade six strings for four.

Even after switching to bass, McCartney couldn't keep his hands off the guitar. Try to imagine Beatles tunes like "Yesterday," "Blackbird" or "Michelle" without his gentle acoustic artistry. For that matter, try to picture "Paperback Writer" without his fuzzed-out electric guitar riff, or "Ticket to Ride" without the melodies he wrenched from his Epiphone Casino, or "The End" without his sharp, expressive leads, or the intro to "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" without the proud six-string proclamations he launched through a Vox Conqueror from his Fender Esquire, or "Taxman" without his solo's blotter-art swirl of blues-rock and Indian influences... Shall we go on?

After the Beatles disbanded, the Former Fab leaned in harder, plastering albums like *McCartney* and *McCartney II* and *Wings' Band on the Run* with his distinctive guitar work. His array of equipment broadened over time, but his Epiphone Casino, Vox amps and go-to acoustics – a Martin D-28 and an Epiphone Texan FT-79 – stayed close to both his heart and his hands.

Realizing that even he can't play bass and guitar at the same time, McCartney has taken legions of gifted guitarists under his wings (yeah, we said it) throughout his career. From Wings alumni like Denny Laine, Henry McCullough and Jimmy McCulloch to more recent collaborators such as Robbie McIntosh (no, you don't have to have a last name starting with "Mc" to play guitar with the Big Mac, but it helps) and current band members Rusty Anderson and Brian Ray, these players have all enriched McCartney's music with their skill and creativity. In turn, they've learned crucial lessons in musicianship, stage presence, band dynamics and music-biz politics while enrolled at "McCartney University," as guitarist Laurence Juber calls it.

Juber, who stepped away from a successful career as a studio musician to join Wings in 1978, says he and his bandmates had an abundance of artistic freedom under Paul's leadership. "We were encouraged to really think of it as a band," he says. "There were very few occasions when he gave me something specific to play. That would be when something was written into his concept of a song, whether it was a riff on the live 'Coming Up' single or those figures in [*Wings B-side*] 'Daytime Nighttime Suffering.'"

Trying to spotlight every standout guitar performance in a body of work this vast – especially one so rich in contributions from world-class musicians – is like trying to cram every item in a restaurant into a to-go box. We'd love to list every deserving candidate, such as Pete Townshend's feisty leads on "Angry" from 1986's *Press to Play*... or the harmonized solo that closes out "Alligator"

from *New* (2013), or Jimmy McCulloch's leads on "The Note You Never Wrote" (*Wings at the Speed of Sound*, 1976), or Lloyd Green's adroit pedal steel quips on the 1974 "Junior's Farm" B-side "Sally G"... Well, hell, if we don't stop there, the list of honorable mentions is going to be longer than the round-up itself.

With that caveat out of the way, let the rock show begin. Here, in chronological order, are our picks for the guitar highlights from the great Sir Paul's post-Beatles studio catalog. May they provide newcomers with a six-string-centric entry point to the hallowed halls of Maccademia, and may they inspire longtime fans to go back and listen to what the man played.

"Maybe I'm Amazed"

McCartney (1970)

With a little help from Linda on backing vocals, the ever-industrious Mr. McCartney recorded every track of this soaring proto-power ballad in a single day. His rhythm guitar playing is sparse and unobtrusive, accentuating the song's emotional peaks without crowding his vocal. Still, there's a quiet ingenuity at work here; in the latter half of the song, McCartney builds intensity by fretting chords without fully depressing the strings. Combined with palm-muting, this creates a percussive sound with just a whisper of harmony. Paul uses this technique to craft a rhythm not dissimilar to the one his ultimate guitar hero, Jimi Hendrix, played in the intro to "Are You Experienced?" Within the context of the song, it sounds like he's sending a love note to his new bride in Morse code. Also noteworthy are the song's twin guitar solos ■



Too many people? John Wayne [right] hands Grammy awards to Paul and Linda McCartney in 1971



Jimmy McCulloch in 1976 and [below] Henry McCulloch in 1972

— loose variations on the vocal melody that he decorates with slides, hammer-ons and swiftly released ghost bends. While largely alike, the two solos diverge at the last instant. In the first, McCartney colors outside diatonic lines with childlike glee, but in the second, he stays loyal to conventional tonality. Midway through each solo, he adds an arpeggiated rhythm track much like a passage from the Beatles' "You Never Give Me Your Money," which still bore the scent of fresh paint when "Maybe I'm Amazed" was released.

"Too Many People"

Ram (1971)

One of McCartney's finest post-Beatles works, "Too Many People" cloaks unusually bitter sentiments in a melody sweeter than buttercream. Paul wastes no time setting the hook, driving the intro with insistent downstrokes on an acoustic guitar tuned a whole step south of standard. This detuning allows a droning A string (sounding as G) to underpin a shifting series of dyads on the D and G strings.

After the vocals take hold, the guitar temporarily recedes into the background. Then the guitarist plants a bomb in the bridge: a simple, catchy melody that fills the space between the sung lines. Mid-song, cowbell and shakers help propel a momentum-building electric solo. In the verse that follows, the cowbell pairs with animalistic guitar wails to foster the pastoral atmosphere suggested by the album's cover. A second solo bites harder than the first, as if echoing the little jabs at John and Yoko in the song's lyrics. Debate persists over whether McCartney or the late session player Hugh McCracken handled at least one of the leads in this song. However, beatlesbible.com credits McCartney with

overdubbing both solos in a single take. Either way, the sharp-edged lead guitar at the song's end hints that a formidable set of fangs lurks beneath this sheep's clothing.

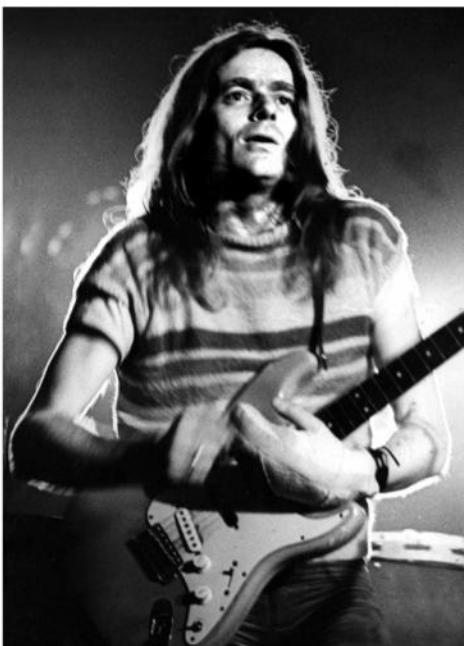
"My Love"

Red Rose Speedway (1973)

In a statement on former Wings guitarist Henry McCulloch's death in 2016, Paul McCartney described the solo on this recording as "a classic that [McCulloch] made up on the spot in front of a live orchestra." McCartney, who had initially composed a different solo for the song, tells the origin story of McCulloch's lead in the book *Wings: The Story of a Band on the Run*: "Just before the session, Henry came over to me, leaned

down and whispered in my ear. He said, 'Do you mind if I try something else on the solo?'... I had to have faith, and boy, was it rewarded."

In *Band on the Run: A History of Paul McCartney and Wings*, McCulloch claimed this was the first time a member of Wings had challenged the former Beatle. Granted, his nightly improvisations of the "My Love" solo throughout Wings' 1972 tour probably gave him the head start he needed to nail his single-take performance at Abbey Road Studios. Still, this lead, likely played on a goldtop Les Paul with P90s, is sensitive and unforced, briefly echoing George Harrison's most tender musical moments without lapsing into imitation. McCartney has named it as McCulloch's finest moment with Wings, and McCulloch called it a "one-take wonder" and a "gift from God."



"Junior's Farm"

Non-album single (1974)

With 1966's "And Your Bird Can Sing," Paul McCartney and George Harrison slipped harmonized lead guitar into the rock lexicon through the f-holes of their Epiphone Casinos. By 1974, acts like UFO, the Allman Brothers Band and Queen had embraced this device, bejeweling their songs with gleaming dual-guitar leads.

Toward the end of that year, Paul McCartney & Wings released "Junior's Farm," the band's final output on Apple Records. The song barrels in with an anthemic guitar line harmonized mostly in thirds, similar in spirit to the triumphant major-key fanfare that would later parade through Thin Lizzy's "The Boys Are Back in Town." "Junior's Farm" also serves as a coming-out party for Scottish guitarist Jimmy McCulloch, the former child prodigy who played on Thunderclap

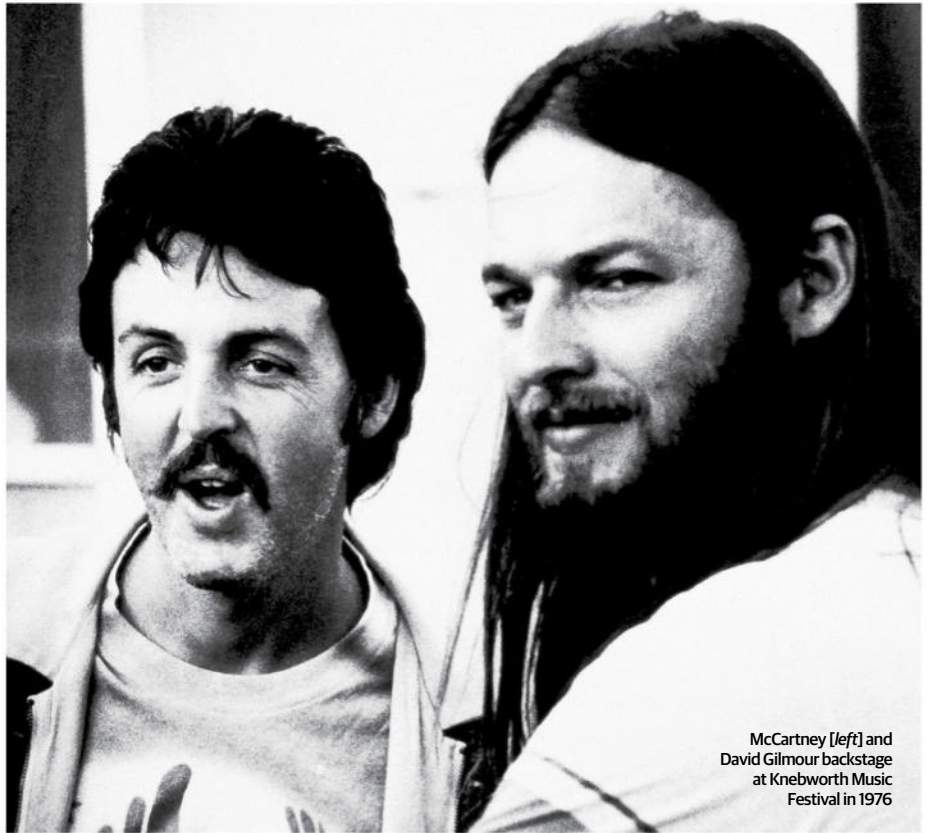
Paul McCartney

Newman's U.K. Number 1 hit "Something in the Air" at age 15. McCartney's shout of "Take me down, Jimmy!" is unmistakably reminiscent of "Get Back" ("Get back, Loretta!"), as is the instrumental break that follows. However, in contrast to John Lennon's straightforward lead (yes, "Get Back" is a rare example of Lennon playing lead guitar on a Beatles tune), McCulloch studs his solo with flashy ostinato runs and a double-stop that he goes into a screaming dissonance. He burns through the song with confidence and finesse, then embeds some deceptively simple-sounding arpeggios in the coda, his deft picking camouflaged by the band's harmonized vocals.

"Spin It On" and "To You"

Back to the Egg (1979)

The title of Wings' final record, *Back to the Egg*, reflects the back-to-basics ethos that permeated that album's creation. "We were basically recording in a barn in Scotland, so we didn't have any of the sophistication of being at Abbey Road or one of the other London studios," Laurence Juber says. One of the guitarist's most prominent memories from those sessions is of working out the leads for the punk/rockabilly-influenced "Spin It On," one of the first songs recorded for the album. McCartney sat with him in



McCartney (left) and David Gilmour backstage at Knebworth Music Festival in 1976

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

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the control room, encouraging him to come up with licks “that fit the title in terms of the ‘spin’ aspect of things. Paul brought stuff out of me that I didn’t necessarily know that I could do. When you’re sitting eye-to-eye with a Beatle, one tries to rise to the occasion.” And that Juber did, spinning speedy legato runs and screeching bends that beg for swear words of appreciation. His tone came from a 1963 Stratocaster plugged into a Mesa Boogie Mark II – the same rig he used to far different effect on “To You,” which finds him plowing straight through the roadblock of the song’s key signature. “Paul was in the control room manipulating an Eventide Harmonizer while I was improvising, so I was hearing notes in the headphones that were transposed from what I was actually playing,” he says. “That led me to play outside of the changes.” The result was a harmonized (and disharmonized) solo that stands triumphantly at the junction of consonance and dissonance. Juber calls the effect “weirdly satisfying”; we call it glorious.

In a 2012 interview for the webzine *Something Else!*, the guitarist described his solo on “To You” as “a precursor to what Trevor Rabin did on [Yes’] ‘Owner of a Lonely Heart.’” Elsewhere on *Back to the Egg*, Juber used an ARP Avatar guitar synthesizer and, on occasion, an EBow. More recently, he recorded *One Wing*, an album consisting of selections from McCartney’s post-Beatles work. This year saw the release of *I’ve Got a Feeling... LJ is Still Playing the Beatles!*, Juber’s fifth collection of Fab Four tunes adapted for solo guitar.

“No More Lonely Nights”

Give My Regards to Broad Street (1984)

Before lighting up “No More Lonely Nights” with a pair of inspired solos, Pink Floyd’s prodigious axeman, David Gilmour, played on a couple of tunes from *Back to the Egg* (“Rockestra Theme” and “So Glad to See You Here”) as part of a “rockestra” that also included GOATs like Pete Townshend, John Bonham and John Paul Jones. However, whereas Gilmour blended stealthily like the ensemble on those tracks, he is recognizable from note one of his first solo on “Lonely Nights.” Gilmour plays a melody as hummable and lyrical as the song itself. His sustained ending note morphs into a pinch harmonic that stings like a bite of live hornet pizza. At the song’s end, his second solo starts as a reiteration of the first, but an upward modulation seems to bring out the snarl in him. He spray-paints the song’s outro with screaming bent notes, surly double-stops and sneering whammy bar flourishes.

The-paulmccartney-project.com quotes Gilmour as saying, “In one three-hour session with a band, we learnt [‘No More Lonely Nights’] and put it down, and Paul played piano and sang the lead vocal live, and I put the



[from left] Robbie McIntosh, McCartney and Hamish Stuart in 1993

guitar solo down, bang.” In a 1984 interview for *Guitar Player*, he said the gear he used for this session was a stripped-down version of his live rig. According to gilmourish.com, that full rig comprised – among other things – an array of Stratocasters, a Mesa Boogie Mark 1 60w head, four MXR Digital Delay effects racks, an assembly of Fender Concert combo amps and a slew of Boss pedals. Gilmour would go on to contribute characteristically outstanding performances to Paul’s *Flowers in the Dirt* and *Run Devil Run* (from 1989 and 1999, respectively) and the song “I Love This House,” which first appeared on McCartney’s radio show *Oobu Joobu* in 1995. That said, his work on “No More Lonely Nights” gets our vote for Best in Show.

“Good Times Coming / Feel the Sun”

Press to Play (1986)

How is it possible for a guitar solo to be simultaneously pleasant and abrasive, stiff and flowing, jagged and smooth, jarring and melodic, mechanical and friendly, angular and sinuous? Somehow Carlos Alomar reconciles these seeming opposites in “Good Times Coming.” With its thick, heavily processed tone, abrupt stops and aggressive whammy bar dives, his lead on this song sounds like a PG-13 reboot of Robert Fripp’s R-rated playing on “Fashion” by David Bowie. While we’re on that subject, Alomar also appeared on “Fashion,” but he played the clean, funky rhythm part on that track, while former 10cc multi-instrumentalist Eric Stewart fulfilled that role on “Good Times Coming.” Stewart’s syncopated chord stabs, nimble fills and muted 32nd-note flurries are worth the price of admission all by themselves. Stick around for the transition to “Feel the Sun,” which illuminates McCartney’s knack for stitching song scraps together seamlessly. Culminating with a bright guitar melody, this bouncy little piece wouldn’t need its cheerful lyrics to impart the feeling that the sun has just broken through, and the good times have arrived.

“Peace in the Neighbourhood”

Off the Ground (1993)

The recording of “Peace in the Neighbourhood” (yes, that’s the British spelling) that made it to the *Off the Ground* album was originally intended as a rehearsal take, but the band couldn’t recapture its loose feel on subsequent passes.

“That was a good one for me, that guitar outro,” guitarist Robbie McIntosh commented in the tour book for McCartney’s New World Tour. “We were rehearsing, arsing about, really, so I wasn’t thinking, ‘Woo! I’ve got the chance to show off now!’ It was aimless in a way, and yet it ended up sounding quite nice.” While not lacking in technique, his solo glides with a relaxed smoothness that only a seasoned player can conjure when he’s not trying overly hard.

McIntosh brings the same verve and professionalism to *Off the Ground* that he has displayed in his work with artists like the Pretenders, John Mayer, Joe Cocker and Roger Daltrey. Other morsels of guitar goodness on the album: the slide work on “Biker Like an Icon” and the title track, the solo on “Looking for Changes” and the honky-tonk blues leads on “Get Out of My Way.”

“House of Wax”

Memory Almost Full (2007)

Paul’s dreamlike lyrics on this tune border on the Dylanesque, depicting lightning striking a house of wax, poets spilling out to the street and thunder drowning a trumpet’s blast.

The song reaches its emotional apex during a second solo filled with quick alternate picking, wailing bends and flashy legato licks. In the final moments of “House of Wax,” the lead guitar seems to portray the lightning in the song’s lyrics as drummer Abe Laboriel Jr. brings the thunder. Some online sources claim that longtime McCartney guitarist Rusty Anderson is the player who bottled this lightning, but *Memory Almost Full*’s producer, David Kahne, recalls being in the control room when McCartney improvised the lead: “I had this weird moment, because it reminded me of the solo in ‘Taxman.’ It has that same chaotic, loose, all-over-the-place [feel], almost like the tape wasn’t on, but it works so well and sits in the track perfectly.”

Apparently, these kinds of lightning-bolt moments aren’t uncommon when you’re working with McCartney. “He does something that makes you think, ‘How did he do that? Where did that come from?’” Kahne says. To borrow from this song’s lyrics, the answer to that question is “buried deep below a thousand layers.” Whatever its origin, this spontaneous blast of electricity could melt steel, let alone wax.

“Long Tailed Winter Bird”

McCartney III (2020)

Bluebirds, blackbirds, skylarks and wrens have all winged their way through McCartney’s music over the years. In 2020, he continued that tradition by composing an acoustic guitar-based piece called “Winter Bird” for an animated short film.

“I liked what I did so much that once I’d finished the film bit, which was less than a minute in length, I then thought, ‘OK, let’s keep going,’” he told *NME*. McCartney created an elongated version of “Winter Bird,” adding drums, Höfner bass, vocals, recorder, harmonium and extra layers of guitar.

“Winter Bird” and its long-tailed counterpart eventually bookended *McCartney III*, which was recorded during the Covid lockdown. In both tunes, McCartney zigzags between fretted notes and the open E string. At times, the second and seventh notes of the E harmonic minor scale momentarily clash with the root note, creating exotic dissonances. Is it one of the best guitar licks of 2020? The jury is story out on that one, but it’s a certainly compelling listen, bearing an air of mystery and a badass groove that continues to hum in the listener’s bones after this winter bird has flown.



McCartney with his Epiphone Texan in 2011

please?” chord that kicked off their *A Hard Day’s Night* album, Sir Paul used an equally unusual guitar voicing to draw listeners into the first track from this year’s *The Boys of Dungeon Lane*. The quirky, harmonically jarring arpeggio at the beginning of “As You Lie There” – either a D13₉ (no 3rd) or a Cm(maj7)/D (no 5th), depending on who you ask – makes a disconcerting first impression. While using his acoustic guitar’s open D string as a recurring pedal tone, McCartney then moves the top note of the arpeggiated chord down a whole step, bringing a shaky sense of relief, as the chord changes to a slightly less dissonant but still restless D7₉. A shift to a relatively stable-sounding second-inversion G chord, G/D, provides grounding and familiarity, and a revelation that we’re in the key of G, but its open D bass note warns us not to get too cozy.

Capping off the four-bar phrase, a melodic staccato hop down G major pentatonic scale, doubled two octaves lower on bass, outlines the home chord and takes us back to the start of the progression. For those whose eyes glaze over at the sight of flat symbols and Roman numerals, suffice to say that it’s a cool, offbeat mix of sweet and unsettling sounds, setting the perfect tone for a song that’s equal parts light and shade. **GW**

“As You Lie There”

The Boys of Dungeon Lane (2026)

Sixty-two years after the Beatles struck the famous “May we have your attention,

KIMAZUR/WIREIMAGE

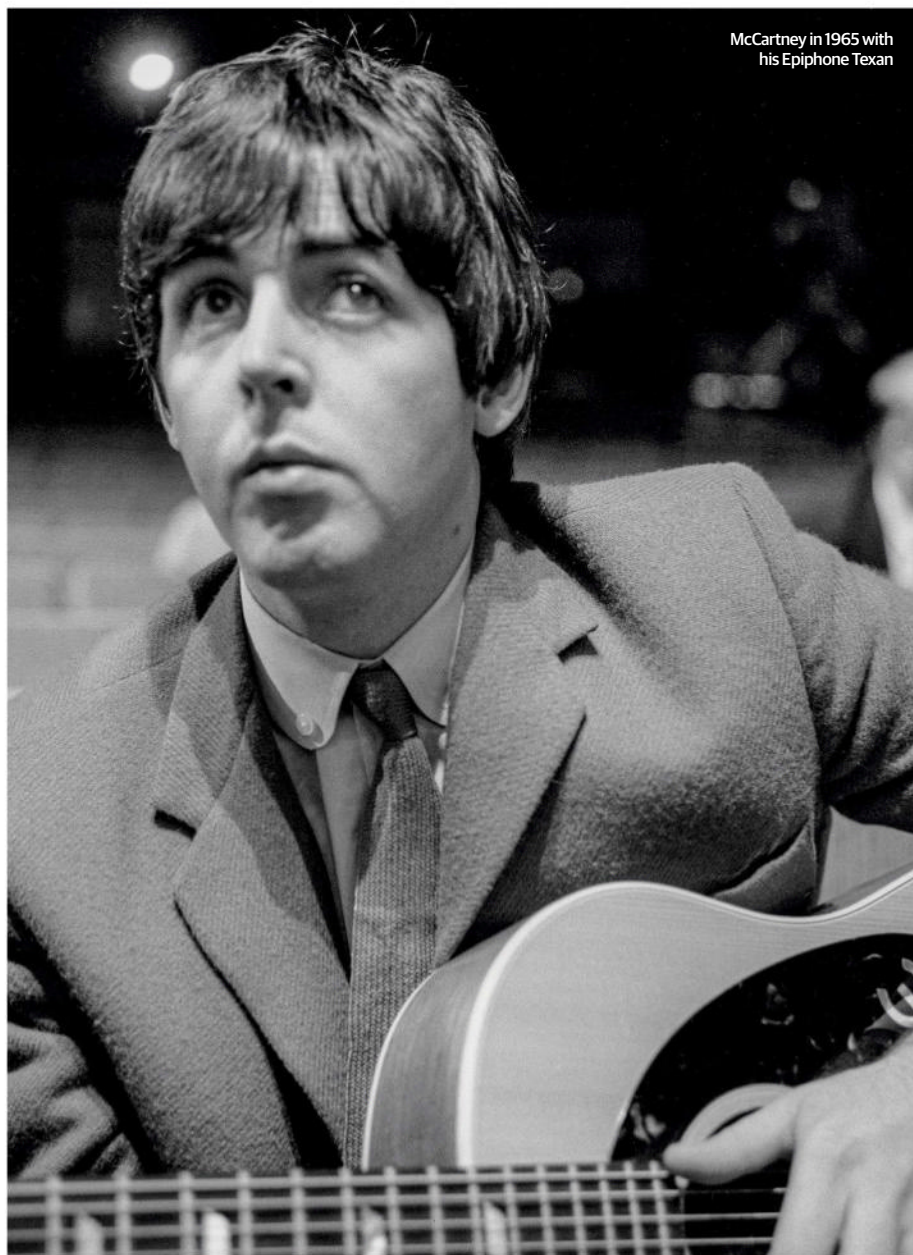
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McCartney in 1965 with his Epiphone Texan

Paul Is Gear

The guitars that have shaped McCartney's sound — yesterday and today

BY DAMON ORION

LET'S NOT KID ourselves; one instrument and one alone will forever be tied to Paul McCartney in the minds of the masses — the Höfner 500/1 Violin Bass. It is to Macca what the Frankenstein guitar is to Eddie Van Halen, practically serving as an emoji for the man himself.

Be that as it may, the Höfner is just one of many instruments McCartney calls his own. That, of course, includes a host of guitars he has embraced throughout nearly seven decades of playing.

Paul has never been a gearhead or a self-styled guitar hero. From the moment he traded his trumpet for a Framus Zenith 17 acoustic as a teen, he has used the guitar as a tool for self-accompaniment, not for instrumental acrobatics or deep dives into the mechanics of sound manipulation. Nor has he made it a priority to accumulate the most expensive or sought-after instruments.

"The terrible thing about me is that I got locked in a mindset that I picked up from my dad," he once told *Guitar World Acoustic*. "He really ground it in me to never be in debt, because while we weren't on the poverty line, there wasn't much money to go around."

Even after all the sweet Beatle cash started rolling in, that mentality led the Cute One to continue choosing economy-class guitars over luxury gear. That said, when you're Sir Paul McCartney, loved ones and admirers tend to give you an extravagant instrument here and there. Over time, that has helped him build a collection that reflects both his modest background and his present-day status as musical royalty.

Here, from the unassuming to the lavish, are six of the guitars most central to McCartney and his artistry.

1964 Epiphone Texan FT-79N

The Texan acoustic has been one of Macca's pet instruments for more than six decades. It's the guitar he used not only to write and record "Yesterday," but also to play said song in an *Ed Sullivan Show* performance that fairly shifted the Earth's crust. Much later, it helped bring solo cuts like "Calico Skies" and "Jenny Wren" to life.

The FT-79N (N for "Natural," as in "natural finish") is a close cousin of the Gibson J-45, but at 25.5 inches, it's significantly longer. It has a slope-shouldered dreadnought body, a spruce top, parallelogram-shaped fret inlays and mahogany back, sides and neck.

Restrung and flipped upside-down for left-handed use, McCartney's Texan still bears the Detroit Red Wings sticker he was given when Wings played Red Wings Stadium in 1976 (see page 63). Depicting a wheel with two wings, that emblem held obvious appeal for a man with a winged band and a heart like a wheel.

In 2004, McCartney worked with Gibson to create a signature replica of the Texan. While not radically different from the original, the updated instrument offered some fancy new frills. Not the least of these were an embroidered case and, in some cases, a soundhole label signed by the Big Mac himself.

1962 Epiphone Casino ES-230TD

"If I had to pick one electric guitar, this would be it," McCartney has said of his fully hollow thinline Casino. Equipped with a Bigsby tremolo and an early Gibson-design headstock, it's the axe that helped send his playing on tunes like "Taxman" and "Paperback Writer" into the red.

According to legend, McCartney bought his Casino in late 1964 on the advice of his close friend John Mayall, leader of the Bluesbreakers. In photographs taken backstage at the Hammersmith Odeon in December '64, it still appears to be set up for right-handed playing. Paul would soon modify it for lefty use by changing its nut and bridge and installing a strap button on its upper treble bout.

Following McCartney's lead, John Lennon and George Harrison quickly purchased their own Casinos. Not coincidentally, sales of the instrument nearly doubled between 1965 and 1966. The folk musician Donovan would later convince Harrison and Lennon to sand the finishes off their Epiphones for improved tone, but McCartney opted to preserve his guitar's sunburst lacquer. To this day, the Casino remains one of his most cherished companions, original finish and all.

1964 Fender Esquire

As a more affordable precursor to the Telecaster, the Fender Esquire offered just one single-coil bridge pickup, with a three-way pickup switch serving as a tone selector. After taking one of these utilitarian instruments home while the Beatles were cooking up *Revolver*, McCartney turned it into a left-handed guitar in his usual way: by restringing it and moving the strap button to the upper cutaway horn. Featuring a sunburst finish, maple neck and rosewood fretboard, it was his favored guitar on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. On songs like "Good Morning Good Morning" and the title track, its raw, cutting



McCartney with his Ovation during Wings' 1976 U.S. tour

tone imbued his performances with a kick that threatened to send turntable arms flying.

1967 Martin D-28

With its dreadnought body, solid Sitka spruce top, rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck and ebony fretboard and bridge, the D-28 is an ordinary-looking acoustic with an above-average sound. The combination of spruce and rosewood helps give it a full-bodied voice, powerful projection and a crystalline top end.

Shortly after acquiring his Martin in 1968, Macca put it to use on Beatles cuts like "Blackbird" and "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da." It has stood the test of time, enhancing solo works such as 2005's *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard* and popping up in McCartney's current-day live sets.

Ovation 1619-4 Custom Legend

In the early Seventies, Macca stepped back onto the concert stage after a long absence. By the middle of the decade, he and Wings were helping inflate the airbrushed zeppelin we now call arena rock. The new aesthetic demanded new sounds, as offered by the Ovation acoustic-electric guitar.

There's some dispute over whether Paul's Ovation is a Custom Balladeer or a Custom Legend. However, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's Paul McCartney and

Wings Exhibit unambiguously identifies it as a 1619-4 Custom Acoustic, part of Ovation's Custom Legend series. It has a rounded back made of Lyrachord, an undersaddle piezo pickup system, a solid sitka spruce top, an ebony fingerboard and a neck made of a five-piece mahogany/maple laminate.

1957 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop

Fifties Les Pauls are already highly prized, but left-handed models are among the rarest of beasts... and when one of them happens to be a goldtop owned by pop music's Mozart, it might as well emit rays of white light and a heavenly hum when its case is opened.

McCartney's Les Paul has a Tune-o-matic bridge, which became a feature of the goldtop in 1955. In 1957, Gibson started equipping goldtops with dual-coil PAF humbuckers rather than single-coil P90s, giving this instrument a punchy tone, expanded dynamic range and greater responsiveness to attack.

Not to be confused with the coveted '57 Les Paul that Brian Ray has been known to play during Macca's live sets, McCartney's goldtop is said to be a gift from his late wife Linda. This is a golden ax fit for a knight, demonstrating just how far he's come from the "smoky bars and cheap guitars" he looks back on in his new song "Days We Left Behind." **GW**



McCartney's 1964 Epiphone Casino, photographed in 2010



McCartney with his goldtop in 1988

Laurence Juber in action with Wings in late 1979



Wings Over Easy

Laurence Juber – the last remaining Wings lead guitarist (a weird thing to say, but it's true) – revisits the making of the band's final album, 1979's *Back to the Egg*

BY ANDREW DALY

LAURENCE JUBER GREW up a Beatles fan, which isn't uncommon, especially among the generation of British musicians born in the early Fifties.

"When I started playing guitar in November 1963, it was during the breaking wave of Beatlemania in the U.K.," Juber tells *Guitar World*. "The Beatles had an impact, but so did the Shadows, the Rolling Stones, the Animals and other British Invasion bands. My focus was on being a studio musician – once I learned that it was an actual career path."

That career path got rolling pretty quickly, as Juber, a versatile player with a knack for laying back and choosing the right gear, became an in-demand session guitarist. His first brush with the Beatles' universe came when he hooked up with their producer, George Martin, for Cleo Laine's 1976 album, *Born on a Friday*.

"George was the first real record producer I worked with – and an icon," Juber says. "His manner in the studio was relaxed and encouraging."

It's very possible that Martin's relaxed demeanor rubbed off on Juber; still, the

guitarist admits to feeling nervous when he joined Paul McCartney's successful post-Beatles band, Wings, in 1978, replacing Jimmy McCulloch, who had been fired for drunken misbehavior. "Recording was my day-to-day experience," Juber says. "Being on stage with a Beatle was a different perspective."

In the case of *Back to the Egg*, the 1979 Wings album on which Juber played (along with another new member, drummer Steve Holley), perspective is everything. Some of its reviews were negative, perhaps because the LP represented the tail end of a band that was a spent force after eight years of ups and downs. Then again, there are some fabulous moments, like "Rockestra Theme," which bagged a Grammy, plus "Spin It On," "Getting Closer," "Arrow Through Me" and "After the Ball/Million Miles."

There was a missed opportunity, though, with "Goodnight Tonight," one of Wings' last hits. Although it was recorded during the *Back to the Egg* sessions, it didn't appear on the album, robbing the LP of the pop single it needed to take it over the edge.

What led to your joining Wings? Longtime Wings guitarist Denny Laine had a hand in it, right?

I was very active in London as a session guitarist in the mid-Seventies. I was playing lead guitar on a TV show with David Essex. Denny was a guest, performing the Moody Blues hit "Go Now!" [Editor's note: Laine was in the Moody Blues from 1964-66]. He liked my playing and recommended me to Paul and Linda McCartney.

What were Paul's expectations of you going into the studio, and what do you think he liked about your playing?

The basic expectation was that we were forming a new incarnation of Wings and to think of it as a band. I think my versatility was an asset. My predecessors were fine rock players, but Paul was looking for a more comprehensive approach to the guitar.

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

We started *Back to the Egg* on the farm in Scotland, where the studio was basically a barn with a mobile recording truck. It was quite basic but functional. My go-to electric guitars at the time were a mid-Seventies Gibson Les Paul Custom, a '63 Fender Strat and a mid-Seventies maple-board Strat. For acoustics, I had a Martin D-28 and some Ovation. I had been using a Music Man amp, but we also had some small old Fenders and a Mesa Boogie.

Paul is on the record as suggesting he wanted to record an up-tempo album

Paul McCartney

influenced by things other than the previous Wings albums. Is that how you remember it?

The musical zeitgeist was changing, punk was in the air and new wave was around the corner. Our co-producer Chris Thomas was in between doing the Sex Pistols and the Pretenders.

What was it like putting together "To You," "Spin It On," "Old Siam, Sir" and "Arrow Through Me"?

The first tunes we recorded were "To You," "Spin It On" and "Old Siam, Sir." "To You" was interesting, as Paul played a Zemaitis acoustic bass on the track. For the solo, I was playing the '63 Strat through the Mesa Boogie. Paul was in the control room manipulating an Eventide harmonizer while I was improvising, so I was hearing notes in the headphones that were transposed from what I was actually playing. That led me to play outside of the changes... weirdly satisfying. The "Spin It On" solo was done in the control room with the same gear. Paul and I sat eye to eye, and I learned his strengths as a producer while he coaxed a punk-rockabilly-like solo out of me. "Arrow Through Me" had a whole different sensibility and was keyboard- and horn-driven.

How about "Rockestra Theme," "Winter Rose/Love Awake" and "The Broadcast"?

"Winter Rose" was started in Scotland. I played an Ovation nylon-string direct with a pickup that alternated the strings left and right in the stereo spread. "Love Awake" was recorded in our second studio, which was a medieval castle [*Lympne Castle in Kent*]. I played bass when we cut the track, while Paul and Denny played acoustics. I figured Paul would replace the bass, but he said he liked my part. When I rerecorded it, he knelt on the floor in front of me and gave me picking tips. It was pretty cool getting a bass lesson from Macca. I overdubbed the harmonic cascades near the end with an Ovation Adamas.

"The Broadcast" was also done at the castle. Paul played a Tele copy with a Gizmotron prototype, plus a Mellotron for strings. I played my Seventies Strat with a Roland pickup through an Arp Avatar guitar synth with a string-type patch. I used that setup on "Reception," too, doubling the lead guitar with a horn patch.

We demoed "Rockestra Theme" at the castle but recorded it with the full Rockestra band in Studio Two at Abbey Road. That was quite a session — being in the guitar section with Denny Laine, Hank Marvin, David Gilmour and Pete Townshend.

And then there's "After the Ball," which has a brief outro solo made up of longer solos played by Denny, Paul and you.

Also done at the castle. I recall playing a Gibson ES-335 Dot, the same one that's in the "Goodnight Tonight" music video. I forget which amp I used. That guitar also was on "Baby's Request" — and that's curious since I had a Gibson Super 400 [*archtop*], which would have been the more obvious choice. I think I played it through a 50-watt Hiwatt. The tone was right.

What did you think of *Back to the Egg* the first time you heard it?

I thought it turned out quite well — the fans liked it. Other than "Rockestra Theme" and a few other spots, Denny mostly played acoustic guitar and contributed to the backing vocals. The sound of Paul, Linda and Denny singing together still gives me chills. In the 2026 *Man on the Run* documentary, the director, Morgan Neville, very effectively used some of the *Back to the Egg* tracks as underscore. Hearing the music in a Dolby Atmos mix made me want to hear the whole album that way.

Some of the reviews for *Back to the Egg* were negative, which is interesting 



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because, as you said, fans tend to love it.

How did the reviews affect everyone?

Not all the reviews were negative — just the ones Paul reacted to. It went platinum in the U.S. and was more successful than some other Wings projects. The album would likely have sold better if the hit single from that period, “Goodnight Tonight,” had been on it.

Why was “Goodnight Tonight” omitted?

The Beatles’ singles in the U.K. weren’t on the albums, and Paul had the notion of standalone singles giving the fans extra value. It didn’t really work the same way in the U.S., where labels depended on singles as the primary promotional tool. I don’t know if he regretted not putting the single on the album. “Goodnight Tonight” and its B-side, “Daytime Nighttime Suffering,” were added to the CD release. Paul generally seems to move on to the next project without reflecting much on the previous releases.

Some fans also wonder why Denny Laine’s “Weep for Love” wasn’t included on the album.

It wasn’t recorded for *Back to the Egg*; the album was already finished. It was recorded at Lympne Castle, May 23, 1979, during the period we were filming the video special [also



called *Back to the Egg*]. We had the mobile studio and did some extra recording on days we weren’t filming. Steve plays the percussion groove. Paul is playing the bass guitar with a drumstick. I played the tremolo electric guitar and both of the harmony solo parts.

How do you think the album stands up?

It occupies a unique spot in Paul’s artistic timeline — a slightly different dimension. [Laughs] I’m gratified. It’s nice to get some peer recognition, but the real satisfaction is reaching people with music. Over the years, it’s been reevaluated and recognized

on its own musical terms, especially among musicians and musical artists, and “Rockestra Theme” won the first Grammy awarded for Best Rock Instrumental Performance in 1980.

How do you view your time with Wings?

I look at it as getting my “master’s degree from McCartney University.” [Laughs] It was a great musical experience, an education in the business of music, plus it gave me a launching pad to develop the next phase of my life and career. The Japanese bust was unfortunate [Editor’s note: McCartney was arrested in Tokyo in January 1980 for attempting to smuggle around 7.5 ounces of marijuana into Japan]. It functionally put an end to the touring band. Subsequently, Wings’ live version of “Coming Up” went to Number 1 in the U.S.

What advice would you offer a guitarist stepping into a similar situation?

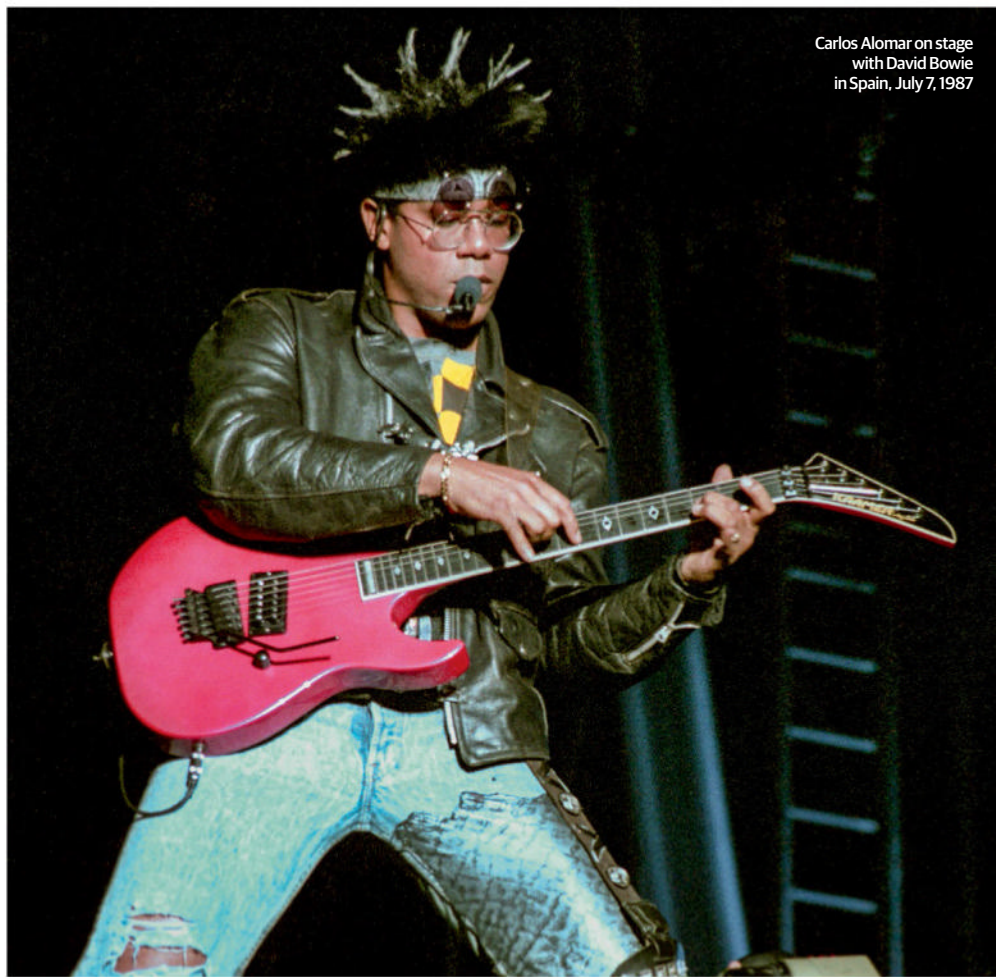
For professional freelance players, be a musician — study the masters, take care of business and be on time and well-prepared for the gig. In the studio world, you never know what you might be called on to play. For performing artists, life on the road can be hard and, for solo performers, quite solitary. But it develops chops, style-refining opportunities and audience interaction. **GW**

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Carlos Alomar on stage
with David Bowie
in Spain, July 7, 1987

Play Mates

Bowie favorite Carlos Alomar on how to bond with ex-Beatles – and the making of Paul McCartney's 1986 album, *Press to Play*

BY ANDREW DALY

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED to find a pop or rock guitarist who came of age in the Sixties who isn't a fan of the Beatles. Carlos Alomar is no different. This is why, despite years spent working with James Brown, Chuck Berry, David Bowie, Brian Eno, Iggy Pop and Mick Jagger, Alomar was slack-jawed at the chance to work with Paul McCartney on his 1986 record, *Press to Play*.

"It was truly a wish-come-true moment," Alomar says. "I'm not sure why Paul liked my

playing, but maybe my success with David Bowie, Iggy Pop, John Lennon, Mick Jagger, Duran Duran and others might have tickled his curiosity."

This seems a good time to remind you that, in 1976, Alomar actually co-wrote a song – "Fame" from Bowie's *Young Americans* – with Lennon, putting him in rare company with McCartney. And yes, Alomar also shares that co-write with the one and only Bowie. But, regardless of how or why it happened, Alomar lent his unique brand of rhythm playing (and

a bit of lead) to McCartney tracks like "Press," "Pretty Little Head," "Stranglehold" and "Only Love Remains," all of which turn 40 years old this summer.

"The fact that I was included with such notable musicians who have played with Paul was awesome in itself," Alomar says. "Paul was gracious enough to allow me to always complete my musical ideas, and then he'd simply say, 'Great! Let's try another song.' Many of my tracks were first takes."

That said, while he and McCartney got on well during the *Press to Play* sessions, they haven't seen one another since. "I departed the same way I arrived," Alomar says. "Happy and knowing I had just served Sir Paul McCartney. Paul, in turn, met a Puerto Rican Buddhist rocker who satisfied his curiosity and gave him stories to remember!"

What led to your being called to play on *Press to Play*?

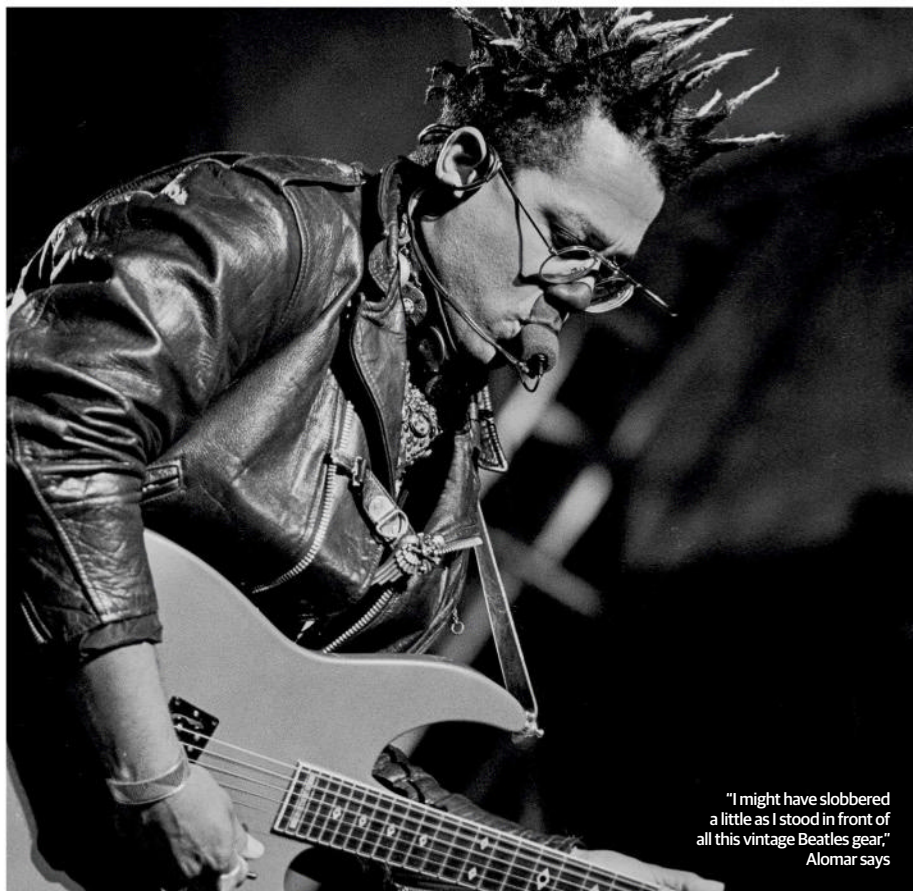
Like most musicians, it always starts with a call to action. I got a call from producer Hugh Padgham, whom I'd met when he produced David Bowie's *Tonight* [1984]. He was now producing Paul and wanted to know my availability. Paul had laid down some guitar parts, but Hugh felt that a "finishing" session with me would complete the tracks. At first, the answer from Paul was, "No." But a little later, I received a call confirming that, on second thought, Paul thought it was a good idea. So off I went to meet my second Beatle.

What was it like meeting Paul?

It was unreal to meet another Beatle. [Laughs] I'd already worked with John and Yoko, and my wife, vocalist Robin Clark, worked on Ringo Starr's 1977 album, *Ringo the 4th*. So – to us – George Harrison was the only missing member.

Paul is known to be pretty chill. What was he like while bantering and relaxing?

He was the most regular guy I'd ever met. Almost a farmer, the kind of guy that frequents the local pub, no pretense whatsoever... a lovely chap. And I was in a friendly "home" environment as well. His wife, Linda, was there; his daughters, they were all there! But here's my real first impression. When I arrived, Paul invited me up to his study. There, a comfortable high-back velvety chair invited me into its warm embrace. We talked. Paul was super intrigued by my stories about being on the R&B chitlin' circuit tours. We talked about Bowie, James Brown, the Apollo Theater and Harlem. Quite honestly, my curiosity as a Buddhist prompted me to ask about the Beatles and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. That time in their career had always intrigued me.



While listening, Paul turned his back to me slightly to get something. What emerged was a perfectly rolled Jamaican “carrot” ganja joint. [Laughs] We talked and talked, and time stood still. Finally, I said, “Maybe I should listen to some of the tracks before it gets too late — or we get too wasted.” That’s when we headed down to his Hogg Hill Mill studio [in East Sussex, England].

What was Hogg Hill Mill like, and what gear did you bring in?

I brought my favorite Strat, thinking it might be stylish enough to create whatever I’d need. And yes, maybe I’d get an offer to try one from the studio. But it wasn’t really a plan... more like a wish. [Laughs] But since you asked, I’ll tell you this. While maneuvering the corridors to his studio, we came across an enclosed glass studio room. My gait stalled while the vision of what lay within froze me instantly. I felt a slight lip-drool. I might have slobbered a little as I stood in front of all this vintage Beatles gear. I’m talking about his Hofner basses, Vox amps, Mellotrons and a Beatles-logo drum kit. There was so much gear that it was impossible to take it all in. It was too much for any musician to endure for too long, so I followed them down the hall, promising myself the luxury of returning to this sacred crypt once again.

Paul and Hugh Padgham produced *Press to Play*. How did they impact your guitar playing?

Hugh is one of my favorite engineers. He mixes while we’re listening. That’s really cool. So when I play anything, it already sounds like it’s mixed into the record. And he records everything, regardless of what you think. This methodology helps capture great bits of music when you least expect it.

What do you remember about putting together “Press” and “Pretty Little Head”?

We finally got to the studio, and Hugh started playing tracks for me. First song, I



said, “Nah! That sounds finished. Next...” And another, I said, “That one’s cool...” “Nice guitar work...” Finally, they played “Press.” When I listen to the tracks, I try to hear this other [hypothetical] guitar player, not me, playing something, you know? I kinda hear it, and then I think, “Damn! Can I play that?” So I look over at Hugh and tell him that I hear this digital delay effect on my guitar, and we started setting the timing.

Little did I know, he was recording everything. It appears as the intro to the song before the count-in, which was brilliant. After that, I just used classic call-and-response for the rest of the song. And then it happened — the moment every guitar player wants to hear: “Would you like to take a solo?” I was in heaven. Somebody pinch me! [Laughs] Incidentally, we used the same digital delay effect on “Pretty Little Head” in the “Ursa Major” section of the song.

What are your memories of recording “Stranglehold” and “Only Love Remains”?

Not much, because there are some songs that you have to lay in the cut, you know? Like, no signature guitar lines, just accompaniment and tone. For example, when you have a string section playing syncopated stabs and other rhythmic parts, it’s best to just play a little acoustic for color. For horns, it’s best to follow or get out of the way. Sometimes less is more; don’t disturb the groove.

Pete Townshend played on “Angry.” Were you in the studio with him?

No. Regrettably, sometimes we are called upon to do overdubs and not the basic rhythm tracks. To that end, I’ve not met many iconic guitarists that I’ve shared credits with. I guess the wish list continues.

The first time you heard *Press to Play*, what were your thoughts?

I loved it — especially the intro to “Press.” And I liked that it was the album’s sort-of title track. Wish-list — check! Also, remember that the final vocals, some of those spoken voices and other tidbits weren’t there when I laid down my tracks. I heard it all for the first time just like everyone else. I love being a fan.

Forty years later, what does *Press to Play* mean to you, and have you kept in touch with Paul?

It was a pleasure working with Hugh Padgham again, and we’re still connected. As for Paul, he and I had a large time. We raised our glasses high, visited Jamaica on the down-low, flew kites on the hilltop and broke bread together as family. Who could ask for more? Although we haven’t spoken since, I can always visit him in the inner-chambers of my heart. **GW**

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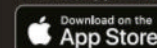


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Ibanez Iron Label AZ41B1

Ibanez's pitch-black metal machine is hiding a secret beneath its stealthy exterior

BY MATT McCRACKEN

THE IBANEZ IRON Label range is unashamedly all about producing metal guitars for those who want to get heavy and shred. Launched in 2013, the ethos is to strip back anything non-essential, prioritize performance, and – of course – that all-black-everything aesthetic. The Ibanez Iron Label AZ41B1, however, represents a slight deviation from the ultra-aggressive ethics of previous Iron Label guitars.

It's the first Iron Label instrument to take the form of an AZ guitar, which is a bit less aggressive than the RG, S and Xiphos models we've seen previously. That means some more modern features like the Super All Access Neck Joint and a much chunkier "Oval C" neck profile – what you'd typically expect to find on the more rock/fusion orientated models – meet the hardtail bridge, stainless steel frets and dual humbuckers.

The AZ41B1 has an S-style American basswood body, finished in a satin black. It has a roasted maple neck attached via four offset screws, with an ebony fretboard and 24 stainless steel frets. It's a 12-inch radius with a GraphTech nut at the top. Gotoh MG-T locking tuners adorn the headstock, while at the other end, an Ibanez F106 hardtail, strings through the body bridge, acts as the anchor point.

The two DiMarzio Fusion Edge humbuckers are controlled by a 5-way pickup selector and an alternate switch that unlocks Ibanez's "Power Tap" function, which allows bass frequencies to pass through both coils but limits the high frequencies to one, delivering better split-coil tones. You can apply these in each position, which gives you a total of 10 different pickup configurations. A single volume and tone control completes the electronics layout.

Pulling the AZ41B1 out of its box, the all-black design made it clear what its intended purpose is. Literally everything is black, even down to the Ibanez logo on the headstock, which made it difficult to read at certain angles and distances. We certainly appreciate the commitment to making everything as dark as possible – the only tiny splashes of color are the side dots on the fretboard, the stainless steel frets, the strings, and the thumb screws on the locking tuners.

Performing a close inspection of the guitar, the only thing we found aesthetically out of place was a slightly jagged cut where the pickguard meets the body on the bass side of the fretboard. It's absolutely tiny, though, and only visible with our nose pretty much up against the guitar.

On the back side of the body there are a few interesting flourishes. The low E-string ferrule is slightly further back than the rest, which helps those downtuning by ensuring that even if you've got the saddle pushed all the way to the back of the bridge, there's still a break angle. There's also no cavity on the back for the main electronics, so to access these, you'd need to take the whole pickguard off along with the strings.

On a more positive note, the knobs offer a firm travel when turning, and the switches are all solidly applied, completing

PHIL BARKER



what is a very well put together instrument indeed.

The Oval C profile is a very comfortable all-rounder, with the rounded shoulders paying homage to the D profile of the Ibanez Wizard necks but feeling much fuller in our hand overall. Playing some power chords and open chords feels great, and the satin finish ensures that it's smooth when moving our hand up and down the fingerboard.

The jumbo stainless steel frets felt fantastic to bend against, and with the action lower, those three-note per string legato licks fly on the ebony fingerboard. There are no fret markers, so it's easy to lose your way higher up, particularly if you usually play a 22-fret guitar. But, after an

initial adjustment period, we soon found ourselves able to wing our way through our usual arsenal of lead licks, and the guitar accommodates everything from bluesy bends to sweep-picked diminished arpeggios.

Plugging into a Fender '64 Princeton Reverb reissue tube amp, we were very surprised by the character of the humbuckers. It's not the super-compressed, surgical feel we expect from a modern metal machine; instead, we're greeted by very organic-sounding, sweet clean tones.

Starting in the neck position, there are bags of articulate clarity, although with the volume on 3 on the amp, we did need to roll off the volume knob on the guitar a touch to get it

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PROS

- ✦ Superbly versatile DiMarzio Fusion Edge humbuckers
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- ✦ Build quality is flawless and the all-black aesthetic is very cool

CONS

- Some shredders won't like the thicker neck profile
- The higher output jack placement on the body may cause issues for some cables and wireless transmitters
- No gig bag included

VERDICT: We expected to enjoy the tones of the Ibanez Iron Label AZ41B1 for heavier styles, but it definitely caught us off guard with its versatility. If you like that style, it very much looks like the epitome of a metal guitar, but you could realistically take this to any kind of gig and it'd do the job.

completely clean, as there's a fair bit of output. Moving to position 2, it was very much that SSS Strat type sound, bright and thin, but it never verges on brittle. Position 3 put both coils of both humbuckers on, which delivers a nice balance of spanky high end and low end warmth, without ever feeling overbearing on either side.

Position 4 delivered a similar sound to position 2, and ended up being our least favorite. It's smoother than position 2 and sounds great with open chords, but there was a touch of brittle high end when we dug in on lead work. Position 5 was a return to form though, delivering plenty of round warmth in the lows while still retaining clarity and cut for lead work.

Switching to something a little better suited to this type of guitar, we brought out Nolly's Neural DSP plugin and its 5150 simulation to see how the AZ41B1 feels with a metal amp. Needless to say, it excelled in all departments. Digging in with open notes and alternating power chords sounds glorious, with a nice, tight bottom end, hefty midrange, and articulation in the highs.

It was chug city on the bridge humbucker, and there was some lovely extra warmth and thickness when we switched to the neck position for some lead work. Those in-between sounds? Not quite as nice with this much gain piled onto them, so we ended up skipping through those as we test each of the sounds.

The AZ41B1 also features five other pickup configurations accessed via the Alter Switch between the volume and tone knobs. These offered some interesting tone combos by mixing power-tapped coils with regular ones, giving a great variety of sounds. We liked some of these better than others, and to our ears, they sounded better on the clean amp than through any high gain.

While some of them fall into 'nice to have', we did find the power tap in positions 1 and 5 was really great on the clean amp, delivering a sort of hybrid single-coil sound with a bit more oomph than what you'd expect from a traditional single-coil pickup. It also unlocks a single-coil of each humbucker on its own in positions 2 and 4, which sounded a little sweeter than the regular position, where a coil from each humbucker is active. **GW**



Strymon Canoga Vintage Silicon Fuzz

The wizards of digital stompbox design conjure more analog magic with a two-knob fuzz box

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

THE CANOGA IS something completely different from DSP masters Strymon; an analog fuzz pedal inspired by a vintage Fuzz Face. Just two knobs and the truth, ma'am.

This fuzz does not reinvent the wheel-shaped original. But, says Strymon, it might just prove to be more than the sum of its parts. The Canoga is a simple pedal, but it is designed to perform both as a fuzz, and a drive-plus-distortion when you roll back the volume on your electric guitar.

As with all the pedals that come out of Strymon's U.S. facility, the build is impeccable. All of your connections on the top of the pedal. It's a simple affair, but you can unscrew the base plate to change how the pedal powers up — in bypass mode or engaged. But the Canoga is not about presenting players with all mod cons. Adjust the Drive and Level, and use the volume control on your guitar to roll off the gain.

This is one of those occasions where the instinct to dime a fuzz

pedal's controls and work back makes sense. Strymon has designed this to be one of those fuzz boxes you set up on the floor but control with your guitar's volume knob — or indeed with how hard you hit the strings.

Unity gain was a little surprising. With our Fifties Telecaster into a clean tube amp, it came around two o'clock on the Level control but there is a whopping amount of output gain beyond that. The Canoga can hit your amp hard.

But just like a shot of tequila as your first drink of the night can be a bit much, the Canoga is best introduced when you've already got a little bit of breakup on the amp — that's where it sounds the sweetest. And it really does sound sweet, teasing out that harmonic content, adding a bit of sparkle and bloom to your chords and helping single notes to hang in the air just that extra bit longer.

Strymon is as good as its word here; the Canoga cleans up beautifully. Starting from our all-guns-blazing position of both dials maxed out, there's all the bestial woof you could want — especially when switching to a Jackson loaded with a Bare Knuckle Holy Diver humbucker, but notably also with both Tele pickups engaged in series, whereupon it came good for all those hairy Kyuss-style stoner tones.

A great-sounding fuzz pedal that's more versatile than you might think

MANUFACTURER:
Strymon, strymon.net

PRICE: \$199

PROS

- Simple two-knob format
- Brilliant, versatile sounds, and cleans up without losing any high-end information
- Super-solid build and top-mounted jacks

CONS

- Some players might want a tone dial on the pedal

VERDICT: Who would have thought in 2016 that the best Fuzz Face-inspired pedal of 2026 so far would've come from Strymon? The digital powerhouse has proved it has the appetite for adventures in analog, with the Canoga presenting as an old-school fuzz that can be equally effective as an all-purpose dirt pedal.

Rolling back the volume brought us to almost clean, but with the Canoga just heating everything up. This is where your Jimi Hendrix-style triads might take flight. Who needs a blend control when a pedal sounds this good?

Sadly, we didn't have a Uni-Vibe to hand, but the disorientating throb from the CE-1 vibrato mode on our Boss Waza Craft Chorus pedal was surely lysergic enough to give some acid casualties a mean flashback to Monterey.

Stick it on your 'board and you'll surely open up pathways to all kinds of sounds. There is the countrified scratch of its low-gain drive-stortion voicing. There is chewy Gary Moore blues-rock.

Just as the original fuzz pedals were deployed for quasi-horn tones, you can dime this, noodle on the upper registers on the neck pickup and the guitar transcends its anatomy as a stringed instrument.

Which is all to say that the Canoga is a great-sounding vintage-voiced fuzz, and that can be a much more versatile pedal than you might think, especially if you are comfortable working your volume pot during a show. **GW**



OLLY CURTIS

PRS SE Ed Sheeran Hollowbody I Piezo Baritone

One of the biggest names in pop delivers a first signature electric that bridges the gap between open chords and heavy metal chugs

BY MATT McCracken

▶ WE CAN'T IMAGINE many people had an Ed Sheeran baritone guitar on their bingo cards after he hooked up with PRS back in 2019, but that's exactly what we're looking at here. It's Ed's first signature electric guitar ever – never mind his first with PRS – and it has certainly taken the guitar community by surprise.

As with every PRS SE guitar we've come across over the past few years, the build quality is close to faultless. A close inspection reveals a very small spec of black in the binding on the bass side where the neck meets the body, and on the treble side at the same point, there's what looks like some paint bleeding over onto the binding. That aside, we couldn't find anything out of place in terms of the aesthetic.

Our test model weighs in at 6.6 lbs., which is what we'd expect for a baritone take on the Hollowbody, and

on the lower cutaway there's some sculpting to help you get at the upper frets more easily, while on the reverse of the guitar, a very slight belly cut aids the comfort factor. The knobs are well applied, and the toggle switch moves with a firm and satisfying click through its three positions.

Looking at the output jack, unusually, there are two outputs, with one marked "mix/piezo" and the other marked "mag." Both are marked so that when you look at them from the playing position, the writing is the right way up, which is a nice touch. There's a compartment that houses a 9V battery which powers the preamp of the piezo system, although this is only engaged when plugged into the "mix/piezo" jack, so you can use it as an entirely passive instrument with the other output jack.

Trying out some lead work, we could get around pretty quickly, but the hefty neck is not quite slinky



enough for proper shred stuff. Jumbo frets might have helped here, allowing us to get around the fretboard a bit quicker, but as it is out of the box, we'd be hesitant to call this a "shredder" guitar as the marketing suggested, but lowering the stock string height (2mm from the low E) would help on our test example.

Changing the tuning to drop A and pulling out some *Ashes of the Wake*-era Lamb of God riffs, it was very satisfying indeed to play. The thicker neck profile made for a nice

Both a singer-songwriter's tool and a guitar for classic chugging metal riffs

LUCY ROBINSON

**MANUFACTURER:**

PRS, prsguitars.com

STREET PRICE: \$1,499**PROS**

- Versatile pickups can handle a huge variety of sounds
- Piezo bridge adds extra flexibility and some unique tones
- Hefty neck profile feels great for riffing and open chords
- The usual excellent PRS build quality and attention to detail

CONS

- The neck profile makes it difficult to shred on
- Doesn't quite handle super high-gain tones with low tunings

VERDICT: From the typical quality PRS build to the added versatility of the piezo bridge, the PRS SE Ed Sheeran Hollowbody I Piezo Baritone can be a singer-songwriter's tool — or a guitar for classic chugging metal.

anchor when alternate picking and digging in with palm-muted riffs, and it was super satisfying to chug along with. Although the scale is comparatively long compared to a normal PRS, it doesn't feel ginormous, offering a nice balance between length and string tension with the 14-68 gauge strings that come on it from the factory.

Starting with just the piezo pickup engaged, it sounded great on the treble end of the fretboard, with very little of that “plink” you might expect from this kind of pickup. The low stuff wasn't quite as nice, though. It feels as though the piezo struggles to pick up the low string, which results in it getting drowned out when we picked some arpeggiated open chords.

Bringing in the magnetic pickup adds some more of the low-end back

in, giving it a fuller sound overall. When we switched to the neck humbucker with the piezo and both volume knobs on full, it's an absolutely delightful tone blend of high-end from the piezo and warm tones from the neck humbucker that left us picking arpeggios for a long time. With some spring reverb and a gentle touch of tremolo from the amp, it's clean-tone heaven.

The tone control only affects the magnetic pickups, and rolling this off when combining with the piezo added huge versatility to the guitar. Switching back to just the neck humbucker made it feel almost dull in comparison, but that's also partially because adding the piezo in also increases the overall volume of the guitar, and for the human ear, louder equals better.

Sticking our Joyo Klon clone in front of the amp and dialing up the volume, we found a very smooth lead tone from the humbuckers. Even with some drive applied to chords, they rung out very clearly. Turning up the gain on the amp and on our overdrive pedal, slow, doomy power chords sounded really powerful, and here adding in the piezo gave them some more “clank” that really suits that particular type of sound.

While the marketing speak of singer-songwriter to metalhead holds true to some degree, it's perhaps unsurprising that this baritone is not quite capable of super shreddy stuff, thanks to the neck profile. That said, for many styles, you'll find a sound here, and perhaps some truly unique ones once you start blending in that piezo pickup. **GW**



PHIL BARKER

EVH 5150 III Hypersonic 6L6 2x12

EVH releases a digital combo version of the coveted 5150 amp, combining digital modeling and a real guitar cabinet

BY PETE EMERY

THE ORIGINAL 5150 tube amp started production life in 1992 as a signature model built by Peavey for Eddie Van Halen. After moving on from Peavey in the early 2000s, he took the 5150 trademark with him to his own brand – EVH (Peavey continues to produce its take under the 6505 name).

Fast forward a few decades, and the 5150 III 6L6 has been brought into the modern era with the release of the EVH 5150 III Hypersonic 6L6 combos. The EVH Hypersonic series follows in the footsteps of parent company Fender's Tone Master range, turning to digital modeling technology for the amplifier but marrying it with a real guitar cabinet to create a digitally modeled combo amp.

Like parent company Fender's Tone Master range, this digital version of the 5150 III 6L6 should, on paper, have a lot in its favor when it comes to accuracy. First, all of the digital processing power is dedicated to recreating one amp well, rather than a collection of iconic amps and effects and fancy (but useful) routing in floorboards such as the Quad Cortex.

Second, utilizing a real cabinet bypasses digital cabinet emulation and puts the player directly in front of two 12" Celestion G12H speakers (a 1x12 model is also available), reducing the number of digital steps between the modeled tone and your ears. We should note here that there is

cabinet emulation for a direct-to-desk sound on the amp, should you need it.

Generally speaking, one of the biggest upsides of digital technology is increased portability, but this does not apply in quite the same way when you start making digital combos big enough to house two 12" speakers. Even considering this, the EVH 5150 III Hypersonic is pretty big at 27.5"x11.8"x24.4".

At 56 lbs./25.5 kg., it is also relatively heavy in the context of digital equipment (for example, the 2x12 Boss Katana Gen 3 is 43 lbs.), but, when compared to the 85 lbs. of the tube equivalent, it is a significant, back-saving reduction.

Another benefit of digital technology is the ability to include some extra features, including a three-band EQ for each of the three channels (on the tube version, channels one and two share an EQ), a noise gate for each channel, and a speaker-emulated XLR out with two built-in Impulse Responses. For running a silent stage and utilizing just the XLR output, there is a mute switch around the back.

Plays like a real amp in a room, but with some upsides of digital technology

MANUFACTURER:
EVH, evhgear.com

STREET PRICE: \$1,699

PROS

- ✦ Lighter than the tube version
- ✦ Real guitar speaker cabinet bypasses any chance of digital fizz
- ✦ Fantastic 5150 distortion
- ✦ Decent built-in IRs
- ✦ XLR output can be run with the cab muted

CONS

- ✦ Heavy relative to other digital combos
- ✦ The top half of the dual concentric controls gets in the way of the bottom half
- ✦ Clean channel is a little lackluster

VERDICT: The EVH 5150 III Hypersonic 6L6 blends the benefits of a modeling amp with the feel of a real speaker cabinet. It plays like a real amp in a room, but with some of the upsides of digital technology, such as an IR-loaded XLR out and lower power modes. It's an ideal gigging solution for any high-gain player.

When we ran it squeaky clean, the Green channel was a little lacking in those harmonic overtones that make a clean tone feel lively. However, turning the Gain control up until it growled a bit, and there was a healthy, but not unpleasant, amount of high-end that was complemented by a tight low end, making for a very rewarding pushed clean tone.

Testing with both our Gibson SG and Music Man Silhouette Special, things got a little muddy in the low mids when that gain is pushed beyond halfway, so be careful here.

Let's face it, most of us will be looking at this amp for its driven sounds. And it did not disappoint. The Blue channel immediately added a ton more gain, with the control ranging from a heavier crunch to all-out distortion in the first half of its travel, and then adding more than you would ever need as you push it further. What makes it so much fun to play is that it stays tight throughout. No flubby low end here, so use that neck pickup to your heart's content. On a bridge humbucker, it's perfect for the chuggy, high-gain, Eighties rock thing, with palm-mutes benefiting from that tightness.

The Red channel was similar to the Green but got into distortion territory even earlier and had a slightly more pronounced mid-range, whilst staying super tight in the low end. In short, the perfect high-gain lead.

The digital reverb is kept simple with just one control to adjust the amount, and is voiced with a controlled low end that keeps things mud-free even at higher settings. Being picky, we'd say it felt a little bit separate from the dry signal at lower settings, but not problematically so.

As previously mentioned, the XLR out on the back comes with two stock IRs. These are based on the EVH 5150 III cab and speaker, one with an off-axis SM57 and the second an on-axis SM7B. Both impressed us, but we preferred the on-axis SM7B as it was just a little rounder and has less of that digital fizz. In both cases, utilizing the high cut built into the IR Loader app was a good option for mitigating that.

The IR loader app allows users to load in their own IRs, too, so if these don't do it for you, you are covered. But with a little bit of that high cut, we would happily use the built-in IRs as a direct-to-desk solution. **GW**



PHIL BARKER

Kustom Amplification Carbon 100

Is this simpler approach to modeling amps a breath of fresh air?

BY PAUL RIARIO

FOR THOSE OF you under the age of 30, Kustom with a “K” is most likely an unfamiliar amp brand. But it was one of the first “trendy” brands to integrate solid-state technology into its amplifiers and PA systems in the early Seventies.

Kustom eventually went bankrupt but resurfaced with new ownership during the late 1990s and 2000s, reviving its nostalgic and visually distinctive Tuck-n-Roll amp series. Now, Kustom has returned with a new line of amps that look surprisingly... well, basic. Gone is the plushy visual flair that’s been replaced by a line of boxy, vintage-style combos that will undoubtedly appeal to players who don’t want their amps to look like car upholstery. Looks aside, that shouldn’t stop you from further investigating Kustom’s new and enticingly affordable Carbon Series – the company’s first digital modeling amplifiers, which come in full-featured 25-, 50- and 100-Watt combos, as well as a 100HD head. And there are no apps or LCD screens in sight.

When you think of a 100-watt combo, you might imagine it to be a behemoth of an amp, not so with Kustom’s 27-pound Carbon 100, which is astonishingly compact and rather boxy. In fact, it’s very much a portable cube of an amplifier, ruggedly handsome and classic-looking with its black tolex covering and vintage silver-and-black woven grille cloth, miniature “Kustom” logo,

durable rubber handle, chrome corners and a gray steel control panel with classic Kustom knobs.

The Carbon 100 is all about good ol’ fashioned knob-twisting of familiar amp control. There are two distinct channels with a shared 3-band EQ (Bass, Mid and Treble) to bounce between (using either an optional footswitch or the channel select button).

Channel 1 provides an unadulterated, pure tone, without modeling, making it an excellent foundation for guitarists who rely on pedalboards. Most players will vibe in the digital backyard of Channel 2, where the amp thrives in its amp-modeling and effects capabilities. You have separate Volume and Gain controls, and a rotary Amp model knob to select 12 different amp types. This rotary knob breaks up the amp types into four categories – Clean, Drive, Lead, and Hi-Gain – with three differently voiced amp models in each.

Moving over to the FX rotary knob, it functions similarly to the Amp knob, separating the effects into four categories and options. For example, Multi-Effects has four groupings (Reverb, Delay, and Chorus; Reverb and Chorus; Reverb and Delay 1; Delay and Boost), and Mod FX also includes four options (Chorus; Flanger; Phaser; Tremolo and Reverb). Two choices are offered in Verb (Long and short reverb) and Delay (one repeat and long delay), and if you’re wondering, the

MANUFACTURER:

Kustom Amplification,
kustom.com

PRICE: \$429.99

PROS

- Digitally modeled amp tones sound remarkably “tube-like”
- Intuitive controls
- Ideal pedal platform
- Affordable
- Compact and lightweight

CONS

- Some may feel its set-and-forget operation is too basic
- No onboard presets
- Hi-gain sounds are a weaker area
- Limited capability in fine-tuning effects

VERDICT: The Kustom Carbon 100 stands out as an affordable plug-and-play modeling combo that offers the touch-sensitive responsiveness of a traditional tube amp, making its digital guts easy to forgive. There are a few drawbacks to this simpler approach, but whether you are in a rehearsal space or performing live, this compact combo proves to be an impressively capable performer.

delay sounds very much like an analog tape echo, and the tap tempo button and the tap LED help with on-the-spot tweaking.

Your only means of adjusting any amount of depth, rate or output to the effects is with the sole FX Level knob, which is not terrible; you just have to use your ears. The other drawback is once you adjust your personal setting on any effect you’re using – whether it’s a delay time or a warbly chorus – you can’t save that sound, and it reverts to the default effects setting once you switch channels. But this is still a great-sounding combo with responsive amp modeling and a solid effects selection that complements your tone.

When you turn the amp on, it automatically defaults to channel 2 on the first clean amp model setting with the short reverb from the effects. Right off the bat, it’s a sparkling clean sound with a splashy spring reverb adding some musical depth. So far, nothing to complain about here, and as you rotate your way toward the drive settings and upping the drive using the Gain knob, you’ll run the gamut of classic rock bark and bite, and warmly overdriven textures, no matter what guitar you use.

The Lead section is also quite good and has a slightly mid-focused EQ to its saturation. Once you add the longer delay setting or the multi-effect grouping of delay and reverb, you’ll be one step closer to nailing some cool Lukather-style solo tones.

The Hi-Gain models were the only section that we felt was kinda “mid” (as the kids say), where we found ourselves sticking with one model that was decent for metal and Dimebag-inspired riffing. We did run the Carbon 100 through various speaker cabs using the external cab out with great results, allowing the amp to sound fuller and louder. We’ll be the first to say the onboard 12-inch Kustom speaker is voiced perfectly in not making this cubed semi-open back combo sound boxy. **GW**





Mad Professor Little Green Wonder

Harking back around 20 years to the original, arguably more interesting design, the Finnish brand brings back an old favorite

BY PETE EMERY

THE ORIGINAL LITTLE Green Wonder from Finnish brand Mad Professor is an example of a more interesting choice of overdrive, with its different take on controlling tone courtesy of its unique "Body" control.

Since the initial release around 20 years ago, the original has been discontinued, with that Body control being replaced by the more ubiquitous Treble and Bass controls on the second iteration, the Green Wonder. Now, Mad Professor is bringing the original layout back, including its bougie handwired nature.

Because it's a hand-wired pedal, we are paying a hand-wired price, and the Little Green Wonder, with its metal chassis, boasts the near-indestructible feel we can expect when spending this sort of money. The knobs and footswitch push back in a way that makes them feel premium and reassuring in use, and the art deco artwork here is more intricate and attractive than the less expensive factory version.

The Little Green Wonder can take up to 18V, but Mad Professor recommends we stick to the noted 9V for best results. Less obvious alongside the Volume and Gain is the Body control. Fully left adds more bass and low mids with a slight treble boost, and fully right reduces bass with more mid focus.

A range of boost and overdrive tones that will fit most 'boards and guitars



Now, as a drive pedal with green in its name and finish, most are going to, fairly, assume that the Little Green Wonder is a take on a Tube Screamer.

The gain range is similar, as it goes from light breakup to a relatively driven overdrive. But the increased headroom and Body Control are where things differ quite drastically from a classic TS-type pedal.

With the Body control set straight up the middle, the tone has a TS-style mid hump, but without the smooth feel of a Screamer. This is our least favorite setting, as it sounds a little lacking in high-end life to us.

Turn left, and some high-end gets added back in while the bass response is retained, resulting in a pleasing, relatively full-range type of drive, quite far removed from the TS thing, and perfect for edge-of-breakup tones or classic rock rhythms when the Gain is pushed. Turn right, and some more high mid is added (at a higher mid-frequency than a screamer), and

MANUFACTURER: Mad Professor, mpamp.com

PRICE: \$378

PROS

- More versatile than its TS-associated name suggests
- Body control creates interesting tones

CONS

- Some experimentation is needed to get the best from the Body control
- It's quite a high investment for an overdrive pedal

VERDICT: This is an impressive drive/boost pedal with the unique Body control being the crux of its versatility. It can provide a relatively full-range drive, or a mid-humped lead as a boost or a standalone pedal.

the low end is slightly reduced, which means a cutting type of drive that will get you heard in the mix whilst still being pleasant to listen to on its own.

This setting is well-suited to pushing another drive pedal or driven amp into saturation, helped along by a huge amount of output available on the Volume control.

This all ends up in a unique-sounding drive pedal that can work well as a standalone crunchy rhythm or driven lead, or as a boost for a driven amp and other pedals. It is not transparent like a Bluesbreaker, for example, but has a mid hump that is not as forward as a TS-type pedal. A pretty great middle ground.

The result of all this is versatility. It can do Tube Screamer things, but the highlights are within the Little Green Wonder's ability to provide a range of boost and overdrive tones, creating a drive pedal that will fit most pedalboards or guitars. A handy little device. **GW**

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RAW DAWG

BY ERIC GALES

My Feeling for the Blues

Blues as the foundation for music and the guitar

HELLO EVERYBODY, AND welcome to my new column for *Guitar World*. In this series of lessons I will demonstrate the techniques and approaches that are essential to my playing style. I hope that the material we cover will be beneficial to you in your own musical endeavors.

I'd like to begin by talking about the importance of the blues and blues-influenced music, such as gospel, soul and R&B, in my approach to music and the guitar. I come from a family of musical brothers, and blues and gospel played a big part in our lives and provided a strong foundation for me as a musician. Like all aspiring blues guitarists, my brothers and I listened to B.B. King, Albert King, Freddie King, T-Bone Walker, and all of the blues guitar greats. I learned as much as I could from all of them, as well as gospel music, in trying to develop a sound and approach of my own.

FIGURE 1 illustrates a solo played over medium-slow shuffle in the key of B. I begin in bars 1-5 with simple melodic phrases based on B major pentatonic (B, C#, D#, F#, G#) that are supported by chordal accents, such as B9 in bars 1 and 3, and E7 in bars 2 and 5. To me, these single-note phrases are very vocal-like; maintaining a "vocal" mindset helps me to stay focused on speaking in a musical way in the lines that I play.

I must mention that I choose to play the guitar "upside down." I take a guitar strung for a right-handed player and flip it over and play it left-handed, in the same manner as Albert King, Otis Rush and a variety of other players, including my late brother Emmanuel Gales, aka Little Jimmy King. Playing this way completely changes the riffs, phrases and

Tune down one half step (low to high: Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Bb, Eb).

All music sounds one half step lower than written.

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

chords that are available to you. One of the big differences is that, to bend one of the treble strings, I need to pull it downward, as opposed to pushing it up as most players do.

Additionally, with the guitar strung and played this way, it's easy for me to finger some unusual chord voicings that would be unnatural for "normal" players; a good example is the F#11 chord in bar 4, wherein the high B note, the #11 (or b5), is fretted by wrapping my thumb around the top of the neck at the 7th fret.

FIGURE 2 illustrates a few more examples of my pull-down string bends, with many of the accented notes in the phrases treated with a wide, fast vibrato, à la Albert and B.B. King. If playing the guitar in the conventional way,

you would, of course, need to push the strings upward to perform these bends and vibratos.

As I move through the I-IV-V (one-four-five) blues chord progression – B7-E7-F#7 in the key of B – I like to reference each chord with the chord tones. Over B7, I'll accentuate B, D#, F# and A. Over E, I'll touch upon E, G#, B and D. And over F#7, I'll emphasize F#, A#, C# and E, resolving back to the I chord, B7 when necessary.

Having a firm grasp and understanding of the blues lays an essential groundwork for all guitar players, regardless of the specific style of music they choose to explore and perform. Just about every style of music has had an influence on me as a player, but blues is definitely at the core of my playing style. **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/october2026

According to Eric Gales' website, this Memphis-born southpaw is "widely regarded as one of the best blues guitarists in the world" – and we definitely do not disagree! His latest album is 2025's *A Tribute to LJK*. Check out ericgales.com.



TALES FROM NERDVILLE

BY JOE BONAMASSA

Get the Clamp

Using a capo to get more out of "cowboy" chords

A SIMPLE, EFFECTIVE way to discover new sounds on the guitar is to use a capo along with 1st-position open chords, commonly referred to as "cowboy" chords. A great example of this approach can be heard in the title track to my 2012 album, *Driving Towards the Daylight*, which I co-wrote with the great Danny Kortchmar. Danny is renowned for his work with James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Linda Ronstadt, Don Henley, Ringo Starr and many others.

In truth, this was a song that I had forgotten all about. Around 15 years ago, I had a Korg multitrack machine that I was going to get rid of, but before I did, I decided to go through it to hear what had been recorded on it. I saw the title and thought, "What is that?" and when I heard it I remembered it was a song Danny and I started but never finished. I decided to finish it, and it became the title track of my next record.

The song is played in the key of F minor, because that is the best key for my voice. But I opted to use a capo at the 1st fret and play the song as if it were in E minor. The capo allows me to play 1st-position "cowboy" chords throughout the song, along with many open-string embellishments that 1st-position chord shapes facilitate.

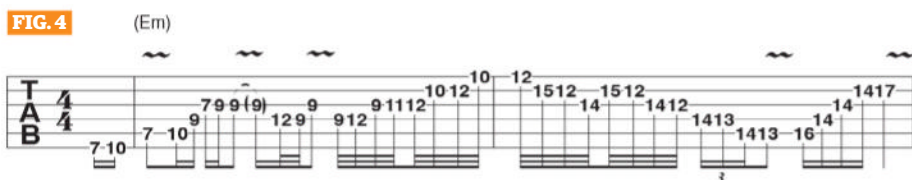
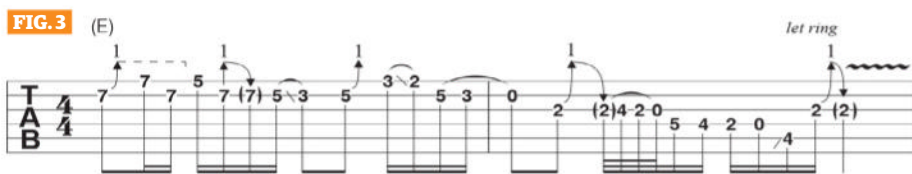
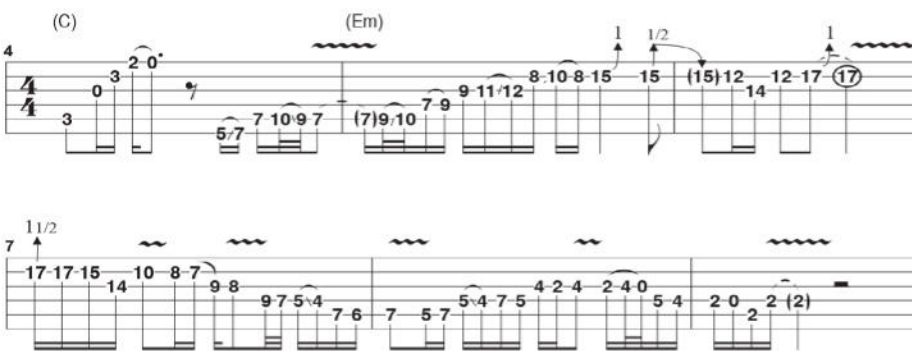
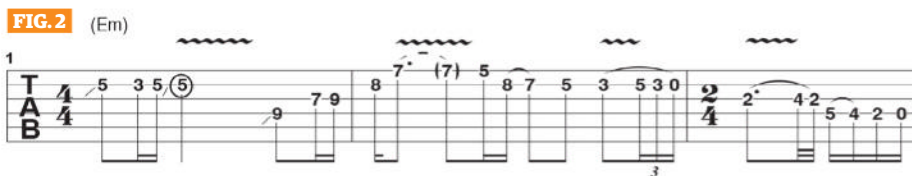
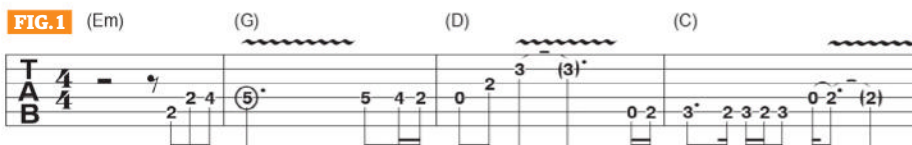
Stylistically, the song has a country/Americana feel. Personally, I like all kinds of music, and this song affords me the opportunity to visit that musical terrain.

FIGURE 1 illustrates the first four bars of the intro/verse section of the tune, wherein I play a single-note melody that connects the chord progression of Em-G-D-C. For each chord, I allow all the strings to ring together.

When it comes to soloing, there's an old adage that you can't do a lot of string-bending if you're using a capo. The truth is that you

Capo 1

All music sounds one half step higher than written. All tab numbers are relative to the capo ("0" = 1st fret).



can, as long as you have a good capo. It needs to be affixed to the guitar tightly, so that when you bend and release a string, it will go back to the proper unbent position.

FIGURE 2 presents a nine-bar solo that moves loosely between Em and C; you can imagine a G and D chord played in bars 2 and 3, as well. This improvised solo is based primarily on the E hexatonic minor scale (E, F#, G, A, B, D) with brief use of C, C# and D#.

When using a capo, it can get a little disorienting when playing more than five frets away from it because all the fret numbers are relative to the capo. In this case, a note tabbed or visualized to be at the 9th fret is actually at the 10th.

Because we're thinking in E minor here, I wouldn't play country-type licks such as that shown in **FIGURE 3**, because these phrases are more suited to the key of E major. **FIGURE 4** is a better example of sitting firmly within the key of Em by sticking with E minor pentatonic (E, G, A, B, D) or hexatonic.

"Driving Towards the Daylight" is inherently a rock song with country elements, akin to the music of the Eagles, Jackson Browne and the music that came out of Laurel Canyon in the late Sixties. And in this application, the capo helps to achieve some chordal sounds that would otherwise be unavailable. **GW**



WORKIN' MAN

BY CHARLIE STARR

The Tool for the Job

Choosing the right guitar for a song

FOR GUITAR PLAYERS, an element that is essential to recording as well as writing a song is choosing the right guitar for the job. I love a lot of different guitars – all guitars, really! – but especially Gibson guitars fitted with P90 “soapbar” pickups.

For those unfamiliar, a P90 is a large single-coil pickup that was standard issue on Gibson electric guitars prior to 1957, when the double-coil humbucker pickup replaced the P90 on most of their instruments. I love the sound of P90s! They’re loud and clear and have more top end than a humbucking pickup.

When choosing a specific guitar for its tonal qualities, for me it will often happen when I’m writing the song. The riff itself will “decide” whether it needs to be played with a single coil pickup, a humbucker or something else entirely. There are Blackberry Smoke songs played on Gretsch and Rickenbacker guitars. So it’s all over the map!

When I sat down to write “Workin’ for a Workin’ Man,” recorded for our 2016 album, *Like an Arrow*, the guitar that brought the song to life was a 1953 Gibson Les Paul Standard, fitted with P90s and a Bixby vibrato tailpiece. The “honk” of the bridge-position P90, with its accentuated midrange, was perfect for a hard-driving riff like this.

FIGURE 1 illustrates the song’s primary riff, which for me felt so “at home” on a P90 guitar set on the bridge pickup. I begin with an A5 power chord and then play two-note voicings on the D and G strings against the open A string, making brief reference to G/A and D/A. Bar 2 incorporates the A minor blues scale (A, C, D, E, E, G). In bar 3, the two-note voicings move over to the A and D strings.

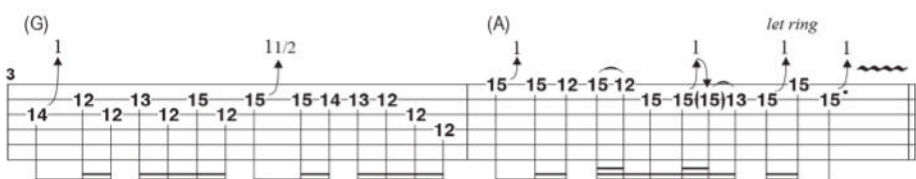
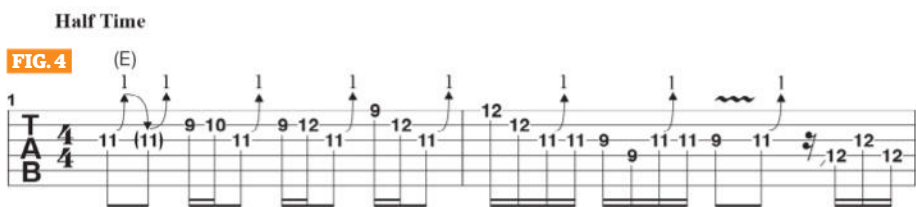


FIGURE 2 shows the song’s pre-chorus, which is built around two-note 6th intervals, fretted on the A and G strings, which are played against an open low E pedal tone. In bar 1, I begin in 9th position and then slide down to 6th position. In bar 2, I begin in 9th position and slide up to 11th position. Be sure to allow your open low E string to ring out while playing the two-note 6ths on the other strings.

About midway through the song, we hit a breakdown section that features the riff shown in **FIGURE 3**, which is primarily a single-note riff based on the A blues scale. Here, I utilize double-stops along with D5

and C5 power chords.

At the guitar solo section, shown in **FIGURE 4**, I switch from the bridge to the neck pickup. Bars 1-2 are based on the E major pentatonic scale (E, F#, G#, B, C#). Bar 3, played over a G chord, is based on G major pentatonic (G, A, B, D, E), and bar 4, which is played over an A chord, is based on A minor pentatonic (A, C, D, E, G).

After this, it’s back to the bridge pickup for a recap of the main riff for the final verse. To me, this song is a prime example of how the right guitar, in this case a 1953 Les Paul Standard, serves every aspect of the song perfectly. [GW](#)

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/october2026

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



MULTIDIMENSIONAL GUITAR

BY ALEX SKOLNICK

The Holdsworth Influence

Exploring the intriguing sound of the Lydian-dominant mode

HELLO, AND WELCOME to my new *Guitar World* column. It's great to be doing this again, after more than 30 years. Over the course of the next several months, I look forward to sharing and illustrating some of the many various concepts and techniques for both soloing and rhythm playing that are at the core of my multi-faceted approach to music and guitar playing.

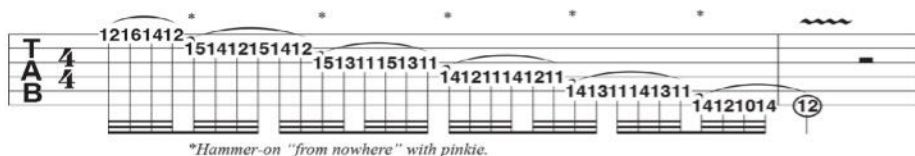
Let's begin with a look at legato phrasing. The term legato means "smooth and connected," and for guitar players, this generally refers to an abundant use of hammer-ons and pull-offs, with minimal use of the pick, in terms of the way notes are articulated.

The focus of this month's lesson is a lick that I first played back in the early Nineties and have since used in a variety of contexts. I played it in the Testament song "So Many Lies," from our 1992 album, *The Ritual*. At the time, I was discovering and studying the playing of legendary jazz-fusion guitarist Allan Holdsworth, who was without doubt one of the greatest legato-style players ever.

Along with the legato phrasing, the lick is based on the fourth mode of the B melodic minor scale (B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A#), which starts on E (the scale's fourth degree) and is known as E Lydian b7, or E Lydian-dominant.

FIGURE 1 illustrates this fast one-bar lick, which is played in a steady succession of 32nd notes played across all six strings. I begin on E (1st string, 12th fret) and hammer-on to G# at the 16th fret then pull-off to F# and back to E. I then move one string lower and sound the first note, D (2nd string, 15th fret) by

FIG. 1 E Lydian b7 mode
(E9#11)



*Hammer-on "from nowhere" with pinkie.

FIG. 2

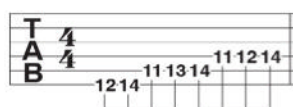


FIG. 3

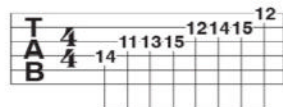


FIG. 4

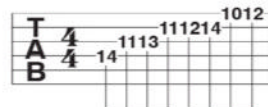


FIG. 5

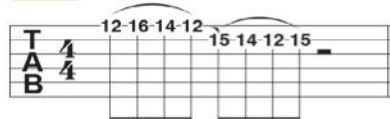


FIG. 6

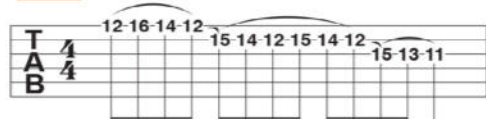


FIG. 7



FIG. 8

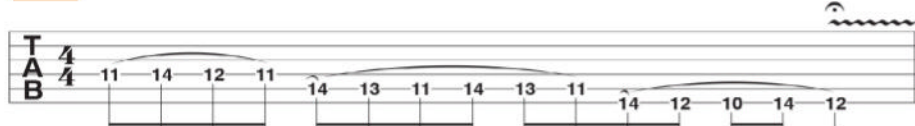
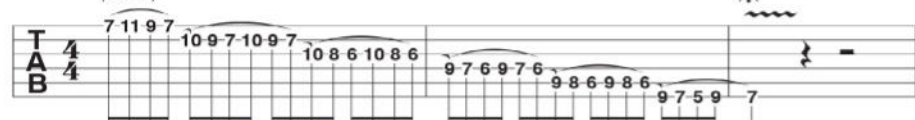


FIG. 9 B Lydian b7 mode
(B9#11)



hammering my pinkie down onto the string "from nowhere." the pick is not used to sound this note or any of those that follow, all of which are articulated with either hammer-ons or pull-offs. I fret all the notes on the top two strings with my 1st, 3rd and 4th fingers.

The sequence then migrates over to all of the remaining strings, staying within the framework of E Lydian-dominant. Notice that, when playing the notes on the G and D strings, I switch my fret-hand fingering to 1, 2 and 4, moving back to 1, 3 and 4 on the A string and then to 1, 2 and 4 when I get to the low E string.

Let's look at the scale itself one octave at a time: **FIGURE 2** illustrates E Lydian b7, played in the lower octave, moving between the low E and D strings. **FIGURES 3** and **4**

offer two ways to finger the scale in the next higher octave.

The best way to get this lick under your fingers is to break it into smaller pieces: **FIGURES 5** and **6** focus on the first part, played on the top three strings. **FIGURES 7** and **8** show how it lays on the bottom three strings.

Now that you have an understanding of the lick and how it's executed, let's move to a different key and part of the fretboard.

FIGURE 9 shows this same lick played in 7th position and transposed to B Lydian- b7 (B, C#, D#, E#, F#, G#, A), which is the fourth mode of F# melodic minor (F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E#).

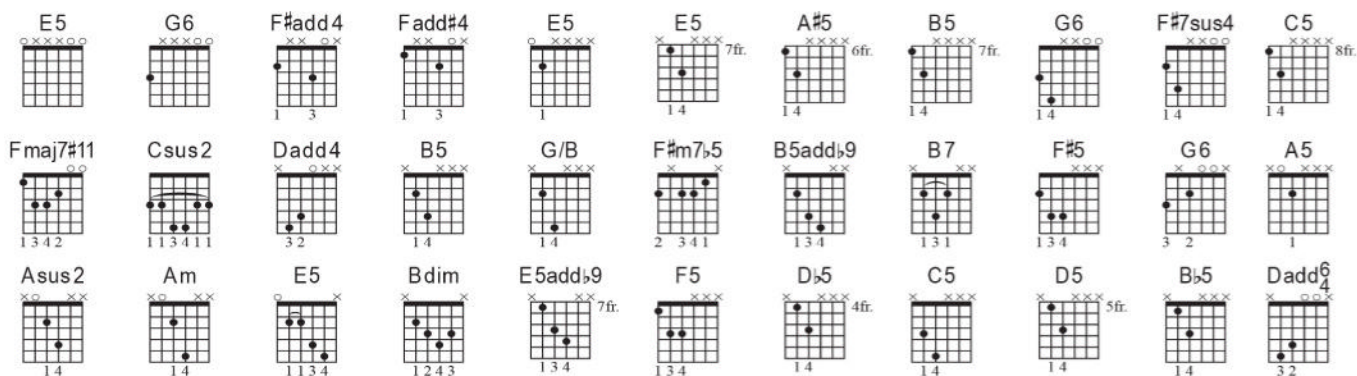
As you will find, this lick offers a great way to get a handle on legato phrasing, as well as the intriguing sound of Lydian-dominant. **GW**

DREAM THEATER

"Night Terror"

AS HEARD ON **PARASOMNIA**WORDS AND MUSIC BY **JOHN MYUNG, JOHN PETRUCCI, JORDAN RUDESS, KEVIN LA BRIE AND MICHAEL ANTHONY MANGINI**TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**

6-string bass tuning: (low to high, B, E, A, D, G, C).

**A** Intro (0:00)

Moderately ♩ = 95

E5 (A#5) (B5) G6 F#add4 E5 (B5) (C5) F#7sus4 Fadd#4
 Gtr. 1 (clean elec. w/prod. effects*)
 let ring throughout (play 3 times)

GTR. 1

1

*(effects mix gradually reducing over time)
 **Chord symbols in parentheses reflect implied harmony.

6-string Bass

B (0:20)

E5 (A#5) (B5) G6 F#add4 E5 (B5) (C5) F#7sus4 Fadd#4
 Gtrs. 1 and 2 (w/dist.)
 Rhy. Fig. 1 (play 3 times) end Rhy. Fig. 1

GTR. 1**GTR. 2**

5

Bass Fig. 1

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"NIGHT TERROR"

E5 (A#5) (B5) G6 F#add4 E5 (B5) (C5) F#7sus4 Fadd#4

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 5)

9 Bass (play 3 times)

C (1:00) (♩ = 98)

(decrease tempo)

(♩ = 110)

E5 A#5 B5 G6 F#7sus4 E5 B5 C5 F#7sus4 Fmaj7#11 E5

GTR.1

GTR.2

13 Gtrs. 1 and 2 let ring (play 3 times) P.M. let ring (drums re-enter)

D (1:29)

E5

Gtr. 1

20 Riff A

GTR.1

GTR.2

P.M.

22 P.M. P.M. end Riff A

TRANSCRIPTIONS

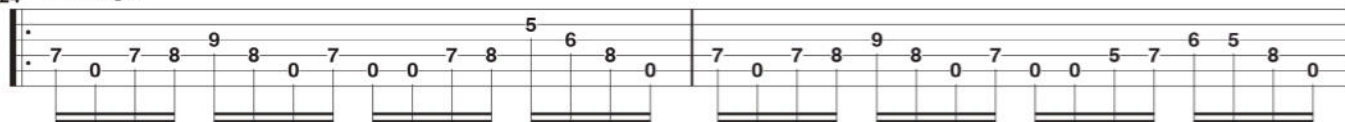
E (1:38, 9:26) (♩ = 110) (w/double-time feel)

N.C. (E5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Riff A (see bar 20)

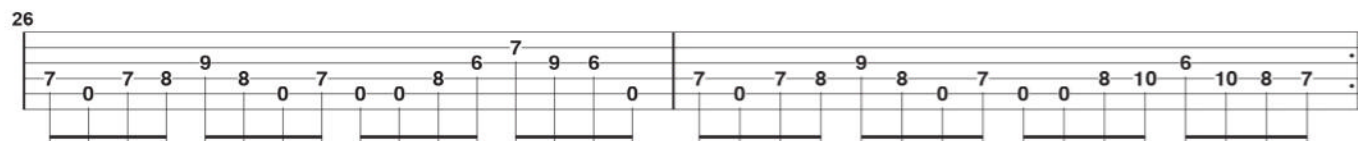
Bass

24 Bass Fig. 2*



*Bass Fig. 2 takes 2nd ending only.

1.



2.

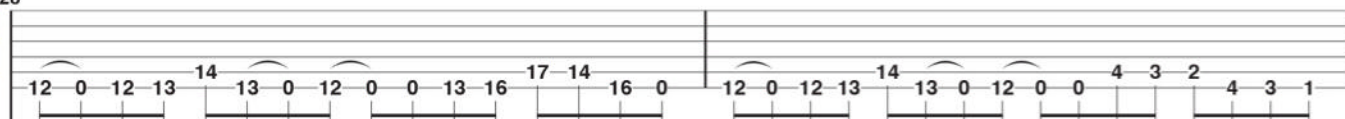
(end double-time feel)

2nd time, skip ahead to **EE** Outro (bar 227)

28 Gtrs. 1 and 2

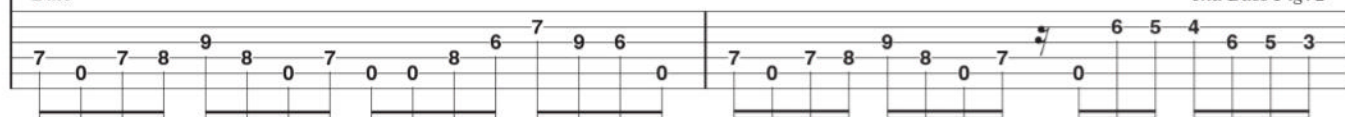
GTR.1

GTR.2



Bass

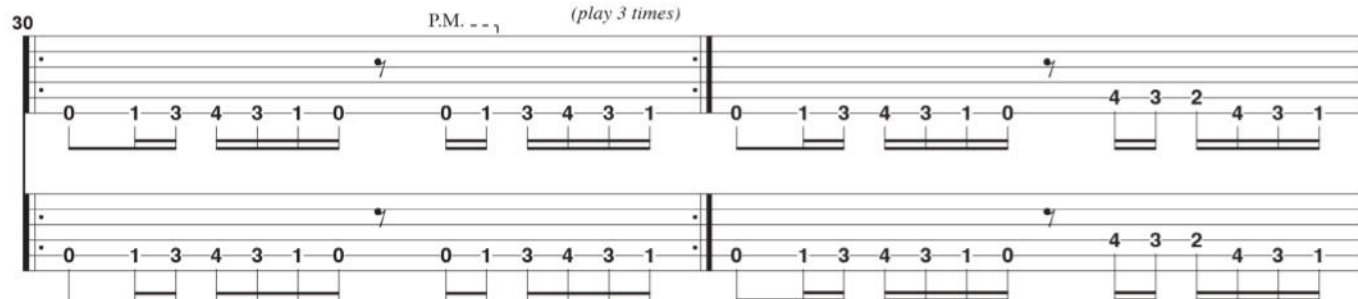
end Bass Fig. 2



F (1:56)

1st time, go back to **F** (bar 30)

2nd time, continue to **G** (bar 32)



G 1st Verse (2:13)

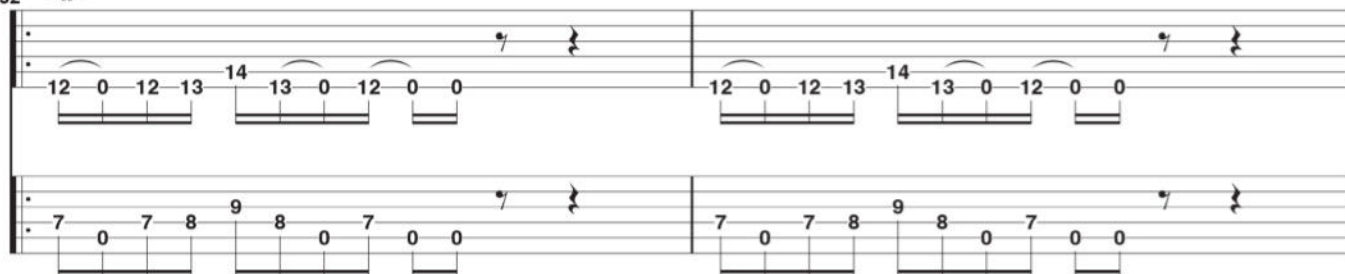
Spiders
Vanishing

seeking

shelter
at sunrise

as

32 Riff B



Fading morning with the dawn
light shines on

34 P.M. --- end Riff B

H (2:31) (w/double-time feel)

36 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 24)

(end double-time feel)

38

I 2nd Verse (2:39)

Sacrificial martyr Victim dressed in white
Headed for the slaughter Angels

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Riff B (see bar 32)

40 Bass

*Note played first time only.

2.
cry for her tonight

44 Gtrs. 1 and 2 P.M.

GTR. 1
GTR. 2

Bass

Eyes open wide but I can't see

Csus2 F#m7b5 B5add9 B7(no 3) B5

let ring P.M. P.M. P.M.

N (3:39) (w/double-time feel)

N.C. (E5)

65 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass plays first two bars of Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 24)

(end double-time feel)

(♩. = 128)

N.C.

67 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass

O (3:49)

N.C. (E5)

Bass Fig. 3

1.

2.

end Bass Fig. 3

TRANSCRIPTIONS

P 3rd Verse (4:04)

Mind awake body at rest Drifting through sleep transition
warning I fall down the bottomless well

N.C. (E5)

75 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 (see bar 70)

Flesh is Borderland crawling state Need to Swimming through waves
claw my way out of this

78

Sensory dream condition
hell

Without

81

Bass plays Bass Fill 1 (see below bar 57)

Q (4:34)

By the sword On the wheel
Pierce the silence with a scream

Gtrs. 1 and 2

84 P.M. P.M. P.M.

GTR.1

GTR.2

Bass

Twisting in the wind
Why can't I remember

anything

86 P.M. P.M. P.M.

N.C.

P.M.

R (4:49) (♩ = 104)

E5 Anything N.C. (G5) (F#5)

89 N.H. -----

pitch: G F# pitch: E

(E5) A#5 B5 G6 F#7sus4 (E5) (G5) (B5) (C5) F#5

93 let ring -----

S 2nd and 3rd Choruses (5:06, 8:45)

Night terror Hysteria Nocturnal trial by fire

F5 Gadd6 A5 Asus2 Am E5

97 let ring ----- P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

(play repeat simile)

2nd time, skip ahead to **DD** (bar 217)

Eyes open wide but I can't see

F5 Bdim E5add#9 E5

101 let ring ----- P.M. P.M. P.M.

TRANSCRIPTIONS

T Interlude / Keyboard Solo (5:25)

(♩ = 196)

4th time, skip ahead to U (bar 110)

105 (A5) (E/G#) F5 D♭5 A5 C5

P.M. -----, P.M. -----,

Bass Fig. 4

1, 3. 2. Go back to T (bar 105)

(B5) (Gm) N.C. P.H. P.M. -----, P.M. -----,

pitch: D# end Bass Fig. 4

4. U (5:57) V (6:00) (♩ = 98)

N.C. (E5) (play 4 times)

110 P.M. -----, Riff C

Bass Fill 2 Bass Fig. 5

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Riff C four times (see bar 111)

112 Bass

W Guitar and Keyboard Interlude (6:19)

(A5) (E/G#) F5 D♭5 A5 C5

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.)

GTR. 3

116

Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 twice (see bar 105)

(B5) (Gm) (A5) (E/G#) F5 D_b5

119

15 16 17 15 14 16 15 (15) 10 12 13 12 13 12 14 16 (16) 17 16 (16) 19 16 18 20 15 16 15 18 17 (17) (17)

Slight P.H. P.H.

pitch: B

A5 C5 N.C.

122

12 14 14 12 13 12 14 11 13 13 13 15 13 11 12 16 16 10 12 13 13 15 16 16 18 19 14 16 17 10 11 13 10

12 16 16

Bass plays Bass Fill 2 (see bar 110)

X (6:37)

(E5)

Gtr. 3

GTR. 3

124

14 (14)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 (w/wah)

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7 13 13 13 13 15 15 15 15 10 10 10 10 9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7

7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 11 11 11 11 13 13 13 13 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5

*repeat previous beat

Bass plays Bass Fig. 5 four times (see bar 111)

128 Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

14 14 14 14 9 9 9 9 17 17 17 17 10 10 10 10 15 15 15 15 19 19 19 19 21 21 21 21 22 22 22 22

12 12 12 12 7 7 7 7 15 15 15 15 8 8 8 8 13 13 13 13 17 17 17 17 19 19 19 19 20 20 20 20

Bass

0 0 0 8 (8) 7 0 0 0 8 (8) 7 0 0 0 8 (8) 7 0 0 0 8 (8) 7 (7) 5

Y Guitar Interlude (6:57) (♩ = 208 / ♪ = 416)

(E5)

Gtr. 3

(F5)

(C5)

(B5)

(F5)

GTR. 3

132

12 13 12 0 12 13 12 0 16 15 13 0 0 0 (repeat previous bar) 13 14 13 0 13 14 13 0 13 12 9 0 0 0

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1

GTR. 2

0 0 0 0 1 3 2 1

Bass

0 0 0 0 1 8 7 (7) 1

TRANSCRIPTIONS

(E5) (F5) (G5) (G#5)

136

5 6 5 0 5 6 5 0 9 8 6 0 0 0

0 (0)° 0 1° 3 4°

(B5) (C5) (C#5) (E5) (F5) (G5) (G#5) (B5)

140

8 9 8 0 8 9 8 0 8 7 4 0 0 0

12 13 12 0 12 13 12 0 16 15 13 0 0 0

2 3° 4 2° 3 5° 6 4°

(C5) (C#5) (E5) (F5) (G5) (G#5)

144

20 21 20 0 20 21 20 0 20 19 16 0 0 0

8 16

5 6° 5 6° 8 9° 8 16

(E5) (F5) (G5) (G#5) (E5)

(trem. pick)

147

8 16

7 16

24 (24)

7 16

Z (7:16)

(E5) (F5) (G5) (G#5) (B5) (C5) (C#5) (E5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR.1

GTR.2

149

7 16

0 1 3 4 2 3 4 7

Bass

Bass Fig. 6

(F5) (G5) (G#5) (B5) (C5) (C#5) (F5) (E5)

153

1 3 4 2 3 4 8 7

end Rhy. Fig. 2

end Bass Fig. 6

(E5) (F5) (G5) (G#5) (B5) (C5) (C#5) (E5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

let ring throughout

GTR.1

GTR.2

157

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 1 3 4 2 3 4 7

Bass plays Bass Fig. 6 (see bar 149)

(F5) (G5) (G#5) (B5) (C5) (C#5) (F5) (E5)

161

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

1 3 4 2 3 4 8 7

TRANSCRIPTIONS

AA Guitar Solo (7:32)

N.C.

Gtr. 3

*(scoop w/bar)

vibrato w/bar

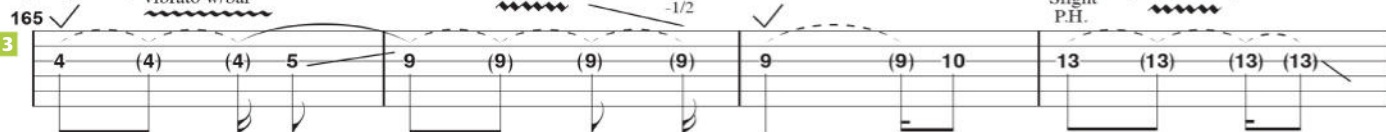
(flutter w/bar) w/bar

-1/2

Slight P.H.

(flutter w/bar)

GTR. 3

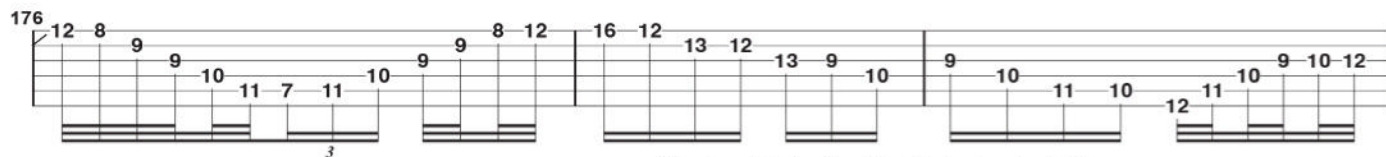
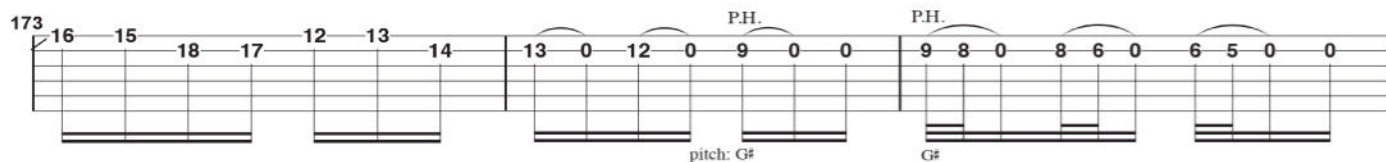


*Depress bar prior to picking note.

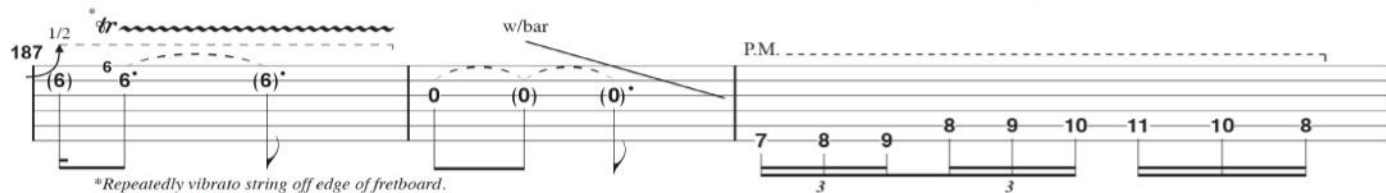
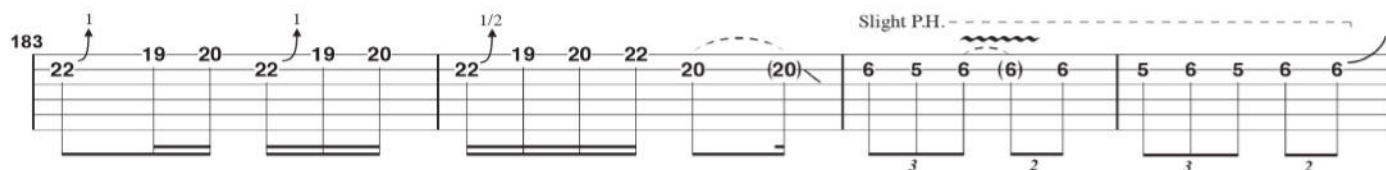
Bass plays Bass Fig. 6 four times (see bar 149)



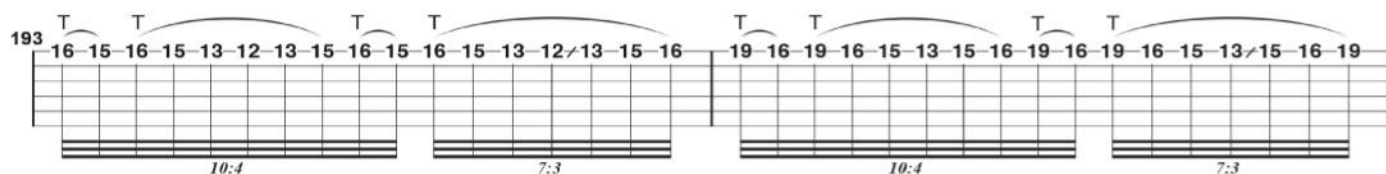
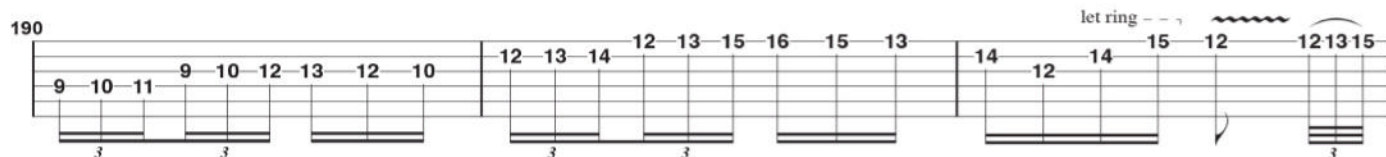
pitch: C#



Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fig. 2 twice (see bar 149)



*Repeatedly vibrato string off edge of fretboard.



"NIGHT TERROR"

195 **BB** (8:04)

Gtrs. 1 and 2 play Rhy. Fill 1 (see below bar 58)

Bass plays Bass Fill 3 (see below bar 59)

GTR. 3 Gtr. 3

GTR. 1 (19)

GTR. 2 (19)

(Gtrs. 1 and 2)

Bass

0 1 3 4 2 3 4 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 5 8 16 3 5 6 4 5 6 10 9 4

0 1 3 4 2 3 4 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 4 2 3 5 8 16 3 5 6 2 3 4 3 2 4

CC (8:08) (♩ = 105)

A5 (E/G#) (F5) (E5)

Gtr. 3 1/2

Slight P.H.

201 12 (12) 12 (12)/17 9 9 9 9 8 9 (9) 12 (12) 12 12 (12)/17 17 (17) 14 15 13 16 15 17 3 3

Gtrs. 1 and 2

GTR. 1 (2) (2) (4) (4) (4) 4 1 0

GTR. 2 (2) (2) (4) (4) (4) 4 1 0

Bass 5 5 5 5 5 5 7 5 7 5 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 1 0

D5 (C5) Bb5 (B5) (G#5)

205 17 (17) 17 15 (15) (14) 15 (15) 15 13 14 16 14 13 16 15 13 16/19 16 18 16 5

(7) (3) (3) 2 0 4 (4)

3 3 3 3 3 3 1 1 (1) 2 0 4 4 4

TRANSCRIPTIONS

A5 (E/G#) (E5)

209

Go back to [S] 3rd Chorus (bar 97)

(D5) (C5) (B5) (E5) E5

213

P.H.

pitch: F#

DD (9.03)

Night terror

Hysteria

Nocturnal

trial by fire

Csus2

Dadd⁶₄

E5

B5

G/B

B5

Gtrs. 1 and 2

let ring

P.M.

GTR.1

GTR.2

217

Bass

Eyes open wide by I can't see I can't

Csus2

F#m7b5

B5addb9

221 let ring

Go back to **E** (bar 24)

see

B5

225 P.M. P.M. (pick scrape)

EE Outro (9:43)

N.C.

227

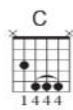
230

THE ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND

"Midnight Rider"

AS HEARD ON **IDLEWILD SOUTH** WORDS AND MUSIC BY **GREGG ALLMAN & ROBERT KIM PAYNE**

TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN**



A Intro (0:00)

Moderately ♩ = 94

D5

Gtr. 1 (acous.)

w/pick and fingers
let ring throughout

w/pick

(play 4 times)

GTR.1

1

Elec. Bass w/pick

B Verses (0:15, 0:45, 1:54)

- (1.) run
(2.) own
(3.) by

to keep from
the clothes I'm
the point of

hiding
wearing
caring

And I'm bound
And the road
Some old bed

to keep on
goes on for-
I'll soon be

D5

Rhy. Fig. 1

4

Substitute Bass Fill 3 on 3rd Verse (see below)
Bass Fig. 1

riding
ever
sharing

And I've got one more
And I've got one more
And I've dropped one more

silver silver
dollar dollar
silver dollar

But I'm
But I'm
But I'm

end Rhy. Fig. 1

7

Substitute Bass Fill 1 on 2nd and 3rd Verses (see below)

Bass Fill 1 (0:55, 2:04)

(D5)
Bass

Bass Fill 3 (1:54)

(D5)
Bass

C Chorus (0:30, 1:00, 2:09)

not gonna let 'em catch me no Not gonna let 'em catch the Midnight Rider

Gm

C

D5

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/dist.)

GTR. 2

GTR. 1

Gtr. 1

Bass

*Substitute note in parentheses 2nd time.

3rd time, skip ahead to

E Outro Chorus (bar 32)

(3rd time) No I'm

2. And I don't

13

Substitute Bass Fill 2 third time (see below).

2.

D Guitar Solo (1:16)

D5

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fill 1 (see below)

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see bar 4)

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist. and slapback echo)

GTR. 3

16

Bass

Bass Fill 2 (2:17)

Bass

(D5)

Rhy. Fill 1 (1:13)

Gtr. 1 D5

TRANSCRIPTIONS

19

let ring ----- *let ring* -----

E Interlude (1:26)

C B $\flat$ C

Gtr. 3

21

GTR. 3

Gtr. 2 (w/echo)

GTR. 2

Gtr. 1

GTR. 1

Bass

B $\flat$ C

24

"MIDNIGHT RIDER"

[illegible]

Go back to **B** 3rd Verse (bar 4)

3. And I've gone

Gtr. 1 repeats Riff A (see bar 28)

Gtr. 3

Gtr. 1

29

GTR. 3

Bass

F **Outro Chorus** (2:19)

(w/vocals first three times only; begin fade-out 4th time)

(play 4 simile and fade out)

not gonna let 'em catch me no

Not gonna let 'em catch the Midnight Rider

Gm

C

D5

Gtr. 2

[illegible]

SIMON & GARFUNKEL

"Scarborough Fair/Canticle"

AS HEARD ON **PARSLEY, SAGE, ROSEMARY AND THYME**

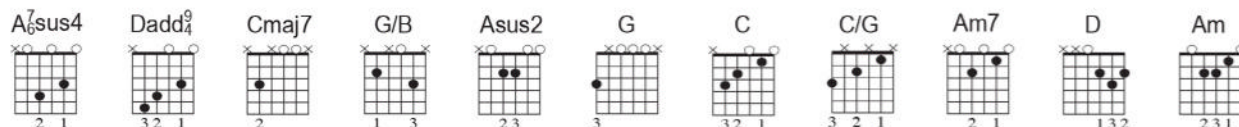
ARRANGEMENT AND ORIGINAL COUNTERMELODY BY **PAUL SIMON AND ARTHUR GARFUNKEL**

TRANSCRIBED BY **ASKOLD BUK**

Acoustic Guitar, capo 7

All chord shapes and tablature positions are relative to the capo ("0" = 7th fret; "5" = 12th fret).

All music sounds in the key of E minor, a perfect 5th higher than written.

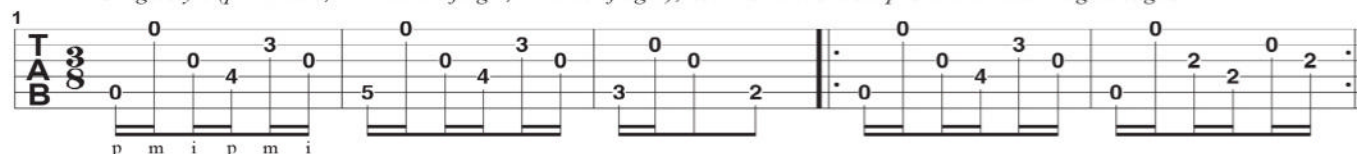


A Intro (0:00)

Slowly, in "one" ♩. = 43

A⁷sus₄ Dadd₉ Cmaj₇ (G/B) A⁷sus₄ A_{sus}2

Fingerstyle (p = thumb, m = middle finger, i = index finger); hold down chord shapes and let them ring throughout.



B 1st, 3rd and 5th Verses (0:10, 1:17, 2:24)

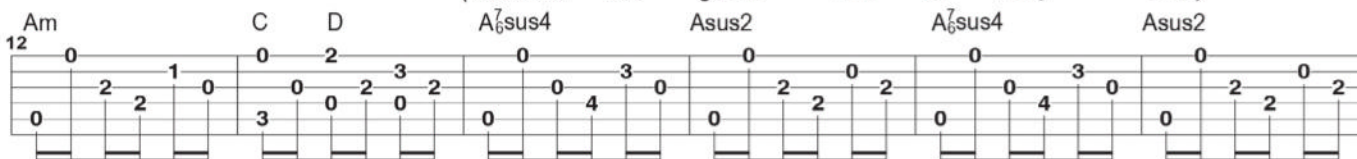
1, 5. Are you going to Scarborough Fair
3. Tell her to find me an acre of land
(On the side of a hill a sprinkling of leaves)
Parsley Parsley

A⁷sus₄ A_{sus}2 G C/G A⁷sus₄ A_{sus}2 C

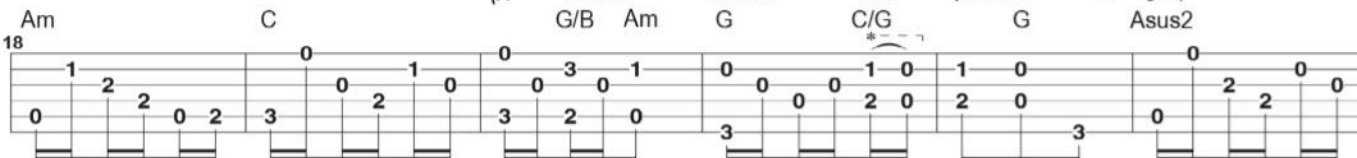
Substitute Rhy. Fill 1 on 3rd Verse (see bar 32)



sage rosemary and thyme
sage rosemary and thyme
(Washed is the ground with so many tears)
Re-Be-



member between the salt water to one who lives there
(A soldier cleans and polishes a gun)
She Then once she'll



*1st time, hold down C/G chord without pulling off.

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"SCARBOROUGH FAIR/CANTICLE"

3rd time, skip ahead
to [D] Outro (bar 54)

was be a true love of mine
a a true love of mine
G C/G G C/G G A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 A₆⁷sus4 Asus2

24 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 3 0 0 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2

[C] 2nd and 4th Verses (0:43, 1:50)

2. Tell her to make me a cambric shirt in the deep forest green) Parsley
4. Tell her to reap it in a sickle of leather blazing in scarlet battalions) Parsley
(On the in a War bellows of hill in the deep forest green)
(War bellows of hill in the deep forest green)
A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 G C/G G A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 C
Rhy. Fill 1

30 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 1 0

sage rosemary and thyme a sparrow on snow-crested ground) With
sage rosemary and thyme (Tracing thyme a sparrow on snow-crested ground) And
(Generals order their soldiers to kill)
Am C D A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 A₆⁷sus4 Asus2

36 0 2 1 0 0 0 2 3 0 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2 0 2

out no seam nor needle - work bedclothes a child of the Then mountains) she'll
gather it all in a bunch and of leather a child of the Then mountains) she'll
(And to fight for a cause they've long ago forgotten)
Am C G/B Am G C/G G C/G G Asus2

42 0 1 2 2 0 2 3 0 2 1 0 0 0 3 0 1 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 2 0 0 0

Go back to [B] (bar 6) twice,
for 3rd and 5th Verses

be a true love of mine (Sleeps unaware of the clarion call)
be a true love of mine
G C/G G C/G G A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 A₆⁷sus4 Asus2

48 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 3 0 0 0 2 0 2 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2 0 2

[D] Outro (2:55)

A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 A₆⁷sus4 Asus2 Cmaj7 (G/B) Slower (Am) N.H. 12

54 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2 0 0 3 0 0 2 0 2 0 2

POWER TOOLS

Gibson L-00

1931-1945/1991-PRESENT

CATEGORY: STEEL-STRING FLATTOP ACOUSTIC

BY CHRIS GILL

 **ROCK PLAYERS SEEKING** an acoustic guitar usually follow the adage that bigger is better, since bigger guitars like dreadnought and jumbo models usually deliver higher volume output and more assertive bass and treble. However, choosing an ideal acoustic for playing blues – specifically fingerstyle and Delta-style blues – requires a different approach, as tighter bass, warm, round midrange and full-bodied, sustaining treble become prioritized over loud and aggressive tone.

One of the best flattop guitars for fingerstyle blues also happens to be one of the most affordable models made during the pre-war great depression era – the Gibson L-00. Gibson produced a variety of small-body flattop L series models before the L-00's later introduction, including the L-0 and L-1 introduced in 1926 and L-2 introduced in 1929. Specs changed considerably over the years, but by 1929 Gibson settled upon a consistent body style for these small-body L series flattops that measured 14.75 inches wide and had a less-rounded squared lower bout compared to rounder earlier models. The scale length is 24 ¾ inches, which allows for a very comfortable transition for Gibson electric players switching to acoustic.

Probably due to guitarists' shrinking budgets during the depression years, the relatively stripped-down L-00 made its debut in 1931. Distinguishing features include binding surrounding the top only, a 3- or 4-piece spruce top, mahogany sides and a one-piece slab-sawn mahogany back. Initially, the L-00 came only with a black finish to hide the piecemeal top construction, although by 1933 Gibson started offering the model with a sunburst finish. The L-00's neck switched from a 12-fret to 14-fret configuration, and the x-braces were scalloped also starting that same year. In 1941, Gibson offered the L-00 with an optional natural finish at an additional expense due to its higher-quality materials.

Many players prefer the more modern 14-fret neck because it offers easier access to the higher frets. However, some discerning guitarists prefer the earlier 12-fret version for its bigger tone and more robust bass, thanks to the placement of the bridge further down the body, right in the center of the lower bout, which optimizes top vibration and dynamic responsiveness. Interestingly, the cheaper L-00 and L-0 models generally have a bolder, more focused tone than fancier similar models like the L-2, Nick Lucas and Century, which have more delicate construction and lighter braces that tend to enhance sparkling treble overtones.

Gibson reissued the 14-fret L-00 as the L-00 Blues King, which was produced from 1991-2016. These are



The original list price for this 1934 Gibson L-00 was probably around \$25

The L-00 was one of the most affordable models made during the pre-war great depression era

very good small-body flattop blues fingerstyle guitars, but the L-00 models Gibson has offered since 2017 are even better and built much closer to the originals. Today Gibson offers several L-00 flattop models in 12- and 14-fret versions and with a wide variety of classic and new finish options. With prices starting at \$1,999, they are considerably cheaper than an original vintage example with prices that start around \$5,000 for one in very good condition (a considerable increase from its original \$25 list price in the early Thirties). **GW**

NEIL GODWIN

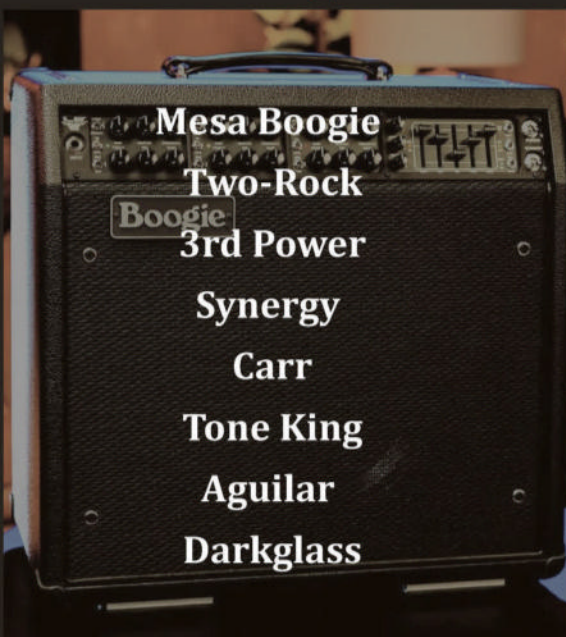


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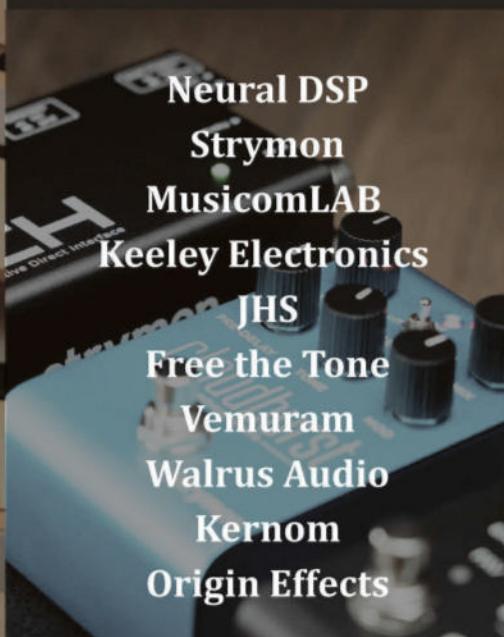
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Learn more about the
Chris Buck Signature Revstar

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