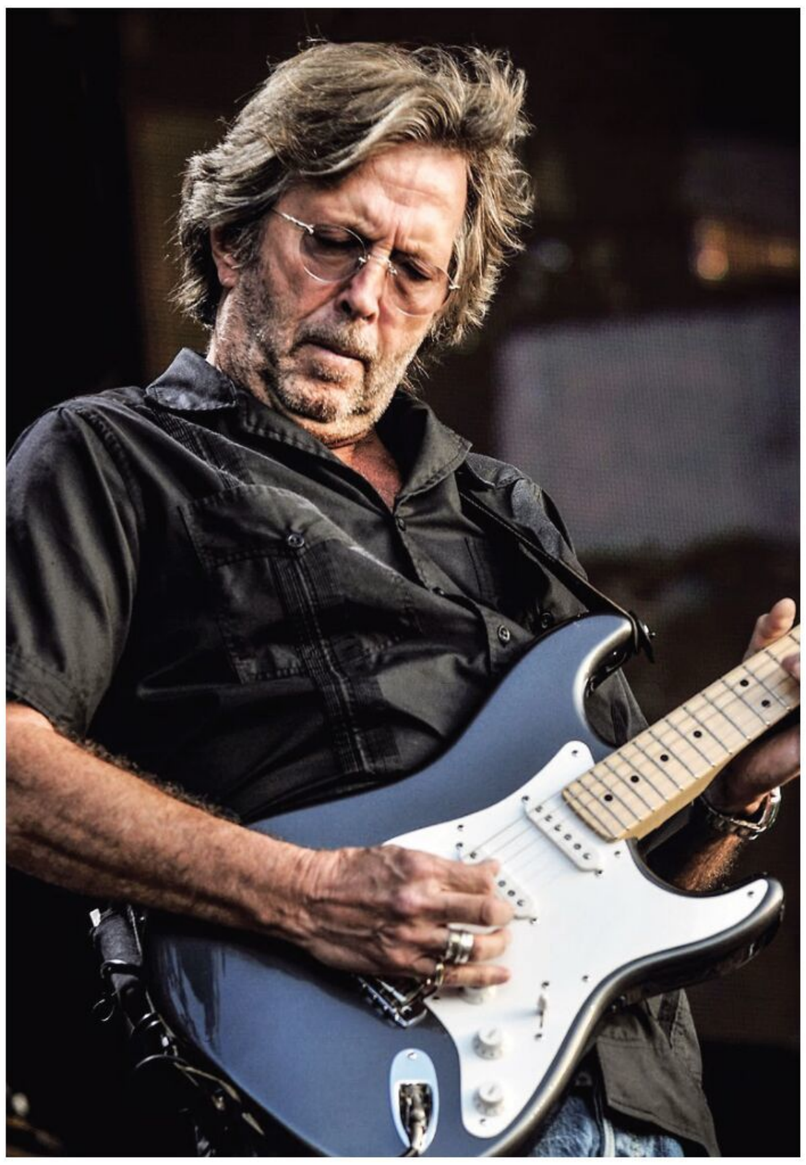


Guitarist PRESENTS

GUITAR GODS

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

30 YEARS OF CLASSIC INTERVIEWS

FEATURING

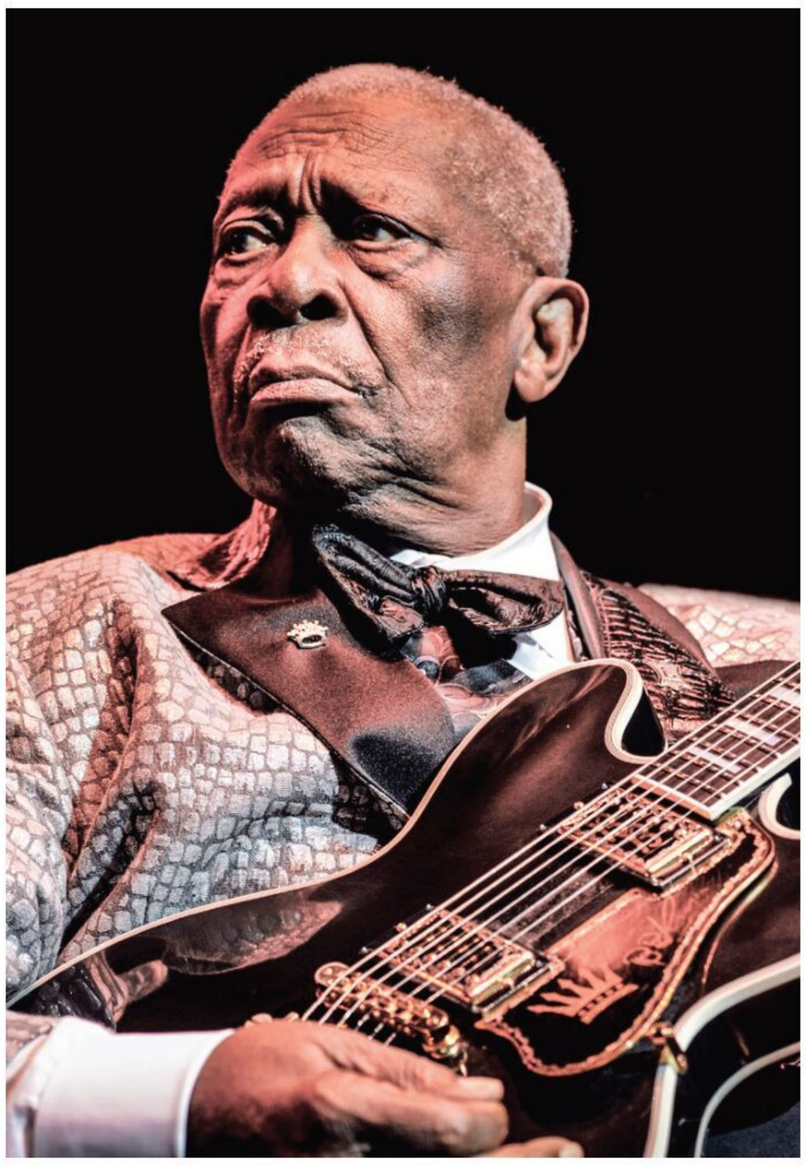
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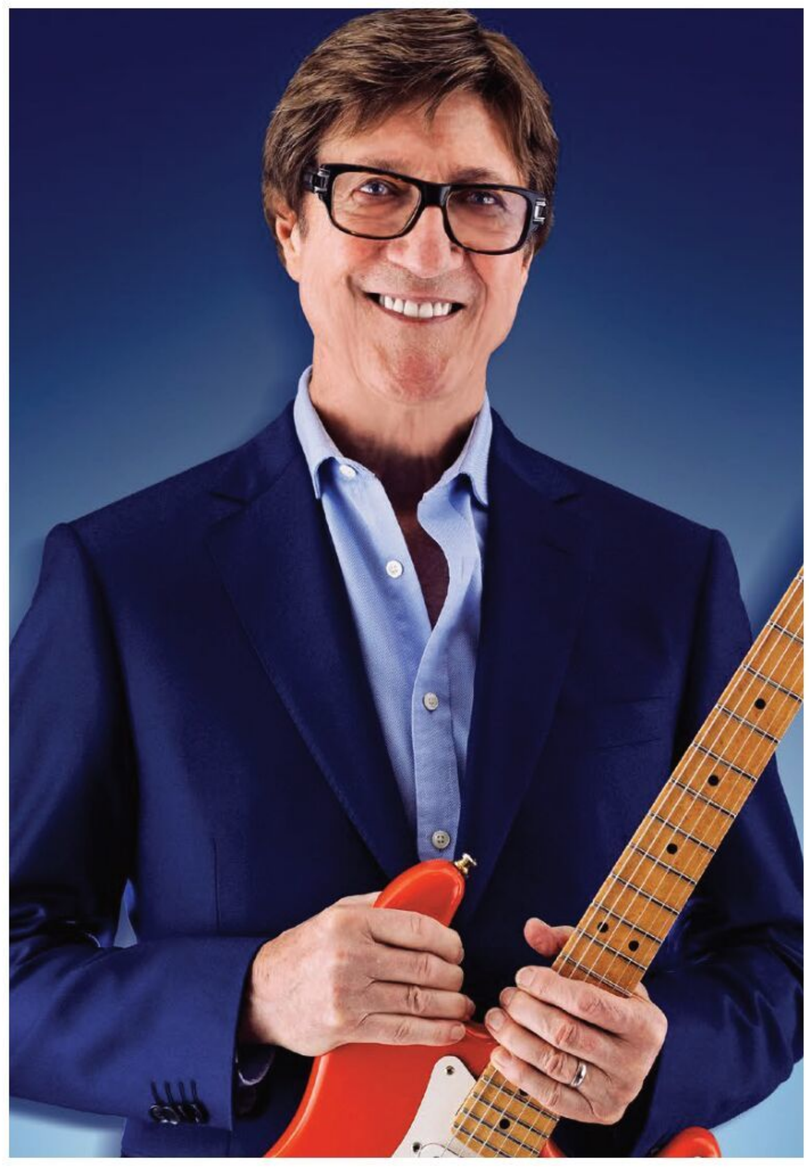
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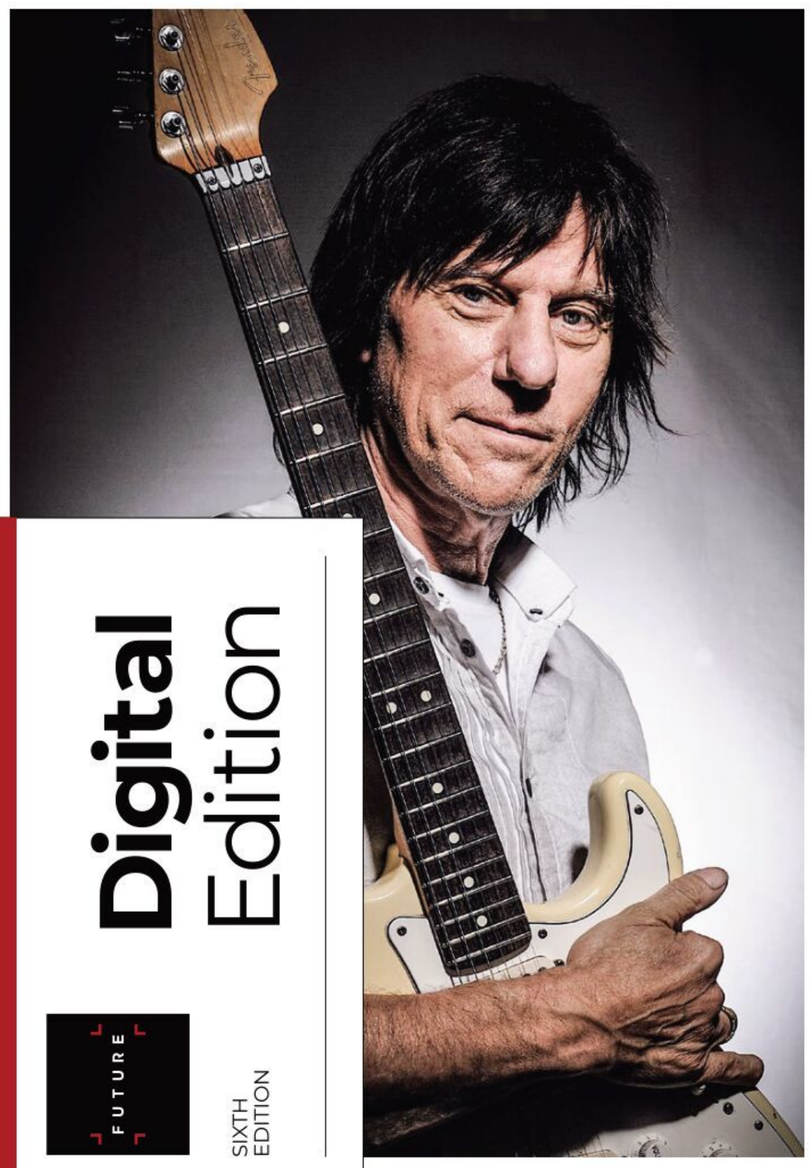
PLUS DETAILED GALLERIES OF
HISTORIC GUITARS



PLUS
PLAY LIKE THE LEGENDS
Learn their best licks inside!











Digital Edition

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FUTURE

WELCOME TO GUITAR GODS

The gates of rock's Mount Olympus have been flung open for this bookazine, which brings together insightful interviews from the archives of **Guitarist** and our sister magazine **Total Guitar** with 16 gods of the guitar world. What's striking about these players is not how much they dwell on technique or even gear, but how life itself was the mainspring of their brilliance on the guitar. The excitement, the anger, the love of music and the irresistible call to express themselves through six strings formed the most important elements of their sound. Fame for its own sake was never the goal in view – and occasionally it became a gilded prison. Nev Marten's riveting interview with The Who's Pete Townshend on p128 is a perfect example of how art, rebellion and pure attitude shaped the viscerally exciting sounds of guitar in the rock era. Indeed, the more you read about the guitar gods the more you realise that, as always, it is the player not the gear that brings the magic. The insights of these gods remain inspiring touchstones for any guitarist, man or woman, so we hope you enjoy this collection of classic interviews.

AUDIO LESSONS

To enjoy all of the audio content in this special issue, simply type the following link into your browser and follow the instructions on-screen:

http://bit.ly/guitar-gods

GUITAR GODS

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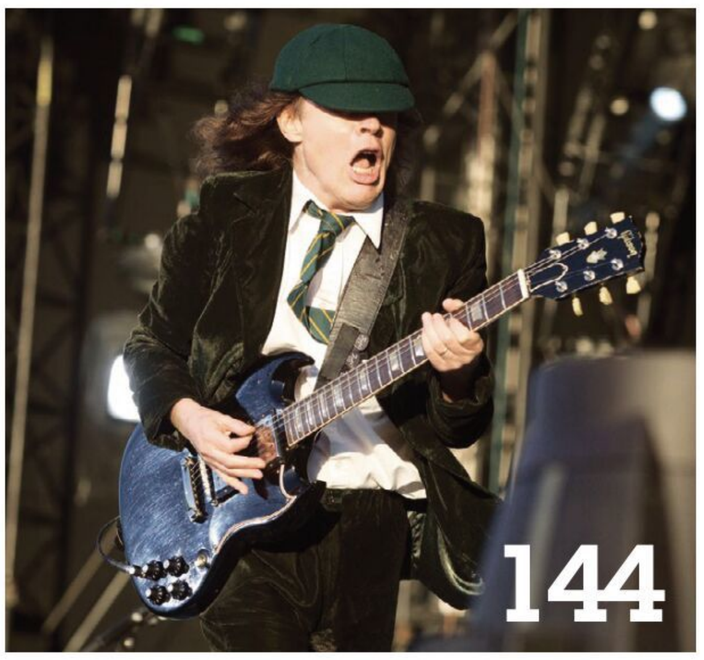
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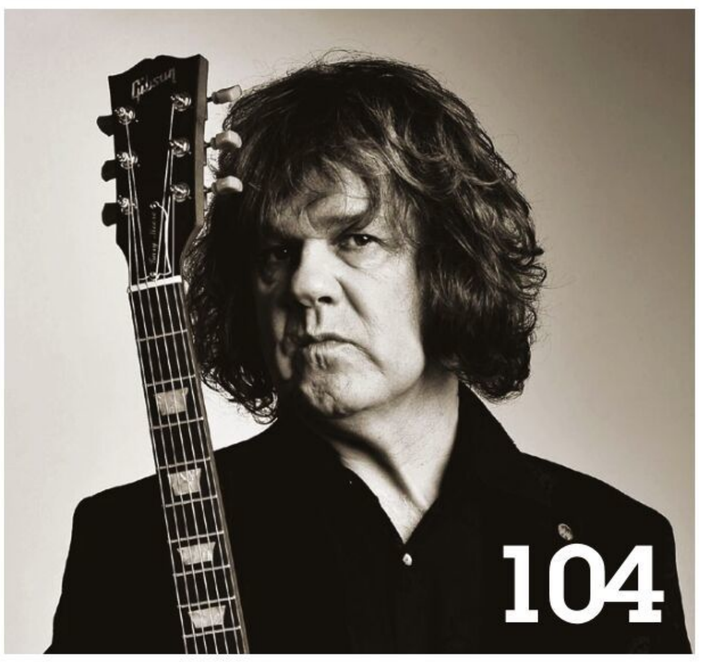
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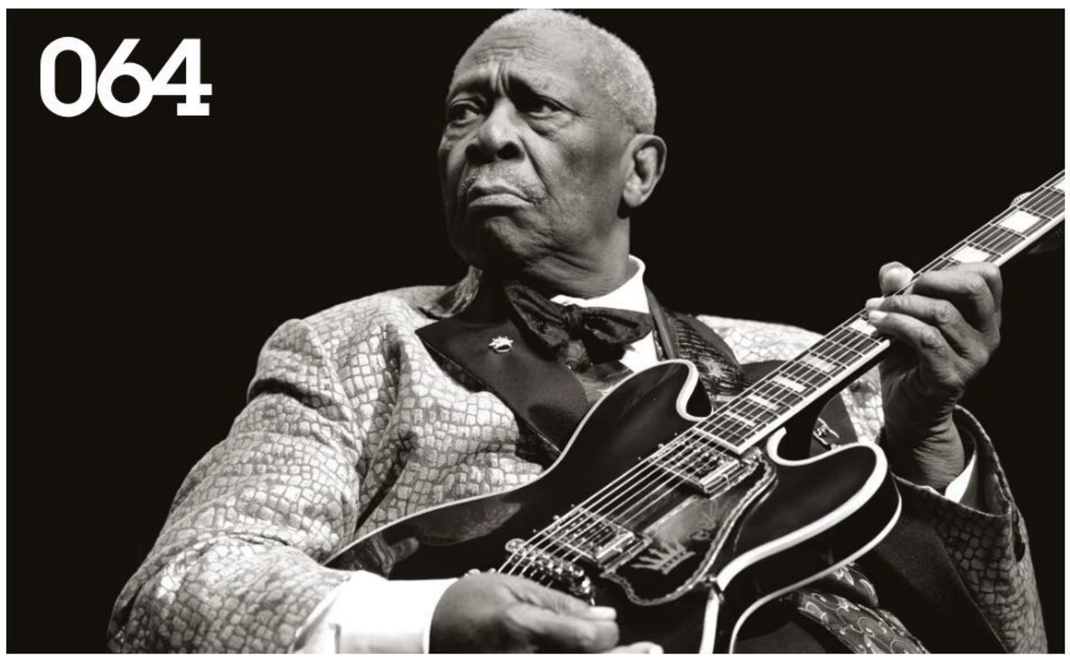
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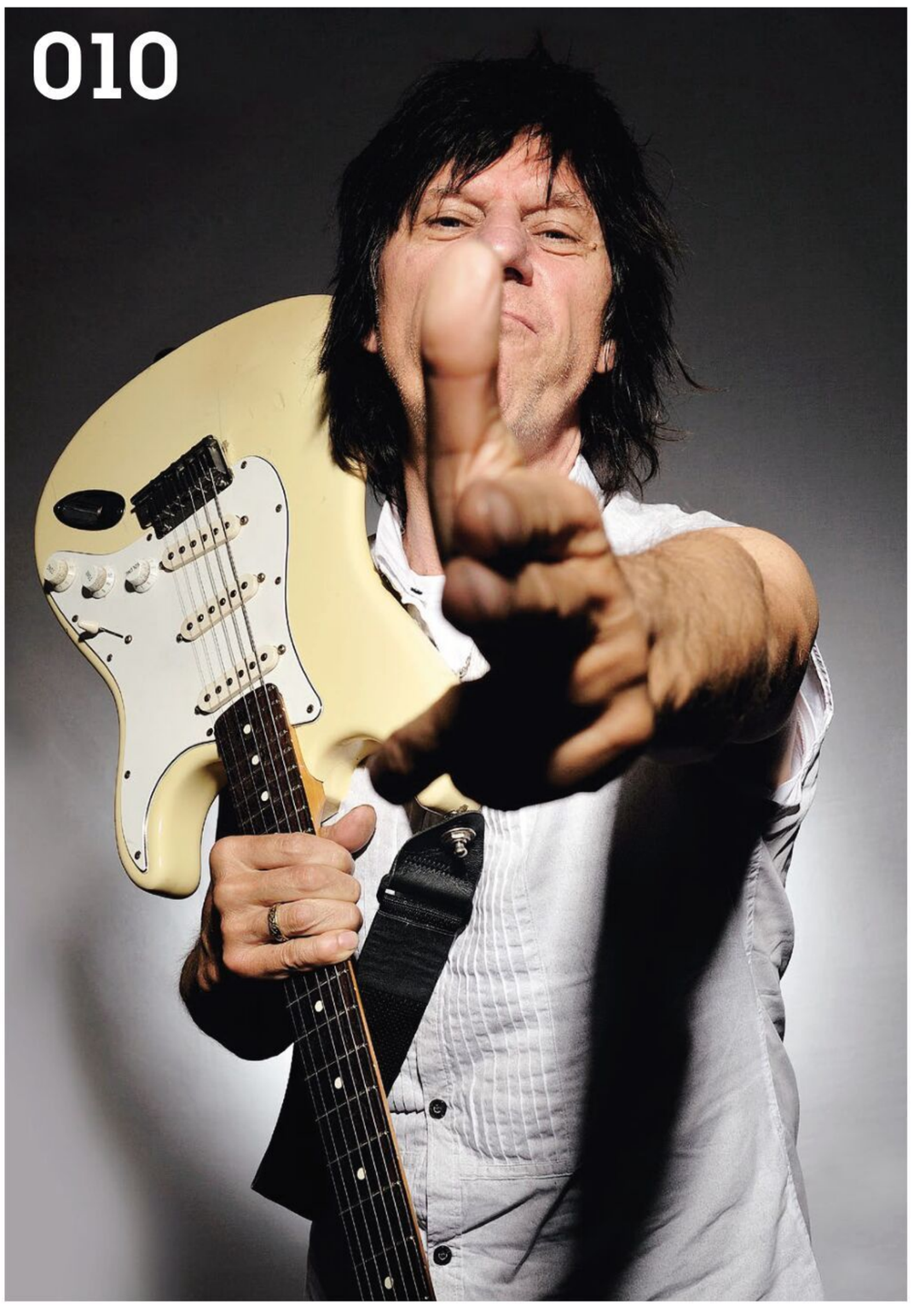
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DIVINE INSPIRATION

Why the qualities you need to sell out stadiums night after night can help any guitar player sound better in their own home

WORDS **JAMIE DICKSON** PHOTOGRAPHY **ROB ANTONELLO**

When we consider great guitarists, one common quality that stands out is having a 'voice' on the instrument that is not only different to that of other players but which leaves an indelible trace on the memory and which finds an echo in the listener's heart.

We'll add the caveat that not every great player becomes widely known. Some incredible guitarists never reach the big-time and many of them prefer it that way. Spend enough time in the better music venues of any major city and you'll find some of them. They are by no means failures and in some ways, watching a stranger step onto a small stage and unexpectedly blow your mind is one of the best musical experiences you can have if you appreciate guitar music in its most vital form.

But what does it mean to be a guitar player who is recognised across the world as one of 'the greats'? How does one's relationship with the instrument change as the audience for your playing rises from a handful of onlookers to hundreds, then thousands and finally millions? As Toto guitarist Steve Lukather once told us, you have to make each note "hit the back wall of the arena". In other words, you have to paint on a large canvas, musically speaking, and in that setting melody and phrasing become paramount. Think of Don Felder and Joe Walsh's outro solo in *Hotel California*. It's a piece of music in itself, not merely a series of licks.

Great guitarists are not merely hot players – they are composers, interpreters of the song and lightning rods for 1,000 watts of pure musical emotion. Guitarists who make it to the great stages of the world have to have a handle on that deep musicality – what they play can't just be a series of generic licks. What they play has to work both in the arena and on car radios in the morning rush hour. It has to work when they are performing on their own in the spotlight in front of 40,000 people.

Back To Basics

Curiously, that means focusing on some really basic fundamentals. Lance Lopez is a fine Texas bluesman and he learnt his incendiary style of guitar from ZZ Top guitarist Billy Gibbons. Gibbons had some advice for the young player when, during formative years, he noticed that Lance was relying too heavily on flashy playing that was technically impressive but essentially disconnected from the heart of the song.

"Doesn't matter what you play, or how fast you play... if it doesn't sound good then it's not gonna be good. That was always the number one thing," Lance told *Guitarist*, speaking of Billy's early advice to him. "And then he said, 'You gotta play what makes you happy – you gotta be able to play with feel and with heart, and it has to make you feel good.' Thirdly, Billy would say, 'Your playing's gotta have groove and feel.'

"A lot of that boiled down to making sure that you got a groove established in the song and that what you're playing lead-wise should also groove – instead of just flying off the handle and throwing lots of notes out. Because when I was a young man, that's what I was doing [laughs]. But Billy saw me as a kid and he said, 'You gotta groove,' and I'm thinking like, 'What, a funk groove?' But he said, 'Go listen to *You Don't Have To Go* by Jimmy Reed.' So, I listened to Jimmy Reed and it was like, 'Ohhh, that groove.'

"That's when it started to make sense – and then it was about putting the lead patterns around that to where it was just interweaving with the groove and not just blowing over the top of it. Tone, playing with love and groove... those are really the three main insights that I've got from Billy."

Tone. Playing with love and groove. Those aren't scary, impossible-to-achieve goals. They are simple fundamentals that too often we push past, in our haste to get 'better' at guitar – not realising that they are the foundation of all 'better' guitar playing. Too often, when



Billy Gibbons: "You gotta play what makes you happy – you gotta play with feel and with heart. It has to make you feel good"

Great guitarists are not merely hot players – they are composers, interpreters of the song and lightning rods for 1,000 watts of pure musical emotion. Guitarists who make it to the great stages of the world have to have a handle on that deep musicality – what they play can't just be a series of generic licks

we look up to guitar gods we see them as creatures from another world that we could not possibly emulate. Yes, there are players such as Steve Vai and Guthrie Govan who have pushed the boundaries of what is technically possible on the instrument. But both those players would agree that without feel, groove and phrasing, godlike speed and dexterity alone are meaningless. Thus, we'd argue that close study of the world's 'Guitar Gods' yields a surprising number of home truths about playing guitar that anyone can benefit from.

That's why we've sifted through 30 years of landmark interviews from *Guitarist* magazine to look inside the musical minds of some of the greatest players of the modern of rock and blues era. Of course, they, too, had their childhood heroes: forefathers of guitar such as T-Bone Walker, Charlie Christian and Django Reinhardt. But that is a different story, covered elsewhere. Instead, we present here 16 classic conversations with giants of the fretboard that shed light on their creative approaches, influences, techniques and a lot more. You'll also find hands-on lessons in how to emulate the playing styles of some of these players, with accompanying video and audio examples to make learning simple. Likewise, you'll also find detailed insights into some of the legendary instruments they used on their greatest recordings.

We think you'll find that, instead of feeling diminished by what these players have achieved, what they've learned about performing with a guitar on the great stages of the world can reconnect you to what really matters in your own playing. These musicians have had a lot of opportunity to discover what works and what doesn't, after all. So, pull up a chair among rock's Olympians and prepare to receive their manna of six-string wisdom. G


VOLUME
TONE
TONE

JEFF BECK

TOTAL GUITAR INTERVIEW SEPTEMBER 2016

On an endless quest to find fresh talent and to conquer new musical horizons, Jeff Beck tells us why he never sought the limelight, why he ignored Eric Clapton's advice, and how he expresses his true identity on his latest album, 'Loud Hailer'

WORDS **DAVID WEST** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

Most people in their 70s are picking out a comfortable chair to nap in, but not Jeff Beck. The guitar hero's guitar hero is back with a new album, *Loud Hailer*, that sees him reinvent himself once again. From playing blues with The Yardbirds in the 60s, Beck has taken his beloved Fender Strat into the worlds of fusion and jazz-rock, rockabilly, electronica, and now he's plunged into straight-ahead hard rock by teaming up with Rosie Bones and Carmen Vandenberg from the band Bones. *Loud Hailer* was written by the trio at Beck's house – a process aided by several crates of Prosecco – and is released alongside *BECK01* – a book of photographs chronicling both the guitarist's long career and his lifelong love of hot rods. Preparing to mark 50 years in music with a huge gig at LA's Hollywood Bowl, Beck's engine shows no signs of slowing down.

What was it about Carmen Vandenberg as a guitar player that made you want to work with her?
"First of all, I couldn't believe that a young 22- or 23-year-old girl would be in love with Buddy Guy, or even know about him. When she said Albert Collins that was it, because I think he's the coolest. She goes, 'I've got a band with a girl called Rosie and if you want to hear us, we're playing at this place.' So, we hot-footed it up there not knowing what to expect and there they were just giving it large. I thought, 'This is great. Maybe we should ask them down, go outside of their style, try to challenge them to do something else.'

"My job was to instigate the proceedings. It was joyous watching them get stuck in – I just had to put the idea on the table and they were all over it with a freshness that's so lacking nowadays."

Were you and Carmen coming from the same place, musically speaking?
"The big joiner was the blues, and the fact that she could really play made me think, 'Wow, this is incredible, maybe this is the right choice for me.' To have Rosie as well – I hadn't envisaged a time when somebody would sit down in my house and literally write lyrics as I was coming up with the ideas. We made the demos and they weren't great sound-wise, but the content was there. You could see what was going to unfold with very little effort. Then the third thing that cemented it was Filippo [Cimatti], who produced it. To have those three people of one accord joining up with me it made a pretty slick outfit."

Any young guitarist might feel intimidated at the prospect of playing with you. Was Carmen nervous?
"She probably was, but I tried to instil confidence so I was playing 'tutor' as well. It wasn't a high pressure thing, 'You've got to learn this,' but she treated it as though it was. She'd go on YouTube and check me out. The last six months hasn't just been doing the album, she's been learning all the stuff, so there's been just about enough time to get comfortable and I'm confident that she's going to deliver."

You have a reputation for musical reinvention. How many times do you think you can do it?
"I think it's good to do that. It's been easy, because if you have a massive hit, where are you going to go? You'll make the worst step ever and slip over. But not having any big hits – and I mean giant hits – it makes it a lot easier to just jump into another genre: you're not cheating somebody out of something they like. I'm an experimenter. It's rich, because every album I've done,

"My Strat is another arm, it's part of me. It doesn't feel like a guitar at all. It's an implement which is my voice... Instantly, it becomes mine"

JEFF BECK

except for a couple of techno-y records, are different. You've got to hand it to the Fender Strat, because there are songs in [that guitar]. It's a tool of great inspiration and torture at the same time, because it's forever sitting there challenging you to find something else in it. It does respond to touch and the tonal variation is unlimited really, especially with the whammy bar. I have it set up so it becomes almost like a pedal steel."

Are you ever tempted to use a Les Paul or Tele again?
"My Strat is another arm, it's part of me. It doesn't feel like a guitar at all. It's an implement which is my voice. A Les Paul feels like a guitar and I play differently on that and I sound too much like someone else. With the Strat, instantly it becomes mine so that's why I've welded myself to that. Or it's welded itself to me."

You recently said that *Loud Hailer* was you trying to get away from music that only pleased guitar nerds and guitar magazines...
"That came out as a little bit of slur on [guitar magazines]; it was never intended to be that. I just didn't want to be a central figure in muso-land. I want to be doing more than being on the cover of *Guitar World* magazine. That whole scenario of reciting a series of instrumentals, I've done it – it's okay but it's so wearing. It's very difficult to be entertaining. That was okay in the day, especially with Jan Hammer [Mahavishnu Orchestra keyboard and synth maestro that Beck collaborated with in 70s and 80s], because there was gymnastics that were beyond belief. But there is no Jan Hammer any more – he doesn't play live shows, he's folded the tent, gone into the studio.

"But I didn't want to start becoming elite and above [guitar magazines] – they've been great to me. I didn't want to be in the middle of a fusion confusion, I wanted to be me again. The real me is on this record, more of the real me musically.

Your new book, *BECK01*, is an interesting idea...
"Genesis Publications had already done Jimmy Page [2010's *Jimmy Page On Jimmy Page*], so I supposed I was in their sights. I didn't want to do it at all and they said, 'But you can choose what photos go in there.' So, I agreed a bit reluctantly. My autobiography was delayed and I thought this would be a missed opportunity to have an album and a tour and not to have something there, so I agreed, at least that photographic album will be out. I've seen it enough times to start worrying about what's in there! Hopefully, somebody will get some enjoyment out of it – there are some rare pictures in there."

Did you find it emotional going through the photos?
"Yeah. The first day we'd look at a picture and talk about it for 20 minutes. 'We'll never get there! Come on! What about this one?' There were the obvious ones of me and Stevie [Wonder] in Electric Ladyland, and I've got a rare shot of me in Motown. There are only two in existence, faded Polaroids of me sitting at the desk in Motown when I was there in '70/'71. It was right before they folded and went west, and I think there is one with [producer] Mickie Most posing outside Hitsville [USA – Motown's original headquarters in Detroit].

"What a time – 10 days of racism and abuse! They didn't like me and Cozy [Powell, Beck's drummer at the time] until we started playing. 'Hey Whitey! What have you got?' Cozy comes out with his double bass drums and it's deafening and they're not used to that. But after a few days they really took to us. We were trying to supercharge what Motown were offering. They had these very tasteful, beautifully played pop singles. We came along and put metal to it – Metal Motown. The funniest thing was one of the tape ops said, on a coffee break, 'You guys came here for the Motown sound?' 'Yeah, man!' 'It just went straight out the door!' because Cozy moved the drum kit! I said, 'What are you doing, Cozy?' He said, 'Well, I can't play that kit. If you want, I'll play badly on that kit or really well on my kit.' I went, 'Okay.' He didn't realise that was the Holy Grail of that studio. They were tuned for the room, how could he not use that kit played by Benny Benjamin, Pistol Allen? But that's just the way he was."

After you split from The Yardbirds, were you instantly comfortable leading a band under your own name?
"No, hated it. You can't hide – your name is out front, on the tickets, on the front of the buildings. I wasn't really ever after that, but the fact that I could be somebody elusive in a band and be ridiculously badly behaved musically, that was a job that you die for. You could hide within the name of The Yardbirds and get people talking about you without running the risk of being shot down in flames individually. That's what the whole essence of The Yardbirds was about – they gave me that licence to experiment within a certain framework, so I didn't like seeing my name in lights at all."

What about taking on the burden of writing?
"It's so difficult because I didn't sing. Eric [Clapton] said, with great wisdom, 'Get used to the fact that you hate your voice, because I did.' And I went, 'But you sound good, I sound unbearably bad. I loathe it. I would never enjoy it even if we had another single like [*Hi Ho] Silver Lining*, I just couldn't bear it.' He said, 'I'm telling you, if you don't, it's going to be tough.'

"And it was tough, but then I can turn around and say, '*Blow By Blow*, put that in your pipe and smoke it, mate.' But he's right: if I did come up with a song and everybody loved it, it would instil confidence automatically and I might even get to like what I sound





"Not having any giant hits makes it a lot easier to jump into another genre. I'm an experimenter. Every album I've done is different"

JEFF BECK

like. But letting that out there is more than I can bear. It's just not me. I listen to Jimi who had a peculiar voice and it wasn't a great voice, but it was just magic. He never did scream, it was always the guitar that screamed for him and I still marvel at him even today. I never listened to more Jimi than I do now, because I've got some really rare recordings. It's just humiliating to know that he was doing that up to 1970, all in a period of about three and a half years.

"Things took a funny turn in the early 70s. It all turned out well when I heard John McLaughlin – his performance on the Miles Davis *Jack Johnson* album and with Mahavishnu Orchestra said, 'Here's where you can go.' Every musician I knew was raving about it. 'This is a little bit of me, this. I'll have some of that.'

Your work in that first Jeff Beck group with Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood was so important in the development of the heavier side of blues-rock...

"What I was trying to do with Rod was take a little bit of Motown, put in some heavy backbeat. The drummer at the time was trained by one of the Motown drummers, who I think was over here on a Motown revue, so he had all the chops of Motown but with more rock 'n' roll power behind it for live stuff. The combination really worked, especially with Ronnie on bass. He played a big Fender with a Marshall and it was great. He's a better bass player in some ways than he was a guitarist. And with Rod, it was like a black soul singer, the gruff voice – unfortunately, it didn't last long. We did all the dirty work over here and it wasn't until we went to America that I was able to plug into my reputation from The Yardbirds for my first outing as a solo act, and they just ate it up. I don't know what happened [with the band breaking up]. It was lack of material or I think Rod had it in his mind he was going to go long before I found out. I think he wanted to see his name up there."

How did you end up playing with Rod?

"Let's not beat around the bush, I was pretty down at the time: I'd lost my girl, Hendrix had come and smeared everybody across the floor... it wasn't looking too rosy. I'd fallen out with The Yardbirds –whatever happened I was out, and I'm facing a Monday morning just outside London thinking, 'What's the point?' So, I went to the Cromwell Inn, which was my last hope of preventing anything silly happening. It was the flattest, most boring Monday and I remember sitting there listening to Motown, thinking, 'This isn't a bad move, such great songs, great playing – whoever the artist is, you know that those players are the same fabulous players that were the studio players.' I looked up and there's a bloke in the corner like that [slumped over] with a beer. I said, 'Hey mate, you all right?' He looked up and it was Rod. I said, 'We're both fucked. What about we go together and get a band?' He went, 'If you mean it, then put your number on this piece of paper.'

"I had a phone call, we arranged to meet and that's how it started, because I'd already heard him when he was with [English blues singer Long] John Baldry – I liked him better than Baldry. But he only did three or four songs as a guest. The next time I heard him was at a festival, Richmond I think. We played and then he was on afterward with Baldry. The sound was blasting out of a big PA and I thought, 'That man, there he is, that's the geezer we need!' And I never did anything about it. Then I heard that he might be free, and as luck would have it, he was the last, dying ember in this club I was in, and I'm glad I went! It's always a good idea to go out somewhere, because you're not going to have anybody knocking on the door, are you?"

There's a huge difference between the first Jeff Beck Group albums, with their soul and R&B, and the fusion on *Blow By Blow*. Do you think that was John McLaughlin's influence?

"That was always lurking because of the mastery of the playing, it was unequalled and I don't think there will ever be a four-piece with that kind of [talent]... It's as peculiar as the gathering of the Monty Python guys. The incredible individual talent of those players – they had Billy Cobham for crying out loud; he became a household name. Jan Hammer. I was so thrilled to have Jan for two years and for him to be enthusiastic about being on an album and a tour. It was just a natural thing, to follow your heart. That's what I do and so far it has served me quite well."

Gene Vincent's guitarist, Cliff Gallup, was one of your first heroes. Is his influence still in your playing?

"Yeah, little bits. It's difficult not to. It's getting less, because I'm finding more who I am, steering clear of Jimi, steering clear of Les Paul – but they're there. With Cliff, it's less of a problem because the sound is organically different. [My] Fender Strat is loud, it's distortion and wild – whereas Cliff is crystal clarity and brilliant top end. But the phrasing – I still have his phrases, because those are the solos I learned. There's nothing wrong with copying solos as long as you don't say they're yours. As a matter of fact, I've had some news about his guitar – the guitar on *Be-Bop-A-Lula*, *Cruisin'* – that's come to light from Gretsch, and I'm just putting out feelers. It was sold by somebody who ran out of cash. It's the original Duo Jet, the '56. He didn't like it, apparently. Come on! That was the guitar on all those early records and he engraved his name on the fingerboard. When I saw it I went, 'Did he have two and that one is custom engraved?' No, he engraved the original. They think they know where it is. Imagine having that – just imagine it. I don't know if I could deal with it. I'd just look at it and put it away." G

Beck's Blues

Jeff Beck takes the guitar beyond its limits, referencing the numerous styles in his repertoire to form his iconic signature technique

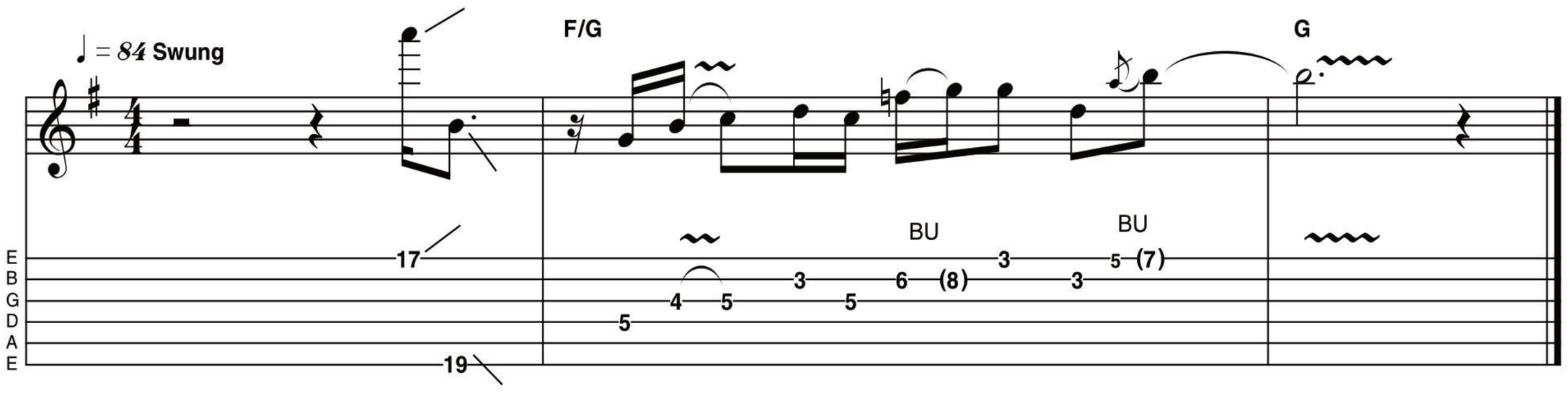
THERE ARE guitar players, there are excellent guitar players – and there is Jeff Beck. Since blazing to the forefront of the British Invasion in the mid-60s with The Yardbirds, Jeff hasn't particularly courted publicity or fame, although he is deservedly renowned for his consistent invention and reinvention of electric guitar playing through psychedelic rock, blues, fusion, rockabilly, dance and world music. Though he has a phenomenal facility in the traditional sense, Jeff is far more interested in the expressive 'non-guitaristic' qualities he can coax from the instrument using a relatively simple rig, but a variety of unusual techniques, such as tapping a bottleneck on the strings over the pickups in *Angel Footsteps*, or shaping a single harmonic into a complex melody using the vibrato bar, as featured in *Where Were You*. This also stretches to his choice of material – *Adagietto* from Mahler's *Symphony No 5* and The Beatles' *A Day In The Life* are hardly obvious choices for guitar instrumentals, after all!

With so many stylistic areas to choose from, we've opted for pretty definitive 'Beck' territory here, playing a solo with fingers, which borrows ideas from Jeff's guest solo in Jon Bon Jovi's *Blaze Of Glory*, using the vibrato bar to emulate bluesy slide playing, with a feel reminiscent of The Pump, from 1980's *There & Back*.



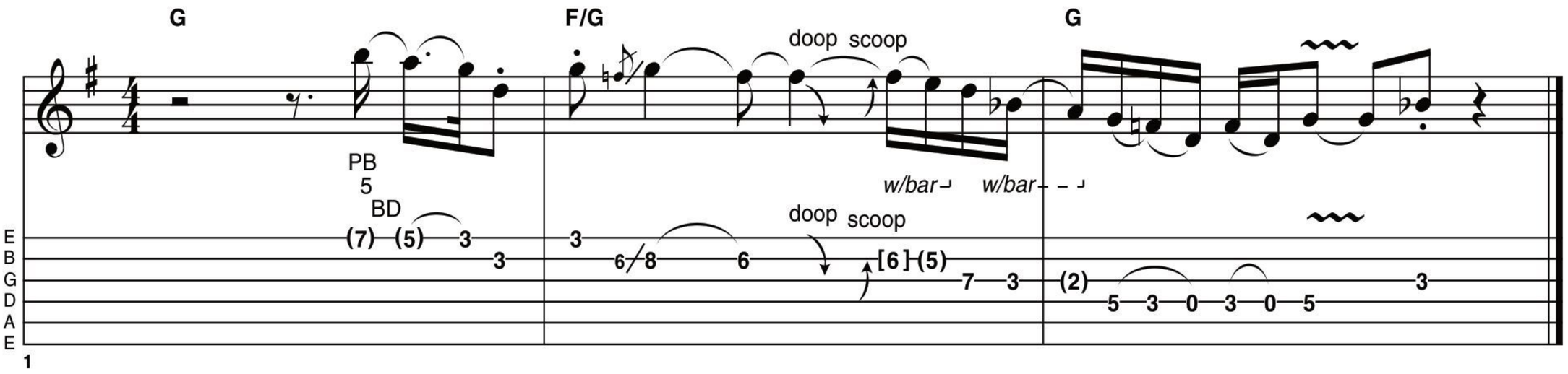
Example 1

PLAYED with a swung feel, this phrase attempts to emulate some of Jeff's eccentricity and exploit the different tones that using thumb or finger on the strings can give. A little restraint may be required; unless you're using hefty strings, it's easy to 'ping' them back against the 'board. A great technique, but not what we want here. The presence of an F natural gives what we might call a 'Mixolydian' feel.



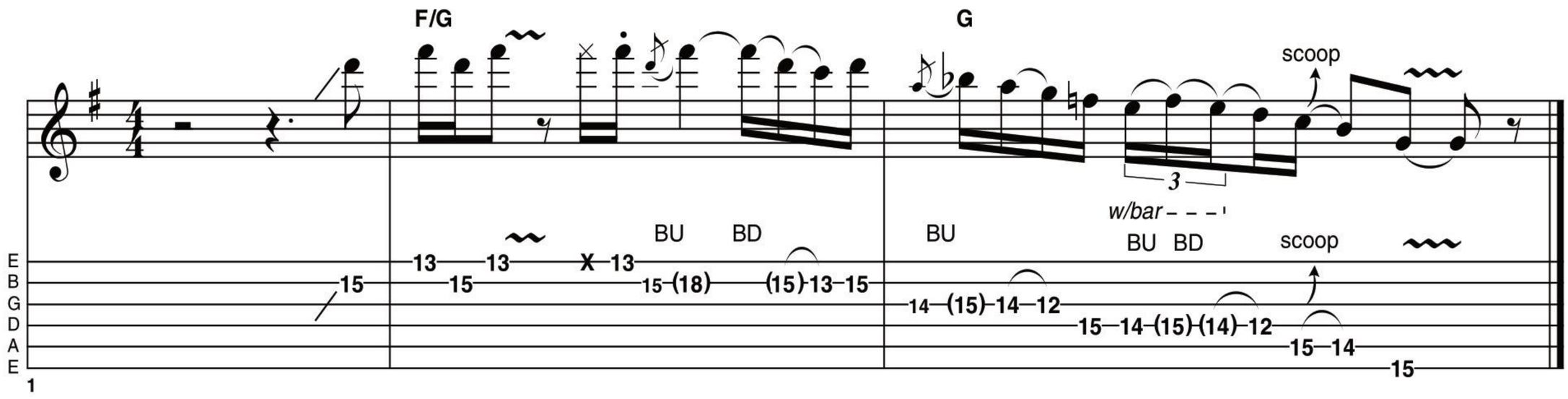
Example 2

CONTINUING in the same vein, the vibrato bar comes into play for a series of 'swoops' and 'scoops' similar to the way Jeff emulates bluesy bottleneck licks. Expect to spend some time getting the desired result, but don't get too caught up in the desire to duplicate this type of phrasing with 100 per cent consistency. That's not really the spirit here...



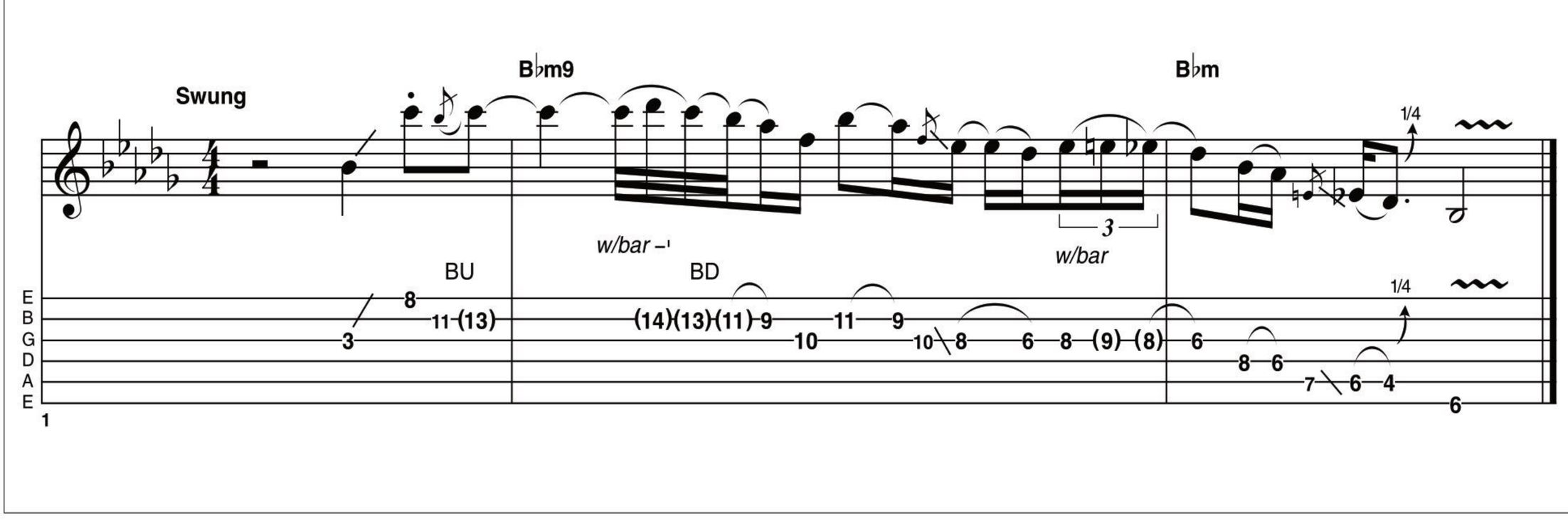
Example 3

THE opening notes are played with alternating thumb and finger – a technique often used by Jeff to articulate rapid 'trill' type effects. Moving on, here is a useful pentatonic style pattern with more of that 'psychedelic' Mixolydian feel, pulling up as well as down on the bar to shape the melody. Starting out with short bursts, it's possible to build dexterity for some of these unusual bar techniques.



Example 4

TIME for a modulation! Jumping straight in on the 9th from the underlying B♭min9 chord (C), there is more whammy trickery, raising an already bent string briefly by a further semitone, then releasing the bar to its original position, followed by releasing the bend. Not as complicated as it sounds, though you may find it sounds different each and every time you play it. We feel sure Jeff would approve!





ERIC CLAPTON

INTERVIEW JUNE 1994

In 1994, Guitarist caught up with Eric Clapton for the first time to talk about his music, his influences, his gear, and that 'Clapton is God' thing. From insight on his great friend Jimi Hendrix, to what it was really like to "survive" the 70s, Clapton tells us how "things have come full circle"

WORDS **DAVID MEAD** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

What are you currently working on at the moment?
"I'm recording this album [*From The Cradle*] as much as I can with everybody on the floor at the same time – horns and everything. We're trying not to overdub anything, so mistakes and everything go in. I suppose [it's a bit like the old Chicago days] – although I think even they overdubbed sometimes. But for the purpose of getting it the way I want it to feel, I want everything live."

We're conducting this interview in the Olympic Studio, Barnes. Your old stomping ground, isn't it?
"This is where a lot of the early stuff was done, yeah. This is my idea of a recording studio. It's between where I was born and where I used to go. It's in the middle of all my stomping grounds and I think I must have recorded here with just about every outfit I ever played with, although I don't think John Mayall came here."

The first guitar of yours was a Hoyer, wasn't it?
"Yes, a Hoyer acoustic from Bell's in Surbiton. Funnily enough, it looked like a gut-stringed guitar, but they were steel. An odd combination. Then I got a Kay double cutaway – because Alexis Korner had one."

That can't have lasted too long either, because by the time you were in The Yardbirds you were using Telecasters and Gretsches...
"It didn't stand up too well. I think the neck bowed and it didn't seem to me that you could do much about it. It had a truss rod, but it wasn't that clever and the action ended up being incredibly high. I remember at some point I didn't want it to look like it looked any more and so I covered it in black Fablon! Can you imagine what it sounded like after that? Let alone what it looked like. I ended up with the ES-335TDC and then I got into Fenders – I had a Telecaster and a Jazzmaster."

It's well known that in the early part of the 60s nobody could get 'the sound' that you were hearing on records out of British-made amps. How did you overcome that?
"By turning them flat out! I thought the solution was to get an amp and play it as loud as it would go until it was about to burst. When I was doing that album with John Mayall, if you miked the amp too close it would sound awful, so you had to put it a long way away and get the room sound of that amp breaking up."

That was when you discovered Marshalls, wasn't it?
"Yes. Prior to the Blues Breakers I was using Vox AC30s and things like that, but they didn't do it for me. They were too toppy – they didn't have any midrange at all."

Do you harbour any romance for that period at all? I think it was Mark Knopfler who said that in some ways he misses the old days where you could turn up at a club with an amp and guitar and just do a gig...
"Back in the 60s, if you did go into a club to see someone play, you already knew those people; there was no intimidation – no inhibitions at all. It was just simply that you hung out with these people and you played with them all the time, so in that respect I miss that camaraderie. There was competition but it was friendly.

"Now, I think it's much more aggressive. I went through that 'dinosaur' thing 10 years ago so God knows what it's like now for me to show up somewhere! I don't know what they think of me now if I walk into a club. What do I represent to young players? I have no idea – I don't know where they've gone in their heads now,

what they think, what their influences are. It's probably nothing to do with what my contribution was."

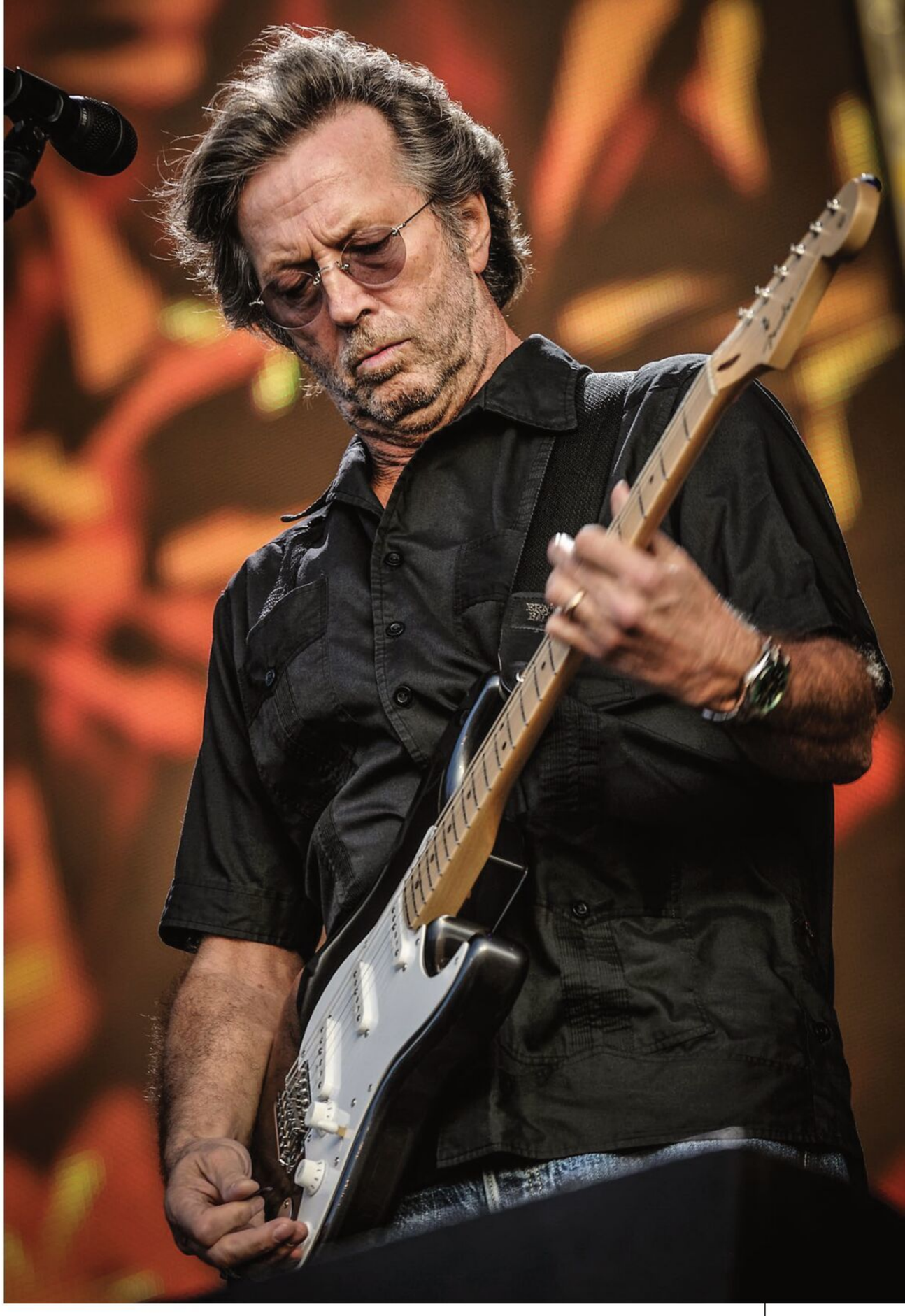
Before that time you'd actually played with Muddy Waters. How did that come about?
"I think Mike Vernon put the whole thing together. He got Muddy in the studio and all I can remember is just being incredibly scared, clumsy and overwhelmed, you know? Completely overwhelmed. At that time the blues thing was going through some funny changes; if you played electric guitar you'd sold out. Josh White had done a lot of touring in Europe and Big Bill Broonzy, too, but Josh came later and picked up the slack. He would go on and do *Down By The Riverside* and *Scarlet Ribbons* and things, it was very middle of the road blues and folk and it was all acoustic. Then Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry would tour and they really made it palatable; they acquainted everyone with the blues via the acoustic guitar, so I think when Muddy came over the first time he brought an electric guitar and it wasn't very well received. He wasn't everybody's cup of tea – it was only the purists who knew about Chicago blues."

It must have been an overwhelming thing for you; you were only about 20 years old at the time...
"I couldn't take it all in. I felt really stupid – I was a little boy trying to play a man's music and these were the men. They'd done what I'm still trying to do. I felt really clumsy, I thought I didn't really belong but I just felt very grateful for the opportunity."

People assume you were with The Yardbirds or The Bluesbreakers for a long time...
"I went through all those things very quickly. I mean, Cream was like a year and a half, and even with John Mayall, I was only half there. I was so unreliable, so irresponsible. I would sometimes just not show up at gigs and that's how Peter Green was asked to play with John – because I wasn't there! I went to see John last year [1993] to actually make amends; I looked back and realised how badly I'd behaved."

How does Cream fit in to your perspective?
"It was very intense and it actually seems like we were together for three or four years. My overall feeling about it now is that it was a glorious mistake. I had a completely different idea of what it would be before I started it and it ended up being a wonderful thing, but nothing like it was meant to be. It was meant to be a blues trio. I just didn't have the assertiveness to take control. Jack and Ginger were the dominant personalities in the band; I just played. I just went with the flow in the end and I enjoyed it greatly, but it wasn't anything like I expected it to be at all."

In the Cream period, you virtually ran the whole gamut of Gibsons: your Firebird, 335, Les Pauls, SGs – the very famous psychedelic SG. Were there any particular favourites? I hear you've still got your 335.
"Yes and I love it – I still get it out every now and then. The 335 was a big favourite and that particular Firebird, I had some great times on that; the single



pickup produced a fantastic sound. I think that SG went through the Cream thing just about the longest; it was really a very, very powerful and comfortable instrument because of its lightness and the width and the flatness of the neck. It had a lot going for it – it had the humbuckers, it had everything I wanted at that point."

Looking back now, are you able to put all of your early stuff into context objectively?
"Yes, fairly. I think all of it was okay until drugs and drink got involved. I don't think my facility as a player has really got much better or worse. I mean, I've just finished doing a blues tune, a Freddie King song, and it doesn't sound that much stiffer or that much faster than when I was doing John Mayall or Cream – a bit more fluent, a bit more confident maybe. But what's clear to me is that then I was much more in touch with the actual making of music – as I am now – and there was this long bit in between where I was more inclined to just get out of it. It was at some point towards the end of the 60s and all the way through the 70s – I was out, you know? I was kind of on holiday, and being a musician was my way of making the money to be on holiday."

That whole thing started with Jimi's death in a way. The dates are almost coincidental, aren't they?
"Yeah. It was funny how that all picked up. The 60s were great and we were all doing drugs recreationally. We were all under the impression that we could take

it or leave it and it was more like weekend bingeing – you'd do whatever you were doing and then you'd get stoned one night, or you'd take acid and then you wouldn't do it again for a while. Then it got to the point where those of us who were addicts by nature just carried on doing it and we'd do it all the time.

"I think we lost the thread then, and I suppose this may be a bit presumptuous, but it kind of opened the door for punk, because there was no continuity from the musical pattern that evolved in the 60s. It got scrambled and lost with all the drugs and opened the door for all the anarchy, bitterness and anger. The musicians of the 70s didn't really have a very clear legacy. The legacy got very fucked and very self-indulgent. I think that the whole thing about The Sex Pistols was that they were really pissed off at our indulgence – the indulgence and that self-righteous stance of the 60s."

Jimi actually jammed with Cream, didn't he?
"Mmm. First time I ever met him we were playing at the Central London Polytechnic. Harvey Goldsmith was the promoter – he was the Entertainments Secretary of the Students' Union – and Jimi came along with Chas Chandler. I don't know how long he'd been over here, maybe a couple of days, but he got up and played. He was doing Howlin' Wolf songs and I couldn't believe this guy. Part of me wanted to run away and say, 'Oh no, this is what I want to be – I can't handle this.' And part of me just fell in love. It was a really difficult thing for me to deal with, but I just had to surrender and say, 'This is fantastic.'"

You became good friends, didn't you?
"Oh yeah, instantly, instantly."

I don't think people realise how much of a blues player Hendrix was. In a lot of ways it's obvious now...
"I know. I think a lot of people thought, 'Oh yeah, the Band Of Gypsys thing was the best.' Or they look at different eras of his music-making in terms of his peak or his most prolific or his most creative. But the core of all his playing was blues and what really used to upset him the most was that he got this fixation about selling out. He got very down on himself and very cynical about his acceptance. He thought he was going commercial and yet he couldn't stop himself."

You've recorded Jimi's *Stone Free* and *Little Wing* – why haven't you recorded more?
"I got very jealous of Jimi. I was very possessive about him when he was alive. When he died I was very angry and I got even more possessive. If people talked to me about him I would turn away; I wasn't interested in their perception of him, because I felt like they were talking about an ex-girlfriend or a brother who had died. I just thought, 'I'm not talking about it, I knew him, he was very dear to me and it's very painful to hear you talk about him as if you knew him – you fucking didn't!' It's taken me all of this time to heal. I don't know how long the grieving process is, but in my experience it's a fucking long time and it's taken me this long to be able to pick up a guitar and play a Hendrix song."

Was your switching to Strats around the time of Jimi's death a conscious tribute to him?
"I think it was. Once he wasn't there any more I felt like there was room to pick it up. But I saw Steve Winwood playing one and something about that did it for me. I'd always worshipped Steve, and whenever he made a move I would be right on it. To me, he was one of the few people in England who had his finger on some kind of universal pulse. I always watched his next move and thought, 'There's something to be learned from this.' I went to see him at The Marquee and he was playing a white-necked Strat – there was something about it."

When did you start playing slide guitar?
"I've always played slide; not electric, but I played slide when I was playing acoustic in the pubs. I tried to play like Furry Lewis and the more primitive rural blues musicians. I also tried to be a little bit like Muddy. It's always come and gone – I've never really stuck very hard at it. I've done a couple of Elmore James songs where I've come back to it again. I do love it, but somehow or another it doesn't have the madness. When I got into Buddy Guy, there was something about the madness of his playing, it was like someone jabbing you with his forefinger that I fell in love with – the staccato madness of it that you can't do on slide."

Was Duane Allman an influence?
"Yes, very much so."

The story of you meeting has it that you just went to see him in concert...
"We'd started the Derek And The Dominos album and we hadn't got very far. I'd written some songs and we'd played gigs and we'd got a kind of persona. But in the studio it was very one-dimensional and it didn't feel like we were getting anywhere. There was a bit of frustration in the air and Tom Dowd has always been a clever mixer of people; a great one for being a catalyst and putting different combinations of musicians together to get an effect. He just wanted me to see Duane; in fact, I'd been talking about Duane, because I'd heard him play on *Hey Jude* with Wilson Pickett and I kept asking people who this was. So, he took me and all the rest of The Dominos to see The Allman Brothers play in Coconut Grove and introduced us.

"I said, 'Let's hang out – come back to the studio.' I wanted Duane to hear what we'd done and we just jammed and hung out, got drunk and did a few drugs. He came in the studio and I kept him there! I kept thinking up ways to keep him in the room: we could do this. Do you know this one? Of course, he knew everything that I would say and we'd just do it. A lot of those things like *Key To The Highway* or *Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out* are first or second takes, and then I'd quickly think of something else to keep him there. I knew that sooner or later he was going back to The Allmans, but I wanted to steal him! I tried, and he actually came on a few gigs, too. But then he had to say, almost like a woman, 'Well, you know, I am actually married to this band and I can't stay with you.' I was really quite heartbroken!"

Wasn't that the beginning of your dark period?
"I don't know whether it can be fairly placed at the door of drugs or relationships or life issues as much as I just had to get away. I had been doing so much; I'd been out there for a long time, playing with no break. I do work quite hard – I always have done – and at that point for some reason a combination of things put me into a kind of fairly necessary retirement and I needed it in a way.

"I remember listening to music very hard and wanting to play very much, but I had to get off the scene to get that enthusiasm back – I'd really lost it. Derek And The Dominos were recording in here when we broke up and I went into that dark place. I didn't give a shit about the music any more. We'd just argue all day and have a go at one another and then one of us would blow up and split. The music didn't matter: I didn't like the sound of my guitar, I didn't like the way I played and it took me a while to go away and come back to it. When I came back I came back with a different point of view, a fresh enthusiasm and a kind of open-mindedness to learn about new music, because that's when I heard reggae – I was just like a kid again in a sweet shop."

You toured a hell of a lot in the 70s!
"Toured and recorded and got out of it! I had a great time, but it was all fairly directionless. I don't regret any of it. To be honest, I think there was no other way for me to go. I'm just very grateful that I and didn't die, because I was often in some very seriously dangerous situations with booze and drugs. I used to do crazy things that people would bail me out of and I'm just grateful that I survived. But the music got very lost; I didn't know where I was going and I didn't really care. I was more into just having a good time and I think it showed. I got fairly irresponsible and there were some people who liked it and others who got very pissed off. And my guitar playing took a back seat. I'd got totally fed up with that whole thing about 'The Legend' – I wanted to be something else and I wasn't really sure what it was."

People have said that if they came to see you, nobody could predict what the concert was going to be like...
"It would very much depend on who I'd bumped into that day, who had managed to corner my attention, because then I'd just go off with them. I was just like a grass in the wind – I went anywhere. I was literally anybody's, depending on what they were holding; you know, what drug or what drink they were on and I'd go with them. Then there'd be the gig in the evening and I'd be wherever that was, wherever I'd been taken."



Did the multiple Grammys for *Unplugged* take you by surprise?
"Yeah, I must admit I found it all a little bit overblown. I mean, I thought the album was quite rough to say the least. I think most of the recognition and applause was wrapped up in another gesture – which is beautiful and I don't want to put that down at all. I appreciate all of it – but I felt it was all a bit blown out of proportion. And frightening. If I'd taken it too seriously it could have done me in."

Singing *Tears In Heaven* and *The Circus Left Town* must be so difficult for you...
"It's been close on occasions where I could choke and not be able to do it, but then what would happen? We'd have to stop and it would get mawkish and embarrassing. At the same time, to back off and pretend that it's about nothing and just play it as if it was a song that had no meaning would be pointless, so there's a thin line you have to tread, somewhere in the middle. It really does require a fair amount of discipline, concentration and focus to stay in the right place and not to step off the tightrope either way."

At the Albert Hall this year, not only were you using a Les Paul again, there were many vintage Gibsons. Are you using them on the *From The Cradle* album?
"Yeah. This album is paying respect as much as possible to the records the way I heard them and felt about them and so, when I'm singing and playing, I'm trying to be me being Freddie King. Of course, that doesn't happen, because it still comes out as me, but I'm doing it as much as I can. In the way we record it, for instance, all on the floor at the same time, the instruments I play and the way I sing it – everything to try and be as true to my recollection of the experience. Not that I want to copy the record that closely, but the experience – the emotional way it felt to me."

There have been so many books written about you. What do you really think of them?
"I think they all take it far too seriously. It's a bit like the 'Clapton Is God' thing – they all follow on from that. The book *Survivor* has got a hint of that; it's all a bit reverent, isn't it? I don't really see myself as being that heroic; I was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time and very fortunate to have survived. So, I am a survivor, but it all ought to be taken a little less seriously, I feel.

"I think, if it's due to anything, it's just the fact that I'm fairly honest about what I do. I just try to do the best and carry on working and do it as simply and unaffectedly as possible. I'm not bullshitting people; all I want to do is to play with dignity and self-respect. I'm making a blues album, because things have come full circle." G

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The Summer Of ’66

In this masterclass of tone and technique, we channel our hero, Eric Clapton, during the year that electric guitar changed forever

EVEN IF you’re not a football fan, the summer of 1966 is historically significant. Eric Clapton redefined electric blues forever on the ‘Beano’ album with his Les Paul and Marshall setup – reportedly very loudly, too. Just a couple of months later, the music scene was given another monumental shake-up by the arrival in London of Jimi Hendrix, wielding his Strat and a radically new approach in soloing, accompaniment and signal processing.

Though these two players would have listened to some of the same records growing up, Clapton had stayed resolutely true to his blues roots – to the point of leaving The Yardbirds after the release of *For Your Love* .

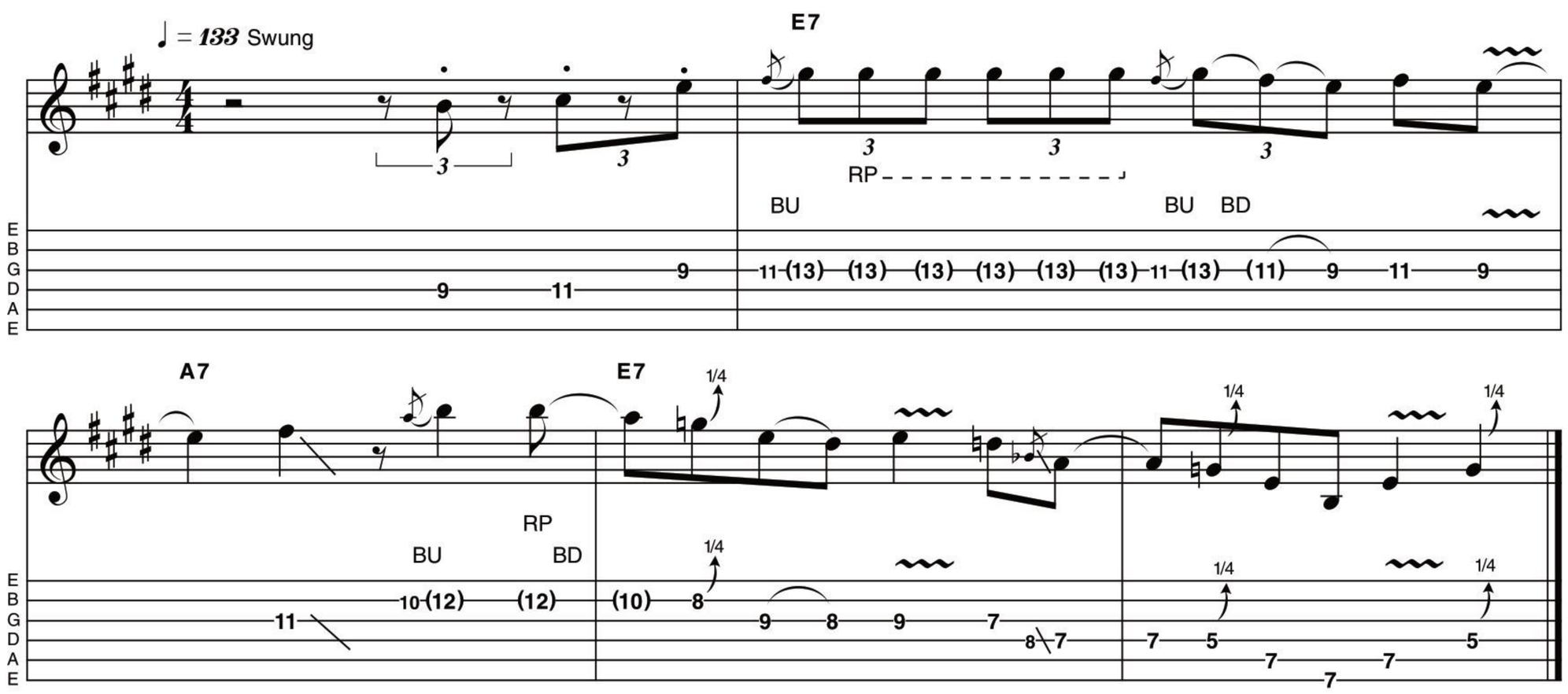
For these examples, we plugged a Gibson Les Paul into a Marshall JTM45, with the channels linked – almost all the way up on both volumes for these Clapton-style licks, balancing until we felt we’d achieved the right ratio of warmth and bite. No pedals here, an approach Clapton still adheres to today.

Though we’ve been as authentic as possible, you don’t need the exact, specific gear to sound ‘right’. Any good quality amp/distortion pedal will give perfectly acceptable results if you’re willing to spend the time tweaking. Don’t forget, a simple thing like rolling back the guitar’s tone control slightly can make a huge difference.

In the first example, we crank the JTM45 and note the difference pick attack can make; similarly, Example 2 digs in hard with an E major-to-minor pentatonic idea; next some jazzy chords are introduced; and in the final example we head for a rockier style. Enjoy!

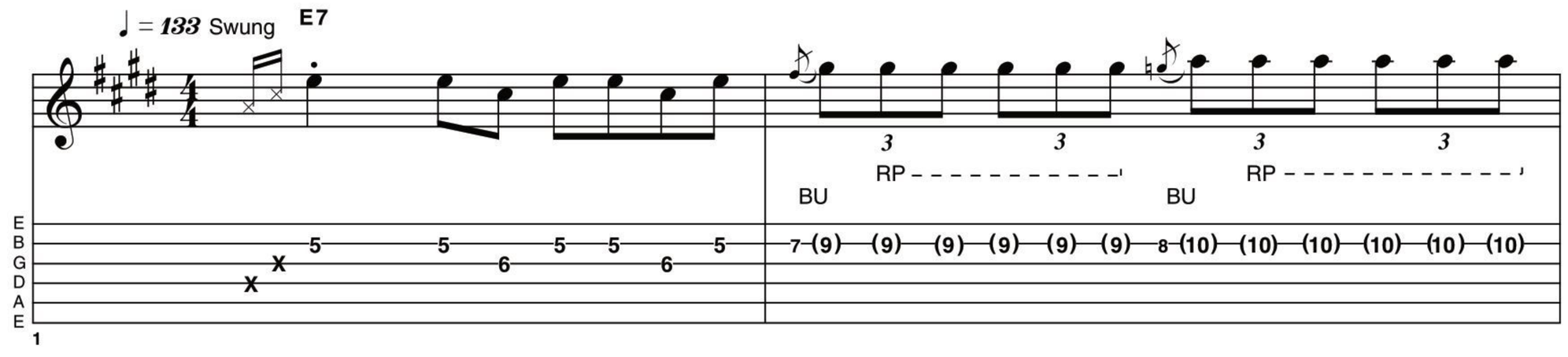
Example 1

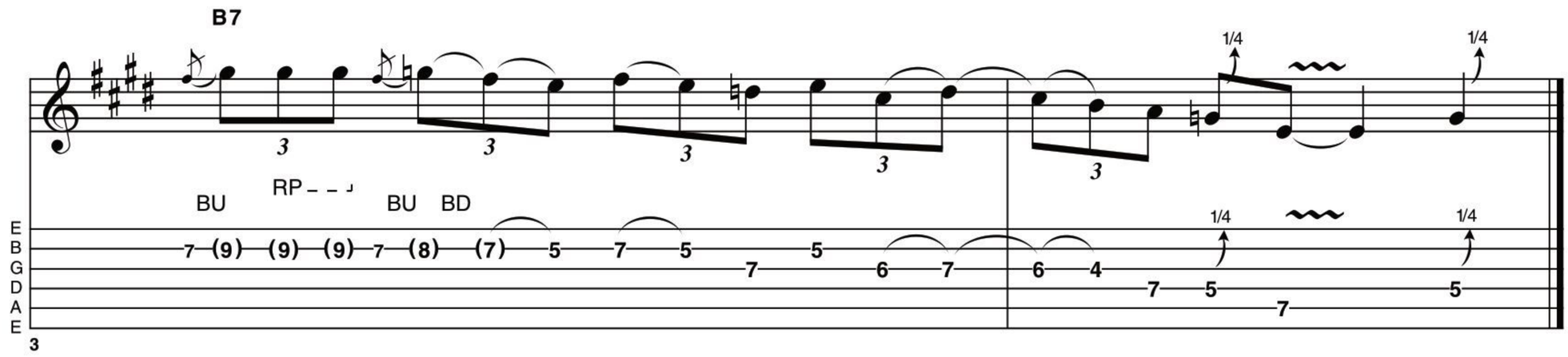
USING the JTM45 this loudly, the pick attack makes a big difference to the amount of drive in the tone. There is less drive overall than a modern rock tone, but the natural compression you get when cranking a Marshall yields many of the benefits of a higher gain sound. This E major pentatonic phrase is the first idea that came forth when thinking of ’66-era Clapton!



Example 2

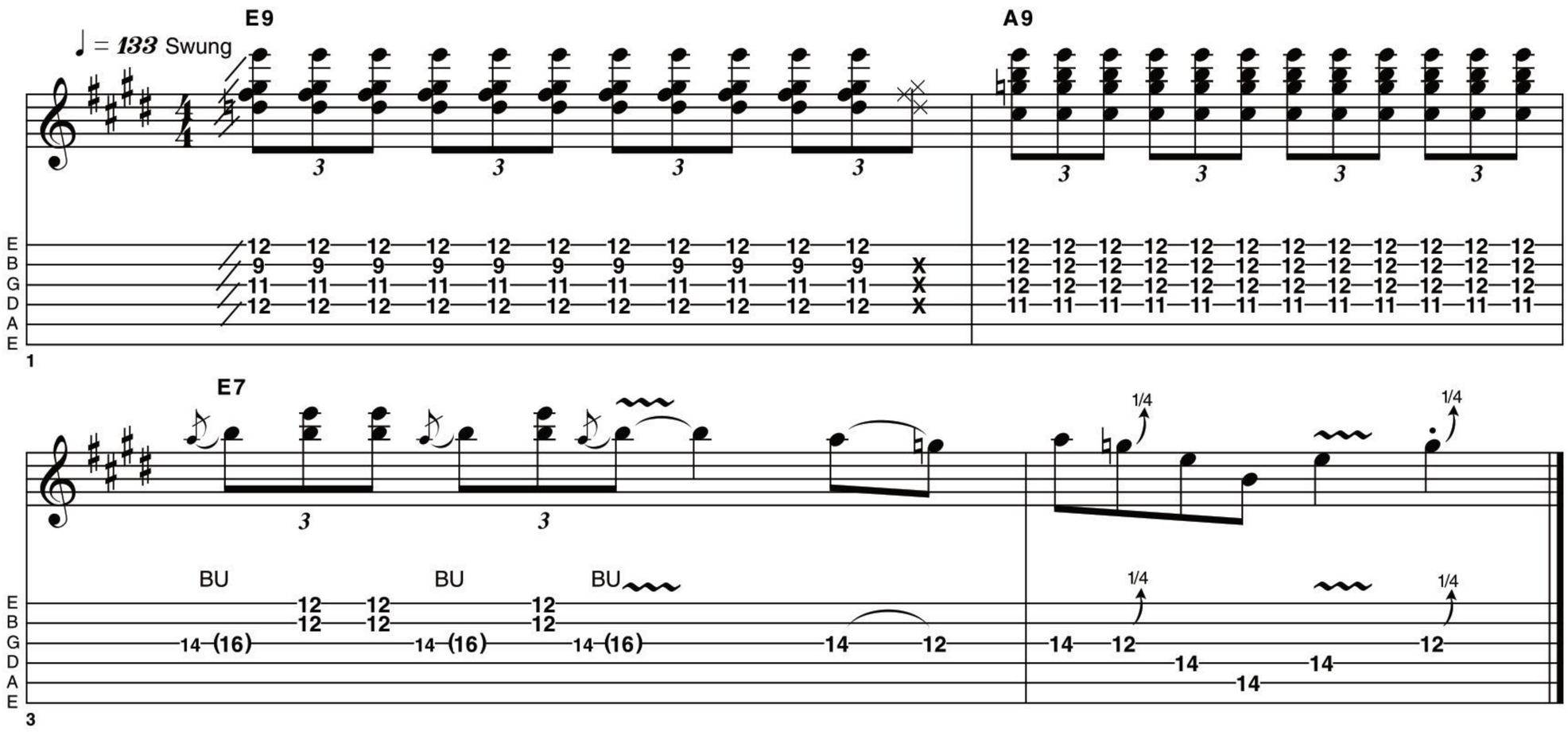
BROADLY similar in theme to Ex 1, this idea makes use of the more cutting sound that results from digging in hard with the pick on the thinner, higher strings. This idea morphs from E major pentatonic to minor in bar 3 – an essential feature of all blues playing, at which Clapton is particularly adept. Take your time to choose the most comfortable fingering.





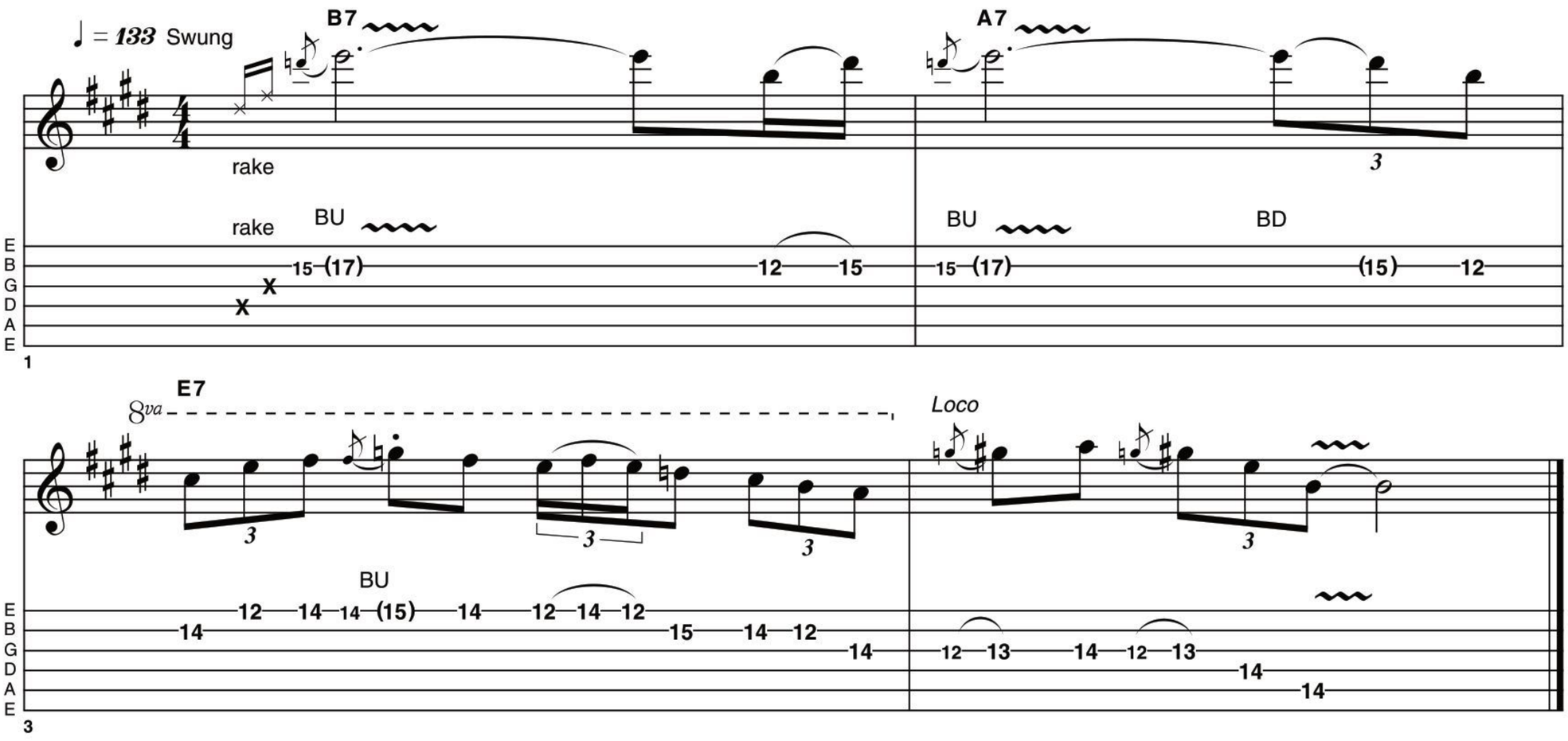
Example 3

AS well as classic pentatonic lines, this style often features jazzy 7th and 9th chords, though on the bridge pickup of a Les Paul through a Marshall they will inevitably pick up a bluesy edge... This raunchy feel continues into bar 3 with some Chuck Berry-style doublestops, leading to the minor pentatonic finish.



Example 4

IT'S easy to imagine a young Gary Moore being inspired when hearing this style for the first time in 1966. Rockier in style and at a higher register, this was the blueprint followed by nearly all the lead guitarists that followed. Pay particular attention to subtle details such as raking into the first bend and variation in vibrato depth.



ALBERT COLLINS

INTERVIEW FROM 1986

With his unusual tuning, distinctive sound and trademark walks into the audience, Albert Collins is one of the underrated greats of blues music. Here, he tell us how he worked day jobs to play guitar at night, what Hendrix was like to play with, and the reason behind all those 'cool cuts'

What sort of music did you listen to as a child?
"I'd hear a lot of music on the radio, and my uncle was a minister, so I'd watch him playing guitar. But I didn't want to play till I was 12 or 13 – I loved piano, though, and used to take lessons. My cousin Lightnin' Hopkins used to come to our house, so he was a big influence on me. Another cousin, Willow Young, actually showed me how to play. He didn't use a pick and he played the guitar across his lap like a steel guitar; he'd use a knife for a slide. So, when I picked it up, I didn't use a pick either, and I still can't. I guess that helps make the Albert Collins sound. The first thing I learned was John Lee Hooker's *Boogie Chillen*. Took me two weeks, man."

Let's talk about your famous tuning...
"I got that from my cousin, too. I tried standard tuning, but I always came back to it. I sometimes have D minor, sometimes E minor. In D minor, my D and A strings stay as they are and I tune the rest down [D-A-D-F-A-D, low to high]. For E minor, I tune my D and A a whole step higher. I use a choker [capo] to select the key I'm gonna play in. I can put it up real high, too, and just play above the 12th fret. I got that idea from Gatemouth Brown [the great blues and jazz guitarist and violinist]."

The tuning, the capo and the fingerpicking have certainly made your sound unmistakable...
"When I was coming up, I'd listen to BB King, John Lee Hooker, Guitar Slim, Lightnin' Hopkins, but I never wanted to sound like those guys – I wanted people to say, 'That's Albert Collins!' I met BB when I was 20 and he told me to find my own thing – said it would help me on my way."

What was it like in Texas in the 50s?
"In those days, in Texas, it was the thing to have a big band with horns and singers."

Was money tight?
"Yeah, real slim, but we all had day jobs and we'd travel up to 150 miles at weekends. We played what we called the chittlin' circuit [black-only backwater clubs], and when we needed extra cash we'd play white clubs and Holiday Inns. We'd have to change the material and play stuff like *Canadian Sunset*, *Body And Soul* and *Tennessee Waltz*. I had musicians who could read and could play that – but I was still a blues player. If any artist came to town we could back them up, we had all the styles covered.

"It would have been impossible to make much of a living [out of that work], though. You see, ever since I was 14 years old I had a job – started out delivering medicine to a drug store, mixed automobile paint for six years, drove trucks for 18 years. My father was a sharecropper, and he always taught me to work for what I wanted – I wasn't taught to steal. That's why it doesn't bother me today, 'cos I worked for years in the daytime and played music at night – to the point where I thought I could make music my living, which I started to do in 1964."

When did you cut your first record?
"In 1958, I cut *The Freeze*. That record sold about 150,000, but I didn't make too much money out of it. In 1960, I hooked up with the Hall-Clement label out of Beaumont, Texas and I cut *Defrost* and *Frosty* with them in 1962. That's when my name started to spread. Instrumentals sold really well at that time – Freddie King had a few releases and Booker T's *Green Onions* was real popular."

ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS / GETTY IMAGES



"When I was coming up, I'd listen to BB King, John Lee Hooker, Guitar Slim, Lightnin' Hopkins, but I never wanted to sound like those guys – I wanted people to say, 'That's Albert Collins!'"

ALBERT COLLINS

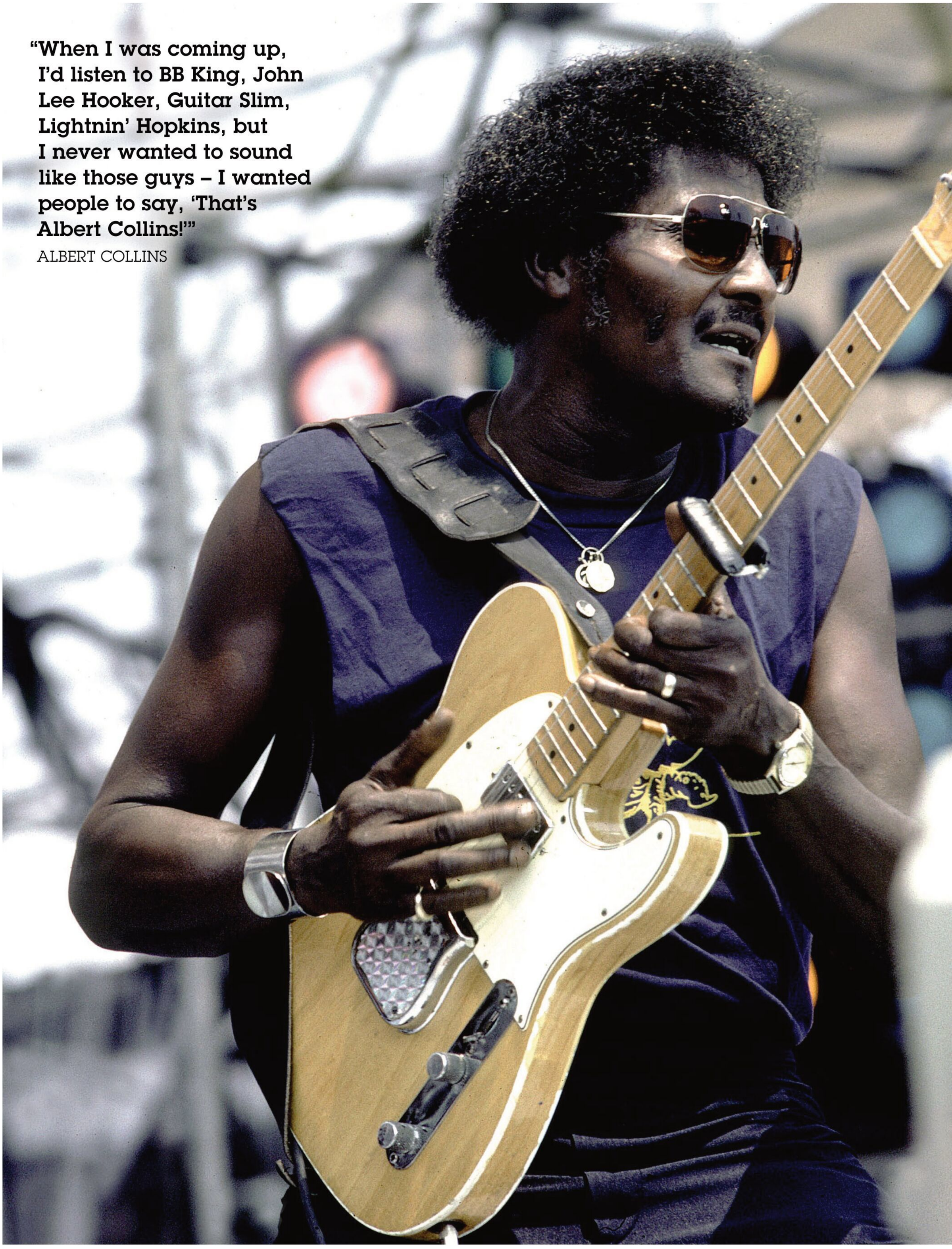
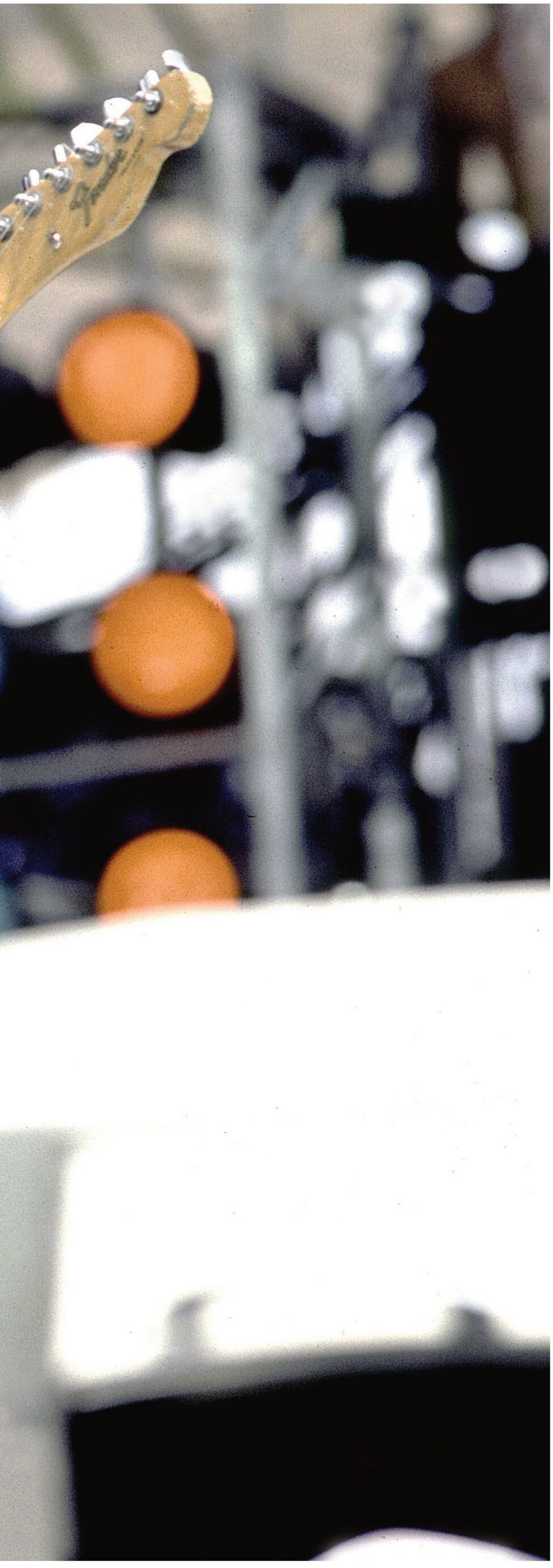


PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES



Why all the references to ice and the cold?
"Well, they all came about because of the dashboard in my car. On our way back to Houston one night it started raining and my windshield fogged up. My bass player said, 'Why don't you put the defrost on?' I thought about it and I figured it would be a good trademark, so that's where the 'cool sound' stuff comes from."

You were friends with Jimi, weren't you?
"Yeah, man. I first met him in 1964 when he was with Little Richard at the age of 17. I replaced him in that band when he went to join a band called The Drifters. Richard brought him down to see my band play at a club in Houston, and Richard had been telling me about this hot kid he had in the band. Well, he introduced us, and Jimi asked if he could sit in. I told him to go get his guitar and he was rollin' around the stage playing. We became friends and hung out together in 1968 and '69. The last time we appeared on the same bill there was him, Ike and Tina Turner and me, and he got more money than the rest of us. Just before he came to England the last time, he called me in the early hours of the morning said, 'When I get back I want us to tour together.' That was the last thing he said to me.

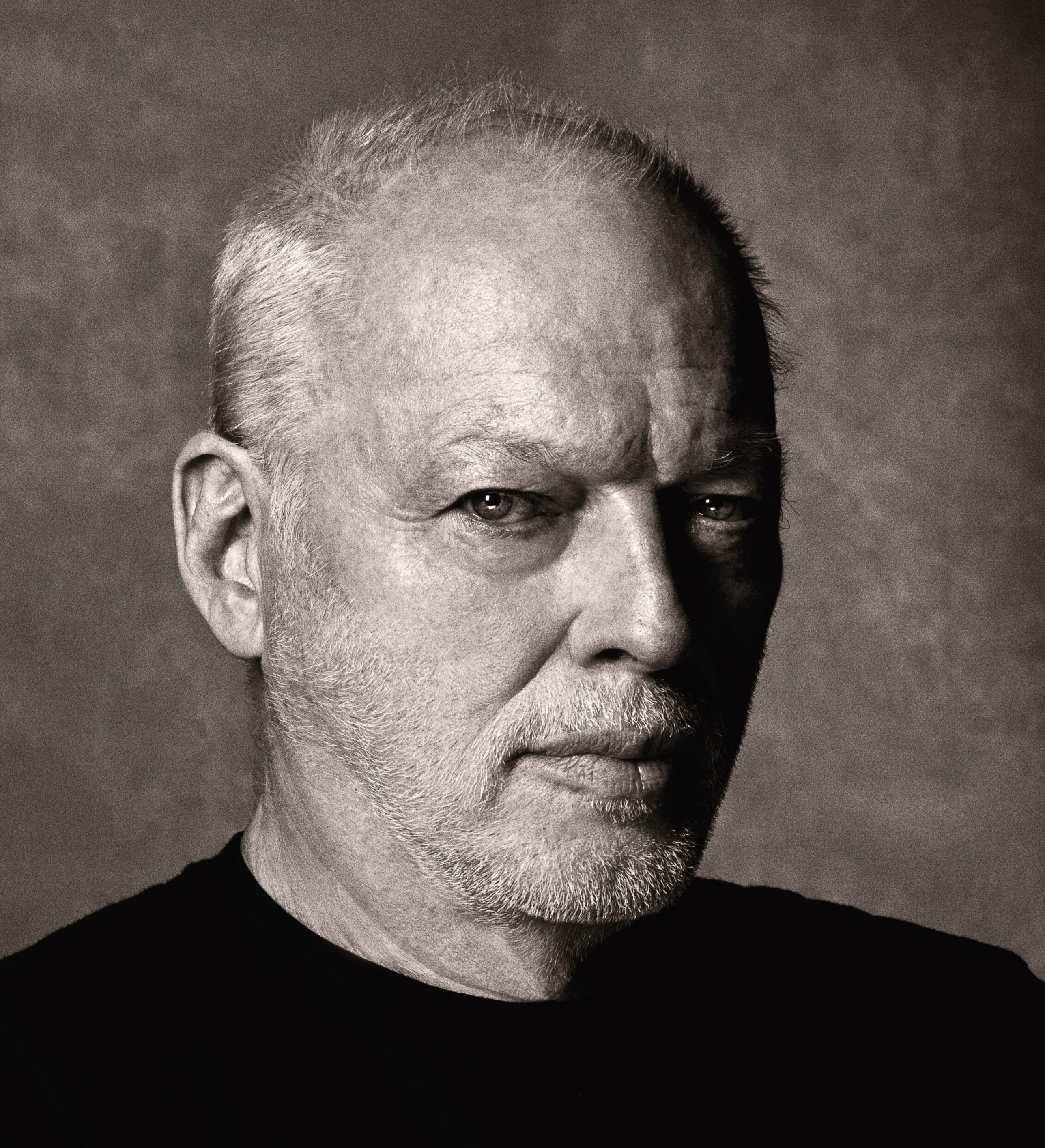
"Jimi's got a brother, Leon, who looks like him and plays left-handed, too. I tried to take him on the road when he was 19, but he's been in and out of little troubles, so... but he can play."

In the mid-70s you gave up the business for a while?
"I got so disgusted I just quit for almost a year and worked in construction – on Neil Diamond's house. My wife stopped me going back to truck driving and told me I'd better get back to music."

After all that time in the wilderness, how did you get to sign with Alligator Records?
"I'd known a writer for *Living Blues* magazine called Dick Shurman since 1969. He hooked me up with Bruce Iglauer at Alligator in '78, which was a turning point for me. I went to Scandinavia that year, and a lot of people over there had thought I was dead. I went back in '79, cut *Ice Pickin'* and came over to Europe again. After that, I started getting some attention back in the States."

Tell us about your guitars...
"I went to Fender in 1952. I couldn't afford a Telecaster, so I got an Esquire, which I used on *Frosty* and *The Freeze*. Then I had a 1959 Tele, which got stolen. Fender gave me one of them paisley design guitars and I traded it for a 1961 Tele with a humbucker that someone had put on. That's my main one today, and I put the strap over my right shoulder, same as Freddie King did. My amp is a Fender Quad Reverb – around 100 watts with 4x12 JBL speakers. I always run it on 10, but I turn it to an angle to cut feedback."

One of your trademarks is your 150-foot guitar lead. Did you get the idea from Guitar Slim?
"Guitar Slim was great. He put on a really good show– wearing a pink suit and playing the guitar real low – and he was a tall guy, too. I didn't get the long cord idea from him – I thought of that myself, before I saw Slim." G



DAVID GILMOUR

INTERVIEW OCTOBER 2015

David Gilmour's new solo album, 'Rattle That Lock', is the follow-up to 2006's 'On An Island'. Here, he gives Guitarist an insight into his songwriting and recording process, discussing changes in his technique, the importance of early demos, and the gear he used to create the album

WORDS **JEFF SLATE** PHOTOGRAPHY **KEVIN WESTENBERG**

From the opening notes of *5 AM*, the track that kicks off David Gilmour's new album, *Rattle That Lock*, you know you're in for something reflective. There's always been something intimate and yearning about Gilmour's remarkable guitar playing, but *5 AM* conveys something much deeper; amidst the familiar longing he manages to wring out of the notes he so expertly delivers. Seated in the London offices of his long-time publicist, Gilmour is fit and engaged. At the outset of our conversation, we remind him of a previous meeting at a party in the early 90s, around the time of the making of Pink Floyd's *The Division Bell*, and that he'd said a total of about eight words the entire evening. "That sounds about par for the course," Gilmour says with a wry smile.

In fact, both the keyboardist Jon Carin, who has worked with Gilmour off and on for more than 20 years, and Gilmour's wife, the novelist Polly Samson, warned us prior to our conversation that the legendary guitarist isn't exactly the most talkative guy. On this occasion, however, Samson and Carin are wrong; on the day we catch up to discuss *Rattle That Lock*, his collaborative process and, of course, his inimitable guitar technique, David Gilmour is a veritable fount of information...

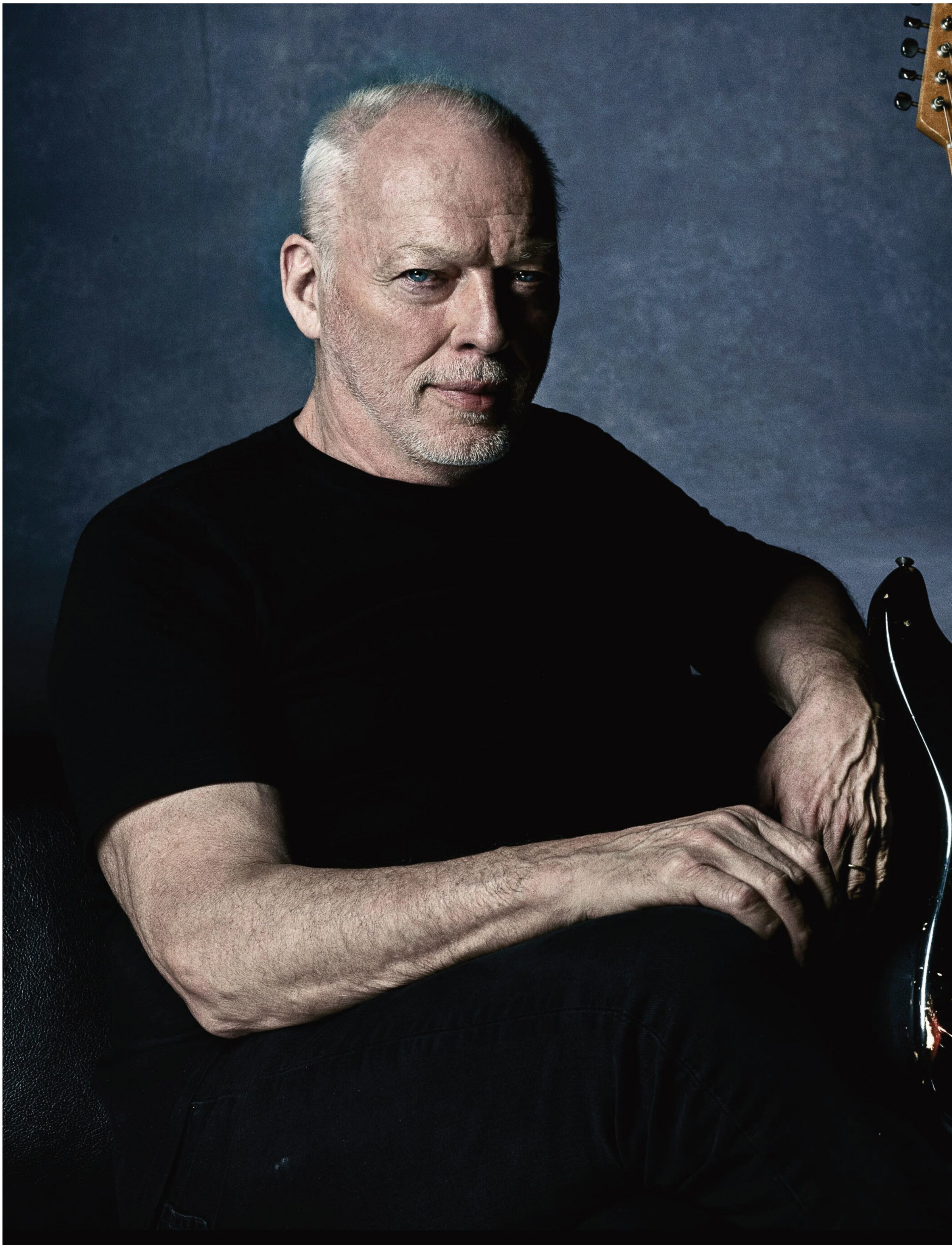
It's been nine years since Gilmour's last solo album, 2006's majestic *On An Island*. It was followed by a lengthy tour, which included sold-out shows across continents and yielded a couple of live CD/DVD packages. But, as far as any further original material is concerned – nothing. It seemed like radio silence was the order of the day in the Gilmour camp, only broken by the surprise announcement that a final Pink Floyd album, *The Endless River*, was to be released as a sort of memorial for Rick Wright who sadly passed away from cancer in 2008. The album is mainly reclaimed from the vaults, and Gilmour acknowledged that it was an epitaph for Floyd, too, as he insisted that the band was finally done and that he was now focusing on his solo career. So... nine years, then?

"It's nine years, yes it is." Gilmour ponders for a minute. "I have had a long and busy career, and I don't feel that it's essential for me to keep going at the rate I was going when I was younger. I work until things start gathering momentum. This just happens to be that moment."

We discuss *The Endless River* for a few minutes, and ask if sessions for *Rattle That Lock* began in earnest after work on that album was complete.

"It's very hard to define the moment that you can say is the start point of it," Gilmour says. "I've been working on bits of these songs for years, since *On An Island*, really. It gradually starts moving to a point where you start thinking, 'Yeah, actually, I'm close to having something which I could turn into an album.' Of course, just at the moment when I had started that process and was getting a head of steam up and working on it, the *Endless River* project came into view, and I had to put this one on the shelf and do a few months of hard work on that one before moving back to this one. But here we are, we've now got there."

While *Rattle That Lock* includes many of Gilmour's signature sounds, it also dabbles in jazz and more modern-sounding song structure and polish. There





"There were about 200 little snippets, just odds and ends. I gave them to Phil, who whittled them down to about 30 ideas, then we focused in on what were the best of those and what we wanted to develop"

DAVID GILMOUR

are hints of Pink Floyd and Gilmour's earlier solo work throughout, but it's also a remarkable step forward for Gilmour as a solo artist, defining him more than ever as having a career outside the shadow of his former band. Is this something he feels, too?

"I guess every experience you have, every project you take part in subconsciously affects you in some way or another," Gilmour reflects. "But trying to pin down what exactly has made any difference is kind of impossible, really. I have no idea. That just is the way that my mind and fingers are working at the moment. I can't find another explanation."

A Sony Full Of Secrets

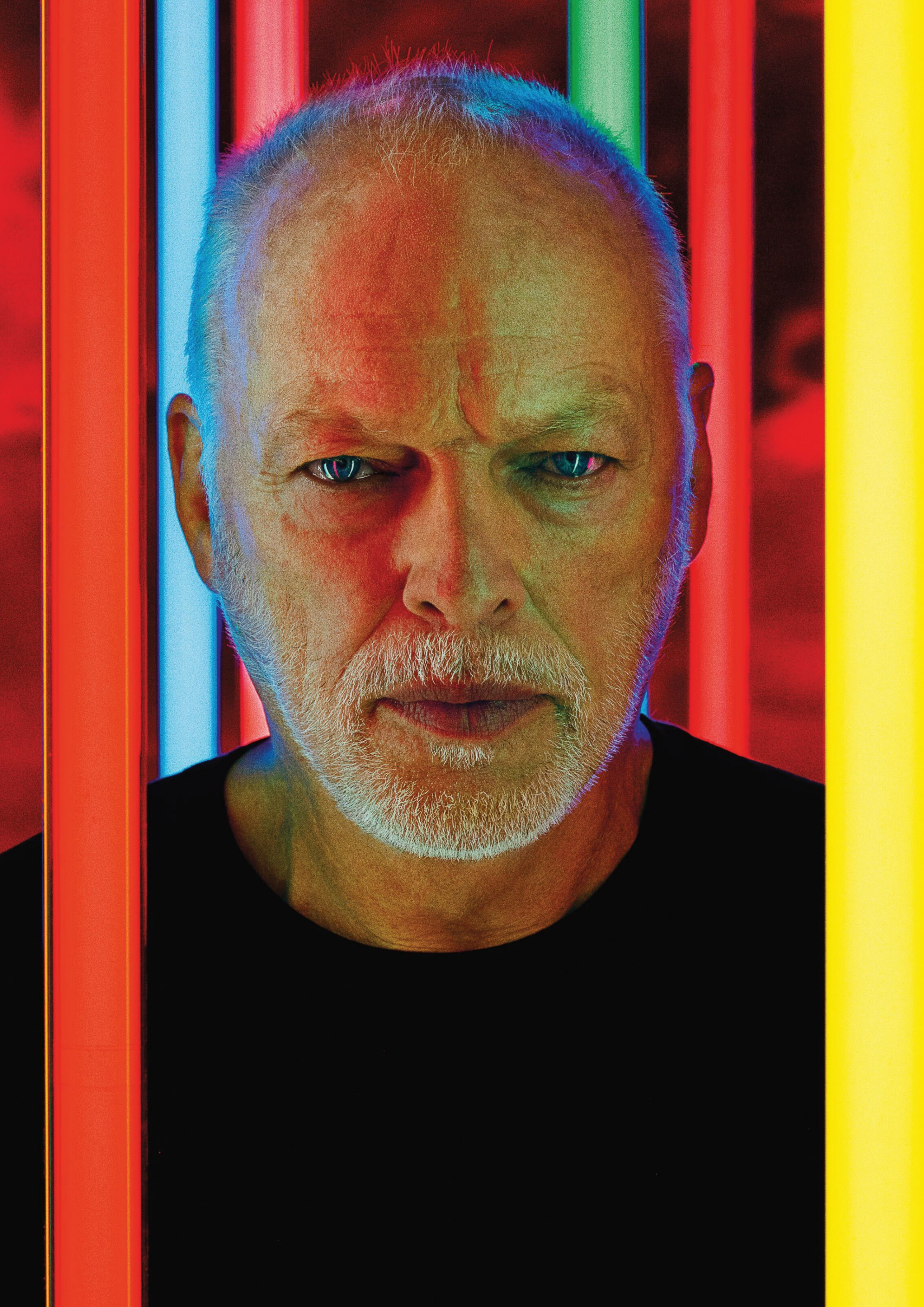
As we discuss the earliest days of demoing *Rattle That Lock* at home – some of which were recorded on an iPhone and used in the final mixes – Gilmour brightens at recalling his composition process.

"These things will tumble out of a guitar or piano, and I'll pop them down on my iPhone these days. Before the iPhone, it was something else: a MiniDisc player; before that, a cassette player; before that, well... God knows what else. It means that I never forget a new little snippet of music that comes to me, nine-tenths of which, of course, is rubbish. When you listen to them later, you go, 'Oh God, not that.' But it's easier now, and [working like that] has really helped the process of making this album."

What did he do with the demos, and how did he choose which ideas to pursue?

"I turned them over to Phil Manzanera!" Gilmour says, with a hearty laugh. "There were about 200 little snippets, just odds and ends. I gave them to Phil, who whittled them down to about 30 ideas, and then we focused in on what were the best of those and what we wanted to develop – about 10. But we had plenty of ideas to draw from that were also good if we got stuck. And Phil was invaluable, in that sense. Phil has a mind that can keep all those ideas organised, and he can make suggestions really quickly. That was enormously helpful."

Once in the studio, Gilmour tackled the songs with an energy that surprised even him, he says.



"On 'A Boat Lies Waiting' you can hear my son, who's now 20, as a newborn baby – three months old or something – squawking on that track. That tells you how old that track was!"

DAVID GILMOUR

"Most of them were started off with a click track on a Pro Tools rig, and I'd do it all myself," he says of the recording process. "At some point later, I'd get a drummer in. Stevie [DiStanislao], who came in for a couple of days, did dozens of tracks for me."

Another track, the jazzy *The Girl In The Yellow Dress*, was different.

"That was done live with a little jazz trio," he says. "Jools Holland is on that. He wasn't in the original trio that played, though. There's a trio – a bass player, Chris Laurence, a drummer called Martin France, and a guitar player called John Parricelli – they were the trio on the original one. Then I did another session to try it again, but I used the same click at that session at Abbey Road, which Jools Holland and Rado Klose and a few other people were on. In the end, though, I just took those guys off that session and put them onto the other session. That did start off with a live track, but most of them don't."

Does he yearn for the days of playing live in the studio, with the interaction and creative dynamic it generates?

"I keep thinking that I want to do it all with a live band and get in a big room and record the songs," he admits. "But I always seem to find myself at the end thinking that what I've got is so good that it would be hard to top it by doing that. But I'm always planning to do that on the next record."

Does he feel – like many musicians – that it's often hard to recapture the magic of the original demo?

"It's exactly that," he says, flatly. "On the demos for *A Boat Lies Waiting*, the piano is actually my demo, the main piano. That was recorded in my sitting room with me playing piano over 10 years ago on a MiniDisc recorder – a stereo MiniDisc recorder, a rubbish Sony thing. That's how that piano was recorded. When you put it into Pro Tools and you've tidied up the dodgy timing, taken out the bum notes, and put a double bass on it to give it some rich bottom end and stuff, it starts to sound very good and it's very hard to even think about replacing that. On *A Boat Lies Waiting* you can hear my son, who's now 20, as a newborn baby – three months old or something – squawking on that track. That tells you how old that one was!"

A Whammy Lies Waiting

We broach the subject of his approach to the guitar on *Rattle That Lock*. While he is well known as being reluctant to examine his guitar playing and inspirations, it seems today, however, that Gilmour is happy to ponder exactly those questions, and talk a little about his gear, too.

"Well, I guess I just try to find what is the right sound and feeling for the track I'm playing on," Gilmour says. "Sometimes, it's tricky to get to that. I don't really think there's anything particularly different or new in what I'm playing or the way I'm playing it. I tend to play more with my fingers than a guitar pick these days, for some reason that I don't quite understand. It just seems to be the way it is. That might make a little bit of difference to the sound, but it's not really anything I've been analysing or intending to do."

When we point out that the playing and pristine-sounding acoustic guitar on *Faces Of Stone* was possibly a highlight of the album, Gilmour is matter-of-fact about the pedigree of the guitar he used.

"The acoustic on *Faces Of Stone* is, I think, the same one that I used on *Wish You Were Here*," he says. "It goes back a fair old way."

Phil Taylor, Gilmour's long-time guitar tech, has said his boss has been using his fabled black Strat again, so we ask if Gilmour used that much on this album, and what his other go-to guitars were.

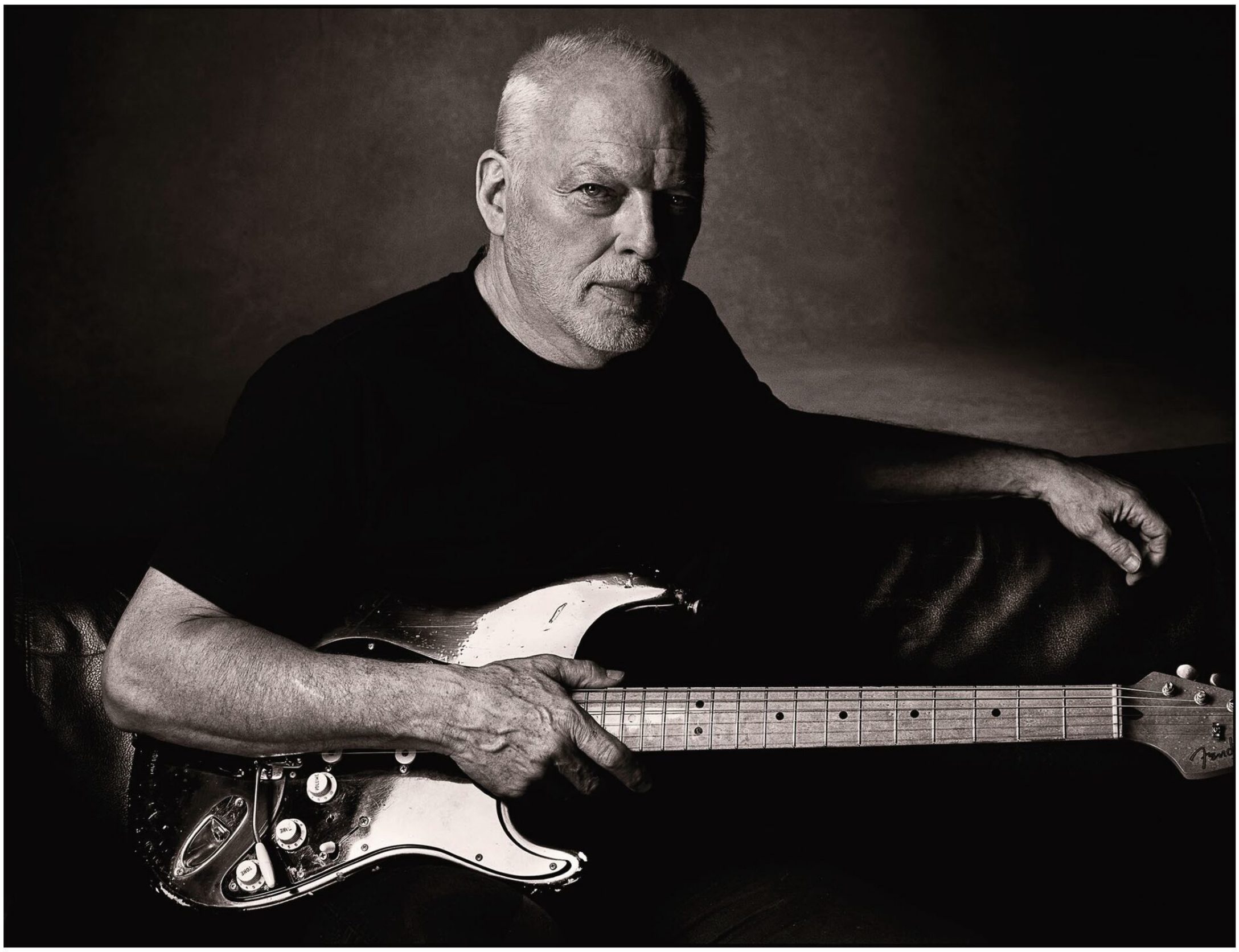
"Well, I used the Strat quite a bit," he says. "I also have a black Gretsch Duo Jet that I used quite a lot. It's a really old one. The old ones have got a very curious sort of hi-fi sound, a lovely top end. It has got a very different sound. I don't know what it is about it that makes it have that sound, but I've tried to buy a spare to take on the road and looked at other ones and newer ones, but there's something missing. There's something in the sound of that old one, and I haven't got a spare for it. If I break a string or something when I'm using it on stage, I have to switch to another one that's okay, but it's not quite in the same league. I don't understand why those particular pickups on that particular guitar have got a sort of hi-fi top end. It's unusual on an electric guitar.

"I also used a Gibson Goldtop, like the one I played on *Another Brick In The Wall*, but it's not actually the same one. Those are the electrics I used – oh, and I'm using my old Esquire as well on a couple of tracks."

As for amps, Gilmour is equally forthcoming.

"I tried all sorts of different amps," he begins. "I've got an old Fender Twin that's pretty trusty and I've got a Hiwatt combo that, I guess, is 50 watts. I use my Yamaha rotating speaker cabinet quite often, mixed in with the other sounds..."

Then he gets stumped. "What's the other amp?" he asks no-one in particular. "I can't even remember what the name of the other amp is, because it's not written on it. It's in a wooden case and I don't even know the name of it [most probably his Alessandro Redbone Special – Ed]. It's the one I used on the solo on *The Endless River*."



"I didn't use the DigiTech Whammy pedal on this album at all. I did play with it a couple of times, but it just didn't seem like the right thing at this moment on this album"

DAVID GILMOUR

Gilmour laughs, saying he's just not that technical. But he's willing to take a stab at the pedals he used in making the album.

"I didn't use the DigiTech Whammy pedal on this album at all," he says, when we mention how arresting its use was on *On An Island*. "I did play with it a couple of times to try it, but it just didn't seem like the right thing at this moment on this album. I couldn't find a spot for it.

"I actually haven't used a Big Muff for quite a few years," he continues. "Certainly not on this album. I don't think I used it on *On An Island*, either. I tend to use is a [BK Butler] Tube Driver these days, often with a compressor feeding into it. On this one, it's actually pretty much untreated. On a couple of tracks, I've just gone through with a compressor and used the output volume to be the overdrive. But yeah, I just fiddle until something starts sounding nice."

As for how he'll approach his sound for upcoming live shows, Gilmour chuckles.

"I don't memorise what I use, if that's what you're asking," he says. "I just don't work that way. I probably should try a bit harder to make notes of these things and sort all that out, but I'm afraid I don't. I just try to get something that sounds similar when I go into rehearsal. I just press a button on the pedalboard on stage, see what comes close, and then stick with that." G

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THE MACHINES

INTERVIEW FEBRUARY 2015

We join David Gilmour's long-serving tech Phil Taylor to examine in full detail the gear that the Pink Floyd legend used to summon up the soundscapes of the final Floyd album 'The Endless River'

WORDS **MICHAEL LEONARD** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

David Gilmour clearly likes water. His famed houseboat studio, Astoria, is moored on the Thames near Hampton. Today, *Guitarist* is at his other studio, Medina, near Brighton and overlooking the Channel. Aptly, it was these two venues that were employed to record the bulk of the final Pink Floyd studio album, *The Endless River*. Gilmour has declined to talk any more about *The Endless River*: he thinks there's been "too much fuss" already. But he has sanctioned his guitar tech, Phil Taylor, to guide us through some of his studio setup. Prepare to be boggled.

Medina is smaller than you may expect for a musician of Gilmour's legendary status, but size isn't everything: Medina is bespoke to Gilmour's needs.

"It was a derelict storage unit when David bought it three years ago," Phil Taylor explains.

Once the building's 'shell' had been renovated, Taylor got to work on bespoke appointments. The control room's mixing desk is hand-built and on wheels, meaning Taylor can access its rear for servicing. Gilmour has his own custom control room rack, with switching that allows him to turn on any combination of amps in the live room – if he fancies recording in the control room. Even the wiring of Medina is custom-designed by Taylor.

He explains: "Because David records with single-coil guitars – his Strats, his Teles – particular attention was paid to the electrical installation to avoid creating mains power 'radiating' and interference. The entire building was wired in shielded mains cable. All earthing is connected to the regular main 'company' earth – except the audio-technical earth, which has two 60-foot copper rods sunk into the ground. All lighting systems are run in 12 volts DC, and the technical studio power is derived from a balancing transformer."

The Black Strat

David Gilmour's most celebrated guitar is something of a 'mongrel'. He bought the Fender from Manny's Music store in New York in May 1970 during Pink Floyd's USA tour. Gilmour had, just weeks earlier, bought his first black Fender Strat at Manny's, but it was soon stolen, along with much of Floyd's rig. Floyd cancelled their remaining US dates, but David again visited Manny's and bought this before returning to the UK. The Black Strat was first played by Gilmour at the Bath Festival in June 1970. Serendipitously, Phil attended the show as a punter – four years before he began tech'ing for Floyd. Gilmour replaced a lot of his older Fenders in the 80s with Fender's then-new 1957 reissues, and the Black Strat was on display at the Dallas and Miami Hard Rock Cafes until 1997, after which Gilmour played it for Floyd's 2005 *Live 8* show. It remains his most iconic instrument.

Hard Knock Cafe

"When we put the Kahler on [the Black Strat], it seemed to deaden the sound somewhat. It fell out of David's favour when the new '57 reissue Strats came out, so he agreed to loan the Black Strat to the Hard Rock Cafe.

"In time, we asked for it back. I called the Hard Rock head of memorabilia, but they said, 'But we own it, now.' 'No, you don't!' I had all the paperwork that said it was a *loan*. Eventually, we got it back, but it came back with the Animals tour-case missing, the knobs gone, and filthy. I put it all back together and put it in the studio.

"David didn't use the Black Strat again until I suggested he try it at the Live 8 rehearsals. 'Oh, all right!' David says. But when he started playing it again, we suddenly went from that EMG sound to the single coils. That was it. He was back to the Black Strat."



PHIL TAYLOR

Phil Taylor has been David Gilmour's guitar technician since 1974. He is also Pink Floyd's warehouse and studios manager. He oversaw Fender's 2008 introduction of the David Gilmour Signature Stratocaster. Taylor's definitive book, *The Black Strat*, is now in its third updated edition. **www.theblackstrat.com**

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MOD SQUAD

As a close-up examination of the original Black Strat attests, it is a much-modded guitar. It was originally a Fender 1968 to '69 alder body with black painted over the original Sunburst. It had a Fender late-60s maple neck (large headstock) and 21 frets, but a rosewood-necked version features on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*. To muddy the waters still further, it later had a Charvel neck fitted!

When it came back from Hard Rock Cafe, it was damaged and with knobs missing, so the mods have continued. See the opposite page for a rundown of the current features of this changeling Strat.

In terms of prior discography, this guitar features on some huge tracks, including *Money*, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, *Comfortably Numb* and many other Floyd classics. See it in the concert film *Live At Pompeii* when it was 'new' for Gilmour, with a white scratchplate.

1. Examining the guitar, you can clearly see evidence of old routing work, which has since been filled in for the once-fitted Kahler vibrato

2. In the 70s, Gilmour fitted an edge-mounted XLR socket to send the signal to a fuzzbox then back to the guitar – also since removed and filled in

3. The black scratchplate was added in 1974 and was custom made, as Fender didn't then make them. The five-way pickup selector (replacing the original three-way) arrived in 1985. The mini-toggle just below the pots allows independent switching-in of the neck pickup "for a more Jazzmaster-like tone"

4. The neck and middle pickups are dated 1971 – while the whole pickguard assembly comes from a '71 'bullet truss rod' Fender Strat in 1973. Meanwhile, the bridge pickup is a Seymour Duncan custom-wound SSL-1C, installed in 1979. It replaced a DiMarzio FS-1

5. After the tonal properties of a Kahler vibrato fitted to the Black Strat were found wanting, the original three-spring vibrato was fitted to the guitar. Note the extensive belt-buckling that the body's reverse has picked up during years of hard use

6. Currently, the Black Strat is fitted with a Fender 1983 '57 reissue C-shape maple neck (from one of DG's cream Strats) with 7.25-inch radius fingerboard and 21 vintage-style frets. Tuning is handled by Fender/Gotoh vintage-style machineheads

7. Note the shortened vibrato arm, which measures 4.25 inches. "They're nothing special. Fender make these short arms now, but I originally just hacked the ends off. The arms are screwed in tight, so it never 'flops', that's one thing. And David likes to have the end of the tip in the crease of his palm. He doesn't seem to plan whether he plays finger vibrato or arm vibrato, or a combination of the two, at any one time. But with a longer arm, he may have to play closer to the neck. That would be more of a separate action to David. This is more 'integrated' in the way he plays. He doesn't often play electric guitars without a trem"

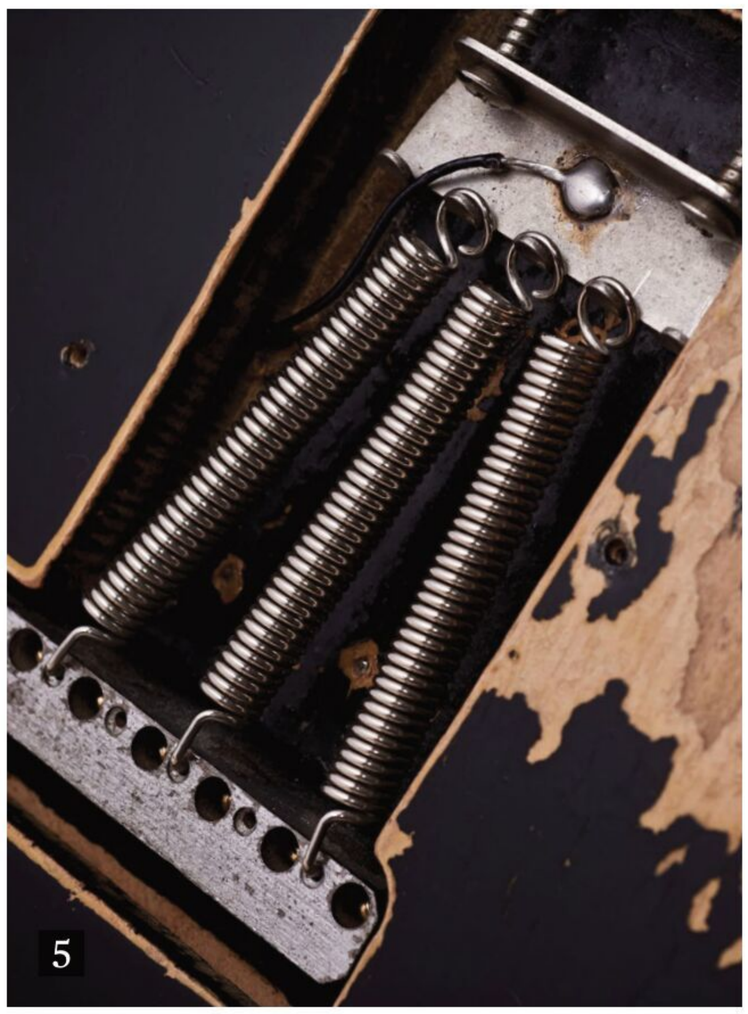

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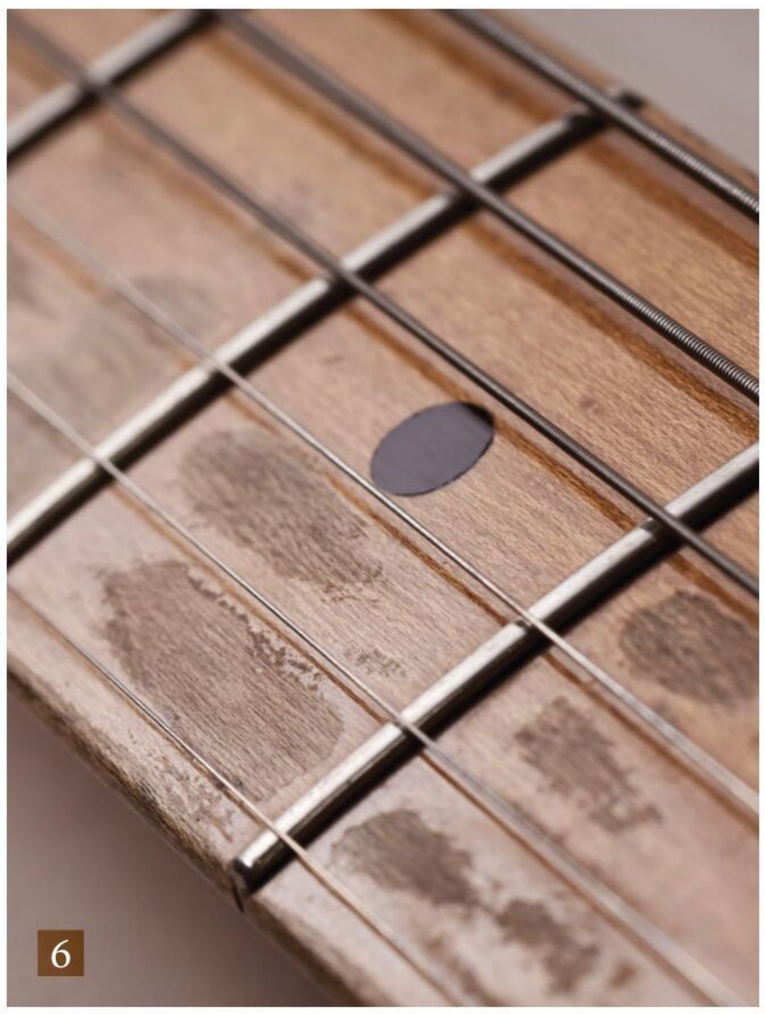

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SEEING RED

Like the Black Strat, the Red Strat has been extensively modded. Gilmour eventually replaced the single coils on his main Red with active EMG pickups – 1979-made forerunners of what became the signature DG20s (DG still employs the originals). The EMGs feature an EXP control boosting treble and bass and an SPC control, boosting the midrange for a humbucker-esque tone. Gilmour also added his 'custom' 4.25-inch vibrato arm. As well as being used on *The Endless River*, it also featured extensively on *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason* and *The Division Bell* albums and tours, and some of *On An Island*. It was also used in solo live shows for *Shine On...*



Fender Custom-made baritone Telecaster

PT: "David has a 1963 Fender Bass VI. It's strung relatively light for a baritone. But it's still a 30-inch scale, so I thought I'd get him a new one made. I wanted it to be more like a guitar, shorter scale, but it also had to have a vibrato on it. I talked to Fender, and they made two.

"They have a 27-inch scale, so between a guitar and a bass. You can put lighter strings on these, it feels very nice. But I had to change a few things: I put a Vibramate String Spoiler on the back-end of the Bigsby and replaced the electronics with Callaham Cryo. I wanted to get as much detail out of the strings as possible.

"The strings were unbalanced on the regular Fender Tele pickups, so I got Ron Ellis to make some custom baritone pickups. I was very pleased, thought it was marvellous. But it sat here for a year before David even picked it up! Only for *The Endless River*, was it played. We were here with [co-producer] Youth, who said David maybe needed a more baritone sound. David shrugged and says, 'Okay... have I got a baritone?' Finally, he played it."



Roger Waters' Fender Precision Bass

When Roger Waters exited Pink Floyd, there were several 'band-owned' instruments. One of them was this 1970s Fender Precision played by Waters. David Gilmour kept it.

PT: "This was the bass Roger had from 1974 to '78. It was his main bass. It was played on *Wish You Were Here* and *Animals*, mostly. I replaced the pickguard to be black just before the *Animals* tour, 1976.

"Roger had three black basses – one with a rosewood neck, two with maple. This was his main one. I just asked him if he fancied changing the pickguard to black, just like David's Strat. Late '76, I think. It's a good bass. David plays it on *The Endless River*."

"The baritone sat here for a year before David even picked it up!"

PHIL TAYLOR



1956 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop

PT: "We got this because it had an original Gibson factory Bigsby on it. He has his '55 [hardtail] Goldtop – that's the one on *Another Brick In The Wall (Part 2)*. But David wanted a Bigsby one. He didn't want a modified one, with a later-added Bigsby. He played this a lot on *On An Island*.

"It's got P-90s. The only humbuckers David uses are on the Gretsch Duo-Jet – and although they are humbuckers, they sound more like single-coil pickups. He also has a reissue Gibson Les Paul from about 2009, which has Rolph pickups and a Duesenberg trem."

You can hear this guitar on *On An Island*'s title track, in the first part of the first solo. Note the P-90 pickups: "David generally doesn't like humbuckers," says Phil Taylor.

Key cuts for Gilmour Goldtops are the solo of *Another Brick In The Wall (Part 2)*, *Round And Around* and *Poles Apart* on *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason*, *A Great Day For Freedom* from Division Bell, *This Heaven* from *On An Island*, *Happiest Days Of Our Lives* and *One Of My Turns* (*The Wall '80 to '81 tour*).

1958 FENDER TWEED TWIN

1976 YAMAHA RA200
Rotary speaker with
Alembic preamp

WIRED FOR SOUND

"These were David's main amps on *The Endless River*," comments Phil Taylor on the beautiful array of vintage and modern amps in the studio's live room. "He also used the Leslie Studio 12 cab with the Allesandro Redbone Special 55-watt model."

The setup is made more flexible by the addition of a rig that allows the amps to be operated from the control room (pictured, right). Note the Fender Tremolux and Champ amps.

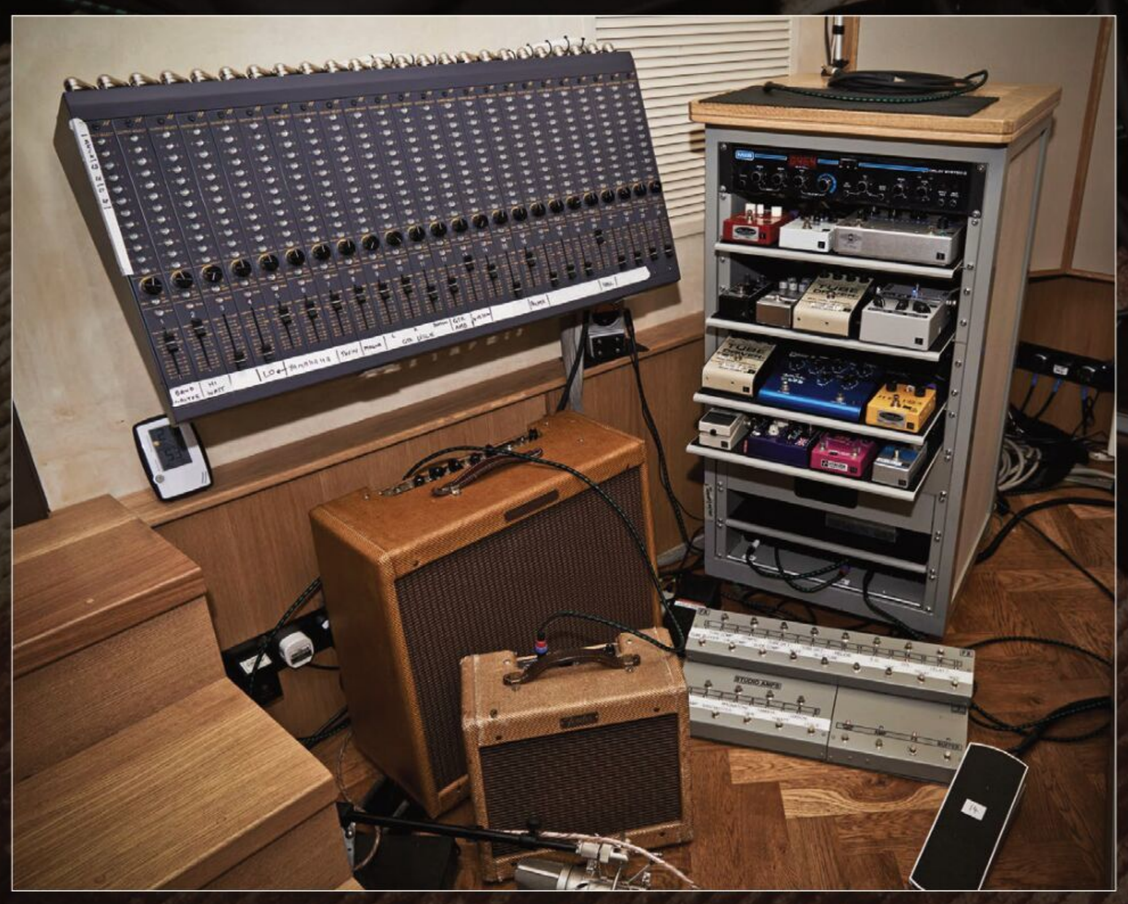
PT: "If David wants to record in the control room he can, without being in the live room. This [effects] rack is not a mirror of his main rack, it's a system in its own right. But you can select the studio amps in the live space or from here. He can use the effects in here, or play in here and send the signal to the effects in the live room.

It all means he can monitor what he's recording in the control room. He can alter the speed of his Leslie cabinet, or the speed of the Yamaha RA200, all from here.

"The Tim de Paravacini board [wall-mounted] is custom made: 24 tracks into 12. Once David's selected his amps, he can then control the amp mics, too, plus a couple of ambient mics as well. And he can send all this direct to Pro Tools.

Is it complicated?

"Not really. It's actually very user-friendly. David can come in, hit four switches and the whole place powers up. Ready to go."



ALESSANDRO
REDBONE SPECIAL

1970s HIWATT SA212

LESLIE MODEL G27 CAB



1



2



3



4

Black To Front

In addition to the real thing, David began using two replica versions from 2008 onwards – a Relic (with all the battered bruising of the Black Strat) and a cleaner-looking NOS (New Old Stock) model. They're as close as most of us will get to the iconic original.

Phil Taylor explains: "Fender asked me and David about this over 20 years ago. But David just wasn't interested. But when they asked in 2006, David finally said, 'Well, what do they want to do?' Fender wanted to do 200 or so really high-priced models. But David didn't want to do copies of the Black Strat that were only available to rich people who'd buy it and just put it in their closet. If Fender were going to do it, David insisted it had to be of that same quality, but affordable. So, there was a bit of negotiation.

"And David didn't want to make the guitar a limited edition model, either – he wanted it to be available over a number of years. So, all credit to David for insisting that it wouldn't be a limited edition, and both the NOS and signature versions of the guitar were all available at the same time."

Of Fender's replicas of the Black Strat, Phil adds: "Fender first sent a test guitar, which was quite interesting. Fender's master builder Todd Krause sent this guitar that had the side of the body removed in order to be able to swap out pre-wired pickguard assemblies in seconds to enable us to do pickup comparisons. They sent seven versions for us to try.

"I spent some time with David going through these until he was happy with the pickups in relation to his original. They do sound very close, though the neck unit he settled on was slightly brighter. David was not so bothered about the exact replication of the body wear. It was left to me to ensure it was correct. When we finally had an acceptable prototype, and we were happy with it, David said that he liked the idea of having one without all the wear – this became the NOS model. David insisted both were put on sale at the same time to give people the choice."

1. **PT:** "I don't know the exact date of this Fender Lap Steel Deluxe. But if David is playing slide now, it's usually on this. He doesn't play 'stand-up' with a slide on his finger; he just doesn't do it. The Fender is easier to sit down with and play."

   Gilmour also has an early 1940s Gibson EH-150 lap steel, played on *High Hopes* and *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*, plus *Take A Breath*. A Weissenborn Hawaiian-style lap steel was played on the song *Smile*. On *Jam #166*, featured on the *Live In Gdansk* DVD, he plays a Rickenbacker A-22 "frying pan" lap steel

2. **PT:** "David bought this 1971 Martin D-12-28 secondhand off a friend of his. I don't know exactly when – '73 or '74 – but prior to *Wish You Were Here*, obviously."

   Note that Gilmour played the lead parts of the song *Wish You Here* on another six-string Martin

3. The Conn ST-11 Strobotuner has been a regular fixture of Gilmour's rig for years

4. This well-used but beautiful 1958 Fender Twin, complete with weathered tweed finish, formed a tonal component of *The Endless River*

The Red Strat

Associated with post-Roger-Waters-era Floyd and solo work, Gilmour bought a bunch of new Fender Strats before his 1984 *About Face* solo album and tour, as he didn't want to take the Black Strat and others on the road. Purchases included a Fiesta Red 1983 '62 Reissue with white pickguard and a rosewood neck, two Cream 1983 '57 Reissues [see the current Black Strat neck] and a Candy Apple Red 1983 '57 reissue with white pickguards and maple necks. His main Red Strat is the Candy Apple Red guitar pictured earlier in this feature.

Phil Taylor explains: "We went up to the Arbiter warehouse in London and we tried them and bought a few. Very nice guitars. David just started using them instead of his Black Strat. For a long time, he was happy with that sound. Then again, David can get a good sound out of anything."

The '57 reissues are denoted v57 by Fender, but that refers to "Vintage", not the neck – these '57 reissues have C-shaped necks, not V-profiles. Got that?

5. A number of Gilmour's go-to pedals are mounted on racks at hand-adjustable height in the live room, for convenience during use, but can be accessed from the control room, where – in case these weren't enough – a second, variant rack of pedals is located

6. Echo and reverb effects are central to Gilmour's sound, including this Binson Echorec 2 reissue that evokes the tone of vintage Floyd tracks

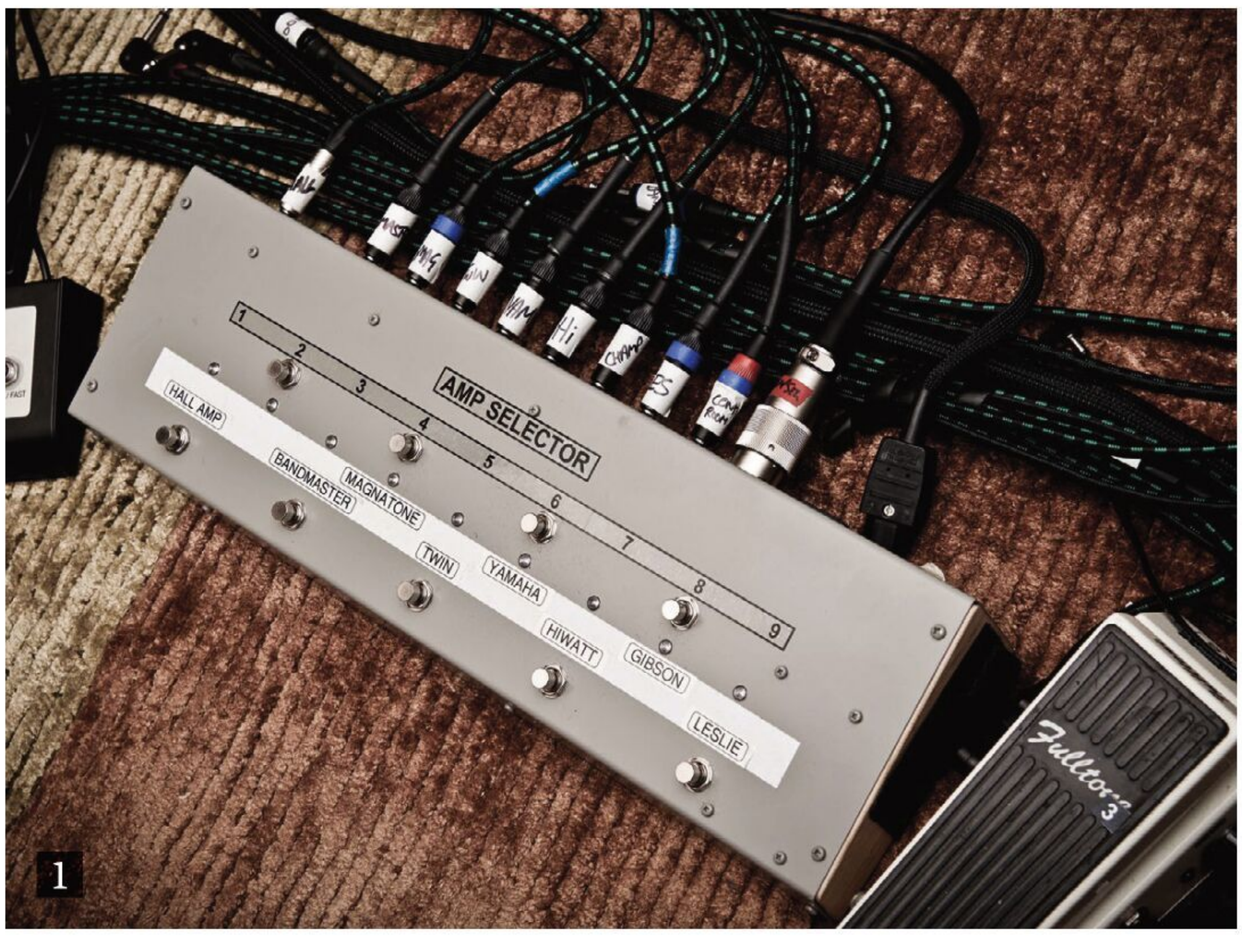
7. A custom switching system on the floor allows the racked pedals to be engaged easily via conventional footswitches





"It's the touch. I've heard hundreds of people trying to play the solo of *Comfortably Numb*. No-one sounds the same. David owns that sound"

PHIL TAYLOR



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4



5

1. A custom switching unit that is used to select the amps in the live room – this can also be done from the control room

2. **PT:** "I'm sure *Guitarist* readers can work out what this 1990s DigiTech Whammy pedal is on. At the 1993 recording sessions that became the basis of *The Endless River* – recording *The Division Bell* at the time – I changed a couple of pedals in David's setup. Just so he had something else to try. He'd never used a Whammy before. But out of that came *Marooned*, which won a Grammy. And there are bits of Whammy on *The Endless River*. He generally uses it in the 'one octave up' position. And that's it. Is David playing slide, or is he playing a Whammy? Let's leave a bit of mystique!"

3. The Hiwatt SA212 combo is a staple of Gilmour's recording rig. Powered by a brace of EL34s, it is fitted with Fane Crescendo drivers

4. A handful of picks tells you who's normally at home here in Medina

5. A vintage Magnatone 260 combo joins the Hiwatts and Fenders in the live room, further evidence of the regard in which amps by the US company, recently revived, are held

GILMOUR'S GUITAR VOICE

Phil Manzanera: "Does David realise he has a unique 'voice' as a guitar player? Yes, he does. He just doesn't make a big deal of it. I've always noticed he's got very thick fingers. I've got slim fingers. And I think Jimi Hendrix had big fat fingers! Strong hands. The difference in guitarists is often in the touch, to me. People write PhDs on the 'touch' of musicians, don't they? And David's ability to make his own sound is, I think, down to his touch.

"It's blues-based, but echoey... and his sense of being 'in tune', finding the sweet spot of any note, is brilliant.

"This is all difficult to describe, of course. It's intricate, if you want to analyse it. In a straight 4/4 beat, you can play a note before the beat, in the middle, or after. Where to put the note, when to play, when not to play... David doesn't intellectualise this, of course. He just plays. We *all* just play. But he has something special. It's down to the touch. Nuanced. I've heard hundreds of people trying to play the solo of *Comfortably Numb*. No-one sounds the same. David owns that sound.

"He might do four or five takes on something. I'll listen, advise, and he's happy with that. When you improvise like David does, there's always a point when one can suggest things like, 'Keep that part, but then lock it onto this part.' But for *The Endless River*, David was actually very dedicated in 'constructing' his solos."


MIDDLE
BASS
VOLUME

GUTHRIE GOVAN

INTERVIEW MAY 2013

He's got a brand-new Charvel solidbody and has just finished packing a huge amount of upper-crust chops into a second album with the super-talented Aristocrats trio. We meet the inimitable Guthrie Govan to find out more from the lord of the 'board…

WORDS **JAMIE DICKSON** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAM GASSON**

Let's come right out and say it: Guthrie Govan is a bit of a national treasure. He can play with almost supernatural precision and rapidity, but he just as often chooses simple, expressive bends to make his point. He's sometimes (incorrectly) labelled a shredder, but in reality, he's scarily capable across a whole spectrum of styles, from smoky jazz to warped country pickin'. We joined Guthrie to talk about his new Aristocrats album, lift the bonnet on his latest Charvel prototype electric and hear his advice on how to develop formidable picking technique...

Guthrie, what can you tell us about the new Aristocrats album?

"We're 99 per cent sure it will be called *Culture Clash*, which started out as one of these in-jokes that develop during a tour. We were all watching *A Serious Man*, the Coen Brothers film. There's a scene where someone mentions the phrase "culture clash". Then, for the next couple of weeks, we were touring Europe – there was a different country every day, and a different kind of weirdness would present itself. So, we were saying that to the point where it was incredibly funny, and then suddenly, one day, it stopped being funny. I thought I would resurrect the joke by calling one of the tracks *Culture Clash*, and now we're thinking it should actually be the album title.

"It also works on another level, because it's a weird 'Benetton advert' band we've got: Bryan [Beller, bass] is the Jewish guy from New Jersey; Marco [Minnemann, drums] is the German guy who lives in California; and then I'm the half-Scottish, half-English guy. So, we're coming from different planets in a sense."

How does the Aristocrats work differ from your solo material?

"Well, the Erotic Cakes thing was basically me trying to release some stuff into the wild, some of which I wrote 20 years ago. It was very much a solo album. It's like, 'Here's my guitar music.' There's something cool about releasing an album with your name on it, saying, 'Check me out!' [laughs]

"But, in many ways, I prefer just being part of a band. The great thing about The Aristocrats is we've got three fairly powerful musical personalities. Everyone has got something to say. We really run it as a democracy. In terms of writing, it's an equal partnership: if we're making an album with nine tracks, we write three each. Everyone's opinion is equally valid."

What kind of sound were you aiming for on the new album?

"This album was a bit of a departure. For the first album, we were adamant that everything has to be three guys in a room. No make-up, no cheating, no overdubbing. We just want an honest album, which we will be able to replicate in a live format.

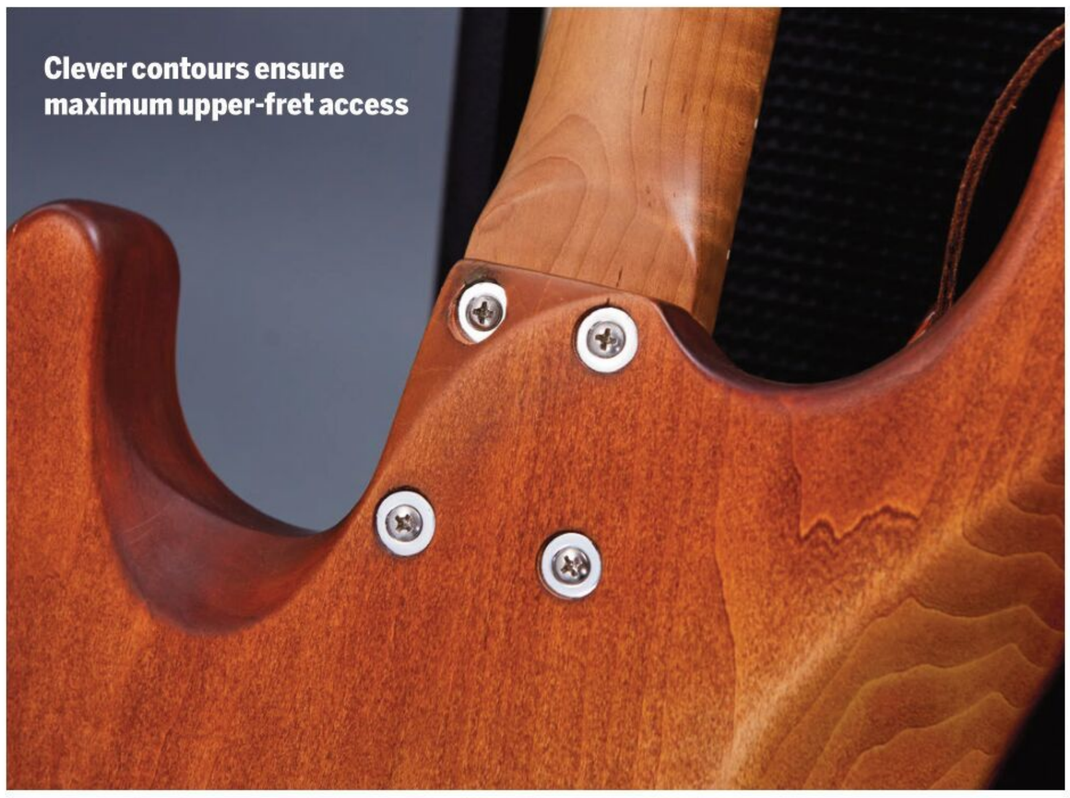
"So, for this album, I think we all diverged slightly, in terms of what we thought we wanted. Marco, in particular, just said, 'Well, fuck it. We've done the raw trio album. This time around, I am going to overdub like a maniac. I am going to produce this.' I didn't even know that's what he intended to do, but it being the glorious







Guthrie's second, final, version of the Charvel signature model has a Floyd but with no locking nut or fine tuners



Clever contours ensure maximum upper-fret access

democracy that it is, we go along with each other's ideas! So, this album is a lot more varied in that sense."

Did you have a particular plan for the guitar parts?
"Kind of. I was trying to explore a different aspect of what you can do with a power trio. Some guys can just do it; some guys can just write music that sounds perfect and sounds complete, just with three people. I'm thinking Eric Johnson, certainly. You listen to some of that stuff that he does as a trio, and you're not missing the fourth person.

"But for some of the stuff I wrote on this album, I thought, 'I'll go the other way; I will bring the guitar back.' So, I was thinking in terms of one big instrument, which was the guitar plus the bass. I was trying to come up with fun harmonic things, where you'd hear a chord that's not possible on either one of those instruments on its own."

Turning to gear then, what guitars did you use when you were recording the album?
"Most of the album was done with, not this guitar that you see here, but its predecessor – a Charvel prototype that also had a roasted maple neck, 24 frets and custom pickups. The body of that guitar was made of koa, which is a recent discovery for me. I've been a lifelong fan of mahogany. Of course, mahogany is great for the barking rock, but it doesn't clean up quite as well as you want it to sometimes.

"Koa, to me, sounds like what would happen if you recorded a mahogany guitar and then played it back, sped up slightly. Somehow, the clean stuff comes through a little bit better. So, it's a really nice all-round wood, I think, for the rock guitar thing. But one of the problems with koa is that we're killing it. Someone told me if we carry on at this rate, it will be extinct within 50 years or something like that [the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists Acacia koaia (very similar to Acacia koa) as vulnerable – Ed], although I think most of the blame should be apportioned to furniture [production] and things like that.

"So, I used that Charvel for most of the album, and then for a couple of tracks, as a complete shocking departure, I borrowed a Gretsch. It's a Reverend Horton Heat signature model – an orange Gretsch with the Bigsby and the Filter'Trons and all of that stuff. Just because it's the least 'Guthrie' guitar ever. I thought, 'That might be fun; let's see what comes out.'

"There's one track that Bryan wrote called *Louisville Stomp*, which is very much from another decade. It's almost comically old-school music. It seemed appropriate to try to do that in a rockabilly pseudo-Brian Setzer kind of way, and abuse the Bigsby and hit the thing really hard."

What prompted the move from Suhr to Charvel?
"Suhr and I, we're still talking – everything is still good. But in terms of developing a signature model, stuff like


CLEAN
CHANNEL SELECT
OVERDRIVE
INPUT
GAIN
BASS
VOLUME
REVERB
MASTER 1
S/BY


1
2
3
4



"In many ways, I prefer just being part of a band. The great thing about The Aristocrats is we've got three fairly powerful musical personalities. Everyone has got something to say"

GUTHRIE GOVAN

EVOLUTION OF THE SPECIES

1. Pickups

"These pickups were designed by Michael Frank-Braun. This is the guy who came up with the pickups that ended up on the Eric Johnson signature Strat, so he obviously knows what he's doing!

"I just told him I want a certain kind of honesty in the pickups. I want them to reflect all the different ways you can hit a note, which is the opposite of the flattering pickup. I want the pickup to hear every subtlety, even if it's a mistake, and also transmit the natural sound of the wood. They're not ultra-high output."

2. Vibrato

"20 years ago, I was a proud Floyd Rose owner, but I now have a number of objections to the Floyd. I'm often flying to a gig, and when I get there, I might have to play a song in drop D, or I might have to do some country and western thing, where I'm bending behind the nut. So, a locking nut is a no-go. A bridge like this responds more like an old Strat trem, but because you've got the back rout, you can pull up – so I'm getting a perfect 4th on the G string. Tuning is very stable."

3. Fingerboard

"It's fairly flat. I like being able to have low action and still have the wide, wailing bends. If the 'B' string won't go up a perfect 4th without choking, I'm not happy. It's also a compound radius, this guitar. I can't remember what the two radii are, but certainly it's a little bit more round towards the nut where the cowboy chords are, and a little bit flatter up at the top."

4. Saddles

"The one weird thing, I guess, is using these bent-steel kind of 50s-style saddles [present on Guthrie's initial prototype but later replaced with an early-spec Floyd – Ed]. I think, generally, when people try to perfect the Strat bridge, one of the things they address first is getting rid of the bent-steel saddle – the reasoning being it should stay in tune better.

"But I just think they sound more musical somehow. There's something in the top-end, something in the attack of the note that sounds more real to me. I've heard so many recordings of everyone from Buddy Holly to Hendrix using these saddles."

that, we decided we should see other people. So, it was an amicable split and I'm still using the Badger amps for certain things. I'm excited about the Charvel thing, because this [second prototype] guitar already feels like some kind of logical progression in the right direction, and we're not done with it yet."

How about amps?
"The whole thing was done with two amps. The master amp was the Suhr Badger and the 2x12 Warehouse cab with what they call Veteran 30 speakers. Those are basically the same idea as a Celestion Vintage 30, except this is the American equivalent. I've used that amp for The Aristocrats gigs for quite a long time, and it's become a voice I know well. Even though it's a single-channel amp, I know how to get a lot of sounds out of it." [The amp pictured opposite is a prototype from UK amp maker Martin Kidd, that Guthrie was sound testing for the day – Ed.]

"The range of tones you can get out of the Badger with one setting is something that feels quite familiar to me. There was also a Fender Super-Sonic, the 22-watt one. So we mic them both, and add a little buffer to split the guitar, so that it was feeding both amps. Then we mixed them. For a lot of the music, what seems to work is panning the two. Not completely hard left-and-right, but relatively hard left-and-right, so you can hear some 3D quality to the tone."

Your pedalboard is being overhauled before your tour in Steven Wilson's band. Why?
"Because I have to. For a lot of the things I've done lately, in particular The Aristocrats, I've been able to be 'one-channel amp guy' with all the different tones I can get with the Suhr Badger and the Suhr Koko Boost pedal and then moving the knobs around on the guitar, hitting the strings differently.

"However, Steven's music is different. It's a bigger band and there's a lot more going on, which means the volume level of each guitar sound that I have suddenly becomes more important. With Steven's music, sometimes I will have to be able to step on something that changes the channel on the amp, makes it four decibels quieter, adds a rotary effect and a compressor and so on. Then four bars later, step on something else for a completely different sound. It's the only way I can get through that gig."

You mention creating a wealth of sounds with just your hands. Tell us about your picking style...
"I like the idea that your picking hand should be like a Swiss Army knife: it's one thing, but different attachments come out, depending on which technique you want to summon at any given moment, but the basic position of your hand should always be the same. Then I think it's easier to switch from one technique to another if the basic shape of your hand and alignment of your wrist doesn't have to change drastically."

So, where does the picking movement come from?
"I think it's the wrist. It's a misleading thing. When you watch someone playing, sometimes it looks like some of

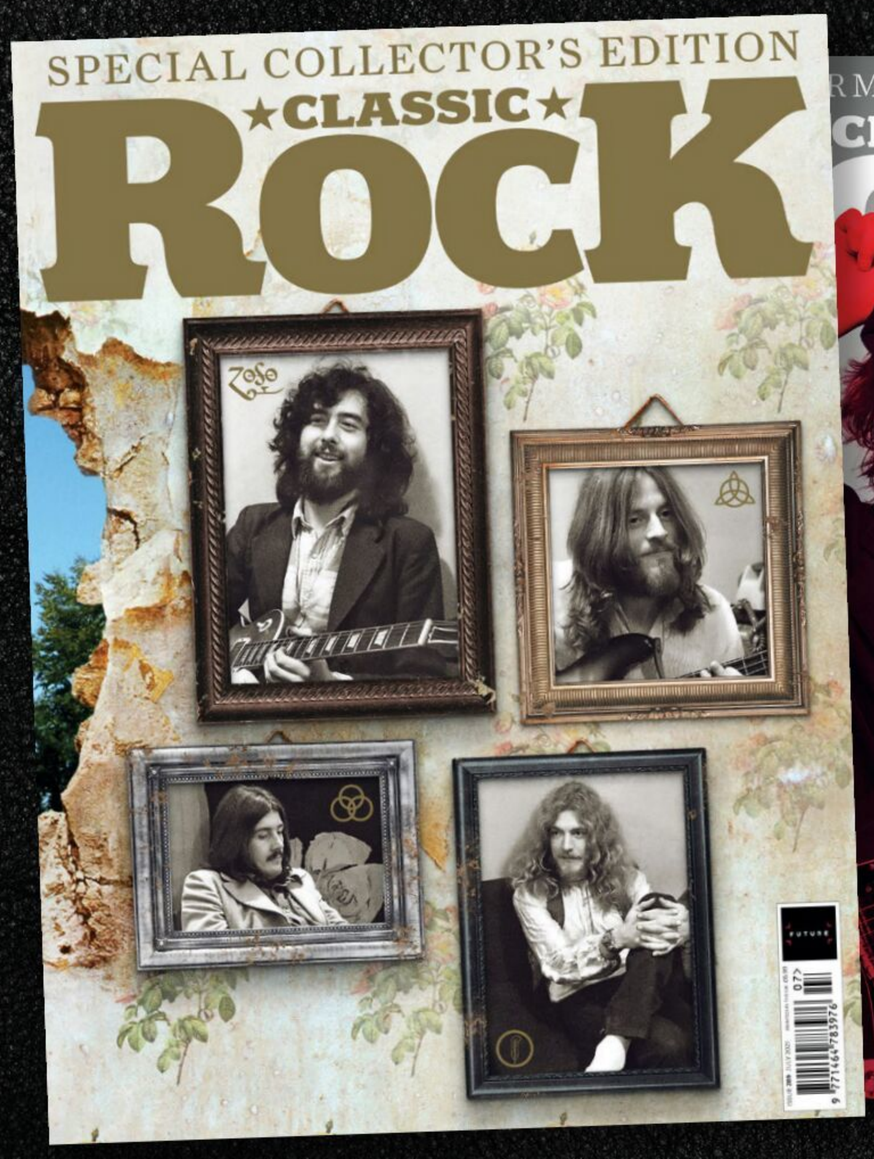


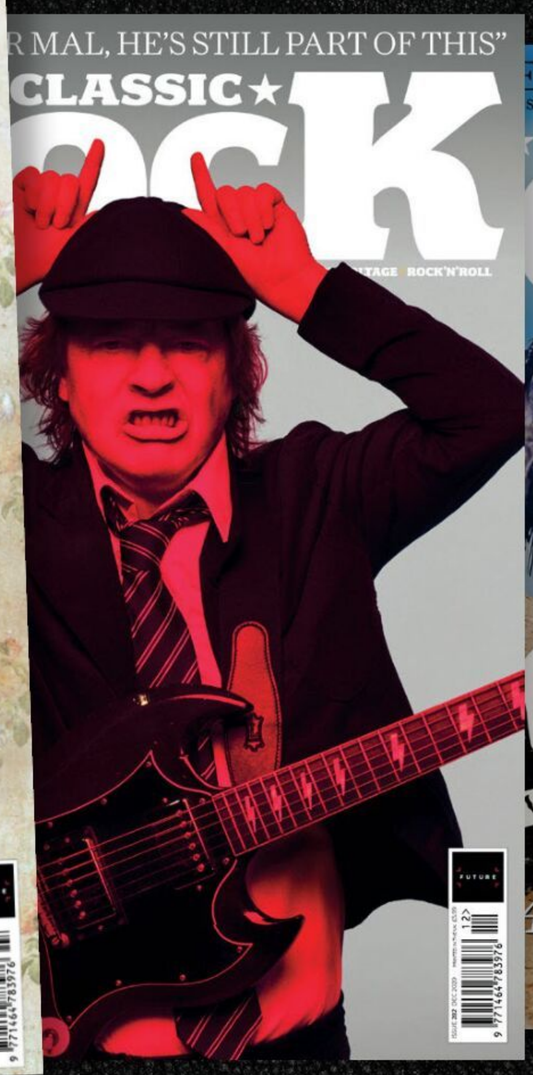
the movement is coming from the forearm. But as often as not, that's just muscles and tendons in the forearm moving, because of what it's telling the wrist to do. But the basic picking motion is the kind of twisting – it's a bit like that 'turning a doorknob' analogy.

"If you pick from the fingers, it all goes horribly wrong, because you're giving a small part of your anatomy too many different duties. If you pick from the elbow, you can get ridiculous speed – but then you get tendonitis. So, for me, the forearm's job is generally to clamp the guitar, in the same way that you would lean on a desk if you were writing. Then you can afford to do really subtle movements with your picking hand and know that you'll always hit the target."

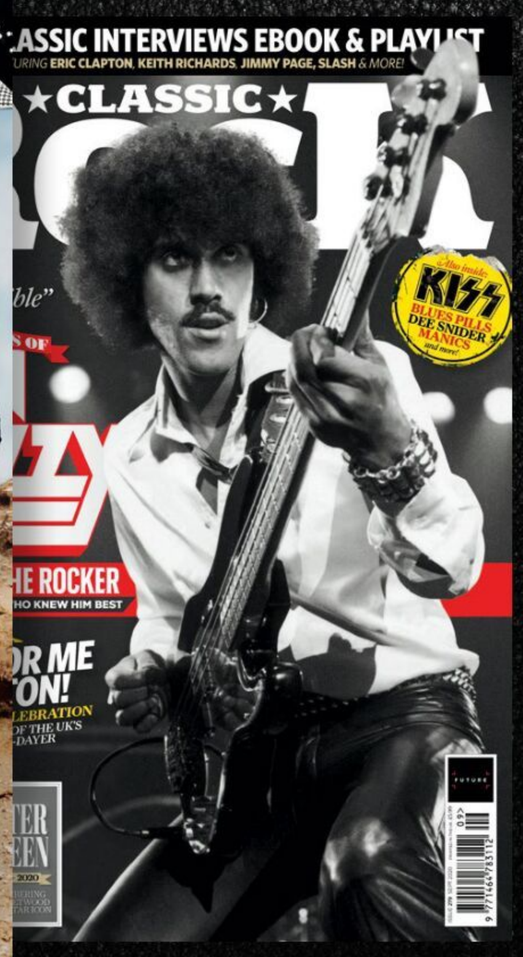
Do you still think of the fretboard as visual patterns, or is it more deeply ingrained?
"It's more deeply ingrained. I think my fretting hands can probably 'see' the fretboard. For me, it really doesn't matter if I'm looking at it or not, unless I'm playing something like *Waves*, where it's nice to just check every few beats that you're going in the right direction. I have had to play that song in the dark, though, and most of it works. So, generally, it's muscle memory now, and I don't have to be too conscious.

"But you will notice I have freaky fret markers on this guitar, and there's a reason behind that. I've done some gigs with the maple neck and, with pretty much any kind of fret dot, there'll be some lighting effect they can turn on that'll make your dots disappear. So, the reasoning here is, let's have black-and-white markers, because surely the lighting engineer can't make both colours disappear at once. So, we'll see. I'm thinking this should be idiot-proof now. I will always be able to see the dots, if I do need them." G



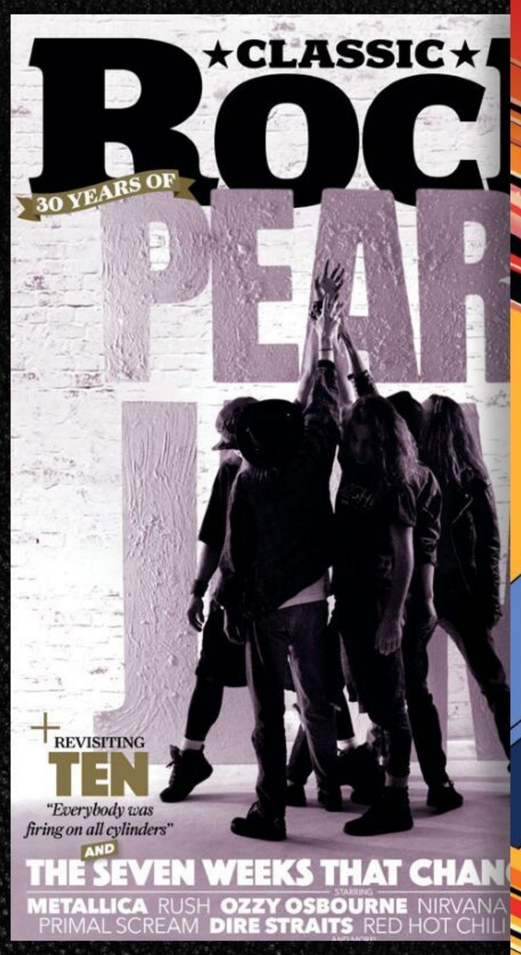


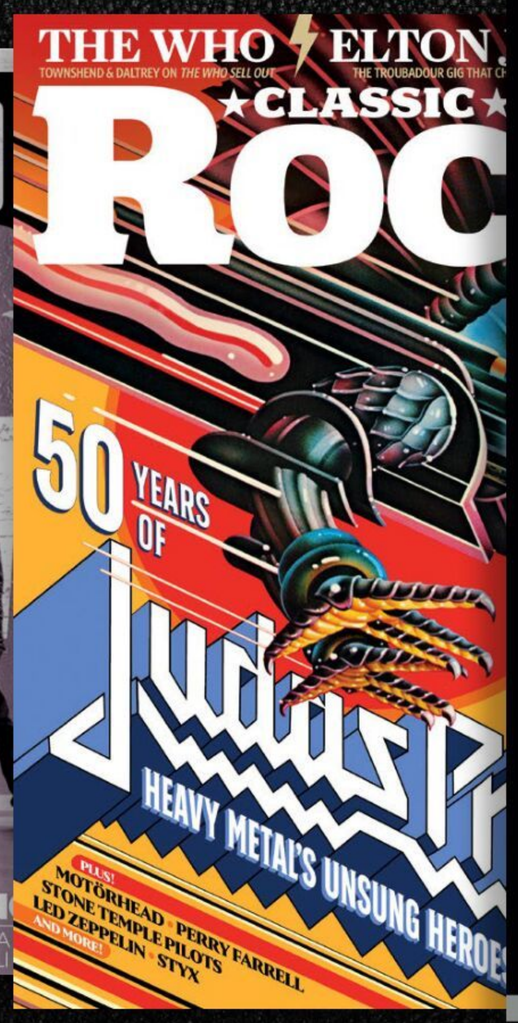




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Beyond Shred

If there's an envelope to be pushed, Guthrie will find it. We delve into his far-ranging style with some examples from the man himself…

WE'RE OFTEN guilty of putting our favourite players in pigeonholes. There's the fast picking guy, the legato master, the one who does that tapping lick – and so on. But there are a select few players whose creativity, curiosity and technical prowess transcend simple categories. And yet, every so often, you find one.

Guthrie Govan has been amazing us with his wide-ranging skills since the early 1990s. To concentrate on his effortless alternate picking, for example, would be to overlook his eloquent vocabulary of bends, his command of note choice or his seeming ability to go from any 'point A' to any 'point B', anywhere on the neck!
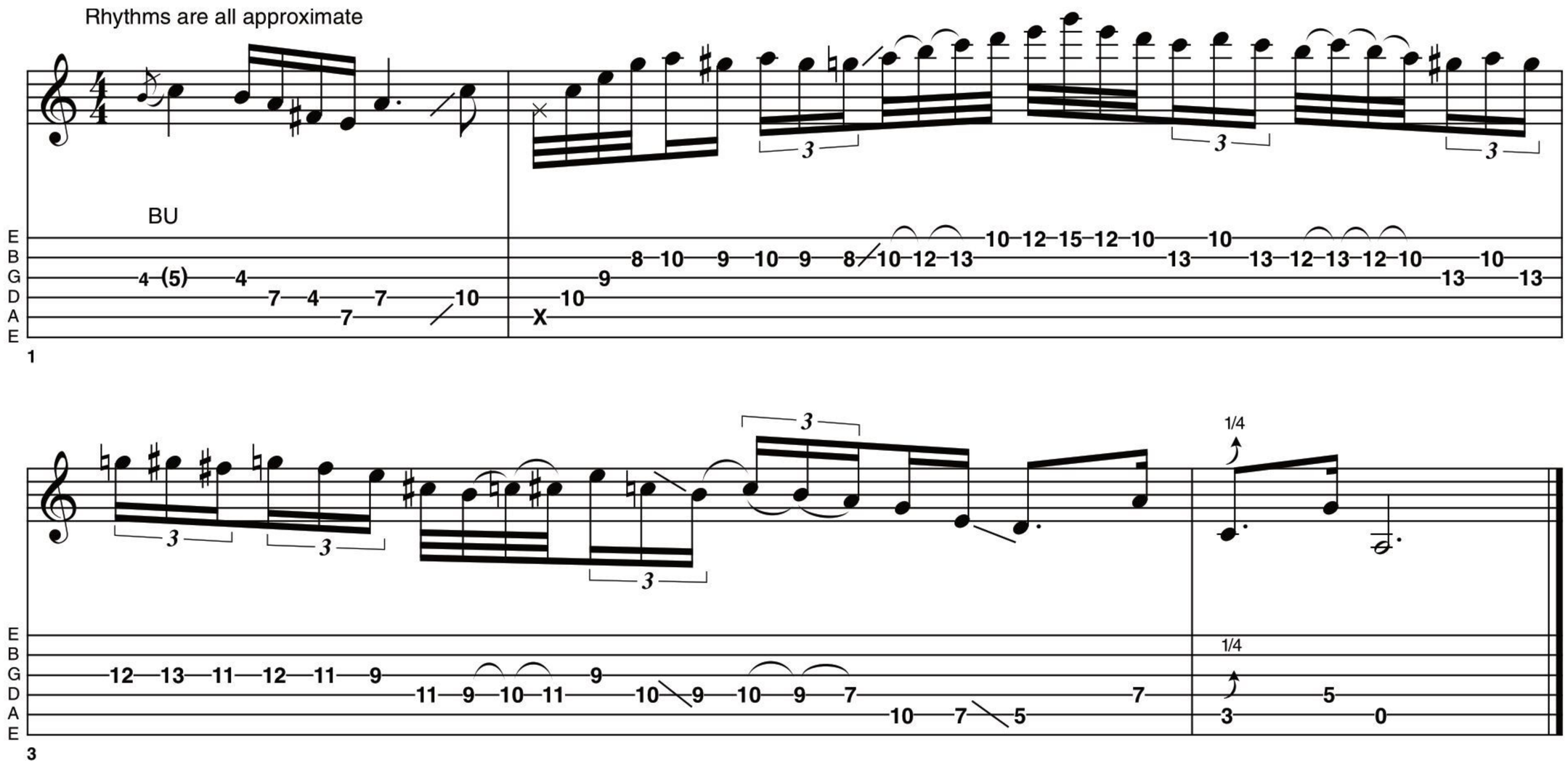
What's more, Guthrie's playing style and sound are continuously developing. Over the years, he's been creating blinding rock licks, sax-like fusion lines, and gnarly country bends and, nowadays, you might hear intricate ornamentation that's executed with the delicacy of a master slide player. Yes, he can do that, too.

So, while demonstrating his Charvel prototype, Guthrie ran through some licks that illustrate a few aspects of his style. You can hear more on *Erotic Cakes* or the first Aristocrats album, but remember: this is still only scratching the surface. He will amaze you, so don't try to resist!



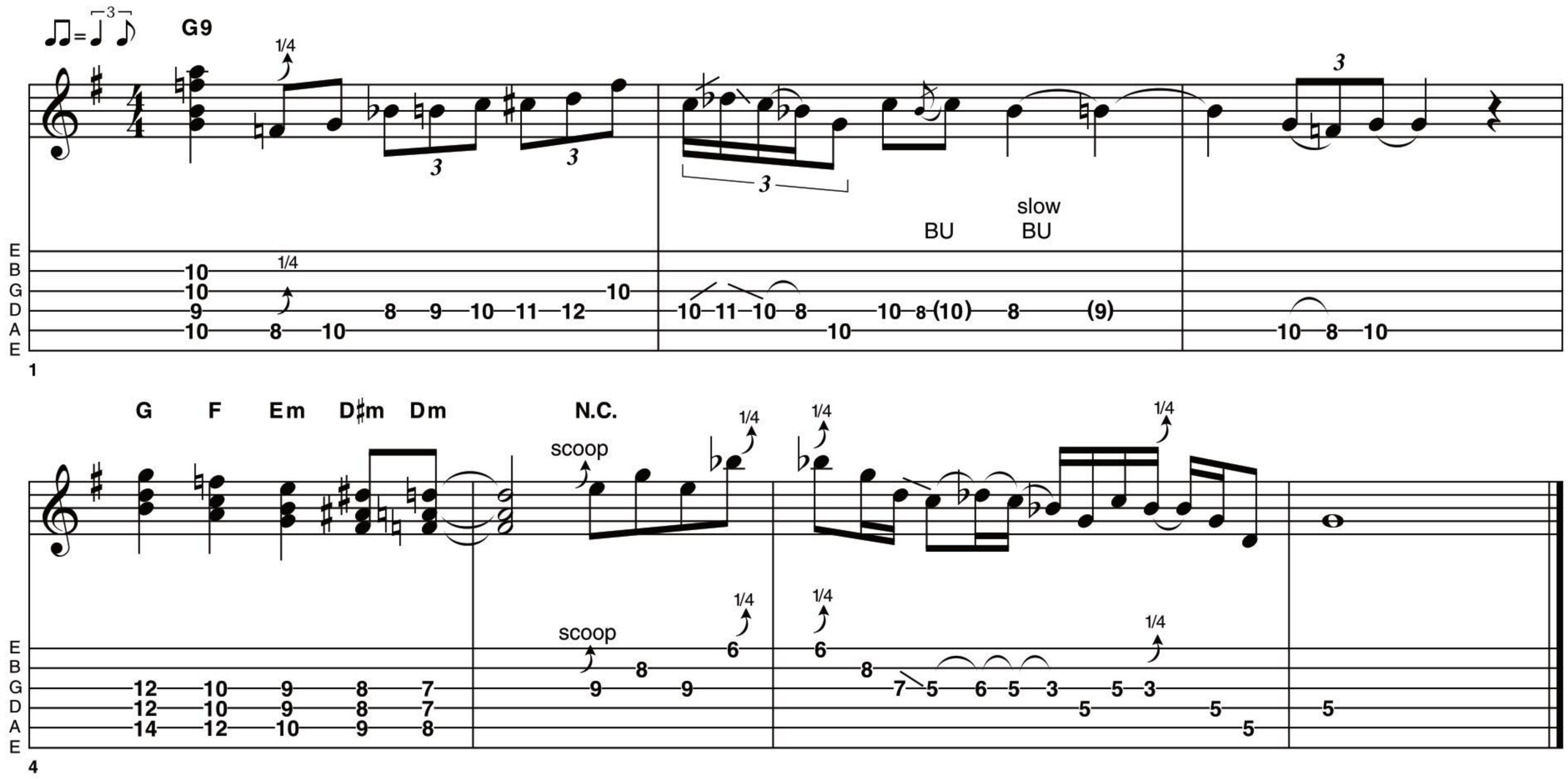
Example 1

WHEN Guthrie plays fast rock licks, he rarely sticks to a single scale pattern. By using the full range of the guitar, you have access to different tonal qualities, as well as arpeggio fragments and larger intervals. This example mostly uses A Dorian (A B C D E F# G), but there are some chromatic notes as well.



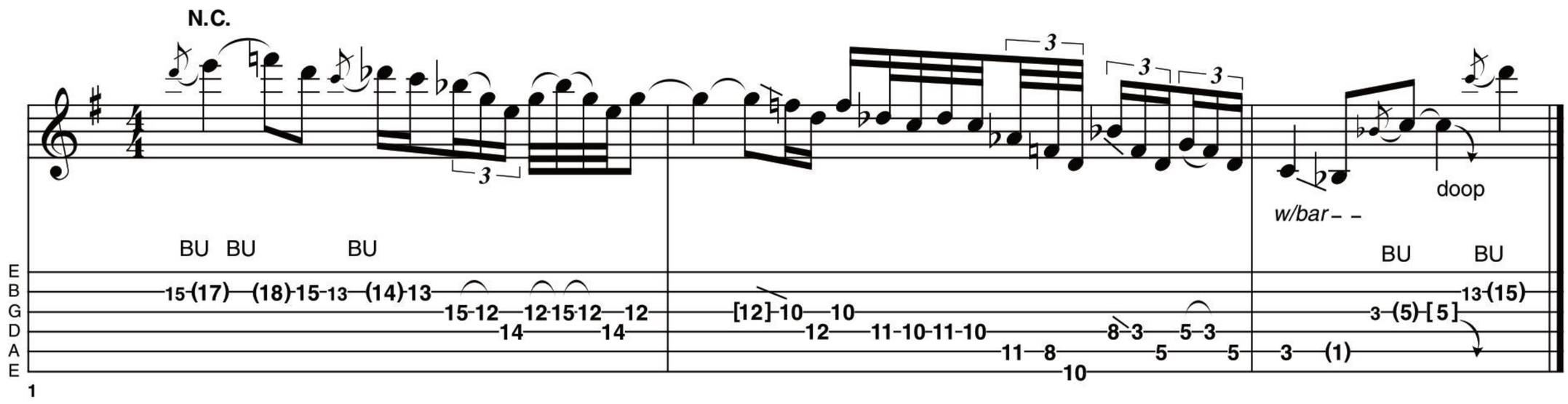
Example 2

THIS bluesy demonstration of the same 'whole guitar' principle uses G Dorian (G A B♭ C D E F). These licks can be fingered in other ways, possibly more convenient for you, but don't just go for what's easy. Changing the fingering of a familiar lick can open up new possibilities.



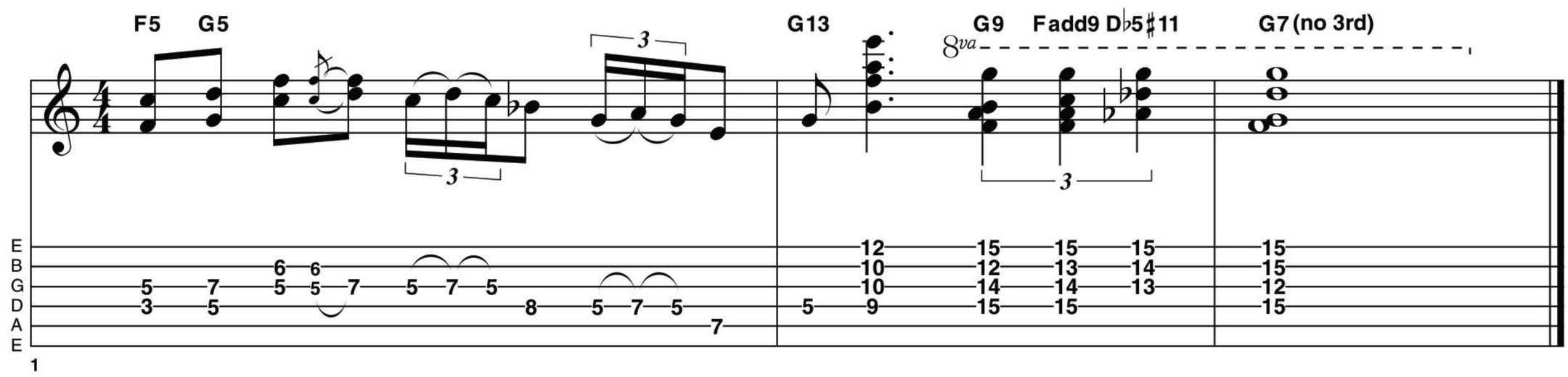
Example 3

IN this example, Guthrie moves smoothly from the 15th position down to the 3rd position using a mixture of gradual position changes and slides. Again, all these notes are perfectly normal for blues-rock playing, but there are always new ways to play them.



Example 4

FINALLY, here's a little chord example, like a mixture of Eric Johnson and Joe Pass. Everything is based around a general G7 sound, from the Dorian licks at the start to the extended chords at the end. The exact progression at the end runs through G13, G9, Fadd9 and then partial D♭5#11 (or G7♭5♭9) and finally G7 (no 3rd).



BUDDY GUY

INTERVIEW DECEMBER 2013

It's a long road from the plantations of the Deep South to the White House, and 77-year-old blues titan Buddy Guy has battled every step of the way. Taking in poverty, tragedy, Strats and Cadillacs, Guitarist settles down to hear how Buddy forged his heavyweight guitar style in the tough clubs of 50s Chicago – learning at the speaker grilles of the greats, including Muddy Waters and Guitar Slim, to become a master in his own right…

WORDS **HENRY YATES**

"I was born in 1936 on a plantation in Lettsworth, Louisiana," Buddy tells us, starting right at the beginning. "I didn't have a guitar [as a kid]. I used to take rubber bands and stretch 'em up to my ear, or I would put two nails in the wall and then stretch a piece of wire between them as tight as I could. Anything that made a noise.

"There was no such thing as electric guitars back then, just acoustic," he continues. "And there was only one guitar player! This guy would go from house to house every Christmas. He'd play and sing and drink wine until everybody got half-drunk and went to sleep – and then I would get the guitar and mess with it. I wouldn't see a guitar again until the next Christmas.

"I was so far in the country that I couldn't get no instruction on guitar," he remembers. "I didn't know what to do. But I think it was a blessing from upstairs..." And indeed from those early country days, Buddy Guy forged his own style that would go on to make legend.

Strat's Amazing

"Later on, in the 50s, I saw BB King with a Stratocaster. But the one who impressed me the most was Guitar Slim, playing *The Things That I Used To Do*. I saw him in Baton Rouge, Louisiana – and man, that guitar had scratches everywhere 'cos he was even wilder than I was when I was a young man. He didn't even have a shoulder strap on it – he had a fishing line! I looked at that guitar and I said, 'This guitar here is like a hammer and a nail, and it's been beat to death, but it still sounds good.' I fell in love with the Stratocaster then, and I'm still in love with it now."

Joining The Dots

"My mother had a stroke. I was the oldest boy in the family and I was gonna leave for Chicago, so I was trying to make her feel good about me leaving. I wanted to make her smile, so I told her, 'I'm gonna drive back down here in a polka-dot Cadillac.' I knew I was lying to her, and later on in life, after she passed away, I said to myself, 'I owe her something for lying to her,' and I came up with the idea of a polka-dot Strat in her memory."

Chicago Calling

"Oh, it was frightening moving to Chicago [in 1957]. I didn't know anybody. But when I came here, you could walk down the main streets and they had so many blues clubs. I didn't even want to go to sleep, man, because I was afraid I was gonna miss something. I'd just get up and go walking.

"Back then, we didn't have all the crime we got now; you could walk from club to club and learn something every time you walked in. If I saw a guitar player, whether he was famous or not, he was always playing something that was pleasing to my ears. I was copping everyone who played guitar. I'd learned how to play a Lightnin' Hopkins lick, a John Lee Hooker lick and a few little licks from BB King and the late Guitar Slim..."

PHOTO BY DEBRA L ROTHENBERG/GETTY IMAGES





Luck Walks In

"All of these great guitar players were playing around Chicago back then, like Wayne Bennett, but they were all sitting around in chairs playing. I had seen Guitar Slim doing the splits on stage, so I thought, 'Well, I can't play as well as these guys, but I'll do something different from them.'

"I had a 100-foot cord that I had loaned from Guitar Slim, so I just plugged me in and I'd come in through the front door – even when it was snowing outside! Everybody in the club stood up and said, 'Who in the hell is that?' So, I thought, 'Well, I got some attention,' even if I couldn't play that well."

Muddy's Guy

"I was stranded in Chicago; I didn't know what to do. Then somebody found out I could play guitar and they took me to a blues club where Otis Rush was playing. I played *The Things That I Used To Do*. Then somebody called up Muddy Waters and he came over.

"I'd been told before I left Louisiana, 'Be careful in Chicago, 'cos they'll mug you.' When Muddy showed up, they all told me, 'That's the Mud' and I thought they were saying I was gonna get mugged! I was walking down the street, still looking for a day job. Muddy stopped me, slapped me so hard that my ears was ringing, brought me a salami sandwich, put me in his car and told me, 'Don't even think about going back to Louisiana.' Because he knew I could play his music [at Chess Records]."

Lean Years

"Everything was kinda rough back then. You didn't have as many guitar players as you got today, because there was no future in it. There wasn't nobody getting paid worth a damn playing music. Even all of those guys like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and BB King, they wasn't making no money. But they played for the love of music, and that's what made them stick with it. Their pay was playing well and getting drunk, and if you played well enough, you got a good-looking woman to watch you. That's what it was all about."

Chess Moves

"In the 60s, Chess Records wasn't ready for what I was playing. Back then, they already had Muddy, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson, and they were selling records better than anybody. So, they was looking at my [wild] playing like, 'Whatever you doin', I ain't ready for that now.' I would go into Chess Studios and I'd be told how to play. Then the British guys started turning up their big Marshall amplifiers, and their records was selling, and Leonard Chess sent for me.

"I went down there, ready to get my pink slip. But he bent over and told me, 'I want you to kick my behind,

PHOTO BY JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"Leonard Chess sent for me. I went down, ready to get my pink slip. But he bent over and told me, 'I want you to kick my behind, because you were playing this stuff when you first came here and we weren't ready for it'"

BUDDY GUY

because you were playing this stuff when you first came here and we weren't ready for it.'"

Fire Inside

"It bothered me when I couldn't get a break in the 80s. But I was used to not going anywhere, so it didn't bother me as much as it would a youngster today. We're all living in a modern world now, where you just click your light on. I came up the hard way, with a lamplight and a fireplace. My parents didn't have nothing to look to tomorrow for. They lived from day to day. Now, I tell my children, if they cut my electricity off, I still know how to stay warm with firewood and cook on the fireplace."

Doing It My Way

"Eric Clapton brought me over there [to the UK] to the Albert Hall [in 1990] and that's how I got signed to the label I'm with now. The British guys give me credit for coming through there with the Stratocaster in 1965, but their playing speaks for itself, man. Those guys can play as well as anybody who ever picked up a guitar.

"When I got to meet Eric and Jeff, they told me, 'Man, just go in the studio, play your guitar and stop listening to other people.' So, when I recorded *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues* in London, I finally got to be Buddy Guy. I had been trying to be Buddy Guy ever since I landed in Chicago, but I was told that Buddy Guy didn't have it. And on that album, they told me, 'Just play,' and I was the happiest man you'd ever seen. I didn't go in there saying, 'Well, here's my chance to sound like Eric or Beck or Stevie Ray or whoever else.' I just closed my eyes and said, 'Here's the Buddy Guy I been all my life...' and I don't know nothing else but Buddy Guy!"

Best Of British

"When you play with The Rolling Stones, it's always something you can't forget, man. We went in to rehearse for *Shine A Light* [2008], and when we got ready to record, Mick had lost his voice a little bit and he said, 'You gotta sing another verse of *Champagne & Reefer*.' They liked it pretty well and it got me a little exposure, because there's always somebody who don't know who the hell you are until you've showed up with The Stones. Those guys, we owe everything to them in blues music, because they exposed Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Ike and Tina Turner, myself, John Lee Hooker – everybody. They didn't forget. The British guys deserve all the respect that they get."

Room At The Top

"Playing at the White House [in 2012] made me nervous. I was raised on a farm. I was picking cotton, driving tractors and ploughing mules. And I even told the President, 'I come a long ways from picking cotton to picking the guitar in the White House.' I was the happiest guitar player you ever seen that night, because I had BB King beside me, too. When you're on the same stage as BB, you're nervous in the first place, but there's that joyful thing at the back of your mind – man, just look where you're at! Everything went through my mind that night. Like, 'Buddy, you're in the White House with BB King, and the President of the United States is smiling at you every time you hit a pretty good lick.' Man, what else can I ask for?"

Good Vintage

"I didn't know this, but they tell me the cognac they make in France has to stay in the bottle for 100 years before they put it out there. I guess you could look at a blues guitar player the same way. So, if you don't have the blues yet, just keep living!

"I still get so happy when I play guitar. I'm the happiest man alive when I hit a note and somebody looks at me and smiles. I say to myself, 'I know you been through life, had more downs than ups, but I made you forget about that down feeling for that moment I played.' When I see someone smiling, I know that I made them forget it all for a few seconds..." G

TWICE AS NICE

At the grand old age of 77, Buddy Guy is on searing form with this year's double-album, *Rhythm & Blues*. The gear remains much the same – his iconic 1989 signature Strat, Chicago Blues Box amp and bespoke Cry Baby – but there's no evidence of his fire dying.

"We just kept cutting tracks," he recalls. "We'd cut 14 or 15, and I just kept throwing another one at [producer] Tom Hambridge. All of a sudden, we'd cut 21 or 22 tracks. I got invited up by RCA, and I thought, 'Oh my God, maybe they're gonna cut me loose.' But they said, 'No, we love this album, man. We're gonna put a double-album out.' Man, I was smiling, because I don't remember no other blues player with a double-album out there.

"I've been trying to play the guitar with fire my whole life, and I think this album captures a little bit of that," he continues. "But I don't actually listen to myself that much. I wait for people to tell me if it's a pretty good album or if it's a bad album!"

BB KING

INTERVIEW DECEMBER 2011

He's the most influential living blues guitarist, revered by everyone from Clapton to Slash. Still performing seven decades after he began, BB granted Guitarist an exclusive interview at the Royal Albert Hall, during the making of a definitive new film about his life. He talked about the origins of his legendary vibrato, the early years of his love affair with the guitar, and, at nearly 90 years of age, just how long he thinks he can continue…

WORDS **JAMIE DICKSON** PHOTOGRAPHY **KEVIN NIXON**

The Royal Albert Hall is an impressive sight when it's full to capacity, as it is tonight. Some 5,000 people file down the well-lit aisles, filling the historic auditorium all the way up to the roof, while their voices generate the murmur of collective anticipation at what is afoot.

It's remarkable enough that so many people have gathered to watch an 86-year-old-man from Mississippi sing and play guitar. But when you consider that when the same man was a teenager, he made a backbreaking and obscure living in America's Deep South picking up to 480 pounds of cotton a day – a load which earned him around $1.75 – you're struck by a feeling not unlike vertigo. What freak tide of history carried him here?

In fact, there is nothing freakish about the story of Riley B King – it's as simple as a note ringing out pure and clear from an old archtop guitar, and the way that sound can snare the heart of a young man. It began near the village of Berclair, where King was born on 16 September 1925 – the son of Nora Ella and Albert Lee King, who tilled cotton fields for a tiny share in the sale of each harvest.

Somehow it led to this giant hall filled with fans, eight decades and some 4,000 miles away from that rural boyhood. How? The answer, in the irrepressible form of the man himself, is waiting in the wings as his band strike up the opening chords of a jazzy vamp. The murmur of the audience dies to a sudden hush, palpable beneath the easy swell of the music.

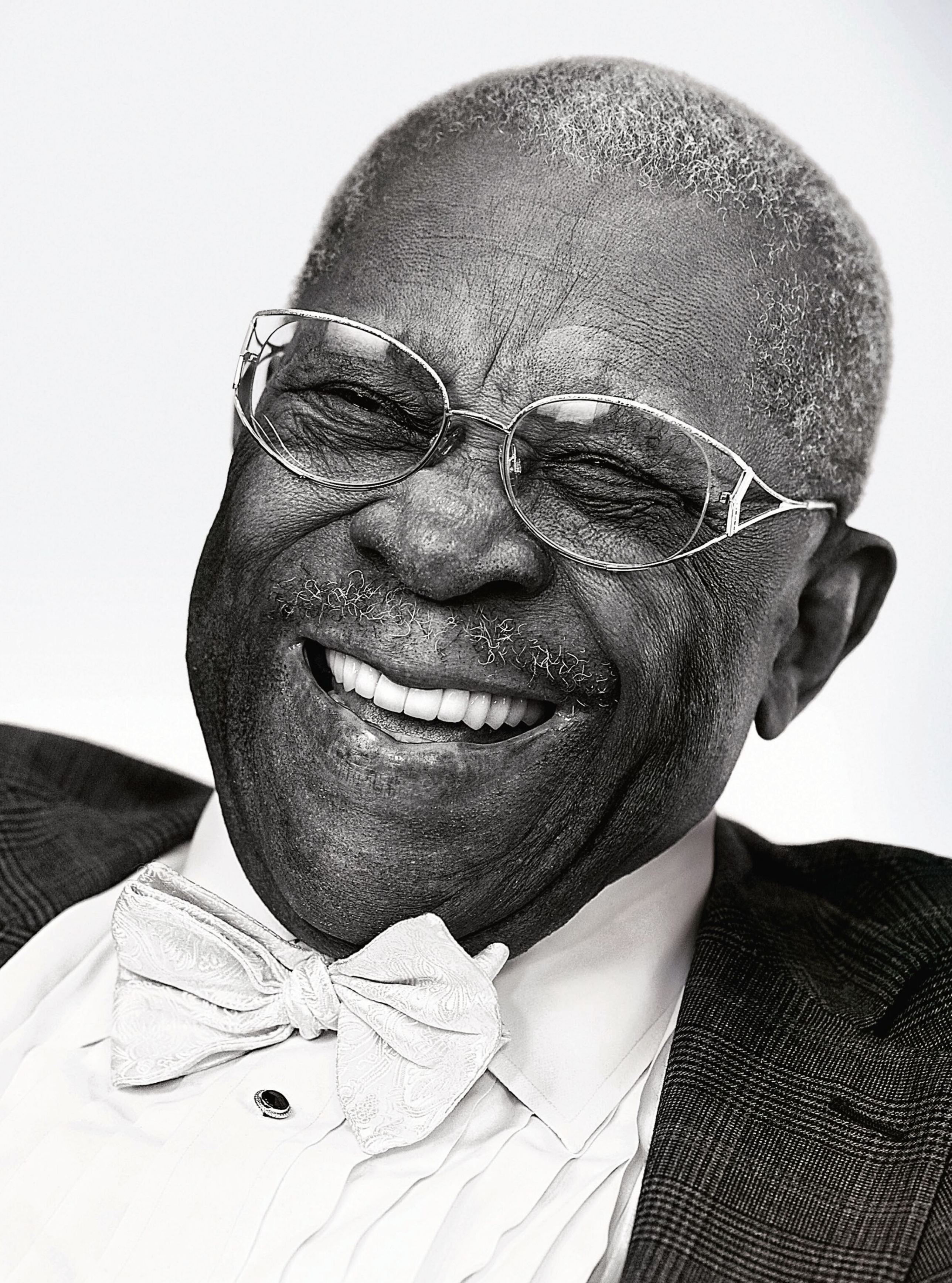
Backstage With BB

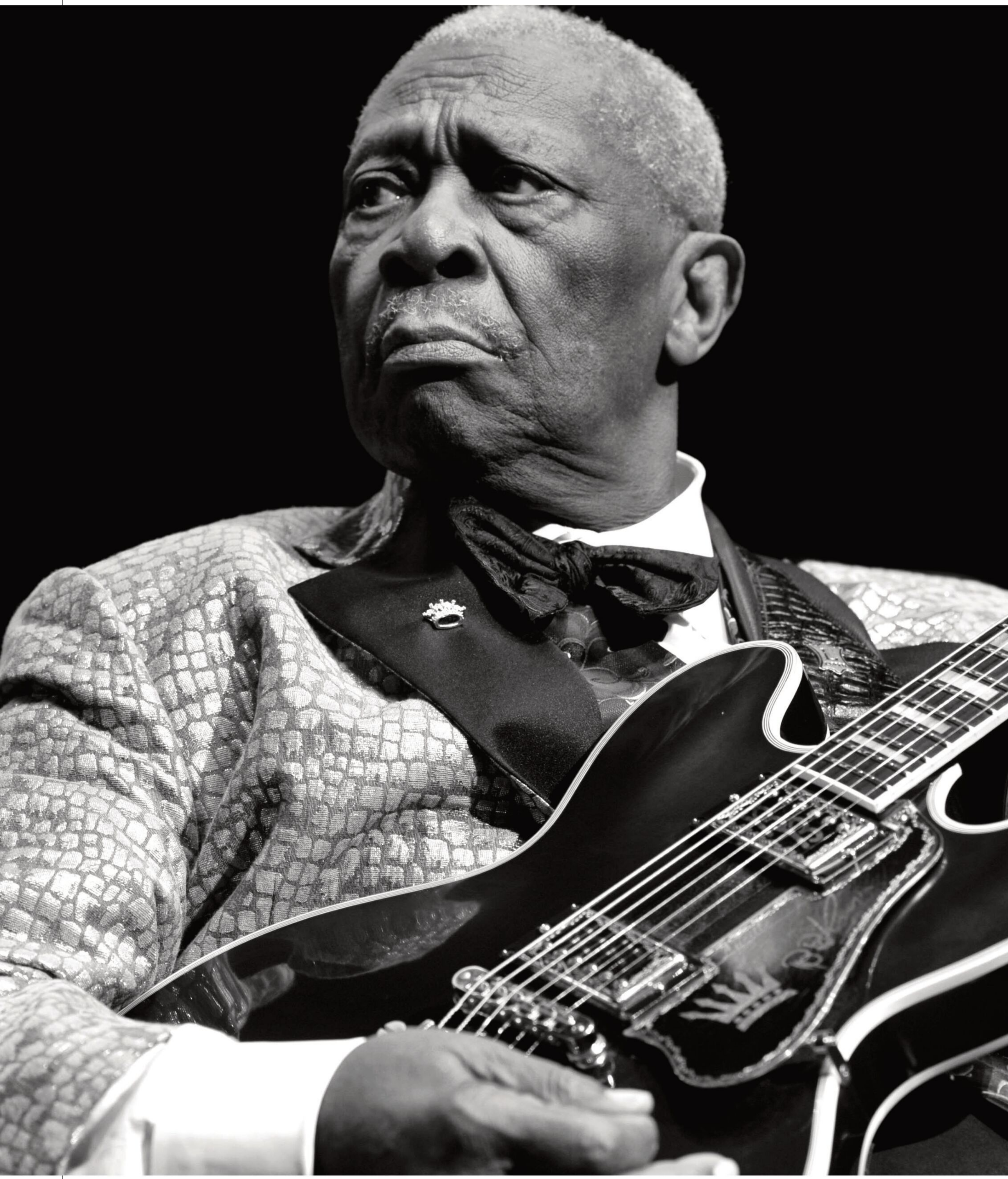
About an hour before the show, *Guitarist* is waiting in the maze-like depths of the Albert Hall, laminated plastic passes swinging flimsily from lanyards. It's the only thing that keeps us from being ejected by security staff, who are on the prowl, because the backstage area is a like a tropical fish-tank of stars tonight. Slash is wandering around somewhere, along with Ronnie Wood and Derek Trucks, accompanied by his wife, Susan Tedeschi, whose honeyed vocals and barbed Tele lines provide sweet counterpoint to Trucks' foundry-hot slide licks.

It's a measure of BB King's huge influence as a player, and the general affection in which he is held, that these stellar musicians have turned up to join him on stage as devoted fans of his music, rather than as grandstanding stars – although to be sure they provide an edge of high-powered glamour to an event that is, ironically, centred on a man who couldn't be more down-to-earth.

When the time comes for *Guitarist*'s interview slot with the man himself, we're ushered into a small dressing room, through the ranks of a protective entourage, to where BB 'Blues Boy' King sits easily in an armchair, smiling – demeanour somewhere between that of a benevolent monarch and the well-tended octogenarian he is.

To kick things off, we ask him about his first memories of playing the guitar, especially with regard to local preacher Archie Fair, whom King first encountered as a boy, during family gatherings after







"I've never been what you would call a real hot player – and a lot of kids I hear are hot players. I've never been like that: I play slow, because I walk slow, talk slow, sing slow – the whole works. It isn't because I feel that way – that's just the way I am"

BB KING

Sunday worship in the years both before and after the tragically early death of his mother in 1935.

"My uncle – my mother's brother – was married to a sanctified preacher's sister," he replies, after a short pause to recollect. "And whenever the preacher came over to my uncle's house – to visit his sister, who was my aunt – he'd always bring his guitar with him. And he would lay it upon the bed and they'd go in to eat. And I'd love to see him, because he played guitar, but I didn't like them to go in and have dinner before the rest of us, because nothing was left but the chicken feet and its neck – they'd eat up everything else," he fondly recalls.

"But whenever he would come over there and lay his guitar on the bed, when they went into the kitchen to eat, I went to the bed. That's the best I can tell you. When I heard him play the guitar I thought that was the nicest thing ever – and I guess that's about when I first started paying attention to it."

Praise For The Reverend

Later on, other guitarists such as Booker T 'Bukka' White, King's cousin, would have a different but no less significant influence on BB's growing appreciation of guitar, playing gritty blues songs that a preacher such as Fair would have considered inappropriate. It's a matter of record that Bukka White, who cut his first blues records in 1930, was a big inspiration to King, who has described his playing as "the prettiest sound this side of heaven". Back in the Albert Hall, *Guitarist* asks him who among the six-string pioneers he encountered during his upbringing was most influential to his sound, but King says that Reverend Archie Fair made both the first and strongest impression.

"I really wanted to play like him," he says. "I wanted to play just like him, because he was the preacher, but, gosh, before he started preaching he would always sing and play. Then one day they caught me on the bed fooling with his guitar and my uncle was getting ready to tear me up [laughs]. And the preacher said, 'No, don't hurt him, don't hurt him.' And they didn't beat up on me. I guess I just seem to have a habit for the guitar, and that's where it started. The preacher told them, 'Don't bother him – go ahead and play.' And that's how I got addicted to it, and it went on from there."

Good Vibrations

Inspiration also came from sources less close to home. King heard many of his other childhood guitar heroes, such the Texan bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson plus the more jazz-influenced playing of Lonnie Johnson, on his aunt Mima's Victrola record player. But when we ask him how he developed his unmistakable vibrato, his answer highlights the close ties that existed between country and blues in the early 20th century – especially the crying voice of the lap steel guitar that many players, including BB King, sought to imitate on fretted instruments.

"I was crazy about the Western players," King recalls. "We called it cowboy music. If you ever heard of a guy called Bob Wills, he had a guitar player with him, he called him Leon [McAuliffe, Wills' 18-year-old steel guitar player], and Bob Wills was howlin' on the record – 'Hialeah!' – and going crazy on that thing. Now, they was white and they played Western music – least that's what they told me it was – and I just loved it. So, he was one of the guys that inspired me to want to play."

Likewise, the near-forgotten sound of the even earlier Hawaiian lap steel guitarists – who originated the style long before American country musicians adopted it – had an even more direct influence on BB's trademark vibrato.

"At that time Hawaii wasn't part of the US," he recalls. "But you'd hear those Hawaiian people play and sing – and they had a quiver in their voice. And when they would play, it was so mellow, so good to your ears. And every time I'd get a guitar and pick it up, I'd always trill my hand like this [imitates the classic wide BB vibrato in mid air] and that became a habit. It got so whenever I played, I'd always do that first. But as to when it actually got a hold of me, I can't tell you – but all the guys would say, 'How do you do that?' And I would say, 'Like this...' [imitates vibrato again]. And that's about it."

Voices From The Past

We mention to him that many players interviewed by *Guitarist*, most recently Brit blues-rock veteran Robin Trower, have said that they were inspired by the voice-like quality of his tone and vibrato, to which King raises his eyebrows and comments that he hadn't heard that before. Was his playing influenced by any vocalists in particular?

"Well, there were many singers that did, such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe," he says, speaking of the Arkansas-born gospel singer and guitarist who later offended religious conservatives by crossing over – SG in hand – to the world of pop music.

"I was crazy about gospel and in my early years I would sing gospel songs with various quartets and usually I was the lead singer – that was with a group called the St John Gospel Singers," King recalls, referring to a group he formed in Indianola in the 1940s before he became better known as a blues guitarist. "We wasn't popular like some of the groups we sang with. I knew the Dixie Hummingbirds in later years when I started to sing professionally. I was so crazy about that, and then to see them on the BBC the other night with Sister Rosetta Tharpe... Oh man, I was sorta like a mule with the ears like this..."

"You'd hear those Hawaiian people sing – they had a quiver in their voice. And when they would play, it was so mellow, so good to your ears. And every time I'd get a guitar and pick it up, I'd always trill my hand to try to imitate it – and that became a habit. It got so whenever I played, I'd always do that first"

BB KING

King places his hands behind his ears and pushes them forward to imitate that animal swivelling its long ears forward in curiosity. This impulsive humour is one of the things that makes him so likeable and engaging to talk with. But when we ask him about the current tour, he gives the simple reply that it's "fine" and even a question about what it was like to play on the main stage at Glastonbury is greeted with a polite but workaday response.

"Oh, that was a lot of fun. I saw a lot of people I had heard of but never seen before," he says. "I was on stage with one of the groups that had done a lot for me – Bono and the band – they came on. They've done a lot for me; they took me round the world, wrote a song for me called *When Love Comes To Town*. And here we are."

He gestures with open hands to indicate that his current activities hold little mystery, being his daily bread and butter – but there's also a faint suggestion that the past looms larger in his mind than the present. Nevertheless, when we mention that he embarked on a 'farewell' tour in 2006 but has always – happily – come back for more, he asserts that he never had any serious intention to cease performing.

"Search the records, you've never heard me say it. Go through it all: you never heard BB King himself say it, ever. Somebody said that – I didn't," he adds.

When we ask how he thinks time has changed him as a player, he responds with characteristic modesty.



FIGHT CLUB

We may have heard the story many times before, but there's nothing like hearing it from the man himself. BB describes how his signature ES-355 – and many other guitars – got their name...

"Every guitar that I play becomes Lucille. The first one that was named Lucille was because of a fight in a little nightclub in a place called Twist, Arkansas," he recalls, "And in that little nightclub, it got pretty cold in winter – and it used to have something like a big garbage can – just like that one [indicates a nearby wastepaper bin], but a little larger, and they would half fill it with kerosene, light that fuel and that's what we had for heat.

"But this particular night two guys started to fight and one knocked the other one on that container. And when they did, it fell over and spilled on the floor. And everybody in the little club who was dancing started to run outside – including me. When I got outside, I found out that these two guys was fighting about a lady that worked in the nightclub. I learned that her name was Lucille and they was fighting over her because one of them had said something... So, they started to fight.

"But when I got outside, I realised that I'd left my guitar inside. I went back in for it – a lot of people tell me that I was fighting because of a lady... I was not [laughs]. I didn't even know who the lady was! And after that I found out her name was Lucille, so I named my guitar Lucille to remind me not to do a thing like that again. And I haven't [laughs]."

"It made me know that I couldn't play very well. I hear some people playing so good – I hear them and say to myself, 'Oh God, I might as well quit.' Then the other half of my mind says, 'Well, how you gonna eat? [laughs].' So, that's one of the reasons I haven't quit."

And how long does he hope to carry on performing for in future?

"As long as I think I'm doing pretty good," he says, after a pause to consider.

"I have a pretty good idea about what I do. And I have a pretty good idea of what I sound like. I don't think I ever sounded like I wanted to. But I think sometimes the sound that I hear has never been the sound that I wanna hear, if that makes any sense. I haven't done that yet. When I hear what I would like to hear, if ever, I think I'd have to stop, because it probably won't sound as good as I'm thinking it will."

He reflects a little further, chin in hand, before continuing on the theme.

"I don't know – I've never been what you would call a real hot player – and a lot of kids I hear are hot players. And I've never been like that: I'm slow, because I walk slow, talk slow, sing slow – the whole works. It isn't because I feel that way – that's just the way I am. And if I have to answer you, I don't know. I really don't know. I'm hoping that when I start to sound as bad as I think I will when I get to a certain age, I hope that little bell will ring in my head, say it's time to stop. But other than that I'll wait until the Great One upstairs take me away. Because I don't feel bad – I feel pretty good at 86, so here I am. That's the best I can answer." G

FIRST LADIES OF BLUES

Many different Lucilles partnered BB King on his musical journey since meeting the first one back in 1949. Here, we examine some landmark ladies that accompanied him in the quest to make beautiful music



Gibson L-30

It was an instrument like the one here that BB King rescued from that infamous nightclub fire in Twist, Arkansas and which began the long line of legendary Lucille guitars. Made between 1935 and 1943, the L-30 was one of Gibson's budget models, born of the Great Depression that beset the world economy in the decade preceding World War II. A small-bodied, non-cutaway model with a flat back, the L-30 featured a simple trapeze tailpiece and pickguard, an adjustable bridge, single-bound body both front and back, plus basic dot fingerboard markers. Early examples were finished in black, but later L-30s had dark mahogany sides, back and neck, with a dark Sunburst top. The model was discontinued in 1943.



Gibson ES-5

As King's earning potential rose, so did his desire for a more up-market guitar. Already an ardent Gibson fan, BB flirted with many top-end models including the illustrious L-5, looking for something akin to his growing status. Eventually, he settled, for a while at least, on one of Gibson's flashiest and sonically most versatile models, the ES-5. First released in 1949 and bragging three P-90 pickups, King's was the early version, without the complicated switching that characterised 1955 to 1960 updates. The ES-5 came in Blonde and Sunburst. BB's was a Blonde with a trio of volume controls in-line behind the raised black pickguard, and a single tone pot adjacent to the Venetian (rounded) cutaway. The three 'dog-ear' P-90s were set into a laminated maple top and the guitar featured an adjustable bridge, trapeze tailpiece and two elegant f-holes. The ES-5 was discontinued in 1960.



Gibson ES-125

King's first major hit came in 1951 with Lowell Fulson's *Three O'Clock Blues*. By this time, BB was using Gibson's simple but excellent budget electric, the ES-125. With a single P-90 neck pickup, the instrument sang in the hands of King, and on *Three O'Clock Blues* – a moody, slow 12-bar number – demonstrated his unique vocal and guitar interplay. Introduced a decade earlier than the song, the guitar was 16.25 inches wide and 3.5 inches thick. With no cutaway, it featured a bound top and back, tortoiseshell pickguard, 'raised diamond' trapeze tailpiece, single-bound top and back, and carried dot fingerboard inlays. It was available in Dark Sunburst finish until it was discontinued, after nearly three decades' service, in 1970.

Gibson Byrdland

From the moment he heard it, BB King was smitten with T-Bone Walker's playing. T-Bone favoured Gibson's ES-250, a medium-to-top-range hollowbody with two P-90 pickups. In 1955, Gibson released the ES-350T and Byrdland models with slimmer bodies, more up-market specs and a shorter scale length. The Byrdland was endorsed by jazz players Billy Byrd and Hank Garland, hence the name. It was available in Blonde or Sunburst, with a 17-inch wide body that was just 2.25 inches deep. Its ebony fingerboard featured block pearl inlays, and while its short scale made it perfect for complex jazz chord shapes, it proved generally unpopular with lead guitarists. Chuck Berry went for the 350T, but BB – who seemed to be trying out various guitars as his career picked up – went for the top of the line Byrdland.





Fender Esquire

Never one to shirk advances in technology, King spent a while in the 50s experimenting with Fender's new Esquire. Essentially a single-pickup Telecaster and miles from his big three-pickup ES-5, the Esquire/Tele was nevertheless a bluesman's dream. Muddy Waters used one, as did Albert Collins, and for a young BB King, it represented a modern look and sound. Although equipped with just one single-coil pickup, the Esquire's clever switching allowed fat, bassy tones as well as sharp, incisive ones, plus a meaty honk in the middle that's not so far from a sound that BB would return to later – on a big red Gibson. Introduced in 1950, King's was an early model – pre-1953 – as its 12th-fret dots are closer together than on later versions. The black pickguard on BB's style of Esquire was changed to white in 1954, and the maple neck gained a dark rosewood fingerboard in 1959.



Gibson ES-175

One of the few Gibsons never to be discontinued, the ES-175 is the working jazzman's favourite. Used by the likes of Joe Pass and Herb Ellis, the ES-175 set the perfect balance between form, function and flash. First released in 1949, it looked the part with Blonde or Tobacco Sunburst finishes, a Florentine (pointed) cutaway and double-parallelogram fingerboard markers. Body and neck binding completed a handsome but workmanlike picture. The early 175s featured a single P-90 pickup but by 1953 it had two. Unlike the top-line L-5 and Super 400, the ES-175's body was laminated maple, not solid carved spruce. This kept the price down and made it less susceptible to climate changes, and also helped combat feedback. In 1957/'58, the ES-175 was the first model to receive Gibson's new humbucking pickup, as shown above. King is pictured with one on the 1959 album *BB King Wails*, but would soon look to a radical new range from Gibson...



Gibson ES-335 & ES-355
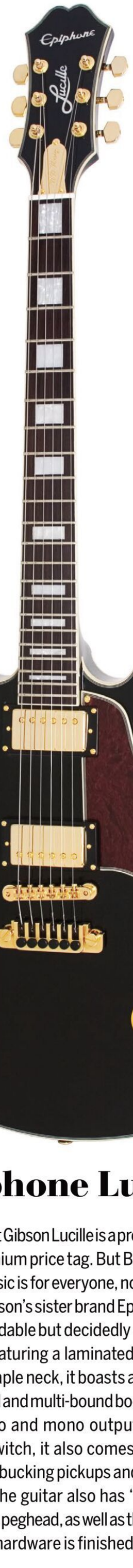
In 1958, Gibson unleashed a range so radical that it became an instant classic. A guitar that crossed all boundaries of style or genre, the ES-300 Series boasted three models in this style: the 'Standard' level ES-335; the 'Deluxe' level 'stereo' ES-345 with gold hardware and six-position Varitone switch; and the 'Custom' level ES-355, also stereo and with Varitone, but with multiple bindings, ebony fingerboard with pearl blocks, and a vibrato tailpiece. The killer stroke was that these apparently semi-acoustics had a fully solid centre section that lent huge tone and fantastic versatility. The guitars also carried Gibson's recently designed humbucking pickups – a match made in heaven. BB was often pictured with a Sunburst ES-335 with Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, but while it suited him as a player, he needed something that looked a little more special...

It's almost as if BB had been waiting for the ES-355. The new semi-solid had everything he wanted, and rarely has a musician been so perfectly suited to his instrument. With its show-stopping looks and innovative construction, the 355 really was a guitar fit for a King. Capable of sweet sounds and powerful, stinging tones, it also boasted a sophisticated feature that suited King's love for more 'vocal' tones. The six-way Varitone switch offered an array of different sounds over and above the Gibson norm, including the nasal 'honk' that's plainly audible on BB's 1969 release, *The Thrill Is Gone*. Although not officially released until 1959, some models did sneak out of the factory a few months earlier in 1958.

Gibson Lucille model

BB King had been playing ES-355s exclusively for almost 20 years when Gibson approached him in 1980 to create his own exclusive Lucille model. As well as personalised pearl inlays, BB requested Gibson remove the f-holes that, at high volume and in close proximity to an amp, can set up acoustic feedback or 'howl'. BB would often stuff his regular ES-355's f-holes with cloth to inhibit feedback, so this was a natural move. For many years he had also employed Schaller's TP-6 fine-tuning tailpiece and that, too, was added to the mix. The guitar is available in cherry, as well as BB's preferred ebony finish. In 2005 for BB's 80th birthday, Gibson built a run of 80th Birthday Lucilles, presenting the prototype to the guitarist as a special anniversary gift. The guitar was later stolen, but due to an unwitting but vigilant and honest purchaser, it later returned to its rightful and happy owner.



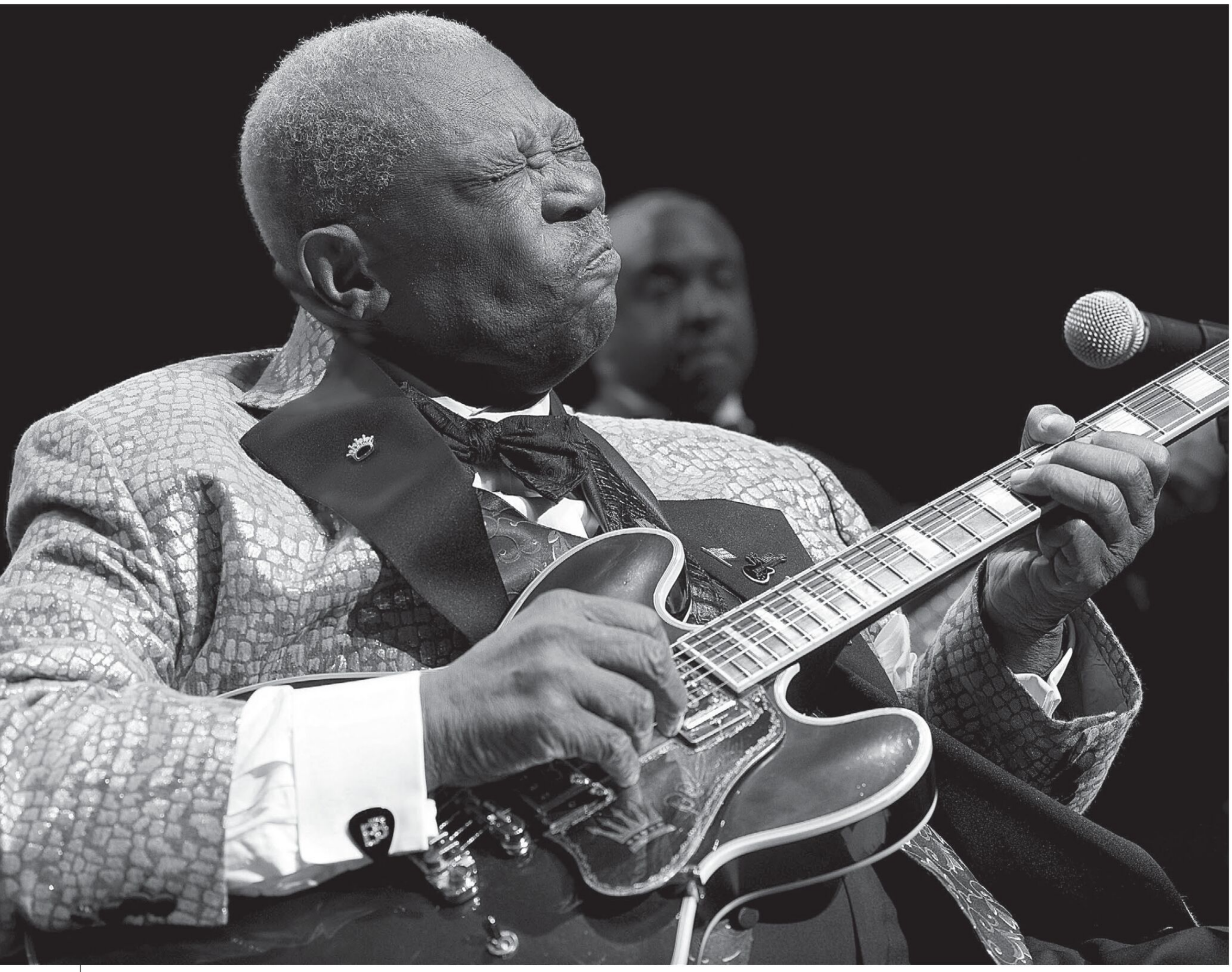






Epiphone Lucille

The US-built Gibson Lucille is a premium instrument with a premium price tag. But BB King has always said his music is for everyone, not just an exclusive few. So, Gibson's sister brand Epiphone now offers a very affordable but decidedly classy take on the original. Featuring a laminated maple body with glued-in maple neck, it boasts a bound rosewood fingerboard and multi-bound body and headstock. With stereo and mono outputs plus a six-way Varitone switch, it also comes with two Classic Alnico humbucking pickups and TP-6 fine-tuning tailpiece. The guitar also has 'Lucille' tastefully inlaid on the peghead, as well as three-a-side Grover tuners. All hardware is finished in gold.



Opening The BB Box

In this lesson, we focus on the legendary 'BB Box', which became his favourite area of the neck in later years and made him instantly recognisable

BB KING ranks alongside the giants of the mid 20th century – Lonnie Johnson, Robert Johnson, Sonny Boy, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bill Broonzy, Son House, Memphis Minnie, T-Bone Walker – with an influence that can be heard in the playing of virtually any current guitar player, in any style.

The piece that we've arranged here is all about the so-called 'BB box' – we have a raunchy blues in E, over which we play a solo entirely using this position. While he did indeed use this particular shape often, BB would be most unlikely to sit on it throughout an entire solo as we have here, but would rather move to other areas of the neck and use other shapes to inject even more interest.

To recap on the BB box: it's the area on the neck that broadly corresponds to minor pentatonic shape 3, and puts the root note on the second string, offering great first-finger vibrato potential of which BB took full advantage. Unlike shape 1 – where your first finger pivots off the root on the top string and the ♭3rd is the highest note available without bending (a tone bend, of course, gives you the 4th) – the fact that here the root is on the second string puts much higher intervals at your disposal. For instance, the 5th above (B in our key of E) is two frets up on the top string, and toggling between the two is a great sound. If you bend this note by a tone, you hit the 6th (C#); push it another semitone and you make the ♭7th. This is a typical BB sound, but one that's also adopted by Jimmy Page (*Whole Lotta Love*), Joe Walsh and others.

Since certain notes of E major pentatonic (E F# G# B D) sit just a semitone away from notes of E minor pentatonic (E G A B D), and various bends give BB his glorious major/minor ambiguity. Chord tones sit right under the fingers, too, making implying the IV or V chord with the minimum of movement easy.
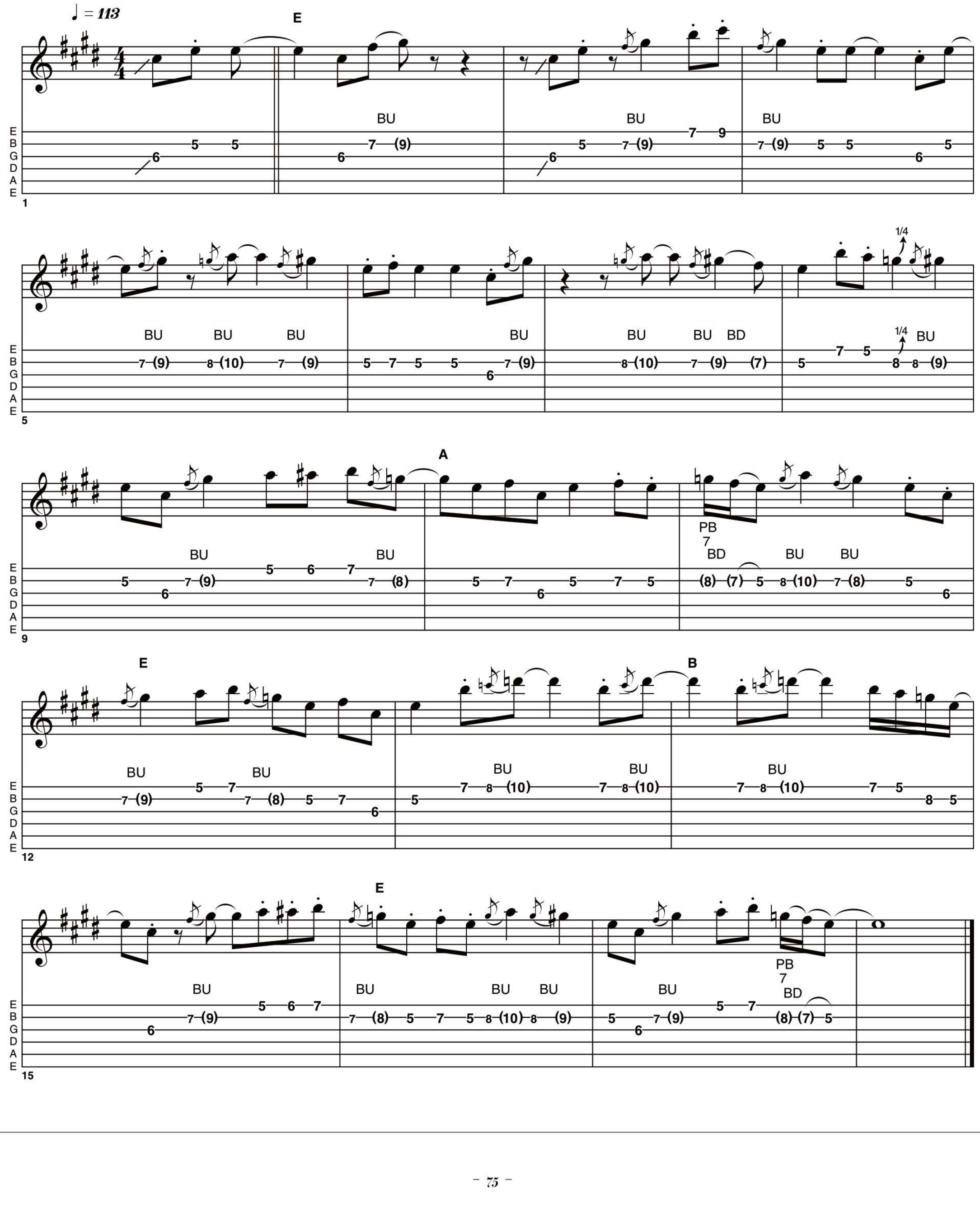
The whole business of restricting one's sonic palette is also worth mentioning here. BB King was known for milking a few notes for all they're worth, and indeed his style did become characterised by it. But King also took advantage of the fact that suddenly hitting a lick outside this shape gives a big lift to a solo. Check out a few 80s YouTube clips of the man himself and you'll see how effortlessly he does it.

And with that in mind, take note of the various bends, chord tones and so on in this solo, then have a go at devising something along similar lines. And why not see if you can inject extra interest by busting out of the box (Eric Clapton's favourite shape 4 is right next door, for instance), but come back 'home' to finish things off?

Example 1

THERE'S nothing too challenging here, but the string bends will require control. We didn't go for the 'fluttering' BB vibrato, but used what felt appropriate. King generally didn't add vibrato to string bends, but instead confined it to a first-finger wobble when returning to the root note at the end of a phrase. As with so many of these blues solos, there's a distinct question and answer feel to things, not an endless stream of notes. As hinted in the opening, the solo is designed to illustrate one particular shape, but there's still a lot to be had from these few frets. It's really worth experimenting with where the chord tones in each of the three chords actually are within this shape.

One really useful coincidence is that the second string bent up a tone at the 7th fret is the major 3rd of the I chord (E), but let down a semitone, it's the ♭7th of the IV chord (A). Another nice touch is the chromatic run from the 7th to the 6th to the 5th fret of the first string is the great-sounding 5th to ♭5th-4th move that's so useful in blues.





MARK KNOPFLER

INTERVIEW APRIL 2015

Mark Knopfler's covered a lot of miles since the days when he walked the 'Telegraph Road'. His new solo album, 'Tracker', is an essay in understated, eloquent playing – but it's the songs and the characters that inhabit them that linger in the mind long after the record has stopped turning. In a world-exclusive guitar interview, we join Mark at his London studio to talk about everything from songcraft to slide technique, amps and old archtops, and learn why a '58 Les Paul Standard is something you can rely on in life…

WORDS **JAMIE DICKSON** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

It's a cold, bright morning at British Grove, Mark Knopfler's big, airy studio in West London. Outside, traffic angrily inches forward on a choked arterial road, but inside it's a haven of hospitable calm as we wait for the man himself to arrive. In the corner stands a '58 Les Paul Standard – a real one – with a plain top and a sherry-red tint still lingering in the Sunburst. There's a fireplace and a long oak table; yards of neatly varnished floorboards. It's all very low-key, but, undeniably, the haunt of a guy who's sold one or two records in his time.

And, without any fanfare, here he is, greeting us with a handshake and a steady, cautiously friendly gaze. He's just come from a Pilates session, a discipline that he says he gets a lot of benefit from, which quickly leads us on to a discussion of how muscle tension can stifle your playing.

"I'm still learning to relax my left arm, when I'm playing," he says. "The more you can learn to relax that left arm, the more fluid you'll be. If you tense up, you're just gonna slow down. And for a long time I played that way – and I used to get pain all down my forearm. I used to play *Sultans*... like that a lot. It's just habit. Getting the urgency into the playing gets translated into tension, unfortunately. But you've got to stop associating emotion with tension."

Tension. The Zen-like calm of British Grove studios seems calculated to reduce it to a background hum, like the traffic, and leave Knopfler free to be creative in his own time, on his own terms. The colossal success of Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* album in 1987, which sold 30 million copies, must have been giddying, even troubling, for a musician who today prefers to go unrecognised in the street. It sold and sold, and as it did Knopfler's thoughtful writing and richly melodic playing were reduced, by the shorthand of fame, to thumbnail icons in the popular imagination: the headband; the intro riff from *Money For Nothing*; the shining '37 National Style O guitar on the album's cover that looked as if it was being thrown into heaven by an unseen hand.

Nearly 30 years on, Knopfler is about to release his ninth solo album, *Tracker*. Tender and downbeat, the songs are a portrait gallery of people and places: odd nooks and corners of life as it's lived by deckhands and writers, penniless musicians and Bentley-driving chancers. With far less fanfare than in the Straits years, his solo albums have sold in their millions and, arguably, it's Knopfler's preference for a (relatively) down-to-earth lifestyle that means his music still connects. He's got the same eye for character that made the London nightclub life in *Sultans Of Swing* come to smoky,

"You get to that kind of age and you have to follow something through to finish it. You're not necessarily sure of what you're going after. Some sort of instinct leads you to the songs. And then you have to follow them down and finish them"

MARK KNOPFLER

jostling life, but the writing on *Tracker* seems to have acquired, with the years, extra patina and depth like the checked lacquer of an old guitar.

"You could see it in terms of time – tracking time," Knopfler says of the album's title. "You get to that kind of age and you have to follow something through to finish it. You're not necessarily sure of what it is that you're going after. But some sort of instinct leads you to the songs. And then you have to follow them down and finish them. So, you're the one that brings the stuff back, who's tracked it down and got it."

Character Forming

The album – co-produced by former Dire Straits keyboardist Guy Fletcher – features top-drawer performances from an exceptional band, and from Knopfler himself, who sounds immersed in its sparse but warm soundscapes. When he takes a lead, it's generally just a few judicious notes, perfectly placed.

"One of the things you find out over time is that if you're choosing between a few different passes over a song, you learn to go for the one with fewer notes," he observes. "It usually says more."

Likewise, the subjects of the songs themselves – ranging from the Newcastle poet Basil Bunting to the broke-but-happy London musicians of *Laughs And Jokes And Drinks And Smokes* – are all brought to life with understated skill.

"The characters that I'm interested in are usually not sorry for themselves," he explains. "If you're talking about a retired navvy, or you're talking about a young man who works on a barge who's alone at Christmas time in a strange city, they're not sorry for themselves. You've just got to watch for being sentimental about it. You're interested in the truth."

Does he reject a lot of songs? Or just turn material over in his mind until he finds a way to make it work?

"I certainly have a lot of songs that take their time putting their hand up. So, what I'll do is I'll just look at them every now and again. Just drop in on them, you know? And see if I can make them happen. Or see if anything can happen. And sometimes something does and sometimes it doesn't.

"And I'm not sure if it's part of the enjoyment of it, but it's the mystery of it that some things just happen in their own time. And they manage to stand up and go out into the light of day. But I don't worry too much if a song isn't wanting to leave home just yet. I suppose what I ought to do is just delete the damn thing, but I don't [laughs]."

Tracking Tracker

The album abounds not only in memorable characters, but timbres, too. Most of the amplified sounds live in that just-breaking-up zone in which all the clarity of clean tone is retained, but with a cushion of extra warmth and grit to lend character to each phrase, notably on standout track *Basil*. It's a tone some will know from the intro to *Brothers In Arms*, almost a signature sound for Knopfler. What amps did he turn to for the sessions?

"There were various amps. With something like that, you're talking about the Les Paul through something like the Reinhardt Talyn, which is a great amp that Bob Reinhardt built for me. Also Ken Fischer, who built the Trainwreck amps, made me a Komet before he passed away, a fantastic thing that he christened 'Linda' when he built it. And I think he wasn't 100 per cent happy with the way Komets then went on to be. But this one was personally built by him. It's extraordinarily loud, so for stage you'd have to find a way of calming it down. Because it's just such a beast. But in the studio, of course, you can just let her rip. That's a fantastic-sounding amp.

"And for clean tones I've been using the Tone King Imperial a lot. And I use the rhythm channel for that, not the lead channel. I always go into the rhythm channel to play lead on it. It's very, very clear. For that kind of sound, like the one I use on *Beryl*, with a Stratocaster, it was always going to be a toss-up between the Tone King and my old brown Tolex-covered Vibrolux.

"But on the road, I was playing slide through the Tone King as well – it's great. And when I was playing with Bob [Dylan], on his sets, I would just go straight into the little Tone King. It's a killer amp. And Mark Bartel has made a new one [the Mk II version], which I tried yesterday and it's great – it's right up there with my old one, I'd say. So, that will be coming on the road with me. And I suppose Richard [Bennett, guitarist in Knopfler's band] will have one, too, because they're terrific amps."

Slide Rules

Another striking feature of the album is how much slide playing there is. It's something Knopfler says he's enjoying more and more with time, adding that he made a few minor breakthroughs in his slide technique during *Tracker*'s recording sessions.

"I've been using the white ['64] Strat for slide," he explains. It's just been beautiful to play, I realised I could fret notes a little bit in front of the slide, too. And that sort of just fell into place. I never thought I'd be able to do that."



ABOVE "I tend to play the old Martin D-18 quite a lot, which a friend very generously gave me," Mark says of his go-to acoustic. "It's a mid-30s Martin with a very dry, slate-y kind of sound. Beautiful guitar. But I've also been playing two other acoustics at home, which are both beautiful guitars, just to get them played in a little bit. One of them is a Froggy Bottom parlour guitar, which is a beautiful thing that was given to me by somebody very generous, and the other one is a Stefan Sobell flat-top guitar. It's a beautiful guitar and you're conscious that, to be worthy of a thing like that, you've got to play it. So, I pick that up and try and play it a little bit. It's like getting a guitar from John Monteleone or something. You've got to play it in to try to bring it on, which is what I'll try to do every now and again. But they're all so beautiful"

Despite his association with vintage Stratocasters, Knopfler says he doesn't make a fetish of period-correct details and is content if he can play a decent Strat that has a few of his preferred features.

"I think I get on better with rosewood fingerboards. Although having said that, I like heavy strings on my old '54: I hit them with a pick for tone and use the tremolo arm for that style of playing. But for most of the ordinary stuff I don't. I think they're all much of a muchness really. I don't think it matters too much. Early 60s ones are great, and I don't think they've ever got much better than that. I think my signature Strats have been good and that's what I use. It was just a good combination of the bits they were making – because they don't incorporate anything particularly special."

Does he play electric slide in standard tuning?

"No, never – I'd like to and I ought to really get on with it. Because I love the possibilities of that. But normally it's either the open G tuning or an E tuning. But playing slide in normal tuning is something that I'm really looking forward to getting into. But I'm always doing something else [laughs]."

It's gratifying to hear that one of the world's best guitarists can't, like most of us, find enough time in the day to advance his technique as much as he'd like – although you'd have to say he seems to have muddled by okay, so far.

"The slides I use are a glass composite material," he continues. "But they're the best ones I've ever used. And I had a beautiful one that I dropped and smashed, but the other ones that they've replaced them with are just about as good. My favourite ones ever so slightly taper; the hole is slightly offset, so you can have different thicknesses. But I never really bother about that too much, I just put it on and play it.

"And the Coricidin bottle slides, I've tried them and they're good, too, but they're a little bit lighter. Originally, I started with a lot of steel and brass and my dad, bless him, he made me some from brass tubing. He made me my first slides. And so, every now and again, yeah, a piece of steel will do it – but I think I prefer these ones that this company Diamond Bottlenecks makes."

Archtop Aficionado

Touching on slide, we ask whether the well-known '37 National Style O Resonator that has been with Knopfler ever since his formative days playing blues with Steve Phillips in Leeds made it onto the new album.

"It nearly always does. I don't know whether it did this time, but I tell you what has, on a couple of the songs, is my mid-30s D'Angelico, and that's just been a fantastic guitar to record with. It's an amazing thing, sound-wise. But, yeah, the National would always get on things. Sometimes, it just occupies that ground between a piano and a guitar.

"But I love using archtop guitars on records, too. And, in fact, I picked the D'Angelico on a song called *Silver Eagle* and it sounds like a flat-top with a pick on it – but it's just that D'Angelico speaking. And on *River Towns* I'd be strumming that, too. But, yeah, those mid-30s ones are just unstoppable. As good as anything can be."

"One of the things you find out over time is that if you're choosing between a few different passes over a song, you learn to go for the one with fewer notes. It usually says more"

MARK KNOPFLER

His praise for archtops, often under-used in a purely acoustic role, stems partly from his admiration for master luthiers in the grand old Italian archtop-building tradition, such as New Yorker John Monteleone, whose patient skills Knopfler paid tribute to in the song *Monteleone* from the 2009 album *Get Lucky*. Today, Knopfler worries that the craft is so exacting that it may die out for want of fresh blood.

"It's a shame. John Monteleone is such a brilliant builder, but he doesn't have an apprentice. Because D'Angelico used D'Aquisto as his apprentice," Knopfler explains, speaking of the two most celebrated makers in archtop history. "D'Aquisto would do repairs when D'Angelico didn't want to be bothered with them, when he wanted to be getting on with his own ideas instead. And so the same thing happened with D'Aquisto: when he wanted to get on with his own ideas, he gave his repairs to John – Monteleone being the only one he could trust to do them properly, to his standards.

"And I was asking John about that. I said, 'Who's your apprentice?' Never found him. And I was also asking [luthier] Stefan Sobell about that in Northumberland a couple of years back. There was a young guy making a guitar in Stefan's workshop, and I said, 'Is this your apprentice?' and he said 'Oh, no – he's a perfectly nice young man. But no, I've never been able to find anybody.' And I think this is the story of modern times: when you get somebody of that level of excellence, they can't find the youngsters capable of being disciplined up to that level."

Song Makers

You can hear in Knopfler's strong performances with these archtops an echo of his early days playing trad-blues on unyielding acoustics in pubs of the North. Knopfler's a naturally left-handed musician who grew up playing the guitar right-handed, so that in itself has shaped his style to a degree, meaning he's not daunted by vintage guitars that require some old-fashioned elbow grease.

"Oh yeah, there's no question that playing cheap acoustics and Nationals certainly played its part," he says. "Because they'd usually be strung up with stair rods. You need to get some strength into your fingers. When I was little, I was [miming] playing left-handed guitar with a tennis racquet and my older sister, Ruth, turned it round and made me play the tennis racquet the other way instead. But the thing that really clinched it was some unsuccessful violin lessons – although they were successful in that they got me playing the guitar right-handed. That can help you develop a style where you have a strong left hand. I find that I can get vibrato on three strings at once, that sort of stuff."

The reputation Knopfler won as a guitar hero in the classic mould, during the Straits years, will be how some always think of him. But Knopfler says that he's closer to the plain acoustic songcraft of his early days than ever.

"I think with me there's two sides to it. Most of the time I just use the guitar as something to help the songwriting," he explains. "It tends to be not particularly demanding. But every now and again, if I'm sitting down and trying to learn something, moving it forward a little bit, you realise the depth of the thing – but that is more to do with being a musician.

"It's a whole different thing being a musician from being a 'guitar player'. I think if I'd had to make a living with the guitar as a guitar player, I think I'd have spent a lot more time trying to achieve a rounded position with it, where I could do more with it. But there was a spell back there – a long time ago now – where I realised I had to. I had to improve the vocabulary, just because of the kinds of things that I was doing.

"And when you go into more sophisticated chordal stuff, you've got to make yourself learn all that stuff. Just like you did when you were a teenager. And then you can start to put more complex constructions together, and, in my case, I just became used to the sound of those things. Almost like learning a language and starting to use longer words, so that a lot of their mystique and the impossibility of it, this foreign language... you start to slowly put it together a little better."

Core Values

The point Knopfler makes about the distinction between being a musician and a guitar player is an interesting one. In common-sense terms, to be a guitarist is, by default, to also be a musician. But on another level, what instrument someone chooses is not as important as the prime virtues of musicality that exist in all of us to a greater or lesser degree: being able to listen sensitively, to play only what's appropriate, to sound notes that have a magical quality.

He's generous with his praise for the musicians who contributed to *Tracker*, and says they all possess that high degree of musicality, including the extraordinary Canadian singer Ruth Moody with whom he duets on the album's closing track, *Wherever I Go*.

"It's always a joy to have great players around you," he adds. "And they let me get away with murder. So, if I make a mistake somewhere, the band will never comment on it. And I said that to Richard one time: I said, 'I'm sorry about the greeny' and he said, 'The singer is always right!' So, they let me get away with it," he concludes, with a smile. G

SULTAN OF STRINGS

With the help of Mark's long-time guitar tech, Glenn Saggers, we tour Knopfler's rig – from his Strats and his custom-made Pensa Blue, to his gorgeous late-50s Les Pauls – and find out how his guitars are set up for that unmistakable signature sound

Tech Insider

Guitar tech Glenn Saggers on fettling Mark Knopfler's guitars for studio and stage

"The setup of individual guitars depends on what we're doing," explains Glenn, who's been Mark Knopfler's tech for nearly 20 years. "If he's a semitone down, for example, we go up a gauge on the strings, or half a set depending how it is. Basically, all the acoustics are 0.012 gauge, the Nationals are 0.013, because they're tuned down, and everything else is 0.010 gauge in standard tuning. But that's about it really – specific guitars for specific jobs. Mark decides he wants something a certain way and he relays it to me. Ultimately, he makes the decisions about what sounds best. It's always song-driven.

"The guitars generally don't need much maintenance while they're in the studio, because the building's so well designed. The only thing that really needs doing from time to time, because we also use these live, is that we have to clear out the pots. We very rarely have to tweak anything. Obviously, if there's an alternate tuning or what have you, we might have to relax the truss rod or whatever every now and again. But that's about it. When we're out on the road, it's a different thing because it's a different building every day.

"In terms of Strats, he mainly uses his signature model for everything that's not slide-related. Then we have a '64 Strat that's set up specifically for a couple of [open-tuning] songs he does. Those are the only two Strats we take out, plus the Pensas [see right], a couple of Groshes and the Les Paul.

"The resonators are really quite solid – they don't cause you any problems. Unless the actual cone collapses, which is pretty rare. But we hardly have any problems with the Les Paul. I don't want to tempt fate, though! The tuning pegs are new because the old ones were about to disintegrate, so we took those off and replaced them. We still have them, they're just not on the guitar.

"This Les Paul has a lot of output; the neck pickup has a lot of output as well. More so than any other Les Paul that I've had to deal with. But this one is a bit of a beast. And so is the Grosh guitar, the ElectraJet. Mark has two. And the main white one, that has the Fralins in it, just like the Pensa. That has got a lot of output to it, too. But again, because live they run in-ear systems, it doesn't have to be deafening."

"'It's too late for that," chimes in Knopfler's manager, Paul Crockford, dryly.



ABOVE The Pensa 'Blue' is the latest guitar to be made for Mark by Rudy Pensa, who owns the famous New York guitar emporium Rudy's Music. Mark calls the Pensa Blue, which features a maple cap on a conventional S-type body, a "mighty, mighty guitar", which is in regular studio and live use. The first instrument of this type, dubbed the Pensa-Suhr MK-1, was made for Mark in 1980 as a means of combining the power of a Les Paul with the comfort and playability of a Strat. This example is much more recent, as Knopfler's tech Glenn Saggers explains:

"Rudy has a dating system that he inscribes on the back [of the neckplate]. This one's from 14 December 2011. This is one of the best, although there's been a few over the years."







Mark owns two golden-era Les Paul Standards including the '58 pictured here. "I've got a beautiful '59 that I also like and I play that '58 a lot. I've also got a '59 Reissue that's a really great guitar – so they can get pretty close. But I don't know what it is about Les Pauls from that era, but, on stage, I've never had to touch a single tuner on the '58. Ever. It's had plenty of time to settle"

Brother In Arms

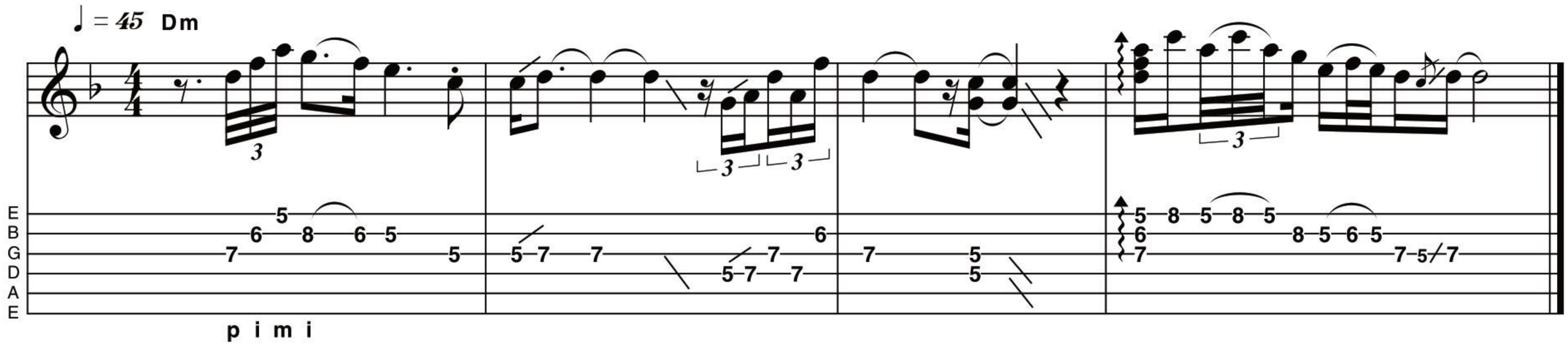
Get some of the Sultan's secrets under your fingers (not your pick!) with this four-lick lesson on the stellar guitar style of Mark Knopfler

NOT MANY guitarists are instantly recognisable from just a few notes; we usually need to hear the context of a song or signature riff. But along with such luminaries as Brian May and Hank Marvin, even non-guitarists can instantly identify Mark Knopfler's playing from just one bubbling filigree of *Sultans Of Swing*.

A major part of this is his determination to forge his own musical style. Most of the Dire Straits albums, for example, come from an era of flash rock solos, whammy bars and meaty distortion, so Knopfler's fingerpicked clean tones and modest approach to solos stood in stark contrast to the norm. These examples cover a few elements of Knopfler's playing. For a start, put down your pick and get used to the feel of those strings under your fingers. Mark uses his thumb and first two fingers, unusually anchoring his other two fingers below the strings. He's used loads of guitar tones over the years, but here we've used the classic old 'in-between' pickup settings on a Strat.

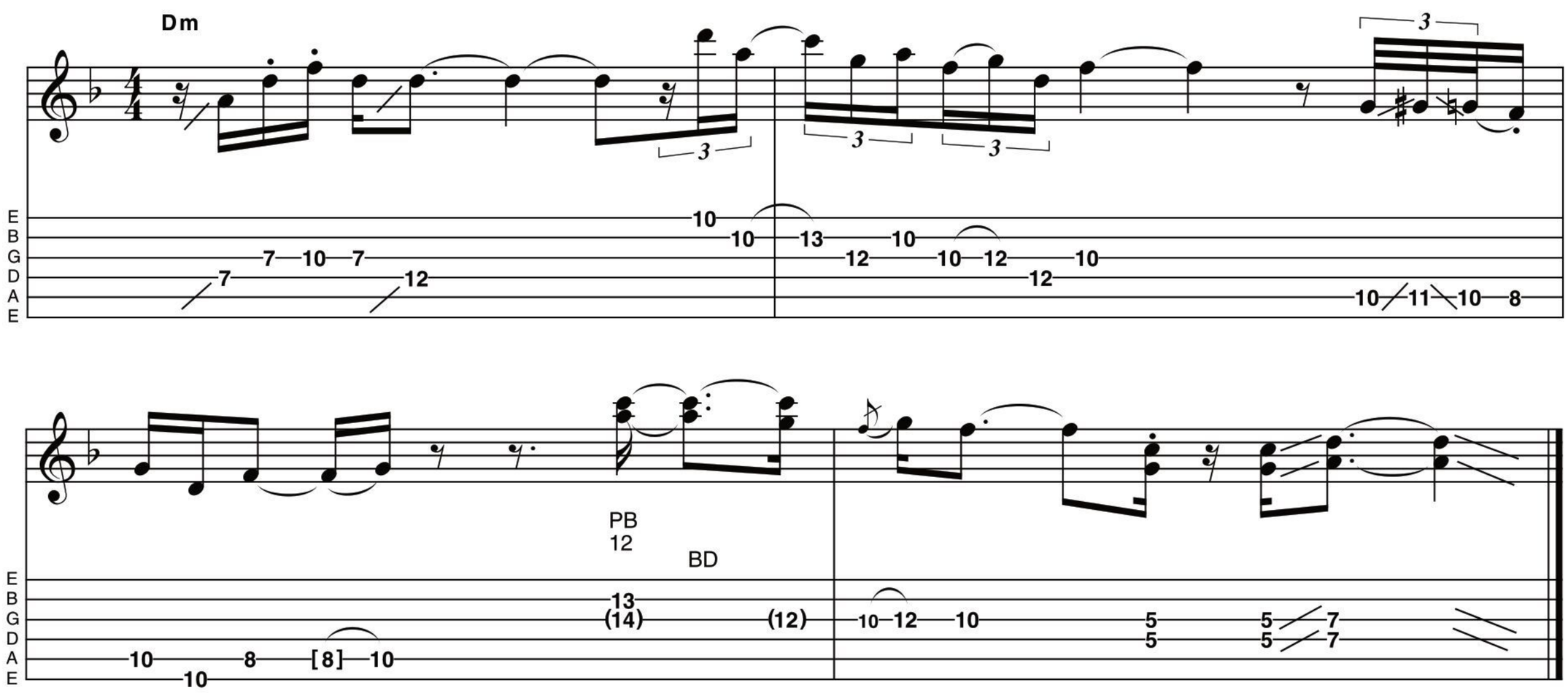
Example 1

WE'LL start slowly. Knopfler's crisp 'in-between' Strat tones lend themselves to spacious soundscapes, and you can find plenty of those in the Dire Straits back catalogue. You may find it easier to count in half-beats here, as the tempo is pretty slow.



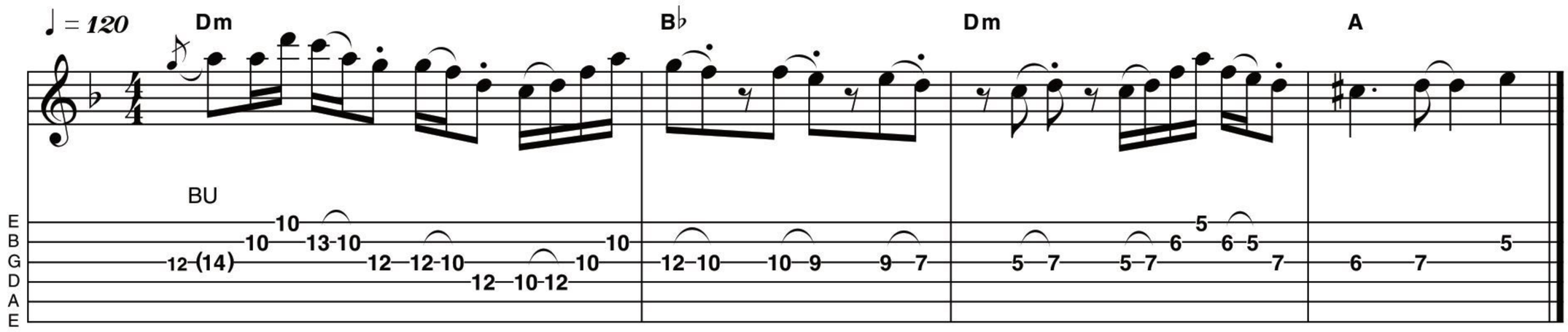
Example 2

HERE'S another take. Although Mark has a strong connection with country music, there's lots of blues in his playing. These first two examples are primarily built from D minor pentatonic (D F G A C) with the addition of the 2nd (E) and the bluesy flat 5th (A♭). And hey, put down that plectrum and stop cheating!
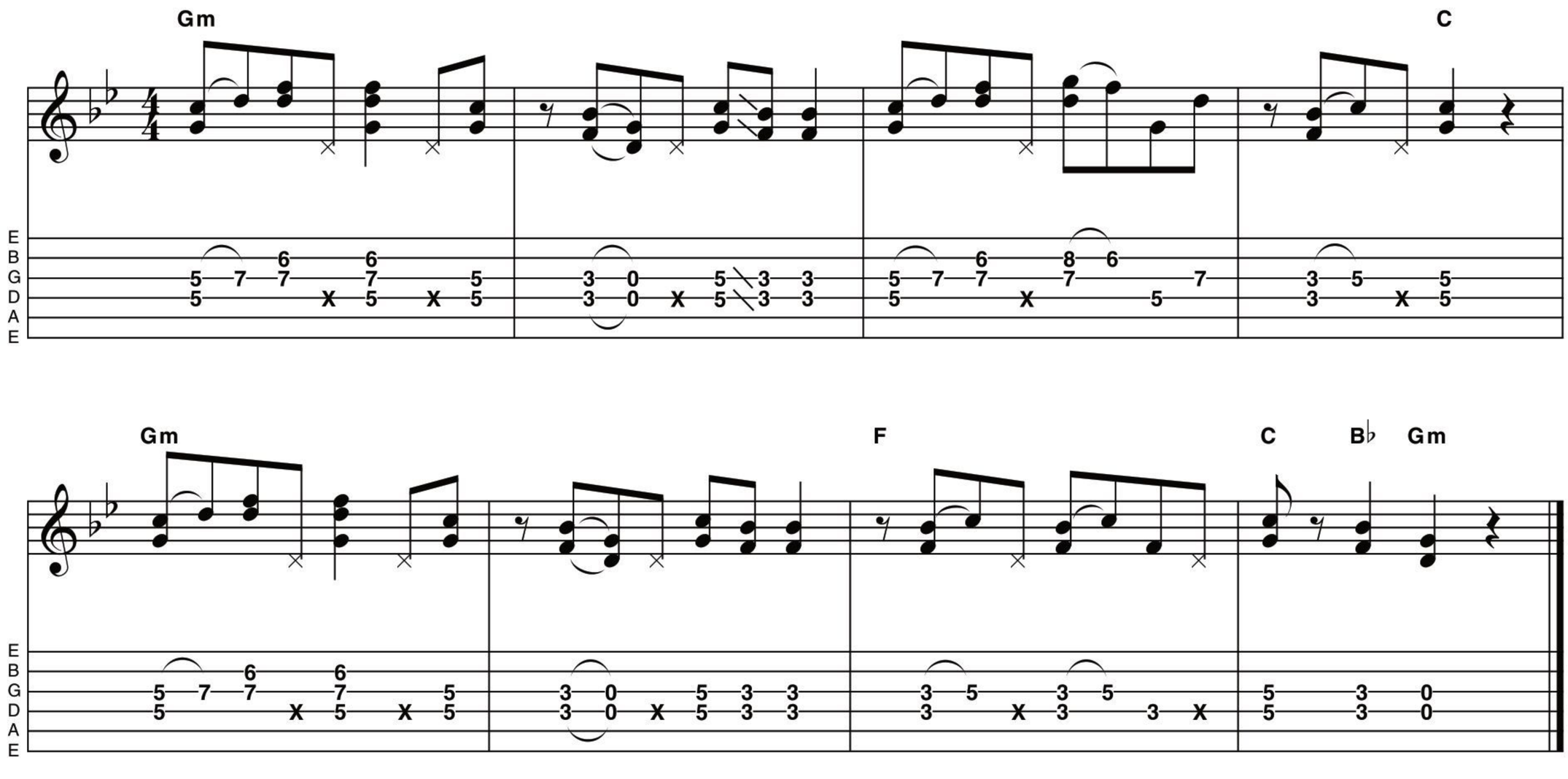


Example 3

BEGINNERS often have trouble playing fills over the verse part (Dm-C-B♭-A) of *Sultans Of Swing*. It's mostly D Aeolian (D E F G A B♭ C) or minor pentatonic, but the C note clashes with the C# in the A chord. The solution: a temporary swap, resulting in D harmonic minor (D E F G A B♭ C#), a bit like this...



Example 4

IT'S not all about clean tones, though. Knopfler used a Les Paul Junior with overdrive and lots of midrange to create an iconic guitar sound on *Money For Nothing*. Like a cross between Billy Gibbons and Ry Cooder, it's all about using partial chords (especially root-5th diads) and notes from the minor pentatonic (G minor, in this case: G B♭ C D F).





HANK MARVIN

INTERVIEW JUNE 2017

Hank Marvin has influenced the greatest guitarists of all time, so with a new album announced earlier this year, who better to quiz their hero on his playing, influences and gear than the guitarists themselves?

WORDS **NEVILLE MARTEN**

Hank Marvin's latest album, *Without A Word*, is one of the best of his 16 solo releases so far. Co-produced by Hank with son Ben, it brims with beautifully played instrumental versions of some of the ex-Shadow's favourite melodies. Most feature Ben and Hank's Gypsy jazz cohort Gary Taylor on acoustic rhythm guitars, with a production that's modern, crisp and instantly pleasing.

Hank is on top form, bringing every nuance of his envious melodic style to bear, with guitar tones both familiar and surprising. You don't expect to hear him say, "Yes, we put the Tube Screamer on for that one," but these days the Twangmeister is all for a bit of sonic change. "It's adding another tone colour to the music," he says. "I've found that sometimes when I get to some of the solos on numbers I've been doing since the early 90s, to play it with my normal 'clean' sound leaves something wanting. If I crank the amp a little, I get a bit more sustain and can do a little more with it. More voice-like, if you like. For this album, I was flicking over to the neck pickup and cranking the amp for the solos, just enough to make it sing. *On Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, that's a very nasty crunch, but it did seem to suit the number. It's like, 'Wow, I've suddenly got a Tom Jones voice here.'"

That's not to say there's not plenty of Hank's delicious 'plummy' clean tones. But this time he wanted to get more experimental, with several tracks featuring pickup changes, some of Hank's beloved Gypsy jazz influence and even some tasty bluesy licks. Blues licks? Oh yes, Hank loves blues guitarists, too. "A lot of them," he affirms. "One of the first guys I heard playing electric blues, funnily enough, was Eric Clapton with the Blues Breakers. Then Peter Green, very tasty player. Suddenly, I was aware of the original American blues players like BB King, Albert King, Freddie King. Of course, you had the new wave come along – Robert Cray, and Stevie Ray Vaughan was wonderful. I love to hear guys who can not only play with feel and dynamics, but have some technique to back it up; it means they're not just playing the same basic licks over and over again. Gary Moore, for example, was an outstanding blues-rock player. Robben Ford, I like his stuff as well."

Hank talks us through a selection of album tracks throughout this feature, but since our first interview with the great man back in '95 (with this self-same writer), we've asked and he's answered every conceivable question. So... we put the feelers out to some fine players who admit to a bit of Shads in their own musical DNA, to ask some for us.

Six-string luminaries Brian May, Peter Frampton, Steve(s) Howe, Hackett and Lukather, Bill Nelson, Dave Davies, Guthrie Govan, Phil(s) Manzanera and Hilborne, Martin Taylor, Darrel Higham, Carl Verheyen, Marty Wilde, Andy Powell, Gordon Giltrap, John Jorgenson and Richard Hawley didn't wait a second getting back to us. Hank has answered their questions with his usual blend of humour, honesty and humility, so pick up that Red Strat, sit back and read on...

Brian May asks:

As you know, I've been inspired by The Shadows all my life. The very first track on your very first album was called *Shadoogie*, and on the face of it, it was a rendition of a traditional boogie 12-bar blues. Our dear, departed friend Bert Weedon played a simple version called *Guitar Boogie Shuffle*. But your track is beyond astounding. It's different from anything that had gone before... almost a declaration that The Shadows were in a different league of creativity and excitement – a new universe. The track opens with an original build-up on the B chord, and then the main riff kicks in and within seconds we are blown away. The riff is so complex and yet flows off your fingers apparently so effortlessly and so locked

"In the 60s,] we recorded 12 tracks in two days, in four sessions… There was the adrenaline rush, a certain amount of nerves – and that was the album"

HANK MARVIN

in. The whole band is glued as if you'd played this already a thousand times before recording it. The production is immense, your massive clang on the lead guitar setting a benchmark that's never been equalled. The drums are huge and enveloping, the bass is thunderous, and the rhythm guitar (as Bruce [Welch] always was and is) immaculate. The whole thing sounds so incredibly evolved and steams through like a juggernaut. HOW DID YOU GUYS DO THAT? How did you become so flawlessly epic so fast? What inspired you? Cheers, Hank. Honoured to know you.

Hank Marvin replies:

Hi Brian. The thing is, in those days it was very different from recording now. We all played together, live, and the expectation of EMI Records was three sides in a three-hour session. So we recorded 12 tracks in two days, in four sessions. And that was the album. So you just played it: there was the adrenaline rush, a certain amount of nerves – the red light is on, and we all know about that one – and you play. You just hope you can play as an individual well enough not to let your colleagues down, that as an ensemble you can play well enough so it sounds as if you're all in the same ballpark, as regards timing, feel and everything. Naturally, we'd done our arrangements, but that was it – you just played it and all those factors come to the fore and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. And when Norrie [Paramor, producer] was, 'Oh that's great guys, thanks,' we'd go, 'Phew.' It was relief – we've done it. None of us knew it would have such an impact on a young Brian May. But I'm glad it did, because you inspire me with your playing.

Peter Frampton asks:

I was doing a session for Cliff recently in Nashville and he told me the story of the original Fender Strat. He said you ordered a sunburst one, like Buddy Holly's, but how the famous red one arrived instead. He said Bruce has that one now. Is there a possibility you might play that one again? I used to draw it during maths class!

Hank replies:

Hi Peter. Actually, we didn't order a sunburst one…

JAKE ROTHAM DEZO HOFFMANN/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK



As Hank's career has evolved, so has his experimentation with different "tone colours" – but the Red Strat lives on





Hank Marvin performs live on stage with his Burns Marvin guitar in 1970, shortly before its theft

"Elvis Presley, Scotty Moore, Cliff Gallup, Buddy Holly, James Burton, Chuck Berry… They were the guys that I really got excited by; it wasn't jazz, it wasn't dance music – it had a twangy sound"

HANK MARVIN

we called it Flamingo Pink, but the guy said it was Fiesta Red. So we ordered that, to be different. Bruce has the guitar now. It was a lovely guitar, and still is. But as regards ever playing it again, probably not; I'm very happy with my signature models. It meant a great deal to me – because of the whammy bar, I developed a certain style – and obviously the sound it produced, coupled with the Vox amp and the echo, was a new sort of sound. So that played a huge part in my career.

Marty Wilde asks:

You played on so many of Cliff's great records – which guitar solo gave you the greatest satisfaction?'

Hank replies:

Hi Marty! There's a question. One solo that has become almost an integral part of the song is the one on *Living Doll*. It's not a rock 'n' roll solo, but it was absolutely spontaneous. Again, fear and adrenaline played a huge part. Also, it wasn't played on a Strat. A guy that we used to know down the Two Eyes had gone to France to play with Johnny Hallyday, and he came back over to London, came to Abbey Road and we had a bit of a natter: 'Oh, we're doing a session, blah, blah, blah.' And he had this big guitar case with this lovely white archtop guitar that was a copy of a Gretsch White Falcon. I was still using my little Antoria. He said, 'Have a play.' By this time, we were working on *Living Doll* and I found, purely by chance, that if I pressed down on the tailpiece I could give it a sort of vibrato effect. So I said, 'Can I borrow this guitar for *Living Doll*?' He said, 'Yes.' The solo came along and I just played this doublestopped solo and everyone said, 'That's great.' At the end of the tune, I did the 6th chord and I used the tailpiece to give a whammy bar effect. So while it might not be the most rock 'n' roll solo, it gives me a lot of pleasure because it felt very musical. And there were more than three chords in it!

Bill Nelson asks:

Hank, it has been great to be able to ask you, after so many years of being a fan, about a concert you and The Shadows did so many years ago at a cinema in Wakefield in Yorkshire, the town of my birth. It was a package show with Lord Rockingham's XI and other acts on the bill in the early 60s. Myself and a school pal were in the early stages of playing guitar. When The Shadows were introduced and the lights went down, the curtains parted in the darkness and the audience could glimpse the glowing lights of the band's Vox AC30s, set on chrome stands with The Shadows logo in silver on the speaker cloth.

Then a spotlight hit you as the band erupted into *Shazam*, you all sporting midnight blue mohair suits and red Fenders. The sound was thrilling. It was a moment that literally changed my life forever. I can't begin to describe how amazing it sounded.

But after all these years, thinking about *Shazam*, I wonder how much impact Duane Eddy's music had on yours at the time, despite the differences in style. Were you a fan of Duane's?

Hank replies:

Hi Bill. Thank you! Yes, I was a fan of Duane Eddy's. His early records had a wonderful sound. *Rebel Rouser* – brilliant! *Shazam* – great piece of music that worked perfectly for us as a guitar band. And a very nice guy, too; I had the pleasure of doing a track with him on an album I did in 1991. We did a version of *Pipeline* together: he did the low parts and I did the high bits. What I really liked was that beautiful rich sound he got from that tremolo on the amp – very moody and full of character. So yes, I was a fan of Duane's, very much so, but I wouldn't I ever consciously have tried to copy him.

Andy Powell, Wishbone Ash asks:

Did you use tapewound strings in the very early days? Your sound had twang, but there was also a 'plunk' to it. Also, did you use reverb for live performances as well as echo? How about when in the studio?

Hank replies:

Hi Andy. I never used tapewound strings – hated the sound of them. The reason that the guitar would have a bit of a 'plunk' is because the strings were a bit dead. When we were young struggling musicians, you only changed a string when it broke so the strings would be on for quite a while so they lost that brightness and we'd end up with a slightly deader sound. Hey! Maybe that is part of the secret [laughs]! On stage in the early days, [it was] only the Meazzi echo box, then I went on to a Binson, and then in the 70s the Roland Space Echo.

As regards to reverb in the studio, I have an idea that they didn't put reverb on my guitar because the echo was so prominent.

Phil Manzanera, Roxy Music asks:

Growing up in South America in the late 50s/early 60s, your records were one of the few possible to listen to, they really inspired me. Was tuning ever a problem? Or do you have perfect pitch, as your playing is always so precise and in tune?

Hank replies:

Hello Phil. Tuning could be a problem: we didn't have electronic tuners; you had a tuning fork or you'd to tune to the piano in the venue. We didn't have a tuning amp,

PHOTO BY ITV/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

"It was just great fun. The studio time had been booked and we were encouraged to go and indulge our musical fantasies irrespective of cost, so we did"

BRIAN MAY



so we tuned up acoustically. We hit the tuning fork to get an A, tuned one guitar, then if there was a bench in the room we'd lie the guitar down, put the guitar headstock on it to get slightly more volume, and we'd tune it acoustically, one guitar to the other, and the bass to that. Later, we got Vox to make us a small amplifier so at least you could hear your guitar. But still no electronic tuners till much later.

So I appreciate your thought that we sounded in tune. We tried to be, but I always had problems because the whammy bar caused the third string, sometimes the second, to go slightly sharp. I don't have that problem in modern times – the way my guitars are set up, I can be pretty vicious with that whammy bar and it will pretty much be in tune. But in those days I was constantly having to adjust particularly the third string at any performance.

Martin Taylor asks:

I really enjoy your playing with the Gypsy jazz group. How big was Django's influence in your early days? What did his music mean to you?

Hank replies:

Hi Martin. In the early days I hadn't heard of Django, but I did have a couple of experiences... One was Bruce and me coming home from a gig that we'd done with our skiffle group in a working man's club in the Newcastle area. Two guys accosted us and said, 'Oh, what do you guys do, you've got guitars?' 'We're in a skiffle group.' He said, 'Can I have a look at your guitar?' So he picked it up and he played a couple of things. I thought, 'That's pretty good.' I said, 'What is that?' He said, 'Django Reinhardt, mate.' I wasn't quite sure what that meant. So I asked around a bit: 'Does anyone know what Django Reinhardt means?' Someone said, 'Yes, he's a guitarist.' So I bought a Django LP and it sounded awful. It was so thin, there was no bottom-end, it was just like playing through a little tube or something. I later learned that the very early sessions that Django and Stéphane [Grappelli] did, the materials the record company used were recycled, which apparently made things sound pretty grim. I wasn't that impressed. Then years later I heard the Rosenberg Trio and I thought, 'Wow, that is fantastic.' So I started to revisit Django and I now have everything he ever recorded. There are some tracks where the vibrato is just sensational, and the way he bends notes and the feel and the runs. The guy has been a huge influence on so many people. But thinking about it, in some of the early stuff, like *Please Don't Tease* where I did a little bit of sweeping, and then I did octaves at the end of *Apache*, maybe you listen to something and don't realise you've retained the way to phrase something. So it could have had more effect on me than I realise, listening to that dodgy Django thing. But now I'm a huge fan – way ahead of his time.

Darrell Higham asks:

On the first three Cliff 45s, they use session musicians. Ernie Shear played lead guitar, but I'm pretty sure you were playing the live gigs with Cliff at that time. Who made the decision to have Cliff's live band back him on his records instead of the session guys?

Hank replies:

Hi Darrel. It was a combination of Cliff and Norrie. Cliff had recorded some sides before we met him – *Move It*, *Schoolboy Crush* then *High Class Baby*. We met up with Cliff at the end of September '58, just a few weeks after *Move It* was released. We did his first tour, then they released *High Class Baby*. Cliff had some more recording sessions coming up for *Livin' Lovin' Doll*, *Never Mind* and *Mean Streak*. Cliff said to Norrie, 'I want my band to play on the records.' Norrie was apprehensive, we were very young and inexperienced and obviously he wants to make good records and to a budget. So he compromised with Cliff. Norrie said, 'We'll do a version with Ernie playing and a version with Hank.' And on *Livin' Lovin' Doll* I did a lot of string bending – bizarrely on my Antoria, which had this banana-shaped action. Cliff came up to me surreptitiously and said, 'Hank, I think I sang better on your version than on Ernie's.' So we had a listen and Norrie was happy, so we were on the third single, *Livin' Lovin' Doll*, then *Never Mind*, *Mean Streak* and after that Norrie was happy just to use us. We got £7.10s session fee!

Steve Hackett asks:

I loved hearing your guitar as I was growing up. Which guitarists did you enjoy when you were starting out?

Hank replies:

Hello Steve. Guys like Leadbelly and Big Bill Broonzy were the first guys I really heard playing guitar. Then one guy who impressed me was Denny Wright, who played with Lonnie Donegan. I wouldn't say he influenced me, because he was playing a jazzy style with Lonnie. Then I started hearing Elvis Presley records, like *Heartbreak Hotel* and that first LP with *Mystery Train* and all those things with Scotty Moore; Cliff Gallup playing on things like *Be Bop A Lula*; Buddy Holly on the Crickets' stuff; James Burton on Ricky Nelson's records. The early Chuck Berry stuff was cool. They were the guys that I really got excited by; it wasn't jazz, it wasn't dance music – it had a twangy sound. Sometimes they were bending strings and I



The Shadows in the mid-60s (left to right): Brian Bennett, Bruce Welch, the late John Rostill and Hank Marvin

thought, 'Wow, I want to play like that.' I tried to copy their solos, not always very well, but at least it gave me a bit of a grounding in that style. They were the guys that strongly inspired me.

Steve Lukather asks:

First off, I love your playing and your style is one of a kind. My question is: when you're hungry, do you ever walk into catering at the gig and say, 'I'm a little 'me' ' (as in the Cockney rhyming slang – Hank Marvin: starvin')?

Hank replies:

Hi Steve! That is very funny. My answer to that is, now that you have mentioned it, I just might!

Carl Verheyen, Supertramp asks:

Hank, you have one of the most iconic Strat sounds of all time. In your early days of playing the Stratocaster, did you do much tweaking or adjusting of pickup heights, spring tension, tone knob to pickup delegation, or did you just take it out of the case and play it as is?

Hank replies:

Hello Carl. Excellent question! In the first instance, none of us knew anything about guitars as regards setting them up. So I basically took my first Stratocaster out of the case, plugged into an amp, played it and was horrified at how heavy the strings were. They felt much heavier than the strings on the Antoria. They came in with 13 to 56 and, oh man, they felt ridiculously heavy. The action wasn't that good either, it was a little high, but being a man I pursued it, I carried on, endured. And pickups? No, again, I left them where they were. I think we all thought, 'Well, they've been set up at the factory.' Later on I became more aware of things such as adjusting pickup height.

Tweaks with the wiring? Not until modern times, where I put a switch in to get the bridge and neck pickup on. And I didn't even know about lodging the switch in between the two. The only fiddling I did was when I found out that one of my strings was buzzing, I used to take a little bit of the string packet, fold if over a few times, cut it into a small bit, and put it in the nut slot to raise the string. That might be another reason why my string sounded like a 'plunk'!

Steve Howe, Yes asks:

During the transition from the Strat to the Burns, did you think the sound was as good? Was the guitar set up to imitate the sound of the Fender or did you develop an ear for its own qualities?

Hank replies:

Hi Steve. The sound of the Burns was a little different but close to the Strat. They had a good sound. Although I expected some subtle change I didn't really want it to be dramatic, so Jim Burns and his team endeavoured to get the sound as close as they could to a Strat given

PHOTO BY DEZO HOFFMANN/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK



The Shadows in 1975, ready for a televised performance

the different pickups [Rez-o-matic] and bridge construction.

Guthrie Govan asks:

The guitar instrumental was a relatively young art form when you recorded tracks like *Apache*. Who or what were your main musical reference points when you started to record tracks in which the guitar carried the main melody? Were you conscious of being an innovator, or was your motivation more of a desire to refine or perfect an existing genre? Also, your work has inspired countless players. When you hear someone like Jeff Beck, do you recognise elements of your own voice in his playing?

Hank replies:

Hi Guthrie. My reference points were the human voice, various jazz sax ballads with a strong melodic content and, of course, guitarists like Les Paul whom I heard on the radio before I even started playing. The human voice and saxes usually had a vibrato that I emulated on the Strat, helping the notes to be more expressive. I wasn't aware of being an innovator. My sound and style more or less happened by accident; the combination of the Strat, the AC15 amp, which soon became the AC30, and the echo box sort of pushed me in a direction, and who was I to argue? Jeff Beck is one of my favourite electric guitarists. He has wonderful feel and expression, but I don't know that I hear any of the elements of my musical voice in Jeff's playing. If there are, he's taken it to a different level. Some of the next generation of guitarists probably thought, 'If Hank can get away with it, so can I.'

John Jorgenson asks:

Knowing well your passion for Gypsy jazz, I've got a two-part question for you. What have been the most enjoyable parts and the most challenging aspects of delving in the world of Gypsy jazz, and how has your gift for melodic phrasing on electric guitar helped your playing Gypsy jazz on acoustic guitar?

Hank replies:

Hi John. Being blown away by the artistry of Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli was enjoyable and inspiring, as was learning some of the tunes they played with the Hot Club. Then came the challenge of trying to incorporate the Gypsy picking technique – very different from the technique most of us use, and now I use way more downstroking when I'm playing Gypsy jazz than I ever used to. It's a sort of semi Gypsy picking technique, but I will carry on regardless. Improvising over the chord changes was a big challenge; I still have a great deal of room for improvement, but I love it. I do seem to incline toward melodic improvisation, probably because I haven't got the blinding speed that some like yourself have. I think, too, that a feel for melodic phrasing is naturally a help in playing the heads in Gypsy jazz tunes.

I love your playing, John. I still remember that gig at the Samois jazz festival you played with your Gypsy jazz group. Outstanding, stole the show, and your version of Man Of Mystery still leaves me in a daze. Brilliant!

Phil Hilborne asks:

Do you find the transition between your Shadows-style work and Gypsy jazz difficult? Also, do you see any common threads between the two styles?

Hank replies:

Hi Phil. There was and is a difficulty in transitioning from the Strat to a Gypsy acoustic guitar (with a longer scale), playing what is usually swing jazz music that calls for improvisation. Playing the acoustic demands a different right-hand technique: you can't rest your wrist on the bridge unless damping, so the wrist is well arched away from the bridge. Rest stroking and lots of downstrokes are necessary and do produce more volume. All of the above clearly presents challenges, not the least is trying to play flowing, coherent improvisations that contain Gypsy jazz characteristics such as octaves, trills, ornamentation, injections of

chord stabs and so on. Common threads? Six strings and a pick!

Dave Davies asks:

I was a big fan of your work, but who did you listen to as a boy? I loved your tone, your swagger and your stage persona. I liked your glasses like Buddy Holly!

Hank replies:

Hi Dave. Thanks for your kind comments. I still have some of The Kinks recordings on vinyl. In fact, I did an instrumental version of *Waterloo Sunset* on my last CD [*Hank*]. I saw Big Bill Broonzy perform at the City Hall Newcastle, and Leadbelly, then Lonnie Donegan came on the scene and I got right into skiffle. After that, I heard Scotty Moore, Cliff Gallup with Gene Vincent, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and James Burton. The way they played and the sound they produced was so excitingly different from anything we'd heard in the UK. I wanted to try to play like them, but, as you know, I failed.

Gordon Giltrap asks:

Do you still play the Dave Hodson Selmer copy he made for you?

Hank replies:

Hi Gordon. Actually, I had three, but one was stolen! He made me an experimental copy with a shorter scale, same as a Strat. I still have that, but it doesn't sound as good as the other two. Recently, I've been using a 60s Favino and a Stefan Hahl: good tone and quite loud. *Guitar Man* had an original composition on it entitled *Song For David*. Gary Taylor and I wrote that after David Hodson's untimely death. We used the two Hodsons; it had a vaguely Gypsy Latin feel. That was before the theft. I pick it up and play it now and again. I try to give all my Gypsy guitars a loving hug once in a while.

Richard Hawley asks:

One of my favourite tracks of yours is *Scotch On The Socks*. How did you come to use the DeArmond pedal on that song and why you think it disappeared from being more widely used?

Hank replies:

Hello Richard. *Scotch On The Socks* was the result of a bit of fun one night at Abbey Road Studios. I got a grungy sound on my guitar and used the DeArmond pedal to simulate a trumpet 'Derby hat mute', wah-wah effect. It was a tone and volume pedal: swivel the pedal horizontally to the left, full bass; to the right, full top. Add to that the vertical up and down movement to alter the volume and a crying sound could be produced (me when I got it wrong!). But it caused a considerable volume loss and the gear wheels were a kind of plastic and could come unseated. Reliability was a problem, so I suspect all of the above is why they fell out of favour. I moved onto Morley and Boss volume pedals, which are much more robust – the only thing missing is the DeArmond's tone shift. G

"I'd like to extend my thank you to all the fab guitarists who took the time to pose their questions" – **Hank Marvin**"



The Shadows' influence is immense, as our long line of guitarists who queued up to interview Hank attests



BRIAN MAY

INTERVIEW OCTOBER 2005

Brian May reflects on the past year, Queen's most prominent for two decades, and on the album, released 30 years ago, which ultimately made the band. "I like all the albums," he tells us. "But 'A Night At The Opera' did have a certain glittering quality: not perfection as such but... something"

WORDS **SIMON BRADLEY**

This was always going to be a significant year for the remaining members of Queen. Three decades ago, on 21 November 1975, EMI released the band's fourth album. Meticulously recorded over a period of four months in six studios and, due to the presence of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a song that always seems to top those 'best ever...' lists, it finally put the band where they wanted to be: centre stage and bathed in the limelight.

However, thanks to the germ of an idea that began when Brian May got up with Paul Rodgers at the Strat Pack concert in September 2004, Queen have just completed their first full tour since 1986, culminating in a huge show in London's Hyde Park. No-one who was there will forget 2005's gigs and rejuvenated line-up in a hurry, and neither will Brian May: relaxing in his Surrey home, he can't keep a smile from his face for long.

"It's going crazy again! I have to pinch myself every morning really," he laughs. "We do seem to be incredibly current without having to try too hard."

Fans in the audience at any of the European dates will have spotted that smile, too, mirrored by similar expressions from drummer Roger Taylor and the former Bad Company and Free vocalist.

"It felt like the old days, it really did," says May. "The idea started off quite small, too. We thought Paul was a guy we could really play with, so let's do a couple of gigs and see if we can have some fun. Then suddenly we're in Hyde Park in front of 70,000 people... it's outrageous. The feeling was great. I think it's because people can see we're having fun. We all enjoy what we're doing and Paul's there with a stupendous input of his own, so nobody feels like a puppet. Anyone singing for Queen would feel overawed, but Paul brings his own legend, and his own incredible talent."

Inevitably, many fans and critics weren't too sure how Rodgers would fit into the picture, especially as his style is far removed from that of Freddie Mercury. As it transpired, he slotted in very well.

"He amazes me even after working with him around Europe," says May. "When I first listened to the recording of the Sheffield gig [recorded on 9 May and released as the *Return Of The Champions*], I asked the engineer if he'd done a lot of work on it to improve it, but he hadn't. He just has an incredible natural pitch and way of expressing himself. It doesn't happen overnight, though, which I think is rather nice. If you listen to what he did throughout that European tour, his performance changed a lot as he became more accustomed to things. But in the end, he sounded as comfortable singing *I Want It All* as singing *All Right Now*. He works his way into things organically and I think that's his great skill."

It must have been something of a release for Brian to crank out the likes of *All Right Now* and *Can't Get Enough*, songs with riffs as influential as any from the Queen back catalogue: "We all grew up on those things and there's no greater joy. There are moments when I think that out of 70,000 people in the audience at least 50,000 of them can play this riff and it's up to me to do it justice. I just go back to my insides and play it how I feel. I don't have such a high opinion of myself but, whatever it is that's there, it's organic and real."

"'A Night At The Opera' really was make-or-break. There was that feeling that if it didn't succeed we'd always be in the red, so we were fortunate that we made the album of our lives. And I think it is"

BRIAN MAY

As ever, even in triumph, there's a downside to be dealt with. In May's case, it's the fact that demands on his time are likely to become even more challenging. When we broach the subject, he becomes serious.

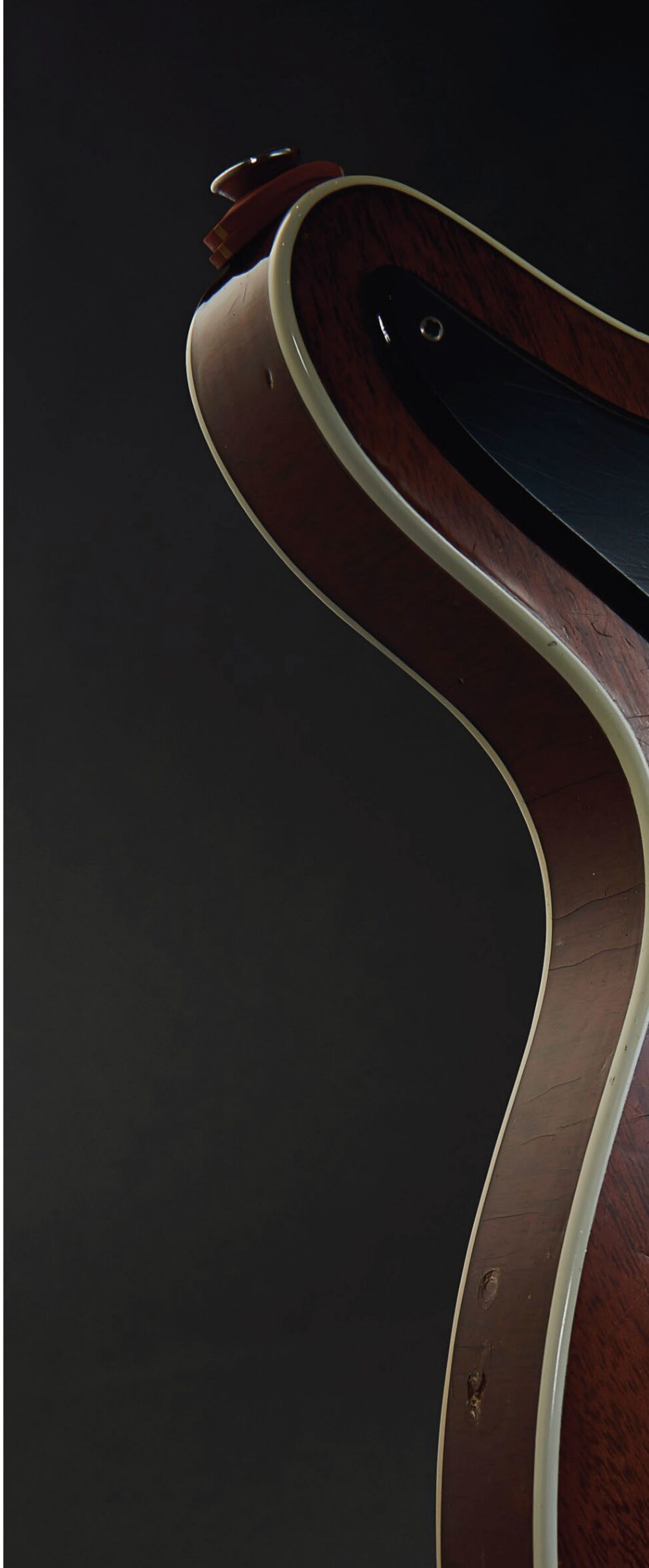
"It does concern me a lot, yes. At the moment we're doing a couple of dates in America, as a sort of teaser I suppose, and then we're moving on to Japan. Of course, the whole thing now is do we go and do the American tour, which is big-time, three months minimum really: a lot of investment of time?" He sighs: "I'm really not sure and, much as I would love to be in those arenas again, time's ticking on. I treasure my private life and that time with my family.

"I do find myself torn, and I'm involved in other projects, too. I'm writing an astronomy book with Patrick Moore, which is great fun, and I'm also looking very seriously at my old astronomy PhD project that I never finished. The opportunity has come up to effectively finish that off in Tenerife and I'm very drawn by that idea. It's unfinished business for me, and I'm not the sort of person who can leave things alone."

May's self-confessed fascination with making anything he's involved with as good as possible is a recurring theme as we move on to chat about *A Night At The Opera*. The year of 1975 was make-or-break for Queen. On the back of their biggest single to date – *Killer Queen*, from third album *Sheer Heart Attack* – the band were poised on the brink. From the outside, things may have looked pretty rosy, but, as May recalls, it was a different story within the inner sanctum.

"Business-wise, we were in crisis. We'd had a lot of success but we were in a management situation that seemed to have no light at the end of the tunnel," he says. "We weren't getting any of our royalties and, although money isn't everything, it's not good to feel you're in what you perceive to be a slave-labour situation. So, *A Night At The Opera* really was make-or-break in that sense. John Reid, who'd just taken over our management at our request, said that he'd sort out all the debts, and that we should go away, make the best album we'd ever made and we'd all be fine! But there was that feeling that if it didn't succeed we'd always be in the red, so we were fortunate that we made the album of our lives. And I think it is really."

Other albums released by classic English bands in 1975 include Led Zeppelin's *Physical Graffiti*, *Wish*



It's a kind of magic: Brian May's Red Special is the guitar he played on almost all of Queen's hits


BURNS
TRI-SONIC
BURNS
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TRI-SONIC



"We were so steeped in harmony from our childhoods, from stuff that our parents listened to, that we'd become aware of the rules and already enjoyed the fact that we could break them"

BRIAN MAY

You Were Here by Pink Floyd, The Who's *By Numbers* and, ironically, *Straight Shooter* by Bad Company. Were Queen aware of all the great music surrounding them?

"We were much more aware of things like that before we got into the high-pressure touring situation after *Sheer Heart Attack*. As soon as you're into that – touring for virtually nine months of the year, recording for the other three, taking a deep breath and starting all over again – you really don't have much time to take in what's around you. It was very seldom that we'd get off to see another band as we were too immersed in our own stuff. Earlier, we used to see Zeppelin and The Who and loved it – still do – but by the time we were making *A Night At The Opera* we were within almost a sealed bubble. We were working on energy within us and not very aware of anything else."

If you've never sampled the musical delights that define classic Queen, *A Night At The Opera* is, in effect, the band's majestic style in microcosm. As well as *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the album includes heart-breaking ballads, raunchy Zep-flavoured rock, a nod at vaudeville, an alien-themed folk song, a jazz band comprising just guitars and much more.

The opening track, *Death On Two Legs*, is an insult-laden offering from Mercury's pen that was dedicated to an ellipsis on the album sleeve, but to the band's ex-management company Trident in reality.

"We did suffer a sharp intake of breath at a couple of [lyrical] things and I still do," May laughs. "It's pretty severe stuff and it hadn't really been done up to that time: you didn't hear Frank Sinatra putting his bitterness about his record company into his songs. I think we felt it was on the edge and we were told to be very careful not to name anybody; we narrowly escaped being sued for slander as it was."

Throughout an album littered with what would come to be regarded as Queen trademarks, the harmonies have to be the most important. Whether revelling in the operatic mid-section of *Bohemian Rhapsody* or spotting simple phrases within the likes of *Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon*, perfectly-tuned passages are everywhere.

"We were so steeped in harmony from our childhoods, from stuff that our parents listened to, that we'd become aware of the rules and already enjoyed the fact that we could break them," Brian explains. "So it wasn't too hard to have something in your head, to know how to proceed in order to get it and then to try a few experiments to see what happened. It was all very instinctive, not at all theoretical, and I was always obsessed by it."

Next up in the running order is *I'm In Love With My Car*, written and sung by Roger Taylor and filled with all sorts of schoolboy-style double-entendres. To support the theme, May conjured up an especially abrasive guitar tone.

"It was real tape phasing if I remember, and just using a fairly harsh guitar setting. I played near the bridge, too, which is something I play around with live as sometimes it's nice to go into that area."

The song will also go down in Queen infamy as the B-side to *Bo Rhap*, thus earning Taylor the same royalties as Mercury, the writer of the A-side. May laughs knowingly as he recalls the story: "Roger took a lot of stick for that, but he still pocketed the money! It's probably the most lucrative song that was never a hit!"

Following on from *You're My Best Friend*, the album's second single written by bassist John Deacon, is *'39*, a dyedin-the-wool album track that seems to have a place in every Queen fan's heart.

"It's surprising that it's still such a favourite, because it's difficult for a song that isn't a single to do that," concedes May. "I would've loved it to have been a single, but the politics of our group were such that I don't think I even dared mention it!"

The story of the song describes a race of aliens flying off to find another planet, something that can become hidden beneath the deceptively simple structure.

"I remember writing it: it came into my head so quickly with all the words at 3am – the spacemen trying to find a new world. It's a folk song of the future. The middle section took some putting together as there are all sorts of quite subtle multitracked guitars in there, as well as Roger's amazing vocal piece. He had this incredible super-high range and I got him to sing that strange unearthly cry that expresses the general relativistic journey through space back to the last verse when they return.

"I'll always remember..." he pauses. "There's one note in there that Roger refused to sing – I could point it out to you if we

BRIAN'S 'BIRD'

Brian played an acoustic guitar on *A Night At The Opera*, specifically during the intro and outro sections of *The Prophet's Song*, just before it morphs into *Love Of My Life*.

"I was in Japan and I didn't have a guitar, so I was feeling very frustrated, so we went out one day and found it in a music shop. It had this wonderful plummy look and smell – smell is very important, of course! – and this lovely rich sound, so I bought it on impulse and it's stayed with me ever since. That would have been around 1974, I think."

Although Brian wasn't sure of its origins, we've managed to ascertain that the guitar is an F-120, one of the very first models to be produced by Tokai, more details of which can be unearthed at www.tokairegistry.com

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

"It was just great fun. The studio time had been booked and we were encouraged to go and indulge our musical fantasies irrespective of cost, so we did"

BRIAN MAY

played it. Roger and I have certain little impasses and I wanted him to sing this one note and he could not – or would not – sing it. Eventually, I accepted the note he sang, and varisped it up to make it the one I wanted."

When we mention *The Prophet's Song*, an eight-minute epic that opens side two (of the vinyl version), May offers a fascinating insight into the writing and recording processes employed by the band.

"This was really a kind of little hell in itself for me: I could hear it in my head, but I had a very difficult time translating it into something we could play. I could hear too much, actually, and had to keep throwing bits out, which was upsetting, yet it still ended up a long sinewy journey. I agonised a lot over it and I didn't ask anyone else. Freddie was doing his things and I remember getting up every morning in Rockfield [Studios, Monmouth], where we were staring, to evolve it, and listening to him pounding out his backing tracks on the piano thinking, 'My God, he's completely prepared and I'm stuck with these bits of spaghetti in my brain!' I felt right on the edge of not being able to cope, but, at the same time, very keen to get my own thoughts across."

May had been using Echoplex tape units on stage to allow him to perform his question-and-answer solo during *Brighton Rock* and one of the many passages during *The Prophet's Song* involves a similar trick with vocals. In an age before Pro Tools, Cubase et al, how on earth did any of this actually get recorded?

"It was live, in effect, but it went through a number of separate processes. Firstly, the idea came from my obsession with canon or delays and, as I'd been doing it a lot with the guitar, I thought it'd be fun to try it with vocals. The only way to explain to Freddie what was in my mind was actually to do it, so I did a number of demos with two distinct delays and I was able to do some things that would end up working as a canon, have counterpoint and so on. Having done all that I sat down with Roy [Thomas Baker, producer], chose the bits that worked best and spliced them all together. Of course, when you do that and cut the tape you get the wrong echoes in the wrong place, so then you have to strip off all the echoes and regenerate them. And then when you join the bits together, it becomes touch-and-go as to whether it'll work with the echo that overlaps on to the next part. That done, I played it to Freddie and then stuck him in a room with these delays on and said, 'Go for it!' Some of it was what I'd asked him to do and some of it was just what he felt like on the spur of the moment, and he came up with some great things. Then we went through the whole process again, selecting the parts we liked best, and Bob's your uncle!"

This sort of process – for a small part within a single song – goes some way to explaining just why Queen used six studios throughout the recording process.

"Well, it was really needs must. We had so much to finish off and time was marching on. A lot of it we were able to do separately. All those little pieces of guitars playing trumpets, clarinets and trombones on *Good Company*; I just had to just do it. Freddie would be off doing his multitracked harmonies by himself... On this album for the first time there was a whole period when we each went off and developed our own little areas."

May is renowned for his guitar orchestrations, but surely none of them has been as involved as the aforementioned *Good Company*, in which the guitar mimics brass and woodwind in the style of a traditional jazz band. It was a labour of love.

"It was just great fun," he confirms. "The studio time had been booked and we were encouraged to go and indulge our musical fantasies irrespective of cost, so we did. I think I was mainly in Scorpio Studios with Mike [Stone, engineer] doing that stuff and we put bits of cloth of over the old Deacy amp, moved the mic around, and used a swell pedal and a wah-wah mainly as an EQ.

"We were always experimenting with mic positions. Sometimes, there would be two or three mics on one amp, some in the back, some taped to the cab, too. Sometimes, we'd put the amps into a small room to get the resonance and tape a microphone to the window – we'd use all sorts of strange methods.

"Again, it was all in my head, and if it hadn't been, I'd have really been struggling. It's almost a novelty track, I suppose, but it was a passion and something you do once in your life. I'm not going to do another!" he chuckles. "For the next album [*A Day At The Races*], I was much more into the guitar being a guitar, but I felt I gained a richness in vocabulary because of going through all those stages."

And so to *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a single that has sold over 2.1 million copies in the UK alone. The textbook example of light and shade, the song contains the celebrated operatic mid-section, complete with 180 vocal overdubs, alongside May's equally revered guitar solo and super-heavy riff before the whole thing reduces to a simple piano line and, ultimately, a gong hit. Many thousands of words have been written on the song, yet Brian allows us further unique peeks into what is arguably the band's best single.

"We really stuck together with Freddie, who was at the helm. Whoever's song it was would be, by unwritten law, in charge for those sessions and Freddie had the ideas in his head from the start. Most of those harmonies, with the exception of the very beginning, were the three of us multitracking. The introduction is all Freddie and it was quite stunning the way he could multitrack himself; he would always base his harmonies around what he'd worked out on the piano.

"Later on he got much lazier: 'Oh Brian, you know how to do that, don't you? Can you do some harmonies



The engine room of Brian's backline: the central AC30 is un-effected, the left and right amps carry the effects

there?"" Brian laughs. "But he was quite capable if he wanted to be and in those days he had every last note written down on little pieces of his dad's notepaper."

There's so much going on within both this song and *ANATO* in general, but it would seem that this was a conscious choice. We mention the example of May embellishing the "shivers down my spine" lyric by picking the guitar behind the bridge.

"We were very much into little things for people to find on the 50th playing of the song and that little scraping behind the bridge was something that an artist might put on, a little glint on a ring. There are lots of things like that in Queen music. I think that with other people's songs you sometimes feel very free. With your own songs you're very focused, but with Freddie's songs I always felt I could get a great perspective. I knew what he was driving at and I could act as this sort of arranger person who could do some decoration.

"Freddie was very into it, and I certainly was, the idea that there are layers of texture and people would be rewarded by delving further in time after time. Often, I'd wake up in the middle of the night and think, 'Let's try that.' Usually, it was on Freddie's songs, not mine!"

Another highlight is *Love Of My Life*, bearing all the Queen hallmarks – perfect harmonies, goosebump-inducing vocals – and a guitar orchestration section that May feels pleased with to this day.

"I do feel pretty proud of that," he confirms. "Freddie gave me an open canvas, 'Do your stuff, Brian; do your orchestra,' so I wasn't there doing everything on my own; we were interacting the whole time. It starts with a little violin line and we did that very much together – how it should speak, what it should say – but when it got to the large splurge I brought the complete armoury of what I had to offer. It's a great song and he sings it wonderfully. The harmonies are matchless."

In conclusion, after all this time, how does Brian sum up *A Night At The Opera*?

"It was certainly quite a leap," he says. "I don't think we realised that at the time, though; it was all a natural progression. Stylistically, I think it's closer to *Queen II* than *Sheer Heart Attack* as we deliberately made *Sheer Heart Attack* compressed and very slick, while *ANATO* was really going back to the idea of, 'This is our canvas, we will paint on it at our leisure,' which was the philosophy behind *Queen II*.

As we prepare to leave, we ask Brian to try and pinpoint the influence of Freddie Mercury at that time, a man who's an icon to many but, to his old bandmate, is a still much-missed friend.

"Freddie was great," he says at once. "People always thought he was some sort of dictator, but actually he was the ultimate diplomat. If we had arguments in the group, he was normally the one who could find the compromise and cut away the emotion so we could get down to making music. He was such an inspiring guy, totally inspiring. And always for the right reasons. He just cared about the music, nothing else – not egos, legends or whatever – he just wanted the music to be right, and that was a great uniting force in the studio." G


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GARY MOORE

INTERVIEW FROM 1995 FIRST PUBLISHED 2016

February 2016 marks the fifth anniversary of Gary Moore's death and in this tribute, we hear from the man himself in a previously unpublished interview that was originally carried out in 1995, prior to the release of the album 'Blues For Greeny', Gary's blues salute to his mentor and friend, Peter Green. Read on as Gary explains why the blues is far fom simple and why modern players are "missing the point"

WORDS **DAVID MEAD** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAM GASSON & JOBY SESSIONS**

Guitarist deputy editor David Mead remembers the circumstances under which the interview was carried out. "Gary's management contacted me and asked me if I would write the liner notes for the *Blues For Greeny* album and, of course, I immediately said, 'Yes.' I had interviewed Gary in the past and we subsequently enjoyed a sort of nodding acquaintance and so we arranged to meet for lunch in a hotel in London's Holland Park in order to discuss my contribution to the album cover. On the day, Gary was very relaxed – it was far from being a formal interview, more like a conversation. He said that he wanted the liner notes to be autobiographical and tell the story of his love for Peter Green's playing that had started way back when Peter replaced Eric Clapton in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

"As it turned out, there wasn't an enormous amount of space on the album cover and so very little of our exchange that day ended up being used. But I had let the cassette tape roll and we ended up talking for ages, the subject matter veering away from Gary's historical recollections to his overview of the state of the guitar world in the mid-1990s. As such, I believe it represents a fascinating snapshot in time of a legendary player, who was rediscovering his enthusiasm for a purer form of the blues. We begin when Gary was just 14 years old, seeing Peter Green play in a Belfast club..."

"The first time I saw Peter Green play was at the Club Rado, which was a very rough club in Belfast," says Gary, "and at that time he'd just replaced Eric in the Bluesbreakers. I'd gone up there to sort of hang out and see if I could meet this guy Peter Green, because I'd read about him and everything. They were really miserable because they were pissed about the equipment that had been rented for them and nobody was saying anything and I was sitting down beside John Mayall and I tried to sound really cool. I said, 'Is Greeny here yet?' and he said, 'No...' and I just blushed; my face was burning, I can remember that really well.

"Peter had a rented Selmer amplifier. In those days, Selmer amplifiers were not regarded as being very cool, but he came on and plugged straight into this amp, played the first lick of *All Your Love* and just devastated everybody because he had the most incredible tone. I'd never heard anyone reach down that deep with their guitar tone and really make the thing resonate and I was just blown away. He did *The Stumble*, *Another Kind Of Love* and all those things from *A Hard Road*.

"The next time I saw him play was in the very early days of Fleetwood Mac with Jeremy Spencer, Mick Fleetwood, John McVie and himself. That was the band and, again, it was the same club. He came out on stage this time – he had a smaller amplifier, Selmer again – and he played absolutely amazingly. He was such a charismatic player, so much larger than life when he played, just pulling all this stuff out. You didn't know where it was coming from. It was so soulful and so beautiful and, again, that *sound*. It was just so clean, and don't forget, in those days, they didn't mic instruments

"Music is not to impress people, music has to stand up on its own and guitar solos are nothing to do with it. But [new players are] just so into the athletic side, they're missing the point"

GARY MOORE

up. That was the sound coming off the stage, but so beautifully balanced."

After that, Gary moved to Dublin and joined the fabled Skid Row. Still only 15 years of age, he soon caught up with Peter once again.

"I saw Fleetwood Mac play yet again and, by this time, they had Danny Kirwan in the band and had hits with *Albatross* and *Man Of The World*. Peter was using Orange amps and playing a bit differently – a little bit more distorted, a little bit more sustain. He had this great big Orange reverb unit as well. They did *Albatross* and all the stuff and absolutely blew me away. It was the first time I'd heard two guitars play in harmony. That was a big thing as well, because up until then I'd been listening to *Albatross* and I'd figured out how to play the second verse by bending two strings at once. At the time, I could bend them in harmony. I thought that's what he was doing. I thought, 'That's so clever, but it's really hard to do it, it's so controlled.' But, of course, when they came on stage they suddenly split into stereo and I went, 'Oh fucking hell, they're both playing it!'

"The following year they came to the National Stadium in Dublin. I was still only 16 and we opened for them. This guy Pat Egan, he was sort of compering the show, came up to me after our set and said, 'Peter Green wants to meet you.' I was totally blown away because I'd always wanted to meet him and I was really nervous. Peter came out of his dressing room and said, 'I really like your playing, come back to the hotel and let's have a talk.' We just jammed for hours and I left really, really late. After that, he spoke to his manager at the time, Clifford Davis, and persuaded him to help get us to England. He signed us into a management contract and got involved with the record deal and everything from thereon. We moved to London – this was 1970, I guess – and one day, I went round Peter's house and he said, 'Let's go for a drive' and we were driving along and he said, 'I'm leaving the band, I've had enough.'"

Thus began Peter Green's well-documented descent into virtual obscurity, but the friendship between the two players had left an indelible mark on Gary.

"An amazing player. I just wish he'd never stopped really, because he was very much one of the people from that era who had something to say. Then you had Eric and Jeff, Jimmy and Peter and not much else, in my eyes, anyway. There were other guitarists from that era who were very highly rated, but, to me, they didn't have anything compared to someone like Peter. So when he



After the *Still Got The Blues* session, Gary's 1959 Les Paul "became possibly his most played guitar", says Graham Lilley, Gary's guitar tech

Guitarist Presents ***Guitar Gods***



left the scene, he took a big part of that whole thing with him, as far as I'm concerned. There's a whole dimension that's been missing from British guitar playing since then. It was approached from a very British point of view, even though he was emulating BB King, Freddie King, people like that, but he did it his own way and he kind of made that his own: his own voice, which is the hardest thing to do, really.

"There were other guitarists, obviously – after that you had Mick Taylor and everything – but Peter had the toughest job: to walk in after that Blues Breakers album and to shine the way he did was an amazing achievement and he got a lot of respect for that. When you listen to Peter's playing – the kind of sound that he went for and everything – it wasn't in any way fashionable. It wasn't such a radical departure as Eric's sound. Eric used a lot more distortion and everything. Peter's sound has not dated, it's become a classic in its own right and today, when you listen to it, it's still as valid as ever. And it teaches people. I think if young guitarists could listen to that, they would learn so much about where they're going wrong – because he's the opposite end of the scale to what's going on today."

Gary had very strong opinions about the direction that guitar playing was headed in the mid-1990s.

"I think that a lot of people are going so wrong by analysing music too much and learning from a totally different perspective from the way I learned. I mean, I just learned by listening to people. People I learned from learned by listening to people. The generation above me was Eric and Jeff and all those guys, so there wasn't anything like the information that is available today. These guitar institutes and things like that, I think they take away people's identity and they're actually encouraging a lot of people to play who are not naturally good players anyway, but they're telling

"[In blues playing], you're constantly refining, taking away all the stuff you don't need until all that's left is the bare bones and what's there is totally necessary, and that's the hardest way to play"

GARY MOORE

people that anyone can learn to play. And anyone *can* probably learn to play, but that doesn't make them a good player and, at the end of the day, they're turning out a generic generation of guitarists who are coming out the other end of this sort of conveyer belt sounding pretty much the same. I mean, I can't name one of these people who amount to anything special. Who's actually become a *voice*? Who's actually had anything of any real depth to say? Who has written good music? To listen to these guys talk, you'd think they were the most amazing musicians on Earth and you hear what they come up with and it just doesn't follow through for me. In fact, they do kind of play like they talk, because they talk too much and they play too much and they just kind of miss the point. It's not their fault. You're just overloaded with information: 'How shall I learn? Which guitar should I play? Which pedal should I use?' And everyone's bombarding you."

In the years leading up to our interview, there had been an obsession with speed, with technique appearing to obliterate content in some cases.

"I think it's going away a little bit, but I'm probably not the right person to ask because I was as guilty of that as anybody, in my own way, in the 70s, playing all that fusion stuff. But that's why I can see it now because I've been through that. I can see a lot of these young guys are going nowhere with that whole attitude, it's so wrong. They're more interested in impressing each other than playing music. We're losing the whole point: music is not to impress people, music has to stand up on its own and guitar solos are nothing to do with it. If you hear a great song and you hear a really great guitar solo, that's a nice embellishment. But they're just so into the athletic side, the competitive side, and they're missing the point. But that's fine, because at least there's room for people who *do* want to play music."

Gary was also aware of the influence his return to the blues was having on other players.

"When I made *Still Got The Blues*, you had all these guys who'd never heard of blues going out to promote blues albums – these LA guys. It was quite laughable. From my point of view, it was a complete turnaround because there I was, setting a trend and influencing the wrong people to play the wrong music for them. It was arrogant for me to think I could go and make a blues album as simply as that – I hadn't played that music professionally for so long. It was very successful, but the way I did it was totally wrong: 'Oh, I'm a rock guitarist and I can play the blues...' and these guys followed suit and they were even further removed from it because they had no background of the blues. At least I'd grown up with it. I knew something about it, but these guys were like *widdly-widdly* playing that Albert King stuff.

"For me, making this record was like going back and relearning everything that I'd forgotten over the past few years. I know I did a blues album in 1990, but this was going back to where I started off. It's given me another chance to get back to that point and not fuck it up this time because I think, in many ways, I did fuck it up, musically speaking. I went off on a tangent and got too far away from the whole truth of what we were trying to do. This record sounds like the rehearsals for what *Still Got The Blues* became. That's what it was like; that's how we played together and it's nice to be able to get that sound down on record. It's given me another chance, really.

"People will disagree and say, 'No, *After Hours* and *Still Got The Blues* were blues albums,' but they weren't really, in all honesty. They were still rock albums because of the sound and the production.

"This, to me, is my first real blues album because it's a blues record: it's stripped right down, it's gone back to what the blues is about and I'm playing in a style that I can play. I'm not trying to be anybody I'm not. I'm not trying to play in a way that is very alien to me. It's been like a revision course. This music is so fucking hard to play and people don't realise; they think they have to just pick up a guitar and play three chords and that's the blues. It's a lot more than people realise – constantly refining, taking away all the stuff you don't need until all that's left is the bare bones and what's there is totally necessary, and that's the hardest way to play.

"It's just very honest. It's like you're almost in the room, I feel, anyway. You can hear there's lots of mistakes and everything – really fucking sloppy playing for me, especially on a couple of tracks, but I didn't want to change it. I didn't want to drop things in and fix it; I wanted people to hear it the way it was done. I think it's a lot more honest to do that. Anybody can fix things in the studio, but if you can you get a performance out in one go, that means something. All the records I like have got mistakes in them, anyway."

At the end of our conversation, Gary hinted that there might be some unreleased material, which, 20 years later, still hasn't seen the light of day.

"I also did a sort of unplugged version of about eight songs as well, a whole load of acoustic versions for B-sides and stuff. We did *Need Your Love So Bad* acoustically and *The World Keeps Turning* from the first Fleetwood Mac album. It was the first acoustic one Peter did. So, I've got a load of stuff and it's actually gone straight to DAT so you don't need to mix it or anything. It's very different from anything I've done before, it's much more a vocal performance, because you're just sort of strumming most of the time. So, we just banged about eight different songs out in a couple of hours and I've got all those at home." G

G-FORCE

For over two decades, Graham Lilley looked after Gary Moore and his gear, and got to know him better than almost anyone. Here, Neville Marten and Graham walk us through some of the great man's six-string treasures ahead of their 2016 auction

"GARY used this Les Paul and reissue JTM45 amp – 1989, serial number RI000011 – on the track *Still Got The Blues*," Graham recalls, through a Marshall Guv'nor pedal, and Alesis Quadraverb in the headphone mix. It was a one-take, first-take solo, too



1959 Gibson Les Paul
Still Got The Blues

NEVILLE: "I have to confess I felt very small and insignificant when holding this guitar. One of those 'not worthy' moments. Luckily, Gary liked his guitars set up exactly as I do, and so at least I felt at home with the action. I've played a few '59s and, just like the others, this was very articulate and open sounding. Brighter than a modern Les Paul, I'd say. But kick in the Tube Screamer and it becomes a beast. Most of all, though, it was a privilege and an honour to even hold it"

GRAHAM: "This is a guitar that Gary didn't use much when he first got it, but that changed after the *Still Got The Blues* session and following tours, when it became possibly his most played guitar. It featured on many recordings and live shows across the 1990s and 2000s, only getting a 'rest' from around 2006/'07 onwards. I think we had it on the BB King farewell tour, but not much after that, as it was becoming too valuable to cart around, and as Gary had bought a bunch of newer LPs, Goldtops, plain tops, Sunbursts, aged, and so on, then they were getting used more and more"

"THE Marshall 1960 TV cab was custom-made with that grille cloth at the Marshall factory and is part of an amp-and-cab setup that was made for the 1994 BBM tour," says Graham. "The set comprised SLP1959 heads, some modded into 1992 bass amps, along with 1960TV 4x12 cabs, 1960BX, 1960AX 4x12 cabs, plus the tall 'B' or straight version of the 1960TV angle cabs. It's quite an impressive sight and sound when it's all set out and fired up!"

ONE of the coolest guitars around, the 'reverse' Firebird's headstock was fitted with rear-facing Kluson banjo tuners

MARSHALL '74 Lead And Bass 20 head. "Gary mostly acquired equipment items to use on recording sessions or live shows," Graham Lilley recalls. "His reasoning was that if an amp, pedal or even a second-hand guitar triggered a riff or different tone that could be developed into a song, then it was worth getting for that initial inspiration"



1964 Gibson Firebird #153314

NEVILLE: "It was a shame I didn't have a bottleneck with me for this, as it still has the action jacked up for when Gary used it for slide. This is just like the guitar Clapton used in the last days of Cream and on the *Blind Faith* album, and clearly why Gary bought it for the BBM (Bruce, Baker, Moore) project. It's a meaty old thing and if you know *Sitting On Top Of The World* from Cream's *Goodbye* album, then that's the tone. These are ace-looking guitars and make a real statement"

GRAHAM: "Although this was bought in 1994 for the BBM project, it was not really featured on the album or live shows in that year. Currently, it has a Seymour Duncan mini-humbucker fitted, but the original pickup and replaced volume pot are included in the case. I should get round to putting it back as it was, and dropping the action to make it more playable!"





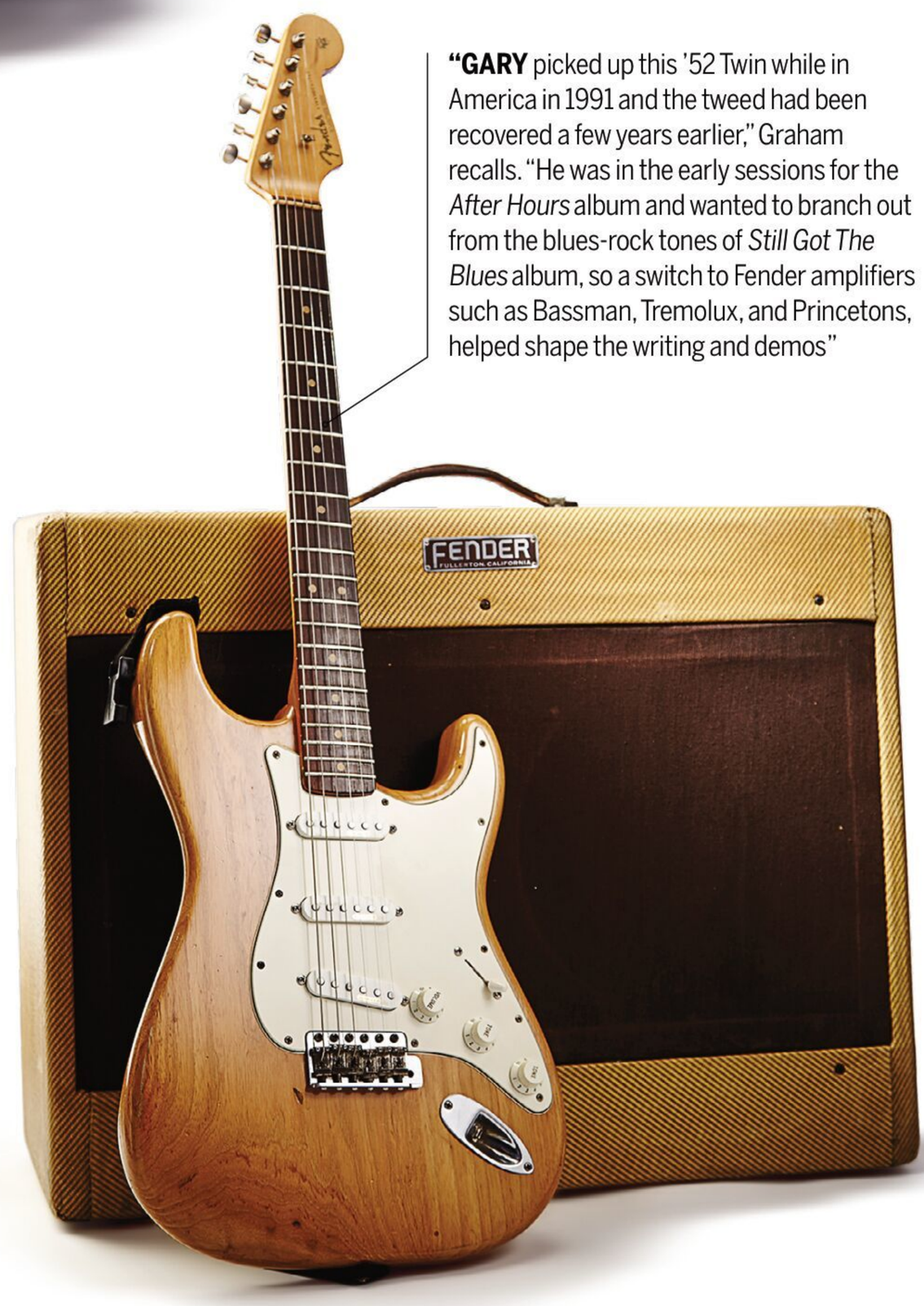
Gibson Les Paul Collector's Choice #1 'Artist Proof #3'

NEVILLE: "It was a lovely surprise to discover that this guitar had been wired so it was out of phase in the middle position. In non-aged 'Sunburst' livery and with a beautifully figured top, it looks fabulous and plays like any modern Gibson, with a reasonably fat but not baseball bat-type neck. Due to its bullet-proof provenance, this will excite a lot of interest"

GRAHAM: "This was one of the prototypes, an 'artist final proof' model of the Gibson Guitar Company Collector's Choice #1 VOS. This is the Melvyn Franks model guitar, the non-aged version, as the aged versions were christened the Gary Moore model. This will be a very rare item, as it's #3 of possibly only three artist's proofs. It's stock from the factory, still with all the tags.

"Unfortunately, this guitar arrived well after the model had been launched and quite possibly after Gary's passing, as up until then only the prototype of the aged version #CC1 had arrived, which Gary used on the Summer Of Rock tour in 2010. It's fitted with Bare Knuckle PG Blues humbuckers [with an out-of-phase in-between tone], replacing the out-of-phase Gibson pickups.

"The Marshall 1930 2x10 combo dates from 1973 to '74 and was part of his 'unofficial' Marshall amp collection – it would overdrive nicely as you turned it up. I say 'unofficial' in so far as Gary didn't set out to collect one of most types of Marshall amp, but he did have a few Marshall amps, cabs and combos tucked away. Often it would be something he'd owned previously, but had been lost in band moves. So, no doubt it was a little trip down memory lane for him, also"



"GARY picked up this '52 Twin while in America in 1991 and the tweed had been recovered a few years earlier," Graham recalls. "He was in the early sessions for the *After Hours* album and wanted to branch out from the blues-rock tones of *Still Got The Blues* album, so a switch to Fender amplifiers such as Bassman, Tremolux, and Princetons, helped shape the writing and demos"

Refinished '63 Fender Stratocaster #L21725

NEVILLE: "This was a monster! Just as loud as the Les Paul, and almost as fat. Fitted with Kinman pickups, it was hum-free next to the Marshall 1974X I was demoing through, and it played like butter – it had been refretted with big wire but the fingerboard radius had been left at 7.25-inch radius, which made it feel rather special. I'm not a fan of stripped and refinished 'natural' Fenders, but it made it feel much more like a gigging workhorse and less like a scarily pricey artefact. This one was my favourite"

GRAHAM: "Originally a gift from the late Claude Nobs, founder of the Montreux Jazz Festival, the guitar required extensive work to return it to playable condition. This included a complete refret, new tremolo block, replacement machineheads, a rewire and the addition of a set of the Kinman AVN noiseless pickups. There is also an alternative complete electronics setup, mounted on a separate scratchplate, with Stratocaster pickups by Seymour Duncan. These were made for Gary, to give an additional set of tones in certain combinations of pickups when using the selector. So, only the body [stripped and clear lacquered], the neck and some hardware are 'original'. As seen on the live footage of the TV broadcast from the Fleadh in Finsbury Park in 2001, and in the *Blues For Jimi* DVD release, from 2007"

1959 Gibson Les Paul Jr
#929342

NEVILLE: "These are superb guitars, but even those without links to a famous artist are fetching silly money now. The single P-90 at the bridge offers a dark and throaty range of sounds, especially if you are prepared to work the volume and tone controls. To my ears, they sound lighter than the single-cut version and a little heavier than the similarly equipped SG Junior. This one felt great, with a medium-fat neck and total fretboard access"

GRAHAM: "This comes with the Bill Of Sale, and it was also mentioned in an article during the promotion of the *Dark Days In Paradise* album in 1996/'97. Gary did fly on Concorde with it, on his way to Miami that year to oversee the mixing. It may also feature here and there on that album"

GUITARS like the 'student' Gibson Les Paul Junior and Fender's Musicmaster were designed to go with similarly 'beginner' amps like these, but all became fully grown in the hands of Gary, Jimmy Page, Leslie West and many others

"THIS is Gary's 'blackface' 1964 Champ, again with a similar control layout," Graham says. "It's a little bit more robust than the '49, with a solid chassis and slightly chunkier styling than its older 'brother'. But it works really well with harmonica, P-90 or humbucker-equipped guitars, as it adds a nice, thicker tone than the earlier model"

"THE cream-and-brown Fender Champion dates from 1949 and is a very sweet little combo," Graham says. "With just two inputs and a combined on/off volume control, which goes up to 12 – two more! – it's got a vibe that's all of its own"

The Moore The Merrier

Gary Moore could dazzle in a number of styles, but his 'Still Got The Blues' playing truly captured guitarists' hearts. Try it for yourself…

THIS PIECE is unashamedly inspired by the late, great Gary Moore. As a teenager in Belfast, Gary was influenced by Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Jimi Hendrix and BB King. He went on to create some of rock's most fiery and exciting solos, which alone would have secured his reputation as an incomparable player – but there was so much more to Gary Moore than that.

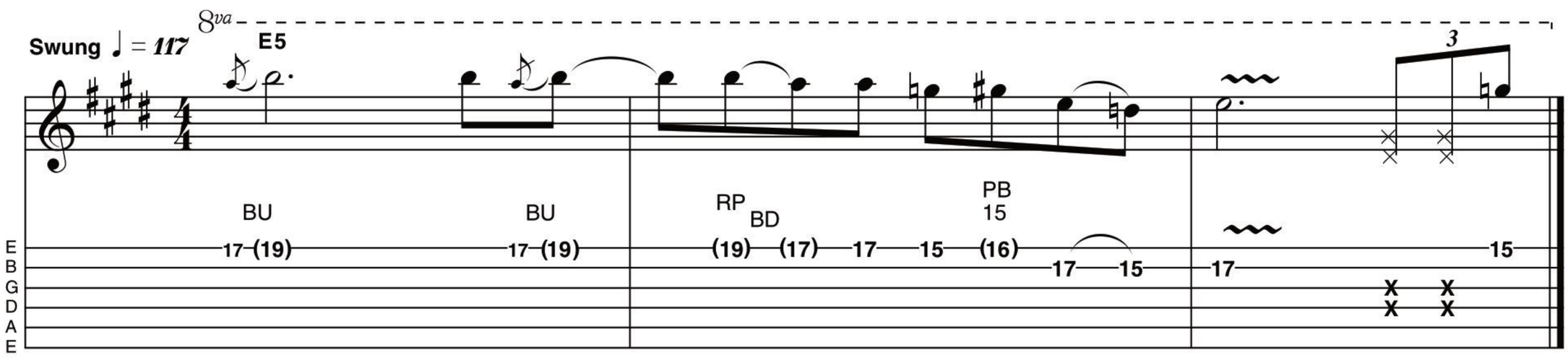
A true devotee of the instrument, Gary was able to turn his hand to many genres, such as jazz-fusion, Celtic folk and slide. Whatever he played, there was an energy and commitment that drew the listener in – and this came through whether he was playing his '61 Strat, his '59 ex-Peter Green Les Paul, or a Charvel with EMGs.

The playing in these examples takes its cues from Gary's playing on the 1990 album, *Still Got The Blues*. There is plenty of rock aggression and distortion, along with rapid-fire legato and economy picking. Though a fabulous alternate picker, too, Gary tended to steer away from this on his blues recordings, possibly feeling that was more suited to out-and-out rock, which he was keen to move away from at this point in time. Hopefully, these examples will give you an overview of where Gary was coming from as a player during this part of his career, with the option to add a sprinkling of alternate picking here and there if you so wish.

We've opted to use a humbucker-equipped Knaggs SSC for these examples, but you can get an authentic result with almost any type of guitar – the main ingredient is the passion Gary would put in, which is arguably the hardest thing to emulate, but a good reminder for us all to play like we mean it!

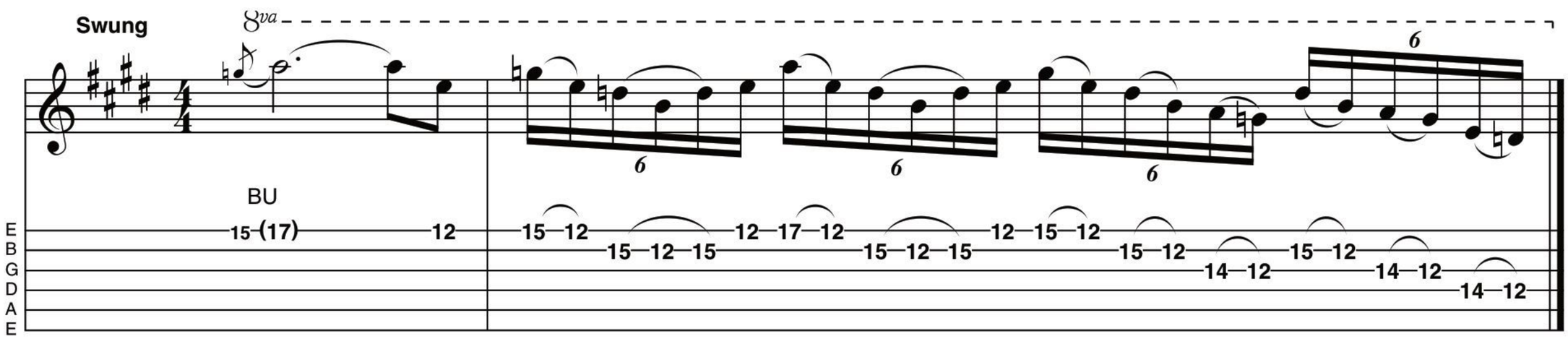
Example 1

ONE way Gary would add thickness and attack to a single-note line is to 'rake' into bends. You'll hear we've done that several times in this example, most pointedly on the first note. We haven't added this to the transcription, as we feel this is something that should be assimilated into one's style rather than consciously thought about – as soon as possible anyway! We're using the bridge pickup and heavy overdrive.



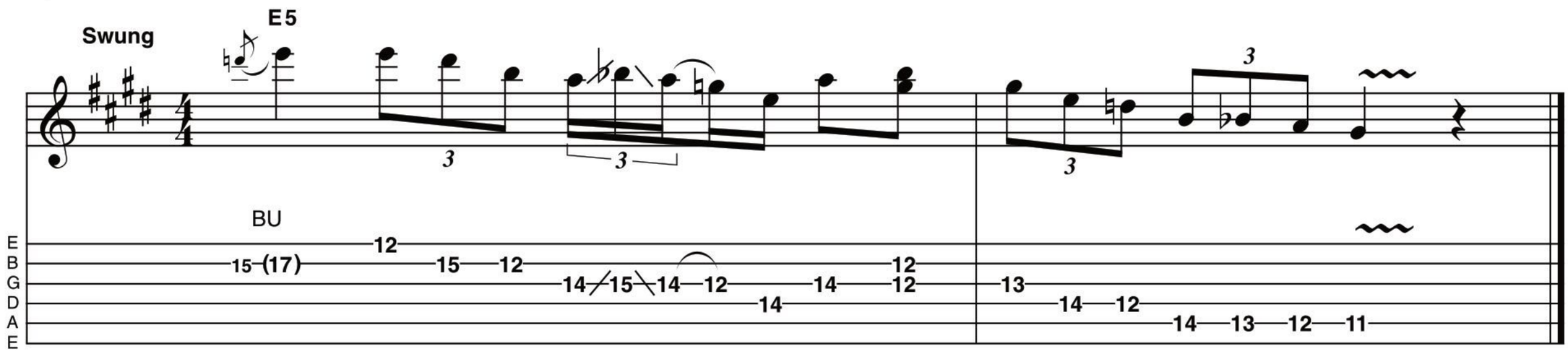
Example 2

APPROACH the vibrato on the first note carefully, allowing it to be heard clearly before adding any 'wobble'. Gary would use alternate, economy and legato picking on phrases like this, depending on the effect he wanted – we've opted for a legato, leaning towards an economy picking approach here, but it's simple (if not easy!) to 'convert' this into an alternate-picked frenzy. Check out the solo on Thin Lizzy's *Toughest Street In Town* and you'll hear what we mean.



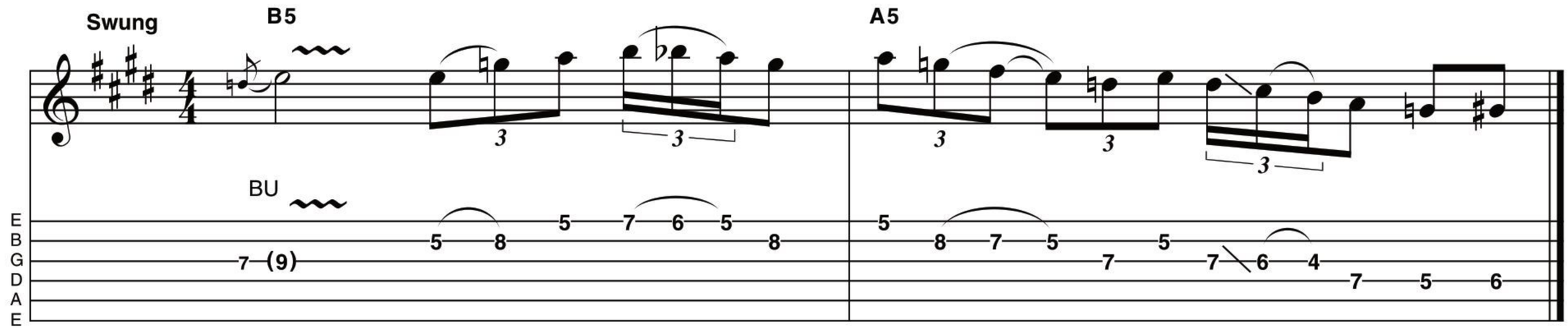
Example 3

TAKING a more traditional blues approach, displaying a little of his Clapton side, Gary would often add little details such as the rapid triplet in beat 3 of bar. This isn't a particularly taxing phrase technically, but Gary had a way of making each note punch through with a sense of importance. This isn't easy to explain, but if you start by playing through the second bar with an exaggerated pick attack, keeping as much clarity on each note as possible, you'll be well on the way.



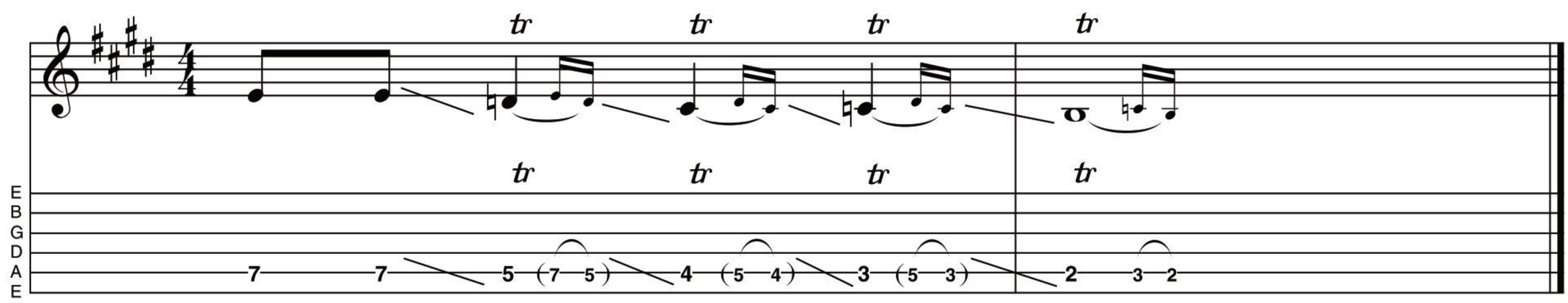
Example 4

MOVING to a lower register, this example showcases how Gary would often approach a 'shape 3' minor pentatonic/blues scale. Wade straight in with a wide vibrato on the first string bend – lower register notes seem to respond so much better to this than high ones – and keep things as smooth as possible with legato and slides as you descend. It's not imperative that you emulate this exactly, as long as the overall effect is fluid.



Example 5

FOR a fun, flashy finish, we've gone with this series of trills, descending down the 5th string, ready to jump back into the rhythm part (in the context of a live performance, at least). If you're not used to this type of playing, it can take a while to get brain and fingers playing nicely, but if you're patient and don't put your fingers under too much strain repeating this endlessly, you'll find it becomes second nature!



JIMMY PAGE

INTERVIEW NOVEMBER 2014

Page's autobiography is a labour of love that charts his musical journey through over 600 photographs, including many from his private archive. Here, in an exclusive new interview, one of rock guitar's true giants talks about the instruments that shaped his early path from teenage pretender to star of the London session scene, Yardbird and beyond…

WORDS **TONY BACON**

Jimmy Page is sitting in a London hotel talking about the book that tells the story of his musical life. He leafs through the copy that's on the table in front of us and points to one of the many photographs. In this picture, he's about 20 years old, frozen in black and white while recording one of the innumerable studio sessions he took part in back in the 1960s.

"Do you know what's really interesting?" he asks. "There's all these pictures in here of me in the studio doing sessions with various people, and yet when it comes to Led Zeppelin, the only time that we're in the studio being photographed is across the second album. Isn't that interesting? So, pro rata, there's more of me at those studio sessions, when you wouldn't think there'd be anything. I just find it ironic. But it was interesting, sieving for gold…"

The 70-year-old Page looks dapper today – dressed all in black, silver-haired – in a wafer-thin, ageing gracefully rock star kind of way. He's very enthusiastic about his book, very proud, and he's intrigued by the idea that its procession of pictures can also tell the story of his guitar life.

"That's what we've got to do," he says with a grin as he turns more pages and reveals the sequence from Grazioso to Les Paul to Telecaster. "We've got to try and explain what it is and why it is."

The early material in Jimmy's book is especially interesting. There are fascinating connections and links during the decisive years from the period in which he acquires his first guitars, through the studio sessions, and onto The Yardbirds and the first months of Led Zeppelin. Page turns to a picture of himself playing live with Neil Christian & The Crusaders, supporting Cliff Richard, which was probably taken in 1960. He's got his Grazioso electric and he's on his knees with it at the front of the stage.

"The interesting thing here," he says, "is that my body language is exactly the same as something from 1977 in the white poppy suit, pictured later in the book. And we had a superb drummer in that band, a drum major in the army. He had a load of swing, he loved all the big-bands. Look at the size of that bass drum! So, I got used to big bass drums before hearing John Bonham – someone else who had an amazing swing to his playing."

There's a lovely picture in the book of you as a teenager in front of someone's fireplace with a Grazioso or Futurama…

"Isn't that great? That's the first electric guitar I got. The one before it, a Hofner, my dad bought, but… maybe he was psychic, and he knew what was coming. Because there's a whole procession of guitars that come into my life over the next few years.

"I'm either 14 or 15 in that picture, it's 1958, or probably 1959, and that's the first one, the Grazioso. It looked and felt like an electric guitar, even though it wasn't a Fender. In fact, it had a tremolo arm on it, and I've got recordings of me playing on this thing, but you'd think this arm would break, actually. I heard somebody, a sort-of record collector, he told me, 'You've got to hear this Carl Perkins stuff' – and it's terrific guitar playing, he's a real stylist."

PHOTO BY JAN PERSSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES





"When it came to the time of Led Zeppelin, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. Exactly what material. There was an audience if I got a good band together. I didn't just get a good band, I had a phenomenon"

JIMMY PAGE

Were you thinking, 'Actually, I really want an American guitar'?
"Oh, this is a result of seeing and drooling over Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps, by the time they're doing *Hot Rod Gang* [1958 movie] and they've got all those Fenders. It was oh... my... God. I've seen Bruce Welch talk about when he saw the Fender with Buddy Holly on *The 'Chirping' Crickets* album, and he describes it exactly the same way as I felt, too, which is: that thing looks like it's from outer space! What is it?! So, you find out, and then you see them, and they've been sprayed in almost hot-rod colours, and they're all matching. It just looked so damn sexy! The Fenders were sexy to begin with, just beautiful, sculptural designs. Then when you saw a whole nest of them, with the bass and the guitars and Gene Vincent standing there, well..."

What was the first American guitar you got your hands on?
"I did get a Strat along the way. But guitars in those days, they weren't all user-friendly, you know? Just because it was a Strat, didn't mean to say it was like a Strat we know now. Then it goes from that to one of those orange Chet Atkins Gretsches, and then pretty much from there through to the Les Paul Custom.

"In [2008 documentary film] *It Might Get Loud*, that was nothing to do with me whatsoever where they've got [the caption] 'Jimmy Page's first electric guitar' and they show a picture of a Strat. I don't know whose Strat it is. The reality of it is that Grazioso was the first electric guitar. Here I am with these guys, but up in Liverpool, there's pictures of George Harrison playing one, too. So, that guitar was as good as you were going to get around that point of time."

There's a picture with you posing with your Les Paul Custom and some Selmer and Fender amps...
"None of it was mine apart from the Les Paul Custom – and I'm wearing clothes from John Stephen in Carnaby Street. Anyway, I went in this shop, and they asked me to do a photograph with all the amps that they were promoting. I guess I must have had enough of a reputation for them to want to take a picture of me with their amps, even though I was just a studio musician. I was doing both, art college and sessions."

There weren't many Les Pauls in Britain at that point in time, were there?
"No, there weren't. It was just such a gorgeous-looking thing. It just sounded so wonderful. The middle setting wasn't what you'd expect it to be, it was a spiky sound that was really superb. It's the one that got stolen later, and eventually Gibson said to me, 'What sort of guitar shall we make you?' And I said, 'I know exactly what guitar: we're going to do a Custom so you can get all the pickup combinations.' I played it at the O2, and it sounded bloody marvellous. Everyone was saying that guitar sounded the best of anything that night."

You used the Custom on many sessions in the 60s...
"Yes, and also I introduced my semi-acoustic Danelectro into the world of sessions. The first session was when Glyn Johns put me in the Jet Harris & Tony Meehan thing, *Diamonds*, but I was really young then, it was way before that. Later, I was at art college and I was playing in the interval band in the Marquee, when the Marquee was on Oxford Street, and somebody there said, 'Do you want to play on a record?' I said, 'Yeah, absolutely.' So, I went along and took my DeArmond [tone and volume] pedal and all the rest."

Did you have to read?
"At one point, they came along and gave me a piece of music, and it had dots on it. Just a little bit. And I thought, 'Uh-oh. This obviously means either we're going to kick you out, or you better bloody well learn to read music a bit sharpish, because we've got things which are more demanding of you.' I'd be playing on film scores, on television adverts, on folk sessions, I'd be playing middle-of-the-road music, playing with groups, I'd be playing with singers that were from groups where they'd substituted group members with session

PAGE-TURNER

Jimmy Page By Jimmy Page **is a handsome 512-page hardback book published on by Genesis at £40, an 'affordable' version of the limited-edition original from 2010, with some updates. It's a pictorial story of Jimmy's musical life, marking the progression from choirboy to OBE, from schoolboy strummer to world-class rock star. "I set out to create a photographic autobiography," he says. "I wanted the images to illustrate the journey of my musical career, beginning as a teenager."**

There are treats for the student of Jimmy's guitar history, too, with all the landmark instruments incidentally documented, from early Hofner and Grazioso guitars, to classic Telecasters, Les Pauls, and double-necks, plus a few surprises. "I wanted to make it as thorough as possible," he says, "so that meant trawling through all the thousands of files that photographers had taken, and pulling from my personal collection. It's the most complete document there's ever going to be because of the amount of time I've put into every aspect."

PHOTO BY ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY

musicians. I'd have people coming in from France, from America, right across the board, all kinds. And now I've got the hint: you better learn to read music! So, I sort of did, I got to read music. In the early days, there were some sympathetic arrangers who would actually give you your part first, so you'd have a chance. But I've got to tell you – reading the sort of fluent notes, that was all right, but when it was chords written, it was, 'Oh my God, why don't they just write down the chord names?' That was testing.

"And here's the key to it. I'd played so many different styles of guitar, I'd played fingerstyle on my Harmony acoustic, and I'd played blues, and I knew how to play rock – I knew where the roots of these things came from. Also, I learnt to be able to ask a lot of questions, to the engineers, about certain things that I'd heard. I'd play things to people, say, 'What's that? How's that done?' It was an apprenticeship, and I became so accepted behind that closed door. I'm experimenting with the bow, too, although I'm not doing anything on pop records with that. I'm doing all of this, all my friends are off having a great time, and I'm faced with fucking muzak. And it's like, 'Okay, this is it, this is the moment, it's time to go.' Everyone's been really kind, and you think: thanks so much, but I really want to be on my way. I just had so much that I wanted to do."

You joined The Yardbirds, and Jeff Beck had his Sunburst Les Paul, so you got his Telecaster...
"He came round one day in a brand-new [Corvette] Stingray and gave me that guitar. It's the Yardbirds guitar, but I wanted to make it my own, and that was when I painted it. That's the only area that tells you the boy went to art college, the only thing that illustrates that, the fact he painted his Telecaster. Well [laughs], it wasn't a wasted opportunity, then, was it?"

What was your musical relationship like with Jeff?
"It was really good, great. I don't know how old he says we were when we met, I think he reduces the years to almost 11. His memory's bloody good, I'll tell you that much. You know that by his guitar playing: he's got a photographic memory. I met Jeff when we both had homemade guitars, so we go back that far, when we're seeing who's got the closest version of *My Babe* by James Burton. Just two kids really enthusiastic and passionate about music and guitar playing. Anyway, Jeff had said it would be great if we both played in The Yardbirds together. That was what he said, and I said I didn't really think it was going to be possible, because there was this union, five Yardbirds – five live

"That Les Paul was a beauty. It wanted a new home, so I took it home. I had it right through to the O2, and that's unusual. Most people have other guitars they'll play, but no matter what, it's the same Les Paul"
JIMMY PAGE

Yardbirds – and it didn't seem that that was going to be six, to have even more guitars."

You did end up joining The Yardbirds, but you started out on bass...
"Yes, because Paul Samwell-Smith left the band and they had dates to do. I'll tell you what, that was a hard gig, doesn't matter if I'd done sessions or whatever: I'm playing bass and trying to fill Paul Samwell-Smith's shoes, and that was tough. But the idea was that Chris [Dreja] would take over the bass and Jeff and I would play guitars together, so we did stuff where I do a bit of bowing, doing stuff like *Over Under Sideways Down* in harmony guitars. It was just fun. It was really good and promising. There wasn't anything like that, not what we were doing or were planning."

There are some pictures of you playing Jeff's Sunburst Les Paul...
"I had no choice, I had to take over on guitar if he walked off. What else are you going to do? Walk off with him? It was usually because the amplifiers were playing up, or something. All in all, knowing Jeff's sort of technique and his precision, I can understand it, but at the time it was, 'Oh my God, he's being really temperamental here.' But he was in the whole world of what he was trying to do, and shaping his sound. So, I've got to play the stuff that's been done before, but I'm really keen to move it into other areas and put my own stamp on it.

"The stuff that I did sort of collides with singles that have to be done, and you try to put the stuff that you're really doing on the B-sides – *Think About It*, *Puzzles*, the bow, it's all coming

CUSTOM SHOPPING

Jimmy says he bought his black Les Paul Custom in a London music shop in the early 60s. Was it the famous Selmer shop? No, he says, there was Selmer, and then there was an affiliated shop further along Charing Cross Road. "It's called Rock Stop now, but it was something else back then. I bought the Custom in there, when it was called something else."

Two brothers ran Selmer, Ben and Lew Davis: Ben had the Selmer shop and Lew Davis had a shop in his own name. "You've got it, Lew Davis: that was it," Jimmy says. "Selmer probably had too many Gibsons to put on show at the time, and they sent one down there. I remember going in and there was a sort of cash desk, and the guys behind it, and right up on the wall was this Custom.

I said, 'Oh my God, let me try that!' It was, oh, this is just... I fell in love with the bloody thing."



in. You have no idea how quickly the *Little Games* album was recorded. 'Right, red light's on, take, next...' because [producer] Mickie Most didn't like albums, he only liked singles. When it came to the time of Led Zeppelin, that's how I knew exactly what I wanted to do. Exactly how I was going to go about it, exactly what material. There was an audience for it, if I got a good band together. And I didn't just get a good band, I had a phenomenon together. It was really exciting! Imagine! But when people talk about Zeppelin as musicians... everyone dreams of being in a band like that.

"I really wanted The Yardbirds to continue, I really believed in it... we'd done some recording in the studio, we'd also done a live thing, none of it actually was supposed to come out – I don't know what sort of leaked out on bootleg – but I had an idea, I had material to be done. They wanted to try something else, they didn't want to be The Yardbirds any more, so that's it. I know what I'm doing, I've had this period now coming out of the studio, really studio-disciplined; I know how to do things and I know how to approach the next stage, certainly in my life, and how it relates to America."

So, you took the Telecaster with you into Zeppelin, and that lasted for the first-album period, before you got your own Sunburst Les Paul...

"Absolutely, the first album is done on the Telecaster, because it is a transition from The Yardbirds to Led Zeppelin. It's not until 1969 that I get the Les Paul, when Joe Walsh insists on me it. He bloody insisted, he said, 'You've got to buy this guitar!' I said I didn't necessarily need it. 'No, you've got to have it, just try it, you'll want it.' I said, 'I've already got the Custom.' 'No, no, you've got to try it!' I knew it was a good guitar.

"I knew there wouldn't be the feedback, the squealing you got from the Telecaster – every night there was a whole episode of controlling that. Everybody had that, if they started turning up a Telecaster loud, you know? So, I did buy it and I kicked off the second album with it. It was a pro rata price, he wasn't stealing me up, and he wasn't giving it to me as a present.

"It's the intervention of the guitar again. My first one was left behind at a house we moved into. Then there's the energy-charged guitar in The Yardbirds that Jeff Beck had. Then Joe Walsh insists I buy this guitar. That Les Paul was a beauty. It wanted a new home, so I took it home. I had it right through to the O2 [2007], and that's unusual. Most people have got other guitars they'll play, but no matter what, it's the same Les Paul. It's hypothetical, but I may not have come up with the riff from *Whole Lotta Love* on the Telecaster. That fat sound on the Les Paul, you're inspired. Well, I am, and I know other people are inspired by the sound of particular instruments. Suddenly, they're playing something they haven't played before, and it's really user-friendly, and they've got some sort of riff, which is peculiar to that moment. So many things start singing, you know? Really singing." G

PHOTO BY ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS


ROADRUNNER
RECORDS

SLASH

INTERVIEW JUNE 2012

Slash wrote some of rock's greatest-ever songs, indulged in mythical levels of excess and experienced almost religious heights of global adulation. His timeless chops and evocative tones powered Guns N' Roses, Slash's Snakepit and Velvet Revolver, not to mention cameos alongside the biggest names in music. These days he's clean, sober and has bounced back with two hard-hitting solo albums. Here, he talks us through the writing and recording of his latest release, his devotion to the Gibson Les Paul and why digital just isn't right for him…

WORDS **SIMON BRADLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAM GASSON & JOBY SESSIONS**

There are few guitarists more famous than Slash and, as word reaches us that a sleek, blacked-out car has pulled up outside *Guitarist*'s London photo studio, a ripple of anticipatory excitement goes around our usually celeb-hardened team.

He nonchalantly strides onto our set and plugs his #1 Gibson Appetite Les Paul into a Marshall AFD half-stack. He's forgivably aloof, but not in an unfriendly way, and is resplendent in full iconic regalia: black t-shirt strewn with obscenities, leather strides, mirror shades and the obligatory topper that we're satisfied to note travels in its own hat box.

After the critical acclaim of 2010's *Slash* album – recorded with a roster of vocalists that included Lemmy, Wolfmother's Andrew Stockdale and Fergie from The Black Eyed Peas – Slash quickly got back on the horse to record his second solo offering, *Apocalyptic Love*, which is released via an exclusive fan pack on 21 May and worldwide on 18 June. This time, he's stuck with a single singer, Alter Bridge vocalist Myles Kennedy, and during the exclusive playback we were granted, we were struck by the depth of the sound, the massive riffs and kinetic solos.

Back in the studio for the cover shoot, Slash tweaks the amp's EQ and gain levels, before letting rip with a piece of ferocious lead guitar, then, as the camera crew gives the thumbs up, simply says, "If it's fine with you, it's fine with me" – and that's that.

As you'd expect, he effortlessly oozes rock 'n' roll attitude, yet is softly spoken, engagingly intelligent and perfectly coherent. As we sit down to chat, he fixes us with the first of several unwavering yet affable glances and says: "I have to remember that we're talking guitars now, not anything else." Yeah, we get that a lot...

How did you write material for the new album?

"The majority of the material was written during the [2011] tour over a period of about a year. I'd come up with an idea, record it, send it to Myles, and we'd just compile loose demos. When the tour was over I got together with [bassist] Todd Kerns and [drummer] Brent Fitz to start thrashing out the band arrangements of the songs.

"Myles was out with Alter Bridge, so when he got done, we started pre-production. We went into the studio in December and recorded three songs – then came back in January and finished the other 12 tracks."

How did you go on to develop the songs further?

"There was a very fixed way, because of all the touring and the crazy schedules. I'd send Myles my

"I've always felt that the sound of headphones, and that confined feeling, means I play pretty poorly. Recording live captures the spontaneity of a performance and the chemistry that happens..."

SLASH

ideas, he'd come up with a melody and that would kick the song off. Sometimes, the ideas would be in one part, or two parts, or a whole arrangement and it was totally open to him to come up with what he wanted. Him being a guitar player, too, he would have his own take on it. It was very collaborative."

The vocal style is very different to that of Alter Bridge. Does Myles find it challenging?

"Because of the energy of the type of band it is – a sort of loose rock 'n' roll band – he has to get up to speed naturally, whereas in Alter Bridge it's a very calculated band with a lot of different [musical] changes. They know exactly what they're doing, so he has more time to sit down and settle on the melodies, make sure they're right. I just sort of let him do it loosely."

How do you share Myles with Alter Bridge?

"We sort of work it out, between Alter Bridge's manager and my manager. When I first asked Myles to do the tour he was on a break from Alter Bridge, so we toured for a little bit, then he went back to Alter Bridge, then when he was done doing that... the poor guy hasn't had a fucking wink of sleep in three years [laughs]. But we just co-exist that way.

"For this tour, he's on a break, as Creed are going out and Mark Tremonti is doing a solo record, so I get Myles for a year. And when the year's up we'll see where the schedules are at. In a way, it's sorta cool. The bands are so different, so it's easy for us to co-exist, but there's also a sense of looseness where he's not stressing out about this as a career move: we're just jamming."

The guitar sound on *Apocalyptic Love* is massive. Is it true it was an all-analogue recording?

"Yeah, the last record, too. Y'know, for pop or for hip-hop, digital's fine, but if you're trying to mic a drum set or to get a proper sound out of a cabinet, analogue just sounds better. I have nothing against digital, it's convenient and it's very fast, but when it comes to this... [it's not right].

"The other thing was that we recorded everything live. This is the first record I've done since we devised a system where I could play in the room with the guys. In fact, it was actually in a room within the room, so I could hear the playback through monitors and didn't have to use headphones. All the guitar tracks, all the leads and rhythms are all at the same time and I didn't have to go in and overdub.

"I've always felt that the sound of headphones, and that confined feeling, means I play pretty poorly. I've always wanted to be able to play with the band and keep the tracks, and this is the first time in my career that I've been able to do it. Normally, if you wanted to do that, different producers would complain about the bleed from the cabinets no matter how far away they were, so this is a system that actually worked.

"It's so different, to capture the spontaneity of a performance and the sort of chemistry that happens when everybody's working off of one another: it's like night and day. There are some mistakes and some sloppy things, but, to me, it just sounds more real."

Have you ever recorded digitally?

"I did in Velvet Revolver; I had a shocking thing happen during the first Velvet Revolver record [*Contraband*, 2004]. The way I always record is live with the drums, and I thought we'd gotten really great performances. Everything was fine, but I came in one night during the mixing process and found the engineer tweaking everything on Pro Tools. I was like, 'Why would you do that?' It just takes all the life out of the record. That was my first real digital experience and I've been really wary of it ever since."

The album's guitar sounds are really varied, on *Halo* and *We Will Roam*, for example...

"It's all Les Paul – one guitar throughout the whole record. The thing is, sometimes you want a certain sound and you go get that guitar. You want it to sound like a Strat, so you get a Strat; you want it to sound like a Gretsch, you get a Gretsch. But there's something very unsatisfying about that. I've learned over the years that whatever it is I'm trying to do, I'll do it with the guitar I have. So, for the most part, it's really just one guitar and one combination of amps, and I just changed a couple of things around to make it sound how we wanted."

The main riff on *We Will Roam* is pretty unusual...

"That's something I wrote on baritone guitar and it's one of the few songs I wrote and recorded at home with a drum machine and all that stuff. I had a very fixed idea of what I wanted it to sound like and it's all fingerpicking, except for the chorus."

How about amplification for the sessions?

"I tried mixing a few together. I have a Slash signature model – the new Marshall AFD head – and an old JCM800 of mine that I used on the last record, and I combined the two. Marshall also gave me one of Kerry King's signature amps [the 2203KK head – Ed] and there was this multi-channel amp that Santiago Alvarez from Marshall designed that they sent me to try. They were all interesting in their own right, but I found that my amps and my setup was the best: the AFD into a 4 x 12 cabinet with Shure SM57s."





"It's embarrassing to tell you how much time I spent evaluating my rig! With Guns N' Roses, in the early days it was whatever we could get together. In a stadium, you've got more gear, but you don't necessarily need it..."

SLASH

Talking of the AFD, you've toured with it a lot – how's it been?
"The head's great. We spent a lot of time developing it, so I had it on the road, then back to Santiago's office in Hong Kong, then back out again and, finally, got it to where it was right. Now it sounds amazing, but I think for the next tour, I'll take a new JCM800 2203 head and hook them up. I don't want it to sound like *Appetite* all the time!"

Do you spend much time refining your live setup?
"It's embarrassing to tell you how much time I spent evaluating my rig! With Guns N' Roses, in the early days it was whatever we could get together, so it'd be some sort of full stack. Then when we started moving into bigger places, we managed to get more gear. Yet the thing is, in a stadium you've got more gear, but you don't necessarily need it; you take the gear you're using in an arena, and in a club for that matter, and augment it ever so slightly with a couple more cabs."

How does playing massive stadiums differ from doing smaller venues?
"You just do your thing. We play a lot of festivals and, between clubs, arenas and the festivals, it's all basically the same kind of performance. Sometimes there's a little more wild abandon depending on the size of the stage."

Do you use much in the way of effects on stage?
"There might be something on a record that had something particular I'd used, so I try to have a foot pedal to do that for the live performance, a vibrato or chorus. My go-to for concerts is the wah pedal and I have a Dunlop MXR boost pedal for solos. That's really it, but I have an MXR Blue Box [an octave fuzz] that I like to have there for one particular section of a song. And then there's a chorus for the beginning of *Paradise City*. But I'm really bad with pedals. I can't even have them on the stage, so I have my tech switch them on when I need them. They don't get used that much."

For *Nothing To Say* you use a Les Paul with a vibrato. What is it?
"I used a Les Paul Axcess for a second, and it's okay. I'm not a huge supporter of Les Pauls with tremolos, but there's also that whole thing where I'd rather use a Les Paul than something else. There are certain songs that I used the bar on in the studio that I want to recreate live; I used to have a BC Rich that I used all the time, but it never sounded that great to me, so I used the Les Paul Axcess for a while. But it's too thin a guitar compared to my regular Les Pauls, so they took one of the Appetite models and put a Floyd Rose on it, and it actually works pretty well."

Are you still able to go out and see bands these days?
"You know, I don't go out and see bands live that much because I'm usually working, and I'm very single-minded when I'm touring or in the studio. It does happen, though – a friend might tell me about something – but most new bands I see are when we're touring with them, or we're playing a festival."

Have any guitarists caught your ear recently?
"The guitar player who really stuns me is Synyster Gates [Avenged Sevenfold], who's a technically amazing player. I did a gig with them and I worked with [vocalist] M Shadows on my last record.

"There's a lot of shredding going on right now, but not much that's in the vein of guitar that I'm into. I played with Derek Trucks recently, and he's phenomenal, but he's a little bit too far over towards the blues side, too mellow. And the other guys are just too much shred, so I haven't been hearing many what you'd call straight-up rock 'n' roll guitar players."

Talking of Derek, what was it like playing with him and BB King?
"Oh, that was an awesome experience. I'd played with BB before, but to play with him at [the] Royal Albert Hall was a great moment for me."

How does your playing technique compare what it was like when you were starting out?
"Over time, I've developed a rapport with the guitar. It's really about connecting your brain to your fretboard as quickly as possible so anything you hear you can achieve instantaneously. A lot of the stuff you're doing when you're a kid, you don't really know what you're doing, which has a certain charm to it."

Everyone wants to be a rock star, but how does the reality compare to the dream?
"When I was a kid just picking up the guitar, I used to play air guitar to Cheap Trick at Budokan, so there's that fantasy: the concerts, the masses of people. That was pretty much it – the only ambition I had was to get out and do concerts. As soon as I started playing, the first thing I did was put a band together and that's always been my focus. The whole rock star thing – the fame, limos, chicks, hotels, all that stuff – wasn't part of my consciousness.

"So, when it came to be, it was always about the actual concerts, and it's probably exactly how I thought it would be playing in front of masses of people. The rest of it was just never that glamorous to me – and we used to spend a lot of time dousing it with booze!" [laughs]. G



PETE TOWNSHEND

INTERVIEW JUNE 1990

"I pulled the tremolo arm out and thought, 'That's going to need a stitch,' then I looked at the floor and it was covered in blood. I was thinking, 'God, somebody's had an accident' – I still hadn't realised! Then I look at the back of my hand and it was gushing out like a pipe…"

WORDS **NEVILLE MARTEN**

At that moment, Pete Townshend realised that his arm-swinging trademark – something he'd been resisting, despite his audiences' apparent desperation for it – might just have cost him the use of his right hand. But it all started with the acquisition of a Casio MIDI guitar with a locking nut.

Pete explained: "I started to play around and thought, 'So that's how they do all this unbelievable string bending; it's this thing that you can wiggle all over the place...' I always used to take the arm off. So I pulled off some solos I was proud of and it kind of brought me back to the electric guitar. I was studying pull-offs and all that stuff and deliberately trying to keep away from the Townshend clichés..."

When the massive, augmented outfit that called itself The Who went on its much publicised 25th anniversary tour, Townshend's electric playing was conspicuous by its absence, save for the occasional anthem, such as *Won't Get Fooled Again*. He was also becoming increasingly irritated at how well the arm-swinging was going down in some American stadiums.

"It was like... like Hitler arriving! And all I'm doing is swinging my bloody arm," he states, almost surprised. "In the end, I did it a few times and suddenly I just felt my arm stop," he recalls. "I thought I'd just banged my hand but I looked, and it was actually still in there... sort of hanging. I thought, 'Shit! That's gone in quite a way,' then I realised it had gone right through the hand! I tried to move my fingers and couldn't, and I thought, 'Oh no, I've done a nerve.' Then I went into quite severe shock and was really ill for about five hours."

After a visit to a local hospital where the wound was irrigated, the surgeon did some tests and pronounced everything to be okay. "That night I was sufficiently coward enough to pray," he admits. "I didn't care about rock 'n' roll, or the guitar, or having money, or being thought of as an important this or an unimportant that, a has-been this or a has-been that. But never to be able to hold a pencil again or, as I said to the doctor, have a good wank... It was so shocking to realise for the sake of a catch-phrase, I'd put myself in a position where I might have disabled myself for life. I so desperately want what I do not to be circus, and it is circus. So much of it is tight-rope walking and so little of it has to do with what I write, what I play and the quality of it."

So, what originally influenced you to become a player and a writer?

"My father had played the guitar when he was young and my uncle Jack had worked for Kalamazoo before the war, developing guitar pickups. There was a kind of family thing about the guitar, but it was considered something of an anomaly then. My father was in a dance band and I wanted to do what he did, play the saxophone, but I couldn't blow a note so he suggested the guitar. Chromatic harmonica was actually my first instrument; I got very good at it, not quite Stevie Wonder, but very good. Then I hit 11 and decided I did want to try guitar, so my grandmother bought me one.

"Then I started to examine what was happening, listening to Elvis Presley like all my friends. But to be honest, I never really liked him, and also I think Scotty Moore was an aberration – not my idea of great playing. I think he was someone from another era who'd been drafted into rock 'n' roll; he was competent but not brilliant. I know that's sacrilege to many people and I wouldn't want to slight him as an individual or player, because he's cited as a seminal influence by so many, but, for me, it was more the sound of Nancy Whiskey."

PHOTO BY GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

What, *Freight Train*?
"Yes, the sound of strumming guitars, such a glorious sound. And I like flamenco music and used to listen to a lot of that, and that's really where my style was born.

"I got my guitar for Christmas but I didn't learn it. Instead I bought myself a banjo, because in my class at school we had quite a good trad band – we even had a tuba player – and [John] Entwistle was on trumpet. We were all very left-wing, or they were. I didn't know what politics was about, but I went on the Aldermaston march – or, again, they did. And they were always disappearing into sleeping bags with girls...

"So, I picked up the banjo. And the players I looked at were the guys with Acker Bilk, Ken Colyer and Kenny Ball. English banjo players really were a law unto themselves – you don't find that kind of brisk banjo playing on the original Louis Armstrong or Six Beiderbecke records. But Acker Bilk's banjo player had this very vital, bright sound. He used a G banjo with a long scale and played it with lots of flourishes. I copied that until I went back to guitar a couple of years later.

"I didn't start to collect records and listen to guitar properly until I went to art school, when I'd already been playing for five years. My style was already formed and that's why I think it's so unique. I did start copying Chet Atkins when I was 18, and I can do quite a good impersonation – not quite as good as Mark Knopfler, but I could give him a run for his money on *Lambeth Walk*. But they're not in my blood. They're things that I learned but rapidly got tired of, and I became interested in the intuitive style that seemed to be R&B – like Jimmy Reed, who just played two shapes, but it was the depth in those two shapes that created the poetry."

Was your writing concurrent with all that?
"Yes, listening to R&B and to other players, and the creative process were all part of the same thing. Prior to that I'd just been playing for amusement, not really accepting any challenges. In a way, I regret not having had a formal beginning, because there are walls that I come up against, particularly in these days of players who are so brilliantly expressive and can play so fast. I can play much faster now than I used to, but I'm always ahead of my fingers, my vocabulary is limited and I can't read very well. I wish I'd taken a more formal route..."

Mightn't that have changed the way you evolved?
"No, I think it might have structured my songwriting a bit better. I look back and see wasted songs, because I was working so intuitively. There were lots of really lucky songs, like *Won't Get Fooled Again* or *Behind Blue Eyes*, which came out perfectly, but not through any understanding of song structure. Computers have since helped me a lot there – it's a bit like having always suffered from hay fever and then finding that your computer will analyse the pollen count...

"Analysis is a lost art, and to replace it with intuition is asking too much of intuition. Intuitive players and composers should have all their armoury before they start relying on their intuition. That's when they'll make quantum jumps. Look at somebody like Prince. He has that armoury, he can write an orchestral score, sit at a piano and read a part, knock out a fairly good version of the *Moonlight Sonata* or study Gershwin if he likes. Then you've got this impetuous imp-like character grafting all this intuitive, waif-like feel – and a sense of eroticism, too – and you come up with that kind of magical quality."

Where do blues, rock 'n' roll, country – the simple, exciting songs – fit into that?
"I think people are now looking at blues, rock 'n' roll, country and folk music as a separate strain. But it's not, it's just that those four categories are the most disciplined forms of music that exist, with rock 'n' roll probably the most disciplined of the lot.

Because you're hide-bound by certain limits?
"Yes, and they're very strict. A lot of them have now become rules that you break at your peril – people who broke the rock 'n' roll rules in the 70s are still smarting from the response..."

But didn't bands like The Who push those boundaries and merge the feel of rock 'n' roll with true pop?
"The interesting thing is that rock 'n' roll was denied to The Who in a way. The Who were more a pop band than a rock band. Some people get confused when they read the history of The Who, or hear me talking about 'rock'. When I talk about rock I'm talking about the ideology that lay behind the emergence of new pop in the 60s – British pop. And I include in that people like Bob Dylan, who wouldn't have been able to do what he did without The Beatles. That unleashed something I'm very proud of, because it happened here and it came from us! I talk with Paul McCartney about when it all started, and it's fascinating to feel that you were the beginning of a movement that has outlasted Cubism!

"A lot of people will find that statement unbelievably pretentious, but the fact is that rock 'n' roll itself lasted as long as the pundits said it would – a couple of years. I mean, Elvis only made one rock 'n' roll album! Then there were a couple of albums from Bill Haley and one from Eddie Cochran. Buddy Holly isn't really rock 'n' roll at all, but you'd concede one album. And Jerry Lee Lewis said it... they were buried by the emergence of bands like The Beatles, who actually took the song form back to its romantic and sentimental post-war origins."

The set middle eight and everything...
"Yes, much more melody involved, lyrics about love and sentimentality rather than sex. Very few code works for sex, which rock 'n' roll was full of. We really didn't understand then – I don't think The Beatles understood better than anybody else what was really going on. We were quite naive and I think it produced a very innocent and refreshing form of music. And where the guitar fits into all this is as the symbol, the anchor, the only continuous line through that period and probably out to the present day. People occasionally try to revive the saxophone, The saxophone is the symbol of the 80s – bullshit! Even today, people hold saxophones like guitars! I'm not claiming superiority for the guitar, I'm just talking about what's been imposed..."

PHOTO BY ALESSANDRO BOSIO/PACIFIC PRESS/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

The feedback and other noises you extracted from your guitar... were these conscious efforts to do something new, or did you happen to turn your amp up too loudly one day?

"No, I'm afraid I was an arty little sod and I was actually experimenting. I was at art school, surrounded by real intellectuals, people that were experimenting all the time. I was greatly impressed by all this and wanted to please these people. A lot of it was posing, trying to drag something out of the band that it was resisting – this is pre-Keith Moon. And as I got louder, John got louder by inventing the 4x 12 cabinet, which he did with somebody up at Marshall. Then I got a 4x 12 cabinet and put it on a chair, so then he invented the 8x 12 cabinet, to get louder than me, and then I invented the stack by getting two 4x 12s and stacking them up. Marshall were outraged, and one day somebody from Marshall came and they were nagging me about the fact that the top cabinet was shifting and was going to fall off and get damaged. I just said, 'So what?' and knocked it over! There was a tremendous kind of arrogance...

"I haven't actually shown up at any of Jim Marshall's anniversaries or anything, because firstly I feel a bit guilty about the way we treated their products, but also because I never see anywhere that what they actually did was rip off the circuit of a Fender Bassman amplifier. I remember them doing it. I remember the amplifier in the shop, on the counter. 'This is the one we're copying...' Of course, there was a revolution in the way that they built the stuff and the sound it produced...

"Our experimentations were all to do with our irritation with the audience, who heckled if you played a rhythm and blues song that they didn't know. You'd get blokes in the back with their pints of beer shouting, 'What's all this rubbish? Play some Shane Fenton!' And we just got louder as a result. Then the squeaks and farts did start to occur in the feedback, but by that time I was already well along that path...

"I was an arty little sod and I was experimenting [with feedback and other noises]. I was at art school, surrounded by real intellectuals. I was greatly impressed and wanted to please these people"

PETE TOWNSHEND



"When I broke my first guitar... I'd actually watched a guy called Malcolm Cecil, at Ealing Tech, where I was at high school, beat me to the punch. He went on to co-produce *Innervisions* for Stevie Wonder and he was bass player with the Johnny Scott Quintet. A girl in my class went out with the flautist and she invited Malcolm Cecil to come and give a talk. Halfway through the talk he started to get carried away, saying, 'There are lots of different ways you can play the bass; you can play it like this, or like that,' and then he started to bang it. Somebody had been doing something on the stage with a saw, and it was still there, and he picked it up and said, 'You can even saw at the bass,' and he started to saw through his strings and we all stood up and cheered! It made a fantastic noise, and the fact that he was sacrificing his strings...! And he just carried on sawing, right though the strings and through the belly of the bass!

"The whole college was full of it, so that wall had been broken and it seemed perfectly natural for me, a couple of months later, to find myself doing the same thing. I saw myself as an R&B/jazz musician, and also as an artist. I thought The Who would last about a year and I'd end up back in experimental music, pursuing a career very much like Brian Eno, who, believe it or not, I was a primal influence on, from a lecture I did at Winchester when he was in the audience.

"It shows that radical experimentation really is worth pursuing. Because even though it might feel stupid and pretentious, if you do discover something new, it's your property and you're identified with it forever.

"Other people stumbled on feedback at the same time as me. Jeff Beck was using it when Roger went to see The Tridents rehearsing. He said, 'There's a shit-hot guitar player down the road and he's making sounds like you.' Then later, when we supported The Kinks, Dave Davies was adamant, 'I invented it. It wasn't John Lennon and it wasn't you!' I worshipped The Kinks and never let a bad word about them pass my lips, so I conceded. But I believe it was something people were discovering all over London. These big amps that Marshall were turning out – you couldn't stop the guitars feeding back!"

But you did try to turn it into something musical?
"Oh yeah, you can hear it on records. *Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere*, the solo, on the note A, I would flick a harmonic, get it feeding back and then go 'dit dit dit dar dar' with the switch. And by standing at certain angles I could get incredible sounds out of it, some of which were just characteristics of the Rickenbacker body, which I stuffed with paper. You could control it and it could be very musical – certainly that sort of thing where you hit an open A chord and then take your fingers off the strings... The A string is still banging away, but you're hearing the finger-off harmonics in feedback. Then the vibrating A starts to stimulate harmonics in the other strings and it's an extraordinary sound, like an enormous aeroplane. A wonderful, optimistic sound that happened because I was posing. I'd put my arms out, let go of the chord, then find that the resulting noise was better."

Is it true that *You Really Got Me* influenced you to write *Can't Explain* to attract the attention of The Kinks' producer, Shel Talmy?
"That's right. I had two songs, one called *Talking Generation*, which became *My Generation*, and *Can't Explain*. We picked *Can't Explain* as the first song to play him and I re-did the original demo with staccato chords. Listening to it, it's a craftsman-like pop record of the time and a lot of people's favourite Who record. Shel Talmy was producing a particular kind of sound in the studio, a particular kind of arrangement..."

So, you were into home demos even then...
"Yes, I actually started with tape recorders before I started with guitars. As well as the trad band, John and I were in a rock band with a drummer friend – we'd get together and talk about The Shadows! The guy had a tape recorder and we had such fun with it, doing spoof radio shows, and I set my heart on getting one.

"My mum and dad had a junk shop, in which I worked, and inevitably a tape recorder came in – it was a Grundig or something. I couldn't dub on it, but I realised that all I needed was another tape machine and I'd be able to. It was Kit Lambert who set me up with a studio of my own. He was The Who's manager. I had a flat above my folks' and I set a studio up in one of the rooms. He bought me two machines and although those demos are a little brittle-sounding, they were the first things I ever did. They sound really good."

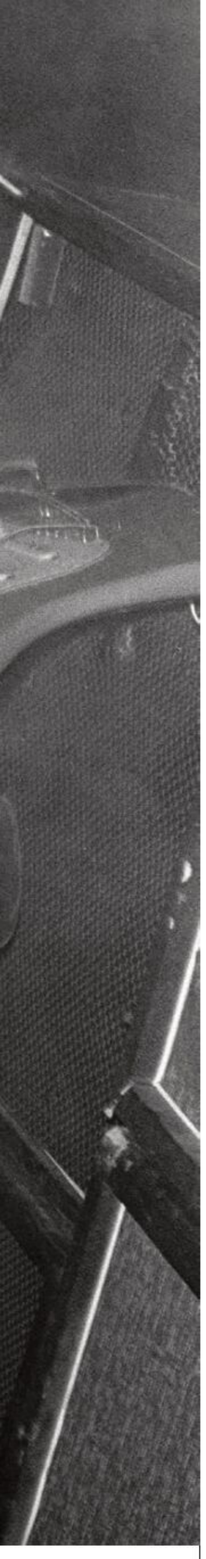
Like Ray Davies, your songs were statements on youth vs age and change vs the status quo. Did you actually feel trapped?
"Yes, and I think Ray Davies did, too. I think it was to do with British life. People look back and say, 'What's so interesting about The Kinks, The Beatles, The Who and The Stones is that they were so successful so young.' But what happens is that you do get trapped when you're young. I never got to leave home – I had a record in the charts and I was still living at home! All my adolescent neuroses, I've carried with me. They're there, frozen, and it's taken what feels like centuries to grow up to the level of the average 25 year old, let alone 45 year old!



"The guitar smashing was basically marketing. I had to use real guitars, because I am primarily a musician and I wanted it to be real. I'm also an artist and I'm not afraid to claim that what I do is art"
PETE TOWNSHEND

"When your voice is recognised at a young age, your thoughts are acknowledged for their weaknesses rather than their strengths. You're appreciated for your vulnerability, your naivety, your innocence, your ignorance, your desperation, your frustration, your ugliness: things that are very endearing in somebody young, with a record in the charts. Those are the things people hang on to, you're frozen with them and they become the tools of your trade. Of course, you rapidly grow out of them, but you still have to exercise your life in terms of those tools. It would be absurd for somebody of 19, instead of writing *Can't Explain*, to write a song saying *I Understand What Makes The World Go Round*. Some people do and they don't last long."

Many, if asked what songs Pete Townshend writes, would say, 'aggressive songs'. But some of them are really gentle – like *Sunrise* from *The Who Sell Out*...
"Well, everybody has different shades, some of which don't get seen by the public. But anybody who cares



to go further can find that stuff. I find myself whining about how record companies put everybody into boxes, but we put ourselves into a box. If you've got something to say it's best to specialise, but when you're the product, you end up lumbered with that specialisation. It's not like running a factory and saying, 'We'll start by concentrating on garden gates and then move on to the rest of the furniture'. You say, 'I am a garden gate...' But then, when you've successfully sold yourself as that and you say, 'Oh, by the way, I'm not just a garden gate', people say, 'Oh shut up.' They don't want to know; somebody else is the rest of the furniture. There's only room for one garden gate and that's The Who.

"When we vacated the live garden gate industry it was filled by Queen and Status Quo in the UK. When we play here, there's one big chunk of the audience missing and those are the people who thought, 'Well, if you can't be bothered we're going to go and watch Queen!' In fact, both their managers have said, 'The year The Who broke up was our best ever year' – that was the year Queen became a quantum supergroup.

"I've always liked Queen. The idea is, 'We're not afraid to be pretentious' – the same kind of thing that The Who had in the 70s. Then Quo picked up the roustabout, rough and ready, good-time kind of thing... I was talking to Eric once and he said, 'I'm going to see Status Quo tonight.' I laughed and he said, 'No, I really like them.' I said, 'Status Quo?!!' Then I thought about it and thought, 'Yeah, why not?'"

When everybody else was after guitar hero status, you played a one-note solo on *I Can See For Miles*. Was that Townshend the anti-hero?

"Well, maybe. I'm sure it was a kind of defence mechanism. You have to remember that I knew Jimmy Page – Led Zeppelin weren't formed then, but I'd seen him in various bands and if anything his playing slowed down as he got older! He was an extraordinary player, arrogant, flash... And Eric, with The Yardbirds, used to play absolutely beautifully and he'd only been playing a year! And Jeff Beck, who always had that quality of making the guitar sound like a voice... That was the kind of market place I was in, and although I hadn't been belted round the chops by Jimi Hendrix yet, I definitely didn't want to be competing with those players.

"I used to watch Dave Davies – dang, dang, dang. He couldn't really play and I thought, 'I don't want to be like that.' I used to take refuge in symbols: you play the guitar, I'll do this. I wasn't very interested in scales...

"I don't practise every day and I don't intend to, so I've tended to end up dealing in musical clichés to some extent. I was very embarrassed playing on The Who's first album, because I tried to play solos and I could hear the jazz creeping in. So, I made a conscious effort to keep away from feature solos. And it did feel very much like a competitive area...

At the time of *Live At Leeds*, you had a formidable repertoire and a stage act to match. Keith Moon's death must have knocked the whole thing sideways...

"Yes, it did. And it took a long time for us to accept that it was over. The road we were on was inevitably going to end in death for one or all of us; it was certainly looking very threatening. When Bonzo died in Led Zeppelin, they knew to stop. But we dealt with it in a rather clumsy way. The interesting thing is that the band was actually broken up, and some people claim that this is why Keith died, because he had no *raison d'etre*.

"Halfway through the *Tommy* film, I decided to stop touring because of a growing drink problem. I proceeded to get drunk and announce that I was never going on the road again. I also decided that we should concentrate on films, because the only way we'd ever reach a larger audience would be through that medium. So, we bought Shepperton Studios and made *The Kids Are Alright*, *Quadrophenia*, *Tommy*, *McVicar* and a few other bits and pieces. Keith was brilliant at the PR side of things and it all looked like it was going to go okay.

"But you see his last performance in *The Kids Are Alright*. That was the last time he ever played: you can see how glue and string he is there – he's overweight, bloated, he's desperately trying to stop drinking, so he's in a constant kind of withdrawal. I, on the other hand, swallowed a bottle of brandy and did the gig looking a 100 per cent fit. I don't know about the state of my liver, though! When Keith died, maybe I felt guilty and thought we should go on in his memory, or something."

He was impossible to follow, a massive personality...

"That's the thing – more as a personality than as a drummer. He was capable of playing the straight-up rock style that Kenney [Jones] produced for the band, but it was nice not to be fighting some of his lunatic ego trip things he used to pull off on the drums. Kenney did a great job, but you missed Keith's personality..."

Many people with drink or drug problems are the highly articulate, highly intelligent people who could put forward the best arguments for never getting embroiled in such things...

"Maybe they think they're superior, that it's not going to happen to them. You know, it's physical frailty that gets you, it's nothing to do with your intellect. But I think human beings are addictive – we're addicted to behaviour patterns and rhythms and regularity. And drinking's great, it's one of the great things that we do. It's a problem in music and there are other industries that suffer, like journalism, where it's permissible for somebody to be a drunken old hack as long as they meet their deadline. And people are quite happy to sit and watch an old guy die at his typewriter. I mean, look how they've immortalised Jeffrey Bernard...

"These days they tend to wheel out the successful people in front of the unsuccessful people and say, 'Look, successful people can be alcoholics, too! There's Elizabeth Taylor and Pete Townshend – they've slept in the gutter.' It's to give hope to ordinary people, who sometimes feel their problems are related to money, success and fulfilment. They're not really. The mistake is underestimating the frailty of your own body."

You say you were belted round the chops by Jimi...

"It's very difficult now, just listening to records, to understand what all the fuss was about. He was such

PHOTO BY CHRIS MORPHET/REDFERNS

a visual performer and it's difficult to find the words to explain how extraordinary he was. There was something else, other than music, going on. Hendrix was a great player, but he wasn't really creative. He was dealing in other people's ideas, old blues things and tricks that were either borrowed from Eric – that Marshall kind of style – or the pyrotechnic things that he had caught off watching me.

"He used to follow the band around, watching, and then he suddenly appeared on stage doing all this stuff. But it was something else that made it extraordinary; he was just an extraordinary man. Talk to the women who came in contact with him – he literally enchanted them. And he was a pretty unremarkable kind of gnarled-looking guy, but he was a real enchanter... The thing that really stunned Eric and me was the way he took what we did and made it better. I really started to try to play. I thought I'd never, ever be as great as he is but there's certainly no reason now why I shouldn't try. I remember saying to Eric, 'I'm going to play him off the stage one day.' What Eric did was even more peculiar. He said, 'I'm going to pretend that I am Jimi Hendrix!'"

What did you think when punk arrived? Many people have written that you were its originators...

"Well, we weren't really; our managers were. Malcolm McLaren went to pick the brains of Chris Stamp, who was really the original punk manager... Chris told him to get a group who couldn't play, do a deal with a record company, get session musicians to play on the record, get a hit, renege on the contract, go to another company, sack everybody in the band, reveal who the session musicians were, make them appear on television, have a flop, go to another record company... The thing about Malcolm was that, according to Chris Thomas who produced the first Pistols album, he actually wanted the Pistols to be the next Beatles! He wasn't subversive at all, he wanted massive success! It was a combination of things that led to the punk explosion and the anti-industry destructive element.

"I remember being very depressed, much as I am now, about the music industry. We need another punk explosion. There's some good stuff happening with rap and hip-hop and everything [now]. But all there was [then], really, was Queen! That wasn't the end of the world, because Queen were fun. But that's all there was – Queen and the Electric Light Orchestra pretending to be Queen, and lots of other people pretending to be the Electric Light Orchestra Meets Queen – like Asia.

"It was just dreadful – lots of music students, lots of Rick Wakeman clones, lots of people coming on stage wearing saris. It was weird being in The Who: a lot of these bands loved The Who, and everything I was doing was being associated with this unbelievably boring wave of music, which was music for its own sake, without any ideological values, music by music students or people who did a gig and then went down the pub and talked about cricket! I don't understand it. I still find it extraordinary to see musicians come into the studio to do a session and read a newspaper! Music to me is pervasive: time stops for me. I look at the clock and it's 12 o'clock, session starts, next time I look it's six o'clock. I wonder what's happened to the last six hours.

"So, I welcomed punk, but it also frightened me – I felt there was real danger in it. I saw Super-8 footage of early Siouxie And The Banshees; she was on the stage in a see-through dress and somebody was getting badly cut up in the front row, and nobody was doing anything about it. He kept getting up, covered in blood, and laughing. Then you realised he was banging his head against other people! It frightened me. I'd seen crowds get out of order, but now the band was part of it... When I finally got to see bands like Wayne County, or Jayne County, Generation X and the Pistols, I liked them. They seemed to be about guitar, bass and drums again."

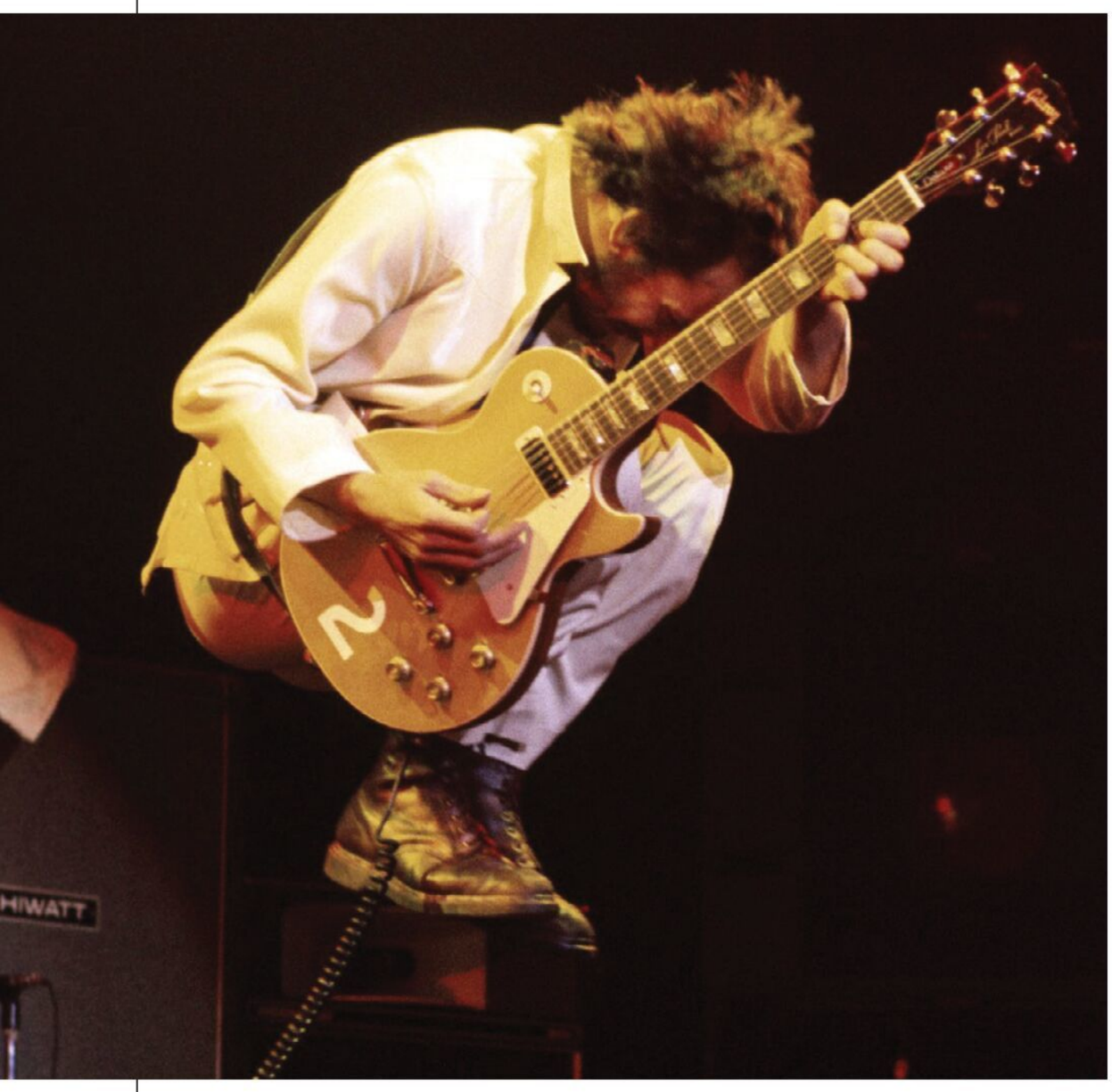


PHOTO BY TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE

But The Who are hardly that any more...

"They don't exist."

Well, why have they just done this massive tour?

"To celebrate history. But they don't exist as a functioning band: we're a singer, guitar player and bass player, without a drummer. It looks to an outsider that we armed ourselves with an enormous band to disguise the fact that we're not what we were. In actual fact, they were my musicians and I'm the one who has the luxury of singing the same person's songs and working in the same band. There are 14 of them now, two of whom have sadly had the sack – Roger and John...

"Five years ago I went to the group and said, 'I want to do a 25th anniversary 'something'. I can see the music being forgotten, I don't think we said goodbye properly and I think we owe it to ourselves to have a good time on our 25th birthday.' And immediately the managers' response was, 'There's millions of pounds to be made here and I'm going to get myself a new yacht out of it.' And I couldn't really fight that.

"I was quite keen to get into the studio to make an album, but for various reasons the album didn't seem like a good idea. So, we rushed a tour together and I think it's a much better thing to have done. If we'd made an album it probably would have been a failure. The Stones' album – which was their most unadventurous album ever – got the best reviews of any album they've made, precisely because it's unadventurous! I would never have been able to do that; I'd have made a record like *Who's Next* – that's what everybody's always wanted us to do ever since we did it. In my solo career, all anybody ever wants me to do is make another album like *Empty Glass*. You've got *Empty Glass*, play that."

A lot of brilliant songs are written by 20 year olds, but yet they never seemed able to capture it again...

"I think in my case it's a resistance to doing it again. I could do it again very easily, but I think I'd feel like a big prat. What we did we did with honesty – when we sang *My Generation*, *Can't Explain* and *I Can See For Miles*, they were written from the heart. If I were to write the same things again, I'd be saying, 'Now, what would appeal to a young person?' – which would be against the rules. People are really relieved that Paul McCartney has decided to be honest – nothing is ever going to diminish *Yesterday* or *We Can Work It Out*, but I don't want to listen to *Silly Love Songs*.

"It's the directness of the statement that's difficult to come up with as you get older, because it feels wrong to simplify things. It also feels wrong to make all the things that are wrong in the world somebody else's fault, which is what I did in *My Generation* – 'You are accused, we have found you out.' It's almost like saying, 'And we will kill you and then everything will be fine in this fairyland in which we live.' Life's not like that.

"It's very important to be able to live with what you say, and I can live with what I said when I was young. I'm perfectly happy to say, 'Yes, I said it and I meant it and I'm proud of it.' Some of the things I did when I was young were quite aggressive and brutal, and I couldn't live with that now. I couldn't live with something as absolutely irresponsible as *My Generation*, or even *Won't Get Fooled Again*, which says, 'Everything that's wrong with the world is the fault of the politicians, and I'm not going to get involved.'"

When you were smashing Rickenbackers, I was playing on a Rosetti Lucky 7, which I'd helped scrape together 8 guineas for. I couldn't comprehend the statements you were making by doing it...

"That's a statement in itself, though. It's like one of the only people who understood how you felt was me. And we also know that had you shown up and asked me to give you a guitar, I would have told you where to go – although I have given away a lot of guitars in my life.

"The guitar smashing was basically marketing. I knew it was going to work, but I had to use real guitars and that was because I am primarily a musician and I wanted it to be real. I'm also an artist and I'm not afraid to claim that what I do is art. But it couldn't be phoney, there had to be a kind of act of vengeance against the consumer society that was telling people like you and

"I'm arrogant, I'm rich and maybe I'm very jaded. I don't need anybody and I don't even need anybody to buy my records, sad to say, and I don't think I ever have. I never really wanted the success people have conferred on me"

PETE TOWNSHEND

me that we had to have a Fender with those funny little Phillips screws on, otherwise we weren't real people. And I did the paper round for three years to buy my first real guitar! I lent it to John Entwistle one day and it was pinched and his mother gave me three quid! I think I swore then that I would never get attached to another instrument as long as I lived...

"When Rickenbacker made me a signature model, a couple of guys in the factory weren't happy about it, like it was a kind of jibe. But I don't have romantic misconceptions about instruments. They're just wood, probably far more useful as pulp than anything else. There are actually a couple of instruments that I would miss. In fact, a weird thing happened to the J-200 that I've had for a long time. Half way through *Iron Man* it got wet here in the studio and exploded, and it was almost like the guitar getting back at me – the only guitar I really cared about dying on me!"

The music press haven't been kind to the album...

"I'm arrogant, I'm rich and maybe I'm very jaded. I don't need anybody and I don't even need anybody to buy my records, sad to say, and I don't think I ever have. I've never really wanted the success that people have conferred on me, and when they feel that somewhere along the line there's been a betrayal, it's been of a contract that I've not been party to. I've taken decisions about The Who's career very seriously – when I decided to stop touring I pondered on it for a very long time. With this album I thought it was a great sound, well produced and interesting, but what's it really doing that's new? But at least the gigs were an event... All you have to do is look at the track list to see that it's a live album of the 25-year tour, and if you disagree that that's part of what pop should allow itself, then there's really no defence because you're arguing with opinions...

"It's interesting to think that somebody says, 'Michael Jackson's a load of crap' thinking, 'He'll never read that.' But he reads it! He moves the llama aside and reads it. And this insignificant little nerd with his typewriter, living in Hackney, on the dole and managing to squeeze through an *NME* article every two months in lieu of writing a university thesis to become a social worker, is actually hurting fragile, insecure Michael Jackson, who obviously wants everybody on earth to love him. I don't. Not any more." G


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EDDIE VAN HALEN

TOTAL GUITAR INTERVIEW JULY 2016

It's been 21 years since TG last caught up with Eddie Van Halen. So, after an exclusive invitation to visit the man himself at his 5150 Studios in Los Angeles, California, we pull up a chair as one of the electric guitar's greatest legends tells us how his very first guitar got the EVH treatment, how the right setup can bulletproof a guitar, and why "you shouldn't be afraid to turn anything!"

WORDS **STUART WILLIAMS** PHOTOGRAPHY **KEVIN BALDES**

Every instrument has its pioneers – game-changing mavericks who push things forward – and if Jimi Hendrix kicked the electric guitar door down, Eddie Van Halen ran through it, picked up what was left, covered it in tape and built a stairway to the next level.

Just like Hendrix, Clapton, Page et al, the idea of Eddie Van Halen doesn't seem real. These people are heroes, otherworldly beings who exist solely on posters, album covers, stages and the imaginations of thousands of guitar players across the globe. Except Eddie Van Halen is real. We know this, because he's sat next to us in 5150 Studios, playing the tapped part from *Eruption*. Eddie built the facility adjacent to his house in the early 80s and it has become the creative headquarters for every Van Halen album since, and the walls are lined with the guitars that bear his name.

It's lunchtime on a hot California day, the door is wide open and TG has just been introduced to Matt Bruck, Eddie's right-hand man for all things EVH brand. Eddie and his wife (and publicist), Janie, enter the room accompanied by an excited Kody, the Van Halens' famous-in-his-own-right pet Pomeranian. "[Kody's] going to be on the cover of *Esquire* with George Clooney!" Janie proudly announces. "Yeah, me and him go way back," Eddie adds.

We're nervous. What do you ask Eddie Van Halen when you have a once-in-a-lifetime hour with him? You ask everything. From the story of that guitar and that amp and how they led to the creation of his gear company, to how he single-handedly became the greatest guitarist of his and – many would fairly argue – every generation since. What you find is that not only is he real, but Eddie Van Halen is one of the most humble, friendly and funny rock stars you'll meet. And he loves talking about guitars...

It's been nine years since you started the EVH brand – how did it first come about?

"It doesn't seem that long! Well, I first started off with Music Man, and then I went to Peavey, and when they stopped, kind of... doing what I asked [laughs], we moved to Fender. Which is a great home, a great team."

It seems like you're involved every step of the way with every piece of gear that has your name on it...

"Well, I have to be. If I'm going to use it, then it has to be my way, you know what I mean? I'll approach Matt, and Matt and I will approach the engineers, 'How about this?' – and everyone gets excited! Generally, depending on the intricacy or difficulty of the build, it can take between a year to three years to come to fruition."

It also seems that your level of involvement is there regardless of the price, too...

"The first thing we started out with was obviously the flagship/benchmark models. I very much wanted a versatile three-channel amp. That's what I need to do my gig. As the brand evolved, we

"When I first started playing guitar, I fell in love with this hollowbody 12-string because of the neck, and the first thing I did was I took six strings off! They didn't have what I wanted, so [the tinkering] had already started there!"

EDDIE VAN HALEN

expanded our line with some more affordable models, like the Lunchbox amp and the Wolfgang Standard, for example. I just heard yesterday that a lot of players are buying the 1x12 cabinet, because it's the perfect match and a reasonable price. When I use it, I use it with a 4x12 cabinet – for a 15-watt amp, it will still power a 4x12 cabinet and get a great sound – but I'll have to try it through a 1x12 and see how it sounds, since everybody else seems to dig it that way!"

What was it like building the Frankenstein, and doing that out of necessity?

"Let me start at the beginning. When I first started playing guitar, I was at the local music store, which wasn't even a music store, it was kind of like a Radio Shack that also sold musical instruments – it was called Lafayette Music. I fell in love with this hollowbody 12-string because of the neck, and the first thing I did was I took six strings off, because it was a 12-string and I didn't want 12! They didn't have what I wanted in the store, so it had already started there!

"Then I got a paper route. We didn't have any money and my parents couldn't afford to buy us equipment, so I saved the money from delivering papers for two and a half to three years, and bought my first real guitar, which was a '68 Goldtop Les Paul with single-coil P-90 pickups. So, what do I do? I take the chisel to it right away! Because I wanted a humbucking pickup! But in Pasadena, there were no Les Pauls with a humbucker in them. There was one store in northern Pasadena – a Les Paul came in and they called me right away: 'Hey, we've got a Les Paul!' I walk in and I go, 'Ah, shit! It ain't the kind Clapton plays!' It didn't have humbuckers.

"So, of course, I hunted down a humbucker, took a chisel and made the hole bigger and crammed it in there. I was lucky enough to solder it back properly, then I painted it black and added binding. I did all kinds of crazy shit to it. The funny thing is, I only changed the bridge pickup and left the P-90 neck pickup. My right hand was covering the bridge pickup, so when I played people were going, 'How the fuck's he getting that sound out of a P-90?!' That's all they could see. Little did they know that I'd stuck a humbucker in there!

"From there, I bought a Strat, and the rest of the guys in the band hated the way it sounded! And I couldn't really handle the hum, so it was just a logical marriage to – with the humbucker – cross a Gibson with a Fender. Because I loved the vibrato bar, and that was probably the most difficult thing: trying to keep that thing in tune. This might take a while, but I'll try to explain...

"Everything from the bridge to the tuning peg had to be perfectly straight. The only reason a tremolo goes out of tune is because of friction. When you bring the vibrato bar down and if the string angle is wrong, then it's not gonna slide back to its original position. So, I would do things like take the string and put it through the tuning peg hole and wind it up instead of down, so there would be no tension on the nut to the tuning peg. I had a brass nut that I cut larger grooves into, and I put oil in it all to eliminate any friction that could cause the string to hang up.

"Another problem is Fender Strats always have the string retainers; I removed them. Again, to eliminate any other factor that would cause the string to not slide back and forth smoothly. As a result, if I hit an open string too hard it would pop out of the nut. So, I'd have to keep my index finger on the other side of the nut to keep it from popping out! I got away with that – in the club days, through the whole first record and live on tour. That's how I used the stock Fender tremolo until the locking tremolo was introduced."

So, a lot of it came out of solving problems?

"Yeah, a lot of it was through necessity and just mistakes. A lot of accidents. Like the one-pickup thing wasn't intentional. I just didn't know how to wire it back up to the five-position toggle switch; it was just too complicated! Even with what we call the Shark guitar – the Ibanez Destroyer that I cut a chunk of wood out of – it's got two pickups in it, but I couldn't figure out how to wire it to the toggle switch, so I just went straight to the pot and boom! I'm happy."

Were you always the kind of person who was taking things apart?

"Yeah, that very first thing that I did [to a guitar] was take six strings off a 12-string, because I didn't want 12 strings. Anything just to make it do what I wanted."

Do you think people are less inclined to tinker with their gear these days?

"It's totally up to them. If you're happy with what you have then fine, but if not then do something about it. I apply it to everything. Even if there's something about my car I don't like – or anything for that matter – I'll change it, until I like it."

Do you think the advancement in technology and gear killed some of the need for players to be imaginative with their gear?

"Yeah, I mean, really there was no humbucker Strat available until I built one. Now, it's just common, everyone uses them now. But even before I did what I did, I didn't know anybody who fucked around with guitars and amps as much as I did. It wasn't until the first interview I ever did that I tried to explain how I got the sound out of my Marshall with the Variac [a variable



voltage transformer], except our singer said, 'Don't tell 'em the truth, lie!' So, I told them I cranked the thing up to 140 volts, instead of lowering it. And, God! The editor's note in the next magazine was, 'Don't do what Eddie said!' – because everyone was frying their amps!

"The real reason I did it was I had my main baby Marshall, except it was too loud and it would blow up on full voltage. So, not only did lowering the voltage take care of the amp not blowing, it also enabled me to contain it and play anywhere between 60 to 90 volts depending on the size of the room. Everything was all the way up on the amp; the Variac was my volume knob.

"What made me think of lowering the voltage was I bought another Marshall head not realising it was a European model. I plug it in and there's a really dim pilot light. I'm waiting and waiting and there's no fucking sound coming out! 'Goddammit, I got ripped off!' I just let it sit, and I come back to it an hour or two later. I pick up my guitar and it's really, really quiet, but it sounded like it was all the way up. Then I realise 'Shit! The damn thing's set on 220 volts!' Then I went, 'Ding! I wonder what'll happen if I hook my main amp up to the light dimmer in the house?!' Of course, I blew out all the fuses in the house because I wired it backwards, but once I figured it out, I went down to an electronics store and asked, 'Do you sell an industrial type of variable voltage regulator?' and they go 'Yeah, here you go!' It was called a Variac. So, I plug my amp into it and voila. I was going, 'Holy shit, this is great!' But you know, so many people like Tom Scholz came out with the power soak or whatever. They all thought I had something in between the head and the cab, but I didn't... it was a very happy accident that I bought that 220-volt Marshall!"

Your personal involvement in the development of EVH gear extends down to the very smallest detail...

"We scrutinise every little piece of the guitar to what I need. The pots that we have are guaranteed for a million turns or something like that. They're really low friction on the volume knob, because when I'm doing *Cathedral* live, the normal pots would freeze up on me, because I'm turning it so fast. After two weeks, they'd start making noise, so we had a bunch of different companies make us samples and, finally, we've landed on one that makes a custom one, just for us. But at the same time, the tone knob is really stiff. You won't accidentally bump it. Since I never use it, I like it stiff."

These guitars have your name on them, but they seem like they're designed to be versatile, not just for your fans...

"No, no. It's designed for anybody to use. There are a lot of country guys that love EVH amps and guitars. EVH guitars do everything I want and more. They're very versatile, all-round guitars, as are the amps.

"It's just a really well-built, a-lot-of-attention-to-detail instrument that makes it easy for anyone to play. I mean, how many beginner guitarists do you know who stopped playing because their fingers hurt? Well, get lighter strings and set it up right! I have a Harmony guitar – a really cheap beginner guitar, and what I always do is just lower the action until it buzzes, then I back it off a little bit. It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure that out!

"Which brings me to something really funny that I read years ago. Even though I love his playing, and I'm sure he's a wonderful guy even though I've never met

PORTRAIT BY KEVIN BALDES

Eddie's Frankenstein guitar is synonymous with the guitarist: "I used tape to paint it that way. I have no idea what possessed me to do that!" The famous striped pattern is so inextricably linked to Eddie, he's even trademarked it!

him, I read something where Ritchie Blackmore said, 'I play a Stratocaster, because it's harder to play than a Gibson.' I'm going, 'Wow, why would you want to make it hard on yourself?' Not that it's really true, I mean, you can set up a Strat to play easy, too. But I always thought it was a strange comment, because I was always the opposite. For me, it was like, the easier the better! That's why our entry model [Wolfgang Standard] guitar plays as well as the top of the line Wolfgang."

Do you have a benchmark setup for the EVH guitars?
"Oh, yeah! The guys on the assembly line do the final checks, and before it goes in the box, it had better be set up right. And we do spot checks, and if it ain't right, we get pissed!"

Is the idea basically that you should be able to walk into a guitar store, buy one and use it that night?
"Yeah, exactly. And you know, when I say in an ad, 'This is what I use' – I mean it. There's nothing custom about my stuff, or actually, it's all custom for you and for me!"

There have been conflicting reports about the humbucker in the original Frankenstrat. Could you clarify what guitar it came from?
"Yeah, it's from a [Gibson ES-]335. Actually, if I had my phone here, I'd show you a picture of me playing that guitar. Somebody just sent me it; it's the only picture I have of myself playing it. I painted it white because, of course, I fucked with that, too! But yeah, I yanked it out of there. I took the rear pickup out and it was really hard. I pretty much destroyed that guitar because you had the f-holes to get to the electronics. Man! Talk about a pain in the ass! I just yanked the stuff out and once I got the pickup out I said, 'Fuck this guitar!'"

It was never going back in anyway...
"Nah!"

And when you made the tape finish, was that just another solution to a problem?
"It wasn't a tape finish, I used tape to paint it that way. I have no idea what possessed me to do that! I wish I did, but it's just one of those things. I have no fucking idea! And now I have a registered trademark on it. But at the same time, it's just like potting the pickup, dipping it in wax to hopefully stop feedback. I have no idea, nobody told me about it, it's just straight from wherever ideas come from. I just had this crazy idea that maybe the coil windings vibrating caused that high-end squeal. Not controlled feedback, the high-end squeal, the real nasty shit. The paint job and the potting of the pickup, I don't have a fucking clue where these ideas came from! Everything I did back then was either intentional, or the outcome of a happy mistake."

Are you quite technically minded with other stuff outside of guitars?
"Not really. Computers? Nah! We have a Pro Tools system in the studio, but I still use the tape machines. Even the tape machines are too difficult for me! The console's too big. Too many knobs, you know? The only thing I really use on the console are the faders. I leave everything flat, because if you're not getting the sound from your instrument then what's the point? If you start EQ-ing to tape then you start getting in trouble."

"With the Frankenstein, a lot of it [came about] through necessity and mistakes. Like the one-pickup thing: I just didn't know how to wire it back up to the five-position toggle switch!"
EDDIE VAN HALEN

Does that extend to microphone placement? Do you get it right at the amp first?
"Yeah, mainly, your amp better sound good, or your drum better sound good!"

You were one of the first players to get onboard with the Floyd Rose vibrato. What was it like when you were first presented with it?
"Okay, this is a funny story. Three tours in a row, every time we'd play Seattle – I can't remember if it was '79, '80 and '81 – it had to be '79, I never put it in the black and white guitar. So, in '79, somebody goes, 'Hey, there's a guy here named Floyd Rose and he wants to show you something.' He comes in and goes [with cupped hands], 'You wanna try this?' and I say, 'Sure, what the fuck, why not!?' I gave him one of my guitars and asked him to put it in, because I didn't know how to do it. It was different to the Fender tailpiece and it wasn't a direct swap.

"So, I tried it once it was ready to go and... it was a pain in the ass! For one, the Allen screws on the neck were very small, and in order to torque it down you'd either strip the Allen key or the screw would strip. But more importantly, when you're playing the guitar, things bend and they move and the neck shifts a little bit. Depending on the temperature of the gig from the beginning to the end, the temperature fluctuates. So, between every fucking song I had to unclamp and tune! Dave and the rest of the guys would be going, 'Is he ready yet?!' It was just a pain in the ass. So, first I told him, 'Beef the thing up!' because I kept snapping shit.

"He comes back the next year with a beefed-up model. But there was still the problem of having to tune between every song, so I told him, 'Put some fine-tuners on it. I played a little cello and violin when I was in elementary school and those instruments have finger adjustable fine-tuners. Okay?' So, that's what I meant.

"The third year he comes along and goes [cupped hands] 'I did it!' and I go, 'No! You fucking numbnut!' Because now you needed a wrench to fine-tune it! So, now instead of three, you've got nine, you know? I'm going, 'No, you idiot, I meant fucking finger tuners! You've seen 'em before!' Then he patents the fucking thing behind my back. Pissed me off... whatever!"

"I left the 5150 III feeding back for a month! And then I put a bass through it and left it for another month to see how the amp and cabinet would hold out... Nothing goes out until I've totally crash-tested it"

EDDIE VAN HALEN

You've always had your Floyds set without a rout underneath, haven't you?
"All flush to the body. Everything needs to be connected. I even like my cabinets on wood, not on wheels. Everything needs to be solidly connected. The more connection, the more sustain and resonance."

Could you explain why the pickup switching on a Wolfgang is backwards to the usual three-position?
"I have to have it that way! When I use my right hand on the fingerboard, if it's wired the other way I always bump it up. It's just out of necessity: the USAs are like mine, but the Specials are like a Les Paul. But you can turn them around – that's what I did, just turned it around, because I kept bumping it."

You seem to be favouring the Wolfgang in recent years. What are your favourite features on it?
"It's the ultimate guitar for me. Everything from that 12-string I took the six strings off, to the Frankenstein, to everything else I've broken or rebuilt – this is the ultimate guitar, which we still continue to improve on. Like that low-friction pot, we just added it a year ago. We've upgraded it to stainless steel frets, so they don't wear out. We're always just doing something. As Matt would say, 'Building a better mousetrap.'

"I played a Special in *I'll Wait* during the last tour. I traded off between that and the Star guitar. I actually preferred it to the Star, because it has the neck pickup. It just so happens that on the record I used the neck pickup, so for that I preferred the Special. And just last week we were tinkering with different magnet types to make the guitar sound even better."

Does that come from a place where you live with something for a while and then your tastes change?
"It's a natural evolution. I hate to put it this way, as it doesn't apply to everything – like my wife or anything – but everything guitar-based! [laughs] It's not that I get tired of it necessarily, but after a while you go, 'Hey, this could be a little better. I'd like a little more of this.'

"Like the difference between the 5150 III and the IIIS. I didn't like the fact – even though a lot of people do like it – that on the 5150 III the second channel has a different tonal quality to the third channel. I want them to be identical in tonal response and quality – the same sound – so that when you're facing the other way and not looking at which channel you're on, you can't tell, except one is just fucking over the top overdrive for soloing and the other is rhythm so you can have your guitar full up and it won't drive you crazy feeding back. But yeah, we just continue to – in my mind – evolve and change and improve, and in turn give players a better product. It's an ongoing thing."

When you first designed the 5150, were you conscious of the fact that what you were creating would become a benchmark in heavy guitar tones?
"I had no clue. I just wanted something that I liked. I just wanted a high-gain amp that wouldn't blow up!"

How does it feel? You're obviously used to being emulated, but still!
"Yeah, I guess it's a wonderful feeling that people like the stuff we design. But even if they didn't, I would still use it! Because, really, that's the bottom line. I have to like it, otherwise it doesn't go out."

We heard an interesting story about you bench-testing the 5150 III with feedback...
"Oh, yeah! I left it feeding back for a month! And then I put a bass through it and left it for another month, because I wanted a really low frequency to see how the amp and the cabinet would hold up. [I'd try] different feedback frequencies, really high, then I'd muffle the other strings once I got the note that I wanted it to feedback at, and I'd just leave it.

"I'll never forget, we had a Fender meeting with the powers that be to talk about something. We're walking up the hill to the studio here and they hear this, 'Ooooh'. Then we open the door and it's 'OOOOOH', then we open another door and it's just fucking screaming! And they all went, 'What the fuck are you doing?' and I'm like, 'I'm crash-testing the amp!' I don't like stuff to blow up. Then I take it out on tour for a whole cycle before it was released to the public. Nothing goes out until I've totally fucking crash-tested it."

So, did it break down?
"No, it held up!"

Were you secretly hoping you'd be able to destroy it?
"No, no! I mean, even when I was with Peavey, guitars would show up in stores or even to me with loose necks or this and that. So, I went to Peavey and said, 'Give me a Wolfgang,' and I took the whole fucking guitar apart, right there, in the board meeting with Hartley Peavey sitting there, the owner of the company. I took the neck off, took the pickups out, took it all apart, then put it back together. The way I would. Then I grab the guitar and I threw it across the fucking room and it hit the ground. I go, 'Go pick it up.' The guy picked it up, and it was perfectly in tune, because the strings were stretched properly, the neck was tight, everything was the way it was supposed to be.

"I just looked at them and said, 'Now, tell me it's [because of] shipping! It ain't fucking shipping, you guys just aren't setting them up right!' Attention to detail. It blew their fucking minds."

PORTRAIT BY KEVIN BALDES

You seem very conscious of the fact that it's your name on the gear...
"Yeah, well, I'm not endorsing a product; it's my product, y'know? It's definitely a team effort, I couldn't do it on my own. But it's a brand, it's our company, so to speak. The only variable or possible thing that we have no control over is tubes. Like last tour, I blew a head once, because I had a bad tube. But you know, you get a bad tyre on a car or whatever. We don't make tubes. If we made EVH tubes, they wouldn't blow! [laughs]"

You mentioned the Lunchbox earlier. It's a small amp, but it has your sound...
"Yeah, and that's the whole point. It's a 15-watt amp, and it just screams. I mean, you could play The LA Forum with that amp. It's got a quarter-power switch that brings it down – we used EL84s in it, they're great tubes. It sounds like a 5150."

Was it a challenge to scale that sound down?
"Everything's a challenge, basically. When we come up with the idea, they build it and send it over and then I'll suggest changes and it's just back and forth until it's right. The pickups on a Wolfgang – we had two companies each build us 40 pairs of pickups. So, we had 80 pickups, and I didn't like any of them! I ask Fender, 'Who makes your Strat pickups?' They go, 'Well, we do them in-house.' So, I say, 'Well, let's build my pickup in-house.' First time around, first attempt, boom! That's what I want! Because they listened. The other guys, I don't know, I guess they just threw me something that they already had so they could say, 'Hey, Eddie Van Halen uses this model pickup.' I mean, it wasn't the point – I would have used anything if it sounded the way I wanted, but it didn't."

The power switching thing is kind of a continuation of the whole Variac idea...
"Yeah! On the combo 5150 III, it has a knob that does the same thing. It's a different circuit, but it's the same premise, so that's actually more like a Variac."

Could you imagine what it would have been like to have had that in your early days?
"Oh, man! These things happen for a reason, I guess..."

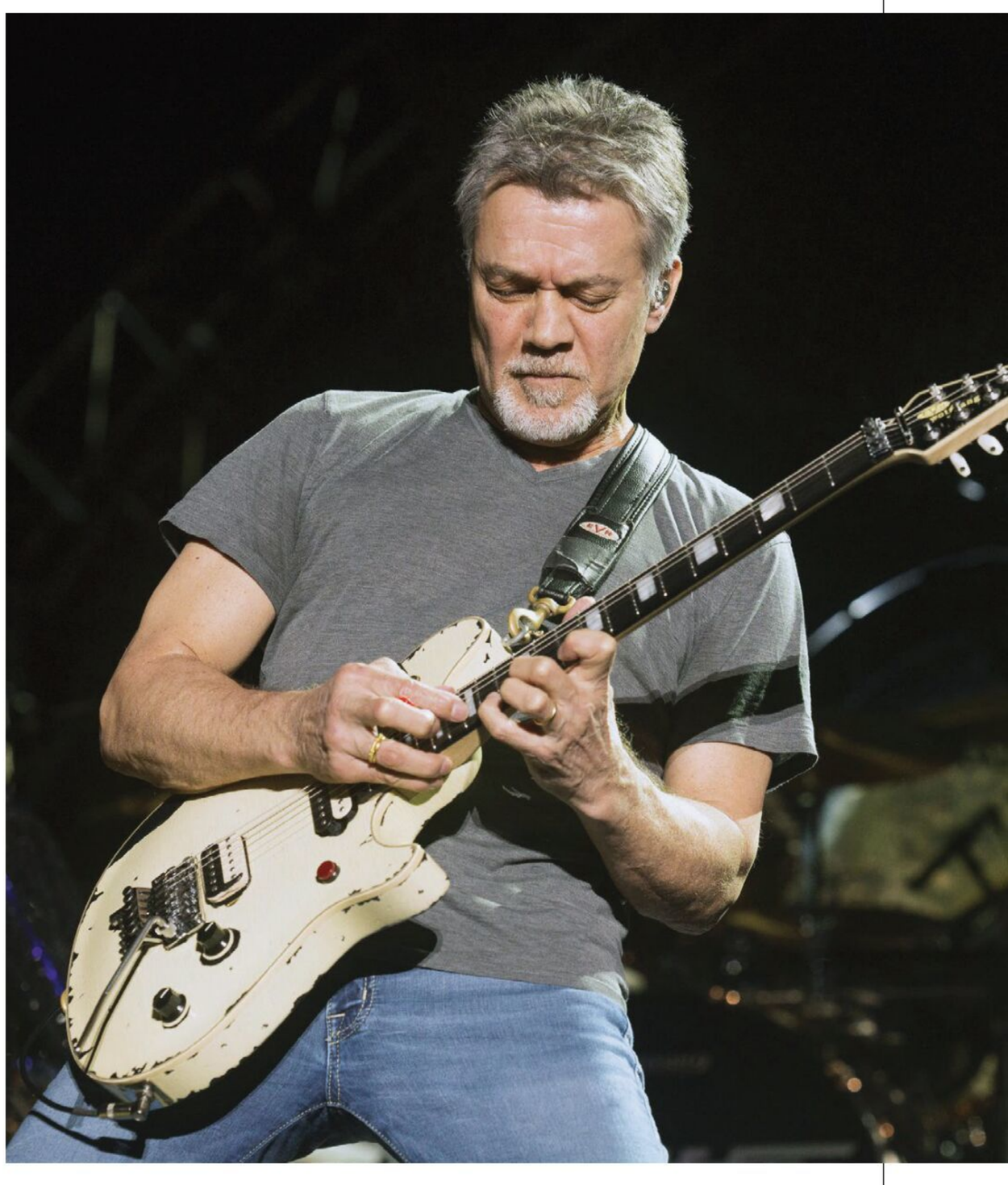
The Lunchbox also has a lot of features on it compared with a lot of low-wattage amps. Was it important to keep features like full EQ, the effects loop, and so on?
"Oh, definitely. Our mission is to build a better... everything. Whatever it is that we approach, it had better be better than our competition."

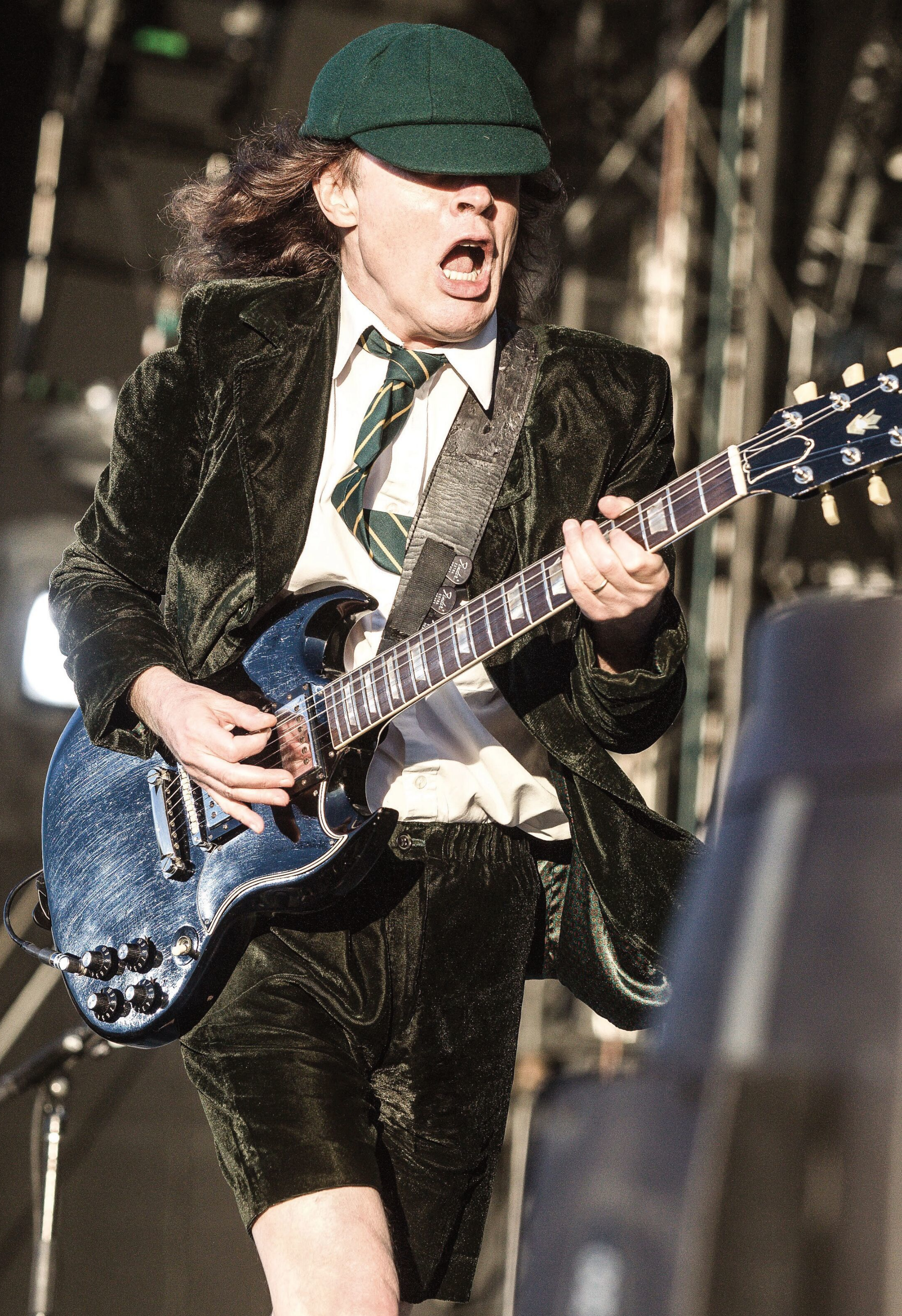
And you've included Resonance and Presence controls on there. Do you think these are often misunderstood, sometimes forgotten by players?
"Well, you shouldn't be afraid to fucking turn anything! That's my philosophy. I know it's a Spinal Tap line, but I turn everything up to 15. To the point where it gets so ugly, then I back it off to the point where the ugliness goes away. That normally ends up around 14, not 11!"

More than 11...
"Yeah! And then we continue to push. Just like the burn channel on the 5150 IIIS is hotter than the 5150 III. It's like a race car, every year you've gotta be faster. It's never-ending."

It sounds like you're never going to stop looking for improvements in tone...
"It's just innately part of my DNA, you know? It's who I am. I like people to be able to pick up a Wolfgang and a 5150 and not have to struggle to get a sound. I mean, I see so many people who plug into an amp and they don't have a clue how to even set it. With a 5150 III, it almost doesn't matter where you set it, it's going to sound good. Just turn the volume up; it's not difficult. To get a bad sound out of a 5150 is really difficult. I know so many engineers who have a 5150 III in their studio, because they re-amp. When the guitarist leaves they plug it all back through a 5150 III and the guy comes back the next day and goes, 'What did you do, man? It sounds fucking great!'"

Finally, what's your advice to aspiring guitar players?
"Obviously, enjoy doing what you're doing. Bottom line is, you've gotta love what you're doing. There are no rules. I think it's funny when people take all these music theory classes, it's exactly that. It's theory. You have 12 fucking notes, the 13th one is the octave, do whatever you want with them. It's really that simple. There are no mistakes: I call those passing notes! [laughs]" G





ANGUS YOUNG

INTERVIEW MARCH 1998

Angus Young's blues-influenced riffs, scorching lead breaks and crushing guitar tone have defined AC/DC's enduring sound…

WORDS **SIMON BRADLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAM GASSON**

The time is New Year's Eve 1973, and the place is a small, out-of-the-way club in downtown Sydney. The clientele are awaiting the arrival on-stage of a new band named AC/DC, eager to usher old Father Time out to pasture, and ring in 1974. Not one of them knows what to expect, but when the lead guitarist, standing barely five feet tall, scampers on to the dancefloor dressed as a schoolboy and blasts the intro to the first number, every jaw in the house drops with unabridged surprise.

So began a rollercoaster ride that would see AC/DC become one of the planet's biggest bands.

Angus says: "That gig was really wild. It's wild on New Year's Eve anyway, but putting what we were doing on top of all the seasonal stuff just made it wilder!"

As we all know, AC/DC are revered as a live act, with Angus and either Brian or Bon vying for the audience's attention. And you can't fail to notice the diminutive axeman during an AC/DC show, as he never stops running around for the entire duration. The only time he pauses is to either moon at the crowd, spin around on his back, take a lungful of oxygen from a backstage cylinder, or simply gurn with pleasure. Apparently, it takes him around six hours to come back down to earth. But is he actually conscious of what he does up there?

"Not really… I concentrate on that and whatever comes, does so by itself, rather than me thinking, 'Now move left then right.' Then it becomes robotic. I get my rocks off on the guitar and I'm lucky that I hear what's going on behind me on stage and I can't help but move. Even if you gave someone else the guitar – if it wasn't me – they'd be moving, too."

Although our Angus is no Holdsworth in the technique department, he certainly has an ear for both blues and rock 'n' roll, whatever you may think, and his influences come straight from the golden era of this type of music.

"Good rock 'n' roll is hard to come by. You still get The Stones going out there and doing it, and they know a party tune when they hear it, and that's what rock 'n' roll is all about. I grew up on Little Richard and Chuck Berry. I never really plugged in to Elvis Presley, not even The Beatles. I didn't get off on all the *She Loves You*… stuff; it was just pop, and used to make me cringe. When they played a rock 'n' roll tune, they were cooking. I mean, even John Lennon said that The Beatles were a great band, but they never wrote *Great Balls Of Fire*."

Newcomers to AC/DC have a hard time differentiating between albums and even different songs, as they all have a tendency to sound fairly similar, to say the least. Yet there's something primal about the sheer strength of the rhythm that each offering possesses.

"I like doing what I'm doing. I like rock and I always find a challenge in it. There's one great thing that stands out on guitar for me, and that's Chuck Berry's *Johnny B Goode*. You hear that and you immediately know what it is. For me, that's the thing; that's what it's all about. If you can come up with something like that, great. As long as it's different but it's still you, that's the challenge. There are always new things that you can plug into. You can always try to find new ways of looking at things. Hey, you might even get a *Johnny B Goode*," he laughs.

Angus's AC/DC have remained unchanged by the fickle music business, and have continued to sell albums by the container load, regardless of who's in vogue. Mr Young doesn't think all that much of what's out there at the moment anyway.

"Some people plug into an era and say, 'Well, this is today's music,' but what I hear now and what I've heard over the years hasn't impressed me as much as the stuff I grew up on," he explains. "I always felt that the stuff people would write about, or put on TV, was rather safe and acceptable."

With titles such as *Sink The Pink*, *Let Me Put My Love Into You* and *Given The Dog A Bone*, the lyrical content of the band's songs is often less than 'acceptable' to staid moral society, but you can't fail to realise that this is tongue-in-cheek.

Angus explains: "All we did in those days was play half a dozen Little Richard and Chuck Berry tunes, then throw in our own and play them 'as is'. We had bigger amplifiers, but it was the same deal. We weren't reinventing the wheel, you know?" G

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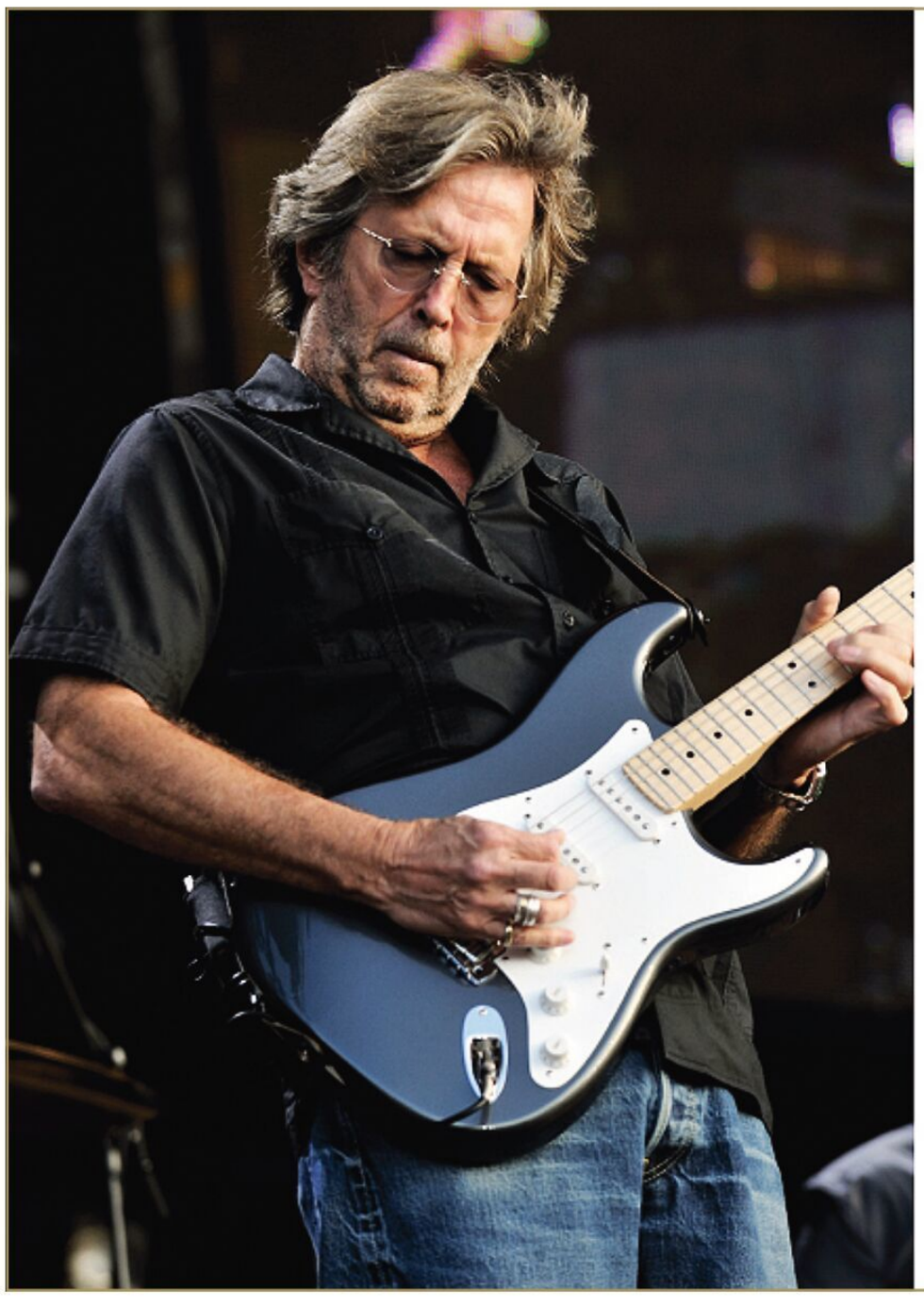
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ERIC CLAPTON

INTERVIEW JUNE 1994

In 1994, Guitarist caught up with Eric Clapton for the first time to talk about his music, his influences, his gear, and that 'Clapton is God' thing. From insight on his great friend Jimi Hendrix, to what it was really like to "survive" the 70s, Clapton tells us how "things have come full circle"

WORDS DAVID MEAD PHOTOGRAPHY JOBY SESSIONS

What are you currently working on at the moment?
"I'm recording this album [*From The Cradle*] as much as I can with everybody on the floor at the same time – horns and everything. We're trying not to overdub anything, so mistakes and everything go in. I suppose [it's a bit like the old Chicago days] – although I think even they overdubbed sometimes. But for the purpose of getting it the way I want it to feel, I want everything live."

We're conducting this interview in the Olympic Studio, Barnes. Your old stomping ground, isn't it?
"This is where a lot of the early stuff was done, yeah. This is my idea of a recording studio. It's between where I was born and where I used to go. It's in the middle of all my stomping grounds and I think I must have recorded here with just about every outfit I ever played with, although I don't think John Mayall came here."

The first guitar of yours was a Hoyer, wasn't it?
"Yes, a Hoyer acoustic from Bell's in Surbiton. Funnily enough, it looked like a gut-stringed guitar, but they were steel. An odd combination. Then I got a Kay double cutaway – because Alexis Korner had one."

That can't have lasted too long either, because by the time you were in The Yardbirds you were using Telecasters and Gretsches...
"It didn't stand up too well. I think the neck bowed and it didn't seem to me that you could do much about it. It had a truss rod, but it wasn't that clever and the action ended up being incredibly high. I remember at some point I didn't want it to look like it looked any more and so I covered it in black Fablon! Can you imagine what it sounded like after that? Let alone what it looked like. I ended up with the ES-335TDC and then I got into Fenders – I had a Telecaster and a Jazzmaster."

It's well known that in the early part of the 60s nobody could get 'the sound' that you were hearing on records out of British-made amps. How did you overcome that?
"By turning them flat out! I thought the solution was to get an amp and play it as loud as it would go until it was about to burst. When I was doing that album with John Mayall, if you miked the amp too close it would sound awful, so you had to put it a long way away and get the room sound of that amp breaking up."

That was when you discovered Marshalls, wasn't it?
"Yes. Prior to the Blues Breakers I was using Vox AC30s and things like that, but they didn't do it for me. They were too toppy – they didn't have any midrange at all."

Do you harbour any romance for that period at all? I think it was Mark Knopfler who said that in some ways he misses the old days where you could turn up at a club with an amp and guitar and just do a gig...
"Back in the 60s, if you did go into a club to see someone play, you already knew those people; there was no intimidation – no inhibitions at all. It was just simply that you hung out with these people and you played with them all the time, so in that respect I miss that camaraderie. There was competition but it was friendly.
"Now, I think it's much more aggressive. I went through that 'dinosaur' thing 10 years ago so God knows what it's like now for me to show up somewhere! I don't know what they think of me now if I walk into a club. What do I represent to young players? I have no idea – I don't know where they've gone in their heads now,

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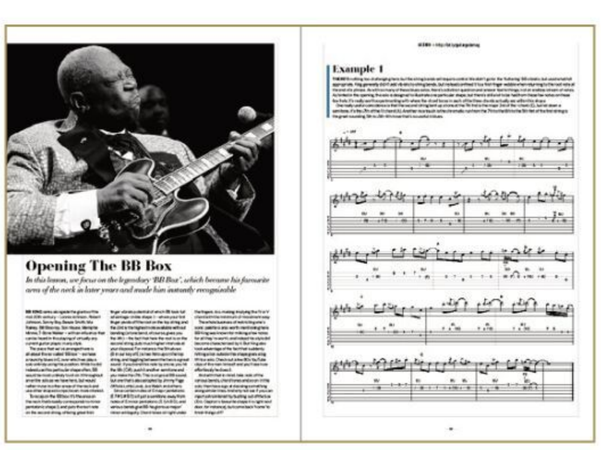
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