

PLAY

ZZ TOP
SHARP DRESSED MAN

REM
EVERYBODY HURTS

TASH SULTANA
JUNGLE

SLIPKNOT
THE CHAPELTOWN RAG

TOTAL **Guitar**

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THE AWARDS ISSUE

THE BEST GUITARISTS OF 2021

AS
VOTED
FOR BY
YOU

STARRING
JAKE KISZKA of
GRETA VAN FLEET
TASH SULTANA
ARCHITECTS
SAMANTHA FISH
& MORE

REVEALED!
GEAR
OF THE
YEAR!
TOP 25
GUITARS,
AMPS & FX

PLUS!
2021'S
HOTTEST
RIFFS, SOLOS
& SONGS

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GUIDE!
+
BEGINNER
GUITAR
LESSON

ELECTRIFYING!
HOW **MDOU MOCTAR** MADE
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OF THE YEAR

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Welcome...



Welcome to the first Total Guitar Awards Issue! Back in November, TG conducted an online poll to ask readers of GuitarWorld.com to vote for their favourite guitarist of 2021. There was just one rule: the guitarists in question had to have released new music over the course of the previous 12 months. The votes flooded in in record numbers (nearly 90,000 were cast!) making this the biggest poll we've ever conducted here at TG Towers. The winner is revealed on p35, and, depending on which version of the mag you have in your hands, may be on the cover.

I say 'may be' because this issue is a special edition of Total Guitar with two covers available to buy, celebrating both our first- and second-place guitarists, Tash Sultana and Greta Van Fleet's Jake Kiszka. We also speak to three other guitarists who placed high in the poll – Samantha Fish, Josh Middleton of Architects, and Joe Bonamassa – about the music they made this year.

Also as part of our flagship Awards Issue, we pick out 2021's finest songs, riffs and solos, and give special awards for the best album and TG's guitar icon of the year, Billy Gibbons. Plus we round up the year's best gear, revealing 25 of TG's favourite guitars, amps and pedals which had us GAS-ing to part with our cash.

I really hope you enjoy the magazine and I'll see you again next month.

Chris Bird Editor

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Cover Images Jake: Alysse Gafkjen / Tash: Dara Munnis

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at guitarworld.com. Here you'll find all
the audio and video for the issue,
available to download or stream.



Words Paul Elliott Photo Steve Thrasher

CALIFORNIA STREAMING

O

n November 5, Slipknot premiered their first new song in two years – *The Chapeltown Rag* – performed during their first-ever livestream from Knotfest Los Angeles at the Banc of California Stadium, at which this shot of guitarist Jim Root and percussionist Michael ‘Tortilla Man’ Pfaff was taken. *The Chapeltown Rag* is TG’s Riff Of The Month this issue – turn the page for full details.



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN:

- ✓ Drop B tuning
- ✓ C Ionian_{b2} mode
- ✓ Tremolo picking



RIFF OF THE MONTH

SLIPKNOT

The Chapeltown Rag

S

lipknot's latest single is an uptempo, high energy track which is dense with Mick Thompson and Jim Root's intricate, pummeling guitar riffs.

The band's style is rooted in the technical proficiency of death metal, coupled with a unique melodic and harmonic sense that makes it so uniquely Slipknot. This riff is split into three sections.

First is the melody played up at the 5th to 8th fret region of the fretboard. Use your first, second and third fingers to fret the notes, and alternate pick each note four notes per beat. It's important to keep this 16th-note feel consistent throughout.

The riff repeats twice, each with a different ending. Ending one uses C₅ and D_{b5} powerchords on the 1st and 2nd frets, whereas the second ending uses single notes on the

open sixth string before finishing with a C₅dim powerchord. Check out the slowed down play-through in our video.

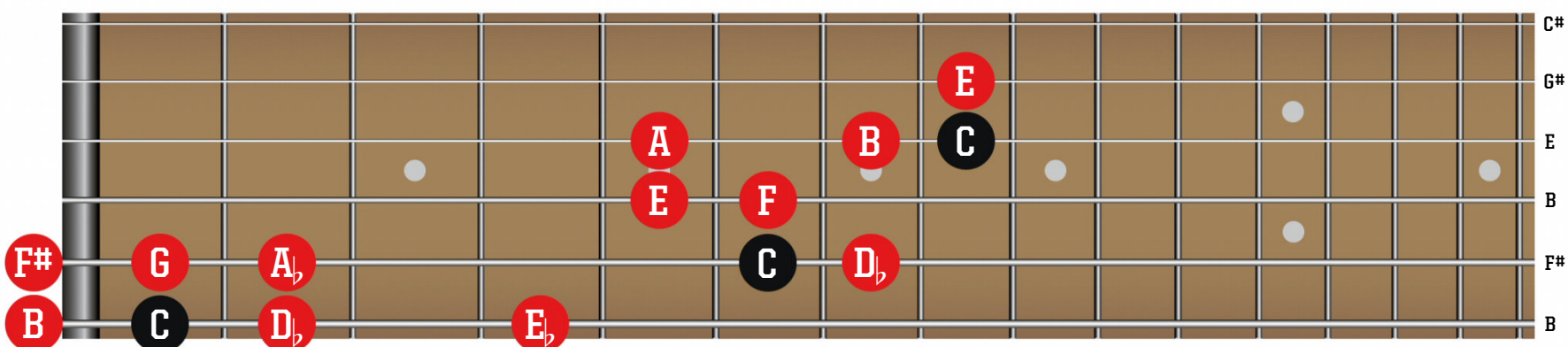
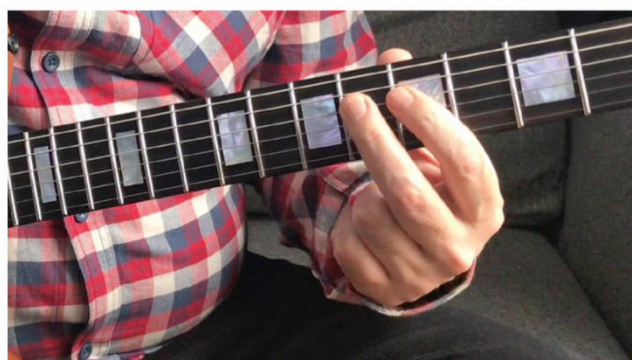
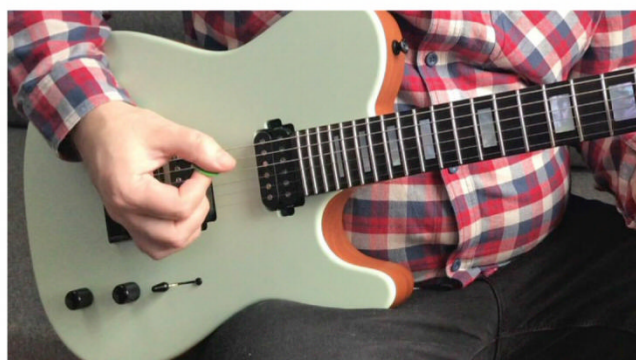
CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 0:44-1:04

Tempo: 190bpm

Key/scale: C Ionian_{b2}

Main techniques: Alternate picking, palm-muting, string skipping

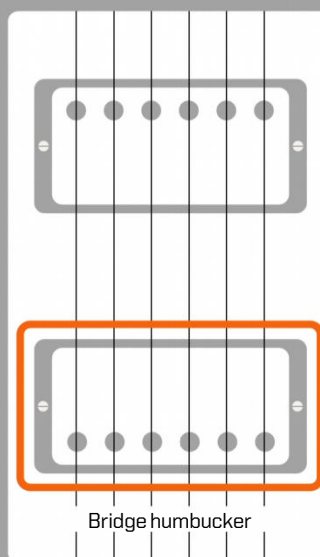
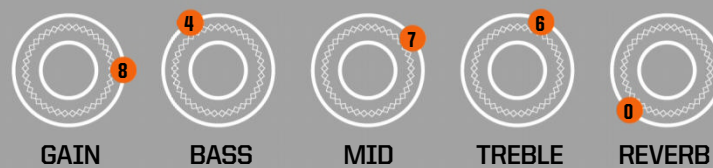


As we're in drop B tuning, the notes are three frets higher on the fretboard, so the fifth-string C is now at the 6th fret instead of the 3rd. The single-note part of the riff takes place above the 5th fret. Most of

the notes are from the C major scale (aka the Ionian mode: C D E F G A B), except for a D_b instead of the usual D. This is the Ionian_{b2} mode – an unusual sound, perfect for Slipknot riffing.

GET THE SOUND

CHANNEL DISTORTION



Use a bridge humbucker and a saturated distorted tone with plenty of mids and try using a boost pedal to keep the low palm-mutes tight and aggressive. The track is played in drop B tuning (B F# B E G# C# from low to high). This is the equivalent of dropping every string down by three semitones, then dropping the bass string down another tone. If you're using a guitar that's usually in standard tuning, use a set of strings at least two gauges heavier to keep the tuning stable – so, if you usually use .009s, try a set of .011s or even .012s.

ANGEL VIVALDI

ARTIST SIGNATURE



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SCENE

YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS

INTERVIEW

“I WAS HAVING TO TUNE 24/7!”

SPIRITBOX GUITARIST MIKE STRINGER ON HOW HE FOUND THE PERFECT GEAR



Spiritbox are one of the breakout bands of 2021. Led by husband and wife duo Mike Stringer (guitars) and Courtney LaPlante (vocals), the Canadian quartet have enjoyed huge success with debut album *Eternal Blue*, which hit the US top 20. Mike describes their brand of modern metal as “very dark and very melodic”, and tells TG how he discovered the right tools for the job...

For anyone who hasn't heard the album yet, what can they expect?

Eternal Blue is definitely something that we wanted to have the listener listen to from start to finish. It's got the heaviest songs we've written and the prettiest songs we've written.

How do you balance heaviness and melody?

A lot of the time, we end up in drop F# on my 7-string, which is very comfortable for Courtney because, if you remove the bottom F#, you're basically in standard C# on a 6-string. But, for instance, we have a song called *Blessed Be* and that's half a step down. So sometimes we'll go a bit lower, but never higher. I have a Quad Cortex and the pitch shifting is incredible. A lot of the time, if we're messing around and something doesn't feel right – especially for her – I'll just pitch it down, instead of having to tune down. We have a lot of tuning changes, even within our songs.

Holy Roller has four tuning changes in it and the Quad Cortex enables that.

What are your main guitars and what makes them right for you?

I started playing Aristides guitars back in 2015 and they've been with me ever since. Their whole thing is that they don't make wood guitars – they make guitars out of Arium – which is a whole other thing they developed. The material has these crazy qualities that really complement low tunings. There's a lot more high end snap and a lot more sustain. I have two multi-scales: an 070sr and an 070s. They built me one based on our album artwork and it has our *Eternal Blue* eye on it. They built me a blue sparkle one as well which has an EverTune, and that's my main live guitar. I was so used to having to tune 24/7 during our set, and now, I don't tune once.

You really only see these instruments in specific genres – at what point did you commit, and did anyone in particular inspire you to do so?

I'd have to say Aaron Marshall from Intervals. Back in 2015, we were on the road and I was playing this guitar where every show we turned up to, the neck was bowed, and everything was completely out of whack. He was playing the Aristides stuff and I kept seeing rumours online advertising it as ‘the guitar you'll never have to set up’. With the issues I was facing, I was like,

‘That sounds awesome, I would love to get my hands on that!’ What we do is so niche, we require such particular gear in order to do it right. I look at a lot of this stuff as tools – like what a carpenter would need. Now I know that all I need is: one volume knob, a five-way switch, really hot pickups and an EverTune – then I'm probably good to go!

And what about the other tools in your arsenal?

Right now, my set-up – for everything – is just a Quad Cortex. I carry it in a backpack, show up and we just mount it. It takes care of all the clean stuff, all the heavy stuff and it's switched via MIDI from our sessions so I don't touch it. For recording, we use the Neural DSP Nolly plugin, and that's it!

It's an increasingly popular approach...

I think a lot of it has to do with the people you're working with. If you're working with a producer who's a purist, they're going to be adamant about having to use a tube head. But Dan [Braunstein], our producer, has been using plugins since Guitar Rig days. All of a sudden, everything started shifting towards plugins and DIs, so I think we're at a point where you can make full albums with these things and it's super convenient! We recorded *Eternal Blue* in an Airbnb kitchen!

Ellie Rogers





INTERVIEW

“FULL AND BEEFY!”

LINDSEY TROY OF DEAP VALLY ON HER DISTINCTIVE SOUND AND BEATLES FIXATION

Deap Vally’s third full-length record, *Marriage*, sees the duo collaborating with KT Tunstall, Peaches and Warpaint’s Jennylee. Guitarist/vocalist Lindsey Troy discusses her “sonic journey” and love of vintage gear.

What can people expect from *Marriage*?

For fans of rock or guitar music, there’s a little bit for everyone. There’s definitely songs that hold down our OG Deap Vally sound which is tongue in cheek, really fuzzy 70s rock. Then it takes a sonic journey. We definitely explored more territories on this record.

Who are your biggest guitar influences?

My biggest influence – it’s so cliché but I don’t care – is The Beatles. I’ve been a massive Beatles fan all my life. I love melody so much and, sometimes when I write guitar solos, I’m definitely doing a George Harrison thing.

Is there a solo on the album you’re particularly proud of?

I do very simple, tasty, minimal solos – it’s all very melody-heavy, but simple, hooky and with great tone. I love the solos on *Where Do We Go* and *Tsunami*.

How did collaborating change your approach?

I love collaborating with people, but I definitely have a bit of an identity crisis because my whole approach to writing on guitar shifts. Traditionally, with Deap Vally, the guitar part needs to hold its own, and it needs to be full and beefy and well-rounded, and hold down rhythm and lead. When I play with a bass player, I can experiment and do beautiful melodic stuff.

Did you experiment with new gear in the studio?

Yeah. Working with Jennylee from Warpaint

– her bass tone is so tasty. It’s that chorus pedal she uses and also the delay. I think this album was the first where there was an introduction of chorus pedals, which I kind of fell in love with.

Is your top guitar still the vintage Mustang?

That’s my favourite guitar, for sure. I’m so used to playing it and it’s total second nature, like an extension of my body. But half of our repertoire now is in E_b. I hate playing with a capo and I don’t want to have to tune on stage, so I have another guitar – an Ovation Viper. There’s this really cool vintage shop called Future Music in my neighbourhood. It was just there and it was super cool. It’s from the mid-70s and was just adorable.

Ellie Rogers

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Words Ellie Rogers Portrait Ross Halfin

"I DON'T BELIEVE IN PERFECTION"

The power of **Volbeat** comes from Michael Poulsen's mighty riffs. But as a self-taught player, he admits: "I'm pretty terrible at solos!"

For their new album, *Servant Of The Mind*, Volbeat have taken their signature metal-meets-psychobilly sound up a notch. Penned by Michael Poulsen, the band's mastermind, frontman and rhythm guitarist, the record was borne out of a short period of relative calm: at home in Denmark with the family during the lockdown necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic – but you wouldn't guess so from listening to it. The riffs are huge, the tones are dark and foreboding, and the riotous pace barely lets up throughout.

All in all, the writing and recording process took only three months – a creative outburst that surprised even Michael himself. He recalls: "I was even asking myself, how the f*ck did you come up with all this in such a short time? But I think being at home – not leaving home or being on a tour bus or playing shows – there was only one thing I could do and that was writing."

This time around, with American lead guitarist Rob Caggiano stuck on the other side of the Atlantic, most of what you hear on the record is Poulsen, whose trademark heavy riffs and energetic playing are very much the beating heart of the album. "I always had a signature guitar sound when it comes to Volbeat," he says. "You can pretty much hear that it's my guitar on the record, and on this one I recorded all the guitars." He laughs: "The only thing I didn't record was the solos because I'm

pretty terrible at that, and we have a really good guitar player in Rob and he's a lead guitar player."

Not knowing how long the pandemic would last, Michael decided not to wait on Caggiano before heading into the studio with drummer John Larsen and bassist Kaspar Boye Larsen: "We just wanted to get to work," Michael explains, "and Rob was fine with that because it was just how the situation was. So we just sent over the tracks and he put down the solos, and I actually think that's some of his best solos ever."

Although this way of working might seem inconvenient, it actually proved refreshing for Michael not to spend such long periods of time in the studio as they did when making 2019's *Rewind, Replay, Rebound*. He reflects: "The thing is, Rob is a perfectionist, and I don't believe in perfection – I think it's kind of boring. I like to get stuff done quickly so it still has a soul and a spirit and an energy. But there's certain other people who can be in the studio forever and Rob is one of those guys."

Michael's musical personality is stamped all over his playing. He notes: "I definitely have a signature rhythm guitar sound. A lot of people, mostly beginners, think that you have to have the right amp, you have to have the right guitar and that's only correct in a small way of looking at it."

Although he has favoured a Marshall JCM800 and a Gibson SG GT with Seymour Duncan pickups for many years, Michael has never been overly-

picky with gear. "The guitar has always been important for me," he says, "but if the truck with all my guitars was going into a river and I suddenly had to play another guitar for a couple of shows, I would be okay! It's not like I would be jumping in the river to save the guitars. I would just pick up whatever is available until I get my Gibson back."

Years of experience have taught him a thing or two about where a recognisable guitar sound really comes from: "The signature sound is in how you play the guitar. I'm not really technically skilled. You know, when you look at blues guitar players, half of the time their guitars are not even in tune, but they know how to catch the strings so it sounds right and that brings the signature out of them."

Likewise, much of the magic in his rhythm playing comes from the little idiosyncrasies of being self-taught. Describing one of the quirks in his technique, he explains: "There's a way where I'm picking my strings, where normally you would pick down and I pick up, in between some of the riffing. I remember when Rob first stepped into the band and I was going to teach him some of the Volbeat songs and he said, 'What the f*ck are you doing? How do you do that? You're not supposed to go up on the strings!'"

He laughs again: "I've even been asked if I want to have any lessons in playing the guitar, and I say, 'No f*cking way', because it might ruin what I've got."

BEAT MASTERS!

Volbeat: (Left to right) Michael Poulsen, Rob Caggiano, Jon Larsen and Kaspar Boye Larsen



"I'VE BEEN ASKED IF I WANT TO HAVE GUITAR LESSONS. NO F***ING WAY!" MICHAEL POULSEN

Words Grant Moon Portrait Mia Mala McDonald

"I FEEL MORE LIKE A GUITARIST THAN A SINGER"

Courtney Barnett is the singer-songwriter who doesn't identify as one. Her secret weapon: "My 'guitarmonies'..."

16 **S**he's shy and polite, but Courtney Barnett clearly knows her own mind. "It's impossible to describe music," she says. "We try to put everything into these neatly organised categories so we can understand them, but it's always a bit difficult. I try to not bother doing it any more – it's restrictive."

She's got a point, and Barnett's own catalogue is certainly resistant to easy labelling. Call her indie, call her alternative, call her whatever, but over the past decade the Australian's arty, happy-sad tunes have won her a growing audience in hip circles.

She co-founded her label Milk! Records to release her first EP, 2012's *I've Got A Friend Called Emily Ferris*. Three years later her debut album *Sometimes I Sit And Think, And Sometimes I Just Sit* earned her four ARIA Music awards and a Best New Artist nomination at the Grammys. The follow-up, 2017's *Tell Me How You Really Feel*, and *Lotta Sea Lice*, her acclaimed collaboration with uber-cool vocalist Kurt Vile, saw her stock rise further. Disappointingly, Covid nixed her opening slots for Nick Cave on his 2020 UK dates, but among her own shows this year she'll support the Foo Fighters on two of their four UK dates.

Barnett's latest, third album, *Things*

Take Time, Take Time sees her at her most spare, direct, and emotionally impactful. From droll opener *Rae Street* to sleepy-eyed coda *Oh The Night*, Barnett's intimate-yet-universal observations are delivered in her cool, talky vocal style – intersecting somewhere between Patti Smith and Sheryl Crow at times – and it's all underpinned by some subtly strong, melodic guitar playing.

The chords jangle in all the right places: the uplifting *Write A List Of Things To Look Forward To*; the lovesick *If I Don't Hear From You Tonight*, featuring bass from Welsh folk-indie star Cate Le Bon. And Barnett has a strong ear for a lead hook (*Sunfair Sundown*'s simple two-note motif; *Turning Green*'s angular, discordant, almost Robert Fripp-like solo). It takes effort to make music sound this languid.

"It was just where my head was at," she says. "I was trying to find the positives in things, because 2020 was such a hopeless year, it was all a bit overwhelming. We tried to keep it simple. I wanted clean, luscious, warm sounds, and for it to be a really beautiful listening experience. We tried to embrace the spaciousness where we could, not needing to fill the gaps with noise, just kind of letting it breathe."

Born in 1987, Courtney grew up in Northern Sydney where, she says, "we didn't have too much music. Our friends and neighbours would give us mixtapes

with Nirvana, Jimi Hendrix, Beastie Boys, No Doubt, Janet Jackson – whatever they were listening to at the time. Eventually we bought our first CD player and a couple of CDs. It was pretty minimal, so we just listened to stuff on repeat."

She first picked up the guitar in '97, aged 10. It belonged to a family friend, a right-hander. As a lefty, Barnett instinctively turned it upside down, to fret with her right hand and pick with her left. Her dad, elder brother and neighbours showed her a few riffs – Nirvana's *Something In The Way* and *Come As You Are*, Deep Purple's *Smoke On The Water* – and she was hooked.

"A family friend gifted me this old, three-quarter size nylon-string," she recalls. "It was kind of broken, the fretboard was coming off the neck, but I was over the moon. I was a lefty, so one of the boys changed the strings around for me, and that worked. That was my learning guitar. I had a great guitar teacher in school too. Every Tuesday afternoon I'd get a lesson. I'd take him songs I'd taped off the radio and say, 'Can I learn this?' And he tried to teach me some theory and technique – a bit of pentatonic scales and how to solo. I don't think I have an incredibly theoretical brain for music theory, but I know the basics."

As a teenager, Barnett cut her teeth playing guitar in covers bands, gradually building up to writing songs, going solo

**"I PREFER THE
CLOSENESS
AND CONTROL
OF JUST
USING THE
FINGERS"**





"THE BEST GUITAR STUFF IS INSTINCTUAL"

18

➔ and taking to the vocal mic herself aged 18. By the 2010s she was playing guitar for Melbourne grunge/punk unit Rapid Transit and psychedelic folk/country band Immigrant Union, and now, even after her subsequent success as a singer-songwriter, she doesn't identify as one: "I'd call myself a songwriter first, a guitarist second, and a singer third. I never really sang until I was 18, so I feel more like a guitarist than a singer. I just like figuring it out as I go. That's my style, I guess."

When it comes to guitar, Barnett favours fingerstyle over plectrum. Her main strumming technique – thumb and index finger used in a simplified clawhammer style – is elegant and effective. "I might have used a pick when I was learning, but I preferred the closeness and control of just using the fingers. I played solo from when I was 18, and there was something about being able to move between rhythm and lead, including bits of the two of them, and I can't do that with a pick."

In the past she's used Teles and Strats, but in 2018 Fender suggested that she try a Jaguar, and that changed everything for her. "It just has this extra body to it that something like the Strat didn't give me. It's just bigger – a bigger sound. Then a little later I got the

sunburst Kurt Cobain Jag with the humbuckers, which is when I found I loved that guitar."

And that's the only electric guitar used on *Things Take Time, Take Time*. Co-produced by fellow Australian talent, drummer Stella Mozgawa, the album was recorded at Sydney's Golden Retriever Studios in early 2020. Barnett turned up with just her Jaguar and her 'dream' acoustic guitar, custom made for her by Australian company Maton. For effects she raided the studio's pedal cupboard, using various choruses, a POG, and a Death By Audio reverb. In the control room, Mozgawa put the guitars through an Eventide H3000 effects unit, cycling through hundreds of patches to find interesting, chorusy sounds.

Barnett went through the studio's own amps – a Mesa Boogie, a Kendrick boutique amp and a Roland Jazz Chorus – usually playing through two at once to get the tone she was after. "Then Stella and I both played bass," she says. "The studio had this really beautiful old Fender Musicmaster. Normally we recorded guitar to the programmed drum [machine] parts, then Stella played the live drums. After the studio we did a lot of the guitar and vocals at mobile setups all around. Everything

SMOOTH OPERATOR

"I wanted clean, luscious, warm sounds," Courtney says of her new album

was all over the place because of Covid. We got stuck locked out of Melbourne because there was a lockdown there, so we ended up going to northern New South Wales. We booked an Airbnb for a while and set up this little kind of home recording setup."

Guitar-wise, there are some neat, musical techniques going on throughout the album. Along with its 12-string-like guitar tones, *Write A List Of Things To Look Forward To* has a shimmering outro figure, wobbling with chorus and rich in harmonies. "Those are my 'guitarmonies'," she says with a self-conscious laugh.

"Have you never heard that phrase? I guess it's just harmonies on guitar. It's the same with vocals – you sing the lead line then the harmony is on the third or the fifth [of the scale]. I'm trying to think of an example, and all I can think of is *Hotel California*! I just wanted to really thicken it up with multiple guitars playing at once, kind of like an organ."

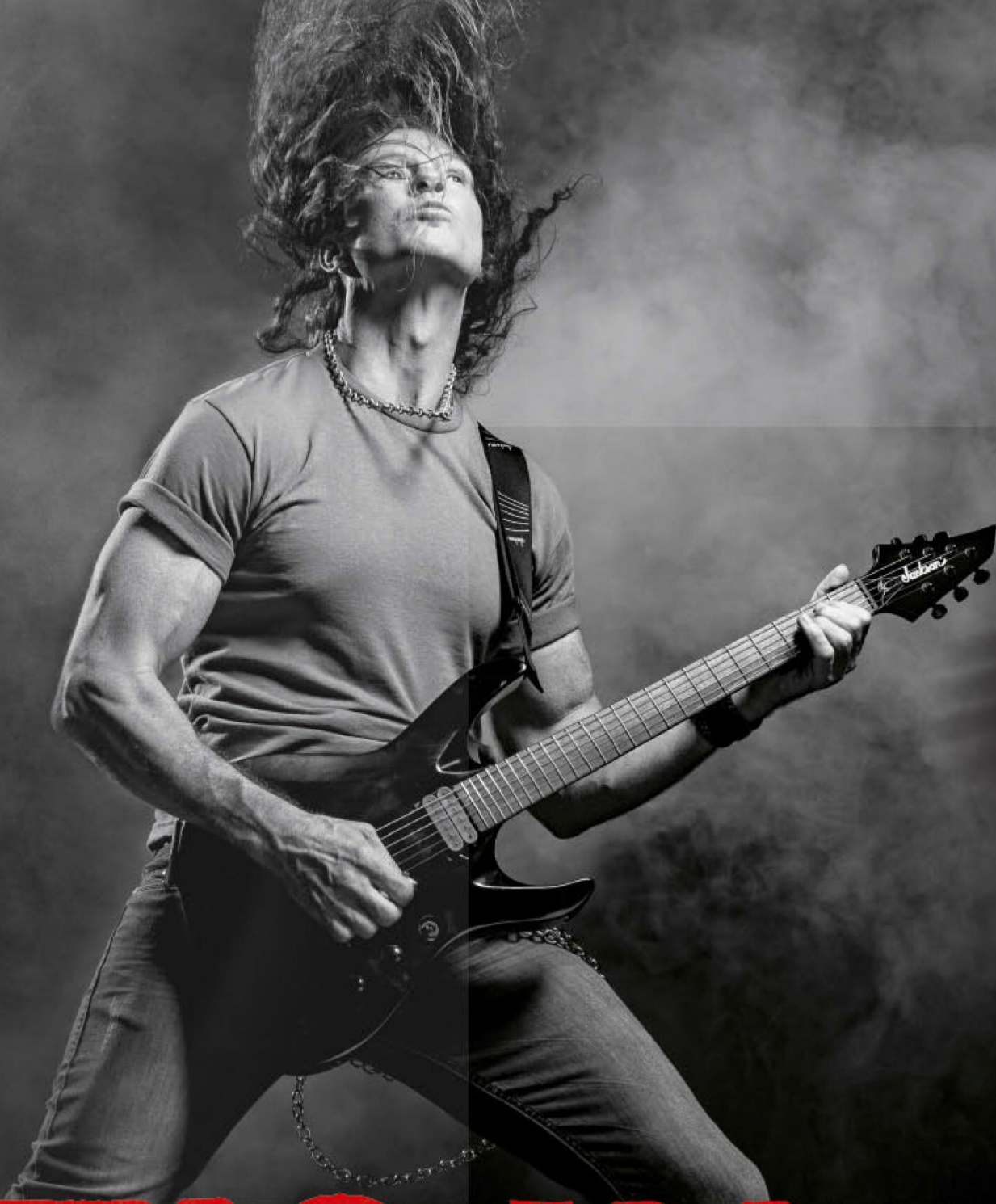
Besides the guitarmonies, the plaintive *Sunfair Sundown* is in G, with one guitar playing the chords in first position, and a second playing with a capo on fret seven, a C-shape providing the G up there – a great songwriter's trick. Barnett nailed her hot, avant-garde solo on *Turning Green* in one take: "That was fun," she says with a laugh. "Sometimes the best guitar stuff is kind of instinctual. After that first take I said, 'Okay, I made some mistakes, now I know how to do it better.' But then I never could. The energy in that is what makes it special."

Speaking of energy – while her music is indeed hard to categorise, it is permeated by an arty, relaxed, almost slacker-y feel. It's something of a trademark. "Yeah," Barnett concedes, and her sigh says she's been asked this before. "This music sounds quite relaxed. I don't know – a lot of that just ends up coming naturally. When I force something too much, you can hear it. This time I was just trying to channel calm, peaceful energy, and maybe that was reflected in the music."

"A lot of my songs are just me going through stuff, figuring it out as I go. And so, you know, it all feels slightly vulnerable in that way. I think anyone can relate to different elements of it. I want my music to appeal to anyone willing to go on a little musical or emotional journey."

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Words Jonny Scaramanga Photos Pablo Martinez, Pooneh Ghana, Marcello Ambriz

“WE’RE REAL MUSICIANS NOW!”

With two guitarists experimenting with new techniques and the mother of all pedalboards, this is how **Idles** reinvented their sound



Most of us would be happy never to hear the word ‘lockdown’ again, but the UK’s most exciting guitar band have made the best out of a bad situation. Forced to abandon their usual approach to writing, Idles found a new way of working – and discovered entirely new sounds in the process. The result is a brilliant new album, *Crawler*.

Less than a year since TG spoke to them about the hit album *Ultra Mono*, guitarists Lee Kiernan and Mark Bowen are back with even bigger pedalboards and an even more ambitious sound. But this story starts with the band’s members scattered across the globe, separated by Covid-19.

“We had to write it with everyone off in different places,” says Mark, simply. “Normally we write in a room together, and you have to impress four other people with something loud and brash. This time, you were able to sit and work on something until you got better at it. You didn’t have to be good at it right away. There are arpeggios and things like that that I’ve never done before. And we used production as a tool in songwriting, not just playing the guitar.”

Those two new elements – musical subtlety, and making production techniques integral to the songs – have produced something entirely new. Mark is animated as he explains the journey. “*Ultra Mono* was all about the context of playing live – big bangs that can reverberate around the room. This time we were writing music that only lived

in playback, in whatever recorded medium. That meant things got smaller but lighter. Up until this point intricacy and nuance weren’t there. Idles was always about expression through violent movement. Now I get the feeling of expression through subtle changes in pick action, subtle changes in tone. I did a lot of guitar synthesis on this album, like subtle filter sweeps that take a whole song to finish. It’s almost the polar opposite of *Ultra Mono*.”

Lee gives an example: “The most violent thing I do on this whole album is the bridge in *Car Crash*, and I barely move my body. I am the most static yet violent sounding I’ve ever been. It’s just a tiny, tiny filter sweep with my foot, that’s all.”

Lead single *Car Crash* embodies the creative vision for the album. “It’s like everything we were trying to do with





**“THE ABILITY LEVEL
OF WHAT WE DO IS
STILL NOT OUT OF
REACH OF ANYONE”**

LEE KIERNAN

Ultra Mono, but we actually did it,” Mark says. “It’s a noise-rock/hip-hop song and I don’t think you can recognise guitars in it. There’s no synths on that song. There’s no synths anywhere on the album – well, there’s one synth and it really p*sses me off! On *Ultra Mono*, we were trying to do this, like, hip-hop thing, but the first thing you would hear is that this is a band. If you listen to *Car Crash* or *MTT 420 RR*, you’re like, ‘Is that guitars?!’”

The synthetic sounds are indeed all guitars, though. As Mark explains: “There’s a lot of looping going on.” The guitar parts were recorded directly into the computer and cut into loops. Those were sent back out into a specially built pedalboard known as the ‘Crawler Machine’, designed by Mark’s tech Gavin Maxwell. “I guess you could describe it as a modular synth where the guitar is the primary oscillator,” Mark says.

Three loop stations allow Mark to make loops both pre- and post-effects, and a GigRig G3 switcher lets him change the order of pedals on the fly. Core sounds are the Moogerfooger Freqbox, Ring Modulator, and Cluster Flux pedals, connected via Moog’s CP251 modular synth controller. There’s also an EHX POG, the ElectroLobotomy

Particle Smasher (a synth noise generator which also accepts guitar signals), and a delay. This fearsome array makes it (just) possible to recreate *Crawler* live. “I had these guitar loops going through,” Mark says. “Then it was lots of knob twiddling and that’s how we ended up with the song *MTT 420 RR*, and a similar thing for *Car Crash*. We’ve had to work out how to play it live, and it’s weird – we can!”

Not to be outdone, Lee’s pedalboard has doubled in size since last year. “The whole point was to be a writing board,” he says. “I had a reverb at the beginning and at the end, two tremolos, an expression pedal, a Whammy pedal, and then a harmoniser for double octave capabilities. The problem with all that crap is that it ended up having to come out on tour because things were written for this pedalboard. It has to stay a double f*cking pedalboard. It’s so large it’s really not economically viable. There’s certain songs it’s really difficult to actually change sections because the pedals are so far apart from each other you can’t do it in time.” The defiantly old-school Lee is going to add a GigRig G3 to facilitate patch changes. “No one told me before that I could turn eight pedals on and off at once! That that seems like key information that I should

IDLE GAME

Mark Bowen rocks out





➔ have been told. It's really sick. Within about ten minutes of Bowen having one I was like 'well I need one of those.'"

Making *Crawler* an entirely studio-based project meant the band were unrestricted by concerns of what they could pull off live, and some songs have multiple guitar tracks. Despite this, fans at their recent US tour have seen that the songs do work live. "They're translating really well," Mark smiles. "We've done *Progress* in a live session. It's the hardest thing I've ever done because I have to set up [the loops]. I'm playing a different part of the song to the rest of the band, and then I'm responsible for something with my right foot, something different with my left foot while moving knobs or remembering to go back to play the guitar. It's really hard work! It's a very

different beast to jumping up and down and running around on stage. There's a lot more thinking to do."

Lee agrees: "The new songs don't quite feel natural performatively yet. All the other albums were played live so often like, even before they came out, that it was just like ready to perform. Now even though we've played these songs on repeat in a practice room, we're on in-ears now and we're playing to click all the time, concentrating, and it's just so different. It doesn't feel like I have to dance around. I feel like I just really want to know the song and really enjoy it."

As Mark puts it: "The musicianship has become the means of expression rather than the performance. Now it's about actually if we nail this, we all lock in and get this song sounding the way

BRUTALISM

Lee Kiernan searches for the sound

that we want it to, that's the performance in itself. We're real musicians now!" But despite this newfound intricacy, says Lee, "The ability level of what we do is still not out of reach of anyone. That's the best thing. You don't have to be a super amazing player to play anything we do. It's just the use of pedals, the sonics and the timing."

When we interviewed Mark and Lee about *Ultra Mono*, they described the evolution of their playing. On their debut, *Brutalism*, they both played constantly without really listening to each other. By *Joy As An Act Of Resistance*, this had evolved into each guitarist playing off what the other was doing. For *Ultra Mono*, they frequently played the same parts together for power. This time, says Lee, "We've gone back to the

"WE'VE HAD TO WORK OUT HOW TO PLAY THE NEW ALBUM LIVE, AND IT'S WEIRD — WE CAN!" MARK BOWEN

sort of realms of *Joy* where we do play off each other, except we've learned from making three of those albums. All the things we wanted to do before we're actually able to do. There's stuff that we still want to do that is completely within our grasp now, because we're starting to understand each other. It's taken four albums!"

Conceived as a studio project, *Crawler* features many layers of multi-tracks, and it wasn't always clear how it could be done live. Backing tracks, though, were out of the question. Says Lee: "We had many conversations about how to play this live and how no one really wanted to play to backing tracks because

it goes so far against the way we perform. We want to be a bit loose at times, and the only way to be loose is to actually play things. Even though we're on a click for some of the songs – for loops and stuff – the thing that makes us loose is not the timing, it's the playing. Bowen is always looping things slightly different every time he does it. It keeps it real. If we were playing to a backing track I just don't see us being happy."

Despite all the electronic elements, for amps Lee and Mark remained resolutely old school. "We built an enormous wall with every single amp that we have," Lee explains, "and

FLAT OUT

All in a day's work for Mark Bowen

moved the microphones around whenever we needed them." Where the guitars on *Ultra Mono* were a blend of up to three amps each, for *Crawler* the band looked carefully at which frequencies were needed for each part, and chose amps specifically for the job. They worked tirelessly with combinations of mics until the recorded guitar sounds captured the sound of the amps in the room. Lee used primarily a Marshall Plexi, Fender Twin, and WEM ER-40, while Mark used a Hiwatt DR103, and a Hex Micro T preamp (which recreates the sound of the legendary Sunn Model T) into an Orange AD200 and 2x15 cabs, to cope with the thunderous low end of his baritone guitar.

For guitars, Mark again relied on his custom Fender Baritone and aluminium-necked EGC, while Lee found himself with, most shockingly of all, a brand new guitar. "Fender gave me the American Professional II Telecaster. Within 20 seconds that guitar just created a song, *When The Lights Come On*. That became the guitar I primarily used because it had such versatility and such a warm sound we'd been looking for."

Last time we met, Mark was at pains to stress to musicians that it isn't necessary to spend a fortune on gear to get creative tones like the ones on *Ultra Mono*. But the same can hardly be said of *Crawler*, dependent as it is on entirely custom rigs. "I'm not going to pretend that you can make the sounds of my rig," he says. "The *Crawler Machine* is prohibitively expensive even for us to go out on tour. It requires a constant tech because neither one of us has the ability to fix anything that fast.

"Don't worry," he laughs, "I'm still in love with standing in front of a wall of amps and turning everything to 10. But there's a crazy amount of creative scope out there. If I was starting off as a musician I would be less interested in getting my hands on a Fender Stratocaster than getting my hands on a laptop and an audio interface. From forums and YouTube you can learn how to make insane music by just getting your hands on a DAW [Digital Audio Workstation – audio recording software]. I think that the more we dinosaurs in rock bands embrace that, the more progressive we will become. It's the new rock and roll, and I think that there's scope to be both. Hopefully that's what *Crawler* is."



Words Jonathan Horsley

The Total Guitar Christmas Gift Guide

All stocking filler, no budget killer! Gifts under £100 for the guitar maniac in your life

Electro-Harmonix Soul Food £75

Loved by pros and amateurs alike, EHX's Klon-style transparent overdrive pedal is incredible value, and a pedalboard essential for players of all styles. It can be used as a tone-sweetener, a boost, or for adding touch-sensitive grit to your sound.

D'Addario Nexus 360 £30

The accessories giant's first fully USB rechargeable headstock tuner is a nifty, omnidirectional little unit. Simply clip it to your guitar's headstock – or your bass – and rotate it so you can see the bright LED screen, and tune up. You'll get 24 hours of tuning, er, charge.

Shubb Paua Pearl Capo £19.50

If you own an acoustic guitar you need a capo, likewise if you play electric guitar and intend on doing some Keith Richards-esque open-tuning jamming. This one has a polychromatic finish inspired by abalone shells and is solid.

LEGO Ideas Fender Stratocaster £89

Once you have mastered *Eruption*, adapted the works of Thelonious Monk for guitar and find no more worlds to conquer, why not take five and build a LEGO replica of one of Leo

Fender's most-famous designs. For the guitarists who has everything.

Air Straps limited edition guitar strap £54

For the player who likes to stand with their instrument, these limited-edition straps will give them a certain

je ne sais quoi, a whiff of the boutique that will elevate their sartorial stage presence. Available in a variety of eye-catching designs.

Ernie Ball Power Peg electric string winder £24

Changing strings is a chore. This might not stop you from the agonies of impaling the soft pad of your index finger with a sharp string end, but this powered winder gets the job done in no time. And who doesn't like power tools?

Fender Mustang Micro headphone amp \$99

Internet music retail giant Reverb's biggest-selling guitar amplifier of 2021, the Mustang Micro is surely the smallest too. It fits in the pocket, has a dozen amp models and effects, can be used as an audio interface and can be taken anywhere.

Eruption: The Eddie Van Halen Story £19

Written by Paul Brannigan, former *Kerrang!* editor and author of *This Is A Call: The Life And Times Of Dave Grohl*, this authoritative biography of the guitar world's greatest trailblazer will deepen your appreciation of a unique and much-missed talent.

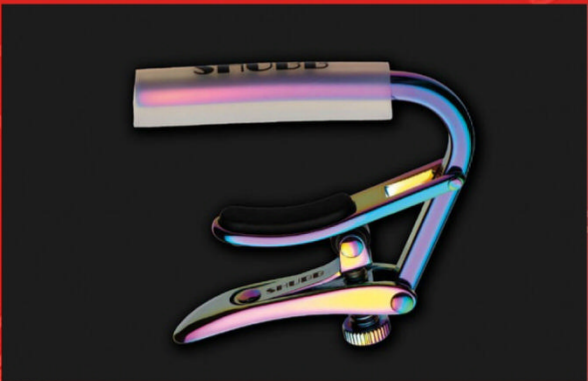
Mooer Micro Drummer Pedal £66

Metronomes might be essential but sometimes the blip-blip-blip or click-click-click can sound unnatural. This fuss-free drum machine pedal is a fun, compact and affordable option for enhancing your practice regime, or indeed for solo performance.

Harley Benton PowerPlant ISO-12 Pro £71

We live in the age of the ever-growing pedalboard and finding a budget-friendly solution to power them is not easy. Enter, Harley Benton. Here you have 12 isolated outputs, three with selectable voltages and high-current (500mA) outputs.





QUICK-START GUITAR

Begin your guitar-playing journey here with our beginner's lesson on essential chords and techniques

Just got your first guitar and itching to play? Well, read on, because over the next three pages we'll get you started with some essential basics such as chords, strumming and easy lead guitar techniques. By the end of the lesson you'll have enough info to potentially

play thousands of songs. If that sounds like a lot, well, it is!

We've condensed a lot of information into this feature. A beginner having weekly lessons with a guitar teacher might take two or three months to cover all this material. With that in mind we urge you to take it slowly as you

progress through the lessons. Look at, say, one or two chords and just one of our musical examples (shown in standard notation and guitar tablature) per day – and always make sure to go back and practise what you learned in the previous days.

Pick up your guitar and let's get started!

ESSENTIAL GEAR

1 GUITAR TUNER



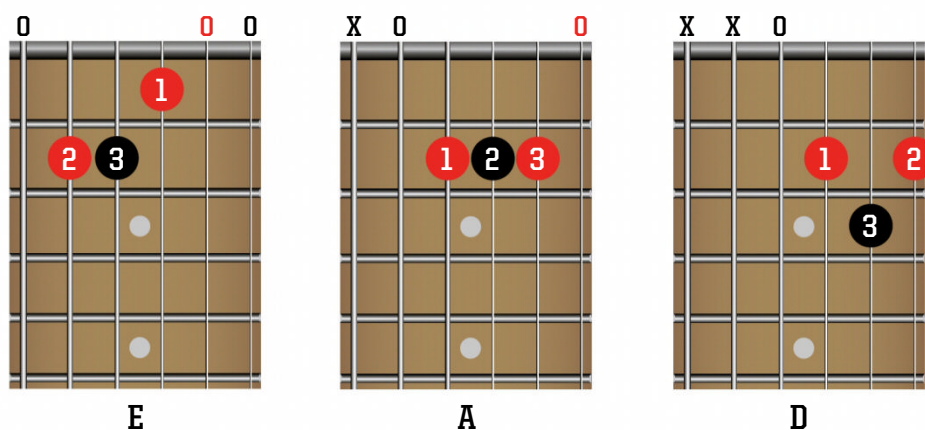
2 PICKS, AKA PLECTRUMS



3 CABLE, SPARE STRINGS, AMPLIFIER

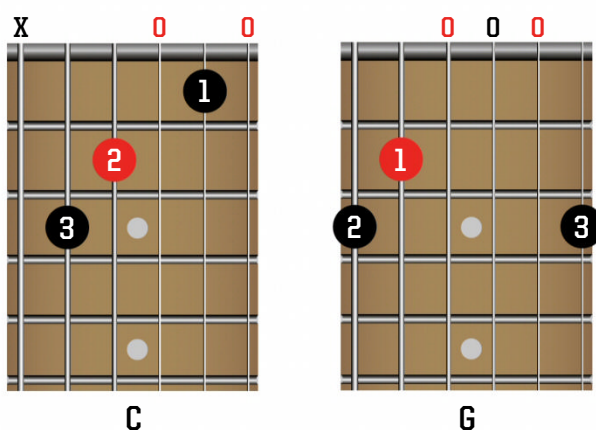


1 E, A & D CHORDS



These diagrams show you where to place your fingers on the guitar's fretboard to play three essential chords. The numbers tell you which of your four fingers to use. Press the strings down firmly and strum the strings. Avoid strings marked 'X'.

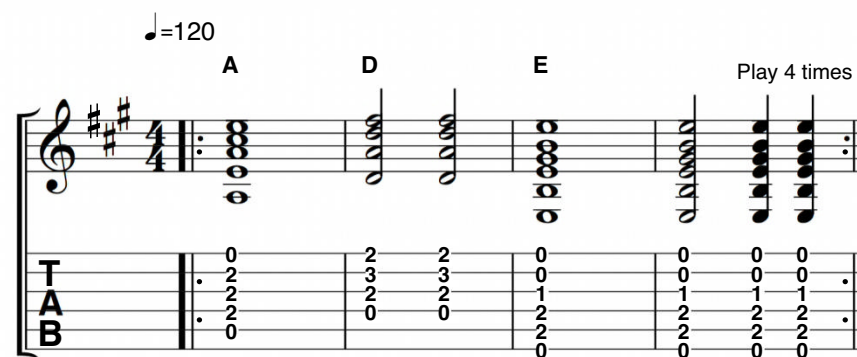
2 C & G CHORDS



Thanks to their fiendish stretches, C and G chords can take a while to master. If you struggle with them, play only the top four strings (the thinnest ones) to make it easier for now.

YOUR FIRST MUSIC

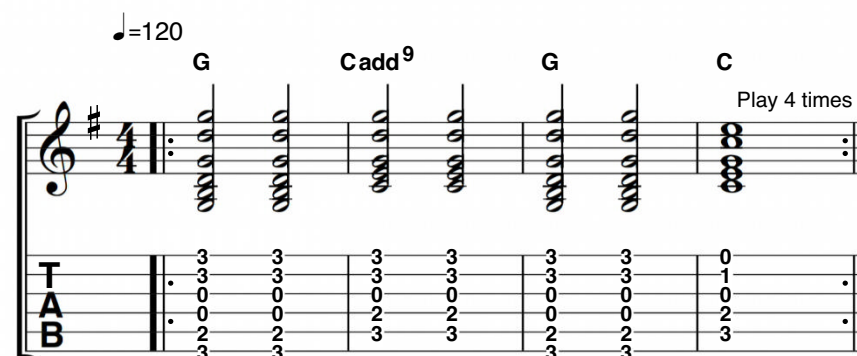
BIT.LV/TG353AUDIO



Guitarists use tablature to write down their music, just as we've done with this upbeat rhythm guitar track. The tab lines represent guitar strings and numbers tell you which fret to place your fingers at. Play A once, D twice, then E four times.

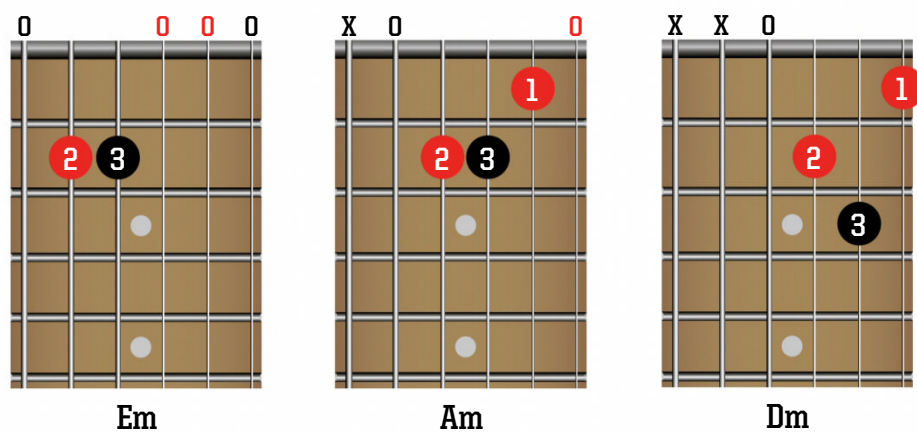
MORE CHORDS

BIT.LV/TG353AUDIO



Here we're putting C and G into action with two strums of each chord until the long, ringing final C. Notice bar 2 uses a slightly different chord called Cadd9. The fingering is similar to C and G shapes – it's sort of a mix of both.

3 EM, AM & DM CHORDS



Minor chords (shown with a lowercase 'm') have a darker, moodier sound than the 'major' chords we looked at before. Strum all six strings for Em, five strings for Am and four for the Dm chord.

4 DISTORTION AND POWERCHORDS



If you have an electric guitar and an amplifier, you'll be able to dial in a dirty tone using the gain control. This is called 'overdrive' or 'distortion' and it's used in hard rock and heavy metal. Powerchords will sound great.

5 POWERCHORDS AND PALM MUTING



If you've ever noticed 'chugging' rhythm guitars in rock and metal, you're most likely listening to a technique known as palm muting. The idea is to keep the side of your hand resting on the strings beside the guitar bridge as you strum the strings.

6 STRUMMING



Strumming is a simple technique: just run your pick across the guitar strings in one steady move - up or down. But that's the easy bit! Strumming is all about the different rhythms you can create using a mixture of downstrokes and upstrokes.

MOOD MUSIC

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

♩ = 80

Am Dm Am Em Play 8 times

TAB: 1 1 3 1 1 0, 2 2 2 2 2 0, 0 0 0 0 0 0

Listen to our audio track to hear the dark, sad sound of minor chords. The music is quick so practise changing between the chords before you play along. Start slowly and eventually your fingers will start to 'remember' the moves.

HEAVY POWERCHORDS

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

♩ = 80

E⁵ F⁵ A⁵ B⁵ D⁵ B⁵ Play 8 times

TAB: 2 2 4 2 4 7 4, 0 0 2 0 5 2

Powerchords are written with a '5' next to the root chord name. They're easy, too - you only need to play two notes. For example, for E⁵ you play an open sixth string and fret the fifth string at the 2nd fret. See if you can work out the rest.

CHUGGING ROCK

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

♩ = 100

E⁵ G⁵ F⁵ Play 8 times

TAB: 2 2 2 2 2 2 5 5 3, 2 2 2 2 2 2 5 5 3, 0 0 0 0 0 0 3 3 1

More powerchords here, but employing a different shape on three strings. This is a distorted rock riff, but acoustic players can join in too - palm-muting is used in all music! Just take care to slightly deaden the strings as you strum.

STRUMMER TIME

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

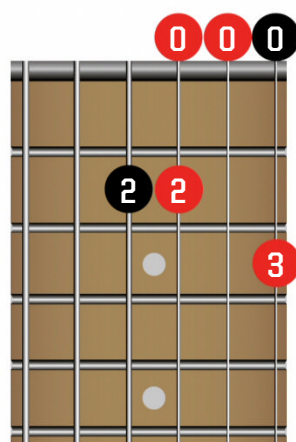
♩ = 80

G D Cadd⁹ Play 8 times

TAB: 3 3 3 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 3, 0 0 0 2 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0, 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 2 2 2 3, 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

There's a simple strum pattern to try out here: down, down up. We've played it once on the G chord, once on D and twice on Cadd9. You can improvise your own rhythms, too. Just keep your strumming arm moving in time with the music.

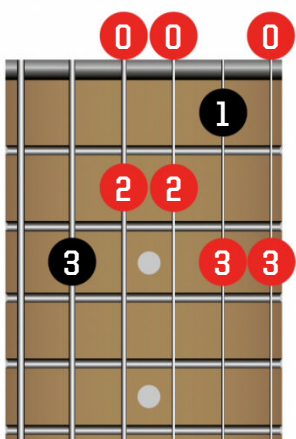
7 LEAD GUITAR: ONE NOTE AT A TIME



E minor pentatonic scale

Try playing the notes shown here one at a time, starting on the lowest pitch until you reach the highest. Groups of notes like this are known as scales.

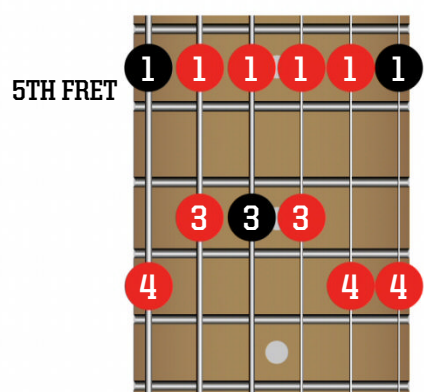
8 LEAD GUITAR: A NEW SCALE



C major pentatonic scale

You've tried a minor scale, now here's a major one. Just like major and minor chords, you can use major scales for bright, happy sounds, and minor scales for moodier moments.

9 LEAD GUITAR: CHANGING POSITION

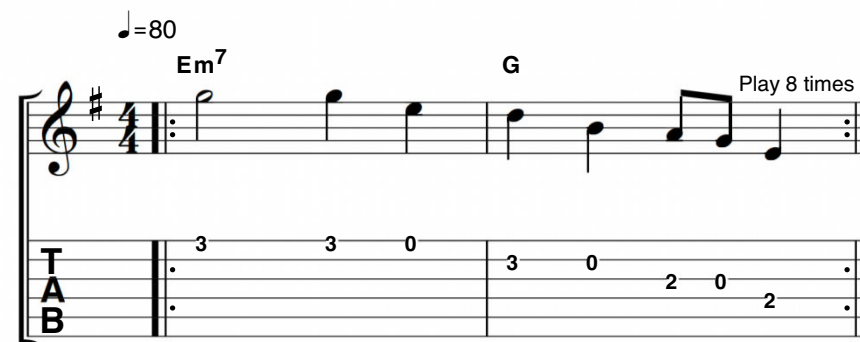


A minor pentatonic scale

The guitar has lots of frets and you can play notes on every one, so we're moving up to the 5th fret here. There are more notes to play in this shape so it may take longer to master. Give it a go when the others start to feel a bit easier.

YOUR FIRST SOLO

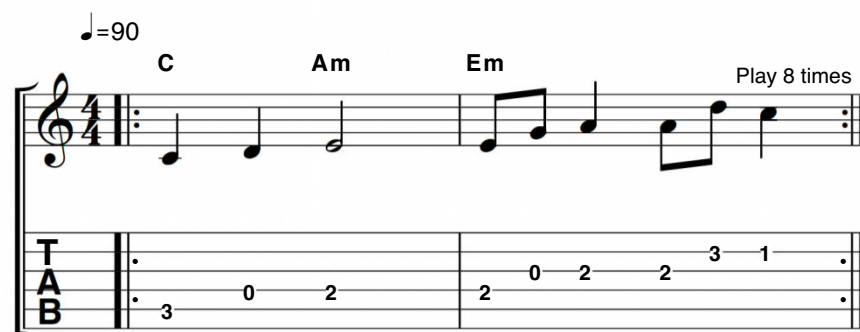
BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO



We're using the E minor pentatonic scale here in a lead guitar lick. You're playing one note at a time, so make sure to use a tighter, more accurate picking motion than if you were strumming. Pick each note with a downstroke.

MAJOR PENTATONIC SOLO

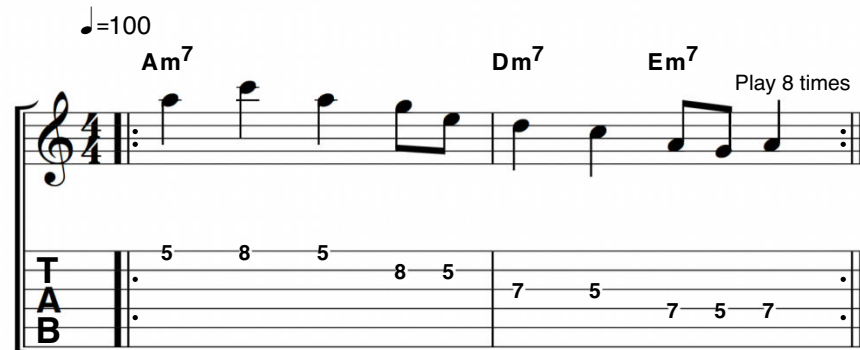
BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO



Here's a lead guitar lick based on the C major pentatonic scale for you to try out. Try to use one finger per fret: so start with your third finger at the 3rd fret, your second finger at the 2nd fret, and so on. Again, use downstrokes for now.

5TH POSITION SOLO

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO



Once you've tried your hand at the scale shape, have a go at this lick. We're playing on the four higher-pitched strings here, but why not try making up your own ideas using the lower notes of the scale.



FIVE SONGS YOU CAN PLAY NOW!

1 WILD THING

The Troggs

The classic repeating riff of this track cycles between A, D, E and D, with a rest between each chord giving you time to switch between the shapes.

2 TWIST AND SHOUT

The Beatles

This song is comprised of three major chords: D G A. It'll take novice guitar players a bit of time to master the changes - so make sure to practise slowly.

3 PERFECT

Ed Sheeran

You may recognise this chord progression

(G Em C D). Sometimes known as the '50s progression', it features in many well known classics and modern hits.

4 IN THIS RIVER

Black Label Society

The progression Em C G D has a melancholy feel which Zakk Wylde used on this track. Like the 50s progression, it appears in countless other songs too.

5 WHEN I COME AROUND

Green Day

The guitar on the original recording is tuned down a semitone, but the chord shapes are G, D, Em and C. You can also sing Journey's *Don't Stop Believing* over these chords.



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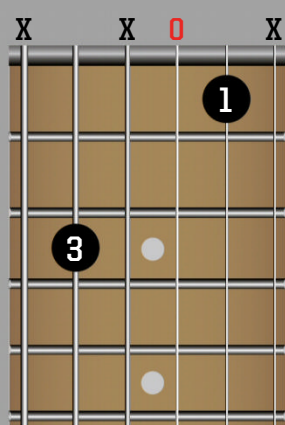
GETTING STARTED WITH...

OPEN POWERCHORDS

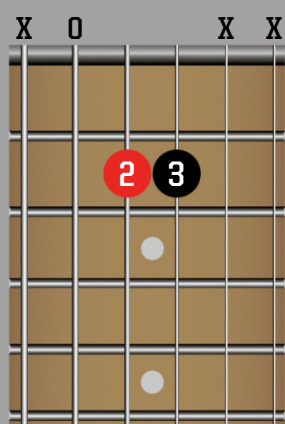
Make easy changes to five chords you already know to master riff rock and classic metal

FRET BOXES

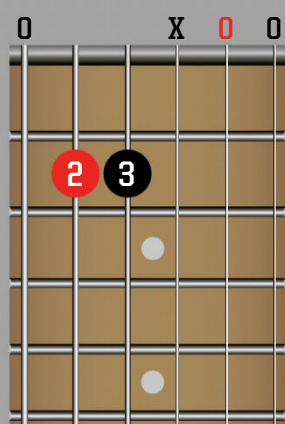
Notice that these shapes are almost identical to standard open C, A, G, E and D shapes. And remember all the hard work you put into avoiding accidentally muting strings with the undersides of your fingers? Well, now you can relax a bit, as for chords like C5 and A5 you'll deliberately let your fingers choke the high E string. For G5, the underside of your second finger should mute the fifth string en route to fretting the low E.



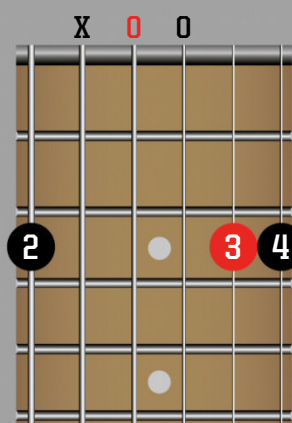
C5



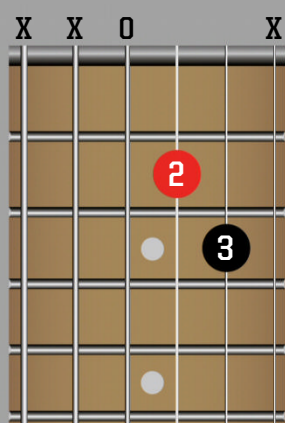
A5



E5



G5



D5



By now you're probably confident with classic two-note fretted powerchord shapes. There's another way to play powerchords, though. Most associated with AC/DC, open powerchords sound bigger and looser than fretted ones. They're perfect for hard rock and classic metal, and essential for playing like Van Halen, Ozzy, Maiden, and any of the bands they influenced.

Mastering these powerchords shouldn't take too much work either, because they're

based on shapes you probably already know. Open powerchords take the five basic open major chords (that's C, A, G, E, and D) and remove the major 3rd.

To play them, first identify the note(s) you need to remove (we've done that for you with our fret boxes). Then form the chord shape as normal. For any notes you don't want to hear, rest a fretting finger gently on the string to mute it. Read on as we help you get started with the all important new shapes, plus we've written two tab examples for you to jam along to.

TECHNIQUE CHECK...

Get your fingers in the right place and your powerchords will rock!



1 STRING MUTING
The way to mute unwanted notes is to touch your finger against the string, but not press hard enough to fret the note.



2 A5 TO G
Try playing A5 by barring with your first finger, angled so the first and second strings are muted. Your second finger is free to fret the sixth string.



3 C5
For C5, mute the bass string by stubbing up against it with the tip of your third finger.



4 D5
For D5 and A5 powerchords, bring your thumb over the neck to mute the low E string.

1 OPEN POWERCHORDS

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

♩=108

A⁵ D⁵ G⁵ A⁵ D⁵ G⁵ A⁵

1/4 Play 4 times

TAB: 2 2 0 | 3 2 0 | 3 0 0 | 2 2 0 | 3 2 0 | 3 2 0 | 2 2 0

Bar 3 is a common AC/DC and Van Halen move. See pic 2 above for how to do it. For G5, the underside of your second finger should mute the A string.

2 GALLOP RIFF

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

♩=115

E⁵ C⁵ D⁵/A E⁵ E⁵ D⁵/A E⁵

PM PM PM PM Play 4 times

TAB: 0 0 2 0 | 1 0 3 | 3 2 0 | 0 2 2 | 0 2 2 | 0 2 2 | 0 2 2

Get the chord stabs right first, then add the gallops on the sixth string. Pick all gallops down-down-up so that you land on a downstroke on each chord.





Welcome to this special issue in which we present the very first **Total Guitar Awards**

– spotlighting the very best in the world of guitars this year.

We asked TG readers to vote for their Guitarist of 2021. And you voted in your thousands.

The winner is Jake Kiszka of Greta Van Fleet. The runner-up, Tash Sultana.

Over the next 24 pages, we speak to Jake, Tash and three other guitarists who placed high on the list – Samantha Fish, Josh Middleton of Architects, and Joe Bonamassa – about the music they made this year, the gear they used, what they have learned as players, and who they would have voted as their guitarist of 2021.

There are special awards for Mdou Moctar, whose inspirational *Afrique Victime* is TG's Album of the Year, and for Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, our Icon of 2021.

There is an analysis of The Year in Guitar, focusing on all the biggest stories of the past 12 months. We also pick out 2021's best songs, riffs and solos. And to finish, there is an in-depth guide to all the must-have gear of the year.





LEARN TO PLAY ARCHITECTS ANIMALS BETTER OBLIVION COMMUNITY CENTER DYLAN THOMAS

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THE 50 GREATEST SOLOS OF ALL TIME

FEATURING AC/DC, Prince, Pink Floyd, and much more!

PLUS CHORD CHANGES FOR BEGINNERS FENDER AMERICAN PRO STRAT HSS TC ELECTRONIC QUITO+ LOOPER DANELECTRO '57

IRON MAIDEN THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

JEFF BECK CAUSE WE'VE ENDED AS LOVERS

LEARN TO PLAY GRETA VAN FLEET AGE OF MACHINE TOTO HOLD THE LINE IGGY POP THE PASSENGER

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20 ROCK RHYTHM LESSONS From Hendrix to Red Hot Chili Peppers

FOO FIGHTERS

INSIDE THE BIGGEST ROCK ALBUM OF 2021

PLUS STEVEN WILSON LANEY CUB SUPER 12 LONELY THE BRAVE

THIN LIZZY! PLAY LIKE GORHAM!

GROHL & CO. ON RIFFS, GEAR AND "HEAVY F***ING GR-OOVES"

LEARN CLASSIC FOO'S RIFFS! MONKEY WRENCH EVERLONG THE PRETENDER

LEARN TO PLAY FLEETWOOD MAC GO YOUR OWN WAY ZZ TOP LA GRANGE THE PRETTY RECKLESS AND SO IT WENT

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STARRING! KEITH RICHARDS, ALBERT COLLINS, JOHNNY MARR, JIM ROOT JASON ISBELL & MORE

Tones, tips, techniques!

PLUS ARCHITECTS MICHAEL SCHENKER ADRIAN SMITH & RICHIE KOTZEN

REVIEWED 2021 CHRISSIE HYNDE TELECASTER

THE GEAR THAT MADE THE STONES

KER-TWANG! LEARN THE LICKS OF THE COUNTRY SUPERSTARS

THE 15 BEST T-STYLES ON ANY BUDGET

WOLF ALICE SMILE

LEARN TO PLAY GOJIRA ANOTHER WORLD EVA CASSIDY SONGBIRD ED SHEERAN AFTERGLOW

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THE NEW ACOUSTIC GENERATION

STARRING Ben Howard

PLUS TASH SULTANA STEVE CROPPER THE OFFSPRING

BLUES POWER! GARY MOORE How the Irish rocker took the blues up to 11 CLASSIC SRV TAB! Mary Had A Little Lamb Modern blues lessons

REVIEWED SHEERAN BY LOWDEN PRS SE CUSTOM 24-08 BOSS RC-30 LOOPER

GOJIRA WE DIVE DEEP INTO THE METAL ALBUM OF THE YEAR

PLAY BOB MARLEY REDEMPTION SONG RUSH LIMELIGHT PEARL JAM JUST BREATHE MASON HILL AGAINST THE WALL

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VAN HALEN

THE NEXT GENERATION HOW EDDIE IS STILL INFLUENCING MODERN GUITAR With Weezer, Yvette Young, Tyler Bryant & more

Plus LEARN CLASSIC EVH RIFFS! RUNNIN' WITH THE DEVIL PANAMA / 5150 ED'S 'BROWN SOUND' EXPLAINED: GUITARS! AMPS! EFFECTS!

Also ICEAGE GRETA VAN FLEET STEVE LUKATHER

REVIEWED EVENTIDE MICROPITCH DELAY VAN HAGER-ERA TONES

PLAY QUEEN BRIGHTON ROCK OASIS WONDERWALL THE WHITE STRIPES SEVEN NATION ARMY

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THE 50 GREATEST RIFFS OF ALL TIME

AND HOW THEY WERE CREATED FROM THE BEATLES TO METALLICA & BEYOND!

ROYAL BLOOD MIKE KERR'S RIG SECRETS REVEALED!

PLAY LED ZEPPELIN GOING TO CALIFORNIA AEROSMITH DREAM ON JAMES TAYLOR FIRE AND RAIN

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BACK TO LIVE!

GET GIG-READY AND LEVEL UP YOUR PLAYING

- 12 TECHNIQUE WORKOUTS
- JAM TRACK CRASH COURSE
- GET MORE FROM YOUR GEAR

REHEARSAL TIPS FROM THE DARKNESS MANIC STREET PREACHERS ON STAGE WITH SQUID

BILLY GIBBONS FENDER MUSTANG MICRO BLACK MIDI MDOU MOCTAR

REVIEWED EPIPHONE ALEX LIFESON LES PAUL ACESS RUSH ICON'S SIGNATURE

PLAY TOM PETTY FREE FALLIN' CREAM STRANGE BREW ROYAL BLOOD TYPHOONS

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MAYER

"YOU CAN'T TAKE THE GUITAR PLAYING OUT OF ME"

THE NEW ALBUM HIS WHOLE STORY GEAR BREAKDOWN TECHNIQUE LESSONS

SHAME MODES MADE EASY TEDESCHI TRUCKS LINE 6 HX STOMP XL

REVIEWED CHARVEL PRO-MOD SO-CAL STYLE 2 T-STYLE TONAL ALL-ROUNDER

PLAY NEWTON FAULKNER TEARDROP GREEN DAY WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS AC/DC T.N.T.

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METALLICA

THE GUITAR POWER OF THE BLACK ALBUM How A Classic Was Created... And Reinvented.

REVEALED! THE ULTIMATE "DEEPPAKE" METALLICA SONG FULLY TABBED

PLUS SAMANTHA FISH CAGE THE ELEPHANT THE VACCINES

REVIEWED FENDER NOVENTAS! THE BIG F'S LATEST WORKHORSE RANGE REVIEWED

20 CLASSIC ROCK LICKS TO LEARN BILLY GIBBONS BRIAN MAY JIMI HENDRIX

Words Jonny Scaramanga

2021

The Year In Guitar



Amazing new music. A mountain of great new gear. And the long-awaited return of gigging. These were the highlights of the year that was...

As we entered 2021, things did not look great. The UK was locked down with no clear indication when things would improve. NAMM, the world's largest music trade show, was cancelled. Planned stadium tours by Guns N' Roses, Rammstein, and Green Day were postponed to 2022. It was a good thing for our mental health that we were at least quarantined with our guitars. Appearing in TG's January issue, Tom Morello and Covet's Yvette Young reminded us that guitar creativity was very much alive, even if we couldn't go and see it in person.

Lockdown had a silver lining, though: an avalanche of new music as artists emerged from a year in their studios. Foo Fighters were first out of the gate, with Pat Smear comparing *Medicine At Midnight* to Van Halen ("It has a party vibe!") while Dave Grohl bigged up his disco influences. In a vivid demonstration of guitar's vitality, established greats and new artists delivered equally strong efforts, with every possible style and sound of guitar represented. Highlights from the old guard included John Mayer's *Sob Rock*, mixing blues chops with 80s AOR vibes; Van Weezer, which was exactly what you'd hope to get from a high speed collision between Van Halen and Weezer, and Iron Maiden's *Senjutsu* was their strongest album this century.

It was the young acts that really set the pace, though. On *Cavalcade*, Black Midi spearheaded a wave of experimental post-punk, unbothered by restrictions like genres; their friends Squid, Black Country, New Road and Shame all sound different but equally daring. Fans of more traditional songwriting were well served by blues rock efforts from Samantha Fish and Emily Wolfe. Tash Sultana's *Terra Firma* offered lush guitar tones and laid back soul grooves, Greta Van Fleet put suggestions of being mere Zeppelin imitators to bed with *The Battle At Garden's Gate*, and Sam Fender's combination of indie rock cool and Tom Petty-esque heartland earnestness won over just about everyone. And then, bridging the gap between the old guard and the new, came Wolfgang Van Halen's *Mammoth WVH*. This slab of hook-laden rock didn't sound like his dad's band but nevertheless appealed effortlessly to Van Halen fans.

As May rolled around, restrictions finally lifted enough for gigging to resume. TG immediately went to see Squid, whose *Bright Green Field*

album would have been exciting even if we hadn't been stuck inside for four months. As it was, catching Squid in a Wiltshire pub was like seeing Hendrix jam with The Beatles. Glastonbury Festival may have been cancelled, but the Download festival pilot saw 10,000 metalheads devouring performances from Bullet For My Valentine, Enter Shikari and Frank Carter & the Rattlesnakes.

Reading and Leeds went ahead, with standout sets from Biffy Clyro, Sam Fender, and Wolf Alice representing the guitar contingent. Manic Street Preachers celebrated their first #1 album in 23 years with a hometown show at Cardiff's Motorpoint Arena for NHS workers, where they blasted unexpectedly through Guns N' Roses' *Sweet Child O' Mine*.

The big guitar brands sought to build on 2020's record breaking sales. If you've recently tried ordering a new guitar that wasn't already in stock, you'll have some idea how strong demand still is. Fender's Noventa series tempted us with gutsy P90 pickups in otherwise classic Fender designs. Charvel impressed with various hardtail models and tasteful finishes that widens the brand beyond its core shred audience. Cort shook things up with their G300 Pro, which carried a spec sheet worthy of a California custom shop but retailed at just £749. After their financial woes in 2018-2019, Gibson seemed confident again, snapping up Mesa/Boogie and launching new lines of guitars. The Generation series of acoustics are the most affordable Gibson acoustics to date and impressive with it. Epiphone, meanwhile, launched a slew of signature models from Slash, Nancy Wilson, Emily Wolfe, and Alex Lifeson. If it wasn't already clear, Epiphone is not only a brand for beginners.

In amp land, we saw the rise of solid state mini heads with serious offerings from Friedman, Bogner, and Diezel. Boutique pedal manufacturers have been showing you can get killer tones from solid state circuitry for years, so applying that to amps is a logical step. These all-analogue units are straightforwardly plug-and-play, but compared to valve amps they're cheaper, lighter, and more reliable. Despite the rise of digital and solid state gear, many of this year's best amps were still valve powered. The smartest can run at ultra-low wattages for cranked tones at practical volumes. Our favourites, including the Peavey Invective Mini and Laney Cub-Super12, go down to just 1 watt, which was extremely helpful for quarantine jamming.





THE SONGWRITER ISSUE

PLAY BETTER NOW!
TOTAL Guitar

MAMMA MIA!
ABBA'S GREATEST GUITAR MOMENTS

LEARN TO PLAY
KISS
I WAS MADE FOR LOVIN' YOU
ED SHEERAN
PERFECT
MASTODON
PUSHING THE TIDES

HOW TO WRITE SONGS BY
SAM FENDER

THE WAR ON DRUGS
MANIC STREET PREACHERS
JERRY CANTRELL
BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE
LARKIN POE

LEARN
SAM FENDER'S
SEVENTEEN GOING UNDER

GIBSON
GENERATION SERIES
FOUR US-MADE ACOUSTICS FROM UNDER A GRAND

SESSION STYLES
GET VERSATILE WITH 10 EASY LICKS

MAJOR SCALE
BASICS
JOE BONAMASSA
PRO CO LIL' RAT

PLAY FREE ALL RIGHT NOW
BIFFY CLYRO
A HUNGER IN YOUR HAUNT
EXTREME
MORE THAN WORDS
PASSINGER
SWORD FROM THE STONE

PLAY BETTER NOW!
TOTAL Guitar

NEW!
ALL AUDIO & VIDEO NOW ONLINE TO DOWNLOAD OR STREAM

FAB GEAR!
GET AUTHENTIC BEATLES TONES NOW
LEARN!
THEIR SONGWRITING SECRETS

50 THE BEATLES
Greatest Guitar Songs

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT
THE MYTHIC CHORD EXPLAINED!

HELTHER SKELTER
THE BEATLES TURN IT UP TO 11



MASTODON
HOW THEIR HEAVY TWO-GUITAR ATTACK WORKS

ON TEST
FENDER
PLAYER PLUS
PRO-SPEC STRAT



THE MAGIC OF CARLOS SANTANA
"LET THE SPIRIT TAKE OVER YOUR FINGERS"

Modelling continues to look like the present and future of guitar tone, whether you're in a bedroom, a studio, or a stadium. Floor units are getting smaller, more powerful, and more user-friendly. Neural's Quad Cortex was the headline grabber, with its giant touchscreen, footswitches that double as knobs, and ability to capture new rigs. Line 6's HX Stomp XL could fit in a gig bag while replacing an entire pedalboard or, if going direct to PA, an entire rig. Fractal's FM3, meanwhile, saw their class-leading tone quality at last matched by an intelligible user interface. At the other end of the price spectrum, Fender's Mustang Micro headphone amp offers 12 great amp and effect models, Bluetooth audio streaming for bedroom jamming, and doubles as a USB audio interface. There really is no need to put up with bad guitar tone ever again.

Despite digital gear's strides towards supremacy, guitarists still can't get enough of stomp boxes. The Vaccines, Idles, and Lonely the Brave don't have much in common at first glance, but they each took TG through their giant pedalboards. Consequently some of the biggest gear launches have enabled guitarists to combine the advantages of digital functionality with a classic pedal setup. The Boss IR-200 and Walrus ACS1 put software cab emulations directly onto your pedalboard, while Mooer's L6 Pedal Controller brings digital pedal switching to a budget price point. If you want the flexibility of digital switching but the tones and intuitiveness of stompboxes, the future is here. The best pedals we tested this year

"IT WAS THE YOUNG ACTS THAT REALLY SET THE PACE"

were Blackstar's Dept 10 Dual Drive and Dual Distortion pedals, with valve-based overdrive circuitry and onboard digital Cab Rig speaker simulation. Increasingly, the answer to the analogue vs digital debate is "both."

Social media is still the place to find new guitar stars. Japanese YouTuber Ichika Nito is now big enough that Ibanez is producing his signature model with an entirely new headless design. In March, YouTuber Mary Spender went viral, by releasing her best guess at how John Mayer's single *Last Train Home* would sound before he could drop the real thing. Luckily Mayer saw the funny side. In November, Italian glamsters and Eurovision winners Måneskin became a viral TikTok sensation with their version of Franki Valli's classic *Beggin'*. Now they're hotly tipped for 2022's Best New Artist Grammy award, raising the prospect that next year's rock may include a great deal more glitter than it has for quite a while.

The pile of cancellations from 2021 means 2022 is set to be a monster year for gigs. If there's an act you want to see, chances are they're playing down the road at some point. Aerosmith, Tool, Foo Fighters, The Killers, Guns N' Roses, Red Hot Chili Peppers, My Chemical Romance and Queen + Adam Lambert will all be making the rounds. And set for release in 2022 are new albums from the Chili Peppers, Slash feat. Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators, Eric Gales, Steve Vai, Johnny Marr, Alt-J, Stereophonics and Jack White.

What's more, modelling tech continues to get smaller, cheaper, and more realistic, guitar manufacturers continue to cram pro-level spec into mid-price guitars, and boutique pedal builders make ever-more accurate amp-in-a-box creations. The UK guitar scene is the strongest it's been since Britpop, and none of the new guitars so far announced for next year have robot tuners on them. Bring on another year of powerchords and vibrato...

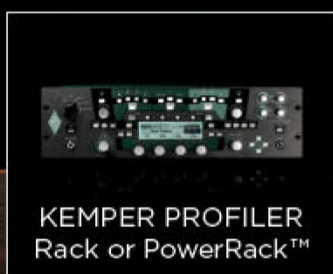


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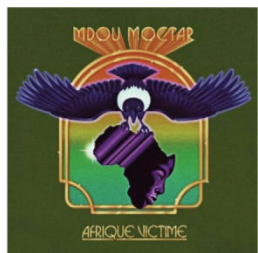


Words Jonathan Horsley, Amit Sharma

Albums of 2021



With too many albums to choose from, 2021 has been a vintage year for guitar music. These are the best...



1 Mdou Moctar Afrique Victime (Matador)

M

dou Moctar is one of those rare guitar players who make us rethink the instrument. Some of the base ingredients to his sound might be familiar – a Fender Stratocaster, Roland Jazz Chorus 120 combos, a scattering of commonly found effects pedals. And he, like many of us who picked up the electric guitar post-1978, has cribbed techniques

from Eddie Van Halen. But Moctar's idiosyncratic style is cut from different cloth; it's a rock 'n' roll and skronky blues and psych-rock take on traditional Tuareg music, and the product of the most unorthodox guitar-hero origin story.

Moctar grew up in rural Niger. When he saw the great ishumar pioneer Abdallah Oumbadougou in concert he knew he had to play. He just had to work out how. He knew he had to learn guitar in secret so as not to offend his observant Muslim parents – “They thought that when I become an artist I am going to start to drink alcohol or take drugs!” He made his first guitar out of spare wood, with strings fashioned from his bicycle's brake cables, tuners from the keys used to open sardine cans. It was pure MacGyver, and it worked; it was so rudimentary Moctar's family thought this guitar playing would never go anywhere.

It has, though, and his playing style and songwriting is evolving all the time. On *Afrique Victime*, Moctar's guitar sounds like it

has discovered a new vocabulary, his instinctive phrasing dovetailing with rhythm guitarist and protégé, Ahmoudou Madassane. Tracks such as *Chismiten* might be described as Saharan rock or desert blues, but they present the circular rhythms of Tuareg music in a way that resists categorising.

“I want to do something new,” explains Moctar. “If you hear all my albums, it is not the same [sound]. If you listen to *Anar*, it is Auto-Tune, acoustic, and then I'll go electric with acoustic – all the time, I am changing what I am doing. *Afrique Victime* has some places when we we use the calabash.”

That is the tension that gives *Afrique Victime* its energy; the industrial power of electric guitar, bass and drums on one hand, the old-world spirituality of Tuareg arrangements on the other. There's a sleight of hand to Moctar's phrasing; you think you know where it is going and then it takes off in new direction. And while the performances are

propulsive and celebratory, the songwriting is animated also by anger, at French colonialism and the lack of basic provisions in Moctar's hometown, Agadez.

Moctar recorded *Afrique Victime* on the road, with bassist Mikey Coltun – a New Yorker who is also their bus driver and tour manager – producing. They'd play a show one day, record another, then take off. Moctar says this was preferable to the torturous sessions for debut album *Ilana (The Creator)*, when he was homesick and fasting for Ramadan. But then, recording *Afrique Victime* on the road – in hotel rooms, backstage, in the desert – that seems thematically apt, too, for a record whose sound never sits still. **JH**





2 Gojira

Fortitude

(Roadrunner)

Now well-established as one of the most potent metal groups on earth, there's a deep magnetic pull to the brilliantly jarring riffs heard on Gojira's seventh full-length release. While plenty of traces of their tech-death past still remain, it's the brute groove and force of their more direct ideas that truly stun.



3 St Vincent

Daddy's Home

(Loma Vista)

The 70s pop lullabies heard on St Vincent's sixth album take the listener on a journey through the weird and wonderful, at times touching on the psychedelic sounds made famous by The Beatles, David Bowie and Pink Floyd via her own lens of vintage Americana. The solo during *Live In The Dream* could very well be one of the finest of her career.



4 John Mayer

Sob Rock

(Columbia)

The Connecticut singer-songwriter is no stranger to reinvention – this year's eighth album could very well be one of his bravest yet. Inspired by the 80s music that soundtracked his childhood, its 10 tracks are a testament to a musician maturing with age and using everything at his disposal: his PRS guitars, his Dumble amps and, believe it or not, an Axe-FX III.



5 Mastodon

Hushed & Grim

(Reprise)

On their eighth album the Atlanta quartet have fine-tuned a perfect blend of the progressive psychedelia heard on 2009 fan-favourite *Crack The Sky* and the catchy hooks from albums more recent. Truth be told, guitarists Brent Hinds and Bill Kelliher have never sounded this impressive – the 15 new tracks are as mesmerising as it gets.



6 Greta Van Fleet

The Battle At Garden's Gate

(Lava/Republic)

Armed with his prized 1961 Les Paul, Marshall Astorias, Fender Champs, Bletchley Belchfires and a handful of pedals, guitarist Jake Kiszka was on a mission to tread new sonic ground on album number two. The group's efforts were not in vain – proving there's a lot more to their band than just that Led Zeppelin influence.



7 Black Midi

Cavalcade

(Rough Trade)

Math rock, experimental rock, post-punk: Black Midi's thrillingly unpredictable and wildly eclectic music defines categorisation. Their second album did not disappoint in terms of bold ambition, from the cascading madness of opener *John L* to the King Crimson worship heard on grand finale *Ascending Forth*.



8 Tash Sultana

Terra Firma

(Lonely Lands/Sony)

Some of the finest clean tones we heard this year came courtesy of Australian singer-songwriter Tash Sultana – which, as we learned back in summer, mainly came from plugging DiMarzio-loaded Fenders into various Axe-FX and Kemper rigs “because the noise floor is silent as f*ck” and well-suited to crystal clarity.



9 King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

L.W.

(KGLW)

Considering they've released 18 albums in just over a decade, it seems King Gizzard are a band with no shortage of ideas. But it's the quality of those ideas that's turned them into one of Australia's biggest and best – this recent effort marrying Beatlesy psychedelia and garagey riffs via every pedal under the sun with jaw-dropping results.



10 Ben Howard

Collections From The Whiteout

(Island)

Taking inspiration from acoustic greats such as Nick Drake and John Martyn while also embracing the modern production techniques utilised by bands like Radiohead and Sigur Rós, Ben Howard's fourth studio album is a deep-dive into all things leftfield. Modern folk has never sounded this enchanting.

11 Sam Fender Seventeen Going Under

12 Samantha Fish Faster

13 Architects For Those that Wish To Exist

14 Billy F Gibbons Hardware

15 The Black Keys Delta Kream

16 Joe Bonamassa Time Clocks

17 The War On Drugs I Don't Live Here Anymore

18 Iron Maiden Senjutsu

19 Royal Blood Typhoons

20 The Killers Pressure Machine

21 Trivium In The Court Of The Dragon

22 Iceage Seek Shelter

23 Biffy Clyro The Myth Of The Happily Ever After

24 Dream Theater A View From the Top Of The World

25 Mammoth WVH Mammoth WVH

26 Squid Bright Green Field

27 Yngwie Malmsteen Parabellum

28 Cory Wong Cory And The Wongnotes

29 Larkin Poe Paint The Roses

30 Paul Gilbert Werewolves Of Portland



Words Amit Sharma

Songs of 2021

Albums are an artist's grand statement, but a truly great song will always stand out...



there, either – the singer/guitarist is known to plug his Jazzmasters into amps that also bear his surname, specifically the '65 Deluxe Reverb and the '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb.

2 Mastodon Gigantium

The Atlantan modern metal heroes have always been known for epic album closers and this year's *Hushed & Grim* is no different. More open and airy than the tracks leading up to it, there's an ethereal charm to *Gigantium* that sucks you right in before Brent Hinds' wah-drenched solo in E minor brings everything to a fittingly kaleidoscopic conclusion.

3 Tash Sultana Pretty Lady

Using dyads played on the low E and G strings, the main loop from the lead single from Sultana's latest record moves from B minor to A major and

then D major down to G major, which are all found in the D major scale. What gives it a distinct sense of rhythm is the usage of the open low E before hammering onto certain bass notes.

4 John Mayer Last Train Home

There's always been a seductive slickness to John Mayer's musical presentation. On this year's big comeback single, it's evident in how he uses his clean guitars to frame the synth chords that dominate the tracks opening two minutes, before finishing up with some chorus-effected blues runs in E minor pentatonic.

5 St. Vincent Down

There's a lot going on in the mix of this single released back in May, so much so it can be hard to pick out the funky guitar lines buried near the back. The sitar guitar melody heard during the chorus, however, is much more prominent – as is the short but sweet wah-coloured A minor blues break just over two minutes in.

1 Sam Fender Seventeen Going Under

Since the release of his 2019 debut *Hypersonic Missiles*, Sam Fender has gone from strength to strength. He's performed with Elton John and supported other legends such as Bob Dylan and Neil Young, as well as selling out his own arena headline shows across the UK. So it came as little surprise when the 27 year-old North Shields singer-songwriter scored his first top ten single back in July, taken from the second chart-topping album of his career to date. Taking influence from the driving rhythmic rock pioneered by Bruce Springsteen, this title track is undoubtedly one of the biggest guitar anthems of the last 12 months – thanks to its soaring hooks, jangly six-strings and heartfelt message, written as a letter to his 17 year-old self. His guitar of choice thus far has mainly been a Fender Jazzmaster, which he recently described as the “multi-purpose machine gun of the Fender guitars” thanks to the shimmering brightness the company are well-renowned for being supported by “a bit more body and warmth”. The Fender connection doesn't end

Words Amit Sharma

Riffs of 2021

A truly outstanding year for heavy music saw these mammoth riffs make TG's top five...



singer/guitarist Stu Mackenzie has used “since forever” and describes as “a one-trick pony” thanks to its knobs no longer working (“you just step on it and it squeals”).

2 Gojira

Another World

The opening riff heard on *Fortitude*’s third track is a lot easier than it sounds, employing hammer-ons and pull-offs on the fourth and fifth strings to create rapid movements that are surprisingly straightforward for both the fretting and picking hands. To jam along to the recording all you need to remember is to tune your guitar a whole step down, as open strings are key here.

3 Black Midi

John L

There’s an atonal quality to the scratchy riff that introduces and concludes the opening track on Black Midi’s latest album. It’s the kind of

idea few would dare to come up with, let alone release, which is precisely what makes it so miraculously captivating.

4 Mastodon

Pushing The Tides

Harking back to the chaotic discordance heard on Mastodon’s 2002 debut *Remission*, the main riff in *Pushing The Tides* uses tritone chords against an open drop C to great effect. Back in October, Bill Kelliher explained the idea had originally been penned for 2017 track *Roots Remain* and was later reworked for what became *Hushed & Grim*’s lead single.

5 Trivium

In The Court Of The Dragon

Picking our favourite riff from *In The Court Of The Dragon* – not even the album, but the title track itself – was not an easy task. The opening intensity of the main chorus hook certainly grabs the listener from the off, while the palm-muted neoclassical frenzy that backs the solo three minutes radiates mindboggling brilliance. The result? Let’s call it a tie!

1 King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

Pleura

Generally speaking, the heavy side of King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard tends to dwell more in 70s garage rock worship than anything overly distorted or hellishly metallic. There are occasional exceptions, however, such as the riff that arrives 30 seconds into *Pleura*, which could easily have been penned by the Iron Man himself, Tony Iommi of Black Sabbath, and sat on early 70s masterpieces such as *Master Of Reality* or *Vol. 4*. Performed in C# minor, bouncing between the root and minor seventh, it’s the little trills in between that add melodic depth – utilising the second, minor third and perfect fourth intervals to decorate the groove and widen their sonic range. It’s hard to know exactly which pedals in their sizeable collection were used on this track specifically, though firm favourites over the years have included the standard Cry Baby wah and the Devi Ever Torn’s Peaker fuzz – the latter of which

Photo: Getty

Words Amit Sharma

Solos of 2021

From blues battles and shredding prog metal heroics to Nigerian psych-rock, these are 2021's finest solos...



he's 'tired of hearing about Joe B and how he tweaks that sound' in the lyrics, ending the video sat on a throne proudly wearing that highly coveted crown on his head, we may have sit on the fence and call it a draw.

2 Mdou Moctar Afrique Victime

It only takes one listen to the title track from this Nigerian singer/guitarist's new album to understand why he's being touted as one of the guitar heroes of the modern age. Shredding his way through C minor pentatonics on a Strat, with plenty of treble and very little in terms of gain, his desert blues is a truly beguiling psychedelic affair.

3 Dream Theater Invisible Monster

Let's face it, every release connected to John Petrucci has been littered with mind-bending solos to the point where choosing a favourite is never easy. For album 15, it's *Invisible Monster* which perhaps best encapsulates the guitarist's genius – mixing neoclassical, bluesy and modal runs in the way only he can.

1 Eric Gales I Want My Crown (feat. Joe Bonamassa)

Christmas came early for blues fans back in August when it was teased that Eric Gales and Joe Bonamassa would be going head-to-head in what looked more like a boxing match than a musical collaboration. When the video finally arrived a few months later the pair were indeed found in a ring together, though thankfully no punches were thrown. Instead, the two friends unleashed some of the most life-affirming blues of 2021, taking turns to trade one dazzling lick after another over an epic minute-long solo section in A_♭ minor. And while both players are undoubtedly masters of their scene, there's a lot more to their lines than just pentatonic shapes – Gales occasionally mixing in Phrygian flavours to his wah-effected dominant runs, pointing back to the parent scale of C# harmonic minor, and Bonamassa using more jazzy passing tones and chromatic flavours than usual. Though Gales jokes about how

4 Greta Van Fleet The Weight Of Dreams

For the closing track on his band's second album – also notable for being the longest piece of music they've ever recorded – Jake Kiszka was clearly gunning for the solo he'd be remembered for. His efforts were not in vain, thanks to some fiery A blues runs coupled with emotive vibrato and mouth-watering bends.

5 Cardinal Black Tell Me How It Feels

The debut single from Chris Buck's new project certainly made an impression, overtaking Noel Gallagher in the UK rock charts. For the solo section, which sees Buck bringing some wonderfully tasteful fretwork over a C# minor/F# major vamp, he used his Yamaha 502 Custom goldtop into a Mythos Golden Fleece stacked with a Thorpy FX Gunshot and then finally into a Victory V140 head and out through a UA Ox Top Box.



Words Grant Moon

ICON OF 2021

Billy Gibbons

In a year when many legendary guitarists made fine music – from Steve Cropper to Carlos Santana – TG salutes **Billy Gibbons**, who dug deep in ZZ Top's darkest hour

For over 50 years Billy Gibbons has been retooling the blues, and infusing it with timeless gih-tar. His musical ear, soulful style and tasty Tex-Mex tone – his own 'Texas mud', as his friends in Depeche Mode aptly put it – are vital ingredients in ZZ Top's irresistible mix. The sad, untimely passing this year of bassist Dusty Hill – Gibbons' bandmate of 50 years – may ultimately mean the band itself passes into history, but in 2021 The Reverend's third solo album proved that, in his 71st year, he remains a powerful creative force.

Hardware was recorded with drummer Matt Sorum and engineers Mike Fiorentino and Chad Shlosser at Escape Studios, deep in the California desert. With his peso in his pocket, Gibbons flourished in this remote and arid setting. "Strange surroundings and strange, unfamiliar instruments led to taking blank pen and paper and making something out of it," he told TG. "We were surrounded with nothing but sand, a few rocks, some cactus and a bunch of rattlesnakes. It will stimulate the mind – 'here's nothing, let's do something!'"

The record they made is caked with that Texas mud – those lyrical, gutsy blues licks and lines, and those low-down 'n' dirty blues riffs he does so well. Packed with his trademark slide playing, drop-D opener *My Lucky Card* comes from the same place as ZZ Top's classic *Just Got Paid*, and the E-pentatonic workout *I Was A Highway* wouldn't have been out of place on *Eliminator*. Every tune has a melodic, rhythmic

or tonal hook, with clever, cheeky subversions of the blues. *Shuffle, Step & Slide*'s traditional shuffle rhythm is undercut by subtly unorthodox chord progressions – I/II/I in the verse (D/E/D) replacing the much more common I/V/I (D/A/D); the chorus's IV/II/I (G/E/D) giving a cool twist on an old form.

Hardware's production is airy, modern, live, but comes with echoes of times gone by – theremin (on licked-lipped rocker *Spanish Fly*); Fender Jazzmaster/Fender Reverb combo (60s surf-rocker *West Coast Junkie*) and a groovy cover of a Texas Tornados hit *Hey Baby, Que Pasó*.

As an artist, Gibbons draws on his surroundings and circumstances for inspiration. Showcasing his husky, baritone drawl centre-stage, *Desert High* is a clever, impressionistic sonic representation of the desert's 'mysterious energy'. Slinky rocker *She's On Fire* came to him when the Mexican joint he and his band ate at daily went up in flames, and the lap steel style of Megan Lovell – of roots rock duo Larkin Poe – struck him so much that he invited them to play on the rockin' *Stackin' Bones*. He also broke out his own vintage Rickenbacker 'Frying Pan' lap steel on the record. The dude paid things forward, encouraged younger talent, and reaped the creative rewards.

Hardware came out in June, over a month before Hill's death in July. While mourning him Gibbons revealed ZZ Top had been working up new tunes during lockdown. Whatever happens, that band's legacy is assured, and its spirit still endures in the work of this truly iconic player.



Interview Jonny Scaramanga Photo Getty

MY 2021

Jake Kiszka

Voted the number one guitarist of 2021 by TG readers, the **Greta Van Fleet** star discusses the art of the five-minute solo and explains why playing live is all the practice he needs...

You have been voted Total Guitar readers' favourite guitarist of 2021. How does that feel?

Wow! That's very sweet. I'm grateful for the amount of support that was provided. I'm grateful to have been nominated for something like this.

Greta Van Fleet's second album, *The Battle At Garden's Gate*, saw you expanding your sound. What songs on the album are you most proud of?

Well, all of them to be honest! But there are certain ones that stand out because of the guitar, like *The Weight Of Dreams*, where there's a linear or progressive solo at the end of the song that spans maybe four or five minutes. I think it's an achievement for guitar playing in the contemporary world because there aren't really records where you can put a five minute guitar solo in there. *The Barbarians* is really cool too because it's a really interesting approach to riff writing. It was written on keys first. Most of our songs are written on guitar, so I had to approach it very differently. I'm quite proud of that one. I suppose there's really something interesting about each track on that album that if you listen to the guitar.

What's your favourite riff on the record?

I don't know that I can select a specific one! *Caravel* is one of my favourites.

How do you approach writing a five minute solo? It's an achievement to keep it interesting for that long.

You're right, it's very difficult. You wouldn't put a five-minute solo in a song just because you felt like it. The song would have to request it in a way. This song actually started when Danny [Wagner, drummer] had really bruised his hands up, so we had to cancel a show or two. We were in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a small, small town, and I started writing the beginning phrases of the song. During live shows we started using this segment as a prelude or some sort of jam section. It just kept evolving and it'd be twenty minutes or something, and always end with guitar solos. It started becoming a structure of a song and it was

like, well, we should probably just turn this into a song, because it became like the arc of the show. It was a really predominant theme that overtook a lot of other actual written and recorded songs. The solo was worked out over a long period of time. It started with just jamming, just completely running with it. It's one of the songs on the album that actually has a written solo. The pieces all came together where I'd accumulatively shaped them enough to do a very specific thing. It's very strange how a song can necessitate something like that.

It's cool to hear you talk about playing for the song by adding a long guitar solo. Normally when guitarists talk about 'playing for the song' they mean not playing a solo.

Yeah, if you're a guitar player at the right time in the right place, you can see what's needed and go, 'I'm gonna inject this into it.' It's funny to consider because you're right, most of the time the initial instinct would be to go, 'I'm going to serve the soul of the song. I'm not going to play something.' But in this case it's the opposite.

What guitar have you been playing the most this year?

It's still my 1961 Les Paul that I use most predominantly. I've recently acquired a harp guitar, an old Gibson. I've been playing that a lot. It requires an entirely different technique that I'm working out now.

Is that one of the guitars that looks like a double-neck, with the harp section above the guitar neck?

Yeah. It was originally used for string quartets. You're playing individual bass notes on top, or you're using it as a drone, and you're kind of playing through the whole thing. I also have a double neck acoustic that's strange. It's called an Espana and it's a 12 and a 6 string. There's a lot of dimension with an instrument like that. You can really get so much more depth of character from playing the 12 up top and then the six underneath. You can do more complex things. It's been a very strange and cool experience. A lot of different techniques going on.

What other new gear have you tried this year?

I've been doing more experimentation with octavers. I've been using



"WE'RE SEEING SO MANY NEW GUITAR PLAYERS THAT ARE DOING REALLY COOL THINGS"



an Electro-Harmonix POG a lot recently. There's an EHX pedal called MEL9 which is like a Mellotron sample pedal for electric guitar, and I use that on *Trip The Light Fantastic*. The Mellotron you're hearing is actually the guitar, it's not keys. You get these nuances in the playing that you couldn't play on a keyboard. It's really cool to hear how that translates to guitar. I've been using a [TC Electronic] Flashback more recently as well for slapback delay stuff and doing stereo things live, so you get the whole PA doing stereo guitar. I was able to program a wah pedal to do stereo things live as well this year. If it's decompressed it's panned fully to the right and if it's compressed then it's fully to the left, so you get this stereo wah. That's been really interesting. It's a really large stereo image with that sort of thing going on. It creates a really large dimension. If you love guitar and playing guitar then I think you'll get a kick out of that at the live show.

Who would have got your vote for guitarist the year 2021?

Oh man, there's so many. Cedric Burnside is a remarkable guitar player. I've been really getting into his traditional approach to blues. In a contemporary way, Joanne Shaw Taylor is phenomenal. Chris Turpin [of UK roots/Americana duo Ida Mae] is fantastic, another blues/folk/rock 'n' roll guitarist. He'd have got my vote. But there's tons, man. What's really cool is there's this generational split where we're seeing so many new guitar players that are doing really cool things. It's difficult to list everyone. I don't want to leave anyone out!

What have you learned on the guitar this year?

I suppose I'm spending more time with scale structures outside of the pentatonic, moving more into Dorian or the suspended pentatonic, or Egyptian scales. I try to take at least one technique away from every guitar player we tour with. This year I've traded tricks of the of the trade with other guitar players, and just focusing on studying things I've never gotten to. You know, I skipped a lot of the traditional learning elements. When we were touring with Chris Turpin, he'd go, 'Yeah, I was playing with Willie Nelson and he was doing this. I was just watching and I figured it out.' We trade the notes. Even the pentatonic stuff where you're skipping strings, then you're going back down and dancing back over them. I've been really working on of that stuff, too.

Do you still practise?

No, I don't think so. My form of practice is touring, being on the road and playing every single night. I suppose everybody picks up a guitar and they do something different with it right away. Some people have a standard tune they always play, or they'll start working out scales. I usually pick up guitar and just start writing. That's what comes naturally to me. That's kind of like my form of – I don't know, I wouldn't consider that practice. I guess I get all my practice on the road.

How do you expect the next Greta Van Fleet album to sound?

With the way that we write and approach the albums, I don't think we'll ever repeat ourselves, so I can say the next record will be different from this one. I've been learning folk and Romani stuff, more multicultural things that have been interesting to me and influencing my guitar playing and my writing for the next record. It'll sound like us obviously but there'll be different things to expect. A lot of surprises that we buried into it.

And more touring?

It seems like that flag is flying now which is exciting. I suppose it was the last thing to come back, but maybe the most necessary thing to come back.



The 50 Best Guitarists of 2021

AS VOTED BY YOU

Jake Kiszka (Greta Van Fleet)

Tash Sultana

John Mayer

Joe Duplantier & Christian Andreu (Gojira)

Joe Bonamassa

Mark Tremonti

Samantha Fish

Matt Heafy & Corey Beaulieu (Trivium)

John Petrucci (Dream Theater, Liquid Tension Experiment)

Wolfgang Van Halen

Josh Middleton & Adam Christianson (Architects)

Jerry Cantrell

Carlos Santana

Derek Trucks

James Dean Bradfield (Manic Street Preachers)

Adrian Smith, Dave Murray & Janick Gers (Iron Maiden)

Steve Howe

Gus G

Brent Hinds & Bill Kelliher (Mastodon)

Tom Morello

Billy Gibbons

Yngwie Malmsten

Joanne Shaw Taylor

Paul Gilbert

Matt Tuck & Michael Paget (Bullet For My Valentine)

Rebecca Lovell & Megan Lovell (Larkin Poe)

Cory Wong

Richie Kotzen

Mdou Moctar

Joanna Connor

Lindsey Buckingham

Mark Lettieri

Michael Schenker

St. Vincent

Stu Mackenzie (King Gizzard And The Lizard Wizard)

Pat Metheny

Rivers Cuomo (Weezer)

Nick Johnston

José González

George Lynch

Robben Ford

Brian Setzer

Simon Neil (Biffy Clyro)

Sam Fender

Ben Howard

Emily Wolfe

John Smith

Dave Keuning (The Killers)

Geordie Greep (Black Midi)

Adam Granduciel (The War On Drugs)



TOTAL
Guitar
GUITARIST OF 2021 NO.2

50



Interview Jonny Scaramanga Photos Dara Munnis

MY 2021

Tash Sultana

This year saw the Australian singer-songwriter make an international breakthrough with the album *Terra Firma*. And yet, Tash says, “I’ve only really been recognised as a guitarist recently.”

T

total Guitar readers voted you the number two guitarist of 2021, second only to Jake Kiszka...

That is actually very lovely to be honest. I wasn’t really expecting anything from it. On the nominations list there were a lot of incredible guitarists with a lot of longevity, like your Santanas and John Mayers and all of

that. And Jake Kiszka, he’s a good guitarist. Actually, he’s a very good guitarist. I quite like Greta Van Fleet. So thank you to everyone who voted for me because I really wasn’t expecting this. Do we get a cute sticker or a lollipop something?

We’ll see what we can do. Who have been the standout guitarists for you in 2021?

I’m very heavily inspired by John Mayer actually, and Santana, which is why I thought that was really cool to be with them on the list. I’m more of a rhythm player, as well as lead, but in terms of rhythm guitar playing I really like Cory Wong a lot. I think it’s just really groovy, really tidy guitar playing. People sometimes think that rhythm is easier. I actually think it’s harder to be a pocket rhythm player because there’s just a lot to say in holding down the groove.

How would you describe your style of playing?

Guitar for me is like my home base. I form all my music around my guitar knowledge, and I think I’ve only really been recognised as a guitarist recently. For a long time I played a more acoustic guitar finger-tapping style, the sh*t that everybody does when they’re sixteen years old. I didn’t play any electric guitar for a few years until I started busking. I busked with the acoustic guitar for a bit and that just did nothing. I couldn’t draw a crowd. Then I was looking in my cupboard and I pulled out one of my old electric guitars. I don’t know what happened but it worked. It was the street-stopping performance of the day, just because of this electric guitar and ripping solos. But I think there’s a severe lack of guitar in music now. One of my friends was in conversation with a record label, and their A&R person came back and said that they’re not going to sign him because his music has too many guitars. F*ck that.



What song on *Terra Firma* are you most proud of?

Coma. It’s actually a really old song that I wrote acoustically and I never did anything with it. I think the song matured with me. It’s quite funny because these songs that I used to play before people knew me and no one batted an eyelid are all everybody’s favourite songs now. I’ve always written stuff acoustically and I’ve always loved the blending of acoustic and electric guitar. When I was starting out I wasn’t turning heads on the acoustic guitar, but now I can do songs that bridge the gap. It opened all these doors for me to write the music that I wanted to write. I got known for a bedroom recording of a song, *Jungle*, that is something I didn’t even think twice about. It’s definitely my least favourite piece of material I’ve ever written, but for some reason it was the what broke me. Now I can write whatever I want.

What are your favorite guitar moments on the record?

I wanted *Blame It on Society* and *Coma* to have guitar solos that you could sing. The aim there was to just kind of go for melody rather than shreddville. I like to keep shreddville for live stuff because just something comes through me and I just go f*cking nuts so I don’t even know what I’m playing.

What guitar have you played the most this year and what new gear have you been trying out?

My loop station is all custom done. That was a project that took two years with two of my crew members. It’s one of the things I’m most proud of. I do a lot of stuff on MIDI so I’ve just been exploring like new depths of MIDI and MIDI programming, making my guitar sound like electronic instruments, like keyboards and stuff. I don’t use a MIDI pickup. I actually do a lot of that in the Axe-FX. I have a bit of a hybrid pedalboard where I’ve got like all my digital sounds coming from Kemper and Axe-FX but at the front of the chain I’ve got my analogue pedals that I really love. I’m doing some really cool stuff at the moment with a very big company making my own pickups so I can’t tell you who they’re with but that’s happening. I’m kind of going for clean jazz meets shred-metalville. I’m going for the warmest, widest, cleanest, most noiseless pickups that you can play super, super clean jazzy R’n’B style guitar and then turn it into f*cking Iron Maiden. The pickups are so quiet that unless you tapped the guitar you wouldn’t know that the guitar was plugged in.



➔ What have you learned on the guitar this year?

I've been doing a hundred days of daily practice where I do you meditations and mantras every day, and I learn something new on an instrument every day for a hundred days. I'm just feeling really good about life. I'm learning a different approach to soloing. I've been doing a lot of fingerstyle guitar, doing solos just with the fingers to get a little more control. I've been trying to play the guitar like you would sing. When you're when you're singing you've got all these microtones before you hit the note. Part of what makes your voice so unique is being able to travel through all of the [itches between] notes. I've been trying to apply that to the guitar. I've actually been looking at a bunch of guitarists that I've seen on Instagram. The best thing about being a musician is there's always someone better than you. You'll never reach the end because perfect doesn't exist.

You're the first non-binary guitarist to get this level of recognition [Tash uses they/them pronouns]. Is that important to you?

Yeah. For me it just comes down to the art. I don't label my art as gender specific. The way that I think about making music is this source travels through me, and I express that is through music. So I don't identify by

labels really because I just feel that I am just experiencing life as a human being and I'm just applying my passion through music. So the label doesn't really fit. I've always been like that, but there was no language for it when I was younger. There wasn't language that was inclusive of people that sat in the middle or outside of it all [the gender spectrum]. I'd never heard of non-binary or fluid or anything, even though I always felt this way. I don't give a f*ck about what other people think because I'm living my truth and I'm having a f*cking ball.

What are your plans for 2022?

When I go on tour again I reckon I will actually explode. like I actually think that I will f*cking combust. We've been deprived. I think everybody is allowed to have their time in the sun. It's been a big two years for your radio/streaming artists. For all of us acts that get our rocks off playing live we've just had to sit back and twiddle our thumbs. I don't know if I'm even gonna be allowed to crowd surf but f*ck do I wanna crowd surf. But I also don't want people's hands on me at the same time. I almost wanna buy a bubble so I can get in it and like just go for a stroll on the crowd.

"I WANTED GUITAR SOLOS THAT YOU COULD SING - MELODY RATHER THAN SHREDSVILLE"

GOOD TO GO

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Interview Ellie Rogers Photo Getty

MY 2021

Samantha Fish

Samantha Fish ventured out of the blues-rock box in search of new sonic territory with her genre-bending album *Faster*. She also found that lockdown helped her fall back in love with playing...

WT

Which songs on *Faster* are you most proud of?

I really like *Hypnotic* because it's got a really jarring, surprising guitar moment. I don't think, on first listening, you're anticipating that it's going to drop into this frenetic solo in the middle of this vibey,

electronic R&B type song. And I really like the solo on *Twisted Ambition*. It's short but it comes with some real rock hits.

What guitar was in your hands most this year?

I would say probably the SG – it's just my most comfortable-feeling guitar. I wish I had more surprises for you on that! It just feels good to me – I find it fits my personality and my playing really, really well.

What new gear have you been using?

The JHS SuperBolt. A friend of mine – Mike Zito – gave it to me. He's always doing hand-me-down pedals – I feel like his little sister! He's such a gear freak and he sent this to me. Honestly, when you're going for the kill and you just need a little bit more to drive the thing past 12, that's the one.

Which guitarists have rocked your world this year?

I loved St. Vincent's *Daddy's Home*. I'd say she has a fairly atypical

style compared to the guitar players I came up around. She's cool, she's conceptual. She's an artist. I'm also going to say Wild Heart recording artist Jonathon Long. I produced his record *Parables Of A Southern Man*. It came out this year and he's one of the best guitarists I've ever heard. I say there's people who play guitar and people who play with guitars, and with Jonathon, it's like it's his toy.

Who would you have voted for as the best guitarist of 2021?

Eric Gales always freaks me out in such a good way! We did a show with him over the summer. They were playing a festival we were at, and he came and sat-in on an old-school Mississippi Fred McDowell song we were doing. He talks in such an incredible way with his instrument.

And what did you learn as a guitarist over these past 12 months?

I'm very fortunate to play the shows I've gotten to play, but it's a lot of running around and it can be a grind. There were times when I got off the road and I really didn't even want to touch my guitar. So, having that relationship off-stage when you're not working, I found a renewed love affair with the guitar, and that sparked some creativity. The pandemic was not fun, but if I'm looking for silver linings, my love and joy in playing was renewed.





Interview Amit Sharma

MY 2021

Josh Middleton

It was a great year for the **Architects** guitarist, as the band scored their first number one album and his latest signature model was launched

55

I *or Those That Wish To Exist* topped the UK album chart. Which songs really stand out for you?

Impermanence is the one I enjoy the most live. It has this slightly different and darker melodic element to it and I get to do some weird sinister-sounding lead stuff. There aren't many solos on this album. I really like the big doomy riff that comes in during the middle-eight of *Ordinary Extinction*. It's this big octave wall of guitars so it feels extra heavy. I actually do have a bit of a solo at the end, well, more like a lead. It's quite Billy Howerdel-inspired, it has that A Perfect Circle kind of sound – especially with that chorusing effect we added in.

What guitar did you play most this year?

My signature [ESP LTD JM-II] came out this year which was a huge deal for me and the one I played the most. My main focus is a good tone and we nailed it. But I did get some more guitars – including this ESP Arrow that I really like. It's almost like a Randy Rhoads thing, shape-wise. And then I also got an ESP F-Series, which are really spiky looking.

What new gear have you been using?

I made a plug-in with STL Tones and I also got the Neural DSP Quad Cortex, which has been great for recording. The feel is a little bit further on than the Kemper I think, at least in terms of the real amp vibe. It hasn't been announced yet but both Adam [Christianson, fellow Architects guitarist] and I have been working on an overdrive pedal

with Fortin. It's classic in terms of application – to tighten up a high gain amp. If you've got a Rectifier that's a bit flubby, you put an overdrive in front to tighten it up. For our pedal we included a low and high pass filter so you can take off the frequencies you don't want. You can tighten up even more and tailor it to anything you play through, which is very beneficial to a studio guy like me. It won't be out for a while yet, though!

Which guitarists have impressed you recently?

I'm a big fan of Dave Davidson from Revocation, he's one of the best in terms of the new generation. I also have to mention Erik Rutan, especially now that he's in Cannibal Corpse. He's inspired me a lot over the years, especially in terms of lead phrasing. He always had this melodic vibe which I liked. There's also Kyle Rasmussen from Vitriol – he's a very erratic and aggressive player that captures the Slayer vibe, but he's also got the chops as well. He sounds very p*ssed off... Which I like a lot!

And what have you learned as a guitarist this year?

I've been working on a lot of economy picking stuff. It's the one thing I never thought I'd bother with, just because I felt it might not sound as aggressive as picking every note like Zakk Wylde – you can really hear the attack and I like that brutality. I thought I'd try expanding my playing with little bursts here and there, maybe two notes at a time instead of full arpeggio shapes. For the most part I alternate pick everything, that's still my main thing!

A full-page photograph of Joe Bonamassa. He is wearing sunglasses and a dark jacket over a t-shirt, playing a hollow-body electric guitar. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

Interview Amit Sharma Photo Rick Gould

MY 2021

Joe Bonamassa

56 The blues-rock master introduced a new, more restrained approach to soloing – and a tongue-in-cheek Instagram series featuring “mindless” riffs...

Guitar-wise, which songs on your album are you most proud of?

One of the coolest songs I’ve written in a while is *Questions And Answers*. I’m really proud of it and it’s the song I like the most on the record, but nobody talks about it. That’s always the case – the one I love most is the one that nobody cares for!

Which specific riffs and solos on your album stand out for you?

I like the solo on *Notches*, it’s a different kind of solo for me. I’ve been trying to show more restraint as I go on. The difference between this record and my records of yesteryear is that the solos seem to be more truncated. There’s not the obligatory, ‘Okay, well here’s fifty choruses at the end with some big blues battle!’ That’s been my mindset over the last couple of years. It’s like, everybody knows I can shred at this point. Now I’m trying to be more economical in my approach and service the song a little bit better than being like ‘Here’s my moment to blaze!’ That said, I’ve started a p*sstake Instagram series called ‘Just Because You Can Don’t Mean You Should’ – which I think is funny. It’s always a mindless riff that won’t fit into any music. A couple of my buddies, who are quote-unquote Instagram influencers and will remain nameless, have texted me asking ‘Is that a p*sstake?’ And I tell them it is a little bit, though it’s not aimed at anybody.

What guitar was in your hands most this year?

I would say... nuthin’! For the first half of the year, I didn’t really play

guitar at all. The guitar I played most was my bike! I just rode that everywhere. Generally, if I’m f*ckin’ around at home, I’ll pick up whatever is on the stand and in tune. For the sake of this interview, I probably played more Fender Telecasters than anything else this year. I don’t know why, it just made me happy playing them. There’s one 1952 Esquire I’ve been playing a lot. I guess it’s my go-to. It’s one of those guitars that I find myself reaching for. It makes me want to play.

Which guitarists have rocked your world recently?

The guy that freaks me out is that kid from Italy, Matteo Mancuso. What the f*ck is going on with that guy?! The great thing about him is that he’s not just a behind-the-camera, ‘influencer’ guy. You see him out with the band playing live gigs and he’s ripping. Sometimes making that jump from being an online influencer to playing in a band is a little more difficult than you might expect. I think he’s great and he’s also Italian. We stick together, us Italians.

And what did you learn as a guitarist this year?

I learned that I’m not in the guitar business, singing business or songwriting business. I’m basically just an entertainer. If you take away the audience, I really don’t fit in anywhere. That’s what I learned about myself. My greatest strength is when a crowd shows up and I can go out there and put on a show. That’s what I prefer! All this other stuff is tertiary and doesn’t really matter at the end of the day. For me, having that audience is super important.



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THE PLAYER

GIFT GUIDE!

2021 Edition

Words Simon Arblaster, Chris Bird, Rod Brakes, Dave Burrluck, Trevor Curwen, Nick Guppy, Amit Sharma, Stuart Williams
Photography Olly Curtis, Phil Barker

Gear of 2021

In our first annual Gear Awards feature, we take a look at the guitars, amps and pedals that had us GAS-ing to part with our cash in 2021. We'll start with...



ELECTRIC GUITARS



WINNER

CORT G300 PRO £749

This new-for-2021 G300 Pro has the sort of specification that a few years back would only come from a high-line or Custom Shop maker. Turning its back on the vintage obsession of many, the G300 Pro is

progressively forward-looking yet remains the sort of instrument that's equally at home with high-octane shred as it is with pristine pop/funk, classic rock and hair metal. Receiving TG's coveted Platinum Award in our June issue, the

specs are seriously impressive, with a Gotoh 510 trem, Graph Tech nut, Seymour Duncan pickups and a beautiful deep caramel roasted maple neck. Find one before someone realises they've cocked up the pricing. It really is that good.



2 EPIPHONE JOE BONAMASSA 'LAZARUS' 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD £799

Reviewed in this very issue, we feel this represents Epiphone's crowning glory in 2021. The best vintage-flavoured Les Paul available for under a grand.



3 CHARVEL PRO-MOD SO-CAL STYLE 2 HH HT £959

Charvel's take on Fender's classic Telecaster design, this guitar can effectively cover so much ground that it makes brand preconceptions redundant.



4 FENDER PLAYER PLUS TELECASTER £939

Another Tele in our top five, this time from Fender themselves. Featuring noiseless pickups and expanded tone circuits, this could be your workhorse T-style.



5 PRS SE CUSTOM 24-08 £899

Impeccably fit for purpose, here's a guitar for the player that really wants to cross genres, a superb studio guitar and a perfect fit for function gigs, too.

ACOUSTIC GUITARS

It's time to go unplugged as we take a look at the year's very best strummers...

WINNER

GIBSON GENERATION ACOUSTIC G-WRITER

£1449

Would you like a US-made Gibson with tasteful satin nitrocellulose finishes, great sounds and build quality to match for a snip of the price of the company's other strummers? Well now you can. In fact, you can have four, as the G-Writer is one of a series of guitars comprising two acoustics (the G-00

and G-45) and two electros (G-Writer and G-200). Striking a balance of practicality and reasonable affordability (it's a US-made Gibson, remember!), the Player Port-equipped G-Writer scored highly in our review back in November, with a smooth, 'studio-like' acoustic tone and great sounds when DI'd. What's not to like?



2 EPIPHONE SLASH COLLECTION J-45

£799

The fruits of Slash's partnership with Epiphone strike a balance of design, build, value and quality. You'd be forgiven for thinking you were looking at a USA Gibson.



3 SHEERAN BY LOWDEN W03

£805

This 2021 upgrade model features the most impressive low end we've encountered on a travel-size acoustic, and balances with a compressed character to give a beefy presence.



4 CORT CORE-OC BLACKWOOD

£499

There was a time when an electro-acoustic with solid back and sides for £500 would seem the stuff of dreams. Cort have duly delivered with this quality stageworthy guitar.



5 EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON HUMMINGBIRD

£749

The classic dreadnought character is resonant and strong across the spectrum, and singing rather than sweet in the high end. With solid tonewoods, it's only going to get better with age.

AMPLIFIERS

From mini-heads to classy combos, we've seen a raft of fully-featured giggable amps in 2021...



WINNER PEAVEY INVECTIVE MINI HEAD £769

Misha Mansoor's 2018 120-Watt Peavey Invective signature was designed with the modern metal player in mind, but also proved itself more than capable of handling tones across the board. This mini-sized take on that head is just as impressive, repackaging the main features into lunchbox form. It should come as no surprise that there is a serious amount of distortion available on the lead channel. Even more so when you factor in the footswitchable boost, based on Mansoor's favourite TS-style circuit. And, thanks to the buffered effects loop it can also take pedals well, so there's more to enjoy here than your average metal amp. One of the most functionally versatile and best sounding lunchbox heads out there.



2 LANEY CUB £399 SUPER12

A versatile amp that'll handle home practice and recording as well as the kind of small to medium sized gigs. A reminder of the addictive power of a valve amp and under £400? It's super, alright!



3 FRIEDMAN £299 BE-MINI HEAD

This is a real USA-made Friedman you can afford, offering most of the fun of a Brown Eye Deluxe at less than a tenth of the price. What more temptation does a guitar player need?



4 ORANGE SUPER £599 CRUSH 100 COMBO

This combo delivers the full gamut of essential electric guitar tones, from sparkling cleans to crushing distortion. The Super Crush 100 is a highly versatile amp for both stage and studio.



5 SUPRO DELTA £569 KING 12

One of the strongest contenders in the Fender Blues Junior's affordable small valve combo market, the Delta King 12 is a superb combo for smaller gigs, recording and home practice.

EFFECT PEDALS

Guitarists still can't get enough of stomp boxes. Here are 2021's finest...



WINNER

BLACKSTAR DEPT. 10 DUAL PEDALS

£249

We know from the last 14 years that Blackstar can deliver world class valve-based amplification, but here they're pairing that engineering reputation with their more recently developed cab modelling technology. The Dept. 10 Dual Drive and Dual Distortion represent a meeting of those worlds. It's a showcase of valve technology and modelling working together as a versatile solution for players, with a superb range of tube tones that we found transferred equally well to stage and studio. Both pedals come into their own on a pedalboard, utilising the FX loop for time-based pedals, and the XLR out to go to the mixing board at gigs. But you could even use it in your amp's FX loop. Blackstar have delivered a world class and accessible package here. For usability, value and quality of tones, these are two of the best gear releases of 2021.



2 BOSS HM-2W

£159

Boss' Waza Craft version of its classic design not only offers the tone of the original, but surpasses it too. If high gain is your thing then the HM-2W is a goblet of connoisseur's distortion.



3 DUNLOP CRY BABY JUNIOR

£125

Designed in collaboration with pedalboard titans Pedaltrain to fit on its popular 'boards, this medium-sized multi-mode wah hits the sweet spot for versatility and convenience.



4 EVENTIDE MICROPITCH DELAY

£279

MicroPitch is a classic stereo widening algorithm from Eventide's landmark H3000 multi-effect unit. Here in pedal form, this is no one-trick pony, with 50 downloadable presets offering great expandability.



5 UNIVERSAL AUDIO UAFX ASTRA MODULATION MACHINE

£355

If you're on the fence about modulation this could knock you over into a sea of shimmer and oscillation. A benchmark modelling pedal.

MULTI-EFFECTS

We look the year's best all-in-one FX units that'll make you rethink your rig...



WINNER NEURAL DSP QUAD CORTEX £1449

2 021 saw Neural DSP's hotly-anticipated next-gen floor unit arrive. From the off, the Quad Cortex promises unrivaled power in such a small footprint that Neural DSP calls it "the most powerful floor modeller on the planet", stuffed with 2GHz of dedicated DSP power straight out of its Quad-Core SHARC processor. All that power doesn't mean a thing if it can't deliver sonically, and you can be rest assured that it can, in spades. With its highly intuitive touchscreen interface, plus a 'Neural Capture' feature which allows users to clone the sound of their own amps and pedals, our reviewer concluded that this might be "the last all-in-one digital rig we'll ever need", and promptly awarded it TG's prestigious Platinum Award – reserved only for the best of the best.



2 FENDER £105 MUSTANG MICRO

The Mustang Micro takes amp/effect modelling tech of Fender's Mustang series and squeezes it into a chassis about the size of a Club chocolate biscuit. We think this will make you play guitar more, and enjoy it more, too.



3 LINE 6 £769 HX STOMP XL

The original HX Stomp gives players access to Helix sounds without the large footprint of the Helix floorboard. The XL expands the original Stomp with five extra footswitches, making it a more flexible option for stage use.



4 BOSS GT-1000 £599 CORE AMP MODELLER/ FX PROCESSOR

The GT-1000 Core lives up to its name as a core that you build a pedalboard around, or a versatile chameleon-like source of effects to add to an existing pedalboard. A practical asset for any guitarist.



5 LINE 6 POD £499 GO WIRELESS

An all-in-one floorboard processor that's more keenly priced than the more upmarket Helix models now available in cable-free wireless form. It's worth digging deeper in your pockets for if being decoupled from your pedalboard offers advantages for you.

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ZZ TOP SHARP DRESSED MAN

It's time to stop shaving and don your most dapper suit as we look at Billy Gibbons' classic pentatonic licks and slide lines



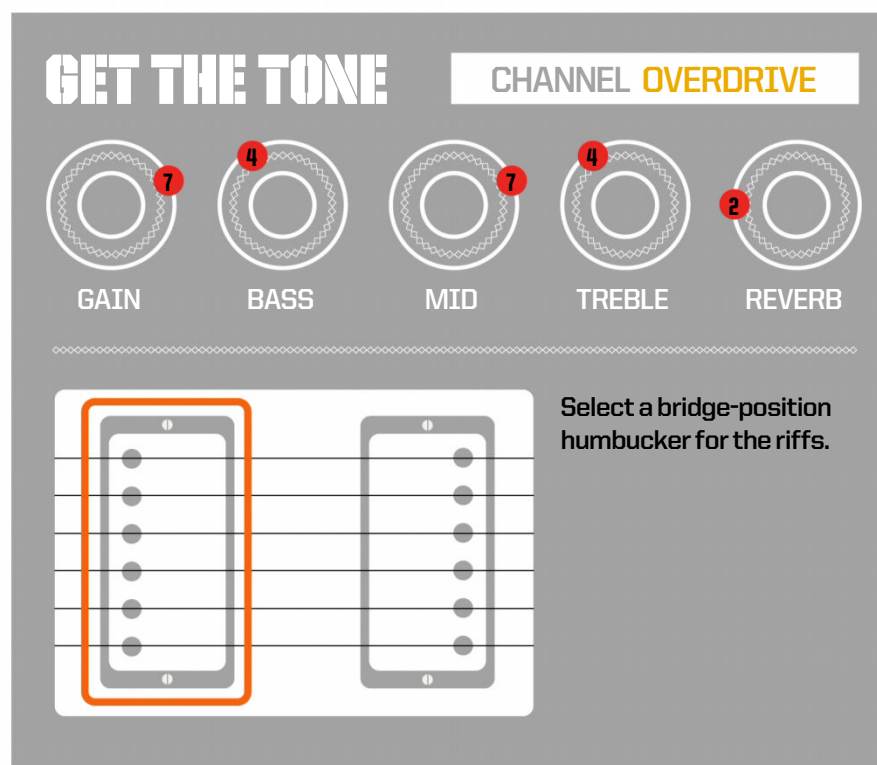
Arguably their best known song, *Sharp Dressed Man* was taken from ZZ Top's commercial breakthrough album, 1983's *Eliminator*, which propelled them from a not-so-well-known blues band to international superstars. The two solos in particular are dripping with Muddy Waters-inspired bluesy doublestops and quarter-tone bends.

Guitarist/vocalist Billy Gibbons played the first solo using a slide. If you plan to do the same, make sure to position your slide directly over the frets for accurate pitching. Wear your slide on your third finger and use your first and second fingers for additional string muting.

One particularly tricky aspect of Gibbons' lead style is his use of pick and fingerstyle 'hybrid' picking, most notably after bar 21 of the outro. The idea is to allow you to pick notes on non-adjacent strings. You could use standard fingerstyle (no pick) if you prefer, but a pick is better for the rock vibe of the rest of the track.

GET THE SOUND

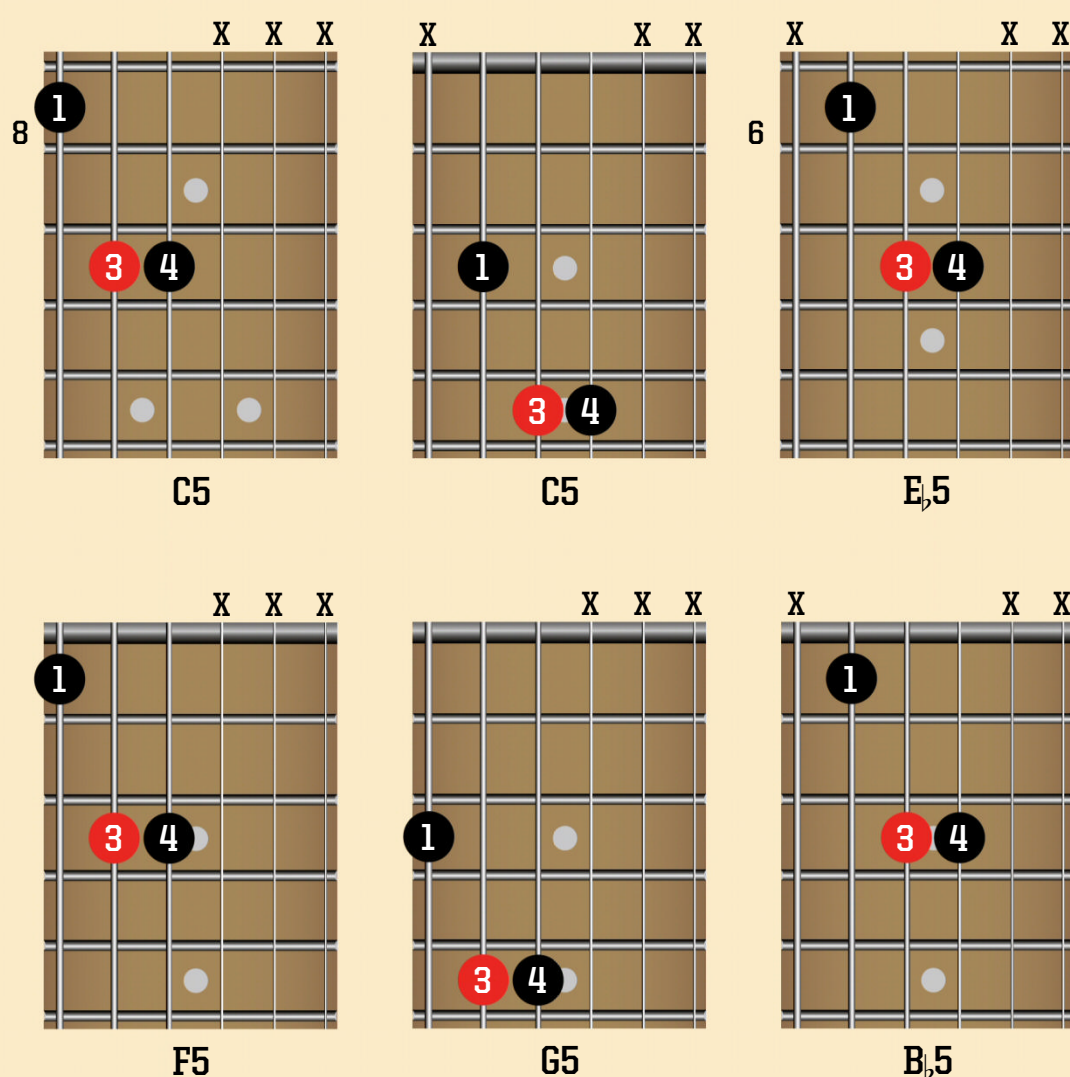
Everything you need to know before playing 'Sharp Dressed Man'



Gibbons is best known for his 1959 'Pearly Gates' Gibson Les Paul paired with a 100-watt Marshall Super Lead amp, though he's known to have switched to a 1951 Fender Esquire to record the slide solo. You're best off using a humbucker-equipped solid-body guitar through a valve amp (or a digital emulation of the Marshall) with a little added fuzz-style distortion. Try using a modulation effect (chorus or flanger) to get closer to the sound of the phasey sound of the main riff.

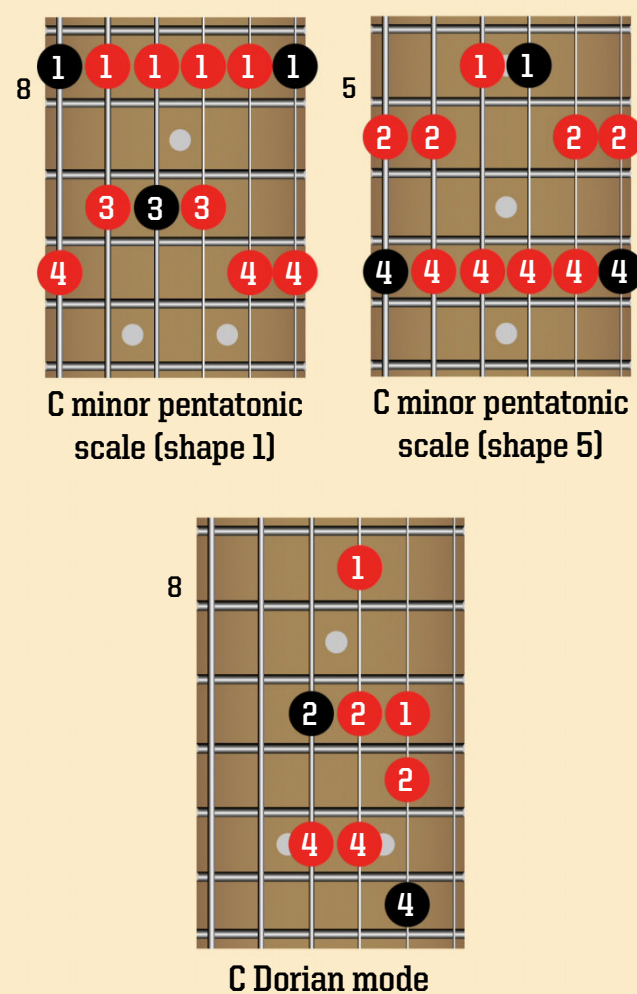
CHORDS

You only need to know six chords to play through our transcription, and all of them use that staple powerchord shape that you almost certainly already know. You may notice Cm7 and Fm7 chord names over the tab in the outro, but these are implied by the mix of synths and rhythm and lead guitars, and are not played as actual guitar chords.



SCALES

Most of Billy Gibbons' outro lead lines are based on shapes 1 and 5 of the C minor pentatonic scale (C E♭ F G B♭) along with a brief moment in the C Dorian mode (C D E♭ F G A B♭) in bars 14 and 15. Practise the shapes to get a feel for how the solos are written.



ZZ TOP

SHARP DRESSED MAN

SHARP DRESSED MAN
Words and Music by Billy F Gibbons, Dusty Hill and Frank Lee Beard
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ZZ TOP SHARP DRESSED MAN Main riff

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/TG353AUDIO)

♩=125

This riff was recorded as two separate lines, but in live performances Gibbons plays them as one riff. Play the 8th position half of the riff 'thumb over the neck'-style for fluency. You'll need to shift quickly to open position for the riff's second half so make sure to practise these quick changes. Bars 3 and 4 are also repeated after the first verse (played twice) and after the slide solo (four times).

ZZ TOP SHARP DRESSED MAN Verse

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/TG353AUDIO)

As you play the hammer-on on beat 4 of bar 1, make sure that your third finger doesn't make contact with the open third string. Hammering on squarely with your fingertip, rather than the front of your finger will help with this. Mute the strings after this phrase for a clean change to the powerchord that follows.



FULL TRACK + BACKING (BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO)
This song comes with a full demo track and a backing track (minus guitar). Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

ZZ TOP / SHARP DRESSED MAN

ZZ TOP SHARP DRESSED MAN Slide Solo

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

1:17

C⁵

w/slide

RP

RP

TAB

1

TAB

4

TAB

7

let ring - - - - -

TAB

10

TAB

13

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

You can pick the slide section (bars 1 to 20) however you like because the slide makes the transitions between notes less clear and, therefore, the picking is less crucial. We've tabbed this section in DGDGBD tuning (as per the recording) but in live performances Gibbons stays in standard tuning and improvises without using a slide.

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

ZZ TOP SHARP DRESSED MAN Outro solo (cont'd)

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

12

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It features a guitar part and a corresponding tablature (TAB) system. The guitar part is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked "Moderato". The guitar part includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and chords, with some notes marked with a "1/4" indicating a quarter note. The TAB system is written below the guitar staff, using numbers 1-5 to represent frets. It includes a "T" for the treble staff and a "B" for the bass staff. The TAB includes a "12\10" indicating a double stop, and a "3" indicating a triplet. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines. The page number "16" is visible in the bottom left corner.

[illegible]

Fm⁷

RP *let ring* -----

TAB

28

Cm⁷

TAB

32

Fm⁷

fade out

TAB

36

Cm⁷

let ring -----

TAB

39

TAB

42

The trickiest part starts in bar 21, where you'll need to switch to pick and fingers style 'hybrid' picking. Keep hold of your pick between your thumb and first finger and use either your second or third finger to play the first string. It's a long, bluesy solo so why not improvise some of your own ideas?

OUR GENERATION

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REM EVERYBODY HURTS

Grab your acoustic and let's take a look at Rockscool's Grade Two arrangement of this timeless ballad

Everybody Hurts was recorded for REM's 1992 Album *Automatic For The People*, and was later released as a single in 1993 to widespread critical acclaim. The song has a simple message, sung powerfully by vocalist Michael Stipe and instantly recognisable by simple, guitar arpeggios from guitarist Peter Buck. Rockscool's Grade Two arrangement is for two guitars and can be played with or without the backing track. The part opens with the

arpeggio pattern, which can be played fingerstyle or with a pick and must be rhythmically smooth and even. From bar 5, we have a mix of arpeggios and vocal melody, so try to make the melody notes stand out (you can pick these up by checking out the original recording). This arrangement is great for working on your picking hand control, as there will be a lot of moments where open strings will be ringing out when you might not want them to!



ACOUSTIC

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EVERYBODY HURTS

Words and Music by William Berry, Peter Buck, Michael Mills and Michael Stipe

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REM EVERYBODY HURTS

TRACKS: BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

♩ = 64

D

let ring throughout

G

TAB

1

D

G

TAB

5



FULL TRACK + BACKING (BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO)
This song comes with a full demo track and a backing track (minus guitar). Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

REM / EVERYBODY HURTS

REM EVERYBODY HURTS

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

Musical notation for measures 1-4. Chords: D, G. TAB: 2 0, 2 3 2, 3 2 0, 3 0 3 0 0 0.

Musical notation for measures 5-8. Chords: D, G. TAB: 0 2 3 2 2, 3 2 0 3, 0 3 0 0, 3 3.

Musical notation for measures 9-12. Chords: D, G, G, G/F#. TAB: 2 0, 2 3 2, 0 4, 3 3 0, 3 2.

Musical notation for measures 13-16. Chords: Em, A. TAB: 0 2 0 3, 0 0, 3 2.

Musical notation for measures 17-20. Chords: Em, A. TAB: 0 2 0 3 0, 2 0, 3 2.

Musical notation for measures 21-24. Chords: Em, A. TAB: 2 0 3 0, 0 0, 3.

33

37

41

46

Everybody Hurts is in 6/8 time - giving it a swaying feel. You'll need a strong tone and precise rhythm when strumming or plucking the D7 and G7 chord shapes at the end of the track, but be careful not to keep the offbeat chords (e.g. bar 41, beat '46') lighter than those on the downbeats. Don't be tempted to rush when the song gets louder!

♩ = 64

20

Em

A

Em

1

4

REM EVERYBODY HURTS

TRACKS: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

System 1: Measures 1-4. Chords: A, Em.

TAB: 0 2 2 0 2 2 | 0 2 2 0 2 2 | 2 0 0 0 0 0 | 2 0 0 0 0 0

8

System 2: Measures 5-8. Chords: A, D. Includes a Natural Harmonic (NH) section.

TAB: 0 2 2 0 2 2 | 0 | 7 | 7

12

System 3: Measures 9-12. Chords: G, D. Includes a 12th fret bend.

TAB: 12 2 4 | 3 2 0 3 | 2 | 3

16

System 4: Measures 13-16. Chords: D7. Includes a Rest (RP) section.

TAB: 0 3 | 2 0 | 3

20

System 5: Measures 17-20. Chords: G7, D7.

TAB: 0 3 | 2 0 | 3

24

System 6: Measures 21-24. Chords: G7, D7. Includes a *rit.* (ritardando) section.

TAB: 0 3 | 2 0

28

This is the unassessed part - so you don't have to play it if you're taking Rockscool's Grade Two exam. After a 20-bar rest the part comes in on the first Em chord. If you're playing along, make sure to listen out for the 6/8 pulse and lock in with guitar 1 to really nail the feel and timing.

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

TASH SULTANA

JUNGLE

Get your groove on with this looper pedal epic, complete with rhythm parts, harmony guitar riffs and two killer solos!

Using loop pedals, delay, drum machines and the odd synth, Tash Sultana creates fascinating soundscapes of dense guitar work, mixing styles and genres with a refreshing disregard for commercialism or fashion. *Jungle* was the third single to be released from their debut EP *Notion*, and Tash recently spoke to TG about the songwriting process.

"It's just a little four-chord song – sometimes that's all you need. I had these four chords and a Loop Station, and I just jammed it. I started doing all these little diddles over the top of it, and they turned into a melody line. I put my phone on record and just started filming it. It's funny that

sometimes these things that you give no thought to end up being the biggest things that happen to you."

"I recorded the original demo with my old Epiphone Les Paul. It was just a Boss RC-30 Loop Station, a little analogue delay pedal, and a little distortion pedal for the solo. I still use the distortion to this day, but I can't say what it is. I don't want people to know! I used to cover my guitar pedals so that people couldn't copy them."

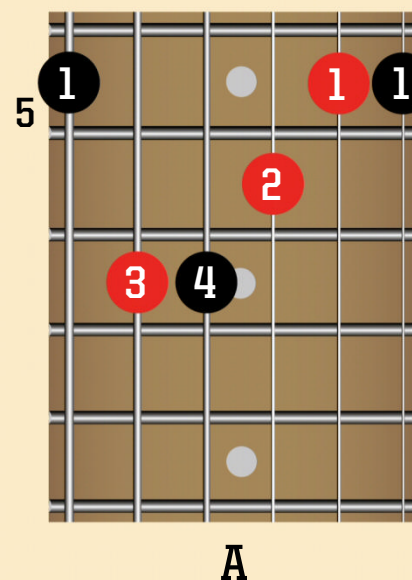
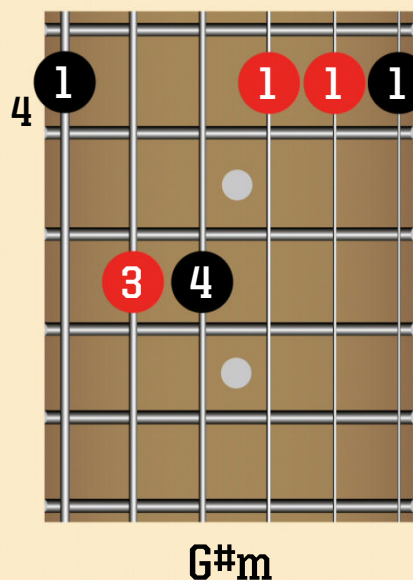
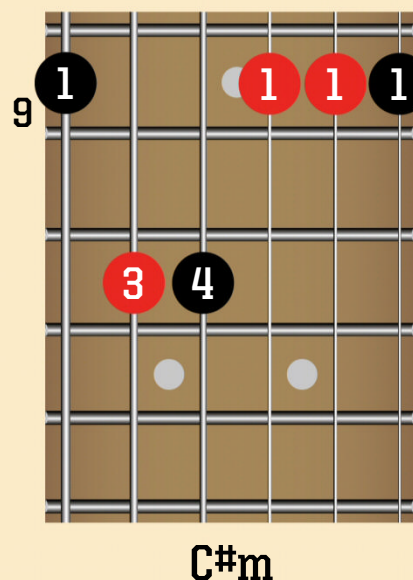
"I didn't use an amp. The YouTube video was not even into a mixing desk. I literally just slammed into the back of the speaker. I use amps at home just to have a fiddle on. But for my actual rehearsal and touring, everything is digital and DI'ed."



CHORDS

The good news: you only need to know four chords to play this song. The bad news: they're all tough six-string barre chords!

JUNGLE
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BACKING TRACK (BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO)
This song comes with a full backing track (minus guitar).
Enter the above link into your web browser of choice;
press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

SONGSHEET

Jungle

Verse 1

C#m I see the way you move. It's fluid **B**
G#m With you by my side, got nothing to hide **A**
C#m Now that you're hurting
B I see the tears behind those eyes
G#m And I can't wipe them clear
A Your love was like gold to me
C#m But you hold me closer to the light **B**
G#m Wouldn't find the bullet inside
A Unless you magnified
C#m But you throw me into the deep end
B Expect me to know how to swim
G#m And I put my faith inside of my hands

A
Because I will be just fine

Chorus

C#m Welcome to the jungle
B Are you gonna dance with me?
G#m Welcome to the jungle
A You got to close your eyes and see
C#m Welcome to the jungle
B Are you gonna dance with me?
G#m Well, nah, well, no nah, ooh ooh

Verse 2

C#m Sitting tight with my black jeans on
And I'm paralysed
Make your way toward the sun

B Got the palest soul you ever seen oh darling
You mightn't be the one
G#m Sitting tight with my curly hair
Making your way with that sheepish stare
A Said are you real, do you feel, are you there?
C#m Ashes to ashes in the embers I, I blaze, oh **B**
G#m I gotta rise amongst it all and I think
A About your face everyday
C#m But you hold me closer to the li-i-ight **B**
G#m You wouldn't find the bullet so insi-ide
A Only if you magnified

Repeat Chorus

TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Intro (rhythm guitar)

TRACK: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

$\text{♩} = 74$ $\text{♩} = \text{♩} = \text{♩}$
C#m **B** **G#m** **A**

w/8th note triplet delay

T
A
B

Try to feel the 'bounce' in every strum you play here. Achieve this by using alternate 16th-note strumming and making your downstrokes longer than your upstrokes.

TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Intro (solo)

TRACK: [BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO](https://bit.ly/tg353audio)

C#m **B** **G#m** **A**

0:13

let ring - - - rake - - -

T
A
B

Fret the doublestops in bar 4 with your first and third fingers, before switching to your second finger for the 17th fret E note.

TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Harmony guitar

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

Notice the vibrato on beats 2 and 4. Aim for consistent timing, as you need to match it when you overdub the second part.

TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Harmony guitar 2

BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

Use the same vibrato width and speed here as harmony guitar 1. This is crucial to achieving slick and polished results.

TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Recurring lick

TRACK: BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

As with the intro solo, switch between your first and second, then your first and third fingers for the two-note shapes.

TASH SULTANA JUNGLE Outro (solo)

TRACK: BIT.LY/TG353AUDIO

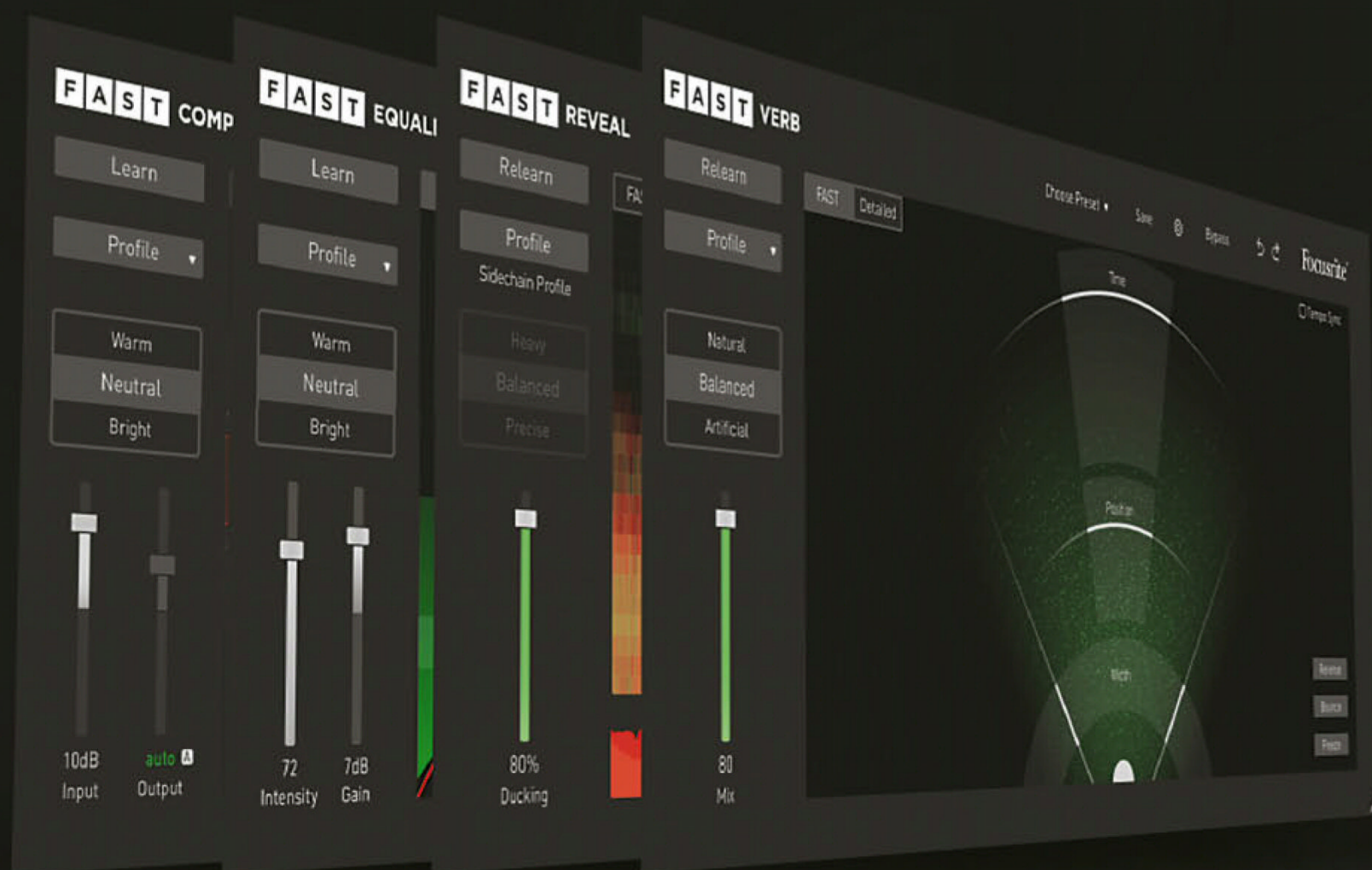
There is a lot of complex rhythm here, but a lot of the phrases such as the triplets in bars 2 and 3 can be picked up by ear. Just listen carefully!

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THE COLLECTIVE

The Collective by **Focusrite**

THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE
BEST NEW GEAR

Welcome to the GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome*) Station! Every issue, TG scours the market for the hottest new gear and brings you transparent reviews that you can trust. From the smallest of accessories that make your life easier, to big investments, such as brand new guitars, amps and effects pedals – if it's worth your attention, you'll find it here!

HOW WE TEST

CURATION

Our product selection is driven by our love of gear. We select the most exciting products on the market every month to bring you opinions you can trust.

FACE-VALUE REVIEWS

We're not gear snobs here at *Total Guitar*. We judge it on whether it looks good, sounds good and plays well – not by the name on the headstock.

*WHAT IS GAS?

Gear Acquisition Syndrome is the guitar-player's never-ending urge to acquire new gear, irrespective of whether they actually need it. Don't pretend you don't have it – we all do!

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You won't find us getting hung up on hokey mythology or nonsense marketing speak: we aim to bring you bullsh*t-free opinions on the gear you're interested in.

WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT

TG review scores are a true reflection of our experts' opinion on the product they've been testing. You'll never find a rating in our mag that has been bought and paid for.

REAL WORLD REVIEWS

We test every product under the conditions that they were designed for. For example, if an amp is designed to be played loud, rest assured that we'll have tested it at rehearsal/gig volumes!

BEST BUY AWARD

TG Best Buy Awards are reserved for stand-out products that earn a 4.5 star overall rating. This is the most exciting new gear that you *need* to check out



PLATINUM AWARD

Reserved for the very best of the best, TG's Platinum Awards are given to class-leading, gamechanging products that score a maximum 5 stars in every category.



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How much difference does a valve make?



SUPERB, A BEST BUY



EXCELLENT



ABOVE AVERAGE KIT



SOME ISSUES



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START ME UP!

Five awesome new products to get your gear engine revving this month...

HARLEY BENTON GOTOH SC AND DC

1 Gotoh tuners and bridges on sub-£300 guitars? If you're buying this Thomann brand's value-packed electric guitars as a modding platform, or just like the idea of even more value being packed in, these guitars are very good news indeed. Add in rosewood fingerboards and, for the DLX models, stainless steel frets... Well, these present a crazy good spec on paper and some tempting finish options, including Pelham Blue, High-gloss Black, Satin Daphne Blue and Satin Shell Pink.

From £253
www.harleybenton.com

SOLIDGOLDFX ETHER MODULATED REVERBERATOR

2 Few things in the effects world get us as excited as the words 'modulated reverb' and the "vast ambient and shimmering soundscapes" the Canadian company promises here explain why. A darker take on shimmer that devolves as it decays combine three different modulation types, each with a trio of LFO shapes and Tap Tempo operation. The latter's Tap Tempo Vibrato, Tremolo and Harmonic-Tremolo add an intriguing level of control.

£189
www.solidgoldfx.com

SHUBB CAPO ROYALE PAUA PEARL

3 Shubb capo... Strong, reliable... Stunning? Well the iridescent finish here is certainly catching our eye. Shubb even promises that no two Paua Pearl Capos will look alike. The finish on these capos is inspired by the pāua abalone shell and like the rest of the company's Capo Royale series, it's built using the same durable titanium process. Meanwhile, the clear rubber sleeve is designed to mimic your fingertip.

\$29.95
www.shubb.com

DUNLOP JCT95 CRY BABY WAH

4 The signature wah for Tool's Justin Chancellor was never going to be a minimalist affair, and the partnership has packed a custom midrange filter and fuzz in with the expected custom wah circuit. The Wah Select footswitch and allows you to toggle between the wah and the UK Filter mode, which uses a solid-state circuit to deliver a mid-focussed filter sounds you hear on Tool tracks including *The Patient*.

£299
www.jimdunlop.com

CORT KX507MS

5 Poplar burl finishes. Fishman Fluence pickups and multi-scale; Cort know how to woo the progressive players with the improved return of its KX500MS guitars. The 25.5-to-27" multi-scale remains, with fanned jumbo frets, but the active Fishman Fluence Modern humbuckers now replace the previous EMGs and offer alternate pickup voicings and coil-splits via push-pull controls on the tone and volume pots. A solid bridge unit for each string is added to enhance intonation.

£749
www.cortguitars.com



Words Rob Laing Photography Phil Barker

EPIPHONE JOE BONAMASSA LAZARUS 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD AND BB KING LUCILLE

Two signatures of blues masters... two more accessible ways to enjoy vintage class?

It's been a vintage year for Epiphone, not just in the quality of the output but literally, too. The return of the Crestwood, Wilshire and Coronet has helped to affirm it as a distinct brand, but the '59 Les Paul saw it stepping up its Gibson experience. Incredibly, we're now seeing another Epiphone Les Paul based on a '59, alongside a signature so iconic we're on first name terms with it. Is this the perfect victory lap to Epiphone's 2021?

With a name like 'Lazarus' and a Joe Bonamassa connection, you know there's a story behind it. But there's expectation too; Joe's eye for detail and Epiphone's willingness to deliver has led to some superb annual signature releases; from the Amos '58 V to the Black Beauty Les Paul Custom, the partnership has delivered an accessible taste of high value vintage guitars. And like those guitars, this one is a stunner.

When Joe bought his original holy grail it had been refinished in cherry red, and only revealed its true Burst glory after a restoration; hence the name Lazarus. This is not a relic'd recreation; instead it's Lazarus born anew. The wide centre seam maple veneer top is certainly not your usual Epiphone LP, and there's clearly been a careful selection so it appears close to Joe's own guitar. The AAAA flame maple cap on the two-piece mahogany body and 'Aged Gloss' finish looks wonderful – more on the nose for vintage tonehounds than the '59 Epiphone LPs released earlier this year.

Joe describes the one-piece neck shape (yes, a proper one-piece neck on a £799 Les Paul!) as “not a slim taper but just smaller – like a shrunken ’59 neck, which is very similar to the original guitar.” Original ’59 necks varied and this is certainly not as meaty as the 50s Epiphone Les Paul we reviewed earlier this year, but hits a real sweet spot for us when it comes to moving around nimbly, with a smooth satin back to help transitions.

In contrast, the Lucille isn’t based on one guitar and is a glossy Ebony affair. BB had a number of Lucilles in his life, but the blueprint was the Custom 355 that Gibson introduced in 1980. Epiphone state this model is based on a 335 semi-hollow model. Production Lucilles had no f-holes on BB’s request – to reduce feedback at high amp volumes – and also features a Varitone; an additional six-way tone control that Gibson developed way back in 1959. Like the Emily Wolfe Stealth Sheraton we reviewed a few issues back, this is a substantial guitar at 9.2lbs, and up to a pound heavier than your average Epi 335. While the Les Paul clocks in at an unsurprising 8.8lbs, it balances well on the strap. If you play sat down like BB in his later years, it could feel less of an issue of course.

The tension is a little higher than we would want on the Lucille but Lazarus sits in the Goldilocks zone, offering easier bends and vibrato. Lucille makes us work a little harder. Like weight, personal preferences obviously come into play, but what is less up for debate is the finish on both these guitars; we can’t find any gripes with the cosmetics here. They are just stunning examples of what Epiphone can do at this price point. It cannot be overstated just how much these guitars offer players tonally with only some medium gain and a dash of reverb for company. For us, 50s-style wiring offers the greatest showcase of Les Paul versatility, and in combination with Gibson Burstbucker pickups here (yes, Gibson not Epiphone), we’re well positioned to find out why this design is so feted.



With this kind of wiring the volume cleans up much easier, and if you’re not a player who usually shapes their sound from the guitar’s controls, it really encourages you to. The cap here goes from the hot wire on the tone control to the middle lug on the volume control, and you’ll notice differences on gain levels very early on around the 8 and 9 mark, but with midrange still present.

The effect may see a player looking to their gain pedal less and working to shape their tone from the guitar on the fly. The relationship between the tone and volume controls becomes much more dynamic, especially with the vintage PAF character of the Burstbucker. The tone control offers more leeway for subtle taper, even on the lashings of sustain from the neck pickup here, and these Burstbuckers really shine for detail with heavier gain.

The Lucille experience is initially much less about exploring the relationship between the volume and tone controls and focussing on its Varitone switch in conjunction with the three pickup positions. Because there’s enough to get on with there; 18 sounds!

So what is it? It’s a notch filter with six separate capacitors. Position 1 is true bypass, with the signal going straight to the volume pot from the pickup selected and no caps involved. Then the next five positions on the switch remove ‘certain frequency ranges’, according to Gibson, who are then more specific about what that means. Unlike the regular passive tone pots elsewhere on your guitar, the Varitone doesn’t act as a low-pass filter, it’s effectively a notch filter. It takes preset slices out of the midrange. The result is a selection of tones that are increasingly more ‘nasal’ than their full-fat bypass equivalents.

We know that BB favoured position 2 so it’s a good place to start for a more nasally tone. BB called Varitone “the magic switch”, and it’s unlike anything else you’ll experience in the way it removes frequencies by bringing in different capacitor values. It’s great if you like exploring sounds beyond the traditional controls, less appealing if you want to avoid the distractions of more variables. It’s actually very effective for getting more hollow-sounding tones and quickly dialling in a pleasing frequency for jamming along to songs. Plus, you can find a quick way to cut through band mixes with it if you allow for those frequency changes with your playing dynamics.



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£849

BB KING
LUCILLE

AT A GLANCE

BODY 5-ply Layered Maple
NECK Maple
SCALE 628.65mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD Ebony
FRETS 22 (medium jumbo)
PICKUPS Alnico Classic PRO
CONTROLS 2 x volume, 2 x tone (CTS pots),
6 x position Varitone switch,
HARDWARE Grover Rotomatic with
keystone buttons, TP-6 stop bar with fine
tuners, Epiphone LockTone Tune-O-Matic
bridge, Epiphone 1/4" mono and 1/4"
stereo output

£799

EPIPHONE JOE
BONAMASSA
LAZARUS 1959
LES PAUL
STANDARD

AT A GLANCE

BODY Mahogany with Wide
Grain AAAA Flame Maple Veneer
NECK 1-piece mahogany
SCALE 628.65mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD Indian laurel
FRETS 22 (medium jumbo)
PICKUPS Gibson BurstBucker 2 (neck),
Gibson BurstBucker 3 (bridge)
CONTROLS 2 x volume, 2 x tone (CTS pots,
Mallory caps and 50s wiring)
HARDWARE Epiphone Deluxe with tulip
keys, Epiphone LockTone stop bar,
Epiphone LockTone Tune-O-Matic

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FINAL VERDICT

Which of these signatures is a must-have?

The Lucille is an unusual proposition in the Epiphone stable for reasons beyond the Varitone. The TP-6 Stop Bar with Fine Tuners seems somewhat unnecessary on a guitar fitted with Grovers, and we'd like to see a nickel hardware option, but the stereo output offers further scope for sonic adventure.

The feedback reducing and sustain enhancing step of excluding f-holes also up the potential for heavier gain here. Making this regal-looking guitar capable of going way beyond the blues.

Lazarus offers the Les Paul experience we love – and that counts for a lot. For us it is Epiphone's crowning glory this year and the authentic recreation at this price

point with tonal versatility means it's a no-brainer if you want the best vintage-flavoured Les Paul available under a grand new. It even has a plush, pink-lined special edition hard case with it.

We can't see them sticking around for long – indeed they could become more valuable. No wonder Joe is welcome back every year...

BB KING LUCILLE





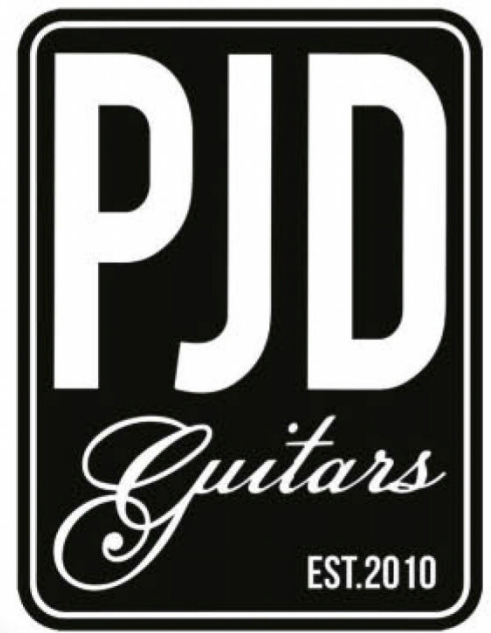
SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

JOE BONAMASSA 'LAZARUS' 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD





SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★



**CAREY
STANDARD**



WWW.PJDGUITARS.COM

**Guitarist
CHOICE**
9/10



RAPIER 33

A forgotten gem from the 60s returns



If you were into new-fangled rock 'n' roll back in the early 60s here in the UK, you'd probably have started plucking on a British or European-made guitar: Vox, Burns and Hofner, for example, were all satisfying the demand, and of course, Watkins – whose Rapier range looked the part. In short, the Rapier 33 was a Stratocaster copy but one that certainly had its own thing going on. Quite why the original guitar had a slanted middle pickup is anyone's guess; then, as now, it marks the Rapier 33 out as a bit of an oddball. But, hey, that's part of the appeal.

Today's sharp Chinese build quality gives this Rapier 33 much more credibility than the originals. We get a slab okoume body – a far eastern mahogany-alike used by some pretty big names like Eastman and Music Man – to which a quite Fender-y neck is screwed on. It's tidily fretted, the rosewood fingerboard has a more Gibson-like 12" radius and while the neck itself is a little bigger than, say, Fender's Player series we're not complaining.

Instead of the odd single coils of the original, here we get ceramic-loaded 'silver foil' mini-'buckers which certainly provide some single coil-like character, but they are hum-cancelling. They're pokey though far from high in output but we'd better explain the controls. In reality, the 33 works as a two-pickup guitar with the ability to add in the middle pickup – via that upper slide switch – to the usual three selections of the 3-way toggle pickup selector:

bridge, both and neck. The lower slide switch introduces a Jaguar-style bass-cut to enhance the jangle. The upper rotary control is a volume for both the bridge and neck pickups, the centre knob a volume for the middle pickup (which only works when it's switched into the circuit) and the lower knob is a master tone... Got that?

With the middle pickup switched out there's plenty to enjoy: appealing poke from the bridge pickup contrasted by the smoother neck pickup create an almost Jaguar-style palette that sits between a prettier sounding Stratocaster and the thickness of even a start-up Les Paul. Its retro style suits dirty garage rock but turn off the fuzz pedal and played clean you can comp jazz on that neck pickup or funk things up with both pickups on. Adding the middle pickup brings in more character, especially if you like your 'in-between' Strat-y tones; here you have the ability to subtly blend those with the dual volume set-up. It's a good player and although we hear a few pings from the zero fret unplugged, amp'd up there's no issue and that vibrato is smooth – unless you go mad it holds its tuning well.

A great slice of retro and there's more to come. Watch this space!

Dave Burluck

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

1 PICKUPS These three 'silver foil' Alan Entwistle-designed EWR64 mini-humbuckers offer single coil-like bite without any hum.

2 CONTROLS Along with the standard controls, there are two slide switches: one to switch the middle pickup in or out, the other is a bass-cut.

3 VIBRATO Based on the original design, this Hi Lo vibrato was re-engineered specifically for this guitar. The roller saddle bridge helps with tuning stability, which is rather good.

AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Okoume
- NECK:** Maple
- SCALE:** 25.5" (648mm)
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 22
- PICKUPS:** 3x EWR64 mini-humbuckers
- CONTROLS:** 3-way toggle pickup selector, 2x slide switch (middle pickup on/off; bass-cut), volume 1 (bridge and neck), volume 2 (middle), master tone
- HARDWARE:** Hi Lo vibrato, roller saddle bridge, Wilkinson E-Z-Lok tuners
- FINISH:** 3 Tone Sunburst, Artic White, Daphne Blue, Fiesta Red (reviewed)
- CONTACT:** www.jhs.co.uk



Photography: Phil Barker



LTD EX BLACK METAL £859

A solid high-gain monster with none of the frills but all of the thrills

It can be said that many trends are cyclical and, broadly speaking, music and fashion tastes have been recently following a trend of borrowing cues from 20 years previous. To further back up this spurious claim with another, it looks like black satin guitars are back. Or is it more that they've never been away, but that they've just caught this particular reviewer's eye and brought back memories of the early noughties when the black satin look was definitely in? Fast forward to 2021, which sees LTD ushering in a new batch of stealthy numbers, bolstering its Black Metal range to a now plentiful 12 guitars. One of the company's most striking silhouettes has to be the EX and ESP/LTD's spikier than thou version of the Explorer, which makes its debut in the collection.

Equipped with a solitary EMG 81 and single volume control, the EX Black Metal is perfectly complemented with black metal hardware, tune-o-matic bridge and locking tuners. Setting up what is bound to be a solid, no-frills, high-gain affair. It features a set-thru construction with a mahogany body, a three-piece maple neck and a Macassar ebony fingerboard. And while you'd be forgiven in thinking that this could all add up to quite a weighty guitar, you'll be very much mistaken. As were we when we took receipt of the EX Black Metal, thinking that we'd been sent an empty box. This thing is super-light, weighing in at just 2.54kg/5.6lbs. Of course, having such a lightweight body can come with its own issues and while your back may thank you, the combination of this and the upper strap button location, the neck just wants to nosedive whilst standing.

The construction, overall, is solid and that is mirrored in the guitar's sonic attributes, too. The EMG 81 is fixed and adds to the overall resonance, which is very good. The 81 is well-known for its detail in the highs, whilst still delivering that weighty low-end required for metal. The lack of moving parts adds to the guitar's direct and solid feel. It allows you to get straight down to the business of big heavy riffage and at great speed, should the need take you. The neck is flat and on the wide side, so plenty of space for the big-handed folks out there, but not too big for us smaller digitised types either. However, the locking-tuner spacing on the headstock is very tight and could frustrate some, though the addition of extra-jumbo frets is always welcome for those who want to rock a lower-tuning with big string gauges.

While this guitar delivers a striking silhouette, all the blackness feels like it's not too showy. Further complemented by the lack of inlays on the fretboard, although handy glow-in-the-dark dots adorn the side of the neck. The EX Black Metal is ideal for those who want to plug in and rock out with no messing around with tonal variation, so tone-hounds need not apply. Don't be fooled by the supposed lack of features when compared to the price. This guitar is designed to shorten the distance between your riffs and the gain channel, making sure that they sound as precise as possible.

Simon Arblaster

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

1 EMG 81 PICKUP

The 81 is a classic found in the bridge position of countless metal-ready axes, most often paired with an 85. On this occasion it takes centre stage and it's fixed mounted, too.

2 MAHOGANY BODY

As mahogany bodies go, this has to be one of the lightest we've come across.

3 LOCKING TUNERS

LTD's own brand of locking tuners adorn the EX and should come as standard on all guitars at this price point. Although that spacing is a little on the tight side.

AT A GLANCE

- Construction:** Set-Thru
Scale: 24.75"
Body: Mahogany
Neck: 3Pc Maple
Fingerboard: Macassar Ebony
Fingerboard radius: 350mm
Finish: Black Satin
Nut width: 42mm
Nut type: Molded
Neck contour: Thin U
Frets: 22 XJ Stainless Steel
Tuners: LTD Locking
Bridge: Tonepros Locking TOM and Tailpiece
Pickup: EMG 81 with Black Logo
Controls: Volume





BLACKSTAR DEPT. 10 BOOST

How much difference does a valve make?



£159

To be frank, Blackstar's Dept. 10 Dual Drive and Distortion preamp pedals dazzled us; receiving a coveted Platinum award in TG352. Those valve-driven dual-switch units offered four-voices and onboard editable cab modelling for a comprehensive and flexible backline on your 'board. Their smaller sibling is packing the same ECC83 tube but it could easily be overshadowed by the features of the larger duo. In serving a different player need it places itself in a much more crowded marketplace; there are a wealth of boosts and overdrives out there. So can this little Blackstar pedal shine?

It needs to be highlighted that all three Dept.10 pedals use a full-voltage dual-triode valve



with internal circuitry running to over 250VDC, to help the valve reach its operating range, just like a full valve amp. And yet they are powered by a 9V PSU that runs at 500mA. There's one included here but if you're adding this to your pedalboard's power supply it's worth keeping in mind that you'll need one capable of powering a pedal at that higher milliamp rating.

So there's serious power under this steel little hood; this is a valve being run as it should. And

protected by a metal roll bar. The controls here are simple; Boost, High and Low. The latter two controls use James-Baxandall passive tone circuitry that provides an organically gradual sweep. The boost adds smooth sustain and fatness to a Strat bridge pickup set low at around 8 o'clock, and its breadth and presence in your tone really does feel and sound like a tube amp rather than the approximation some boosts can. Even at higher levels, this quickly finds a home as a natural tube-driven extension of your amp or pedal gain stages. Its quality makes it a go-to boost for a wide variety of rigs, and would even make a great bedfellow to push either of the Dual units.

Rob Laing

AT A GLANCE

- TYPE:** Triode valve-driven boost pedal
- FEATURES:** Built-in buffer / line driver
- CONTROLS:** Boost, Low, High
- CONNECTIONS:** Input, output, power
- POWER:** 9V DC 500MA (PS)

A GO-TO BOOST FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF RIGS

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

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Words Grant Moon Photo Pooneh Ghana

FAYE WEBSTER

Faye Webster's guitar of choice is fittingly cool. "It's a Harmony Stratotone Jupiter," the singer-songwriter says. "I think it's from the 60s. Harmony don't make them anymore, which is a problem – I've been trying to buy another one to travel with, in case something happened to mine. I got it as a gift a long time ago, when I was still finding out who I was and what kind of guitar player I was. I've learned with it, I love it, but also it's a comfort piece to me. I feel I have to have it to perform well."

The Stratotone certainly served its purpose on the 24 year-old's fourth album, released last summer. *I Know I'm Funny haha*

is a wry, candidly emotional set that takes elements of folk, pop, lounge, soul and country, and wraps them in an indie-shaped package. Tunes like *Better Distractions*, the rocky *Cheers* and ballad *In A Good Way* – all of which are also featured on her recent Spotify-exclusive EP *Live At Electric Lady* – ride along on Webster's elegantly spare guitar.

"I've always been the rhythm player in the band, and I definitely feel I've evolved. I'm very precise in how I play my songs now. I don't use a pick, because I like the way my nails sound when they hit strings. I take homeopathic supplements to keep my nails hard."

She has a taste for ravishing, Bacharach-like major-seven

chords, and an easy way with modal-flavoured changes, but she says it's all done by ear. "I suck at music theory – I don't even know what chords they are. But I do have a group of chords I really like the sound of, and I'll try to play them in different areas [of the fretboard] and in different keys. But I don't know what I'm playing half the time, I always have to ask my bandmates."

Regular bandmate Matt 'Pistol' Stoessel supplies the weeping, country tones of the pedal steel that characterises Webster's catalogue. Growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, she learned a lot from her grandfather, a bluegrass guitarist who got her into Doc Williams, Chet Atkins and the

Texan, western swing of Asleep At The Wheel. These roots informed her 2013 debut *Run And Tell* – written when she was 15 – but by 2019 breakthrough Atlanta Millionaires Club her palette had broadened, and signature tune *Kingston* has racked up 39 million Spotify plays to date.

Now she's taking *I Know I'm Funny haha* on the road for the first time. "And I'm really looking forward to it," she says. "I'm not very interactive online, but when I tour and I see people, that's when I'm glad they people can relate to me. And I'm sure I can relate to them. But I am doing this for me at the end of the day, because it's the only way I know how to express myself."

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TOP 40 AND FUNK with Jason Sidwell



This course is for guitarists that desire strong abilities to suit being in a band. This will include picking approaches and band relevant chord voicings to modes for soloing and exciting repertoire analysis with a bias towards funk and RnB legends like Chic, James Brown and Michael Jackson.

JUMP BLUES with Chris Corcoran



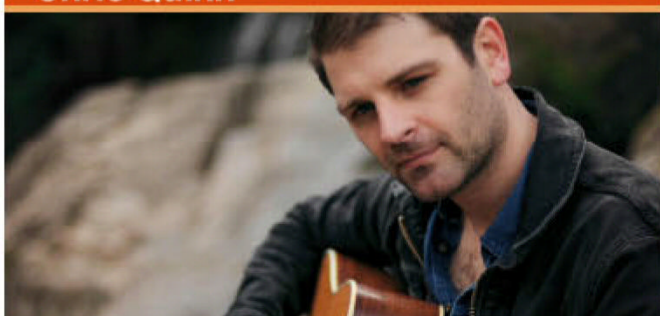
Referencing the big sound of '40s & '50s R&B and Jump Blues guitar, this course will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention. Licks, riffs and phrases will be covered as well as the styles of guitarists like T-Bone Walker, Lonnie Johnson, Tiny Grimes and Barney Kessel.

BLUES SONGS with Neville Marten



The aim for this course is to cover a range of blues tunes from classic to more modern. The onus is on great blues songs that everyone will know and enjoy playing. Guitarists of every level will be able to join in, whether you can improvise full solos or just play chords and a few licks.

ACOUSTIC SONGS with Chris Quinn



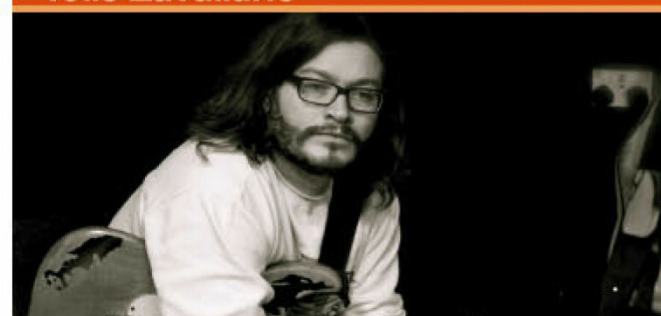
This course focuses on roots based music, ranging from folk to blues songs. You will study guitar techniques used by some of the greats of popular songwriting and also touch on useful fingerstyle methods and open tunings.

CLASSIC ROCK & INDIE ROCK with Jon Bishop



This course will cover many of the main components that guitarists use, ranging from scales and chord riffing through to string bending and use of harmonics. Lots of classic rock and indie riffs will be looked at with iconic songs.

MODERN ROCK with Tolis Zavaliaris



The focus of this course will be on relevant techniques, from picking to legato, and to improve and supercharge your rock guitar playing. Guitarists covered will range from Randy Rhoads to Paul Gilbert, Yngwie Malmsteen to Steve Vai.

JAZZ with Gianluca Corona



This course will cover the basics (extended chords, simple diatonic licks, swing feel, blues) through to more advanced concepts and devices (chord substitution, modal phrasing, outside playing).

GYPSY JAZZ with John Wheatcroft



This course will help to get your playing 'campfire jam' ready, with a hands on look at the fundamentals of this inclusive and engaging style – from using the correct chords and mastering 'La Pompe' to adding authentic licks and lines.



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