

TOTAL
Guitar

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Slash

THE RETURN OF
THE GUITAR
HERO
NEW ALBUM
NEW INTERVIEW

PLUS
10
WAYS TO PLAY
LIKE SLASH

GUNS N' ROSES
RIFF LESSONS
WELCOME TO
THE JUNGLE
AND MORE!



PRS SE
SILVER
SKY

NEW CUT-PRICE
SIGNATURE
REVIEWED



CORY WONG
ALT-J
COBAIN
JAG-STANG
TOP TIPS
FOR
BEGINNERS



YARD ACT
THE "SKRONKY"
SOUND OF 2022!

ANGEL VIVALDI

ARTIST SIGNATURE



**SAVAGE
ELEGANCE**
PRO-MOD
DK24-6 NOVA



charvel.com

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Welcome...



Way back in November 2014, upon the release of his second album with Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators, *World On Fire*, **Total Guitar** proclaimed Slash to be “in the form of his life”. Well, as it turns out, he still is! His latest outing with the Kennedy/Conspirators outfit sees them in fine creative fettle, with Slash himself thrilled about the energy created from

having the whole group playing together in the studio. In this month's exclusive eight-page interview he talks about the writing and recording process, how he used less gain in his tone, and he expresses his enthusiasm for the Gibson Flying V.

And on the subject of the big G, it's probably fair to say that when you think of Slash, you're probably envisioning him with a Gibson Les Paul in his hands. So intrinsic to the modern Gibson identity is Slash that the company even appointed him as Global Brand Ambassador a few years back. So it's fitting that new album *4* is the first to be released on Gibson Records. Slash says he's excited to see who else they sign. Same here!

It's not always about Les Pauls, though. Make sure to check out our piece on some other highlights from Slash's \$2 million guitar collection on p60. We've also produced a lesson on Slash's playing style for you, looking at the techniques he's used from his early days with Guns N' Roses right up to today. Plus, you can learn three great GN'R riffs with our easy-to-follow video lessons.

Enjoy the mag and I'll see you next month!

Chris Bird Editor

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#355

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Words Jenna Scaramanga Photo Arthur René Walwin

KILLING IT

E

xpectations are high for Nova Twins' second album, *Supernova*. The London duo of Amy Love (guitar, vocals) and Georgia South (bass) have landed on many metal fans' radar thanks to collaborating with

Bring Me The Horizon on *1x1* and Tom Morello calling them "an incredible band who deserve to be huge." New single *KMB (Kill My Boyfriend)* continues genre-bending sound with elements of metal, grime, punk, and hip-hop.

Amy tells TG that despite the filthy, synth-like sounds, it's all done live: "Some of the instruments sound electronic but all the sounds were solely done on guitar, bass and drums. There's a few bits of drum programming but there's no synths." There are, however, some pedals. "The bassist's 'board is so massive," she says. "We can't even fly with it."





My 'board's relatively big as well. On stage we do it all live, just hopscotching around."

They're tight-lipped about exactly what's on those 'boards after an experience at an early gig: "This band actually came on the stage, snapped Georgia's pedalboard on their phone and ran away! Since that day we were like, 'No one needs to know'. You can't give away that secret sauce."

Guitar and amp-wise, things are more straightforward: Amy recorded most of her guitars for *Supernova* on a P90-equipped Fender Mustang into a Fender Hot Rod.

She explains *KMB*'s genesis: "Georgia came up with a lot of the music. We wrote it in lockdown, so we didn't actually write it together. When it came to record it, we kept a lot of the drum programming. Even some of the basslines, guitar and vocals we did in our bedrooms." The final cut, recorded with producer Jim Abbiss [Arctic Monkeys, Kasabian], has live drums and some experimental percussion. "At points I was using a fire extinguisher!" Amy laughs.

Supernova is released in June, and as Amy says: "We're really excited about it. It's a rollercoaster ride!"

SCENE

YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS



Photos Amy Huang

EFFECTS

FUZZY LOGIC

THE BRAND THAT KICKSTARTED THE STOMPBOX MOVEMENT RETURNS WITH FIVE NEW PEDALS



uzz fans will be well aware of Gibson's Maestro brand, largely thanks to Keith Richards' use of the FZ-1

Fuzz-Tone – widely recognised as the world's first fuzz pedal upon its arrival in 1962 – on The Rolling Stones' *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. But despite its inclusion on the song, it almost didn't make it to the final version at all. The story goes that Keef recorded a scratch track of the iconic main riff using the FZ-1, but, hearing it as brass section in his head, his guitar part was originally intended as a demo for a horn section to follow later. That didn't happen, the track was released – apparently without his knowledge – with Keef's fuzz guitar line still present, and pedal history was made. Here's to happy accidents.

Now, for 2022, Gibson has revived its Maestro brand with five new pedals, including one based on the notorious FZ-1 Fuzz Tone. The all-analogue Maestro Original

Collection line-up includes the Ranger Overdrive, Invader Distortion, Comet Chorus, Discoverer Delay, and the FZ-M Fuzz-Tone. Each pedal follows a similar control layout, with three pots, a mini-toggle and a bypass switch, with the mini-toggle offering two different modes per-pedal.

For the FZ-M, you get a tone inspired by the classic FZ-1, as well as a more modern, thicker fuzz sound. On the Ranger Overdrive the toggle takes you between Hi and Lo modes for a cleaner, more expressive drive or a warmer, amp-like overdrive. On the Invader Distortion the switch is used to introduce a noise gate, while the Comet Chorus offers Earth (a more regular chorus sound) or Orbit (a Leslie-like swirl). Finally, the Discoverer Delay uses the toggle to add a modulation circuit to your delay sound.

As well as the external controls, there are internal trim pots on the Invader, Comet and Discoverer, which allow you to fine-tune some of the settings governed

by the respective toggle switch role (gate threshold, Orbit level, modulation rate and width).

"Maestro was the first commercially successful pedal, it changed everything and set the entire world of pedals and effects into motion." Mat Koehler, Gibson's Senior Director of Product Development says. "We're using the distinct Maestro aesthetic to develop unique takes on each of these effects in a way that's fun and looks back at the past, but with an awareness of what modern guitarists require. Maestro sounds are relevant to new, casual and professional level players and everyone at Gibson felt a responsibility and obligation to revive Maestro because it's vital to pedal history."

All of the new Maestro pedals are true bypass, and are priced at £139 except for the Discoverer Delay which will cost £149. Gibson tells us that this is just the start, and that we'll be seeing another round of Maestro pedals before the year is out.

Stuart Williams



THESE BOXES ARE MADE FROM STOMPIN'

From left: the Ranger Overdrive, Comet Chorus, Discoverer Delay, FZ-M Fuzz Tone and the Invader Distortion.



GUITAR

SHRED & BEAUTIFUL

The Ibanez RG series is a stone cold shred classic, and for 2022 (the first time ever), Ibanez has bolstered one of its most popular lines with neck-thru construction with its RG Premium models. There are three new guitars in the line-up, the 1220PB, 1221PB and 1270PB. Each shares a largely similar, albeit impressive

spec, with American basswood bodies, striking poplar burl tops, maple/walnut Wizard III necks, ebony fingerboards and stainless steel frets. The 1220PB comes with an Edge tremolo and DiMarzio Air Norton/The Tone Zone pickups, and is available in Antique Brown Stained finish. Meanwhile, the 1221PB AND 1270PB are both available in Deep

Twilight Flat finishes, with the 1221 offered as a hardtail with Air Norton/The Tone Zone humbuckers, plus Ibanez's dyna-MIX10 and Alter Switch system. Finally, the HSH 1270PB adds an Edge tremolo, plus a DiMarzio True Velvet single coil in the middle, while doing away with the additional switching. They're available now from £1169. *SW*



INTERFACE

RIFF POWER

Positive Grid isn't slowing down after the success of its Spark practice amp. Now, the brand has moved into audio interfaces with Riff, aimed specifically at recording guitars alongside its Bias modelling software. It's a simple one-in/two-out interface, but includes some handy features like Auto Gain to set your levels for you, three preamp emulations built into the hardware and direct monitoring to eliminate latency. It's available in three tiers – the interface and a copy of Bias FX 2 LE, or two software upgrades to Bias 2 Standard or Elite. It's currently priced at \$99, with the regular price set at \$179. *SW*

HEAVY HITTER
Nergal on screen

INTERVIEW

“MY APPROACH IS INTUITIVE”

HOW TO PLAY EXTREME METAL - BY BEHEMOTH LEADER NERGAL

I

t's no secret that Behemoth are one of the most ferocious live bands on this planet. But even by their own standards, new cinematic release *In Absentia Dei* – filmed in an

abandoned church with all kinds of pyro and theatrics thrown in for good measure – depicts some truly jaw-dropping heaviness. Singer/guitarist Nergal talks us through his weapons of war...

It's surprising how pentatonic and almost bluesy your leads are in places.

I don't really know much theory. My brain seemed to reject a lot of that knowledge. My approach is intuitive. I try to find the right notes and quite often they are pentatonic ones, because those are what I learned. If it was just me doing the licks for Behemoth, maybe it would get a little boring. But Seth [rhythm guitarist] is doing more leads now and his skillset is very different. It makes for an interesting combo, crossing between two

distinct styles. I'm a big Slayer fan and it's the same with Jeff Hanneman and Kerry King. They were both gods and they had that trademark of crossing over. The same goes for Judas Priest, two very different guitarists with unique skills. That's what made those bands magical for me.

What kind of rig were you running for the recording?

I tend to swap between my ESP and LTD guitars, generally taking three to five out when we play, but for this show I mainly played my most recent signature. I use a Peavey 6505+ because for touring you need a Kalashnikov... and Peavey are the Kalashnikov of amps. If the road gets bumpy, you need something that you can trust to work. I have a similar relationship with ESP, I can't remember a situation where they've let me down. I have a large collection of Gibsons at home but I never carry them around – they never stay in tune! The older I get, the less bullsh*t I take. I just want something that works, not something that's 60 years old and super vintage. Give me the Kalashnikov.

What pedals did you have in front of you?

I keep to just a few pedals from different brands, general basic stuff. There was a boost pedal, though I didn't have my KHDK signature back then. I always have two noise gates, one on the way in and one on the way out. Because all that gain with the pedalboard and cables can make things pretty noisy, it really needs to be controlled. There was a Dunlop Cry Baby wah pedal, a delay and a pitch shifter. That's it.

Speaking of your KHDK LCFR overdrive/boost, what kind of sounds inspired it?

I use it more as a boost. If there was any point of reference in terms of circuit, it would have been the classic Tube Screamer, but tailored for high-gain playing. What's funny and surprising is that I've found its range to be way wider than I expected. My other band, Me And That Man, is very vintage-sounding and I've been using it for my lead tones in that group. It sounded great with my Gretsch White Falcon, so I've realised this pedal is not just for extreme metal.

Amit Sharma

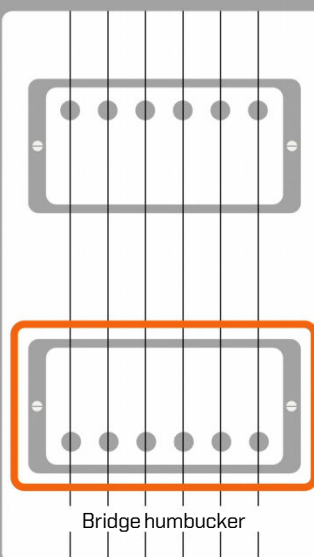
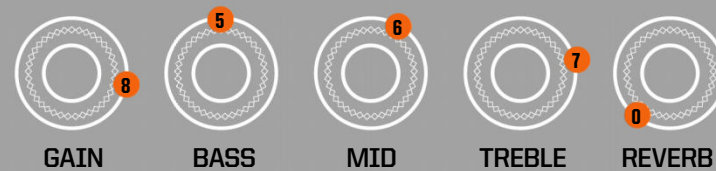
WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ String bending
- ✓ B minor pentatonic
- ✓ Atonal arpeggios

RIFF OF THE MONTH

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



White can be seen playing *TMB* on a variant of his Three Wheel Motion Low Rider Telecaster, with a Gretsch-style FilterTron bridge pickup taking the place of the original's Lace Sensor. We don't yet know whether this is a custom refinish or a new Fender build, but, in general, FilterTron pickups have an 'in-between' humbucker/single coil sound – so aim for a treble-rich, but full-bodied guitar tone. The fuzz and octave effects are likely to come from Jack's Third Man Bumble Buzz and Mantic Flex pedals, both of which have been spied on his 'board.

JACK WHITE

Taking Me Back

Jack White's first solo release since 2018, *Taking Me Back* features huge fuzz-fuelled guitar riffs blended with bass, synth and octave effects. The song is based around B minor pentatonic scale (B D E F# A) with the main riffs staying relatively close to those notes. The guitar solo at the end of the song (which we're looking at here) starts with three of those notes in a repeating lick: F#

E D E. This four-note pattern repeats eight times, followed by a phrase played between B and D. Listen carefully for some slight variations on the final repeat.

The following section uses descending arpeggios played as one-note-per-string shapes; first it's A D B, then E A F. Next, things get a little atonal and step outside the pentatonic sound with D# B, and D G D#. To add to the strangeness here, there are

two guitars playing slightly different notes and perhaps a ring modulator effect to add to the dissonance.

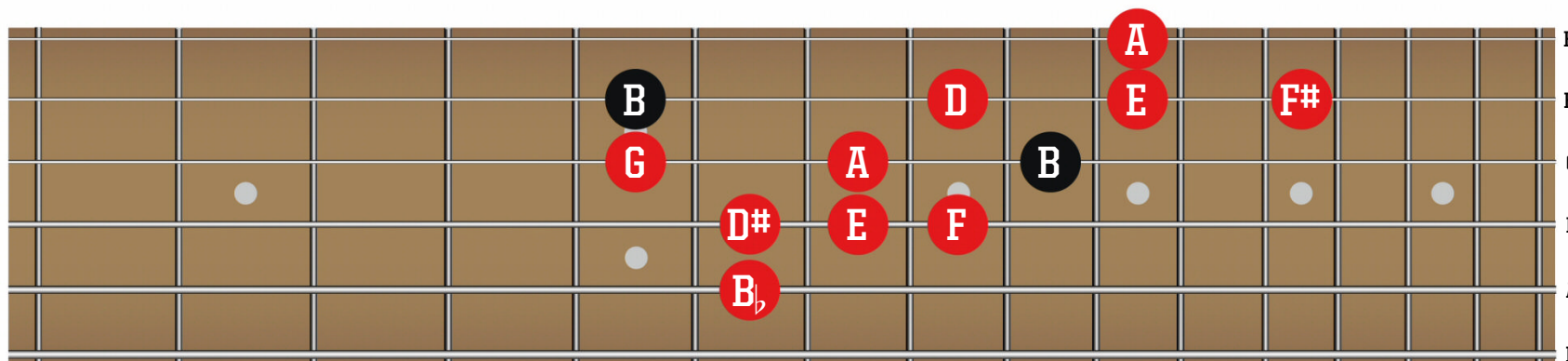
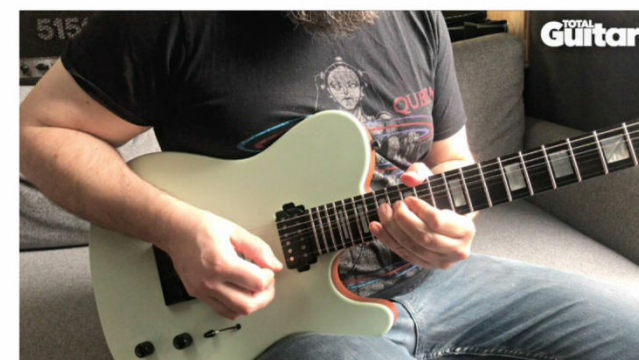
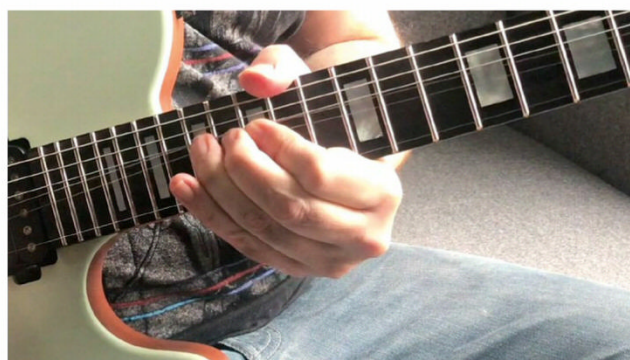
CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 3:26-3:58

Tempo: 117bpm

Key/scale: B minor pentatonic

Main techniques: string bends, hammer-ons, one-note-per-string arpeggios



The first half of the solo uses B, D and E notes on the second and third strings, with a tone-wide string bend on the 17th fret to access the F# note. The second half of the solo descends through the notes shown in

the diagram, as unusual arpeggios. These don't really fit into a specific scale or mode and it's possible that Jack hit those notes while improvising and simply liked the atonal sound it creates.

THE NEW HYBRID

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Guitars and backing Jenna Scaramanga

10 THINGS EVERY NOVICE GUITARIST NEEDS TO KNOW...

Chords and scales, rhythm and lead.
These core skills set you up for success in any style

Nobody ever finishes learning the guitar. You could be a master classical guitarist and a novice at blues; or you might be a virtuoso with a pick but uncertain with fingerstyle. Still, some essential skills let you play in a huge variety of situations. Get these down and you've completed your guitar apprenticeship.

Here we break down those essential skills to get you quickly on the road to guitar mastery. We're taking a look at the chords and scales you need to know, and we've provided some exercises for you to try out. Treat each exercise as something to build up to – and if an example is too tough to play at first, break it down into shorter 'phrases' and gradually piece it together as you improve. And why not try recording yourself playing our riffs and licks too? It's a great way to track your progress.



SETTING 1 SCOOPED MIDS

This is a stereotypical modern metal setting, fun for bedroom moshing.



SETTING 2 BOOSTED MIDS

After the scooped tone, this probably sounds harsh and honky when you play on your own. Add bass and drums and it works perfectly for rock and blues.

01 LEARN YOUR AMP

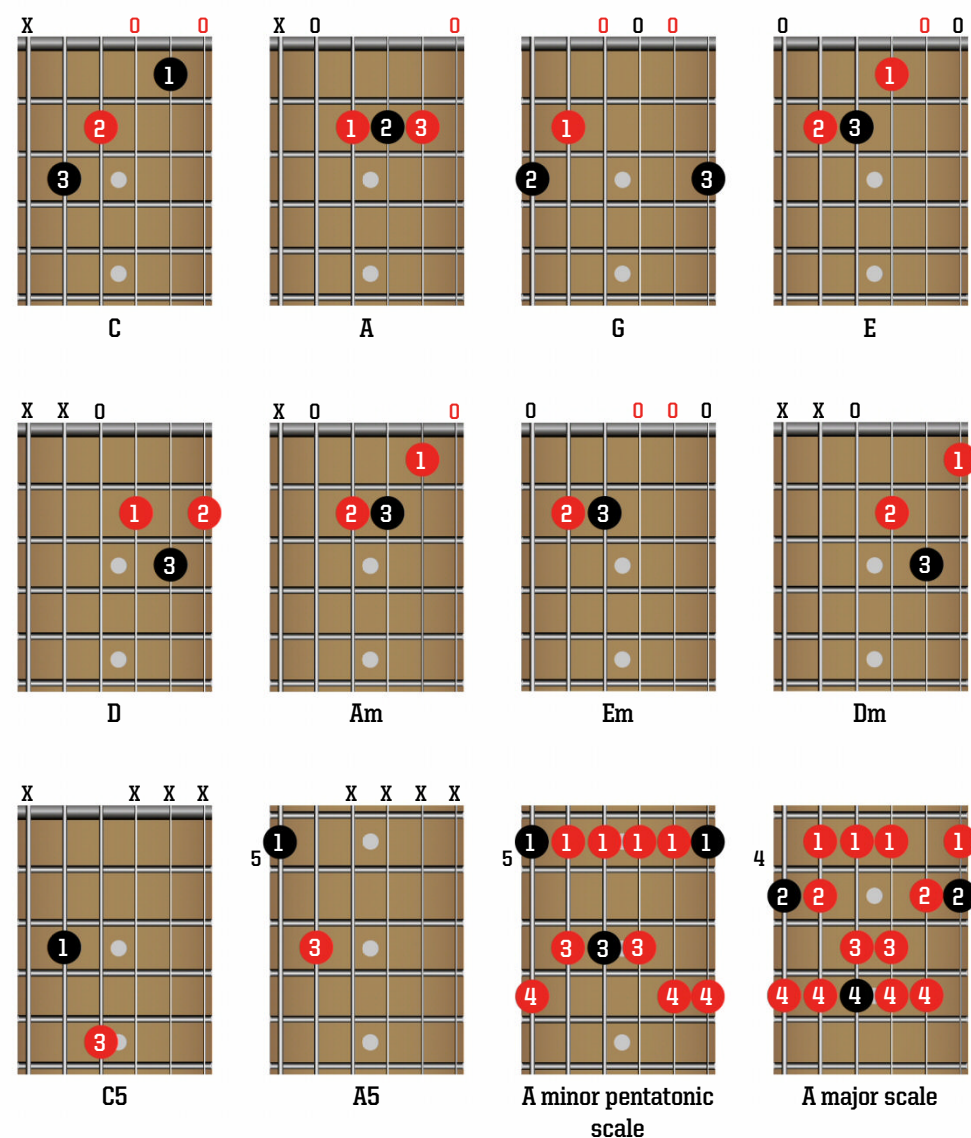
Unless you know how to set your amp? Start with treble, middle, and bass at 12 o'clock. Try turning bass to zero and then to maximum, and listen to the differences. Put it back to 12 o'clock and repeat with the middle and treble knobs. Try it with various gain settings and listen to how the amp behaves. If possible, crank the master volume. The same settings sound different and the guitar feels different at high volume. Settings shown in TG are only ever suggestions: even if we all had the same gear, every *room* sounds different. Try playing in your bedroom, bathroom, and garage and see how much the tone changes.

02 TUNE UP BY EAR

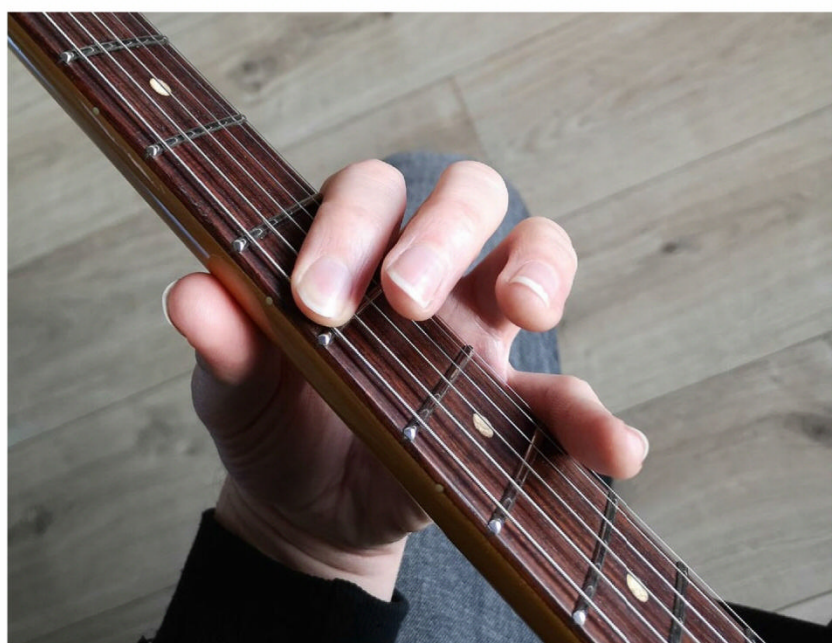
Everyone needs an electronic tuner, but you should still learn to tune by ear to train your sense of pitch. While tuning, you might get confused whether a note is flat or sharp. If that happens, loosen the string so it's definitely flat, and tune back up. This will 'reset' your ear so it's easier to hear the right pitch. Some machine heads also work more efficiently when tuning up rather than down, so the guitar stays in tune better.

03 ESSENTIAL CHORDS AND SCALES

The ten chord shapes shown here are the most important ones you need to know. Many more advanced chords are related to these shapes in some way. And if you only ever learn two scales, learn these. The minor pentatonic scale is probably the most commonly used shape in lead guitar, and the major scale is the basis for most music theory.



04 FINGER POSITIONING



CORRECT FRETTING

Aim to fret with your fingertips close to the frets, but not on top of the metal.



INCORRECT FRETTING

Fretting inaccurately will cause fret buzz or even sound the wrong note!



THUMB POSITION

This position allows maximum stretch for one-finger-per-fret scale shapes.





05 OPEN CHORD STRUMMING

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=80

A **C** **G** **D**

E Play 4 times

1 3

etc.

Tablature for Open Chord Strumming in A major (4/4 time, 80 BPM). The piece consists of five measures, each featuring a different open chord (A, C, G, D, E) strummed in a rhythmic pattern. The tablature shows the fretting hand positions (0 for open, 1 for first fret, 2 for second fret, 3 for third fret) and the strumming pattern (downstrokes and upstrokes) for each measure. The first measure is marked with a '1' and the last with a '3'. The piece ends with a repeat sign and the instruction 'Play 4 times'.

Wondering how pro guitarists change chords at lightspeed? They cheat! Throwing in one or more strums of open strings just before a change buys time to prepare the next shape. In the tab there's one strum of open strings before most changes, but if you need longer just move your fretting hand earlier while you keep strumming.

06 MINOR PENTATONIC ALTERNATE PICKING

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=80

1 4

etc.

Tablature for Minor Pentatonic Alternate Picking in A minor (4/4 time, 80 BPM). The piece consists of four measures, each featuring a different minor pentatonic scale (A, C, G, D, E) played in an alternate picking pattern. The tablature shows the fretting hand positions (5 for fifth fret, 7 for seventh fret, 8 for eighth fret) and the picking pattern (downstrokes and upstrokes) for each measure. The first measure is marked with a '1' and the last with a '4'. The piece ends with a repeat sign and the instruction 'etc.'.

For lead guitar, down-up style 'alternate' picking is the most efficient way to play: follow every downstroke of the pick with an upstroke so you're plucking the string every time the pick passes it. Once you've mastered two pickstrokes per fretted note, as tabbed, you can also try three, four, or one.

07 HAMMER-ONS AND BENDS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=80

TAB

5 8 5 7 5 7 5 7 BU (9) 5 8 BU (10) 5

Your hammer-ons should be in time and about the same volume as the picked notes. The bends need to be exactly in tune. You'll be able to tell if you do it right, because the first picked note after each bend should be exactly the same pitch as the bent note.

08 MAJOR SCALE DESCENDING SEQUENCE

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=80

TAB

5 4 7 4 7 5 7 5 7 5 7 6 7 6 4 6 4 BU 6(7)

To improvise confidently, you need to know your scales inside out. This exercise increases familiarity with the shape as well as being a useable lick. Pick with all downstrokes at first, but it can also be an advanced alternate picking workout.

09 SHIFTING POWERCHORDS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=90

TAB

5 3 7 5 7 5 9 7 7 9 9 7

Moving cleanly between powerchords is about muting. The gaps between stabs should be silent, so drop your picking hand gently onto the strings to mute them. For the slide, keep pressing into the strings as you shift the chord shape up two frets.

10 CHANGING BETWEEN BARRE CHORDS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=90

TAB

7 9 9 7 7 8 9 7 5 7 7 5 5 6 7 7 5

Play 4 times

Playing only on beats 2 and 4 like this is a classic soul guitar trick. To get the timing, listen for the snare drum and sync up with it. Use the rests to prepare the next chord shape. Soul greats like Steve Cropper often only strum three strings from within these shapes.

Words Jonathan Horsley Photos Phoebe Fox

“WRITING A GUITAR PART THAT ENDS AT AN IRRATIONAL POINT IS QUITE A CHALLENGE!”

Yard Act are the most talked-about new band in the UK. Guitarist Sam Shjipstone and singer James Smith reveal the origins of their unconventional post-punk sound





LIVE FROM LEEDS

That 'Yorkshire Shaft' sound in full effect

Chances are, by the time you read this, you will have heard a lot about Yard Act. The Leeds-based post-punk quartet's debut *The Overload* is one of those rare albums that feels universally anticipated across the pop-cultural firmament, showcasing a sound with the energy and clarity of purpose to meet our present moment, to help us make sense of it.

Vocalist James Smith delivers his observational verse with an antic verve, telling everyday stories of everyday people, their foibles and prejudices. Smith's vocals are delivered in an undiluted Yorkshire brogue. This could be spoken word but it's not; underneath you have a propulsive rhythm from drummer Jay Russell and a bassline from Ryan Needham that sits high in the mix, directing traffic, leaving room for Sam Shjipstone to add light and shade on guitar.

If it wasn't for Smith's accent, there are moments when you might swear Yard Act were a New York concern, a decades-late echo of the East Village no wave scene, with that beat holding the leash on skronky, treble-forward electric guitar tones, funk guitar rhythms, and spider-ish melodies that crawl off Shjipstone's fingerboard to augment the mood.

"The Yard Act sound is very British, but when I think about what my influences would have

been on this record, they're nearly all American," Sam says. "I was thinking of guitarists who I really dig, and so many of them are from New York. I come from a hardcore or post-hardcore background. I have just come out of a psych-rock band [Hookworms], and when I was asked to join this band, I thought I would do something completely different. I was thinking [influences-wise] Marc Ribot for a couple of the songs, and on *Land Of The Blind*, I definitely ripped him off – I hope it's not obvious!"

There's an in-built tension to Yard Act's sound. The beat pulls it forward, demanding a super-tight performance. When Shjipstone is in lock-step with it, he's holding down rhythm guitar in the style of an after-hours Nile Rodgers, and yet, when it comes to introducing melody, it is almost as though the guitar exists outside of the time signature. To the audience, this sounds like off-the-cuff chaos but it's all gamed out.

"It's not a tension," Sam says. "It's not a problem. But you are right; it's either rigid on the grid or it's loose as f*ck. There are parts that are just nicked from Fela Kuti guitar lines, or James Brown, very punchy, then there are bits that are a little more atonal."

To make this work, you need a certain type of sound. With Needham's bass so dominant, Shjipstone opts for a more wiry, squirrely tone, favouring a Leo Fender-designed G&L ASAT for that next-gen Telecaster twang and cut, and a Fender Blues DeVille amp.



says Shjipstone – and *Pour Another*, which, when compared to the collapsed jazz and James Chance contortions of earlier tracks like *Rich*, uses melodies more in keeping with a pop song.

“There is a lot more space in that song,” James says. “Sam used that space creatively to leave even more space, which was really interesting. In previous bands, it was always overdub central – pile on, pile on, pile on! Yard Act is the opposite of that, and the music, the sound quality benefits from it. It makes you think about the arrangements a lot more when it is just the conversation between the three instruments.”

In the studio, Smith says they pride themselves on brevity, cutting and cutting. Earlier drafts of the record had Morricone-esque interludes. For his part, Smith was brutal when it came to nixing verses. Onstage, however, Yard Act stretch out the arrangements. In concert they have a chance to breathe, to step on the wah and jam. Shjipstone wasn’t sure but Smith insists on it.

“I just want everything to sound like [Isaac Hayes’ 70s funk classic] *Theme From Shaft*,” Sam laughs. “That’s why I am like, ‘Yeah, put the wah on that! Do the wacka-wacka! The Yorkshire Shaft, set in Batley.’”

Shaft? Again, another New York reference. But Smith’s wah pedal advocacy is undertaken on behalf of a fictional character who is 100 per cent Yorkshire, Graeme. Seeing the world through Graeme’s eyes affords Smith a freedom to comment on the everyday absurdity of the human condition without judgement. When all is said and done, this storytelling element is what informs everything that Yard Act do. You can dance to them, but once Russell counts them in, it’s story time.

“I found doing those character studies is a good exercise for putting yourself in the shoes as someone whom you don’t necessarily agree with,” Sam says. “By putting myself in his imaginary boots I can humanise him. You just never know anybody else’s story. Empathy is really important. Human beings are all right, and you should make the most of them.”

FAB FOUR
(Left to right) Sam Shjipstone, Ryan Needham, James Smith, Jay Russell

“The most important thing for me is the [Fulltone] MOSFET FullDrive 2,” he explains. “I really, really love it. I thought it had a compressor in it but it doesn’t; it just sounds really compressed. When you strike a chord, it is full immediately, from the get-go.”

Shjipstone swore off effects for Yard Act but he still keeps his pedalboard stocked with life’s essentials. Besides the FullDrive 2 two-channel overdrive pedal, he has an MXR EQ – “just to make things lift when they need do” – and a Seymour Duncan pickup booster that he uses as an always-on tone-sweetener. Or, rather, a tone spoiler. “The guitar sound is a bit broken, cheap sounding,” he says, proving once more that it’s easy to find devices that make the guitar sound good but less so when you need something wrong sounding and off-menu instead. There’s also a Strymon Flint on the ‘board for reverb and tremolo, an Electro-Harmonix POG2 polyphonic octave generator, a Moog ring modulator for those straight-outta-Weirdsville sounds, and over the past few months Shjipstone has found himself reaching for the wah pedal.

Yard Act might require less of Shjipstone’s pedalboard than Hookworms, and the precision of the G&L through his rig is a change of pace from the heavily processed tones and thicker-sounding, low C tunings used for psych. But there are similarities, with dynamics crucial to both. “There’s space for non-western tonalities, too” says Shjipstone. “Both of these musical styles allow for that,”

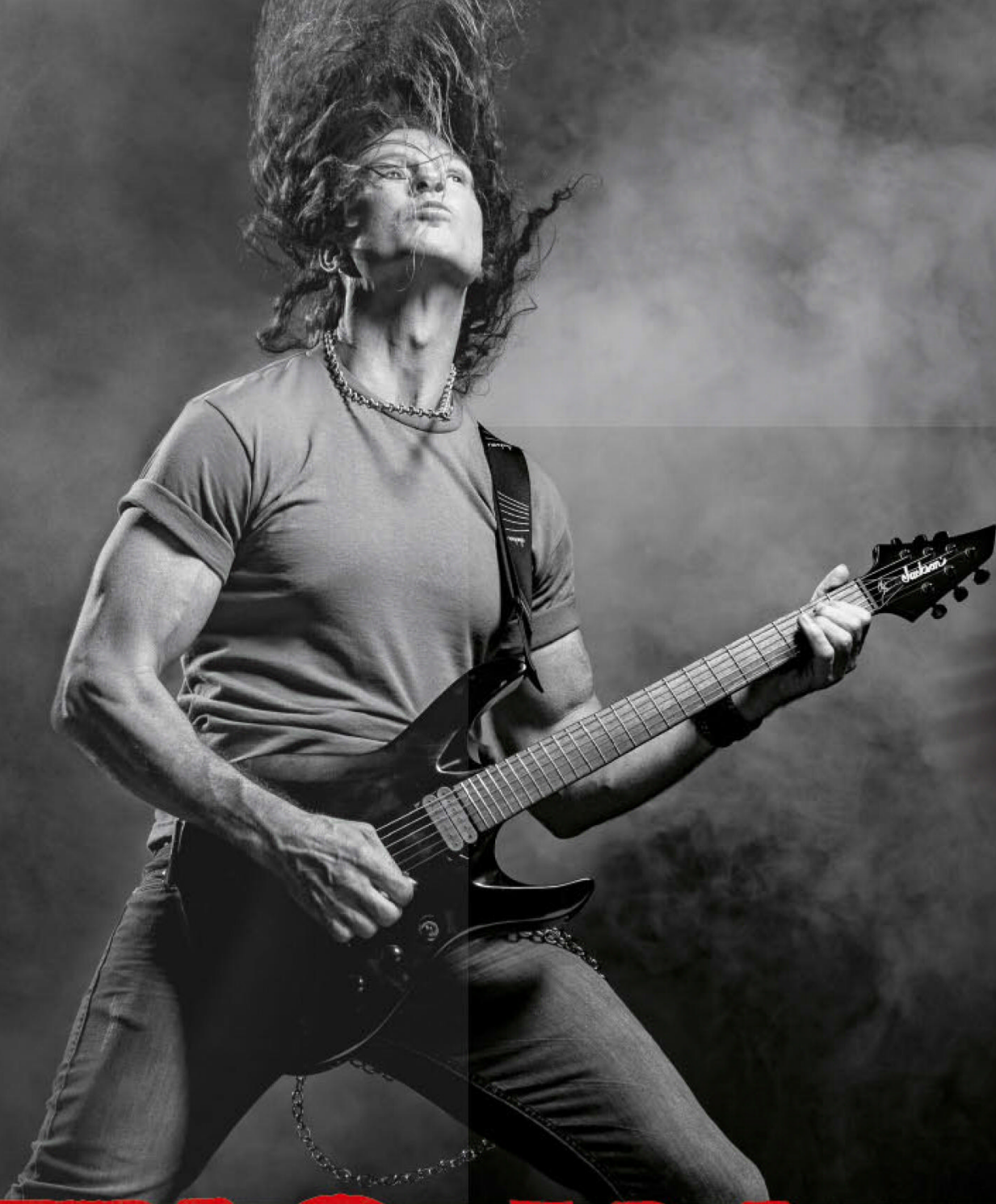
Yard Act, however, is an unorthodox gig, with so much of the songwriting guided by vocals. “Some of James’ sections are totally irrational in length,” Sam says. “Writing a guitar part that ends at an irrational point is quite a challenge, but I really enjoyed it. That part of it is tricky but the melodic part is very freeing.”

You can hear all of this in play on tracks such as *Dead Horse*, which has a sort of Arabian Tom Verlaine guitar motif. As the record progresses, the raw-nerve energy builds towards bigger melodies. There’s the epic *Tall Poppies*, all jangling on the edge of euphoria, evoking the Velvet Underground’s *Heroin* – though not intentionally,

"YARD ACT SOUND VERY BRITISH, BUT MY INFLUENCES ARE NEARLY ALL AMERICAN" SAM SHJIPSTONE

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Words Ellie Rogers Photos George Muncey, Rosie Matheson

“WRITING A GUITAR SOLO IS LIKE WRITING ANOTHER SONG”

Joe Newman has led **alt-J** to worldwide success, but has always focused on songwriting first – guitar playing second. Until now...

The genre-defying alt-J have kept listeners waiting for a new album for a little over four and a half years. Now, almost a decade since the release of their Mercury Prize-winning debut, *An Awesome Wave*, the trio – guitarist/vocalist Joe Newman, keyboardist Gus Unger-Hamilton and drummer Thom Sonny Green – are back with their fourth album, *The Dream*. It’s a record that effervesces with a rejuvenated sense of experimentalism and self-confidence, underpinned by elegantly macabre themes, serpentine guitar and infectious hooks.

After a planned hiatus in 2019 became prolonged by the Covid-19 pandemic, Joe spent the last couple of years directing his energy towards rekindling his love for the guitar, reflecting upon his musical past and, of course, penning the 12 new tracks that would come to make up *The Dream*.

A self-confessed cinephile, Joe describes the new record in visual, rather than musical terms, likening it to “a jagged

➔ landscape with great views.” He explains: “I think each of our songs are separate stories, so I see them as kind of short films, and overall, there’s a greater landscape of melancholic music that explores love and loss and the darker sides of the human condition.”

The album does indeed come with its fair share of underlying darkness, with themes ranging from murder and revenge, to love, loss, and even getting rich quick with crypto currencies. “I’m always searching for vignettes,” Joe says, “and then you combine those vignettes and before long you have twenty seconds of something and it’s really exciting.”

Imaginative, ambiguous and dark story-telling, backed by richly textured soundtracks, has been an alt-J calling card since the beginning, and with the ten year anniversary of *An Awesome Wave* on the horizon, reflecting on old material helped Joe welcome in the new. As he explains, “For me, I see revisiting old music as quite an important process for writing new music. It’s just nice to listen to your back catalogue – it’s like looking at old family photos. You get an idea of your origin story by finding yourself and what you used to sound like. How things may have changed is important to seeing where you may go in the future.”

He laughs: “There is one big change. There was a time when we started the band and I was very self-conscious about singing. Even before I was in the band and I met Gus and Thom, I used to wait for everyone to leave the house so I could sing and play guitar on my own.”

This early self-consciousness, however, doesn’t seem to have stemmed from an unfamiliarity with guitars when he was growing up, and Joe’s father clearly played an important role in his musical upbringing. “My dad was a huge fan of guitars,” Joe says. “He collected Ovations and played Taylor acoustics. So I’ve always been around guitars and been exposed to guitars in that way. I think my attachment to the guitar was that it helped me find my voice as a singer and as a songwriter, so I was kind of riding that wave of treating the guitar as more of a work tool for getting me to that destination.”

However, in the midst of lockdown and with plenty of time on his hands, Joe took a deep dive into online guitar culture, and emerged with a new found appreciation for his instrument as more than just a means to an end. “In the



“WE’RE PRAYING TO THE AC30!”

The amp that’s key to alt-J’s sound

“Throughout the duration of us writing records,” Joe says, “all of the guitars have gone through one particular amp which is a Vox AC30 from the 60s. It was famous, I believe, for being used by David Gilmour, and then it was purchased by Clive Langer.”

The amp’s custodian is now Charlie Andrew, alt-J’s long-time producer. “We’ve always used it,” says Joe, “and the tremolo is kind of the voice of the guitar work on all of our albums to date. I can’t imagine a world without tremolo. It’s kind of like Stockholm Syndrome: at first I wasn’t sure, and it’s all I know now and I love it to bits!”

Such is the importance of the AC30 that on this album, other instruments, vocals and even percussion were re-amped through it. Joe explains, “This album really honours that amp. We’ve fallen to our knees and we’re praying to the AC30. It defines this album sonically and it’s a homage to the only amp we’ve ever used.”

Outside the studio, Joe uses a digitised recreation of the hallowed Vox, along with a hefty helping of space echo to complete his sound.

pandemic,” he explains, “I re-evaluated what the guitar means to me, and on reflection, I decided I wanted to explore the guitar more. I kind of got obsessed with YouTube guitar channels like Rhett Schull and Norman’s Rare Guitars and things like that. And the big thing was I just bought a lot of guitars in lockdown! It was like a self-assessment: what do I love, and what do I value? And all roads led to the guitar. So I kind of started buying guitars and that turned into – not an obsession – but definitely one of the ways I coped with lockdown.”

There was also some necessity to this sudden spending spree. At the beginning of lockdown, Joe only had one guitar at home: a Larrivée P-05 Parlour Guitar that his father had gifted him a few years earlier. “All the other guitars were in our studio,” he recalls. “They were Telecaster Deluxes from 2011. I’d only really ever played those guitars, but there was a disconnect: they were over there and my writing world was at home.”

First to be added to the collection was a 2016 Candy Tangerine Nocaster Telecaster reissue (listen out for a special mention of this guitar in the lyrics to laid back holiday groove *U&ME*). Then the axe-purchasing floodgates were opened. Soon after came a Japanese Offset Telecaster, a 1962 Gibson ES-330 which Joe is particularly fond of for chilling out on the sofa with, and a Yuriy Shishkov Masterbuilt Fender Telecaster in white, with gold hardware and twin humbuckers. He says of this unique Tele: “It’s built like a Les Paul... almost, but it’s Fender. I’ve not found a song to write on it yet, but it’s the most beautiful guitar ever. At the moment, it’s an aesthetic wonder rather than something I pick up and play. I have tried to write songs on it, but there were just other guitars in the vicinity that just worked better. But it is something that will be used at some point. I just don’t know when.”

Rather than having a ‘go-to’ guitar for all his writing, Joe finds different songs on different guitars, which is as good a reason as any for expanding his collection. He notes: “I always had this belief that you can pick up any guitar and you can find the song on that guitar, and that had been what I’d done in my ➔

“IN THE PANDEMIC I RE-EVALUATED WHAT

THE GUITAR MEANS TO ME. I BOUGHT A LOT OF GUITARS!"

➔ history of writing. They'd either been my father's guitars or they'd been friends' guitars. I was always drawn to the guitar in a room, particularly if it looked unloved. There's something about unloved guitars – there's a history to their misuse. I could write nice songs on those guitars, and it's happened a few times."

Another of Joe's recent acquisitions was certainly in need of some TLC when he found it. He recalls: "My dad knew someone who was selling a 1962 Stratocaster and the price was cut in half because someone, at some point, had dipped the whole thing in some kind of black rubber paint. The wood, not the hardware, that is – that would be ridiculous! So it just cost a lot less. On the record, most of the lead guitar work is on that guitar."

Dynamically, lead guitar has not always featured right at the forefront of alt-J's music, especially on 2017's *Relaxer* – the predecessor to *The Dream* – which featured synth and percussive elements more heavily, as well as strings arranged and performed by the London Metropolitan Orchestra. This time around, however, Joe is embracing his identity as a guitar player with what feels like reinvigorated self-confidence.

The emotional ode to frontline workers, *Get Better*, features just Joe and a solo acoustic guitar, with only an occasional vocal harmony and wistful piano chords for support. Elsewhere, tracks such as *Walk A Mile* also place Joe's guitar front and centre – bathed in vintage Vox AC30 tremolo. *Walk A Mile* is a favourite track of his. "If I put my guitarist hat on, I return to that song more than any other. It's the exploration of melody and the variations of one lyrical line, and it kind of spirals into another world. I love the guitar in it. I have a few people in my life that I play my guitar parts to, who help me understand why I like what I do and why it's worth pursuing."

With *Walk A Mile*, I played the beginning riff to my dad, and he was just like, 'That's beautiful. That's so simple, so beautiful and it's such a lovely introduction.' I keep returning to that song because the guitar is so important. It has its own voice and it's the shelter that surrounds the lyrics and the melody."



Another stand-out guitar moment is saved until the album's final track, and comes in the form of a short but beautifully formed guitar solo on *Powders*. Solos, in the traditional sense, are not a regular feature of Joe's playing, and its very existence is quite significant. "Writing a guitar solo, no matter how small it is, it's like writing another song," he says. "It takes a lot of work but it's so rewarding because, on one hand, it kind of validates why I spend all this money on guitars; and on the other, it's an avenue that I'm exploring later in my career, where I can see a lot of excitement. So actually, a lot of my writing post-this album is very guitar-driven, and it's really exciting because I love the idea of seeing myself as a guitarist in the future, rather than just a songwriter."

It's curious that after a decade-long career which has seen him receive some of the most prestigious awards in music, and led the band to sell-out some of the biggest venues in the world – from Madison Square Garden and the Hollywood Bowl to London's O2 – that Joe is only just becoming comfortable with referring to himself as a guitarist.

ORDINARY JOE
"I don't know how to shred," Newman says, "and I don't know how to improvise..."

"My identity as a guitarist," he reveals, "was that I was constantly feeling under a certain amount of doubt because I very much felt like I knew nothing, and I was going with my gut throughout my career. The truth is, I've only ever played what I want to play. I know what the pentatonic scale is but I couldn't play that, and I don't know any other scales. I don't know how to shred, and I don't know how to improvise. But what I do know is that I've got a good ear for liking what I'm playing."

The misconception that having an encyclopaedic knowledge of the fretboard is essential to being considered a great guitarist has doubtless played havoc with the confidence of many self-taught players, but as Joe now notes, "I think you end up with a product which is more interesting. And you're less called upon by other guitarists to come and jam, which is okay – I'm okay with that!"

In addition to this, Joe's guitars will more often than not be found in open tunings like DADF#AD (open D major), which again serves to shake up the known landmarks of the fretboard, and encourages a more instinctive and exploratory way of playing. As Joe explains: "The reason why I liked DADF#AD was that it was the quickest route to connecting with my guitar when I was younger. As a result, a lot of songs are written in DADF#AD, so not only do I not know the traditional scales, but I certainly wouldn't know what that would look like on an open-tuned guitar."

As an accomplished fingerpicker, open tunings also lend themselves particularly well to Joe's intricate playing style, helping to provide depth and texture with drone notes and open strings – particularly as there isn't another guitarist in the band to help fill-out the dynamics. "I've always been fascinated by fingerpicking," Joe says. "My dad's a guitarist and I always listen to what he used to listen to – like John Martyn, Robbie Basho and JJ Cale. I've listened to different types of guitarists throughout my life but watching him play guitar, I think, allowed me a good foundation. So I think that's maybe where the complicated fingerpicking patterns stemmed from."

"I LOVE THE IDEA OF SEEING MYSELF AS A GUITARIST"



DO THE MATH!

Fingerpicking the Joe Newman way

Intricate picking patterns are a trademark of Joe Newman's playing – a feat made all the more complex by the fact he'll usually be singing a divergent vocal part at the same time.

"I remember the days where I couldn't sing and play guitar at the same time," Joe Newman says, "and it's probably the greatest endeavour of my life! As I got better at it, I started becoming more and more curious about almost mathematical fingerpicking patterns. Mathematics is the defining feature of creating structure – both in society and in how we write and understand music. So, I would say that it's key to creating a strong foundation. Fingerpicking creates a pattern that is stable – it's the stability of the song. The concept or the dreamlike ways you take a narrative is for the voice and the lyrics."

Almost a form of self-hypnosis, his process turns a complicated feat of fingerpicking into a background task that can all but be forgotten about: "I find complete safety in being in the calm space: playing this repetitive pattern, changing the chord structure and singing along. I stop thinking about the multi-tasking. Ironically, the harder the pattern, the easier it is for me to lose my process of thought."

IN THE FUTURE, RATHER THAN JUST A SONGWRITER"



Words Amit Sharma Portrait Jen Rosenstein

"Everyone's personality is in their phrasing"

He plays heavy with Black Label Society and Ozzy, but **Zakk Wylde** is inspired by the emotion in blues and "pentatonic insanity" of jazz fusion

The world may still feel like it's in a state of pause, but that's not enough to stop Zakk Wylde from doing what he does best. He ended 2021 out on the road with Black Label Society, while teasing singles from the band's 11th studio album *Doom Crew Inc.* – another masterclass in blues-based metal and pentatonic shred. And continuing his long association with Ozzy Osbourne, he features on the singer's forthcoming album alongside three legends in Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Tony Iommi.

In one of the new BLS tracks, *End Of Days*, your solo climaxes with a pentatonic run in six – it's like hearing Eric Johnson or Joe Bonamassa with more distortion!

I learned all of that from players like John McLaughlin and Frank Marino. When I first listened to [jazz fusion pioneers] Mahavishnu Orchestra, Jan Hammer and Jerry Goodman would be doubling what John McLaughlin was doing. That stuff felt like true pentatonic insanity to me. Hearing Eric Johnson and Bonamassa doing it came quite a while after for me, but I'm glad I discovered their pentatonic goodness!

Those kinds of licks can be quite a challenge for the picking hand.

How did you get them up to speed?

It's just a matter of repetition. You have to keep doing a little bit more and more, starting slow and building up speed. It's just like laying bricks – one day you wake up and you just have it. I would just alternate pick pentatonic scales up and down. But really it all depends on what kind of sound you're going for. For example, Allan Holdsworth was trying to sound like a sax, so playing legato helped get him that sound. If he played more like Steve Morse, with every note picked and lots of staccato, it wouldn't have had that fluid sax feel. Guys like Al Di Meola and John McLaughlin tend to pick every note because that's the sound they're looking for. Techniques are just different colours you can use...

It's great to hear your co-guitarist Dario Lorina trading licks with you on some of these tracks, which is a first.

Yeah, like on *Destroy And Conquer*, Dario comes in for the second half doing the diminished stuff. He's phenomenal. I guess he's more like a gazelle and I'm more of a bull in a china shop! He has more grace in his playing. Even though he can pick everything, he uses more legato ideas than I do... Which is great. That's what separates us.

We're guessing you're still using your Wylde Audio guitars and amps, and it definitely sounds like there's some flanger and phaser on certain tracks.

We used the MXR Eddie Van Halen flanger on the *You Made Me Want To Live* intro. I probably had it on the *Unchained* setting, because you can press one button that takes you right there! I had a Phase 90 on a few things too. All of my stuff is out in front. A lot of people use the effects loop for delay, which gives you a great sound that doesn't cover up your tone, it sits behind it. But I really don't use delay on anything and if I do it's used as an effect, like at the end of the solo in [Ozzy classic] *No More Tears*. Usually I'm just dry. The only thing I have on is the overdrive and the chorus, though in the studio I won't use a chorus pedal – I'll have one head and one cabinet, then double up for the wide spread of a natural chorus.

Funnily enough, your solos in *You Made Me Want To Live* and *No More Tears* both feature bends where you catch other strings and make your guitar scream...

That's a big Gary Moore thing, at least to my ears. He'd do those big bends and catch an extra string to add to the emotion. It definitely sounds very angry! Everything he played was rooted from the pentatonic scale and chromatics, but it came down to his interpretation of the blues and the aggression he put into it. That's the beautiful thing about guitar. From Paul Kossoff to David Gilmour, everyone's personality is in their phrasing.

And speaking of legendary players, you must have been blown away when you found out you would be co-starring alongside Clapton, Beck and Iommi on the new Ozzy album...

Yeah! I was shocked when I heard it was happening and even more when I heard what they played. They'd already recorded their parts so I ended up rerecording rhythm tracks underneath what they'd done at my home studio. It came out awesome. With Eric, he went from John Mayall and Cream to his solo stuff, and it was always tasteful. The same goes for Jeff Beck. The whammy bar is a big part of his sound, he treats it almost like its own instrument which is amazing. Both of them are incredible songwriters. That's the reason why we listen to them. It's all about the musicality with those guys.

"TECHNIQUES ARE JUST DIFFERENT COLOURS YOU CAN USE"

Words Jenna Scaramanga Photos Rosie Foster

"IF WE LIKE IT, IT MUST BE GOOD!"

After their surprise top 5 debut album, *Black Country, New Road* deliver a more melodic follow-up. But as guitarist Luke Mark says:
"I insisted on being louder than everyone else!"



H

ailed the best band “in the entire world” by one journalist, Black Country, New Road entered 2021 as a buzz band with their debut album *For The First Time*. Unusually for critics’ darlings, they then found themselves selling more records than expected. As the UK’s experimental indie scene gatecrashed the mainstream, BC,NR joined Squid and Black Midi at its forefront.

“It’s crazy to chart with an album like that and to get any kind of nod from outside indie circles,” admits guitarist Luke Mark. “The response was amazing. You go see Black Midi a few years ago and there’d be fifty people who loved it. After they put an album out, you go see them and there’s like a thousand people who all love it just as much. You don’t think it has that reach until it happens. Through the summer we did some festival shows and were very surprised at the size of them. We expected the Wide Awake Festival to be small but it was ten thousand people, a celebration of our scene. It was very odd to be playing on the main stage.”

Vocalist/guitarist Isaac Wood once joked that BC,NR would be “the next Arcade Fire”. It’s a quip that might have backfired as the band drops its more accessible second album, *Ants From Up There*. “We do love Arcade Fire,” Luke says, “but it was just a funny idea. Now it seems slightly cynical because the first album was

surprisingly popular. *Ants From Up There* may from the outside seem like some bid for pop stardom, but it’s just how the songs worked out. From our point of view it was more of a risk than a safe bet because all of the people who like the first album could very easily not like this.”

Still, there’s an undeniable air of pride from the band about album two. “This is the record that we, like, wanted to make for a long time,” Luke smiles. “Making the first record was like ‘this is cool music, it feels new,’ whereas this record feels akin to what we liked as teenagers, making an album that we probably would have loved then.”

The band’s writing process changed too. “Because it was written while we weren’t playing shows, we’d have the start of a song and very slowly piece it together in a songwriting workshop. It ends up being a bit more considered, whereas if

you’re doing it live you might just try an idea out to get an immediate response. When you have to do it loads of times in the room, it still has to seem good after all of that.”

BC,NR elected to use their live sound engineer Sergio Maschetzko to produce, since no one has made them sound better. They demoed the songs once a month at London’s Lexington club, before returning to rehearsal to improve the arrangements. “I think we did two or three sessions in the end,” Luke recalls. “During our first socially distanced tour, we did most of the songs live. Charlie [Wayne, drums] went out before every show and asked people not to record them because they weren’t done!”

Although they used the tour to premiere new material, BC,NR relied strictly on each other to judge which songs worked, as Luke explains. “When we played *Chaos Space Marine* on the socially distanced tour we thought people were going to love it. There was no response at all, just confused clapping, but we knew it was good. Once it came out as a single people really liked it. We think we’ve got such good taste that if we like it, it must be good!” he laughs. “We’ve never played

anything and abandoned it due to a bad response from the crowd.”

Despite its more accessible songs, *Ants From Up There* opens unconventionally with an instrumental intro in 5/8 time. This, Luke says, is part of an ambitious composition strategy. “The intro track is a motif that appeared elsewhere on the album. Lewis

[Evans, saxophone] just played it once and we thought it sounded really cool. We wanted it to be established when it came up later on, not that it is particularly obvious. It’s Easter egg. There are certain times when that theme pops up but not clearly. It’s definitely on *Basketball Shoes* and *The Place Where He Inserted The Blade*. It’s on *Chaos Space Marine* arguably, and then a couple of other places. It’ll pop up sometimes quite obviously; sometimes not so much.”

This approach to writing with motifs is reminiscent of how classical composers worked with a theme and variations. Luke explains: “If you take the theme as a starting point for writing a new piece, you might end up changing it beyond recognition. Whether or not it’s obvious, you’ve got something new out of it that hopefully gels in some way because it has a similar origin.”

"TWO GUITARS
PLAYING IN UNISON
SOUNDS A BIT
SH*T IF YOU DON'T
PLAY PERFECTLY!"



treble needs to be down really low and the bass needs to be up really high. I use a bright sound anyway so that's why." When the Maxon isn't enough by itself, Luke hits it with a JFET clean boost pedal that Isaac built. Elsewhere, effects are fairly minimal. "There's not really any obvious delay but there's a [EHX] Memory Man on most of the time because the preamp just makes everything sound wicked. There's some tape delay on the guitars, from a tape machine I think, not from a delay unit. That's on both the guitars on *Snow Globes* because it's just two guitars playing in unison. It sounds a bit sh*t if you don't play really perfectly, so there's a slight bit of tape delay to make it sound nicer."

With such simple guitar tones, the creativity comes more from the playing, which Luke prefers to being reliant on a particular pedal to make a part work. For *Chaos Space Marine*, he developed a chord progression with contrary motion, where the highest and lowest notes in each chord move in opposite directions. "It feels like it changes key but it doesn't really. Now it's hidden in the song it doesn't sound that weird, but it is quite a weird chord sequence."

The odd-time intro isn't the end of the band's rhythmic trickery, but one of the most effective changes is deceptively simple. "*Concorde* is in 6/8, but as it goes to the pre-chorus it drops to a hi-hat and a little bit of snare," Luke reveals. "It kind of takes away the time signature. It just feels like what we always refer to as '1/1'! It builds this tension that you don't get when there's a really definite groove. It's not mathy and it doesn't sound that weird, it just makes it feel different suddenly."

For *The Place Where He Inserted The Blade*, Isaac employs some unusually wide, piano-style chord voicings inspired by Blake Mills. And perhaps most unexpected riff on the album is in *Concorde*, in which Luke employs tapping: "I do a bit of clean tapping in the third verse," he says. "I hold the chord and then tap extensions onto it with a sliding two-finger movement." Wherever BC,NR go from here, you'd be safe to expect the unexpected.



Gear wise, the BC,NR guitar geeks remained largely faithful to their debut album rigs. "I think my rig evolved less than it would have usually because we haven't been playing live very much," Luke says. "But the Fenders continue to be hacked! I've been using Isaac's gold Strat. It still has a Mojo Pickups Gold Foil in it, and now I've put an anodized metal pickguard on it: Gold Foil in the middle and the Creamery Firebird pickups in the neck and bridge. I was looking for ages for a bridge pickup that I actually wanted to use. It's quite hard when you set up your sound around a middle pickup and make that really bright, you can't really go any nearer the bridge. The Firebird pickup works pretty well. There's definitely something about the attack that's a bit Tele-like, especially for like a hum cancelling pickup. I just played that through an AC30. We recorded live in a room so it wasn't like cranking anything to crazy volumes, but I insisted on being louder than everyone else because the amp needs to be loud to sound good."

"Isaac plays acoustic guitar on basically the whole album. It's

a Sigma acoustic with a Gold Foil pickup going into an Orange Custom Shop 50 with a bass cab. We also had a mic on it attached near the soundboard. Because we tracked it live we ended up not being able to use much of the mic. It was mostly to get that liveliness, that string noise and stuff. Isaac sang all the vocals live. To try and get a good live vocal take I was going to play his fingerstyle part from *Bread Song* on his acoustic, but he uses so much *rubato*, pauses so much to allow a line to breathe, that he had to play it because I wouldn't have been able to read his mind."

Although both Isaac and Luke are dedicated pedal hounds, the core tones are surprisingly dry. "A lot of it's clean," Luke says. "There's little bits of distortion and occasionally really big distortion." This comes from Luke's treasured Maxon Distortion Master. "It's a bit of a secret weapon. I had to learn the hard way that the

**DISTORTION
MASTER**
BC,NR with Luke
Mark (top, centre)

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Interview Amit Sharma Portraits Olly Curtis

“MY RIGHT HAND IS ALWAYS MOVING - WHETHER I HIT ANY NOTES OR NOT!”

Funk master **Cory Wong** is all about the groove. But on his new album with Vulfpeck, he's also rocking out. As he says: “I got to be a little more Eddie Van Halen!”

C

ory Wong gets time. As the poster boy for modern funk, the American guitarist knows all about how playing in the pocket and feeling the groove gets bodies moving – it's his area of expertise. He's the kind of guitarist who can make one static chord sound interesting for longer because he'll never run out of interesting ways to deliver it.

2021 was a big year for Wong, with the launch of his first signature Strat and even his own YouTube variety show, brilliantly titled *Cory And The Wong Notes*. This year, he's teaming up again with funk supergroup Vulfpeck, the band that gained him worldwide recognition, for *Vulf Vault 005: Wong's Cafe...*

“We decided to do this series called the *Vulf Vaults*,” explains Wong, talking to TG from his home studio – with his 2002 Highway One Strat, bought for just \$300 on Craigslist, sat in his lap. “It started as a vinyl-only compilation series where it would be songs by just one of us each time. I was talking to Jack [Stratton, drums] and told him there was a bunch of recordings we did pre-pandemic which I liked but didn't make it on our last album. Some I'd written with him and some with the other guys, so I suggested using this

unreleased material for my vault. He said, ‘Produce them, do what you want and make it very Cory Wong!’ So I took the recordings and started to produce them, adding different textures to make them more guitar-centric...”

How exactly did you go about making this new album ‘more guitar-centric’?

I wanted to capture that classic old-school Vulfpeck feel with all this extra guitar stuff. The original albums were instrumental and were less song-oriented, so I wanted to explore

more of that. I wrote some stuff with Woody [Goss, keyboards] over email and I started making new recordings to showcase guitars in a way that's not always done on regular Vulfpeck albums. Because usually I show up and Jack is the bandleader, so I'll play the part that's appropriate. Joe Dart is the Angus Young of the band – it's all led by his bass playing and that's cool. I like doing my thing around that and seeing where it fits in. On this album, I got to be a little more of the Angus or Eddie Van Halen. It being called *Wong's Cafe* meant I could showcase my own recipe... or whatever metaphor you prefer! I didn't have to think about staying away from anyone else. I decided to make it very guitar-forward. It's the most guitar-led Vulfpeck project yet!





➔ **The opening track, *Smokeshow*, has moments where several guitar parts merge into one line – similar to what Nile Rodgers did on Daft Punk hit *Get Lucky*.**

Definitely! A lot of the time when I play those lines, I'll come up with one lead part, just a little hook. I'll record it and pan it hard left, then do the exact same thing panned all the way right to make it feel wider. Then I'll make a harmony part sticking to the same pentatonic scale but starting on an adjacent string, and keep that panned to the middle. Or I might have the harmony part in stereo and the main hook in the middle. Then I might stack in another layer on the next string along and then add in another played an octave up. For live shows I've learned how to play the harmonies as chords, which is fun, because you have to barre across three strings for every note! So there are a lot of three-part harmonies like that on the album.

The solo in that song is quite overdriven for you.

Yeah, I guess it is quite different and more of a rock thing. Most people know me as a rhythm player with a clean sound. But I've been playing lead guitar

resolution. I actually got to talk to John Scofield about this stuff, asking how he always found these interesting notes. And he told me that a lot of the time he'll find a melodic shape he likes, move it back a fret and then come back when he wants to resolve. It creates this cool effect. Guitar players love shapes... we often use these shapes to the point where we get stuck in them. So maybe don't do that, but definitely try to add in some more chromatic tension and see what happens. You might start inside, then go way outside and then wham, you find your way back.

***Let's Go* has an interesting fuzz tone for the intro, as well as super clean octave lines that are reminiscent of The Jackson 5's *I Want You Back*.**

That was a 335 into a Princeton Reverb that was cranked, but most of the fuzz was actually from overdriving the analogue board going direct to tape. If you crank into the red, you can overload your signal and find some interesting tones. And yeah, that's definitely a Jackson 5 thing, plus stuff like *Celebration* by Kool & The Gang. I love all that – it's the kind of thing that would be like a cowbell pattern, like

of pentatonic diads, similar to the stacking effect I mentioned earlier for *Smokeshow*. On *Let's Go* I'm using tenths, which is the third up an octave. It's a nice sound because it has the same harmonic information as just playing the thirds but it carries so much more because of the interval skip. It's almost like your brain fills out the blanks. Your ear is tricked into thinking it's thicker than it really is.

Where did you learn things like that?

I actually got a lot of that stuff from Dave Matthews, who I loved growing up. He used those tenths a lot, sometimes with an open D ringing at the same time, which is kinda similar to [The Beatles'] *Blackbird* – that kind of idea is based around tenths. It's a clever way of playing things that have weight but don't get in the way. Because on that track there's two keyboards, two guitars, bass and drums. I don't need to play full chords. If I did that, I'd just get in the way. It would be too thick and I would make everyone else feel like they can't fit in. Leaving out a lot of those extra notes is how I make sure I don't get in the way.

"MOST PEOPLE KNOW ME AS A RHYTHM PLAYER, BUT I'VE BEEN PLAYING LEAD SINCE I WAS A KID"

since I was a kid, too. I've played lead on sessions and in a lot of bands. I'm a Steely Dan nut and I'm a freak for John Scofield! Those were my two influences on this song. Just listen to Jay Graydon's solo on Steely Dan's *Peg* and then listen to my solo. I wasn't trying to hide it, that was a total homage to him.

That solo also features some interesting concepts in G Mixolydian, with a few chromatic twists...

Yeah, there's a descending modal lick in there, going down in G Mixolydian with some chromatics thrown in at the end for a bit of tension and release – which, again, I got from the *Peg* solo. It's an interesting shape to move but it also resolves on strong notes, ones which are modal and have that sense of

a party percussion thing, but on guitar you can give it a note! It still adds that fun, driving and party feel. And because I'm playing the tonic, it's so non-threatening harmonically! Everything can move around it freely. I'll either do that move on the tonic or the fifth of whatever key I'm in, because in modern music, there will be a root and fifth hanging out anyway.

The main theme of the song has these climbing diads on the low E and G strings which leave a lot of sonic space in between...

There are different types of diads you can use, close interval ones or distant interval ones. Anything in the same octave I consider to be a close interval diad, from thirds, fourths and fifths to sixths and sevenths... the latter of which I rarely use! I also use a lot

The song *Memories* covers a lot of ground considering it's all electric guitar.

I wanted to create a song that's only guitar, so came up with the main chordal riff which I panned left and right. There are the slight nuances you get because you've played them twice, almost like an effect. In the centre I played basically the same riff but without the scratch notes, playing only the staccato chords. All the extra 'chukka' stuff, the Nile Rodgers stuff, is on the sides. I'm using three takes to make this rhythm guitar driver. Then I played a 'bassline' down the bottom of the neck, panned left and right and then taken down an octave in the centre. It sounded different to an octave pedal with the mix at 50% because you have three different recordings of the same person playing the same part. It creates an interesting groove.

KOOL CUSTOMER

"The Jackson 5,
Kool & The Gang.
I love all that..."



PUSH THE BUTTON!

How Cory Wong made his signature Strat stand out in the Fender line-up

There are numerous reasons why the Cory Wong Stratocaster definitely feels more like a signature instrument than other artist models. First of all there's its size – with a body slightly smaller than typical modern Strats, which Cory feels provides exactly the kind of sustain and attack he's looking for. Then there's the fourth position 'panic button' to ensure the pickup selector can be overridden. "Whenever I'm playing I knock my selector out, so I needed that panic button to make sure my tone doesn't change!" Cory laughs. "I actually have it taped on my Highway One, so I literally can't go to positions one, two and three without removing the tape."

That's not the only Fender first, either. The signature Strat also includes a hair tie within its case candy, which Wong fits onto his springs to reduce unwanted ambience. "I have a hair tie on all my Strats because the sympathetic vibrations of the strings create a little bit of reverberant gushy noise," he continues. "A lot of people love that noise, but I'm more of a precision rhythm person. I like my notes to hit hard without the extra hangover."

→ Then I came up with the melodies and again, panned them hard left and right with extra spices in the middle to make it more interesting. It's the same idea with *Smokeshow*. I create these little guitar sections – like in an orchestra you have the violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, the woodwinds. I was thinking, 'These are my cellos and violas and these are the violins!' I was orchestrating my own parts just like that.

So what exactly are we hearing on this album in terms of gear?

The majority of it was done using my signature Stratocaster and, of course, my Highway One. There are a couple of songs like *Disco De Lune* and *You Got To Be You* where I used [bandmate] Theo Katzman's [Gibson] ES-335, the same one as on *Let's Go*. A lot of this was done while Vulfpeck were on tour. We didn't have a studio with all our gear. We'd find somewhere available with what we had on us, so it was really just those three guitars. The main pedals were my Wampler Ego Compressor for certain parts, my signature Jackson Audio Optimist dual overdrive, a Vertex Ultraphonix and a Strymon BigSky. But I actually went DI for most of it, though there was an amp in the room instead of using headphones. We didn't record the amp, we mainly ran the DI through my signature Neural DSP plug-in. I even got the gain for the *Smokeshow* solo from that plug-in. It comes with two overdrives, one is like a TS-808 and the other is like a Klon. I just turned them both on with default settings, which is



"I WANTED TO CREATE A SONG THAT'S ONLY GUITAR"

exactly why I developed that plug-in. You want to be ready to rock.

You've gotten a lot of mileage out of your Highway One Strat – which goes to show a cheap Fender can go a long way indeed...

Oh yeah! Over the years I made a few mods to my Highway One to get up it to a pro level, but you really don't have to buy a ten thousand dollar guitar to sound incredible. My signature is a bit different to my Highway One, although they look similar with a rosewood neck, pearloid pickguard and exact same finish, the specs aren't the same. As a teenager, did I want a nicer, higher-end Strat? Sure, but I couldn't afford one, so I got the \$300 Highway One and it worked great for me. A guitar should have the sound you are looking for right away. I'm going to sound like me pretty much no matter what guitar I play, but certain ones just instantly feel right with me too. You need to find the instrument that draws out your creativity in the most effortless way, and it doesn't need to be super expensive.

It's interesting how your strumming hand never seems to stop – it's quite the engine!

That's a great metaphor there, my right

hand is constantly going like the pistons running in an engine! No matter what, I'm always going down and up in sixteenth notes and my hand is always moving, whether I hit any notes or not. I never have to think about the strumming pattern, I think about the rhythm. That's what dictates how I play the pattern.

Which exercise do you think helped you most when it comes to this side of playing?

There's one I used to learn how to accent – so I'd start strumming against muted strings, accenting and emphasising on the first strum downbeat four times. Then I'd shift the accent to the other sixteenth note beats (1 e & a, and so on). After that I'd do the same but playing a chord where the accents are. It helped me learn where all the subdivisions are and the coordination needed from both hands to make it happen. The most important thing is to be 100% consistent in your engine. You want absolute timing precision and accuracy. Some people might think that means robotic but no, it doesn't. You get feel from using downstrokes and upstrokes, which inherently sound different, as well as when you attack and hit the strings. It all comes down to groove.

TELE PARTY!

Cory Wong on his latest acquisition from Fender...

"Everyone knows I'm a Strat guy, they just work perfectly for what I do," Cory says, when we point out it's rare to find a picture of him holding any other kind of instrument. But what are the modern funk hero's thoughts on the other Fender favourite?

"I recently had them make me a Tele with my signature Strat design spec, just for fun!" he grins. "I was playing this Nash Tele for a little while, but wanted a good Fender one. So I got an American Ultra series Tele and I liked it so much I asked Fender to make me a one-off with the same nitro finish, colour and parts as my Strat. So that's the guitar I've been really excited about playing recently. It looks, sounds and feels incredible!"

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Robben Ford

Interview Grant Moon Portraits Will Ireland

HE'S A MASTER CRAFTSMAN WHO HAS PLAYED FOR LEGENDS SUCH AS MILES DAVIS AND JONI MITCHELL, AND CREATED A SERIES OF BRILLIANT SOLO ALBUMS. FOR ROBBEN FORD, ONE GOLDEN RULE APPLIES: "TONE HAS ALWAYS BEEN NUMBER ONE TO ME."

G

uitarist, singer, songwriter and occasional saxophonist, Robben Ford got his break in 1969 when, aged 18, he and his band were recruited to back blues harmonica maestro Charlie Musselwhite. Ford went on to play guitar for Joni Mitchell with elite jazz fusion collective, The L.A. Express, to play sideman for Miles Davis, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, and to grace records by legendary figures such as Michael McDonald,

Bonnie Raitt and Larry Carlton. But it's through his solo career that Ford's own legend has truly grown.

With the heart and soul of a bluesman and the brain and fingers of a jazzier, he has a back catalogue packed with high-grade blues/rock records such as *The Inside Story*, *Talk To Your Daughter* and – featuring his must-hear 90s group The Blue Line – the Grammy-nominated *Mystic Mile* and *Robben Ford And The Blue Line*.

Now 69, Ford's on a hot streak through recent acclaimed releases *Into The Sun*, *Purple House* and *The Sun Room*, and he continues with *Pure*, a masterclass in blues, funk and – via the title track – exotic, world-tinged guitar alchemy. He shares a lifetime of musical wisdom online at robbenfordguitardojo.com, and speaks to *Total Guitar* from his Nashville home to offer advice on how to be the best musician you can be...

With both melody and lyrics, that first line is all-important. I'm pretty good with melodies, they come spontaneously to me. The opening line of *Pure* has a lot of chromatics in there, and I just sort of played it... As far as I'm

concerned, it's the same way writing melodies and lyrics – when you have your first line, basically the song is there. It's there to be written, you just have to follow that musical thread out.

Make tone your first priority.

Tone has always been number one to me. It needs to sound good first, otherwise, who cares what the notes are?! My first musical hero was Paul Desmond [sax player for The Dave Brubeck Quartet; writer of *Take Five*]. *Take Five* is beautiful – that sound just went into my body. With the guitar, when I heard The Paul Butterfield Blues Band I wanted to play like [guitarist] Mike Bloomfield, and to *sound* like him. The two go hand in hand. Bloomfield was a playing a '63 Telecaster. Around 1965 I went into a music store and bought a Guild Starfire III. It was semi-hollow – far from a Tele! – but when I played it, it sounded like Mike Bloomfield to me. There must have been a connection that you bring out of the guitar. I felt like, 'Wow, I'm getting the sound I want!'





➔ Learn your chords, then the scales to solo over them.

I learned chords out of Mickey Baker's [classic 1955 instructional book] *Complete Course In Jazz Guitar*. They're all on page one and two. I applied those chords directly to Chicago blues music, which is what I was playing at the time with Charlie Musselwhite. Instead of just the straight-up nine or seven chords, I started using altered chords [see boxout]. Charlie liked jazz and didn't mind hearing these behind him. I was still just playing pentatonic and blues licks, so then I learned the scales that go over those chords. I just banged away at it the same way I had the pentatonic scale – no teachers, no lessons. I just tried to play something that sounded like something I'd heard. I have big ears, you know? I'd listen to what I'd heard other people play and would start to recognise the scale, because I knew it now. I can't play jazz like great players like Kurt Rosenwinkel can, but I have enough of an understanding of harmony, chords and scales. For me, it's more spice to my blues playing.

Work on your rhythm playing (and listen to Hendrix...)

In the beginning, I was a bad rhythm guitar player, but The Blue Line was usually a trio – I was the only soloist, I was singing everything and I had to be the chordal instrument, so I started to become a better rhythm player. For my record *Supernatural* [1999] I was listening to Hendrix for inspiration, especially *May This Be Love* [from *Are You Experienced*]. I started playing something on the guitar like that, it felt pretty natural to do, and that became a really important thing from that point on. My influence up to that point had been straight-up blues or jazz, but I started really getting into that more fluid, strumming, Hendrix style of rhythm playing. I just love it, it's so *guitaristic*.

Approach music like a composer and an arranger, not just a guitarist.

I've always thought like a composer. You have to have a song, or you've got

nothing to play! I learned that in the mid-70s, through my early work with [fusion sax great] Tom Scott – an excellent composer – and The L.A. Express, and Joni Mitchell. I learned through them that if *this* instrument's doing this, then you don't do that [on guitar], as it's already being done. If *this* instrument's playing low, then you play something high. I learned that in my twenties, thankfully, and always carried it with me. It's something people don't always think about, young guitar players especially.

Right hand, left hand...

I never really thought a lot about the right hand, it just sort of happens. I used to play a lot more with my fingers than I do now, but I've

FORD FOCUS

"You have to have a song," Robben says, "or you've got nothing to play!"

gone back to using the pick more. Early on, I did practise back and forth [alternate] picking, up and down, but then I'll play things differently – sometimes I'll start with an upstroke, sometimes a downstroke. I don't always know what's going to happen! As far as my left hand technique, I use a lot of hammer-ons and pull-offs, and I use all four fingers. That's something some people skip – they'll use just three fingers, but I made an effort to use all four.

When playing with another musician, be sure to listen.

I've sat down with another guitar player to jam in a teaching situation, and when they start playing that person is louder than I am, and not listening to me at all.



"I USE A LOT OF HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS. SOME PEOPLE USE JUST THREE FINGERS, BUT I USE ALL FOUR"



I understand that, because you're just full of energy and trying to do something. So I might simply ask them: 'Are you listening to me at all?' Make sure you're listening to what's around you. It does take time to learn, and you have to be in situations to learn it. I was lucky being with Tom [Scott] and all those studio musicians. They knew how to *accompany*, they were amazing.

Your equipment reflects your 'voice'.

I have a 100-watt Dumble Overdrive Special, and a 2x12 speaker cabinet. I'd actually just bought the Dumble when I worked with Mike [Michael McDonald, in the mid-80s]. I'd go to recording dates with that, because that's what I did, and it took me a very long time to learn, 'Okay, this is *this* type of music and requires this or that guitar, and a smaller amp in the recording studio!' But I've been a solo artist for such a long time, people usually call on me to be myself. I have a voice, you know? On *White Rock Beer... 8 Cents* [from *Pure*] that's the Dumble cranked up with

ALTERED FIVE CHORDS

The strongest harmonic pull in any progression is from the V to the I chord, and this solid sense of resolution means you can get creative with the V chord itself and add jazzy 'altered' notes, without jeopardising the music's flow. In jazz you can treat any dominant 7th chord (ie chords with a major 3rd and flat 7th) as the V chord of its corresponding I. So, as C is the fifth note in the scale of F, so C7 can be treated as the fifth chord of F.

"So if you're playing a blues in the key of C," Ford explains, "the C can become the five chord for your next chord, the F, so you just treat the C as an altered five chord, and then treat the five chord [G7] as an altered five chord [of C]. Traditional blues does not do that. It's that altered five chord where the jazz influence really comes in."

Typical altered chords are the 7#9, 7b9, 7#5, 7b5 and combinations thereof. So next time you play a blues, try to hear that fifth relationship between your 7 chords, and get creative with these altered flavours.

THE DOUBLE-DIMINISHED SCALE

"I use the double-diminished scale all the time," says Ford, "and it's something I still work at. It's become a big part of my thing, but you don't hear much about it with anybody else."

Also known as the half/whole diminished scale, this tasty run contains eight notes in half-step/whole-step intervals, so in C it's: C Db, D# E F# G A Bb. Notice it contains the notes of the C7 triad (C E Bb), the C's fifth (G) and sixth (A), but along with these it gives you 'altered' notes: Db (the b9 of C), D# (the #9), F# (the #11). Try adding a few licks from this scale into your blues, particularly when moving from the I to the IV chord (in C, from C7 to F7) and in your turnaround from V to I (G7 to C7). Those non-diatonic, 'altered' tones will give your blues a dash of jazz spice.

THE ALTERED SCALE

The altered scale (aka Superlocrian mode) is the seventh mode of the melodic minor scale, and because it's packed with flats and sharps, it'll work over altered chords. "Over an altered five in a blues," says Ford, "you can use the melodic minor, but a half step up. So if you're playing over a G altered chord, you'd play Ab, melodic minor (Ab Bb B C# D# F G)." Just remember G would be your root note here.

THE PENTATONIC SCALE AS AN 'ALTERED' SCALE

Ford notes that the good old minor pentatonic scale (in C: C Eb F G Bb) also conceals altered notes, i.e. tones that aren't in the standard chords played in a I-IV-V blues: "If you're playing the C pentatonic scale over the G7 chord, and you play the minor third of C [Eb] and then the flat seven [Bb], you've just played the altered fifth and the raised nine of the G chord. So if you're playing the pentatonic scale in the key of C against a G, before you even know it you're playing altered tones."



the '54 Les Paul Gold Top converted to '59 specs. Best PAFs I ever heard, flametop on it and everything. I use a Paul Reed Smith on *Blues For Lonnie Johnson*, and the solo on *Dragon's Tail* is done on my 1965 Epiphone Riviera. The Riviera my 1960 Tele were my road guitars for about two and a half years, but I've found myself moving back toward the Les Paul. The melody to *Pure* is played on a cool '64 SG, plugged into a 15-watt Little Walter 'King Arthur' head and a single 12 – it's like a Tweed, but it's *cranked*. That's why that melody is just kind of screaming out of there. I do like to play loud!

Be generous with your knowledge.

It makes me very happy if I'm teaching a masterclass and I see the light bulb go off over somebody's head. Somebody might tell me, 'I never understood the modes until just now', just because of how I put it. Theory can seem so mysterious. And whenever I hear somebody who can really play the guitar, that's very exciting. If I can be of service, I'm happy to help...

Slash

THE TOTAL GUITAR INTERVIEW

In 1987 Slash changed the face of rock music with Guns N' Roses. In 2022 he's still playing rock 'n' roll as it's meant to be – with edge, grind and a bluesy swagger – now, of course, balancing GN'R commitments with Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators. Read on as we speak to the guitar icon ahead of new Conspirators release, *4*, as he talks about writing and recording, using less gain in his tone, his love of the Gibson Flying V, and why he'd rather “keep it rock 'n' roll” than conform to what's popular. We'll also take you through some of the lesser-known highlights of Slash's \$2 million guitar collection, and take a look at some trademark Slash style playing techniques. We've even produced three awesome GN'R video lessons for you.

Turn the page and let's get started!



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“I WANT TO STICK TO WHAT EXCITES ME RATHER THAN CONFORM TO WHAT’S POPULAR AT THE MOMENT. I’D RATHER KEEP IT ROCK ‘N’ ROLL.”

Slash made his new album with **Myles Kennedy and The Conspirators** in just five days. He’s also working on the long-awaited new Guns N’ Roses record.

But the guitar hero admits:

“I’d be lying if I said I don’t feel the pressure in this age of technical expression and fluidity...”

Slash



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Slash



H

e was just 21 when Guns N' Roses' debut album *Appetite For Destruction* was released – the record that made him famous as a guitar hero. And all these years later, as Slash speaks to TG via a Zoom call from his home in LA, it's evident that his love of rock 'n' roll is as strong as it's ever been.

When he talks about 4, the new album from Slash featuring Myles Kennedy and The Conspirators, he's thrilled about how it turned out, with an energy created from having the whole group playing together in the studio. "Recording live is something I've always wanted to do," he says. And when he talks about how things are working out in Guns N' Roses – seven years since he and bassist Duff McKagan reconciled with singer Axl Rose and rejoined the band – he says he couldn't be happier.

4 is also the first release on Gibson Records, a fitting honour for a player who has been synonymous with the Les Paul since *Appetite For Destruction* defined Guns N' Roses as the greatest rock band of the late 80s.

In that era, when hard rock music was getting increasingly slick and safe, GN'R sounded genuinely dangerous. Slash's lead playing had a grind that over-polished shredders couldn't touch, but his melodic hooks in *Sweet Child O' Mine* and *Paradise City* were irresistible. 35 years and 30 million sales later, it's quite probably the greatest rock debut of all time.

After exiting from Guns N' Roses in 1995, Slash found success second time around in the 2000s with the supergroup Velvet Revolver, co-starring Duff McKagan, ex-GN'R drummer Matt Sorum and former Stone Temple Pilots frontman Scott Weiland. And again, it was thanks in no small part to more unforgettable Slash melodies on hits songs such as *Slither* and *Fall To Pieces* that Velvet Revolver became a multi-platinum act.

In the wake of that band's break-up, Slash's self-titled 2010 solo album saw him collaborating with an array of superstar vocalists including Ozzy Osbourne, Motörhead's Lemmy and the Black Eyed Peas' Fergie. But it was his chemistry with Alter Bridge singer Myles Kennedy that really turned heads, and soon they coalesced into Slash featuring Myles Kennedy and The Conspirators. This is now the most stable group line-up of the guitarist's career, and his commitment to this project is such that he never considered giving it up when the Guns N' Roses reunion happened. He just has to juggle

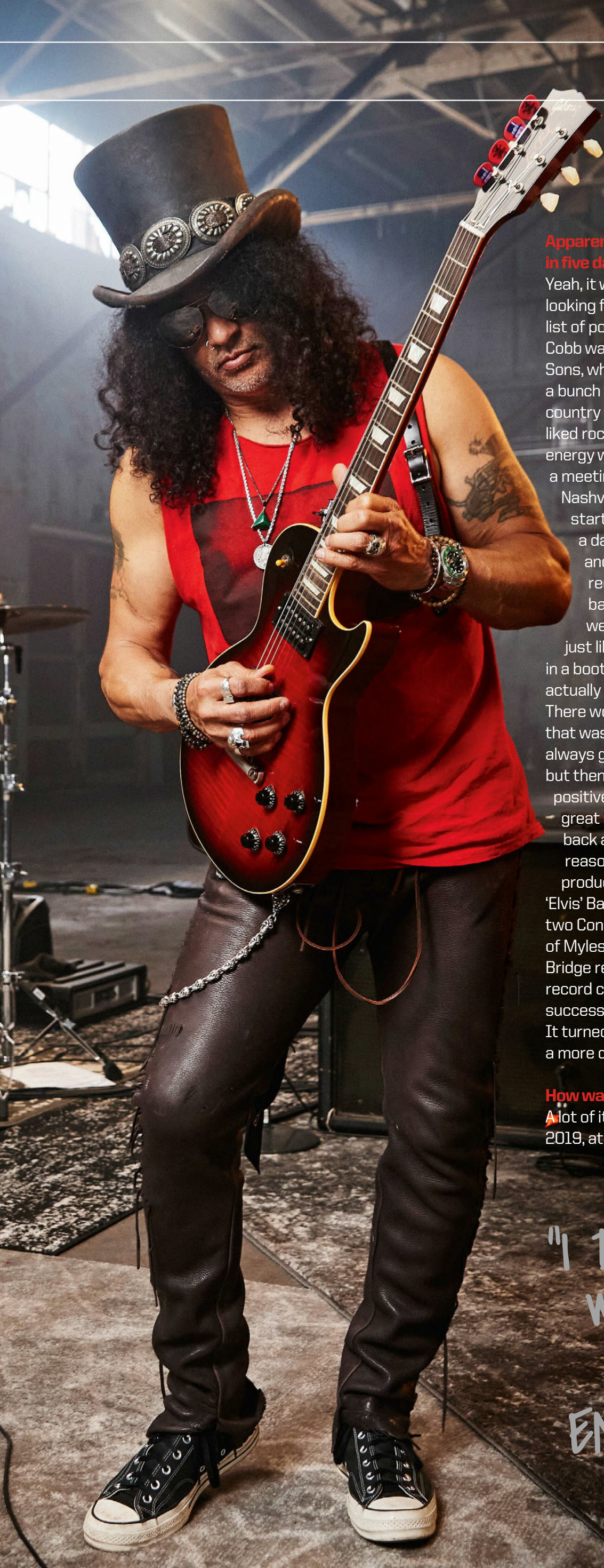
the two as best he can – and right now, he admits, "it's pretty busy".

GN'R's latest tour wrapped in October 2021 and there are more dates this summer, including massive outdoor shows in London and throughout Europe. A new EP is released this month featuring *Hard Skool*, one of two recently released tracks originally recorded during Slash and Duff's absence for the 2008 album *Chinese Democracy* but re-recorded with the current line-up. They have also begun working on a new album – the first since *Chinese Democracy*, and the first with Slash and Duff since the covers album, *The Spaghetti Incident?*, in 1993.

With so much riding on a new Guns N' Roses album, this is one subject on which Slash remains tight-lipped, stating simply and diplomatically: "We put two songs out already and there's more stuff coming." But for the rest of our conversation he is open, energised and passionate as he discusses his dual roles with GN'R and The Conspirators, his gear and inspirations, and this new album on which his guitar tone is possibly the cleanest and most direct he has ever recorded, revealing all the detail in his ferocious chops.

You've now played for longer and made more albums with this band than any other line-up. How do you feel about that?

That's funny! I've never thought about that. New milestones, right? I hooked up with these guys in 2010 and we've just had a great time of it. Even when I got back with Guns N' Roses, which was a pretty monumental thing, I didn't want to let that go. I just managed to thread the needle and keep it going.



Apparently you recorded the album in five days?

Yeah, it was quick. When we started looking for a producer I had a very short list of potential rock 'n' roll guys. Dave Cobb was one of those. He'd done Rival Sons, which is a band I really like, and a bunch of really cool down-to-earth country stuff. We discussed how we liked rock 'n' roll performed live and the energy with that. It was like it was a meeting of minds. We went out to Nashville, set the gear up and just started playing. We did two songs a day over the course of five days and that was basically the whole record sans overdubs and background vocals. We used wedges as monitors and it was just like playing in a club. Myles was in a booth right next to us, but I could actually see him and he just sang along. There would be two or three takes and that was it. I think Myles thought, 'I can always go back and redo this or that', but then he was the first one to test positive for Covid. The vocals were great so there was no need to go back and redo them. One of the reasons I wanted a different producer was because Elvis [Michael 'Elvis' Baskette], who produced the last two Conspirators records, also did both of Myles' solo records and all the Alter Bridge records. I didn't want another record coming out in such close succession that had the same sound. It turned out that you couldn't get a more different approach to vocals.

How was this album written?

A lot of it was written on the road in 2019, at sound checks and stuff, which

is how we normally do it. When Covid happened it stalled our routine. Normally we come off the road, do some work on the songs, then get into pre-production and go back in the studio and do the record. Covid delayed all that, so I did demos of all the material that we had plus a lot of new material. I did the computer drum machine kind of deal, playing them with my fingers, sent it out to Myles and he put down some vocals. Todd (Kerns) finally flew in and put bass on the demos, so that's how the stuff came together.

Was any of it written in the studio?

When I do demos, all my arrangements are never completely finished. You'll have an intro and a verse and a chorus. You might have even a middle. Whatever, it's always open to change. When we go into pre-production we'll jam everything out to the point where I think this is reasonably finished. Once we get in the studio and you're playing the arrangement in earnest some things will change. There was a couple different things that happened. *Fall Back To Earth* really developed. *April Fool* was only three parts that really weren't fine-tuned and Dave Cobb helped us do that.

Your guitar tone on this record sounds a bit cleaner. Was that deliberate?

There's a big difference in sound when you play with the band compared to when you mic up an amp in a booth and go into the control room and dial the sound in that way. It was just a much more direct, raw approach. The sound was cleaner just because of the way that I set up, standing right in front of it.

"I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH PLAYING FAST AS LONG AS THERE'S AN EMOTIONAL CONTENT TO IT"

Slash

➔ **You don't need as much gain because the sustain comes from the volume and closeness to the amp.**

Yeah, it's just a different trajectory, the way that the sound is coming out and the way that you're perceiving it. Plus on a couple songs I used a Flying V which I love because it's got great output but it is demonstrably cleaner than my Derrig guitar [the *Appetite For Destruction* Les Paul]. *C'est La Vie* and *Actions Speak Louder Than Words* were both played with the Flying V. It's a Hendrix '69 reissue Flying V. It's f*cking great, and it works great for the talk box.

You and the talk box have a great history going back to *Appetite For Destruction*.

It was fun to break it out. It was sort of an afterthought. I wrote it like on regular guitar and in pre-production it dawned on me that that riff would be great with a talk box. The first talk box I ever got was when I was about 16. A friend of mine's mom who in a band had one in her garage, and she gave it to me. The first thing that I ever heard the voice box on that really stuck out to me was Peter Frampton (on *Show Me The Way*), and then it was Aerosmith, a live version of *Walk This Way* off the *Live Bootleg* record. I came up in an era where talk box was around. A lot of people over saturate it now, and it's just more of a tonal effect as opposed to really enunciating with it. I definitely like a cleaner, buzzier old-school sound.

The reverb sounds great. How did you get that?

That was just the room! We discussed Glyn Johns and some of the records he engineered that were really live records, like *Led Zeppelin II*. That was basically it, going in and just setting up live in the room.

What was the amp?

Just a [Marshall 2555] Jubilee 100 watt into straight cab with [Celestion] Vintage 30s. I go through phases. I used the Jubilee for a long time

with Guns N' Roses and then I sort of went off it when I was working with Velvet Revolver. I went through a couple different Marshalls, and then I really came back around to Jubilees on the last tour.

On *April Fool*, the two guitars play variations on the same riff, panned left and right, similar to how you used to play with rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin in Guns N' Roses' early days. How do you develop those parts?

I'll come up with an idea and start jamming it with the guys. Unless I have a specific part, they just make up whatever. Frank [Sidoris, *Conspirators* rhythm guitarist] just goes along with it in his own fashion. We don't spend a lot of time analyzing the guitar parts as long as it works. Sometimes it inspires different ideas for syncopation, but for the most part we just start playing and people make up whatever they want until it starts to jump.

Is that a sitar on *Spirit Love*?

That was the first time I've had the electric sitar. I can't remember what the brand is but I might have had it since the 90s. I've definitely had it since Velvet Revolver. I just never used it because the sitar has become such a cliché in rock and roll that it's very iffy whether it's gonna work. I recorded it on my Les Paul, but then I went back and overdubbed it with the sitar, through the Marshall exactly the way my guitar was set up. It sounds like the speakers are about to blow up! It was a cool sound and it doesn't sound like the Beatles or anything.

Is the riff on *Fill My World* a nod to *Sweet Child O' Mine*?

I know what you mean now that you've said it, but it didn't come from that. It's that kind of single note riff that's got a rotation thing to it, but it wasn't intended to sound like anything in particular. I was not sure if I was going to show it to the band because it was this ballady type thing, but I sent it to



"GIBSON
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IZZY RULES!

Slash on his magical partnership with GN'R's Izzy Stradlin and with his current GN'R foil Richard Fortus

On *Appetite For Destruction* was it planned that you and Izzy played variations on the same riffs?

No, it never was. I think playing with Izzy is what started the trend to have one guy playing his main part and the other one playing something off of that. That loose thing was just the way that I play with other guitar players. The other guy does his thing and I do my thing and hopefully the twain meet on the same ground somehow. Izzy was such a unique guitar player unto himself. Everything he did was so simplified that if he had a riff I would take it into another place. My approach to it, inspired by whatever he was doing, would make it a bit more complex or more driving. If I had a riff he would just find an off-the-cuff way of playing it without having to play all the notes. It just worked. There was never much discussion or sitting around working stuff out, and I just never have done since then.

Do you play differently with The Conspirators' Frank Sitaris compared with current GN'R guitarist Richard Fortus?

I mean, I play the way I play with Richard as well. He just does his thing, so it's the same dynamic. Some things are a little bit different when it comes to *Chinese Democracy* stuff. I learned parts from listening to whoever was playing, Bumblefoot or Buckethead. If there's a particular part, I want to play it to sound like that. Richard would come up and go, 'Actually, this is how he did it.' Other than that I mean we just do our thing.



ROCK SOLID

Slash and Myles Kennedy, co-conspirators since 2010



Myles and he came up with this really great melody so it became a song. The riff is a mix of open strings and fretted notes and there's little bends in there, too.

The album is the first release from Gibson Records. How did you hook up with them?

I have no idea how long Gibson was thinking about starting a record company prior to us coming together for this record. I'm my own record company and I find distributors in different territories to put the record out. I was talking to my manager about who we're going to use this time around and he mentioned Gibson wanting to do a record company. I had to think about it for a second because that almost sounds too good to be true. I couldn't think of any negative side to it. I know the people at Gibson so I know how much they put into it and how much integrity the company has. I just couldn't go wrong doing it through Gibson. We partner on it an equal share, so we both have to work hard to make it happen. I'm actually very excited to see who else they sign.

Now you're playing with Guns N' Roses again as well as the Conspirators, do you use separate gear for each band?

There's definitely guitars that I use with Guns N' Roses that I don't use with the Conspirators because they're signature guitars for certain Guns songs, but there's not a conscious effort to separate the two. I use what I need to do the gig, so I take a lot of the same stuff out with both bands, especially

effects-wise because it's such minimal effects anyway. Jessica, my '87 main Les Paul, I use primarily with Guns just because that's such a Guns N' Roses thing. I experiment with a lot of different stuff with the Conspirators.

How is it different playing your old songs with Guns N' Roses again versus playing the same songs with Conspirators?

There's a certain chemistry that Duff, Axl and I have that goes back to the very beginning. That's the magic ingredient that nobody could necessarily put a finger on what it is. That happens instantly when I'm working with Guns. I have great chemistry with the Conspirators but when we do a Guns N' Roses song it doesn't have that particular spark to it. I realised that as soon as we started rehearsing. There really is a magic that happens with that combination of people that is different than doing the same material with Myles, Todd and Brent [Fitz, drums], even though those guys do play the sh*t out of the Guns N' Roses stuff. As soon as I rejoined Guns I didn't have that need to play Guns stuff in the Conspirators. We only play one Guns song in the set now. I don't know what song we're gonna play this time around. The Conspirators holds up on its own, which is great.

Have you put your own stamp on the Chinese Democracy parts?

Yeah, if there's a signature part like the hook or something, I want to be recognisable, but the way I go about playing it is probably entirely different

from how the original guys played. It's definitely my own interpretation.

You've said in the past you weren't the biggest fan of shred guitar. You can play extremely fast but you don't sound like a shredder. Do you have any thoughts on why?

I don't have an issue with playing fast. When I'm talking about Eddie Van Halen or Alvin Lee, there's a lot of great fast guitar players but they have an emotional quality. It feels like it's they're doing it for a reason, there's a there's a feel to it, and it's part of the energy of the tune. It's not playing fast for the sake of playing fast, and it's not playing technical for the sake of playing technical. Like, 'how many tricks and how many techniques can I put into this?' sort of loses the plot for me. When I play fast, it really is an energy thing. I would actually like to tone it back sometimes, especially when I'm doing solos live, but I get so taken away. Things get sped up because you're just really aggressive and you're emoting, like an emotional thing that just calls for that. That's where it comes from. I don't have a problem with playing fast as long as there's an emotional content to it.

Your lead playing has always sounded so distinctive. Why is that?

I take that as a compliment. I'd be lying if I said I don't feel the pressure of all these kids standing in front of you or listening to your record and expecting you to f*cking keep up with the Joneses in this age of a lot of real technical expression and fluidity. I've seen some amazing f*cking techniques. They remind me of BMX tricks, and the time it must take to execute them. It always has been like that, especially in the 80s man. It was shred city in LA. I mean, f*cking Yngwie came to town and it was like, okay... I just don't feel like I want to go that direction. I wanna still feel like what turns me on when I listen to other people playing. I want to stick to what excites me rather than trying to conform to what might be popular at the moment. I'd rather keep it rock 'n' roll.

"ON A COUPLE OF SONGS I PLAYED A HENDRIX '69 REISSUE FLYING V. IT'S F**KING GREAT!"

GUITAR SHOPPING WITH SLASH!

Thinking of buying a Les Paul? Take Slash's advice on finding the right one...

I've learned to be really flexible with a guitar: neck, weight, to some extent hardware—I'm a little fussy over pickups but basically a good, functional Gibson, whatever model, is something I can probably be comfortable with. The biggest issue for me is how each one of them sounds. I really admire people that can pick up any guitar no matter what it sounds like and feel comfortable with it. I can have 10 of the same model, same year – I'll pick out a string of guitars and they all sound different. I can pick one up and go "no, that doesn't work". I can do that for five guitars and then find one and go "oh, this one!"

A good example of that was when Gibson did the Joe Perry '59 reissue, the Slash/Joe Perry guitar that he owned and that I gave back to him. They did a replica of that. I went down to the showroom to get one. They had 30 or 40 custom shop guitars at the showroom in Hollywood. I played probably a dozen of them to find the one that sounds right. It's a specific sound. If it's too bright it will bother me, or if it's too muddy on the bottom.

It's a myth that weight is the most important thing. You can find a light one that sounds great, or you can find a light one that sounds terrible. Same with the heavy guitars. A really heavy Les Paul, you pick it up and think, 'A really dense guitar, this is going to sound huge?', and it can sound really thin. It's really hard to predict what a guitar is really gonna sound like.

PLAY LIKE Slash

Take a look at Slash's key playing techniques to get inside his style

Guitars and backing Charlie Griffiths

If you're interested in learning about Slash's playing, it's worth taking a minute to think about his early Guns N' Roses style and which elements still feature in his solo material today. Compared to their 80s contemporaries, there was a rawness to GN'R's sound, and a punky, blues-tinged swagger courtesy of Slash and rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin. Today,

Frank Sidoris takes rhythm duties alongside the hatted one in the Conspirators, but that raw swagger remains: a looseness and behind-the-beat attitude – and this is what you should aim for. Sure, metronomic timing is a good thing in principle, but really, it's all about feel when you play like Slash. Here are ten exercises on the techniques he's employed throughout his career. Let's rock!

1 EPIC MELODIC SOLOING

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=60

G⁵ D A⁵ G⁵ D C G/B A⁵ G⁵

Play 4 times

We're taking inspiration from *Knocking On Heaven's Door* and *November Rain* here in our short solo. The shape that opens both bars 1 and 3 is one of Slash's favourite melodic tricks, allowing him to switch between major pentatonic and pure major scale phrasing.

2 DORIAN DIADS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=140

A⁷

Play 4 times

This lick uses doublestops in the Dorian mode – a technique you can hear in Slash's 2022 track *Call Off The Dogs*. You can play the entire lick with just your first and third fingers by barring across each pair of strings. For added attitude use downstrokes to strum each note throughout.

3 BLUES-ROCK RIFFING

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=110

N.C. A⁵ N.C. B⁵ D⁵ A⁵ G⁵ A⁵ E⁵ N.C. Play 4 times

Here we're looking at how Slash uses 70s-style blues-rock riffs in tracks like *Mr. Brownstone* and recent single Kennedy/Conspirators single *The River Is Rising*. Use tight, palm-muted alternate picking for the opening notes, then let the A5 chord sustain, before muting the riff again. In bar 2, use pull-offs to smoothly play the bluesy notes.

4 FOUR-NOTE SEQUENCE

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=110

A⁵ D⁵ A⁵ D⁵ A⁵ Play 4 times

Slash frequently uses this kind of run, but perhaps most notably in the solo to *Sweet Child O' Mine*. Based in the E minor pentatonic scale (E G A B D), it's essentially a four-note pattern, repeating each time one note farther up the scale.

5 CONSTANT EIGHTH NOTE LICKS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=120

A C⁵ G/B A/C# D⁵ A/E Play 4 times

Slash has used constant eighth-note licks most famously in GN'R's *Sweet Child O' Mine*, on *No More Heroes* from 2012's *Apocalyptic Love* album, and, most recently, on *Fill My World* on latest release, *4*. If you can play an open D chord you'll get the idea - it's essentially the same shape moved higher up the neck.

6 COWBOY CHORDS

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=100

C Fadd⁹ G⁵ C N.C. Play 4 times

Clean-tone cowboy chords like these do figure in Slash's work, but mainly with Guns N' Roses. His later work with Myles Kennedy tends to feature more sophisticated harmony, for example in the opening to *Anastasia* and *Shots Fired*. The picking is a challenge here, so practise slowly, keeping your pick movements as small as possible.



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Slash

APPETITE FOR INSTRUCTION

TG takes a look at the cat in the hat's greatest riffs with GN'R and more

Video Jamie Hunt



Slash will always be known best for his work with Guns N' Roses, however, he's one of a rare breed of guitarist who has found success outside of the act that first made him famous. Whether with G N' R or his various other bands, Slash is *the* riffmeister general.

We're looking at three GN'R riffs here, spanning from the LA rockers' beginnings with 1987's *Welcome To The Jungle* and 1991's *Civil War* right up to latest release *Hard Skool*. All three tracks see Slash tuning down to E, standard, but we've presented our lessons in E to save you having to retune.



1 GUNS N' ROSES WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Appears at: 0:00-0:28

Tempo: 98 bpm

Key/scale: B minor pentatonic

Here's where it all began! For many, these were the first notes we ever heard Slash play: the opening notes of the first track on GN'R's debut album, and a riff that'd soon be many guitarists' favourite delay line. And regarding that delay, you'll want yours set to a dotted eighth note – the telltale sign being the first repeated note which falls on the fourth 16th note of the bar. You'll be playing a descending run through the B minor pentatonic scale (the scale notes are: B D E F# A B) plus a repeating open second string. The first three-note phrase goes B, open second string, B; the next goes A, open second string, A; then F#, second string, F#; then E, second string, E, before the final four notes go D, second string, B, second string.



2 GUNS N' ROSES CIVIL WAR

Appears at: 2:00-2:27

Tempo: 70 bpm

Key/scale: E minor

This riff from 1991's *Use Your Illusion II* is based in the E minor pentatonic scale (E G A B D), before wrapping up with a brief moment in E natural minor (E F# G A B C D) thanks to the inclusion of an F# note. It's all played in the open position, with the exception of those slides up the strings so it's really all about milking the whole tone bends on the third string and the smaller, bluesier bends on the first and second strings. Aim for a drawn out, vocal-like drawl with your bends and, like Slash, use a wah pedal to enhance the effect – it'll make a ton of difference. On that note, Slash is rocking the wah mainly with a quarter-note pulse, but listen out for variations, e.g., between 2:04 and 2:06 where there's a more gradual swell, and at 2:16 where he follows triplet timing.



3 GUNS N' ROSES HARD SKOOL

Appears at: 0:06-0:16

Tempo: 167 bpm

Key/scale: E minor

There are two guitar parts here, with Slash playing a diad lick over a lower, riffier line. This low riff begins with C5, B5 and E5 powerchords before a single-note line follows G, F#, G, B and A notes – all from the E natural minor scale (E F# G A B C D). Slash's lick also uses this scale but at times feels a bit more like a minor pentatonic riff thanks to some bigger intervals. It's played on the second and third strings between the 7th and 12th frets – and that means you'll be changing fret position a few times: the first part is phrased around 7th- and 8th-fret F# and G diads, before a move up to 8th- and 10th-fret G and A single notes with a 9th-fret E on the third string. Another shift up to the 11th and 12th frets to play B, B, and G wraps up the first cycle of the riff. On the repeat you'll move back to 7th and 9th frets instead of going up to the 12th.



BACKSLASH / FORWARD SLASH

Three more of our favourite
Slash moments

SLASH'S SNAKEPIT BEEN THERE LATELY

Appears at: 0:08-0:20

The lead single for sophomore Snakepit album *Ain't Life Grand* kicks off with this hard rocking four-bar riff. Fretting position is key. Play the first two bars in 3rd position, but by bar 3 be ready to shift between the 7th and 1st frets.

VELVET REVOLVER - SLITHER

Appears at: 0:27-0:41

Probably Slash's best known non-GN'R song, *Slither* features a rare venture into drop D tuning. This makes for easy one-finger powerchord shapes, but practise slowly - it's easy to lose your way during those position shifts.

SLASH FEAT. MYLES KENNEDY & THE CONSPIRATORS - FILL MY WORLD

Appears at: 0:00-0:32

After the opening bend from 4th to 5th fret on the second string, Slash targets the open first and second strings. Follow up with: 4th fret second string, 6th fret third string, 5th fret second string, 7th fret first string, 5th fret second string.

Slash

THE FORGOTTEN GEAR

If you thought he only played Les Pauls, check out these amazing highlights from Slash's \$2 million guitar collection

Words Jenna Scaramanga

BC RICH WARLOCK

Slash's main guitar before getting signed was this decidedly 80s beast, which appeared at 18 early GN'R club shows. It's immortalised on the live tracks from *GN'R Lies*, recorded in 1986. It was missing for 30 years before appearing at auction in 2016, where it fetched \$96,000.

GIBSON FLYING V

In TG's interview, Slash waxes lyrical about his '67 Hendrix reissue Flying V which appears on two tracks on new album *4*. Turns out he's got history with Vs, having used a phenomenally rare 1959 Korina model for lead parts on *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* and *Live And Let Die*.

GIBSON ES-335

Appearing only with Velvet Revolver, particularly for live versions of *The Last Fight*, was Slash's black 335, with block inlays and Les Paul Custom-style diamond headstock inlay. Uncovered humbuckers (black, of course), completed the Slash look.

TRAVIS BEAN 1000

These rare beasts have a neck and hollow body all milled from a single piece of aluminium, with a solid wood top. Slash's heroes Keith Richards and Joe Perry have both used one live. The aluminium's stinging resonance is great for slide, which Slash exploits on *Shine* from the second Slash's Snakepit album, *Ain't Life Grand*.

GUILD CROSSROADS DOUBLE-NECK

Slash owns at least four of these, but arriving in 1993 they came too late for Guns N' Roses' heyday. The Tele-inspired hollow body has an electro-acoustic upper neck and a lower neck with twin humbuckers. It's been recently seen on performances of *Anastasia*.



LES PAUL LEGEND

Slash will always associated with Gibson's classic singlecut. These are his best known...

DERRIG

When Slash's Jackson wasn't cutting it during the *Appetite* sessions, GN'R manager Alan Niven found a Les Paul replica made by luthier Kris Derrig. Unlikely as it may seem, if not for this twist of fate we might today associate Slash with a pointy headstock.

JESSICA

One of two Les Pauls Slash received on signing his first Gibson deal in '87, this standard is recognisable by its distinctive three-piece plain maple top. Featured on every GN'R tour to date, Jessica's headstock once snapped clean off during a neck bend.

'87 GOLDTOP

Slash's second '87 Les Paul was a goldtop. It was used on the *Use Your Illusion* world tour video, notably for his legendary rendition of the *Godfather* theme. It was stolen in the 90s by someone called Victoria, hence the name of his 2020 signature goldtop.

FENDER 1965 STRATOCASTER

Slash with a Strat seems wrong somehow, like when Michael Jordan played baseball. Still, Slash has called the Strat "hands down, probably one of the best, most versatile guitars there is." His Olympic white '65 model made it onto GN'R's *Yesterdays* and *So Fine* as well as Velvet Revolver's *Sucker Train Blues*.

FENDER 1956 TELECASTER

While the Strat gave *Sucker Train Blues* its solo, Slash opted for his '56 Telecaster for the rhythm parts. So, unbelievably, the first song on the first Velvet Revolver album does not feature a Gibson at all. Yeah, we don't know how to feel about that either.

BC RICH MOCKINGBIRD

Okay, maybe you did know Slash played this, appearing as it does in the video for GN'R's highest charting single, *You Could Be Mine*. He still whips it out live whenever he needs a whammy bar, and it featured heavily on Velvet Revolver's *Libertad* tour.

FENDER 1965 BASS VI

With its short scale and standard guitar tuning, the Fender Bass VI is popular with guitarists: George Harrison and Joe Perry played classic riffs on them. Maybe it's no surprise then that Slash got into them during his time playing in the Snakepit lineup.

GIBSON SG

Before Slash met his destiny in the Les Paul, he tried an SG. They were not soulmates. Arriving at the studio one day, Guns N' Roses' manager looked at their van and saw "a f*cking SG through the windscreen, neck-first." Still, Slash's SG rhythm track survived on *My Michelle*.





SOUND LIKE SLASH

A guide to the gear that'll get you a signature Slash tone

EPIPHONE SLASH LES PAUL STANDARD (£799)

There are countless Les Paul models available to buy, so why not opt for the one specced by Slash himself?

BOSS GE-7 (£89)

Slash used this reliable EQ for years to boost his solos. Push the upper mids and pull back the bass slightly for that cutting, almost nasal tone.

DUNLOP SLASH WAH (£174)

Slash's signature wah has an integrated distortion circuit. It's unclear how much he actually uses the distortion though, so you could economise with a regular Crybaby.



MARSHALL 2555X (£1100)

Slash has used many Marshalls but the Silver Jubilee has spent the most time in his touring rig. The 2525H version is more bedroom and wallet-friendly.

MXR CAE BOOST/LINE DRIVER (£99)

Slash's current favourite boost just slams the amp with clean signal to push it further into overdrive. Any clean boost can do this job, though this one is effective and well made.

MXR ANALOG CHORUS (£99)

Slash has used this to get his *Paradise City* clean tone live. He prefers the warmth of analogue chorus, and keeps the settings subtle.

IK MULTIMEDIA AMPLITUDE SLASH (£99)

Recording at home? This collection of amp, cab and effect models allow you to rock Slash's rig in the virtual environment!



Join us at the IGF Bath summer school 2022



We present an amazingly rich and varied programme packed with all the guitar things you always wanted to know and be able to play! Blues, rock, jazz, acoustic and much more!

Tutors include **Neville Marten, Jason Sidwell, Jon Bishop, Gianluca Corona, Chris Quinn, John Wheatcroft** and **Tolis Zavaliaris**

16-21 august

TOP 40 AND FUNK with Jason Sidwell



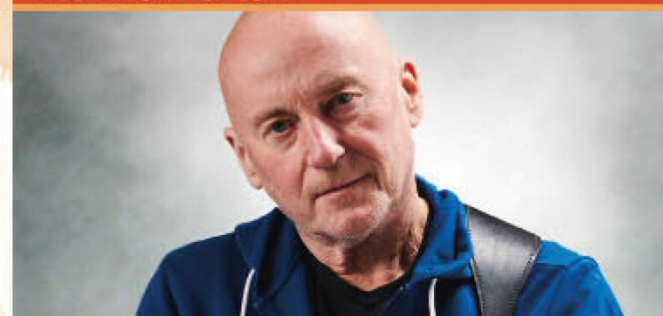
This course is for guitarists that desire strong abilities to suit being in a band. This will include picking approaches and band relevant chord voicings to modes for soloing and exciting repertoire analysis with a bias towards funk and RnB legends like Chic, James Brown and Michael Jackson.

JUMP BLUES with Chris Corcoran



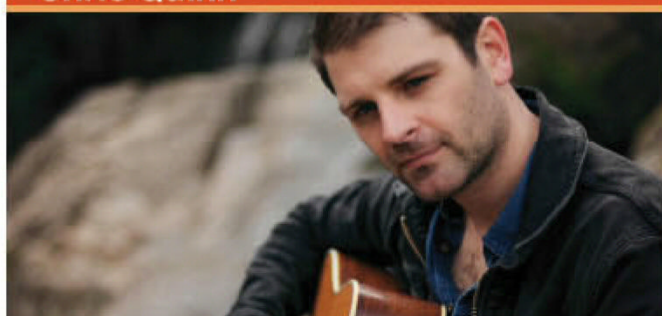
Referencing the big sound of '40s & '50s R&B and Jump Blues guitar, this course will give a fresh perspective on how to add drive, style and invention. Licks, riffs and phrases will be covered as well as the styles of guitarists like T-Bone Walker, Lonnie Johnson, Tiny Grimes and Barney Kessel.

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



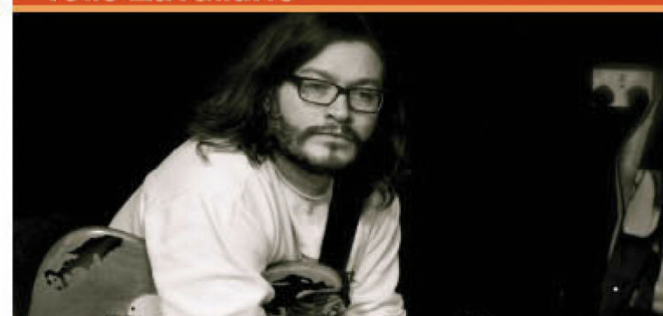
This course focuses on roots based music, ranging from folk to blues songs. You will study guitar techniques used by some of the greats of popular songwriting and also touch on useful fingerstyle methods and open tunings.

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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SANTANA SAMBA PA TI

TG takes a trip back to 1970
to look at this liquid gold
Latin rock instrumental

66

By 1970, the virtuosic musicianship of San Francisco Latin-rock fusion pioneers Santana had already garnered the kind of mainstream success most kids in their early 20s can only dream of. A genre-breaking set at the Woodstock Festival in '69 was followed by a Top 10 Billboard single, *Evil Ways*, and Top Five eponymous debut album.

The second album, *Abraxas*, recorded at San Francisco's Wally Heider Studio the following year, arguably trumped its predecessor with even more heady experimentation and refined blasts of the band's 'everything but the kitchen sink' influences. Just take a listen to *Oye Como Va*, *Incident At Neshabur* and this month's track, *Samba Pa Ti* and you'll be blown away by the vibrant results of the band's musical melting pot.

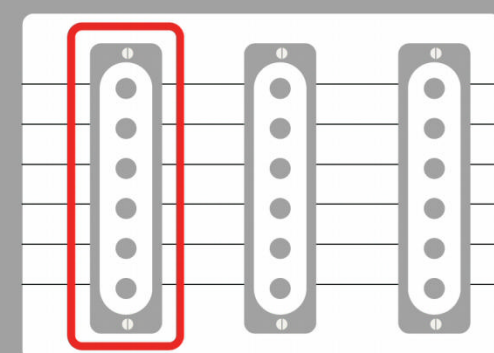
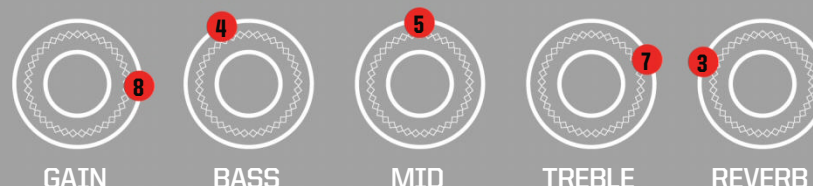
Broadly speaking, *Samba Pa Ti* is a song of two halves. The first part is driven by the main melody and, we'd argue, worth following closely; the second half is an extended solo, which, with its freer vibe, rewards with a little bluesy experimentation.

GET THE SOUND

Everything you need to know before playing 'Samba Pa Ti'

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



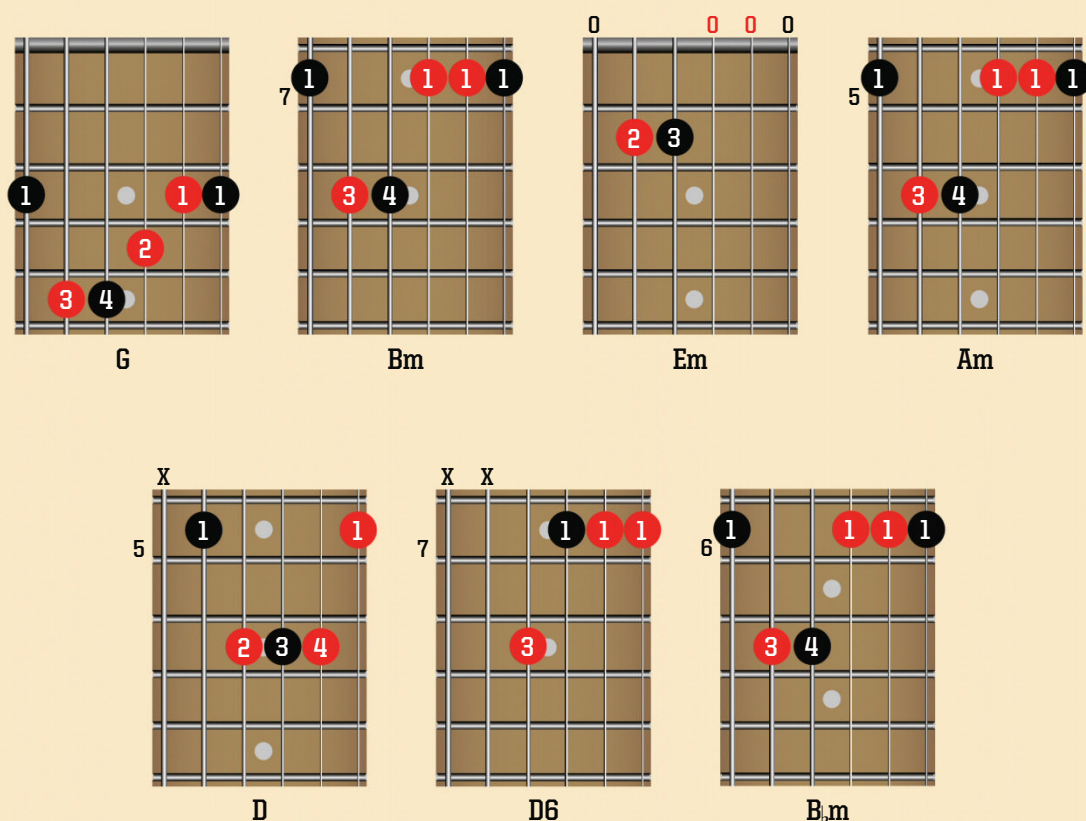
Select a bridge position pickup, roll off a little tone on your guitar, then make final eq tweaks on your amp.

Carlos Santana recorded this track on a Gibson SG Special fitted with P90 pickups.

These are single coils, so a Telecaster- or Stratocaster-type guitar may get you closer to the treble-rich but full-bodied tone than a humbucker-equipped guitar. If you are using humbuckers, you may need to lower your amp's gain and bass controls and raise the treble to compensate for the different sound. You can try using a wah wah pedal purely to set your guitar tone, positioning the treadle at a midway point and then leaving it. Also experiment with a volume pedal for the dynamic changes throughout the track. Otherwise, it all comes down to your picking attack.

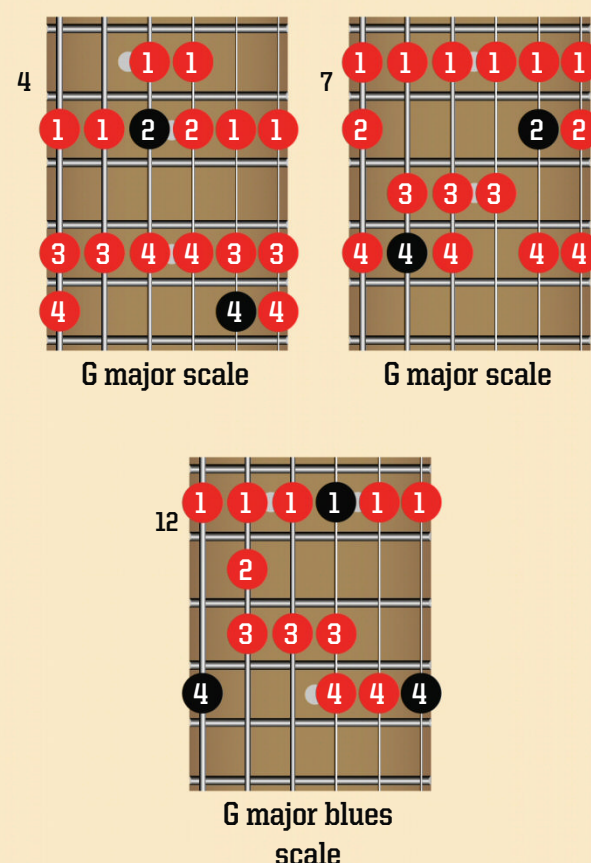
CHORDS

The rhythm part that runs throughout the song is played by gently strumming the top four strings of these barre chords with a simple quarter note (crotchet) rhythm. Notice that the D6 is a variation on the D chord. It's easiest to play it using your first and third fingers, rather than trying to adapt the D chord fingering.



SCALES

The G major scale (G A B C D E F#) is used throughout the main theme. Two patterns are shown here in the 4th and 7th positions, but make sure you also practise them an octave higher. The G major blues scale (G A B, B D E) is the same as the E minor blues scale (E G A B, B D) but starts on a G note. Carlos used it to create his rockier licks.



SANTANA

SAMBA PA TI

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SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Main theme (part 1)

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=75

grad. accel. throughout

G Bm Em

TAB 1

7 4 5 7 4/5 8 | 5-7 0 0 3 | 6/7

Am G Bm Em

TAB 5

7 4 5 7 4/5 8 | 5-7 0 0 3 | 6/7 7

♩=82

Am D⁶ Am

TAB 9

5 7 5 7 5 8 5 | 8 (10) 10 (12) BU BU | 5 7 5 7 5 8 5

D N.C. Am

TAB 12

BU BD 8 (10) (8) 5 5 7 5 7 | 5 7 5 4 5 7 5 | 7

Bm Am D

♩=88

TAB 15

4 7 4 4/5 7 4 7 | 5-7 5 7 5 5 8 8 5 8 8 (10) BU

This section is based mainly in 4th and 5th positions. That means your first finger is based around either the 4th or 5th frets, with your remaining fingers at the following frets. Hit the out-of-position 3rd fret hammer-ons with your first finger and jump back into position with your third finger on the 7th fret slide that follows.



FULL TRACK + BACKING (BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO)
This song comes with a full demo track and backing track.
Enter the above link into your web browser of choice;
press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

SANTANA / SAMBA PA TI

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Main theme (part 2)

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

0:48

D G Bm Em

TAB

1

Am G Bm

TAB

5

Em Am D⁶

rake ↘

BU

TAB

8

Am D N.C. Am

TAB

11

Bm Am D

TAB

15

The lick in bar 8 was an overdub on the original recording. We've kept the last note short so you can incorporate it into the main theme. Don't forget to keep the hammer-on short in the following bar – you need to get back to 5th position quickly on beat 2.

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Bridge

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

1:38

G Bm B^bm

8 8 8 5 7 10 (12) 7

BU BU BU 9 (11)

1

Am D

3

BU 5 (7) 5 7 5 8 7 7 8 5

3

G Bm B^bm

8 8 8 5 7 10 (12) 7

BU BU 9 (11) 7

5

Am D

3

BU 5 (7) 5 7 5 8 7 7 8 5

7

When you're playing the unison bends at the end of bars 1 and 5, fret the higher note with your first finger. This leaves your remaining fingers free to bend the lower string up by a whole tone. Make sure you allow both notes to ring out simultaneously.

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Bridge (harmony part)

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

1:38

G Bm B^bm

10 12

13 (15) 15 (17)

BU BU

1

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Bridge (harmony part, cont'd)

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

Am

D

BU 5 (7)

5 7 5 8 7

7 8 5

3

G

Bm

B^bm

8 8 8 5 7 10 (12) 7

BU

12 BU 13 (15) [15] BD (13)

5

Am

D

BU 5 (7)

5 7 5 8 7

7 8 5

7

This is a double-tracked part used to fatten up the bridge part we covered previously. The unison bends in bars 2 and 6 are played a minor 3rd higher than the main part to create a harmony line.

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Solo

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

G

Am

G

Am

1:59

3 3 3 5 3 5 [5] 7

3 3 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5

1

G

Am

G

Am

3 3 3 5 3 5 [5] 7

3 3 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5

7

5

G Am

TAB

9 10 10 10 10 10 8 7 7 5 8 7 8 5 7

G Am

TAB

3 3 5 3 0 BU BD 3 (5) (3) 0 BU 2 (4) 0 5 3 0 BU BD 2 (4) (2) 0 2 7 9 10

G Am

TAB

10 10 10 7 10 7 10 10 8 7 5 7 5 8 7 8 5 7

G Am

TAB

8 3 5 3 12 BU BD 15 (17) (15) 15 15 15 15 15

G Am

TAB

15 15 15 12 BU BD 14 (16) [16] (14) 12 14 BU 12 14 (16) 15 [15] 12

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Solo (cont'd)

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

19

G Am

PB 15 BD 15 (17) (15) [15] 12 15 12 BU BD 15 (17) [17] (15) 12 15 15 15 BU BU BD 14 (16) 14 (16) (14) 12 14

21

G Am G

RP BU BU BD BD BU 12 12 15 12 BU BD 15 (17) (15) 12 BU BD 15 (17) (15) 12 BU BD 14 (16) (14) 12 14

24

Am G Am

12 14 14 15 15 17 17 15 15 14 14 12 12 [12] 10 12 [12] 12 [12] 13 12 10 12 10 8 10 8 7 5 BU 7 (9) 5

27

G Am G

BU 5 5 5 BUBD BU BU BU BD BU BD BU BU BU 17 (19)

30

Am (8va) G

RP BD (19) (17) 15 17 12 [12] 12 14 15 14 12 14 12 10 12 10 8 7 5 8 5

Am G

32

Am G Am

34

G Am

37

G Am

39

G Am

41

SANTANA SAMBA PA TI Solo (cont'd)

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

43

G Am G

TAB

14 12 15 12 15 12 BU BD 5 7 8 5 7 8 5 7 8 5

46

Am G Am

TAB

5 0 5 0 BU BD 12 15 12 12 14 12 14 12

49

G Am G

TAB

15 12 15 PB 15 BD BU 12 14 12 14 12 15 12 15 12 BU 14 (16)

52

Am G

TAB

BD BU BD BU BD BU BD BU 12 BU 12 BU 12 BU 12 BU 12 BU 12 15 (17)

54

Am G Am

TAB

12 BU 12 15 12 BU BD rake 3 2 0 3 0 0 4 0 2 0 2

From bar 9 onwards, the solo is full of 16th note syncopation, which emphasises the weaker-sounding offbeat 16th notes, and they need to be played confidently – or they can sound like mistakes. Clap the rhythm of any challenging licks to a slow metronome pulse to help you learn each phrase more accurately.

BILL WITHERS USE ME

Catchy riffs and an infectious groove. TG and Rockschoo! take a look at Bill Withers' acoustic smash

Use Me was a US hit for Bill Withers in 1972, dealing with earnest lyrical themes and underpinned by an infectious guitar groove. To practise this catchy acoustic part, hold down the three notes of the Em7 with your fretting hand and strum the chord, ensuring that the idle strings are muted with your first finger. Then, strum 16th notes with a light attack from the

picking hand (you may find a medium or lighter plectrum is best here), counting '1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a' to keep time. Do this at a slow tempo so you can easily count the clean fretted strums (shown with standard black notes in the notation) and the muted strokes (shown with Xs). Your aim is for those mutes to have a 'chuka chuka' sound that contrasts with the clear ringing chords.



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USE ME

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BILL WITHERS USE ME

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩ = 77

Em⁷

A⁷

8^{va}

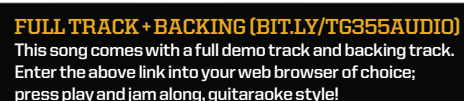
† Leave fretting hand finger in contact with strings to produce a muted sound with subtle/occasional harmonics. Use same technique for harmonics throughout.

Em⁷

A⁷

8^{va}

† Leave fretting hand finger in contact with strings to produce a muted sound with subtle/occasional harmonics. Use same technique for harmonics throughout.



BILL WITHERS USE ME

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

19

21

23

25

27

BILL WITHERS USE ME

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

Ad lib. E minor pentatonic fills and/or muted strum patterns

29

Em⁷ A⁷ 8^{va} NH

33

Em⁷ A⁷ 8^{va} NH

35

Em⁷ A⁷ 8^{va} NH

37

Em⁷ A⁷

39

Rockschool have notated harmonics in bar 2 (and elsewhere), but, in fact, these are string mutes, just like bar 1, but with a looser, slightly ringing sound. Think 'loose mute' rather than 'harmonic'. The arrangement includes an E Dorian solo, though you could experiment with E minor pentatonic and blues scales too.

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

TAYLOR SWIFT

WILLOW

Learn the lockdown hit from Taylor Swift's second number one album of 2020, *Evermore*

Taylor Swift has never been afraid to try out different styles and 2020's *Willow* is a case in point, showcasing a folk-meets-contemporary pop style. The acoustic guitar at the beginning of the song was originally made up of five separate parts, so we've created a composite part for you to play. They sound like a nylon-string guitar, but are actually an old Silvertone acoustic guitar that guitarist Aaron Dessner fitted with a rubber

bridge. This gives a dryer percussive sound that you could try recreating with some foam under the strings near the bridge, or even a little palm-muting.

Though the open position chords aren't too challenging, using fingerstyle technique and adding the pull-offs and melodic ideas can be tough. You could try strumming along if the fingerstyle part is too much of a challenge. Finally, listen out for occasional 2/4 bars that feature throughout the song, as these can easily catch you out.

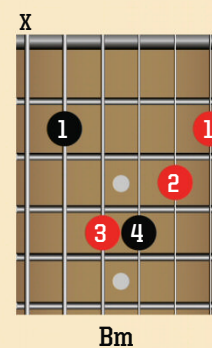
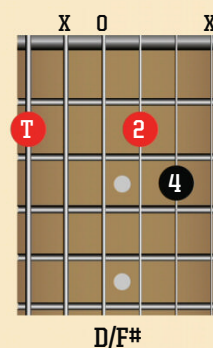
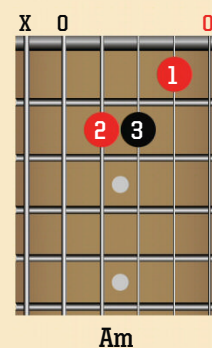
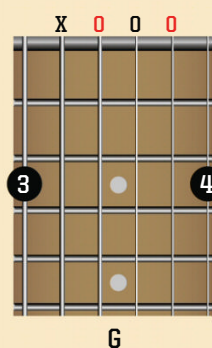
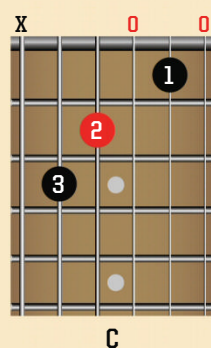
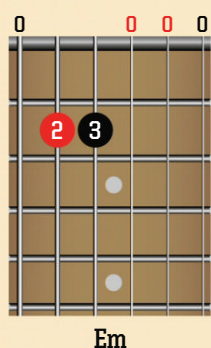


CHORDS

Willow is a relatively straightforward song played with commonplace open shapes. And, though there's generally a fingerstyle vibe, it can also be strummed for a simpler approach.

WILLOW

Words and Music by Taylor Swift and Aaron Dessner
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BACKING TRACK (BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO)
This song comes with a full backing track. Enter the above link into your web browser of choice; press play and jam along, guitaraoke style!

SONGSHEET

Willow

Verse 1

Em
I'm like the water
D
When your ship rolled in that night
Em
Rough on the surface
D **C**
But you cut through like a knife
Em
And if it was an open-shut case
Em
I never would've known
Em
From that look on your face
D **C**
Lost in your current like a priceless wine

Chorus 1

G **D** **Am**
The more that you say, the less I know
Em **G**
Wherever you stray, I follow
D **Am**
I'm begging for you to take my hand
Em
Wreck my plans, that's my man

Verse 2

Em
Life was a willow
D **Em** **D**
And it bent right to your wind
Em
Head on the pillow

D/F# **C**
I could feel you sneaking in
Em **D**
As if you were a mythical thing
Em **D** **Em**
Like you were a trophy or a champion ring
D **C**
And there was one prize I'd cheat to win

Repeat chorus 1

Chorus 2

G **D** **Am**
You know that my train could take you home
Em **G**
Anywhere else is hollow
D **Am**
I'm begging for you to take my hand
Em
Wreck my plans, that's my man

Bridge

Bm **Em** **Am**
Life was a willow
G **Bm** **Em**
And it bent right to your wind
Am **G** **Bm**
They count me out time and time again
Em **Am**
Life was a willow
G **Bm** **Em**
And it bent right to your wind
Am **G**
But I come back stronger than a 90s trend

Verse 3

Em
Wait for the signal
D **Em** **D**
And I'll meet you after dark
Em
Show me the places
D/F# **C**
Where the others gave you scars
Em **D**
Now this is an open-shut case
Em **D**
I guess I shoulda known
Em
From the look on your face
D **C**
Every bait-and-switch was a work of art

Repeat chorus 1 & 2 x2

Outro chorus

G **D** **Am** **Em**
Hey, that's my man
G **D** **Am**
That's my man... yeah, that's my man
Em **G**
Every bait-and-switch was a work of art
D **Am** **Em**
That's my man... hey, that's my man
G **D** **Am**
I'm begging for you to take my hand
Em
Wreck my plans, that's my man

TAYLOR SWIFT WILLOW Intro

BIT.LY/TG355AUDIO

♩=84

The musical notation for the intro of 'Willow' by Taylor Swift is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature, and a corresponding guitar tablature staff. The first system shows a sequence of chords: Em, D, Em, D. The second system shows Em, D, C. The tablature includes fret numbers (0, 2, 3, 4) and fingerings (a, i, p, m). The tempo is marked as ♩=84.

As the pull-offs were originally played as separate parts, this composite part is more challenging. Using your fingers rather than a pick will allow you to get better string separation. It's easy to pull the third finger into the C# because of the barred first finger however. Try bending your finger slightly so it arches just above the second string.

TAB GUIDE

Get more from TG by understanding our easy-to-follow musical terms and signs

What is tab?

This is where the key signature and time signatures are shown

♩ = 72 — This is the beats per minute (BPM)

0:51

2nd string 3rd fret 2nd string 1st fret 3rd string 2nd fret 4th string Open

1 E
2 B
3 G
4 D
5 A
6 E

TAB

CD time (where the part occurs on the original CD)

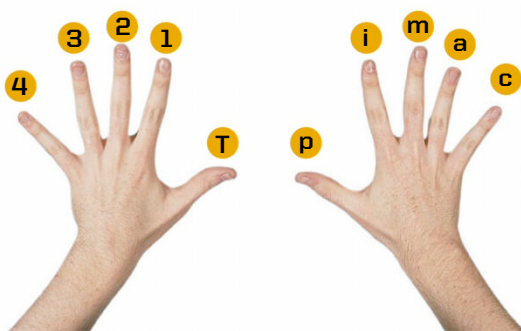
Tab is short for tablature, a notational system used to give detailed information as to where notes should be played on the fretboard. Tab appears underneath conventional music notation as six horizontal lines that represent the strings of the

guitar, from the sixth (thick) string at the bottom to the first (thin) string at the top. On these lines, numbers represent which frets you place your fingers. For example, an A note on the 2nd fret, third string, will be shown as a number '2' on the third line

down on the tab. Unfretted strings are shown with a '0'. The key and time signatures are shown in the notation. TG also includes a timestamp to tell you where in the original track you'll find each example and tempo expressed in beats per minute.

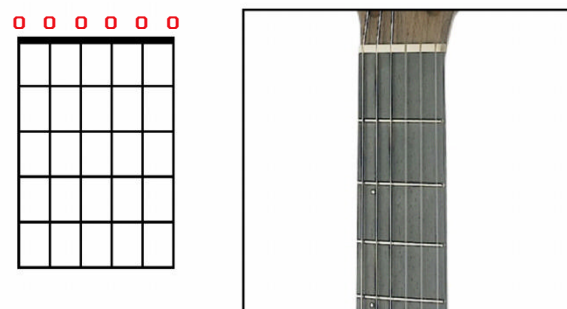
FRET BOXES: CHORDS, SCALES AND CAPO NOTATION

HAND LABELLING



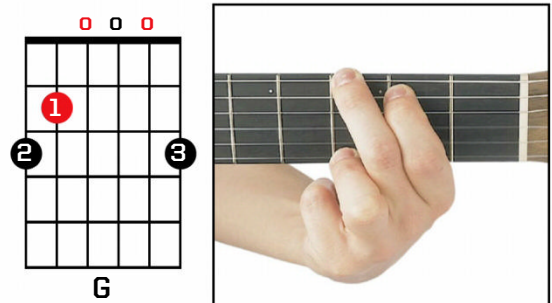
Here are the abbreviations used for each finger. Fretting hand: **1, 2, 3, 4, (T)**
Picking hand: **p (thumb), i (index), m (middle), a (annular), c (little finger)**

NUT AND FRETBOARD



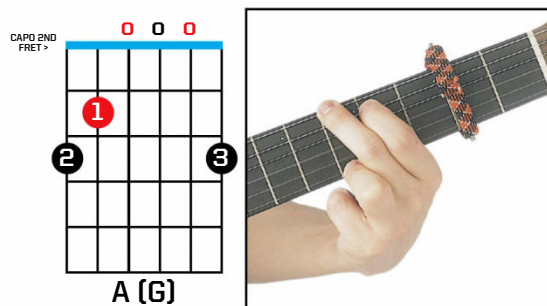
This fretbox diagram represents the guitar's fretboard exactly, as seen in the photo. This design is used for ease of visualising a fretboard scale or chord quickly.

CHORD EXAMPLE



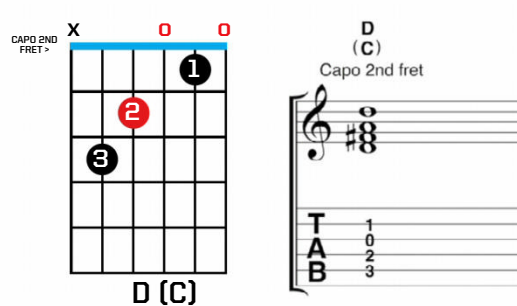
This diagram represents a G chord. The 'o's are open strings, and a circled number is a fretting hand finger. A black 'o' or circled number is the root note (here, G).

CAPO EXAMPLE



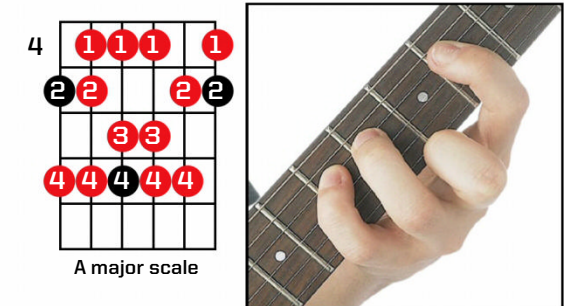
The blue line in the diagram represents a capo for this A chord, place it at the 2nd fret. Capos change the fret number ordering. Here, the original 5th fret now becomes the 3rd fret, 7th fret now 5th fret, etc.

CAPO NOTATION



Here the chord looks like a C in the tab, but the capo on the 2nd fret raises the pitch to make it a D. The 2nd fret capo'd notes are shown with a '0' in the tab as if they were open strings.

SCALE EXAMPLE



The fret box diagram illustrates the fret hand fingering for the A major scale using black dots for root notes and red dots for other scale tones. The photo shows part of the scale being played on the fourth string with the first, third and fourth fingers.

GUITAR TECHNIQUES: PICKING

DOWN AND UP-PICKING



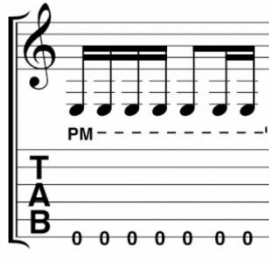
The symbols under the tab tell you the first note is to be down-picked and the second note is to be up-picked.

TREMOLO PICKING



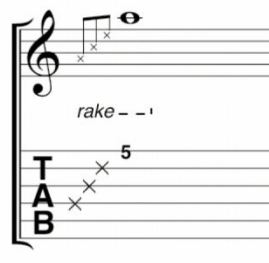
Each of the four notes are to be alternate-picked (down and up-picked) very rapidly and continuously.

PALM MUTING



Palm-mute by resting the edge of your picking hand palm on the strings near the bridge saddles.

PICK RAKE



Drag the pick across the strings shown with a single sweep. This is often used to augment a rake's last note.

APPREGGIATED CHORD



Play the notes of the chord by strumming across the relevant strings in the direction of the arrow head.

FRETTING HAND

HAMMER-ON & PULL-OFF



Pick the first note then hammer down on the string for the second note. Pick the third note and pull-off for the fourth note.

NOTE TRILLS



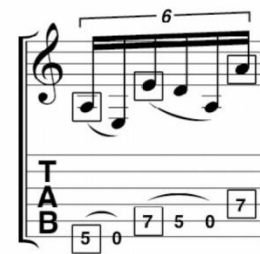
After picking the first note, rapidly alternate between the two notes shown in brackets using hammer-ons and pull-offs.

SLIDES (GLISSANDO)



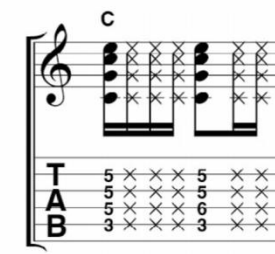
Pick the first note and then slide to the next. For the last two notes pick the first, slide to the next and then re-pick it (RP).

FRET-HAND TAPPING



Sound the notes marked with a square by hammering-on/tapping with your fret hand fingers, instead of picking.

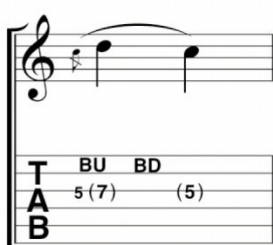
FRET-HAND MUTING



X markings represent notes and strings that are muted by your fret hand when struck by your picking hand.

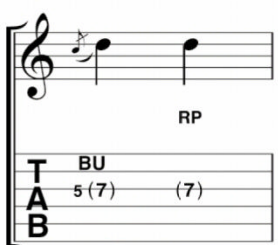
BENDING AND VIBRATO

BEND AND RELEASE



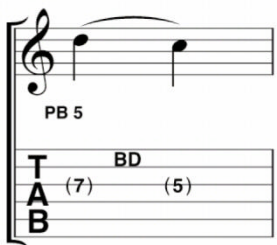
Fret the first note (here, the 5th fret) and bend up to the pitch of the bracketed note, before releasing again.

RE-PICKED BEND



Bend up to the pitch shown in the brackets, then re-pick the note while holding the bent note at the pitch shown.

PRE-BEND



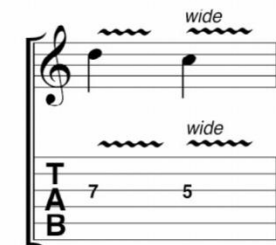
Silently bend the string up from the 5th fret (PB5) to the pitch of the 7th fret note, pick it and release to the 5th fret note.

QUARTER-TONE BEND



Pick the note then bend up a quarter-tone (a very small amount). This is sometimes referred to as a 'blues curl'.

VIBRATO



Your fretting hand vibrates the string by small bend-ups and releases. Exaggerate this effect to create a 'wide' vibrato.

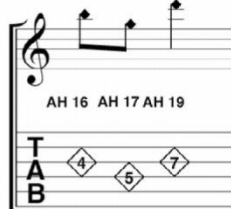
HARMONICS

NATURAL HARMONICS



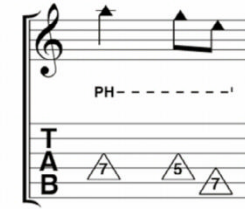
Pick the note while lightly touching the string directly over the fret indicated. A chiming harmonic results.

ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS



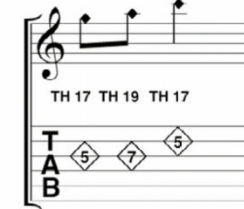
Fret the note as shown, then lightly place your index finger directly over 'x' fret (AH'x') and pick (with a pick, p or a).

PINCHED HARMONICS



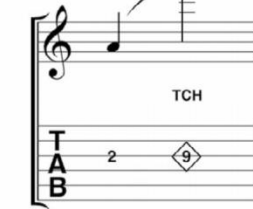
After fretting the note in the triangle, dig into the string with the side of your thumb as you sound it with the pick.

TAPPED HARMONICS



Place your finger on the note as shown, but sound it with a quick pick hand tap at the fret shown (TH17) for a harmonic.

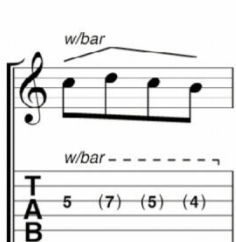
TOUCHED HARMONICS



A previously sounded note is touched above the fret marked TCH (eg, TCH 9) for it to sound a harmonic.

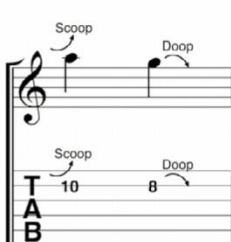
VIBRATO BAR / WHAMMY BAR

WHAMMY BAR BENDS



The note is picked as shown, then the vibrato bar is raised and lowered to the pitches shown in brackets.

SCOOP AND DOOP



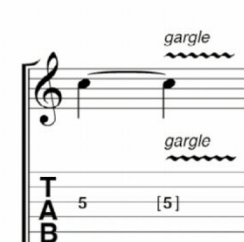
Scoop: depress the bar just before striking the note and release. Doop: lower the bar slightly after picking note.

SUSTAINED NOTE AND DIVEBOMB



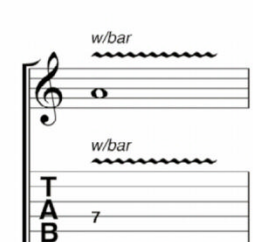
A Note is sustained then the vibrato bar is depressed to slack. The square bracket indicates a further articulation.

GARGLE



Sound the note and 'flick' the vibrato bar with your picking hand so it 'quivers'. This results in a 'gargling' sound!

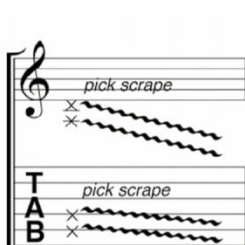
WHAMMY BAR VIBRATO



Gently rock the whammy bar to repeatedly bend the pitch up and down. This sounds similar to fret hand vibrato.

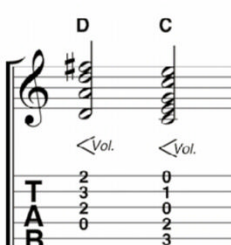
OTHERS

PICK SCRAPE



The edge of the pick is dragged either down or up along the lower strings to produce a scraped sound.

VIOLINING



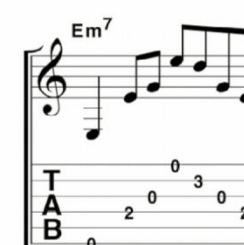
Turn the volume control down, sound the note(s) and then turn the volume up for a smooth fade in.

FINGER NUMBERING



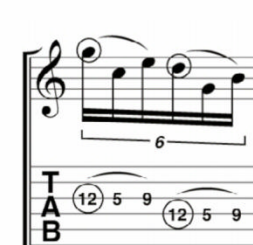
The numbers in the traditional notation refer to the fingers required to play each note.

PIMA DIRECTIONS



Any kind of fingerpicking requirements are shown at the bottom of the tab notation.

PICK HAND TAPPING



Tap (hammer-on) with a finger of your picking hand onto the fret marked with a circle. Usually with 'i' or 'm'.

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!

NO SNAKE OIL

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.



86



92



85 START ME UP

Five new products you need to check out

86 PRS SE SILVER SKY

Will PRS and John Mayer have another hit with this cut-price Silver Sky?

90 EPIPHONE 1961 LES PAUL SG STANDARD

A Gibson in all but name?

92 FENDER KURT COBAIN JAG-STANG

Cobain's "dream guitar" gets a reissue

94 FUNNY LITTLE BOXES 1991

Son... have we got a little pedal for you



SUPERB, A BEST BUY



EXCELLENT



ABOVE AVERAGE KIT



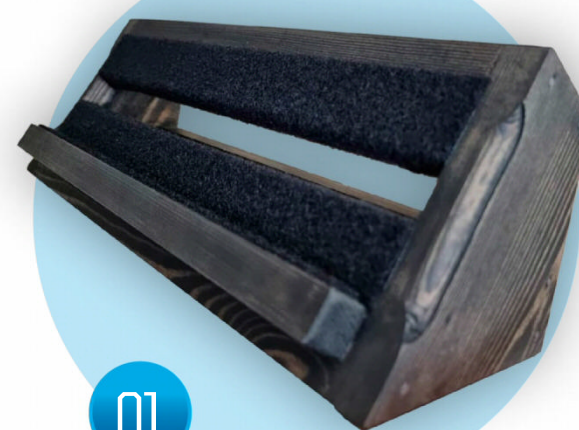
SOME ISSUES



POOR



02



01



05



04



03

START ME UP!

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

MARCUSDLUXE VERTDLUXE LIMO

1 Why keep pedals at your feet? Record and film with them on your desk, on an amp or just show them off with this VertDuxe Limo pedalboard. The fine work of UK builder, player and all-round good guy Marcus Darby, he reduces waste by using excess timber to create the two sizes of 'board (and also makes regular 'boards, too). They come fitted with hook-and-loop fixing and in a range of colour options. **VertDuxe Limo £50 (four standard-size pedals), VertDuxe £40 (two standard-size pedals)** www.instagram.com/marcusdluxe

MXR M306 POLY BLUE OCTAVE

2 This is the expanded version of the old classic MXR Blue Box Jimmy Page stomped on for Led Zeppelin's *Fool In The Rain*. As the name suggests, it's expanding on the original's preset two-octaves drop with polyphonic and monophonic modes. There's now a four-octave range with dedicated level controls for sub-octave one and two, as well as two additional controls for blending in one and two octaves above the note you're playing. **£199** www.jimdunlop.com

WALRUS AUDIO SLÖTVÅ

3 We love Walrus's ambient Slö pedal, so a variant with three presets for your imagination to run riot with its multi-texture reverbs has us salivating! Three algorithm modes help unleash the glory; Dark (Lower Octave), Rise (Ambient Swell), and Dream (Latching Pad). These are shaped by five control parameters for huge tones here to be inspired by and get lost in. You can turn trails on and off for fading its sounds out, too. **£209** www.walrusaudio.com

ESP JAMES HETFIELD SNAKEBYTE CAMO

4 The Snake' gets a new skin with this urban camo and was inspired by a specific finish on one of the Metallica man's ESP Custom Shop models, that was in turn inspired by his favoured hunting gear manufacturer KUIIU. This weapon is cocked and loaded with Papa Het's signature active EMG humbuckers and TonePros locking TOM bridge and tailpiece. A portion of proceeds will go to Metallica's All Within My Hands Foundation. **£TBC, Available in May** www.espguitars.com

HARLEY BENTON GA-250 POWER ATTENUATOR

5 Volume can be a problem with tube amps; how do you run them to that lovely breakup point without becoming persona non grata with the neighbours? With this! The GA-250 allows you to drive your amps harder at lower volumes. Catering up to 250W and offering six steps of power reduction, selectable on its rotary dial and ranging from -2dB to -15dB, plus a Fine control for dialling in amp response. It also features a silent cooling fan. **£125** www.harleybenton.com



PRS SE SILVER SKY

£895

Will PRS and John Mayer have another hit with this cut-price Silver Sky?

PRS has tried many times to crack the bolt-on market. Yes, there's the CE but that's really a bolt-on version of the Custom 24, and despite well-received attempts like the 305 and DC3 they've never managed to get close to a Fender-style electric that stuck around. Then along came the John Mayer Silver Sky. When it was launched four years ago, it 'broke' the internet – everyone had an opinion – and it is now up there with PRS's best-selling designs alongside the original Custom 24 and the 594. Four years on, PRS still can't keep up with the demand. The problem is that at £2,620 it is out of reach for many of us. Well, now we have an

small upgrades to the Fender recipe on the USA model, most of which are replicated on this new SE version.

Visually, the SE is virtually identical save for the small 'SE' on the headstock face and a more standard shaped truss rod cover. As you examine more closely you'll notice more obvious differences: the country of origin on the headstock back, the non-locking tuners, a two-post vibrato with a more standard rear cover over the four springs. The four opaque colours, chosen by John, differ too, and they hide a more primary difference in that unlike the USA model which uses an alder body, the SE switches to poplar which might have a reputation as a wood

“A THIRD OF THE PRICE BUT FAR FROM A THIRD OF THE GUITAR”

option: the Indonesian-made SE Silver Sky that with its included gigbag is a third of the price but far from a third of the guitar.

While the Silver Sky was developed with considerable input from John Mayer, unlike many idiosyncratic signature guitars the Silver Sky comes across more as a loving recreation of a Stratocaster from the early 60s, but with every facet tweaked and 'improved' by the exacting standards of John and Paul Reed Smith. To many, however, it's just a Fender copy with the wrong headstock – one of the Sky's most polarising features. But the three-a-side reversed PRS headstock is lightly back-angled so unlike a Fender you don't need any string trees. It's just one of a raft of seemingly

reserved for lower-end guitars, but, like every aspect of the re-design, was actually approved by Paul Reed Smith in a double blind sound test.

The PRS 635JM 'S' single-coils were a crucial part of the new model too. Using coil wire and parts from Cor-Tek's PSE pickup-making division the boffins at PRS USA set about creating a pickup set that worked with these different ingredients. These were then sent back to Indonesia to be replicated, a process alone that took over a year before they were signed off. The two-post vibrato differs from the six-screw USA design but still uses pressed steel saddles, a steel top plate and deep-drilled steel block along with a push-in

1 NECK, FRETS & FINGERBOARD

The neck here is very similar to the USA Silver Sky but has a satin polyurethane finish, not gloss nitro, and an 8.5" fingerboard radius as opposed to the USA's 7.25". Frets are slightly wider than the USA model.

2 PICKUPS

The SE's 635JM 'S' pickups are made by Cor-Tek's pickup division, PSE. The design was conceived in the USA and they are close cousins to the USA pickups but certainly not identical. Slightly darker and slightly hotter, they provide a very valid voice that some players might prefer.

3 VIBRATO SYSTEM

The big difference here is that this is a two-post vibrato rather than the six-screw vibrato of the USA Silver Sky. It uses pressed steel saddles and has a push-in arm, and, like the USA Silver Sky, is shipped decked to the body with no upbend.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Poplar

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE: 25.5" (648mm)

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood/8.5" radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

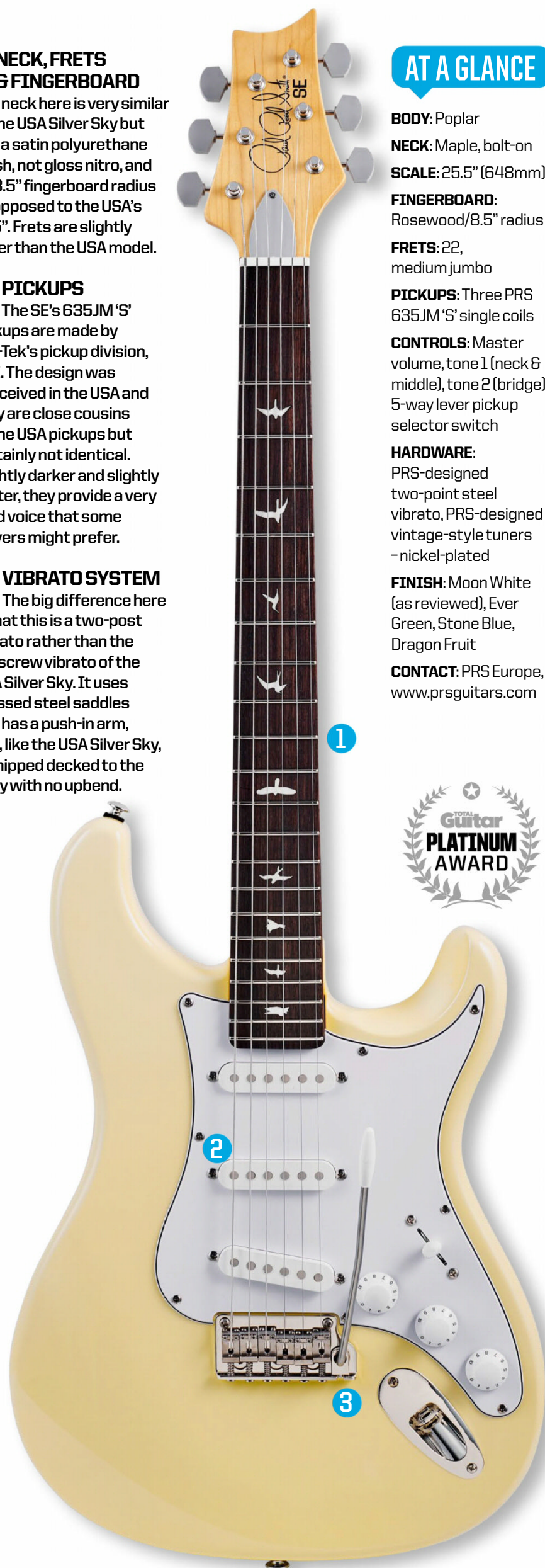
PICKUPS: Three PRS 635JM 'S' single coils

CONTROLS: Master volume, tone 1 (neck & middle), tone 2 (bridge), 5-way lever pickup selector switch

HARDWARE: PRS-designed two-point steel vibrato, PRS-designed vintage-style tuners – nickel-plated

FINISH: Moon White (as reviewed), Ever Green, Stone Blue, Dragon Fruit

CONTACT: PRS Europe, www.prsguitars.com





Cor, blimey!

Who is Cor-Tek and why should we care?

As one of, if not *the* largest electric guitar making factories in the world, you'll have probably played an electric guitar made by Cor-Tek in Indonesia even if you didn't know it. PRS proudly states, on the back of the headstock, that this SE Silver Sky and their other SE electrics are made there. Cor-Tek's house brand is Cort, although obviously they sub-contract for numerous major brands, though few of them care to admit it. Those that do, like PRS and Manson, are hugely positive about their manufacturing skills and having reviewed many Cor-Tek guitars in these pages, we'd have to agree.



tension-adjustable arm. The moulded jack socket plate, however, wasn't recreated for the SE: it's the exact same part that is used on the USA version. A colourful back-story then, but with the SE in our hands there is nothing 'cut-price' about the feel. Importantly, it's very stable tuning-wise even with the vibrato in play. The fingerboard radius is *slightly* flatter than the original but far from modern in feel and the satin neck back, which is lightly tinted, is something many might prefer over the 'new' gloss feel of the USA model. At 3.21kg (7.1lb) it's also the lightest of any of the USA Silver Sky/Fiore family we've tested. A quick unplugged strum

reveals a very lively response that translates when we plug in to a very full and balanced voice with noticeably more depth than any of our reference Stratocasters. The actual sounds are simply very good vintage-informed representations of classic Fender voices. That depth produces a neck pickup voice that has an almost humbucker-like thickness. The bridge is a big contrast but avoids being over bright or harsh not least with a little roll-off from the tone control. There's sparkle and bounce from the hum-cancelling mix positions and here's a middle pickup that you might use a bit more than on many Stratocasters: a true halfway house balanced

between the depth of the neck and the stridency of the bridge. Overall, and comparing the SE with the USA Silver Sky, we're hearing a little less clarity here but with a little more kick that could quite possibly edge the SE towards anyone wanting to use it with rockier intentions. Price aside, we're not sure which Silver Sky we'd buy: the SE is really that good and hugely valid in its own right.

Dave Burrluck

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

ALSO TRY...

FENDER VINTERA 60S STRATOCASTER

£919

Very well regarded vintage-style Strat made at Fender's huge Mexican factory. It features an alder body, pau ferro fingerboard, old-style 7.25" fingerboard radius and 21 vintage-style frets in three colours.



FENDER PLAYER STRATOCASTER

£719

Another Mexican-made Strat, the Player is more modern in style, with 22 frets on a 9.5" radius pau ferro fingerboard again with an alder body and maple fingerboard options.



FENDER PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER

£939

Part of a new mini-range, the Player Plus is more forward-looking than the Player, with a flatter 12" radius fingerboard, noiseless pickups and locking tuners.





@rotosound_uk



OUR GENERATION

Kim Logan plays **Top Tape** flatwound electric guitar strings:
in production and used on era-defining records since 1961



EPIPHONE 1961 LES PAUL SG STANDARD

£749

A Gibson in all but name?

We sometimes find ourselves pondering how much a headstock matters. Specifically, the name on a headstock. And we're musing on that theme again because Epiphone has been gleefully blurring the lines between its brand and Gibson more than ever recently; the Lazarus and Standard '59 Les Paul moderns being very impressive cases in point. Gibson USA BurstBucker humbuckers, one-piece mahogany neck, two-piece body, Mallory capacitors and a vintage-style hard case are the order of the day here on a 'partnership with Gibson Custom' that really just equates to those aforementioned Gibson

has some neck droop on the strap that's not uncommon with SGs. The SG is one of the most comfortable guitars to stand with and this is a fine example – a veritable feather compared to a Les Paul! The unplugged resonance we crave is here too, and a tidy build with a sleek Aged Sixties Cherry Gloss (what we'd call a semi-satin) finish that oozes quality. There's just has one strange anomaly that we haven't encountered before on an SG. The bevel contour on the back edge stops before it reaches the curve of the lower horn. It's a subtle cosmetic feature but strange, especially when the Custom Shop name is appearing here. The SlimTaper 60s neck is on the wider end of C-shape scale but nowhere near as divisively clubby as

A TIDY BUILD WITH A GLOSS FINISH THAT OOZES QUALITY

features on an Epiphone. With a higher asking price accordingly. But still not a ballpark we can get a new US Gibson SG for. So what's the deal with the Les Paul name appearing here too? Gibson first introduced its Solid Guitar in 1961 with a 'Les Paul' moniker in an attempt to widen appeal after declining LP sales. Les Paul the man was not happy with his name on this very different design and by the end of 1963 the LP references had been removed. Now they're back in reissue form – on the truss rod cover, at least. The fretboard here is laurel, not rosewood, so it's not upgrades across the, um, board here. So do the spec upgrades on this guitar justify an extra £350 street price over an Epi SG Standard? First impressions are mostly very positive; it's light (6.6lbs) and

our 2005 Gibson SG Special. The playing touch sensitivity and articulation of the BurstBuckers is a great example of contemporary channeling of PAF versatility, with responsive pots that really get the best out of that. Clean up from the guitar and you'll have serious breadth. We found ourselves in the neck position far more than on many of the cheaper Gibson-style guitars we've played in the last year. Sometimes you get what you pay for. So that question remains for you, does the name on the headstock matter to you?

Rob Laing

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

- 1

WIRING
No upgrades required here – CTS pots, Mallory capacitors (an upgrade over Orange Drop) and Switchcraft jacks are the quality combo we like to see.
- 2

NECK
Most Epiphones use a two-piece neck with a scarf joint, but this has a historically-accurate one-piece.
- 3

VALUE
The BurstBucker 2 and 3 humbuckers sell on Gibson.com for \$175.99 each, add in that plush hardcase and the street price checks out.

- AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany (two-piece)
NECK: Mahogany (one-piece), SlimTaper C-shape
SCALE: 628mm [24.75"]
FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
PICKUPS: Gibson BurstBucker 3 (bridge), Gibson BurstBucker 2 (neck)
CONTROLS: 2x Volume, 2x Tone, CTS potentiometers, Mallory Capacitors
HARDWARE: Epiphone LockTone Tune-O-Matic, Epiphone Deluxe double ring tuners
LEFT-HANDED: No
CASE: Gibson vintage-style hard case
FINISH: Aged Cherry (reviewed), Aged Classic White
CONTACT: Epiphone, www.epiphone.com





FENDER KURT COBAIN JAG-STANG

£1199

Cobain's "dream guitar" gets a reissue

Nirvana and Kurt Cobain fans probably associate the late frontman closest with his sunburst Jaguar or the Mustangs he used throughout his career, but there are others – the pawn shop Mosrites, the ‘Vandalism’ Strat, and the Jag-Stang.

Cobain worked with the Fender Custom Shop to develop the Jag-Stang concept, famously sending an annotated collage of a Jaguar and Mustang in order to direct the builders to the shape he had imagined. In essence, it's a Jaguar shape on the bass side and a Mustang on the treble side.

The Jag-Stang is often a slightly forgotten weapon in the Cobain arsenal, largely due to the fact that the guitar was still in the unreleased prototype stages at the time of his death. But Kurt did receive one, and used it on stage at a number of Nirvana's final gigs in late 1993 and early 1994. While there have been tributes to his Jaguar and Mustangs, the Jag-Stang is the only 'signature' guitar that had Cobain's involvement.

This reissue is the third incarnation of the Jag-Stang, having originally materialised as a Japanese-made model in 1996, then again in the 2003 with an alder body replacing the basswood original. Today's version comes from Fender's Mexican factory, and includes the alder body of the second run. Fender has developed Jag-Stang pickups this time around – a single coil in the neck position and a humbucker in the bridge. Elsewhere, it's got a maple neck, rosewood fingerboard with a 7.5-inch radius, Mustang bridge and Fender Dynamic vibrato, white pearloid scratchplate and is offered in the same two Fiesta Red and Sonic Blue finishes.

Now, the first thing you'll notice is that neck. It's a gloss finish which is either your thing or not, but whereas many modern Fenders come with a C-shape profile and 9.5" or 12" radius, the Jag-Stang's vintage 7.5" definitely complies with Cobain's wishes for it to feel thin. Combined with the 24" scale length, it might be a bit of a hunch if your digits are less than dainty. That said, it does keep everything feeling a little more within reach than, say, a 25.5" Strat with a 12" radius.

Electronically, there's a single volume and tone control, and a pair of horizontal toggles, giving you on, off and out of phase positions. It's a change of mindset that will likely take some getting used to as switching one pickup off and another on independently requires two switch movements.

Sound-wise, the neck pickup is very much in the Strat neck ballpark, becoming punchier and snappier with plenty of clarity when you really hit it, great for the cleaner side of Cobain's riffing.

There's a lot to love about the Jag-Stang, but it's not for everyone. The body is unique, the neck is quite different, and the switching isn't straightforward. But isn't the idea of a signature guitar to bring something new to the table? And while the Kurt Cobain Jaguar is still a current model in the Fender catalogue, the Jag-Stang has the unique connection of being the guitar that Kurt conceived, and for fans that will be the deciding factor.

Stuart Williams

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

1 DESIGN Kurt Cobain created the Jag-Stang by merging two of his favourite Fender models – the Jaguar and Mustang. This reissue is available in the same Sonic Blue and Fiesta Red finishes as the original was.

2 NECK The Jag-Stang follows the Fender short-scale blueprint at 24", but has a vintage-style 7.5" fingerboard radius.

3 ELECTRONICS Two three-position toggle switches give you on/off/out of phase switching for the Jag-Stang single coil and humbucker.

AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Alder
- NECK:** Maple
- SCALE:** 24"
- FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood
- FRETS:** 22
- CONTROLS:** Master volume, master tone 2x 3-position pickup switches
- HARDWARE:** Nickel/Chrome
- LEFT-HANDED:** Yes (same price)
- FINISH:** Fiesta Red [pictured], Sonic Blue
- CONTACT:** Fender, www.fender.com



Photography: Phil Barker



FUNNY LITTLE BOXES 1991

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TOTAL GUITAR BEST BUY AWARD

Son... have we got a little pedal for you

The pedal market keeps finding new ways to part us with our cash. The name here will strike a chord with many of us who grew up on an incredible era of alternative rock, and it started with a challenge from excellent YouTube guitar tutor at Let's Play All and Pearl Jam tribute band guitarist Matt Webster to Funny Little Boxes pedal store founder Andy Ilgunas: build a pedal that nails Pearl Jam's *Ten* album tones for £99.

This original circuit offers two gain-stages on the basis that Gossard and McCready pushed their JCMs with drive pedals on PJ's debut. The latter inspiration

seemingly in the ballpark of a Tube Screamer that drives the second Marshally gain stage.

Hand-made in the UK and a quality build, we love the *Ten* touches in the colourway and control typeface. And yes it can do that Gossard drive tone, and more.

We tried the 1991 with valve and solid-state amps, with a variety of guitars and found its 'mid forward' voice to be a huge strength, along with the dual gain stages that offer gritty overdrive that sounds *big* while retaining the articulation and chime of your guitar's character. It will hold up in the live mix. Even with the gains at zero it's probably too spicy if you need subtle boost, but that's not its

agenda, and we found the whole gain range appealing here; up to big riff and overblown solo territory. By the way, if you're playing *Alive*, set gain 1 full and gain 2 around midday on a bridge 'bucker.

This is a hugely appealing drive pedal for rock. And as Ilgunas' first original circuit, we can't wait to hear what he does next. The logical next step for the 1991 could be a version 2 with switchable channels for 1 and 2, though that would likely bump the price up from what is currently a sweet spot for both your wallet and your tone.

Rob Laing

AT A GLANCE

- TYPE:** Overdrive pedal with two gain stages
- CONTROLS:** Gain 1, Gain 2, Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble
- SOCKETS:** Input, Output, Power
- BYPASS:** True bypass
- POWER:** 9VDC (11mA draw)
- CONTACT:** Funny Little Boxes, funnylittleboxes.co.uk

SOUNDS *BIG* WHILE RETAINING YOUR GUITAR'S CHARACTER

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

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Words Jenna Scaramanga Photo Tom Mitchell

SERRA PETALE

LOS BITCHOS

“Is there anyone who doesn’t like Van Halen? I can’t tell you how much I’ve listened to that first album,” grins Los Bitchos guitarist Serra Petale. “I wanted to sound like Van Halen and Cocteau Twins – but from Turkey!” The Bitchos formula – party-hard surf rock instrumentals like a tequila-fuelled Tarantino soundtrack – takes in plenty of world music influences. Petale’s Turkish mother inspired her fascination with folk instruments like the oud, while Uruguayan keytarist Agustina Ruiz sold her bandmates on Latin American

sounds. If you listen to Dick Dale’s *Misirlou* and think “This would be even better played by an international collective of hard-drinking women”, Los Bitchos are your band.

Bitchos found an early fan in Franz Ferdinand’s Alex Kapranos, who produced their debut album *Let The Festivities Begin!* Kapranos’ Greek heritage let Serra indulge her fascination with folk instruments and melodies. “We stuck a bunch of bouzoukis on because Alex has so many at home. It was so fun to play,” she says. “The dimensions of sound and the scales, you just cannot really get that from the guitar.” Serra has studied music

theory – “I think a solid knowledge of that stuff can only help” – but she doesn’t think about it when writing eastern European-flavoured lines. “If I start to go with that, it takes me down into a technical rabbit hole and I stop writing the song.”

To emulate the bouzouki on guitar, Serra uses a Mooer Pure Octave pedal: “It tracks pretty well and it’s got these mad settings on it. It doesn’t sound like a quintessential bouzouki but it gets it into that spectrum at least.” Her favourite pedal, though, is the Electro Harmonix Neo Clone chorus. “It’s just on everything! Even when Alex was like, ‘Maybe do you want to try

something different?’ I was like, ‘No!’”

Serra’s main guitars are the twin-humbucker Italia Maranello Speedster 2, and a Strat-style Lâg Jet. These run into a Fender Twin Reverb. Drive comes from the ever-reliable Boss SD-1, which she uses with the Neo Clone. “It’s got that 80s hair metal-like drive to it. The combination of those two pedals makes me so happy!”

Now that *Let The Festivities Begin!* is released, Los Bitchos are preparing their exuberant live shows. Serra can’t wait: “Live, you’ve always got that extra adrenaline that I just don’t think you can get in a rehearsal room.”



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