

THE BEST OF THE YEAR

TOTAL Guitar

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LED ZEPPELIN
I CAN'T QUIT
YOU BABY

BLINK-182
DANCE WITH
ME

The players,
riffs, solos
and gear
of 2023!

**NEW
INTERVIEWS**

Nuno Bettencourt
Kirk Hammett
Sophie Lloyd



COMPACT SIZE, MONUMENTAL TONE.



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Welcome...



I'd promised myself we wouldn't mention the pandemic anymore in *Total Guitar* – but here's a thing: I feel like 2023 has been the first *great* year for guitar music since before the lockdowns. Sure, albums continued to be made during those dark days, and last year saw plenty of tours – but Covid outbreaks could still halt gigs in their tracks (just ask the Red Hot Chili Peppers)

and many artists held out on touring altogether.

2023 has been different. This summer's festivals were epic, with barnstorming sets from Metallica at Download and Guns N' Roses at Glastonbury. Nuno Bettencourt's solo in Extreme's *Rise* set the guitar world alight. The Stones released their first album of original songs since 2005. We've heard amazing music from rising stars like Matteo Mancuso, Unprocessed and more. I could go on...

This month, we're rounding up the highs of this amazing year of music, and we have a slew of new interviews with the guitarists who made it all happen. Featured are Kirk Hammett, Nuno Bettencourt, Jake Kiszka, Wolfgang Van Halen, Cory Wong, Yvette Young and lots more. And TG's resident ace tutor Jon Bishop has created a lesson on how to play like the stars of 2023, too.

Elsewhere, you'll find reviews of Epiphone's new Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' Les Paul that's half the price of the Gibson version, a pair of beauts from Fender's Vintera II range, plus gear from Guild, Jackson and more. And with songs to learn by Led Zeppelin, Phoebe Bridgers and Blink-182, hopefully there's something for everyone.

Enjoy the issue and I'll see you back here for more in 2024!

Chris Bird Editor

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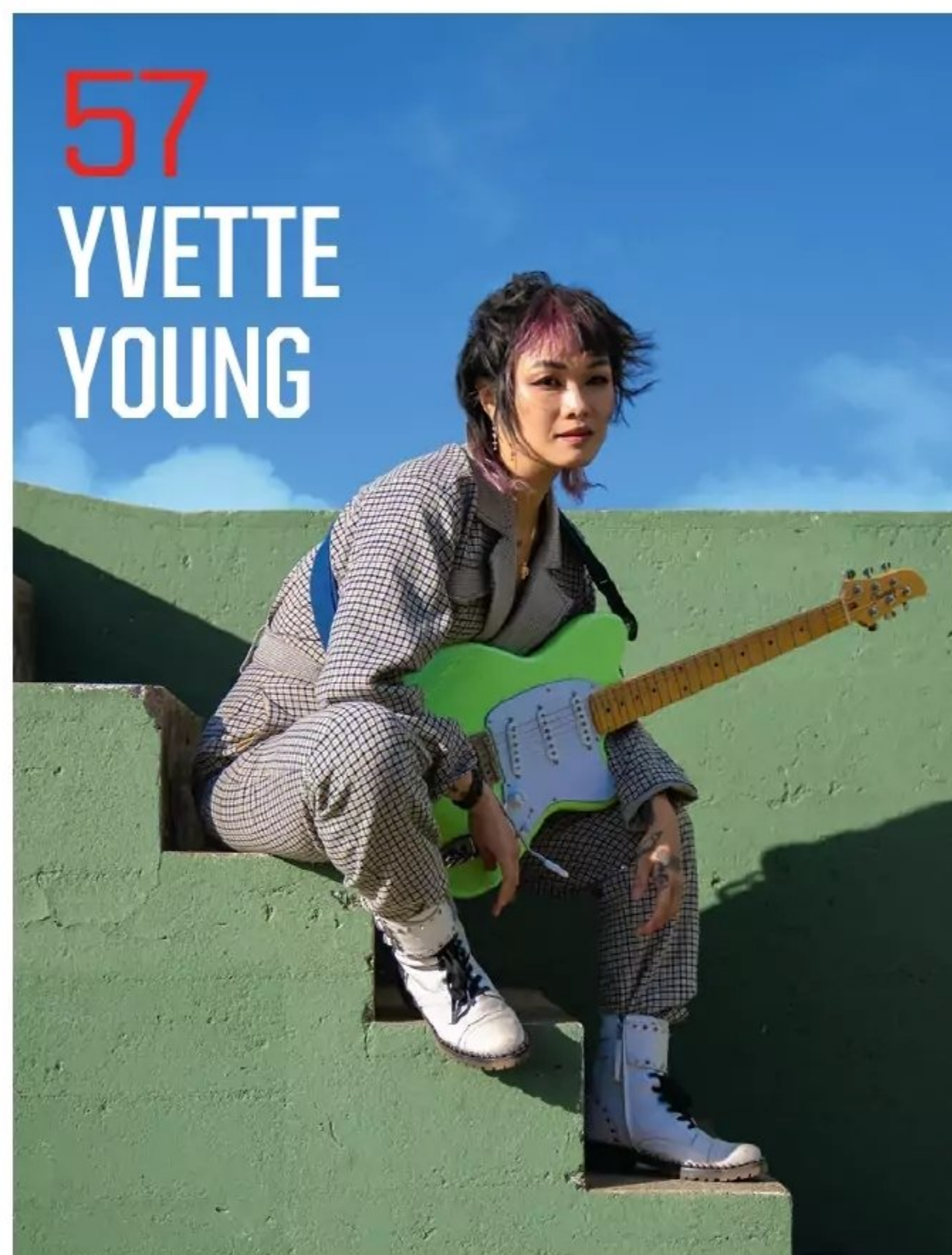




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Words Stuart Williams
Photography Phil Barker

ONE CARELESS OWNER

Fender's latest signature Strat is a tip of the hat to a grunge icon

Pearl Jam fans will recognise the guitar pictured as Mike McCready's 1960 Fender Stratocaster – the iconic guitar he's owned and played ever since Pearl Jam's second album, *Vs.* Except, that's not Mike McCready's guitar. It's a finely recreated replica, and you can own it!

Following in the tradition of Fender's Kurt Cobain Jaguar and Road Worn series, its nitrocellulose lacquer finish has undergone some serious relic'ing to recreate the look and feel

of Mike's prized Strat. As well as the heavy-relic alder body, the maple neck has been carved to recreate that of Mike's original with a custom "Early-'60s oval C-shape" profile. It's fitted with a 9.5"-radius rosewood fingerboard, 21 medium jumbo frets and authentically aged dots. Electronically, the pickups are Custom Mike McCready single coils with a five-way switch and vol/tone/tone controls.

It's fitted with a vintage-style tremolo and it comes in a deluxe Brown hardshell case. We'll be reviewing one soon.

UP CLOSE



Road Worn

The Three-Color Sunburst finish has been heavily beaten-up in order to recreate Mike McCready's original.



Custom pickups

Those single-coils are Custom Mike McCready models. Given his love of Hendrix and SRV Strat tones, we've got high hopes for these.



Neck

Fender has carved the neck into a '60s oval profile to match that of McCready's vintage guitar.

SCENE

YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS



08



“I’M STILL A GREEDY LEAD PLAYER AT HEART!”

SO WHY HAS **PLINI** GIVEN A SOLO TO TOSIN ABASI ON A NEW EP?

Australian maestro Plini is exploring darker tonalities on his new EP, armed with a newly updated Neural DSP plugin. And for an ‘evil’ solo, he called in a famous friend...

Your new EP, *Mirage*, explores the darker side of your playing, intermingled with your bright signature sound. How did you navigate blending the two together? There’s still a lot of Lydian in there, but in trying to expand my vocabulary I’ve been using a lot of chromatic and uglier tonalities. I don’t approach it too theoretically; I’ll treat what I’m playing as a minor pentatonic but with this extra evil note that’s borrowed from another scale. It’s just adding them note-by-note, seeing how they feel and what I can do with that extra tonality.

The track *Still Life* features a guest solo from Tosin Abasi. What does he bring

to the track?

There aren’t many guitarists I know that can write things that sound genuinely musical but also so evil; the way he plays is pretty, like, out-there compared to most guitarists. That’s probably the reason that I haven’t had too many guest guitarists lately. I’m still a greedy lead guitarist in my heart, so if I’ve written a section for the most epic ‘John Petrucci on a mountain’ solo, I could ask him, but I would rather do my best impression for the self-satisfaction. However, I knew Tosin would be perfect for that section. I love the fact that he’s constantly finding new ways to be more ridiculous as a guitarist!

Your Neural DSP plugin is the first to receive an update and it comes armed with a host of new features. How did that come about?

There are features in other plugins which have become a very integral part of how I like to make music. For example, the octave and fuzz pedals on Archetype: Gojira have been by my go-to tone for any sort of simple, not-too-

notey riffs, so I pestered Neural and they did everything on my wish list. We wanted to put a new take on some of the features, too. The octave on my plugin has an octave up and down, which is what I’ve been using on the Quad Cortex for live, and we made a few changes to the fuzz, getting it to break up in the right places. Now I have everything that I need for my sound all in one plugin.

And which is your main guitar for playing live these days?

I’m using my true temperament Strandberg Sälén, but I’ve just put some Fishman Fluence Open Core pickups on my through-neck signature which are sounding awesome. Most of the players I admire use Fishman now, and I play this ridiculous space-age looking guitar, and Fishman are the most space-age pickup company, so it makes sense. All the main rhythm tones sound clearer, brighter and spankier, and all the clean tones are just as warm and round. It just feels better.

Phil Weller



AMP HEAD

PRS MT-100

Mark Tremonti gave us a guided tour of his PRS MT-15 amp when it first launched, and we were instantly impressed with its crystalline cleans and thick distortion. So, imagine our excitement when we heard about the MT-100. Coming in at £1,595, this 100-watt head is equipped with three channels, joined by an Overdrive in between the Clean and Lead, and it's made to be loud.

Each channel has its own preamp valves, adding up to eight 12AX7s and a quartet of 6L6s at the output stage. That middle Overdrive channel is based on one of Mark's favourite amps (now might be a good time to mention that he loves his Dumble), and all three channels are equipped with a three-band EQ with presence, there's an FX loop, and it comes with a footswitch. Creed we say more?



PEDAL

JHS NOTAKLÖN

The Klon Centaur ranks amongst the most sought-after and, now, expensive guitar pedals of all time, but thanks to pedal gurus JHS, you can have a go at making your own clone. That's because the tongue-in-cheek-titled NOTAKLÖN is not only a clone, but a build-it-yourself kit.

There's no soldering required, and the kit contains the housing

plus all the components you'll need to build the pedal (including a tube of 'Goop' for you to keep your components secret, if you really want to go that far).

But as well as giving you the classic Klon circuit, JHS has built in its Shamrock mod, adding 4dB of gain as well as a mid bump. Priced at £99, it'll be out by the time you read this, and demand is already high!

PEDAL

BOSS RV-200

There's no shortage of reverb pedals out there, but when Boss unveils a multi-mode reverb unit, we listen. The RV-200 is the latest addition to Boss' 200 Series pedals, which are bigger than a regular compact unit but still manageable on your 'board. The RV-200 has certainly got our attention, with no fewer than 12 reverb modes ranging from traditional plate, room and spring to creative and experimental modes including Shimmer, Slowverb and Boss' brand new Arpverb, which produces rhythmic, cascading,

pitch-shifted reverb sounds. There are 127 user memories, MIDI in and out and hold, Warp and Twist functionality, and as well as true stereo functionality, you can hook up external footswitches or an expression pedal to maximise your control. Expect the price to be around £259. We'll be reviewing one shortly.



KIRK HAMMETT

"GREENY" 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD | GREENY BURST



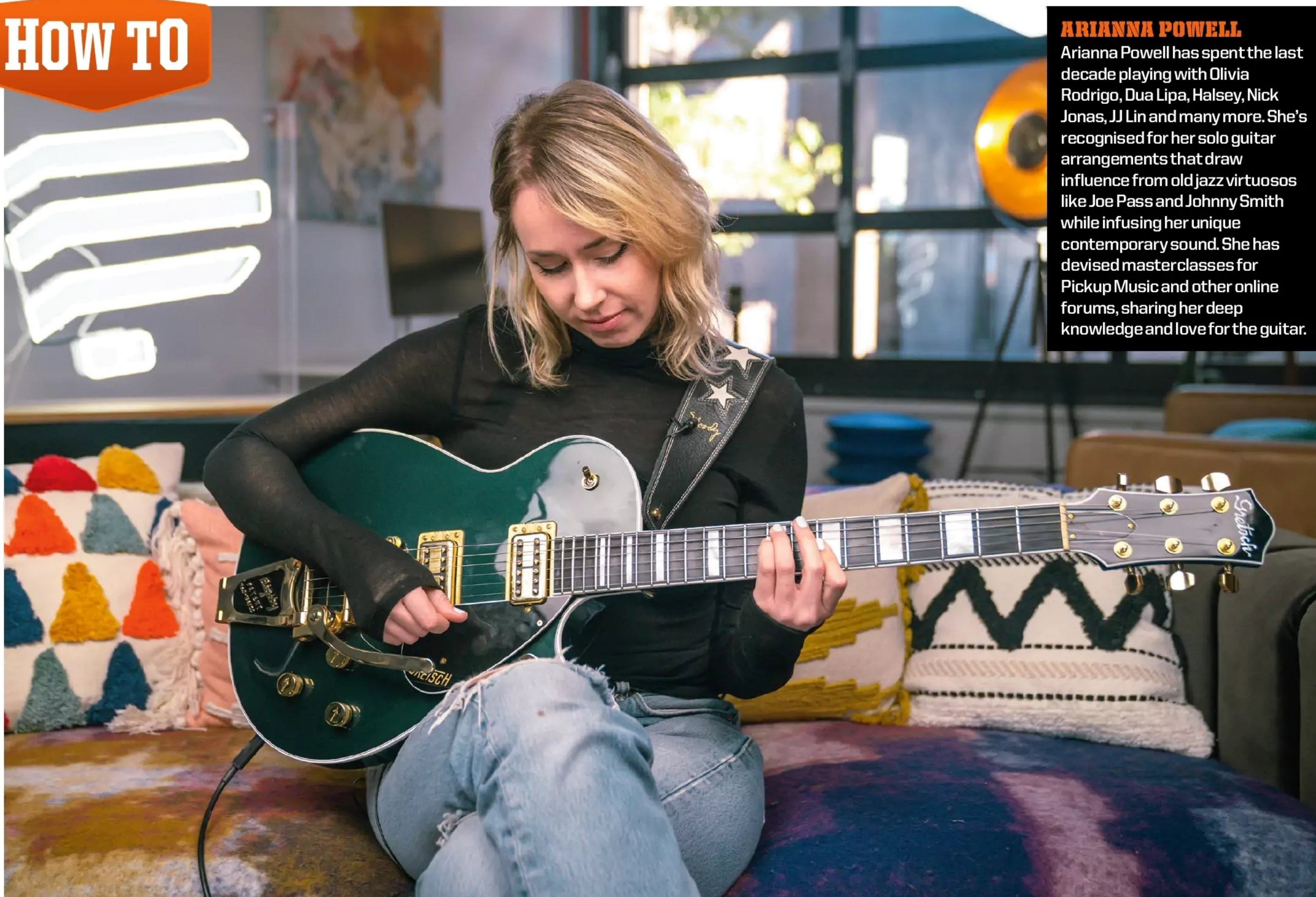
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ARIANNA POWELL

Arianna Powell has spent the last decade playing with Olivia Rodrigo, Dua Lipa, Halsey, Nick Jonas, JJ Lin and many more. She's recognised for her solo guitar arrangements that draw influence from old jazz virtuosos like Joe Pass and Johnny Smith while infusing her unique contemporary sound. She has devised masterclasses for Pickup Music and other online forums, sharing her deep knowledge and love for the guitar.

10 FINGERSTYLE JAZZ LICKS

Go fingerstyle as Pickup Music tutor Arianna Powell introduces some cool jazz licks to play without a pick

Sometimes getting those silky smooth jazz licks requires a lighter touch. Most guitarists gravitate towards a pick, but fingerstyle offers a whole new palette of dynamic colours and a warm, mellow sound. Even if you're

not a jazz player, there's plenty to take away from this style. One of the most enjoyable things about guitar is learning something new and then incorporating it into your own unique style.

We've got a special treat courtesy of Pickup Music – 10 tasty licks, guaranteed to get those creative

juices flowing. The first seven are in C major, before we mix it up a bit at the end. Arianna Powell, one of LA's finest, will guide you through each one in our video. We've also included tab so you can go at your own pace. Right, let's ditch the pick, unfurl those fingers, and explore some cool jazz runs.

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Free time

C

TAB

5 4 5 5 6 7 8 10 12

We start with the I chord - C major, using diad 3rd and 6th intervals. Take care with the slides and hammer-ons and make your changes as smooth as possible.

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[illegible]

This lick is over the ii chord – D minor. Now we're getting to the good stuff! Listen out for notes that "don't belong" in the scale and use them like stepping stones.

bit.ly/tg379audio

Free time **Em^b6**

TAB

7 5 4 7 9 8 7 10 8 7 10 7

This pretty little arpeggio is based on the iii chord. Take your time making the movement between each note nice and fluid. The perfect arpeggio should be a string of individual notes that sound like they flow into one another.

bit.ly/tg379audio

[illegible]

Here's a lick to outline the IV chord (F). The main idea is to include a G (GB D) triad to introduce the extended notes of the F chord (F A C). The G, B, and D notes of the G chord are the 9th, #11th, and 13th over our F chord. Crazy right?

bit.ly/tq379audio

Free time

G⁷

RP

3

3

3

3

5

5

5

8

8

7

5

4

5

TAB

This lick goes over the V chord (G major). We have core blues techniques, bends, diads, slides, but we don't want too much attitude. Aim for a mellow jazzy feel.

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Am¹¹
Free time

T
A
B

5 5 3 5 6 3 5 8 7 8 7 5 4 5 5

Now we're on to the vi chord. This lick is based around an Am11 chord and the A natural minor scale. Start by outlining the chord, then end with a pretty flourish.

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Free time Bm^{7b5}

TAB

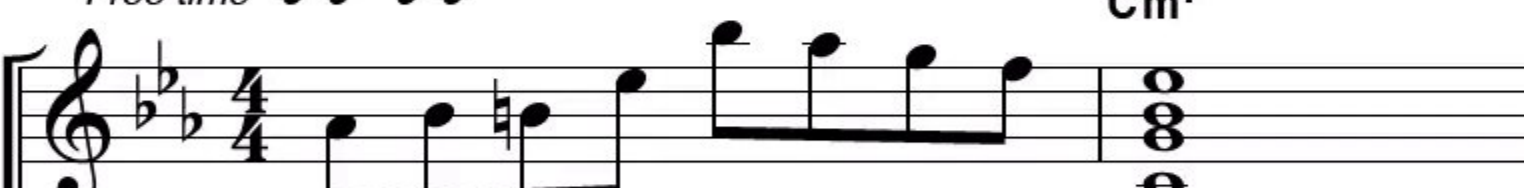
10 10 10 9

12 13 12 12

It's time for some dissonance over the vii chord. Our lick is essentially running through inversions of a Bm7 $\flat$ 5. There's nothing too tricky, but it sounds great!

bit.ly/tq379audio

Free time  Cm7



**T
A
B**

6 3 4 4 6 4 3 6 | 4 3 5 3

We're switching from C major to C minor (C D E_b F G A_b B_b) now. This jazzy lick is short and sweet - just an altered chord run landing back on the Cm7 root.

bit.ly/tg379audio

Free time

Gm7

Em7^b5

C

PM - 1

TAB

3 3 3 6 5 3 3 5 3 5 3 1 3 3 0 7

10 8 × 6 5 × 8 8
7 7 × 3 3 × 9 9
8 8 × 5 5 × 10

This is based around a classic ii-V vamp in F (Gm-C7), but we substitute the boring old C7 for a spicy Em7♭5. The single-note licks are slippery so proceed cautiously.

bit.ly/tg379audio

Free time **Gaug⁷**

TAB: 8 9 10 6 7 8 4 5 6 2 3 4 | 3

Let's drift off with a dreamy augmented lick. Nothing too complex for the fretting hand - just a fun symmetrical run down the fretboard.

- ✓ Pedal notes
- ✓ Pull-offs
- ✓ Single-string scales

RIFF OF THE MONTH

BLINK-182

Dance With Me

Featuring on the ninth studio album from Blink-182 *One More Time*, this riff features some inventive open-string pedal-note riffing by Tom DeLonge.

Pedalling means repeatedly returning to a certain note while alternating between other melodic notes.

This riff uses a D pedal note which is played as an open fourth string. The first note is

actually played a 16th note before the downbeat for a pushed feel. The best way to feel the push is to pick the first note with an upstroke, then keep your hand moving down and up in tempo. Play the first phrase at frets 11 and 12 with your first and second fingers, only picking the fretted notes, and pulling off to the open D each time.

Next, shift down to the 7th fret and play the second phrase using on the 7th, 5th, 4th and 2nd frets respectively, once again picking the

fretted notes and pulling off to the open string. Repeat each phrase twice and finish with a B5 powerchord.

CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 0:03–0:13

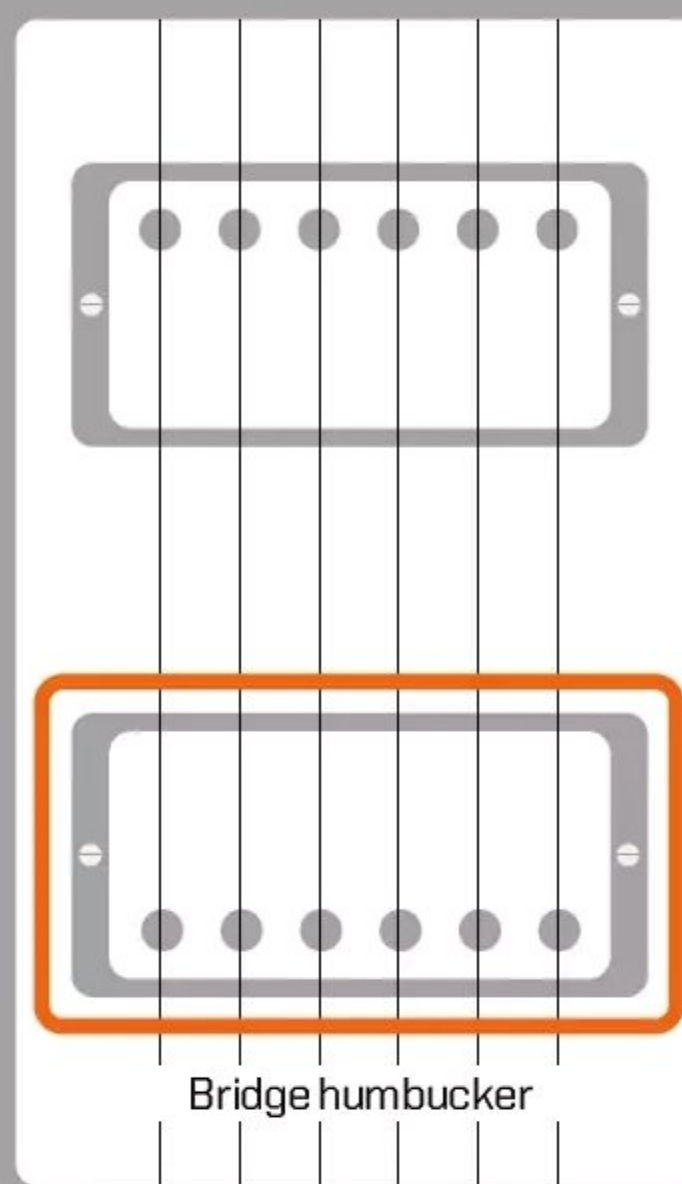
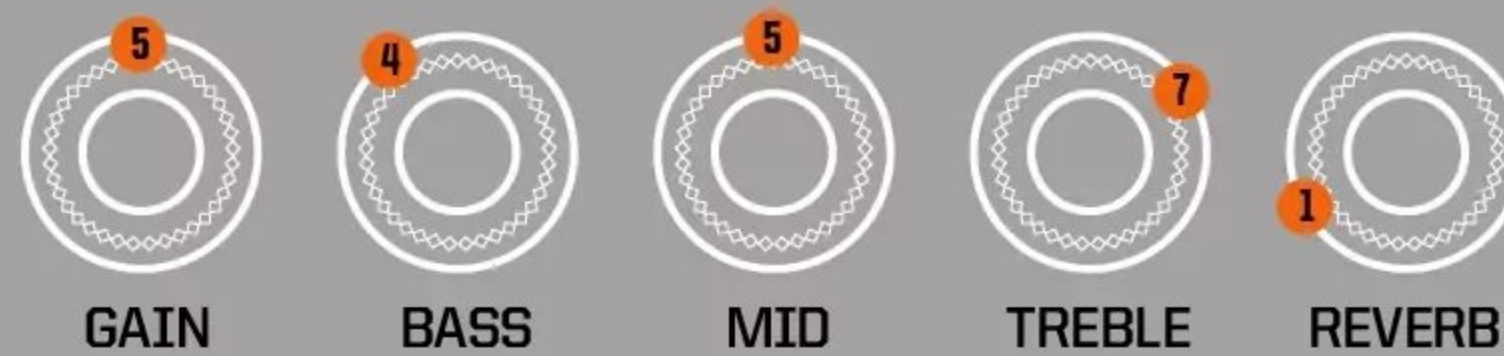
Tempo: 100bpm

Key/scale: B minor

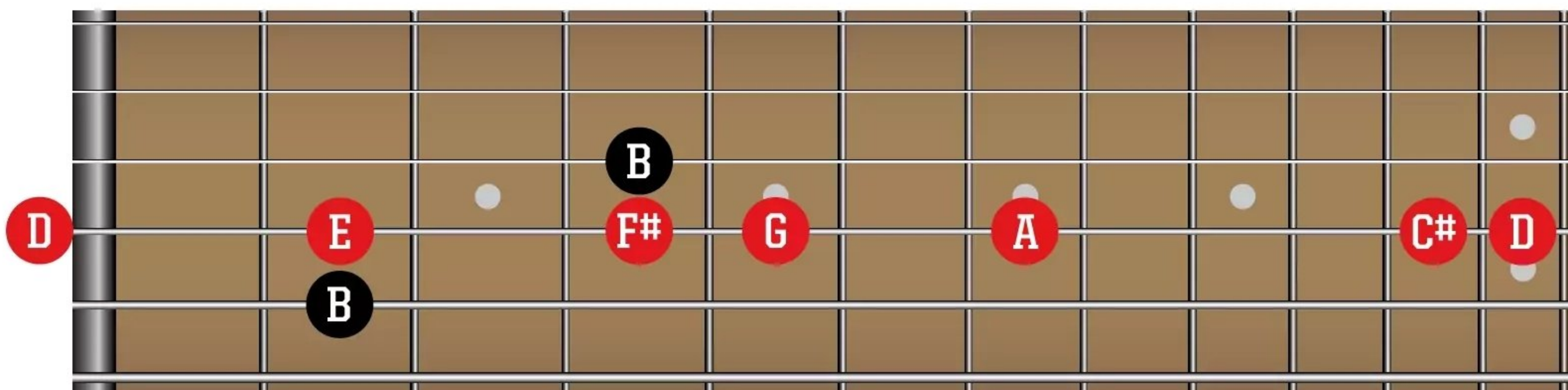
Main techniques: Pull-offs, picking, position shifts

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL DISTORTION



Use the bridge pickup of your guitar into a distorted amp with the gain set around halfway. If your pickups are lower in output, you can turn the gain up to 6 or 7. The notes should feel rich and full, but not too oversaturated. The natural compression of the distortion should make the picked notes and pull-offs the same consistent volume throughout.



The main part of this riff is played on the fourth string using notes from the B natural minor scale (B C# D E F# G A). Tom skips the B note on this string, but it would be at the 9th fret. A good exercise would be to play up and down the scale to clearly visualise

where the notes are on the string. You might notice that doing this sounds like the D major scale. This is because B minor and D major are relative keys, which means they have exactly the same notes, only starting from different roots.



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2023 BEST OF THE YEAR

A 50-page celebration: Brand new interviews with Nuno Bettencourt, Kirk Hammett and Keith Richards; the Year in Guitar; play like the stars of 2023, and much more...

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GUN FOR HIRE
Sophie Lloyd ripping
it up with Machine
Gun Kelly





Words Jonathan Horsley

2023 THE YEAR IN GUITAR

There was so much great guitar music to celebrate this year, with the return of **Metallica**, **The Rolling Stones** and a fired-up **Nuno Bettencourt**, alongside the rise of modern virtuosos **Matteo Mancuso** and **Sophie Lloyd**. But the story of 2023 began with the loss of one of the most influential players of all time...

S

o many things happen in a year in guitar, it can be hard to keep track. But when 2023 is done and dusted, how will it be remembered? Will it be remembered? Perhaps not by Kevin Buell, Bruce Springsteen's guitar tech, who, in February, during a show at Atlanta's State Farm Arena, got cleaned out by the world's first mass-produced electric guitar when The Boss threw his Telecaster to him in customary fashion and it connected with his head. Thankfully there was no lasting damage from an incident that proved there was still danger in rock 'n' roll.

The guitar and those who play it are fated to live out a strange existence; this instrument takes us to some strange places, doing some strange things.

What went through DragonForce's Herman Li as he shredded down a water slide in a mask and snorkel during the 70,000 Tons Of Metal Cruise? Chlorinated water, if he's lucky.

The year in gear is a story unto itself, but we must note some of the weird builds we have seen from outside of the music instrument industrial complex; guitars like the custom S-style that Devil & Sons' Daniel Wallis builds that was equipped with an iPad where you would normally find the pickups. The official line from Wallis says it's for playing along to video lessons and backing tracks. Our six-string obsession can steer us towards new discoveries. If you follow Aaron Rash on YouTube you will see why. His relentless quest to explore Kurt Cobain's *In Utero* tones culminated in the building of a replica aluminium Veleno and recreating a tone unerringly close to what we hear on the recording.

Photos Getty

VIRTUOSITY AND 'THE FUTURE OF GUITAR'

Obsession steers us to new heights in performance, too. This was a year in which virtuosity was once more pushed a little further, in hard-rock by the long-anticipated return of Extreme and Nuno Bettencourt with a fire under his ass. We also witnessed the rise of Sophie Lloyd, whose all-star debut album, *Imposter Syndrome*, finally secured her place at shred's top table – and a number one – after years building a YouTube following that's now millions-strong, and becoming first-call guitarist for Machine Gun Kelly. We also bore witness to the debut of Matteo Mancuso with *The Journey*, which feels like an epochal moment for the instrument. Whether applied to rock or jazz, the Sicilian's bravura fingerstyle approach is audacious and it looks like Al Di Meola, Steve Vai and Joe Bonamassa were right; this kid is the future of guitar.

And there was also some silly stuff, too, as when Wolfgang Van Halen threatened to change his name to Wolfgang Led Zeppelin – presumably Wolfgang Chili Peppers was taken. Sure, 2023 was fun, but it got off to the worst start...

FALLEN HEROES

If Jeff Beck's death on 10 January was the defining moment of 2023, his life, spent at the frontier of guitar, restlessly manipulating its sound to expand its musical potential, similarly defined what it means to be a guitar hero, to ultimately transcend the instrument.

Beck was a generational talent, the likes of which we may never see again. Evidence of his greatness is writ large in his discography. With The Yardbirds, he helped inaugurate rock's second evolutionary leap. "Jeff could channel music from the ethereal. His technique unique. His imaginations apparently limitless," wrote his friend – and, briefly, Yardbirds bandmate – Jimmy Page.

As a solo artist, Beck brought us the stately and majestic in *Cause We've Ended As Lovers*, and what would become his signature theme, *Beck's Bolero*. He would rework Charles Mingus. He would reference Indian scales and work them with slide and vibrato on *Nadia*. He was unorthodox, cavalier, with a fingerstyle technique that somehow changed the physical properties of his Stratocaster. It was like watching someone mould clay. No one had a whammy bar technique like him.

Evidence of his impact could also be found in the caliber of musician paying tribute to him and to the degree to which Beck influenced them; Rod Stewart, Tony Iommi, David Gilmour, Brian May, Eric Clapton, the list goes on.

"Jeff was completely and utterly unique, and the kind of musician who's impossible to define," said May.

"And I was absolutely in awe of him. He was only a couple of years older than me, and came from the same area where I came from, but he was a hero to me all along, doing things which I kind of dreamed of doing."

The Royal Albert Hall tribute shows in May did Beck's memory justice, with Stewart, Susan Tedeschi, Derek Trucks, Eric Clapton, Doyle Bramhall II, Billy Gibbons, Gary Clark Jr, Ronnie Wood and Kirk Hammett all sharing the stage to celebrate Beck's life.

January was a tough month. The 10th also saw the death of Dennis Budimir, 84, the jazz and rock session ace and Wrecking Crew alumnus, who worked with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, the Carpenters, Bill Withers, and played on *Trouble Child* from Joni Mitchell's jazz-inflected 1974 album *Court And Spark*. On 18 January, David Crosby died, aged 81, the co-founder of The Byrds and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young would not be described as a technical virtuoso but like Beck he influenced a generation. Lacing folk with the lysergic aura of psychedelic music,

the Mighty Croz helped establish the countercultural tenor of the '60s.

On 28 January, Tom Verlaine – co-founder of Television – died, aged 72. Forming a formidable twin-guitar partnership with Richard Lloyd, Verlaine radically altered the vocabulary of post-punk guitar through epic arrangements, songs knitted tight during extended practice sessions, and introduced to the world via their essential 1977 debut *Marquee Moon*. Just make sure you don't overlook its follow-up, *Adventure*.

Southern rock lost a figurehead and marked the end of an era on 5 March when Lynyrd Skynyrd's Gary Rossington died, aged 71. He was the band's last surviving original member. The last of a dying breed; he played through the pain barrier, with a metal plate in his left arm a constant reminder, not that it was needed, that he survived the band's 1977 plane crash. Rossington wrote his legacy into popular culture mostly with a 1959 Les Paul Standard, but always with a keen ear for melody, intonation, and the homespun grandeur that made Skynyrd the band for all occasions, BBQ cook-out and funeral alike.

Canada lost a national treasure and the world a songwriting great when Gordon Lightfoot died, aged 84, on 1 May. "Once in a blue moon you get to work and hang out with one of the people you admired when you were growing up," wrote Bryan Adams. "I was lucky enough to say Gordon was my friend and I'm gutted to know he's gone. The world is a lesser place without him."

Lightfoot left multi-platinum songbook behind him, an enduring influence on Bob Dylan, and countless others. Among whom was Robbie Robertson, who died on 9 August, aged 80. Robertson's work with The Band left us with tracks such as *The Weight*, *King Harvest Has Surely Come*, *Up On Cripple Creek*, each singular in their own right but complementary, as though Robertson and co were creating a tapestry of the mythologised American experience. Little wonder his playing took on a second life in the movies; Robertson was a Scorsese favourite, whose playing posthumously features on *Killers Of The Flower Moon*.

Bernie Marsden's passing on 24 August, aged 72, was another that hit the guitar community hard. The former Whitesnake guitarist was not just



FUTURE AND PAST
Above: Matteo Mancuso. Right: the inimitable Jeff Beck

"VAI AND BONAMASSA WERE RIGHT; MANCUSO IS THE FUTURE OF GUITAR"



➔ a player of rare ability but generous with his insight and time. Before his death, he sparked something of an outrage. His 1959 Les Paul Standard, aka the Beast, on which he wrote all the early Whitesnake material, was up for sale. How could he part with it? The internet implored him to reconsider, and he did.

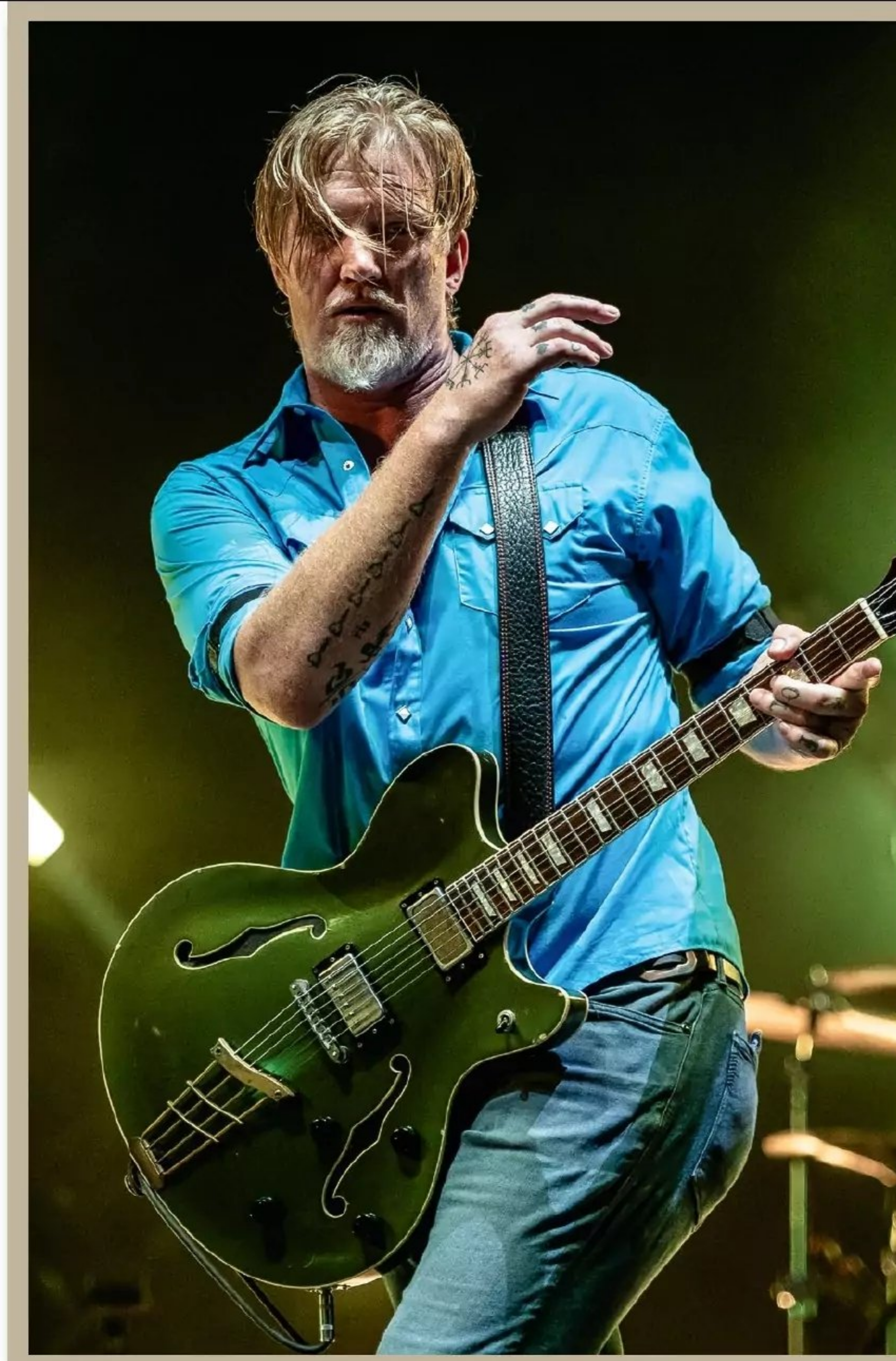
HOW THE INTERNET BROKE OUR GUITARS

There is ample evidence of the internet magnifying our collective insanity without needing an example, but this year it officially fried people's brains in the bidding war for a long-forgotten overdrive pedal from DigiTech, the Bad Monkey. At the height of the fever it was being listed for up to £1,250 BNWB, or £10,000, on the basis that it was once owned and used by Gary Moore.

Ostensibly this was all JHS Pedals owner Josh Scott's doing, posting a civic-minded public service announcement to the JHS YouTube page that drew attention to the tonal similarities between the prohibitively expensive and out-of-production Klon Centaur and the Bad Monkey, the latter hitherto cheap as chips. It got out of hand. Scott then posted a number of alternatives to the Bad Monkey, explained supply and demand to the hard of understanding, and advised us to enjoy the gear that we have.

"To the people complaining that I raised the price on this pedal and 'now you can't buy one,' I would like to remind you you had 19 years, but you never cared," said Scott. "This pedal has existed four years longer than JHS as a company, and most guitarists have hated on it since day one. No one kept you from trying it in 2004. Learn to listen with your ears and not trends, and you will be a much happier guitarist."

There were other crazes, thankfully less fiscally prohibitive, like fixing a rubber bridge to your guitar to give it that slightly deader, shorter-sustaining and clunky but still clear tone, favoured by neo-folk indie singer-songwriters and made famous by Phoebe Bridgers and especially Taylor Swift. It's an easy



and cheap mod. And TikTok users even propagated a virtually cost-free workaround – simply wrap rubber bands around your strings. Again, you get that muting, the overtones, a texture that can be used for fingerstyle, but with the option of being able to apply the dampening to certain strings.

MCCARTNEY JOINS THE STONES

This was a year of spectacular comebacks from rock's box-office elite. The Rolling Stones produced their first studio album since 2005 in Hackney Diamonds, drafting Paul McCartney, a young up-and-coming bassist from Liverpool, to guest on *Bite My Head Off* – and he did, almost literally, using a '64 Höfner with a built-in Univox Super Fuzz circuit, gifted to him by producer Andrew Watt. "During the breakdown section of the song, he activated the Super Fuzz switch, and it was complete

carnage!" Watt told Guitar Player. "Everyone was like, 'What the f*ck was that?' It was hilarious and so cool."

Queens Of The Stone Age also made a big impression with *In Times New Roman...*, ditto Metallica with *72 Seasons*, and Foo Fighters with *But Here We Are*, their first following the tragic death of drummer Taylor Hawkins.

It was a year of dramatic exits; Jeff Schroeder quit The Smashing Pumpkins after 16 years. And less dramatic returns; Nita Strauss returned to the Alice Cooper band. It was the year that Slash announced a new partnership with Magnatone, seemingly ending his long association with Marshall. Momentarily, the world stopped before a hastily drafted statement clarified things – signature Magnatone or not, he was still with Marshall.

...AND SATCH PLAYS VAN HALEN

At the year's end, the biggest stories in guitar include Eric Clapton's 1964 'Fool' Gibson SG selling at auction for \$1.27 million. And Joe Satriani is going to be busy next year. The original G3 of Satch, Steve Vai and Eric Johnson are reuniting. There is the Satch-Vai Tour, with the promise of the two guitar icons working on music together. And finally, do we have the big one, The Best Of All Worlds Summer Tour, on which Satriani will play alongside VH alumni Sammy Hagar and bassist Michael Anthony, with Jason Bonham on drums, playing a set packed with Van Halen tracks. For Van Halen fans, that's as good a tribute to Eddie as we'll get, and if that's a taste of things to come, 2024 is going to be huge...

ROMAN EMPEROR
QOTSA's cool ruler
Josh Homme

EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!!
Joe Satriani is ready to fire up some classic Van Halen



"SATRIANI WILL PLAY ALONGSIDE VAN HALEN ALUMNI - A TRIBUTE TO EDDIE"



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GUITARIST OF 2023

NUNO

Interview Amit Sharma
Portrait Dustin Jack

BETTENCOURT

HE CREATED THE MOST TALKED ABOUT GUITAR SOLO OF THE YEAR – INSPIRED BY HIS GREATEST HERO, EDDIE VAN HALEN. NOW, THE EXTREME VIRTUOSO REVEALS THE FULL STORY OF *RISE*. “THIS,” HE SAYS, “IS THE FIRST TIME I’VE BROKEN DOWN THE SOLO IN THIS LEVEL OF DETAIL...”

2023

was an exceptional year for guitar music, with no shortage of talent old and new dazzling us with

world-conquering riffs, miraculous fretwork and life-affirming compositions. But no one ruled the roost quite like Nuno Bettencourt, whose work on Extreme’s album *Six* – notable for being their first in 15 years – left everyone speechless in its sense of bold ambition, indicative of a band who knew how to play to their strengths while also reinventing themselves in other ways for the modern age. Particularly, it was his solo on lead single *Rise* that got the guitar community talking in every corner of the globe, ultimately proving why Bettencourt remains one of the finest gunslingers of his era.

In this new interview, Nuno offers what he describes as “the most detailed analysis yet” of the *Rise* solo, and tells the full story of how it was created – from Edward Van Halen dropping by the studio while it was being recorded to Nuno’s unorthodox amp settings and the secret pedal used during the rapturous climax of its very final moments. As he’s told us in the past, his approach often boils down to how pentatonic-based blues lines and neoclassical shred runs coalesce into what he refers to ‘simplicity’.

So without further ado, we present our Guitarist Of 2023 and also the man responsible for delivering our Solo Of 2023 – in the process motivating everyone from devout guitar aficionados to more casual listeners to appreciate just how powerful the right solo at the right time can truly be...







Congratulations, Nuno. It's been quite the year for you!

Thanks! It's been a bit overwhelming. When I look back on this year, there are definitely a lot of different emotions there. The response has been crazy. You always go into an album doing the best you can, but we definitely did not expect this response at all, with a lot of sold-out shows and excitement about the new music. Being called guitarist of the year and being voted solo of the year at this age and time in my life is remarkable... it's a miracle! I'm grateful for everything this year.

What better place to start than the Rise solo itself? It tells a story almost like different acts within a play, using a smorgasbord of gravity-defying techniques, heartfelt blues and lyrical phrases...

Wow... can we just leave it at that? Because what I'm about to say probably won't sound as good! When solos like this happen, or any leads for that matter, you never go in thinking all of those things you just said. You try your best but it's never like, 'This is what I'm going to do and I'm going to blow people's minds by opening with *this*, and then go into some three-act play that sounds like *that*!' It's not pre-decided or predefined. I'm usually guided by the song itself... like, what is going on behind the solo? What is the rhythm section playing? What areas have been left open for me here? When you start asking yourself those sorts of questions, they help you find what the song calls for and what to superimpose on top.

So how exactly did it start to take form?

I remember thinking I wanted to black

out all the lights and kick everyone out of the studio. I stood up, put my guitar on and cranked the sh*t out of all the speakers so everything was super loud, and just went for it. The first thing I remember is that everything stops in the beginning – the whole band cut out. You instantly get this direction either from Led Zeppelin or Van Halen, because both had these hits where everyone would stop and the guitarist would carry on. For whatever reason, I went straight into this tremolo [picking] thing. I don't know why, I just started doing it. For those early takes I was thinking I wouldn't keep it, it was just f*cking around. But what's really strange is what happened next...

Was this the Eddie Van Halen visit?

Yeah! My phone kept vibrating. I ignored it because I didn't want to be taken out of my zone. But I started thinking something bad was going on, so I looked at my phone and it was our singer Gary [Cherone]. I was like, 'Leave me alone, I'm recording!' Then he sent a message saying 'You've got to go downstairs right now and come out front!' And I'm like 'No, I'm recording!' Then he calls me... we haven't called each other in 25 years, never mind five times in one go! So I thought 'Right, I'm going down to knock this dude out because he's f*cking up my vibe!' I walked out the door and he was there with Edward Van Halen. I remember looking at them, smiling and thinking 'Okay, that's a good reason to interrupt my solo!' It would end up being the last time I saw Edward.

What did you guys talk about?

There were lots of big hugs and big kisses. I was asking about what he was up to and he told me, 'Keep it between us for now but Van Halen wants to go out the way we came in, we're reaching out to all the original guys for a big tour!' I thought it sounded incredible and he was so excited. Then he went to his car and started blasting some music out the window telling us that it was his son Wolfie, who had played all the

instruments on this debut album. It's crazy, the Rise solo was anointed by whatever DNA I grabbed from Edward that day. Whatever kiss he gave me on the lips, I definitely went back into the studio and brought it with me. You can't get more inspired than Edward showing up. He changed the world, yet was always very loving and very giving.

And he is greatly missed. Did you invite him up and play him the solo?

He said, 'I know you're doing an album up there!' And I regret not asking, 'You wanna come up and hear it?' But I was only in the early stages. I wanted to give him the proper version once it had been finalised, not some demo! So he said, 'Okay, I'll come back, let me know when it's done!' The fact I never got to play it to him is brutal. Nobody will ever take that throne from him, but I hope he's looking down at me like, 'You done good, kid... you done good!' This guitar solo would 1,000% never have existed if it were not for Edward, and maybe a couple of others like Brian May and Al Di Meola. You have to tip your hat to the players who shape you. At the end of the day, you are what you eat.

Did that meeting change what you did next with the solo?

I went back up feeling amped and inspired, because it was effectively him saying, 'Go get 'em, kid!' – like a coach coming out before play. I probably sat down to catch my breath because... no pressure or anything! Seeing him pumped me up, and I think you can hear it. I remember listening back to those early takes afterwards thinking, 'You know what, this is 80 per cent done!' Seeing Edward that day made me listen to it with a different pair of ear goggles. If he hadn't come by, I might have redone or swapped things. In a weird way, that beginning part – that couldn't have been more Eruption-esque! – maybe I would have felt it was too Edward-sounding. But the fact he turned up made me think, 'Just go for it and let it fly!' I stopped asking questions or worrying.

"AFTER A CERTAIN POINT ON GUITAR, YOU START GETTING MORE EXCITED ABOUT THE ACCIDENTS - THE THINGS THAT SHOW HOW HUMAN YOU REALLY ARE"



“It’s scary how perfect he is!”

WOLFGANG VAN HALEN SALUTES NUNO

“When Extreme came back with *Six*, and that solo especially on *Rise*, I think it was one of the best guitar moments of the year for sure,” Wolfgang says. “Nuno has always been such a wonderful person and champion of my father’s legacy and it’s super cool just to see how my father has inspired every guitar player and how they use that inspiration. Man, it’s just so badass! It’s a really good solo. I love it so much. It’s actually scary how perfect he is! We’ve conversed on social media and we’ve met in person a couple of times. I know I hung out with him a few times around Dad, but I think we need to hang out more...”

The next section of the solo has some pretty ambitious whammy bar work – again, not a million miles away from what Edward was famous for.

So where do you go after that? I hadn’t used a whammy bar much in years. So I grabbed the damn thing and started doing things with it. I remember listening back after a few more takes and listening out for this big epic bend that I was going for. That did not come out, I hit three or four notes instead! I thought I’d go back and fix it, but it made such a weird sound I’m still trying to figure out exactly how I played it. It was one of those ‘what the f*ck?!’ moments where things sound a bit horrible, weird and twisted. I decided to leave it, because that’s another thing I learned from Edward. Leave the weird sh*t, embrace the imperfect. After a certain point on guitar, you start getting more excited about the accidents – the things that show how human you really are, the emotions and the cracks. That’s what connects with people. By the end of this second act, we’re all moving...

At this point, as well as merging ideas from the D Mixolydian, D Aeolian and D minor pentatonic scales, you also slow down and speed up for certain lines – adding to the unpredictable thrill of it all.

Was that a conscious decision?

I was almost thinking of it like drum fills. The groove is going but my lines go slow then fast. Nothing goes out of time, but I’m definitely f*cking with time. When I speed up for those bluesy licks, those are the kind of things I would do if I was playing timbales! That side of me comes from Al Di Meola. He’s the king of all that stuff, making his guitar sound like percussion. That connected with me and worked well against the Edward influence, who is the total opposite and legato-led. Al’s stuff is meticulously fierce and on the beat while Edward was so elastic-y and stretchy. The *Rise* solo is those two worlds colliding!

And, as for the final act, there are those heavily muted open-string legato arpeggios that you play on the three lower strings. Given the speed you’re hitting and the rolling rhythms created through hammering on and pulling off, it’s as climatic as a guitar solo can get.

There’s something about the drums going from that punk groove to half speed. Funnily enough, everyone else slowing down made me want to go faster! It felt like the soundtrack to a movie. I didn’t think about it or write it, I just started doing this percussive muted thing that I’ve probably been doing for 30 years on tracks like *Peacemaker Die*. And because I was playing in drop D, my fingers started naturally going to these patterns. It was like an out of body experience where I was telling myself, ‘I don’t know where you are going with this!’ while my fingers kept following the chords. I cleaned it up a little, but 90 per cent of the idea was there. Every now and then you play a solo and it just happens.

You’ve told us in the past that your trusty ProCo Rat pedal is what tightens up your signal and helps give certain lines a percussive feel you liken to a kick drum.

You’re absolutely right, because that palm-muted thing at the end of *Rise* is





➔ the epitome of why the Rat pedal is so important to me. It tightens up the floppiness of any Marshall or whatever I use, making it sound more percussive and much tighter. A big reason why people think there's a delay is because I don't pick every note. I only pick the notes I want to pop forward to create a wide dynamic. If I'd picked every note or muted every note, it would have been very straightforward and might have actually sounded like an exercise! The way I look at it, this section is more like a drum solo that ebbs and flows than a straight beat.

As for other pedals, it definitely sounds like a Phase 90 was engaged for that alternate picked 'first act'?

You're right... but it's hard to remember exactly. I might have stuck it on lightly for the whole thing! To be honest, this is the first time I've broken down the solo into this level of detail. One thing that I've never told anyone is what happens in the second half of that palm-muted bit. All these interesting harmonics come out of nowhere and no one seems to hear it because the vocals come in to trick people into just hearing that. I also kick in an octave pedal going up, just enough to be faintly heard. I've never said this in an interview, nobody has ever asked, so here you go! It's funny, in some of the clips for the video, you can see me playing that section high and some people were commenting, 'You're f*cking with us and playing it in the wrong place of the neck!' Because there was a pedal creating that octave up, I moved up to the higher frets even though I didn't play it like that. I felt stupid that these octaves were coming in but my hands weren't showing it!

Which octave pedal did you use?

It was the latest Boss one, the OC-5, which has a new octave up feature. The old ones could only go down. I set the

pedal so low that at soundchecks, I find myself wondering if it's even on, but I can tell as soon as I turn it off. Because the original guitar doesn't go away, that part is almost like a synth. Octave pedals don't sound the same and can be a little synthetic... that's why we use 'em! Right now I have the Rat pedal sitting on my head and the OC-5 next to it, but I don't like what it does when I'm not using it. I can hear it in the loop, so my tech plugs it in just before *Rise* and takes it out for the next song!

You mentioned Marshall earlier, are we hearing a vintage head or something more recent?

It was the same head for the whole album, a straightforward JCM2000 DSL. It's not modded or anything. It's the same head I'm using on tour because I love the way it sounds. My settings are crazy, though! People often tell me they can't make their head sound like the

same and here's why.

I have everything almost off. The Presence is on one, the Treble is on one, the same goes for Mids and the Bass is on about four. I know that sounds like I'm putting a blanket on the amp but when it's loud it sounds f*ckin' big, warm and crunchy.

It was definitely a strong year for you. But do you feel it was a strong year for guitar music in general?

What kind of musicians have impressed you?

There are so many great players out there, like Andy James from Five Finger Death Punch. He's the epitome of someone doing all this heavy sh*t but still keeping it really creative. He surprises me with every solo he does. And it's not super out-there or jazz crazy. He's able to be creative in an area we can all do if we worked hard enough, but he's also inventive enough to take the left turns you don't expect. Things that make you go, 'That's so good... f*ck you!' Because he's that great. And then there's Matteo Mancuso, who is an Allan Holdsworth or Pat Metheny-level guitarist that's completely jaw-dropping but also knows how to play really emotive. So it's weird when people say *Rise* is the best solo of the year. I remember texting Steve Lukather

and saying I couldn't believe they'd chosen me. And he replied, 'Nuno, I'm excited it's you, who else could it be... when was the last time we were all texting each other like this about some solo?!' I didn't have an answer so he said, 'Yeah, not for a long time, so suck it up, tough sh*t!' I still find it strange to be on the receiving end of stuff like this because there are so many great players out there.

Well, there's no shortage of note-perfect *Rise* covers on YouTube to prove how universally it's adored...

There are guys who can play the *Rise* solo with their f*ckin' eyes closed. It's really not that crazy. The creativity always comes first. Edward did it best because on that first album he changed the whole world with *Eruption*. End of story. I don't give a f*ck if you're Jimmy Page, Brian May or a beginner, back then you just knew things would never be the same. But on the same album, Edward was playing *Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love* and that solo was so simple, just an ascending line on the second string with the first ringing out. The same thing played twice and that's a wrap. He had the courage to play what the song needed. If it was fun and fast like *Hot For Teacher*, he went and did it. If it was something slow or tasty, he did it. He was fearless about being human when it was needed. That's something that never gets talked about. It's always about the flashy stuff but people miss out on the stuff that really matter – doing what the songs call for.

And like many of the guitar greats you just mentioned, some of your most famous solos are the ones most indicative of your personality – musical truths, if you think about them from a philosophical standpoint...

Edward was smiling the whole time. You could easily hear his personality in his playing. The same goes for Brian May, Jimmy Page, Stevie Ray Vaughan and David Gilmour. Gilmour even talks like how he plays. It's not just technical stuff, it's the human touch. You play who you are. I can try and learn all the chops, but whatever I do with my hands and my mind will be uniquely me. You get good at guitar by being yourself. Even though we all learn the same notes and scales and have access to the same kinds of gear, you will always sound like you. It's important to embrace that.







POWER PLAY
Nuno Bettencourt
(right) with Extreme
bassist Pat Badger

Words Amit Sharma

RISE AND SHINE

The 5 Greatest Solos Of 2023

05 KING GIZZARD AND THE LIZARD WIZARD SUPERCCELL

In one of King Gizzard's heaviest tracks, inspired by the stoner metal fury of bands like High On Fire, it makes perfect sense that guitarist Joey Walker chose to end this song with a burst of ascending tapping licks in C# Phrygian Dominant – the fifth mode of the F# harmonic minor scale.

04 JOE BONAMASSA IS IT SAFE TO GO HOME

Taking inspiration from Gary Moore as he often has done in the past, Bonamassa delivered this Josh Smith-penned track as a masterclass in how to solo over a slow ballad in A natural minor, using the major 2nd and minor 6th intervals to inject more mood into pentatonic lines.

03 UNPROCESSED DIE ON THE CROSS OF THE MARTYR

Ibanez endorsee Manuel Gardner Fernandes has quickly become one of the most respected tech-metal guitarists today, which is why few will be surprised by the gravity-defying super shred heard on this track from Unprocessed's third album.

02 MATTEO MANCUSO SILKROAD

Performed on his Yamaha Pacifica to imitate whammy bar heroes like Jeff Beck and Scott Henderson, and written in dedication to his hometown of Palermo, this track from the 26 year-old guitarist's debut stunned many of us not only for its technical prowess, but also its tasteful moments of restraint. A highly conceptual instrumental, in which the F# Phrygian mode is employed to reflect the

Sicilian capital's Arabic history, *Silkroad* captures the essence of Middle Eastern culture through the usage of minor 2nd and minor 6th intervals. Ultimately it presented Mancuso as a perfect storm of fingerstyle technique and highly evolved musicality.

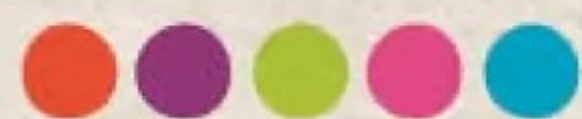
01 EXTREME RISE

It is often said that the best solos are the ones that ebb and flow in order to tell a story, pulling the listener in different directions that amaze as much as they surprise. Which is precisely what Nuno Bettencourt chose to do for Extreme's big comeback single, stringing together a sequence of contrasting ideas that incorporated a range of different modes and techniques in the key of D. It's the kind of solo that makes you feel like he was making it up as he went along and having fun with it, which was precisely how it came to be.

"IDEAS THAT INCORPORATED A RANGE OF DIFFERENT MODES AND TECHNIQUES"

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Words Ellie Rogers

POWER UP!

The riffs that rocked 2023

05 GRETA VAN FLEET THE FALLING SKY

Since his band burst onto the airwaves with *Highway Tune* back in 2017, Jake Kiszka has continually proved himself as a swaggering rock 'n' roll riff machine. This doozy makes use of DADGAD tuning, lots of fleet-fingered hammer-ons and pull-offs, and places heavy emphasis on that open D string to establish a mystically-hued drone and a rolling, almost infinitely loopable groove. Locked in with the track's pounding drums, it's a recipe for vigorous head nodding – voluntary or otherwise. Sure, it might not do much to stem the never ending slew of Jimmy Page comparisons, but on what planet could that really be a bad thing?

04 COVET BRONCO

Catchy, complex and well outside the box of traditional riff-craft, *Bronco* captures the essence of Yvette Young's extraordinary style. A leading light of the math-rock universe, she

utilises open tunings, uncommon time signatures and principles derived from her piano playing background to explore beyond the norms of guitar technique. This particular riff undulates with a sense of perpetual motion until it's halted in its tracks by one of the coolest gear deployments of the year: as Young stomps on a Boss's DD-3 delay, the riff stutters into suspension for a few glorious seconds before dropping straight back into another immaculate groove. Frankly, it deserves a chef's kiss for pure tastiness.

03 THE HIVES COUNTDOWN TO SHUTDOWN

If the last 25 years or so have taught us anything about The Hives, it's that they're masters of building maniacal tension and then detonating it right in your face. This dynamite riff is no exception. For the tension, we have an ascending intro lick that climbs its way right to the top of the fretboard, but which incorporates lots of unsettling semitone slips backwards

along the way. Then, for the detonation, Nicholas Arson and Vigilante Carlstroem explode into their trademark brand of flawlessly tight, dual-powerchord riffage. Despite the decade-long pause between albums, this banger proves the high-octane Swedes never really missed a beat.

02 MUTOID MAN CALL OF THE VOID

Boasting some wickedly off-kilter guitar tones, this simple hammer-on riff by Stephen Brodsky is not only one of the most fun of the year, but it's also a solid gold reminder that it's not just about what you play, but how you doctor the sound that can make or break a guitar line. Part punk, part metal and part something else entirely, this mutant riff is set in a Drop A# tuning and gets its characteristic squawk from a Boss Super Shifter that's been set to pitch up by octave. According to Brodsky, this chaotic anthem sonically approximates "a hungover cyborg vomiting after a night of partying."

01 KING GIZZARD & THE WIZARD LIZARD WITCHCRAFT

With the release of their 24th album, these ultra-prolific Aussies finally gave their fans what they'd been waiting for: a record about wizards and lizards. Nestled among six other thrashy, ritualistic romps on *PetroDragonic Apocalypse; Or, Dawn of Eternal Night: An Annihilation Of Planet Earth And The Beginning Of Merciless Damnation*, the lead riff for *Witchcraft* is perhaps the most liable of all to get stuck in your brain – just as any good black magic incantation should.

Chiefly performed by Stu Mackenzie, the minor-hued riff is hammered out in single notes that precisely follow his vocal melody – or vice versa. By King Gizz standards, it's a relatively straightforward approach to riff writing, but it's one taken straight from the original manual for heavy metal guitarists (think *Iron Man* by Black Sabbath, but on steroids), and – rather than their trademark proggy stoner rock – this is the direction towards which the whole album leans.

As the rest of the band kicks in, the riff gets doubled up and propelled by a thundering rhythm guitar, bass and drum assault for extra apocalyptic urgency. It's fast, furious and perfect for a spot of good old fashioned headbanging.

Tonewise, Mackenzie's guitar is shrouded in a suitably ungodly fuzz effect. While the exact gear he used in the studio isn't reliably documented as of yet, he's known to be partial to the Devi Ever Torn's Peaker – a pedal that conjures thick, abrasive tones reminiscent of those classic fuzzes from the '70s and '80s, or indeed the kind of distorted sound you might get from a badly torn amp speaker.

Live, Mackenzie has been wheeling out his super rare, humbucker-equipped Gibson Holy Explorer for this one. With its inherently meaty tones, the guitar also proved a studio favourite during the band's last adventure into thrash territories, 2019's *Infest The Rats' Nest*.

"PERFECT FOR
A SPOT OF GOOD
OLD FASHIONED
HEADBANGING"





Words Ellie Rogers, Amit Sharma, Phil Weller, Stan Bull

The guitar albums of the year:
from metal to blues, rock 'n' roll
to jazz fusion and all points
in between...

50
STEVE VAI
VAI/GASH

(Favored Nations)

These long-lost biker metal recordings were a glimpse into what could have been if Vai's friend Johnny 'Gash' Sombretto had not tragically passed away.

49
SKINDRED
SMILE

(Earache)

Nearly topping the UK charts with album eight, the Welsh reggae metallers are experts in combining aggressive guitars with off-beat syncopation.

48
ROYAL BLOOD
BACK TO THE WATER BELOW

(Warner Records)

Returning to their heavier roots after experimenting with dance influences last time round, the signal-splitting UK duo again proved there's more to them than hype.

47
BLACK STONE CHERRY
SCREAMIN' AT THE SKY

(Mascot Label Group)

The Kentucky troupe give skyscraping stadium rock a modern edge, peppering album eight with luscious harmonies and chunky, drop-tuned anthems.

46
COACH PARTY
KILLJOY

(Chess Club)

Powered by the fuzzy guitar interplay of Steph Norris and Joe (not that one) Perry, this cheerfully anarchic debut was one of 2023's most infectious.

45
NITA STRAUSS
THE CALL OF THE VOID

(Sumerian Records)

The versatile string-slinger harmonises her voice with a cast of guest vocalists, excelling in melodeath, industrial metal and shock rock simultaneously.

44
HAKEN
FAUNA

(InsideOut Music)

Henshall and Griffiths continue their derring-do double act, blending extended range, time signature-skewed metal with jazz, funk and punching choruses.

43
CODE ORANGE
THE ABOVE

(Blue Grape Music)

Less abrasive and more contemplative than their recordings of the past, the Pittsburgh sextet's fifth album thrilled in all the right places.

42
FEIST
MULTITUDES

(Fiction)

She's always been an exceptional songwriter, but the magic of Feist's latest lies in its ASMR-like guitar recordings that capture every wonderfully woody detail.

41
IN FLAMES
FOREGONE

(Nuclear Blast)

After two decades of experimentation, the melodeath mainstays return to their roots as ex-Megadeth guitarist Chris Broderick helps reignite their fire.

40
THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM
HISTORY BOOKS

(Rich Mahogany)

The reunited band's first album in nine years delivers trademark guitar-driven heartland rock – including a duet with Brian Fallon's hero Bruce Springsteen.

39
MAEBE
REBIRTH. RELIVE. REPEAT.

(Self-released)

The brainchild of guitarist Michael Astley-Brown, in which emotional depth and technical ability collide in the most articulate lyric-free album of the year.

38
TIGERCUB
THE PERFUME OF DECAY

(Loosegroove)

For those who like their choruses catchy and their riffs dark, detuned and unsettling, Tigercub's latest hits like sonic catnip of the highest order.

37
MUTOID MAN
MUTANTS

(Sargent House)

Emerging after a six-year pause, Stephen Brodsky unleashed the absolute riot of



contorted guitar madness that Mutoid fans had been salivating for.

36 ENTER SHIKARI A KISS FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

(So Recordings)

Weaving around sizzling synths and vocal hooks, Rory Clewlow's energetic, treble-stacked guitars win best supporting actor on this triumphant affair.

35 THE LEMON TWIGS EVERYTHING HARMONY

(Captured Tracks)

The eccentric New Yorkers exchange glam rock pomp for delicate fingerpicking on their melodically rich fourth album.

34 SQUID O MONOLITH

(Warp)

The UK five-piece steer further away from previous post-punk touchstones and into unwieldily experimental territory.

33 BARONESS STONE

(Abraxan Hymns)

On their second album since Gina Gleason joined as lead guitarist, Baroness streamlined their heavy sound in favour of a more refined and focused attack.

32 RODRIGO Y GABRIELA IN BETWEEN THOUGHTS... A NEW WORLD

(ATO)

2023 was the year that these pioneers of nylon string badassery funk'd up and went electric. Boy, was it a stylistic risk worth taking.

31 JOE BONAMASSA BLUES DELUXE VOL. 2

(J&R Adventures)

This love-letter to greats like Albert King and Fleetwood Mac saw the blues giant simplify his approach to embrace a more minimalistic side.

30 EMILY WOLFE THE BLOWBACK

(Crows Feet Records)

Transfiguring righteous feminine rage into hooky, punk-spirited guitar anthems, the



Epiphone signature artist found her true voice while self-producing her third album.

29 SOPHIE LLOYD IMPOSTER SYNDROME

(Autumn Records)

Roping in famous friends from Trivium and Halestorm for a shred masterclass, the English guitarist's solo debut delivered on its promise and then some.

28 GRETA VAN FLEET STARCATCHER

(Lava)

Doubling down on songwriting and improvisation, Jake Kiszka took another giant leap towards true rock god status on the band's blockbuster third LP.

27 JAKUB ZYTECKI REMINDE ME

(Jakub Zytecki)

New to the concept of ambient shred? Marvel as clean tapping and bludgeoning eight-string riffs collide at the hands of next-gen virtuoso. Jakub Zytecki.

26 EMPIRE STATE BASTARD RIVERS OF HERESY

(Roadrunner)

Behold Simon Neil and Mike Vennart's explosive new lease of life in this metal supergroup which melds thrash, grindcore, sludge and more.

25 CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM LIVE IN LONDON

(Alligator Records)

Armed with his signature Telecaster Deluxe, the former teen prodigy cranked things up a notch or 10 with his improv-packed debut live offering.

24 BEN HOWARD IS IT?

(Island)

Reeling from two mini-strokes, Howard set his recovery to a soundtrack of spliced guitar rhythms and delay-drenched electrics on his most ambitious record yet.

23 SYLOSIS A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME

(Nuclear Blast)

Following his departure from Architects, Josh Middleton returned to what he does best – penning neck-snapping riffs that whip mosh pits into a frenzy.

22 SAMANTHA FISH & JESSE DAYTON DEATH WISH BLUES

(Rounder)

The Kansas City phenom and Texas country renegade brought out the best in each other on this fun-filled and Grammy-nominated blues-rock romp.

21 MAMMOTH WVH MAMMOTH II

(I Am The Sheriff/BMG)

Wolfgang Van Halen cut this second album of high-powered hard rock as a one-man band. As a guitarist, he's raised the bar with some extra fizz in his solos.

20 MEHRO DARK CORNERS AND ALCHEMY

(Heroine Music Group)

The LA-based singer-songwriter's second album is a richly textured blend of intricate fingerstyle guitar work and dreamy falsetto vocals.

19 THE HIVES THE DEATH OF RANDY FITZSIMMONS

(The Hives AB)

High-voltage fuzz tones and gritty '60s cleans swing through garage rock riots and frenetic punk jams with great effect.

18 BOYGENIUS THE RECORD

(Interscope)

The long-awaited debut from Lucy Dacus, Phoebe Bridgers and Julien Baker is full to the brim of heartfelt indie guitarplay.

FOOS COMPANY

Chris (left) with Dave Grohl, Nate Mendel and Pat Smear



➔

17

FOO FIGHTERS BUT HERE WE ARE

(Roswell)

If the first Foo Fighters album since the death of drummer Taylor Hawkins was marked by grief, the band rocked as hard as ever. Dave Grohl, Pat Smear and Chris Shiflett crafted swathes of clever guitar parts with clean, jangly layers rubbing against crunching fuzz to produce some of the most epic sounds

the Foos have ever given us. Opening track *Rescued* had shades of the band's '90s classic *Everlong*. Power ballad *Beyond Me* has a touch of Brian May in its gargantuan guitar solo. And in *Rest*, the album's emotional finale, the passage from beautiful acoustic intro to shattering fuzz chords has a poignant echo of Nirvana.

"CLEAN, JANGLY LAYERS RUBBING
AGAINST CRUNCHING FUZZ"

Photos: Danny Clinch / Adam Gasson

"For most of this record, I didn't even bring a guitar!"

Inside the Foos' M.O. – by guitarist Chris Shiflett

How much of this album was recorded at the band's HQ, Studio 606?

To be honest, I'm not sure what we recorded where! Some of it was at Studio 606, but the meat of the record was done at our producer Greg Kurstin's studio. He's got such a ridiculous collection of guitars, amps, pedals, everything you need. For most of this record, I didn't even bring a guitar!

You didn't even use your beloved '57 Goldtop?

No! I figured I didn't need my '57 if he's got all these beautiful Les Pauls, Teles and Jazzmasters lying around. I'd just look through the collection and think, 'Oooh, we'll use that today!' As things were trucking along, it became my mission to not use any of my own gear on this album!

The album's closing track, *Rest*, really takes the listener on a journey – from brooding acoustic simplicity to orchestrated fuzz...

There's a lot of layers on that one, for sure. It's a big sound, no doubt! Because I didn't bring any of my stuff, I have to text Greg from time to time asking, 'Hey man, what did we put on my guitar for this part?!' And he'll do his best to help me find the formula! What I remember most is that we had so much fun making the album.

And is there one song that you love more than any other?

If I had to pick just one, my favourite tone was on *Under You*. I don't know what the f*ck that pedal was because Greg had some really cool vintage stuff, but I think it was this old wah-wah that also had overdrive. He was operating it and doing the wah-wah as I was playing, and we did it all in one take. We actually had made a version of that song that was pretty different. The main guitar moment was played as a single-note thing that was more jangly in ways and had less of that rock 'n' roll feel. Then Dave [Grohl] came in and said, 'This is too nice, we really need to f*ck this song up!' So we were trying to figure out how to do that and I started playing that idea differently. We pretty much did it in one or two takes. The take on the record, from start to finish, is just one take. It's loose and not perfect at all. It's glitchy and pulls from that Johnny Thunders side of my brain, rather than the Randy Rhoads side. It's that punk kinda spirit. I just love the tone we got on that track... it really has some teeth!

Interview: Amit Sharma



16 STEVEN WILSON THE HARMONY CODEX

(Virgin)

This year's seventh solo release showed the progressive mastermind at his most eclectic, with some jaw-dropping leads from guest guitarist Niko Tsonev.

15 COVET CATHARSIS

(Triple Crown Records)

Spangly math rock gets ethereal as Yvette Young's experimental playing exudes heavy emotions without saturating the band's colourfully wonky grooves.

14 TESSERACT WAR OF BEING

(KScope Records)

Djent progenitors return with a darker sound as swathing cleans and abrasive riffs become plot devices on an ambitious concept record.

13 RIVAL SONS LIGHTBRINGER

(Low Country Sound/Atlantic)

Their second LP of the year served up six psych-rock adventures with plenty of reminders as to how Scott Holiday earned the nickname 'Mr Fuzzlord'.

12 PERIPHERY V: DJENT IS NOT A GENRE

(3DOT Recordings)

A brutal progressive metal masterclass boasting incendiary chops, pick scrapes, whammy pedal screams, wild solos, dizzying rhythms and laser-focused songwriting.

11 EXTREME SIX

(eraMusic)

After 15 long years, the funk metallers returned with some of the finest songs of their career, as proven by lead single *Rise* becoming the talking point of 2023.

10 THE ROLLING STONES HACKNEY DIAMONDS

(Polydor)

In the Stones' first album of original material in 18 years, and their best in 40, the near-telepathic guitar interplay between Keith and Ronnie is a thing of wonder.



09 AVENGED SEVENFOLD LIFE IS BUT A DREAM...

(Warner Music UK)

If 2016's *The Stage* hinted at the Californian metallers getting experimental, this year's follow-up was a mind-melting deep-dive into the progressive unknown.

08 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE IN TIMES NEW ROMAN...

(Matador)

After fighting off cancer last year, Josh Homme returned on triumphant form, dreaming up fuzzed-out experimental anthems in the way only he can.

07 KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD PETRODRAGONIC APOCALYPSE

(KGLW)

The prolific Aussie sextet embrace drop-tuned chugging and motorik rhythms across seven lengthy and ambitious head-banging jams.

06 CORY WONG THE LUCKY ONE

(Roundwound)

Having built his career outside of Vulfpeck to the point where he's now headlining venues like London's Apollo, Wong's latest release was a rhythmic revelation.

05 NAT MYERS YELLOW PERIL

(Easy Eye Sound)

At Dan Auerbach's studio, this lefty fingerpicker cut the most authentically old-school Piedmont blues album of the year – nay, century!

04 CORY HANSON WESTERN CUM

(Drag City)

The Wand frontman's third solo album combines peak '70s guitar solos, acoustic detours and offbeat lyrical humour to dazzling effect.

03 MATTEO MANCUSO THE JOURNEY

(The Players Club/Mascot)

The Italian virtuoso's highly anticipated debut took instrumental guitar to new heights, with nods to fusion greats like Guthrie Govan and Pat Metheny.



➔ “Dark. Heavy. Technical.”

Manuel Gardner Fernandes details his unique take on thrash metal

How would you sum up this album?

It's pretty dark and heavy with a technical taste that we haven't lost throughout the years. The previous record *Gold* was a bit more poppy and more shiny. This is like the heavy, dark brother.

You've become known for your 'clean shred' sound, so it's cool to hear this heavier side.

From the YouTube and social media perspective, it's quite new. But for me, and as a band, it's back to the roots. The stuff I'm doing on YouTube and social media, I wouldn't listen to. It's just easy for me to write these little guitar pieces and put them online, but I grew up on metal.

Who are your favourite metal guitarists?

I was always into the rhythm side of things. As a child, I never played any solos. I just played the riffs, the rhythms and that was it. So, James Hetfield was the main inspiration for me.

Where did you get the ideas for your hyper-fast rhythmic strumming and harmonic tapping techniques?

I get a lot of inspiration from clips of other people playing. I have more of a metal approach than the usual Instagram guitarists. I like darker chords and melodies and I combine that with my own 'chick-chick-chick' percussive strumming thing. I take my influences from all over the place - even the percussive thing was from flamenco.

How would you break down that technique?

I do it with a pick, but I take the flamenco approach with the dead notes and put it into more of a metal version. A lot of people ask me how to play really fast and there's no answer because I didn't force myself. It just happened, probably because I played a lot of thrash metal back in the day.

What guitars do we hear on the album?

I used a pink and gold Ibanez AZ2204F for all the clean stuff and my Golden 8-string that Ibanez made for me.

Did you use an amp or DI and plugins?

For the record, we used Synergy. How Synergy amps work is by having different modules from companies like Bogner and ENGL. I used one module by Synergy itself called II2P, which has tubes in it. So, you have the real tube sound and that's the sound of that record. There's no plugins, it's all analogue. That was different for the first time.



THRASH TALK

"For me, it's back to the roots," Manuel says

02

UNPROCESSED ...AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

(Unprocessed/SPV)

Lots of bands talk about pushing boundaries in their work, but - as their latest release proves beyond doubt - Gen-Z virtuosos Unprocessed are in the business of obliterating them. Here, pop meets djent, thrash metal gets a clean makeover and guitarist Manuel Gardner Fernandes deploys

his progressive production skills alongside his wild fretboard abilities to bring us fresh, futuristic sounds. Highlights include his trademark warp-speed strumming on *Thrash*, the Ichika Nito-inspired harmonic licks of *Glass* and a cameo appearance from Polyphia's Tim Henson and Scott LePage on *Die On The Cross of The Martyr*.

"WILD FRETBOARD ABILITIES THAT BRING US FRESH, FUTURISTIC SOUNDS"





VIRTUOSO PLAYED **AMERICAN MADE**

Jackson
AMERICAN SERIES
VIRTUOSO



Interview Jonathan Horsley
Portraits Ross Halfin

“THE RIFFS FLY, BRO!”

Lead guitarist **Kirk Hammett** recalls how Metallica made the guitar album of the year – with songs pulled from the “riff bank” and solos cooked up on the spot. He also reveals how he grabbed another prized guitar thanks to Joe Bonamassa, and how he finds inspiration playing along to birdsong and aeroplanes...

Metallica get the same 365 days as the rest of us, but something happens to them on a trip around the sun that spins time all out of proportion. More happens than seems possible.

When lead guitarist Kirk Hammett speaks to TG during a rare moment of respite from the band’s remorseless trek across the States, pillaging its largest stadia, he barely pauses for breath as he reels off the highlights from his year.

First, the M72 World Tour; two nights in a stadium, no two the same, with no-repeat setlists culled from the most formidable back catalogue in metal. The scale of these shows is on a different level to anything Metallica have attempted before, and the sheer size of the stage has meant that Kirk has had to find a new way of locking in with drummer Lars Ulrich. “We really had to change our whole approach to playing live because that stage is so goddamn big I am literally 100 feet away from Lars,” Kirk says. “His hi-hat in the count? Sometimes I can’t hear that hi-hat but I can see it, and that is what I have to rely on, and that’s the case with all of us.”

The tour has included festival stop-offs, such as Download and Power Trip – that big shindig in the Californian desert with Iron Maiden, Guns N’ Roses, Tool, AC/DC and Judas Priest. Kirk has also enjoyed some extra-curricular live engagements: jamming onstage with Journey and trading licks with that band’s founder Neal Schon on their ’70s classic *Wheel In The Sky* and Metallica’s anthem *Enter Sandman*; performing with Eric Clapton, Ronnie Wood and more at the Royal Albert Hall to pay tribute to Jeff Beck.





01

METALLICA

72 SEASONS

(Blackened)

The Hetfield/Hammett guitar axis is at full power on what is arguably Metallica's most complete album since *Load* from way back in 1996. The title track from *72 Seasons* has the kind of fast and complex thrash metal riffing on which the band's reputation was made in the '80s. The 11-minute closing track *Inamorata* has the slow grind and gnarly tones of Tony Iommi at his peak, and the melodic two-guitar interplay of classic Judas Priest. And throughout, Hammett's off-the-cuff approach to soloing plays brilliantly against Hetfield's machine-like rhythms. 40 years after these dudes revolutionised metal with the band's seismic debut *Kill 'Em All*, they're still operating at the very top of their game.



Then there are the guitars of 2023, with Gibson rolling out various replica editions of Greeny, the 1959 Les Paul Standard famously owned by the late Peter Green, latterly the late Gary Moore, and Hammett since 2014. An Epiphone version is reviewed on page 80 of this very mag. Kirk's 1979 Flying V that consecrated Metallica's thrash sound on the band's first three albums has enjoyed similar treatment. ESP has done its bit, too, refreshing Hammett's signature range with the offset LTD KH-V, offering frontman/rhythm guitarist James Hetfield's Vulture in Olympic White.

Kirk's personal arsenal has grown. With the help of Joe Bonamassa – a man with a bloodhound's nose for aged nitrocellulose. Kirk finally got his hands on the 'Factory Black' 1959 Les Paul Standard that had eluded him for over a decade, costing him considerable blood and treasure along the way.

"It is so beautiful. I love it," he says. "I tried to get it once and got ripped off. I tried to work out a deal where I was going to trade 30 guitars for that guitar but ended up getting 30 guitars stolen! I kept my eye on it for a long time. About a year-and-a-half ago, Joe Bonamassa texted me and said, 'I know

you love that black Les Paul. It's at Carter Vintage right now. Call them ASAP!' I called them up that morning and then my second call was to Joe. 'Joe, thank you so much for alerting me, and, and on top of that, not buying it!' I'm probably going to be using it in the studio right alongside Greeny as Greeny's foil. I call it Ella. Ella is going to be the yin to Greeny's yang."

But when all is said and done, when the PA powers down at Ford Field in Detroit, Michigan, sending 78,000 sweaty fans into November's cold night air, placing this pop-cultural juggernaut into park for the year, Metallica's story of 2023 will be about *72 Seasons*. Not for the first time, metal's own

FOR WHOM THE BIRD CALLS...
Kirk at one with nature in Hawaii.
Below: with heavy friend James Hetfield

Fab Four had stared into the abyss to be reborn anew, emerging with the guitar album of the year...

SEASONS IN THE ABYSS

If *72 Seasons* is by most people's estimation Metallica's strongest album of the 21st-century then we have the existential funk of 2020 to thank. Thursday Zoom calls under the spectre of cataclysm helped Metallica decide what sort of band they wanted to be. There would be more trust in one another. There would be riffs. This was an era of stockpiling. In Metallica's world, it was riffs. "We were all telling each other, 'You gotta invest, you gotta put a riff into the riff bank!'" Those investments paid off; the riffs gave them something to build on and the rest just flowed.

"We didn't work on it that much!" continues Hammett. "When we were

coming up with the songs, we had all of them in a short space of time. Another thing that was key: because we were all in different geographical spots, the debates and the arguing was brought down to a minimum! It felt good. It was primal. It didn't feel like there was a lot of second-guessing. Second-guessing amongst band members can lead to arguing."

The songs soon took shape, some drawing from familiar reference points. *Lux Aeterna* is as NWOBHM as Metallica get. With a less box-office production, it wouldn't be out of place on *The \$5.98 E.P. – Garage Days Re-Revisited*.

Vocally, Hetfield operates right on the frontier of his leonine Metallica persona, redoubtable yet vulnerable. Rhythm-wise, he's totally on brand; *If Darkness Had A Son* and *Sleepwalk My Life Away* are as good as dental records or a fingerprint.

"You should see it when we are in the rehearsal room working on a part. Man, the riffs fly," Kirk says. "The riffs fly, bro, between James, Rob [Trujillo, bassist] and myself. The whole process is a lot of

experimentation, looking for different note patterns, different techniques, different ways to pick the notes, ways to phrase. We are always searching for it."

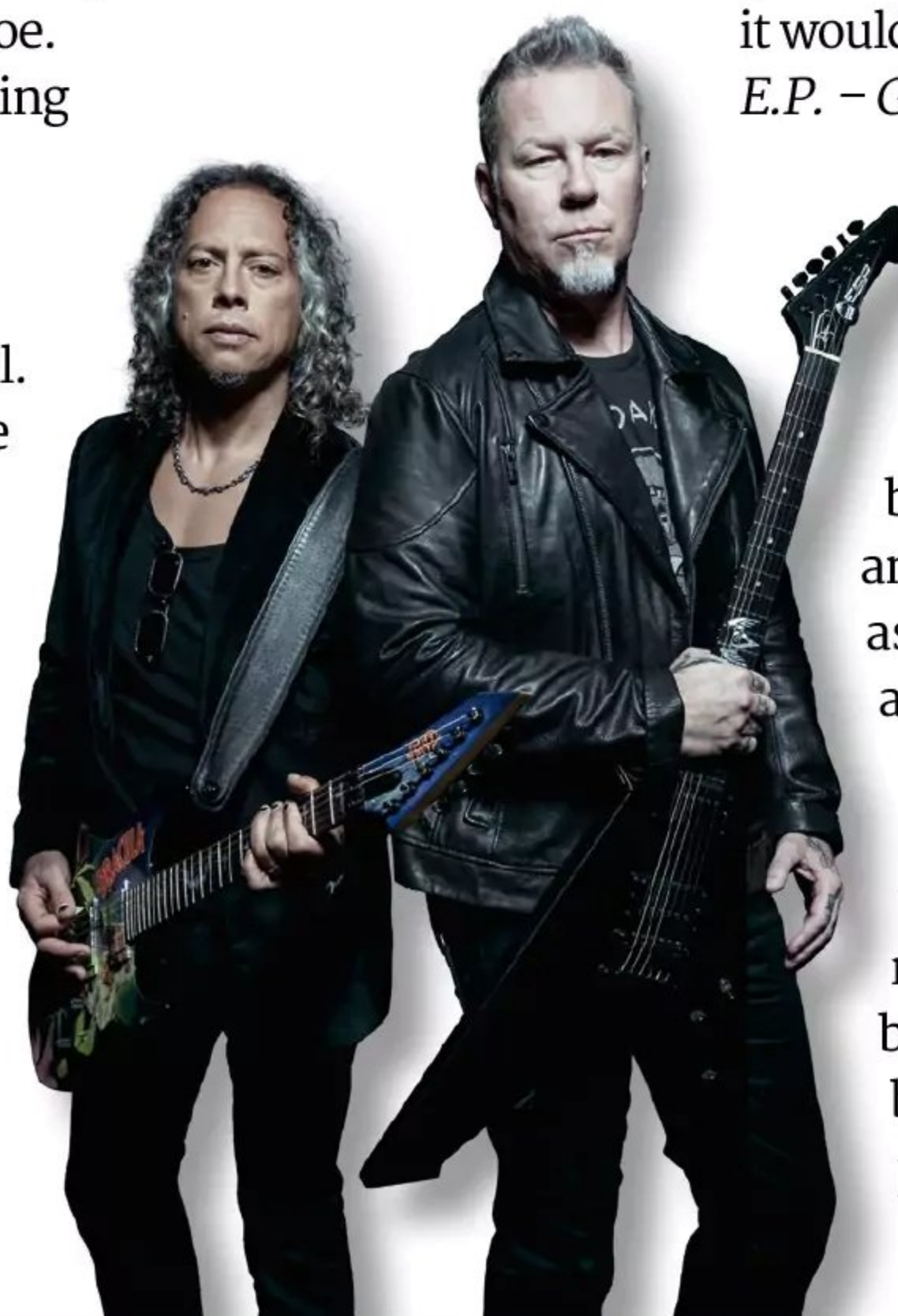
Metallica hired producer/engineer Greg Fidelman (Slipknot/RHCP) to play midwife to this creative outpouring. Hetfield and Hammett needed tones. As Fidelman told TG, Hammett would use his signature Randall head, Friedman heads with the fire-breathing HBE channel, a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier combined with a 100-watt master volume Marshall JMP. Hetfield mixed and matched from his trusty Mesa/Boogie Mark IIC++ – aka, the 'Crunch Berries' Master Of Puppets amp – a Marshall Super Lead modded by the legendary José Arredondo, and 100-watt heads from Diezel and Canadian boutique amp brand Wizard. There were lots of amps, lots of volume, air getting pushed out of the speakers, but not too much gain. This isn't 1989. Now, the watch word is clarity, and if you're looking for the secret sauce you'll find it in the circuit of the SoloDallas Schaffer Replica EX Tower. "Right on, bro, it's all about the Tower," Kirk says. "The first version of the Tower that came out about five or six years ago is built so horribly. It's flimsy plastic but it's the best-sounding thing. They have the foot pedals out and the foot pedals are great but for some reason this f*cking thing sounds 10 per cent better!"

That Hammett deployed the secret weapon behind the searing tube-heat warmth of Angus Young's *Back In Black* tone betrays his thinking. He wanted his leads to have more rhythm, to be conceptually smaller, less about modality and structure, more guided by instinct, just how they did it in the '70s. Just how Angus Young did it.

"I love Angus' groove, and over the last couple of years or so I have found a bigger appreciation of his playing because Angus always plays for the song," Kirk says. "Some of his solos are crazy and wacky and out there but they always, always are in that context of the song, and it never sounded like Angus worked anything out."

Hammett didn't either. He knew the key. Hetfield's lyrics and vocal set the tone. Whatever happened was all in the moment. He tracked dozens of solos before turning them over to Fidelman and Ulrich. "It was a huge risk-taking,

"SOMETIMES I'LL
HEAR THIS WEIRD
BIRD DO A MATING
CALL AND I'LL
TRY TO MIMIC IT
ON THE GUITAR"







a huge experiment, and to this day I'm wondering if I pulled it off or not," Hammett says. "But I had to do it this way because it was how I felt inside. I wanted spontaneity. I didn't want picture-perfect solos because some of my favourite players' solos were kind of rag-tag and I love that."

"My solos are a reaction – absolutely 100 per cent – to what's happening in the song because it was my only point of reference. I purposely didn't work out anything so that all I had to fall back on was what everyone else can fall back on, which is pure feeling, and that in itself is a challenge."

You can call *72 Seasons* metal, thrash, whatever, but there is a ton of musical information to process before reaching any conclusion. Some songs reference vintage British steel, others are clad in the downcast timbre of Iommi; album closer *Inamorata* is the sound of Metallica processing Black Sabbath's influence through the same long-form sensibility that brought *Orion* into this world, complete with a harmony solo Hetfield composed on the spot. *You Must Burn!* traffics in a vibe that could be the summer of 1991 re-revisited. Lars Ulrich's snare sounds like the discharging of a firearm. There's even a call back to Neal Hefti's Adam West *Batman* theme in *Shadows Fall*. What are Metallica if not a rock 'n' roll band?

"Thank you for recognising that because we are," Kirk says. "That's really funny because we called that riff 'The Batman Riff', and I know exactly what you are talking about. One thing I noticed from watching AC/DC at Power Trip is that AC/DC are actually a bunch of different bands. AC/DC is a f*cking boogie-woogie blues bar band... a rock band... a hard-rock band... a heavy metal band. They are all those types of bands rolled into one. It goes from 'Baby, please don't go' to f*ckin' *Back In Black*."

This could be Metallica, too; a sound and identity so big it spreads itself across categories. The depth of Metallica's songwriting vocabulary

owes much to Ulrich's restless deportment and uncanny ear. There are few, if any, with a better sense for a song's raw material.

"Sometimes, I'll just sit there out of frustration because I can't come up with a heavy riff, and I'll start arpeggiating E minor and then muting it, and then Lars will go, 'Hey! What's that!?' " Hammett says. "And it's so far away from what I am trying to do, what anyone is trying to do! Or James will play something when he is frigging trying to tune his guitar and Lars starts screaming, 'Stop! What did you just play!?' James will start up, 'I'm just tuning my guitar!' 'No, that other thing.' And James will start teasing Lars. It's all about experimentation."

GREEN ENERGY

Even if Angus Young was magnetic north as far as inspiration went, and improvisation was the radical modifier guiding his note choices, there is no mistaking the lead guitar on *72 Seasons* as anything other than a Hammett solo. They sit high in the mix, like they're in the room with you.

The squawk of wah still vocalises his phrases but Hammett is a very different player these days. Greeny has a lot to do with it. *72 Seasons* was a two-hander between the storied single-cut and Hammett's ESP Mummy, his best-sounding S-style. It is Greeny that leads Hammett down these new paths, as though it has a muscle memory of its own, an intention pressed upon it by its former custodians.

"I play Greeny differently to all the other guitars, and I play Greeny the most out of all my guitars," Kirk says. "I don't know what it is but when I play Greeny my approach is different. I want to hear Greeny sing. I want to hear the wood. I love hitting powerchords on Greeny."

Ella didn't quite make the cut but shows great potential. "It doesn't quite have that extra 10 to 15 per cent aggression," he says. "Greg and I came to the conclusion that it is almost too

**WHEREVER
I MAY ROAM**
Kirk in action during
the epic M72 World
Tour this year

pretty, but for single lines, single note stuff and leads, oh man, it's so nice. It sings. It is so well balanced. It is a real blues, jazz, rock guitar."

Greeny's history inspired a deep dive into British blues and rock players from the '60s onwards, another factor colouring Hammett's lead guitar. Right now John McLaughlin is the one.

"I've been on a John McLaughlin tip for the last year or so because his playing is so out there and diverse, and unique," Kirk says. "I love it. And, as a person, John McLaughlin is my kind of guy. He is spiritual. He meditates. He does yoga. He's a vegetarian. Boom!"

The biggest change in Kirk Hammett is that he's left writer's block behind. He even has a whole methodology that he promises will help pros and six-string noviciates alike. He sits down, clears his mind as best he can. He relaxes. Then he plays. Where he is on the fretboard is immaterial. The crucial component is the listening. "I just listen to the notes and I start getting ideas," he says. "All of a sudden I have clay to play with. I'll just play with that little thing for 10 or 15 minutes and if it shapes itself into something then that's great, if it doesn't I'll just move on. It's a real slow, quiet, very observant sort of awareness."

You've got to be aware if you want to be a musician. There's music all around us. At home in Hawaii, Hammett has the pulse of the ocean keeping time. He has got the birds in the trees, air traffic... "I love playing my guitar outside because I love hearing the sounds of nature," he says. "I love incidental sounds. A plane will be flying over me and I'll find the pitch. It's weird. Daimler-Benz, who makes all these airplanes, I think they f*cking pitch all the airplane motors because they almost always start in A then modulate down to F#. It's so crazy, [if] a plane [is] flying over me, I'll find the tone. Sometimes I'll hear this weird bird do a mating call and I'll try to mimic it on the guitar. There's stuff that's all around you, giving you little nudges towards ideas. You can get ideas anywhere if you just open up your ears and let your creativity flow."

Metallica are in the memory making business. That's what spectacles such as the M72 World Tour are for. Such endeavours aren't without risk. Hammett and Hetfield take

"I DIDN'T WANT PICTURE-PERFECT SOLOS.
MY FAVOURITE PLAYERS' SOLOS WERE
KIND OF RAG-TAG AND I LOVE THAT"



precautions, deploying Fractal Axe-Fx units in live rigs for low-noise consistency. They have two monitor engineers between four. But for all Metallica's struggles over the years, fear of failure has never constricted them. Hammett says it is freeing being up onstage, totally exposed and on camera. What else is there to do but to perform and engage the crowd?

"It's pretty wacky on the technical side but once you go out there and things are sounding good, my guitar is sounding good, I can hear myself, man, there's something about that stage," Hammett says. "There's nowhere where we can hide. We are exposed all

the time, so we make the most of it and we're just like, 'Hello, everyone! Here we are!' And it's crazy because when I am facing out into the stadium it feels like a stadium show, and when I turn around and face into the inner part of the stage and see the Snakepit, it feels like we are playing a nightclub!"

The triumph of the M72 World Tour is that it has all the spectacle that a stadium show implies and yet it feels as though it could be '83 and you're down the front at The Metro in Chicago. This intimacy makes such memories indelible. Even Hammett flubbing the intro to *Nothing Else Matters* and restarting the song creates a special

Photo: Brett Murray

moment for audience. Band and crowd alike, we are all human.

"What you definitely are doing is setting yourself up for a lot of comments afterwards!" Kirk says. "But I didn't care, man. In that moment, I was like, 'F*ck! Y'know I'm going to play that for you decently because you guys deserve to hear it correctly!' Yeah, I f*cked it up. So what!? I don't take myself that seriously. I'm not going to go up there and say I'm some f*cking perfect machine." It did momentarily freak him out, shaking his hands post-show to see what was up. "Then I thought, 'F*ck! I'm dehydrated,'" he says. "That's why. I'm not as limber as I usually am. Playing in dry heat, in the middle of the desert, I just didn't drink enough water."

THE MELODY REMAINS...

Hammett has another one if you want to follow Metallica into the memory-making business. All that time you spend on solos? It's all for nothing if you don't have a song.

"I hate to say it for all your readers out there, but non-musicians, who are the majority of the f*cking listening world, they are not going to remember guitar solos," he says. "But yeah, they are gonna helluva remember a great melody, and they're really gonna remember a great song – especially a song that's gonna bring them to a different place from where they were five minutes previously."

His advice? Start writing songs. It doesn't matter how bad you suck. This is where it all starts. Trust him. Kirk Hammett has been there.

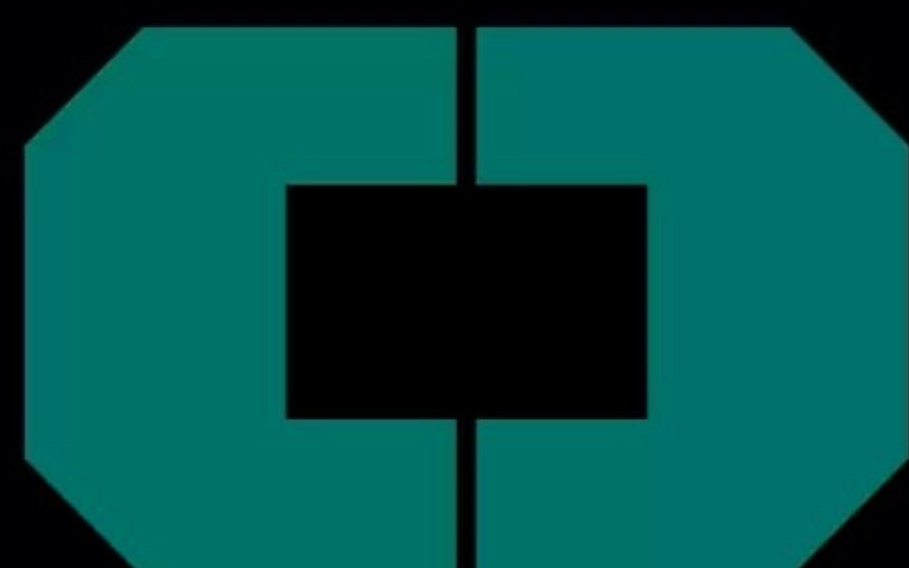
"I figured it out when I was 15 years old," he says, recalling a conversation he had with his childhood friend John Marshall, who ended up being Kirk's tech for many years, as well as playing guitar for Metallica as an emergency stand-in for James Hetfield during two tours – first in 1986, after Hetfield broke his wrist, and again in 1992, when James was suffering from burns following an on-stage pyro accident.

As Kirk remembers it: "John Marshall and myself had literally been playing guitar for six months when I said to him, 'We need to start writing tunes. Look at KISS, they write all their own songs... and Aerosmith, Van Halen.' So John and I started writing music. And it was a lot of crap, but it was something!"

Interview Brad Tolinski
Portrait Mark Seliger

KEITH RICHARDS

KICKING ASS WITH THE ROLLING STONES, HAVING FUN WITH A BEATLE, AND PAYING TRIBUTE TO THREE ALL-TIME GREATS - CHARLIE WATTS, MUDDY WATERS AND JEFF BECK...



One of the biggest stories of 2023 was the return of The Rolling Stones with *Hackney Diamonds*, the band's first album of original material in almost two decades. The album includes tracks recorded with drummer Charlie Watts, who died in 2021, and bassist Bill Wyman, who left the Stones 30 years ago. It also features guest appearances from Elton John, Stevie Wonder, Lady Gaga and, most surprising of all, Paul McCartney.

Keith Richards, the Stones' guitarist and founding member, explains how he and singer Mick Jagger put this album together; how he and fellow guitarist Ronnie Wood enjoy a near-telepathic understanding; and why, for him, five strings are still better than six...

Hackney Diamonds sounds so fresh, but I understand it had a lengthy evolution.

Yeah, it took a while to get it going, but when we finished touring last year, Mick and I decided, Let's just blitz a record, man, and let's get a guy that can push this thing with us. Mick found [co-producer] Andy Watt, and I've got to say, it was quite an experience working with him. He's very young, very enthusiastic, and we worked very fast on it once it got going.

Andrew Watt is much younger than you guys. What did he bring to the table?

He brought exactly what we wanted: energy and a fresh mind. He knew our stuff back to front, and I think he had a ball making the Stones' record. It was fun to make, very quick, compared to a lot of our records. We did most of it in a month or two.

The first two songs on the album, *Angry* and *Get Close*, begin with great kick-ass rhythm guitar hooks. Does your songwriting process usually begin with finding a riff?

Kind of, although from my point of view, there's no fixed formula for writing a song.

I feel more like I'm an antenna than a creator, particularly because, to

me, songs seem to come from somewhere out there in the cosmos. If I sit down with a guitar or a piano and just start playing, eventually a song comes. It's a bad day when it doesn't. Most of the time I feel like I'm just receiving inspiration from everything that has gone on before me, and then put it through my own point of view, and then sort of pass it on. I almost don't feel any sense of ownership.

Most guitar players are pretty good at noodling around. The hope is that you stumble onto something interesting.

Yeah, exactly. Right. I mean, sometimes an idea just finds you. Regardless, guitar playing is just a fantastic form of relaxation. Everybody should have one!

There are a lot of guitars on the album. Lots of texture.

My five-string Tele is on a good half of the tracks, but there's also a lot of the Gibson. That's not unusual. I've never just used one guitar in the studio, but I've been getting to know this '59 Gibson ES-355 lately, and I really enjoy playing it.

In the early days of the Stones, you leaned pretty hard into Les Pauls, and then there was a bit of a shift. Do you remember what drew you into using a Telecaster?

I don't know how I started moving in that direction. I think it was something to do with the way I was playing, and a Telecaster made it easier. But I've always loved Gibson guitars, and, I mean, there's a lot of overdubs on everything here, so as usual, with every Rolling Stones record, there's a great mixture of different guitars.

Fender and Gibson guitars make a great time-honoured pairing.

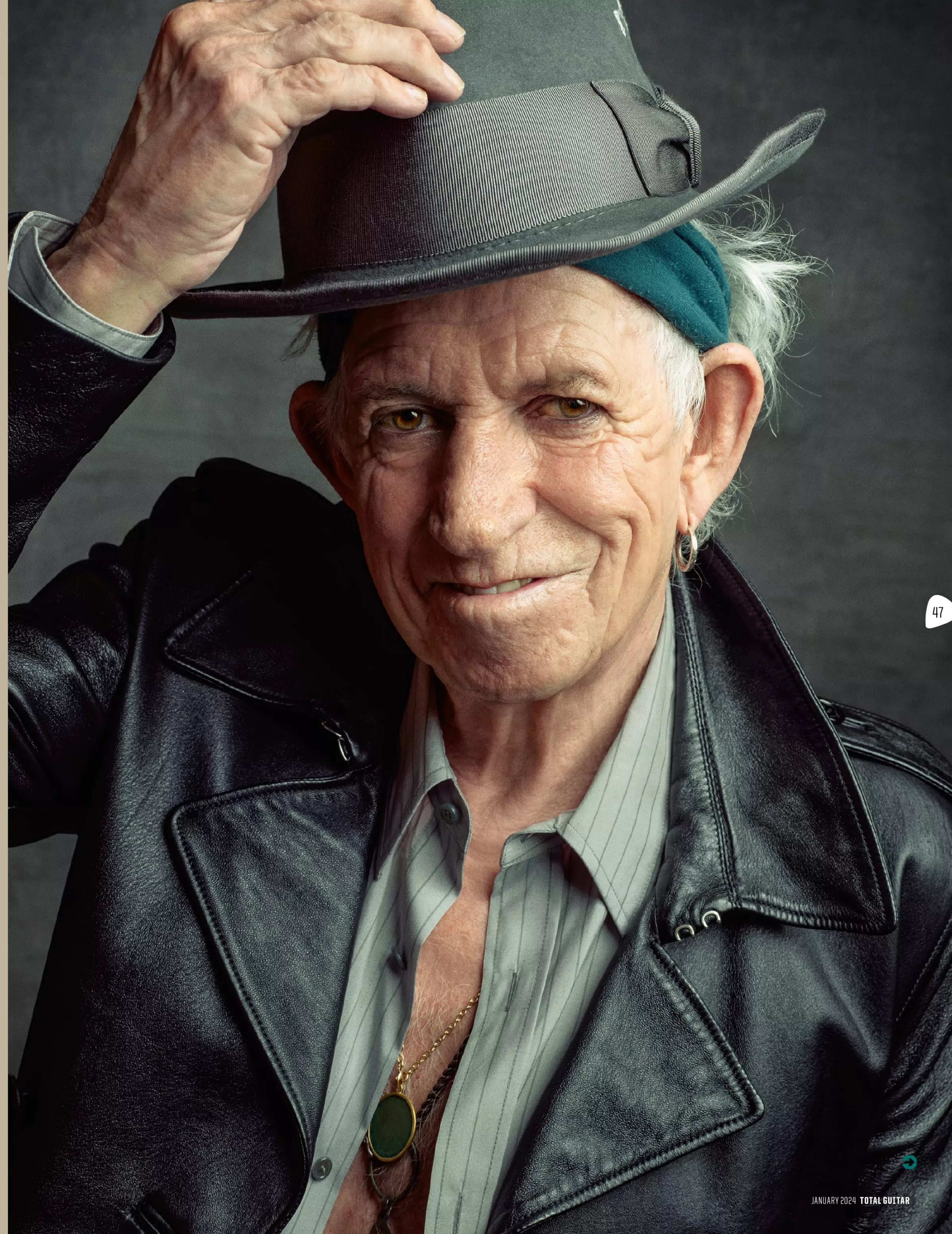
And then, of course, it depends what amp you're going to use. Yeah, it's a big difference. I used Fender Twins most of the time, with the occasional Fender Champ when I was looking for something different.

I'd like to ask you about the appeal of playing your five-string Tele tuned to Open G [-GDGBD]. Is it because it automatically creates a great blend with a six-string?

Yeah, that's part of it. That's the sound of a

Stones record: a five-string with a six-string on top. It always creates a beautiful

"GUITARS ARE AMAZING THINGS. YOU CAN MAKE AN ORCHESTRA OUT OF THEM"



blend. You always have to play around with the amps a bit, but guitars are amazing things. You can make an orchestra out of them with just a simple blend.

Do you find that by eliminating your low sixth string, it opens the mix up so other instruments can be properly heard?

Yes! It's always been the mystery to me why so much space opens up for other instruments by taking off the bottom string. You're right, but I can't really put my finger on a reason why, but somehow that one extra note disappearing allows for all kinds of other instruments to come through. It's just one of those things, I guess.

What was it like working with Ronnie on this record? Do you guys spend a lot of time figuring out those blends?

Truth is, it's almost never complicated. We just fit together. I mean, it's like knit one, purl two, and it's not something we need to think or talk about too much. If we thought about it, it would probably become too studied. It either works or it doesn't, and then we try it another way. But usually, Ronnie and I just fall into a groove without even discussing it.

The album features two tracks recorded with Charlie Watts. I know this is very personal, but how did Charlie's death affect you?

All I can say is that I loved the man dearly, and I miss him. I still have conversations with the f*cker.

Charlie's replacement in the Stones, Steve Jordan, had previously played in your side project the X-Pensive Winos. That must've made the transition a bit easier.

When I started putting the Winos together, it was Charlie Watts who told me, 'If you're going to work with anybody else, Steve Jordan is your man.' But still, it's impossible to put into words what Charlie meant to us. Charlie could swing and he could roll it a little more than most straight rock drummers. Charlie always added a jazz tinge to everything he played, so there was always that slightly different feel about the Stones' music.

Former Stones bassist Bill Wyman plays on the song *Live By The Sword*.

How did that come about?

Well, Bill and I have regularly stayed in touch through the years. I'm not sure if he sees a lot of Mick and Ronnie, but I always make a sure point of getting to him. We just thought it would be cool to have him on one of the last tracks with Charlie. A reunion of sorts. Unfortunately, we weren't in the same room together to record that, because we all just overdubbed to Charlie's original track. But we're all still good friends.

And how did Paul McCartney end up playing bass on *Bite My Head Off*?

He had been doing some work with Andrew Watt as well, and happened to be around and dropped by. I don't even think he intended to play bass on a track, but once we he was there, I just said, 'Come on, you're in. You ain't leaving until you play!'

Famously, Paul and John Lennon wrote *I Wanna Be Your Man* for the Stones, and it became your first hit in the UK...

The Beatles and the Stones have been basically joined together at the hips from the beginning. We were totally different bands, but we knew each other well. I think we first met them in the fall of '62, when they came down to see us play in London. Later, John and Paul sang on *We Love You* and on *Dandelion*. Ronnie and I used to hang with George Harrison quite a bit in the 1970s, so there's always been an open door between The Beatles and the Stones. We were the only ones that knew what it's like to have that extreme kind of fame in the 1960s, so that created a bond.

At the end of *Hackney Diamonds*, you and Mick perform a terrific, intimate duet of Muddy Waters' *Rolling Stone Blues*, the song that gave your band its name.

That was Andrew's idea. He turned up at the studio with a 1920s Gibson L-4 acoustic and asked us to do that Muddy thing. Ironically, I'd never played that

song before, but the guitar was beautiful, and we did it in a couple of takes. The guitar that he laid on me was just the perfect sort of instrument for the job. It was perfectly archaic and, I must confess, pretty difficult to play!

What does the music of Muddy Waters mean to you?

It's the foundation. The blues was what I was chasing as a young man, and at one point I was going to stay there, and it was only rock and roll that got me out! But to me, if you're a rock musician, it's essential to have a grounding in the blues, and it doesn't get much better than Muddy Waters.

***Rolling Stone Blues* would be a perfect way to end your recording legacy. You know, 'Here's where it started, and this is the way it's ending.' Were you concerned that people might interpret it that way?**

Man, I've never even come close to thinking of wrapping up the Rolling Stones' story, so my answer to that is, 'Absolutely not!' It was just a cool way of wrapping up this album, and the story so far. We plan to keep working. I know we're going to work next year. Making music is still quite exciting for me.

So, do you think your next album will be done...

...Sometime before the next century? Yeah, I do hope so! And we'll be on the road next year. After that, we'll see...

Another great musician passed this year. What did you think of Jeff Beck? And is there any truth that he was being considered for the Stones in the mid-'70s after Mick Taylor left?

Jeff? No. He was a soloist to the max. He was such an individualist. It wouldn't have worked with the Stones at all. We're all about teamwork. But don't get me wrong, he was a tremendous player. The odd times we got together, I was always amazed by the stuff that he did with his tremolo bar. He was one of the best, man.



"THE BEATLES AND THE STONES HAVE BASICALLY BEEN JOINED TOGETHER AT THE HIPs FROM THE BEGINNING"

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BLUES/ROCK FOUNDATIONS WITH David Mead

level
1/5



This course will address all the skills you need to make sure-footed progress with your playing. Typical topics will involve mapping out the fretboard using the CAGED System, the major and minor scales you need to make your solos ignite, picking hand technique – specifically alternate picking and muting – fretting-hand skills like slurs, bends, double stops and vibrato, etc., and much more. We'll also look at the fundamentals of blues playing, both rhythm and lead, the 12-bar blues format and some of the common variations like the 'quick change' and 'riff blues'. But most of all, we're going to have fun!

ACOUSTIC SONGS WITH Chris Quinn

level
2/5



This acoustic course promises to reveal how techniques from Robert Johnson through to Ed Sheeran will make you a better fingerstylist. Looking at guitar masters like Merle Travis, Jason Isbell, John Mayer, James Taylor and Paul Simon, you'll study important exercises and techniques that can give you that solid, timeless sound. You'll learn how to use these skills in modern guitar arrangements and for your own live performances. This inclusive week of workshops and group playing is aimed at lovers of quality songwriting, fingerpicking and guitarists wishing to take their acoustic playing to the next level.

BLUES SONGS WITH Neville Marten

level
2-3/5



This is an inclusive get-together of guitarists on a quest to play and perform great blues songs. During a week of intensive but fun learning the collective talents of the group will put together four, possibly five great blues tracks both classic and modern. A solid degree of competence is required, such as ability with the major and minor pentatonic scales, blues scales and standard 7th chords, but everyone's abilities will be put to good use whatever their level. The student concert set list will be made from everyone's suggestions and they will be worked on from day one alongside technique and guitar tone considerations.

ROCK 'N' ROLL WITH Jon Bishop

level
2-3/5



If you are looking for a good time course then look no further than rock 'n' roll. The rock 'n' roll style is an exiting blend of country, blues and rock with artists as diverse as Elvis (Scotty Moore), Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Brian Setzer and Albert Lee will be studied. Your tutor Jon Bishop is perfectly placed to help you in your quest as he has recorded and toured for the past 16 years with UK rock 'n' roll legend Shakin' Stevens. Throughout the week, many iconic riffs and songs will be covered.

JUMP BLUES WITH Chris Corcoran

level
2-3/5



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 Freddie King, Matt Guitar Murphy, Bill Jennings, Earl Hooker, T-Bone Walker, Tiny Grimes and Barney Kessel. Chris will also include examples and pointers of his signature chromatic blues style.

GROOVE! WITH Jason Sidwell

level
2-3/5



Playing in time with energy and sophistication is what this involving course is about. Typical funk/soul artists include James Brown, Prince, Chic, Michael Jackson, Rick James and Earth Wind and Fire. The core topics will be rhythmic syncopation, chord vocabulary, octaves, double-stops, Dorian and Mixolydian mode usage and how best to interact with drums and bass. There will be additional modules that cover soloing over unique chord progressions (Stevie Wonder to Steely Dan) and deep dives into expanding alternate and hybrid picking techniques.

BLUES WITH Andy Saphir

level
3/5



This course looks at the techniques, musical approaches and lick vocabulary used in electric blues lead guitar. By delving into the styles of blues guitar greats of the past and present like T Bone Walker, BB King, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Joe Bonamassa and Kirk Fletcher, you will learn staple blues guitar approaches such as mixing minor and major pentatonics, string bending and double stops. In addition, the course looks at the theory behind some of those cool jazz sounding approaches used by players like Robben Ford, Larry Carlton and Josh Smith.

ROCK WITH Jamie Hunt

level
3/5



For the rock course, key techniques like picking and legato plus phrasing approaches will be explored, ranging from classic acts such as ACDC and Black Sabbath through to modern players like Joe Satriani and Alter Bridge's Mark Tremonti. You will study typical scales and modes plus soloing approaches that enhance your familiarity with the fretboard and expand your vocabulary as a lead player. Alongside this, you'll explore equipment and tone settings that achieve chugging rhythm guitar tones and screaming leads. To bring it all together, numerous famous riffs will be enjoyed as well as three songs learnt for the closing student concert.

JAZZ WITH John Wheatcroft

level
3/5



This course focuses on the exciting sounds of jazz, looking at players ranging from Wes Montgomery to John Scofield, George Benson to Mike Stern. We'll be covering a wide range of topics, ranging from accessible simple and direct ideas to more sophisticated and complex concepts, all framed into repertoire coming directly from the American Songbook. You'll learn immediately applicable ideas to expand your comping, melodic delivery, ensemble interplay, technique, improvisation and creativity.

SINGING WITH Sara Davey

All levels



A course for all levels of singing. While teaching and reinforcing basic healthy singing habits Sara will help each singer to find their own style and unique voice. We will work on personal technique and skill, anatomy of the voice, one to one coaching, stage craft, improvisation harmony singing. There will be opportunities for soloing, duets and small ensemble acapella singing in addition to singing on stage with a band. Vocal students will have the opportunity to sit in on other guitar classes while one-to-one voice lesson slots are offered in the afternoon.

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Interview Ellie Rogers
Portrait Kevin Nixon

WOLFGANG VAN HALEN

ROAD-TESTING HIS NEW PROTOTYPE GUITAR, HAVING FUN WITH SEVEN- AND EIGHT-STRINGS, ROCKING WITH METALLICA AND SHARING SONGS WITH DAVE GROHL...

In what ways did you push yourself while making your second album under the Mammoth WVH name?

Literally my only rule was: No sophomore slump. *Mammoth II* needed to be as good or better than Mammoth WVH. It was difficult to write and figure out ways to expand upon the sound. With everything I had dealt with in the past five years and with Mammoth's successes, everything was so wonderful and terrible in every way at all times. I guess it all poured into it, and that's what made the album a bit heavier and more aggressive.

What's your favourite solo on the album?

I'm quite proud of *Take A Bow*. That was an evolution in my solo writing, performing and playing. So it felt like a cool moment to mark by using Dad's guitar and having him involved to a certain extent. I think it's a very special song on the album.

You said you'd originally planned on using a different guitar of his for each solo...

I was going to do that, and then I ended up saving that for the *Frankenstein*. For literally everything else, I used my prototype. It was crazy how much that guitar was the backbone of the album. It's a very versatile instrument and I'm very excited to talk about it more next year once it's out.

Can you reveal anything about how the SA-126 is progressing, or any tweaks that have been made as a result of road testing it this year?

It's been a fascinating journey, putting the

guitar together with Matt Bruck and Chip Ellis at EVH. It's been really fun to be the one crash testing it live, while they fine tune everything to just make it better and better. I can't spoil much, but it's going to be wonderful and I'm so excited for people to get the guitar in their hands.

It's been a long tease, but your father also liked to put his signature models through their paces very thoroughly before releasing them, didn't he?

That's exactly what he did with the Wolfgang on the 2007-2008 Van Halen tour. He played it for two years. So, it's that same rule. We're following the exact same way that my dad tested products for the brand and EVH Gear. That's what we want to continue doing. It's only gotten better and more refined as we're peeling back the skin every couple of months and making it tighter and better.

Besides things that bear the family name, what's been your best gear acquisition of 2023?

I've literally only been playing the SA for the last two years! Aaron Marshall from Intervals did a deal with Schecter and I bought his six-string and seven-string guitars. I've been trying to figure out how to do seven-string stuff and I can't at all, but it's fun to mess around!

Are there any other techniques you've been working extra hard on over the last 12 months?

Well, I also have an eight-string from Tosin

Abasi's company that I've been having fun learning Meshuggah songs on.

What's been your most memorable on-stage experience of 2023?

Having the opportunity to play with Metallica at every show we've done with them has been so insanely memorable. Everybody is wonderful at Metallica and they make you feel like family. It's crazy to be playing a song and then look over and see James Hetfield watching!

What about your favourite album by another artist?

Foo Fighters put out the album I've listened to the most. It's a really emotional experience, and I think being part of the Taylor Hawkins tribute shows made me personally invested in a way that I haven't been before. There was this crazy moment: Dave [Grohl] texted me before the album came out, and he'd filmed a video in his car while *Distance* [from the first Mammoth WVH album] was playing. He said he thought it was a beautiful song and that writing is a great way to work through pain. He then sent me his song *The Teacher*, which he wrote about his mother. It was a really cool moment to share that sort of bond with Dave on how songwriting can heal you.

Who would you nominate as guitarist of the year and why?

Aaron Marshall is my favourite guitar player. I just love his melodic sensibilities. Even though it's instrumental progressive metal, he has hummable, singable melodies throughout. It's endless. He doesn't write a bad song!

"IT'S CRAZY TO BE PLAYING AND SEE JAMES HETFIELD WATCHING!"



Interview Amit Sharma
Photo Sasha Shemirani

NITA STRAUSS

FINDING INSPIRATION IN ALL THINGS METAL, AND DOING SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IN THE BEST GIG OF HER LIFE...



What was your personal highlight of 2023?

I would have to say the packed-out hometown show for my new record *The Call Of The Void* back in July, where I ended up getting engaged on stage! Everything about that day felt so full-circle. It ended up being one of the most magical experiences of my life with my family there to celebrate. It was probably the best gig I played, too. I was happy with all my gigs this year – but that one was the most special for obvious reasons.

You tend to stick with your Ibanez signatures going through Marshall amps or a Boss multi-effects processor. But has there been anything new you've been impressed by, gear-wise?

I really haven't tried much new stuff because I've been so busy touring, but the new wireless I'm using has been really awesome. It's the Shure GLX-D+ and though it's not quite a new pedal or amp, it definitely has a bit more range

and clarity to what I was using before. A very practical unit for anyone who plays live!

So what was the album you ended up listening to most this year?

I loved the new In Flames record, *Foregone*. I'm a huge fan of the band and I'm also a huge fan of [new guitarist] Chris Broderick. So hearing him on a very classic-sounding In Flames album was great. It was straight-up Swedish melodic death metal, but it also felt new.

Did you have a favourite solo from this year?

I loved what Synyster Gates did on the Avenged Sevenfold single *Nobody*. It was so cool and creative, really leftfield for that kind of song because it's really moody and droney. Then all of a sudden, you hear this fantastic neoclassical shred stuff!

Was there one riff to rule them all in 2023?

I'll go with Metallica's *Lux Aeterna* because it felt

so classic and heavy. James Hetfield's voice sounded incredible, too. The whole *72 Seasons* album is one of my favourites they've done over the last couple of decades. It's funny, all of the bands I love seem to be returning to their classic sounds right now. Sure, the production is modern and super heavy, but the energy is really old-school.

Final question. Who would be your guitarist of the year?

Okay, now it's getting really tough! It was such a strong year for guitar music. It's hard to pick one name that stands head and shoulders above the rest... everyone seems to be killing it. But my friend Angel Vivaldi put out a fantastic EP called *Away With Words: Part 2*, which covered a lot of styles from Spanish flamenco to modern shred metal and everything in between. He's breaking boundaries with his compositions and imagery. There was a video he did for the song *Nine* where he ended up jamming with himself in drag [as alter-ego Nova Gina], showing us different sides of his wonderful personality. So yeah... guitarist of the year? I'm giving this to Angel!

"IT WAS SUCH A STRONG YEAR FOR GUITAR MUSIC"

Interview Amit Sharma
Photo Jen Rosenstein

CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM

FLYING HIGH IN LONDON, JAMMING WITH
ERIC GALES AND SAMANTHA FISH, AND
HEADING INTO FUSION TERRITORY...



**What was your
favourite
moment of
2023?**

Definitely my London show, which we recorded for the *Live In London* album. It was an awesome night – tickets were sold out and the crowd was great. I'd played London a lot in 2022, including a couple of shows with The Rolling Stones at Hyde Park. I feel like the crowds are more appreciative of blues music in England. People in America sometimes look at it more like a yesteryear kinda genre. In the UK, it feels like blues is still at the forefront.

Were there any other milestones documenting your growth as an artist?

Mainly it was about getting my band on the road and giving it our all every night. Sometimes the road can be tough. Sometimes this whole industry can be tough. But when you get yourself up and out there, it can be very beautiful. I met some cool people like Steve Miller, who I ended up playing some shows with. And I jammed *Going Down* with Eric Gales and Samantha Fish at Crossroads Festival. Eric is one of the very best blues players in the world right now and Samantha's

slide stuff always amazes me. I also saw some homies like Gary Clark Jr. and got to meet cool people like Nathan East there.

You seem to get a lot of mileage out of the pentatonic scale. How do you keep it fresh and interesting?

Feel can be an overused term, but it's so important. Unless a lick is integral to the song, I don't really play the same thing twice. I like to go off into the unknown and freestyle! As simple as the scale is, pentatonic ideas are always the best way to reach an audience. Those tend to be the notes they feel even if they don't even know why. A lot of my development came from criticism – people would tell me when I'm being repetitive. So the secret to pentatonic playing is finding as many licks as you can. You have to be inventive so it

doesn't sound like a scale. It has to sound like you're actually saying something, rather than playing a series of notes in order, which can quickly get repetitive.

Well, a player's vibrato can breathe so much life into those licks and bends...

My vibrato comes from mimicking my favourite singers, people like Luther Vandross, Erykah Badu and Patti LaBelle.

You hear a lot of blues players with a fast vibrato, which is cool, but I tend to like the slower shakes. Listening to Otis Rush was a big part of that, too. He had this really dope vibrato that sounded out of this world – not too fast, not too slow, just right there in the middle.

So what will you be working on next year in terms of your personal development?

I'd like to go more into the fusion style. Not to say I'm following a trend or anything, but it seems like more blues players are starting to implement more jazzy ideas. I want to keep getting better. Learning more about theory, melodic minor and chord changes will be my mission for next year.

"MORE BLUES PLAYERS ARE
STARTING TO IMPLEMENT
JAZZY IDEAS"



Interview Ellie Rogers

JAKE KISZKA

HONING SLIDE GUITAR CHOPS, CREATING AUTHENTIC ROCK MUSIC AND FINDING NEW INSPIRATION IN PLAYERS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD...

When Greta Van Fleet's third

album *Starcatcher* was released this year, how did you feel about the reception you got from your fans and from critics?

I think one major thing has culturally shifted in the journalistic approach to what we're doing. One major factor of this being that we've stood our ground. We were going to do what we were going to do regardless. It's not like we're going to deviate from our approach, based on a few mere words that are brittle and fickle. I think people have realised that we're sticking around and this is who we are, so they now need to take a second crack at exploring the depth of what us guys are actually doing for our generation and for rock 'n' roll music.

Which is what?

We are creating something that is authentic to us. Artistically, this is who we are and this is what we sound like. We're not hiding anything from anyone.

What is the most powerful element in *Starcatcher*?

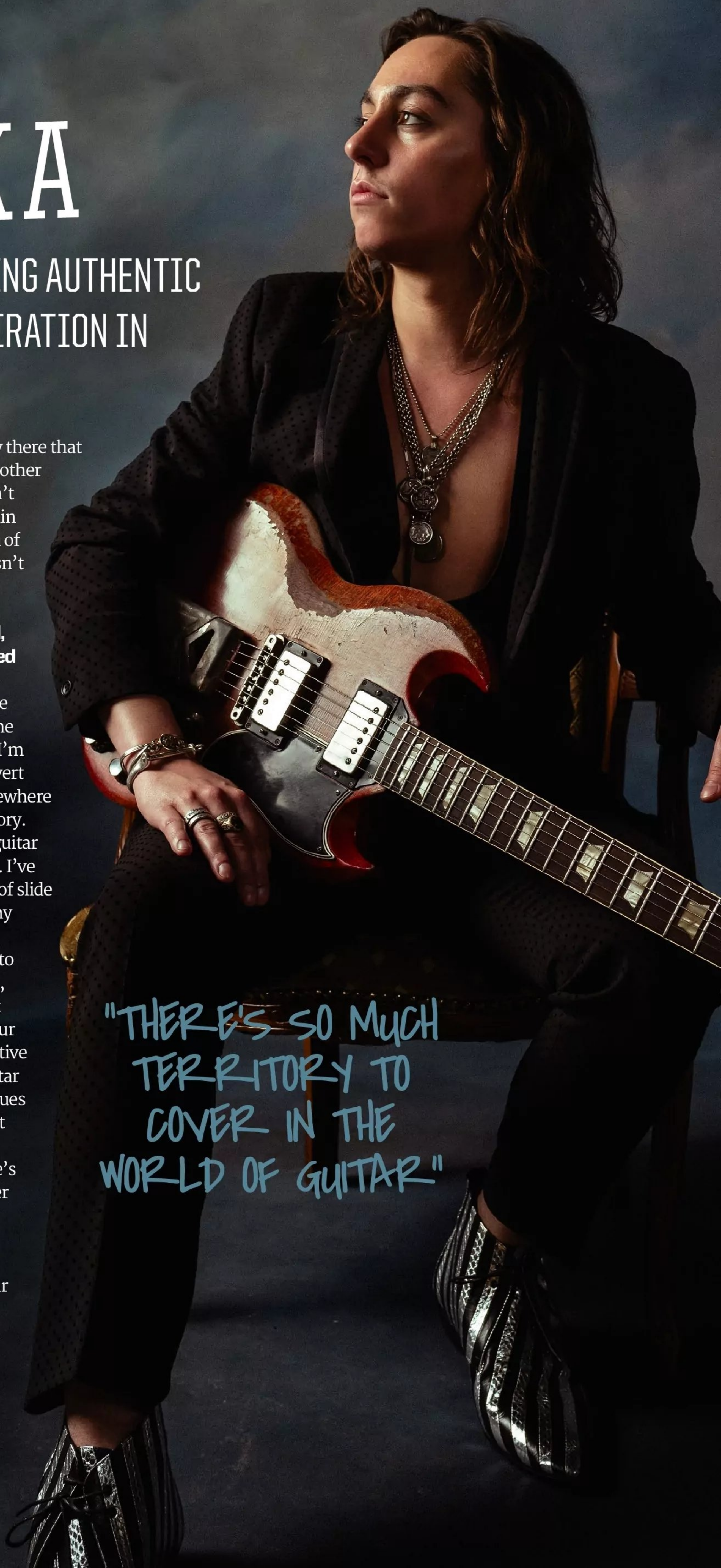
I believe that there is maybe one more level of chemistry to what we're doing than what most groups are dealing with. One thing is the fact that you've all grown up together, so there's a collective language if you will – a form of unspoken word – and that's a nuance of the live performance, but also of the creative element in terms of writing music. We grew up together but also we're bound by blood, so

there's a bit of chemistry there that I don't necessarily think other groups might have. I don't really know how to explain it. All I know is that form of communication. If it wasn't there, it'd be strange...

And on a personal level, how have you developed as a player this year?

I'm kind of already on the next record because by the time we'd finished this, I'm ready to move on and divert and follow a tunnel somewhere else into unknown territory. I'd like to do more slide guitar playing and get into that. I've sort of developed a style of slide guitar playing through my influences, and I really haven't had the chapter to demonstrate that yet. So, getting into some of that territory – really to honour some of the whole collective influence for me as a guitar player, which is blues. Blues is pretty much at the root of what I do, so that's an important one. But there's so much territory to cover in the world of guitar. There's this new wave of Middle Eastern guitar players and African guitar players coming into the contemporary scene and that stuff's really cool and interesting – that suspended pentatonic stuff and the Egyptian scale. For me, there's a lot still to uncover.

"THERE'S SO MUCH TERRITORY TO COVER IN THE WORLD OF GUITAR"





Interview Ellie Rogers

SOPHIE LLOYD

A LANDMARK SIGNATURE GUITAR, A WHOLE LOT OF SHREDDING AND A NEW ADVENTURE IN FUNK...

How would you describe your 2023 album *Imposter Syndrome*?

It's a collaborative album that I've done with 11

different artists: 10 vocalists and one other guitarist. The album was like an ode to my 15 year old self, who was a bit lost and didn't really fit in, but knew she loved rock music. She had these heroes on her wall and a lot of them are on this album.

What would you say is your finest solo on the record?

The one that was the hardest – and the longest – is on *Avalanche*. I wrote it a few days before going to the studio and I always find I write better under pressure. I threw everything and the kitchen sink in it! I took the Yngwie Malmsteen 'more is more' approach. That was a tough one to play and I feel like writing that solo really levelled up my guitar playing.

What was your most challenging shred cover of 2023?

Without a doubt, the Metallica one [*Enter Sandman*]. Not because it's a hard piece, but

because I had white-out contact lenses in when we recorded it. I thought I'd be able to see a little bit, but I could see absolutely nothing! Having to really trust my fingers made it really difficult!

What did releasing your first Kiesel signature model this summer mean to you?

It honestly meant so much. I was the first female to have a signature guitar for Kiesel, so that was a special thing for me. Kiesel took a chance on me when I didn't have many followers and I've sort of grown with them. I've always loved Kiesel guitars and I play my purple one all the time. I wanted to make a version of that, but on steroids.

What other gear have you acquired in 2023?

I've definitely shifted a bit more towards digital this year. I just got the Neural DSP Quad Cortex. All of my shreds are recorded with the Archetype Nolly plugin, and the Quad Cortex is kind of the extension to that.

Are there any styles you've been working hard to master over the last 12 months?

I haven't put this out into the world yet, but behind the scenes I've been working on my R&B playing. The other guitarist for Machine Gun Kelly, Justin Lyons, has these amazing R&B chops where he can play any chord progression and make it sound like the most beautiful thing ever. That's something I never did. I always wanted to do the fast shreddy stuff, so I never really got into proper chordal theory.

What's your favourite album of 2023?

One of my tops has been this girl called Scene Queen. She blew up on TikTok and it's heavy-metal-Barbie-esque. It just gets me hyped!

Who would you nominate as your guitarist of the year?

Definitely John 5. We played with Mötley Crüe and I got the opportunity to watch them stage-side and stand with John's guitar tech

while he was playing. It's unlike anything I've ever seen before. Everything about his performance is absolutely phenomenal and he's such a nice, humble guy.

"BEHIND THE SCENES I'VE BEEN WORKING ON MY R&B PLAYING"

Interview Ellie Rogers

CORY WONG

MORE SOLOS ON RECORD. MORE AMPS ON STAGE. AND A WHOLE LOTTA LOVE FOR NUNO...

What did you do differently in the making of

The Lucky One compared with your previous albums?

We made my last couple of records on set for my variety show, and this one really

was made purely in the studio. I wanted to have more of a controlled sound and make it a real

studio album. The other big difference is, this time, I just felt like a lot of the songs required something different of me. As I'm evolving as a player and a writer, I wanted to explore a new space, so I was diving a lot more into lead guitar. There's more guitar solos than on any of the other records.

Which solo was the most challenging to play?

They each had their own thing to them. *Separado* is probably my favourite because it was improvised straight through. I think I go the hardest on *The Grid Generation*. One that was also really fun to make was *Acceptance*. I wanted to create more of a guitar anthem for it, so it was a long arc and it was much more of an emotional journey of a solo.

What has your touring rig looked like this year?

There was a tour where I had seven or eight amps on stage purely for the fun of it. I got to try out so much different gear and I played through a bunch of different things. My preference right now is this modded Tone King amp and I love the DV Mark Eric Gales signature amp. I use that amp head into a Two-Rock cabinet. The common denominator on all three of my pedalboards is a Shure Wireless GLXD16, the Wong Compressor by Wampler, the Hotone Soul Press and then a Quad Cortex. I'm only using that for effects, I'm not using any amps in there. As soon as we can get the Cory Wong Archetype plugin in the Quad Cortex, I'll probably ditch my amps, if I'm being honest.

Did you learn anything new in terms of groove while gigging with legendary bassist Victor Wooten?

There's certain things in groove where you need to make sure you're paying attention to the releases as much as you are to the attack, but so many of the things I learned from him were more like life advice: how and why you approach what you do. The technical stuff then comes around that. He's somebody who knows how to ask the right questions to get you thinking in a different way.

What's your favourite 2023 album?

There's one album I've been listening to a lot and it's this cat from the UK, Ben Jones. It's *Mixtape - Live In London*. It's a really cool instrumental record.

And who would you nominate as guitarist of the year?

To me, there's no question, it's got to be Nuno Bettencourt. Everybody in the guitar community suddenly freaked out because of that big solo on *Rise*, but cats forget that he's also an amazing songwriter and an amazing producer. It was just a matter of time before we were all reminded that Nuno is as good as he is!

"I WANTED TO EXPLORE A NEW SPACE, SO I WAS DIVING A LOT MORE INTO LEAD GUITAR"

Interview Ellie Rogers
Photo Howard Chen

YVETTE YOUNG

USING ONLY ONE GUITAR, BUT SEARCHING FOR NEW WAYS TO MAKE GUITAR MUSIC THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE GUITAR MUSIC...

Which track from Cove's 2023 album *Catharsis* are you

most proud of and why?

There's different reasons why I'd be proud of certain things. With *Firebird*, I just think it's catchy so that one's cool. I'm pretty proud of *Coronal* because I feel like that's a different style, but it's more representative of the kinds of tones that I really want to do now.

What's been the one guitar you couldn't have lived without this year?

My Talman – it's the only one I play! The pickup response is very dynamic and the way I play is very dependent on finger tones. If you want to push them, they get broken up and dirty, and if you lay back, they're sparkly and clean. The neck's really flat and the action's not too

high, but not too low where it buzzes. It feels really comfy for the kind of style I do.

How would you describe your current style?

I call it 'detail rock' because I'm so obsessed with every little detail and getting the melody to feel the way it should, whether that's tone or phrasing.

What's your most used tuning of 2023?

Definitely FACGCE. It just feels good and I got annoyed with changing my tuning all the time, so I wanted to leave my guitar in this one that I know now. It's the American Football tuning. I'd say half of the songs on *Catharsis* are in that tuning.

What guitar skills have you been working on most lately?

I've been working on writing and producing and just trying to make the guitar sound fresh. I really love songwriting and I keep on wanting to find ways to make guitar not sound like guitar music. I've been playing around with granular effects and finding weird tones to put on top of melodies on guitar, so it almost takes on this pop or EDM hybrid thing. But, it's still guitar and it's still analogue tones.

What has changed for you in 2023?

I made a lot of big decisions this year. I parted ways with people that just weren't good for me. Now I make sure I have the most time for making music and creating an environment in which I can do that without burning out.

What's your favourite album of 2023?

My friend Brothertiger's albums are so great. If you're a big fan of '80s synth sounds and keyboard tones, then he's for you.

And who would you nominate as guitarist of the year?

I've been listening to a lot of stuff where guitar is not at the forefront and it's a tool. For me, my guitarist of the year wouldn't be someone who's purely virtuosic. I had this really amazing guy called Scarypoolparty with me on tour and he's incredible. He's technically amazing and he writes really good songs, so he can be my guitarist of the year!

"I'M OBSESSED WITH EVERY DETAIL, WHETHER THAT'S TONE OR PHRASING"



PLAY LIKE THE STARS OF 2023!

TG looks at the playing styles of the guitarists who made waves this year

Having heard from some of this year's stars of guitar over the preceding pages, no doubt, like us, you're itching to get playing – so here we take a look at the techniques of some of those musicians who have inspired us in 2023.

From the shred stylings of our guitarist of 2023, Nuno Bettencourt, to the searing jazz fusion of Matteo Mancuso, modern funk courtesy of Cory Wong, and drop-tuned prog metal from Periphery and Tesseract, there's something here for everyone to learn. Make sure to check out our audio tracks and jam along with our guitar-less backing mixes.

01 NUNO BETTENCOURT

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=140
Dm

Play 4 times

TAB

2023 has very much been Nuno's year. Be it playing the half time show at the Superbowl with Rihanna or lighting up the internet with his solo from Extreme's *Rise*, Nuno continues to amaze us with his guitar playing prowess. Our example showcases some of his trademark fast tremolo picking.

02 MATTEO MANCUSO

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=140
Em

Play 4 times

TAB

Matteo stunned us with his debut album *The Journey*, which shows off his fingerstyle fusion facility and wowed greats such as Steve Vai along the way. Our example uses the fingerstyle lead technique to play some string-skipping ideas. The lick is inspired by the electric sitar lines in *Falcon Flight* (try the excellent EHX Ravish Sitar pedal for a similar sound), but these ideas can work with most tones set up for soloing.

03 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=140

E⁵ F^{#5} G⁵ D⁵ A⁵ E⁵ F^{#5} G⁵ D⁵ E⁵ Play 4 times

NH

TAB

2 2 4 5 5 7 7 2 2 2 2 2 2 4 5 5 7 7 9 9 9 7 7

0 0 2 3 3 5 5 0 0 0 3 0 0 2 3 3 5 5 7 7 9 9 7

Queens Of The Stone Aged raged back into the charts this year with their first album in six years, *In Times New Roman...* For our example, we cracked out the fuzz pedal to play some *Paper Machete*-inspired eighth-note riffage.

04 WOLFGANG VAN HALEN

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=140

E⁵ G⁵ A⁵ G⁵ E⁵ G⁵ A⁵ G⁵ Play 4 times

PM - - - - PM - - -

BU BD

TAB

2 2 5 7 5 5 7 5 5 17 12 15 19 12 15 20 12 15 19 12 15 20 12 15 22 12 15 20 12 15 19 20 20 15 12

0 0 5 7 5 0 0 0 3 3 3 5 5 3

In addition to rocking some his Dad's most famous songs with an uncanny similarity in tone and delivery, Wolfgang Van Halen dropped his second album this year, *Mammoth II*. Our example is inspired by tracks like *Another Celebration At The End Of The World*, mixing heavy powerchord riffs and shreddy tapping.

05 CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=140

C⁷ Play 4 times

BU

TAB

11 (13) 11 8 11 8 11 8 10 8 10 10 8 10 12 13

If you are in the market for some straight-ahead, rocking blues, then look no further than Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram. Our example is inspired by tracks like *Outside Of This Town* and uses classic blues lines constructed from the C minor pentatonic scale.

06 JOE BONAMASSA

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=120

C⁷ 1/4 Play 4 times

BU BU BU 1/4

TAB

11 13 11 13 13 (15) 13 (15) 11 13 10 (12) 10 (8) 10 8 10 10 [10]

This year, the incumbent king of modern blues wowed us with his 16th solo studio album *Blues Deluxe Vol. 2*. Our example here is inspired by songs like *It's Hard But It's Fair* and uses the fingerstyle technique to play some classic Bonamassa-style licks that tip the hat to his hero Albert King.

bit.ly/tg379audio

Our example is inspired by downtuned riff extravaganzas of *Wildfire* and *Atropos*. These tracks are in a drop G# seven-string tuning (G# D# G# C# F# A# D#), but we're staying a semitone higher in drop A for simplicity. Our riff covers only five strings—so, if you have a guitar set up with heavy-gauge strings, it's possible to play it on a six-string.

bit.ly/tq379audio

The British progressive metallers hit back strong with this year's *War Of Being*. Our example is inspired by the use of odd time in the title track. For this one you will need to drop all the strings down two semitones (DGCFAD) to D standard tuning. It may take a few listens to get used to the 7/4 time signature.

bit.ly/tg379audio

The math-rock superstars once again nailed it with their latest offering *Catharsis*. Our example is inspired by guitarist Yvette Young's soundscapes on songs like *Coronal* and *Lovespell*. We've kept it simple here by using a standard-tuned six-string guitar. However, we have gone for the signature use of a capo on the 2nd fret.

bit.ly/tq379audio

If you are after some Led Zeppelin-inspired classic rock, then no band have captured the vibe better than Greta Van Fleet. The band announced their new album would be called *Starcatcher* in June this year, and the rest is history. Our example delves into Jimmy Page-style territory by using the E blues scale (E G A B, B D) in the open position to create some classic rock riffs.

bit.ly/tg379audio

Cory's new album *The Lucky One* is a corker and our example is inspired by songs like *Look At Me*. Playing those simple single-note popping lines really adds to the groove and is a technique that can be traced all the way back to Michael Jackson records such as *Thriller*.

bit.ly/tg379audio

American metalcore sensations Code Orange released a great new album this year in *The Above*—and our example is inspired by *Never Far Apart*. For this one you will need to detune the sixth string down to B. All the other strings remain in standard tuning.

bit.ly/tg379audio

Swedish garage rockers The Hives thrust their infectious riffwork back into the spotlight with this year's *The Death Of Randy Fitzsimmons*. Our example is written for one guitar, but, if you're playing with another guitarist and you want to emulate the vibe of the band's twin-guitar attack, try this trick: one of you play tight, aggressive downstrokes; the other should use a slightly freer down-up approach.

bit.ly/tg379audio

A mind-boggling 61 years after they formed, The Stones were back in 2023 with their first album of original material since 2005. Our example is inspired by rockers such as this year's *Angry* and earlier classics *Start Me Up* and *Brown Sugar*. We're using the open G tuning that Keith Richards has used to such great effect for so many years.

Words Amit Sharma, Daryl Robertson, Dave Burrluck, Jonathan Horsley, Nick Guppy, Rob Laing, Stuart Williams, Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis, Phil Barker

THE GEAR OF THE YEAR

The six-strings, amps and effects pedals that have had us reaching for our wallets in 2023

ELECTRIC GUITARS



01 Epiphone Adam Jones Les Paul Custom

£1,149

Given his background in visual arts, with credits for makeup and special effects in several Hollywood blockbusters long before guitar stardom beckoned in Tool, the recent batch of Adam Jones signatures were never going to be run-of-the-mill. This model details Frank Frazetta painting *The Berserker* in all its glory, but it's the pickups that are the biggest talking point: a reverse-mounted humbucker in the neck, just like the guitarist's 1979 original, and a passive ceramic powered Seymour Duncan Distortion in the bridge which packs a whopping 16.6k DC resistance. There's brightness and definition in abundance from the pairing of maple neck with ebony fingerboard. Amped up, these vibrations are articulated very well, with the neck pickup's warmth providing well-matched contrast to the high-power snarl from the bridge. To say we're impressed is an understatement. Aesthetically and tonally, this could be the finest Les Paul ever produced by Epiphone.





02 PRS SE DGT £979

What we hear from Dave Grissom's first SE signature is alarmingly close to the USA model – no mean feat at a quarter of the price!

03 Fender Vintera II 70s Jaguar £1,229

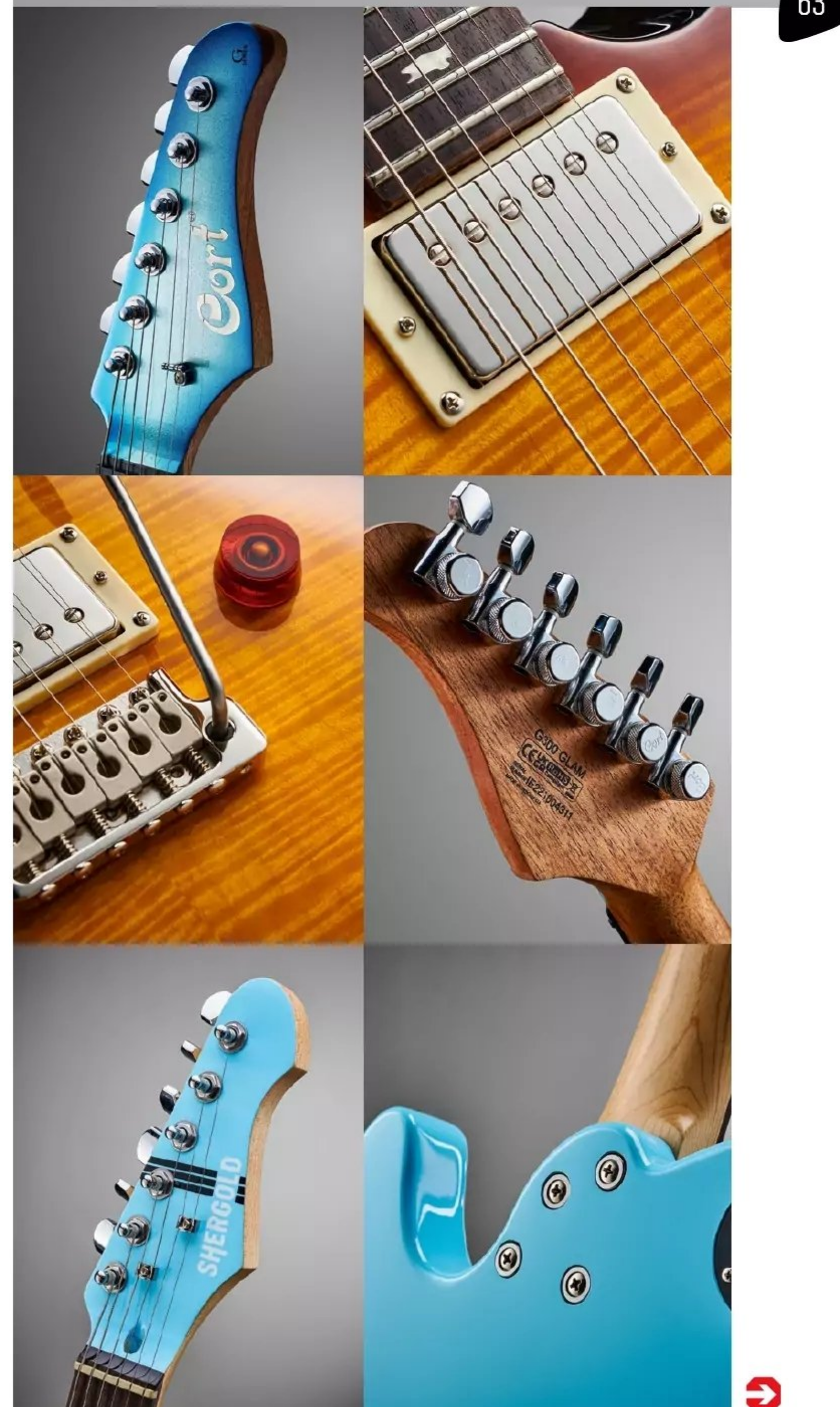
You'll find a review of the Jag later on in this very issue (p84). We'll have no spoilers here, suffice to say it's really rather good!

04 Cort G300 Glam £829

With the same hardware and pickups as the earlier flagship Pro, the G300 Glam adds a 6mm maple top on a chambered African mahogany body to the spec.

05 Shergold Telstar Standard ST14 £379

The '70s Brit-brand dropped this boutique-style, slightly offset T-style solidbody. It performs way above its price point in both sounds and style.



ACOUSTIC GUITARS

01 Fender California



£779

Fender's retro-inspired range consists of three models: the Malibu, Palomino and this, the King – and there's no doubt, it's quite the looker. Its aged natural top complements the handsome squared-off body, while the exotic grain of the Ovangkol back and sides shines through beautifully. The elegant Okoume neck is adorned with pearloid block inlays and crowned with a period-correct six-in-line headstock, culminating in a charming looking guitar that will turn heads. The King sonically shines when plugged in. The onboard Fishman Sonitone Plus electronics with under-saddle piezo and internal body transducer do a fantastic job at producing a natural-sounding tone that's clean and crisp. This series breathes new life into a mostly forgotten model, bringing it up to date for modern players. While excellent playability and drop-dead-gorgeous looks are no mean feat, at this price, the sheer value for money on offer is this King's crowning achievement.



02 Martin SC-10E

£1,375

The look may not appeal to Martin traditionalists, but this guitar's sound, playability and reasonable price for a premium brand make this worth your time.



03 Fender Acoustasonic Player Jazzmaster

£969

The JM's body and neck relationship makes top fret access a breeze, and the neck is fantastic, especially when set just right with the micro-tilt adjuster.



04 Gretsch Roots Collection G9500 Jim Dandy Acoustic

£205

This retro-inspired, small-bodied parlor guitar offers up fun-to-play personality at a cheap-as-chips price. What's not to like!



05 Martin Shawn Mendes 000JR-10E Acoustic

£869

Sustainably built with solid sapele back and sides and Sitka spruce top. 24" scale and the Mendes signature gives appeal for younger players.

AMPLIFIERS

01 Positive Grid Spark Go Micro Amp

£129



The Spark GO is your amp, effects suite, Bluetooth speaker, jam partner, audio interface and social media video rig all in one affordable, diminutive box! It's hard to think of a more value-packed offering. So impressed were we that we gave it TG's coveted Platinum Award when we reviewed it in our October issue. Many tiny, battery-powered practice amps are loud, but only a few sound great, too. The Spark manages both. Its settings are handled by the accompanying Spark app, which aims to keep your attention on playing rather than on sounds. With its AI-driven Smart Jam and Auto Chords features it 'listens' to what you play and delivers a stylised bass/drums beat to match. The whole lot runs off an internal rechargeable battery which promises around eight hours of use from a full charge. Consider us really rather impressed!



02 Blackstar Debut 50R Combo

£209

An affordable, meat-and-potatoes combo amp with two foot-switchable channels, reverb, effects loop, and that's about it. It sounds great, too!



03 Boss Katana-50 MkII EX 1x12 Combo

£345

Packing in realistic amp tones alongside boutique-grade effects at prices that seem almost too good to be true, the Katana MkII is practically unbeatable.



04 Laney Ironheart Foundry Dualtop Head

£259

Essentially Laney's acclaimed IRF pedalboard-sized amp re-imagined as a compact twin-channel head. Cab emulations make it easy to hook up to a desk, live or in a studio.



05 Blackstar HT Venue Club 40 MkIII Combo

£899

A solid performer built to handle years of live use, with typical Blackstar reliability and tonal flexibility. The MKIII is the best iteration of the Venue yet.

EFFECTS / MULTI-EFFECTS

01 Fender Tone Master Pro Floorboard

£1,649

Just a few months ago, Fender dropped its Tone Master Pro floorboard, and, right now, we reckon it's the one to beat. Its processor features eight cores – twice that of its closest competitors. The touch screen renders full-colour graphics in an intuitive visual editing system – simply drag and drop components around the signal chain. Seriously impressive sound quality is a given, however what hooked us is how easy and intuitive the Tone Master Pro is to use. Even without a manual, we were able to access and use practically everything within minutes. While competitors can come close with the quality of their amp models, the Tone Master Pro is way ahead when it comes to accessibility and being just plain fun and inspirational to plug into. If you've ever given up on a multi-effect pedal due to complex menus, the Tone Master Pro might bring you back into the fold.



02 Blackstar Dept 10 Amped 2

£539

Amped 1 put real amp tones into a compact and powerful package. Amped 2 took this idea to its logical conclusion with the addition of high-quality built-in effects.



03 Funny Little Boxes Skeleton Key

£99

FLB set their sights on recreating one of rock's most revered guitar tones: those belonging to Queens Of The Stone Age. With humbuckers and single coils alike, the results are oddly uncanny.



04 Electro-Harmonix Lizard Queen

£99

A great contemporary fuzz pedal with just enough retro vibe. If modern fuzz merchants like Matt Bellamy or Jack White are your kind of players, you'll get a lot out of this one.



05 Soldano Super Lead Overdrive

£229

Soldano's SLO hand-wired valve amp has a reputation for setting the standard for high-gain guitar amplification. Here's an affordable way to get that tone into your rig.



CLASSIC LUXURY MODERN PLAYABILITY

EC-1000T CTM

With a traditional full-thickness mahogany body and custom multi-ply binding, at first glance the LTD Deluxe EC-1000T CTM might remind you of classic guitars from eras past. But take a closer look. Features like the EverTune constant tension bridge, stainless steel frets, a modern smooth heel joint, and innovative Fishman multi-voice pickups give you the sound and performance needed for the most contemporary music styles. See your new EC-1000T CTM guitars along with dozens of other superb "New for 2022" offerings at www.espguitars.com



EC-1000T CTM EverTune Black



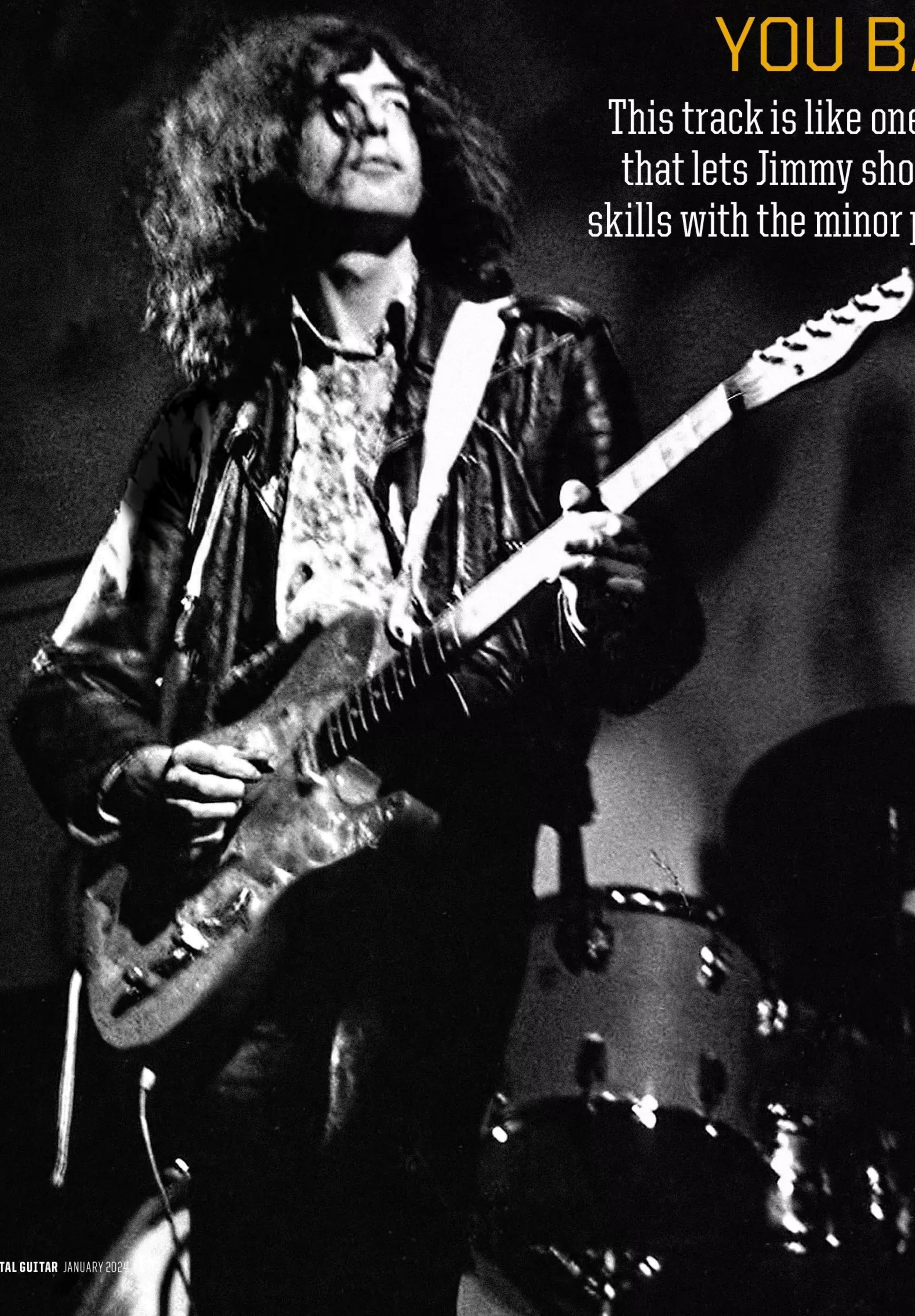
EC-1000T CTM Violet Shadow

EC-1000T CTM Vintage Gold Satin

LED ZEPPELIN

I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY

This track is like one big guitar solo that lets Jimmy show off his blues skills with the minor pentatonic scale!



Zeppelin's mix of Celtic, Arabic and Indian styles was underpinned by blues, and on this track from their self-titled debut you can hear the band in their rawest, bluesiest form.

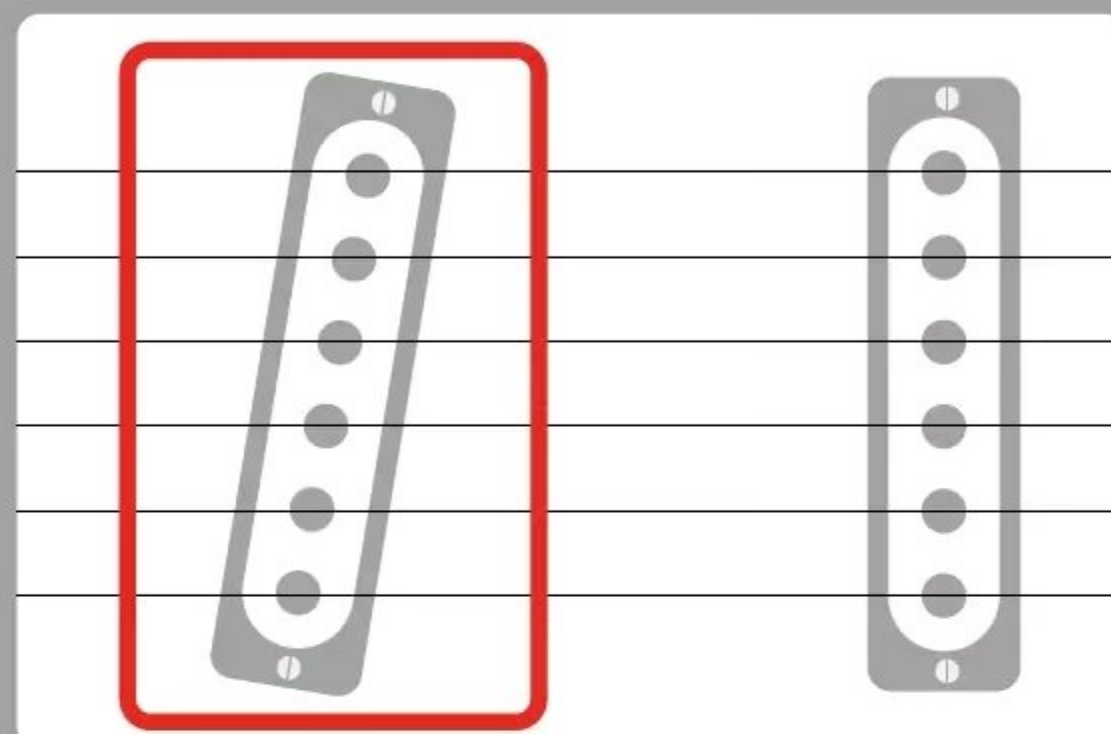
Jimmy Page is on blistering form, showing no mercy to his Fender Telecaster and a tiny Supro amp turned up to 10. Though his phrasing is mostly based on the minor pentatonic scale, the rhythm is incredibly complex, as a quick glance at our transcription will confirm. A lot of phrases are repeated, though, so take it one lick at a time. In particular, the very first lick in the first verse is repeated throughout. In typical bluesy style, Page varies the lick every time. You can make up your own variations, so make sure you know the minor pentatonic scale in a few positions on the neck.

SOUND ADVICE

Everything you need to know before playing 'I Can't Quit You Baby'

GET THE TONE

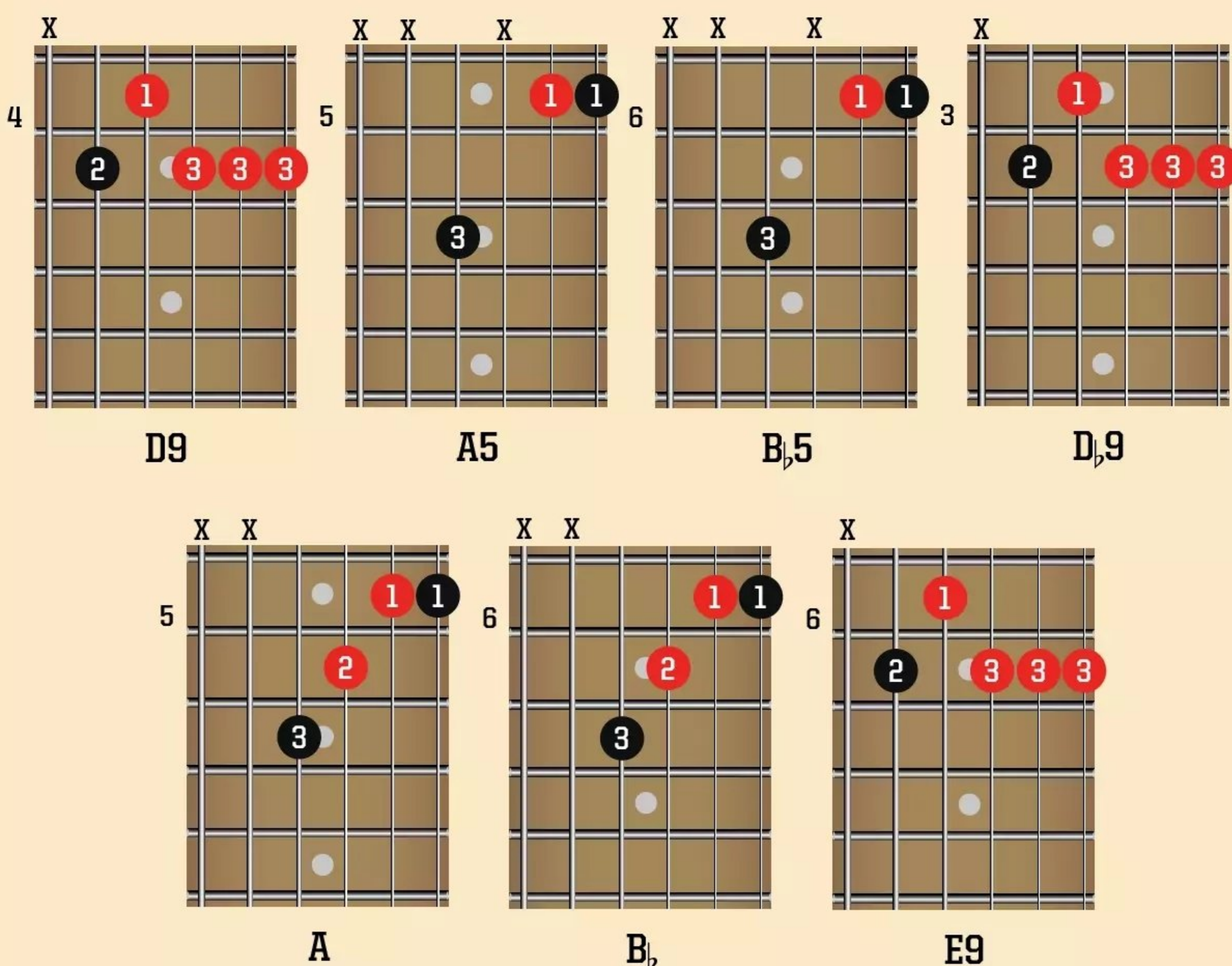
CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



Jimmy used a Fender Telecaster and a small Supro valve amp. To emulate this on a larger amp, keep the mids high but lower the bass. Boost the treble and slightly reduce the gain if you're using humbucking pickups, or reverse this process for single-coil pickups.

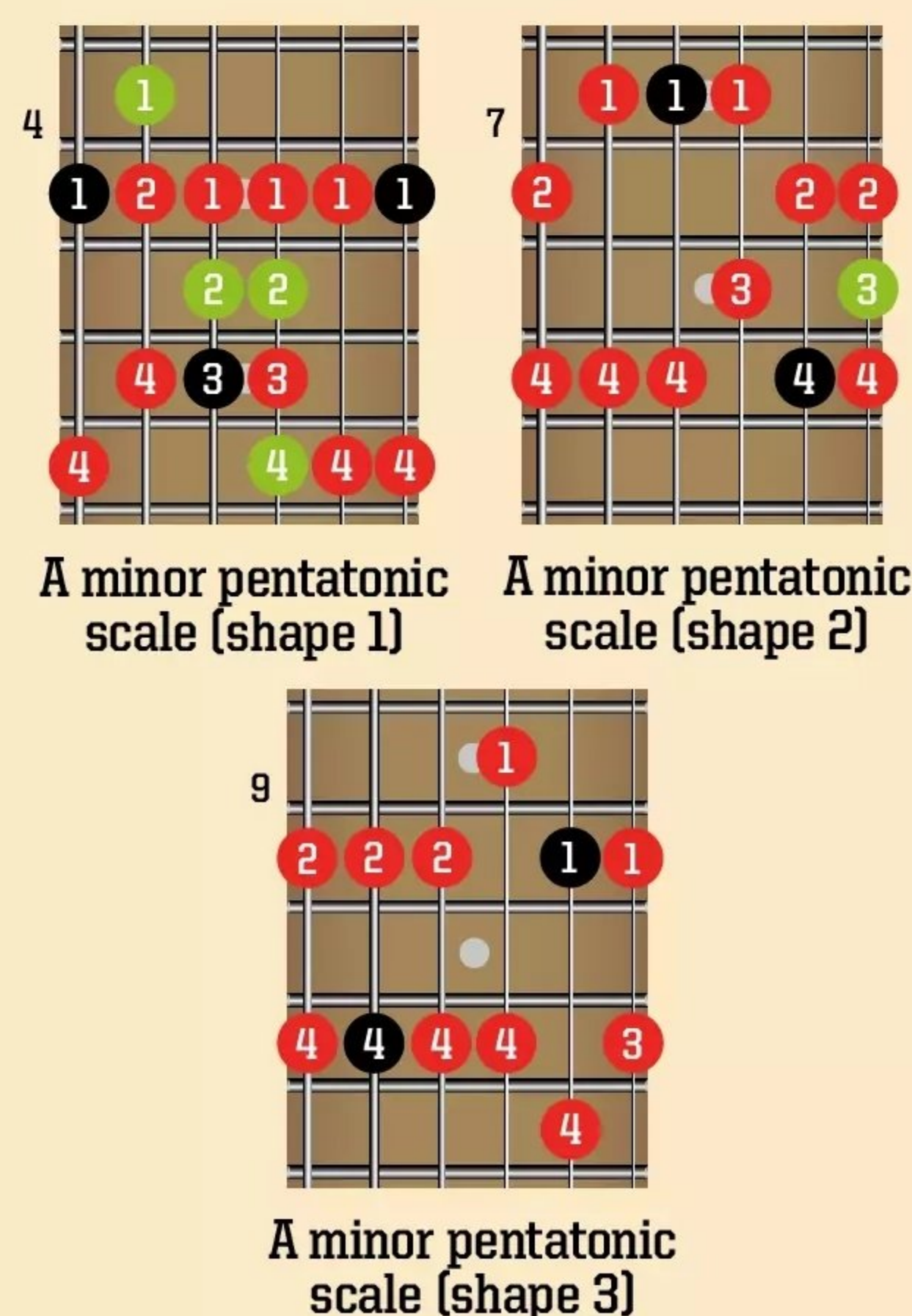
CHORDS

Page's bluesy noodling takes centre stage here, so there are only a few chords to play. The track is a I-IV-V in the key of A, which means A, D and E chords outline the main progression, although the chords are 'implied' by the bass guitar most of the time. Keep an eye on the chord names above the notation to show you where the changes occur.



SCALES

Most of Page's licks are based within these three A minor pentatonic scale shapes. Practise the shapes and you should get a feel for how Jimmy pieced his lead lines together. Notice that we've added a few extra notes highlighted in green. Jimmy frequently targets these non-scale notes but without really leaving the minor pentatonic framework.



LED ZEPPELIN

I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY

FULL
TAB

I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY

Music and lyrics by Willie Dixon

©1956 (Renewed 1984) Hoochie Coochie Music (BMI).

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LED ZEPPELIN I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY Verse 1

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩ = 81

1

2

D⁹

A

BU 5 8 5 8 (10) (10)(8) 5 7 5 6

RP BD

3

4

BU 5 8 5 8 (10) (10)(8) 7 7 10 (14) (10)

RP BD

7

A

BU BDBU BD

BU 5 8 5 8 (10) (8)(10) (8) 7 5 6

BU 5 8 5 BU 12 (14)

20 15 2 10 0

10

D⁹

A⁵

B^{b5}

A⁵

B^{b5}

BU 5 6 7 (9) 7 5 5 7 7 7 7

BU 5 6 7 (9) 5 7 5 5 7 7 5 7 5 7 5

Page's very first lick finishes on a 6th fret C# note. Adding this note into the minor pentatonic scale gives an A Mixolydian (A B C# D E F# G) tonality that you could experiment with yourself. Just take the notes Jimmy has used and try rephrasing them with a few of your own ideas.



LED ZEPPELIN I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY Verse 2

bit.ly/tg379audio

0:57

A

D^b9 D⁹

A

RP 3

BU BD

7(9) 5 8 5 8(10) (10)(8) 5 7 5 6

1

D

grad. BU

7(9) 5 8 5 12(14) [14] (16)

0

3/4 3/4 3/4 2 4 2

4/5 4/5 4/5 3 5 3

4

A

E

BU BU

7(9) 5 8 5 8(10) 8 5 7 5 6 5 5

0

BU BU

7 7(9) 5 8 5 8(10) 8 5 7 5 6 5 6

5 13

7

D

A B^b A B^b

BU BD

[13] (17) (13) 10

BU BD BU BD

7 (8)(7)(8) (7)

7 (8)(7)(8) (7)

5 6 6 6

7 7(9) 5 7 5 5 7 7 7 7 X

7 (9) (9)(7) 6 7 8

10

Bars 1 and 2 feature a sliding chord change from D^b9 to D⁹. The D^b9 is a passing chord that draws out the change from the A to the D⁹ so Jimmy doesn't hang on it for too long. If you've played through verse 1 already, the licks in bars 3, 4, 7 and 8 should all be starting to feel familiar.

1:51

A

PH

BU

10(12)

10

8

1/4

7 6 7 5 5 8/10 8 9 10 10 8

D

A

1/4

1/4

1/4

10 10 8 8 8 10 8 9 10 9 10 9 10(12) 8 10 10 8 9 9 10 9 10(12) 10 8 10

2

8va

BU

6

BU

4

BU

12 10 10 10 12(15) 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 13(15) 13 12 10 13 10 13 13 12 10 11 11

4

D

3

3

BU

BD

BU

BD

10 12 10 12 10 11 10 11 10 13 (17) (13)(17) [17] (13) 10 10 13 \

5

3

3

9

6

3

BU

5 7(9)

5 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 5 8 7 5

6

A

3

3

4

4

4

7 7 5 6 5 7 5 6 5 0 5 7 5 5 7 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 5/7 0 0 5/7 17 0

7

LED ZEPPELIN I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY Solo 1 (cont'd)

bit.ly/tg379audio

9

E

6 6

3 3

10

D

A

B^b

BU BD BU RP BD BU

13 (17) (13)(17) (17) (13) 10 12 (14) 12 10 5 6 7 6 7 7 (9) 7 5 7 7 7 7 7

12

A

B^b

BU

7 7 (9) 5 6 7 7 (9) 5 7 5 7 5 6 5 5

The whole track is an extended solo for Jimmy Page, so the same rules apply throughout. Make sure you know your A minor pentatonic scale (ACDEG), A blues scale (ACDE, EG) and A Mixolydian (ABC#DEF#G) mode. You can improvise with any of these scales at any point throughout the track.

LED ZEPPELIN I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY Breakdown

bit.ly/tg379audio

1

N.C.

2:48

BU

10 (12) 10 8 10 (12) 10

BU

10 (12) 10 8 [8] 10 10 10

3

BU

10 (12) 10 (12) 10 13 10 (12) 10

BU

10 (12) 10 (12) 10

RP

(12) [12] BD

(10)

The licks are relatively simple in terms of the tab here, but it's hard to get the hard-edged blues inflections that Page extracts from his axe. Dig in and pick each note with attitude. We've tabbed the top line melody here but listen closely to the recording to hear how Jimmy occasionally hits the second and third strings.

D

3:05

TAB

1

TAB

2

A

TAB

3

TAB

4

E **D** **A**

TAB

5

B^b

TAB

7

LED ZEPPELIN I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY Solo 2 (cont'd)

bit.ly/tg379audio

Sheet music for Solo 2 (cont'd) in D major. The music features a melodic line in the treble clef and a guitar tab in the bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 4/4. The music is divided into measures by bar lines. The guitar tab includes fret numbers and bending instructions (BU for bend up, BD for bend down). The music is marked with a tempo of 8.

Jimmy uses hammer-ons and pull-offs during his fastest licks, instead of trying to pick every note. Wherever you see two consecutive notes on the same string connected by a 'slur' symbol in the tab/notation you must play a hammer-on or pull-off. String bends are notated with BU (bend up) and BD (bend down).

LED ZEPPELIN I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY Verse 3

bit.ly/tg379audio

Sheet music for Verse 3 in D major. The music features a melodic line in the treble clef and a guitar tab in the bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 12/8. The music is divided into measures by bar lines. The guitar tab includes fret numbers and bending instructions (BU for bend up, BD for bend down). The music is marked with a tempo of 3:40.

Sheet music for Verse 3 in D major. The music features a melodic line in the treble clef and a guitar tab in the bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 12/8. The music is divided into measures by bar lines. The guitar tab includes fret numbers and bending instructions (BU for bend up, BD for bend down). The music is marked with a tempo of 4.

Sheet music for Verse 3 in D major. The music features a melodic line in the treble clef and a guitar tab in the bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 12/8. The music is divided into measures by bar lines. The guitar tab includes fret numbers and bending instructions (BU for bend up, BD for bend down). The music is marked with a tempo of 7.

Sheet music for Verse 3 in D major. The music features a melodic line in the treble clef and a guitar tab in the bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 12/8. The music is divided into measures by bar lines. The guitar tab includes fret numbers and bending instructions (BU for bend up, BD for bend down). The music is marked with a tempo of 10.

Sheet music for Verse 3 in D major. The music features a melodic line in the treble clef and a guitar tab in the bass clef. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 12/8. The music is divided into measures by bar lines. The guitar tab includes fret numbers and bending instructions (BU for bend up, BD for bend down). The music is marked with a tempo of 12.

In bar 5 there is a two-string bend. It's fitting of the blues style to use the flat of your fingers laid across two strings at once to play it. Aim for a loose, drawn out feel and don't worry too much about hitting the notes exactly as transcribed.

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

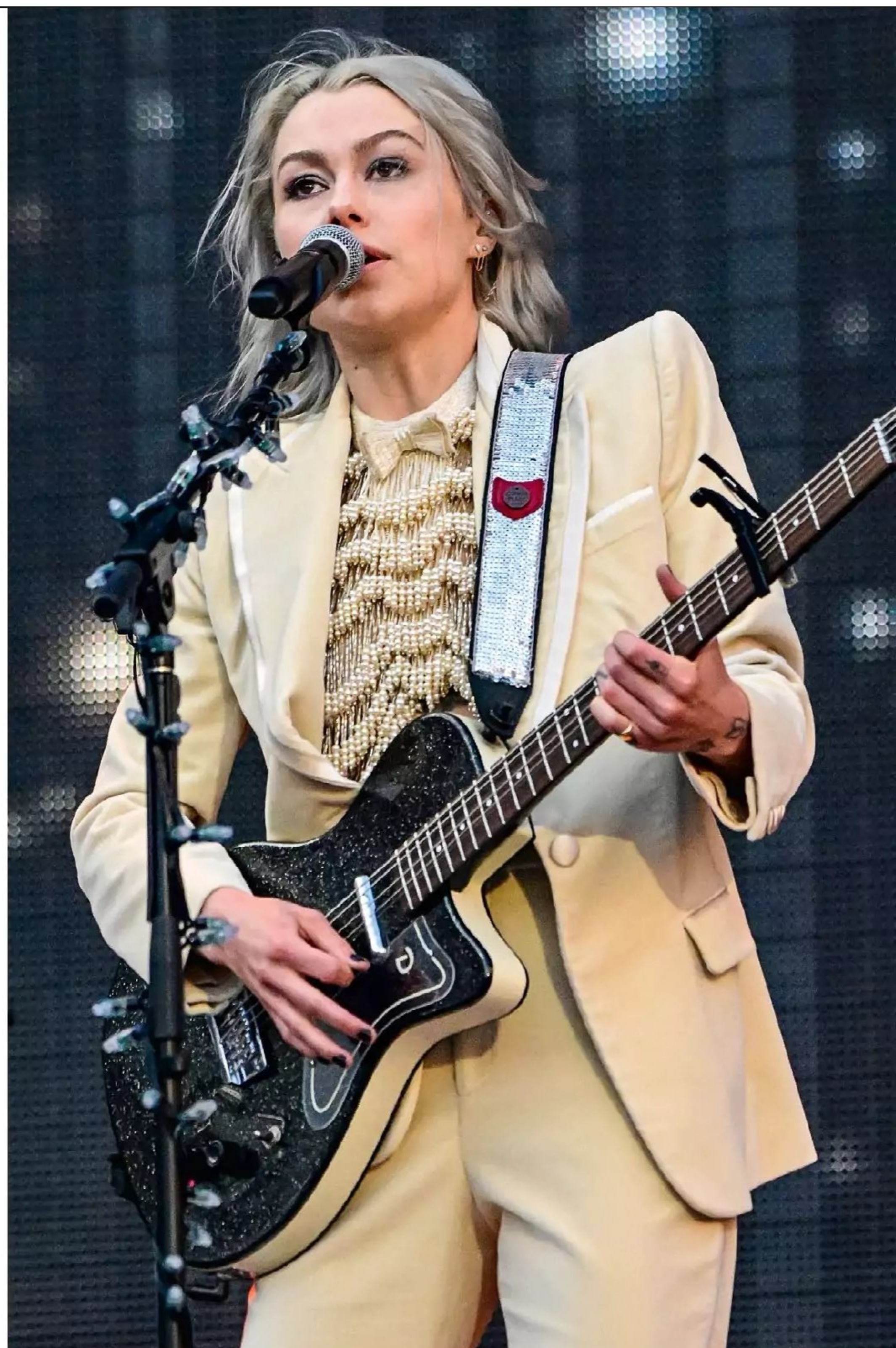
PHOEBE BRIDGERS SO MUCH WINE

Phoebe's Christmas song can be strummed with just five shapes, or try it fingerstyle and learn an essential picking technique

Traditionally, singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers releases a Christmas cover every year. Her 2022 self-released download was a version of the The Handsome Family's *So Much Wine* (also available on a six track EP of the same name). Poignant and moving, this is definitely a contender for one of the saddest Christmas songs ever written.

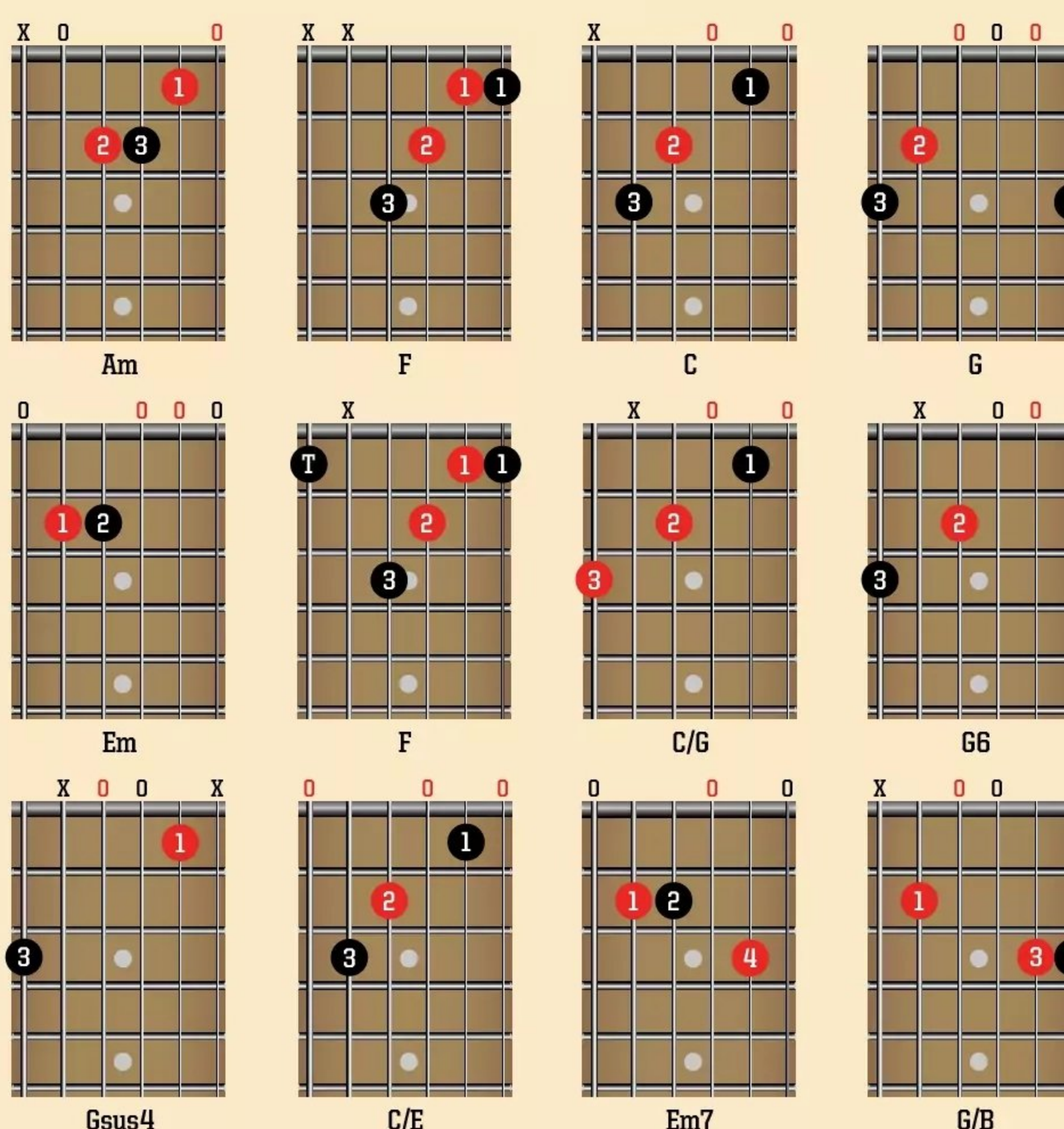
The beauty of the song is that you can make it as easy or as challenging as you like: strum the whole song using just five chords, or go for the

full fingerpicking approach with every subtle detail included. Go the fingerstyle route and you'll learn a simple but highly effective technique called 'Travis picking', named after the country picker Merle Travis who pioneered it. This involves using picking a constant alternating bass pattern with your thumb, while your fingers add the melody notes (stems up). This sounds complicated, but follow our guide and you'll soon be building an invaluable technique that sounds great on acoustic or electric, and can be applied to many different styles.



CHORDS

If you're opting to just strum along to our audio track then you can use Am, F, C, G and Em (the first five shapes shown here). C replaces C/G, G replaces G6, Gsus4 and G/B, and you can just play Em instead of C/E and Em7. If you're going for the full 'meal deal' and fingerpicking the full piece then take a look at the rest of the shapes.



SO MUCH WINE

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SONGSHEET

So Much Wine

Intro

Am F C/G G6

Verse 1

Am F
I had nothing to say
C Gsus4
On Christmas Day
Am F C/E Em7
When you threw all your clothes in the snow
Am F
When you burnt your hair
C Gsus4
And knocked over chairs
Am F C
I just tried to stay out of your way

Pre-Chorus 1

C
But when you fell asleep
F C
With blood on your teeth
Am F G/B
I just got in my car and drove away

Chorus

C F
Listen to me, butterfly
C
There's only so much wine
Am F
That you can drink in one life
C
And it will never be enough
Am F C
To save you from the bottom of your glass

Instrumental

Am F C G
Am F C
Am F C G
Am F C

Verse

Am F
Where the state highway starts
C G
I parked my car
Am F C/E
And I got out and stared up at the stars

Am F
And as meteors dived
C Gsus4
Shot across the sky
Am F C
I thought about your sad, shining eyes

Pre-Chorus 2

C
I came back for my clothes
F C
When the sun finally rose
Am F G/B
And you were still passed out on the floor

Repeat Chorus

Repeat Instrumental

PHOEBE BRIDGERS SO MUCH WINE Intro/Verse

bit.ly/tg379audio

♩=126

Am F C/G G6

let ring throughout

1 2 3 4 5

Am F C Gsus4

cont. sim.

Learn the bassline first, using only your thumb to pick the notes. Generally you'd use your first finger to pick notes on the third string, and your second finger for notes on the second, but some players Travis pick using only the first finger for the melody, so experiment and see which feels right for you. The first melody note is frequently 'pushed' (ie, played half a beat early) before the start of the bar, getting this detail right in your performance is the key to sounding like a fingerstyle pro.

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.



84

79 START ME UP!

Five new products you need to check out

80 EPIPHONE KIRK HAMMETT 'GREENY' 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD

The most affordable version of 'Greeny' yet

84 FENDER VINTERA II JAGUAR & MUSTANG

Fender's retro-inspired line gets a hotly-anticipated sequel

88 GUILD SURFLINER DELUXE

The Surfliner gets a vibrato and 'deluxe'

90 NATIVE INSTRUMENTS GUITAR RIG 7 PRO

One of the oldest suites of guitar effects is still one of the best

92 JACKSON PRO PLUS SERIES DINKY DKAQ

A shred machine loaded with premium parts for just over a grand?

94 TAYLOR BEACON

Bring home the Beacon?



SUPERB, A BEST BUY



EXCELLENT



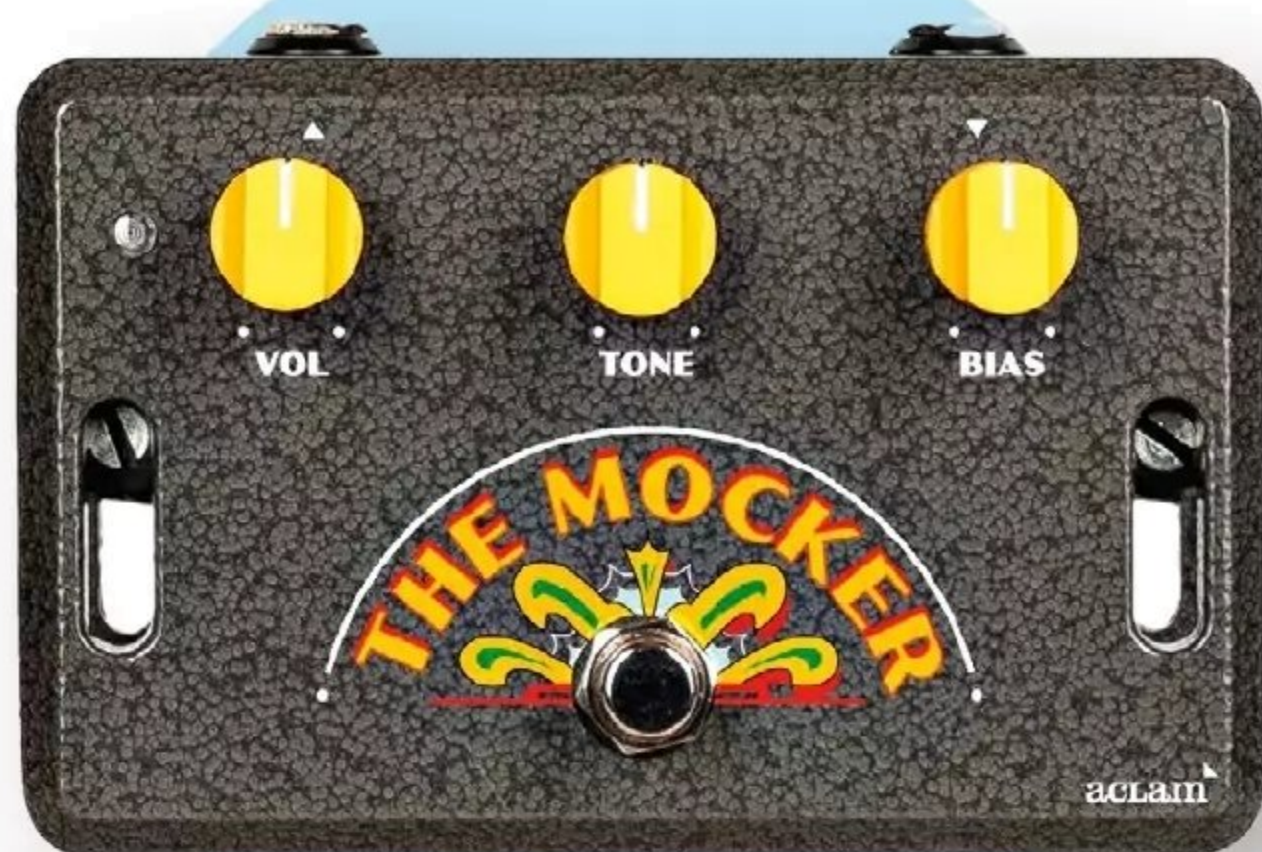
ABOVE AVERAGE KIT



SOME ISSUES



POOR



1



3



4



2



5

START ME UP!

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

ACLAM THE MOCKER

1 Get Fab fuzz tone with The Mocker from Aclam, which is based on the fuzz circuit of the Beatles-favoured Vox UL 730 amp. Adding Volume, Tone and Bias controls, it's made using the same Phillips OA200 germanium diodes found in the amp - Aclam got its hands on enough new-old-stock diodes to make 200 pedals, so if you want one, you'll need to be quick!

£299

www.aclamguitars.com

BLACKSTAR ST JAMES PLUGINS

2 Earlier this year, Blackstar unveiled its first foray into the world of software plugins with its St James Suite. Now, the Brit amp maker has followed up with the release of the two St James variants (EL34 and 6L6) as individual products. By splitting it in half, it's also cut the price (almost) in half, so you can choose your tonal flavour and save money, too! You can also demo the plugins for 14 days while you decide which one to get.

£69

www.blackstarplugins.com

HARLEY BENTON DIY GUITAR KITS

3 We love Harley Benton's approach to affordable gear. Now it's expanded its range of DIY guitar build kits with left-handed S and T-style options, plus a Thinline T and the 'Square' which leaves the body blank for you to carve out yourself. Each body is sealed, ready for finishing and while there's no soldering required, you will need to be handy with some tools to put it together.

£77

www.harleybenton.com

FENDER BRUNO MARS STRATOCASTER

4 "A signature guitar for a singer?!" Well, as it happens, Bruno Mars is no slouch on the guitar, either. If you're so inclined, you can bag yourself one of his Limited Edition Stratocasters. It's got an ash body, finished in Mars Mocha Heirloom, Custom Bruno Mars pickups and it comes with a spare scratchplate and leopard print strap! Er, did we mention it's over £3,000?

£3,149

www.fender.com

IK MULTIMEDIA TONEX ODS LEGENDS

5 You've never played through a Dumble, in fact most of us have never been in the same room as one, but the fact remains we'd trip over our modellers to have a go on one. Well, now you can experience four models of the fabled Dumble Overdrive Special in all its glory, along with some bonus Tube Screamer TS-808 and Klon Centaur models courtesy of IK Multimedia's ODS Legends Collection for its TONEX software and hardware. Get it before the intro price goes up to €99.

£49.99

www.ikmultimedia.com



EPIPHONE KIRK HAMMETT 'GREENY' 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD

£1,499

The most affordable version of 'Greeny' yet

Back in issue 373 we took a look at the rather fine Gibson USA Kirk Hammett 'Greeny'. Easily one of the most debated and discussed guitars of 2023, it's quite a piece, except it costs just shy of three grand. But just as we were writing that review, Kirk Hammett let slip that there was going to be an Epiphone version and here it is! It might not be a cheap date but at half the price of that Gibson USA guitar, is it only half as good? No. It's much better than that.

Classed as an 'Inspired by Gibson Custom Shop' model – like the current '58 V and Explorer, the '59 Les Paul

quite striped and reasonably deep in colour nonetheless. The neck shape is spec'd as 'custom Greeny profile' and dimensionally it's bigger in depth than the USA model with a full-feeling deep C shape. Nice.

As we've seen with quite a few of Epiphone's recent flagship models we get a smattering of other USA-style features too. Along with that pukka pickup set the control circuit uses CTS pots, wired '50s-style, with a pair of Mallory capacitors rated at .022 microfarads.

Okay, the lightly flamed maple top is a AAA veneer over the maple cap but we do get a satin finish – presumably a polyester or

“ONE OF THE BEST SOUNDING EPIPHONE LES PAULS EVER”

Standard and '61 SG Standard – the new Epi Greeny lacks the battle scars of the real thing, or the cost-a-lot Gibson Custom versions, but headstock logo aside, it does a pretty good impersonation of the USA model.

Our sample is actually lighter: a very good weight at 8.6lbs if such things bother you and all the key details are here: the same Greenybucker covered humbuckers – the neck reverse mounted with its flipped magnet polarity – and those mis-matched control knobs, added originally by post Peter Green owner, Gary Moore. We don't get the rosewood fingerboard of the USA model. Here it's Indian laurel, but

urethane, rather than the satin nitro finish of the USA models – that's a little matt over the light golden maple top but smoother and slightly burnished over the two-piece centre-joined, brow-stained mahogany back and one-piece neck. It's nothing like the thick, over-glossed finishes of so many Eastern builds.

Even if you have zero interest in Peter Green, Gary Moore or Kirk Hammett, there's plenty here to enjoy. Yes, it's another Burst-inspired repro, but it's the girthsome pickups that, in the world of original PAFs, are pretty pokey and, seriously, if you can't coax some archetypal classic rock Les Paul tones out of this thing you

1 NECK, FINGERBOARD & FRETS

Not surprisingly, Greeny sticks to Gibson's classic formula with its shorter 24.75" scale length, quite a narrow width fretwire that has good height and is tidily installed on the 12" radius bound fingerboard with what are spec'd as mother-of-pearl trapezoid inlays.

2 PICKUPS

Reproduced by Gibson to replicate the pickups in the now Kirk Hammett-owned 1959 Burst, the Greenybuckers – currently the only pickup in Gibson's Artist series – are on the hotter side of the notoriously variable PAF scale. Here the bridge measures 8.52k ohm, the neck is 8.25k, and both use an Alnico II magnet.

3 CONTROLS

Unlike the majority of Epiphone LP's the controls here are wired '50s style – just like the originals. Compared to 'modern' wiring, you lose less high-end as you turn the volumes down, and the controls are quite interactive: a subtly different drive.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Two-piece mahogany back, maple top w/ AAA flame maple veneer

NECK: One-piece mahogany, glued-in

SCALE: 24.75" (629mm)

FINGERBOARD: Indian laurel, 12" radius

FRETS: 22, medium

PICKUPS: Gibson USA Greenybucker set. Neck pickup reverse mounted w/ reversed magnet polarity

CONTROLS: Individual volume and tone for each pickup, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch

HARDWARE: Epiphone LockTone ABR-1 tune-o-matic and stop tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic tuners with 'modern-style' buttons – nickel-plated

FINISH: Greeny Burst

CONTACT: Gibson, www.gibson.com





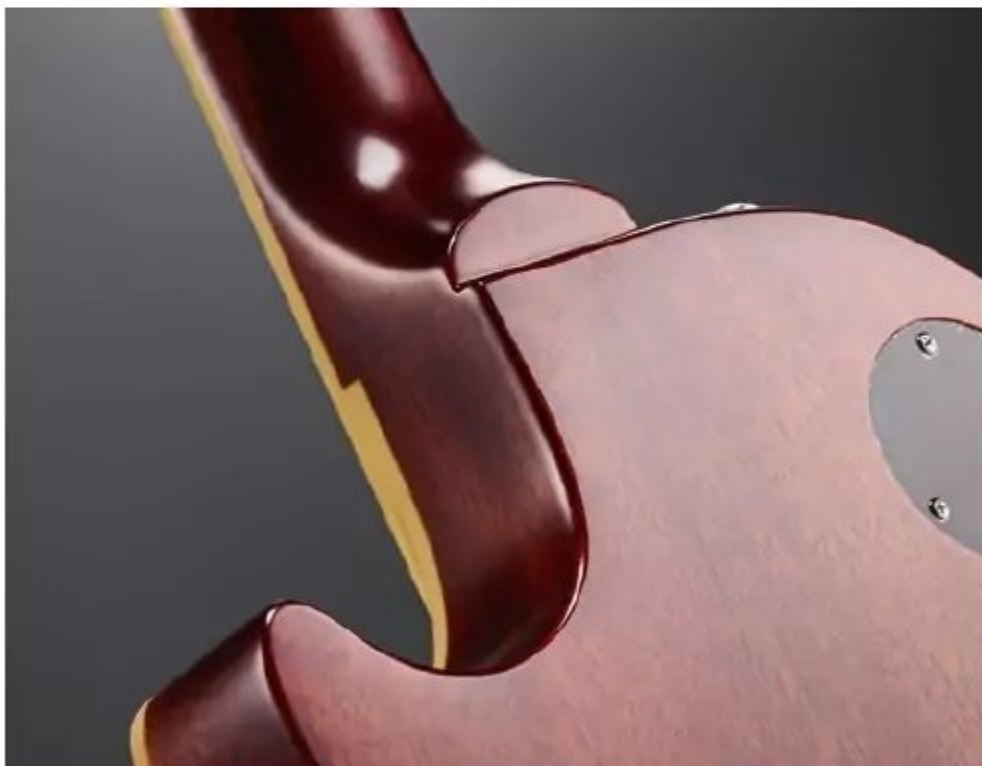
Voicing Greeny

Not only has Gibson recreated the pickups from the famous original, you can now buy them to fit on *any* Les Paul

Mired in myth and magic, numerous pickup makers offer their versions of the unique pickup set featured on Greeny. Gibson themselves took a more pragmatic approach. “The guitar has been analysed more than once here,” says Gibson USA’s Jason Davidson, “but the pickup specifications were confirmed with Kirk’s tech as well. Then we did a lot of ear-testing to make sure the sound was there. I remember Jared [Brandon, Pickup Shop Product Manager and designer] made three batches, sets: they were all very close but we went to our sound lab with Matt Kohler [Vice President of Product at Gibson Brands]. Matt has a really good ear and he’d listened to Kirk playing Greeny several times: he had a pretty good idea of what it sounded like when Kirk played it. Eventually we all agreed on which set we thought was right and Kirk gave a big thumbs up and obviously compared them to the real thing.”

The Greenybucker set is available now for £319 from the Gibson Pickup Shop.

might need to question your other gear and your technique. But it’s also far from a one-trick pony: use the volumes to pull back the bluster and things clean up beautifully while the interactive tone controls – which, wired like this, take a bit of getting used to – do a lot more than just round off your sound.



But Greeny is all about its fabled out-of-phase tones, isn’t it? Push the toggle into the centre position and instead of that lovely Les Paul dual pickup combination with its added bounce and chime, we get a thin, nasally voice that might not be to everyone’s taste. But the trick is to offset the volume controls: just pull back one control and the sound, because the phase relationship changes, is now much fuller but still with a touch of that nasally edge, great with a little grit and fuzz: oodles of attitude.

Okay, we have to mention the price. Yes, this is a Kirk Hammett signature guitar that’s half the price of the Gibson USA version, but it is quite a bit more expensive than Epiphone’s Inspired by Gibson Custom Shop 1959 Les Paul Standard, for example, which

also employs Gibson USA Burstbuckers and CTS pots with ’50s wiring which will cost you £929 including a hard case. In store you can buy a Gibson USA Les Paul Tribute for less money than this Greeny, too.

That said, these Greenybuckers really do a great ‘hot-vintage’ job and irrelevant of the out-of-phase voices, help make this one of the best-looking (the finish is really superb) and sounding Epi LPs we’ve ever had in our hands.

Dave Burrluck

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

ALSO TRY...

VINTAGE REISSUED SERIES V100PGM

£549

Vintage’s stab at Greeny comes in a faded Lemon Drop finish and powered by a pair of covered Wilkinson WVC humbuckers – the neck pickup is reversed and it’s wired out-of-phase.



GUILD POLARA KIM THAYIL

£899

This new addition is based on the Gibson SG, and replaces the previous S-100. This signature is the same guitar in black with gold hardware and, offers a mini-toggle phase switch. Peter Green to Soundgarden in one guitar!



PRS SE 594 SINGLECUT

£1,049

This Indonesian-made SE is the closest the range gets to a vintage Les Paul. It uses a PRS-designed two-piece bridge plus Indonesian versions of the very vintage-sounding 58/15 covered humbuckers.



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Words Daryl Robertson Photography Olly Curtis

FENDER VINTERA II JAGUAR & MUSTANG

Fender's well-received, retro-inspired line gets a hotly-anticipated sequel, but can it live up to the hype?

When the original Vintera models were released in 2019, their retro charm and modern playability proved to be a hit with

players, and Fender found themselves with a bonafide box-office smash on their hands. So, it was only a matter of time before this popular series received a sequel. Featuring a new cast of suitably vintage-inspired models as well as a few returning faces, this updated lineup looks to refresh the range and continue the story for fans of the series.

Among the colourful band of characters is everything from a '50s Stratocaster to '60s cult classic the Bass VI and a few '70s models sprinkled in for good measure. In fact, the two guitars we are taking a closer look at today come from the latter decade – the '70s Jaguar and '70s Competition Mustang.

Now, while this particular period doesn't get the same love as Fender's golden age, there seems to be a newfound appreciation for this decade, with

more and more players discovering that there were a few gems to be found at the height of the company's CBS-era.

Just like the original iteration of Vintera guitars, the follow-up models blend vintage specs with contemporary production techniques to create a six-string that offers players the best of both worlds – nostalgic looks and sound with effortless modern playability. It's worth noting the Vintera series is not trying to emulate an exact year of manufacture. Instead, this line is purely attempting to evoke the vibe of its chosen decade.

Both offsets feature classic finish options, with the Jaguar being available in either a Black or Vintage White colourway, while the Mustang opts for the ever-popular Competition Burgundy and Orange. Of course, each model comes loaded with period-correct Vintera II pickups, 'F' stamped machineheads, retro C-shaped necks with 7.25" radius fingerboards and vintage-tall frets.

So join us as we put this duo of asymmetrical guitars through their paces to find out if Fender has just released yet another star-studded blockbuster or if this is a straight-to-DVD sequel that is destined for the bargain bin.



FENDER VINTERA II '70S JAGUAR

Short-scale stunner

We can't help but admire how gorgeous this Jaguar is. Its asymmetrical body is as handsome as ever in its off-white getup, while the vintage tint neck, block inlays and large headstock complete the retro aesthetic. The finishing is on point, too. This guitar is impeccably put together and very well spec'd for the price.

That said, a rather curious spec detail is the neck profile, which may raise a few eyebrows among Jag fanatics. Due to dwindling sales, the Jaguar wouldn't see the latter half of the decade, getting the chop in 1975. So, we aren't too sure which "late-'70s" model was the inspiration. But that doesn't detract from the fact that this guitar is a joy to hold. Pair that with the vintage-tall frets and slinky feel of a 24" scale, and you get a guitar that begs to be played.

As expected, the guitar comes equipped with vintage-style saddles and classic tremolo. While this goes a long way to helping you achieve that signature Jag sound, the strings can pop out when struck with force – so heavy-handed players be warned.

Tonally, the Jaguar is known for its bright attack, and that's exactly what we get. The sound is precise and defined but not brittle. Thankfully, both the Lead/Rhythm Circuit and Bass-Cut are represented in all their retro glory, so you can effortlessly achieve those reverb-soaked single-note lines.

So, whether you think of the Jaguar as the guitar that helped surf stay afloat or the axe that killed glam, there's no denying that this crooked offset sounds like no other model and this latest offering is no different.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
BODY FINISH: Gloss Polyester
NECK: Maple
NECK SHAPE: Late-'70s C
FINGERBOARD: Maple
PICKUPS: Vintage-Style '70s Single-Coil Jaguar
CONTROLS: Lead Circuit Controls, Master Volume, Master Tone; Rhythm Circuit Controls, Two Thumbwheel, Neck Pickup Volume and Tone



FENDER VINTERA II '70S COMPETITION MUSTANG

Small stature, massive tone

Starting life as a budget-friendly student model, the Mustang galloped out of the classroom and straight into the hands of '90s alt-rock heroes, cementing itself as the poster child of the grunge movement. Turning our attention to the latest Mustang offering from Fender, and we are greeted with a guitar that looks like it arrived here in a DeLorean.

Fender has again nailed the '70s aesthetic. Here the vintage patina of the neck, the retro 'F'-stamped machine heads with aged white buttons and the period-correct black and gold decal all lead to a rather authentic-looking guitar indeed.

Much like the Jaguar, this model features a 24" maple neck with C profile – although this time, it's based on earlier examples – as well as the familiar 7.25" radius fingerboard and vintage-tall frets. If you've never had the joy of playing a short-scale Fender, we'd highly recommend seeking one out, as they are a lot of fun – and this one is no different. The shorter nature of the neck results in a much more elastic feel to the strings and once-impossible bends are now a total breeze.

Again, like the Jag, the build quality here is top-notch. The hardware feels robust, the tremolo unit is as smooth as you like and the machine heads are perfectly responsive. The tonal heart of this miniature offset is a set of vintage-inspired '70s single-coil pickups and they sound fantastic. Cheerful, snappy and full of detail, these pickups are sure to cover a lot of musical ground. Whether it's clean chords or aggressive fuzzed-out solos, this Mustang takes it all in its stride.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Alder
BODY FINISH: Gloss Polyester
NECK: Maple
NECK SHAPE: Early '70s C
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
PICKUPS: Vintage-Style '70s Single-Coil Mustang
CONTROLS: Master Volume, Master Tone, 2-On/Off Slide Switches

FINAL VERDICT

Does the latest offering from Fender prove the '70s weren't so bad after all?

Sequels are a lot harder to get right than they would first appear. While every follow-up thinks of itself as *The Empire Strikes Back*, it's more likely to be *The Phantom Menace*. All too often, the new instalment fails to capture the magic of the original, becoming a soulless cash grab that is a pale imitation of what came before.

Luckily, that isn't what has happened here. Fender's Vintera II Series brilliantly builds on the previous generation, expanding the lineup with two models that are sure to become fan favourites.

Both the Jaguar and Mustang perfectly evoke the feel and sound of the old guitars from which they draw their inspiration, while also benefiting from Fender's modern building methods. From style to playability, build quality to tone, these '70s offsets offer players an affordable way to harness a little bit of vintage mojo without breaking the bank.

Now, we can't help but look forward to the next instalment of the Vintera story and wonder what direction the guitars will take next. Maybe this next series will be set in the '80s and star the short-lived Katana? Yeah, probably not.



FENDER VINTERA II '70S JAGUAR

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



FENDER VINTERA II '70S COMPETITION MUSTANG

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



GUILD SURFLINER DELUXE

£699

The Surfliner gets a vibrato and 'deluxe'

It's rare that heritage companies like Guild come up with new guitar designs. Why should they when there are a huge number of models to reproduce from their own past? The Surfliner originally appeared in early 2022 and although you can see some design cues from their past, it was actually the first new design they'd created for, well, longer than we can remember.

Named after a train line that runs down the West coast of California, the original HSS model, quickly followed by a dual humbucker version, was a rare Guild bolt-on, but unusually features a tune-o-matic with through-body string anchorage along with, unusually, 23 frets. It also features some unusual on/off pickup switches, the sort of thing you'd find on a small table lamp from IKEA.

This aptly named Deluxe model – which was actually announced early in 2023 and has only just arrived on our shores – adds a touch of class to that base with three gloss metallic body colours, a block-inlaid and bound rosewood fingerboard on a roasted, as opposed to plain, maple neck, its large back-angled and colour-matched headstock spliced on under the 2nd fret.

But the fundamental change is the addition of an offset-style vibrato – surely essential if you're going to have 'surf' in a guitar's name – along with rear-locking tuners while those tricky on/off switches are replaced with an industry-standard five-way pickup selector.

Yes, all this deluxe-ness heaps £300 onto the price but, plugged

in, there's no sense of style over substance. Certainly, if you want some big clean surf sounds, the Deluxe delivers. The Aerosonics have a little edge to them that seems to add a little grit while the relatively low output HB-2 bridge humbucker combines a bit of thickness, smoother but with clarity and without a big volume difference. It certainly sounds rather good into a low-wattage valve amp but really loves a decent pedalboard where that clarity and bite can be tamed or enhanced to take you way beyond surf. It sounds huge with some ambient delays and nice and gnarly with your favourite fuzz.

It's a little heavier, at 8.47lb, than the earlier Surfliner we reviewed but that does give it a very centred feel strapped on. The frets could do with a final polish though, along with the neck to smooth the slightly papery-feeling satin. We'd also like to see a roller bridge tune-o-matic bridge although, to be fair, after the strings were stretched and things settled in a bit, the small travel vibrato stayed perfectly in-tune for those essential light shimmers.

Overall there's some good craft and classy design here, a very vibey, cool-looking guitar that pulls out some Strat-y sounds with kick if you need. We'd rock this one!

Dave Burrluck

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

1 VIBRATO
The original Surfliner models are both hardtails. Our Deluxe adds this offset-style vibrato with its 'G' cut-out. It's of good quality, though, not least the metal-tipped arm that pushes into a nylon collar and has swing tension adjustment.

2 PICKUPS
Made by Booheung Precision Co., the Surfliner introduced these Aerosonic single coils which use Alnico V magnetic slug pole pieces and have a partial cover to reduce hum pick up.

3 CONTROLS
The initial Surfliner models use small on/off switches for each pickup. While that means you can voice seven sounds (plus totally mute the guitar) we didn't find them particular fast in use. The more conventional five-way lever pickup selector here cures that problem although we can't select bridge and neck, or all three pickups together.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Poplar
NECK: Roasted maple, bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian rosewood with block inlays
FRETS: 23, narrow jumbo
PICKUPS: Guild HB-2 humbucker (bridge), 2x DeArmond Aerosonic single-coils (middle/neck)
CONTROLS: Master volume and tone controls, five-way lever pickup selector switch
HARDWARE: Guild tune-o-matic bridge with Guild Floating Vibrato, and enclosed modern-style rear-lock tuners – nickel plated
FINISH: Black Metallic (as reviewed), Evergreen Metallic, Rose Quartz Metallic
CONTACT: Guild, www.guildguitars.com



THE GAS STATION

Reverb Delight

BASS RAGE

ac box xv

Tremolo
off
Vibrato

Depth Speed Tone Cut Brilliance Volume

Volume Room Volume

Depth Master Room Volume



Presets Components

Amplifiers Cabinets Delay & Echo Distortion Dynamics EQ Filters Modifier Modulation Pitch Reverb Special FX Tools

STUDIO REVERB SUPERFAST100

SUPER CHARGER SUPER CHARGER GT

Talk Wah TONE ECHO

topeWobble TRANSISTOR'S DELAY

TRANSISTOR'S REVERB TransAmp

TRANSIENT MASTER TRANSISTOR'S TRANSPOSE STRETCH

TREBLE BOOSTER TREMOLO

TONE COMPRESSOR Twangy Reverb

TWEED DELIGHT TWEEDMAN

TWIN DELAY Ultrasonic

Ultra Heavy

Reverb Delight

Bright Bass Treble Reverb Speed Intensity Volume

MATCHED CABINET PRO

SEATTLE FUZZ Harmonics Diodes Volume

topeWobble Scrape Wow Flutter Speed Stereo Saturation Age Mix

SKREAMER DELUXE Classic LED EQ Overdrive Tone Volume

LOOP MACHINE PRO

Input 0 2x 1x 0.5x 0.25x 0.125x 0.0625x 0.03125x 0.015625x 0.0078125x 0.00390625x 0.001953125x 0.0009765625x 0.00048828125x 0.000244140625x 0.0001220703125x 0.00006103515625x 0.000030517578125x 0.0000152587890625x 0.00000762939453125x 0.000003814697265625x 0.0000019073486328125x 0.00000095367431640625x 0.000000476837158203125x 0.0000002384185791015625x 0.00000011920928955078125x 0.000000059604644775390625x 0.0000000298023223876953125x 0.00000001490116119384765625x 0.000000007450580596923828125x 0.0000000037252902984619140625x 0.00000000186264514923095703125x 0.000000000931322574615478515625x 0.0000000004656612873077392578125x 0.00000000023283064365386962890625x 0.000000000116415321826934814453125x 0.0000000000582076609134674072265625x 0.00000000002910383045673370361328125x 0.000000000014551915228366851806640625x 0.0000000000072759576141834259033203125x 0.00000000000363797880709171295166015625x 0.000000000001818989403545856475830078125x 0.0000000000009094947017729282379150390625x 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NATIVE INSTRUMENTS GUITAR RIG 7 PRO

One of the oldest suites of guitar effects is still one of the best



£179

It's been nearly 20 years since Native Instruments first released Guitar Rig, the software guitar effects suite that's evolved from three amp simulators in v1 to the ultimate collection of guitar tools. This latest v7 Pro includes 26 guitar and bass amps with matching cabinets, and 115 stomp boxes and rack effects. Many newer inclusions are modelled on hardware using NI's Intelligent

clear and bluesy Fender Deluxe emulation; Bass Rage is about low-end Ampeg boosting, providing big but well-defined bass; AC Box XV is a Vox AC emulator which can be a little polite, but there's plenty in Guitar Rig to throw into the mix and help with this; and Superfast 100 is a valve amp based on a Soldano that delivers fantastic lead sounds. The extra effects are simple but deliver big sounds. Seattle Fuzz is

easy to filter down to a particular style, genre or sound and find something immense, that it's almost criminal not to explore. Guitar Rig has always been great for humanising sterile computer recordings, and that is now an even bigger strength with its new lo-fi effects. And while it can still be the ultimate live guitar effect rack – early versions even shipped with a hardware pedal – the software really comes into its own when you use it as a DAW effect with live or recorded guitar. Play directly in and experiment – stepping through the presets is inspirational – or simply record the guitar clean to work on later. For this use, it's always been the best and easiest-to-use suite of guitar effects out there. V7 maintains that, and while not an essential £89 update from v6, it is still the ultimate suite of software guitar tools.

Andy Jones

STILL THE ULTIMATE SUITE OF SOFTWARE GUITAR TOOLS

Circuit Modeling technology which uses machine learning for accurate emulations. The new additions in v7 are four amps, five pedals, three lo-fi effects, 100 new presets, and a new Impulse Response loader. With this you load in custom Impulse Responses – effectively software models – from a range of amp setups. The current library includes IRs from 3 Sigma Audio, Bogren Digital and Lancaster Audio. The four amps are the biggies. Reverb Delight delivers a lovely,

the perfect example: just two knobs to take you to the west coast in an instant (Seattle, that is, not Weston-Super-Mare!). Chainsaw is for thrashy death metal rage, while Kolor offers less melodramatic saturation but is no less useful. The lo-fi additions are fantastic, with every type of analogue imperfection you need, delivered by way of Noise Machine, Vintage Vibrato and Tape Wobble. The 100 extra presets are also welcome. While we don't always advocate preset usage, here it's so

AT A GLANCE

26 guitar and bass amps with matching cabinets; 115 stomp boxes and rack effects; runs standalone or as a VST3, AU or AAX plugin on Intel or Silicon Macs (macOS 11 or later), or PCs with Windows 10 or later.

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



JACKSON PRO PLUS SERIES DINKY DKAQ £1,119

A shred machine loaded with premium parts for just over a grand?

With a heritage stretching back all the way to the mid-'80s, the Jackson Dinky was originally designed for guitar players wanting big tones out of a smaller package. Technically speaking, the body shape is 7/8 that of a typical Superstrat like the Jackson Soloist – which means its ever-so-slightly less bulky and cumbersome figure lends well to ambitious acrobatics, whether that takes place on stage or the fretboard itself. This year, these models have been reborn in Jackson's newly launched Chinese-manufactured Pro Plus series, bringing a lot of the features and sounds from their more costly American-made instruments to a more affordable price point.

Perhaps one of the biggest areas of discussion here is the choice of body wood – the new models utilising okoume, one of several hardwoods commonly referred to as African mahogany, to conjure the warm and punchy tones rock and metal players tend to be looking for. In the past, Dinkys have usually been made out of alder or basswood, though in recent years we've seen more usage of okoume – not only from Jackson but other manufacturers like Ernie Ball Music Man, Ibanez and Epiphone. And, unlike the regular solid finish DKA Dinkys, the DKAQs feature a quilt maple top for extra upper-frequency resonance and, of course, that instantly recognisable aesthetic grandeur, as wonderfully demonstrated by this rather stunning Ghost Burst model.

Other than that, it's very much business as usual, with a pair of tried-and-tested Seymour Duncan humbuckers and a Floyd Rose 1000 series tremolo providing all the tonal firepower and tuning stability you'd be hoping for. With a five-way switch, and an overall tone control, it's versatile enough to cover just about any genre from jazz and funk to blues and beyond. Positions two and four are perhaps a little twangy compared to the warmer EQ curve of a Strat, but make no mistake, if there's anything a Jackson Dinky should excel at, it's hard rock and heavy metal. From palm-muted chugging rhythms to the screaming harmonics of bands like Pantera and Slayer, the DKAQ is a rugged workhorse you can truly depend on in high-gain situations.

Admittedly, these models live on the more expensive side of Chinese-made guitars, though it's the inclusion of premium aftermarket upgrades that make them worthy of being considered mid-tier rather than entry level. In fact, if you were to acquire just the pickups and tremolo system as standalone parts, it would cost you almost half the price, which should help explain where the money is going. All in all, this is a Dinky that lives up to the legacy behind it – offering great playability and impeccable tones in that famous petite package.

Amit Sharma

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

1 FINISH
The Ghost Burst finish reminds us of the Silverburst Les Paul Customs usually seen in the hands of Tool guitarist Adam Jones... no bad thing at all!

2 PICKUPS
This classic pairing of high-powered yet surprisingly versatile Seymour Duncan humbuckers has stood the test of time, and with good reason.

3 BRIDGE
Rest assured the recessed Floyd Rose 1000 Series double-locking tremolo offers great tuning stability no matter what you throw at it.

AT A GLANCE

- BODY:** Okoume with quilt maple top
- NECK:** Five-piece bolt-on maple/walnut
- FINGERBOARD:** Ebony
- FRETS:** 24, jumbo stainless steel
- PICKUPS:** Seymour Duncan JB TB-4 (bridge) and Seymour Duncan '59 SH-1N (neck)
- CONTROLS:** Five-way blade switch, single volume control and single tone control
- HARDWARE:** Floyd Rose 1000 Series Double-Locking Tremolo (Recessed), locking strap buttons and die-cast tuners
- FINISH:** Ghost Burst, Transparent Purple Burst, Firestorm
- CONTACT:** Jackson, jacksonguitars.com





TAYLOR BEACON

£47.25

Bring home the Beacon?

Taylor is looking to take the headstock crown with its new Beacon. More than just a tuner, this little multi-mode device has got a metronome, countdown timer, stopwatch and flashlight built in, as well as an internal rechargeable battery and a full-colour LCD display. At just shy of £50, it's up there with TC Electronic's PolyTune Clip, price-wise, but with an entirely different approach.

Getting started needs no explanation, the sprung clip and multi-axis, rotatable screen angle means you clip it on, angle it how you like and you're ready. There are multiple buttons on the Beacon – on the side there's the home button, which also fires it up; on the other side there's a 'Confirm' switch, while on the top we have up and down cursors and a Select button.

First things first, we have to comment on that screen. Visually, it's like having the sharp display of a smartwatch strapped to your headstock: crisp, bright and very easy to read. You cycle through each of the Beacon's modes using the Home, Select and Confirm button, which takes a bit of getting used to as you might want to use the arrows to move up and down through the list of options, but you can't! The tuner has chromatic, guitar, bass, ukulele and violin modes, and it's a doddle to use once you've got your button-pressing sequence in order.

Everything reacts at speed to the pitch of your notes and the colour display really makes a difference. The metronome can pulse at tempos between 30–208 BPM, in 11 different time signatures, and you get an audible 'bleep' with a visual representation too. The bleep can be set to three volume increments,

but there are no selectable sounds, so you'll have to stick with the bleep. Likewise, it will only produce a quarter-note pulse with no facility for subdivisions.

The timer modes will come in handy if you're timing a song, set or practice session, and the flashlight is engaged by pressing the two cursor arrows. The resulting light is similar to the flash on your phone, only less bright.

So, a bit of a jack-of-all-trades? We'd certainly recommend the tuner and metronome modes. The others are useful, but ultimately already taken care of by the phones we carry everywhere, so we'd see them as bonus features rather than reasons to buy. Overall, it's all about the tuning, display and time-keeping.

Stuart Williams

AT A GLANCE

- FEATURES:** Headstock tuner, metronome, countdown/stopwatch timer (90 mins), flashlight
- TUNING MODES:** Chromatic, Guitar, Bass, Ukulele, Violin
- METRONOME:** 30-208 BPM; one tone, three volume levels
- DISPLAY:** Colour LCD
- POWER:** USB-rechargeable battery
- CONTACT:** Taylor, taylorguitars.com

THE SCREEN IS CRISP, BRIGHT AND VERY EASY TO READ

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	PERFORMANCE	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL	★	★	★	★	★



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Words Amit Sharma Photo Sara Messinger

MAMAS GUN

Taking the sound of classic soul to audiences across the world, London-based quintet Mamas Gun take inspiration from Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield into a sound that is very much their own. And for guitarist Terry Lewis – who works as a teacher for guitar schools BIMM and WaterBear, and has played for Lisa Stansfield, Beverley Knight and Sandi Thom – it’s a fun way of experimenting with rich chord progressions, laid-back grooves and what he lovingly refers to as “many layers” of tape saturation and spring reverb.

“As a jobbing player I’ve always wanted to be versatile, and have owned all kinds of instruments, though I tend to stick with 335-style guitars,” he says. “You can play any kind of music on them, though when it

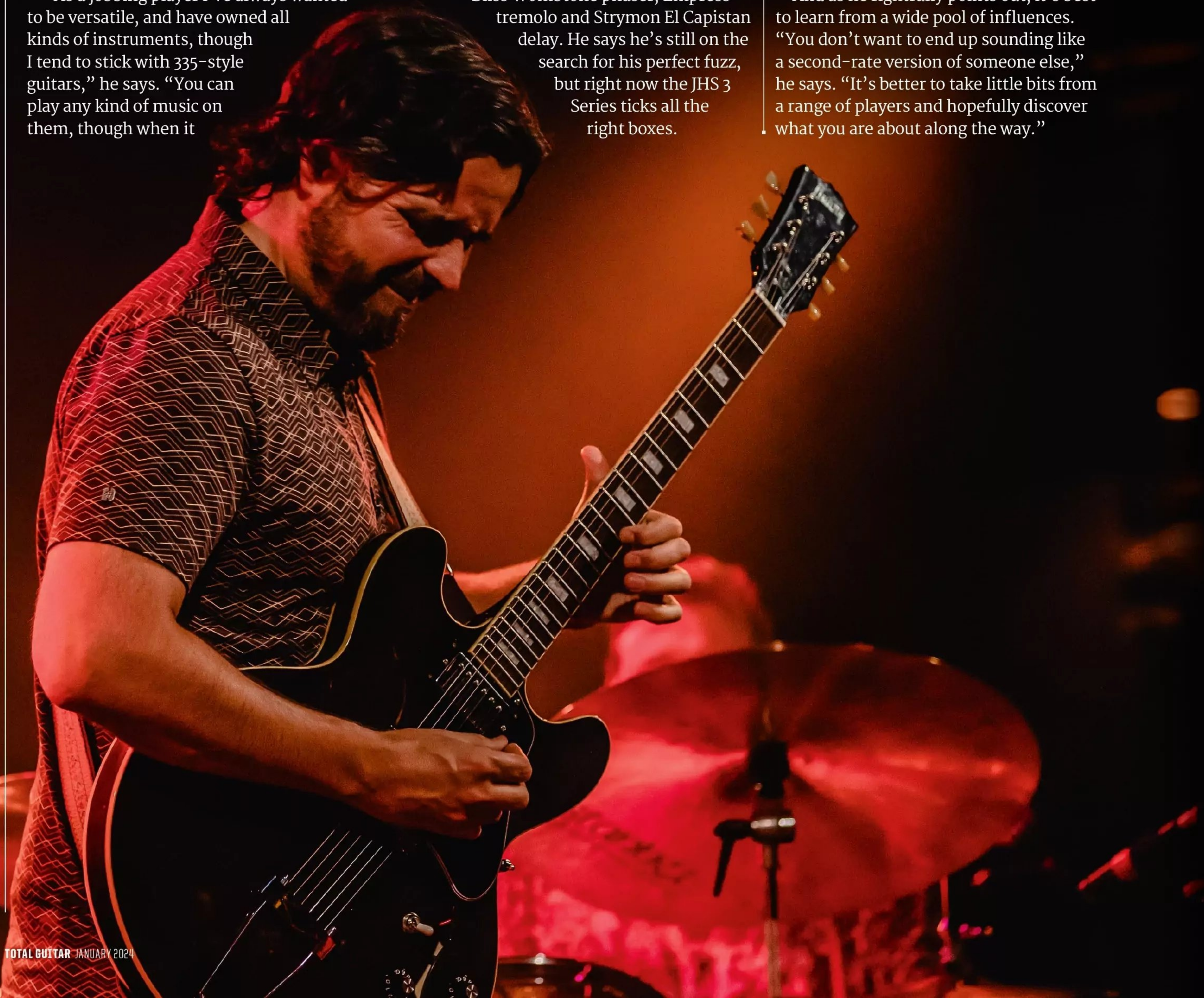
comes to soul/funk/jazz stuff, they are perfect.”

His main workhorses right now are a Gibson Custom Shop ’64 reissue and a cherry red Lucille from 1998 which he describes as his “absolute baby” because it sounds “so thick and characterful”. Travelling abroad with such valuable guitars can be daunting, so there’s also a fly rig consisting of a modern Chinese-made Epiphone Riviera with mini humbuckers (“great for ’60s-style twang”) and a Burny ’70s-style 335 copy. These are usually fed into a Dumble-inspired Fuchs ODS 30 via his Hermida Zendrive, Chase

Bliss Wombtone phaser, Empress tremolo and Strymon El Capistan delay. He says he’s still on the search for his perfect fuzz, but right now the JHS 3 Series ticks all the right boxes.

If you listen to any of Terry’s lead work in Mamas Gun, you will probably detect an influence from American jazz legend Larry Carlton. So what advice can he offer those of us hoping to sound a little more like Mr. 335? “I think the important things would be to work on dynamic control, harmonic vocabulary, phrasing and timing,” he reveals. “Larry knows all about note choice and how to superimpose triads over different chords. But most importantly he always plays a great phrase. That’s true of all my favourite players. I tend to think if you wouldn’t sing it, don’t play it.”

And as he rightfully points out, it’s best to learn from a wide pool of influences. “You don’t want to end up sounding like a second-rate version of someone else,” he says. “It’s better to take little bits from a range of players and hopefully discover what you are about along the way.”



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