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QUAY HOUSE, THE AMBURY, BATH, BA11 1UA
Tel: 01225 442244 Fax: 01225 822763
Email: totalguitar@futurenet.com
Website: www.totalguitar.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor: Chris Bird
Group Art Director: Graham Dalzell
Senior Music Editor: Jason Sidwell
Content Editor: Paul Elliott
Production Editor: Stan Bull
Music Co-ordinators: Zoe Maughan, Natalie Beilby

CONTRIBUTORS

Stuart Williams, Amit Sharma, Charlie Griffiths, Michael Astley-Brown, Andrew Daly, Jonathan Horsley, Phil Weller, Neville Marten, Richard Barrett, Dave Burrluck, Steve Allsworth, Ellie Rogers
Music Engraver: Simon Troup and Jennie Troup
Photography: Neil Godwin, Olly Curtis, Phil Barker

ADVERTISING

Phone: 01225 442244 **Fax:** 01225 732285
Chief Revenue Officer: Zach Sullivan, zach.sullivan@futurenet.com
UK Commercial Sales Director: Clare Dove, clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Sales Director: Lara Jaggon, lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
Account Sales Director: Tanya Ely, tanya.ely@futurenet.com

MARKETING

Head Of Marketing: Sharon Todd

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Production Controller: Frances Twentymen
Head of Production UK & US: Mark Constance
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Head of Newstrade: Tim Mathers

CIRCULATION

Trade Marketing Manager: Michelle Brock 0207 429 3683

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Head of Print Licensing: Rachel Shaw, licensing@futurenet.com

MANAGEMENT

Brand Director, Music: Stuart Williams
Head Of Design (Music): Brad Merrett
Content Director: Scott Rowley
Group Art Director: Graham Dalzell

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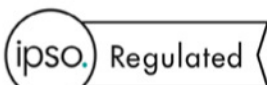
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Welcome...



We can always rely on the readers of guitarworld.com to collectively voice their opinions when we post a poll online. We've done this several times before in our greatest solos, riffs, albums and guitarists polls, to name but a few. Recently, a chance conversation here at TG Towers on the subject of early blues recordings led us to wonder who can truly be considered the greatest blues guitarist of all time. So, you guessed it, we just had to create a poll.

Of course, what actually constitutes 'great' will surely be what drives bar room conversations on the subject. After all, let's face it, we can't really compare Robert Johnson's Delta style blues with, say, Buddy Guy's Chicago style, the Texan fire of Stevie Ray Vaughan, or the modern shred blues of Eric Gales. They're all greats amongst countless other greats!

With that in mind, the mag you have in your hands is a celebration of all blues. You'll find the results of our poll (almost 25,000 votes were cast before we just had to close the poll and get on with making the mag!), and new interviews with Gary Clark Jr., Cedric Burnside and Joe Bonamassa. We profile 12 blues albums you should check out, plus 10 guitars played by legends of the style - and we've recommended some modern equivalents if you want to get a bit of blues mojo in your own rig. Finally, you'll find a big tutorial on how to play like a selection of blues greats, covering big names like Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix, plus a few you may not know so well.

Enjoy the issue, and I'll see you next month!

Chris Bird Editor

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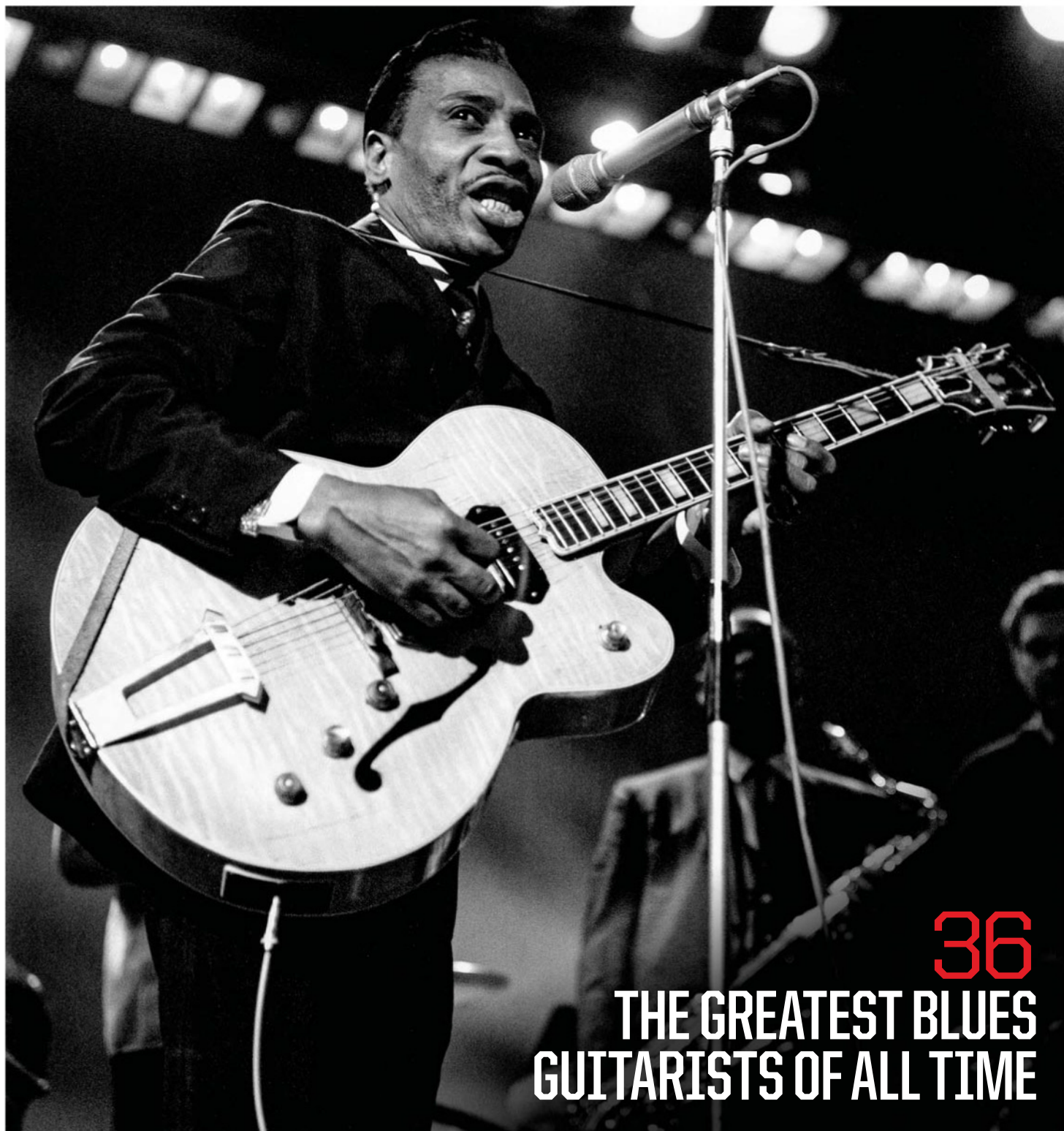
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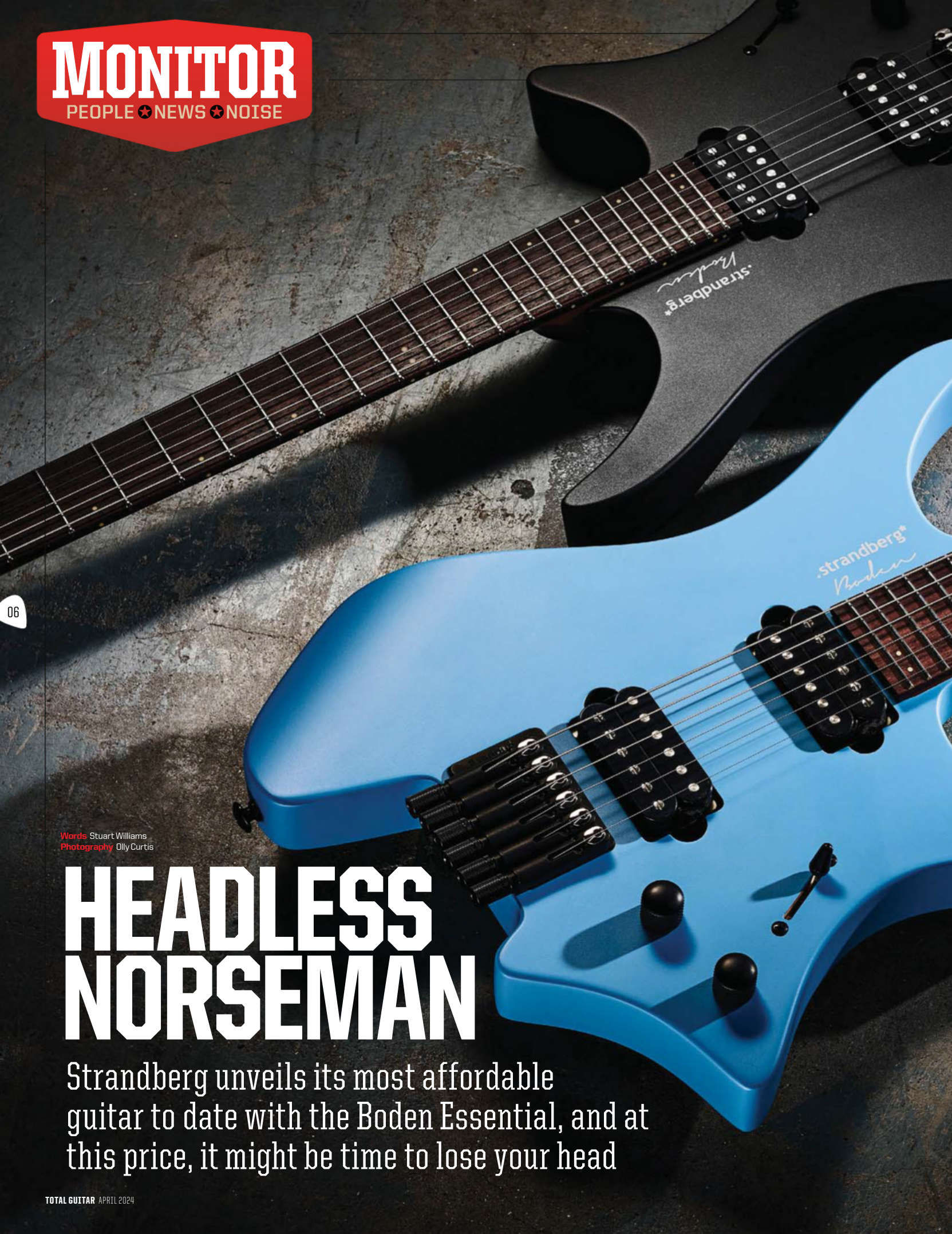
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06

Words Stuart Williams
Photography Olly Curtis

HEADLESS NORSEMAN

Strandberg unveils its most affordable guitar to date with the Bodén Essential, and at this price, it might be time to lose your head

Y

ou might already be aware of Swedish guitar-maker Strandberg, whose range of modern, headless guitars are enough to make your own skull spin. If so, then you're also

aware that these premium instruments don't come cheap. Well, they do at least now come at a lower price, with the introduction of the Boden Essential – a more affordable version of the brand's Boden model, making it the lowest-priced instrument the company has ever created.

However, while the price tag is just brushing the £1,000 mark at £999, Strandberg hasn't stripped away the key Boden features. Included are a meranti body, contoured for forearm and torso. Then there's the patented EndurNeck profile – here, applied to a one-piece, roasted maple bolt-on neck with 25.5" scale, 24-fret (stainless steel) rosewood fingerboard – which is designed using flat surfaces to aid comfort and reduce fatigue. This is further enhanced with a sculpted neck heel, and elsewhere Strandberg has outfitted the guitar with its own in-house-designed hardware and electronics. The pickups are a pair of Strandberg OEM humbuckers, which are wired to a five-way switch offering individual, split, and combined voicings. Meanwhile, a new Strandberg EGS Arc bridge and string locks at the headstock throat end take care of tuning and stability.

The Strandberg Boden Essential comes in a choice of three finishes: Granite, Elemental Blue and Astro Dust, and comes with a gig bag.

UP CLOSE



Headstock

Strandberg's known for its headless guitar designs, and the Boden Essential is no different. This svelte machine weighs in at just over 2kg!



EGS Arc bridge

Tuning adjustments are made from the bridge end, and here, Strandberg's own cast zinc EGS Arc offers a fixed bridge, with string locks at the other end of the neck.



Strandberg pickups

The company's OEM humbuckers are wired to a five-way switch where you can select combinations of individual pickups, and coil-split voicings.

SCENE

YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS

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ALBUM

“I’M ALL ABOUT WORKING THE VOLUME KNOB!”

GREEK SHREDDER GUS G’S TIPS FOR KILLER SOUNDS AND SOLOS

09

F

rom becoming one of Greece’s biggest musical exports to joining Ozzy Osbourne’s band and releasing signature gear through Jackson, Blackstar

and his own company Blackfire Pickups, Gus G is a man of many talents. Returning this year with his band Firewind’s tenth album *Stand United*, he’s still firing on all cylinders.

What tones are you dialling in these days?
 I’ve been really getting into Klon-type pedals! I love how they tighten and compress your tone but also sound super clean. As well as custom shop versions of my pickups, I’m actually looking at doing pedals through Blackfire, starting with a Klon. My main sound right now is a Blackstar St James 6L6 with the J. Rockett Archer in front. It’s insane how good those two sound together – that’s the sweet spot for me.

Is that what we’re hearing on the new Firewind album?
 It was a profile of my signature Blackstar head,

mixed with STL and Soldano plug-ins. As well as my own Jackson guitars, I used a Randy Rhoads Concept Series model because it had a Floyd Rose. I hadn’t used one in so long, so why not have a bit of fun with big dive bombs and harmonic screams? I just need one good sound and I’m set. A lot of players forget that. I remember watching an interview with Joe Bonamassa and him saying there are so many sounds you can get by changing your volume, tone and pickup controls. I’m all about working the volume knob!

One of the new songs, *Salvation Day*, features one of your most dazzling solos, rapidly shifting through varying techniques while always sounding musical and fluid...

That’s probably most demanding bit on the record. We’ve only played it live once and I thought straight away, ‘Oh sh*t, I need to practise this way more!’ It requires attention because there’s a lot happening. I’ve always constructed my solos bar-by-bar. And while it’s easy to get lost in it all, you have to remember the goal, which is to serve the song. However

fast you go, whatever techniques you use, there needs to be some kind of musical statement. That’s my philosophy. Some solos might be longer and self-indulgent, others might need something more simplistic...

It’s the Paul Gilbert-rivalling alternate picking runs that often sound the scariest!

I actually struggle way more with economy! I’ve really had to develop that. I’m still not where I’d like to be, but you know, that’s part of the fun of playing guitar, it’s a constant work in progress. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Even your strengths can be developed and improved. I was so caught up in alternate, I actually became scared of economy because I thought I’d forget what I’d learned! It doesn’t work like that, of course. More knowledge will only further your playing and self-expression. The main problem for alternate pickers is switching strings without losing speed. And, yeah, it was the Paul Gilbert videos that demystified those three note per-string runs. I had to lock myself away for long periods of time!

Amit Sharma



IN YOUR HONOUR

'The Pretender' or 'My Hero'? You can decide for yourself soon enough

GUITAR

EPIPHONE DAVE GROHL DG-335

Epiphone has got another confession to make... and it comes in the form of a Dave Grohl signature model based on the Foo Fighters frontman's Pelham Blue DG-335 (itself derived from Grohl's prized Trini Lopez guitar).

All of the Grohl/Trini hallmarks are there, from the six-in-line headstock to the diamond-shaped F-holes and split-diamond fretboard inlays. The pickups are Gibson USA Burstbucker 2 and 3 models, and under the hood there are premium components

including Mallory capacitors, CTS pots and a Switchcraft toggle. The body is laminated maple, with a one-piece mahogany neck. Of course, it's accurate in both the colour and the shape. Priced at £1,249, we'll be seeing these very soon, complete with hardcase.

GUITAR

EVH SA-126 SPECIAL

Fans of Wolfgang Van Halen will have seen him toting a semi-hollow EVH guitar on stage over the last six months or so. Now, that guitar has officially been announced as the SA-126. It's available in two versions – the SA-126 (Matt Army Drab, Stealth Black, £1,449) and SA-126 QM (£1,499) – the latter finished with a quilted maple top in Transparent Purple or Tobacco Sunburst. Both feature the same chambered/centre-blocked mahogany body design, with maple/flame maple tops; a graphite-reinforced mahogany neck (with 24.75" scale-length, 22-fret, 12"-16" compound radius ebony fingerboard) and SA-126 humbuckers designed by Fender's magnet maestro, Tim Shaw. The name? That's Eddie's date of birth, and check out that E-shaped F-hole!



EFFECT

THIRD MAN HARDWARE X DONNER TRIPLE THREAT

You think you know Jack White and his Third Man Hardware brand – all rare components salvaged from long-forgotten wireless radios, repurposed and soldered together using custom flux made from the silverware of 1,000 nans, right? Think again, because Third Man has recently teamed up with affordable instrument-maker Donner to bring us the Triple Threat: an

analogue pedal containing distortion, phaser and echo circuits. Essentially three pedals housed in one chassis, each effect has its own set of controls and footswitches, and it looks like the business tool! Best of all, the Triple Threat clocks in at £118, which as you've already worked out, is a very reasonable £39.33 recurring per-effect.



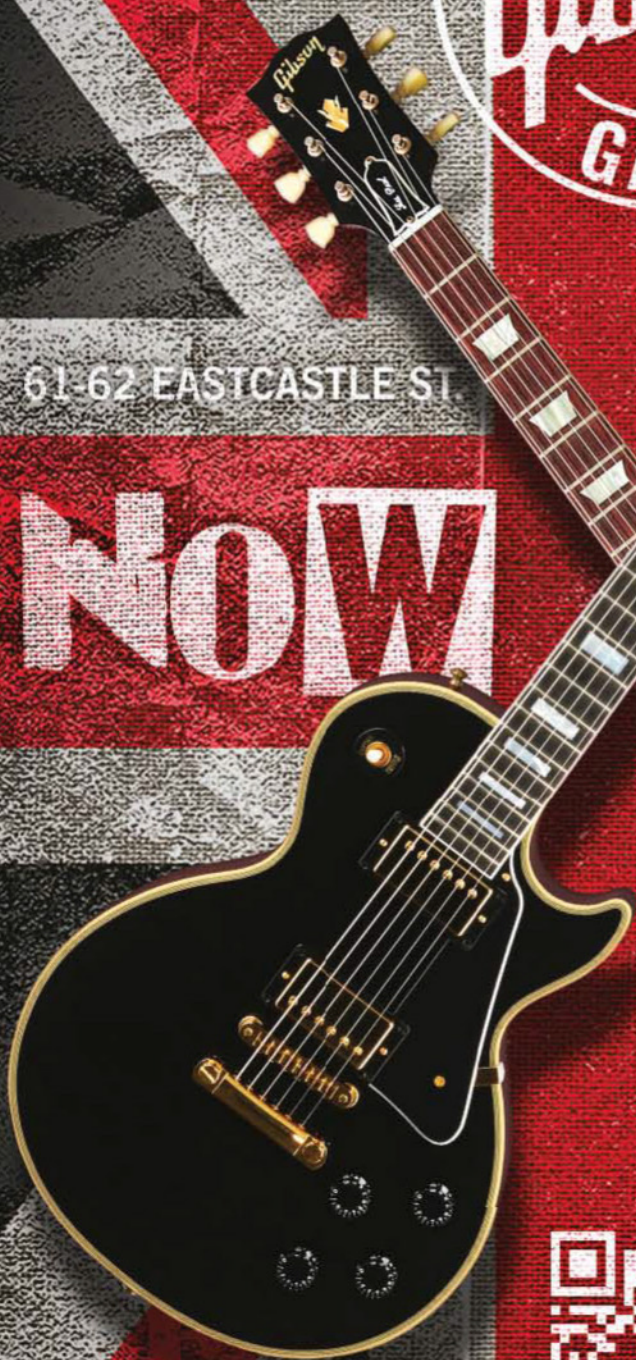


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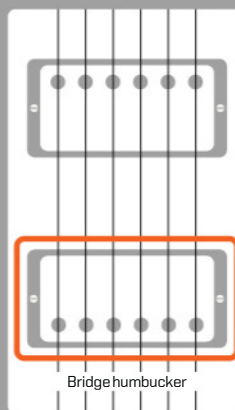
HOW TO

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- ✓ Minor pentatonic scale
- ✓ Triplet-feel riffing
- ✓ Incorporating open strings

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



Use the bridge pickup on your guitar for a clear, biting pick attack and a fuzz tone to overdrive the notes. Something like a Jimi Hendrix-style Dallas Arbiter/Dunlop Fuzz Face pedal will provide the required growl to help the riff come to life. It'll likely come down to balancing the drive effects of both the fuzz pedal and your amp's channel, so dial in a ballpark tone, then try increasing the gain on one, while decreasing it on the other.

RIFF OF THE MONTH

GARY CLARK JR.

Maktub

M

Maktub is the opening track and lead single from *JPEG RAW*, the latest album by four time Grammy Award-winning artist Gary Clark Jr.

Play the bulk of the riff with your first finger in the vicinity of the 3rd fret of the sixth string, keeping your hand in position while your third and fourth fingers reach to the 5th and 6th frets. There's also a first-finger pull-off to

the open fourth string to include. The opening 10-note phrase is played three times before you reach a descending pattern using open-string pull-offs on the third and fourth strings. To add to the fun, there are some repeated notes played on different strings here. Next, repeat the original riff twice more, then play a longer descending lick starting at the 7th fret.

It's a twiddly riff, so make sure to watch our slowed-down performance video.

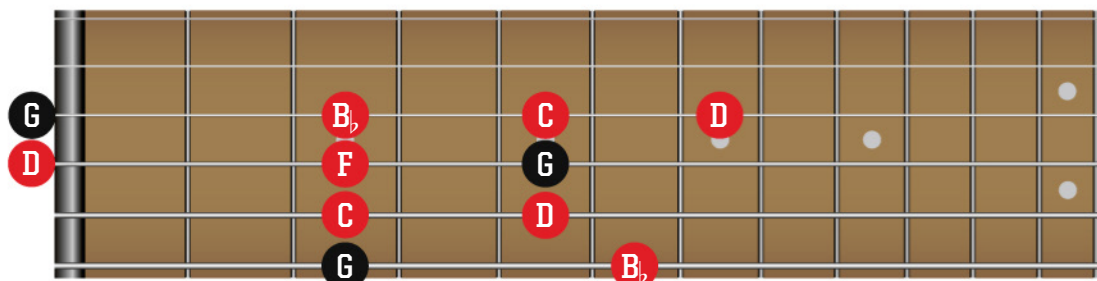
CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 0:00-0:17

Tempo: 120bpm

Key/scale: G minor pentatonic

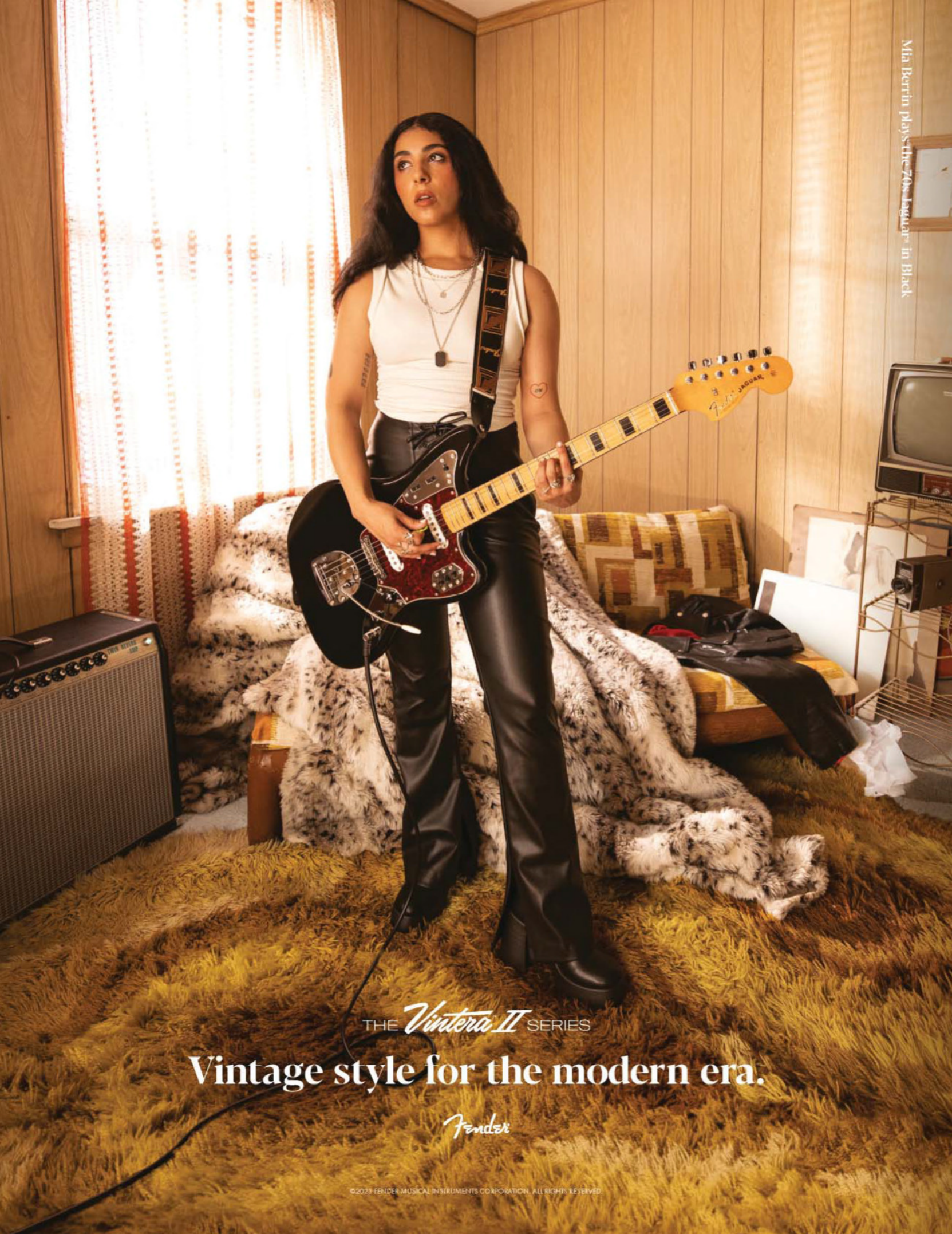
Main techniques: Single notes, picking, pull-offs



All of the notes in this riff are from the good old minor pentatonic scale, here in the key of G (G B $\flat$ C D F). Hopefully you recognise the basic shape and can see that your first finger is based at the 3rd

fret, as your other fingers dance around a little bit. The riff also extends up to the 7th fret briefly and makes use of the open third and fourth strings for Gary's pull-offs.

Mia Berrin plays the 70s Jaguar in Black



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DR. MOLLY MILLER

Dr. Molly Miller is a Professor of Studio Guitar at USC and one of the most sought-after session guitarists in L.A. – working with household names like Jason Mraz and the Black Eyed Peas. Her band The Molly Miller Trio has earned praise from NPR and has been featured in major music publications.

THE CAGED SYSTEM

Pickup Music's lesson on the CAGED system will have you flying around the fretboard in no time at all!

It's no secret that a lot of guitarists shy away from music theory. Let's face it, most of us want to have fun when we grab our guitars, not make our brains hurt. Luckily, you don't need to bury your head in wordy books to decipher the secrets of the fretboard.

The CAGED system is a foolproof way to understand the musical relationships between notes, chord shapes and scale patterns, and Pickup Music has sent over a free lesson to make learning the basics a piece of cake. There's a companion video lesson, too, so if you want some musical backing for the exercises, load it up and jam along.

We'll start with a quick overview of the CAGED system for those who don't know it. You take the five basic open chord shapes (C, A, G, E and D) and connect them together along the fretboard. Just like our well-known barre chords, these shapes can be moved around the neck and all five shapes neatly fit together.



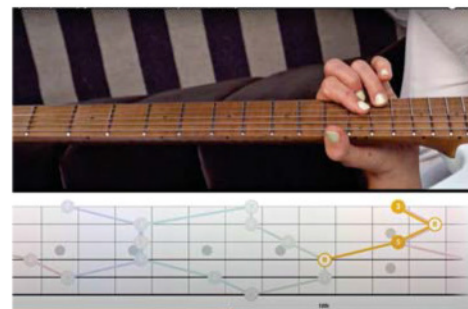
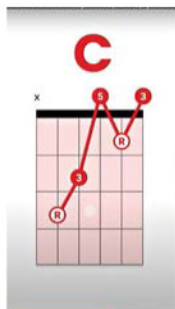
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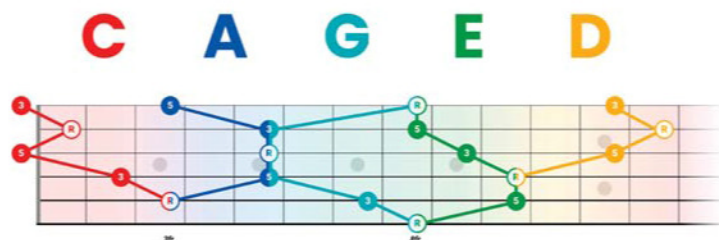
instagram.com/pickupmusic/

tiktok.com/@pickupguitar



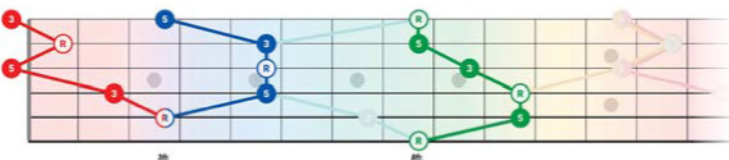
1 HOW MANY WAYS CAN YOU PLAY A C CHORD?

Guess what? Every shape on this diagram is a C chord! It can be tough to spot the patterns at first, so read on and we'll break them down for you. Note that 'R' denotes a root note, '3' is a 3rd interval and '5' is a 5th. We'll let you work out which fingers to use!



2 SHAPES YOU KNOW

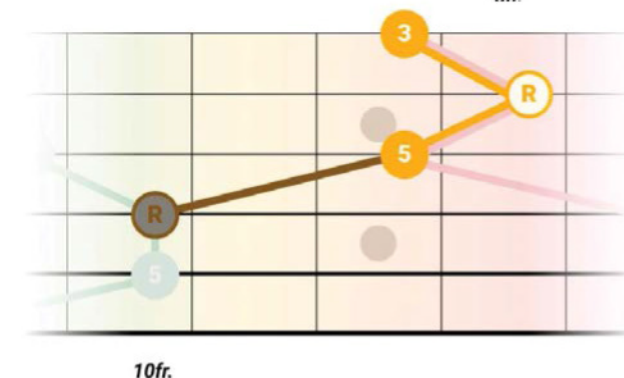
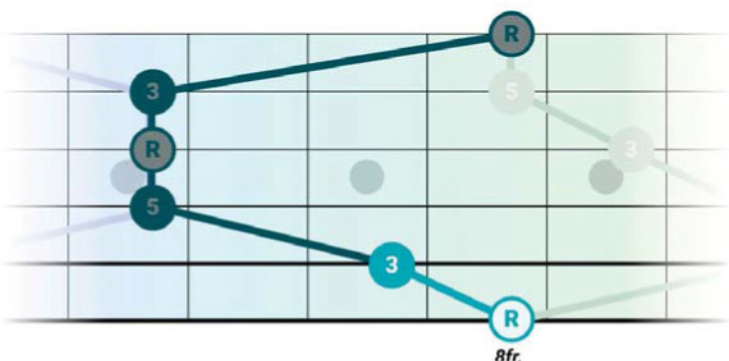
You probably already know the open C (shown in red), and the 'A shape' (blue) and 'E shape' (green) barre chords. That's three out of five already. G and D fill those gaps. These two shapes aren't commonly used – they're a bit awkward to play and usually better options are available. But it's still important to learn them to give us a full map of the fretboard.



3 EXERCISE 1: STRUM THE SHAPES

Time to get comfy playing through each shape in order: C, A, G, E and D. Make life easier by splitting that awkward G shape into two. And for the D shape, just play the little triangle section around the 12 fret. Don't worry about the root note if you can't reach it.

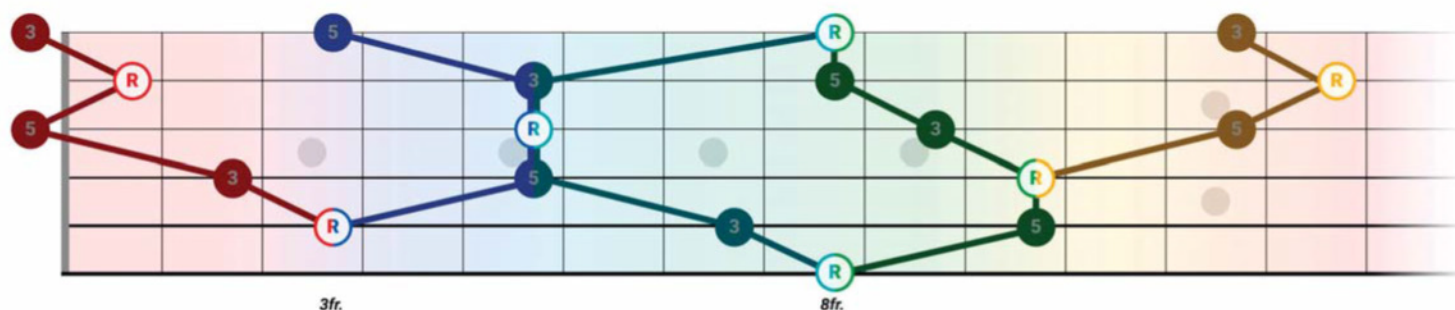
Important! Your aim here is to develop fretboard visualisation, not just muscle memory. Make this your main focus, more than playing the shapes. Jump to 5:50 in the video to play along with Molly.



4 EXERCISE 2: PLAY THE ROOT NOTES

The CAGED system, like every good map, has markers for important places – and root notes are our landmarks for chord and scale shapes. There is always at least one root that crosses over between shapes. For example, the C and A shape share a root note at the 3rd fret of the A string.

Study the fretboard diagram, see where the root notes are in each shape and how they connect and use these as anchor points. Follow the video from 7:00 for a deeper explanation and play-along section.





Words Andrew Daly Portrait Murdo Macleod

"SO MANY AMAZING PLAYERS IN ONE ZONE!"

Mark Knopfler's Guitar Heroes is the all-star charity project featuring an array of legendary players – and the final recording by Jeff Beck. One famous name who played his part is **Steve Lukather** of Toto. "It was an honour," he says. "And a lot of fun."

When Mark Knopfler's *Guitar Heroes* was hailed as "a landmark in rock music history", it was no exaggeration. The former Dire Straits leader has pulled together an astonishing line-up of famous players to appear on a charity single in aid of noble causes including Teenage Cancer Trust and Teen Cancer America. *Going Home (Theme From Local Hero)*, a song written by Knopfler and originally released back in 1983, has been reworked as an extended showcase in which he is joined by legendary guitarists including David Gilmour, Eric Clapton, Pete Townshend, Brian May, Slash, Steve Vai, Ronnie Wood and Joe Walsh. Poignantly, it also features the last ever recorded work of guitar icon and innovator Jeff Beck.

And elsewhere, layered within Knopfler's six-string tapestry, is longtime Toto man and general session legend Steve Lukather, who was more than happy to lend his licks. "Are you kidding me?" Luke tells TG. "To be a part of something like this, which is so cool, and to be on this with all those cool players for such a great cause – it's an honour. I just wanted to be a part of it."

In his typically Southern Californian way, Luke breaks down the experience as only he can. "It was special to be a part of something so great," he says. "I hope it raises millions of dollars for the cause because it's a really good one. I don't know Mark personally, but he's very into philanthropic work, as we've seen with him auctioning off all his guitars. I can relate to getting to the point where you have a warehouse full of sh*t and you say, 'Why?' I'm at a stage where I want to give back and just be thankful for what I've got. I'm into simplicity now. So, it's very easy to want to be a part of it..."

So how did you end up involved with this project?

SL: It's funny, because I was very flattered to get the call. I was immediately into it and said, 'Yeah, let's do it!' They basically reached out to me out of the blue, which had me saying, 'Wow', as they already had so many people involved. I made zero demands and just did what I did. It was a lot of fun.

Once you dug in, what were your initial thoughts regarding what you were hearing?

The biggest thing was that I didn't want to put much input into it other than trying to find something cool to play.

I hadn't heard the full track at first, so I wasn't sure what they were gonna keep, but my initial thought was something like, 'Man, this is such an undertaking to get so many people like this on one track!'

What was your approach?

I knew that the track was stuffed from top to bottom, so I had to figure out a way to play over all of that. I kinda figured I should stay outta the way, and I came up with some cool rhythm parts and stuff like that. I said, 'Seems like everyone else is playing all this crazy stuff.' And I appreciated that, and my thought was to do something a little lower key.

LEAD PLAYER

Mark Knopfler (right) has assembled many of the biggest names in the business for his *Guitar Heroes* project

Did Mark give you any direction?

Interestingly, no. When they reached out, I was like, 'Wow, you've got so many people, so what do you want me to do here?' And they basically said, 'Just do what you do.' I said, 'Well, thanks!' So I had no other input other than, 'Try and find something interesting to play.' And like I was saying, that wasn't easy since there are so many amazing players in one zone.

While working out your parts, did anything immediately stick out?

It was hard since they sent me a pre-mixed [song], so I had to work with this in-progress thing. I couldn't dissect it and take it apart to see who was who. That said, some players' styles are more obvious than others, so there was that. I also didn't have a lot of time, so it wasn't something where I could get super deep into it. I just found some little parts, added them, and I guess they liked it!

Surely you found a way to add some of those quintessential Steve Lukather touches?

Ah, you're too kind! I realised that there was a lot of single-line stuff going on, so that impacted how I went about adding some rhythms and the textures I used. And as far as Mark goes, I've been a big fan of his playing forever, though we don't really know each other. We've met briefly, and his stuff definitely stuck out. I was just honoured to be asked to be a part of it.



I'm a huge fan. Mark is another one of those unbelievable, unique and wonderful players. He's a fingerstyle guy, and his touch is amazing. From what I've gathered over the years and from what I've listened to – which is a lot – Mark is an incredible guitarist. And like I said before, he wasn't there when I recorded and gave me no notes. He never said, 'Play this, or do that.' There are so many players on this track, and so much is going on, but they just let me be me.

There are 54 musicians on the track, and yet you found a way to stand out. You deserve a lot of credit for that.

It's crazy, because the initial thought was, 'What the hell am I gonna play?' But I found this little muted part, with more than a few notes, and managed to create some parts that fit well in there. It was important for me to stay in my lane, you know? I felt like I needed to jump back because, with all these players on there, I just wanted to find something to help the track and not get in the way.

Your career as a session player served you well to that end!

I think so, too. I've done that in a lot of instances in my life, and maybe that's why they sent the track to me – they knew I'd do something like that. But it was flattering not to be told what to do, and it was cool that they said what I did was great. They said, 'Oh, this is different from what everyone else did, thanks!' It was a lot of fun and a massive honour to be in the same musical space and on the same track as players I consider my favourites, many of whom are dear friends.

Where did you record your parts?

I don't have a home studio – I believe in separation of church and state! Home is home, and work is work. But I've got a million friends, and my son [Trev Lukather] has a studio, but he wasn't around. Otherwise, I would have asked him. So, my old friend [Toto vocalist] Joseph Williams said, 'Come over to my house, and we'll do it.' He engineered it, helped me put it together, and we sent it

➔ The track features the final recording by Jeff Beck...

Knowing Jeff was on it was pretty cool. I mean, it's no secret how much I love Jeff Beck's playing, man. We'd known each other since '82, and I'd worked with him on a bunch of stuff. Jeff was and is my favourite single-note guitar player ever on this Earth. Granted, I know there are many great players, but if you ask anybody, they'll tell you Jeff was the guy.

Did you find Jeff's contributions particularly moving?

I haven't heard the final mix, so I can't say for sure. But that cat never stopped moving forward and never stopped moving the needle. He was a quirky dude, man, but at the same time, he blazed his own trail. I don't think there will ever be anyone like him again. He's up there in the same space as Hendrix, and he's one of the true innovators of the guitar.

Considering how Jeff's playing often brought guitar circles together, it's

special that his last recorded piece is part of track designed with the same purpose in mind.

Jeff was a one-of-a-kind player and guy. I toured with him, got to record with him, and all that stuff. When Jeff played, everyone else would stop playing and listen. I would be like, 'Okay, let's watch the master work.' He always brought something special to the game in the sense that you can hear one note and go, 'Oh, there it is. There it is, man!' It never had to be a flurry of crazy notes. It just had to be one f*cking note that would bounce off the wall and back at the listener. One note, and everyone would be on their feet. That's a special player.

Though you don't know Mark, has his playing affected you much?

POP ART

The Guitar Heroes single cover, by Sir Peter Blake: an echo of his design for The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*

"MARK KNOPFLER IS AN INCREDIBLE GUITARIST - HIS TOUCH IS AMAZING"

COOL HAND LUKE

"Everyone else is playing all this crazy stuff," Steve says. "My thought was to do something a little lower key"



back. The big thing was to be in a place that I thought would sound good, so that's what I did. It took maybe an hour.

What was your recording rig?

I had my Music Man [Luke 4 HH] that I've been playing forever, but my rig was a little different. I have a totally new pedalboard that my tech is putting together for me with all different stuff, but it's still being built. So, I had this Mickey Mouse temporary rig with the Music Man, one of my favourite 50-watt Bogner amps, my Shure SM57 mics, a little reverb, and some compression. That was it.

Overall, do you feel any one player stole the show?

That's impossible to answer. You're talking about a roster full of legendary people, all of whom have their own voices. I dig them all for different reasons. I mean, the whole 'who is the best' thing is just an impossible question. Hell, who is the most beautiful person in the world? I can say these types of things and ask them, but none of it matters. Everybody has their own voice and can play great sh*t – and that's what I heard. The track and the people speak for themselves. I can't pick a favourite.

A lot of people are referring to this as the *We Are the World* of guitar playing. That's heavy praise.

Once you get a lot of great people together for a good cause, all the bullsh*t goes away. If you're doing this for nothing other than the cause and because you want to be a part of it – which is the way this was – it can't go wrong. They came to us with the idea that this was a charity project, explained what it was, and that Mark put it together and wrote the piece.

And how do you view and relate to it on a personal level, if at all?

It sounds like something Mark would write, and he procured amazing people, which again leaves me very flattered. I made the cut among some amazing players who are friends and heroes. It's a cause toward a very positive thing. Whenever I can give back, I do it. I've been blessed, so I need to give back. But need aside, I want to give back, too.

Going Home (Theme From Local Hero) by Mark Knopfler's Guitar Heroes is released on March 15.



LET'S GEEK OUT! THAT'S WHAT US GUITAR PLAYERS DO, RIGHT?"

Words Amit Sharma
Portrait Ross Halfin

The Black Crowes' guitarist **Rich Robinson** has a pure and simple approach to playing classic rock 'n' roll. As he says, "Less can be more." But not when it comes to collecting vintage gear...



If Guns N' Roses were the natural successors to Aerosmith in the late '80s, then The Black Crowes were there to fly the flag for the rootsy rock pioneered by The Rolling Stones. Led by singer Chris Robinson and his brother Rich on guitar, the Atlanta group signed to Def American in 1989 and released their debut album *Shake Your Money Maker* the following year to wide critical acclaim – cementing their stature as one of the most vital new forces in rock at the time.

But nothing lasts forever. As well as a brief hiatus in the early noughties, the band broke up in 2015 following a disagreement between the two siblings, and four years would pass until they were able to put their differences aside to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the album that launched their careers.

This year they return with their tenth full-length *Happiness Bastards* – a tour de force of Southern-voiced rock 'n' roll, tastefully and eloquently cross-pollinating bluesy minor pentatonics with country majors as they so often have done in the past. When TG tells Rich Robinson the tones on the latest release are possibly the finest

he's ever put to tape, he's more than ready to spill the beans. "Let's geek out," he nods. "That's what us guitar players do, right?"

The timing, by the band's own admission, could have been better. They were all geared up and ready to celebrate the album that launched their careers when the pandemic put paid to much of the anniversary tour. Keen to make up for lost time, however, the brothers decided to commence writing for their first album of original material in 15 years – the ideas starting with Rich and then being sent over to Chris, who would use a neighbour's studio to overlay his vocals and send the demos back. By the time they were recording the final versions, creativity was in full flow, and once again it was vintage gear helping them conjure up authentic sounds of the past...

"A couple of years ago I wanted an old Marshall Bluesbreaker, which can be hard to find," reveals Rich. "Suddenly a 1966 model appeared in Nashville and I had to buy it. I brought it to rehearsals and knew it was amazing. Being a typical guitarist, I knew I'd need another one in case it blew! So I found a '68 in Seattle, which is one of the best amps I've ever heard. I realised that I wanted a spare '68! So I had a guy duplicate it, in every possible way."



FAMILY GUY

Rich Robinson, left, with big brother Chris

The like-for-like clone led to the launch of the guitarist's own company, Muswell Amplification, named after The Kinks' 1971 album *Muswell Hillbillies*. You won't find these reverse-engineered boutique combos in your local guitar shop, however, as they're all made to order with a wait time of roughly two months. In any case, as Rich goes on to explain, the Bluesbreakers are just one part of a wider sonic picture, working in tandem with an old Vox AC30 and the same Marshall Silver Jubilee that has been with him since the start. "Jubilees are so special," he says of the amps that were released in 1987 to celebrate Jim Marshall's 50th year in music, ending up as the head of choice for Slash, John Frusciante and Joe Bonamassa. "It doesn't make sense because usually the less knobs, the better. They have the pull rhythm clip and other clever stuff, but it all just f*ckin' works! Every time I hear one, I'm blown away. I have a 50-watt and a 100-watt, both '87 originals, one of which was all over our first record."

Naturally, old amps call for old guitars: the main protagonists in this case being a 1956 Les Paul Special in TV Yellow, a 1969 Les Paul Junior in the same finish, two early 60s ES-335s, as well as a black Telecaster and Gretsch White Falcon. All acoustic parts were tracked with Rich's Martin signature – a faithful recreation of the 1954 Martin D-28 he inherited from his father Stanley Robinson, a travelling musician who scored a late '50s hit with *Boom-A-Dip-Dip*. There probably would have been even more vintage instruments in the studio with him if were not for the severe flooding and havoc wreaked by Hurricane Sandy – one of the most destructive natural disasters in American history – back in 2012.

"I lost around 70 guitars!" admits Rich, the passing of time having gently eased some of the understandable heartache. "My 1964 ES-335 got

destroyed. I sent it to get fixed because it was delaminating and they tried but it was never the same. It sounded horrible to me and didn't play well. But there was a 1968 Goldtop that got damaged and actually came back better after getting fixed. It was so destroyed you could take

the paint off with your hands. They mixed it back together to refinish the guitar, then used the leftovers for a pedal which had a mahogany back, just like the Goldtop! It's a little boost – really simple – so I used that a bit on the record, too."

Boosts aside, in these 10 new tracks there is little in terms of gain stacking or colouration. Even ambiences are kept to a minimum, with a vintage Electro-Harmonix Memory

Man providing what Rich calls "a ratty, old-fashioned delay sound" by being placed in front of the amps on two tracks. The Black Crowes have always been quite minimalist in that regard, favouring a salt of the earth musical

"MY 1968 GOLDTOP
LES PAUL WAS SO
DESTROYED YOU
COULD TAKE THE
PAINT OFF WITH
YOUR HANDS"





SOUTHERN HARMONY
Sibling rivals, musical companions

honesty that is as pure as it gets instead of anything too modern, effected or processed. If Rich has one piece of advice for all the younger musicians starting out, it's about finding your sound by sticking to the basics. "I'm always like, 'Guys, put the pedals away!' because you get the bulk of your tone out of your guitar, amp and fingers. Sure, use pedals as a little bit of salt here, a little bit of sugar over there. But a lot of kids get carried away and have five pedals running at once instead of getting a nice amp and turning it up... which sounds way more natural."

Natural is definitely the right word to describe what we're hearing on new tracks like *Bedside Manners*, *Cross Your Fingers* and *Rats And Clowns* – the

latter of which eschewing the guitarist's breezy country rock influences in favour of the heavy open A-string riffing one might link to Malcolm Young's work in AC/DC. The comparison is welcomed with open arms and evokes fond memories for Rich. "It's my homage

to Malcolm, man! I've never not loved AC/DC. That's exactly where that chugging you mentioned comes from. Anyone who thought that AC/DC were heavy metal was wrong – that's the best Chuck Berry-style rock 'n' roll you'll ever get. Funnily enough,

we did the Monsters Of Rock tour with them in 1991. They loved us because they felt we were a proper rock 'n' roll band, which meant a lot. Also, we were brothers, just like Malcolm and Angus. I remember we played one headline

"AC/DC IS THE
BEST CHUCK
BERRY-STYLE
ROCK 'N' ROLL
YOU'LL EVER GET"



show on a night off and they came down to see us, which was so cool.”

The Young brothers’ influence can also be felt on *Wanting And Waiting*, which features D minor pentatonic hooks that sway and swagger. “It’s a driving song,” Rich says, likening its groove to *Gone Shootin’*, a deep cut from AC/DC’s 1978 classic *Powerage*. But, for the most part, the predominantly open tuning-led tracks owe a lot to famous recordings by The Rolling Stones’ Keith Richards and folk music legend Nick Drake.

“I think there was something really special about Nick Drake’s rhythm playing; it sonically reached inside of me,” smiles Rich. “So I would take that and mix it with what Keith Richards was doing, as well as Jimmy Page and Stephen Stills. My approach is an amalgamation of all that. It mainly came from listening to all those old English bands – that was the sh*t for us!”

As the guitarist freely admits, The Black Crowes aren’t trying to break any speed limits with their instruments. Their approach is as old school as it gets – owing more to feel and simplicity than anything too studied or regimented. Some people see music in colours and others experience it more as shapes, and Rich counts himself firmly in the latter camp. “Everything should have this flow, almost in an architectural way. That’s what I loved about Peter Green. He was always so f*ckin’ tasteful. So many times, less can be more. There are those who play for the right reasons and others who won’t shut the f*ck up! It’s like ‘Dude, you can put that guitar down for a bit... you don’t have to play every note all the time.’”



In that regard, it would be fair to say the Rich Robinson approach shares more in common with the Gilmours and Becks of yesteryear than, say, busier blues players like Joe Bonamassa and Eric Gales who steal all the headlines today...

“Those virtuoso guys are great players and they can do everything on the guitar,” Rich says. “They can do gymnastics, run up and down, anything you could possibly ask them to. But sometimes it’s more fun to hit one note and see what happens, see if it can mean as much. Sometimes it can mean even

more! Jimmy Page was great at that, I think it’s why he’s considered to be so brilliant. Melodically, he knew when to play less. Jeff Beck is absolutely another one. Those two had the technique but more importantly they knew when to use it and when not to.”

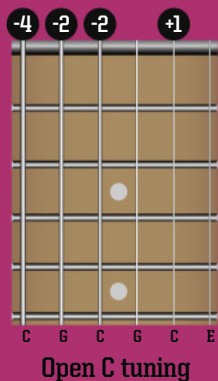
The same goes for Rich’s approach to slide guitar – he’s picked up more from “the sweeping beautiful melodies of George Harrison, Ry Cooder and Lowell George of Little Feat” than more technically ambitious players like Derek Trucks, who he happily admits is “f*ckin’ brilliant and another level”. But humans aren’t perfect, he reasons, noting how the real magic lies in how our imperfections manifest themselves in how we’re heard, giving the listener deeper insight into a musician’s true nature and character.

Rich also puts a lot of trust in his signature brass slide – made by D’Addario and worn on his pinky – to guide him and take the lead in all things glissando and vibrato. It’s almost like he, as the player, surrenders to the creative tool and lets it decide where the line should go and when it’s finished with him. “We don’t have to be so uptight about everything being perfect,” Rich shrugs. “A song can speed up going into a chorus and then slow down – and that’s okay. When you add vibrato on slide, it doesn’t have to be exactly note-perfect the whole time. The more you play, the better you get at it. So my advice is don’t worry too much about intonation or technique, because it’s all relative. Just don’t lose the human element in your music.”

***Happiness Bastards* is released on March 15.**

“I CHANGE OR INVENT TUNINGS TO PUSH MY ABILITIES”

How Rich Robinson finds new inspiration in opening tunings



Open C tuning

The Black Crowes’ new album features a number of tracks such as *Kindred Friend*, *Cross Your Fingers* and *Bleed It Dry* which are performed in open C – where the guitar is tuned to a C major chord and the low E is dropped to an even lower C, meaning the two lowest strings are actually different octaves of the same note. It makes for an inspiring sound which feels different to other open tunings, and Rich Robinson believes that the problems which arise with navigating an unfamiliar fretboard are far outweighed by the timbre in which it holds a chord. Similarly, another new Crowes song, *Wilted Rose*, is in an

open B tuning to add enough depth and shimmer in the right places.

“I remember being around players as a kid and they would practise all the time,” Rich says. “But I don’t want the guitar to become laborious. I’ve always played only when I want to. That way I’ve always felt joy and strived to sound great. I prefer to change or invent tunings to see what I might come up with, which pushes my abilities. Open G and E are good templates. You can also use capos to move keys around. But when you get into DADGAD and some of the crazier ones Nick Drake was using, you have to rethink everything.”

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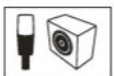
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"TALK LESS AND JUST PLAY. THAT'S WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IN BANDS"

Words Jonathan Horsley Photos Kelsey Hunter Ayres

Ahead of **The Gaslight Anthem's** UK tour, guitarist/vocalist Brian Fallon and lead player Alex Rosamilia discuss their unique chemistry - and how their influences run all the way from Nirvana to Def Leppard

Just think for a moment on how a year of life feels, how things change, how you change, and then think what nine years of living feels like. That's the time and distance The Gaslight Anthem put between the release of 2014's *Get Hurt* and current album *History Books*.

During their hiatus, declared in the summer of 2015, life marched on relentlessly. For one thing, frontman/guitarist Brian Fallon had a solo career to launch, releasing four albums in the interim. Gaslight, for their part, did get back together just three years later to mark the 10th anniversary of the New Jersey rockers' landmark release, *The '59 Sound*. Even if only unconsciously, this yawning gap in Gaslight history needed addressing before officially executing a comeback, when it was time to really get the band back together, ie, in a studio, with new material and a vision, and the collective pursuit of an album to deliver to a label and the fans. It's the sort of thing you've got to puff out the cheeks and get serious about.

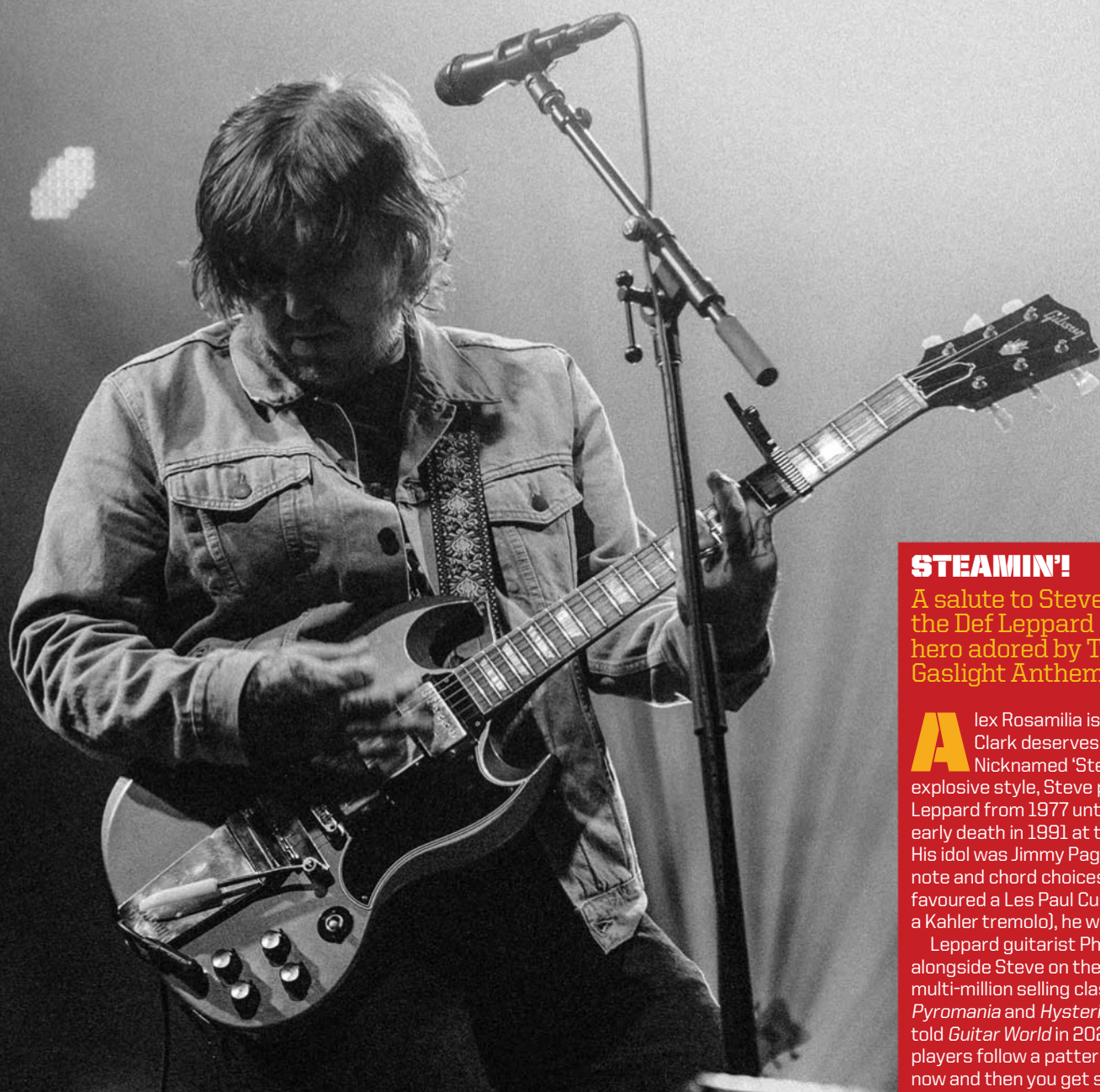
"When I sat down and thought, 'Uh-oh! Gotta write a Gaslight Anthem album. Ha! And it's gotta be good!' That's tough," says Fallon. "This one was us trying to figure out what we sounded like now, but including all of the elements we have ever had. Like a lot of bands try to run away from whatever it was they were before - and I have done that myself - but if you try and embrace everything that you are and just maybe shine a light on one side of it,

or a different perspective, it only takes a small change for people to notice."

Which is to say that *History Books* has its surprises but is not going to leave anyone with a black eye and hurt feelings from a wicked curveball. This is Gaslight exploring their centre of musical gravity, a band who graduated from the American punk rock scene to become heirs apparent to Bruce Springsteen's role as commander-in-chief of blue-collar rock songs that can reach, inspire and affect all demographics. That exalted status is all but anointed on *History Books* by a guest spot from The Boss himself on a title track that lays bare the The Gaslight Anthem's sound and ethos. Everything you ever needed to understand them is right here, the full emotional range, from haunting and elegiac *Michigan, 1975* to the wide open spaces and constant movement of *Autumn*, and it is also a showcase of some of the guitar sounds that had the most profound influence on Fallon and lead guitarist Alex Rosamilia in their formative years. *Positive Charge* was the first song that came together, and it betrays that with an exhalation from the guitars, as though they're in a hurry to get started, and is lit up by a lead that has all the organic, earthy, almost-edible quality of a J Mascis [Dinosaur Jr.] tone.

"That's what we were going for. You nailed it," Alex says. "On the lead, that's the Hizumitas from EarthQuaker Devices. It is Wata from [Japanese sludge band] Boris's fuzz. It just cuts. I don't want to say it's touchy but the dial definitely changes the tone drastically, as I found out later on tour! If that





STEAMIN'!

A salute to Steve Clark, the Def Leppard guitar hero adored by The Gaslight Anthem...

Alex Rosamilia is right. Steve Clark deserves more love. Nicknamed 'Steamin' for his explosive style, Steve played for Def Leppard from 1977 until his tragic early death in 1991 at the age of 30. His idol was Jimmy Page, and from note and chord choices to gear (he favoured a Les Paul Custom with a Kahler tremolo), he was different.

Leppard guitarist Phil Collen played alongside Steve on the band's multi-million selling classics *Pyromania* and *Hysteria*, and as he told *Guitar World* in 2020: "Most guitar players follow a pattern. But every now and then you get someone who

just does things differently where they'll bring a different kind of flavour to it. That was Steve."

Two key examples of Clark's unique style are *Switch 625*, the guitar-heavy instrumental track from 1981 album *High 'N' Dry*, and *Gods Of War*, the epic piece from *Hysteria* that was essentially Steve's answer to Led

Zeppelin's *Kashmir*. As Leppard singer Joe Elliott tells TG: "Steve liked to play loose - sloppy the way Johnny Thunders was, or Jimmy Page was to a point. It captured a vibe."



"MY GUITAR IS LIKE THE HORN SECTION OR THE BACK-UP SINGERS"

ALEX ROSAMILIA



Photo: Taylor Hill/Getty Images



BOSSING IT

Brian's friend Bruce Springsteen says about the Gaslight sound: "You guys have so much space, but there's so much going on. I don't understand!"

knob is not exactly where it is supposed to be, it's like super bassy or super thin, kind of buzzsaw-y. In a good way!"

He is not wrong. Set just right and the Hizumitas Fuzz Sustainer is a gourmet proposition. It tone rears its head again on *I Live In The Room Above Her*, making for a case study in how Gaslight's guitarists mesh together on record and enrich the guitar textures, with Fallon complementing Rosamilia's Hizumitas with a vintage Big Muff on the riff. By any metric, *History Books* is a lot of guitar.

"On this record we have got a lot of guitar stuff on it, nods to indie bands, and those Sub Pop bands that we grew up listening to," Brian says. "There is a nod to that but it doesn't sound like them – it still sounds like The Gaslight Anthem, and that's why we have Bruce on the record and not J Mascis!"

Some of the inspirations behind the guitar-centric approach are less obvious. Def Leppard, and in particular the late Steve Clark's era of the band in the early '80s, is an influence percolating deep in the background.

"Steve Clark is somehow who we don't really talk about when talking about guitar heroes," Alex says. "He's another one of those guys. He's one of the reason why I've gravitated to Les Pauls and a heavier sound..."

Going back to the "before times", as Alex puts it, the primordial influences, was a reminder of the sorts of things that made them want to pursue this life in the first place. Fallon, similarly, saw

gold in the stone-washed blue-denim sound of Sheffield's biggest rock export.

"I love Def Leppard! *Hysteria* is a great record," he says. "We've been really going back to our hardcore guitar lesson days. Everybody has been leaning that way. I've got this playlist that I made that's got, like, Slade, T. Rex and Cheap Trick, and all this stuff that, when I was a kid, I learned to play guitar to. Nirvana were not around when I first started learning guitar, so you'd learn all the '70s stuff. Zeppelin was too hard for me and, also, I didn't like *The Lord Of The Rings*! I was just into make-up and dressing up like KISS – a Starchild or a Demon. 'Yeah, that's for me!' With a guitar on fire? I wanted that."

On the advice of producer/engineer Peter Katis, Fallon leaned on some vintage grunge songwriting conceits for tracks such as *Spider Bites*, which works the quiet/loud spectrum with verse sections that sound as though he is performing in the eye of the storm, the persistent thump of Alex Levine's bass in the background before the heavy weather rolls in for the chorus.

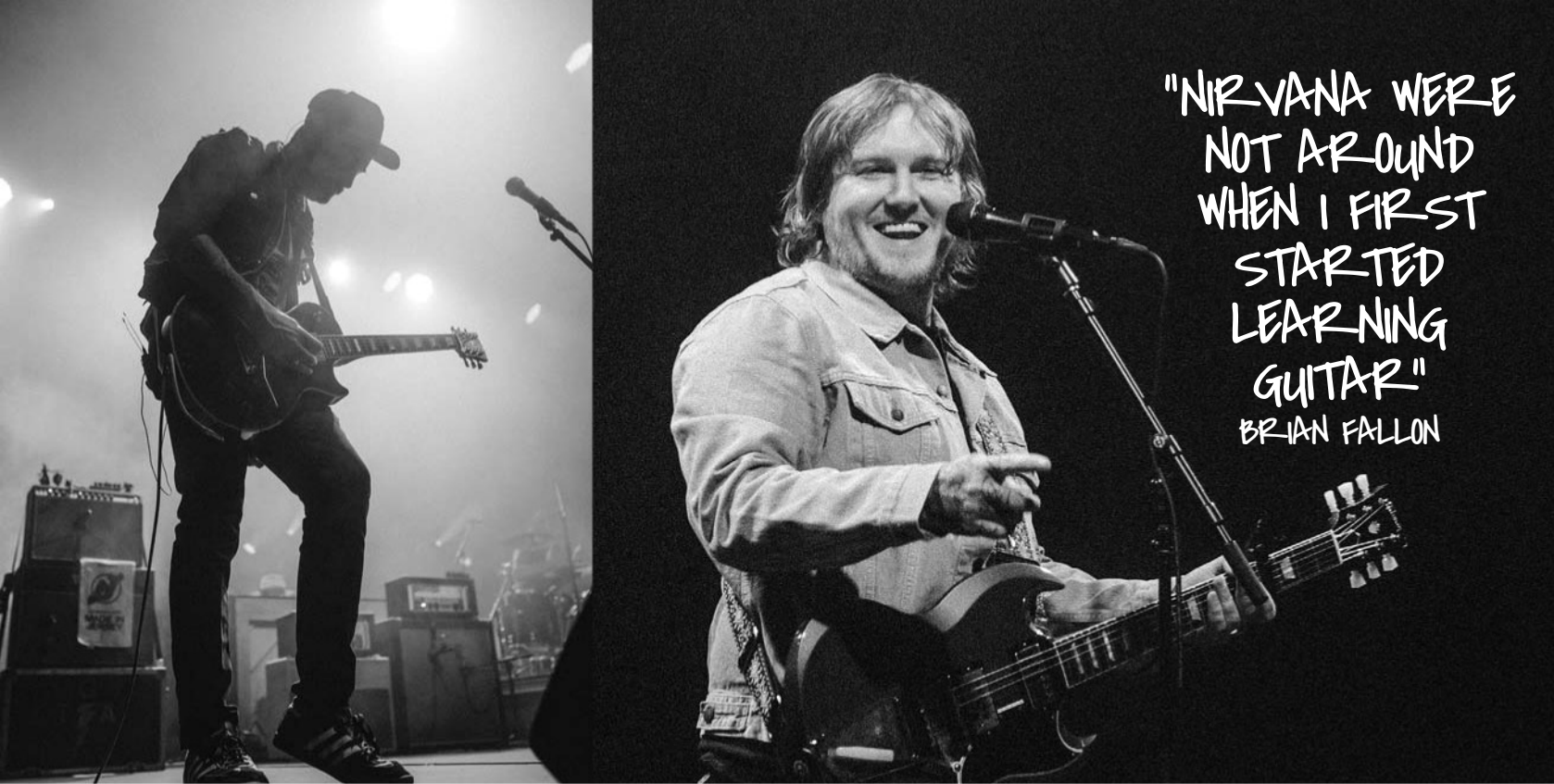
"For that one, the real trick there was to stop playing," Brian explains. "Because a lot of times people say, 'Well, what can I do here?' But sometimes, if you say, 'What can I take out here?' it makes it a lot better. The best thing we could think of to do was to just drop out and let the bass and drums take it, which is something we don't really do a lot. But I was listening to a ton of Nirvana at the time, and that's

Nirvana's thing, just bass and drums and then all of a sudden the guitar comes in and it sounds like a landslide."

Spider Bites is one of those tracks that Gaslight really let bloom. It is typical of how they avoid overcrowding the arrangement. That can be more difficult when they're playing live with Ian Perkins on guitar and Bryan Haring on keys and there are just more frequencies bouncing around. But with Fallon and Rosamilia never playing the same part in unison, with so much distance between the pair's guitar, they have the freedom to explore different sounds knowing that it's invariably going to sound bigger.

"It's just something to be conscious of," Alex says. "If Brian is below the 12th fret, I stay above the 12th fret. If Brian is above the 12th fret I stay below the 12th fret. That's a simplification of how it works. The way Brian plays a song when he shows it to us is a certain way, and I'll try to make sure that I am writing a different part next so that we don't step over each other. You get a bigger sound."

"Not to get all 'woo-woo' on everything," he continues, "but music is supposed to be this thing that moves you in an emotional sense, so I just feel for the emotion that Brian is going for and extrapolate on it in places where it seems like there is room for me. That's how I approach it. Like this punk-rock Sam Cooke thing, using a lot of soul stuff as an influence. With Brian already playing the guitar, what am I in all of



"NIRVANA WERE NOT AROUND WHEN I FIRST STARTED LEARNING GUITAR"
BRIAN FALLON

this? My guitar is either like the horn section or the back-up singers. I would try to play my parts like my guitar was the Supremes to Brian's Diana Ross." As an additional comparison, he refers to past and present members of Springsteen's E Street Band, saxophonist Clarence Clemons and guitarist 'Little' Steven Van Zandt. "I see my guitar doing more what Clarence does as opposed to what Little Steven does, right?"

Often Rosamilia will forego chords and tease out melodic ideas instead, or will play an octave when the song calls for it, and octaves can have that illusive quality of sounding wider and more spacious than single notes. The Gaslight Anthem's sound – further bolstered for live performance by additional touring guitarist Ian Perkins – is an illusion of space in which the moving parts don't call attention to themselves. It's clever. It even blows Springsteen's mind.

"That's always the thing that comes up when I talk to Bruce about our sound," Brian says. "He always says to us, 'You guys have so much space, but there's so much going on. I don't understand. How do you guys get so much space in there?' And I'm like, 'I don't really know.' But we don't play the same parts, so if I am playing a chord, like the way I play a chord is

very different from the way Ian will play a chord – and I don't even know if Alex has ever played a chord in the band!"

History Books is a recording of constant movement. Fallon has spoken before about The Gaslight Anthem's sound being built for the road, long trips on the two-lane black-top, and so it is here, where even in reflective, intimate arrangements there may be a quarter or eighth-note pulse holding down a rhythmic momentum that scarcely yields. Fallon and Rosamilia say this has got to be from making their bones in the punk scene, when the energy of those shows manifests itself in the tick of nervous energy and the irresistible urge to hold the crowd's attention. Old habits die hard.

Gear is another means of putting some distance between Fallon and Rosamilia's tones. For *History Books*, Brian used a Fender Jaguar, a Stratocaster and a Gibson ES-330 he borrowed from Katis, all going through an Orange Custom 50 through a 4x10 Marshall cabinet. There was no changing horses mid-stream. "So much stuff is changing in recording that I tend to be the constant, where I tend to use one or two guitars, and the same amp, and then let everything around me change," he says.

Alex leaned mostly on a Les Paul Custom and his Fender Deluxe, and a little Supro for when he wanted a stereo spread. He used a borrowed Gretsch, too. He also messed around on a Prophet synthesizer for *The Weatherman*, but when it comes to playing it live it will be on guitar and his rig will have changed. He will be playing Flying Vs. There is now a Boss HM-2 Heavy Metal on his pedalboard to see if can perform a similar function to the Hizumitas, only being a little more forgiving with the settings.

Fallon says they are always switching things out. "Oh, constantly. Some people use one guitar, one amp, and then 'this is what I am going to use for the rest of my life' and I am like, 'No!' We change it up as much as we can."

The way Brian Fallon tells it, it kind of sounds like marriage counselling for player and instrument – how to maintain the spice in your relationship – that speaks to the romance of The Gaslight Anthem. He has similar advice for rock bands, too: a little less conversation, more action. "We don't say anything to each other!" He says. "That's what you should do in bands. Talk less. Say less and just play."

The Gaslight Anthem tour the UK from March 18–27.

SIZE MATTERS

Alex Rosamilia (left): "I'll write a different part so that we don't step over each other. You get a bigger sound..."

"WE'VE BEEN GOING BACK TO OUR HARDCORE GUITAR LESSON DAYS" BRIAN FALLON



"I'LL ALWAYS FALL BACK
ON A GOOD LES PAUL"
DERICK WHIBLEY

"HOW WE DO GUITARS FEELS SO NATURAL."

Words Andrew Daly
Portrait Ariana Whibley

With their final album and tour, **Sum 41** are going out with a bang. And while metalhead lead guitarist **Dave Baksh** provides the shred, frontman **Deryck Whibley** has rediscovered his pop-punk mojo and got his hands on his dream guitar...

Since the late '90s and early noughties, Sum 41's Deryck Whibley and Dave Baksh have shown a blatant disregard for the supposedly established confines of the bouncy, made-for-MTV genre of pop-punk. Records like *All Killer No Filler* (2001) and *Does This Look Infected?* (2002) were edgy when compared to records by their contemporaries. But if Whibley, a songsmith who can rattle off catchy tunes with the best of 'em, and Baksh, a raging metalhead at heart, cared about such a lack of integration with the masses, they never showed it.

Sum 41's shred-head meets pop-laden sound has produced a hell of a lot of hits over the years, combining the hell-on-Earth antics of the Sex Pistols with the sweet melodies of Green Day. But a new double album, *Heaven :x: Hell*, will be the band's last, putting a full stop on a career that's brought them everything and more.

Some will say it's too soon, as Deryck and Dave are both just 43, but the decision isn't arbitrary. "I was given a choice whether to pursue education or Sum 41, and that was the last real gamble I took," Dave says. "I can't explain what this band has meant to me. The people that have followed this band, and who welcomed me back after I left, outside my family, have been everything. This gave me the life I've dreamed of having, and so, to go out on top like this and not just be a band to make money off fans, that's everything, too."

Sum 41 might always be remembered as snotty kids who penned sneering tracks like *Fat Lip* and *Still Waiting*, but there is no doubting the emotions in play as Deryck thinks about this final album and the following trip around the world, wryly billed as the Tour Of The Setting Sum. "This was a difficult decision to come to," he says. "It was a long process, and kinda feels like a divorce taking a long time to walk out the door from. We still love each other, the music, and the fans. I don't know what the end feels like – I'm sure I'll be sad, and it's terrifying. But I'm excited. I needed to remove the safety net, and I needed the urgency of something else."

Are you absolutely sure that this is the right time to finish?

Deryck: I've been thinking, 'This is all I've ever done since I was 15' – meaning be the singer of Sum 41. For the past few years, I've been getting to a point where I want to do something new. I've got other ideas, and I can't dive into them because this band takes up my entire life. As much as I love it, I wonder if there's more out there. I won't know until I try, and if I'm doing Sum 41, I'll always get pulled back in.

Dave: It's bittersweet. There is a love of what we do – it's incredible. But we also want to pursue other things, and I'm not a good multi-tasker. If I'm doing something I'm all-in on it. So, if I'm doing Sum 41, I'm all-in on Sum 41. Maybe

this will allow me to do other things I've wanted to do in my career.

And with this stellar new album you can go out on a high.

Deryck: A lot of this record was by accident! The pop-punk stuff had



VERY METAL
The head-banging
Dave Baksh



FLAME ON!

"I'm just concentrating on enjoying this beautiful thing and feeling the crowd's energy one last time," Dave says

always come by accident, but with this album, many people were asking about that stuff. It had been a long time since I wrote that way, as we're more on the heavy side now, but I decided to try and see if I could still write something pop-punk. I got going with that and thought, 'F*ck, I actually like these songs!' I didn't want to give them away, and when the heavier stuff started happening, I said, 'This could be a double album...'

Dave: For the last few records, we've adopted the Slayer approach, and once the music started to come together, I could apply that – especially to the more metal-sounding stuff. I'm not the only metal fan in the band, and there are multiple performances with over-the-top rhythms and cool solos. Deryck's writing style tends to err toward old-school thrash, which lends itself to that classic pentatonic, slow build-to-a-high-point type of thing.

Your guitar approaches complement each other, regardless of style.

Deryck: We played left and right for the

early records – specifically the first two. I'd be on the left and Dave on the right. Back then, I played more guitar solos, but we settled into a space where I played most of the rhythm parts and Dave the leads, and that's what we do now. We don't trade off as much as we used to, and Dave takes on more of the shreddy stuff.

Dave: A good example of that are two songs from the new album called *Rise Up* and *Stranger In These Times*. I'm on the metal side of things, but I also get into the punk stuff, and songs like that feel so natural regarding how we do guitars. I have become more conscious of when to be ahead of the beat or lay back. With that approach, even our old songs feel fresh.

As I understand it, Deryck acquired a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop previously



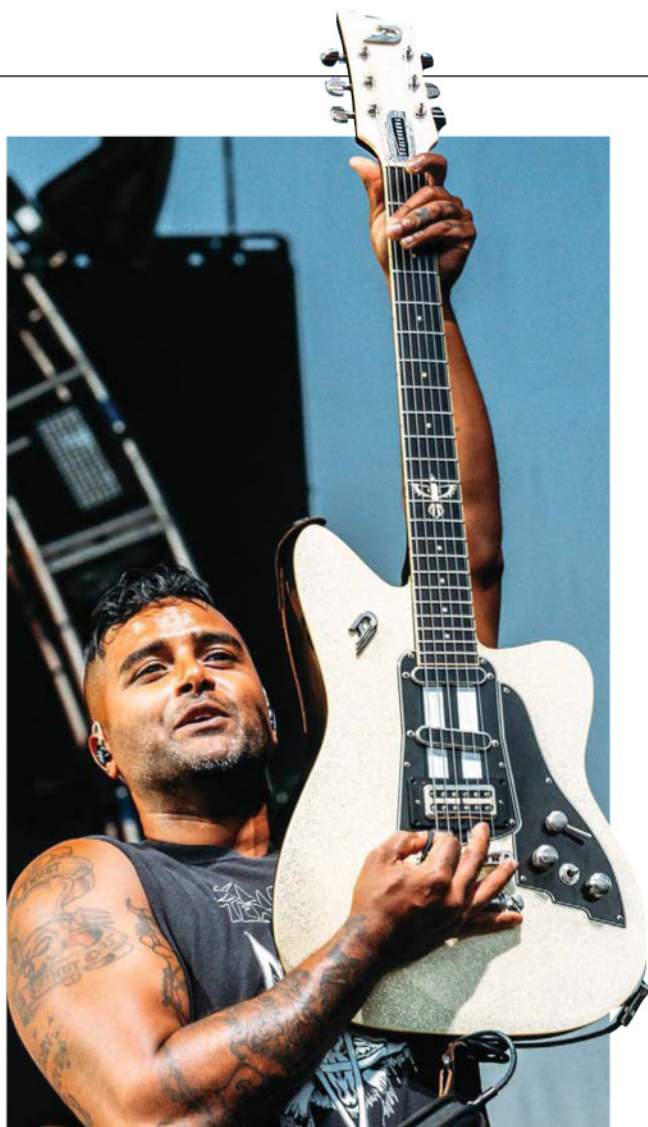
SOLID GOLD

Derek's 1968 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop, previously owned by Social Distortion's Mike Ness

owned by Mike Ness from American punk legends Social Distortion. Did you use that on this record?

Deryck: I have a huge guitar and amp collection. I've got a '59 Les Paul reissue, a white '63 SG, and a Les Paul Jr that I've had since the '90s. I used the SG a lot because it's got P-90s, which I love. They have so much attitude, but I'll always fall back on a good Les Paul. As for the Goldtop, it's a '68, and it's the same guitar Mike Ness used in the '90s. I was into Social Distortion's *White Light*, *White Heat*, *White Trash* record, and that guitar sounds just like that. I've always loved that guitar

– I'm mesmerised by that sound. So when [producer] Michael Beinhorn put it up for sale, I had to have it. I've had years of listening to that Goldtop, and now, I own it, and I'll take it on tour.



Dave, what guitars are you leaning on most at the moment?

Dave: I'm still mainly using my Duesenberg Alliance Series, my signature guitar. I had gone to a local music store and found a Malcolm Young Gretsch with a single TV Jones pickup and a light body, and it sounded so good. I had attempted to make a guitar like it with other companies, and they even offered me a signature, but I wanted it to be just right. It took me over 20 years to go with a company, and then I got with Duesenberg, and my Alliance Series guitar was born.

With this being your final tour, you must be dialling in your respective rigs. What does that process look like for you both now?

"THERE ARE MULTIPLE PERFORMANCES WITH OVER-THE-TOP RHYTHMS AND COOL SOLOS"
DAVE BAKSH



Deryck: The biggest change is we don't use live amps anymore. We use Kempers, and I've got all these amazing profiles loaded in. I had this '71 Fender Super Bass that was modded, and we had that on tour for years, but it would break down daily. I profiled it, retired that, and we still have it. That's the biggest change. I never use pedals – I'm just guitar and amp. I'm excited about that because the sound of the '68 Goldtop is just so amazing!

Dave: The Kemper thing is big. I used to use Marshalls and had this hand-wired Plexi, but as Deryck said, we've got all these profiles now. He's got the Super Bass in there, and we've also got the Plexi, and there's even some Suhr and other good mods in there. I know they're profiles, but there's a lot

of soul to them, and they cover just about every situation.

And finally, do you have any regrets when you look back on Sum 41?

Deryck: There was more anxiety in the early days, but I'm more relaxed now. Life has ups and downs, but I've always been on a path toward happiness. I used to be fearful that I'd lose my songwriting ability or never have a hit, but now we've just made a record we could go out on. It all worked out, so I'm never worried about where life will take me.

Dave: I regret that when we were 20, we didn't think there was enough pie to go around, but that's part of being young and slugging it out. The early days can be compared to doing magic mushrooms with your friends, but that's just an entry point. Our music is funny and bright but also the darkest sh*t you have ever heard. I'm just concentrating on enjoying this beautiful thing and feeling the crowd's energy one last time.

Heaven x: Hell is released on March 29.

The Greatest Blues Guitarists Of All Time

COVER
FEATURE





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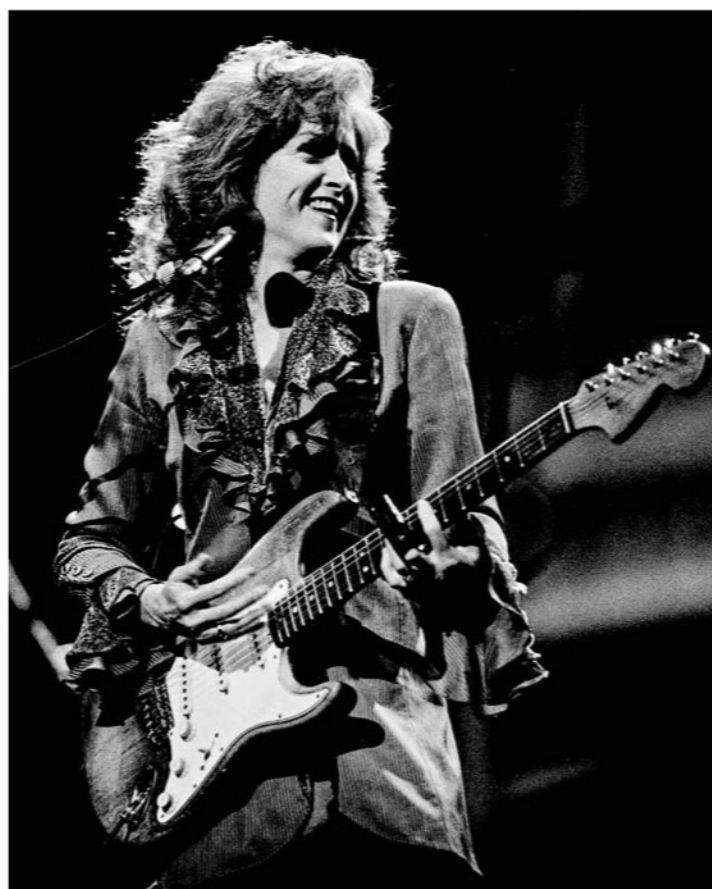


100 Shades Of Blue

THE RESULTS OF THE
TG READERS' POLL
REVEALED!

It's easy as pie making a huge, long list of great guitarists. It's difficult as all hell to pare them back to just 100 players, even when you've narrowed your choices down to one genre – which is exactly what we did back in February. We chose 100 of our favourite blues guitarists and created a poll for the fine readers of guitarworld.com to vote for their favourites. And vote they did – in their masses. With over 25,000 responses logged, this was a biggie! Now, the results are in. Every vote has been counted and here you'll find a countdown of the final positions from 100 to 11. The top 10? Just turn the page...

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| 100 | Anthony Gomes | 55 | Eric Steckel |
| 99 | Nat Myers | 54 | Otis Rush |
| 98 | King Solomon Hicks | 53 | Keb' Mo' |
| 97 | Erja Lyytinen | 52 | Son House |
| 96 | Lowell Fulson | 51 | Taj Mahal |
| 95 | Cedric Burnside | 50 | Robben Ford |
| 94 | Tyler Bryant | 49 | George Thorogood |
| 93 | Quinn Sullivan | 48 | Tab Benoit |
| 92 | Brian Jones | 47 | Jimmie Vaughan |
| 91 | Buddy Whittington | 46 | Sister Rosetta Tharpe |
| 90 | Rebecca Lovell | 45 | Mike Bloomfield |
| 89 | Shuggie Otis | 44 | Keith Richards |
| 88 | Greg Koch | 43 | Eric Johanson |
| 87 | Bukka White | 42 | Alvin Lee |
| 86 | Justin Johnson | 41 | Elmore James |
| 85 | Davy Knowles | 40 | Lightnin' Hopkins |
| 84 | Blind Blake | 39 | Christone "Kingfish" Ingram (left) |
| 83 | Kirk Fletcher | 38 | Samantha Fish |
| 82 | Memphis Minnie | 37 | Howlin' Wolf |
| 81 | Skip James | 36 | T-Bone Walker |
| 80 | Aynsley Lister | 35 | Robin Trower |
| 79 | Matt Schofield | 34 | John Mayer |
| 78 | Dan Auerbach | 33 | Hubert Sumlin |
| 77 | Jared James Nichols | 32 | Roy Buchanan |
| 76 | Charley Patton | 31 | Robert Cray |
| 75 | Ally Venable | 30 | Warren Haynes |
| 74 | Josh Smith | 29 | Jeff Healey |
| 73 | Terry Kath | 28 | Eric Gales |
| 72 | Earl Hooker | 27 | Chris Buck |
| 71 | Big Bill Broonzy | 26 | Gary Clark Jr. |
| 70 | Elvin Bishop | 25 | Albert Collins |
| 69 | Lonnie Mack | 24 | Walter Trout |
| 68 | Jimmy Reed | 23 | Dan Patlansky |
| 67 | Philip Sayce | 22 | John Lee Hooker |
| 66 | Jack Whit | 21 | Jackie Venson |
| 65 | Paul Kossoff | 20 | Kenny Wayne Shepherd |
| 64 | Mississippi Fred McDowell | 19 | Peter Green |
| 63 | R.L. Burnside | 18 | Freddie King |
| 62 | Marcus King | 17 | Derek Trucks |
| 61 | Mississippi John Hurt | 16 | Billy Gibbons |
| 60 | Blind Lemon Jefferson | 15 | Jimmy Page |
| 59 | Joanne Shaw Taylor | 14 | Johnny Winter |
| 58 | Mick Taylor | 13 | Duane Allman |
| 57 | Lead Belly | 12 | Rory Gallagher |
| 56 | Sonny Landreth | 11 | Jeff Beck |



The Others!

WE DIDN'T VOTE FOR 'EM, BUT YOU DID! HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 'OTHER' SECTION IN THE POLL...

Bonnie Raitt

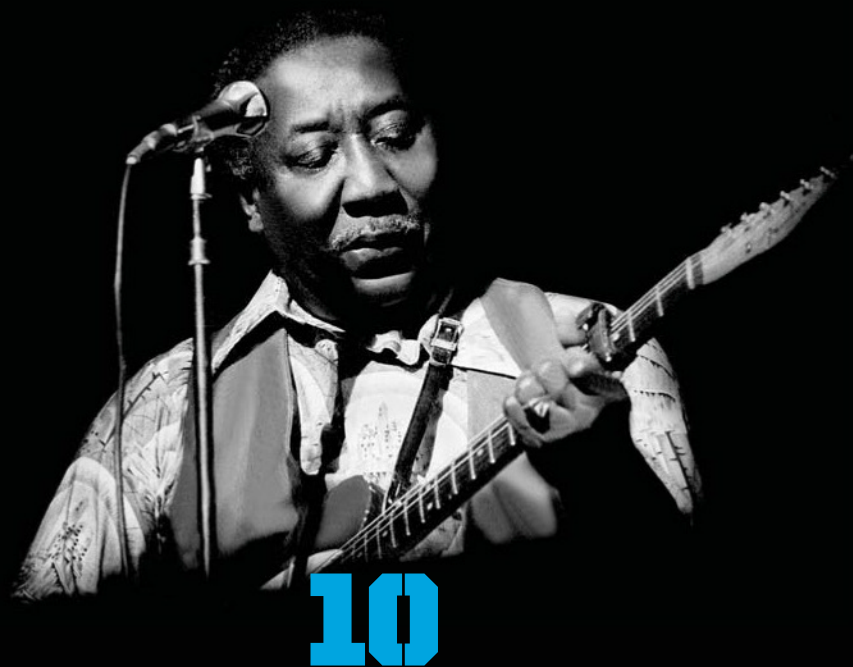
A glaring omission from our own shortlist (see, we told you it's difficult!), but the readers of guitarworld.com set us right, voting in big numbers for the guitarist B.B. King once referred to as the "best damn slide player working today".

Brian Cober

Though not a household name, the late Brian Cober has a loyal fanbase voting for him. For over 20 years he was leader of 'The Nationals' Band in Canada, but it's perhaps his 1970s double slide invention (which he'd play over the neck paired with a thumb slide) that sets him apart.

Taj Farrant

At just 14 years old it's probably fair to say the best is yet to come from the young Aussie - but that didn't stop him registering a whole bunch of votes in our poll. If he's not one of the greatest yet, he probably will be, and the guitar-playing public already knows it.



MUDDY WATERS

The man who electrified the blues – literally and metaphorically

Words Ellie Rogers

As the father of modern Chicago Blues, it's hard to overstate the importance of Muddy Waters in the development of blues music as we know it. After he had grown up playing acoustically in the rural South, Muddy's sound evolved as he moved northwards, where he would play at juke joints located near Chicago's many factories. In order to be heard over the industrial hubbub, he very pragmatically decided that he would need to amplify his guitar. Thus, Muddy electrified the blues – both literally and metaphorically speaking – and changed its sonic trajectory once and for all.

Prior to this, he'd developed an aggressive right-hand technique from playing loud and hard, and this still played a major part in his sound after going electric, but the introduction of an amp and the change of guitar gave him access to extra tonal possibilities. Gritty and expressive, early records like *The Real Folk Blues* bridged the gap between the rural tradition and Muddy's burgeoning urban blues identity, before 1969's double LP, *Fathers And Sons*, really served to define the sound of modern Chicago – as well as the sound of the now iconic Chess Records.

As for his influence, the long list of artists who have covered Muddy's tunes speaks for itself: Led Zeppelin, The Yardbirds, The

Animals, Johnny Winter, The Allman Brothers Band, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Gary Moore, The Black Crowes, the New York Dolls and many more have all paid homage. The Rolling Stones even got the inspiration for their band name from Muddy's song of the same name.

Profundity in simplicity

From *Got My Mojo Working* and *Mannish Boy* to *Spoonful* and *I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man*, his body of work has truly stood the test of time, and learning some of those canonical licks, slide lines and foot stomping rhythms will be a necessity – nay, a rite of passage – if you ever plan to play at a local blues jam night.

His signature style demonstrates one of the fundamental principles of blues music: that there can be profundity in simplicity. Muddy's playing was not about cramming in as many notes as possible. In fact, he got a whole career's worth of mileage out of the five notes that make up the Minor Pentatonic scale, with the addition of the flat 5th – or 'blue note' – that transforms the shape into the Minor Blues Scale with its deliciously sour twang.

Melodically speaking, Muddy's music draws heavily from the call and response tradition, which has its roots in gospel music. Often, he would answer a vocal 'call' with a complimentary, exclamatory or inquisitive-sounding response played on the guitar. A great

example can be heard right at the beginning of *Mannish Boy*, where Muddy's soulful "Oh yeah" vocalisations get answered with bright, trebly and vibrato-laden guitar phrases in response. It's simply a blues masterclass in just a handful of notes.

Although we'll never possess the fingers or the soul of Muddy Waters, getting the right kind of guitar to emulate those razor-sharp tones will be important if you want to approximate his sound. For the majority of his career, he favoured a 1957 Fender Telecaster with two single-coil pickups and a medium-sized tube amp. Originally white, Muddy's favourite Tele was customised by dunking it in Candy Apple Red paint and bolting on a new rosewood neck. He christened it 'The Hoss' and played the heck out of it until his death in 1983.

MUDDY WATERS ESSENTIALS

Technique: Call-and-response phrasing structures, utilising slide and fretted note melodies and a forceful right-hand attack

Scales: Minor Pentatonic, Minor Blues Scale

Gear: 1957 Fender Telecaster, 1965 Fender Super Reverb tube amp

Album: *The Real Folk Blues*

Track: *Mannish Boy*



ROBERT JOHNSON

The enigmatic King of The Delta Blues

Words Andrew Daly

The everlasting image of Robert Johnson comes from the classic 1961 album *King Of The Delta Blues Singers*. It's an above-shot of Johnson sitting in an old wooden chair while hunched over his guitar. The shadow cast toward the bottom of the image is harrowing enough to set the vibe of an album that includes bewitching classics *Cross Road Blues*, *Terraplane Blues*, *Walkin' Blues*, and *Kind Hearted Woman Blues*. With titles like that, what's obvious is that Johnson, while inventive and ahead of his time, liked to keep it simple.

Beyond that image and the more jovial black-and-white picture from 1936 that you might have seen via Johnson's Wikipedia page, the reality is that we know very little about his life. Sure, Johnson was iconic – a master of the Delta blues, and one of the most impactful guitarists ever. Hell, he might even have been the first ever rock star. At least, that's what the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame describes him as.

Setting aside the mystery, though, what we do know is that Johnson was a roving six-stringer akin to a walking jukebox.

Ramblin' man

Residents of New York City, for example, know these types of performers as 'buskers', and Johnson was a damn good one. Be it local saloons, weekend dances, or seedy street corners, Johnson spread his message via guitar the only way he knew how, and, in the process, gained a cult following. Though any following he might have claimed didn't come via recording sessions, as he only participated in two, one in San Antonio, Texas, in 1936 and another in Dallas, Texas, in 1937.

These songs, which can be found on *King of The Delta Blues Singers* and the subsequent *Vol. II* are all we have. Beyond that, the man with a guitar, who spent most of his life in the Mississippi Delta, and died ominously, is a mystery to be reconstructed by those fascinated enough to do so. That aside, as evidenced by our

slim pickings as far as recorded work, Johnson could play as well as anyone. Some even say he sold his soul to the Devil at a local crossroads in a rather sad attempt at success, though his skill shows that the Devil probably would have asked for pointers!

Luckily, to play like Robert Johnson, you won't need to sell your soul, nor will you need to die ambiguously. But you will need to brush up on a wide range of styles, including raw country slides and some basic jazz licks. Don't be afraid to incorporate Chicago boogie, swing, and ragtime, along with lyrical licks that aim to tell stories via sound, meaning your guitar should be your accompanying vocalist rather than just a supporting instrument.

ROBERT JOHNSON ESSENTIALS

Technique: The 'Johnson Progression' had bass in quarters and shuffle-eighths, up-the-neck chords, melodic fills, and classic turnarounds

Scales: Focus on open tunings like open G (low to high: D G D G B D)

Gear: Gibson L-1 Flat Top small body acoustic, preferably from between 1926 and 1937

Album: *King Of The Delta Blues Singers*

Track: *Cross Road Blues*

"JOHNSON MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE FIRST EVER ROCK STAR"



ALBERT KING

With his trademark overbending technique, he made his guitar scream and holler

Words Ellie Rogers

Nicknamed 'The Velvet Bulldozer' and standing somewhere between 6 ft 4 in and 6 ft 7 in, Albert King was a literal giant of the blues and a man of seriously unique musical talent. Against his considerable stature, his guitars often looked like miniscule toys, but he wrenched from them some of the biggest and boldest notes you're ever likely to hear.

V's up

As a left-handed player in the mid-20th century, King would hardly have been spoiled for choice when it came to instruments designed specifically for his needs, particularly early on in his career. But he got around this issue of accessibility by flipping a regular right-handed Gibson Flying V upside-down, dropping into some unorthodox open tunings and figuring out an approach that was altogether his own.

Because of the way his upside-down guitar was strung, with the bass notes at the bottom and the treble notes at the top, he couldn't fret chords in quite the same way as his right-handed contemporaries and he chose not to make rhythm a focus of his playing. Instead, King doubled down on dramatic lead playing, making his guitar scream, holler and sing with

his trademark overbending technique. Unlike most blues guitarists, who mine emotional nuance from a mixture of mostly quarter-, half- and full-tone bends, King went big, often bending his notes one-and-a-half or two tones wide. Really, it's enough to make your fingers bleed just thinking about it! Certainly, his muscular brawn played a part in this ability, but he also benefited from an advantage known only to lefties...

Left-handed benefits

With the highest pitched strings at the skyward edge of the fretboard, he was able to pull down on them to execute bends, rather than pushing them upwards, as is common practice for right-handed players. The hand is naturally much stronger when working in this direction, making it much easier for him to incorporate the intense, stinging howl of huge pitch bends into his guitar vocabulary.

Interestingly, King's bends and even his wide, slow vibrato often teetered ever so slightly on the sharp side, giving his playing an extra searing quality that hits like a dagger right through the heart.

But the idiosyncrasies don't end here, because King also chose not to use a pick. Instead, he relied on his thumb and index

finger to pluck and pinch the notes. Again, this added to the gut-wrenchingly raw and physical way he expressed himself on the guitar.

His impact on those who've come since has been as immense as those hallmark bends. Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan were two of his biggest fans and Eric Clapton even 'borrowed' his *Oh, Pretty Woman* solo and used it in Cream's *Disraeli Gears* album opener, *Strange Brew*.

Although many guitarists have tried to cop a little bit of Albert in their playing style, the key to his unique sound remains largely 'protected' by the unconventionality of his set up, making him a true original and a true king of the blues.

ALBERT KING ESSENTIALS

Technique: Raw, powerful attack with plenty of huge bends – usually a tone and half or two tones wide

Scales: Minor Pentatonic, particularly the 'Albert King Box'

Gear: Gibson Flying V, Roland JC-120, MXR Phase 90

Album: *Born Under A Bad Sign*

Track: *Born Under A Bad Sign*



07

BUDDY GUY

The way he wielded a Strat inspired Jimi, SRV and countless others

Words Ellie Rogers

Born in rural Louisiana in 1936, George 'Buddy' Guy first learned to make music on a homemade two-string diddley bow, before getting his hands on a Harmony acoustic guitar and embarking in earnest on his journey to become one of the most loved blues guitarists of all time.

As a young man, Buddy travelled from the country to the city, working for a time in Baton Rouge, before moving to Chicago in the late '50s. There, he met and was mentored by blues innovators like Muddy Waters, B.B. King and Lightnin' Slim, and he became a house guitarist at Chess Records.

While the label didn't fully appreciate Buddy's wicked chops and natural charisma, Brits like Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton and The Rolling Stones idolised him, and American guitar stars like Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan would take notes on how to really wield a Stratocaster from the bombastic Mr. Guy.

Besides his trademark blonde and polka dot models, the most effective weapon in Buddy's arsenal is his personality, and it's often prudent to expect the unexpected, especially when it

comes to his live performances. He's great at working changes in tempo and dynamics into his arrangements to ensure that his listeners are always kept on their toes. From fleet fingered flurries to slow, stinging bends that ache with real emotion, Buddy is a master communicator and there's little room for misinterpretation when it comes to the meaning behind his melodies and solos.

Although the blues might typically be associated with the expression of hurt and despair, Buddy's take on the genre has also always been tinged with light-heartedness, wit and even a hearty smattering of tongue-in-cheek humour. Because he often leans towards the lighter side of life, you'll find lots of major pentatonic licks in his tunes as well as the staple minor pentatonic wizardry that makes for most traditional bluesers' bread and butter.

But, purely in terms of gear, if you want to sound like Buddy, then you really will need to get your hands on a Strat, or at the very least, a guitar with the same configuration of three single coil pickups and a five-way switch. Buddy typically employs quite a clean tone, relying on the natural breakup of a cranked tube amp for more distorted moments. He

doesn't use a lot of toys, but will break out his signature Dunlop BG95 Cry Baby Wah pedal when he wants to get funky and dial in some ultra-expressive open vowel sounds for his solos, as in the 2022 track, *I Let My Guitar Do The Talking*.

When you boil it down, Buddy's life story is literally stuff of blues legend. Many consider him to be the last great bluesman and his music is the common thread that ties the genre's past to its present. Now, well into his eighties, his decades of experience can teach us many things. But perhaps the most important lesson of all we can take from the inimitable Buddy Guy is this: if you've got a personality, then don't be afraid to use it!

BUDDY GUY ESSENTIALS

Technique: Aggressive pick attack, heavy use of hammer-ons and pull-offs and powerful, expressive bends

Scales: Minor Pentatonic, Major Pentatonic

Gear: Fender Stratocaster, Fender Bassman or Fender Deluxe tube amp, Dunlop Crybaby Wah

Album: *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues*

Track: *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues*

"THE STUFF OF BLUES LEGEND"

06

GARY MOORE

With rock power, he reinvigorated the blues

Words Ellie Rogers

Inspired by the likes of Peter Green and Eric Clapton, Gary Moore began his guitar playing career in the late 1960s when he joined Dublin-based blues rock outfit Skid Row. He then transitioned to playing hard rock and metal, before returning to his blues roots in the late '80s and early '90s. With him, he brought a contemporary highly saturated guitar sound, his trademark aggressive vibrato and a whole lot of emotion. He helped to reinvigorate the blues during this period and paved the way for next generation artists like Joe Bonamassa.

Moore was renowned for many things: his melodic sensibilities, his powers of expression, his ability to hit jaw dropping speeds and his

knack for conjuring seemingly endless sustain – as you'll hear in just about every live version of the classic track *Parissienne Walkways*.

Although you'll find lots of impressive legato, rapid trills and hammer-on and pull-off flurries in his playing, Moore's 'note' is so instantly recognisable because of the depth of feeling he was able to pour into it. When thinking about trying to sound like he did, it's a good idea to focus on single notes and short phrases and try to play them with real feeling, emphasising the emotion that you're trying to convey every time you make contact with the strings. Once you've got that down, you can change things up between slow and soulful and fast and furious to make your solos ooze with variety just like Gary's.



GARY MOORE ESSENTIALS

Technique: A mixture of speed and raw emotion. Crucially, any technique used must serve the meaning of the song

Scales: Minor Pentatonic

Gear: Gibson Les Paul Standard, Marshall JTM45 (or similar), Ibanez Tube Screamer, Marshall Guv'nor overdrive

Album: *Still Got The Blues*

Track: *Still Got The Blues*



05

JIMI HENDRIX

Rock's greatest guitar hero – but deep down, a blues-based player

Words Andrew Daly

JIMI HENDRIX ESSENTIALS

Technique: Combine feedback and expressive string bends and tune your guitar down one semitone while blending rhythms and leads

Scales: The E7#9 'Hendrix Chord' includes the E, G#, D, and G, a vital part of the 'Hendrix Scale' built from major 3rd (G#)

Gear: Fender Strat, Jim Dunlop Fuzz Face, Jim Dunlop Wah, Marshall Super Lead, aka a Plexi

Album: *Electric Ladyland*

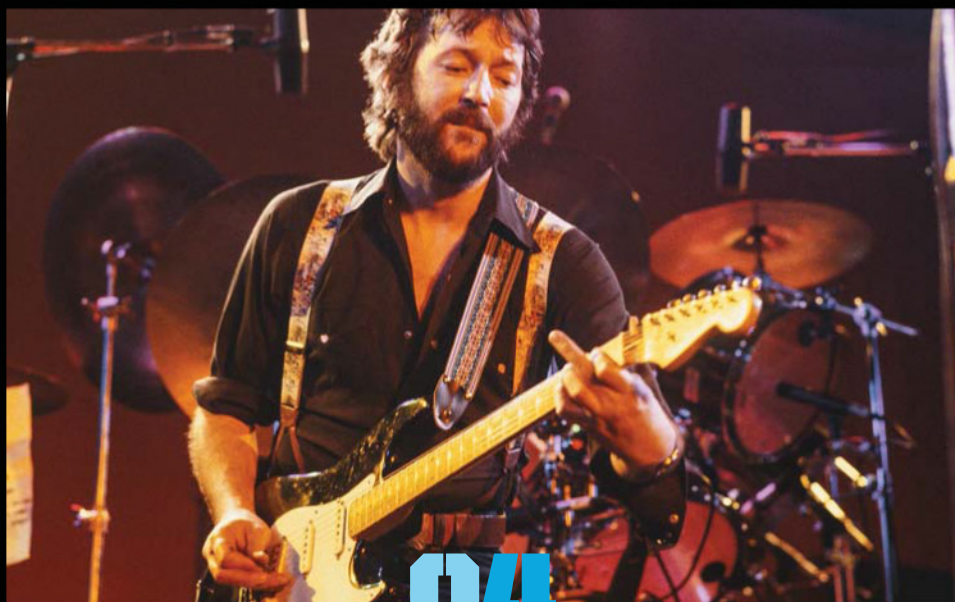
Track: *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*

If you ask most who came of age in the '60s, they'll often recall the first time they heard Jimi Hendrix as 'scary'. It's not hard to understand, considering Hendrix reinvented how we look at the guitar. Although Jimi is most known for blistering rock licks like *Purple Haze*, *Hey Joe*, and lush tones inherent in *Castles Made Of Sand* and *Little Wing*, he was a blues-based player; one listen to *Red House*, *Catfish Blues*, or *Once I Had A Woman* will tell you as much.

Regarding Hendrix's blues licks, close listening is critical; that's the only way to

absorb his take on one of the oldest musical art forms. Absorbing Hendrix is one thing, but if you want to play like him, you must embody his aesthetic. Pay attention to his chord choices, microtonal bends, vibrato, and use of chromatics to catch the vibe. And don't forget the way he wraps his thumb around the lower E string, allowing him to play rhythms and leads simultaneously.

Beyond that, you'll want to explore all five of your Strat's selector positions – though Jimi only had three – opening the endless possibilities of S-type curios.



04

ERIC CLAPTON

From his fingertips came some of the most dynamic British blues ever heard

Words Andrew Daly

Since the words ‘Clapton is God’ first appeared as spray-painted graffiti across a wall in Islington, London, in the mid-’60s, it’s been painfully apparent that as far as

amalgamating rock and blues together via six-strings, few have done it better than Eric Clapton. When those sacred words first immortalised Clapton as a halcyon deity amongst mere mortals, it was during his John Mayall and Cream era, when some of the most dynamic British blues ever heard were emitted from his fingertips and reverberated from his strings, which, at the time, were usually adhered to a 1960 Gibson Les Paul known as the ‘Beano’ guitar, and a ’64 technicolour Gibson SG known as ‘The Fool’.

From the first ‘Clapton is God’ sighting in ’66 onward, such proclamations were scrawled across bathroom stalls and construction sites, and in rock’s back pages. That shouldn’t surprise anyone given the sounds Clapton

was creating. In retrospect, albums like 1966’s *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* and anything he did with Cream were damn shocking at the time. Before Clapton – and a few other British souls – the idea of electric blues was more in line with the likes of Buddy Guy, B.B. King and Albert King, but Clapton changed the game.

With a Les Paul in hand, which Clapton plugged into a ’62 Marshall Bluesbreaker, he created songs like *Steppin’ Out*, and *Hideaway* with John Mayall, and *Sunshine of Your Love* with Cream. Not too shabby. If you’d like to give it go, it’s important to remember that while Clapton picked up a Strat in the ’70s, as we alluded to earlier, in his ’60s blues days he was a card-carrying Les Paul lover. So, if you want to dig into his blues roots, you’ll want to keep that in mind from the jump.

Pay special attention to Clapton’s phrasing, how he lays out solos, and how he injects loads of expressiveness, soulful, floaty, yet muscular vibrato, and translates the blues through the

lens of pure emotive balladry – even if the song rocks hard on the surface. Beyond that, mix and match your pentatonics. Don’t rely too heavily on the minor scale; feel free to inject the major scale, too. To that end, don’t hold back after you’ve dimed your amp. Clapton never played it safe regarding solos and effortlessly flexed his skill. Be sure to let it all hang out. But most importantly – be a student. To embody Clapton, you need to be a scholar of the blues. Let passion guide you!

ERIC CLAPTON ESSENTIALS

Technique: Combine raw power, volume and fearless muscle with nuance and intentional vibrato, and always remain in control

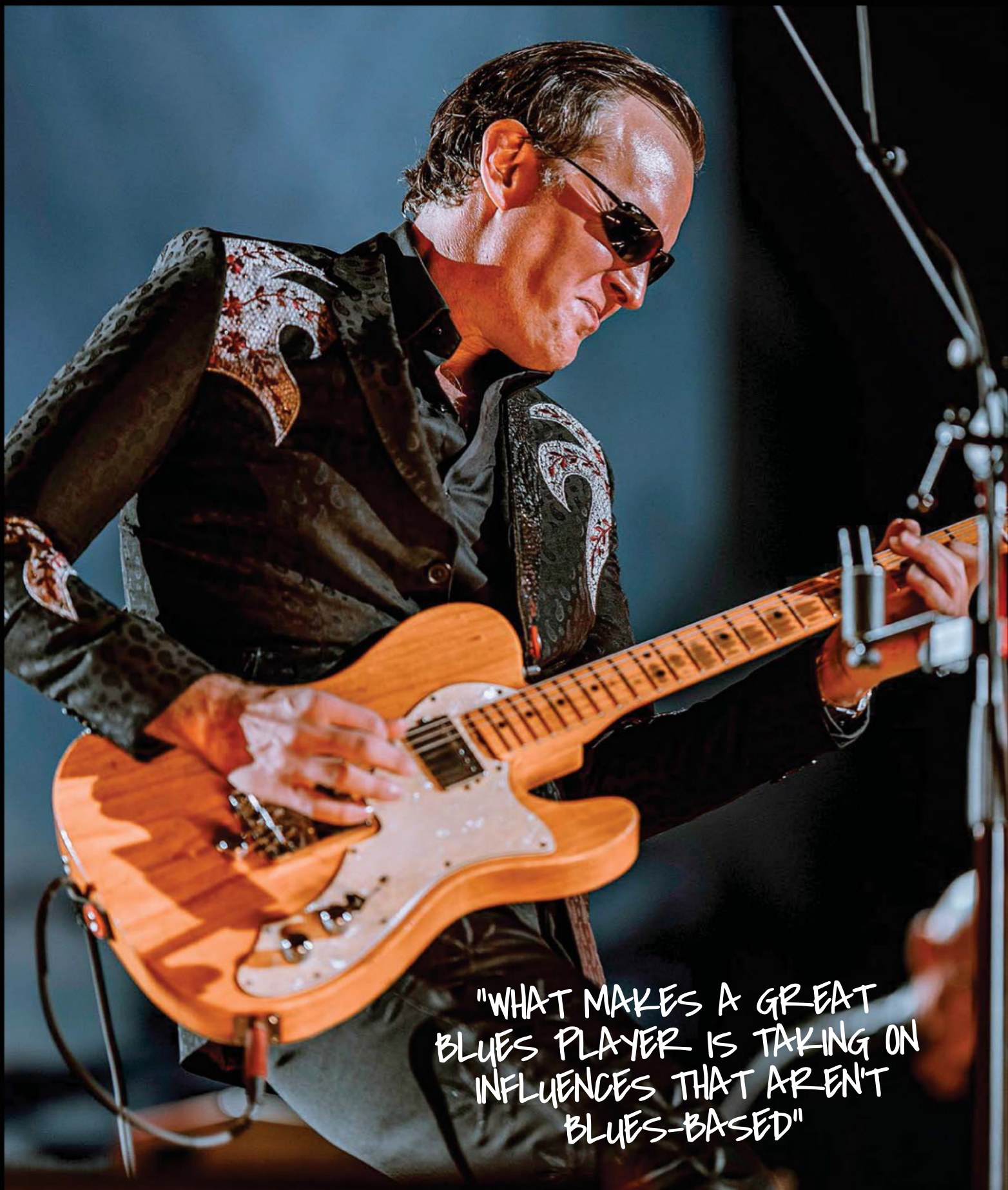
Scales: Keep it simple. Clapton loves the E minor pentatonic (E, G, A, B, D) but often adds single notes from the A major pentatonic (A, B, C#, E, F#) for variation and embellishes with hammer-ons, pull-offs, bends, and slides

Gear: Les Paul ‘Burst, a Strat, Marshall Bluesbreaker, JTM45, or Fender Twin

Album: *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton*

Track: *Steppin’ Out*

"TO EMBODY CLAPTON, YOU NEED TO BE A SCHOLAR OF THE BLUES"



"WHAT MAKES A GREAT
BLUES PLAYER IS TAKING ON
INFLUENCES THAT AREN'T
BLUES-BASED"

03

JOE BONAMASSA

Now, more than ever, he's all about putting the right notes in the right place

Words Andrew Daly

Joe Bonamassa has long been a modern-day pillar of the blues and all its offshoots, as he rarely adheres to one genre sector. Bonamassa himself would tell you that his amalgamated blues is the key, which is why *Total Guitar* readers have named him the third greatest blues guitarist of all time, just behind Stevie Ray Vaughan and B.B. King.

To this, Joe says, "That's a great honour, but it's 100% not true! It's not even 99% true! That's as definitive as the sun will f*cking rise tomorrow. It's not true, but I'll take it. Thanks to the fans; it's not like I was stacking the ballot box!"

You're clearly a little surprised by the result of the TG readers' poll, but it does reflect you status as an important figure in the story of blues music...

I look at the blues as a 10-year thing, meaning someone new comes along every 10 years and kicks the door in. It goes back to Hendrix, to SRV, to Robert Cray, and beyond. It was a long-established thing before Hendrix with the classic guys. Now, you've got guys like Gary Clark Jr., Kingfish and others. It seems like every ten years, something happens where people are ready to consume this music, and regardless of whether it's a male or female, someone comes up with just the right recipe. And then it's like, 'Oh, here's the saviour of the blues! The blues is cool again!' Someone young will come and kick me in the ass, and then a new generation will kick whoever that is in their ass.

In general, what are some of the key things that make for a great blues guitarist?

What makes a great blues player is taking on influences that aren't blues-based. It's got to be something that's a little bit off the main trail, you know? If you listen to some of B.B. King's '80s stuff, you'll hear that he's got some jazz in there, like from Wes Montgomery. He wasn't just a straight blues player. It was the same with SRV – you can look at him and say, 'Okay, he's the confluence of Hendrix and Albert King', that's true. But there's also

bits of Ritchie Blackmore, which comes out in the tone.

How do you apply that mindset to what you do?

I'm not here to say I'm a great player, but like I was saying, I take my influences and apply them, but I don't become overwhelmed by them. I like to shake things up and turn them into new things. I've always been okay with taking influence from guitarists who may or may not be within the genre of the blues.

Where are you primarily pulling inspiration from these days? Are you focusing on any new techniques?

I was in the studio a few weeks ago and decided not to give my producer all the options like I used to. I'll have something I want out of a solo and don't want to edit it, so I don't give him all the options. What I mean is, I won't give him the blistering option, the slow option, and the medium option. Rather than looking at all these different angles, I'll focus on my phrasing, what I'm trying to say, and the overall sound.

And that's different from how you once approached it?

Yeah. Now, it's about putting the right notes in the right place. We've established that I play guitar, and that's the career. There's no need to go into career-saving mode and overdo it. It's about refining my phrasing, which I think happens to any player nearing fifty.

It's no secret that you're a guitar collector, but which of your guitars sings the blues best would you say?

A Strat and a [Gibson] ES-335. To me, those are blues machines. A Strat can do so much, kinda like [how] Buddy Guy [used one]. And the 335 is like the classic instrument that a guy like Freddie King used. I'd have to include a Les Paul, too. The British guys, like Jeff Beck, Peter Green and Mick Taylor, took the classic Les Paul 'Bursts from '59 and used them as weapons for the blues. Those 'Bursts plugged into a Marshall became a common denominator. So, the Strat,

335, and the Les Paul – those are the quintessential three.

What's the best Strat, 335, and Les Paul you've ever owned?

Oh, God. The '55 hardtail 'Bonnie' Strat is the best one for me. As for the 335, there's a couple of '62s that I play live – they're Les Paul killers. And with Les Pauls, it depends on what I'm playing. It's hard to name a favourite as it depends on the job. You've got a Goldtop with P-90s, and then there's 'Bursts with PAFs, so it all depends.

To this point, is there a quintessential song or performance of yours that you always go back to?

I always hope to reach that point with each record. But even if I did reach that, I'd never be aware of it. No one will know if you've recorded that until you're dead. You never know the ones that will stand the test of time, so I always keep trying. But my 2014 Red Rocks performance is probably the best performance I ever did. The Three Kings tour was fun, and the DVD we did at the Greek Theater [2015's *Live At The Greek Theatre*] was great. I'm proud of those. But again, this me being number three stuff – thank you. I will always appreciate the accolades, but it's 100% not true!

Joe Bonamassa plays the Royal Albert Hall on April 4 and 5.

JOE BONAMASSA ESSENTIALS

Technique: Play fearless, fast, fiery; execute nasty string bends and exude rage through repetition

Scales: Mainly the minor pentatonic, with some major pentatonics, and Dorian and Mixolydian modes added in

Gear: '55 hardtail Strat, '59 Les Paul 'Burst, '62 ES-335, 100-watt Marshall, and an Ibanez Tube Screamer TS9 and TS808

Album: *Blues Deluxe*

Track: *Blues Deluxe*



02

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

In the early '80s, the blues needed saving.
Enter SRV...

Words Andrew Daly

When Stevie Ray Vaughan burst onto the scene as a Stratocaster-wielding badass in a Plateau hat, the blues world was begging for

a shake-up. And who better than a guitarist with an affinity for Dumble amps, Tube Screamers and strings the thickness of telephone lines to set off the earthquake?

When SRV's debut album *Texas Flood* dropped in 1983, it had been years since a guitarist of this calibre had come along, let alone one with the levels of bravado-driven machismo the Texas native boasted. As for *Texas Flood*, it was a revelation. Exuberant tracks like *Love Struck Baby* and *Pride And Joy* set the tone, and the rest of the album brimmed with the same gritty yet effervescent blues that SRV took influence from via Hendrix and Albert King.

Hendrix, specifically, was critical regarding SRV, considering few guitar players had caused the same level of musical disturbance since Jimi dropped *Are You Experienced* in '67. That, along with the fact that many found SRV's playing like Hendrix's from a structural standpoint, made him the choice for the next big thing, the latest saviour of the blues.

And to be fair, by the early '80s, the blues needed saving. Many of SRV's heroes had been relegated to indie labels, and Clapton was only just beginning to find his mojo again. The raging jolt of energy SRV provided not only reignited the guitar hero conversation as it pertains to the blues, but it opened the commercial viability of the blues to people who previously didn't care if it lived or died.

Texas Flood was no flash in the pan, either. SRV continued to make great music with the albums that followed – 1984's *Couldn't Stand The Weather*, 1985's *Soul To Soul* and the last album released before his death, 1989's *In Step*. There were many great guitar players active in that era, not least Edward Van Halen and Prince. But if ever a guitar player could be described as a force of nature, it was Stevie Ray. Certainly, his hero and friend Eric Clapton saw

him that way. "It wasn't ever that he took a breather or paused to think where he was going to go next," Clapton said of SRV. "It just flowed out of him. And actually, even that doesn't come just with virtuosity or practice. It's not a question of doing it over and over again or anything like that. It's just that he seemed to be an open channel. It just flowed through him. He never ever seemed to dry up."

Save for a select few, no one impacted guitar, or the blues, more than SRV did. To this day, up and coming six-stringers aspire to sound, play and swagger like him. And if you're up for the challenge of a lifetime, you'll want to dig deep into his phrasing to start. His use of fast ascending licks, open strings, repeating melodies, grace notes, pentatonic swings between the minor and major scale, and off-kilter notes between notes are all hallmarks you'll need to master. Take your time, and it'll serve you well to go back and study his most significant influences: Hendrix and Albert King.

Understanding the backstory of where his sound came from might give you a puncher's chance for total ownership and mastery, just like SRV. If you can do that and play through the pain of playing with the thickest strings you've ever felt, you'll be on your way.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN ESSENTIALS

Technique: Be aggressive, deploy question-and-answer licks, doublestop phrases, and monster bends by flexing one string and letting down the adjacent string twice in succession.

Scales: SRV leaned on the E minor pentatonic scale of E, G, A, B, D – down a semitone, of course, due to his E₇ tuning.

Gear: '62 or '63 Fender Strat, 150-watt Dumble Steel String Singer, Blackface Fender Super Reverb, and an Ibanez Tube Screamer TS-808.

Album: *Texas Flood*

Track: *Pride And Joy*

FEW GUITARISTS
CAUSED THE
SAME LEVEL
OF MUSICAL
DISTURBANCE
AS SRV



01 B.B. KING

King of the Blues

Words Neville Marten

The man born Riley B. King had every right to play the blues. Revered by peers such as Buddy Guy, Freddie King, Albert King, Chuck Berry and Otis Rush, he also garnered a plethora of later admirers, from Clapton and Hendrix to John Lennon and Keith Richards. Indeed, pretty much every guitarist that ever bent a string, added vibrato and let that note sing, owes something to King's style. Today's fine roster of bluesers, including John Mayer, Eric Gales, Joe Bonamassa, Gary Clark Jr., Susan Tedeschi, Joanna Connor and Derek Trucks were all, directly or otherwise, affected by him.

Even Lennon, when asked if there was anything more he'd like to achieve said, "Yes, to play guitar like B.B. King." Well, listen to John's solos on The Beatles' *Get Back* and the influence is there for all to hear. And check out Peter Green's sublime guitar on Fleetwood Mac's *Need Your Love So Bad* – it has King's blues DNA all over it.

First steps

Born on the Berclair Cotton Plantation in Itta Bena, Indianola, Mississippi in 1925, King's parents were sharecroppers, and from a young boy into his early

teens Riley picked cotton, worked on a cotton 'gin' (the 'engine' that separated the fibres from the seeds), or drove a tractor. Due to his parents splitting up when he was just four, King's maternal grandmother looked after him until she died a few years later.

During his time in and around Indianola, Riley would have witnessed endemic racism, segregation, deprivation, even the horrors of lynching. Riley, though, sought to distance himself from the brutal things he saw, never wanting his career to be defined by them. As blues legend Buddy Guy tells it: "Whenever we'd have that conversation he'd always lead away from it, making me think: there's stuff you don't want to tell here."

Thankfully, Riley discovered music, initially at his local church when a preacher taught him a few chords on the parlour guitar he'd been given by slide guitar-playing cousin, Bukka White, but also in Indianola's bustling nightlife. Great blues and jazz artists would come through town to play. Too young to venture in, Riley would sneak round the back to listen, totally absorbed by the music he was hearing. By this time, King had also acquired a better instrument with money forwarded from his salary by the plantation owner. It cost 15 dollars.

"WHEN I PLAY THE TRILL WITH MY
FINGER, MY HAND IS NOT ON THE
NECK AT ALL. IT ALL COMES
FROM THE WRIST"
B.B. KING

In 1943, King joined a local gospel group playing in churches in and around Indianola. King, already into the blues, once described how when he played a gospel song, people would pat him on the head and say, "That was good, boy", but give him nothing for his troubles. When he knocked out a blues tune he'd receive the patronising pat on the head, "but this time they'd put something in the hat", he quipped.

Blues Boy

Blues was Riley's ticket off the plantation. In 1948 he moved to West Memphis, Arkansas, where he began making a name for himself in the bars and clubs, and through appearances on Sonny Boy Williamson's radio show. He then gained a regular spot on Radio WDIA, across the river in Memphis, Tennessee. The station re-christened its hit-signing Beale Street Blues Boy, shortened to Blues Boy, then B.B. (he had both 'Bee Bee' and 'B.B. King' hand-painted on his guitars).

By this time, King had acquired his first Gibson, a small-bodied non-cutaway L-30, but his jobs earned him enough to buy the instrument with which he'd cut his first record, a P-90-equipped Gibson ES-125.

In 1951, King recorded Lowell Fulson's *3 O'Clock Blues*. It hit the top of the R&B charts and put King squarely on the map. Even then, his delivery was exquisite. The style, while yet to be refined, was instantly recognisable; effortless vocals punctuated with succinct and idiomatically faultless guitar lines.

While it's easy to think it all started with King, on his road to creating the style that's so recognisable today, B.B. found his own guitar heroes. First of these was T-Bone Walker. Texas-born Walker developed a fluid, jazzy style that oozed class, and King found his warm Gibson tone and perfect note choices irresistible. "He was the first electric guitar player I heard on record, and I had to have one, too," King recalled. "I can still hear T-Bone in my mind from that first record, Stormy Monday." Next, enter Benny Goodman Orchestra guitarist Charlie Christian. "Oh boy," sighed B.B. as he recalled first hearing the groundbreaking jazz guitarist. "Charlie Christian was amazing. He was a master of diminished chords, and a master of new ideas, too."

King's next influence, a Romani guitarist from Liberchies in Belgium,



THE G.O.A.T.

Joe Bonamassa pays tribute to the master

"B.B."

is truly one of the guitar greats. Some players you can identify by just one note, like B.B., Albert King, and, of course, B.B. King. That's why he is constantly on top – he was so identifiable. And it's funny because B.B. was known as a guitarist but also a singer of the highest order. When Frank Sinatra is one of your biggest champions, you must be doing something right as a vocalist. B.B. could play, but he could also croon and had an incredible voice. He was the total package as an entertainer."

is perhaps more surprising. As King put it: "A friend of mine who was in the army came back to Mississippi and said, 'I've brought some records back and I want you to listen to this fella.' He then played me Django Reinhardt. I instantly fell in love with him, his guitar seemed to talk. So those three are my guitar idols. Each one had something that seemed to go through me like a sword. It's something that happens and you just know, on some spiritual level, that this was meant for you to hear."

The road to Lucille

Django had played a Selmer Maccaferri guitar, but Walker and Christian both used Gibsons, so it's unsurprising that King had also chosen the Gibson route. From the earlier L-30 and ES-125 he graduated to flashier archtops like the L-5 and three-pickup ES-5 (as used by T-Bone), a short-scale Byrdland, and the jazzers' favourite, an ES-175. He also had brief flirtations with a Les Paul Goldtop and a single-pickup Fender Esquire.

By trialling these various instruments King was clearly waiting for the perfect

model, but it wouldn't roll off Gibson's production line until 1958. This was the ES-300 series, incorporating ES-330, ES-335, ES-345 and ES-355. King sporadically played all four models, but eventually settled on the blingiest, the ES-355, which the company later tweaked to create the B.B. King 'Lucille' model.

Why Lucille? While playing at a dance one cold Arkansas night, a fight broke out. During the fracas, which was over a woman, someone kicked over the burning pail of kerosene intended to keep the place warm. Instead the venue caught alight, and King ran in to rescue his beloved L-30 from the flames. He later learned that the woman's name was Lucille, and every subsequent B.B. guitar would bear her moniker.

At its best, King's guitar style was a fluid mix of major and minor pentatonic licks, mixed with complex jazz-style flurries. From his early playing years it morphed from a simplified version of the Lonnie Johnson, Charlie Christian and Django melodic 'chord tone' style, as heard on *3 O'Clock Blues*, to the more typical pentatonic 'box shapes' of

"I'M HORRIBLE WITH CHORDS. I GET SOMEBODY ELSE TO PLAY THEM!"
B.B. KING



T-Bone Walker, which you can hear on *When My Heart Beats Like A Hammer* from 1988's collection of B.B.'s early recordings entitled *B.B. King - Do The Boogie*.

The 'B.B. Box'

By 1965 and the legendary *Live At The Regal* album, King's style, now fully formed, had come to revolve around what's known as the 'B.B. box'. Looked at in the key of A, King would locate the root note A with his first finger at the 10th fret, second string, using this as 'home'. From here it was easy to reach all the key major and minor pentatonic notes, both on the string above (the 5th interval at the 12th fret, pushed up to the 6th and flat 7th with a two or three-fret bend, and the flat 5 'blue' note located in between). The 2nd and flat 3rd situated one and two frets above 'home' on the second string, were easily bent up to major 3rd and 4th, and on the next string down were lower-octave 5th, 6th and flat 7th, at the 9th, 11th and 12th frets. That's a lot of musical information within a short, four-fret spread.

King's fluttering finger vibrato is also the stuff of legend. Loving the slide

B.B. KING ESSENTIALS

Technique:

Sung lines alternated with measured guitar phrases, occasionally big string bends and 'fluttering' vibrato

Scales:

Mixing major and minor pentatonics, jazz-style flurries and chord tones around the 'B.B. box' shape

Gear:

Gibson ES-355 'Lucille' model with Robert Moog-designed Gibson Lab Series combos (or Fender if unavailable)

Album:

Live At The Regal

Track:

The Thrill Is Gone

guitar vibrato of cousin Bukka White but not wanting to play bottleneck himself, B.B. created a way to emulate it by wobbling and rotating his first finger on the string. "To get the vibrato started, my thumb is on the neck. But when I play the trill with my finger, my hand is not on the neck at all. It all comes from the wrist," he once described.

King rarely played rhythm. "I'm horrible with chords," he once confessed to U2's Bono, "so I get somebody else to play them." For 22 years this was his big band's guitarist, Leon Warren. As frontman, King would often sing a line and answer it with a guitar phrase. And when he wasn't playing, his fretting hand would hang loosely by his side, or he'd hold both arms up in jubilation.

The long road

Tonally, King went from ultra-clean to pretty overdriven, usually through Fender amps or, from the late '70s onwards, Gibson Lab Series combos. He loved position two on his ES-355's five-way Varitone switch, which lent a nasal, 'out of phase'-type tone to his phrases. You can hear all of B.B.'s classic

tones and licks on the incredible aforementioned album: 1965's *Live At The Regal*.

B.B. King spent his life touring – playing upwards of 300 shows most years – and recording. He sold over 50 million albums and collaborated with everyone from Gary Moore to Elton John. Check out 1971's *In London* album, featuring guests Peter Green, Steve Winwood and Ringo Starr; 2005's *B.B. King And Friends: 80* with Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler, Billy Gibbons, Bobby Bland, and Sheryl Crow; and King's most successful album, the co-headliner with Clapton, *Riding With The King* from 2000, which sold over 3.5 million copies and took the 2001 Grammy for Best Traditional Blues Album (King won 15 Grammys in total).

Always dressed to impress, B.B. wore tailor-made suits, fancy guitar straps, and that ultimate accessory – his gold-plated, pearl-encrusted Gibson Lucille. This never less than impeccable look was due to a word of early advice from Bukka White. "Bukka told me, 'Riley, blues musicians should always dress like they're going to the bank to borrow some money!'"



T-BONE WALKER T-BONE BLUES

(1959)



That an album released 65 years ago can sound this fresh is testament to T-Bone Walker's brilliance. Its two most famous tracks, *T-Bone Shuffle* and *Call It Stormy Monday*,

highlight the jump jive and slow blues genius of the Texan singer-guitarist. Brim-full of sliding 9th-chord rhythms and tasty 6th and 9th-infused licks and solos, they highlight Walker's musicality, with *Stormy Monday*'s solo so modern-sounding it might have been recorded yesterday. The title track, too, displays a cool swinging vibe with T-Bone laying back on the beat while spitting out streams of Gibson-toned licks. Every track is a masterclass.

Standout track: *Call It Stormy Monday*

HOWLIN' WOLF MOANIN' IN THE MOONLIGHT

(1959)



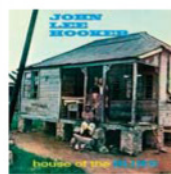
A collection of '50s singles, *Moanin' In The Moonlight* contains more A-grade material than you could shake a six-stringed stick at. Although several different guitarists appear across the collection, most of the stand-out moments come from Willie

Johnson and Hubert Sumlin, and there's a real variety of tones, moods and styles to dig into. Sumlin is credited with the mesmeric guitar hook of *Smokestack Lightnin'* – a riff so good that it loops unchanged, aside from a just-perceptible increase in tempo, for three whole minutes – while Johnson contributed some ahead-of-his-time distortion and macho swagger to *How Many More Years*.

Standout track: *Smokestack Lightnin'*

JOHN LEE HOOKER HOUSE OF THE BLUES

(1959)



This Chess compilation holds 12 low-down and dirty cuts from the undisputed 'King of the Boogie'. Although Eddie Kirkland performed secondary guitar on songs

like *Louise* and *High Priced Woman*, the bulk of the collection saunters along under the raw insistence of Hooker's infinitely-loopable one-chord rhythms and the casual accompaniment of a lone footstomp. Stark arrangements, hypnotic thumb-and-index-finger grooves and sassy lead fills are Hooker 101, but there are some more experimental moments here, too. For example, *Walkin' The Boogie* puts a radical twist on the earlier hit *Boogie Chillen* with a loose double-tracked vocal and an artificially sped-up lead overdub!

Standout track: *Walkin' The Boogie*

ELMORE JAMES AND THE BROOM DUSTERS BLUES AFTER HOURS

(1960)



Few could deliver a blues with the passion of Elmore James. The only full-length album released during his lifetime, *Blues After Hours* kicks off with *Dust My Blues*,

a raucous romp featuring Elmore's trademark 'diddy-diddy' slide riff, with his *Broom Dusters* (including Ike Turner on guitar) in great form. *Mean And Evil* has a swinging T-Bone Walker-style vibe with tasty non-slide licks, while *No Love In My Heart* features riffing horns and soulful lead. But it's *Goodbye Baby*, a 12/8 slowie which mates Elmore's mournful vocals with spine-chilling guitar, that seals his status as a true blues giant.

Standout track: *Goodbye Baby*

LET'S HIDE AWAY AND DANCE AWAY WITH FREDDY KING FREDDIE KING

(1961)



This all-instrumental album from the youngest of the three Kings (his name curiously spelt differently in the title) proved fertile picking for any budding blues

guitarist. Eric Clapton and Peter Green covered *Hide Away* and *The Stumble* with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, but King's versions sound more stately and authentic. Freddie's major and minor pentatonics, doublestops and sliding 6ths are all over the record, with *San-Ho-Zay* and *Sen-Say-Shun* firm favourites of Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia. The gutsier tone of *Side Tracked* is a foretaste of how Freddie's sound would evolve as the '60s unfolded, but it's a shame there's no instrumental ballad here, and, of course, King's raucous vocals are much missed.

Standout track: *The Stumble*

SON HOUSE THE LEGENDARY SON HOUSE: FATHER OF FOLK BLUES

(1965)



Utilising dramatic bottleneck and fingerpicking techniques for self-accompaniment, Son House literally slid back into public consciousness during the '60s folk revival with

newly recorded collections such as this. As a storyteller with some pretty visceral tales to tell, his style relied more on evocative

physicality than technical finesse. Twanging, thumping and thwacking the strings, the raw gusto of his playing matched his emotive vocal delivery to a tee. Tone-wise, House was all about steel. You'll hear the slippery jangle (and occasional clunk) of a metal slide against steel strings as well as the characteristic reverberations of his 1930s National Duolian steel resonator guitar.

Standout track: *Death Letter*

ALBERT COLLINS ICE PICKIN'

(1978)



One of the stand-out blues guitar recordings of the late 1970s, *Ice Pickin'* catapulted Collins into the major league, ready to enjoy the 1980s' contemporary blues boom.

From funky upbeat grooves (*Honey, Hush, Ice Pick*) to swinging twelve-bars (*Avalanche*) and the sultry slow blues of *Cold, Cold Feeling*, the album is notable for its stylistic breadth as well as the cool guitar tones that earned Collins the nickname 'The Iceman'. This penetrating signature sound came from a combination of factors: the neck pickup on his favourite 1966 Fender Telecaster, the open F minor tuning he used for much of the material, his frequent use of a capo way up the neck and the distinctive 'snap' of his fingerpicking attack.

Standout track: *Cold, Cold Feeling*

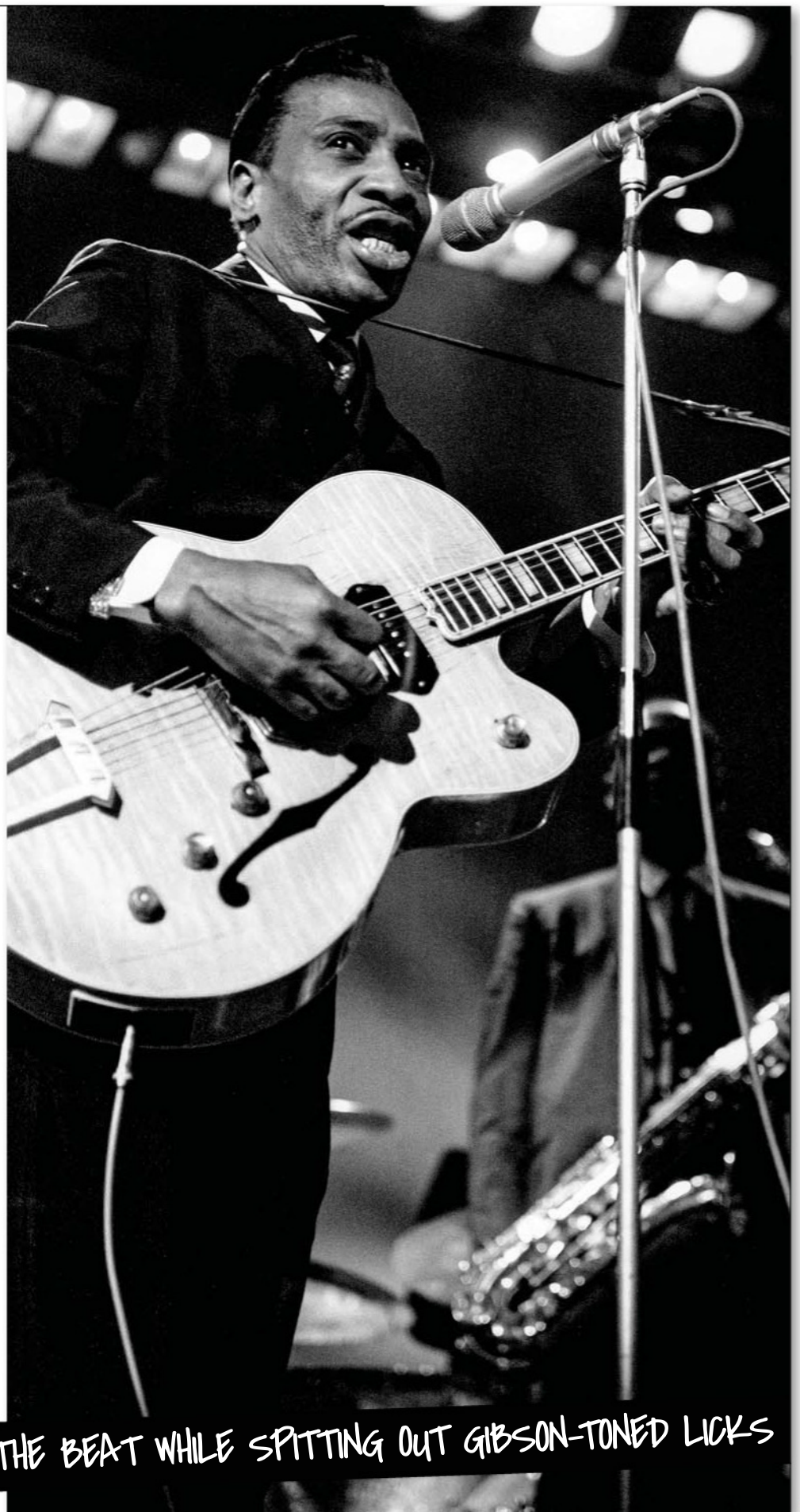
ZZ TOP DEGUËLLO

(1979)



ZZ's head honcho Billy Gibbons had his tongue in cheek behind that famous beard when he said: "For a guitarist such as myself, it's easy to play the blues: you put your fingers in the right place on your guitar and the instrument does the rest." Joking aside, Gibbons' mastery of blues phrasing is evident in his band's early-'70s classics *Jesus Just Left Chicago* and *Blue Jean Blues*, and is captured in perfect clarity on *A Fool For Your Stockings* from *Degüello*, an album on which he also paid tribute to Robert Johnson and Elmore James with a cover of the deathless standard *Dust My Broom*.

Standout track: *A Fool For Your Stockings*

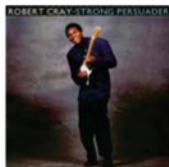


T-BONE LAYING BACK ON THE BEAT WHILE SPITTING OUT GIBSON-TONED LICKS



ROBERT CRAY STRONG PERSUADER

(1986)



Updating the blues from its roots into something slicker and more contemporary sounding in the mid-'80s, this mainstream breakthrough for the Strat-wielding Cray

remains highly lauded to this day. His clean fretwork on singles like *Smoking Gun* and *Right Next Door (Because Of Me)* led to an invite from Keith Richards to join Chuck Berry's backing band and touring opportunities with the likes of Eric Clapton. Having grown up watching originals like Albert Collins, Freddie King and Muddy Waters, Cray now himself stands as one of the elder statesmen who paved the way for what the blues has become.

Standout track: *Smoking Gun*

JOHN MAYER CONTINUUM

(2006)



Mayer achieved great things with his first two records, but it was the third that made him the electric blues hero we know today. It's also the album that introduced the

world to *Slow Dancing In A Burning Room* – a modern blues standard that's been covered to death on stages and in bedrooms since its release. *Continuum* also includes Mayer's take on the Hendrix classic *Bold As Love*, and is notable for being the first album made with The Black One – a Custom Shop Strat made in late 2004 by master builder John Cruz, inspired by the singer/songwriter's SRV signature and Fender's heavily relic'd Rory Gallagher line.

Standout track: *Slow Dancing In A Burning Room*

JEFF HEALEY MESS OF BLUES

(2008)



The blind Canadian guitarist – who would often perform seated, with his fretting hand over the neck like a lap-steel player – was so well-versed in the art of blues that B.B. King

said “he was like another one of my sons”. Likewise, Stevie Ray Vaughan once admitted that Healey had “deeper roots than I probably have”. *Mess Of Blues*, released less than a fortnight after Healey's passing in 2008, comprises four live tracks and six studio recordings, with electrifying renditions of famous works by Freddie King, Hank Williams and Neil Young, and an unforgettable

SMOKING GUN

Robert Cray on stage in London in 1991. Cray now stands as one of the elder statesmen who paved the way for what the blues has become today.

elongated version of the B.B. ballad *How Blue Can You Get*.

Standout track: *How Blue Can You Get*

ERIC GALES CROWN

(2022)



“My name is Eric Gales, any questions?” asks the blues supremo at the beginning of *Crown*. Well, come to think of it, there are a few – mainly

centred around how one player can exude such an impossible amount of talent. Plugging his signature Magneto guitar into his DV Mark Raw Dawg amp, the American guitarist's chord voicings and leads are nothing short of breathtaking on tracks like *The Storm*, *Stand Up* and *Too Close To The Fire*. And of course, there's that headline-stealing collaboration with Joe Bonamassa on *I Want My Crown* – a tour de force from two giants of modern blues.

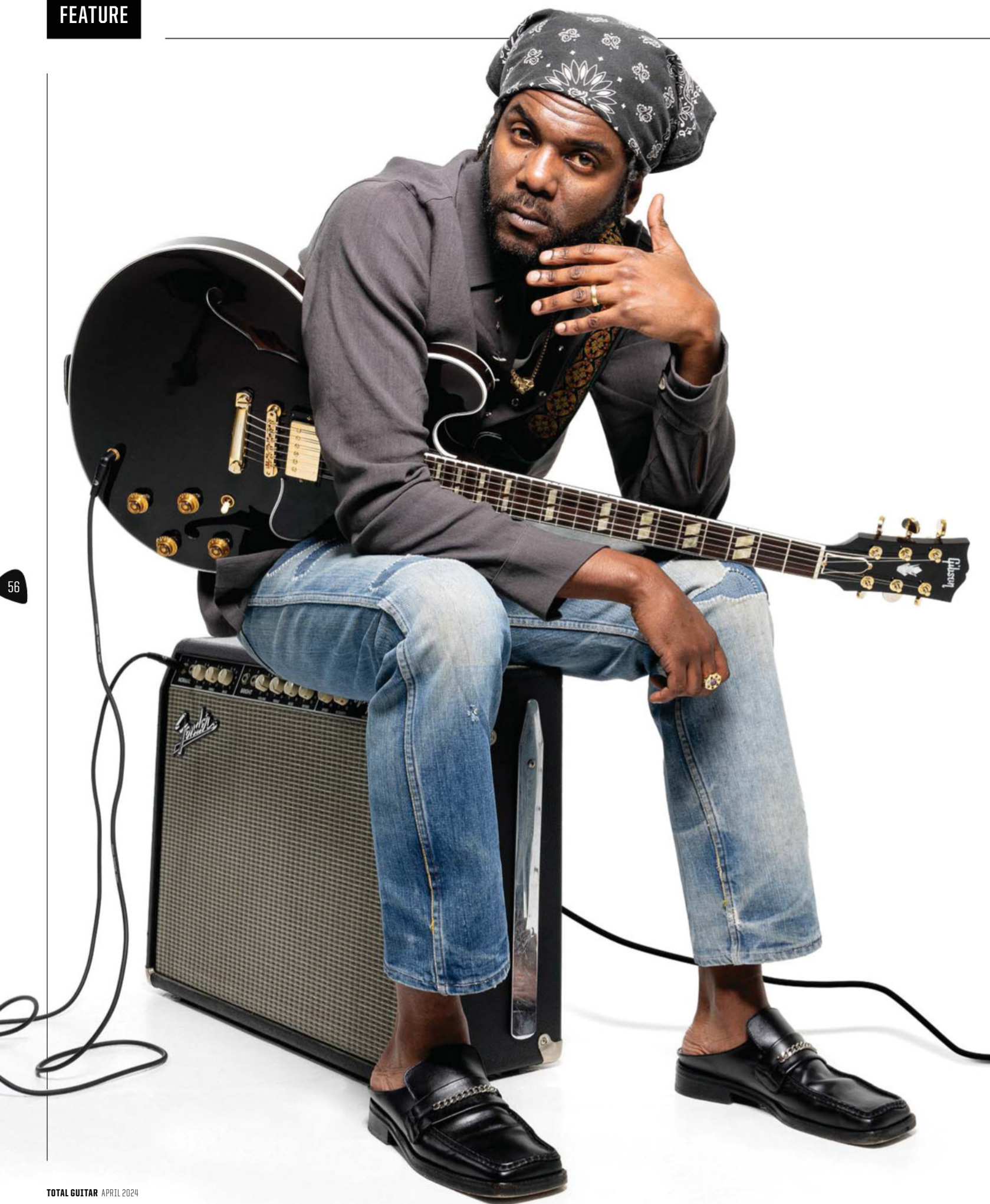
Standout track: *I Want My Crown*



THE SOUND OF SMOOTH



**INTRODUCING NEW STAINLESS STEEL FLATWOUND
ELECTRIC GUITAR & SHORT SCALE BASS STRINGS**



"I JUST LOVE MAKING NOISE."

In a powerful and experimental new album, **Gary Clark Jr.** is channelling the pioneering spirit of the blues greats.

"With music and gear," he says, "it's cool to paint with all the colours..."

MY OWN NOISE"

Words Amit Sharma

When Gary Clark Jr. greets *Total Guitar* on Zoom, it's with a warm smile and a slight sense of amazement. After a quick scan of this writer's music room, what grabs his attention is an unexpected "blast from the past" – the same electric guitar he cut his teeth on, in the exact same finish, on a guitar rack in the background. The rare model in question is a late-'90s Japanese-made Ibanez Blazer in Vintage Sunburst, which is exactly what the Texan brought along to the blues jams that schooled him at the very beginning of his teenage years. These were no ordinary club nights, however, given how Antone's – the legendary downtown Austin venue – was also where Stevie Ray and Jimmie Vaughan started their careers, and a place that was frequented by many a guitar great.

Seeing the old favourite transports Clark Jr. back to the start of his musical journey and, as we soon learn, draws parallels to much of his work on latest album *JPEG RAW*. The 12 tracks eloquently stretch out the format of blues into new sonic horizons without losing the core fundamental values, travelling through the realms of gospel, jazz, soul and hip-hop while also roping in star guests including Stevie Wonder, George Clinton and Valerie June.

"What felt different about this record is that I kinda went back to my 12 year-old self," Gary says. "There was a fork in the road where I could have headed towards blues or shred. I chose blues, and ended up being the kid at those jam nights with that same Ibanez Blazer and a 60-watt solid-state Crate amp. The blues guys were looking at me like I was crazy! I actually still have the Blazer and play it all the time. I bought it because I needed some versatility. I thought the coil tap meant it would cover all the tones I'd need for the rest of my life."

He adds with a laugh: "That didn't quite go according to plan..."

So what exactly informed the musical direction you took on this album?

After that Ibanez and Crate setup, I got myself a Fender DeVille, a Jimmie Vaughan Stratocaster and a Gibson ES-125, but I had a bunch of friends who were listening to Guns N' Roses and they introduced me to Slash's playing. The G3 thing was also huge when I started – you had Steve Vai, Joe Satriani and Eric Johnson playing together. I'd read about those guys all the time in the guitar magazines. I'll never forget seeing Eric Johnson playing *Cliffs Of Dover* on Austin City Limits. I'd stop the tape, rewind it and watch every part closely. Eventually I realised it was too complicated for me. I knew I needed to learn more of the basics and figured I'd circle back around to it later down the line.

Did you ever get round to it?

Well, fast-forward to 2020, the whole world shut down and I decided to become a 12 year-old guitar player learning again. This time, however, I went the other way and got an Ibanez with a Floyd Rose! I went crazy on distortion, chorus and delay, going nuts in my studio for hours and hours every day. That was the approach for this album. I was being a full-on musician and not sticking to one style. I didn't care. I didn't



know what was going on with the music business or my record. I just played for me. I didn't care what anybody thought because I didn't know if anybody would hear it or not!

But we're guessing you relied on more vintage-leaning instruments for the album sessions? There's the 1961 Gibson Les Paul SG Standard reissue from Pat Smear you used on your last album, plus all the Gibson and Epiphone archtops you're typically seen with.

I mainly used my Gibson ES-355. They hooked me up with a very special one

of those. I used my Epiphone Casino, that SG you mentioned which Pat Smear gave me, as well as my signature SG. There was a 1991 American-made Fender Squier Strat. What else? There was a Wide Sky guitar – Patch Rubin in Taos [New Mexico] has been really doing his thing with these handmade guitars. I think that's about it. I didn't really go too crazy. There was a Dobro on the song *Don't Start*, that I completely fuzzed out and played nasty slide over – which was very disrespectful!

Is your Fender Vibro-King still the main amp?

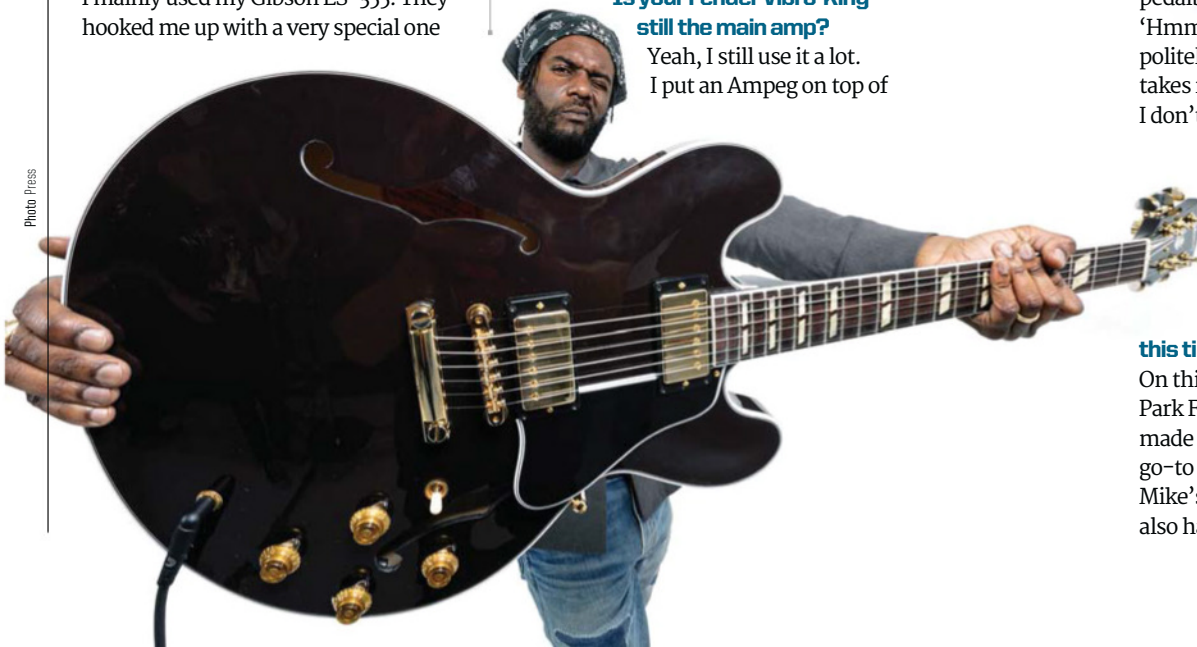
Yeah, I still use it a lot. I put an Ampeg on top of

FUTURE FACING
"I'm not going to do the one-four-five thing just because people want some sense of nostalgia"

my 2x12 Fender cabinet and had fun with that. But there was also a 100-watt Cesar Diaz amp at Arlyn Studios that I fell in love with. I could just crank that thing up and go... It was unapologetic playing! The tones I got out of that were sick, especially with my whole pedal rig. I was experimenting a lot. We also went over to Mike Elizondo's studio in Tennessee. We've done some great work together musically, writing- and production-wise. Anytime I go to his studio, I'll play through whatever he decides to rig up. I'll bring my pedalboard and he'll look at it saying, 'Hmm, let's try something else!' He very politely pushes all my gear aside and takes responsibility for the sounds. I don't know what I used half the time!

You're well-known for being a bit of a fuzz aficionado, having mainly stuck with the Analog Man Astro Tone and the Fulltone Octafuzz in the past. What are we hearing this time round?

On this record it was an EarthQuaker Park Fuzz and the Toronzo Cannon fuzz made by Function F(x). Those are my go-to pedals. But so much got done at Mike's studio, I can't say for sure. He also had this crazy reverb pedal that



I cannot remember the name of. It was this out of this world, psychedelic-looking thing. I know we used some Universal Audio delays and reverbs. There was a TC Electronics tremolo. Things keep getting rotated out. Whenever I'm not quite satisfied, the people in my band and our techs will throw stuff on my pedalboard and tell me to mess with the dials, just to see what works. I'll try it all out for a week or two, and keep swapping stuff out.

It was interesting to see footage of you with an Abasi Concepts Larada Space-T a few years ago. It's definitely not the kind of guitar you're known for playing!

Oh yeah! That thing is a beautiful instrument. Tosin is such an incredible player and his attention to detail for his brand is crazy. When I picked up that guitar, it was so buttery. It just made sense, you know? Every single amp it hit, it resonated just right. So shout out to him. He's been doing his thing with those funky space guitars. It's very cool!

It says a lot about your attitude towards gear in general, to be honest.

At a certain point, it's not about sticking to what you know. I've always been open to trying stuff out because why not? You never know until you try it. Especially with music and gear – it's cool to paint with all the colours. If you get an opportunity to try something, you never know what might happen. You could find a creative spark and end up being inspired to do things you never thought you'd be capable of. There's no greater buzz for me than self-discovery and problem-solving. I love the idea of adjusting my perspective in ways I'd never considered before.

So what are the oldest or most valuable instruments in the collection?

I've got a 1937 Martin D-18... at least, I think that's what it is! I've got a 1966 Gibson Casino, a 1968 Riviera that my wife got me which is in mint condition. I opened it and immediately put it back in the case because I didn't want to get any dust on it! It's an incredible instrument, but she always tells me, 'You never play that guitar I got you!' She also got me a nice late-'70s Firebird.



TOUGH LOVE
"Maybe one day, when I've beaten up all my guitars, I'll sit down and appreciate them..."

I've got a 1958 ES-125. That's a couple of them. I'm not too big on being a collector. I'm not too precious with my stuff, I want to beat things up and play them in. Maybe one day, when I slow down and I've beaten up all my guitars, I'll sit down and appreciate them. But I'm scared! I remember with the first SG signature I got from Gibson, I tripped over a cord and the thing went *bam!* The headstock snapped off and that's happened with too many of my guitars. I don't want to be that guy with all the precious ones.

One of the new songs, *To The End Of The Earth*, is notable for your usage of harmonic minor and diminished ideas alongside embellished jazz voicings.

This definitely feels like new ground for you.

If I'm being honest, I feel like I've been getting away with the pentatonic for a long time! Straight-up minor blues and seventh chords. It's been fun; people love that. I love it. That's the sound of the blues, it's rootsy and evokes a certain feeling, but I also listen to Wes Montgomery, Django Reinhardt, Charlie Christian and Lonnie Johnson. Even B.B. King in his early days was doing some crazy jazz voicings and wild runs! I was inspired because Mike Elizondo played me this record Johnny Hartman and John Coltrane did together. It had this beautiful singing, this crooning that nobody seems to be doing anymore. I sat there with some chords and put it together. We recorded it real quick. When everyone asked if I had another verse, I said 'No, that's it, all I got!'

Other tracks like *Maktub*, *This Is Who We Are* and *Hearts In Retrograde* demonstrate how lyrical you can be with the humble blues scale. What pentatonic tips can you offer those of us who haven't grown up around so much history?

I didn't study any music theory or scales until the pandemic. When I was the young kid at those jams, people would point at the note on my fretboard or I'd mirror what they were doing. They'd say, 'This is the one, this is the four, this is the five'. That's all I knew. Everything else was just guesswork. See, it wasn't cool to know music theory when I was growing up, it was about the feeling. I'd ask all the other players and they'd say, 'All you need is three chords and the truth!' So that's just what I lived by – the pentatonic scale with a little bit of soul. I'd hit some bum notes that sounded kinda off but weren't, and I wouldn't know what they were called.

In 2017, you and Eric Gales teamed up in the studio to reproduce Freddie King's version of *Boogie Man*. That felt like a big moment for modern blues.

Eric Gales is one of my favourites, if not the favourite guitar player of mine. The way he can be so soulful, funky and free with it, but his attack and intention is so clean and precise. He's like the Beethoven of guitar – that guy will take you to church! His level of talent is so crazy. Working with him was such an honour, it was amazing and I felt so inspired. I'm not going to lie, I definitely tried to steal a couple of licks!

"I DECIDED TO BECOME A 12-YEAR-OLD GUITAR PLAYER LEARNING AGAIN"

➔ **Eric Clapton once sent you a letter thanking you for making him want to play again. That's pretty powerful. How many other people can say that?**

I'm not sure, but I can't be the only one! It was definitely an honour. I think back to the 12 year-old sitting around in the living room, whose sisters were complaining as he kept watching the Stevie Ray Vaughan tribute concert. Hearing Eric Clapton on *Ain't Gone 'N' Give Up On Love* was magical. I loved the sound of that Strat and that vibrato. I'd listen to that solo over and over again. I remember my dad handing over Clapton and Santana records and saying to me, 'If you want to learn how to play guitar, this is how you do it!' That was my homework! So to have Eric Clapton call me up and say such nice things meant a lot. There are no words that can fully capture it, almost like it was a dream. You want to be called up by the big dogs and then they do! I have to remember, 'this really happened!'

Which other blues players did you learn from the most?

My biggest tricks came from people like Buddy Guy, who would overbend his strings and exaggerate the hell out of it – it's ridiculous how far that guy can bend a string! I learned how to do things like that in order to evoke emotion. Put a fuzz pedal on top and your eyes will roll into the back of your head! I've also been trying to play with more intention; being more musical instead of getting too excited.

How exactly does one achieve that?

When I first started, it was three-piece band stuff and I only had a few songs. All I had was long guitar solos to fill up the time. That's where I learned how to start slow, build it up, introduce more excitement and bring it down before a final climax going back into the final chorus or verse. My songs would end up being 12 minutes long!

These days I'm more precise about it. I kinda get grossed out by these long, ridiculous, noisy solos. I want to be more creative in terms of orchestrating and arranging music... because I love music. Sometimes it's a little disrespectful to put a loud, obnoxious solo on a beautiful arrangement.

Speaking of beautiful arrangements, in contrast to a lot of your peers, you mix the blues with other genres to produce more contemporary sounds. You might have one foot in the past, but it seems like you're only ever looking forward...

All the guys that came before me were pioneers in terms of moving it forward. Robert Johnson. Muddy Waters. Son House. All these guys put their own flavour into this music and evolved it. We sometimes look at it as this thing to preserve, but the guys who were making it weren't preserving it. They were trying to push the boundaries. If you're trying to do Muddy Waters, that's some big shoes to fill, and I don't really want to spend my time trying to be that guy. People used to tell me all the time, 'Just play the blues, you gotta preserve the blues!' And I'd think, 'Yeah, but look at Buddy Guy with a record like *Sweet Tea* – what the hell is that?' Why would people want me to sound like Buddy Guy's old records when even Buddy Guy doesn't sound like that anymore? What the hell kinda sense does that make?

It's easy to forget the blues had to evolve to get where it is now.

Hubert Sumlin was an electric guitar pioneer. He didn't play it like Charlie Christian or Wes Montgomery. The guys who ended up listening to him, like Keith Richards and Eric Clapton, then took it forward in their own way. I'm not going to just do the one-four-five thing just because people want some sense of nostalgia. That's not my role. Blues keeps on going. It's inspired by everything around it. Why would I not put my own filter on that? I like playing and experimenting. I just love making noise – my own noise. Why not?!



GARY'S CAREER IN GEAR

1997 Ibanez Blazer BL850VB

The Blazers were originally introduced in 1980 to replace the Roadster line and were later revived in the mid-'90s, proving that – despite being more associated with metal machines – Ibanez still had excellent options for those in need of something more sonically flexible. Essentially, they designed a Swiss Army Knife Superstrat with an alder body, a quartersawn maple neck and an HSH pickup configuration that could be split as genuine single-coils. "If there were only one guitar in the world, it would have to be the Blazer," Ibanez boldly declared in their 1998 catalogue. "Why? Because the Blazer can handle anything. A funk recording session on Thursday, a blues gig on Friday night, the wedding gig on Saturday you don't want to play and the original band showcase on Sunday you do want to play."

1961 Gibson Les Paul SG Standard Reissue

By his own admission, Gary Clark Jr. never really saw himself playing a Gibson SG until he made his guest appearance on 2014 Foo Fighters track *What Did I Do?/ God As My Witness* from the group's eighth album *Sonic Highways*. He borrowed Pat Smear's P-90-loaded 1961 SG reissue for the recordings and, after he fell head over heels for its "light weight and nasty edge", the guitar was kindly gifted to him. It would loosely serve as inspiration for the Gary Clark Jr. signature SGs that were launched in late 2017, fitted with "a trio of aggressive P-90 pickups" and available in Gloss Yellow or Vintage Cherry finishes.

2015 Epiphone Blak & Blu Casino

Having recorded and toured with a number of Casinos over the years, particularly ones from the mid-to-late '60s, Gary Clark Jr.'s first signature was the Blak & Blu model launched through Epiphone in 2015. Named after his major label debut, boasting two Gibson USA P-90 pickups and available in two versions, one with a trapeze tailpiece and the other with a Bigsby, it offered a lot of guitar for very little money. "They're a dream," raved the guitarist at the time. The hollowbodies were originally popularised by Beatles legend Paul McCartney – who purchased a 1962 Casino in 1964 because he wanted a guitar that could feed back like Jimi Hendrix. It's what he ended up using for his leads on *Ticket To Ride*, *Taxman* and *Helter Skelter*, in turn inspiring guitarists John Lennon and George Harrison to purchase their own.



Words, guitars and backing Richard Barrett

BLUES JR.

It's a case of 'blues, but not as we know it' on Gary Clark Jr.'s latest album *JPEG RAW*. Here's a brief look at some of Gary's musical approaches

Hopefully the previous five pages have given you plenty of insight into *JPEG RAW*. And, if you hadn't gathered, we think it's a damn fine record – highly eclectic and doing a mighty good job of defying musical categorisation. Sure, there's some meat and potatoes blues and rock phrasing for us

guitarists to learn from, too, but it's all set against a truly diverse backing.

Here, in our lesson, we look at some of the musical approaches Gary uses. In the context of our bite-sized tab/notation examples, it's hard to convey the scale of Gary's creative vision, but we do have a suggestion on that score – pun not

intended! Each of our riffs could work in soul, funk, blues or jazz, and, to a lesser extent, some genres of rock and World music. We recommend learning our riffs and trying them (or short phrases taken from them) in various styles when you jam. Make sure to take a listen to *JPEG RAW* for inspiration, too!

01 CROSS-GENRE CLEAN RIFF

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 85

Dm7 G/D Dm7 G/D Dm7 G/D Dm7 G/D

Inspired by the diverse range of styles – old and new – on Gary's latest album, this example uses a super-clean tone and funky approach with lots of clipped chords and sliding pentatonic lines. Note in bars 3 and 4 the muted strings are occasionally played to add a purely rhythmic element.

02 JAZZ INFLUENCES

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 83

Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

Gary experiments with jazz on his new album. Here, use a neck pickup with a clean tone (slightly warmer, with less treble than the previous example) and some reverb, first strumming the chords with a downstroke, then picking the linking melody notes. No backing track here, but there is a count in and click to help you keep to time.

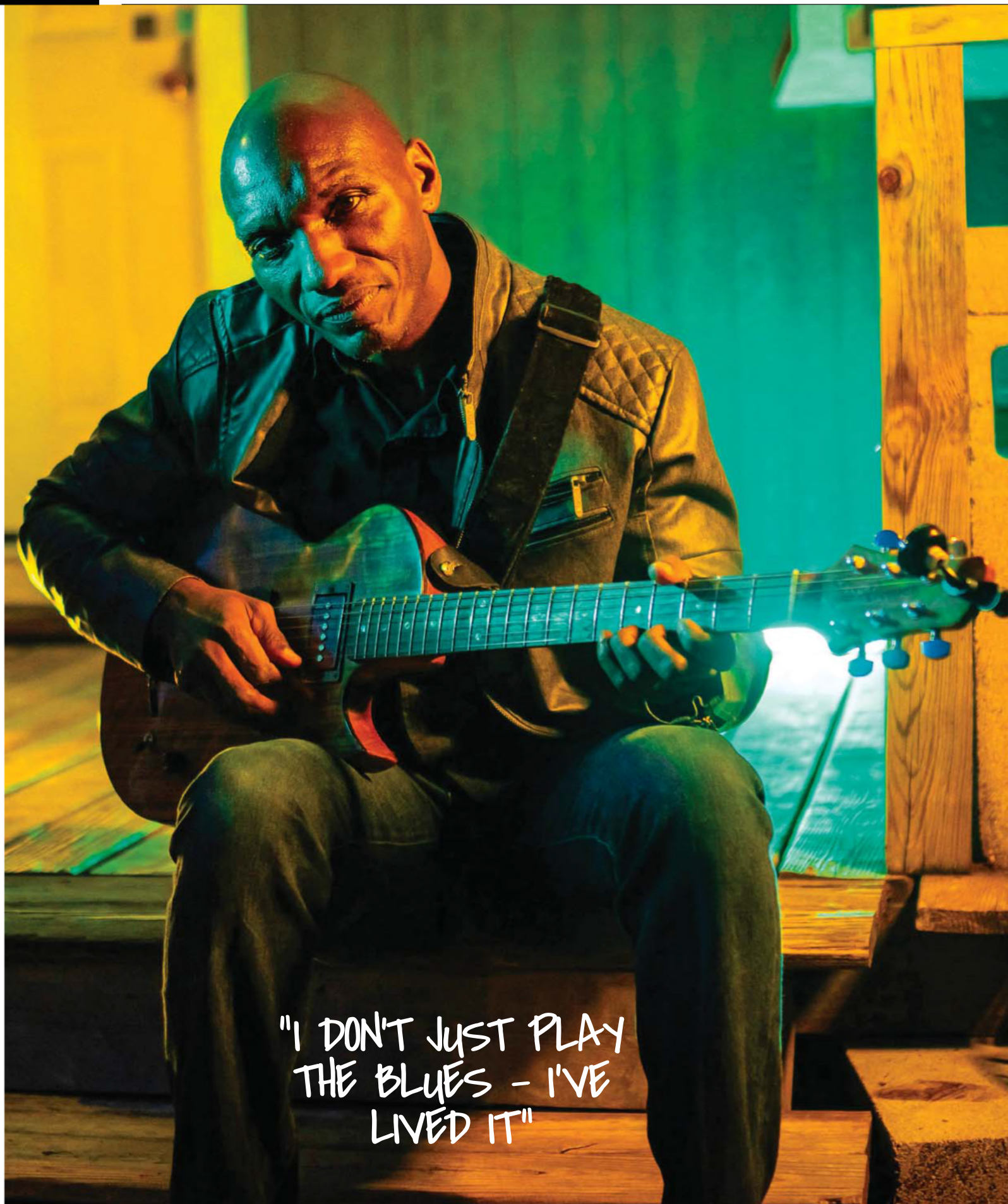
03 FINGERSTYLE DISTORTED BLUES RIFFING

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 87

N.C.

In this third and final example inspired by Gary's new album, this bluesy riff is played with a distorted (but not too distorted) tone. Try this fingerstyle, but really digging in with the picking hand – the sound of the strings pinging back against the fretboard really adds something to the overall sound.



"I DON'T JUST PLAY
THE BLUES - I'VE
LIVED IT"

Words Phil Weller Photo Jim Arbogast

"I DON'T NEED MUCH TO GET MY POINT ACROSS"

Cedric Burnside's style of blues is deep and deceptively complex. But with gear, he keeps it simple...

Cedric Burnside's musical DNA is defined by tradition and authenticity. Born in Memphis, Tennessee into a heritage of hill country blues musicians, the 45-year-old's career – which saw him transition from drummer to bandleader – has been all about “keeping the music alive”, but doing it in his own way.

“My big daddy, R. L. Burnside, opened the door for the Burnside family and I’m grateful for that,” he says. “But I also think that, in the midst of keeping the hill country blues alive, he would want me to make my own way. This music has been embedded in my heart since I was a kid watching R. L. play, but you have to change with the times.”

Cedric can't read music, and so his music is the epitome of ‘heart over head’. For him, the blues isn't a genre – it's the telling of his story. A great example of his reinterpretation of his family's music, from his latest album, *Hill Country Love*, is Funky. It injects a danceable guitar groove into the style's often-peculiar rhythmic template. “It's totally different from any song on the album,” he says. “I was debating not putting it on the album, but I couldn't stop playing it, so I thought, ‘What the hell!’”

This track offers an easier entry point – and a rare usage of a I–IV–V progression in his repertoire – into a blues style which can otherwise be a little discombobulating. “I always tell people that hill country blues is something within itself. You either get it or you don't,” he believes. “To me, the unorthodox rhythms make it sound and feel different than any other style of blues. It's all off-beat on purpose.”

Originating in Mississippi, hill country blues places great emphasis on West African rhythms, brought over to the US on slave ships. Playing it is all about feel,

even if it's unusual. “I don't knock anybody who's been to music school,” Cedric says, “but playing music by the book is a bit different to coming up with music from your heart. Musicians have gotten on stage with the kings and queens of hill country blues and not known what to do because they were so by-the-book, and this music isn't in there! All the notes are broken. They don't match up how you'd think they would.”

A total of five guitars were used across the new record. Front and centre are two guitars custom-made for the guitarist by a brain surgeon called Mike Aronson. “He's a good friend of mine,” Cedric explains. “He makes guitars as a hobby and he made me two. I love the feel and tone of them.”

His first is based off a Les Paul, and features a more PRS-styled headstock. Comprising twin humbuckers fashioned after P-90s, it's become his electric of choice for standard tuning songs. He told Aronson not to bother with a tone knob, saying all he needed was a control for “turning the volume up.”

The second build, meanwhile, traces the shape of a Stratocaster and offers a twangy trio of single coil pickups. It's employed for open G songs, whilst two Martins, an EST 1883 and a 000-15M are his acoustics of choice. However, he quickly turns the conversation towards his latest purchase.

“I've always wanted a Resonator,” he purrs. “I only got one recently and this one in particular – it has a very rough but warm feeling. When I practised *You Gotta Move* on it, which is my version of a Mississippi Fred McDowell song, I was stunned by how raw it sounded. It sounded good on the Martins, but this felt different. I used to love hearing R. L. play that song. He always made it sound so gritty and warm. So playing it on the Resonator made me think of him.”

Cedric plugs his electrics into an A/B box, allowing him to run a bass and lead amp simultaneously. An Ampeg PF-500/115HE head and cab and Fender Tone Master Twin Reverb are the weapons of choice here.

“It's all the power I'll ever need,” he says, adding, “the only pedal I have connected to them is a tuner. When it comes down to it, all I want is to get loud enough without feeding back. I don't need much to get my point across and I'm glad of that.”

Asked why hill country blues is the perfect vehicle for his storytelling, he says: “Life is always gonna throw you something to write about. That could be good or bad. The most important thing is that you write about it. If you look at the Book of Psalms, they've all got the blues, whether they want to call it that or not. They're talking about what they're going through, and that's all I'm doing, telling my story and being present in the moment. I know that the blues is classified as a genre, but I don't see it like that. The blues is feelings and that's why it's here to stay. I don't just play the blues – I've lived it. I know what it's like to wake up and not having anything to eat, and walk four miles to haul water. My blues comes out differently than somebody who just plays the blues because they like it.”

While his greatest inspirations have now sadly passed, he's quick to mention two names under whose fingertips the future of the blues is safe and sound. “Kingfish [Ingram] is keeping it going and I'm very proud of him, especially being so young. He's so humble, and talented, so I definitely look up to him. Jontavious Willis, too – he's an acoustic player and a really good musician. I listen to those guys a lot.”

However, Cedric isn't about to pass the torch just yet, and *Hill Country Love* is a testament to keeping the family's legacy alive in a way that no one else could.

***Hill Country Love* is released on April 5.**

Words Jonathan Horsley

10 LEGENDARY BLUES GUITARS

Behind every great blues player is a great guitar, and they don't come more iconic than this

Maybe it's all the bending and vibrato, and the associated pain that comes with steel-string manipulation, but there is something deeper about the connection between the blues player and their guitar. The great blues players do something with those guitars;

they take on a life of their own. Their guitars are often named, as though a surrogate for a lover, past or present. Here we're going to take a look at some of the most famous blues six-strings in history, and also suggest some reasonably priced options on today's market for the next generation of players to tell their story on. That's us, right?



01 Robert Johnson's circa-1926 Gibson L-1

We might imagine Robert Johnson's life in sepia and monochrome but that's an illusion sold by archive photography. His reality was lived in vivid colour as the Delta blues godfather breathed life into the art, mostly in juke joints but, thankfully for posterity, across two recording sessions too. He played a number of guitars but the 1920s Gibson flat-top - spruce topped, round-bottomed - is the one we remember.

BUY NOW
Epiphone I-00 Studio
£419

Small in body, big on mojo.



02 Muddy Waters' 1958 Fender Telecaster

Someone needed to take that sound pioneered by Johnson and the acoustic forebears of blues and electrify it. Enter Muddy Waters. Mississippi born, made in Chicago, Waters' Telecaster (aka The Hoss) was his number one. Serial number: 026176, ash-bodied refinished red, upgraded with a six-saddle bridge and rosewood neck, it gave Waters some spike to work with. The Stones, Clapton et al were listening.

BUY NOW
Fender Vintera II '60s Telecaster
£1049
Pro-quality, sensibly priced.





03 Stevie Ray Vaughan's circa-1963 Fender Strat Number One

Number one, aka 'First Wife', is the greatest guitar in Texas blues, recognisable for its engraved pickguard, three-colour sunburst, and a left-handed vibrato on a right-handed guitar. Bought at Ray Hennig's Heart of Texas Music, Austin, Number One is a mongrel with a '63 body, '59 pickups '62 neck, but it had guts.

BUY NOW

Squier Classic Vibe '60s Stratocaster
£379

A great, modifiable beginner Strat.



04 B.B. King's Gibson ES-355 Lucille

There have been many Lucilles in B.B. King's arsenal over the years, but they all share the same story: named after a woman two men were fighting over in a dancehall, knocking over a barrel of burning fuel in the process and starting a fire that King ran into in order to save his beloved guitar. Typically, Lucille was an ES-355, dressed in a tux, f-holes filled in, and a TP-6 bridge because intonation is everything.

BUY NOW

Epiphone BB King Lucille
£969

Take out fire insurance.



05 Eric Clapton's 1959 Gibson Les Paul 'Beano Burst'

Eric Clapton used it to track *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* in 1966, and it's named Beano because Slowhand is reading the Beano on the album cover. What makes this the Loch Ness Monster of Les Pauls is that it was stolen in '66 and hasn't been seen since. The late Peter Green said in 1999 it'd be worth £50 million. Where is it?

BUY NOW

Epiphone 1959 Les Paul Standard
£969

Won't Burst the bank.



06 Billy Gibbons' 1959 Gibson Les Paul 'Pearly Gates'

Another Holy Grail Les Paul, and one that ZZ Top's whiskered master of ceremonies says is irreplaceable. Gibbons bought Pearly Gates in 1968 for \$250, from a country player turned rancher whom he described as "a John Wayne guy". A feature of every ZZ Top record since, it is one of the best-sounding Les Pauls ever made.

BUY NOW

Gibson Les Paul Standard '50s
£2,285

Pony up for a serious tone gun.





07 The Greeny 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard

Not another '59 Les Paul Standard? Yes, and how could we leave Greeny off this list? Owned by two blues greats, first Peter Green, from whom it takes its name, then Gary Moore, and now by Metallica's Kirk Hammett, Greeny has the iconic out-of-phase tone and mismatched controls.

BUY NOW:

Epiphone Kirk Hammett 'Greeny' 1959 Les Paul Standard
£1,499

Hammett says it's his favourite replica Greeny.



08 Johnny Winter's 1964 Gibson Firebird V

They say dogs look like their owners (or is it the other way round?) but what about guitarists and their instruments? There was something truly simpatico about Winter and his beat-down Polaris White Firebird V, bearing the scars of its removed maestro, the worn Firebird log on the pickguard, all the signs of a life lived hard. And then it had that voice, the perfect vehicle for Winter's animalistic playing style.

BUY NOW:

Epiphone Firebird
£549

It's not Polaris White, but it's all right!



09 Albert King's 1959 Gibson Flying V 'Lucy'*

We're putting an asterisk on which Lucy is considered Albert King's main squeeze because, like his namesake B.B., he loved a few in his life, but the korina V from the first batch out the Gibson factory helped establish one of the most captivating presences in blues. Legendary luthier Dan Erlewine built King some custom Lucy V's, replete with her name on an open-book style headstock.

BUY NOW:

Epiphone 1958 Korina Flying V
£1,299

Gibson USA humbuckers FTW.



10 Albert Collins' 1966 Custom Telecaster

The Iceman cometh! Now here's a Telecaster to pin the audience to the back of their seats, which Albert Collins, the undisputed Master of the Telecaster, did on a nightly basis throughout his career. Famously, he'd tune his Tele to open F minor, using a capo to change the key, playing with his fingers through a dined Fender Quad. With a Gibson PAF at the neck position, what else could anyone need from a guitar?

BUY NOW:

Squier Classic Vibe '60s Custom Telecaster
£379

Vintage-inspired, modern price.





Budget Blues Rigs

AMPS AND EFFECTS FOR WHEN YOU'VE GOT NO MONEY, NO LUCK...

Fender Blues Junior IV £679

Not as cheap as it used to be but still our number one for a compact tube combo with classic Fender tone. It'll pair nicely with any of the above.

Harley Benton Tube5 £129

Super simple, super cheap, and as user-friendly as a tube combo gets, this is a lot of fun for beginner blues, complete with an all-important single-watt bedroom setting.

Laney Cub-Super10 £329

Boutique tube combo design meets affordability, with the onboard boost just what you need for solos.

Boss BD-2 Blues Driver £99

The legendary low-gain overdrive is appropriately named, giving you ample drive for warm, juicy blues tones.

Wampler Tumnus Deluxe £199

A modern classic, the Deluxe version of Brian Wampler's Klon-inspired drive has plenty of tone shaping power, with switchable Normal and Hot modes, and will work gangbusters with any of the guitar/amp combos above.

Ibanez Tube Screamer Mini £99

Tube Screamer is a blues guitar no-brainer, an SRV favourite that adds some midrange body to your drive.



Words, guitars and backing Richard Barrett

BLUES ICONS

Get inside the styles of 15 blues greats, complete with scale shapes to show you how it's done

Today in 2024 we can listen to over one hundred years of blues. Sylvester Weaver's unaccompanied instrumental *Guitar Blues* (1923) may be the earliest example of recorded blues guitar, with Son House, Charlie Patton, Memphis Minnie, Lead Belly, Robert Johnson and many more cutting records in the late 1920s and '30s.

These greats inspired the post-war Chicago blues explosion, which was subsequently seized upon by "British Blues Invasion" bands, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who and more in the mid-'60s.

From there, blues-rock was born, and the style has branched out ever since, taking on wider musical influences with every passing year.

Here in our lesson, we're covering a little bit of everything from early Delta blues, slide guitar, Chicago blues, through to the styles of modern day shred-blues greats like Eric Gales and Joe Bonamassa.

Where relevant, you'll find scale boxes to help guide you. Don't be put off by the technical nature of these scales. A key part of this lesson is how our licks veer away from formal scales – and this is the very heart of blues playing.

01 ROBERT JOHNSON

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♩=90

Picked fingerstyle, this example uses a slide for all notes except, obviously, the open sixth string. This is usually worn on the third or fourth finger of the fretting hand as this allows a combination of slide and conventional fretting as you become more advanced. Remember to position your slide directly over the fretwire and lightly mute the bass notes throughout.

02 MEMPHIS MINNIE

bit.ly/tg382audio

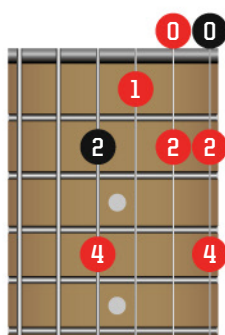
♩=110

This example is played with downward thumbstrokes, alternating with upstrokes using the first finger. It's a technique Memphis Minnie used, and it gives the impression of two guitars playing separate rhythm and melody parts. Note the open strings at the end of each bar which allow for smoother chord changes.

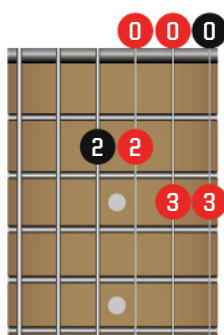
03 SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

bit.ly/tg382audio

Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of the first people to play electric guitar through a very loud valve amp. She usually played with a thumb pick, but our example is just as practical with a regular flat pick. The rapidly-picked notes in bar 1 are best articulated with alternate down- and upstrokes.



E major pentatonic scale



E minor pentatonic scale

Our lick showcases how blues melodies often blur the lines between major and minor tonalities. So what? Well, it means you're sometimes playing minor scales over major chords, and vice versa – and this is key to sounding authentically 'bluesy'.

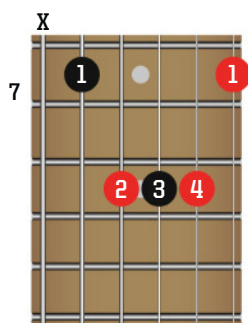
Play through these two pentatonic scales and compare the notes with our lick.

04 ELMORE JAMES

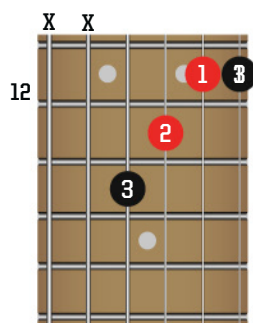
bit.ly/tq382audio

[illegible]

Elmore James usually played slide in an open tuning, but for convenience, our example is arranged in standard tuning. Take care to position the slide over the fret rather than behind it as you would in conventional playing. Muting behind the slide by resting a fretting finger on the strings also helps deliver a cleaner note.



E



E

Check our tab and you'll see how a lot of the 'fretting' (done with a slide) appears at adjacent frets - that's thanks to the bottleneck keeping your finger straight, of course. It means you'll often be thinking chordally, even when playing more melodically.

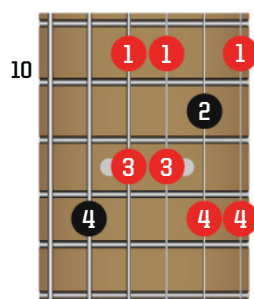
See how our lick targets notes from E major chords where they appear next to each other on the neck.



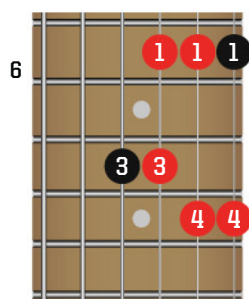
05 B.B. KING

bit.ly/tg382audio

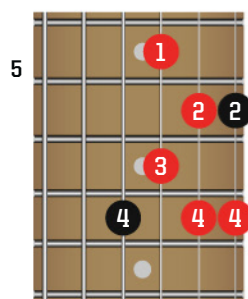
B.B. King used a sharp tone, just on the edge of distortion. Our example is in the key of B $\flat$, a key B.B. used a lot as it suited the brass sections he would often play with. Note particularly the shallow, fast vibrato and flamboyant slides up and down the fretboard. These are real trademarks of B.B.'s style.



B $\flat$ major pentatonic scale



B $\flat$ minor pentatonic scale



B $\flat$ major pentatonic scale

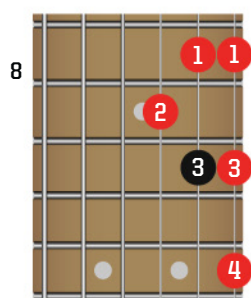
We're mostly in the major pentatonic scale for our B.B. King-style lick, but, again, typically of blues, we're stepping outside momentarily too, hitting the minor variant of the scale in the run up to the F7 chord.

Play these shapes and take another close look at the tab.

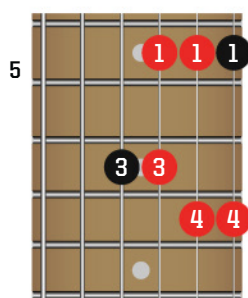
06 BUDDY GUY

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Buddy's aggressive, distorted Strat tones inspired Jimi Hendrix among many others. Our example is played using the neck and middle pickups with plenty of drive and some reverb. Dig in hard with the pick and be sure not to miss details such as staccato notes and quarter-tone bends.



A minor pentatonic scale



A minor pentatonic scale

These shapes of the A minor pentatonic scale give you the building blocks to play through our lick.

Again though, there's more detail to be found in the tab where we briefly head outside of the scale (7th fret of the second string) to add some colour to the sound.

07 JIMI HENDRIX

bit.ly/tg382audio

[illegible]

Jimi was known for his inventive rhythm playing as well as his soloing. This example is inspired by tracks such as *The Wind Cries Mary*, using unusual versions of F, E, and B₁ chords. These versions allow you to add embellishments from the pentatonic scale. Use the neck pickup with a clean tone and some reverb.

08 ERIC CLAPTON

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 132

E

3 3 3

BU RP- BU RP- BU RP- BU

1/4

let ring

10 12 12 12 10 12 12 12 10 12 12 10 8 9 8 9 8 10 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 10 8 9 7 9 9 9 9 9

TAB

Inspired by Eric's playing on the famous 'Beano' album, this example highlights a few ideas you can still hear in his playing today. For example, the re-picked bends in bar 1, the unusual use of D# in bar 2 (against D in the bass and next to E in the guitar part, all giving chromatic flavours) and the ringing doublestops with vibrato in bar 3.

E minor pentatonic scale (shape 4)

E minor pentatonic scale (shape 5)

E minor pentatonic scale (shape 1)

Two small fragments of the E minor pentatonic scale (known as shapes 4 and 5) outline most of our lick here.

They're less well known than the good ol' shape 1, so it's worth comparing them all to see how you can put licks together that travel across the neck.

09 PETER GREEN

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♩ = 120

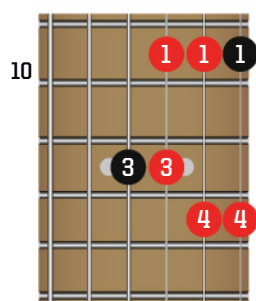
Dm Gm Dm Am A7 Dm

BU

TAB

10 13 (15) 13 10 BU 12 (14) 12 10 12 10 12 10 12 10 12

Peter Green was the master of saying a lot with just a few notes. Our example demonstrates this, featuring lots of held bends with vibrato. Don't be afraid to leave lots of space between the phrases when playing in this style. As with the B.B. King example, you should aim for a sharp, almost distorted tone with reverb.



D minor pentatonic scale

Our Peter Green-style lick is an exercise in simplicity as we stay in one scale throughout.

Take note of the chords above the tab though. They're all from the key of D minor (D E F G A B_b C), with the exception of the A7 (A C[#] E G) which brings in a C[#] note.

10 STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 115

E A E A E

As well as being a great soloist, Stevie was able to create deceptively tricky rhythm parts. Using a bright overdriven tone and the neck and middle pickups of his Strat (though any guitar set for a bright sound could work), you should aim to let the notes and chords ring into each other where possible.

11 DEREK TRUCKS

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 61

A⁷ G⁷ D G G^m D A⁷

w/slide

Derek's incredibly accurate slide playing can sometimes give the illusion of somebody playing in the conventional fretted style. This example is designed to help you develop that facility using lots of slides along a single string. A little distortion and some reverb will help you get the sustain you need.

12 ERIC GALES

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 110

N.C.

One of the most technically challenging examples, this is played using the bridge pickup and plenty of fuzz style distortion. Bar 2 is the trickiest, with its descending pentatonic line. Don't worry if it doesn't fall under the fingers straight away, take your time and work through it slowly – you may be pleasantly surprised!

13 SAMANTHA FISH

bit.ly/tq382audio

♩ = 84

Em G A Em

8va -

BU 12 BU 12 BU 12 BU 12 PB 14 BD BU 15 14 (16) (16) (14) 12 14 (16) 14-12 14-13-12 15 14-12-14-15 15 12-14-15 12-14-15 15 17 (19)

TAB

Coming very much from the roots/rock side of blues, this example is representative of Samantha's pentatonic-based lead playing. Note the picked ascending chromatic run in bar 3 - this is played with alternating down- and upstrokes, then really dig into the ascending line in bar 4 using only downstrokes.

E blues scale

E minor pentatonic scale w/chromatic notes

E minor pentatonic scale w/6th & 9th intervals

The blues scale is a common variation on the minor pentatonic scale. Most guitarists, Samantha Fish included, use it extensively.

We've actually avoided it here in our lick, but it's worth comparing it to the various chromatic additions we that have made.

14 MARCUS KING

bit.ly/tq382audio

[illegible]

This example mixes blues, rock and country styles, with an aggressive distorted tone. Be mindful of details such as the vibrato and staccato hit in bar 1, the pre-bent note in bar 2 and the triplets in bar 4. Once you have this phrase under your fingers don't be afraid to experiment with different timings and groupings of notes.

15 KIRK FLETCHER

bit.ly/tg382audio

Kirk is a fabulous lead player but is also well known for his ability to create interesting chord parts. This example attempts to mix the two approaches with some pentatonic phrases combined with doublestops. A little bit of drive works well with tones like this but be careful not to go too far!

PINK FLOYD

HEY YOU

It's time to scale *The Wall* with Pink Floyd's twin-guitar epic, featuring flatpicked acoustic, plus David Gilmour's liquid leads and beautiful bends

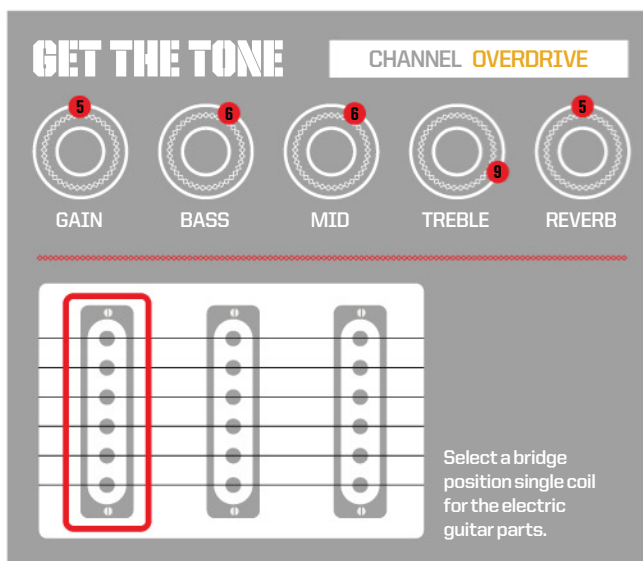
74

Roger Waters has long regarded Pink Floyd's 1979 epic two-disc concept album *The Wall* as his crowning musical achievement – and we'd say he's probably right thanks to the sheer scale of the project. Music notwithstanding, the theatrical production in the 1980 tour required a 40-foot high cardboard wall to be erected... and then torn down as part of the show.

However, here in the Waters-penned *Hey You*, guitarist David Gilmour steals the limelight, laying down most of the lead vocals, plus six- and 12-string acoustics, pedal steel and all the electric guitars, too. The acoustic part that leads the majority of the track is in Nashville tuning (more on that below), and this is the secret sauce to the song – those high-tuned strings giving real sweetness and atmosphere.

SOUND ADVICE

Everything you need to know before playing *Hey You*



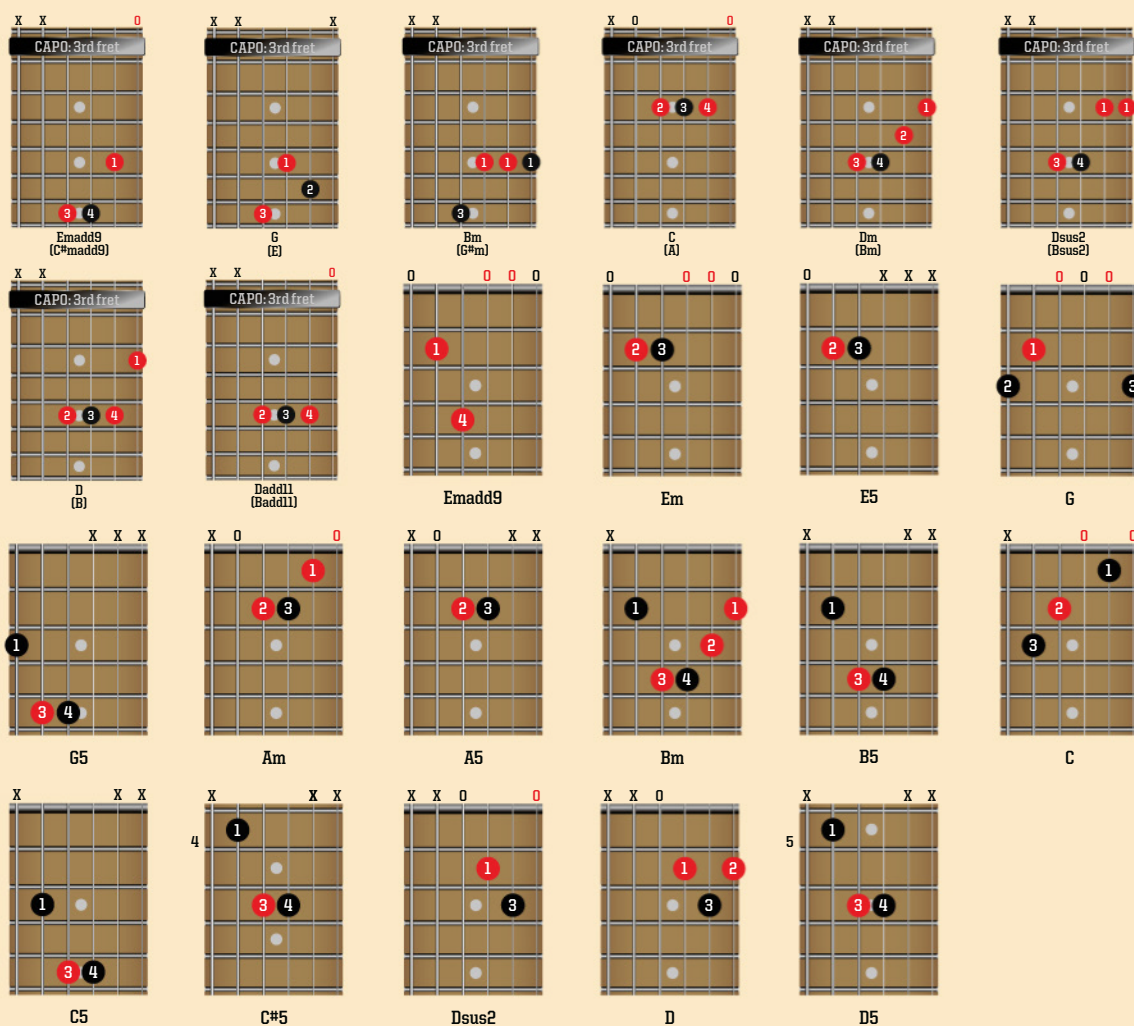
At least two guitars/guitarists are required to play this track live, featuring, as it does, both six- and 12-string acoustic guitars, plus two distinct electric guitar parts. Early in the track, the acoustic guitar has an auto-panning effect applied, which requires a stereo setup. If you have stereo capability, make sure you don't overdo the autopan – it's blended with the central 'un-panned' sound and possibly a touch of chorus to give a fairly subtle effect. For the electric guitar parts, David Gilmour most likely used his Strat set to the bridge pickup and with a healthy dose of distortion, delay and reverb.

CHORDS

The acoustic guitar part was recorded in a modified Nashville tuning, with the third, fourth and fifth strings tuned one octave higher than standard, and the sixth string tuned two octaves higher (the first and second strings stay as standard tuned).

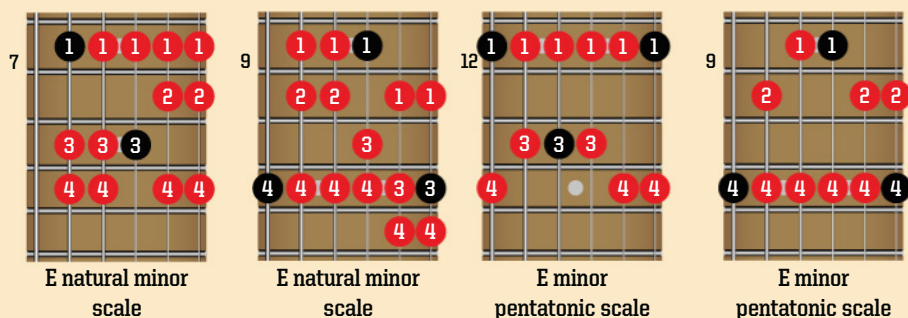
We've kept our transcription in standard tuning, and with a capo on the 3rd fret. It isn't 100 per cent authentic, but it allows you to play the same notes without the hassle of restringing your guitar – ideal for gigging.

The electric guitar parts are all standard tuned, and we've divided the chords up into capo chords and standard chords for swift reference.



SCALES

The minor pentatonic and natural minor scales should be bread and butter for most guitarists, but you'll be moving through several shapes during David Gilmour's solo. Practise the scale shapes to get a better picture of the structure of the solo, and to build a greater understanding of how Gilmour builds up his solo as he moves into higher registers.



PINK FLOYD HEY YOU

FULL
TAB

HEY YOU
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PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Intro

bit.ly/tg382audio

♩ = 112
Emadd⁹ (C#madd⁹)
Capo 3rd fret

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 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PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Verse 1 (cont'd)

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The first few shapes use similar fingering patterns, which should make moving between them a little easier. The D chord is probably best approached with separate fingers for each fret rather than barring your third finger; the latter technique tends to mute the first string, but it needs to ring out clearly here.

PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Verse 2

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PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Verse 2 (cont'd)

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This is a double-tracked overdub played on both Nashville- and standard-tuned acoustic guitars. It has to be played without a capo on the standard-tuned guitar in order to reach the low notes. Assuming you don't have two additional guitarists who want to play just this part, we recommend using a clean-sounding electric guitar here.

PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Solo (riff)

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The electric guitar parts are all standard tuned with no capo. Anyone who knows Pink Floyd's *Another Brick In The Wall (Part 2)* should recognise this riff because it follows the "We don't need no education" lyric. It's played initially on the sixth (E) and then fifth (A) strings to outline the Em and Am chords.

PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Solo (lead)

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Am

TAB

5

Em

TAB

9

Am

PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Bridge

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Capo 3rd fret

2:55 w/12-str. ac. gtr.

C (A) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹) G (E) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹) C (A) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹)

G (E) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹) C (A) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹)

G (E) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹) C (A) Dadd¹¹ (Badd¹¹)

TAB

1

6

10

This is another capo'd acoustic guitar part. Notice how the initial C chord is the same as an open A chord shape. Just slide your fingers up two frets to play the Dadd11 chord based on the same shape. If you use a first finger barre, take care not to mute the first string.

PINK FLOYD HEY YOU Verse riff

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4:13 w/elec. gtr. w/distortion

B⁵ C⁵ C^{#5} D⁵ G⁵ D⁵

C⁵ B⁵ A⁵ E⁵

TAB

1

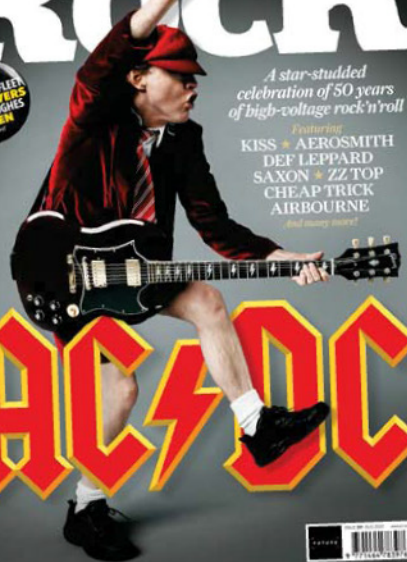
5

These simple powerchords follow the bass guitar part, so listen carefully if you're not sure of the rhythm. When breaking down rhythms, it's also a good idea to count eighth-note rhythms with a '1&2&3&4&5&6&7&8' count. Play only on the relevant beats and strum in midair when there's no chord to play.

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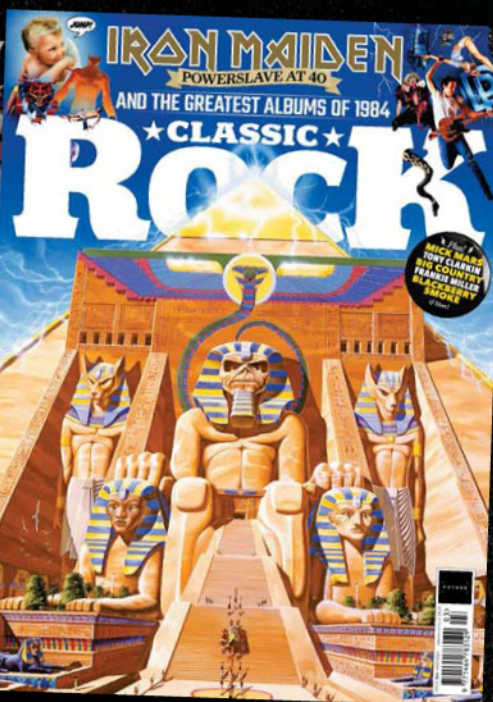
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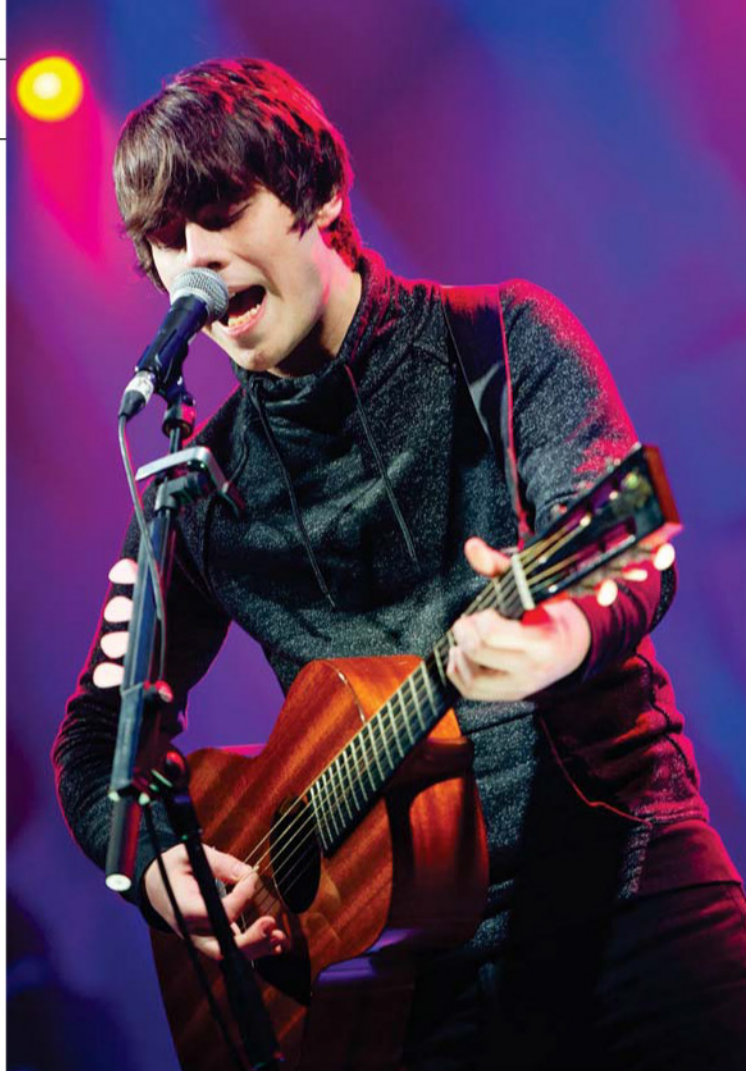
KISS LIKE THE SUN

Jake Bugg shines a light on open G tuning, acoustic riffs, and some easy slide lines

Kiss Like The Sun was originally released as a download single in 2019 and also features on Jake Bugg's fifth album *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*. The track doffs an appreciative cap to his early influences; it's a foot tapping tour de force of country, blues, and even a bit of the mighty Led Zeppelin (think *Bron-Y-Aur Stomp*) thrown in for good measure! And though the original release was recorded on an acoustic, Bugg usually performs this live on electric – so feel free to experiment yourself.

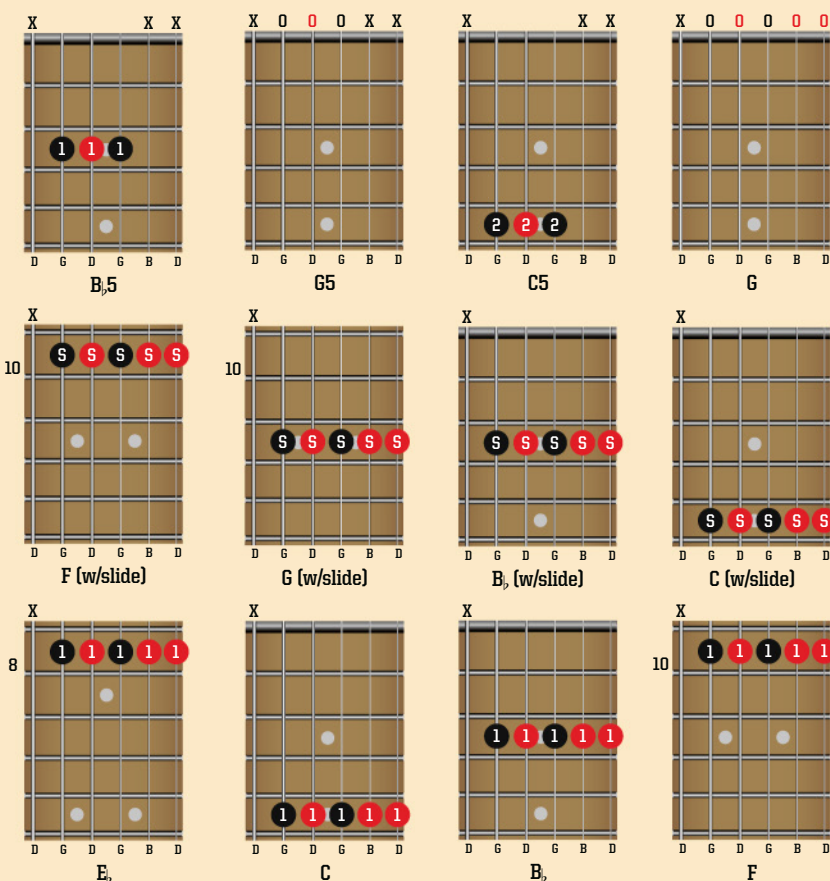
This song was recorded in open G tuning (low to high: DGDGBD), also famously used on just about every Rolling Stones hit from the late '60s onwards. The only minor drawback is that you really need to keep that low sixth string muted, because the root notes of open G chord shapes are on the fifth string, making the sixth string superfluous.

Still, open G is a resonant, big-sounding tuning, and here, with Jake's easy slide riffs, this track is the ideal place to begin your slide journey.



CHORDS

Although the riffs are played in 3rd position (ie, with your first finger on the 3rd fret), you'll need to use your second finger to fret the C5 as shown because the slide needs to be on your third finger. Mute the sixth string throughout by bringing your fretting hand thumb around the back of the neck so that it just touches the string.



KISS LIKE THE SUN

Words and Music by Jake Bugg, Andrew Wotman, Nathan Perez, Lee Ho and Alexandra Tamposi
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Kiss Like The Sun

TABBED BELOW

Verse 1

C Watching those lips

G5 B₅ C B₅ G5
Got my mind wrapped around the taste

C G5 B₅ C G5 B₅
She coloured my name - And whispered my place

C **G5 B_b5 C**
Watching her sip on my drink

B_b G5
Makes it hard to look away

Chorus

E_b C G B_b
My kiss is like the sun and my love is for everyone

E_b C G B_b
It was all for fun until I let you fall, never call

E_b **C**

Wasn't trying to hurt you, but

G **B_b**
It wasn't love, it was only for a night

E_b **F**
Wasn't trying to hurt you

Riff 1 x4

Verse 2

C G5 B_b5 C G5 B_b5
She left a necklace - On my nightstand

C **G5 E**
You can come back

C B_b G

But it don't mean we're meant to be

C **G5 B_b5 C** **G5 B_b5**
It's not about you - Look on the bright side

C G5 B $\flat$ 5
I'm only saving you

C **B_b** **G5** **Riff 2**
From someone else like me

Repeat chorus

Riff 1 x4

Riff 2 x8

JAKE BUGG KISS LIKE THE SUN **Intro**

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♩ = 108

B^b5 G⁵ C⁵ G⁵ B^b5 G⁵ G Play 3 times B^b5 G⁵ C⁵ G⁵ B^b5 G⁵ G F G w/slide

0:02

TAB

G⁵ B^b5 G⁵ C⁵ G⁵ B^b5 G⁵ G F G Play 3 times w/slide G⁵ B^b5 G⁵ C⁵ G⁵ B^b5 G⁵ G B^b5

w/slide

Take a close look at bars 1 and 3. At a glance they look the same – but that opening B,5 chord in bar 1 (we'll call this riff 1) appears on the offbeat when you get to bar 3 (riff 2). If you've spent a bit of time learning bar 1, this variation might feel a bit unusual, but it facilitates the high slide line that precedes it.

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!

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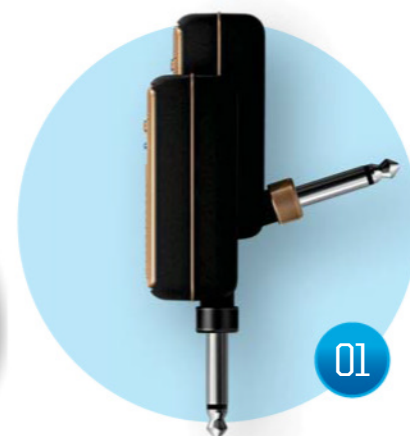
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02



05



01

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www.jimdunlop.com

THIRD MAN FUZZ-A-TRON FUZZ

3 You might remember that JHS caused a tidal wave of DIY-ers to start building pedals late last year with its NOTAKLÖN pedal. Now, Jack White's Third Man Hardware wants you to build-yer-own with its Fuzz-a-Tron kit. It comes with everything you need to put together your own simple two-control fuzz pedal (tone and volume), including the box and all components, and you'll learn to solder while you do. Best of all, it's dirt cheap.

£68

www.thirdmanhardware.com

LR BAGGS HIFI DUET

4 When it comes to amping-up your non-electro acoustic, LR Baggs knows more than a thing or two. The latest offering from the acoustic pickup/electronic gurus is the HiFi Duet – a dual transducer/mic system which pairs the existing HiFi pickups with Baggs' Silo microphone. Installation is easy with peel-and-stick attachment to your guitar, and a soundhole-mounted preamp provides volume and mix controls.

£TBC

www.lrbaggs.com

GRETSCH JIM DANDY

5 We all know and love Gretsch's Jim Dandy acoustics, which serve up an incredibly affordable slice of railroad mojo. But Gretsch has just lifted the lid on a whole bunch of new Jim Dandy models, with prices starting at £209. The new additions include Parlor, Dreadnought and Concert shapes, as well as pickup-equipped Deltoluxe versions of all three. They come in Rex Burst and Frontier Satin for the acoustics, and Black Top for the electros.

£209

www.gretschguitars.com





1 CONNECTIVITY

One of the 200 Series' greatest strengths is its wealth of jacks: you've got full MIDI control, stereo operation and expression pedal/external footswitch capabilities.

2 MEMORY/HOLD

This footswitch cycles through your four onboard patches or activates a variety of hold features, from infinite sustain to more esoteric options.

3 LOCK

Hold the Density button and you activate the RV-200's Lock function, which prevents you from accidentally knocking your controls mid-gig. We wish more pedals had this!

BOSS RV-200 REVERB £259

It's one of Boss's most eagerly anticipated pedals ever – but is this featured-packed reverb worth the wait?

The RV-200 has been a long time coming. When Boss's pedalboard-friendly twin-footswitch designs made their debut in summer 2019, the 200 Series featured four pedals. Two of them – the DD-200 Delay and MD-200 Modulation – were downsized from Boss's flagship 500 Series units. But one escaped Boss's shrink ray: the RV-500 Reverb. It would have been the no-brainer of all no-brainers – the ideal counter to the Strymon BlueSky or Source Audio Ventris. Yet as the 200 Series expanded with Synthesizer and Impulse Response offerings, an RV-200 never emerged. Mock-ups were made by Boss fans, but we had all but given up hope... until now.

Thankfully, the RV-200 is spec'd pretty much as we'd expected it. It features 12 reverb types, 10 of which are lifted from

the RV-500. You've got your standard Room, Hall, Plate *et al*, Shimmer and Modulate for the post-rockers, Reverse for the shoegazers, and a combined reverb and delay based on the cult classic RV-3. Boss has also compensated fans for the wait with a new algorithm exclusive to the RV-200: the arpeggiated 'Arpverb'.

These are controlled with your usual 'verb controls – Type, Time, Pre-Delay, Effect Level – as well as separate Low and High EQ controls, a Parameter control to adjust type-specific settings, plus a Density button that tweaks the 'thickness' of the reverb trails. Your sounds can be saved into one of four onboard presets, while the Manual setting calls up whatever you've got the controls set to. You also get a dizzying level of connectivity via MIDI, stereo inputs and outputs, plus an

expression/external footswitch jack. Then there's the Memory/Hold footswitch – that's your gateway to the RV-200's infinite sustain features and preset switching: short press to change sounds, long press for Hold.

Boss reverbs have a distinct tonality, and given the RV-200 is mostly composed of the same 2017 algorithms that featured in the RV-500, the story is the same here. The effects are pristine and unblemished – this pedal is more of a do-all workhorse than many of today's singular boutique offerings. It also means the same strengths and weaknesses rear their heads. Spring modes have never been Boss's strength, yet its modulated reverbs are among the best in the business. Room, Hall and Plate are all excellent with a little taming of the high frequencies, and the octave-up

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Reverb pedal

DIMENSIONS: 63 (h) x 101 (w) x 138mm (d)

CONTROLS: Type, Time, Pre-Delay, Effect Level, Parameter, Low, High, Density button, Memory, Memory button

CONNECTIONS: 2 x inputs, 2 x outputs, Ctrl1/2/Expression TRS jack, power, MIDI in/out mini-jacks, USB micro B

POWER: 3 x AA batteries (included), 9V DC power supply 260mA (not included)

CONTACT: Boss, boss.info



It takes two (hundred)

What's the buzz about the 200 Series all about?

The successor to the long-running 20 lineup, the 200 Series offers perhaps the greatest features-per-pedalboard real estate of anything in the Boss catalogue. Launching with the MD-200 Modulation, OD-200 Hybrid Drive and Jonny Greenwood-favoured DD-200 Delay back in 2019, the series crammed the best bits of the company's flagship 500 Series into a considerably more compact chassis, complete with presets, stereo operation and a heck of a lot of onboard tweakability. Want more control? How's full MIDI capability, external footswitches and expression pedal connection sound? It's a smart format, and since that initial launch, the company has expanded the range with the SY-200 Synthesizer, EQ-200 Graphic Equalizer and IR-200 Amp & IR Cabinet. Where will Boss take the series next? Well, we'd say a dual-footswitch Slicer and Space Echo wouldn't go amiss...

Shimmer has a pleasingly psychedelic organ tonality.

There are some frustrating oversights, however. Initially, you'll be bowled over by the Arpverb's 5th and octave cycles – it's an inspiring sound, like



a step phaser with reverb. But there's no control over the tempo of the arpeggiation. Likewise, adjustment over the speed of the Slowverb's fade-ins would make that setting infinitely more useful. Lo-Fi sounds like running your guitar through a transistor radio in an aeroplane hangar – cool for a reverb effect, but we found its influence on our dry guitar sound less than appealing.

The Reverse function sounds rich and atmospheric, but there's no way to go 100 per cent wet – ie, Kevin Shields shoegazing 101 – without menu-diving and digging up the Direct Mute setting. Which is universal, so can't be saved to a patch. Speaking of which, dialing in the pedal's deeper settings is slow going with the three-character LED display, which feels a little outdated now.

The Hold functions, meanwhile, sound like they belong on a delay pedal – the infinitely-sustaining

Hold function has a definite repeat-like pulse to it that's not as smooth as rival offerings, while Twist and Warp are both essentially versions of delay oscillation takeoffs. Fun, but not what you'd expect from a reverb of this calibre.

Boss reverb pedals are legendary, and their algorithms remain inspiring, so if you're after a reasonably priced studio-quality reverb that doesn't take up much room on your 'board, and boasts excellent connectivity and preset functionality, the RV-200 is a must-try. But its more adventurous offerings are let down by some odd design choices, most of which are (hopefully) updatable from Boss's end in due course.

Make no mistake, the RV-200 is a good reverb pedal, but after five long years we really wanted it to be great.

Michael Astley-Brown

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



ALSO TRY...

STRYMON BLUESKY V2

£359

Still the gold-standard of dual-footswitch reverbs, the BlueSky's immersive ambience is an effect in itself. There are only three modes, but they're deceptively versatile.



MOOER AUDIO R7 X2

£149

The preset scrolling might drive you mad, but the algorithms on the R7 are top-notch. With modes like Reverse, Shake, Crush and Dream, it gets seriously out-there, too.



ELECTRO-HARMONIX OCEANS 12

£239

Two simultaneous stereo reverb engines and 24 presets make EHX's flagship reverb a force to be reckoned with, with superb shimmer, spring and infinite options.



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STERLING BY MUSIC MAN VALENTINE CHAMBERED BIGSBY

£1,149

Sterling nails the Maroon 5 guitarist's semi-solid signature axe

When we heard about Sterling's new chambered models we had to get our mitts on the white ash-bodied Bigsby model.

Although a non-Bigsby version is available, this is surely the cooler option. The design traits it shares with other Music Man family guitars include four-over-two locking tuners, a five-bolt neck plate with dressed-back heel, body-end truss rod adjustment, and matt-finished neck. A quick-release battery compartment is tidily located on the guitar's rear.

With knurled chrome master volume and tone knobs, a three-way lever switch, black pickguard, and an f-hole tidily cut from the ash front it's a functional but funky looking guitar, and we can't fault the Indonesian factory's attention to detail.

While the guitar's slender nut may not appeal to all players, Van Halen was a fan so you know it's not the big inhibitor to technique that some maintain. The C-profile neck is a comfy palmful and the 22 frets, although quite narrow, are tall enough that string bends and vibrato are a breeze.

The Bigsby means dive-bombs are off the agenda, but a gentle wobble of the arm adds a pleasant shimmer to chords, or lends expression at the top of string bends, à la David Gilmour. There's a helluva lot to commend the guitar, but some may mourn the absence of a Strat-style forearm contour and belly cut.

Plugging into a 20w Laney Lionheart combo we hear

a bright-toned instrument whose neck-humbucker chords and licks leap out with the kind of clarity you'd probably associate with a Strat. Switch over to the bridge single coil and things become spanky but not at all harsh.

Mixing neck and bridge tones produces the bright chime you might expect from a Rickenbacker. Rhythm parts, clean riffs, or jangly solos are all well served, but pile on some drive and the guitar retains all its innate musicality. Clean or dirty, pushing in the volume knob engages the active boost to add creaminess and just the right amount of kick for solos.

When confronting the 'diet' version of a guitar that one has enjoyed in full-fat form, it's often met with a dose of trepidation. But with Sterling By Music Man's latest twist on its excellent US-made predecessor, that doesn't apply. This looks, feels and sounds like a proper, grown-up musical instrument, no mere cheapo version. Clearly with help from Ernie Ball in the States and James Valentine's own musical input, Sterling has devised a guitar that stands entirely on its own merits. What hasn't changed is a great feeling neck and a stunning set of tones that would make one of these a welcome addition to anyone's guitar rack.

Neville Marten

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

1 BODY
The body's semi-solid white ash construction features a carved top and sides with the large f-hole cut from the front. The back is glued on.

2 PICKUPS
The Valentine's neck pickup is a Sterling By Music Man chrome-plated humbucker, while at the bridge sits a humbucking-sized single coil with diagonal pole pieces

3 BRIDGE/ TAILPIECE
The Bigsby vibrato tailpiece is great for subtle shimmers and the occasional rockabilly-style scoops and wobbles. Plus, it brings a definite extra layer of cool!

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Semi-hollow white ash
NECK: Solid Roasted Maple
SCALE LENGTH: 638mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
RADIUS: 305mm / 12"
FRETS: 22 / Narrow Tall
FRET MARKERS: Dots
NUT: Synthetic Bone
NUT WIDTH: 42mm (1.65")
TRUSS ROD: Body End / Easy Adjust
BRIDGE: Tune-O-Matic / Bigsby Machineheads: Locking
PICKUPS: SBMM humbucker/single coil
CONTROLS: Three-Way Lever Pickup Selector / Single Volume (12dB Push-Push Boost) / Master Tone
FINISH: Gloss Butterscotch
CONTACT: Sterling By Music Man, sterlingbymusicman.com





PRS SE SWAMP ASH SPECIAL

£979

The return of a PRS player's favourite

Though better known for their glued-in neck models, a PRS bolt-on has actually been around since 1988 when the company introduced their Classic Electric – originally a Fender-inspired, alder body/maple neck version of the pricier Custom and Standard. Despite its lower cost, the market didn't really *get* the Classic Electric, and, renamed 'CE', it slowly became more like the Custom, including a change to a mahogany body around 1995. After dropping in and out of production it returned to the USA line in 2016.

playing platform with its shallow 'C' wide-thin profile neck, with satin back and perfectly installed and polished medium gauge frets on the 10-inch cambered fingerboard. There's a certain duality to its sounds. In its standard drive mode, the two humbuckers are selected by a Gibson-style three-way toggle: bridge, both, and neck. Pull back the tone control and you get bridge/single-coil, all pickups together, and neck/single-coil.

Like that original SAS, this model captures a hot-rod vibe like a modded Strat. The tone is Fender-like, but with humbucking

CAPTURES A HOT-ROD VIBE LIKE A MODDED STRAT

In 1996, PRS introduced the Swamp Ash Special, named after its lightweight ash body. It lasted, in various formats, until 2011-12. This year it's back in the Indonesian-made SE line – and is joined, for the first time, by an SE version of the CE 24.

Of course, the oh-so Fender-like Silver Sky has taken PRS's bolt-on offering to dizzying heights in the USA Core and SE lines, but the SE Swamp Ash Special (SAS) is quite a different proposition: definitely a PRS, not a Fender with the wrong headstock. The SE SAS sticks more closely to established PRS style, with a 25-inch scale length, the patented version of their classic vibrato and 85/15 'S' humbucking pickups – Indonesian-made versions of the USA pickups. The HSH format is unique to the SE line.

Although weightier than we'd hoped for, the SAS is a superb

clout giving a strong strident voice at the bridge and a deeper hot-PAF-like voicing at the neck. There's plenty of indie jangle to be had thanks to PRS's treble bleed capacitor which helps retain clarity as you lower the volume.

Even with the single-coil out of the mix, there's more depth to the sound than the newly released SE CE 24, which uses the same humbuckers. With the middle pickup in play it adds more Fender-y flavour (though you can't select that single-coil on its own) that, aside from the Silver Sky, is unique in the SE line-up. Good to have you back, ol' fella!

Dave Burriluck

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

1 NECK

PRS first used a maple bolt-on, as opposed to a mahogany glued-in neck, on their 1988 Classic Electric which became the CE. This is a 22-fret 25-inch 'board with a 10-inch radius.

2 ELECTRONICS

The Swamp Ash Special always had a tricky circuit, and it's pretty similar here: the central AS-01 single-coil (based on the SE Silver Sky design) is flanked by two 85/15 'S' humbuckers and added to the circuit by a pull-switch on the tone control.

3 BODY

The swamp ash body has a distinctive wavy and bold grain clearly visible through the translucent finish. It's also used on the current Core-level Fiore, the NF53, Myles Kennedy signature and the limited edition 'Dead Spec' Silver Sky.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Swamp ash with w/'shallow violin' top carve

NECK: Maple, wide-thin profile, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 25" (635mm)

FINGERBOARD: Maple/10" radius

FRETS: 22, medium

PICKUPS: PRS 85/15 'S' Treble and Bass humbuckers; AS-01 single-coil (middle)

CONTROLS: 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (w/ pull switch to add in middle pickup plus, in centre and neck positions, split the neck humbucker to single-coil)

HARDWARE: PRS patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed non-locking tuners – nickel-plated

FINISH: Iri Blue (as reviewed) Charcoal, Vintage Sunburst

CONTACT: PRS, www.prsguitars.com





ELECTRO-HARMONIX PICO ATTACK DECAY

£129

Pushing the envelope

There are some effects that fill us with excitement, and others that instantly sound like the pedal equivalent of your sensible keyboard-player mate who doesn't like fun. The Attack Decay's name might fool you into thinking it lives in that 'utility' category, and in all honesty, once we tell you that it is a transient shaper – modifying the envelope of your input signal's sound wave – that perception probably won't change.

But, what we have here is actually a hugely creative tool based on EHX's larger-format pedal of the same name. Only now it's been shrunk to the new Pico size, with the power to unleash spooky, ethereal sounds, or take you on a full-on psychedelic

hippie freakout, and it does it all using our old pal, volume. The controls are (for the most part) simple – there's a Level control which sets your output, and a sensitivity control, which governs the level at which the effect will kick in. Attack, which fades in your signal in a similar way to the 'violin' trick using your guitar's volume control. The decay knob does the same, but at the other end, acting more like a staccato gate than a fade. Then there's the Poly button. This takes the pedal from one monophonic envelope, to triggering a new envelope for each string.

Now, we said this wasn't your boffin's stompbox, so what does all of that mean for sound? As you can expect, there's the obvious slow-fade setting which is always

a winner. But with some experimentation you can manipulate the pedals to give you a much more 'plucky' sound, or roll off just the initial part of your attack to create synthy/mellotron type replications.

As is often the case, though, things become more interesting when you start to combine it with other pedals. Placed in our effects loop after a reverb and delay makes for some cool pad sounds, or feeding it into a wah pedal for additional filtered, reverse textures. On the face of it, it's a pretty unassuming pedal, but delve deeper and it's got dozens of possibilities, plus it's small enough to take up very little space. We like it!

Stuart Williams

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Envelope shaper
CONTROLS: Level, Attack, Decay, Sensitivity, Poly/Mono
SOCKETS: Input, output power
TRUE BYPASS: Yes
POWER: 9v psu, included
CONTACT: Electro-Harmonix, www.ehx.com

DELVE DEEPER AND THERE ARE DOZENS OF POSSIBILITIES

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

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Words Amit Sharma

JAGUAR THRONE

Jaguar Throne might be one of the newer names on the UK metal circuit but its members come with decades of experience, with some familiar faces from well-established bands Bossk, The Hell, Krokodil and Cognizance. Given the mix of influences at play here, from post-metal and prog rock to hardcore and tech-metal, there's no shortage of avenues for sonic exploration available to them...

"I met the guys by producing their records or playing shows together," says guitarist Steve Sears. "We all bring our own thing to the table. Although I write almost everything, our other guitarist Chris Binns plays a lot of the technical parts that are completely beyond my abilities!"

So far the band have released one EP and are currently penning material for their debut full-length. Early songs like *Tectonic* and *Chrome Goddess* nod to the gargantuan heaviness typified by bands like Mastodon – weighing complexity against moments that are more atmospheric, loose and free. "We definitely share that dark prog vibe with bands like Mastodon," continues Steve. "A lot of heavy music can just sound like people playing scales up and down, but Mastodon have a lot of feel. I use a lot of open strings in my riffs, which can make for interesting chords."

For their recordings thus far, Steve has mainly stuck with single-coil and P-90 models like his Telecasters and Les Paul Classic Custom, which get fed into a Peavey 5150II through an oversized Mesa/Boogie cabinet via his Tube Screamer. It's very much the metal sound he grew up with. "I have Marshall, Orange and Victory amps, but they just don't have the bark I need for this project," he shrugs. "The 5150 was the first serious amp I bought, and that's what metal sounds like to me. I lean towards the pokier, mid-heavy tones, as opposed to anything too smooth or scooped."

Given his production background, having engineered and mixed bands such as Gallows and Conjurer, as well as his own projects Gold Key and The Hell, Steve certainly knows a thing or two about capturing high-gain tones. For all the bands learning how to self-produce, he recommends a certain degree of distance. "It's hard to be objective with your own music. My advice is: don't buy a bunch of toys because the Internet says they're good. It's always tempting to use the latest miracle plugin, but it's better to understand how your DAW's stock compressor works than to guess blindly with more attractive tools. 'Better' gear doesn't mean better recordings!"



TRIPTYCH

THE POWER OF THREE

Pushing the boundaries of vintage Strat tones into uncharted territories of super heavy fuzz-drenched riffing



"For me, the perfect Strat tone has been an ongoing journey for the last few years, and I'm happy to say that the journey has ended with the Triptych single coils"

RABEA MASSAAD

BEA



bareknucklepickups.co.uk

Bare Knuckle



FAST AS F# 

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