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**CARMEN VANDENBERG**

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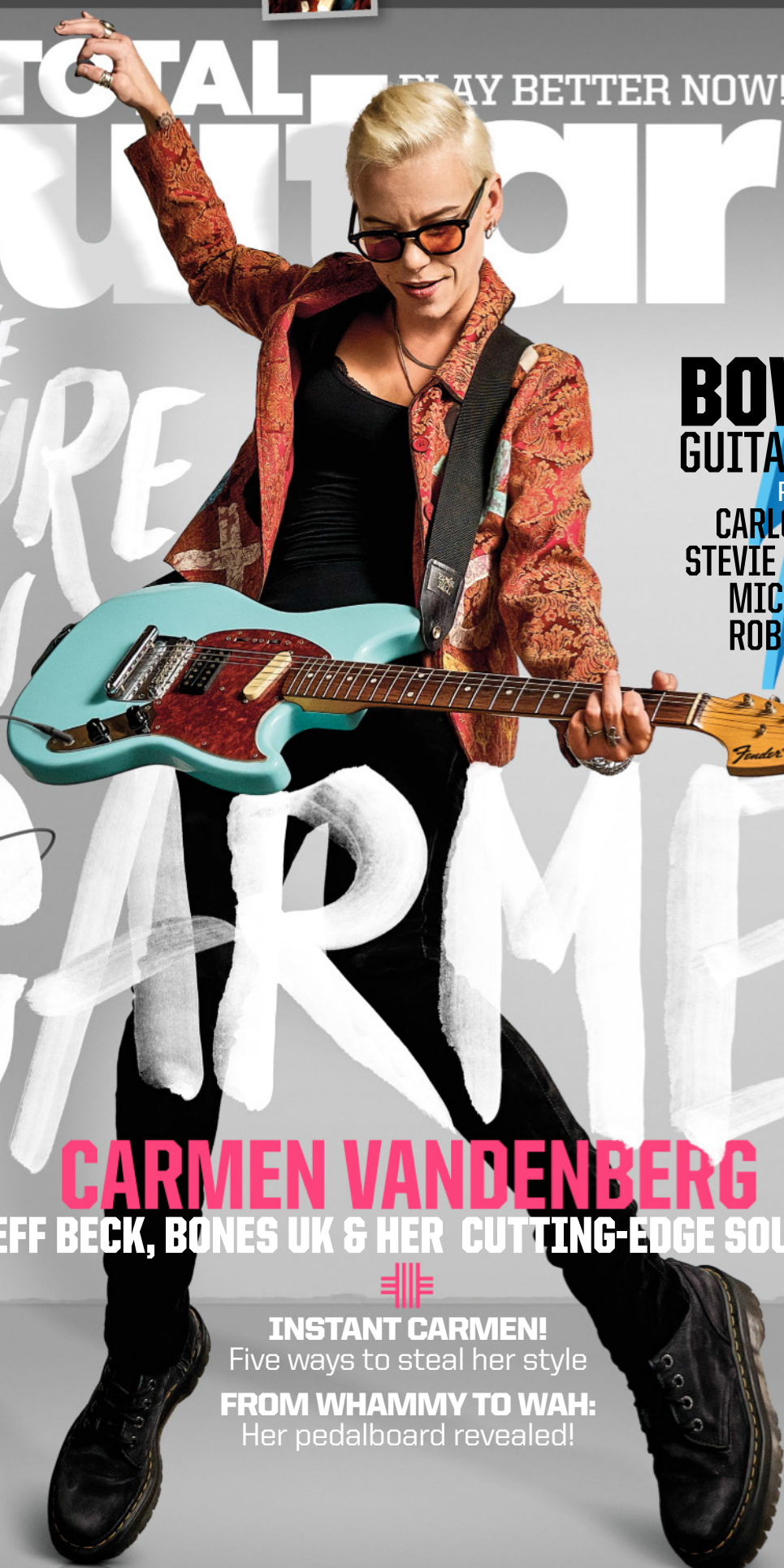
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# Welcome...



One of the things that excites me about listening to new music is hearing guitar playing where I can't tell what's going on. You're probably the same yourself. Sometimes even brand new music sounds overly familiar and you can tell how it's been played or recorded.

Enter our cover star, Carmen Vandenberg of rising stars Bones UK. Touted by rock royalty (Queen's

Roger Taylor, Pink Floyd's David Gilmour and the late Jeff Beck) as the UK's next big guitar hero, it's fair to say that Carmen and bandmate Rosie Bones are innovating with tone on new album *Soft*. Tellingly, Carmen says to TG, "Sometimes it will take me five hours just to get the tone. I want people to think: 'Is that or is that not a guitar?'"

Now, Carmen *does* draw on traditional effects – fuzz, in particular, appears all over the new album. But then, fuzz is a raucous and unruly sound. I wonder if it'll ever truly go out of fashion or sound dated. Routed amongst Carmen's signal path with pitch shifters, synth effects and modern production, fuzz is at the heart of Bones UK's contemporary sound. After our interview, Carmen personally sent us an image of her latest pedalboard and we've annotated the highlights. Check it out on p64.

Elsewhere, you'll find our usual interviews, lessons and reviews. We speak to Metallica's Kirk Hammett, who outlines his top playing tips. Carlos Alomar gives his account of the inspiring time he spent working with David Bowie. You'll find lessons on funk, blues and three great songs. And our reviews section is near to overflowing with gear from Fender, Epiphone, Line 6 and much more.

Enjoy the issue and I'll see you next month.

*Chris*

Chris Bird Editor

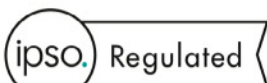
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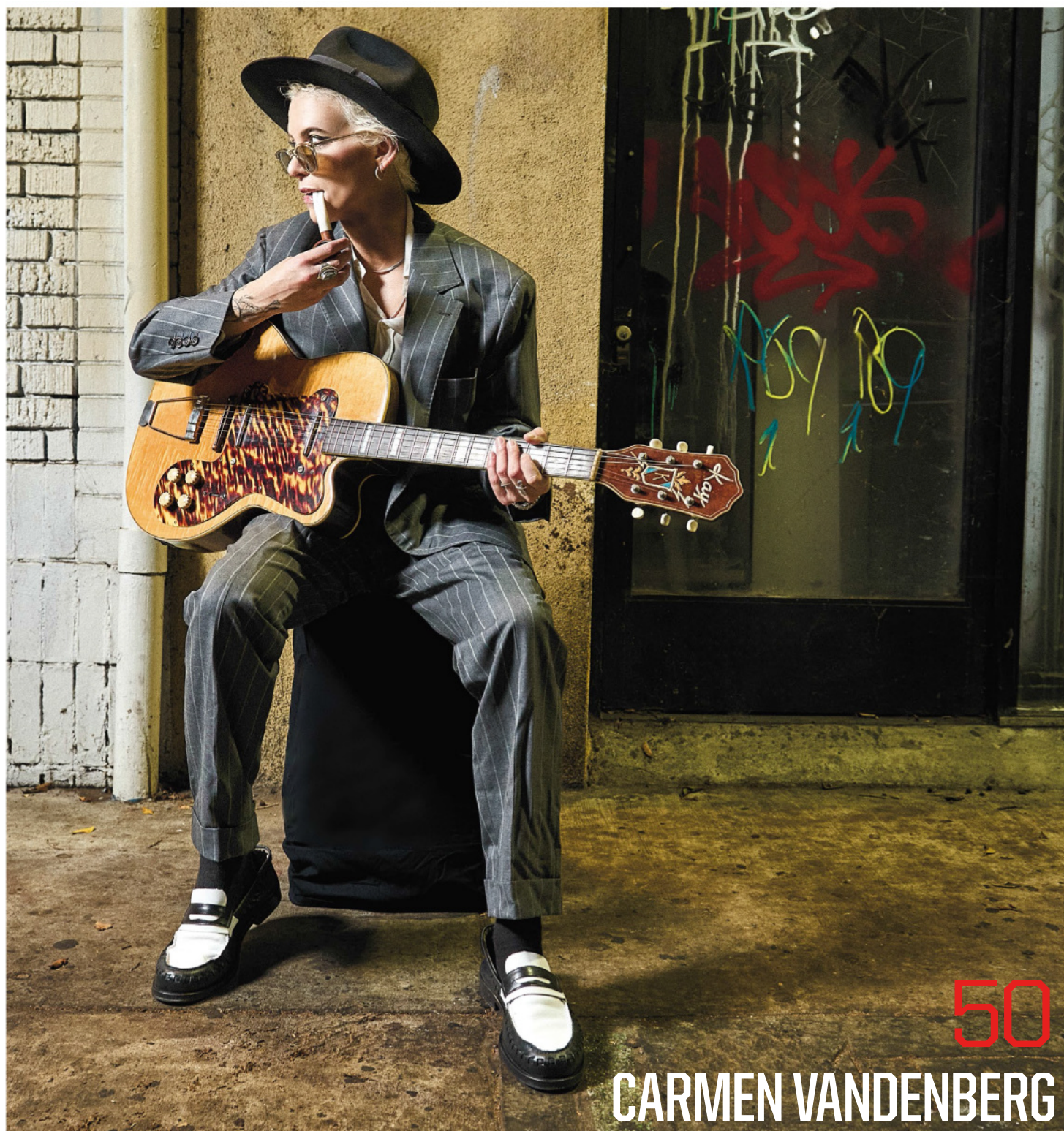
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# Contents



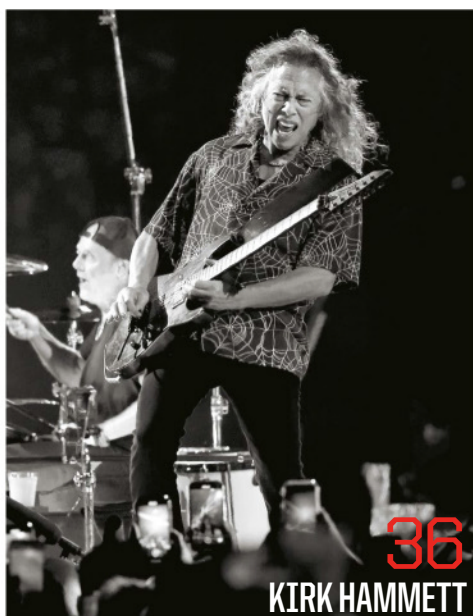
50

CARMEN VANDENBERG





## 28 CAGE THE ELEPHANT



## 36 KIRK HAMMETT



## 68 LEARN TO PLAY: AC/DC - THUNDERSTRUCK

## Audio & Video

Find your audio and video  
content online at:

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Type this link into a web browser on any computer, smartphone or tablet to be directed to [guitarworld.com](http://guitarworld.com). Here you'll find the issue's A/V content, available to download or stream. Alternatively, scan the QR code to the right.



## MONITOR

06 In The Picture

08 First Look

10 Scene

## Q&A

14 Talking Guitars: Mike Campbell

## HOW TO...

18 Pickup Music: *Love Machine*

20 Riff of the Month:  
Jerry Cantrell - *Vilified*

22 Guitar Tricks: Intro to Blues

## FEATURES

24 Zeal & Ardor

28 Cage The Elephant

32 Hinds

36 Kirk Hammett

40 Leprous

44 Carlos Alomar

## COVER FEATURE

50 Carmen Vandenberg

## LEARN TO PLAY

68 Classic Track:  
AC/DC - *Thunderstruck*

80 Open-Mic Songbook:  
Ben E. King - *Stand By Me*

## THE GAS STATION

80 Contents / Start Me Up!

82 Fender Player II Stratocaster

86 PRS SE NF3

88 Gretsch Jim Dandy Concert

90 Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom  
1959 Les Paul Standard

92 Line 6 POD Express

94 Electro-Harmonix LPB-3

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

96 Subscribe to TG!

## SPOTLIGHT

98 Hello Mary



Words Tim Tucker  
Photo PL Gould/Getty

# ZAPPA BONANZA!



In 1974, Frank Zappa released *Apostrophe (')*, his most successful album up to that point. It became his first gold-selling record in the United States and even yielded a hit single in *Don't Eat The Yellow Snow*. A new 50th Anniversary Edition box set includes a remaster of the album, plus over 50 unreleased and rare studio and live tracks.

It's no wonder Frank's son Dweezil makes *Apostrophe (')* his first recommendation to anyone new to his father's music. The range of styles alone is dizzying, from rock to jazz, soul to funk, and even a rare instance of a Zappa piano ballad in *Uncle Remus*. Ever since its release, musicians have marvelled at the high level of playing throughout, with Zappa writing and arranging intricate multi-instrumental arrangements, all played with awe-inspiring dexterity.

For guitarists, Zappa's signature mid-range Gibson SG guitar tone provides the highlights. His blistering rock phrases tear through *Nanook Rubs It*, *Cosmik Debris*, and *Stink Foot*, showcasing his unique left-hand technique and inventive melodic sense. Elsewhere, *St Alfonzo's Pancake Breakfast* sees Zappa switch to a cleaner tone for a flamboyant exercise in blistering 16th-note neo-classical scale fragments. *Excentrifugal Forz* will appeal to fans of psychedelic rock, with Hendrix-style licks slicing through the bed of synth and brass textures beneath. The guitar highlight is the extended jam with Cream's bassist Jack Bruce on the title track *Apostrophe*. This vigorous workout, built on beefy blues rock riffs, sees Bruce's fuzz tone bass in conversation with Zappa's wah-wah-enhanced blues phrasing to dazzling effect.

Included amongst the extras are two complete concerts from 1974, which many fans consider a high point in Zappa's touring history. The band is one of his all-time best, including keyboardist George Duke, drummer Chester Thompson, and percussionist Ruth Underwood. In a live setting, the musicians spread their wings, showcasing Zappa's brain-melting guitar solos across extended jams with intricate time signatures.

The box set isn't cheap, but it's a must for anyone interested in Zappa's development as a guitarist and an artist.





# IN THE PICTURE

PEOPLE ★ NEWS ★ NOISE



07







Words Stuart Williams  
Photography Phil Barker

# BORN IN THE USA

Epiphone returns production of a late-'50s classic to its US roots

**B**ack in the 1970s, Gibson moved production of its Epiphone brand to Korea – but it wasn't always this way. Prior to the '70s, Gibson, having acquired Epiphone in 1957, produced its Epiphone-branded, Gibson counterparts in the same Kalamazoo factory as some of rock's Holy Grail instruments. The Epiphone USA range sees a return of the Epiphone name to US production, and the latest model to come out of the American stable is the Coronet.

This rounded doublecut first appeared in 1958, and Gibson/Epiphone have gone to town with trying to get the 2024 version as visually close to the original as possible, with the benefit of modern playability. There's the mahogany body (finished in Vintage Cherry or Ebony, both nitrocellulose), 'Bikini' headstock plate and first-era-correct scratchplate shape. These are met by a modern SlimTaper neck with an increased nut width, slimmer body depth and Graph Tech nut. Pickup-wise, we get a single P-90, wired to master tone and volume controls. It's priced at £1,599.

## UP CLOSE



### Single pickup

Just like the Les Paul and SG Junior models, the Coronet is proof that one pickup can do a lot of miles, especially if it's a P-90.



### US-made

The original Coronets were made in the US, and have made their way into the hands of lots of players, from Jimi Hendrix to Johnny Marr.



### Finishes

That mahogany slab is finished in gloss nitrocellulose, and comes in a choice of Vintage Cherry (shown here) or Ebony.



# SCENE

YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS



## “I LOVE THE UNDERLYING SADNESS OF A CHORUS PEDAL”

HOW **LOS BITCHOS** CREATE “BASTARDISED” VERSIONS OF CLASSIC '80S SOUNDS

**T**

wo years after their sparkling debut album, Los Bitchos are back with more luscious guitar textures and feel-good vibes with its follow-up,

*Talkie Talkie*. For guitarist Serra Petale, that meant pushing their funk disco pomp to quirky new dimensions and never turning her chorus pedal off.

**What were your go-to guitars for the new album?**

Most of it was on my Italia Maranello Speedster. It's my number one, but I also used a Lag which has the most fabulous rounded but tinny sound – I just want to eat it! I also used our prouder Oli Barton Wood's 'Smokers Tele'. Loads of cigarette smoke has stuck to it from people chain-smoking around it, but it has the most wonderful tone. Then we split their signals into a Fender silverface and a Roland, which is my favourite amp in the world. The blend worked really well.

**Was the album's '80s aesthetic intentional?**

Many of our influences come from '80s records. I mean, who doesn't love Duran Duran's bass sound, or the way on Simple Minds' *New Gold Dream*, the guitars are so far back that they just become a texture? That's very inspiring to us. But what I really enjoyed was that we had all of this new gear, so we were able to come up with bastardised versions of the '80s sound.

**What was the standout modern gear, then?**

I used lots of EarthQuaker Devices pedals. They're incredible vehicles for giving each song their own dimension. In *Hi!*, there's a really weird, watery effect on the lead guitar in the first verse, and then a real highlife-type clean in the chorus. In another song, *Open The Bunny*, *Wasting My Time*, we used The Warden for a really dialled-back tone that still had a presence. It compressed the signal to give it a lift without distorting it. It's really interesting to see where you can push and take your guitars with pedals. I really welcome that.

**What's one pedal you can't live without?**

One thing I won't waver from is having a chorus effect on my clean tone. I love the underlying sadness that it gives to a guitar tone, even if you're playing something happy. There are a lot of joyous moments on the record but I think that oscillation gives a really nice mood. It sounds human. At the moment I'm using an EHX Small Clone, it's really simple. I've found others to be too complicated for my liking, and I want it to do one thing. The Nano Clone was my first ever chorus and that was delightful, but it's lost its chorus-ness now. I think I played it to death!

**And you're a Hiwatt artist now...**

Yeah! I've been using a Hiwatt Custom 50 combo live all year. It's super-powerful and it holds pedals really well. I was a Fender girl for many years, but the Hiwatt sounds wicked. I don't need too much gain, but I still want the clean with chorus sound to hold its own. I can't wait to take it back out on the road – we're pumped!

*Phil Weller*







**GUITAR**

# **EPIPHONE YUNGBLUD SG JUNIOR**

**Y**ou might not be familiar with Dominic Harrison, but there's a fair chance you're familiar with the name Yungblud. The Yorkshire-born rocker is the latest artist to grace us with his own signature model in collaboration with Epiphone. The Yungblud SG Junior features a mahogany body, along with a set mahogany neck and laurel fingerboard. It's loaded with a single Epiphone Dogear P-90 Pro in the bridge position, and the bridge is a factory wraparound model, which, in conjunction with the Epiphone Deluxe vintage tuners, promises to keep everything stable. It comes with an Epiphone hardshell case (with hot pink lining), complete with a die-cut Yungblud bumper sticker for £549.



**AMP**

# **BLACKSTAR DEBUT 30E**

**I**n 2024, we're used to seeing amps of all sizes coming loaded with all kinds of bells, and indeed, whistles. But sometimes, what we want – nay, need – is a simple amp to make our guitar loud, and sound good while it does it. That's where Blackstar's Debut series comes in. The latest addition is the 30E: a two-channel, 30-watt solid-

state amp with a footswitch, effects loop, line input and headphone output. It's equipped with Blackstar's ISF tone-shaping control. The whole lot runs through a 10-inch speaker, and could be the perfect partner for your pedals, or as a simple, plug-'n'-play amp. It's available now in Cream/Oxblood or Black/Basketweave at £179.

**GUITAR**

# **EVH FRANKIE RELIC**

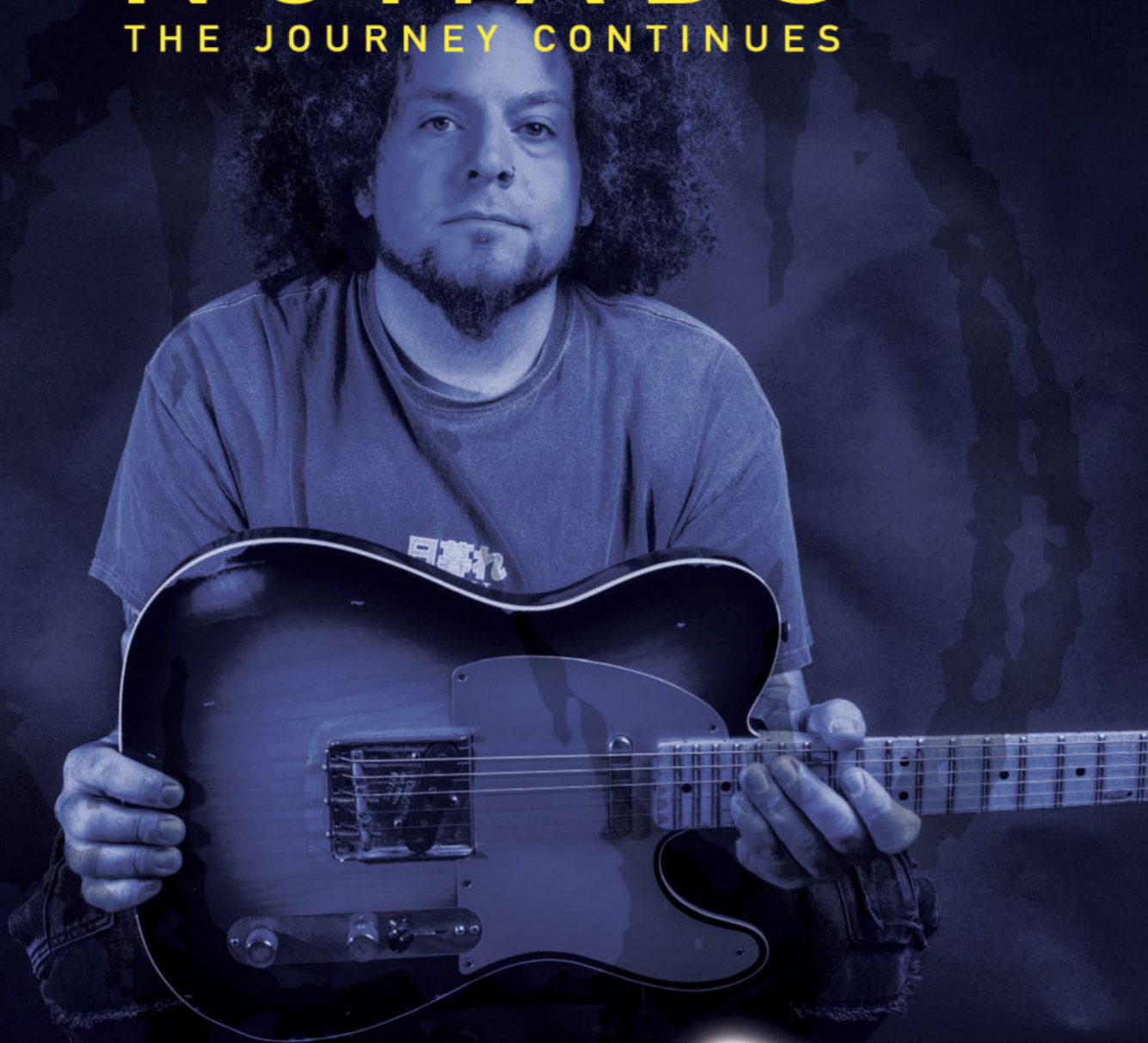
**W**e make no secret of our love for Eddie Van Halen here at TG. Nor should we, and that extends to the superb guitars Fender makes under the EVH brand name. Following the EVH Frankie Relic earlier this year, Eddie's brand has just announced a trio of new finishes that swap the stripes for scars. These feature the same specs as the previous Frankie Relic – EVH Wolfgang bridge humbucker, Fender vintage-style dummy single-coil, Floyd Rose, D-Tuna, satin-finished maple necks and more – but now come in striking Blueburst, Silverburst and Vintage Sunburst finishes for £1,479.





# NOMADS

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# Bare Knuckle



# TALKING GUITARS:

## MIKE CAMPBELL

GUITAR SLINGER FOR TOM PETTY  
AND OTHER ASSORTED LEGENDS

Words: Andrew Daly Photos: Chris Phelps



**M**

ike Campbell first tasted fame in the late '70s as the lead guitarist in Tom Petty's backing band The Heartbreakers. He has worked with Stevie Nicks,

Johnny Cash and the Eagles' Don Henley, co-writing the latter's '80s classic *The Boys Of Summer*. And after touring with Fleetwood Mac in 2018–19, he has made three albums with his cheekily-named band The Dirty Knobs.

**You've played a lot of guitars over the years. What was your first?**

I remember it well. It was an acoustic guitar,

though I don't have it now. It was a Harmony acoustic with an F-hole that my mom got me for 15 bucks. It was unplayable, but I didn't know that. I learned to play on that thing, even though you couldn't tune it! You could hardly put the strings down, and my fingers would bleed trying to play the damn thing!

**What was your first electric?**

When I was young, I went to a friend's house, and he had a [Gibson] SG. I picked up that guitar and said, 'Oh, my God, it's so easy to play!' That was the first electric guitar I played. My dad was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, and he sent me a Goya Electric, a real cheap version of a Strat, and I learned a lot from that.

**Which guitars in your collection mean the most to you?**

Lately, I've brought out my original [Fender] Broadcaster from the first Heartbreakers album, which I used on *American Girl* and *Breakdown*. It's been exciting to hear that again because it sounds great. Other than that, there's been my '59 Les Paul and a Rickenbacker here and there.

**Which guitarist is your biggest influence?**

I tend to listen to guys I grew up on, and I go back quite a bit. I've been around a long time, and I'm still drawn to the '60s. I hear new music, but I haven't heard any guitarists more inspiring to me than George Harrison, Jimmy





"I'M NOT HERE TO SHOW OFF  
MY TECHNICAL ABILITY!"

Page, classic Jimi Hendrix or Chuck Berry. Nobody new has really thrilled me to the point where I want to figure out what they're doing per se. To my ears, the '60s is when all the cool stuff happened. Those are the places I go now. I don't really keep up. I've tried, but most of the new music just leaves me cold. If I want to be inspired, I listen to the stuff that originally inspired me.

**In terms of technique, what's the last new trick that you learned?**

Not to overplay. I've learned most of the tricks that I'm gonna learn. I just try to refine all the nuances, play in pitch, get a good tone, not play too many notes, and help the song.

**What was the last piece of gear you were excited about?**

Lately, I've been using an Ampeg Rocket amp, which I used on *Mary Jane's Last Dance* and some of the earlier records. I found it in the closet, pulled it out, and loved its sound.

**How much did you practise in the early days, and how much do you still practise now?**

That's a good question. I don't practise per se. When I was learning, I practised a lot to learn the notes, scales, and how to bend notes. I learned that pretty well, but now, when I pick up the guitar, I don't pick it up to practise.

I pick it up because I'm inspired to play or have an idea for a song, and I'm gonna chase the song. So, when I pick up the guitar, I'm usually off and running.

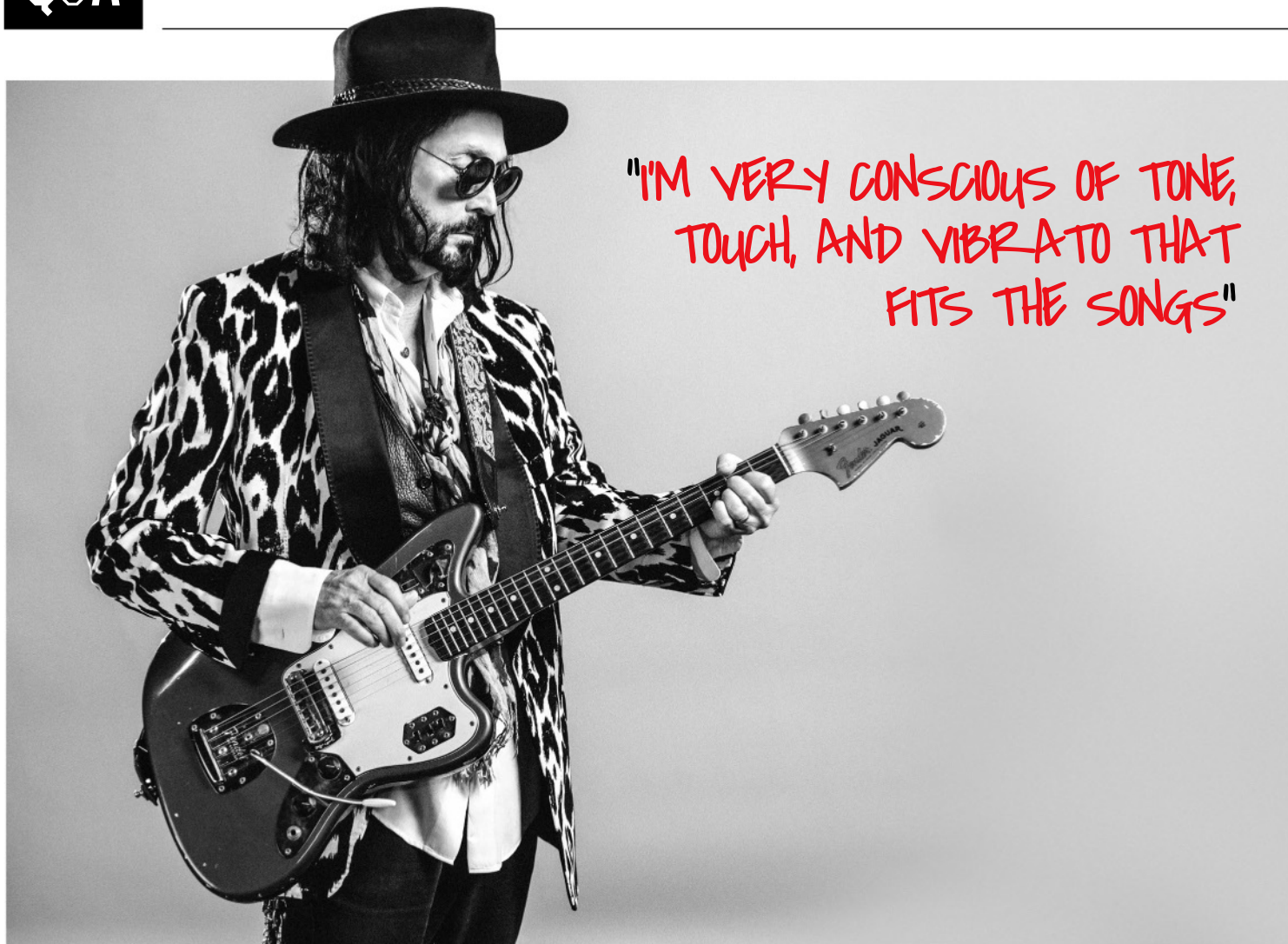
**Is playing fast overrated?**

I'm not a flashy player. I can do it real fast if I want to, but that doesn't fulfil my musical mojo. I like the song, you know? I've always emulated George Harrison and Keith Richards and tried to come up with guitar parts, and it sounds like that. I'm very conscious of tone, touch, and vibrato that fits the songs. And I try to come up with great melodies.

**As a player, do you have any bad habits?**

It's like being a painter – I don't try to do it too hard. I don't think anybody wants to hear me struggling to do something. I stay within my parameters of the stuff I can control and play well. I always focus on my vibrato, and it often needs to be in the rhythm of the song. If you listen to old songs by the Heartbreakers, like *Breakdown*, there's a slow vibrato, and it's bluesy and in pitch. Those are my main focuses. I want the guitar to sound like a voice, be in tune, and not bend the strings past the note. I'm not here to show off my technical ability. I always want to help the song, rather than show off.





➔ **Is there anything that you can't play that you'd like to?**

The cello! I wish I could play the cello or violin. Several years ago, I tried to teach myself, but it's hard to play an instrument without frets on it. If you take those frets away, boy, I'm in real trouble! Put a bow in my hand, and it doesn't work. I wish I could play those because I love them, but I just gave up. It's beyond me.

**What technique did you have to work hardest to master?**

Well, I can tell you one little thing I have incorporated into my style that comes out quite a bit – using chords with open strings under. The guys in the Heartbreakers used to laugh at me, saying, 'Yeah, you're doing the bagpipes again!' It's like a drone. Underneath the suspension are the open strings as the chords change up the neck, and some open strings ring against it. It kind of gives me a sound like The Byrds, and it's something I often fall into because it's natural for me.

**What is one song or performance that you're most proud of?**

On my latest record, [*Vagabonds, Virgins & Misfits*], the first song that comes to mind is

*Hands Are Tied*. It's an old song that I dug up, and I like it because it's unique to me and has different time signatures. And now, I'll get technical! It's got a movement and a time signature that's a challenge to play, but the words are spiritual and personal to me. I didn't notice this till after the fact, but there's a guitar intro there that's very reminiscent of *Breakdown*. It's a similar type of lick in a similar tone and harkens back to that a bit.

So, of the older songs, I'd probably choose *Breakdown* from the Heartbreakers' first album. When we first cut that track it was a six-minute jam. Tom wrote it on the piano, and I went in at the end of the night, noodled around for six minutes through the whole song, just playing the blues, just a mindless stream of consciousness. And at the end of the song, I got bored, went home, and said nothing about it. And then Tom called and said, 'You've got to come back to the studio. There's something at the end of the song that you played that would be perfect for the beginning.' I didn't know what it was, but I went back, and they played it for me. I ended up putting the line at the top of the song, and it kind of became very definitive. That's a good example of my vibrato, tone, and finding my essence.

**What do you play when you're just relaxing and playing for the fun of it?**

Oh, I do that a lot. I tend to fall into blues lines by, like, Mike Bloomfield, B.B. King or Chuck Berry. If I get stuck, I always go into Chuck Berry mode, leading me in the right direction.

**And after all these years in the game, can you remember a time when you felt like you'd failed as a player, or felt embarrassed by a performance?**

That's a good question, but I don't think I can answer it clearly! I tend to work stream-of-consciousness with guitar stuff, especially solos. I tend to run the tape, record it, then listen back, and go, 'Oh, well, that little piece there... that should be the essence of this. Let's get rid of that other crap!' And then I'll do it again with that in mind. I will just play it again and try it in the right vein. You always learn something from every song, and you surprise yourself. If you're lucky, you'll surprise yourself a lot and think, 'What was that? Where did that come from?'. The important thing is to be open, pay attention, and don't let anything get past you that was really good.

*Vagabonds, Virgins & Misfits* is out now.





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## DONNIE LAUDICINA

Donnie Laudicina is a professional session and touring guitarist based in Los Angeles. After studying under legendary guitarists Kenny Burrell and Wolf Marshall at UCLA, Donnie has gone on to perform, record, and tour with acts like DPR Ian, Ashe, and many more



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**O**ften in funk, the guitarist's role is strictly rhythmic. It's less about shredding or melodies and more about adding a syncopated rhythm or some texture, and that means most of the work lies with the picking hand. Here, in this lesson from Pickup Music, you'll learn funk fundamentals like chanking and shell chords.

If you want to tighten up your funk rhythm chops, you'll need

to get down with the 'chanking' strumming technique, as used famously by James Brown guitarist Jimmy Nolen, who employed it as part of his 'chicken scratch' approach. Essentially, it's a mix of sharp strumming and tight on/off muting to cut chords short and give a percussive feel.

A big part of funk guitar is reducing chords down to their core, playing only the most important notes. It's rare to strum a full barre chord in funk and more common

to use only the top three or four strings. Often, this means removing the 5th interval and sometimes the root note, and even other notes may be ditched for the sake of practicality. These are known as shell chords.

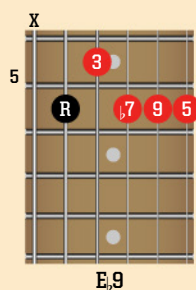
Across the page is Pickup Music's study track, *Love Machina*, where you can try out both techniques. Make sure to follow the bit.ly link too, where you'll find a video lesson complete with a full play-through of the track.



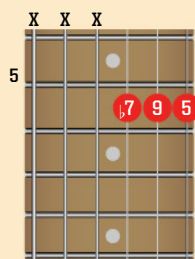


## CHORDS

Here's an example of E<sub>1</sub>, 9 and E<sub>1</sub>, 13 chords getting trimmed down to size - making them shell chords. By removing the lower notes, the guitar takes up less sonic space and makes room for vocals and other mid-frequency instruments. Don't worry about losing the root note. In a band arrangement, the lower register will be covered by the bass.



E.9



### E<sub>b</sub>9 (shell chord)



E13



### E.13 (shell chord)

## LOVE MACHINA (STUDY TRACK)

**bit.ly/tg388audio**

Bar 2 is the track's main groove. Start with the E<sub>9</sub> shape and play two downstrokes, followed by a downstroke E<sub>13</sub>, and finally back to the E<sub>9</sub> on an upstroke. The bass and drums create the foundation, so your job is to sit lightly on top and stay "in the pocket". Bar 6 is a new groove based around an A<sub>1</sub> dominant chord played down-up, down-up, up-up-up. Take note where the shape moves to G<sub>9</sub> and be ready to walk it back up to the A<sub>9</sub>. Bar 7 is a repeat of the intro which acts as a turnaround to take you back into the E<sub>9</sub> groove.



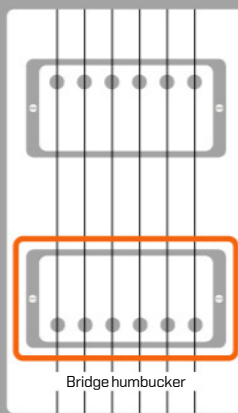
- ✓ E Phrygian mode
- ✓ Odd time signature
- ✓ Pull-offs



## RIFF OF THE MONTH

### GET THE TONE

CHANNEL **CLEAN**



Over the years, Jerry has used various amps, from modified Marshalls to various Bogners, plus his signature Friedman JJ-100 model. He's been seen playing *Vilified* on his original humbucker-loaded GGL Rampage. Aim for a high-gain tone but be careful not to use too much drive; it should sound heavy and tight, but also controlled and focussed. The original recording is played in E<sub>1</sub> standard tuning, but our video is played in E standard so you don't have to detune to learn the parts.

# JERRY CANTRELL

## Vilified

**T**he Alice In Chains guitarist returns with his fifth solo album, and this track featuring Metallica's Rob Trujillo on bass. The riff to *Vilified* is played with a clever combination of palm-muted pick strokes and pull-offs to repeat a phrase which is in 6/8 time with a '1 2, 1 2, 1 2' count.

Start with two open sixth string palm-mutes, then use your first, second and third fingers to

pull off from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd frets on the low E, A and D strings in that order. After repeating the riff seven times, ascend the sixth string with the E blues scale notes E, G, A and B<sub>1</sub>, using the same rhythm.

The second half of the riff moves up to the 5th and 6th frets and alternates between A<sub>1</sub>5 and G5 powerchords. This section is in 7/8 time which can be counted as '1 2, 1 2, 1 2 3', with downstrokes played on each '1'.

Check out our slowed down video play-through at the bit.ly link above to pick up on all the finer details.

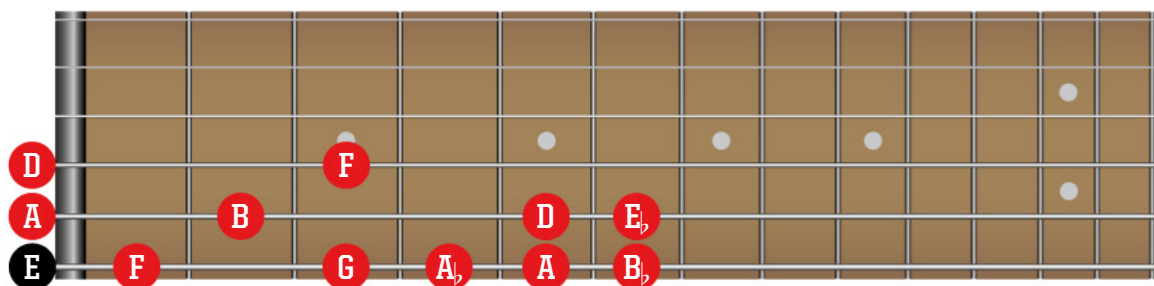
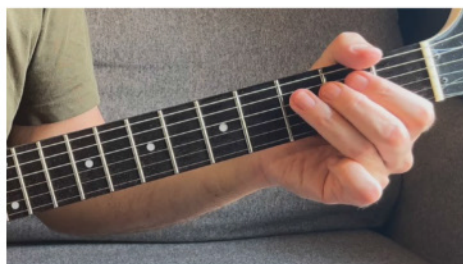
### CHEAT SHEET...

**Appears at:** 0:00-0:40

**Tempo:** 95bpm

**Key/scale:** E Phrygian / blues

**Main techniques:** Picking, pull-offs, string-muting



The first part of this riff is based in the E Phrygian mode (EFG ABCD) and focuses on the 2 interval (the F note) to create a dark, aggressive sound. To transition into the next section,

Jerry climbs up the sixth string using the E blues scale (E G A B<sub>1</sub> D). The second part of the riff uses two powerchords, A<sub>1</sub>5 and G5, with the root notes on the 6th and 5th frets.





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## GARY HEIMBAUER

Throughout Gary's career, from public school modern band teacher, to Director of Curriculum at Little Kids Rock and currently guitar influencer at POW Music, there has been one single mission—to empower students to discover, play, and create music on their own terms. His role is simply to be the best guide he can be.



# INTRO TO BLUES

## How to start playing blues guitar and sound authentic

**I**n this lesson, we'll get right into the blues and teach you three straightforward licks so you can start playing in the style straight away.

These licks will be built from the A blues scale. This is the same as the minor pentatonic scale, but with an added, 5 passing note. While this interval sounds very dissonant, as a passing tone it adds tension to the blues scale. The kicker is that we'll

be playing the pattern up an octave on the higher strings.

For more advanced players, there's a clever way to get up to this position by working your way through the regular scale pattern, then through the 'Albert King' box. You'll be able to begin the A blues scale again on the top strings.

All of these licks will be in the 10th fret position. The first lick is a standard that everyone needs to know, showcasing the classic blues

sound. The second lick adds four notes to the end of the first lick creating a phrase. Playing with phrases is helpful in giving your solos space and making statements with your ideas. The third lick adds variation to the original lick. This is a great reminder that by adding simple variations in your riffs, you can create compelling solo ideas.

For more blues soloing specifics, including the best notes to use, head to: [guitartricks.com/totalblues](https://guitartricks.com/totalblues)



Guitar Tricks' step-by-step lessons will be your guide to learning how to play guitar. With our Core Learning System, video feedback, practice reminders and Custom Lesson Plans you will save tons of time on your guitar learning journey. Guitar Tricks has a 14-day free trial plus a 60-day money-back guarantee so you can purchase with confidence.

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### 1 REPEATING BLUES LICK

[bit.ly/tg388audio](https://bit.ly/tg388audio)

♩ = 80

3:40

TAB

10 13 10 11 10 13 10 13 10 11 10 13 10 13 10 11 10 13

With this straightforward repeating blues lick you'll be able to sound like a classic blues guitarist. Notice that it's phrased in triplets (groupings of three notes) – and you may need to spend a little time nailing the triplet feel separately from memorising the notes. The timecode at the left of the tab tells you where the lick appears in the video.

### 2 CLASSIC BLUES PHRASE

[bit.ly/tg388audio](https://bit.ly/tg388audio)

6:06

TAB

10 13 10 11 10 13 10 12 10 13 10

Ending a riff with some 'statement' notes will take your sound to a more professional level. You'll sound more experienced by playing phrases between your repeating licks. This lick has a different feel from the previous example, with four notes for each musical pulse. Again, practise slowly.

### 3 BLUES LICK VARIATION

[bit.ly/tg388audio](https://bit.ly/tg388audio)

9:00

TAB

10 13 12 11 10 13 10 13 10 12 10 13 10

Here, we're mixing up the rhythm to add some variety the more standard licks we've looked at so far. This will allow you to extend your solos and play longer. You'll also get more out of each idea – so make sure to experiment with rhythm in your own ideas.







"THE WORST THING  
WE COULD HAVE DONE  
WAS WRITE ANOTHER  
HEAVY RECORD!"

For three albums, avant-garde metal act **Zeal & Ardor** has effectively been a one-man band in the studio. But now, leader Manuel Gagneux is opening up his creative process – finding new sounds with fellow guitarist Tiziano Volante

Words Phil Weller

**M**anuel Gagneux began writing music as Zeal & Ardor with a point to prove. A regular on 4chan forums around 2013, he was taking requests to mash genres together when one user, with a racist undercurrent, suggested he mixed black metal with black music. Born to an African mother and Swiss father, he didn't take the comment lightly, but stumbled upon something unique in the process.

The aggression of black metal proved a counterpoint, in equal parts tasteful and forceful, to African-American spirituals, blues, soul, trap and hip-hop. Suddenly, what started life as a retaliation, of taking pride in the diversity of sounds black





musicians have forged throughout the history of recorded music, the project took on a life of its own.

From his home in Basel, Switzerland, Manuel created Zeal & Ardor's debut album *Devil Is Fine* as a one-man band, singing, playing all instruments and programming the drums. Self-released in 2016, the album was re-released with label backing – the UK-based MVKA – having garnered a cult status on Bandcamp. For live performance, Manuel put a band together, but on the two albums that followed, only drummer Marco Von Allmen was involved in the recording, as the multi-tasking Manuel dived deeper

into avant-garde and dark, Tom Waitsian territories on 2018's *Stranger Fruit*, and then took an altogether more progressive and aggressive direction on 2022's self-titled *Zeal & Ardor*.

With each record, Manuel has pushed the boundaries of what Zeal & Ardor is, the music becoming catchier and more technical, simultaneously more destructive and delicate. But now, his MO has changed. With new album *Greif* – named after by a mythical griffin-like creature from Swiss folklore that stands as a symbol opposing elitist oppression – Manuel invited the band into the studio, embracing collaboration and, in particular, harnessing the magic of

**THE JOY OF SIX**  
Zeal & Ardor, 2024.  
Top row, from left: Lukas Kurmann (bass), Marco Von Allmen (drums), Marc Obrist (backing vocals, production). Bottom row, from left: Denis Wagner (backing vocals), Manuel Gagneux, Tiziano Volante

his partnership with co-guitarist Tiziano Volante. The former may be the brains and the vision behind the band, but Tiziano is arguably their secret weapon.

"Our roles in the band are split generally between the hard stuff and the stuff you can play while singing," Manuel says. "It's funny – we kind of got into this harmonious thing where we don't really talk about who plays what anymore. I just record the demo and appear at rehearsal and Tiziano can essentially play everything on his own. He's like, 'Sure you can take something, you're part of it too.'"

As Tiziano puts it: "I try to keep Manuel's back as free as possible so he has the freedom to either lock in with me, or play the lead lines, which I think are really important to the band's sound. I'm the glue between the bass and the leads."

Having penned the first records on a Charvel Pro Mod Style 1, Manuel has since transitioned to an Aristides Raw

"THERE AREN'T THAT MANY TONES BEING USED ON THIS ALBUM. WE WANTED A MORE INTIMATE AESTHETIC"

TIZIANO VOLANTE



060. “The Charvel is my second guitar now,” he explains. “I play the Floyd Rose just with my palm – the whammy bar is kind of annoying. But the Aristides – just the gain on that thing is amazing. “It doesn’t fluctuate in tuning if you’re going from a hot country to a cold country, because it’s just plastic.”

Tiziano, meanwhile, wasn’t content with just grabbing an off-the-shelf axe. Instead, he linked up with Swiss luthier Aeschbach Guitars for a custom build that delivers seven-strings of meaty metal tones. With a signature body shape, which Tiziano describes as a mix of “Ibanez Iceman, Strandberg, and a little bit of Rickenbacker,” plus, of course, an extended range, it’s a unique weapon in their arsenal.

“I’m always looking for excuses to use that low string,” he grins. “We play in D standard and I have an extra low G. On *Tuskegee* [from 2020 EP *Wake Of A Nation*], in the chorus I usually play a mid-range powerchord with tremolo picking, but in the last chorus I go down to the low octave. It adds a little more depth for those peak moments. For a riff that Manuel plays on the low E, I’ll often play it on the seventh string but higher up the neck. I think string gauges can make a bigger difference to the tone than amps. I use a 0.074 for the seventh string. I basically buy an eight-string set but don’t use the [seventh] string.”

Asked what the key specs had to be, seeing as this was a custom build and the world was his oyster, he says: “The string setup has become the one thing I really care about. The strings need to ring like you want them to and the push and pull of the action. And the scale length [26.5"] is really important. I think tonewoods are a little bit of a tail-chasing situation. It really comes down to what you put your gear into afterwards. These days there are so many great options to get great sounds. Personally, I’m a big fan of having one box that does it all so there’s no hassling around with cables and grounding issues.” Manuel adds: “We’ve just switched from Axe FX to Neural DSPs and it’s been lovely. It’s the same functionality but you don’t break your back carrying it.”

Tiziano says that on stage, the Quad Cortex has been “bliss”. He highlights the importance of being able to change presets – via MIDI – in an instant, with gapless scene changes helping band’s heavy-quiet aesthetic punctuate their performances.

In the studio, however, real amps are still king. For rhythms, they used a Marshall JCM 800 and a Hiwatt Custom 200, but it was a Lil’ Rat distortion pedal, modded by their friends in Swiss psych band Oakhead, that stole the show.

“The Hiwatt itself it wasn’t that great,” Tiziano explains, “but in combination with the Rat it just had this extra something on top, and it was so awesome! We put it in front of both amps. “On the Marshall I had to pull it back a little bit, but on the Hiwatt it’s completely open so it really boosts the high frequency. You can hear the fingers and the pick. So for live I’m using captures of that now.”

Clean tones saw another pairing, a Vox AC30 and a Fender Twin Reverb, with no jiggery-pokery needed. “Those things, if you just mic them up properly, they do everything for you,” Manuel says. “They’re very warm and beautiful machines. But contrast is more important than the tone itself. If you just have the hardest, heaviest tone as a constant you get numb to it. So we intersperse it with clean guitars or a bit of peace and quiet. One of the harsher songs on this new record is *are you the only one now?*, which is kind of like a lullaby that kind of has harsher moments, and I just love that contrast.”

“There aren’t that many tones being used on this album,” Tiziano reveals. “It’s mainly in the performance, playing with extra energy or pulling back. We wanted to give it a more intimate aesthetic. It isn’t overbearing with dubs. It’s quite focused.”

Manuel says that “the band is at its best on the stage,” so, where previously he’d record most parts himself, he brought the stage to the studio. “The songs we play have gradually mutated into bigger things on stage, so to have that version of Zeal & Ardor in the studio was a no-brainer. It’s brought more energy to the music.”

By treating the band’s sonic canon as a living, breathing organism, evolution supercharges each record in fresh ways. Following the grinding and grunting heaviness of 2022’s self-titled album, Manuel felt it right to reveal another side of the band. Repetition wasn’t an option.

“The worst thing we could have done was write another heavy record, because we would be that band forever,” he says. “We’ve been a lot of things in Zeal & Ardor. We’ve been aggressive, sad,

contemplative, but never enticing, and with a song like *Disease*, I wanted that aspect to be represented. I love guitar harmonies, but you can’t really do them without it being cheesy, so we just leaned into it, and we’re happy we did.”

Tiziano calls *Disease* “one of the most interesting songs on the album”, and admits to a specific influence. “Queens Of The Stone Age took dibs on the pitch-shifted lead sounds years ago, so it would be a lie if we didn’t admit it was a nod to them, but it’s really cool to show a more tongue-in-cheek side of us, because it reflects us as people.”

Another of the new songs, *Thrill*, is similarly tongue-in-cheek. “It’s an exceptionally dumb riff!” Tiziano says. “What I tried to do is loosen the idea and give it some variation with how it is played, jumping between octaves on the low G and D strings. In the verse it’s the other way around. It gives it movement and I think that represents how we tracked guitars on the album.”

With *Greif*, the band has entered a new era. “We haven’t reached our capacity yet, and that’s the exciting part,” Manuel concludes. “It’s brilliant to know that I have people which I can do silly things with. I can’t describe it as anything other than a privilege.” *Greif is out now.*

#### RIISING FORCE

“We haven’t reached our capacity yet, and that’s the exciting part,” Manuel says





Words Andrew Daly Photos Getty

# "I PLAY GUITAR AND I LISTEN TO MUSIC ALL DAY. IT'S ALL I DO!"

**Cage The Elephant's** lead guitarist Nick Bockrath loves a rocking riff and a catchy solo. But he's also finding new inspiration in African music, jazz and playing pedal steel

**T**he latest album from **Cage The Elephant** was a long time coming. As lead guitarist Nick Bockrath says, "We started recording it three years ago!" But *Neon Pill*, the band's first new record since 2019's *Social Cues*, was worth waiting for.

Led by the Shultz brothers, singer Matt and rhythm guitarist Brad, Cage The Elephant have perpetrated some seriously radical indie-meets-garage-meets-psych-rock over the years. An expansive sound and boundary-pushing mindset has been evident from their self-titled debut from 2008, featuring the slinky blues-rocker *Ain't No Rest For The Wicked*, and continued across albums such as 2013's *Melophobia*, with its dreamy acoustic hit *Cigarette Daydreams*, and 2015's *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, produced by The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach.

The latter featured Nick Bockrath as an additional studio musician, but he graduated to full band member status for *Social Cues*, and his guitar hooks are slathered all over *Neon Pill*.

When Nick speaks to TG, the band are midway through a huge US tour, with close to 50 dates in major arenas. "This is really exciting," he says. "It's been almost five years since we've done a headline tour. It's good to be back."

**As far as guitars go, what sounds were you searching for with this album?**

I'm always trying to react to what's happening in the moment, but I've been

listening to a lot of African music and amazing '70s rock 'n' roll. I got really into that stuff where the rhythm section is doing those African things, and the guitars are like the sound of Black Sabbath, like crazy fuzz. I'm always searching for off-the-beaten-path stuff. I also got really into psychedelic rock guitar, and I even got into Link Wray and Duane Eddy, who are classic examples of vibrato and the emotion they get from that. So my parts on the record were reactive to what I was hearing and influenced by.

**One of the great things about your playing - and it's perfect for Cage the Elephant - is how you fill space within the layers of sound.**

I think of the guitar as a punctuation to the vocal. Whatever Matt is saying is the most important thing and the whole point of the song. It's about, 'How can I support that, and be like an exclamation point, or a comma, after his words?' Sometimes a song will call for a cool-sounding chord or a hooky riff. And sometimes, all those things happen and I don't differentiate between the lead and the rhythm. I'm building





"IF I'M LOOKING FOR  
SOMETHING NEW, I CAN  
ALWAYS FIND IT ON  
PEDAL STEEL"





throughout the song, but we as a band do lean toward having a hooky solo, where you can sing back the part. I think that kind of thing always wins over shredding, even though shredding is fun.

#### Are there any keys to your tone?

On this record, I really liked the Death By Audio Echo Dream 2 [delay]. It's kind of an echo pedal, but it's got a fuzz built into it and a master volume. If you take the delay off or turn the fuzz down, it does something that is kind of like an always-on thing for me. I just love the tone of it. And I have this pedal from a guy who doesn't make pedals anymore, a company called Pedal Projects. He made this pedal called a Growly, which is like a drive and a boost and has some compression. I always have it on and in front of my chain, and it's essentially doing what a compressor would do.

#### What sort of amps do you find to be the best pedal platforms?

Looking at the new album's track listing, I think I used one amp on everything, which was a Fender Vibrolux. But we did some of the record at Electric Lady Studios, and they had a [Fender] Twin Reverb there, and I used that on a few tracks where it needed to be clean, but I wanted to crank it up and make the effects speak more.

#### Were there other interesting gear discoveries at Electric Lady that took Neon Pill in an unexpected direction?

I had my [Gibson] SG Custom from the '70s. Well, the serial says: '70/71'. And I brought my pedal steel, too. There's a song called *Over Your Shoulder* where I did a pedal steel overdub, and it was kind of cool because I don't think there are a lot of people cutting pedal steel at Electric Lady in New York! It's usually a Nashville thing.

#### And the album was finished at Sonic Ranch studios in Texas.

That was an amazing environment to

#### TWO PLAYER GAMES

Nick Bockrath  
rocking out with  
Brad Shultz

be in. They had a great guitar collection there. We finished the record there, but there was this one particular '61 Les Paul Jr. – it was one of the sad-looking ones with just the one P-90, and I think it found its way onto every song. I just completely fell in love with that guitar!

#### Speaking of *Over Your Shoulder*, your pedal steel playing harnessed the emotion of that track perfectly.

I really love that song. It was inspired by Matt and Brad's father, who passed away. He was an amazing guy that we all loved, and he was a musician himself. That song has a beautiful, sentimental feeling to it, and there are some electric arpeggios that I play that I weave between the vocals in the chords to match Matt's intensity. Matt's dad loved pedal steel, so I thought that was a fitting vibe for him, and it supports the message of the song.

#### You mentioned earlier that catchiness can't help but win in Cage's music. To that end, the riff from *Rainbows* sticks with you.

That was one of the first songs we wrote, and it came together really fast. We spent a lot of time making the material for this record, but it was kind of cool to have that first one in the bag. That lead line was done during one of

"A HOOKY SOLO ALWAYS WINS OVER SHREDDING, EVEN THOUGH SHREDDING IS FUN"





the first times we were all together after the pandemic, and it just felt amazing. I started humming part of the line, and then I came up with a call-and-response. When we shifted it around a bit, it turned into what it is, and it's fun to play. That was one where I used that SG and my Maestro Fuzz. I love that tone.

**Is there one song on *Neon Pill* that best captures where you're at now as a guitarist?**

That's a hard one, but I feel like *Ball And Chain* is cool for guitar stuff. There's a really cool interplay between me and Brad, and the solo section I did was one I did when we were first writing it, and it stuck until the end. It's sort of like a Robert Fripp thing, like what he would play on a Talking Heads record. I really like that. I feel like there's a cool, angular, rhythmic thing.

**Where will you take your playing next?**

I'm always just trying to grow and be able to play more styles of music. I'll go through phases where I'm into country music, jazz, and Afrobeat, and I'm always blown away by really great rock riffs. So, I don't know. I guess it keeps getting better. I'd maybe like to do an instrumental album one day. Before Cage, I used to do mostly

improvisational music, so maybe getting back to that would be cool.

**Are there any techniques that you're working on right now?**

I'm always working on being able to play stuff that I can incorporate into our songs. The best stuff always comes in and becomes natural to your playing. I'm playing a lot of jazz, and learning pedal steel has been really fun because it's great for inspiration. You can always find something out in left field on the pedal steel, so that's been great for me. If I'm looking for something new, I can always find it on pedal steel. I kind of have an innocence with it because with guitar, I've been playing since I was in the third grade. So, I just keep at it. It's all I do. I play guitar, and I listen to music all day, honestly!

**Do you ever feel like you're hitting a plateau, not advancing, or stuck in a rut? How do you get past that?**

Oh, totally. I mean, it sounds simple, but just keep the thing in your hands. Sometimes I try to learn something that's not in my comfort zone, or something I want to work on, but it's tough. Like, you can learn a tune, or a scale, or you can try to write it out as practice. And then there's putting on a metronome and just recording yourself

**SHARP DRESSED MEN**

"Before Cage, I used to do mostly improvisational music," Nick says. "So getting back to that would be cool..."

and hearing it back. But if you get stuck, it's also good to go out and see other people you love playing music. I gain so much inspiration from just seeing a great show or listening to a great record. Going to shows is important.

**It also helps that you do some session work outside of Cage.**

I feel really lucky with that. It's like a symbiotic thing for Cage, because I'm constantly getting inspiration from all over and coming up with parts for songs. It's just like with practice. I'm not expecting a big eureka moment every time I practice, but sometimes my hands will just take me where I need to be. I'll run a mindless scale, and it just comes.

**Beyond that, what's your best piece of advice for TG readers?**

If you're really bored with your playing, try to learn whatever you can play at half speed. It's very humbling! And then work on your rhythm playing. I really think that there's always something to learn, even if it doesn't feel like a big thing. It can be learning a new chord or a riff. You might write something or a song 20 minutes later or figure out something you might not know. And that's okay – either outcome is great!

*Neon Pill* is out now.



**VIVA HINDS**  
Ana Perrote (left)  
and Carlotta Cosials

32





Words Jenna Scaramanga Photos Darío Vazquez

"WE'RE SO PASSIONATE  
WE GET CARRIED AWAY  
WITH SO MANY MELODIES!"

On a vibrant comeback album featuring Beck and Fontaines D.C. singer Grian Chatten, Spanish duo **Hinds** have found a new guitar style. "We still like solos," they say. But now, the sound of a steel-string acoustic makes them cringe...

**C**arlotta Cosials has set her display name to "best guitar player" when she joins the TG Zoom call. When bandmate Ana Perrote joins moments later, she storms in mock outrage, "And that's how Hinds ended!" The two collapse in laughter, demonstrating an a bond that has enabled the Spanish duo to survive a rough four years. They've changed management, found themselves briefly without a label and split with two former bandmates. Bands have ended over less, but new album *Viva Hinds* confirms Cosials and Perrote are nowhere near finished.

In an indie field where guitar solos can be minimal to nonexistent, Hinds' love of guitar melodies has always stood out. "Maybe it's because we're Spanish, and we sing in English," Ana muses. "Listening to so many songs, sometimes we don't really understand what they're saying. Having guitar solos for us is kind of an international language that everyone can feel. Sometimes when you hear a solo you feel as strong as you feel when someone's singing the best lyric ever. So we've always really been very big on those. This album has more space, but we still like solos."

*Viva Hinds* features notable guests in Beck, who duets on first single *Boom Boom Back*, and Fontaines D.C. frontman Grian Chatten, who lends his voice to *Stranger*. "We call them *majestuosos* – majestic," says Ana. Although both guests are known for their

guitar skills, neither of them played on their tracks. "We were their session musicians," Ana smiles. "We did the whole song, everything, for them to arrive, have their glorious moment!" Carlotta picks up: "It makes me feel very confident, you know? It's very cool that they both just sang. They both probably are the best guitar players, compared to us, so it's cool that they respected what we did."

For this album the pair decamped to LA for songwriting sessions with Beach Weather guitarist Sean Silverman. "Sean is probably my favourite guitar player in the world," Ana confides. "The tones he uses, just watching him work is super inspiring." It was here they met Beck, as Carlotta recalls. "The first time we met was accidental. He was just in a bar that we were in. We started just chatting. We kept seeing each other that same week that that we wrote *Boom Boom Back*. We were obsessed with the song. It was just like a silly demo, but it already sounded like this is gonna be important, you know? So we showed it to him, and he loved it."

Songs written, Hinds returned home to Spain, stuffed all their gear into two cars, and drove to two houses in rural France where they set up improvised recording studios with producer Pete Robertson, formerly drummer of The Vaccines. "The good thing was that options weren't unlimited, so we could master the few things we had," says Ana. They kept meticulous notebooks of what gear was used for each track, a habit learned from bitter experience on previous albums, as Carlotta explains. "It's so f\*cking horrible



when you go back to your practice place and you're like, 'Sh\*t, I'm not achieving the same tone!' And you have just done it. It's so stupid!"

They used a Gibson SG Standard, a Fender Acoustasonic Jazzmaster, and Fender Mustang and Aerodyne Jazz basses. "We were choosing between personalities," Ana says. "Like the Mustang is cute and easy. When we needed something more hardcore we went to the Aerodyne." For amp sounds and distortion, everything went through the Audio Kitchen Big Trees, a 2.5w all-valve pedal, using its speaker emulated line out for everything. "You know how heavy amps are?" Ana laughs. "We carried them all the way to France. For nothing!"

Emblematic of their Spanish heritage, every Hinds album before now has featured a layer of nylon-string rhythm guitar under the electrics. Its use is scaled back on *Viva Hinds*, but it's still an essential ingredient. "The sound of [steel-string] acoustic makes us cringe a bit," admits Ana. "We sometimes write with this just because I have it handy," she adds, picking up a cheap blue dreadnought, "and it's like, ugh! Actually, on the song *On My Own*, the solo is like a conversation between guitar and piano, and that's a nylon string. I love it because it sounds so cheeky.

It was an Eko that belonged to a friend of Carlotta's who left it in her house by accident. It sounded so good. The whole drive back she was like, 'So when are you bringing it back?' We were like, 'You could just give it to us? We made a whole album with it, we deserve it!' But she didn't give it to us!"

Surprisingly, given the duo's distaste for steel-string acoustic sounds, the album's unexpected main guitar was the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster, mainly using the electric pickup. Ana explains: "We really didn't like it so much, but we said, 'Let's just bring everything just in case. Tom Roach, the engineer, was just shocked. He absolutely loved it. We used it for a layer of cowboy guitar on about half the tracks. So now it's my favourite guitar. It's cool when someone sees something special in something you just didn't appreciate."

Pete Robertson brought a Fano Alt De Facto SP6, a kind of Les Paul/Telecaster hybrid that supplies the gorgeous arpeggios that open *The Bed*, *The Room*, *The Rain And You*. They namecheck the James Bond Theme and Britney Spears' *Toxic* as guitar tone inspirations. Those arpeggios are layered with the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster playing a drone on the low E string. "That's why it has a bit of a shoegazy vibe, because there's someone playing the same note the

whole time," Carlotta explains.

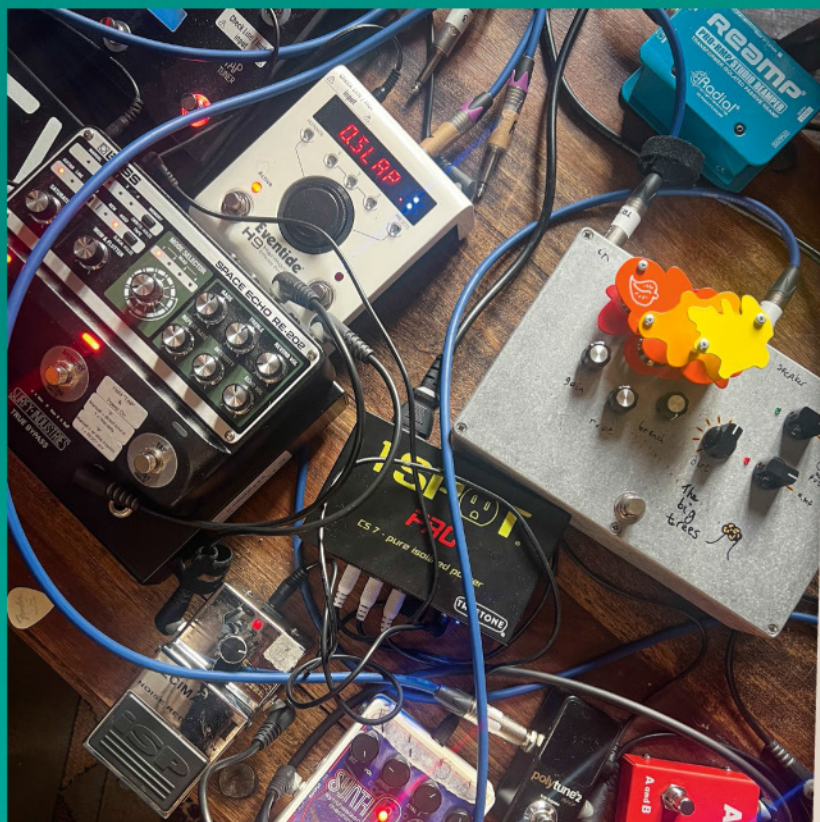
"That's always pretty fun. We used a DigiTech Whammy pedal to change the tone a bit. The Jazzmaster also plays a two-note overdub, up and down."

Although Ana is sitting beside her Tequila Sunrise Fender Player Plus Stratocaster for the interview, it didn't make it onto the album. "We've never been huge fans of Telecasters or Stratocasters," admits Carlotta. "That's like the final boss screen of playing guitar. We're not there yet. We prefer guitars that are a little bit worse and give a bit more personality!" Carlotta's main gigging guitar is the black SG, while Ana has been using a Fender Meteora.

The band's newfound confidence manifests itself, ironically enough, in less guitar playing on *Viva Hinds*. "Four years ago, I was more aggressive," Carlotta says. "I was in that moment when you're feeling confident, but you need approval from everyone else. After these four years – yeah, I don't need no one to confirm that I'm the best guitar player," she laughs, calling back to her display name. "It's less cocky, less in your face," agrees Ana. Their earlier desire to prove themselves, Carlotta suggests, came from self-consciousness about how they began. "We picked up the guitar very late. I was already in my 20s, so I am aware that my way of playing is kind of 'street style'. I don't have very good technique. I had to learn

#### THE GEAR

Snapshots from the studio in France, taken by Ana





"I HAD TO LEARN GUITAR ON STAGE, WHICH IS AMAZING FOR THE AUDIENCE, BUT ALSO A LITTLE BIT EMBARRASSING FOR MYSELF!" CARLOTTA COSIALS



while being on stage, which is amazing for the audience, but also a little bit embarrassing for myself!"

Third single *Superstar* encapsulates this more self-assured approach, with Carlotta's catchy solo using only three notes. "I was just telling her it's by far my favourite guitar solo of the whole album," Ana enthuses. "With the songwriting in general, we said, 'Let's give it a bit more space,' like maybe not everything so crowded. We're so passionate, sometimes we just get carried away with so many melodies that everything is just fighting against each other. On this album, it was just like, 'Okay, let's step have a step back and just let things breathe. It's fun that we have a different guitar style on this album after so many years.'"

"I was listening a lot to the Breeders' *Last Splash*," explains Carlotta.

"I realised that having the guitar doing little details sometimes is better than having a part that's like, 'Hey, I'm talking!' There are two guitars in *Superstar*. One of them, sometimes you don't even notice that it's there, but it's lifting you up because they keep going up and up and up. The other one is the opposite. It goes down. I'm even sometimes a little bit off-tempo. I think that conversation is really cool."

Despite recording the album without a single speaker cabinet, Hinds are now considering what to do on tour. Like many smaller touring acts, they often face an unappetising choice of rented gear on the road. "Fender Twins are our biggest nightmare because they're always broken," groans Ana. "Carlotta uses a Fender Deville 212 and I use a Hot Rod [Deluxe] because they sound similar-ish and the reverb isn't usually broken. In my dream, when I have money, I'm gonna get [Audio Kitchen amp pedal] The Big Trees. We lose a lot of money having to rent everywhere. Maybe we could have something you can fly with, rather than amps. But we need to buy it. Let's talk in three years!"

*Viva Hinds is out now.*



Interview Jonathan Horsley

# “I USED TO GET FRUSTRATED AND THINK ABOUT SMASHING MY GUITAR. THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN ANYMORE.”

Metallica guitarist **Kirk Hammett** describes himself as “the consummate team player”. In this TG exclusive, he discusses the challenges of songwriting, soloing and live performance...

**I**t began in Amsterdam on April 27, 2023. 17 months later, Metallica's epic M72 world tour will reach its conclusion with a show in Mexico City on September 29. In this previously unpublished interview, the band's lead guitarist Kirk Hammett looks back on the tour and the *72 Seasons* album, and explains how and why he is constantly adapting his approach as a player, songwriter and performer.

## When you look back on the making of *72 Seasons*, what gives you the most satisfaction?

The crazy thing about *72 Seasons* is that it just flowed. The riffs were great; lots of high-energy. It was a reprioritisation of what Metallica is, what Metallica means to us all. There was an immense amount of trust. People could take as much responsibility as they wanted and do what they needed to do and that in itself was a great thing. I mean, we trust each other, right? But sometimes we don't trust each other to make the right decisions! And it's nothing personal. It is all for the betterment of the band. It's all for the wellbeing of the music.

But this time around, there was a confidence and a trust in everyone that really just made a difference. From day one, that trust was there. I didn't think we had a choice – we had to trust each other. And we managed to squeeze out a really great album.

## You told TG that for this album you tracked a lot of solos and sent them over to Lars (Ulrich, drummer) and Greg Fidelman (producer) to cherry-pick the best. Is that really a new approach for you? Your solos have always had this improvisational quality.

I have always done a version of that, but on this album I just went in with smaller concepts. I wanted the solos to be more '70s rock solos, or in a nutshell, Angus Young! It never, ever sounded like Angus worked anything out. It sounded like he just went in there and went for it, and so that's what I did. I had to do it this way because it was how I felt inside. Internally, it felt like the right thing to do at this point. I wanted spontaneity. I didn't want picture-perfect solos, because some of my favourite players' solos were kind of rag-tag, a lot of them, and I love that. Don't get me wrong – I love precision, too. I listen to jazz. I listen to prog. And I love

precision. I love well-crafted guitar solos, but it really felt like I should show up at the studio and just f\*cking go for it, man! Get that feeling and go for it. And, having said that, this is a one-time thing. I don't think on future albums I will be doing this, because if I do this again in the future I have a real fear of repeating myself. It's just I have a fear of being redundant. So this is not going to be my approach to solos on the next album.

## What will be your approach next time?

I don't know what my approach will be on the next album! I usually decide once I hear the music. I might be playing really super-clean jazz solos or something. But then the other guys might try and kick me out of the band! Who knows? I don't know, but I don't spend a lot of time worrying about it, because I know once I sit down and clear my mind and play, I get ideas. Stuff just appears. I can just rely on that stuff to appear and then just act on it, and that is the beauty of being a musician, and music in general. Music just appears, and you have the choice of doing what you want to do with it. Change an idea, make it longer, make it heavier, make it lighter, whatever. It's just like clay.









**When you talk about clearing the mind, is that also the key to songwriting for you?**

Agreed, 100 per cent. This is my M.O., and I do this all the time – it's really very simple. There is no hard science or years of experience needed for this. A person that's been playing guitar for, like, two weeks can do this. I just sit there, I try to clear my mind, close my eyes, just relax, and then I just start playing and I listen. I listen to the notes being played. I am not looking at my guitar. I want to be somewhere different on the neck. And I just listen to the notes and I start getting ideas. 'All right! The first note and the fourth note are great. I'll stick with those notes. What's gonna be the second and third one? What can we change?' And then the idea comes.

**How do you deal with writer's block?**

Don't think about the past or what has been done. Don't think about the future and what you need to do. Just see what you can grab in the moment. That's how I write music, and it has turned me into a more prolific composer because I don't get stuck like I used to. I used to get writing blocks for months and months and months, and not write a riff for

months, and get frustrated about it, and think about smashing my guitar. That doesn't happen anymore.

**Do you think of songwriting as an imprecise art?**

It's all about experimentation that's propelling that whole thing forward, propelling it forward and giving it more momentum – more momentum to see it through. One thing that we are all aware of, and it's not spoken about, is when you are trying to come up with stuff, and you're trying to write songs, there is a difference between adding to a song or making a song better. So you've got a song. You've got a part. Add it on. Does it necessarily make the song better? Maybe so, but usually not! There is a point where you have to stop yourself and say, 'Okay, I am just adding onto the song. I'm not necessarily making the song better.' A lot of times we will go back and friggling really rearrange the song and edit it, and take, like, two minutes out of a song.

**Many of Metallica's songs originate from stockpiled ideas – drawn from what you call 'the riff bank'...**

The riff bank is used in two instances.

**WHEREVER I MAY ROAM**

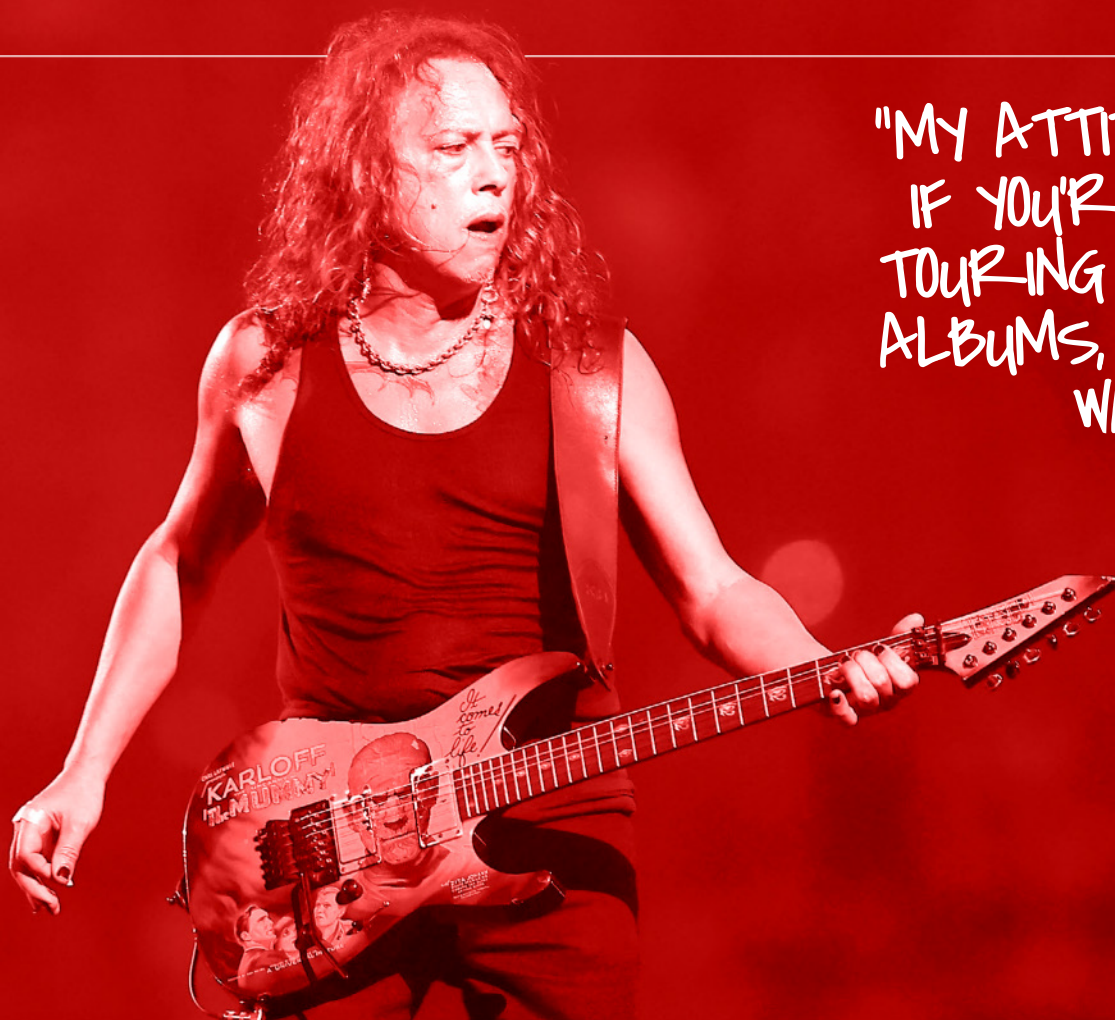
Kirk in action on the M72 world tour

It's used for our riffs, 'Okay, go to the riff bank, we'll take this riff, we're gonna build a song around this riff.' And we're building and building, and then we come to a standstill and no one can come up with anything in the moment that works, then we'll go back to the riff bank. 'Okay, anything in there that will work?' And we'll pluck something out of there and then, all of a sudden, the ideas start flowing again.

**Last year you acquired a 'Factory Black' 1959 Les Paul Standard. What does it sound like?**

It is a beautiful-sounding guitar. It is so well balanced. It is a real blues, jazz, rock guitar – a hard rock guitar. But it doesn't quite have that extra 10 to 15 per cent aggression for me to use it in Metallica. Greg [Fidelman] and I came to the conclusion that it is almost too pretty! But for single lines, for single-note stuff and leads? Oh man, it's so nice! It sings! And the thing about it, because it has been so well looked after, and so well played, it sounds really even. The pickups have aged really nicely. It's a real smooth bridge pickup sound, a real smooth neck pickup sound. The playability of the guitar is amazing.





"MY ATTITUDE IS THAT IF YOU'RE OUT THERE TOURING AND MAKING ALBUMS, THERE IS NO WAY YOU SUCK!"

#### Have you made any interesting gear discoveries recently?

Well, about five years ago I figured out that Marshalls sound the best in Britain. You plug a Marshall straight into the wall in London and it will sound 30 per cent better than the same Marshall hooked up to the wall in America. It's everything to do with the voltage. And it would drive me crazy because it would sound different from show to show!

#### Has your approach to preparing for a show changed at all over the years?

For me, when I get to a show I am all-business. It is all about doing everything I need to do to make the show the best as possible. Or, in other words, I am not sitting around backstage watching TV or socialising, or doing whatever. Everything I do, from minute to minute, has everything to do with the show, whether I am warming up, running through my own personal warm-ups or warming up with the other guys as a band.

The only thing I really, really worry about during our live shows is whether I can hear myself or not, because we put ourselves in situations, like the M72 stage, where it is extremely, extremely

challenging to hear yourself or the other band members. The monitor system is pushed to its absolute limits as far as being able to hear ourselves on that big stage. We have monitors everywhere. We have in-ears. We have two monitor engineers – one for James [Hetfield, guitarist/vocalist] and Lars, one for Rob [Trujillo, bassist] and I, because one guy can't do it. There's too much switching from song to song. It's pretty difficult!

#### The M72 tour stage design has offered changing perspectives, from full-on stadium to club to arena...

It's so crazy how it shifts like that for me in numerous times during the course of the show. I think people pick up on the fact because we are on cameras the whole time, video monitors the whole time. When we are playing to the Snakepit it feels like we are playing in a club, the camera is right there, and then we are projecting that club feel to the stadium, so I think that helps – that helps in creating intimacy.

#### At this stage of your career, does criticism still hurt you?

My attitude is that if you're out there and you're touring, and you're making

**IN THE ZONE**  
"When I get to a show, I am all-business!"

albums, and you're recording, there is no way you suck. And so I can't stop being bewildered by all these people who say, 'This guy sucks! That guy sucks!' Hey, I've got news for you – you don't get to where you're at if you f\*cking suck! Okay? These people are talking on 10 per cent of what they see in all of these people musically. It's incredible. I don't think anyone really sucks. These days, I don't think bad guitar solos even exist anymore because everyone is just so much better than they used to be. Like, in the '60s there were bad guitar solos. You would find them in pop songs, where you'd go, 'Urgh! Nice try. Next!' But that's the past, and that's a good thing.

#### And now, where do you feel you're at as a player?

I love watching technique, but if I had to be put in a situation like that where I had a pressure to play a certain way all the time, I would be bummed out! I want to be able to play however the f\*ck I want to play, and I want to be able to improvise when I want to improvise. And I want to play for the song because I am part of a package. It doesn't begin with me and it doesn't end with me.



# "YOU SHOULDN'T OVERTHINK THE GUITAR"

With an eight-string in his hands, **Leprous** guitarist Tor Oddmund Suhrke is playing progressive metal by his own rules. As he says: "It's cooler not to try to show off."

Words Amit Sharma Photos Grzegorz Golebiowski, Tomasz Gotfryd

**T**he term 'progressive metal' often suggests the kind of indulgent, neoclassical futurism typified by Dream Theater and Symphony X, but

Norwegian quintet Leprous – arguably one of the most exciting names operating in the genre today – have chosen moods and atmospheres over sprawling overtures.

The group, formed by singer/keyboardist Einar Solberg and guitarist Tor Oddmund Suhrke in 2001, cut their teeth early on as the live band for Ihsahn, the man who famously pioneered the symphonic black metal sound through his work in Emperor. Such an opportunity during the band's embryonic years benefitted them greatly in terms of musical development and helped sharpen their collective tools of the trade.

"We don't sound like those technical progressive bands with all the fast leads," Tor says. "Our music is more about emotion. We focus on mood. It's funny, Leprous is like an overdue youth project."

Myself and Einar started the band when we were 15. Most people start out in one group and then switch to other things as they develop, but we never quit our first band!"

As illustrated by their stunning eighth full-length *Melodies Of Atonement*, the band have come a long way indeed. And as Tor explains, these latest recordings were born out of a desire to evolve in different directions, a mission to make the complex sound simple...

**Who were your biggest influences when you started this band?**

The first ones I think about tend to be my early ones, when I picked up the guitar. That's when you really focus on your inspirations and heroes. After that, you start to develop your own sound through a whole bunch of guitarists. Mikael Åkerfeldt from Opeth was one of our biggest inspirations in the early years, and those guys still are our idols. Another big hero of mine is Ihsahn of









➔ Emperor, which I guess is quite obvious given how much we've worked and toured with him.

**Ihsahn was also your guitar teacher for a while. Not many people can say they had one-on-one lessons with one of their biggest musical heroes!**

I took lessons for about year or so before we started Leprous. He's a really important mentor for musicians in Notodden, where we live. He helped people in my hometown by starting this youth project. Einar is his brother-in-law and also my best friend, which is how I joined. Eventually Ihsahn asked if we could be his backing band. That's how we ended up playing abroad and stepping up in terms of musicianship, performing at big festivals and getting experience.

**What exactly did you ask him to teach you in those lessons?**

I remember he taught me how to play songs by Dream Theater, Iron Maiden and King Diamond. That was a good way to learn how to play metal guitar, though I remember giving up on some of the John Petrucci solos, like the one in *Pull Me Under*, which has fast bursts that are really hard. Maybe if I'd continued, I'd have ended up sounding more like a shredder. Those lessons taught me a lot, like how to hold a guitar pick. All those tips stayed with me. There are no rules in music, but there are always things that will feel more natural. You shouldn't overthink the guitar or feel you have to play in a specific way – in fact, that can ruin your progress. I had to be able to play Ihsahn's solo material perfectly, plus old Emperor songs with big chords being strummed fast. He would show me how to strum, and through that I ended up developing my own technique.

**You started out on regular electric guitars and ended up using eight-strings. What helped most with that transition?**

It was a necessity! I probably wouldn't have gotten an eight-string if we weren't playing for Ihsahn. They're like a mix between guitar and bass. I wouldn't recommend starting out on eight – fewer strings is easier. It's best to begin with rhythmic single-string ideas, like a lot of djent stuff. That will teach you how to handle the instrument correctly. Don't give up, because it will seem awkward at first but it does get easier. I now look at them as a tool for creating more dimension. Einar does most of the composing, but he isn't a guitar player. So he will write the arrangements and then it's up to us guitarists to find our role within those songs. I use eight-strings and handle the low frequency riffy stuff while our other guitarist Robin [Ognedal] does the leads, following the vocals higher up. We meet in the middle!



**You were using PRS guitars through Blackstar and Fender amps for a while, but on more recent tours it's been Aristides guitars going into a Kemper profiler...**

Yeah, I'm mainly using my Aristides models these days. The eight-string parts were recorded with my o8os, which is my go-to. When Ihsahn introduced me to Aristides, I was totally converted. It felt like another level of tone, sustain and playability. The chords felt easier and the neck was nicer. I also love the Aristides six-strings, like the T/o Telecaster six-string that you can hear on the new album. There's a coil-split, which comes in really handy for our live shows. It took me several years to realise that my PRS guitars also had coil-splits... I never knew! Maybe it's because I was just a metal guitarist to start with, using humbuckers and everything on full.

**So what amps are we hearing on the album?**

Every single part was fine-tuned and tweaked, so we used different amps and settings for each part. But it was mainly a Diezel VH4. I'd never seen one until we recorded the *Malina* album in 2017 at Ghostward Studios. It looked so metal and strange, I didn't think I'd like it. But after some blind tests, we all felt the VH4 crunch channel sounded the best. It won the blind tests on every album after that, including this latest one. There was also a Hiwatt amp that got used in the studio a bit, with maybe a Fender Twin somewhere in there.

**A lot of songs you've recorded in the past have featured odd-time signatures. What's your approach for coming up with the more unusual ideas?**

I guess the general prog approach is to make things sound more complicated than they are.

I'm not pointing fingers, we were guilty ourselves early on. We'd try our hardest to make music that sounded complicated. Later on, we switched to ideas that were complicated but sounded like they weren't. I think we managed to achieve that. Sometimes we see prog fans complaining that 4/4 is the Devil and not liking our more recent albums. They accuse us of cheating or going pop. But a lot of the songs they mention aren't 4/4 at all. People just think they are, because it's easy to nod along. This new album is all 4/4, but sounds more complicated because we use polyrhythms with Baard [Kolstad] on drums, who can make riffs sound all over the place. The old Leprous would have written an idea and then added or subtracted notes to make it sound odd-time. That's a cool experimental thing to do, just to see what happens. As we've grown, we've realised it's cooler not to try to show off. You almost keep the clever stuff to yourself.

**There's a lot of dynamic range in your songs. From the clean single-note lines on *Atonement* to the slide work on *Faceless* and *Starlight*, and then the big bendy riffs of *My Specter*, you've clearly mastered the art of building tension and momentum...**

While learning the songs for the tour, we noticed they're more intuitive and playable. We recorded live in the studio with bigger and longer takes. Before we used to do one part at a time and then reamp them to perfection. We used a lot of slide. I think Robin played slide the whole way through *Atonement*! He made it sound so different, people actually thought it was keys. He did such a good job, he didn't get the credit!

**The chemistry between the keys and guitars is fundamental to your sound. How can other bands blend these instruments with the same kind of cohesion?**

Einar will make songs on his laptop and program loads of things. It will start off as a keyboard part and then we'll evolve it into a guitar part. It's all about listening. The Electro-Harmonix POG got used a lot, turning the guitars into something more synthetic. I love that sound, though we had to filter out some of the weirder frequencies when mixing. I guess the POG tone can be a little too obvious. I can do similar things using my digital rig, but the POG is so unique. I'm actually thinking about touring with a POG in front of my Kemper, which handles everything else. My sound has really evolved on this album. We moved away from the metal elements on *Malina* and found not using distortion can create a lot of extra space. The sound is less compressed and more organic. But this time we weren't afraid of adding gain. We're looking to reintroduce things we'd thrown out. It's all about what fits!

*Melodies Of Atonement* is released on August 30.



"SOMETIMES WE SEE PROG FANS COMPLAINING  
THAT 4/4 IS THE DEVIL!"





# “IT WAS LIKE RIDING A WAVE – A SONIC WAVE!”

For guitarist **Carlos Alomar**, working with David Bowie in the '70s was a great adventure filled with musical experimentation and gear innovation.

“It was,” he says, “a glorious odyssey...” **Words by** Andrew Daly

**D**avid Bowie was one of rock music's true visionaries, his long career one of continual reinvention. And at the height of his creativity – all through the '70s and into the early '80s – he worked with an array of extravagantly gifted guitar players.

In his reign as glam rock's brightest star, his backing band The Spiders From Mars was led by the Les Paul-wielding riff machine Mick Ronson, whom Bowie called “my Jeff Beck”. In the mid-'70s there was streetwise New Yorker Earl Slick mixing rock 'n' roll swagger with effects-driven weirdness. On art rock masterpieces “Heroes” and *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*, Bowie had Robert Fripp, the progressive rock pioneer of King Crimson, playing out of left-field. And on his 1983 smash *Let's Dance*, alongside Chic maestro and producer Nile Rodgers on rhythm guitar, Stevie Ray Vaughan brought a little Texas blues to the party.

But of all the guitarists that worked with Bowie during his most experimental period, arguably the most important was Carlos Alomar, a key collaborator for the singer in his run of classic albums from 1975 to 1980: *Young Americans*, *Station To Station*, *Low*, “Heroes”, *Lodger* and *Scary Monsters*.

Born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York City, Carlos was in his early twenties when Bowie hired him for the recording of *Young Americans* in 1974. The album was a radical left-turn for their singer as he moved beyond rock to embrace soul and funk – and this was precisely the kind of music at which Alomar excelled. Previously, he had served as a backing musician for Chuck Berry and James Brown before moving on to session work for RCA Studios. He'd also played in the Main Ingredient, an NYC-based R&B group that had a hit with *Everybody Plays The Fool*, and guested with another soul legend, Ben E. King, on *Supernatural*.

As Carlos says now of Bowie's vision for *Young Americans*: “He was looking for a new sound.” And the young guitarist knew instinctively how to get it. After the success of *Young Americans*, Carlos was appointed as Bowie's musical director, and on the following album, 1976's *Station To Station*, he enlisted bassist George Murray and drummer Dennis Davis to complete the D.A.M. Trio – Davis, Alomar and Murray, the core of Bowie's backing band until 1980.

“We had a tight, cohesive sound,” Carlos says. “It underpinned much of David's music during that era. We were a crucial part of his transition through different musical phases. And this fact is also undeniable: the D.A.M. Trio's legacy equals, if not surpasses, that of the Spiders from Mars.”

That's a weighty claim. But then again, listening back to *Station To Station* and the fabled ‘Berlin Trilogy’ that followed – *Low*, “Heroes” and *Lodger* – maybe Carlos has a point. Flourishes of funk, R&B, jazz and rock are apparent throughout, all in stark contrast to the atmospheric electronica orchestrated by Bowie's other partner in crime, former Roxy Music maverick Brian Eno. “It was exciting,” Carlos says, “to hear how our collective efforts resulted in something so groundbreaking.”

And as impactful as he was in the studio, Alomar's influence didn't end there. When playing live alongside Earl Slick, he found himself competing with the latter's walls of Marshalls, and so devised one of the earliest examples of a live rack system. “I could now compete with any Marshall stacks with these bad boys,” he says. “I developed one of the first rack systems for rhythm guitar – out of necessity. I did it to keep all my gear organized in total stereo, and to make it easily accessible. My main live guitar at that time, ‘Maverick’ – a custom-made instrument from Alembic – and my new rig gave me the confidence, flexibility and reliability I needed for live performances.”

Now, 50 years on from his debut recording with Bowie, Carlos speaks in depth about his role in all the great music they made together in those golden years...











**Before you hooked up with Bowie, what was your approach to guitar?**

I learned to be versatile and innovative, blending my roots in R&B and soul with a growing interest in rock and funk. My key was always to stay adaptable and open to new sounds and techniques.

**What did your rig look like in the early '70s?**

I used my Gibson ES-335 for its clarity and punch, paired with a Fender Twin Reverb. This was standard gear for R&B. I loved the clean, powerful sound that setup gave me.

**It was early for that sort of thing, but did you use many pedals?**

Initially, I didn't use many effects, just a little amp reverb. I focused on getting the right tone directly from my guitar and amp. However, as the decade progressed, I heard *Theme From Shaft* by Issac Hayes, so I started incorporating a wah-wah and, of course, Jimi Hendrix's Fuzz Face, as well as a phase shifter to add some colour to my playing.

**How did you adapt your style when you joined the Main Ingredient?**

They were looking for a guitarist to add a fresh, soulful vibe to their sound. I approached the guitars with a focus on complementing their rich vocal harmonies, using smooth R&B rhythms and melodic lines – what I then called 'chord-based' soloing.

**What was it like working with Ben E. King on *Supernatural*?**

It was an amazing experience. *Supernatural* had this infectious groove, and I wanted to capture that with my guitar work. There was more than one guitarist, so I used a lot of syncopation and tight, funky rhythms to enhance the track's feel.

**You first met Bowie in New York, when you played on a session he was producing for Scottish singer Lulu...**

We hit it off while in the studio, and he asked me if I would work with him, but I was already with the Main Ingredient and making good money. So, regrettably, Bowie couldn't afford me! But, later, he invited me to join his band for the *Young Americans* sessions – and made me an offer I couldn't refuse!

**What did your rig look like in the studio as you worked on that album?**



I hadn't really expanded my rig at all. By then, I knew some of the outboard gear found in studios and depended on 19-inch studio rack units instead of pedals to experiment with new sounds. I was using an ES-335TD CRS Country Rock Stereo for its warm, rich tones.

**How did your style impact songs like *Young Americans* and *Fame*?**

My style brought a distinctive funk and soul flavour to those tracks. My rhythmic playing on *Young Americans* helped define the groove, giving it that soulful Latin feel. For *Fame*, the main riff I came up with became the backbone of the song. It was all about creating something catchy yet intricate.

**What are your memories of recording the next album, *Station To Station*?**

It was an intense and creative process. When I first arrived at the sessions, I chose my Twin Reverb. When Slicky

**BOYS KEEP SWINGING**

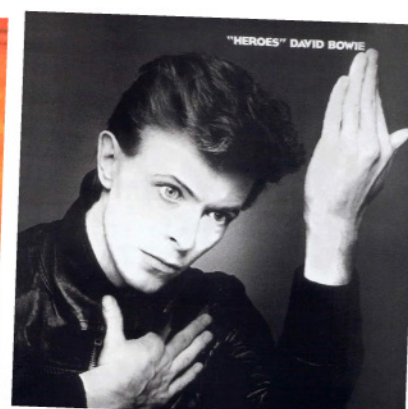
Carlos backing Bowie in Brussels in 1978

[Earl Slick] came in, he dragged in a Marshall stack and would not turn it down. So I decided to turn my guitar down. When Bowie came in to rehearse, we started playing and he stopped and immediately turned around and asked Slick to turn down because he couldn't hear me.

**Was there a trick to sharing space with Earl?**

That ploy worked for rehearsals, but I knew I was in sonic trouble with Slick and his Marshall stacks. Since I now had an ES-335TD CRS Country Rock Stereo, I got two Fender Twin 12s and turned them up to match my mood. Sharing space with Earl Slick was a balancing act of sorts. We each had our unique style, so it was about complementing each other rather than competing. Communication and mutual respect were key to making it work. But you should duly note that I was not alone.





"MY RHYTHMIC PLAYING ON YOUNG AMERICANS HELPED DEFINE THE GROOVE, GIVING IT THAT SOULFUL LATIN FEEL"

This was the formation of the D.A.M. Trio, featuring Dennis Davis and George Murray. We would remain with Bowie throughout many collaborations. At this point, Bowie and I agreed that I'd work only as a trio, and everything else would be an overdub. This remained so throughout our relationship, so we didn't really have any problems, though we had challenges.

**On the *Low* album, the first from Bowie's Berlin period, he and Brian Eno were experimenting with ambient sounds and Kraftwerk-inspired electronica. How did that impact the D.A.M. Trio?**

We were really trying to develop our own sound, and this was evident from all the material from the Berlin Trilogy – in the things that were not the more computer-based symphonic

orchestrations that dominated the headlines. The D.A.M. Trio was the bedrock and the foundation, but the collaboration with Brian Eno on *Low* also brought a new dimension to our sound. The D.A.M. Trio had to adapt to a more experimental approach, which included more ambient and electronic elements.

**How did this influence your guitar sound specifically?**

It pushed me to think differently about my guitar parts, often simplifying them to fit the broader, more atmospheric context. That experience truly changed me, and I've got Brian Eno to thank. Respect. Even now, I want to recreate that discovery of wonder that comes from experimenting. Hearing the finished product of *Low* was definitely surprising. It was so different from

The first four albums that Carlos recorded with Bowie – all released within a three-year period

anything we had done before. I was very happy with the D.A.M. Trio and our offerings [on the album's first side]. And then I flipped over the album – I just turned off all the lights and got lost in the ambience.”

**Robert Fripp was brought in to play lead guitar on “Heroes”. Can you describe the sessions for that album – and specifically the title track?**

The sessions for “*Heroes*” were magical. The title track was particularly special. The atmosphere was just electric. Ah, Berlin, the Wall, the gunners, Checkpoint Charlie, the speakeasies, the underground! Brian had his synths and all kinds of magnetic ribbon things sticking out of it. It was mesmerising. That song was like riding a wave – a sonic wave. It just had a beautiful drone that we didn’t want to disturb. My approach was to keep the guitar parts simple, allowing David’s vocals and the production to shine.

**Throughout your time with Bowie, you were playing your Alembic guitar. How did you discover it?**

Oh, man! You're talking about Maverick, my stereo Alembic guitar. I love that guitar. Did you know that it was used

## CARLOS ALOMAR-STYLE FUNK GUITAR

**bit.ly/tq388audio**

♩=107  
E7

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1/4

Play 4 times

TAB

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1975's *Young Americans* was the first David Bowie release to feature Carlos Alomar, with Carlos describing his input as “a distinctive funk and soul flavour” on the album. Our funky example is inspired by tracks like *Fame* and requires accuracy from the strumming and picking hands. Adding a phaser effect to the single-note popping line is very effective, and you can try adding a palm-mute to keep the notes marked with staccato dots short and abrupt.





exclusively with David? Yep! Maverick only 'twanged' for Bowie. Here's how it went down... I found out that Stanley Clarke used an Alembic bass, and I was always so impressed with his tonal capabilities. I then discovered that Jerry Garcia from The Grateful Dead had commissioned them to make a guitar version. That was all I needed to hear. I immediately contacted Alembic and asked them to build a guitar to fit my fingers and style. And once I had a new powerful stereo guitar with total tone control, I knew I'd have to address that situation with Earl Slick and his Marshall stacks. In that moment of clarity, I decided I had to get into some kind of amplifier design...

**Did this lead you to develop your rack system, one of the first of its kind?**

Yes. By this time, I was very comfortable with studio-quality 19-inch effect rack units. I decided my best option would be to create a rack unit for the road. I told David, and he endorsed and financed the whole thing. So I hired builders to build me rack units, some speakers and a special rig to compete against Marshall stacks. What an awesome experiment!

**What were the specs?**

Tweeters for highs, two 12-inch speakers in an enclosed fibreglass Alembic cabinet for the mids and an inverted 15-inch Gauss speaker bass cabinet for the low end – coupled with a three-way crossover system to integrate them all. Separate Crown power amps to power them all. And then my 19-inch rack units, MXR flangers and phasers and other effects topped the cake.

**Another noted guitarist, Adrian Belew, joined Bowie's band in 1978, first appearing on the live record, *Stage*. How did you gel with him?**

Touring with Adrian was a blast. He brought a very creative, experimental energy to the band. He, along with Roger Powell [synthesizers], Simon House [violin/mandolin] and Sean Mayes [piano], added a bright, whimsical, fun styling to the D.A.M. Trio. While Adrian's style differed from Earl Slick's, we found a good rhythm together.



Adrian's avant-garde approach was a great complement to my funkier style.

**Adrian also featured on *Lodger*. Where was your head at, musically, by then?**

By the time we recorded *Lodger*, I was in a very experimental mindset. The '70s had been a decade of incredible growth for me. Musically, I was focused on pushing boundaries and continuing to evolve my sound. I wasn't thinking about recording. I was playing with my toys. But regrettably, I also found this period to be a little awkward. We really had nothing prepared. The studio was rather dull and uninspiring, and the Eno experiments had waned.

***Scary Monsters* was your last album with Bowie, though you worked with him many times over the ensuing decades. When you look back over the '70s, how do you measure your impact on his music?**

It was extremely significant in terms of bringing a unique rhythmic and melodic sensibility to his work. The ease of collaboration in the studio, extraordinary diversity of styles, cadences, syncopations and ethnic diversity that I offered David was

**LET'S DANCE!**

On stage in France during the *Serious Moonlight* tour in 1983

unsurpassed, if I do say so myself. However, on a more esoteric level, our personal relationship, which developed over these decades, was crucial to David's comfort and, thus, his growth.

**How do you measure your own growth as a player during this time?**

My growth as a player during the '70s was tremendous. Bowie was an integral part of it, but it wasn't my only source of inspiration. Working with many diverse artists and styles pushed me to improve and adapt. While the electronic music with Eno was challenging, it wasn't stifling. Instead, it broadened my perspective and forced me to innovate in new ways.

**With hindsight, is there anything that you would change?**

Oh no, I am delighted to face my fate. What a glorious odyssey it still is. I'm most proud of the collaborative work I did with Bowie, especially on *Young Americans* and *Station To Station*. If there's anything I'd change, it might be to have experimented even more with different sounds and techniques. But overall, I'm very satisfied with what I've accomplished during that incredible decade. I was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Bronx, and in this epoch of music during the '70s, I traveled around the world with a bonafide rock star. So mark me down as someone who loved the '70s!

"ELECTRONIC MUSIC FORCED ME TO INNOVATE IN NEW WAYS"





**Guitars and backing** Jon Bishop

# CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES!

Taking inspiration from Carlos Alomar, we look at the styles of three of the greatest to play alongside David Bowie

**B**owie documentary maker Brett Morgan is reported to have said “Bowie cannot be defined, he can be experienced”. This is true. David Bowie resisted categorisation. ‘Art-rock’ is about as close as one can get with a catch-all term, but his constant reinvention earned him the nickname of the Chameleon of Rock. You get the idea.

Accompanying his creative journey was a rolling list of ever-changing musicians, and, of course, it's the guitarists we're most interested in. Here, we look at some of the styles and techniques you can learn from Bowie's axe-wielders – from the early glam-rock of Mick Ronson to the experimental art-rock leanings of Robert Fripp and the blues-rock style of Stevie Ray Vaughan...

## 1 MICK RONSON-STYLE GLAM

**bit.ly/tq388audio**

[illegible]

Mick Ronson played guitar on early Bowie records between 1970 and 1973 – a brief period, but a full five albums. He had a great rock tone courtesy of a Black Beauty Les Paul Custom that was stripped of its finish, and it fitted perfectly with Bowie's glam aesthetic. Our riff is inspired by *Queen Bitch* and utilises classic powerchord fingerings. The overdriven tone is augmented with a wah-wah pedal that is left in one position to act as a filter.

## 2 ROBERT FRIPP-STYLE ART-ROCK

[bit.ly/tg388audio](http://bit.ly/tg388audio)

King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp was enlisted by producer Brian Eno to play guitar on 1977's *Heroes* album, but we're taking inspiration here from his experimental sounds on songs like *It's No Game* and *Fashion* on 1980's *Scary Monsters...* release. We've created an angular-sounding riff by jumping around the A minor pentatonic scale in wide intervals. Be sure to include the finger slides out of the high register A7#9 chord.

### 3 SRV-STYLE BLUES LEAD

**bit.ly/tq388audio**

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Play 4 times

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Blues supremo Stevie Ray Vaughan played lead guitar on the *Let's Dance* album. His signature Albert King-style licks feature in the outro sections of songs like *China Girl*, *Ricochet* and more. Our example features a beefy neck pickup tone with plenty of picking attack. Experiment with digging into the strings and make sure your string bends are aggressive and passionate.







“SOMETIMES IT  
WILL TAKE ME FIVE  
HOURS JUST TO GET  
THE TONE. I WANT  
PEOPLE TO THINK:  
IS THAT OR IS THAT  
NOT A GUITAR?”

**Carmen Vandenberg** is making guitar sounds you've never heard before in songs you won't forget. In a brilliant new album from *Bones UK*, she's also channelling blues, Hendrix and her mentor Jeff Beck – all in the pursuit of authenticity...

Words Jenna Scaramanga Photos David A Solorzano







**T**he fuzz pedal was the first guitar effect ever invented, so it's kind of mind-bending that Bones UK's second album *Soft* uses fuzz pedals to generate tones unlike anything we've ever heard.

These tones are the result of painstaking collaboration between guitarist Carmen Vandenberg and producer Filippo Cimatti, and they make *Soft* an incredibly fresh listen. "We spend a lot of time trying to find sounds that I haven't heard before," reveals Carmen. "Sometimes it'll take me five hours just to get the tone, and then it might be done in one take or two takes. I love spending time on that. It's a world to discover. I want people to think, 'Is that or is that not a guitar?'"

Rock royalty have been touting Vandenberg as the UK's next guitar great for almost a decade. After working briefly with Queen's Roger Taylor, she met Jeff Beck at Taylor's birthday party.

and then grab whatever days we could be in the same place, or fly and meet somewhere. A little bit was done in Nashville a little bit elsewhere. It was a long process," Carmen sighs. "We're definitely not going to do the next one like this. We're just going to write it and then ideally do it all in one long session."

Two tracks, *Won't Settle* and *Fix Me*, were produced by Queens Of The Stone Age bassist Michael Shuman, and two more, *Us* and *Blood*, were co-written with The Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan. "We went to Billy's place in Chicago and he gave us some suggestions. I always remember this one phrase. He said, 'When you think you've got a chorus, just write another one. Try and top that with a better chorus. Then what you thought was the chorus will probably end up being a pre-chorus.'"

Carmen's manifesto for the album is to make it sound real. "On the first record, we had the electronic thing, but we've done it. After we did it, a lot of other people were doing it. We got tired of listening to these over-polished records, not just in pop, but in rock 'n' roll, where the human element's gone.



"I DON'T WANT TO CHANGE MISTAKES ANYMORE. THAT HUMANITY - I WANT TO KEEP IT IN THERE"

She featured on Beck's 2016 album *Loud Hailer* and was promptly invited to join David Gilmour on stage during his *Rattle That Lock* tour. Carmen's session career has seen her working with Kate Nash and most recently with Morrissey.

The biggest hype, though, was around Bones UK, the duo comprised of Carmen and vocalist/rhythm guitarist Rosie Bones. Their single *Pretty Wast* was nominated for a Grammy. Their fusion of industrial and electronic sounds with Carmen's blues-rooted playing made them look like the future of rock. Their single *Dirty Little Animals* from the *Arcane: League Of Legends* soundtrack helped keep them in the spotlight, so that five years later *Soft* remains one of 2024's most anticipated rock albums.

*Soft* was a headache to make. "We live in different places now, and it was during the pandemic. We would write

There's no mistakes or quirks because everything's just so gridded and perfect and tuned. We wanted to get away from that." There are still industrial and electronica influences, but the duo kept it sounding live, with the assistance of regular drummer Aaron 'Heavy' Matthews. "We recorded *Me* without a click in one take, just me and Heavy."

She continues: "We all love Motown records. I'm a big Stax fan, too. All those records are incredible. We were discussing why we love those records, and we realised the verses are slower, and then they speed up in the choruses. We were like, 'Let's try and recreate the things that we love.' So we recorded it without a click. Heavy actually started writing that song." Carmen then went to extremes to create a guitar tone that would fill the space with just one take. "I went through two amps, each one

with its own pedalboard. Each 'board would have different octaves. Then I was going through a Leslie with a distortion on it, and a bass amp. It sounds like a bass, Leslie, and four guitars, but it's just one. I'm still figuring out how I'm gonna do it live."

*Soft* was recorded over three years in multiple studios, often with in-house gear, so the details of what pedals and amps were used are often lost. "What I love is every time that you go to a studio there's a bunch of sh\*t that isn't yours. That makes it really fun because I don't know what I'm about to hear." Still, Carmen is happy to share what she can of her tone secrets. "I want to share! I think it was B.B. King who said, 'We're not thieves, we're all borrowers'. Everybody's taking something from somebody. Zeppelin wouldn't have been Zeppelin if it wasn't for the blues.



# "IT'S ROCK 'N' ROLL FROM THE FUTURE!"

Vocalist and rhythm guitarist **Rosie Bones** reveals how she and Carmen create a unique sound

Words Jenna Scaramanga

At the heart of Bones UK is a paradox: the music is futuristic while also backward-looking. "We always want to do something people haven't heard before," explains Rosie Bones. "We never wanted to sound like another rock band. We often said that we sound like 'future rock' – it's rock 'n' roll from the future, so having that kind of electronic element is really important to us. At the same time, we wanted this record to feel old-school because Carmen's an old-school kind of girl. She loves the old guitar players. She's a blues head. She's like a 60-year-old man that lives in a little blonde girl's body! So that combination is what we like doing as a band: the future, but kind of nostalgic."

The second Bones UK album took longer than anyone would have liked, but Rosie is upbeat about it. "It was as much of a blessing as it was a curse," she says philosophically. "It meant that we had a lot more songs than we needed. We had the opportunity to handpick the best ones." It's part of what makes *Soft* such a consistently strong record.

Another part was their outstanding choice of collaborators. Their main producer, Filippo Cimatti, produced their debut album and Jeff Beck's *Loud Hailer*. "Filippo is like a family member," Rosie enthuses. But two other guests took the album up a notch. "We just wanted to try out some other stuff, so we worked with Michael Shuman from Queens Of The Stone Age, who's incredible. Mike's got another project called Glu, which is just my favourite thing in the world. I'm a massive Queens Of The Stone Age fan and he's a good friend, so it felt like

a very natural collaboration. I don't normally enjoy co-writes. The other person that we did it with on this record, because we couldn't say no to the experience, was Billy Corgan. Obviously, when Billy Corgan says he wants to work on your stuff you say yes. He reached out saying he was a fan and then we went to his house and did some writing. So there's two tracks we worked on with him, which is *Us* and *Blood*. That was ridiculous! We've never done co-writes before. It has to feel like we have a relationship with the person. I'm not into just going into a room with a stranger. Those two people gave this project so much worth. We had a really good rapport with them, and what they brought to it stepped it up. It was such an honour to be part of it. You could definitely hear the Queens sound."

Rubbing shoulders with rock royalty has not gone to her head, though, and Rosie is self-effacing about her guitar playing. "Carmen plays anything that's complicated!" she claims. "I'm very rhythmic. My first instrument was drums. I quite enjoy this as a songwriter: I can't do very much, but the restrictions that I have mean that I find rhythmic things that maybe Carmen wouldn't. She can be like, 'Oh, a minor seven!' I'm like, 'This is all I can play!' People often think that I play bass. I really enjoy that almost Bootsy Collins-style rhythmic funk. I wrote the riff in *Knee Deep*. It's kind of the ballady one, and that came from me just supporting what I was doing vocally."

Rosie's weapon of choice is Fender's Alternate Reality Powercaster, which has a body similar to a Jazzmaster, P-90 neck and humbucking bridge pickups, and a Gibson-style tune-o-matic

**DYNAMIC DUO**  
Carmen Vandenberg  
and Rosie Bones  
(right)



bridge. "It's amazing," she enthuses. "I broke the headstock off at the last show, so we had to get that fixed, because they've discontinued them! But it's the perfect balance of functionality and also having a bit of a vibe."

The Powercaster goes into a Blackstar Artist 30 amp, by way of a couple of pedals. "My pedal set-up is unspeakably simple," she shrugs. "It's just a tuner, and then I have a distortion and a boost. The distortion changes because Carmen picks out an amazing distortion, and we try new things." At the time of writing





"CARMEN IS LIKE A 60-YEAR-OLD MAN THAT LIVES IN A LITTLE BLONDE GIRL'S BODY!"

Rosie was using the Blackstar Dept 10 Dual Drive for both drive and boost.

That rig has powered an album that is more live-sounding than its predecessor. "The big thing was to make it a bit more gritty, a bit more London, and have a bit more live energy, because we know how much people enjoy our live show," Rosie says. "We really wanted to translate some of that energy into this new record, where the first record was a bit more electronic. It feels cohesive because that work was done at the front end. Then the songwriting just kind of flows into that much easier, I find."

Although this record is more live-sounding, it is better not to ask when the band will be getting a bassist. "Every f\*cking show we do, a bass player comes up to us afterwards and goes, 'Why don't you guys have a bass player?' as though we forgot bass players exist!" laughs an exasperated Rosie. "We know they exist. They're wonderful. But it's not something that we want because we're building this sonic world of electronics – that almost dance feel." Live, their bass parts are on a backing track. "We enjoy the track element because we've got that solid bed to play on and we like the electronic feel."

Rosie says that the chemistry between herself and Carmen is what makes the band work. "The whole thing with us, live, is to free Carmen up to shine as bright as she can, and to free me up to shine as bright as I can," she reflects. "That involves me not playing very complicated guitar parts. It's giving Carmen the backbone of me just rhythmically doing stuff for her to stretch out. We've always said it's not a lead vocalist and a guitarist – her guitar is a lead vocal, too. It's not like I'm at the front and then Carmen's behind. We're always at the front together."







So I want everyone to know about it, because once you've discovered something, you want to share it."

One of the key tracks on the album, *Me*, was recorded at Nashville's Sputnik studios, owned by The White Stripes' producer Vance Powell. "There's every pedal that you can think of at that studio. There's one that looks like a beehive. I was experimenting. You should have seen it! It was like an ocean of pedals all around me. I know for sure there's a Pigtronix Octava. If you put the fuzz of that with an EHX Micro POG, the way that they phase out is beautiful. I also experiment with adding a wah to that all the time, because there'll be certain tones that come out that you wouldn't really expect." This combination produces one of the signature sounds of the album, an intense octave fuzz sound, but with a much clearer upper octave than a Hendrix Octavia tone. "You have an A/B system," Carmen explains. "Put one pedal through one amp and the other one through the other amp. That can clean it up as well."

Earthquaker Devices make another of Carmen's favourite octave-up effects: "The Tentacle did so, so much on these records. I use a lot of Earthquaker Devices – Organizer, Data Corruptor... That stuff is incredible." The Data Corruptor, a mono, three-octave guitar synth and fuzz, explains how some of the guitars sound so much like dirty analogue synths.

For the two amp rig, Carmen admits: "There'd be my signature Blackstar CV30 and a Fender. I don't remember if it was a DeVille or a Twin. A lot of the credit for the tones goes to Filippo. We put the two amps facing each other. I think both of them were mic'ed, but then there was a mic in the middle as well, just catching whatever was happening in between. The two amps were just shouting in each other's face." Carmen's limited edition CV30 boasts an unusual design with an American-style 6L6 valve output stage coupled with a more AC30-style chime. Live, she runs a pair of them. "I EQ them so they sound very different."

On the track *Fix Me*, there is a similar tone, but some notes have dissonant overtones that sound almost like a ring modulator. "I was playing the part, and it did something weird. It was one of those moments you go, 'Nobody touch anything! Let's record that before I lose this tone'. I wouldn't be able to recreate that one. It was one of those moments where you're just playing around with a bunch of sh\*t. Suddenly, there's a harmonic that's jumping out. I have another song that I did, which is just one of my own songs, where it's happened again," says Carmen, referring to a solo album she is working on between other projects. "The guitar does a weird overtone thing, jumping an octave. That happens a lot when you put these kinds of pedals together and you f\*ck with a wah. Then you're like, 'Oh, that note was amazing!' I'm always saying to the producer 'Did you get it?', because it's timing. Unless it's perfectly the same as the previous take, you're never gonna get it again. Your footwork has to be very precise on the wah."





"THE TELE IS MY BABY.  
SHE TRAVELS WITH  
ME EVERYWHERE"





While there were enough pedals on *Soft* to make Nova Twins blush, there are just three main guitars: “The Tele is my baby, a 1963. She travels with me everywhere. It was really the tone that defined the first record, because it really cuts through. So I use that when I’m not gonna blend in to the music. If you put the octave on you have the sound that I created with Filippo, and you add the lower octaves so it gives you the substance a Tele normally wouldn’t have.

“She was used quite a bit on *Soft*,” Carmen continues. “But I did use a lot of my Duesenberg Julia, and some of the heavier riffs in the studio I do use Gibsons, quite often a Les Paul. It’s a 1984 that I bought from a friend in Italy when I was sixteen. So those would be the three main ones. I did use an SG as well. I love using as many tools as I can. I’ll try the riff or try the part with multiple guitars until I find the one that I like to play with a track.

“I try not to layer too much, because that will make it really difficult for me to do live,” Carmen says. “Typically when I pick a guitar for the track, it’ll stick to that one, unless I really want a different tone for something else.” *Knee Deep*, which features one of the album’s standout solos, was the Duesenberg, and Carmen cites *Bikinis* as an example of the Les Paul tone, and *Fix Me* was the Telecaster.

When we interviewed her, Carmen hadn’t yet configured her ’board for the next *Bones* UK tour. “I have a fair idea about that. There are some new Pigtronix ones, like the Star Eater. I use the Supro Drive, which is quite funny. But a few of my classics are always just going to stay on the ’board. Jeff Beck gave me his gold [J Rockett] Archer, based on the Klon. And the octave, the Micro POG. All of that can never leave. I’m probably gonna do two different pedalboards this time. The tap-dancing becomes a bit tricky.” The ’board she had with her for the interview was set up for her work with Morrissey, with whom she is recording an album. “With Morrissey, I’m using a CV30 and a Supro. I used a lot of Supro on the *Bones* UK record. A lot of Jeff’s tones were with the Supro as well on *Loud Hailer*.”

The Morrissey ’board has a lot in common with her most recent *Bones* UK setup. The Crybaby wah, J Rockett Archer, Pigtronix Octava, and MXR

Super Badass Distortion are mainstays on *Soft*. The Fulltone OCD and Eric Gales signature EHX Raw Dawg drive give her other flavours of dirt. Sandwiched between them is the Pigtronix Class A Micro Boost, which, thanks to its positioning, can either be used to push the Raw Dawg into more breakup or to boost the volume of the preceding pedals. Next up is the ever-popular Line 6 DL4, which Carmen loves for its ability to save three different delays. For modulation, there’s the MXR Analogue Chorus, an MXR Uni-Vibe, and the Earthquaker Organizer, an organ simulator. The Mooer Shim Verb, Earthquaker Dispatch Maker, and Earthquaker Astral Destiny give her three reverb options. Carmen uses the Shimverb in Spring mode. The Dispatch Marker is a combined delay/reverb; here, it’s set for a slapback ideal for Morrissey’s rockabilly material. The Astral Destiny is a pitch shifting reverb for more out-there sounds.

*Soft* ends with *What If I Died?*, a profound track featuring only Rosie’s voice and a single track of Carmen’s reverb-drenched guitar. The way Carmen weaves melodic licks around the chords recalls Hendrix, her first guitar inspiration. “I like trying to add a melody instead of just playing chords,” she says. Amazingly, the cut on the album is the original demo they later realised they couldn’t top. “It was one live take, Rosie and I, without a click. We did it in the living room of the

head of our label’s house in Lake Tahoe. It would have just been a small amp with a mic dangling in front of it. I can’t remember what the guitar was, but it sounds like a Strat. It was a late-night recording after a couple of martinis. The song is quite heavy, lyrically. If you do a bright-and-early take with a coffee, it’s not going to sound the same as a late-night recording when you’ve had a couple of drinks.”

The reverb-soaked clean tone on *What If I Died?* brings to mind Jeff Buckley, and it occasionally sounds as if some other effects are fading in and out of the mix. “That’s another trick that we did, because each time we wanted to do something we haven’t heard. Basically, the ambient stuff is the whole track reversed and flipped.”

For the climactic solo in *Knee Deep*, Carmen improvised one take. “Again,” she explains, “with this record, we were trying to catch authenticity. I remember that solo was recorded at Sonic Ranch in El Paso, and that’s the first take. We were just jamming through the song and Rosie was like, ‘We need an epic solo at the end’. I tried to do a few other ones, but we ended up keeping the first one. That’s a Gibson for sure, a Gibson and a big-ass Marshall. I don’t remember the pedal. It might be the MXR Super Badass. It was a vibe. There are times where I write a melody. For that song, I just went with it and followed the energy. It was very pentatonic-based.”

#### THE REAL DEAL

“With this record we were trying to catch authenticity,” Carmen says



Photo: Jim Steinfield



# “JEFF INFLUENCED US IN MORE WAYS THAN YOU COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE!”

Carmen Vandenberg and Rosie Bones share their memories of working with the legendary **Jeff Beck**, and discuss his continuing impact on their music

Words Jenna Scaramanga

**F**or much of his long career, Jeff Beck dedicated himself to instrumentals, working only with occasional guest vocalists. All that changed with 2016's

*Loud Hailer*, when he grabbed the fledgling Bones UK for a triumphant return to song-based rock.

Asked about working with Beck, Rosie Bones doesn't hesitate. "I can't put into words how honoured that I am to be part of his journey and his legacy in some way. It was a small way but to be part of that in any way."

But calling it a "small way" is too modest. After meeting Carmen Vandenberg at Roger Taylor's birthday party, Beck attended a Bones UK gig with his wife and immediately recruited the duo to make an album. The list of vocalists to have recorded with Jeff Beck is short, and not since 1972's final and self-titled Jeff Beck Group album had one singer delivered an entire album. For Carmen, the claim is even more impressive: she is one of only five guitarists, besides Jeff himself, to have played on a Beck solo album.

*Loud Hailer* was a clear statement that Beck was not content to stay in the past. A return to driving funk rock, it retained elements of the electronic experimentation he had begun on 1999's *Who Else* and 2003's *Jeff*. In his TG tribute to Jeff Beck, Aerosmith's Joe Perry singled out *Loud Hailer* as a career highlight. "Yeah, Joe's told us that before," Carmen smiles modestly. "He said it was one of his favourite records. It's beyond flattering."

When we ask about Beck directly, Carmen pauses. "First of all, I miss him so much. Jeff and I would make our morning coffee with our guitars on. That man never stopped playing all day, and listening and trying to be inspired, whether it was from classical music, or Rosie and me. Anything that he heard or saw, he would try and incorporate it in his playing."

"What did we learn? I mean, *everything* is learned from that the time," Rosie adds. "Jeff influenced us in more ways than you can even possibly imagine. It was very apparent that we were kindred spirits. We definitely all had the same sensibilities and the same sensitivities. So I think that maybe is one of the reasons why we were all



**TOTALLY WIRED**  
Above: Bones UK on stage in Texas, 2019.  
Right: Carmen with Jeff Beck in California, 2016.

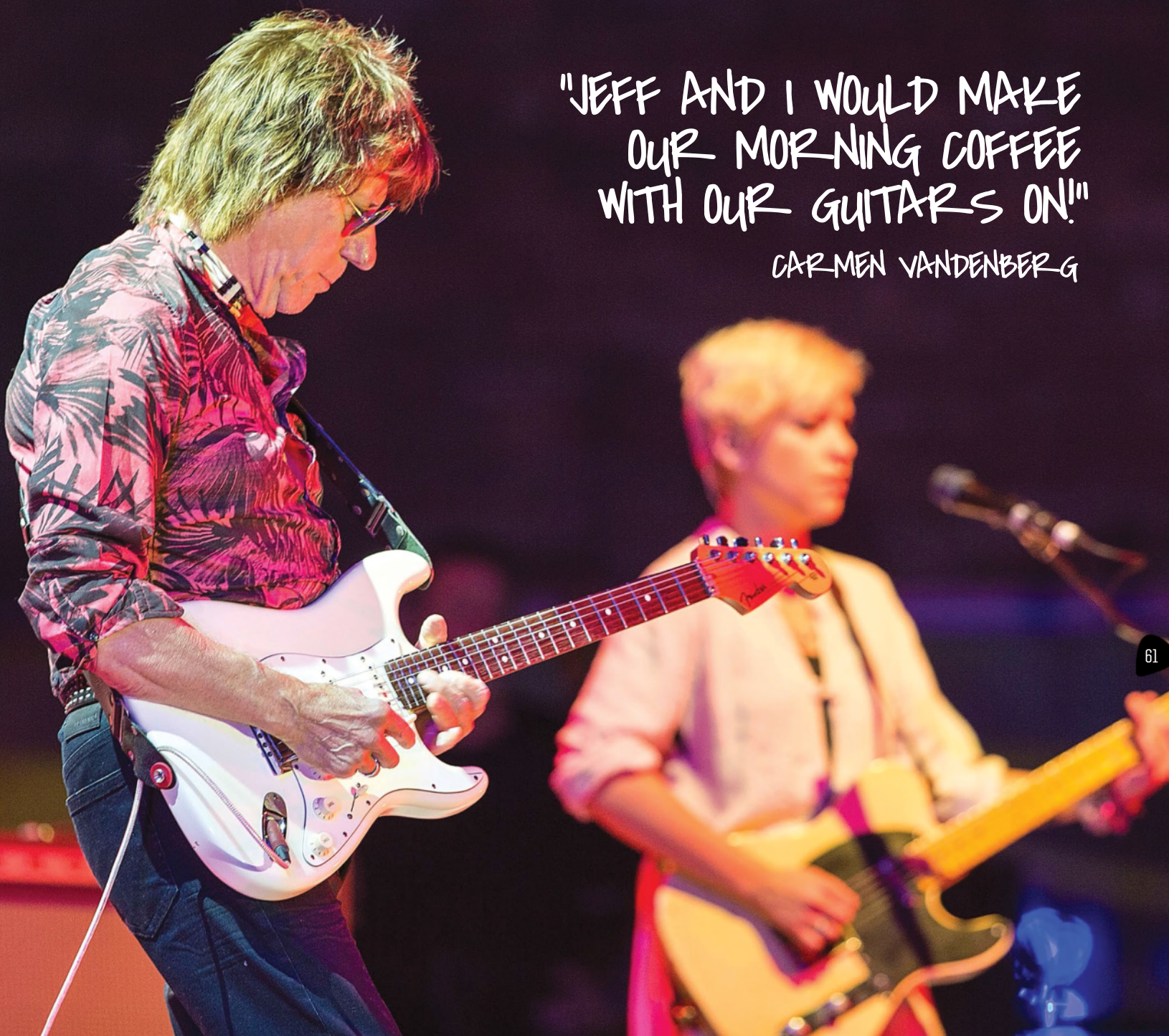
drawn together, in some cosmic way. He really respected vocalists, and obviously, he was incredible to work with."

"Within this record, we decided to allow space," Rosie continues. "There's a lot of pressure to do radio singles and to cut things short. You know, you've got two bars for the solo, and then you get out of it and we're back to a chorus. And a big decision, which is definitely influenced by Jeff, is just letting it breathe. Like, the outro needs to be as long as it needs to be, and Carmen needs to be able to express herself freely



"JEFF AND I WOULD MAKE  
OUR MORNING COFFEE  
WITH OUR GUITARS ON!"

CARMEN VANDENBERG



without feeling like she's got two bars to whack in as many things as possible. There's a song called *Blood* which has a really long outro. There's quite a few of them. We just let her dictate how long that should be."

Carmen recalls: "The first time I went to his house, he sat me in front of a ton of amps, no pedals or anything, and gave me a guitar. The test was, he would put me through each one of the amps, and he wanted to see if I could get my tone no matter what he put me through or how he set it. Because technically, your tone is all on your fingers and the way you play, and you've got some control with the guitar itself.

But, you know, Jeff would always sound like Jeff no matter what you put him through. That was his test. I was 23, so I was intimidated. I was so scared, but I passed the test. Pedals and gear, it's all fun and games, and it's interesting to find unique styles that haven't been done, but you need to be able to play with nothing in my opinion, and that's something I learned from Jeff."

Rosie adds: "Another thing that we wanted to do on this record was really allow Carmen to have the space to feel like she can express herself on guitar. That's definitely from Jeff. And a lot of the solos, the way that she played,

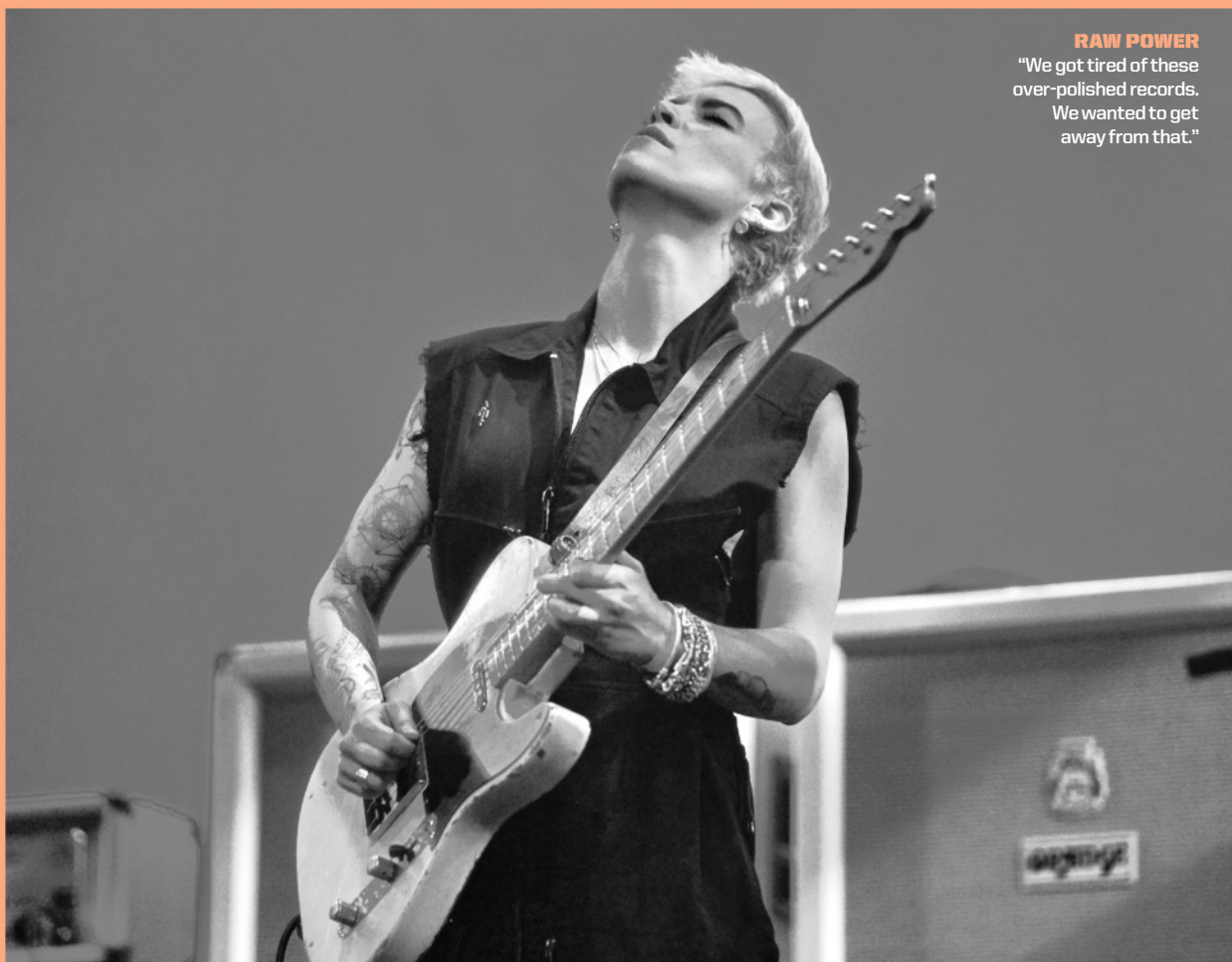
you know, those real long, sustained notes – it's that simplicity that he had. His simplicity, I think, was his key. He wasn't a big showy player. He could do it, but his simplicity to just hold a note and be confident for that to be it. I definitely hear that in Carmen all the time. When he played the guitar, it would sing. He would sing his melodies, his light and shade. I think it's influenced Carmen so much."

Summing up Jeff's impact on them both, Carmen concludes: "It's just his curiosity. His never-ending curiosity to want to do something that hasn't been done before. That's beyond inspiring."









## RAW POWER

"We got tired of these over-polished records. We wanted to get away from that."

As Carmen notes, the solo uses classic blues phrasing, but set in a context of modern, electronica-influenced pop, and with her masterful playing, it sounds fresh. "On a track like that, and chord changes like that, I can't help the blues coming out," she smiles. "I love the blues. It's in my playing, so if someone says to go do a solo, it's going to sound bluesy at some point. It's part of who I am, and so it's always going to be on all of our records. The first album had *Girls Can't Play Guitar*, which is just a Muddy Waters riff and then I changed the tone and made it modern."

A similar thing happens in *Fix Me*, when a rock 'n' roll riff that would be a cliché anywhere else takes the listener completely by surprise. "It's like, 'We like that stuff. We listen to it. So why can't we do our version of it?'" Carmen shrugs.

*Girls Can't Play Guitar* was inspired by a real incident at an early Bones UK gig. "It was really funny. The words were exactly, 'Your band will never be as good as our band because girls can't play guitar as well as boys.' It was just like, 'Sure, sure,'" she laughs, then says the

way that such nonsense often comes from the worst players. "It's insecurity, isn't it?" she muses. "Only people that are actually insecure or feel threatened in any way would say that. If you're confident in yourself, you wouldn't waste your time trying to bring other people down."

Carmen identifies *Dopamine* as another standout on the new album. "It has a Middle Eastern kind of feel to it. I was learning all those scales, so I put them into this. For the ending of the song, because dopamine can become really addictive, we wanted to showcase that feeling of discomfort. It really makes you quite anxious at the end. That was inspired by The Beatles' *A Day In The Life*, where the whole orchestra keeps ascending in semitones, but they're never at the same time. That's how we created that discomfort. It's just a bunch of instruments creeping up, but all in different places."

Carmen Vandenberg's ability to turn her creativity in almost any direction makes her the complete modern guitarist. In Bones UK, she combines Hendrix and Jeff Beck-worthy blues

sensibility with cutting-edge tones and production.

There is also that solo album in progress: "Coming out in a few years, or whenever I'm ready." And while working with Morrissey, she's filling the giant shoes of not only Johnny Marr but also Morrissey alumni Jesse Tobias and Alain Whyte – while maintaining the same philosophy that propels *Soft*.

As she says of her performance on a new Morrissey song: "There's a solo with this bum note. I played it over and over to make people believe that I did it on purpose. But I didn't go and change it. I don't want to change mistakes anymore. That humanity – I miss it on records. So I want to keep it in there. I'm learning a lot, doing a record with Morrissey and Joe Chiccarelli, who's an incredible producer. Again, just plenty of time to learn a bunch of things that I didn't know before. Even just the way he writes in his melodies."

She pauses and smiles: "I guess I'm a listener. And when I'm listening, anybody I encounter can inspire me." *Soft is released on September 13.*





# SPECIAL EFFECTS

What's on Carmen Vandenberg's pedalboard?

## 1 DIGITECH WHAMMY

This is a perennial favourite of creative guitarists, from Steve Vai and Tom Morello to Sean Long of While She Sleeps. In *Bones UK*, Carmen uses it for their 2021 track *Boys Will Be Girls*, where she uses the two-octaves-up setting for some radical bends.

## 2 JOE BONAMASSA CRY BABY WAH

The copper treadle and subtle signature in the rubber foot grip give this away as a Bonamassa wah. It's just an authentic vintage wah sound with a switchable true bypass, the most common modification for stock Cry Babies.

## 3 J ROCKETT ARCHER IKON

This gold Archer is special because it lived in Jeff Beck's board before he gave it to Vandenberg. The Archer was one of the first and most respected pedals to closely replicate the Klon Centaur circuit in a small and comparatively affordable format. The Archer iKon gets extra close to the Klon by using the same diodes, offering slightly smoother overdrive than the regular Archer. While many users prefer the Klon as a clean

boost with the gain at 0, Carmen uses it with the gain at 3 o'clock.

## 4 PIGTRONIX OCTAVA MICRO

Like the Octavia Hendrix used on *Purple Haze*, this generates an analogue octave effect that is clearest when playing above the 12th fret on the neck pickup. Unlike Hendrix's Octavia, the fuzz is switchable, so you can have the octave with or without fuzz.

## 5 MXR SUPER BADASS DISTORTION

Carmen never sets her amps entirely clean. They're always slightly broken up, but she can get a clean sound by picking more lightly. All the dirt pedals are used to push the tone further into distortion. She tends to use the different drives individually rather than stacking them, so the gain is set fairly high on each.

## 6 MXR ANALOG CHORUS

With Morrissey, Carmen uses much more extreme chorus settings than Slash, another Analog Chorus fan. Where Slash has the depth at about 1 o'clock, Carmen puts it closer to 4 o'clock. Slash also cuts the high

frequencies as much as possible, whereas Carmen only subtly reduces the high cut (top right) from its maximum (flat) setting.

## 7 EARTHQUAKER DEVICES ORGANIZER

This cunningly titled pedal emulates an organ. Other Organizer fans include Idles' Lee Kiernan and the Vaccines' Freddie Cowan.

## 8 MOOER SHIMVERB

Carmen's CV30 signature amp does have reverb, which she keeps on at a low setting. The pedal is only for when a washy sound is needed, hence the quite heavy spring reverb setting she has here.

## 9 EARTHQUAKER DEVICES ASTRAL DESTINY

A reverb with modes that pitch-shift the reverb tail up or down, the Astral Destiny allows expansive and ethereal tones. The sub mode setting used here adds a lower octave to the reverb tail, filling out the low end. The left footswitch, labelled 'stretch', doubles the length of the reverb tail and temporarily shifts the pitch, allowing even more other-worldly tones.



CARMEN USES DIFFERENT DRIVES INDIVIDUALLY RATHER THAN STACKING THEM, SO THE GAIN IS SET HIGH ON EACH...







# BARE BONES

TG goes under the skin of **Carmen** and **Rosie**'s techniques and tones in this bite-sized lesson

Guitars and backing Jon Bishop

**S**o far, then, we know that Carmen's pedalboard is quite substantial, and that, tone-wise, the band's latest release *Soft* is highly experimental. Having taken a look at Carmen's 'board already, this gives us a head start in recreating her tones – though unless your set-up mirrors Carmen's, it's best to aim for a ballpark sound.

But what of playing techniques? We'd argue that some of the secret sauce is directly tied to the pair's tonal set-up. For example, vibrato is vibrato, right? Well, yes – but played through a pitch shifter its signature warble takes on a new life, and you may find yourself employing subtly different finger movements. And that goes double if you're playing bends and divebombs with a treadle-operated pedal like DigiTech's Whammy. Add a raucous fuzz tone (near omnipresent on *Soft*) and one of

Carmen's boost pedals into the mix and you may find yourself needing to control a fair whack of feedback. Again, a finer point of technique.

For now, we're looking at a handful of simple ways to get into some of the approaches on the album. Like any lesson of this kind, focus on the individual techniques without worrying too much about mastering every example from beginning to end.

## 1 HEAVY FUZZ-TONE RIFFING

[bit.ly/tg388audio](https://bit.ly/tg388audio)

♩=140  
N.C.

Play 4 times

Fuzz appears throughout *Soft* – and we're taking our inspiration here from the songs *Won't Settle* and *Fix Me*. In most cases on the record, the raw fuzz tones are processed through other effects such as pitch shifters and synth pedals, so we're following suit with an octave-down effect for extra weight and growl.



## 2 EXPRESSIVE LEAD

bit.ly/tg388audio

♩=140 Half time feel  
C<sup>5</sup>

let ring - - - - -

let ring - - - - -

BU BD BU

12 15 [17]

Play 4 times

Bones UK are not shy of big, Hendrix-style lead guitar wig-outs – Jimi is, after all, one of Carmen's biggest, earliest influences. Our example takes inspiration from tracks *Knee Deep*, *Blood* and *Dopamine*, and features a heavy fuzz lead tone with plenty of sustain. Wring those string bends with vibrato where notated.

## 3 '80S-STYLE BARITONE REGISTER MELODIES

bit.ly/tg388audio

♩=140 Half time feel  
Eadd<sup>9</sup>

let ring - - - - -

0 7 6 4 2 4 2 1 0 7 7 7 7 6 4 0 11 11 11 11 9 9

Play 4 times

Low-register melodies are a key feature of bands like New Order and The Cure, and Bones UK have put their own twist on it. Inspired by tracks *Us* and *Won't Settle* and with the assumption that you won't have a baritone guitar to hand, we've written our example in the low register of a standard-tuned guitar. If you do own a baritone, try playing the riff as tabbed. Most likely, that'll be a 4th lower than standard tuning. Add chorus and spring reverb for an authentic delivery.

## 4 PITCH-SHIFTED LEAD

bit.ly/tg388audio

♩=150  
E<sup>5</sup> † 8va - - - - -

let ring - - - - -

let ring - - - - -

† w/pitch shifter + 8va

2

Play 4 times

With a DigiTech Whammy and a Pigtronix Octava on her 'board, Carmen is well equipped with pitch-shifting options. Taking inspiration from *Fix Me*, we've set a Whammy pedal to a fixed one-octave-up in our example. We've played it quite straight, but if you apply wide vibrato on the fretted E notes you can achieve some dissonant, almost ring modulator-like sounds as the third string rings against the open E string.

## 5 OPEN-STRING CLEANS

bit.ly/tg388audio

♩=120 Half time feel  
E<sup>b</sup>m C<sup>b</sup>sus<sup>2</sup> G<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup>5

let ring throughout

0 2 5 5 3 0 0 3 0 2 0 0 2 2

Play 4 times

With its sumptuous Telecaster cleans, album closer *What If I Died?* evokes Jeff Buckley. We're combining open strings and simple lead lines to recreate some of the magic – though, it must be said, with its partial chord work, the original is far more complex than we can really tackle here. Note that we've down-tuned to E<sup>b</sup>, standard for a darker, moodier tone.





# AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK

Bring the noise with this  
high-voltage Angus and  
Malcolm Young classic

Guitar and backing Phil Dapone Photography Getty

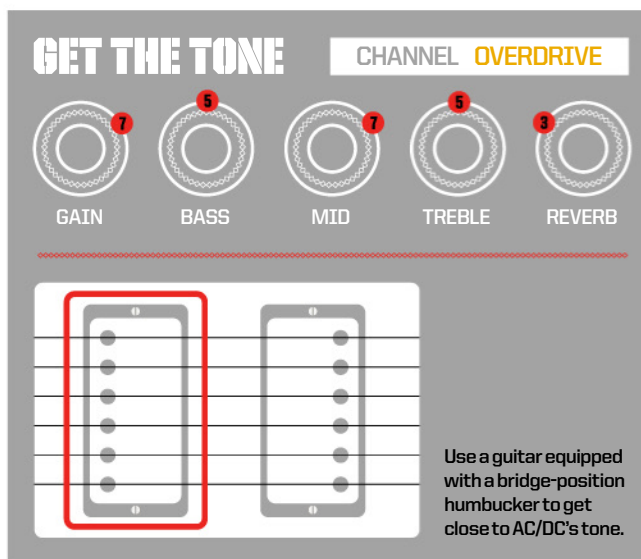


**T**hunderstruck features on the 1990 AC/DC album *The Razor's Edge* and is one of the band's most iconic and popular songs, remaining a fan favourite to this day.

Angus Young's intro melody is instantly recognisable and is played using an open B note as a pedal with notes along the second string coming from the B Mixolydian mode. The lick is played with alternate picking throughout, making it excellent practice for hand synchronisation – both your fretting and picking hands need to work together perfectly to play the part cleanly. The rhythm guitar parts are based around a three-chord progression with lots of rhythmic and riff variations throughout the track. AC/DC are renowned for their tight-riffing feel, so be sure to lock in with the backing track by tapping your foot on the downbeats throughout.

## SOUND ADVICE

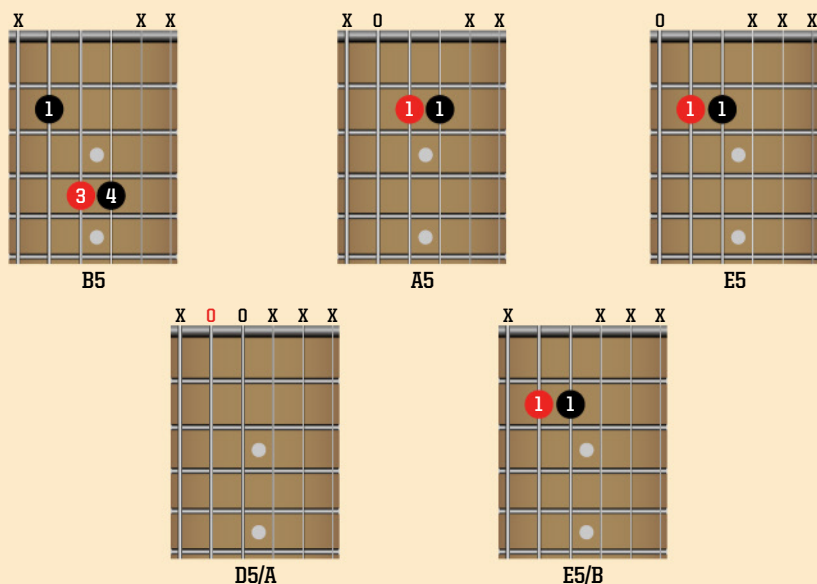
Everything you need to know before playing *Thunderstruck*



**T**he AC/DC sound is the pairing of Angus' Cherry Red Gibson SG and Malcolm's Gretsch G6131 Jet Firebird (aka 'The Beast') straight into Marshall 100-watt JTM45 and 1959 Super Lead heads. In general, Angus dials in a little more gain than Malcolm so it's worth having two tones set up – a Malcolm-style light drive plus an overdrive/boost such as an Ibanez Tube Screamer to get closer to the sound of Angus' cranked Marshalls.

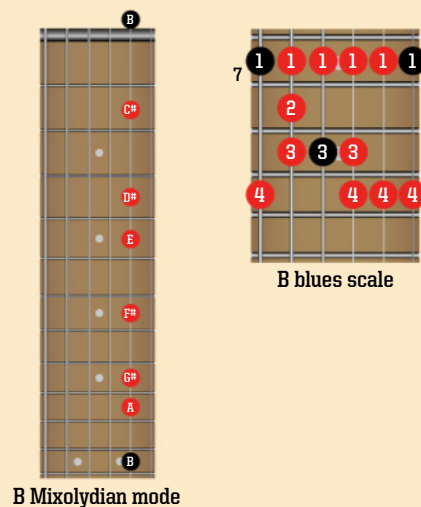
## CHORDS

**T**his is a bona fide three-chord song revolving around B5, E5 and A5. These are the I, IV and V chords in the key of E major, but as the B chord feels like 'home' this gives the progression a B Mixolydian flavour. The remaining two chords are E5/B which is an inversion of the E5 chord (with a B played as the lowest note) and the D5/A (with its A in the bass) is a brief passing chord.



## SCALES

**T**he first diagram shows the B Mixolydian (B C# D# E F# G# A) mode along the second string. The intro and main descending melody is based in this scale and uses the open B as a pedal tone. The solos are mostly based in the B blues scale (B D E F# A) which is shown here rooted at the 7th fret, but Angus does make use of different positions across the neck.





# AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK

FULL  
TAB

**THUNDERSTRUCK**  
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AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Intro

[bit.ly/tg388audio](https://bit.ly/tg388audio)

♩=133

TAB

TAB

B<sup>5</sup>

TAB

Play 5 times

TAB

This is Angus' awesome alternate-picked riff that opens the song and whose second half continues throughout most of it. Notice that the very first note is on its own in a pick-up bar. Pick this B with an upstroke to allow you downpick the following 4th-fret D# and maintain down-up style picking from there.





**bit.ly/tg388audio**

Malcolm's riff runs for eight bars before another 16 which Brian Johnson sings over. Hold the B5 powerchord shape and use the side of your picking hand palm to mute the strings at the bridge. Keep your picking hand moving in constant alternate 16th notes striking the strings with down- and upstrokes as they naturally occur.

**bit.ly/tg388audio**

Though bars 5 to 8 of the intro continue here on the recording, in live performances Angus switches to these powerchords. Start with the B5 powerchord, followed by A5, both played with downstrokes. Next, shift your first finger down a string and strum E5 with an upstroke. In bar 2, repeat A5 and E5 with downstrokes only.

**bit.ly/tg388audio**

For this section, we play long-held powerchords which act as an extra layer to accompany Malcolm's rhythm from verse 1. It's all simple stuff here, so focus on keeping the idle strings silent by resting your active fretting fingers against them.



## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Bridge 1

bit.ly/tg388audio

Play the three different powerchords with downstrokes here. Keep the rests completely silent by laying your fretting fingers lightly across the strings on the fretboard and using your picking hand palm to mute the strings near the bridge.

## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Chorus 1

bit.ly/tg388audio

Play the initial B5 and A5 powerchords in bar 1 using downstrokes. Next, play the open fourth and fifth strings, then use your first finger to hammer on both strings simultaneously at the 2nd fret. Repeat the riff running through bars 1 to 4 four times then play a B5 powerchord and hold it for four bars.

## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Bridge 2

bit.ly/tg388audio

Play the 4th and 2nd frets as single notes and pick them with downstrokes, followed by a sustained B5 powerchord. Repeat this - then, for the pick scrape, turn your pick at a right angle to the wound strings and press into the strings as you slide it toward the headstock.



## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Solo 1

bit.ly/tg388audio

3:11

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

This eight-bar solo is based in the B blues scale, with a few extra intervals from the B Dorian mode added in. The solo is structured in a series of two-bar licks in different areas of the fretboard. Learn each lick in isolation first before linking them together.

## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Interlude

bit.ly/tg388audio

3:26

1

2

3

4



## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Interlude (cont'd)

bit.ly/tg388audio

4

7

pick scrape

Here, we revisit the powerchords from the intro with added guitar licks which mirror the vocal melody. The licks are based around the B blues scale position and use vibrato, pull-offs, single-note bends and doublestop bends.

## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Chorus 2

bit.ly/tg388audio

3:43

1

5

This chorus starts with the same riff as chorus 1 but ends with an alternate riff starting in bar 5. Once again, you'll be starting on a B5 chord, but then following F# and G# note on the sixth string to lead in to an E5.







## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Solo 2 (cont'd)

bit.ly/tg388audio

Chord progression: B<sup>5</sup> (8va) — A<sup>5</sup> — D<sup>5</sup>/A — E<sup>5</sup>/B — A<sup>5</sup> — E<sup>5</sup>

BU 17 (19) 17 14 17 (19) 17 14 17 (19) 17 14 17 (19) 17 14 17 (19) 19 22 BU (24)

Chord progression: B<sup>5</sup> (8va) — A<sup>5</sup> — E<sup>5</sup>

BU 22 (23) 19 22 19 18 (19) 18 17 15 16 17 16 17 (19) 17 BU 17 (19) [19] Let ring

This solo is also based in the B blues scale, using different positions of the scale across the fretboard. Once again breaking the solo down and learning it in two-bar licks is advised. This solo features quite a few pre-bends and re-picked bends, which are very similar in that the string should be bent up to pitch before picking it.

## AC/DC THUNDERSTRUCK Outro

bit.ly/tg388audio

Chord progression: B<sup>5</sup> *rall.*

12 0 10 0 9 0 10 0 9 0 7 0 9 0 5 0 7 0 4 0 5 0 4 0 5 0 4 0 5 0 4 0

Here, we return to the descending single-string B Mixolydian lick from the intro coupled with a *rallentando*—which means gradually slowing down the tempo throughout the part. Finish with a B<sup>5</sup> powerchord with a slight slide down toward the headstock.





# OUR GENERATION

IDLES' Adam Devonshire continues in the footsteps of legendary players, pushing musical boundaries with Rotosound strings



# OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

## BEN E. KING STAND BY ME

Ever fancied playing along to your own string section? Then get stuck in to this month's iconic strum-along track

**T**his month's repertoire booster was sung and co-written by the late Ben E. King – the lead singer in The Drifters during the late 1950s who quit the band to go solo in 1960.

Surely his most iconic song, *Stand By Me* has been covered by a long list of artists including Otis Redding, John Lennon and Florence + The Machine. King's 1961 original is an archetypal, gospel-tinged, R&B classic with a double

bass riff to die for and lush string arrangements – and it's great to play.

You only need four chords. Granted, one is a full barre shape (F#m), but the rest are easy open chords, so this is a great tune to practise if you're working on barre chords. If you're finding that F#m chord too much of a handful, try playing it as a 'partial chord' – that just means you don't play all the strings. Simply fret the four treble strings instead and take care with your strumming.



### BEN E. KING STAND BY ME Verse

[bit.ly/tg388audio](https://bit.ly/tg388audio)

♩=120

A N.C. F#m N.C.

0:16

TAB

1 V V V V cont. sim.

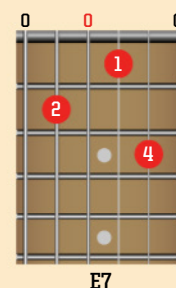
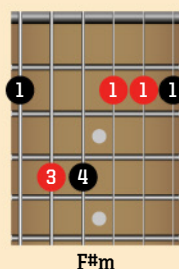
D N.C. E7 N.C. A

5

You'll be strumming the same eighth-note rhythm pattern throughout – aim for a fluent down-up strumming motion. Because beat 3 isn't sounded, you'll need to 'ghost' this downstroke; just lift your pick clear of the strings on this downstroke, keeping your down-up motion going all the time.

## CHORDS

A, D and E7 are common open chords that every guitarist should know. Every string (except those marked 'X') should ring out cleanly. The only difficult shape is the F#m barre chord. For a steady barre, keep your first finger flat across the strings with your thumb roughly opposite and try putting your second finger on top of your first for more strength.







## SONG SHEET

# Stand By Me

### Bass intro

A / / / / / F#m / / / / /

D / / / E7 / / / A / / / / /

I won't cry, I won't cry

F#m

No I won't shed a tear

D

E7

A

Just as long as you stand, stand by me

### Verse 1

A

When the night has come

F#m

And the land is dark

D

E7

A

And the moon is the only light we'll see

No I won't be afraid

F#m

Oh I won't be afraid

D

E7

A

Just as long as you stand, stand by me

### Chorus 2

A

And darlin', darlin', stand by me

F#m

Oh stand by me

D

E7

A

Woh stand now, stand by me, stand by me

### Instrumental break

A / / / / / F#m / / / / /

D / / / E7 / / / A / / / / / x2

### Chorus 1

A

So darlin', darlin', stand by me

F#m

Oh stand by me

D

E7

A

Oh stand, stand by me, stand by me

### Chorus 3

A

Darlin', darlin', stand by me

F#m

Oh stand by me

D

E7

A

Oh stand now, stand by me, stand by me

Whenever you're in trouble won't you stand by me

F#m

Oh stand by me

D

E7

A

Woh stand now, oh stand, stand by me

### Verse 2

A

If the sky that we look upon

F#m

Should tumble and fall

D

E7

A

Or the mountains should crumble to the sea

#### STAND BY ME

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# THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE  
BEST NEW GEAR

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

## HOW WE TEST

### CURATION

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

### FACE-VALUE REVIEWS

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

### \*WHAT IS GAS?

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

### NO SNAKE OIL

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### WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT

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

### REAL WORLD REVIEWS

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

### BEST BUY AWARD

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



### PLATINUM AWARD

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



## 82 FENDER PLAYER II STRATOCASTER

The Big F strikes back with a long-awaited sequel for one of its most popular ranges

## 86 PRS SE NF3

Another skeleton from PRS's past reimagined for today

## 88 GRETSCH JIM DANDY CONCERT

Vintage catalogue chic at entry-level prices. We've found the mojo, but have we found the tone?

## 90 EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON CUSTOM 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD

Epiphone takes an ambitious swing at the most desirable guitar ever made

## 92 LINE 6 POD EXPRESS

Nostalgic digital modelling with hands-on control

## 94 ELECTRO-HARMONIX LPB-3

Boost with EQ offers powerful tonal shaping



SUPERB, A BEST BUY



EXCELLENT



ABOVE AVERAGE KIT



SOME ISSUES



POOR





1



2



3



5

# START ME UP!

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

## FENDER JASON ISBELL TELECASTER PICKUP SET

1 Not only is Jason Isbell one of the best-loved modern Americana singer-songwriters, but he also knows what great tone is. Now, he's teamed up with Fender for the launch of the Jason Isbell Telecaster pickup set. Voiced by Tim Shaw, they're Alnico 5 magnets which are wax potted and lightly aged with Fender's Road Worn process, now available for your Tele or T-style guitar.

£149  
fender.com

## EHX POG3

2 EHX's POG is up there with the octave GOATs, and it might just be about to get even better. The POG3 takes your guitar's signal, and spits out up to five re-pitched versions of it, along with your dry sound for six voices in total. There's one and two octaves down, a 5th up and one and two octaves up, as well as filtering, envelope control, direct outputs, MIDI and 100 memory slots for you to recall in an instant!

£649  
www.ehx.com

## ZOOM MS-80IR+

3 Zoom is back with an all-new addition to its MultiStomp range, and this time it's focussing on impulse responses. The MS-80IR+ comes pre-loaded with 23 amp IRs, but these are created using Zoom's multi-layered IR process, which captures each amp at three points, rather than a single, static IR. In addition, there are five ambience effects, and a dozen others including EQ and delay. It'll work in full stereo, and Zoom has even thrown in a tuner and audio interface!

£169  
zoomcorp.com

## HARLEY BENTON ELECTRIC GUITAR KITS

4 Ever wanted to build your own guitar? Harley Benton has been supplying BYO kits for a while, and has just added to the range with some pointier models for you to put together. There's the Extreme 84 and Extreme 76 X-shapes, plus the Victory (V-shape). Each one comes with all the hardware and electronics you need to build the kit, and they're super-affordable. Head to Thomann to order yours.

£157  
harleybenton.com

## MOOER GE200 PRO

5 Mooer has updated its GE200 with the release of the new GE200 Pro – a modelling multi-fx unit bursting with features for practice or on-stage use. It's got 286 models, a 3.5" colour screen and IR-loading capability. As well as this, there's a USB-C audio interface, Bluetooth connectivity, MIDI, multiple outputs and an FX loop. Plus, it's got a 60-second, BPM-syncable looper, too! We're expecting it to hit these shores shortly.

£TBC  
moeraudio.com







# FENDER PLAYER II STRATOCASTER

£739

The Big F strikes back with a long-awaited sequel for one of its most popular ranges

It's been six years since the original Player Series guitars launched. The world was a different place back then, and guitars were a hell of a lot cheaper. As with everything else in life, the price of Fender's ever-popular made-in-Mexico guitars has risen significantly, which might leave guitarists wondering whether Player II is worth investing in as a successor.

The Player II Strat arrives as an evolutionary update to one of Fender's best-selling guitar series, nicking a feature from the Player Plus Series along the way. Returning to its roots we see a more vintage spec offering than that of the Player Plus, with a boatload of brand-new colours

unusual one, though, and without a clue what Hialeah is, we dubbed it 'the lemon cheesecake'. Sort of like Olympic White met your favourite dessert, we were initially unconvinced, but during our tests, it grew on us a lot. If traditional finishes are more your thing, you'll be spoiled for choice with a whopping 11 to choose from.

Getting started playing, Fender hasn't rocked the boat with regards to the neck profile. It's just as slinky as both the Player and Player Plus series guitars we've played, with the addition of those rolled fretboard edges to enhance the playability. It feels comfortable with pretty much any style, whether you're smashing out three-note-per-string legato licks

## IT DELIVERS THOSE ICONIC STRATOCASTER TONES

that are much more traditional feeling, rolled fretboard edges, and the welcome return of slab Rosewood to certain colourways.

This Player II Strat sports a Hialeah Yellow finish on a contoured alder body, with a trio of Player Series Alnico 5 single-coil pickups. The neck and fretboard combo is maple with 22 medium jumbo frets, a 9.5" radius, and Fender's now-classic Modern 'C' profile on the reverse. Vintage-style ClassicGear tuners adorn the headstock whilst you've got a 2-point synchronised tremolo with bent steel saddles at the opposite end.

So far, so standard vintage-spec Strat. That finish is an

or strumming simple open chords. 22 frets add a touch of modernism, allowing you to bend up to a high 'E' a little more easily, and the overall feel is fantastic.

Plugging the guitar in, we're greeted with all the classic Strat tones you'd expect. Position 2 delivers superb surf sounds with the addition of some spring reverb, while moving to the neck positions allows you to nail those cleaner-than-thou staccato funk licks. Flicking back to the bridge position and cranking the gain gives you an aggressive tone that's great for punky powerchords, and although it doesn't quite hit chugging territory, you can certainly nail some heavy riffs.

### 1 FRETBOARD

The edges of the fretboard have been rolled to deliver a more played-in feel, resulting in a smooth feel for your fretting hand.

### 2 PICKUPS

A trio of Player Series Alnico 5 pickups delivers plenty of aggression for modern playing, as well as all of those iconic Stratocaster sounds.

### 3 TREMOLO

The rugged two-point tremolo lets you add some shine to your licks, giving you an extra tool for expressing solos and chords.

### AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Alder

**NECK:** Maple, modern C profile, bolt-on

**FINGERBOARD:** Maple, 25.5" scale, 9.5" radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**PICKUPS:** 3x Player Series Alnico 5 Strat Single-Coil

**CONTROLS:** Master volume, tone 1, tone 2, 5-way pickup selector

**HARDWARE:** 2-point synchronized tremolo with bent steel saddles, Fender ClassicGear tuning machines

**FINISH:** Hialeah Yellow (as reviewed), 3-Color Sunburst, White Blonde, Polar White, Transparent Cherry Burst, Coral Red, Birch Green, Black, Aquatone Blue, Aged Cherry Burst, Transparent Mocha Burst

**CONTACT:** Fender, [fender.com](http://fender.com)







### One in the chamber

The Player II Series' chambered bodies, explained

In a move that absolutely no one saw coming, the Player II Series will get a selection of chambered body options on certain Strat and Teles for the very first time. The ability to choose between chambered ash and chambered mahogany on certain colours is not only great for players who prefer a lighter instrument, but also offers a slightly different tonal quality from that of a regular solid-body guitar. Without getting too deep into the tonewood debate, the chambered ash bodies promise a more snappy tone, while chambered mahogany typically has a warmer timbre. Both should sound different from a regular solid body, with an extra resonance and openness that is an interesting (not to mention potential weight-saving) option to have at this price point.

There is one small issue however. The high E doesn't ring out properly when played open, which after some checking we deduced is a result of a badly cut nut. It's either a simple fix with a fret file or a nut replacement, but either way, a little disappointing to find it managed to slip past the factory quality control.

If you want a classic-sounding Strat, the Player II will tick all the boxes marked 'tone' and 'playability'. It may not be the very best value-for-money guitar out



there nowadays, but if you must have that Fender logo on your headstock, it's undoubtedly the cheapest way to do so, and it delivers those iconic Strat tones. **Matt McCracken**

| SUMMARY | FEATURES        | <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> |
|---------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | SOUND QUALITY   | <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> |
|         | VALUE FOR MONEY | <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> |
|         | BUILD QUALITY   | <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> |
|         | USABILITY       | <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> |
|         | OVERALL RATING  | <div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div> |

### ALSO TRY...

#### SOLOKING MS-1 CUSTOM

£349

A hot-rodded super Strat with two powerful humbuckers and a roasted maple neck/fretboard combo. Perfect for those who want a little more heat in their guitar tones and playability.



#### SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE '60S STRATOCASTER

£379

For vintage Strat tones on a budget, this Squier Classic Vibe is a brilliant choice. The neck is incredibly playable and instantly familiar, a great option for the budget-conscious.



#### PRS SE NF3

£979

It looks like a Strat but delivers many tonal flavours, bridging the gap between classic single-coil and low-output humbuckers. Exceptional build quality and playability help it stand out.





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# PRS SE NF3

Another skeleton from PRS's past reimagined for today

£979

**P**RS's bolt-on guitars go back to the brand's very early history with the 1988 Classic Electric, but its first attempt to actually create a more Fender-style guitar came in the early '90s with the short-lived first-series EG models. PRS history is peppered with plenty more, not least the original NF3 from 2011, and then, of course, there's their most Fender-like and most successful yet, the John Mayer Silver Sky.

So, what is this new three-pickup bolt-on with vibrato bringing to the table? You could certainly argue that it's a 'Stratocaster' for those of us that don't get on with the 70-year-old hallowed design. The first 'fixes' to the design go back to the original PRS guitars: the vibrato, with its six notched pivot screws, block saddles and push-fit tension adjustable arm that floats parallel to the body, and, more fundamentally, the 25-inch scale length – shorter than Fender, a little longer than Gibson. Likewise, the fingerboard radius which at 10 inches sits between the giants.

In fact, every small detail of the design has been considered over these past 39 years: the friction-reducing nut, the medium jumbo fretwire and the feel of the neck. It's called a Wide-Thin profile, but 'classic C' is a better description enhanced by a smooth satin finish, rolled fingerboard edges and perfectly installed frets. Here's an Indonesian-made guitar that costs £799 in-store, but actually feels and plays like PRS's considerably more expensive USA bolt-ons. It's very in-tune, too,

with a rock-solid vibrato system. Hey, it's a PRS!

But the key 'fix' here are these new pickups. Yes, we have the classic five-way lever switch which gives us those Strat-like selections, yet immediately we're treated to a fuller voicing compared to our reference SE Silver Sky. Aside from being hum-cancelling, these dance rather beautifully between lower-output full-size humbuckers and classic Fender-style single-coils. While positions two and four on the five-way produce the most Strat-like voices, at the neck you'd swear you were hearing a good mini-humbucker, while the bridge balances jangle with a little poke that makes our SE Silver Sky sound rather bright and thin.

The simple control circuit works very well to shape these voices, too: there's no treble bleed on the volume, so pulling it back smooths the attack a little that not only cleans things up a little for those jazz/blues flourishes at the neck, but we're hearing that slightly rounded Rickenbacker jangle at the bridge. But it's not just a clean machine, it works just as well under heavier gains retaining good clarity.

The SE NF3 is a stand-out guitar for players of any level, boasting a huge range of hum-free voices.

**Dave Burrluck**

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

## 1 BODY

Like the SE Silver Sky, the NF3 uses a solid poplar body with a similar outline and contouring, but there's a chamfer to the upper horn that nods back to the original PRS EG, and the output jack moves to the body edge.

## 2 PICKUPS

This new SE introduces a trio of hum-cancelling Narrowfield Deep Dish 'S' pickups, Indonesian-made interpretations of those used on the more T-style NF53 that launched in 2023.

## 3 CONTROLS

Unlike the SE Silver Sky's two tone controls, the NF3 has master volume and master tone, with the volume placed out of the way of the bridge pickup.

## AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Poplar  
**NECK:** Maple, wide-thin profile, bolt-on  
**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood or maple  
**FRETS:** 22, medium  
**PICKUPS:** 3x PRS-designed Narrowfield DD 'S' humbuckers  
**CONTROLS:** 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (w/ pull-switch coil split)  
**HARDWARE:** PRS vibrato (cast), PRS designed non-locking tuners  
**FINISH:** Ice Blue Metallic (as reviewed), Gun Metal Gray, Metallic Orange, Pearl White  
**CONTACT:** PRS, prsguitars.com









# GRETSCH JIM DANDY CONCERT

Vintage catalogue chic at entry-level prices. We've found the mojo, but have we found the tone?

£209

Once upon a time, in the prelapsarian era before broadband, TikTok and vaping, players could browse guitars in a catalogue before ordering one through the mail. If this was you in the 1930s and you took a shine to a cheap acoustic guitar with a squarish headstock, badged "Rex", you were in fact buying a Gretsch, and this Rex sub-brand is the inspiration behind Gretsch's Jim Dandy Concert model.

Now, we've seen the JD a few times before in its smaller, parlor-style size, but for 2024, Gretsch has expanded the range to also include Dreadnought and Concert-sized strummers. Here we have the Concert model, and as with the rest, it looks like it's straight out the '30s. Don't expect many modern appointments, this is a time-machine project. But there have been refinements. The headstock is squarer than its catalogue counterparts, and bears the Gretsch name. The single-ply aged white pickguard has the "G" graphic, matching the tuner buttons. An unfussy black-and-white rosette complements the "Rex Burst" finish.

Gretsch has applied a semi-gloss treatment to body and neck, attenuating some of that new guitar shine. It's very tactile. There's painted pinstripe purfling and a single-ply aged white binding tying it together. Jim Dandy sure looks dapper, the period aesthetic enhanced by three-on-a-plate open-gear tuners and a pinned walnut bridge. The pre-war feel extends to a walnut fingerboard that seats 18 narrow vintage-gauge frets.

But whether the year is 1934 or 2024, some things never change; compact but with bigger lungs than its parlour-sized siblings, the concert acoustic will always be a popular proposition for players. For many, this is the goldilocks option, catering to fingerstyle, strummer and blues picker alike.

The nato neck joins the body at the 14th fret, and is shaped into a pleasing C profile, neither too fat nor too lean. If this Jim Dandy steps out of the box and makes you think of Gibson's old L-series models, it'll be because we've also got Gibson-esque dimensions by way of a 24.75" scale and 12" fingerboard radius.

All of this looks great, but how does it sound? How does it play? At this price, don't expect the hi-fi quality of a Taylor V-Class acoustic. The tuners are a little stiff. With a body of laminated basswood, the Jim Dandy's tone is not going to age as gracefully as a solid-wood acoustic, but it is a tidy build, and in the here and now it provides today's player with affordable versatility. This is a viable beginner guitar. The Jim Dandy will happily accommodate your first open chords, and there's enough sparkle in its voice to support budding crosspickers. But anyone looking for a budget acoustic with retro looks will be charmed by ol' Mr Dandy. It is a hard guitar to put down.

**Jonathan Horsley**

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

**1 HEADSTOCK**  
Gretsch's name assumes pride of place on a squared-off 3x3 '50s profile peghead that helps give the Jim Dandy series one seriously cool silhouette.

**2 NECK**  
This C profile shape feels more classic than many Cs we get today, offering a bit of zip, but plenty support for chord playing.

**3 BODY**  
The laminated basswood will be hard-wearing and it keeps the price down, but it would be nice to see Gretsch do an all-solid wood version.

## AT A GLANCE

**TYPE:** Concert-sized acoustic guitar

**TOP:** Laminated basswood

**BODY:** Laminated basswood

**HARDWARE:** Walnut bridge with compensated saddle, open-gear die-cast nickel tuners with Aged White buttons

**FINISH:** Rex Burst (as reviewed), Frontier Stain

**CONTACT:** Gretsch, gretschguitars.com









# EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON CUSTOM 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD

Epiphone takes an ambitious swing at the most desirable guitar ever made

£1,199

**P**age, Green, Gibbons, Marsden; the names tied to the coveted '59 Les Paul are nothing short of legendary. Thought of by many as Gibson's greatest achievement, an original "burst" will set you back at least six figures – and that's if you can even find one in the wild. It is highly likely that most of us will go our entire playing careers without ever getting our hands on an original example, but that doesn't mean we can't get close to this sought-after tone.

That's where the Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom series comes in. After successfully recreating the '58 Korina Explorer, '59 ES-355, and '63 Firebird, Epiphone is now turning its attention to the most fabled electric model to leave its stable – but can Epi do it justice?

Taking a look at the body, and as you'd expect, Epiphone sticks to the original recipe of rich mahogany and a maple top. However, this replica's flames come courtesy of a AAA-flamed veneer that crowns a thicker maple cap. Not that you'd be able to tell – this guitar looks fantastic. Our review model doesn't have the most pronounced figuring, but we actually quite like that – in some ways, it makes it look more authentic.

The finishing is on point, too. The dark perimeter of the Tobacco Burst perfectly complements this guitar's iconic outline, while the subtle VOS treatment feels incredibly smooth under our fingers.

Making our way to the neck, and we're instantly reminded why we love '59 reissues. Not too big, not too small, you'll understand immediately why this is considered by many to be the ultimate neck profile. Whether it's 1st position chords or more demanding lead work, the guitar never feels like it gets in our way. Combine this stellar neck with perfect fretwork, a well-cut nut, and a nice setup out of the box and you get one of the most playable Epiphone guitars we've tried.

Okay, it has the look and feel, but it needs to have the sound to match. Thankfully, the tonal heart of this Les Paul is a duo of Gibson Custombucker pickups, which most definitely don't let the side down. A creamy neck pickup paired with a fierce bridge position and days of sustain locked away inside make this guitar genuinely inspiring to play – and it seals the deal for us.

Is this the most authentic R9 out there? No, of course not. It may not be an exact replica of a golden-age Gibson guitar, but we didn't expect it to be. This is a fabulous guitar that more than evokes the spirit of the original while delivering a tone and feel that is sure to get the best out of your playing, and we can't ask for more than that.

**Daryl Robertson**

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

## 1 NECK

A Gibson-style open-book headstock, one-piece mahogany neck, and long tenon shows Epiphone is serious about this reissue – pity the fingerboard is laurel and not rosewood.

## 2 PICKUPS

A pair of Gibson Custombucker pickups, CTS potentiometers, and Mallory capacitors, along with '50s wiring, combine to deliver an exceptional sound.

## 3 FINISH

VOS stands for Vintage Original Sheen, and sits somewhere between a dull satin and the typical high-gloss polyurethane found on Epiphone's other models.



## AT A GLANCE

**BODY:** Mahogany with maple top and AAA flame maple veneer

**NECK:** Mahogany

**FINGERBOARD:** Laurel

**FRETS:** 22 Medium

Jumbo

**PICKUPS:** Gibson

Custombuckers

**CONTROLS:** 2 volume,

2 tone; CTS

potentiometers,

Mallory capacitors,

'50s wiring

**HARDWARE:** ABR-1

bridge, Gibson historic

reissue stop bar,

Epiphone Deluxe

tuners

**FINISH:** Tobacco Burst

(as reviewed), Factory

Burst, Iced Tea Burst,

Washed Cherry

Sunburst

**CASE:** Hardshell with

brown exterior, pink

interior, and Inspired

by Gibson custom

graphics

**CONTACT:** Epiphone,

epiphone.com











# LINE 6 POD EXPRESS £199

## Nostalgic digital modelling with hands-on control

It's been over a quarter of a century since Line 6's unmistakable red, kidney bean-shaped modeller burst onto the scene and kickstarted a tonal revolution, laying foundations for what is today a commonplace alternative to using an amp. The POD, of course, still exists, even if it's in the more conventional floorboard format. Line 6's latest release also falls into the POD family, and while it takes the shape of a stompbox, there are parallels to be drawn with its ancestors.

The POD Express comes loaded with HX-derived amp and effects models – seven amps, seven cabs and 17 effects, distilled into a compact-sized pedal. There's an on-board looper, a tuner, tap-tempo switch and a USB-C audio interface, plus you can hook up an external expression pedal, two footswitches, or a combination of expression and footswitch using a splitter cable. The battery power, plastic casing, headphone socket and consumer-style volume wheel suggest this is aimed at headphone practice, but it can also be chained into your rig like

any other pedal, or used as your amp simulator into a PA or cab. In short, it's a Jack of all trades.

That's well and good, but we're hardly lacking for solutions when it comes to playing or recording our guitars in 2024, so the proof is in the tonal pudding. The POD Express works in either Preset mode (you can save 21 of your own) or Manual mode. The first is a good way of getting to grips with some of the capabilities, but the fun starts with building your own sounds. There's no display, as such. Instead, everything is centred around the LED segments surrounding the Amp control in the middle. The POD Express is laid out into five sections (Dist, Amp, Mod, Delay and Reverb), and the LED bezel displays the range for whichever control you're turning at that moment.

The controls serve double-duty when it comes to sound-shaping, with amp gain, three-band EQ and channel volume all accessed by holding down the Alt switch. There's a lot going on, and the amps sound great, holding up that HX reputation nicely. The same goes for the effects:

deep, rich modulation, analogue flavour to the delays, and very usable, rich-sounding reverbs. In basic operation, everything is simple, but, delving deeper, you'll find yourself having to memorise several combinations of button-presses.

There's no doubt that there are a lot of features here, but we can't ignore products such as the Positive Grid Spark GO and Boss Katana GO, both of which offer 'smart' features for practice and sound editing. In fact, a computer or mobile-based editor would make unlocking the POD's full potential very easy. That said, the POD Express has the added edge of being able to integrate into our existing rigs, and not everyone wants to get their hands dirty with the details. Ultimately, it's an excellent all-rounder, even if it's not quite a master in any single area.

*Stuart Williams*

| SUMMARY | FEATURES |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|         | ★        | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
|         | ★        | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
|         | ★        | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
|         | ★        | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
|         | ★        | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
|         | ★        | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |

### 1 MODELLING

The amps and effects are derived from the HX series and sound brilliant. Each amp loads a matching cab by default, but you can mix and match any of the seven amps and cabinets for customisation.

### 2 OPERATION

On the face of it, everything is accessible via the controls and switches. However, there are many 'hidden' settings operated via combined button presses. We'd love to see a software editor to make this easier.

### 3 CONNECTIVITY

As well as the on-board looper and audio interface, the POD Express can be placed into your rig, with mono input/stereo outputs. You can also hook up an expression pedal or footswitch for more control.

### AT A GLANCE

**TYPE:** Amp/Effects modelling pedal  
**AMPS:** 7 amps with 7 matching cabs (interchangeable)  
**EFFECTS:** 7  
**FEATURES:** Tuner, looper, audio interface  
**CONNECTIONS:** Input, output (L/R), headphones, external footswitch (1x TRS socket), USB C  
**POWER:** 3X AA or PSU (sold separately)  
**DIMENSIONS:** [WXHXD] 92 x 56 x 130mm  
**CONTACT:** Line 6, line6.com





# ELECTRO-HARMONIX LPB-3

## Boost with EQ offers powerful tonal shaping

£129



**B**ack in the late '60s – before the Big Muff – Electro-Harmonix came up with a nifty way to boost guitar signal into an amplifier with its LPB-1 Linear Power Booster, a simple one-knob, battery-powered device. Now, the company has brought the LPB family right up to date with the much more sophisticated LPB-3, still with the same role of boosting the signal from guitar to amp, but this time with some powerful active EQ to complement the boost.

The pedal gives you the choice of two amounts of maximum boost – a thumping 33dB or less intense 20dB, which does the trick for most instances. You set the boost by juxtaposition of two knobs – a Boost knob which sets

the overall output for the pedal and a Pre-Gain knob which comes before the EQ section and sets the input gain between unity and 20dB. To adjust the EQ, you get Treble and Bass knobs that cut or boost either side of a central notched detente position plus some parametric control of the midrange via a similar cut/boost knob, and another to set the frequency. There are two options to set the bandwidth (Q) of the frequencies adjusted, so you can tweak a broad range of frequencies or zero-in on a narrower, peakier area.

Leaving all the cut/boost knobs at their neutral position, you can dial in a potent boost that's pretty transparent, but you can also set the pedal so you get no boost but can use it purely for tonal

tweaking. While the EQ has the potential to get really extreme, a little goes a long way, like a touch of treble for a sparkly sheen or a midrange scoop to make a mid-forward amp more Fender-like. The potential, though, for targeted boost with a dialled-in combination of boost and EQ may be the pedal's greatest asset, with the likes of a decent amount of pre-gain combined with an upper midrange boost delivering some Tube Screamer-style lift-off for solos.

Whether permanently engaged as a tone conditioner or set to change things up when needed, the LPB-3 is a versatile pedal that provides many options.

**Trevor Curwen**

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

### AT A GLANCE

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Boost and EQ pedal

**FEATURES:** Selectable Buffered / True Bypass

**CONTROLS:** Boost, Pre-Gain, Bass, Mid Level, Mid Frequency, Treble, Max switch, Q switch, internal bypass mode switch, Bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** standard input, standard output

**POWER:** Supplied 9V adaptor 120mA

**DIMENSIONS:** 111 (d) x 67 (w) x 50 mm (h)

**CONTACT:** Electro-Harmonix, ehx.com

“ EHX HAS BROUGHT THE LPB FAMILY RIGHT UP TO DATE ”





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Words Phil Weller Photo Skylar Watkins

# HELLO MARY

**G**uitarist Helena Straight and bassist Mikaela Oppenheimer have been jamming together since they were 14, so it's understandable that, now in their early 20s and three albums deep, their tastes have changed. Drummer Stella Wave joined them in Hello Mary two years into the project, and a symbiosis has slowly formed, skewing their songwriting. Hints of their Nirvana-tinted garage rock remain, but, on new LP *Emita OX*, there's an extra angularity to Helena's buzzsaw riffs and psych-rock cleans.

"I got really into Black Midi for a while," she says. "We put each other onto music all the time so our tastes are melding which helps us write more cohesive songs. We didn't realise some songs were in funny time signatures!"

Typically, Helena writes on an acoustic before electrifying her ideas in their basement practice space. Together, they'll "feel the song out and find the section that naturally feels like it should be huge."

She splits her signal – her father's old Ampeg VT-40 and a Leyland Pedals Hum Along distortion growling alongside an Orange Rockerverb 50, while an MXR Phase 90 and a "wonky and insane" Death By Audio Space Bender pedal supply the spice. The final piece of the puzzle is a Reverend Spacehawk guitar – a 16th birthday present from her ever-supportive father. "I'm totally in love with it," she says.

This is the signature axe for The Cure's Reeves Gabrels, who inadvertently helped Helena become an endorsement artist when he shared a clip of Hello Mary to chief luthier, Ken Haas. "It blows my mind," Helena beams. "This is the only guitar I need for our shows. It has a Bigsby whammy and it feels thick and sturdy. I don't like when it feels like the guitar I'm playing is gonna break. Vintage guitars scare me!"

Helena toyed with "becoming a shredder," but quickly realised that wasn't who she was. "I feel like my guitar playing has always been based in songwriting," she says. "Those lessons helped with my ability to move quickly around the neck, but when I would sit down to practise I found myself wanting to write instead."

*Emita OX* sees her focusing on her own identity, with sharper edges and an experimental sheen. "Courtney Barnett and Kurt Vile are a huge inspiration," she concludes. "It's more impressive to me when a guitarist writes something I've never heard before, rather than their technical ability."





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