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TOTAL Guitar

ANNUAL 2026

ULTIMATE 30-DAY GUITAR WORKOUT

INSIDE

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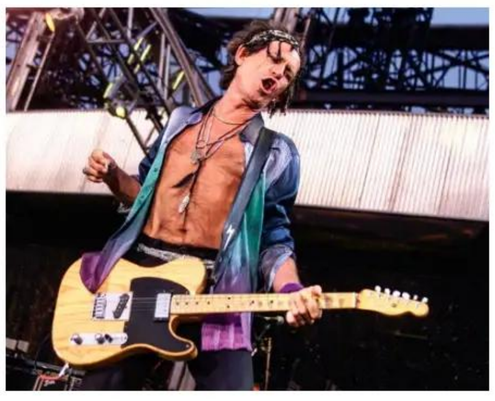
PLAY LIKE BRIAN MAY

GET MORE FROM YOUR ACOUSTIC

21 WAYS TO BETTER RHYTHM

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUITAR GUIDE









KIRK HAMMETT • THE STONES • MOLLY TUTTLE • CHRIS BIRD

Digital Edition

FUTURE VOLUME 9

WELCOME

TOTAL Guitar ANNUAL 2026

Welcome to the Total Guitar Annual 2026 – packed with the very best features, interviews, advice and more from the magazine's final issues, it's essential reading for guitar enthusiasts of all levels and styles.

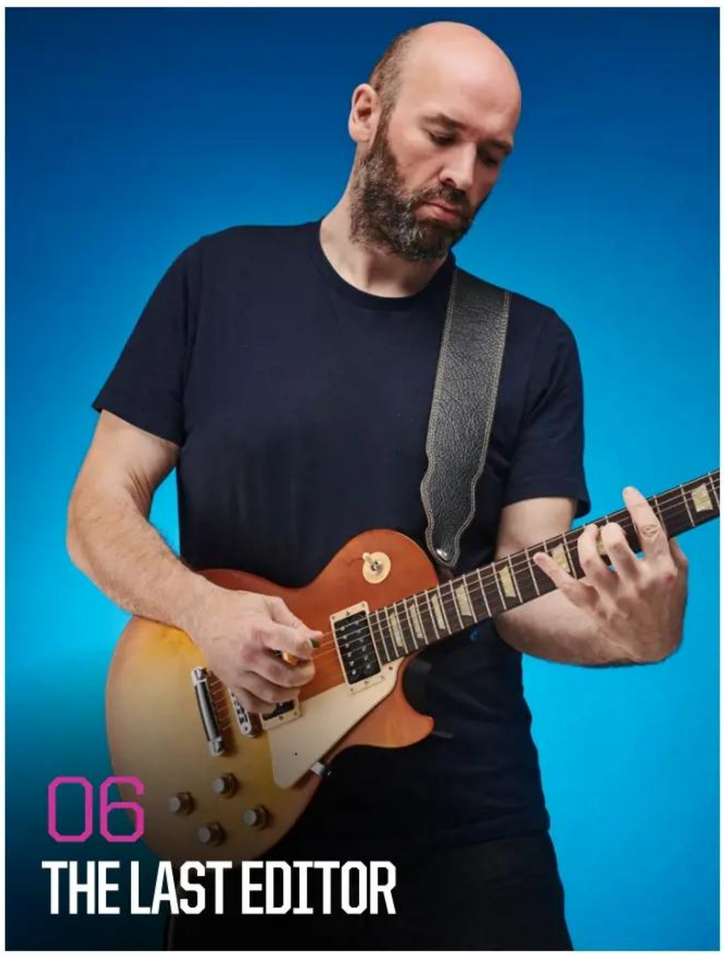
We begin with a journey through the musical life of Chris Bird, Total Guitar's final editor and member of the team for over 17 years, who sadly passed away in May 2025.

Elsewhere we look back on the highlights of over 30 years of Total Guitar, from the very first issue to Too Drunk To Pluck, Mark Tremonti's exclusive TG track, John Frusciante's Letter From America and many more amazing moments!

We've also got an exclusive interview with legendary Queen guitarist Brian May, as he takes us through how the band's greatest songs were created, followed by a guide to playing like the guitar hero. There's also a whole host of other brilliant features on offer – discover the greatest cover versions of all time, run down the Rolling Stones' 50 best riffs, and get top tips on taking your acoustic playing to the next level. And that's not all! We also bring you an ultimate 30-day workout to help you smash your guitar goals. As well as the aforementioned Brian May, we also speak to Kirk Hammett, Molly Tuttle and Carlos Alomar, who tells us what it was like to play with David Bowie.

Whatever your skill level, we're also here to help – our tips, tricks and tutorials will give you the confidence to master your guitar and play like the legends. You'll find a wealth of easy-to-follow tab throughout this annual, complete with free audio, video and backing tracks. Enjoy!

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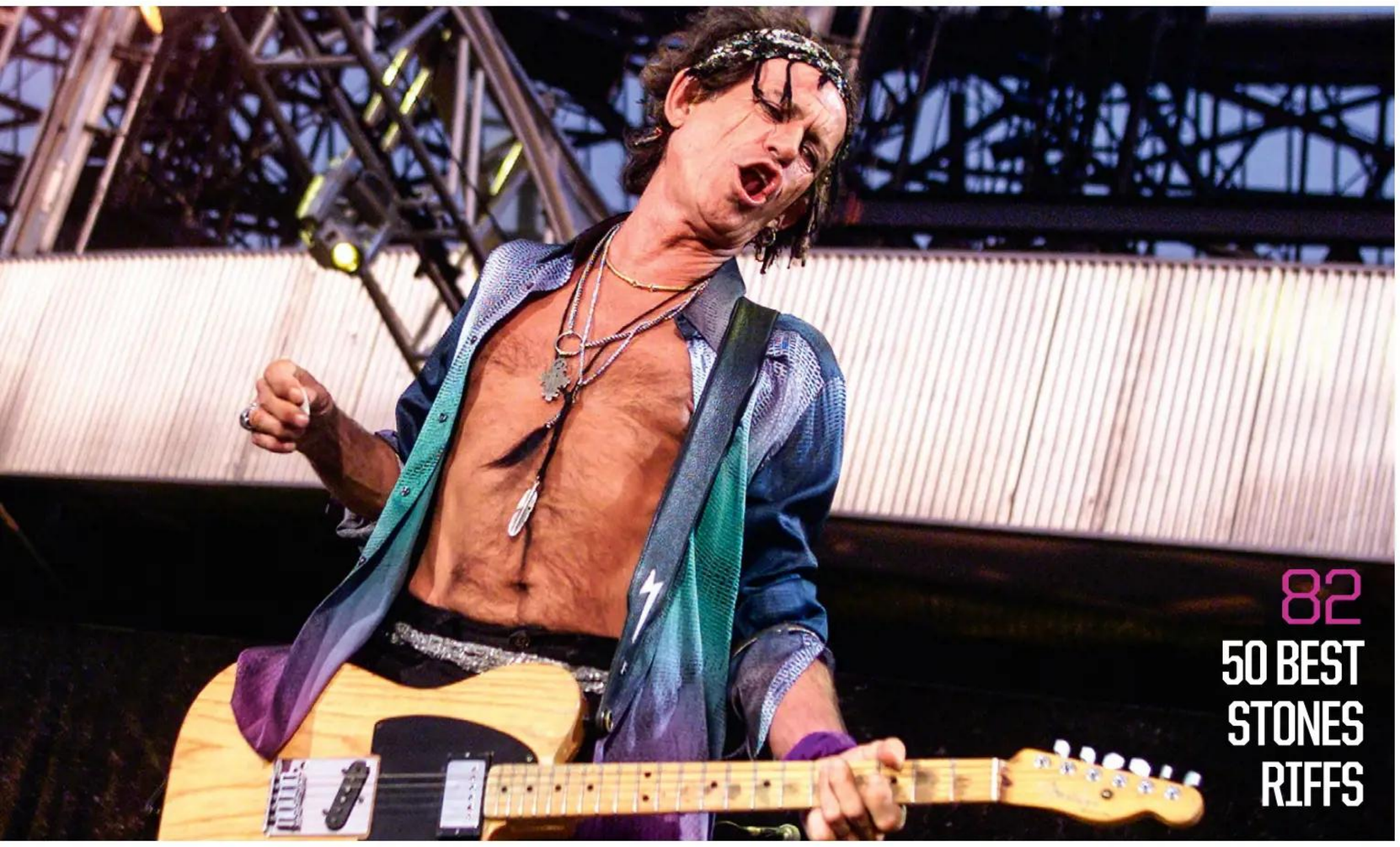
75 Play Like David Bowie





Photography: Getty; Gareth Parker; Sam Cahill; Cal McIntyre; Ross Halfin

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THE LAST EDITOR

The musical life of **Chris Bird**, the final editor of Total Guitar

Words Scott Rowley **Portraits** Phil Barker

It was May 2025, and Chris Bird was sitting in his living room in Chippenham, Wiltshire, surrounded by amps, guitars, and books. On the floor, in the centre of the room, a Fender Precision bass lay in an unopened flight case. Chris hadn't played guitar for a while, and the calluses on his fingers had gone.

"So steel strings are out," he said. He nodded at the flight case. "But maybe I can play bass."

He scrolled through Spotify and played the music of Gareth Dylan Smith, a jazz drummer Chris had played with in his first-ever band, when they were still at school. "I should have been on that album," said Chris. But the album was recorded in 2024, he explained, "and I just couldn't."

Maybe you could record something from home, a visitor suggested, and send it to him, get on the next one? "Maybe," he said. "Maybe I could play some bass."

Chris Bird worked on Total Guitar magazine for 17 years, from 2007 to 2024. Launched in 1994, Total Guitar – known to the team that worked on it as TG – quickly became the biggest-selling guitar magazine in the UK and Europe, targeted at young players just finding their way on guitar. But by the mid-2010s, the presence of free tab sites and video lessons on YouTube, meant that the attention of young players was elsewhere.

"AT THIS STAGE, I JUST NEED TO OUTLIVE MY MUM"

Total Guitar had eight Editors in its 30-year lifespan before it ceased publication in October 2024. Chris Bird was the last Editor of TG.

It wasn't something he dwelt on. In April 2024, Chris was diagnosed with Stage 4 bowel cancer. It had spread to his liver.

"At this stage," he said, "I just need to outlive my mum."



Chris met many of his favourite artists during his time at TG

Chris Bird was brought up in Shoreham, on the south coast of England, where he lived with his mum, Sue, his dad Graham, and his older brother and sister, Matthew and Sarah. One of his earliest memories was listening to The Beatles on his dad's huge hi-fi system.

"I don't think I would have gotten into music if it wasn't for hi-fi," said Chris. "I think if I'd listened to music on a little teeny radio, it might have turned me off."

Forget music, forget guitar – Chris Bird fell in love with *sound itself*.

He was inspired to play guitar when he stayed with his uncle in the summer of 1988. His uncle was living on a narrowboat and at night, they sat on the boat, singing and playing acoustic.

He came back from his narrowboat holiday in love with the guitar.

He picked it up quickly, self-taught at first. He discovered the legends of guitar playing. Chris Bird was a 12-year-old Eric Clapton and Mark Knopfler fan.

His parents divorced when Chris was 13 and around then he formed a band with his friend Gareth Dylan Smith and a guy called Steve Reynolds. He took A-Level music, and his school had a 24 track reel-to-reel recording system that he'd play around with.

And some new music was finally fighting for his attention. "I really loved the grunge stuff," he said. "It suited the fashion of the time – the bands looked like all my friends."

His brother Matt was another musical influence. Born in 1971, Matt was a big music fan and in his later teens, began roadie-ing for a Brighton band called Altogether Elsewhere. The Levellers had kicked off a huge folk-rock scene in the area. Matt took Chris to some Altogether Elsewhere gigs. "You'd see a whole room of total hippies just descend into total madness when they came on. Brilliant fun."

He went to University of Wolverhampton where he did an unlikely joint degree: Philosophy and Popular Music. "It's the weirdest degree you can ever have," he said.

University was also the beginning of another unlikely period: Chris Bird, The Punk Years.

"One of my best mates, Ben, was a punk fanatic," said Chris. Ben played guitar and needed a bassist. Chris said, "Sure, man." The band was called Seal Club. (Ben later formed the equally brilliantly-named Crap Shags.)

In his living room in Chippenham, the Precision Bass remained in its flight case. Chris's throat was dry. He was always softly-spoken, but the cancer, or the treatment, gave him a dry throat and reduced his voice to a husk. Sue brought him an ice lolly.

He wanted to talk about a difficult period.

"I've had various dalliances with illness in my life," he said.

It was when he was at university, and playing with Seal Club, that he experienced "a bout of ill health." ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) is also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and is defined by the NHS as "a long-term condition that can affect different parts of the body. The most common symptom is extreme tiredness. The cause of ME/CFS is unknown."



Ratbush, 2018: Rob Laing, Mike Astley-Brown, Stu Williams and Chris. *Pic courtesy of Rob*

The medical establishment is still debating whether ME is psychological or physiological.

"THEN I GOT THE HELL ON WITH MY LIFE"

Chris wouldn't care to guess either way, but something was stressing him out.

He was gay and he hadn't told anyone.

"I was in the closet at that time," he said. "I didn't come out until my mid-20s, which was a bit more normal back then. These days, kids come out in school."

He'd recently spoken to one of his old schoolmates and the two of them realised that – of the 1,200 people at their secondary school – neither of them knew a single person who was gay. "So I don't know," said Chris. "Maybe depression was a part of it."

He suffered from ME for around three years and it subsided around the same time as Chris began using a new medication for his epilepsy. The epilepsy started when he was 13. He took medication for a few years, "let it slip for a bit" and then made it part of his daily regimen – and that's when it seemed to make the ME go away.

"But maybe that epilepsy medication acted in a similar way to an antidepressant," he said. "I don't really understand what made it stop. But it did – and then I got the hell on with my life."

In 1999, his sister Sarah died, aged 26. Sarah had been disabled all her life. She was born with hydrocephalus – aka 'water on the brain', a buildup of fluid that exerts pressure and damages the brain – and she also suffered from epilepsy and died of an epileptic seizure. She was in hospital for something else and just didn't wake up one morning.

"It was as peaceful an ending as we could have hoped for," he said. "And a life lived longer than we could have hoped for."

After university, Chris Bird decided to do another music course, at the ACM in Guildford.

"They had just opened up in their biggest new building, and all the guitarists who are now famous through the guitar mags were in the school that year: Guthrie Govan, Dave Kilminster, Eric Roche, Pete Callard, Jamie Humphries..."

He developed an interest in fingerstyle acoustic, inspired by Eric Roche and Clive Carroll. Eric Roche was Head of Guitar at ACM. His percussive style – where he'd tap rhythms on the body of his acoustic while playing – was legendary, as were his performances, which often culminated in extraordinary solo arrangements of pop and rock hits like Van Halen's *Jump* or *Smells Like Teen Spirit*.

Eric Roche died in 2005, aged just 37, from throat cancer.

"I had lessons with Eric," said Chris. "It was one of the reasons to go there that year."

It was Clive Carroll's playing that really bewitched him. *Acoustic Guitar Magazine* once called Clive "the best and most original young acoustic guitarist/composer in Britain".

"Clive Carroll's style utterly, utterly amazed me," said Chris. "His album, *The Red Guitar* is,

to my mind, the finest 45 minutes of unaccompanied acoustic guitar music ever recorded."

In 2002, more tragedy: Graham, Chris's dad, died alone in bed from a heart attack. Chris didn't talk much about that.

He moved to Brighton and became a full-time guitar teacher and – at the age of 30 – made himself a five-year plan. It had one real goal: By the age of 35, he'd be writing for the guitar mags.

And then – just like he'd willed it into being – a year later, The Job came up. **Total Guitar** were looking for a Music Editor.

He told himself: "There's no way you're not applying for that."

Part of the application was to fully transcribe and record a song of your choice. He chose *Nutshell* by Alice in Chains. It took him three weeks to transcribe and record the full song to the standard he was happy with.

He got the job.

We could finish this story here, with a happy ending. We could talk about the good times he had working with Editor Stephen Lawson and Deputy Claire Davies.

We could skip forward to when Stuart Williams became Editor and, says Chris, kicked off "a new golden era", with Rob Laing as Content Editor (Rob later became Editor of TG, and is currently Reviews Editor of Guitars, across *Guitar World*, MusicRadar and Guitar Player), and Michael Astley-Brown as Reviews Editor (Mike is now Editor In Chief of Guitarworld.com).

We could talk about how the four of them formed a covers band, playing grunge classics, called Ratbush. Chris got to work with guys he'd looked up to for years, like Steve Allsworth, and he interviewed legends like Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, Brian May, Jimmy Page and many others.

In 2009, he bought an iMac, switched from PC to Mac, from Cubase to Logic, and did a Logic course at Bath City College, where he met a guy called Adrian. Adrian and his partner Adan were songwriters, and Chris started working with them on some songs.

Over a four year period, they wrote and recorded 80 or 90 songs, initially under the name Electrolyze and then as Sea Of Flowers.

Some of their tracks sound like REM, others like Fleetwood Mac or Coldplay, some are disco and R'n'B. Recently, Adrian sent Chris a new song, suggesting they work on it together.

"I'm afraid you're probably too late," replied Chris.

At the end of 2019, Chris became Editor of **Total Guitar**. "Nobody knew the mag better than I did at that point," he said. "We had good wins, with Jimmy Page and Brian May in particular."

Chris's interviews with Brian May and Jimmy Page were long and detailed – guitar hero heaven. But he also brought a modern sensibility to the magazine. As well as the usual set of legends, the people he put on the cover of TG included Sam Fender, Polyphia, the Nova Twins, Yvette Young, Marcin, Matteo Mancuso, Tash Sultana, Carmen Vandenberg and more.



Chris doing what he loved most

Young, diverse, talented. It showed a love of music – of sound itself.

In 2023, Chris's brother Matt died, aged 52.

After Altogether Everywhere, Matt had become a DJ, promoted dance nights in Brighton and London, and somewhere along the line, gotten into drugs.

Matt died from sepsis. He'd had a fall, cracked a rib, and it had gone undiagnosed.

After Matt's death, Chris discovered that the password on his phone was Sarah's date of birth. Chris connected that to a traumatic incident when Sarah was 14 and Matt was 16. Sarah had a stroke: Matt found her and resuscitated her. "He carried that at some level," said Chris, "and he became a drug addict."

Towards the end of 2023, Chris started to feel unwell. He couldn't work out what it was. One night, after work, he walked from the Future office to the train station – possibly 200 metres – and had to sit down and rest.

He went for blood tests, had his heart checked out, and then – in April 2024, he got the news. He had stage 4 bowel cancer and it had spread to his liver.

He continued to work – was determined to, to keep busy, stay positive.

Almost exactly a year after his diagnosis they told him that his liver was too sick to continue with chemotherapy. "You have months," they told him, "but prepare for weeks."

"I'm hoping for months," he said. "Not least because there's a new Hives album out in August. My next job is to stop my mum from playing bloody Elbow at the funeral."

It was getting late. His living room in Chippenham was glowing orange. "I think we've spoken about everything I've ever done, musically," he said. "It's been a lot of fun."

"I don't know what I'm going to do with this," said his guest. "But I don't want it to be your obituary. Let's work on it together. I'll write it up and send it to you. There might be some bits you'll want to add or take out."

"Yeah," said Chris. "And then after I'm gone, you can just add a footnote. 'Chris Bird died on blah blah blah.'"

"Yeah." It was a hard thing to talk about. "I'm sure we can do that."

Chris Bird died in hospital, just a week after this interview, on 27 May 2025.

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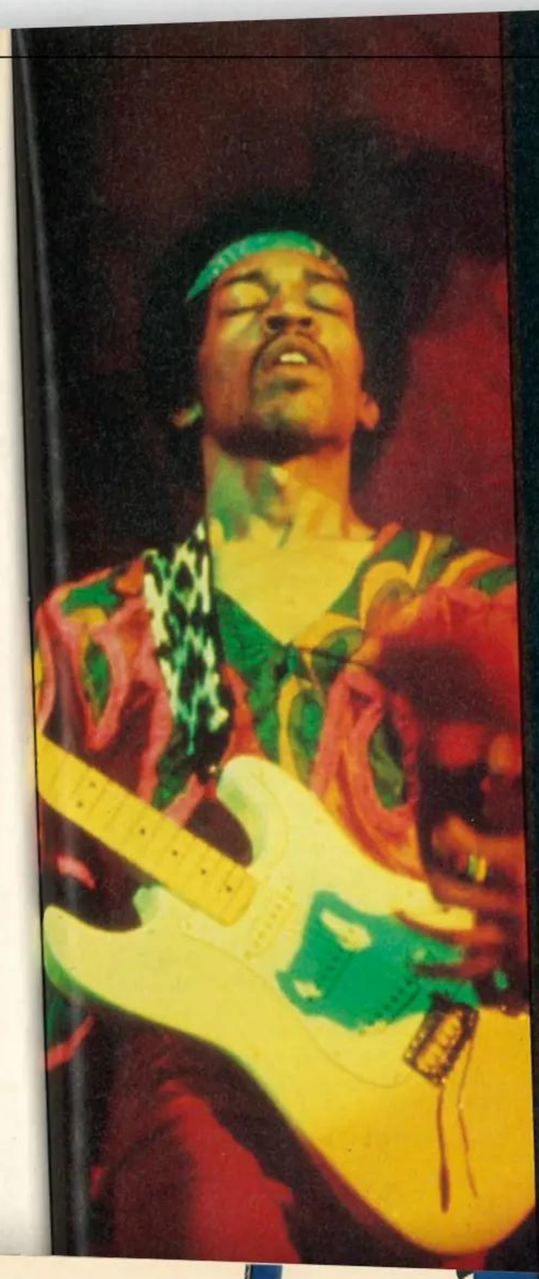
The bluffer's guide to JIMI HENDRIX



Amaze your friends! Be a wow at parties! Play your guitar upside-down and fell mountains with the edge of your hand. RICHARD RILEY, KARL FOSTER and PAUL SAMSON attempt to unravel how you too can sound like Jimi Hendrix.

"I am the reincarnation of Jimi Hendrix, all kneel before Jimi!" Vim Fuego of Bad News uttered these words before his unfortunate lynching

nothing and play a couple of hundred bar-gigs for a few dollars. Two or three shows a night wasn't unusual at that time and with no Musicians' Union you got whatever the band leader wanted you to have. When he finally arrived in New York in 1966 after cutting his teeth in endless R&B outfits and



HEND INSPIR

Paul Samson guides you Jimi's technique and

Because of his touring experience behind many name acts of the day, Jimi's repertoire of licks and musical ideas was phenomenal. He'd been on the road with Ike and Tina Turner, Little Richard, Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson, among many others, and he'd absorbed ideas from them all.

A lot of his up-tempo rhythms came from the soul music circuit and R&B acts he'd worked with – listen to *Ain't No Tellin'* from the *Axis* album. He was a great blues fan, but there are also Red Indian scales in his music, as well as Eastern influences. He often played phrases rather than constant flurries of notes, believing that the spaces between the licks were as important as the licks themselves.

It sounds corny, but his attitude to music was deeply spiritual. He felt music could get a mood or a feeling across much better than words – and it was something that wasn't restricted by language or race. He often talked about his music awakening people to their own creative potential, and how he was getting it into people's souls rather than just their ears – he would point out the difference between listening to music and really hearing it.

HENDRIX TECHNIQUES

Jimi played with his thumb over the top of the neck to hold down the bass string parts in chords. He also held it down when

FIRST TEST PARKER FLY DELUXE

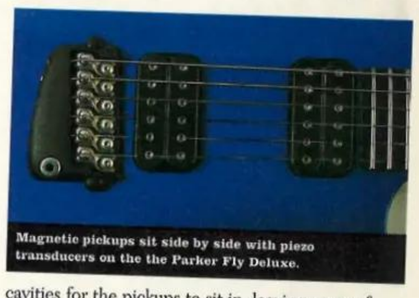
CD TRACKS 6-7



five sharp, you'll know how useful this feature can be when playing live. However, multi-string bends can still send the unbent strings flat.

FLY FISHMAN

Moving on to the electronics, Ken Parker and Larry Fishman devised the two separate pickup systems that produce the Fly's full tonal range. The first consists of a regular pair of magnetic humbuckers, which aren't particularly high powered, but do an adequate job thanks to the instrument's natural loudness. They're screwed directly into the body of the guitar, rather than sitting on springs like normal humbuckers – apparently to help the "transmission of acoustic energy". It's a theory I agree with, having always packed my pickup frames with resin so the sound of the guitar comes through more. In this instance, the Fly doesn't need such deep



Magnetic pickups sit side by side with piezo transducers on the the Parker Fly Deluxe.

cavities for the pickups to sit in, leaving more of that resonant tonewood in the body.

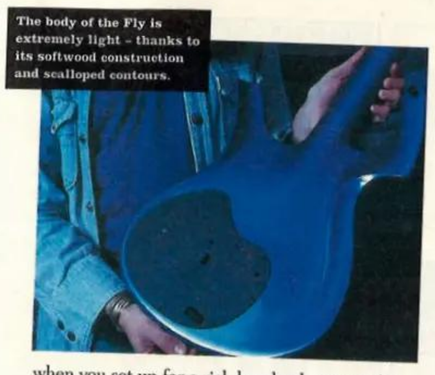
The humbuckers are controlled by single volume and tone pots with a three-way selector for bridge, neck or both. When switched to both, the pickups are in single-coil mode, but there's no means of using a single coil of just one pickup.

The second pickup system is based on a piezo transducer which sits in the bridge assembly. It's controlled via a dual-concentric pot for volume and tone, with a three-way switch to give you piezo, humbuckers or both. A fourth master volume pot covers both systems. There's a stereo jack output, so you can split the systems, and there's a push-button switch next to the socket for stereo or mono.

With so many tone options available, you're going to have to spend a lot of time fiddling with the Fly to hear what it's really capable of. Still, it's immediately apparent that the secret of getting the best from both systems is to have two amplifiers, or to direct-inject the piezos into a mixing desk. If you set up a regular amp for a good acoustic tone, the humbuckers sound weedy and woolly. And

CD TRACKS 6-7





The body of the Fly is extremely light – thanks to its softwood construction and scalloped contours.

when you set up for a rich humbucker tone, the piezo doesn't sound like an acoustic, although it does give a fair bit of zing to the humbuckers when both are used together.

Plug the piezo into a desk and the humbuckers into an overdriven amp and you're away. The acoustic sound is very good indeed (depending on which acoustic you compare it with) and in the context of recording or PA use it's hard to tell that you're listening to a solid-body electric.

The humbuckers aren't so impressive, though, and I found myself overdriving the amp hard to get any raunch – by which time the tone of the guitar was slightly lost in the distortion. Even with the amp on clean, the humbuckers were rather flat-sounding. Parker says the guitar doesn't need super high-output magnetic pickups because of its inherent tone, but I reckon more power in this department would help immensely.

TWO INTO ONE

The idea of two pickup systems in one instrument is certainly a good one. The Fly would be very useful to busy session players who don't want to carry lots of guitars around. But rock guitarists playing live will probably need to plump for an instrument with a better overdriven sound.

Also, separate volume pots for each pickup would be more useful live, as would separate tone and volume pots for the acoustic side of things (you need two hands to adjust the dual-concentric). However, that would make for a lot of knobs cluttering up the body.

One downer for those in a recording environment is that, despite signal conditioning circuitry to cut noise and low-frequency rumblings, you can hear the vibrato arm through the bridge piezos when it is tapped or touched. Still, would you really want to use the wang bar in an acoustic passage? Probably not.

Talking about noise, both three-way selectors are stiff and a bit noisy in the model under review – and there is a distinct thump through the amp when you switch between the two systems while not playing anything.

R&D SPREE

It's evident that Ken Parker and his team have put an incredible amount of research and experimentation into the development of this guitar. He has a long history of building, maintaining and upgrading guitars, and I'd guess the Fly is a genuine labour of love for him. Acoustically, he's done it. For such a light, thin instrument the resonance and response is truly excellent.

But I don't think it's quite there as an electric guitar. If you're one of those players who only feels comfortable playing through a rack of 38 effects processors then you probably won't notice because you'll get the same sound from any guitar. But with just a cable and a combo the Fly definitely isn't a winner in the humbucker department.

In summary, I can't help but feel that the Fly has been designed more by guitar builders than live performers. Yes, it's certainly a revolutionary instrument and it's far more attractive than, say, a Steinberger, but there are too many facilities that you would never use once the instrument was set up the way you wanted.

Then again, the neck and body construction is excellent – despite its lightness, the Fly feels rugged and strong and is very smooth to play. This is doubtless a classy guitar – but, remember, you could buy a great electric guitar and an acoustic to go with it and still have a wad of change for the price of a Parker Fly. TG



The Fly is a beautifully-finished guitar. You don't see paint jobs like that too often...

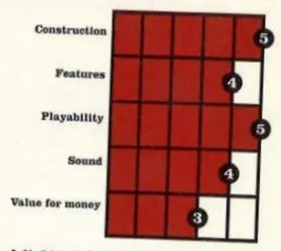
FACT FILE

MODEL Parker Fly Deluxe with vibrato
BODY & NECK Poplar body with reinforced glass and carbon fibre shell; basswood neck
FRETS 24 hardened steel
SCALE LENGTH 25.5 inches
TUNERS Sperzel locking
TREMOLO Parker flat-spring type with tension adjuster and lock
NUT Non-locking, self-lubricating
PICKUPS Two humbuckers (piezo pickup on Deluxe model)
COLOURS Red, black, white, blue metallic, galaxy grey
OPTIONS Standard model (two humbuckers), Deluxe (two humbuckers plus piezo) and Deluxe with vibrato system

TOTAL GUITAR VERDICT

Parker Fly Deluxe

Electric guitar • £1,895



A lightweight, futuristic guitar that is great to play and can sound like an acoustic or electric.

Total rating 84%

CONTACT

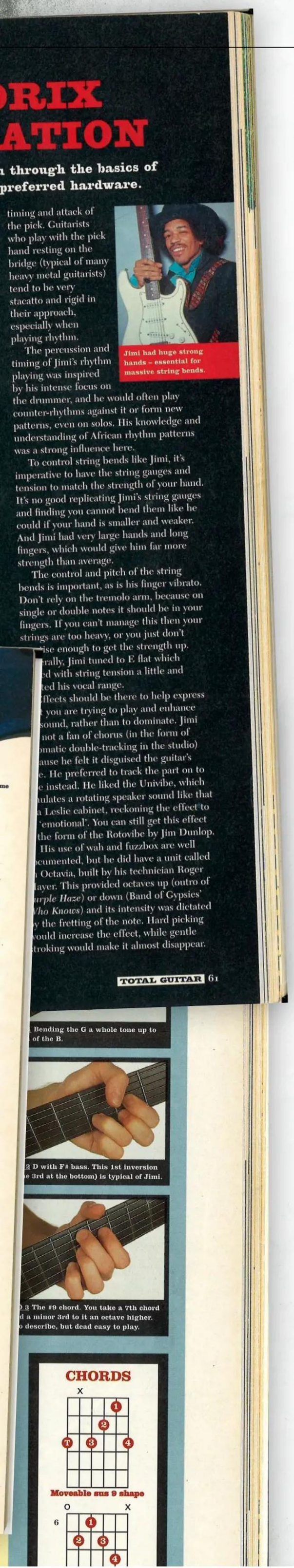
PARKER FLY: Korg, 081 427 5377

For full address, see p137

Reverse the strings (incidentally, trainspotter fans, Jimi preferred Fender Rock 'N' Roll Lights in gauges .10, .13, .15, .26, .32, .38) so that they're the right way up.

application of a Fender Strat pushed at high speed through the front of the cab, perhaps followed by a dramatic 'collapsing building' impression as the whole stack went over.

Hendrix made a number of effects


ORIX
ATION
h through the basics of
preferred hardware.
timing and attack of the pick. Guitarists who play with the pick hand resting on the bridge (typical of many heavy metal guitarists) tend to be very stacatto and rigid in their approach, especially when playing rhythm.
The percussion and timing of Jimi's rhythm playing was inspired by his intense focus on the drummer, and he would often play counter-rhythms against it or form new patterns, even on solos. His knowledge and understanding of African rhythm patterns was a strong influence here.
Jimi had huge strong hands – essential for massive string bends.
To control string bends like Jimi, it's imperative to have the string gauges and tension to match the strength of your hand. It's no good replicating Jimi's string gauges and finding you cannot bend them like he could if your hand is smaller and weaker. And Jimi had very large hands and long fingers, which would give him far more strength than average.
The control and pitch of the string bends is important, as is his finger vibrato. Don't rely on the tremolo arm, because on single or double notes it should be in your fingers. If you can't manage this then your strings are too heavy, or you just don't ise enough to get the strength up.
erally, Jimi tuned to E flat which ed with string tension a little and ted his vocal range.
ffects should be there to help express t you are trying to play and enhance sound, rather than to dominate. Jimi not a fan of chorus (in the form of matic double-tracking in the studio) ause he felt it disguised the guitar's e. He preferred to track the part on to e instead. He liked the Univibe, which ulates a rotating speaker sound like that a Leslie cabinet, reckoning the effect to 'emotional'. You can still get this effect the form of the Rotovibe by Jim Dunlop.
His use of wah and fuzzbox are well cumented, but he did have a unit called Octavia, built by his technician Roger ayer. This provided octaves up (outro of *urple Haze*) or down (Band of Gypsies' *Who Knows*) and its intensity was dictated y the fretting of the note. Hard picking would increase the effect, while gentle troking would make it almost disappear.
TOTAL GUITAR 61
Bending the G a whole tone up to of the B.
D with F# bass. This 1st inversion e 3rd at the bottom) is typical of Jimi.
The #9 chord. You take a 7th chord d a minor 3rd to it an octave higher. o describe, but dead easy to play.
CHORDS
Moveable sus 9 shape

IN THE BEGINNING: ISSUE 1

Hendrix, dirt boxes, new tech: TG's launch issue shows guitarists' interests are timeless



Total Guitar debuted in December 1994 with – who else? – Jimi Hendrix on the cover. His influence on Pearl Jam and Red Hot Chili Peppers made Jimi especially relevant as TG launched in 1994, but Hendrix has never been anything less than a natural cover star. Our Bluffer's Guide promised to teach you to "Play your guitar upside-down and fell mountains with the edge of your hand".

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO HENDRIX

This feature contextualised Hendrix's playing and early career: "After Hendrix was invalided out of the US Air Force because of a parachuting injury, he supported himself by playing with any band that would take him on. The Isley Bros, B.B. King, Ike & Tina Turner and Sam Cooke all benefited from having the young Mr Hendrix in the ranks. It's impossible to ignore the effect that these lean years had on Hendrix. So to play like Jimi, join a band and do some work."

There was also advice on how to play Hendrix parts authentically: "Because of his touring experience behind many name acts of the day, Jimi's repertoire of licks and musical ideas was phenomenal. A lot of his up-tempo rhythms came from the soul music circuit and R&B acts he'd worked with—listen to *Ain't No Tellin'* from the *Axis* album. He was a great blues fan, but there are also Native American scales in his music, as well as Eastern influences. He often played phrases rather than constant flurries of notes, believing that the spaces between the licks were as important as the licks themselves.

"Jimi played with his thumb over the top of the neck to hold down the bass string parts in chords. He also held it down when soloing where the overtone rings in sympathy with the lick, especially on bends, unison phrases and sustained notes. It's very important on tracks like *Foxy Lady* to play the bass note of the riff while the fingers hold down the chord. A riff like this doesn't work with barre chords, and Jimi rarely used them.

"The pick-hand is very loose and percussive. His hand sat at almost 90 degrees to the strings, allowing an almost circular movement from the wrist. It never rested on the bridge, enabling more freedom in the timing and attack of the pick. The percussion and timing of Jimi's rhythm playing was inspired by his intense focus on the drummer, and he would often play counter-rhythms against it or form new patterns, even on solos.

"To control string bends like Jimi, it's imperative to have the string gauges and tension to match the strength of your hand. It's no good replicating Jimi's string gauges and finding you cannot bend them like he could (incidentally, Jimi preferred Fender Rock n' Roll Lites in gauges .010, .013, .015, .026, .032, .038). The control and pitch of the string bends is important, as is his finger vibrato. Don't rely on the tremolo arm, because on single or double notes it should be your fingers. Generally, Jimi tuned to E flat which helped with string tension a little and assisted his vocal range."

THE GUITAR OF THE FUTURE

Elsewhere on the cover, we asked if the Parker Fly was the guitar of the future. As it had been with the Steinberger and would later be with the Line 6 Variax, the public response to this question was generally a no. Our reviewer Paul Samson was impressed by its light weight, innovative construction, and then-groundbreaking combination of piezo and magnetic pickups, but felt this early version's humbuckers lacked oomph and was doubtful whether it could supplant classic guitar designs: "The Fly feels rugged and strong and is very smooth to play. This is doubtless a classy guitar – but, remember, you could buy a great electric guitar and an acoustic to go with it and still have a wad of change for the price of a Parker Fly."

Our Caught By The Fuzz round-up of distortion pedals had some eyebrow-raising scores in hindsight: Marshall's now-iconic Shredmaster earned a middling 55% and Ibanez's budget Soundtank version of the Tube Screamer was slated despite containing the legendary TS9 circuit. Meanwhile, TG's first ever Star Buy awards went to Boss for niche favourite the FZ-2 Hyper Fuzz and the largely-forgotten HM-3 Hyper Metal.

CD TRACK 8



Roland VG-8

GUITAR MODELLING SYSTEM

Physical modelling – no, we're not talking Kate Moss, we're talking about a futuristic, utterly revolutionary guitar effects system. JOE BENNETT, boldly plays where no man has played before...

LET'S start with the basics. How do you get noise out of a guitar? In the case of electric guitar, you start with a pitch – a vibrating guitar string. The sound of this is affected by the instrument's construction (the body, hardware, electrics, etc) and anything else between this and the listener (ie, the amp, mic positioning, EQ, speaker type, and effects).

Now, imagine you could tell a computer just how these variables alter the sound, then get it to shape the guitar's tone accordingly. This would allow you to create virtually any guitar sound imaginable; do the same with a selection of amplifiers and you'd have a complete rig.

Don't be deceived by appearances – the VG-8 is not a multi-FX unit. Rather than just processing the guitar's output, it takes the vibrating string as a starting point and *creates* the sound from scratch, so you get the same sound whichever guitar you play. A disadva
not thinking electr
imagine – play a S
and out comes the
Paul, acoustic gui
tinny banjo.

TECHNICAL

The new VG-8 w
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pickup. These si
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recreate the tonal characteristics of amp choice, pickup position and harmonic balance within each note. The whole lot then goes through a standard digital effects processor which supplies chorus, reverb, EQ, etc and out to a desk or an amp.

The VG-8 is *not* a guitar synth. Many guitar synthesis systems, (eg the Casio guitar, the short-lived Ibanez MIDI guitar, and Shadow system), worked by figuring out the pitch each string was playing, turning it into computer data and using this to trigger a standard MIDI synth. All of this took, in computer terms, a long time (say, 0.03 of a second). While this may not seem much, the sound of every note coming out slightly late proved very frustrating for players, who had to alter their technique to suit the instrument.

No such shenanigans with the VG-8. What you hear is still, in effect, the original guitar note, so there's no delay at all. Another nice feature of the system is that all of your playing nuances are preserved, including fret noise,

NEBULA & SPACEMAN (TELEGRAPH COLOUR LIBRARY) CONCEPT: IAN MILLER

CD TRACK 8



The VG-8 has an appearance that will be familar to many multi-FX owners. The simple stomp pedals and on-board tuner make it surprisingly practical for live use, despite its ultra-hi-tech capabilities.



STAR BUY · TOTAL GUITAR · STAR BUY

TOTAL GUITAR VERDICT

Roland VG-8 & GK-2A

Guitar Modelling System • £1,999

Construction 4

FACT FILE

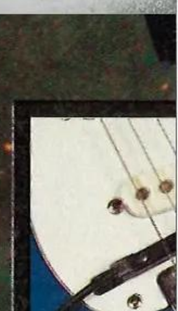
SOUND CREATION Pickup and speaker/mic emulation, distortion/overdrive, tube amp sim

PATCHES 64 preset, 64 user (expandable with memory card)

EFFECTS Modulation (chorus,

TG

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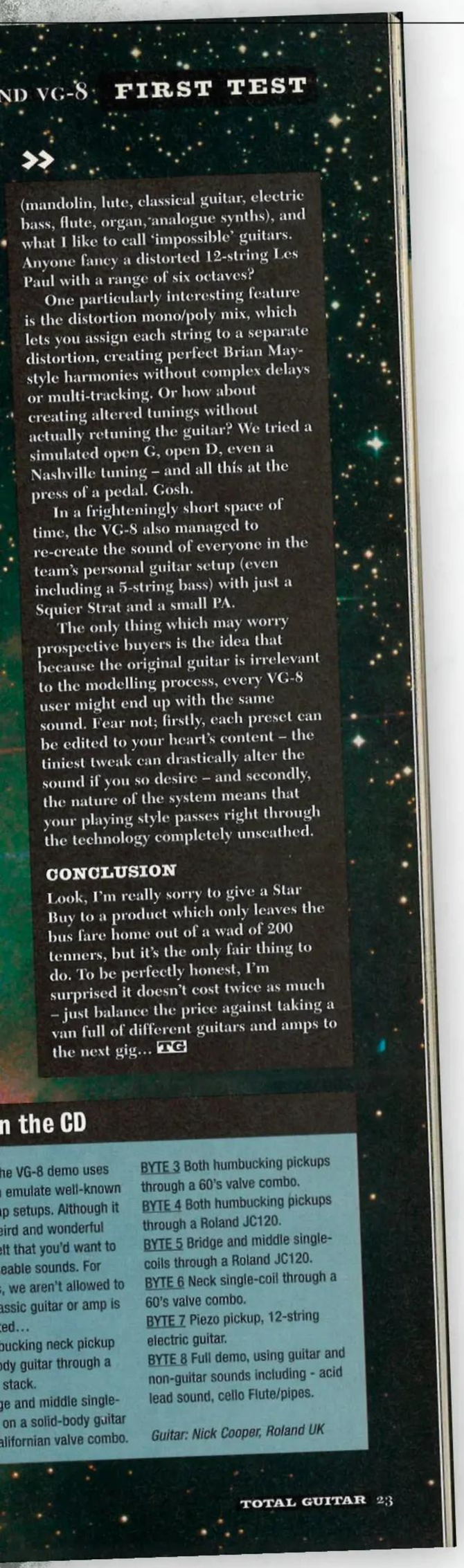
record guitar...?



seek POD.™

POD FROM LINE 6 - THE FIRST GREAT SOUNDING DIRECT RECORDING TOOL FOR GUITARISTS—DESIGNED TO DELIVER A WIDE RANGE OF LEGENDARY AMP TONES AND REALISTICALLY RECREATE THE SOUND OF MIC'D SPEAKER

NOW, FOR £299 INC VA
"AIR" WITHOUT DISTURE
THANK POD.
CABINET/SPEAKER/MICR
A PORTABLE, FU



ND VG-8 FIRST TEST

(mandolin, lute, classical guitar, electric bass, flute, organ, analogue synths), and what I like to call 'impossible' guitars. Anyone fancy a distorted 12-string Les Paul with a range of six octaves?

One particularly interesting feature is the distortion mono/poly mix, which lets you assign each string to a separate distortion, creating perfect Brian May-style harmonies without complex delays or multi-tracking. Or how about creating altered tunings without actually retuning the guitar? We tried a simulated open G, open D, even a Nashville tuning – and all this at the press of a pedal. Gosh.

In a frighteningly short space of time, the VG-8 also managed to re-create the sound of everyone in the team's personal guitar setup (even including a 5-string bass) with just a Squier Strat and a small PA.

The only thing which may worry prospective buyers is the idea that because the original guitar is irrelevant to the modelling process, every VG-8 user might end up with the same sound. Fear not; firstly, each preset can be edited to your heart's content – the tiniest tweak can drastically alter the sound if you so desire – and secondly, the nature of the system means that your playing style passes right through the technology completely unscathed.

CONCLUSION

Look, I'm really sorry to give a Star Buy to a product which only leaves the bus fare home out of a wad of 200 tenners, but it's the only fair thing to do. To be perfectly honest, I'm surprised it doesn't cost twice as much – just balance the price against taking a van full of different guitars and amps to the next gig... TG

n the CD

he VG-8 demo uses emulate well-known p setups. Although it eird and wonderful lt that you'd want to eable sounds. For , we aren't allowed to assic guitar or amp is ed...
oucking neck pickup dy guitar through a stack.
ge and middle single- on a solid-body guitar alifornian valve combo.

BYTE 3 Both humbucking pickups through a 60's valve combo.
BYTE 4 Both humbucking pickups through a Roland JC120.
BYTE 5 Bridge and middle single-coils through a Roland JC120.
BYTE 6 Neck single-coil through a 60's valve combo.
BYTE 7 Piezo pickup, 12-string electric guitar.
BYTE 8 Full demo, using guitar and non-guitar sounds including - acid lead sound, cello Flute/pipes.

Guitar: Nick Cooper, Roland UK

TOTAL GUITAR 23



eatures a 'hex pickup' which lies under the the bridge, and this supplies the pitch for the VG-8. Our review model was fitted t it can be used with any guitar. A certain anufacturer is even planning an with a GK-2A hidden inside the body.

THE DAWN OF DIGITAL MODELLING



Just six months into TG's life we were hit by what we thought would be a revolution: The Roland VG-8 and GK-2A guitar modelling system. The GK-2A 'hex pickup' converted each string's signal into a separate digital signal, avoiding tracking problems that had plagued earlier attempts at digital guitar modelling, while the V-Guitar System promised to be able to model anything at all. "Imagine," wrote music editor Joe Bennett, breathlessly, "play a Strat at one end and out comes the sound of a Les Paul, acoustic guitar, or even a tinny banjo..."

"Don't be deceived by appearances – the VG-8 is not a multi-FX unit. Rather than just processing the guitar's output, it takes the vibrating string as a starting point and creates the sound from scratch, so you get the same sound whichever guitar you play." We contrasted the VG-8's usability with 1980s offerings from Casio and Ibanez, which could be confused by techniques like string bending and hammer-ons. "Another nice feature of the system is that all of your playing nuances are preserved, including fret noise, harmonics, and muting, so you don't have to compromise that hard-learned playing technique for a moment."

"There literally seems to be nothing it can't do. A basic fave guitar/GK-2A/VG-8 setup replaces every guitar you've ever heard, an assortment of classic amps, miscellaneous other instruments (mandolin, lute, classical guitar, electric bass, flute, organ, analogue synths), and what I like to call 'impossible' guitars. Anyone fancy a distorted 12-string Les Paul with a range of six octaves?

"One particularly interesting feature is the distortion mono/poly mix, which lets you assign each string to a separate distortion, creating perfect Brian May-style harmonies without multi-tracking. Or how about creating altered tunings without actually retuning the guitar? We tried a simulated open G, open D, even a Nashville tuning, and all this at the press of a pedal."

While the VG-8 was not the universal success we anticipated, this feature was embraced by folk legend Joni Mitchell, who uses just one guitar and a Roland system to tackle the plethora of tunings she uses live.

The VG-8 review shows how modelling tech has continued to get cheaper even as everything else gets more expensive. Our reviewer apologised for giving a Star Buy Award to "a product which only leaves the bus fare home out of a wad of 200 tenners." You can buy any of today's best floor-based guitar modellers for less than the VG-8's £1,999, but we can't remember the last time we got a bus anywhere for a quid...

THE RISE OF THE POD

Despite our gushing, the VG-8's modelling did leave room for improvement. While its amp sims were a leap forward, they pale compared to contemporary modellers, including Roland's own Boss GT-1000. But it was not so much this that limited the VG-8's appeal as the fact that it didn't work with standard guitar pickups. Just a few years later, Line 6 would solve this problem, opening the door to the modelling revolution we are now enjoying.

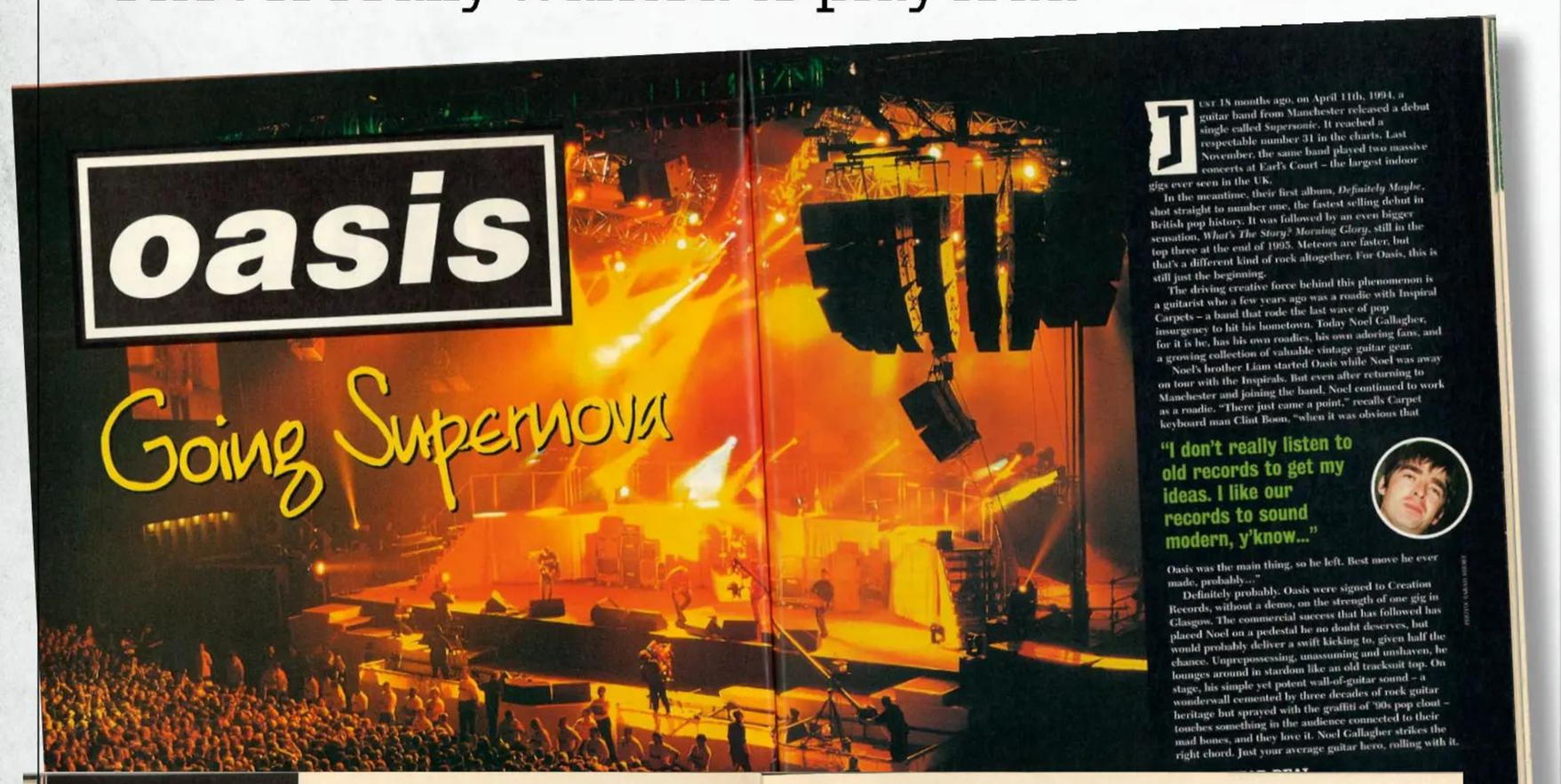
We're not sure if the original Line 6 Pod was ever reviewed in TG – we couldn't track a review down – but it first appeared in an advert in TG51: "Play guitar? Seek Pod." At just £299, the Pod made the VG-8 an irrelevance for most players. There had been affordable amp sims before then, but none were particularly satisfying, and even in your bedroom mic'ing a real amp usually produced better results. The Pod changed that. The ad's claim to bring "unprecedented life to direct recording" was not just hype.

"You can record tonally mind-blowing guitar tracks with full volume punch and 'air' without disturbing the neighbours, waking the kids, or driving your significant other up the wall," boasted Line 6. As with the VG-8, the tones were not flawless – how else would they sell you a Helix today? – but they were genuinely convincing. The general consensus was that clean and high-gain tones were more believable than the light crunch and edge-of-breakup sounds that remain the benchmark for today's modellers. Sadly, the 16 amp models didn't include Line 6's hilarious 'Insane' model, but it covered all the most recorded amps of the 20th Century.

Interview Henrik Tuxen

NOEL GALLAGHER

"I never really wanted to play lead"





In the first year of a new millennium, Oasis guitarist, songwriter, occasional lead vocalist and perennial motormouth Noel Gallagher invited TG to Wheeler End Studios just outside of London, where he had recently completed work on his band's fourth album *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants*.

With characteristic bluntness, Noel told us straight off the bat: "The new album is very good but not great. I think we can do better and probably will."

He also conceded that it had been a challenge for him to handle pretty much all of the guitar tracks on the album following the departure of founder member Paul 'Bonehead' Arthurs. "I never really wanted to play lead," Noel said. "I'm more of a rhythm guitar player. That's how I write."

Bonehead's replacement was already confirmed – Gem Archer, formerly of fellow Creation Records band Heavy Stereo. But Archer hadn't joined Oasis in time to play on the new album, and as Noel revealed, a famous friend had been willing to help out if needed...

"Johnny Marr offered his services to the band," Noel confessed. "He said, 'If you can't find anyone I'll step in for a while'. And we said, 'Fine'. But then we recruited Gem. Johnny was just gonna save us if we didn't have anyone."

Noel gave TG's writer a guided tour of the studio set-up, showing off a few prized guitars from his 180-strong collection, plus the mixing desk that was reportedly used on Pink Floyd's classic *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. What he also revealed was that the main guitar he used for the recording of *Standing On The Shoulder Of Giants* was a gift from Marr.

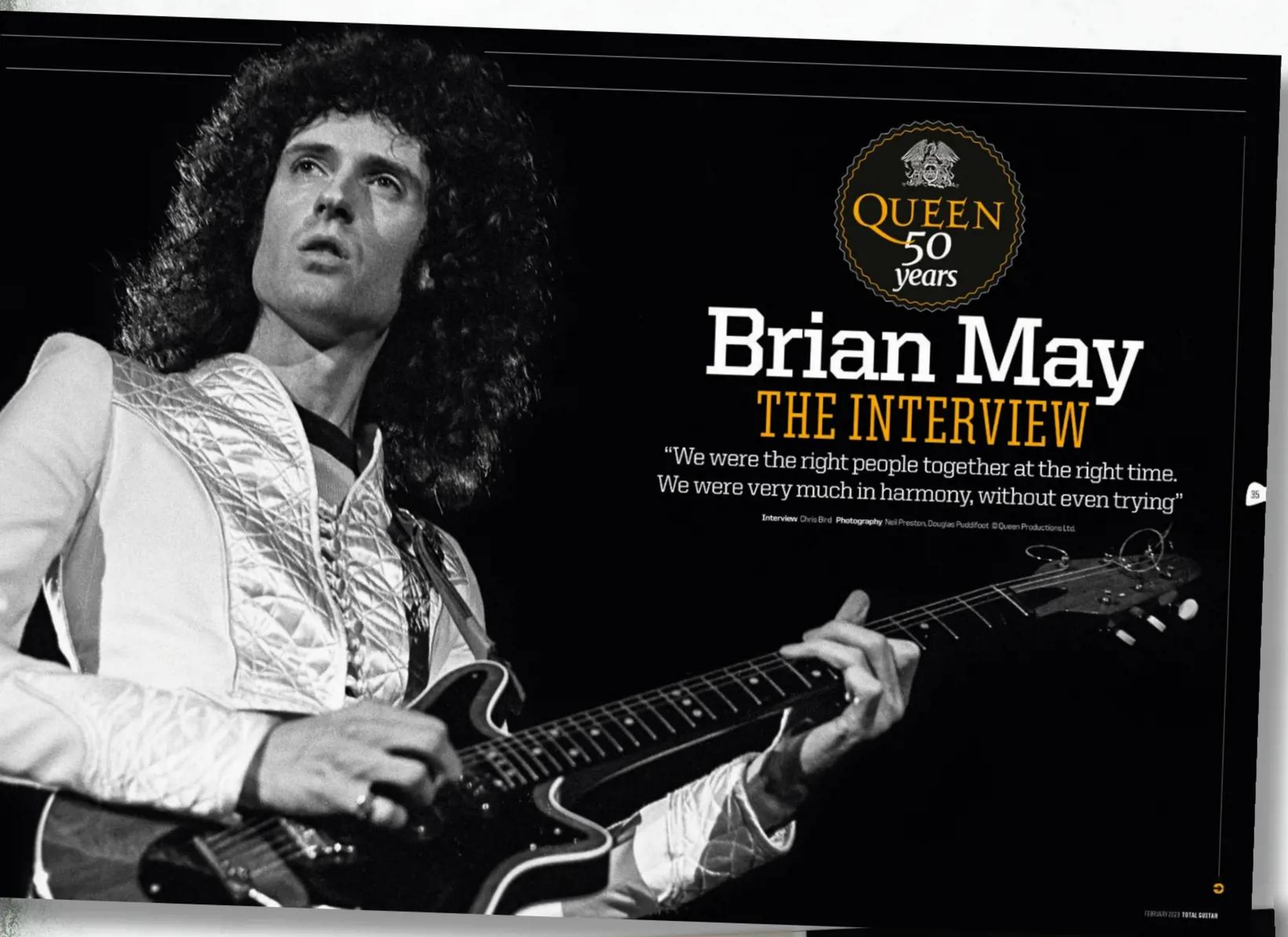
"I got this Les Paul from Johnny," he said. "There were really modern pickups in it and I didn't like it. So I tossed the pickups out, took some from another guitar and put them in this."

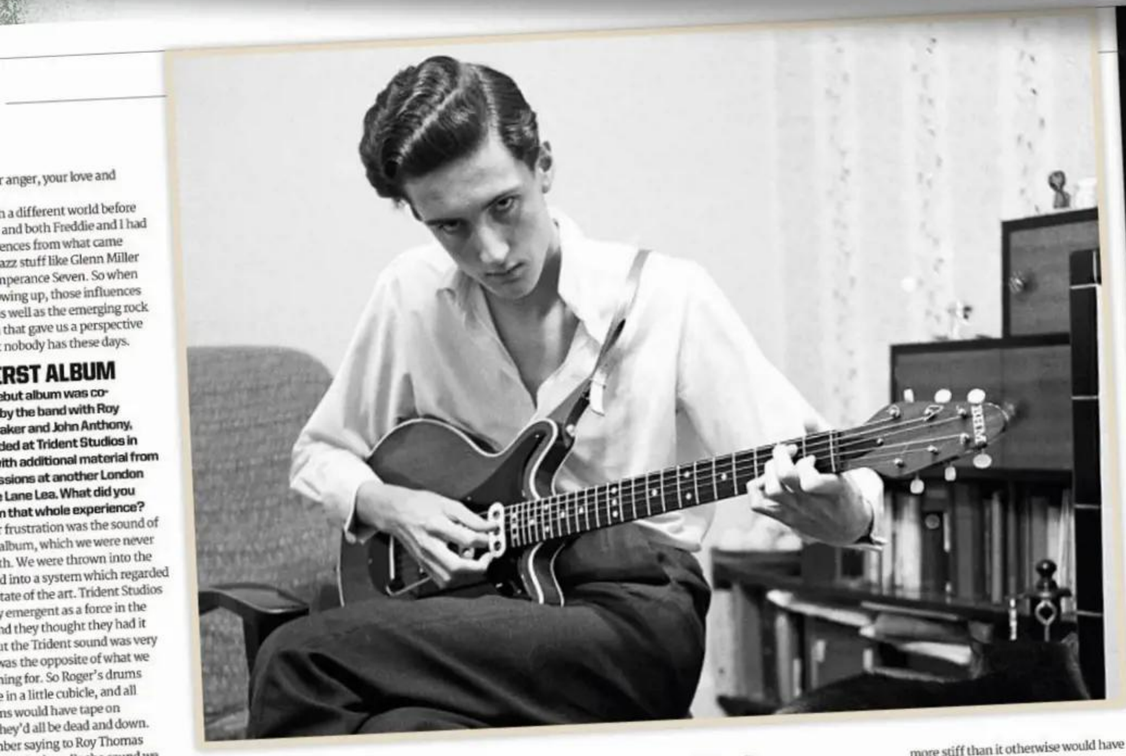
He concluded with a wry smile: "It's a better guitar now, so he's not getting it back!"

Words Chris Bird

BRIAN MAY

"I just wanted to rock!"





r anger, your love and
n a different world before
and both Freddie and I had
ences from what came
azz stuff like Glenn Miller
nperance Seven. So when
wing up, those influences
s well as the emerging rock
that gave us a perspective
nobody has these days.

RST ALBUM

ebut album was co-by the band with Roy aker and John Anthony. ded at Trident Studios in ith additional material from ssions at another London e Lane Lea. What did you n that whole experience?

frustration was the sound of album, which we were never th. We were thrown into the d into a system which regarded tate of the art. Trident Studios y emergent as a force in the nd they thought they had it t the Trident sound was very was the opposite of what we hing for. So Roger's drums e in a little cubicle, and all ns would have tape on hey'd all be dead and down. nber saying to Roy Thomas This isn't really the sound we oy.' And he said 'Don't worry, fix it all in the mix.' Which of is not the best way, is it? And we all knew: it ain't going een!

ngely enough, the demos we'd t De Lane Lea Studios in ley were closer to what we ed of – you know, nice open drum s and ambience on the guitar and hing. That's much more the way nted it to go. So that's the major ation with the first album. But were other frustrations. Roy was a great job of kicking us into e, but it didn't really sit very well our way of playing. His idea of g on track was do it again and

EARLY MAY As a young man in the 60s, with his newly-built Red Special

again. And again. And again. And again! So there's no mistakes. But of course, by the time you've done that, you've lost all your enthusiasm for it. And it kind of shows.

"Much later we evolved these techniques of keeping ourselves fresh – particularly with *The Game* album [1980], where if the backing track sounded good, and you make a mistake, you'd just drop in on it. Then we said, 'Why didn't we do that before?' And it was because people told us it couldn't be done. But with those backing tracks on the first album, they got a bit tiresome. And I think you can hear it in some cases.

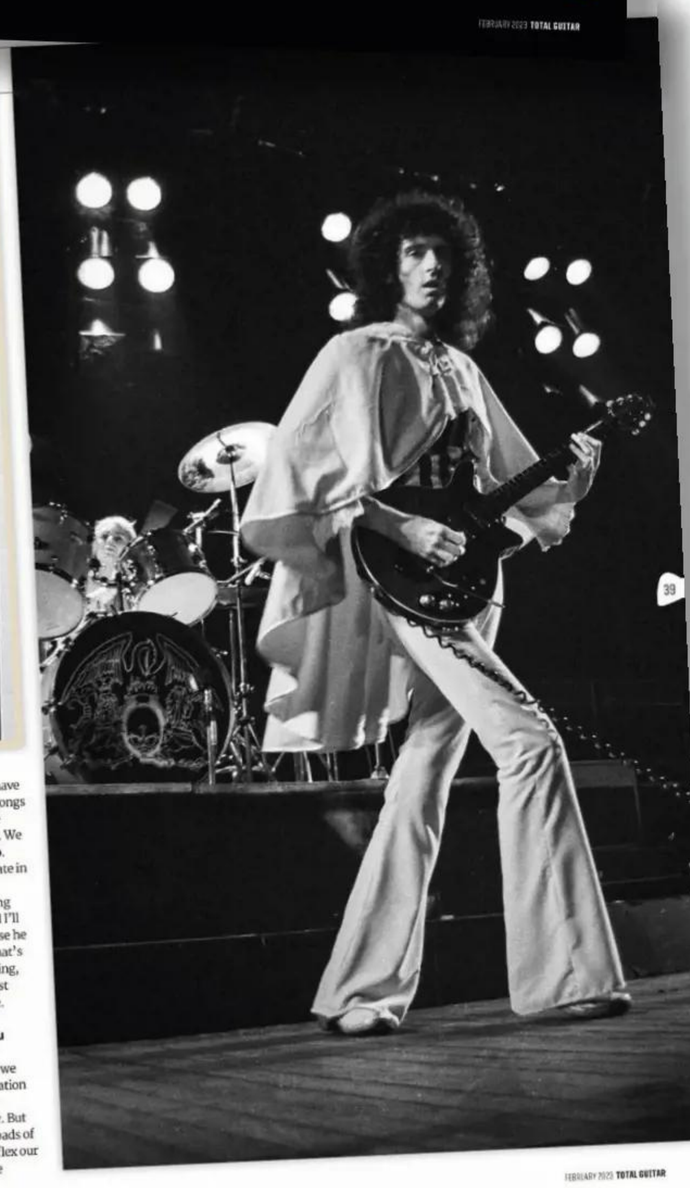
How happy were you with the guitar sounds on the album?

That was a bit of a fight as well, because people had discovered multi tracking, and there was this feeling that everything ought to be multitrack. So you play a solo, and the first thing people say is, 'Oh, do you want to double track that?' And maybe you do. But maybe you don't – because sometimes you want to hear the personality, the attack, and the feeling in the moment when you do that one track. So there was an awful lot of overdubs on that first album, which I would say now was unnecessary, and perhaps made it a bit more stiff than it otherwise would have been. Having said that, I think the songs are very representative of where we were at the time. We were evolving. We had our heroes, as people always do. Anyone who tells you that they create in a vacuum is not telling the truth, because you have to create according to what you've grown up with. And I'll mention Buddy Holly again, because he was such a big influence on me. That's what got me excited in the beginning, I guess. But you can hear in the first album that we're finding our style.

Despite its difficult birth, are you proud of that album?

Oh, I love it! It encapsulates what we were at the time, and it's a declaration of where we were going. It's very emotionally-based and quite raw. But it's got a lot of melody and sh*tloads of harmonies. We were starting to flex our muscles. We were painting those

"WE WERE NEVER HAPPY WITH THE SOUND OF THE FIRST ALBUM"



39

FEBRUARY 2023 TOTAL GUITAR

AR FEBRUARY 2023

In February 2023, TG's cover story on Brian May was billed as 'The Ultimate Interview', and that was no exaggeration. Editor Chris Bird has had many conversations with the Queen legend in recent years, but this interview, spread over 20 pages, was truly definitive.

Marking the 50th anniversary of the band's debut album, Brian told the story of Queen's extraordinary career while focusing on the songs that he created, beginning with *Keep Yourself Alive*, the opening track on that first album, and running through other landmark songs such as *Stone Cold Crazy* (a precursor to thrash metal), *The Prophet's Song* (an epic to rival *Bohemian Rhapsody*), *We Will Rock You*, the mother of all rock anthems, *Brighton Rock*, one of Brian's statement pieces, and *The Show Must Go On*, the emotional finale to the last album released in singer Freddie Mercury's lifetime.

Brian revealed that he had major reservations about *We Will Rock You*. "I was hoping that the song would catch on," he smiled, "but I was nervous, because it seemed over-simplistic." And he said of that's song's guitar solo: "I don't think it was planned – I just wanted to rock! Everybody puts guitar solos in the middle of the song, and I didn't want to do that. I wanted this song to start with the audience, and that would then lead me to the stage, so the guitar solo would be the climax of the song."

He paid tribute to Jimmy Page as the inspiration for one of Queen's classic heavy songs, *Now I'm Here*. "I owe a lot to Jimmy, of course – the master of the riff, and the master of getting lost deliberately in time signatures."

And in conclusion, Brian talked about how Queen's story has continued with singer Adam Lambert. "We make the Queen legacy live," he said. "The thing is, people want live music. And we're happy to on supplying it as long as we can."

WHEN ROCK STARS GO MENTAL!

DAMAGE PLAN

HOW *TG* WENT TWO ROUNDS WITH DIMEBAG DARRELL AND SURVIVED. JUST.

ROUND ONE: STEVE ALLSWORTH
ROUND TWO: JOEL McIVER
RINGSIDE SHOTS: JAMES WILSON



"Listen man, you askin' me some fuckin' gay ass questions!"

Dimebag Darrell and *TG* are eye-to-eye in a London hotel room. We're so close we can smell the booze on him. It's the last straw.

"Shut the fuck up and play the guitar," we tell him.

Dimebag grabs his brand new signature Washburn and slings it over his shoulder to use it as a weapon.

... How did it come to this?

Flashback to a few weeks before and a call from Mick Calvert, nicest-bloke-in-rock and publicist for Washburn guitars and Randall amps. He wants to know if we'd like to do something with their biggest endorsee, former Pantera man, Dimebag Darrell. Of course we would, we tell him. He sets something up.

Within days, his record company make us a similar offer: Dimebag's coming to the UK to blow the roof off the Astoria with his new

Because of the way things have worked out, two dates are set: one to get the Guest Lesson, and one the following day to do an interview about his gear and get photographs. *TG* is about to go two rounds with Dimebag Darrell...

ROUND 1

It's 12.45pm, a room in one of London's many Holiday Inns. *TG* arrives early and sets up. The record company has donated a brand new Dimebag signature Washburn especially for the interview – it is then be given away to the readers of *Kerrang!* magazine. We tune it up and get the multitrack ready to roll.

At about 1.30, Neil Smith from the record company knocks on the door, followed by a bleary eyed Dimebag, and his tour manager. Dimebag is dressed all in black with his trademark purple goatee. The Tour Manager then announces that they've been up all night drinking. Well that's OK, I mean, these guys can knock back two bottles of Jack Daniels and still perform a blinding set, right? *Right?*

"Let's do this fuckin' thing!" roars Dimebag.

Yessir!

Neil and The Tour Manager leave us to get some drinks. *TG* has some very tasty questions about Dimebag's low key man."

Right. OK. Dimebag then ham-fistedly runs through some painful pentatonic runs, and then makes his guitar howl with open string harmonics. The guy is clearly wasted. How are we gonna get anything from this?

TG: "So, do you dip the bar before you play the string?"

DD: "Well that's for all you to find out, kinda seem to feel the trickery that's involved in rock 'n' roll. Naawunderstand."

TG: "OK, great, well you see, the







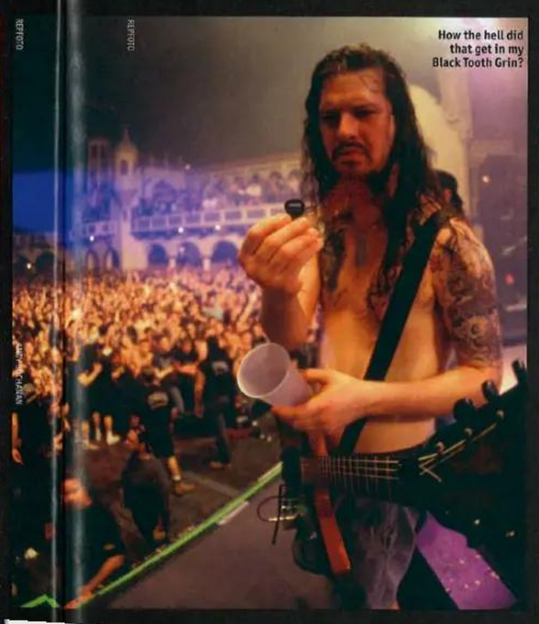




SCOTT IAN

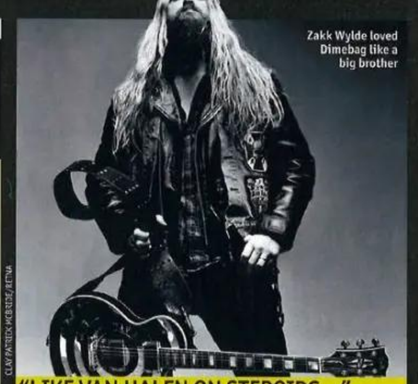


"I am devastated as I'm sure we all are. All I can convey at this moment are my condolences to Rita and Vinnie and the whole family. My heart is with you."



WES BORLAND

"We were playing in Texas a few years ago and I saw this sweaty, big-bearded, Dimebag Darrell-look alike coming over the barricade in front of me. 'Holy crap.' I thought, 'That IS Dimebag!' I had only met him once before but I had grown up on Pantera and was a little star-struck by his presence. He was smiling and looking up at me, rocking out to whatever we were playing. The security were getting ready to shoo him out from in front of the stage but I stopped them and shook his hand. He hung out in front of me for about four songs. I'm glad I got to have that moment with him. I'll never forget it."



"LIKE VAN HALEN ON STEROIDS..."

SPEAKING EXCLUSIVELY TO *TG*, ZAKK WYLDE REMEMBERS A DEAR FRIEND AND A COMRADE IN METAL GUITAR...

The guitar community was devastated by the news of Dimebag's murder. This must be a difficult time for you, being a close friend of his...

"It's a fucking joke. It just blows me the fuck away. I mean, I'm sitting here looking at Dime in a fucking casket. What the fuck is going on? He was in Ohio when this fucking douche bag shot him and I was just talking to him a couple of days before. I called him up on his cell phone when I was wailing the fuck away on the guitar in my cutter shit – they all look the same. When record company people were telling him how his band should look and sound Dime was like, 'Fuck that! It's gonna be like Black Sabbath but heavier. We're gonna wear jeans and t-shirts. How's that sound?' His music is unique. He is totally original."

You and Dime shared a lot of musical influences yet you both remain distinctive as guitar players. How would you say your styles and techniques differ?

"I suppose Dime would say I



DIMEBAG

1966-2004

THE DUST MAY HAVE SETTLED, BUT DIMEBAG DARRELL'S MURDER HAS LEFT A GAPING HOLE IN THE METAL WORLD. *TG* AND SOME OF DIMEBAG'S FRIENDS FROM THE GUITAR WORLD LOOK BACK AT THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF A TRUE ROCK 'N' ROLL LEGEND...

WORDS: HENRY YATES

Legend is an overused word in rock 'n' roll. The term has become diluted over the decades. Bestowed with casual generosity upon musicians who barely warrant footnote status and applied in equal measure to those who survived decades in the business or whose fall from grace is sudden or sharp. If Dimebag Darrell had been less talented, the circumstances of his tragic death might still have seen him immortalised. Ultimately though, it won't be the violence of his end that will see Dimebag's name resonate, but what the guitarist achieved in his short lifetime. Many years from now – when Nathan Gale and the Alrosa Villa Club have been forgotten – guitarists will still form bands, write riffs and drink JD with his music ringing in their ears. Now that's what we call a legend.

Darrell Lance Abbott was born on 20 August, 1966, in Dallas, Texas. As the son of a local country and western producer, Darrell (and brother Vinnie Paul – later to become Pantera and Damageplan's drummer) would see many artists of the day pass through his father's studio. Despite this early exposure to the sounds of bluegrass, and following a failed stint behind the drum kit, Darrell was soon hinting at the heavier direction his own music would take. At school he was ostracised (mainly for the crazed

I didn't go to school for a month," Dimebag admitted to Kerrang! in 1996. 'The seeds had been sown.

It paid off. By the age of 16, Dimebag (now calling himself 'Diamond' – although he later denied this) had been banned from virtually every guitar competition in Texas due to his sheer ability on the instrument. The contests had become foregone conclusions. It had become embarrassing. Dimebag would simply show up, often in full KISS regalia or using Ace Frehley as a pseudonym, and proceed to wipe older and more experienced guitarists off the stage with an air of casual virtuosity.

But a talent like Dimebag's couldn't have its wings clipped that easily. In 1982 he formed Pantera with his brother Vinnie Paul on drums, drafting in bassist Rex Brown (aka Rex Rocker) and frontman Terrence Lee (aka Terry

"I was playing him some licks, joking with Dime on the phone just before it happened. It's nuts" Zakk Wylde

Glaze) to complete the lineup. They released three albums in this form during the 1980s, although Dimebag's early glam influences, not to mention

TONY IOMMI



"I'm stunned. The taking of Dimebag Darrell's life in this horrific murder is a senseless tragedy for his fans and unfathomable loss for his family. I send my deepest condolences to Vinnie and the rest of his family. My thoughts are also with the families of all the other victims of this heinous act."

reveal he could write as well as widdle. As evidenced by that year's *Cowboys From Hell* album – seen by Pantera purists as the band's 'proper' debut – the guitarist was now playing like no-one else on the scene. Amidst the ham-fisted grunge movement and the fag-end of hair metal, Dimebag's riffs (at this point punched out on Dean guitars and solid-state Randall amplifiers) sounded like the four horsemen of the apocalypse pulling up outside the music industry's front door. It was heavy as hell and more vicious than a knee to the groin. A white-hot onslaught of riffing played with almost military precision and stalking tempos to make it all the more menacing and intense. Yet this was a delicate balancing act. While totally uncompromising, Dimebag's riffs were never sludgy (unlike the nu-metallers that followed) and rarely too brutal to be hummed. Nor were his guitar parts mere showboating – they always had a groove. "It's gotta be catchy," he explained when *TG* asked about his approach to writing. "Like *Walk*, y' know? How simple could it fucking get? But it's fucking brutal. Or something like *Cowboys From Hell*. You can still hum it."

Like any great guitarist, Dimebag had signature techniques. The passing of the years has seen these

Words Henry Yates and Steve Allsworth

DIMEBAG DARRELL

"Dude, I've been doing this my whole life!"

In the 30 years since TG was first published, we have mourned the passing of so many legendary players. Within the last decade, we've lost Eddie Van Halen, Prince, and the man that Brian May and many others called The Guv'nor, Jeff Beck. And back in 2004, we lost one of the most influential and beloved figures in the world of heavy metal – Pantera guitarist 'Dimebag' Darrell Abbott.

His death was as shocking as it was senseless. On December 8, 2004, in Columbus, Ohio, Abbott was performing on stage with Damageplan, the band he formed with his brother, drummer Vinnie Paul, after the breakup of Pantera. During the first song of the set, a deranged fan jumped on to the stage and shot the guitarist multiple times. Abbott and two others died at the scene, along with the perpetrator.

In the wake of this tragedy, Dimebag's friends and fellow guitarists spoke to TG to offer their tributes. Tony Iommi lamented "an unfathomable loss". Zakk Wylde – the man who is now honouring Dime's legacy and playing his role in the reconfigured Pantera – told TG of all the crazy times he had enjoyed with Dime over the years, and spoke poignantly in the present tense when he said of his great friend: "His music is unique. He is totally original."

TG's Henry Yates wrote an eloquent eulogy that captured the spirit of the man: "If Dimebag Darrell had been less talented, the circumstances of his tragic death might still have seen him immortalised. Ultimately, though, it won't be the violence of his end that will see Dimebag's name resonate, but what the guitarist achieved in his short lifetime. Many years from now, guitarists will still form bands, write riffs, and drink Jack Daniels with his music ringing in their ears. Now that's what we call a legend!"

TG's tribute included excerpts from interviews we'd had with Dime from years gone by. He spoke of the simplicity and groove in his riffs – a key ingredient in so many of Pantera's classic songs. "It's gotta be catchy," he said. "Like *Walk*, y'know? How simple could it f*cking get? Or something like *Cowboys From Hell*. You can still hum it." He also spoke of that other key element in his playing – as celebrated in the title of a Pantera song, *The Art Of Shredding*: "Where I came from, if you couldn't play all six strings you weren't jack-sh*t!" he said. "I came from the old school. It's cool to jam rhythms all night, man, but if you really wanna express yourself then you've gotta get up on those little strings and bend those motherf*ckers all over the place! I'm always gonna be shredding like a motherf*cker, man!"

What is also remembered at Total Guitar, with great affection, is the last interview that Dimebag gave to us, just a few short months before his extraordinary life was cut short. When he met our writer Steve Allsworth at a London hotel in the summer of 2004, Dime was in the home stretch of one of his infamous three-day booze benders, and completely plastered. At one point he grabbed his new Washburn signature guitar and swung it at our man's head. But even as the hangover from hell crept up on him, he remained lucid enough to discuss the magic of spontaneous creation.

"I've got to the point where I just don't f*ckin' practice," he said. "If I feel it's slacking, I'll do a little work. But dude, I've been doing this my whole f*cking life! I don't know all the f*ckin' scales, but you know what? If I knew all the scales, I'd know what something was gonna sound like before I played it. And then there'd never be that experience of stepping out there and saying, 'Let me see if I can make this solo fly! Can I get that last lick in there?' And if you can turn a sour note into a good one just by bending it a half step, you can almost make it sound like it was meant to be!"

And at the end of that interview, the man who would be buried with one of Eddie Van Halen's guitars had some sage advice: "As far as guitar playing goes, go to the old school – Randy Rhoads, Tony Iommi, Eddie Van Halen – for the lead chops. And do what's right for you."

For Dimebag, it was all about passing the torch. Even now, 20 years on, the flame he lit still burns bright.



PAUL GILBERT'S SCHOOL OF SHRED

No other guitarist has presented more lessons for TG than Paul Gilbert. Here, we revisit one of our favourites...

As guest editor of Total Guitar'S one-off *Shred Special*, uber-shred lord Paul Gilbert expressed his view on the "one deadly conflict" that all shredders must face... "This is the fact that the goal of shredding is to play guitar with ferocious speed, deadly accuracy, piercing tone and crushing intensity," Paul says. "But in order to accomplish these goals, the guitar player must use small, delicate, controlled and patiently honed motions that are generated from one's wee fingers."

Now, though Paul was mostly concerned with fine-tuning our most precise finger movements and helping us all to become better players, it's fair to say he likes to have fun on guitar, too.

Here, we're taking a look at an exclusive lesson from 2008, when Paul offered up his secret to the slickest, fastest tremolo picking technique possible.

All you need is Paul's preferred picking tool: the Makita power drill with four picks attached to the end. We'll start with the obvious caveat... Perhaps don't *actually* try this at home. We think it might be dangerous.

DRILL LICK bit.ly/tg390audio



For all the silliness, Paul did use his drill on Mr. Big track *Daddy, Brother, Lover, Little Boy* – so it's not impossible to do. Here in our video, though, he presents an ordinary tremolo picking exercise for you to try, with or without power tools. Paul's lick is an A major pentatonic idea (A B C♯ E F♯) with a few extra notes thrown in giving it a light Japanese flavour. If you're crazy enough to use a drill, make sure it's a cordless one and hold it as steady as you can while you pick.

Transcription: SteveAllsworth


VOLUME
TONE
VOTING
is for
PEOPLE
Ibanez

THE GLORY YEARS: TOO DRUNK TO PLUCK

Cementing TG's reputation for quality educational content, this 2005 advert for clean living taught us... well, nothing really, but it seemed like a great idea at the time

In recent years, Total Guitar has focused on responsible pursuits like improving your knowledge of guitar playing. This, though, was the early noughties: the height of *Top Gear*, *Jackass*, *Loaded* and lad culture. Into this rich cultural milieu came TG's immortal drinking experiment.

The premise was simple: a contest to see who could still play the opening two bars of *Sweet Child O' Mine* after the most drinks. Slash being mysteriously unavailable for this important research, TG's editor Stephen Lawson, staff writer Nick Cracknell, music editor James Uings, and deputy editor Phil Ascott stepped up, with production editor Claire Davies dodging the vomit and keeping score.

Our excuse that we aimed to discover whether, as some had apparently claimed, you can play *better* when drunk. But mostly it was a chance to get hammered at work.

What follows is a representative sample of the evening's proceedings:



ROUND 3

A couple of beers in and Nick is supposed to be up next, but James is lurking by the sofa ready to pounce on the guitar like a sniper on a deadly stealth mission. "I can't drink it any faster!" protests Nick, in his Arnie accent when harassed to finish his drink. Donning his trusty cowboy boots for extra rock powers, he stomps over to the amp, places a fag in the guitar's headstock, lets out a mighty belch and plays with boundless attitude. Struggling to keep his warm beer down, and swallowing just in time to prevent a globule of vomit exploding down his t-shirt, James grabs the axe and rips through his piece while plots to "take him down" fly around the room like a wasp on speed.

ROUND 5

Strutting around, swigging his vodka and trying on everyone's sunglasses, Phil causes a ruck over who gets to wear the really cool *Top Gun* aviator shades. Rock bundle over with, Phil's copious vodka drinking is starting to affect his playing as minor timing errors creep in, much to the amusement of James, who's seized the axe again, this time for a lounge jazz rendition of Green Day's *Basket Case*.

ROUND 8

Everyone has taken to kissing and licking the fretboard, seemingly oblivious to the fact it's the *same* fretboard they're lavishing attention on. Not content with the standard tempo and speed of the opening bars, Stephen makes a break for Widdle City. Overcome by a rush of adrenaline, he smashes a bottle of 'our precious' beer on the kitchen floor before getting chased out by an angry mob. After an admirable eight pints, the beer has won and Nick finally screws up his attempt at playing *Sweet Child*. Hell-bent on throwing an almighty John McEnroe strop with TG's axe, he gets quickly escorted outside.

ROUND 10

Even after a staggering 10 beers, Stephen plays it perfectly and everyone's riddled with jealousy, and alcohol, as he struts away from the amp with the air of a smug git who's just been given Angelina Jolie's mobile number. As he crashes into the table on his way out, we somehow suspect his blaze of glory will burn out quite soon...

ROUND 11

Hanging over TG's trailer, debating whether or not to be sick, James is howling Stevie Wonder's *I Just Called to Say I Love You* down his mobile phone to some poor unsuspecting bugger at the local kebab house while trying to order special fried rice. "Woddya mean you don't do it?" Tearful at his inability to order a Chinese from a kebab shop, he picks up the axe and plays it straight off the bat.

ROUND 12

Stephen's slurring his words and looking considerably heavy-lidded. He can't quite manage the first bar and, after a superhero effort, we reluctantly say goodbye to our editor. Even though he declared himself pissed after just two beers, James is the last man playing. Our music ed knows how to celebrate success the rock 'n' roll way: with a perfectly formed forward roll.

We concluded that, while the likes of Dimebag and Zakk Wylde may have been able to perform three sheets to the wind, "the rest of us should invest our pre-gig efforts in practising and not trying to down a yard of ale in one". We maintain that this wisdom could not have been gleaned any other way.

TOO DRUNK TO PLUCK!

TOO DRUNK TO PLUCK!

SLASH HAS PLAYED BLIND-DRUNK MANY A TIME, AND DIMEBAG RARELY STEPPED ONSTAGE WITHOUT CONSUMING A VAT OF TEQUILA. SO DOES DRINK MAKE YOU A BETTER PLAYER OR A DROOLING MESS UNABLE TO STRING THREE CHORDS TOGETHER?

WORDS: CLAIRE DAVIES, PICTURES: JOBY SESSIONS

TG pulls a catering-size bottle of vodka from the fridge and asks our landlord: "Do you have a pint glass, mate?" After spending most of the afternoon jamming Velvet Revolver's *Fall To Pieces*, Team TG are ready to step up to the most rock 'n' roll challenge of their careers' – to see how much alcohol can be consumed while still being able to play the opening two bars of Guns N' Roses' *Sweet Child O' Mine*.

It's no easy task, and one you should definitely NOT try at home, but, in the name of pioneering rock journalism, or just plain stupidity, TG's prepared to pick up the bottle and find out...

WARNING

THE FOLLOWING STORY FEATURES ACTS PERFORMED EITHER BY PROFESSIONAL IDIOTS OR UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF PROFESSIONAL IDIOTS. ACCORDINGLY, TOTAL GUITAR AND ITS PUBLISHER MUST INSIST THAT NO-ONE RE-ENACT ANY STUNT OR ACTIVITY PERFORMED IN THIS STORY.

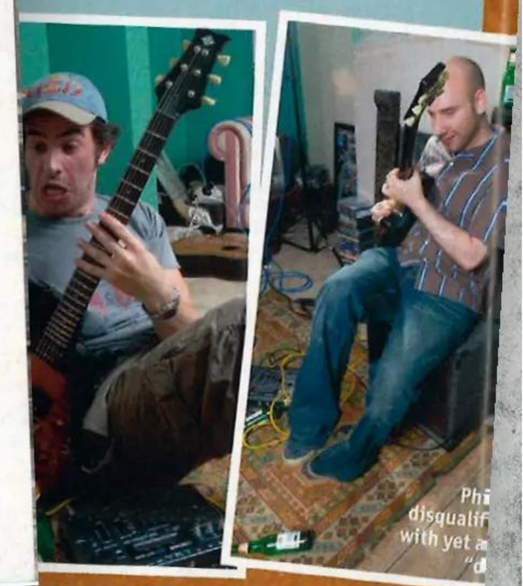
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CONCLUSION

e than 42 beers and a flood of vodka later, team e drunker than a bunch of winos at a Threshers nvention. Putting the initial opening rounds n to a mix of adrenaline and nerves, it *appears* ough alcohol helped the guys feel more relaxed en playing. But it's just as likely, and more sible given the state they were in at the end, practice – not booze – makes perfect. When y the same two bars six, seven times in a row, e bound to get better, right? A barrel full of l may loosen you up, but it's a loaded gun, as nd out while drooling, semi-unconscious in chair; James and his '*Exorcist*' vomiting out ck and his nigh-on broken arm, and Stephen "bastard behind the eyes" and a hefty beer tab to boot.

ral of the story is, TG readers, that Slash, g, Zakk Wylde, and just about every other ster who was drinking since before TG was y be able to slug it back and *still* rip solos ir ass, but the rest of us should invest our forts in practising and not trying to down a yard of ale in one...



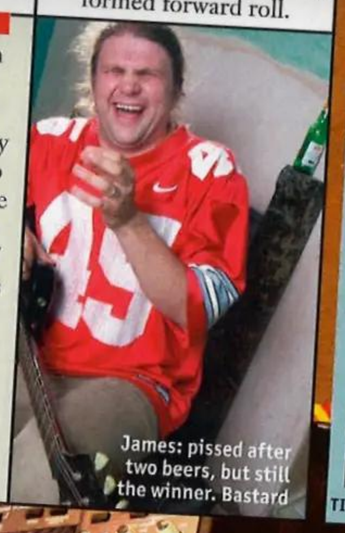


WARNING 2!

Phil's on his final warning, as conspiracy theories abound his drink spillage is a ploy to avail himself of consuming too much alcohol. With vodka dripping down his chin, he bellows: "You're all girls for not drinking vodka; you shrivel in the face of it!" By now he's struggling to pick up the axe, let alone get through the two bars.

DISQUALIFIED!

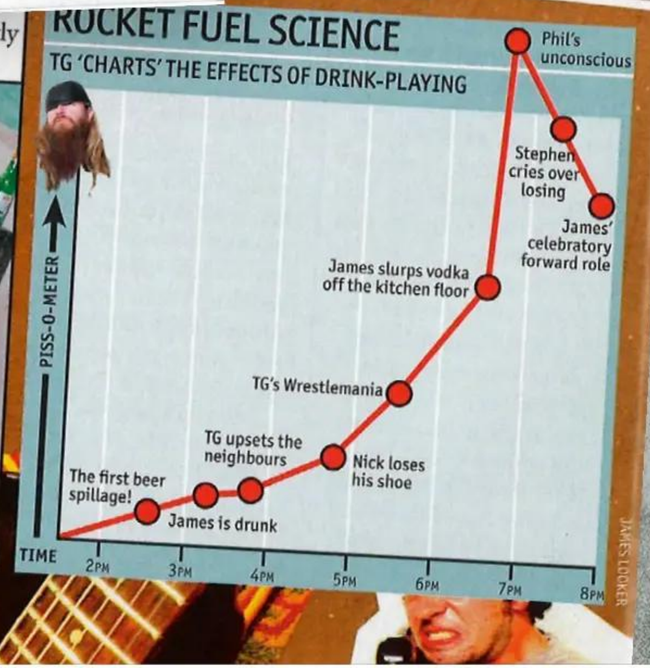
Wobbling in the kitchen doorway, drunk out of his skull and comparing TG's Art Editor to Jeremy Beadle, Phil makes it into the front room just in time for the final chorus of the umpteenth version of *Fall To Pieces*. He totally screws up his two bars, tries to focus on the floor in front of him, then decides it's best to get on all fours and crawl to the nearest armchair and pass out.



James: pissed after two beers, but still the winner. Bastard

ROCKET FUEL SCIENCE

TG 'CHARTS' THE EFFECTS OF DRINK-PLAYING





Mark Tremonti: the man don't give a truck

MARK TREMONTI

WHEN TG ASKED MARK TREMONTI TO RECORD AN EXCLUSIVE INSTRUMENTAL TRACK FOR THE TG READERS, WE NEVER EXPECTED SUCH A RESOUNDING "HELL, YEAH!" PREPARE YOUR EARS FOR THE STORY BEHIND THE BREATHTAKING *AHAVO RABO TACO SALAD*... WORDS: NICK CRACKNELL, PICTURES: MICK HUTSON

We've adopted a new motto here at TG Towers: 'Who Dares Wins.'

It all started at Download 2005, back in June, when we were interviewing Alter Bridge's shred-tastic axeman Mark Tremonti for our annual Guitar Gods summit. We're not sure whether it was star-struck adrenaline, too much booze, barefaced cheek or just a lethal combination of the three, but all of a sudden we were asking him to record an exclusive instrumental track, 'For TG Readers' Ears Only.' The brief was simple... "It can be in any style you want, Mr Tremonti, as long as it rocks!" Not only did Mark leap at the chance, but he also very sportingly got the three other members of his current band Alter Bridge – drummer Scott Phillips, bassist Brian Marshall and vocalist/guitarist Myles Kennedy – involved as well. The band even had to take time out from a hectic US touring schedule with the likes of Staind and 3 Doors Down to commit it to tape.

Mark's rock pedigree is the stuff of legend. In the 1990s he was the guitarist and co-songwriter in America's biggest band, arena-slaying rockers Creed. He also has more than 30 million album sales under his belt, and regularly jams with super shredders Rusty Cooley and Michael Angelo. So you can imagine our delight at having a guitarist of his calibre aboard the TG Train.

Seeing it as the perfect vehicle to exploit the shredding chops he rarely gets to use onstage, Mark dived head on into writing his first ever instrumental, emailing us regular progress reports along the way. The resulting track he named *Ahavo Rabo Taco Salad* – you'll discover why in a moment.

Finally it was ready, and three months after we opened our big mouths at Download we were jetting to Atlanta – where Alter Bridge were playing a Hurricane Katrina benefit gig – to be presented with the final mix. It is going to surprise a lot of people who thought Mark Tremonti was just another write-for-radio US stadium rocker. For a start, it showcases some gobsmacking precision shredding chops. It's a testament to Mark's commitment to bring shred back to the masses. It's a skin flaying combination of hard pounding metal riffs, tasty Spanish strumming and not one, not two, not even three, but FOUR ripping solos that had our transcribers crying into their cornflakes to tab! It's Mark Tremonti's most virtuoso work ever.

And, TG readers, it's all for you...

Firstly, where on earth did you get the name Ahavo Rabo Taco Salad from?

"Man, we've had some trouble coming up with a cool name for this thing, let me tell you! The original idea we messed around with was *Phrygian Taco Salad*, because the whole piece has that phrygian feel running through it – the Taco bit came from the cool Spanish breakdown in the middle where I pull out the nylons – but it didn't have that ring to it. Then Myles was surfing around the web and discovered that the name for the A harmonic minor scale I use in the solo is actually the Ahavo Rabo scale. So, there ya go!"

"If people don't like guitar solos, they're frickin' stupid"

What was the writing process like?

"We got in the rehearsal pad and just went through some riffs – I decided to make it more of a metal track so I could whip out the cool technical playing. I love that neo-classical harmonic minor sound. We did a metal riff to start the song off with, and picked three or four parts to splice together to make a little over a three minute rhythm track. Then I got to work on the solos. It was like writing four solos in one song: two solo breaks, then a double solo break at the end. It's been so much fun, man."

Did you want to really exploit your shredding capabilities that perhaps don't get used as much in Alter Bridge?

"Totally, because when I'm backstage and practising, I'm practising the real shred stuff, the real neo-classical stuff, whereas in Alter Bridge I play mostly pentatonic solos with little bits of flashy improv here and there. This was definitely a chance for me to rip out the real fun diatonic solo stuff. This is strictly shred! I thought, for TG, the more technical the better – give the readers something to get their chops around!"

Did you have the riffs already written or did you work on something with TG in mind?

"A bit of both. The meat of it is actually a couple of riffs that I'd already written, but we just thought let's try some metal riffs and see which ones stick. I'd actually been playing the original rhythm track as the start of my live guitar solo, so it fitted the kind of mood that I was trying to get for TG. It had never been put into a song before, so I thought this would be the perfect opportunity."

Originally you were going to record it yourself. Why did you decide to get the rest of the band involved?

"I wanted to have drums and the whole big band feel, I didn't want to just sit down and have one guitar going. That would be an instrumental that would take about two years to write! So we rigged up the Pro Tools at my house and spent one day doing the arrangement, then spent one day recording the main rhythm tracks. Over the last three or four weeks, every time I got a couple of hours away from the wife, I've been up there working out the solos!"

Will the track affect the sound of the next Alter Bridge album?

"We're all trying to constantly grow. The next album will definitely be more of a departure from what we have done with our Creed past. It's a little moodier, a little darker. The *One Day Remains* record was kind of a mid-ground to hopefully where we're going with the next record."

When you're recording solo spots, do you like to improvise or do you spend a lot of time writing specific parts?

"When we're writing the record I always improvise, but when we come to the studio to record I like to listen back over the tapes and see what ideas I had and then piece my favourite improvs together. Sometimes I have to write from the word go, sometimes it just comes right out, but sometimes it's real hard. I love A harmonic minor – the solos for the TG instrumental are all in that because I figured this was one I couldn't improvise on. This was one that I had to really sit down with specific parts and just throw everything I had at it. But with the more rock 'n' roll 1970s-vibe stuff, it's easier to just improv some cool pentatonic runs."

Have you ever written an instrumental track before?

"I've always wanted to do an instrumental, but no, it's something I've never done

TREMONTI FACT FILE

NAME: Mark Thomas Tremonti
BORN: 18 February, 1974, in Detroit, Michigan

FACT: Growing up, Mark's favourite bands were Metallica and KISS, but his favourite guitarists are blues legend Stevie Ray Vaughan and Zakk Wylde.
FACT: Mark got his first guitar when he was 11. It was a $10 Gibson knock-off called a TARA.
FACT: Mark was voted Best Rock Guitarist for three years *in a row* in TG's US sister mag *Guitar World*.
FACT: Mark is one of only four guitarists to have their own signature PRS model. The others are Carlos Santana, Dave Navarro and Good Charlotte's Billy Martin.
FACT: Mark collects pinball machines.
FACT: Mark had eight No1 singles in the US as the main songwriter with Creed.
FACT: Mark played all the guitars and bass on Creed's third album, the multi-million selling *Weathered*.
FACT: Mark's neighbour in Orlando is golfing superstar Tiger Woods.

→



Alter Bridge (l-r): Myles Kennedy (vocals/guitar), Mark Tremonti, Brian Marshall (bass), Scott Phillips (drums)



Mark will practise for eight hours a day...



...and it's shred and neo-classical all the way!



Mark Tremonti: Hi-Fi Buys Amphitheater, Atlanta, 2005



Mark with his signature PRS

"This is strictly shred! I thought for TG, the more technical the better - give the readers something to get their chops around. It's been fun!"

→ before. In fact, I have this master plan where I want to write a track and then ask the world's best guitar players to all play on it, one after the other, to see everybody's different approach to it. I had something going there before Creed broke up. There were a bunch of guitar players who were interested in doing it with me."

Can you name a few?

"I talked to Steve Vai about it, and I'd have liked to involve Carlos Santana because he's a PRS guy. There was also Eric Johnson... but this was years ago. Right now I'm great friends with Michael Angelo, John Petrucci and Rusty Cooley. It would be cool to get those guys on it. Michael, Rusty and I get together and jam. It's really weird playing with guys like that. You can't gain much from them because there are so many notes! Maybe you could put a call out in the magazine for me: 'Calling all shredders!'"

It seems people are only just cottoning on to the fact that Mark Tremonti is actually a frikkin' guitar god! How have you gone about developing your technique as a player?

"[Laughs] I like to spend months at a time with a different guitar player. Right now I'm in Jason Becker mode. I really try and play their stuff the way they play it, but every time you do that you feel you're not up to par because you start mastering one person, then jump into somebody else and it's a completely different story. I just try to achieve a good level in all different aspects of playing: the blues, shred stuff, and mostly just writing interesting song arrangements. That, for me, is the most difficult thing. It's easy to go out and shred, but it's hard to get technical shred type stuff into a song that actually makes sense. You know, for the good of a song. So when you can make it more interesting and have parts that sound really cool... that's my main goal as a songwriter. As a shredder I just wanna shred as fast as anybody can and learn as much as I can while I'm still young!"



Turn over to learn this exclusive Alter Bridge track!

FINDING THE TONE

IN PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT LEAD TONE, MARK APPROACHED MESA/BOOGIE FOR A WHOLE NEW RIG TO RECORD HIS EXCLUSIVE TG INSTRUMENTAL...

"I wouldn't be doing a lot of stuff I do nowadays without the big chunky Mesa/Boogie rhythm tones. It was actually John Petrucci who turned me on to using their Road King amps. So I spoke with the guys at Mesa/Boogie and they sent me down a whole new rig that we tweaked to get the lead tones for the instrumental. I had that on Channel 3 with some 4x12 traditional cabs, they're like smaller Marshall-size cabinets and John swears by them. I'm also experimenting with a 2290 (digital delay) and a Lexicon Reverb. For the clean stuff right now I'm using a 2x12 Mesa/Boogie Heartbreaker and a Fender Twin. The Heartbreaker is a powerful amp, it's great for clean strumming and it doesn't break up like the Twin does, but the Twin is great for the clean fingerpicking, the nice big bright stuff."



You're also a big fan of Stevie Ray Vaughan and blues guitar, aren't you?

"When you guys interviewed me at Download earlier this year, I was really into my blues playing, yeah. I was trying to get that Stevie Ray Vaughan feel. Now I'm right off the blues again. It was going good, but it's just that I love playing the fast shred stuff. I grew up a metal head, man. I'll stick on the blues for a couple of months but I always get back to the shred, so my blues playing will suffer. I mean, Stevie is my all-time favourite player in the world and he loved the blues more than anything else in the world. That was his thing. But I try not to put all my eggs in one basket."

Do you feel you've improved as a guitarist since forming Alter Bridge?

"I think I'm always getting better. I went the last couple of years without taking any breaks, you know? I played constantly and developed tendonitis in my wrist so I had to take a break. I went one whole month without even touching a guitar and I was terrified to pick it back up again. My fingers were real soft. I felt like I was just starting out, but two days later I was playing better than I've ever played 'cos everything was fresh. I honestly feel like that break made me a better player. Now I'll play eight hours a day out on tour, get home, spend a few days with my wife and child and then come back out and play better for having taken those days off. It works for me and I'd say to your readers if you're starting to hit a rut then it's something to try. It's the same thing with techniques. If you take time out, step away, then come back to it you have a different perspective."

Were you at all intimidated by writing an exclusive track for a guitar mag?

"Well it's funny, I used to be intimidated by everything, but I've been in this business a long time now! I used to be real nervous about playing in front of a huge crowd or meeting certain people, but nowadays I like to have fun with it. I would have been real intimidated back in the 1980s doing something like this, but nowadays there's not a lot of shredding going on – well there is, but you gotta look real hard to find it. It's fun to kinda spread the word and get people back into shred. I never did it in Creed. Shred didn't really fit and, to tell you the truth, back when we started Creed I couldn't even solo that well. We had so much success with the format we had, it just never fit in to the master plan of the band."

Did that not frustrate you?

"Yeah! It got frustrating because backstage I'd be playing and playing, and getting better all the time, but was never allowed to do it onstage. The biggest improvements I made in my playing came after Creed were done. There was a break in between the Creed and Alter Bridge days where I just sat with a bunch of other players. I mean, I took two guitar lessons in my life – I always learned through books and watching other people. I used to think, if I didn't learn it myself it wasn't my lick and I'd be ripping someone off if I used it, but then you learn someone else's lick and change it to the way it feels most comfortable for you and make it your own. It really changed my playing, just watching other guys."

Do you feel a certain responsibility for bringing shred back ?

"Our first album was called *One Day Remains*, and the theory was you gotta live your life like one day remains. We've all been in the business for a long time now, but we never really had fun with it because we were in the wrong situation. Now we're making all the decisions based on that theory that it could all end tomorrow. And what would I be doing if only one day remained? I'd be soloing man! I do it because it's fun for me. People at the record label say, 'Don't put solos on the radio,' but that's being narrow-minded. It's just something I think I've worked long and hard enough to do not to have to compromise. If people don't like guitar solos, if they don't like people trying to be the best they can be on their instrument, then they're frikkin' stupid."■

TECH MATE

ERNIE HUDSON JOINED MARK FOR CREED'S 1999 *HUMAN CLAY* TOUR AND HAS BEEN HIS TECH EVER SINCE

"Mark has improved so much even in the last couple of years. He's smokin'! A lot of techs have a love/hate relationship with their guitarists but Mark's the mellowest guy I've ever worked for. There's no hate at all. He does go through a lot of strings though! I usually put .010s on the bottom EAD strings and .011s for the top GBE to give him a little more flexibility for the shredding solos. I'll change the strings on Mark's PRS guitar first thing, and he'll play all day long, four or five hours if he has time. Then I'll change the strings again before the show and he'll warm up on it again, if I don't he'll break a string. I've set his rig up twice today already."

Words Jenna Scaramanga

MARK TREMONTI RECORDS TG AN EXCLUSIVE TRACK

December 2005: despite the rise of the Internet, print media still rules. And that means when magazines ask for a favour, sometimes extraordinary things happen...

One surreal aspect of being TG is that sometimes our biggest guitar heroes turn out to be fans of *us*. Kirk Hammett and Joe Perry have both told us they read the magazine, as have Yungblud and Fontaines D.C.'s Conor Curley in more recent times. But nothing tops the time Mark Tremonti wrote *Ahavo Rabo Taco Salad* exclusively for TG and got the rest of Alter Bridge to play on it. It also marked a changing of the times. After the guitar solo wasteland of nu metal, Mark Tremonti spearheaded the return of shred.

Did you want to really exploit your shredding capabilities that don't get used as much in Alter Bridge?

Totally, because when I'm backstage, I'm practising the real shred stuff, whereas in Alter Bridge I play mostly pentatonic solos. This is strictly shred! I'd actually been playing the original rhythm track as the start of my live guitar solo, so it fitted the mood that I was trying to get for TG.

When you're recording solos, do you improvise or write specific parts?

When we're writing the record I always improvise, but when we come to the studio I like to listen back over the tapes and piece my favourite improvs together. Sometimes it just comes right out, but sometimes it's real hard. I love A harmonic minor – the solos for the TG instrumental are all in that because I figured this was one I couldn't improvise on. I had to really sit down with specific parts and just throw everything I had at it. I thought for TG, the more technical the better. With the more rock 'n' roll 1970s-vibe stuff, it's easier to just improv some cool pentatonic runs.

FINDING THE TONE

In pursuit of the perfect lead tone, Mark approached Mesa/Boogie for a whole new rig to record his *Total Guitar* instrumental

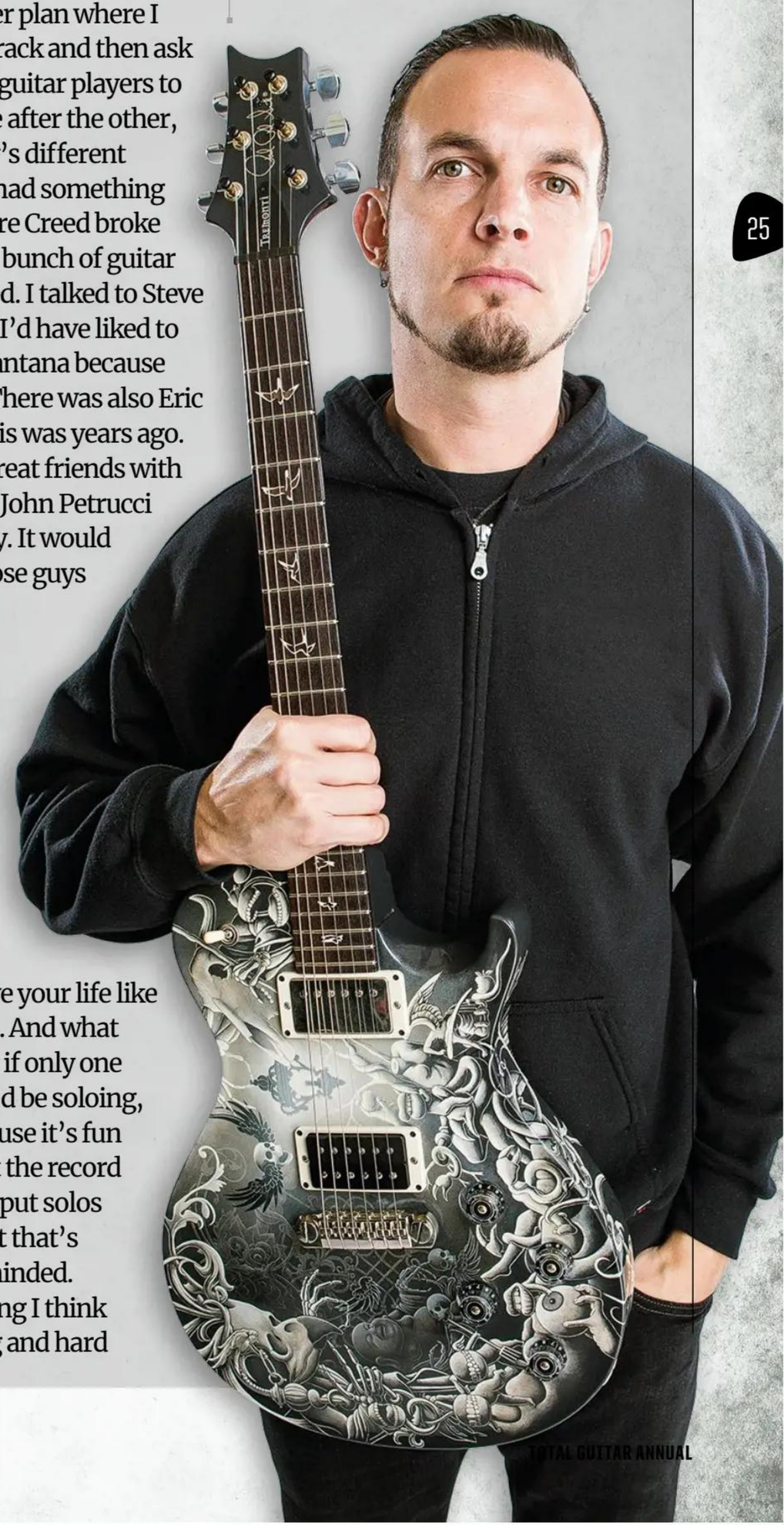
"I wouldn't be doing a lot of stuff I do do nowadays without the big chunky Mesa/Boogie rhythm tones. It was actually John Petrucci who turned me on to their Road King amps. So I spoke with Mesa/Boogie and they sent me down a whole new rig that we tweaked to get the lead tones for the instrumental. I had that on Channel 3 with some 4x12 traditional cabs. They're like smaller Marshall-size cabinets and John swears by them. I'm also experimenting with a (TC Electronic) 2290 and a Lexicon reverb. For the clean stuff, I'm using a 2x12 Mesa/Boogie Heartbreaker and a Fender Twin. The Heartbreaker is great for clean strumming and doesn't break up like the Twin, but the Twin is great for bright fingerpicking stuff."

Have you ever written an instrumental before?

I've always wanted to, but no, it's something I've never done. In fact, I have this master plan where I want to write a track and then ask the world's best guitar players to all play on it, one after the other, to see everybody's different approach to it. I had something going there before Creed broke up. There were a bunch of guitar players interested. I talked to Steve Vai about it, and I'd have liked to involve Carlos Santana because he's a PRS guy. There was also Eric Johnson... but this was years ago. Right now I'm great friends with Michael Angelo, John Petrucci and Rusty Cooley. It would be cool to get those guys on it.

Do you feel a certain responsibility for bringing shred back?

Our first album was called *One Day Remains*, and the theory was you gotta live your life like one day remains. And what would I be doing if only one day remained? I'd be soloing, man! I do it because it's fun for me. People at the record label say, 'Don't put solos on the radio,' but that's being narrow-minded. It's just something I think I've worked long and hard enough to do not to have to compromise. If people don't like guitar solos, if they don't like people trying to be the best they can be o their instrument, then they're frikkin' stupid.



Words Joe Matera and Amit Sharma

MATT BELLAMY

"I wanted one guitar part to stand out and be just *perfect*"



In December 2003, Muse guitarist Matt Bellamy spoke with TG writer Joe Matera to give us the lowdown on the band's third album *Absolution*, which we described as "some of the grandest, most unashamedly epic guitar music ever created". When quizzed on how he managed to achieve such an impressive wall of noise, Matt was more than happy to spill the beans.

After trying out "a lot of different cabs and heads" he ended up sticking with "a Diezel head with a Soldano cab". As this pairing worked so well on the recordings, he revealed it was going to be his tone for an impending world tour, pointing out how the MIDI-controllable Diezel VH4 head allowed him to plug straight in and have all his effects, like the Line 6 Echo Pro, running in the loop.

"It's a German high-gain valve amp and the sound it makes is just unbelievable," he enthused. "They're very rare and extremely hard to find. You can only buy them hand-built, but the sound you get is absolutely pristine! It's got four channels that create completely different tones."

Elsewhere in our interview, the Muse leader explained how he'd streamlined his guitar parts and placed more care into writing ideas that could be executed exactly as recorded when performed on stage. And some more metallic flavours were brought in for tracks like *Stockholm Syndrome*, with Matt describing its "fast, speed metal-type riffery" being inspired by American nu-metal heavyweights System Of A Down.

"In the past, I used to layer the guitars quite a lot, but this time around I wanted to get just one guitar part to stand out and be just perfect," he said. "On the last album, on songs like *Citizen Erased* or *Micro Cuts*, I did a lot of multiple-guitar parts. But when I went to do it live, I found myself simplifying the parts, which I then thought sounded much more powerful."

Of course, that didn't mean the album lacked any technical wizardry. Far from it, in fact, with Bellamy's 20th century piano influences helping him orchestrate some of the band's most elaborate music to date and break down some of the barriers that had been holding him back on guitar.

"It's very emotional, but quite technical as well," he said. "I found that to be an interesting concept, because with the guitar it seemed you could only be either emotional or technical, but you couldn't do both. The piano helped me understand it was possible to make music that was technical and emotional at the same time."

Words Luke Lewis and Amit Sharma

THE DARKNESS

"People don't do guitar solos anymore. That's the problem!"



By the time The Darkness got their first TG cover in May 2004, they were fast-becoming one of the biggest rock bands in the world. But just over a year before that, they were still playing in pubs as an unsigned act. So how did they manage to do it?

"The Darkness will save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*te," lead singer and lead guitarist Justin Hawkins told us. "But that's not what we really intend to do. It's merely a by-product of our impending world domination."

His brother, rhythm man Dan Hawkins, added: "We don't make this sort of music as a reaction to anything else going on. This is actually the music we're really into. Right now we're the biggest band in the country, but it's taken us four years to get a record deal because people just couldn't take us seriously. And it's because the rock climate is so one-dimensional at the moment."

At a time when the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal was taking over – led by groups such as Trivium, Killswitch Engage and Lamb Of God – The Darkness were keen to highlight the classic rock heroes that helped shape the sound of their debut album *Permission To Land*. For Justin it was Eddie Van Halen and Mark Knopfler, while for Dan it was Malcolm Young and Scott Gorham.

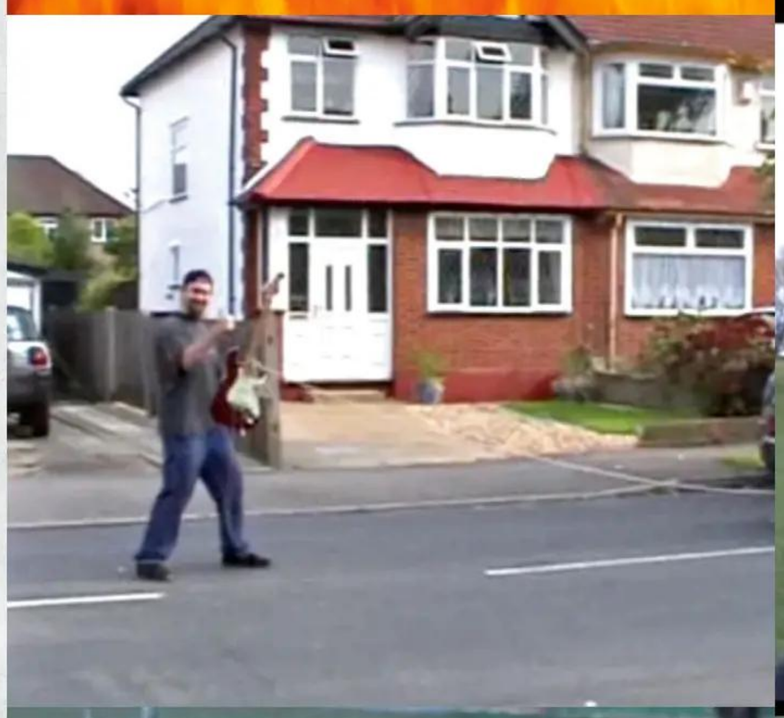
"The last decent guitarist I can remember is Kirk Hammett," said Dan. "People don't do guitar solos anymore. That's the problem."

The brothers also expanded on how their simple-but-deadly backline was the secret behind their earth-sharking crunch. Justin revealed he'd chalked up a deal with Mesa/Boogie, plugging his Les Paul into a pair of Dual Rectifiers via a wireless system and noise gate, but with no effects in between. Dan, on the hand, preferred to place his trust into Marshall 100W Super Leads, with a Marshall Drive Master and Ibanez Tube Screamer to thicken things up in places and "one of those Line 6 delay modellers, just to create a lot of noise" – praising its ability to create "two notes of feedback" and ultimately give the illusion of a triple-guitar assault.

The world of rock was never the same again.












CHALLENGE CHARLIE

At a time when TG's staff were getting, frankly, rather silly, one man stood up to take on the daftest of all our challenges...

If our Too Drunk To Pluck feature hasn't informed you of just how daft a gang of feral TG staffers can be, well, check this one out.

For an all-too-brief handful of issues around 2005/2006, freelancer and TG shred guru Charlie Griffiths was requested by mag editors to indulge the silliest of all their loosely guitar-related ideas. The result was our video feature titled Challenge Charlie.

High points included asking Charlie to snap all the strings on his guitar in under 30 seconds (his innovative approach involved a rope and a car – you can work out the rest), playing Van Halen's *Jump* while jumping (this time with a trampoline being our hero's tool of choice) and delivering a version of *Roundabout* by Yes (yup, you guessed it, on a roundabout!).

These days, Charlie is a far more sensible chap, off shredding his way around the world on tour with prog metal titans Haken, with, we assume, a little less time for frivolous challenges from TG.

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KEVIN COX/WIREIMAGE



John Frusciante: he actually wrote to TG!

STAR LETTER VAGUELY LITERATE? MILDLY AMUSING? WIN AN SFX-01

INDIE SCHMINDIE BULLSHIT!

OK, OK, I know this is my second letter to you guys, but I have a genuine gripe about this month's issue (TG151). In your article about the Towers Of London, you state – and I quote – "Towers Of London are the perfect antidote to all that self-loathing, indie schmindie bullshit currently clogging up the charts." As I read this, my heart began to flutter and I thought to myself, 'Yes! They have finally seen the light! They are finally going to stop wasting paper and ink on all these crap indie bands!' But my elation was short lived. After a quick glance at the two pages of adverts following the feature, you have an article about possibly *the* most "indie schmindie" looking sons of bitches I have ever had the misfortune to lay my eyes upon: The Futureheads.

C'mon TG! What's with the hypocrisy? You can make it up to all your *true* rock 'n' roll readers by featuring Silvertide in your next issue! And I'll even buy THREE copies if you do! Thanking you again (but not as sincerely since I read the aforementioned Futureheads article).

TG replies: OK, so we're a bunch of hypocrites. What are you gonna do about it? We know, you're gonna take this Seymour Duncan Pickup Booster and shove it in your signal chain!

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It's the first effects pedal designed to work together with the pickups in your instrument, to achieve optimum gain and resonance for all your tonal applications. Turn the knob to dial in pure, flat-EQ gain, from 6dB all the way to an astonishing 25dB! Make your singlecoils sound like humbuckers!

IT'S JOHN FRICKIN' FRUSCIANTE!

"Do as thou wilt shall be whole of the law."

I am sitting here listening to The Beatles and I want to say a couple of things regarding my comments on the question of whether or not to learn theory.

If you don't know theory, and yet when a chord progression is played low on the neck you can play a melody in keeping with the chords halfway up the neck without being lost, you are doing well. In this case, there is no pressing need to learn theory because you can make music with another person, understanding as you do the numerical relationships of music. Though you may think of them as shapes, the relationship is a numerical one as numbers are a human's way of measuring distance. So theory shows a person how to be far away in terms of frequency (how high or low the notes are) but close in terms of feeling and connectivity.

In the article [Phil Ascott's interview with John Frusciante, TG150] I irresponsibly generalised that the reason people don't learn theory is because they are lazy. There is another, better reason to not learn it. If you have such a good flow of creativity going and are making music that fills you and those who hear it with joy, or if in your heart you believe you are well on your way to doing that, learning theory could slow you down as your brain would have to learn to function in a different way. I firmly believe it would help such a person eventually (as it helped Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Frank Zappa, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, etc), but until a person can use this knowledge quickly and effortlessly without having to think about it, thinking theoretically will be a distraction. Therefore, I encourage people to learn it when they have time on their hands, like when they're young or when they have no creative demands on them. Theory can deepen anybody's expression (even the hypothetical people I mentioned who already understand basic 'numerical' relationships), but it doesn't happen overnight. And in the meantime a creative person may think they have lost something, but once they can access their knowledge effortlessly they will be more free and will have more colours to chose from.

I must also comment on one of Joe Satriani's (much respect!) reasons to learn theory, from an otherwise fine lesson on this subject, where basically the student is asked "Can you play like Stevie Ray Vaughan?" thereby supposedly proving the need to learn theory. I postulate that none of these geniuses, who made great music without theory, knew they were geniuses when they were first learning. If someone feels they have the time, patience and brainpower to form their own conception of musical relationship and to figure it all out in their own way, then they should. I have learned as much from the styles of musicians who don't know theory as I have from musicians who do. Many of them just found a unique style that resulted in beautiful music. Many of them don't even understand the relationships I speak of too well and have to fumble around for 10 minutes before they play anything good, but when they do it's something incredible. But, by the same token, let it be remembered that some people, like Hendrix, were just too poor to take lessons and would have if they had had the means. Hendrix was quoted as saying he would like to quit the music business for six months and go to music school. My own musical growth was compromised by not having enough money to pay the fee of the teacher I wanted to take from. But some of us have the desire to learn and the will to gain knowledge by whatever means necessary. Magazines like *Total Guitar* taught me immensely. In fact, I don't know what I would have done without them. Life gives you what you put into it, and if you have the will to learn, practise and make music, it doesn't matter if theory is part of the equation or not (but I recommend it).

Love is the law, love under will,
John Frusciante

SOUND BITES

ELSEWHERE IN THE TG MAILBOX...

Connor O'Brien emails from Ireland where he's disgusted by scenes from this year's Download on his TV: "Not one person in the crowd was singing along. We only got Download this year for two days, yet every person in the crowd was singing. And why were you allowed to mosh? Every time a moshpit started here, stewards broke it up!" Shaun from Oxford and his fiancée are expecting a baby girl on 26 October: "I'm on the lookout for a girly guitar for when she's old enough. She kicks hard every time I play Dragonforce." Tom Bown takes umbrage at GR of Leicester's comments in TG151 regarding Luke Kook's assertion that James Blunt gives acoustic guitar a bad name: "You suggest being popular makes Blunt a good musician. Do you believe talent is only based on popularity? Would you dare suggest McFly were better than Pantera just because their albums achieved higher chart placings?" Ian Burnett's girlfriend has asked him to learn a love song: "I wonder if TG would help me out by tabbing Clapton's *Wonderful Tonight*?" We tabbed it in TG45, Ian. But you never know, there's always our Valentine's Day issue...

HOT SHOTS SEND US YOUR PICS AND WIN A CROWD OF ADORING FANS!

Email your shots to totalguitar@futurenet.co.uk along with your full name and address. The best each month will win one of these crowd scenes, courtesy of redhotrockshop.com. Each scene is 6x4ft in size (comprising three posters) and features the huge crowd at Download 2005. Stick it up on your wall and pretend to be a rock god!



Win this crowd then install it in your bedroom!



THIS MONTH'S WINNER...
Jim Pierce, via email

JOHN FRUSCIANTE'S LETTER FROM AMERICA

Our July 2006 issue featured none other than John Frusciante of the Red Hot Chili Peppers on the cover, with a line of text promising discussion of meditation, drugs, Hendrix and some chat about the band's then-latest album, *Stadium Arcadium*. As the interview went on, John waxed lyrical about his thoughts on learning music theory. Turns out he had more to say on the subject post-interview. So he wrote TG a letter. And, rather than abridge it for you, here it is in full. Thanks again for your wise words, John!

THE LETTER

"Do as thou wilt shall be whole of the law."

I am sitting here listening to The Beatles and I want to say a couple of things regarding my comments on the question of whether or not to learn theory.

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Love is the law, love under will.

John Frusciante



MYTH BUSTERS:
THE CABLE DESTRUCTION TEST

Need to know whether gear is worth your cash? Who you gonna call...

Lightly inspired by the success of a particular TV show, April 2014 saw us slaying guitar's sacred cows. We gave the TG verdict on such hot potatoes as whether heavy strings mean better tone (tell B.B. King and Billy Gibbons), if true bypass is better than buffered (not on a long cable run), and whether old batteries make pedals sound different (yes, amazingly, but only certain pedals – mostly old fuzzes). But to find out whether expensive cables are worth the money, we subjected our test cables to multiple rounds of gruelling misuse. "This debate," we announced "is the stuff of all-out audiophile warfare."

Three cables stepped up, one would emerge. Cable one: the thin lead that came free with your guitar, with moulded jacks. Cable two: a £20-ish functional workhorse with a thick outer sleeve and replaceable plugs. Cable 3: a premium model promising better isolation from interference, fancy wound cable to improve phase/midrange signal, 24K gold plugs and multiple insulation technologies to improve handling noise.

Here's how they'd stack up to our tests...

1. SOUND TEST

To our ears, the budget and mid-priced cables sounded almost the same, but the premium cable had slightly less treble than the other two. Now, our premium cable was longer than the others, and this probably demonstrates the effects of capacitance on your tone from longer cables, rendering this a fairly even result in real terms. You don't necessarily have to rule out using a budget- or mid-priced cable on pure sonic terms.

2. INTERFERENCE TEST

We wrapped a mobile phone in the cable and called it, with the end of the cable plugged into our DAW. The mid-priced cable had some general background noise, followed by a peak as the phone rang. The premium cable was quieter in terms of background noise, but louder when the phone rang, probably due to the longer cable acting as a more efficient antenna. Finally, and quite amazingly, the budget cable not only picked up signal noise, it also acted microphonically, picking up the vibration and ring tone of the phone. This cable could literally transfer the sound of you touching it to your amplifier.

3. BEER-SOAKING TEST

Spilled drink could pose a serious risk to your gear, so we tested our cables to see which was most beer-proof. All we needed was a bucket... and some of the finest lager money can buy for £2. After a good soaking, we gave our cables a few minutes to dry out. The result: no change. While the beer soaking could prove problematic over a period of time (rusting the terminals on your cable), as long as you dry your lead properly, you shouldn't have a big problem. Just don't go spilling drinks on your mains-powered devices.

4. BLUNT TRAUMA TEST

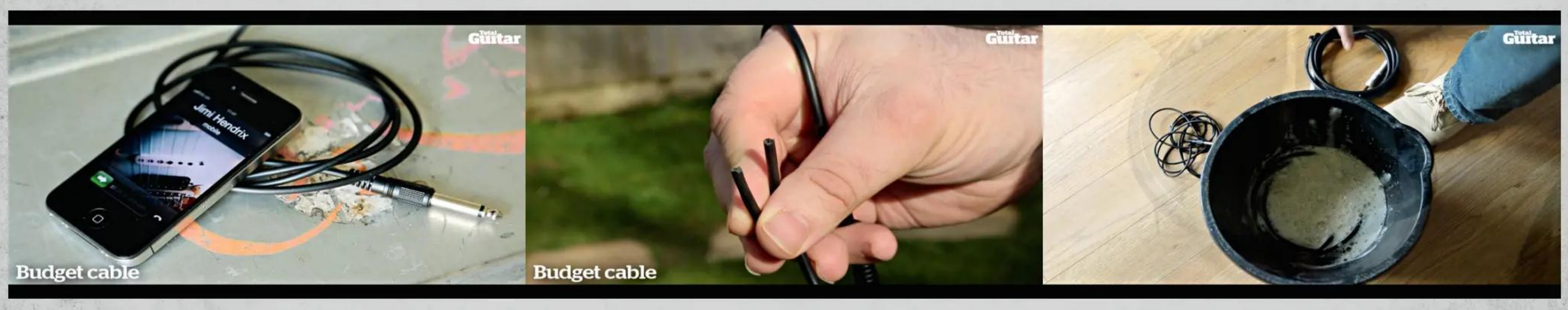
This is where things get serious. It's time to see how the jack plugs on our cables survive the impact of the blunt end of a rather heavy axe. Each cable was held in place with a staple (without damaging the cable), before we dropped the back of our axe on the same part of each plug. The result: the budget cable had taken some damage and split, but it still worked and was totally usable. The mid-priced cable suffered significant damage, losing its treble frequencies. Meanwhile, there was superficial damage on the metal plug of the premium lead. It was slightly misshapen, but it still worked fine.

5. SNAP TEST

Next, we tested our cables against the might of TG's now editor, Chris Bird. He wrapped each cable around a metal bar he was standing on, while pulling as hard as he could. The budget cable snapped easily. Likewise, as Chris yanked the mid-priced cable, the internal wires snapped, even though the sheath was stretchy enough to hold its shape. The premium cable remained unharmed. We suspected the internal copper braiding makes this kind of cable pretty much un-snappable.

6. EXTREME HEAT TEST

Stage lights generate huge amounts of heat (or at least they did before LEDs). You only needed to lay your cable over a floor-mounted lamp for a couple of minutes to see smoke. We set up our old studio lamp (outside, in case of fire!) to see how the last cable in the contest handled the heat. It emerged pretty burnt, but still working. With only one cable left in the contest, there was one clear winner. Our advice? Get the best cable you can afford, and look after it!



Myth BUSTERS!

GETTING DOWN TO THE TRUTH BEHIND THE SNAKE OIL

FROTHY LANGUAGE *and artistic licence with the truth is never far from a discussion about tone. On one side of the table sits the tone snob, willing to argue to the death that they can hear the most incremental of differences in tone from the latest tone-hunting trends. On the other side sits the tonally ignorant my-guitar-I-found-in-a-skip-sounds-better-than-Hendrix's dullard. He's not bothered by his capacitors, he doesn't care about braiding, and he couldn't tell his arse from his EBow in a blind test.*

We're here to strike a little balance. If the stench of bullshit is burning your nostrils, or you feel like your ear drums are made of cotton wool, read on as we attempt to find some truth...



True bypass is better than buffers

INCONCLUSIVE!

FOR True bypass simply means that when your pedal is switched off (bypassed), the signal doesn't run through the stomper's circuitry, thus avoiding any unwanted colouration along the way. It's a cleaner signal path from your guitar to your amplifier via your pedalboard.

AGAINST In a buffered pedal (Boss, for example), the signal from the input is given a helping hand by a small 'buffer' circuit, which maintains your signal's impedance and level. This means that any signal loss from cable runs is compensated for.

CONCLUSION We hope you brought a can opener, because we're cracking into a container of worms here. Let's start at the beginning. Every guitar lead introduces capacitance, which results in high-end signal loss. Double the length of your cable and you'll also double the capacitance – so by plugging in a 'board made of only true-bypass pedals, you'll be effectively joining a load of cables together.

Conversely, not all buffers are equal, and if you're using all-buffered bypass pedals by different brands, you run the risk of each one imparting different colourations into your signal.

In the real world, you're most likely going to be running a mixture of the two: some true bypass, and some buffered bypass. We'd say you're better off thinking about which effects, and how many, you're using, and then planning your 'board that way. For example, some overdrives/distortions will expect to see a signal direct from your pickups, while some true-bypass delays/reverbs will cut the tails off your ambience the moment you stomp on the switch. We'd recommend having a buffered pedal – or standalone buffer – every three or four pedals on bigger 'boards, and using true-bypass loops where possible. In both instances, keep your cable runs short, and you'll be golden.



If you're mixing true-bypass and buffered pedals, plan your 'board accordingly

Heavier strings give you more tone

MYTH!



FOR Many guitarists will tell you that using heavier (thicker) strings will result in a heavier tone. The argument goes that a greater mass from the string feeds a greater vibration to your pickup, resulting in a fatter, richer output.

AGAINST Let's think about a couple of tonehounds for a second. Not just the guy down the pub that likes to chat tone, but proper, bona fide, I'd-cut-off-my-thumbs-just-to-sound-like-that tonehounds. Billy Gibbons, Brian May, Jimmy Page, Carlos Santana, even early Jeff Beck – all of these guitarists are well known for using 0.008s or 0.009s. Think their tone sucks? You suck.

CONCLUSION It's a tricky one, this. Your string gauge will feel different depending on the scale length of your guitar. A standard 'Gibson' length (24.75-inch) will require less tension to tune the strings to any given tuning than a longer 'Fender' scale (25.5-inch). Tension will govern the amount of vibration on the string, how easy it is to bend or change the pitch with picking, and how much resistance is required to fret notes. All of these things affect the way you play, and it's getting them right that will have the most bearing on your overall tone. Fitting light strings to a guitar that's set up for a heavier gauge means you could encounter buzz from the nut or fretboard, and you'll probably find your pickup height will need adjusting: all causes of poor tone. We'd wager that paying more attention to a comfortable/stable string tension, proper guitar setup and choice of string material will have as much (or greater) effect on your tone.

Pedals sound different with dying batteries

TRUE!

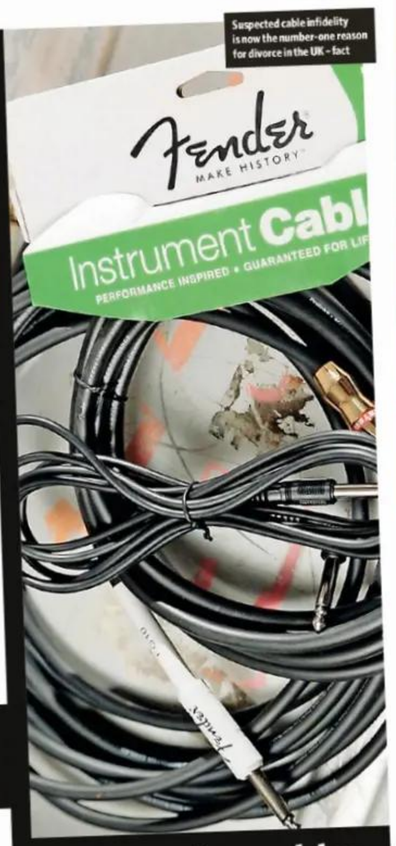
FOR "I plugged my pedal in, and right before the battery died, it sounded better than normal". These words have been written hundreds of times on internet forums, and in some cases, are true. Some analogue pedals can still function with less than nine volts, and often sound 'warmer' than when powered from a power supply or fresh battery.

AGAINST Bollocks. Does your iPod sound better when the battery has nearly run out? Can you even hear the difference between a dying battery and a fresh one in the context of a gig? Surely, if it's about to run out, it could stop working at any second?



CONCLUSION We're not ones for hyper-bull-e (geddit?) here at TG, but this is technically true. As the voltage in the battery runs low, it starves the pedal of power, but can still supply enough for it to run. Common side effects of this include less treble and a 'smoother' sound, but all of this comes with a caveat: it's only true of analogue pedals. Try it with a digital pedal, and you'll be met with silence.

Whether or not the effect actually sounds better is a totally subjective call. You may or may not prefer the sound: it's completely unpredictable, and you risk your sound cutting out at crucial moments. Products such as the Beavis Audio Devolt allow you to starve your pedal of juice, and Electro-Harmonix's Germanium Overdrive and Germanium 4 Big Muff Pi have a 'Volts' control to do the same thing. And legendary Texan tonehound and bluesman Eric Johnson once claimed he could hear the difference between battery brands!



Expensive cables are better than cheap ones...

This debate is the stuff of all-out audiophile warfare. Every guitar player needs a cable or five, but what's the difference between the free one that came with your guitar and the expensive one that your mate bought?

We're not sure we can tackle this in one simple answer, so we've decided to put some to the test! ▶▶



CABLE ONE

This fine specimen is familiar to all. It's the lead that came free with your guitar, the one that you used until it broke and then put in a box somewhere and pull out for 'special' occasions. It's thin, and you can't replace the jacks, because they're moulded on.



CABLE TWO

This is the all-rounder, the £20-ish functional workhorse that has seen you through numerous gigs and recording sessions. It's sturdy, with a pretty thick outer sleeve and the plugs are replaceable. It even came wrapped in nice card packaging with some info you never read.



CABLE THREE

Our third cable is an example of an expensive premium cable. It promises better isolation of magnetic fields (interference), fancy wound cable to improve phase/midrange signal, 24K gold plugs and multiple insulation technologies to improve handling noise. It costs about £50, and is longer than the other cables, as we want to see how much of an impact capacitance can have.

Cables THE TG TEST

VIDEO www.bit.ly/tg252cable

We'll be checking our cables in two main areas: sound quality and durability. Here's what we'll be looking for

SOUND QUALITY
The main thing you're looking out for is the dreaded C-word: capacitance. Any cable will introduce a certain amount, and the effect is akin to your tone control. In basic terms, the longer the cable, the more capacitance it will introduce, and the more high end you'll lose. It's not just the one cable though; every patch lead you introduce will add to it, so clearly, it pays to keep your cable runs as short as possible. It's worth noting that some players actually like the effect of capacitance.

DURABILITY
Jack leads have a tough life – they get knotted up, kicked around stage and trodden on. Then, at the end of the night, your drummer starts coiling it tightly around his elbow, risking breaking the internal wire, weakening connections and putting strain on the jack plugs. You want a lead that can survive these things, but ultimately, no cables are indestructible. We'll be rigorously punishing our cables, to see how they stand up to stress.

SOUND TEST



Our first test is a pure reference sound test. We need to know how our leads sound before we start testing them properly. We're playing through our Vox AC15 amp. The tone and volume controls on both guitar and amplifier are set the same throughout, so the only variable in play is the cables.

THE RESULT **To our ears, the budget and mid-priced cables sounded almost the same, but the premium cable had slightly less treble than the other two. Now, do remember our premium cable is longer than the other two, to demonstrate the effects of capacitance on your tone from longer cables, rendering this a fairly even result in real terms. What this does mean is that you don't necessarily have to rule out using a budget- or mid-priced cable on pure sonic terms.**

INTERFERENCE TEST

This is also a sound test, of sorts. Nothing will get sound engineers riled like a mobile-phone signal interfering in the PA. We want to know which of our three cables, if any, picks up most noise from a ringing mobile phone. We wrapped the phone in the cable and called it, with the end of the cable plugged into our DAW.

THE RESULT **The mid-priced cable had some general background noise, followed by a peak as the phone rang. The premium cable was quieter in terms of background noise, but louder when the phone rang, probably due to the longer cable acting as a more efficient antenna.**

Finally, and quite, amazingly, the budget cable not only picked up signal noise, it also acted microphonically, picking up the vibration and ring tone of the phone. This cable can literally transfer the sound of you touching it, to your amplifier. Not good!



There's a guitar legend on the 'phone, telling you to buy a curly cable like his

KNOTTING TEST



Cables have magical abilities to tie themselves in knots as soon as you turn your back, in some cases, breaking the wires internally and causing the cable to cut out intermittently when you move it. So, simulating a busy stage or rehearsal room, we wanted to know if our three leads would survive being knotted and pulled tight.

THE RESULT **As you might expect – given how frequently your cables knot up - knotting did nothing to any of our cables. We'll get a little more heavy handed, but next, it's beer time...**

BEER-SOAKING TEST

Let's face it, most gigs take place in bars, pubs, clubs and at parties. Because spilled beer could pose a serious risk to your gear, we thought we should test our cables to see which is most beer-proof. All we need is a bucket... and some of the finest lager money can buy for £2. After a good soaking in lager, we gave our cables a few minutes to dry out.

THE RESULT **No change. While the beer soaking could prove problematic over a period of time (rusting the terminals on your cable), as long as you dry your lead properly, you shouldn't have a big problem.**



Power soak: this is one sonic brew that we wouldn't recommend

BLUNT TRAUMA TEST



Angry Bird: TG's music editor finally loses it with those tardy contributors

Right. This is where things get serious. It's time to see how the jack plugs on our cables survive the impact of the blunt end of a rather heavy axe.

Each cable was held in place with a staple (without damaging the cable), before we dropped the back of an axe on the same part of each plug.

THE RESULT **The budget cable had taken some damage and split, but it is still worked and was totally usable. The mid-priced cable fared less well. And, as you can hear on our video, there is significant damage – the treble frequencies are lost. Meanwhile, there was superficial damage on the metal plug of the premium lead; it's slightly misshapen; but as you can hear, it still worked fine.**

SNAP TEST

Next, we wanted to see how our cables stand up to the might of TG's music editor, Chris Bird. More specifically, whether he could snap the cables by wrapping them around a metal bar he was standing on, while pulling as hard as he could.

THE RESULT **The budget cable snapped easily, crashing out of our test. Likewise, as Chris yanked the mid-priced cable, the internal wires snapped, even though the sheath was stretchy enough to hold its shape. The premium cable remained unharmed. We suspect that the internal copper braiding makes this kind of cable pretty much unsnappable; certainly under normal use.**



The premium cable was the only one in our sample to survive the snap test



EXTREME HEAT TEST

Stage lights generate huge amounts of heat. You only need to lay your cable over a floor-mounted lamp for a couple of minutes and you'll see smoke. We set up our old studio lamp (outside, in case of fire!) to see how the last cable in the contest handles the heat after a few minutes. It's pretty burnt, but despite the beating it's taken, the premium lead is still working. Here are the final scores.

THE TG TEST	BUDGET CABLE	MID-PRICE CABLE	PREMIUM CABLE
SOUND TEST	1	1	1
INTERFERENCE TEST	0	1.5	1.5
KNOTTING TEST	1	1	1
BEER TEST	1	1	1
IMPACT TEST	1	0.5	1.5
SNAP TEST	0	1	2
BURN TEST	-	-	1
TOTALS	4	9	9

Conclusion

TRUE!

With only one cable left in the contest, there's one clear winner. We were impressed that our premium cable still worked after this, to be honest. Rounding up the scores, it seems that you get what you pay for. The budget lead you received with your guitar being more fragile and prone to noise, whereas a good premium lead is almost unbreakable under normal use. But, certainly for home use and regular gigging, there's a lot to be said for mid-priced and budget leads, too. Our advice? Get the best cable you can afford, audition it for sound quality first, and look after it!

CABLE JARGON EXPLAINED!

JACK PLUG
The bit that you actually plug into your guitar. Don't bother with gold-plated plugs unless the socket they're going into is also plated. Only bats can hear the difference.

STRAIN RELIEF
This is a collar that grips the cable by the jack plug. Without it, you're relying on the soldered connections to hold the whole thing together – eventually, it'll break.

OXYGEN-FREE
Forget about sonic benefits: oxygen-free cable will prevent the wires inside from rotting, meaning it'll last longer.

DIRECTIONAL CABLE
A cable with inherent benefits when the signal flows in a certain direction. Printed arrows determine which end goes to your guitar, and which end goes to your amp. Theoretically true, but years of standing next to amps and cymbals mean that we can't hear it above the singer's whining.

LIFETIME GUARANTEE
An invitation extended by nearly every cable manufacturer to replace the lead in the instance of it breaking. Someone, somewhere made use of it once. He wasn't available for comment.

Words & Science Milton Mermikides

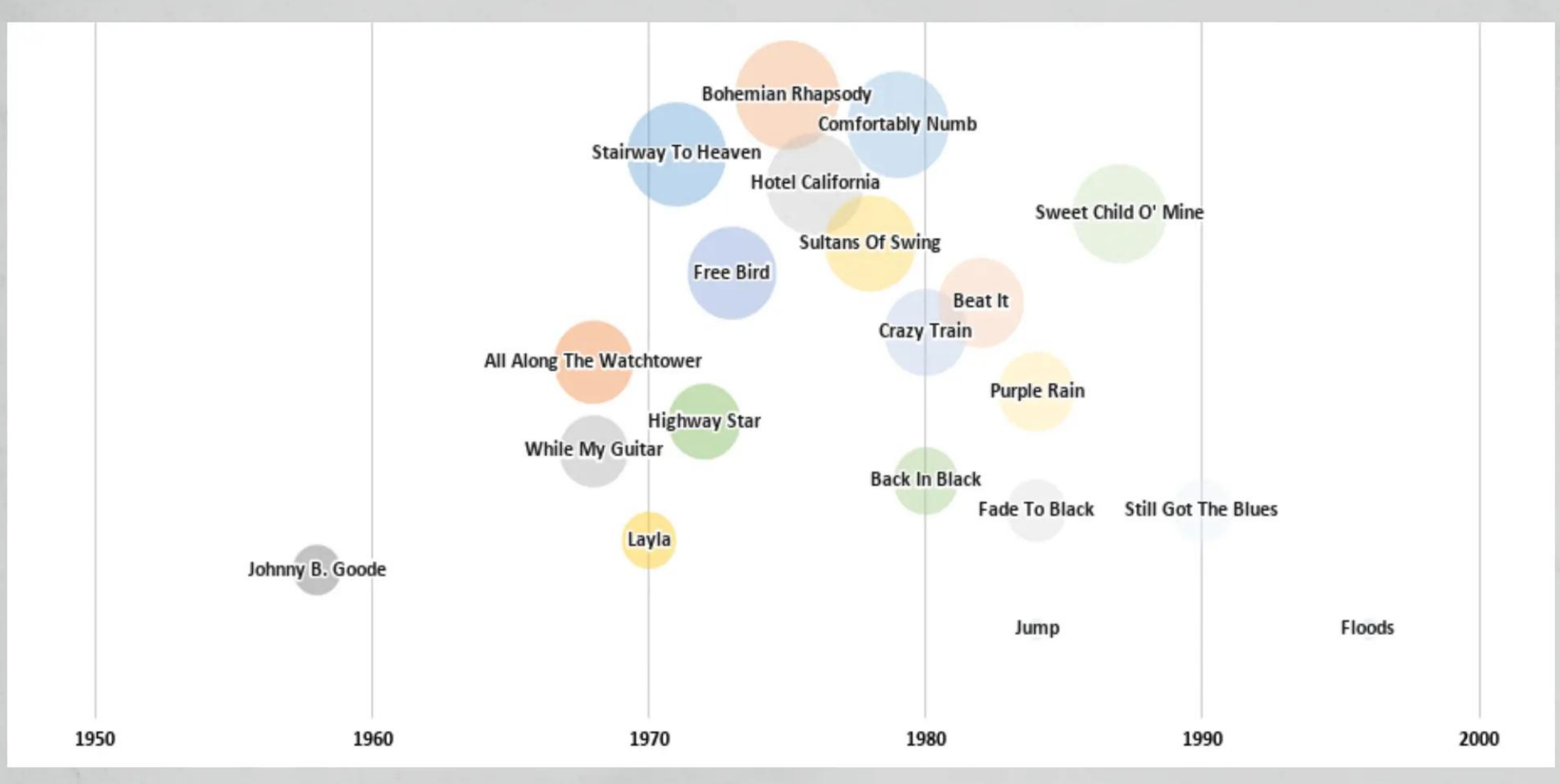
SOLOS SCIENCE

TG'S EPIC SOLOS SCIENCE EXPERIMENT

bit.ly/tg390audio

TG analyses the science behind 20 great solos to find out exactly what makes them so enduring

Back in February 2021, we ran a poll to find out your views on the greatest guitar solo of all time. Then, here at TG Laboratories, we donned our white coats and set about analysing the top 20 lead breaks under our musicological microscope. Our goal was to look at the science behind the solos to find out if there's some secret formula, a foolproof blueprint to replicate the success of these giants of rock. At the end, we created a scientifically proven greatest solo of our own based on our findings (which you can download at the link above). Here are a few of our results.



HOW IT WORKS

- Instrumentals are out! So no *Eruption* or *Cliffs Of Dover* in our experiments
- Our focus is on 'classic' solos, so all songs here are pre-2000

1. POPULARITY

Finding: There's something enduring about the late-'70s guitar style

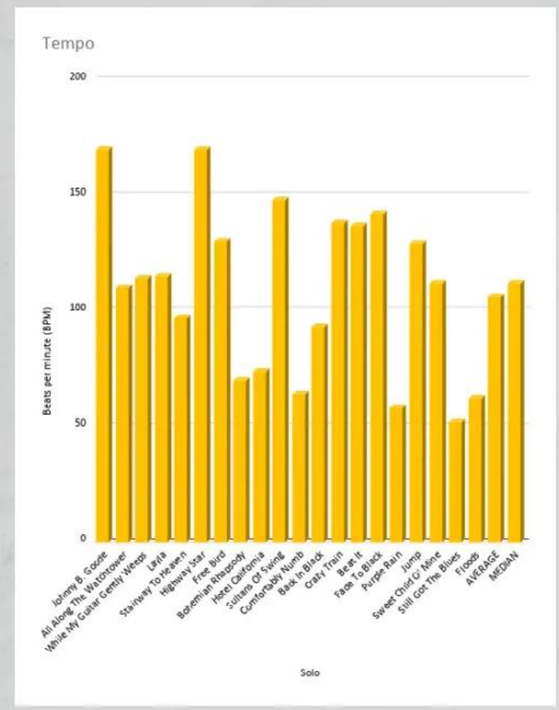
1 Queen – *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975)
2 Pink Floyd – *Comfortably Numb* (1979)
3 Led Zeppelin – *Stairway To Heaven* (1971)
4 Eagles – *Hotel California* (1976)
5 Guns N' Roses – *Sweet Chile O' Mine* (1987)
6 Dire Straits – *Sultans Of Swing* (1978)
7 Lynyrd Skynyrd – *Free Bird* (1973)
8 Michael Jackson – *Beat It* (1982)
9 Ozzy Osbourne – *Crazy Train* (1980)
10 Jimi Hendrix – *All Along The Watchtower* (1968)
11 Prince – *Purple Rain* (1984)
12 Deep Purple – *Highway Star* (1972)
13 The Beatles – *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* (1968)
14 AC/DC – *Back In Black* (1980)
15 Metallica – *Fade To Black* (1984)
16 Gary Moore – *Still Got The Blues* (1990)
17 Derek & The Dominos – *Layla* (1970)
18 Chuck Berry – *Johnny B. Goode* (1958)
19 Van Halen – *Jump* (1984)
20 Pantera – *Floods* (1996)

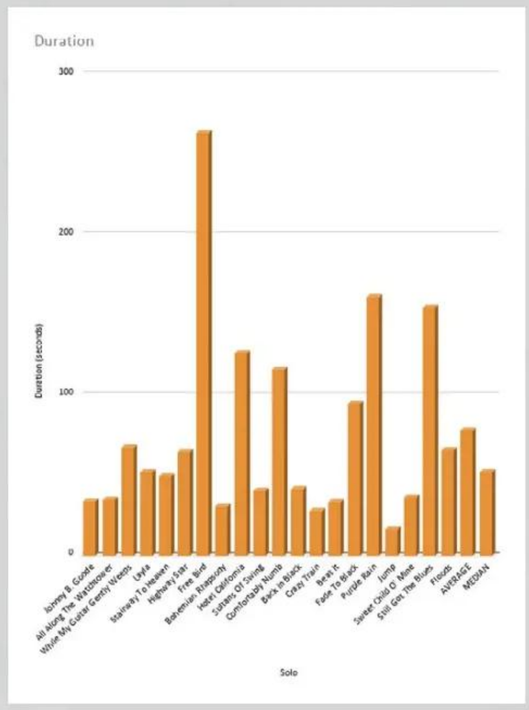
Our solos span 38 years (1958–1996). What is both clear and remarkable is that if you plot the poll popularity in a graph as height (which puts *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Comfortably Numb* at the peak), a bell curve emerges telling us that the mid-to-late-'70s style is not only the midpoint of the era, but the peak of popularity, too. Go '70s!

2. TEMPO AND DURATION

Finding: Any length can work, but short and sweet can succeed

The average tempo of these solos is about 106 bpm, but the songs vary considerably from the stately 58 bpm of *Purple Rain* to about three times faster in *Highway Star*. Duration varies from the short, sweet nine bars of *Bohemian Rhapsody* to the ludicrous 143 bars of *Free Bird* and over half of our solos clock in at under a minute. Long or short, it's no barrier to writing a world-beating solo.

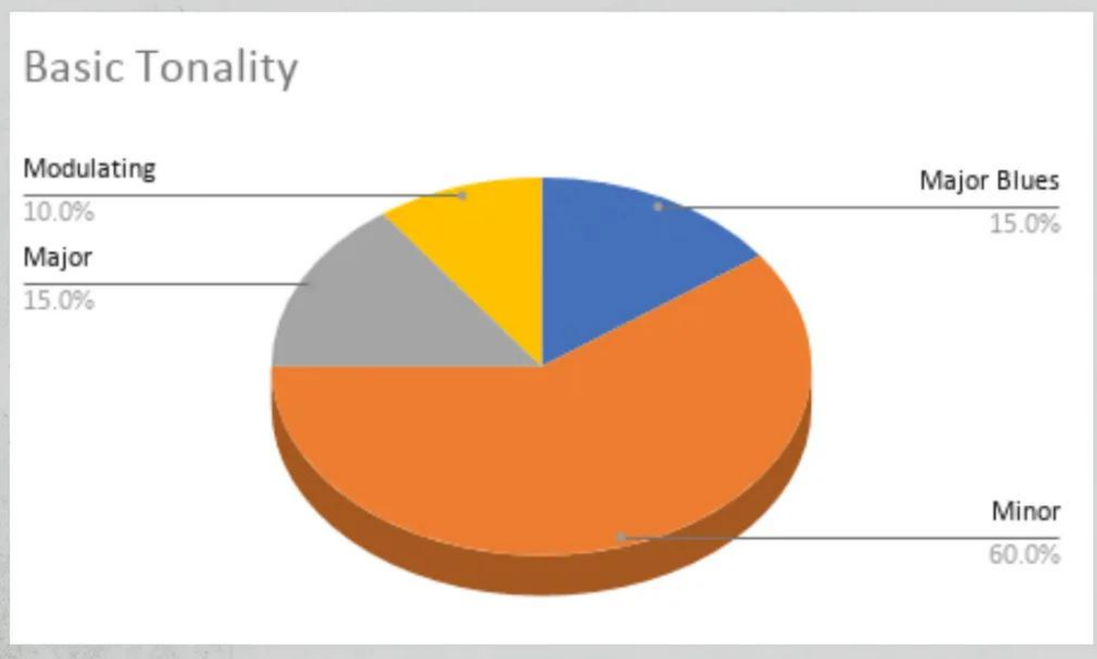




3. KEY SIGNATURES AND SCALES

Finding: Scales are generally minor but sophisticated and 'guitar-friendly'

Minor tonality makes up for more than all other categories put together, and, of these, guitar-friendly keys of A minor, B minor, D minor and E minor are the most common. Given that this is rock, one might think the minor pentatonic scale would be king, but our solos are all sophisticated, using at least seven notes. The Aeolian mode is most common but 30 percent of our solos are Aeolian with extra notes borrowed from other keys/scales.



4. HIGH AND LOW NOTES

Finding: The lowest note tends to happen before the halfway point, and the highest afterwards

Also crucial is when the highest and lowest notes occur – the position and pacing of these peaks and valleys creates the solos' satisfying narrative arcs after all. There's a general pattern, but it's not strict...

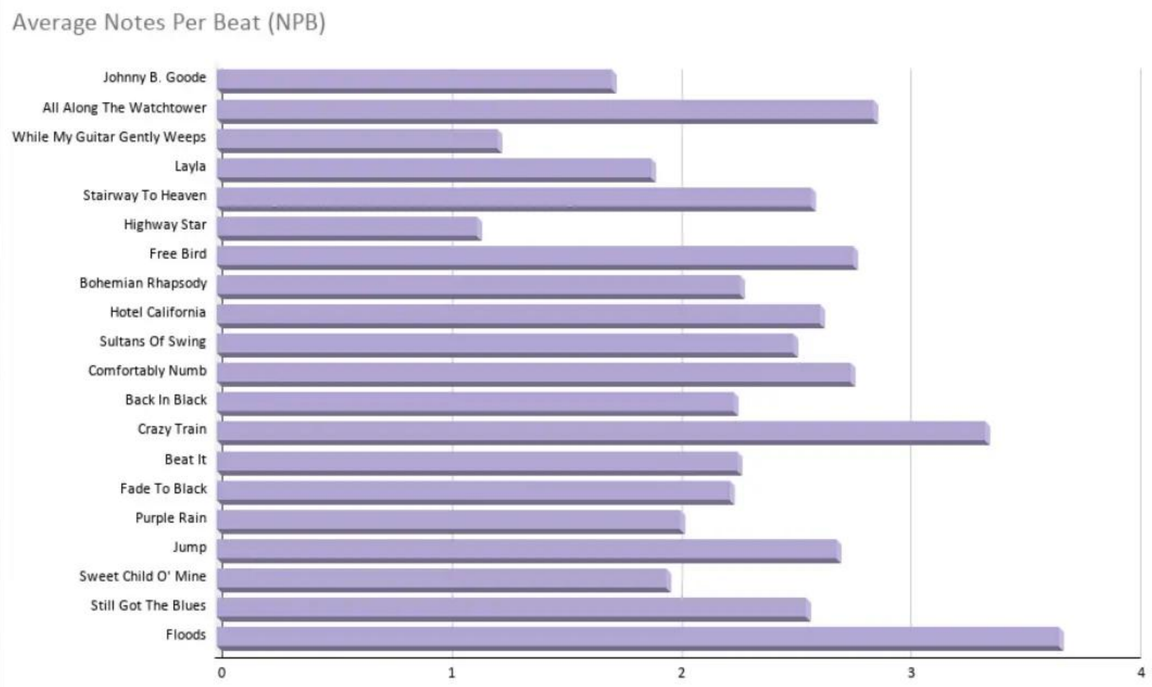
KEY FACTS:

- In 60 percent of our solos, the highest note occurs later than the lowest note.
- In 70 percent of the solos, the highest note happens in the second half, with the average peak at about 61 percent of the way through.
- 70 percent of the solos have their lowest notes in the first half (averaging about 37 percent of the way through).
- Our champion solo, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, violates the first two of these three tendencies – so there are no hard, fast rules!

5. NOTINESS, SHREDDINESS AND BURSTS

Finding: Notiness can be characterised by occasional bursts or by more constant shred!

Now for the matter of number of notes. Yep, we counted the lot! And we're most interested in the average number of notes per beat (NPB), which ranges from as little as one NPB in parts of *Highway Star* to almost four in *Floods* A better measure of shreddiness is the average notes per second (NPS). Here, *Crazy Train* leads the pack (7.7 NPS), and the most relaxed is *Purple Rain* (just below two). However, ditch averages all together and measure the fastest bar and both EVH solos catch up to Rhoads, showing that Eddie's style balances bursts with longer notes.



6. GEAR AND TONE

Finding: Melody and ideas are more important than effects

Les Pauls, Strats and Teles appear most frequently, with humbuckers more commonplace than single-coils and a one-off P-90. Although gain level varies wildly (on the *Floods*-*Sultans* scale), effects are relatively sparse – a little chorus, delay or wah are the most common.

Words Steven Rosen and Amit Sharma

EDDIE VAN HALEN

"You either capture the vibe or you don't!"

The year was 1995, and for TG's ninth issue, having been launched less than a year prior, a 38 year-old Edward Van Halen invited writer Steven Rosen into the pinball room at 5150 Studios for an in-depth look through his evolution as a guitar player, his favourite gear and Van Halen's latest full-length *Balance*. And despite being the biggest guitar hero in the world, Eddie was remarkably modest, talking about creativity and inspiration with the same humbling fear as the rest of us.

"You'd figure after 11 records and all the sh*t I'd done that I would know what I was doing," he laughed. "But I still don't f*ckin' know. I get just as nervous, just as insecure as I always did."

This album signalled a creative and personal rebirth, with what would be singer Sammy Hagar's final album in the group taking more of an acoustic direction, and a short-haired, clean living Eddie enjoying a new chapter in life as a father to the then three-year-old Wolfgang. While being quizzed on his latest work, it's clear he was proud of his achievements without a shade of the overconfidence or arrogance you'd expect from virtuosos of his ilk.

"I don't think I've gotten p*ssed off or depressed about my playing – I've never been one to go, 'Ah, dammit, I could have done that better,'" he confessed. "Even though sometimes I listen back and I go, 'Yeah, there's a little mistake in there that I wish I could have fixed'. But at the same time it ain't that important. You either capture the vibe or you don't. It doesn't have to be sterile and correct."

And *Balance* certainly had its fair share of strong vibes, from the solo in *Feelin'* that Eddie described as "way out" where he was "just winging some silly sh*t" to the song *Take Me Back* with a "little melody thing" he "planned out".

He also looked into the future and gave us an idea of where he saw himself in the decades to come, looking at how The Rolling Stones were still writing, recording and touring. There was still a lot to be done, he pondered, while also acknowledging his personal growth as a songwriter and musician: "I wouldn't give this up for anything," he reflected.



- four months in the studio. We started in June with Bruce
irn; we had been working on and off since last October with Al.
always in there dicking around, just putting down little ideas
d there. But we didn't start actually in the studio with Bruce
ne. Then through June, July, August, September and October
e mixing. It's the quickest we've ever done a record – outside
ery first one.

take input at all from any of the music going on you?
bit, you know, I hear the radio every now and again. Every
rn MTV on it's not even music anymore. So I don't know.

eresting that Van Halen rarely is played on MTV except r videos like *Jump* and yet you've obviously survived.
y way, I always think we have. We did get signed to Warner
ng punk and disco.

eople look for a new Van Halen album to...
em back to the ground in some
hs). To get them out of the
ust mark my words, every ten or
rs it just goes in a cycle. And it's
t ten or fifteen years since punk

at you've been producing ?
orking with a guy named Rich
inger/songwriter who plays
been trying to get something
him. The guy is very talented
n't fit into what's going on right
think it's such bullshit, because
od music and when people hear
Wow, I really like this.' But you
anywhere because record
ren't signing anything like that.
it's baffling.
't look the part, he doesn't look
d roll *anything* – he looks like
uy. He lives in Utah, and he's just very talented and plays
, something like a cross between Tori Amos and that
Walkin' In Memphis (Ed – Mark Cohn). It makes you
on John or Billy Joel could get a record deal if they
– you know what I mean? Record companies say,
on't hear it,' or 'We're not signing acts like this now.'
isn't his time...

ten back to your playing on *Balance*, do you feel ?
ot of things I do or otherwise I wouldn't do them; it's
and it's fun within the unit of the band. Yeah, it's
in there and blow. I don't think I've ever gotten like
pressed about my playing – I've never been one to go,
"Ah, goddammit, I could have done that better." Even though sometimes I listen back and I go, "Yeah, there's a little mistake in there that I wish I could have fixed." But at the same time it ain't that important. You know what I mean? You either capture the vibe or you don't; it doesn't have to be sterile and correct.

The feeling people get from listening to a solo is probably more important than the feeling you get from playing it?
Yeah, it's just kind of the way I felt at the time I played it. It doesn't matter if it's perfect or not.

Did *Balance* capture where you were musically at that time?
I think for some things I was out of balance, some things I was in balance. Like the solo in *Feelin* was way out; I was just winging some silly shit. Whereas other stuff was more uniform. Like on *Take Me Back*; I planned that out, that little melody thing.

The instrumental track, *Baluhitherium*, is something different for you. It reminds me a little of a Jeff Beck track.
It didn't start out being an instrumental track, it's just nobody kinda liked where we were going with it. So we just left the vocal off – and just like basically any Van Halen song, you take the vocals off and the music still holds up.

And here's the proof because this one held up. And we thought, 'Oh fuck it, let's put it out like that.' It's like what we were doing with the singing, with the vocal, it just didn't add to it. It just didn't add shit to it so we left it right off.

> "If I had to call it quits I'd say it's been a lot of fun... But I wouldn't give it up for anything."

And that's you doing a drum solo on *Doin' Time*?
It's really not a drum solo, it's just a little intro to the song. And I do those weird 'monk' sounds at the very top of the record (Sound consists of Edward basically scratching guitar strings and making miscellaneous noises).

Does the title of the record have anything to do with you and where you are in your life?
It has to do with everything, and it can mean to you whatever you want it to mean.

Nobody knows better than I do how much you hate to do interviews. So, if this was the last interview you ever did, what thoughts would you like to leave with the public?
It's all been a gas, it's been a lot of fun. It feels great to be able to do what I do and have people like it. Or more importantly, for *me* to like what I do (laugh). How many people do you know who go to work and really like what they do? I'm just blessed in that respect.

There was a special on television the other day about the Rolling Stones and how most of them are over 50 and still making music.
Oh, yeah, in that sense they're paving the way for us. That means now I can do it when I'm 50. And even if the Stones stopped, I'd still be doing it. We're not going away (laughs). When you compare us to people like the Stones it just means we've been very consistent and we're getting great fans who believe in us. Still... I don't really feel like I've done that much. There's still a lot to be done and I think I'm gettin' better.

So, what follows *Balance*?
Well, I think this is one of the best records we've made. You know? And, yeah, there's still so much more to do. But if I had to call it quits now I'd say it's been a lot of fun. I mean I would have to *die* in order not to do this. But then – hey – I couldn't play golf either! Still, I wouldn't give this up for anything. Obviously if I couldn't make music anymore, I wouldn't be living. So, I wouldn't be doing anything else. Cool? Cool. TG

TG On the CD

EDDIE ON THE TGCD

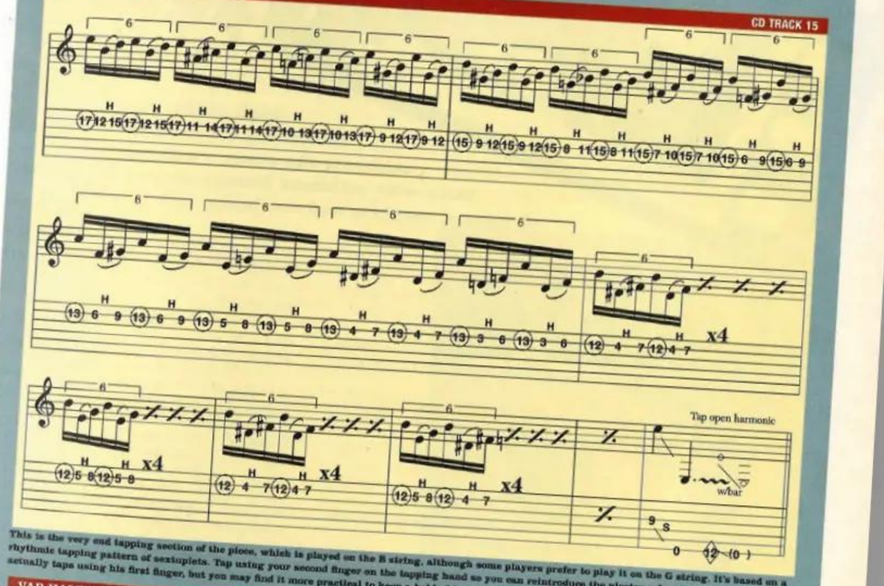
Van Halen's influential first album took the music world by storm. JIMI SAVAGE talks technique...

I'VE transcribed two short excerpts for you to try. If you want full versions you can get books of every Van Halen album (including *Balance*) from Music Mail on 01474 813813. These versions are slightly simplified to make them more 'gig-friendly' – eg Eddie sometimes plays septuplet taps instead of sextuplets – but these licks should give you a good insight into his style.

TRACK 15
The end section of *Eruption*, as shown in the notation. Each tap is followed by a pull-off.

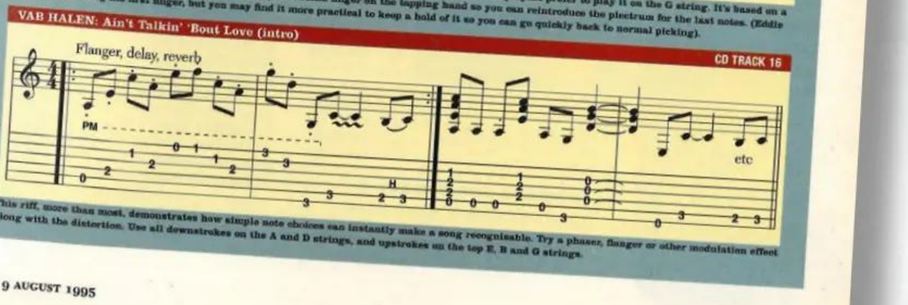
TRACK 16
Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love intro riff, as shown in the notation, with MIDI band backing. The guitar was played through a Digitech ValveFX with flanger, distortion, reverb and delay.

VAN HALEN: Eruption (outro) — CD TRACK 15



This is the very end tapping section of the piece, which is played on the B string, although some players prefer to play it on the G string. It's based on a rhythmic tapping pattern of sextuplets. Tap using your second finger on the tapping hand so you can reintroduce the plectrum for the last notes. (Eddie actually taps using his first finger, but you may find it more practical to keep a hold of it so you can go quickly back to normal picking).

VAN HALEN: Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love (intro) — CD TRACK 16



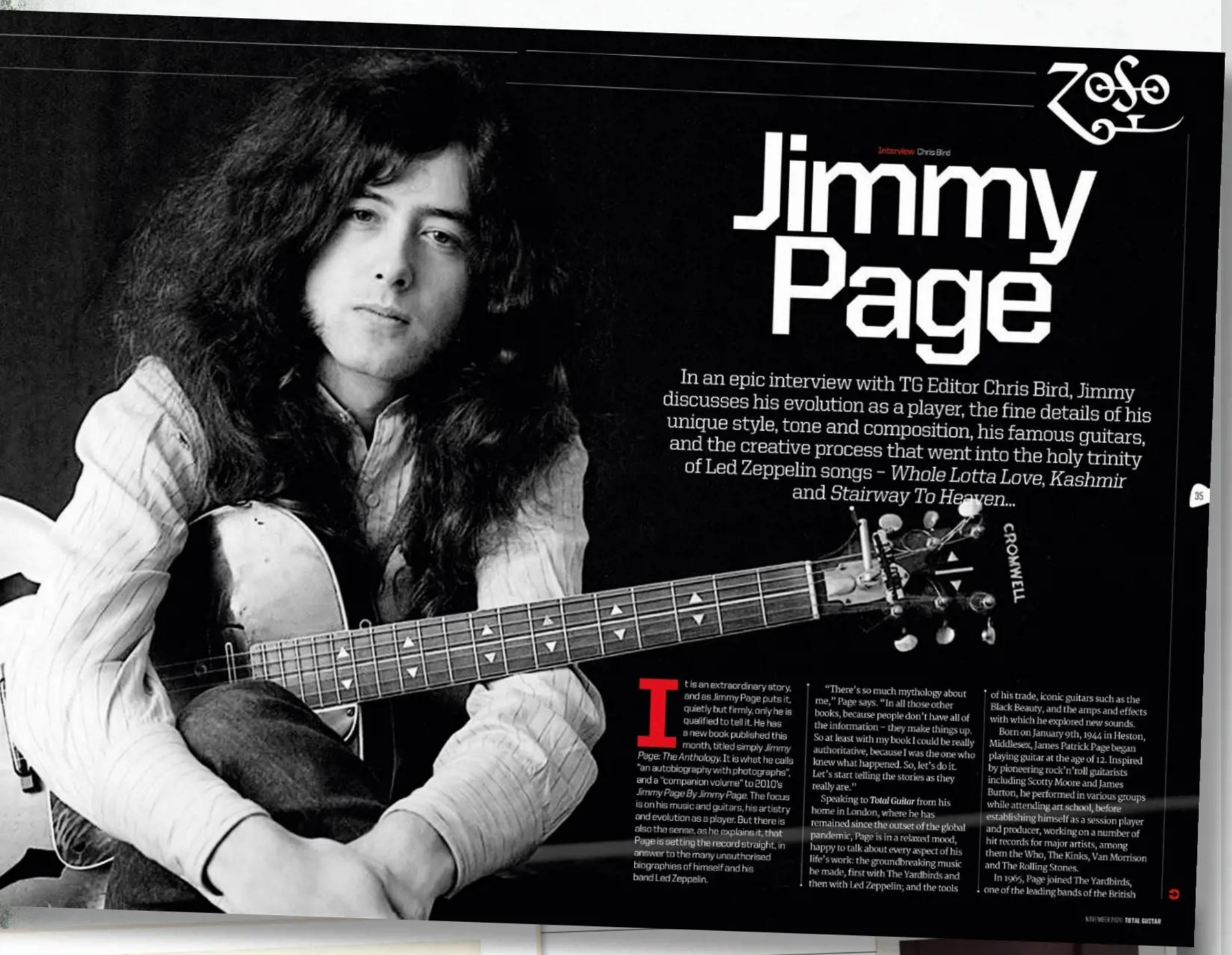
This riff, more than most, demonstrates how simple note choices can instantly make a song recognisable. Try a phaser, flanger or other modulation effect along with the distortion. Use all downstrokes on the A and D strings, and upstrokes on the top E, B and G strings.

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Words Chris Bird

JIMMY PAGE

"I was using what was really meaty!"







It's an incredible story.
Well, these things don't reappear, do they? It is a great story insofar as I'm still paying tribute to it, if you like, the one that was lost, even though Gibson made an edition of it. And yeah, then the first one turned up afterwards, and it was amazing, fantastic.

On the subject of replicas, last year Fender released both Custom Shop and production line recreations of your famed Telecaster. Can you tell us a bit about your original instrument?
The thing about that is Jeff Beck gave me a Telecaster, one that he played in The Yardbirds for a while, but I was still doing sessions, and he gave me that as a gift. And once I went into The Yardbirds I was playing that Telecaster. Bit by bit I started to customize it. I put some mirrors on it. I wanted to really make the guitar my own. People had started painting guitars at that point and I thought, well, I'd like to paint mine and really consecrate it, so that guitar is absolutely my own. So I went about painting it [with the Dragon artwork] – all that art school training didn't finally go to waste [laughs]! This was a guitar I was using in The Yardbirds, so when Jeff left I had the one with the mirrors and then I painted it. And that painted guitar goes through from The Yardbirds through *Led Zeppelin*.

The finish on this Telecaster was damaged, wasn't it?
Well, somebody mucked up the painting on it. I needed to repaint it, let's put it that way. Somebody had sort of vandalised it in my absence. So [restoring] it was always something I wanted to do. I had to take it back to the natural wood.

And the guitar was renovated for an exhibition of guitars at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2019.
What happened was that the people from the Met came to my house and they had a blueprint floorplan of how they wanted to do the exhibits and they explained that they wanted the original instruments, and I thought here's the time to actually [restore] it, because that guitar was going from the Yardbirds to 'Zeppelin I', for God's sake. So this is the time to do it. So I got in touch with Fender. I got a graphic artist to help me map it out, so that I could paint by numbers and then build it up. So that was the way I approached it.

Then, of course, came Fender's reissues...
Then the idea was I'd like to do a run of it, and Fender said they were really interested in doing it. Other people were saying, 'you don't have to do it with Fender', but I thought, no, if it's going to be honest it has to be a Fender thing, they're going to measure it up and get that neck which is a really unusual neck, all manner of different things about it that needed attention paid to it.

You were right to go back to Fender, because their Custom Shop is so good at this...
Oh gosh, yeah. I worked with a guy there called Paul Waller, and he was a dream to work with, such a cool guy. I saw the machinist stamp out the plates that go over the screws that hold the neck to the body of the Telecaster and the Strat. Jesus Christ, it was an amazing place. In a factory, I didn't think that spirit existed anymore, but it jolly well does at Fender. The spirit in there. It's like they know what they're making is something that is going to be really loved by somebody. Not only that, it's going to be like their buddy, if you like. And not only that, that combination of the instrument and the musician – that can make people happy. So they've got the right attitude. It's a really noble thing that they're doing, as opposed to something like making a car part in a factory. It was a great experience.

Les Paul 'Number One' and 'Number Two' are your famous sunburst Standards. What are the differences between them in terms of setup, and more than anything how they feel to you when you're playing them?
The first one has got quite a shallow neck, and that's how it was when I had it. I've often wondered if it had been re-finished when I had it, by Joe Walsh, who sold it to me – whether he had re-finished it. He had more than one Les Paul at the time and he'd obviously decided to let this one go. But this was the neck that was on it. On the other one, they all played differently, they weren't consistent on the 50s ones. There's a definite difference in the feel and the tension between the two of them. I'm not so sure whether the neck is quite so shallow on the Number Two, but it's not one of those big clunky ones. And tonally it's different as well. However, that's the one I started to experiment on, so that I could do all various combinations, [coil-tapping] with the push-pull switch.

ON THE TELE
"I'd like to paint mine and really consecrate it, so that guitar is absolutely my own."

"JEFF BECK GAVE ME THE TELE HE WAS PLAYING IN THE YARDBIRDS AS A GIFT"

JULY 2020 TOTAL GUITAR

In an exclusive interview with TG editor Chris Bird in 2020, Led Zeppelin legend Jimmy Page discussed his evolution as a player, the fine details of his unique style, tone and composition, and the creative process that went into the holy trinity of Zeppelin songs – *Whole Lotta Love*, *Kashmir* and *Stairway To Heaven*.

"With *Whole Lotta Love*, that was clearly going to be the track that everybody was going to go to," he said. "If somebody plays that riff it brings a smile to people's faces." He also recalled his gear choices for that song and its parent album *Led Zeppelin II*. "I was using the Super Beatle amps with the [Rickenbacker] Transonic cabinets. So that's exactly what's on *Whole Lotta Love*. The first album's got the Supro; the second album, I wanted to the change the whole sound character, so that's what I was using. I was using what was really meaty, and what I was using on stage, what I'd arrived at once I had the Les Paul Standard."

For *Kashmir*, from the 1975 double album *Physical Graffiti*, Jimmy favoured a Danelectro. "Because it's hollow-bodied, put together with plywood, it sounded phenomenal," he said. "I started to write things on it like *Kashmir* because I was used to playing it in the DADGAD tuning, so *Kashmir* came out on that guitar, and *In My Time Of Dying*. They're both on the same album. So clearly I was using it in [altered] tunings."

And for the recording of his masterpiece, *Stairway To Heaven*, he used two 12-strings, the Fender Electric XII and the Vox Phantom XII. "The Vox one, I had that in The Yardbirds, and I got the Fender one a little later. I wanted to use both, so I'd have one [panned] left and one right. There is a slight difference in the sound of them, so that bit in the fanfare that leads into the solo with all the 12s, that's tracking both the Vox and the Fender."

And that last comment spoke volumes about the man and what made Led Zeppelin the greatest rock band of them all. It was Jimmy's genius as a songwriter, his prowess as a player, but also his attention to detail as a producer and arranger. On every level, a visionary.

“It’s highly technical music. You have to work *really* hard!”

Words Jenna Scaramanga
Photos Olly Curtis

Bluegrass virtuoso **Molly Tuttle** on the art of super-fast flatpicking. “Eventually,” she says, “my brain would catch up with my fingers!”

With strong songs, engaging storytelling and phenomenal technique, Molly Tuttle has established herself as bluegrass’s premier young talent. Her last two albums – 2022’s *Crooked Tree* and 2023’s *City Of Gold* – both won Grammys and she has twice been Bluegrass Guitarist of the Year, the first woman to win the title.

Tell us about your most recent EP...
It’s called *Into The Wild*. I’ve been working on writing a whole new batch of songs, but *Into The Wild* felt more like a continuation of the last record. It has two new original songs on it with my bandmates in Golden Highway. There’s also a stripped down version of *Stranger Things*, a reworked song from our last record, *City Of Gold*. Then we have a new cover of *Here In California* from Kate Wolf, one of my favourite California songwriters. That’s a tribute to my musical upbringing. My dad sings on it, and also my friend AJ Lee, who used to sing with me when we were growing up. Then there are covers from the last couple years that haven’t officially been on any release yet: Jefferson Airplane’s *White Rabbit* and Olivia Rodriguez’s *Good For You*.

In rock and metal, shredding can be divisive. Virtuoso bluegrass players don’t seem to get the same negative reactions. Why do you think that is?
When I hear a heavy metal guitar player there is that raw emotion that can maybe sound a little angry, whereas I feel like bluegrass is more friendly competition – who can play the fastest, who can play the hottest licks or whatever. It’s on acoustic instruments and it is very happy sounding music, even if a lot of the songs have sad lyrics. It’s like folk music in that you can be a complete beginner and enter a jam circle, and as long as you know a handful of songs you’re okay. It is kind of an accessible music in that way. But then to get to playing on stage or being one of the prominent people in the genre you do have to work really hard because there’s that speed element and it’s a highly technical type of music.

Even the fastest bluegrass lines are very melodic. How do you do that?
You definitely do play to the chords a little bit more than other styles. Like when I went to Berklee, I couldn’t play very well over, like, jazz changes. But then I would meet jazz guitar players who are like, ‘Whoa, that’s so crazy! Every note you’re playing is in the chord, and you’re incorporating melody while playing fast!’ It seems a lot more simple to me to just play over three major chords, but for people who are more used to playing modes over jazz changes, that was weird to them.

How much of what you do is improvised?
It depends if I’m playing my own set. When I’m playing a show, I have so much to think about. I tell stories between the songs. I want to make it an entertaining show, and I’m singing. So I do fall into similar solos, or at least I know I can fall back on a lick that I know will work, just because there’s so many other variables when I’m carrying the show. But there are always songs in the set where I’m totally improvising. If we throw in a new song that we haven’t done before, then that’s completely improvised. Usually, if I’m playing with other people or sitting in, that’s all improvised. I used



MOLLY TUTTLE

to work stuff out for my albums, but recently I've started either totally improvising it using the take that I played in the studio, or if I wasn't happy with it, improvising takes until I get one I really like. Sometimes I'll work it out in the studio. I'll play a take and if I like part of it, I'll try to play it again, and maybe save the good part from the take before, and flesh it out that way.

Did it take a lot of trial and error to develop your technique?

My dad was my first guitar teacher. I settled on my technique pretty early on because if I was holding the pick weirdly or doing it in a way that would mess things up for me later down the road, he would be like, 'Here's a better way'. I didn't spend a lot of time on it after those first couple years.

Is there one accepted technique for bluegrass, or is there a lot of variety?

There's quite a bit. A lot of people are self-taught or learn from watching different guitar players and who all do it differently. Someone might study Tony Rice's technique, or David Greer or Clarence White. Brian Sutton is someone who teaches a lot, and he holds the pick in a totally different way than I do. That works for him and will probably work for all his students, too. My technique is not exactly the same as my dad's but pretty similar. There are a lot of people you'll see anchor their ring finger and pinky finger on the guitar body. My fingers are more curled in and my wrist is resting on the guitar a little bit more.

Did you struggle to develop your speed at all?

IT MIGHT GET LOUD...

"The fast songs are when you need to play your loudest," Molly says

Speed for me came more easily. I would practice with a metronome and just play faster and faster each day, try to push my speed to where sometimes I would play faster than I could really play it cleanly. After doing that, for a couple days, eventually my brain would kind of catch up with my fingers, and I would get faster. The thing I plateaued on was learning about the fingerboard, improvising, being able to play new ideas. Sometimes I'd get stuck playing the same things over and over again. I still feel like that sometimes, but now I just see it more as my style, like I have a sound that is my own. It's okay if I play some of the same licks or play things that I gravitate towards, because that's what I like. I didn't know any music theory growing up. When I went to Berklee I finally learned the notes on the fingerboard and different scales, and worked on incorporating that. I was just playing by ear before that.



"THE ONLY WAY TO PRACTICE SOMETHING FAST IS TO PRACTICE IT WHERE YOU CAN'T ACTUALLY PLAY IT VERY WELL"

"BLUEGRASS IS FRIENDLY COMPETITION—WHO CAN PLAY THE FASTEST, WHO CAN PLAY THE HOTTEST LICKS"

That's really interesting, because it's the opposite of what many of us were taught.
My dad would say, 'You have to play a little faster than you can actually play if you ever want to get faster'. He had so many students who would hit that plateau of like, 'Oh, I'm afraid to play any faster than this', and they would just never gain any speed. I think in a way he was experimenting with me and my brothers, like, 'What if I have them play these pieces extremely fast – to where they sound super messy at first?' It did work. We would practice something super, super fast to a metronome, and push it past our abilities. That really helped us gain speed over time. I guess he had the idea of, 'Well, if you are always practicing slow, then you're not going to ever practice things fast'. The only way to practice something fast is to practice it where you can't actually play it very well. But it's great to practice things slow, too. If there's one little three- or four-note section that you can't do up to speed, then play that tiny little section slowly, figure out what's going on, and troubleshoot it, instead of just practicing the entire thing. It's important to be super effective with figuring out what what's actually holding you back.

Are there any secrets to playing fast?
I've arranged whole guitar pieces that took me a long time to get up to speed or, but I realised that with a lot of my favourite guitar players, their playing isn't really like that. They find things that sound complicated, but they're actually easy to play. I think that's really an art in itself to find things that are secretly simple, but sound like, 'Wow! How do they do that?' Like David Greer's solos – they're hot. They are hard to play. But I'm always surprised at how much easier it is to actually play them than it sounds. He's so good at finding things that you can play really fluidly.

Most players get lighter as they get faster. How do you maintain the power?
That's one of the big struggles of acoustic guitar flatpicking. I feel like the fast songs are when you need to play your loudest. When you play a fast bluegrass song, everyone's playing as loud and as hard as they can, and the guitar's the quietest instrument. You have to bring up the volume, which makes it harder to play clean and fast. I use an incredibly heavy pick. Even other guitarists I talk to who play similar styles are like, 'Whoa, I couldn't ever play with that!' I use these Dunlop 208 Jazztone picks.

Your clawhammer technique uses aggressive downstrokes with the backs of your fingernails. Do you have to do anything to protect them?
It wears them down a bit, but I don't really do anything because I'm not sitting around playing that way for hours a day. Usually in the show we'll do one or two songs. Sometimes we work up a new clawhammer song and I might be playing that a few times throughout the day, but usually when I'm warming up I'm flatpicking. I just feel like the clawhammer style for me is ingrained. I don't need to sit around practicing it all day. If that were my main style I would probably have to do something about my nails. One or two times I've had a tear in a cuticle or a little cut on my finger, but it wasn't a disaster.

Tell us about the dreadnought you play.
Yeah, that's my main guitar on the cover of *City Of Gold*. It's from Pre-War Guitars Company, made in North Carolina. They take these old 1930s Martins and Gibsons and model their guitars after them. They make them like the old guitars with just a few changes, like mine has a truss rod so I can adjust it on the road. That's the perfect balance for me. It sounds a little bit like an older guitar, but it's a lot more road-friendly. I just started using it on my records, too, because I really liked how it sounds and it's the guitar I'm the most used to playing. It's the one I played on most of *City Of Gold* and the new tracks.

Is a dreadnought the bluegrass standard would you say?
Yeah, basically everyone plays one. Occasionally, you'll see people pull out a 000. I guess 90 or 95% of bluegrass guitar players are playing a dreadnought. It really cuts through the band, and it's pretty resonant and takes up a lot of space, which is good when you're playing with four instruments that are a little louder than you.

Do you use lighter strings or a low action to help with playing fast?
I use medium [13 gauge] strings, but I do keep my action pretty low. I've experimented with light strings, but I find that when I'm playing hard it just gets too buzzy and thin. The struggle for me is I really like when my action's low, but if it gets too low, then I get the same buzzy-ness. I have to keep it somewhere in the middle. By bluegrass standards, I keep mine pretty low because there's this macho thing like, 'We got to have high action and we have to use these heavy strings!'

How do you get a good amplified acoustic tone?
I go through so many different things to try to get the tone I want. Pretty much the one thing I've used for the past few years is my Grace Audio Felix preamp. It doesn't add a whole lot of tone, but there's a lot of different options with it and it has two channels that worked when I was using two different pickups. Now I have the LR Baggs HiFi pick up and they've now installed a little mic in it. It's still going through one line, but inside the guitar I can adjust how much mic I want to use. I struggle with the internal mic. It sounds good but since it's inside the guitar, me moving the guitar at all on my shirt is really loud. So we've turned down the mic and we just use a little bit of it. I'm running it through a Fishman Aura. Fishman modelled my guitar through all these mics, and it's supposed to take my pickup and model it after my guitar being played through mic. It's not perfect. I hear back sometimes and I'm like, 'That sounds like a pickup.' But it's better than nothing.

Molly's Into The Wild EP is out now.

21 WAYS TO GET MORE FROM YOUR ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Acoustic guitars are arguably simpler than electrics, but there's still a wealth of details involved in playing like a pro...

Words Jenna Scaramanga

1. KNOW YOUR BODY TYPES

If you're shopping for an acoustic, realise that the different shapes and sizes of body are not only about what's most comfortable, but also what style of music they most suit. Dreadnoughts are the go-to for big strumming and bluegrass picking, while smaller bodies are often better for bringing out delicate fingerstyle parts. That said, if you love a particular guitar, don't be put off if it isn't the standard choice for your genre. Just be aware of the different sounds each shape can produce.

2. CHANGE YOUR PICK GAUGE

Changing your pick is the most direct way to change your tone. The thickness and the shape of the tip both impact the sound. Generally, thinner picks have more attack and less of the fundamental note, although very thick picks produce more upper harmonic 'chirp' as they contact the string. If you want a new tone, buy a variety pack of picks and try them out side by side.

3. EXPERIMENT WITH PICK MATERIAL

Delrin (as used in Dunlop 500) is smooth and warm. Celluloid (used by Fender and many other brands) is bright with a lot of click in the attack. Nylon has a gentle tone with probably the least pick click. Ultex, meanwhile, has both brightness and warmth for a very balanced sound. Which is right for you will depend on the song, the way you pick and your guitar's natural tone.

4. TRY DIFFERENT STRINGS

The most common strings are 80/20 bronze (brighter) and phosphor bronze (warmer). Many acoustic guitarists believe it's worth using heavy strings to get the wood to vibrate, but lighter strings allow a higher proportion of harmonic overtones relative to the fundamental with less low end. Another theory is that larger body styles benefit more from bigger strings. It's always worth experimenting to find what you like.

5. USE VARIOUS PICKING GRIPS

Changing the way you hold your pick will not only change the feel, but also the angle your pick approaches the strings at, and therefore the tone. If you want more attack and harmonics, angling the pick at 45 degrees to the string could help, while having the pick parallel to the strings gives a bolder, rounder tone. Holding the pick on the side or the pad of your index finger, with thumb and middle (a la noted acoustic player Eddie Van Halen!) or with all three will give different feels and sounds.



6. VARY YOUR PICKING MOTION

Guitar teachers sometimes insist that picking motions must come from the wrist, but if you watch the pros carefully, you'll see it's more complex than that. Strumming can come from the wrist or rotating forearm. Even the elbow, which some teachers say should never be used, can work effectively as long as you're not holding unnecessary tension. It's rare to see an acoustic strummer with a completely still elbow. Try different things until you get comfortable.

7. DON'T DIG TOO DEEP!

Your strumming should sound effortless, even when it's loud and intense. If it feels like you're having to fight to get over each string, the tone and timing will suffer. The most likely cause is burying the pick too far below the strings. Think of the pick as brushing over the top of the strings rather than colliding with each one.

8. BUY A BRIDGE PIN PULLER

If you've ever yanked at a bridge pin for minutes, only to have it explode out of the guitar and vanish under a sofa, you probably won't need much persuasion here. Pulling bridge pins without losing or damaging them is an annoying job, and a dedicated pin puller can save you frustration every time. Most string winders have a small indent to make the job a little easier, but dedicated tools like those by Martin, Music Nomad, or Allparts can make it a breeze.

9. GET YOUR STRING HEIGHT RIGHT

String height is always a compromise. Lower is almost always easier to play, but will buzz if it gets too low, while higher often sounds better. Because most acoustics don't have adjustable saddles, lowering the action yourself is not a great idea for the inexperienced. Raising it is less problematic though. Remove the white saddle from the bridge (it should lift out without a fight), drop in a thin strip of card or hardwood maple, then place the saddle back in. It's easily reversible if you don't like it.

10. BUY A GOOD CAPO

If you think capos are just for people who can't play barre chords, you're missing out. A capo will allow you to play things that are physically impossible even for Tommy Emmanuel. A good quality one will also give a tone similar to that of open strings, so you can get the great tone of open chords regardless of what key you're playing in.



11. CHANGE WHERE YOU STRUM

Changing where you strum on the strings makes a big difference to acoustic tone. It's easy just to let your picking hand land wherever feels natural and never examine it. Try instead to be intentional about where you're picking. Moving from the bridge to the fingerboard is as dramatic as switching pickup positions on an electric. Try accenting a change with a purposeful raked downstroke beside the bridge.

12. TRY FINGERSTYLE

Fingerstyle playing on acoustic guitar is older than flatpicking, so, if you're only ever using a plectrum, you're missing out on your guitar's potential. You can use flesh or fingernails, although steel strings can be tough on nails, so many advanced fingerpickers use false nails. Use your thumb to pluck the low E, A, and D strings. You may want to use just one finger at first, and you can achieve a lot of beautiful parts without getting more complicated than that.

13. TRY A THUMBPICK

If you like fingerstyle parts but miss the attack of a plectrum, a thumbpick is a great tool. Because you no longer need to grip the pick, your index finger gets freed up for plucking. Travis picking works especially well with a thumbpick. Check out Chet Atkins to see its potential.

14. CHECK OUT HYBRID PICKING – THE BEST OF BOTH

Hybrid picking is the art of combining regular flatpicking with fingerstyle, by using your middle, ring, and occasionally pinky fingers to pluck notes the plectrum can't reach. You'll probably have to slightly change your pick angle to get the other fingers comfortably in position, but switching between this and regular picking technique will be a breeze. Tommy Emmanuel, Mike Dawes and Richard Thompson have all used this approach.

15. GET A QUALITY DI

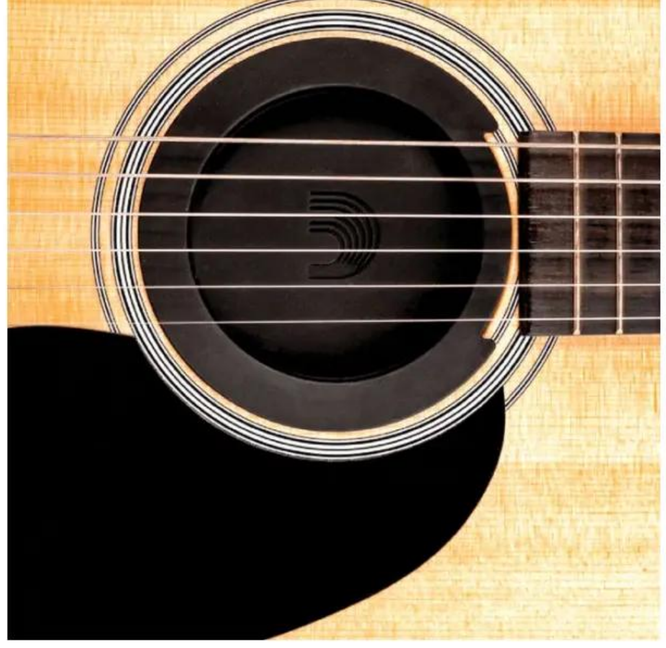
When plugging in your piezo-equipped acoustic, the difference a good DI (direct injection, meaning plugging straight into a PA or mixer) box can make is enormous. The LR Baggs Para Acoustic DI also includes a preamp and EQ, and is a classic. The Fishman Platinum Para DI has bags of flexibility, although it's not cheap. Caline, Behringer, and Harley Benton, meanwhile, have budget-friendly options that will make you sound better without causing unpleasant alerts from your mobile banking app.

16. FIT A SECOND STRAP BUTTON

Many acoustics only come with one strap button at the base of the body, leaving you tie the strap to the headstock if you want to stand up. Many players find that quite ungainly, and if you're one of them, adding a strap button where the neck joins the body will improve things no end. If you're confident drilling a small pilot hole it's a quick DIY job, but look at some other guitars first for the best position.

17. SLIDE

Setting up an electric guitar with the high action and heavy strings needed for slide is an off-putting barrier of entry. Happily, most acoustic guitars already have a setup that will work for slide. Glass and brass slides have a mellow tone that sounds great on acoustic, the ideal place for your first slide excursions. And if your acoustic's action is on the low side, simply opt for a lightweight slide such as Taylor's Ebony Slide or the MagSlide MS-2, which are sure to put less downward pressure on those strings.



18. DESTROY FEEDBACK

If you're playing live, you'll find that acoustic guitars just love to break into uncontrollable feedback. Covering the soundhole is a cheap and easy solution. For the cheapest fix, you can just use duct tape, but if you'd rather preserve your instrument's finish and have a reusable option, feedback busters can be bought from under £10.

19. RELAX YOUR FINGERS

Chances are, when you first tried playing chords on a steel string acoustic, you had to push with all your might just to get a clear note without buzz. Many players never get out of this habit, and you could be wearing yourself (and your frets!) out unnecessarily by over-squeezing. Try fingering a chord and applying as little pressure as possible with each finger while still getting a clear tone. If you notice this feels more relaxed, practise this regularly until you form a new habit. This goes double for barre chords!

20. TRY GETTING YOUR THUMB OVER THE NECK

The wide fingerboard on classical guitars makes thumb-over hand positions impractical, but you can happily fret notes on the low E string with your thumb on most other guitars. Try adding your thumb to the 2nd fret while playing an open D major chord for a big D/F♯, or fretting the lowest note in E shape barre chords with your thumb like Hendrix. It's a great alternative if you get fatigued playing barre chords.

21. EXPERIMENT WITH IMPULSE RESPONSES

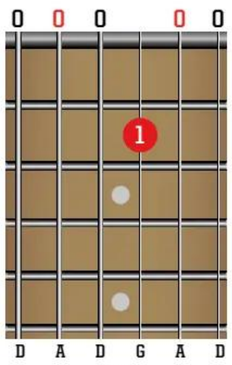
If you use a piezo pickup, you've doubtless struggled to get a natural plugged-in tone. Impulse responses (IRs) have changed the game for speaker cabinet simulation and they're doing a similar thing for amplified acoustic guitar. You can add them to your recorded tone with a plugin, or the Fishman Aura Spectrum, NUX Optima Air, and LR Baggs Voiceprint DI are all dedicated pedals for the purpose.

ESSENTIAL ALTERED TUNINGS

Learn how retuning your guitar can fuel your creativity with our pick of the most useful altered tunings

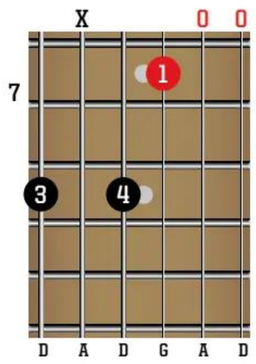
DADGAD

First up is the ever popular DADGAD tuning. It's harmonically somewhat 'ambiguous' because it contains stable-sounding perfect 4ths (G), perfect 5ths (A) and the root note (D) – but no 3rds to make it major or minor. Strummed all at once, the open strings are a big, bold Dsus4 chord. It's a de facto standard alternative to traditional E standard (EADGBE) tuning amongst fingerpickers and percussive players alike.



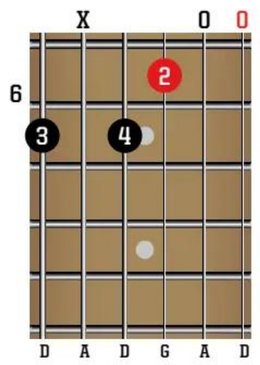
D5

This chord only requires one finger, but creates a huge-sounding D5 powerchord.



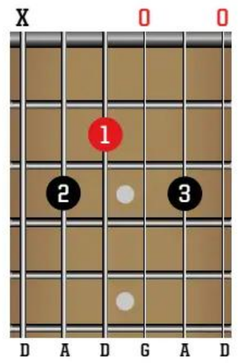
Bm7

This fingering sounds great as it uses the first and second strings as a drone.



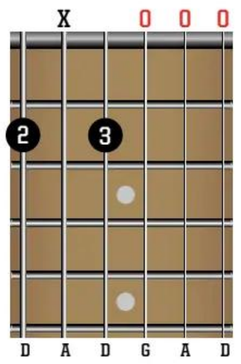
Aadd11

This shape also uses a drone. Try swapping between the previous shape and this one.



Cadd9

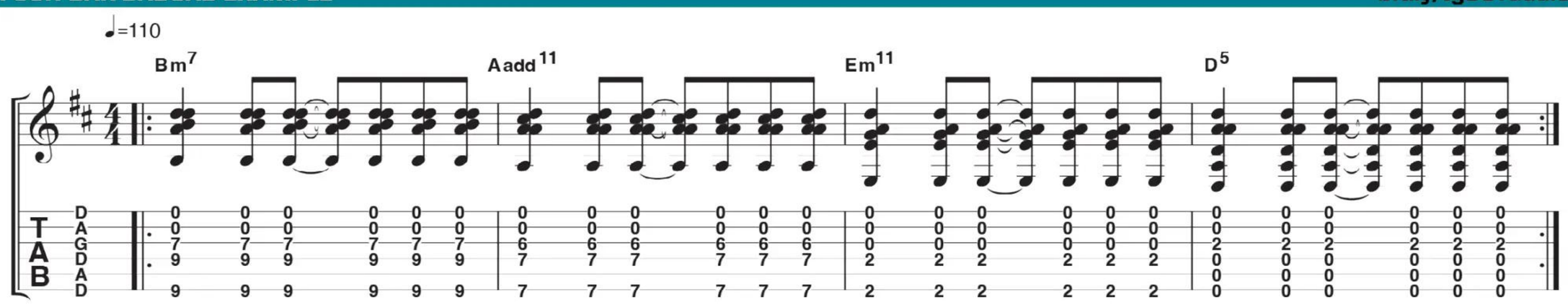
This one can be heard in action by Jimmy Page in his fingerstyle classic, *Black Mountain Side*.



Em11

This final chord provides a huge, resonant Em11 sound thanks to those ringing open strings.

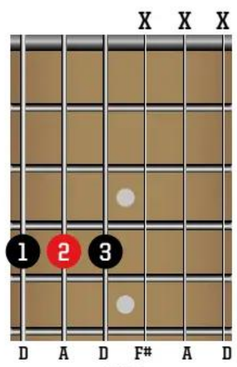
FOUR-BAR DADGAD EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



Our DADGAD example creates a part out of some of the chords we looked at. The fifth string is dampened when necessary by laying the second finger of the fretting hand lightly on top.

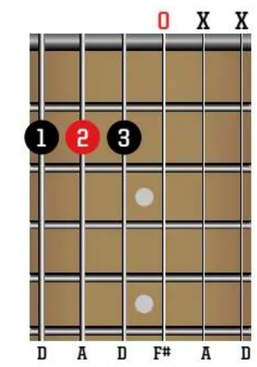
Open D (D A D F# A D)

Our next tuning is open D (aka D A D F# A D). As with DADGAD, drop the sixth string down a tone to D, then drop the first and second strings down a tone to D and A, respectively. The final step is to drop the G string down a semitone to F#. The open D tuning is great for blues and fingerstyle acoustic pieces.



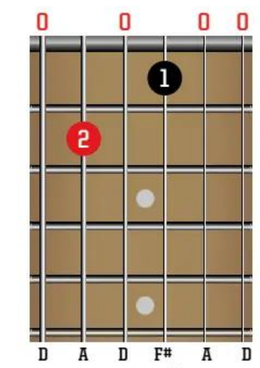
F#5

This powerchord shape features in Mumford And Sons' *The Cave*, transposed to various fret positions.



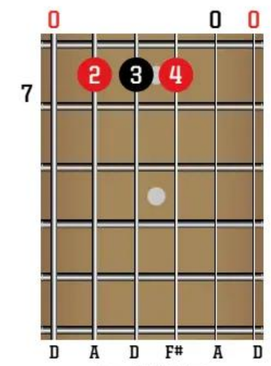
Esus2

If we move the F#5 fingering down two frets and leave the third string ringing, this Esus2 is created.



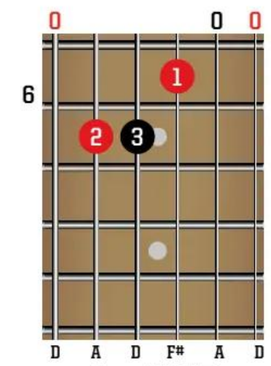
Gadd9/D

This one is nice and easy, and sounds great when followed by a D chord played on the open strings.



Aadd11/D

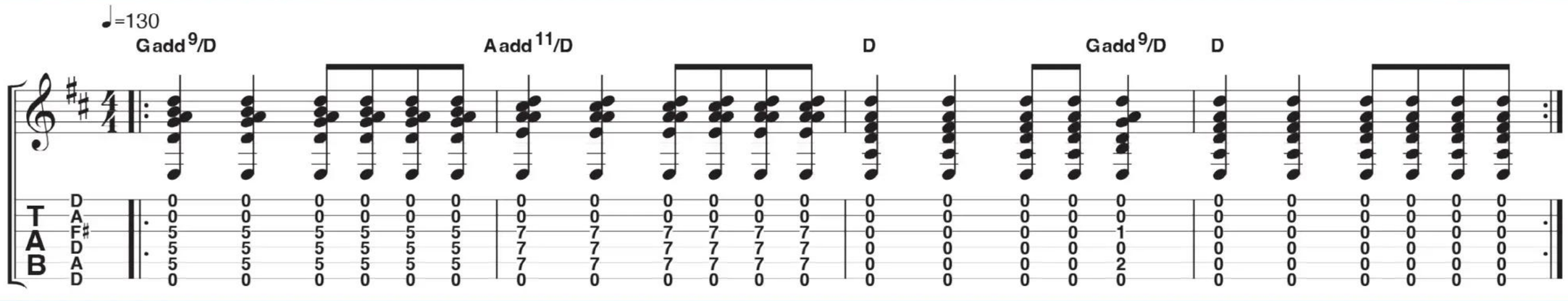
This fingering uses the open strings as drones. Simply move the shape around the fretboard to find different sounds.



Amadd11/D

This final chord fingering is the minor version of the previous chord – it only differs by one note.

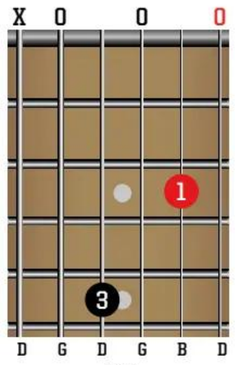
FOUR-BAR DADGAD EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



The simple shapes and easy strumming pattern should allow you to get to grips with open D tuning quickly. As you gain confidence with the part, try out some arpeggios, either picked or played fingerstyle.

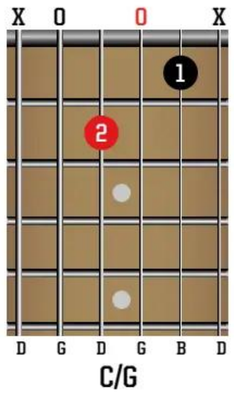
Open G (DGDGBD)

To retune into open G from standard tuning, drop the sixth, fifth and first strings down a tone. The open strings form a G chord, but, where open D tuning has its root note in the bass, here in open G, the low string is a D. It's still a note in the G chord (G–B–D), but it means you'll often find chords and riffs phrased around an open fifth-string root. The tuning is common in many styles including Hawaiian 'slack key' and bottleneck blues.



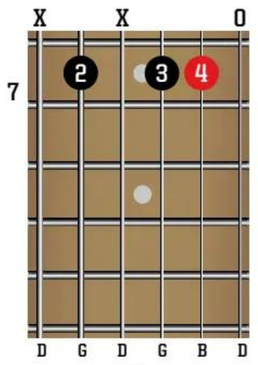
G5

With its G-G-G-D-D arrangement of notes, this first chord is near impossible to play in standard tuning.



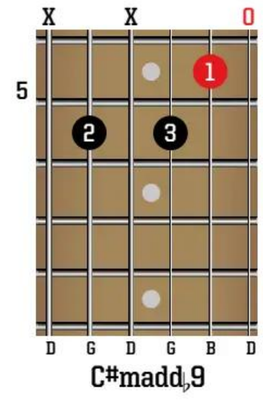
C/G

This chord offers a way to create boogie riffs by moving between an open-string G chord and this C/G fingering.



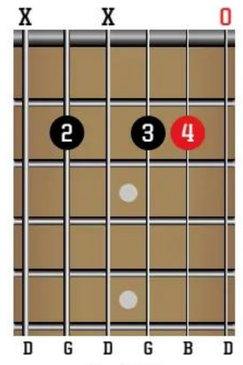
D

It's well worth having a fingering for the V chord (D) of the key of G up your sleeve.



C♯madd♭9

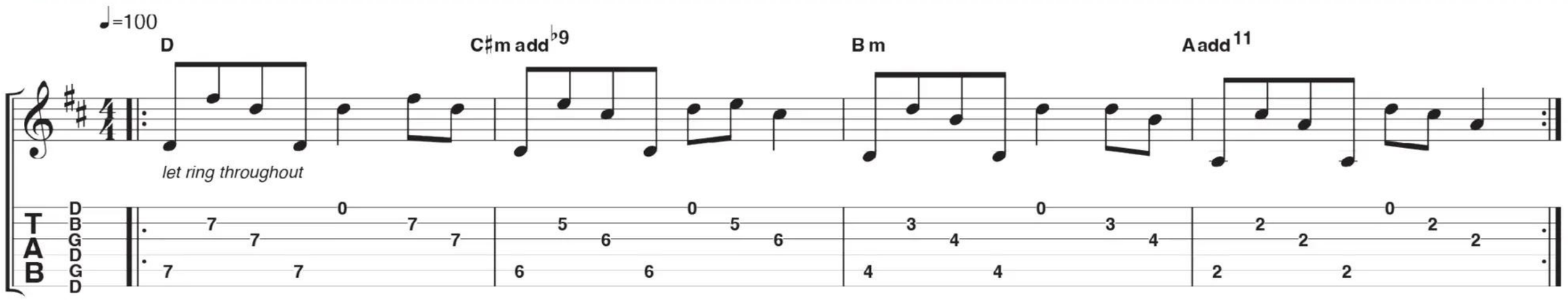
This minor version the major shape includes a lush sounding ♭9th interval.



Aadd11

This chord sounds great and the dissonance between the major 3rd (C♯) and 11th (D) adds colour.

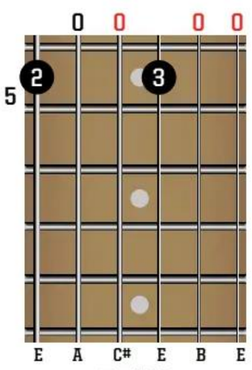
OPEN G EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



For this example, we're linking a few of the chords together using a simple fingerstyle pattern. If you're new to fingerstyle then concentrate on practising the first bar until you have the pattern locked in before moving on to the rest.

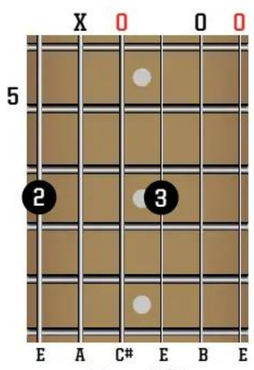
Open Aadd9 (E A C♯ E B E)

This next tuning is a bit more of a rarity, and is the main tuning used by Australian virtuoso Alan Gogoll. The tuning has a wide open sound all of its own, with the brightness of a major 3rd interval (C♯) and the richness of a 9th (B) giving the signature sound. It won't disrupt your neck/string tension much, either – simply drop the fourth string by a semitone and the third string by three semitones.



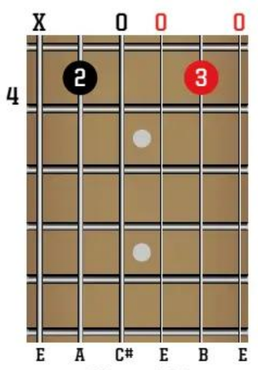
Aadd9

Use your second and third fingers to fret the notes on the sixth and third strings. Strum all six strings and let it ring!



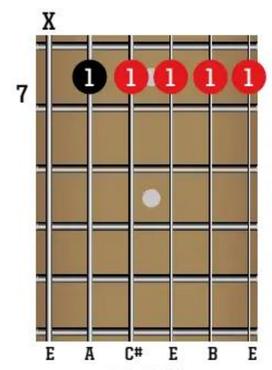
Bsus2/4

This chord is created by moving the previous shape up by two frets. Try other fret positions, too.



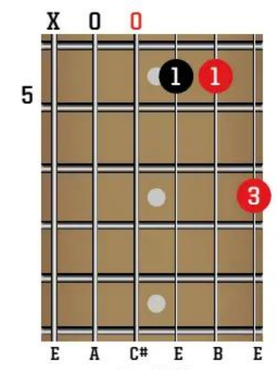
C♯madd9

This time, instead of changing fret position, we're moving the shape on the fifth and second strings.



Eadd9

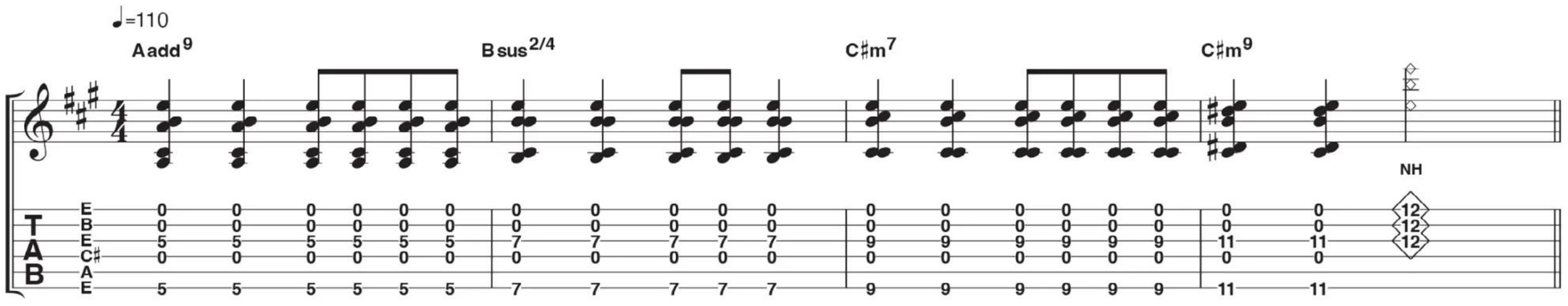
If we barre across the top five strings at the 7th fret, a large Eadd9 chord is created.



Aadd9

This shape has a jazzier character to the opening Aadd9 thanks to a wider pitch range and fewer ringing open strings.

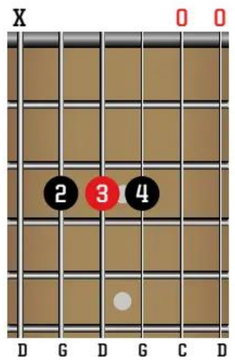
FOUR-BAR DADGAD EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



Here, we're taking the same shape and moving it up the fretboard in two-fret intervals. The drone strings remain the same and provide some cool dissonances and resolutions as the chords change. The harmonic is played by lightly touching the strings above the 12th fret.

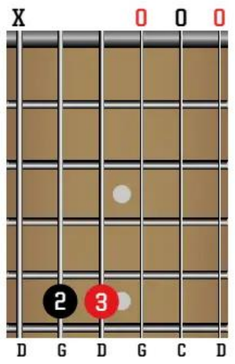
Open Gsus4 (DGDGCD)

Our next tuning is a popular tuning for clawhammer guitar. It is essentially the same as open G tuning, but with the second string raised by a semitone. So to tune from standard tuning drop the first, second and sixth strings down a tone and then raise the second string by a semitone. Molly Tuttle uses this tuning for her track *Take The Journey*.



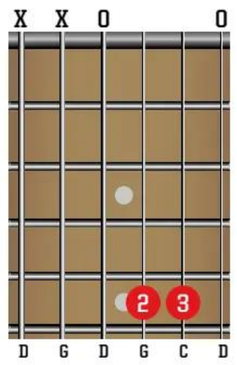
B♭add9

It's a little awkward to fit all three fingers in place here, but the results are worth it.



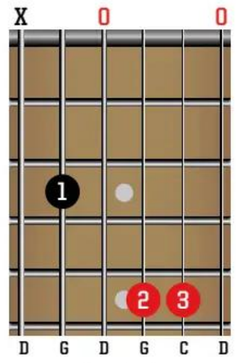
Csus2

This chord sounds great following on from the previous shape, and this forms the basis of our recorded example below.



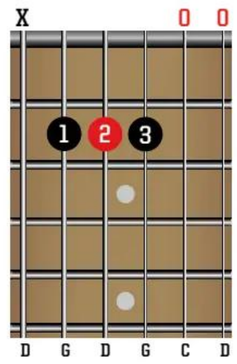
Dm7

This fingering here is easy. Simply place your second and third fingers on the second and third strings at the 5th fret.



B♭add9

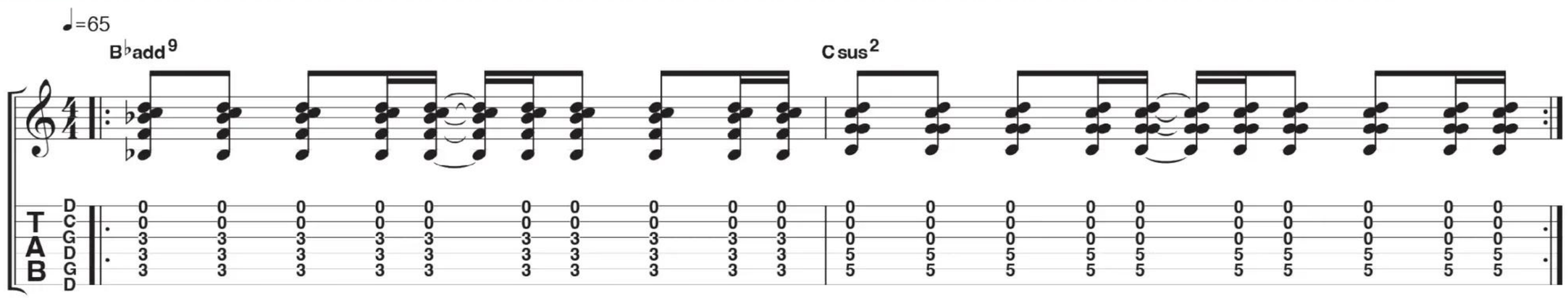
This chord use the same fingering as the previous Dm7 chord, but places a B♭ note in the bass.



Amadd11

The final fingering is easy to play and gives a moody minor tonality to experiment with.

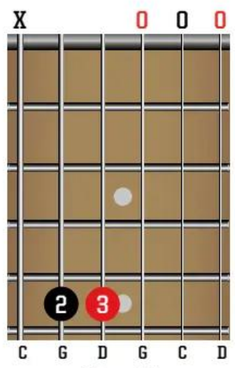
BBADD9 bit.ly/tg387audio



Our example here is inspired by Molly Tuttle's *Sit Back And Watch It Roll*. Simply linking two-chord fingerings sounds great – that's the beauty of using open tunings. Use our example as a springboard for your own ideas – for example, by moving the shapes to other fret positions.

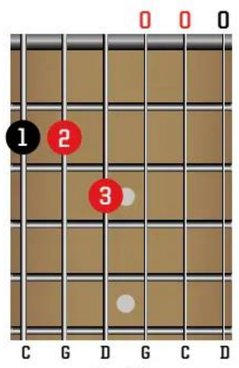
Open Csus2 (CGDGCD)

This next tuning is a cracker and is actually very similar to the previous Gsus4 example. The only difference is that for this tuning we'll drop the sixth string another tone down to C. It's quite remarkable how two tunings that share the same notes can be applied in different ways. Just think how different drop D feels compared to standard tuning on electric guitar and you'll see what we mean!



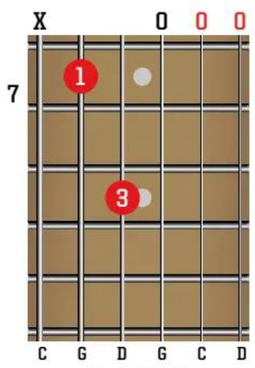
Csus2

The low C is deep and full here, and it sounds especially good in when played on a dreadnought or jumbo.



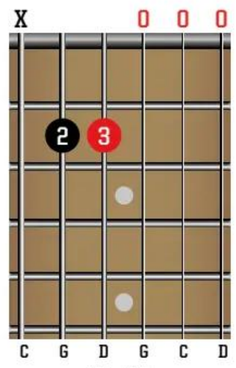
Dm11

This chord is created by simply moving the last shape up two frets. Try other fret positions, too.



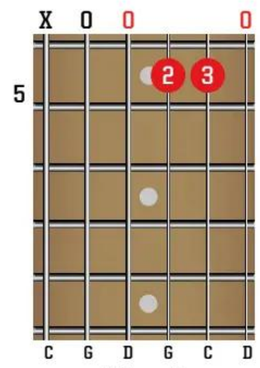
Gadd11/D

This shape resembles a standard-tuned powerchord but it's a much richer sounding Gadd11/D chord.



Am11

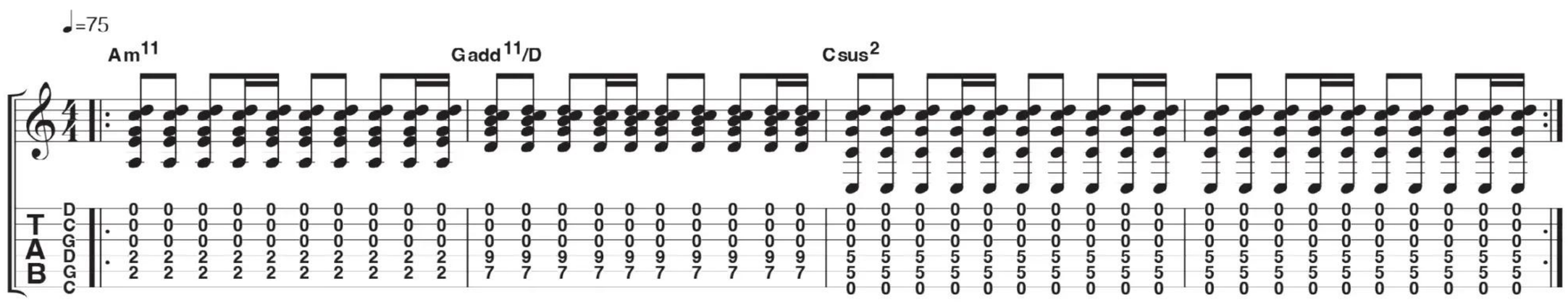
This chord is easy and sounds great. Keeping the sixth string muted gives a more focused bottom end.



G7sus4

Sus chords sound great on acoustic – just look at how many tunings are based on them! This 7sus4 shape is no different!

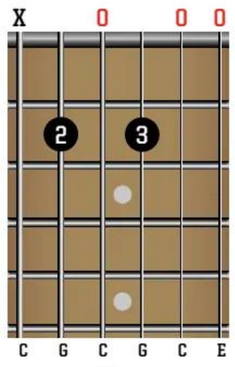
FOUR-BAR DADGAD EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



This example links together three of our open Csus2 tuning chords to create a flowing progression. We're introducing a 16th-note strumming rhythm into the mix which is really simple, so feel free to add your own rhythmic ideas and try our other shapes, too.

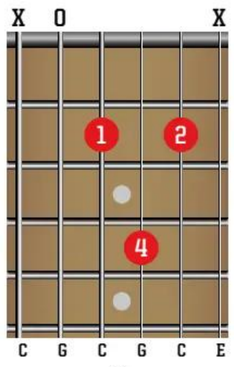
Open C (CGCGCE)

Another 'C' tuning here, but this is different to our previous example because the strings are tuned to a major chord, not a suspended sound – and that changes the character. To get into open C from standard tuning, adjust the fifth and fourth strings down a tone, tune the sixth string down two tones, and raise the second string up a semitone. Check out *Come To Me* by Goo Goo Dolls and *As It Was* by Hozier for songs in this tuning.



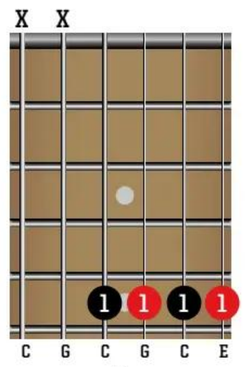
Am

This first chord is an easy fingering for Am, with the open strings giving it a nice, rich sound.



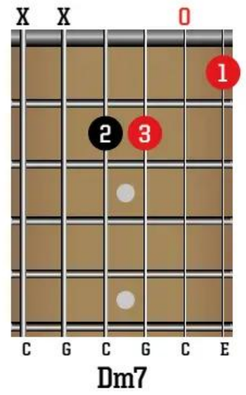
G

This G chord has a sweet sound thanks to the wide intervals between the three lowest notes. G fingering. Try it also with a barre.



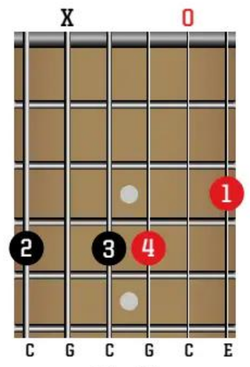
F

You've gone to the trouble of tuning to a major chord. Well, that means any barre across the strings like this is a major chord, too!



Dm7

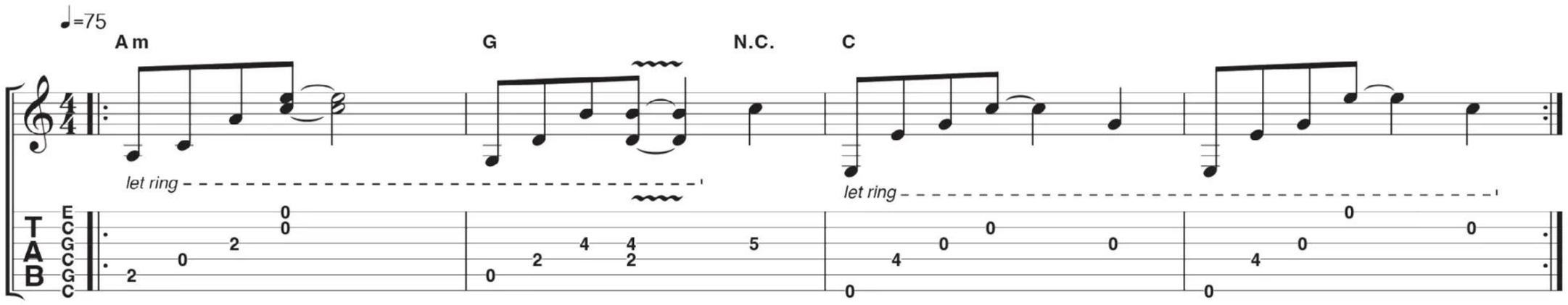
This Dm7 chord fingering has an open, ringing sound to it.



Em♭6

The Em♭6 chord in standard tuning it doesn't always sound the best. Open C tuning gives us this more musical fingering.

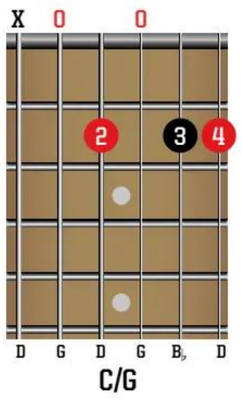
OPEN C EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



This example creates a fingerstyle version of the chord progression we used in our Csus2 tuned example, albeit with some slightly different chord extensions. Get creative and see how the fingering patterns for both examples sound when played in each tuning.

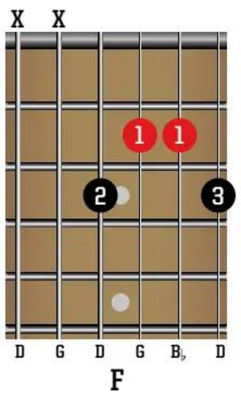
Open G minor (D G D G B♭ D)

For our final, tuning we are going to take open G and turn it into a G minor version. To do this tune into open G as we did before but drop the second string down a semitone to a B♭ – that's the all-important minor 3rd in the key of G. Though not as commonplace as its major counterpart, G minor tuning is used in many songs including John Renbourn's *The Mist Covered Mountains Of Home*.



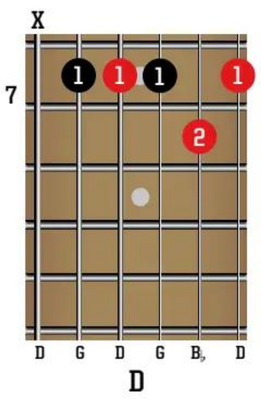
C/G

This first chord is a nice, easy fingering for C/G. Do your best not to accidentally mute the open third string.



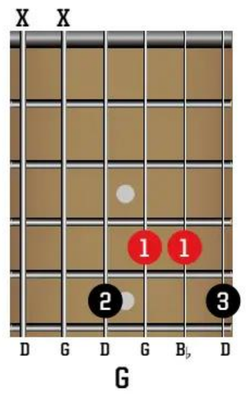
F

The F chord is the fourth chord in the key of C, so this will go well in a progression with our C/G chord.



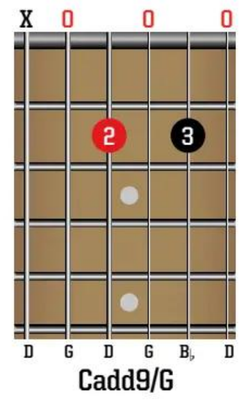
D

Play a first-finger barre, then use a spare finger to raise the minor 3rd to make a major chord in this minor tuning.



G

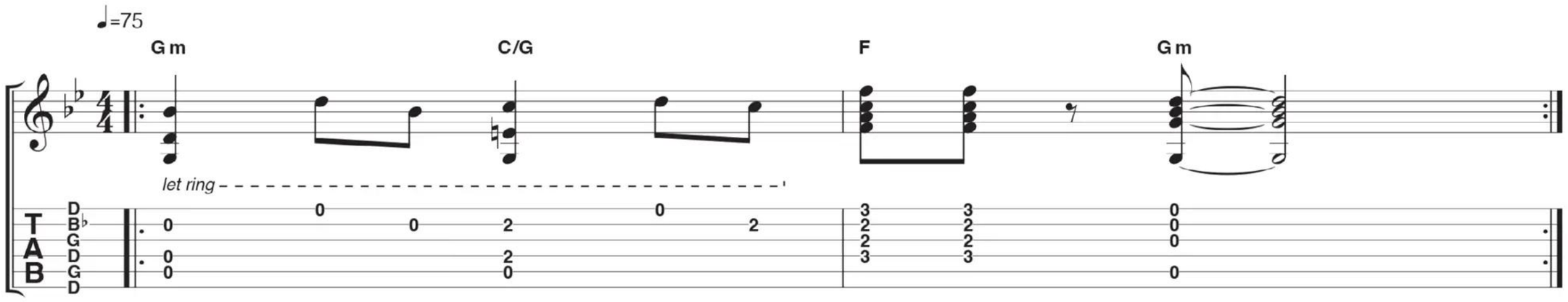
The G chord is the fifth chord of G major and completes our three-chord trick of C/G-F-G.



Cadd9/G

To finish off, it's another great fingering. The Cadd9/G chord only requires two fingers and sounds ace.

FOUR BAR OPEN G MINOR EXAMPLE bit.ly/tg387audio



This final example provides another opportunity to practise a bit of simple fingerstyle picking. There's a lot of space here in our simple part – and that can expose inaccuracies. Try to be deliberate with every note and aim for clarity and good timing.

BECOME AN ACOUSTIC POLYMATH!

Acoustic guitar is one of the world's most versatile instruments. This TG lesson runs the gamut from folk to metal in ten riffs and licks

Whatever style of guitar you most want to play, it's worth dipping a toe into as many genres as you can. Most genres have a handful of defining signature sounds. By getting those signatures under your fingers, you can seem like an acoustic Jedi, capable of anything. Or you can transport those sounds back into your usual genre to create new ideas.

Don't be intimidated by styles that are unfamiliar to you. Everything on the guitar seems impossible the first time you try it and easy once you master it. Chords with long names are not necessarily harder, and fingerstyle patterns are often less complex than they sound. To get the most out of this lesson, look for ways to adapt these ideas. You can use the fingerpicking patterns in the acoustic folk examples with other chords, play the blues examples in other keys, try more chords against the ringing open E string in the prog slash chord riff, or throw one of those jazz chords into an unsuspecting pop song.

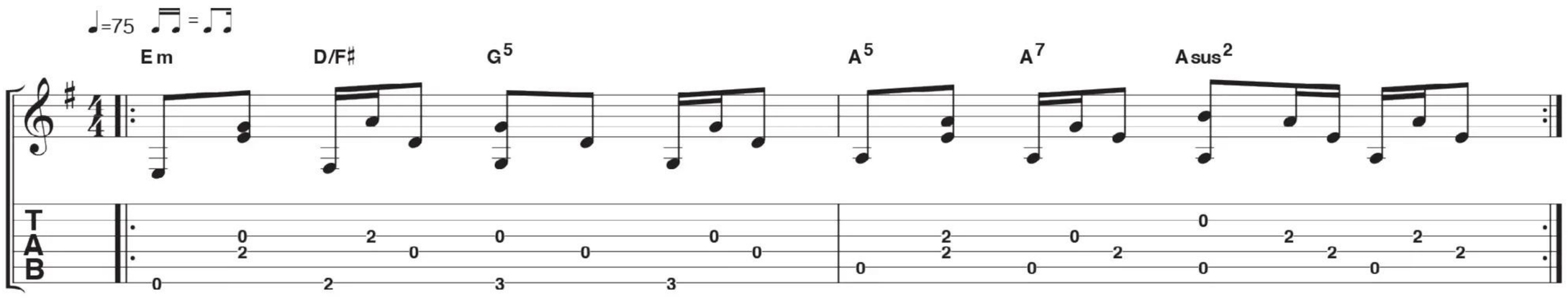
Words Jon Bishop & Jenna Scaramanga

Guitars and backing Jon Bishop **Photography** Phil Barker

ACOUSTIC FOLK

1 INCORPORATING BASSLINES WITH FINGERPICKING

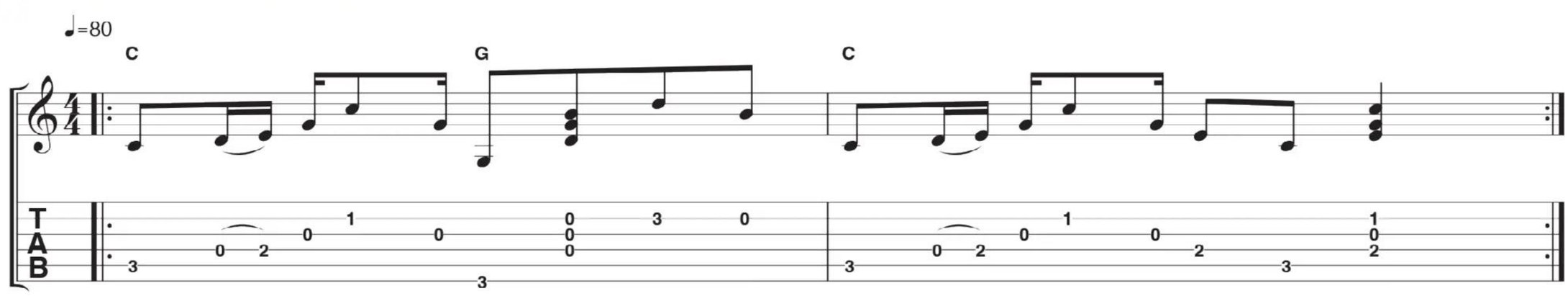
bit.ly/tg387audio



Your thumb plays the E, A, and D strings, with a steady eighth note rhythm. Once that's solid, add the other plucked notes with your first finger, or with your middle finger for the B string. Noah Kahan uses this type of idea to great effect on his song *You're Gonna Go Far*.

2 COMBINING FINGERPICKING AND HAMMER-ONS

bit.ly/tg387audio

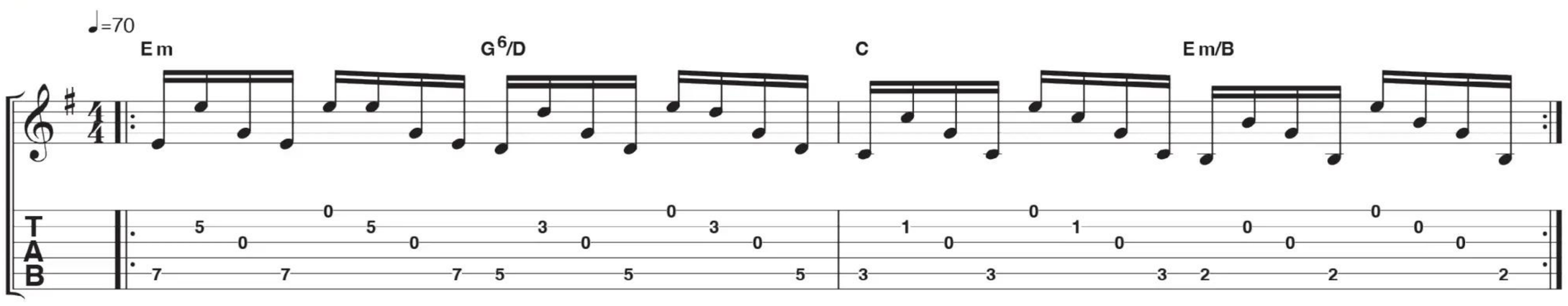


This picking pattern is more irregular, but still use your thumb for the lowest three strings and fingers for the rest. The hammer-ons add rhythmic interest. Check out *Not Strong Enough* by Boygenius to hear how this type of playing can work in a song.

ACOUSTIC PROG

1 OPEN-STRING DRONES

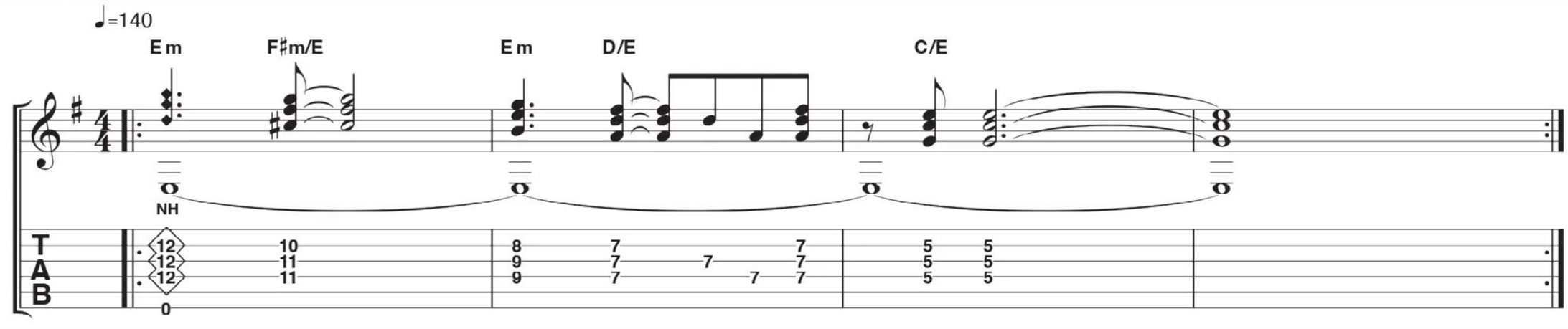
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This hypnotic groove comes from a repeating 16th-note pattern with changing chords. You can try sliding around almost any shape that mixes open and fretted notes and find interesting harmonies. You can think of this one as moving around an open C major chord shape, although you avoid the D string.

2 USING SLASH CHORDS

bit.ly/tg387audio

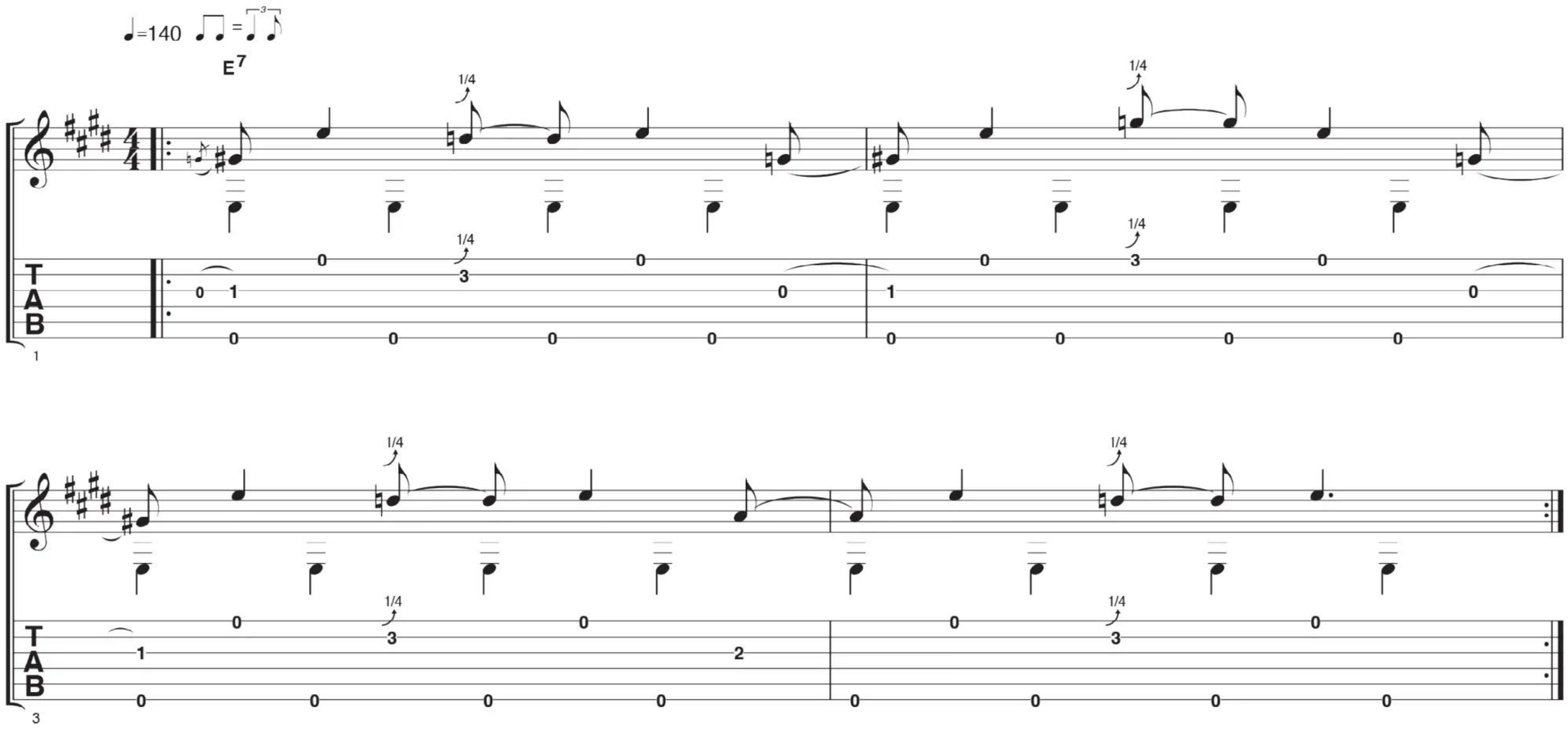


A slash chord is any chord where the bass note is not the root note of the chord. If you play a D major chord while letting the low E string ring out, that's D/E. Changing chords over one sustaining drone creates really interesting harmonies. Prog legends Genesis were big fans of this technique.

ACOUSTIC BLUES

1 FINGERSTYLE GROOVE

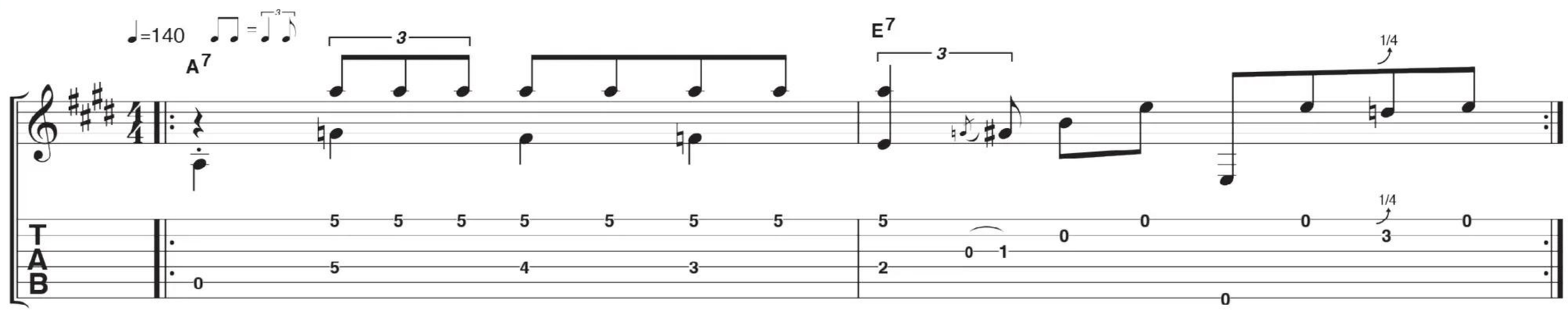
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The TG audio for this example is played on a resonator, but you can use any guitar. The groove is the main thing here: get your thumb solidly on the beat, and then place the plucked notes so that they swing nicely. Listen to Justin Johnson to hear this style done right.

2 DELTA BLUES-STYLE TURNAROUND

bit.ly/tg387audio

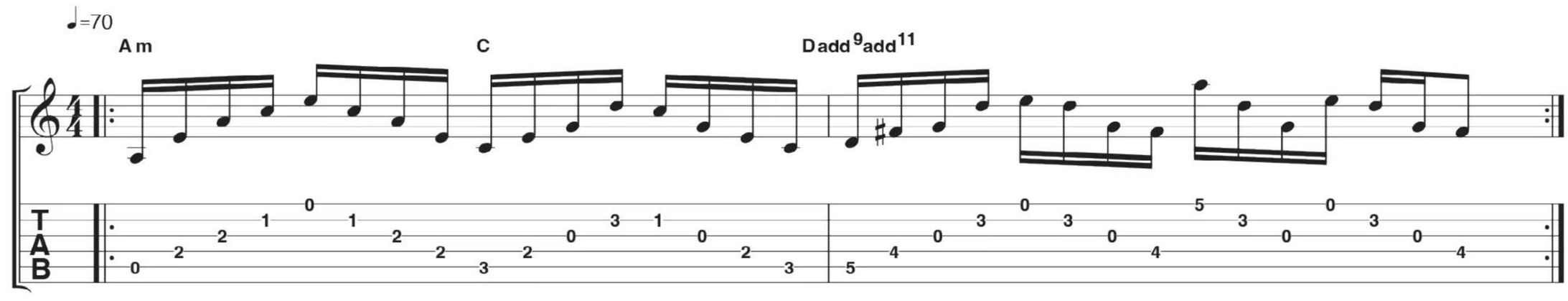


You never truly perfect this type of lick – there's always more to learn about getting the sickest swing and the greasiest quarter-tone bends. You can give yourself a head start by listening to Robert Johnson or Jontavious Willis and absorbing the feel. Make crucial notes 'snap' by getting your plucking finger underneath the string.

ACOUSTIC METAL

1 NYLON STRING FINGERPICKING

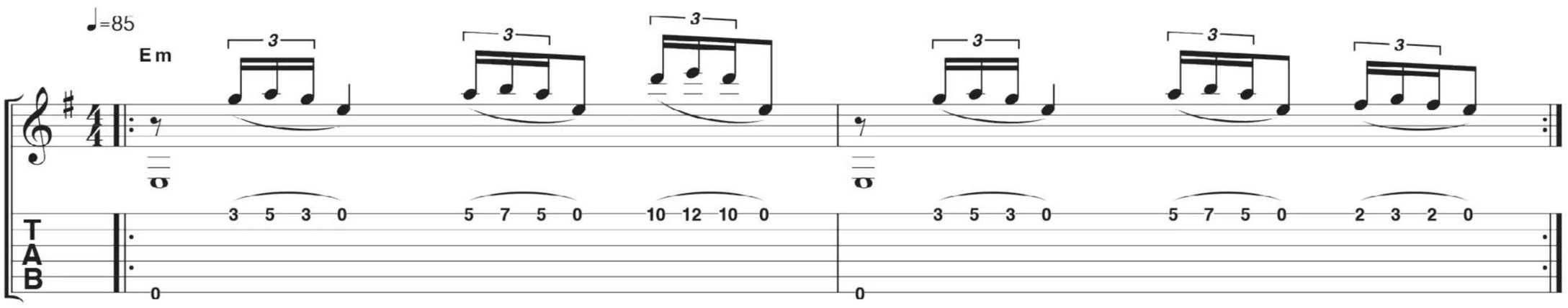
bit.ly/tg387audio



Metallica's James Hetfield uses a nylon-string acoustic in songs like *The Unforgiven* and *Battery*. Don't worry about the chord name in bar 2 – you just slide the open C major shape up two frets. If you're comfortable with fingerpicking, you might try using your annular (ring) finger for the high E string.

2 TOP STRING TRILLS

bit.ly/tg387audio

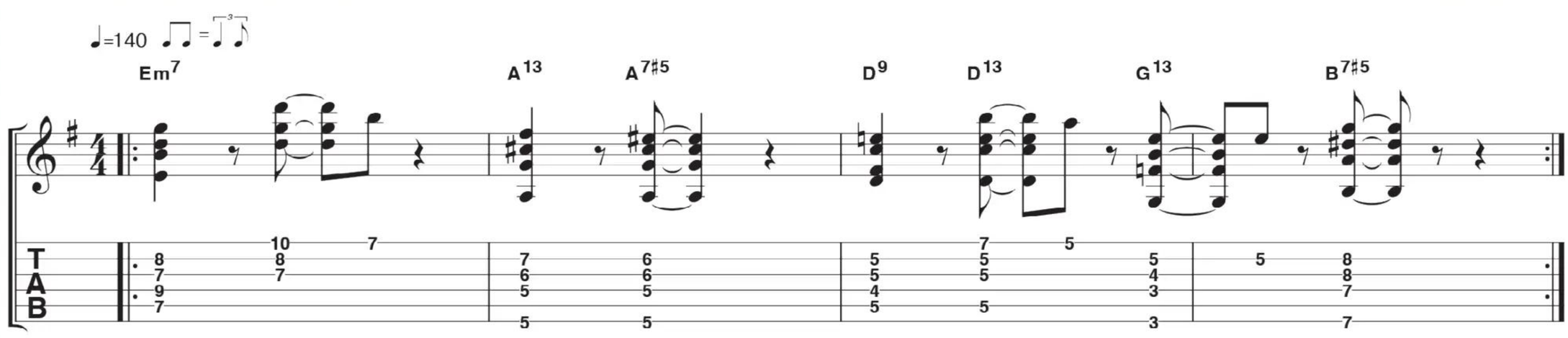


Hammer-on and pull-off fills like this are trademarks of bands like Death and Metallica. Once you have the co-ordination together, you can play all kinds of notes with these, so don't restrict yourself to the tab. Your pull-offs will be louder if you pull slightly downwards towards the floor, 'plucking' the string as you release it.

ACOUSTIC JAZZ

1 JAZZ-STYLE CHORD GROOVE

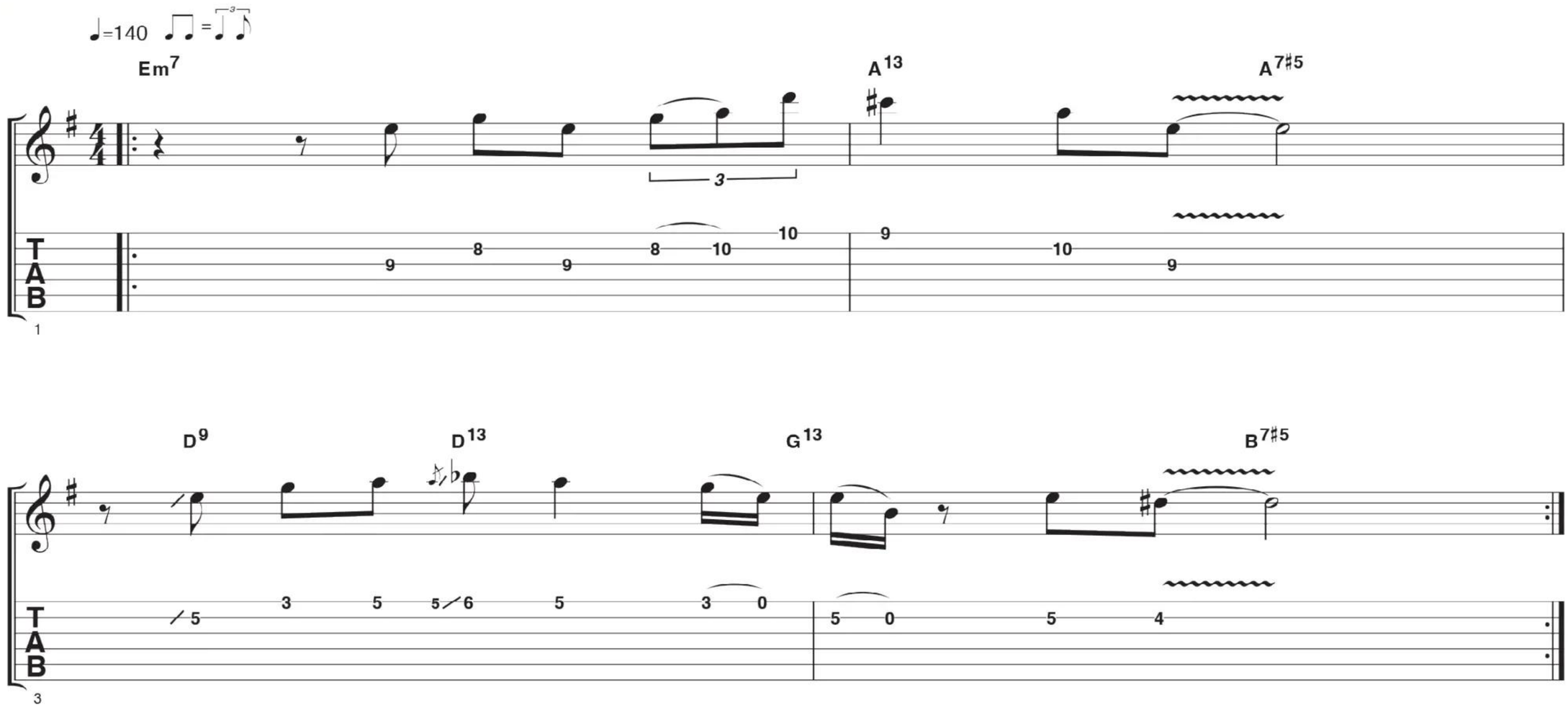
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Think of jazz chords as adaptations of simpler shapes. These 13 and 7♯5 chords are just E-shape barres with your third finger removed from the A string and deployed somewhere on the B string. Advanced jazzers play these with a thumb over the top of the neck fretting the root note.

2 JAZZ-STYLE LEAD LICK

bit.ly/tg387audio



This Julian Lage-style lick fits over the previous chord progression. Lines like these work by targeting key notes from within the underlying chords. The first note in bar 2 is C♯, the major third of A13. The lick ends on D♯, the major 3rd of B13.

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...

It began in Amsterdam on April 27, 2023. 17 months later, Metallica's epic M72 world tour reached its conclusion with a show in Mexico City on September 29. In this exclusive 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.

Photo Christian Petersen/Getty


KARLOFF
THE MUMMY
It comes to life!
A UNIVERSAL PICTURE





WHEREVER I MAY ROAM
Kirk in action on the M72 world tour

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.

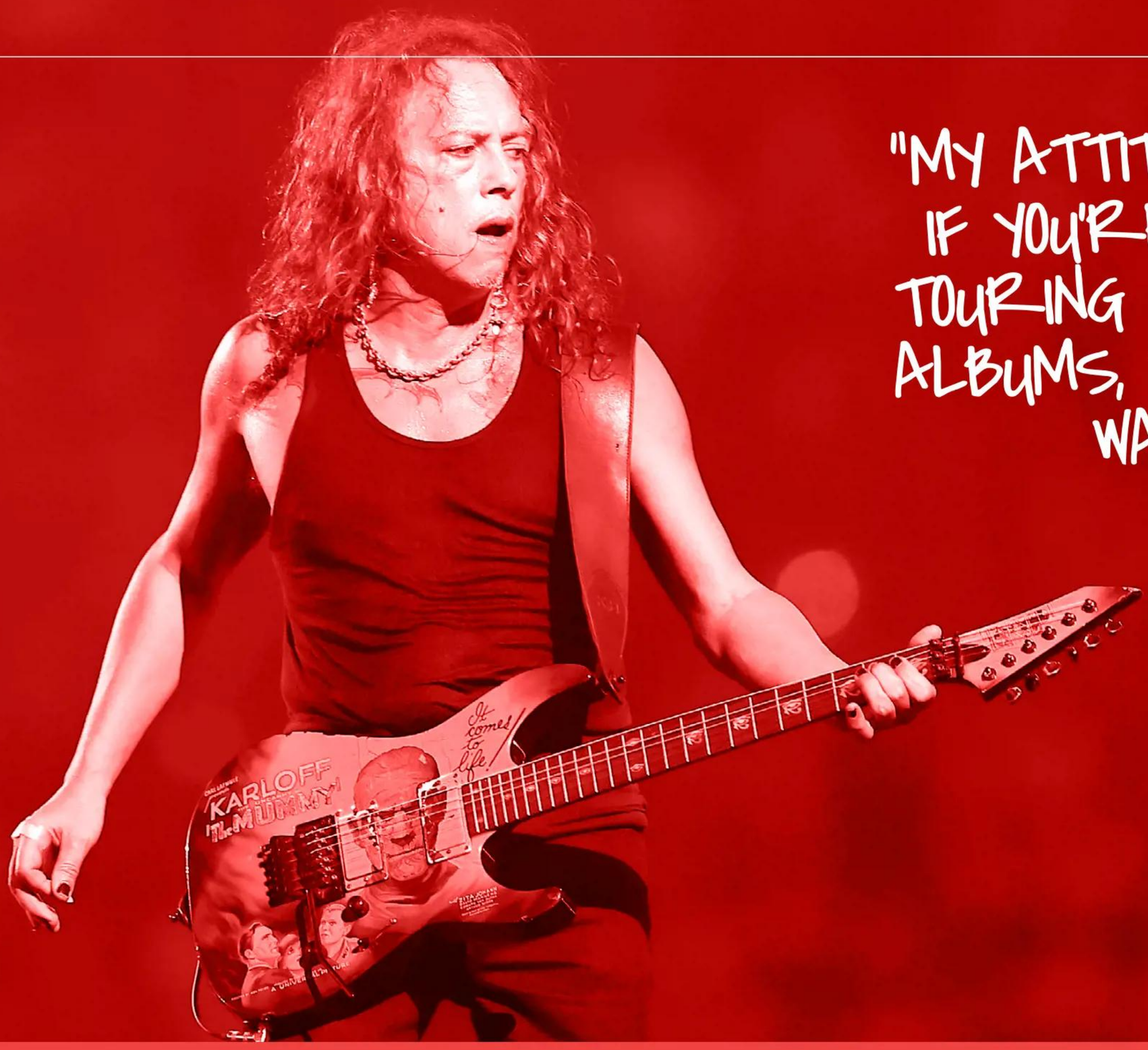
How do you deal with writer's block?
Don't think about the past or what has been done. Don't think about the future and what you need to do. Just see what you can grab in the moment. That's how I write music, and it has turned me into a more prolific composer because I don't get stuck like I used to. 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 frigging 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. 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.

Photos Monica Schipper, Kevin Mazur, Christian Petersen/Getty



"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 [Hetfiield, 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 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.

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

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.

Words, guitars & backing Jon Bishop

THE ULTIMATE 30-DAY WORKOUT

Smash your guitar goals with our 30-day technical workout

In this feature we're going to flex our fingers and strain those steel strings in TG's 30-day guitar workout. Of course, guitar practice can be a thorny subject for some. Most of us took up guitar because of our love for music – and 'homework'-style practice may not be high on your wish list. So, here, we're tackling the challenge head-on with a jam-packed set of lessons that are both fun to play and guaranteed to help you improve your technique. You can either dip into the lessons as you wish, or, alternatively, you can let our practice plan guide you through the next 30 days. It's designed to be as flexible as possible so you can work towards your own playing goals. Grab your guitar, plug in and let's get started...

A



1 CHECK YOU ARE PLAYING IN TIME

Choose a simple piece of music you know well and try playing in time with a metronome. Aim to synchronise onbeat notes with the click. If it doesn't seem fully aligned, you may need to work on your timing. Slow down a little and try to feel the rhythmic pulse more tightly.



DAY 1

ASSESS YOUR PLAYING SKILLS

You'll get more out of any practice routine if you know which areas of your playing need most attention. Get started by taking an honest look...



2 HOW CLEAN ARE YOUR CHORDS?

Put your fingers in the wrong position and you'll end up with annoying fret buzz, so aim to play most chords using the very tips of your fingers as close to each fret as possible. Barre chords, of course, need a flat finger. Keep your thumb roughly opposite your fingers for maximum strength.



3 ARE YOU PLAYING TOO FAST?

You don't have to be a shredder to want to play fast. We've all tried to play a song at full speed before we've fully learnt it, usually resulting in fluffed chord changes and solo lines that don't quite link together. Play slowly to a metronome or drum beat and try to improve your speed by a small amount every day.

DAY 2

CHECK YOUR LEAD TECHNIQUES

There's always an optimum position for your hands to be in when you're playing lead guitar. Make sure you've got the techniques sorted...



STRING BENDS

For most first-, second- and third-finger bends place your thumb on the top side of the neck (sometimes called a 'baseball bat grip') for maximum strength. You may need to adjust position for fourth finger bends.



HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS

Can you play a pull-off as you lead out of the hammer-on (and vice versa)? If not, adjust your hand position. You'll need a firm thwack for a hammer-on, then a flick of the finger to pull off.



ALTERNATE PICKING

The ability to pick in a down-up 'alternate' pattern is crucial. To practise, choose one note and play it down-up-down-up in time with a metronome. If your timing is choppy or uneven, slow down.



ONE-FINGER-PER-FRET HAND POSITION

For the minor pentatonic scale, hand position isn't so crucial. If you want to play more complex tunes and solos you need all four fingers. Arrange the digits next to each other at consecutive frets.



B

DAY 3

IMPROVE YOUR RHYTHM SKILLS

Eight exercises to tighten up your rhythm

A solid rhythm feel is an essential ingredient of any musician's skill set. In day three we are going to break down some key rhythmic subdivisions so you can practise and master each one in isolation. To promote consistent delivery we've included the correct strumming directions, so try to stick to these even if they feel awkward at first. The pay off for all this hard work is two, fun to play examples designed to put your new skills to the test.

Bar 1

Crotchets

The crotchet (aka quarter note) lasts for one beat and is here played with a simple downstroke.

Bar 2

Quavers

The quaver (aka eighth note) lasts for half a crotchet beat and is best understood when played in a repeating down-up pattern.

Bar 3

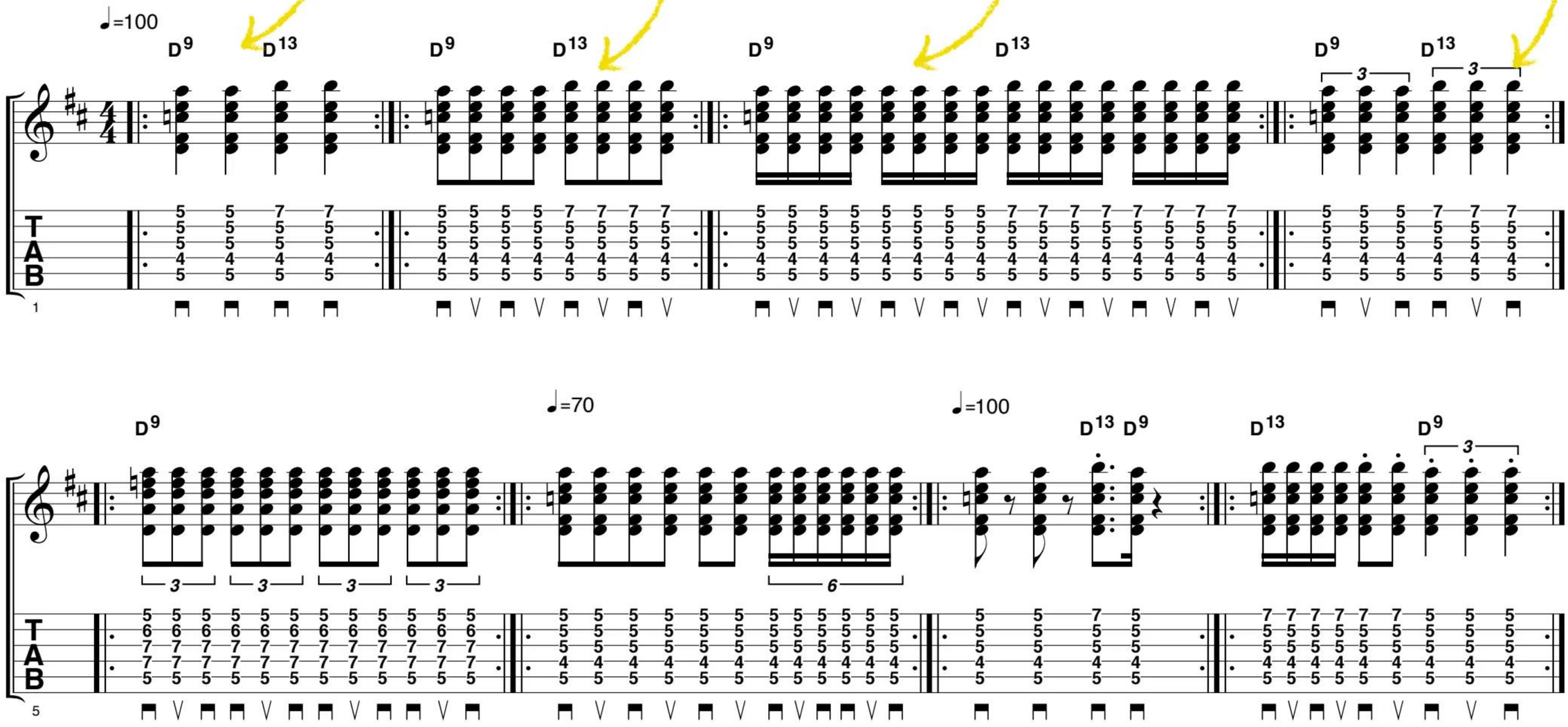
Semiquavers

The semiquaver (aka 16th note) lasts for quarter of a crotchet beat. Play it with alternating down and upstrokes.

Bar 4

Crotchet triplets

The crotchet triplet places three evenly spaced beats in the place of two standard crotchets.



Bar 5

Quaver triplets

Another triplet here, but this time we fit three in the space of two standard eighth notes.

Bar 6

Semiquaver triplets

Again, three in the space of two – but this time with semiquavers. Our example alternates eighth notes with bursts of semiquaver triplets.

Bar 7

All the rhythms 1

Here we are combining the rhythms to create a simple funky part. The dot above the rhythms means to play the chords short and snappy.

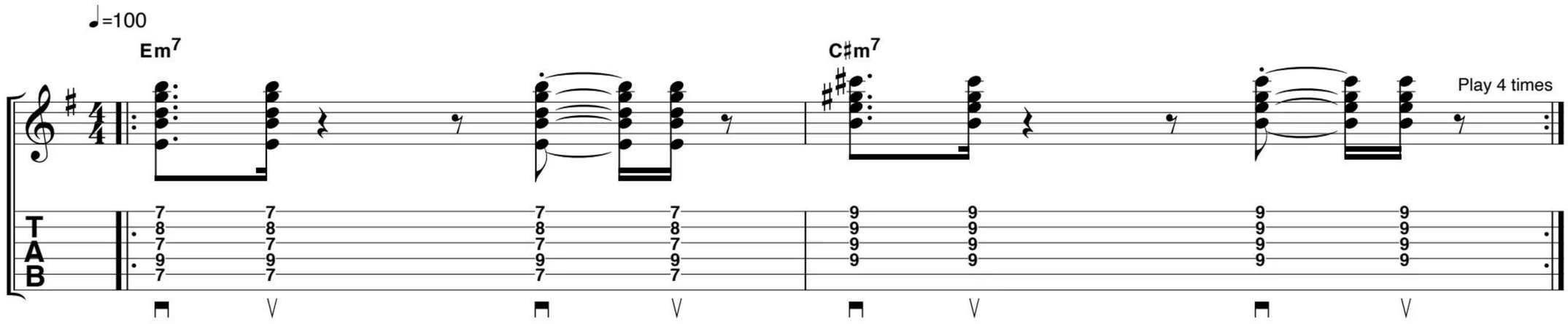
Bar 8

All the rhythms 2

For this last example we're combining the semiquaver and triplet rhythms to create more complex-sounding part.

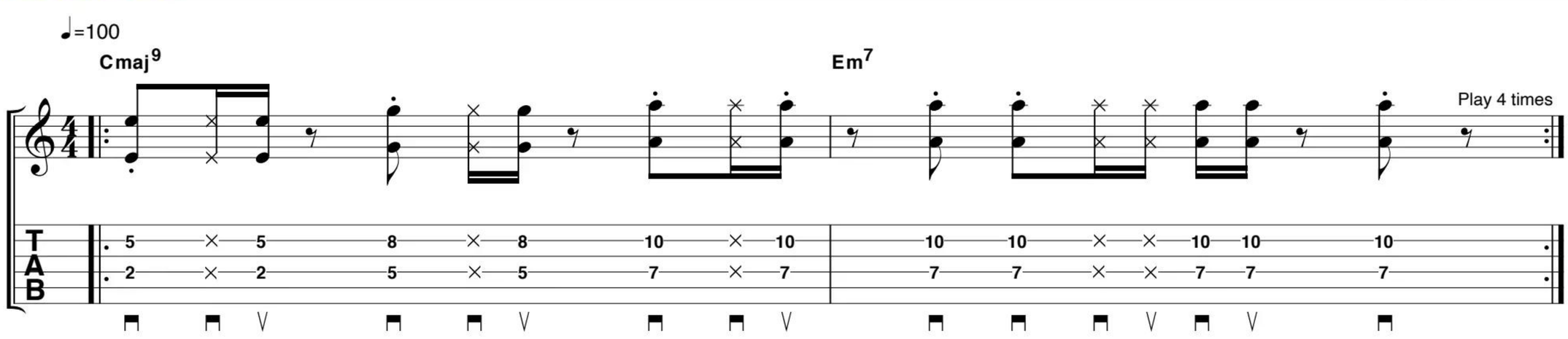
DAY 4

LIGHT FUNK RHYTHM bit.ly/tg380audio



We're keeping things light today with a couple of musical examples. Here, we're putting some easier rhythms together into a musical idea in the style of modern funk artists like Cory Wong and Vulfpeck. Check out the strumming directions and lock in with the backing track.

JAZZ-FUNK RIFF bit.ly/tg380audio



Our second example showcases the harder 16th note subdivision. The backing track provides an easy canvass for you to come up with parts of your own. Simply use our octave fingerings and add any of the rhythms we have worked on so far.

DAY 5

C

IMPROVE YOUR EAR FOR HARMONY

Today is all about working on your musical ear. For each exercise you will hear three strummed chords, followed by those same chords played in a different order. It's your job to identify each chord type and the order they are played in the second time. The answers are printed upside down at the bottom of p68.

TEST 1
BASIC CHORDS

• D major
Listen out for the typically positive, happy sound of the major chord.

• D minor
The opposite of major, minor chords have a sad, melancholy flavour.

• D5
The powerchord has a stable sound, without the emotional character of major or minor.

TEST 2
7TH CHORDS

• Dmaj7
The major 7 has a very mellow and laid-back sound.

• Dm7
The minor 7 is more reflective, but not as sad as the minor chord.

• D7
The "dominant" 7 chord has an edgy, bluesy sound.

FIND THE ANSWERS ON P68

TEST 3
SUS CHORDS

• Dsus4
The sus4 chord sounds suspenseful and like it wants to resolve.

• Dsus2
The sus2 chord sounds strong, but more colourful than the powerchord.

• D7sus4
Harmonically more complex than other sus chords. Slightly mournful.

TEST 4
UNUSUAL CHORDS

• Dm7♭5
The m7♭5 chord has a dissonant sound and is the same as the minor 7 chord only with a ♭5th.

• Ddim7
Jazzy and mysterious. Useful as a chromatic passing chord between major, minor and 7th chords.

• Dm6
Another jazzy chord, this time with an almost scary vibe. Easier to jam to than a dim7, though.



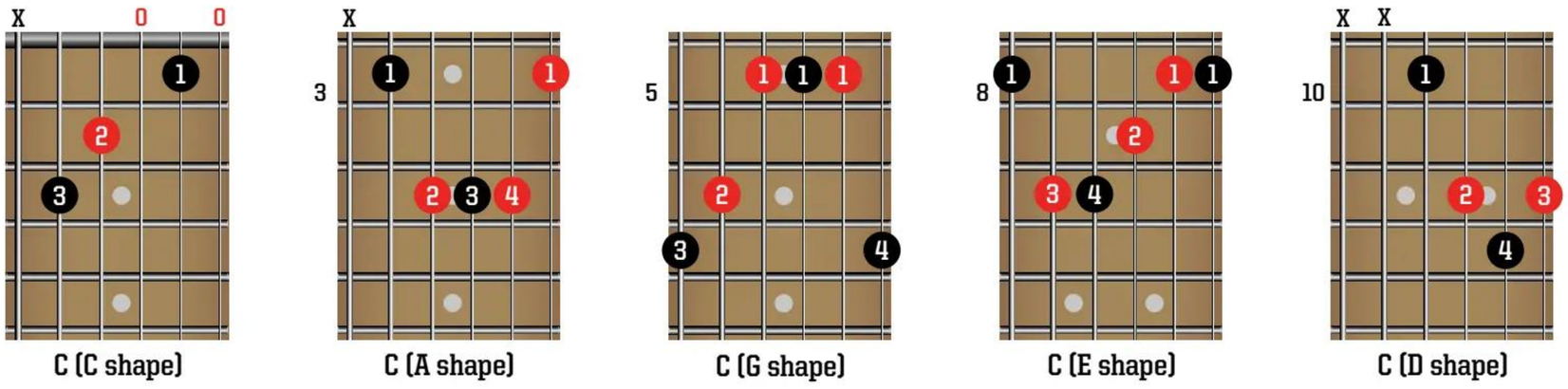
MASTER THE FRETBOARD WITH CHORDS

Ride the road to fretboard mastery and learn some cool new chords along the way

A great all-round rhythm player needs really good chord knowledge. There are two ways to develop this part of your playing. The first is simply to learn some new chords – and this is fun, a journey of discovery with new sounds and moods. The other method is to learn how chords link together when played in various positions on the fretboard. It's known as the CAGED system, because you'll be looking at C, A, G, E and, yep, you guessed it, D chord shapes. Get to grips with it and you'll soon be playing the best riffs and rhythm parts ever, as you navigate the whole fretboard in the process. Read on and we'll show you more...

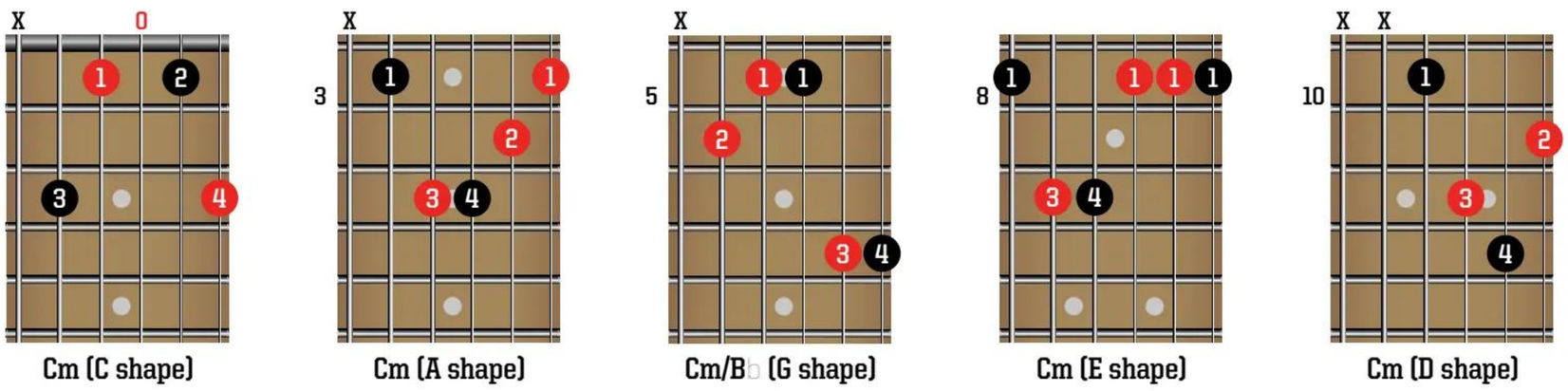
DAY 6 MAJOR CHORDS

We start here with five C chords, including the good old open shape. Your task is to see how they link together across the fretboard. The first barre chord shares the root note with open C. This resembles an open A chord, so it gets called an "A shape" even though it could be any pitch – C here, of course. Play the chords one after the other, then see if any ideas come to mind.



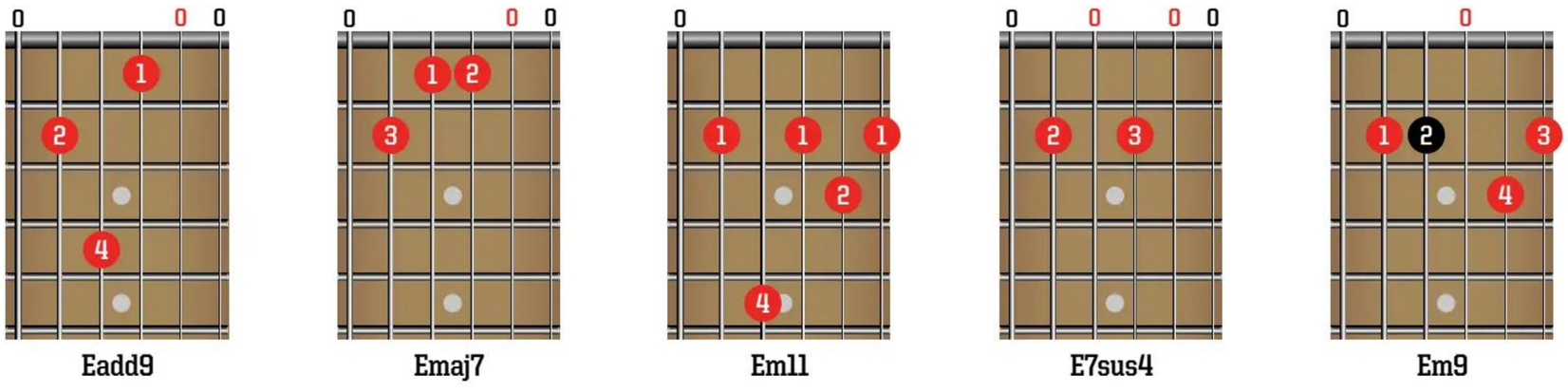
DAY 7 MINOR CHORDS

Once again, the idea is to see where these chords share notes – the idea being that you could create cool rhythm parts across the entire fretboard. Though a couple of these shapes are tough to play, it's still useful to see how they link together. And there's nothing to stop you playing an easier "partial" version – just fret three strings instead of the full shapes.



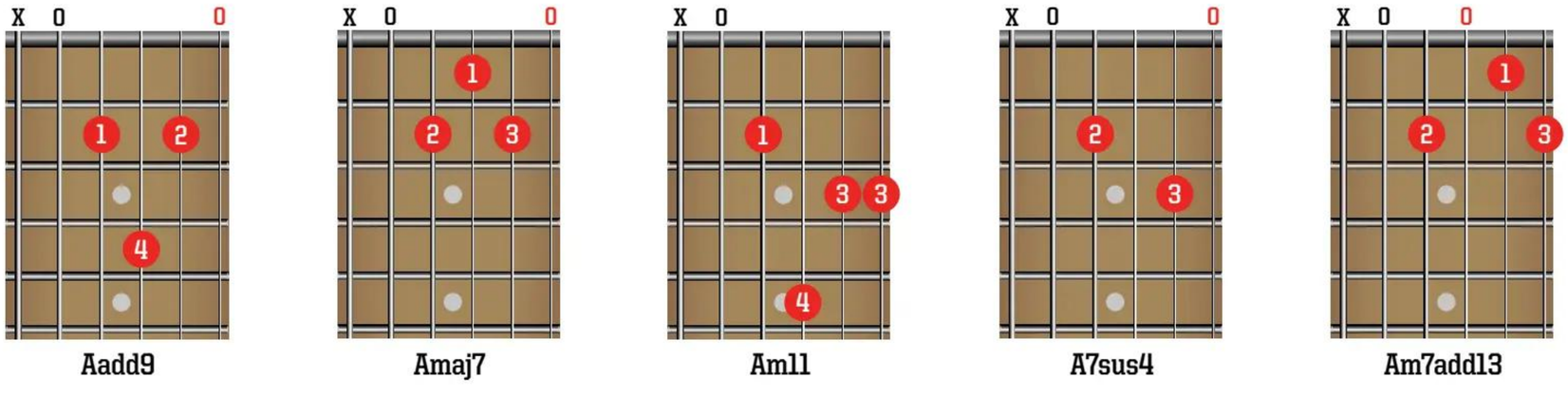
DAY 8 E SHAPE CHORDS

Here we'll turn our attention to fresh sounds, in particular, some variations on the open E chord we all know. Try them out in open position, then see if you can make them work as closed position barre chords.



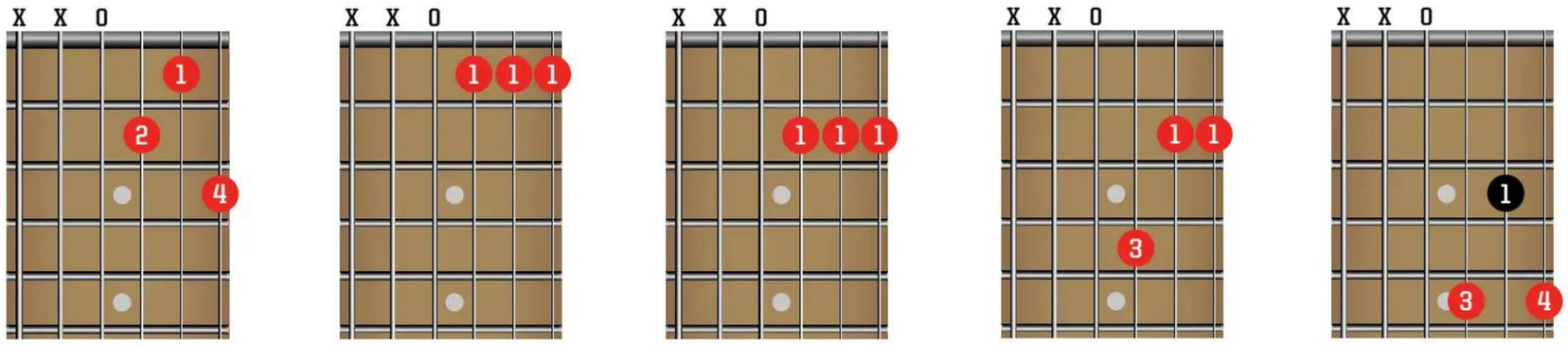
DAY 9 A SHAPE CHORDS

Today we're doing the same as yesterday, but with the open A chord as our starting point. Once again, try out the chords in open position and choose your favourites. If you can also make them work as barre chords you're acing it!



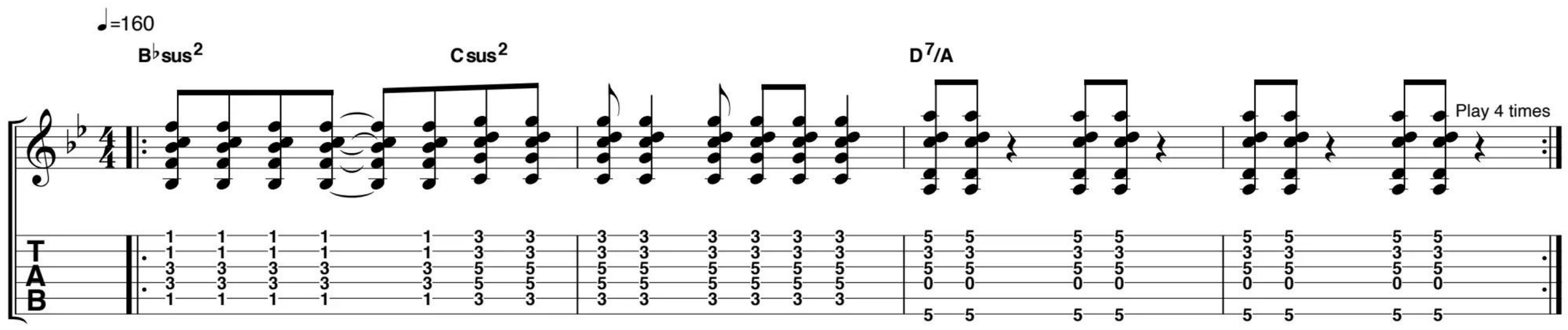
DAY 10 D SHAPE CHORDS

One more time! Here we're looking at some creative variations on the humble open D chord. Some of these can be tricky when played as barres, so take it slow and focus on accurate fretting before any changes.



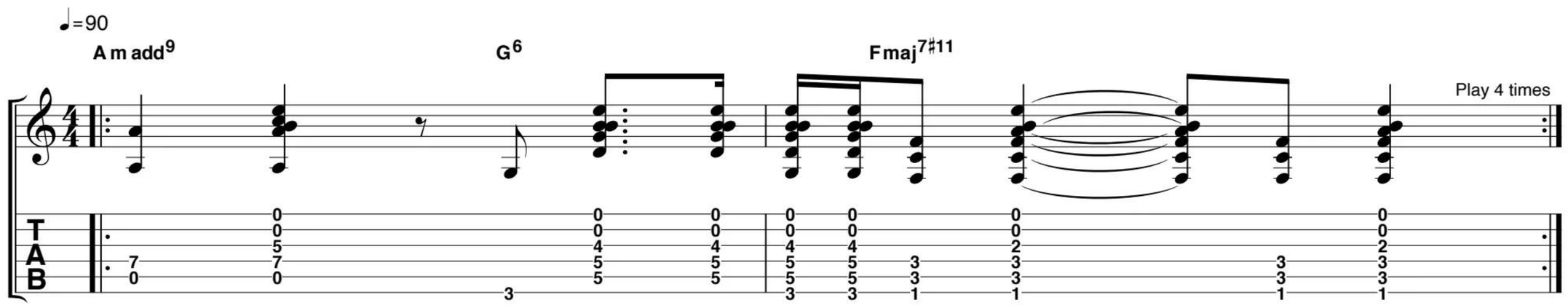
DAY 11

FOO FIGHTERS-STYLE SUS CHORDS bit.ly/tg380audio



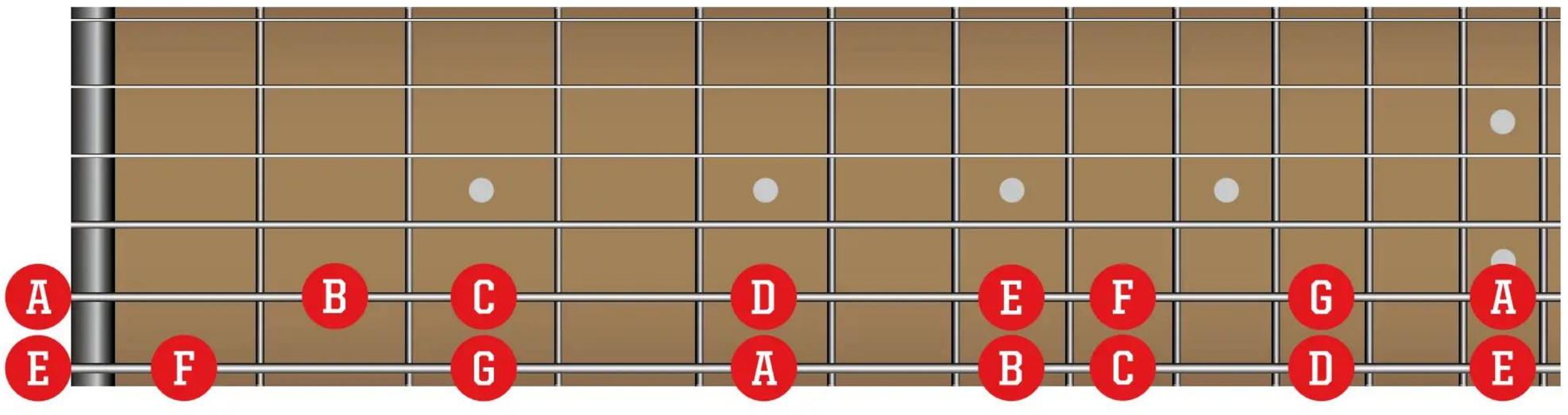
The sus2 chord we're using here sounds great with a light overdrive and provides a contrast when followed by some dissonant sounding stabs. The D7/A chord we used for the stabs is a bit of a Dave Grohl favourite!

CHORDS WITH OPEN STRINGS bit.ly/tg380audio



This part uses the open string to create a lush, ringing sound with plenty of sustain. Incorporating the open strings into pretty basic fingerings is an easy way to generate more harmonically rich sounding chords.

DAY 12 LEARN THE BASS-STRING ROOT NOTES



It's pretty tricky to remember all the notes on the neck at first, so here we're looking at just the natural notes (no sharps or flats) on the two bass strings. Try these two exercises to help you memorise them.

1 Play the notes on each string, saying the note names out loud as you go.
2 Play a barre chord using each note shown as your root.

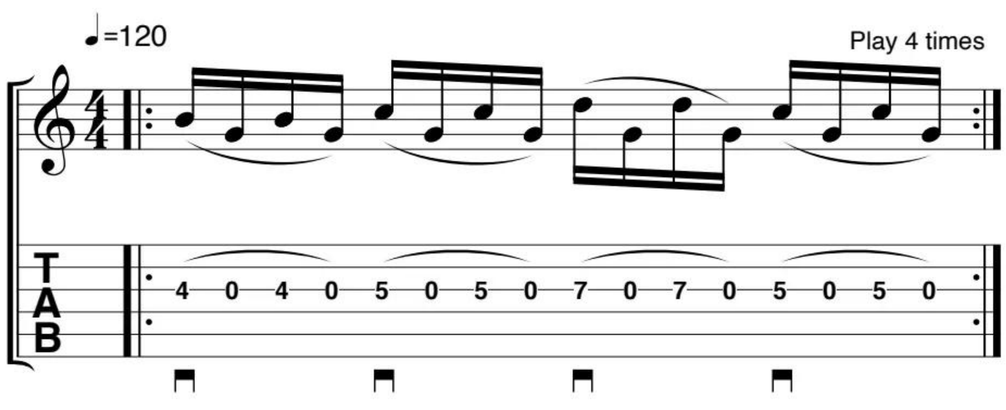


DEVELOP YOUR LEAD PLAYING

Work on basic techniques, then increase your speed and your solos will soar!

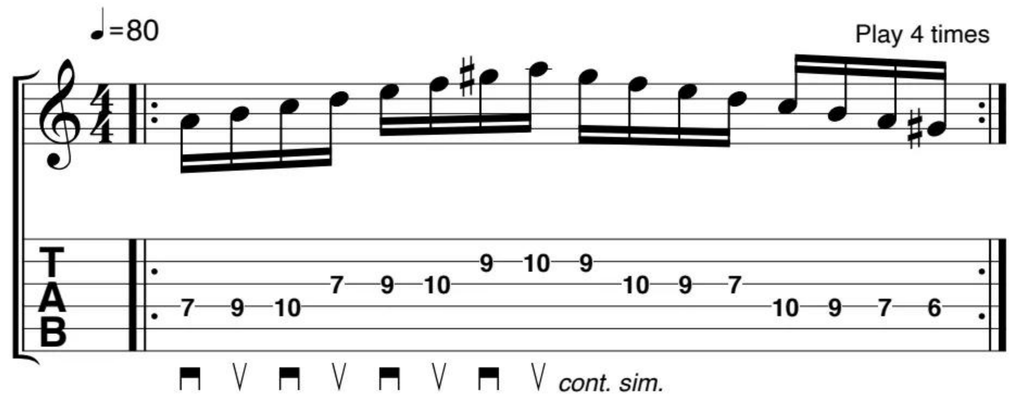
Whether you're an aspiring shredder or you prefer to navigate your solos by feel, every player can improve their technical skills. Work on simple, repeatable ideas and you can take a relaxed approach to guitar practice and you're guaranteed to see results. Here, we're taking a look at a mix of standard lead guitar techniques employed in solos of all genres. Each exercise is a short idea which you can widdle away at without really thinking about it. If you want to take things up a step, try pushing the tempo up higher along with a metronome. Spend a few minutes a day on each one.

HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 13 The open third string makes this an easy exercise to get started with. Experiment by fretting with different fingers. As you progress you can move the idea to other parts of the fretboard and onto other strings.

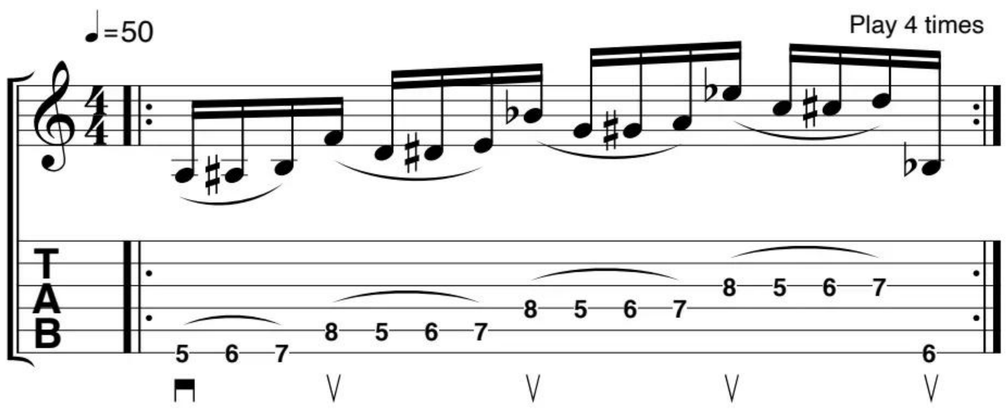
ALTERNATE PICKING bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 14 Our alternate picking exercise addresses the issue of crossing strings and using the pinky for fretting. The constant down-up picking can be tough, so focus on short three- or four-note fragments to make it easier.

SYNCING PICKING AND LEGATO

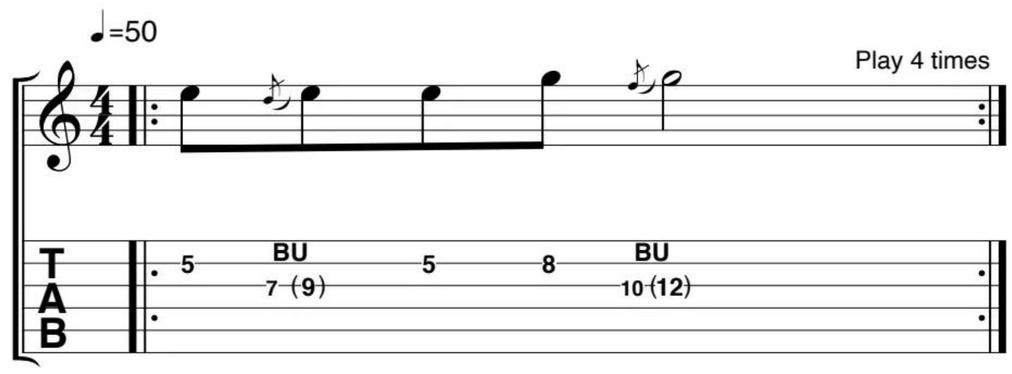
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DAY 15 Our chromatic exercise is a simple pattern that works on picking, hammer-ons and pull-offs. This pattern can be adapted to move across all the strings and can be used to both ascend and descend the neck.

ONE-TONE BEND WITH A REFERENCE PITCH

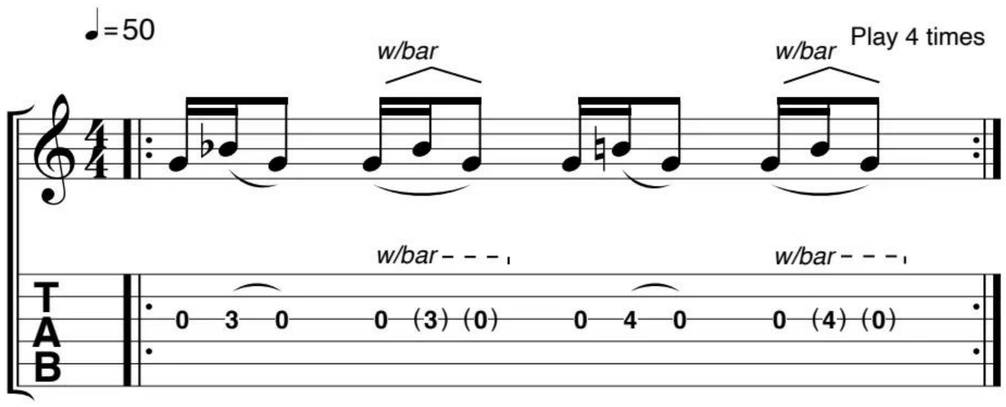
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DAY 16 Aiming for a target pitch is a good way to ensure good string-bending intonation. This exercise works on a one-tone bend in two places on the fretboard. Be sure to adapt this idea to practise on other strings.

PITCHED WHAMMY BAR BENDS

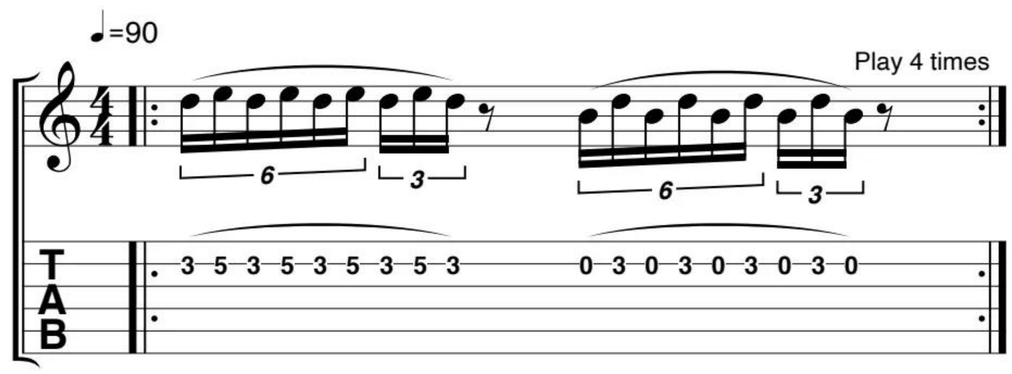
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DAY 17 Guitarists like Jeff Beck and Steve Vai are masters of playing melodies with the whammy bar. As with string-bending it's good practice to take a target pitch and practise either scooping up or dooping down to it.

TRILLS

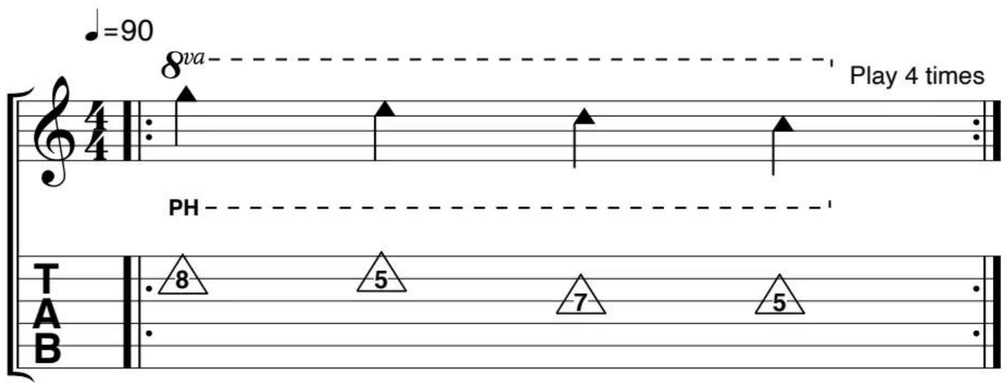
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DAY 18 If you can manage the tight timing here then the generally looser technique of trilling should feel a whole lot easier. Treat it as two exercises: the first half using two fingers, and the second part using just one digit.

PINCHED HARMONICS EXERCISE

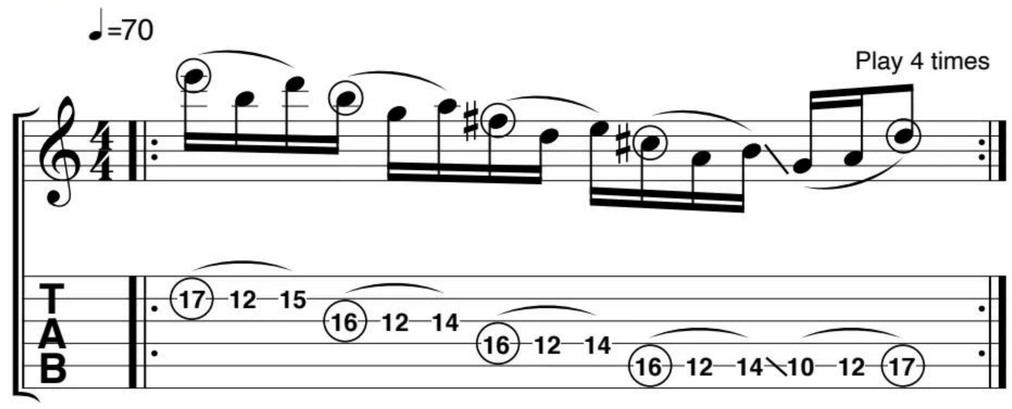
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DAY 19 As you pick the string, let the flesh of the thumb that is holding the pick touch the string on the way through to release the harmonic. Try to pick 12 or 24 frets higher than the fretted note for the best harmonic.

TAPPING RUNS

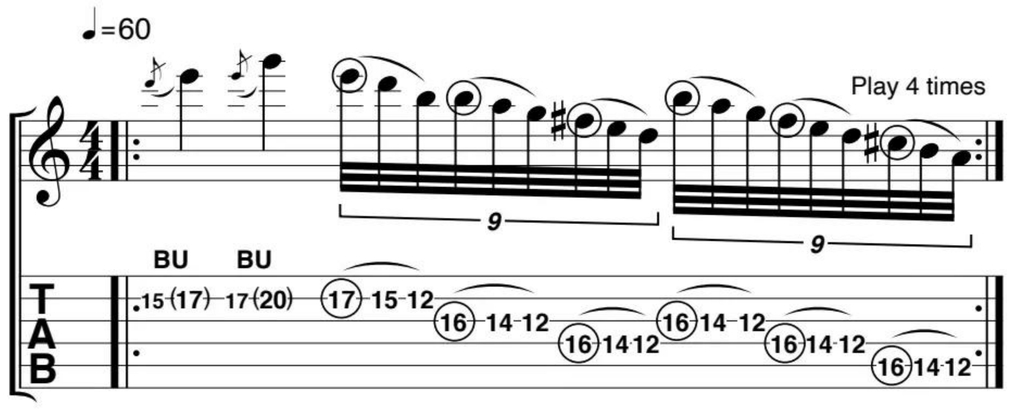
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DAY 20 Eddie Van Halen and Nuno Bettencourt are masters of melodic tapping. Our example uses the minor pentatonic scale to create a flowing run. Make sure to start slow, focusing on steady, even timing.

COMBINING TECHNIQUES

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DAY 21 Here we're working on combining various techniques in one lick. We start out with some string bends and then finish off with a tapping run. After getting this down why not combine two of your favourite techniques?

MIX AND MATCH NOTES AND PHRASES FROM EACH EXAMPLE FOR A REAL-WORLD WORKOUT

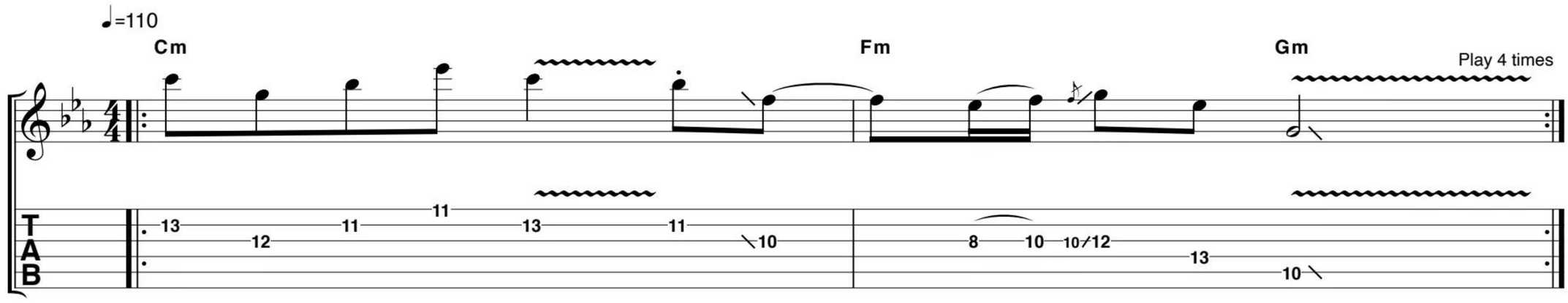


GET BETTER AT IMPROVISING

Try these improv exercises and shine at your next jam

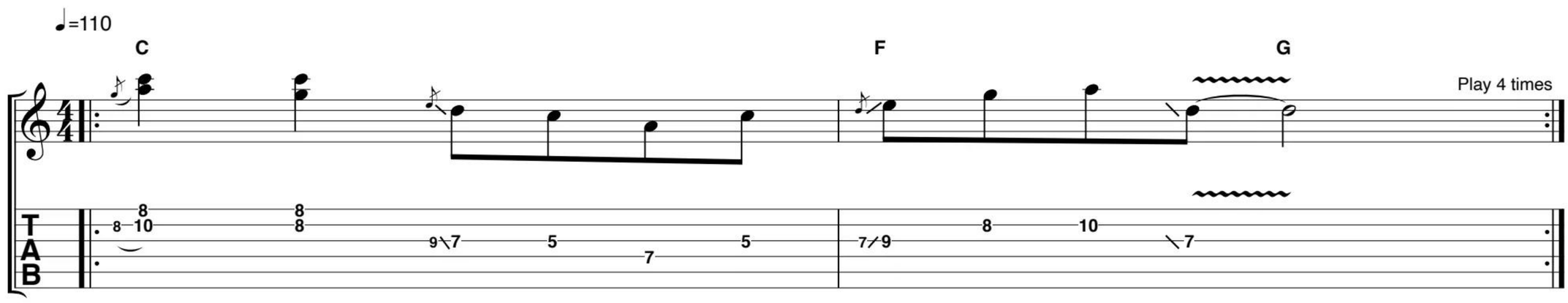
Whether you play in a band, jam with backing tracks or you prefer to improvise unaccompanied, ad libbing is another of those continuous and unending quests. That doesn't mean you can't get a whole lot better at it, though! Here, we're looking at a few strategies to help you develop your improv skills so you'll be 100 per cent ready when your next jam session comes around.

USING ONE SCALE #1 bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 22 The chords used for the backing music come from the same key: C minor. This means you can use just one scale (C minor pentatonic) and your ear for music to navigate the progression. It's a staple approach in simple blues progressions.

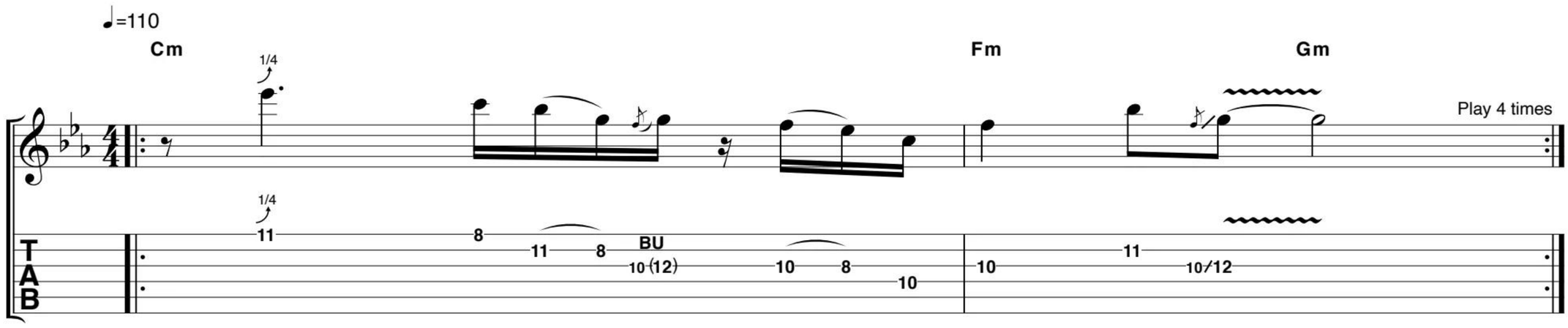
USING ONE SCALE #2 bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 23 Again, all of the chords are diatonic here (this time from the key of C major) so we can use the C major pentatonic scale for the whole solo. Guitarists like Brian May and Slash are masters of making major key solos sound good.

PHRASING AROUND ROOT NOTES

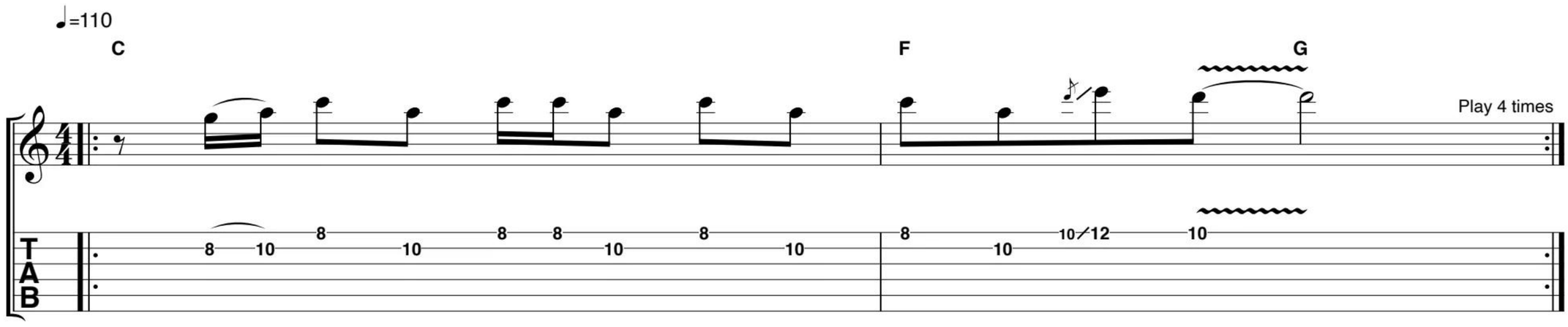
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DAY 24 Targeting the root note of the chords is a good way to outline the harmony as it passes. Here, we approach linking the root notes together with finger slides to provide more interest.

USING RHYTHM IN YOUR SOLOS

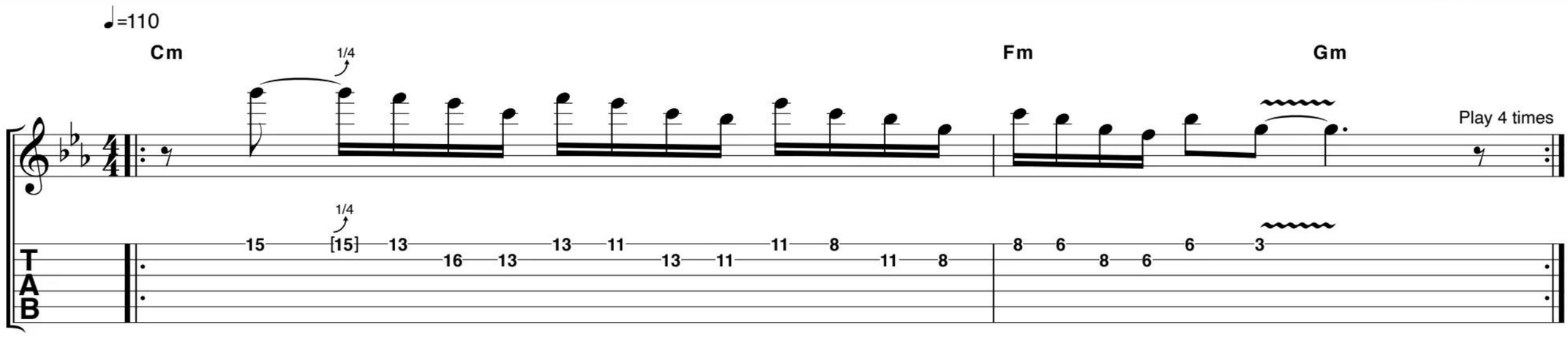
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DAY 25 In this lick we get away with playing only a handful of notes as the rhythm is interesting. Rhythm is one of the most important aspects of a solo, and even a one-note solo can be memorable if a good rhythm is used.

POSITION SHIFT LICK

bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 26 Here, we move down through the pentatonic box shapes. Using position shifts allows you to recycle and rework each melodic lick, making only small adjustments to allow for the new shape.

IMPROVED IMPROVS...

Three ideas for your next jam session

1 ONE-NOTE JAM

Okay, staying on one note might not sound like a recipe for a world class solo, but, by ditching all the other notes, you can focus on rhythm and how loud or soft to play.

2 ONE-STRING JAM

Confine yourself to one string and you'll free yourself from predictable scale box patterns and start thinking more melodically. Give it a try!

3 CHOOSE FIVE RANDOM NOTES...

...and use only those five! Okay, it could be four notes, six, seven, or however many, but improvising with a restricted set of notes will ensure creative new ideas.

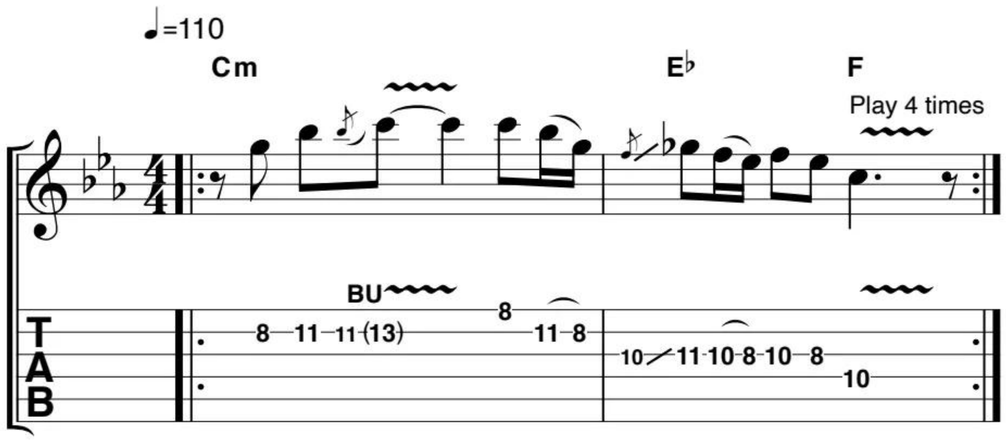


CREATIVE SOLOING

Turn your attention to the more musical side of lead guitar with four ways to develop a solo

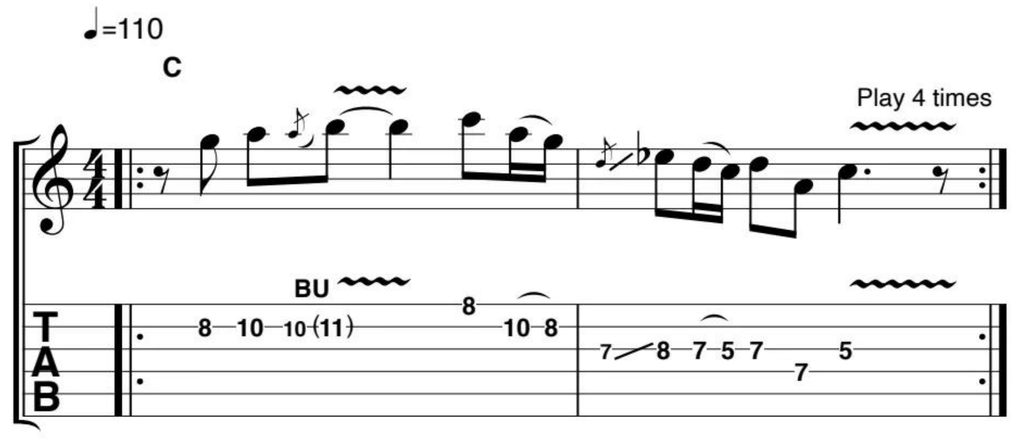
Yes, yes, we *are* aware we've just been looking at improvising solos and that "creative soloing" might appear to be just a little bit similar... but bear with us. This next idea takes you a step further. Think of it as a more developed approach to improv if you like, but it's also something to employ when writing longer solos. Here, we're going to take a basic C minor pentatonic lick and demonstrate three ways you could adapt the idea to take it somewhere new. Recycling ideas and globalising concepts is a great way to maximise your vocabulary and make sure your solos always sound like they're going somewhere.

THE BASIC LICK bit.ly/tg380audio



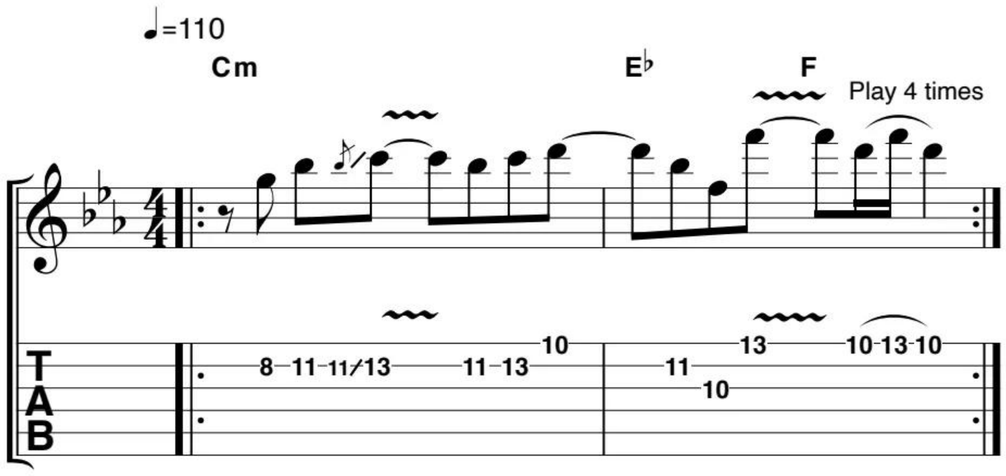
DAY 27 This is our basic lick. It uses the C minor pentatonic scale and has a simple, memorable melody. The use of string bends and finger slides helps to bring the idea to life.

CHANGING THE HARMONIC CONTEXT bit.ly/tg380audio



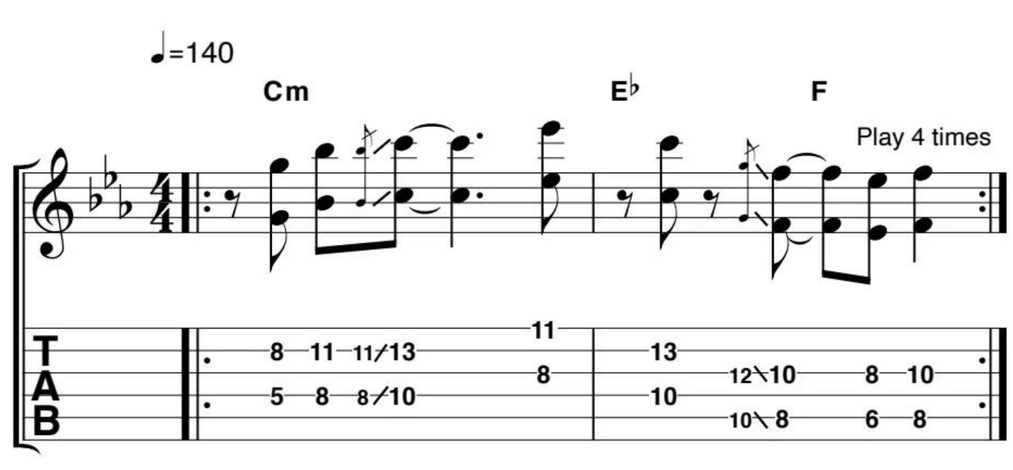
DAY 28 If we move our basic lick down three frets a C major pentatonic version can be produced. Blues guitarists are fond of shifting licks around to make major versions with ease.

ADD IN TARGET NOTES bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 29 We can add in target tones and flavour notes in to spice up our basic lick. Here we are adding a D note. This D doesn't appear in the C minor pentatonic scale, but it sounds great.

CHANGING STYLE bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 30 With a change of tone and phrasing we can adapt the basic lick to fit other styles of music. Here we're using octaves and a neck pickup to beef up the sound. Use downward thumb strokes to get a jazz-style delivery.

EAR TEST ANSWERS

TEST 1 Dm · D5 · D

TEST 2 Dm7 · Dmaj7 · D7

TEST 3 Dsus2 · D7sus4 · Dsus4

TEST 4: Ddim7 · Dm7♭5 · Dm6

Week 1

1. Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
2. Daily practice: play the five or 10 easiest exercises from the feature
3. Day 7: play through all the exercises in the feature again

Take it fairly easy during week 1. You may not be able to play all the examples, so don't worry about it. Focus most of your time on the easiest riffs, licks and exercises as well as the ones you enjoy the most. Don't neglect your existing repertoire either. If you're playing for an hour, then 15 to 20 minutes on a technical workout is as much as you need.

Week 2

1. Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
2. Daily practice: aim to increase speed and accuracy on week 1's chosen exercises
3. Introduce five to 10 new exercises into your daily routine

Your aim this week is to upscale your efforts from week 1. Not in terms of how long you play for (unless you want to), but in terms of accuracy, quality and speed. If you're focusing on chord vocabulary, ear training or similar, then you should be seeing improvements here. Start to introduce some of the more challenging exercises, too.

30-DAY PLAN

You've tried all our exercises, now structure your practice time with our planner

Hopefully by now you've read through the feature and had a look at most of our lessons. Now, it's time to think about how to use the examples over the coming days and weeks so that you see steady improvements in your playing. Here, we're focusing on general improvement over the first three weeks, then homing in on more specific goals in week four. Feel free to adjust this flexible plan according to your own interests and playing goals.

Week 3

1. Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
2. Daily practice: increase speed and accuracy on week 1 & 2's exercises
3. Introduce the remaining exercises from the feature

Once again, this week your aim is to improve on the exercises you've been focusing on so far and to introduce anything you haven't tried. Jam along to our backing tracks or practise with a metronome or drum machine – either way, starting slowly and increasing the tempo in small steps is the key to sustained improvement.

Week 4

1. Daily practice: play the hardest exercises from the feature
2. General technique: sections A, B and F
3. Rhythm guitar: sections B, C, D and E
4. Lead guitar: sections E, F, G and H

Time to change tack. Ditch the easiest exercises – hopefully they're too easy for you by now. And dropping them in favour of more challenging material will help you continue to improve. Double down on your playing goals this week, too. If you want to improve your soloing then pay most attention to our lead guitar sections.

Days 29–30

1. Get creative! Mix and match from the feature
2. Test yourself

Try mixing up, say, alternate picking with pinched harmonics, or trills with tapping. Alternatively, try switching between rhythm and lead exercises, or rewriting one of our rhythm examples with some new chords. As you free yourself from the stricter practice of following tab you should find that the creative ideas begin to flow. Finally, test yourself on any areas you struggled with.

"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

David 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...

Photos Pete Still / Getty





BOYS KEEP SWINGING
Carlos backing Bowie in Brussels in 1978

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!

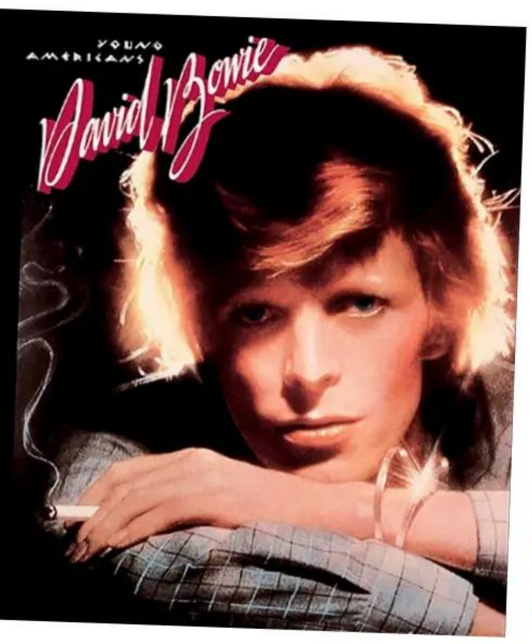
What did your rig look in the studio as you worked on that album?
I hadn't really expanded my rig at all. By then, I knew some of the outboard gear found in studios and depended on 19-inch studio rack units instead of pedals to experiment with new sounds. I was using an ES-335TD CRS Country Rock Stereo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

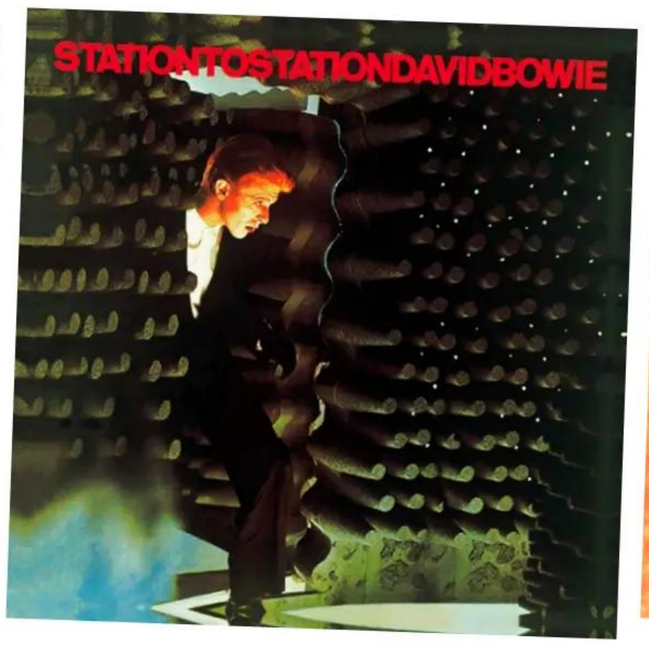
How did your style impact songs like *Young Americans* and *Fame*?
My style brought a distinctive funk and soul flavour to those tracks. My rhythmic playing on *Young Americans* helped define the groove, giving it that soulful Latin feel. For *Fame*, the main riff I came up with became the backbone of 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 [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.

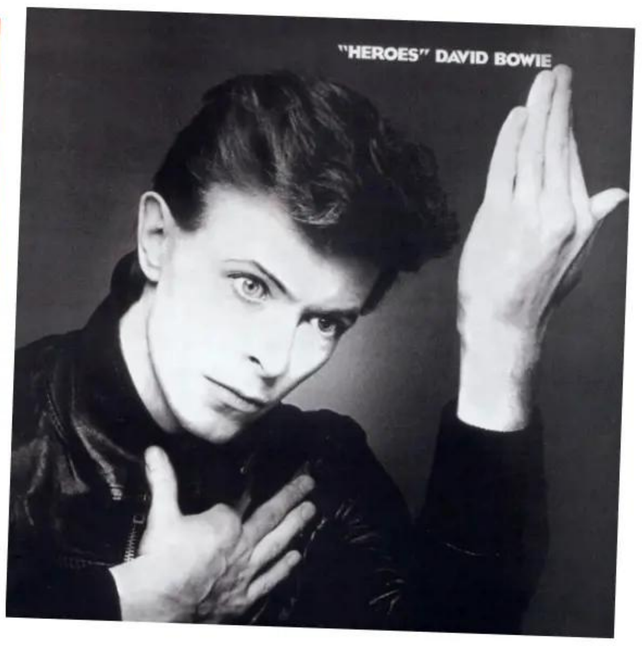
Was there a trick to sharing space with Earl?
That ploy worked for rehearsals, but I knew I was in sonic trouble with Slick and his Marshall stacks. Since I now had an ES-335TD CRS Country Rock Stereo, I got two Fender Twin 12s and turned them up to match my mood. Sharing space with Earl Slick was a 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. This was the formation of

Photos Gie Knaeps / Getty









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

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

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.

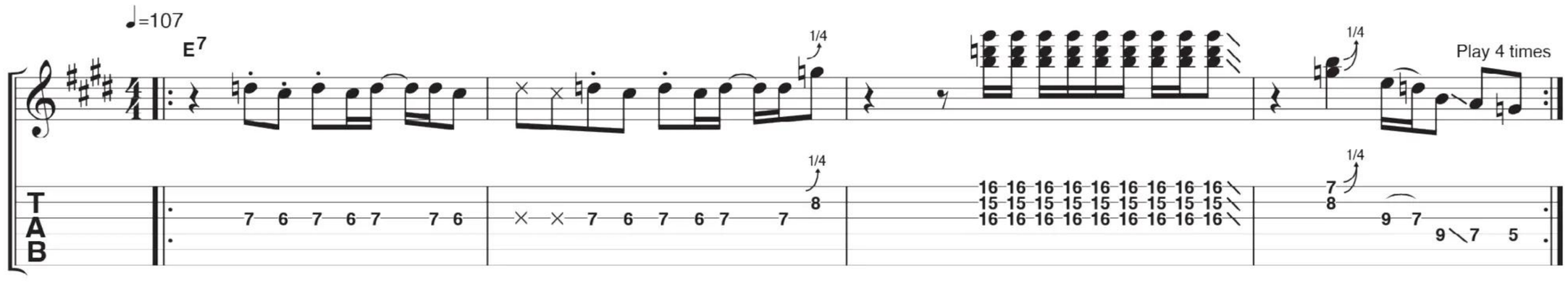
On the *Low* album, the first from Bowie's Berlin period, he and Brian Eno were experimenting with ambient sounds and Kraftwerk-inspired electronica. How did that impact the D.A.M. Trio?
We were really trying to develop our own sound, and this was evident from all the material from the Berlin Trilogy – 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 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/tg388audio



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 [synthesisers], 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 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.



LET'S DANCE!
On stage in France during the Serious Moonlight tour in 1983

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"

Photos Luciano Viti / Getty



Guitars and backing Jon Bishop

CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES!

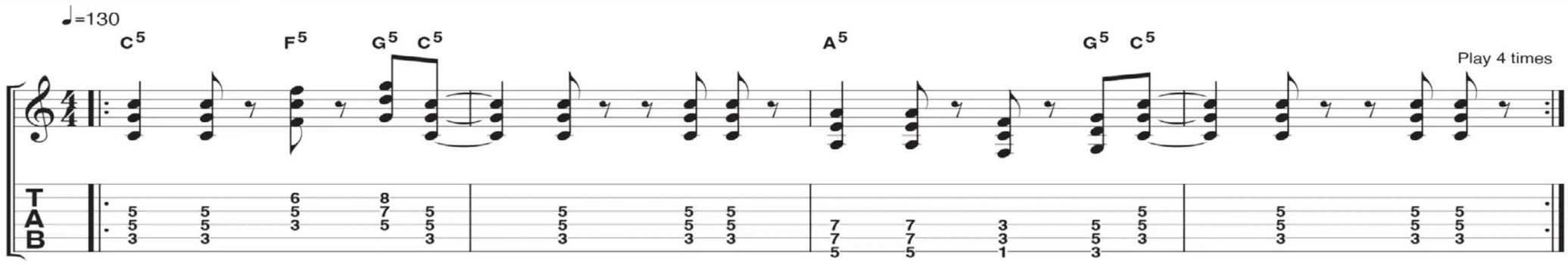
Taking inspiration from Carlos Alomar, we look at the styles of three of the greatest to play alongside David Bowie

Bowie 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

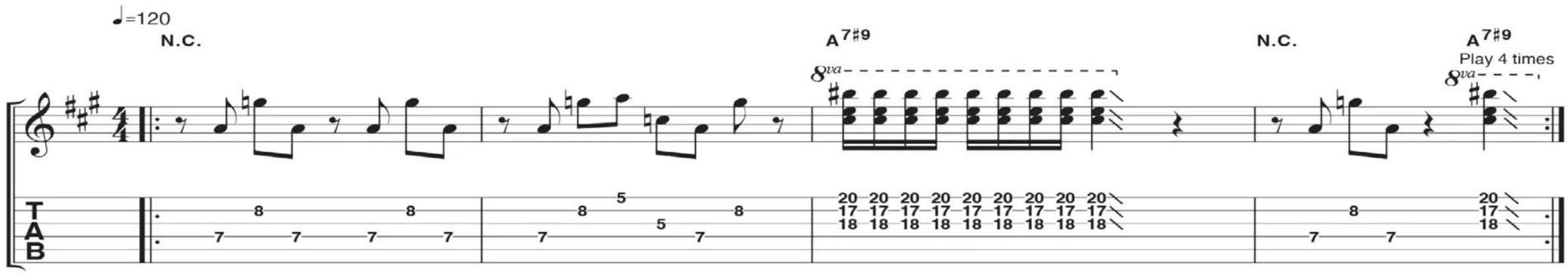
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Mick Ronson played guitar on early Bowie records between 1970 and 1973 – a brief period, but a full five albums. He had a great rock tone courtesy of a Black Beauty Les Paul Custom that was stripped of its finish, and it fitted perfectly with Bowie's 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

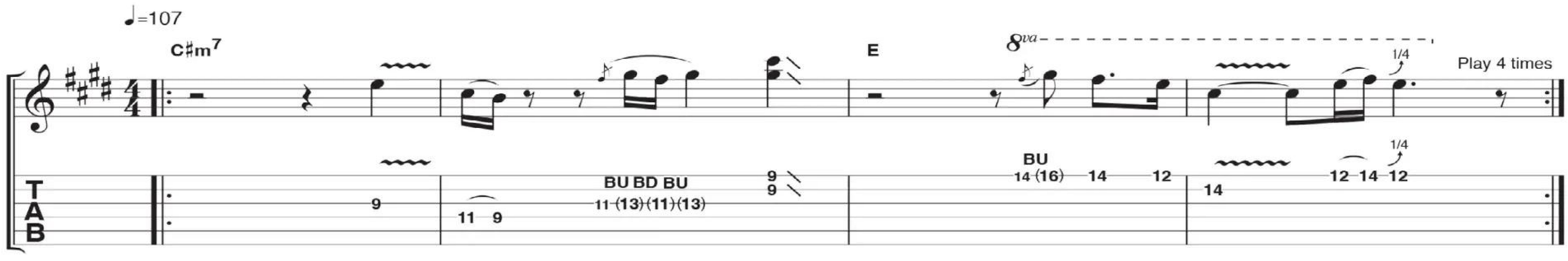
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King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp was enlisted by producer Brian Eno to play guitar on 1977's *Heroes* album, but we're taking inspiration here from his experimental sounds on songs like *It's No Game* and *Fashion* on 1980's *Scary Monsters...* 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

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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.



POWER PLAYER
Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong is a master of rhythm guitar

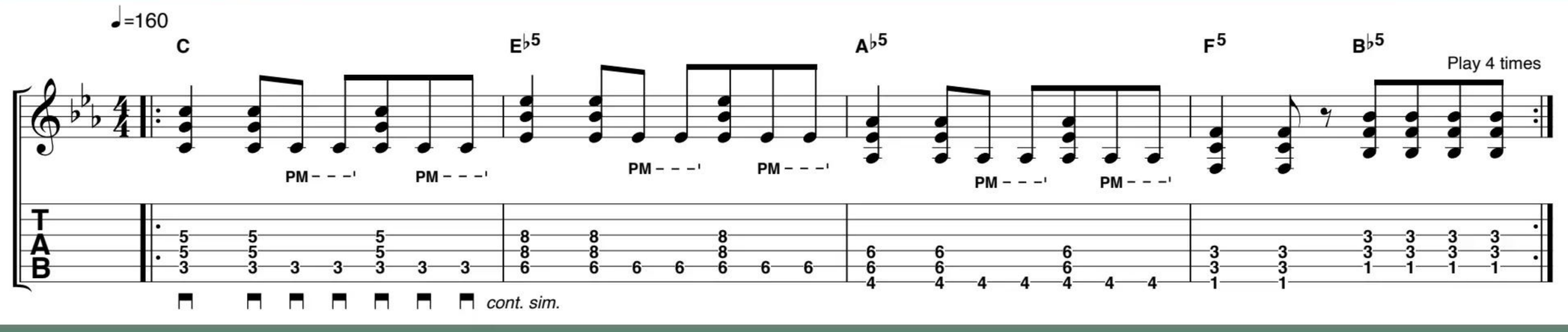
21 WAYS TO **BETTER RHYTHM**

Master different styles of music and improve your timing with TG's massive lesson

We've said this many times within these pages: the majority of most electric guitarists' performance time is spent playing rhythm – and, as such, it's pretty important to practise this aspect of your playing. Now, we don't want to bring up the thorny subject of what constitutes rhythm guitar, and, of course, the line between rhythm and lead is somewhat blurry. Suffice to say, here in our massive six-page tutorial, we're taking the broadest definition of rhythm guitar. Chords, picking, strumming, riffs, single-note accompaniments, various aspects of timing and more all feature here. And with 21 tab examples, complete with recorded audio tracks and guitar-less backing mixes to jam along to, all in different styles of music, there's enough here to keep us all rocking until, well, until next month's issue comes out!

01 DOWNPICKING: PUNK

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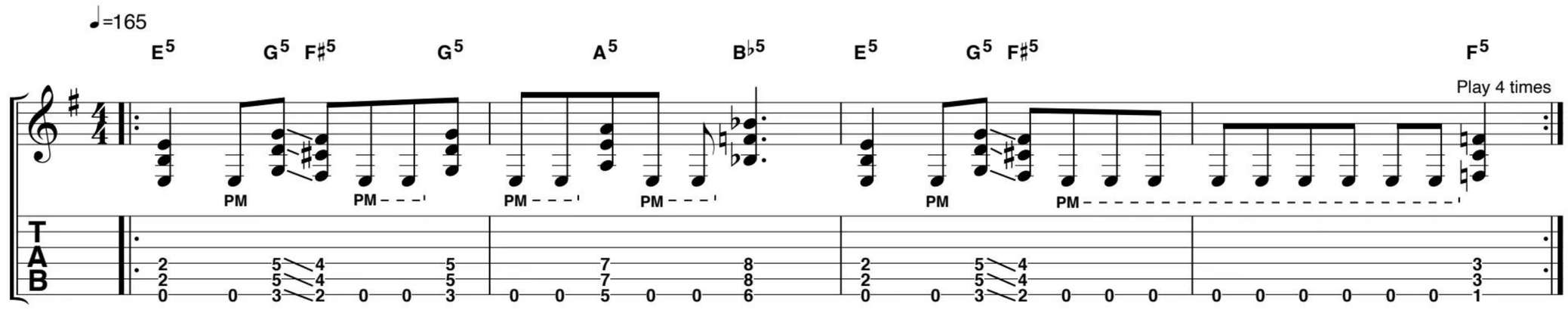


No surprises here! This example mixes up core punk ingredients of powerchords, palm muting and downpicking. At 160bpm, the tempo is fairly rapid, so you'll need a steady picking motion, keeping your movements as small and focused as possible. The thinner sounding palm-muted single notes contrast with the full chords and are a crucial punk rhythm technique. Think Ramones or Green Day and you'll be on the right lines.

Guitars and backing Jon Bishop Photo Getty

02 DOWNPICKING: '80S THRASH

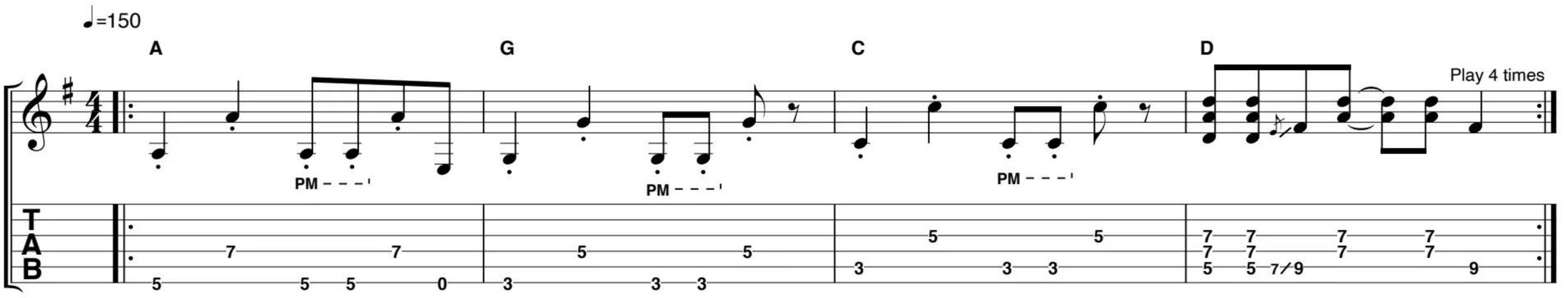
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There are a lot of similarities between this example and the previous one, namely the fast tempo, and the downpicked palm-muted powerchords. Once again, that means taking care to emphasise the full chords against the single notes. Typical of thrash metal rhythm though, there's more distortion and the harmony is more complex than punk, with the B♭5 and F5 chords momentarily hinting at the Locrian mode.

03 DOWNPICKING: '00S GARAGE/POST-PUNK

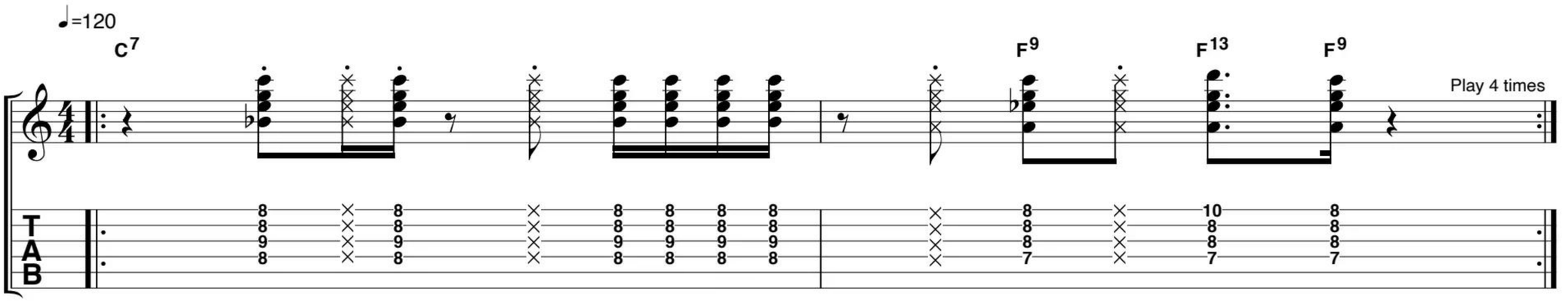
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The turn of the century saw a post-punk and garage rock revival, with acts like The Strokes and The Hives seeing major success. Our example exploits the octave interval, and downpicking is once again the order of the day. Dig in with a bridge pickup selected and a light overdrive tone. The sound of the guitar being hit hard and sending the amp into overdrive is more important than tickling the guitar with a higher gain setting.

04 FUNK CHORDS

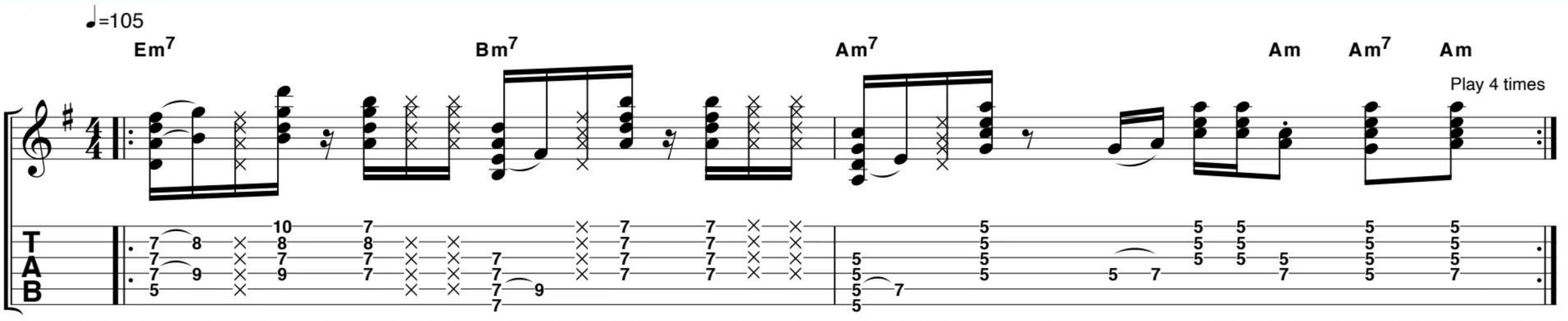
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We're firmly in James Brown/Jimmy Nolen territory here, with trademark 9th and 13th chords (as heard in Brown's *Get Up...*) and super-tight 'in-the-pocket' timing. If you struggle with the rhythm, play fewer strums so that the timing is always your main focus. You can come back and perfect the riff later if you want to.

05 16TH-NOTE DISCO

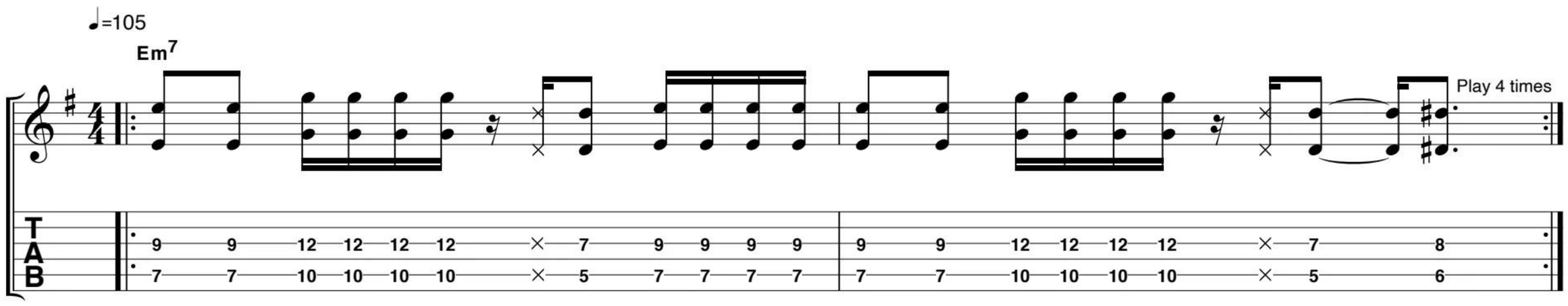
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This example is inspired by legendary disco strummer Nile Rodgers, who has been a prolific hit machine since the '70s. For this one simply select a neck single coil, dial in a lively clean tone and strum those funky 16th-note rhythms. We recommend using a thin pick (Rodgers himself uses 0.5mm picks). The flexibility just gives a smoother stroke across the strings that suits the sound of the constant 16ths.

06 90S FUNK-ROCK STRING MUTING

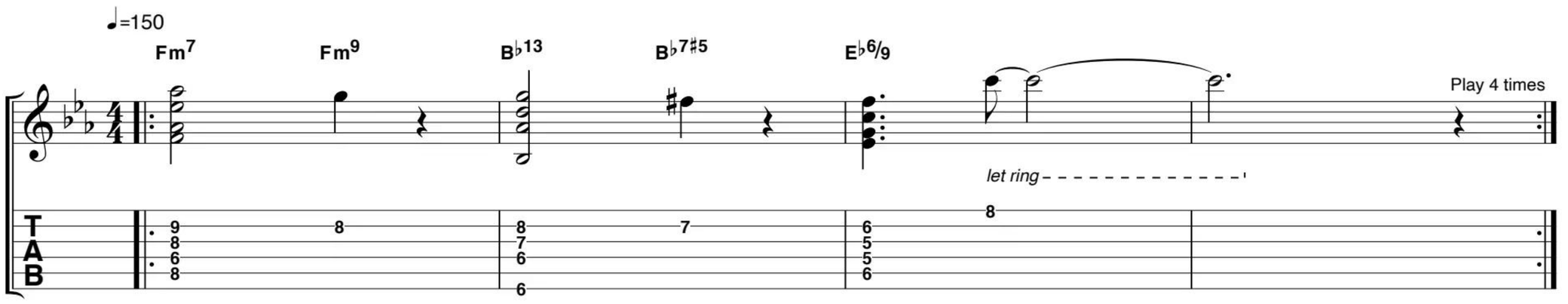
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Here we're taking inspiration from funk-rock greats Jane's Addiction, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Rage Against The Machine with a combination of octaves and 16th-note strumming. The Chilis' John Frusciante has almost superhuman string-muting abilities (check out how he *strums* the two-string shapes in *Scar Tissue*). And though the shapes are different here, the principle is the same – so be sure to stub free fingers up against the idle strings.

07 JAZZ "VOICE LEADING"

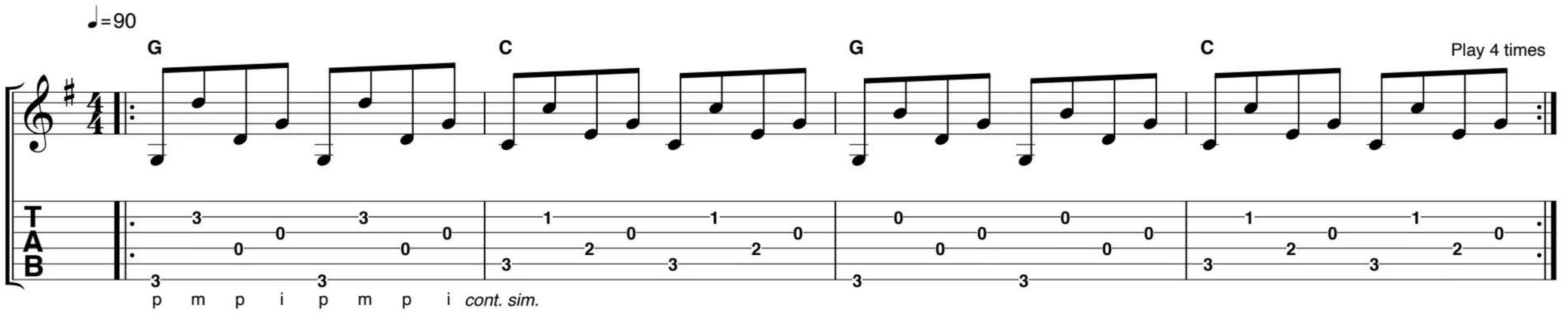
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This is a concept whereby the top notes (though bass or middle work, too) of a chord progression act as a melody that leads into and implies the next chord. There aren't really any rules other than the need for your melody to catch your listener's ear. You can introduce new melody notes, or just let the chord tones form the tune. Check out our tab example and listen to Wes Montgomery and Joe Pass for inspiration.

08 ESSENTIAL FINGERSTYLE

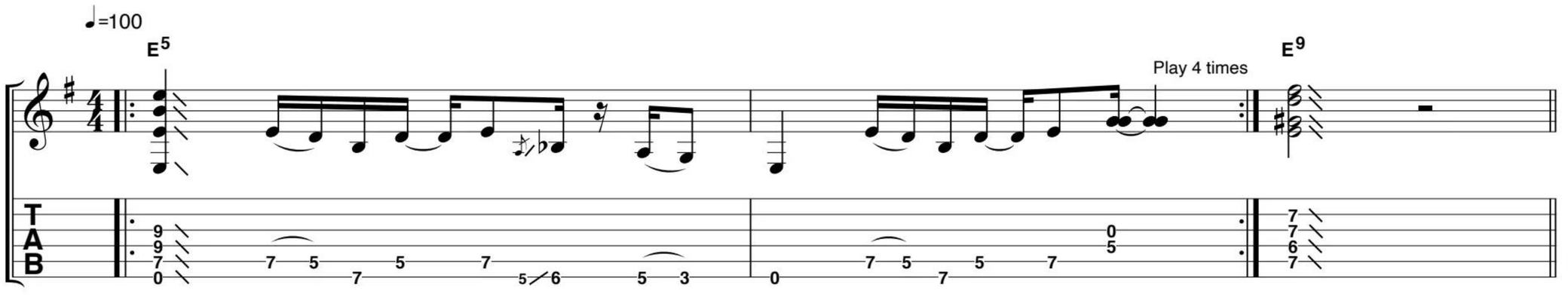
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Our folk example combines a bassline with melody notes to create a flowing fingerpicked part. It's a commonly used picking pattern than can be applied to countless chords and progressions. Our advice is to spend time on the picking pattern, working with open strings first so you don't have to worry about the changes. When you've got it down, try applying it to as many chords as possible.

09 70S PENTATONIC ROCK

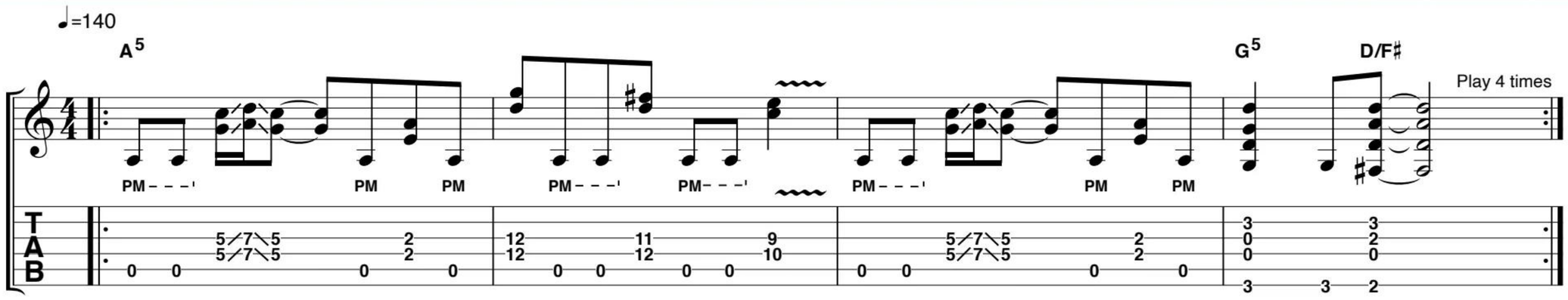
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The next example is inspired by '70s supergroups such as Led Zeppelin and Bad Company. The E minor pentatonic scale provides a tried and tested canvas to create rock riffs. We've also included the ♭5th blue note (B♭) to add that dirty, blues rock flavour. The riff is repeated four times and finished off with a funky E9 chord.

10 80S ROCK

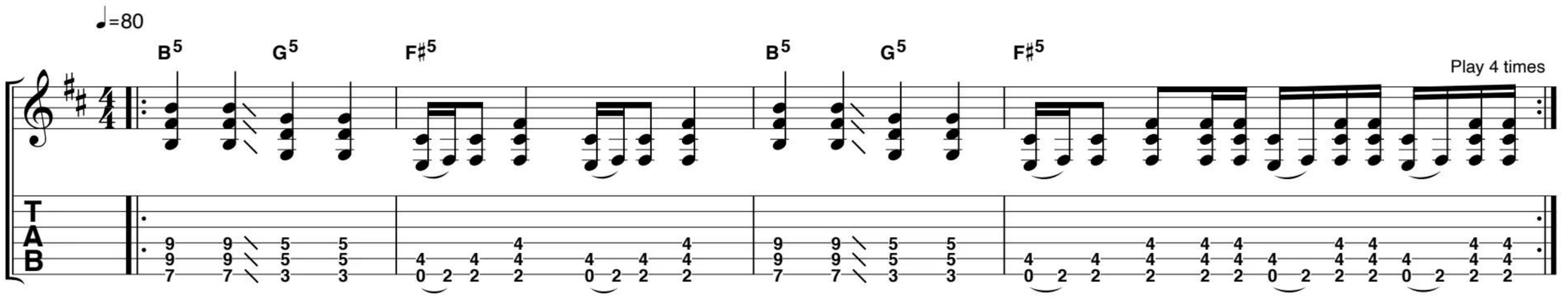
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This example will help you play in the style of acts like Van Halen, Def Leppard and Bon Jovi in their '80s pomp. Notice how we're using the open fifth string as a repeating root note, with doublestops added on the third and fourth strings. Use palm-muting to keep the fifth string under control.

11 00S STONER METAL

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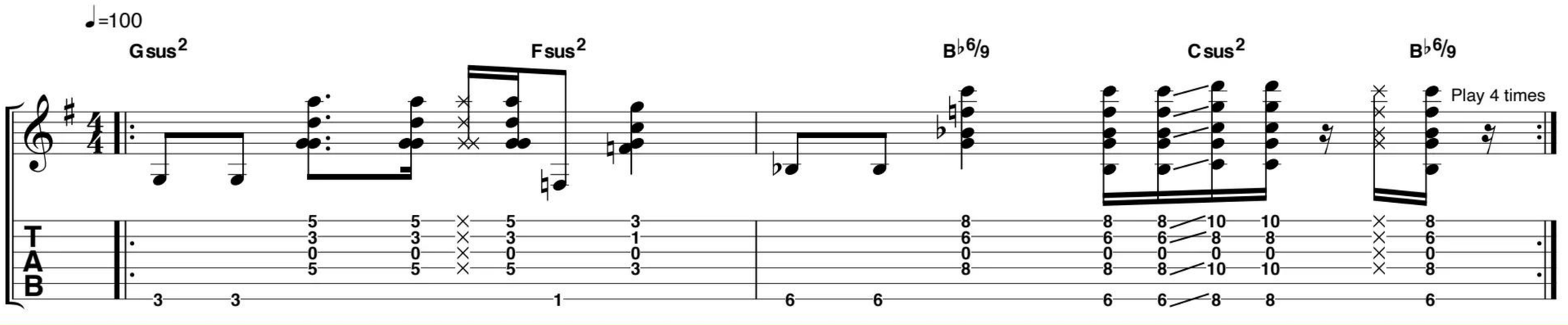
For this example, we wind the tempo down and lay into those low register powerchords. We're in standard tuning here, but this is the kind of riff that'd work better played in a lower tuning or on a baritone guitar. D, C♯ or C standard are good starting points, or try out the "drop" equivalents where the sixth string is tuned down by a tone.

JIMI HENDRIX

A master of funk, rock and soul – and he even used jazz chords! Jimi Hendrix was a true all-round rhythm machine!

12 EXTENDED CHORD RHYTHMS

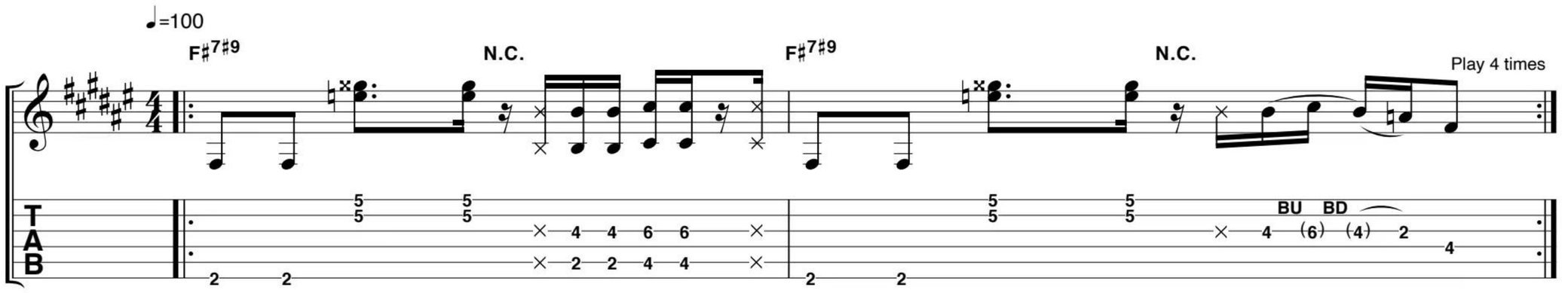
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Our first Jimi-style example is inspired by songs like *Castles Made Of Sand* and *Angel*, and uses chords with a thumb-fretted root note on the sixth string. Another key aspect is the open third string which rings out against the moving shape sometimes in harmony and sometimes creating dissonance.

13 FUNK-ROCK

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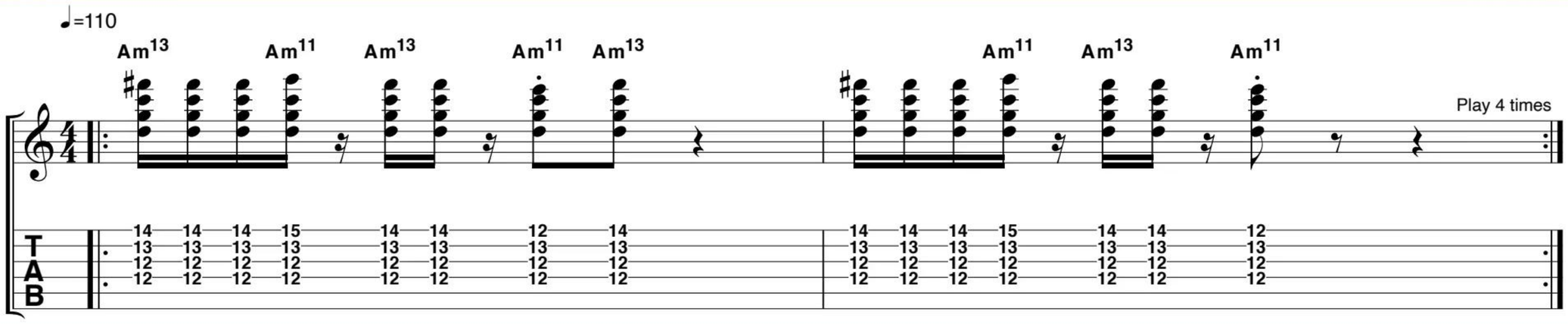
Our second example is inspired by tracks like *Foxy Lady* and *Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)*, and utilises the classic 7♯9 "Hendrix chord" – a simple jazz voicing that Jimi made regular use of. Octave shapes and some 'in-between' lead licks complete the Hendrix package.

PRINCE

Multi-instrumentalist, multi-stylist, producer and one of a kind, Prince was the pop star who could do it all. We look at a pair of his rhythm tricks...

14 FUNKY CHORDS

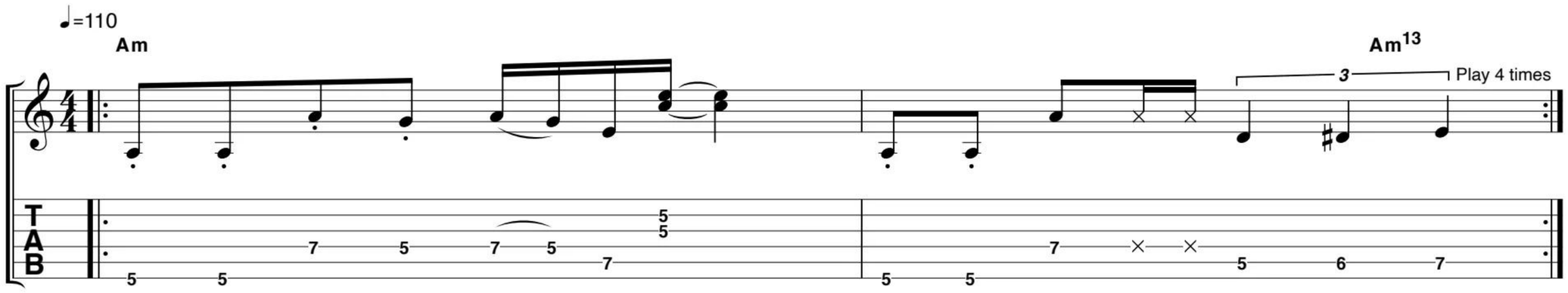
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With pop, R 'n' B and progressive soul all part of the Prince package, funk guitar techniques are a must. The Am11 and Am13 chords we've used are classic Prince-style fingerings. We'd recommend experimenting with a super-clean compressed tone without any reverb for that direct, dry funk sound.

15 ROCK RIFFS

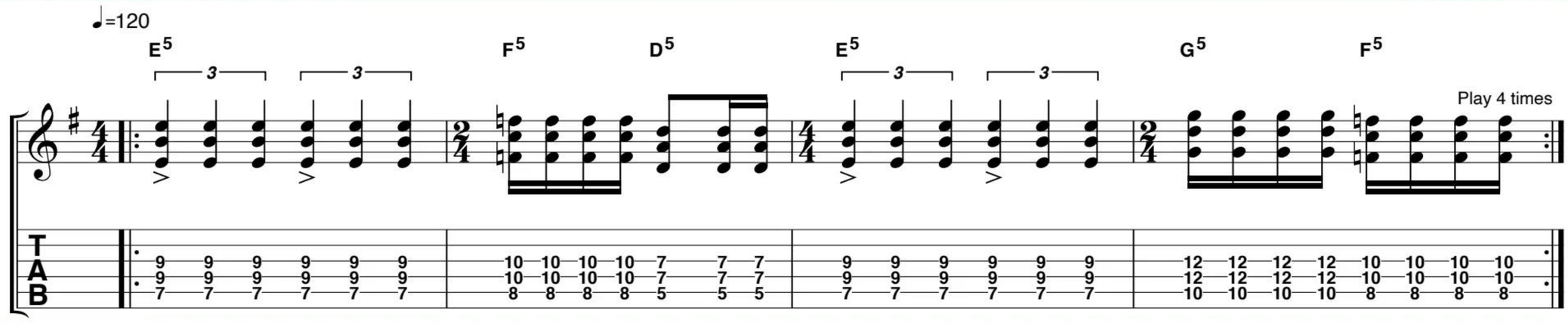
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For our second Prince-inspired example we head into the world of rock. Prince was a great rock guitarist and was no stranger to the overdrive pedal. We've used the A minor pentatonic scale (A C D E G) to create a chorus-style riff that would work alongside our previous funky verse example.

16 PROG METAL POLYRHYTHMS

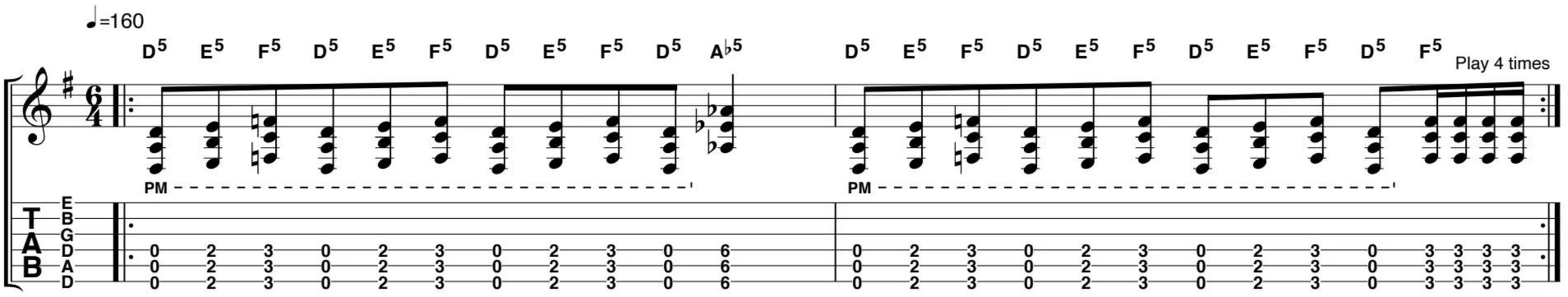
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The '90s saw the worlds of prog and metal collide, with the rise of now-iconic bands Dream Theater and Tool, from whom we've taken inspiration here. Our riff uses a quarter-note triplet rhythm played against a straight eighth-note groove to set up a polyrhythmic effect. To maintain the prog factor we're swapping time signature every bar, so count to four, then two, then four, then two again to keep time.

17 DROP D ALT-METAL

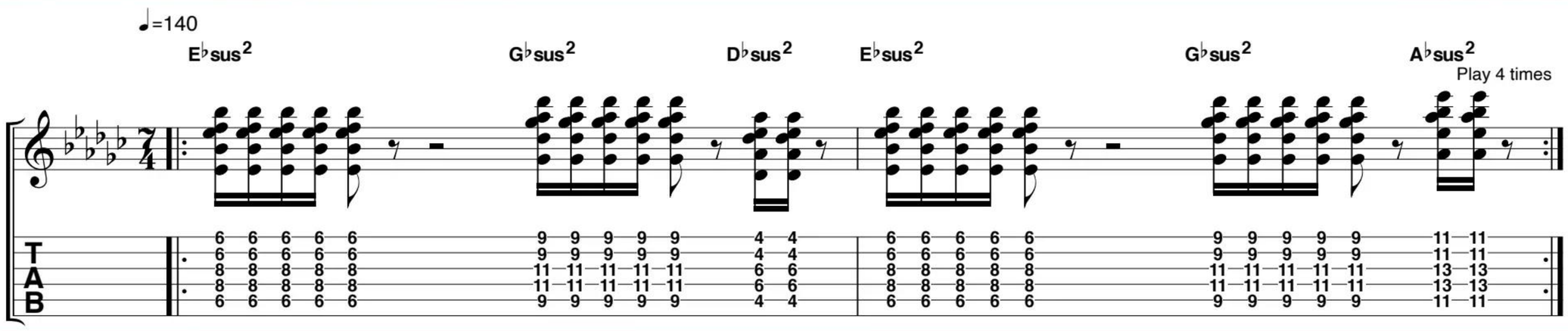
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Think Soundgarden and Alice In Chains and you'll be in the ballpark here – the Drop D tuning has been used in tracks such as *Outshined* and *Them Bones* respectively. Simply drop your sixth string's pitch down a tone to D, dial in a chunky, high-gain tone and rock out with the one-finger powerchord shapes shown here.

18 CONTEMPORARY MATH-ROCK STRUMMING

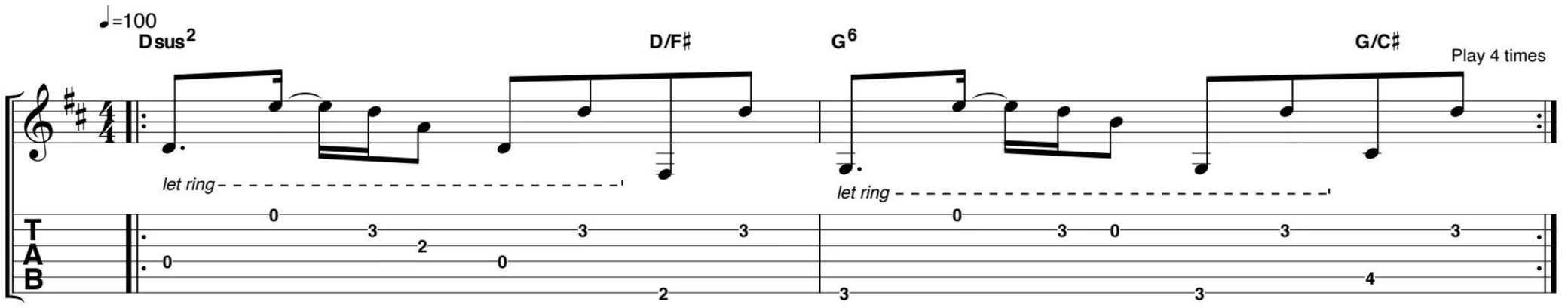
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The last few years have seen math-rock evolving greatly, with virtuoso acts like Chon, Covet, Polyphia and Unprocessed treading new ground. We're keeping things simple here, taking a look at some simple chord playing in odd time – specifically 7/4. This means there are seven quarter-note beats in each bar. Aim to make the 16th note strumming snappy and tight.

19 '80S INDIE ARPEGGIOS

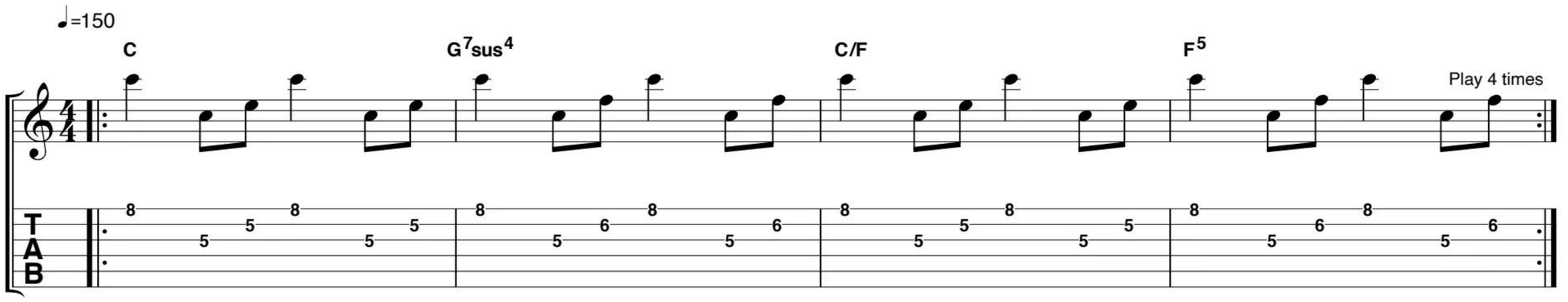
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This '80s indie-style example is inspired by bands like The Stone Roses and The Smiths and exploits the chorus effect to add depth and lushness to the clean arpeggios. To emulate the sounds in our example you will need a chorus pedal and a good base clean tone. Try using an 'in-between' pickup setting (position 2 or 4 on a five-way Fender-style selector, or position 2 on a three-way Gibson unit) for some 1980s' indie jangle!

20 DANCE-ROCK ARPEGGIOS

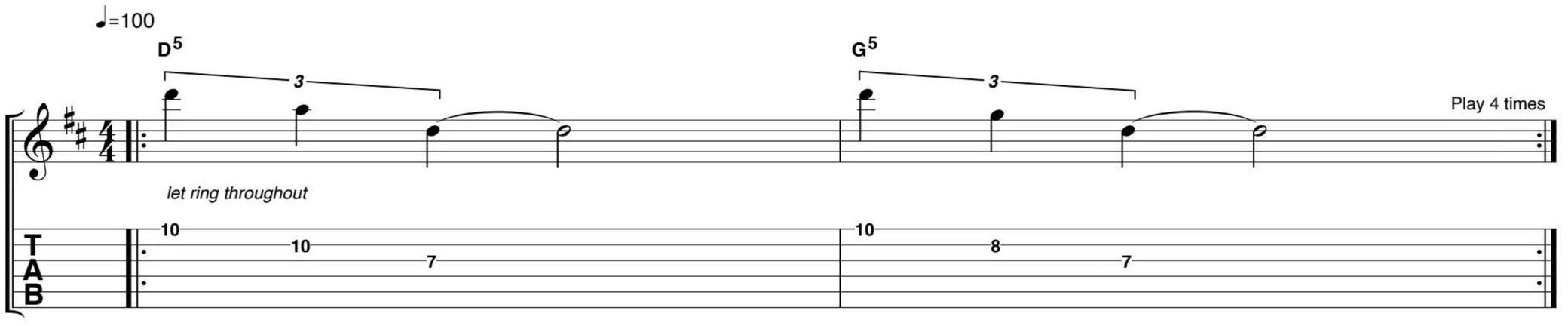
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Delay and chorus effects are combined here to create a spacious, modern vibe. This works well on dance tracks and our example is inspired by bands like Bloc Party and Walk The Moon. This part is relatively simple to play and uses the trick of having the bassline change to provide a different harmonic context to the arpeggios, which remain the same.

21 CLASSIC DELAY

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A delay effect can be used to superimpose rhythms into the guitar part. The optimum delay setting for this one is to have one delay with the repeats set to a dotted quaver and another set to a crotchet setting. Some modern delay units have this feature built in, which, though a useful shortcut, can be confusing. You'd tap a crotchet note pulse for the repeats to sound with a dotted eighth timing.

Words Neville Marten Photos Getty

"You just jump on the riff and it plays you!"

THE ROLLING STONES' 50 GREATEST RIFFS REVEALED – PLUS AN IN-DEPTH GUIDE TO HOW THE VERY BEST OF THEM WERE CREATED

From 1968 on, The Rolling Stones' sound was dominated not only by Mick Jagger's swaggering vocals and the funky rhythm section of Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts, but the guitars that somehow sounded unlike anything else out there at the time. Keith Richards had discovered a new rhythm sound, and with it an unprecedented burst of creativity.

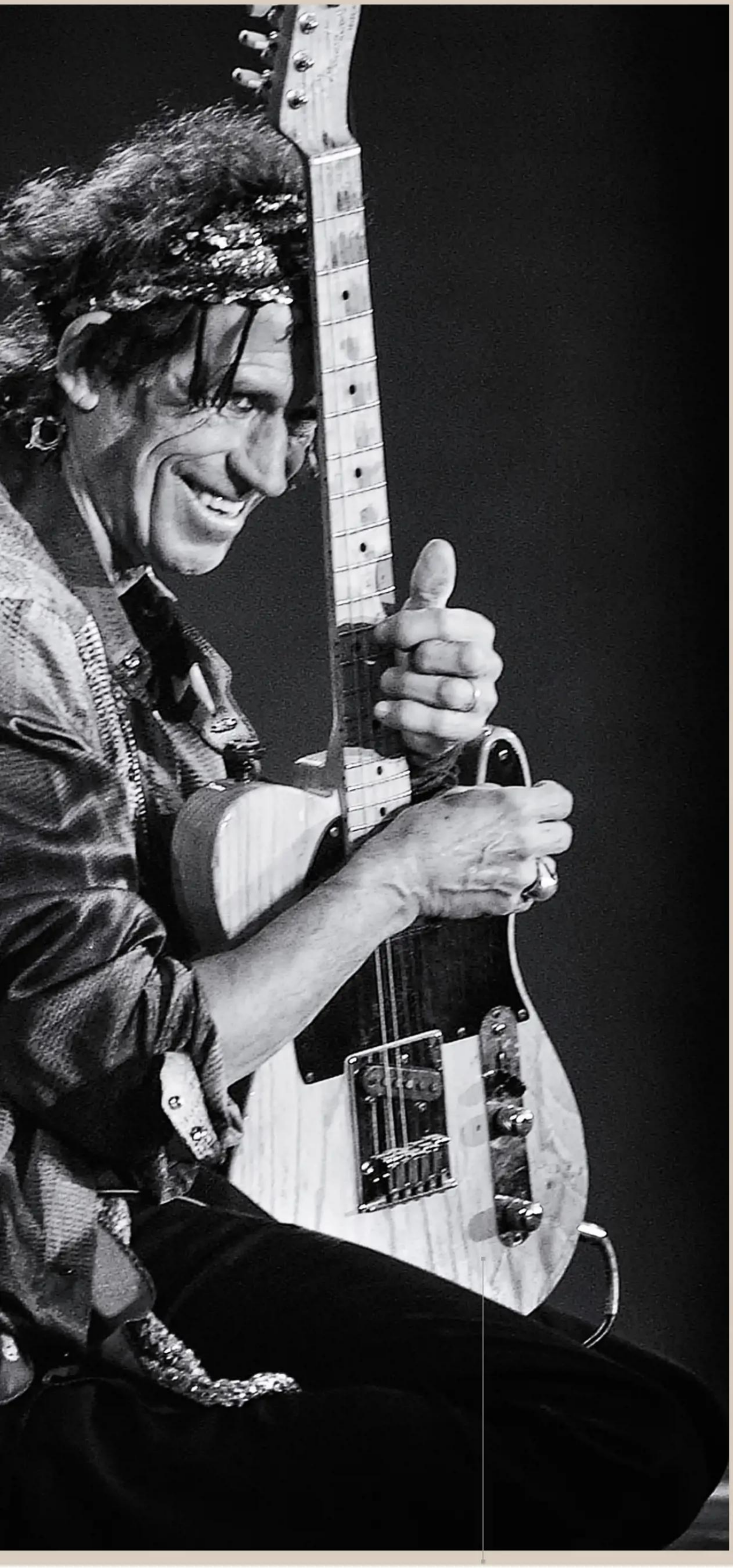
Open tunings are common in the world of fingerstyle acoustic and blues slide, but far less so with regular strummed rhythm guitar. But when country-blues legend Ry Cooder showed Richards open G tuning while working with the band during 1968, it was a lightbulb moment for Keith. With this new tuning he would go on to write some of the most memorable riffs of all time.

Tuning the sixth, fifth and first strings down by a tone gives the notes DGDGBD. Keith quickly surmised that having a 5th interval on the bottom string (the bass string) would be a hindrance, so in a moment of genius he simply removed it. This gave a five-string G chord with the root on the bottom, so placing a full barre anywhere on the neck created a new major chord; at the 5th fret we get C, on the 7th fret D, and so on.

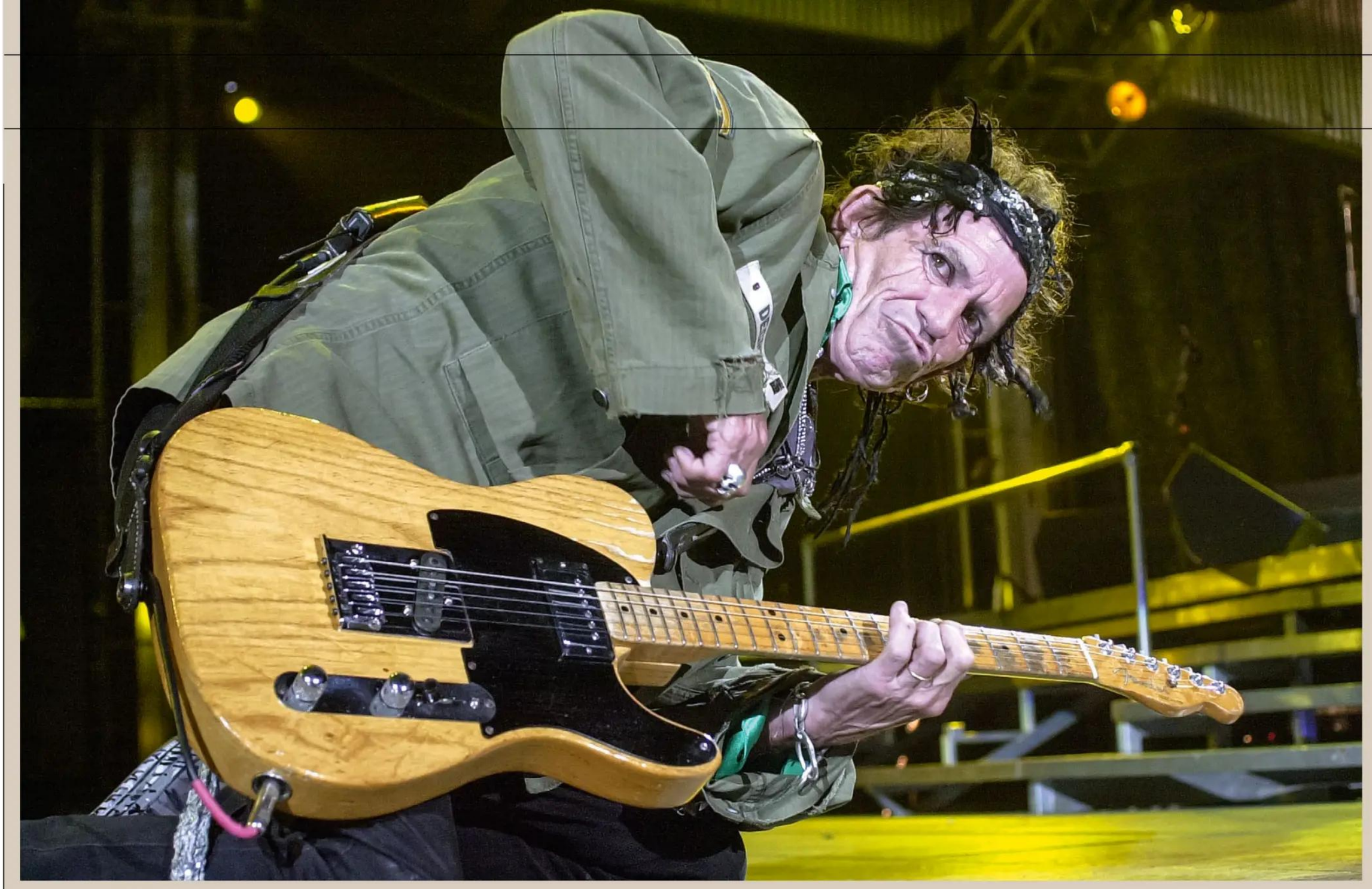
When Keith added his second and third fingers to the barre to create what looks like an Am7 shape, the G chord became Cadd9/G, the C became Fadd9/C, the D became Gadd9/D, etc. This simple scheme with its unique sound launched many of the Stones' greatest riffs.

Here, we list the top 50 – as voted by TG readers – and reveal the stories of how each the top 10 were written and recorded.





50 Too Much Blood
49 Goin' Home
48 Dance Pt.1
47 Heaven
46 Soul Survivor
45 Live With Me
44 Fingerprint File
43 Dancing With Mr. D
42 Casino Boogie
41 Love Is Strong
40 Jiving Sister Fanny
39 Some Girls
38 One Hit (To The Body)
37 Slave
36 Star Star
35 Undercover Of The Night
34 Mother's Little Helper
33 Harlem Shuffle
32 Before They Make Me Run
31 Hot Stuff
30 Little Red Rooster
29 Sway
28 Stray Cat Blues
27 Let's Spend The Night Together
26 19th Nervous Breakdown
25 Shattered
24 Miss You
23 Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo (Heartbreaker)
22 Get Off Of My Cloud
21 Rocks Off
20 All Down The Line
19 Happy
18 It's All Over Now
17 The Last Time
16 Bitch
15 It's Only Rock 'N' Roll (But I Like It)
14 Monkey Man
13 Paint It Black
12 Beast Of Burden
11 Street Fighting Man



10
Tumbling Dice
(1972)

Recorded at Keith Richards' rented chateau in the South of France, the lead single from *Exile On Main Street* kicks off with a killer riff in B, played in Keith's newfound open G tuning with a capo at the 4th fret. "I was starting to really fix my trademark, starting to find all these other moves," remembers Richards. "How to make minor chords and suspended chords. The five-string becomes very interesting when you add a capo. It gives a certain ring that can't be obtained any other way." As Bill Wyman was absent for the session, lead guitarist Mick Taylor played bass.

09
(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction
(1965)

The riff that broke the Stones globally was 'dreamt' by Keith who captured it on his cassette recorder before going back to sleep. In the studio he used a Gibson maestro fuzz to emulate horns, as initially he wanted to replace the guitar figure later.

"I was screaming for more distortion," he recalled. "We turned the sh*t up and it still wasn't right." Pianist Ian Stewart nipped out to a local music store and returned with the pedal. "I never got into the thing after that," states Richards, "but it was just the right time for that song."

Guitarist and founding member Brian Jones played the E-D-A chord figure that goes under the riff on acoustic, Richards added clean electric rhythm, while Bill Wyman walked his bass from root to 4th and back, along the E natural minor scale.

08
Midnight Rambler
(1969)

Originally recorded during the *Beggar's Banquet* sessions, *Midnight Rambler* was held over for the following album *Let It Bleed*. It was also the final track to feature Brian Jones, who played congas.

Jagger and Richards reckon it's the archetypal Stones song, written together while on holiday in Italy. Keith said of their four-part epic: "Nobody went in there with the idea of doing a blues opera. That's just the way it turned out. I think that's the strength of The Stones; give them a song half raw and they'll cook it."

Held together by Keith's 5th-fret capo boogie rhythm and slide guitars, Jagger adds fills on harmonica while Wyman and Watts groove as only they can.

07
Sympathy For The Devil
(1968)

The opening track on *Beggars Banquet* began life on acoustic guitar with Jagger strumming the chords. "The first time I heard it was when Mick was playing it, and it was fantastic," Charlie Watts enthused.

Along the way the song transformed into the hypnotic epic we recognise today. As Richards remarked, "It started as sort of a folk song and ended up as a kind of mad samba, with me playing bass and overdubbing the guitar later." Although there is strummed rhythm on the final cut from Brian Jones it's barely audible. Instead the song is propelled by session pianist Nicky Hopkins, with percussion added by members of the band plus Ghanaian musician Rocky Dijon.

The main guitar feature is Keith's two spiky-toned solos, played on a three-pickup Les Paul Custom through a Vox AC30. The first enters two and a half minutes in, with spitting E minor pentatonic licks played mostly in shapes one and two. His second outing begins at 4:42, where he elaborates on the gritty, blues-flavoured theme until the track fades.

While Richards' lead work certainly divides opinion, what cannot be denied is that this instantly recognisable guitar playing powers one of the most important rock songs of all time.

06
Start Me Up
(1981)

On any Top 10 Greatest Intros list, *Start Me Up* should be right up there. But the track, which begins with one of Keith's greatest ever riffs, had a difficult birth. From when the band first tried it for 1978's *Some Girls* sessions (and some have said even earlier), Richards always envisaged it as a reggae number. But after 40 or so takes they shelved the song as a lost cause.

Come 1981's impending tour, and management demanded a new album. With Mick and Keith not on the best of terms, producer Chris Kimsey trawled the archives knowing he had a clutch of half-finished gems in the can. Among the failed reggae attempts, Kimsey found a rockier version of *Start Me Up* that became the basis for the 'new' track. As Richards later mused, "With a band that goes on for a long time, you end up with a backlog of really good stuff that you didn't get the chance to finish, or put out."

Assembling in New York for overdubs, Keith adopted his trademark Tele and open G tuning to nail the three-chord boogie intro. Ronnie doubled it using a harder electric tone and added sparse fills. Jagger's vocal is classic Stones sleaze, while engineer Barry Sage and Santana percussionist Michael Carabello augment Watts and Wyman's groove with handclaps and cowbell.

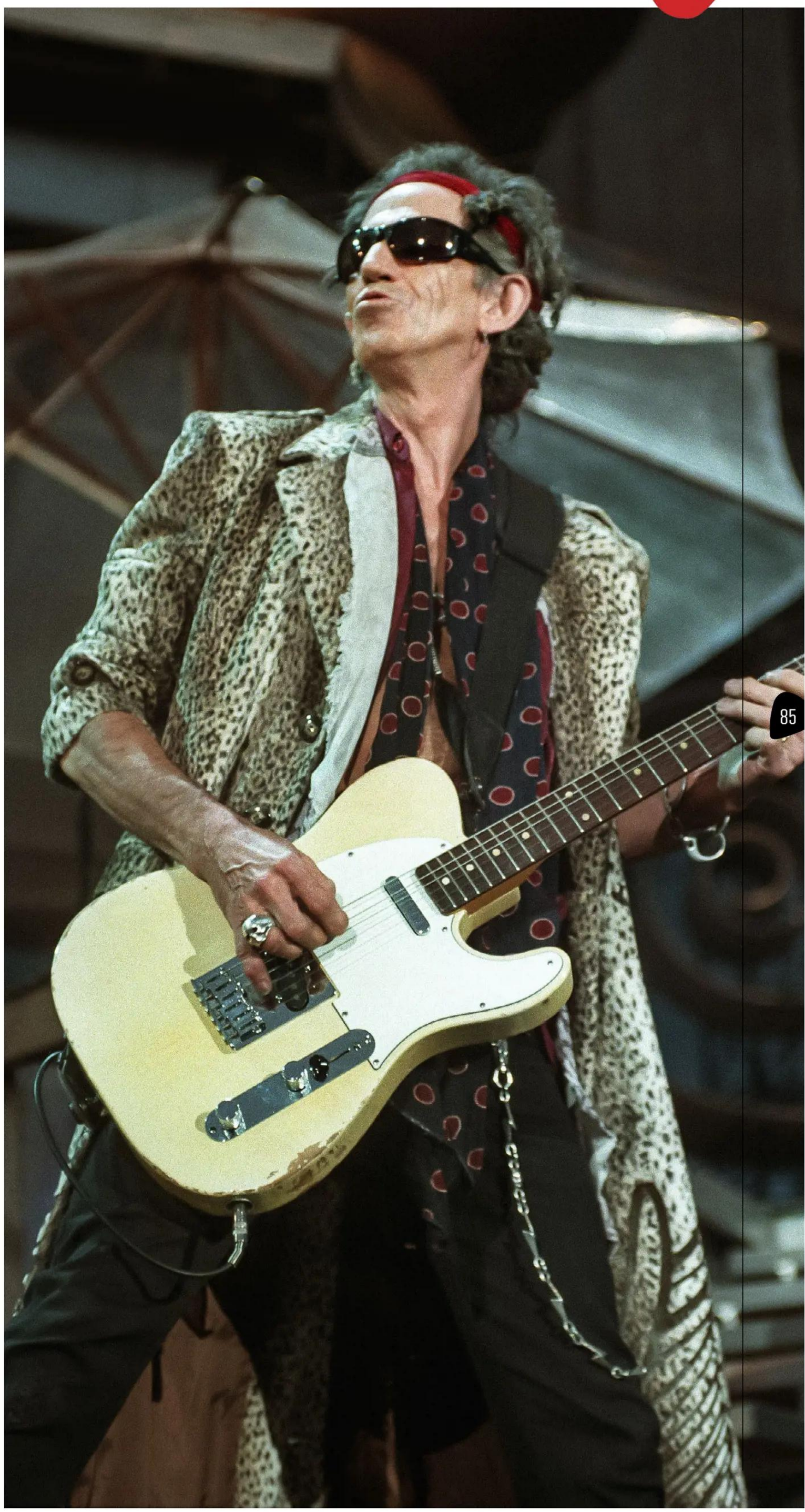
05
Honky Tonk Women
(1969)

Another brilliant Keith intro, here he simply picks the open fourth and third strings with thumb and forefinger to create the unforgettable, "Der, dert-dert, der' lick. With it, Richards stamped *Honky Tonk* on the world in mere seconds – with a little help from producer Jimmy Miller's cowbell, Charlie's kick and snare, and it would seem also from Ry Cooder.

Hired by the band for various projects Cooder has claimed the track is built around licks 'lifted' from these sessions. "A lot of what I did showed up on *Let It Bleed*, but they only gave me credit for playing mandolin on one cut," bemoans Cooder. "*Honky Tonk Women* is taken from one of my licks." In his autobiography, *Life*, Richards admits that Cooder showed him the open G tuning that became his mainstay. Over the years, of course, it has become his own.

Mick Taylor played lead on the track. "I didn't play the riffs that start it," he states, "that's Keith. I played the country-influenced rock licks between the verses."

We'll leave the last word to Richards: "*Honky Tonk* can be a b*stard to play, man. When it's right, it's really right. There's something about the starkness of the beginning you really have to have down, and the tempo has to be just right. It's a challenge, but I love it."





04
Brown Sugar
(1971)

It's that open G thing again! And on *Brown Sugar*, which opens 1971's *Sticky Fingers* album, it forms the basis of the song's entire rhythm track. From the opening 'dit-dit, dat-dat-da-daa-da' lick, Keith runs around the extended turnaround chords of E♭, C, A♭, B♭, C, with added and pulled-off sus4 and 6th (his classic move).

The verses are built around a modified boogie blues, but with the inimitable sound of Richards' pile-driving guitars stamping them with pure Stones magic. And when Mick Taylor added fills in the G breakdown section, and Bobby Keys played his belting sax solo, a rock classic was born.

The joyous music, however, is a backdrop to lyrics that were dark and controversial even back in 1971. But 50 years on it was deemed unsuitable to air live, so in 2021 Jagger withdrew it from the band's setlist, admitting that he would not write such words today.

03
Jumpin' Jack Flash
(1968)

This single from 1968 marked a welcome return from the band's psychedelic 'lost weekend' of *Their Satanic Majesties Request* to their bluesier, rockier roots. It was also their first time with producer Jimmy Miller, and ushered in a more relaxed and enjoyable way of working – the band had self-produced Satanic Majesties and it had been a long and arduous process.

"I hated it," remarked Bill Wyman. "Every day at the studio it was a lottery as to who would turn up and what, if any, positive contribution they would make." Richards, too, found Jimmy's regime much more enjoyable. "Suddenly, between us, this whole new idea started to blossom, this second wind. And it just became more and more fun."

Jumpin' Jack Flash is driven mainly by Keith's Gibson Hummingbird acoustic tuned to open D with capo added. This was fed into a cassette recorder and back out to a mic'd-up extension speaker. "The band all thought I was mad," laughed Richards, "and they sort of indulged me. But I heard a sound and Jimmy was onto it immediately."

Richards added a second acoustic in Nashville tuning (essentially the high octave half of a 12-string set, which gives an almost mandolin-like effect, especially when capo'd). Jones played another rhythm on electric guitar, along with the sparse licks in the choruses.

Jumpin' Jack Flash is The Stones' most performed song, and one of Keith's best-loved. "As soon as I pick up the guitar and play that riff, it's one of the best feelings in the world," he grins. "You just jump on the riff and it plays you!"

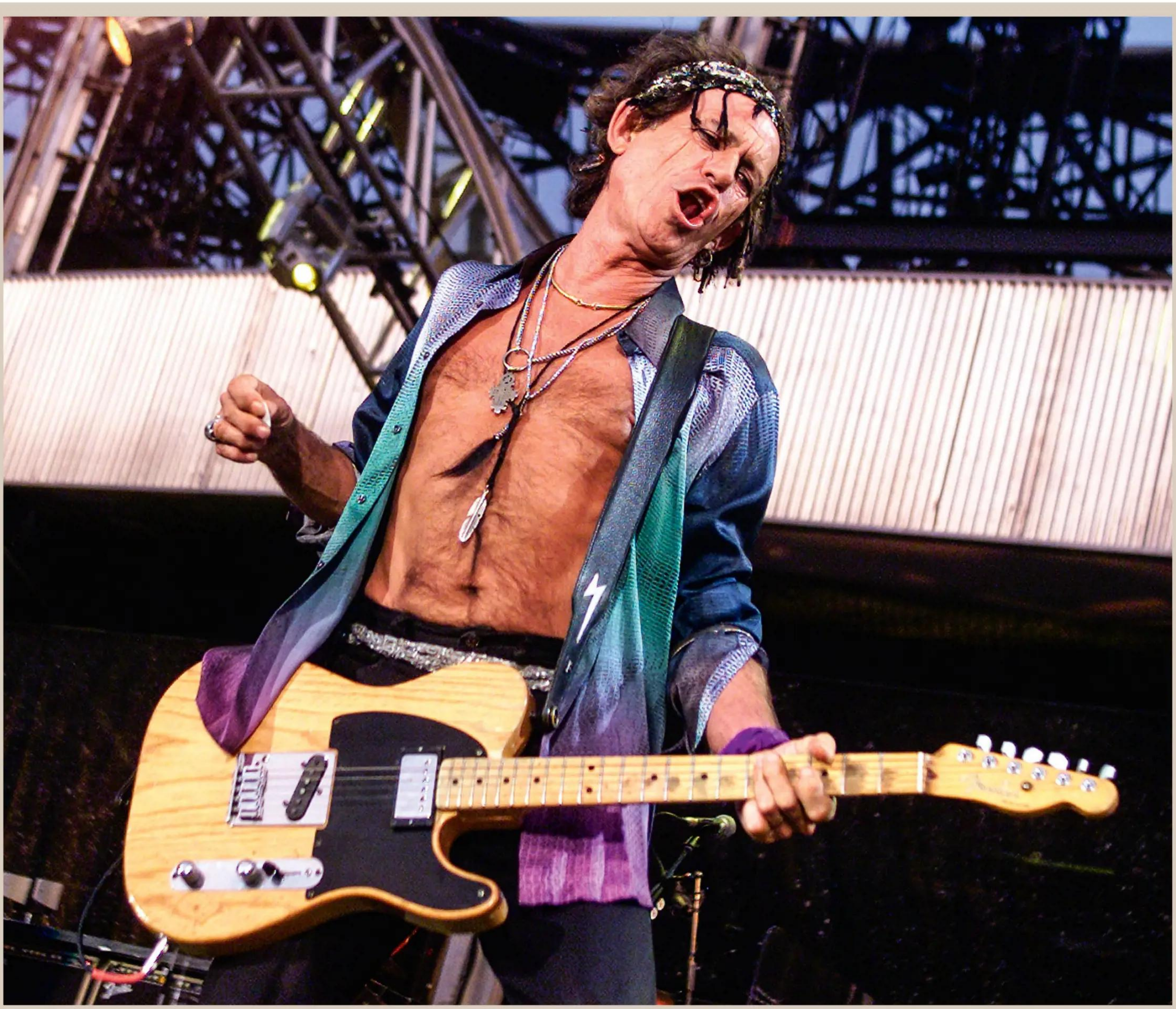
02
Gimme Shelter

(1969)

The track that kicked off *Let It Bleed* came from a dark place in Richards' life, but also represented a time of political unrest, race riots, and the Vietnam war. Keith's problems were that his girlfriend Anita Pallenberg, whom he'd earlier stolen from Brian Jones, was doing risqué scenes with Jagger for the film *Performance*, and Richards was convinced they'd take things further. He was also consumed by drug use, and came up with *Gimme Shelter* while watching people outside a friend's London apartment rushing to escape from a sudden storm.

Jones doesn't appear on the track, and Taylor was not yet fully in the band, so Richards played all the guitars. Again it was open G tuning, picking out notes from the descending and ascending C♯, B, and A chords, then embellishing them with overdubbed fills. "That beginning is so eerie, "says Richards. "Sometimes in a stadium you start to hear echoes." The strumming becomes more insistent as the song progresses, with Keith adding further lead interjections.

Keith also played acoustic on *Shelter*, but "it died on the very last note," Richards quipped. "The whole neck fell off. You can hear it on the original take."







01
Can't You Hear Me Knocking

(1971)

Our poll's winner is a seven-plus-minute epic of two halves. The first is the 'song' part which, unusually for a band that used to jam their tracks into shape, was more or less worked out before they entered the studio. The second section was a Latin-inspired jam that happened purely by accident. More of which later...

The meat and potatoes of *Can't You Hear Me Knocking* is Richards' tight and grungy rhythm track, once again employing the open G, five-string regime and probably played on his black Les Paul Custom. This is countered by a second, equally strident rhythm part performed by Taylor on a walnut brown Gibson ES-345 through a 100-watt Ampeg VT-22 combo.

Richards' part is relatively complex when compared to simpler numbers such as *Honky Tonk Women*. Using mainly doublestops in 4ths and 3rds, he weaves around the changes while Taylor supports him with a more straight-ahead feel. The two-guitar arrangement works brilliantly to create one of the band's tightest and most focused pieces of work.

Unusually for a Stones song, *Can't You Hear Me Knocking* features a stack of vocal harmonies. According to Jagger the key was too high and he struggled in places, so layered up his vocals to disguise the crack in his voice on some of the high notes.

The slowly building jam that takes up the majority of the tune is perhaps Mick Taylor's crowning glory as a Stone. We'll let him pick up the story: "Towards the end of the song I just felt like carrying on playing" he explains. "Everybody was putting their instruments down, but it sounded good so everybody quickly picked them up again and carried on playing. It just happened, and it was a one-take thing."

As luck would have it, the tape was still rolling so Taylor's beautifully toned licks, languid string bends and smooth vibrato (the antithesis of Richards' spiky leads), were captured in full. "We didn't even know they were still taping," Keith confirms. "We were just rambling and I figured we'd just fade it off. It was only when we heard the playback that we realised we had two bits of music. There's the song and there's the jam."

Listening to the finished article, on which Bobby Keys added a gritty tenor sax solo, Billy Preston provided organ stabs, and Rocky Dijon and producer Jimmy Miller chimed in with congas and other percussion, it's clear that Richards was giving Mick Taylor his moment. Having no idea that they were being recorded, the confidence and class of the core members is evident throughout, while Miller's idea to augment the jam with other musicians was a masterstroke.

Many cite Mick Taylor's tenure with The Rolling Stones as the band's most musical period, and listening to this it's hard to deny. Taylor, however, is more modest about his contribution. "I tried to bring my own distinctive sound and style to *Sticky Fingers*, and I like to think I added some extra spice," he speculated. "I don't want to say 'sophistication' – I think that sounds pretentious. Charlie said I brought 'finesse.' That's a better word, so I'll go with what Charlie said."

Words Chris Bird **Photography** Bojan Hohnjec © Miracle Productions LLP / Getty

"IN THE HEAT OF THE BATTLE, WHEN WE'RE PLAYING *BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY* LIVE AND *THAT* RIFF COMES ALONG, I'M EXCITED, BUT I'VE GOT TO KEEP A PART OF MY BRAIN COOL JUST TO HANDLE WHERE THE FINGERS HAVE TO GO. IT'S ONE OF THE MOST UNNATURAL RIFFS TO PLAY THAT YOU COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE!"

In a world exclusive interview, Queen's guitar genius **Brian May** recalls how many of the band's most famous songs were created, what inspired his magical solos in *Killer Queen*, *Don't Stop Me Now*, *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* and more, and why the band cooked up a punk-stye version of *We Will Rock You*. He also reveals why he didn't play the funk rhythm on *Another One Bites The Dust*, and why that heavy riff on *Bohemian Rhapsody* is still one of the hardest things to play...

BRIAN MAY IS FEELING GOOD.

"A little tired," he smiles, "but very happy." On a cold winter afternoon, the legendary guitarist is talking to *Total Guitar* from his home in Surrey, a few days after the North American leg of Queen + Adam Lambert's Rhapsody tour ended with another sold-out date at the BMO Stadium in Los Angeles.

"Everyone in the States has been saying that this show is the best we've ever done with Adam," he says. "So it's a great result. Wonderful!"

Certainly, the Rhapsody tour – which concluded in Japan in February 2024 – was a huge production with spectacular state-of-the-art visual effects. "I've always loved to make a show a real event," Brian says.

But it's the music, of course, that continues to draw huge audiences for this tour across the globe – all of those great songs that Queen recorded with Freddie Mercury from the early '70s until the singer's death on November 24, 1991.

In a lengthy conversation with TG, Brian discusses the creation – and his role specifically – in many of the biggest hit songs and landmark tracks in Queen's career. Ten of these songs featured in the setlist from that recent show in LA: *Killer Queen*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Love Of My Life*, *We Are The Champions*, *Don't Stop Me Now*, *We Will Rock You*, *Another One Bites The Dust*, *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*, *Under Pressure* and *A Kind Of Magic*.

One is a hit that Brian wrote with his tongue-in-cheek – the OTT movie theme *Flash*. Another has great poignancy as one of the last Queen songs released in Freddie Mercury's lifetime – *These Are The Days Of Our Lives*.

And finally, there is a fan-favourite deep cut from 1980, *Dragon Attack*, picked out for TG by one of Brian's greatest admirers, Metallica lead guitarist Kirk Hammett.

As Kirk tells us: "I love Queen. I love all of it. I love all the stuff that everyone else loves. I especially love that song *Dragon Attack*."

But before we get to that, we're going all the way back to the 1970s, beginning with the hit single that defined Queen as one of the most inventive and original rock groups of that era...

GOOD COMPANY
Brian with drummer Roger Taylor and singer Adam Lambert, who has performed with Queen since 2011

KILLER QUEEN

On the 1974 single that gave Queen their first taste of international success, Brian's solo is exquisite – starting with some bluesy minor bends lower down the neck before the motif repeats higher up and swells into harmonised layers, adding depth in similar ways to the vocals in The Beatles' early hit *Please Please Me*. Similar usages of harmonisation can be found in 1961 track Pasadena by '60s trad-jazz revivalists The Temperance Seven, and the cascading strings typified by Anglo-Italian conductor Annunzio Paolo Mantovani. As Brian has noted, it's as if "the three voices of guitars are all doing little tunes of their own".

Can you talk me through the process of writing and recording the guitar solo in *Killer Queen*?
Well, I love the track. I think it's one of Freddie's most perfect creations. The story behind it is that I was in hospital. We'd come back from a tour in America and I got very sick with hepatitis, so when the other guys went into the studio to start making the *Sheer Heart Attack* album I was in hospital, with lots of complications. While I was there they brought a tape of *Killer Queen* in for me. They'd already laid down the piano, bass and drums, and they'd started putting some backing vocals on.

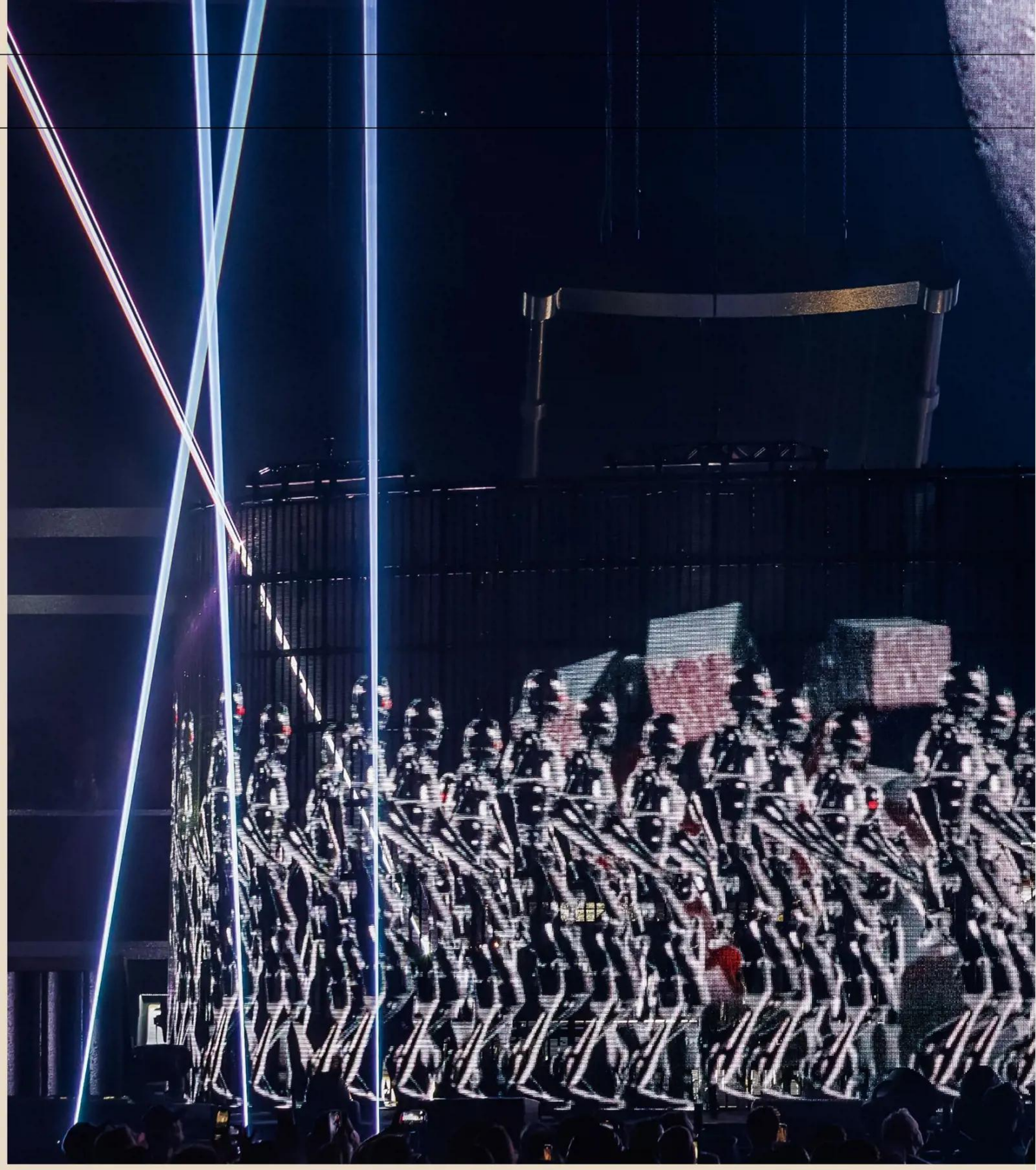
I had loads of time to sit and think – to figure out where I wanted the solo to be and develop the idea in my mind. And what we ended up with is a solo that has lots of different parts. So it's not just playing a verse, it's being part of the arrangement and leading into a verse. I could kind of hear it in my head, and that's always a good sign for me. I don't like to go into the studio with no ideas. I like to have a clear idea of where I'm going. The main solo has three parts, three guitars. I could hear that solo in my head and I wanted to do this kind of bells thing...

Bells?
I call it bells. I don't know what other people would call it, but it's when you play a note on one instrument and then it carries on but the next note comes in from another instrument and makes a harmony with it while it's still going. And then another one. It's like a peal of bells where the sounds add up in sequence. And really I got it from listening to things like the Mantovani piece *Charmaine* in my childhood, where he does exactly that – a dissonant harmony.

I know for a fact that The Beatles were influenced by that as well, because they did something similar in *Please Please Me*. It's not quite the same thing, but it's like adding instruments in to make the dissonance and the harmony.

I should be talking about the Temperance Seven and a song called *Pasadena*. The three lead instruments, which I think is a trumpet, clarinet and trombone, they do this bells thing. And I was always inspired by it. I always wanted to do it, and that was the opportunity.

"KILLER QUEEN IS ONE OF FREDDIE'S MOST PERFECT CREATIONS"



In the third section of that solo, that chiming bells effect is enhanced with stereo panning. So if you're listening, particularly in headphones, you get that feeling of things happening in stereo.
Yeah, we were always into stereo. We were influenced by The Beatles and Jimi Hendrix, where they actually painted pictures in stereo. And of course, we were able to start where The Beatles left off in a way, because we had much more up to date gear, and we had a lot more tracks to play with. So we went with those influences, but we were able to take things a lot further.

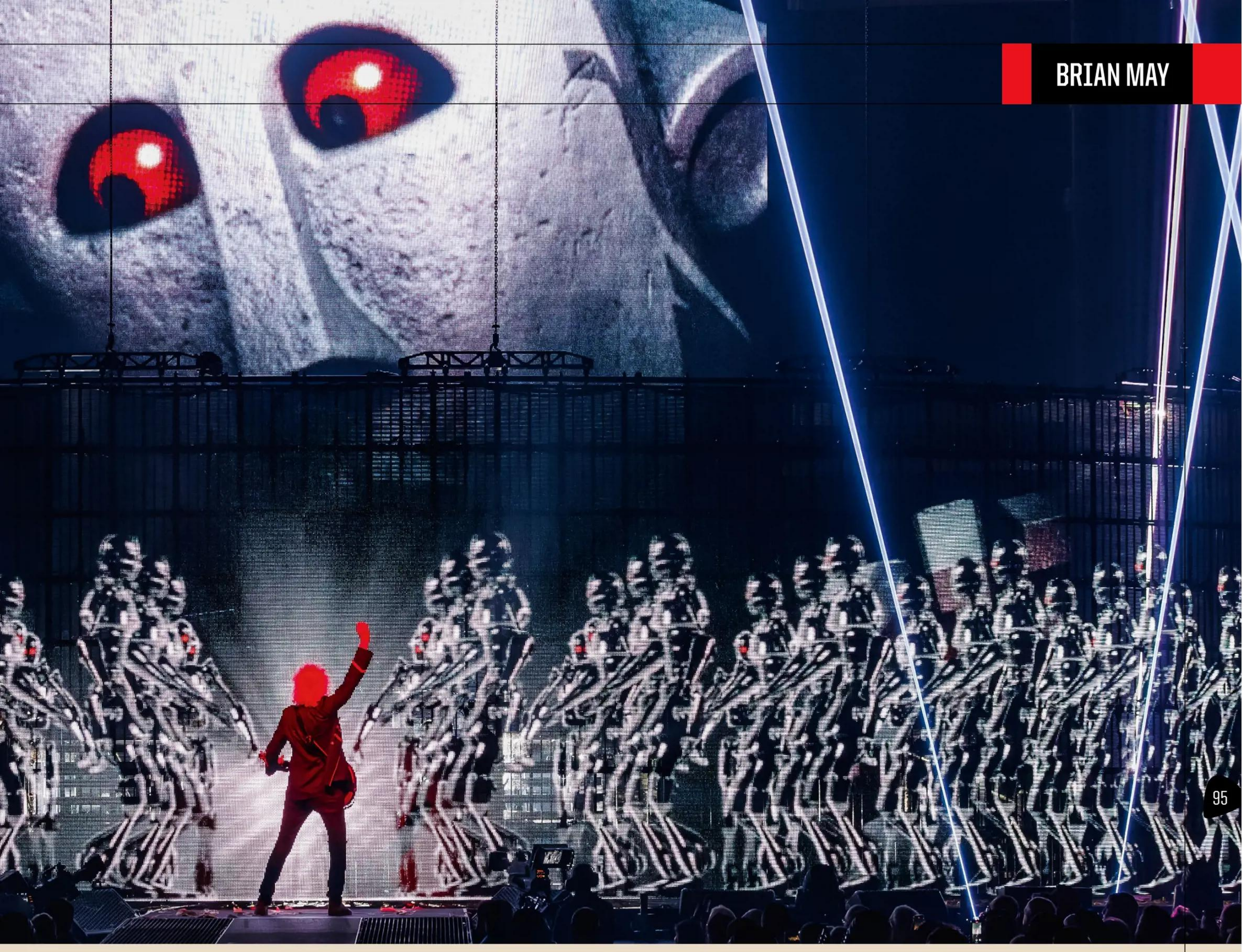
BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

Freddie Mercury's masterpiece is a six-minute suite of world-conquering brilliance. And in its climactic hard rock section, the riff, written by Mercury on piano, feels quite unnatural when transposed onto guitar. It starts on the sixth fret of the A-string and climbs back up from the third fret of the low E in a way that implies G Phrygian, the third mode of $E_{\flat}$ major. Towards the end of the idea, the original opening note moves up a tone and the same shape repeats, the A note on the sixth string suggesting a key change into A Phrygian, the third mode of F major.

In previous interviews with *Total Guitar* you've spoken about the guitar solo in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, but let's talk now about that song's end section, in which the band really rocks out. It was Freddie's song, so did he have all of it planned out, or was that rock section worked out with you?
It was more Freddie's idea. Freddie had that riff in his head and he played it on the piano, which is quite difficult because he plays in octaves. I just worked off that and slightly adapted it to the way a guitar needs to play it. And I was able to do a lot of interesting stuff with sounds because in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, I pretty much use every sound that my guitar can create with different pickup combinations. So even during the course of those riffs, the sound is changing because there are different guitars coming in with different pickups selections. But it's funny – Freddie was a good riffmeister, really! That riff for *Ogre Battle* [from 1974's *Queen II*], a lot of people think that's mine, but that came out of Freddie's head. So he had very good 'heavy' sensibilities. He was a devotee of Jimi Hendrix. People think he was just concerned with the lighter stuff but it's not true. He did enjoy the heavy stuff, too.

The *Bohemian Rhapsody* riff in particular doesn't sound very guitaristic in an obvious sense...
No. It's not a riff that a guitarist would naturally play. And that's a double-edged sword. It's difficult for the guitar to get a hold of it, but once you have got hold of it, it's very unusual. And to be honest, I still don't find it easy! I can play it at home okay, but in the heat of the battle, if you like, when we're playing it live, and there's huge adrenaline, it's the climax of the show and that riff comes along, it's not the easiest thing to play. I'm excited and I've got to keep the passion, but I've got

"IN BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY, I PRETTY MUCH USE EVERY SOUND THAT MY GUITAR CAN CREATE"



to keep a part of my brain cool just to handle where the fingers have to go because it isn't natural. It's one of the most unnatural riffs to play you could possibly imagine. But that's that is the joy of it, really, because it's so unusual.

Yeah, I have learned it myself in the past...
It involves a lot of stretching of the fingers, doesn't it?

It does, and it's definitely very complex. I probably should have guessed that it was a Freddie thing because it's just so un-guitar-y in that respect.
Yeah, well, Freddie had a habit of writing an E♭ and A♭, and so it was always a challenge for me to find places on the guitar to make that work. But it obviously contributed a lot to the way I developed as a player. It was a good thing, even if it was... strange!

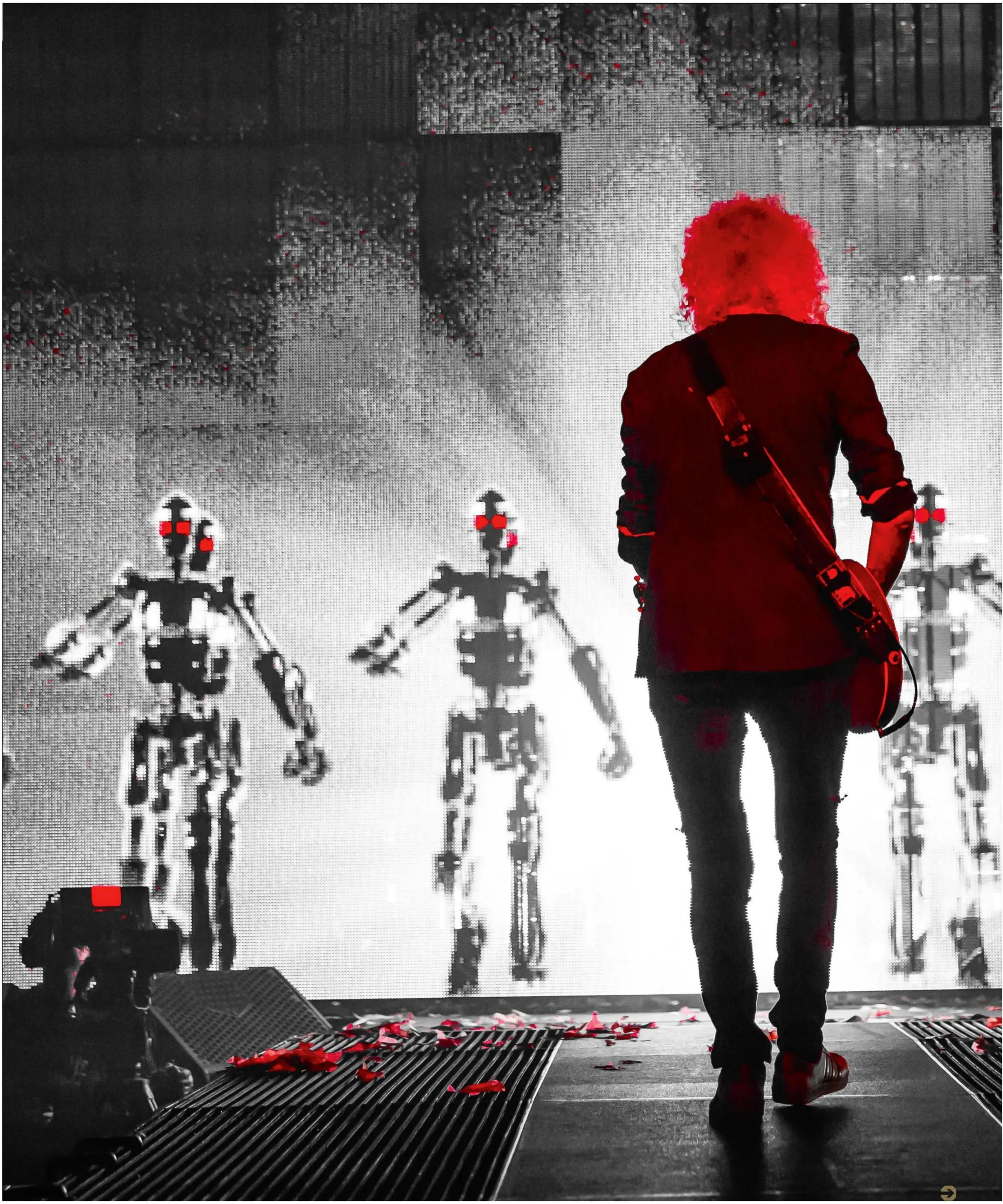
EYES DOWN FOR A FULL HOUSE
Brian in action on The Rhapsody Tour

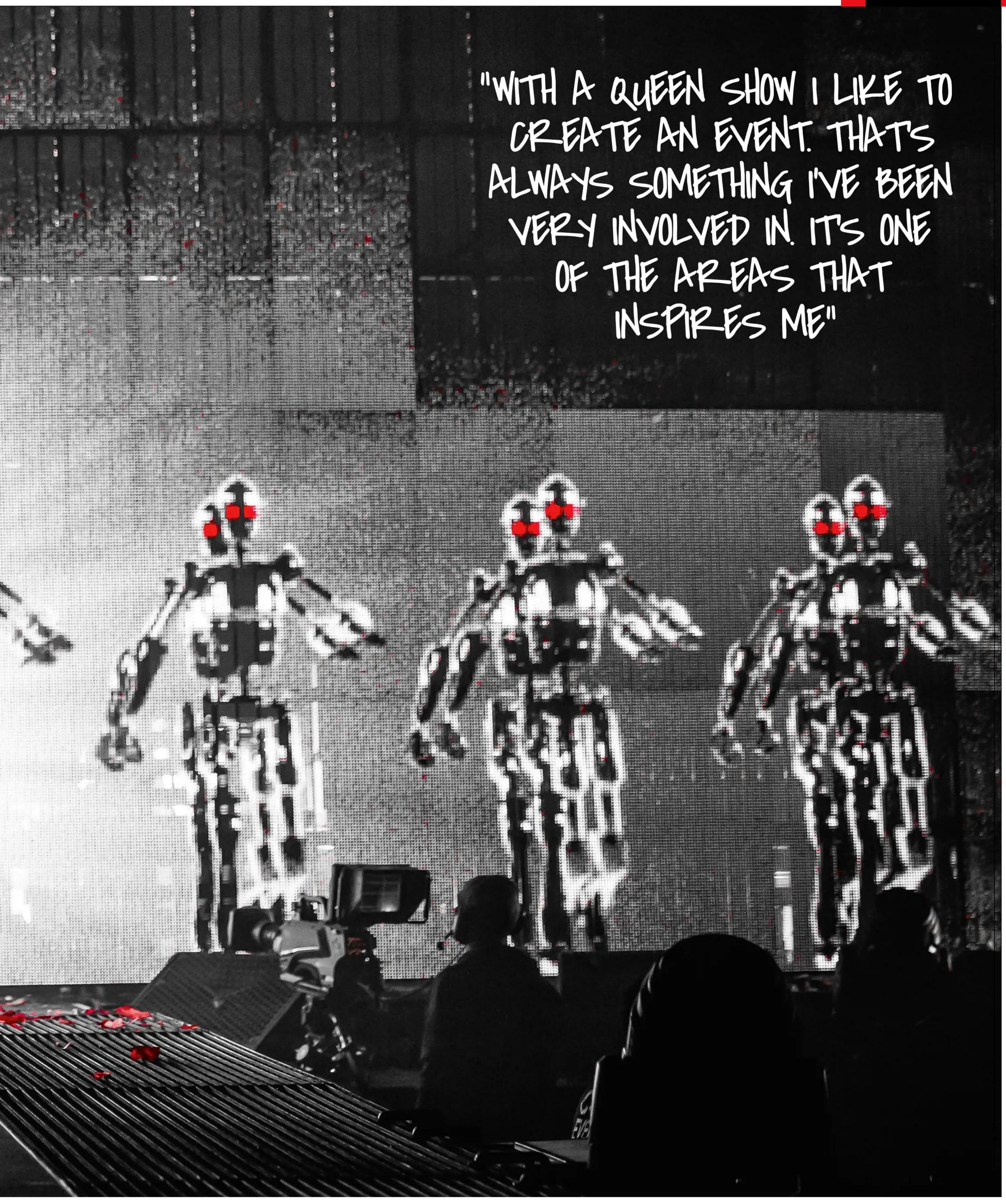
LOVE OF MY LIFE

The original recording of Mercury's beautiful ballad on the 1975 album *A Night At The Opera* features May on harp and, of course, his Red Special, which was used for the sustaining string-like notes that are introduced halfway in, as well as the harmonised leads in F major that arrive shortly after. Later, a different version was rearranged for 12-string acoustic and transposed minor 3rd down. This version featured on 1979's *Live Killers*, and due to the song's popularity with South American audiences it was released as a single and became a huge hit in Argentina and Brazil.

How did you go about turning this song from a piano arrangement to the acoustic guitar arrangement that you perform live?
That happened very quickly with just me and Freddie. It was obvious that we couldn't do the arrangement on the record because it's so complex. It's not just the piano, it's got harp and all sorts of lovely backing. And it's got a whole orchestra of guitar. So we couldn't do it live that way. I don't know whose idea it was, but Freddie and I thought we would just try and do it as the two of us with an acoustic guitar. So I just started playing it. I think it's even in a different key. I played it the way it was easy to play on an acoustic and it was just thrown together in a few minutes, to be honest. The song became so enormously successful in South America that we eventually put it out as a single in that style. But you can tell it's enormously simplified from the way it is on the record.

The guitar part is quite sophisticated. It doesn't feel like a simple strummed three- or five-chord vamp, as it were.




"WITH A QUEEN SHOW I LIKE TO CREATE AN EVENT. THAT'S ALWAYS SOMETHING I'VE BEEN VERY INVOLVED IN. IT'S ONE OF THE AREAS THAT INSPIRES ME"

No, you're right. It's not strummed, it's picked. And I suppose I was trying, in my mind, to do what the piano did on the record – in my own way. And it grew. It gradually grew into something which stood up on its own. And that guitar solo in the middle, I don't even know where that came from, to be honest. It just kind of grew out of the atmosphere of doing that thing live.

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Two of Queen's greatest songs are inextricably linked – May's *We Will Rock You* and Mercury's *We Are The Champions*, released as a double A-side single in 1977, and often paired for live performances. Brian's guitar work in *We Are The Champions* has more of an overdub feel – especially as there's no dedicated solo section. Instead, May duels against Mercury's vocals basing himself around the first position of D minor pentatonic at the 10th fret in order to imply F major. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book for playing in major keys – shifting down three frets and playing the relative minor shape instead.

There's plenty of guitar playing in this song. But was a breakout solo ever considered or discussed? A melodic break-type solo? Do you think it could have worked?

No, it was never discussed. But what was discussed was that Freddie wanted the guitar to be fighting with the voice towards the end. It's a strange story. I'd done the rhythm part for that, and sort of forgotten about it. And then I think we were in Wessex studios. And it came quite quickly to the time when we were going to mix it, and I suddenly thought, I haven't really thought about this, there's not really any lead guitar on there. And I came back into the studio on the morning of the mix, and basically redid most of it, because I could hear it much more clearly in my head. And I put in those answering pieces, the lead guitar responses to Freddie's vocal, particularly at the end. Also, again, those little bell chimes-type things in the second verse, because I'd sketched it but it wasn't clear.

So I redid all that. And Freddie came back in and said, 'Oh, I like what you've done with the guitar at the end. I want to make sure we mix it so the guitar is fighting with the vocal at every point at the end. It should be a battle!' And Freddie, when we were mixing it, had his hand on the guitar fader. Now, this is unusual, because usually he's got his fingers on the vocal and I've got my fingers on the guitar. But he said, 'No, I want to handle the guitar. I want to push that guitar to make sure it fights with the vocal'. So that's the way it was done.

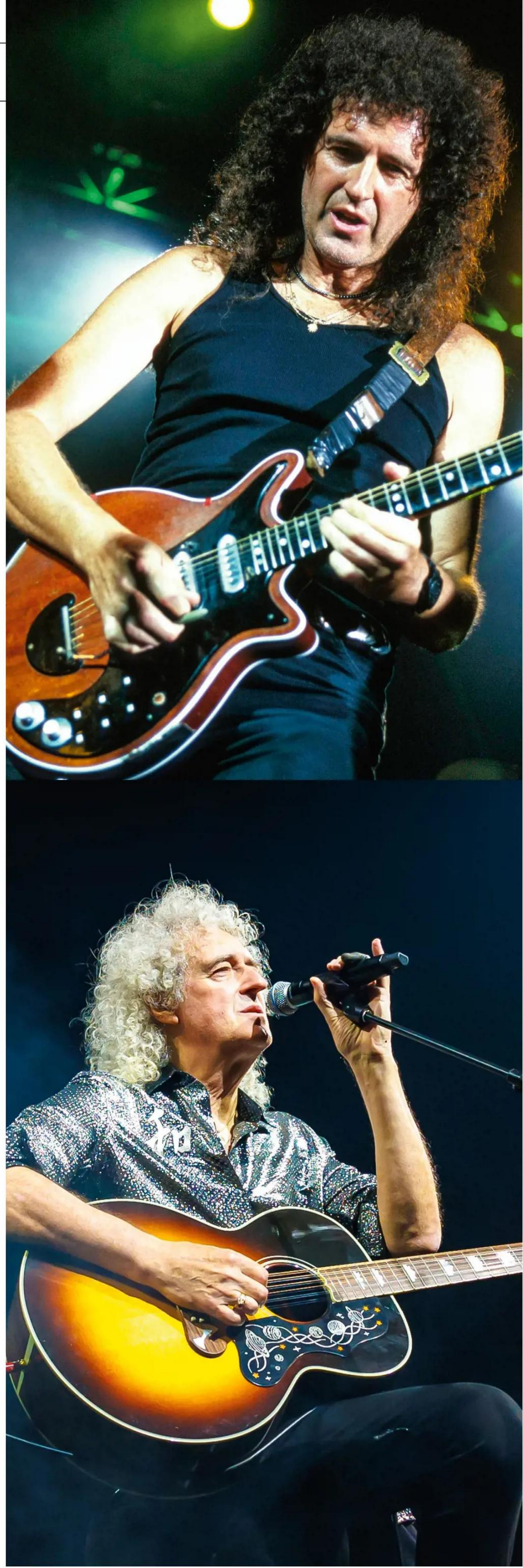
So that song doesn't have a solo as such, and I don't think it's ever needed one. And the problem would be live. Once you started soloing extensively, the bottom would drop out of it. And I can do a lot with bluff on the night. I can make people think there's still a rhythm guitar there. But not for very long...

DON'T STOP ME NOW

It is not a particularly guitar-driven song – but that all changes two thirds of the way in, during the solo section. As with *We Are The Champions*, the song is in the key of F major, but the leads are performed three frets down using its relative minor D. As for the warm but ever-so-slightly quacky tone, it's most likely May was using his neck and middle pickups together with both set in phase – the Red Special with independent on/off sliders for each pickup, doubled by phase selectors underneath, giving him 27 different combinations in total, as well as more control via the volume and tone knobs.

Can you tell us how this song's solo came together?

Yes, it's quite funny. Freddie saw it very much as a piano song, *a la* Elton John, really. Powerhouse piano, powerhouse vocal, and that's it. So I played lots of rhythm guitar on it, and Freddie still said, 'No, no, no, no – it's a piano song!' That was a bit disappointing, but he did say, 'Well, it *does* need a solo. I need you to take over the vocal.' Which is what the way we thought about things. I said, 'Okay, give me a verse and let me see what I can do.' And again, being in the studio and hearing it evolve, I could sort of hear the solo in my head before I actually picked



up the guitar to do it. As very often with me, it's a kind of little diversion. It's a counter melody. It's not the actual tune of the verse. But it's something which goes with it, a sort of counterpoint, and it's something I could sing. And it was just a question of transferring it to a guitar. It's very simple. And I sometimes feel a bit apologetic about it. But I do notice that when it's played in the dancehall, it gets a reaction from people in the solo and it steps up the energy quite a bit, even from a song that's got high energy, so I'm happy with it the way it is.

It must be one of Queen's most popular songs.
It is now. It wasn't in the beginning. It was a sleeper and it grew. And worldwide now, it's a massive Queen song.

It's certainly one of those solos that takes the song to a whole new place, but why do you feel, as you say, apologetic for it?
Well, it's a little too typical, perhaps? Maybe that's why I feel kind of apologetic. But the funny thing is, I've had years and years to live with it, and every time the solo comes up live, I think, well, actually I can't do much better than that! So I tend to play it more or less as it is on the record - with little variations. But it just works as a as a counter melody for the for the main melody.

As a listener, it does seem like the ear draws you in to that melody. You kind of want to hear it once you know the song.
That's what I feel. I feel like the audience is singing along to it, and it would be disappointing to them if I didn't play it!

WE WILL ROCK YOU

In its original form, Brian's monumental anthem is arguably Queen at their most minimalistic – with no melodic information to accompany the vocals until its final 30 seconds. First the guitarist rings out some feedback (an E note, to be precise) and then strikes a C powerchord before introducing some ideas in open position A that recur an octave up around the 14th fret. May then juxtaposes an D/A shape against the straight major chord, adding melodies using the higher strings – almost as if he's playing rhythm and lead at the same time. The faster, guitar-driven version which opens 1979's *Live Killers* omits this outro section and reimagines the song in E minor.

I'd like to talk about the live version of *We Will Rock You* that features on the *Live Killers* album as the opening track. It's fast and furious and almost punky in its attack.
That came about because of trying to visualise the openings and closings of a Queen show. That's always something I've been very involved in. It's one of the areas that inspires me. I like to create an event. And, of course, you play a lot of songs during the course of an evening, but the opening of the show is an event, and the closing of the show is also something that's going to stick in people's mind. So it's always fascinated me, I've always been drawn to it.

So, [the fast version] came about from thinking about how we could start the show. At this point, *We Will Rock You* already featured at the end of the show, but I thought, what would the audience be like if we started the show with *We Will Rock You*? And if we start the show with *We Will Rock You*, how do we go about it? Basically, they want to rock; they want to just rock out at that point. And so I could hear in my head a fast version of *We Will Rock You* – a sort of all-out punky-type version, as you say. And it happened very quickly. We just tried it out and it worked in rehearsal, and that became the opening of the show for that period. It worked out great. Much later, we did an adaptation of it for the *We Will Rock You* musical; that's what plays when the actors come forward and take their bows, and it worked out very well. And from time to time we just fancy playing it fast. And sometimes we have other people that fancy playing it. Dave Grohl is very fond of it, so we did that with him at the Taylor Hawkins tribute show. It's just an easy thing to play. It's got a lot of slog in it. It's got a lot of energy and power. And not too much thought! And it's something which is... just, there. And it's always a nice place to go.

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

Bassist John Deacon – affectionately referred to as Deacy – wrote a handful of the band's biggest hits, including this Chic-influenced track from Queen's 1980 album *The Game*. What's more, it was Deacon who played the funk rhythm guitar on this track, with Brian contributing rock licks. For the rhythm guitar parts, Deacon played an E minor chord rooted on the seventh fret of the fifth string, an A minor rooted on the seventh fret of the fourth string and another variant of same the chord in fifth position, sliding up from a fret down at the end of the phrase.

Am I right in thinking that this song is influenced by Chic and Nile Rodgers?
Yeah, this track is very much John Deacon world. That's what he was into. He was much more into funk than we were, and he brought that into our workings. It's very Deacy and it's very much influenced by Nile Rodgers.

So as a Deacy song, how influential was he in the whole arrangement? How much did he tell you what to play in this song?

THEN AND NOW
Top left: Brian rocking the Red Special
Below: In more reflective mood during The Rhapsody Tour

"THE FAST VERSION OF WE WILL ROCK YOU HAS A LOT OF ENERGY AND POWER. NOT TOO MUCH THOUGHT!"

Well, I don't think I was in it at all to start off with! Because he's hell bent on getting what he wants. So it's his rhythm guitar playing – it's not mine. That very funky style, that's John. Oh yeah. And he wanted Roger to have a sort of disco-type sound. And it's all done on a loop, so Roger reluctantly put loads of tape on his drums and played very stiff, and Deacy made a loop out of it. So it starts to be unnatural at that point. It's a damn good loop, though, and it's beautiful. And Deacy did the bass, Deacy did the rhythm.

He worked with Freddie on the vocal. Deacy didn't sing, so he would tell Freddie what the words were, and play the tune on the guitar. You can imagine it was quite a strange process. Freddie absolutely adored it. He just stepped into it with a vengeance. And he sang it until he bled! He was forcing himself to get those high notes and he loved it. Freddie really was such a driving force.

Because, to be honest, it wasn't going down very well with the rest of us. You know, Roger actually didn't want to have it on the album; didn't like it. It was much too funky and not enough rock for him. I was a bit on the fence. I kind of enjoyed it. But it obviously wasn't the rock that I would have been creating. And I remember saying, 'Look, it needs a little bit of something a bit more dirty on it.'

So I started playing these little bits of the more grungy guitar. I don't think the word 'grungy' existed in those days. But the distorted guitar is obviously me, and that punctuates it and gives it another dimension, takes it to a slightly more rocky place.

I remember Michael Jackson hearing it and saying, 'That's where I want to be. That's what I want to do.' And I think his whole album which followed [*Thriller*] was deeply influenced by *Another One Bites The Dust* and the fact that it straddled funk and rock. Michael came to the same place from a different direction. Very interesting!

Do you remember what guitar John played? Did he play your guitar?
Not my guitar, no. It was a Strat, I think. I'm pretty sure of that.

It's funny – it doesn't sound quintessentially Strat-y
I suppose it doesn't. Well, you can ask him – if you can get hold of him! You know, my memory is telling me it was a brand new Strat. At least that's the way I remember it. I think I can remember him playing it. It's not my style.

And when we do it live, that's one of the more difficult things I have to do. And I have to not try too hard, because it has to roll off the wrist in a very natural way. And you have to get the sound exactly right. It can't be too burned out or it doesn't work. It can't be too turned down or that doesn't work either. It's tricky to get that sort of real clean funky sound. It comes and goes with me. Sometimes I just do it my way.

Sometimes I veer back more to the way of John's playing. I always think about John when I'm playing it – always. I can't be John, you know, nobody can be someone else. So I do it my way. And I can edge it up into being a little bit more dirty in some of the some of the parts where I'm playing with Adam. I enjoy doing it with Adam, he brings something different to it.

And the song, it's actually still evolving, which is quite something after all these years. So every time we do it, it gets a little bit of a different drift. And I enjoy it a lot more these days. Because we have made it our own I suppose. It's quite heavy. And we do it early in the set at the moment, which is quite adventurous. It's in the sort of rock part of the set, which in the beginning you never would have thought.

That song is a very important part of the Queen canon. It's perhaps our biggest song ever in terms of sales. I'm not sure, but it must be close.

"ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST NEEDED MORE GRUNGY GUITAR!"



"HE JUST TURNED IT UP TO 11!"

Kirk Hammett chooses his favourite Queen song – and salutes the genius of Brian May

"*Dragon Attack*. Urgh! I love that song! Brian's guitar sounds so overly saturated on that song, more so than other songs. It's like he walked over to his f*cking tone booth and just turned it up to 11. Brian May has just such a wide reach. He's like David Gilmour. Both of those guys have such a wide, wide reach. They can play extremely just like beautiful! Or, man, they can just f*cking make you cry with their guitar solos, and the sense of melody that both David Gilmour and Brian May have is incredible, man. It's voice-like. Voice-like! And both those guys do an extremely great job of doing their singing through their guitar. It is hard to be specific because everything they have done is so great."

Photo Ross Halfin

CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE

Written by Mercury in 10 minutes while he was lounging in a bath at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel in Munich, *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* was a tribute-of-sorts to early rockers Elvis Presley and Cliff Richard. By the singer's own admission, the restriction that came from his limited knowledge of the fretboard and chord shapes is what helped him write "a good song, I think". Brian complimented its lazy D Mixolydian feel with ad-libs inspired by Elvis Presley's guitarist James Burton. It's a rare example of him recording an electric that wasn't his Red Special, and there is more of a twang to his lines than usual.

Famously, you didn't use the Red Special on this song. What guitar did you use?
It's Roger's. And I think it's actually a [Fender] Broadcaster. I think it was one of those early sort of [Telecaster] prototypes, which they called a Broadcaster. I could be wrong, because Roger had a lot of those very rare guitars, and he just happened to have this one in the studio. I was actually going to do it on my guitar, because maybe if I set it to just the bridge pickup it sounds a lot like a Telecaster.

I remember saying to Mack, our producer, 'I want to make this sound like James Burton. This is a pastiche of rock 'n' roll. James Burton is my hero. This is a James Burton solo and it should sound like a Telecaster'. And Mack looked at me quizzically and said, 'Well, if you want it to sound like a Telecaster, why don't you play a Telecaster?' I thought, 'Okay!', and Roger just happened to have this other guitar, so I picked it up, and it yes, it had the right sound, obviously. The perfect sound.

And I think I did it through a Fender amp rather than my usual Voxes. So, yeah, that's the sound, and it worked out great.

FLASH

Unlike anything Queen had recorded before, there's a prog rock intensity to this May-penned theme for 1980 space adventure movie *Flash Gordon*. The piece features vocals from both Mercury and May, with drummer Roger Taylor providing the higher harmonies. As well as the usual fretwork on his Red Special, Brian was also responsible for all the piano work (an Imperial Bösendorfer Grand Piano with 97 keys instead of 88) and synths (performed on the Oberheim OB-X that he plays in the music video) – all of which layer together and combine into a retro-futuristic symphony that perfectly encapsulates the daredevil sci-fi spirit of the movie.

***Flash* is an interesting song. It almost sounds like a Freddie song, because it's so flamboyant. Was there a brief for this? Take us through the writing process...**
I was so immersed in the *Flash Gordon* project. I always loved that kind of '50s science fiction stuff anyway, and I was very aware that the way that the film was evolving was very comic book. It was very tongue in cheek. Very retro. Mike Hodges, the director, handled it that way in a very clever approach, I think.

Strangely enough, Mike didn't see eye to eye with the producer of the film, Dino De Laurentiis, who was the guiding force behind the whole thing. Dino saw it more as a serious epic, but it was Mike who said, 'No, you can't do that. It's got to have this element of fun and slightly taking the mickey out of itself.' In the end Mike won, and some of what I was trying to do with this track is to do a comic book in sound. That's exactly what it is. And it's slightly exaggerated. It's sort of little over-heroic, if you like. But it's fun and it's colourful.

But there is also a little undercurrent of something deeper in the lyrics: 'Just a man/With a man's courage.' That, to me, is what gives it its heart and soul, because there is something rather lovable about the character of Flash Gordon. He's so innocent. And there's this love affair going through the film as well, and I think you really warm to him as a character, even though he's unreal, he's a comic book character.

So that's what I tried to put in the song. And I wanted to make it something that people would just grab ahold of very easily, and I could hear [the vocal shout] 'Flash!' very quickly in my head. So it was just a question of realising it in the studio. I had a lot of fun with it.

SPACE JAM
Brian says of the movie theme song *Flash*: "I was trying to do a comic book in sound..."

And when you had the song finished, did Dino De Laurentiis like it?
Well, when we'd made all the tracks in demo form, having seen the rushes of the film, we had a session with Dino and Mike Hodges, all of us in Trident studios playing back what we done for the film. And Dino sat there with a face like iron. Like, 'I'm not sure if I like this?' And the last thing we played was *Flash* and he went, 'Yes, it's very good, but it's not for my film.' That was a mortal blow for me. I thought, 'I didn't encapsulate what the film needed'. But Mike took me aside and said, 'Don't worry, I'll sort him out. He will love it!' And the conclusion of the story is when we had the premiere of the film. Dino came over to me and said, 'Thank you for what you did for my film. It's beautiful!' So that was nice.

It perfectly encapsulates the vibe of the film.
Yeah, I'm very proud of it. It is very fluffy, but I'm proud of it because within my brief, within the genre, I think it does fit perfectly.

UNDER PRESSURE

Two of the biggest acts in rock music collaborated to produce a worldwide smash hit, giving Queen their second number one single and David Bowie his third. *Under Pressure* came from an impromptu jam at the Queen-owned Mountain facility in Montreux. The verses have May ringing out his open D against notes on the higher strings, followed by thicker-sounding open G and A7 shapes and overdriven chords from halfway in. The main bassline was sampled by Vanilla Ice for 1990 hit *Ice Ice Baby* – the first hip-hop single to top the US chart – although Queen and Bowie were not credited until after its success.

It's an unusual song in Queen's canon. Obviously, David Bowie featured, and it feels very much composed around the two vocalists. So how did you feel your part was played in that? What did you contribute to the song?
Well, it was a very complex process. And of course, it's the four of us plus David Bowie, who is a very persuasive force. And it was put together completely off the cuff. And David brought this technique in where everyone would go in and sing the way they felt the song

should go without thinking about it. And without listening to each other. And then there was a whole system of going through and picking out the bits that you liked from different people's vocals. So that's how the vocals were put together.

And David, in the end, wanted to be the guiding force as regards lyrics, and he ended up writing all those lyrics, with not much from us. And it was all done spontaneously in the studio very late at night after we had a meal and a lot of drinks. And it was a pretty heavy backing track. When it gets to 'Why can't we give love', we were all working on it together, and it sounded like The Who. It sounded massively chord-driven. And I was beaming because I liked The Who. I remember saying to David, 'Oh, it sounds like The Who, doesn't it?' He says, 'Yeah, well it's not going to sound like The Who by the time I've finished with it!' You know, in a joking kind of way. But he didn't want it to be that way.

It was very difficult to mix because we all had different ideas of how it should be mixed. I think it's probably the only time in my career I bowed out, because I knew it was going to be a fight. So basically it was Freddie and David fighting it out in the studio with the mix. And what happened in the mix was that most of that heavy guitar was lost. And even the main riff, I played that electric, pretty much in the sort of arpeggiated style which I do live now. But that never made it into the mix. What they used was the acoustic bits which were done first as a sort of demo.

I never liked it, to be honest, the way it was mixed. But I do recognise that it works. It's a point of view, and it's done very well. And people love it. So we play it quite a bit different live, as you probably noticed, it is a lot heavier and I think it benefits from it. I mean, David was an awesome creative force. But you can't have too many awesome creative forces in the same room. It starts to get very difficult! Something has to give.

You might say that in some respects it doesn't even sound all that much like a Queen song. You know, as you say, in the sound of the overall mix.
Yeah, if I'd mixed it, it would have sounded very different. And maybe it wouldn't have been a hit. Who knows?

It's surprising to hear you say that it was so improvised.
Oh, completely improvised! There was no prior writing whatsoever. The only thing we had was the bass riff. We started off before dinner, and John had this nice bass riff, and when we came back there was a dispute. We said, 'Let's try and build on that nice bass riff.' But no one could remember how it had gone – least of all Deacy, who'd had more to drink that most of us! So there was a lot of discussion, and I remember David stepping in at one point and saying, 'No, no, it wasn't like that – it was like this!' And so to this day, I don't know if that riff the same one that we had before dinner, but it's the one that ended up on the record!

A KIND OF MAGIC

The third single from the album of the same name was penned by Roger Taylor for 1986 fantasy action film *Highlander*, with many references to the film in its lyrics. Its stand-out guitar parts include the same kind of chord motif heard in *We Will Rock You*, once again played around the 14th fret, and the faster licks in A Mixolydian and A major heard near the end of the song. *A Kind Of Magic* was the album that followed Queen's legendary show-stealing performance at Live Aid in 1985, and it was the sound of a band full of confidence and creativity.

We've tabbed *A Kind Of Magic* in this issue. It's quite a shreddy song with some really fast licks towards the end. Can you give some tips as to how you'd approach playing them?
I don't usually play them these days! I just like to go off and do my own thing, really. It's opportunity to have some fun with it. And if I was actually going to play those licks, it would be like being in a straitjacket because they're difficult to play and I would be worried about my fingers being in the right place – and I don't enjoy that! I'd much prefer to just do what comes into my head. And that's one of the places in the show these days where I have no idea what I'm going to play when I get to that solo. And I like it to be that way, so it can go anywhere.

I also have an extra weapon, which is the rocket I use. You know, we fire rockets during this song. I fire the rocket. It's a childish toy, but it means that I can fire rockets in the air exactly the way I always dreamed of doing it when we made the video for that song. The video has the guitar with fireworks coming out of the top of it, and I always thought would it be great to do that live. Well, we could do that now! Yes, it is childish, but it gives me such a lot of pleasure. And I can do it whenever I want. It's a surprise for the audience. And the solo builds itself around that.

So, those are the little peaks where the rockets come out. And I kind of fill in the gaps and try to lead the audience towards wondering what's going to happen next. I have a lot of fun with it really. To me, it's a lot better than kind of showing off and doing the fast stuff. There is a little bit of fast stuff still in it, but it's basically playing with the audience. That's what I like to do at that point.

LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU...
Brian has the best seat in the house

So do you have some special modification to one of your guitars?
Yes, there's one particular guitar which has it all built into it – or built on to it, I should say. It's a lot of fun, and the audience love it. Sometimes the simple tricks are the best. Like the mirrorball. Everybody loves a mirrorball. Which we use in the solo for *I Want To Break Free*. It gets a huge round of applause, and they're not applauding me – they're applauding the mirrorball!

THESE ARE THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES

In this beautiful synth-driven ballad, written by Roger Taylor, the lyrics reflected on the band's shared experiences early on and the love that brought them together. The video was filmed in black and white, with a frail-looking Freddie Mercury at the very final stages of his life. Although the use of rhythm guitar in this track is fairly sparse, there are some incredibly melancholic lead lines from May halfway in – starting in A natural minor and then phrases in D minor which repeat a whole tone up in E minor – and more passages wrapped around Mercury's vocals towards the end.

Let's talk about the solo in there. I love the tone, the delay effects...



"FREDDIE AND I THOUGHT WE WOULD DO LOVE OF MY LIFE AS THE TWO OF US WITH AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR. AND IT GRADUALLY GREW INTO SOMETHING WHICH STOOD UP ON ITS OWN"


"I FIRE ROCKETS DURING A KIND OF MAGIC.
THE SOLO BUILDS ITSELF AROUND THAT NOW"





Well, it's a very delicate song and I was aware it had to be a very delicate solo. I started experimenting with the delays live, so it's not like we put an effect on the solo afterwards – I was playing using those effects to make little harmonies, as I've fairly frequently done, but this was a very different atmosphere from anything we've ever done before.

And those little arpeggiated runs, I did very quickly as an experiment. But as soon as I'd done it, I liked it. That's the second part of the solo that I'm talking about. I remember sitting with Freddie and him going, 'Oh, yeah. That's nice. You know, when you get that together it'll be quite good!' And I thought, I actually don't want to change it. I said to him, 'I quite like it the way it is.' And he came around, eventually; he liked it too.

Of course, it's Roger's track, so Roger is going to have the ultimate say as to whether it goes on or not, and he liked it so that's the way we kept it. And that guitar is woven into the whole song. It's not just in the solo. It does little duets with a vocal all the way through. It's quite delicately woven, that song, and I love it. I think it's probably Roger's best song ever. It's a beautiful song.

Are you mixing up picking and fingerpicking in this song?

It's not fingerpicking, actually. It's just very delicately played with a pick, mainly. I wasn't so much into using my fingers in those days. But the solo is; oh, yes, you're right. I am doing it with the soft part of my fingers. I beg your pardon. You're right. I'd forgotten!

DRAGON ATTACK

This powerful deep cut from 1980 album *The Game* is another example of Queen taking influence from the funk sounds that were popular at the time. But it's more rock than disco – sounding almost like the kind of riff Thin Lizzy would have come up with in the mid-to-late '70s, in this case built around the D minor pentatonic scale. Breaking down the solo in his 1983 *Starlicks* instructional video, Brian explained how "with that particular screaming tone setting and also by hitting the string with your pick and the thumb, you can get those octave harmonics coming out, which gives it a bit more tension and screams a little more."

Kirk Hammett tells us that *Dragon Attack* is his favourite Queen song. I'd love to get your reflections on it...

Well, I love it too! It's got such an amazing feel. We were in that funk place, but this one has a real kind of rock-funk feel. And again, it started off very spontaneously, me playing along with Deacy. And, probably, it was more Deacy's riff than mine, to be honest. But I took hold of it and built it into the song that it became.

It came out of spontaneity, and it came out of, I think, wanting to play the kind of music which was inspiring us when we would go down to the rock disco after work in Munich every night. We used to go to a place called the Sugar Shack, and it was definitely a sort of rock club, a rock dance club, if you like. And generally they would play Queen music, but when Queen music came on it didn't work so well, it didn't inspire people to get up and go nuts on the dancefloor, whereas a lot of other things did – songs that had a lot more space in them.

So what I tried to do with *Dragon Attack* was make it the kind of track which was going to work in the Sugar Shack. That's totally what it was about, which was to get girls excited and make boys want to get up and go nuts with them on the dance floor there. So it's very spacious. The song doesn't have the usual kind of rhythm build-up. It's just the riff – bass, drums, guitar. Very open, very stark. And the lyric also comes from the Sugar Shack, if you want to know what that's about?

LIVE KILLER
Brian on Queen's US tour in 1979

Who wouldn't?

The dragons are in the sugar shack. It's about that strange twilight world where you stay till the lights come on in the morning, and you come out and it's dawn! It was a pretty wild time for us, and that's what I attempted to put in the song. It's all about us and the way things were, and the sort of sexy side of the peripherals of rock. That track was designed to be uniquely a dance track. So you have *Another One Bites The Dust* and *Dragon Attack* which are both big departures from the way Queen had come up.

I remember touring after we finished the record, and American radio picked up on those songs just like that. We never expected they would. We thought they would want just the rock tracks. But they picked up on that stuff and it was all over! Every time we got into a limo or car or a restaurant or whatever, they wouldn't be playing those tracks. And it's interesting - it was the same time as The Rolling Stones put out *Miss You*, which is also very funky; very different for them. Rock was becoming funky for a while. And it worked!

A lot of people said that [Queen's 1982 album] *Hot Space* didn't work, but it actually did. It brought people to a new place. And it gave birth to Michael Jackson doing his incredible stuff – and later, Michael Jackson inviting Slash to play on a track with him. All that sort of stuff. It was that fusion of funk and rock which I think lives with us to this day.



Words, guitars and backing Charlie Griffiths

ROCK YOU!

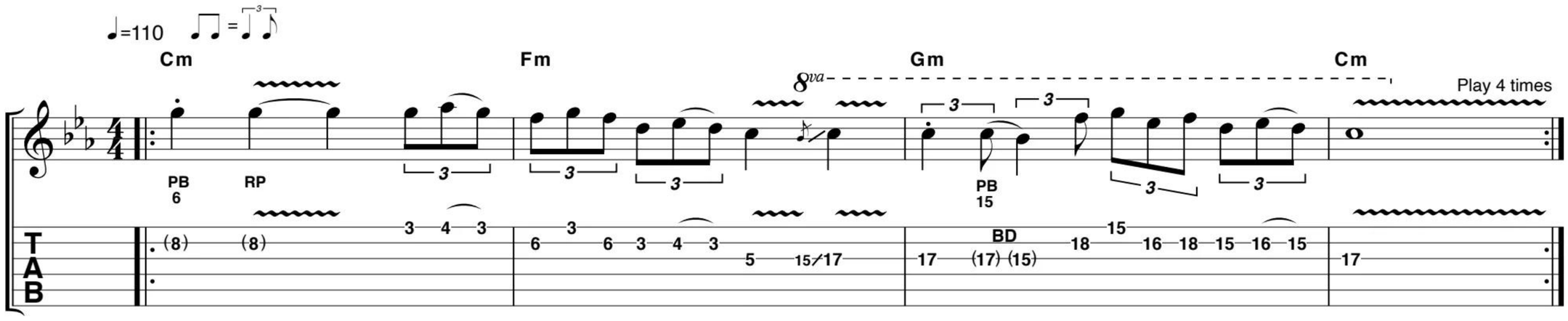
You've heard from the man who played 'em! Now, TG takes you through the techniques you need to know to play 13 of Queen's greatest songs

Brian May has been rocking Queen's repertoire for over 50 years now. And, though all four members of the band penned hit singles, it was Brian and original lead singer Freddie Mercury who took the lion's share of the writing credits. Before we get into the nitty gritty of Brian's trademark composition and playing techniques, it's worth taking a moment to think about that other key element of his unique sound: the homemade Red Special guitar.

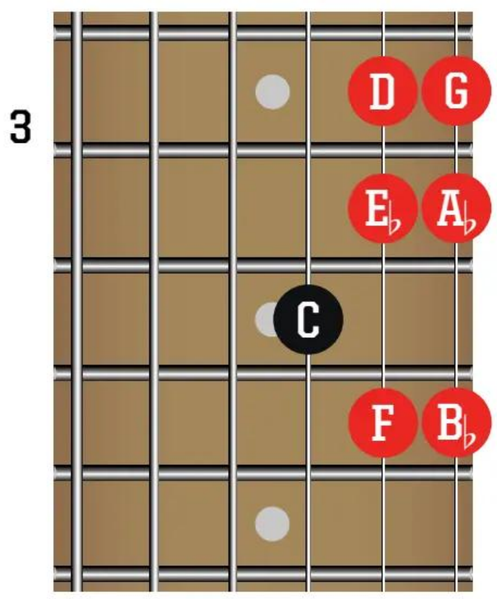
Though equipped with 'off the shelf' Burns pickups, its body, neck and sophisticated electronic switching system were all bespoke, designed and built by Brian and his father, Harold. Factor in Brian's choice of a sixpence piece as a pick and you have a tone that's near impossible to recreate.

That said, diehard Queen fans could invest in a BMG Red Special guitar and a Vox AC30 amp, and there are modelling options, too. Almost any digital multi-fx unit will have an AC30 model. And do check out IK Multimedia's Amplitube Brian May, which not only models the AC30, but also the Red Special itself, and the band's studio secret weapon, the 'Deacy' amp, which was key to many of Brian's violin-esque sounds. Right, let's take a look at Brian's kind of magic...

01 KILLER QUEEN SOLO TECHNIQUE: PRE-BEND AND TRADEMARK VIBRATO **bit.ly/tg381audio**



This is a subtle but important element of the Brian May style and you'll hear it right at the beginning of *KQ*'s solo. Here, in our lick, start by pre-bending the 6th fret up a tone to hit a G note. Brian employs this technique to allow his vibrato to go below the pitch of the note (whereas a wobble of a string in its rested position *raises* the pitch).

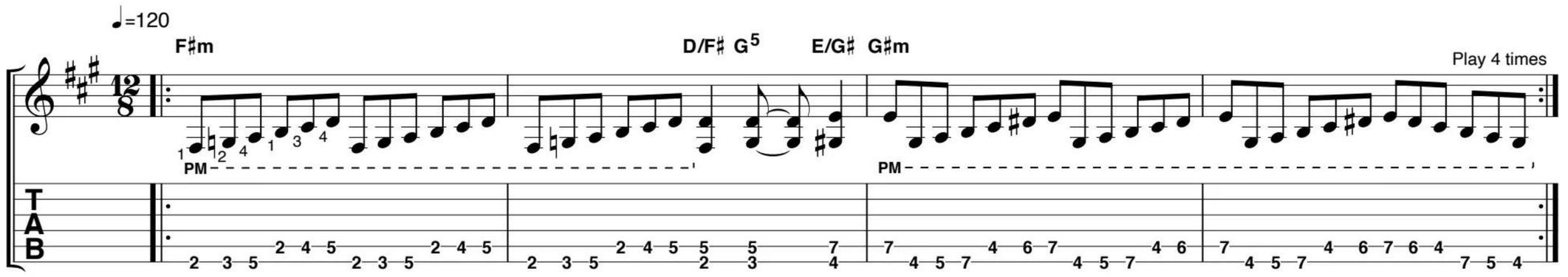


C NATURAL MINOR SCALE

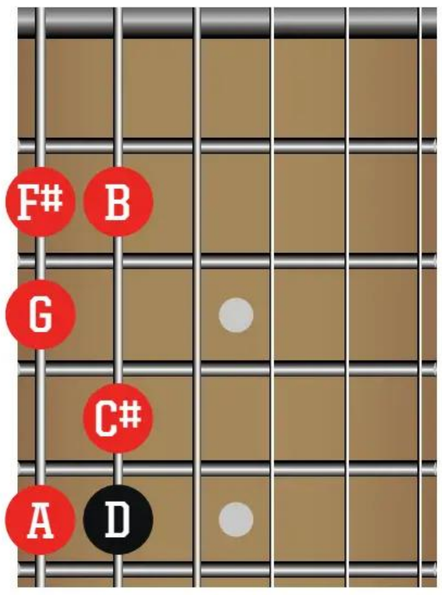
This C natural minor shape has the root note on the third string and is played using all four fingers in a one-finger-per-fret fashion. Brian employs it in bars 3 and 4 of his solo and we've used it here. Try playing it twelve frets higher up the neck to attempt Brian's octave-up phrasing.

Photo Bojan Hohnjec@Miracle Productions LLP

02 BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY HEAVY RIFF BREAK TECHNIQUE: THREE-NOTE-PER-STRING RIFFING **bit.ly/tg381audio**



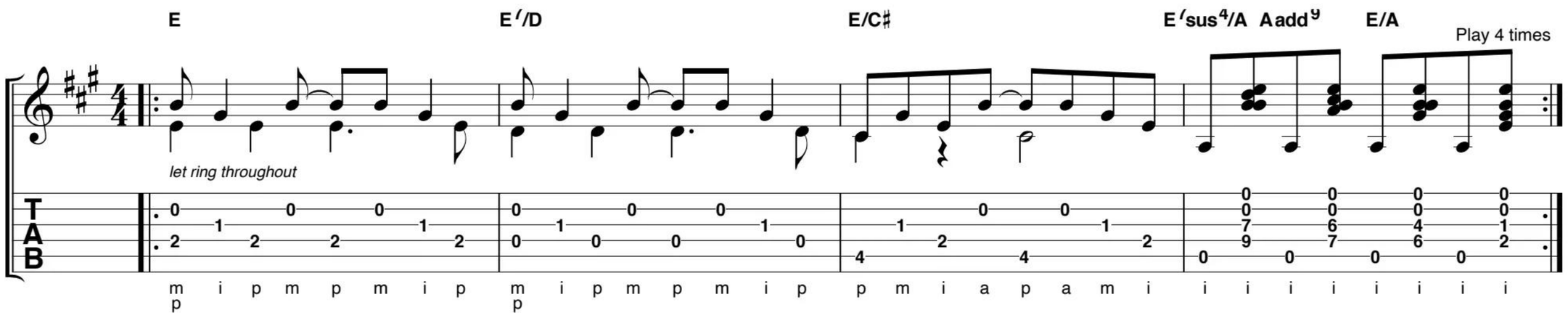
Brian admits himself that he still finds *Bo Rhap*'s heavy riff (coming in after the opera section) a challenge – perhaps because it was penned for piano by Freddie Mercury. Our simpler version shows you that you'll need two three-note fingering patterns: 1 2 4 (on the sixth string) and 1 3 4 (fifth string). Use alternate picking and, if you use a coin as a pick, use the serrated edge to create the signature Brian gritty pick attack.



D MAJOR SCALE

The original track was a semitone higher than this in E♭, but we've stayed in D to make it a friendlier key for guitar. Take note of the fingering pattern on each string and practise running up and down the notes in order.

03 LOVE OF MY LIFE THROUGHOUT TECHNIQUE: FINGERSTYLE ACOUSTIC **bit.ly/tg381audio**



The original track is primarily piano-led. However, in live shows, Brian typically expands on the acoustic part heard in the recorded intro to provide guitar accompaniment to vocalist Freddie Mercury and, later, Adam Lambert. We're showcasing the fingerstyle technique here, so pay attention to the pima instructions under the tab which tell you the relevant fingers to use.

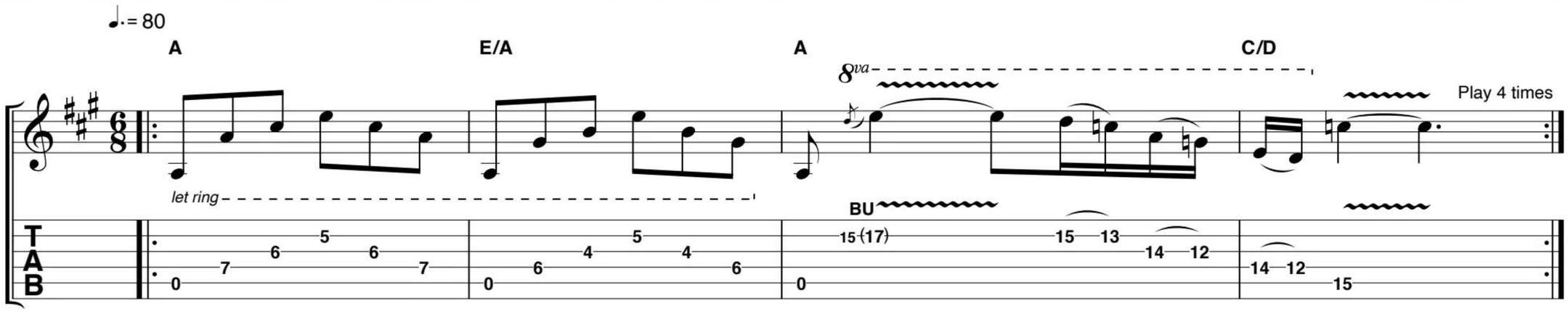


PIMA DIRECTIONS

Whether you're playing our short example or tackling a full tab of a live performance of Queen's song, you'll need to get to grips with fingerstyle. The basic principle is to use your thumb (p) for the three bass strings, and your index (i), middle (m) and ring (a) fingers for the top three strings respectively. The little finger (c) is supposedly rarely used, at least according to 'classical' technique. But you're free to make any practical adjustments to pick anything you need to – including making use of the pinkie!

04 WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS CHORUSES CHANGING FROM RHYTHM TO LEAD

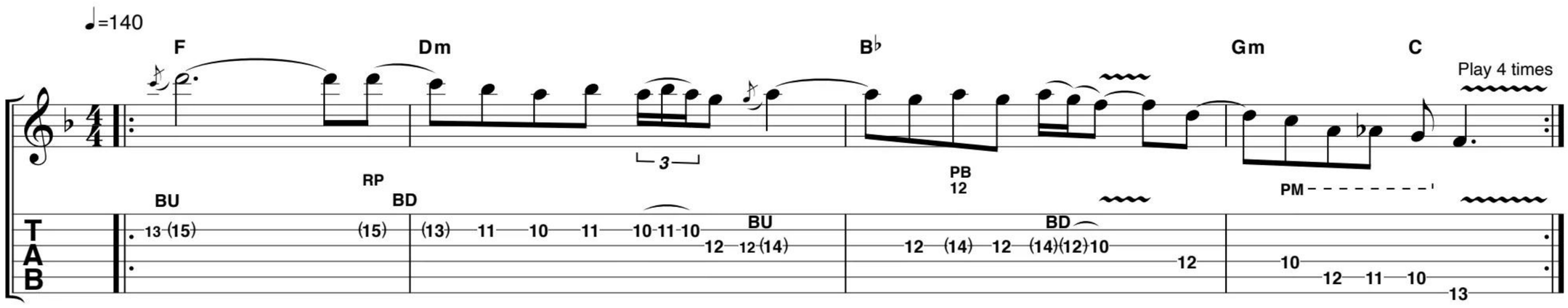
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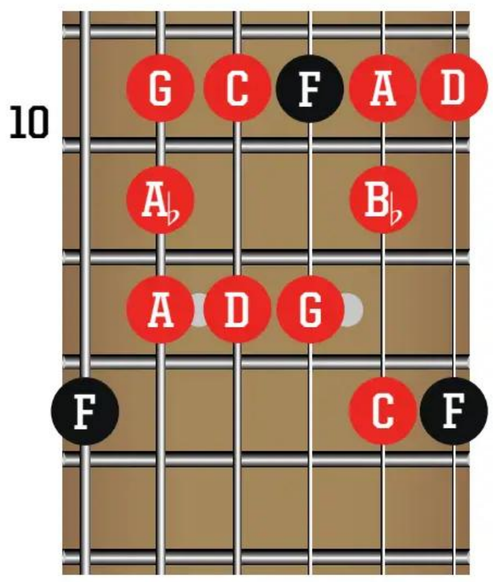
With Queen being a one-guitar band, Brian frequently needs to seamlessly switch between rhythm and lead guitar parts, often in a 'question and answer' style with the vocal – and *WATC* is a great example, featuring a patchwork of arpeggios, heavy chords, riffs and lead lines artfully stitched together. Take care here in our riff as we switch from arpeggios to soloing. You might want to kick in a little overdrive midway through, too.

05 DON'T STOP ME NOW SOLO TECHNIQUE: BENDS, PRE-BENDS AND SLURS

bit.ly/tg381audio



Like the original, our *DSMN*-inspired lick is in F major and uses bends and pre-bends (plus brief hammer-on/pull-off slurs) to make the melody more vocal-like. As you bend the string, listen closely to each one to ensure perfect tuning and take note of your hand position so you can apply it to the pre-bends (which, remember, you don't hear until it's too late and you've already bent the string!).

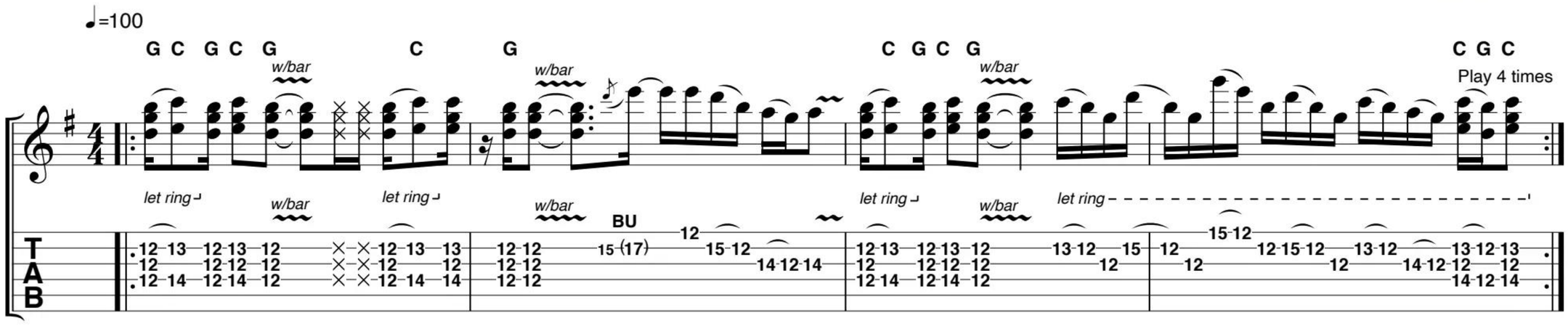


F MAJOR BLUES SCALE

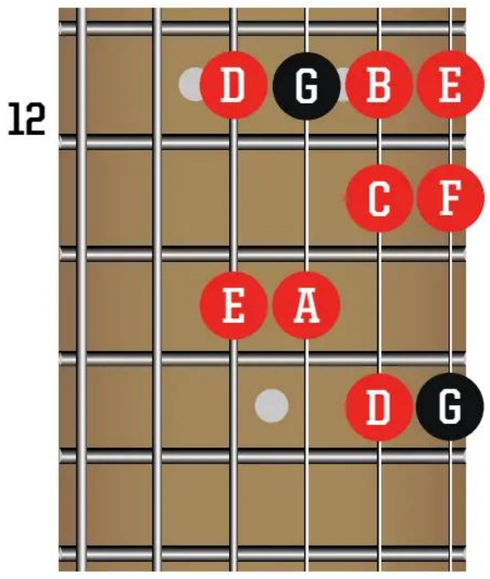
Play the sixth-string root note with your fourth finger and use your first finger to play the notes on the 10th fret, employing one finger per fret to complete the shape. This is essentially an F major pentatonic scale (F G A C D) with added 4th (B♭) and ♭3 (A♭) intervals which Brian uses to add melody.

06 WE WILL ROCK YOU OUTRO TECHNIQUE: I-IV CHORD CHANGE

bit.ly/tg381audio



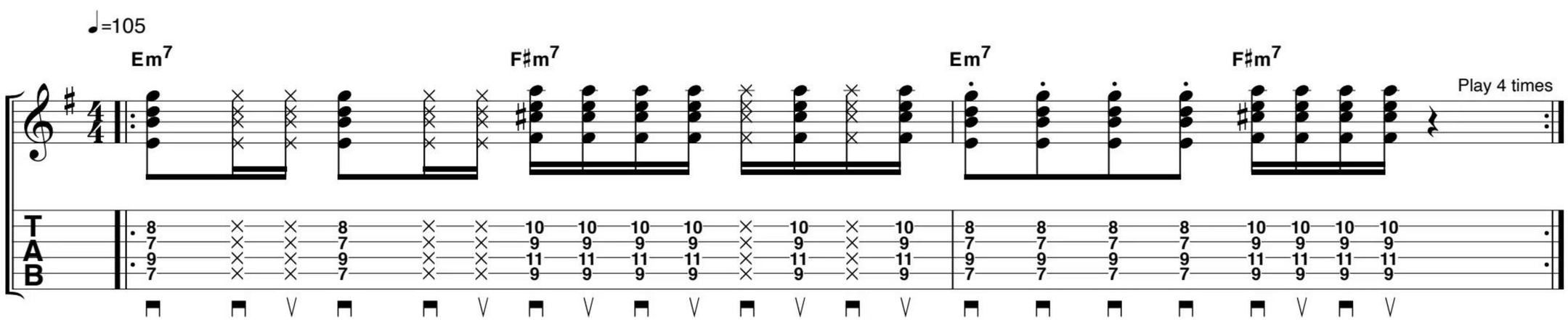
The iconic *WWRY* guitar solo features one of Brian's signature chord changes (he also employs it in *Hammer To Fall*, for example), which starts with a first-finger barre, followed by a second- and third-finger hammer-on. It gives a quick change between two major chords (G to C here in our example), but it can be moved to any key by shifting the shape up and down the fretboard.



G MIXOLYDIAN MODE

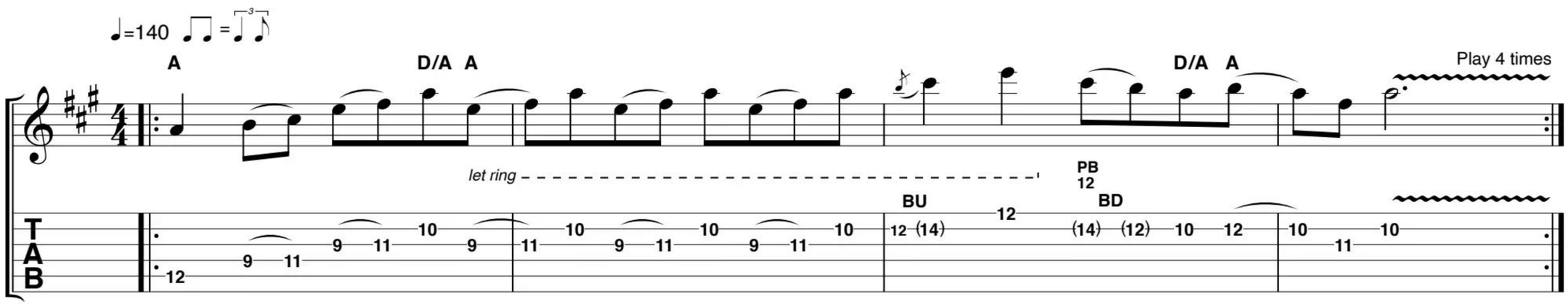
In *WWRY*'s solo Brian plays melodic licks in and around his chord change. So, instead of playing every note of G Mixolydian one by one, here, keep a first-finger barre at the 12th fret and use your other fingers to target the other notes as you please.

07 ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST VERSES 2 AND 3 TECHNIQUE: FUNK RHYTHM 16THS **bit.ly/tg381audio**

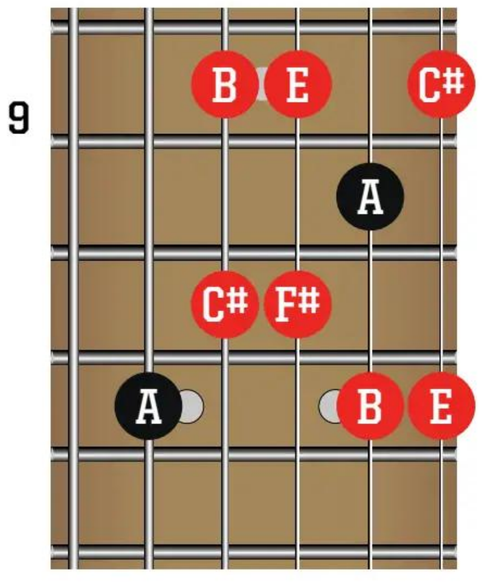


John Deacon's two-chord Stratocaster funk vamp is a super-tight 16th-note groove. That means you'll be playing with constant alternating down and upstrokes while varying the pressure of your fretting fingers to play full chords or muted sounds. We've kept things simple for you, using the same shape for two chords. Note that John's original part changes to a 5th position Am and is a little more complex.

08 CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE SOLO TECHNIQUE: ROCKABILLY LEAD **bit.ly/tg381audio**



We're aping Brian's rockabilly stylings here in our shuffle-feel lick. Say "Humpty Dumpty, Humpty Dumpty" to roughly approximate the timing of the shuffle – or listen to our audio, of course. Once you've got the idea, try applying this to the notes in the tab. Take care not to rush the hammer-ons. You can easily lose the shuffle feel if you are not careful.

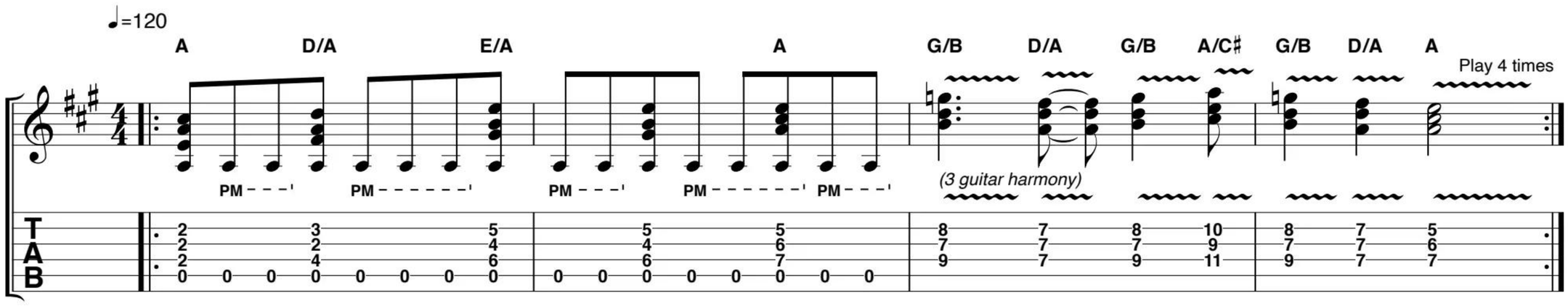


A MAJOR PENTATONIC SCALE

Our lick is played over an A major backing and the country/rockabilly harmony owes a lot to the bright sound of the major pentatonic scale (1 2 3 5 6) used here. Use the fourth finger to play the root note on the 12th fret, and a one-finger-per-fret style for the remainder of the shape.

09 FLASH SOLO THROUGHOUT TECHNIQUE: HARMONISED LICKS

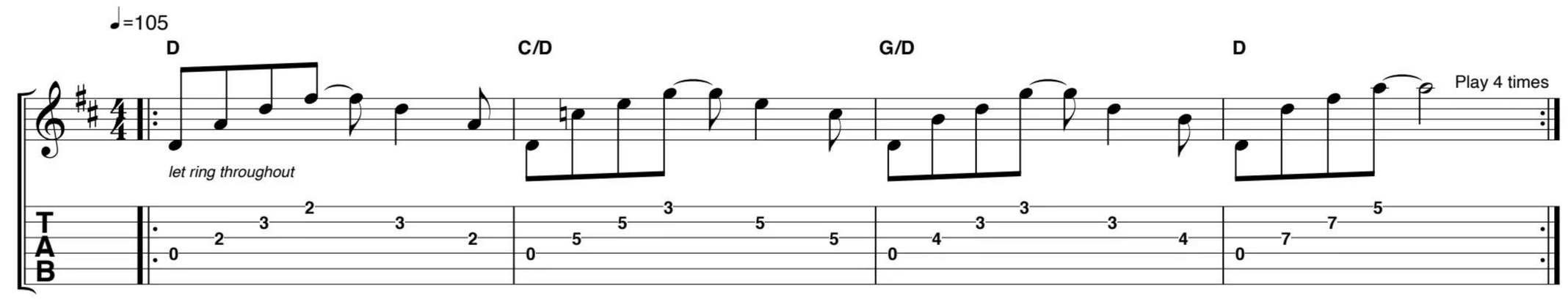
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"Flash, ah-ah! Saviour of the universe!" ...And we all know what comes next: Brian's signature harmonised guitar lines, which is what we're looking at here. Bars 3 and 4 show a three-guitar harmony with each guitar assigned to its own string. Essentially, this arrangement is the same as playing triads, but the added vibrato and stereo panning creates a beautiful, singing harmony that sounds totally different from the chordal approach.

10 UNDER PRESSURE THROUGHOUT TECHNIQUE: ARPEGGIOS

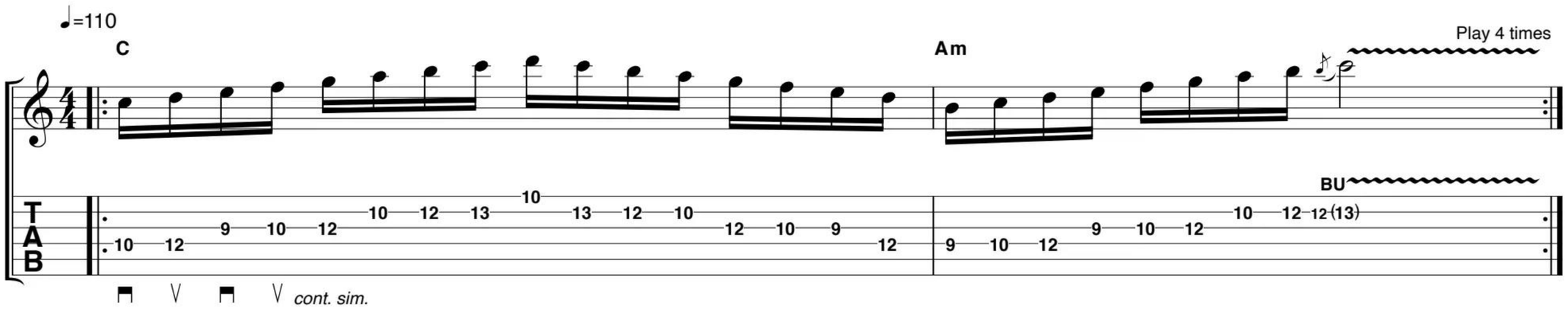
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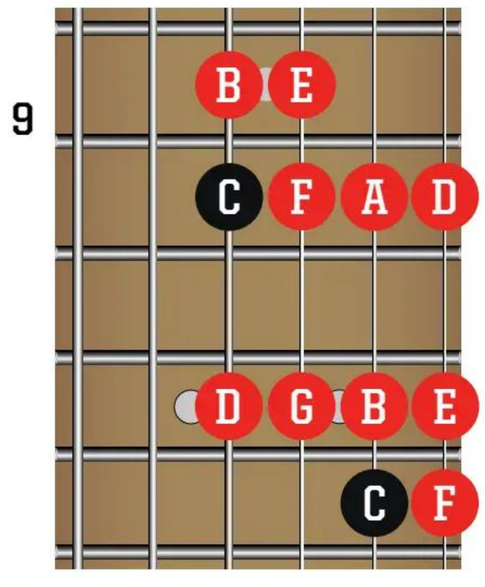
Brian very often uses triad shapes on the higher strings, which perhaps stems from his earliest days of learning chord shapes on the ukulele before picking up the guitar, and *Under Pressure* features this style of playing throughout. The triads here in our simpler example are from the D Mixolydian mode (D E F♯ G A B C) and are played as slash chords over the open D root note.

11 A KIND OF MAGIC SOLO TECHNIQUE: FAST LEAD RUNS

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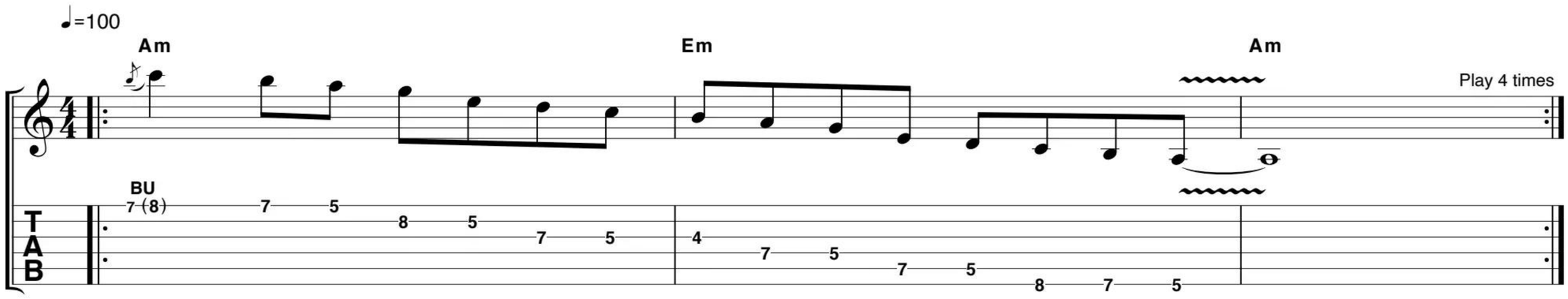
The 16th-note runs in *AKOM* are some of the slickest lead lines Brian ever recorded. Turn to p68 to learn them in our full transcription, or ready yourself with this shorter idea here. Based in C major, ascend and descend the lick evenly using down-up-style alternate picking. It's quite relentless stuff, so we recommend attempting just four or eight notes at first, looping each phrase to build accuracy. Make sure to start slowly, too!



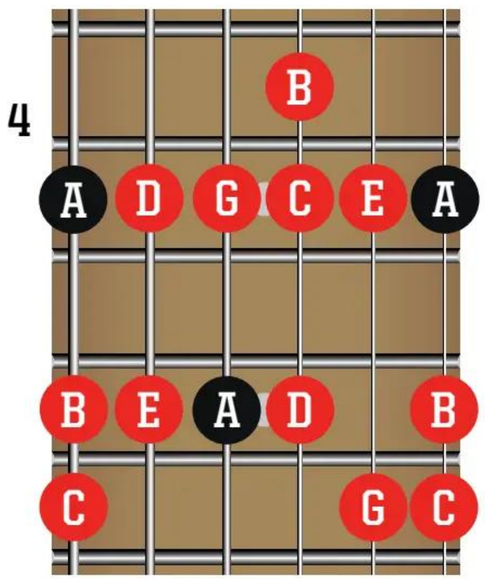
C MAJOR SCALE

A simple C major scale it may be, but this shape comes with its own challenge: a position change as you reach the second string. You only have to move up one fret, though, so it's not too bad. Just take it slowly, playing from low to high at a slow enough tempo that you don't make mistakes.

12 THESE ARE THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES SOLO TECHNIQUE: TIMED DELAY EFFECT **bit.ly/tg381audio**



Here, we're looking at Brian's approach to the cascading licks in this beautiful song's emotive solo. You'll be descending through the scale using even eighth notes until you arrive at the A root note. The all-important delay effect is added with the repeat set to a quarter-note (600Mms at this tempo). This has the effect of a harmony being created between the played note and the delayed note.



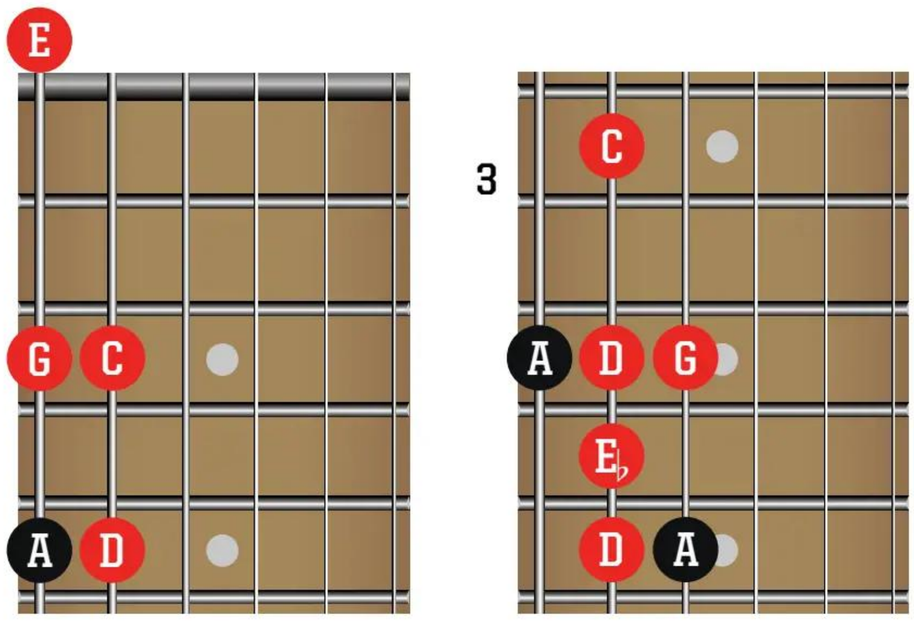
A MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE WITH ADDED 9TH

This scale shape is based on the traditional A minor pentatonic (A C D E G) with the root on the sixth string. Added to this is the 9th interval B note resulting in a hybrid six-note scale, somewhere in between the pentatonic and natural minor scales.

13 DRAGON ATTACK MAIN RIFF TECHNIQUE: SINGLE-NOTE FUNK LINES **bit.ly/tg381audio**



This riff, inspired by Brian-penned funk-rocker *Dragon Attack*, is played in unison with the bass and features syncopated 16th-notes to create the groove. Keeping your picking hand moving constantly in a down-up, 16th-note fashion will really help you stay locked in with the bass and drums.



A BLUES SCALE

Our riff is based in the A blues scale (A C D E♭, E G), with the notes arranged on the lowest strings and using the open E and A notes as pedal tones.

100 GREATEST COVER VERSIONS



Way back in 1970, during a long night of drinking at a club in the German city of Bielefeld, the two guitarists in British rock band Status Quo heard a song that would change their lives.

Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt had already begun to reshape Quo's sound, moving away from the psychedelic pop of their hit single *Pictures Of Matchstick Men* to embrace a harder rock direction on their third album *Ma Kelly's Greasy Spoon*. But when they heard The Doors' song *Roadhouse Blues* blasting at high volume in that club, it was a genuine eureka moment.

As Rossi now recalls: "We'd been watching this couple dancing, and when *Roadhouse Blues* came on they started moving in a totally different way; really sexy. The tempo was like, 'wow!' We were mesmerised by it."

What Rossi and Parfitt heard in *Roadhouse Blues* was the template for the heavy boogie shuffle that would make Status Quo one of the greatest and biggest selling rock groups of the '70s. The song became fixture in Quo's live set, and was recorded for their definitive 1972 album, *Piledriver*.

"Fundamentally," Rossi says, "what made it work was Rick playing that rhythm and I played off that. He played very much downstrokes and I had the left swing stroke, and they worked so well together."

For Quo, simplicity was key. As Rossi says with a smile: "Everybody used to say how great Clapton was, but I remember saying to Eric, 'You try playing that one riff for eight f*cking minutes!'"

But where Quo stayed faithful to the original *Roadhouse Blues*, many other artists have taken the opposite approach – by radically reinventing a famous song. And at the top of TG's list of the The 100 Greatest Cover Versions – as voted by our readers – is a perfect example of interpretive genius from a visionary guitarist...

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The 100 Greatest Cover Versions
From Sonic Youth to Jimi Hendrix, and all points in between. Featuring commentary from Nancy Wilson, Joe Bonamassa, Slash, Joe Perry and more. Plus: tips on how to play 'em like the stars.



100 SUPERSTAR SONIC YOUTH

The alternative rockers' artsy take on a '60s love ballad

Written in 1969 by Bonnie Bramlett and Leon Russell, and then recorded by Bramlett and her husband Delaney with none other than Eric Clapton on guitar, *Superstar* would be covered by a number of big-selling artists, including MOR superegos The Carpenters and soul legend Luther Vandross. However, it was the Sonic Youth rendition, recorded for a 1994 tribute album to The Carpenters, that marked the greatest departure from its original form, with singer/guitarist Thurston Moore's dreamy vocals evoking a heightened sense of melancholy and fatigue.

It all starts with a pair of acoustic guitars – one strumming barre chords lower down the neck and another playing a single note melody higher up – before overdriven octaves on the low E and D strings, performed by co-guitarist Lee Ranaldo in the video, are brought in for the chorus. The acoustic melody returns soon after, this time with a heavily effected and noisy electric matching it note for note, mixing elements of modulation and feedback into an experimental swirl that fades just in time for the second verse.

It's this extreme shift in dynamics that make Sonic Youth masters of their trade, controlling the chaos and being able to bring it all down to whisper quietness. In this case, they were able to take a beautiful ballad and turn into something lethargic and intoxicated, unravelling new layers of depth in a piece that had already been explored many times, while also managing to stay true to the core message behind the music. But not everyone appreciated it. When interviewed in 2009, Richard Carpenter expressed a distaste for what Sonic Youth did with the song.

Amit Sharma

SUPER SONIC
The Youth on stage in Belgium in 1991. From left: Lee Ranaldo, Kim Gordon, Thurston Moore

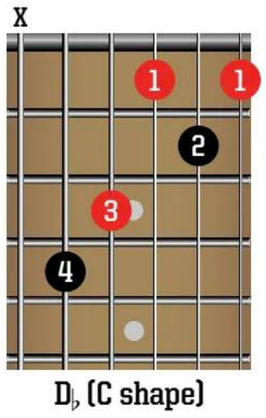
THE GREATEST DEPARTURE FROM SUPERSTAR'S ORIGINAL FORM

PLAY IT LIKE... THURSTON & LEE

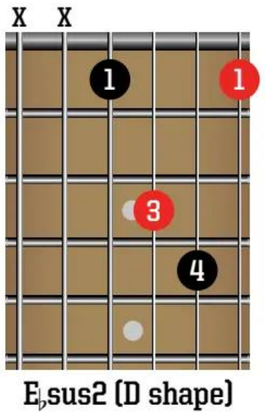
Use a noisy distortion pedal like a ProCo Rat to achieve the right kind of feedback.

A ring modulator or vibrato pedal could help create the right kind of movement for the noise section after the first chorus.

Get used to E-, C- and D-shape barre chords to recreate the acoustic guitar parts. E is fairly easy. C and D shapes, less so!



D♭ (C shape)



E♭sus2 (D shape)

Photo Getty



99 THE BATTLE OF EVERMORE
THE LOVEMONGERS

Heart's Ann and Nancy Wilson show why Led Zeppelin love them

This Led Zeppelin classic influenced early Heart both musically and in their love of Tolkien-inspired lyrics. As Nancy Wilson tells TG: "When I was at university in Forest Grove, Oregon, I heard that song for the first time on the record player that I had in my dorm room. I was like, 'I'm going to get a mandolin immediately!' The sound of that instrument was so magic. I got a ride to Sherman Clay music store in Portland, and I found a Japanese knockoff of an f-hole Gibson-style mandolin, which I still play onstage."

The Wilsons' cover of *The Battle Of Evermore* didn't happen until 1992, when they took a break from Heart with their informal acoustic project, The Lovemongers. This collective was more in the spirit of the MTV Unplugged era than Heart's recent power ballad-heavy albums had been, and their version of *Evermore* found its way onto the soundtrack to 1992 film *Singles* alongside Alice In Chains, Pearl Jam, and Soundgarden, solidifying the Wilsons' credibility in the 1990s.

Nancy played the track on mandolin, and while her version varies from the original, she admits this wasn't intentional. "I learned from the record, putting it down to half-speed," she recalls. "But it was confusing, because it uses delay in time with the song, so what you're hearing is not exactly what John Paul Jones was playing on the mandolin. I approximated what I could figure out from the record, and played it like the accompaniment to the whole song. Ann and I would play it just with one mandolin and two voices, or a guitar and a mandolin and two voices. So it wasn't an intentional reinterpretation. It was just what I could figure."

Jenna Scaramanga

WILSONS PICK IT!
Nancy, with mandolin, and sister Ann

"I LEARNED FROM THE RECORD, PUTTING IT DOWN TO HALF-SPEED"

Photo Getty

PLAY IT LIKE... NANCY WILSON

If you're using a guitar, try a capo at the 12th fret to play it in the mandolin register.

You could experiment with a pitch shifter detune effect of +/- 3–5 cents to approximate the mandolin's unison strings.

If your acoustic is unplayable past the 12th fret, a capo on the 7th fret with the chords Dm, C, F, and G will sound good.



98 JUMP
MIKE DAWES

Impossibly brilliant acoustic rearrangement of Van Halen's biggest hit

The synth-powered rock anthem that gave Van Halen their only US number one single, *Jump* gave the band recognition far beyond the rock 'n' roll audience. Its instantly recognisable melody was performed by Edward Van Halen on an Oberheim OB-Xa instead of the 1958 Gibson Flying V and Steve Ripley stereo guitars that dominated the rest of the *1984* album, though his guitars are more prominent during the pre-chorus, solo and outro sections.

English fingerstyle guitarist Mike Dawes wasn't the first to cover *Jump* – percussive acoustic guitar trailblazer Eric Roche did a great version before. But Mike came up with idea of a one-man band acoustic version on the night that Eddie passed away in October 2020. "I stayed up until 6am compelled to try and arrange this," he explained, "not for any kind of crass bandwagoning but because Eddie's music is the reason I play guitar, especially fingerstyle, funnily enough. I just want people to know that the Van Halen guitar style transcends 'that sound', and strikes chords with guitarists of all styles."

He made his point very well, indeed. In the video, Mike can be seen playing one of his guitars by German luthier Andreas Cuntz, appropriately adorned with Eddie's favoured stripes, and skilfully manages to fit the rhythmic backbone, keyboards, vocal melodies and guitar solo into one perfectly constructed arrangement. The arpeggios that follow the guitar solo, originally performed on the Oberheim, involve some wide stretches and challenging position shifts, but Mike effortlessly manages to make it look like a walk in the park.

There have been many great Van Halen covers over the years, but this could very well be the finest of them all – a masterclass in execution that's evocative and powerful enough to bring a tear to any Van Halen fan's eye.

Amit Sharma

HIGH PRAISE
"Eddie's music is the reason I play guitar," Mike says

PLAY IT LIKE... MIKE DAWES

Tune your guitar to DADGAD, which is essentially an open Dsus4 chord, and use open strings to fill out the sound.

Hit your thumb against the bass strings to create a kick drum sound and experiment with knocks on the body for a higher-pitched snare.

Use artificial harmonics to add even more depth and increase the sonic range of the guitar in your hands.

Photo Olly Curtis



97 SAD BUT TRUE ST. VINCENT

Annie Clark's electro-rock take on the Metallica masterpiece

Enter Sandman may well be Metallica's most famous song, but *Sad But True* – from the same 1991 self-titled release aka The Black Album – can't be too far behind. Its mid-tempo stomp and lower tuning made it one of the heaviest tracks on the record, at least in terms of groove and subterranean weight. In 2021, to coincide with the album's 30th anniversary, the all-star tribute album *The Metallica Blacklist* was released, with everyone from Ghost to Biffy Clyro to Sam Fender contributing their own versions of various tracks.

One of the stand-outs was St. Vincent's take on *Sad But True*, which boldly traded the meaty high-gain guitar aggression for a synth-based eeriness closer to what you might expect to hear on a Nine Inch Nails record. While James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett were dialling in plenty of distortion on the original recording, Annie Clark's version features more of a light fuzz effect and less emphasis on the six-strings in the overall mix. Even the guitar sound for the solo is surprisingly clean, cutting through with a treble frequency bite instead of anything too saturated or thick-sounding. The second lead section, roughly two minutes and 50 seconds in, is erratic and off-kilter – stylistically, far removed from the original. It's things like this, as well as the moody synth rock pulse, that makes it a great example of a song being reimagined in a way that's completely different.

A year after the cover was released, Annie joined Metallica on stage to sing *Nothing Else Matters* at the Helping Hands charity concert in Los Angeles, proving herself yet again to be one of the most eclectic and all-encompassing talents of the modern age.

Amit Sharma

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

Annie Clark's *Sad But True* is a highlight of *The Metallica Blacklist*

PLAY IT LIKE... ANNIE CLARK

Set your amp to light break up and use a vintage-style fuzz in front, set at roughly one third of the way up.

Use a delay pedal with long and loud repeats to create an orchestra of guitars like Annie does at the very end of her first solo.

Recording yourself? Harmonise like Annie does at the end of her second solo, by using bends that are less rigid and more free and spontaneous.

ERRATIC AND OFF-KILTER, IT'S STYLISTICALLY FAR REMOVED

Photo Getty



TRES HOMBRES
Josh with Billy and Queens sidekick Alain Johannes

96 PRECIOUS AND GRACE
QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

Homme and Gibbons unite for a ZZ Top classic

One is the bearded Texan hombre that Jimi Hendrix once called his favourite guitarist; the other, "the Ginger Elvis" who helped pioneer stoner rock with Kyuss in the '90s. But ZZ Top's Billy F. Gibbons and Queens Of The Stone Age mastermind Josh Homme have more in common than you might think, and their mutual love of sleazy desert rock is on full display in this QOTSA cover of the 1973 Top deep cut.

2005's *Lullabies To Paralyze* album found the ever-collaborative Queens collide with Gibbons, who provided lead guitar and vocals to third single *Burn The Witch* and this excellent cover of Billy's own *Tres Hombres* cut *Precious And Grace*, which was included as a bonus track, and features the late Mark Lanegan on co-lead vocals.

Before linking up with Gibbons in the studio, QOTSA could be seen performing *Precious And Grace* live as early as 2001, and years of muscle-memory playing adds to the recording's tight guitar and drum attack. Sounding more powerful than its predecessor due to the band's focused playing and modernised production, the resulting cover is just as groovy, but weightier than the original.

Though a faithful rendition throughout, it's the outro section that improves upon the original, where Homme and Gibbons trade red-hot licks for 40-odd exhilarating seconds, showing different but complementary guitar styles from two generations of desert rock innovators. At 2:52, fellow Queens six-stringer Troy Van Leeuwen joins in, where the wild ride outro becomes an epic three-way solo. The guitarists each have time to shine, with Gibbons in particular ripping harder than on his own prior version, before the three unite for the song's hooky descending riff and righteous final chord.

Gibbons called his work with Queens one of his favourite collaborations, performing *Precious And Grace* with the band live in LA in April 2005 and adding the song back into Top's setlists soon after. Like master and apprentice, Homme and Gibbons have remained pardners ever since, with Homme praising Gibbons on Matt Sweeny's *Guitar Moves* YouTube series, and Gibbons appearing on Homme's most recent Desert Sessions album (*Vols. 11 & 12*) back in 2019.

Stan Bull

Photo Getty

PLAY IT LIKE...
JOSH HOMME

Homme often plays guitars in C standard tuning (C F B♭ E♭ G C). Using thicker strings here will bulk out your tone.

If you're playing with another guitarist, double-up the rhythm parts for a thick Stone Age sound.

Learn the Hungarian major scale (in G: G A♯ B C♯ D E F); it's a Homme favourite for soloing, and very easy to differentiate from Gibbons' blues scale (G B♭ C D♭ D F).

95 Nazi Punks F*ck Off – Napalm Death
94 Man In The Mirror – Lari Basilio
93 Burning Down The House – Paramore
92 Smokestack Lightning – Soundgarden
91 Snowblind – System Of A Down
90 Black Diamond – The Replacements
89 Purple Rain – Andy McKee
88 Here Comes The Sun – Ghost
87 Have Love Will Travel – The Black Keys
86 Fever – The Cramps
85 Every 1's A Winner – Ty Segall
84 Spanish Castle Magic – Yngwie Malmsteen
83 Sunshine Of Your Love – Living Colour
82 Would? – Opeth
81 Dissident Aggressor – Slayer
80 I Wish You Would – The Yardbirds
79 Master Of Puppets – Trivium
78 Mr. Tambourine Man – The Byrds
77 Head On – Pixies
76 John The Revelator – Steve Vai
75 I Heard It Through The Grapevine – The Slits
74 Simple Man – Deftones
73 The Hunter – Free
72 No More Mr. Nice Guy – Megadeth
71 Please Don't Touch – Motörhead/Girlschool

70 Africa – Ninja Sex Party
69 Bad Romance – Halestorm
68 I Am The Walrus – Oasis
67 Roadhouse Blues – Status Quo
66 California Man – Cheap Trick
65 Walk On By – The Stranglers
64 Warning – Black Sabbath
63 Killing Floor – Slash
62 Steppin' Out – John Mayall's Blues Breakers
61 Word Up! – Korn
60 Crawling King Snake – The Doors
59 Come Together – Gary Clark Jr.
58 God Save The Queen – Queen
57 Summer Breeze – The Isley Brothers
56 God Gave Rock & Roll To You II – KISS
55 Ain't No Love In the Heart Of The City – Whitesnake
54 Kentucky Woman – Deep Purple
53 Helter Skelter – Mötley Crüe
52 Hanging On The Telephone – Blondie
51 Orion – Rodrigo y Gabriela
50 It's My Life – No Doubt
49 So You Want To Be a Rock 'N' Roll Star – Tom Perry And The Heartbreakers
48 Walking By Myself – Gary Moore
47 Faith – Limp Bizkit

46 Need Your Love So Bad – Fleetwood Mac
45 Little Red Rooster – The Rolling Stones
44 Landslide – The Smashing Pumpkins
43 Free Fallin' – John Mayer
42 Planet Caravan – Pantera
41 I Gotsta Get Paid – ZZ Top
40 The First Cut Is The Deepest – Sheryl Crow
39 Key To the Highway – Derek And The Dominos
38 Land Of Confusion – Disturbed
37 Got To Get You Into My Life – Earth, Wind & Fire
36 Rockin' In The Free World – Pearl Jam
35 Mrs. Robinson – Lemonheads
34 War Pigs – Faith No More
33 The Green Manalishi – Judas Priest
32 Satisfaction – Devo
31 No Quarter – Tool
30 Summertime Blues – Blue Cheer
29 Sweet Jane – Cowboy Junkies
28 Walk This Way – Run-DMC/Aerosmith
27 Higher Ground – Red Hot Chili Peppers
26 Call Me The Breeze – Lynyrd Skynyrd
25 Hard To Handle – The Black Crowes
24 Whiskey In The Jar – Thin Lizzy

Photo Getty



MAC UPDATE
The Smashing Pumpkins, from left: Billy Corgan, Jimmy Chamberlin, James Iha



23 JOLENE THE WHITE STRIPES

A country classic becomes a pained blues ballad

20 years before Beyoncé, The White Stripes had a hit with their cover of Dolly Parton's *Jolene*, recorded live in the rock Mecca of Blackpool in 2004. This was actually their second release of the song. A studio take was released as the b-side to *Hello Operator* back in 2000, but it was the live take that attracted attention.

Parton's original kicks off with a fingerpicked classical guitar part, and features an interweaving steel string part that arrives in the second chorus. White played the live version entirely on his Airline Res-o-glass. His fingerpicked intro contains a nod to the original part, but it isn't a reproduction. The original part is played in C# minor, using an A minor shape and a capo at the 4th fret. White, who sings it a semitone higher than Parton, goes for an open D minor shape with no capo. The studio b-side version has a complementary acoustic guitar layered with the electric take, echoing the guitar interplay of the original. The higher key means White's voice breaks into falsetto on the highest notes, sounding utterly despairing.

Where Parton's original has a foot-tapping pulse that's irresistible for country radio stations, the Stripes take it at an altogether slower and more mournful clip. While Parton zips through the song in 2:41, the White Stripes version is 3:17. Although it's slow, the tempo is still very solid, and the studio and live takes are almost exactly the same length.

White's tone is not exactly clean at the start, but when he turns up the volume on his guitar for the second and third choruses, his amps go into meltdown. Though a Big Muff was his main White Stripes pedal, the tone here is not very Muff-like, suggesting he was just running his Fender Twin and Sears Silvertone amps ragged.

Jenna Scaramanga

PAINT IT, WHITE
The dynamic duo, Meg and Jack

PLAY IT LIKE... JACK WHITE

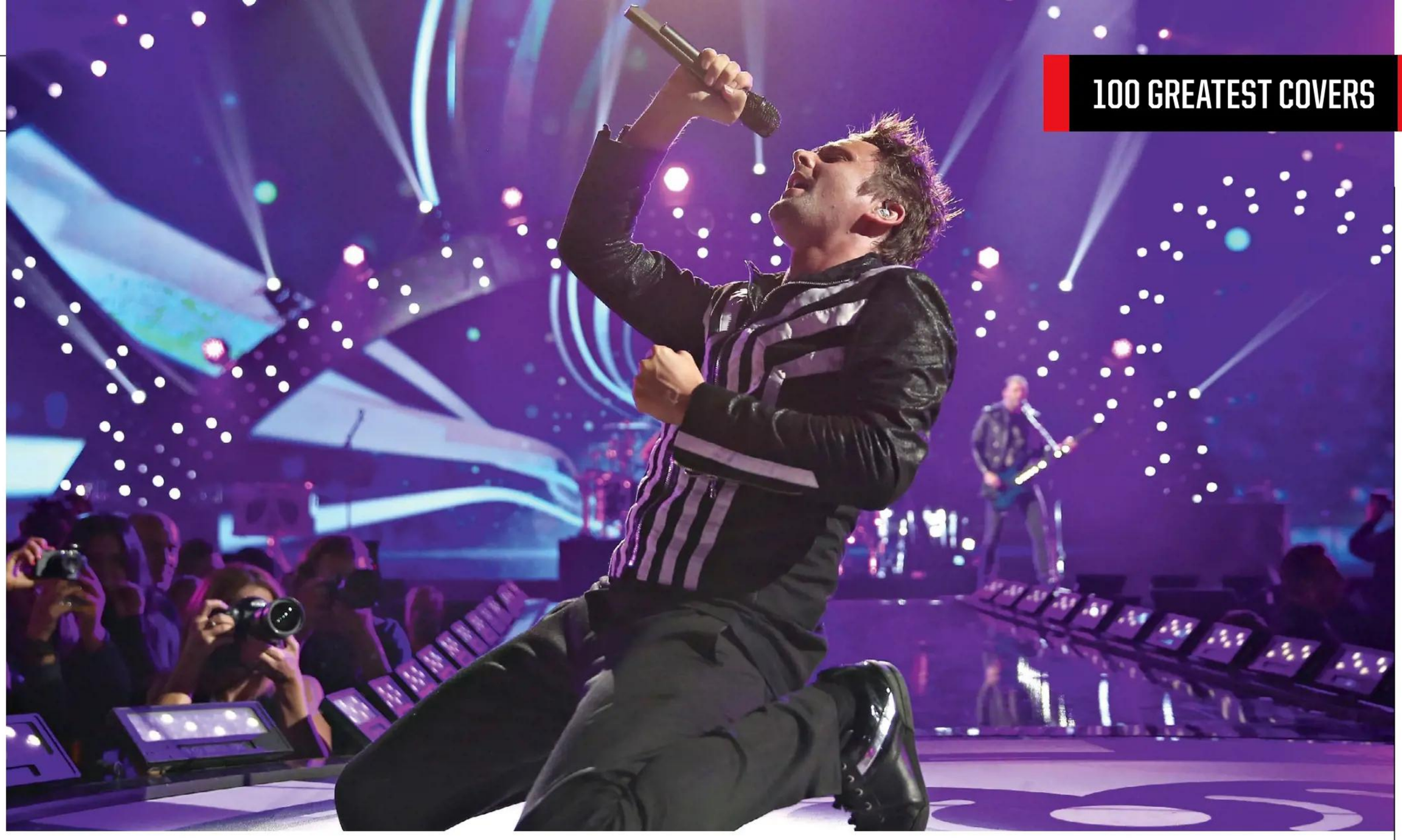
Jack moves between Dsus2 and Dm for his main riff. He frets the Dmr using his second, third, and fourth fingers, but most guitarists will feel more comfortable using the first finger to fret the high E string. Lift that finger off to get the Dsus2.

The other chords are F major and C major, but White plays them more like powerchords, keeping those 3rds muted out. Either will work though.

Set your amp for the amount of crunch you want for the chorus, and get a softer tone in the verses by backing off your guitar's volume and picking more gently with your fingers.

RECORDED IN THE ROCK MECCA OF BLACKPOOL...

Photo Getty



22 FEELING GOOD MUSE

Nina Simone made this show tune famous. Muse made it rock.

Originally written for *The Roar Of The Greasepaint – The Smell Of The Crowd*, the 1964 Newley and Bricusse musical, *Feeling Good* became a standard thanks to Nina Simone's towering 1965 performance of the tune. When Muse covered it in 2000, there were no plans for it to make the *Origin Of Symmetry* album, but it ended up as that record's fourth single. Although it charted at a relatively modest #24, it went on to reach Gold status, matching *Plug In Baby* for sales.

Muse's version sees the horn riff from Simone's version transferred to bass guitar, the massive sound of an entire horn section replicated with octave and fuzz effects. Matt Bellamy stayed relatively close to the piano part from Simone's version, with its consistent triplet pattern. In true Muse fashion, though, he played it on an electric piano through a wah pedal for that distinctive filtered effect. Bellamy doesn't actually play guitar on the track; in a move that anticipated modern acts like Royal Blood, Chris Wolstenholme created the wall of sound with his bass.

Wolstenholme favoured the distinctive tone of the Boss OC-2 for an octave-down effect. For *Origin Of Symmetry*, Wolstenholme used a multi-amp rig, consisting of three Marshall 7400 stacks. One amp was run clean, to preserve the low end lost by distortion pedals. Another was fed his Black Russian EHX Big Muff fuzz tone. A third had the distorted tone from a Human Gear Animato, an obscure and nasal-sounding Japanese pedal. It sounds ugly in isolation but is so important to Wolstenholme's overall tone that his tech Shane Goodwin commented "That is Chris's sound."

If you're using a modeller, you could try running your distortion effects in parallel to replicate this blend of tones. Boosting your distortion with a Tube Screamer-style pedal may help get closer to the Animato's midrange honk.

Jenna Scaramanga

NO STRINGS
Muse's version of Feeling Good is missing only one thing - guitar!

PLAY IT LIKE... MUSE

Whether you play guitar or bass, an octave pedal is essential. If you're on guitar, set it for two octaves down to replicate Wolstenholme's floor-shaking rumble.

Where the notes stop is as important as where they start. Cut the notes off with your fretting and picking hands, and pay attention to the gaps between the notes.

Stick to single notes, not chords, and you'll both sound more like a bass player and be able to use gnarlier-sounding analogue octave effects.

THIS COVER OF FEELING GOOD PREDICTED ACTS LIKE ROYAL BLOOD

Photo Getty



21 RENEGADES OF FUNK
RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Ignoring the rules, RATM made this an entirely new song

Like many of the tracks on Rage Against The Machine's 2000 album *Renegades*, this is not so much a cover as a total rewriting of an old song. The tempo, key, groove, and instrumentation are all entirely new, and only the lyrics really survive. The 1983 original by Afrika Bambaataa & The Soulsonic Force does have a funky clean guitar part in the first verse that could perhaps have been converted into a Rage riff and some wild synth lines that might perhaps have been reinterpreted with help from his Whammy pedal, but Tom Morello opts for entirely new ideas.

It's in Drop D, so you know you're hearing Tom Morello's 1982 Telecaster, which he has used for every Drop D riff of his career. Morello's rig has been similarly consistent, and the key players here are his DigiTech Whammy, Crybaby wah, Marshall 2205 head, and Peavey 4x12 cabinet. That siren effect is created by leaving the Whammy set to shift the pitch two octaves up, which gives the screeching tone. Rock the wah pedal all the way forward in time with the beat and all the way back on the off beats. The two notes are the A string, fret 7, and the dropped D string, fret 10. When it shifts up, both notes are on the A string, frets 8 and 5.

The main riff in the verses has no effect at all, while the chorus uses the Whammy two-octave shift and wah from the intro again. If you haven't got a wah or whammy, try rolling your guitar's tone control all the way off and tweaking your amp so that the heavy riff sounds right. When you roll the tone control back up, you'll get a piercing sound that will work for the intro.

Jenna Scaramanga

FIST OF RAGE
Rock renegade Tom Morello

PLAY IT LIKE... TOM MORELLO

Tune to drop D. The heavy verse riff hammers on from fret 3 to 5 on the A string, followed by a hit on the low D string. The powerchords are played by barring the low D and A strings, sliding from the 3rd to the 5th fret.

Use your neck pickup for this one, as Tom does for all his heavy riffs.

The chorus part uses the D minor pentatonic scale. In drop D, that's 0-3-5 on the D string and the same on the A string. Simple!

NOT SO MUCH A COVER AS A TOTAL REWRITING OF AN OLD SONG

Photo Getty



20 SLOE GIN JOE BONAMASSA

Bonamassa's guitar fireworks elevate a forgotten ballad to a classic

In 1978, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* star Tim Curry launched a music career. Working with producer Bob Ezrin months before he would be tapped for Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, Curry's debut album included *Sloe Gin*. "That song initially came to me via [producer] Kevin Shirley who was born in South Africa," explains Joe Bonamassa. "It was a hit there but nowhere else."

"I have to give a special shout out to Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner who played on the original version," Joe acknowledges. "They were basically Bob Ezrin's ringers. The first time I played it, people applauded like they knew the song. And they didn't know the song, it just sounded familiar. That was a very cool thing. That song has been with me for twenty years now. What you hear on the record and how we play it live are two different things. That song's got a life of its own. I'm thrilled with that... sometimes we just have to play it! There's definitely a sense of build in the solo section. I did my best not to go 'widdly widdly' on that one from the get-go. The solo was actually way longer. I think there must have been 10 minutes of B-roll, because we just kept going and Kevin edited it down."

"For the recording, I used my Marshalls and Van Weeldens, which is what I've been using on my latest tour, funnily enough. As for the guitar, it would have been an R8 or R9 reissue Les Paul." Joe's magnificent solo came 42nd in TG's 2020 poll of the greatest guitar solos. While no one doubts Joe's technical ability, he plays with incredible restraint on Sloe Gin, building intensity without relying on speed. Instead, he creates excitement by working up the neck with increasingly wide bends and vibrato.

Amit Sharma, Jenna Scaramanga

BOOZE BROTHER
"That song has been with me for 20 years now," Joe says

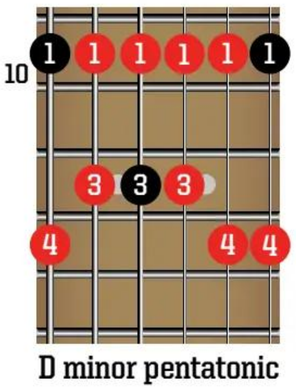
"THE FIRST TIME I PLAYED IT, PEOPLE APPLAUDED LIKE THEY KNEW IT"

PLAY IT LIKE... JOE BONAMASSA

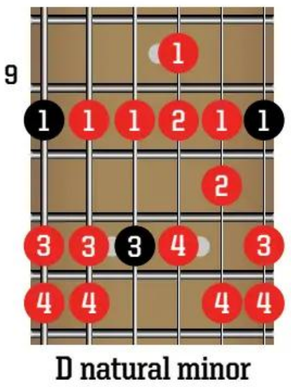
Base your solo around the D minor pentatonic and D natural minor scales, as Joe does here.

Use your pickup selector! Joe flips to his neck pickup to smooth out high bends and the bridge to add definition to low notes.

Use your volume pot, too – Joe controls the gain from the guitar, starting low to allow the song to build.



D minor pentatonic



D natural minor

Photo Getty



19 TRAVELLING RIVERSIDE BLUES
LED ZEPPELIN

Zeppelin's homage to the blues' master

This is a song that seemed destined to remain a little-known gem. Robert Johnson's original version was laid down at his last ever recording session on June 20, 1937, but wasn't released until 13 years after his death. Zeppelin's cover, too, was released posthumously, appearing in 1990 after Jimmy Page negotiated its release from the BBC archives.

Each verse of the Zeppelin version plays the main riff four times, then goes into a standard 12-bar blues progression. The Johnson original is harder to follow if you're unfamiliar with early acoustic blues. Like many solo singer/guitarists of the era, Johnson simply changes the chords as he feels them. His intro can be counted as two 4/4 bars and one 5/4 bar, and his first verse has 13 4/4 bars, with three bars of 2/4 interspersed. It's a mystery how Zeppelin decided whether to claim their songs were originals or covers. *Travelling Riverside Blues* has an original riff and melody, but because it retains Robert Johnson's title, was credited as a cover version. Still, this is as thunderous as the highlights from *Led Zeppelin II*, even though it first aired on BBC radio four months before that album's release.

It is widely assumed that Jimmy Page played the 1967 Vox Phantom XII he had used since The Yardbirds for the recording of *...Riverside Blues*. The following day, Zeppelin recorded *Thank You* and *Living Loving Maid* at Morgan Studios, and Page has confirmed he used the Phantom XII for those songs. The amp is still shrouded in mystery (Page says he doesn't remember), but during this time period he was gigging with Marshalls, often paired with an Arbiter Power One Hundred or the Vox UL4120 he is thought to have used on *Whole Lotta Love*.

Jenna Scaramanga

BLUES TRAVELLERS
Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, John Paul Jones and Jimmy Page

IT SEEMED DESTINED TO REMAIN A LITTLE-KNOWN GEM

PLAY IT LIKE... JIMMY PAGE

Tune to Open G. Low to high: D-G-D-G-B-D

For the start of the riff, slide up to the 12th fret and strum (Jimmy uses a chrome slide). Then strum the open strings, followed by sliding to frets 3-5-3, and back to the open string.

The overdubbed solo was probably Jimmy's Telecaster. It starts in G major pentatonic and finishes in G minor pentatonic.

Photo Getty



18 AM I EVIL? METALLICA

James and Kirk salute their heroes

In 1980, when Diamond Head were rising stars of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, their epic track *Am I Evil?* was widely cited as one of the heaviest pieces of its time. Making similar use of the eerie tritone interval featured in Black Sabbath's defining song *Black Sabbath*, it's the kind of music tailor-made to send shivers down the spine and provoke the same sense of dread associated with horror movies. One of its key attributes in achieving that is its usage of time – with the doomier chords ringing out much slower to the mid-tempo palm-muted sections, highlighting the intensity and drama of each part.

As a band who made no secret of how much they learned from the NWOBHM movement, Metallica released their own version of *Am I Evil?* as the b-side to *Creeping Death* in 1984. Their version was faster and heavier, replacing Brian Tatler's hard rock guitar tones heard on the original with something more distorted and aggressive, intensified by James Hetfield's signature snarl. Kirk Hammett's solo stays close to Tatler's, sticking with minor pentatonic ideas in the key of B or E, depending on the chords underneath, as well as wide intervallic runs using either hammer-ons and pull-offs on open strings or two-handed techniques. These ideas had been popularised by the likes of Eddie Van Halen and Angus Young, who were looking for ways to break out of the pentatonic rock shapes in the late '70s.

Over the years, Metallica recorded three other Diamond Head classics, all of which were subsequently included on their covers album *Garage Inc.* in 1998. In fact, Metallica's early shows regularly included four DH songs. They were, arguably, the best Diamond Head tribute act in the world!

Amit Sharma

DIAMOND GEEZERS
Messrs Hetfield and Hammett. Are they evil? Yes, they are.

PLAY IT LIKE... METALLICA

Dial in plenty of gain while cutting some of the midrange frequencies to nail that metallic attack. Keep an EQ or overdrive pedal with the midrange raised in your signal chain to bring those mids back in for the solo.

Practice hammering on from your open B-string to the 5th and 8th frets, and moving the fretted notes a semitone down.

Trying to get the evil sound of the riff that kicks in at 1:13? Repeat patterns in tritone intervals: fret the 2nd and 1st frets on the A string, 3rd and 2nd on the D, 4th and 3rd on the G, and so on.

WIDELY CITED AS ONE OF THE HEAVIEST PIECES OF ITS TIME...

Photo Getty



17 COME TOGETHER AEROSMITH

The ill-fated Sgt. Pepper movie's chief redeeming feature

Creating a film based on The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* probably sounded like a great idea. Some had their doubts about stars Peter Frampton and the Bee Gees, but Aerosmith agreed to play the Future Villain Band chiefly so they could work with producer George Martin. The well-medicated Aerosmith had a reputation for slow recording, so Martin told them once they were done they could see Jeff Beck at Trax, a New York club. Aerosmith whipped through the recording in two takes and headed to Trax, only to find Martin had hoaxed them: Beck was not playing.

Aerosmith's version of the song sticks close to the original instrumentation, although Joe Perry used a Strat, unlike George Harrison's Les Paul. Joe Perry tells TG: "I always felt like when you cover a song that's as iconic as a Beatles song, you don't want to go too far off the path. Certain things make it a classic song, such as some of the guitars, the melody or the lyrics. I mean, there are no hard and fast rules here. Like, Jimi [Hendrix] certainly f*cking killed Bob Dylan's *All Along the Watchtower*! He made it his own, and I think that's fine, too. So with *Come Together*, with Steven singing it and me and Brad's guitar tones, of course it's gonna sound like Aerosmith. But I think we kept pretty close to the sound that made it the classic that it is. As a Beatles fan, I didn't want to drift too far off from that. I wanted to pay my respects to the song, and that's kind of how I feel about covering songs in general. I feel it would have been wrong to go about it and not recognize the song and what made it popular in the first place."

Jenna Scaramanga

BEATLE JUICE
Joe Perry with Aerosmith singer Steven Tyler

"I WANTED TO PAY MY RESPECTS TO THE SONG" JOE PERRY

PLAY IT LIKE... JOE PERRY

Unlike the standard tuned original, Joe tuned to drop D to record this track.

The guitar solo uses D minor pentatonic with an added B note until the chord changes to A, at which point he switches to A minor pentatonic with an added F#.

The into riff outlines a Dm7 chord. Play two low D notes, then slide from the 5th to 7th frets on the D string. Finally, play G string fret 5 and B string fret 6 together, bending them slightly for extra attitude.

Photo Getty



16 OVER THE RAINBOW JEFF BECK

The Wizard of Wallington took this song to a place beyond yellow brick roads

Judy Garland's performances of *Over The Rainbow* are the benchmark, of course, and it's appropriate to compare Beck with her, because Jeff was a master of giving guitar melodies a vocal quality. Voices, of course, do not have frets, and Beck used his whammy bar ingeniously to mimic the way vocalists swoop into notes and slide between them.

It can be difficult to tell on recordings when Beck uses a slide, because he could create such similar effects using the Strat tremolo. In a 2023 TG interview, Joe Perry recalled seeing Beck perform a slide version: "That two and a half minutes, the audience was on the edge of their seats." The version Beck is best known for, though, was played without a slide. There is video of him performing it as early as 2006, but the definitive recording appeared on 2010's *Emotion & Commotion*.

Producer Steve Lipson recalls that the only amp used was a Fender Pro Junior combo, mic'ed as close as possible with an AEA R-84, two inches from the centre of the speaker. The guitar, of course, was a Jeff Beck Stratocaster. Beck didn't use a pick, plucking the string with his thumb. Occasionally you can hear the stronger attack of his thumbnail to bring out the natural harmonics. You need the amp very loud to provide the compression that keeps the harmonics at an even volume, since some are naturally much quieter than others. You'll also need that volume and compression to get enough sustain to play an entire phrase just by manipulating one note with the bar.

Beck's performance is a masterclass in emotion and control. His volume swells, edging the guitar into distortion at the song's peaks, are sublime. It's a performance worthy of comparison with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald and Garland.

Jenna Scaramanga

WAY UP HIGH
Jeff Beck's interpretation of *Over The Rainbow* was a late-career peak

PLAY IT LIKE... JEFF BECK

You'll need your guitar to be set up just right to tackle the bends and whammy bar action of *OTR*. The nut is the main cause of tremolo tuning issues. Make sure yours is cut by a capable luthier. A lubricant like Big Bends Nut Sauce, D'Addario Lubrikit, or just graphite from a pencil lead will help keep you in tune, too.

You'll need your tremolo set floating so that you can both raise and lower pitch. Beck had a perfect 4th of up-pull on his.

Use your bridge pickup, as it is the best at reproducing high harmonics.

A MASTERCLASS IN CONTROL...

Photo Getty



15 AMERICAN WOMAN
LENNY KRAVITZ

A ’70s anthem revamped by the man with the Flying V

If the original version of *American Woman* – written and recorded by Canadian rockers The Guess Who – sounds like the product of an improvised jam, that’s because it is. Guitarist Randy Bachman, who would later go on to lead Bachman-Turner Overdrive, had broken a string on stage and started strumming a riff after replacing it, prompting the band to join in and make it up as they went along. The finished song would end up topping the US chart.

Fast forward 30 years and *American Woman* would find a new lease of life through Lenny Kravitz’s rendition on the soundtrack for espionage comedy *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Sh*gged Me*. Lenny’s version would omit the acoustic intro and start with the main riff, performed in a lower tuning with a more overdriven and modernised electric guitar sound, almost sounding closer to Def Leppard hit *Pour Some Sugar On Me* in feel and delivery. The riff is performed dry twice, before reverb gets added in to thicken the sound before the vocals come in, and then switched off – an unusual production trick that catches the listener’s ear in more subtle ways.

There’s a new key change introduced for the solo section, moving a semitone down from C to B and then back again, over which Kravitz implements his favourite minor pentatonic licks, presumably on the black Gibson Flying V being played in the official video.

For the outro section, the guitars thin out and adopt more of a funk approach with strummed dead notes in between the chords that land on the stronger beats, swapping the full-bodied attack for something more scratchy and abrasive.

Amit Sharma

V FOR VICTORY
Lenny Kravitz in his world of leather

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE, 30 YEARS LATER

PLAY IT LIKE... LENNY KRAVITZ

The guitar tones on this track have more of a British rock voice, so use a Marshall-style amp with the gain around three or four.

Learn how to link lead ideas through key changes. In the solo the progression cycles between B-A and C-B♭. Lenny lands on the minor 7th of the B chord, which becomes the major 6th as he hits the C, invoking more of a Dorian sound.

Practice your funk strumming by playing 16th notes across all six strings and only fretting a chord on the first beat of every bar.

Photo Getty



14 I SHOT THE SHERIFF
ERIC CLAPTON

The reggae classic receives slick production from a rock legend

Originally appeared on *Burnin'*, Bob Marley's 1973 album with the Wailers, *I Shot The Sheriff*'s is Marley's iconic protest song aimed at police harassment. Marley and Peter Tosh shared guitar duties; with wah-wah effects and tight, backbeat-style rhythm, Tosh also supplying lead licks, plus piano and organ. Next to Eric Clapton's more sophisticated cover, the Marley recording sounds organic and earthy.

Clapton maintained Marley's original key of G minor, but turned the bridge's E♭ chord into the slicker Ebmaj7. George Terry, Clapton's six-string sideman at the time, probably played rhythm, leaving EC to plant understated minor pentatonic fills that honoured the original. In fact, Eric was so worried about covering the song that he sought Marley's approval. This was granted, although Bob later complained that the cover got all the airplay, even in Jamaica. While Marley, Tosh and percussionist Bunny Wailer supplied backing vocals on the original, Eric used his preferred background singer at the time, Yvonne Elliman. And while Marley answered the backing vocals call and response style, Clapton sang the full line.

The EC version hit the top of the Billboard Hot 100, and remains his only chart-topping record. His success with the track also set Marley's career soaring, the Jamaican star continuing to perform *I Shot The Sheriff* until the year before his death in 1981.

Neville Marten

NUMBER ONE WITH A BULLET

Clapton hit the top spot in America with his version of a great Bob Marley song

PLAY IT LIKE... ERIC CLAPTON

Eric's fills are sparse and nod courteously to Peter Tosh's originals, so aim to do the same.

Rhythm-wise, don't get too busy. Use small, four-string chords, not huge barre shapes.

On Marley and Clapton's versions the licks are mostly G minor pentatonic shapes #1 and #2. No need to venture further.

CLAPTON'S ONLY CHART-TOPPING RECORD

Photo Getty



13 I FOUGHT THE LAW
THE CLASH

A '60s hit transformed into a punk anthem

In 1978, while The Clash were working on their second album *Give 'Em Enough Rope* at The Automatt studio in San Francisco, guitarists Joe Strummer and Mick Jones were toying with the owner's collection of classic jukeboxes when they heard the Bobby Fuller Four version of *I Fought The Law*. The song was penned by Sonny Curtis, who played guitar for rock 'n' roll legend Buddy Holly and was a member of his backing band The Crickets.

The Clash's recording of *I Fought The Law* initially appeared on the band's 1979 EP *The Cost Of Living* and the subsequent American edition of their debut album. It would become one of their best-known songs and a live staple for the members in various projects for years to come.

Although mainly built around basic G and D chords, the track features some impressive interplay between the two guitar players – particularly during the harmonised lead break nearly a minute in. It's the kind of dual attack that had been popularised by bands like Thin Lizzy in the years prior, sounding more like two guitarists having a conversation at the same time and playing off each other than anything strictly harmonised to a specific interval across the board.

Another key element of the track is the usage of double strikes, whether that be how the rhythm guitar chords are strummed or some of the lead sections, adding to the staccato feel. Especially in comparison to the clean Strats heard on the infinitely more polite Bobby Fuller Four recording, The Clash's tones sound remarkably raucous, with humbucker-equipped guitars such as a Gibson Les Paul Standard fed into overdriven amps for a more aggressive and anarchic snarl.

Amit Sharma

CAUGHT BY THE FUZZ
The Clash, from left: Mick Jones (guitar), Joe Strummer (guitar/vocals), Topper Headon (drums) and Paul Simonon (bass)

REMARKABLY RAUCOUS TONES

PLAY IT LIKE... JOE AND MICK

Strum the chords hard, but focus on letting only the higher strings ring for an emphasis on the bite.

Use a British-style amp with the gain around four o'clock to keep enough clarity to what you play.

If you don't have another player with you, a long delay could create a harmonised effect that will get you roughly in the same ballpark for the leads.

Photo Getty



12 I LOVE ROCK 'N' ROLL
JOAN JETT & THE BLACKHEARTS

How a flop from the '70s became a mega-hit in the '80s

Alan Merrill, the singer for British pop rock band Arrows, explained the inspiration behind their most famous song back in 2016, explaining how the group "needed a fourth single", and it was producer Mickie Most who told him to "think of a simple three-chord rocker with an anthemic sing-along chorus and a great riff."

Few would deny he met that brief, even if the song didn't give Arrows a hit. But by chance, Joan Jett was on tour in England with her band The Runaways in 1976 when she saw Arrows performing *I Love Rock 'N' Roll* on their own ITV television show. She would then record her own version in 1979 with guitarist Steve Jones and drummer Paul Cook from the Sex Pistols, before cutting the definitive version in 1981 with her band The Blackhearts – which topped the US charts for seven weeks and eventually become the song she is best known for. This version was slightly faster with more reverb compared to the more direct-sounding original, though both feature guitars overdubbed an octave up for the tag at the end of the main riff.

Another interesting difference can be found in the leads halfway in – the Arrows version, played by guitarist Jake Hooker, sits comfortably in an F minor pentatonic framework, while Ricky Byrd's work on the Joan Jett cover has a much more major pentatonic feel – using relative minor shapes three frets down from F major in the 10th fret position.

He can also be seen bending the headstock of his Les Paul in the video to detune a chord in a similar kind of way to a whammy bar – a move which certainly looks cool but has its dangers given the well-documented weak points of that particular guitar design.

Ultimately, it's an example of the cover version surpassing the original, thus becoming incredibly lucrative for Messrs Merrill and Hooker.

Amit Sharma

RUNAWAY SUCCESS

Joan Jett's kick-ass version of *I Love Rock 'N' Roll* topped the US chart for seven weeks

PLAY IT LIKE... JOAN JETT

The original track isn't in a "perfect" concert pitch tuning, falling somewhere in between E and F. Tune your guitar to the recording if you're hoping to jam along.

The guitars have a very British kind of gain, so any Marshall-style amp with the overdrive set roughly halfway will get you there.

Experiment with major pentatonic ideas by performing minor pentatonic shapes three frets down from where you would normally play them.

Photo Getty



THE LAST ACT
Kurt Cobain during the recording of Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged* session in December 1993

11 THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD NIRVANA

David Bowie's 1970 deep cut became Kurt Cobain's emotional swansong

The title track of David Bowie's 1970 album passed unremarked on release, only appearing on singles as a b-side and rarely garnering comment from reviewers. Bowie and guitarist Mick Ronson produced Lulu's 1973 cover version, which made the song famous. Lulu's version lacked Ronson's guitar riff, though, replaced by a new saxophone hook.

With customary anti-corporate instincts, Nirvana largely ignored their own hits for their *MTV Unplugged* session in December 1993. Instead, they pulled out album tracks and deep cut covers. When the album was released in December 1994 following Cobain's death, it was *The Man Who Sold the World* that became the de facto single, gaining heavy airplay on MTV and alternative radio stations. For mourning fans, it became a memorial. It was a testament to Cobain's ability to strip a song to its core and elements and deliver a moving performance. Like many of Cobain's own compositions, the song features a deceptively complex chord pattern drawing from the keys of both A major and A minor.

The Martin D-18E Kurt used for the performance became the most expensive guitar ever sold at auction, fetching $6m in summer 2020. Kurt played the right-handed model upside down. Its original DeArmond single coil pickups didn't sound good with Kurt's bronze strings, so for Unplugged Kurt used a Bartolini 3AV soundhole pickup. The now very much plugged-in D-18 went through a Boss DS-2 and into a Fender Twin.

While Mick Ronson played the main hook by bending the G string, with heavier acoustic strings Kurt went for a hammer-on and pull-off. The singing sustain Kurt gets on the outro solo is thanks to the DS-2, helped by the hollow body's tendency to feed back. He shrugs off his mistake at 2:47, where he lands on the wrong note when sliding to the tenth fret – with any Nirvana performance, the don't-give-a-f*ck attitude is key.

Jenna Scaramanga

PLAY IT LIKE... KURT COBAIN

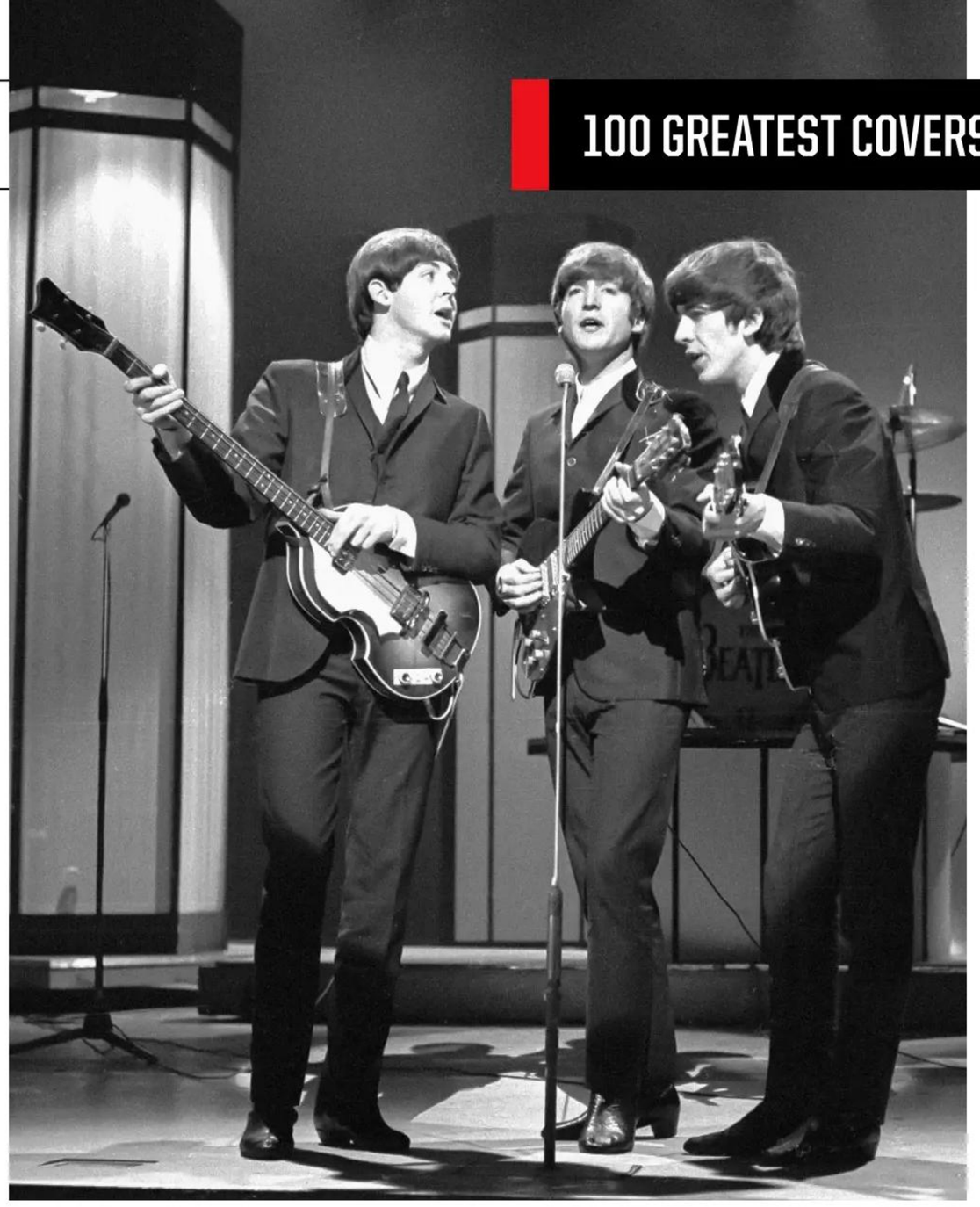
Use a down, down-up, up-down-up strumming pattern for the verses and chorus.

For the main riff (which cycles through these frets: 2-2-2-0-2-3-2-0), kick in a distortion pedal. Hammer on and pull off for the fast 2-3-2 turn.

For the outro solo, you need enough gain to soften the pick attack. Kurt does repick those long sustained notes, but it's largely masked by fuzz.

Photo Getty





10 KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR
GUNS N' ROSES

The second greatest Dylan cover of all time?

"I always loved that song from when it came out," says Slash, meaning he discovered Bob Dylan's original aged just 8. "At some point Axl and I had a conversation and we both ended up loving the same song. We sort of just threw it together when we were playing in London at the Marquee in 1987." It became a GN'R standard, finally getting a studio recording for 1991's *Use Your Illusion II*. Slash played the clean parts through a Roland JC-120, with the amp's built-in chorus. The solos were played on a Gibson Explorer, using the neck pickup with the tone rolled down.

PLAY IT LIKE...
SLASH

The intro chords are G, D, and C. The verses alternate between G, D, Am and G, D, C.

Slash often strums the low strings open and hammers on the notes of the C chord, a trick he also used in *Paradise City*.

The first solo draws mainly on G major with nods towards G minor pentatonic. The second solo uses more G minor licks.

09 TWIST AND SHOUT
THE BEATLES

A cover version from the most covered band of them all

The song was written in 1961 by Bert Berns and Phil Medley, and the monumentally twee first release by the Top Notes was not a hit. The Isley Brothers' ripsnorting 1962 cover made it a hit, and provided the blueprint for The Beatles' take. The Fab Four took it at an even faster pace, and pushed the third chord in the riff ahead of the beat, giving it a real driving energy. They arranged the horn parts for guitar, making the harmonised solo in a classic double-stop workout. It failed to reach #1 in the US, held off by the Beatles' own *Can't Buy Me Love*.

Jenna Scaramanga

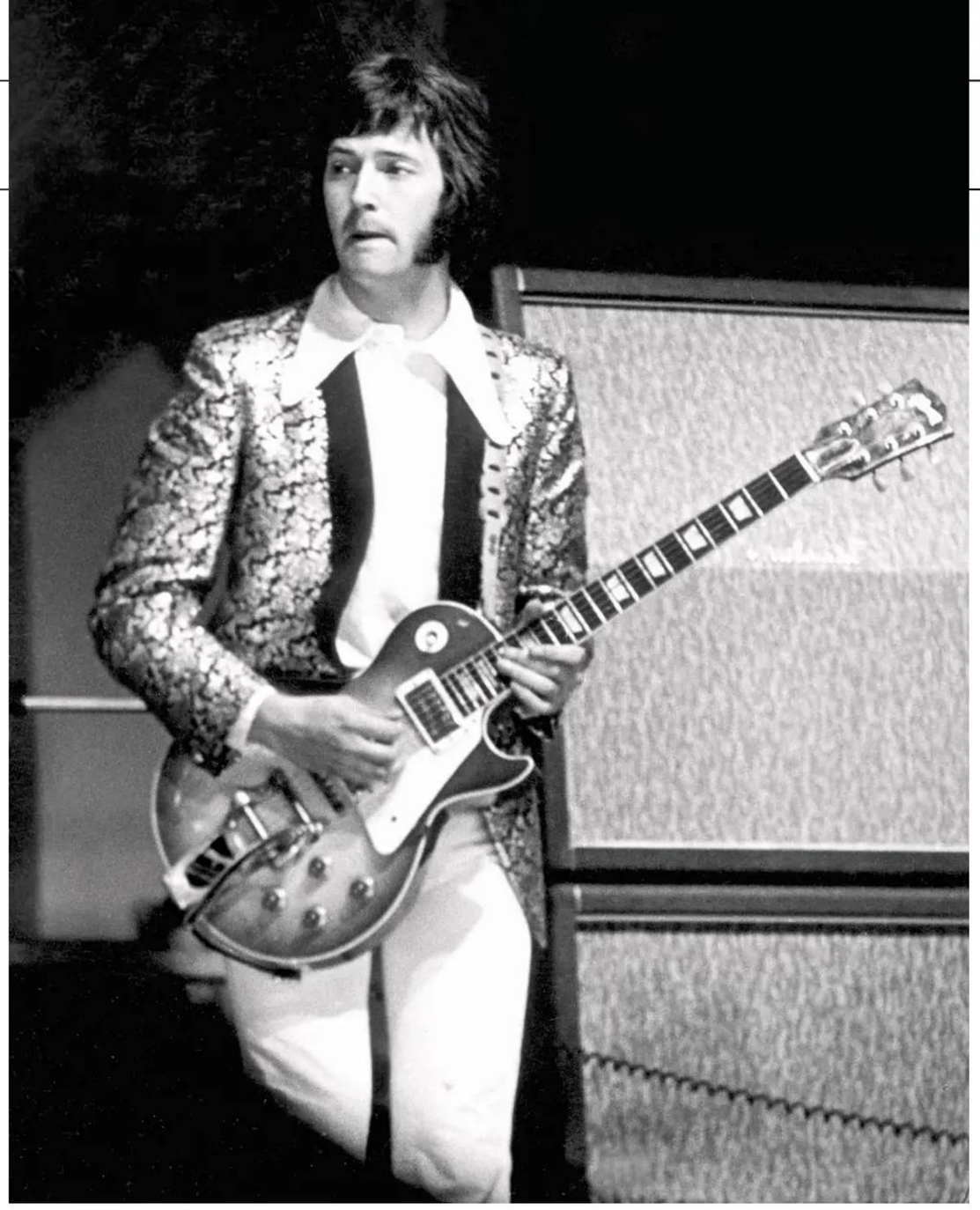
PLAY IT LIKE...
JOHN AND GEORGE

The chords are D, G, and A7.

Lennon used an open D chord and E-shape barre chords for the G and A7, while Harrison's D chord was an A-shape barre at the 5th fret.

The Beatles' early live sound saw them cranking their AC30s to 10, so try a Vox-style amp model. If there's too much gain, back off your guitar volume.

Photos Getty





08 CROSSROADS
CREAM

Mississippi blues gets a British rock power boost

Of all the blues covers, Cream's *Crossroads* ranks among the best. Robert Johnson recorded two takes of *Cross Road Blues* in 1936, with one released the following year and the other on a 1961 compilation. Cream's epic live version stands out for its pounding open-position riff and a speedy turnaround lick that Clapton refers to throughout.

There are two fabulous solos, the first a tasteful 24-bar pentatonic workout that was quick by 1968 standards. But with his second outburst, Eric takes the roof off with a 36-bar break that starts with Chuck Berry-style doublestops and builds to a frenzied climax on a final repeat of Eric's turnaround lick. The greatest blues solo ever?

Neville Marten

07 RESPECT
ARETHA FRANKLIN

Aretha transformed Otis' soul hit into a civil rights anthem

Otis Redding recorded Respect in 1965 with Stax Records house band Booker T. and the M.G.'s, featuring Steve Cropper on guitars and production. Aretha Franklin began covering it almost immediately. The studio band had never heard Franklin's live version, but producer Jerry Wexler had Franklin play piano on the track, and guitarists worked out their parts from watching Aretha's right hand. Redding's version was fast with a horn line as the main hook. Franklin's heavier groove called for a new intro, and guitarists Jimmy Johnson and Chips Moman stepped up with a work of genius. Chips Moman played a 1956 Gibson Super 400 he had bought from Elvis guitarist Scotty Moore.

Jenna Scaramanga

PLAY IT LIKE...
ERIC CLAPTON

Eric plays the riff at the open position using pick and fingers. The IV chord is an open D7 and the V chord open E major.

Although largely pentatonic, Clapton's solos often feature the major 3rd, and occasional 6th and 9th, so it could be seen as A Mixolydian.

On the IV7 chord, Clapton and Bruce sometimes play an F♯ bass note, making this a D7 first inversion.

PLAY IT LIKE...
CHIPS AND JIMMY

Soul guitar is all about hitting partial chords on beats 2 & 4, in time with the snare drum.

The verse chords are G and F. The chorus moves from C7 to F7.

The intro lick is played at the 12th fret. Hit the G string twice, then bend the B string 10th fret up gradually until you hit the right pitch. Then play the same lick starting on the D string, and bending the G string, 9th fret.

Photos Getty



06 VOODOO CHILD (SLIGHT RETURN)

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

Jimi's epic gets turbocharged, Texas-style

One sage saying about cover versions goes something like, 'if you can't better it, change it completely or leave it well alone'. Witness Hendrix reinventing Dylan's original, or The Byrds's electric 12-string take on Bob's *Mr Tambourine Man*, and Joe Cocker's sublime reworking of The Beatles' *With A Little Help From My Friends*.

Stevie Ray Vaughan evidently didn't get the memo, as his take on Hendrix's slice of *Electric Ladyland* genius (which made a posthumous #1 on the UK singles chart) is a faithful, if fire-breathing, remake. At just over eight minutes long, it's really more like one of Jimi's live renditions, as on *Hendrix In The West*, where Hendrix retains the essence of his composition but extends and paraphrases it. Were it not for SRV's even more overdriven Strat tone it could be Jimi on another day.

While Hendrix was at the cutting edge of guitar technique in 1968 when the song was recorded, by 1984 and the album *Couldn't Stand The Weather*, Stevie had stood on the shoulders of his formative giant and lit a furnace under Jimi's licks. He was faster, more technically accurate, and it's clear why a new generation of guitar fans thought he was musical manna from six-string heaven.

All the elements of the Jimi, Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell jam remain; the chukka-chukka wah intro, the Muddy Waters-influenced blues curl riff, and the freeform jam with its changes of volume and dynamics. What's missing is the psychedelic mix, with Jimi's guitars flying left and right across the stereo picture, and his constant change of tones using his Strat's controls and wah-wah pedal.

Without the original before it, Stevie's would simply be one of the finest blues workouts ever committed to tape. But brilliant as it is, it's a tough call to beat what writer John Perry called, "interstellar hootchie kootchie", and Joe Satriani states simply as "the greatest piece of electric guitar work ever recorded."

Neville Marten

SORCEROR'S APPRENTICE
SRV "lit a furnace under Jimi's licks"

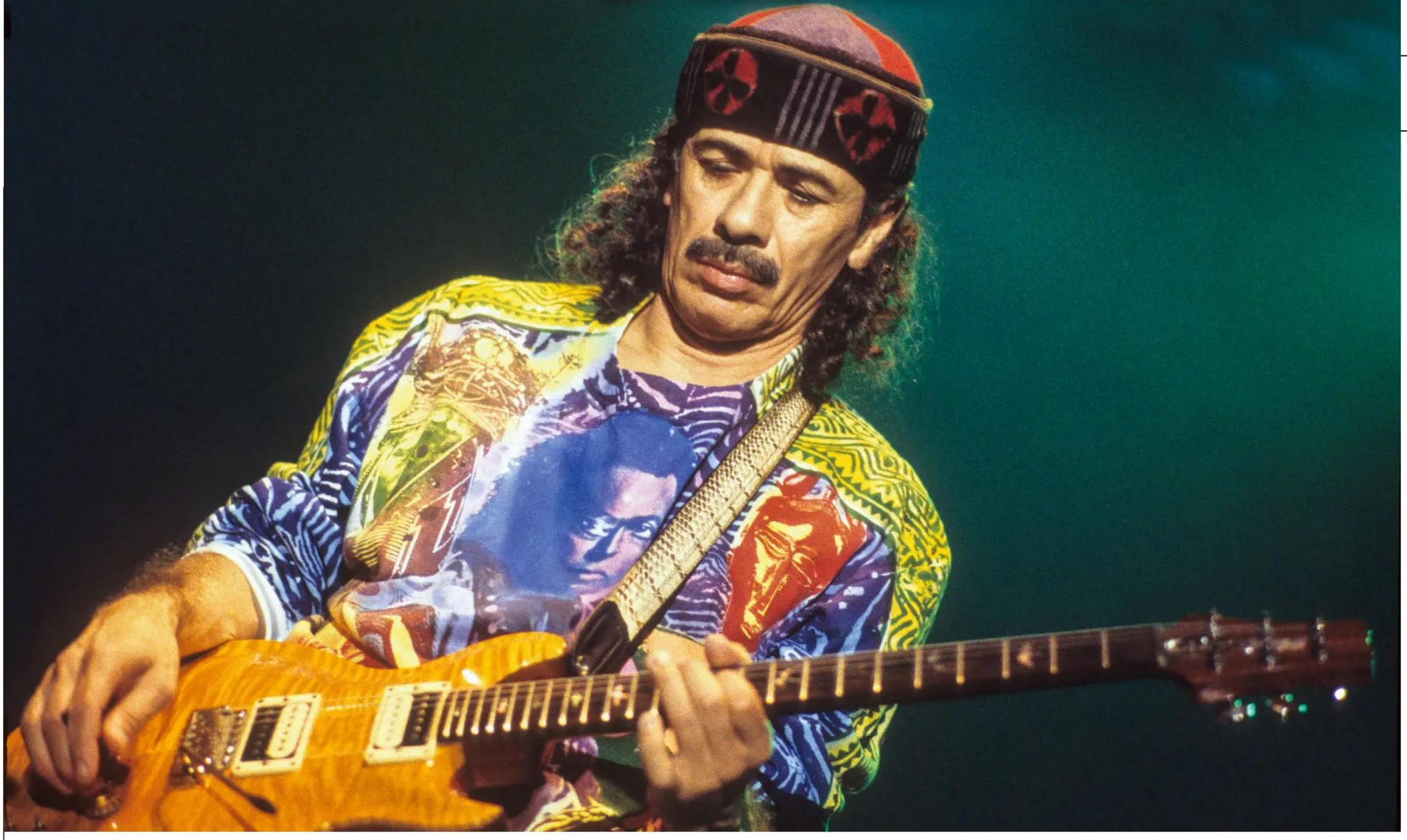
PLAY IT LIKE... STEVIE RAY

To stand a chance of sounding like Stevie, keep your string bends accurate and your finger vibrato strong (it's easier if you tune down a semitone to E♭, as SRV did).

Hammer-ons and pull-offs were a huge part of both players' technique, and SRV often included 2nd or ♭2nd intervals within his speedy legato flurries.

Lay back on your timing. Stevie's feel was superb, often playing slightly behind the beat to give his licks time and space to breathe.

Photo Getty



05 BLACK MAGIC WOMAN
SANTANA

GREEN ENERGY
Carlos added a new level of sophistication to a Peter Green classic

Fleetwood Mac's early hit gets the Latin treatment

In a recent interview, Fleetwood Mac's drummer Mick Fleetwood revealed that only recently did the band's Stevie Nicks discover *Black Magic Woman* to be founder Peter Green's composition, and not a Santana song. But such was the cover's success in America where it hit #4 on the Billboard Hot 100, that it's a common misconception.

Fleetwood Mac's second single, which made a half-hearted UK #37, begins with a haunting three-note D minor chord at the 17th fret of Green's Les Paul. Drenched in reverb, and sustained due to Peter vibrating the chord with all three fingers, nothing like it had been heard before. Likewise, Green's 24-bar solo, played on his recently out-of-phase-wired Les Paul, which was simple but perfect.

Based on Otis Rush's *All Your Love*, as recorded by John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton, Green also takes his song from a lazy lope into a shuffle over which he interjects vocal scats and answering licks.

Santana took the arrangement a whole lot further. The album version (from the chart-topping *Abraxas*) bolted it together with Gábor Szabó's *Gypsy Queen* for an almost prog-style extravaganza.

Santana's soloing took elements of Green's playing but added another layer of sophistication. His intro and subsequent solos hinged around the use of D minor's 2nd/9th interval (E) which, when played over the song's second chord of A minor, becomes its 5th to create a dark, unsettled vibe.

It sounds like the track was a straight band take, as we clearly hear Carlos riding his volume control between rhythm and lead parts. His unique sound and touch, and the band's natural Latin swing, with keyboard player Gregg Rolie's vocal sounding eerily like Green, make it one of the most successful covers of all time and deservedly set Santana on the path to guitar legend status.

Various other versions exist, but an acoustic tribute to Green from ex-Bluesbreaker Eric Clapton in 2021,only months after his death, was particularly poignant. Another moving occasion was when Green guested with Santana to perform the song on its induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1998, when Peter and Carlos traded solos.

Neville Marten

PLAY IT LIKE... CARLOS SANTANA

The Santana tone is raspier than Green's, and he rides his Gibson's volume control to regulate overdrive. It's a great trick to try.

Carlos hinges his solos around D minor's 2nd/9th (E), 9th fret, third string. He lands on it as the chord changes to A minor, but the interval is a great passing note in any minor blues.

Santana was using ultralight strings at the time of *Abraxas*; possibly 8-38. If you're looking for easy bends and Carlos's fluttering vibrato then this is a good way to go.

Photo Getty



04 YOU REALLY GOT ME
VAN HALEN

The game-changing riff and the game-changing guitarist collide

Van Halen knew how to take someone else's song and inject it with own sense of panache – just listen to their versions of *You're No Good, Ice Cream Man* and *(Oh) Pretty Woman* and you'll see what we mean. But it's their rendition of *You Really Got Me* by The Kinks that demonstrates this best.

Originally released in 1964, *You Really Got Me* was written by Ray Davies, although it was his brother Dave who played the riff that is widely acclaimed as the blueprint for heavy metal.

In their version, Van Halen threw in as much charm and energy as humanly possible to truly make it their own. They stuck fairly close to the structure of the original, but with Edward turning up the gain for a fatter sound than the comparatively tinny tones tracked by Ray and Dave Davies, as well as singer David Lee Roth's typically high-energy vocals, it became readapted as a modern classic for its time, appearing on the band's revolutionary 1978 debut.

For the recording, the guitarist used his Ibanez Destroyer 2459 – the Japanese company's take on the Gibson Explorer design – and after a heavy amount of modding in the years that followed, the guitar would eventually become known as 'The Shark'. It was plugged into the late-'60s Marshall 1959 Super Lead that was responsible for the tones heard of the first six Van Halen albums, with an MXR Phase 90 providing the swirling modulation heard during the solo section

While the original's leads were jangly and more bluesy in feel, the VH cover boasts a much more flamboyant approach to lead guitar, with classical-sounding tapped ideas where the fretting hand chromatically descends one fret at a time as well as wildly expressive overbends higher up the neck.

The song wraps up with a 7#9 shape, also known as the 'Hendrix chord', before the guitarist throws in a final flurry of licks leading to the last stab.

Amit Sharma

Photo Getty

ON FIRE!
Eddie Van Halen on stage with singer David Lee Roth in 1978

PLAY IT LIKE...
EDDIE VAN HALEN

Dial in a lot of reverb to create a sonic shadow around your guitar that fills out space during the pauses.

Use a phaser pedal to nail the swirly tone of the solo, ideally the MXR EVH Phase 90 set to 10 o'clock with the script mode engaged.

Turn off your neck pickup and use your pickup selector like a kill switch like EVH does at the end of his solo.



03 HALLELUJAH
JEFF BUCKLEY

The old master's song. The young prodigy's masterpiece...

The original version of *Hallelujah*, written and recorded by Leonard Cohen in 1984, was by all accounts a challenge to realise at its full potential. The Canadian folk legend is said to have drafted 150 verses, deliberating over countless versions of each line in order to unravel the version that finally appeared on his seventh album *Various Positions*.

The song was first covered by John Cale in 1991 before Jeff Buckley recorded his version for his debut album *Grace* in 1994, the only album released before his tragic death three years later. Though it was performed in the same key, there are several notable differences – the first being Buckley's higher range as a vocalist in contrast to Cohen's baritone; the second being the guitars brought right to the very forefront of the mix and transposed up an octave with a capo at the fifth fret.

As a result, the cover was less subdued and spoken-word in feel, with more upper frequencies emanating from both the voice and guitar. There has been some debate as to which guitar was used for the recording, and while many believe it to be Buckley's main workhorse, a 1983 Top Loader Fender Telecaster – which eventually was bought by Muse frontman Matt Bellamy in 2020 – an assistant engineer who worked on parts of the album has claimed a Gibson semi-hollow was used. Whatever it was - and it definitely sounds more like the single-coil twang associated with Telecasters than the open warmth of a semi-hollow – the guitar was most likely plugged into a rented Fender Vibroverb with an Alesis Quadraverb rack unit providing the ambience.

Though it might look like a simple succession of rudimentary G, Emin7, C and D chords, Buckley's delivery in terms of picking is actually quite intricate and will require some attention to detail to replicate authentically.

Amit Sharma

SONG OF PRAISE
Jeff didn't simply cover Hallelujah. He elevated it.

PLAY IT LIKE... JEFF BUCKLEY

Use a single-coil guitar, preferably a Telecaster, plugged into a clean amp with plenty of reverb for a washy sound.

Learn how to pick patterns on the higher strings while changing the bass note underneath to create a sense of continuity.

Get used to playing in free time and using dynamics: speeding up and striking harder to emphasise certain lines before slowing down and picking softly.

Photo Getty



02 HURT JOHNNY CASH

This profound interpretation became Cash's epitaph

The 1994 Nine Inch Nails track was Trent Reznor's agonised examination of loneliness and drug abuse. The standout feature of the guitar track is the chilling B5 (add *#11*) that opens the track, played in Drop D tuning 9-9-9-10-x-x. Johnny Cash's reimagining of the song dispensed with that dissonance, but lost none of the emotional impact, thanks in large part to the obvious frailty of Cash's voice.

The 2002 music video showed Cash near the end of his life, and following his death in 2003 the video became his memorial, much as *The Man Who Sold The World* became Kurt Cobain's. Even Trent Reznor said "That song isn't mine anymore," describing his response to the video as "tears, silence, goosebumps".

Tom Petty sideman Mike Campbell played acoustic guitar on the track alongside the sessioneer Smokey Hormel. They played the tune in A minor, down a tone from the original. Where Reznor's version is cold and stark, Cash's is rich and warm, yet both convey a strong sense of grief.

The chorus is propelled by a repeating G note, doubled on piano that persists through the chord changes. The impact of this pedal tone belies its simplicity; without it, much of the chorus's power would be lost. This pedal tone is undoubtedly inspired by the original, which uses a plinky, percussive tone to do something similar, although it follows more of the chord changes.

Campbell and Hormel have not commented on what acoustics they played on the record, but Campbell has revealed that he bought a 1956 Gibson J-200 while recording with Johnny Cash after the studio engineer told him it was for sale nearby.

When recording, Cash's failing health meant he could only record in brief sessions, so Hormel recorded the guide vocal while the band laid down the backing track.

Jenna Scaramanga

THE MAN IN BLACK

"That song isn't mine anymore," Trent Reznor said of Cash's version of *Hurt*

PLAY IT LIKE... MIKE AND SMOKEY

The guitars are panned hard right and left. The opening is Am, C and D, using simple open chords. However, the left guitar plays a Dsus2 (X-X-0-2-3-0) while the right plays D major.

The chord leading into the chorus is G. The pattern is then Am-F-C-G twice, and Am-F-G twice.

It's possible to keep your fourth finger on the 3rd fret of the high E string for all the chorus chords, replicating the pedal tone from the chorus. It can make it a bit easier to play too!

THE VIDEO BECAME CASH'S MEMORIAL

Photo Getty

PLAY IT LIKE...
JIMI HENDRIX

The first strums come after beat 3, so you should start strumming on the '&' after 3: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &...

Use your thumb over the top of the neck to fret the E-shape barre chords ($B\flat$, 6th fret, Cm, 8th fret, and $A\flat$, 4th fret), which will leave your fourth finger free to try Hendrix-style embellishments on the first three strings.

The solos use C minor pentatonic, but Jimi makes great uses of adding the major 2nd note, D (10th fret, first string).

01 ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER
THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

Bob Dylan wrote the song. Hendrix made it a work of genius.

In news that will shock precisely no one, TG readers have named Hendrix's *All Along The Watchtower* the greatest cover version of all time. Bob Dylan's album *John Wesley Harding*, which featured the song, was released on December 27, 1967. Hendrix spotted the track's potential immediately, and the basic track for his version was recorded less than three weeks later, on January 21. He had always felt a kinship with Dylan, and his father Al Hendrix suggested that Dylan's limited vocal abilities gave Jimi the confidence to try singing himself.

At that January 21 session, Traffic guitarist Dave Mason played the slightly out-of-tune 12-string that gives the track its depth. He recorded live with Mitch Mitchell on drums and Hendrix on six-string acoustic. What guitar Jimi was playing isn't documented, but it's known he arranged the track on his Epiphone FT-79 acoustic, the guitar he owned longer than any other. Mason reportedly took dozens of takes to get the part Jimi wanted.

After 13 takes, Rolling Stones guitarist Brian Jones stumbled into the studio drunk, disastrously attempted to play the piano, and was soon demoted to percussion duties. At take 27, Hendrix and Mason's guitar parts finally gelled. "To me, it's a wonderful moment in the song to hear those two guys locking in," recalled engineer Eddie Kramer. Bassist Noel Redding left the session without playing. Some accounts claim he disliked the arrangement, preferring Dylan's original, while others say Jimi wanted to play bass himself and Redding went to the pub in protest. Either way, Hendrix recorded the bassline on a Fender Precision, naturally played upside down but strung right-handed, unlike his guitars. Both on bass and guitar, Hendrix drove the groove. In the verses, Mason's 12-string plays sustained chords, while Hendrix plays rhythmic muted strums and accents.

The rhythm tracks, though, were only the beginning. After they went down at London's Olympic Studios, Hendrix went on tour in America, adding overdubs to Watchtower at The Record Plant in New York. The 4-track tapes from Olympic were transferred first to The Record Plant's 12-track machine, and then the newly invented 16-track. Hendrix recorded and erased countless solo takes over multiple sessions, with engineers including Tony Bongiovi and Phil Brown. Brown recalls Hendrix using a Vox AC30 amp to record. The guitar used is cloaked in mystery. A photo exists of Hendrix playing his Flying V in the studio with Dave Mason. Hendrix also owned a 1955 Les Paul Custom with Bigsby tremolo and P90 pickups. He used it live during this period, usually for performances of *Red House*, and it has been claimed but not substantiated that the guitar also appears on *All Along The Watchtower*.

TOWER OF POWER
Jimi's version of *All Along The Watchtower* perfectly illustrates his deft ability to combine rhythm and lead guitar

Even without Hendrix's revolutionary solos, this would be a great cover. Jimi's genius was seeing the potential to create a heavy groove from Dylan's chord progression. The space in the riff for the percussion hits prefigures the likes of AC/DC's *Back In Black* and Queen's *Hammer to Fall*. And the dynamics, which Hendrix took such pains to teach Dave Mason, allow the song to reach peaks and troughs that Dylan's acoustic rendition comes nowhere near.

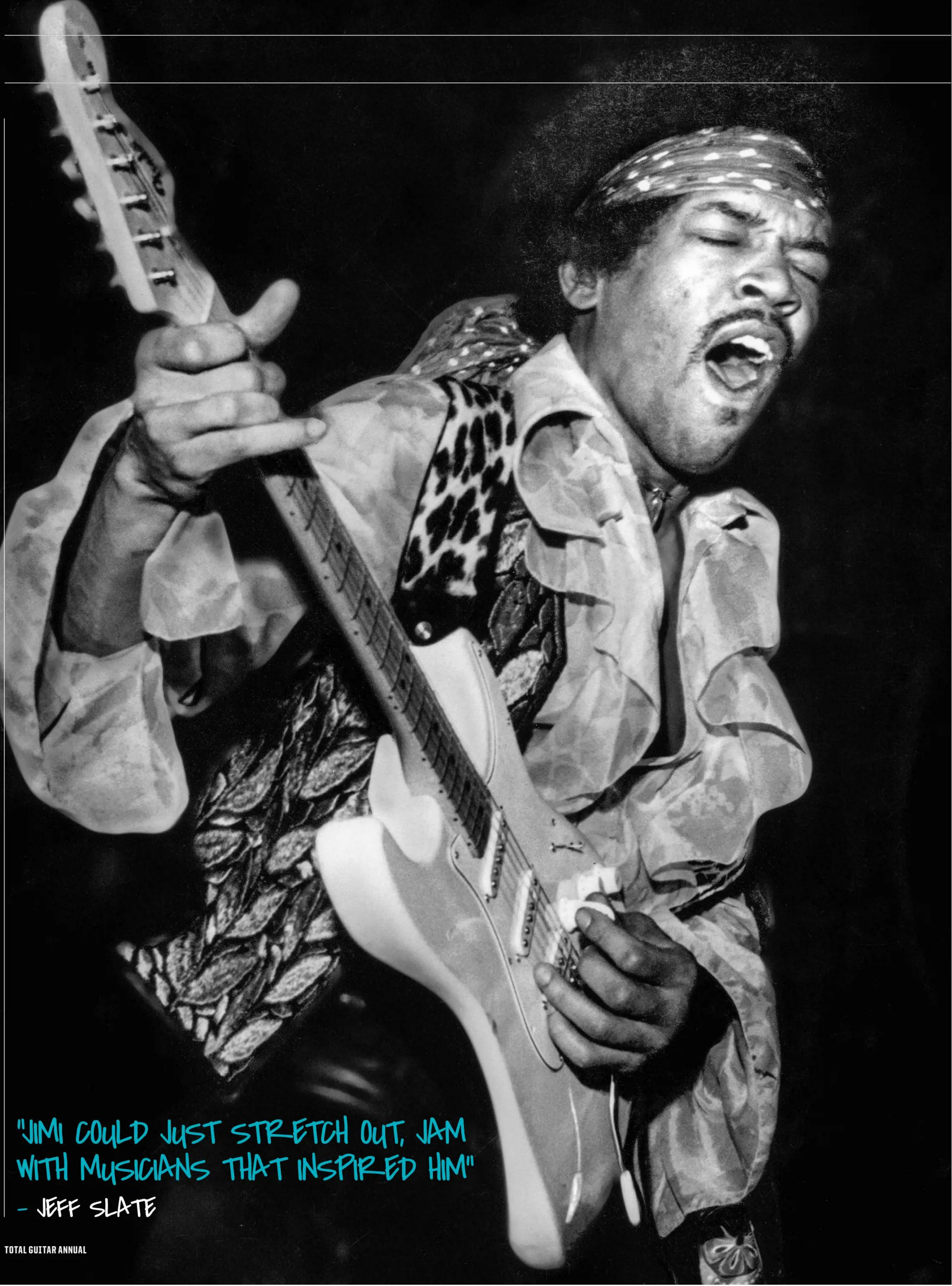
Arguably the greatest of all Hendrix's innovations was his deft ability to combine rhythm and lead guitar, and this is among his finest performances. In the verses, his electric guitar dances around the chords, dropping in responses between vocal lines. At the end of the third lead break, he falls into a repeated chordal lick that somehow sounds like a riff and a solo at the same time. And then there's the fact that Hendrix played four solos, all of which are contenders for the greatest solo ever played. The opening is everything a melodic guitar intro should be: simple, infectious, and setting the scene for what's to come. The second solo is equally singable while including a climactic blues lick that gets developed later on. The third is a tour of Hendrix's strengths, opening with his most lyrical string bending. Then comes the slide portion, allegedly recorded with a Zippo lighter when nothing else provided the right tone. And then there's the wah section. Hendrix had already used the effect on *Burning Of The Midnight Lamp*, but this solo showed his mastery of the pedal.

Electric Ladyland was a more ambitious and less commercial album than its predecessors, and *All Along The Watchtower* gave it a vital hit single. It climbed to #5 in the UK and in the US it became, incredibly, his only Top 40 hit, reaching #20. Today, it is the definitive example of a cover that eclipses the original version. Famously, Dylan's live performances of the song were Hendrix-ified, with electric guitars and The Band guitarist Robbie Robertson soloing between each verse. Hendrix, though, was less interested in repeating it, and the song was gone from his set list a few months after *Electric Ladyland* was released.

Jenna Scaramanga

THE SOLOS ARE ALL CONTENDERS FOR GREATEST EVER PLAYED

Photo Getty



"JIMI COULD JUST STRETCH OUT, JAM WITH MUSICIANS THAT INSPIRED HIM"

– JEFF SLATE

ELECTRIC DREAMS

Near the end of his life, **Jimi Hendrix** founded Electric Lady Studios as a place where he could express his creativity to the full. A new boxset full of previously unreleased recordings reveals how the guitar genius was pursuing a bold new vision

Words Tim Tucker **Photo** Steve Braker

The Generation blues club in Greenwich Village, New York, was a favourite hangout of Jimi Hendrix, a place where he could enjoy the music he loved and jam with musicians he respected. He liked it so much he bought the property in November 1968, with the idea of installing some recording equipment to capture live recordings by himself and others. He was soon persuaded by his producer, Eddie Kramer, to turn the space into a fully fledged recording facility, and the concept of Electric Lady Studios was born.

Work started on converting the space into a recording studio in January 1969, but due to unforeseen setbacks and logistical complications, Hendrix wouldn't start recording there until June 1970. When he did, it became the perfect place for him to develop the tracks for his next project.

At this time, Jimi was still riding high on the success of his double album *Electric Ladyland*, his third with the Jimi Hendrix Experience, released in October 1968. This sprawling self-produced set showcased Hendrix's extraordinary vision for the future of rock, incorporating blues, psychedelic pop, funk and soul, and blending them all into a sound and style uniquely his own. The result gave Jimi his first number one album in the US, and he was able to command enormous fees as one of the hottest acts on the touring circuit.

However, recording tracks for his next album in studios like The Record Plant and Hit Factory proved expensive and draining. With his own studio, Jimi felt in full creative control for the first time in his career. He brought all the existing tapes from previous sessions to Electric Lady Studios, in readiness for his next project, provisionally titled *Straight Ahead*. He envisioned this to be another double album with high ambitions for the quantity and quality of the music. Gone were the time and budget restrictions that came with working in commercial studios. Now he had the luxury to explore his ideas in a relaxed and inspirational environment.

A GENIUS AT WORK

TG spoke to Jeff Slate, recording artist, guitarist and writer, who worked with the Hendrix estate on the new six-disc release, *Electric Lady Studios: A Jimi Hendrix Vision*. "At that time, Jimi was constantly on the road," says Jeff. "He was having to be creative in his off hours, which was minimal. Now he had his own studio, he could just stretch out, jam with musicians that inspired him, and work out his ideas."

Electric Lady Studios became the environment Jimi had been dreaming of all along: a workshop and laboratory for developing his music. "There were little rooms in there where he could find a nook or cranny to hide away in, with a guitar or microphone, and noodle until he found what he was looking for," says Jeff. "It was invaluable creatively."

The newly released boxset includes 39 tracks (38 of which were previously unreleased), offering incredible insights into Jimi's creative process. We've heard other versions of some of these tracks on posthumous albums like *The Cry Of Love* (1971), *Rainbow Bridge* (1971), *Voodoo Soup* (1995) and *First Rays Of The New Rising Sun* (1997). But here we get a treasure trove of unreleased demos and outtakes that reveal his working practices in extraordinary detail.

Hendrix fans now get to hear snippets of Jimi discussing the tone of his guitar and the musical arrangements of songs he was writing. The alternate takes let us hear his different approaches to improvised solos, and provide invaluable insights into how he developed his musical vision. We learn how tracks like *Dolly Dagger*, *Freedom*, and *Night Bird Flying* were formed from scratch and developed, take-by-take, into (almost) finished articles.

UNIQUE SOUNDSCAPES

Hendrix had to feel inspired to create his best work, and many of the outtakes on the new release show how he would take his fellow musicians into new territories to fire them up. Listen to the mix of *Bolero/Hey Baby (New Rising Sun)* and hear how Hendrix launches into vigorous improvisations on the spur of the moment – to drive the band to new heights.

One of the most stunning discoveries here is a 26-minute medley improvised by Hendrix, along with bassist Billy Cox and drummer Mitch Mitchell. Transitioning from a take of *Astro Man*, tempos vary from the chugging *Beginnings*, picking up the pace for *Hey Baby (Land of the New Rising Sun)*, downshifting again for *Midnight Lightning (Keep on Groovin')* before wrapping up with a thrilling instrumental rendition of *Freedom*. The almost telepathic interaction between the musicians is astonishing, with Jimi providing blistering lead runs and inspired double-stopped licks in this marathon session.

Other revelations include fresh new takes that reveal Hendrix's creative approach in more detail than we've heard before. Jimi's mastery of the wah-wah is on full display on the alternate mix of *Bleeding Heart*, while the first instrumental take of *Belly Button Window* is a beautiful jazz-inflected shuffle, showcasing his inspired rhythmic chops.

Takes 6 and 8 of *Tune X/Just Came In* provide evidence of Jimi's superb sense for song development. With Cox and Mitchell, Hendrix's rock-solid riffs lead to improvised lyrics that spur his bandmates on.

Weeks later we hear the track more fully developed as *In From The Storm*, showing how Jimi would layer alternative guitar parts to create unique soundscapes.

A HOME FROM HOME

It was the flexibility of his working practices, along with the ambience that he was able to create in the Electric Lady Studios, that gave Jimi the ultimate inspiration, with no barriers to his creative process. The architectural structure, interior design and even the lighting were important, as they allowed Hendrix to control the environment and create the atmosphere he needed to relax and make music.

Jeff Slate has worked at the studio and felt the vibe for himself: "There are long winding passages, it's almost womb-like," he says. "And I think that's something that would have really spoken to a guy like Jimi." Hendrix himself said that he always found studios blank and impersonal, and this drained him of drive and inspiration. "Electric Lady Studios is different," said Hendrix at the time. "It has been built with great atmosphere, lighting, seating and every comfort that makes people think they are recording at home."

In fact, the studio did become his creative home for those few months in 1970. His apartment was just a few blocks away, and he could walk down Sixth Avenue to the studio whenever inspiration struck. Engineer Dave Palmer, who lived across the street from the studio, recalls more than once being woken in the middle of the night to attend sessions Jimi wanted to record.

A NEW VISION

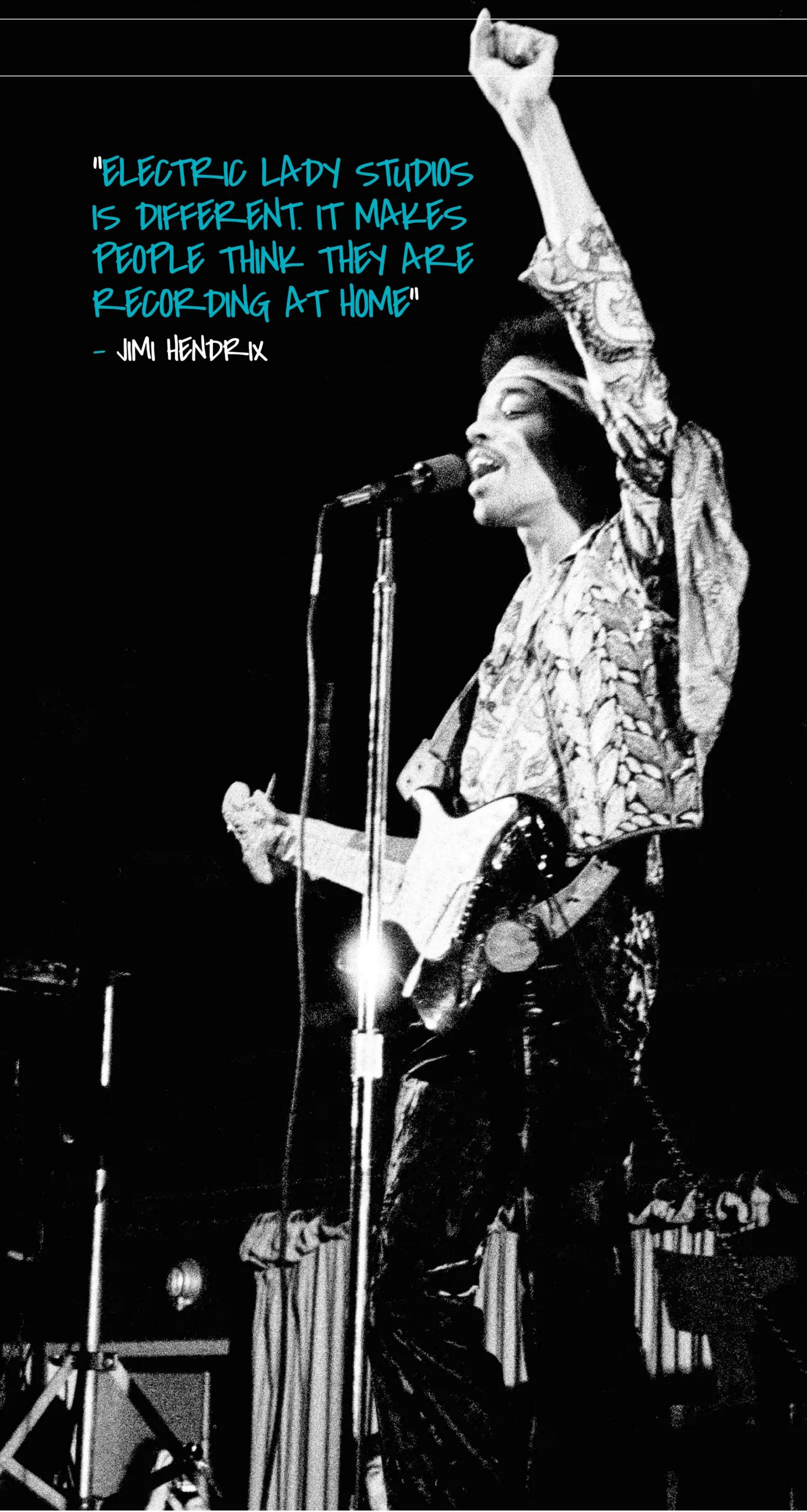
The tracks documented on the new album show a work in progress. From



GENIUS JAMS
The newly released recordings offer incredible insights into Jimi's creative process

"ELECTRIC LADY STUDIOS IS DIFFERENT. IT MAKES PEOPLE THINK THEY ARE RECORDING AT HOME"

– JIMI HENDRIX



what we hear, Hendrix was poised to take a new direction yet again, foreshadowing imminent shifts by other black artists of the time. "It's pointing toward a less rock, more soulful direction, a sound that became so prevalent shortly afterwards," says Jeff Slate. "Curtis Mayfield, Sly Stone, the Isley Brothers, Miles Davis, what all those people were on the cusp of and heading towards, Jimi was hearing in his head. Would he have put strings and horns on there? We don't know. In these recordings we're just hearing the way they went down."

In late August 1970, a party at the studio launched Electric Lady Studios as a commercial venture for other artists to use. The next day, Hendrix left New York to play the Isle of Wight festival and other concerts in the UK and Europe. He never returned. The day before his death on September 18, he planned to travel back to America to finish the album he'd been working on at Electric Lady Studios, convinced he was on a roll. It was never to be.

After his death, Electric Lady Studios went on to host legendary musicians like Carly Simon, Led Zeppelin, John Lennon, Stevie Wonder, David Bowie, U2, The Clash, AC/DC and many more. Artists who have recorded there talk of feeling the aura of Jimi, and some even claim his spirit still resides in the studio.

"There are mosaics on the wall from Jimi's time," says Jeff Slate. "The design has so much of Jimi's sensibility to it, even now that it's been upgraded, they've maintained that feel. It's just a beautiful space. And when you're in that space, whether it's your mind playing tricks, or you want it to be the case, you do feel a sense of him. I know Questlove has his own room there, which he uses to workshop, make audio books, recordings and demos. People just love Jimi, and they want to be associated with him."

The *Electric Lady Studios* boxset and accompanying film finally give to the world some of the most important recordings Jimi made as he was poised to take music in a new direction once more. Included in the box is a newly created 5.1 surround sound mix of the *First Rays Of The New Rising Sun*, and it's surely the closest we'll get to the album he never lived to see released.

Electric Lady Studios: A Jimi Hendrix Vision is out now.

Photo Jorgen Angel Getty Torben Dragsby



Never Mind the Harmonics

Think punk is just powerchords and rubbish technique? Think again as we take you through all you need to know...

Words, guitars and backing Charlie Griffiths

Punk is traditionally ensconced in a DIY ethic, from its "use what ya got" approach with gear to self-taught playing and musicianship. This was probably truer in the 70s heyday – and punk has come a long way since, spawning a raft of sub-genres. We could list these, but perhaps the most telling fact is that pop-punk, post-punk and more of those sub-genres are now all on their second or third revivals, with acts like Idles, Fontaines D.C. and Yungblud at the forefront today.

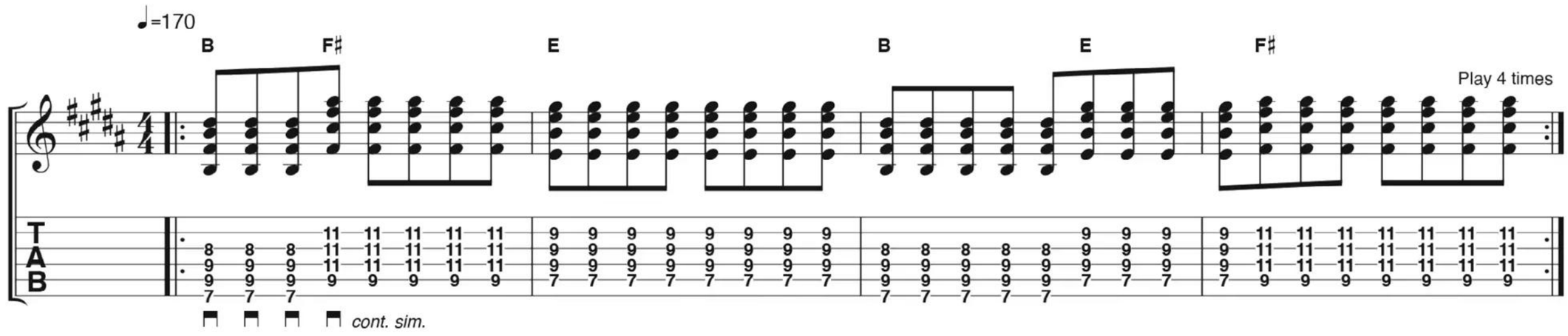
For us guitarists, there's now greater musical history to draw on, and a lot more techniques to learn too. Our lesson here takes you through 10 examples which are loosely based around one or two artists apiece, but, more importantly, with a focus on the techniques you need to know to cover 50+ years of punk.

As ever, your aim is to improve your playing, so don't worry if you don't master each example in full. It's all about identifying the bite-sized ideas that you're not so familiar with, then adding them to your own arsenal of techniques.

Photo Gie Knaeps Getty

1 OFFBEAT CHORD CHANGES

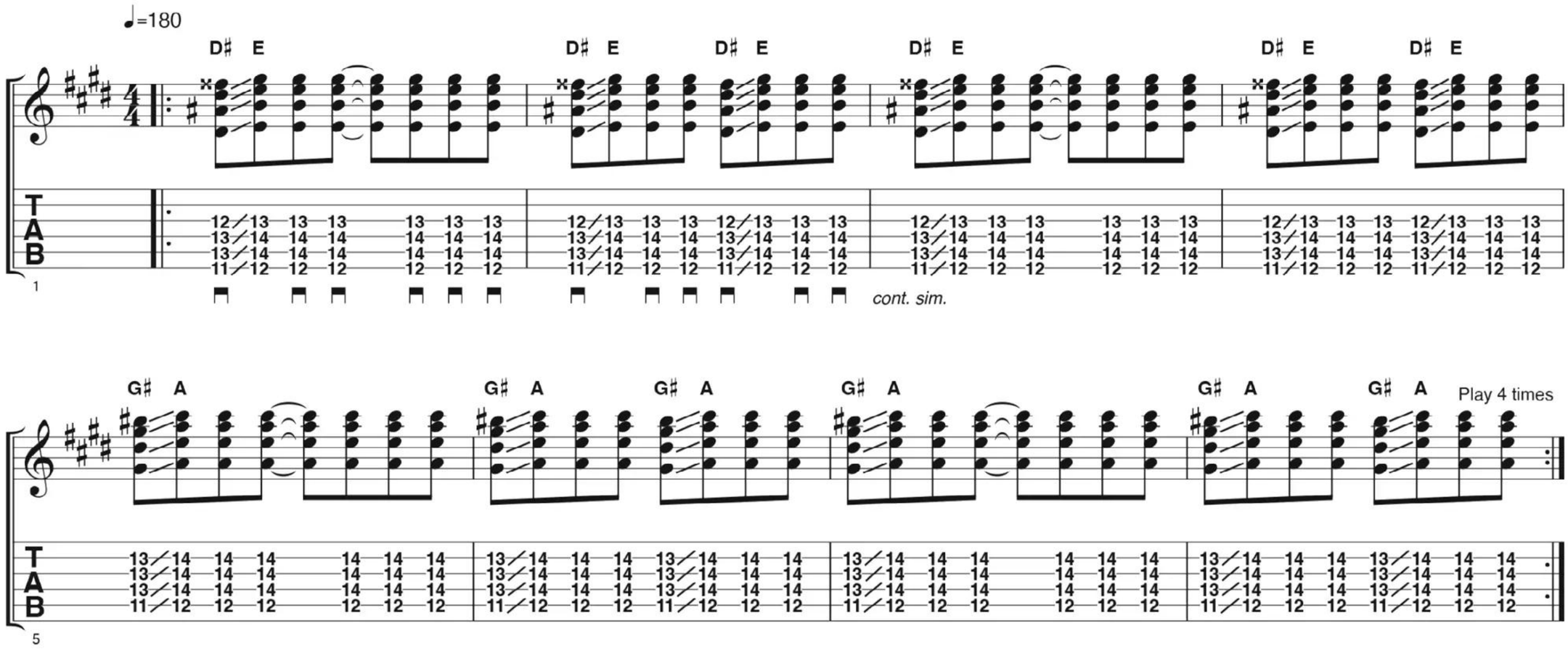
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We're kicking off in the style of US shock-punk rockers, Misfits, with a riff using barre chords from the key of B major and delivered in continuous eighth-note downstrokes. Take careful note of where the chord changes appear. They're played on the offbeat on several occasions, so, if you're counting to four to keep time with the quarter-note pulse, the changes will appear in between the numbers.

2 SLIDING APPROACH CHORDS

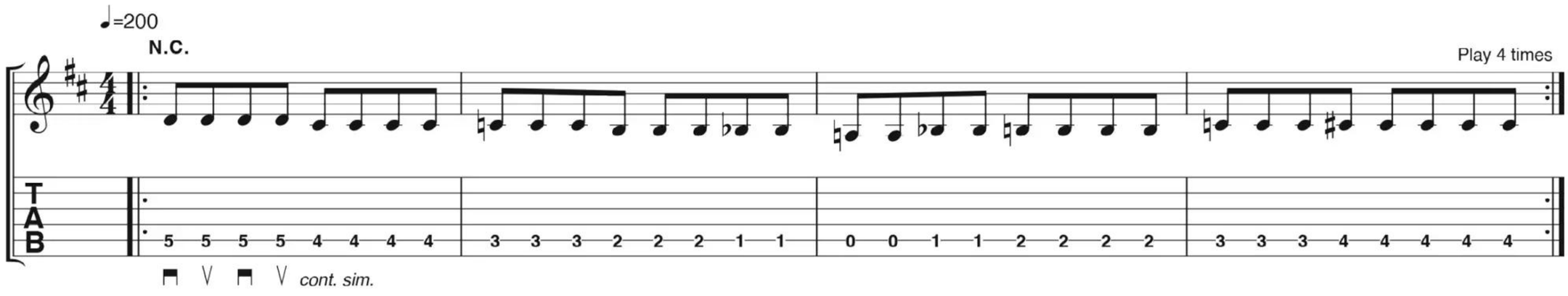
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Played with E and A major barre chords at the 12th fret, this riff is spiced up with a slide from a semitone below each chord, Johnny Ramone style. It's a technique that you'll also hear on *God Save The Queen* by the Sex Pistols, amongst tracks by countless other acts. Keep your hand and fingers fixed in the barre chord shape and focus on sliding each finger across the fret-wires at the same time.

3 CHROMATIC RIFFING

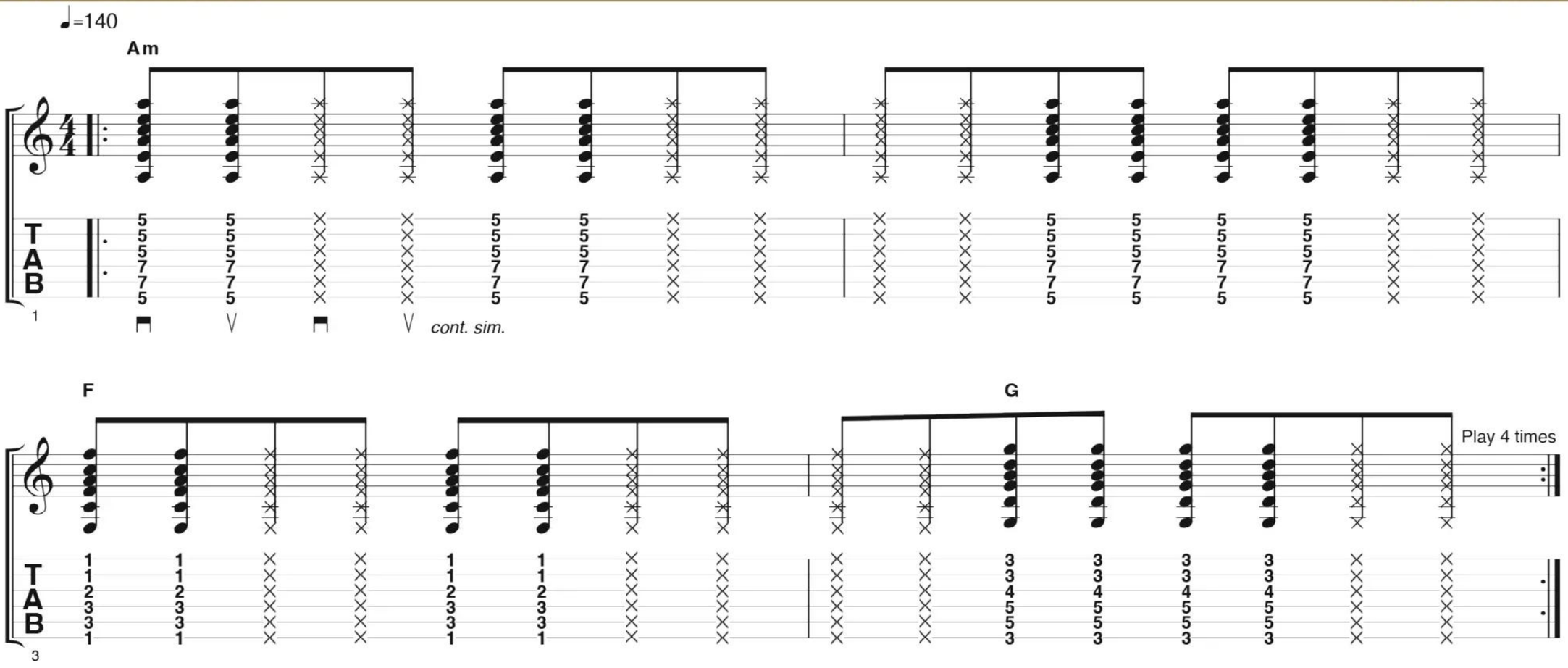
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This riff is something Black Flag's Dez Cadena might play to create a spooky sound – an effect that comes from the chromatic arrangement of notes, instead of staying within the key signature. Use your wrist and thumb to control the pick in an even alternate picking motion and use your four fretting fingers to span from the 5th fret down to the 1st. Stub your fretting fingers up against the idle strings to keep 'em quiet.

4 MUTED STRUMMING

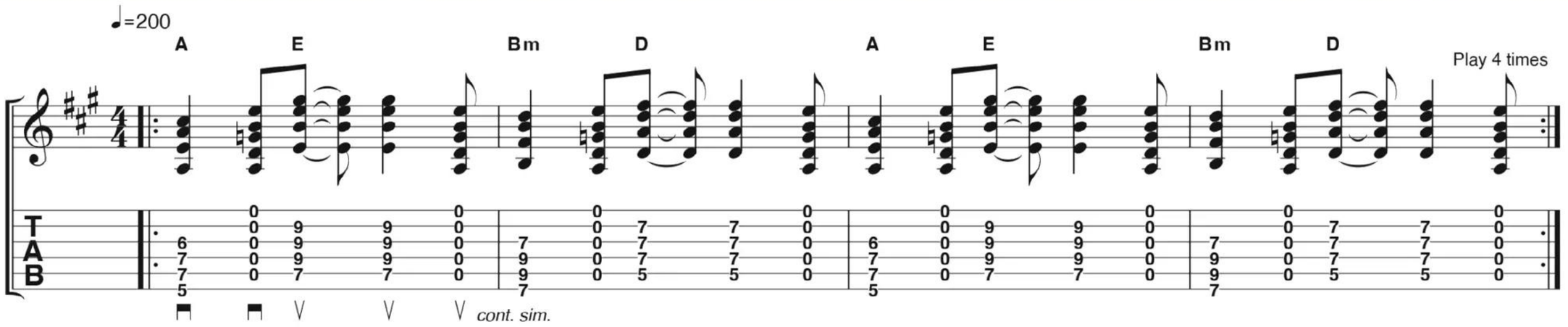
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Add interesting rhythms to your strummed barre chords here by mixing full chords with muted strings in the style of Fall Out Boy's Joe Trohman. For these mutes, hold the chord shapes with your fretting fingers and relax them so they are touching the strings but not pressing into the frets. Note that the mutes don't appear on the same beats in every bar – and you can experiment further with this idea.

5 GREEN DAY-STYLE OPEN STRING CHANGES

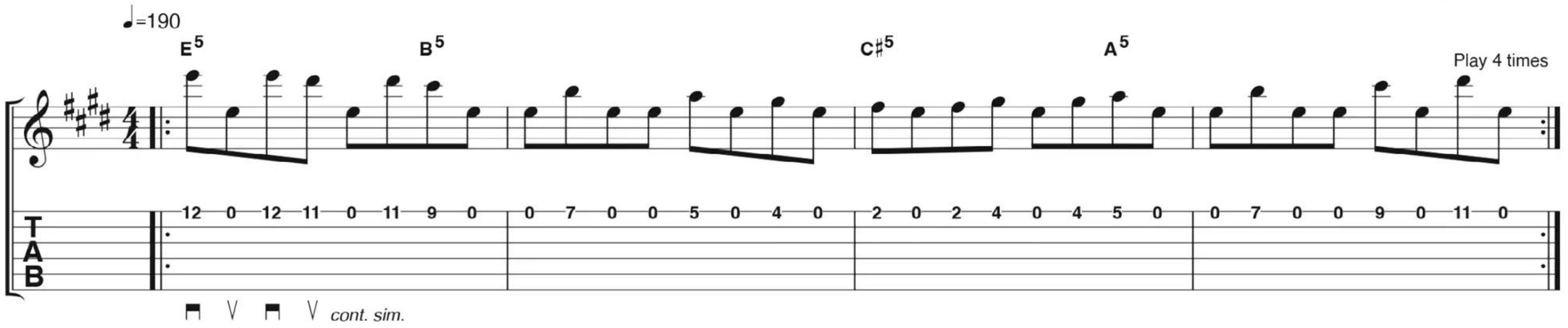
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Play rapid-fire Green Day-style chord changes by adding open string strums as you make the position shift. Moving between two chords can be tricky at high tempos and quickly strumming the open strings in between chords is a good way of giving your fretting hand time to find the shape, as well as being a subtle but important nuance of punk rhythm playing.

6 POP-PUNK MAJOR MELODIES

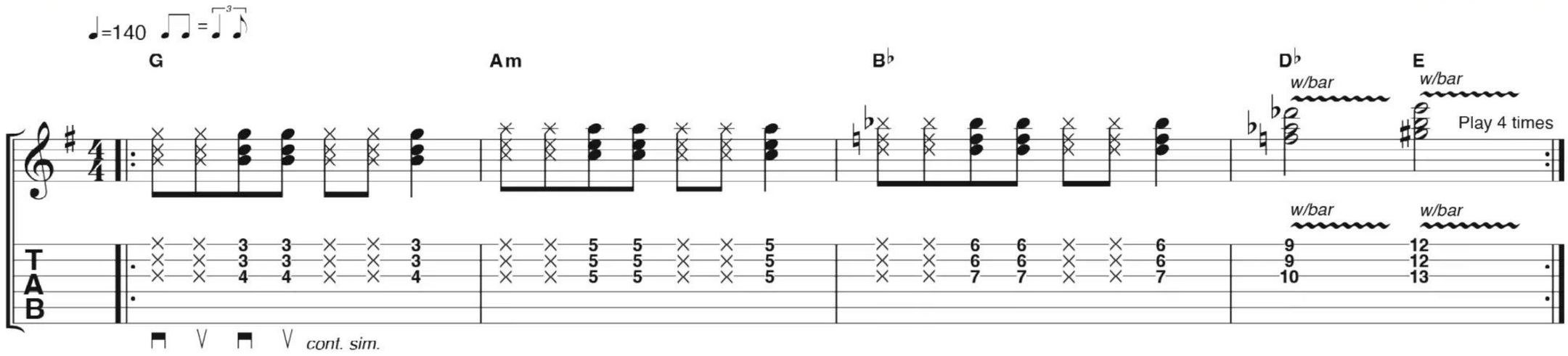
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This technique is a great way of creating an energetic, positive vibe like Tom DeLonge's upbeat pop-punk style in Blink-182. Here, we're using the notes of E major (E F♯ G♯ A B C♯ D♯) along the length of the first string, and using that repeating open E note (known as a pedal tone) to really root the lick in its intended key. Use alternate picking or try hammer-ons and pull-offs. It's up to you.

7 SKA FEEL

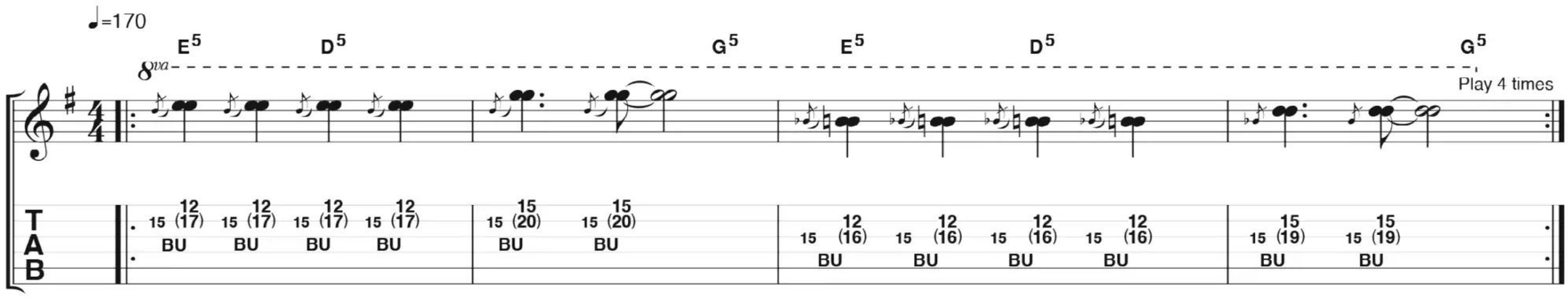
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Focusing the rhythm guitar on beats 2 and 4 gives this riff a ska feel akin to Mick Jones on The Clash's *London Calling*. Ska would overlap elsewhere in the genre with The Police's post-punk style then later in the 90s with the ska-punk scene. Our riff has a swung eighth-note feel which means longer downstrokes and shorter upstrokes.

8 DISSONANT BENDS

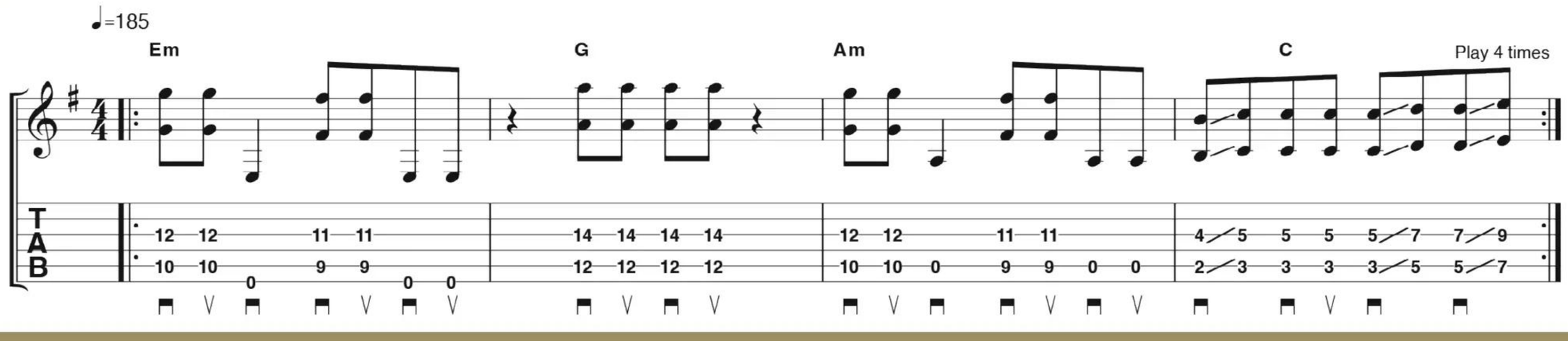
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Mark Bowen of Idles creates striking guitar parts by employing dissonant string bends, sometimes on a single string and other times using unison bends. The idea here is to bend the lower string to match the pitch of the fretted higher string. The slower you do it, the more dissonant and sour it will sound. You might say it's a "classic rock" technique but it's used extensively in punk and its sub-genres too.

9 OCTAVE LICK

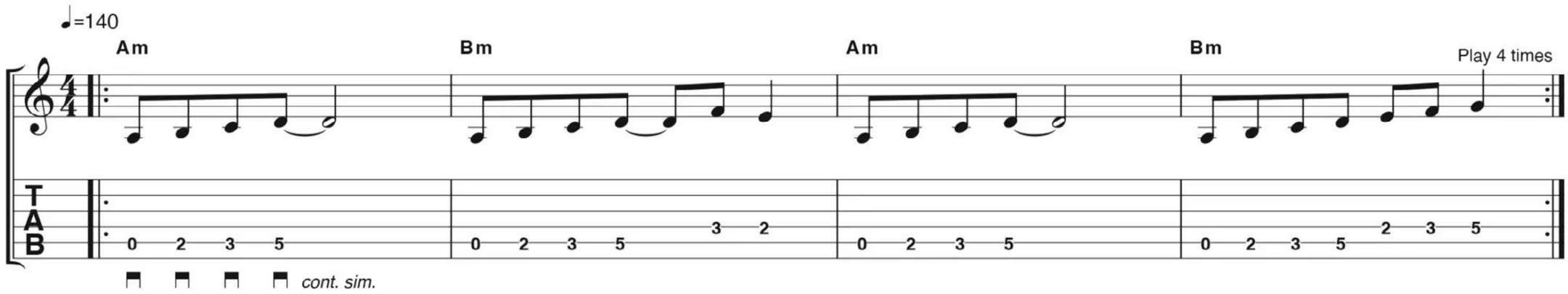
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We're taking inspiration from East Bay Ray of Dead Kennedys and Dave Baksh of Sum 41 here. You'll hear countless bands use octave shapes though, filling out the sound of melody lines. Play the lower note with your first finger and the higher note with your third or fourth, ensuring you keep the idle strings silent by resting your fretting fingers against them. Ideally, you should be able to strum without string noise.

10 YUNGBLUD STYLE SINGLE-NOTE RIFF

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This single-note Yungblud style riff uses the A natural minor scale (A B C D E F G) starting with the open fifth string. After the root note, keep your hand steady and in position as you play the scale notes with your first, second and fourth fingers. Pick each note with a downstroke for an even, consistent attack making sure you strike the string exactly when your fretting fingers land.



DANIEL DONATO

Daniel Donato is a rising Nashville artist with over 2,000 shows under his belt who's known for his pioneering cosmic-country style. He's more than just a country shredder, though – Daniel has a knack for teaching. In his lessons, he breaks everything down step-by-step and makes learning country guitar a joy. Whether you're a country music fan or just want to expand your guitar skills, this lesson is packed with all the fundamentals to kickstart your journey to Twang City!

COUNTRY GUITAR

Whether you're a country music fan or not, every guitarist can learn some serious chops from this iconic genre

From harmonious doublestop solos to blisteringly fast chicken pickin', country guitar has so many techniques and tricks that it's a crime to overlook it. If you're already familiar with blues guitar then the transition to country isn't that difficult – it often follows similar chord progressions and scale choices.

Leading this month's guest lesson for Pickup Music is Daniel Donato, a legit country guitar guru, and he's about to show you some fundamental rhythms, tones, and licks to get you started on your journey to Twang City.

There's lots to learn here. First, a country chord cycle: the standard I–IV–V progression in the key of A, and the classic technique of 'walking up' to the root note of each chord. There's the 'Train Beat': the characteristic country music rhythm/strumming pattern. And we wrap up with a country jam where you can lock in everything you've learned and play over the backing track. There's a video to accompany this lesson, too, so if you want to watch how it's done and jam along at the end, check that out.

It's no secret that a Telecaster is the definitive country guitar. If you don't have one to hand, or if your guitar has humbuckers, tweak your amp's treble control and pick close to the bridge where the strings are most tense – this is where the twang lives!

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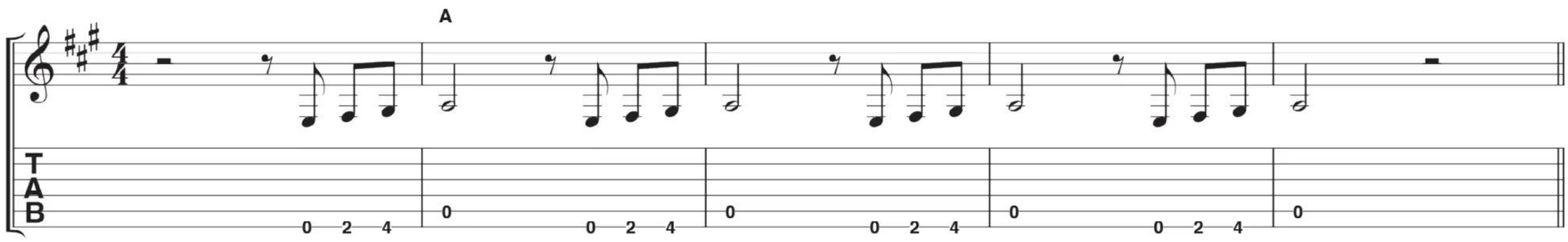






2 LICK #1: WALKING INTO A

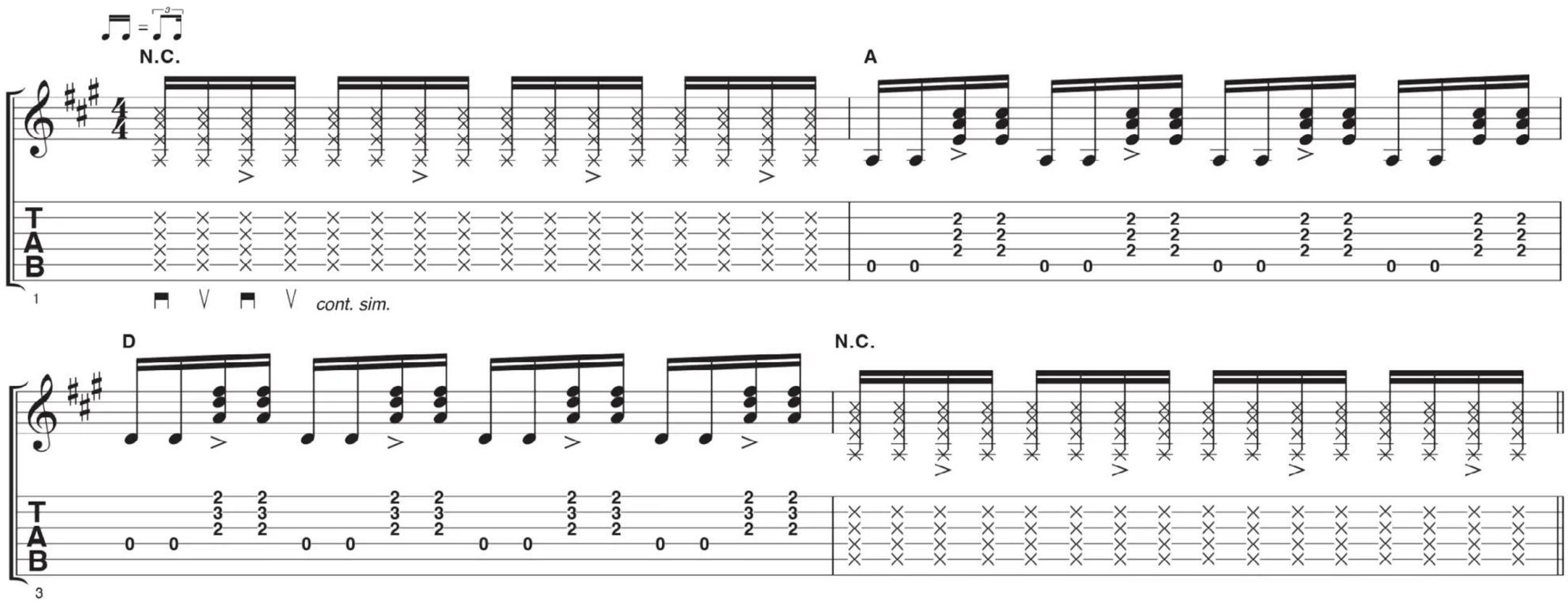
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Our progression is a standard I-IV-V in the key of A – which means the chords are A (I), D (IV), and E (V). A classic country technique is to 'walk up' to the root note of each chord. Simply pick the open E string, then the 2nd and 4th frets, finally arriving at the open A string. This walk-up approach creates movement between the chords.

2 THE 'TRAIN BEAT'

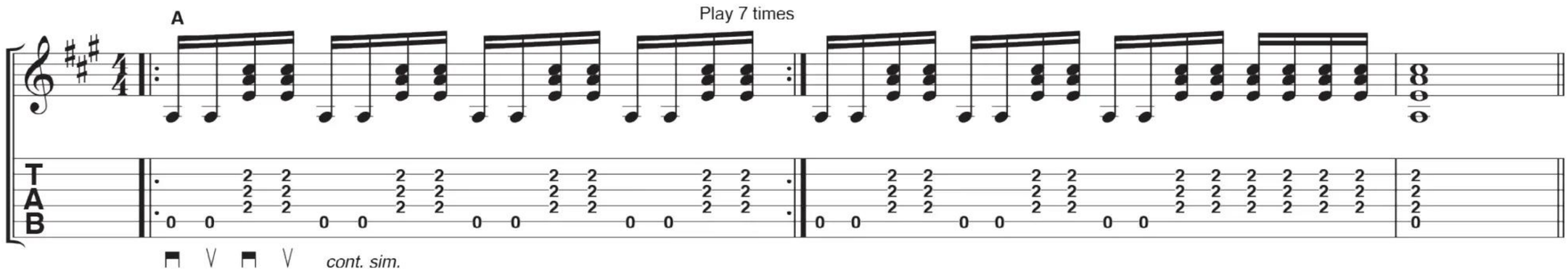
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Every genre has certain characteristic rhythms, and country is no different. The 'Train Beat' is synonymous with country music and, as the name suggests, it mimics an old-time steam train. This drill is for the picking hand. You can either hold a chord or just mute the strings while practising the pattern. Think in groups of four and accent the third beat with a slightly heavier strum.

3 STRUMMING PATTERN

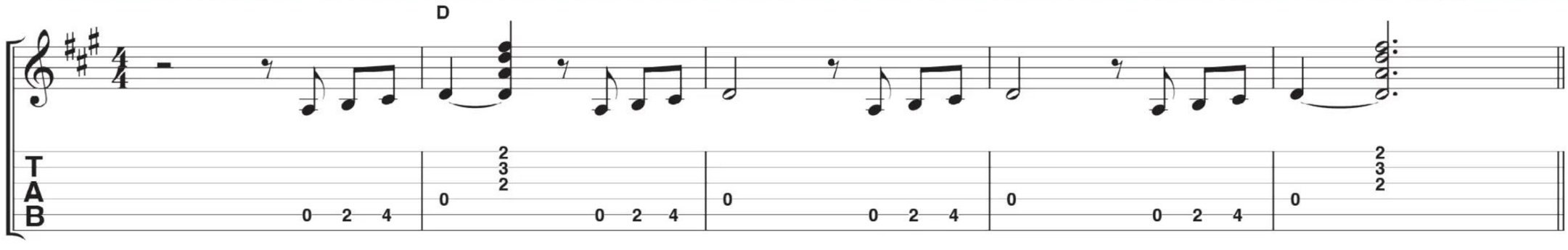
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Daniel starts with a simple down-down-up strumming pattern before adding in the extra upstroke (down-up-down-up) as tabbed here. Once you've figured out the rhythm, try to let it flow naturally. Just like when you walk, you're not thinking "left foot, right foot" – it just flows!

4 LICK #2: WALKING INTO D

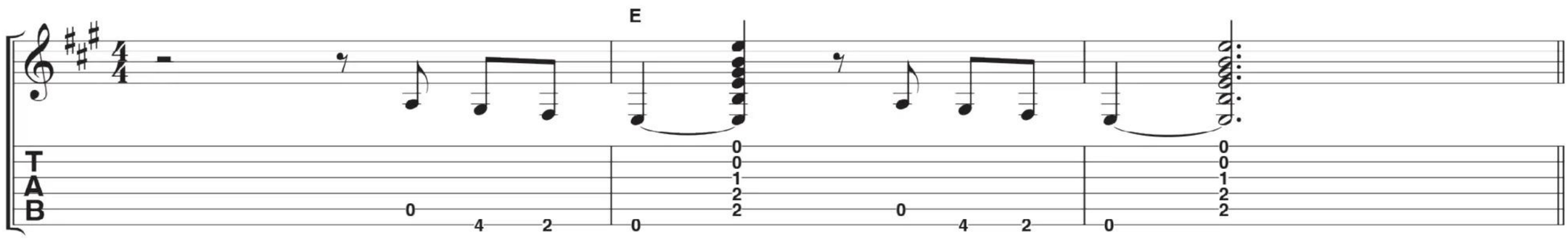
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You've already learned this lick walking up to the A, so let's try it with the D chord. Just shift everything over one string. Easy!

5 LICK #3

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Walking to the V chord (E) is slightly different. It's basically the A lick in reverse. Start on the open A string and then walk down the 4th and 2nd frets of the E string, finishing on the open E.

6 PLAY-THROUGH #1

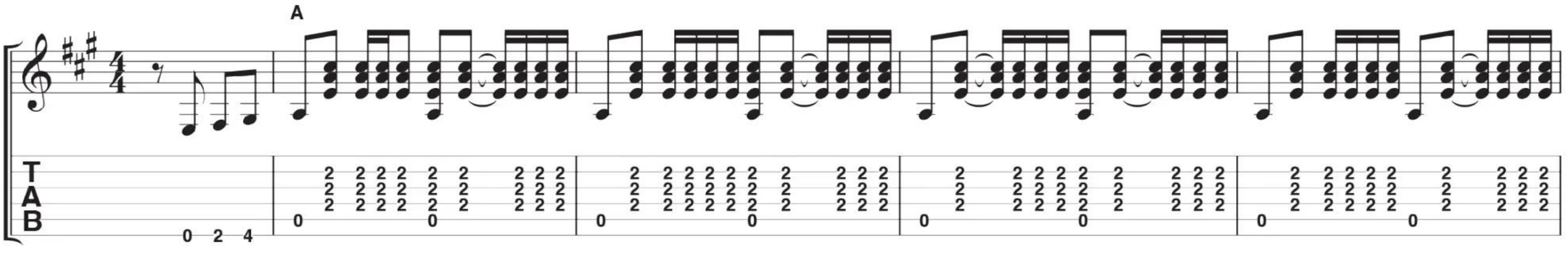
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Let's put everything together: the rhythm, the chords and the licks. This unaccompanied play-through includes the lot, so it may be a challenge to begin with.

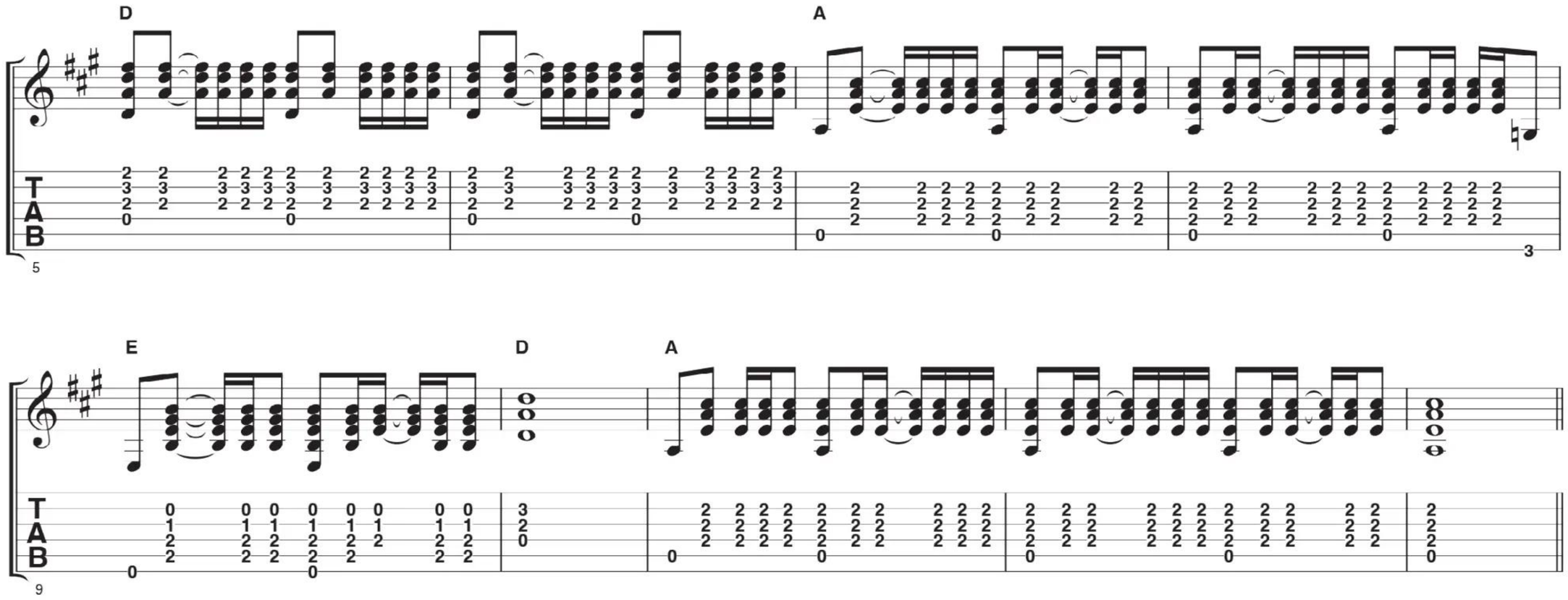
7 PLAY-THROUGH #2

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7 PLAY-THROUGH #2 (CONT'D)

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Here, Daniel plays a simpler version of his first play-through, with fewer walk-up licks. Try this one if you're struggling with the first version.

8 JAM TRACK

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This final play-through represents the version played over the jam track at the end of the video. Feel free to mix and match all three while you're learning.



Guitars and backing Jon Bishop

CROSSROAD BLUES

We take a look at Slash's phrasing and technique as he explores a new direction in his playing

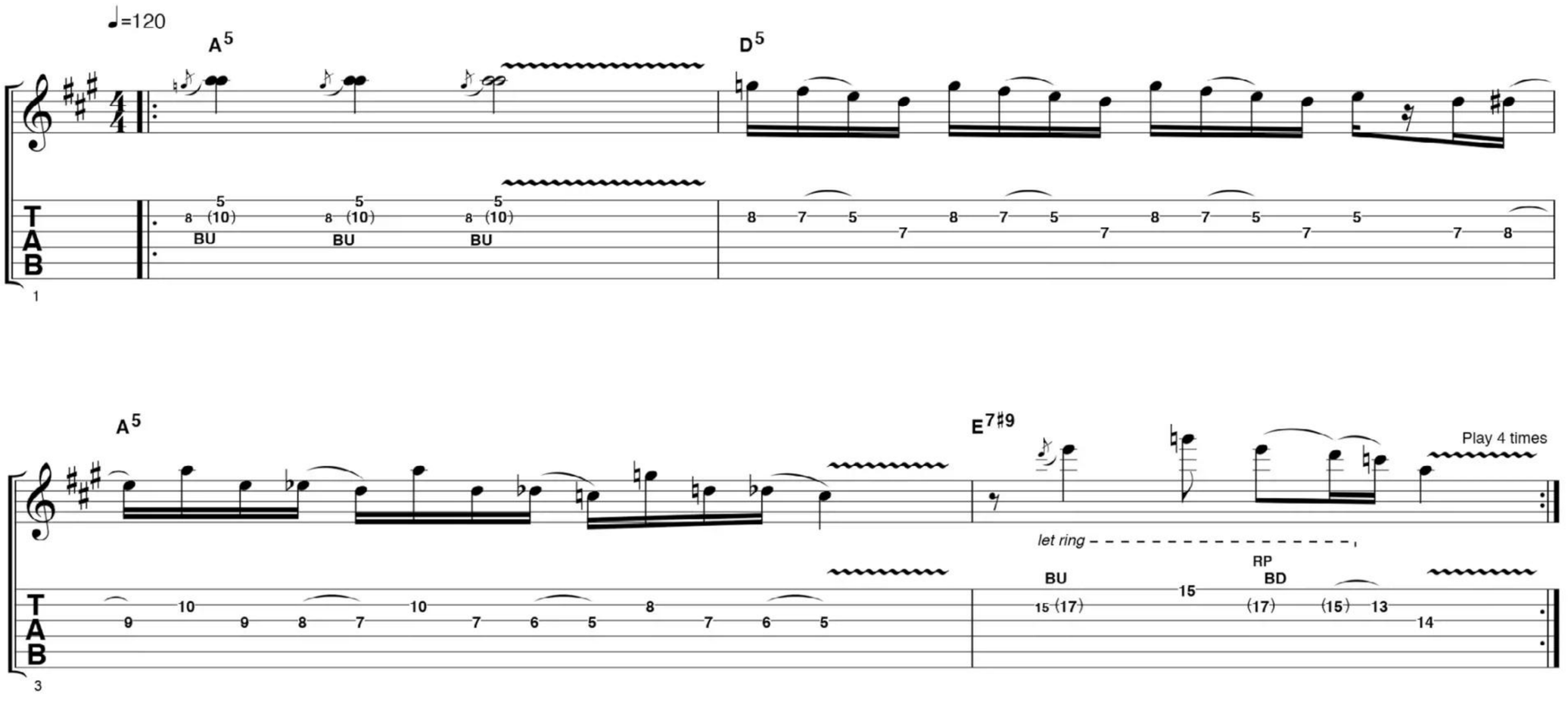
The 2024 album *Orgy Of The Damned* was very much *not* business as usual for the Guns N' Roses icon! Take one look at the *Killing Floor* music video and you'll immediately notice The Cat In The Hat eschewing his usual Les Pauls and donning a Bigsby-loaded 1963 Tobacco Sunburst Gibson ES-335 in front of a rack gear that includes (gasp!) a pair of Strats and a Telecaster. And if the experiments in tone hadn't given the game away, well, presumably the song title has – it's a blues cover, from an album of more of the same.

You know this already, of course, but the new direction sees Slash taking influence from blues pioneers he holds in high regard – and his playing sounds revitalised as a result. Here in our tab lesson, we're taking a look at some of the techniques and phrasing he employs on his latest outing. As ever, you can find accompanying audio files at the included link.

Right, plug in and let's get started – and it probably doesn't matter what guitar you use...

1 COUNTRY-STYLE CHROMATIC RUNS

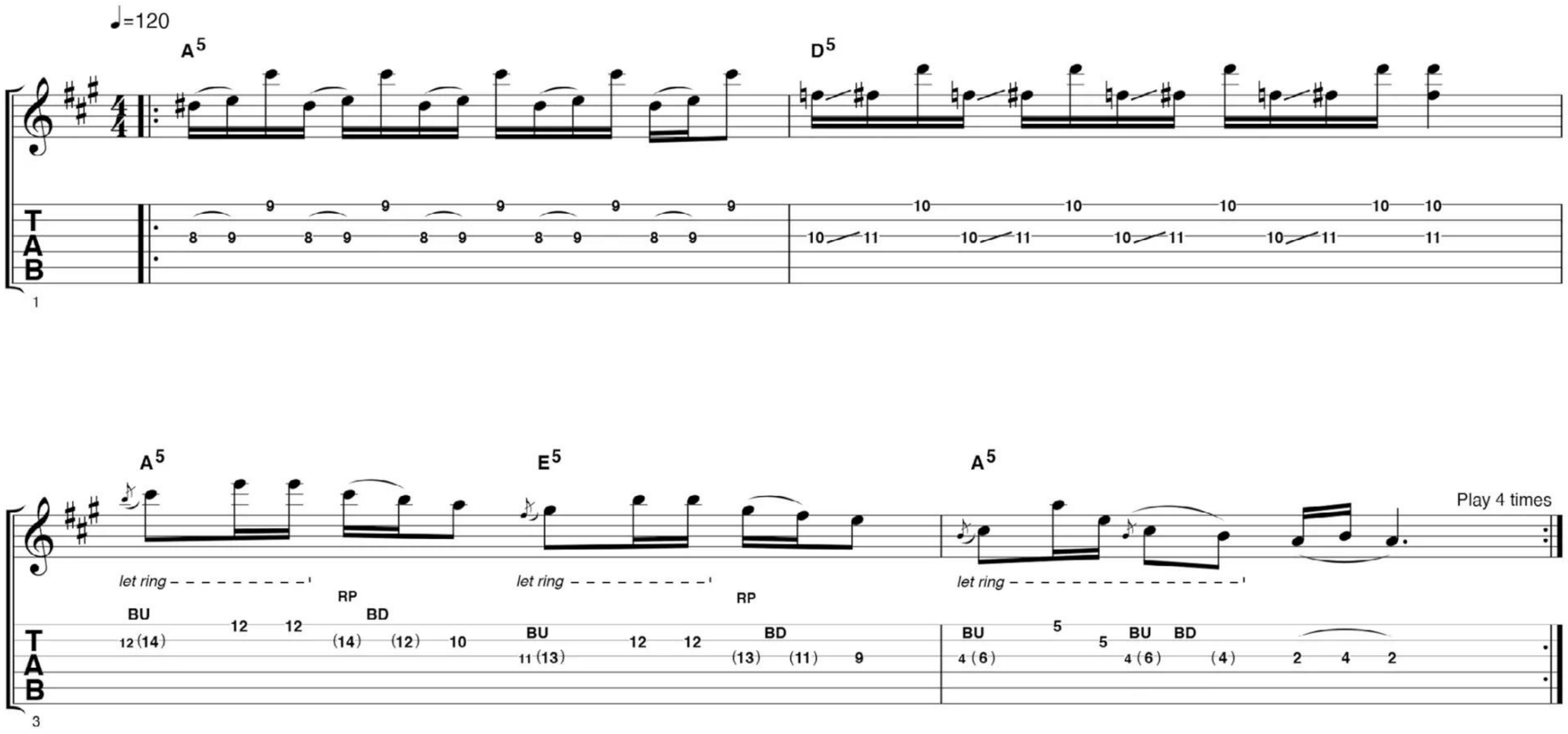
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Our first example is inspired by Slash's lead work on *Killing Floor* – played on that 1963 Gibson ES-335. Using country-style chromatics in a rock/blues-rock backing is a Slash trademark, and you can hear them in action in Slash's solo (at 2:25) and here in our tab example.

2 DOUBLESTOP BENDS

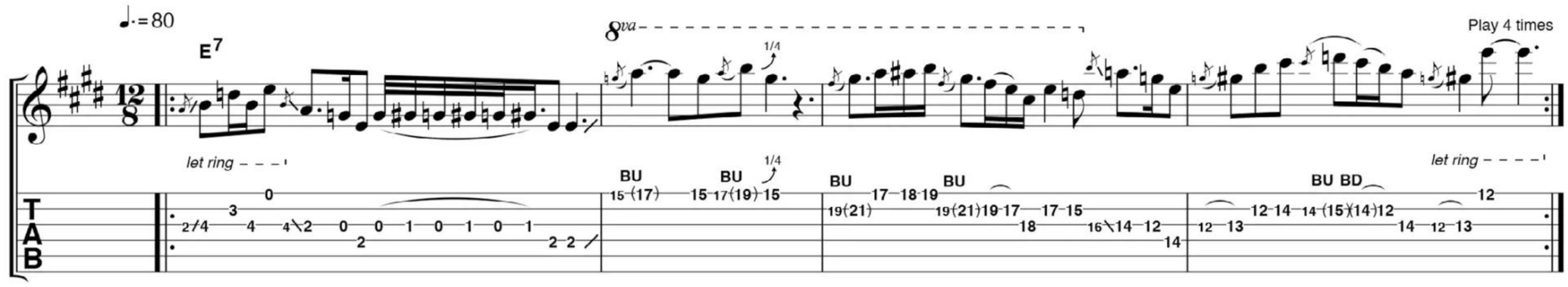
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More of the country-rock here, as we start with a couple of doublestop shapes played on the first and third strings. These can be augmented by finger sliding in or hammering on from a semitone below. It's a staple Slash motif.

3 SHUFFLE PHRASING

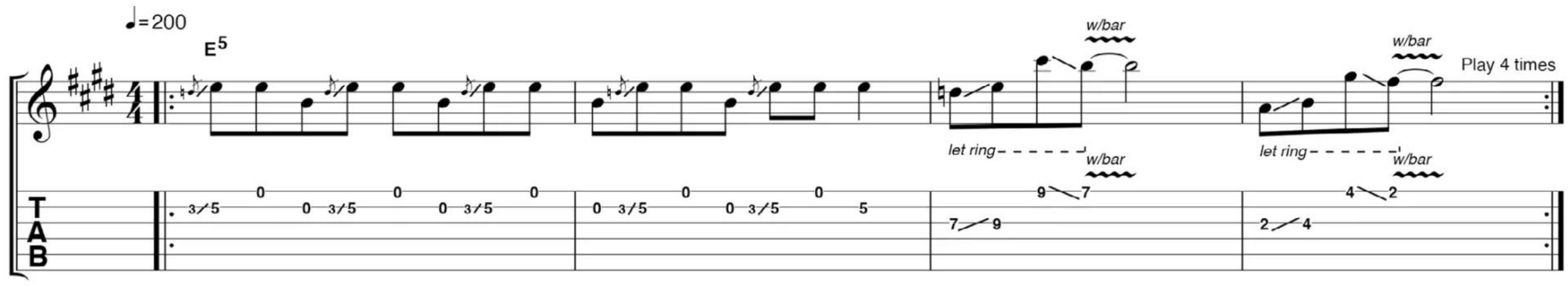
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This example is inspired by Slash's collaboration with Billie Gibbons on *Hoochie Coochie Man*. The track has a shuffle feel, and our example mirrors some of the ways Slash phrases within the shuffle feel. High-register string-bending is a Slash trademark, as is the use of chromatic notes to add extra colour.

4 WHAMMY BAR VIBRATO

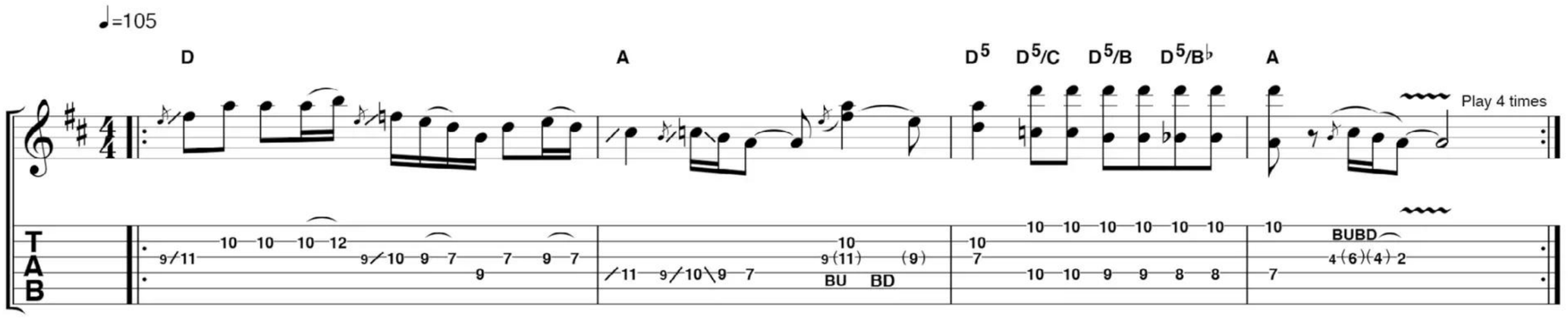
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Yep, you read that right! Slash has opted for a tremolo-loaded Fender Strat instead of the fixed stop bars of his usual arsenal of Les Pauls on his rendition of Fleetwood Mac's *Oh Well* – and, here, we're looking at the whammy shimmer he applies on doublestops. Make sure you're holding down both the first and third strings as you wobble the tremolo arm in bars 3 and 4.

5 MAJOR KEY PHRASING

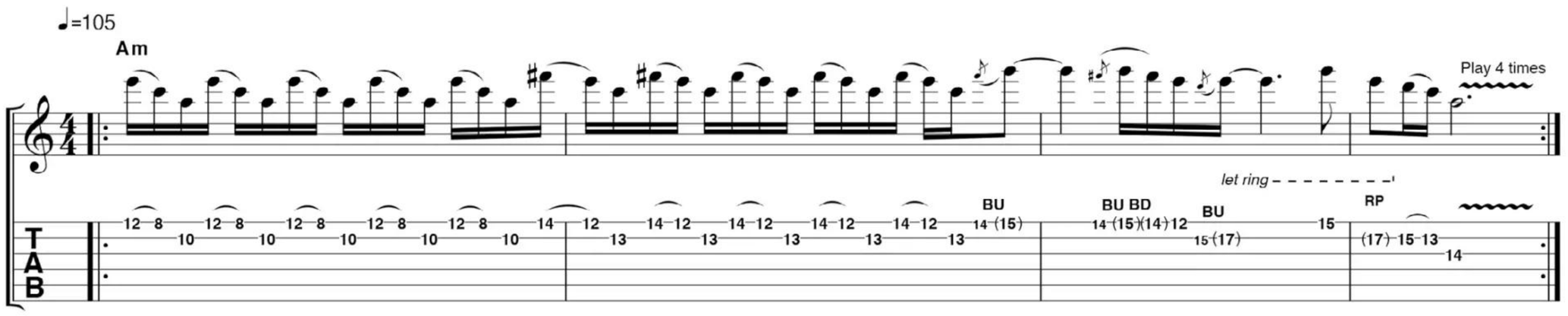
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Slash has always been great at major and Mixolydian phrasing, and in *Key To The Highway* he really goes to town, with D major and A major pentatonic scales. Our example showcases a way to navigate the classic blues turnaround in the key of D. The finger slides are a classic way to improve the overall feel and presentation.

6 REPEATING PATTERNS

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Born Under A Bad Sign sees Slash channeling his inner Albert King, with his trademark pentatonic rock licks driving the solos. Here, we're looking at a trademark Slash-ism that he's employed to some extent with every act he's been in: repeatable short phrases. Most of the action takes place in bars 1 and 2, but watch out for the early change on the last note of that first bar.

7 FUNKY WAH WAH LEAD

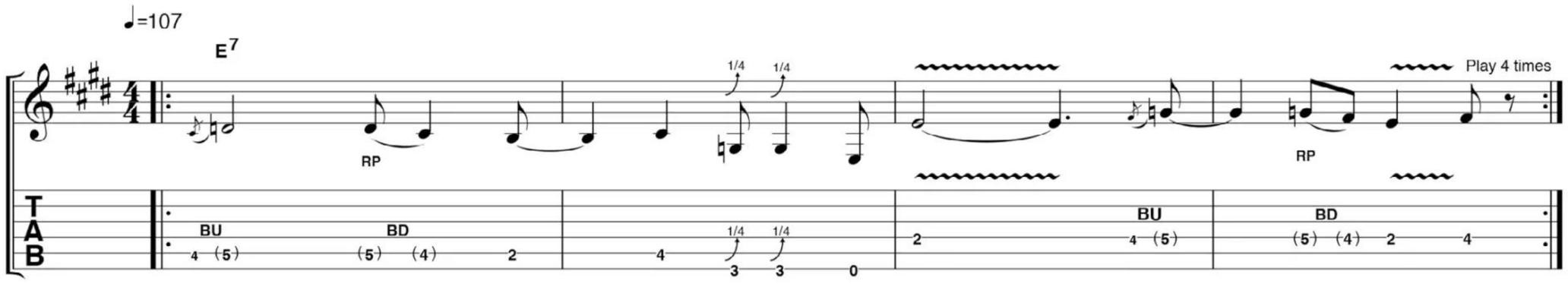
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Slash's *Papa Was A Rolling Stone* cover sees wah and talkbox riffing, but it's in the solo at 3:54 where the hatted one really opens up with his wah pedal – and our example features a typical descending phrase. The basic pattern is two picked notes followed by a pull-off and finger-slide. This creates a four-note pattern that can be moved around on the second string as required.

8 LOW-REGISTER SOLOING

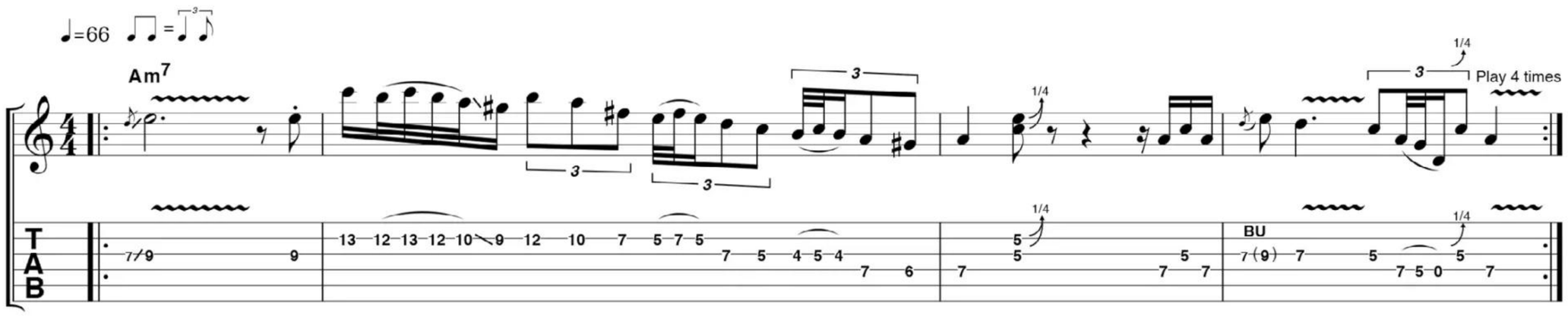
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Slash's solo in his cover of Stevie Wonder's *Living For The City* starts in the low register, gradually ascending to a big finish up at the dusty end. Your main aim here in our example is to concentrate on the string bending and digging in with your pick to get all of the juice out of the notes.

9 USING THE HARMONIC MINOR SCALE

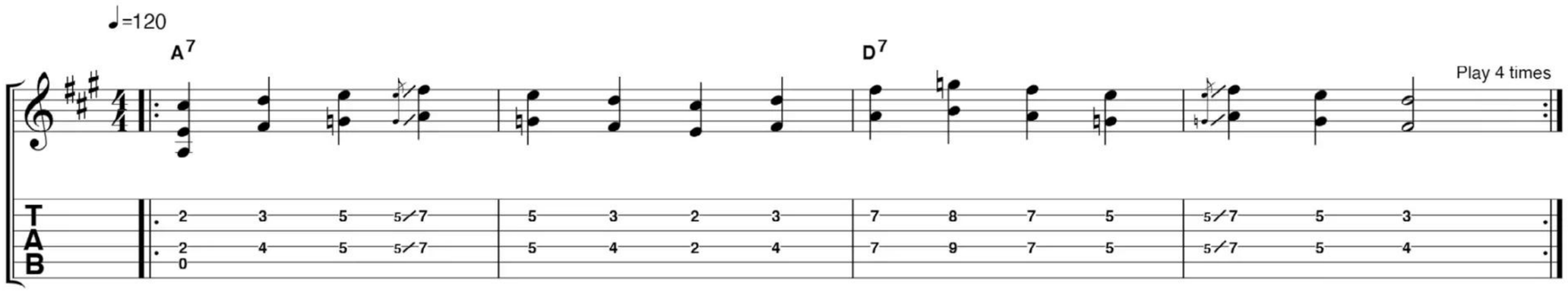
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Over the years, Slash has flirted with the harmonic minor scale to spice up his soloing, and his take on T-Bone Walker's *Stormy Monday* features an exploration of the exotic sounding scale in its unaccompanied intro. The tension of the harmonic minor scale is released by reverting back to the A minor pentatonic scale.

10 DOUBLESTOP ACCOMPANIMENT

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Our final example is inspired by the opening doublestops in the new instrumental track *Metal Chestnut*. The 6th interval sounds great and can be used to create movement and colour. We have used a simple chord progression of A7 to D7, and then spiced it up by moving the doublestop 6ths around. We've used a slightly cleaner tone by rolling off the volume control.

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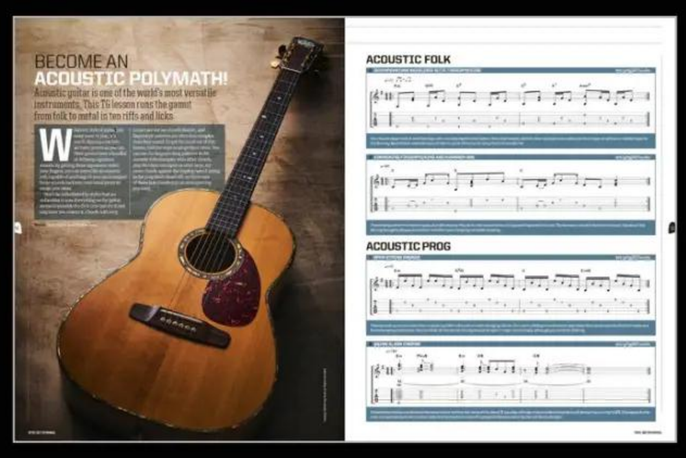
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