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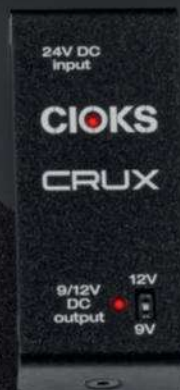
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And now our print run has come to an end. With this issue, *Guitar Player* will move fully online to [GuitarPlayer.com](http://GuitarPlayer.com), where we'll continue to bring you the same great content you've come to expect, as well as video interviews and lessons, and more.

The "why" will be obvious even if you don't keep each issue tucked away chronologically on shelves. These increasingly slim volumes demonstrate our almost heroic efforts to persist in an era where advertisers find greater opportunities online. Throughout the ups and downs of these years, we've appreciated the support of those readers and advertisers who have kept *Guitar Player's* print edition a going concern.

While longtime readers will lament this change, there's much more to come in *Guitar Player's* future. As for this final issue, what better way to wrap up our history than to have Jimmy Page help us do what we've always done best — bring you the finest interviews with your favorite players.

And now, a few last matters:

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**IN THANKS:** My six years at *Guitar Player* wouldn't have been as fulfilling without the support of our managing director Stuart Williams, content director Scott Rowley and head of design Brad Merrett. So much of your enjoyment of these pages is also due to our art editor, Philip Cheesbrough, whose designs led one publicist to call *Guitar Player* "the most beautiful music magazine." My gratitude extends as well to my longtime guitar magazine compatriot and music editor, Jimmy Brown, whose deep knowledge of music theory and passion for guitar have directed our lessons content since 2016.

Many of the stories you've enjoyed these past six years are thanks to our writers and my longtime friends in guitar publishing. To that end, I'm indebted to Joe Bosso, Gary Graff, James Rotondi, Rich Bienstock, Tom Beaujour, Bill Milkowski, Dave Hunter, Jim Campilongo, Terry Carleton, Jude Gold, Alan Paul, Ken Sharp, Jim Beaugez, Joe Matera, Andrew Daly, Martin McQuade, Mark McStea, Chris Buono and Jeff Jacobson.

I also owe deep thanks to two *Guitar Player* family members who were here long before me: senior editor Art Thompson and Frets editor Jimmy Leslie. Both have been my touchstones throughout this journey, and I've published not a single issue without trying to make them proud of the magazine they've served well for so long.

Finally, my thanks to you for supporting us. I look forward to seeing you at [GuitarPlayer.com](http://GuitarPlayer.com), where we'll continue to bring you the best in guitar stories, interviews, gear reviews and lessons.

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*Christopher Scapelliti*



# Guitar Player

Vol. 58 No. 12

DECEMBER 2024

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# CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2024 | VOLUME 58 | NUMBER 12

## PLAYERS

**34**

Twanguero

**38**

Jimmy Page

## SPECIAL FEATURE

**48**

A journey through  
58 Years of *Guitar Player*

**62**

MC5

## FRETS

**72**

Jerry Douglas

## NEW & COOL

**17**

Abernethy Sonic Empress THC

## ALBUMS

**20**

Sadler Vaden

**22**

Paul Gilbert

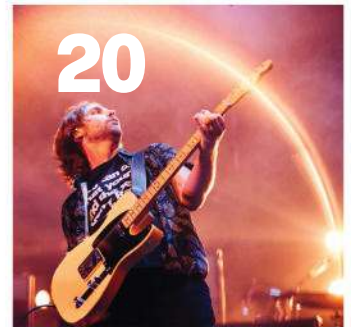
## TIPSHEET

**24**

Zakk Wylde

### ON THE COVER

Jimmy Page photographed with his Gibson EDS-1275, courtesy of Gibson



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# CONTENTS

DECEMBER 2024 | VOLUME 58 | NUMBER 12



26

## FIVE SONGS

26

The Moody Blues' Justin Hayward

## COLUMNS

30

Dave Hunter's Classic Gear  
Gibson ES-345TD

32

Jim Campilongo's Vinyl Treasures  
Prince — *The Black Album*

33

Terry Carleton's Whack Job  
Odessa Rhythm Solo

## LESSONS

78

How to play some of the greatest guitar moments from 50 years ago

84

Lessons learned, and reflections on our online future

90



92



88



86

## GEAR

86

Epiphone USA Collection Coronet

88

Universal Audio SC-1 Standard

90

Line 6 POD Express

92

UAFX Teletronix LA-2A Studio Compressor

## HOW I WROTE...

98

Al Stewart on his 1976 hit "Year of the Cat"

98



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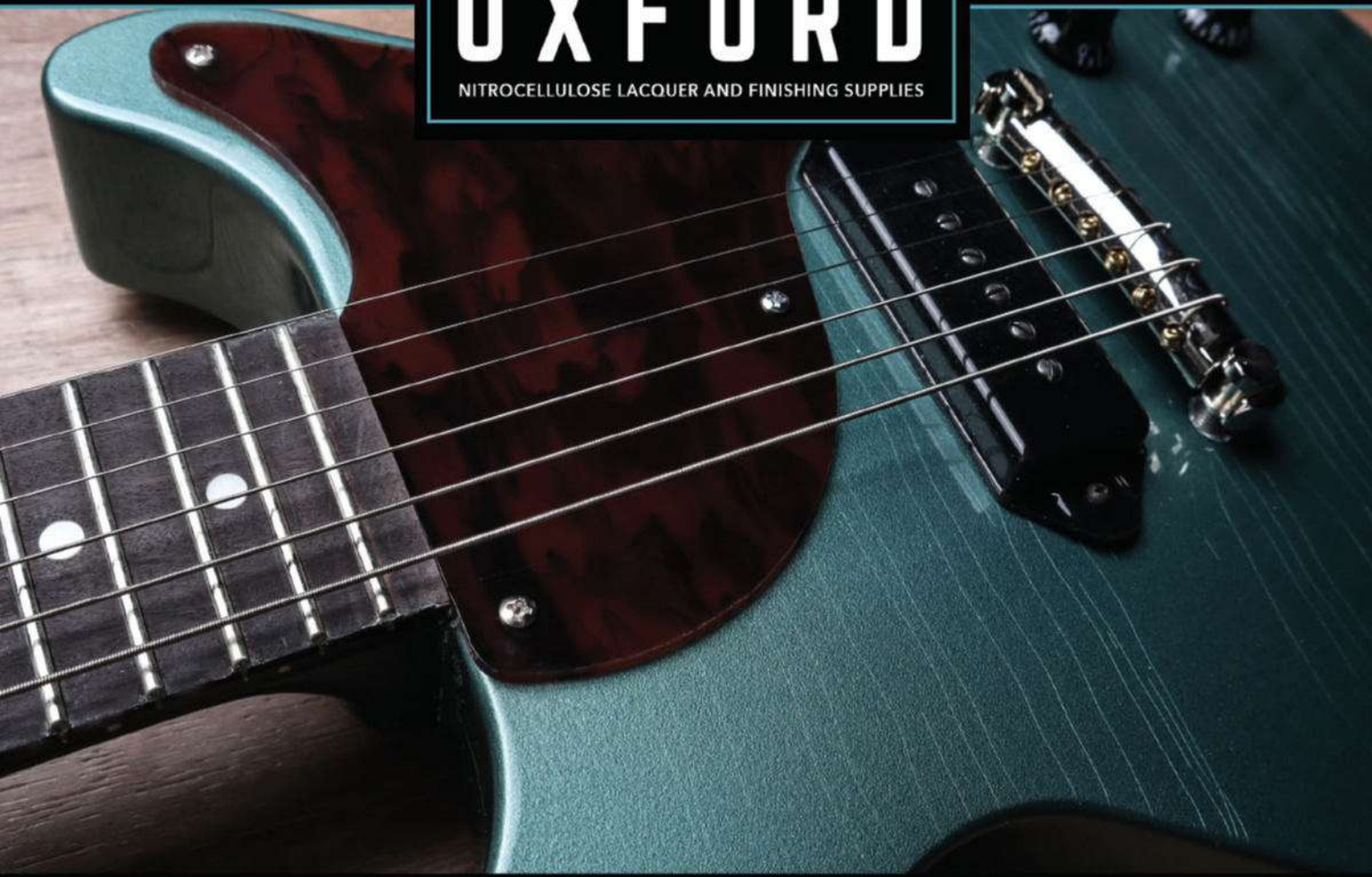
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NEW & COOL

# TURNING JAPANESE

Inspired by 1960s budget axes, Justin Abernethy's **Sonic Empress THC** combines vintage and modern in an offset design that's built for these times.

BY DAVE HUNTER



**SOMEWHERE BETWEEN**

**DISSECTING** guitars as a teen and opening his own shop half a dozen years ago, Justin Abernethy has worked with several of the finest guitar makers in business today. All of that has inspired the Abernethy Sonic Empress THC, a guitar that reflects some of the most appealing trends of these offset-inspired times.

The guitar shown here is not just any example of Abernethy's cornerstone model

but one built specifically for that icon of offset-leaning indie/alt/Americana, Jeff Tweedy, who kindly let *GP* divert it on the journey from its birthplace in Guadalupe, California, to the Wilco loft in Chicago, for a quick run through its paces. Although the rather Mustang-like upper bout and more bulbous lower bout may suggest otherwise, the Sonic Empress THC is made to a full 25 1/2-inch scale length, with a width of 1.65 inches across the bone nut

and a 12-inch radius to the Indian rosewood board. The bolt-on neck is made from tempered (a.k.a. roasted) maple, and the body is made from tempered pine. Its Sonic Blue nitrocellulose lacquer finish has greened up nicely due to the factory aging of the clear coat, with further character added by Abernethy's own hand distressing.

Elements of the general look and build approach — from the tempered pine and maple to the pre-aged finish — remind me of Dennis Fano's work under his own name in the past, and more recently via his Novo brand. As it happens, there are just a few degrees of separation between the two builders. After graduating from high school, Abernethy apprenticed in guitar repair at a local shop, then jumped at an opportunity to work for Gene Baker. Over a period of about 15 years he worked and built guitars for Baker, Ernie Ball, National Resophonic, Fine Tuned Instruments and Premier Builders Guild — which was headed by Baker and made Fano guitars under license — before starting up his one-man shop in the late 2010s. If anything, though, Abernethy takes the "alternative-vintage" premise even further with a combination of elements that never really appeared together on any one production model before, plus plenty of original touches.

Yet for all the Sonic Empress's funky Jaguar-meets-Japanese-meets-catalog-grade-guitar looks and features, it's the sheer quality and playing feel that grab you when you pick it up. The neck has a beautifully rounded medium-C profile that's virtually impossible not to like, whatever your usual favorite, and everything is utterly solid and well-honed.

Even the quirkiest elements in evidence here — the colored slider-switch tips, fluted vibrato-arm tip, clear radio knobs and clear buttons on the open-gear Grover Sta-Tite tuners — are hand molded in-house and accordingly exhibit a high degree of custom-building. And if those pickups look like something you'd find on Teisco and other budget-level Japanese creations from the '60s, you're not wrong. Abernethy sources what he can of these vintage Kawai-made pickups and has them rewound as necessary by his pal Rob Banta at Gemini Pickups in Newburgh, New York.

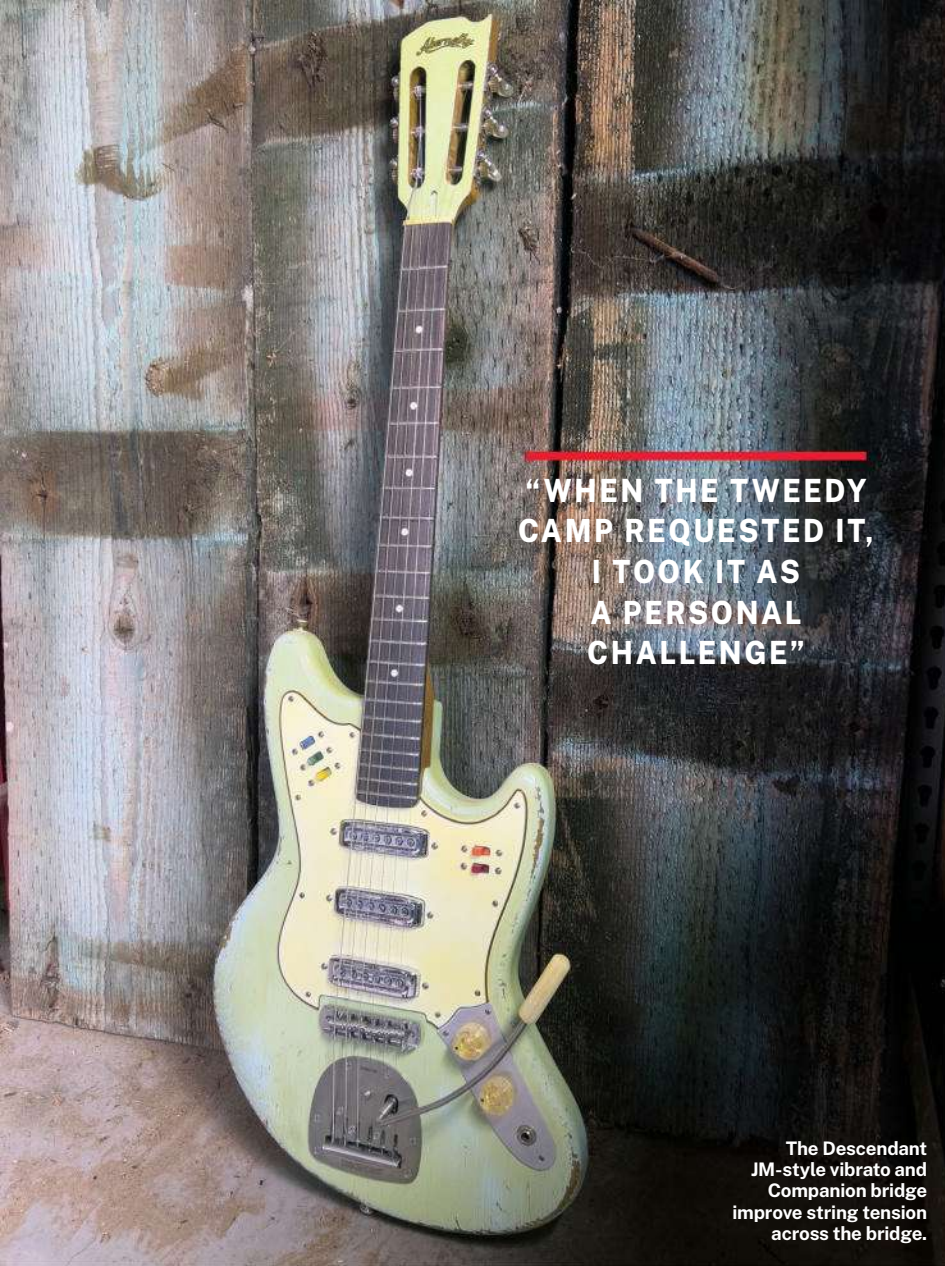


The colored sliders are difficult to cast but lend the Sonic Empress vintage charm.



"I think the stability is second to none," Abernethy says of the slotted headstock.





**“WHEN THE TWEEDY  
CAMP REQUESTED IT,  
I TOOK IT AS  
A PERSONAL  
CHALLENGE”**

**The Descendant  
JM-style vibrato and  
Companion bridge  
improve string tension  
across the bridge.**

“This particular build is kind of unique, not a standard option—although they are all kind of unique,” Abernethy tells us. “I hadn’t really planned to build another like this because of the work involved casting the colored sliders, but when the Tweedy camp requested it, I took it as a personal challenge. The Kawai pickups are sweet, and I use them as often as I can find them. Rob is a brilliant pickup designer and has made some really killer old sets magical by rebuilding damaged ones with vintage-correct wire and components. They’re like the best-sounding Strat set but with bigger cajones. Ever wonder what it would be like to take an old Model T and retrofit it with a 350 V-8? This is kind of the same concept.”

The slide switches include an on/off at the upper horn for each of the pickups. Two more sliders on the lower horn include a phase-reverse for when either the neck or

bridge pickup is used with the middle pickup, and a low-cut filter reminiscent of the “strangle switch” on the Fender Jaguar.

The most notable elements of the hardware set are the Descendant JM-style vibrato and Companion bridge, designed and manufactured by guitar maker Chris Swope. I reviewed these new designs in the Holiday 2022 issue and was impressed with how they improved string tension across the bridge, often a tone-eviscerating weak point of offset-style guitars. Abernethy agrees. “The Descendant trem and Companion bridge have become a staple on all my trem builds,” he says. “I love working with Chris, and the latest version of his trem is great. Plus, it’s a tad lighter than the Mastery, which makes a big difference when considering weight and the sum of all parts.”

Most observers will find plenty of noteworthy features at the other end of the

guitar, too, where Abernethy’s headstock presents a style you don’t find on many electric guitars. “I’ve always loved the look of a slotted peg head,” he exclaims. “I think a lot of players are skeptical, being that their only experience with them is on an old classic guitar, but I think the stability on these is second to none. Plus, I’ve never seen anyone else utilize a one-inch quartersawn neck blank this way. I’m able to get excellent downward pressure on the back of the nut without need for any string trees as well, so it’s kind of the best of both worlds between an angled and straight headstock.”

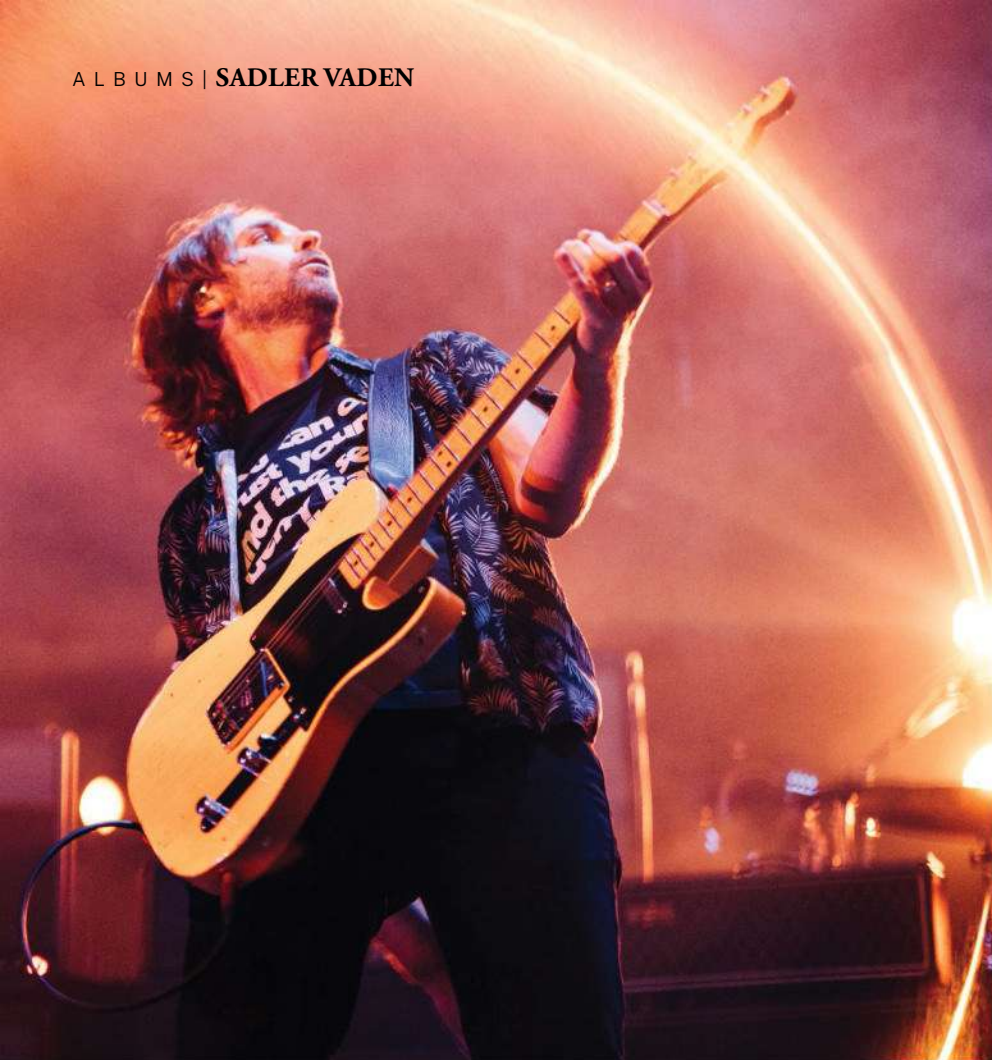
The Sonic Empress was a blast to test-drive through a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo, and a Fractal FM9 into headphones. If the three single-coil pickups and access to in-between sounds makes you think “alt-Strat,” hold that thought. The pickups and switching combinations do yield incredible versatility and a wide range of voices, but the tones available are really quite unlike anything else. Think “Jaguar meets Jazzmaster meets mail-order guitar,” with the snarky edge of lower-wind pickups, a touch of gold-foil attitude, and plenty of depth and resonance imparted by the quality of the build, woods and hardware.

There’s tons of sparkle and shimmer from the bridge pickup, with no harshness. I can see this being fantastic for recording sounds you’d expect to be getting from a Rickenbacker or any Fender offset, for example, but too often have trouble successfully achieving. While the pickups are a pretty low-output design, the end result is still surprisingly girthy, with a slightly gritty edge to the voice that adds texture and depth. Added to that, the Jaguar-style strangle switch was particularly sweet applied to the neck pickup, while the out-of-phase positions were very cool with a fuzz pedal engaged, eliciting a nasty, hairy scooped tone that’s great for funky psychedelic blues riffs.

To extend Abernethy’s car metaphor, the Sonic Empress is something of a Ferrari disguised as a Nissan Figaro, and tons of fun by any measure. 🚗

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## POP ART

With *Dad Rock*, **Sadler Vaden** crafts an album whose songs and guitar sounds recall the best days of classic rock.

BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH WEICHMAN

**SADLER VADEN'S NEW** album, *Dad Rock*, is bursting with hooky, well-crafted tunes that recall the glory days of '70s classic rock and power pop, but it still sounds fresh and vital. Every song is loaded with big guitar sounds — some bright and sparkly, others snaggle-toothed and gnarly — but they're not buried in distortion. It's one of those rare records that's impossible not to like. And it doesn't wear out its welcome: Its eight songs zip by in something like 40 minutes. All steak and no fat.

"I'm not a fan of super-long records that just don't know when to stop," Vaden says. "I grew up on my dad's record collection. He had all the great stuff from back in the day.

Sure, there were some double albums that are great, but for the most part I was a single-album guy: You'd listen to one side of the vinyl, four or five songs, and then you'd repeat on side two. Give me the best stuff and leave the rest, I say."

Vaden, who for the past 20 years has held down the lead guitar spot with Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit, has issued two previous solo albums, but *Dad Rock* is his first since becoming a father (he and his wife, Candice, welcomed son Townsend in 2020, and another son, Theodore, arrived late last year). Explaining the album's title, Vaden says he was inspired by John Mayer's '80s-themed record *Sob Rock* and, more

specifically, its promotional merchandise. "They put out a coffee mug that said, 'Sob Rock is Dad Rock,'" he says. "I thought, Well, why don't you just call the album *Dad Rock*?" So I decided to do it myself. I fully committed to the idea, and all of the tunes seemed to fit the concept."

Between tour dates with Isbell and his new-dad duties, Vaden had only a couple of days clear to cut live rhythm tracks in his home studio (half of the cuts feature bassist Timothy Deaux and drummer Julian Dorio from the Whigs). The guitarist recorded most of his parts on his own, sometimes late at night after his family had gone to bed. "On those occasions, I couldn't go for real cabinets," he explains. "Sometimes I'd dial up a tone that didn't sound good on its own, but when I fit it inside the mix, it worked."

Vaden also used remote recording to feature contributions from two of his musical heroes: former Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers keyboardist Benmont Tench, and Cars guitar ace Elliot Easton. "I'm a big believer in bands playing together in one room, but I have no problem with technology if that means getting what I want," Vaden says. "With Audiomovers [*real-time collaboration tools*], it's almost limitless what you can do. Benmont Tench played his parts right at the same time I had to go pick up one of my sons from day care. I was literally in my car driving down the road, and I was listening to him on my earbuds as he played on my record. I think that's pretty wild."

**To me, this record has such a cool '70s feel to it. In fact, if I didn't know it was you and somebody just played it for me, I might have thought it was some lost British gem from 50-odd years ago.**

[laughs] Well, mission accomplished. I didn't set out to do that exactly, but I think I'm so influenced by music of that era and from that part of the world that it just kind of comes out. I didn't labor over the record or overthink it. Not to say there wasn't some quality control, but I just focused on letting things happen.

**There are the classic guitar tones, but it's also in what you play. You're judicious in how many tracks you use. Each guitar part serves a purpose. It results in guitar tracks**

**that really stand out and serve the song.**

I'm glad you're picking up on that. And thanks — that's a huge compliment. There's so many of my heroes that I could run down here, but I should mention McCartney. I mean, I love all the Beatles stuff, but when Paul started doing his solo records, he brought his guitar tone with him and really perfected it. It was so dirty and snarly, and it sat perfectly in the mix.

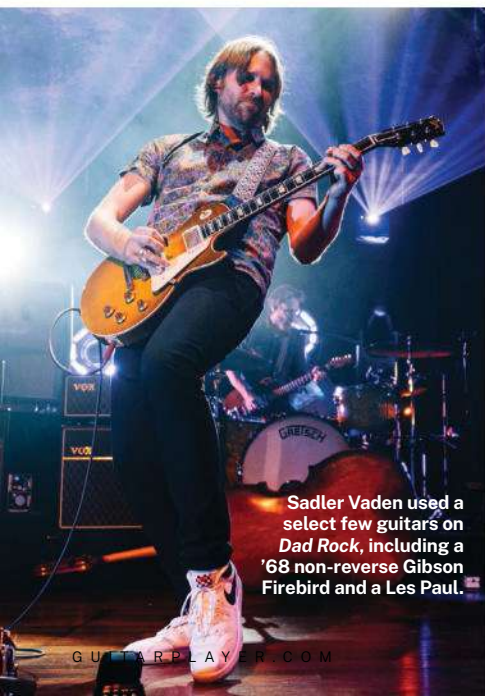
**The first McCartney album, for sure.**

**A lot of those songs feature single guitar performances.**

Absolutely. I didn't want to stack too many guitars. I think of Wilco records and the way Spoon record their tracks. They're two of my favorite bands. They'll have verses with guitar parts and cool tones, but you won't hear them again in the song.

**Your opening song, "Townsend's Theme," is an instrumental. Sound-wise, there's some Pete Townshend, but there's also a Pink Floyd–like section, but then it gets into Neil Young territory. You go from calm to chaotic.**

Yes to all of that. Of course, I'm a huge Who fan, and there's definitely a *Tommy* element to it, especially in the C section. What I was going for was taking it from this Neil Young "Down By the River" thing — kind of a Crazy Horse vibe — to this Zeppelin-esque thing and back to Neil Young.



Sadler Vaden used a select few guitars on *Dad Rock*, including a '68 non-reverse Gibson Firebird and a Les Paul.

I really wanted to make sure that people could also stay focused with an instrumental. That was a big thing for me — to keep this interesting. Nobody really does instrumentals anymore, and I feel like people's attention spans make them inclined to skip over them.

To counteract that, I kept it moving and threw in a little chaos.

**On "Staying Alive," you get a wonderful**

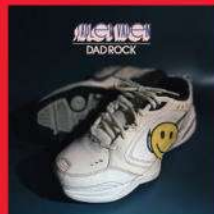
**Joe Walsh guitar crunch, and your slide solo is also very Walsh. You don't mind all the references, do you?**

No, not at all. I knew exactly what I was doing. Also, that song is a cover of a song by the Whigs. Two of my friends, Tim and Julian — that's two-thirds of the Whigs — played bass and drums on that song. I always loved the song, and I thought, If I could go back in time and convince them to let me put slide guitar on it, that would be great. That's where the idea came from.

I wanted the song to have a little "Life's Been Good" kind of long instrumental break. I mean, let's face it, there's nothing more "dad rock" than Joe Walsh. I've got to tip my hat to the man. He's become a friend of mine, and he's friends with Jason, too. Hopefully, Joe will hear the song and recognize that it's an homage to him, especially in the middle section.

**When you wrote "Two Balloons," did you automatically think, "I'd love to get Elliot Easton to play on this one"?**

I've always been huge fan of his guitar work, and I loved the Cars. He started following me on Instagram, and we would interact with each other. I thought it would be fun to get some of my musical heroes on the record — and maybe people who are also dads. I messaged Elliot and told him, "I'm making this record called *Dad Rock*. I'd be honored if you would consider playing on it. If not, no sweat." He wrote back and said, "I'd love to. Send me the song you're



## RECOMMENDED LISTENING

### *Dad Rock*

"Townsend's Theme,"  
"Dove," "The New You,"  
"Staying Alive,"  
"Two Balloons"

thinking about and we'll work something out." I didn't really have a song in mind yet, but as I listened to "Two Balloons," I thought, It's got a lot of open road.

**How much of your own guitar was on your demo? Did you give him any direction?**

I didn't have any lead or melody guitar on it. It was all rhythm guitar. It evolved with Elliot. I didn't really want to give him any direction, but he asked. I gave him very little because I really wanted to hear what he would come up

## "HE MADE THE TRACK SHINE. I THOUGHT, THAT'S WHY YOU'RE ELLIOT EASTON AND WE'RE EVERYBODY ELSE"

with, and ultimately that's what he did. He made the track shine. All the melodic things and the solos he did, they're just perfect. When I first heard what he did, I thought, That's why you're Elliot Easton and we're everybody else.

**What guitars did you use on the record?**

The guitar I used most is a '68 non-reverse Gibson Firebird. Every time I plug it in, it sounds right. Of course, I used my SG; I'm always playing that one. "Townsend's Theme" has a few different guitars. There's a Les Paul, and I think I used a Tele on some of it. But the Firebird got played the most.

**How about amps?**

I used my '68 Marshall "Plexi" quite a bit, and I also used a Hiwatt 50 that belongs to my guitar tech, Dave. Amp-wise, it was a lot of British rock goodness.

**It's somewhat ironic that your album is called *Dad Rock*, yet you're going to spend the rest of this year on the road with Jason Isbell. No time off for touring bands anymore, is there?**

Yeah, I'll be playing "dad rock" with Jason — he's a dad, too. It's going to be pretty great during the summer part because my family will get to come out for a good part of the time. Obviously, I miss my kids when they're not around, and it's hard for my wife. But you find ways to make it work. 📍



# THE BIG GOODBYE

As Mr. Big calls it a day, **Paul Gilbert** reflects on hearing loss, his vintage Ibanez guitars and the good times ahead.

BY ANDREW DALY

**MR. BIG HAS** always blended dysfunction with virtuosity. That probably wasn't the intent when bassist Billy Sheehan, vocalist Eric Martin, drummer Pat Torpey and guitarist Paul Gilbert got together in Los Angeles in 1988. In the years since, the hard-rock group has navigated music's changing styles, from the shred badassery of their 1989 self-titled debut and 1993's *Bump Ahead* to their hit power ballads "To Be With You" and "Just Take My Heart." At the same time, they've endured more than their fair share of inner turmoil. Gilbert left in 1999 and was replaced by Richie Kotzen before Mr. Big called it quits for the first time, in 2002.

But there's something about the original quartet's "occasional dysfunction" (as Gilbert calls it) that has kept them coming back for more. They reunited in 2009 and toured Japan, where — true to the phrase — they remained big. The group went on hiatus in 2018 following Torpey's death from Parkinson's-related complications, but they regrouped in 2023 with Nick D'Virgilio on drums. That resulted in their latest album, *Ten*, which the band intends to make their last. It's quintessential stuff, but like most of Mr. Big's records, it took work.

"There's a price to being in a band," Gilbert tells *Guitar Player*. "You get great things from it, like the irreplaceable characters of these various musicians. But sometimes it can be really stressful on the heart. So I look forward to a calmer heart and doing my own stuff."

*Ten* may be Mr. Big's final record, but there's still a slate of shows to wrap up on



Paul Gilbert with an Ibanez FRM100, the first mass-produced Fireman series guitar, designed by Gilbert.

the Big Finish tour. From there, no one knows if additional dates will be added or if the band plans to walk away quietly. Regardless, Gilbert is at peace. "This is a nice way to finish it," he says. "Everybody has pulled together for one last time to do something where there are no apologies. I'm very proud of what we've done as Mr. Big."

**A Mr. Big record is very different from one of your solo records. What sort of mindset do you need to get into for a band record?**

Being a guitar player is at the bottom of the list. The main thing is that the songs really need to work for Eric's voice as well as for the band's style. At the end of it, it's like, "Oh, there's some guitar solos," so the guitar playing is just one element; the overall picture is really important.

**Give me an example of how that worked.**

Eric came down to my studio to play through the songs he had, and I showed him my stuff. And with my stuff, again, a lot of it is, "What key should this be in? Where is this going to

resonate best?" So, for example, for "Up On You," the single we just released, I changed it up from its original key to suit Eric's voice.

**That song has some interesting slide work, which has been a late addition to your arsenal and is very different from your early Mr. Big style.**

I had a song on my *I Can Destroy* record that was maybe all slide, and it just worked because I could keep the slide with me the whole time. But I learned that it could be frustrating, because you get stuck with it. So I came up with the idea of having a magnet on the guitar that holds a steel slide. I got together with my local guitar repair guy, and he came up with how to best mount it under the pickguard. Just having it in close proximity is great because I can use it more. That, combined with being better at hearing blues melodies and getting into learning a lot of vocal melody stuff, has helped a lot.

**To your point, there's a lot of bluesy undertones throughout *Ten*. Mr. Big has**

always been an amalgam of influences, but this record seems especially bluesy in some spots.

I think with Mr. Big, we always wanted to have a bluesy influence. I don't know if it's just that I'm much better at blues now than I was back in the day, but if I do go in that direction, I've got a lot more to say, and do it with more confidence in terms of phrasing and melody.

**And, of course, you're dealing with the challenge of only having eight bars to get your point across when it comes to solos with Mr. Big.**

Right. It's like, "How much time do I have?" With "Up On You," I think I gave myself one of the longest Mr. Big solos ever. It's 24 bars! [laughs] I count bars a lot these days because most of the older Mr. Big solos are eight bars, which is painfully short. It's so hard to improvise with eight bars; you can't even get started! But if we ever do "Up On You" live, I'm really gonna have fun with it.

**Beyond that, what did your overall process for constructing solos look like on Ten?**

If you're lucky, your instincts kick in and you just know what to do without having to think about it. But if there's any problem solving, it's like, "Let's ask the singer, because he might have a melody that you want to do." And that's especially true if it's his tune. From there, you think, Am I hearing anything? And if you do, it's, What's the best way to get that out? It's a combination of the instincts in my toolbox.

**You're pretty open about the fact that you love to tinker with your gear and**

**interchange pedals. But with Mr. Big, there are tonal expectations, and you nailed them on Ten. What are the keys to that?**

Well, I'm always happy to get a good review because I hear very little above 1k. I have a lot of hearing loss! Whenever it comes to the treble knob, I just sort of put it halfway up and hope for the best.

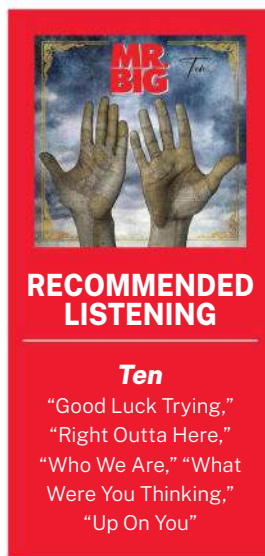
[laughs] And then I make sure I have a mixing engineer who can fix whatever crimes against treble I've committed.

But hearing is only one element; the other is feel. You can feel how a guitar responds and when an amp is breaking up. You can get a sense of how the pick attack works with distortion and choose the amount of sustain. That's a big deal.

**Have the limitations that come with your hearing loss impacted your overall approach? Is that part of the reason you've leaned so heavily into melody?**

Well, live, I have to meet with the drummer and tell them, "If you're playing with a snare and a kick, I'm right with you. But if it's only cymbals or hi-hats, I won't hear it." That's why I have earplugs onstage. And to protect my hearing. It cancels out the high end that I'm missing. But in the studio, I can still feel it. I can still hear pitch because the low frequency is still there.

**If anything, homing in on feel and those**



**nuances have probably helped you.**

I believe my inner voice and hearing music in my head have improved. As an improviser, I'm more aware of telling the truth because I'm not thinking about visual shapes and fingers. I'm listening to my inner voice, which is a joy to pay attention to what it's giving me.

**I see you've been collecting early pre- and post-lawsuit-era Ibanez guitars. Did any of those make it onto Ten?**

When Ibanez made their own designs, like the Iceman and the Artist, that was a blast. The '80s were such an explosion of trying to have a whammy bar like Eddie Van Halen, and they invented, like, 10 different bridges. They're all unique, and I've really enjoyed collecting old Blazers and Roadstars.

**Ten is about the unexplained chemistry of yourself, Billy, and Eric coming together to make something great. After all these years, have you found a way to explain what's between you all?**

It's unavoidable. I'm glad you found a way to find our particular chemistry appealing. [laughs] We have no choice in the matter. We just sound the way we sound.

**Do you ever have moments where you second-guess the decision to walk away?**

It's a big challenge. You're competing against the best that you gave when you were young. The fact that we got through it, and there was some good chemistry to match a couple of moments, that's a big sigh of relief.

**You sound ambivalent. Are you comfortable calling it a day?**

It's much easier to be the benevolent dictator than a member of an occasionally dysfunctional democracy. [laughs] I really look forward to that. I'm doing a gig next week that I booked just to do songs that aren't Mr. Big. If I want to tell the band to do something, I can kindly ask them to do it, and they do. It's such a joy to never have to worry about that stuff. ■

## "WE HAVE NO CHOICE. WE JUST SOUND THE WAY WE SOUND"



(from left) Billy Sheehan, Nick D'Virgilio, Eric Martin and Gilbert.





**“YOU DO WHAT YOU DO.  
THAT’S ALL THAT  
MATTERS”**

## TIPSHEET

Doing what comes naturally is at the heart of Zakk Wylde’s advice.

BY JOE BOSSO

**WHEN ASKED TO** describe how his guitar playing has evolved over the years, Zakk Wylde lets out a chortle. “Bro, there’s no way I can answer that,” he insists. “I’m still evolving!”

Simply put, the rock legend finds joy and purpose in doing the work. Whether he’s on tour or recording (and there’s little time out of the year when he’s not involved with one of the other), he maintains the same sort of rigorous practice routine that he followed as a guitar-obsessed teenager more than 40 years ago.

“It’s like anything. If you want to get good at something, you put the time in,” Wylde says. “I’m always going over my technique

and trying to better myself. It’s not going to happen just by wishing it. And I come up with surprises all the time. I’ll be running through Pat Martino stuff, practicing his chromatic licks, and then I’ll say, ‘Hey, what if I incorporate that into ‘Voodoo Chile’?’ The more you play and practice, the more likely you are to stumble on those kinds of ideas.

“I guess that’s all part of evolution. But like I said, as long as you keep at it, it never ends. It only ends when you stop.”

As Wylde notes in his tips for *Guitar Player* readers, there’s no substitute for diligence and dedication, but he also stresses individuality. “Don’t let anybody tell you what’s good and what’s not good,” he says. “If it’s what you feel, eventually people will come around. Or maybe they won’t. Who cares? You can’t dwell on that stuff. You do what you do. That’s all that matters.”

### 1 PLAY WHAT YOU LOVE

“I can’t stress this enough: Play what you love — always. If something moves you, that’s what you should be doing. If something doesn’t move you, don’t worry about it. I know there’s guys that say things like, ‘Get

out of your comfort zone.’ That’s fine for some people, but if you just don’t dig something, you can’t force yourself to like it. It’s like trying to eat food that you don’t like. No matter how many times somebody says it’s good for you, all you can think is, I just don’t like it.

“I remember reading an interview with Johnny Winter. He was talking about how amazing classical guitar players were. He could admire their dedication and technical proficiency and all that, but in the end, he said that classical music didn’t move him like the blues. He’d rather listen to Albert King or B.B. or Buddy Guy.

“I can relate to that. I can only do what I love. I’m not going to try to do something just to show how diverse I can be, because it wouldn’t be real. You need to be authentic.”

### 2 BE YOURSELF

“Originality is a hard one. I mean, who’s an original? Let’s face it: We’re all taking bits from somebody else. Even the guitar players that we say, ‘Oh, so and so’s an original.’ Well, c’mon! They’re borrowing things from somebody they used to listen to.

JEN ROSENSTEIN (ABOVE); EDWARD DOSE (OPPOSITE)



"On the other hand, you don't want to sound like a carbon copy of somebody, so that means you have some decisions to make. When I was a teenager, obviously I loved Sabbath and Randy Rhoads and Jake E. Lee. And, of course, there was Eddie Van Halen doing his whole thing. I loved them all, but I didn't want to sound like them.

"I made a conscious decision not to do the things these other guys were known for. I wrote out a list of things I wasn't going to do. Everybody started playing with a Floyd Rose, so I wrote, 'No Floyd Rose.' People started playing three notes per string, so that was another: 'No three notes per string.'

"Pretty soon, it was like, 'All right, I guess I'll just do pentatonics. Let me see how much I can get away with this.' But that's the beauty of it all: If you limit yourself to working with just a few elements, it forces you to be creative. It's like, you've got two crayons and that's all you're allowed to color with. What are you gonna do?

"Did that make me an original? That's up to other people to judge. I just knew that I didn't want to be compared to anybody else."

### 3 MAKE VIBRATO MEANINGFUL

"Vibrato is a weird aspect of guitar playing. I've heard a lot of players who have great technique — they're clean and flawless — but when it comes time for them to end a phrase, their vibrato is a little off. It's like they're not confident about how to work that final note, so they just kind of shake it around or



something. It doesn't sound pleasing to the ear. It's like a bee buzzing around your head.

"Listen to some of the greats: Eddie Van Halen, Paul Kossoff, Angus Young, Neal Schon — all of them have vibrato that's pleasing to the ear. Jimi, Frank Marino, Robin Trower, David Gilmour — I could go on and on. Jared James Nichols is a new guy who really knows what he's doing.

"Playing a note means knowing how to work it, and there's a lot of different ways to get inside that note. You want to try to convey some emotion through your playing, particularly when you're bending strings. Try playing around with different speeds of string bending. There are times when it's cool to go fast, but you don't want to sound like you've had 650 cups of coffee — not all the time, at least. Slow down and explore all the little shades of the bend. Think of your vibrato like you're singing. That's a great frame of mind to put yourself in. Instead of using your throat, you're putting your finger on a string, but the sound is similar."

### 4 SCALES: THEY'RE NOT FOR EVERYBODY

"I never minded working and training. When

**"I made a conscious decision not to do the things these other guys were known for," Zakk says. See tip two.**

I played little league and high-school football, I enjoyed the practice and the workouts. Same thing applied to guitar, even from an early age: I loved practicing my scales. Even now, I have a great time sitting down and running through scales. I'll put on some Pat Martino or Joe Pass or maybe some Mahavishnu, and I'll do my scales. But hey, that's just me. I always saw the benefit of working hard at something and keeping at it till I got it right.

"That doesn't work for everybody, and I'm not going to tell them, 'You must learn scales!' I mean, do you think Kurt Cobain sat around practicing scales? Do you think he was knocking himself out trying to play 'Eruption'?

"I really don't think people are missing out on anything if they don't know scales. If that kind of thing doesn't move them, they don't have to go there. For me, I think it adds to what I do. I like being able to move around and throw different note patterns in solos. My advice to anybody about scales is, if you think you're going to get something out of it, go for it. Start out slow and work on it till you can play faster. You'll see the results."

### 5 DON'T BE AFRAID TO WRITE

"I don't put much thought into songwriting. If I allowed it to be some daunting task, I'd probably never write another song. I don't have a process for writing. I'll just play until something hits me, like a riff or a cool chord pattern.

"Sometimes I'll land on something right off the bat, and it's like, Okay, that one's no problem. Other times you get something that doesn't want to be a song today, so you come back to it. There's lots of bits that sit around for years waiting for their turn.

"Again, don't overthink it. And if you come up with something that's simple and sounds good, don't tell yourself you gotta make it more complicated. Look at songs like 'Heart of Gold' by Neil Young or Tom Petty's 'Free Fallin' — they're just a few chords, but they're awesome. Anything more in one of those songs would have been all wrong.

"Songwriting is a craft like anything else; the more you do it, the better you get at it. And I think the more you do it, the more likely you are to get inspired. Just try to enjoy the process along the way." ■



**"If something moves you, that's what you should be doing," Zakk offers. See tip one.**





## MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

The Moody Blues scored a dozen top 10 hits in their five-decade prog-rock reign. **Justin Hayward** says these are his favorites.

BY GARY GRAFF

**“SONGS KIND OF** jump out of a guitar,” Justin Hayward notes via Zoom from his home in the south of France, where he splits time with his native England. He should know. Shortly after he discovered his beloved Gibson ES-335—particularly the 1963 model he plays to this day—the Moody Blues guitarist from days of future passed had a magic guitar to begin writing songs on. It was a 12-string gifted to him by skiffle great Lonnie Donegan when he signed the then 17-year-old Hayward to a publishing deal (unfortunately lopsided, as so many were at the time). “It was the first nice guitar

I’d had,” Hayward recalls. “A guitar is so rhythmic, so harmonic. It contains so many resonances within it. It’s the perfect instrument to play to and write with. You don’t need anything else if you don’t want.”

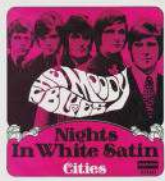
Hayward, who bought the 12-string back after Donegan reclaimed it, did have plenty more to work with, however. With the Moodys he created a body of songs that was responsible for worldwide sales of more than 70 million albums and a dozen Top 40 hits in the U.S. There was also the short-term Blue Jays project with Moodys bassist John Lodge—with whom Hayward had

joined the band in 1966—and, to date, seven solo albums. He has the reputation of a songwriting guitarist, but when the spirit takes hold he can cut loose as well. Evidence his solos on tracks such as “Ride My See-Saw,” “I’m Just a Singer (In a Rock and Roll Band)” and “The Voice.”

“That was always a bit of a dilemma to me,” Hayward says of those solos. “I was the only guitar player in the group, and doing the solos was just a joy. The only trouble was when I had to play those songs live: The bottom dropped out, ‘cause I would stop playing the rhythm. That’s the dilemma for every guy who’s the only guitar player in a band. But I always loved to play a solo when the opportunity presented itself.”

These days Hayward does have another guitarist in his band—Mike Dawes, a fellow Brit who in 2016 became the first acoustic guitarist signed to an endorsement deal with DiMarzio and will be alongside as Hayward continues his Blue World Tour this fall in the U.K. The two have a large repertoire at their disposal, of course, but from that Hayward considers these the five songs that define a career that’s nearing the end of its sixth decade.

**“NIGHTS IN WHITE SATIN”**  
**DAYS OF FUTURE**  
**PASSED (1967)**



“I wrote this song the summer before *Days of Future Passed*. It’s the only song from *Days* that was written before the recording sessions took place.

I came home from one big night and sat on the side of my bed very early in the morning. I knew the other guys would expect me to have something to play the next day, because there was a session booked. They were always of the mind: ‘Oh, there’s a session booked. Justin will have something.’

“So with ‘Nights,’

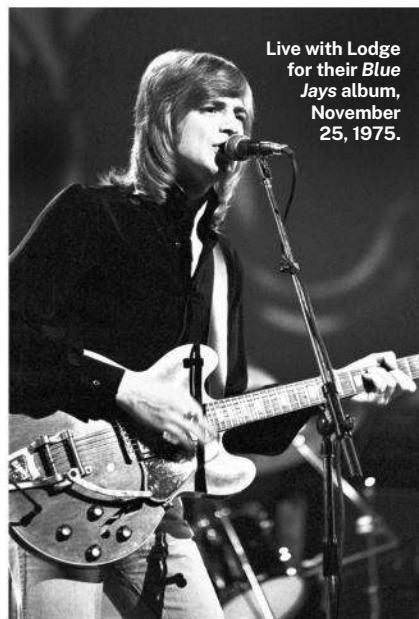
I sat on the side of the bed and just wrote the two verses. I was at the end of one big love affair and the beginning of another. These are the things that boys, when they’re in the middle of love affairs, they think about. Every word in that song makes perfect sense to me, but trying to explain it to someone is difficult. [laughs] I mean, I lived every one of the lines in that song.

“I played it to everyone in the rehearsal room, and people were mostly indifferent.

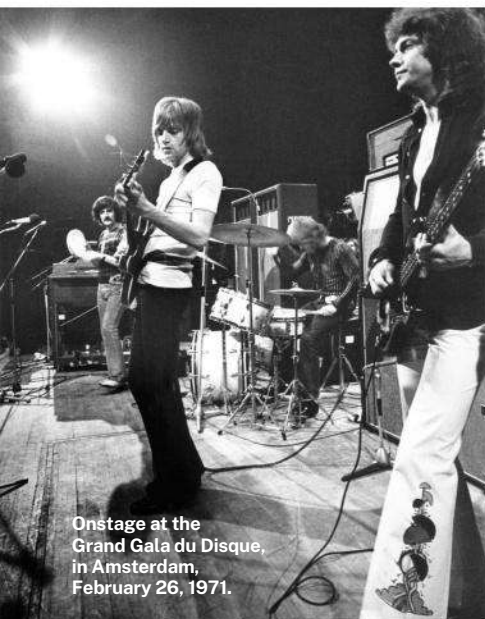
**“‘NIGHTS IN WHITE SATIN’ WAS AT THE END OF ONE BIG LOVE AFFAIR AND THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER”**

to make sense. It was a little bit of relief, you know? I was sure the other guys were thinking, We’ll get rid of this guy as soon as we can and move on, because if you’ve got nothing to offer, it doesn’t make any difference if you’re in or out. It’s always an interesting dynamic in a young group.”

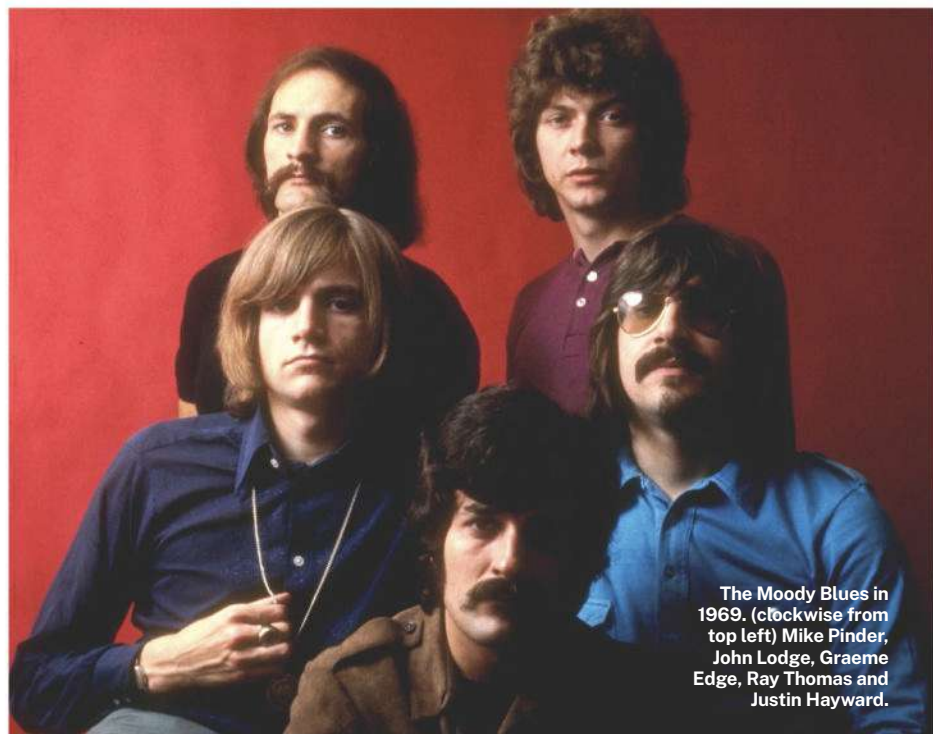
But then Mike [Pinder] said, ‘Play it again.’ He’d just gotten his Mellotron and he went [sings Pinder’s flute-sample riff]. Suddenly everyone was interested and the song just seemed



Live with Lodge for their *Blue Jays* album, November 25, 1975.



Onstage at the Grand Gala du Disque, in Amsterdam, February 26, 1971.



The Moody Blues in 1969. (clockwise from top left) Mike Pinder, John Lodge, Graeme Edge, Ray Thomas and Justin Hayward.

**“TUESDAY AFTERNOON”**  
**DAYS OF FUTURE**  
**PASSED (1967)**



“There was a lovely man at Decca called Hugh Mendl who really believed in the band. He was the reason, I suppose, why we were asked by Decca

to do this demonstration record, a stereo record, with a theme. Between us, we decided it should be this story about the day in the life of one guy, and people started putting their hands up — ‘Right, I’ve got the afternoon. You’re good with that?’ And Hugh Mendl just absolutely loved it. He was an elderly gentleman among the guys, smoking a pipe. Such a sweet man.

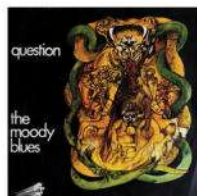
“So once I got the afternoon, I went down to my parents’ house in Wiltshire, west England. I remember going into a field there with a guitar and writing ‘Tuesday.’ I was a bit hung up on tempo and changing keys, which ‘Tuesday’ does. It was the simplest thing to record, just a pure, good vibe from the writing through to playing it to the other guys — no stress, good vibe, all having a good time, thank you. Just three of us did the backing track, and I played the piano as an overdub and Mike did the Mellotron part, with that funny little trumpet on it that’s just so evocative.

“A friend of mine who’s a shock jock phoned me up one morning, live on air. He said, ‘What is this “gently swaying through the fairyland of love”?’ which is a line from



‘Tuesday Afternoon.’ I was completely baffled, like, ‘What?!’ It was like being back in school with somebody throwing a piece of chalk at me, expecting me to explain something.” [laughs]

**“QUESTION”**  
A QUESTION OF  
BALANCE (1970)



“That was another one of those ‘Justin will have something.’ I was living in a flat on the main road in Barnes, and I knew I was expected to have

something the next day, which was a Saturday. So on Friday night I had two songs in this weird, big open tuning — maybe not so weird, but I wanted to write two different songs, but in completely different tempos. At the last minute I thought, I haven’t got one complete song, so I just put them together, and when I played it to everyone, nobody noticed. All the other guys just accepted it.

“It was written at a time when we were touring America, and a lot of young people of our generation were living in fear of being called up into a terrible conflict [the

**“I REMEMBER GOING INTO A FIELD THERE WITH A GUITAR AND WRITING ‘TUESDAY AFTERNOON”**

Vietnam War], so I think we were speaking for them in a way.

“When I wrote it, I knew what the bass line was going to be and what it needed from the drums, and fortunately I had Graeme [Edge], who could do that on the high hat. He was well up for doing that beat. And it was great — we didn’t do many takes. There’s no

real double tracking on ‘Question.’ It was one of those things where we got back to basics. The *Question of Balance* album had that philosophy, to get back to basics and a simple way of recording.”

**“GEMINI DREAM”**  
LONG DISTANCE  
VOYAGER (1981)



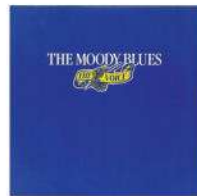
“‘Gemini’ was a jam session, as some songs often are. It was just myself, Graeme and John [Lodge], jamming. We just started this groove,

this kind of four-on-the-floor beat, and then I came up with the guitar riff out of that. Then John and I wrote some lyrics to it. I didn’t think it was anything important at the time, but politically, in the group and everything, it was kind of the right thing to do.

“*Long Distance Voyager* was the first real album without Mike and our producer Tony Clarke. We had a very different crew — a

different producer, different engineer — the whole thing. And a different keyboard player; Patrick Moraz’s contribution was going to be really big for the next few years. So ‘Gemini’ was the perfect thing to throw in there and start this new phase.”

**“THE VOICE”**  
LONG DISTANCE  
VOYAGER (1981)



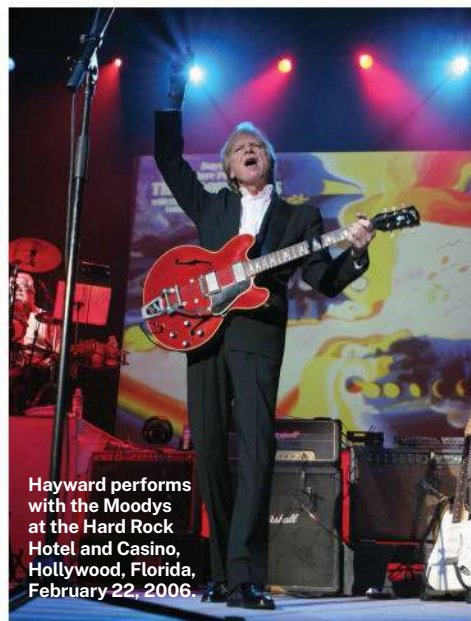
“It’s a guitar song — a rhythm guitar song. It was one of the first things I ever did with a click track, at home. Fortunately, Graeme was never one of those

drummers who was like, ‘I don’t like click tracks or drum machines. I want to set the tempo!’ No, Graeme was great, fantastic, really took the pressure off me and said, ‘Sure, I’ll play on top of the click track.’ I knew it was a tempo that suited us, that suited the way I play guitar and the way Graeme and John played. It was like ‘The Story in Your Eyes.’ It was kind of safe.

“I remember exactly how [the solo] happened. It was my red ‘63 ES-335, which of course I’ve still got, and is the greatest guitar in the world as far as I’m concerned. It’s kind of sweet and clanky at the same time, which 335s are. You stand in front of a Vox AC30 with the treble boosted in the Normal channel, full-up, and ‘The Voice’ is what it sounds like. That’s what comes out. ‘The Voice’ is another song that means a lot to me, every word. But don’t ask me to explain it, please. It just means a lot.”



Hayward and Lodge, January 1975.



Hayward performs with the Moody Blues at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Hollywood, Florida, February 22, 2006.

RALPH NOTARO/GETTY IMAGES (2006); MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES (WITH LODGE)

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## Medium Cool

Striking the middle ground between its Thinline brethren, Gibson's **ES-345TD** remains a versatile, if underrated, gem.

**IN THE LATE** 1950s, Gibson was in the last throes of trying to make its flagship Les Paul solidbody fly in a skeptical market. Adding a luscious sunburst finish in 1958 to the humbucking pickups that arrived in '57 hadn't quite done it, even if those same ingredients would in future decades make it one of the most desirable vintage guitars of all time.

But the company must have felt confident about the semihollow archtop it introduced in '58. The ES-335 wasn't allowed to linger on its own for long before it was joined by not one but two more-deluxe variations on the theme: the top-of-the-line ES-355, introduced later in 1958, and the ES-345, introduced in 1959, which sat right between the "3" and the "5" in features and adornments.

Initially called the ES-345T (for "Thinline") and later the ES-345TD for "Thinline, Dual pickup," it had the same basic construction as the ES-335 and ES-355, made with a semihollow body built from laminated maple top, back and sides, and a solid-maple block down the center. To this was glued a mahogany neck with a rosewood fingerboard that was less fancy than the ES-355's ebony with blocks, but its split-parallelogram inlays were still dressier than the ES-335's rosewood with dot markers, and, later, small blocks. Further elegance was found in the ES-345's four-ply top binding and gold-plated hardware, while everything

**ES-345S, ALONG WITH THEIR SIBLINGS, ARE KNOWN TO BE AMONG SOME OF THE MOST VERSATILE ELECTRICS EVER MADE**

else was virtually identical to the appointments of its less-expensive sibling. The main exception was the deluxe wiring loom with six-position Varitone switch and stereo output, features that it shared with

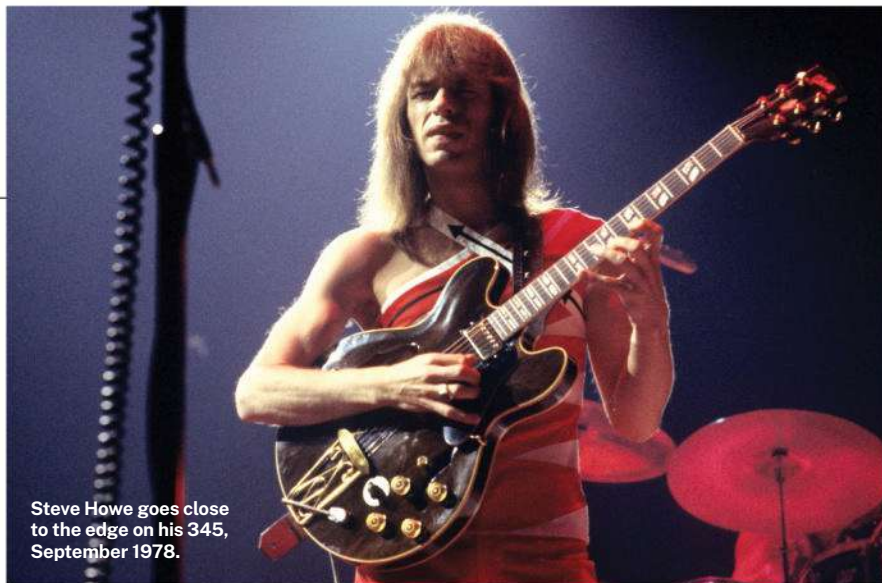
the ES-355. This configuration sent each pickup to different legs of the included "Y" cord for routing to individual amps or a single stereo combo, like Gibson's own GA-79T.

For many players, the ES-345 hit the sweet spot between

form and function, offering a little more glam than the ES-335 with the same easy playability and tonal versatility. Notable

among those who have taken the middle ground are B.B. King, Elvin Bishop, Freddie King, George Harrison, Bob Weir, Steve Howe, Keith Richards, Joe Bonamassa, Jorma Kaukonen and several others. Often noted, too, is the fictional character Marty McFly from the movie *Back to the Future*, although the scene in which he duckwalks across the prom stage wielding a cherry ES-345 was set in 1955, four years before the model came along.

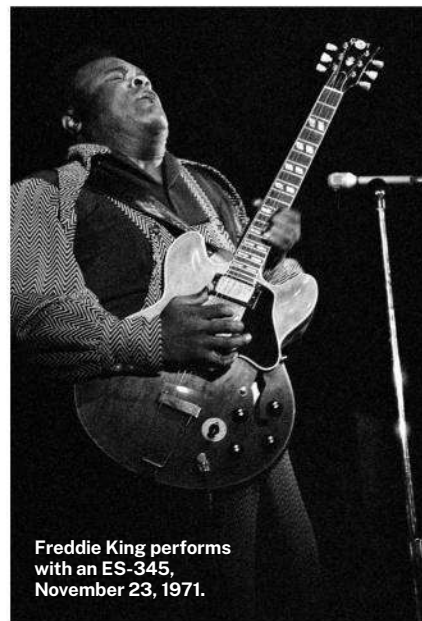
Despite its elevated features, however, the ES-345 has taken a back seat to the ES-335 in the collectability stakes, as has the ES-355, simply because their feature sets were just too ambitious. The standard-edition ES-345's stereo output is a feature that many guitarists simply don't care for, and many could do without the Varitone switch as well. The "stereo" features touted



Steve Howe goes close to the edge on his 345, September 1978.



Bob Weir plays an ES-345 with the Grateful Dead in 1967.



Freddie King performs with an ES-345, November 23, 1971.

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS (HOWE); JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS (KING); LENTI SINCLAIR/GETTY IMAGES (WEIR)



Despite its versatility, the ES-345's Varitone switch (inset) won over few players and is often removed when owners convert their models from stereo to mono.

by some guitar and amp makers in the late '50s and early '60s never took off with players. While it's interesting to try out a stereo ES-345 today, many players through the years have converted their examples to mono to simplify their use. For one thing, the mono mod makes them easier to play with a standard cord and just a single traditional mono guitar amp. For another, the further simple modification of flipping the magnet in the neck pickup 180 degrees — reversing an alteration at the factory that created an out-of-phase middle position for a more dramatic stereo sound — restores an ES-345 to the in-phase sound when both pickups are engaged in mono, something the majority of guitar players prefer.

The Varitone switch itself accesses five different tone settings produced by

### ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Thinline symmetrical double-cutaway body of laminated maple, with a solid maple center block
- Four-ply body top binding, gold-plated hardware
- Glued-in mahogany neck
- Rosewood 24.75" scale fingerboard with split-parallelogram inlays
- Two humbucking pickups
- Varitone switch and stereo output jack

sending the signal through an array of capacitors and a large choke, plus bypass. Many players feel that even the bypass setting sucks some tone from the signal, and most yank out this feature while



BY DAVE HUNTER

undertaking a mono conversion (which itself is often easiest done by installing an entirely new control harness). Extracting not only the Varitone switch but also the bulky, heavy choke that enables its function removes around a full pound of weight from the guitar, which many ES-345 players find beneficial as well.

The majority of ES-345s produced in its first two years of existence carried Bigsby vibrato tailpieces, with other "hard-tail" versions given stopbar tailpieces. Around 1961, Gibson introduced its new "sideways" vibrola to the ES-345 and ES-355, as well as the new SG-bodied Les Paul Standard and Custom. These oddly configured devices produced a dip in pitch when the handle was pulled sideways. The function never became popular with players, although with their elaborate "tailfin" covers they arguably look pretty cool on the guitars that carry them. Gibson got the message, and ES-345s of the next few years wore either a Bigsby or a Gibson vibrato (a.k.a Maestro vibrola, in some literature). In the hardtail variant, from around 1965, the stopbar was replaced with a trapeze tailpiece like that used on fully hollow archtop electrics.

In 1962, Gibson began phasing out the hallowed PAF humbuckers it had used in the late '50s and early '60s and equipped these guitars with the Patent Number pickups that followed, so-called because the pickup design had finally earned its patent. Gibson changed the decal accordingly, although the number printed on it was inexplicably that for the patent awarded to one of the company's bridge designs. The Patent Number pickups used from late '62 well into '65 or so weren't demonstrably different than the last iteration of PAFs, however, and still delivered classic vintage Gibson humbucker tone in a good semihollow guitar. Otherwise, ES-345s, along with their siblings, are known to be among some of the most versatile electrics ever made, excelling at blues, rock and roll, jazz, country, prog and even heavy rock. The bonus of elegantly elevated looks doesn't hurt much either. 🎸



BY JIM CAMPILONGO



# Funk Noir

With *The Black Album*, Prince made his greatest — and most infamous — musical statement.

**I DON'T KNOW** why, but for the past couple of years I didn't listen to Prince. Then one day *The Black Album* found its way onto my turntable and it was like hearing an old friend, or maybe a great new undiscovered artist. I had forgotten how cutting edge, dangerous and deep his music was. It's all there on *The Black Album*.

I was once a Prince superfan, but my obsessiveness began to wane around the release of 1984's *Purple Rain*. I preferred the underground funkiness of his early works, although the vibe of 1982's *1999* and, my personal favorite, 1986's *Parade* kept him as one of my inspirations. And yet, oddly, it's *The Black Album* that has won out. It's the Prince album I've listened to most, even if Prince himself disowned it. It's greasy, funky, raw as hell, and feels like a great live show, Prince style.

As the story goes, Prince made

*The Black Album* as a response to critics who claimed he'd gone too pop, its ever-changing groove designed to show he was re-embracing his Black roots. But by the time the album was packaged and on loading docks for its

release on December 8, 1987, Prince killed it, having decided the record was "evil" and represented "anger" and "licentiousness" he needed to flush from his system. In its place he rush-released *Lovesexy*. Warner Bros. finally issued *The Black Album* as a limited edition on November 22, 1994 before pulling it on January 27, 1995. It has since been made available on Tidal.

## IT HAS EVERYTHING I WANT FROM A PRINCE RECORD: NASTY LYRICS, FUNKY GROOVES, GREAT RHYTHM GUITAR AND DISTORTED SHREDDING

It's a shame the album has such a notorious history, because it has everything I want from a Prince record: nasty lyrics, funky grooves, great rhythm guitar, some good distorted shredding, interesting keyboard sounds galore, and vocals reminiscent of Sly Stone, James Brown and more. It does this all while remaining unique, intimate and distinctly Prince.

Side one opens with "Le Grind," and from the first snare hit, we know who this is. The cut has a James Brown vibe, and the occasional quarter-note bass line has jazz underpinnings that stretch the time elastically,

in a delightful way. "Cindy C." finds Prince professing his desire for supermodel Cindy Crawford in a falsetto proclamation riddled with nasty lyrics of sexual desire. "Dead On It" is a grooving commentary about rap that left me trying to find a musical reference, but there is no one who sounds like Prince. Side one closes with the otherworldly "When 2 R in Love," a ballad of vulnerable

romantic love that's a counterweight to his nasty erotic stuff.

Side two opens with the great "Bob George," with Prince's vocals comically pitch-shifted downward as he plays the role of a jealous, gun-toting husband who disses the singer as "that skinny motherfucker with the high voice." It's a great track that has brought me hours of pleasure. "Superfunkycalifragisexy" delivers a hard-hitting infectious funk rhythm guitar tutelage, while "2 Nigs United 4 West Compton" continues side two's relentless funk attack. "Rockhard in a Funky Place" brings the album to a close with a slamming groove, bop horn lines and a snare sound I can never get enough of.

Prince was an artist who showed me the way, through his production, diverse influences, uncompromising vision and work ethic. Some say he was a weirdo, but weirdos are usually my favorite people. I don't think there are enough of them around. One thing is for certain: The music biz could use another one like Prince. 📀

Look for Jim Campilongo 4TET's brand-new album, *She Loved the Coney Island Freak Show*, out now.





BY TERRY CARLETON

## Back in the U.S.S.R.

This **Odessa Rhythm Solo** is a remnant from when the Soviets made guitars, not war.

**YOU CAN'T OWN** so much as a smartphone today and not know about Russia's relentless, unprovoked war against Ukraine. But back in the early 1970s, the U.S.S.R. was intact and relatively peaceful, and the Soviets had begun to produce fairly decent guitars. Made in Ukraine's Odessa Factory of Musical Instruments, this Rhythm Solo is one of the standout guitars from that period — which is simply to say it's one of the better-playing models from that corner of the guitar world, with a thinner-than-usual neck, three pickups and a Fender-esque shape... although that's as far as the similarities go.

### WEIRDO FACTOR

Compared to the bulbous and ornately decorated Russian guitars from this era, this guitar is rather sleek, with a thin, angular body and an art deco-inspired pickguard. There's not too much weirdness going on, but the knobs are sparkly and the four organ-style pickup switches glow in the dark!

### PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

I've owned other Eastern Bloc guitars from this era, and they all have two things in common: They look bizarre (which is great) and have thick necks and high action that make them challenging to play. The Rhythm Solo's triple-laminated maple-beech-maple neck is deeper and wider than what we westerners are used to, and it certainly needs no truss rod. For a guy like me with smaller-than-average paws, it's a bit like playing a '60s-era Gretsch 12-string acoustic. Fortunately, the action is low, and I gradually adjusted to the neck. The mahogany fingerboard is nearly a quarter of an inch thick and has 21 frets, plus a zero fret, and large position markers.

The pickup switches offer settings that range from a full tone that's good for clean strumming to one that's super skinny and makes a good '60s psychedelic sound when used with distortion. The fourth switch appears to be a bypass or boost. I don't know if my guitar has been rewired, but it exhibits a strange interaction between the pickup switching and the master tone knob, wherein adjusting the tone turns down the volume. Depending on your disposition, that's either a frustration or a feature. The plastic tuners were stiff when I got the guitar, but I loosened them up with a little WD-40. The vibrato bar is rigid but comes back in tune pretty well.

### VALUE

Given their reputation, Soviet-era guitars don't command much money, but that makes them perfect specimens for modification. I paid just \$240 for this one, and with about \$300 and a bit of TLC — sanding down the neck, polishing the frets and revamping the electronics — it can become a lightweight and unique guitar.

### WHY IT RULES

I bought this from the Ukraine-based eBay store [musicmysoul](#), which like many of Ukraine's businesses needs support during Russia's attack on their country. It rules because I got a cool, freaky guitar, and they got some much-needed financial help.

*Thanks to singer/songwriter Julia JD from Ukraine for supplying the guitar's chrome Ukrainian trident and the sunflowers logos by her friend, Ukrainian-American artist Veronika Maynard, as seen on the headstock. Be sure to visit [musicmysoul](#) on eBay to see other Eastern Bloc guitars for sale. 🇺🇸*

*Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at [rtcarleton@gmail.com](mailto:rtcarleton@gmail.com). Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it!*





# CLOSER TO HOME

**I**F YOU WANT to find Diego Garcia these days, head to Marina Del Rey in California and look for the boat studio where he makes his home — and whose name, *Panamerica*, is also the title of the award-winning Spanish-born guitarist's latest album under his performing moniker, Twanguero.

"It's like a small apartment for me," Garcia, 48, explains. "I purchased it because rehearsal rooms are so expensive here in Los Angeles; it's almost like renting an apartment on top of whatever you're renting to live in. So I decided to buy a boat. It's way cheaper."

"I know Bob Dylan used to have a boat here, like two slips away. So if it was good enough for him..."

Although it's no competition for the larger yachts that populate the marina, the *Panamerica* is a kind of all-things proposition for Garcia. "We can have a studio here, we can rehearse the band here," he says. "It's inspiring when you watch the sunset over the Pacific Ocean when you're playing a guitar and smoking a joint or something." Equally inspiring, he adds, "There's a small community of musicians here in Mariana del Rey: some people from Argentina, some people from the Congo... a lot of places. We have friends, we have jams. People here in the marina know us. They like when we're playing. When we're playing some cumbia or something, all the Mexicans that come to work on the boats love that music. So it's good."

Indeed, it takes a village — in his case, a global village — to make Twanguero's music. His output over seven albums has been shaped by his travels, logging time in Buenos Aires,

Rehearsal space, studio, vessel and abode — **Diego Garcia's** boat is the home base for his new album, as well as his musical life as the seafaring Spanish guitarist **Twanguero**.

BY GARY GRAFF

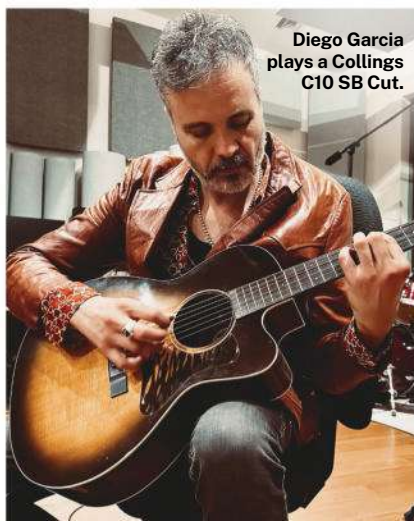
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HÉLÈNE KIEFFER

Mexico City, New York and, for the past eight years, California. That makes all of his music, including *Panamerica*, an aural travelog from Spain to Latin America to the Mississippi Delta and Sun Records in Memphis. The 10-track, largely instrumental album mixes North American electric guitar and rock and roll with Latin American classical guitar-based styles, including bolero, cumbia, Tejano, ranchera and rhumba, as well as Hawaiian, surf and country. It all adds up to a throwback vibe that Garcia calls "new nostalgia," as if the listener is

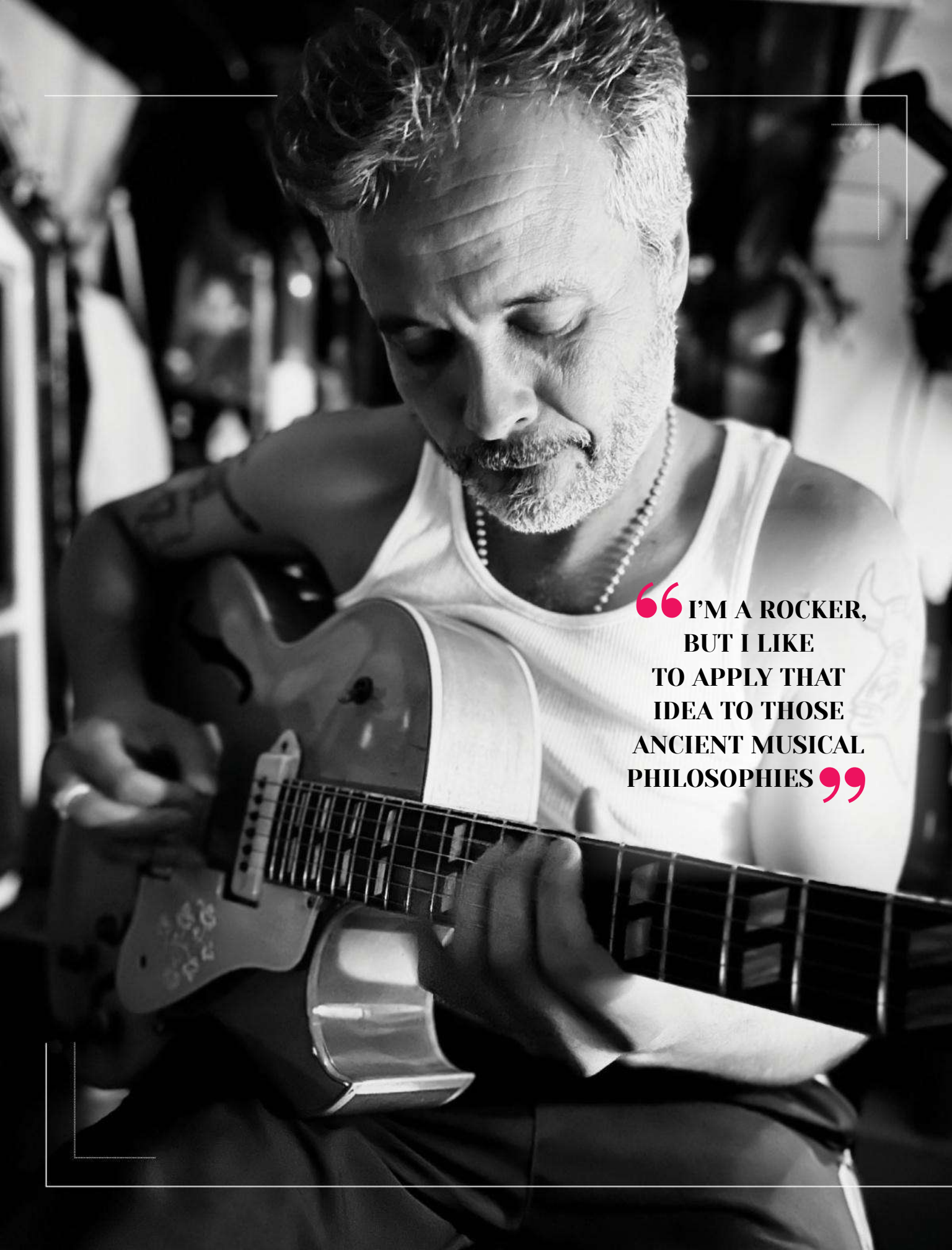
flipping between radio stations in some multi-cultural milieu of decades past.

While his approach is unorthodox, it's never irreverent. Garcia has a serious and genuine love for quite possibly every kind of music. And he loves expressing it in his own voice, mostly with a Gibson ES-295 slung over his shoulder and a cadre of musical kindred free spirits around him. "I don't see myself in any particular style," Garcia explains. "I respect them all. I'm not a purist. Maybe some purists hate me. Like flamenco players: 'What's this guy doing with an electric guitar?!' The purists are maybe upset with me, yeah. But I explore different styles with no fear. I'm a rocker, but I like to apply that idea to those ancient musical philosophies and respect the music. 'Respect for the music' is our guide."

The second oldest of four children, including two sisters and a brother, Garcia was raised in Valencia, with music in his DNA through his paternal grandfather. His own parents "had to work a lot" to support the household, but from about the age of eight Garcia and his brother (now a teacher in France) were able to pursue their musical studies on weekends at a public conservatory, working with a teacher who had been a student of the legendary Andrés Segovia. The heritage, he says, taught him "discipline and a lot of



Diego Garcia plays a Collings C10 SB Cut.

A black and white photograph of a man with short, light-colored hair and a beard, wearing a white tank top and a necklace. He is playing an electric guitar, looking down at the instrument with a focused expression. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a stage or rehearsal space with other people and equipment.

**“ I’M A ROCKER,  
BUT I LIKE  
TO APPLY THAT  
IDEA TO THOSE  
ANCIENT MUSICAL  
PHILOSOPHIES ”**



respect.” For summer vacation the master would give Garcia a handwritten letter wishing him a good summer and reminding him to practice. “And he always added a couple of transcriptions to study: ‘I will ask you in September to play these for me,’” Garcia recalls.

“That was the relationship we had with the instrument. We come from that tradition. We took it very seriously.”

Bolero and rumba were one thing; rock and roll was another — and one that was even more seductive for the aspiring player. “I remember my father had the Shadows on vinyl,” Garcia says. “I saw that Stratocaster Hank Marvin had. I’d say, ‘Wow, I want to play *that!*’ I was in love with Jeff Beck and Chet Atkins and Link Wray — all those sounds. I was more into Eric Clapton when I was 13, 14. I wanted to be Mark Knopfler. This was after ’75, when Franco died. Spain opened up a lot. We heard a lot of British music, and the artists came to perform.”

While the classical teachers generally frowned on electric guitars and rock and roll, Garcia knew it was his future. “First of all, classical guitar you have to play in a chair,” he notes. “I wanted to play standing up — and get girls, probably. That’s why I switched to electric.”

Soon after, his parents bought him his first electric guitar, an all-black Samick Strat knock-off from Japan. While Garcia does own an Olympic White 1964 Stratocaster, he’s particularly attached to the ES-295, with 1956, 1957 and an early ’90s model in his arsenal. “It’s *the* rockabilly guitar,” Garcia notes. “I remember seeing it on an early Elvis Presley album; Scotty Moore had a gold-top that was just beautiful. It’s a jazz guitar, but with P90s it’s more rockabilly.”

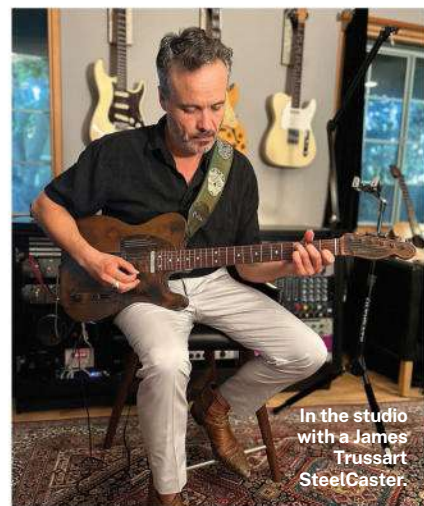
It also fits Garcia’s ‘Twanguero’ nickname, an onomatopoeia of a string’s vibration. “For me, Twanguero is a project,” he explains. “Twanguero is a vision of seeing the world and the music through the guitar, not competing at all but learning from here and there, finding my personal path and sharing it with the world. That would be the life’s goal of any musician’s career.”



Garcia's Olympic White '64 Strat with a pair of vintage Champ amps.



His 1956 Gibson ES-295.



In the studio with a James Trussart SteelCaster.

There have been many paths, geographically and musically, that Garcia has followed over the years. Along the way he won a Latin Grammy Award for producing Rodolfo Mederos & Cuarteto Q-Arte’s 2002 album, *Tango Sacro*. He also spent time in the Costa Rican rainforest composing songs for his last album, *Carreteras Secundarias Vol. 2*, released in 2022. “My career has been shaped by all this traveling,” he says. “Because I search through the guitar. I never have anything planned, but I’m

always influenced by where I am. Jeff Beck was a maestro of the guitar, but I’m an explorer — forever.”

Traveling became more complicated when the pandemic hit in 2020. Isolated on his boat for the better part of a year and a half, Garcia missed playing with others, but he stockpiled ideas. “We tried to do remote recording, emailing audio files, but I wasn’t happy,” he says. “But I had a lot of time and inspiration, so I could design — abstractly speaking — what I wanted and think about the





Garcia playing his 1955 ES-295 on *Panamerica*. "I purchased [the boat] because rehearsal rooms are so expensive," he says.

musicians I would want to play on them." As soon as he was able, Garcia rented a studio in Culver City, close to Marina del Rey, and began bringing his compatriots there to hang out as much as to record.

"I rented it and lived there for a year, so I didn't have to pay for hours and could bring my guys there," he recalls. "It was a celebration of friendship. I love to cook, so we'd have the barbecue going and we'd play and explore."

The collective was crucial to the album's sound as well. "You just pick the right people to look for a sound," Garcia says. "In Los Angeles it's very easy to find good people — like a good percussion player who understands Elvis and the salsa. So it's all about hanging with the right guys, the right people. And then I write for my guys."

But the key, he adds, is creating songs that might be outside their wheelhouse — having former Black Crowes drummer Brian Griffin play a cumbia, for instance, or laying Bob Bernstein's pedal steel into a bolero. Garcia also takes on the traditional "La Bikina" on *Panamerica*, moving it from a six-eight into a straight four-four to create "a more Caribbean, dreamy situation."

## “TWANGUERO IS A VISION OF SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE GUITAR AND FINDING MY PERSONAL PATH”

"I think the audience needs some fantasy too," Garcia expounds. "The composer needs to create a picture that he can pass along in the song. Like my song 'La Bikina' — I have a cheap boat, but there are a lot of big yachts passing through in the summer with women on their decks in bikinis. That's 'La Bikina.' It puts a picture in your mind. That's the fun thing of art, no? Giving yourself the freedom to imagine creative things that can make people happy. That's the cinematic way of playing."

Garcia says he did a different style of playing on *Panamerica*, too. "Now I play with my fingers, the way I was playing Spanish guitar — with nails. I play that way on the electric guitar," he explains. "But, of course, steel strings are different than nylon strings, so I try to adapt the attack. Instead of having a pick, which would be more the American style, I've been working the last two years to get that sound from my hands."

*Panamerica's* release puts Garcia and company back on the road, hoping to build his U.S. footprint up to the level of his strongest markets in Europe and Latin America. And while the album is job one now, Garcia's own wanderlust has him thinking about what — and maybe where — comes next.

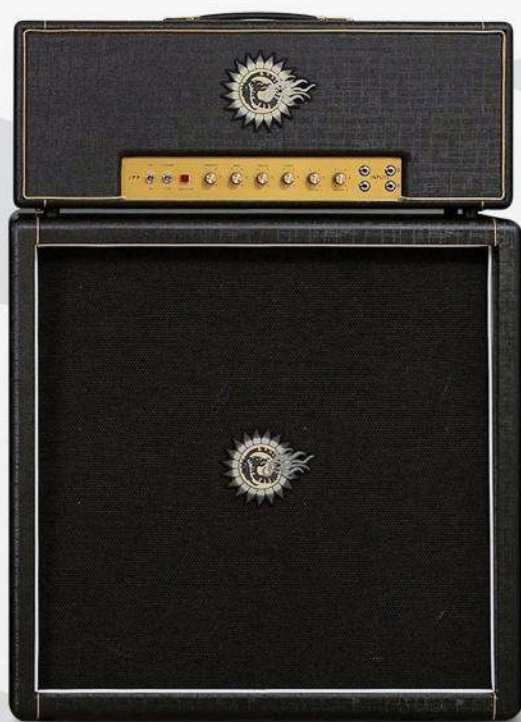
"Moving here and there gives you the freshness of starting again," he says. "Maybe I'll stay longer in Los Angeles, but moving and starting over, making contact, trying to socialize with a community — that's something I've been doing, and it's a gas. You improve your skills in so many areas, not just music. That's what nurtures the spirit, or the soul. The mission is going higher, bettering what you love. That's the point of the thing." ■



“FROM THE MOMENT  
I PLUGGED THE  
DOUBLE-NECK INTO THE  
SUPER DRAGON, IT WAS  
LIKE, ‘HALLELUJAH. WE  
FOUND IT. WE GOT IT”



# DRAGON TALES



In a *Guitar Player* exclusive, **Jimmy Page** sheds light on the amplifiers behind his Led Zeppelin tone and how they live again in his line of Sundragon signature amps.

BY JAMES VOLPE ROTONDI



**“We’re well charged-up!”** Jimmy Page reports over the phone from New York City. Page has been in New York the previous few days meeting minds and making plans with his two chief collaborators in Sundragon, the boutique amp company he founded in 2017 with former Marshall/Vox executive VP and Park Amps chief Mitch Colby, and noted producer and vintage gear collector/curator Perry Margouleff. It was Margouleff who, among other things, famously rescued Page’s long-missing 1960 Gibson Les Paul “Black Beauty” from obscurity back in 2014.

**MARGOULEFF IS, PERHAPS** above all things, a dedicated believer in the idea that music and audio history must be preserved. Sundragon’s mandate since its inception, then, has been to hand-build exacting replicas of Page’s most storied amps. Those include the modified two-channel 1959 Supro Coronado 1690T combo that fuels the fury on Led Zeppelin’s 1968 debut album, and his Number One 1969 Marshall JMP Super Bass 100, Page’s principal amp for recording and live work from 1969, which he’d had heavily modified by amp tech and Unicord/Marshall man Tony Frank in the late ’60s. (Frank is often credited as being the inventor of the master volume control in the 1970s, as well.)

The resulting signed, limited-edition models — the Sundragon 12-inch combo and Super Dragon 100-watt head and 4x12 cabinet, respectively — not only passed what Page calls his own “acid test” for authenticity but also quickly sold out despite their hefty list price of \$12,500 and \$22,500, respectively. Adding to Page’s current enthusiasm is the imminent release of Sundragon’s brand-new Nymph, a more compact, low-wattage take on the Sundragon in a one-watt (switchable to ¼-watt) single eight-inch combo with two 12AX7s, which will be widely available in 2025 [see sidebar on page 42].

The genesis of Sundragon dates back to the December 2007 Led Zeppelin reunion show at O2 Arena in London, in honor of Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun. Page was keen to fire up

his faithful Super Bass and turned to Margouleff and Colby to give it some overdue TLC.

“Around the time of the O2 Arena shows,” Page says, “Perry and Mitch put my original Super Bass on the bench in New York and opened it up to do some

work that needed to be done. So they really knew what that amp was all about.”

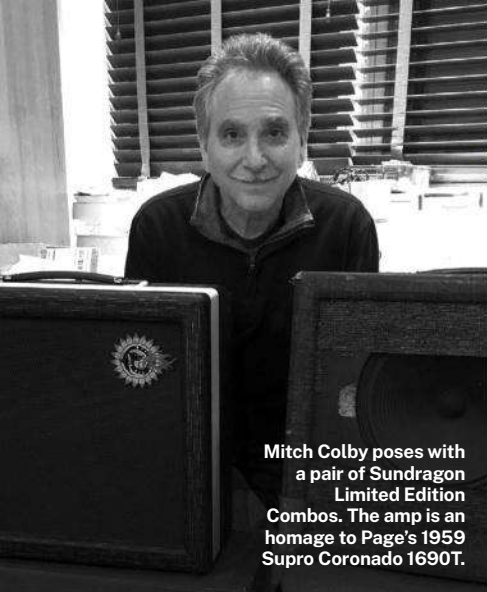
By showtime at the O2, Page would opt to forego the Super Bass. Instead, he’d call on a pair of Marshall 100JH heads, a Petersburg P-100 and JP-100 head,

Orange AD50 and OR50, and an ENGL 4x12 cabinet. But Margouleff and Colby’s under-the-hood adventures with the Super Bass had stimulated an exciting dialogue with Page. The result? “Perry and I put our heads together and we concluded that because my Coronado



Page speaks with Sundragon co-founder, producer and vintage gear collector Perry Margouleff.

COURTESY SUNDRAGON (HERE AND TOP)



Mitch Colby poses with a pair of Sundragon Limited Edition Combos. The amp is an homage to Page's 1959 Supro Coronado 1690T.

“[MY MARSHALL JMP SUPER BASS] WAS JUST THE BEST AMP THAT I’D EVER HAD IN MY COLLECTION. IT DID ALL THOSE LED ZEPPELIN TOURS, AND ALL THE RECORDINGS. IT DID FLIPPIN’ EVERYTHING, Y’KNOW?”

was such a unique amplifier, and had such an absolutely unique provenance to it, it would be a good idea to try to replicate it. That’s how the whole idea of the Sundragon line came to be.”

The company’s first offering, the Sundragon Limited Edition Combo, of which only 50 were made in 2019, paid homage not only to the spirit of Page’s two-channel, tremolo-equipped Coronado but also to its unique

backstory. That includes a fall from an equipment van that led to Page swapping out the original Coronado’s two 10-inch speakers for a single Oxford 12-inch Alnico magnet speaker, re-coned with a British-style eight-ohm cone.

“Before we finalized the Sundragon,” Colby explains, “we analyzed every detail of Jimmy’s original amp. We incorporated the most important circuit details, including NOS [New Old Stock]

parts, such as transformers that were hand-wound by the original manufacturer, plus NOS tubes made by Mullard and GE. And while the speaker manufacturer who made the cone in Jimmy’s Oxford speaker is long out of business, we chose a speaker that really captures the essence of it: the Jensen P12Q with an Alnico magnet.”

The signed, limited-edition Sundragons sold out quickly, so Page, Colby and Margouleff created the more widely available Sundragon Standard, at around a third of the cost (\$3,875), in 2020. As Colby points out, the Standard is still completely hand-built, including its separate preamp and power amp chassis — preamp on top and power section on the bottom — with the original specification power and output transformers. The Sundragon Standard is likewise engineered with point-to-



Page performs with Led Zeppelin at Madison Square Garden, February 7, 1975. His 1969 Marshall JMP Super Bass 100 amp is at far left in his line of Marshall half-stacks.

JEFF HOCHBERG/GETTY IMAGES



## LITTLE DRAGON

**Jimmy Page and Mitch Colby reveal Sundragon's newly hatched Nymph mini amp.**

**“IMMEDIATELY AFTER I** played ‘Rumble’ at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame show last November,” Jimmy Page recounts to *Guitar Player*, “I went backstage, and you’ve got to understand the headspace I was in. I had just played, and I’d also taken in all the other performances, so all my senses were tuned intensely to the guitar at that moment. And Mitch [Colby] comes into the dressing room with this tiny little amp, and he says, ‘So, this is the Nymph!’ I thought, Hmm, the Nymph. Right!”

Colby and Perry Margouleff had hatched the idea for the Nymph several months earlier, largely as a response to players who were looking for the tone and feel of Page’s Supro Coronado-inspired Sundragon, but in a lower-wattage package — something they could coax that classic Zep I sound out of, but at more modest volumes than the original Sundragon, which Colby rates at roughly “eight watts clean, and maybe 20-watts flat-out.” Page was intrigued by the idea, and gave them his blessing to explore it. After first experimenting with a circuit at half the wattage, the pair decided to shoot for an elusive goal: a one-watt amp that still had the weighty impact, character and tonal variety of Page’s original modified Coronado.

“There have been a number of one-watt amps out there,” Colby says, “but most of them



**“I JUST THREW MY HANDS UP. I’VE GOT TO TELL YOU, THAT AMPLIFIER IS ABSOLUTELY EXTRAORDINARY”**  
— JIMMY PAGE

use a single dual-triode preamp tube as a power tube, generally a 12AU7 or a 12BH7. Because they’re preamp tubes, they’re not really functioning properly as power tubes in the first place, and they don’t give you that ‘big amp’ sound, especially that bottom-end thump.”

After a good amount of experimentation, Colby and Margouleff settled on what Colby capgily describes only as “a small pentode tube, not common, but which we’ll never run out of. And we use two of them in a ‘push-pull’ circuit, just like a big amp, which is why it sounds like one.”

Colby had another trick up his sleeve too. “In most small cathode-biased amps, you’ll have a cathode resistor and a capacitor that set the bias for both output tubes,” he explains. “What I did here is give each

tube its own resistor and capacitor, so each tube biases itself individually. So even if the tubes are not matched, it’s not a problem. Just put ‘em in, plug and play. And yes, it really enhances the sound considerably.”

Using a custom-designed 15-watt, eight-inch speaker by Warehouse, Colby and Margouleff discovered that the speaker’s high efficiency — perhaps owing in part to its large Alnico magnet — also gave them the latitude to make the Nymph’s output switchable from one-watt down to approximately a mere one-quarter watt.

Still, at first blush, backstage at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame minutes after blazing through a 100-watt Super Dragon, Page was understandably skeptical.

The Nymph prototype shown here is a tantalizing sneak peek at Sundragon’s soon-to-arrive mini amp.

“I mean, the idea of it sounded good,” he says with a laugh. “A small amp that you can switch from one-watt to a quarter watt, but is this tiny thing going to be able to handle the [Gibson EDS-1275 SG] Double-Neck? I don’t want to blow it up!” After Colby assured him it was safe to plug in the double-neck, Page first played through the six-string lower bout and circuit of the guitar, switching between its two double-coil pickups, and tweaking the volume and tone pots to test the Nymph’s response to his preferred method of on-the-guitar tone-shaping.

“I thought, Well, this is pretty extraordinary,” Page recalls, “but hang on: Will it really be able to handle the higher output of the 12-string side? And it was incredible how it dealt with it. I said, ‘Eureka for all of us here, because you’ve found that elusive thing: a low-watt amp which reacts perfectly to a guitar and delivers all the tonal qualities you want.’”

There was one more little surprise for Page. “I said to the guys, ‘Hold on a minute, is this the one-watt setting?’” he recounts. “And Mitch said, ‘No, Jimmy, that’s actually the quarter-watt mode!’

“I mean, I just threw my hands up. I’ve got to tell you, that amplifier is absolutely extraordinary.” —JVR

The Sundragon Nymph is expected to be available in late 2024/early 2025 at [SundragonAmps.com](http://SundragonAmps.com). For more on veteran amp designer Mitch Colby, visit [ColbyAmplification.com](http://ColbyAmplification.com). To learn more about Perry Margouleff, and his acclaimed analog-based Pie Studios, visit [PerryMargouleff.com](http://PerryMargouleff.com)

“ALL THROUGH MY HISTORY OF PLAYING, MY PRIORITY HAS BEEN, ‘IS THAT AMPLIFIER GOING TO SOUND REALLY GOOD DRIVEN BY THIS PARTICULAR GUITAR?’

point hand-wiring on '50s-style “terminal strips,” with each component soldered from one terminal to the other.

If the Sundragon presented Page and his team with a serious technical challenge, creating the Super Dragon only upped the ante, and by all accounts it was a lengthy process, both in terms of tracking down viable examples of the original parts as well as tweaking the circuit design until it met all the demanding criteria of a truly one-of-a-kind, historic amplifier. Page describes his original Super Bass as, “a really hot-wired Marshall, the main one that I would play all the way through my career. It was just the best amp that I’d

ever had in my collection. And it was so roadworthy. It did all those Led Zeppelin tours, and all the recordings. It did flippin’ everything, y’know?”

Since the '80s heyday of Soldano and Marshall Silver Jubilees, many of us likely think of a “hot-wired” Marshall as one that boasts more gain and onboard saturation — and perhaps even features diode clipping. What Page means by the

term — or at least what Tony Frank’s mods would produce for him — is an appreciably cleaner amp than either a classic Super Bass or a Super Lead. It’s worth noting that in 1970, it was less common to mic guitar amps onstage, and monitor systems were still in their infancy as late as 1969. Page’s impetus then with the changes he wanted made to his Super Bass — including swapping out the stock EL34 power tubes for much cleaner 6550s — was to increase volume, clarity and dynamic range, choices that speak as much to his distinctive playing style as they do to the audio demands of the time.

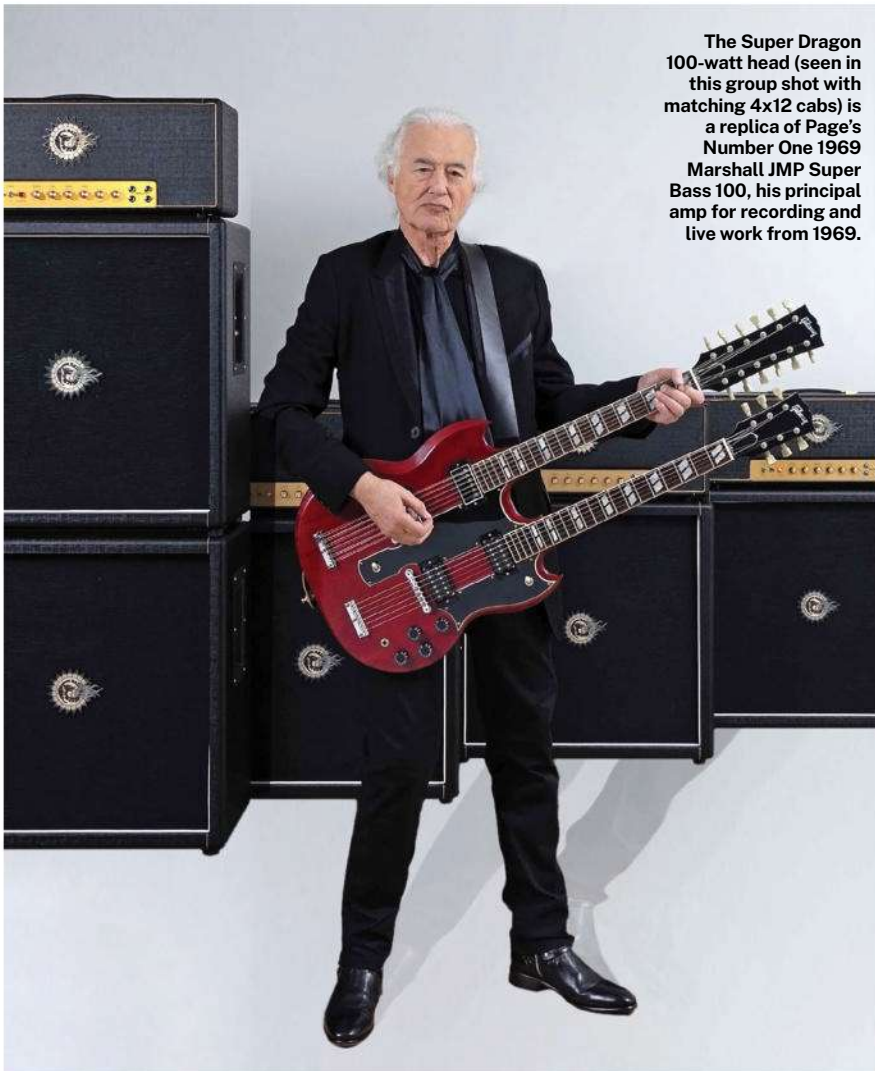
Throw on your vinyl copy of Zeppelin’s 1977 dusky jewel *Presence* (you do own a vinyl copy of *Presence*, don’t you?). Listen to the glistening phased minor-chord slashes of “Achilles Last Stand,” the popping Leo Nocentelli-style funk stabs of the majestic “Royal Orleans” or the syncopated rockabilly double-stops of “Hots on for Nowhere.” *Presence* is a master class in the art of how to make “clean” sound “heavy.”

Page describes *Presence* as “the best example of the sound of my Marshall Super Bass, because it was an album we made in about three weeks, in Munich, Germany. So I wanted to work very efficiently, and that entire album is all Super Bass, along with mostly my Number One 1959 Les Paul.” [Page also reportedly used his rosewood-neck 1964 Stratocaster on *Presence*’s “For Your Life,” and a 1959 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster to cop some Carl Perkins-approved rockabilly tones on the sassy “Candy Store Rock.”]

Is it also possible that part of the wisdom behind Page’s relatively clean but heavy, impactful sound was to stand up to the sheer might of John Bonham’s bigger-than-life drum sounds? Page is circumspect about this.

“Well, it definitely wasn’t accidental, any of this stuff,” he avers. “But it became more like an ESP between the members of the band, I’d say. For my part, I would hope to encourage John and showcase him by the kind of phrasing that I was doing in my riffs — to deliberately throw in those ‘big note’ accents.

**The Super Dragon 100-watt head (seen in this group shot with matching 4x12 cabs) is a replica of Page’s Number One 1969 Marshall JMP Super Bass 100, his principal amp for recording and live work from 1969.**



COURTESY OF SUNDRAGON



“‘STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN’  
... THAT’S WHERE THE  
DOUBLE-NECK CAME IN”

## THE BEAST IS BACK

**Jimmy Page’s Double-Neck breathes fire again, thanks to 3-D scanning.**

**IT WAS FALL** 1970, and having finished much of the work on Led Zeppelin’s now-iconic *Led Zeppelin IV*, Jimmy Page turned his attention to a slew of upcoming tour dates beginning March 5, 1971. Though the album would not be released until November ’71, the band planned to debut future classics like “Black Dog,” “Rock and Roll,” “Going to California,” and the evocative piece that was to become their signature song: “Stairway to Heaven.” There was just one catch.

“I was so involved in creating the guitar parts for ‘Stairway to Heaven,’ on the acoustic guitar and two [tracks of] electric 12-string” Page recalls in *Jimmy Page: The Anthology*, “that I hadn’t been thinking about how I was going to perform it all live. That’s where the Double-Neck came in.”

Gibson had been making a model designated as the EDS-1275 SG Double-Neck since 1963 (Elvis Presley even totes one in his 1966 film *Sprout*), and while the guitar went out of regular production in 1968 (only to be recontinued in 1974), Page was able to custom-order one, which he received in early 1971, just in time for the tour.

It’s this very same 1969 EDS-1275 that provided the model for last year’s limited-edition run of the Gibson Jimmy Page 1969 EDS-1275 Double-Neck Collector’s Edition. Custom-aged to the original’s exact wear detail by Gibson’s in-house Murphy Lab, only 50

Collector’s Editions were made, each hand-signed and actually played by Page himself, all for a tidy \$49,000. Thankfully, Gibson is putting the model into regular production — minus the Murphy Lab aging — at a manageable price point this December.

Neither the Collector’s Edition nor the standard Jimmy Page EDS model are mere approximations of Page’s instrument. Gibson used 3-D scanning technology, in tandem with CAD diagrams and CNC machining equipment, to replicate every component of the guitar to the most minute detail. That includes Page’s original T-Top pickups, where readings for ohm resistance, gauss (the magnetic charge in a pickup), number of winds and more were all duly registered.

“All of the parts will match exactly what was used in 1968/’69,” explains Mat Koehler, Gibson’s vice president of product, “down to the precise material of the chrome-plated bridges, the exact saddle contour and shape, the butyrate [speed] knobs and even how the reflectors are mounted within those knobs. We now have what’s known as a five-axis CNC machining tool, which allows us to do incredibly intricate carvings, and this means a lot more attention to detail.”

Calling Page’s original EDS “the lightest solid-body double-neck I’ve ever played,” Koehler says his other first observation of the guitar when he met with Page at his home near London last year to conduct the scans was its overall condition. “Especially for a guitar that saw as much touring as Jimmy’s did, his EDS is in excellent shape,” Koehler says. “It was obvious that he’s very proud of it, and that he’s been a really great caretaker.” —JVR



“FOR ME, WHAT ONE IS  
LOOKING FOR IF YOU’RE  
GOING STRAIGHT INTO  
AN AMPLIFIER WITH VERY  
LITTLE EFFECTS IS  
SIMPLY THE SOUND OF  
THE GUITAR.”

“Look, the moment that I heard John Bonham for the first time, when he was playing with [American singer] Tim Rose, I could tell that he was unlike any other drummer I’d heard before. His whole approach to the drums, and the swing that he had to his playing — you either had that or you didn’t. Maybe one in 10,000 drummers have that swing, let alone that attack on the bass drum to be able to do those rolling bass drum triplets. He could go on forever and ever doing that, with no break. So if you had

somebody like that, then it was a good idea to be able to craft songs around riffs that had dynamics which would showcase that style of playing — as well as his personality and character on the drum kit — to the highest degree.”

Ultimately, says Page, the real wisdom behind the Super Dragon is quite simple. “For me, what one is looking for if you’re going straight into an amplifier with very little effects is simply the sound of the guitar,” he explains. “Which is a very different mindset from, say, those awful days when people had all those multi-effect processors with everything in them, and they made their guitars sound like squawking cats and parrots, as opposed to guitars.

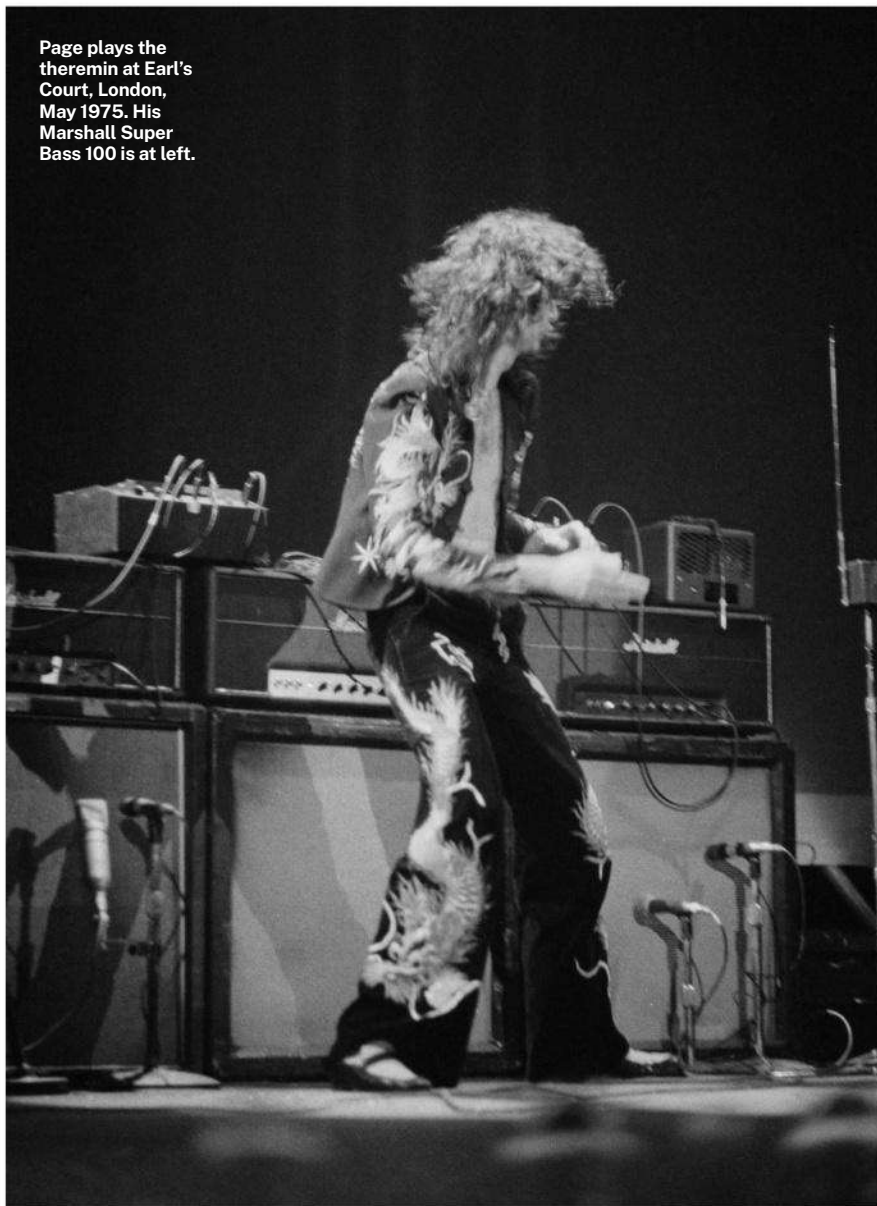
“All through my history of playing, from when I was just a kid to when I was a teenage player, and throughout my career, my priority has been, ‘Is that amplifier going to sound really good driven by this particular guitar?’ In a way, this Super Dragon amp was meant to be the ultimate test of that way of doing things.

“The other point,” he continues, “is that one wants the dynamics of the amp to be very controllable from the guitar, in terms of using the guitar’s volume, tone and pickup selector. This way, you can back off the volume for your really clean sound, and then you can just put it up to 10 — I won’t say 11, that would be stupid [laughs]. But put it up to 10, and then the whole thing blooms. You can really feel that drive and that just... edge and body to it. That’s what you want. You want to be able to control your sound through those means: the pickup selections that you have, and the tone and volume controls. But you need your amplifier to be able to drive the guitar’s response in such a way that you can get all those tones and all the dynamics that you’re looking for.”

Margouleff agrees, explaining that it’s precisely those wide dynamics and range of available tones that Page was looking to duplicate with the Super Dragon. “As Jimmy often points out,” he says, “there’s a huge dynamic range in the tones on any given Led Zeppelin album. When Jimmy cleans up the guitar [by lowering his volume pot], he really needs those softer sounds to remain clean and punchy, and to cut through — even against John Bonham’s drumming.

“The 6550 power tubes in his Super Bass and in the Sundragon are a big

Page plays the theremin at Earl’s Court, London, May 1975. His Marshall Super Bass 100 is at left.



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



## FLOWERS & VINES

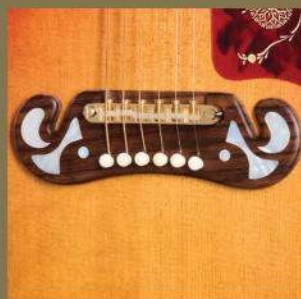
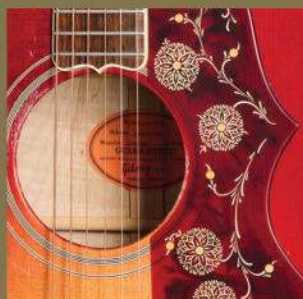
**Gibson's Jimmy Page 1964 SJ-200 acoustic blooms anew in Bozeman.**

**IN LATE SPRING** 1970, Jimmy Page did a rare thing: He performed on solo acoustic, without the other members of Led Zeppelin, on the BBC's *Julie Felix Show*.

Felix, an American folk singer from California, was nevertheless so popular in Britain at the time that she was dubbed "Britain's First Lady of Folk." Page, whose affection for folk music ran deep — in particular for fingerstyle guitar greats like Davey Graham, Bert Jansch and Doc Watson — performed a semi-improvisational medley combining his "White Summer" and "Black Mountain Side." Both tunes, like the later Zeppelin epic "Kashmir," are played in the evocative DADGAD modal tuning, popularized by Graham.

Page's guitar of choice for the Felix performance was a 1964 Gibson J-200, with the classic "Flowers & Vines" splayed pickguard, a Sitka spruce top, and flamed maple back and sides, belonging to noted British pop producer Mickie Most. Page had first borrowed the guitar from Most in September 1968 for the Olympic Studios recordings of "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You," "Your Time Is Gonna Come" and "Black Mountain Side."

"Mickie's J-200 was a dream to play," Page recalls fondly in *Jimmy Page: The Anthology*, "and it was a beautiful guitar. I remembered it had such a



**"MICKIE'S J-200 WAS A DREAM TO PLAY, AND IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL GUITAR"**

wonderful recording sound." Put on *Zeppelin I*'s "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You," and listen carefully to Jimmy's subtle dynamic shifts within that descending A minor-based rhythm pattern, and the gorgeous flamenco-inspired lead figures from 4:52–5:25, and you'll hear it: a sound that is at once feathery and bold, jangly and structured, resonant and chimey.

Robi Johns, the Gibson senior product development

manager in Bozeman, Montana heading the team behind the new Custom Shop/Murphy Lab Jimmy Page 1964 SJ-200 and Jimmy Page 1964 SJ-200 Collector's Edition, explains that while all J-200s feature a distinctive mustache-style bridge plate, the Page/Most J-200 boasted a Les Paul-style Tune-o-matic bridge with — wait for it — nylon bridge saddles, which adds a pleasing, almost papery, sitar-like timbre to the notes. "Those nylon saddles

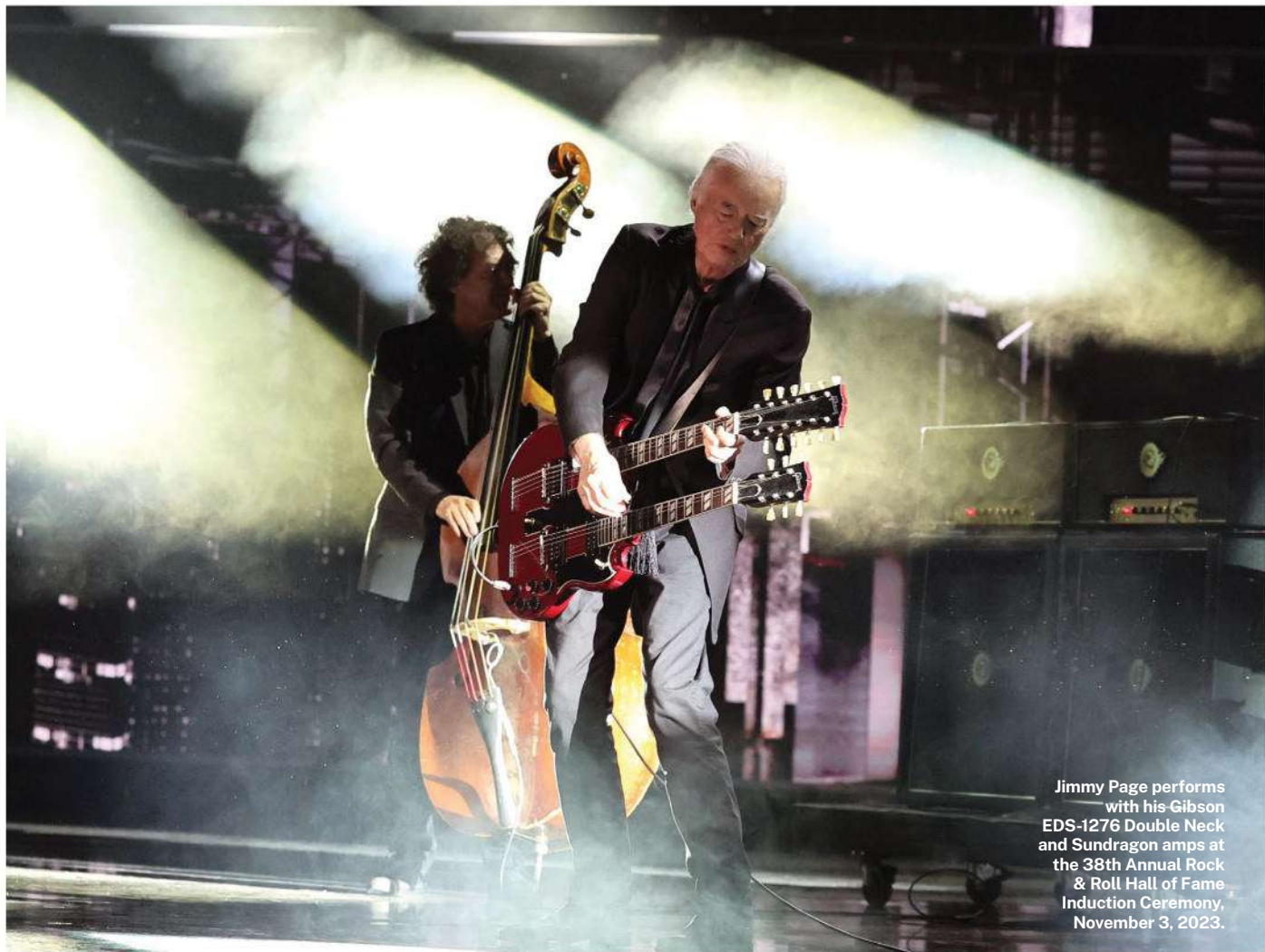
give the guitar a very balanced sound, but it's also jangly in a nice musical way." (For those who prefer brass saddles, Gibson includes an additional brass Tune-o-matic bridge with every Page SJ-200.)

The new models, 150 instruments in all, were produced in close collaboration with Page, and feature a subtly curved or "domed" top, a nitrocellulose lacquer finish, increased depth around the neck joint, mother-of-pearl graduated crown fretboard inlays, and a highly-flamed maple three-piece neck with a round profile and rosewood fretboard. The first 50 examples produced by Bozeman's Gibson Custom Shop are further designated as the 1964 Jimmy Page SJ-200 Collector's Edition.

Each Collector's Edition guitar is signed by Page on the back of the headstock, and was personally played by Page himself in early September at Nashville's storied RCA Studio B, the legendary recording home of the great Chet Atkins — one of Page's formative influences — currently under the able helm of Brandi Carlile and Rival Sons producer Dave Cobb. (Other than lacking the signed headstock and not being Page-played, the non-"Collectors" models are identical instruments, and each features an individually signed sound-hole label.)

"We weren't quite sure if maybe he'd just play a few chords on each one," Johns says, "but not only did he play each of them for three or four minutes, he even suggested that some of them be put in alternate tunings, so he'd be surprised with each SJ-200 that he played. That's pretty cool."

— JVR



Jimmy Page performs with his Gibson EDS-1276 Double Neck and Sundragon amps at the 38th Annual Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, November 3, 2023.

part of that,” Colby continues, “and there are other changes in the circuit that are a little unusual for a Marshall.” For instance, says Colby, Page’s Super Bass utilizes a 12AU7 in the phase inverter. “That alone makes the 6550s run a little bit cleaner,” he suggests. “You could say the Super Dragon is somewhere between a Super Bass and a Super Lead, but not necessarily with all of the values you normally see in a modded Marshall.”

Once the Super Dragon had bounced back between New York and London a number of times for Page to offer his input on how close it was to his original, the stage was set for its biggest test: Maestro Page performing with the first fully realized Super Dragon live at the 2023 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction ceremony in November 2023, where Page performed Link Wray’s classic “Rumble” on his Gibson EDS-1275 in honor of the late North Carolina-born guitar legend’s long-overdue induction into the Rock Hall.

### “I KNEW THE GIBSON EDS-1275 DOUBLE-NECK INSIDE AND OUT. BUT IT WAS STILL A SERIOUS TEST”

“Boy, oh, boy, was it ever the acid test!” Page laughs, recounting the event and its lead-up. “I mean, we all believed in it, and we’d done our tests over in England — though it should be said not even with one of our special Super Dragon 4x12 cabinets but just with some Marshalls I had. And sure, I knew the Gibson EDS-1275 double-neck inside and out [see sidebar, page 44]. But it was still a serious test.

“And what’s more, the bass player [Tim Givens] was also playing through a Super Dragon, with a standup bass. So to go out there onstage at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame with just a drummer [session great Anton Fig] and a bass player,

and completely rely on this brand-new amp to carry the sound of ‘Rumble,’ by Link Wray, one of my heroes?”

“But I’ll tell you — from the moment I plugged the double-neck into the Super Dragon, it was like, ‘Hallelujah. We found it. We got it.’ The Super Dragon actually lived up to its name: it truly is a super dragon.” ■

For more info, or to purchase a Sundragon amplifier, visit [SundragonAmps.com](http://SundragonAmps.com)

A former editor at *Guitar Player* and *Guitar World*, and an ex-member of *Humble Pie*, Mr. Bungle and French band *AIR*, author James Volpe Rotondi plays guitar for the acclaimed *Led Zeppelin* tribute, *ZOSO*, which the *L.A. Times* has called “head and shoulders above all other *Led Zeppelin* tribute bands.” *ZOSO* will be on tour this December and January supporting Zakk Wylde’s *Zakk Sabbath*. Find JVR on Instagram at @james.volpe.rotondi, on the web at [JVRonGTR.com](http://JVRonGTR.com), and look for upcoming tour dates at [zosoontour.com](http://zosoontour.com)

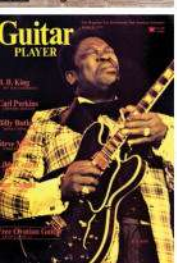
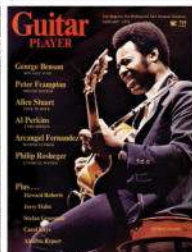
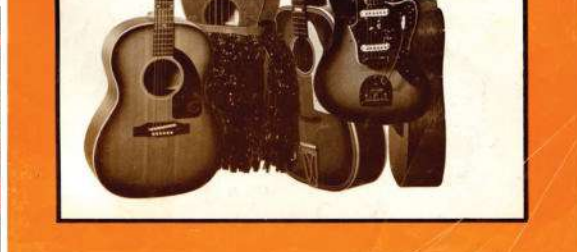
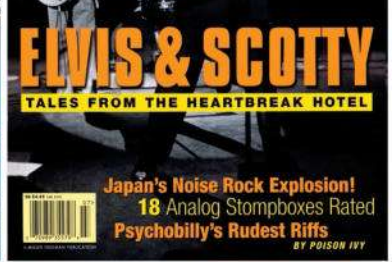
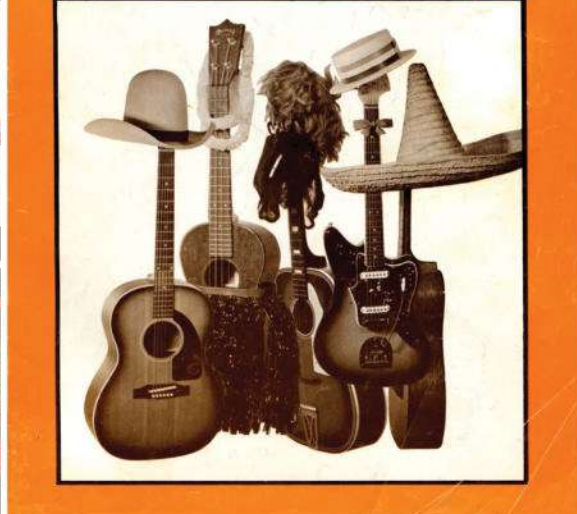




# Guitar Player

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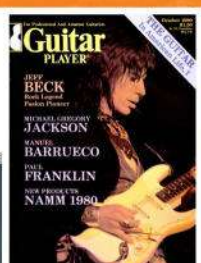
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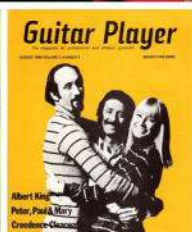
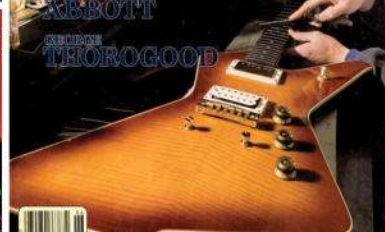
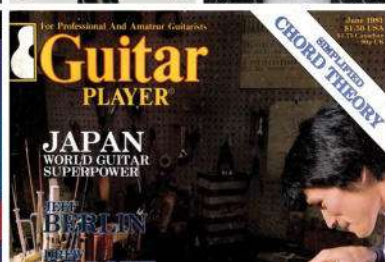
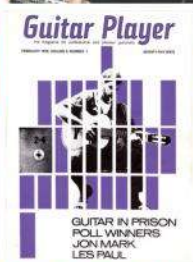
## Guitar Player

JULY 2004 FOCUS YOUR OBSSESSION

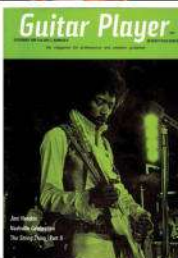
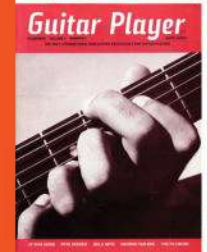
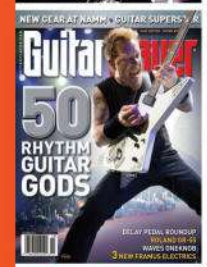
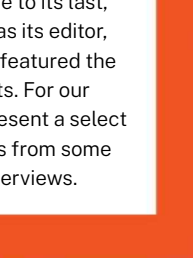
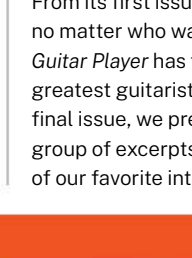
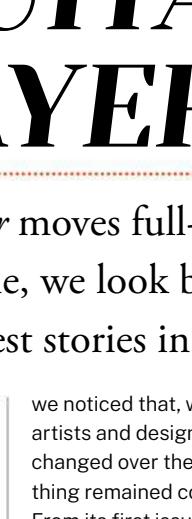
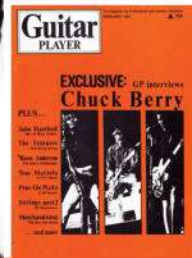
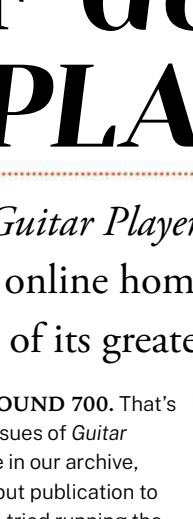
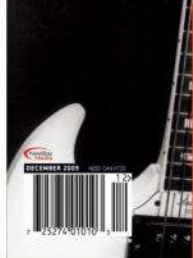
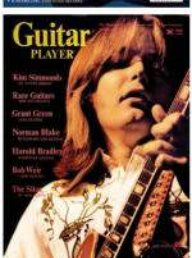
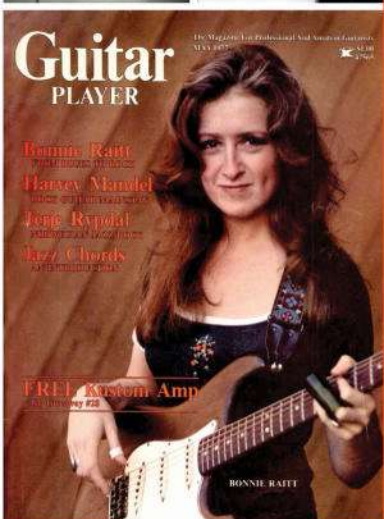


**PRINCE**  
THE RETURN OF THE FUNK KING

TONY IOMMI  
JIMMY PAGE ON HIS SIGNATURE LES PAUL  
CHICAGO BLUES  
JOHN SCOFIELD  
22 GEAR REVIEWS







# 58 YEARS OF GUITAR PLAYER

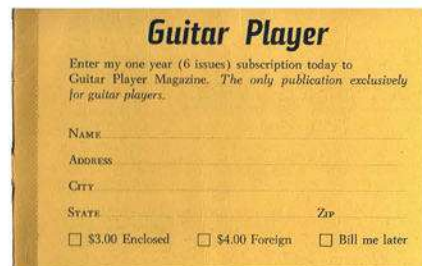
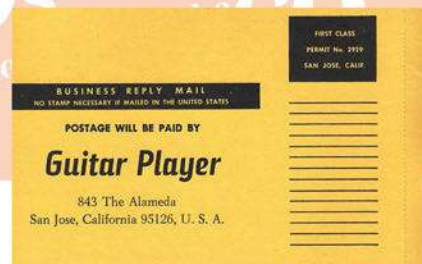
As *Guitar Player* moves full-time to its online home, we look back at some of its greatest stories in print.

**RIGHT AROUND 700.** That's how many issues of *Guitar Player* reside in our archive, from our debut publication to our last. (We tried running the numbers several times, but we'd lose count after being distracted by some fascinating nugget from an earlier age.) As we pulled together this celebration of the magazine,

we noticed that, while the artists and design styles changed over the years, one thing remained consistent: From its first issue to its last, no matter who was its editor, *Guitar Player* has featured the greatest guitarists. For our final issue, we present a select group of excerpts from some of our favorite interviews.







## Tuning Up

FROM ITS FIRST issue, *Guitar Player* made a point to include established guitarists in folk, classical, country and jazz as well as the new breed of rock players. It wasn't unusual to find artists like Chet Atkins, Joe Pass, Juan Serrano, Johnny Smith and Gabor Szabo sharing space with the Byrds, the Who or Cream. Even in these very early issues, *Guitar Player* gave readers access to top guitarists, who would write monthly columns and provide answers to readers' questions.

### JIMI HENDRIX

## "Jimi Hendrix"

December 1968



**JIMI HENDRIX WAS the first rock guitarist to score a GP cover when he appeared on the December 1968 issue. This excerpt from his interview by an unnamed**

*scribe is a reminder that every story in those early days was a seminal exploration, giving us an insightful record of the techniques and thoughts of the greatest players of the time.*

When Jimi Hendrix plays, the house comes down. It doesn't fall in small pieces but in chunks, and the whole place topples on the audience, but it doesn't touch them because he's got them flying up there with him somewhere. That's the way it was at Winterland in San Francisco when we interviewed Jimi Hendrix. That's the way he makes it.

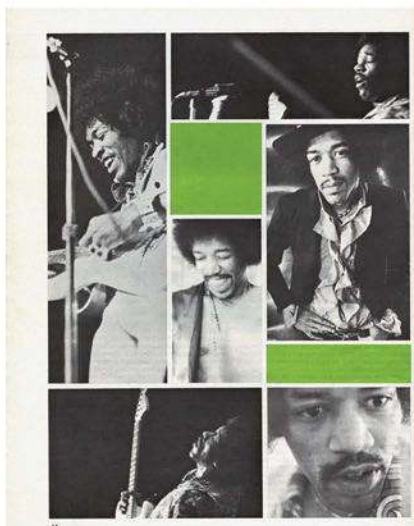
"All my songs happen on the spur of the moment," he says, and he's not handing you a line, you know he's leveling with you. So you ask him if he has to compensate for this spontaneity by using gimmicks.

"On some records you hear all this clash and bang and fanciness, but all we're doing is laying down the guitar tracks and then we echo here and there, but we're not adding false electronic things. We use the same thing anyone else would, but we use it with imagination and common sense. Like 'House

Burning Down,' we made the guitar sound like it was on fire. It's constantly changing dimensions, and up on top that lead guitar is cutting through everything."

He tells you about the trio, about working with Mitch Mitchell the drummer and Noel Redding on bass, and how tough it gets sometimes. "Sometimes they might want to tell me something and I might not be able to understand, and it gets frustrating. Anytime you make a song, you want your own personal thing in it, as well as the group. We don't compromise with each other very much, you know. Like one guy thinks one thing and he's going to stick with that one thing, so he does it the way he wants it.

"We try to put our own self into it, no matter what song we play," he says. That's how he feels about Jimi Hendrix, but how does a musician look at other musicians? "When I see a group I look for feeling, not the jump-around kind of feeling... and then I look for togetherness, a communication between the musicians. Originality comes about fourth or fifth."



**ABOVE: The cover of our debut issue, featuring interviews with Chet Atkins, Charlie Byrd, Barney Kessel and Jefferson Airplane, alongside an early subscription mail-in card.**

Jimi feels it's important not to have a closed mind to new things that are happening. "You can't just get stuck up on guitar, you have to use a little bit of imagination and break away. There's millions of other kinds of instruments. There's horns, guitars, everything. Music is getting better and better, but the idea now is not to get as complicated as you can but to get as much of yourself into it as you can."

### PETE TOWNSHEND

## "Really Smashing"

October 1967



**THE WHO'S PETE Townshend was among the first rock guitarists featured in the magazine, making his appearance in the third issue. It's evident that, even at this**

*early stage, Guitar Player had established the nuts-and-bolts mix of shop talk that defined it through its history.*

### Why "the Who"?

Because we wanted it big on posters, so that it would stand out among the other attractions. We all laughed at first when a friend of mine came up with the name.

### How did you get started smashing your guitars?

It started when we were doing long feedback buildups. Every night we





## really smashing

Few of the thousands of British pop groups survive the competition; fewer meet with success. The Who, of whom there are four, have not only survived the latter comments of their erstwhile critics but the same fate of the Beatles, as well. Their big records: Pictures of Lily, Cyr! Ex-plos!s, My Generation, Subliminal, Happy Jack. But they have the standards too: John Entwistle (bass), Pete Townshend (lead guitar), Roger Daltrey (lead vocal), and Keith Moon (drums). Entwistle's (lead guitar) ends each smashing performance by demolishing his guitar (a real Fender-sounder). The other, Roger Daltrey (lead vocal) affects a woman's shrill, post-coit and a slight shuffle, yet exhibits professional showmanship and confidence in his

singing. Keith Moon (drums) is the group's most aggressive performer, grinding out steady—often complex—rhythms for his partners. The following is an interview with Peter Townshend and John Entwistle of The Who, taped in San Francisco prior to their appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival on June 18.

**GP:** How do you go about destroying an expensive guitar?  
**Townshend:** I used to bash it on the amplifier, always backbeat because I was worried about the neck. And then the first time that I ever hit the neck, it kind of didn't break! And then I kept it up and it kind of never broke! So I threw it at the roof and it made a hole in the roof. And so I thought 'I'd do that again, I put it up three yards and it broke. The audience thought I was drunk!'  
**GP:** What about the speakers?  
**Townshend:** The speakers go, but then I don't mind 'em to page 12

wanted to go a bit farther; but we couldn't because we didn't have any more volume, musical ideas or musical dexterity. All we could do was freak-out!

### What does this sort of showmanship cost you?

Practically all my earnings; it costs a lot! But it's more than showmanship, really. It's enlarging the experience by visual rather than musical stimulation.

### Do you feel better after?

It depends. If I've done it with abandon or hysterically, yes; I feel better. But if I've done it aggressively, in anger, it makes me punchy and I just want to go and finish the lot off!

### Did you know what you were doing when you modulated in "My Generation"?

Of course we did! That was all highly considered. We worked on those modulations for ages; they were changed 10 times before we recorded. Each one was supposed to turn you on a bit more!

### What is your amp volume setting on a ratio of 10?

Mine's on about five. I always have the guitar flat-out; otherwise you lose top.

### Do you use any special equipment?

I use a Grampian reverb unit for distortion; it gives a kind of clear fuzz dirge. I like a slightly broken guitar sound.

### So we noticed. What about amps?

We use Vox in the States... Super Beatles, four altogether.

### What would you like to see written about the group?

Only that we're good.

## B. B. KING

### "Jamming With B.B."

BY JIM BREWER

## December 1969

**Guitar Player** CONTRIBUTING EDITOR  
**JIM Brewer caught B.B. King in a typically charitable encounter with two young fans when he visited the King of the Blues prior to a 1969 show at the Fillmore West.**

### "Can you jam a few bars before you go, B.B.?"

"Well, just a few, I'm late as it is." He had 10 minutes to make it to Bill Graham's Fillmore West from his hotel room at the Fairmont. But there he was — the guitar man who has probably had more influence on today's

blues scene than any other — showing two kids "how to play it with feelin'" while his drummer paced anxiously about the room. Two young guitarists, about 14 or 15, came looking for autographs. What they found was an inspiration. The kind that comes from a blend of true genius and downright humility. The kind that seems to characterize B. B. King best. You could see it in the faces of those two eager kids. He was much more than an artist — he was a teacher.

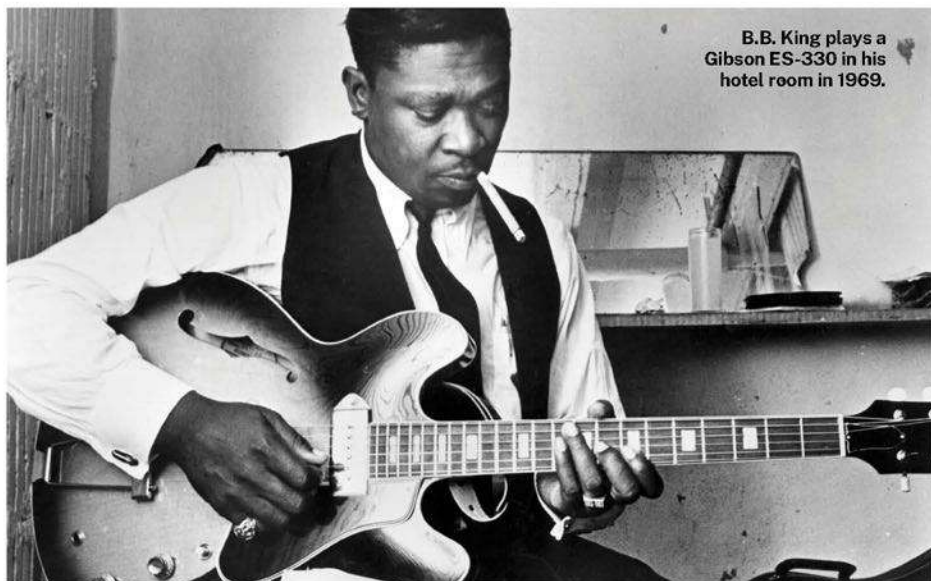
He told it something like this: "Stay close to the melody. Play around the tonic note, pretty near the tonic chord. You can extend the progression a little, but do it with feelin' — bend it, pull it, tease it, get everything you can out of that one note.

"But what's really important: *Play it from the wrist!*"

Talking about his music, B.B. says that "blues is an extension of me, especially the guitar. Sometimes I feel like it's part of my fingers. If I'm singing and I forget what I want to say, it seems like the guitar takes over." Blues, he says, "is somethin' I can play better than I can play anything else. So I try to stick with blues. It's somethin' that's soothin'; something that arouses; whatever mood I'm in, I can play blues to fit it."

"How does it feel to be a star?" one of the kids asked as we were about to head out.

"I don't know. I haven't got to be one yet. If there's somethin' I can do to make people happy... I love people. People have been good to me."



B.B. King plays a Gibson ES-330 in his hotel room in 1969.



## Into the Groove

**GUITAR PLAYER FOUND** its rhythm in 1971 when Jim Crockett became the publisher of GPI Publications. It was Crockett who pushed writers to drill down to get details about guitarist's music and gear and to consider what readers would ask if given the chance. He was also the architect of the magazine's longform journalism, resulting in thorough deep reads that players valued and which today remain a vital resource into the work of the era's greatest guitarists.

JIMMY PAGE

### "Jimmy Page — Zeppelin!"

BY STEVEN ROSEN

July 1977



STEVE ROSEN'S 1977 interview with Jimmy Page remains one of the greatest and most-talked about cover stories from Guitar Player's early years. Rosen was the

first writer to press Page for details about his early years, his approach to guitar and the gear he used on key Led Zeppelin tracks.

In this excerpt, Page talks in detail about joining the Yardbirds in 1966 and the strains that ultimately caused the lineup to splinter, paving the way for Zeppelin.

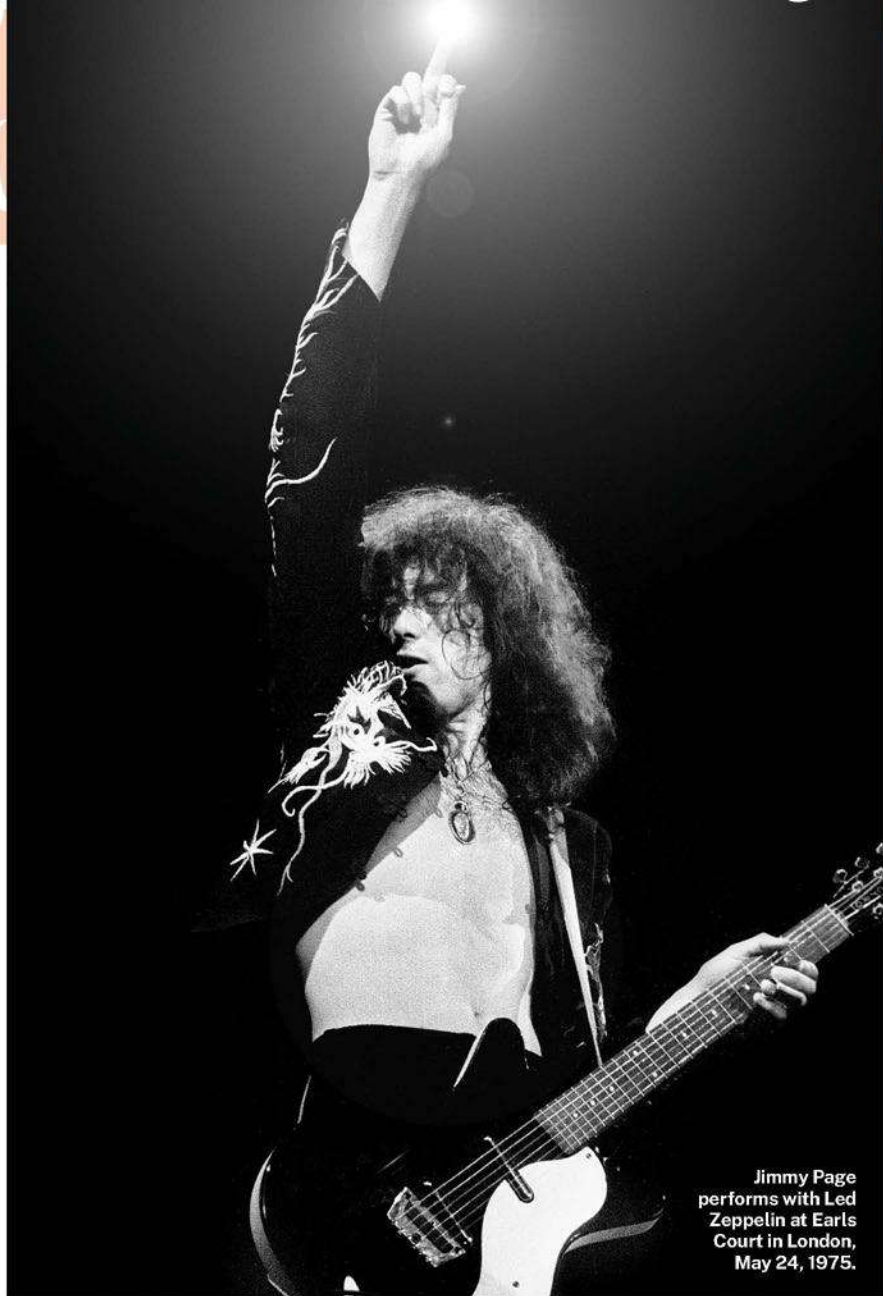
**PAGE** For a while I just worked on my stuff alone, and then I went to a Yardbirds concert at Oxford, and they were all walking around in their penguin suits. [Lead singer] Keith Relf got really drunk and was saying "Fuck you" right into the mike and falling into the drums. I thought it was a great anarchistic night, and I went back into the dressing room and said, "What a brilliant show!" There was this great argument going on; [bass player] Paul Samwell-Smith saying, "Well, I'm leaving the group, and if I was you, Keith, I'd do the very same thing." So he left the group, and Keith didn't. But they were stuck, you see,

because they had commitments and dates, so I said, "I'll play the bass if you like." And then it worked out that we did the dual lead guitar thing as soon as [rhythm guitar] Chris Dreja could get it together with the bass... But then came the question of discipline. If you're going to do dual lead guitars riffs and patterns, then you've got to be playing the same things. Jeff Beck had discipline occasionally, but he was an inconsistent player in that when he's on, he's probably the best there is, but at that time, and for a period afterwards, he had no respect whatsoever for audiences.

#### What do you remember most about your early days with the Yardbirds?

One thing is it was chaotic in recording. I mean we did one tune and didn't really know what it was. We had Ian Stewart

from the Stones on piano, and we'd just finished the take, and without even hearing it [producer] Mickie Most said, "Next." I said, "I've never worked like this in my life," and he said, "Don't worry about it." It was all done very quickly, as it sounds. It was things like that that really led to the general state of mind and depression of Relf and [drummer] Jim McCarty that broke the group up. I tried to keep it together, but there was no chance; they just wouldn't have it. In fact Relf said the magic of the band disappeared when Clapton left. I was really keen on doing anything, though, probably because of having had all that studio work and variety beforehand. So it didn't matter what way they wanted to go; they were definitely talented people, but they couldn't really see the woods for the trees at that time.

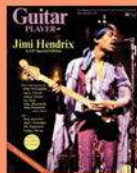


Jimmy Page performs with Led Zeppelin at Earls Court in London, May 24, 1975.





## First Flexi!



**GUITAR PLAYER READERS** found a nice bonus in their September 1975 Jimi Hendrix special: a single-sided Flexi-disc featuring "Beginnings,"

one of the tracks included on the posthumous Hendrix collection *Midnight Lightning* that November. The Flexi-disc would become a long-running addition to the mag starting in 1984 (see page 54).

**You thought the best period of the Yardbirds was when Beck was with them?**  
I did. [Yardbirds' manager/producer] Giorgio Gomelsky was good for him because he got him thinking and attempting new things.

**Can you describe some of your musical interaction with Beck during the Yardbirds period?**

Sometimes it worked really great, and sometimes it didn't. There were a lot of harmonies that I don't think anyone else had really done, not like we did. The Stones were the only ones who got into two guitars going at the same time from old Muddy Waters records. But we were more into solos rather than a rhythm thing. The point is, you've got to have the parts worked out, and I'd find that I was doing what I was supposed to, while something totally different would be coming from Jeff. That was all right for the areas of improvisation, but there were other parts where it just did not work.

### ERIC CLAPTON

## "Clapton"

BY DAN FORTE

August 1976



**GP ASSISTANT EDITOR Dan Forte sat down with Eric Clapton for his first in-depth Guitar Player interview, touching on a range of topics, from chording to recording with Howlin' Wolf. It remains one of the best**

*and most illuminating interviews with the blues giant from his early solo era.*

**You've played blues right from the beginning, but only recently got into playing slide, which is an integral part of blues.**

I always used to play slide just on the acoustic guitar, and that was never employed onstage, and consequently it never got on record either. I think what really got me interested in it as an electric approach was seeing Duane [Allman] take it to another place. There were very few people playing electric slide that were doing anything new; it was just the Elmore James licks, and everyone knows those. No one was opening it up until Duane showed up and played it a completely different way. That sort of made me think about taking it up.



**Are there any similarities between your electric slide technique and Duane's?**

No, not a great amount, because I approach it more like George Harrison. Duane would play strictly blues lines; they were always innovative, but they were always in the blues vein. I'm somewhere in between him and George, who invents melodic lines often on the scales.

**You were one of the first people Jimi Hendrix jammed with when he went to England. What was he playing like at that stage?**

He did the whole show; he did two songs and pulled out every stop. He did everything that he did for the rest of his career in those two songs. It just blew the audience away; they'd never seen anything like it before. He wasn't into his clothes scene at that point; I think, he was just wearing jeans and a jacket of some kind. But his technique and his vibrato were just as strong.

**What causes you to switch guitars over the years?**

It's a fad, I think. Like, at *The Concert For Bangladesh*, I was playing a Gibson Byrdland. If you remember, Chuck Berry had a lot of publicity photographs taken with a Byrdland, and that looked like a very delicious guitar. I couldn't get hold of an old one with the black pickups, so I got one with humbuckers instead.

**Were there any feedback problems using a full-box guitar?**

Yes, that's one thing I never accounted for. You have to really be careful, especially on the low, bass strings.

**Why do you record at such low volumes?**

There's less interference, less noise. I like to record a lot of tracks as "live" as possible, including voice. So if you've got a really loud amp, you're going to leak onto everyone else's track, and you won't be able to sing either. I also like to record tracks without cans [headphones]; I like to hear the sound the room is making itself, rather than the balance coming through the board and into the cans. I recorded "Motherless Children" [from 461 Ocean Boulevard] with just a Pignose mini amp.



## The Decade of Guitar

THERE WAS LIKELY no better time for *Guitar Player* than the 1980s. Under the steady leadership of editor Tom Wheeler, the magazine became the guitarist's bible. Virtuoso playing and technical expertise ruled the day, and guitarists latched on to every word spoken by heroes like Eddie Van Halen, John Sykes, Steve Stevens, Warren DeMartini, Steve Vai and Joe Satriani, to name a few of the day's most notable players. From guitarists to gear to lessons, the 1980s had it all in spades, and no magazine covered it better than *GP*.

GEORGE HARRISON

### “The Jungle Music & Posh Skiffle of George Harrison”

BY DAN FORTE

November 1987



THE QUIET BEATLE gave contributing writer Dan Forte quite a mouthful when he sat down for his first-ever — and possibly only — guitar interview. The timing couldn't

have been better. Harrison was enjoying a new hit album, *Cloud Nine*, and was eager to discuss everything from his guitar influences to sitar and, of course, the Beatles. For guitarists, Dan's feature remains the only Harrison interview worth reading.

In the Beatles, you always seemed to play solos as mini compositions and use different sounds and techniques according to whatever the song called for. That attitude tends to get overlooked a lot with so much importance placed on pyrotechnics.

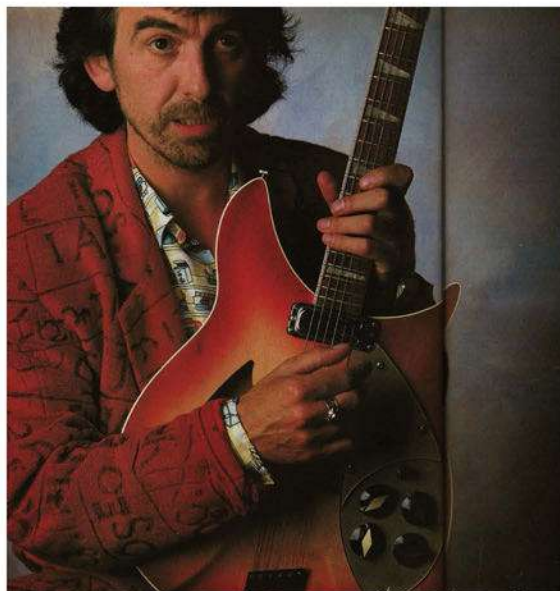
Yeah, worked-out solos. I think that was largely because, like on the early records, we went straight onto mono or stereo. Then we got a four-track. But a lot of those takes,

we had to do everything at the same time, or as much as possible. So we'd say, “These guitars are gonna come in on the second chorus playing these parts, at which time the piano will come in, too, on top.” And we'd have to get the individual sound of each instrument, and then the balance of those to each other, because they were all going to be locked together on one track. Then we had to do the performance, where everybody got their bit right. I think it was maybe to do with that, where we'd worked out parts. Listening to some of the CDs, there are some really good things, like “And Your Bird Can Sing,” where I think it was Paul and me, or maybe John and me, playing in harmony — quite a complicated little line that goes right through the middle eight. We had to work those out, you know. In the early days, the solos were made up on the spot, or we'd been playing them onstage a lot.

**Do you think that Indian music and the sitar influenced your approach to slide? Definitely.**

**Because you can get all those quarter-tones.**

Yeah. See, I never really learned any music until I sat down with Ravi Shankar with the sitar. He said to me, “Do you know how to read music?” Oh, no, here we go again. Because I felt like there were really much better musicians who deserved to be sitting with this guy who's such a master of the



### the jungle music & posh skiffle of GEORGE HARRISON

The ex-Beatle talks guitar for the first time

GEORGE HARRISON ALWAYS HAD A reputation as the “quiet Beatle,” but after five years behind a new album, studio sessions, and playing guitar to some of the world's most famous and influential rock acts, he was finally ready to talk. In the October 1984 issue of *Guitar Player*, Harrison sat down for his first-ever guitar interview. The timing couldn't have been better. Harrison was enjoying a new hit album, *Cloud Nine*, and was eager to discuss everything from his guitar influences to sitar and, of course, the Beatles. For guitarists, Dan's feature remains the only Harrison interview worth reading.

By Dan Forte



## Play This Magazine



BETWEEN 1984 AND 1990, nearly every issue of *GP* came with a removable Flexi-disc Soundsheet that gave readers access to exclusive and premiere recordings by the top guitarists of the day. Sixty-seven sheets were published, beginning with Steve Vai's “The Attitude Song,” which was bound inside the October 1984 issue, with Stevie Ray Vaughan on the cover.

instrument. I started getting panicky. I said, “No, I don't know how to read music.” He said, “Oh, good — because it's only going to influence you...”

So that was the first time I actually learned a bit of discipline — doing all these little things in conjunction with what you do with your right hand, the stroke. If you strike the string down, it's called *da*, and if you hit it up, it's called *ra*. I'd be trying to practice one of these complicated exercises, thinking





I'd just be getting it, and Ravi would say, "No, no. Ra. Ra." I'm hitting it one way instead of the other, you know, "Does that matter at this stage?" We don't have that sort of frame of reference in guitar.

Then with slide what I could do is actually hit the string with one stroke and [hums a scale] do a whole little wobbly bit. And because of the Indian stuff, it made me think a bit more about the stroke side to it, and I realized there's so many different ways of playing, say, a three-note passage. You can strike it and go down with one stroke; you can strike it each time; there's a million permutations of that one thing. The Indian music also gave me a greater sense of rhythm and of syncopation. I mean, after that I wrote all these weird tunes with funny beats and 3/4 bars, 5/4 bars. Not exactly commercial, but it got inside me to a degree that it had to come out somewhere.

## EDDIE VAN HALEN

### "Young Wizard of Power Rock"

BY JAS OBRECHT

April 1980



**JAS OBRECHT'S CHANCE** encounter with a then-unknown Eddie Van Halen on July 23, 1978, resulted in the virtuoso's first guitar interview, which ran in GP's November 1978 issue. Ed and Jas would meet again, including for a five-hour interview in 1980 where they discussed Eddie's approach to gear and modifications, how he learned to play guitar, the importance of phrasing and much more.

#### How did you develop your speed?

Well, I'll tell you. They used to lock me in a little room and go, "Play fast!" [laughs] I was actually trained to be a classical pianist. I had this Russian teacher who couldn't speak a word of English, and he would just sit there with a ruler ready to slap my face if I made a mistake. This started in Holland, and both my brother and I took lessons. Then when we got to the U.S. my dad found another good teacher. Basically, that's where I got my ears developed, learned my theory, and got my fingers moving.

#### What do you look for in a solo?

Feeling. I don't care if it's melodic or spontaneous. If it's melodic and has no feeling, it's screwed.

#### How do you decide what to do with the solo?

Sometimes it's spontaneous, sometimes it's set. Like the solo in "Runnin' With the Devil" [from Van Halen] was set. And the same with "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" [Van Halen]. By "set" I mean that I figured out something melodic instead of just going for it. When I wrote "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" I thought it was about the lamest song I ever wrote in my life. It took me six months before I even worked up the nerve to show the guys, but kids go nuts for it!

#### What were some of your spontaneous solos?

"Ice Cream Man" was one — that was a first take. The solo in "You Really Got Me" was totally spontaneous. Next time you listen to it, turn the balance to one side, because the way Ted [Templeman] produces, my guitar is always on one side. Listen to it — there's only one guitar, no overdubs. But it sounds full.

#### Has seeing other guitarists ever inspired a change in your playing?

Allan Holdsworth — that guy is bad! He's got a rock sound. I love his solo in "In the Dead of the Night" on the U.K. album. I love the solo in "Hell's Bells" on *One of a Kind*. Holdsworth is the best in my book. I can kind of play like him, but it doesn't fit our style of music. He plays a guitar like mine, too. He wears it up high, like a jazz guitar. I could play all that stuff, too, if I played with my guitar up that high, but how would a rock and roll kid look with a guitar up like that? I like playing much better on a stool. I don't do it, though, not even in the studio, because then it would sound like I'm sitting on a stool.

#### What do you picture yourself doing in 30 years?

Same thing we're doing now. That's what I want. I don't know what's gonna happen in the future — maybe somebody else in the band will get egoed out and quit or something, but I'd love Van Halen to be forever. And if not, I know I can always make it playing guitar somewhere, because I'm getting hit up left and right now — "Will you play on my record, will you do this, will you do that?" And I go, "No. Van Halen is my family. I'm not gonna wash your dishes; I'll wash dishes for Van Halen alone."



## Ragged Glory

THE EMERGENCE OF grunge had a noticeable impact on *Guitar Player*'s cover stories. Overnight, guitar virtuosity became passé, as did many of the artists whose faces had graced the magazine in the previous two decades. While *GP* courted new six-string talents like John Frusciante, Kim Thayil and Jerry Cantrell, it also placed a stronger focus on lessons, gear and "greatest legends" compendiums to compensate for the relative dearth of guitar heroes. But as these two excerpts demonstrate, *GP* could still score memorable interviews with guitar giants in the decade where the instrument seemed on the verge of becoming irrelevant.

NEIL YOUNG

### "In the Eye of the Hurricane"

BY JAS OBRECHT

March 1992



WITH THE SEATTLE scene in full swing, associate editor Jas Obrecht went searching for tone secrets from the grunge king himself, Neil Young. The guitarist had just released *Arc/Weld*, the feedback-drenched audio-vérité documentary of his 1991 American tour. But while the film reveled in Young's primitive sonic grandeur, Obrecht was more entranced by "his ability to journey inward to find the right note" — starting with, of course, his choice of gear.

**Given your onstage abandon, are you hard on guitars?**

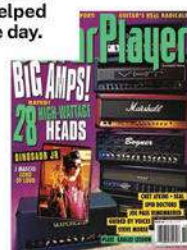
No. I don't have any guitars that are broken because of me playing them. I treat them pretty gently, actually. I don't think I have to break a guitar to get a violent sound out of it.

**Do you have a favorite guitar that you've written a lot of songs on?**

Not really. Usually cheap guitars that are no good are the ones that I write on. Like, I got



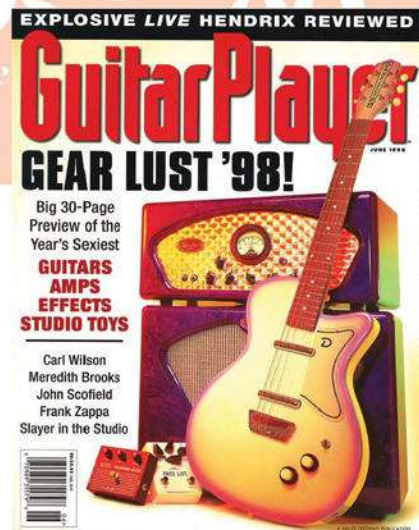
With 1990s guitar heroes in short supply, gear issues helped save the day.



a Japanese Epiphone in New Zealand. It's terrible, but it's got a particular sound to it. It's not a good sound, but it is that sound. And it's unique. I always like to get a new old guitar because I know that I'm going to get a song or two out of it, at least. Because every guitar comes to you with all this information, all these feelings and everything from everybody else that's had it. It makes you play certain chords that you wouldn't, so then you're into another thing. If you're lucky, you get a song out of it.

**You rely on one particular amp?**

Well, the amplifier is like a conglomerate. It has several different wings and controls. I have a thing on my amp that no one else has, it's unique unto itself, completely original. I'm very happy with it. It's called the Whizzer, and it sits on top of my Fender Deluxe, which is the brain of the whole thing. On top of the Deluxe, coming down on all the controls, are machined, power-driven potentiometers that are locked in. I preset them all by turning the digital controls. They turn the motors, the motors turns the real



Big 30-Page Preview of the Year's Sexiest GUITARS AMPS EFFECTS STUDIO TOYS

Carl Wilson  
Meredith Brooks  
John Scofield  
Frank Zappa  
Slayer in the Studio

knobs, and then I lock that preset number. I assign it a button, and when I hit that button all the knobs turn on the amp. I have four sets of those, so there is no interruption of the sound. There's no volume pedal loss; there's no split-signal loss on the original sound. The whole thing is very deep.

**What's the source of your feedback? Amp gain, devices?**

Volume. There is no amp gain. We don't use a distorted effect at all. Just the Fender Deluxe.

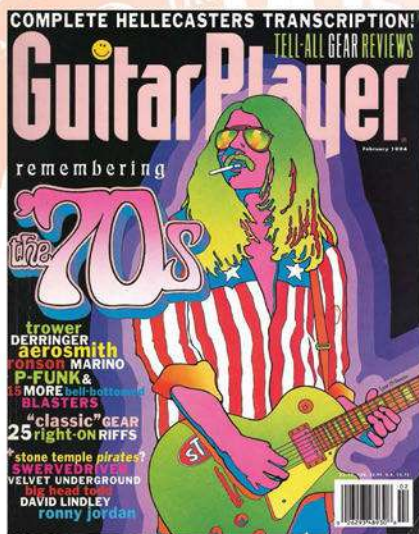
**Do you take that amp on the road?**

I couldn't go without it. I've got 10 spares, but none of 'em sound like it. All Fender amps are different, the old ones, because of the way they were made, with different amounts of metal and windings. The transformers are all different powered. Everything used to be loose, you know, so every combination of specs was different. I got mine for \$50 at Saul Bettman's Music on Larchmont in L.A. in 1967. Took it home, plugged in this Gretsch guitar, and immediately the entire room started to vibrate. The guitar started vibrating, and I went, "Holy shit!" I turned it halfway down before it stopped feeding back.

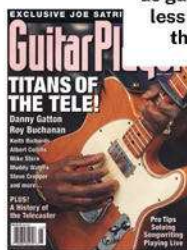
**What do you look for in a guitar?**

I buy guitars mainly to remember something by. If I'm enjoying a place, I will try to find an old guitar in that area, and that will always remind me of when I was there. The way it sounds is the way I sounded when I was there. I've written a lot of songs on a Martin D-18 that I really like, and I stole that out of [manager] Elliot Roberts' office. I always think of Elliot's office whenever I play it. And there are other reasons to buy guitars. You can buy them because they're classics. So I'll buy like an Explorer or a Flying V or a





“Legends” issues drew in readers as guitar became less relevant in the 1990s.



Black Falcon or a White Falcon just because that's what it is. But I got those now, so I don't need those anymore. Material things are becoming less and less relevant to me, so I'm not contingent to collect guitars.

### Do you still have your Buffalo Springfield guitars?

Yeah, I still have every guitar that I ever played, except for one I traded to Stills for something else. I also have a Gretsch that Jim Messina had that's like the one I played in Buffalo Springfield.

### TOM PETTY

## “Heartbreaker Hideout”

BY ART THOMPSON

May 1999



SENIOR (THEN TECHNICAL) editor Art Thompson was invited to Mike Campbell's home for a preview of Echo, Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers'

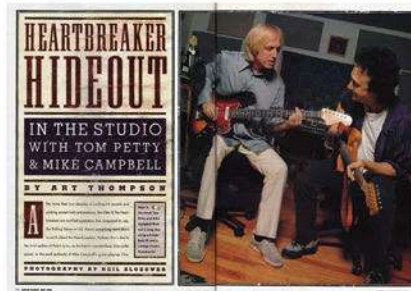
1999 release, only to be told by his host, “You're the first to hear it!” The occasion was perfect for a talk about Campbell's musical skills and, in this excerpt, a discussion with Petty about guitars and songwriting.

### Is spontaneity key to the Heartbreakers' sound?

It's the band's nature, I'm afraid. We tend to play best early on, when we're discovering the song. It's actually a little frustrating that once the band learns a song, it doesn't get any better, just more studied.

### Your main Tele is a custom, right?

Yeah, I got it in '81 at Norman's Rare Guitars



[in Reseda, California]. Norm said, “Take it home and tell me what you think.” I haven't stopped playing it since. A master craftsman named Toru built it [Toru Nittono of L.A. *Guitar Works in Reseda*]. I don't know whether he used old components or what, because this guitar looks like an old Tele — same pickups, same tailpiece.

### So you prefer it to a vintage Tele?

I've had people bring 20 vintage Telecasters to rehearsals, and I'd play them all trying to find one that matches this one. The closest I got was an old Esquire, which I bought for a spare. But if I ever lost my main Tele, I'd die — it's so good. Toru even tried to make me another one, but it didn't sound nearly as good.

### How do you decide whether to play your Tele or Rickenbacker on a particular song?

The Telecaster is versatile — I can play lead on it or turn it down and play jangly rhythms. The Rickenbacker is rich and acoustic-sounding. It's great for rhythm, which is mostly what I do. Rhythm playing is a lost art these days — there aren't a lot of people who do it seriously anymore. But it's really important to our band that I play the rhythm, because the music sounds different if I don't.

### What's the secret to playing good

### rhythm guitar?

I've put a lot of time into learning not to speed up or slow down, and being real nimble with the part. We often cut with both the vocal and guitar mics on, so if you screw up either part, you've lost them both. You've got to be confident that you're going to be able to go through a song, and sing in pitch and play in time. If you get good at rhythm, you can really make the band jump.

### Which players influenced your rhythm style?

When I was coming up, I tried to emulate great rhythm guitarists like John Lennon, Mike Pender of the Searchers and Keith Richards. The rhythm guitarists in '50s and '60s country music were amazing. And just listen to Elvis's stuff from the Sun Records period. His guitar was very loud in the mix, because it was bleeding into the vocal mic. Scotty Moore is great, but Elvis really carries those records.

### Is songwriting easy for you?

Yeah, but it was hard to get good at it. It took the longest time to understand that just because I wrote a song, that didn't mean it was good. When I first came out to Hollywood in '74, I'd probably written 60 or 70 songs, but our producer [Shelter Records owner] Denny Cordell really brought home to me that only a small percentage of what I had was good enough to record.

### Do you ever worry about running out of ideas for songs?

I always find more in the songs when I look back at them than I knew when I was writing them, so it doesn't pay to worry about it much. I have to come up with about 14 to 20 songs a year. It's what I do. Fortunately, there's always something in my head.

### What's hardest about writing a song?

Getting what you feel across and then having other people grab that feeling. I've never been one to say, “I'm going to bear my soul on this one,” but I think you eventually do. My rule is to let the music dictate the lyric — don't try to hammer two things together that don't like each other. There have been times when I wrote a lyric in advance, and it took forever to find music that felt right.



## Old Hands & Young Guns

A NEW WAVE of post-grunge guitar heroes kept *Guitar Player* busy at the dawn of the new millennium. Guitarists like Jack White and, later, Gary Clark Jr. gave new life to blues and revived the interests of players whose love of the instrument was informed by the basics rather than a 1980s style of virtuosity. There were plenty of classic rockers to keep up with as well, and a fair amount of anniversaries to celebrate, not least our own 50th in the January 2017 issue.

JACK WHITE

### “White Heat: The White Stripes’ 21st Century Blues”

BY DARRIN FOX

June 2003



JACK WHITE SINGLE-HANDEDLY jump-started both a blues-rock revolution and a hot vintage market for cheap '60s guitars and amps. As the White Stripes released their fourth album, *Elephant*,

associate editor Darrin Fox got to the bottom of White's game-changing approach.

#### What initially prompted you to pick up the guitar?

I was originally a drummer. My older brothers had a guitar lying around, but I didn't really play it until I got a four-track reel-to-reel tape recorder. At that point, I just started to track simple things on the guitar so I could play the drums along with them and hear how everything sounded together.

#### Do you think being a drummer influenced your guitar playing?

Yeah, it was a good thing. A lot of guitarists I respect, like Dick Dale, started off as drummers. I think it's interesting how

rhythms are already in your head before you even know how to play guitar.

#### Robert Johnson is one of the more popular Delta bluesmen, but not many players cite him as an influence. What did you glean from him?

His technique was so subtle you barely noticed the intricacies of his playing. My favorite thing of his is how he ended his tunes. They almost sound like throwaway endings that he didn't take seriously, but they're so perfect.

#### Your first two records leaned more heavily on the blues, as does the new record.

#### Why did you avoid the blues on *White Blood Cells*?

I've always been torn by this. The blues is from such a different time period and culture than where I'm from. Being a white kid from Detroit who was born in the '70s is a long way from being born black in Mississippi in the '20s. I'm always worried that playing the blues is going to be misconstrued as me trying to cultivate an image, or that it's going to come across as fake. We completely avoided the blues on *White Blood Cells* on purpose. The thinking was, "What can we do if we completely ignore what we love the most?" On *White Blood Cells*, we were strict about other things, as well. We decided to record the album in three days, take no guitar solos, avoid slide guitar and banish covers.

#### And yet *Elephant* has a lot of guitar solos.

Initially, I viewed solos as excess, and I didn't want to bother with them. But for *Elephant*, I thought I would give myself a present and express myself in a way that I hadn't explored in the White Stripes.

PAUL McCARTNEY

### “Here, There, and Everywhere”

BY MICHAEL MOLEND A

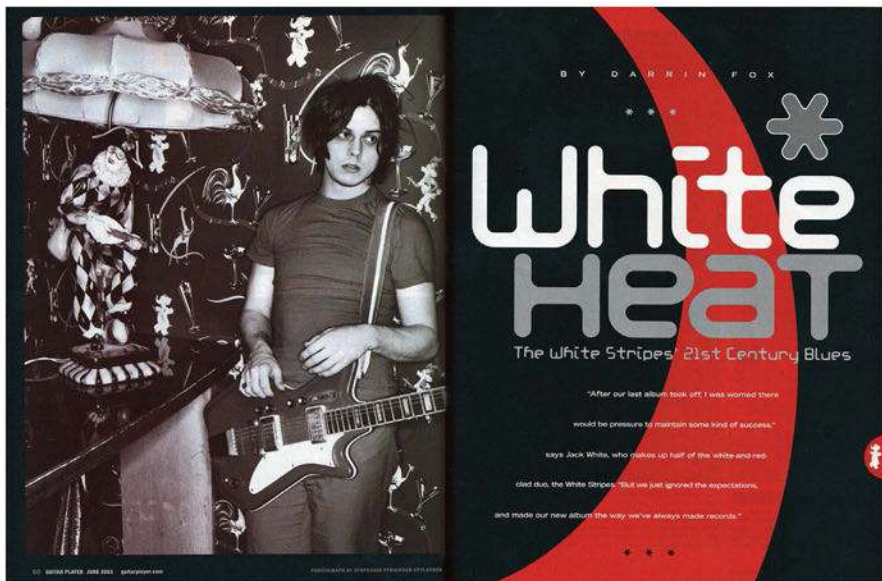
November 2005



WHEN PAUL McCARTNEY came calling, editor-in-chief Mike Molenda got the honor of sitting down with the former Beatle to discuss his then-new album,

*Chaos and Creation in the Backyard*, a return to form that saw him teamed with producer Nigel Godrich. In these condensed excerpts, it's clear that the Beatles influence is never far away even for Sir Paul.

Going into pre-production for the album, was it a surprise that Nigel wanted to pursue a very simple and natural approach, one that almost brought you back to the unfussy charm of your first solo album?









## Encore

OUR FINAL YEARS saw *Guitar Player* mark a milestone — its 50th year in publication, making it the longest-lived guitar magazine — and change owners as well as editors. In a nod to the magazine's golden years, *Guitar Player* returned to long-format features that brought readers deeper and more insightful interviews and stories, while continuing to serve up a mix of artists from a wide range of genres, bringing the magazine full circle.

### DEREK & THE DOMINOS

## “For Your Love”

BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

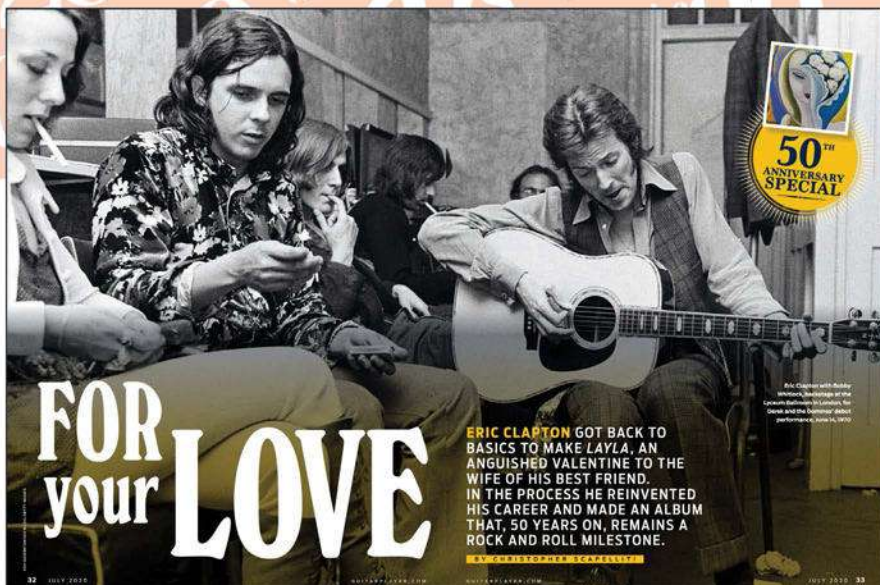
July 2020



THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of *Layla & Other Assorted Love Songs* was good reason to check in with Bobby Whitlock, the only one of two surviving members of Derek & the Dominos who still talks to the media. For our deep dive into the album's creation, Whitlock offered insights into Eric Clapton's and Duane Allman's friendship and guitar partnership.

Clapton and Allman's friendship was as symbiotic as their guitar playing. Whitlock witnessed many moments of camaraderie between them and recalls the profound impact it had on his own awareness of what they were accomplishing in the studio. “One night after we had finished up recording for the day, we went on back to Eric's room,” he remembers. “We were all drinking whisky and playing guitars, and I was listening to Eric and Duane talking about Robert Johnson, Elmore James and so on, and playing Bill Broonzy stuff.

“But I was standing there, leaning up against the wall and taking all this in, knowing that this is some really important stuff that's going down, and I'm a witness to it. And these two young guys — we were all in our 20s — they were like two old, sage



black blues guys talking it over with a bottle of whisky, and then playing the music, right there.

“And it was then that I took the photo of Eric and Duane together that's in the album gatefold. It was the one time I felt truly privileged to be there, at the right time, the right place, and in the right frame of mind.”

Whitlock was also present when Allman worked his magic on *Layla's* title track devising the seven-note opening lick that is the song's calling card. “Duane suggested it, and he came up with it,” Whitlock confirms. “We already had the song together, but it just started out completely different when we worked it up in England. And Duane said, ‘How about starting it this way?’” Perhaps playing off the desperation in Clapton's lyrics, Allman cleverly lifted the first half of the opening melody from Albert King's “As the Years Go Passing By,” where the bluesman sings, “There is nothing I can do if you leave me here to cry.” Whitlock recalls that, originally, Allman played the line slower than it's heard on the recording. “It was Eric's idea to play it fast,” he says. “Duane played it, but Eric sped it up.”

### JOE BONAMASSA

## “Goodbye Joe?”

BY JOE BOSSO

December 2021



JOE BONAMASSA'S GUITAR tales have made informative reading in *Guitar Player* for the past 20-some years. For the release of his 2021 album, *Time Clocks*,



contributing writer Joe Bosso took a different tack by addressing how Bonamassa's image as the sharp-dressed guitar whiz has brought him fame and fortune while it's framed him as an arrogant egotist. The guitarist warmed to the opportunity with surprising humility.

Let's talk about the whole “man in the suit” thing. To your fans, it's become this almost mythical image.

Right. When I put on the suit, I become “that guy.” And therein lies part of the success and part of the problem.

What problem could there be?

The problem is, people judge you by a picture. They think I wear sunglasses because I'm too cool to look people in the eye. The reality is, when we got enough notoriety to play places with spotlights, I came to the realization that I'm very light sensitive. When that spotlight hits me — I'm talkin' this 30,000-watt beam of light right in my face — I'm tearing up and squinting. So I started wearing sunglasses, and I still have to tell them to turn the spotlight down — “You're killing me.” Anyway, the photos and the whole image came out, and suddenly it's, “Joe's got a massive ego.”

You're not the first guy to wear sunglasses onstage.



It's weird. Truth is, I hate the way I play guitar. I hate the way I sing. I know I can do it pretty well, but I wish I could do it so much differently. And then starts the tired system of misconceptions about myself that get amplified time and time and time again because of the internet. I read this stuff and I go, "Oh, my God." How people come up with these theories is insanity to me.

It's a misconception that I'm arrogant, because I really am the furthest thing away from that. They take a sound bite or clickbait statements that were done with a dry sense of humor, and they make them sound like I'm trying to preach the gospel. And it's just not true. That's what gets me when I'm called arrogant online. If people ever met me for just five minutes, they'd be like, "No, he's not arrogant." A sense of humor doesn't always translate in print.

What's weird is, during the '70s, '80s and '90s, things could get taken out of context and we were like, "Whatever, it doesn't matter." Now it's like you're putting everything you say through the loudest amp in the world, and there's an Echoplex set to repeat on stun. So often I'm like, "Where did that come from, and how did you come to that conclusion?" But it's also because I'm not a crafted internet person. I come from a generation where having an opinion is okay. You might be right or you might be wrong, but it was okay. Things are just different now. But you know... whatever. I'm fine.

## KEITH RICHARDS

### "Tell Me Straight"

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

December 2023



THE RELEASE OF the Rolling Stones' Hackney Diamonds presented a rare opportunity for a chat with the one and only Keef. Former Guitar World editor

Brad Tolinski did the honors. In these excerpts, he and Keith discuss five-string guitar and a pair of classic Stones gems.

**I'd like to ask you a few questions about the appeal of playing your five-string Tele tuned to open G [G, D, G, B, D]. Is it because it automatically creates a great blend with a standard six-string?**

Yeah, that's part of it. That's the sound of a Stones record: a five-string with a six-string on top, and Ronnie. It always creates a beautiful blend.

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

Yes! It's always been the mystery to me why so much space opens up for other instruments by taking off the bottom string. You're right, but I can't really put my finger

on a reason why, but somehow that one extra note disappearing allows for all kinds of other instruments to come through.

**When people ask me about the importance of rhythm guitar, I always direct them to "Can't You Hear Me Knocking," from Sticky Fingers. Everyone focuses on the extended solos by Bobby Keys and Mick Taylor, but what kills me are all the different rhythm parts that you use to frame those solos.**

If I can remember rightly, I was really focused on working on the tuning thing and different ways of playing the guitar. I think it was at the time when I was really just balancing between playing with open tunings and regular tunings, so all kinds of different things were sort of coming out. The track really grew while we were playing it. It was a good day.

**Okay, here's another one: "Love in Vain" [from Let It Bleed], your re-invention of the classic Robert Johnson blues song. No one can play like Robert — and you were probably smart to not even try — but your arrangement is equally terrific.**

I've always loved that tune, and I always thought there was something about the melody that suggested it wasn't just a blues song. I heard a bit of country or folk in it, so I attacked it from that perspective. I remember thinking I wasn't going to try to play it like Robert, and I wasn't even going to play it like a blues. I'm going to pick out the notes and take it in a different direction. It just so happened that both Mick Jagger and Mick Taylor cottoned on to the idea, and we found ourselves doing it a new way.

**One last thing. What did you think of Jeff Beck? And is there any truth he was being considered after Mick Taylor left?**

Jeff? No, we felt that Jeff had his own furrow to plow and that he was not a team man. He was a soloist to the max. He was such an individualist. It wouldn't have worked with the Stones at all. We're all about teamwork.

But don't get me wrong, he was a tremendous player. The odd times we got together, I was always amazed by the stuff that he did with his tremolo bar. He was one of the best, man, and he's going to be missed. 🎸



## TELL ME STRAIGHT

In an exclusive *Guitar Player* interview, Keith Richards, the legendary Master of the Telecaster, talks about the magic and loss of *Hackney Diamonds*, the sparking new Rolling Stones album.

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

KEITH RICHARDS SINCE... "Guitar is rock." It's all in the name. Richards is the one and only... "You see, perhaps, the line between the imagination, grit and puncher as the signature Richards brand himself. Over the past six decades, the guitarist has unleashed a torrent of timeless riffs, grinding blues like "Johnny Jack Flash," "Badlands," "Sweet Little Rock 'n' Roll," "Sweet Little Angel," "Sweet Little 16," "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," and "Dag Nabbit."

Years have passed since the release of their 2023 blues-rock album, *Hackney Diamonds*, and twice that time since their last batch of original songs, 2009's *A Bigger Bang*. The good news is, he won't be busy much in 2024 with their tour and clear schedule. Keith Richards, however, remains a working musician, still among their very best work. *Rolling Stone* and *Rolling Stone* magazine's 2023 "Guitarist of the Year" award (RICHARDS) and *Rolling Stone* (2022), the album also features guest appearances by some of rock's greatest luminaries, including Paul McCartney, Bruce Springsteen, Chris Stapleton, and more.

Keith Richards is a true rock and roll icon. He's been playing guitar for over 50 years, and he's still going strong. He's a true legend, and he's a true inspiration. He's a true rock and roll star, and he's a true hero. He's a true legend, and he's a true inspiration. He's a true rock and roll star, and he's a true hero.



# HIGH TIME

PLAYERS | MC5

The new **MC5** album took more than 50 years to arrive. The band members have all passed on, but the celebration is just beginning.

BY GARY GRAFF

**O**N STAGE AT El Club, a respectably divey club in his hometown of Detroit, for a Cinco de Mayo show in 2022, Wayne Kramer was preparing to play something more than 50 years in the making — a new MC5 song.

“Some bands take two years between albums,” Kramer told a packed house at what was, in fact, the first show by a new MC5 lineup. “Some bands take five years between albums. We take 50.” He then cranked up his famed American flag-painted Stratocaster to play the metallic riff that introduces “Heavy Lifting,” the title track from what is the first MC5 album since 1971’s *High Time*. It’s a 13-track set that fits the band’s legacy well. From its boldly topical lyricism to a guitar assault led by Kramer —

with guest appearances from Tom Morello, Slash, Vernon Reid, Rise Against’s Tim McClrath, Steve Salas and Soundgarden’s Kim Thayil — *Heavy Lifting* is a true testimonial to the original troupe’s jam-kicking power.

But much has changed in the two-and-a-half-year interim since that show. Kramer passed away from pancreatic cancer on February 2, in Los Angeles, at the age of 75. Two months later to the day, John Sinclair, MC5’s manager and mentor, also died. With MC5’s three other members — Rob Tyner, Fred “Sonic” Smith and Michael Davis — gone years before, that left drummer Dennis “Machine Gun” Thompson as the band’s only living member, and he died on May 9, also aged 75, after suffering a debilitating heart attack the month before.









**ABOVE:** Recorded at Detroit's Grande Ballroom, *Kick Out the Jams* was a high-powered live debut that defined the MC5's hard-rock sound and anti-establishment political stance.

**OPENING PAGE:** The MC5 circa 1969: (from front to back) singer Rob Tyner, drummer Dennis "Machine Gun" Thompson, guitarists Wayne Kramer and Fred "Sonic" Smith (back right), and bassist Michael Davis.

**BELOW:** Tyner looks on as Kramer plays a Les Paul 'Burst, in 1967. The guitar was later stolen. Kramer went on to play a white Fender Strat, which he modified with a humbucker in the middle position. He eventually gave the guitar its iconic American flag finish.

## "WAYNE DIED BEFORE HE HAD A CHANCE TO SEE WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THIS AND HAVE THE JOY OF DOING IT IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE"

BOB EZRIN

Sadly, his death came less than three weeks after the announcement that MC5 would receive an Award for Musical Achievement from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame after six previous unsuccessful nominations.

If all that places a bit of a pall over the arrival of *Heavy Lifting*, however, those involved with finishing it are sworn to make sure the record's release is a celebration, not a wake.

"The tragedy of all this," *Heavy Lifting* producer Bob Ezrin says, "is that, because it took so long to get through all of the things on the business side, we missed being able to release it in Wayne's lifetime. It's also tragic that we missed having him be able to take it on the road. He was so looking forward to that, 'cause all the stuff was really fun to play, even in the studio. I'm still saddened by the fact that he died before he had a chance to see what people think about this and have the joy of doing it in front of an audience."

For Brad Brooks, who co-wrote 10 of *Heavy Lifting*'s tracks and is the album's primary singer, its release "is really super bittersweet, 'cause Wayne is not here. He and I had been talking so much about this coming year, and he was so excited. Losing Wayne's a big hole in my life. It's been very, very hard. But I'm so excited the album is coming out, and I'm pretty proud of what we did.

"But it also makes me sad because he should be here. It also kind of pisses me off. He should've been here way longer."

The same, of course, could be said about the Motor City 5. Although *Heavy Lifting* is billed under the band's name, the quintet's original run lasted from 1963 to '72, and they were a recording act for only four of

those years. The MC5 formed in the blue-collar Detroit suburb of Lincoln Park, inspired by early rock and roll, Motown and James Brown, though later they picked up on John Coltrane, Sun Ra and other free-jazz improvisational influences. Their debut album — recorded live in concert during a Halloween weekend stand at Detroit's Grande Ballroom — was named for the proto-punk anthem and statement of intent "Kick Out the Jams," but the same performance concluded with the eight-minute-plus "Starship," a screaming freak-out co-credited to Sun Ra.

"I think the band represented a sense of unlimited possibilities — that there could be a new kind of music and a new kind of politics, that there could be a new kind of lifestyle," Kramer said in 2018 while celebrating the 50th anniversary of the *Kick Out the Jams* concerts. He would go on to recount the band's saga in the *Heavy Lifting* track "The Edge of a Switchblade." "Like any generation, we saw a seismic shift in the way we approached life. I think that spirit that anything is possible held up pretty well."

"I believe the impact of the MC5 on all the subsequent rock and roll cannot be overstated," says Don Was, the Grammy Award-winning producer who plays bass on most of *Heavy Lifting*. He was a longtime friend of Kramer's as well, having attended MC5 shows at the Grande and collaborated with him starting with the earliest recordings of his band Was (Not Was), circa 1979. "They may not have sold many records, but it's one of those bands where everyone who listened to them went out and started a band of their own. They were a very unique, very important band."

John Sinclair was particularly impressed by the guitar tandem of Kramer and Smith when he began managing MC5. "They were very versatile for a couple of thugs from Lincoln Park," he remarked shortly after Kramer's death. "They had a special thing I never saw anybody else have, not even the Rolling Stones. They had their minds on big things. They wanted to be great... And they were willing to put in the work to do that."

Those qualities connected as well with a young William DuVall, who would go on to join Alice in Chains in 2006. "The MC5 for me were like superheroes when I was about 11 years old,"







**The group perform at West Park, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1968. Just as Kramer had adopted the Stars and Stripes for his guitar, the MC5 made the American flag a central image of their stage act in defiance of those who found their anti-war stance unpatriotic. “I said, ‘Hey, not so fast. This is my flag, too,’” Kramer told Guitar.com’s Justin Beckner in 2023 of his decision to paint the flag on his guitar. “I don’t support this war and it’s my patriotic duty to say, I don’t agree with what the government is doing.”**

says DuVall, who sings “The Edge of the Switchblade” alongside Slash. “They sort of fit perfectly into the nexus that I was already exploring: the nexus between really high-energy rock and free jazz. I couldn’t have scripted a cooler band from where I was sitting at the time. Just total freedom.”

MC5 made their mark both musically and politically. One significant show included an ill-fated performance outside the Democratic party’s violence-marred national convention during 1968 in Chicago. They became the musical mouthpiece for the Sinclair-led White Panther Party, an adjunct to the Black Panthers, whose 10-point manifesto advocated, among other things, “total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock and roll, dope and fucking in the streets.”

But the group imploded at the end of 1972, plowed under by pressures both external (police, record companies) and internal (drugs, mental

“I THINK THE BAND REPRESENTED A SENSE OF UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES THAT THERE COULD BE A NEW KIND OF MUSIC AND A NEW KIND OF POLITICS”

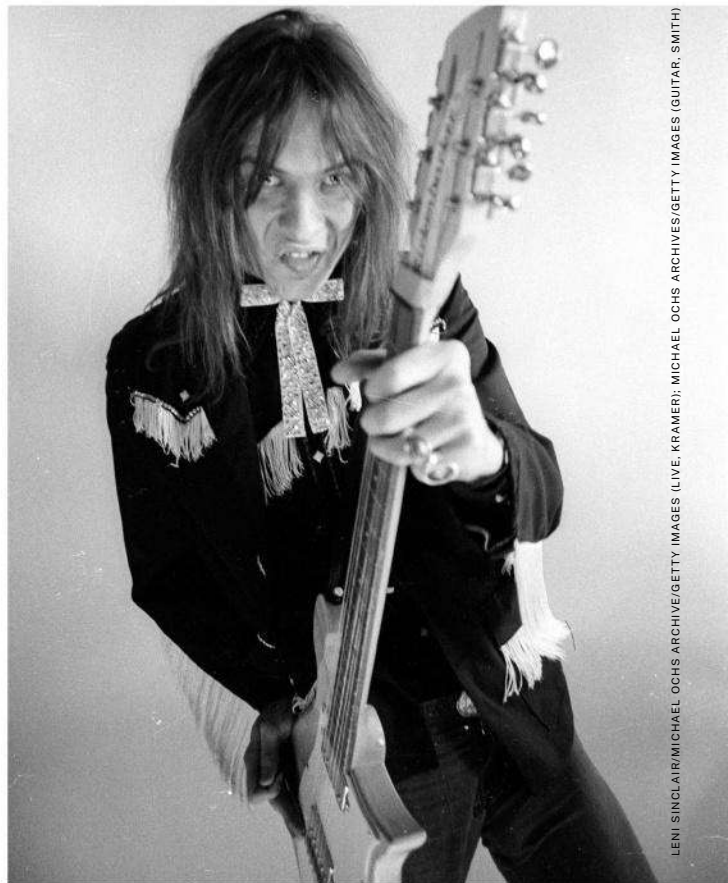
WAYNE KRAMER

a “musical father” to Kramer, expanding his vistas and ambitions with what he called “a Berklee School of Music course in writing and arranging.” Upon his release, he felt inspired again. He started a solo career with *The Hard Stuff* in 1995 and worked with the likes of Bad Religion, Pere Ubu, Mudhoney, Marshall Crenshaw and others. He began scoring film and TV shows as well, started the record label MuscleTone with his wife, Margaret Saadi Kramer, and launched a U.S. wing of British troubadour Billy Bragg’s Jail Guitar Doors music therapy initiative for inmates.

health, acrimony). “I lost my brothers,” Kramer recalled. “We went our separate ways, like [*the band*] never happened. Denial on a large scale.” He killed that pain with some music but also drugs, eventually dealing and landing in the FMC Lexington Prison in Kentucky, in 1975.

The tide changed there. In jail he met jazz trumpeter Red Rodney, who played with Charlie Parker and became





LENI SINCLAIR/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (LIVE, KRÄMER); MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (GUITAR, SMITH)





**ABOVE:** Future Bruce Springsteen producer Jon Landau persuaded the MC5 to move in a more straight-ahead rock direction for *Back in the USA*, their second album and first studio effort. Released in January 1970, it was the group's first record with Atlantic Records. Elektra Records had dropped them the year before after the MC5 took out a full-page ad denouncing the Detroit-area department store Hudson's for refusing to stock *Kick Out the Jams* due to its use of profanity.

**OPPOSITE TOP:** The MC5 perform in Mount Clemens, Michigan, 1969.

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM, COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Kramer's guitar; Kramer poses before an American flag in East Lansing, Michigan, 1969; co-guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith hoists the Rickenbacker 450/12 12-string that was his main guitar during his years with the MC5.

Kramer never let go of the MC5, either. During 2004 he, Thompson and Davis toured as DKT/MC5 with a corps of guest musicians, Was among them. And in 2018, on the heels of his memoir *The Hard Stuff* (and a bout with saliva gland cancer), Kramer formed MC50, touring with Thayil and fellow Soundgarden alumnus Matt Cameron, Fugazi's Brendan Canty, Faith No More's Billy Gould and others.

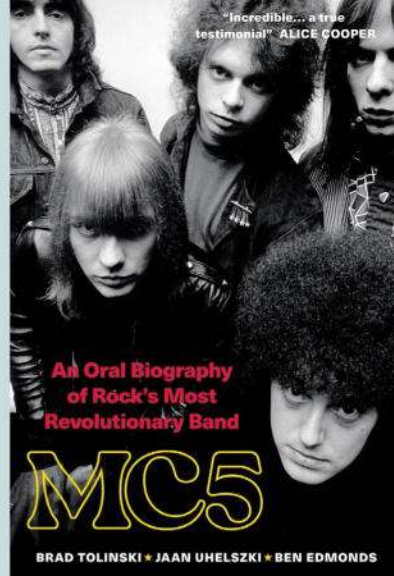
"This is very much a continuation," he explained at the time. "These guys have carried the message of the MC5 all the years, the message of self-determination and self-efficacy and all things are possible if you put in the work. They all live by that message and they're playing their asses off. In a lot of ways it's the realization of the spark that happened 50 years ago at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit, to have a band that produces these high-energy rock shows that completely blow people's minds, like it's come to fruition."

The MC50 troupe did record a new version of "Kick Out the Jams" that's a bonus on *Heavy Lifting*, and Kramer did not rule out the possibility of creating new music under the MC5 moniker. But the real impetus came during 2020, from the dual punch of the pandemic and more than three years of the Donald Trump presidency, which was anathema to everything MC5 stood for.

"I went into a real pit of despair," Kramer acknowledged during the spring of 2022, "and fortunately I have a wonderful therapist who told me, 'Basta, Wayne! Basta! Get up! Go do something creative. Now, today!' So I called up [Brooks] and said, 'Hey, you want to try to write some songs?' and we wrote a couple, and it was fun and it sounded pretty good and we wrote a few more, and they were sounding better and better, and the whole thing kind of snowballed on its own."

Kramer had also been working with Alice Cooper on his *Breadcrumbs* EP and *Detroit Stories* album, produced by Ezrin, with whom he shared his own new music. "Everybody was saying, 'Boy, this could be an MC5 record,'" Kramer recalled. "The more I thought about it... We were in such a dangerous time for our country, I thought, I'm gonna have to pull out all the stops and use the most powerful tools that I have at my disposal. And the MC5 always represented action and commitment and principle, and I think we're gonna need all of that and more if our democracy is going to survive."

Ezrin says Kramer first approached him about a film and album project that was also called *Heavy Lifting*, which the producer describes as "this very elaborate story about some criminals and about a heist and sticking it to the man and so on." The



## BOOK 'EM, DANNO

The life and times of Detroit's unruly firebrands are entered for the record in a new and definitive biography.

**THE NEW MC5** album is called *Heavy Lifting*, but that would have been an equally fine name for the just-released tome *MC5: An Oral Biography of Rock's Most Revolutionary Band*. The book was painstakingly compiled by writers Brad Tolinski and Jaan Uhelszki using the late rock scribe Ben Edmonds' recorded interviews with the proto-punk Detroit rockers.

Tolinski and Uhelszki are no strangers to this territory. Both are Detroit natives who made their mark in rock journalism: Uhelszki as a co-founding editor of Detroit's legendary *Creem* magazine, and Tolinski as the longtime editor of *Guitar World* magazine and the author of the celebrated rock tomes *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen*, *Light & Shade: Conversations with Jimmy Page*, and *Play It Loud*. The duo inherited the project from Edmonds — a one-time *Creem* editor and U.S. correspondent for *Mojo* magazine — following his death in 2016.

What emerges is a candid and at times surprisingly funny portrait of a politically revolutionary and uncompromising rock act. The book's 304 pages include appearances by 1960s icons like fellow Detroit act Iggy and the Stooges, Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon, as well as political and social activists like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, revealing the full scope of the MC5's influence and celebrity in rock's original revolutionary era.

**MC5: An Oral Biography of Rock's Most Revolutionary Band** is out now in hardcover.



## “THEY WERE VERY VERSATILE FOR A COUPLE OF THUGS FROM LINCOLN PARK”

JOHN SINCLAIR

larger concept seemed like a big lift, but the music... not so much.

“I thought this could be an MC5 project. Forget about the movie — what I would be more interested in would be creating a new MC5 album,” Ezrin says. “And it took [Kramer] really no time at all to come to the right conclusion, which was, Yes, of course what we need is an MC5 album, and of course that’s what we need today in this world, in this America we live in today. We need that voice.”

Some may have raised eyebrows about using the band name again (MC50 was its own kind of sidestep), but Kramer explained that “the MC5 never had a band agreement, so we all held the trademark. If the estate of Michael Davis wants to make an MC5 record, they’re well within their rights to do that.” But Kramer also sought to differentiate what he was doing by doing it under the banner of “We are all MC5,” a campaign that expanded the parameters of what was going on.

“My feeling was MC5 wasn’t five individuals,” Ezrin explains. “MC5 was a state of consciousness, a state of mind and, in a way, a political position. So what I said to Wayne was, ‘Listen, we are all

MC5. We all come from that place... So in that sense anybody who wants to join and anybody

who wants to take up the mantle here for not just musical reasons but also philosophical reasons, those people would be more than welcome.

“It was easy for me to say — I’m not an original member of the band. But looking at it as a fan, my feeling was that anybody who wanted to line up behind this banner was MC5. And that’s what ended up happening.”

It’s a position Kramer was comfortable with. “If you look at what the artist’s role in social change could be, it’s to carry a message,” he said in 2022. “What the MC5’s done since inception is to carry a message of self-efficacy, of taking action. We’re not handing out the jams or passing out the jams — we’re kicking out the motherfucking jams! This is about action — get up off the couch, go do something. If we don’t step up and make sure that we barricade our rights, then all the things we all love about living in America are gonna go away.”

Brooks met Kramer during the spring of 2019 at a Jeff Buckley tribute event in his home base of Oakland, California, and they became fast friends,

**Sax and violence.** MC5, with manager John Sinclair (far left), pose with instruments and guns, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969.



LENI SINCLAIR/GETTY IMAGES





Performing at the Grande Ballroom in 1969. Local DJ Russ Gibb acquired the Detroit club in 1966 as a venue for rock acts, having been inspired by a visit to Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium (later the Fillmore West) in San Francisco. In addition to hosting local acts like the MC5, Ted Nugent, the Stooges and the Alice Cooper Group, the Grande booked international artists that included Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Cream and the Who.

bonding over their shared cancer and child-raising experiences. They began writing together during 2020, for the initial *Heavy Lifting* film concept, and Brooks well remembers getting the call. "Wayne said, 'Hey, Brad, we're making an MC5 record. You're the singer of MC5,'" he recalls. "And I'm like, 'Hold on bro...'"

As Brooks explains, the songs he and Kramer wrote were focused on current topics. "It's not a retro record," he says. "It was written about 2021, about the rise of Trump, George Floyd, the [January 6] insurrection, about the homeless situation after COVID. It had to be about now; [MC5] was always about now. They were all very observant cats about the times they were in. I was writing honestly about Oakland, but it does translate to Detroit and everywhere else, and to the state of the world."

"I felt a responsibility to honor the [MC5] name, and honor those guys and their commitment to the music and their commitment to the times."

As for the musical approach, Brooks says Kramer "wanted to see what would be a more modern version of *High Time*... I was always talking to him about the Yardbirds' *Roger the Engineer*, and Parliament-Funkadelic. 'Change No Change' we thought had a [Marvin Gaye] 'Trouble Man' vibe to

it. That song is interesting because it's pretty much the demo Wayne made. I feel like it captured the feeling of what I was seeing, and it's still there."

For his part Ezrin, along with Kramer, was after "that combination of funk, punk and power that was Detroit," and of course part of the MC5's makeup. Demos were exchanged, along with exacting suggestions and tweaks to tighten arrangements and refine lyrics. Tracking sessions with Kramer, Was and Paul McCartney's drummer, Abe Laboriel Jr., took less than a week during November 2021 at Waystation studio in Coldwater Canyon. Studio owner and engineer Dave Way says the recording was "one of the best sessions of my 35-year career. Everybody was happy to be there and brought their very best. And they're all badasses."

"Having [Was and Laboriel] and Wayne on the floor meant there were fireworks from the first note," recalls Ezrin, who co-wrote the *Heavy Lifting* tracks "Blind Eye" and "Barbarians at the Gate." "They spurred each other on. They inspired each other. We had the demos so we knew the songs. We weren't forced to work out the shape of the material. They developed and perfected their parts fairly quickly, together. They just got each other,

and I pushed, like I do, to keep the energy level up and keep it alive."

Was remembers that "there was never any pretense of, 'Now you're the bass player in the MC5.' It was, 'We're making a record that's meant to shine a light on the legacy and keep the ethos alive.'" In

doing that, he notes that, "I did think a lot about Michael Davis" and Davis's isolated bass tracks that Kramer had provided for Was to study during the MC50 dates.

"The thing that really blew my mind was how much R&B there was in his bass playing," Was says. "He listened very carefully to [Motown funk brother] James Jamerson, I think. There's a lot of nuanced groove that gets washed away in the sea of guitar when you hear the mixes. I suspect that's one reason why Wayne called me; I do think that particular way of blending R&B and rock and roll is a Detroit thing. I think he knew that's where I come from."

Both Ezrin and Brooks say Kramer's approach was characteristically straightforward and clean. Most of the album was played with his signature Stratocaster, although Ezrin notes that Kramer was "a quintessential guitar guy. He had a lot of other axes to choose from when we were looking for

## "EVERYONE WHO LISTENED TO THEM WENT OUT AND STARTED A BAND OF THEIR OWN"

D O N W A S





**Kramer and Kim Thayil (right) perform on the MC50 tour at Alcatraz, in Milan, Italy, November 21, 2018.**

different sounds and stuff.” But, Brooks adds with a laugh, “Wayne’s not a pedal guy, right? He’ll use effects here and there, but his studio is filled with pedals that he’s never used.”

That doesn’t mean Kramer’s playing is simple by any measure, Ezrin cautions. “Wayne is such a versatile and interestingly schooled guitar player,” he says. “He had a really great sense of rhythm. He channels his inner Motown star and has a very R&B approach to things, rhythmically, so he’s very funky. And then once he studied jazz, he became not only funky and punky but he also had some harmonically sophisticated constructs with the songs on the record, moments in some of the songs that are on a high level, from my point of view.

“He’s very good at coming up with riffs, too. Riffs are not very easy, especially the simple ones. They’re very much like a motif is in classical music. But he’s a great riff man. When you listen to ‘Boys Play With Matches,’ from the new album, that guitar riff — that’s fantastic!”

Soundgarden’s Thayil — who calls MC5 “probably my favorite band” — gained his own appreciation for Kramer’s method while playing alongside the guitarist in MC50. “It’s a little bit more involved than I thought,” acknowledges

## “SOME BANDS TAKE FIVE YEARS BETWEEN ALBUMS. WE TAKE 50”

WAYNE KRAMER

their way repetitively. But the arrangements are dynamic, so there are little rhythmic emphases here and there to kind of break it up. When you’re young, you don’t understand that. It takes a while to recognize and learn nuance and dynamics, and there’s a lot of that in [Wayne’s] playing, in MC5 and after.”

Once *Heavy Lifting*’s basic tracks were together, Kramer and Ezrin began reaching out to guests for overdubs. “We would discuss it, have a conversation,” Ezrin remembers. “In most cases they were friends of Wayne’s that we were reaching out to. They would discuss what it was Wayne and I had agreed we were missing and that we were looking for. Wayne would give them their marching orders. They would send me samples and examples of what it was they were about to do and we’d make adjustments. And sometimes it would be perfect and amazing.”

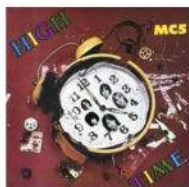
Living Colour’s Vernon Reid met Kramer prior to the pandemic, when both were instructors at one of Morello’s guitar workshops. Reid was surprised

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



“THE MC5 FOR ME WERE LIKE SUPERHEROES WHEN I WAS ABOUT 11 YEARS OLD. JUST TOTAL FREEDOM”

WILLIAM DUVALL



**ABOVE:** Released in 1971, *High Time* was the original lineup's final album. Despite good reviews, it was badly promoted and didn't sell. The band sputtered along for another year before breaking up after a poorly attended farewell show at the Grande Ballroom on New Year's Eve, 1972.

**BELOW:** Kramer and Tom Morello perform during the Road Recovery benefit concert at the Nokia Times Square, New York City, May 1, 2009.

and happy to be asked to play on the track “Can’t Be Found,” one of two that also feature MC5 drummer Dennis

Thompson. “The idea of an MC5 record... you can’t take something like that lightly,” Reid says. “I didn’t. But Wayne was such an encouraging person. He’s a positive, feisty dude. He was kind of like, ‘Do you! Do what you feel. Don’t think.’ So I listened to it and tried to absorb the tune and get a vibe for it, and it worked out.”

Morello, meanwhile, was one of the first guests involved in the project. He co-wrote *Heavy Lifting*’s title track and plays on it as well. “When I found out the song was co-written by him, it was a foregone conclusion he was gonna play on it,” Ezrin says. “And of course I got him to sing on it, too, on the chorus.”

Slash was similarly “an easy ask” for “The Edge of the Switchblade.” “It was exactly the right song for him to be part of,” Ezrin says. “I didn’t have to say anything; what I wanted was pure Slash, just ‘Go be yourself. Play like you play musically. It’s a simple progression.’ It just called for that kind of Slash sensibility.

DuVall, another veteran of the DKT/MC5 shows, says he was “honored” to be vocalizing Kramer’s story about the band

and channeled his pre-adolescent fandom into his performance. “I was just going for that thing I feel like Rob Tyner and the entire band were able to embody, which is that bridge between soul and rock and roll and, of course, experimental music, free jazz, high-energy kind of ecstatic music. I still feel like that soul/rock and roll junction is firmly there, and so I tried to bring that, which is natural for me to do anyway.”

Ezrin feels it’s also important that Thompson, who recorded his drum parts back in Michigan, contributed to *Heavy Lifting*. “He was one of the most important drummers of the era and obviously an original member, an OG — the only one left standing beside Wayne at that point,” the producer says. “So it was very important that we got both of them on the record to the extent that we could, and I think Dennis did a really good job.”

Fans got their first taste of *Heavy Lifting* when Kramer released the title track in conjunction with the 2022 spring tour of the Brooks-fronted MC5 lineup, which Kramer called “the best band yet.” The group was also playing “The American Rose,” another politically pointed song that did not make the final track list. “There were other songs that were part of the other [movie] project,” Ezrin notes. “But from the time we were in the studio until the end, it was the same group of songs.”

*Heavy Lifting* comes out amidst a spate of MC5 activity this fall. In addition to the long overdue Rock Hall honor, a new book, *MC5: An Oral Biography of Rock’s Most Revolutionary Band* [see sidebar on page 67] — comprised of the late Ben Edmonds’ original interviews and finished by Detroit-born writers Brad Tolinski and Jaan Uhelszki — has been published. And, fittingly, the group will be honored in its hometown of Lincoln Park. Kramer’s absence will be felt, as will Sinclair’s, Thompson’s and the other band members — but the *Heavy Lifting* team is confident that the album will stand as a fitting finale and one last set of vital jams kicked out under the MC5 banner.

“I’m gratified that when we finished the album, Wayne sent me a note and just said, ‘This is great. I love it,’ and I feel really good about that,” Brooks says. “We didn’t finish with any regrets. He loved every song, every mix, and all of us were excited about it. That he was happy, satisfied, excited and fulfilled by the process and by the record itself — that’s great. I feel good that I could play some role in helping him to realize one of his dreams.” ■











# MAN OF STEEL

He brought the Dobro to centerstage with his dazzling talent. As he drops his first album in seven years, **Jerry Douglas** reflects on his gear, career and induction in the Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT SIMONTACCHI

**O**NCE IN A blue moon a player's name becomes synonymous with an instrument for an era, and Jerry Douglas is on that extremely short list. He is to Dobro what Béla Fleck is to banjo, David Grisman is to mandolin, Ron Carter is to upright bass and Leo Kottke is to steel-string acoustic. Douglas is the modern standard, and he suddenly made history this summer when he was enshrined in the Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

Douglas has the requisite technical expertise in spades, but he didn't earn his status simply by shredding. Douglas made his bones by being everyone's first call and answering it with impeccable accompaniment instincts developed via a wealth of experience. His ability to play virtually anything earned him the nickname Flux, as reflected in the titles of his first two albums, 1979's *Fluxology* and 1982's *Fluxedo*.

Although the 16-time Grammy winner is best known for his long-standing gig with Alison Krauss & Union Station (he confirms that a finished new album is scheduled for

a spring release), it's estimated that Douglas has a whopping 2,000 album sessions under his belt, including a ridiculously long and varied list of releases by legends like Chet Atkins, Ray Charles, Phish, Johnny Mathis, Ricky Skaggs, Brad Paisley, Paul Simon and James Taylor. Douglas's Dobro is now in demand more than ever and is featured on Billy Strings' 2023 release, *Me/And/Dad*. He's also come into his own as a producer, handling John Hiatt's 2021 album, *Leftover Feelings*, which inspired Douglas to go drummer-less, as well as the past two Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway releases, including *City of Gold*, the Grammy-winning Bluegrass Album of the Year for 2023.

*The Set* (Many Hats) is the first album he's released under his name in seven years. It's an interesting mixture of six familiar songs from the Jerry Douglas Band's live set — hence the title — plus five new original cuts, with contributions from bassist Daniel Kimbro, fiddle player Christian Sedelmyer and guitarist Mike Seal. A member of Douglas's group since 2016, Seal penned the uplifting track "Renee," and, man, can that cat sail! In

addition, Douglas covers jazz giant Mike Stern's "What Might Have Been," which features beautifully breathy vocals from rising star Aoife O'Donovan. The lead single is an adventurous Americana take on George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" that will leave flabbergasted players sobbing.

Through it all, Douglas's Dobro shines. The man is a guru in the instrument's community of fans. His work with Fishman in the early 2000s literally set the tone for modern Dobro in the live arena, and his signature Beard Dobro represents a re-imagining of the original design, which dates back to the 1920s [see the November 2024 *Learn* column for more on the Dobro's history]. Douglas moves at full throttle, but we were lucky enough to catch up with him for insights into his instrument and new album.

**What a treat to hear your Dobro weep on one of the most iconic guitar songs of all time. How did that come about?**

Yeah, "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" is kind of a guitar song. [laughs] I was on a tour when it popped into my head, and I thought I'd try it. The tune laid out so perfectly that it was a no-brainer that I should also record it.

**There's a video of Eric Clapton playing "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" with you in an acoustic setting on a *Transatlantic Sessions* concert at London's Royal Festival Hall in February 2023.**

**[*Transatlantic Sessions* is a BBC Scotland TV program and touring band with Douglas and Aly Bain as co-musical directors.] Clapton plays his Martin, not a Strat, through an amp, so for once you've got more sustain with your Dobro.**

For once! That's the first and last time that's going to happen, right? I was playing it on the *Transatlantic* tour and asked Eric if he'd play it with us. He agreed and asked, "Do you play on the chorus? I told him that I do, and he said, "I've never played the chorus." I asked, "So if you soloed, you wouldn't play the chorus, you would just start singing?" He said, "Yeah," and that surprised me. So I gave him the A section, and I jumped on the next one and played it on out.



He stuck around and we did another song, an old Irish protest song called “Sam Hall.” I later produced a session for him at Abbey Road, and that was one of the three tracks. But yeah, he’s been showing up when we play *Transatlantic* in London for the past four or five years. He asked me if he could be on the tour and I told him, “No, because then it would be the Eric Clapton tour. What about all these other people? It’s better if we don’t advertise and you just show up occasionally.” He’s simply too big for a thing like that, and I don’t know if he understands.

**Maybe you could bill it as Douglas and the Dominos?**

[laughs] We’ll just give him another name. That’ll last one gig.

**Another tune from *The Set*, “What Might Have Been,” was written by another great**

**guitarist, Mike Stern. What do you dig about his playing and that haunting song?**

I heard his version, and it’s a beautiful situation consisting of just guitar notes and a vocal right on top of every note. The vocal is really rangy. Not just anyone could sing it, but Aoife has an amazing voice. She just played a *Transatlantic* gig with us at the Cambridge Folk Festival. I met Mike at a big guitar clinic called Crown of the Continent out in the mountains of Montana, close to Glacier National Park. Mike and Leni Stern were there [in 2017] along with Sonny Landreth, Brent Mason, Albert Lee and David Lindley.

**We did a tribute to Lindley in last month’s issue of *Guitar Player*.**

I loved that guy and knew him well. We had a great conversation backstage at Telluride [*Bluegrass Festival*] one time. He was there playing with Jackson Browne.

Bonnie Raitt was just hanging out with everybody. David has four or five of his target rifles. He’d be talking in his normal voice, someone would walk in, and then he’d go into Mr. Dave and take on a Jamaican accent: “Yeah, mon!” I loved his sense of humor.

I got to play one of Lindley’s screaming-to-the-heavens lap-slide solos with Jackson Browne on a PBS special, and even doing just that made the show different. Jackson’s voice and David’s lap steel are meant to go together. When you hear Jackson, you look for Lindley.

I remember having a special slide one time, and I thought I was the only player in the world that had one. I go running across a field at the Winnipeg Folk Festival to his workshop like this [waving his hands in the air and holding a steel bar]. He went like that too, and he had the exact same one already. I thought, How the hell did he get that?



**What was special about it?**

It was made by one of those special machinists who only makes a few of them. No one can get them but us. I'm totally a Lindley guy. We'd have these arguments about Weissenborns versus Dobros, and he'd say, "Weissenborns eat Dobros for breakfast." On the last gig we did together, he played fiddle and I played lap steel because he was suffering from tinnitus and couldn't do that anymore.

But then I saw him at Crown of the

Continent, and he was fucking great! When he got offstage, he told me that his ear monitors hadn't worked the whole show. He'd left them in, but he had no stage volume because he didn't want to hear anything loud. I don't know how he did it, but it was one of the best David Lindley shows I've ever seen. And he had this special new oud that had a very low-pitched string, like a B $\flat$ . He loved to hit that every once in a while just to watch the visceral effect it had on people.

**When you and I spoke in 2008, you had just undergone a gear renaissance...**

That was a gear renaissance for every Dobro player, because now everybody can sound like a Dobro and not be nailed to the ground in front of a microphone. It enabled us to move around, keep our acoustic sound and be plugged into my signature Fishman Aura for its microphone emulations. I worked with Fishman on their Nashville Series Resonator Pickup, which captures the resonator sound without turning the instrument itself into a pickup at higher volumes. It's a two-piece piezo bridge pickup: one for the top three strings, and another for the bottom three. We created 16 digital Aura images. Onstage, you can blend the live pickup sound with the Aura image. I tend to use all Aura, and I think of the images like EQ to control my slice of the sonic pie.

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**“YOU’VE GOT TO LOOK  
FOR SOMETHING THAT NOT  
EVERYBODY IS DOING.  
THAT’S WHAT I HAD TO DO”**





**Can you explain how you use your crazy bridge?**

That's a Hipshot Doubleshot bridge. I can flip that bar and instantly go all the way from my open G tuning down to D: [low to high] G B D G B D, to D A D F# A D. So I can go totally into blues world without shifting [a tuning peg]. You can set it up to move any string, but it's moving my second, third, fifth and sixth strings. It's all calibrated and doesn't knock your whole instrument out of tune.

[Hipshot founder Dave Borisoff] told me that it was the first thing he'd ever made, and he thought nobody would ever want it, so he put it in a corner. I told him, "Go get it! I'm your man." I need that. It keeps me from flying with two guitars. I can change to a completely different tuning, either by lowering or by starting lower and then flipping higher. And being able to do it on the fly gives me all sorts of options that I can use right in the middle of a solo if I choose.

**Who are some newer players playing creatively and carrying the Dobro torch forward?**

Look up Gaven Largent, East Nash Grass and Dan Tyminski, who is also a great singer. I met him when he was 10 years old. He played one of my more difficult songs and just killed it. I knew I was going to see him again. It was just like me meeting Josh Graves the first time, like a repeat of that scene. He's one of several really good new Dobro players, including Jeff Partin [of *Rhonda Vincent & the Rage*], who are pushing the Dobro forward by listening to other instruments. Eventually you run out of things to listen to for Dobro, so you start looking at saxophone solos. You could start looking at Clapton, Jeff Beck and, for sure, Derek Trucks. You've got to get out of your comfort zone and go look for something that not everybody is doing. That's what I had to do.

**And you landed in the Bluegrass Hall of Fame. How does it feel?**

I never thought about being in the hall of anything. It was crazy. I was at the Ryman, getting ready to go on with the



**“ERIC ASKED ME IF HE  
COULD BE ON THE TOUR.  
I TOLD HIM, ‘NO, BECAUSE  
THEN IT WOULD BE THE  
ERIC CLAPTON TOUR’”**

Earls of Leicester for the bluegrass series there, when the head of the International Bluegrass Music Association, Ken White, came up to me and said, "You're in." I said, "Huh? I'm in what?" He replied, "The Hall of Fame." I went, "Oh fuck." And now I've got to go play!

It took me three or four songs to stop vibrating and settle down. It was shocking. I've been going to those things for so long, I was there when Bill Monroe got inducted. I was there when they inducted Flatt & Scruggs, and all those kinds of people. And that's just the kind of place for them. Those people go there.

**Congratulations on officially being one of those people. Did you personally**

**choose [mandolinist] Sam Bush to do your induction?**

I did. I've known Sam for so long, and we both know where all of our bodies are buried, so to speak. He lives just over the hill from me, but we never see each other here [in Nashville]. We only see each other when we're a thousand miles away. Asking him to do it was like a marriage proposal or something. It was kind of weird. We were in a dressing room at Red Rocks.

But it's a good feeling. I've been doing this a long time, but it doesn't feel like it. It's all one great big musical note at this point. All I think about is what I'm going to play tomorrow, not about being put in a place where people are going to look at you forever. ■

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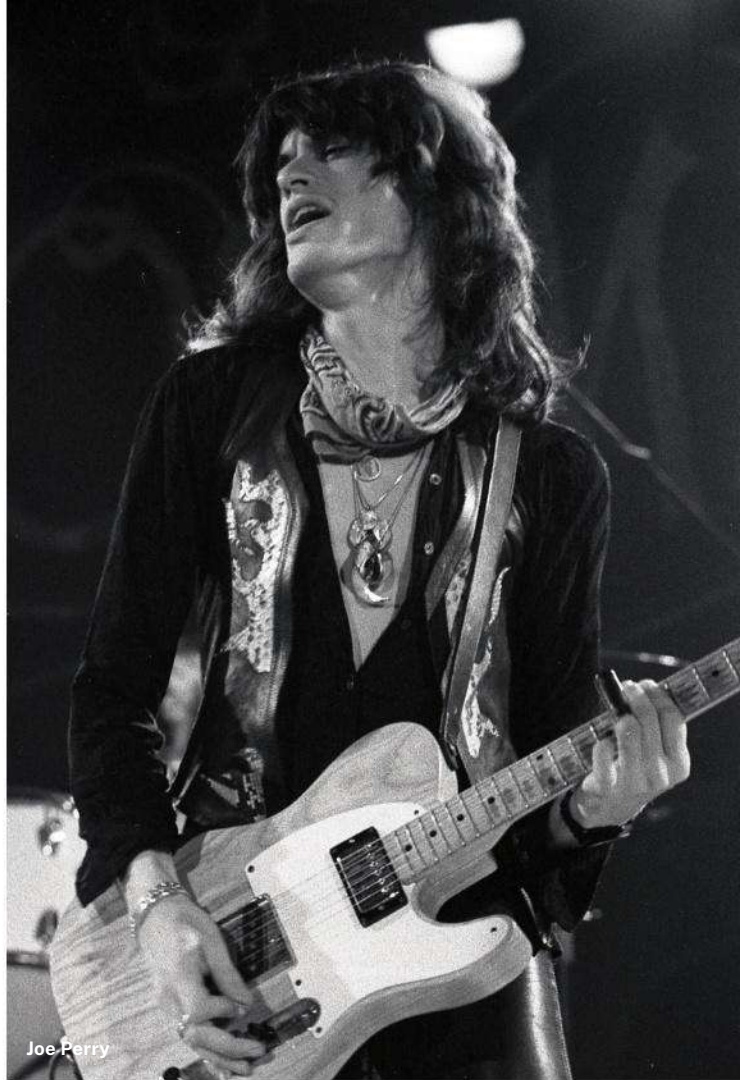


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Alex Lifeson



Joe Perry

# UNFORGETTABLE FIRE

A look at some of the greatest guitar moments from 50 years ago.

BY CHRIS BUONO

**AS THE MODERN-DAY** 2020s roll on, so do the inevitable semi-centennial anniversaries. By my math, that means it's time to celebrate some now classic electric guitar moments from 1974. Speaking to the electric guitar itself, it was 70 years ago that the iconic Stratocaster was introduced by the Fender Electric Instrument Company. Just two years earlier, the Gibson Guitar Corporation gave the world the Les Paul. Fast-forward 20 years to 1974, when these now iconic instruments, along with others, were plugged into an assortment of tube-driven amplifiers to create musical moments that would be more than worthy of remembering today. Both the American and British guitar worlds were in full force, while the

Canadian scene was finally beginning to boom. All three nations contributed albums that featured tunes with unforgettable guitar riffs. As you navigate these works, including the honorable mentions below, you'll discover what I think is an ample amount of material for a drinking game, given the perplexing agglomeration of title tracks and self-titled debuts.

## THE POSITION IS OPEN

Kicking off this look into 1974's greatest guitar moments, we delve into a pair of pivotal open-position riffs from two British artists. **Ex. 1** is inspired by "Rebel Rebel," the sixth track on David Bowie's redefining *Diamond Dogs* album. Although the enigmatic singer-

songwriter has an exemplary track record for picking guitar players to play on his records, it was the artist-formerly-known-as Ziggy Stardust himself who recorded what many consider to be one of most recognizable riffs in all of rock, albeit with a little help from a friend named Alan Parker. Comparatively slowing things down, **Ex. 2** takes its cue from Robin Trower's unflinching use of a Uni-Vibe in a post-Hendrix world in the title track to his album *Bridge of Sighs*. Both riffs call for ample fret-hand finger arching to achieve maximum open-string chime.

## MUSCLE-CAR TOUR

The year 1974 had its share of in-your-face moments from burgeoning guitar

heroes from all over the globe. Be it a Plymouth 'Cuda or the forgotten AMC Javelin, maximum rock and roll could be heard blaring from the hot rods of the day. Continuing to focus on the other side of the pond, the mighty Ritchie Blackmore was not resting on the laurels of "Smoke on the Water," nor was he done with its intervallic impetus — parallel perfect 4ths. Instead, he gave us the aptly titled *Burn* and its scorching title track, which informs **Ex. 3**. Keep in mind, Blackmore notably used his thumb to fret the low G note on his 6th string for his riff.

Hopping across the Atlantic and shifting back down to the open position for a guttural E5 to anchor each bar of power chord muscle, **Ex. 4** offers a reworking of "Working Man" from Canada's soon-to-be favorite sons, Rush. Featuring the punchy riff writing of a young Alex Lifeson, this track was from the band's self-titled debut.

Meanwhile, representing the stars and stripes, Boston-bred Aerosmith were parading their second album, *Get Your Wings*, which features the hard-swinging shuffle "Same Old Song and Dance."

**Ex. 5** emulates the potency of the slick opening Joe Perry-penned salvo that kicks off the track. Both of these North American-made riffs call for looking ahead to the next move, located higher up the neck, as you play their initial low E5 power chords.

### BOOGIE POWER

By '74, the prominence of the Chuck Berry-style "boogie" guitar accompaniment — a root/5th power chord alternating with a root/6th "extension," à la "Johnny B. Goode" — was well established. It can be heard on countless recordings in the worlds of blues, rock and everything in between. Continuing to thrive no matter how diverse the stylistic divide, the boogie comping pattern served its 1974 purveyors well, as demonstrated by **Ex. 6**, which brings to mind the Rolling Stones' "It's Only Rock 'n Roll (But I Like It)" from the album of almost the same name. Much like the riffing of Keith Richards and Mick Taylor, this

Ex. 1

Dmaj7sus2 E6

let ring ——— let ring ———

TAB 0 3 2 0 2 0 1 2

Ex. 2

(Em7)

let ring ——— let ring ———

TAB 0 1 2 0 0 3 2 2 0 2 3 0 0 8 9

Ex. 3

(Gm7)

1

let ring ——— let ring ———

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

3

let ring ——— let ring ———

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



curated excerpt wields the wonder of the boogie before descending open-position chords on the eighth-note upbeats.

Upping the ante on the boogie style, with staccato accents on the backbeats (beats 2 and 4), **Ex. 7** does something similar to what Eagles guitarists Bernie Leadon and Glenn Frey played on “Already Gone,” from *On the Border*. By the way, the searing lead work on that classic track was served up by the band’s newly recruited axman, Don Felder.

Mining another debut album for a momentous boogie moment in ’74, **Ex. 8** recalls Paul Stanley’s deft take on this tried-and-true rock and roll accompaniment device, as heard in the A minor-based intro to “Deuce,” from Kiss’ eponymously-titled first album.



Robert Fripp

**DOUBLING DOWN**

Some of my favorite recorded guitar moments from any year are the ones that make me drop everything to play air guitar. Two standouts that never fail couldn’t be more unrelated in style, yet they share one key element: major 3rd double-stops on the G and B strings. First up, **Ex. 9** brings to mind a collection of moments from the Stevie Wonder-penned Rufus hit, “Tell Me Something Good,” as played by Al Ciner and Tony Maiden. The song is rife with quirky color, but the cherub for me is the 4th-position double-stop bends, as

**Ex. 4**

E5 D5 G5 E5 C5 D5

**Ex. 5**

E5 G D5/A

**Ex. 6**

A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A5 G5 E

**Ex. 7**

G5 G6 D5 D6 C5 C6 C5 C6

MICHAEL LOCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

emulated on beat 4 of bar 1 here. I can't get enough of the bend and release from the 6th-fret D $\flat$  and F notes followed by a pull-off to then hammer-on from the 4th-fret notes.

Same goes for the brooding vibe heard in the haunting King Crimson instrumental "Red," from the album of the same name, as played by the ever-perplexing Robert Fripp. You get a taste in **Ex. 10**, where a remodeling of Fripp's similar approach to parallel major 3rds on the same string set is presented, with a little more bite. In all instances, you can either fret the higher dyad on the G and B strings by barring your 3rd finger across both strings — a true double-stop — or with the individual tips of your 3rd and 4th fingers.

### THREE CHORDS AND THE TRUTH

No matter what year and what approach is taken, the I - IV - V chord progression (and its numerous mix-and-match permutations) will always prevail. In 1974, that sentiment rang true in a big way with two monster offerings from, yet again, transatlantic counterparts. In the U.S. Southeast, where rock was rooting its way into the culture below the Mason-Dixon in its own unique way, a descending V - IV - I progression in the key of G (D - C - G) was fodder for the irresistible repeating progression and instrumental interlude heard in Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama."

**Ex. 11** does something similar while keeping the groove heard in the original intact. Despite the ubiquitous intro, "Sweet Home Alabama" is loaded with guitar moments that are often overlooked, such as this break.

Jumping over to the U.K., we look at the soulful riffing of Bad Company guitarist Mick Ralphs in the hit song "Can't Get Enough," which is built from the key of C's I, IV and V chords (C, F and G). The broken-up iteration presented in **Ex. 12** is arranged in standard tuning for ease of playing on your own, although on the recording Ralphs had employed an unusually high open C tuning (low to high: G, C, G, C, E, G), which is akin to open G tuning (D, G, D, G, B, D), capo 5.

Ex. 8

Ex. 8 shows a guitar riff in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff below. Chords are indicated above the staff: A5, A6, A5, A6, A5, F/A, and G/B. The tablature shows fret numbers for strings T, A, and B.

Ex. 9

Ex. 9 shows a guitar riff in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff below. Chords are indicated above the staff: Ab and Fm7. The tablature shows fret numbers for strings T, A, and B, including a triplet and a 'Full' bend.

Ex. 10

Ex. 10 shows a guitar riff in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff below. Chords are indicated above the staff: E and G. The tablature shows fret numbers for strings T, A, and B, including a 1/2 bend.

Ex. 11

Ex. 11 shows a guitar riff in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef staff with notes and a guitar tablature staff below. Chords are indicated above the staff: (D), (C), and (G). The tablature shows fret numbers for strings T, A, and B, including a 'let ring' instruction.

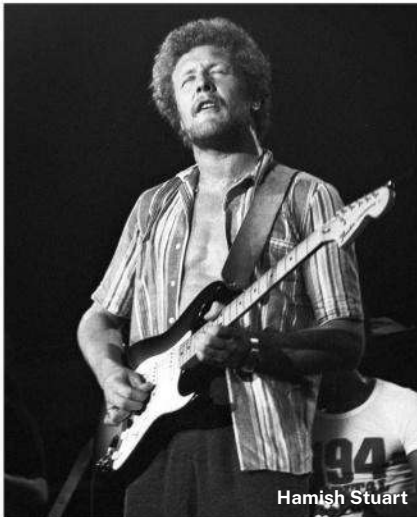


**GUITAR ANTI-HERO**

In 1974, the idea of the “guitar god” was solidified in pop culture with both American and British names populating the list. So much so, it was not unfair to think that guitar moments of note could only come from these mythical luminaries. In a proverbial hold-my-beer moment, under uniquely stressful circumstances Paul McCartney, much like David Bowie on *Diamond Dogs*, decided to play the lion’s share of the guitar parts on the title track of the classic Wings album *Band On the Run*. McCartney’s expressive sliding 4ths double-stops played over the Dmaj7 - G6 vamp that kicks off the tune are respectfully paraphrased in **Ex. 13**.

Another notable, yet off-radar moment is found in the rhythm work of two Canadians — Randy Bachman and Blair Thorton of Bachman-Turner Overdrive.

**Ex. 14** offers demonstrations of the infectious rhythm parts from B.T.O.’s chart-topping song “You Ain’t Seen Nothing Yet,” from *Not Fragile*.



**SUMMER OF FUNK**

When it comes to funk music, the summer of 1974 was a banger. At its peak you had releases from giants like Parliament and Funkadelic, albeit separately. At that time George Clinton was tapping core members like Eddie Hazel, Garry Shider and even Bootsy

**Ex. 12**

(Musical notation for Ex. 12, measures 1-2)

Chords: C, F/A, C/G, F, B $\flat$ /D, F/C

1

P.M. - | P.M. | P.M. - | P.M.

TAB: 8 8 | 8 | 13 13 | 13

56 57 | 6 7 | 5 5 | 10 11 | 11 | 10 |

5 5 | 5 7 | 5 5 | 10 10 | 10 | 10 |

5 7 | 7 | 5 | 10 12 | 12 | 10 |

(Musical notation for Ex. 12, measures 3-4)

Chords: C/E, Gsus4/D, G/D, G/D

3

P.M.

TAB: 12 13 | 13 | 12 | 12 |

12 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

12 14 | 12 | 12 | 12 |

15

**Ex. 13**

(Musical notation for Ex. 13)

Chords: (Dmaj7), (G6)

TAB: 10 12 10 | 5 7 5 | 14 15 14 | 10 12 10 |

10 12 10 | 5 7 5 | 14 15 14 | 10 12 10 |

2

**Ex. 14**

(Musical notation for Ex. 14)

Chords: A/C#, G/D, D

1

TAB: 9 9 x x 9 | 9 | 7 7 x x 5 | 5 |

10 10 x x 10 | 10 | 8 x x 7 | 7 |

9 9 | 9 9 | 7 7 | 5 5 |

9 9 | 9 9 | 7 7 | 7 7 |

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# Pushing Forward

Lessons learned upon reflection — with an eye to the future.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

**AS WE PUT** *Guitar Player's* print edition to rest, it's a good time to reflect and glance forward. Writing *Frets Learn* for nine years (and counting) has taught me a ton about the acoustic universe, and I'd like to highlight a few major themes before we move on to the digital domain. The origin of this column harkens back to a 2015 master class with Dweezil Zappa that needed to be put in paragraph form. While it's exciting to consider expounding ideas using online tools, I'm better with words than pixels. But whatever the delivery medium, this column retains an appreciation for the sounds and styles of wood and wires, and mine has never been deeper than right now. It's also election season, so in that spirit I offer my take on the state of the acoustic union.

## RESPECT THE WOODS

Acoustic guitar is as cool as electric, and acoustic-electric innovation is as exciting as anything happening in the guitar world. The emergence and development of wildly different hybrids is particularly fascinating as the boundaries between acoustic and electric guitars become increasingly blurred. Progressive players, particularly percussive fingerstylists, are utilizing all sorts of electronics to capture the acoustic instrument's every aspect and glory.

But even unplugged, the acoustic guitar demands a deeper understanding than I had ever anticipated. Within the steel-string realm alone there exist a multitude of shapes, sizes and tops, as

well as myriad wood configurations in seemingly infinite combinations. Likewise, the nylon side offers everything from classical to flamenco, not to mention the ukulele. Gypsy jazz guitars are perhaps the original hybrid, and their popularity continues to surge.

The pandemic brought many new players into the fold as manufacturers scrambled to keep up with demand, but it also brought a renewed perspective on sustainability. Acoustic luthiers, from boutique to iconic, are exploring every avenue of the issue. They know better than anyone that good wood is a precious resource.

## TONE MATTERS

The audience might not know about good wood, but they know what sounds good to them, and buttery tones go over better than brittle ones. The more you pay attention to tone, the more you hear the nuances and complex overtones of a holistically sound guitar. To put it simply, the more you listen, the better you hear. Soon you'll be able to identify the subtle differences in woods, much like a wine connoisseur identifies different notes in a particular varietal, blend or vintage.

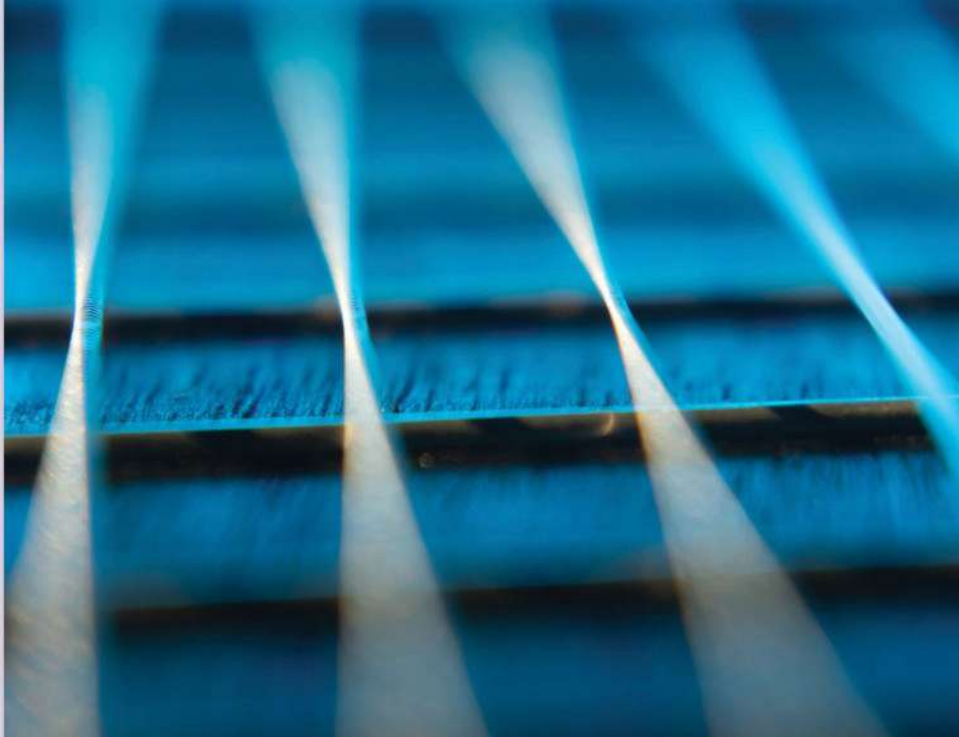
There is also great progress and promise in the realm of acoustic pickups and signal paths. What was top shelf yesterday is basic today, as acoustic electronics manufacturers push the limits of technology. Venerable brands like L.R. Baggs and Fishman are making pedals designed to work with piezo

pickups, as well as magnetic pickups that sense a guitar's body signal along with string vibrations. Acoustic amps are available in an array of styles and with tons of features. I've been experimenting with how to make the most of an acoustic amp using piezo and magnetic pickups, and I have exciting discoveries to share in next month's online column, along with a demonstration video.

## MOVING AHEAD

Acoustic guitar history is fathoms deep, and the future is wide open. Whatever you know, there is oodles more to find out. I personally discovered this when I spoke with Jerry Douglas for this issue's feature [see page 72], as I did when researching last month's Dobro 101 column. *Frets* has traditionally covered all sorts of stringed things, and honoring that spirit more profoundly is on the agenda. The Americana and bluegrass galaxies alone contain constellations of instruments ripe for further investigation. I look forward to accruing more worldly wisdom and searching well beyond American borders for inspiration and enlightenment. I'm giddy with anticipation about expanded opportunities in the digital realm and look forward to seeing you online. 🎸

*Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player- and Frets-related videos on YouTube @JimmyLeslieGTR, learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com and his Allman Brothers tribute at allmondbrothers.com.*





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# EPIPHONE

## USA Collection Coronet

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

**FOR THE PAST** few decades, Epiphone guitars have largely offered more affordable offshore-built alternatives to Gibson models, while generally being made with near-identical shapes and specs, in the broad sense at least. The new USA Collection Coronet, however, takes us back to the original premise of the late '50s and '60s, when Epiphones were manufactured right alongside Gibson guitars in Kalamazoo but were often given their own brand-specific model designs. Shift the production site to Nashville and dial your way-back machine to 1959, and that's largely what we're looking at this month: a USA-made Epiphone Coronet that captures serious vintage vibe in a stripped-down yet unexpectedly versatile guitar.

While the Epiphone USA Collection Coronet appears to be authentic, it isn't a strict reissue, nor is it intended to be, although from the build and quality you wouldn't know it unless you're up on the finer points of the early Coronet model. The 1959 Coronet wore the headstock badge (nicknamed the "bikini" logo for obvious reasons) and pickguard shape seen here, and had a single Epiphone mini-humbucker in the bridge position. The 1960 Coronet swapped that for a P90 in a (usually white) dog-ear cover and featured a larger symmetrical "batwing" pickguard. A little later that year, the Coronet's body edges became more rounded, which approximately coincided with the move to a black dog-ear pickup cover, and the guitar — like all Epiphone guitars and amplifiers — ditched the bikini badge for the more common Epiphone script logo well before the year's end. Otherwise, among the "modern improvements" are the

slightly wider neck width at the nut (1.695 inches) and slimmer body (1.375 inches).

As per the '58-'60 Coronet, this USA Collection model has a symmetrical double-cutaway solid mahogany body with fairly squared-off edges front and back. The glued-in neck is also made from solid mahogany, with an unbound Indian rosewood fingerboard carrying 22 medium-jumbo frets. It's profiled to Gibson's long-running SlimTaper shape, which might feel a little flatter than expected to players seeking a '59-spec neck carve, although it's quite comfortable from nut to joint.

The Vintage Cherry finish on my review sample is one of three nitrocellulose lacquer options alongside Ebony and TV Yellow. Buffed to a high gloss, it looks great over some really superior-looking cuts of mahogany, which display lovely three-dimensional ribbon figuring through the translucent red of the body's top and back. There's just a little puckering where the fingerboard meets the edge of the neck around the upper eight frets or so, but that's no major concern. Otherwise, the overall aesthetic is nicely complemented by the

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### USA Collection Coronet

**CONTACT** [epiphone.com](http://epiphone.com)

**PRICE** \$1,699 street

**NUT** Graph Tech, 1.695" wide

**NECK** Mahogany, SlimTaper profile

**FRETBOARD** Indian rosewood, 24.75" scale, 12" radius

**FRETS** 22 medium-jumbo

**TUNERS** Vintage Deluxe (Kluson-style)

**BODY** Solid mahogany double-cutaway

**BRIDGE** Wraparound

**PICKUPS** P90

**CONTROLS** Volume and tone, Orange Drop tone capacitor

**FACTORY STRINGS** Gibson .010"-.046"

**WEIGHT** 7 lbs

**BUILT** USA

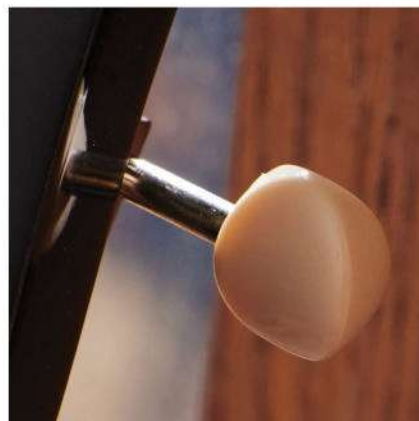
**KUDOS** A well-made reimagining of an early Epi classic, revealing surprising versatility, great tone, and excellent playability

**CONCERNS** Slight neck-heaviness in some playing positions





The USA Collection Coronet is offered in Vintage Cherry, Ebony and TV Yellow nitrocellulose lacquer finishes.



white single-ply pickguard, white tuner buttons, gold-on-white bikini logo, and off-white antique radio pointer knobs.

If the Coronet's shape makes you think of a double-cut Gibson Les Paul Junior, that's essentially correct. The '58-'60-era Coronet's symmetrical horns extend a little further than those of the Gibson, but it yields similar access to the 22nd medium-jumbo fret. Other stripped-down elements — from the single P90 to the wraparound bridge to the unbound fingerboard with dot inlays — strike the same chord.

The Coronet's build quality is excellent overall and displays the fit, finish and solid construction and components to sit perfectly well alongside its Gibson siblings, and even perhaps Juniors from the Custom

Shop. The frets are smoothly crowned and neatly dressed, and the guitar plays easily all along the 'board, while ringing out with a rich, lively acoustic response that's clearly aided by the strong and unimpeded neck joint on this single-pickup model. Putting a long neck on a relatively lightweight body can lead to a little neck heaviness, but the guitar doesn't dive too severely, and I didn't find it a major issue overall.

Tested through a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo, a Vox-leaning 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, and several presets in my Fractal FM9 modeler, the Epiphone USA Collection Coronet proved a fun and exhilarating ride that was far more than what you might expect, given that it's often made out to be a stripped-down rock and

roll machine. If you haven't played a great single-pickup guitar before, it can be easy to assume there just wouldn't be enough tonal variety available, but myriad shades can be found within these models. A slight twist of the volume or tone knob, or a shift in the picking position between the bridge and the end of the fingerboard reveals a surprising variety of moods, proving the Coronet is a versatile performer.

Lively and responsive, the guitar revels in that little bit of P90 grit and bite that many players love so much from this fat single-coil, yet with excellent string-to-string clarity and truly beautiful shimmer and chime when you dial the volume down a little to clean it up. In fact, the guitar cleans up very well using its volume control, whether into an amp on the edge of breakup or a cranked overdrive pedal, which extends its versatility even further.

There's also something to be said for how having just one pickup frees you from making choices. Sure, there are occasions when a great neck-pickup tone is just the ticket, but when the guitar is this expressive and dynamic, I rarely miss it, and this Coronet easily goes there for me. It also shows an Epiphone company that's firing on all cylinders via these collaborations with its American parent company, which in this case earns it an Editors' Pick Award. **E**



Off-white antique radio pointer knobs are among the vintage-style appointments.





# UNIVERSAL AUDIO

## SC-1 Standard condenser microphone with Hemisphere modeling

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

**ONE MIC TO** rule them all? That's the dream, and Universal Audio aims to achieve it with the SC-1, a condenser mic with Hemisphere software that models eight iconic microphones. The promise of such flexibility is appealing, not only for those on budgets but for anyone working in the field or far-flung places where you might be less inclined to use a pricey mic. That was my situation when I took the SC-1 along to a cabin in Yosemite National Park for some remote song-tracking sessions, running it through an Apollo Twin X Duo Thunderbolt interface.

UA's mic-modeling endeavors began in 2022 with its Sphere modeling software and a pair of microphones: the Sphere DLX,

UA's flagship dual-capsule modeling mic, and the smaller and more affordable Sphere LX. The technology has trickled down to Hemisphere modeling and the Standard Series mic line, which includes a range of dynamics — the SD-1, SD-5, SD-7 and SP-1 pencil pair — and the SC-1 condenser mic on review here, which I chose mainly for acoustic guitar and vocal studio applications.

The SC-1 is about the size of an average man's hand, has no onboard controls and feels smooth and solid. The mic fits snugly in its own soft-shell zipper case, which includes a cutout for the included ring mount. Following the provided instructions, I downloaded, installed and registered the

UA Connect software, after which I was able to download the native UAD Hemisphere mic modeling plug-in.

Hemisphere works like a DAW plug-in. The SC-1 mic uses a standard XLR cable to send the mic's pure signal to your DAW, where Hemisphere does its thing. Modeling can happen on the way in if you want to "feel" a mic model's color during performance, and you can print it if you like and have a UA interface with Console software. I opted to focus on performance and sculpt the sound afterward using Hemisphere in Apple Logic Pro as a plug-in. It's fun to audition different mics, and I think it's more reasonable to do it from the perspective of how a track's tone fits in a mix.

Of course, you're undoubtedly wondering, What microphones are emulated? They include an AKG C414 and C12, a Sony C-800G, a Telefunken ELA M 251, and the Neumann U87, U47, U67 and TLM 103. All are large-diaphragm condensers, as is the SC-1, so while Hemisphere can expand the SC-1's palette, it can't change its stripes to emulate, for example, a ribbon mic — an important point to keep in mind.

Some of the models seem to bring the SC-1's inherent characteristics to the fore, while others chill it out. The LD-800 (Sony C-800G) emulation is darker and silky smooth, while the LD-414 (AKG C414) model is forward and present, just as a pro would expect. I had my expert friends at Lucky Recording Company in San Francisco scroll through all eight models. They recognized each mic's distinct characteristics immediately and were impressed. I don't own a locker full of classic mics, so I wasn't particularly attached to preconceptions. I just used my ears to choose the models that gave me the results I liked best.

Bear in mind, Hemisphere offers much more than modeling, delivering a way to home in on tones before you tweak EQ parameters, and allowing you to dial in subtle variances post-performance. If you miked the acoustic too close and caught more soundhole boom than you intended, Hemisphere lets you back off the proximity, move the mic off axis or change the phase.

In use, the SC-1 compared quite favorably to a few different mics in this

class that I brought along to Yosemite. I expected its unmodeled tone would be flat and colorless, but the mic has its own mojo that's quite on point for a singer-songwriter application. Even without modeling, its powerful signal and strong presence bring some classic large-diaphragm tones to mind. The self-noise is very low — just 12dB — and allows plenty of room for later preamp boosting. The mic's cardioid polar pattern did a nice job of focusing in on the guitar-and-vocal performance right in front of it. The mic doesn't have a

low-cut switch, but the Apollo Twin X interface does, which, together with a shock mount I brought along, mitigated the sound of my foot tapping near the base of the mic stand. Hemisphere also has a low-pass filter to help deal with such problems.

It should be said that you don't need a UA interface to use the SC-1 or Hemisphere modeling, which is great. I'm a longtime user of the Avalon 737SP channel strip and was thrilled to find that UA's virtual version sounded remarkably real, while offering programmable flexibility. That sealed the deal for me, as it meant I didn't have to lug my heavy, expensive rack gear up to Yosemite. The SC-1 with Hemisphere modeling through the Avalon model is so high fidelity that I'm comfortable leaving the rack at home.

We all need at least one good mic that suits a wide range of applications. With the UA SC-1, you get a shape-shifting



The SC-1 excels for acoustic guitars and vocals, while the Hemisphere models (some shown below) offer tonal flexibility.

## THE SC-1 SOUNDS EXCELLENT. I'VE NEVER FELT SO EMPOWERED TO RECORD

condenser mic with low self-noise that can handle high sound-pressure levels. Plus, you can enter an ecosystem that facilitates

high-fidelity recordings everywhere, from the wilderness to the home office. Wi-Fi issues are no big sweat: Just capture inspiration and add the plug-ins when you

get back to civilization. Players in search of more options, including stereo sounds, should also audition UA's Sphere mics with Sphere modeling, which is the next level up and awesome for acoustic guitar. But take note that the SC-1 sounds excellent and is one third the cost of the Sphere DLX. I've never felt so empowered to record. For innovation, flexibility, attainability, and straight-ahead solid sound, the UA SC-1 earns an Editors' Pick award.

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### SC-1 Condenser Modeling Microphone

**CONTACT** [uaudio.com](http://uaudio.com)

**PRICE** \$499 street with soft shell case and Hemisphere modeling software

**FEATURES** Condenser mic frequency range 20Hz to 20kHz with cardioid pattern (close proximity) and Hemisphere modeling technology. Sensitivity -39dB, self-noise 12dB, max SPL 145dB.

**HEMISPHERE MODELS** LD-12, LD-251, LD-414 US, LD-800, LD-47K, LD-67 NOS, LD-87 Vintage, LD-103

#### HEMISPHERE CONTROLS AND

**FEATURES** Phase (0 or 180°), Proximity (-100% to 100% of positive range), Axis (0 to 180°), Power on/off, Output

**EXTRAS** Model tweaks savable as custom user presets

**CONNECTIONS** XLR

**KUDOS** Clear, detailed raw sound.

Expanded palate and controls via innovative Hemisphere app

**CONCERNS** Only that players and singers understand this system strictly models other large diaphragm condensers





# LINE 6

## POD Express

TESTED BY STUART WILLIAMS

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

The POD Express comes loaded with HX-derived amp and effects models — seven amps, seven cabs and 16 effects, distilled into a compact-sized pedal. There's an onboard looper, a tuner, a tap-tempo switch and a USB-C audio interface, plus you can hook up an external expression pedal, two foot switches, or a combination of expression and foot switch using a splitter cable. The battery power, plastic case and headphone jack suggest this is aimed at headphone practice, but it can also be chained into your rig like any other pedal, or used as your amp simulator into a PA or cab. In short, it's a jack of all trades.

That's all well and good, but we're hardly lacking for solutions when it comes to



playing or recording our guitars in 2024, so the proof is in the tonal pudding. The POD Express works in either Preset mode (you can save 21 of your own) or Manual mode. The first is a good way of coming to grips with some of its capabilities, but the fun starts when you build your own sounds. There's no display. Instead, everything is centered around the LED segments surrounding the amp control in the middle. The POD Express is laid out in five sections — Dist, Amp, Mod, Delay and Reverb — and the LED bezel displays the range for whichever control you're turning at that moment.

The controls serve double-duty when it comes to sound shaping, with amp gain, three-band EQ and channel volume all accessed by holding down the Alt switch. There's a lot going on, and the amps sound great, holding up that HX reputation nicely. The same goes for the effects. The modulations are deep and rich, the delays have an analog flavor, and the reverbs have depth and air. Basic operation is simple, but many new discoveries await, although unfortunately they require several combinations of button presses.

There's no doubt the POD Express packs a lot of features, although other compact devices, such as the Positive Grid Spark GO and Boss Katana GO, offer "smart" features for practice and sound editing. In fact, a

computer or mobile-based editor would make unlocking the POD's full potential very easy. That said, the POD Express has the added edge of being able to integrate into your existing rig, and not everyone wants to get their hands dirty with the details. Ultimately, it's an excellent all-rounder, even if it's not quite a master in any single area. **A**

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### POD Express

**CONTACT** line6.com

**PRICE** \$179.99 (street)

**MODELS:** 7 amps (clean, special, chime, dynamic, crunch, heavy, lead) with 7 matching cabs (interchangeable)

**EFFECTS** 16 (4 distortion, 4 modulation, 4 delay, 4 reverb)

**FEATURES** Tuner, looper, audio interface

**IO** 1/4" input, stereo 1/4" output, USB-C, 1/8" headphone, 1/4" expression

**POWER** 3 AA battery or 9V DC power supply (sold separately)

**DIMENSIONS** 3.6" x 5.1" x 2.2" (WxDxH)

**KUDOS** Feature-rich pedal for practice or performance, with great sounds you expect from bigger, more expensive options

**CONCERNS** Some features require multiple button combinations







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# UAFX

## Teletronix LA-2A Studio Compressor

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

**AS PART OF** its expanding line of compact pedals, UAFX presents the Teletronix LA-2A Studio Compressor, which emulates the smooth, musical compression produced by the original unit's unique tube-driven electro-optical system, which allowed instantaneous gain reduction without any increase in harmonic distortion.

Teletronix founder Jim Lawrence first used photocells in the early 1960s for controlling audio gain, and his optical compressor design was a technological breakthrough, offering far better stability and transparency than earlier comp circuits. Universal Audio founder M.T. "Bill" Putnam purchased the patented technology and continued to manufacture the LA-2A for years. (The LA-2A Classic Leveling Amplifier reissue is currently produced at UA's custom shop in Santa Cruz, California, and features hand-wired circuitry and components that are true to the original spec.)

As to the subject at hand, the UAFX Teletronix LA-2A Studio Compressor features the same high-grade modeling technology found in the company's large-format pedals and is powered by a nine-volt supply rated at 250mA minimum (not included). I tested it through a Fender Deluxe Reverb, a Vox AC10 reissue and a PRS DGT-15 head and 1x12 speaker cabinet, along with guitars that included a PRS Dustie Waring signature and a PRS NF3 SE.

Derived from the Max Preamp & Dual Compressor [reviewed July 2023], the LA-2A is a mono-in/mono-out device with controls for gain (compressed signal output level), mix (dry signal output level) and peak (amount of compression). A mini-toggle selects between Comp (4:1 ratio medium compression) and Limit (12:1 ratio hard-limiting). Two recessed slider switches on the front activate true or buffered bypass and Stock or Fast compression responses.



The Teletronix LA-2A Studio Compressor pedal emulates the smooth, musical compression of the original tube-driven unit.

The foot switch turns the effect on and off and the LED above it glows green when the input signal is not being compressed, yellow when the signal is being moderately compressed and red when the compressor is responding more heavily to input level.

The LA-2A is a very transparent-sounding comp that doesn't alter the tone of your guitar. I wouldn't call it overly aggressive, but it compresses with a squishy, tactile feel when you put the release switch in the Stock position, which is great for slide playing, smoothing out rhythm parts and putting the pop in chicken pickin'. With the mix knob set halfway or so, there's plenty of dry signal to keep the sound firm, and you just turn it up or down from there to get the dynamic response you want. The gain knob also lets you feed in compressed signal at whatever level is needed to give a healthy boost to the guitar signal — enough to push amps on the edge of breakup into full on grind — and/or mitigate any annoying loss of volume and impact at higher comp levels.

Setting the release switch to Fast makes the compression feel a bit tighter and more immediate, as might be preferable for some styles, like hard rock. Switching from Comp to Limit didn't make the sound dramatically different to my ears, as both modes squash the signal quite well, but in either mode, using the mix knob to blend in the dry signal produces beautifully compressed tones that cut through with gutsy presence and won't leave you wondering "Where's the beef?" when you crank up to play lead or hammer a crunching rhythm part. I'm still a fan of the UAFX 1176 [reviewed in November 2023], but the LA-2A is worth owning as a great-sounding studio classic in its own right. 🎸

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### Teletronix LA-2A Studio Compressor

**CONTACT** [uaudio.com](http://uaudio.com)

**PRICE** \$199 street

**CONTROLS** Peak and gain. Comp/Limit switch. (Front panel) buffer/true bypass switch, Stock/Fast Release switch  
**I/O** 1/4" input and output jacks, center-negative 9V DC input, USB-C for registration and firmware updates via computer  
**FOOT SWITCH** Mechanical  
**SIZE** 5.75" x 2".58" x 2.29" (LxWxH)  
**BUILT** Malaysia

**KUDOS** A pocket-sized rendition of the famed rack-mount LA-2A studio compressor

**CONCERNS** Sonic differences between comp and limit can be hard to discern

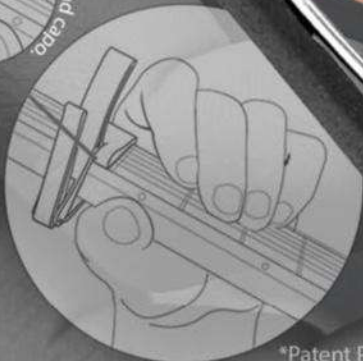




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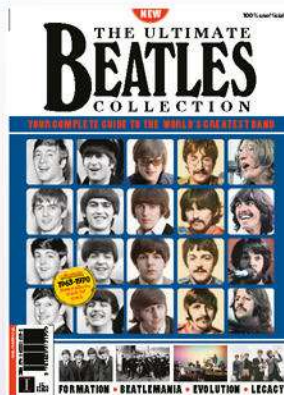
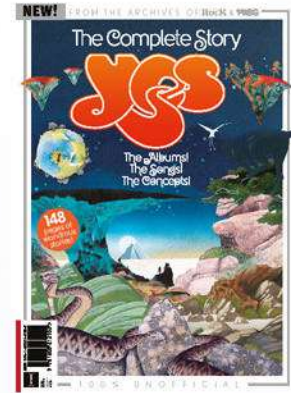
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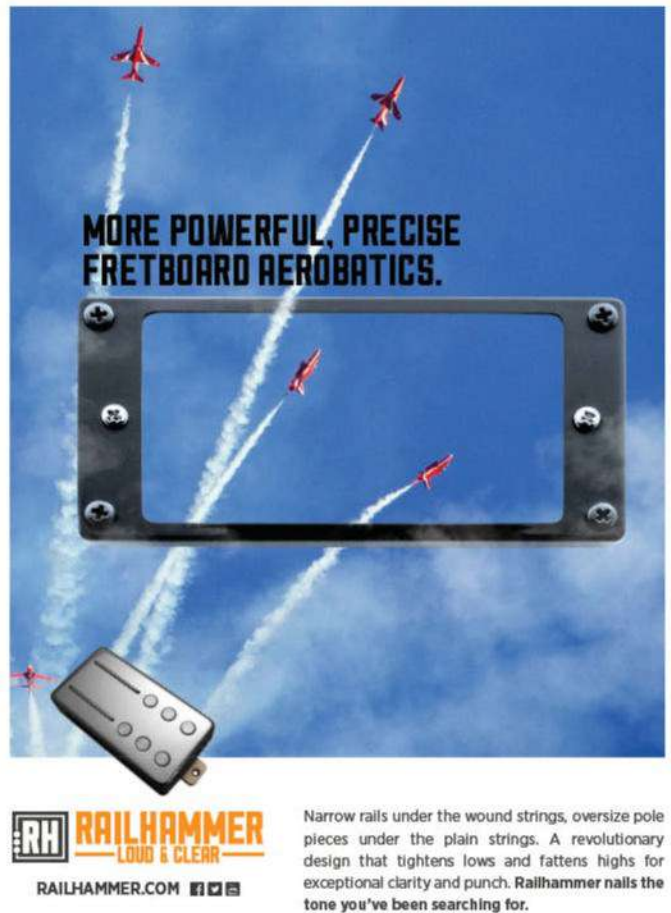
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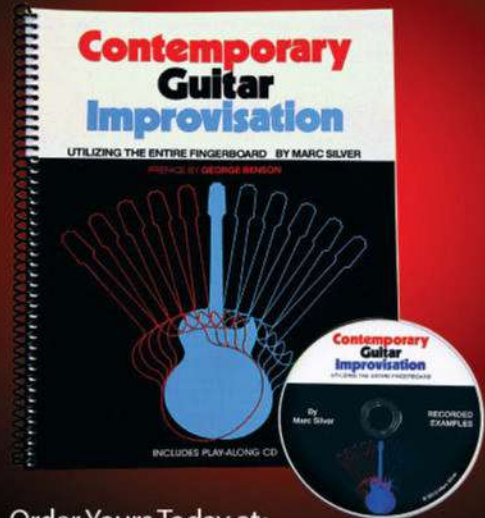
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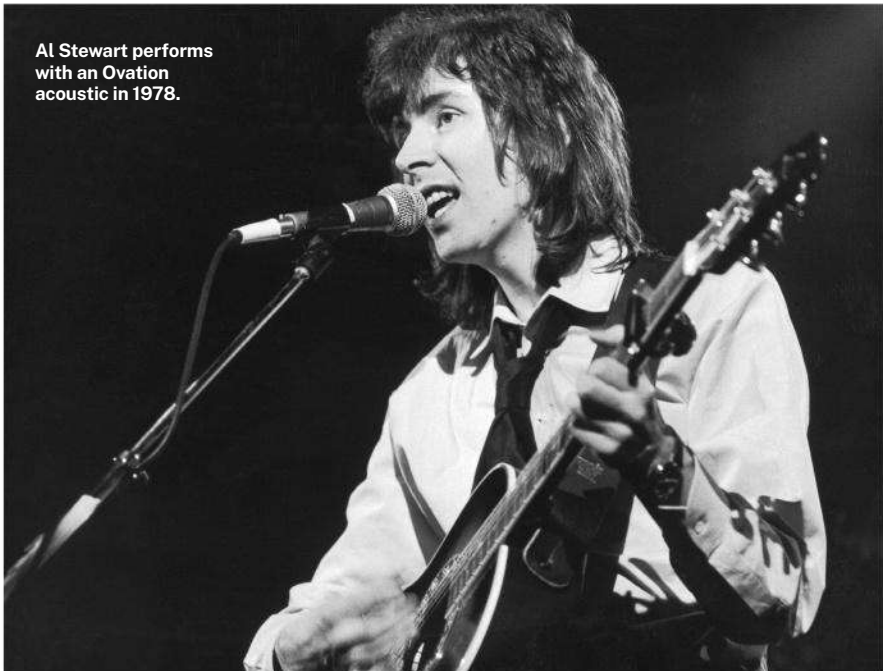


How I Wrote...

# “Year of the Cat”

Al Stewart reflects on his beguiling hit, some 10 years in the making.

BY JOE MATERA



Al Stewart performs with an Ovation acoustic in 1978.

**BY THE TIME** Al Stewart finally achieved his commercial breakthrough with 1976’s “Year of the Cat,” it was the culmination of a decade-long odyssey to bring the song to completion. Its bones date back to 1966, when Stewart penned a set of lyrics titled “Foot of the Stage”.

“It was about British comedian Tony Hancock,” the Scottish folk-rocker recalls. “But the American record company had never heard of Tony Hancock and asked me to rewrite it.” Stewart responded with a new set of lyrics about Princess Anne called “Horse of the Year.” Not surprisingly, he says, “they requested another rewrite.”

## CAT’S TAIL

Luck would finally prevail on the third try. “I had a girlfriend who had a book on Vietnamese astrology, and it was opened on a chapter called ‘Year of the Cat,’” Stewart reveals. “Having studied Bob Dylan, I noticed he always had song titles with the word ‘of’ in them: ‘Chimes of Freedom,’ ‘Masters of War’ and ‘Visions of Johanna.’ I realized there was something portentous about having a song with ‘of’ in the title. Not only that but it’s slightly off-kilter and doesn’t have an immediate meaning. And because nobody knows exactly what that’s going to mean, I thought maybe it’d draw them in. And that’s how it ended up.”

Having secured a title, Stewart began crafting the lyrics to the song’s pre-

recorded backing track. “We had created all the music already, with the guitar solo and overdubs and everything, so we had nearly the whole song done,” he says. “I had an entire canvas to work with.” A hallmark of the song is Stewart’s use of a major-seventh chord throughout the main progression, which imbues “Year of the Cat” with a rich, wistful nostalgia. “Major sevenths are great and kind of cool,” he exclaims. “I’ve probably never met a major seventh I didn’t like.”

## SAX THERAPY

The track was recorded in Abbey Road’s famed Studio Two, where the Beatles did much of their work. Stewart played an Epiphone Texan acoustic, while Tim Renwick

was drafted to record both the acoustic and electric guitar solos. “Tim borrowed a large-bodied Guild that belonged to me for the acoustic solos,” Stewart recalls. “For the electric guitar solo, he played his

faithful ‘62 Strat through a Wallace custom combo valve amp that met its maker when it melted shortly after the session.”

Although the backing was complete, producer Alan Parsons felt it was lacking something — namely, a saxophone. “To me, saxophones belonged in jazz,” Stewart says. “I thought it was a terrible idea and told him so, but he said, ‘Just humor me, and if you don’t like it, we’ll erase it.’

Parson’s choice of sax player was Phil Kenzie, a Liverpool contemporary of the

Beatles who has gone on to play with everyone from John Lennon to the Eagles. “Phil was watching a movie and didn’t want to do the session,” Stewart says. “But Alan said, ‘Just come in and do one take. We just want to hear what it sounds like.’” As it happened, Kenzie lived up the street. “So he scuttled over, did one take on it and went back to see the end of the movie.”

Stewart wasn’t convinced by the session. “I didn’t like it very much,” he says, “but everybody else did. They were like, ‘Wow! That’s different.’ So rather than fight about it, I just let Alan have his way, and I put it at the end of the album as the last track, so I didn’t have to worry about it.”

## NINE LIVES... AND COUNTING

Released as a single in the U.S. in October 1976, “Year of the Cat” climbed to number eight on the *Billboard* Hot 100, earning Stewart his first U.S. charting single. Closing in on 50 years since its release, “Year of the Cat” remains a staple in the guitarist’s live set. He believes the song’s film noir undertones and varied instrumentation are pivotal to why the song continues to enthrall audiences.

“I think it just appeals to people,” he muses. “And you’ve also got four different instruments playing solos in the middle of the song, where it goes out of the strings and into the acoustic solo, then the electric solo, and finally the saxophone solo. The song’s longevity also affirms that one should write about what one is interested in, without regards to fashion or favor of the crowd. Which is exactly what I did.”

**“TO ME, SAXOPHONES BELONGED IN JAZZ. I THOUGHT IT WAS A TERRIBLE IDEA AND TOLD HIM SO”**

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