

COLLECTORS EDITION FINAL ISSUE!

TOTAL Guitar

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LINKIN PARK
THE EMPTINESS
MACHINE
RED HOT CHILI
PEPPERS
CAN'T STOP
THE BEATLES
BLACKBIRD

GUITAR -MAGEDDON!

30
YEARS OF
STARS &
GUITARS



PLUS!
TOO DRUNK TO PLUCK!
The GN'R Challenge
TOP 20
ICONIC SOLOS!
Our weird science
experiment

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John Frusciante, Matt Bellamy, Noel Gallagher

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Welcome...



This month, *Total Guitar* reaches its 30th anniversary, and in celebration we've put together what I have to say is a 'Greatest Hits' list of Team TG's favourite features, lessons and interviews, starting all the way back at issue 1.

One such highlight is 2005's Too Drunk To Pluck feature - TG's immortal drinking experiment to see who could play *Sweet Child O'*

Mine after the most drinks, which is about as wholesome an advert for clean living as you'd expect.

We have a tutorial from our School Of Shred series, with Paul Gilbert outlining his innovative, and, to be honest, slightly risky, approach to tremolo picking, and you can read our attempt to discover if there's some special secret to writing a legendary lead break in our analysis of the top 20 solos of all time - an actual experiment conducted by an actual scientist!

You'll also find amazing interviews from some of the legends who've graced TG's cover over the years, with Brian May, Jimmy Page, Eddie Van Halen and many more appearing.

Sadly, this issue marks the final edition of the magazine. For me, it has truly been a privilege to work with a frankly awesome team of contributors and colleagues, and to have been able to spend the last 17 years of my life creating lessons and features for you.

Thanks for reading.

Chris Bird Editor

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#390

Contents

42

30 YEARS OF
TOTAL GUITAR



04

Cover image: Getty Images; John Frusciante: Jonathan Weiner; Dimas: Future PLC



24
PIXIES



28
OPETH



70
LEARN TO PLAY:
RED HOT CHILI
PEPPERS

MONITOR

06 First Look

Q&A

08 Talking Guitars: Steve Cropper

HOW TO...

12 Pickup Music: Funk Palm-Muting

14 Riff of the Month:
Linkin Park - *The Emptiness Machine*

16 Guitar Tricks: Easy Acoustic Guitar

FEATURES

18 Jerry Cantrell

24 Pixies

28 Opeth

34 Kenny Wayne Shepherd

38 Steve Howe

42 30 Years Of *Total Guitar*

LEARN TO PLAY

70 Classic Track:
Red Hot Chili Peppers - *Can't Stop*

78 Open-Mic Songbook:
The Beatles - *Blackbird*

THE GAS STATION

80 Contents / Start Me Up!

82 Epiphone Jimi Hendrix Love Drops
Flying V

86 Neural DSP Nano Cortex

88 Guild Polara Deluxe

90 Jackson Pro Plus XT Soloist SLAT
HT6 Baritone

92 Positive Grid Spark 2

94 Peterson StrobeStomp Mini

Audio & Video
Find your audio and video content online at:
bit.ly/tg390audio

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



92
POSITIVE GRID
SPARK 2



Harley Benton

Words: Stuart Williams
Photography: Olly Curtis

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Indulgent implement of rock excess, or a valid, useful 'other' guitar? Meet the doubleneck you can afford

In possibly the most surprising trend of 2024, we've seen the return of the doubleneck from multiple brands, with Harley Benton the latest to concede that two heads are perhaps better than one.

The DC-Custom II 612 (£499) is set to create a bustle in your hedgerow, thanks to the pairing of six- and 12-string guitars into one instrument. The meranti body delivers a double-cut design with two meranti necks. Both of these are 24.75-inch scale-length, with roasted jatoba fingerboards and 22 medium-jumbo frets.

Electronically, it's equipped with a quadruple humbucker count from Roswell: two Tesla TM VR-60 Classic Alnico-5 models for the six-string side, and a pair of Tesla Opus-G1 Alnico-5 Vintage for the 12-string. The control set is simplified with a master volume and tone control, but you might also notice the presence of three toggle switches, too. These give regular three-way selection of the guitar's pickup positions on each side, plus an additional switch for engaging the six- or 12-string outputs. It's fitted with Grover tuners and comes complete with a hardcase, in order to save you having to source one!

UP CLOSE



Doubleneck

Why have one when you can have two? There's a 12-string and six-string neck, both featuring 22-fret, 24.75-inch scale-length fingerboards.



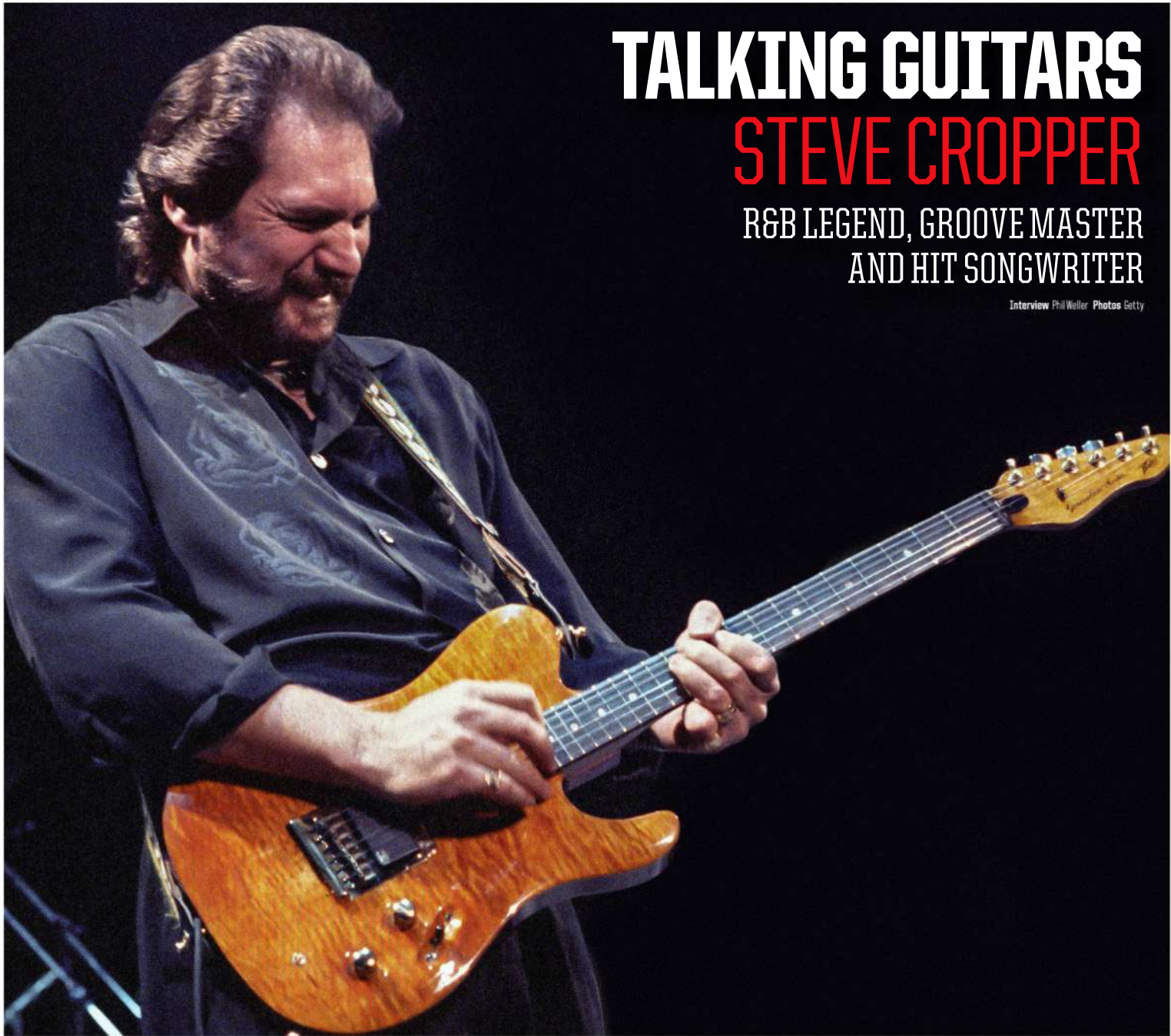
Switching

Master volume and tone controls are joined by three toggle switches: two for selecting pickup positions for each guitar 'mode', and another to select six or 12-string output.



Features

Tesla vintage-style humbuckers and Grover tuners are on the menu, as is a choice of White or Cherry finishes.



TALKING GUITARS

STEVE CROPPER

R&B LEGEND, GROOVE MASTER
AND HIT SONGWRITER

Interview Phil Weller Photos Getty

08

A

s the guitarist in Booker T. & the M.G.'s, the house band for Stax Records, Steve Cropper was a key figure in shaping the sound of soul music in the '60s,

backing legendary singers including Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett. Steve co-wrote the classic songs *Green Onions* and (*Sittin' On*) *The Dock Of The Bay*, and also recorded with rock icons John Lennon and Rod Stewart. His latest album, *Friendlytown*, features guest spots from Billy Gibbons and Brian May.

How did Billy Gibbons come to be on the new album?

Billy and I have been friends for 30 years, but we've never actually worked together before. He ran into Jon Tiven, my co-producer, in a grocery store and he asked, 'What's Steve doing these days?' He told him we working doing an album and he said, 'Good. Can I be on it? I'm not doing anything right now.' So he was there for two of the writing sessions. He played on all but one song, and we wrote *Friendlytown*, the title track, together. Most people put the title track of the album as the sixth or seventh song, but this one, I said, 'It's too damn good. We need to put it first!'

How would you describe your guitar partnership with Billy?

No song on this album is a battle of guitars or knowledge or wits – we're both fans of one another. All these songs are under 3:30, they're simple – two verses, two choruses and a bridge. Most songs nowadays are very long and poetic. Billy and I, we're not bothered about poetry. We're trying to show how it was back in the '60s.

Watching Billy's hands in the studio, I learnt something I never knew – he plays two things at the same time. He always plays a bass part at the same time as his melody like Chet Atkins would do, and like I do. You know, the first time I saw ZZ Top, I said, 'How do three guys make that kind of music?' And I found out in the studio with him!



And what about Brian May?

He's known Jon Tiven for years, and we met at James Burton's birthday about a year ago. Everybody was there. Brian and I got talking and we sent him a track, but then we hadn't heard from him in a while. My engineer called him and Brian said, 'Too much stress – everything's coming at me a million miles an hour!' Four or five days later we got a copy of the track and it was pretty good! So we called the song *Too Much Stress* and wrote the lyrics around it. We didn't have modulation in the song until Brian got his hands on it. He's very talented. I've heard a lot of great guitar players and he's one of the best in the world, I think.

Going back to your early days, what guitar did you learn on?

My first guitar is under glass now at the Memphis Music Hall of Fame. It's only got three strings. I used to play it like a rubber band when I was eight years old. I bought it from the Sears Roebuck catalogue. It was a Country Western, a big round-hole, flat-top guitar. I'd sit on the porch waiting for that guitar to be delivered every weekend, waiting for the truck to turn the corner. And then it finally arrived. The strings were loose and the bridge needed fixing, and they wanted a 25 cent delivery fee – 25 cents! My mom said, 'I'll lend you that quarter if you become a guitar player'. She's not around to defend herself anymore, but I think I did!

What were some important lessons for you in developing your style?

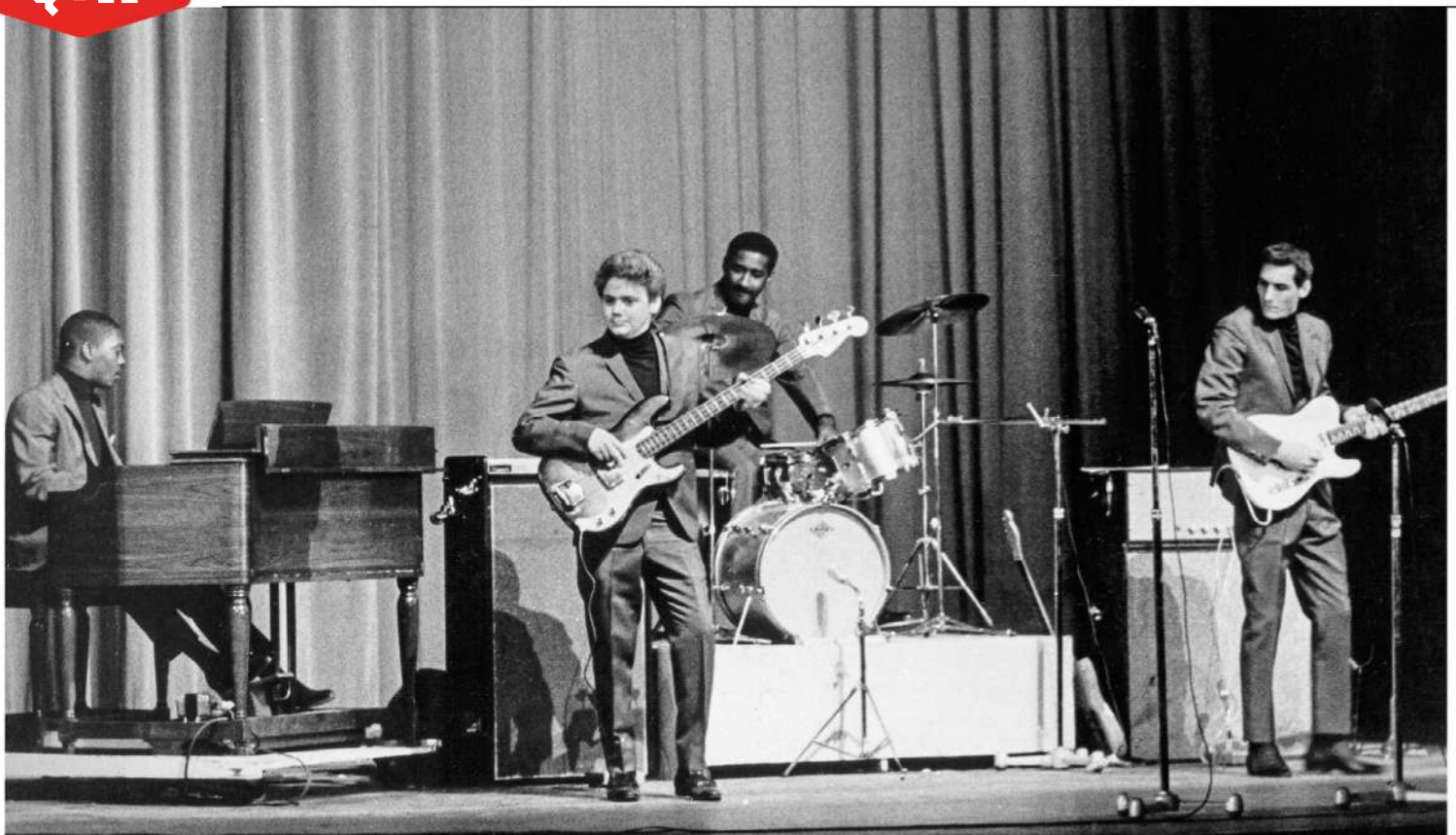
In the early days when I was playing guitar, I knew the world didn't need another B.B. King, Chet Atkins or Les Paul. So, what are you gonna do now? I thought, 'Just be yourself and do your thing. Don't go changing'.

Do you remember a moment you felt you were no longer a beginner guitarist?

It would be doing *Green Onions* with Booker T. and the M.G.'s. Booker actually started writing that and then we worked on it together. A singer was meant to come into the studio but they never showed up – he'd been singing all night and he couldn't even say his name in the morning so he never came in. So we were just jamming around waiting. A few weeks passed and we were working on the song *Behave Yourself* and the label said, 'Do you have anything for the B-side?' I said to Booker, 'What were those riffs you had you thought would be good for a vocal song?' We played it to them and they said 'That's pretty good'. And that was it. That was the record.

What stands out to you in a guitarist?

Groove. If someone's got groove, they're gonna last a lot longer than the person who doesn't, →



"MY PLAYING HAS ALWAYS SUCKED, BUT IT SELLS!"

➔ whatever groove means to you. To me it means soul. And play in the box, not outside it. That's what people like. If you play too far outside the box people aren't gonna like it. My playing has always sucked, but it sells, because I keep it simple, I guess. I'm not a guitar player, I never took the time. I use it as a tool. I couldn't afford to hire another guitarist on a lot of Stax records, so I learned to play rhythm and lead at the same time so when I was soloing the rhythm wouldn't drop out.

Randy Bachman from The Guess Who taught me a lick, and it was more of a country lick where you could bend two strings at the same time, but he did it with two fingers. I figured out how to do it with one finger. I'll never use a capo, either. God gave you a capo right here [hold up his first finger], so I learnt how to play a lot of chords with three fingers instead of four. That was important.

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

The last guitar I bought was probably a Telecaster, but I've never been much of a collector, and I don't play Teles anymore. I play Telecaster copies made by Peavy and I ran over the one I've got now. I ran over all the electrics; the tone and volume and the pickup switch. I hammered everything back into place

and it all works fine. I plugged it in, looked and my engineer and said, 'It still sounds good to me', so it's got something in it. I play it all the time. The problem with running it over is the pickup switch would keep rattling. I'd tighten it up and it would start rattling and changing position again. The bridge pickup is too damn bright for me. I've always preferred the middle position, so I took a bit of cardboard and stuffed in right in there so the switch can't move!

You've played with a lot of guitarists over the years, has anyone surprised you?

Dave Mason [formerly of Traffic] really impressed me. I didn't think he was that good until I toured with him, then I found out how good he really is. Live, he's something else. Jeff Beck, too. Whatever Jeff's mind thought, his hands would go there. You couldn't say, 'You can't get that' to Jeff. He'd just reach for things and grab it. He did things that no one else thought was possible and he'd make it sound right. Working on *The Jeff Beck Group* album [produced by Steve and released in 1972] is one of my proudest moments.

Has anyone not impressed you?

There was a guy who came into Stax one time that put a handkerchief over the strings so that no one could see what he was doing and copy

him. I didn't care about any of that. I'm sure he was a great player, but it didn't impress me.

What about any non-guitarists; who impressed you the most?

A magazine once called me up and said, 'I believe Stax Records is the first label to use an automatic drum?' And I said, 'Yeah, his name is Al Jackson!' With Al on drums, you could edit the intro of take one with the intro of take ten and no one would know - he was that good of a timekeeper. He was great to play with.

What advice would you give to a young guitarist?

Do not get into this business for money. Do it for fun, and if you're good, somewhere along the way someone will pay you.

Can you recall a moment when you felt like you'd failed as a player, or been embarrassed by a performance?

I don't ever remember having a bad show. I've had records that went out to market and didn't sell, so I guess I failed there, but the records themselves have been pretty clean and spot-on to me. I don't release junk, not with my name on it. It has to be quality stuff. It might not sell, but I'm happy with it. I don't have any regrets.

Friendlytown is out now.

INNOVATION NEVER RESTS

THE AMERICAN ULTRA 2 STRATOCASTER®

The American Ultra 2 Stratocaster represents the apex of modern Fender design, performance and craftsmanship. Featuring streamlined body contours, stunning new finishes and our fast-playing quartersawn necks – plus new Ultra 2 Noiseless™ Vintage Strat® pickups for crystalline cleans, searing leads and definitive Strat sparkle.

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JUDE SMITH

Jude Smith is a Nashville-based multi-instrumentalist, producer, and songwriter who gained Instagram fame with his funky guitar playing. His self-produced music has amassed over 1 million streams online. Jude's lessons focus on practical, engaging concepts, offering a melodic approach and an easygoing teaching style.

FUNK PALM-MUTING

Pickup Music give you the lowdown on one of funk guitar's most essential techniques



Get access to the world's best online guitar courses and reach your guitar goals with structured lessons and personalised feedback from pro instructors. Pickup Music even offer a 14-day free trial so you can take a look before you buy.

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[tiktok.com/@pickupguitar](https://www.tiktok.com/@pickupguitar)

Have you ever wondered why funk guitar parts seem to have that infectious groove with seemingly simple riffs? Well, sometimes it's not what you play, it's how you play it – and palm-muting is a crucial component of tight funk playing.

Funk aficionado Jude Smith is here to show us all exactly how it's done. He'll guide you through correct hand placement,

demonstrate how to incorporate palm-muting into chords, licks, and doublestops, and provide practical exercises to help you master this skill. This is part of the Learn Funk In 7 Days course from Pickup Music – you can follow along with the video for free if you want to see exactly how to play each exercise.

Your attack, tone, and dynamics depend on hand placement – so don't breeze over it. Your pick hand should rest gently on the strings just before they pass over the bridge.

Lightly touch the strings with the edge of your palm to mute them.

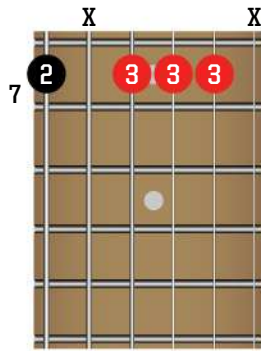
You'll notice a difference in sound when you move your hand further away from the bridge – the notes will sound more choked, to the point where they have no sustain at all. Experiment with the amount of pressure you apply, and the distance of your palm from the bridge.

There are other variables to consider, like your picking force and amp settings. It will take time to find the right balance, so be patient.

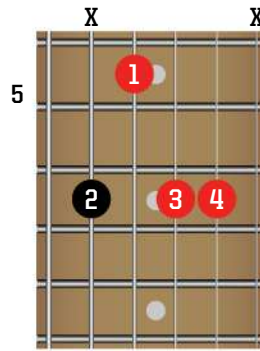


CHORDS

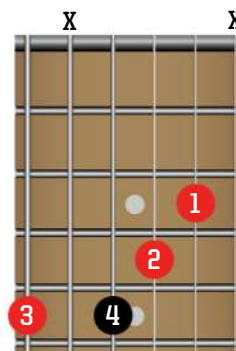
These are the chords and the scale you'll be using in the lesson. Have a quick play through them before moving on to the tab exercises.



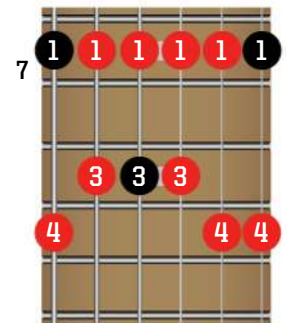
Bm7



Em9



G/A



B minor pentatonic scale

1 PALM-MUTING WITH CHORDS

bit.ly/tg390audio

Free time

PM throughout

Try a 'before and after' comparison. First, play the progression with no muting. It'll sound washy and lacking definition. For some styles that's fine, but with funk, we want it clean and punchy. Now, play the progression with some palm-muting. It should sound defined, with a staccato feel - and much more groovy, too!

2 PALM-MUTING WITH LICKS

bit.ly/tg390audio

Free time

PM throughout

Here, we're using this B minor pentatonic lick to practise. It sounds cool, but it's not really giving funky vibes. Try the lick with some palm-muting and see what you think. Keep in mind that you may need to increase your pick attack a little bit to get the notes to stand out.

3 PALM-MUTING WITH DOBLESTOPS

bit.ly/tg390audio

Free time

PM throughout

Doublestops are a common guitar technique found in blues, country, funk, and more. It's just a fancy term for playing two notes simultaneously, but it's an awesome addition to any funk player's toolkit. Again, first play the riff without any muting. It sounds great, but it's too bold and resonant for funk. We want the opposite - compressed and punchy. Keep that idea in mind and close in the sound with some palm-muting as you repeat the riff.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

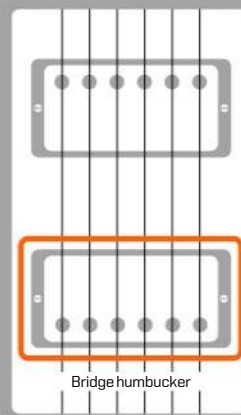
- ✓ Drop D tuning
- ✓ Octaves
- ✓ Powerchords



RIFF OF THE MONTH

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL **DISTORTION**



Shinoda and Delson have been playing *The Emptiness Machine* on humbucker-loaded PRS guitars, and over the years they've been known to use Bogner, Mesa/Boogie, Engl and Orange amps. That means you'll need to dial in a modern high-gain tone. If you feel your amp doesn't have enough gain you can use an overdrive pedal to add more saturation, and this also helps to tighten the low end.

LINKIN PARK

The Emptiness Machine

Lead single from the forthcoming album *From Zero*, *The Emptiness Machine* features this anthemic twin-guitar riff which has a powerchord part played by Mike Shinoda and a melodic octave part from Brad Delson. The powerchords serve to outline a chord progression in the key of D minor.

In drop D tuning, play the three lowest open strings, then barre at the 5th, 8th, 3rd then 10th

frets. For the accompanying guitar part, use your first and third fingers (or first and fourth if it's more comfortable) to play the octave shapes on the third and fifth strings. Depending on the angle of your fretting hand, you should be able to mute out the idle strings by stubbing your fretting fingers against them. Get the muting just right and you should be able to strum the octaves without any open strings ringing out. Practise playing the octaves up and down the

neck within the D natural minor scale, and when you're comfortable with the notes, watch our slowed-down video to learn the melody.

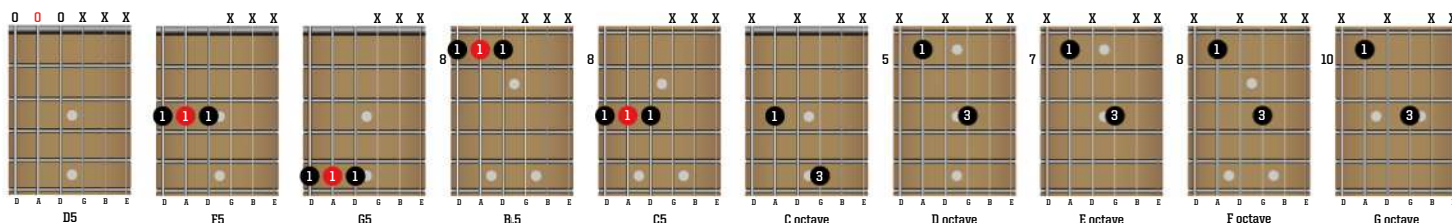
CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 2:13-3:35

Tempo: 184bpm

Key/scale: D minor

Main techniques: Strumming, string-muting, octaves



There are five powerchords played on the three bass strings: D5, F5, G5, B,5 and C5. Each powerchord is comprised of a root, 5th and octave and are all played with

a first-finger barre, except for the open D5 chord. The octave shapes move up and down the third and fifth strings spelling out the D natural minor scale (D EFG A B, C).



TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

"This is the PAF I've always wanted -
incredible dynamics, harmonics and string
separation, all with super-rich midrange, tight
lows and an addictively juicy playing feel"



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GARY HEIMBAUER

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



EASY ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Guitar Tricks take you through some straightforward strumming techniques

There's something special about acoustic guitars. The resonance of the wood right up against your ribs is a unique experience. In this lesson, we'll go over six easy strumming patterns so you'll be ready for any acoustic situation. Visit guitartricks.com/acousticmag for more in-depth and step-by-step acoustic guitar lessons, too.

When learning how to play guitar, the first strumming pattern you need to understand is the simple eighth-note downstroke/upstroke

pattern. It's as straightforward as it sounds: a simple down-up-down-up strumming pattern in an eighth-note rhythm. To make this more interesting, we'll be doing this with both 'straight' and 'swing' feel (more on that across the page) in examples 1 and 2.

Next up is a folk/country strumming rhythm, which alternates between the bass strings and the higher strings. Because folk music is narrative driven, the feel of this strumming pattern is a great complement for that storytelling. We'll also take a look at a great

acoustic rhythm for you singer-songwriters; the eighth-note downstroke, complete with palm-muting for volume control, a drier feel and the option to accent the chords you play.

In our final example, we'll switch up the time signature to a 6/8 feel. This is a super-fun meter to play in which is perfect for campfire songs or late-night sing-alongs. Instead of counting to four to keep time, you'll count two groupings of three beats to get the feel. Again, follow the tab and head to the video lesson for more assistance.



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

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1 EIGHTH NOTES

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This is basic strumming for acoustic guitar. Note that the strumming pattern goes: down, down-up, up-down.

2 SWING RHYTHM

bit.ly/tg390audio

For a swing feel, simply space out your down- and upstrokes so that the downs last twice as long as the ups. It's also known as triplet feel.

3 FOLK/COUNTRY PATTERN

bit.ly/tg390audio

This pattern adds a nice motion to your chords. Notice that the main technique is targeting your pick to alternate between striking individual bass notes followed by the higher notes of the chord. Aim to be as precise as possible on the bass notes, but a little freer on the higher notes. It often doesn't matter if you don't hit every note of the chord, as long as your timing is good.

4 EIGHTH-NOTE DOWNSTROKES

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Implementing some palm-muting with this rhythm will give you a signature singer/songwriter acoustic vibe. The idea is to rest the side of your strumming hand gently over the strings where they meet the bridge. Aim for just a little light muting of the strings' natural resonance.

5 PALM-MUTING WITH DOUBLESTOPS

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Changing the meter from 4/4 to 6/8 will give your acoustic playing more depth. The trick is counting to six along with the music. Try saying '123456', '123123' or '16a26a' to keep time, emphasising the first and fourth beats to establish the groove. Start with downstrokes on all six beats, then try adding some upstrokes between the beats - as we've done in the tab here. The important thing here is to get very comfortable with the groove and feel.



Words Amit Sharma Photos Jon Carver / Darren Craig

"IT'S COOL TO HEAR
YOUR INFLUENCES
COMING OUT
ORGANICALLY"

Jerry Cantrell shaped the sound of alternative rock with Alice In Chains, but on his new solo album he's taking inspiration from the heroes of his youth: for tone, Jeff Beck and blues-rock master Robin Trower, and for guitar harmonies, Iron Maiden and Thin Lizzy

Jerry Fulton Cantrell Jr. is a master storyteller. If you've listened to any of his recordings with Alice In Chains or as a solo artist, you'll know he has a panache for getting to the heart of the emotion behind the music, embedding the listener deep within the sonic world he's created. The pictures he paints using his guitar and voice feel inexplicably vivid, attacking the human senses from all mediums, with melodies and harmonies you can almost touch, see and taste.

In the early '90s, Cantrell's powerful chemistry with singer Layne Staley made Alice In Chains one of the most influential bands in an era when Seattle was the crucible of alternative rock.

There was an intense emotional darkness in their music – not only in heavy, riff-driven songs such as *Man In The Box*, *We Die Young*, *Would?* and *Rooster* from the albums *Facelift* and *Dirt* – but also in the beautiful acoustic tracks laid down on the EPs *Sap* and *Jar Of Flies*. But even without Staley, who died in 2002, Cantrell has steered *Alice In Chains* through a second phase with frontman William DuVall alongside the classic-era rhythm section of bassist Mike Inez and drummer Sean Kinney on three acclaimed studio albums.

And while the band has kept Cantrell busy since 2005, recent years have seen him working again as a solo artist.

His 2021 album *Brighten* was his first solo release in almost two decades since 2002's *Degradation Trip*. And now comes *I Want Blood*, a more up-tempo and hard-hitting record than the acoustic-focused *Brighten*. It proves that Jerry Cantrell's creative remit is one that's unusually broad for an artist working within the confines of rock. The sky really is the limit for this guitar hero...



20

This album has more distorted electrics and less acoustics than your last one. What made you want to take off the cowboy hat and get heavy?

The last one probably had some country tinges, but if you were expecting another one of those, well, I just did that! If you look at my discography and listen to what came before what followed, the next one usually doesn't match the last. That's what I find fun. I don't know where it's going when I start. The cool thing for me is we covered a lot of ground early on in Alice In Chains. People got used to us doing face-melting f*ckin' metal stuff to acoustic things like *Sap* or *Jar Of Flies*. We cut a pretty wide field for us to play on early on and that's something I always do, whether it's with Alice or not. I like to explore *all* the space.

It's interesting what happens when you submit and go with the flow.

Yeah! I don't sit down and think I'm going to write a heavy or acoustic record. I just get the urge to take the journey and create *something*. That's part of the fun. You're operating in the dark. I don't have a light... alright, maybe a little flame in front of my face, but that's it. I look to create things that don't exist, making something out of nothing. It's always interesting to see where I end up. I like the heavy stuff as well as spacious, acoustic ideas and everything in between. I'm very proud of this record, it's got some ferocity and teeth to it. I'm glad it's nothing like the last one!

The lead track, *Vilified*, has some atmospheric harmonised leads rather than full-blown shredding. Your solos always make a point, serving the song first and foremost.

I make do with what I can do. As you correctly stated, I am not a shredder. I wish I could shred, but I kind of gave up that conquest years ago! I always treat my solos like a scene change. I try to make them singable. Those seem to be the solos that have the longest lasting impact with me as a fan. I like the melodic, cool things that have more vibe than technical prowess. Sure, I can play,



but there are plenty of guys out there who could smoke me technically. I do what I do, and would like to think I do it well. And yeah, with every record, it's interesting to see what I can achieve through harmonies. I'm such a huge fan of guitar duos. I hear Glenn Tipton and K.K. Downing. I hear the Schenker brothers. I hear Kirk and James from Metallica. I hear Joe Perry and Brad Whitford. I love Thin Lizzy, what can I say? Those elements are always in me.

The lyrics to *Vilified* discuss the topic of A.I. - which begs the question, have you ever plugged your guitar into your laptop or amp simulator?

I look at them as tools, but I prefer old analogue tube amps. When I record, that's pretty much what I use. I have used a Fractal, Kemper or plug-in in the past, just for little parts to create an effecty-type thing. But in the demo process, I'm almost *exclusively* playing through my Kemper. I've got every amp I've ever played through, plus everyone else's loaded into that thing, including

VIBE MERCHANT
"I like the melodic, cool things that have more vibe than technical prowess"

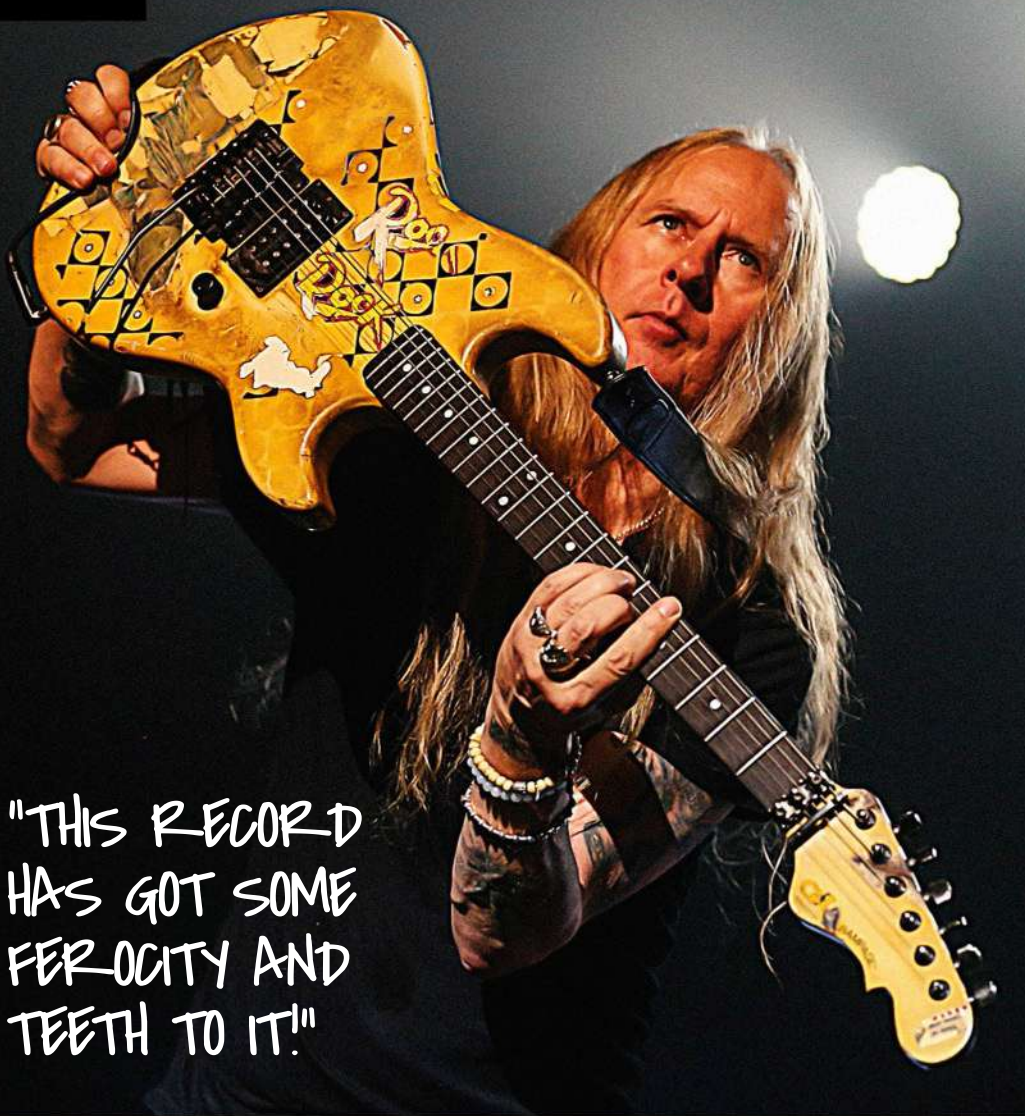
bass amps. It's a great tool for not having to carry a bunch of gear around. My studio is very spartan and lo-fi. It's just a little Pro Tools rig and a Kemper with some guitars and basses on the walls. I will usually do the basses through a Sans Amp direct. That's the demo process. When I get to the real recording, I start whipping out the tube amps, analogue effects and all that stuff.

A lot of players use digital gear to make touring easier, too. Have you ever tried that?

I'm reluctant to use digital gear live, but a lot of compatriots think that the technology is getting better. I understand that moving heads and cabs around internationally comes at an astronomical price. A lot of my peers have turned to Fractals as a smaller and inexpensive way to get close to their sound. I have looked at that but I'm not there yet. I've done a few gigs outside of the US with those things and it still feels like a f*ckin' electronic toy to me. But I think Metallica guys were the first

"I WANTED ALICE IN CHAINS TO BE A GUITAR DUO BAND PRECISELY BECAUSE OF BANDS LIKE IRON MAIDEN"

Photo: Getty



"THIS RECORD HAS GOT SOME FEROCITY AND TEETH TO IT!"

ones I heard about using those live. I was like 'F*ck, man, what are you playing through?' and they'd tell me it was a Fractal. So it definitely *can* sound good. But, like anything else, you've got to know that tool and spend the time or have somebody around who knows how to run those things. I'm about as dumb as it gets when it comes to being a gearhead. I'm the guy who owns a 1963 and 1967 Corvette, but couldn't do anything mechanically on them. But I know people who can keep them running! I'm not an audiophile when it comes to every guitar, effect and amp. I try to keep my focus on a narrower zone for creation.

You once said you got into vibe pedals like your Rotovibe because of Robin Trower's tone on *Bridge Of Sighs*. Now, there's a sound...

Oh, for sure! I think there's a solo section in the song *It Comes* that references that. My producer on this

album, Joe Barresi, is a big gear nut and guitar head. It's really fun working with him because he has just about every colour, paintbrush and canvas you can think of. We were tripping on Robin Trower and Jeff Beck while making this record, watching old clips of Robin with the vibe or Jeff using his old school talk box in between takes. When it came to that solo, I think we used a Rotovibe and something else to get the Trower sound.

The intro for *Off The Rails* almost has a cheeky nod to Iron Maiden's *Wasted Years*. Can you hear it?

F*ck yeah, dude! I'm a huge fan of Iron Maiden. I wanted Alice to be a guitar duo band precisely because of bands like that. And we kind of are, now, since William DuVall joined. Earlier on, Layne would pick up a guitar and play a little bit, but we were mostly just a three-piece with a singer. Now we actually have two guys playing a lot of guitar,

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL!

"Making music is a joyous thing in the end. But it's a battle, man!"

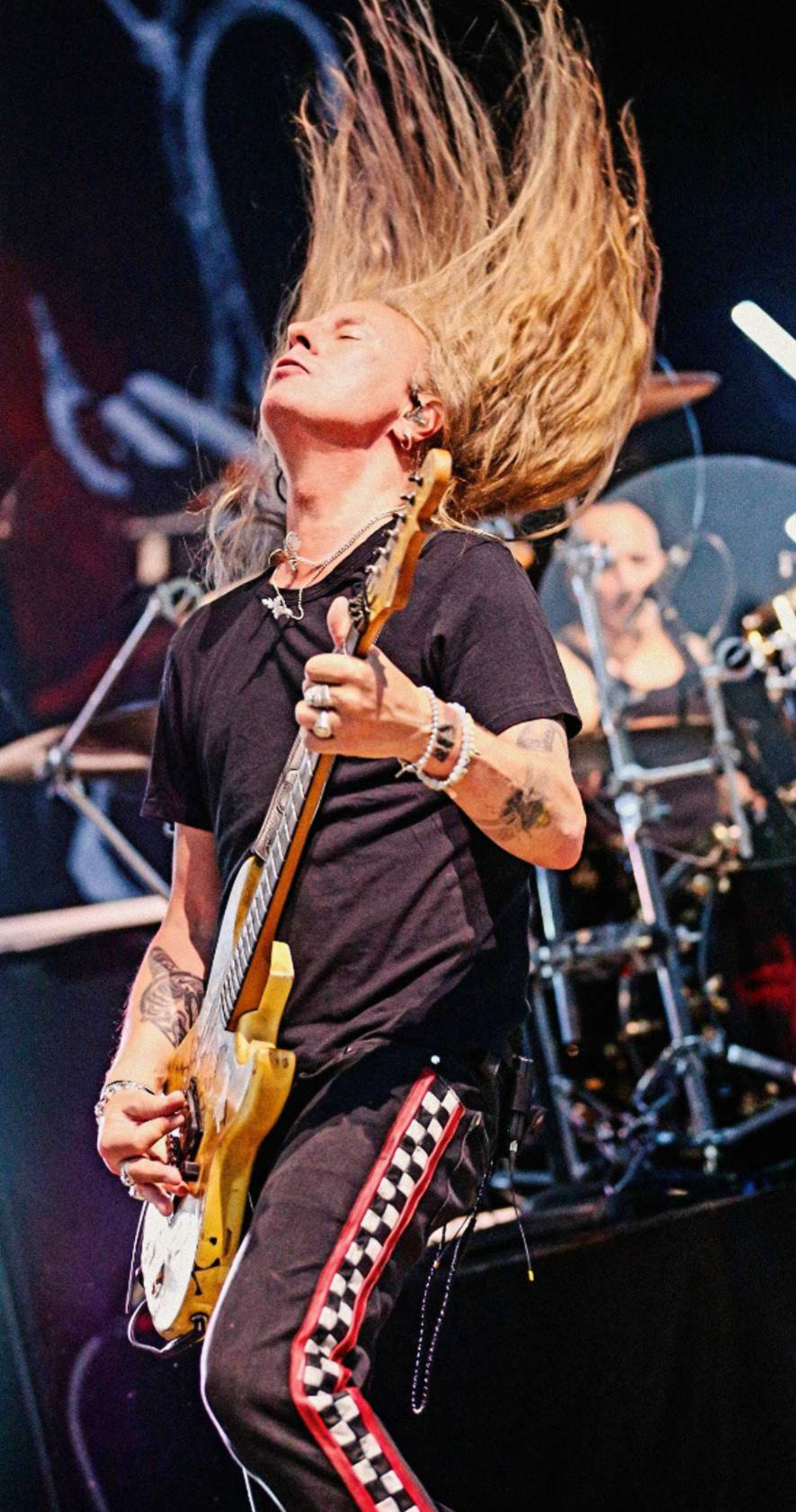
so I got my wish! But when we initially talked about starting a band, I wanted another guitar player and that was purely because of Dave Murray and Adrian Smith. Or the guys from Priest or Aerosmith. I love the Young brothers [Angus and Malcolm, of AC/DC fame]. There's something special about bands with two guitar players working as a unit. And you're right, I hear Iron Maiden in that intro for *Off The Rails*. I'm immediately drawn to those flavours, just because I love that band. It's cool to hear your influences coming out organically, because you don't sit down and intend to do anything. It just happens and you can tell that it's in there.

Duff McKagan, who plays on this album, once said you swear like a sailor while fighting for your leads. Is that true?

Making music is a really joyous thing in the end, and the process is enjoyable too, but it's a battle, man! You don't have to travel very far to bump into the edge of your limitations! But that's also part of the process and also part of the challenge. Can you put together something together that's pretty cool? You end up surprising yourself a lot of the time. It's like, 'I didn't think I could pull that off!' That's exciting, it keeps you interested. Duff's right, by the way. If you've ever been in the studio with me, you'd think I had Tourette's! I've got the worst gutter mouth in the world. When I get frustrated or blow something, it erupts. It's not at anybody, it's just the situation, man. So I'm talking to me but it's like, 'F*ck, man, goddamit!' There's a lot of that. If you're faint of heart and can't stand some blue exclamations from time to time, it's probably not very f*ckin' peaceful to be with me in a studio. But it's actually pretty funny...

You tend to stick with your main Les Paul and G&L guitars going into your signature Friedman amps. Was there anything else on this album?

We did make a little bit of a change, going a little more retro and looking back to the earlier years of Alice. We dug out the old Bogner Fish preamp. I think I used a VHT power amp with it back in the old days but now it's a Fryette, which works really well. When I started talking to Joe, he said we should switch that Fish back in. I didn't even know if it worked but he was like, 'Well, let's



get it over to Reinhold [Bogner] and get it tuned up.' Then Reinhold got hold of it, tuned it up and put it side by side with his Fish. Then he said mine sounded better, because of the weird tubes somebody put in over the years. And he didn't want to f*ck with it because three of my channels sounded better, while only one of his to mine. So we only used my Friedman JJ on a couple of songs, and the rest was the Bogner Fish. And there was also a sprinkle of the old Rockman stuff I had used on *Facelift* and *Dirt*. That was the main core rig, but we had Wizards, Oranges and a Bogner Snorkler for layering.

Which guitars won the shoot-out, then?

There were three we kept coming back to. I used a ton of guitars on this record. Billie Joe Armstrong gave me one of his Juniors a couple of years ago. I used that on quite a few tracks for rhythms and stuff like that. We really leaned heavily on my original Blue Dress and No War G&Ls, plus my D-Trip Les Paul, also with SGs, Teles and Vs going on top. We even used a Steve Miller Ibanez Icedman on something with all sorts of cool pedals. And that Jeff Beck talkbox I mentioned earlier is on there, too – one of those old-school bag things [The Bag]. It has a thin tube and a bit you put in front of your teeth. Joe Barresi pulled it out, you wear it kinda like a strap and hold it under your arm. It was very cool, I'd never seen one of those before. We did a few tracks with that, including the breakdown of *Vilified*.

G&L recently announced they were bringing the Rampage back, which will make a lot of Alice In Chains fans happy...

Yeah! It is cool. And they've said they'll add a couple of frets to it, and that's two more frets I'll have to swear at as I try to play! I love G&L. I'll be forever tied to those guys, I love their guitars. They're a great company. It's the guitar that's always felt right to me. That and the Gibson Les Paul. The way I see it, there are only two guitar brands I play – my G&Ls and my Gibsons. Those have been the main axes on every record. And I've actually been talking to Gibson about doing another guitar or two for this cycle, so who knows, there might be more to come there...

I Want Blood is out now



Words Andrew Daly Portrait Liam Maxwell

“I DON’T THINK ANYONE ELSE IS DOING THIS. AND IF THEY ARE, THEY’D BE STUPID!”

Long ago, the **Pixies** blazed a trail for Nirvana and others to follow. But now, as before, there is no masterplan. As guitarist Joey Santiago says: “I still go by feel – and with my gut.”

Nirvana. Radiohead. Weezer. All have the Pixies’ weird-out/freak-out signature stamped across their foreheads. Formed in Boston, Massachusetts in 1986, Pixies changed the alt-rock game forever with the classic albums *Surfer Rosa* (1988), *Doolittle* (1990) and *Bossanova* (1990) with era-defining songs such as *Where Is My Mind?*, *Here Comes Your Man* and *Debaser*.

The mad scientist behind the bulk of that indie rock splendour is guitarist and lead vocalist Charles Michael Kittridge Thompson IV, aka Frank Black, aka Black Francis. A lyrical savant and a master of loud/quiet dynamics, Francis set the template for ’90s rock, which has been copied endlessly across the years. But he couldn’t have done it without his trusted sidekick Joey Santiago, who injected gain-drenched, off-the-wall, shards-of-glass-meets-sticky-pop guitar goodness into the mix.

As Joey tells TG, the Pixies’ approach as always been about “feel” in its purest sense. “I knew what was overdone,” he says. “And I knew what people could do better than I could, so I steered away. But now, I’m learning more theory, which has been interesting...”

Starting with the 2022 album *Doggerel*, Francis began to lean on Joey for not only guitars but also lyrics. Joey cautiously, if

GAME CHANGERS

Pixies (from left): David Lovering, Black Francis, Joey Santiago, Emma Richardson

not jokingly, attributes this to Francis’s “thinking the way I look at the world is interesting”. The results on *Doggerel* were strong, but even stronger on the band’s new album *The Night The Zombies Came*, with the classically-inspired *I Hear You Mary* being a Santiago-penned standout.

Joey admits that the Pixies’ earlier catalogue looms large. And he’s not about to proclaim that *The Night The Zombies Came* is their best yet. Sure, he’s happy with it, but he still yearns to complete a magnum opus.

As he puts it: “I want people to one day say about the post-break-up records, ‘These are great records, just as good as the earlier ones’. I want to make one definitive album where it’s like, ‘F*ck... okay, that’s it!’”

But for now, he’s got plenty to say about the new album, starting with his expanded role in the band...

You’re writing words for Black Francis to sing. Is that a pretty daunting task?

Going back to our heyday, nothing was really broken. I was quite happy doing what I was doing – and I’m still happy. If I don’t have to write again, I’ll be happy. The lyrical aspect is a great and fun exercise. But I consider Charles [Black Francis] one of the best lyricists. Music is one thing, but his lyrics are like, ‘What the f*ck?’ You know?

Why do you think Francis has asked you to contribute lyrics at this stage of the game?

I have no idea. Maybe he thinks the way I look at the world is quite entertaining. That’s the only reason that I can think of. But I really don’t know, man.



OLD SCHOOL

"There's something about the feeling of the amp behind you," Joey says

So how do you look at the world?

Oh, man... it's a f*cking goofy world. It really is. It's like this parade of people. It's just the weird way the world ended up.

How does the state of the world, combined with what's expected of the Pixies, inform how you approach making new records?

Once we're in the studio, it's all just whatever happens. Musically, I feel kind of trapped within the parameters and the rules of music. I navigate around that. I'm fortunate enough to have carved out this style that comes out naturally, and I'm aware of it. Sometimes I avoid it, and sometimes I embrace it. I don't know if I answered your question...

Let's try it this way: what are your default settings when you pick up the guitar while in Pixies mode?

I fool around with the guitar, and I've been fooling around with it a lot more. What comes to mind is that I like to make a story out of it. When I'm watching a TV programme with my wife, I tend to score the scenes. It's just exercising another part of my brain.

Would you say inspiration usually strikes randomly for you?

It comes out of the ether. Sometimes it's two notes that will start everything, and it will snowball from there. It will come from the ether, and then, I'll be like, 'Okay, I want this to be like

David Gilmour-ish', or whatever it is. Most of the time, it'll just come out of nowhere.

Digging into *The Night The Zombies Came*, as we understand it, *I Hear You Mary* came from an instrumental track that you put together which was inspired by classical guitar. Is that correct?

During Covid, I bought a nice acoustic guitar and started to learn [1968 Mason Williams instrumental] *Classical Gas*. Along the way, this thing – *I Hear You Mary* – came along. I was listening to *Classical Gas*, and just the technique and the alternative picking were there. I kept fooling around with it, and this thing came along.

Your style is totally fearless. You're unafraid to go anywhere on guitar. But does it creep into your mind that injecting classical touches might alter your guitar identity?

That's a good question. Subconsciously, as far as my style goes, I've always been like, 'Okay, I don't think anyone else is doing this. And if they are, they'd be stupid – I just stuck to it'. And then, in my head, I was like, 'If I learn more, I'm gonna f*ck everything up!' I already knew a bunch of stuff as a kid. I knew all the scales and stuff and the pentatonics, but that was boring for me.

So it's a matter of merging your idiosyncrasies with theory.

In a way, yes. When I'm learning it,

there's some kind of theory, like modes, for instance. But what I've discovered is that I've been doing this already. I kind of already knew what I was doing and knew certain modes would provoke feelings, but – for me – I had to discover it naturally. In the end, it's all feeling anyway. I discovered these things by feel because sometimes there's a shortcut if you want a certain feeling. There's a shortcut to do that, but I've found that now I don't find that satisfying. But I'll still go by feel – and with my gut.

Which track from the new album would you pick as the blending of your quintessential vibe with your newfound chops?

The end of the *Chicken Solo* is straight pentatonic, which I would have avoided in the past like the plague! But I like the pace of it. I got the David Gilmour pace.

Have you brought any new gear into the fray to support your new outlook?

I've had my Marshall JCM800 for a long time. It's a 50-watt, two-channel one. I like to use its natural distortion. But then I've had a blackface '64 Fender Vibrolux for a while now, too. That's the one that just punches through and gets the transience. The Marshall is just the wolf behind it.

Do you use the same gear live as in the studio?

Well, that's my setup for live. In the studio, I want to use the same gear so it will translate live.

So no amp modelling for you, then?

I haven't tried them. I do have one at home, but I don't know – there's something about the feeling of the amp behind you. We've played with bands that use modelling, and it sounds fine to me, but I just think the romance of real amps is there. Modelling is what it is, but without my amps there'd be nothing to model.

The Pixies have never been into following trends anyway...

We never listen to any of that outside stuff that influences you one way or

"ONE SOLO IS STRAIGHT PENTATONIC, WHICH I WOULD HAVE AVOIDED LIKE THE PLAGUE IN THE PAST!"

another. When someone tells me, 'Have you listened to this band? They kind of sound like you guys' – I will avoid listening to that. We were never a trendy band. Deep down, we feel like outsiders. We never fit into a scene. When we were in Boston, I definitely felt like an outsider. I did go to a handful of parties where other musicians were, but I did not feel the vibe!

That's why your style is unlike anything else out there. It's all internal.

Internal, yes. When I listen to music, I listen for the mood. I'll get some sonic influences from it, but I don't trespass on people's style. I don't like when people do it. It's like, 'Oh, God, you sound like that guy. Why did you do that?' It's like, 'We've already seen that painting, don't do that. It's boring'.

Interestingly, a lot of bands from the '90s – and even today – have trespassed on the Pixies style.

Yeah, it's fine. It's bound to happen. Well, not bound to happen, but it just gets filtered out into something that nice. But hey, who knows? Sometimes it sounds like us. Some bands managed to make it a part of their own identity.

The Pixies' second act is now 20 years strong. What's the secret to that?

Just staying on the same page and staying creative. That's going to be the key to the band moving forward, just continuing on that way creatively. I can only speak for myself, but it's my desire to learn more.

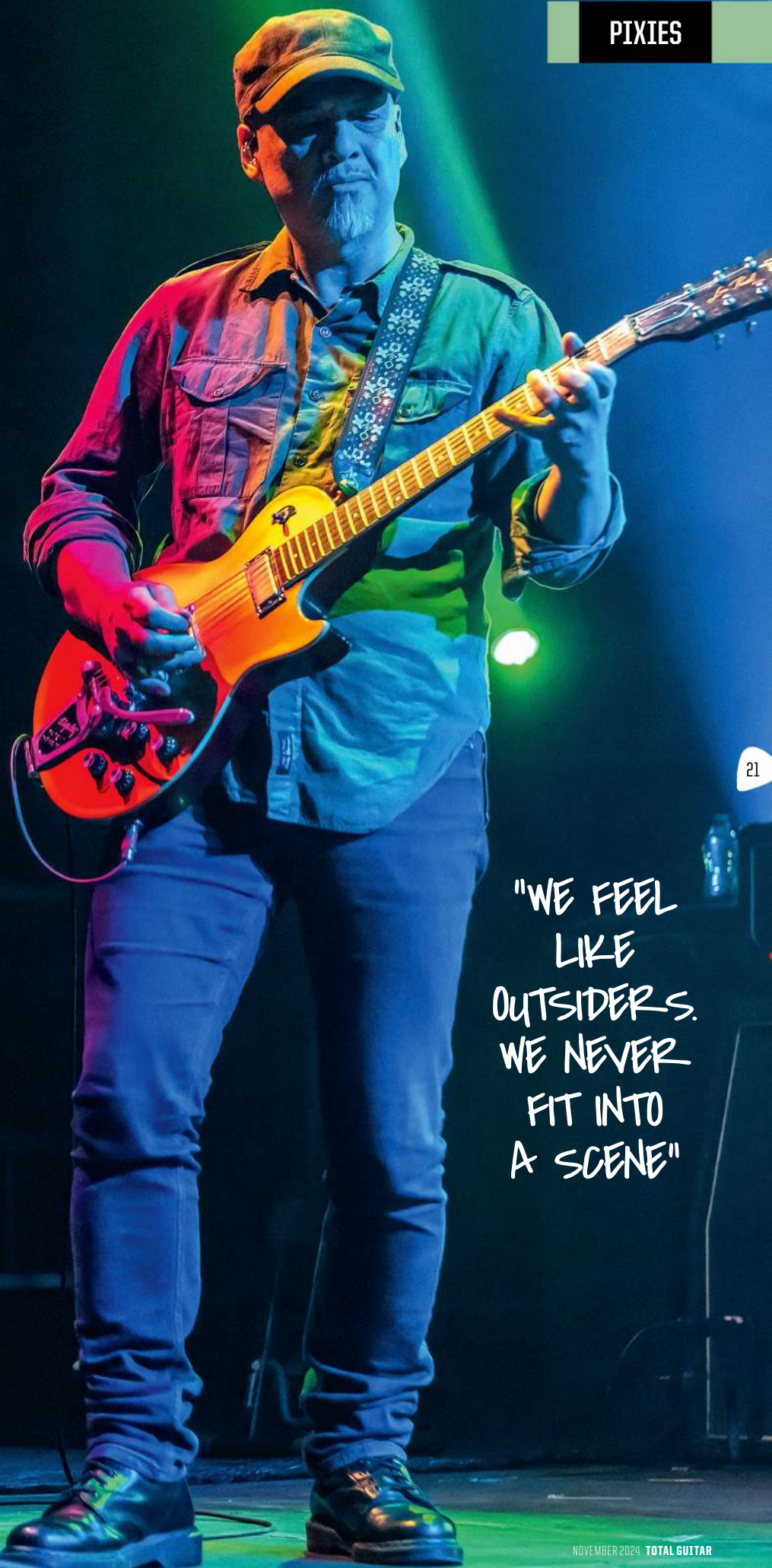
Is the best yet to come?

We've made great records, don't get me wrong. But I want one where people go, 'God dammit!' Like, universally, I want one where people go, 'Holy sh*t, they did it!' That's what I want. We haven't gotten that yet.

Some would say you've already done that with *Surfer Rosa* and *Doolittle*.

There's a barrier we have to go through with those legacy albums where people are always going to be like, 'Yeah, that's it'. But I want history to show that these post-breakup albums we've done have people eventually going, 'You know what? We were wrong about those guys!'

***The Night The Zombies Came* is released on October 25**

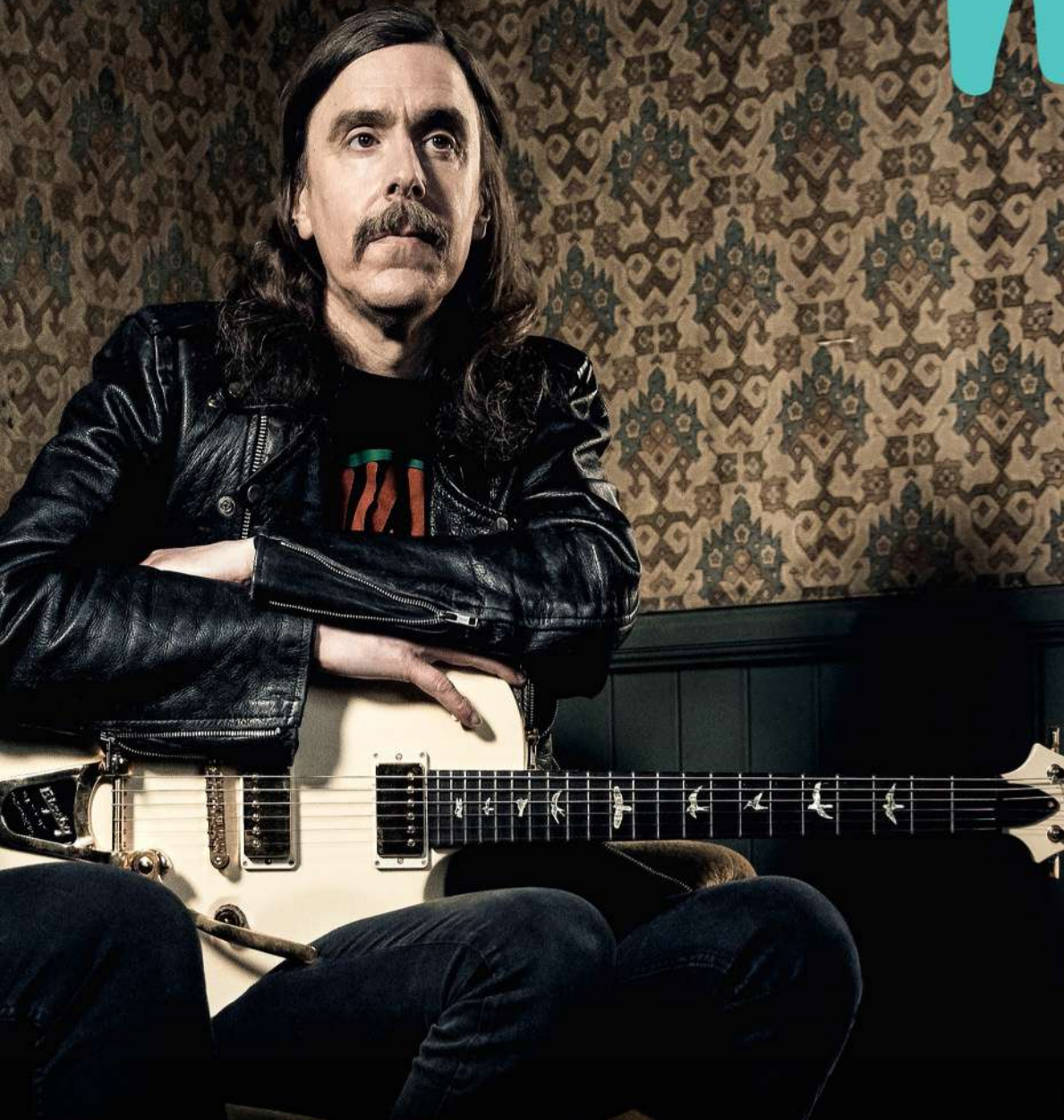


"WE FEEL LIKE OUTSIDERS. WE NEVER FIT INTO A SCENE"



Words Amit Sharma

"AC/DC FAMOUSLY WROTE HIGH VOLTAGE. OUR VERSION IS MORE LIKE CORRECT VOLTAGE!"



Opeth leader Mikael Åkerfeldt and fellow guitarist Fredrik Åkesson love to experiment with new sounds. But in a surprising twist, the band's latest album is a return to their roots. As Mikael says: "It's that old death metal magic!"

W

Mikael Åkerfeldt has been called many things over the years. At best, the Opeth leader has been hailed as a visionary. But when his band's tenth studio album

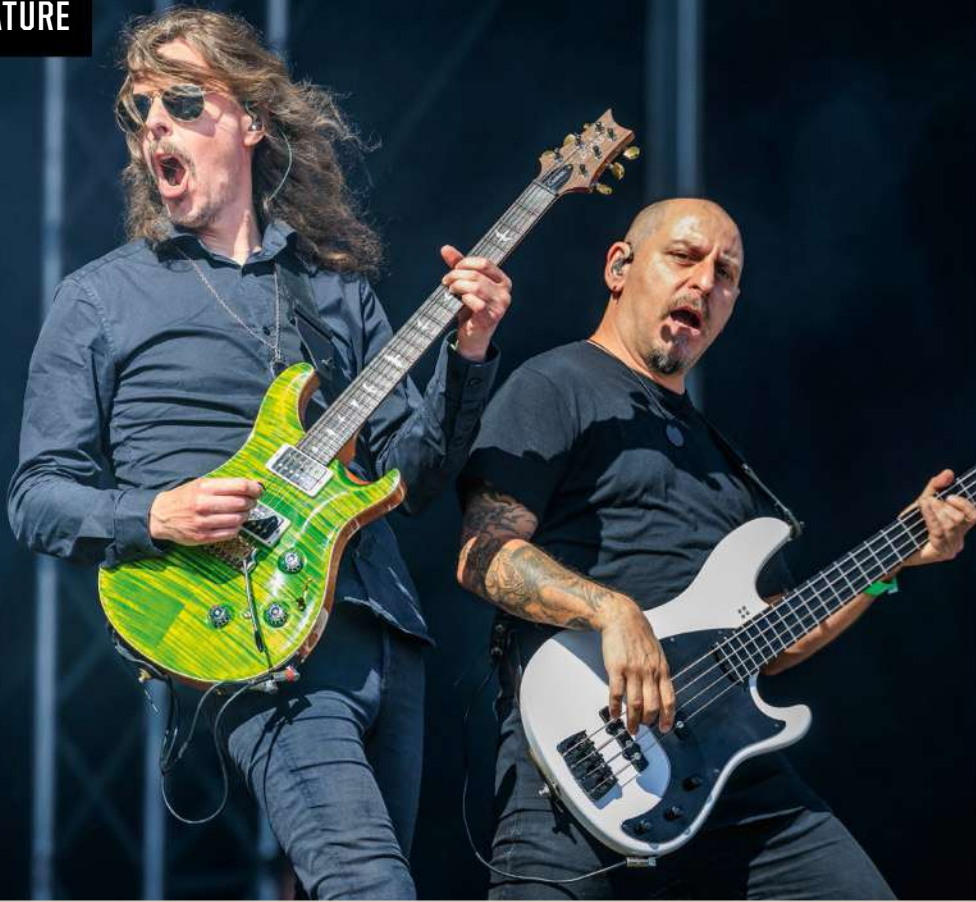
Heritage was released in 2011, a vocal minority of fans lambasted the singer/guitarist for abandoning his metal roots in search of more progressive and folk-flavoured musical meditations. Some even went as far as sending death threats, enraged by how their favourite musician had the forsaken underground extremities that launched his career in favour of more avant-garde and psychedelic influences which – let's face it – had always been detectable in his wildly creative pursuits.

For the most part, however, the Swedish quintet were deeply admired for daring to march to the beat of their own drum, resulting in the breathtaking sounds heard on the three albums that followed.

Deep-diving into the ethereal unknown, converging elements of blues, jazz, and classical in ways no group had ever dared, these cinematic and progressive orchestrations would twist and turn in the most delightful of ways, cementing their stature as world-class innovators and true masters of their own destiny.

But Mr. Åkerfeldt, as we've grown to learn, can be a tad unpredictable, to say the least. In August of this year, when Opeth dropped the first track from their new album *The Last Will And Testament* – a track with the enigmatic title *\$1* – fans were amazed to discover that the guttural roars and blastbeats of old had returned.

Why? And why now? As Mikael tells it, this was always going to happen, but only ever on his terms, and when the time felt right...



a step down. I used a Burny guitar, a black Les Paul copy, with a Fernandes sustainer which helped the top notes ring out. It was actually an old Neal Schon signature that I found from a dealer in Stockholm.”

Given his reputation as a gear hound and self-confessed guitar addict, the list of equipment used by Fredrik on the recordings is extensive indeed. Mikael, however, has always been more minimalist in that regard, but that didn't stop him from trying out something completely different for his latest opus. He's been seen playing PRS guitars, as well as Les Pauls and Strats on stage in the past, but never a Telecaster...

“I only brought one guitar along,” he shrugs. “All my parts were recorded using a Telecaster Custom from the '90s, with a humbucker in the neck and single-coil in the bridge. No one's seen me with a Tele before. I wouldn't normally be caught dead with one because I think they're fucking *ugly!* But that's the only guitar I used. It doesn't hum when you raise the gain. Nobody knows this, but I actually used it on the [Netflix series] *Clark* soundtrack, but never with Opeth. I love the feel of that Tele, it's so comfortable I didn't feel the need to bring anything else. I also knew if it didn't work, Fredrik would have a bunch of sh*t for me to try.”

Fredrik's weapon of choice for the rhythms was his prized 1970 Strat acquired from John Norum, the Europe guitarist who mentored him early on and remains one of his closest friends. It was plugged into one of two Friedmans (“a BE-100 Deluxe and an old one that Dave Friedman probably soldered himself”) as well as a newly acquired Marshall Studio Vintage head and cab for the cleans. And that was just for the riffing...

“For the leads, I plugged into a Marshall Plexi from 1972, the year I was born, with an old Boss OD-1 from 1980 in front. It has an old chip, so there's some ancient magic there. Later on, I found one from 1978 in Japan which has the original 14-pin quad op amp [RC3403D] chip. I would go into the bass side of the Marshall and roll off most of the low end. I think it's the same approach Jake E. Lee used on [Ozzy Osbourne album] *Bark At The Moon*, as well as Gary Moore on *Corridors Of Power*. There's something about the mids that cuts through.”

HEAVY FRIENDS

Mikael and bassist Martin Méndez

It's a late-summer afternoon in London when Mikael and the band's lead guitarist Fredrik Åkesson meet with TG in the downstairs bar of the Sanctum Hotel in London, a place affiliated with Iron Maiden. Naturally, the pair are also enjoying pints of Maiden-branded Trooper IPA as they discuss the making of *The Last Will And Testament*.

It's a concept album built around the narrative of a wealthy man's will revealing dark family secrets. Every track but one is titled with a section symbol representing paragraphs of the will. And as Mikael explains, that lead track *\$1* is what set the tone for the whole piece, both conceptually and musically.

“The first song I wrote was *\$1*, but I actually didn't like it at first,” he admits. “It had some of those death metal connotations which reminded me of Morbid Angel, but I stopped halfway because I felt like an imposter. I let it sit for a while and started writing what would become *\$7*, which had more death metal vocals. I started to feel like there was a purpose to it all, especially with the concept brewing. It sounded

good, strong and relevant – a combination of the old with new ideas we hadn't explored before. I didn't feel embarrassed, I felt cool! Then I went back to *\$1*, which quickly became one of my favourite songs. It's short, hard-hitting and innovative while also being evil! It reminded me of how I screamed in the olden days. I would be in the studio clenching my fists to the point where I was bleeding from the nails sticking into my flesh! I felt that *thing*. It's hard to describe, but I guess it's that old death metal magic!”

He makes a valid point. *\$1* is condensed and succinct – perhaps unusual for a band associated with sprawling 10-minute-plus masterpieces that never seem to run out of creative steam. From the simplistic chorus riff that nods to Sepultura in their heyday (“I love stupid riffs because they're easy to play!” Mikael grins) to the dizzyingly chromatic tapped solo from Fredrik, it's the kind of song that goes straight for the jugular.

“That idea was developed out of something Mike did on the demo,” Fredrik says. “There was a weird trill in there, which gave me the inspiration for a spidery kind of lick with an evil sound. I added some more tapping into it, while hammering on from nowhere on the B-string, then moving the same pattern

"YOUR FINGERS
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AMAZING"
MIKAEL ÅKERFELDT

→ “And we shouldn’t forget about the cabinet!” Mikael interjects. “A local engineer found an old Marshall from the 60s. It had probably never been serviced! I asked the Rockfield Studios owner if one of my favourite English prog bands, Spring, used that cab on the one album they recorded. And he said they definitely did. It sounded f*ckin’ awesome. It was old, beat-up and looked like somebody had taken a dump on it, but the tone was amazing.”

Another secret weapon came in the form of the AmpRx BrownBox, used to attenuate the power running into the heads. The old Plexis were made for 220V, explains Mikael, while modern sockets in the UK and Europe often run at 240V, which will obviously affect the end result. The BrownBox can therefore remedy this, he notes, and take the voltage down even further, if so required. “It’s not a new concept by any means, but we found it took a lot of the annoying bright frequencies away,” Fredrik says, noting how Eddie Van Halen would bring his American power down to 90V with a Variac to achieve what is often lovingly referred to as ‘the brown sound’.

“The only bad thing is that turning down is not very metal!” Mikael laughs. “AC/DC famously wrote *High Voltage*... well, our version is more like *Correct Voltage!*”

But whatever the voltage, it should come as no surprise that there’s no shortage of big guitar moments on *The Last Will And Testament*. Perhaps it’s Fredrik’s lead work on closing track *A Story Never Told* that showcases the guitarist at his most melodically enthralling – helping narrate the story behind the music one note at a time. In similar ways to his *Lovelorn Crime* solo on Opeth’s previous full-length *In Cauda Venenum*, it’s a long-form statement that hits in all the right places thanks to its well-considered balance of choice notes, expressive vibrato and striking sense of lyricism. Its composition took quite a bit of time, Fredrik admits, but the luxury of



SHARP DRESSED MEN

Opeth in 2024. From left: Joakim Svalberg, Martín Méndez, WALTER Väyrynen, Fredrik Åkesson and Mikael Åkerfeldt



"I HAD TO DO A HOMAGE TO YNGWIE. HE WAS A HUGE INFLUENCE ON ME GROWING UP"
 FREDRIK ÅKESSON



writing and demoing at his own home studio gave him the creative freedom required to come up with something extra special, using trial and error to find the right contrast of feel, sophistication and technical wizardry. “I knew it needed a unique melody to start with,” he says. “Then towards the end I borrowed some of Mikael’s vocal melodies to close it all up. I was going for a combination of Ritchie Blackmore and David Gilmour. The solo from Rainbow’s *Snowman* was a loose inspiration there, just in terms of vibe. I’m very happy with how it came out.”

“There’s one note in there that just kills everything else,” Mikael says. “It’s so strong that the rest of the music goes down in favour of that note. I wondered if we did something in the mix, but no, it just overpowers the rest of the music. People keep telling me how beautiful the solo is and I thank them to steal credit!”

Other notable leads include Mikael’s tear-jerking blues at the end of *\$6*, nodding to old school greats like Eric Clapton and Peter Green, plus Fredrik’s contributions to *\$5*, which features some screaming wah leads using dominant ideas, and the mid-section of *\$6*, effectively serving as a tribute to neoclassical maestro and fellow Swede Yngwie Malmsteen.

“That solo comes after a keyboard section, so I figured, ‘why not?’” grins Fredrik, who has also been working closely with Ghost on their latest releases, and previously handled the fretwork in bands like Arch Enemy, Krux and Talisman. “After a Moog solo, I had to do a homage to Yngwie. He was a huge influence on me growing up and I still really love those early albums. Everybody in my neighbourhood was trying to keep up with him. I wrote this solo the quickest and improvised, what we kept was close to the first take. I wouldn’t say the licks are directly from him, but it’s me playing in that fast style...”

“As for *\$5*, that one took a while to write. I couldn’t just go for it because of the chords underneath. I had to put some thought into the modes. It was partly inspired by an Indian player on Instagram called Guitar Prasanna [Ramaswamy], who does all these quick slides. I was jumping between a more happy sound and then something darker. I like the sound of dominant, diminished and minor7flat5 arpeggios – they’re all kinda related to each other,

so you can come up with some interesting ideas by mixing things together.”

And while we’re on the subject of interesting ideas, it would be fair to say that Mikael Åkerfeldt is an expert in this field. He has in the past been critical of metal bands who follow trends and stick to tried-and-tested formulas, resulting in recordings that can feel uninspired, sterile or mundane. It’s almost too easy for bands to end up sounding the same, he rightly points out. So, as a parting gift to TG, what advice can the progressive metal polymath offer us to help stand out from the crowd, as he himself has done so poetically time and time again?

“My best advice is: real musicians don’t take advice!” he deadpans, half-jokingly. “If you like playing straightforward metal, then sure, that’s what you should do. But if you are open to things, you should try them. It might result in ideas that are less generic. I don’t necessarily think our way of working is a good recipe for success. When you start doing weird sh*t, that’s a starting point for trouble between the writer, the other members, the fans and even the labels. Don’t forget why you started a band in the first place.”

Opeth, however, are no ordinary band, and even if you go all the way back to 1995 debut *Orchid*, written and recorded when Mikael was just 20 years old, it’s clear they’ve always been an anomaly to the metal scene around them. And proudly so...

“We were kinda special when we started, writing long songs with sh*tloads of stuff happening,” he says with pride. “We never had to make the transition from normal to weird – we were already there! I dare anyone to say our debut sounded like anything else, because nothing like that existed in 1994. If you want to break away from the mundane, listen to different kinds of music and don’t rule anything out.

“I don’t have a pre-set idea of how I want to sound. It changes. Something can set you off. You play the wrong chord and suddenly a new world opens up, like Pink Floyd did with *Shine On You Crazy Diamond*. Your fingers might be in the wrong place, but the accident can sound amazing. Ultimately, you might not have intended it, but you should be open to running with it.”

The Last Will And Testament is released November 22.

Words Phil Weller

“WHEN YOU
START
WITH A
CRAPPY
GUITAR
IT BEGINS
THE CYCLE
OF GEAR
ADDICTION!”

Blues star **Kenny Wayne Shepherd** owns some amazing gear - bespoke Dumble amps and a pedal that reportedly belonged to Jimi Hendrix. In his new album, he's still finding new ways to express himself as a player...





Kenny Wayne Shepherd penned a chunk of his new album *Dirt On My Diamonds Vol.2* while soaking up the history of Alabama's FAME Studios, a place where legends such as Etta James and The Rolling Stones cut records in the past. Here, the Louisiana-born bluesman discusses his creative process from writing to recording, and explains how the gear addiction he developed as a young player is still as powerful as it ever was...

Your new album *Dirt On My Diamonds Vol.2* is the second instalment of a two-volume epic. What was your thinking behind this?

It really boiled down to me trying to do something different and wanting new ways to engage with my fans. You don't see many two-volume albums anymore. When I first started recording these songs, I was envisioning two completely separate, unrelated albums. They're not meant to sound similar, but they were written at the same time. We ended Vol.1 with *Ease My Mind*, which is the most *down* song on the whole record. It's back-alley blues, you know? And then you pick up Vol.2 with *I Got A Woman*, which is a really uplifting and upbeat song. My goal over the past few records has been to project a really optimistic tone. Music is a powerful thing and I want to affect people in a positive way.

What were the FAME sessions like?

It's like walking back in time to when all of those legendary albums were recorded back in the day. It's an incredible facility. One of the things for me was standing in the vocal booth like, 'This is where Etta James stood when she was singing' – she's one of my all time favourite blues singers. But if you walk into it going, 'Okay, we're in Muscle Shoals, this has to affect what we're doing', then it's going to sound contrived. I try to let it happen naturally.

When I was writing *Born With A Broken Heart* at my dad's lake house, a train started rolling down the tracks – and that moment inspired the lyric referring to the blues as a slow rolling train. Your environment is always going to influence what you're writing, but you can't force it. The imprint of FAME is definitely on those songs.

Going back to your beginnings, what was your first guitar?

My parents bought me a Yamaha SE 150 when I was six or seven. It's basically a Strat body without the contours. It had

one pickup and one volume knob, and it was made out of particle board plywood, and had a Candy Apple Red paint job. It was an incredibly crude guitar. My family couldn't buy me a fancy guitar even if they wanted to. But it was all I needed at the time, to get me going and to really give me an opportunity to start honing on my skills. When you start with a crappy guitar, it begins the cycle of gear addiction. You appreciate it, but you long for a better instrument. It gives you a level of appreciation because you started with humble beginnings, and then when you make it to the top of the guitar mountain then you've appreciated every step along the way and what it took to get there.

Is there one guitarist above all others that has had the biggest influence on you?

I think every great guitar player has heroes and they start by learning to play their heroes' music. Then, if they're smart, they start figuring out how to make it your own and not a note-by-note replica of what they did. Every legend has had someone that they've looked up to and learnt their music as a starting point, like Stevie Ray Vaughan was for me.

But it's not just about legends. I had a friend of the family, Tommy Kramer, and he told me how to tune the guitar, stretch the strings and different ways to do vibrato. He showed me fundamental things which a lot of people overlook. They became focal points in my approach to playing guitar and what I do today, so he's just as important as anyone else to me.

You spoke of that cycle of gear addiction. Is that still as strong as ever for you?

I'm always looking for whatever the next thing might be, but the things that have gotten me incredibly, over-the-top excited and influence the music I'm creating are the amplifiers that Alexander Dumble built me before he passed. He built 11 different amplifiers over the course of our friendship, and from the first amplifier to the last they elevated my playing and creativity. It freed up so much energy for me to express myself, because I didn't realise how much energy I was using with my previous amplifiers to try and get them to do the things I wanted them to do.

There's something about them that is incredibly revealing about your playing. The transparency is incredible. Some guys won't like that. But I will officially go on record and say that playing through all of those clones there is no honest comparison. It might get you in the stadium, but you're nowhere near

the ballpark. So if we're talking about 'Oh sh*t!' moments, that one is unbound. How did I live without this stuff before?

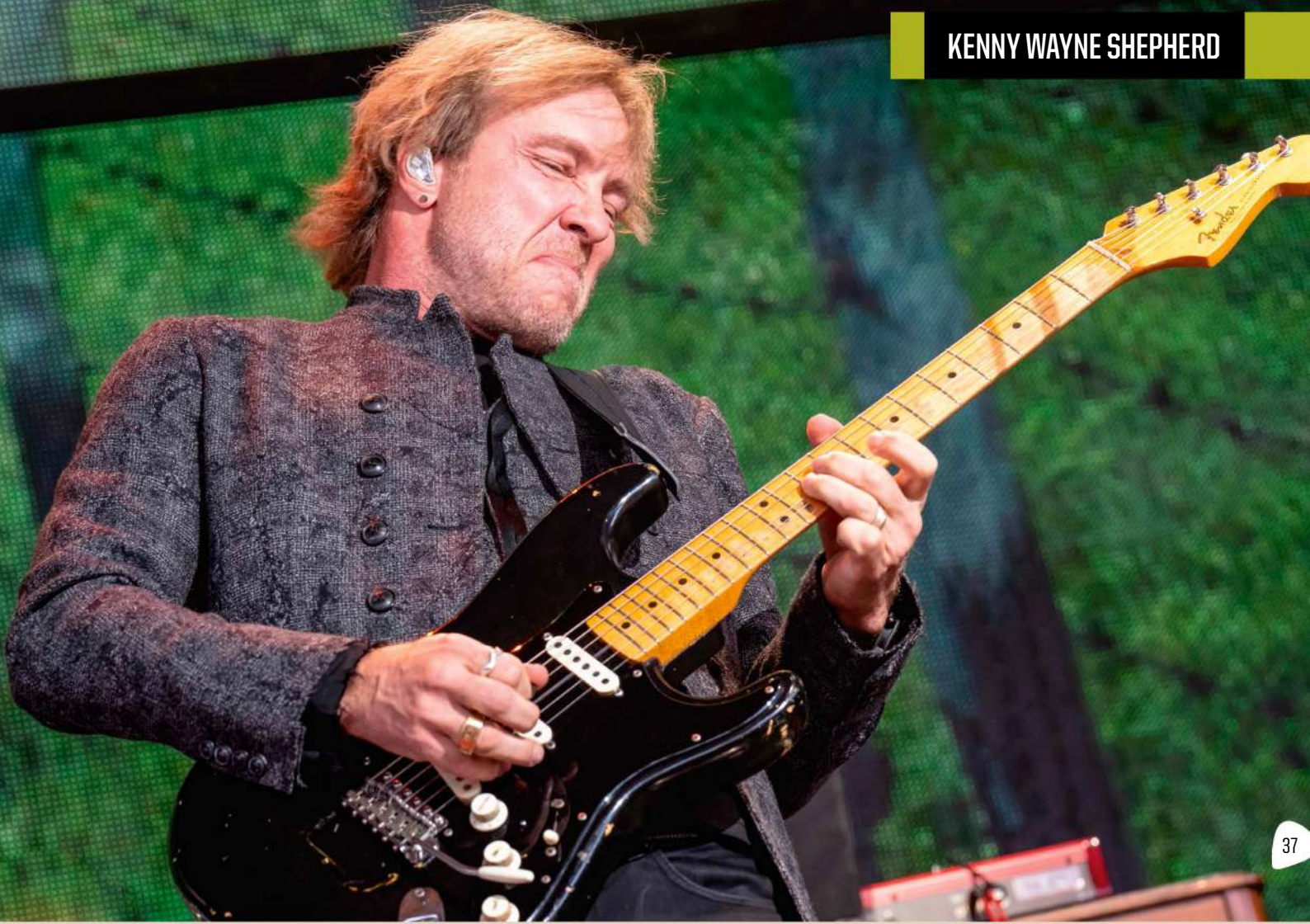
Are you using those amps on the new album?

I brought them all to the studio, but I'm usually running three to a maximum of five amplifiers at any given time on any given song, and then we're creating a blend of the

best two or three for that particular song. The effects were relatively minimal and very much in my standard wheelhouse.

There hasn't been any incredibly groundbreaking developments in the effects world for me, so I have the original versions of all my pedals. I have my Vox Clyde McCoy wah from the '60s, my original Tycobrahe Octavia, a TS808 Tube Screamer, an Analogue Man King of Tone overdrive, an Analogue Man Bi-chorus pedal. And I have an MXR Univibe that allegedly belonged to Jimi Hendrix. There's also an original '60s Fuzz Face on Pressure. It had died on me at some point, so Dumble told me to bring it to him because he had a mod he could do to it. It's the only Dumble Fuzz Face that I'm aware of. It has a really cool sound to it.

“WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO MAKE YOU FEEL SOMETHING? THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS TO ME”



Do you notice a difference with vintage pedals?

I can hear it. But only a trained ear can hear the differences. In a live environment, are those subtle differences gonna make a difference? Absolutely not. I have no problem using reissue pedals live – by the time it’s gone through speakers, microphones and cables nobody’s gonna notice the difference.

In terms of technique, are you still learning new tricks?

My biggest technique that I’ve been honing in on for years, that I feel is more of a fundamental thing than a technique, is: ‘What do I need to do to make you feel something?’ That’s all that matters to me. It’s not like, ‘Am I using this many fingers?’ Or, ‘Am I doing this hybrid picking thing?’

So what has that quest taught you?

For me, it’s been discovering the space between the notes and the space within the notes. I’ve learnt to create a space where you normally would feel inclined

to fill it to see what that does to the music. Does it let the music breathe? Does it give the audience a moment to reflect on what you just played? Does it create tension? And then the space within the notes means holding a note for longer. How long can I hold this note and it still mean something instead of transitioning on to the next thing?

I’ve found that’s simplified a lot of things I’m doing on stage and in making those subtle changes at the right time, a lot of times the beauty is in the simplicity. It’s created a more emotive experience and a better statement of what I’m doing with my instrument.

Is it hard to restrain yourself like that?

Awareness is the first step. It’s a very conscious thing at first but so is everything with the instrument. Like learning a scale until it becomes part of your muscle memory. The hardest thing is identifying where in your music those moments exist and then it’s a lot of trial and error from there.

Have you ever embarrassed yourself onstage?

I got caught up playing with The Rolling Stones. It was a massive stage and I had a 25ft cable. I took off running and I yanked the cable out of my guitar in the middle of my solo, and then I was having to scurry around to find the cable and plug it back in – in front of 80,000 people! But we’re human. There’s been bad notes. You’ve gotta smile and shake it off. I’ll put it on full display: own it and embrace it. It takes the pressure off.

And what would you say is your definitive Kenny Wayne Shepherd moment?

Blue And Black sounds 100 per cent like me, and it was a massive hit. But if you wanted me to give my definition of what contemporary blues is I’d play *I Want You* from *The Traveller*. It’s not the most mainstream or successful song, but that’s my definition of modern day blues music. That sound is still evolving and there are still defining moments to be had for me.

***Dirt On My Diamonds Vol.2* is out now.**

BLUES TRAVELLER
“Every guitar player has heroes, like Stevie Ray Vaughan was for me.”

Photo: Getty

Words Jonathan Horsley

“MY HANDS HAVE BEEN PLAYING FOR SIXTY YEARS, SO THEY KNOW WHERE THE FRETS ARE!”

In the 1970s, **Steve Howe** became a hugely influential figure in the sphere of progressive rock as the guitarist for Yes. Now on his third stint with the band, he's also created an experimental new solo album. “The guitar,” he says, “is a very tempting instrument to explore...”

We have Steve Howe to thank for extending progressive rock's boundaries beyond the horizon. The Yes guitarist's jazz sensibility and musical curiosity shaped a sound that continues to evolve. His conceptual new solo album *Guitarscape* comprises a diverse array of chordal-driven guitar instrumentals, recorded with his son Dylan on drums.

What guitar did you learn on?

I think it cost £14. I bought it in King's Cross, London. It was just a brownish archtop kind of guitar, two f-holes and a bridge. Nothing fancy.

It wasn't a Framus but it was like that kind of guitar, and that was the first instrument that I owned. I was very grateful my Dad bought it for me. That was in 1959, and I really started in 1960.

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

The answer is simple. I don't practice, because I don't think that practicing in itself is necessary unless I haven't played for a long time and I want to do some warming up, then yeah, I might do some scales, and I have got an interesting kind of run-up thing that starts quite steady and then gets faster where you go through every note on the guitar.

I love doing those but I don't do them very often, and usually because I am in touch with my guitar. My hands have been playing for 60 years, so basically they do know where the frets are.





➔ **OFF THE CUFF**
 "I just improvise," Steve says. "That's what I replaced practising with."

Sometimes I like to play something I wrote to make sure I can still play it. I hadn't played *Clap* [his instrumental track from 1971's *The Yes Album*] for about two months, and I sat down and picked up a Martin and went, 'Play *Clap*,' and I played the whole thing! That is my confirmation, periodically, if I need it, because I don't play it a lot.

Who was your biggest influence or what was your biggest motivation as a player?

When I heard Chet Atkins, everything changed. I became more personalised in my ambitions, not just to become a guitarist but a particular kind of guitarist, free to do lots of things, not just *Apache!* Chet could manage nice things on just about anything, and also he had this marvellous back story of being associated with other great people. I didn't know that at the time,

and it took me a bit of time to realise that I had just read about him on the Everly Brothers records, in the liner notes [Atkins produced the Everly Brothers]. There was more to the man than you see. But playing was the central thing. He was brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

Initially, I didn't realise how much two guitarists influenced me before I had even picked up the guitar, because I loved the sound they got. That was a guy called Jimmy Bryant, who played on the records my parents had, sung by Tennessee Ernie Ford, and of course Les Paul! My parents had Les Paul records with Mary Ford, so I played those and I thought, 'That's pretty wonderful!' They may have encouraged me towards the guitar. There was this interest in music in the house generally and I got into pop when it came out, Hank Marvin... guitar instrumentals.

What are your non-negotiables when it comes to guitar?

What is crucial now is that I'm playing guitars that I'm very familiar with. I won't accept being unfamiliar with a guitar, and how it feels has become much more important. It has to feel absolutely right. I perform on performance-level guitars because I need that so much, and I won't have a hindrance from the guitar. The guitars have to be very well maintained and well-strung, and Simon Thorn is doing that for me now. Simon's doing great. The setup of the guitar is important.

In terms of technique, what was the last new trick you learned?

Most of what I think up has something new about it to me, although it maybe in the chords or something that I hear. I don't know that I think about new

"SOMETIMES I LIKE TO PLAY SOMETHING I WROTE TO MAKE SURE I CAN STILL PLAY IT!"

tricks. There is a lot that you can do on a guitar that sounds really wonderful but is actually quite easy, so in a way, the guitar is a very tempting instrument to explore. Most players probably don't stop finding nice things.

In your early days, what guitar was the game-changer for you?

My heart was set on a Gibson ES-175, in 1964, which my dad helped me buy. That is the most important guitar in the world to me, and that's why it is heavily protected! I bought that only four years after starting the guitar, so it was very ambitious of me, but in that time, I'd had two other electric guitars; a Guyatone LG-40, sometimes called an Antoria LG-40, and also a Burns jazz guitar which had two pickups.

What new instruments have you acquired recently?

I got a new pedal steel by Williams and that is brilliant. That's quite inspiring, too. Last year, I bought a Gibson Tennessean, which is once again a big wave to Chet Atkins because he designed this guitar, and he always sounded wonderful playing them. I mean, I had to get one, inevitably, and I find it wonderful, too. It is the featured guitar on a new track, *Secret Mission*.

As a player, do you have any bad habits that you worry about?

Well, the lightness of touch that Chet plays electric with – I'm getting there a little bit on the Tennessean, but I could play lighter. I would almost confess that when I hear the original *Mood For A Day* [his instrumental from another Yes album from 1971, *Fragile*], I think I am thrashing that guitar to pieces, and I don't play like that at all anymore. So some of the things that I've done before I don't do the same now, because I get more out of playing it beautifully and respectfully – and that goes for all of that area of performing it and making it right for the moment.

Which is the song or performance that is you're most proud of?

It's transient. It's not the same. In one period, there will be something that grabbed you, but there can't be an overriding song that I enjoy in that way. I would probably say *Clap* to be honest! Because that is only me and if I get it right then I am pretty happy. It's good to have that pressure. I take it for

granted that I can perform anything that I have recorded, but some things are easier than others.

What do you play when you are relaxing and just playing for the fun of it?

Basically, I don't like to feel like there is any reason why I should play anything in particular. I do like to pull out a solo piece and play that, if it is the appropriate guitar to do that on. There might be something musically that I am thinking about, something I played last week. I've got my little voice recorder and I might check back.

But I don't need inspiration from outside. I just sit and play, but what I play... it might be improvised. I might just improvise. That's what I replaced practising with. Just improvise. It doesn't matter if you are playing chords or a single line, and you can hear the sort of music that you would hear background, imagining it was there, and jam if you like on a 12 bar. I think that's the freedom I like – just to have fun.

Is there a piece of music that you wish you could play but can't?

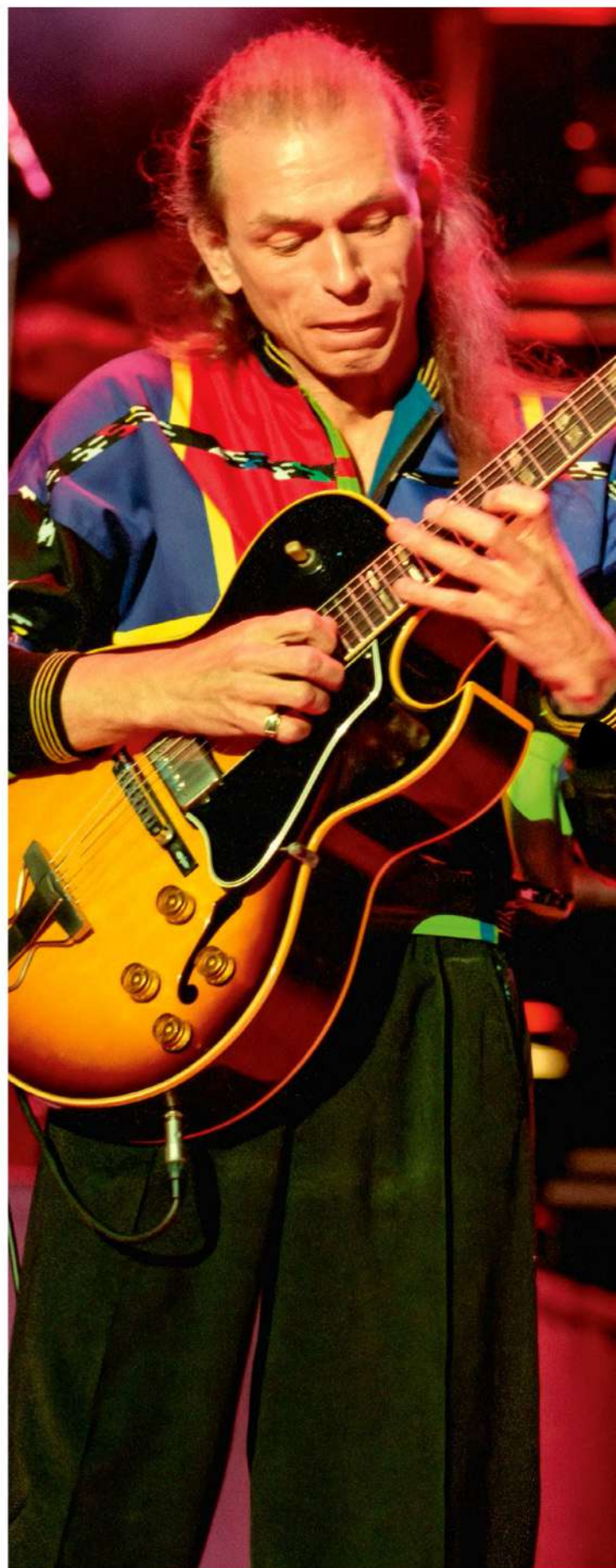
Loads of things! Thousands of things! I couldn't even start there, but that's what I do. I admire music. I admire other people's music. When I hear Tal Farlow playing *Chuckles* or something, this is just sheer heavenly delightful jazz guitar – why would I even think I could do that? But there again, I have been influenced by jazz and it has a way of showing me that doesn't require me going to the extent of specialising in it.

And after all these years, is it still a challenge to play live?

A performer can really beat themselves up if they did something wrong that's rather apparent or that is dreadful. You can spend days trying to forget it – just that one moment. That happens often. It's not never. That happens periodically with something you do; you come off and feel hurt.

But you have to remember that this is live performance and you don't know what's going to happen when the show starts. All sorts of things can distract you. What we want to do is play the most electrifying shows that we can, but then again, we are not robots. We won't be the same as the other show. I think that's why most people come to shows – to see what happens.

Guitarscape is out now.





42



44

In The Beginning: Issue 1

Hendrix, dirt boxes and new tech

46

The Dawn Of Digital Modelling

48

Noel Gallagher

"I never really wanted to play lead!"

49

Brian May

"I just wanted to rock"

50

Dimebag Darrell

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

52

Paul Gilbert's School Of Shred

54

The Glory Years: Too Drunk To Pluck

56

Mark Tremonti records TG an exclusive track

58

Matt Bellamy

"I wanted one guitar part to be just perfect"

59

The Darkness

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

60

Challenge Charlie

One man stands up to take on TG's daftest challenges

62

John Frusciante's letter from America

64

Myth Busters: The cable destruction test

66

Solos Science

TG's epic soloing experiment

68

Eddie Van Halen

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

69

Jimmy Page

"I was using what was really meaty!"

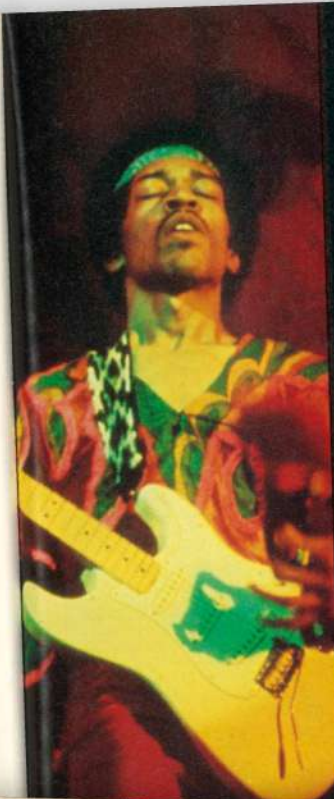
The bluffer's guide to **JIMI HENDRIX**



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

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

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



HEN INSPI

Paul Samson guides Jimi's technique a

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

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

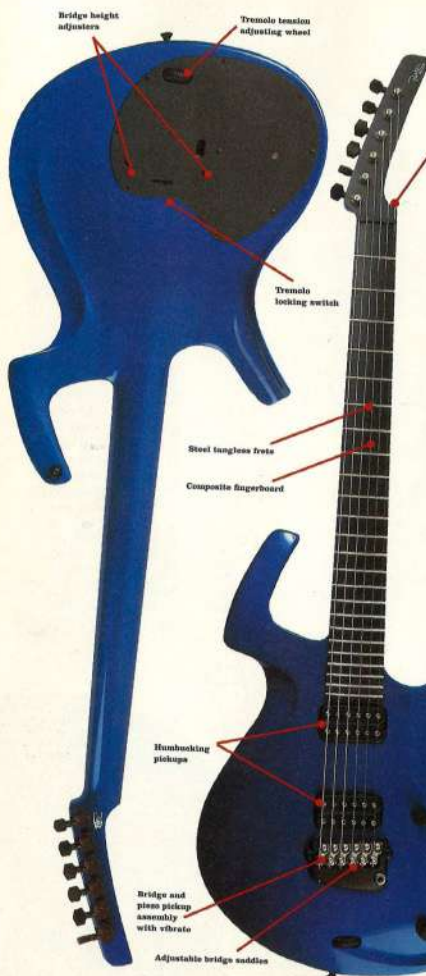
It sounds corny, but his attitude to music was deeply spiritual. He felt music could get a mood on a feeling across much better than words – and it was something that wasn't restricted by language or race. He often talked about his music awakes people to their own creative potential, how he was getting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

HENDRIX TECHNIQUES

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

FIRST TEST PARKER FLY DELUXE

CD TRACKS 6-7



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

FLY FISHMAN

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



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

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

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

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

CD TRACKS 6-7



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

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

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

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

TWO INTO ONE

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

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

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

Talking about noise, both three-way selectors are stiff and a bit noisy in the model under review – and there is a distinct thump through the amp



when you switch between the two systems while not playing anything.

R&D SPREE

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

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

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

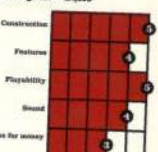
Then again, the neck and body construction is excellent – despite its lightness, the Fly feels rugged and strong and is very smooth to play. This is doubtless a classy guitar – but, remember, you could buy a great electric guitar and an acoustic to go with it and still have a wad of change for the price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

FACT FILE

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

TOTAL GUITAR VERDICT

Parker Fly Deluxe
Electric guitar • £1,800



A lightweight, Asturias guitar that is great to play and can sound like an acoustic or electric.
Total rating 84%

CONTACT
PARKER FLY, Hong Kong
001 427 5277
For full address, see p137

DRIX RATION

you through the basics of
and preferred hardware.

timing and attack of the pick. Guitarists who play with the pick hand resting on the bridge (typical of many heavy metal guitarists) tend to be very staccato and rigid in their approach, especially when playing rhythm.



Jimi had huge string bends - essential for massive string bends.

The percussion and timing of Jimi's rhythm playing was inspired by his intense focus on the drummer, and he would often play counter-rhythms against it or form new patterns, even on solos. His knowledge and understanding of African rhythm patterns was a strong influence here.

To control string bends like Jimi, it's imperative to have the string gauges and tension to match the strength of your hand. It's no good replicating Jimi's string gauges and finding you cannot bend them like he could if your hand is smaller and weaker. And Jimi had very large hands and long fingers, which would give him far more strength than average.

The control and pitch of the string bends is important, as is his finger vibrato. Don't rely on the tremolo arm, because on single or double notes it should be in your fingers. If you can't manage this then your strings are too heavy, or you just don't practice enough to get the strength up. Generally, Jimi tuned to E flat which helped with string tension a little and assisted his vocal range.

Effects should be there to help express what you are trying to play and enhance the sound, rather than to dominate. Jimi was not a fan of chorus (in the form of automatic double-tracking in the studio) because he felt it disguised the guitar's tone. He preferred to track the part on to tape instead. He liked the Univibe, which simulates a rotating speaker sound like that of a Leslie cabinet, reckoning the effect to be 'emotional'. You can still get this effect in the form of the Rotovibe by Jim Dunlop.

His use of wah and fuzzbox are well documented, but he did have a unit called an Octavia, built by his technician Roger Mayer. This provided octaves up (outrio of Purple Haze) or down (Band of Gypsies' Who Knows) and its intensity was dictated by the fretting of the note. Hard picking would increase the effect, while gentle stroking would make it almost disappear.

TOTAL GUITAR 61

Bending the G a whole tone up to the B.



D with F# bars. This 1st inversion is 3rd at the bottom is typical of Jimi.



The #9 chord. You take a 7th chord of a minor 3rd to it an octave higher. describe, but dead easy to play.

CHORDS



IN THE BEGINNING: ISSUE 1

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



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

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO HENDRIX

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

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

influences. He often played phrases rather than constant flurries of notes, believing that the spaces between the licks were as important as the licks themselves.

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

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

"To control string bends like Jimi, it's imperative to have the string gauges and tension to match the strength of your hand. It's no good replicating Jimi's string gauges and finding you cannot bend them like he could (incidentally, Jimi preferred Fender Rock n' Roll Lites in gauges .010, .013, .015, .026, .032, .038). The control and pitch of the string bends is important, as is his finger vibrato. Don't rely on the

tremolo arm, because on single or double notes it should be your fingers. Generally, Jimi tuned to E flat which helped with string tension a little and assisted his vocal range."

THE GUITAR OF THE FUTURE

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

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

FIRST TEST ROLAND VG-8

CD TRACK 8

CD TRACK 8

ROLA



Roland VG-8 GUITAR MODELLING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

TECHNICAL

The new VG-8 will let the guitarist supply the pitch – one per string (now standard) – and the pickup. These signals are transformed using synthesis techniques to

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

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

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



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



TOTAL GUITAR VERDICT

Roland VG-8 & GK-2A
Guitar Modelling System • £1,099

FACT FILE

SOUND CREATION Pickup and speaker/mic emulation, distortion/overdrive, tube amp sim
PRESETS 64 preset, 64 user (expandable with memory card)
EFFECTS Modulation (chorus, reverb, delay), EQ, compressor, limiter, noise gate, auto wah, auto filter, auto phaser, auto flanger, auto tremolo, auto vibrato, auto pitch bend, auto auto-tune, auto auto-pan, auto auto-chorus, auto auto-reverb, auto auto-delay, auto auto-distortion, auto auto-overdrive, auto auto-tube amp sim

T G 0

TRACK 8 The presets which guitar and amp will create in guitars, we hear more us legal reasons say which cl being emulat BYTE 1 Hum on a solid-bc British valve BYTE 2 Brid coil pickups through a C

record guitar...?



seek POD.

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

NOW, FOR £299 inc V!
"AIR" WITHOUT DISTURBANCE
THANK POD!
CABINET/SPEAKER/MIC!
A PORTABLE, FL...

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

in the CD

The VG-8 demo uses emulate well-known up setups. Although it bird and wonderful tilt that you'd want to leable sounds. For s, we aren't allowed to asic guitar or amp is ed...

ucking neck pickup dy guitar through a stack. ge and middle single-on a solid-body guitar alliformian valve combo.

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

Guitar: Nick Cooper, Roland UK



features a 'hex pickup' which lies under the bridge, and this supplies the pitch for the VG-8. Our review model was fitted so it can be used with any guitar. A certain manufacturer is even planning an with a GK-2A hidden inside the body.

THE DAWN OF DIGITAL MODELLING



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

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

"There literally seems to be nothing it can't do. A basic fave guitar/GK-2A/VG-8 setup replaces every guitar you've ever heard, an assortment of classic amps, miscellaneous other instruments (mandolin, lute,

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

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

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

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

THE RISE OF THE POD

Despite our gushing, the VG-8's modelling did leave room for improvement. While its amp sims were a leap forward, they pale compared to contemporary

modellers, including Roland's own Boss GT-1000. But it was not so much this that limited the VG-8's appeal as the fact that it didn't work with standard guitar pickups. Just a few years later, Line 6 would solve this problem, opening the door to the modelling revolution we are now enjoying.

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

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

Words Chris Bird

BRIAN MAY

"I just wanted to rock!"



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

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

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

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

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

anger, your love and
a different world before
and both Freddie and I had
visions from that same
size stuff like Glenn Miller
supercarriac scenes. So when
making up, these influences
well as the emerging rock
that gave us a perspective
nobody has these days.

FIRST ALBUM
...the band with Roy
...and John Anthony.
...in
...with additional material from
...of another London
...Lance Lotus. What did you
...that whole experience?
...ization was the second
...album, which we were never
...s. We were chosen into the
...of the era. Trident Studios
...emerged as a force in the
...and they thought they had it
...the highest sound has very
...the experience of what we
...ing for. So Roger's drums
...in a little while, and all
...we would have tape on
...they'd all be dead and down.
...their way to say 'Thank
...This isn't really the sound we
...ry'. And he said 'That's weird,
...is all in the mix. What's the
...the best way, is it? And we
...all know it ain't going
...end

...oughly enough, the demon will
...Dr Lane Les Sittelen in
...they were down to what we
...and if you know, nice open drum
...and ambience on the guitar and
...thing. That's much more the way
...smoking it up. You know the major
...ation with the first album. But
...were other frustrations. Ray was
...a great job of locking us into
...but it didn't really sit very well
...our way of playing. His idea of
...ing on track was to do it again, and

EARLY MAY
As a young man in the 1950s, with the newly-built first electric guitar...

again. And again. And again. And again!
So there's no mistakes. But of course,
by the time you've done that, you've
lost all your enthusiasm for it. And
it's kind of sheer.
"Much later we evolved these
techniques of keeping ourselves fresh
- particularly with *The Game* album
(1981), where if the bass line track
sounded good, and you make a mistake,
you'd just stop it on it. Then we said,
"Why didn't we do that before?" And
it was because people told us it couldn't
be done. But with those leading tracks
on the first album, they got a bit
stomach. And I think you can hear it
in some ways.

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

Despite its difficult birth, are you
proud of that album?
Oh, I love it! It encapsulates what we
were at the time, and it's a declaration
of what we were going. It's very
emotionally-based and quite raw. But
it's got a lot of melody and it's kind of
harmonious. We were starting to find our
muscle. We were pointing those

WHEN ROCK STARS GO MENTAL!

DAMAGE PLAN

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

ROUND ONE: STEVE ALLSWORTH
ROUND TWO: JOEL MULVIER
KINGSIDE SHOTS: JAMES WILSON

"L... then make you look like some fuckin' guy on a loonybin!"

Dimebag Darrell and TG sat together in a London hotel room. While we close, we'll read the boozed-up transcript. It's the best story.

"But the fuck up and play the guitar," he told him.

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

How did it come to this?

F... lack to a... the... he... and... call from Mick... Cabaret... incident... broke out... Washburn guitar... and... Russell... amp... know if we'd like... do something... wash down... sign... custom... former... Partner... Dimebag Darrell... Obviously... would... tell... him... something... up... Within... days... the... record... company... was... a... standard... offer... Dimebag... coming... to... the... UK... to... have... the... first... in... the... world... with... his... band... The... Damned... Years...

Reason of the day things have... worked... you... that... are... we... can... to... get... the... Coast... L... and... then... the... following... day... to... the... interview... about... his... gear... and... get... photos... TG... is... about... to... go... last... rounds... with... Dimebag... Darrell...

ROUND 1

I... 12:45pm, it... room... in... one... of... a... London... hotel... room... TG... arrives... early... and... sets... up... The... record... company... has... provided... a... hotel... room... Dimebag... appears... without... exception... for... the... interview... It... is... to... get... away... to... the... readers... of... Kerrang!... magazine... We... just... sit... and... get... the... photographs... ready... to... go...

...the... way... to... get... away... to... the... readers... of... Kerrang!... magazine... We... just... sit... and... get... the... photographs... ready... to... go... (The... text... is... a... bit... blurry... but... it... seems... to... be... a... continuation... of... the... interview... with... Dimebag... Darrell...)

TG: "OK, great... well... you... see... the... way... to... get... away... to... the... readers... of... Kerrang!... magazine... We... just... sit... and... get... the... photographs... ready... to... go..."



"LIKE VAN HALEN ON STEROIDS..."

The guitar community... (The text... is... a... bit... blurry... but... it... seems... to... be... a... continuation... of... the... interview... with... Dimebag... Darrell...)



DIMEBAG 1966-2004

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

Legend in an increased word... (The text... is... a... bit... blurry... but... it... seems... to... be... a... continuation... of... the... interview... with... Dimebag... Darrell...)

Tony Iommi

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

Zakk Wylde... (The text... is... a... bit... blurry... but... it... seems... to... be... a... continuation... of... the... interview... with... Dimebag... Darrell...)

Words Henry Yates and Steve Allsworth

DIMEBAG DARRELL

“Dude, I’ve been doing this my whole life!”

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

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

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

TG’s Henry Yates wrote an eloquent eulogy that captured the spirit of the man: “If Dimebag Darrell had been less talented, the circumstances of his tragic death might still have seen him immortalised. Ultimately, though, it won’t be the violence of his end

that will see Dimebag’s name resonate, but what the guitarist achieved in his short lifetime. Many years from now, guitarists will still form bands, write riffs, and drink Jack Daniels with his music ringing in their ears. Now that’s what we call a legend!”

TG’s tribute included excerpts from interviews we’d had with Dime from years gone by. He spoke of the simplicity and groove in his riffs – a key ingredient in so many of Pantera’s classic songs. “It’s gotta be catchy,” he said. “Like *Walk, y’know?* How simple

could it f*cking get? Or something like *Cowboys From Hell*. You can still hum it.” He also spoke of that other key element in his playing – as celebrated in the title of a Pantera song, *The Art Of Shredding*: “Where I came from, if you couldn’t play all six strings you weren’t jack-sh*t!” he said. “I came from the old school. It’s cool to jam rhythms all night, man, but if you really wanna express yourself then you’ve gotta get up on those little strings and bend those motherf*ckers all over the place! I’m always gonna be shredding like

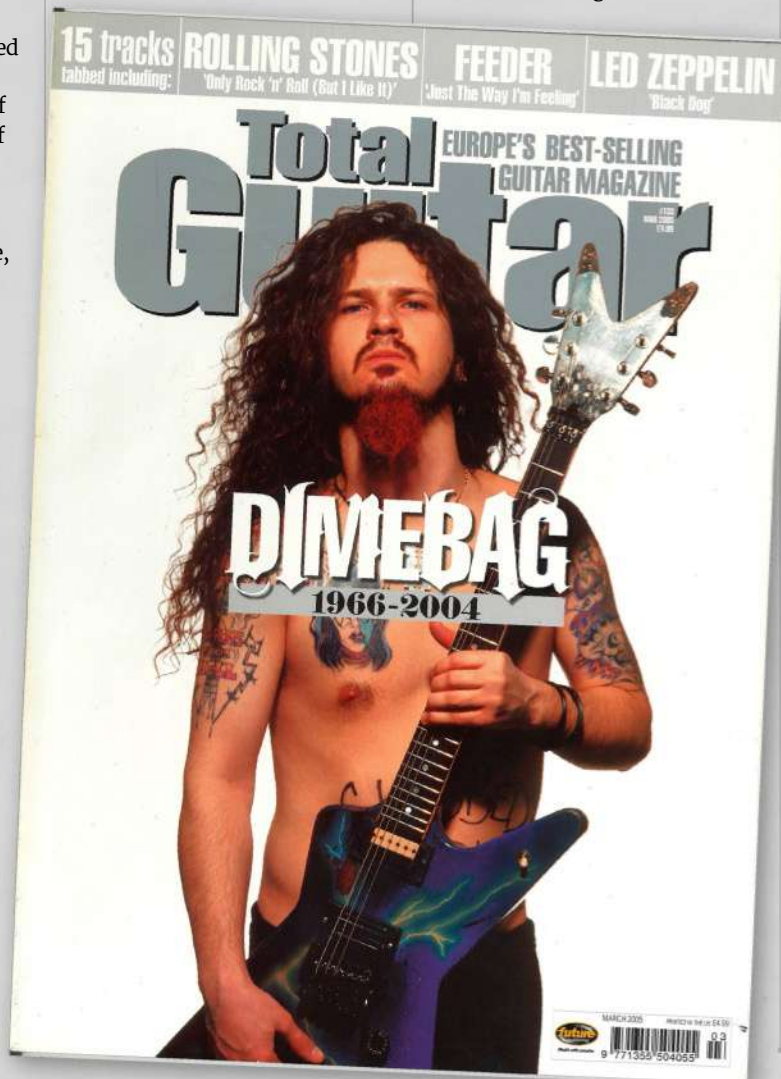
a motherf*cker, man!”

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

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

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

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





PAUL GILBERT'S SCHOOL OF SHRED

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

As guest editor of TG'S one-off *Shred Special*, uber-shred lord Paul Gilbert expressed his view on the "one deadly conflict" that all shredders must face... "This is the fact that the goal of shredding is to play guitar

with ferocious speed, deadly accuracy, piercing tone and crushing intensity," Paul says. "But in order to accomplish these goals, the guitar player must use small, delicate, controlled and patiently honed motions that are generated from one's wee fingers."

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

Here, we're taking a look at an exclusive lesson from 2008, when Paul offered up his secret to the

slickest, fastest tremolo picking technique possible.

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

DRILL LICK

bit.ly/tg390audio

Musical notation for the first part of the drill lick, including a treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The notation shows a sequence of chords and notes. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers: 5, 9, 14, 12, 10, 9, 10, 17, 19, 17, 14, 12.

Musical notation for the second part of the drill lick. The notation shows a sequence of chords and notes. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers: 14, 12, 10, 9, 0, 7, 5, 4, 5, 0, 9, 12, 10, 12, 10, 9, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14. A triplet of notes is indicated with a '3' over a bracket.

Musical notation for the third part of the drill lick. The notation shows a sequence of chords and notes. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with fret numbers: 12, 10, 8, 7, 0, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5. A tremolo pick symbol (†) is shown above the final note.

† drill motor sound
next to bridge pickup

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



THE GLORY YEARS: TOO DRUNK TO PLUCK

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

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

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

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

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

ROUND 3

A couple of beers in and Nick is supposed to be up next, but James is lurking by the sofa ready to pounce on the guitar like a sniper on a deadly stealth mission. "I can't drink it any faster!" protests Nick, in his Arnie accent when harassed to finish his drink. Donning his trusty cowboy boots for extra rock powers, he stomps



over to the amp, places a fag in the guitar's headstock, lets out a mighty belch and plays with boundless attitude. Struggling to keep his warm beer down, and swallowing just in time to prevent a globule of vomit exploding down his t-shirt, James grabs the axe and rips through his piece while plots to "take him down" fly around the room like a wasp on speed.

ROUND 5

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

ROUND 8

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

ROUND 10

Even after a staggering 10 beers, Stephen plays it perfectly and everyone's riddled with jealousy, and alcohol, as he struts away from the amp with the air of

a smug git who's just been given Angelina Jolie's mobile number. As he crashes into the table on his way out, we somehow suspect his blaze of glory will burn out quite soon...

ROUND 11

Hanging over TG's trailer, debating whether or not to be sick, James is howling Stevie Wonder's *I Just Called to Say I Love You* down his mobile phone to some poor unsuspecting bugger at the local kebab house while trying to order special fried rice. "Woddy mean you don't do it?" Tearful at his inability to

order a Chinese from a kebab shop, he picks up the axe and plays it straight off the bat.

ROUND 12

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

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



TOO DRUNK TO PLUCK!

100 DRUNK TO PLUCK!

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

WORDS: CLAIRE DAVIES, PICTURES: JOBY SESSIONS

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

TG pulls a catering-size bottle of vodka from the fridge and asks our landlord: "Do you have a pint glass, mate?" After spending most of the afternoon jamming Velvet Revolver's *Fall To Pieces*, Team TG are ready to step up to the most rock 'n' roll challenge of their careers' - to see how much alcohol can be consumed while still being able to play the opening two bars of Guns N' Roses' *Sweet Child O' Mine*. It's no easy task, and one you should definitely NOT try at home, but, in the name of pioneering rock journalism, or just plain stupidity, TG's prepared to pick up the bottle and find out...

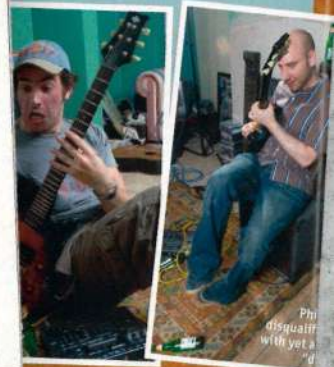
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SEPTEMBER 2005 | TOTAL GUITAR | 49



CONCLUSION

More than 42 beers and a flood of vodka later, team TG are drunker than a bunch of winsos at a Threshers convention. Putting the initial opening rounds down to a mix of adrenaline and nerves, it appears that enough alcohol helped the guys feel more relaxed when playing. But it's just as likely, and more probable given the state they were in at the end, that practice - not booze - makes perfect. When you play the same two bars six, seven times in a row, you're bound to get better, right? A barrel full of vodka may loosen you up, but it's a loaded gun, as we found out while drooling, semi-unconscious in an armchair; James and his 'Exorcist' vomiting out the back and his nigh-on broken arm, and Stephen "bastard behind the eyes" and a hefty beer tab to boot. The moral of the story is, TG readers, that Slash, Dimebag, Zakk Wyld, and just about every other guitarist who was drinking since before TG was founded may be able to slug it back and still rip solos out of their ass, but the rest of us should invest our efforts in practising and not trying to down a yard of ale in one...



Phil disqualified with yet a...

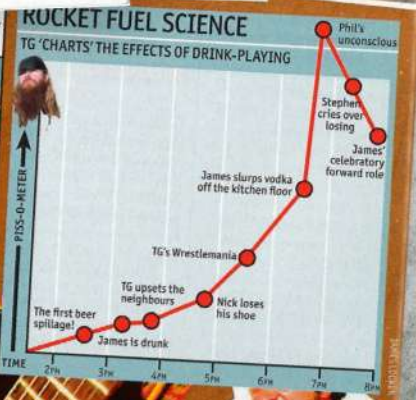
the bar.

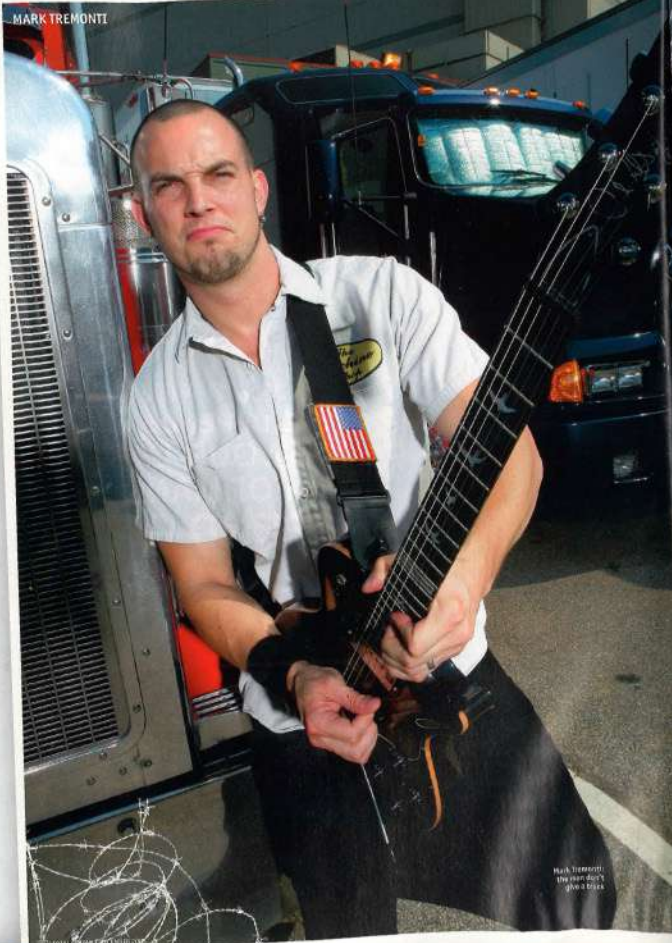
WARNING 2!
Phil's on his final warning, as conspiracy theories abound his drink spillage is a ploy to avail himself of consuming too much alcohol. With vodka dripping down his chin, he bellows: "You're all girls for not drinking vodka; you shrivel in the face of it!" By now he's struggling to pick up the axe, let alone get through the two bars.

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

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

your way: with a perfectly formed forward roll.





MARK TREMONTI

MARK TREMONTI

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

MARK TREMONTI

When we asked a new member of the band to record an instrumental track for the TG readers, we never expected such a resounding "HELL, YEAH!"

And, TGI readers, it's all for you...
Finally, there's an artist. Did you get the name Ahavo Rabo Taco Salad?
"Man, we had some trouble coming up with a good name for this thing. We had some ideas like 'Purgatory' or 'Sala', because the whole place has that... I mean, the whole place has that... I mean, the whole place has that..."

Originally you were going to record it yourself. Why did you decide to get the rest of the band involved?
"I wanted to have drums and the whole big band feel. I don't want to just sit down and have one guitar going. This would be an instrumental that would take about two years to write. So we figured out the 'Taco'... I mean, the whole thing... I mean, the whole thing..."

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

What was the writing process like?
"We got in the rehearsal and just... I mean, we had some trouble coming up with a good name for this thing. We had some ideas like 'Purgatory' or 'Sala', because the whole place has that... I mean, the whole place has that..."

Did you ever really expect your shredding capabilities that perhaps don't get used as much in Alter Bridge?
"Well, because when I'm shredding and playing, I'm shredding the whole band... I mean, the whole band... I mean, the whole band..."

Have you ever written an instrumental track before?
"I've always wanted to do an instrumental, but it's something I've never done... I mean, the whole thing... I mean, the whole thing..."

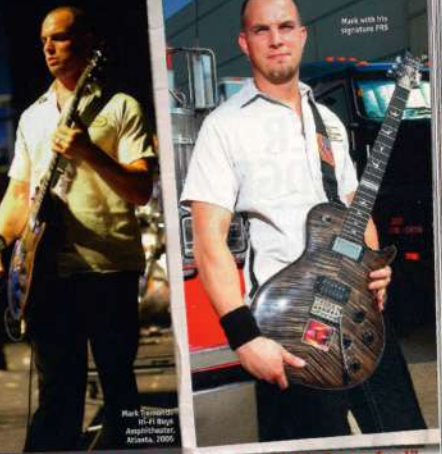
TREMONTI FACT FILE
Tremonti, 38, from Phoenix, Arizona, has been playing guitar since he was 12. He was a 300-pound kid who was called a 'dick' by his friends.



MARK TREMONTI



MARK TREMONTI



MARK TREMONTI

"This is strictly shred! I thought for TG, the more technical the better"

How did you come up with the idea for this track?
"I was in the studio and I was just... I mean, the whole thing... I mean, the whole thing..."

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FINDING THE TONE
Tremonti is a big fan of the Marshall stack. He uses a Marshall JCM900 V and a Marshall 1960A. He also uses a Marshall 1960A. He also uses a Marshall 1960A.



How did you come up with the idea for this track?
"I was in the studio and I was just... I mean, the whole thing... I mean, the whole thing..."

- give the readers something to get their chops around. It's been fun!"

How did you come up with the idea for this track?
"I was in the studio and I was just... I mean, the whole thing... I mean, the whole thing..."

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TECH MATE
Tremonti is a big fan of the Marshall stack. He uses a Marshall JCM900 V and a Marshall 1960A. He also uses a Marshall 1960A. He also uses a Marshall 1960A.

Words Jenna Scaramanga

MARK TREMONTI RECORDS TG AN EXCLUSIVE TRACK

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

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

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

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

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

When we're writing the record I always improvise, but when we come to the studio I like to listen back over the tapes and piece my favourite improvs together. Sometimes it just comes right out, but sometimes it's real hard. I love A harmonic minor – the solos for

the TG instrumental are all in that because I figured this was one I couldn't improvise on. I had to really sit down with specific parts and just throw everything I had at it. I thought for TG, the more technical the better. With the

FINDING THE TONE

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

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

more rock 'n' roll 1970s-vibe stuff, it's easier to just improvise some cool pentatonic runs.

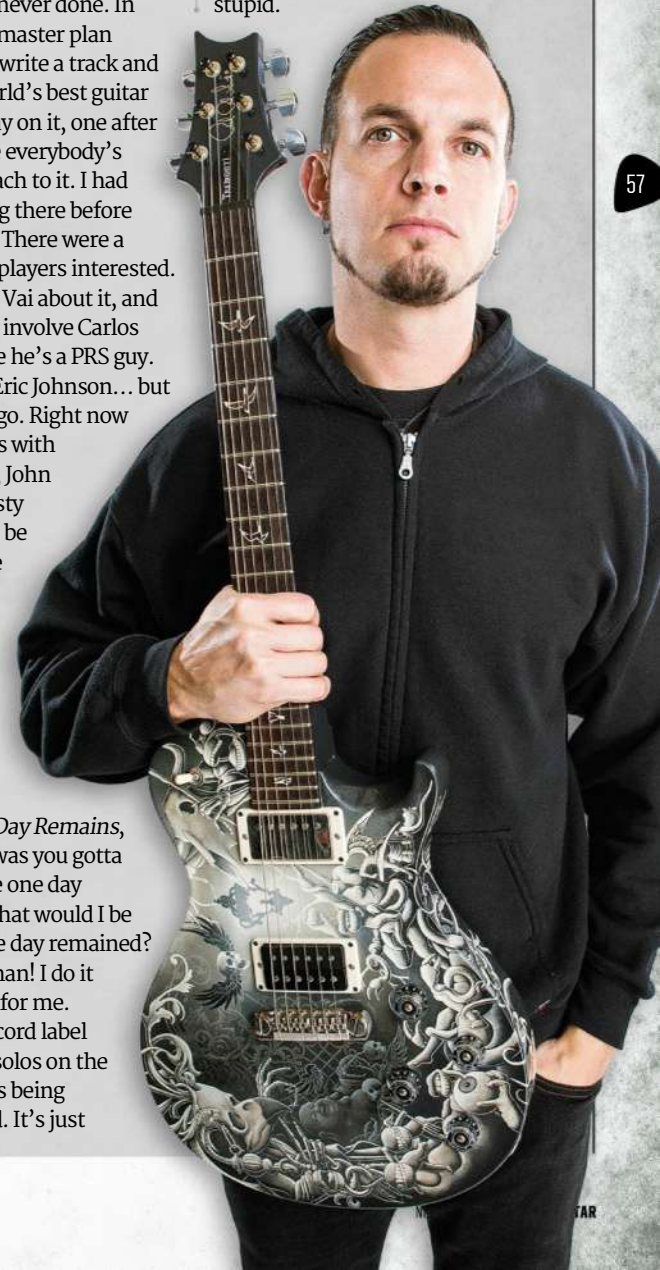
Have you ever written an instrumental before?

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

Do you feel a certain responsibility for bringing shred back?

Our first album was called *One Day Remains*, and the theory was you gotta live your life like one day remains. And what would I be doing if only one day remained? I'd be soloing, man! I do it because it's fun for me. People at the record label say, 'Don't put solos on the radio,' but that's being narrow-minded. It's just

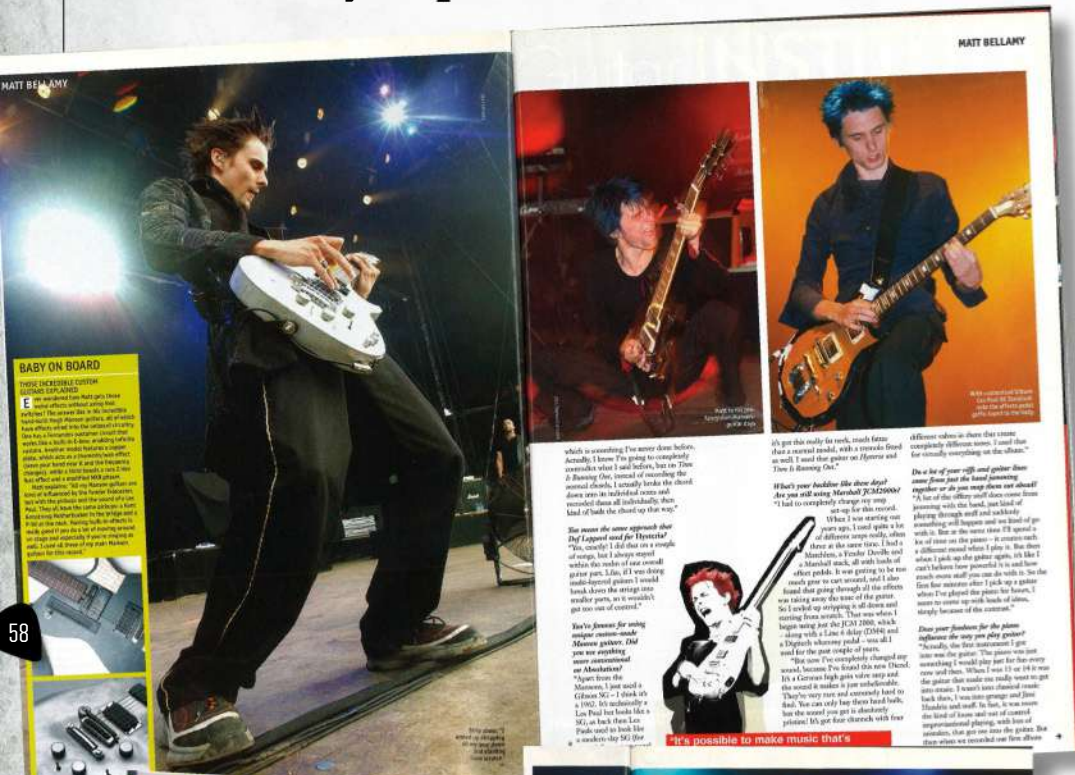
something I think I've worked long and hard enough to do not to have to compromise. If people don't like guitar solos, if they don't like people trying to be the best they can be on their instrument, then they're frikkin' stupid.



Words Joe Matera and Amit Sharma

MATT BELLAMY

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



58

17 tracks tabbed including: ANTHRAX Bring The Noise, PANTERA Cemetery Gates, THIN LIZZY The Boys Are Back In Town

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When I was starting out years ago, I used to play a lot of different songs really, when there at the same time. I had a Marshall, a Voxa Dumble and other amps. It was going to be hard to get to work, and I thought that going through it all was taking away the fun of the game. So I bought an amp that was starting to wear out. That was when I began using just the FCB 2000, which came with a Line 6 delay (DSE) and was for the single of years.

"The amp I've completely changed my mind because I've liked the new Dumble. It's a Carver high gain valve amp and the sound is much more like what I had. You can only have three hand built, but the sound you get is absolutely incredible. It's got four channels with five

Over the years, the mixing desk was really big and because we're only a three-piece band we got a lot of extra on our instruments, then mixed different microphones together to get a sound. We would get through things all day - on some songs we'd have, like, four mics going at once while others would have just one. That was the other reason we'd have a little of all of them. That approach gave us a lot of maneuverability. We actually mixed the album on the same mixing desk the Beach Boys used for the Beach. The man was Bob Katz (producer) idea."

"I've got it, I need to have the guitar quite a bit, but this time around I wanted to get just one guitar part to stand out and be just perfect."

"On one song I broke the chord down into notes and recorded them individually. Like Def Leppard and he just

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Words Luke Lewis and Amit Sharma

THE DARKNESS

“People don’t do guitar solos anymore. That’s the problem!”



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

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

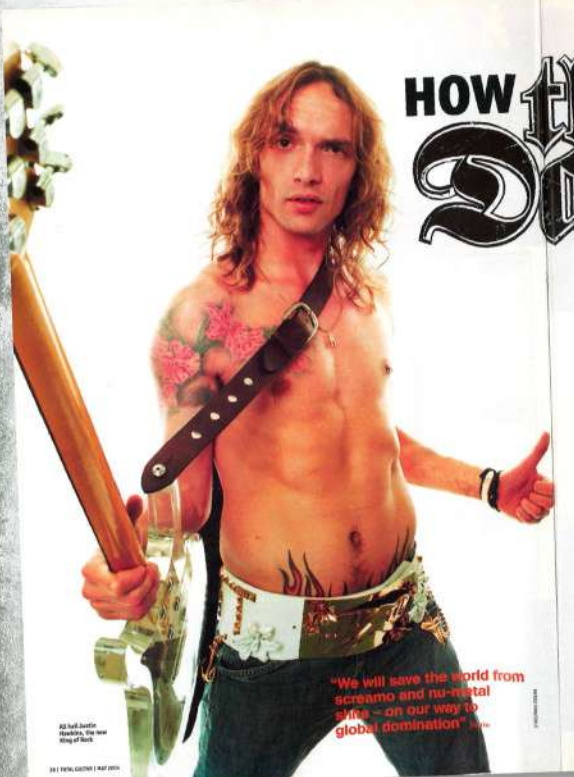
His brother, rhythm man Dan Hawkins, added: “We don’t make this sort of music as a reaction to anything else going on. This is actually the music we’re really into. Right now we’re the biggest band in the country, but it’s taken us four years to get a record deal because people just couldn’t take us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

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

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

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

The world of rock was never the same again.



HOW the Darkness CONQUERED THE WORLD IN 10 AMAZING STEPS

THIS TIME LAST YEAR THEY DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A RECORD DEAL, BUT TODAY THE DARKNESS FIND THEMSELVES ON THE BRINK OF GENUINE GLOBAL STARDOM. TG CAUGHT UP WITH JUSTIN, DAN AND FRANKIE ON THE EVE OF THEIR SELL-OUT US TOUR AND ASKED: HOW THE HELL DID THEY DO IT?

STEP 1: REDEFINING THE ROCK GUITAR
 Justin: “The Darkness was born in a pub in London. It was a place where we could play our music and have a drink. It was a place where we could be ourselves and not worry about what anyone else thought. We were a band of misfits, and we were proud of it. We were a band that didn't care what anyone else thought. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 2: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 3: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 4: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 5: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 6: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 7: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 8: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 9: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

STEP 10: THE DARKNESS FINDS A RECORD DEAL
 Justin: “We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte. We were a band that was going to save the world from screamo and nu-metal sh*tte.”

CHALLENGE CHARLIE



CHALLENGE CHARLIE

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

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

For an all-too-brief handful of issues around 2005/2006, freelancer and TG shred guru

Charlie Griffiths was requested by mag editors to indulge the silliest of all their loosely guitar-related ideas. The result was our video feature titled Challenge Charlie.

High points included asking Charlie to snap all the strings

on his guitar in under 30 seconds (his innovative approach involved a rope and a car – you can work out the rest), playing Van Halen's *Jump* while jumping (this time with a trampoline being our hero's tool of choice) and delivering a version of

Roundabout by Yes (yup, you guessed it, on a roundabout!).

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



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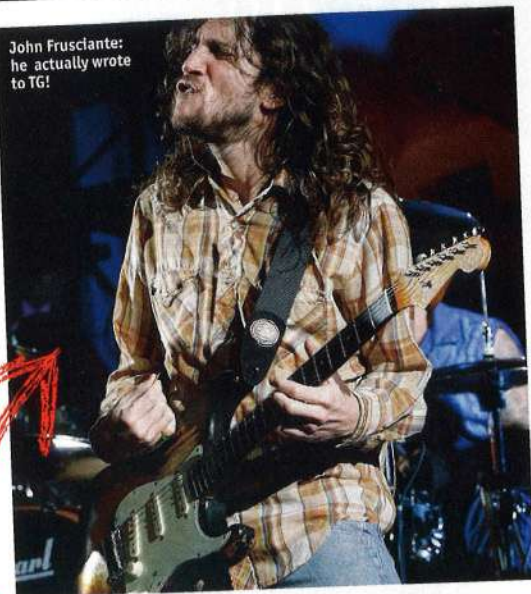
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KEVIN COV/WIREIMAGE

John Frusciante:
he actually wrote
to TG!



IT'S JOHN FRICKIN' FRUSCIANTE!

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

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

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

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

SOUND BITES

ELSEWHERE IN THE TG MAILBOX...

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

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

INDIE SCHMINDIE BULLSHIT!

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

have an article about possibly the most "indie schmindie" looking sons of bitches I have ever had the misfortune to lay my eyes upon: The Futureheads.

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

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

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

understand basic 'numerical' relationships), but it doesn't happen overnight. And in the meantime a creative person may think they have lost something, but once they can access their knowledge effortlessly they will be more free and will have more colours to chose from.

I must also comment on one of Joe Satriani's (much respect!) reasons to learn theory, from an otherwise fine lesson on this subject, where basically the student is asked "Can you play like Stevie Ray Vaughan?" thereby supposedly proving the need to learn theory. I postulate that none of these geniuses, who made great music without theory, knew they were geniuses when they were first learning. If someone feels they have the time, patience and brainpower to form their own conception of musical relationship and to figure it all out in their own way, then they should. I have learned as much from the styles of musicians who don't know theory as I have from musicians who do. Many of them just found a unique style that resulted in beautiful music. Many of them don't even

understand the relationships I speak of too well and have to fumble around for 10 minutes before they play anything good, but when they do it's something incredible. But, by the same token, let it be remembered that some people, like Hendrix, were just too poor to take lessons and would have if they had had the means. Hendrix was quoted as saying he would like to quit the music business for six months and go to music school. My own musical growth was compromised by not having enough money to pay the fee of the teacher I wanted to take from. But some of us have the desire to learn and the will to gain knowledge by whatever means necessary. Magazines like *Total Guitar* taught me immensely. In fact, I don't know what I would have done without them. Life gives you what you put into it, and if you have the will to learn, practise and make music, it doesn't matter if theory is part of the equation or not (but I recommend it).

Love is the law, love under will,
John Frusciante

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

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

Win this crowd then install it in your bedroom!



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

JOHN FRUSCIANTE'S LETTER FROM AMERICA

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

THE LETTER

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

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

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

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another, better reason to not learn it. If you have such a good flow of creativity going and are making music that fills you and those who hear it with joy, or if in your heart you believe you are well on your way to doing that, learning theory could slow you down as your brain would have to learn to function in a different way. I firmly believe it would help such a person eventually (as it helped Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Frank Zappa, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, etc), but until a person can use this knowledge quickly and effortlessly without having to think about it, thinking theoretically will be a distraction. Therefore, I encourage people to learn it when they're young or when they have no

creative demands on them. Theory can deepen anybody's expression (even the hypothetical people I mentioned who already understand basic 'numerical relationships'), but it doesn't happen overnight. And in the meantime, a creative person may think they have lost something, but once they can access their knowledge effortlessly they will be more free and will have more colours to choose from.

I must also comment on one of Joe Satriani's (much respect!) reasons to learn theory, from an otherwise fine lesson on this subject, where

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

Love is the law, love under will.

John Frusciante





MYTH BUSTERS: THE CABLE DESTRUCTION TEST

Need to know whether gear is worth your cash?

Who you gonna call...

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

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

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

1. SOUND TEST

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

2. INTERFERENCE TEST

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

3. BEER-SOAKING TEST

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

4. BLUNT TRAUMA TEST

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

lead. It was slightly misshapen, but it still worked fine.

5. SNAP TEST

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

6. EXTREME HEAT TEST

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



MYTH BUSTERS!

FROTHY LANGUAGE and artistic licence with the truth is never far from a discussion about tone. On one side of the table sits the tone snob, willing to argue to the death that they can hear the most incremental differences in tone from the latest tone-hunting trends. On the other side sits the tonally ignorant my-guitar-I-found-in-a-skip-sounds-better-than-Hendrix's dullard. He's not bothered by his capacitors, he doesn't care about braiding, and he couldn't tell his arse from his elbow in a blind test. We're here to strike a little balance. If the stench of bullshit is burning your nostrils, or you feel like your ear drums are made of cotton wool, read on as we attempt to find some truth...



SA: Total Guitar APRIL 2014

GETTING DOWN TO THE TRUTH BEHIND THE SNAKE OIL

True bypass is better than buffers

INCONCLUSIVE!

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

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

CONCLUSION We hope you brought a can opener, because we're cracking into a canister of worms here. Let's start at the beginning. Every guitar lead introduces capacitance, which results in high-end signal loss. Double the length of your cable and you'll also double the capacitance - so you'll also double the capacitance - so you'll also double the capacitance - so you'll also double the capacitance...



some true-bypass delays/reverbs will cut the tails off your ambience the moment you stomp on the switch. We'd recommend having a buffered pedal - or a standalone buffer - every three or four pedals on bigger boards, and using true-bypass loops where possible. In both instances, keep your cable runs short, and you'll be golden.

Heavier strings give you more tone

MYTH!

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

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

CONCLUSION It's a tricky one, this. Your string gauge will feel different depending on the scale length of your guitar. A standard Gibson length (24.75-inch) will require less tension to tune the strings to any given tuning than a longer 'Fender' scale

(25.5-inch). Tension will govern the amount of vibration on the string, how easy it is to bend or change the pitch with picking, and how much resistance is required to fret notes. All of these things affect the way you play, and it's getting them right that will have the most bearing on your overall tone. Fitting light strings to a guitar that's set up for a heavier gauge means you could encounter buzz from the nut or fretboard, and you'll probably find your pickup height will need adjusting. All cases of poor tone. We'd suggest that paying more attention to a comfortable/stable string tension, proper guitar setup and choice of string material will have as much (or greater) effect on your tone.

Pedals sound different with dying batteries

TRUE!

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

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

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

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

Expensive cables are better than cheap ones...

This debate is the stuff of all-out audiophile warfare. Every guitar player needs a cable or five, but what's the difference between the free one that came with your guitar and the expensive one that your mate bought? We're not sure we can tackle this in one simple answer, so we've decided to put some to the test!

IMPROVE YOUR TONE MYTH BUSTERS



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



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



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

Cables THE TG TEST

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

SOUND QUALITY

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

SOUND TEST

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

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

INTERFERENCE TEST

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

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

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

KNOTTING TEST

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

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



BEER-SOAKING TEST

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

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

BLUNT TRAUMA TEST

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

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

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

SNAP TEST

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

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

EXTREME HEAT TEST

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

THE TG TEST	BUDGET CABLE	MID-PRICE CABLE	PREMIUM CABLE	Conclusion
SOUND TEST	1	1	1	With only one cable left in the contest, there's one clear winner. We were impressed that our premium cable still worked after this, to be honest. Rounding up the scores, it seems that you just what you pay for. The budget lead you received with your guitar was more fragile and prone to noise, whereas a good premium lead is almost unbreakable under normal use. But, certainly for home use and regular gigging, there's a lot to be said for mid-price and budget leads, too. Our advice? Get the best cable you can afford, audition it for sound quality first, and look after it!
INTERFERENCE TEST	0	1.5	1.5	
KNOTTING TEST	1	1	1	
BEER TEST	1	1	1	
IMPACT TEST	1	0.5	1.5	
SNAP TEST	0	1	2	
BLUNT TEST	-	-	1	
TOTALS	4	9	9	

CABLE JARGON EXPLAINED!

JACK PLUG The bit that you actually plug into your guitar. Don't bother with gold-plated plugs unless you're into 'special' occasions. It's thin, and you can't replace the jacks, because they're moulded on.

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

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

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

LIFETIME GUARANTEE An invitation extended by nearly every cable manufacturer to replace the lead in the instance of a breaking. Sometimes, sometimes made use of it since. We haven't available for comment.

TRUE!



Words & Science Milton Mermikides

SOLOS SCIENCE

TG'S EPIC SOLOS SCIENCE EXPERIMENT

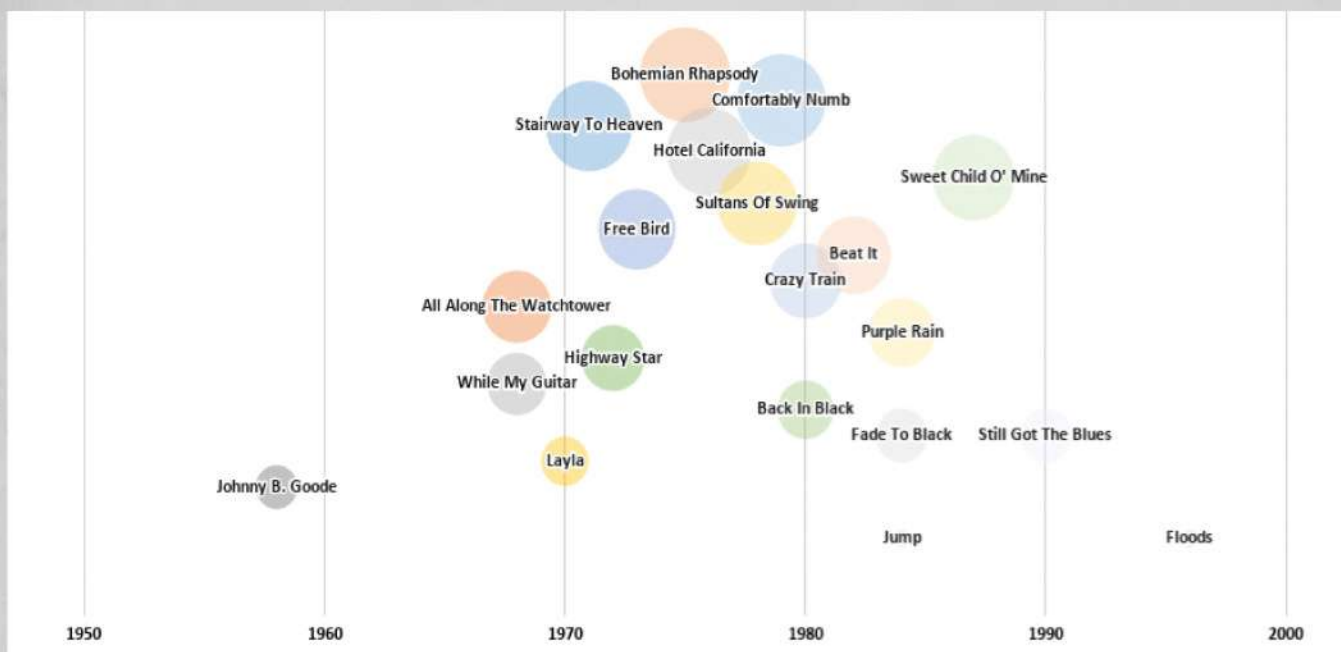
TG analyses the science behind 20 great solos to find out exactly what makes them so enduring

Back in February 2021, we ran a poll to find out your views on the greatest guitar solo of all time. Then, here at

TG Laboratories, we donned our white coats and set about analysing the top 20 lead breaks under our musicological microscope. Our goal was to

look at the science behind the solos to find out if there's some secret formula, a foolproof blueprint to replicate the success of these giants of rock. At the

end, we created a scientifically proven greatest solo of our own based on our findings (which you can download at the link above). Here are a few of our results.



HOW IT WORKS

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

1. POPULARITY

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

- 1 Queen - *Bohemian Rhapsody* (1975)
- 2 Pink Floyd - *Comfortably Numb* (1979)
- 3 Led Zeppelin - *Stairway To Heaven* (1971)
- 4 Eagles - *Hotel California* (1976)
- 5 Guns N' Roses - *Sweet Child O' Mine* (1987)
- 6 Dire Straits - *Sultans Of Swing* (1978)
- 7 Lynyrd Skynyrd - *Free Bird* (1973)

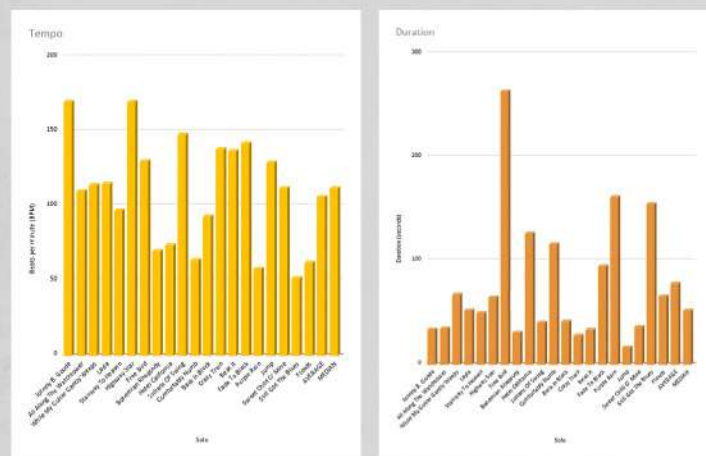
- 8 Michael Jackson - *Beat It* (1982)
- 9 Ozzy Osbourne - *Crazy Train* (1980)
- 10 Jimi Hendrix - *All Along The Watchtower* (1968)
- 11 Prince - *Purple Rain* (1984)
- 12 Deep Purple - *Highway Star* (1972)
- 13 The Beatles - *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* (1968)
- 14 AC/DC - *Back In Black* (1980)
- 15 Metallica - *Fade To Black* (1984)
- 16 Gary Moore - *Still Got The Blues* (1990)
- 17 Derek & The Dominos - *Layla* (1970)
- 18 Chuck Berry - *Johnny B. Goode* (1958)
- 19 Van Halen - *Jump* (1984)
- 20 Pantera - *Floods* (1996)

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

2. TEMPO AND DURATION

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

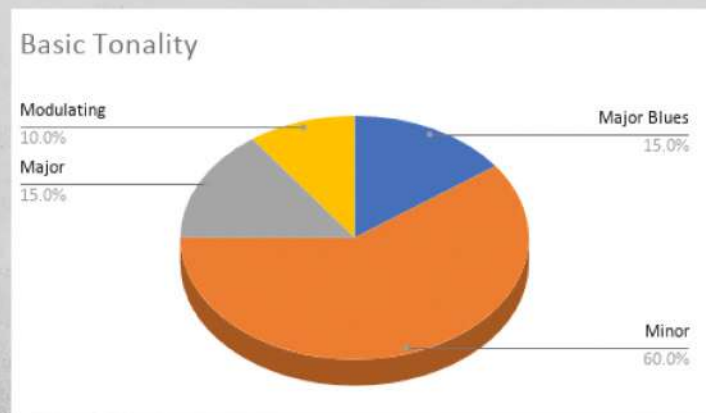
The average tempo of these solos is about 106 bpm, but the songs vary considerably from the stately 58 bpm of *Purple Rain* to about three times faster in *Highway Star*. Duration varies from the short, sweet nine bars of *Bohemian Rhapsody* to the ludicrous 143 bars of *Free Bird* and over half of our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



3. KEY SIGNATURES AND SCALES

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

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



4. HIGH AND LOW NOTES

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

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

KEY FACTS:

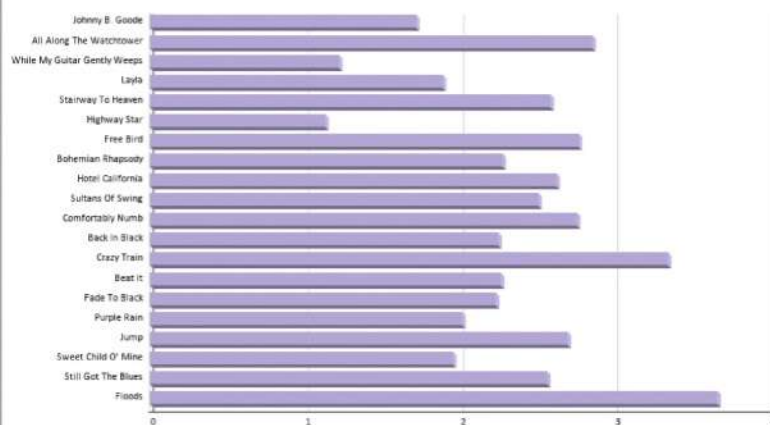
- In 60 percent of our solos, the highest note occurs later than the lowest note.
- In 70 percent of the solos, the highest note happens in the second half, with the average peak at about 61 percent of the way through.
- 70 percent of the solos have their lowest notes in the first half (averaging about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

5. NOTINESS, SHREDDINESS AND BURSTS

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

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

Average Notes Per Beat (NPB)



6. GEAR AND TONE

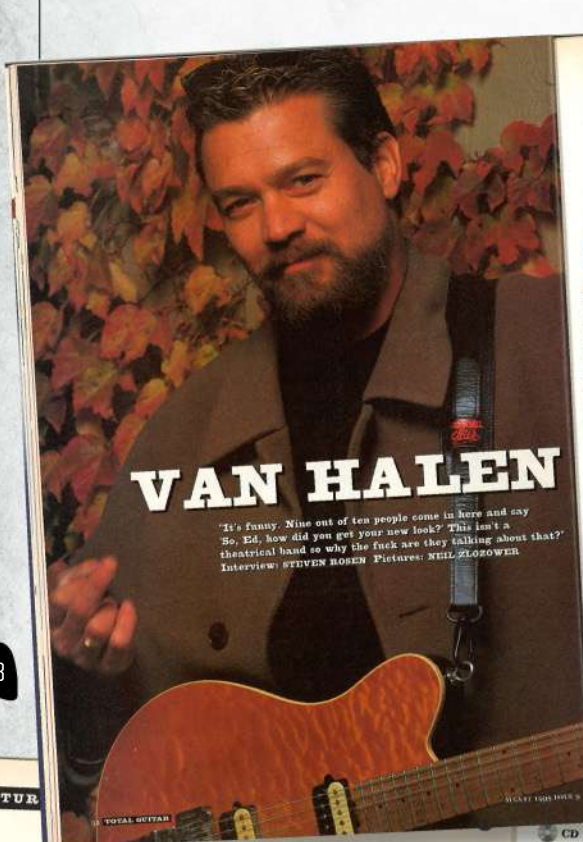
Finding: Melody and ideas are more important than effects

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

Words Steven Rosen and Amit Sharma

EDDIE VAN HALEN

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



VAN HALEN

"It's funny. Mine out of ten people come in here and say 'So, Ed, how did you get your new look?' This isn't a theatrical band so why the fuck are they talking about that?"
Interview: STEVEN ROSEN. Pictures: NEIL ZLOFFEN

At 39, Edward Van Halen is a changed man—other less legal nonsense—and after a three-year break, he has released a new studio album, *Balance*. It's his first since his 1991 release, *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*. Where *CK*—a knowledge of a studio studio to it—encompasses guitars and huge and delicious rock anthems, *Balance* leans more to the acoustic side, more to the rock side. It was recorded at Edwards' 3530 studio and at Woodhouse Studios in Vancouver (Bruce Adams' studio)—the whole recording took just four weeks to complete.

What songs have you done that you think would give someone that feeling?
Oh, I don't know. I couldn't name you any specific ones right now. I'd say 90% of our music gives you some kind of feeling. Because that's the kind of band that you're a band. We're not a band that's the kind of thing. We don't change into any style. I hear so many people say that it's a studio who can't hold half a cup. Being to pump rock bands all of a sudden who can't hold half a cup. It's so stupid. Do what you're good at, be true to yourself, do what you like.

"You'd figure that after all the shit I've done, I'd know what I was doing. But I still don't know!"

CD TRACKS 15-16

VAN HALEN FEATURE

On the CD

EDDIE ON THE TGC D

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

FRANK 15
The most accurate of Van Halen's...
EDDIE 16
The guitar was played through a...
ED TRACK 15
The title of the record has...
ED TRACK 16
The title of the record has...
ED TRACK 17
The title of the record has...

four months in the studio. We started in June with Bruce...
take input at all from any of the music going on...
you, I know. I hear the radio every day and again. Every...
people look for a new Van Halen album to...
back to the ground in some...
it just goes in a cycle. And it's...
it or three years since punk...
"If I had to call it quits I'd say it's been a lot of fun... But I wouldn't give it up for anything."
And that's you doing a drum solo on...
Does the title of the record have...
Nobody knows better than I do how...
And, you know, it's that same time I...
So, what follows *Balance*?
Well, I think this is one of the best records we've made. You know? And, you know, it's still so much more to do. But if I had to call it quits now I'd say it's been a lot of fun. I mean I would love to do it over and over again. But then—hey—I couldn't play off either. Still, I mean, I wouldn't be lying. So, I wouldn't be doing anything else. Cool? Cool. **ED**

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

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

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

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

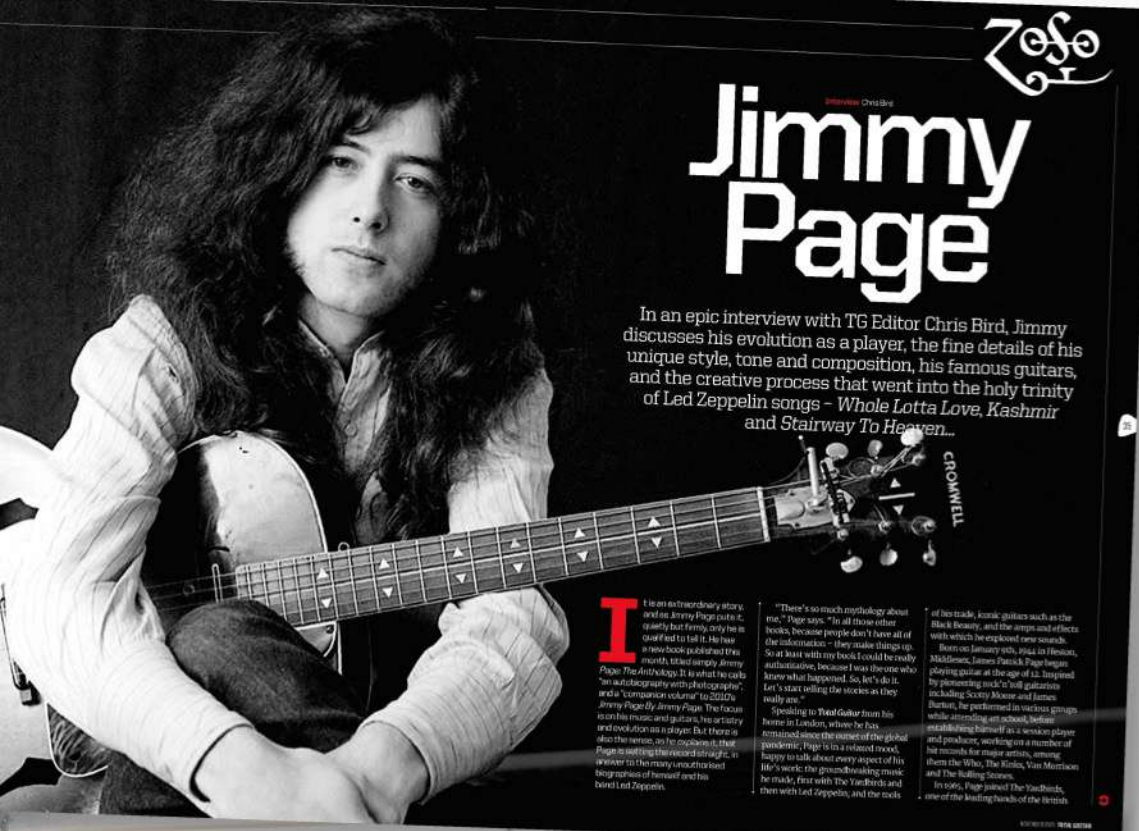
And *Balance* certainly had its fair share of strong vibes, from the solo in *Feelin'* that Eddie described as "way out" where he was "just winging some silly sh*t" to the song *Take Me Back* with a "little melody thing" he "planned out".

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

Words Chris Bird

JIMMY PAGE

"I was using what was really meaty!"



Zeppelin
Jimmy Page
 Interview Chris Bird
 In an epic interview with TG Editor Chris Bird, Jimmy discusses his evolution as a player, the fine details of his unique style, tone and composition, his famous guitars, and the creative process that went into the holy trinity of Led Zeppelin songs - *Whole Lotta Love*, *Kashmir* and *Stairway To Heaven*...

It is an extraordinary story, and as Jimmy Page puts it, it's really that funny, only he is careful not to tell it. In this new book published this month, titled simply Jimmy Page: The Art & Soul, it is his autobiography with photographs, and a "companion volume" to 2010's Jimmy Page: My Jimmy Page. The focus is on his music and guitar, his evolution as a player. But there is also the version, so to speak, that Page is telling in the second half of it, as he answers to the many uncut and biographies of himself and his band Led Zeppelin.

"There's so much mythology about me," Page says. "In all those other books, because people don't have all of the information - they make things up. So at least with my book, I can be really authentic, because I was there who knew what happened. So, let's do it. Let's start telling the stories as they really are."

Speaking to *Total Guitar* from his home in London, where he has remained since the onset of the global pandemic, Page is in a relaxed mood. Happy to talk about every aspect of his life's work, the green-tinted movie he made, first with the Yardbirds and then with Led Zeppelin, and the rocks

of the trade, iconic guitars such as the Black Beauty, and the amps and effects with which he explored new sounds. Born on January 20th, 1944, in Leicester, England, James Patrick Page began playing guitar at the age of 12, inspired by pioneering rock 'n' roll guitarists including Scotty Moore and James Burton. He performed in various groups while attending an art school, before establishing himself as a session player and producer, working on a number of hit records for major artists, among them The Who, The Kinks, Van Morrison and The Rolling Stones.

In 1969, Page joined The Yardbirds, one of the leading bands of the British



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

On the subject of replicas, last year Fender released both Custom Shop and production line recreations of your famed Telecaster. Can you tell us a bit about your original instrument?

The thing about that is Jeff Beck gave me a Telecaster, one that he played as the Yardbirds for a while, but I was still doing sessions, and he gave me that as a gift. And once I went into The Yardbirds I was playing that Telecaster. But by the time I started to customize it, I put some custom on it. I wanted to really make the guitar my own. People had started painting guitars at that point and I thought, well, I'd like to get more and really customize it, so that guitar is absolutely my own. So I went about painting it with the Oregon artwork - all that set school training didn't finally go to waste though? This was a guitar I was using in The Yardbirds, so when Jeff left I had the one with the mirrors and then I painted it. And that patterned one goes through from The Yardbirds through Led Zeppelin.

The finish on this Telecaster was damaged, wasn't it? Well, somebody messed up the painting on it. I needed to repair it, but I put it that way. Somebody had sort of sandblasted it in my absence. So [laughing] it was always something I wanted to do. I had to take it back to the natural wood.

And the guitar was showcased for an exhibition of guitars at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2018. What happened was that the people from the Met came to my house and they had a blueprint. I thought of how they wanted to do the exhibits and they explained that they wanted the original instruments, and I thought here's the one that guitar was going from the Yardbirds to Zeppelin I, to God's sake. So this is the time to do it. So I got the one with the fence. I got a graphic artist to help me map it out, so that I could

paint by numbers and then hold it up. So that was the way I approached it.

Then, of course, came Fender's release.

Then the idea was I'd like to do some really limited in doing it. I don't think I can do it with Fender, but I thought, well, if it's going to be limited, I can do it myself. So I thought, they're going to release it up and get that one which is a really unusual rock, all manner of different things about it that needed attention to it.

You were right to go back to Fender, because their Custom Shop is so good at this.

Oh yeah, well, I worked with a guy there called Paul Waller, and he was a down to work with, such a cool guy. I saw the machine stamp on the places that give the screws that hold the neck to the body of the Telecaster and the best, Jesus Christ, it was an amazing piece. In a factory, I don't think that you could expect any more, but it really well done at times. The spirit in there, it's like they know what they're making something that's going to be really loved by somebody. Not only that, it's going to be like their buddy, if you like. And not only that, that combination of the instrument and the musician - that can make people happy. So they've got the right attitude. It's a really noble thing that they're doing, as opposed to something like making a car part in a factory. It was a great experience.

Les Paul 'Number One' and Number Two are your favorite sub-brand Strats. What are the differences between them in terms of setup, and more than anything how they feel to you when you're playing them?

The first one has got a shallow



ON THE TELE: "I'd like to point new owners to the fact that guitar is absolutely my own"

neck, and that's how it was when I had it. I've often wondered if it had been or finished when I had it, by Joe Walsh, who said to me - whether the had or finished it. He had more than one Les Paul at the time and he'd obviously checked out his two guitars. But that was the neck that was on it. On the other one, they'd played differently, they weren't consistent on the two ones. There's a definite difference in the fret and the consistency between the two of them. I'm not so sure whether the neck is quite as shallow on the Number Two, but it's one of those big, chunky ones. However, that's the one I started to experiment on, so that I could do all various combinations, [and] trying with the push-pull switch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

CAN'T STOP

This enduring classic from 2002 features John Frusciante's constant chord chemistry and relentless riffing



From the 2002 album *By The Way, Can't Stop* features one of John Frusciante's most recognisable verse riffs, some chordal chorus strumming and arpeggiated triads, as well as a short melodic solo. The main hook of the song features a repeating two-note motif played on the third string which is played against four different root notes. John ingeniously makes use of the open fourth string and his thumb over the top of the neck to fret the notes with minimal hand movement.

There are many chord shapes throughout the song and John makes use of thumb-fretting, slash chords and triads to keep each section distinct, but all the chords in fact come from either E minor or the relative key of G major. Both keys have the same seven notes, but the verse section being rooted in the E minor sound gives it a darker sound whereas the chorus is played from the brighter G major perspective.

SOUND ADVICE

Everything you need to know before playing *Can't Stop*

GET THE TONE CHANNEL OVERDRIVE

GAIN 7 BASS 4 MID 5 TREBLE 6 REVERB 1

Use the bridge pickup on a Strat-style guitar

Frusciante would have used one of his 1955 or 1962 Fender Stratocasters through a cranked Marshall amp which reacts to the dynamics of his playing. The amp should provide for a crunchy distorted tone with harder picking and a cleaner sound with softer picking. The solo is played with a fuzz pedal such as a Big Muff.

CHORDS

The verse is in the key of E minor and revolves around the basic four-chord sequence Em-D-Bm-C, but the chords are outlined by a riff with changing bass notes. The chorus moves to the relative major key of G and is played with adapted barre chord shapes, which John plays with his thumb over the neck to play the sixth-string root notes.

Em Em Bm/F# Bm7/F# G C/G

A6/9 D/A Bm Bm Bm7 Em/B

C/B Cmaj7 D D D

SCALES

John bases his solo in the familiar E minor pentatonic scale (E G A B D / 1,3 4 5,7), but also adds the 9th interval F# note. Adding this note works in most minor situations and provides the pentatonic scale with more melodic choices and hints at the jazzy flavour of the E Dorian mode (E F# G A B C# D / 1 2,3 4 5 6,7).

E minor pentatonic add9

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS CAN'T STOP

FULL
TAB

CAN'T STOP
Words and Music by Anthony Kiedis, Flea, John Frusciante and Chad Smith
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RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS CAN'T STOP Intro

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♩=90

Em7

Play 3 times

Start the song with the two-note riff alternating between D and E. Pick very lightly using the tip of the pick to glide across the string, and with each repeat, pick slightly harder - dig the pick in more and add vibrato to gradually build the intensity.

Em/B C/B D/A A⁹/9 Bm/F# C/G D/A

T	12	12	12	13	10	10	10	12	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	10
A	12	12	12	12	11	11	11	11	7	7	7	7	9	9	9	11
B	14	14	14	14	12	12	12	12	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	12
	14	14	14	14	12	12	12	12	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	12

5

Em C D Bm

let ring

T	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	10	10	10	10	11	12	11	12	11	12	11	12
A	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	10	10	10	10	11	12	11	12	11	12	11	12
B	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	12	12	12	12	14	14	12	11	12	11	12	11
	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	12	12	12	12	14	14	12	11	12	11	12	11

9

Bm⁷ Cmaj⁷

T	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	11	7	8	7	8	7	7	8	10	11
A	9	11	9	11	9	11	11	9	9	8	9	8	9	7	8	10	11
B	9	11	9	11	9	11	11	9	9	8	9	8	9	7	8	10	11
	9	11	9	11	9	11	11	9	9	8	9	8	9	7	8	10	11

11

Em D Bm

T	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	10	10	10	10	11	12	11	12	11	12	11	12
A	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	10	10	10	10	11	12	11	12	11	12	11	12
B	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	12	12	12	12	14	14	12	11	12	11	12	11
	12	12	12	12	13	13	12	13	12	13	12	12	12	12	14	14	12	11	12	11	12	11

13

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS CAN'T STOP Bridge (cont'd)

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This section opens with a reggae-inspired feel, with each chord played on the upbeat. Practise tapping your foot on beats 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the bar and play the chord stabs in between. Next, add the triad shapes starting at the 12th fret and use your pick to play the arpeggiated pattern.

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS CAN'T STOP Solo

bit.ly/tg390audio

The solo section is played with long, sustained notes, so use a slight vibrato using your wrist to bend the string up and down slightly. This will help the notes sustain and give the part some life. Check that your bends are in tune by playing the target note first to hear it, then try bending to the same pitch.

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS CAN'T STOP Verse 3

bit.ly/tg390audio

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS CAN'T STOP Verse 3 (cont'd)

bit.ly/tg390audio

Em⁷ Dadd⁹

TAB: 7 9 7 9 | 0 7 9 0 0 0 7 9 0 0 0

13

Bm¹¹ Cmaj⁷

PB₉ PB₉

TAB: 7 9 7 9 9 9 9 9 | BD BD 7 9 9 7 9 9 7 9 9 9

15

Em⁷ Dadd⁹ Bm¹¹

TAB: 7 9 7 9 | 0 7 9 0 0 0 7 9 0 0 0 | 7 9 7 9 9 9 7 7

17

Cmaj⁷

TAB: 7 9 7 7 9 7 7 9 7 7 9 7 7 |

20

The song finishes by returning to the signature verse riff, played in the same manner as before, but this time John adds some more variations such as repeatedly picking the 9th fret and adding some bends. Play the final chord with your thumb on the 8th fret and use your first and third fingers to play frets 7 and 9.

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

THE BEATLES BLACKBIRD

If you're keen to bump up your fingerstyle technique then this timeless McCartney classic is perfect for you!

Probably one of the most famous acoustic guitar songs of all time, *Blackbird* has been learnt by legions of guitarists since its release nearly six decades ago. It's a solo guitar/vocal performance by Paul McCartney with what sounds like a metronome in the background, but was actually created by mic'ing up his tapping foot in the studio.

There has been controversy over the technique used to play the song, but we reckon our version is as close as you can get short of inviting Paul over to show

you how it's done. Using only the thumb and first finger of your picking hand, and employing an unusual (some say "wrong") technique, the bass notes are played with your thumb while picking and strumming the melody notes with the first finger. *Blackbird* is proof that there is no such thing as bad technique if you can create a masterpiece by ignoring the rules.

Since you only use your thumb and first finger throughout, this is an ideal piece to help improve your picking technique.



CHORDS

These aren't chords as such, but essentially 'pinched' diads sounded against the repeated open G string. Where this open note would unnecessarily complicate the chord name (eg B7#5/D#), we've opted for the simplest description that describes the diad more accurately. Because you'll be strumming the strings with your first finger, it's important to keep the remaining open strings silent by gently angling your fingers against them. This isn't always possible (eg, the open A7 and G chords) so sometimes minimising your picking sweep is the only option.

BLACKBIRD

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Guitars and backing: Phil Coseme - Photography: Getty

SONG SHEET

Blackbird

Intro

G Am7 G/B G / / /

Verse 1

G Am7 G/B G
Blackbird singing in the dead of night
C A7/C# D
Take these broken wings
B7/D# Em Eb
And learn to fly
D A7/C# C Cm
All your life
G/B A7
You were only waiting
Dsus4 G
For this moment to arise

Interlude 1

C G/B A7 / D7sus4 / G /

Verse 2

G Am7 G/B G
Blackbird singing in the dead of night
C A7/C# D
Take these sunken eyes
B7/D# Em Eb
And learn to see
D A7/C# C Cm
All your life
G/B A7
You were only waiting
Dsus4 G
For this moment to be free

Chorus

F Em Dm C Bb6 C
Black - bi - ird fly
F Em Dm C Bb6 A7
Black - bi - ird fly
D7sus4 G
Into the light of a dark, black night

Repeat verse 1 (instrumental)

Repeat Chorus

Interlude 2

G Am7 G/B G / / / / / / / /
/ / / / N.C. / / /
G Am7 G/B C G/B A7 D7sus4 /

Repeat verse 1

Outro

C G/B A7
You were only waiting
Dsus4 G
For this moment to arise
C G/B A7
You were only waiting
Dsus4 G
For this moment to arise

$\text{♩} = 90$

Chord symbols: G Am7 G/B G C A7/C# D B7/D# Em Eb D A7/C#

Picking pattern (T = Treble, B = Bass):

Bar 1: T: 0 1 3 0 | 12-12-12 12-12 12-12 12-12 | B: 0 2 | 10 10 | 3 4 5 6 | 7 7 | 6 6 | 7 0 0

Bar 2: T: 5 5 5 4 4 4 | 3 3 3 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 1 0 0 0 0 | 5 3 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 1 0 0 0 0 | B: 3 3 3 3 | 2 2 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 | 3 2 0 0 | 0 0 0 0 | 3 3

It may sound smoother if you use thumb and two fingers, but we've shown McCartney's picking pattern below bars 1 and 2. Pinch the diads using your thumb (p) and first finger (i), followed by a downward first-finger strum on the open G string. In bar 2, this strum is expanded, but don't dig into the strings. Just brush lightly across them.

THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE BEST NEW GEAR

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

HOW WE TEST

CURATION

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

FACE-VALUE REVIEWS

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

NO SNAKE OIL

You won't find us getting hung up on hokey mythology or nonsense marketing speak: we aim to bring you bullsh*t-free opinions on the gear you're interested in.

WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT

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

REAL WORLD REVIEWS

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

BEST BUY AWARD

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



PLATINUM AWARD

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



*WHAT IS GAS?

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

★★★★★
SUPERB, A BEST BUY

★★★★☆
EXCELLENT

★★★☆☆
ABOVE AVERAGE KIT

★★☆☆☆
SOME ISSUES

★☆☆☆☆
POOR



82 EPIPHONE JIMI HENDRIX LOVE DROPS FLYING V

Prepare to kiss the sky with Epiphone's latest 'Inspired By...' model

86 NEURAL DSP NANO CORTEX

Neural DSP's second pedal might be the ultimate compact all-in-one rig

88 GUILD POLARA DELUXE

A '70s staple gets a bit of a re-jig, 54 years after it was introduced

90 JACKSON PRO PLUS XT SOLOIST SLAT HT6 BARITONE

We get low with this fast-playing, all-black modern metal machine

92 POSITIVE GRID SPARK 2

The sequel to the world's most popular smart guitar amp is here

94 PETERSON STROBOSTOMP MINI

Accurate, compact and can really sweeten things up



4



1

5



3

2



START ME UP!

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

UNIVERSAL AUDIO ENIGMATIC '82 ODS

1 Debating Dumble clones is a bit like ranking horses dressed as unicorns – you've never seen the real thing and can't really say if it's faithful or not. But, if we trust anyone to bring us tip-top recreations of Alexander Dumble's hallowed tones, it's Universal Audio. For the Enigmatic '82, it's got its eye on the Overdrive Special – the amp that fuelled SRV, John Mayer, Robben Ford and more. It's available now!

£379
universaliaudio.com

DUNLOP DAVE NAVARRO SUPREME CRY BABY WAH

2 Jane's Addiction's reunion might well be on the ropes, but Dave Navarro has teamed up with Dunlop and streetwear clothing brand Supreme for a signature Cry Baby wah. Seemingly based on a GCB95, the former Chili Pepper/Jane's Addiction guitarist's pedal looks to bring us the smooth filtered sounds we've come to love. There's no release or official pricing info yet, but we think we'll be seeing this Red Sparkle, Fasel inductor-equipped funk tool at NAMM 2025.

ETBC
supreme.com

NOBELS ODR-1X & ODR-MINI2

3 Nobels' ODR-1 is a much-revered alternative to the Ibanez Tube Screamer, and now, Nobels has announced the ODR-1X and ODR-mini2. Both maintain the same valve-cooking overdrive circuit as before, but now there's a Bass Cut knob (both pedals) along with true/buffered bypass switching and a gain boost with remote switching option (ODR-1X).

ETBC
nobels.de

STL TONES TONALITY: WES BORLAND

4 If you've ever fancied copping the tones of Limp Bizkit innovator, Wes Borland, it's never been easier. WB has joined forces with STL Tones to bring us Tonality: Wes Borland – a plugin recreation of the key components in Wes' rig. There are three amps (JC-120, Diezel VH-4, Selmer Zodiac), as well as filter, fuzz, delay, reverb and modulation effects. What's more, you can try it out for free right this minute!

\$149
stltones.com

WALRUS AUDIO MAKO MKII

5 Walrus Audio doesn't seem to sit still, and its latest release sees the Mako line-up overhauled for a second version. The multi-algorithm FX units have had a redesign with new UI, updated tonal models, an OLED navigation screen and more. The range includes the ACS1 amp modeller, D1 delay, R1 reverb and M1 modulation pedals. They'll be available by the time you read this. For the full info, head to the Walrus website.

£385
walrusaudio.com



EPIPHONE JIMI HENDRIX LOVE DROPS FLYING V

£1,499

Prepare to kiss the sky with Epiphone's latest 'Inspired By...' model

Think of Jimi Hendrix's guitars and there are two models that are likely to spring to mind. The first would be the upside-down double-cut made by a brand starting with 'F' which, let's be honest, is and always will be the go-to for aping the bulk of Jimi's recorded tones. But then there's the alternative: a Gibson Flying V.

Jimi was sort of late to the party with Gibson's futuristic model, which first launched in 1958 as part of Ted McCarty's masterplan to renew the perception of Gibson as the forward-thinking, innovative guitar brand. But it would be another decade or so before the late-'50s idea of how the future might look would converge with the man who showed us exactly

As we've seen in recent years from signature models for the likes of Joe Bonamassa, Adam Jones, Noel Gallagher and Dave Grohl to name a few, Epiphone is taking things more seriously than ever when it comes to the guitars you see in shops. These aren't just the 'one you get if you can't afford the Gibson' models. So, in keeping with this ethos, this guitar falls into the Inspired By... collection. That means greater detail, upgraded electronics and (hopefully) an all-round better guitar brought even closer to the Gibson blueprint.

In the case of the Epiphone Love Drops, that manifests with Gibson USA Custombucker humbuckers, third-party components from CTS (pots), Mallory (capacitor in the tone circuit) and Switchcraft (the

selector switch and output jack). The body and neck are faithful to the '67 spec, too, with the period-correct headstock, mahogany body and one-piece mahogany neck, and Epiphone has also included a Maestro Vibrola vibrato as well.

The whole lot comes packaged in a hardcase – just as well, given that a Flying V isn't going to even begin to fit in that spare generic gigbag you've got knocking about. The artwork is nicely done, and if you're anything like us, you'll spend a good while soaking up the detail. But with that, it's time to plug in, and, of course, strap it up.

You didn't think you were going to play this guitar seated, did you?

1 LOVE DROPS
Jimi's original design was removed from the guitar after he gave it away. It's been replicated nicely here, making this guitar a must-try for collectors.

2 GIBSON PICKUPS
As part of the Inspired By Gibson Custom line-up, the Love Drops features Gibson USA pickups. Here, we're treated to a set of Custombuckers, and the neck pickup in particular sounds brilliant.

3 MAESTRO VIBROLA
Don't expect to do any Van Halen impressions, but for more gentle warblings the Maestro sounds smooth and retro.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, one-piece
FINGERBOARD: Laurel
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
PICKUPS: Gibson Custombuckers
CONTROLS: Volume (x2), Tone, 3-way switch
HARDWARE: Chrome – Maestro Vibrola, LockTone Tune-O-Matic, Epiphone Deluxe tuners
LEFT-HANDED OPTION: Yes
FINISH: Ebony w/ Love Drops design
CASE: Yes
CONTACT: Gibson, epiphone.com

“ A GREAT STATEMENT THAT LOOKS FANTASTIC AND PLAYS WELL ”

how the future of the electric guitar would *sound*. Jimi got his Flying V in 1967, which was a then-new model. Gibson gave the V a push, with a revamped mahogany body (vs the original korina-bodied models), a smaller headstock and tweaked control layout. Jimi's original started life with a sunburst finish before he sprayed it black and hand-painted the 'Love Drops' design himself. That brings us neatly to the guitar we have on test here – the Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Custom Jimi Hendrix Love Drops Flying V. But, that only takes us part-way through the story (see the boxout over the page for more of that!).





Look of Love

While Epiphone has recreated the Love Drops, the original guitar was very nearly lost to time. The story (as told to *Chronicle Live*) goes like this. Hendrix gave his V – artwork and all – to Mick Cox, guitarist of Irish rockers Eire Apparent. Cox stripped it of Jimi’s painting, leaving it as an ebony V. Years later, UK guitarist Dave Brewis (Prefab Sprout) happened upon a left-handed Flying V in an unnamed Newcastle guitar shop. After being informed by the owner that he believed it to have belonged to Hendrix, Brewis ID’d the guitar from books and purchased it. He later had it verified by Sotheby’s, and after painstakingly recreating the original artwork from life-size photos, confirmed with Noel Redding that the Love Drops was indeed the guitar played by Hendrix on the recording of *All Along The Watchtower*. The original is now owned by a US-based private collector and has been displayed at the New York Metropolitan Museum.

Unlike some Flying V models, the ‘Love Drops’ doesn’t include a rubber leg grip. There’s no question: Flying Vs are made to be played standing, lest you adopt a near-vertical, neo-classical seated stance, and even then, you’ll need to be careful not to damage the points of those precarious wings against things.

But, with that caveat out of the way, we can get to the actual playing. Epiphone calls the neck profile on this guitar a C-shape, in reality, it feels a little slimmer



– not dissimilar to that found on our Epiphone Explorer. It’s comfortable, but not too slim, and as you’d probably expect, a fairly all-round feel. The neck pickup is immediately impressive, with a chunky low end and plenty of presence to offset potential wool. It’s versatile, too, sounding great clean, and handling heavier gain and fuzz nicely, and we found it lent itself nicely to drop D tuning. Our favourite tones, though, were found with a moderate amount of crunchy overdrive. Here, we found there was a nice balance of the slightly scoop-y, low/high frequency contrast that allowed our rhythm sound to remain clear and present, while Jimi-style single-note runs bite through.

The bridge pickup also sounded great, but we found our review

model to have its pickup set a little too high, in addition to a small amount of choking further up the neck on bigger bends. These are only minor maintenance tweaks, though.

The Maestro holds up well under gentle use, but if you plan on a psychedelic whammy bar freak-out, be prepared to tune-up again before your next song.

Overall, the Love Drops is a great statement. It looks fantastic, plays well and sounds great, particularly in the neck position.

Stuart Williams

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

ALSO TRY...

EPIPHONE 1958 KORINA FLYING V £1,299

Based on the original run of the Flying V from 1958, the Korina-bodied V has thru-body stringing rather than the Maestro Vibrola, but it comes with Gibson Burstbucker 2 and 3 pickups.



EPIPHONE KIRK HAMMETT 1979 FLYING V £1,349

Sticking with the V design, Kirk Hammett’s signature is based on a 1979 design and is loaded with the Inspired By... upgrades, including Gibson USA T-Type humbuckers.



EPIPHONE 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD £1,199

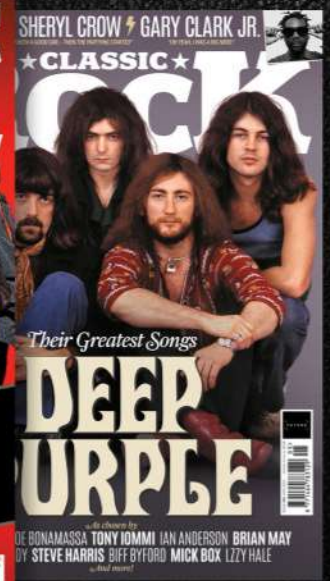
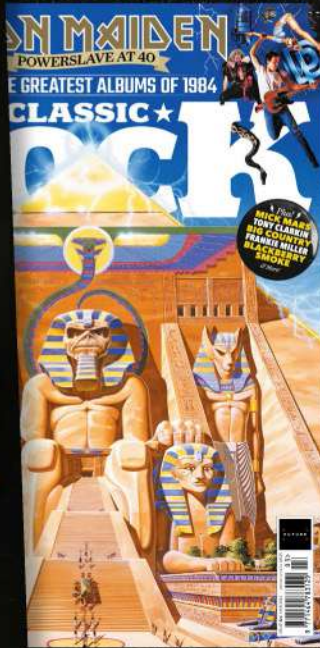
This Inspired By... Les Paul delivers the same electronics (Gibson Custombucker pickups, CTS/Mallory/Switchcraft components) in a more manageable format, if the V is too unwieldy for you.



50TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTOR'S EDITION

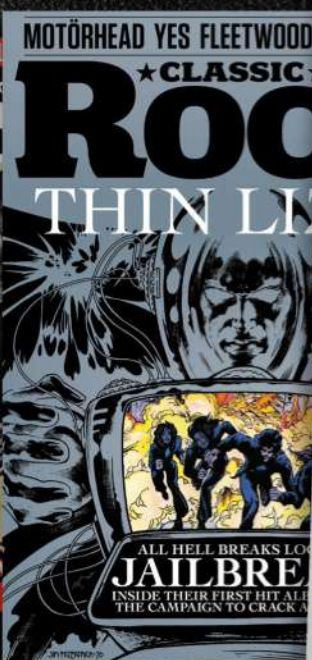
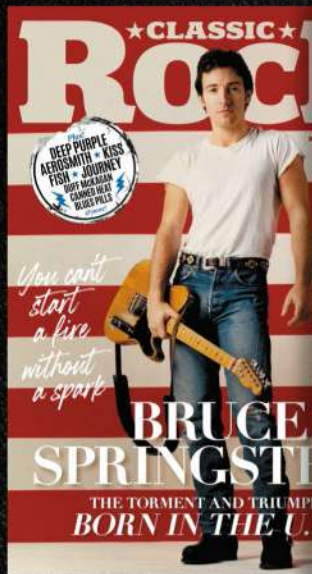
★ CLASSIC ★ ROCK

AC/DC



★ CLASSIC ★ ROCK

HIGH VOLTAGE ⚡ ROCK'N'ROLL



classicrockmagazine.com



86



NEURAL DSP NANO CORTEX

£499



Neural DSP's second pedal might be the ultimate compact all-in-one rig

When Neural DSP unveiled the Quad Cortex – an ultra-powerful amp modeling, cab-simulating, multi-effects processor – the firm altered the face of the guitar world as we know it today. Thanks to its tones and functionality, the QC is seen as the gold standard of its kind, and given mounting competition from the likes of Kemper, Line 6, IK Multimedia and even Fender, that's no mean feat. Four years later, its smaller sibling is here. Enter the Nano Cortex – a tiny amp modeler/effects processor/IR loader/Capture device that looks to deliver QC tones in the smallest package yet.

The Nano Cortex has been positioned as the ultimate compact all-in-one-rig with “infinite” tones on tap, but arrives in a time when such a title is being contested by the likes of the IK Multimedia TONEX and Kemper Profiler Player.

In a bid to push its way to the top, the Nano Cortex offers an array of tones and functions in a tiny form factor: it's sized at 5.6" x 4.0" x 2.4" and weighs just 1.36lbs.

It offers 25 Captures (amp models) organised into five banks of five, five

recallable IRs, two pre- and three post-effects, and a suite of parameters, including a three-band EQ, Level and Gain knobs, and an Amount control to alter the effects. The two footswitches serve as preset buttons and rotary controls for the IRs and Captures.

Notably, it also supports Neural's Capture function: it can be used to create a facsimile of any amp or drive pedal, and the resulting Captures can be stored and used anywhere you wish to take the Nano Cortex.

Those Captures – as well as the ones provided by Neural DSP – all sound absolutely world-class. They're dynamic, responsive, and incredibly amp-like. Few (if any) pedals of this size will let you create Captures of this quality.

However, given the Nano's size, Neural has elected to sacrifice the screen, which is a bold approach. The result hampers the usability of the pedal – which has to be navigated by some tedious taps and blind scrolls – but not to the extent you probably might expect, thanks to an updated Cortex Cloud Bluetooth app. Here, Captures can be browsed and uploaded to the Nano with just a few taps, while the onboard effects (delay, reverb, chorus, transposer

and noise gate) can be tweaked. Everything from Fender and Vox cleans all the way to Marshall and Mesa/Boogie crunch is available here, making for a genuinely inspiring playing experience.

Having said that, a small display telling us what Capture/IR combo is currently in use would have been nice. Not only that, the signal chain and effects are fixed. That means you can't insert a drive pedal Capture, and you can't swap out the chorus for a tremolo, which is a shame.

Nevertheless, the Nano Cortex is still a hugely impressive bit of kit, and the fact it supports Neural's Capture tech while sounding so incomprehensibly convincing is quite something. Some shortcomings could also be amended in future updates, so it looks to be a solid platform for future expansion. Ultimately, as a compact amp modeler/cab simulator/Capture device, this is perhaps the best option out there.

Matthew Owen

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

1 CAPTURE: The fact that such a small pedal can facilitate Neural DSP-quality drive pedal and amp models is, quite simply, mind-blowing. It's so easy, and sounds flawless.

2 CORTEX CLOUD This effortless app carries the entire experience. Here, any amp Capture you could dream of – from boutique Two Rocks to vintage Fenders – can be found.

3 TONES Everyone knew this was going to sound good, but the quality of the amps and effects here still needs to be praised. Neural DSP is in a league of its own.

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Preamp pedal/FX unit

PATCHES: 64 preset slots

FEATURES: 25 Captures organised in 5 banks, 5 IR slots, 5 Effects slots, MIDI/Bluetooth support, Cortex Cloud compatibility

CONTROLS: Gain, Bass, Mid, Treble, Amount, Level knobs/Bank, FX buttons/Exit, Capture, Save action buttons/2 rotary footswitches

CONNECTIVITY: USB-C, Input, Stereo Output, Exp/MIDI, Capture In and Out

CONTACT: Neural DSP, neuraldsp.com



GUILD POLARA DELUXE

£649

A '70s staple gets a bit of a re-jig, 54 years after it was introduced

Proof, if needed, that the electric guitar market has one eye firmly fixed on the rear-view mirror is everywhere, and Guild is certainly doing its bit. Yes, we've seen some recent new designs like the viable Surfline range but the majority of its current Newark St. range wouldn't look out of place in a catalogue from the '50s, '60s or '70s. Guild entered the solidbody electric market quite late, in 1963, and then, in 1970, thought it would be a smart idea to ape the Gibson SG before later in that decade re-designing those for a more original style.

But it's that Gibson-cloned model, specifically the S-100 Polara, that's stood the test of time. Last year grunge legend Kim Thayil shone some welcome light on the S-100 with a very limited USA-made model and a still-current Newark St. version. At the other end is the standard twin-pickup Polara that's available in three solid colours (and there's a single-pickup Night Edition version) leaving our Polara Deluxe as the poshest non-signature model.

So, while the Thayil signature is modelled after his actual '70s original and includes the larger-footprint HB-1 humbuckers, phase switch and gold hardware, it's a costlier piece at £899. The Polara Deluxe trims quite a bit off that price and, while retaining the style, is a little more modern-aimed with its higher output (certainly in the bridge position), standard-sized HB-2+ covered humbuckers which can be split from the pull-switches on each volume control, although here there's no phase switch.

It's a less quirky version of those '70s models, too, with a wider neck boasting a quoted 'vintage soft U' profile that feels like a pretty classic shallow 'C' in the hand. One non-Gibson fixture is that offset rectangular "compensated" stopbar tailpiece, although here it's paired with a generic tune-o-matic-style bridge rather than the original's lower-profile affair with its adjustable roller saddles.

Sonically, there are few surprises, although it's almost like two guitars in one. That HB2+ at bridge is pokey and thick with just enough clarity, and definitely wants to sit on the dirtier side of the tracks. Flick to neck, however, and we have a much more vintage-y voice, less mid-focused and clear enough. Split the bridge pickup and you could be listening to full-bodied Telecaster – definitely a 'secret weapon' with plenty of single-coil jangle and bite – and although the neck split is a little thin and bright, it works rather well in the both-on position.

Our test model suffered from some open-backed tuners which needed tightening, and the nut's string grooves, specifically the fourth string, needed a little TLC. That aside, it's the classic style and wide-ranging voices here that appeal. As it ever was, the Deluxe is a slightly different take on an SG and today, of course, a viable Epiphone alternative.

Dave Burrluck

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

1 PICKUPS
These HB2+ 'buckers use a similar-style indented cover to Guild's original HB-1 humbuckers. Both pickups use Alnico V magnets, and when split, the screw coils are voiced.

2 WOOD CHOICE
The Polara uses all-mahogany construction with its thinner-depth body. The Deluxe reverts to a rosewood fingerboard replacing the previous version's pau ferro, and overall weight is good at 6.56lbs.

3 HARDWARE
Guild's "compensated" tailpiece has always been a feature of their first '70s solidbodies. The 'compensated' bit? Well, that angle means there's more dead string from bass to treble, plus, on earlier models it was some distance from the bridge, giving subtle offset-style resonance and allowing plenty of behind-the-bridge manipulation.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, 'vintage soft U' profile, glued-in
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 12.5" radius
FRETS: 22
PICKUPS: 2x Guild HB-2+ covered humbuckers
CONTROLS: Three-way toggle pickup selector, individual volumes (w/ pull-switch coil-splits) and tone controls
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge, Guild Compensated stopbar tailpiece, Guild 'Vintage 18' open-backed tuners – nickel-plated
FINISH: Cherry Red (as reviewed), Vintage Sunburst, Canyon Dusk Metallic
CONTACT: Selectron UK, guildguitars.com



THE GAS STATION



JACKSON PRO PLUS XT SOLOIST SLAT HT6 BARITONE

£1,299

We get low with this fast-playing, all-black modern metal machine

Over the last few years, there's been a huge resurgence in everything '90s-themed. Whether it's fashion, music, or in this particular case, baritone guitars. We're seeing loads of young bands rebirth the down-tuned tones of nu-metal and with many guitarists eschewing the adjustment period of a seven- or eight-string guitar, these long-scale six-strings have found themselves back in vogue.

The Jackson Pro Plus XT Soloist has a 27-inch scale, which allows you to utilise lower tunings while keeping string tension high enough to prevent any extraneous flapping. Coming tuned to B standard (B E A D F# B) out of the box, this all-black beast is designed to chug and shred, packing some premium specs and a blacker-than-black aesthetic.

The lightweight Nyatoh body makes it feel ultra-nimble when you strap it on. That zippy feel extends to the compound radius Ebony fretboard, which morphs from 12 to 16 inches in radius across its longer-than-usual length. The neck profile isn't listed on the Jackson website, but we found it to be just as slight and speedy-feeling as other Jackson necks we've encountered.

It's packing some serious hardware, too, with Seymour Duncan Nazgul and Sentient humbuckers for plenty of modern metal grind, alongside an impossible-to-miss, Arcade-style kill switch button in place of a tone knob. A hardtail bridge keeps tuning stable, a necessity if you

want to utilise ultra-low tunings, while at the other end, a set of Jackson locking tuners makes tuning solid and string changes rapid.

The real beauty of a baritone is that all the chord shapes and scales you already know will work the same. This means you can chug to your heart's content in drop A while still retaining your inner library of devilish licks. Unfortunately, the stock strings on the Pro Plus XT had to be changed to go lower than standard baritone B tuning. Even at this pitch, the D string doesn't sit quite right, being too thin for a note so low, and we wonder why more baritones don't ship with a wound 3rd string as stock.

With a fresh set of strings on, the Pro Plus XT really does deliver that modern metal sound. The Nazgul bridge pickup paired with a high-gain amp has plenty of sizzling heft for getting those djent tones or searing leads. The more vintage spec of the Sentient neck pickup is slightly tamer, making it great for clean passages, although we wouldn't say it's quite in PAF territory.

If you're looking for vintage rock tones, this isn't for you, but for lovers of all things heavy that don't want to deal with an extra string, it's utter perfection.

Matt McCracken

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

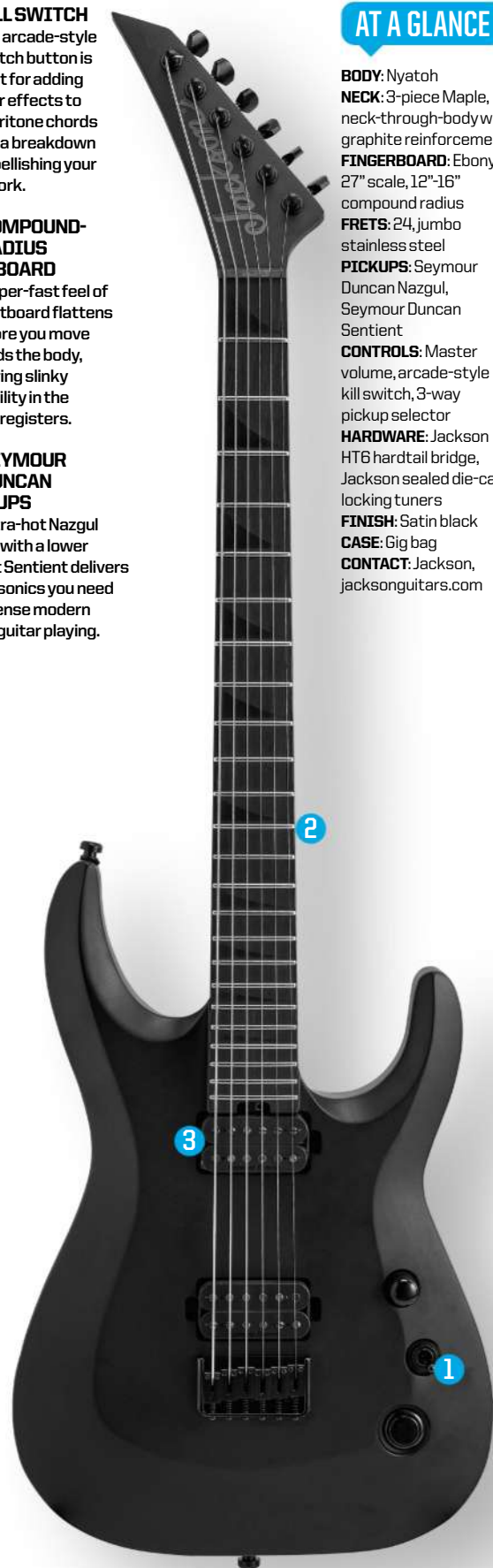
1 KILL SWITCH
The arcade-style kill switch button is perfect for adding stutter effects to noisy tritone chords during a breakdown or embellishing your lead work.

2 COMPOUND-RADIUS FRETBOARD
The super-fast feel of the fretboard flattens the more you move towards the body, delivering slinky playability in the higher registers.

3 SEYMOUR DUNCAN PICKUPS
The ultra-hot Nazgul paired with a lower output Sentient delivers all the sonics you need for intense modern metal guitar playing.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Nyatoh
NECK: 3-piece Maple, neck-through-body with graphite reinforcement
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 27" scale, 12"-16" compound radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo stainless steel
PICKUPS: Seymour Duncan Nazgul, Seymour Duncan Sentient
CONTROLS: Master volume, arcade-style kill switch, 3-way pickup selector
HARDWARE: Jackson HT6 hardtail bridge, Jackson sealed die-cast locking tuners
FINISH: Satin black
CASE: Gig bag
CONTACT: Jackson, jacksonguitars.com







1 BUILT-IN LOOPER
The much-requested looper is finally here, giving players a brilliant practice tool for soloing and songwriting with classic and groove-based loop modes.

2 FULL-RANGE SPEAKERS
The two 4-inch speakers may be small, but they pack a proper punch, delivering 50W of top quality guitar tone.

3 SPARK AI
Hook up your smartphone and through the power of AI you can get any tone you like. Just input a phrase and you'll get four full rigs to choose from.

POSITIVE GRID SPARK 2

£279



The sequel to the world's most popular smart guitar amp is here

There are a select few guitar amps that spawn a series of imitators, those that set the bar so high that everyone else has to play catch up. That's exactly what happened when Positive Grid's Spark 40 launched – it completely changed the way guitarists practise. In a section of the industry obsessed with reissues of boutique tube amps from the '60s, the Spark has become a true modern classic.

It's quite a name that the Positive Grid Spark 2 has to live up to, then, and we all know the sequel is rarely better than the original. Unsurprisingly, not all that much has changed with the Spark 2, which looks eerily similar to the original with just a darkening of the grille cloth and some subtle changes to the top and back panels. The black and gold with accented red is still present and accounted for, and, to our eyes, it does look a touch more distinguished.

The looper that PG fans have been asking for incessantly has arrived, available via hardware buttons on the top panel, a separately-sold footswitch, or hands-on control via the free Spark app. It's got two modes with one acting as a regular three-button looper, but it's the second, groove looper mode that steals the show. It allows you to play along to a variety of rhythm patterns, building your loops with ease via the smartphone. Once you've hit go, it only records for the portion of the beat you're playing to and it works brilliantly well, keeping us looping enthusiastically for hours.

AI has been the buzzword of the past year or so, and it's coming for your guitar amps, too. Spark AI is a Midjourney-esque tone generator that creates entire rigs for you with the input of just a few words. Phrases like 'fat, low-gain rhythm tone' and 'classic rock solo tone' produced scarily good results, and you can even

namecheck famous guitarists and songs to get the sound you want in an instant. Like all things AI, it's still in the early stages so you'll get mixed results, but it's only going to get better as time goes on.

One of the best things about the original Spark was the sound, and Spark 2 manages to sound even more realistic and three-dimensional thanks to the speakers now being angled slightly outwards. The preset tones feature some delicious tone nourishment, and we managed to get some superbly accurate edge-of-feedback lead sounds at low volumes.

The choice of amps and effects is all-encompassing, and at 50 watts it can get loud, too. All in all, Positive Grid's Spark 2 is every bit the practice amp the modern guitarist needs, giving you all the tools to improve your playing.

Matt McCracken

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Digital modelling
OUTPUT: 50 watts
SPEAKER: 2 x 4-inch full-range speaker
CONTROLS: Power button, 8 programmable preset selector, gain, bass, mid, treble, master, mod, delay, reverb, volume, music channel volume, looper controls (rec/dub, play/stop, undo/redo/clear), tap/tuner button
CONNECTIVITY: 1x 1/4" instrument input, 1x 1/8" headphone output, 2x 1/4" line output (L/Mono & R), 1x 1/8" aux input
WEIGHT: 5.5 kg
DIMENSIONS: 214 x 375 x 180 x mm
CONTACT: Positive Grid, positivegrid.com

TO OUR EYES, IT DOES LOOK A TOUCH MORE DISTINGUISHED

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



PETERSON STROBOSTOMP MINI



Accurate, compact and can really sweeten things up

Buying a new tuner might not be the most exciting way to spend your cash, but it's an essential piece of kit for any guitar or bass player. From polyphonic to chromatic tuners and beyond, one type reigns supreme in terms of accuracy – the strobe tuner. The Peterson Strobostomp Mini is a fine example of this and, while it might not be as thrilling as a new overdrive or modulation pedal, it's about as exciting as a tuner gets.

First up, it's incredibly accurate (correct within 0.1 cent). Its quick-reacting strobe display encourages you to make the smallest of adjustments on your tuners to really lock the tuning in. It works well on guitar and bass,

so players who are regularly drop-tuning can rely on it, too. If you are one to play with tunings, you can tell the Strobostomp how many semitones you're tuning down by (or up with a capo), and it will still display the familiar EADGBE to save you having to make quick transpositions.

Possibly this tuner's most unique feature though is the ability to dial in 'sweetened' tunings. These are tunings that contain one or a few notes that are very slightly sharp or flat. Some players prefer the sound of sweetened tunings in certain positions or for particular scales and intervals.

A good example is Eddie Van Halen, who sometimes liked to flatten his B string ever so slightly

so that major 3rds sound more in tune – or sweeter. There's even an EVH setting on the Strobostomp Mini in the sweetened tunings section alongside standard ones for electric, acoustic, bass, and baritone guitar – plus a whole load more. Having these readily available on a tuner can be incredibly useful for certain songs in a live scenario, or if you're experimenting in the studio.

Fancy tunings aside though, it's just a really good, practical, sturdy tuner pedal. The display is excellent – nice, bright and easy to read, plus you can select from 10 background colours. It functions well, it's easy enough to use after spending a bit of time with it, and it's built to a great standard.

Richard Blenkinsop

AT A GLANCE

CONNECTIONS: Input & Output (Top-Mounted), power, USB-C

POWER: 9VDC/USB-C

BYPASS: True or buffered

FEATURES: LCD display with LED backlight, 0.1 cents accuracy, 80+ sweetened tunings, C0-A#8 note range

CONTACT: Peterson, petersontuners.com

FANCY TUNINGS ASIDE, THIS IS JUST A REALLY GOOD, PRACTICAL, STURDY TUNER PEDAL

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

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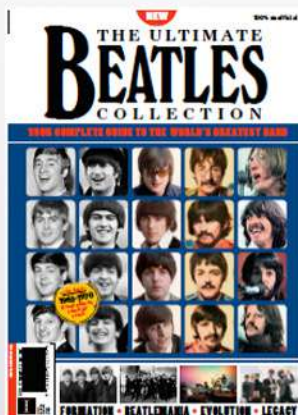
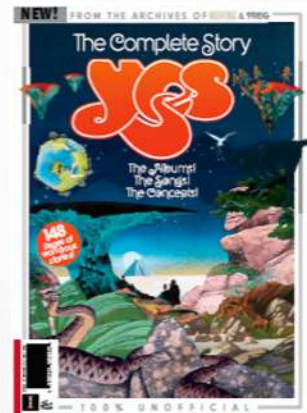
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A photograph of a musician performing on stage, captured from a low-angle, rear perspective. The musician is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, and is holding a guitar. The scene is dramatically lit with warm, golden light, creating a hazy atmosphere. In the background, a drum set is partially visible on the right. The text "Thank you for reading" is overlaid in the center of the image.

Thank you
for reading

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