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NOT FADE AWAY

THERE HAS BEEN little reason to expect a new Rolling Stones album in recent years. The group hasn't produced any new music since 2005's *A Bigger Bang*, and the death of the group's founding drummer, Charlie Watts, on August 24, 2021, only seemed to underline the obvious — that the long-running rock and rollers were reaching the end of their road. While we might be able to expect more adventures in their seemingly endless string of live performances, another studio album of new Mick Jagger–Keith Richards–penned tunes seemed unlikely.

Yet, history has shown time and time again that it's a fool who underestimates the Rolling Stones. The English rockers have been declared past their expiration date many times, only to rear their heads and unleash another slab of vinyl filled with their characteristic blues-rock style and, usually, a hit or two. Yet what no one could have possibly seen coming this late in the game was a new Rolling Stones album that's as energized, vital and sinewy as *Hackney Diamonds*, the group's new, 26th U.S. studio album. We may have had to wait 18 years since the band's last album of original tunes, but this one was certainly worth the wait. There's power and attitude in those grooves, not to mention the signature riffing and rhythm playing of rock's most famous guitar-strumming duo, Keith Richards and Ronnie Lane.

It's all cause for a long-overdue celebration of the world's greatest rock and roll band. We're thrilled we were able to do it with Keith. It's been years since he graced the cover of this magazine, and it is a long-awaited honor to have him here once again. For this special occasion, we enlisted best-selling rock music scribe (and former longtime *Guitar World* editor) Brad Tolinski to pick Keith's brain about the Stones' new album and the magic of his and Woody's five-plus-six-string-guitar approach. What Brad came back with is a compelling interview about not only *Hackney Diamonds* but also former Stones Charlie Watts and Bill Wyman, ex-Beatle Paul McCartney, and some classic Stones cuts that rank among their best.

As if that weren't enough, we also nabbed *Hackney Diamonds* producer Andrew Watt to give us the lowdown on how the album came together and deliver insights into Keith and Ronnie's gear. Along the way he told us some fascinating tales about McCartney's *Hackney Diamonds* bass guitar and a 1930 Gibson L-4 that played a special role in the recording of that album's last track, a Jagger-and-Richards cover of Muddy Waters' "Rollin' Stone," the 1950 classic from which the group took its name.

When you add in new interviews with the Pretenders' Chrissie Hynde, Pink Floyd/Thin Lizzy sideman Snowy White, Chris Shiflett, Gary Hoey, Mark Lettieri and others, you get one very packed issue of *Guitar Player* magazine. So dig in, everyone. There's a whole lotta hot rocks here.

Chris Scapelliti

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NEW & COOL

THE GUITAR BORN FROM A BRIDGE

Joe Knaggs set out to make a better S-style guitar. The result is the new **Severn Trem SSS**.

BY ART THOMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS DORR

The Seafoam/TV Yellow finish has three-ply purfling inlaid between the colors, which creates the illusion that the yellow is the pickguard.

JOE KNAGGS AND his team have been building exquisitely crafted solid and semi-hollow custom and signature guitars for more than 20 years, so it's always a treat when one shows up here for a test drive, as this Severn Trem SSS did. Named for a river in Maryland, the Severn harks back to Knaggs' days working at PRS before he launched his own guitar company.

"The inspiration behind the Severn was to create a guitar that I wanted to play," he explains. "I had a '61 Stratocaster at the time and wanted a Strat-style guitar with a fretboard radius of eight and a half inches, so it wouldn't be as curved as the Fender and fret out when I'd bend strings. There's a lot of other factors that led to where the Severn ended up, but the big one was when I made a hardtail bridge for another guitar called the Choptank — I wanted all my guitars to be named for tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay — so I looked at a Tele, and the front of the bridge plate was lifting up because it wasn't screwed down. That didn't seem right to me, so I made a bridge plate that would screw down in front. And when I put it on the guitar and strung it up and played it, that thing rang better than I'd heard any other electric guitar. That hardtail bridge was really what inspired me to start a guitar company."

The Severn's alder body has an S-style shape, with contours on the front and back and a beveled heel at the 15th position that makes it easy to slide your hand around and reach the high frets. What really makes this guitar pop visually is the Seafoam/TV Yellow finish with three-ply purfling inlaid between the colors. It creates the illusion that the yellow is the pickguard; in reality there's a black pickguard sitting atop that carries the



In Knaggs' design, the bridge is attached to a hinge, with bearings that let it move smoothly.

pickups, knobs and five-way switch.

But apart from the finish, the standout item on this build is the proprietary Chesapeake trem bridge, a unique two-piece affair with a plate surrounding the rear pickup, in Tele fashion, that's attached to a hinged bridge. As Knaggs explains, "That steel plate creates a magnetic field around the pickup, so you get the Telecaster thing going on. But the biggest reason our bridge is different is because I took that Choptank bridge and cut

it in half. I liked the idea of the saddles sitting on the back half. It creates a different effect, because it's more like a Tele in the way the sound is transferred into the middle of the body. So with this design, the front plate is screwed down solid and the bridge is floating against it. It's not a knife edge that's sticking up and rocking back and forth; it's actually a plate that a hinge is attached to and there are bearings that let it move that back and forth. It gives you a very smooth feel on the trem, and it comes back to the right spot, so it stays in tune really well."

Moving to the neck, we find a sweet-looking piece of figured hard-rock maple that attaches to the body via a glued-in joint. The 25 1/2-inch-scale fingerboard is East Indian rosewood with dot inlays, and it carries 22 smoothly finished medium frets. At the top, the strings ride over a polished graphite nut on their way to a set of nickel-plated Gotoh locking tuners on the six-in-line headstock. No string tree is needed due to the mild headstock angle, which Knaggs says is just enough to eliminate the string tree but doesn't pinch the strings in the nut.



A beveled heel at the 15th position makes it easy to slide your hand around and reach the high frets.



The Severn Trem SSS needs no string tree, thanks to the mild headstock angle.

The neck's C shape has a slight V, which feels excellent in the hand, and the 8 1/2-inch-radius fretboard is comfortable under the fingers and easy to bend on. The factory setup yielded excellent low-action playability and tuneful intonation along the entire

fretboard, and kudos to the butter-smooth floating trem, which has a precise feel on the bar and returns to pitch very well when used aggressively. With all of the vibration enhancing elements at play here — especially the über-solid bridge plate — it's not surprising the Severn's

acoustic voice is resonant and sustaining. When strumming this guitar you can feel the vibrations coming from the center of the body and rolling straight up through the neck. At 7.6 pounds, the Severn is an easy hang when standing, and the included Dunlop Straplocks help to ensure it won't slide off a strap button.

The pickups on our review guitar are Lindy Fralin Blues Special single-coils with staggered poles and Alnico V magnets. Optimized for a thicker sound and more output than stock Strat pickups, they have a DC resistance of 6.6k-ohms for the neck

and middle units and 7.1k-ohms for the bridge. Wired through a five-way switch, along with a master volume and two tone controls — one for the neck and middle pickups and one for the bridge — the Fralins proved a good match here. Through a Fender '48 Dual

Professional combo and a Deluxe Reverb, the Severn delivered deep, dimensional tones that were nicely balanced top to bottom, with ringing highs and a round, meaty low end. The neck pickup sounded great for bluesy lead playing though the touch-responsive Dual Pro, and by flicking the switch to the

neck/middle or middle/bridge combinations, the sweet, chiming tones sounded so dialed in for rhythm playing and funky riffing it was hard to get off them. The Severn responded beautifully when played through new compact UAFX pedals — particularly the 1176 Studio Compressor and Orion Tape Echo [see reviews, page 88] — and it cranked out killer grind with gobs of sustain on the rear-pickup setting with distortion from a TWA SH9 pedal.

The Severn Trem SSS is so well sorted that it's easy to find an inspiring path when playing it, and with all the available options in woods, hardware, finishes, pickups and custom work, it can be steered in practically any direction you want. The Severn Trem SSS is just one example of what Knaggs Guitars offers in the Chesapeake, Influence and Signature series, and it's interesting to reflect on how it all started: Joe Knaggs needed an improved S-style guitar. The Severn is the result, and the rest is history. 🎸

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“I TOOK THAT CHOPTANK BRIDGE AND CUT IT IN HALF. IT’S MORE LIKE A TELE IN THE WAY THE SOUND IS TRANSFERRED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE BODY”



‘I WANT THIS EXPLOSIVE ENERGY’

With the help of fuzz, blues guitarist **Eric Johanson** gets into the raw experience of the moment on his latest album, *The Deep and the Dirty*.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAYLIE MCCARTHY

WHEN GUITARIST ERIC JOHANSON was coming up, it wasn't the slippery slide work of Elmore James and the tones of the blues greats that excited him. Once he began playing at age five, what kept him interested in guitar was the manic rhythm playing of Metallica's James Hetfield.

"The rock albums with the big, thundering bass, the drums punching you in the chest and the guitars that sounded huge — that's what drew me in," Johanson explains. "Some of my earliest experiences trying to figure out what I was hearing came down to the tones and textures and the sound itself, rather than the notes and chords."

Johanson's obsession with building walls of sound with his guitar never stopped, even as his interests expanded to include blues. For evidence, listen to the tall tones on

The Deep and the Dirty (Ruf Records), his fourth and latest album of original music, which are as ferocious and fuzzy as anything in Jack White's catalog. Those tones have been part of his sound all along — like his speaker-shredding blast on "Till We Bleed," from his 2017 debut, *Burn It Down*, and the adrenalized tones on "Buried Above Ground," from 2020's *Below Sea Level* — but they're larger than ever now.

"I'm working on my sound constantly," Johanson says. "When I get in the studio, it's more or less just a snapshot of what I've got going on with the rig at that moment. I'm a big fan of that symmetry between the studio setup and the live setup."

After starting out in 2010 as a guitarist for acts like Cyril Neville, Anders Osborne and the Neville Brothers, Johanson signed

with Tab Benoit's Whiskey Bayou Records in 2016 and has worked solo since. On 2021's *Covered Tracks* volumes one and two, he dug mostly into acoustic instruments as he re-imagined songs by Nine Inch Nails, Chicago, Fiona Apple and the Beatles. But on *The Deep and the Dirty*, Johanson roars back on electric from the first notes of the opening track, "Don't Hold Back."

"I'm really into the raw experience of the moment," he says. "I want this explosive kind of energy. There's something about a really gritty Velcro fuzz that, to me, expresses the emotion I was trying to get across, especially opening up the record like that."

Given what you've said about how rock music affected you as a child, I have to imagine tone remains your primary focus.



I'm really particular about tones, and I always try to get the sounds right with just the guitar and the amp first when recording. You really can't fix that if it's not right to begin with. I like a lot of bottom end, so I'm usually running a 4x10 cabinet or a 4x10, plus a 1x12 or 2x12, because I like a full-range sound. Once I've got a full-range sound going, then I'm usually trying to dial in enough grit to have some sustain and a little bit of natural compression going on without losing the definition or getting too much high end.

Is having a full-range setup a necessity for you in a trio?

I think it definitely is. If you're doing the trio thing, it wouldn't make sense to have an exclusively top-end sound, because you are covering so much ground. But that also is just what appeals to me. I really do not like piercing guitar tones that lack bottom end. There are guitar players I like a whole lot, like Freddie King — I love him and can listen to him all the time — but I would never try to seek out his guitar tone. My tone knobs are generally set up the middle, with a little tweak one way or another, depending on what it's sounding like to me in the room. I want to have this natural, warm, full sound, where it

can be loud without hurting your ears.


Is the core of your sound still your Category 5 amplifier?

That's the main amp. It's just one channel, with volume, tone and reverb controls, but I also have a '66 Fender Deluxe Reverb as the second amp, and they're pretty much equal in the mix at all times. On *The Deep and the Dirty*, we also had an Orange amp for a clean track, just in case, and it did come in handy on some of the fuzzy songs and places where we wanted to bring out more definition. Other than that, it was pretty much just the rig.

I really like a round sound, so I've taken to stacking a couple of overdrives. While I like the sound of the amp just cranked, it doesn't always respond exactly how you want it to, because it can start to collapse on itself with a non-master volume amp. So I've gotten into trying out different overdrive pedals and figuring out which ones stay true to the sound of the amp. Fuzz is really a new thing for me. I stayed away from it for a while, just because it's such a different level of intensity sometimes.



With his Duesenberg Starplayer TV Phonic.



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

The Deep and the Dirty
"Don't Hold Back,"
"The Deep and the Dirty,"
"Just Like New," "Gets Me High," "She Is the Song"

How deep is your overdrive bullpen now?

The sound of the Category 5 when cranked is great, but I have taken to not running it in a super-overdriven state, partially because I like the punch of the note attack. On a non-master volume amp, when you start to get it to sing, you also lose the percussive

attack. You can't really have both. And the way I've been able to dial that in, especially at different volumes and different venues, is to use overdrives.

The Origin RevivalDRIVE is one pedal I've found that's really good for that. It has a mix

control, so depending on the level I've got the Cat Five turned to, I can use the mix knob to let through more of the direct guitar or the pedal. In front of that, I've gone back and forth between a Klon KTR and a Wampler Tumnus Deluxe, which I like because it has a full EQ on it, so you

can get those mids under control a little bit. But the KTR is the one I used on this record. I had a gold Klon back in the early 2000s, but I lost it in Hurricane Katrina.

How closely did the themes on *The Deep and the Dirty* influence your tones?

The style of music I play is very much about creating in the moment, so every time you play it you're reinterpreting it live, and it's different every time. I'm getting into those ideas in various places on the record, and certainly the first song, "Don't Hold Back," is exactly what I'm talking about. This moment, right now, is all we get. There's something about the tone that grabs me; the texture of it excites me.

I've learned that I am just about as into sound as I am into music. In other words, the textures and the tones of things. I want the sound of the record to be the sound of the actual guitar rig, versus just recording some old little vintage amp that you only had in the studio that week. I want to feel like I'm hearing the speakers right in front of me. ■

"THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT A REALLY GRITTY VELCRO FUZZ THAT, TO ME, EXPRESSES THE EMOTION I WAS TRYING TO GET ACROSS"

TIP SHEET

Whether teaching, supporting or playing solo, **Gary Hoey** follows these drills to stay at the top of his game.

BY JOE BOSSO

IN ADDITION TO his solo career, Gary Hoey has recorded and/or toured with some of the biggest guitarists around — players like Brian May, Joe Satriani, Eric Johnson, Peter Frampton, Rick Derringer and Kenny Wayne Shepherd, among others. He explains that with each pairing, he keeps his eyes and ears open for any playing tips he might pick up, and he'll seek advice whenever possible.

"I'm a fan of these players, just like anybody else," Hoey says. "I'm always trying to incorporate the things they can do into my style. I did a Rock and Roll Fantasy Camp with Steve Morse, and I picked up some cool pointers from him."

One such technique involved fingerstyle playing with your picking hand. "Steve talked about how a lot of players don't use their fingers while they're using their picks," Hoey says. "Their fingers just hang there while their pick does all the work. You can add all kinds of licks if you work your fingers into the mix. Even if you're strumming chords, you can grab the strings with your third, fourth and pinkie fingers. It's kind of like how a piano player can get multiple notes all at once. I've been doing that now, and it's really cool."

Of course, Hoey has his own tips for guitar players who want to up their game, and he took the time to share them with us. Try these for yourself!

LEARN YOUR NECK

"I'm always surprised to see how a lot of players don't learn the neck of their guitar. They kind of play blindly, but they really haven't taken the time to know where they're going. They're probably thinking, How come I can't play the right note at the right time? The answer is simple: Because they don't know what the right note is.



Gary Hoey plays his 1996 One-Off Blue Flame S-type, made by Russ Ng.

"I started by telling my students to look at the first part of the neck, where there are four dots. Now look at the part of the neck after the 12th fret — there are four dots there too. You've got your big neck and your little neck. Anything you can play on those first four dots can also be played on the little part of the neck starting with the 12th fret. Train yourself to slide up there an octave higher and try it. This can really make your solos more interesting and exciting.

"Remember, there are only 12 notes. If you learn a C major scale like you would on a piano, you've already learned three-quarters of every note on the neck."

PRACTICE BENDS WITH YOUR TUNER

"I'll hear a guitarist play, and he's nailing all the right notes, but quite often I notice that his bends are out of tune. This is what separates the pros from the Joes. It's like when you hear certain singers and you think they're great, but then they hit a note a little flat or sharp.

"I tell people to make sure they're in tune when they practice. The best way is to use a clip-on tuner and play a bend: Try to bend up a whole step without looking at the tuner. Once you think you've done it, look at the tuner and see if you're in tune. I started doing

this and I found that I was flat quite often. To fix that problem, I decided to bend a little higher and use my ear. After a while, I noticed on my tuner that I was right on the money. You can do this with anything you play — it doesn't have to be a bend. After a while, you can train your fingers and your ears to know when you're playing in tune."

DO THE "TRILL DRILL"

"I have this little exercise called the 'trill drill.' I'll play a 16th-note trill on the B string using my first and second fingers on the fifth and sixth frets. After a few measures, I'll switch to the first and third fingers on the fifth and seventh frets. Then I'll do the first finger and my pinkie on the fifth and eighth frets. Try it. You'll feel a little burn, but it'll really develop your hammer-ons and pull-offs.

"You can get fancy and vary it. Try the second and third fingers, and then the second and fourth. Finally, try the third and fourth fingers. You can go through all the different combinations and have a good time with them. Even if you do it for just 60 seconds in the morning, you'll feel your hand is warmed up and ready to go. If you start playing solos, you'll find yourself throwing in little Hendrix trills because you're loosened up."

DEVELOP YOUR INTERNAL CLOCK

"I've noticed that a lot of guitar players don't tap their feet when they play. I don't know why that is. Are they counting time in their head? I don't know what they're doing, but many of them aren't playing in time.

With his Republic Highway 61 Resonator.



DAVID BROWN (BOTTOM); GARY BROWN (TOP)



"Every day I wake up, I get myself a cup of coffee, and I pick up the guitar and play a little something. And I always tap my foot. It doesn't matter what I play — if I'm tapping my foot, I'm in time. That's what you need to do. Tap your foot, get a little groove going and start improvising. But I want you to live inside the eighth note: When your foot goes down, that's the downbeat, and when your foot comes up, it's the upbeat. Play eighth notes

inside each beat, and then add 16th notes. Pretty soon, you'll be improvising and playing really cool stuff. You'll be playing music, and because you're tapping your foot, you'll be in time.

"I was just playing the riff to 'Rockin' in the Free World' by Neil Young. I tapped my feet and played the chords, but then I would alternate a few of the bars and add in a little soloing, all while living in the eighth notes. I was never out of time because I tapped my foot. That was my internal clock working for me."

PUSH YOURSELF PAST YOUR ABILITY

"Nobody ever asks me, 'How can I be a better rhythm player?' It's always, 'How can I play fast? How can I develop speed?' I'll tell you how, and I'm going to go against the grain here, because most guitarists say, 'Start slow

and build your speed.' Well, I have a contrarian approach that really works.

"You need to practice playing fast, but you have to push yourself. Think about it: The first time a NASCAR driver gets in a car and drives 100 miles per hour, he probably doesn't breathe — he's that tense. But the more he does it, he starts to relax and breathe, and what used to feel fast doesn't feel very fast at all. Playing fast guitar licks is the same.

"When I was growing up, I found that I had to push myself beyond my playing ability. That way, my nervous system could adjust, and before long I learned how to relax. That's what I want you to do. Play riffs

and solos to the point where you can't go any faster — and then push yourself beyond your limit. Don't worry about sucking — you will suck at first. Muscle through it. If you're sloppy, that's fine. That sloppiness is your body adjusting to what you're doing. But the more you do this, the easier it'll become. You'll start to relax, and before you know it you'll play the fast stuff with ease.

"If you're always playing right to the level of your ability, you'll never go past it. You'll stay in one place. Push yourself. I'm not saying you should always play fast — of course not. But if you want to develop speed, you won't get there by playing slow. Floor it." 🎸

"PLAY RIFFS AND SOLOS TO THE POINT WHERE YOU CAN'T GO ANY FASTER — AND THEN PUSH YOURSELF BEYOND YOUR LIMIT"

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

On the 50th anniversary of his Super Distortion humbucking pickup, **Larry DiMarzio** looks back at how his company got its start.

BY ART THOMPSON

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LARRY DIMARZIO

INNOVATOR, GUITARIST, INVENTOR

and photographer are some of the words that define Larry DiMarzio, whose early interest in making guitars sound and play better led him to start a company that offered players better tone in the form of replacement pickups. The concept was unheard of in the early 1970s, but DiMarzio revolutionized the music industry by doing what guitar companies couldn't do — build drop-in pickups that replaced the stock units without modification to the instrument. It was something he was

adamant about because of his love for vintage guitars and his belief that owners should always be able to return them to stock if they desired. As he has said, "The Super Distortion humbucking pickup came about because I wanted to improve my guitar's sound and output without chiseling a hole in the body and devaluing it."

DiMarzio got his start in the M.I. business working at the Guitar Lab, near 48th Street's Music Row, in New York City. It was there that he did repairs and fret jobs, installed Gibson

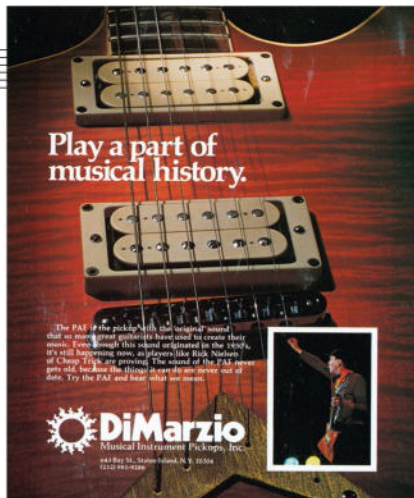
humbuckers in Strats and Teles, and taught himself how to fix broken pickups, wind coils and tune them for a louder, warmer and fuller sound that would blend well with a distorted amplifier. After much experimenting, he created the Fat Strat, later renamed the FS-1, which was a hit with Yngwie Malmsteen and favored by both David Gilmour and The Edge.

Next, DiMarzio set his sights on building a humbucker that would be tuned for the tone he wanted, and have a higher output to coax more sustain from an amp. He called his new pickup the Super Distortion. It was soon adopted by Ace Frehley, Earl Slick and Al Di Meola, creating a ripple effect that led the Super Distortion to be used by artists such as Rick Derringer, Roy Buchanan, Jerry Garcia, Wishbone Ash, Rick Nielsen, Aerosmith, Ronnie Montrose, Iron Maiden, Allan Holdsworth and many others.

Along with other pickups DiMarzio was offering by 1974 — the Dual Sound, Fat Strat and Pre BS Tele — the Super Distortion was soon in demand by guitar makers. "We were selling them to Wayne Charvel and they were



Larry DiMarzio poses with DiMarzio artists John 5 and Joe Satriani.



FROM LEFT: The tweed Fender Deluxe that DiMarzio used to test his pickups, and a vintage print ad for DiMarzio's PAF humbucker. **BELOW, FROM LEFT:** DiMarzio used cream pickup covers on the Super Distortion to make it stand out from the pack; DiMarzio's old Trumeter pickup winder.

going into a lot of guitars," DiMarzio says. "Then we got picked up by Hamer, Dean and B.C. Rich. Think about this: None of those companies could really build anything, because who are they going to buy pickups from? They all started out with Super Distortions. Then Paul Hamer came to me and said, 'Can you make a PAF for the neck position?' I said, sure, we can make something like a PAF.' But again, my attitude is always, What do I do to make it better?"

You were innovating on so many levels, starting out as a musician and improving your own gear. It set the stage for what followed with DiMarzio pickups, right?

Yeah, exactly. If you look at what I was doing, in many ways we were all doing and thinking about the same thing. I just started earlier than a lot of people, and pickups were the direction I wanted to go in. But of course, I designed bodies, I designed necks and guitar bridges and tuning pegs, as well as all the electronic aspects. It was really about the major manufacturers ignoring us — the guys that were really playing.

So you felt that guitar manufacturers had basically forgotten what was good about vintage instruments?

I worked on a number of old Strats, Teles, 335s... The list goes on, and there was no way that what the major manufacturers were turning out, especially in the early '70s, was really the same thing. They looked like the guitars, but they just didn't do what they were supposed to do. Part of my revolution was, "I'm in complete, total hippie rebellion. I'm throwing all of that away, and I'm designing what I want from the ground up."

The first truly successful product was, of course, the Super Distortion humbucking pickup, and it paved the way to introduce a lot of other things. It wasn't really based on a Gibson Les Paul PAF humbucker. It went



someplace completely different, like, "What am I going to put in a 1971 Les Paul that makes it sound like Eric Clapton or Leslie West?" I was going from their records and/or live performances and taking that up a notch. My background is electronics and going to school for electronics, but all I cared about was whatever it took to make things better.

Your first powerful pickup was the Fat Strat, which led to the Super Distortion humbucker. You modified your Strat's electronics, too, so it wasn't just about getting more from a pickup.

It was a matter of how was I going to go out with one guitar and be able to cover, in a Top 40 band, all of the sounds that I heard on the pop records? It was like the equivalent of having a pedalboard built into the guitar.

You mentioned voicing the Super Distortion pickup to have that sound you were looking for — Leslie West and Eric Clapton. You can't just slap a bunch of winds on a pickup and make it happen.

So how did you do it?

Loads and loads of trial and error. Oddly enough, sitting right here is the amp, the original Fender Deluxe I used. I'd go to a show and here's Neil Young playing out of an old Fender amplifier with Crazy Horse, with a sneaker hanging off the headstock of his Gretsch. And he got a great sound. So it was really a matter of going back to, How do I get

more of that sound in a small club environment and not piss the bartenders off by playing too loud?

There were no pedals involved either. You were just going guitar into amp.

Everything was straight guitar-into-the-amp. Eventually, of course, a wah-wah pedal. But even with the wah pedal, I built a dual switch into it so you got a straight wire-bypass, because when you went into the wah, you always had a reduced level. Same thing with my other piece of stage gear at the time, the Maestro phase shifter. You had to go straight wire-bypass so that when you came out of the device, you could turn the guitar up and get the amp to break up in a nice way.

“MY BACKGROUND IS ELECTRONICS, BUT ALL I CARED ABOUT WAS WHATEVER IT TOOK TO MAKE THINGS BETTER”

Getting back to voicing, later on, of course, I met Leslie West and spent some time with him. Leslie had his own sound in his head. A lot of people go on about the Les Paul Junior, which by the way, I always adored. But it's not just the Les Paul Junior and one pickup. It's important that there's no pickup in the neck position, because the magnetic field is interacting to some degree. I started taking everything apart and going through lots of trial and error, because we had a lot of guitars coming through the Guitar Lab and a lot of bands were coming through there. One of the early bands that we worked with was Wishbone Ash, and they began coming to me to get Super Distortions put in their guitars. Al Di Meola did too. But the Super Distortion was already designed by that point, because, once again, I knew that I could plug it into a Fender amp, turn it up and get it to break up the way I wanted it to break up. It was really simple and just a matter of volume control. If you wanted to clean it up, just roll it back a bit. Then, when you wanted that extra step, open it up and there you go.

Guitar players picked up on the Super Distortion right away, but did you still have to convince stores to carry them?

Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, my demonstration used to be I had a Les Paul goldtop. I'd walk into a music store and I would say to the guitar tech, "The neck pickup on a Les Paul is always louder than the bridge pickup." I would play the neck pickup, and then I would switch to the Super Distortion and then look at them and go, "Not anymore." Lo and behold, I literally never left the store without an order.

Besides the pickups, how else were you trying to expand your business?

Simultaneously in that same period of time, I contacted Wayne Charvel, because Wayne was making these Les Paul jack plates that I saw in an ad in *Guitar Player* magazine. I called him up and said, "I'm Larry DiMarzio and I love your jack plates. Can I buy some to use in my shop? I'd also like to buy your jack plates and sell them as DiMarzio products." I could have knocked them off,

but that just wasn't my hippie style. It's your idea and you're entitled to keep your idea. I just want to buy them from you.

We started a relationship at that point. Wayne was making bodies to some degree in the original Wayne Charvel shop. I had ideas about bodies too, because by then Fender had turned the Stratocaster body into what I refer to as the amoeba, where everything

was rounded over. What I wanted was tight contours. I wanted an edge and I wanted that clean line that they used to have. By the late '50s, Fender really had

those lines, and the cuts on the guitar and the weight of the body was really right.

So you added guitar bodies to the product line?

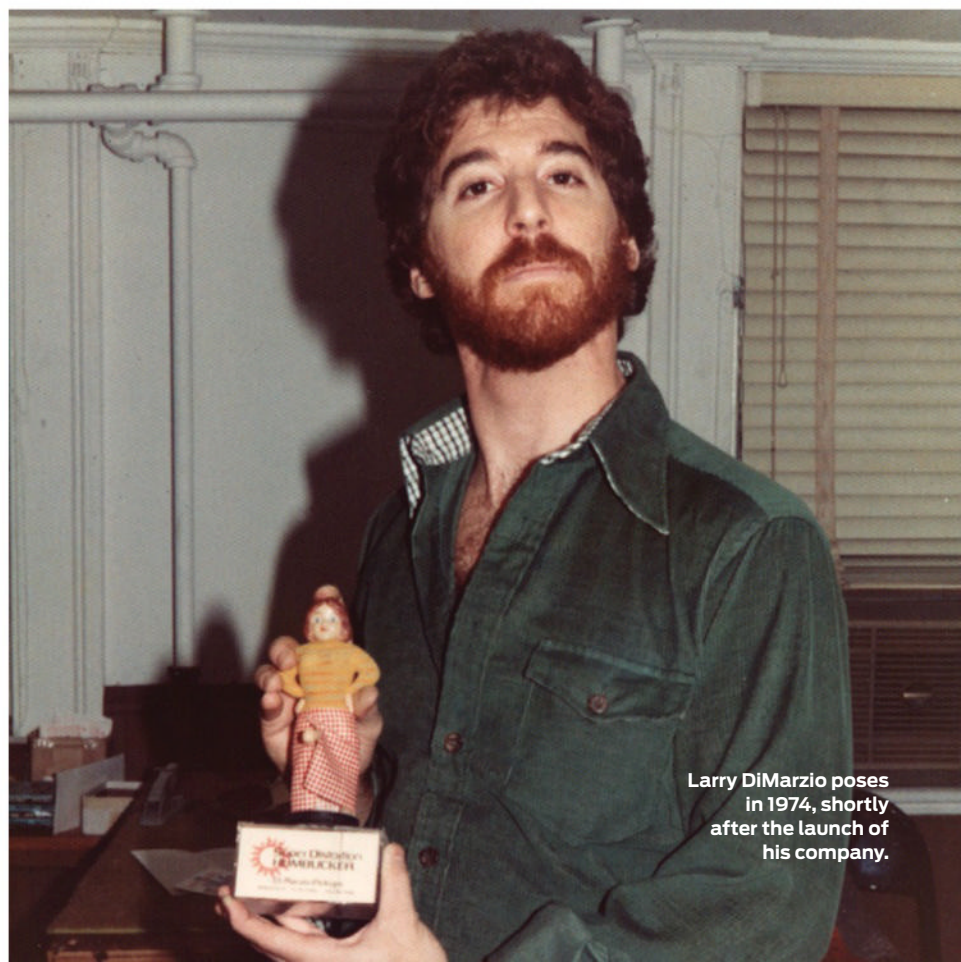
Yes. I basically spec'ed out the bodies that I wanted with Wayne, and we started selling them. And then, within a short period of time,

Grover Jackson took over from Wayne, and we were buying bodies from Grover. I didn't like Fender necks at that time. So I went over and designed a neck with Stewart Specter at Specter Basses. I was in the middle of a bunch of guys, and it was really cool to leave my office and go to Stewart's, and we'd go have lunch and work on what we were doing with the guitar necks. In my opinion, we built a better neck than Fender did at that time, because we kept making changes. I changed the radius to nine and a half inches, and I did that in probably the late '70s. I also redesigned the Fender bridge to be narrower. Allan Holdsworth used that bridge for quite some time on his guitar.

You worked with Eddie Van Halen too. How did that happen?

You were seeing right at that period of time that there's a relationship between the development of what I would refer to as the Superstrat: namely a Stratocaster body with a tremolo arm on it and a humbucker in the bridge position. That was really driven a lot by

"I HAVE TO STAY CURRENT. THE GOAL IS NOT TO TURN INTO A DINOSAUR"



Larry DiMarzio poses in 1974, shortly after the launch of his company.



Rick Nielsen had Super Distortions installed in his Les Paul goldtop and in one of his many vintage Gibson Explorers (right).



Eddie Van Halen. Everyone wanted to know what he was doing. He was a real tinkerer, and he messed around with a lot of things.

When I finally got a chance to work with Eddie in the '90s, I realized that it's almost intuitive on his part. My job was to deal with the technical aspect of stuff; his job was to point the finger in the direction he wanted it to go in. The neat thing is that I was in a really good position with Eddie because he, [*Ernie Ball lead designer*] Dudley Gimpel and Sterling Ball, and Steve Blucher from DiMarzio already had a very good working relationship. I did a photo shoot with Eddie early on, and the nice thing was that he knew who I was, so it made life a lot easier, as opposed to walking in cold as a photographer and doing a project. I didn't know what to expect, but we talked guitars and gear and all that stuff for hours. Everybody wanted to be Eddie's best friend, and as a byproduct of knowing that, I just did my job and enjoyed the fact that he liked what we were doing, liked the sound of the [*Music Man EVH Signature*] guitar and liked the changes that we made, so it was really simple and very pleasant. In a sense, the bulk of my relationship with Eddie was really making sure he looked good in the photos. I felt that that was part of my responsibility, because DiMarzio wasn't using Eddie directly.

You had great stylistic ideas too, like using cream coils on the Super Distortion to make it stand out from regular humbuckers when the covers were taken off. And it worked like a charm. Everyone wanted that look of DiMarzios on their guitars.

I had that from growing up in New York and being around the city and the shop windows. I always had a feeling for pizzazz and a little bit of something that had a look to it. I wanted to have a style for the company.

Ace Frehley had three Super Distortions on his Les Paul, and suddenly Kiss was everywhere. That must have been amazing to see that happen with those guys, since you knew Gene and Paul.

I was excited for them, because you have me playing, Gene coming to the gigs, and me and him recording in the basement together. And Gene, by the way, was a big Leslie West fan. I remember playing back a tape and Gene leaning over and going, "Play it more like Leslie," and I'd lay the part down again. This was like a two-track recorder in mom's basement, just messing around with the direction he wanted it to go in.

With so many new guitarists on the scene these days, how do you incorporate their

ideas for pickup designs?

Sometimes their ideas are similar to mine and sometimes their ideas are really different. I have to stay contemporary and current. The goal, of course, is not to turn into a dinosaur. We work with new people all the time, and because I do a lot of media advertising, I consider myself a marketing/advertising guy as well.

The last album cover I did is the Steve Vai cover with the Hydra guitar on it [*Inviolate*]. I knew that Steve was working on that guitar for quite some time. When I got a call to do the art for the album, I was like, "Can you send me some photos of what the guitar looks like?" That was primarily a Steve and Ibanez project. We were peripherally involved, as opposed to the PIA3761 guitar, where we were majorly involved during the whole development. It always varies. Some companies want us in there and working with them really closely, and other companies just have us make a pickup that the artist likes.

So sometimes it's a subtle variation, and sometimes it's like a complete ground-up build and design. So that's a big variable. But what we like doing is working with people that are doing things that are different. For Gojira [*guitarist, Christian Andreu*] it's a mahogany Fender Telecaster body, a maple neck with an ebony fingerboard and two humbuckers. Now that's not so new, but it's new enough. And of course, it's got to sound good.

Who inspires you these days?

I like staying on top of everything, and I listen to all kinds of music. I'm not really locked into guitar players. I was paying attention to Dua Lipa 10 years ago because I thought she really understood MTV. From a marketing standpoint she has a lot of the right things in the right place. I've been listening to Caroline Polachek too. P.S. — Neither one of them play guitar. ■



MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

He's worked with everyone from Thin Lizzy to Pink Floyd. These are the five cuts **Snowy White** considers his best.

BY JOE MATERA

TERENCE "SNOWY" WHITE is one of those unassuming quiet achievers whose passion for playing blues-infused guitar music has never wavered. Having started out working on sessions, he served as a touring member for artists such as Joan Armatrading, Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel, and Pink Floyd before joining Thin Lizzy in 1980. But he soon found the gig a mixed blessing.

"There were many good things about Thin Lizzy, as they were a great band, but working with Phil Lynott was difficult," White recalls over the phone from his home in Petersfield, England. "He'd say, 'I'll be there at 11 a.m. to start recording,' but he wouldn't turn up until 10 p.m. and expect us to work all night. I'd be thinking, 'They're wasting so much money,

which they probably didn't realize, since the record company was paying for it initially but would be taking it back out of royalties.

"So by the time they started working, I was tired, and I'd say, 'I'm going home now, as it's midnight.' Because I knew what I had signed up for, I worked really hard at being positive, but sometimes it was quite difficult. For example, when Phil turned up to put vocals on, he hadn't done any work on them at all, and we'd be sitting there for hours while he worked on them. Yet all he had to do was spend a couple hours getting some of the lyrics down beforehand."

After two studio albums with the group, White exited Thin Lizzy in 1982 and began forging a successful and prolific solo career.

Since his 1983 debut outing, *White Flames*, he's released more than 20 solo albums. He also spent more than two decades playing guitar as part of Roger Waters' touring band, with whom he performed around the world.

For the duration of his playing career, White's weapon of choice has been his goldtop 1957 Gibson Les Paul, which he purchased in 1969 while in Sweden. He eventually sold it at auction in 2015 and has since played a custom copy.

"I didn't know the copy existed until a friend called me when I was staying at the Savoy in London during Roger's shows at the London O2 Arena," White explains. "He told me a Japanese guy wanted to give me

Snowy White performs *The Wall* with Roger Waters (right), in San Francisco, May 11, 2012.



a guitar that was a copy of my old one, which I was still playing at the time. So he came down to the hotel and showed it to me, and it looked rather nice — had all the scratches in the right places, et cetera. So I said I'd be happy to have it, and he just gave it to me! He didn't want anything in return, not even a photo of me with it or any sort of endorsement. I didn't use it, because I still had my old one, but when I sold that a few years later, I thought I'd give the other guitar a try. It doesn't sing on the top frets like mine did, but it's a nice guitar anyway. I've had a bit more work done on it — wider frets, neck shaved and so on — to make it feel comfortable for me".

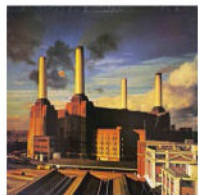
White officially retired from live performances after a 2019 show with the White Flames in St. Petersburg, Russia, and now focuses on recording blues albums. Despite touring the world and performing in arenas and stadiums, he says his live career highlight was when he was playing small clubs. "Back in the 1990s," he explains, "I had a three-piece that featured two Dutch-Indonesian musicians:

Juan van Emmerloot on drums and Walter Latupeirissa on bass and rhythm guitar duties. We'd play in small clubs in Europe.

Sometimes a gig would feel great, because it sounded

good onstage and sounded good at front with the audience, and we were on form and had great vibes. Everything came together, and for an hour and a half it would be wonderful. I still remember how good that felt. It wasn't like playing in stadiums or Berlin. It was really nice."

"PIGS ON THE WING" PINK FLOYD — *ANIMALS* 8-TRACK (1977)



"I got a call from somebody to say Pink Floyd's manager was trying to get in contact with me because the band were looking for a guitar player, and that I should give them a call. Pink Floyd didn't mean anything to me, as I was

a very narrow-minded blues player, so if it didn't have blues in it, I wasn't interested. Also, I didn't know anything about them. But then somebody said, 'Why don't you ring them up? Won't hurt to find out a bit more!' I thought, Well, I'm not doing anything, so I called them and went to their manager's office, in London. He told me they were in the studio around the corner at Britannia

Row, recording the *Animals* album.

"Dave [Gilmour] took me aside and explained to me that they needed a bit of bass, some rhythm guitar, a bit of 12-string and some harmony and lead bits, and

could I play them? I said yes, and then Dave asked did I want the gig? And I said, 'Yes, but maybe we should have a jam so you can hear me play?' Dave answered, 'You wouldn't be here if you couldn't play, would you?'

"So that was it! We went back into the control room and Roger [Waters] says, 'While you're here, why don't you play a solo on this song I've just done called 'Pigs on the Wing'?



White poses with Peter Green in 1996.

I said, 'That'd be nice.' Roger asked the engineer to put the song up, and Dave said, 'Yes, use any of those guitars.' I picked up a white Strat and it sounded all right. So the track played through once and I fiddled about, and then they did a take and that was the take. I got lucky and did quite a nice solo straight away. It turns out the guitar was Gilmour's white Strat, with serial number 0001 on it." [White's contribution appears only on the 8-track tape release of the *Animals* album.]

"IN THE SKIES" PETER GREEN — *IN THE SKIES* (1979)



"I'd known Peter for quite a long time, and we were quite close.

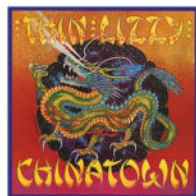
He called me up and said he was going to do a bit of recording — an album — as his

brother Michael worked for this little record company called PVK Records. It wasn't like a big comeback for him or anything; he was just happy to help his brother. And Peter wanted to use my band, too, so we went in and started jamming, and this was one of the tracks we came up with.

"Peter began playing the chords to the song, and I came up with the melody and played all of it just off the top of my head. Then Peter wrote some lyrics to it, as there were no vocals on any of it. The actual session was fun, because I hadn't really played much with Peter. We had jammed a bit, but nothing much on the musical front with him. It was easygoing, as nobody had

any particular thing that they wanted to do. I played quite a lot of the lead bits, and then Pete went away and worked on things, and later we went back in and re-recorded the stuff. There is a recording of the original jam where I'm just playing the melody on guitar."

"CHINATOWN"
THIN LIZZY — CHINATOWN
(1980)



"I had bumped into Scott Gorham in the rehearsal place at Shepperton Studios [a famous film studio in Surrey, England], and he said they were

auditioning guitar players next door, and did I want to come? I couldn't go then, and they called me up a few days later and said they still hadn't found anybody. So I went and had a jam, listened to one or two songs and was asked to join the band. It was the same sort of scenario as Pink Floyd.

I said, 'Yeah, all right,' but told them I had to do *The Wall* shows in America with Pink Floyd first. And they said they would wait.

"So while I was rehearsing *The Wall* shows in America, Floyd gave me an apartment off Sunset [*Boulevard*] and a car, so I was able to get about and do things, and in between rehearsals with Floyd I was learning the Thin Lizzy stuff. And I knew that [*Thin Lizzy*] were going to go in the studio as soon as I got back to do some recording, so I came up with a few ideas. And the main riff and a few other bits and pieces for 'Chinatown' were my first contributions. We went into the studio and I just started playing that riff, and they went, 'That's great, let's do it!' And we built it up from there.

"That was fun to do, too! However, I'm not a rocker that jumps about onstage, which was the only problem with me doing that gig. I did explain that to them, but they said that it was all right, and that I could be the blues player in the band. Of course, people just wanted to hear the old songs, so it didn't work out like that. But I enjoyed doing all those harmony guitar bits. I was using my goldtop Les Paul through a Fender Twin Reverb."

"BIRD OF PARADISE"
SNOWY WHITE — WHITE
FLAMES (1983)



"It was such a good feeling to get into the studio with my friends and do my own thing with this album. The idea for 'Bird of Paradise' had been

in my head for a while — just the chord progression and the idea of the solo. And when I'd finished with Thin Lizzy, 'Bird of Paradise' was one of the tracks that I wanted to record. The guitar solos were all done in one take, because it was such a relief for me to just get on and play without anybody else. The only problem with that song was that I'm not a singer. I was looking for someone to do vocals, and my work on there was only

intended to be a guide vocal while I searched for a singer.

"Suffice to say I am not happy with my vocal on 'Bird of Paradise.' But when the record company

heard it, they wanted to put it out as a single. I figured it would sink without a trace anyway, so it didn't really matter. I went with the engineer into Ringo Starr's studio, at Tittenhurst Park [*John Lennon and Yoko Ono's*

former home, which Starr lived in from 1973 to 1988], and we remixed it and sped it up a little bit, cut one of the solos and turned it into a single. The label put it out, and I thought that was probably the last I was going to hear of it. That is, until I was driving my car one day over Putney Bridge with the radio on and it came on, and it happened to be on the biggest afternoon show on BBC Radio 1 that millions of people listened to. The most popular DJ, Steve Wright, just kept playing it and turned it into a hit."

"MIDNIGHT BLUES"
SNOWY WHITE & THE
WHITE FLAMES — NO FAITH
REQUIRED (1996)



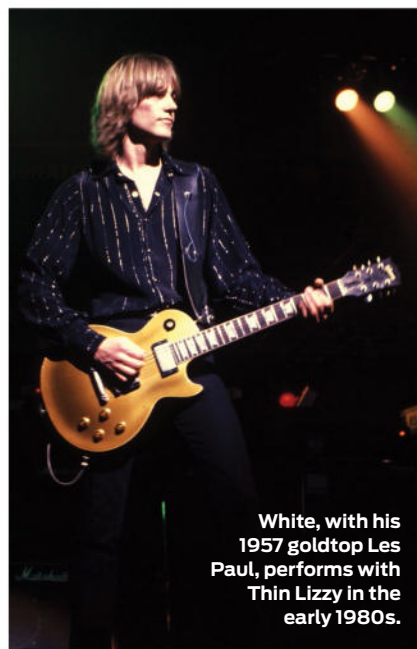
"This was my first proper recording with my new White Flames band, a pickup rhythm section from Holland that were great. I'd been doing a few gigs

around Europe with them, and we ended up being a band. I loved it. When it came to making the album, I went in with the attitude of not caring how long the songs were or how commercial they were. I just had some things I wanted do with the band. John 'Rabbit' Bundrick played this lovely Hammond organ part, which gave me a great bed on which to put my guitar, and it sort of inspired me. We did the whole thing in one take, straight through, including the lead guitar. And I put the vocals on later. I'm so happy with it. I thought it was an uncommercial song, because it's long and slow and it doesn't really go anywhere, but it's become the most popular streamed and downloaded of all my songs.

"I'd never heard of American rapper Meek Mill until I got an email saying he wanted to sample it [*for his 2016 song 'Blue Notes'*]. He just rapped over my whole exact song without doing anything, apart from speeding it up. That track sold a lot and led people who heard it to check out my original song.

"A lot of people got into me from listening to that track, and it sort of snowballed. I was so happy with that. Over the years it felt like the right place for me. Again, I used my goldtop Les Paul through a Vox AC30. 'Midnight Blues' feels like the highlight of my recording career." ■

**"THIN LIZZY WERE A
GREAT BAND, BUT
WORKING WITH PHIL
LYNOTT WAS DIFFICULT"**



White, with his 1957 goldtop Les Paul, performs with Thin Lizzy in the early 1980s.

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The Allure of Asymmetry

For 40 years (and counting), the **Boss SD-1 Super OverDrive** has attracted guitarists with its jagged, granular drive tone.

AMID ALL THE exotic, vintage bucket-brigade delays and germanium-transistor fuzzes that qualify as classic pedals, one humble three-knob overdrive has been doing the job for 42 years with little romance or acclaim, and probably juicing the tones of more rigs and recordings than any other single pedal on the planet. Introduced in 1981, the Boss SD-1 Super OverDrive represented the OD pedal come of age — a just-right circuit for guitarists requiring pushed-amp tone in situations where an amp can't easily be pushed, or providing just a little poke to take a lead from satisfactory to luscious.

Worth exploring in and of itself, the SD-1 is also worth considering in light of the many boutique and vintage reissue overdrives that cost two, three or even four times the price. For all the countless pedals that have made attaining a natural, tube-like overdriven amp tone their MO (many of which have been based closely or roughly on the SD-1 itself, or on its Ibanez rival, the Tube Screamer), this simple Boss pedal just gets the job done, and in a way that still comes as a breath of fresh air to many 21st century guitarists now discovering its charms for themselves.

Parent company Roland was making inroads in the effects market in the early to mid '70s before the Boss lineup came along. The first promising sign came with the release of the CE-1 Chorus Ensemble under the Boss brand in 1976. Just a year later, the company hit the scene in a big way with what was arguably the most modern-leaning and thoughtfully designed pedal range on the market at the time. Forever after known as the "compact pedal series," these brightly colored units displayed a number of next-gen performance features: a big and unmissable stomp switch that covered two-thirds of the pedal's top and doubled as a hinged battery



The pale-yellow Super OverDrive pedal made its debut in 1981.

THE SD-1'S ASYMMETRICAL CLIPPING PRODUCES A DRIVE TONE THAT SLICES THROUGH THE MIX

market today, Boss pedals appear on more professional boards than those of any other single maker out there, and tens of millions have been sold since the range was launched in 1977.

Along with the PH-1 Phaser and SP-1 Spectrum (kind of an enhancer/parametric-EQ combined), the OD-1 OverDrive was

door with thumb-screw access, an LED indicator and a quality buffered bypass. It says a lot that the pedals have never gone out of fashion. With all the esoteric, small-shop, hand-wired pedals on the

among the first three pedals in the range, and it is commonly acknowledged as the first-ever overdrive pedal, a notion that might be difficult to grasp amid the glut of such effects today. (The Maxon/Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer didn't hit the street until 1979.) This debutante of drive won plenty of fans and proved a revelation for those trying to achieve edge-of-breakup tone into a relatively clean amp, but it also had its limitations. Taking the concept further, Boss brought out the SD-1 Super OverDrive in 1981, refining the circuit for more gain and aggression and adding a tone knob to the existing two-knob complement of drive and level. What had been billed as a "soft overdrive" with the SD-1 was now something a little closer to distortion by the standards of 1981, if not today. The original

ORIGINALSD-1 PEDAL AND PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN FOSTER



The SD-1 was a refinement of the circuit in the original OD-1 OverDrive, with more gain and the addition of a tone knob.



BY DAVE HUNTER



The SD-1 was offered in a 40th Anniversary edition in 2021.



The SD-1w Waza Craft version joined the lineup in 2015.

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- All-analog circuit
- Asymmetrical clipping diodes
- Pale-yellow enclosure
- Timeless Boss compact pedal format

OD-1 was discontinued in 1985 but has since been reissued.

The adjectives *smooth*, *sweet* and *symmetrical* might appear to be inherent positives when guitar tone is discussed, but many players have long been aware that a slight asymmetricality in a tube amp's response, induced when slightly mismatched output tubes amplify each side of the sound

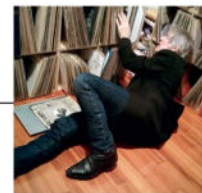
wave a little differently, can enhance character and cutting power. The SD-1 goes there by design. By using an unequal number of diodes in its positive and negative clipping rails — two in one, one in the other — the SD-1 induces asymmetrical clipping relatively early in the signal chain, producing a slightly jagged, granular drive tone that slices through the mix and really perks up the ear.

Aided by the enhanced harmonic overtones of the circuit and an appealing level of saturation in general, it's a pedal that's easy to love. Into a tube amp set clean-ish or just past the edge of overdrive, the SD-1 can evoke an instant rock vibe or provide the perfect solo gain and voicing boost. Into a heavier amp, such as the Marshall JCM800, which the SD-1 frequently accompanied in the '80s,

it can help to eviscerate the roll and take your tone totally rock.

Players who have leaned on the SD-1 are almost too numerous to mention, but their range — from Zakk Wylde, Steve Vai, Josh Homme and Kirk Hammett to Robert Smith, Mark Knopfler, Prince and The Edge — goes a long way toward declaring its versatility. The SD-1 has remained in production ever since its release. In 2015, the SD-1w Waza Craft version joined the lineup, offering a voicing switch to flip between Standard and Custom, and in 2021 Boss released a 40th Anniversary SD-1 in a black finish. Meanwhile, original examples from the early '80s have attained a certain collectability, but they're plentiful enough that prices are nowhere near those of many other iconic pedals of the era. ▶

BY JIM CAMPILONGO



The Lighter Side of Jazz

Jimmy Bryant and his country crew have a shredding good time.

JIMMY BRYANT WAS notoriously difficult to work with. Which might explain why it's not Jimmy but his rhythm guitarist, Billy Strange, pictured with his face turned away from the camera on the cover of *Country Cabin Jazz*, Bryant's 1960 Capitol Records release.

Born Ivy John Bryant Jr. in 1925, Jimmy started as a fiddle player and moved on to guitar. Although he was influenced by Django Reinhardt, Chet Atkins and Les Paul, his style was so unique as to be beyond the definitions of any genre, something *Country Cabin Jazz* makes perfectly clear. The album is packed with great performances, unique and concise songs, and the phenomenal chemistry of Jimmy Bryant and pedal-steel virtuoso Speedy West. They're given exhilarating support here by Strange, bassist Cliff Stone, drummer Roy Harte and pianist Billy Liebert, with the result that every track on this great LP is compelling.

As for that cover photo, as the story goes Jimmy wanted to sing as well as play instrumentals, but Capitol said no, with the result that he was a no-show at this album's shoot. I think stories like this add to his mystique, and make evident the source of his singular, uncompromising vision. Whatever history tells us, true or false, Jimmy Bryant was undeniably one of the great Telecaster heroes of the 20th century and remains so to this day.

All this is evident on *Country Cabin Jazz*. Side one opens with "Frettin' Fingers," an otherworldly, minor-key extravaganza that reinforces Barney Kessel's view that Bryant "is



the fastest and cleanest and has more technique than any other." The classic "Night Rider" shows Jimmy and Speedy at their best, as the former shreds and the latter answers with slower, impactful lines that border on humorous. The lovely "Deep Water" follows, giving us a chance to catch our breath. Jimmy plays a beautiful, unique chord melody while Speedy answers with conversational phrases.

WHILE JIMMY AND SPEEDY'S MUSIC CAN BE COMPLEX AND EVEN "OUT," IT REMAINS FUN AND INCLUSIVE

Stop," Jimmy and Speedy sound like one fused entity, while the ensuing instrumental masterpiece, "Stratosphere Boogie," is the end-all Jimmy-and-Speedy performance for the uninitiated. Jimmy plays a 12-string tuned in thirds, giving his A section performance the sound of a most awesome twin-guitar performance, while the band swings hard, making this an instrumental for the ages.

Side two begins with "Pickin' Peppers," where Jimmy shreds as Speedy runs playfully alongside. "Pushing the Blues" is a double-stop boogie, and the wonderfully paced "Rolling Sky" is a touch of country exotica with a lovely B section that I would offer in music court to prove these gentlemen were underrated songwriters. The uptempo "Yodeling Guitar" features jaw-dropping technique and humor, but it's the next track, "Bryant's Bounce," that floors me. It's a tune I've played for more than 20 years, but only occasionally do I feel "inside" of it. Dominant 7 chords fly by with breakneck speed, and the A section is reminiscent of Thelonious Monk. I never tire of playing it. "Hometown Polka" closes the album, with Jimmy playing a merry melody at top speed, and with a robust, yet unforgiving sound.

I encourage you to seek out *Country Cabin Jazz*. While Jimmy and Speedy's music can be described as complex and even "out," it remains fun and inclusive. Jimmy Bryant's legacy is rich with substance, offering lively and entertaining music to all. 🎸

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

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The Pretenders' 12th studio album, *Relentless* is the second record co-written by Chrissie Hynde and guitarist James Walbourne.

ROCK STEADY

Forty-five years as the Pretenders' sole constant member have done nothing to shake **Chrissie Hynde's** faith in the band or music. On *Relentless*, she and co-guitarist James Walbourne lead the group through territory familiar and new.

BY MARK McSTEAD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KI PRICE

YOU CAN SAY this: *Relentless* (Parlophone), the 12th and latest studio album from the Pretenders, is aptly named. Since forming 45 years ago, in 1978, the group has endured deaths — the melodically gifted lead guitarist James Honeyman-Scott, in 1982, and bassist Pete Farndon, in 1983 — as well as lineup changes and the vicissitudes of popular culture. Through it all, frontwoman and guitarist Chrissie Hynde has remained the sole constant force behind the group.

But since 2008, she's had an equally persistent partner in guitarist James Walbourne, who has served as Hynde's musical foil. Walbourne is not only an astounding guitarist but also Hynde's writing partner, co-penning the band's last two albums with her. On *Relentless*, Hynde and Walbourne combine familiar elements of the band's past work with some unexpected twists and turns,

which makes for quite a different-sounding album from its predecessor, 2020's *Hate for Sale*. As it so happens, the change in direction was not at all unintentional.

"We did want to have a punchier, punkier sound on *Hate* and we were looking toward a different approach for this record — something a little more low-key," Hynde tells *Guitar Player*. "We used keyboards on a lot of the songs when we recorded it. Having said that, after the initial recording, I got James to re-do a lot of the bass lines. It was almost too lightweight and soft. At the end of the day, we are a rock band, so things did toughen up somewhat when we actually recorded the songs."

Chrissie, you were always primarily a solo writer. How did the two of you start writing together, and how does the collaborative writing process work for you?

CHRISIE HYNDE I had such a great live

relationship with James — he's such a fantastic player and a great showman as well — and I think I was slightly nervous about writing with him. I was worried that if I tried writing with him and it didn't work out, it might jeopardize the good thing that we had going.

JAMES WALBOURNE It took us over 10 years to write a song together. The first song was "You Can't Hurt a Fool," from *Hate for Sale*. The floodgates opened after that, but it was so nerve wracking when I sent her my first ideas, knowing how great she is as a writer.

HYNDE With *Hate for Sale*, we had a very specific plan about how we wanted to write together, and we stuck to it. During lockdown, we decided to do some Bob Dylan covers, just for something to do; it wasn't planned to be an album. I'd put some chords down on my phone and send it to him, and he'd work on it and send it back to me, and that was how we put those Dylan songs together that became *Standing in the Doorway* in 2021. With that process working so well, we just carried on in the same way with the songs for this album. I'd send lyrics to James, or sing some ideas, then he'd work on them and come back to me until we had the song.

WALBOURNE Chrissie would just send the lyrics, with no guidelines at all as to how it should sound. I'd work out all the musical parts and send them back, and she didn't really change much at all about what I came up with. Of course, as soon as she starts singing, it sounds entirely different from the version that I sent to her. [laughs] Her vocal takes it to an entirely different level. She puts her own feel on it and it becomes Chrissie.

Are you perfectionists, where you hear things and wish you could have done things differently?

HYNDE Well, in the days of yore, when you made your first album you'd have been playing the songs live for a few years in clubs and whatever. You played those songs and refined them live to the point where you knew exactly what you wanted them to sound like. Nowadays, it seems like people go into the studio and make an album when they come off tour,

The Pretenders' June 24 performance at Glastonbury 2023 featured numerous guests, including Paul McCartney.

and record songs that they haven't played live. We're playing the songs from the album as a four-piece, rather than with the expanded line-up that made the record, so there are changes that we've made there already. But that's the name of the game. I wouldn't actually change anything about the record, but it does seem a little back-to-front the way that the business works these days.

WALBOURNE I think an album is a snapshot of a moment. Most of this record was recorded live in the studio, and that's where the magic takes place.

HYNDE I'm very pleased with it, but it's way behind us now. These days you have to wait nine months for the vinyl to get pressed because there's such a backlog, so it doesn't feel new from our perspective. We've lived with it for a long time.

There are some great tones on the record. What were the main guitars and amps that you used?

HYNDE For me, a Telecaster into a Princeton on a clean setting.

WALBOURNE I used mainly a '63 SG, and a '64 black Firebird. For amps, mostly a Fender Bassman '59 reissue and a blackface Fender Princeton, running together, with a bit of spring reverb on the Princeton.

Chrissie, why has the Telecaster always been your guitar of choice?

HYNDE I suppose I'm just used to it. I like the feel of it, and it's comfortable for me. I have had a few different guitars, but if I don't play them for a while, I punish myself by giving them away, because I feel that

it's not fair to have that guitar in a lockup. I think the Telecaster is a tried-and-tested guitar that I can rely on. James will lie to you and say he's not a guitar nerd kind of guy, but he fucking loves it. He's as much of a guitar bore as anyone I've ever met. *[laughs]* That's what you need in a band.

“HER GUITAR PLAYING BRINGS SO MUCH; WE JUST DON'T SOUND THE SAME WHEN SHE'S NOT PLAYING”
— JAMES WALBOURNE

WALBOURNE It's a very expensive game now, buying old guitars. Everyone knows what they've got and what it's worth, so the fun's gone out of it a bit. *[laughs]* The internet's spoiled everyone's fun.

How do you two work out your guitar parts?

WALBOURNE I'd sit down and show Chrissie what the parts were, but when she plays rhythm it just sounds so much better. She's a great rhythm player, but she just won't admit it. When we started

playing together after two years of lockdown and she started finding her feet again as a guitarist, it completely changed the nature of the sound. Her guitar playing brings so much. We don't sound the same when she's not playing.

HYNDE It's funny, because I use the guitar as a songwriting tool — I make no

bones about it. In the early days, because I'm not a great guitar player, I wasn't good enough to play along to the radio, so I started to make up my own little tunes. I've never excelled at the guitar; I do what I do and I've been told that I have a certain style, but I think that might be a euphemism for “not very good.” *[laughs]* I'll leave it at that. I think I do have a certain style that you can definitely hear on the first two albums in particular, although I think working with other people started to smooth me out.

During lockdown, I was desperate to do something as I was losing my chops altogether. I thought, Fuck me, I can't even play anymore. I just started sinking. I was getting a little scared and I said to James that we should just start playing some little clubs. James and I had a very specific game plan, which was to not do anything anymore unless it was fun. After lockdown — and having done supports at big stadiums, which has never been my cup of tea — I wanted to get back to the unpredictability of playing a club. We've been doing





Johnny Marr (second from right) and Dave Grohl (on drums) were guests at the Glastonbury show. Pretenders guitarist James Walbourne is at far right.

stadium shows with Guns N' Roses, which has been a blast, but in between dates, when we have a gap, we've also been doing shitty little club shows. That's how we get our rocks off. The stadium supports are really like a greatest-hits show for us, as it's not primarily our audience, but when we do the clubs, we play all kinds of things — old album tracks and whatever, that only a Pretenders fan would know.

What got you into playing guitar?

HYNDE I think the biggest things that influenced my playing as a rhythm guitarist were Brian Jones from the Stones and Jimmy Nolen's rhythm guitar on James Brown's records. Something like "I Can't Stand Myself (When You Touch Me)," where they'd have just the one chord all the way through. I always loved the way that the rhythm never changed and just pinned everything down. I'm not fooling myself, saying I preferred rhythm, because I wasn't good enough to play lead guitar, as I actually did want to play rhythm.

TINA K

As far as my style, a lot of it came from writing things for myself. Then I'd play with someone and they'd say, "Hold on, you've left out a beat," and I'd say, "No, that's the way the song goes — just memorize it — don't count it." I think anyone who's ever had to work with me has heard me say that at some time. My playing has probably suffered over the years, because the secret of my success is that I've surrounded myself with some of the greatest guitar players you've ever seen. I know my limitations and I stick to what I do.

Did you know James Honeyman-Scott was special when you first got together?

HYNDE He always said that he didn't like guitar solos and that he was more of a rhythm player. I forced solos out of him, and he was the best guitar player that I ever met. He just needed a nudge.

There are certain Pretenders songs that have to have his solos replicated to work.

Did he plan those solos in the studio?

HYNDE I think he just knocked them

out. When Johnny Marr played with us recently at Glastonbury, we were listening to an old interview with Jimmy in the van on the way back. I'd never heard it before — he was talking about his playing and guitars and things, and Johnny was a huge fan of Jimmy's playing — and we were all just totally in rapture listening to this. He was a hero for all of us.

WALBOURNE When I joined the band, Chrissie said to me that she wasn't bothered about me playing things exactly the same as Jimmy, but there are some parts that you do have to replicate. I will play the old solos almost note-for-note on things like "Kid," but there are some songs that give you a bit of wiggle room to put your own thing in.

Chrissie, you've worked with a lot of great guitarists over the years. What do you look for in a player?

HYNDE I can tell pretty fast if they're going to be great. I think that's my forte — knowing how everything fits and works together. I'm pretty average, but

**“THE SECRET OF MY
SUCCESS IS THAT I’VE
SURROUNDED MYSELF
WITH SOME OF THE
GREATEST GUITAR
PLAYERS YOU’VE
EVER SEEN. I KNOW
MY LIMITATIONS”
— CHRISSIE HYNDE**





I have ears and I can tell what works right. They can see that I've got "primitive skills," as Mike Tyson said of Frank Bruno. I can say, "Can you not do that?" or "Lay out there," or whatever, and they do it because they're afraid I'm gonna yell at them, because I'm a girl. [laughs] But then it does sound better, and the guys seem to respect my role as a kind of ringleader, because the band sounds better for it.

You two seem to have a solid partnership. Over the years there has been quite a shifting lineup in the band. Do you find it interesting to bring new people in with different energies?

HYNDE No, I don't find it interesting! I don't like it at all. I like to stick to the band, but things change, people change and they have families and other obligations or other problems. I know that the handful of bands that have kept the same lineup over the years often don't like each other anymore. Of course, I didn't anticipate losing two band members to drugs all those years

ago. But things change and I have to make decisions as a band leader. I feel my role is a bit like a soccer player — my job is to set the guitarist up so that he can put the ball in the back of the net.

WALBOURNE It's all about personalities. You have to get along with the people in a tour bus more than anything. [laughs]

I feel that bands that don't release new music and rely on rehashing their old hits live aren't really fulfilling the remit of what a viable band should be about. What drives you to keep releasing new records?

WALBOURNE We always talk about music, every day — how to keep it fresh, moving forward and fun. You don't want to be stuck in the past. Chrissie certainly doesn't, and I've always been impressed by the way she pushes forward.

HYNDE And if you haven't got the songs in you, I guess there's nothing you can do about it. I know I get inspiration everywhere — just from mundane life and the way that you view it. I guess if you're not feeling it, then maybe you shouldn't do it. Look at a band like the

Stones, though: They've been coming up with great songs for so long and still feel moved to come out with new music.

Your voice seems unchanged since the first album and you seem as fired-up as ever.

HYNDE I'm 72, and when you see all these other old-timers, like Mick, Bruce and Paul out there, people say to me, "Why are they still doing it when they don't have to?" And I always say that none of us have to do this — it's not about the money. There's a certain excitement about it. Things change, but they stay the same. You don't want to be constantly living in the past and going back to what you used to do. You have to find new things that are a turn-on, or else you might as well throw in the towel. I think age has become irrelevant now. Look at the people on the road: Willie Nelson, Bob Dylan... You know? The number-one criteria for me is if the music can make you laugh. If there's no joy, if things are too reverential, then it's not right. It's what turned you on at 15. Do you still feel that spark? ■



TELL ME STRAIGHT

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

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

KETH RICHARDS ONCE humorously quipped, “Guitar is easy — all it takes is five fingers, six strings and one asshole.”

Yes, easy perhaps, but few have wielded the instrument with as much imagination, grit and panache as the legendary Rolling Stone himself. Over the past six decades, the guitarist has unleashed a torrent of timeless riffs, gracing hits like “Jumpin’ Jack Flash,” “Satisfaction,” “Honky Tonk Women,” “Start Me Up,” “Can’t You Hear Me Knockin’” and “Happy.”

And now, brace yourselves for a dozen more hot rocks. At the venerable age of 79, Richards, accompanied by his eternally youthful crew, the Rolling Stones, has put the final touches on their 26th U.S. studio album. Lord knows, it’s been a long time comin’. Nearly eight

years have passed since the release of their 2016 blues covers album, *Blue and Lonesome*, and twice that time since their last batch of original songs, 2005’s *A Bigger Bang*.

The good news is the wait’s been worth it. Packed with killer tunes and those trademark Keef guitar hooks, *Hackney Diamonds* (Geffen) stands tall among their very best work. Bold, textured and unapologetically ambitious it recalls classics like *Let It Bleed* (1969) and *Exile on Main St.* (1972). The album also features guest appearances by some of rock’s greatest luminaries, including Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Elton John, Lady Gaga and even original Stones bassist Bill Wyman, who hasn’t recorded with the band for almost 30 years.

Guest cameos often distract more than they add, but the Stones have

artfully deployed these music icons in surprisingly subtle and complementary ways. Wonder and Lady Gaga, for example, add just the right touch of soulful elegance to the celestial gospel rave-up “Sweet Sounds of Heaven,” while Elton discreetly provides some tastefully rollicking piano on two tracks. Perhaps the biggest surprise is McCartney’s contribution. Beatle Paul, known primarily for his timeless love songs and gift for melody, goes against type and unleashes the mother of all snarling fuzz-bass lines on “Bite My Head Off,” an exhilarating punk rocker that tears the roof off the joint.

“To be honest, if Paul had come another day, he’d probably have been on a different song,” Richards says with a laugh. “It wasn’t calculated. It just happened to be the flavor of the month that day.”

The guitarist maintains that the album's creation was "fun, quick and effortless," yet he admits it wasn't without a few tears. *Hackney Diamonds* marks the band's first production since the passing of Charlie Watts, one of rock's preeminent drummers, if not the unrivaled champion, who died on August 24, 2021, at the age of 80. The loss of the band's inimitable "engine room" was a bitter pill to swallow.

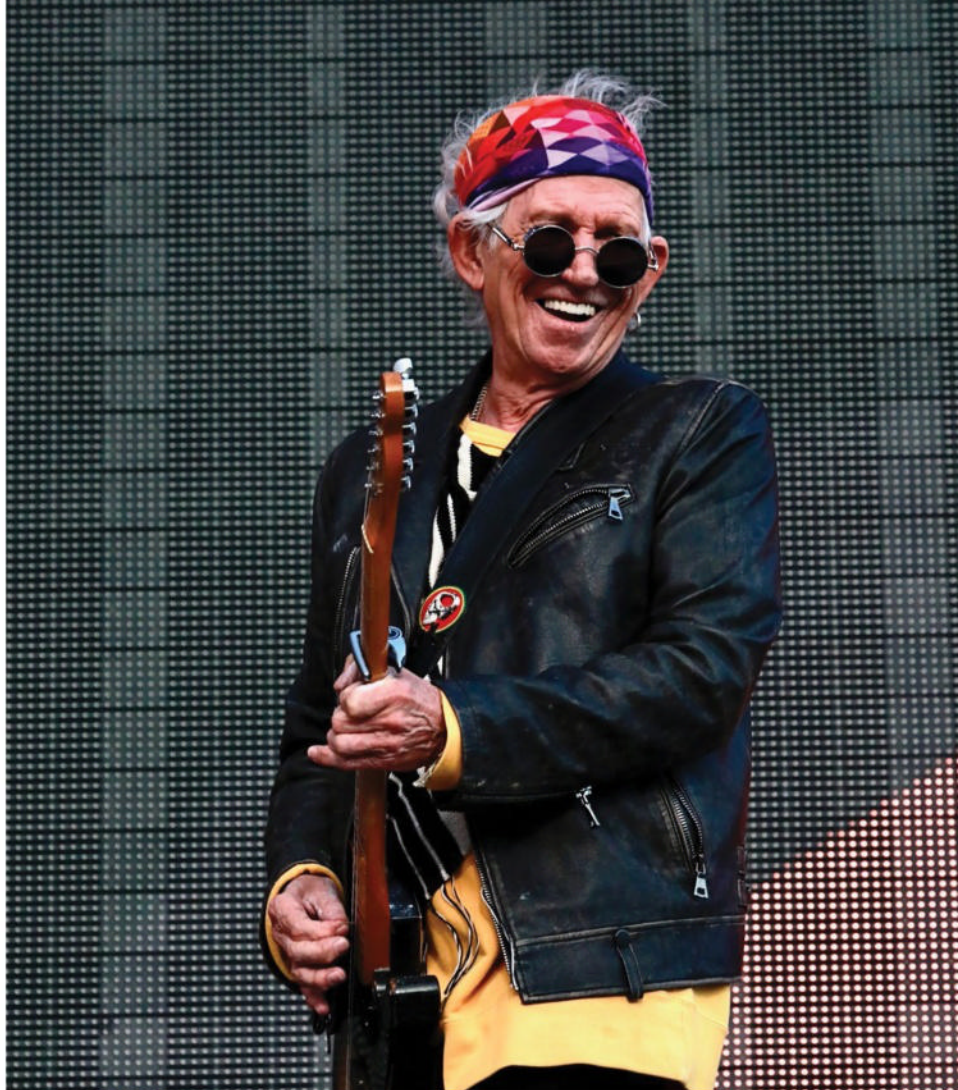
"Charlie was such a part of me and what I played, I haven't quite come to terms with it yet," Richards says somberly.

Fortunately, the band was able to find a suitable replacement for Watts with percussionist Steve Jordan, who has played with Richards in the guitarist's various side projects over the past couple decades. And as Keith explains in the following conversation, it was Watts himself who crowned Jordan as his heir apparent.

Despite the loss of their longtime drummer, the Rolling Stones — Richards, singer Mick Jagger and guitarist Ronnie Wood — are in top form on the album, with some credit going to their young 32-year-old producer, ironically named Andrew Watt [see story, page 52]. While it may surprise some that the Stones would put their legacy in the hands of someone a fraction of their age, Watt has built a solid reputation by crafting excellent albums for several top-shelf veteran rockers and rappers, like Ozzy Osbourne, Eddie Vedder, Iggy Pop, Post Malone and Juice Wrld, all of which earned him the prestigious 2021 Grammy Award for Producer of the Year.

But earning a Grammy is one thing, and gaining the respect of Richards, who undoubtedly has seen it all (and then some) is a whole 'nother matter. The guitarist, however, makes it abundantly clear that he enjoyed working with the producer and credits him with getting the album done in a month or two, something that he considers almost miraculous.

I was overwhelmed by how diverse and fresh the whole album sounds. I understand it had a lengthy evolution.



Yeah, it took a while to get it going, but when we finished touring last year, Mick and I decided, Let's just blitz a record, man, because we were being too relaxed about it and not really putting it together. We sort of made a project of it and said, Let's get a guy that can push this thing with us. Mick found Andy Watt, and I've got to say, it was quite an experience working with him. He's very young, very enthusiastic, and we worked very fast on it once it got going.

Initially, I was almost a little skeptical that we would ever finish another album, because it's been so long since we put new stuff out. For a minute, I was sorta waiting to see what would happen.

Sometimes it's good to have a deadline.

Yeah, exactly. That was Mick's opinion. I said, "If you've got enough material, let's go for it." That's how it happened.

It's been 15 years since your last batch of original songs with the Stones, and I was wondering, as an artist, did you feel like you had something to prove?

I'm not sure whether we needed to prove anything. I mean, maybe we needed to prove we could still make a record. But Mick had been building up material, and once I heard it, I said, "Well, we need to do a little bit of movement here or work on the bridge and stuff." But a lot of the time, his ideas were together, so once we got in the studio, it wasn't that difficult. It was also incredible to work with Steve Jordan for the first time on a Stones record. It was like presenting a "Stones now" kind of thing. [laughs]

The first two songs, "Angry" and "Get Close," begin with great kick-ass rhythm guitar hooks. Does your songwriting process usually begin with finding a great guitar riff?

Kind of, although from my point of view, there's no fixed formula for writing a song. I feel more like I'm an antenna than a creator, particularly because, to me, songs seem to come from somewhere out there in the cosmos. If I sit down with a guitar or a piano and just start playing, eventually a song



comes. It's a bad day when it doesn't. [laughs] Most of the time I feel like I'm just receiving inspiration from everything that has gone on before me, and then put it through my own point of view, and then sort of pass it on. I almost don't feel any sense of ownership.

Most guitar players are pretty good at noodling around. The hope is that you stumble onto something interesting.

Yeah, exactly. Right. I mean, sometimes an idea just finds you. Regardless, guitar playing is just a fantastic form of relaxation. Everybody should have one! [laughs]

I know this is very personal, but how did Charlie Watts' death affect you?

All I can say is that I loved the man dearly, and I miss him. I still have conversations with the fucker. [laughs]

You worked with drummer Steve Jordan for quite a few years on your side projects with the X-Pensive Winos. That must've made the transition a bit easier.

When I started putting the Winos together, it was Charlie Watts who told me, "If you're going to work with anybody else, Steve Jordan is your man." So Steve's been wearing that mantle for a while, and we all knew him, so in that way the transfer wasn't that difficult. But, still, it's impossible to put into words what Charlie meant to us. He was just a fantastic friend and so much more.

I know that Charlie was a huge fan of drummers. He was a real scholar. For Steve to get his endorsement is significant.

Absolutely. And you're right about Charlie, he was totally invested in the great drummers of the '30s and '40s, like Max Roach and Art Blakey. Swing drummers were his joy. He was a historian on them. Yeah. He knew just about everything about 'em. The history side of it was very important for Charlie.

What did he appreciate about Steve's playing?

I think he recognized him as a soulmate. Steve had been listening to Charlie since



ABOVE: Ronnie Wood, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards perform at Stadio San Siro, Milan, Italy, June 21, 2022.

TOP: Onstage at the Festival D'ete De Quebec, Quebec City, July 15, 2015.

“THE STONES ARE STILL THE STONES IN THEIR OWN WAY. I MEAN, NO BAND HAS LASTED THIS LONG, SO THERE IS REALLY NOTHING TO COMPARE IT WITH”

he was a kid and knew his playing from the ground up. He can do an incredible imitation of Charlie’s drumming, and I think Charlie got a kick out of that.

It’s not easy to catch the nuances of Charlie’s feel.

No, it isn’t. No. He had his own little ways of playing and some of those secrets he’s taken with him.

Charlie appears on two tracks on *Hackney Diamonds*: “Mess It Up” and “Live by the Sword.” The album credits list that his performances were produced by Don Was, who produced your previous two albums, so I imagine the genesis of those songs came from earlier sessions.

We had just started working on those tracks a few years ago, before Covid shut everything down. We left Charlie’s tracks as they were and re-did the vocals and everything else with Andy Watt. As soon as you hear that snare, you know it’s him.

Did Charlie have much input on how your songs were constructed?

No, I wouldn’t say that. He would listen to whatever we brought in and made his own decisions about how to play it, but Charlie thought that a song was to be played, and I believe he didn’t think that songwriting was a part of his job. He just liked songs, and if he liked them, he’d play ’em.

You must have had an incredible connection with him, because I know a lot of guitar players play to the drummer.

Yeah, especially rock and roll players, if the drummer is the right kind of drummer. Charlie could swing and he could roll it a little more than most straight rock drummers. Charlie always added a jazz tinge to everything he played, so there was always that slightly different feel about the Stones’ music.

There are a lot of what I call “full-circle moments” on the record, moments that take you back to the band’s origins. One is having Bill Wyman play in the studio with the band after a 30-year absence. How did that come about?

Well, Bill and I have regularly stayed in

touch through the years. He quite often sends me bits of information over the phone. I always see him when I go to England. In fact, I’m going to London next week, and I have no doubt that I’ll see him then. I’m not sure if he sees a lot of Mick and Ronnie, but I always make a sure point of getting to him. We just thought it would be cool to have him on one of the last tracks with Charlie. A reunion of sorts.

Unfortunately, we weren’t in the same room together to record that, because we all just overdubbed to Charlie’s original track. But we’re all still good friends. The Stones are still the Stones in their own way. I mean, no band has lasted this long, so there is really nothing to compare it with. We see each other when we can. It’s not like we forgot each other just because somebody leaves the band.

How did Paul McCartney enter the picture? I think it shocked everyone when it was announced that he was going to be on a Rolling Stones track.

He had been doing some work with Andrew Watt as well, and happened to be around and dropped by. I don’t even think he intended to play bass on a track, but once we he was there, I just said, “Come on, you’re in. You ain’t leaving until you play.” [laughs]

Famously, John [Lennon] and Paul wrote “I Wanna Be Your Man” for the Stones, and it became your first hit in England.

The Beatles and the Stones have been basically joined together at the hips from the beginning. We were totally different bands, but we knew each other well. I think we first met them in the fall of ’62, when they came down to see us play in London, and from there, every now and again, we’d get in touch. Later, John and Paul sang on “We Love You” and on “Dandelion.” We’ve always sort of been in touch. Ronnie and I used to hang with George Harrison quite a bit in the 1970s, so there’s always been an open door between the Beatles and the Stones. We were the only ones that knew what it’s like to have that extreme kind of fame in the 1960s, so that created a bond.



SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES





Paul McCartney's friendship with the Rolling Stones dates back to 1962. Keith and Macca (at top) share a moment at the 2000 VH1 Vogue Fashion Awards After Party in New York City. Richards and Brian Jones chat with McCartney (above) in 1964 at the premiere party for the Fabs' movie *A Hard Day's Night*.

OPPOSITE: Hackney Diamonds guest star Stevie Wonder performs with the Rolling Stones at New York City's Madison Square Garden in 1972.

Another “full circle moment” comes at the end of the record, when you and Mick perform a terrific, intimate duet of Muddy Waters’ “Rolling Stones Blues,” the song that gave your band its name.

That was Andrew’s idea. He turned up at the studio with a 1920s Gibson L-4 acoustic and asked us to do that Muddy thing. Ironically, I’d never played that song before, but the guitar was beautiful, and we did it in a couple of takes. The guitar that he laid on me was just the perfect sort of instrument for the job. It was perfectly archaic and, I must confess, pretty difficult to play. [laughs]

What does the music of Muddy Waters mean to you?

It’s the foundation. The blues was what I was chasing as a young man, and at one point I was going to stay there, and it was only rock and roll that got me out. [laughs] But to me, if you’re a rock musician, it’s essential to have a grounding in the blues, and it doesn’t get much better than Muddy Waters.

When I heard that song at the end of the album, I thought it would be a perfect way to end your recording legacy. You know, “Here’s where it started, and this is the way it’s ending.” Were you concerned that people might interpret it that way?

Man, I’ve never even come close to thinking of wrapping up the Rolling Stones’ story, so my answer to that is “Absolutely not.” It was just a cool way of wrapping up this album, and the story so far. We plan to keep working. I know we’re going to work next year.

Making music is still quite exciting for me. I hadn’t realized how long it was since our last album, I think eight years ago or something. It’s funny how time flies, man, but I’m enjoying the process of releasing a new record and seeing what happens.

Since the 1970s, the Stones have been a fluid entity. You had all these adjunct members, like pianist Nicky Hopkins, guitarist Mick Taylor or saxophonist Bobby Keys, that came and went. Do you feel like that was an essential element

KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (2000); DAILY MIRROR/DAILY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY IMAGES (1964)

“THERE’S ALWAYS BEEN AN OPEN DOOR BETWEEN THE BEATLES AND THE STONES. WE WERE THE ONLY ONES THAT KNEW WHAT IT’S LIKE TO HAVE THAT EXTREME KIND OF FAME IN THE 1960S”

in keeping the band interesting and evolving?

There’s some truth to that, but it wasn’t intentional. It was just, “Hey, we need a piano, we need a sax.” And the best guys just kept hanging around. [laughs] But you’re absolutely right: All of that extra talent and new blood has always helped the Rolling Stones. Ian Stewart was our first piano player, and in many ways the Rolling Stones were his band. But I mean, God, man, it’s been 60 years. You’re going to go through a few changes, right? [laughs]

It’s super smart to bounce ideas off new musicians, but most bands seem to believe that it “dilutes the brand.”

Yeah, I don’t understand that way of thinking. We had Stevie Wonder and Lady Gaga bounce in too, which was a surprise, and it came out cool.

I was a little nervous when I heard Lady Gaga was going to be on a track. I didn’t know where that was going to go, but I have to say, “Sweet Sounds of Heaven” is one of my favorite songs on the record.

Right, I don’t blame you. I understand what you were thinking, but she’s one of the Stones now.

Her gospel singing on the song is pretty righteous.

She’s a talented piece of work. It also helped to have Stevie Wonder playing keyboards. Having the both of them in the same room was pretty interesting.

“Sweet Sounds of Heaven” is built around a textbook gospel chord progression. Did that come from you?

The sound and feel of gospel runs through almost everything we’ve ever done, but Mick and I never actually pinned it down in such a specific way. “Sweet Sounds of Heaven” started as more an Otis Redding–style soul music thing and evolved from there. Soul music and gospel are just a part of us, and at the right time it suddenly comes out.

There was no sort of premeditated decision to do a gospel thing. Mick just had these lyrics, and then there it was. We worked it out while we were all in

a room together, so it felt very organic. I don’t think that song could’ve come together any other way. I was wondering about the false ending at the time. I didn’t get it. But then I got into the flow of it, and I think it really works.

I’m a huge Stevie Wonder fan, and we haven’t heard much from him in recent years. He sounds great on the track and seems like he has so much to offer.

We used to work with Stevie on the road quite a lot in the 1970s, so we’ve known each other for quite a while. But Stevie does what he wants to do, and when he wants to do it, he does it.

As you’ve noted, the album is produced by Andrew Watt. He’s much younger than you guys. I think he was only 15 years old when you came out with your last batch of originals. What did he bring to the table?

He brought exactly what we wanted: energy and a fresh mind. He knew our stuff back to front, and I think he had a ball making the Stones’ record. It was fun to make, very quick, compared to a lot of our records. We did most of it in a month or two. I enjoyed working with him.

Well, you’ve got kids, so I imagine that you can respect the value of a younger perspective, too.



“MICK AND I DECIDED, LET’S JUST BLITZ A RECORD, MAN, BECAUSE WE WERE BEING TOO RELAXED ABOUT IT AND NOT REALLY PUTTING IT TOGETHER”

Right. It rubs off.

If your ears are open, sometimes you can learn some new things.

Right. And it’s all about listening. It’s music. There’s something there.

One of the more striking elements on the record are Mick’s vocals. His approach is more direct and less stylized than in recent years. It’s almost a return to way he sang in the 1960s with producer Andrew Loog Oldham.

Oh, that’s interesting. Maybe it’s because both producers are named Andrew! [laughs] But you make a point. Mick worked hard, and I think he put more consideration into each song rather than just doing it. It was my observation that he thought a lot more about the vocals than usual.

They felt more honest.

Yeah, I get your picture. I had pretty much the same impression as you on that, but I really put it down to the fact that Andrew and Mick worked very tightly on each track.

On “Tell Me Straight,” your lead vocal also has a new vitality. You’re really belting it out.

People have been telling me I sound stronger after I stopped smoking cigarettes in 2019. When we went out on the road a couple years ago, the sound guys started making comments. They were like, “Man, your voice...what’s happening?” Since then, singing has felt different, and I’m enjoying it more.

You sound like a kid on that song!

There’s probably an age when you start to go into reverse. And I’m probably in it. [laughs]

“Tell Me Straight” feels like a life philosophy, sort of a song you were born to write: part mythic, part hardcore truth.

Oh, cool. It came kind of like that. Once it was on the roller, these chords appeared and then the rest of it seemed to fall into place around it. I knew it was getting pretty good because Mick tried to



steal it! I had to say, “Uh-uh buddy. I’m doin’ this one.” [laughs]

There are a lot of guitars on the album. Lots of texture.

My five-string Tele is on a good half of the tracks, but there’s also a lot of the Gibson. That’s not unusual. I’ve never just used one guitar in the studio, but I’ve been getting know this ’59 Gibson ES-355 lately, and I really enjoy playing it.

In the early days of the Stones, you leaned pretty hard into Gibson Les Pauls, and then there was a bit of a shift. Do you remember what drew you into using a Fender Telecaster?

I don’t know how I started moving in that direction. I think it was something to do with the way I was playing, and a Telecaster made it easier. But I’ve always loved Gibson guitars, and, I mean, there’s a lot of overdubs on everything here, so as usual, with every Rolling Stones record, there’s a great mixture of different guitars.

Fender and Gibson guitars make a great time-honored pairing.

And then of course, it depends what amp you’re going to use. Yeah, it’s a big difference. I used Fender Twins most of the time, with the occasional Fender Champ when I was looking for something different.

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

Yeah, that’s part of it. That’s the sound of a Stones record: a five-string with a six-string on top, and Ronnie. It always creates a beautiful blend. A great example is how it sounds with Ronnie’s Dobro on [the *Hackney Diamonds* track] “Dreamy Skies.” You always have to play around with the amps a bit, but guitars are amazing things. You can make an orchestra out of them with just a simple blend.

Your band arrangements tend to be a little



“I don’t know how I started moving in that direction,” Keith says of adopting the Fender Telecaster, the guitar with which he is most closely identified. “I think it was something to do with the way I was playing, and a Telecaster made it easier.”

dense. In addition to a few guitars, there are often some keyboards, horns and backing vocals. Do you find that by eliminating your low sixth string, it opens the mix up so other instruments can be properly heard?

Yes! It’s always been the mystery to me why so much space opens up for other instruments by taking off the bottom string. You’re right, but I can’t really put my finger on a reason why, but somehow that one extra note disappearing allows for all kinds of other instruments to come through. It’s just one of those things, I guess.

What was it like working with Ronnie on this record? Do you guys spend a lot of time figuring out those guitar blends?

Truth is, it’s almost never complicated. We just fit together. I mean, it’s like knit one, purl two, and it’s not something we need to think or talk about too much. If we thought about it, it would probably become too studied. It either works or it doesn’t. And if it doesn’t, then we try it another way. But usually, Ronnie and I just fall into a groove without even discussing it.

Would you mind just talking about a couple of older songs? When people ask me about the importance of rhythm guitar, I always direct them to “Can’t You Hear Me Knocking,” from your *Sticky Fingers* album. Everyone focuses on the extended solos by Bobby Keys and Mick Taylor, but what kills me are all the different rhythm parts that you use to frame those solos.

If I can remember rightly, I was really focused on working on the tuning thing and different ways of playing the guitar. I think it was at the time when I was

really just balancing between playing with open tunings and regular tunings, so all kinds of different things were sort of coming out. That was with [producer] Jimmy Miller, who loved to play around with stuff like that. The track really grew while we were playing it. It was a good day.

Okay, here’s another one: “Love in Vain” [from 1969’s *Let It Bleed*], your re-invention of the classic Robert Johnson blues song. No one can play like Robert — and you were probably smart to not even try — but your arrangement is equally terrific.

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

One last thing. Another great musician passed this year. What did you think of Jeff Beck? And is there any truth that he was being considered for the Stones after Mick Taylor left?

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

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

So, do you think your next album will be done...

...sometime before the next century? Yeah, I do hope so. [laughs] And I suppose given the normal pattern of things, we’ll probably be on the road next year. And after that, we’ll see. ■

THE JEWEL MAKER

How production phenom **Andrew Watt** helped the Rolling Stones cut *Hackney Diamonds* in record time.

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

“**S**O, WHO DOES every kid that picks up a guitar want to be?” producer Andrew Watt asks. “You want to be Keith Richards, right? That’s the whole fucking thing! So making this record and working with the Rolling Stones, earning their trust, was the honor of my lifetime.”

Watt, at 32, is still a little giddy from working with the World’s Greatest Rock and Roll Band on their new album, *Hackney Diamonds*, and who can blame him? Even though he’s arguably the music industry’s hottest producer, having collaborated with everyone from Ozzy Osbourne to Eddie Vedder to Miley Cyrus, the native New Yorker is still buzzing from his time producing the Stones and their legendary guitar duo of Richards and Ronnie Wood.

“I’ve seen the Rolling Stones play countless times,” he continues. “I said to Keith, ‘It’s like you plucked a freak from behind the barricade and let him produce your album.’”

Watt is a fanboy for sure, and his enthusiasm — not to mention his impressive collection of guitars and amps — resonates throughout *Hackney Diamonds*, arguably the Stones’ best work since 1978’s *Some Girls*. But despite his genuine love for the band, he was no pushover, prompting singer Mick Jagger to comment, “We got a producer called Andy Watt who kicked us up the ass.”

Watt told *Guitar Player* just how hard he put the boot in.

How did this project come together?

In our initial conversations, the band explained that they were facing some



creative roadblocks. There was a lot of stop-and-start in their initial process, so it became my job to help facilitate slamming the ball in the end zone.

It must've been intimidating to tell Keith Richards to get his ass in gear.

I don't think that ever happened. He's armed with a knife at all times! *[laughs]* But the band had given me a clear directive, and in my line of work, results are what matter. So I didn't waste time bullshitting. I just tried to make it clear that it was time to focus and get to work.

How did you do that?

I had a bass and just started playing with Keith. I was of the mind that if I could earn his respect as a player, then I could communicate with him musically and offer suggestions chord-wise or inversion-wise or tone-wise or whatever. And we just got into it.

Then, when we started recording the basic rhythm tracks in L.A., I sat next to Keith in the live room across from Mick

and Ronnie. That was an extremely important part of the process for me. I wanted to make sure the sounds were good, and as we were going through the takes, I was able to remember the performances, because I was right there. If we got a good take, we just moved on immediately. After we did the basic tracking of roughly 23 songs, we got into overdubs.

I think it was during the overdub sessions that I really earned Keith's respect and trust. It was very important to me that all of his parts were done before Mick added his final vocals, and we really worked hard together to accomplish that.

What was it like to work with Keith and Ronnie? How prepared were they, or did you guys work out arrangements in the studio?

Many of the songs had been developed over time. So after we listened to whatever the most recent demo was, everyone would start familiarizing

themselves with the song, and we would play it a few times until everyone had it down cold. And this is where it gets interesting: Instead of using the final take, we would use the previous take, because it still had that spark of spontaneity — the take where people were still searching.

The worst part of contemporary music is how producers often kill a performance in search of perfection.

I make loop-based music with some of my other clients, but I don't want to hear the Stones like that. No one wants to hear the Stones on some grid.

Can you talk a bit more about how Keith and Ronnie work together?

Listen to a classic Stones song like "Beast of Burden." You can't tell who's playing lead and who's playing rhythm, and if you muted one of them, it would sound sparse. They fill the holes together so beautifully, and that's apparent on the whole record. Take a song like "Angry." They pause to exchange licks, one handling the rhythm while the other responds. They watch, listen and engage in this incredible musical dialogue. If you want to really check it out for yourself, I purposely mixed it so 90 percent of Keith's parts are on the left and Ronnie's are on the right.

There are at least two tracks I'd love to know more about. The first is "Bite My Head Off," featuring Paul McCartney on that gnarly fuzz bass.

This is part of a much longer story, but essentially, I was working with both Paul and the Stones during roughly the same period. The Stones' regular bassist, Darryl Jones, isn't on the album at all because he was on tour, so everybody was taking turns playing bass, including me, Keith, Ronnie and Bill Wyman.

One day, while speaking with Paul, I thought, Why not invite him to play bass on a song? I realized it was a significant request: Can we get someone from the Beatles to play in the Stones? But surprisingly, both Mick and Paul were like, Sure, no problem, sounds like fun. They were so nonchalant.



Andrew Watt at the 65th Grammy Awards, February 5, 2023. "I said to Keith, 'It's like you plucked a freak from behind the barricade and let him produce your album.'"

Paul McCartney with one of his Hofner basses. Watt gifted Macca the '64 Hofner with built-in fuzz that he would use on *Hackney Diamonds*.



I reviewed the list of songs slated for recording. The typical choice might have been to place him on one of the ballads, such as “Dreamy Skies.” However, I thought, how cool would it be to play on the most aggressive punk-rock track on the album? I knew Paul loved to rock, and they had a great time recording “Bite My Head Off.” They were all laughing like teenagers.

How did Paul achieve that fantastic distortion on his bass?

As Paul and I were becoming friends, I decided to get him a gift. I got him another lefty '64 Hofner, similar to the one he played in the Beatles. However, I added a twist: my guitar tech installed a Univox Super Fuzz circuit on the Hofner that could be activated with a switch.

When I gave it to Paul, he said, “This is an incredibly thoughtful gift, but why? I already have my Beatles Hofner — why another one?” I was like, “Just plug it in and give that extra switch a try.” Suddenly his eyes widened, and he just started ripping on it. I told him to

“I JUST ASKED THE DUMBEST QUESTION: HAVE YOU GUYS EVER PLAYED ‘ROLLIN’ STONE’ BEFORE? KEITH THOUGHT FOR A SECOND AND SAID, ‘NO’”

bring it to the recording session, and he couldn’t stop laughing.

I shared the song with Paul the day before, and when we entered the studio with the band, he brought out the bass. During the breakdown section of the song, he activated the Super Fuzz switch, and it was complete carnage! Everyone was like, “What the fuck was that?” It was hilarious and so cool. I think we recorded just three takes of that song, but almost immediately, Keith and Ronnie were on their feet, and Mick dragged the mic into the middle of the room and the roof left the building.

I think Paul really enjoyed that he was just a guy in a band again with friends that he’s known for 60 years.

It had been a long time since he was with equals, just plugging in his bass and doing a session. I couldn’t wipe the grin off my face for a very long time.

Did Keith and Ronnie use any unexpected guitars or amps on the album?

Keith brought in his usual amp rig, which consists of four amps that he’s been using for a long time — a setup that’s well documented. However, just to switch things up, I brought in five amps that had been worked on by the late and legendary Howard Dumble. Keith was particularly drawn to one of the Dumble-modified 1958 Fender Twins, which he used for a bunch of his overdubs. It just had a magical sound.

Also, in addition to his '54 Tele and Gibson ES-355, Keith also played a Dan Armstrong guitar on a few tracks. One of my all-time favorite performances by Keith is a version of “Midnight Rambler” at a gig at the Marquee Club in 1971. You can watch it online. He’s playing a Lucite Dan Armstrong guitar, and it sounds incredible. Unfortunately, it was

stolen years ago, so I bought a '69 just like it and brought it in, and he used it on some tracks.

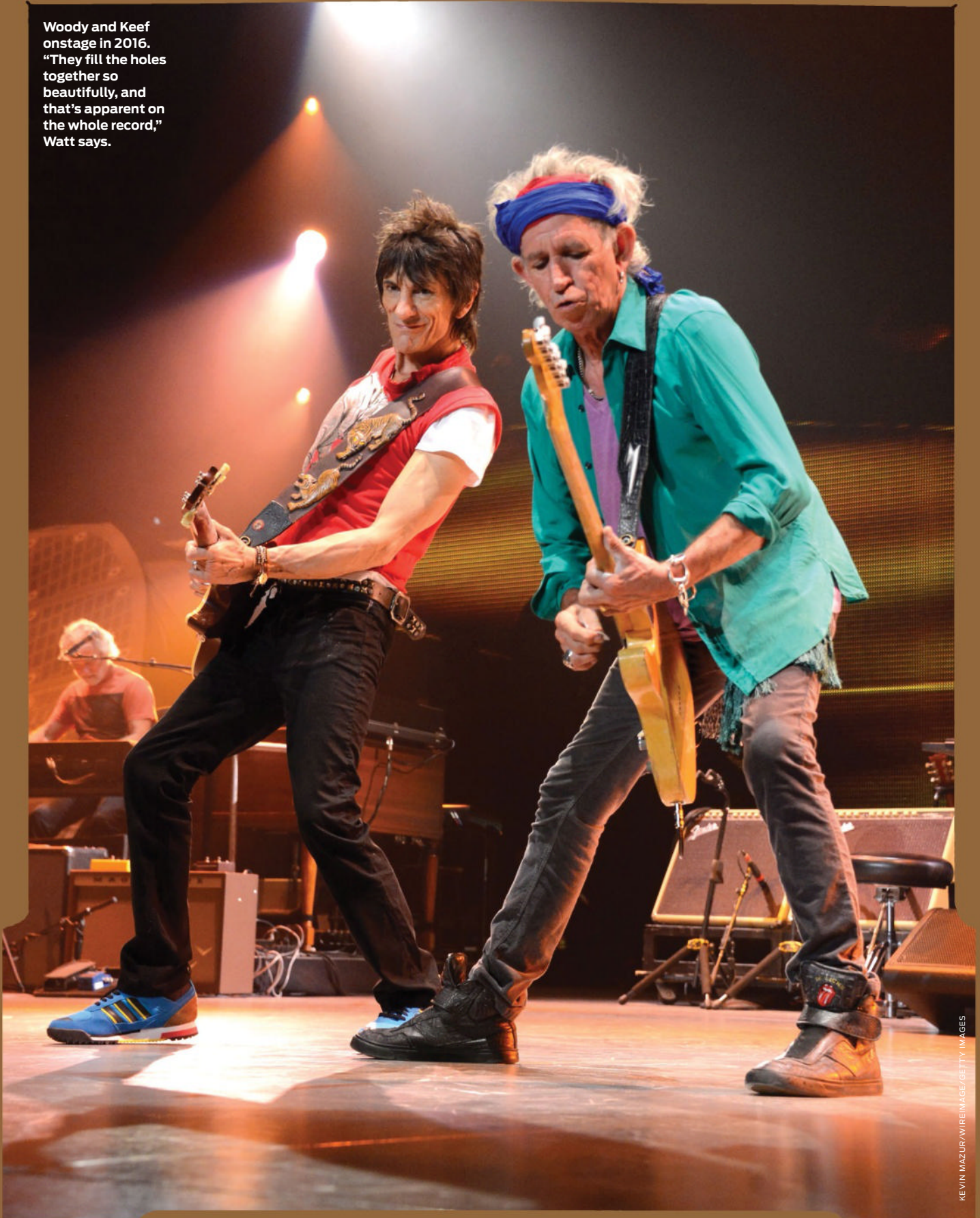
Keith also used a '55 TV Yellow Gibson single-cut Les Paul Junior on “Angry” and “Mess

It Up.” Ronnie used the Junior on “Bite My Head Off,” but most of the time he played his Strat, which is either a '54 or '55, and the Zemaitis he used on the Faces’ hit “Stay With Me.” It was pretty funny. Every time he plugged the Zemaitis in, we’d make him play “Stay With Me,” and everyone would sing along at the top their lungs.

One of the best tracks on the album is Mick and Keith’s powerful duet of Muddy Waters’ classic “Rollin’ Stone” [called “Rolling Stone Blues” on the album]. From what I understand, that was your idea.

Yeah. During our overdub sessions, Keith and I started talking in a more personal way. One day I just asked him

Woody and Keef onstage in 2016. "They fill the holes together so beautifully, and that's apparent on the whole record," Watt says.



KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

**Muddy Waters
at Chess Records,
circa 1952.**



how he met Mick, and he told me the story. He said he saw this kid getting on the train in Dartford and under his arm were two albums: *The Best of Muddy Waters* and the first Chuck Berry album. Both were Chess Records imports, which were almost impossible to find in England at that time. Keith said, Mick “was either going to be my best friend or I was going to rob him.” [laughs] They, of course, wound up being best friends and started playing together.

But *The Best of Muddy Waters* was important for another reason. One of the tracks on the album — “Rollin’ Stone” gave the band its name. The idea of asking them to play that song didn’t hit me right away, but the germ of the idea was there.

So when did the idea of having Mick and Keith play “Rolling Stone Blues” click?

It didn’t happen immediately. One day, while hanging out with Keith in New York, he was sitting with me talking. But I found it hard to focus on his words because he had an old Martin acoustic in hand, and he was playing the most primal blues I had ever heard in my life.

Not many people can play blues like that. Robert Johnson could, Muddy Waters could, and Keith Richards certainly can. He seemed possessed by something, channeling the essence of the blues. It wasn’t about complexity; it was about having it in your soul, and Keith had it in spades. It was surprising. I never really thought of him playing a slow Robert Johnson blues, but it’s what he really loves. So I made a mental note of it.

After that experience, I told Mick that I thought he and Keith should do a straight acoustic blues for the album. Mick found the idea intriguing but was initially noncommittal, given the many other songs we had to complete.

But as the record started falling into place, I pushed him again on the idea. Sometimes that goes well, and other times it does not. [laughs] Suddenly, I heard a change in his voice, and he said firmly, “I have 23 songs I’m trying to write the lyrics for. I don’t have any blues lyrics.” So I retreated a little bit

**“WE AIMED TO RE-CREATE
THE VIBE OF MUDDY’S
ORIGINAL. IF THERE WERE
TWO GUYS WHO COULD DO IT,
IT WAS KEITH AND MICK”**

and didn’t push. That’s where things stood with Mick.

So what led to the change?

At one point, Keith began telling me the story about how the band got its name, and as he was telling me that, I just asked the dumbest question: Have you guys ever played “Rollin’ Stone” before? He thought for a second and said, no they hadn’t — which sorta surprised him. They had played every other Muddy Waters song, but ironically, never that song. And that’s when I pounced and asked whether he would consider playing it for this record. Keith said he knew it backwards and forward, but the decision ultimately rested with Mick.

I said, “Give me a second and I’ll call him.” So I went in the other room, and I called him. I was excited and said, “You don’t have to write any blues lyrics

because you can just tackle Muddy’s ‘Rollin’ Stone.’”

There was a long pause on the phone. At first, I thought he was going to be angry that I was pushing

the blues idea again, but then he just said, “Okay, when do you want to do it?” We were finishing up our overdub session, so I suggested doing it that day.

As Mick made his way to the studio, Keith began playing the song. And now the hairs were raising on everyone’s arms in the studio. They were finally going to record the song that inspired the band’s name.

The sound of Keith’s guitar is so powerful on that track. How did you accomplish that mixture of acoustic resonance and electric distortion? It’s undeniably unique.

I made the decision with Paul Lamalfa, my engineer, that we would record on tape, because there was no better way to capture the essence of the moment. The goal was to capture the magic of two musicians in a room. We aimed to re-create the vibe of Muddy’s original



Mick and Keith performing as a duo during the Stones' 1969 U.S. tour, a vibe captured on Hackney Diamonds' "Rolling Stone Blues."

recording, and if there were ever two guys who could do it, it was Keith and Mick.

Keith, along with his guitar tech, Pierre De Beauport, and I listened closely to Muddy's original recording as a reference. We were like, "Is that an electric guitar?" It seemed unlikely; he was playing acoustic back then, yet the sound was so heavy because of the way he played and how it was recorded.

So I said, "I have an acoustic 1930 Gibson L-4 with me," which is like the L-1 guitar associated with Robert Johnson. Keith was like, "Oh, let me see it." And so he started playing the song. He could play it beautifully, but it's not an easy guitar to play. It was made before guitars had truss rods, so there was no way to really adjust the action.

But this is when the universe does its thing. We started looking at these two pictures of Robert Johnson. There's the one of him with a cigarette, and there's the other one of him with the hat [*shot from*] further away. And we noticed in the photo of him with the cigarette that he had a capo on the second fret of his guitar. Keith caught that. So we all asked, Why is there a capo on the second fret? What does that mean? Most

Robert Johnson songs are in the key of E and A. We theorized that maybe he tuned down the guitar a full step, to D, and put a capo on the second fret to bring the guitar back up to E so that the strings were looser and he could play and bend easier. So Pierre did exactly that with the L-4, then he handed it to Keith, who found it played effortlessly — like butter.

Then we debated whether to record using an acoustic or an electric guitar. Meanwhile, Mick was on his way, and we needed a plan. Ultimately, we settled on trying it both ways and deciding later. We set up microphones for the L-4's acoustic sound, and Pierre added a lipstick pickup to it, so we could rout a signal through all four amps in Keith's setup, located in another room. The funny thing was, the volume was so loud from Keith's amps that the electric sound from the other room began bleeding into the acoustic mic, creating a fantastic blend.

Mick used a bullet microphone for his harmonica, that we routed through one of my Dumble-modified Fender Champs from the '50s. He also used another mic for his vocals. However,

as they played, Mick kept moving closer to Keith. Then Mick stood up, rendering the vocal mic unnecessary because he was right next to the room microphone that was capturing Keith's guitar. Ultimately, the recording consisted primarily of this single room mic, along with a subtle mix of the four amps and a touch of the bullet microphone, which added an extra layer of edge to the harmonica.

Neither of them wore headphones. It was simply the two of them, playing together. By the fourth take, they began to anticipate each other's moves and complete each other's musical sentences. While Keith crafted guitar licks, Mick responded on the harmonica, and they synchronized perfectly. It was an incredible demonstration of their yin-and-yang chemistry that had been developed over six decades. Without overstating it, I feel this recording encapsulates the essence of their enduring relationship.

You were a witness to a genuine moment of music history.

It was heavy. It's probably the most important thing I'll ever record. 🎸

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SEA CHANGE

After he regretted not playing more guitar on his solo albums, **Chris Shiflett** assembled a six-string dream team for *Lost at Sea*. The result is a treat for the ears.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOEY MARTINEZ

Rock stars tend to get a pass for being all over the place, literally and figuratively. But no one can accuse Chris Shiflett of being anything other than dedicated to guitar playing. As Dave Grohl's wingman in Foo Fighters for nearly 25 years, he's wrangled a variety of guitars. But he's also filled all of his free time from that band making music both with other acts and as a solo artist. **"More and more, I just like to be playing all the time and working on music,"** Shiflett tells *Guitar Player* from his home in Southern California, where he's preparing for the October release of *Lost at Sea* (Blue Élan), his third solo album, amid another busy season with his day gig.

a couple songs at a time and then bring back whatever we recorded and tweak stuff and add stuff. I think I recorded most of the guitar solos back home, and then we'd send that back to Jaron. We just worked on it over the course of a year or so to get it where we wanted it to be. The goal was to get into different territory, but also not feel like I couldn't let all my influences shine, and not think about whether we're making a rock record or an Americana record. I feel like I get there a little bit more on each one.

You also called up a dream team of Nashville players. That had to have played a big part in it.

Yeah, and we're all so different from each other. When I'm in the room with those guys, when we're recording the basic tracks, I just love it, 'cause I'm holding down the song, the chords and what I wrote, and trying to get good takes of that. And then you've got those other guys, who are just weaving in and out of different things. We'll do a couple takes, and then they'll switch it up and we'll do a couple more. You wind up having this immense batch of choices. They give you all these colors, and you can pick and choose what needs to be in there, bouncing off whatever I'm doing.

You recorded the basic tracks live in a room with just those guys?

All of it, yeah. Some of the guitar solos were in the room, like "Dead and Gone." For "Where'd Everybody Go," me and Nathan worked out a big, long harmonized guitar solo. It's my little homage to Thin Lizzy. It's just me and him playing over the basic tracks together. I'd done a demo of it, and I don't even remember how we landed on us doing it together, but Nathan's doing all that cool slide stuff through it, and I'm playing the more riffy thing. We worked it out quickly. It's Nashville — all those guys are incredible players, so he picked it up right away. And then some of the tracks I would take back to 606 and write 'em out a little bit more.

It's licks on top of licks right out of the gate with "Dead and Gone," and then your solo comes in with this elastic tone.

That was just in the room from the first session we did. I had an [*Electro-Harmonix*] Micro POG pedal that normally I'll only use sparingly, here and there. It doesn't really sound good to play that thing with chords, but for that song I just left it on the whole time. It's just kind of nasty and fucked up. You've

SHIFLETT IS WELL acquainted with juggling responsibilities. During his late-'90s tenure with speedy punks No Use For a Name, and for a number of years as a Foo Fighter, he also played guitar with the punk supergroup/cover band Me First and the Gimme Gimmes. Since those days, though, he has embraced the Bakersfield country sound and spun it into his own country-rock hybrid.

On *Lost at Sea*, he delivers it in spades, with a little help from a few hired guns. After playing all the guitars on his two previous solo albums — 2017's twangy alt-country *West Coast Town* and 2019's more rocking *Hard Lessons* — Shiflett chose to surround himself with a trio of Nashville's top hired guns: Tom Bukovac, Charlie Worsham and Nathan Keeterle. With Jaron Johnston of country-rock trio the Cadillac Three producing, Shiflett and his crew let loose on 10 songs packed with layers of guitars, all of it recorded in Nashville and at the Foo Fighters' own Studio 606 in L.A.

"There's a lot of guitar playing that I'm proud of on this album, and not just mine," Shiflett says. "Charlie's guitar playing and banjo and mandolin are a big part of it, as is Nathan Keeterle and Tom Bukovac. All those cats really add a lot to the guitar-playing soup. I always look back at my records and go, 'Why didn't I play more guitar?' And I don't feel that way about this one."

The guitar work on *Lost at Sea* feels loose, like you let yourself off the leash.

That's always the goal, but it can be kind of difficult to pull off in the studio. Dynamically, I think this one sits in a slightly different place, but I also think the way we made it probably plays into that because we didn't just go in and make a record in one sitting. I would go out to Nashville and record



Purchased secondhand, Shiflett's paisley T-style electric is in fact not a product of the Corona, California-based company, despite the Fender decal. It's currently loaded with Lindy Fralin pickups, which "brought it to life," Shiflett says.



got Buk doing that more kind of swampy tremolo guitar thing and then Charlie playing the acoustic stuff, so it just sat nice with it. And then I just loved it on the solo, too. It's got that tweaky, almost keyboard-sounding thing to it.

What was it like being the ringleader in that room?

I don't view myself as the ringleader in that situation. I mean, in a sense, it is my session, but I'm leaning on everybody else in the room a lot and I don't want to meddle too much in what they're doing. I like when you've got a bunch of different guitar players on a track, because on previous records, where I've been playing all of the electric guitar, I start to get bored with myself. I like

With his Gretsch Masterbuilt White Falcon. Shiflett says he was drawn to the brand by Brian Setzer, noting "When the Stray Cats came along, that was the one non-rock band I was obsessed with."

"I ALWAYS LOOK AT MY RECORDS AND GO, 'WHY DIDN'T I PLAY MORE GUITAR?' I DON'T FEEL THAT WAY ABOUT THIS ONE"

to have other people bringing their ideas to it. I don't know how much they get policed on other sessions, but I don't think I said shit to any of 'em about what they were planning to do. It was "just let it roll and see what happens." There was never anything I didn't like or felt like I needed to change.

Songs like "Black Top White Lines" are so riff driven.

I feel like of all the songs, that's where I hear Jaron's influence most.

Big time. When we wrote that song, it was me and him and John Osborne from Brothers Osborne, and he had already demoed the riff. We were thinking, What should we work on? He played it, and we were all just like, Yeah, that's what we need to work on. *[laughs]*

There's something there that felt fresh to me and different, and I just felt like I wanna chase this down and make a whole record here. So those songs were the roadmap for the rest of it.

Were there any moments where something those guys did changed your perspective on a song?

On "Damage Control," Charlie's acoustic guitar part wound up being the hook for the whole thing. It immediately took it into a completely different territory for me, and I think maybe he doubled it with a banjo or did some banjo thing in there too. I keep meaning to sit down and isolate that track and try to figure out what he did, because that was not on the demo; that was just him being Charlie.

I was probably halfway through listening to the track before it dawned on me that it was a reggae song.

You know, when I wrote that song, I was thinking of late-stage Clash — even *Cut the Crap*—era Clash. There are a couple of good songs on that record, and the production is so bad in a mid-'80s way that I actually kind of like. It's so thin and janky. And I remember saying to Jaron, "Let's make it sound like that." Which we didn't *[laughs]*, but I took it back home, busted out my Echoplex and just went crazy, hitting stuff and sending it through the Echoplex and trying to make dub sounds.

You've got the signature Fender Telecaster and a bunch of other stuff going on. Let's talk about what you used on the record.

When I would go out to Nashville, I used my butterscotch Custom Shop Tele that I've had for years. It's been my main Telecaster for a long time.





STEPPING OUT

BY HENRY YATES & JAMIE DICKSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM GASSON

TAKE A TOUR of Chris Shiflett's solo pedalboard and you'll find this sometime punk isn't shy of a stomptbox, with his collection spanning from MXR's Phase 95 to the DigiTech Drop and Wampler Tumnus. But the biggest departure in his modern

club-show rig, the guitarist reminds us, is the absence of the traditional backline motherhip.

"Oh, man, this setup that I'm playing with now is so crazy. I just got one of those GigRig G3 channel switchers, and I'm not even playing through an amp



right now — I've got a Strymon Iridium instead. You can arrange it however you want, but I have it so it's all the effects first and then a Strymon Deco, then the Iridium, the Strymon TimeLine and the Strymon Flint. And then I have it coming out stereo on one of those Walrus Canvas DIs."

Isn't the Iridium a big departure for a valve amp aficionado? "100 percent," Shiflett affirms. "Of course, my preference would be a

wall of amps. They're beautiful and everything. But you're hemmed in with budgetary realities in this solo thing, y'know? And just to know that every night, the tone is gonna be unaffected by power or air in the room or somebody's bad EQ-ing. I mean, I guess it still could be, but you know what I mean — it's just a little more direct, a little easier with the Iridium. And those things sound fucking great, man. They really do."





Shiflett's current main guitar is this 1953-spec Fender Custom Shop Blackguard Telecaster that features suitably authentic ageing of the maple fretboard. He says it's "that classic Butterscotch Tele with pretty hot pickups."



“It’s been my main Telecaster for a long time,” Shiflett says of his Custom Shop Tele, which got heavy use at the Nashville sessions.

Because I was just flying out there for, like, two days or something, I would literally just bring that and some pedals. Jaron would bring some amps down. I don’t even remember what the amps were — they were boutiquey little things he had — and I would pretty much record all the basic tracks with that and whatever pedals I had laying around. It was the [EHX] Micro POG, a [Menatone] Red Snapper, probably a [Strymon] TimeLine delay — you know, just grab some stuff, throw it in there. Usually I have an [Xotic] EP Booster on whatever board I’m using, and probably your go-to MXR flanger or phaser. Then back home, I’m sure I used my Fender “Clever” Telecaster, my fancy signature model. I’m sure it got on there, along with some Les Pauls. I should really keep notes on that stuff, but I don’t. [laughs]

Do you get into pedal layering?

In the studio, I just find the tone I want and go. Live, I like to use a lot. Across the board, I like amp gain more than I like pedal overdrives. In my solo stuff, I’m usually playing a little combo, like

a Princeton Reverb, so I wind up using overdrives with that. In Foo Fighters, I’m A/B’ing live between a Friedman and a Vox, and I have the Vox set to a kind of jangly tone, not really gained out, so I’ll throw a KTR Klon in front of that sometimes, but that’s about it. With the Friedman, I just run it hot, at seven or eight on the gain, and then I use my volume knob on the guitar to roll it on or off if I wanna clean it up.

“THERE HAVE BEEN POINTS WHEN I FELT LIKE I STAGNATED. THE WAY OUT OF THAT IS JUST TO PLAY ALL THE TIME”

Between Foo Fighters and your solo work, you’re constantly busy. Does that help or hinder your playing?

It has been easy at points in my life, when I’m on a break or something, to not pick up my guitar for a few days. There

have been points when I felt like I hit plateaus and stagnated a little bit. And for me, the way out of that, or the way to avoid that entirely, is just to play all the time. I think that the older I get, I become aware of the idea that time is running out, and there’s a lot I want to do, musically. I’m so lucky to get to do this all the time that I just want to do it all the time. ■

ONE & FROM & THE & HEART

Grieving the loss of his grandparents and friend Joey DeFrancesco, jazz guitar ace **Dan Wilson** found solace in music. On *Things Eternal*, he dazzles on both a diverse array of covers and on originals that “memorialize the folks that I lost.”

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANE WYNN

THERE WAS NO denying Dan Wilson’s talents, nor the diversity of his repertoire, when he released *Vessel of Wood and Earth* in 2021. They shone through on every track. The sheer speed, incendiary single-note flights and swing factor that the Akron, Ohio-based guitarist demonstrated on tunes like “The Rhythm Section” and “The Reconstruction Beat” marked him as a new talent to watch, as did the impeccable, Pat Martino-esque picking technique he flashed on “Who Shot John.” Elsewhere on that outing, his third as a leader, Wilson balanced those fleet-fingered numbers with two timely

message songs in Marvin Gaye’s “Inner City Blues” and “Save the Children,” the latter grafted onto the stirring intro of John Coltrane’s “After the Rain.” He lent a subtle touch of reharmonization to Stevie Wonder’s “Bird of Beauty,” then delved into an intimate duet reading of “Cry Me a River” with the soulful, gospel-influenced vocalist Joy Brown, and two other duets with bassist-producer Christian McBride on Pat Metheny’s buoyant “James” and the Ted Daffan country classic “Born to Lose,” a tune made famous by Ray Charles on his 1962 album, *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*. Indeed, Wilson seemed like the complete package.

Six years earlier, I made note of his talent when I had the honor of being on a panel of judges for the 2015 Wes Montgomery International Guitar Competition. The five finalists who played that October day, backed by Pat Martino’s organ trio of Hammond B3 ace Pat Bianchi and drummer Carmen Intorre, were all accomplished young players with bright futures ahead of them. But two stood out from the pack: Wilson, who impressed the judges with his George Benson-esque single-note flurries and deep blues feel; and the eventual winner, Pasquale Grasso, who stunned with his incredible fluency and Joe Pass-ian command of the instrument [see *Guitar Player* October 2022].

Wilson would go on to join a group led by Joey DeFrancesco — he appeared on the late organist’s Grammy-nominated 2017 album, *Project Freedom* — and later toured with bassist Christian McBride’s Tip City. McBride would serve as producer on *Vessels of Wood and Earth*, releasing the album on his newly formed imprint Brother Mister Productions through Mack Avenue Music Group.

Now comes *Things Eternal*, the guitarist’s follow-up on Brother Mister/Mack Avenue. Co-produced by McBride, it once again showcases Wilson’s wide-ranging musical tastes in his unique takes on familiar tunes from the Beatles, Sting, Stevie Wonder, Michael Brecker, Freddie Hubbard and McCoy Tyner, along with some inspired original compositions. And as before, the blazing Benonesque single-note lines and Martino-style pick-every-note technique are very much in effect on his fourth overall effort as a leader.

***Things Eternal* once again showcases your musical eclecticism in tackling tunes by everyone from the Beatles, Stevie Wonder and Sting to Freddie Hubbard, McCoy Tyner and Herbie Hancock.**

Yeah, there’s so much stuff out there. And just to be clear, I’m always going to want to swing, I don’t want to lose that. That’s always going to be my foundation. But I’m definitely not going to ignore the myriad styles of music.





When I went to South Africa in 2018 with Joey DeFrancesco, I got a chance to talk to the people there and just kind of get their take on life and how they grew up. So many of them spoke six, seven languages. It's something everybody did, so they're able to communicate with more people. And that's the way I look at music. I like to be musically multilingual, to be able to converse intelligently across musical styles.

That explains how Stevie Wonder's "Smile, Please" fits so nicely next to Herbie Hancock's "Tell Me a Bedtime Story" in the album's sequencing.

Exactly. And of course, that message for "Smile, Please" is good to hear when you're grieving. And that song has all the elements that I look for in music: It has a well-constructed melody, interesting harmony and a groove. That's all I need.

So, Stevie Wonder? I put him right right up there with Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn and composers like that.

I'm curious about your decision to use Glenn Zaleski on Fender Rhodes throughout this new recording rather than having him play piano.

That was completely by accident. The piano that they had at the studio was in pretty poor condition. I planned on having Glenn on Fender Rhodes for just some of the tracks, but he played the piano in the studio and he was like, "Yeah, man, we got to do the whole session on Rhodes." He said, "This piano's terrible."

So it was kind of a happy accident, and it really set the tone for the entire record. It just gave the album a different vibe, especially coming from my last record.

You're on fire on Freddie Hubbard's "Birdlike," right out of the gate. It reminded me of George Benson's "The Cooker," that opening track from his great 1967 album, *The George Benson Cookbook*.

Oh man! [*He sings Benson's solo on that uptempo romp note for note.*] I just saw George this past week. We were talking about *Cookbook* and *It's Uptown*. Man, every time I hear those records I feel like I'm 13 years old again, with my ear by the speaker, trying to figure out what's going on.

You obviously have a friendship with George Benson. Did you ever sit down and study with him?

I feel like I've studied with Benson, because I have studied his playing on records. But we never sat down and went through things. That would be a dream come true, but it hasn't happened yet.

Dan Wilson with his Benedetto Pat Martino Signature Model guitar. "I've had some glorious moments onstage with that guitar," he says.



What's the story behind the title of your tune "Since a Hatchet Was a Hammer"? That's an expression you don't hear much anymore.

That came from my great-aunt Mary. She was 98 when she passed. I went to visit her in the nursing home once and I was like, "How you doing, Aunt Mary?" And she said, "Is that Dan? I haven't seen that boy since a hatchet was a hammer."

Throughout this new record, I'm hearing that easy doubling up of the tempo on your single-note playing. You have it down so well. To my ear it's Benson-esque, or maybe even Pat Martino-esque. It's definitely coming out of that pick-every-note school, as opposed to a hammer-on legato style of playing.

Well, I was a drummer first, so I always wanted that percussive attack on the instrument. I always wanted to be able to pick every note. It's not always the best musical decision to pick every note, but that's the key for me. I guess I'm coming from a different perspective. I love drums more than anything, and that's how I approach my instrument.

Speaking of your instrument, what is that black guitar pictured on the album cover? That's the Pat Martino Signature Model, from Benedetto. When I got the endorsement from Benedetto, they sent me several guitars to play, and I tested them out on Joey's gig and on the McBride gig. I had trouble with some of them feeding back, so I couldn't really use them on those gigs. But then I tried out that Pat Martino model and settled on that one.

I've had some glorious moments onstage with that guitar. When I started with Benedetto, I first tried out the Benny, which was really nice, but it fed back too much. And, like I was saying, I needed to have something that I could speak different languages with. Benedetto had another one called the GA-35, which was like a Gibson ES-335. But they discontinued that model, so they were like, "Why don't you try the Pat Martino Signature Model?" I played that and I was like, Whoa! Yup, this is it right here.



What guitars did you go through before you even got involved with Benedetto?

I had a Gibson Howard Roberts Fusion guitar, and then I had a Gibson ES-446. I loved that guitar, but I broke it and I got it repaired, but it was never the same afterward. So I sold it. I still have the Howard Roberts. That guitar has great sentimental value, because when I started kind of making gains on the instrument, my uncle gave it to me.

So you never went through a period of playing solidbodies? You went right to Howard Roberts?

Well, my first guitar was a cheap Fender Squier, and then I went to a Joe Pass guitar. And then I got the Howard Roberts.

What gauge strings do you have on your Benedetto Pat Martino Signature? I know that Pat Martino had very heavy-gauge strings — 15s.

I got 11s. Yeah, Mr. Benson was talking about that last week. He was like, "Brother, if you tried to play Pat Martino's guitar you wouldn't be able to

"I LOVE DRUMS MORE THAN ANYTHING, AND THAT'S HOW I APPROACH MY INSTRUMENT"

play it. He had ropes on it." Yeah, 15s... I couldn't do it. I guess he wanted the instrument to have some fight in it.

Your soloing throughout *Things Eternal* is incredibly accomplished. Your single-note flow on tunes like "Tell Me a Bedtime Story" and "Birdlike" is just astounding. Where do you get that from?

Honestly, that comes from lessons I learned before I ever set foot in a jazz club. Growing up in church, I was always able to play single lines easily, but they weren't necessarily making much sense. They were fast and precise, but the content was kind of lacking. There were some great, great guitar players in the church that I came up in. I could name 30 of them offhand. So, you know, I was getting my butt kicked. I was getting a lot of those lessons like, "No, you gotta play melodies with those lines. They can't just be fast." They'd pull me aside and go, "Look, Brother Wilson, I'm glad you can play that stuff really fast and clear, but it has to make sense. It just sounds like you're running up and down the neck because you can." But



eventually, as I matured and grew under their tutelage, I started to realize the value in being able to craft a melody in my solos. Because nobody can remember the intricate details of a super-long line, but you may remember a melody that pops out in the middle of a solo.

The title track from *Things Eternal* represents another side of your playing. It's a gorgeous ballad that showcases your accompaniment skills behind a vocalist, à la Joe Pass with Ella Fitzgerald.

Oh, man! I love those records they did together. I've always loved to play behind a singer. One of my mentors is Russell Malone, and I think that's one of his greatest skills. And I learned a ton just from listening to him accompany Diana Krall. He also worked with Nancy Wilson, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight... So just listening to him and gaining wisdom on how to play behind a vocalist has been really valuable for me. I've sat down with Russell with two guitars. I play with him quite a bit. I learned a ton from him.

I was surprised by your gospel-tinged interpretation of that Sting tune, "Let Your Soul Be Your Pilot" [from 1996's *Mercury Falling*].

Yeah, when I listened to the lyrics, I immediately thought, "This is not just Sting, this is Rev. Gordon Sumner." [*Gordon Sumner is Sting's birth name.*] I mean, he brought that from somewhere else.

When I heard Sting's original recording of it, in 2021, it was three days before my son was born and my dad just had a major stroke. He was paralyzed on the whole right side of his body and he is just now getting it back and learning how to walk again. So it was a period when some heavy stuff was going on, and I was just grappling with those realities. And the lyrics to that tune really kind of harkened back to some lessons I learned in my upbringing.



**"STEVIE WONDER?
I PUT HIM UP THERE
WITH DUKE ELLINGTON
AND BILLY STRAYHORN
AND COMPOSERS
LIKE THAT"**



information and the compass spins between heaven and hell / Let your soul be your pilot and it'll guide you well." So when I heard those lyrics, I was like, "Oh, yeah, Sting's been in somebody's church.

So I put Jessica Yafanaro on the melody, and that's why my solo was not that extensive. Because my feeling was, This is not the time to be playing too much stuff. I wanted the message of the

It says: "When the doctors failed to heal you, when no medicine chest can make you well / when no counsel leads to comfort, when there are no more lies they can tell / When there's no more

lyric to shine though. And I'm thankful that I was able to call up my man Nigel Hall, because he really brought that kind of raw gospel element I was looking for.

You wrote some equally thoughtful lyrics on your very moving ballad "Things Eternal," which is sung beautifully by Jessica Yafanaro. The line that resonates with me is, "Things on the surface, they all pass away/Have hope for tomorrow but live today. Things eternal endure always."

Those lyrics kind of came to me in a fever dream that I had. I had a really bad fever and I sweating in my sleep, and then I had this really vivid dream that all my relatives were around the table and we were having dinner and I was able to talk to my grandmother, who had passed. It was crazy, because it was a really vivid dream, like I was really there. That happened a couple of times,



Wilson poses with his Benedetto Pat Martino and a few amps, including a vintage Fender Champ and Music Man combo.



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GUITARS



and then one of the times when I woke up from this fever dream, I just started writing down these lyrics. And that's how the song came about.

So that was kind of therapeutic for me, dealing with all the loss I had been experiencing. My grandmother had passed, and then I lost my grandfather when I was on the road with Joey DeFrancesco. And then Joey's sudden, untimely death last summer was another shot. So for a couple of months I was kind of just walking around in a fog, and my wife was like, "Hey, it's like you're here, but you're not here." At that point I was like, Okay, I gotta get this under control. So I started seeing

a grief counselor and writing this music at the same time. And this tune was a way to kind of memorialize the folks that I lost and to just get back into a good headspace again. It was a really important message that I wanted to get across, and I think in the future I'll be writing a lot more lyrics.

You recently participated in a Joey DeFrancesco tribute concert in Joey's hometown of Phoenix. What was that like?

Man, it was really an emotional experience. I had a tough time keeping it together. But there was a lot of joy in the room. It was good, because the grief could have, like, sucked the air

out of the room, but just being around guys like Troy Roberts, Lewis Nash and Ronnie Foster and seeing how much love they have for Joey — that made it a joyful experience.

It was one of the first times that I've shed tears on the stage. Because you start playing and you get to thinking about how much he did for us, musically, and for our careers and personally. It's just overwhelming sometimes. But Joey, when he got down to business onstage, there was nothing like it. And the hook-up that he had in our band with drummer Jason Brown — it was like they were separated at birth. They shared a brain. A lot of times they wouldn't even be looking at each other and they'd just be hitting the same thing over and over. It was crazy to see. I had a beautiful time in Joey's band. I would not trade it for the world. 🎸

“GEORGE BENSON SAID, ‘BROTHER, YOU WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO PLAY PAT MARTINO’S GUITAR. HE HAD ROPES ON IT’”



DAN WILSON THINGS ETERNAL



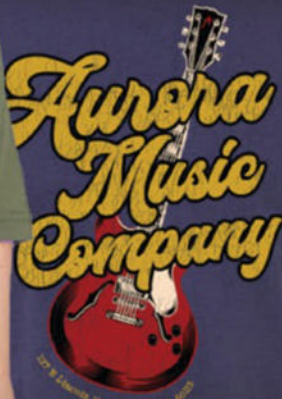
The cover of *Things Eternal* shows Wilson with his Benedetto Pat Martino and family photographs.

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GOING DEEP

A lesson in baritone funk guitar with Mark Lettieri.

BY CHRIS BUONO

IT'S NO SECRET that social media is a powerful vehicle for informing and influencing musicians. From ax-wielding upstarts attempting to show the world what they can do to established players giving curious fans a glimpse into their process as they flesh out ideas, the platform is ripe for opportunity. The catch is that you will be met with a discerning audience that has endless options to follow. To rise above the pack, it helps to have a *thing*.

Enter the proverbial new sheriff in town: multi-Grammy winning guitarist Mark Lettieri. With no interest in sounding like anyone else, and equipped with a production-line Danelectro baritone guitar — a six-string instrument with a longer neck and scale length that is meant for playing in much lower tunings than a conventional guitar — Lettieri showed us he had the goods when he started to drop a consistent barrage of infectious clean-tone, funk-style riffs played over what he calls “Minneapolis grooves.” His playing made an immediate impact and fueled a pair of albums: *Deep: The Baritone Sessions* and *Deep: The Baritone Sessions, Vol. 2*. In this lesson, Mark guides us through his world of baritone funk guitar using some choice riffs from both releases, played by the man himself in the very room where it all started.

Mark’s initial foray into baritone guitar playing dates back to 2008, when a producer recommended the option during a recording session. The simple textural part he tracked using an Ibanez Mike Mushok MMM1 signature baritone



guitar planted a seed that sprouted every few years, starting in 2011, when his group Snarky Puppy were recording their 2012 album, *groundUP*. Once again, by way of someone else’s vision — this time Pup’s Grand Poobah, Michael League — fellow Snarky guitarists Bob Lanzetti and Chris McQueen laid down a baritone part on a tune called “Minjor” using League’s Eastwood Sidejack guitar. Another few years passed before Lettieri adopted the baritone as his main guitar.

His next encounter came when he played League’s Eastwood baritone on Snarky Puppy’s 2016 album *Family Dinner, Vol. 2*, on which the Pups collaborated with the late David Crosby on a tune called “Somebody Home.” With baritone rooting itself in the Snarky Puppy production playbook, Mark took it upon himself to procure his first bari, the infamous Danelectro Baritone in black sparkle finish.

Equipped with additional various low-tuned guitars of varying scale lengths by Supro and Bacci, Lettieri continued down the rabbit hole with episodes of baritone playing, albeit ancillary, on his own solo efforts, starting with 2016’s *Spark and Echo*. But the infectious, groove-laden clean-tone playing that would become a staple in

his burgeoning solo career can be traced to two pivotal scenarios. First, the bonus track “Jefe,” from Snarky Puppy’s Grammy-winning album *Culcha Vulcha*, featured Mark playing a bari for the opening chicken-picked ostinato, with a superb pocket and a cutting to-die-for clean tone. That tone, as well as the attack Lettieri heard during playbacks as the session rolled on, inspired him to incorporate this new approach into his own guitar-playing video offerings on social media. He started with Facebook and eventually shifted to Instagram, using an MXR Bass Octave Deluxe, a Kemper Profiler amp and some choice synth bass playing in the rhythm tracks. It was at this juncture that the journey to the critically acclaimed *Deep: The Baritone Sessions* and the Grammy-nominated *Deep: The Baritone Sessions, Vol. 2* began.

“The beauty of writing riffs with the baritone is you can combine registers to make things sound more interesting,” Mark states. To illustrate this concept, he fires off the verse to “Magnetar” (Ex. 1) from *Vol. 2*, using the syncopated E Dorian riff to show off the value in defining two distinct ranges. To cover the highs, there are the biting high-string chords, such as the Em13 fragment played on the 16th-note pickup to bar 1,

as well as the tritone on the second 16th note of beat 4 in bar 1. The single-note blues-scale riffing in the same measure provides the lows, along with the G, A \flat and A major 3rd dyads that bridge bars 1 and 2.

A note about pitch transpositions: In this first example and several that follow, Mark's bari is in A standard tuning (low to high, A, D, G, C, E, A), which is regular (E) standard tuning transposed down a perfect 5th. While you visualize and think of all the notes and chords "normally," as Mark does — as if you were playing a regular six-string in standard tuning — everything sounds a perfect 5th lower. Think of it as "capo negative 7." Other examples are in B standard tuning (low to high: B, E, A, D, F \sharp , B), for which everything sounds a perfect 4th lower than written, or "capo negative 5," if you will.

Lettieri goes on to explain, "I use both A standard and B standard baritone tunings. It depends on the particular song and where I want the pitches and chord voicings to sit, relative to the key." He illustrates this dual-option approach by offering two riffs in the different aforementioned tunings, the first being the main riff from "Daggertooth" (*Deep: The Baritone Sessions*), shown in **Ex. 2**. Played as if it were in the key of B minor, using A standard tuning, the riff sounds a 5th lower, in the key of E minor. Next Mark plays another selection from that record, the chromatically descending motif in "Gigantactis" (**Ex. 3**), for which he employs the higher B standard tuning, which transposes his E-minor riff down a 4th, to B minor.

Musically, notice in both riffs how Mark employs the tried-and-true call-and-response phrasing construction and uses accented staccato perfect-4th dyad stabs played on the 1st and 2nd strings — a staple in his lauded funk rhythm guitar playbook. Mark adds, "When I'm writing tunes on baritone, I want to explore the low end while keeping the high end present, to keep it bright and funky." Notice the guitarist's use of palm muting (P.M.) on some of the low-string notes, which shortens their duration and keeps things tight by

Ex. 1 A standard tuning (low to high: A, D, G, C, E, A). Everything sounds a perfect 5th lower.

Ex. 2 A standard tuning (down a 5th)

preventing these notes from ringing along with the higher notes and chords that follow.

Shifting gears, Mark explains, "In some songs, the parts are just riffs, such as the verse in 'Gigantactis' or the chorus in 'Tidal Tail,' from the second record." **Ex. 4** addresses the former, as it lays out the tune's strategically spaced E

Dorian riff that continues to follow the guitarist's full-spectrum baritone ethos, coupled with some open notes on the higher strings that he intentionally allows to ring. **Ex. 5** maps out a 2nd-position F \sharp Aeolian riff Mark plays in "Tidal Tail," which he performs almost exclusively with downstrokes. At this point, if you're thinking about how the

bass player fits in the equation, according to Mark, “Wes [Stephenson] either doubles or counters what I’m playing on his five-string. In many cases he’s the human octave pedal.” Lettieri goes on to summarize, “I love riffs. And because the baritone is so engaging, you don’t need a melody if the riff is good.”

The guitarist adds, “Don’t lose sight of the fact that you’re essentially playing a hockey stick.” Since the early days of the Dano, Supro and Bacci baritone axes, Mark’s cache of low-tuned guitars has expanded to offerings from Hybrid Guitar Co. and Paul Reed Smith. The main difference between whichever stick he chooses these days and his many conventional, albeit smaller, counterparts (including his signature PRS Fiore) is twofold: scale length and string gauge. While a standard electric guitar’s scale length — the distance from the bridge to the nut — generally falls between 24 ¾ and 25 ½ inches, baritone guitars range from 27 to 29 inches. To facilitate the lower B and A standard tunings, you need to use thicker string gauges. Many electric guitarists use string sets that range from .009–.042 and .010–.046 inches, with a traditionally unwound (plain) 3rd string, whereas comparative baritone sets come in at .012–.052 and .013–.056, and almost all boast a wound 3rd string, which is harder to bend. Mark goes even deeper and turns to Dunlop for custom sets that go, low to high, .014, .018, .026, .044, .056 and .068.

Mark’s baritone playing celebrates everyday standard guitar playing approaches and techniques while reaping a unique benefit. As he notes, “When playing a bari with a pick, the tone and attack you get are something only a baritone can deliver.” **Ex. 6** showcases this with the eight-bar chorus from the *Vol. 2* selection “Voyager One,” which features open-position chords with added sonic depth, successions of rapid hammer/pulls and legato finger slides, and some Hendrix-y nested grace-note inflections applied to a pair of Steely Dan–approved maj9(no3) voicings.

Ex. 7 is an excerpt from the intro to “Stoplight Loosejaw” (*Deep: The Baritone Sessions*) and offers another cool instance

Ex. 3 B standard tuning (low to high: B, E, A, D, F#, B). Everything sounds a perfect 4th lower.

of Lettieri's refined use of nested chordal embellishments, this time with hammer-ons applied to ringing chords with open strings. Mark performs this figure with hybrid picking, using his pick in conjunction with his middle and ring fingers to sound the notes of the Em7 chord voicing simultaneously, as a keyboardist would.



“THE BEAUTY OF WRITING RIFFS WITH THE BARITONE IS YOU CAN COMBINE REGISTERS TO MAKE THINGS SOUND MORE INTERESTING”

Adopting the baritone guitar not only bolstered Lettieri's already well-established profile as a player with myriad celebrated attributes; it also helped shine a light on him as an artist keenly aware of his surroundings. He found inspiration in his daughter's Fisher-Price Laugh & Learn and its four-key colored keyboard, where a lone red key served up the concert-pitch D note that would become the top-note voice-leading anchor for the harmonic movement in the song "Red Dwarf" (*Deep: The Baritone Sessions, Vol. 2*). **Ex. 8** provides the roadmap for this baritone

Ex. 5 A standard tuning (down a 5th)

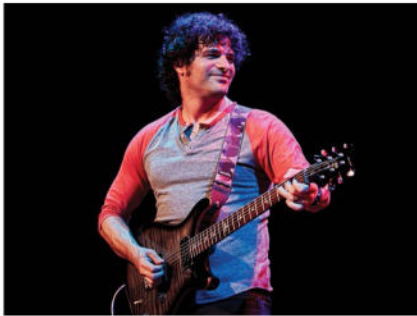
(F#m7)

Ex. 6 A standard tuning (down a 5th)

G5 A

G5 A

A5



“I LOVE RIFFS. AND BECAUSE THE BARITONE IS SO ENGAGING, YOU DON’T NEED A MELODY IF THE RIFF IS GOOD”

chord-de-force, which is made up of variations of triads and tetrads (four-note chords), some being must-know sus2 voicings for anyone looking for a modern fusion sound.

Throughout his journey through the *Deep* albums, Mark uncovered more than a few baritone guitar tenets that he abides by today, some of which are closely associated with his notable good-natured quick wit. For starters, Mark affirms, “You can have a song be a bass line because it’s not gonna feel like a bass line, because it’s not on a bass.” He adds, “A baritone should just be a baritone,” as he makes it clear that he “rarely plays above the 12th fret.” Mark was also forthright about the physicality involved in playing these long-necked instruments, saying “it’s actually work.” Live, Lettieri uses his PRS SE 277 Baritone with Lollar P90 pickups, when not playing his signature Fiore. He plays them both with Dunlop 1.0 mm celluloid picks while plugging into amps that make use of 12-inch speakers, have at least 40 watts of power and allow for plenty of clean headroom. He also adds either an RAF Mirage or Jackson Audio Blossom compressor in his signal path between the guitar and amp to optimally manage the wide dynamic range in his playing and the differences in output levels among his various guitars. ■

Fmaj9no3 F6-9no3 Gmaj9no3 B9sus4

Ex. 7 B standard tuning (down a 4th)

Em7no3 Gsus2

Ex. 8 A standard tuning (down a 5th)

Bbmaj7sus2 G9sus2 D/F#

Dm/F G6sus2 D/F# F9-13

C# D C13 Gmaj9no3 Caug C#aug C#7#5

PETER VAN BREUKEN/GETTY IMAGES

Gigging 101

Playing savvy in the post-pandemic world, with Ben Misterka.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

GIGGING IN THE post-pandemic world is more challenging than before. In the new normal, there are fewer venues, everything is more expensive and everyone has less time to rehearse. Communication is crucial to maximize opportunities. Here are suggestions based on my experience as a bandleader and former editor of *Gig* magazine, as well as input from ace guitarist Ben Misterka. Ben works with acts of all stripes, from hip-hop sensation Lyrics Born to R&B star Goapele, and he leads the fusion ensemble Collectivity using a rotation of top-shelf players, including bassist Uriah Duffy (Fantastic Negrito, Whitesnake, Points North). Preparing to fuse together a group for a gig at one of the most demanding venues — the week-long Burning Man festival — we exchanged ideas about leading a band.

COMMUNICATION KEYS

It's never been easier to communicate, and, in turn, to miscommunicate. For example, group text is a cool tool, but not one to misuse or overuse. We all appreciate a little love and laughter here and there, but try to keep the string on point and timely. Hyper-active text strings are distracting and difficult to track. Show respect. Issues that aren't so time-sensitive or that involve a lot of detailed ideas are better addressed via email, Zoom or in person. Of course, gig opportunities can fly by and need to be addressed ASAP.

Misterka says that “when it comes to being a professional musician, lesson



Ben Misterka leads the fusion ensemble Collectivity.

number one is, Learn to communicate better. A quick reply that you're busy and will answer in full later is better than leaving your bandmates waiting.”

KEEP TRACK

An up-to-date digital performance calendar is crucial. Try to get everyone onboard, or it will be tough to pursue a gig, let alone lock it down. A booking agent won't touch an act that doesn't have an inclusive up-to-date calendar. In my experience, unless a date is blocked out, it's fair game for a gig, and once a show is scheduled, the act is committed. A group calendar is an all-in proposition, as it does more harm than good to have dates appear available that really aren't. The bottom line is an act with a dialed-in calendar has an advantage.

Misterka's approach is a little different, due to the alternating nature of his band lineup. “Every Collectivity gig is different, so I keep a personal gig calendar, not a group one,” he explains. “Top players are always busy just trying to make a living these days, so I use a Google Sheets spreadsheet with lines dedicated to various instruments. I have multiple players at each position divided on the page into A, B and C teams. I check off each name that I've called

to keep from accidentally re-contacting the same player.”

CREATE AN ONLINE HUB

Include a Gig Details document for each date. Crucial information includes parking, timeline, hospitality, guest policy and compensation. If it's a bona fide partnership, be transparent. Otherwise, keep business on an individual basis. Other essentials for the gig box include a set list, reference recordings and charts.

“I prefer a folder for each song where everything about it can be located,” Misterka says. “I'll have different kinds of charts, such as a general lead sheet, a horn chart and perhaps lyrics for the vocalist. I'll put a recording of just that tune in there as well for easy reference.”

He summarizes, “If you want to be a bandleader, the more you have prepared for everyone, the happier everyone will be with the result. If you don't have your shit together, then you cannot expect your band to be.” 🎸

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player- and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.



YAMAHA

Revstar Professional RSP02T

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

IN ITS FIRST significant assault on the North American electric guitar market in the mid to late '70s, Yamaha showed more-established brands how to do it right with its so-called Les Paul killer, the SG2000. In the decades since, the brand has continued to produce high-end guitars for the Japanese market, but here in the United States Yamaha has more often been known for making lower-priced models that nevertheless offer good value. Now comes the Revstar Professional RSP02T, a guitar that shows the company returning to unbounded standards for quality and design in the U.S. market. Built at the company's headquarters in Japan, and primed with top-notch construction and components, its a guitar whose achievements are well matched to its namesake aspirations.

Yamaha's first Revstar hit the streets in 2015 after a years-long R&D process that put prototypes in the hands of several discerning players. The process echoed that of the SG2000's development in the mid '70s, which most notably spent quality time with Carlos Santana and apparently benefited from his feedback (no pun intended... or, maybe it is). The results of this venture are retained in the Revstar Professional RSP02T of 2023, but the model has been refined in several nuanced ways to deliver a thoughtful revamp of the design, if not a total re-think.

For those new to the Revstar, the overall design could be said to take cues from a handful of classics, although without nodding too heavily toward any discernible existing model. The pointy horns of the slightly offset double-cutaway body will obviously recall the Gibson SG, with a faint echo of — again — Yamaha's own symmetrically pointy SG2000, but the offset waist and the rest of the retro-modern

styling take it into different visual territory overall. Most would agree that it's a timeless look, and a rather juicy one too, in the Swift Blue finish of our review sample.

The colorful top and dark-mahogany back are nicely complemented by off-white plastics that include a three-ply pickguard, a single-ply body top, neck and headstock binding, and pickup covers. In addition to the simple two-knob complement in half-knurled chrome, the bling quotient is increased by the elongated Racing Tailpiece, an in-house design that strides between a trapeze and a fully anchored stoptail. Otherwise, the hardware includes a Nashville-style Tune-o-matic bridge and enclosed die-cast Yamaha tuners with pearloid buttons.

Amid all the signature visuals, one significant factor of the Revstar design involves something we don't see: The otherwise solid body is made from two pieces of mahogany carved out with strategic chambers, with two narrow carbon-fiber reinforcement strips inlaid across the lower

SPECIFICATIONS

Revstar Professional RSP02T

CONTACT yamaha.com

PRICE \$2,199 street

NUT Synthetic, 1.625" wide

NECK Mahogany, medium C profile

FRETBOARD Rosewood, 24.75" scale, 12" radius

FRETS 22 medium-jumbo

TUNERS Yamaha enclosed/diecast

BODY Chambered mahogany with solid maple top

BRIDGE Faber compensated wrap-around

PICKUPS Two Yamaha Alnico P90-style single-coils

CONTROLS Master volume and tone, with five-way switch and push-pull Focus switch on tone pot

FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario EXL .010—.046

WEIGHT 8.9 lbs

BUILT Japan

KUDOS A cleverly styled and sonically versatile design that's equally at home with gnarly rock and nuanced pop

CONCERNS Some might find the Focus switch muddies and dulls the tone



The RSP02T is also available with a Sunset Burst finish.

bout and the whole thing capped with a solid maple top. Gentle forearm and ribcage contours aid playing comfort.

The glued-in neck is a three-piece mahogany construction, with a volute to add strength behind the nut and narrow carbon-fiber strips on either side of the truss-rod channel to increase rigidity. Laid out to a 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch scale length, and with a width of 1.625 inches across the synthetic nut, it's topped with a rosewood fingerboard with a 12-inch radius, 22 medium-jumbo frets and elegantly narrow MoP position markers. The semi-Gumby-esque headstock recalls that of Yamaha's funkier pre-SG2000 designs and is adorned with an etched aluminum badge displaying the company's triple-tuning-fork emblem — a minimalist touch on an appendage otherwise free of brand logo or model name. A Japanese “Hanko” mark on the back of the headstock — the stylized stamp that stands in for a signature or branding — signifies the Revstar Professional's made-in-Japan quality.

Feel-wise, the neck sports a medium-C radius with a flattish back to it, which puts me in mind of Gibson's long-running SlimTaper profile. It has never been my favorite amid the Big G neck shapes, but I find it surprisingly approachable on the Revstar, and it's a superbly playable guitar overall — that is, easy to tuck into and get lost in without overthinking the ergonomics.

The pickups are Yamaha's own P90 single-coils, made with Alnico magnets

and coils wound to read 8.10k-ohms in the bridge position and 8.43k in the neck, in this example. In addition to the master volume and tone controls, they're wired through a five-way switch that gives two versions of out-of-phase either side of the both-on middle position. The tone knob includes push-pull switching to engage Yamaha's Focus switch setting, a passive boost that tapers the highs while kicking other frequencies up a notch.

Testing the Revstar Professional through a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab with a selection of overdrive pedals, I found that it refused to be pigeonholed the way so many dual-P90 solidbodies can be. Make no mistake: It will crank out gnarly garage rock and gritty blues with aplomb, but it's also more versatile than many guitars of similar specs, easily stepping up for a range of styles you might not expect it to handle.

First and foremost, the Revstar Professional rocks with gusto. Given a taste of a JHS Angry Charlie pedal into the tweed-ish 1x12, it dished out no end of bite and snarl with an aggressive midrange, while it retained a focused granularity that enhanced clarity

and articulation within the dirt. The off-kilter pairing of pickups with slightly more output in the neck seems an odd choice, and is in all likelihood a random selection from a bucket of P90s intended to be wound to approximately the same specs, but within a range of tolerances. As such, though, the hotter rhythm pickup occasionally makes it harder to tame the mud from that position. Played clean, though, the selector's 2 and 4 positions really come to the rescue, offering a more usable (read “less hollow and honky”) version of out-of-phase tones that favor the voicing of the pickup nearest the switch position, while making everything a little sharper, tighter and more Fender-leaning. The Revstar Professional is a very different beast from a traditional Strat, obviously, yet flip it to one of those bonus positions and few in the crowd are likely to wince when you dip into a little “Sultans of Swing” or “Scuttle Buttin’”

With either amp pushed into breakup, or an overdrive pedal kicked in, lifting the Focus switch shifts the Revstar Professional's voicing toward something altogether more humbucker-like, although to my ears it's a murky, middy approximation of humbucker tone at best. The passive boost comes with something of a subtle cocked wah—like shift

in the EQ, which can work for some cool throaty stylings through a fuzz pedal. Otherwise, I found it sounded generally, well... a little worse than anything dialed up without the Focus circuit engaged. Into a clean amp, I found even less purpose in the thing, and

ultimately decided it was a feature in search of a purpose, although some players might find otherwise.

All in all, though, the Revstar Professional RSP02T is an eminently playable and fiercely versatile creation that loves to rock but also bends to the sweet and musical with surprising ease. Add in its playfully appealing styling and very individual personality, and it's a guitar that plenty are sure to dig — pros and weekend warriors alike. 🎸

EMINENTLY PLAYABLE AND FIERCELY VERSATILE, IT ROCKS BUT ALSO BENDS TO THE SWEET AND MUSICAL WITH SURPRISING EASE



PEAVEY

HP 2 Poplar Burl RM

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

ONE GLANCE AT Peavey's new HP 2 Poplar Burl RM tells you it's primed to rock, with its double-locking vibrato, dual humbuckers and no-nonsense control layout. Likely the same glance also tells you it's a direct descendant of Peavey's best-known and most historic rock axe of all time, the Wolfgang. The company, based in Meridian, Mississippi, manufactured that Edward Van Halen signature model between 1996 and 2004, prior to the virtuoso shredder's split from the deal to make guitars and amplifiers under his own EVH brand, beginning in 2007. Few guitarists missed the similarity between the designs when Peavey introduced its first HP 2 in 2017. Now the HP 2 Poplar Burl RM adds to the formula with an exotic top carved from solid burl poplar, in your top-finish choice of Natural, Transparent Blue or Transparent Black, as on our review sample.

The design's pedigree and decades-long history of manufacture has been seen in undeniably similar forms by three different companies, starting with the Axis from Ernie Ball/Music Man and continuing to the Peavey Wolfgang, the EVH model and Peavey's HP 2. Not surprisingly, the HP 2 Poplar Burl RM's standout features and specifications are likely to be familiar to the majority of players interested in what a streamlined, hard-charging beast like this has to offer. But Peavey has put its own stamp on the formula, and it's worth detailing what this new iteration brings to the table.

The "HP" in the name stands for Hartley Peavey, and the company is quick to point to the founder's initials as a declaration of quality. That'll cost you some bread, too, considering the price point of just under \$3k (and the website shows that as a 25 percent discount off the official list price of

\$3,999). And although that might outwardly seem a little steep for an offshore-built guitar, Peavey tells us the instrument's "handcrafted in the Czech Republic" origins represent no compromise in quality or components. The area of Europe where these guitars are made has some of the finest luthiers to be found, and many of the world's most expensive violins come from this region.

The carved two-piece poplar burl top exhibits plenty of characterful, semi-random swirling and streaking beneath the transparent gloss-black finish. They're all characteristics of this wood, which is sourced from stress or deformation in the host tree, and which has become more and more popular with makers seeking exotic alternatives in recent years (via a range of species, not only poplar). Beneath it, a body made from solid basswood is finished in opaque black, with single-ply off-white binding around the top to set it off.

The 22-fret, bolt-on neck is carved from a lovely piece of subtly flamed and tightly

SPECIFICATIONS

HP 2 Poplar Burl RM

CONTACT peavey.com

PRICE \$2,999 street

NUT Metal locking, 1 5/8" wide

NECK Maple, modified "C" profile

FRETBOARD Maple, 25.5" scale, 15" radius

FRETS 22 medium-jumbo

TUNERS Schaller Mini

BODY Solid basswood body with carved poplar burl top

BRIDGE Floyd Rose licensed vibrato

PICKUPS Two Peavey designed high-output humbuckers

CONTROLS Volume and tone with push-pull switching for coil splitting, three-way selector switch

FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario .010-.046

WEIGHT 8.6 lbs

BUILT Czech Republic

KUDOS A powerful rock guitar primed to ably nail the expectations of the breed, with decent versatility besides, and the exotic beauty of a burl top

CONCERNS Might be considered pricey by some players



grained roasted maple, with its top sliced off and reapplied as the fingerboard after truss-rod installation, built to a 25 1/2-inch scale length and sporting a 15-inch radius. In addition to the truss rod with body-end adjustment wheel, the construction is reinforced with graphite for added stability, and its hand-rubbed oil finish feels great in the palm, revealing a fast but naturally woody texture that further enhances the comfortable modified-C profile. The diminutive scooped headstock sits at a 10-degree back angle behind a locking nut and string-tension bar, with slightly offset three-a-side Schaller Mini tuners with pearloid buttons.

Partnering this configuration at the other terminal end is a Floyd Rose licensed vibrato, which, alongside the dual humbuckers, really comprises the engine room of this long-running design. Recessed into the body's top and primed for deepest dive-bomb action, it's loaded with the requisite fine tuners for attaining pitch perfection once the other end is locked and loaded.

The two Peavey-designed humbucking pickups are mounted directly to the guitar's body and wound hot, as you might expect, at around 12k-ohms in the neck position and



Top-finish choices include Transparent Blue and Natural.

15k-ohms in the bridge. They're wired through a three-way Switchcraft toggle selector and the volume and tone potentiometers, with push-pull switching to split the coils of the pickup in each relative position.

Tested through a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, plus several higher-gain presets on a Neural DSP Quad Cortex into studio monitors, the HP 2 Poplar Burl RM rocked every bit as mightily as its features and format promised. To bill it as a one-trick pony, however, would be a mistake, and in use this design, which descended from the very heart of a rock guitar revolution, displayed impressive versatility.

At first, without employing a little lateral thinking, it might be easy to find this HP 2's clean tones a little underwhelming and simply conclude, "Well, that's not what it was built for." In full-humbucking mode even my most lightly driven amp and patch settings sounded a little woolly and dull, and winding down the guitar's volume control didn't help a lot.

But pop up either control knob to send its relative pickup into split-coil mode, and the HP 2 absolutely shines for pristine rhythm work or shimmery ballad-friendly arpeggios, and with more beef and substance than many humbuckers display while coil-split, thanks to the overwound coils that kick off the design. In the middle position, the dual-split setting also revealed some richly funky, semi-scooped tones with a lot of

potential, while mixing and matching split with full humbucking in either direction further extended the sonic scope.

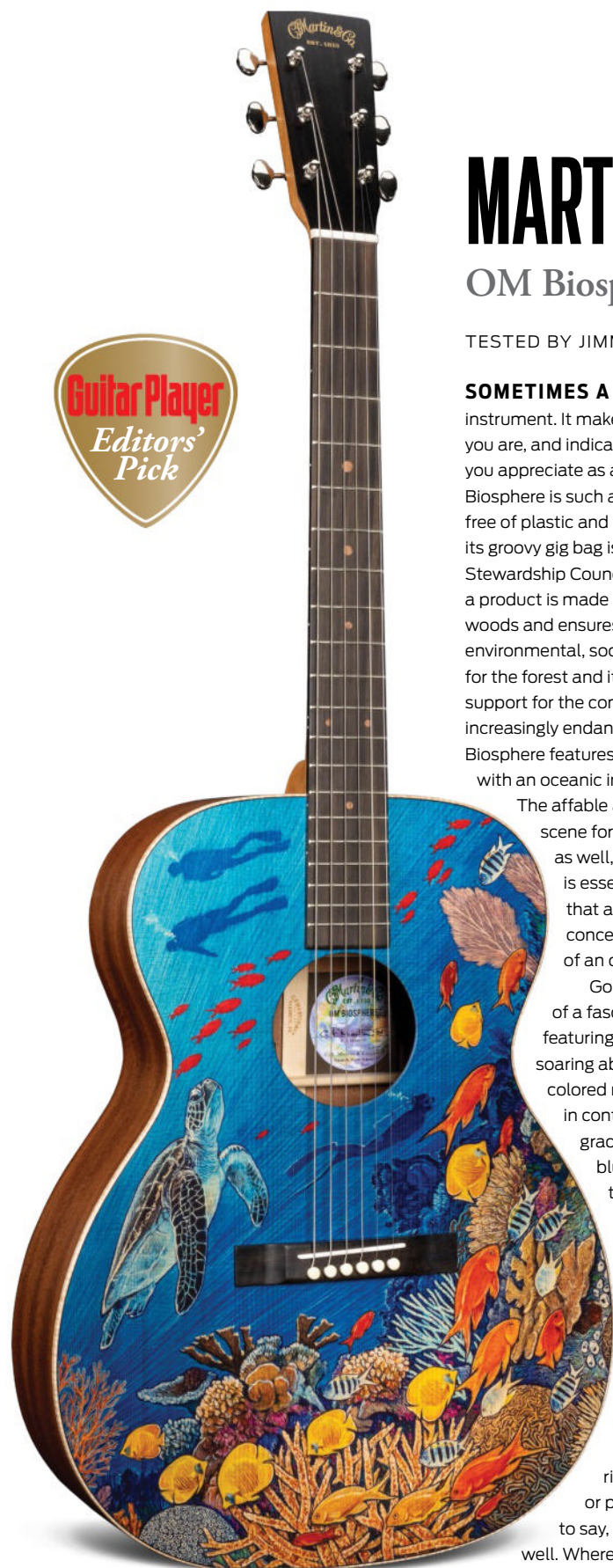
Rather surprisingly, the splits also performed extremely well into high gain, where so many will slur into an overly bright, ice-picky mess. As such, they deliver a more tightly, brightly focused breed of lead tone that retains note definition through the blur. Of course, for archetypal heavy rock and metal, the full-humbucking mode is where it's at with this thing, and the power, sustain and gain-driving dynamics of this design really come into their own when you're pushing it

full bore. Although I'm not that kind of player as a daily driver, the HP 2 Poplar Burl RM quickly had me enjoying the fleet-fingered hammer-ons, gut-thumping power-chord chug, stinging pinched harmonics and singing

sustain to no end, and with surprisingly little effort once I'd slid back into that style of playing. Tuning stability was also excellent, even through considerable vibrato use, and I tweaked the fine tuners only slightly, now and then, after a spate of dive bombing.

Ultimately, the HP 2 Poplar Burl RM might not be your first choice of guitar if clean pop, indie rock, roots rock or edge-of-breakup blues are your thing, and to be fair that's not what it's designed for. But if you need to rock large, it's an axe to check out, and one that offers the flexibility to segue into other realms while you're awaiting your big solo. 🎸

IN SPLIT-COIL MODE, THE HP 2 ABSOLUTELY SHINES FOR PRISTINE RHYTHM WORK OR SHIMMERY BALLAD-FRIENDLY ARPEGGIOS



MARTIN

OM Biosphere

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

SOMETIMES A GUITAR is more than an instrument. It makes a statement about who you are, and indicates your values and what you appreciate as an artist. The Martin OM Biosphere is such an instrument. It's totally free of plastic and fully FSC-certified. Even its groovy gig bag is made of hemp. Forestry Stewardship Council certification means a product is made from responsibly sourced woods and ensures benefits of an environmental, social and economic nature for the forest and its local people. Showing support for the conservation of precious and increasingly endangered coral reefs, the OM Biosphere features an aquatic-themed top with an oceanic image by Robert Goetzl.

The affable artist painted the cosmic scene for 2021's OOL Earth Guitar as well, and the OM Biosphere is essentially a version-two of that admirable eco-conscious concept, this time in the form of an orchestra model.

Goetzl painted a watercolor of a fascinating coral reef scene featuring a large green sea turtle soaring above an array of fishes colored mostly yellow and orange in contrast to the water, with its gradient of deeper to lighter blue sweeping from left to right. Silhouettes of a few divers survey the waterscape, complete with air bubbles emanating from their masks. The turtle is the star attraction, demanding your attention. As the turtle draws in your eye, it appears to be looking right back, an invitation, or perhaps a challenge, as if to say, "We're watching you as well. Where do you stand?"

Martin uses ink-jet printing to project the artwork onto the top, and protects it with a light satin finish. Subdued hues make it appear almost submerged, and wood grains show through, adding to the organic feel. I'm a total turtle dude and fell in love with the Biosphere's top when the model was introduced at NAMM 2023. Fellow marine enthusiasts seem to feel the same way. Bring this guitar to the beach and everyone wants to know more about it, especially folks that already appreciate Martin guitars.

The OM Biosphere has an interesting story because it's a bit of a paradox, being simultaneously fancy and barebones. The Biosphere is built in the style of Martin's workmanlike 16-17 series, American-crafted out of utilitarian woods and with minimal appointments, for maximum affordability. But the Bio is also a bit of a unicorn, because the custom top, which could practically pass for being hand-painted, and the certified woods make it rather fancy and slightly higher priced

SPECIFICATIONS

OM Biosphere

CONTACT martinguitar.com

PRICE \$2,299 street with hemp gig bag

NUT WIDTH 1 3/4", bone

NECK Mahogany

FRETBOARD Ebony, 25.94" scale, 1955 style
18 sapele dot inlays and aluminum side dots

FRETS 20

TUNERS Grover nickel-plated, open gear with butterbean knobs

BODY Solid Sitka spruce top, solid sapele back and sides, scalloped Sitka spruce X bracing

BRIDGE Ebony with compensated bone saddle and bone bridge pins

ELECTRONICS None

FACTORY STRINGS Martin Retro Light Monel MM12

WEIGHT 3.6 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Environmentally conscious, aquatically artistic with resonant, organic tone

CONCERNS Not quite as easily playable or sonically sophisticated as other options at this price point



than its siblings in the 16-17 range, yet still less sophisticated and far more affordable than a Standard OM-28. The Biosphere's top is tried-and-true solid Sitka spruce. The back and sides are solid sapele, which is a lot like mahogany. The binding is European flamed maple, the fretboard, bridge and headplate are ebony, and the neck is mahogany.

The neck has the familiar feel of a classic Martin, with a modern standard 1 3/4-inch width at the nut and a taper designed for high performance moving up the fretboard. I enjoyed the feel in my hands, although the factory action was a tad on the high side for my taste. It's adjustable with a truss rod that requires a hex wrench, not included, so I simply got used to it. Many guitars ship with such low factory action these days to make playing more effortless for a potential buyer. My approach is on the aggressive side, however, so if I had to choose, I'd prefer the action a tad high rather than low, where it's susceptible to fret splat and delivers less resonance.

Set up as such, and with a full 25.4-inch scale length, the Biosphere feels snappy and strong. It's particularly well suited for fingerstyle and handled a hearty percussive approach from my acrylic nails, which were quite long at the time. The Biosphere also accommodated an aggressive approach from a thick pick. On the other hand, it sounded fine going to the other extreme and reacted



with nuance to a delicate touch too.

The Biosphere's tone matches its organic design concept. There are no electronics, and its acoustic quality sounds very natural, open and resonant, with strong sustain. The tone is fundamentally forward, with a rather dry finish, and the sound is balanced across the spectrum, with an overall focus in the middle range. The factory strings are Martin Retro, made of a nickel/copper alloy designed for less attack response to allow more of the wood sound to shine through, and I felt like they did just that. Compared to the deep

sophisticated tone of the OM-28 Modern Deluxe, the Biosphere sounded somewhat shallow, but it's understood that the price is twice as nice and the design goal is more stripped down. I dug the raw sound for blues and roots rock. It sounded right on point when I tried Drop D tuning and played Fleetwood Mac's "Gold Dust Woman."

The Martin OM Biosphere is Martin's second step in the über-environmental direction, and we'd love to see the company continue down that path with models of similar eco-conscious and artistic intent, in a variety of styles and price points. The top is

endlessly interesting, and the body is comfortable. It's mid-size, with a relatively shallow depth, making it a convenient grab-and-play guitar for the office and a fantastic travel instrument for

THE TOP AND CERTIFIED WOODS MAKE IT RATHER FANCY AND SLIGHTLY HIGHER PRICED THAN ITS SIBLINGS

the van, the campfire and on the beach. Jimmy Buffett passed during this review process. He was a Martin enthusiast as much as he was an ocean man, and I'll bet he's smiling down from his heavenly perspective on Martin's new Earthly endeavor. For raising awareness about coral reef preservation in such an artistic way with musical merit, the OM Biosphere earns an Editors' Pick Award. 🐠



UNIVERSAL AUDIO

Evermore Studio Reverb, Heavenly Plate Reverb, Orion Tape Echo and 1176 Studio Compressor

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

THE FOUR LATEST pedals from UAFX are the company's first to feature compact enclosures, and are designed to be both straightforward and easy to use. Nevertheless, they offer the high-grade tones of the more complex UAFX units they're derived from — primarily the Starlight Echo Station, Golden Reverberator, Del-Verb Ambience Companion and Max Preamp and Dual Compressor, all of which have been previously reviewed here.

The Evermore Studio Reverb, Heavenly Plate Reverb, Orion Tape Echo and 1176 Studio Compressor have different control functions, but they share a single on/off foot switch, a status LED (it glows different colors to indicate certain functions), and a complement of jacks that includes mono input and output, a USB-C port for connecting to a computer for firmware updates, and a nine-volt center-negative power-in jack for an adapter of 250mA minimum (not included). Each pedal also has

a pair of recessed slider switches on the front: One selects buffered or true bypass, while the other performs different functions depending on the pedal. All measure 4 ½ by 2 ½ by 1 ½ inches and are manufactured in China.

EVERMORE STUDIO REVERB



Designed to deliver the spacious ambience, grainy trails and mesmerizing modulation of an iconic, late-'70s digital reverb, the Evermore zeros in on the Lexicon 224 algorithm from the Del-Verb Ambience Companion. Evermore's streamlined interface has a mod knob that adjusts reverb tail modulation; a mix knob for setting reverb level; and bass, mid and treble controls that respectively adjust low-, mid- and high-frequency decay time. A toggle switch selects three of what the company says are "bit-for-bit emulations" of classic 224 effects: Room, Small Hall and Large Hall. On the front there's a bypass switch with trails and true-bypass settings; the former lets the reverb trails play out when bypassed, while the latter stops the trails immediately. The predelay switch adds a slight delay before the onset of reverb when set to on.



A marvel of miniaturization, the Evermore basically gives you the large, 34-pound 224 digital 'verb in a pedal, which is impressive when you consider that the Lexicon unit was behind some great sounds of '80s-era albums, such as Talking Heads' *Remain in Light*, Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut*, U2's *The Unforgettable Fire* and many others.

Evermore's sounds are beautifully spacious and so inspiring, I could just set up a lush spring-sounding reverb pad and play over it, basking in that space and time continuum. I was also knocked out by how good the reverbs sound through an amp, and wound up using the Room and Small Hall settings a lot with a non-reverb Fender '48 Dual Pro. The mod knob textures things very nicely with subtly grainy modulation when set around 11 o'clock or so, and the reverb time adjustments afforded by the bass, mid and treble decay controls let you create gorgeous ambient washes that are quite breathtaking. Obviously, the Evermore is serious overkill if spring reverb is all you need to get your guitar game on, but being able to create dreamy sounds that were once only attainable in a world-class recording studio is a luxury I'll take any day.

SPECIFICATIONS

Evermore Studio Reverb

CONTACT uaudio.com

PRICE \$219

CONTROLS Mod, mix, bass, mid, treble (all EQ controls affect the decay signal). Room/Small Hall/Large Hall switch

FOOT SWITCH Reverb on/off

EXTRAS Bypass switch (buffered/true bypass). Predelay switch

I/O Input, output, USB-C (for firmware

updates), 9V power jack (adapter not included, 250mA minimum)

KUDOS Awesome late-'70s Lexicon 224 reverb sounds. Easy to grok controls and great features in a compact pedal

CONCERNS None

HEAVENLY PLATE REVERB



The Heavenly Plate Reverb reaches back to the technology that German company EMT introduced in 1957 with its model 140 plate reverb unit, focusing on those emulations as presented in the UAFX Golden Reverberator. Here we find decay (reverb time) and mix controls across the top; a three-position Plate select switch with settings for Vintage Bright, Vintage Dark and Modern Full; and knobs across the bottom for pre-delay, EQ (reverb tone cut/boost; flat at noon) and mod (modulation amount; interacts with the front-mounted mod rate slow/fast switch). An adjacent switch selects trails or true-bypass.

The sounds of the EMT reverb are typically what you're hearing on hit records from the '60s and '70s. In general, a plate reverb is more natural sounding than a spring reverb, but there's also a certain brightness to it that is caused by the fact that higher frequencies travel faster along an eight-foot thin steel plate than the low frequencies. Heavenly's plate reverb tones can be varied in myriad ways, starting with the Plate switch, which sets the overall response from brighter to darker, and the EQ knob, which controls the frequencies you want to boost or cut. I mostly parked it at noon for a non-boosted response. Pre-delay is also useful for adding a bit of delay between the time you hit a note and when reverb is heard, and the mod knob lets



The Heavenly Plate Reverb emulates EMT's legendary 140 plate reverb unit.

you adjust the amount of modulation, which can pulse at your desired rate, depending on the slow/fast switch on the front.

The Heavenly Plate is great for adding vintage-sounding ambience to instrument and vocal tracks, where its smooth, lively reflections make you realize why real plate 'verbs and their digital modeling equivalents (including UAD's own EMT 140 plug-in) remain popular. I liked the Heavenly's sound with acoustic guitar, and it also sounded great when played into a Fender Princeton with the spring reverb turned off. That spring sound is something I did miss with an overdriven electric guitar through the Fender Dual Pro, but the Heavenly sounded cool running clean, and it delivered a nice studio quality to slower tunes, where the reflections created by the Vintage Bright setting were perfect with pre-delay off and the mod knob at noon or so on a slow setting.

SPECIFICATIONS

Heavenly Plate Reverb

CONTACT uaudio.com

PRICE \$219

CONTROLS Decay, mix, pre delay, EQ (reverb tone cut/boost; flat at noon), mod (modulation amount; interacts with mod slow/fast switch). Plate A/B/C switch

FOOT SWITCH Reverb on/off

I/O Input, output, USB-C (for firmware updates), 9V power jack (adapter not included, 250mA minimum)

EXTRAS Buffered/true-bypass switch. Mod rate switch (interacts with mod knob)

KUDOS There's nothing like this pedal if you're after classic EMT 140 plate reverb sounds

CONCERNS None

ORION TAPE ECHO



Using algorithms from the Starlight Echo Station, the Orion Tape Echo offers authentic emulations of the vintage Maestro Echoplex EP-III tape delay. The delay knob sets the echo rate, mix adjusts echo level (100 percent wet at maximum), and the three-position Tape (tape-age) switch offers Mint, Worn and Old settings. There is also a feedback knob for echo repeats, a Wonk knob to adjust wow and flutter (interacts with the Tape setting), and a record level control that varies tape "color" (i.e. distortion), which increases when turned clockwise. On the front is a bypass switch with trails/true-bypass settings and a preamp on/off switch. In the on position, the preamp is active in either bypass mode, whereas when set to off the preamp is never active when the pedal is bypassed.

The Orion is a colorful and expressive delay that provides a lot of control, but you can set the knobs pretty much anywhere, short of full oscillation, and it just sounds good. The tape-age switch is useful for getting the tape character that you want, from a clear, smooth response on the Mint setting to progressively more grunginess and lo-fi texture. The Worn mode sounded great as the echo repeats faded into gritty darkness, and the record level control can make things grimmer when it's turned up.

The EP-III's coveted preamp stage is a tone enhancer, so I kept it on the dry signal full-time, with bypass in trails mode. I also liked to set the delay, mix and feedback controls to taste and toggle between the tape-age settings. Orion sounded cool through the Dual Pro with single-coils and humbuckers alike from a Knaggs Severn SSS Trem [see review, page 17] and a Gibson/

Memphis '63 ES-335. This pedal sounds so tactile and organic, and having the preamp on even when not using delay definitely adds tone. It's one of a kind, and a keeper.

SPECIFICATIONS

Orion Tape Echo

CONTACT uaudio.com

PRICE \$219

CONTROLS Delay (echo rate), mix, feedback (echo repeats; self-oscillating at maximum), Wonk (wow & flutter; interacts with tape-age switch), record level (tape color; turn clockwise for more distortion). Mint/Worn/Old Tape switch

FOOT SWITCH Echo on/off

I/O Input, output, USB-C (for firmware updates), 9V power jack (adapter not included, 250mA minimum)

EXTRAS Buffered/true-bypass switch. Preamp on/off switch

KUDOS An Echoplex EP-III in a box, with great features that include a tape-age switch

CONCERNS None

1176 STUDIO COMPRESSOR



As the name implies, the 1176 focuses on that classic UA studio compressor. Designed by UA founder M.T. "Bill" Putman, it was the first compressor to use solid-state circuitry and ultra-fast

FET gain reduction and has been a mainstay of the studio scene for decades.

The UAFX 1176 features a standard set of comp controls — input, output, attack, release and ratio — but things get interesting with the Type switch (only labeled as such in the one-page manual), which has three modes. Single is classic UA 1176 Rev E compression (all of the selections here are Rev E versions



which refers to the early '70s blackface low-noise units designed by Brad Plunkett). Dual is two 1176s in series "L. Zep" style, and Sustain is two 1176s in series "L. Feat" style. Circling back to the controls, there's also an All function on the six-position ratio knob that provides the response of an 1176 with all of its buttons pushed in, and an off setting that offers circuit color without compression. On the front is a bypass switch with buffered and true-bypass settings, as well as a parallel switch: Turn it on for blended dry and compressor signals, or leave it off to hear just the comp signal.

The 1176 has that unique quality of making instruments sound juicier and smoother, and the Type switch is all-powerful, as you can simply set it to Single and crank up the input until you get the amount of squeeze needed (the LED glows green, orange or red depending on how much compression is being used), and then tailor the output, attack, release and ratio to suit the playing feel you want. Toggling to the Dual and Sustain positions often results in having to reduce the input level to prevent distortion (because you're dealing with two comps in series), but the fun really begins when you start exploring the dynamic qualities of these sounds. Dual mode models a Jimmy Page

trick of grinding up the input on the first 1176 and using the second to add tube-like sustain and feel. In contrast, Sustain mode models a setup used by engineer Donn Landee that involves DI-ing the guitar into the first 1176 set for mild compression, and then into the second 1176 set for super squash. From there, setting the attack and release controls in opposite directions yields the clean sustain that Little Feat's Lowell George was after.

The Sustain mode is cool, as it delivers a very clear sound with lots of sustain that's really sweet for slide playing. It also sounds great for lead and rhythm with distortion from a pedal, or you can switch to Dual mode, crank up the input and enjoy that kind of Helios console-style grind. It all points to the 1176 Studio Compressor's great versatility.

SPECIFICATIONS

1176 Studio Compressor

CONTACT uaudio.com

PRICE \$199

CONTROLS Input, output, attack, release, ratio. All setting is a 1176 with all the buttons pushed in. Off setting is circuit color without compression). Single/Dual/Sustain without

FOOT SWITCH Compressor on/off

I/O Input, output, USB-C (for firmware updates), 9V power jack (adapter not included, 250mA minimum)

EXTRAS Bypass switch: buffered bypass/true bypass. Parallel switch: On is dry and compressor signals blended; Off is compressor only signals

KUDOS A simple to use and killer-sounding rendition of UAD's 1176 studio compressor. Unique Dual and Sustain modes emulate Jimmy Page and Lowell George 1176 setups

CONCERNS None



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DINOSAURAL

Cogmeister Overdrive

BY DAVE HUNTER

A CERTIFIED LEGEND in effects pedal design, Dan Coggins was in on the ground floor of the boutique boom, brainstorming the circuits behind some of the most collectible small-shop stompboxes ever for Lovetone, which he co-founded in 1995. Later, he provided valuable consulting, and eventually several original designs, for ThorpyFX. If his name isn't familiar, that's probably because he's often done his thing behind the scenes, and is a rather humble and understated guy.

Between Lovetone and ThorpyFX, however, Coggins marketed a handful of pedals under his own Dinosaural brand in Oxfordshire, England, before departing the pedal business for a few years to work as an electrical engineer in magnetometer R&D and high-voltage X-ray and laser-pulse electronics. Serious stuff, indeed!

Recently, though, he resurrected the Dinosaural brand under the Coggins Audio Ltd. umbrella to market the new Cogmeister triple boost/overdrive. Described by Coggins as "with all due modesty, my gain masterpiece," the Cogmeister comprises three independent yet highly chainable and gain-stageable boost and overdrive circuits, all driven by a single nine-volt battery or an external power supply.

From right to left — the order in which the channels are chained within the Cogmeister Overdrive — those circuits are:

- Push, a single-silicon transistor booster based loosely on the original Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster, with its gain knob joined by a low control that adds back low frequencies as you rotate it clockwise, thereby remediating the effects of the original circuit's fixed high-pass filter.

- Drive, a transistor-based overdrive designed to emulate tube-amp clipping, with controls for sustain (gain), tone and volume (output), plus a three-way shift switch to select slight mid scoop, bigger lower-mid scoop or flat mids.

- Solo, a Zener-diode clipping circuit designed to do everything from provide a midrange solo boost to its own breed of relatively transparent (though EQ-dialable) clipping. A level knob governs the output, while the peak control offers a progressive midrange bell-curve emphasis centered

between 1.8kHz and 2kHz, depending upon the setting.

To understand how they work together as a trio, think of the middle Drive stage as your low- to medium-gain tube overdrive, or an always-on tonal foundation; the third Solo stage as the lead boost that helps it cut through the mix when needed; and the first stage, Push, as the front-of-chain booster that makes it all hotter and hairier when you need more dirt in the brew.

To address the elephant in the room, yeah, there are already a lot of overdrives out there, and plenty of good multichannel renditions as well. So, what inspired Coggins — a designer arguably best known for several extreme Lovetone filter

and ring modulator pedals — to make a triple-boost/OD his new masterpiece?

“Back in around 2010, I was playing regular gigs in a local covers band with a wide repertoire,” he tells *GP*, “yet we often found ourselves playing in very cramped spaces. I had the idea of designing a single three-in-one drive pedal to fit within the 120-degree legs of my mic stand. It was based upon how I was chaining as few pedals together as possible to meet my needs: I needed a clean/dirty option, a pre-boost for more sustain and/or ‘bite,’ and a solo boost placed after those two to lift the overall level for solos and/or riffs, particularly voiced to catch the human ears’ sensitivity to midrange frequencies.

“However, it was over a decade before I finally got around to prototyping and building it — during one of the U.K. Covid-19 lockdowns — and by then, in my mind I’d percolated and distilled the individual circuits to do exactly what I wanted. I built the system to do the basic job described above when all knobs were set to 12 o’clock, and I was pleasantly surprised at how well the sections worked together. Not only like that, but even more so when trying the more diverse and extreme settings, something I hadn’t quite anticipated!”

Coggins quickly determined that such a pedal was too useful to keep to himself and decided to take the Dinosaur name out of

retirement to market the Cogmeister as his one and only new offering. His main gig remains as analog design engineer for ThorpyFX Ltd., with whom he’s collaborating on the Cogmeister’s manufacture.

Tested with a Telecaster and a Les Paul into a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, the Cogmeister quickly revealed the utter success of its three-channel design. It’s simply one of the most seamless, natural and organic-

sounding solid-state overdrive pedals I’ve ever played. Each stage manages to be both impressively transparent and string-to-string clear, yet also very characterful and original sounding, while — another “yet

also” — still classic, familiar and immediately approachable. Not only does this thing simply sound great but its three stages interact beautifully while proving extremely useful individually, yielding myriad combinations of lusciously tactile and tube-like clipping tones that should suit just about any playing style.

Yeah, I’m gushing a little, but the Cogmeister really is that good. And the fact that it proved instantly so inspiring and so unswitch-offable — in the face of a dozen other top-notch overdrives staring me down

from my effects shelf — is a real testament to how a great circuit designer can still squeeze new levels of tone and utility out of seemingly long-maxed-out templates. For delivering everything from expressive dynamics to euphonic harmonic saturation laced through a “just right” overdrive tone, the Dinosaur Cogmeister Overdrive earns an Editors’ Pick Award. 🦖

SPECIFICATIONS

Dinosaur Cogmeister Overdrive

CONTACT cogginsaudio.co.uk

PRICE £299 direct from the UK plus £30 shipping to the USA (approx. \$375 plus \$37.50 shipping)

CONTROLS Push: gain, low; Drive: sustain, tone, volume, shift switch; Solo: level, peak

FEATURES Three independent true-bypass foot switches and indicator LEDs (one for each section), center-negative 9V input, internal battery clip

SIZE 7.25" x 4.5" x 1.5" (LxWxD)

BUILT U.K.

KUDOS Lush, clear, dynamic overdrive presented in three extremely useful stages, chained or used individually

CONCERNS The foot switches on the Push and Solo channels might be a little close to the knobs for some big-toed players

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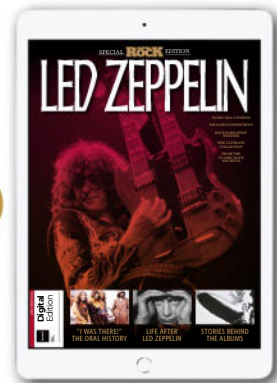
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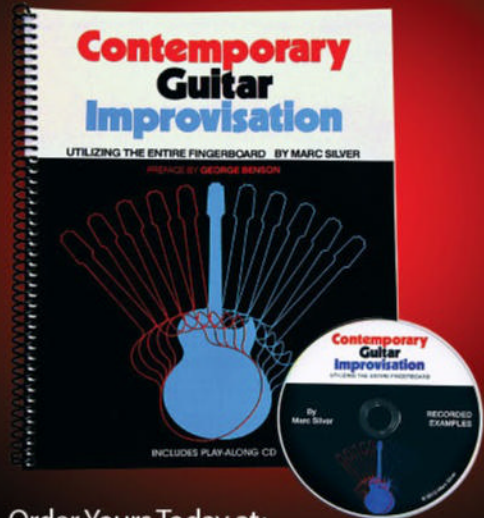
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How I Wrote...

“Working for the Weekend”

Paul Dean reveals how **Loverboy’s** 1981 hit turned five working stiffs into superstars.

BY JOE MATERA



Loverboy in 1981. (from left) Mike Reno, Scott Smith, Paul Dean, Doug Johnson and Matt Frenette

“IT’S TOTALLY A party song, there’s no question about it,” Loverboy guitarist Paul Dean says about the Canadian group’s anthemic 1981 hit “Working for the Weekend.” Although they made their U.S. chart breakthrough with their 1980 self-titled debut album, it wasn’t until “Working for the Weekend” was released as the lead single from Loverboy’s second album, 1981’s *Get Lucky*, that the band became firmly entrenched in pop culture.

“It became clear to me that we were onto something when we played it at this pub in Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island,” Dean recalls. “It was a meat-market type of atmosphere, where nobody cared about the music; they were more interested in hooking up with each other. We played our first two sets, all-original stuff, and people were talking and drinking, paying little attention to the band. But when we opened the third set with ‘Working for the Weekend,’ the dance floor was packed by the end of the intro.”

“I DOUBLE-TRACKED SOME GUITAR PARTS, BUT MOSTLY MY APPROACH WAS, ‘WHATEVER I DO, CAN I REPRODUCE IT LIVE?’”

WEEKEND WARRIORS

“Working for the Weekend” germinated in Dean’s garage practice space, after which he continued to work on it in a Montreal hotel room following one of Loverboy’s club dates. “I used a metronome as my drums and had my Strat plugged into a small Walkman-style cassette player,” he recalls. “I used it a lot, as it’s quiet and I could take it into my hotel

room. I also had a small boom box that I used to record with.”

With this compact demo-recording setup, Dean began improvising riffs and vocals. “Eventually I had most of the guitar parts and lyrics,” he says. “It was missing a couple of things, like the little wah-wah solo in the middle, as I hadn’t worked that out yet. And there are lots of parts to that tune — a lot of key changes going back and forth.”

With two thirds of the song written, Dean brought it to the band at their next rehearsal session. Despite his work on the tune, “it wasn’t flowing and didn’t make sense,” he admits. “I began stabbing at these random chords, and Doug [Johnson, keyboardist] asked me, ‘What are you doing just hitting random chords? There’s no progression!’

I replied, “You never know, I might get lucky.” Sometimes that’s all it takes. You close your eyes and throw the dart at your fretboard.”

Dean really hit paydirt when he came up with the song’s distinctive chord

changes, which shift from the moody verses to the rousing chorus. It was left to Loverboy vocalist Mike Reno and drummer Matt Frenette to add the finishing touches. “It’s thanks to Mike for coming up with the title because I originally had ‘Waiting for the Weekend,’” Dean reveals. “I thought that was pretty cool, but in retrospect I think it was a big deal for him to come up with that.”

LIVE IN THE STUDIO

Once the song was completed, the band entered Vancouver’s Mushroom Studios with producer Bruce Fairbairn to record it. “I used my Strat that I built in 1974 and a modified 50-watt Hiwatt,” Dean explains. “I double-tracked some parts, but mostly my approach was, ‘Whatever I do, can I reproduce it live?’ Which is why we recorded it that way.

“A lot of that approach came from when Mike and I were putting the band together with various drummers and bass players in Calgary. We had this big warehouse to rehearse in, and it had horrible acoustics; concrete and glass, a high ceiling. It was just an echo chamber, so that kind of forced me to play simply. Plus, we made our little demos on that same boom box, and it just sounded amazing with all that echo from the room. So that’s what dictated our attitude about recording. And it worked!”

YOU WANT A PIECE OF THE CHART?

Released in October 1981, “Working for the Weekend” reached number 29 on the *Billboard* Hot 100, and it remains one of the group’s most instantly recognizable songs, turning up in movies such as *Zoolander* and *Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle* and television shows such as *Scrubs* and *Family Guy*.

“It’s unbelievable how it keeps getting placed in movies and TV shows and how it’s held up for 40 years now,” Dean exclaims. “Our song ‘Turn Me Loose’ gets a lot of soundtrack stuff too, but nothing like ‘Working for the Weekend.’ It’s a pretty cool one-two punch.”

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