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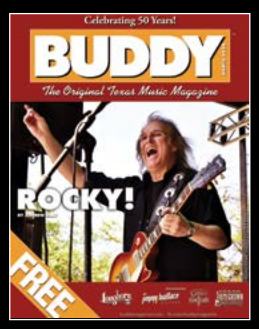

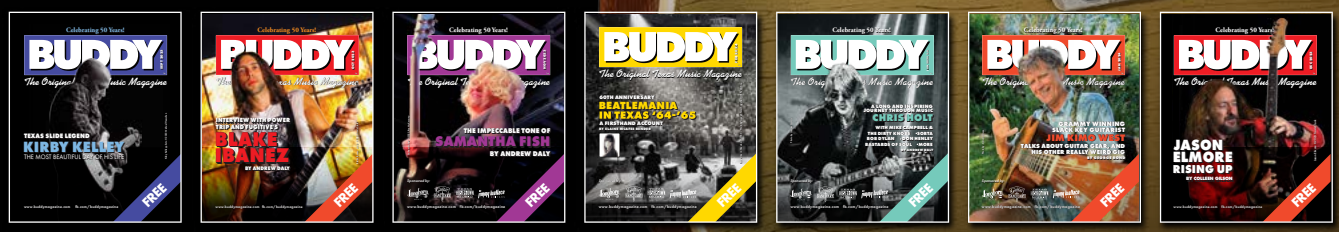

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CONTENTS

DEPARTMENTS

FEATURES

BUDDY

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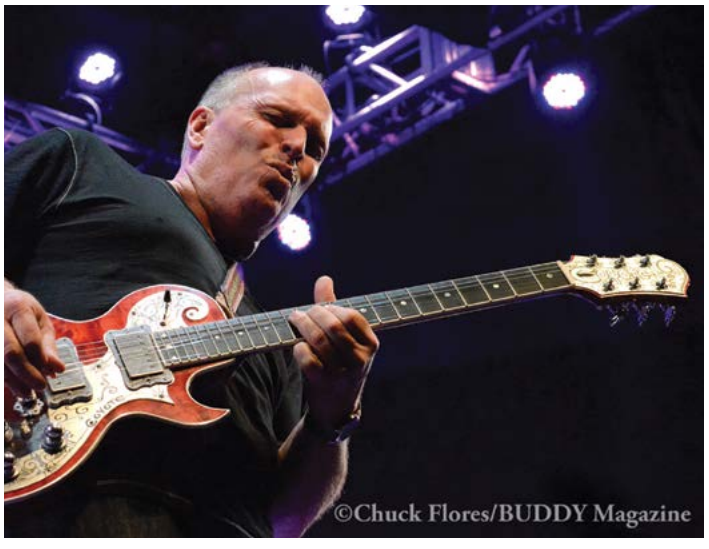
JIMMY WALLACE 2024 TALKS DIGF

The Dallas International Guitar Festival (DIGF), the oldest and largest guitar show in the world, returns with its signature magic and energy to Dallas Market Hall Friday, May 3 – Sunday, May 5, 2024. The event is highly anticipated by the feature guitarists who perform during the 3-day event, guitar fans and vendors alike.

With the world-renown festival in the 46th year, Jimmy Wallace, DIGF CEO, remains as enthusiastic as when he first participated as a vendor in 1978 at Charlie Wirz' first Greater Southwest Vintage Guitar Show. After Wirz passed in 1985, Mark Pollock took the reins and introduced live music to the exhibition. The show continued to grow and in 1996, Pollock invited his friend. Jimmy Wallace (who had already established himself as a guitar dealer and exceptional guitarist as the leader of the Stratoblasters) to come aboard as his partner. Since Pollock's passing in 2015, Jimmy continues to keep DIGF alive and develop its appeal.

BUDDY Magazine recently chatted with Wallace to discuss some things he's looking forward to, some artists he's excited to see, as well as to reflect on his decades-long career in the guitar business

"I love it so much," he said. "I still have the same energetic feelings of anticipation that I did before the first one in 1978. The thing we all have in common is we all love the guitar, guitar music, guitars themselves, the culture that's centered around guitars - and that makes my job very, very easy."



There are many who say that Dallas is the Guitar Capital of the world for many different reasons. There is the talent, the history, the industry, and the music itself. To many people around the world, "Dallas" is synonymous with a TV show and a football team, but it also calls to mind a star guitarist from Oak Cliff, Stevie Ray Vaughan, who left a Lone Star footprint on every stage he played around the world.

Speaking of Stevie Ray Vaughan, his childhood friend and former bandmate, Wallace said, "We just did Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan: Brothers in Blues, (former BUDDY editor Kirby Warnock's documentary), and I think for a very long time to come long after we're gone, the door that Stevie opened there, is really bringing the guitar out of the keyboard era. I'm not down on keyboards, but you get what I'm saying. He was like the ongoing ambassador. Even though he's gone, he's still speaking. He's still influencing how people perceive Texas."

Wallace is always scouting new musical acts and musicians for DIGF, and along with the lineup of returning performers, some new promising artists have caught his ear. "There's a new guy named Andy Wood," he reveals, "that I'm just now getting familiar with, but I'm blown away. And all my guitar buddies that are incredible players in their own right are all going, 'this guy's the bomb. I can't wait to see him.'"

Ally Venable (2022 BUDDY Texas Tornado) is another player who has practically "grown up" around DIGF, and she will be playing every day of the show. She will also conduct a special clinic to talk about her experience starting out as a young female guitarist (and as a DIGF 10 Under 20 contestant), and her journey to where she is today.

Of Ally, Wallace says, "She's like our poster child of success. Like I'm bragging on my kids, but she's now about to start a stadium tour as the opening act for Buddy Guy."

Other 2024 DIGF headliners include George Lynch, Sonny Landreth, Greg Koch and Frank Hannon. Also performing with Joe Mass will be Jeff Lorber and Jimmy Haslip.

For all of the planning, logistics and work that goes into the Dallas International Guitar Festival, it all comes back to the guitar itself.

"All performers have a real heart for the guitar," he said, "and the spirit of this event, the whole point of the DIGF is to celebrate the guitar."

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Thanks for picking up this copy of BUDDY, The Original Texas Music Magazine. Before we start, I want to give a special thank-you to all of our advertisers who made this issue of BUDDY possible.

As you can see, this is a bigger issue than usual, and in full color. What you will find in these pages is a continuation of the great interviews and photos you have come to expect over the years. While this issue celebrates all things strings at the Dallas International Guitar Festival, we also want to celebrate the players – the very souls who play these instruments, and bring them to life in a way that touches our own humanity.

If it feels like technology is moving at an unstoppable pace that is difficult to keep up with, you would be correct. We are at a point where generative artificial intelligence is harnessing all of the art and creativity that has come before us, only to be regurgitated and utilized in a new form. How it will be used and morphed by human artists remains to be seen. The technological powers-that-be have a hidden mantra – "if it can be done, it will be done" - often at the expense of the social order. Like other transformational technologies, the impact of generative AI on music will most likely be a monumental mix of the good, the bad and the indifferent.

Artificial intelligence is not new to the guitar world. The amplified guitar was first made famous in the 1940s as a solo instrument by guitar legend and Bonham, Texas native Charlie Christian. His was a shot heard around the world which has ultimately brought us to this show today. At its time, its debut was pure magic, and its invention continues to have a direct effect on all of us, musicians and listeners.

When you stop and think about it, audio recordings of any kind, from Thomas Edison's early tinfoil "phonographs" to magnetic tape, from the advent of radio and multi-track recording to shellac and then vinyl disks, from 8-track and cassette tapes to CDs and then from downloads to streaming formats – these are all forms of artificial intelligence. Hundreds of years ago, who would have even imagined that sound could be captured at a particular place and time, to be listened to over and over again sometime in the future? While we may take these things for granted now, they are no less of a technological marvel that has greatly impacted the way we hear and experience music.

No matter the technology, it is only when it is transfigured by an engineer, DJ, songwriter, coder or the musician themselves that humans can truly process it.

We hope you will enjoy this issue, and maybe even gain a little insight into what makes these performers tick, and how they play in a way that touches our own souls.

MIKO MARKS, BADU BESTIE TALKS LITTLE FEAT, ROOTS MUSIC, FULFILLING OPRY DREAMS

By Ian Saint

Miko Marks
Photo by Karen Santos

Few names are as synonymous with Dallas music history as Erykah Badu. Before Badu became a household name, she worked at a bookstore called Black to the Basics while attending Grambling State University in Louisiana — where powerhouse vocalist and fellow Grambling student, Miko Marks struck a conversation with her.

Speaking with me for NPR Ohio affiliate WOUB Public Media last year, Miko shared the story of how she was singing with a group in the musical theater stairwell, then Erykah suddenly appeared to harmonize and "she sounded so wonderful." This impromptu epiphany culminated in Miko and Erykah launching an acapella singing group, called Harmony.

Late in 2023, Erykah hailed Miko as "now the biggest Black country-western singer," while fondly recalling Harmony in conversation with K104-FM's Bay Bay. Badu's enthusiasm for Miko's country foray isn't new, however; Erykah even played the title character in Miko's "Mama" music video, way back in 2006, and Miko told me that Erykah "got a trailer and bought, like, 30 outfits…. she showed up for me in a big, supportive way, and I'll never forget that."

On New Year's Eve 2023, Miko played Erykah Badu's hometown for the first time, opening for Little Feat — the funky classic rock band, boasting a massive "Dallas roots by proxy" relationship of their own: the Dixie Chicks, whose name was inspired by *Dixie Chicken*, the title track of their 1973 album. Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page famously named Little Feat as his "favorite American group" in a 1975 *Rolling Stone* interview.

BUDDY magazine sat down with Miko in her dressing room, backstage at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, on Friday the 13th in October. This was a year after Miko made her Opry debut upon her 50 th birthday — a long-awaited milestone that garnered effusive praise from fellow performers Trisha Yearwood, Garth Brooks, and the Oak Ridge Boys.

Her Opry return was commemorated with a performance of "Jubilee," off her *Feel Like Going Home* album (released on her Opry debut day), with the legendary Fisk Jubilee Singers from Fisk University – honoring the significance of historically Black universities, which brought Miko and Erykah Badu together in Harmony.

IAN SAINT: Have you had history in Dallas? We've talked a lot about your good friend, Erykah Badu, and that's her hometown.

MIKO MARKS: That's my only history there, is Erykah being my friend. She's the only person I know from Dallas; but Dallas is rich, from what I can tell from her.

IAN SAINT: We're sitting in your Grand Ole Opry dressing room, a year after you made your marvelous, long-awaited Opry debut to a full house — which gave you two standing ovations. Our camera man, Isaiah Cunningham, saw that; your Opry debut was Isaiah's first time at the Grand Ole Opry, and it was the night before he made his debut with the Black Opry — at the same age you were, when you released your debut album. As a fellow Black country artist, witnessing your Opry debut was profound for Isaiah; and he was just one of thousands who watched you, so imagine how many others you impacted in their own quests. How does processing that make you feel?

MIKO MARKS: For me, it's really come full circle. Because when I got in that Circle [where Opry performers stand in the center], I realized I was not just "me" anymore — I was a piece of the whole experience for the audience,

Ian Saint's backstage interview with Miko Marks *Filming credit: Isaiah Cunningham*

the history, the legacy, the spirits that moved in that Circle… and so I became rooted and grounded in my delivery of what I wanted to say and do. So for Isaiah, or anybody else, I would tell them to just envelop everything around you — like, get out of self for a second — and really bring in the spirit, and the movement, and the sincerity of the people who come here for… because they come here for a reason — because of this legacy, this history, and for all the people that have gone on and left their mark in this space.So I became, kind of, not "me"; I became the roots of the ancestors, I became the roots of what music has transpired in this place, and brought that forward in a way that really was kind of like an out-of-body experience…I was just the vessel to bring it.

A lot of times when I do musical things, I'm transported — it's not only me, but it's all those that have gone before me, and the people in the audience that bring this unseen energy to the space. That's what I'm looking forward to tapping into, because it's not about me — I just got a gift, but I'm only the vessel. I don't own this; I'm supposed to share it, give it to the people — and then when you do that, you get something back, and it's just this… it's something you really can't put into words; it's a spiritual experience.

IAN SAINT: At your Opry debut, you got to meet Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks. I'll never forget how stunned I was to find Trisha soundchecking "She's In Love With the Boy," right before your soundcheck; Garth was an unannounced performer, and had recently completed his stadium residency in Ireland. Trisha then raved about you on Twitter, and shared the link to your new album. What was meeting them like?

MIKO MARKS: I wanted to meet Trisha so bad, and I didn't know if it was going to happen or not. Then she was walking down the hall in her pink costume — because this Opry program emphasized breast cancer awareness — walking down to me. She came up and said, "Girl, if you couldn't sing, I wouldn't be over here right now; but I had to come see who you were!" And then she gave me a huge hug, and embraced me for a long time. She was like, "you were awesome!"

And then Garth asked me, "How was your Opry debut?" I said, "Oh, Garth, I cried like a baby!" And he said that he cried at his Opry debut, too. They were both such amazing people, and so supportive — just loving, kind, and genuine, so it was a real blessing.

IAN SAINT: I saw you open for Little Feat in Lorain, Ohio, near Cleveland. That was super interesting to process, because I had previously always seen you in Nashville, and this was in a very different culture. You've performed all over this country — and a bit outside of this country — since we spoke last year, and for audiences in different genres. What have you observed along the way?

MIKO MARKS: Yeah, I get different crowds all the time! But what I know about what I'm doing now, is it's not just country music… it's blues, it's gospel, it's jazz, there's a little hint of R&B in there, even classical is in there. I'm doing roots music. The music that I'm doing is mostly Americana; like, it's this underbelly of things that don't quite fit into one space — it's too big to fit in one space.

I started out doing traditional country music when I started in 2005 [with debut album *Freeway Bound*]; but as I've grown older, I've brought in different elements of my upbringing, my life, my experiences [impact] my singing technique. I try to make a big old gumbo of music, and I think that it just can't be defined by a genre. I feel most comfortable in a space where it's roots music, and anybody can be a part of roots music; it doesn't matter who you are, or what your sound is — if you're bringing all these different elements, hey, that's roots music. "Roots Music," that's what I feel like I am.

IAN SAINT: When you talk about the gumbo of genres in your upbringing, I'm thinking of how that also applies to the Longhorn Ballroom — which is infamously one of the only places that the Sex Pistols ever played in the USA, but of course it's also had Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson, and also Al Green and James Brown…you gave me goosebumps in talking about enveloping yourself in the spirits of your predecessors — because I'm thinking about if those Longhorn rafters could talk, and what they would say as you become the latest contribution to that vibrant history.

MIKO MARKS: Yes, absolutely. I'm feeling like I'm coming into myself; I'm realizing that, for me, genre doesn't really matter — I just want to put out the best quality, soul-stirring music that I can put out. Wherever you want to put that, put it there; but for me, it's about the real interpersonal spiritual giving of my soul.

IAN SAINT: You began touring with Little Feat before your Grand Ole Opry debut in 2022; and now you're on their "Rollin' Into 2024" Tour.

MIKO MARKS: Yes, I'm keeping up with Little Feat! I love Little Feat; I'm looking forward to it. I get to sing with them on certain songs — I won't tell you what songs, because if you haven't seen the show, then I don't want to spoil it for you… but I get to come out and sing with them, and that is an honor; it's a gift, because this is a legendary band, that has been around for over 50 years. They have three members from their classic line-up, and it's just so awesome to be a part of that, and to feel those roots — because that's roots music, too.

IAN SAINT: The Longhorn Ballroom had their own Americanafest panel this year. They're hailed as the most historic music venue in Texas, and that's where you'll conclude this amazing year you've had.

MIKO MARKS: Wow! I'm looking forward to it. When you told me about the Longhorn's legacy, you made you go research it; and I was like, "oh, this is awesome!" So thank you for that.

For a full list of Miko Marks' tour dates and her music discography, visit Miko's official site: *https://www.mikomarks.com.* ■

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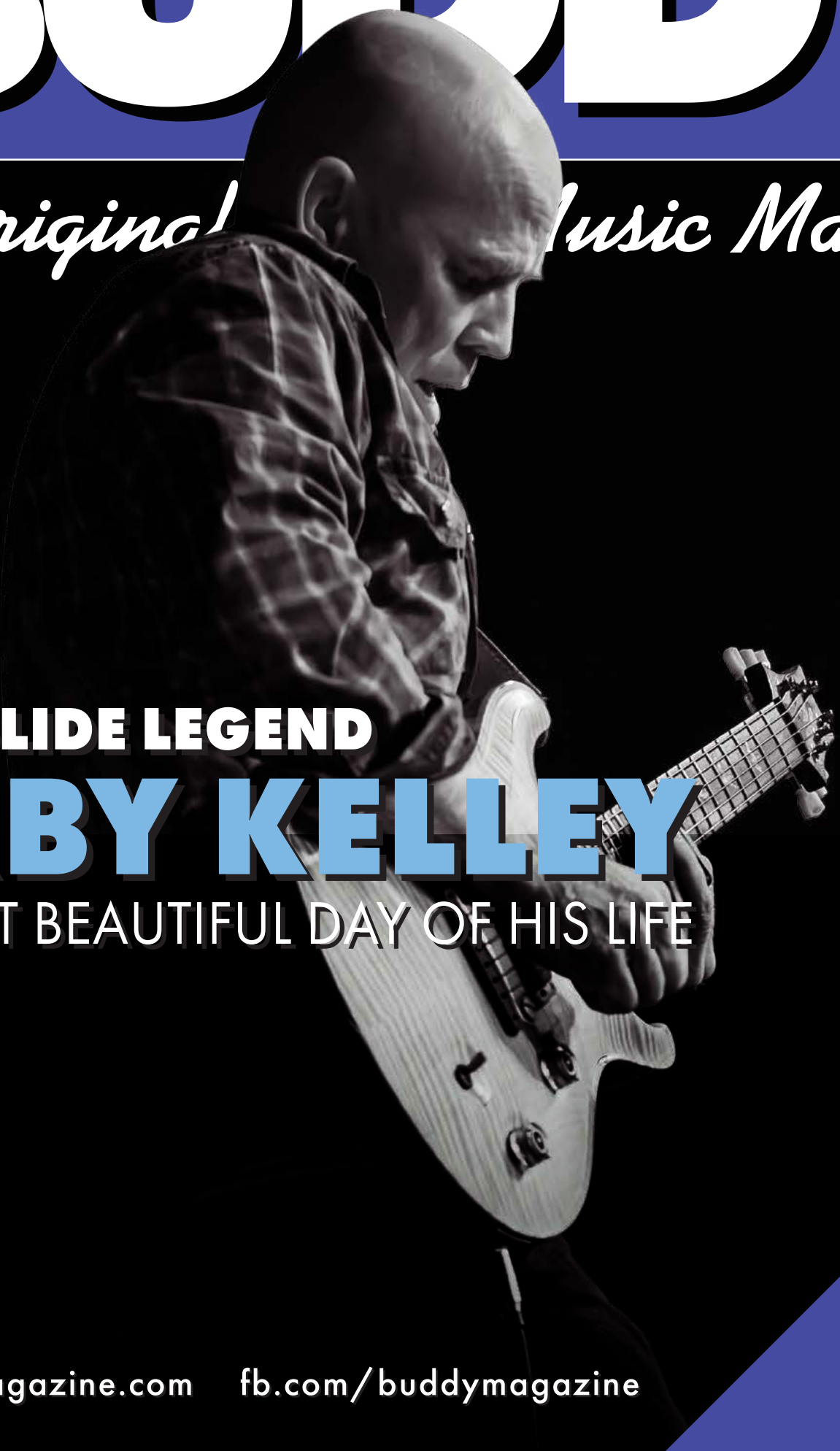

TEXAS SLIDE LEGEND

KIRBY KELLEY

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY OF HIS LIFE

Kirby Kelley photo ©2023 Michael Heeschen

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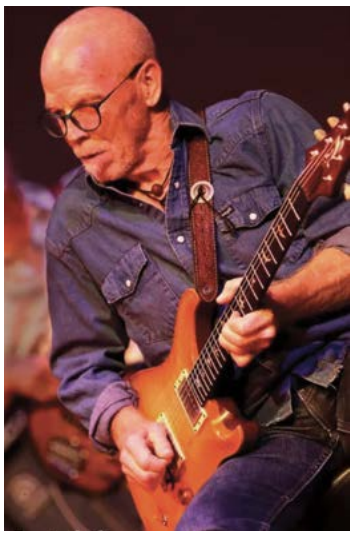
TEXAS SLIDE BLUES LEGEND KIRBY KELLEY: THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY OF HIS LIFE

By Kate Stow



Kirby Kelley
Photo by Travis Clark

There is a realm of guitar playing that few players manage to enter – the "thirteenth note" – the note that figuratively expands the range of the instrument, and aurally touches the heart. So, it's no wonder that any guitar player that manages to do that would be greatly admired among his peers.

Kirby Kelley, slide guitar master and *BUDDY* Magazine 2018 Texas Tornado is one such musician.

"When I first heard Kirby play, he absolutely blew me away," exclaimed Paul Reed Smith, famed luthier and founder of PRS guitars. "He produced noises I've never heard a guitar make – he found the thirteenth note!"

Smith, the CEO of the third largest guitar manufacturer in the world was so impressed by Kirby that he was inspired to create a custom PRS guitar for him. The two men quickly formed a bond that has lasted 17 years.

"I was playing with Bugs Henderson (1978 Tornado), and we were hired to play Paul's 50th birthday party," recalled Kirby. "I was worried because I didn't have a PRS guitar, but Bugs said Paul wouldn't care. While we were rehearsing, he came in and looked over our equipment. I guess he wasn't so impressed 'cause he sent me a PRS soon after!"

While his musical prowess has been recognized by many, it was Kirby Kelley the man, who was celebrated with an awesome gathering of Texas players on Sunday, June 25 at the Plaza Theatre in Garland. After an introduction by Paul, a concert worth remembering began, featuring performances by stellar musicians, including a long list of Texas Tornados: Guthrie Kennard (1992), Jimmy Wallace (1992), Buddy Whittington (1990), Mike "Junior" Clark (1982), Jerry Don Branch (2015), Jim Suhler (1989), Mike Morgan (1992), Andy Timmons (1991), Mike Daane (1992), Robert "Texas Slim" Sullivan (1987) and drummers Linda Waring (1982) and Mike Arnold (1990).

> **"...the most beautiful day of my life. It was taxing and thoroughly exhausting, and worth every millisecond of it!"**
>
> **– Kirby Kelley**

Although these top guns were happy to play together, the reason for it wasn't so happy. The concert was a fundraiser to help Kirby pay medical bills he's incurred since being diagnosed with cancer in November 2022.

Jimmy Wallace, the owner and CEO of the Dallas International Guitar Festival, put the show together and extended the invites. To enter the event cost a donation to the cause, and there were also several auction items to bid on – including a guitar signed by 1978 Texas Tornado Jimmie Vaughan.

Kirby's musical journey began in St. Louis at the tender age of 15. He had a crush on a girl who just happened to have a great record collection that included some old 78's. It was those recordings that touched Kirby deep in his soul, most particularly one by Edward James "Son" House, Jr. the early Mississippi slide guitar player.

Two years later, Kirby moved to Dallas. While working for a moving company, he lived in a furniture storage unit in Grapevine to save money to buy guitars.

"I mostly bought vintage guitars and dobros," he recalled. "You could find them in the weekly *Thrifty Nickel* paper pretty cheap."

Kirby's custom PRS Modern Eagle

Kirby joined his first band in the early 1980s; they moved to West Palm Beach and rented a one-room apartment. He described the experience thusly: "We played around, got broke, and came home."

While his guitar playing was restricted to playing for family and friends, Kirby made his living as a carpenter, among other professions. A 1990 foray into ostrich farming didn't quite get off the ground.

It was in 1992, when he was in his thirties that Ibanez artist relations rep Chris Kelly heard him testing an amp at the Dallas International Guitar Festival. Kelly sent Kirby to the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Show in California and jump started a new career.

While in Los Angeles, Kirby met Texas players Andy Timmons and Mike "Junior" Clark. He gives credit to Mike for getting him on stage.

"Junior tried to coax me into playing, but I had stage fright so bad then," Kirby said. "He's my beloved musical brother – we've played a long time, on and off together. Junior's one of the few people I've met that is respectful and giving and lets you play what you want to play."

© Robert C. Maxfield

Playing with Junior led to playing with legendary Texas blues man Bugs Henderson. Kirby honed his Delta-style slide technique until he mastered the use of two slides – on both his middle and little fingers.

Playing with Bugs led to that fateful day in 2006 when Kirby met Paul Reed Smith.

"He's been so loving and giving and generous, and so beautifully endorses my playing," said Kirby of Paul. "He is so complimentary. I can't explain my love for him. He calls and texts often to check on me."

"Kirby is a beautiful human – inside and out," said Paul, who is currently working on a Kirby-inspired accessory to market and sell through PRS.

"Kirby keeps a Persian silk cloth that he drapes over his amp, and it changes his tone – it's so simple, yet genius," Paul said, adding "I found the textile factory that makes the fabric while on vacation overseas and bought a bunch of it."

"Paul is a flipping genius, and if anyone can market it – it's him," laughed Kirby. "The funny thing is, I got it at Goodwill for about two bucks a long time ago, and the only reason it's on my amp is 'cause it's so ugly my wife won't let me put it on the wall!"

The amp it covers is a Dallas model PRS engineered by Dallas' David Sewell, who works for PRS. The combination of PRS amp and Kirby's PRS custom Modern Eagle axe gives Kirby the sound that helped him win the Guitar Center Blues Challenge in 2009.

"It really is the best guitar I've ever owned – and I've owned a LOT! He did some custom wiring on it and put in special pickups," Kirby explained. "Plus, it's just a stunning piece of art. Paul is an amazing architect and artist."

And so, it was at such a particularly hard time that Kirby found himself trying to sell his last guitar – the custom PRS – to his friend, Robbie Gustin at the North Dallas Guitar Center. Robbie refused to buy the prized possession, instead entering Kirby's name in the national chain's "King of the Blues" contest that year.

By this point, Kirby felt burned out after a string of bad deals with promoters and club owners. Not believing a contest was a true test of a musician's talent, he balked, but Robbie won the argument. Kirby went on to beat over 4,000 entries from all over the country, and pawning guitars became a thing of the past.

"Every month he would ask how much we needed and then he'd come in with the money," Kelley's wife Peg told writer Dan Acree of *Texoma Living Magazine* in 2010. "He never said what he was doing, but I knew."

Besides carpentry and the ostrich farm fiasco, Kirby has taught countless others to play the guitar through taking steel guitar lessons from 1990 Texas Tornado Maurice Anderson, owner of MSA steel guitars, who is in the Texas Steel Guitar Hall of Fame and the International Steel Guitar Hall of Fame. So impressed was Anderson that he built a 12-string steel guitar just for Kirby; it's no surprise they ended up being friends.

Being named "King of the Blues" in 2009 catapulted Kirby into the international guitar scene. He enjoyed touring with Dan Toler of Allman Brothers fame, until Dan got too sick to play.

"We did a small tour through the southeast. I really enjoyed that time, then Dan got sick with MS and passed," said Kirby. "Dan was as beautiful a player as he was a human."

This cloth, draped over his amp, gives Kirby his signature tone (along with his "scary eyes" monkey).

In 2018, Kirby was chosen to teach a slide guitar class at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, during the annual Blues Guitar Week. "Dr. Kim Perlak (department chair) has been a dear friend for a long time, and she asked me and Dave Tronzo to do that," Kirby remarked in his usual unassuming way – as if he

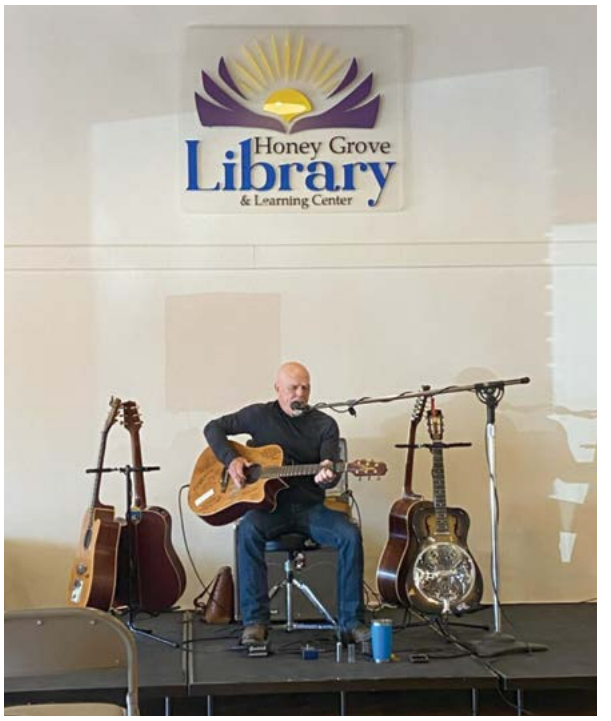
Kirby plays guitar like a bird sings – beautiful and naturally. He's a true musical treasure and he's touched so many people's lives with his gentle yet fierce spirit and his unparalleled guitar playing."

– 1989 Texas Tornado Jim Suhler, George Thorogood and The Destroyers and Monkeybeat

touch young hearts," he said. "You get wonderful feedback and inspiration."

The win gave him a newfound passion for his art, and he began truly doesn't understand what a monumental honor it was.

Life was looking up for the Kelley family, and not one guitar was sacrificed to pay bills.



Kirby Kelley performing at the *BUDDY* Magazine 50th Anniversary gallery exhibit in the Honey Grove, Texas Library, April 2022. *Photo credit: Mitzi Sherwood*

When not playing, Kirby could be found riding his mountain bike, kayaking, or running marathons. "Sitting around is not my style," he said.

The athletic activity slowed considerably in April 2022, when Kirby developed a blood clot in his leg that didn't respond to blood thinners. That November, an astute hematologist at the hospital insisted on an extra sonogram. That scan revealed a mass in Kirby's right lung and brain.

"They diagnosed me with Stage 4 lung cancer, which metastasized into my lymph nodes and brain. There is no remission for this kind of cancer – we can only keep it at bay with heavy rotations of radiation and chemotherapy," Kirby said. "Dr. Sidda, my oncologist at Texas Oncology, said I had about two to four years – but he doesn't know me…or maybe he does."

Despite catching Covid-19 while doing chemo, then double pneumonia, Kirby remains optimistic about his outlook. Although biking and running are temporarily halted, he still loves to work in the garden and play guitar when he can.

"I'm learning the pedal steel and loving every second," he said, full of happy excitement. "David Wright of Pilot Point is helping me – he's in the Hall of Fame."

Kirby and Peg live in Sherman, just north of Dallas; daughter Sara, son-in-law Matt and their three children live just down the road. Kirby said being in the delivery room when his two oldest grandchildren were born are two of his happiest memories.

Among his most prized possessions is a handwritten card that was attached to a bouquet of flowers delivered to him. At first, he thought they were meant for Peg until he opened the note – a testament to his artistry. It read: "Dearest Mr. Kirby Kelley, I was deeply moved by your pristine outlook on why you make music. As you said – to touch people, to be precise, touch people's hearts and remind them that they, like you and I – they matter, they are significant and meaningful. Bless your heart, your mind and your fingers. Look forward to meeting you in the flesh in the future. Love, Respect and Admiration, Carlos Santana."

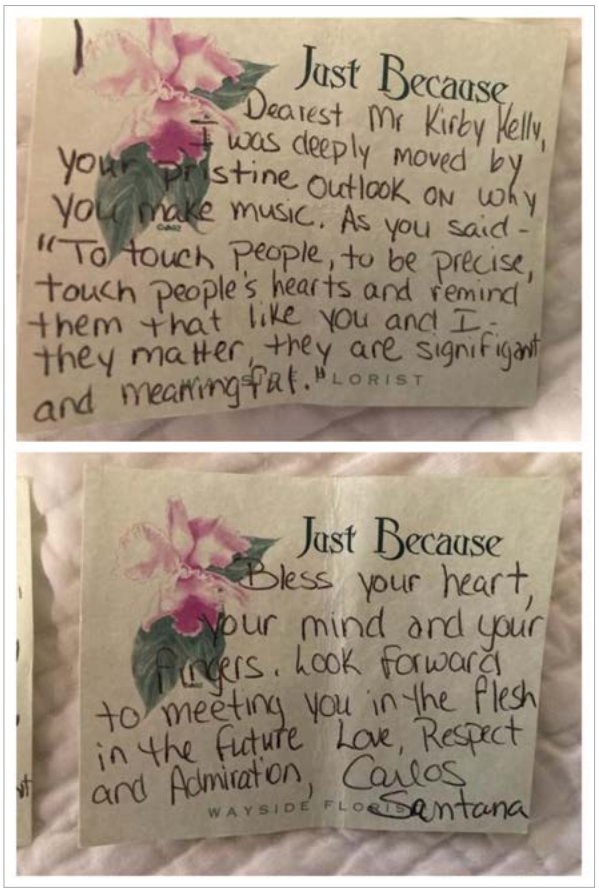
"For as long as I've known Kirby, which has been many years now, he's been a man of few words, with the heart of a baby possum. His soul runs as deep as the Mississippi River, and his music is as real as Robert Johnson standing at the crossroads. There's only one Kirby Kelley."

– 1992 Texas Tornado Guthrie Kennard, Singer, songwriter.

"What an amazing guy, not only a unique and incredible player, but a sweetheart of a human being. I love him dearly and I truly hope we will share the stage more often!"

– Tommy Katona, Texas Flood

It's easy to understand why so many people call Kirby a friend. His humble, easygoing and optimistic attitude is contagious. That is why the Garland's Plaza Theatre was packed on June 25; why Paul Reed Smith flew in from Maryland; and why so many local musicians moved their gigs around just so they could be there.



Most prized: Carlos Santana's personal note to Kirby

"To say Kirby plays from the heart still doesn't paint the whole picture," declared Jimmy Wallace. "He fully invades every heart that can hear him."

To help with Kirby's medical expenses: *https://www.gofundme.com/f/kirby-kelley-kickin-cancer-fund* ■

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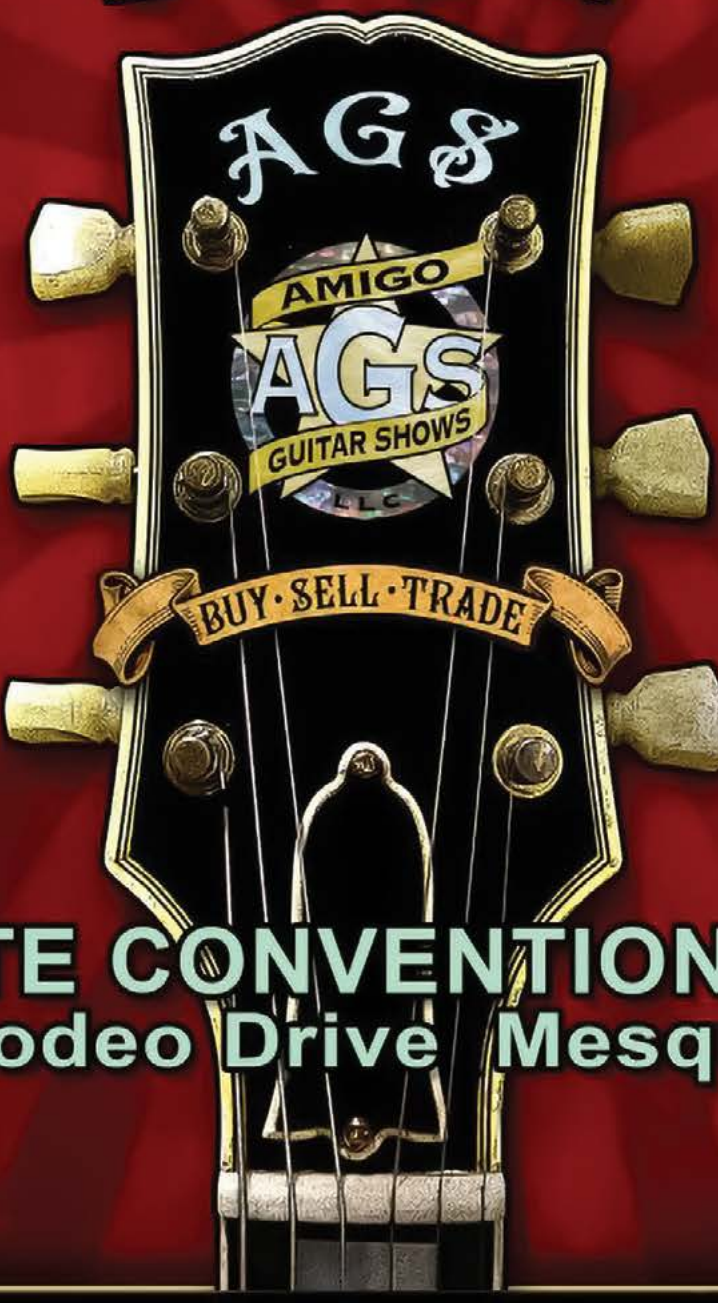

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The Texas Music Magazine

INTERVIEW WITH POWER TRIP AND FUGITIVE'S

BLAKE IBANEZ

BY ANDREW DALY

Blake Ibanez photo ©2023 Travis Clark

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POWER TRIP & FUGITIVE'S BLAKE IBANEZ: TEXAS THRASH MASTER

Through shredding solos, chugging riffs, and punk-meets-metal aesthetic and sound, shuttering Dallas headbangers Power Trip changed the game through the release of modern-day classic albums Manifest Decimation (2013) and Nightmare Logic (2017).

Travis Clark Photography

At the heart of things – and what made the Grammy-nominated Power Trip tick – was the vocalist/guitarist duo Riley Gale and Blake Ibanez. Sadly, while on tour in support of *Nightmare Logic,* Gale died of an accidental overdose, leaving his band members, which also included drummer Chris Ulsh, guitarist Nick Stewart, and bassist Chris Whetzel, to pick up the pieces.

Though Power Trip never disbanded, they've remained inactive in the three-and-a-half years since, leaving fans wondering what might happen next. To that end, guitarist Blake Ibanez tells *BUDDY*, "For Power Trip to reform without Riley, it would take the right person being brought into the fold to make Power Trip something new. But not too new because we've got a lot of pride. We wouldn't do anything that was inauthentic or cheap just to get back out there. I don't think we would ever do that."

Blake Ibanez, at The Warehuse Live, Houston, Texas, August 2023. *Travis Clark Photography*

He continues, "The time could come, but for now, I'm not sure. I'd love for that music to see the light of day again, and it would be awesome to play the songs again because Power Trip has a place in a lot of people's hearts. So, I'm optimistic that one day it'll happen, but I don't know when that will be. For now, I'm happy with what we were able to do, and that's never going to change because the songs and the fans still exist even though Riley is gone."

Power Trip aside, Ibanez has stayed busy with his new band Fugitive, which includes Victor Gutierrez of Impalers, Seth Gilmore of Skourge, Lincoln Mullins of Creeping Death, and Andy Messer of Stymie. Indeed, Ibanez continues to write riffs and shred his way across songs that make one's ears joyously bleed and ring for days. Not that any of that is a bad thing—especially if you're the metal-loving sort.

While the future of Power Trip is murky, it's eternally bright for Ibanez, with songs, solos, and more awaiting. And to be sure, fans, both new and old, are prepared to take the ride, be it through Power Trip, Fugitive, or a band yet known.

What inspired you to pick up the guitar?

I get asked that question a lot when I do interviews like this, but I don't know exactly what it was. It's probably not the coolest answer, but probably Jimi Hendrix. My dad is almost 70, so he grew up with stuff like The Beatles, The Who, Hendrix, and Neil Young. So, aside from Hendrix, I'd definitely say Pete Townsend.

When I was a kid, my dad would show me videos of them smashing guitars and lighting them on fire, and it was just so exciting to see. I'd say those two guys were my first real guitar heroes. They're a lot different from what I've done, but I was amazed at how they looked and the idea of watching them as a kid, saying, "Wow… what the hell are they doing?"

Do you have any favorite players from Texas that influenced you, too?

Oh, yeah, there are a lot of great ones. I've never really thought of my favorites, but guys like Billy Gibbons and Dimebag Darrell are great. What more can I really say about those guys? But obviously, I can't leave out Stevie Ray Vaughan as far as great players from Texas. He's a legend. And you've got Spike Cassidy from D.R.I. and the great Wade Allison from Iron Age. Wade passed away around the same time that Riley did, but he was a big inspiration, and a talented player.

Can you remember your first guitar?

I remember getting a cheap acoustic guitar from one of those mail-order magazines. And then, at some point, I got my first electric guitar for what I think was my 12th birthday. Ironically, it was an Ibanez. It was one of those starter pack-type deals with a little amp, so that was my first electric guitar. I had been taking lessons on acoustic, and those thicker strings had callused up my hands. So, when I got the electric guitar, it was a lot of fun because I could turn it up, and the strings didn't hurt my fingers as much.

What was your first professional gig in the Texas area?

I wouldn't call it professional, but my first-ever gig was like a fourth-grade talent show [laughs]. We played "Louie Louie" by The Kingsmen, and my good friend was on drums. That was like the greatest song you could play at the time, but not long after, we started practicing more covers. I think another was "I Love Rock 'N Roll" by Joan Jett, and we probably did "My Generation" by The Who, too. I went for easy songs that had like two chords in them [laughs]. But after that, I probably ended up doing some battle of the band's stuff.

Your dad showed you classic rock, but were you also surrounded by a lot of metal music growing up?

I started out in the punk and hardcore scene, really. I'd go out to shows probably in the mid-2000s, and from there, I got into a lot of the crossover metal stuff that came out in the '80s. So, that's how I got into metal, and then progressive music came into the picture. But before that, I was very into punk, like The Ramones, The Clash, and the fast-paced, hardcore stuff, too.

That checks out as Power Trip seemed to deeply blend punk, hardcore, and metal.

Yeah, with Power Trip, we never really considered ourselves a strict heavy metal band; we blended all of that. It wasn't until the second record [*Nightmare Logic*] came out that we really leaned into metal sound-wise. We didn't even really find ourselves playing with other metal bands until close to the second album, probably around 2016. That's when we did the tour with Lamb of God, and Anthrax, which kinda put us on the map in the metal world.

Regardless of outside labels, how did the members of Power Trip categorize the band?

After *Nightmare Logic* came out, we were doing tours with Cannibal Corpse, Obituary, and

bands like that, so I guess we became, more or less, a metal band. But we always had one foot in the hardcore scene, even if we were leaning metal. So, I guess Power Trip was always split between those two worlds, which despite being different eras, kind of went hand in hand. They were more separated in the mid-2000s, but not as much now.

How did Power Trip's split personality influence your riff writing?

I guess the journey we all went on coming from the hardcore and punk scene and ending up in the metal world was an interesting path. And I think it influenced my writing a lot over the years. There's no denying the impact that punk and hardcore had on the way I write in terms of the angles I'd take, even if we were playing metal music. Once I started to get into songwriting and looked at it on a deeper level, at my core, I've always been a big rock song guy as far as arrangements go.

I love rock, power pop, and all that stuff from the '70s, so a band like AC/DC absolutely influenced the way I write riffs, too. I'm always trying to connect the dots and take bits and pieces from here and there, creating my style. Different rhythms and all that still inspire me, but I try to keep it within the same realm so that things mesh, even if the influences come from different places.

Despite Manifest Decimation and Nightmare Logic being modern records, they're already considered classics by many. Does that surprise you?

It's always cool to hear people say that about our records. And, of course, I'm proud of the songs, and I think they're good songs, but I'm not here to say what's classic and what isn't, you know? It's almost kind of awkward for me to hear because, in my eyes, everybody has their own idea of what a classic is, and I'm pretty sure that plenty of people would be like, "Are you fucking serious? Power Trip? Those aren't classic."

But, looking back on them, I think the timing was perfect. I guess you could say that in terms of our legacy, our timing, and what we did, I can see how it played an important role in where things are now, even if only in a small way. And, like I said, I do think the songs are good; we wrote some good songs. But regardless of if anyone thinks they're classic, I think that's pretty amazing. I'm very humbled by that.

Did you know they were special from the jump?

Right from the start, I felt like we were doing some good things. We were pushing each other, and Riley [Gale] and I definitely worked hard, man. Riley and I wrote everything, and our styles meshed very well. He had his own ideas and was a great lyricist, so he was very into writing and all that stuff. So, from the outset, from the first note we ever wrote together for Power Trip on our demo, it clicked. I was always writing and arranging songs, which is the same thing I do now.

I won't say that Riley wasn't into that, but he wasn't a songwriter per se; he was a frontman and a lyricist. So, we would butt heads while trying to get on the same page, but things always landed where we needed them to. And looking back, that stuff really does hold up. We were young kids when we started, and I wish I had the wisdom I do now regarding mindset, production, and performance. And when I listen to those records, I hear things I'd do differently, but at the same time, song-wise, they turned out pretty great.

With Power Trip hitting its peak at the time of Riley's passing, it must have been frustrating to hit the pause button.

Travis Clark Photography

It's weird because, on the one hand, in terms of the band, there is a sense of disappointment because we had a whole record written musically. It wasn't fully finished at that point, and there were no lyrics, but it was all there musically. So, it is disappointing. But at the same time, and it sounds stupid to say, you have to take what you're given in life and make the most of it. And as tragic as losing Riley was for us and as disappointing as it is, I grew up a lot through that experience and learned a lot. I don't look back and get angry or upset or feel bad for myself. I've learned that it's better to accept what happened. Do you feel like Power Trip left a lot on the table?

You never know what could have happened or what we would have done next. But it's a fucking shame, that's for sure. It's one of those things where when you go through that, you just accept it at some point. And so, when I look back, I try to appreciate everything and not be bitter, you know what I mean? Being bitter doesn't do anything for anyone, so you just have to move forward. But, like I was saying, it forced me to grow up and take things into my own hands. So, I've tried to appreciate that element of it and take that as a positive, if there is any. But what can I say? It's not the way I wanted the story to go, that's for sure.

How do you apply what you've learned to the music you're making today with Fugitive?

It probably put my instincts to the test a little bit. The way I do the music in Fugitive is basically the same thing I did with Power Trip in terms of writing and how I arrange things. So, that hasn't changed. But with Riley, there was definitely a power struggle between us. I'd give him a fully arranged song, and we'd go, "This is where I want the vocals to go; here's the first chorus…" And generally, he would go along with that because it was written that way, but sometimes he would hear it differently, or we'd disagree.

A lot of the time, obviously, he was writing the lyrics, and it was his phrasing, but there were times when I'd suggest something like, "Hey, maybe a little fast," or "Try repeating this line," and stuff like that. In Fugitive, Seth [Gilmore] is talented in his own right, but he defaults to me when it comes to how I hear the phrasing, arrangement, and vocals going. So, this has tested my natural instincts because I've always known how I want things to go in my head, but the dynamic between Riley and me was much different than between me and Seth.

Are you comfortable with the weight of the band being on your shoulders?

I think I am. I'm more involved lyrically and all that, but it's still kind of the same thing. The big thing is that it's more on my shoulders, but it feels good knowing that I have the creative capacity to get involved with different aspects as opposed to Power Trip, where, even if I tried to get involved, it wasn't always needed because we had Riley. Riley didn't want to take direction from me unless he had to, you know?

He would be like, "I'll listen to what you're thinking, but I still want to do my own thing." There really was a whole lot of meeting in the middle, which generally worked out, but sometimes it didn't. That can be very challenging, and you get fewer ideas in. I don't even know how a third Power Trip album would have gone, but given our capabilities, I'm sure it would have been fine. But regardless, it's very different in Fugitive.

Have Fugitive's early returns given you enough closer to move on from Power Trip?

It's funny when you start a new band, especially for me since I hadn't done that since Power Trip began when I was a teenager. Starting Fugitive was different because we started Power Trip in the pre-social media era. Well, maybe there was social media, but it was definitely the pre-smartphone era. All we had was Myspace and shit, so it was different. You can start a new band quickly because the internet is so powerful. Plus, I have years of experience networking, which helped, too. It's been a learning experience, and I've had a lot of personal growth doing this. As I'm getting a bit older, I'm getting more on the ball about things. I feel pretty good about where I'm at, and it does feel good to have the same confidence in what I'm writing now in that I'm doing things that are stylistically like Power Trip. It's not totally the same, but it's not crazy different. So, yeah, it feels good to have a diverse and new out. I'm having fun playing with different guys and love what we're doing.

With an unfinished record in the can and Power Trip never officially disbanding, despite Riley being gone, do you see a future for Power Trip?

It's one of those where the rest of us are still here. And I know that many people didn't get to see us but have gotten turned onto the records and would love to see us. People talk to me after shows and say, "Man, I never got to see Power Trip play; I'd love to see you guys play the songs." And we'd love to do it again, but it's one of the things where, especially for me, I'm proud of everything we did despite how it ended. I'm proud of where we left things musically.

So, I'm not the type of guy to mess with that. And we all have a lot of pride and share the same expectations and standards of what Power Trip needs to be. I'm not the type of guy to force anything or do anything that doesn't feel right. And the truth is that it may never be right. So, if we ever did anything without Riley, it would be different, which could work, especially in metal. And we've explored options, talked about, and met up and jammed, but as of right now, there's just not an avenue to make it happen.■

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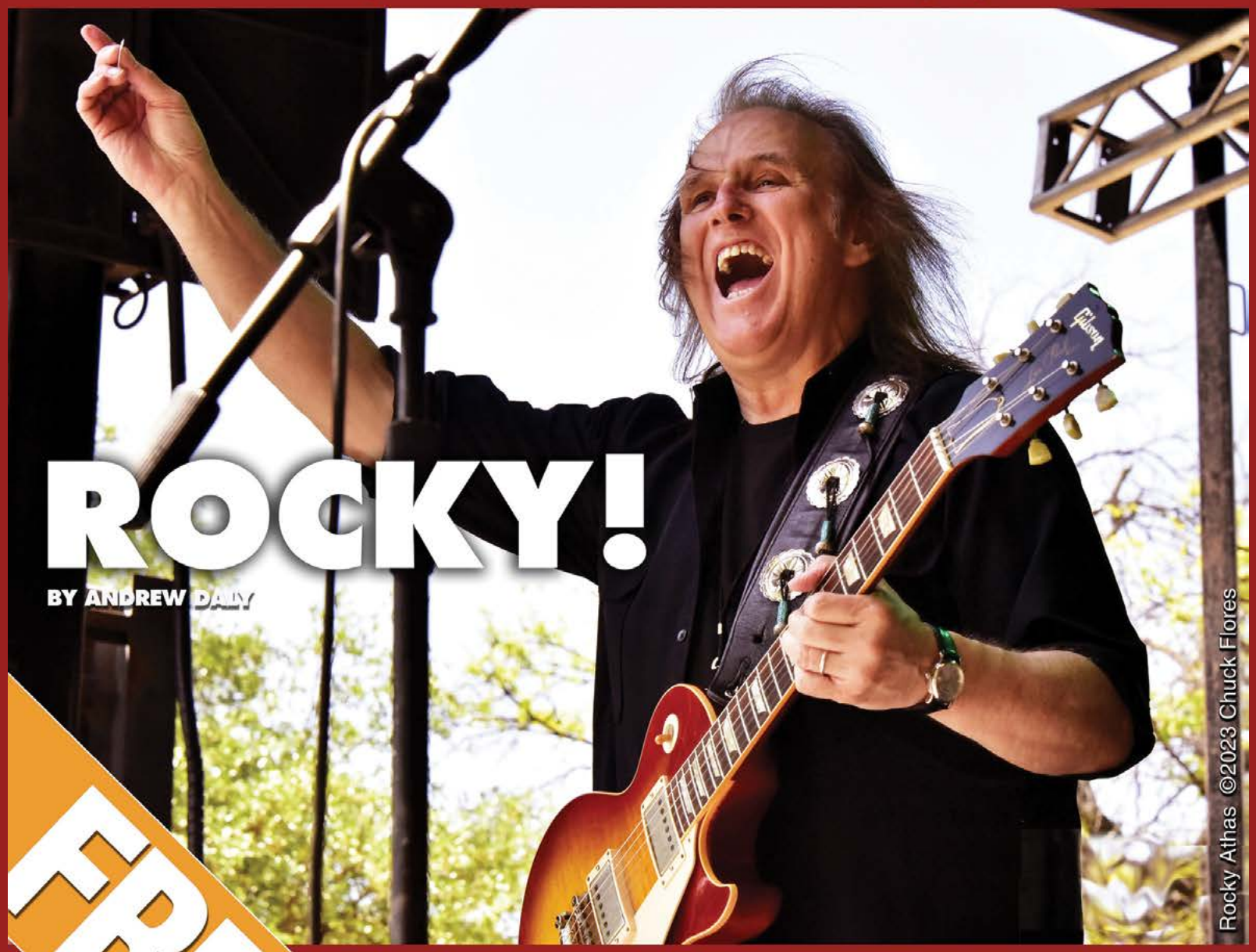

ROCKY!

BY ANDREW DALY

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THE IMPECCABLE TONE OF SAMANTHA FISH

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THE IMPECCABLE TONE OF SAMANTHA FISH

By Andrew Daly

Photo by Ron McKeown, Copyright 2021

Samantha Fish can shred when she wants; make no mistake, but it's her slow-burning feel that makes her special.

As one of the finest players within an energized blues circle, the Midwest native has firmly wrenched her grip around her share of the market through an enticing live show, sometimes sultry, but more often brazen solos, and the type of vocals that can lull you to sleep just as quickly as they'll choke the life out of you.

Sounds pretty great, right? We think so. And so does Fish's growing fanbase, which is becoming stouter by the day on the backside of her latest records, *Faster* (2021), in which she undertook solo style, and *Death Wish Blues* (2023), which found Fish sharing the limelight with fellow off-the-beaten-path sometimes blues, other times outlaw country guitarist, Jesse Dayton.

For Samantha Fish, a Gibson SG in hand may as well be an assault rifle; as she hisses and hums her way to infamy akin to the heroes, she's putting space between through her idiosyncratic brand of modern-day and oh-so-rocking blues. In short, one listen to cuts like "All Ice No Whiskey," "Twisted Ambition," or "Rippin' and Runnin'" tells you all you need to know—at 34 years of age and with a growing stable of gritty yet pretty records under her belt, Samantha Fish isn't going anywhere.

We talk about generational talents, the type who will be remembered for their exploits when they're dead and gone… Fish is one of those players. A long, dark shadow of Delta, Chicago, and any and all blues has long been cast across the modern-day landscape, but Fish, along with a few brave others, is stepping out from that shadow and now casting their own.

While on the road doing what she does best, Samantha Fish dialed in with *BUDDY* Magazine to dig into the recording of *Death Wish Blues*, her tone secrets, approach to riffs and solos, love for Gibson SGs, dialing back on the use of pedals, and more.

How would you describe the evolution of your guitar playing that got you to where you are today?

Over the years, you grow as a player; the more you do it, the more stage time, and the more hours you put in, things naturally progressed and changed, and I've become more melodic. When you start, you learn the scales, then your riffs, and you rely on that to get you going. I find cool melodies and make them a counterpoint to the song or a secondary hook, and I focus on that with my guitar playing.

Where do you pull inspiration from as you grow as a guitarist?

I pick it up from all over. Other guitar players are always very inspiring; it's cool to go and listen to an old recording and try to figure out the synth or horn parts; it just gives you a different perspective on the music. Learning everything, the ins, and outs of what makes a song, and trying to figure out how to play it on guitar. That adds this other dynamic to your playing that is important. It makes you a well-rounded player and gives you new rhythm ideas.

What's your process of putting together a riff?

My phone is just full of recordings. It often starts with me singing something into my phone, and I'll come back to it later and think, "Okay, is that the vocal hook? Is this a guitar hook?" You can diagnose it, see where it fits into a song, and see what you can build around it. I like to focus on making it singable; I'll use "Deathwish" as an example song I wrote with Jesse. There's a hook on the guitar that is the recurring melodic theme throughout, and if it's singable, people can get into it along with a repeated phrase in a song to make it catchy. If I'm going for a more intricate sound, I try to make sure it's gutsy, something a little different. You have to try and figure out a way to make something unique to you.

Do you approach solos the same way?

Solos I like to approach with consideration for the song I'm playing, "Are there any themes that you can quote or chase? Maybe the keyboard is playing this cool part and something you can make a counterpart off of." I liked doing stuff like that, creating these countermelodies that become their hooks as strong as the leading hook in the song. Do whatever you can to make the song more infectious and stick with people. There's a time and a place for flashy, over-the-top guitar playing that people enjoy. I love doing that, and you, I like hearing it. But the most important thing is finding something that makes the solo memorable.

What's the recipe for your impeccable tone?

I used one amp for the entire record, and I like to go for smaller amps. We often fly into these studios and only have a portion of our arsenal of guitars and amps. That's just how I record: get to the destination with just the tools in the studio. A lot of times a studio will have a killer Fender Deluxe and that works

for me, you just crank it up, put a mic on it, and we're set. With *Death Wish Blues,* it was a little tricky because we're both guitar players, and we wanted to figure out a way to stand out from one another sonically but still be just as present and in-your-face.

And how do you do that when you're competing within a smaller sonic zone?

That's where John Spencer came in because he's been doing that with the blues explosion for years, figuring out how to have two guitar players that complement each other and stand out and they're both just as exciting. We experimented with mixing solid state with tubes on songs; we just went and found different textures.

The studio we worked at in Woodstock for *Death Wish Blues* had this room full of beautiful old amps; I'm talking old-school Fenders, Supros, and Airlines. I think I did a lot of the recording through a deconstructed PA speaker that was sitting on the ground. It was from Woodstock Elementary School, and I got a lot of cool rhythm parts playing through that thing. Just going in there and experimenting, turning knobs, seeing what happens, you can come up with cool tones that way.

How do you intermingle your two very different styles from different yet familiar places?

Jesse is rooted in this outlaw country world; he has all that chicken-pickin' shit down for days with a real aggressive style. His rhythm is incredible, and the tone that he gets out of that King guitar is so ballsy, and along with his voice, he's just an incredible artist. I love playing with Jesse; the challenge was that I come from the blues world, so we're comparing apples to apples rather than apples to oranges, like Granny Smith to a Pink Lady. Blues and country are closely related in the music world, but we talk about it like we're from different planets.

So, he does it his way, you do it yours, and you meet in the middle, then?

He does it in his way when he plays a lick, and when I play a lick, I do it in mine. We're two players who chose different backgrounds and shared this love for rock and roll. We were in a honeymoon phase when we first got into the studio. We were tiptoeing around each other, trying to be as respectful and careful as possible because we didn't want to step on each other.

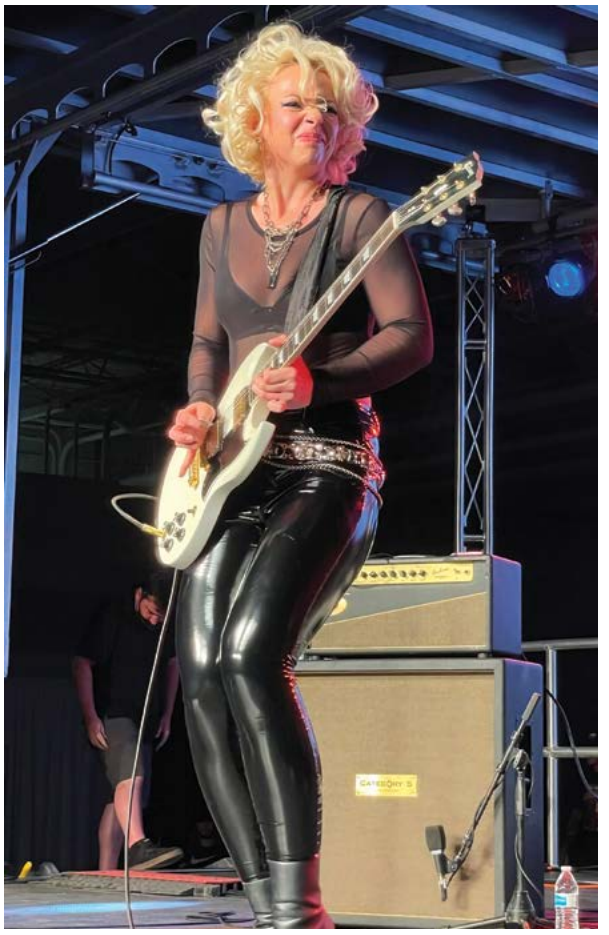
Now that we've been playing together for about a year, it's like, whatever, do your thing. In the studio, John was very encouraging and helped us find the way forward because, to be honest, we probably would have been a lot shyer since it was such a new thing, and wanting to let the other shine, we might not have been as out there as we were on the record.

Jesse is from an area

of Texas that borders Louisiana, which you can hear in his playing. With you being from Midwestern Missouri, do you feel what you were exposed to bleeds into your playing, too?

Totally. We are all just a product of our own experiences, and I came up in Kansas City at a perfect time when the scene was pretty hot. Like anything, the scene ebbs, and flows, but many young adults were doing well in Kansas City then, and there was room for me as a young player to come in. People were very accommodating and welcoming. They encouraged me to do shows, perform, and play.

And I got to spend a great deal of time on stage. You can't help but soak up your surroundings in that situation. Kansas City shaped me as a player. My musical tastes, exploration, my love for different styles of music, and colors my playing in another way. I moved to Louisiana about six years ago, and sure enough, that's seeped in some ways; you can't help but soak up the surroundings.



Samantha Fish at The Dallas International Guitar Festival, 2021. *Photo by BUDDY's Ron McKeown.*

You and Jesse switched between lead and rhythm, something many artists struggle with. Which role are you more comfortable with?

I've never really thought about that; it just feels natural. I've only ever played as a single guitar player in my band, so I've always played rhythm and lead simultaneously. Only now that I'm working with Jesse, I shift gears slightly. We're constantly filling in little things, playing like little riffs here and there, so neither of us abdicates.

Either of us will do the entire rhythm or the entire lead, and we're just both figuring out our parts and getting what feels right and fits in. While I'm singing, I will lean heavier on the rhythm while Jesse will fill in these little riffs. When Jesse's singing and playing rhythm and I'm filling in, I'm just looking for the holes between his phrasing and what will support the story in the song and the lyrics, what will help us build to the dynamic, the apex of the song.

Jesse mainly uses his hollow-bodied King guitar, and you mostly use your Gibson SG. What about that guitar made it the right choice?

I didn't know if it would be the right guitar in that setting. It's just the guitar that I'm most comfortable with. It suits my hands best and what I think to be more versatile. It's a great guitar, becoming my signature guitar that I play everywhere. Jesse brought his signature thing, and I brought mine, and it was like, "Well, let's see if this works."

Can you remember your first SG?

I've only ever bought one, and I bought it in about 2015. It was the first time I'd ever bought a guitar online. I knew it was a great guitar because I pulled it out of the box at a gig that they shipped it to, and I plugged it in, tuned it up, played it, and it was perfectly fine. For any other guitar, I would have had to get it set up and fine-tune it, but this thing is a workhorse. I could throw it across the stage, then pick it up, put it on, and play it. There's a lot to think about on stage: the pedals, tables, microphones, there's no room for fussing with the guitar.

Are there any pedals that you lean on heavily when shaping your tone, or are you mostly guitar-to-amp?

For rhythm, I like going guitar to the amp for a clean, true tone with minimal reverb, just something with a bit of sustain. When I do lead, I can play and do some crazy stuff. I have entirely too many pedals on my board right now, but one of my favorites is King of Tone by Analogman; it's a significant gain boost that sounds like a warmed-up tube amp; it doesn't have distortion or compression on it, and it sounds like my sound but louder and more kick-ass.

I like playing with my delay and the octave pedals; it's always a crazy tone. I've got an EHX Micro Pog that always seems to be a crowd-pleaser because it sounds so weird. Early in my career, I would lean on pedals for the wrong reasons to get the tone I needed, but now I use them more for fun. If I was at a gig, I could unplug the pedal board if I was having problems with it; we could do the whole gig without it. Effects are just color and shaping.

Which song on *Death Wish Blues* best represents you as the player you are today?

We tried to make the album as even as possible. Naturally, when I sing a song, it would make sense for Jesse to play the lead and vice versa. I'm currently out on a solo tour and not playing anything off *Death Wish Blues* because it's our record. It's about this combination and collaboration that we had. If there was a song, I felt people could recognize and go, "Oh, that's Samantha," it would be "Rippin' and Runnin'" because it features my cigar box guitar.

Jesse has a fantastic lead on it, and I support him with the cigar box guitar, but it's the tone people are familiar with when they hear me. "No Apologies" was a good singing highlight for me, with Jesse playing fill-in on the lead. It's a soul ballad that will fit into my catalog well down the line. I'd also say, "Settle for Less" is recognizable as "Samantha."

You're on tour now and have this record out; what's next for you?

A follow-up solo album is needed. I'm out on a solo tour right now, and we're revisiting songs from my past catalog and reconnecting with them. Playing these old songs has been fun, but I'm ready to write something new. It's almost time for me to go into a record because I'm starting to get bored. We're coming up with new ways to play, which keeps things exciting, but I like recording new music and figuring out how to make it work on stage. That's an exhilarating challenge, putting ideas together and trying to make them work. ■

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BEATLEMANIA IN TEXAS '64-'65

A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT

BY ELAINE MCAFEE BENDER

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THEY SAW HER STANDING THERE: BEATLEMANIA IN TEXAS, 1964-65: A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT

By Elaine McAfee Bender

Editor's note: February 9, 2024 marked the 60th anniversary of the Beatles' first U.S. television appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. It was a singular cultural event that instantly launched a monumentally vibrant garage rock band scene across Texas.

Thousands of bands emerged almost overnight, all in pursuit of just a small piece of the magic they saw, heard, and felt coming out of their flickering TV tubes on that first evening. While these early Texas bands would emulate the Beatles and other bands of the time, many of these Texas kids would choose music careers, with an amazing number of them remaining active to this day as performers in Texas and around the world.

At the time of the airing, the North Texas community was still reeling from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, just over two months prior. The emergence of the Beatles at that time perhaps served as a salve for many younger Americans, especially for North Texans grieving the loss of the president, as their music offered a glimmer of optimism and hope.

Above: Elaine McAfee Bender, 1966. *She was also a teen model, and performed as a dancer with major rock bands that came through North Texas in the 1960s.*

From the first moment of the Ed Sullivan Show performances, Elaine McAfee Bender knew what she had to do. The Beatles were coming to Texas, and she and her friends were determined to be there for every note played, every step of the way.

On February 9, 1964, 60 years ago this month, a record 73 million American television viewers tuned in to watch CBS' ***The Ed Sullivan Show,*** the popular Sunday evening variety program.

"Ladies and gentlemen…the Beatles!" The words were barely out of Ed Sullivan's mouth when the screams from the audience began.

While The Beatles were already popular in the United Kingdom and Germany, they hadn't received much TV exposure in the U.S., but they were gaining popularity on the radio. This would be the Beatles' first live appearance in the U.S.

Manager Brian Epstein had negotiated with Sullivan for the Beatles to perform three consecutive Sunday nights in February 1964 for the price of one, $10,000, on the condition that his band be elevated to the coveted position of "featured act" for those shows. By comparison, years earlier, Elvis Presley was paid $50,000 for three shows, but Epstein knew the immediate exposure would be worth it.

Sitting on the floor in my grandmother's living room that February day, I couldn't have known that this would be the beginning of a lifelong love affair with the Fab Four. And it would not be enough to just sit back and watch; I decided at that moment that we were going to get organized.

It was the beginning of an early Beatlemania journey that took us to two Beatles movie premieres, a frenzied Dallas Beatle-riot, and two concerts – one in Dallas, the other in Houston. Not to mention the countless radio station appearances by the girls in our fan club, dishing out every possible detail that fellow Beatlemaniacs needed to know on a daily basis.

The Beatles, live in Houston, 1965. Rare view of the Houston crowd. Elaine was in the front rows near Paul McCartney, in the middle of this picture.

Copyright Jospeh Tunzi / JAT Publishing.

The North Texas Beatles Fan Club is born

The next day in the auditorium at Monnig Jr. High School in west Fort Worth, three friends and I decided to start a Beatles Fan Club chapter. We playfully called it the "Cheese Forever Club" (Paul McCartney had mentioned his love for cheese in a teen magazine), and I applied to the official fan club headquarters in England.

Once I obtained an official fan club charter from the UK, our designation became "The North Texas Beatles Fan Club." As more Beatles Fan Club applications began to pour in, Brian Epstein created a Beatles USA headquarters in New York City to deal with all the North American Beatles Fan Club charter requests. Not all were granted, but those selected were given numbers such as Beatles Fan Club #28, etc. At my request (since we were already established and thriving), I was allowed to remain under the UK headquarters. My information and instructions came from both the UK and USA.

KFJZ Radio in west Fort Worth sponsored some of our fan club activities. Disc jockey Mark Stevens brought us in for an interview and I was asked to return to read The Beatles News on live broadcasts. Sometimes I read straight off the wire and other times I read reports sent from the fan club headquarters. Fan club members received newsletters which we wrote and published, and even met in person at fan club meetings.

A Hard Day's Night premieres at the Hollywood Theatre in Fort Worth

Months after *the Ed Sullivan Show,* the first Beatles movie, *A Hard Day's Night,* premiered at the Hollywood Theater in downtown Fort Worth and other parts of Texas. Advanced tickets for the first special Fort Worth show went on sale Tuesday, July 14. About 100 teenagers lined up outside the theater early in the morning.

1964 was an election year – President Lyndon B. Johnson and his Republican challenger Sen. Barry Goldwater were vying for the office of President of the United States.

We had a better idea. We carried placards proclaiming the presidential candidacy of Beatles drummer, Ringo Starr. "Ringo For President" and "Barry Who? Vote Ringo." *The Fort Worth Star Telegram* ran our photo on the front page, the top story that day.

On Saturday, August 1, 1964, the place for Beatles fans to be was on the sidewalk outside the Hollywood Theater. The first showing of A Hard Day's Night was at 9 a.m., but girls had been camping out in line since 6 p.m. Friday evening. Due to the size of the growing crowd, police sidewalk control was needed by 8 a.m. Saturday.

Beatles' fans started camping out at at Fort Worth's Hollywood Theater to see a special showing of the Beatles' movie *A Hard Day's Night*, August 8, 1964. Elaine is pictured holding the "Ringo For President" sign.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram Collection, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

Singing Beatles tunes was a good way to pass the time, and I led groups of fans in song. Our "Cheese Forever Beatles Fan Club" got its second press hit in the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* in the form of a photo of me – with my mouth wide open singing – and a page 2 story in the evening edition.

The theater was packed and noisy, and the film did not disappoint. Oh, those Liverpudlian accents! Written by Alun Owen and directed by Richard Lester, A Hard Day's Night depicts 36 hours in the lives of the group as they prepare for a television performance. It was an international box office and critical success, and Fort Worth was no exception.

Not long after the movie came out, the Beatles' first full American tour was announced and Dallas was included – on September 18, 1964, at Dallas Memorial Auditorium. I was in line all night outside the box office for advance ticket sales, and grabbed four floor tickets only a few rows back from the stage.

Greet the Beatles!

The night before the Dallas show, my friends and I were at Red Bird Airport (now Dallas Executive Airport) to greet the Fab Four with waves and cheers. Arrival information had been leaked by various sources, but the crowd was not nearly as large as I had expected. We positioned ourselves as close as possible and watched as they came down the steps from the airplane and walked toward a waiting limo. They returned our waves and climbed inside.

A Riot Breaks Out at the Cabana Hotel on Stemmons in Dallas

Next stop was the Cabana Hotel on Dallas'

1965-65-era ephemera from the Cabana Hotel, Dallas. *Photo by George Gimarc, Gimarc archives*

Stemmons Freeway, where the Beatles would be staying. A huge crowd of mostly teen girls were pushing, shoving and shouting, trying to get inside the lobby. There was the sound of breaking glass; then ambulance sirens, followed by police moving the crowd off the property. One girl was seriously injured, having been pushed through a large plate glass window. We moved to the freeway's large grassy median, where we sat down as the entire hotel property and parking lot were now off limits. A local news team approached us with their cameras and peppered us with questions for the 10 o'clock news. "Who's your favorite Beatle?," and "Did you witness the accident here?," they asked.

The Beatles spent part of the next day visiting the injured fan in the hospital and telephoning other fans injured in the crush. The hotel later removed the carpet from the suites occupied by John, Paul, George and Ringo and sold off small squares mounted on an official-looking certificate which stated "The Beatles Walked Here."

The Dallas Concert – September 1964

The next day, September 18, 1964, I was headed to Dallas for my first concert, ever. On a whim, I dropped by the hotel to see if I could get a glimpse of them leaving. Two waiting limos were parked around the back.

Keeping an eye on the limos, I reached inside my bag for lip gloss and a hairbrush. As I was brushing my hair, the door behind me burst open and Ringo took the brush from my hand.

"Mind if I borrow this, luv?" he asked me.

Not a problem.

He ran the brush through his hair and handed it back before getting into a limo with Paul. I laughed and managed a "Hello." Paul patted the seat beside him and asked me, "You coming with us?" A man in the front passenger seat shook his head at Paul, and I answered, "See you there!"

Still shaking, I arrived at the Dallas Memorial Auditorium. Floor seats, center section, 5th row. I was about to see the Beatles live in concert for the bargain price of $5.50. Showtime was 8:30 p.m. The very talented singer-songwriter, Jackie DeShannon, was one of the opening acts. I remember looking around and feeling pleased with our seats.

The crowd was moving around and talking up until the introduction: "And now… the Beatles!" Our blood rushed; and maniacal screaming ensued. Fans immediately rushed the stage. The band opened with "Twist and Shout," followed by "You Can't Do That." Each song was introduced, played, and then the next song was introduced.

It was hard to get any real sense of the band's personality other than the energy between the four of them. I did stand up in my chair for "All My Loving" and Paul looked at me and winked.

I am often asked, "Could you actually hear them at all?" The answer is "Yes," but only because I was near the front. I doubt those fans seated further back or up in the balcony could hear over the roar of screams. The PA systems at the time were inadequate for this type of show. The amps were small, and they weren't even mic'ed.

After years of playing together, John, Paul, George and Ringo were already so skilled they could still keep it together, despite the incessant screaming. Ringo was a powerhouse on the drums, bobbing his head, and keeping the beat where it needed to be. When it was his turn, he sang "Boys." Paul and John seemed to have an understanding between the two of them as they traded lines of lyrics and harmonized.

George lived up to his reputation of "the quiet one" while he played guitar and added harmonies. He was a bit more animated as he sang the lead on "Roll Over, Beethoven."

They performed a total of 12 songs in approximately 30 minutes. Other songs performed at the show were "Things We Said Today," "She Loves You," "Can't Buy Me Love," "If I Fell," "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "A Hard Day's Night. Paul was featured on the crowd-pleasing closer, "Long Tall Sally."

Help! Why go to the theater when you can see the Beatles Live in Houston

Their second film, 1965's *Help!*, also directed by Richard Lester, was the group's first feature shot in color. Besides the Beatles, the movie starred Eleanor Bron, Leo McKern, Victor Spinetti and Roy Kinnear. The plot centers on the Beatles' struggle to record a new album while trying to protect Ringo from a sinister eastern cult, and a pair of mad scientists, who are all obsessed with a sacrificial ring given to Ringo by a fan. The movie offered mystery, a bit of James Bond satire, chase scenes, and music being recorded in beautifully exotic settings. It has been suggested this film inspired the idea of music videos.

There was less-than-expected hoopla surrounding the premiere *Help!* on August 11, 1965, here in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Maybe it was because fans were preparing for the Beatles arrival in Houston on August 18, to perform two shows the very next week.

With complimentary tickets in hand for both Beatles concerts in Houston on August 19,

Elaine McAfee Bender today.

1965, three friends and I prepared to welcome our favorite band to Texas, less than a year after seeing them in Dallas. We arrived a day early and went straight to KILT Radio, KFJZ's sister station in Houston. KILT asked us to come in for a live interview and stir up excitement about this historic station-sponsored concert.

We then made our way to Houston International Airport (now Hobby) where the plan was to be in line to greet the Beatles and hand each one a real cowboy shirt, gifts from the fan club. Each shirt was different for each Beatle. As Ringo was very into all things western, his shirt was the most colorful, red with western braiding and pearl snaps. The others were more sedate, but authentic. Blue for Paul, yellow for George, and navy for John.

The palpable excitement was building, and escalating into hysterics, as we watched their airplane land.

But what happened next was terrifying.

Another Riot Breaks Out in Houston

Hundreds of fans broke through police barricades and rushed toward the airplane. Doors inside were locked as fans ran up the stairs and even out onto the wings. Fans were removed from the airplane, but the police could not safely clear the tarmac.

I had already been knocked down once, and my focus was on getting out of the way of the mob and over to the side of the terminal building. Many fans had been trampled and hurt, with some taken by ambulances to the hospital.

An elevated catering truck made its way over to the airplane, and the Fab Four stepped onto the top platform, protected on three sides from the chaotic scene below, and sat down. I will never forget Paul's lovely face looking down at me, smiling as the truck moved past me to safety. He waved at me and I waved back. The other three looked exhausted.

I did eventually get to meet them and hand over those cowboy shirts at a reception. At the press conference, they were asked how they liked Texas. John replied that he had only been to Texas once before, and "was nearly killed both times."

Sam Houston Coliseum was packed on Thursday, August 19, and we arrived two hours early for the 3:30 pm show. We sat in the Center Floor, 3rd row. This was a much larger venue than where they played in Dallas the year before. Opening for the Beatles was Cannibal and the Headhunters, Brenda Holloway, Sounds Incorporated, and King Curtis and his band, with the Discotheque Dancers.

My Friends in the Back Heard Screaming – and Little Else

My seat was a little toward the end of the row, facing stage right, in front of Paul. Those of us up front could mostly hear the music. Friends further back in the balconies heard screaming and little else. I was focused on trying to hear every bit of the music.

They opened with "Twist and Shout," followed by "She's A Woman" and "I Feel Fine." Ringo sang "I Wanna Be Your Man." George sang "Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby." Others included "Dizzy Miss Lizzy," "Ticket to Ride," "Can't Buy Me Love," "Baby's in Black," "A Hard Day's Night" and "Help!" Once again, they closed with a high energy song featuring Paul on "I'm Down."

The set list was exactly the same for the 8 p.m. show. This time, we sat in the Center Floor, 4th row seats. For those who purchased tickets, the cost was $5. The audience mostly stood up in their chairs once the Beatles took the stage. Surprisingly, the Beatles' energy levels were high for a second performance that day.

I honestly thought I would get to see them again, but their 1966 tour did not bring them to Texas. Shortly thereafter, they quit touring altogether, and who can blame them. The cacophony of constant Beatlemania had taken a toll.

But most of us remained lifelong fans and these experiences defined who we are today. Beatlemania was a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon, and those of us who were a part of it were fortunate indeed. ■

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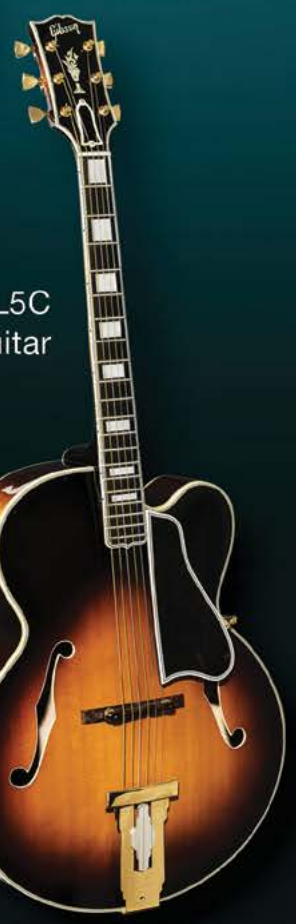

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DALLAS GUITARIST CHRIS HOLT: HIS LONG AND INSPIRING JOURNEY THROUGH MUSIC

By Andrew Daly

Chris Holt recording at Mike Daane's studio in Dallas, 2019 *Photo by Mike Daane.*

AS A GUITARIST, IT'S ESSENTIAL to be versatile, and Chris Holt is undoubtedly that. As a self-proclaimed jack of all trades and an admitted gearhead and guitar addict, Holt has parlayed his myriad of skills into a career that's seen him share the stage with the likes of Mike Campbell, Max Weinberg, Bob Dylan, Derek Trucks, Chris Stapleton and about a million others.

Holt's resume is truly endless; that much is certain. While that's impressive, his tone and sage gear choices, which linchpin his outstanding solo work, sets him apart.

More recently, Holt has been working on his online series, Chris Holt's All-Request Thursday, which helped heal the bruises resulting from lost income over the COVID-19 pandemic. That aside, Holt continues to tour with Mike Campbell & The Dirty Knobs, lending his six-string talents to one of his greatest heroes and doing so with panache and skill.

Known around Dallas, Texas, as a supreme multi-instrumentalist, Holt still burns with passion and desire when talking about guitar. To that end, Chris Holt dialed in with *BUDDY* Magazine to recount his long and inspiring journey through music.

What inspired you to pick up the guitar?

Man… it was several things all colliding at once. But centered around MTV in 1981 and a few other things that all happened there in that year, between 1981 and 1982, when I was eight years old. MTV, Rush's *Moving Pictures*, Ozzy's *Blizzard of Ozz,* and then a year or two later, stuff like Def Leppard's *Pyromania* and, of course, Van Halen. I was completely obsessed with the sound of the electric guitar on tracks like "Limelight," "Crazy Train," and "Photograph."

I wanted to be Alex Lifeson; I thought he was the coolest. Steve Clark. Angus Young, oh man, I was obsessed with the whole AC/DC *Back in Black* record. Those were the earliest days before I even got a guitar. After years of begging and playing tennis racket guitar in the mirror, my parents finally got me one on my 12th birthday in 1985.

There was an obsession with music and melody long before I could play, but I'm not sure it would've all come together without the visual companion of MTV. I was never in piano lessons or anything; nobody in my family was musically inclined, beyond my dad being a big Stones fan. But MTV shook my world. It all seemed like such a seductive lifestyle to be a rock guitarist, especially to a young kid. Those were the heyday of the rock star.

Who were your most significant influences?

I have so many of them I couldn't possibly list them all… but I usually just talk about the players that made the biggest impression when I was young because I guess they've stayed with me the longest. Jimmy Page, David Gilmour, Alex Lifeson, Pete Townshend, and Mike Campbell were probably the biggest influences on me as a teenager once I really dug in with the guitar and was trying to make a move with it. Those five still have a special place in my heart.

But there are hundreds of others. For years, Zeppelin was my be-all-end-all. In my late teens, I branched out a bit. I became obsessed with The Beatles (that's never stopped), Pink Floyd, Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, and The Who, and then my tastes evolved into more sophisticated stuff like Steely Dan. I became completely enthralled by all the guitar players under that umbrella – Larry Carlton, Denny Dias, Skunk Baxter, Elliott Randall, Hugh McCracken, Jay Graydon, and even Walter Becker himself. I went through a jam band phase in my 20s, and I wanted to be Trey Anastasio.

Later, I got into fingerpicking and listened to Paul Simon, Mark Knopfler, Lindsey Buckingham, Elliott Smith, Chet Atkins, and Jerry Reed. I love Steve Howe! My playing could never touch any of those guys; they set the bar so high. And they were all so unique. It was always something to aspire to and be inspired by – to want to play wildly inventive stuff like they were doing. At one point, maybe around the age of 30, I rejected it all and just wanted to play other instruments and be a songwriter… eventually I came to my senses and had to re-embrace my first love, the guitar.

How do they remain within your sound, and how have you diverged?

Ultimately, I'm a creature of habit… I listen to everything that inspires and challenges me, and I steal bits and pieces from each player, but in the end, I still play like me. A lot of my bad habits come from laziness – I'm mostly self-taught; I learned by osmosis more than anything, just absorbing bits and pieces from my heroes and my peers. I was never disciplined enough to figure out exactly what those monster players were doing, so I just took some of their tricks (the ones I could actually figure out) and then twisted them into something that worked for me.

As a teacher (in the late 00s/early 2010s), I always told students to steal from twenty, thirty, forty different players, mash them all together, and you'll sound like yourself. I know that's what I've done, and ultimately, I say like me. But I'm not original or inventive. I wear a lot of influences on my sleeve shamelessly. I never bought into the idea that artists are just born with it, and they always have to invent their own sound. I firmly believe you should study and learn other peoples' music to learn how it's done.

Sure, there are some exceptions to the rule, but in the end, we're all standing on the shoulders of giants – there's so much to learn from the greats of the past. And for someone like me, I'm just a rock n' roll hack – it's all been done a million times in the past 70 years. I'm not reinventing the wheel. I'm putting my own spin on something that has been such a passionate love.

Do you have a favorite Texas guitar player? How do they influence you?

Oh, man… the guy who mentored and showed me the light when I was 14 is still probably my favorite guitarist in this neck of the woods – the great Sam Swank. He's an absolute master of all thing's guitar… any style, any era, he's just smooth as butter. He inspired me to be better as a kid, and he inspires me now. He taught me things as a teen and showed me what I was doing wrong and how to do it right. Then he pushed me out the door and told me to go practice.

I still absolutely love that dude and his playing. Sadly, I don't get to see or hear him do it often enough. He posts videos online, and I love watching them and marveling at his gift. But there are lots of Texas players I love – mainly in DFW, where I'm from. Kenny Withrow and Hunter Hendrickson – those dudes are always pushing forward and playing with such passion and adventurous spirit. I keep asking Kenny to give me some lessons, but we never coordinate our schedules.

I need to make that happen for me! My buddy Big Mike Richardson boggles my mind whenever we play together – he's a fearless guitarist. I'm sure I could name a dozen others I love; they're everywhere, and if you pay attention, you can be inspired and challenged around any corner. I feel guilty that I don't get out and see more live music

these days. The pitfalls of working on the road and getting older, I guess.

Do you remember your first guitar and amp?

Kinda… I got my first guitar and amp on my 12th birthday in the spring of 1985. It was a red Hondo All-Star, and I think I had it for a year or two before I traded it in for a Kramer Baretta (which I still have). I think I just had a tiny Crate practice amp originally. I'd sit in my bedroom and make a most unpleasant noise, but I slowly started to figure it out over a couple of years. When I met Sam, he took me in and changed my life.

My Dad told me that as soon as I could play "Johnny B. Goode" convincingly, he'd buy me the "real guitar" I wanted. So, by the time I was 15, I'd convinced him, and he bought me a beautiful cherry sunburst Les Paul Standard at the Arlington Guitar Show. That was the only guitar I played for about a decade until it was stolen, tragically.

I never got over that. For years, I played it through a Marshall JCM 800 half-stack. And that got stolen, too! What I learned from that rig was how to annoy sound engineers (and bandmates) while blowing out every person's ear within a quarter mile.

What did that rig teach you that stuck?

Unfortunately, being loud stuck for a long time, but as I got older, I learned how to get better tones at quieter volumes. Initially, it was "plug and go," overdrive at 11, and rolling back the volume knob on the LP for a cleaner tone. But eventually, I learned the pedal game, like everyone else. It's a constant evolution, and I'm always learning, primarily by trial and error.

But I also listen to a lot of advice from players I love and respect. I've never been much of a technician – I couldn't tell you the first thing about the tubes or circuits in my amps and pedals.

I just turn knobs until I get the sound I want. And I know what I like – I'm a tube amp and stomp-box guy.

I actually was this close to buying a Kemper and trying to learn how to use it a couple of years ago, just because I figured I was gonna have to dive into that world soon or get left behind. But then, right as I was about to buy it, I got the call from Mike to join the Knobs. And now I'm right back to tube amps and stomp boxes. Maybe later, Kemper.

What was your first professional gig?

My first band was called Thin Ice, and we played our high school Battle of The Bands like you. My first ever gig was one of those, in early 1989, when I was 15. I'm unsure how professional it was, but we made a big noise! I knew from that moment, though, this was all I ever wanted to do. Seriously, that was it for me—musician for life. We did our thing for a few years, and then I went off to college in Norman, OK.

What did you learn?

I had a few bands that I played with there in town, playing guitar, bass, keys – whatever was needed. That was the beginning of my jack-of-all/master-of-none persona. I started doing acoustic shows and learning how to sing. I was really getting into writing my own songs. Eventually, I started playing solo shows by myself. Mostly, what I learned from that era was just how to hold my own onstage, how to fill three or four hours with music, and then, ultimately, how to be self-sufficient.

Is there a Texas venue or spot that you've always loved to play? If so, why?

Lots of them! Mostly places around DFW, just because that was my local scene for so long. Though I must admit, I don't get out and do them often. Most of my work is on the road, at this point at least. But I've long loved playing venues like The Granada Theater and The Kessler; I've played those rooms hundreds of times.

At one point, Mike Schoder (the owner of the Granada) joked that I should have a plaque on the wall because I'd played there more than any other musician, back in the '00s. But I don't get there nearly enough these days. I really love the AllGood Cafe in Deep Ellum – that's a haven for musicians, and Mike Snider has always treated me like family there.

It's a wonderfully supportive environment for songwriters and musicians. And, of course, for years and years, Club Dada was my home away from home. As far as places outside of DFW, I mean, The Moody Theater in Austin is pretty special.

I've done Austin City Limits a couple of times, and that was just the most fun to be a part of. I got to play Bass Hall in Fort Worth with Don Henley and Love Lovett a few years back, which was lovely. And, of course, Gruene Hall is a blast. I've been lucky enough to play some big arenas and sheds around Texas, too, but those are a little less personal, aren't they?

How do you view the way you play today vs the past?

I try to be more self-aware of things like phrasing and tone. The ever-elusive "taste" thing. Some of the best advice I ever got was from a bandmate 25 years ago, who told me, "You need to work on your phrasing." It was a very constructive criticism, and that really opened my eyes. I was like, "Wow, I'm just mindlessly noodling." I think most young players prob-

ably overplay just because they get excited; maybe wanna show off a bit. I know I did.

To show restraint and really play tastefully, for the song and not just for yourself, is something that takes years and a lot of focus and dedication. It's not necessarily instinctive… for me, at least. I almost always have indulgent tendencies. I want to pile everything and the kitchen sink into a song.

But if you do that, you often end up with a ton of clutter, and sometimes you must hear it sounding like a mess before it becomes clear that the best option is to deconstruct and strip it back. I was never the king of speed, but many times, especially in my youth, I relied on speed and frantic playing as a crutch rather than doing things that were melodic and restrained.

And what has changed most?

You could argue that it worked in some of those situations, but as I've gotten older, I've tried hard to be a more laid-back player. I don't play nearly as ham-fisted – or as dirty – as I used to. And I certainly don't have the speed I had when I was young. But that's not important to me now.

Looking back, those influences were always there in guys like Mike Campbell, David Gilmour, and Walter Becker. I loved their melodic sensibilities and that they could say more with one or two notes than most players could say with twenty.

I just had to pursue that goal actively rather than passively overplaying it all the time. I'm doing a better job with that these days, but it's a constant challenge – not to overplay. I'm still guilty of wanking more than I should.

Tell me about your riff and solo writing process.

Sadly, I'm not nearly as engaged with writing as I used to be. But I go in and out of phases; I guess it's always been like that, really. Sometimes, I'll write a bunch of stuff all at once, and then I'll go back to sleep and hibernate for weeks or months. When I was younger, it was an almost daily thing to constantly write and arrange ideas when my bands were rehearsing every day.

We were practically living together – the things young bands do when they're on the road and in each other's faces all the time. As I got older, got married, had kids, and all that, there became less time for that, so I would have to wait for the inspiration to strike, rather than be constantly doing it all day, every day.

It never really went away, but it became more of a special thing rather than just the norm to me. Back in the old days, I used to have a cassette player and four-track, and I would record riffs and work on arrangements all the time that way. Then I got a computer and started doing demos in Cool Edit Pro. Remember that?

So, the new tech changed things for you, then?

It blew my mind when I was able to start multi-tracking demos and stacking parts that way, so for a long time; I would make these really elaborate demos and drive my bandmates nuts because I'd come to the practice room with all the parts already worked out. When the iPhone became ubiquitous, I simplified my process considerably. I just started documenting everything on my phone – every riff, every melody, every lyric idea.

For me, it usually starts with a riff or a couple of chords that sound interesting together, something that sparks a melody. I'm rarely ever a lyrics-first guy. I'm not a particularly good lyricist, so that's always the trickiest part and the thing I'll nitpick the most. Sometimes, I'll get a concept for a song, and I'll think, "I wanna write a song about this topic," or whatever.

But most of the time, I'll get a musical idea and flesh out the melody first and then put words to it as soon as I can. Most of the songs I write are lyrical – but I do have a lot of stuff that stays instrumental for whatever reason. I've got hundreds of instrumentals lying around! Writing's just hard, especially currently when it's all been done a million times already.

I'm less consistent with writing than 20 years ago, but I still regularly mess around with new song ideas. I've gotten better as a writer – I think what I've written in the past decade is considerably better than what I was writing 20 years ago. I have so many songs that still need to be recorded or released.

So, what's the most challenging part?

The hardest part for me – and the most important – is finishing a song and not letting a fragment sit on the shelf collecting dust for years. Cause if you don't finish it quickly, you'll forget it's there, and then a year or two later, you hear it pop up,

or you're going through your old phone demos, and then you say, "Why didn't I finish that? That's good!" So, I am more diligent about finishing a good idea quickly and not letting it drift away into oblivion.

How do you view guitar solos in the modern era?

It depends on what your thing is. If you're a guitar god and that's your thing, then solo away! It just depends on the music. You should always play for the song rather than for yourself. But there's a niche for serious players rather than singers or songwriters. I love guitar solos, but I don't wanna hear somebody endlessly shred or do acrobatics the entire time. It gets a bit exhausting.

Do they need to be deconstructed and changed from being overblown?

Ultimately, I want to hear some melody that moves me, something that touches an emotional nerve, cause that's the kind of music that hits me the hardest. I want there to be some sense of dynamic balance. I think self-indulgence is cool in its proper place.

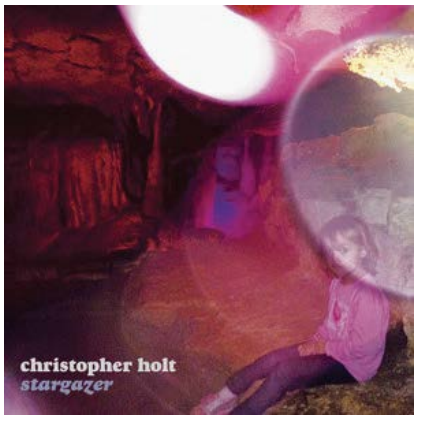
There's a moment in a live show where the energy ramps up, and you want to take a guitar solo through the roof. I have to be careful about that stuff because I can easily get carried away and go on and on without wrapping it up. Noodling on into oblivion can be exhausting for the listener, regardless of how much fun it is for the player.

Honestly, I don't have enough tricks in my bag to keep the listener fully engaged for super long solos – once you've heard me exhaust all my licks, you don't need to hear them all repeatedly. There's certainly a case to be made for not soloing at all. If the song doesn't need a guitar solo, leave it out.

Is there still a place for a little bit of self-indulgence?

I love guitar bands where solos aren't really a thing – it's more about the angular interplay and ping-ponging parts that create a tight, punchy arrangement. One of my favorite bands is XTC – the guitar interplay between Dave Gregory and Andy Partridge is spectacular and unusual. There are some guitar solos, but they're always inventive and different – not just self-indulgent wankery.

They serve the song first and foremost.



Even when a song calls for a guitar solo, it's appropriate only to play what's needed. I'm a big fan of those who have perfected the art of a tight, composed solo. We should always aspire to that. Look at Elliott Easton. That dude wrote such stellar solos – melodic, dynamic, and tricky. He never went on too long, and he always landed the perfect dismount!

Tell me about your amps.

Well, it's certainly more complex now than in the old days! As I said before, in the early years, it was just a Les Paul and a Marshall. Then, in the 00's, things changed and evolved a bit. I started alternating between using an ES-335 and various Telecasters, depending on the band or song. I got cozy using big Fender amps – the DeVille for a while and then a Twin. Those are just the loudest amps on earth. Heavy too. But I loved having that clean headroom.

And how about pedals?

My pedal boards were always relatively simple but got bigger and more indulgent, depending on the bands. When I got the Don Henley touring gig about ten years ago, things started to grow. I had a handful of guitars before, but suddenly, I was able to acquire many of them! I acquired a bunch of gear for that gig, and I needed backups.

Where do things stand as far as guitars? How do you pair them with your amps?

Lots of guitars in various tunings. I had a road vault and a tech, so it was all reasonable, if a bit indulgent. The past decade or so has been a blur of different guitars, amps, and pedals. For the DH tours and Bastards of Soul, I was using Magnatone amps, and I really love those.

With Mike & The Knobs, I'm using several different amps, like Fender Deluxe's and Princeton's, and on our recent fall tour, I just started using a custom Voltmaster amp that sounds amazing. My friend Matt Iddings in Portland builds them, and he made one for me when we reconnected last year. With pedals, I need to figure out where to begin.

I have a small board that I use at home for whatever local gigs I have – my Bastards of Soul board. But I also have a tiny micro-pedal "fly rig" for quick road gigs if I'm jumping on a plane and need something small that fits easily into a suitcase.

For the bigger tours like Henley and Campbell, I have more extensive, more indulgent boards. But it's primarily simple stuff; all my boards have the "essentials" for me: compression, overdrive, clean boost, Leslie and mod effects, delays and reverbs, fuzz, and wah.

Is there a brand you rely on most regarding your signal chain?

I love Analogman pedals. The King of Tone – that's a go-to drive. Strymon makes great mod effects. I've got a ton of Keeley and Electro-Harmonix stuff. And, of course, good ol' indestructible Boss pedals. There are so many pedal makers out there it can be overwhelming. I recently got some pedals from the Caroline Guitar Co. I'm digging – the Hawaiian Pizza fuzz and Parabola Tremolo. I'm a pedal hoarder, really; I have hundreds of them lying around at home.

I can relate! It's part of the disease.

Some pedals will sit there for ages before I find the perfect song. As for guitars, I still lean heavily on Gibson ESs like the 345 and 335. I'm a total Tele junkie, I have a bunch of them – they're so versatile. I still love Les Pauls; of course, that was my first love. In recent years, I've become quite fond of Duesenberg and Gretsch guitars – I've got a White Falcon that I really adore, a Silver Jet, and one of those rare Country Classic Juniors.

I've been playing Fender Jazzmasters more recently – they have a unique vibe. I don't play acoustic guitars as often as I used to, but when I do, I love Martins and Gibson's in the studio. And I still have a beat-up old 90's Takamine Santa Fe model, which, I kid you not, is my favorite go-to stage acoustic. It just feels and sounds right. It's like my "Trigger."

I just love guitars; I can't get enough. Whereas I was a one-guitar guy for many years, long ago, I've now become that guy who switches guitars almost every song, especially when I'm playing an electric rig. I'm sure someday the shit will hit the fan, and I'll sell everything and go back to playing one guitar all the time.

What are your short and long-term goals?

Man, I just wanna stay employed! For me, it's twofold. I've got my career as a sideman, which has obviously been my bread-and-butter for a while now, and then my considerably more fledgling career as an artist. When the Bastards of Soul ended last year, it was really rough for all of us, but that's a hard thing to keep together at this point.

At my age, trying to be in a band where you have multiple songwriters and so many cooks in the kitchen – that's a daunting task. I don't know if I'd want to start another band from scratch like that because it's so much work, and honestly, it's a constant compromise with your art.

With Mike & The Knobs, I've now stumbled into a wonderfully lucky situation – because not only do I get to play with one of my biggest heroes (who's become one of my best friends), but it's a guitarist's dream gig.

Did you lock in immediately with Mike?

Mike and I do a ton of dual guitar interplay, and he gives me so much freedom to play like I want to play while supporting him. I know who the people are paying to see, so I stay within my bounds, but he's very generous with the way he lets me shine onstage. I want to keep doing this gig as long as he wants to keep doing it and as long as he wants me there!

I'd love to keep working with Don if he wants to do another tour anytime. Obviously, that's a fun guitar gig, too, though considerably more scripted than the Knobs. It's such a rich catalog of songs. He's been out with the Eagles for a while, and they're still on a Farewell Tour for another year or two, so who knows what his plans are.

That aside, what else have you got on tap?

I've got other projects that I do whenever I can, touring with Max Weinberg and Tony Kishman in their respective bands; those gigs are always lucrative. The other side of the coin is that I still have a solo career, and there's been a slight uptick in interest in that in recent years.

When COVID first happened, I lost all my touring gigs, so I started doing these online all-request shows (*Chris Holt's All-Request* Thursday series) to keep my mind occupied and make a few extra bucks. That blossomed into this surprisingly beautiful thing over a few years. I built up a small but loyal fan base – we call it the ART Family – and it's been lovely to suddenly have people wanting me to make my original music again.

So, I'm working on a new solo album (my first since *Stargazer* in 2016). I'm eager to start putting out my music regularly again, starting in 2024. Other than that, I wanna stay healthy and stay employed – both as a sideman and an artist. I've been fortunate up to this point, and I'm super grateful that I can have a music career. I don't take it for granted. I hope to keep the train rolling longer. ■

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The Original Music Magazine

GRAMMY WINNING SLACK KEY GUITARIST

JIM KIMO WEST

TALKS ABOUT GUITAR GEAR, AND HIS OTHER REALLY WEIRD GIG

BY GEORGE BOND

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INTERVIEW: GRAMMY WINNING SLACK KEY GUITARIST JIM "KIMO" WEST TALKS ABOUT GUITAR, AND SOME REALLY WEIRD GIGS

By George Bond

If you asked most US music fans across all genres to name their "most beloved" artists, there is no doubt that Al Yankovic would come at the top of that list. Backing Weird Al for the entirety of his career is guitarist Jim "Kimo" West.

What many Weird Al fans might not know is that West is an award winning producer and artist in his own right, taking the "Best New Age" album category at the 2020 Grammy Awards. West is back with a new Hawaiian slack-key album, entitled *Of Wood and Spirit,* and it shimmers clean and clear as the Hawaiian falls of his home in Maui.

In this extended interview wih *BUDDY* Magazine, West talks about the new album, guitar gear, tunings, and all things guitar.

Jim West, Grammy award-winning mainstay of contemporary acoustic guitar in the United States, long time musician for the king of music parody Al Yankovic, composer, producer. It's an honor to speak with you for the 50th anniversary of BUDDY Magazine. How's life these days? What is currently going on?

Well, let's see-it's Grammy season so I have a new project that I've entered into the Grammys, so we're starting to kind of do all that Grammy stuff which is sort of a little bit of self-promotion and going to a lot of parties and things like that (laughs). I think voting starts in the Fall but the new project is called *Of Wood and Spirit*. I released it in July and it's a sort of an interesting dreamy Americana type record, really. It's a little out of the box for what I normally do but it's all instrumental and it's a different kind of project that I'm used to doing, but it's I'm getting a lot of really great feedback from it so I'm promoting that and working on a few other projects. I do have a few little few shows as well here in Southern California. Staying busy, and then I'll be going to Europe starting the first of October for the International Guitar Night tour-it's going to be super fun.

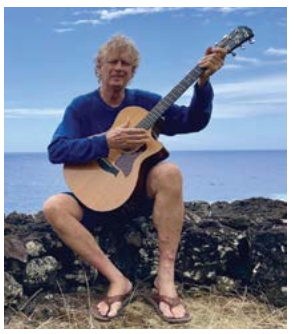
What made you want to play guitar and what were your experiences with keyboards and other instruments as well?

Well my older brother played a little guitar kind of like folk music. He's about ten years older than me and I remember him playing just folk songs and this and that, and I think around the time I was twelve I just got interested in guitar, so he let me use his guitar and he got some new strings and he got a chord book and a capo and and I tell you, once I had that, I never looked back! I mean I'd come home from school and the first thing I would do is just try and learn songs, and and this was before YouTube so it was a little harder. You have to learn by ear and and every so often I'd see somebody on TV like Glenn Campbell or something and try and see what they're doing, but that's kind of how I started, and I think by the time I was sixteen I was already playing electric guitar. I think I played my first first professional show when I was sixteen.

So I got into playing Rock and Roll, of course but I always played acoustic as well, so I never kind of gave up one for the other. I've always played acoustic, and I think the finger picking that I learned came to serve me well in my Hawaiian slack key career, because I've got about a dozen albums and a lot of them are in this sort of kind of a contemporary Hawaiian slack key, which is all finger style guitar.

Who are your main influences back then or now?

Well, I think some of the first records I heard were some of my brother's folk music records, of course, and that's when I first started playing. There were players like Bob Dylan and Gordon Lightfoot and when I started getting into music, I started getting into all kinds of stuff, but I remember I used to always like Paul Simon's playing.



Jim "Kimo" West

He was a master songwriter but he was also a pretty good guitar player, too. I just always like to listen to those kinds of kinds of fingerpicking, and then of course once I got an electric guitar I started listening to everything-a lot of British stuff from the day, old Fleetwood Mac and Cream, early Led Zeppelin and of course Jimi Hendrix, but I just kind of soaked it all up, you know (Laughs).

Of Wood and Spirit, the latest release by Jim "Kimo" West.

Did you study music formally in any capacity?

No. You know it's funny, I always like to say I have a perfect record-I have no classes or no lessons! (Laughs). When I was in college I was a visual arts major but all the guys I played with were all in the music department so I spent a lot of time in the music department and just playing with people who were formally studying music. I think a lot rubs off, and you learn a lot just from who you're playing with and I also really like to devour music books. I'm self-taught but I did teach myself to read when I was young. I got a job teaching guitar when I was about twenty years old and I taught myself to read.

I studied orchestration books and Jazz. Basically just learning from books and from playing with other people, so I'm completely self-taught, but I do have a real extensive musical knowledge, and I've worked as a composer for many years; not so much lately, but I've worked for as a composer for a long time. I did things that were a lot of orchestral music as wel,l but I am totally self-taught.

So did you study anything like Renaissance or Classical or Baroque?

Not really. I mean what I did was when I first decided I wanted to learn to read I did get a book of Bach for guitar and I thought this would be good to learn because rhythmically it's not too challenging-it has a lot of regular rhythmic structure. It's not too crazy rhythmically so I thought, well, that'll be a good way to start and so I started off with some simple Bach, but I you know I never really studied classical. I mean I love classical guitar, it's just a whole world unto itself and I think to excel at that you've kind of pretty much do nothing but that (Laughs). I wanted to play Rock and Roll but I did want to learn some basics and learn how to read, so I did learn some Bach guitar when I was very young just to kind of teach myself to read.

So checking out the album: I've checked out pretty much all the videos on your YouTube channel going back all these years.

Oh, wow! (laughs)

I don't know if the term Hawaiian Bluegrass is a term or not, maybe I came up with the term "Blue Ocean Grass" or "Slow Blue Grass". What would you call your style eactly?

Well, yeah, I used to call it Contemporary Slack Key because I went to Hawaii first in the mid-80s, and I went to a little town called Hana Maui which is one of the most Hawaiian places in Hawaii and that's where I first heard records of slack key guitar like Gabby Pahanui and Sunny Chillingworth and Ray Connie.

I had played in open tunings before so I understood the technical concept but I really fell in love with the the sound of slack key-to me, it sounded just like the place. Hawaiian music sounds like the place, and over the years I never really said, oh I'm going to sit down and learn the style-it just kind of crept in over the years and I started writing my own slack key tunes, so I have a lot of other musical influences like we all do. So when I started writing these slack key tunes of course they had some other other influences-some of them were more traditional than others but a lot of my stuff is more of a contemporary slack key but I like the idea of "Ocean Grass"-that's kind of interesting. (laughs)

Songwriting techniques: Do you put lay down chords first or and put the melody to it or you lay down melodies first and let the that dictate where the chords go?

Well, a lot of my stuff is basically chords and melody all at the same time because I'm playing the thing where you've got the bass going and the chords. My typical songwriting just comes from playing and improvising, and often times a lot of my inspiration comes from trying different tunings. I probably used a couple dozen different guitar tunings over the years and sometimes when I'm working with a new tuning I find it very inspiring so as I'm playing with a new tuning, things start happening creatively and I'll come up with ideas, and sometimes I'll just come up with something on the spot and flush it out and and record it just on my phone or whatever. Other times it'll might just be a little snippet, so I'll record a 15 second thing as an idea. So what I do is I save all those ideas and then I put them on my laptop and I categorize them.

I say, well, this kind of thing and this goes in this kind of category and when I'm working on records, oftentimes usually the bulk of an album will be new compositions that I've written and then sometimes if I need a few more songs I'll go back to my catalog of ideas and I'll find things that will fit in that particular album and then I'll come back and develop them, so it works a lot of different ways, but sometimes if I'm working on a piece that's going to be a little more orchestrated or are going to have more elements in it as I'm playing or developing melodies, I will as I'm playing sing melodies and I'll come up with melodies and then I'll record that so I have the basic idea of the melodies, and then once I get ready to record, I start layering things and deciding what instrument the melody will be, whether it's a violin or cello or whatever, but it's like I say, a lot of my inspiration comes from all these open tunings, and some of the sort of magical

resonance of these tunings is every tuning sounds different.

Every tuning, of course is different. All the chords are different for every tuning. It's like it's like another language and they all have their own kind of way of resonating and to me. I find that really inspiring.

The album *Of Wood and Spirit*. Where where was it recorded?

I record everything in my own studio which is where I'm sitting right now. I record it and mix everything myself and I have for all of my albums since my first album and I think my first album came out in 1999. I record everything here and I do have other musicians come over and play on it. It started a lot during Covid. Other players will sometimes record their parts at their place and send them over you. We're doing a lot of that these days, so on this record there were tracks that were recorded in other places and sent over and then some stuff was recorded here. That's the great thing about doing it remotely.

On my previous record, *Guitar Stories*, the one that won the Grammy, I had people like my friend Jake Erdogan in Istanbul record a part and send it over from Turkey.

How long would it take you to knock out the mix and mastering and all that?

Well, mixing doesn't take too long. This record though, I really started it about three years ago and I had the concept for it. I had this sort of sound in my head, this kind of spacey, dreamy americana-ish type of record and I had this the sound in my head and I had some things started but then last year I was on a tour with Weird Al that was six months long and I had also had done two months on the International Guitar Night tour in the winter, and then this year I was on tour for another couple of months, so all that touring kind of put a dent in my in my record production schedule, because I wanted to finish the record, but after the tour this spring it was like okay, I've got some time, I need to get this thing finished.

So I recorded a few more songs and as I said about mixing everything, oftentimes as I'm working on a track I'm adding stuff. I'm kind of mixing it as I'm going along, too

I might have somebody send over a violin part and I'll do some tweak on it and get the EQ right and find the right kind of Reverb. As I'm layering things, I'm sort of mixing at the same time.

What are your main guitars that you were using?

Well, for a lot of my acoustic records I've been using some Taylor Guitars for quite a long time. The one I'm using now is a 514CE. It's a mahogany and cedar top mahogany guitar. They're very nice and warm sounding and easy to play. They are this kind of production model guitar, but I have them kind of tweaked out a bit. My main Taylor guitar has the factory pickup. I always use microphones when I'm recording-I rarely ever use the pickup, but for live, of course, you know you have to use the pickup, so I have a the factory pickup that's in there and then I also have a sound hole pickup so I run two pickups on it. I've also got a couple of Keith tuners, those banjo tuners on a couple of keys that allow you to lock two pitches and go between two pitches on the string, and you can also use it almost like a pedal steel effect. So they're kind of production guitars, and the one good thing about it is if something happened when I was touring I could get another one it would be pretty close to the same thing (Laughs).

I guess the names that jumped out at me as soon as I saw who played on the record: The great bassist Michael Manring and violinist Charlie Bisherat. Maybe you would agree that Michael kind of picked up as the king of the fretless bass after Jaco.

Yeah, Michael's an amazing guy and he's the only bass player I've ever seen that could do an entire instrumental concert with just bass. He'll blow you away. He will do a whole show on just bass, and he great control of effects and he's got all these pitch levers on his bass. He's just an amazing musician. We had done a show together a number of years ago and I thought, oh I've got a got to get him on a record.

Kimo and his Grammy award for Best New Age Album, 2020.

Yeah I guess I remember him with Pat Metheny back in the day, and also Charlie Bisharat. Maybe he picked up where Jean-Luc Ponty left off.

Yeah, Charlie's amazing. My record that won the Grammy called *More Guitar Stories*-that record has the opening song called "Windward", and it has a great solo by Charlie, and on that one Jimmy Johnson is playing an amazing fretless solo. So there's some great playing on that track.

I know Jimmy Johnson has been a staple of the LA music scene since the eighties.

Yeah, he played with Allan Holdsworth for a long time and James Taylor of course is regular gig, but he's a sweet guy and he's such a great player and so between him and Michael; Manring also played with Michael Hedges. So I would really like to work more with Michael. Jimmy has been on a number of my records and he's amazing. I think I also had some upright bass on this record and that was a guy by the name of Dan Lutz who lives here in LA. He's a great all-around upright and electric bass player. Great reader, too, if you have anything written. When I'm having people over to play, it could be a cello part, and the entire thing is I write the whole thing out because it's a melody and I know what I want and then sometimes it's a combination of written out parts and then section four is just improv and I just let people go and do what they want to do.

I was going down the song list here, Were there any standard tunings used?

No, there were no standard tunings (laughs).

Now, were there any minor drop tunings because I was thinking the song "Griot in Memphis". Was that in G Minor?

Yeah, "Griot in Memphis" was played on a banjo and it's a six string banjo, a Deering six string banjo and I had it tuned to a G minor. A very common tuning in Hawaiian slack key is is what they call Tarot patch, which is just a regular G major tuning, the standard one that even Keith Richards uses, but this was just the same except dropping the major third to a minor third and that's definitely a minor tuning for sure.

There's another song here called "A Circle of friends" using a C major tuning. Was there a D minor tuning for the song "Wind in the Canyon"?

Wind in the Canyon was like a D minor seven tuning.

I had not heard of these!

I think it was like D A E F C-I think it had a C in there. It was basically a D Minor seventh type of tuning and I really like that tuning a lot, it's really interesting.

I just had to just listen to these and just do my best guess.

Yeah, what I do is on the CD is I actually show all the tunings. I list them (shows inside CD jacket of all tunings used) and I list what the main tunings were for that song.

The last song, "The Love That Forgives". That song kind of hit me like the chord progression had some some sort of of a finality to it. It was very direct-almost like it was a hymn or something. It conveyed to me that this is the last song and gave me a sense of finality about the album.

Yeah, well, it is like a hymn and it was the only song where I played an electric for the main part that's played on an electric. It's a Fender Squier Baritone with P90 pickups. It's a fantastic sounding guitar, and not expensive at all-probably three or four hundred dollars or something. I just played it through a old Fender 59 Deluxe.

So the song has a very hymn-like sound, as you said. I was reading this book "Songs of America" by John Meacham and it speaks basically a history of music in America of songs, all from the beginning, and there was a story that really touched me. It was about Alabama when the KKK bombed a school and some kids were killed. It was a great big civil rights moment, and afterwards there was a Sunday School sermon. The leader of the sermon called the sermon "The Love That Forgives", and it was basically about forgiveness in the wake of this horrible tragedy and it really touched me. It was just such a beautiful thing and that's why I ended up naming the song as it is.

Wonderful. Where do you think you'll be going artistically? This CD is incredible. I love listening to it. Where do you go artistically after this?

Well, Right now I'm working on my second record with my friend Joss Jaffe. He's a multi-instrumentalist who did a record-it wasn't put out on CD but it was called "Alm Akua" and it's kind of a new agey, world music record. He plays tablas. He's a trained tabla player he also plays an african ngoni which is like a cora. It's like a harp you play with two hands. He also plays flute and all kinds of percussion. We did a record a couple years ago and it did really well in streaming and on Sirius XM and it's real chilled out record. Sometimes some of it is based on improvisation where we just lay down these grooves and I'll play some kind of African style guitar and he'll play some Cora and we have some drums going.

The record was pretty successful overall and we decided we need to do another one, so we've got about eight or nine tracks started, and he'll be coming down next week and we'll do some more recording, so I'm doing that and then I've got some other projects. I'd like to do a kind of a West African record. I've toyed around on some of my Guitar Stories records with this sort of West African-style guitar-we're sort of imitating a cora, so there's a lot of harp-like arpeggios and that kind of stuff. On my first Guitar Stories record there's a song called "Morning Music" and then on More Guitars Stories there's another song that is African sounding and I've always wanted to just do a whole record of that kind of music. That's another project I want to do before too long (laughs).

Are you playing out much these days in Hawaii or LA with anyone whom you are associated?

Yeah, I was in Hawaii just recently. I've been to Hawaii four times this year. I was over at the Slack Key Show in Napili, which is in West Maui. It's

shut down now because of the tragedy, but its an ongoing series hosted by George Kahumoku, who's a very legendary Grammy winner and musician in Hawaii. Every week they feature a different slack key artist and I've played that for about 10 years, so I was there playing in January and then in June I was there for the annual Workshop, so I was teaching slack key for a week; and of course lots of playing, and then I was back over in Hawaii a couple of times playing shows with my friend Leo Connie, who is a falsetto singer with a beautiful sounding falsetto style that he does, and I'm doing some gigs coming up this Labor Day weekend. We'll have a show tomorrow and Monday with him and then Wednesday in Santa Barbara, and then I have my own show on September 17th in Ojai California, but all gigs out here on the West Coast, and then that's pretty much it until I go to Europe for the International Guitar Night tour.

Moving on to working with Al Yankovic. Did you understand early on about what Al wanted to do? I mean, did he make that clear or was that part of the growth process?

Well, when I first met Al, I really didn't know who he was, but he was looking for a guitarist and I auditioned for him and I had to learn some of his tunes. Digging into these tunes, I was really impressed with how well-crafted they were. His lyrics are very well created he doesn't just let anything go. He really works on it and I was impressed from the beginning. I understood what it was all about, but as you know, over the years he's thrown a lot of surprises out there and done things I'd never expect and of course, he just came out with a movie called "Weird", which is a fantastic movie. It's just a biopic but nothing is true (Laughs). There's even an actor named Jack Lancaster playing me in the movie if you can believe that. That's kind of a interesting accomplishment to have: Somebody play you in a movie (Laughs).

I guess we are all of the understanding that you can do a parody song as long as it's an obviously a parody song. In all of the years that you recorded with Al did you ever have to alter any guitar parts for copyright reasons?

No. Al always gets permission even though he technically doesn't have to get permission. He will only do a parody if the artist and the writer agree to do it, because he doesn't want to create any problems. I mean if he does a parody we are basically trying to fake people out so they think it's the original recording and sometimes, on some of these tracks, maybe not so much these days but sometimes there would be like six guitar parts and it's like, "Hey wait a minute-the bass player only has to do one part and I have to do six!" It's kind of like being a sonic detective. You sometimes have to play with the pan and the EQ and try and get parts to pop out, but I've never had to actually change anything because you know he really does get permission up front and basically just do it just like the record if we can.

Okay! So you played on the "Ebay" recording then right?

Oh yeah.

I mean I've done that one in clubs and that's exactly like the record! And "Party in the CIA"? I've played that riff too. It's amazing that you never really had to change anything.

Over the last seven or eight years I've done a lot of keyboard parts, too, because I work as a composer here. I have a lot sounds and I have that ability, so on a lot of tracks it's me doing a lot of the keyboard parts as well.

I know his fans are hardcore! what's the craziest thing you've ever seen at an Al concert?

Oh man! Fortunately Al's fans are pretty well behaved! I mean, one of the weirdest things though is to look out there and maybe see like five or six people dressed just like him with a wig and the whole look, and it's just like you're looking out at a whole crowd of Als (laughs).

***Of Wood and Spirit*, the latest release by Jim "Kimo" West.**

How many dates are you doing with Al these days?

Well, it depends. Last year we did 140 shows, if you can believe it. And in the winter before that tour I did 40 shows on the International Guitar Night, so I did 180 shows last year. Probably more because I do some other ones on my own, so probably more like 200 shows last year (laughs).

Do you keep in touch with Toronto these days?

Well, I was born there. As a kid I don't remember much because my family moved to Ottawa when I was about two or something, so I do remember Ottawa but my whole family moved to Florida when I was about nine years old, so I kind of grew up in Florida. That's where I first started playing guitar and playing rock and roll, and in the early in the 80s I came out to LA because you had to either go to LA or New York and I said, well LA is warmer, I think I'll come to L.A.(laughs) It was a good move but yeah, I'm in Toronto fairly often because touring with Al, we always play Toronto, so I've been there many times over the years and I was actually at the airport just a few weeks ago.

With the Grammys I've often understood that if you win a Grammy you can celebrate for a day or so but then after that you got to get back to work right?

Well, yeah. I have won one Grammy but I did get two nominations. I did win once but of course you know it's not like a Grammy will just all of a sudden set you free and you know there's no money that comes with a Grammy. You know, I'm kind of a do-it-yourself guy so I kind of do a lot of things myself. I have a graphics person who does my graphics and I do hire out some publicity. The awards are nice and it does open doors. I mean if you're trying to book a certain venue, you'll have a much better chance of getting in the door or if you're trying to reach out to another musician to collaborate with, that really helps as well. So the the awards really do open doors but you know financially it's not it's not like you can just sit back and coast-you have to keep doing what you're doing for sure.

About the nails on your right hand: Are they acrylic or have your nails always been natural?

No, these are these are acrylics. I've been using them for about 15 years. I just go to the nail salon and I usually try and keep them a certain length and then I try and file them down with some real fine grade stuff to where they almost work like glass, because if they're not smooth then you'll get a scratchy sound, and sometimes I hear recordings like "Oh man I should have filed my nails a little more, I guess it's a little too scratchy". If you break a nail you can play but every string you hit with that finger is going to sound different than the others.

What endorsements are you currently running these days?

I have had an endorsement with Taylor guitars for many, many years, as well as Elixir strings. I use Elixirs and a few other companies. Some software companies, and then for electric stuff I use Tom Anderson custom electrics. I've got three of his guitars, and for the Weird Al show all I use is all digital, so I have a relationship with the Fractal Audio Fractal Axe Effects. I use all their gear on the Weird Al shows and have for about six or seven years. It's made everything so easy because I have one small rack with two Axe Effects units because on tour you always have to have two of everything, right? You can't have the show go down if your rig breaks, so I have a couple of Axe FX IIIs and people go, "You know you can get some amazing tones but you have to spend the time with it and tweak it. The sounds right out of the box are going to be hit or miss but you really need do to spend time and tweak it the way the way you want it. People ask, "What's your signal chain?" I say my signal chain is I plug into the Axe Effects and then it goes directly out to the PA. Yeah there's no signal chain. I've been in endorsements and things of that nature and now I think I've got everything.

I was trying to think of when I last played in Dallas-it was back in like 2017 at Poor David's Pub.

That's a fun room and where you played is not the original room, either-it was a shack back in the 80s, but yeah I have played at Poor David's-it's a fun place.

That's what I remember. I've played with Weird Al many times in in Dallas at various places, but the last tour we did last year was just sort of the stripped down show so we don't have all the big video and everything and we're playing all his deep cuts you as opposed to all the famous stuff he's famous for playing, all the non-famous stuff which his fans love. I can't remember where we played but we were playing a lot of kind of concert halls, like symphony concert halls. We played Carnegie Hall in New York, Lincoln Center and all kinds of iconic places but the stripped down show is more like two to three thousand seat places, and then the big tour was 2019, and it was places like Red Rocks and other big venues. We had a full orchestra every night.

I caught the video I on your website with (Vietnamese classical guitar artist) Thu Le. I was familiar with Liona Boyd while I was studying classical guitar. She's Canadian if I understand. I would say Thu Le is the face of female classical guitar players these days.

She is amazing, yeah! I worked with her last year on the International Guitar Night tour and we had a great time. For our duet we did her arrangement of a Vietnamese folk song. We did a little recording of it and I added some Hawaiian slack key and I'm really looking forward to playing with her again. What's amazing about Thu Le is that she's not only just an incredibly studied and competent classical player, but she's got a great ear. She can sit down and just pick out a Metallica tune and just all of a sudden start playing it. She can kind of play anything whereas there are quite a lot of classical musicians who are pretty much just like "I gotta have the paper in front of me" (Laughs). She can just roll with it, She's really good.

You can pick up the album *Of Wood and Spirit* on all the streaming platforms, correct?

Yes, and my website Jimkimowest.com.■

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JASON ELMORE RISING UP

BY COLLEEN GILSON

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JASON ELMORE HITS HEAVY WITH HIS LATEST ALBUM, "RISE UP LIGHTS"

By Colleen Gilson

IN SEPTEMBER, JASON ELMORE RELEASED THE VIDEO on social media for "Fragile," from his new effort, *Rise Up Lights,* and it was a moment of "Ah I KNEW IT!" for this writer. For instead of the blues and blues rock for which he has become known, it's a foray into smoking hard rock– heavy beats, booming bass and screaming guitar, and almost like a harbinger of what was to follow on his fourth CD, the chorus:

"Let me give you fair warning while the air is still calm she said I'm fragile but not like a flower

I'm fragile like a BOMB"

With "bomb," as in "bombastic," being the perfect description of this turn in Elmore's musical catalog.

One listen was all it took for me to want to get into the hows and why's of this other side of Jason Elmore (even though I listened to it nonstop at least fifteen times), and he graciously accepted my invitation to come hang and talk in person about this turn in his musical trip.

The explosion of Elmore's heavier side via influences ranging from 1970's through 1990's heavy rock and metal heyday heroes including Black Sabbath, Van Halen/Van Hagar/Montrose up to Soundgarden are clearly audible, not so much in mimickry but more as a tribute.

The thought hit me that usually guitarists who start out playing metal end up morphing into blues as they get older but surprisingly, with Jason Elmore, such is not the case.

"I started out playing in metal bands in the Texoma region. My dad would take me to see Pantera and AC/DC and any concert that was in town when he would get me on the weekends, trying to be the cool parent, and if there was not a good concert like, that he would take me to Poor David's Pub or Greenville Avenue Bar and Grill to see Jim Suhler or Bugs Henderson, Mike Morgan, Alan Haynes… blues guys. I developed a love for that and after being in the metal scene, dealing with singers that wouldn't help load out equipment and the turmoil of everybody wanting to be Motley Crue, I just got tired of the ego that went with that scene– the whole Jagermeister crowd– and I wanted to express myself in other ways, so it became accessible somehow to get into blues. And Jim (Suhler) had seen me show up so many times to his gigs that he was able to give me a hand and helped me with some gigs in the Dallas area. He gave me opportunities and told people it was okay to like me (laughs)…"

A live clip of Jason Elmore and Hoodoo Witch, from his 2019 DVD, Live From Planet Earth.

My first encounter with Elmore was a KNON Bluesfest perhaps in the early 2010. He played an early opening slot solo, and though the forte was blues, the thought came to mind, "I bet this guy can shred."

The formation of Jason Elmore & Hoodoo Witch, after a few trial and error members, resulted in the solid trio with Mike Talbolt on drums for about the past 13 years, and then the addition of a (then) very young Brandon Katona on bass.

"Brandon's dad was like my dad– he'd bring him to the gigs and he started sitting in with us on guitar. And then things happened that I needed to change bass players and we had a tour coming up to Canada basically 'tomorrow,' so I asked him if he wanted to play bass and he said, 'Sure!' We had a week long residency at this place in Edmonton, and the first gig went really well but the next morning I got a phone call from the owner who said, 'You mean to tell me you brought a 17 year old into my bar?' so I had to send him back to Texas and use a local guy up there– it was a disaster!" However, Katona became third piece of what is now a longtime, solid trio for the past ten years. The chemistry on and off stage is undeniable.

The title of the fourth CD, Rise Up Lights, was a puzzle to me…starting with the design of black background

with a purple and green font and the simple picture of a razor blade (art by Jason's wife, Lauren). "It's a throw back to Judas Priest records, inspired by that era. I was listening to some comedian podcaster who said if you said 'rise up lights' in an Australian accent fast, it sounded like 'razor blades'." (Try it!)

"This is really gonna piss off the blues purists."

Having won two Dallas Observer music awards in 2012 and 2017 for "Best Blues Act" seems to have been a flattering blessing as well as a curse of sorts for Elmore.

"I don't call myself a blues artist– I'm blues rock. There are so many sub genres of rock– like AC/DC or ZZ Top or Led Zeppelin– so I've always tried to stick close to the blues when I've done the other albums and that's the kind of stuff I like cuz that's the way I write, but with this one, I decided they're not gonna like it anyway (laughs) so I might as well not try to stay within these self-prescribed limitations of what I think they think it should be, I'm just gonna make something that I like."

Elmore pauses a few seconds, and turns pensive. "Maybe it's cuz I'm older… but I realized halfway through that this was something different. Eddie Van Halen had just passed away and that hit me hard—because he was and still is one of my top heroes– everything I was writing started coming out that way– it's an homage to Eddie. I've always been a fan of Black Sabbath– I love those doomy riffs– and Led Zeppelin… it's all blues-based.

There have always been elements of heavier stuff on my other albums but the blues purists are really tough… there's a lot of blues Nazis. 'That's not how Muddy Waters would have played it,' or, 'Oh you've got pedals…' I'm a guitar player who likes other guitarist-based stuff and of course, Stevie Ray Vaughan was a big part of my influence as a kid and still is important to me, but a lot of purists look down on that because it's lot of 'excessive guitar' and it's more rock than blues. They get very picky– well, and so is the metal crowd– it's gotta be Cookie Monster or nothing."

We agree that music is art, art is subjective to taste and preference, and not everyone is going to like everything.

"People get too hung up on what is blues, and what's not– everything changes and progresses, and I think if Muddy Waters was around now he'd be using pedals. I love the traditional stuff, too, and I feel it should be done as close to that if you're gonna do it that way. There's guys like Mike Morgan, and Reo Casey, who's a young guy that's coming up– there's guys doing that blues thing who are doing it much better than me.

I asked Elmore if he wanted to go song-by-song to talk about them and the lyrical content, but he said that it's best to allow the listener to experience the 46 minute long musical journey on their own rather than break down and analyze each song.

"I try to put a lot of thought and effort into writing– sometimes I use a rhyming dictionary… to me, the writing is the most important part of music. I won't release a song until it's what I feel is good…like to use a lot of double entendre, not quite as topical of lyrics– I'm really inspired by Roger Miller and Louis Jordan, as far as songwriting goes—really clever cute songs, funny– I've always been a fan of good writing."

From the opening riffs of "Blind" with its Page-esque guitar sound that gives way to power chords, the song ebbs and flows in its musical journey as the backdrop for the lyrical journey of self-discovery.

Elmore is not a political person publicly, but in the straight ahead rocker "None for All" he points out the division of society, and how we seem to have lost our humanity.

The first instrumental is entitled "Leviathan," chockful of guitar wizardry and definitely hat tips to many of his influences.

"Burning Bridge" gives the listener a respite, with lushly strummed chords underscored by crisp drumming and subtle bass, building into a dramatic exercise that perfectly accompanies the lyrics of regretful poignancy. But there's a rather funny story about the video, produced by Jae Worthington of Rainy Day Parade Recordings (as was the straight ahead performance video for "Fragile.")

"I was out riding my bicycle one day at the start of summer and came across this old bridge in Garland and here I am at this old railroad bridge that was burnt up and you can't cross it… so we started incorporating this bridge. I actually wanted to set it on fire again. We were gonna get some smoke bombs and set them off to give the illusion of it being on fire but there were some pretty sketchy homeless people living out there. They were hooting and hollering like zombies, lurching around… not close to us but their clothes were hanging out there. We didn't want to be intrusive. Plus, well, zombies…"

The second instrumental, "Moonbird," is closest to blues on this release, with its moderate pace but the guitar is simply and gorgeously luscious.

"I'll Be Damned" evokes the Van Hagar-era with its heavy boogie bottom end, squealing Van Halen-inspired riffs, breaks of hammer down/pull off, harmonics…the whole bag of tricks that he also credits Andy Timmons and Joe Satriani for influence.

Closing out the CD is"Devil You Know" (my personal fave). One thing I have always been drawn to in Elmore's lyricism is how he delves into the spookier side of things, and this is my fave hands down: starting with a Alice Cooper-esque Welcome to My Nightmare meets Led Zeppelin's No Quarter intro that morphs into nuanced verses which build to the chorus and the lyrics:

"I own the night, I black the sky

the creature that lights the way with electric eyes

But I won't be afraid

when the sunshine turns to shade

I'll shed my skin and start all over again."

Jason Elmore will never fully shed his blues skin, but Rise Up Lights seems like he's starting over again in a way, with a solid and surprising hard rock release harkening back to a bye-gone era of arenas, no phones or social media posts or influencers, just good times and great music.

Read the rest of this story at www.buddymagazine.com ■

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