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CARROLL

MAGAZINE

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**The Roller
Coaster High**

**TASTE:
Colossal
Crab
Recipes**

**OXX
Ovation**

John Christ
ROCKS!

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**CARROLL
BUSINESS
DIRECTORY**

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JOHN KNOLL AKA (JOHN CHRIST): Musical Thrills Ignite

by LISA MOODY BRESLIN
photography by WALTER P. CALAHAN

AS A LEAD GUITARIST FOR THE HEAVY METAL BAND Danzig who played on the band's hit song "Mother," John Knoll (who performed with the stage name John Christ) has witnessed the rush and the crush of fans hurdling barricades to get closer to their idols. And as a music teacher at Coffey Music, he experiences the thrill of igniting students' passion for guitar and then bringing them to a skill level that fires them up just as hot as he is when he gets into his performance zone.

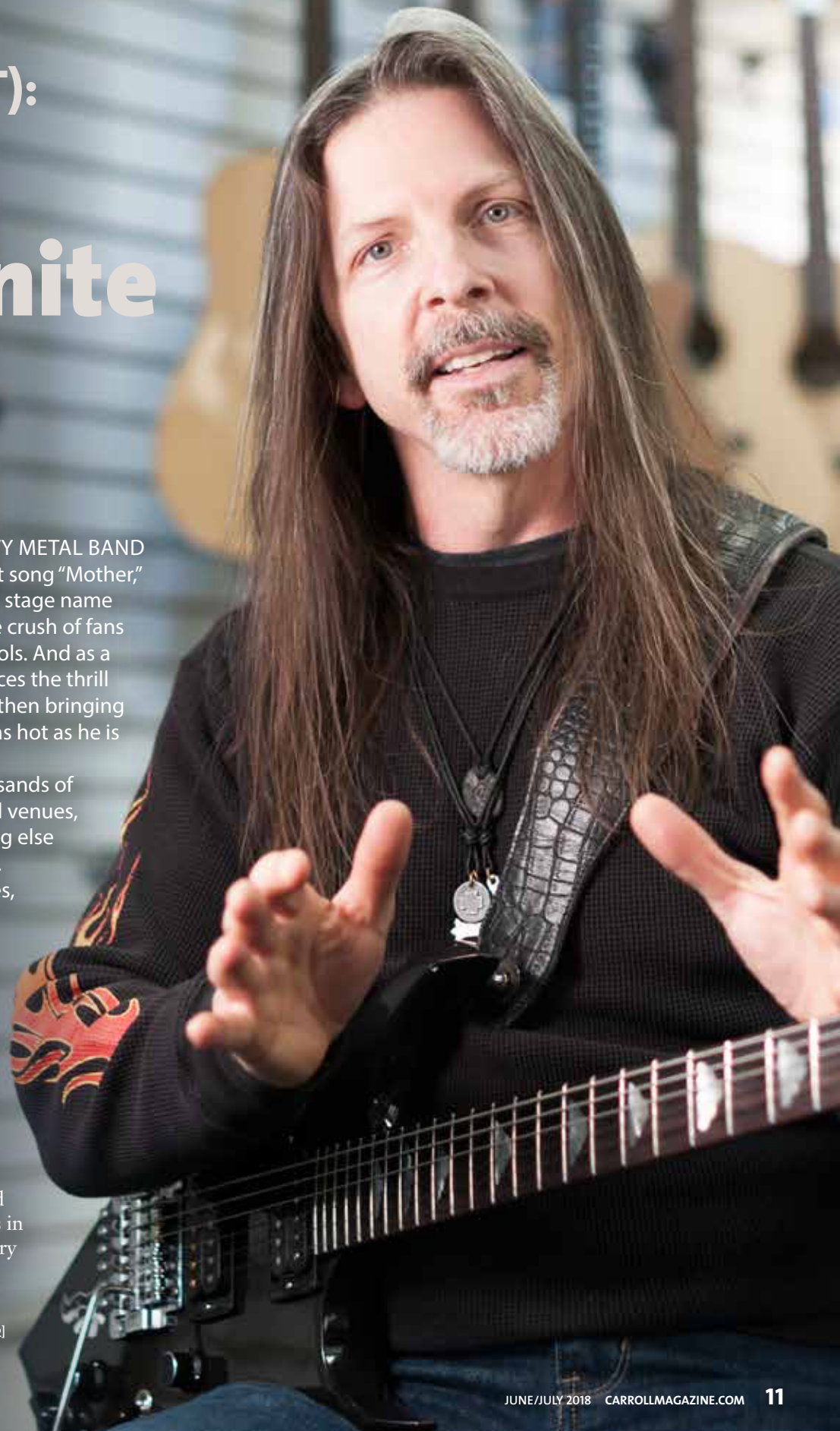
Whether that zone was in front of thousands of people, or before smaller audiences at local venues, Knoll said the stage is a place where nothing else matters but his relationship with the guitar.

"I tune out daily worries about bills, taxes, and I'm in this incredible moment that unfolds almost habitually — it is an incredible rush," he explains.

Talk a bit about childhood influences that shaped your music and stage presence.

I'm the youngest of five and the only boy from a musical family. Both my parents are musicians. Dad played in the band Sentimental Journey and sings in the St. Agnes Choir. He played trumpet in church and was in the orchestra for the St. Charles Players in Pikesville. Mom, who is also a labor and delivery nurse, sings and plays the piano. We all played piano and other instruments.

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“They say that playing and performing comes naturally, but it doesn’t. I ask my students who are working on a new song if they are really committed and how badly.” – JOHN CHRIST

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11]

When did you pick up the guitar? My first lesson was at St. Agnes with the nuns. If you played in the folk group for Mass, you got out of some classes. Later, my sisters’ friends and boyfriends impressed me so much I started taking lessons at Nelson Node Music — bluegrass. At 15, I joined my first band — my sister’s boyfriend’s band, Blind Ambition. Eric Clapton, The Who, Ted Nugent, Aerosmith ... their songs were all big.

And the rest of your journey? While at Towson, a high school friend told me about his boss’s kid, who played in a band in New York and they were looking for a guitar player. My friend said that they had just done a show all covered in blood, and their music was weird, but they had a record deal and a producer (Rick Rubin) working with them who had just signed over Slayer. I auditioned — for Samhain, which was formed by Glenn Danzig — and got the job. Soon after, he replaced the drummer with Chuck Biscuits, and the group became Danzig.

The song “Mother” — briefly describe its success. Once I was with Danzig, we relocated from New Jersey to Hollywood with Rick Rubin. We bounced with record companies and executives, like David Geffen, and the original “Mother” came out in August of 1988. The song was remixed and remastered in 1993, after it gained exposure on MTV’s Beavis and Butthead. That was our peak, in 1992-94. We picked up tours with Metallica, Soundgarden. Later with Korn, Marilyn Manson.

John Knoll to John Christ – talk a little about the name change? With Danzig, no one used their original names. We wanted to be tough — and sometimes anonymous. So I took off for the library with a roommate to look a books with baby names. We had fun reading off wholesome names and pairing them with dark ones: John Black, John Wolf, John Vaughn Wolf, Dracula Von John. I had long brown hair and the start of a goatee. Once I was leaving the gym all grizzly and a friend said, “He looks like Jesus Christ.” I went with JVC for John Von Christ.

Once I was out of town and a record company called a band member to confirm my name. When I returned, he told me, "Your name is John Christ now." I knew my parents would just love that. For a bit they said "Christ for Christian."

You're a Catonsville High School graduate and attended Towson University; what brought you to Carroll County? Management, or lack of management; attorneys, or lack thereof — that's why I'm back in Maryland. I was in the middle of a divorce in California. They were in no hurry to see me come back. Actually, my sister, Margaret Knoll, worked at Airpark Animal Hospital with John Kable. They had gone to vet school together. In 2010, she was diagnosed with lung cancer — a non-smoker. I came home for Christmas — we were both sick and we thought she had pneumonia. I was recovering from surgery; neither of us were feeling that well. The doctors went from trying antibiotics to removing her lung. I moved in with her and I stayed until she passed.

How did you meet your wife, Nancy? We met while we were taking care of Margaret. Nancy was her best friend and now she is my wife. I got to know her in ER and oncology; we have a bond that goes a long way. She knew my sister more than I did — they were friends for 17 years.

How has Nancy influenced your music? [After my sister died,] it was Nancy who said, "You know what, we got to get you out of the house." Her colleague, Carolyn, had a boyfriend who was the lead singer in Half Serious — a local band out of Taneytown. On the day that we had the public service for Margaret at Hashawha, Carolyn was there. "I know it's not a good day and you are not feeling well," she said. "But the band is playing in Emmitsburg tonight." After a brief time at my sister's place where I wanted to crawl into a bottle, Nancy lured me out and drove me to the Ott House.


They brought me up on stage and we played Judas Priest, Aerosmith, some of "Mother."

Some advice you tell your students? They say that playing and performing comes naturally but it doesn't. I ask my students who are working on new songs if they are really committed and how badly. We don't call it done until they have played the song 2,000 times. When they have counted out 100, they send me a text and I offer more direction for 150, then 250. So far, no one has gotten to 1,000. I try to do it 2,000 times before I record. Now I'd play a song 5,000 or 10,000 times until the guitar is part of my body, it moves with me and I'm not thinking about technique. I'm just with the audience and I can focus on how I feel as the music flows through me and I am a conduit.

Favorite memories linked to being on the road? We used alias names at the hotels a lot. Some of mine were Lewis J. Cipher, Norm — the guy from Cheers — and Patty O'Furniture.

Tell us a fun fact that not many people know about you? This was a big thrill for me: The *Young and the Restless* filmed in LA and my motorcycle was in one of the scenes. Someone was getting a tattoo and going back and forth from the tattoo parlor. I had a Jesse James motorcycle — tangerine orange with silver and purple flames. I called her Tang. I remember rolling her onto the set.

Who do you listen to now? Whatever my students listen to and want to learn: blink-182, Alanis Morissette, David Bowie, Nirvana, Metallica, Radiohead, Red Hot Chili Peppers.

What are some of your plans for the future? I definitely have another chapter or two. I love teaching. I'm developing a rock 'n' roll program at Peabody Institute — at the prep. It's a first. Zane Forshee is the director there. He is a world-renowned classical guitarist who is an alien. What he can do with a classical guitar is not human. He is so good it gives me chills. I'd love to take things to a new level — blend rock 'n' roll and classical — teach. And I have plenty of content for a book. 

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