

MARCH 1995

guitar

The Guitar Interview

Eddie Van Halen

transcriptions (including bass lines):

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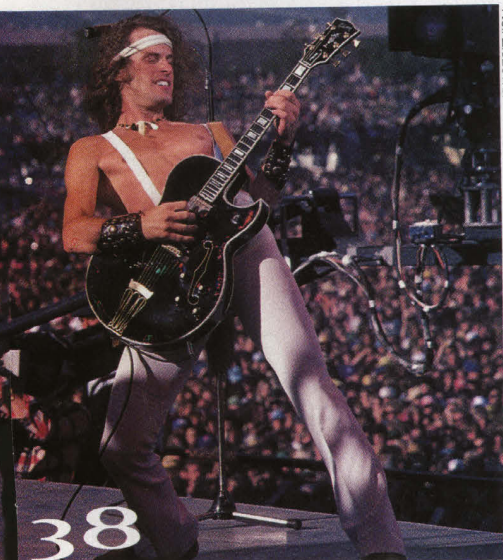
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MARCH 1995

VOLUME 12

NO. 5

DATELINE :
Los Angeles, 3:30 p.m.

I was with my photographer driving the 101 South towards L.A. While gazing into the smog, mentally preparing for the impending encounter, I was struck with the reality of what would soon occur: In one hour I was to meet, do a photo shoot with, and then interview my childhood hero, "the Reverend Atrocious Theodocius," a.k.a. Ted Nugent. With each passing mile, the anticipation grew in direct proportion to the size of the butterflies moshing in my stomach. How was I going to pull this off? Should I be real, or L.A. cool? Would we click? Would I like him? Would he be the Ted Nugent I wanted him to be? I reminded myself that this was it—this was a dream come true. And maybe a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go one-on-one with him and get some answers to the questions I've always wanted to ask.

john & ted's

Excelsior

advent

Marty Temme

Danzig's dauntless
guitarist hunts
down the Wild Man
of Rock'n'Roll

venture
ture

by
John Christ

John Christ & Ted Nugent



At 4:00, we arrived at the famed Greek Theater in Griffith Park where Ted was performing with Pride & Glory and Lynyrd Skynyrd. As I approached the security checkpoint, I was entering a unique situation. Here I was—a fan and a musician—about to interview a legend. It was a challenge that boldly magnified the intensity of the moment. When Marcee Rondan, one of Ted's publicists, escorted me backstage, I got my first glimpse of the Nuge.

Outside the stage door, in a little courtyard littered with Anvil roadcases, the Motor City Madman stood poised, aiming a zebra-striped compound bow. Suddenly, he let fly a hissing arrow. With a loud *whack!* it pierced the red bull's-eye of a cougar target mounted in a custom roadcase 15 yards away. Ted giggled with satisfaction as an impressed TV camera crew *oooh'd* and *aah'd*. Moments later he arrived for our shoot, noodling on his baby, the blonde Gibson Byrdland guitar. I could hear my heart pounding in my head. Mass had begun....

JOHN CHRIST: The first time you picked up a guitar, what did you think of?

TED NUGENT: I thought it was an absolute, essential response to my craving for more Duane Eddy, Dick Dale and the Del-Tones, Chuck Berry, Link Ray, and The Ventures' guitar sounds.

Do you have one favorite band or one special inspiration?

The Rolling Stones. The first 10 albums, to this day, absolutely light my fire. If you listen to what Bill Wyman did against Richards and Jones, that's what "Stranglehold" is. I'm playing Wyman's part against those other guys' parts. That's why I think I invented that pedal-tone thing that's on "Stranglehold," "Stormtroopin'," and everything else I've done since. More influential than the guitar itself was the overall music influence of James Brown.

What is your all-time favorite album?

It depends on what I'm feeling at the time. I could listen to the Stones' *12 x 5*, I could listen to *The Yardbirds' Greatest Hits*, the first Jimi Hendrix album....

Did you ever jam with Jimi?

Oh yeah, many times, in intimate little settings, in little dressing rooms. Talk about having your mind dazzled! He just did stuff that wasn't supposed to be done.

Who is your favorite guitar player besides your tourmate, Zakk Wylde?

I couldn't decide on my favorite guitar player, just like I couldn't decide on my favorite album. I've jammed with Mike Bloomfield and Freddie King, Albert King, B.B. King, and Eddie Van Halen. It was just awesome stuff. I found it fascinating.

Did you pick up any licks from those guys?

Probably. You wouldn't be able to hear it, but I'm sure I did. I take back things from train wrecks, I take back things from bombings of the U.N. building, I take things back

from the lingerie department. So I'd like to think that my playing is a representation of my level of awareness.

Basically you're saying it all comes from your gut.

Absolutely. It's all gut/soul shit.

Are there any of your songs that have a lick you can pull out and say, "That is from such-and-such a guy?"

I don't think so.

I purposely did that with a few of your licks on [the Danzig song] "Mother" to see if anyone would notice.

I'm sure you can hear "Money" by Barrett Strong [*sings "Stormtroopin'" riff*] I guess it's a mutilation. I've done more with A, C, and D than 50 white guys. It's always an adventure. I've got a song on the new record, *Spirit of the Wild*, called "Lovejacker." I don't know if it was influenced by The Young Rascals or Sam & Dave, but I play some shit that is just awesome. It's not technical.

Do you practice scales and arpeggios?

I don't know a scale! The only scale I know is the one I hang my deer on every year. People tell me to play a scale and I don't know what they're talking about. My guitar playing didn't come easy. I had to practice, but I didn't practice from a book, or a teacher, or a tape. I practiced to The Rolling fuckin' Stones, Chuck Berry, Lonnie Mack, James Burton, The Beatles...that kind of stuff.

When did you discover the power of feedback?

It's fascinating that you ask that. It makes me realize that I forgot to mention probably my single most influential guitarist.

Who?

Jimmy McCarty of Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels [*who later formed Cactus with Tim Bogert, Carmine Appice and fellow Detroit Wheel Rusty Day—ed.*]. I consider their songs quintessential rock'n'roll. Now, Jimmy didn't play any feedback, but he played a Gibson Byrdland with a Florentine cutaway [*a sharper, more pointed cut than the Venetian cutaway featured on pre-1961 Byrdlands—ed.*], and a Fender Twin Reverb amp. That was good enough for me. To this day, I can think back to '61-'62 when my band The Lourds opened up for Billy Lee and the Rivas before they changed the name to Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, and watching this guy in absolute awe.

Although I think his rhythm playing was cool, he didn't do the ripping solos you're known for.

You have to remember, John, this was 1960-64. So I took it places. Again I have to emphasize that it did not come easy for me.

I'm the same as you. Nothing has come easy! I have to work for every lick, every artificial harmonic...

Oh, that [artificial harmonic] comes like nothing. I can get that on an acoustic guitar.

Continued on page 134

John Christ & Ted Nugent

Continued from page 40

I hold the pick upside down, and play with the round part of the pick.

It's easy now, but it took me years to get it right. I hold the pick way at the bottom and strike index finger, pick, thumb. Another technique that's a signature of your playing is what I call overbends.

Oh yeah, yeah, just make it squawk back.

Was that to make it sound like an animal, or did you just like to make it scream?

It was an animal thing.

It seems your underlying theme has always been "the wild."

Have you noticed that? I think that's the

greatest part about my career. I've never fuckin' swayed one time. It's cute [*high-pitched giggle*]. To the people in the industry who thought they could pass me by and thought they could slow me down—hello, you haven't been paying attention! I'm still on your leg humping wildly, and that's my stain, motherfucker.

The Reverend Atrocious Theodocious.

That was one of my favorites on *Tooth, Fang and Claw*. That reminds me, wait until you hear the new version of "Great White Buffalo."

Why is "Great White Buffalo" your favorite

song?

Probably because it's just a great lick, combined with a lyric that represents my other, non-electric life. You'll hear stuff on this new record you've never heard in your life. I have to go back and find out what the fuck I did.

Do you get red-light fright?

Nah.

Sometimes I find that I trip over parts in the studio that I had nailed in rehearsal and at home. Sometimes it may take hours to get it right.

The thing is, I never prep anything. I have the song and the bass line, but no solos.

You just wing it.

Absolutely. And what happens is, I'll finish and the guys will go, "Wow that's great." I want to do another one, and they'll say, "Well, save that one!" "Save whatever you want, but let's do another one." We end up saving 50. But I'm looking for something.

Sometimes you know you're getting close but...

I don't know what I'm looking for, but when I hit it I'll know. Typically now, it goes very fast.

You seem all fired up about the new stuff. Is this a reaction to coming away from Damn Yankees?

No, it's not a direct reaction to that. Damn Yankees was a very gratifying experience at the time. Jack [Blades] and Michael [Cartellone] are just super bandmates. They are creative sons-of-bitches and real passionate about what they do.

Going back a few years, the sound of your guitar changed radically for the better between the last Amboy Dukes album and Ted Nugent. What happened?

That was [producer] Tom Werman. He comes from the truest appreciation zone of rock'n'roll. He's honest and he knows what he likes about Stones songs and Aerosmith songs and Who songs. He knows what the sonic balance is to a good rock'n'roll piece of music. He was my watchdog for my Byrdland sound. He made sure that we didn't end the evening's recording until that Byrdland was given its just due. That's what we're doing on this new album. I believe that it is the return to the sonic reverence, and yes, I'm using the R word. I don't think we maintained it on *Double Live Gonzo* as much as *Cat Scratch*, or *Free-for-All*, or *Ted Nugent*.

I know you didn't like *Double Live* as much as the others, but it ripped people's heads off!

That record is a sonic middle finger.

To this day it's my guitar clinic.

It should be.

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John Christ & Ted Nugent

John. The goddamn Byrdland feedback is so wonderful—you just can't do that on a Japanese guitar. It can't be done. You'll be excommunicated from the islands if you try that in Japan.

Are you still blasting at full volume?

Do you want to know how quiet I am?

Hit me, baby.

How about two Peavey 5150 amplifiers on three.

Hundred-watters?

Hundred-watters, quiet as shit. Two bottoms, that's all I'm using on stage. Neither of the bottoms are behind me. One is way over on stage right, and one is way over on stage left.

So you like the sound away from you, too.

Absolutely. I don't want it too close. It gets in the way of your finger movement. You know what I insist on listening to?

The front of house.

The front of house, thank you.

When I'm on stage, playing in front of my rig's raging power, I can't play nearly as well as I do through a little practice amp back-stage or at home.

It stumbles your fingers.

What gauge strings are you using on the Byrdlands?

I go .010, .012, .016, .024, .034, .044. That's my average set. When I tune it down a half-step, I go up a size.

Wow, that's big! Why do you tune it down a half-step?

With just the three-piece band, I like the thickness of a half-step down.

Is there anything guitar-related that you've been kicking around for years but haven't done yet?

Honestly, I just don't think about it that much. I don't think about what I'm going to play until the amp's turned on. What I really emphasize my musicianship through is my songwriting. I think the songs are the vehicle for expression. I'm not trying to impress anyone, I'm not trying to show what I can do on the guitar. I'm trying to talk. I'm trying to sing. I'm trying to enjoy this maneuver, and if that is conveyed, home fuckin' run!

Did you use any special techniques for recording the guitars on the new album?

No, other than listening.

I heard from a friend that you recorded the guitar with only one Fender Tonemaster cabinet.

Yeah, just one cabinet. We climbed on ladders and climbed over shit and listened to see where our ears got the [desired] combination of sonics. Then that's where we stuck the mics.

Did the band track together?

Oh yeah. Every song on the record represents live jamming. I'll only overdub the occasional solo.

You even play solos live?

Oh yeah, you bet.

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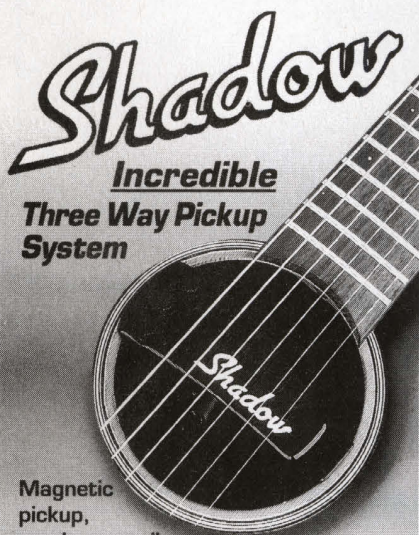
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John Christ & Ted Nugent

I got one little thing I want to do. I'm going to say a song title, and you just react. Let's start with "Papa's Will."

That's exciting memories. "Papa's Will" came, as usual, from a live jam session. It was recorded on the 1971 *Survival of the Fittest* album. It was just a make-believe song, maybe somewhat inspired by fights between my dad and me. I loved my dad dearly. We had some real conflicts over the years. It was about a kid who went out and did what he believed in doing. He went back and visited his dad on his deathbed, in an oxygen tent, and unplugged the fuckin' oxygen tent on his old man. And he turned down his dad's money left to him in the will.

I remember the 18 screams.

Boy, there were some screams. They were cute, man. Even now my screams are out of control. I see stars on stage every night. I black-out temporarily on many occasions.

"Turn It Up."

"Turn It Up" is just a great full-speed-ahead crank song. It's custom-made for Derek's [St. Holmes] voice. It's about the uninhibitedness of rock'n'roll. It was probably motivated by the fact that when I was first getting started in the mid '50s, everyone used to tell me to turn it down. Of course, I'd turn it up. And the next thing you know, I've got two Magnavox amps, then a big Fender, and I ended up with eight Fenders. I like loud rock'n'roll.

"Need You Bad."

Wow, what a great rhythm & blues tune! It's a custom live song. It's just got a great grind. It's the ultimate expression—along with "Stranglehold" and a bunch of my other songs—of how I use that pedal tone.

A couple things always puzzled me about that song. What sound did you use for the chorus lick?

I think [producer] Cliff Davies played a game with the echo, where he allowed the echo to happen before the note. I don't enjoy that sound.

You don't like that sound? I think it added a lot of power to that section.

It added a lot of cut, but I like the rich, solid fiber of the Byrldland without that kind of game played on it.

"Alone."

"Alone" was an emotional composition that reflected a very sad and melancholy time in my life that happened when I was going through my divorce. It was a pretty piece of music that represented some of the pain I was going through. And you can hear that Byrldland when I descend from G to E minor; that bending open G string.

You can do that technique only on that type of guitar, where you can push on single open strings with the right hand.

That's right. You've got to have an extended tailpiece like that where there is a nice expanse of string between the bridge and tailpiece so you can actually flex the strings.

"Paralyzed."

"Paralyzed." What a great song—what a great intro to the album that is. I just love that song. It's just a mutilation of standard use of chords.

The solo at the end of that, over the chorus, is just—

That's a lot of wah-wah happening.

It sounds out of control.

Speaking of "Out of Control," that is one of my best guitar moves ever.

That whole record [Cat Scratch Fever] has that tone. I always wondered how you could get such a fat tone without that much distortion. There is some grunt.

That's the Byrldland. Only the Byrldland can do that, man.

How do you think gear has changed over the past 20 years? Has it gotten better or not?

You listen to my tones today and I don't think it's gotten any better, John. You stop and listen to The Bluesbreakers,

When you're recording in the studio, are you playing with a dry tone?

When we're jamming as a three-piece, it's pretty damn dry. I'll have a little bit of grease on it so I can get a representation of ambience like you would get from a big room. Since Tasmania [*"with a 'z,'" he emphasizes*] Studios is so small, we're really jam-packed in there face-to-face, so you can't use much



songtroopin'

man. Beat that fuckin' tone. Listen to "Shapes of Things" by The Yardbirds. Go ahead, beat that tone. Listen to The Rolling Stones' first album. Is there anybody beating those tones? I don't think so. It's all a matter of utilization.

It seems like the older guitar sounds with all the analog effects sound a little bit fatter than they do today.

You're goddamn right they do.

"Motor City Madhouse" live.

Oh my, what a great lick that is, too. That's just a classic guitar lick, man. Ain't nobody come close to that one.

Did you write any songs on the new record purely from a solo lick idea?

Absolutely. When you hear "Spirit of the Wild," it's a classic twist on the original honky-tonk. When you hear "I Shoot Back," it's a guitar-riff masterpiece. I think that's why most of my stuff excites guitar players, because it's really a great use of standard guitar maneuvering. Nothing quite beats something like a "Paperback Writer" or a "Pretty Woman." It's theme-line. That's what I think I've mastered.

"Come and Get It."

A great lick, but I was a little let down by the production of the song.

In what way?

Oh, I just didn't think the bass was as big as it could have been. I didn't think the drums were as noisy as they should have been. I think Cliff Davies started doing too much production.

"Yank Me Crank Me."

That's just another classic Ted Nugent love song. It's just a classic blues shuffle.

The solo over the first A to D change is so melodically fluid.

You wouldn't think it, but I do love melody. Civilians can sing along to my guitar licks. I look people right in the eye when I'm playin', and the majority sing my guitar solos with me. I'm real proud of that.

When you can sing along to a guitar riff at a concert, it's a high. That's why I never really got next to all of the speed-metal stuff. It's not memorable enough for me—where's the groove, the melody?

If the girls don't like it, I don't like it. It's gotta have a thump. With bands like ZZ Top, Aerosmith, AC/DC, and Jackyl, there's a good grunt going on. There's a real good girl-thing happening.

A lot of the new heavy-metal music, including Danzig's, has gotten so serious, almost to a negative degree.

I tell you what, John. Look at a band; if they're not smiling, I don't like their band. If the music doesn't make you happy, you're hopeless.

volume. But when I do overdubs, I like to have the sound that replicates a live ricochet dynamic.

Is there anything you wish you'd done differently in your career?

On one hand, I wish I'd been more demanding and diligent in protecting my signature following the *Cat Scratch Fever* album. However, what would have tran-

John Christ & Ted Nugent

spired had I been that diligent? Would I be as free and uninhibited as I am today? The bottom line is, talking to John Christ right now, today, I'm so fucking happy that I think ultimately the answer is "no." It's the man in the arena who's willing to try beyond his capabilities and go places that he's not necessarily comfortable in but where he is compelled to experiment and seek adventure, even if he fails. I feel that he is much more fulfilled, and I feel that that's me.

I've always thought your solo phrasing was very unique. Where do you get that stuff?

It's funny, because when I was talking to you earlier about having to go back and relearn what I did on "Great White," that's exactly what I did on "Stranglehold." When I did that guitar solo you hear on the record, I was just playing with my rhythm guitar tone. I played that live with the guys. I was just showing the guys the tune. That's what came out, so I kept it. To this day, the phrasing and the emotion in that middle section is absolutely stunning guitar work.

How do you keep up that confidence and intensity you're famous for?

That's another thing these magazines are going to have to come to grips with: It's diversionary tactics in a man's life.

Do you think that's the secret?

Absolutely. John Christ, until you get a bow and arrow, and walk the wild ground of the swamps and mountains and valleys and deserts and woods and great forests of this great nation and this world, you have not called upon your inner- and outermost influences. Something fuckin' happens. You cannot discount the vitality of an individual who

"Civilians can sing along to my guitar licks. I look people right in the eye when I'm playin', and the majority sing my guitar solos with me. I'm real proud of that."

—Ted Nugent

guts his own fuckin' meals. There is no purer or more honest way than to go out and kill your own food. People are so quick to miss the soul of that statement. The soul is not the killing, it's getting to that point. There is a connection out there, and I call it "the spirit of the wild." Just hanging around me a little while, you've got to know how serious and passionate I am about that. Everyone should experience some form of getting something from its origin to its final utilization. You've

got to touch some of the dirt in life.

Of course, you're saying balance is the key. What should we tell today's young guitar players?

There is one message that is really important. I get asked—in letters, in airports, in interviews, even when I'm pumping gas—when I got my break. There are no fuckin' breaks. Breaks don't happen. You make your break, you make your luck. Play the goddamn guitar! Pick it up, shut the fuck up, and play it from your heart and soul. And have fun. If it is moving you on a fun level, you're headin' in the right direction. If it's not fun, put that fuckin' guitar down. And if you find that half a day has gone by, and the fun factor from that guitar has not motivated you to play it at least half the day, then you are not supposed to be a guitar player!

Amen.

It's got to be genuine. And if it is, then I don't have to tell you to play—you can't put the motherfucker down. You don't wait for a booking agent and a manager, you play your motherfuckin' ass off. And guess what? You will end up projecting that somewhere in a club or something, and they will find you. You cannot stop 'em from finding you if you're playing your royal ass off. ☐

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