

PAUL GILBERT

#1 With A Drill Bit

PAT METHENY

Braving New Worlds

Guitar Player

September 1992

25TH
ANNIVERSARY

THE CURE

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Pop Mastermind

THE NEW FLAMENCO

Spain's Young Radicals

CLARENCE WHITE

Echoes Of A Country-
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BY ALAN DI PERNA

John Christ: Danzig's Guitar Messiah

NO, OF COURSE it's not his real name.

"Back in the early days of Danzig, they used to tease me and say I looked like Jesus," confesses the biblically bearded guitarist, whose grinding, bluesy textures are crucial to Danzig's ominous onslaught. "I come from a pretty strict Catholic upbringing too. So the guys in the band just started calling me John Christ and the name stuck. Naturally, my parents didn't care for it."

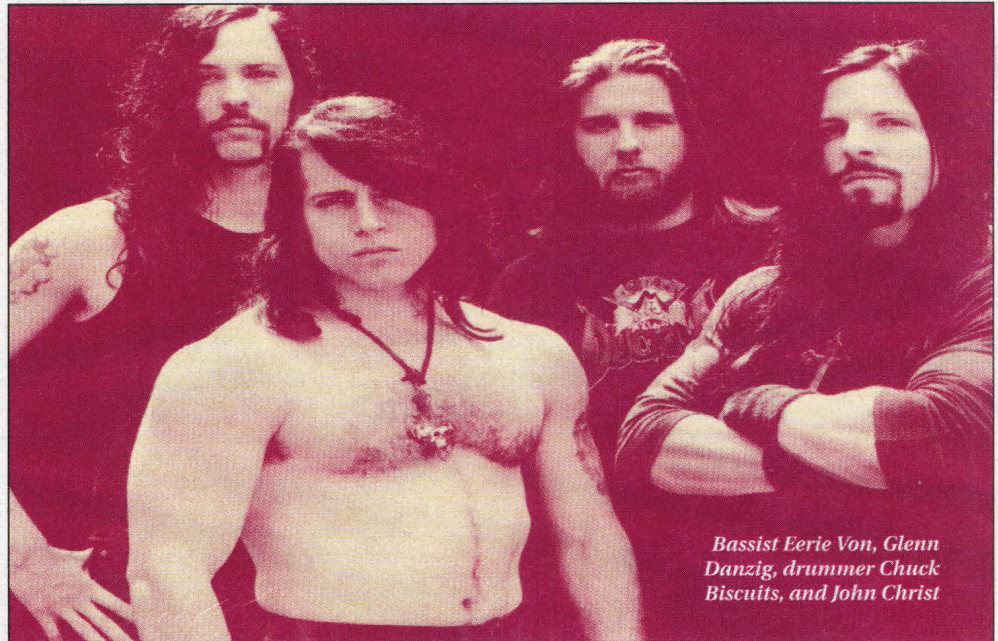
John's folks probably had a different musical career in mind when they sent him to the Peabody Institute and later Maryland's Towson State University, where John received classical training and studied jazz composition. He can play piano, French horn, orchestral drums, and several other instruments. But ever since he was 12, rock guitar has been John's ruling passion: "I heard my first Ted Nugent album and that was it!"

Which explains how—during his junior year of college in 1988—John found himself auditioning for the band that was to become Danzig. "They thought I was kind of crazy. I went wild at the audition and cut my hand open and was bleeding everywhere. They thought I was on drugs. They said, 'We'll call you back.' And finally they did—after I'd spent a few weeks calling up [singer/songwriter] Glenn Danzig and playing riffs into his answering machine. The second audition went a lot better. I called my parents the next day and had them drop me out of school."

Jumpin' genres! John now found himself in a group that had started out as the Misfits—a popular hardcore punk band on the early-'80s East Coast underground scene. By the time John came aboard, they'd mutated into a thrash metal outfit called Samhain. "It was all super fast down-picking at first," recalls Mr. C. "I had to learn all these old Misfits and Samhain songs I'd never

heard of. It pulled me out of the jazz thing in a hurry." John had a key role in Samhain's transition into Danzig. "I'd say a big thing I've contributed to the band is a metal sound. To this day, when we get together to jam, the other guys pull out a bunch of old punk rock riffs, whereas I pull out riffs from Aerosmith, Nugent, AC/DC, Black Sabbath, and all that '70s rock and roll stuff."

Blues is their one common ground; the boys do the occasional impromptu acoustic blues gig



Bassist Eerie Von, Glenn Danzig, drummer Chuck Biscuits, and John Christ

An Ominous Onslaught Of Grinding, Bluesy Textures

around their hometown of Hollywood. John says the reason why Glenn Danzig sings so much like Jim Morrison isn't because Danzig's a big Doors fan, but because Glenn and Jimbo both spent a lot of time listening to Howlin' Wolf. The blues thing comes to the fore on Danzig's latest album, *How The Gods Kill*. John stirs up a swampy, pestilent guitar miasma on the record. Imagine if the Cramps had been into heavy metal, or Gun Club had been more adept at tuning their axes.

"This is the record we've wanted to make all along," John enthuses. "We finally pulled it off." He adds that he's happier with his guitar sound on *Gods* than he's ever been before. "It's heavier, more realistic, with a lot of chunk and sustain.

Danzig

This is the first time I was actually recording in the room with the amp and speakers. I wanted to have that loop [i.e., between the pickups and speakers]. I like to feel the speakers hit me in the chest. It was a lot more fun playing leads this time."

Most of the record's feverish guitar tones were achieved with a very simple rig: a 50-watt Marshall amp and a 10-string 1983 Rich Bich converted to a 6-string and tuned down a half-

step. "It was a gift from Rick Rubin [head of Danzig's label, Def American]. He got it from Tracii Guns. The neck's a little bit wider and the body a little bit bigger; that extra wood and extra weight really makes a big difference in the sound." Clean tones, including some mighty spooky tremolo parts, were done with a rented '69 Strat and a variety of Fender Twins and Super Reverbs. But some of John's favorite bits are the "feedback tracks"—continuous, tortured, one-note screams—folded into songs like "Heart Of The Devil" and "When

The Dying Calls."

Since Danzig is a one-guitar band, John has his hands full reproducing all this live. But he wouldn't have it any other way: "Two-guitar bands sound too cluttered. I like the freedom of the one-guitar lineup."

Dann Huff

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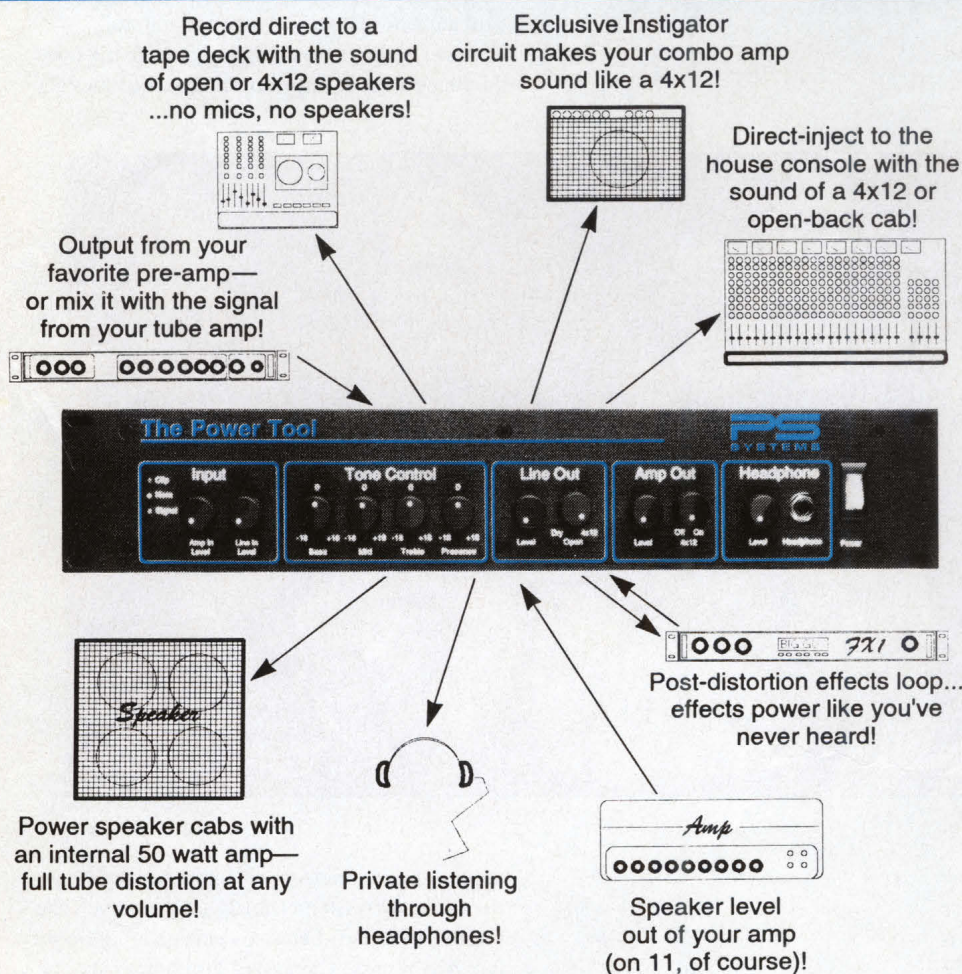
producers, a guitar solo is the way to get from point A to point C. For me, it's different: When I quit singing, my guitar is the voice. Ever record a solo and hear maybe two notes that just slay you, 'cause they hit a certain place in the track? I like to get a whole solo of that stuff."

Dann plays a custom PRS—essentially a Dragon model without the fancy inlay. The neck pickup is an Artist humbucker; the bridge humbucker is wound to Dann's specs. A PRS trem and onboard Demeter low mid-boost preamp complete the package. (The Dann Huff PRS is available through special order.) Huff records most of his parts through a 100-watt Soldano-modified Marshall. "It has the *sweetest* sound. I told Mike [Soldano], 'I haven't bought any of your amps because it won't get better than this.'" Onstage, Dann drives two Peavey 5150 heads and four Peavey 4x12 cabs with stock speakers. The only mods are brown tweed Tolex and a special rack output. Rack-mount gear includes a Kasha Rock-mod preamp, Lexicon PCM 70 reverb, T.C. Electronic 2290 DDL, dbx 160 compressor, Yamaha SPX90 multi-effector, Songbird Tri-Stereo chorus, and an ART MIDI-programmable EQ.

Dann layers guitars to achieve Giant's mammoth, punchy sound. "For power chords, I might cut two tracks of very clean—*loud* clean—vintage Marshalls and then layer some high-gain parts in the background. In the foreground, you hear all the harmonically correct, rich guitars." These days, Huff is moving away from preamp gain and relying more on output tube distortion "so you can hear the notes pop out." "I'm trying to get almost an acoustic sound," he reveals, "where you can really hear the dynamics. That's my personality. I'm not the world's fastest player, and I don't have the biggest repertoire of blues licks. But I'll play the dynamics in such a way it's gonna sound like me, no matter what."

After conquering the session world and scoring hits with Giant, one challenge remains: "I want to record a solo on acoustic. I love that sound: If you mike the guitar right, and sit quietly enough, you can work dynamics like an orchestral player. I want you to hear me sweat a little."

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