

GUITAR WORLD

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AUGUST 1994

SURVIVING THE GRUNGE WARS:
STONE TEMPLE PILOTS' PURPLE REIGN



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FEATURES

42 STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

The DeLeo brothers, Dean and Robert, laugh away the incessant Pearl Jam comparisons but are deadly serious about their fine new album, *Purple*.

54 DEATH METAL ROUNDTABLE

This is the funereal thing: Carcass' Mike Hickey and Bill Steer, Obituary's Trevor Peres and Allen West and super producer Scott Burns meet to discuss why their music is dead and well.

PLUS: DEATH METAL MEGA LESSON

Learn to burn to death with Steer and Peres.

66 THE EAGLES

Reunited, and it feels so good. Or so says Don Felder, the man who wrote the music to "Hotel California" and played a critical guitar role during the years of the Eagles' greatness.

78 YNGWIE MALMSTEEN

He's been through more trials than the Salem witches, but Yngwie always lands on his feet. He's back with a new label and a new album.

PLUS: YNGWIE RATES THE GUITARISTS

Don't expect generosity.

CONTENTS

PROFILES

23 DANZIG Almost the Greatest Story Ever Told: Guitarist John Christ and his martyrdom at the hands of Glenn Danzig.

33 PHISH Trey Anastasio and Co. go easy on the jams, heavy on the structure on *Hoist*, and their dedicated fans couldn't be more grateful.

DEPARTMENTS

16 TUNE UPS The Rolling Stones return, Collective Soul, Steve Cropper, Napalm Death, Nuno Bettencourt and Extreme in the studio, and more.

83 COLLECTOR'S CHOICE Yngwie Malmsteen's 1972 Strat—"The Duck." **PLUS:** Classic Keith Richards poster.

99 REVIEWS The Pretenders, Joan Jett, Spin Doctors, Boston, Metal Detector and more.

160 IN GEAR Your gear questions answered.

163 BASEMENT TAPES Alternative rock producer Don Fleming gets serious about distortion.

165 SOUNDCHECKS 2Tek guitar bridge; Ovation Collector's Series, 1994; Ampeg VL-503.

170 NEW EQUIPMENT The latest and greatest in the world of guitar.

MASTER CLASSES

111 HOCUS POCUS BY GARY HOEY

113 WILD STRINGDOM BY JOHN PETRUCCI

115 THE SOUND AND FURY BY KIRK HAMMETT

117 RIFFER MADNESS BY DIAMOND DARRELL

TRANSCRIPTIONS BASSLINES INCLUDED!

118 "SHINE"— Collective Soul

127 "VASOLINE"— Stone Temple Pilots

134 "BEAST OF BURDEN"— The Rolling Stones

145 "CLEOPATRA'S CAT"— Spin Doctors

ON THE COVER

Robert & Dean DeLeo
by Lisa Johnson

INSET

The Eagles
by John Halpern

THIS PAGE

John Christ
by Marty Temme

John Christ, dark prince of power chords,

would love to play solos.

But he can't—and this is

the cross he must bear.

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

SOME SAY DANZIG is enamored of evil. It is true that they have a fondness for upside-down crosses emblazoned with snakes. And yes, they've been known to slit the throats of plump chickens in bloody sacrifice. Their album titles, *Lucifuge*, *How The Gods Kill*, and *Thrall-Demonsweatlive* are a bit suggestive. Yet all of this evidence is circumstantial. The truth is, the Christian concept of the devil has about as much to do with Danzig as little league baseball. Singer Glenn Danzig, a devoted fan of the Nineteenth Century French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire, explains it: "I'm intrigued by Baudelaire's vision of Satan as more of a rebel than the traditional notion of him as this totally evil, dark guy." Butt-head couldn't have said it better.

Still, it all kind of makes you wonder. Take the band's latest album, *Danzig 4p*. With song titles like "Crucifixion Destruction" and "Little Whip," *4p* is clearly no kindergarten picnic. Danzig stringman John Christ is bracing himself. "I think we're really going to catch a lot of flak with this record," he laughs, almost nervously, citing the album's, uh, potentially controversial themes. Danzig openly embrace the very things that, well, frighten the hell out of the rest of us. "That's one side of us that can be a little scary," admits Christ. "It's not for everyone."

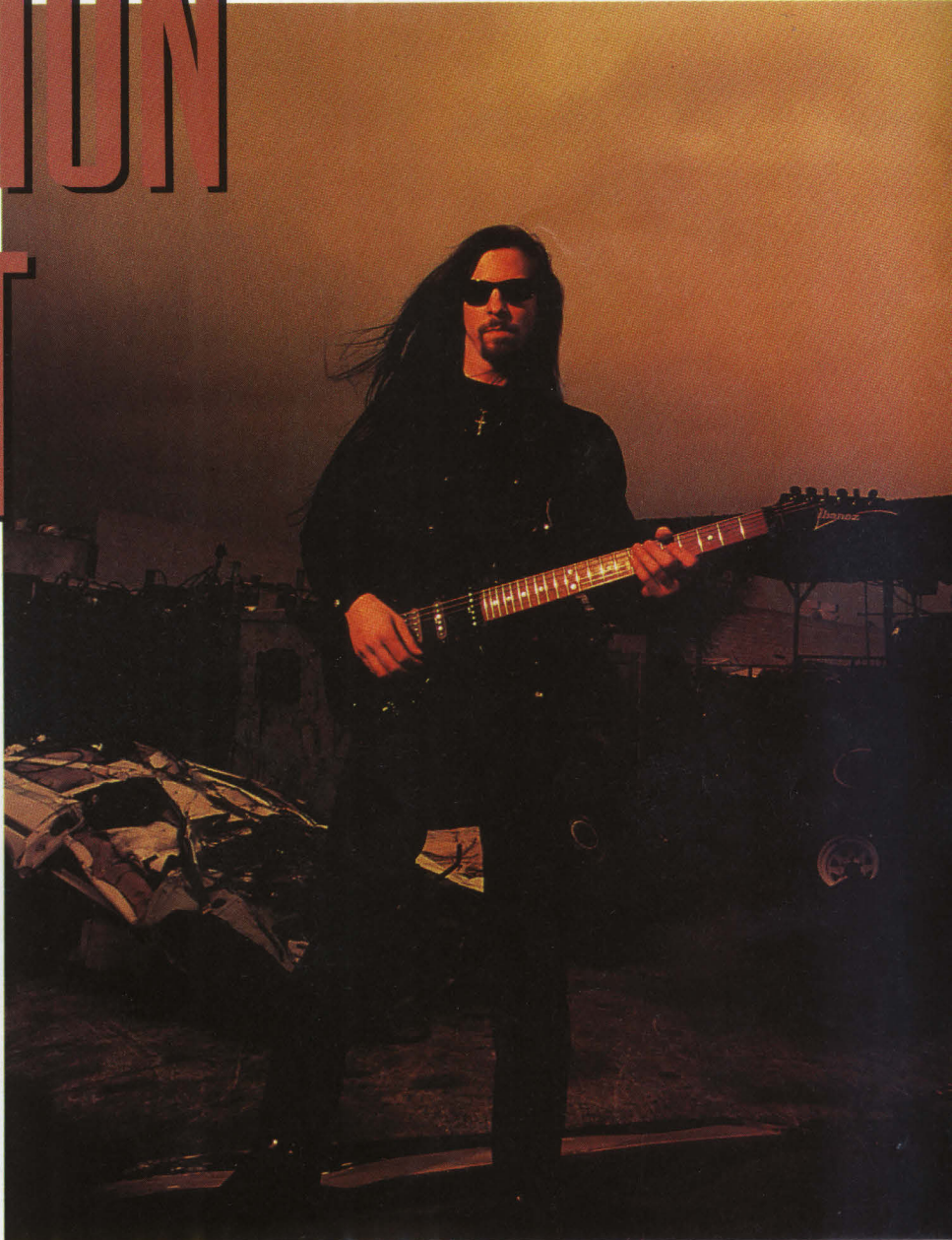
Prior to becoming scary, Christ was a

BY JEFF GILBERT

classical guitar student at the famed Peabody Prep in Baltimore. He later attended Towson St. University, where he focused on jazz bass, theory and composition. In 1987, in an almost Faustian career move, he joined Danzig. Christ's barren guitar work on the band's 1988 debut,

Danzig—arguably one of the greatest metal albums of all time—stood out at a time when everyone else was trying to crack the sound barrier playing full-on thrash and blitzkrieg leads as though the hounds of hell were nipping at their overstuffed racks.

Though Danzig's black atmospherics



have over the years been largely rooted in Christ's desolate riffing, the guitarist rarely solos. He takes the same minimalist approach on *Danzig 4*, a chilling and deliberately rhythm-oriented album whose themes and always fearsome minor chording will make the hair on the back of your ears stand straight up. "I guess Glenn doesn't want to exploit me," shrugs Christ. "He's not into long guitar solos, just something to comment on the songs."

"Most of my tracks on the new album were just jams recorded during the basic track sessions, while we were putting it all together," continues Christ. "There aren't too many distinct solo sections, but they liked the tracks so much, they just left it that way."

Christ is planning a solo album that will enable him to spread his mighty black wings. But this will come only after *Danzig 4* has its run, more videos are made and released for Beavis & Butt-head to extol, and another year on the road to meet the demands of a now huge audience with a taste for the dark side. The band's surge in popularity can be attributed largely to the recent revival of 1988's "Mother," but Christ thinks other forces might be at work as well. "I think people are a lot more open-minded about Danzig than they used to be," says Christ. He ponders an impossibly evil thought: "Maybe people have finally caught up to it."

GUITAR WORLD: *Danzig 4* sounds different from your previous albums.

JOHN CHRIST: I agree. To start with, we wanted to introduce some new textures into the band, so we experimented with several older, exotic acoustic instruments, including a harmonium [a reed organ invented in the early 19th century], a recorder and wind chimes. It's a very moody, atmospheric record.

We're still using a big ambient drum sound. The drums have always been a big thing for a lot of Danzig's music, and the vocals are obviously very prominent in the mix. I have to admit, I wish the guitar tracks were a bit louder.

GW: You tend to play very economically. Did you take more solos on this album?

CHRIST: No. Actually there are very few solos on the record. I did some overdubs, but not like the last record where I overdubbed everything. A lot of these songs have a looser, live, jamming-around feel. In fact, the new album reminds me of Glenn's previous band, Samhain. It's kind of a tradition with him. For example, on the first Danzig record there were a handful of songs that didn't have any guitar leads on them either, like "Twist Of Cain" and "She Rides."

The big difference on this album in terms of my playing is how I use sound and texture. I experimented with several different types of stereo chorusing and pitch-shifting. For example, my tone on "Son Of The Morning Star" constantly evolves through-

out the song. It starts off jazzy and then kicks into this real heavy Led Zeppelin thing. The guitar tone is real bassy, with just a touch of soft chorus. Then it kicks into this real loud, raunchin' groove. But most of the songs are fairly simple. Some only have two parts.

GW: What soloing there is leans to a more bluesy style.

CHRIST: Yeah, Glenn prefers the more bluesy style. It turns him off if I start adding any heavy chromaticism or play too many notes. For one song, I had a solo worked out for the end part and Glenn didn't like it because he thought it sounded too polished—too fancy.

GW: Which song or songs work for you on a guitar level?

CHRIST: "Going Down To Die" is probably the song for me because it has a guitar solo. That's the only solo on the record! [laughs] I, of course, wanted to re-record it a few more times to make it perfect. But I think Glenn and Rick [Rubin] have it the way they want it.

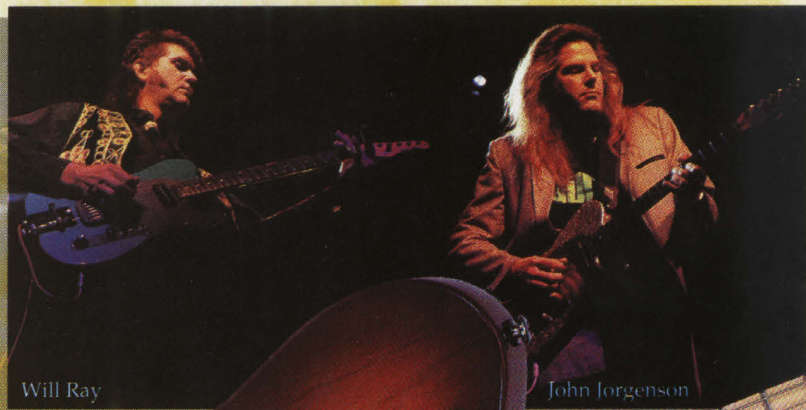
GW: Does the sparse nature of Danzig's arrangements make it easier on you in live performance?

CHRIST: Not really; I look forward to the songs with the solos in them. The tougher the solos, the more fun it is for me to play night after night. When there's not much guitar work going on, then I go into show mode. [laughs] But in Danzig, we've never really had involved guitar solos, unless they were very brief.

G&L and THE HELLECASTERS

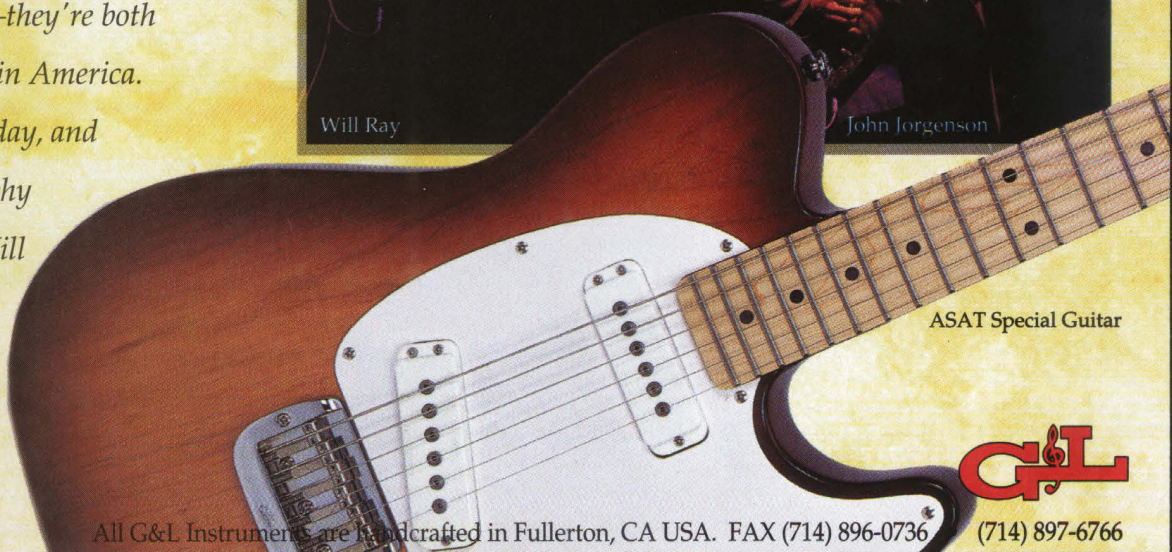
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GW: Do you see that situation changing down the road?

CHRIST: No, I don't.

GW: Too bad, because you're a very underrated guitar player.

CHRIST: Well, I'm gonna be putting out my own record soon, and all the "underrated" stuff will go away. [laughs] I have some tracks that I've been working on for a couple of years now.

GW: Are you singing on your solo project?

CHRIST: Yeah, but I'm gonna mix it up; the first record is going to have a lot of things that I've been playing on my own for years and years and have always wanted to

record, but never had a chance to do right. There will be one or two classical pieces—one on electric, the other on a classical guitar—and some vocal songs. People are gonna go, "What the hell...?" [laughs]

I was brought up on those big arena concert metal bands from the Sixties and Seventies, so I want to do some of that music, too. I haven't decided exactly if I'm going to go for one particular direction or just blow out everything that's been in my head and start clean.

GW: Do you have a release date?

CHRIST: No, it's not gonna happen until after the Danzig tour. We're going to be out on the road for quite a while. I have a few demos recorded, but I still have to write some more songs and see who'd be inter-

ested in picking it up.

GW: You shouldn't have any problems attracting a label.

CHRIST: You don't think so? I love hearing that. I'm hoping to cross over a little bit on my own. I like radio rock—that type of feel and groove. I'm more comfortable doing that than I am doing the dark metal thing. I mean, it's fine, I'm used to it, I've been doing it a long time. But it's not me, really. The gig is cool, and I like playing the part, but I've been doing it a long time now and I need to get out on my own a little bit.

GW: What do you think about "Mother," a song recorded in 1988, becoming a hit, a big hit, today?

CHRIST: It was wild the way that thing came about. Our label wasn't too busy and didn't have any projects going so they decided to take some time and focus on Danzig for a while. The EP was out and selling, but not selling great. And at some point, they decided to remix "Mother." I heard about it out of the blue. I was happy that they remixed it because they fixed the last note on my solo that always went to a noise that I hated. I wanted to fix it when we did it for the first album, but never did. They added delay and made it sound more like the live track, then they added some crowd noises...

GW: You mean "Mother" is the original?

CHRIST: Yeah. They used the studio version, added the crowd noises and sweetened up the mix. Then they re-released it, put a whole bunch of money behind it, and radio started picking it up all over the place.

GW: Radio stations that never acknowledged Danzig before are playing it in heavy rotation.

CHRIST: Funny thing is that it immediately sparked the sales of *Thrall-Demon-sweatlive*. Then stations started getting phone calls from people saying, "Hey, this version of 'Mother' isn't on the disc." So we were in a spot. The label had to put "Mother" on the disc somewhere, so they added it six minutes and 66 seconds after the last track. That seemed to help things a lot.

GW: Because of the success of "Mother '94," I've noticed AOR radio playing more stuff off your first record. It's odd to hear "Twist of Cain" sandwiched between Eddie Money and Blind Melon.

CHRIST: And the mood is so different.

GW: But for some reason, it sounds really good on radio.

CHRIST: Yeah, it sounds better on the radio—the way it gets compressed and pushed out over the airwaves, it comes off sounding smoother and a little bit richer. It's the same thing with "Mother." When we were on our first little minitour, we opened up for Slayer and we were out in Los Angeles playing the Palladium. I was driving around with some friends and "Mother" came on the radio. I thought, "Wow, it sounds better than on my stereo at home!" The only way to get it to sound like that at home is to crank it.

What Are They?

LES CLAYPOOL
TODD HUTH
JAY LANE

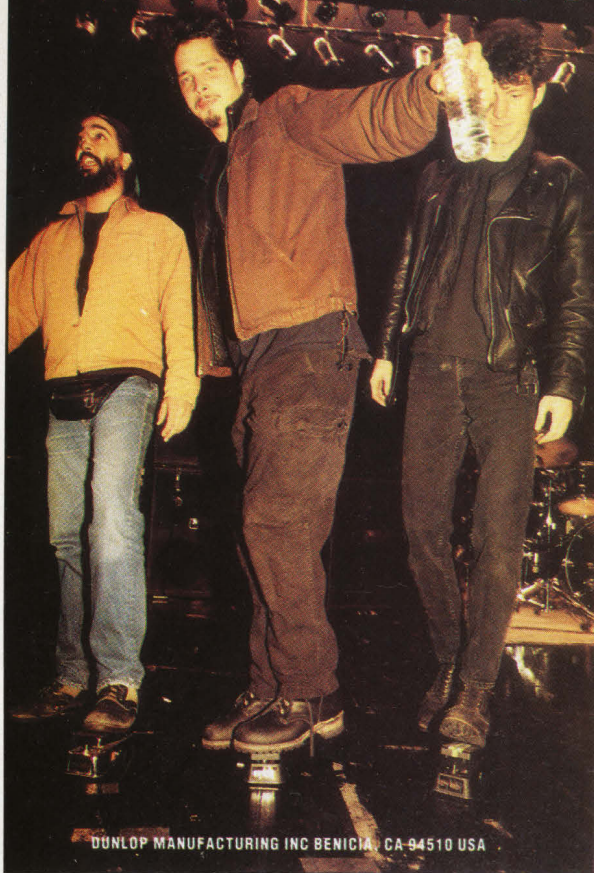
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**GW:** Volume cures all.**CHRIST:** [laughs] Basically.**GW:** The video must have helped, too.

CHRIST: We shot footage for that video all over the world. A lot of it was done at Irvine Meadows in California. But some of it was shot in England and a couple of other places, maybe Scotland. The editing is really good, but when you look at it, you'll notice a change of clothes. Sometimes we have different shirts on...except Glenn. [laughs] Yeah, that video came out really well. We blew a big wad of dough on the Irvine Meadows show with the big lights and all the cameras, the video truck, the remote recording...It was a big production.

GW: The first Danzig record was recorded in a way almost opposite from the way that metal records were being done at the time.

CHRIST: It's very dry. It actually could have been recorded much better than it was. The guitar sounds are horrible, the bass is non-existent, the snare is really distorted and the drum sound is weak. Basically that record was just a way to get a band together. I mean, Glenn and Eerie [Vonn, Danzig's bassist] have been together a long time. Chuck [Biscuits, Danzig's drummer] and I had just joined and Rick Rubin played a big part in pulling everybody together and making it sound like a band. Rick, at that point, was trying to make everything sound like *Black In Black*. He did that with The Cult record—a really flat drum sound and clean, punchy guitars that were really tight-sounding, a minimal amount of reverb, and a good loud vocal. That's pretty much what he did with us.

GW: Danzig is viewed as a landmark album in metal and hard rock circles.

CHRIST: I think it was the combination of songs. The way the band looks at it is, we like a lot of the songs; we just don't like the sound. We've been playing them live for so long now that we like the way they sound better live than they do on that record. That first record didn't sound like us. Maybe it did at the time, but now we're more aggressive and not so stiff. That's a very stiff-sounding record all the way through.

GW: The songs have become stronger over the years.

CHRIST: There are three songs off that album that I still like a lot: "Twist Of Cain," "Mother" and "She Rides"—people still love that one. You go into a strip club and you'll hear that song—strippers all over the world love that one.

GW: Girls taking off their clothes to your music. It can't get much better than that.

CHRIST: That's for damn sure. [laughs]

GW: Are you the last guy on earth to play a B.C. Rich?

CHRIST: [laughs] Some of the Slayer guys still play 'em. Seems like in the last three years, B.C. Rich has kind of disappeared.

continued on page 172

DANZIG

continued from page 30

Ibanez is working on some stuff for me, but I'm still going to be playing the Rich.

GW: What attracted you to that guitar in the first place?

CHRIST: The B.C. Rich posters with the naked chicks on 'em. [*laughs*] You remember those posters? The headstock fit right up between the chicks' legs. Then there was the killer blonde holding the black guitar, and she had a little B.C. Rich necklace between her boobs in her cleavage. Oh man, that was the start of it for me. I thought, "These guitars are great!" So I worked for about a year at some stupid steak house to save up the money to get the guitar. I never did learn how to use the preamps and everything. Eventually, after I joined Danzig and did the first record, I disconnected all that microwave shit and put in some PRS pickups. Just last year I finally refretted it and changed the Kahler. I've been playing that guitar for 11 years. ●