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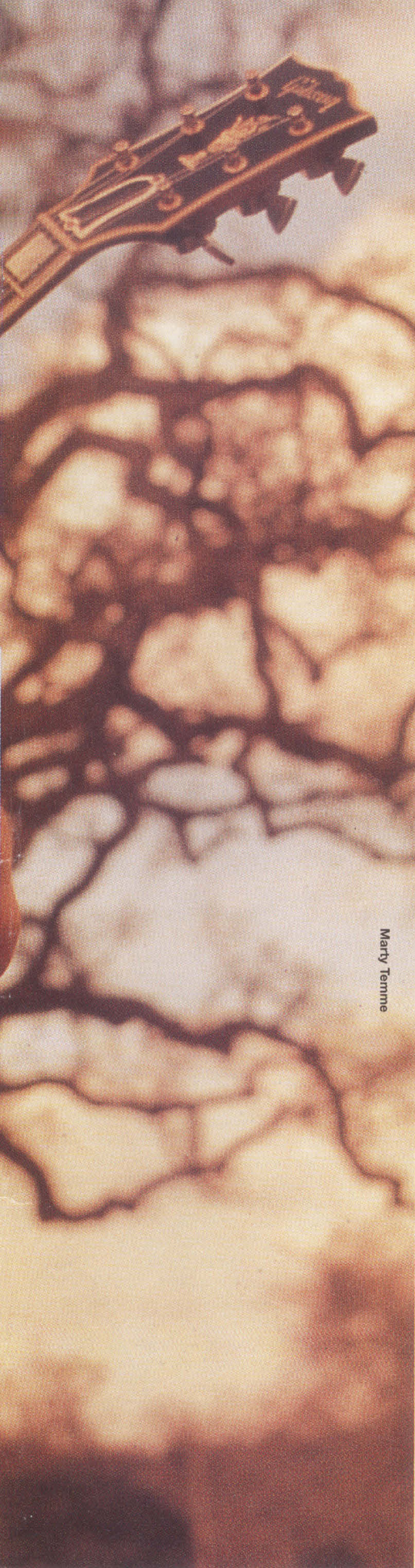


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IDOL *Chatter*

Tired of listening to what some stuffy old critic has to say about your favorite performers? Well, let the stars speak for themselves! Every month here in *Idol Chatter*, read what hot musicians have to say about various topics of the day, including who they are, what they play and whatever else comes to mind. **Edited by Kristina Estlund**

Longtime Danzig guitarist John Christ has been rather busy lately. Not only did Danzig release their latest, *Danzig 4*, break in a new drummer and begin a nationwide tour, but John has been doing a little side work putting music to celluloid (not to mention his forays into the world of rock journalism!). In this month's *Idol Chatter* we chat with John about his schooling, the importance of music in film, the movies he set to music and how he utilizes modern technology along with offering a new view on the film *Apocalypse Now*.

Electronically, I can play a thousand instruments. If you play a keyboard, then you can make it do anything. But guitar is obviously my main instrument: stringed instruments—guitar and bass—and I used to pluck a little banjo in high school. I played in some musicals: We did *Hello, Dolly*, probably *Oklahoma!* as well. Just little parts. I cheated a little bit—I tuned them up like a guitar! But nobody knew the difference in our little orchestra pit.

I went to Towson State University outside of Baltimore, Maryland. College was the funniest thing. We had to do guitar ensembles, jazz ensembles, and I was the only guy with long hair. Everybody else had these big ol' jazz guitars and I had this B.C. Rich Rich Bich guitar with all these switches on it, with a studded leather guitar strap and a Marshall half-stack. The guys were out there with their little rolling choruses, and the teacher gives me a big heavy metal solo in some strange piece called "In C," and it's nothing more than melodic phrases, incomplete melodic phrases that are strung together in no particular rhythm. Each bar has its own rhythm, but the whole piece doesn't have a structure. And you do it in a round—one guy maybe starts, and then five or six measures later somebody else starts, and then eight measures later he'll start somebody else... Well, it's one of those things where it'll get ugly for a second, and all of a sudden it sounds consonant and it sounds neat again. It's a really modern form of music, and then at the end they just gave me this cadenza and said 'Just play every lick you know in C!' I did this big old solo and all these effects, kind of going crazy, and after I finished playing, people just looked at me!

It was funny; I was like the rocker kid trying to fit into the jazz thing. I started picking it up near the end. Of course it was then Christmas break, and I auditioned for Danzig [back in '87]. I never went back to school.

I did a TV show a couple of years ago. It was an Australian TV show that came to L.A. called *Hey Hey, It's Saturday*. They came up here for a week and did a segment called "Hey Hey, It's Hollywood." They had all these stars, like Chevy Chase and some of the stars of *Murphy Brown*, and singers like Tom Jones and Lou Rawls. I was in the band, so I got to back up Lou Rawls and Tom Jones! Yeah, I jammed with Tom and Lou! It was really cool, and they put up funny graphics under your face. They put up a shot of me and underneath they wrote DARTH VADER'S GUITAR PLAYER and all this weird stuff. That was fun, and I've done some other stuff.

I did a movie last year. I played guitar on a soundtrack for a movie called *Stranger By Night*—an HBO movie, and the music was done by Ashley Irwin, who composes the music for the Academy Awards. He and one or two other guys put together all of the music for

SCREEN SOUNDS by John Christ

the show, and he does movies and television stuff on the side. It was great, because we were doing the Danzig record at Ocean Way in Hollywood, and they were rehearsing for the show. I went in and there he was, sitting up at the conductor's podium, with his orchestra—like 200 people—and they got television monitors, and the keyboardist's got like 50 keyboards and all these cables running everywhere. All these geeked-out classical musicians are picking their noses—it was hilarious.

I do a lot of the stuff [music for commercials and movies] on synthesizers, but we [John and his roommate, Noel Masson] also do some analog recordings of guitar and various instruments. That's the tricky part, because you've got to get a computer talking to an analog tape deck, and then everything has to sync up just right—stop and start at the right time—and then when you're finally done, you watch along with the picture and make sure that it works. And sometimes you're just *that* much off and have to do the whole thing again. But it's fun because it's very intense, and the best part is, once you're finished, the producer calls and says, "I've showed it to the executive producer, and they love it... We bought it."

The neat thing is, when you see them [commercials, etc.], you know. I'll be practicin' or workin' on some music or just taking a break, and I'll be watching TV, and all of a sudden you'll see your trailer come up for the first time! The first time I see it with the picture and the music is on TV, so I'd never actually seen it all together.

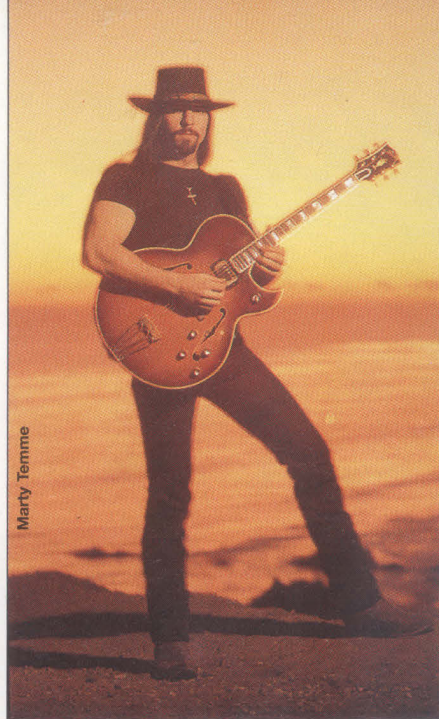
It's fun. We actually had three of them on the air

at one time, and this was within the first three weeks of doing any of this! All of a sudden it was just like they had all this stuff [that was recorded for movies], and we just kept crankin' out these tunes. It was the Sissy Spacek movie *A Place For Annie* and then Jane Seymour's *Passion For Justice*, which was a Southern-fried type of movie.

It was so neat, because I was in the studio—I was like, "Wait a second!" because I'd told my family to watch, and my girlfriend. I said, "It will probably be on tonight," so everyone was watching, all three of them. I was like "Oh my God!" It was just cool. My parents back in Baltimore were watching, and so everybody heard. That was the neatest thing about it, just...wow, you know? It's on TV, and everybody hears it—even if they're not paying attention!

It's fun. I wish I could do more of it, but the Danzig schedule and trying to make some music of my own... It's sort of like you can lay low for a while. When you really want to get some stuff goin', then you just get on the phone lines and start hounding them, or just—daily or weekly—keep sending them more demo tapes. They did buy something that we did for one of the *Lethal Weapon* movies on network TV.

When I go to movies now, sometimes I don't catch all the action, all the plot and all the good one-liners because I'm focused—I like to get a good shot at where the best sound is in the theater, and I'll sit there and just close my eyes and I basically know what's going on on the screen, but I'm trying to figure out what chord progression the guy's using or what instrumentation he's using to really get the emotions to come up. One

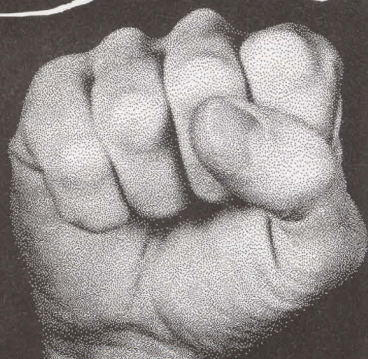


of my all-time favorites for getting the chills or to raise the goose bumps on my skin is the Robert Redford movie *The Natural*. The theme at the end when he hits that final home run—it's got these big French horns—the theme is just perfect! I just dream about making some music like that someday—making music like that that just hits you right in the gut.

There are debates about how important the music is supposed to be. There is a fine line between the soundtrack upstaging the action [on screen] or not. If you watch the cheap B flick on HBO, everything is samples and electric guitar, every scene. That's the difference between going to a theater and seeing one of these movies like *The Firm* or *Dances With Wolves*, and you hear this full-on orchestra going. For me, those are like the real composers. Those guys are the Mozarts of the 20th century. They don't just perform pieces of music for symphonies anymore, they have to make a living, and this is how they create their art. It's unfortunate that only a few of them are going to be remembered, because the quality of the music that they're putting out is amazing. Plus, the fact that they can't just go on their own muse; they have to fit something visual. It's sort of like opera in a sense, where they have to read the play and then visualize the action in their minds and then compose the music. These guys have a certain advantage in that they can see the action and really home in on it, but the audiences are so much more sophisticated that you have to be that much better.

In *Apocalypse Now*, the scenes with Marlon Brando, you're so into the action that you're not paying attention to the music. But the weird instrumentation, the sounds when Martin Sheen first comes across the village, the editing there is really good too. The directors and producers know when to drop the music out completely, when to leak it in and when to nail you with it. When they cut the cow's neck and the clashing and the music... When you remember the music from a movie like that, it's got to be great music. Because you hear that theme, or just a couple seconds of it, you know instantly what it was and associate it with the action. That's the art. •

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