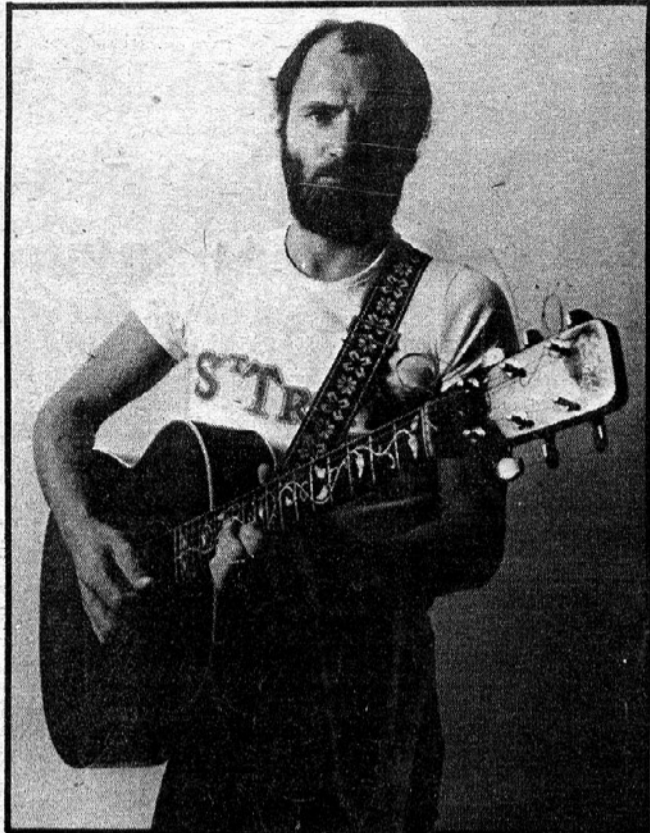


## Michael Chapman



MICHAEL CHAPMAN: preparing to whack hell out of his nice new custom-built guitar...

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got diverted into Dixieland banjo, and only got back into guitar when he heard Django Reinhardt.

"I determined to be the English Django Reinhardt, because nobody'd told me about Diz Dizley." From thence it was discovering Big Bill Broonzy and finger-picking.

"I thought, 'That's a nice band' and it was only one guy. I couldn't figure out what he was doing. I was trying to do it with a flatpick, and because of practising all the Reinhardt stuff I had the speed, but I thought there had to be an easier way than that. Then suddenly I came across this guy who'd sussed it all out, and he was playing with his thumb and a couple of fingers."

"I started playing everything with a 4/4 bass, and it was years after — when I listened to people like Ralph McTell and Wizz Jones — that I got a variation in the bass line. I always wanted to play the guitar like Jimmy Smith played the organ, so that I had complete control. I had bass and lead and didn't have to worry about whether a bass player played the wrong note, because I was the bass player as well."

Even people used to listening to deft picking occasionally think that Chapman is two guitarists. That's partially due to the way he hits the thing.

"You think you've got a double note, say on a bass

string, but it's only because I've hit it so hard that you get all the overtones that are in the guitar, and once you start getting into good guitars, those overtones are really worth having. But on a fairly naff guitar, the overtones just get in the way."

Moral: if you've got a good axe, belt it one and it'll sound even better.

Advice to the Axelorn Department: "Just sit at home and play. And as soon as you've got anything go out and try it on people. The thing is to try and produce the best sound that you can."

"If you play a chord of E, just try and get the best sound that you can get out of that guitar at that time, and then try and get a really good sound out of chord of A. Try and produce the sound that you're looking for. That's in your left hand. If you've got it there, the right hand can come afterwards."

"The left hand is much more important, because you have to get those notes in the right places, get those notes perfectly. When you're buying a guitar, take someone along with you who you think knows a bit more than you do, 'cause it's so easy to get robbed. I spend half my time looking for idiots with good guitars who don't know what they've got."

"I mean, Ralph McTell bought a 1937 Martin on Bournemouth Beach for £14. And I know a bloke who got a Martin D18 in Southampton for £7. Someone had sprayed it bright red and written 'Elvis Presley' up the neck."

IT'S AN interesting fact the the *sound*, the 'electricity' of the electric guitar was exploited from the first in pop and rock music — initially owing to the obsession of the medium with novelty and one-off uniqueness. In jazz, on the other hand, where other kinds of technical virtuosity have always abounded, the sound of the instrument didn't alter significantly for 25 years.

While you can trace the evolution of other instruments in jazz through great figures who are part of the tradition and yet help to transform it — Charlie Parker, Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Archie Shepp for the saxophone, say — the history of the guitar reads very differently.

However distinct their stylistic characteristics, players like Barney Kessel, Tal Farlow, Wes Montgomery or Jim Hall share an attitude to sound and tone which takes no account of the special nature of the electric instrument, and doesn't significantly depart from the ideas of Charlie Christian.

It was in fact the realisation of what was happening in rock that brought about the change in approach of Larry Coryell and John McLaughlin; and for me the first instances of that realisation were much more important and enjoyable than those of the pulp jazz-rock industry of today.

Take, for example, the brilliant Tony Williams' Lifetime, and an album like "Emergency". There's so much strength and energy in this music, and it is also compelling and demanding listening, not the kind of TV-theme-music wallpaper that we're more accustomed to now. "Sangria For Three" is stunning, not least in the underrated organ playing of Larry Young; and McLaughlin's lurch-and-feedback wah-wah commentaries, his controlled and organic use of rock elements, are especially hard-hitting.

Then there's "Communications 9" on the Jazz Composers Orchestra record of 1968 (recently released here). On this track, Larry Coryell plays more or less continuous feed back to full orchestral accompaniment; and although it's tempting to wonder what Hendrix might have made of such an opportunity, the result still demonstrates perfectly the shifting accent in jazz towards a more complete assimilation of the guitar's power.

Now, of course, the mainstream of jazz has come completely to terms with electric sounds, to the extent that by virtue of superior technical ability, jazz players are strongly influencing rock again, if indeed such name-barriers still exist. What's disturbing is the increasing vacuity of the form used in this kind of music. It is pointless to consider the development of an instrument, in

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME

**Guitar developments outside the material world... FRED FRITH of HENRY COW looks beyond the bounds of commerciality**



this instance the guitar, without placing it in the context of music as a whole; and the total situation at the moment appears to be one of conservatism, a fear of taking risks or of committing one self to any other than known paths.

It is inevitable that most of the players who are consciously involved in advancing the language, and who have a radical attitude to music, are working outside the rock medium. Inevitable, because the very essence of rock is against the experimental, dealing as it does almost exclusively with products — created and packaged by the record companies and disseminated through magazines like NME.

This constitutes what amounts to a conspiracy of taste, of people trying to dictate what other people should hear, in order to maximise their profits.

Not that wonderful music doesn't get made, and not that I want to get involved in a 'my taste is better than yours' type of argument. I'm more concerned with the terms, the machinery by which the music is presented to the public.

It is perfectly clear that record companies exist to make money, and that most of them have strong ideas about what sells and what doesn't. Equally clear is the fact that journalists, whatever their intentions, are subject to all kinds of pressures, most of them subtly or unsubtly exerted by the said companies, or managers or whoever.

Sure, the papers are happy to laugh at the amazing games that go on, to give bad reviews or frank interviews, but it's all just a part of the much bigger game of mutual support and glorification that exists between them.

A few quick calculations about the prices of full-page ads, the proportional amount of advertising and who places it, who owns which papers and companies, and so forth, should be enough to set the scene in perspective.

One of the main side effects of the fact that everything is based on records (or 'product') is the insidious tendency to class certain types of music not merely as uncommercial, but as difficult, abstruse or 'coldly conceived' whatever that means.

Even the word 'intellectual' has the status of a put down — as if people who are prepared to exercise their minds must be essentially lacking in some other quality like emotion or warmth — a ludicrous assertion not even worthy of argument.

Such blanket and meaningless judgements interfere badly with people's preconceptions, with the way they come to the music.

It would be silly to pretend that many people are going to immediately identify with radical music; but just as rigged IQ results have shown that teachers are strongly influenced by how intelligent they've been told a child is, so an audience is likely to react to any thoughtless

jargon a critic might impose, good or bad.

Label the music 'difficult' and it'll no doubt be easy enough to find difficulties in it.

All of which is a lengthy way of demonstrating why experimentalists tend to work away from rock; and if we're talking about the guitar, the single most important figure in this context is Derek Bailey, an English schoolteacher who has played with various contemporary jazz groups, who has liberated the instrument to a degree unknown before.

Bailey is a genius; the kind of player who constantly challenges the boundaries of possibility and invention, and as such is an immense encouragement to other aspiring musicians, myself included.

The most interesting aspect of his playing for me lies not so much in the specific techniques employed — the acoustic/electric ambiguity, the extreme range of note lengths and dynamics from the lightest touch to seemingly endless sustain, the phenomenal grasp of harmonics, bending notes behind the bridge etc. — but in the speed with which he employs them and the way they are knitted together into intricate, beautiful and logical sequences.

The results, particularly when playing with someone of equal stature like Evan Parker, can be spellbinding.

Naturally, the fact of his unique abilities tends to overshadow other guitarists working in similar areas. I can only encourage people to discover for themselves the work of say David Toop or Ian Brighton; to listen to the AMM record of 1967 which features much weirdness from Keith Rowe; or to check out the excellent album of guitar solos by Hans Reichel — "Wichlinghauser Blues."

My reservations about this whole area of music are that it represents in some ways an opposite extreme to the critical prejudices mentioned earlier. Playing radical music is one thing, but it's very easy to fall into a kind of rarefied atmosphere of non-acceptance, playing to one's own converted, and letting everyone else get on with playing to theirs.

There is the minimum chance of confrontation, of challenging peoples' perceptions. This situation can only be unhealthy, although it obviously constitutes a problem for musicians wishing to be free of commercial pressures.

The scene could be substantially changed by you the listener. If that music is to become stronger which has something more positive to offer than escapism or background music, then the first move is to destroy the wall of 'taste', the prejudices about possibility and quality that the industry sets up.

If people were a bit more inclined to take risks, to be adventurous and not to put up with any crap that's offered to them, then the situation could become altogether healthier for everybody.

## Further aids to learning

A NUMBER of fascinating items — books, pamphlets and so forth — have been dropping onto my desk (I must do something about that hole in the roof) and they turn out to be various aids of learning the guitar.

So let's take a look at some of the tutors that are available.

The vast majority have been around for years, and if you're academically-minded and would like to play "Shine On Harvest Moon" in a dance band or rival John Williams then they're great.

The modern ones fall into two categories. The first category have you playing "Skip To The Loo" within the first week, and if you stick at it you'll be able to play the entire Burl Ives repertoire.

The second and smaller category are bloody good tutors. Much better than mine — and, that's saying something... Let's have a look at them.

One book that's been constantly to hand while I've been preparing my lessons is *Mel Bay's Rock-Blues Guitar Groove*, by Tony Menke.

This is so excellent that if he'd just gone that little bit further he could have taught me something...

Tony actually treats the guitar as an instrument for playing rock/blues and nothing else. And does it very thoroughly.

Next, two books on blues guitar. *Masters Of Instrumental Blues Guitar* by Donald Garwood (published by Oak, price £1.25) investigates a variety of blues styles in considerable depth, with both tablature and musical explanation.

It is easy to follow and reveals that some of the most complex-sounding licks are quite simple once they're explained.

*Blues Guitar* by B.B. King is the real stuff from the horse's mouth. B.B. is probably the top electric blues man, and this book just about reveals everything about his technique; runs,

riffs, different scales, the lot.

It has bags of illustrations and diagrams, and in addition it has a flexi-disk on which you can hear what the diagrams are supposed to sound like — a great advantage.

Obviously the next best thing to having your own personal tutor is to have a book and a recording which converts the diagrams and writing into sound. There are now a number of these tutors available and they come in several different forms.

By far the best is Stefan Grossman's guitar tutor which is a book and record combined and is another excellent way to learn blues. I can also recommend his most recent album, "Fingerpicking Guitar Techniques" which also includes a booklet.

For more basic learning there are two courses using cassette — which has the advantage that you can easily stop the tape and run back over bits. *Starting To Play Guitar* with Roger Evans is published by

EMI (£3.50). It's rather elementary and slow-moving but adopts the right approach — and has the added advantage of giving you a band to play along with.

But it's a shame that with the EMI catalogue at his disposal Roger has chosen songs like "On Top Of Old Smokey" and "Michael Row The Boat Ashore" instead of something with a bit more life in it.

Better perhaps, although even more laboured and aimed largely at schools, is the Selmer series of cassette learning courses. The complete course is in fact three cassettes and books and would spread over some time. It does give you some Carpenters songs and a bit more rock and roll though.

If you are into really progressive chord shapes and sequences I can recommend Arnie Berle's *Modern Chords And Progressions For The Guitar*, published by Amsco Music through Boosey & Hawkes over here. There's very little music to worry about but the

chords do get very complex, though not difficult to play. It teaches you some great progressions, but having done so neglects to tell you what to do with them.

Not really a tutor is the *Chordfinder* (£2), by Lowndes, Shaw Productions — an ingenious plastic disc which enables you to literally dial the chord you want in a particular key and it will then show up in a window.

It also works well for transposing and has general hints on progressions on the reverse.

More elaborate, and an invaluable friend of mine, is *7,488 Guitar Chords* by Jay Arnold (Chappell, £1.50). This has two uses, first as a reference work in case you should ever be stuck for a fingering and second as a book from which to extract titbits of titillating musical knowledge.

At the back is a fairly straight forward explanation of chord formation.

If music fascinates you as a subject and you'd like to know

more about harmony, progressions, how to read it, other instruments — in fact virtually everything — then I thoroughly recommend *Introducing Music* by Otto Karolyi, a quite slim Pelican paperback. It has nothing about rock... doesn't even mention the guitar... but it is factually very helpful.

Finally, if you've found the whole thing too much of a strain, there's the *Corista* (£4), invented by Amos Clarke a computer consultant. It's an unbelievable little plastic thing that clamps over the top four frets of the guitar like a capo.

Using it you can play the three chord trick, and one or two additional chords, simply by pressing a few buttons and bars (see last week's *Guitar Book*).

In fact, if he could develop one that slid up and down the guitar neck I think this idea could revolutionise guitar fingering in the same way that Theobald Boehm revolutionised that of the flute.

REX ANDERSON

# FRIPP

From previous page

And his guitar-playing improved all the time, although he doesn't admit it. "You know, I think Greg picked up quite a lot of things from that period," says Fripp, twinkling a little. (And in fact if you listen to Lake's acoustic solo on "Take A Pebble" (first ELP album) there's plenty of what Fripp has been demonstrating while we've been talking. No matter. Greg has chosen his road. And Fripp has chosen his.

"We've spent all your tape talking about the ego stuff, but there's really a lot of material which we haven't even touched on yet."

Well, yes, Robert, but the tape's running out.

"I'll lend you one. We've got to talk about Guitar Mechanics."

Ah yes. Guitar Mechanics. Well, Fripp began to pursue this theory when he was about 14, and it's now developed thus far into a kind of "Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance" thing — the kind of postulation which states that if you apply yourself to the study of Guitar The Fripp Way you will develop yourself spiritually as a sort of by-product. In fact, this latter is the chief aim — the development of your guitar ability being, in Fripp's eyes of Secondary Importance.

And listen kids, Fripp's planning to give lessons!

But you gotta be tough to stay the course.

"On purely an automatic level, the guitar-player has no control of his guitar. Guitar Mechanics is designed so that a person following the course can place as many guitar functions as possible on Automatic and develop his control.

"An automatic approach is necessary to enable the Higher Parts to get involved in other things. The aim is to discover a new level of automatic playing, which is why I call it Guitar Mechanics.

"It has, as such, nothing to do with music. But a person who's gone through the full course of Guitar Mechanics — and I haven't yet — will be better able to play within any field of music... adequately". Fripp understatement, this — but we mustn't interrupt because he's getting to the point.

"Mike Oldfield, for example, on 'Star's End' with David Bedford. I think that's quite often effective but he has no control of vibrato. It's so obvious that Mike Oldfield doesn't... he's not in charge of the instrument — where the other players are, to a far greater degree. This makes his inabilities far more

obvious. Uncontrolled guitar wobble which comes at a critical place I find quite upsetting. Most out of place and wholly lacking in taste". (Fripp had earlier laced into Messrs. Hendrix, Page and Beck for not dissimilar reasons. "But that's controversial", I'd said. "I don't care", Fripp had said.

"But all this is not a question of taste, it's a question of control. If the automatic functions are taken care of, you're able to think then about what you might like to play or how to express yourself. If, for example, you're not familiar with the process of playing in 11/8 time, then you're not going to be able to express yourself in that tempo."

Makes sense.

"Do you, for example, on the first of each bar, reverse your picking so that you recommence on a down (stroke), or do you continue with alternate down/up throughout, changing accents so that the main accent is taken with an up-stroke?"

Well, er...

"Guitar Mechanics means developing your mind and putting it in harmonious balance with all your other parts. It's primarily an approach to living. I'll be starting giving personal lessons to anyone interested in the New Year. People can contact me through EG Management — 01-730 2162. It is very demanding: it involves hard work.

Fripp would be happy to take total beginners, who just want to learn guitar, but he'd prefer "Three years practical experience and a dedication to carrying it through." (Pause).

"I don't want someone to come along and gawp at the Star — this isn't involved. My fees will be expensive but within the reach of anyone prepared to put themselves out. I think probably £5.50 an hour — and if you think, to take a language lesson in Turkish costs five pounds an hour."

Probably easier, too.

"And another thing. What I'm interested in doing is creating group situations so that people will learn to work together. In other words, although what I'm doing will help a person to develop as a soloist, I'm not aiming at developing soloists. I'm trying to create an ability to work with others in stressful situations. Which was my main interest in Crimson."

Ah, but Robert, how successful were you in that particular enterprise?

"I learned a lot about the how to do it. Obviously I never achieved it or we'd still be together."

WITH THE possible exception of "I Heard Her Call My Name", last week's solos are fairly unlike anything else by the people who played them. Syd Barrett and Captain Beefheart, on the other hand, maintained their idiosyncratic and bizarre approach over a long period of time, and succeeded in saying more than most with the rock medium.

Not that Beefheart's a guitarist, but the consistency and "un-learning" apparent in three of the players he's worked with — Zoot Horn Rollo, Antennae Jimmy Semens, and Winged Eel Fingering — must largely stem from his manic energy and vision; ditto the work of the original Pink Floyd with regard to Barrett.

Plenty of people write about Barrett's brilliant songwriting, tediously discuss his mental state, or argue about whether his departure from the Floyd made or broke them musically; but few acknowledge the fact of his being a great and inspired guitar player.

Much of his reputation in this respect must obviously rest on early live appearances. I was never fortunate enough to see him in action at that time, but I'm told he was utterly amazing — a revolutionary source of electronic racket.

However, there's quite enough evidence on half a dozen recorded tracks to convince me of his importance. It matters little to what extent Syd was in control of what he was doing, and there are conflicting reports, but the results have an extraordinary originality, urgency and expressiveness.

Surprisingly, he has something in common with many of those I've mentioned already, notably Jeff Beck and Pete Townshend. For example, there's the unity of spirit between the songwriting and the guitar accompaniment, the clear conception of sound and the drawing on the instrumental tradition in, say, the introduction to "Lucifer Sam". Or the occasional surfacing of blues influences, the best instance of which is in the way "Smokesack Lightning" becomes "Candy And The Currant Bun".

Aside from these basics, one should take into account the innovative use of the slide, emulated only by a studious Dave Gilmour; brilliant and painful wah-wah playing; violent treble feedback and a disjointed, aggressive rhythm style.

His rhythm playing is in fact quite spectacular. One of the most telling moments on "Piper At The Gates Of Dawn" occurs on Roger Waters' "Take Up Thy Stethoscope And Walk", a fairly straight song built around a single descending chord phrase. The number consists largely of a long 4/4 jam in the middle during which a weird struggle takes place between on the right, charmingly inept blues clichés on the bagpipe stop of the Farfisa organ, and on the left a non-stop barrage of clipped rhythmic noises from a

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



RARE SHOT of Syd Barrett on stage during Flower Power era (i.e. sorry about the poor picture quality...)

Last week they were bizarre, but this week the focus is on musicians who STAYED bizarre: Analysis by FRED FRITH of HENRY COW



SYD BARRETT: "Apples And Oranges," ZOOT HORN ROLLO and ANTENNAE JIMMY SEMENS: "Dali's Car"

Mr. Barrett, clearly on a totally different plane of existence from his fellow musicians. This is one of the strangest musical contrasts I've ever come across and one which lifts the song from ordinary to absolutely riveting.

The most complete example of his style, though, is on the single "Apples And Oranges". This is my favourite wah-wah playing of all time — incredibly incisive and articulate. He makes the pedal hang always on the edge of feedback, which eventually breaks through as the final sound of the song.

Overall, the guitar acts as a fixed entity in an excellent construction, giving coherence to

all the various departures. Considered in detail, it's great the way the lines which underpin the first part of each verse are made up of tiny units, each contributing to something which becomes greater in concept than any of them.

The playing not only reveals an acute perception of sound, but explores a little exploited region and menacingly undermines the apparently harmless and half-sense lyrics.

Like Barrett, Captain Beefheart often appears to attract more attention by his "weirdness" than any other way. His reputation as an iconoclast of genius also rests on comparatively few tracks and the "live

legend". (It's still hard to believe that "Mirror Man" was made in 1965.)

Chiefly, in a host of good but lesser albums and the crassness of his current output, there remain two great records — "Trout Mask Replica" and "Lick My Decals Off Baby".

What is chiefly striking here is the degree of re-training the musicians went through to achieve the cohesion that the Captain could hear. One can understand his bitterness and disillusionment, whatever the truth of the circumstances, when the Magic Band left him after so long — so much effort must have appeared wasted.

And the musicians themselves were pretty stunning. Just as, now, it seems only too clear how important the original Mothers were to Frank Zappa, so we can see the extraordinary qualities of the "real" Magic Band. It is particularly interesting to think of Art Tripp/Ed Marimba making the transition from rigorous classical training to the intense accuracy involved in Zappa's work, and then to the very different undisciplines of Beefheart's material.

With the guitar, what's important is not any special technical point about the instrument, but the music itself, its form and its demands.

The sound on the recordings in question is a distinctive, thin, slightly distorted tone that seldom varies to any great extent. The style is a unique mixture of strange harmonies and lurching rhythms interspersed with snatches of melody. What Beefheart has always been good at is deploying two guitars, creating a constant contrapuntal tension between them. On "Trout-mask" this is demonstrated at its most developed.

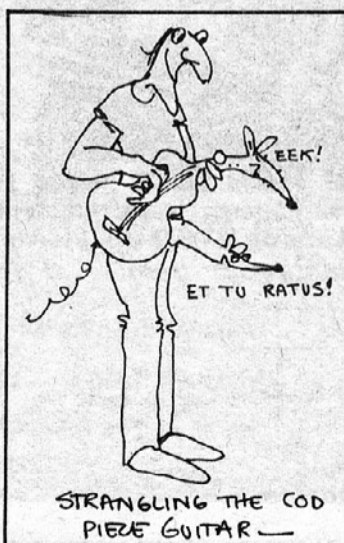
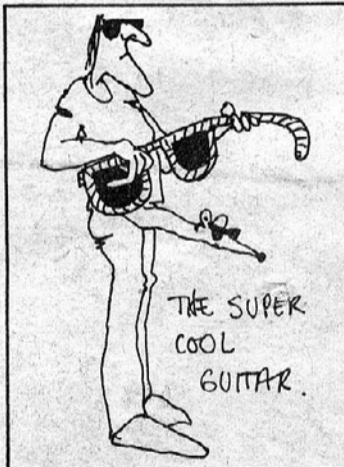
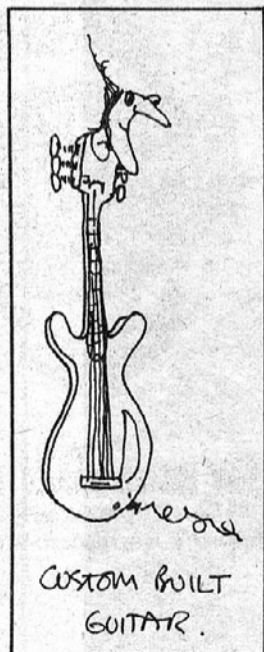
"Dali's Car" is a very clear instance. This is a brief, formal, organised piece, completely outside the terms of what two guitars in rock usually means. It's discordant, angular, weirdly constructed and totally wonderful. In fact, the track is fairly comprehensible in conventional musical terms. Often this is much less true — on "Frownland", for example, or the unison passages on numbers like "Doctor Dark" which seem to be plucked out of thin air.

It is always alarming to hear people playing completely together and yet not in any recognisable rhythmic pattern. This is not free music; it is completely controlled all the time, which is one of the reasons it's so remarkable — forces that usually emerge in improvisation are harnessed and made constant, repeatable.

This has the strong and important effect of blurring the edges of reality, breaking down the distinction between normal and abnormal, possible and impossible.

Both Beefheart and Syd Barrett have in the past exerted this powerful questioning force by redefining the medium in which they operated. It's only a pity that, for the time being we have to refer to both of their achievements in the past tense.

# BENYON



## Karoli

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the names of many other guitarists. However, he decides that as these are frequently obscure Scandinavian session players, "Perhaps it would be better if you just write that I listened to a lot of other guitarists."

He is prepared, though, to speak most highly of Pete Townshend:

"What he plays is definitely electric guitar. He is really into the instrument... it's definitely strings he plays. You can hear it's strings."

"Guitar has probably a greater tone range than any other instrument — especially the electric guitar. The slightest variation in the way you pluck it gets a new sound."

"And Pete Townshend... it's almost like a talking guitar."

However, you were talking about playing the banjo, Michael.

"A banjo is wonderful for helping to learn guitar," he continues, "because you school your right hand. The right hand is very important on a banjo... very important for plectrum playing because the sound is so short it only goes 'Bang!'... the left hand is schooled better on a guitar, I think."

"And a very important thing, I think, is to learn to pick with both hands — not just to use the left hand to press down but also to use it to play melodies without using the right hand. You should be able to make the strings speak without 'knocking them alive'."

"If anything is important, I think it's that."

"I think that though I started with notes — working out where a particular note was, and how I should play a particular chord — I would advise anyone just to hold the guitar in his hand like a ruler — it looks like a ruler. That way you can see where the notes are. You don't have to know which they are."

"Then you just start going up and down it and trying it around. That's how I play today."

I see. Well, let's have a few rather more basic tidbits of information for a minute of two, shall we? You've told me how you were playing on a hand-made Bavarian acoustic when you first started as a guitarist. How did Michael Karoli as Guitarist then develop?

"I stopped plectrum playing almost completely when I was about 15 or so. I thought it was better to play with the fingers and also I didn't have an electric guitar for quite a long time."

"Of course, now I play parts on my Stratocaster with the fingers — but sometimes you can't strike hard enough without a string cutting your hands."

"I think that one reason why I stopped plectrum playing was because I listened mainly to piano players at that time. When I was 15 and 16 and 17, I heard a lot of jazz and I played mainly on an acoustic guitar."

Were you listening to any particular guitar players though?

"All guitar players of the time. A little later I got totally into Wes Montgomery."

Backtracking on himself, Karoli speaks once again of Pete Townshend and then fleetingly mentions Clapton: "I mean, I learnt one thing from Clapton... that's the fact that it's possible to play very long notes on an electric guitar."

Hendrix?

He grins contentedly and nods his head: "Hendrix of course."

Strangely perhaps, the "Band Of Gypsies" album, which Hendrix recorded with Billy Cox and Buddy Miles — and which is generally regarded as one of his lesser recordings — is the one Karoli finds most influential: "The most relaxed rock record I've ever heard. That's the most important thing about it, definitely."

"If you play any instrument unrelaxed it's going to show very badly."

"Sometimes I just concentrate on my hands, actually. If I feel a little strange at the beginning of a concert I concentrate on the hands and try to forget the head and everything else."

And try to make my hands speak."

So you're almost making the instrument sentient, then.

"Yeah, yeah. And I think for electric guitar this fact is the most important."

"A guitar is actually a very masochistic instrument."

In what way?

"You play a piano or a saxophone... a saxophone, for example, is just an elongation of the throat. But a guitar is really like playing with an instrument. It's really different because the guitar itself says a lot. The guitar has much more will — very much like an animal."

"I try to lose myself completely when I play concerts by just turning myself into a control station inside a physical and chemical net."

"Like there is the electric net and there is the guitar which is the kind of body of the whole thing. The guitar is just the body and it will react to any electric happening in the net — like if somebody puts a vacuum cleaner on next door... anything."

"And I'm the brain... the control station. And my ears, of course, take in other things — like the sounds of the audience and the other music being played."

Leaving aside the existentialist guide to guitar playing for a moment can I ask if it would be possible for you to actually dissect the particular chord sequences on any of your albums?

"It's probably quite useless because I have never been asked to write the particular chords of any song."

You can play violin from sheet music, though, can't you?

"Yes, but I have never played guitar from notes."

But who writes your sheet music, then?

"Oh we do. But it depends — because a lot of pieces are written in other ways apart from notes. Usually the chords are very easy once you have found them out..."

"If my little finger isn't long enough to play a certain note in a chord I just think of playing the chord somewhere else on the fingerboard where it's easier — or not playing it at all, because it's probably not useful to play it."

So do you regard what you're playing as difficult then?

Karoli shrugs: "No. Technically not. But there may be fast things in it... and it's possible that if someone tried to follow something I've done he might find out that his hand is too small for it."

Basically, however, he believes that a guitar is best played within the bounds of what can be played on it fairly easily.

"I mean, the instrument was not built to make acrobatic movements on. And if the instrument isn't right for playing a certain thing, then I think it should be played on another instrument. I don't think guitar playing should be made a science. It should be a game or a love affair."

Another touch of the avant garde outlook... "Maybe it's a bit like flying an aeroplane. Playing an organ is more like driving a car. Playing a guitar you have the wind as well... You can use the wind or you might get smashed by it — that's the feedback."

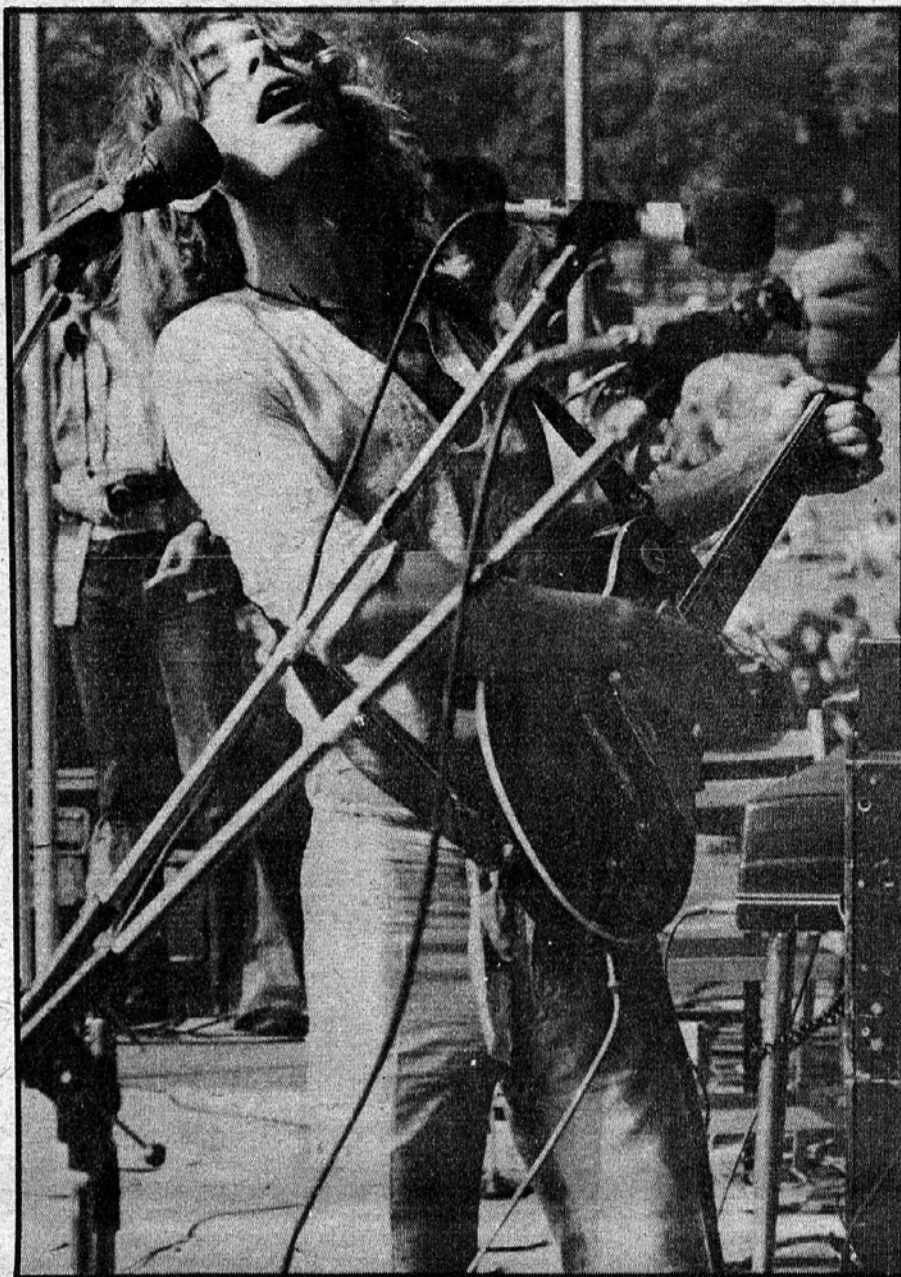
But for someone who hasn't the least idea how to play a guitar — how would you tell him or her how to become a guitarist?

"I like to play with everything I have... like with the knuckles," Karoli says, pointing at the cuts that cover his right hand, "because everything gives it a different sound and I think that's the way it should be treated."

"If you want to make music and you can't play, you should try to play the running of a mouse or the chase of a mouse and a cat or 20 bulls and cows going up a hill. And that's a thing mainly of phrasing and music and that will in the end be what makes an artist's style."

"There's another thing which every beginner should do... Play one note and meditate about it, and hear every single sound, and play one rhythm. Play one note every five seconds for three hours... that's the way to do it. You learn playing guitar that way."

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



KEVIN AYERS: his "Song From The Bottom Of A Well" solo is divorced from recognisable technique.

*Great music doesn't always rely on the use of great technique. This week FRED FRITH of HENRY COW picks out four examples of fine guitar work that defy all the rules...*



IN RECENT weeks, prominence has been given to the fact that a musician with a broad imagination and hardly any technical skill is often in a much better position to achieve purposive and strong expression than a virtuoso; the argument being that such a person has no knowledge of accepted technique to interfere with what he or she wants to say, while someone who knows his instrument backwards is burdened with so much facility, so many options and prejudices, that he can neither clearly perceive a direction, nor prevent himself from using his virtuosity.

There can be a certain amount of anti-snobbery in this assertion — I've heard it used to support the 'rock and roll is where it's at' school; nonetheless, if we look at what little rock music there is these days that lies outside the realms of dancing or entertainment it's true, as I've said before, that those who have a highly-developed language often appear to have little to say.

Conversely, those who have a clear idea of what they're trying to say can use any means to

hand to say it, without needing to evolve a specific technical language at all. Musical sophistication is a very dangerous asset; it all too easily communicates only itself.

From the point of view of learning an instrument, there are two extremes. One is to come to it ignoring its conventional limitations and create a fresh and vital approach separate from technical considerations, using a specific context. The other is more conscious and wide-ranging — a deliberate attempt to re-define technique and to make a new and controllable means of expression. A self-styled non-musician like Eno fits into the first category, while an experimenter like Derek Bailey falls into the other; and there are of course many who in some way are relevant to both.

In the last three weeks of this vibrant series I intend to cover various aspects of guitar playing that have to do with these definitions.

Although more adventurous exciting and in some cases technically demanding than styles that are imitated ad nauseam, such playing is seldom influential in any wide sense. The reasons are pretty clear. When learning the guitar, as was pointed out early on in the Guitar Book, it's important to have someone to look up to, to copy; and one of the basic satisfactions of learning is in achiev-

ing a higher level of skill, making your fingers go where you want them to.

So the players who are copied tend to be those with identifiable ability in fairly specific directions — speed of execution, finger-picking, dynamic rhythm-playing etc. etc.

When it comes to experimentation and venture, it's all very well for some developed musical personality to play the guitar with a brick and toothbrush, but it's obviously difficult for beginners seeking a much more basic and recognisable achievement.

So far in the series, I've looked only at specific individuals — people who are known as guitarists, whatever the other areas of their talent. But it often happens that an important contribution will be made by someone who is not a recognised player at all. It may be completely outside the field in which that person normally operates, a moment when a certain situation produces a certain approach. Or else someone might have a unique, peculiar style which renders him inimitable to all but the dedicated.

Here are four solos which in some way or other are related to the above considerations.

(1) "Eight Miles High": The Byrds.

The 12-string has had very little impact in rock other than as a textural device. Lots of

people have used it for a full chord sound but not many as a solo instrument. Maybe they should listen to Ralph Towner.

Anyway, on this song, recorded in 1966, Jim McGuinn (he's Roger now) whips out a bizarre classic, a mixture of simple melodies and fast runs which pay scant attention to conventional phrasing. The effect of the whole derives not just from the 12-string itself, but from its interaction with the slicing rhythm guitar, making the solo seem far more chaotic and crazy than it is if analysed separately.

The sound is sharp and piercing, stressing the not-quite-togetherness of the rhythm.

For me, this number sums up all that was good about the West Coast school at its best. Although they have nothing else in common, I hear similar qualities of space coupled with an unusual kind of precision in the early work of John Cipollina, Barry Melton, Randy California, and Jerry Garcia.

(2) "I Heard Her Call My Name": The Velvet Underground.

I'm not a great fan of this particular brand of musical nihilism, but sometimes it is undeniably riveting. In this solo Lou Reed employs a minimum number of blues clichés, transformed into a form of total sound oppression using high frequency feed-back and out of tune bent notes, either sustained or abruptly cut short with manic bursts of fast picking.

It's an amazing sound, painful in every sense. The musical voice of decadent fatalism perhaps, but with more power than either Reed's later efforts, or the Velvet's latter day disciples.

(3) "To Isengard": Jack Bruce.

Chris Spedding could hardly be described as an iconoclast. His assessment of McLaughlin's playing as neurotic, and his assertion about rock and roll being the true path indicate fairly clearly his musical bent. It's therefore saying quite a lot for the creative energy of Jack Bruce that Spedding's solo on "To Isengard" is so weird, even if, like so much other rock music, it already appears a little dated.

"Songs For A Tailor" is an inspired piece of work both in the songs themselves and the performances of them. This solo, a fuzz/wah sound picture, is completely apt. It's mostly about noise, not using harmony or melody in any normal sense at all. Like the Lou Reed job, it suggests directions which have seldom been pursued in terms of the guitar's technique alone, never mind the music.

(4) "Song From The Bottom Of A Well": Kevin Ayers.

This solo was at one time wrongly attributed to Mike Oldfield, although his subsequent work should make it clear that an altogether different mind was at work here.

In point of fact, I'm assured, it is the work of none other than Kevin himself.

Another excursion into the realms of noise, it is divorced from recognisable technique in nearly every respect. The instrument appears to be struck at random, producing a mixture of attack and feed-back; there is also what sounds like detuning in the manner of "The Ox" and some very Barrett-like high notes.

It's another sound picture, portentous and ominous in keeping with the lyrics, and again, not the kind of thing that's likely to have much influence. Of all the examples, this is the most pertinent to the non-musician category; Ayers is not by any stretch of the imagination a great guitarist, but a song writer of wit and imagination, with a clear idea of what's required in a given setting. To combine this talent with the suggestion of new possibilities revealed in this song, is rare even in his work.

# Jeff Beck

■ From previous page

to him. He had a Dalcroze which he's sprayed pink or something. He also had a black Les Paul Custom, and I didn't think it sounded very good, which is why I gave him the Fender."

Beck used a Les Paul all the way through the group he had with Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood, but when he formed the "Rough And Ready" band, he was back on Fender — this time a Stratocaster.

"I've always liked the tremolo arm on the Strat, because when the guitar is destringed, you can depress a note nearly as much as an octave, especially the G string. If you know what you're doing you can play a phrase up high, then push it down and it'll still be in tune."

By "De-string," Mr. Beck means using a 1st string for a 2nd, a 2nd for a 3rd and so on, substituting a banjo string for a first. What you lose in raunch, you gain in flexibility. To a certain extent, this method has been rendered obsolete by the advent of Ernie Ball's super-light strings.

"God bless Ernie Ball. They're all right, those strings, but they used to break a helluva lot. Banjo strings never break. This sloppy-string bit has got to go, because the sound of the guitar deteriorates appreciably. The body drops right out of the note. B.B. King uses stock strings," (on a Gibson 335) "and the sound he gets is — for the volume and power, a Fender Strat just wouldn't look at it. You get the level, but you don't get the roundness and the push. That's why I feel that I've missed out a bit on the semi-acoustic bit, because they're so much more gutty."

So why not use one? "They're too cumbersome. I just can't get on with them on stage. They're just not comfortable. I like a guitar to sink right into my waist so I don't even notice it. If I've jammed anywhere and used a borrowed guitar, it's always been like wrestling with a tea-chest or something. Or a suitcase. They used to feed back terribly if you got too close to the amp, and it wouldn't be controllable — whereas with a solid guitar it is."

It was at this point that I decided to prise some of Beck's secrets out of him, and get him to pass on his pet bluffs.

"I don't want to show anybody how to bluff. Let 'em learn the proper way. I don't want a trail of people after me learning the wrong way. You want me to give away my secrets? There aren't any. Just don't take any notice of anybody who can play properly and you got it."

SPECIAL EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: He's only kidding folks... at least we think he's only kidding.

"The best way to play is the easiest way. That way, you're not cheating anybody, because you can overcome what may be cheating by just playing. If it's coming out of you, what the hell."

"I don't like to use speed just because I can play fast. I mean, McLaughlin plays faster than I'll ever play, and I can tell by listening to him that he can play a scale with about four flats in it and they say 'drop out one of those flats and put a sharp in' and he could just do it, straight off without even practising it. I couldn't do that. I can play my own stuff fast enough, but..."

"I'm influenced by lazy guitarists like Steve Cropper, and by fast guitarists like Les Paul, so I'm right in the middle. I don't want to become either too speedy or too laid-back. I just want to stay where I am."

ONE OF the most obvious characteristics of the guitar is the fact that it can produce chords. Since solos are, as often as not, explorations of single melodic lines, there's a danger that, sticking to the format of this series, one could overlook all kinds of the instrument's developments and functions.

There is after all a category of playing generally referred to as 'rhythm guitar'; and this embraces musicians as diverse in approach and skill as Bruce Welch, John Lennon, Bob Weir and John McLaughlin (whose rhythm playing I've always found more challenging than his lead work); not to mention the countless black guitarists who give backbone to the deceptively difficult rhythms of reggae.

Rhythm guitar, expressed simply, is a way of making stresses and accents around the beat while filling in the harmonic background to a song or improvisation. Since the electric guitar is capable of a great range of attack and incisiveness, and the idea of the rhythm in both jazz and rock has always been more basic to the music than that of harmony, rhythm playing has on the whole reached the more sophisticated level of the two.

The ways in which a beat is broken up and reassembled, plus the enormous variety of possible sounds, continue to be expanded in all directions, or at least to throw up new angles; while chord playing on the electric instrument remains fairly static. Rock guitar chords are mainly based on variations of F and B shapes, or one finger blocking; jazz also uses 'closed' shapes, but incorporates all the composites — 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, flattened chords and so on.

It's interesting to compare the evolution of chords in the plectrum style, which is one of accompaniment, with the different kinds of acoustic finger-style playing where the instrument is self-sufficient, capable not only of providing its own backing but of advanced counterpoint.

In flamenco, classical and folk, the use of chords is far more organic. Finger-styles encourage a richer harmonic approach, with greater use of open strings and open shapes.

The latter, along with experiments with tunings, is crucial to the evolution of folk guitar from Blind Blake and Mississippi John Hurt through to the modern British school pioneered by Bert Jansch, or the instrumentals of John Fahey and Robbie Basho. In straight music, Villa-Lobos demonstrates a vast number of chordal possibilities, often using the simplest of means, in his 12 Studies (composed in 1929).

These ideas emerge through treating the guitar as an unaccompanied solo instrument. Electric guitar is seldom placed in this role; and many of the techniques involved are incompatible with amplification, or irrelevant to most people's conception of rock music. I'm nonetheless surprised at how little influence such areas have had.

One player who does have a far wider ranging approach to chords and accompaniment than most, though, as much through his great imagination as through any particular influence, is Pete Townshend.

A study of Townshend, Jansch and Villa-Lobos would give a very sound knowledge of the chordal and rhythmic potential of the guitar. They have a curious affinity too — the same variety of approach, the same attack, the same use of the simplest methods to achieve the most dramatic effects, the same creative originality when compared to others working in the

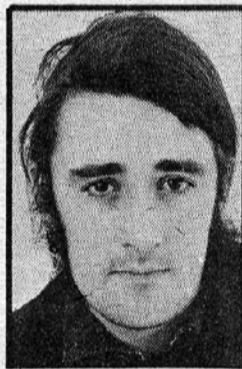
# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



PETE TOWNSHEND, limbering up for a power chord...

**Analysis of a chord king, who thinks guitarese, and whose writing is totally integrated with his playing.**

**By FRED FRITH of HENRY COW.**



## PETE TOWNSHEND: 'I Can See For Miles'

same field.

Listen to the way Villa-Lobos, admittedly making a conscious attempt to explore new avenues and improve players' technical ability, bases whole pieces on one or two shapes; or notice the misleadingly simple sounding playing on "It Don't Bother Me" or "Who Sell Out".

Townshend's strength lies in the fact that his playing is a totally integrated part of his writing. The majority of lead guitarists in rock come at the music from the outside, make contributions to something already written, conceived or at least outlined. In Townshend the two forces are inseparable in a way that goes beyond his own playing to that of The Who, and makes them for me the most consistent and positive of groups.

Hendrix, though he wrote some great songs, will be remembered more for his revolutionary playing; Zappa often plays brilliantly, but is at his

best when composing or constructing. Townshend gives you the feeling that it's all the same process, that a lot of the writing is done through finding a particular progression indigenous to the guitar and building from it.

Along with his consciousness of rock's fundamental power, the result is a unique combination of sheer energy and intelligent control.

Technically he's often cited as a great rhythm guitarist, but I think he's much more than that, because he has a writer's sense of structure and a great feeling for sound. A wide range of different techniques is employed, and juxtaposed to create tension and atmosphere.

Full, ringing chords give way to sharply accented damped ones; continuous rhythm, delicate as in "Sunrise", or driving as in "Much Too Much", is built up by alternating chords and single notes. There are all kinds of broken chords, snatches of lead lines or feedbacks

or electrifying bursts of high speed strumming. The guitar is used in an orchestral way, not just as a concentrated background, but with solos and breaks in between, always concise and to the point — clicks and feedback in "Out In The Street"; straight cross-rhythms in "Good's Gone" and "Mary Ann"; simple, effective lines in "Relax" or "The Hawker"; and amazing raunch in "Run, Run, Run".

As one of those who have developed chordal as well as rhythm playing, Townshend has a refreshing and personal sense of harmony which often derives entirely from 'guitar-thinking', i.e. the kind of chords that are just not possible on any other instrument.

Coupled with his particular obsession, this has produced some of his finest songs. The obsession in question is that of building whole progressions and backings around a single or a few, held or repeated notes.

This is not the 'repetition' that I mentioned last week; it is a means of exploiting the tension that derives from colouring one tone with a series of different harmonies.

It's quite a common device — The Beatles, for example, used it in "You Won't See Me" — but Townshend never seems to tire of it, of continually coming up with a new slant. The note may be on the guitar, the bass or in the vocal harmony; sequences may go down from it step by step, revolve around it, using it as a central axis, or remain virtually static; the note may be implied without even being present; still, the effect is a major part of The Who's music.

Most familiar will be the bass pulse of the Undertone or "Sal-

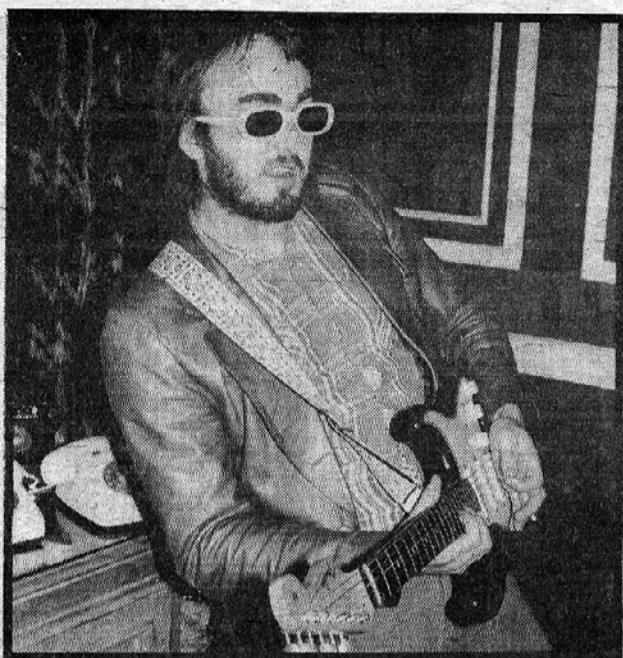
ly Simpson" in "Tommy" or the guitar intro and hidden harmonies of "Pinball Wizard". More recently there's "I've Had Enough" on "Quadrophonia", which uses single-note bass lines to build tension and demonstrates one of the most effective points about the method, namely the enhanced drama that occurs when the note actually changes.

The best examples, and I still think it's The Who's most completely successful album to date, are on "Who Sell Out". There's the guitar part in the verse of "Odorono"; bass, guitar and voice at various moments in "Our Love Was"; the voice in the chorus of "Can't Reach You"; and the entire magnificent solo guitar accompaniment to "Sunrise", showing, if nothing else does, the advanced use of the 'guitar-thinking' that I spoke of.

This album also contains the most single-minded use of one note, in the song which for me most typifies Townshend's qualities as a writer and player — "I Can See For Miles".

The whole number is based on a repeated E in the guitar part (which changes to an A for the latter half). The vocal harmonies explore various paths around this, while the backing is as usual orchestral in scope, surging rhythms, the hypnotic bent note, and in the middle a tight, stuttering solo perfect for the song.

I've heard it said of a lot of guitarists that their aim is to say as much as possible with one note, rather than get into the whole fast licks syndrome. Townshend may take this more literally than most, but he is one of the very few people working in rock with the degree of musical awareness to create depth out of extreme simplicity.



OLLIE HALSALL: Stratocaster left-hander who listens to nobody.

■ From previous page

"That's why I never buy any records. I've always played music but I don't follow anybody."

"If a musical situation occurs, I take it and face it, but to be honest I'm more into people and situations than the intrinsic technicalities of music. That's why I was knocked out with Eno."

Ollie, fresh from a remarkably unproductive stint with Jon Hiseman in Tempest and various sessions with Neil Innes *et al*, had collided with Kevin Ayers at Air Studios during the recording of the "Dr. Dream" album and was instantly co-opted into laying down a guitar solo on "Didn't Feel Lonely Til I Thought Of You", which led to Ayers inviting him to tour and partake of the June 1 A.C.N.E. Rainbow gig — which is where he encountered Eno.

"You see," he explains, "I was very affected when I heard that Cecil Taylor had got this bass player in one of his bands who'd never touched the thing before in his life. I was knocked out to meet Eno, and to play with him, because he thinks along the same lines basically."

"The thing is, you see, I hate this thing of limiting yourself. I love being a sideman. I love playing alongside Kevin. It's a very naive type of music. It's terribly simple but it's totally creative and free."

He says that one of the reasons why his style is so inordinately different from anybody else's is that he's never had to endure the stultifying routine of doing extensive tours 11 months a year.

"It's always completely spontaneous because I'm basically bone idle," he says. "The only world tour I ever went on was as support with Patto for Joe Cocker. Even then I really had to fight not to end up playing the same notes every night."

"I mean, take Alvin Lee — I'm not putting him down, he's a good friend. He's a great front room guitarist. He can play a superb blues, but the strain of

years and years of touring has conditioned him only to one approach. With people like him and Clapton it's down to That Solo's Famous, etc. People expect you to play the same one over and over. It's like having to play your greatest hits."

"Not that there's a lot that can be done any more. It's down to the individual. I've got the same guitar as everyone else, the same strings..."

You always played like that? "Yes, of course. It's me. It's not something I've suddenly hit upon. I've always been a musical freak."

"It's perhaps down to the way I live. I don't live surrounded by music, and I've not got loads of guitars and I don't go out and buy the latest Stevie Wonder album..."

"I mean, so many guitarists are into Following People. They're searching for something, but I've already found it. I know that sounds arrogant. What I mean is that I know what I'm doing and I know that because of the way I approach it, to a certain extent probably about 60 per cent of what I play comes out sounding new."

Any Tricks ya got, Ollie?

"Well I always practise on heavy-gauge strings at home, with a very high action. It's like training with heavy gloves on in boxing — not that I've ever boxed. When you take them off and come down to a low action with nice light strings can really take off."

And any advice for young hopefuls?

"Don't go to 'Top Gear' or 'Orange' for your guitars, don't listen to any music, don't buy any records."

Yeah but surely... I mean most people contend that you're supposed to listen to as much music — of all types — as possible, and then distill the results.

"That's bullshit. Do that and you're perpetuating the whole trip — just another Suburban Clapton."

ANOTHER PLAYER apart from Jeff Beck who's at his best in written or 'set' situations is Frank Zappa. While fellow-Americans like The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Fish, Big Brother and Co., were getting into looser and looser forms and long, spaced jamming, Zappa began to exercise more complete control, sense of purpose, and sophisticated musical resource both in and out of the studio than anyone in rock had done before.

No matter how crude, brash or product-orientated his use of such attributes was, this early period still makes him one of the greater figures the medium has so far produced.

Very few people have matched his ability to bring together disparate elements, musical and non-musical, and, using every possibility that advanced recording techniques have to offer, forge them into a consistent and provocative whole.

Zappa's career falls in two parts — his time with the original Mothers of Invention and its various expansions and contractions, and everything that's happened since that group's demise.

Musically the two periods couldn't be more different. The main characteristic of Zappa's early work from "Freak Out" to "Burnt Weeny Sandwich," is the way the material is totally arranged and organised. Not only individual pieces are 'composed', but the whole structure of each album is directed, aimed, worked through.

This is usually on a much more advanced level than most people's banal efforts at 'concept' albums; and although "Sergeant Pepper" is generally hailed as the first rock record to successfully link numbers into a single creative entity, "Absolutely Free" had already achieved this, in its own particular terms, some time before.

"Hot Rats," on the other hand, follows a straighter path. The main development here is that for the first time the rhythm section is given its head — piano, bass and drums are not tied to fixed ideas, but play loosely along with the arrangements.

There are also top line guitar solos and funky rhythms; and the album is divided into fairly conventionally organised and distinct numbers. The playing, while no longer so individual, is more superficially impressive. I can remember musicians that I knew, me too come to that, raving about aspects of technique displayed by our counterparts on the record.

The fact remains, though, that a lot of its impressiveness lay in its being comparable to other rock music for the first time. What Zappa had been doing before had been so radical and so much in advance of everything else that it was often not given the acclaim it merited on purely musical grounds.

This was no doubt due firstly to the fact that he disguised his musical iconoclasm with the frequent and satirical use of the most plastic of pop styles, and secondly, to his being concerned at the time with a specific, incisive and socially-directed sense of bizarrité and outrage, which made it impossible to consider the music in isolation.

"Hot Rats" is safe, enjoyable on a simple level and comparatively normal — like most other rock music, in fact, except better played; the Cream effect, part two.

This and the fact of there being no awkward message to negotiate made it his most popular and influential album, since when he's been chiefly involved

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME

Continuing the theme of guitarists who are at their best playing arranged music, guitarist FRED FRITH of HENRY COW this week examines the work of FRANK ZAPPA



## FRANK ZAPPA: "Nine Types Of Industrial Pollution"

with ramifications of the few ideas it expresses.

It was on "Hot Rats," where he is featured extensively as a soloist for the first time, that Zappa gained more than slight recognition as a player 'as distinct from a composer.' However, the basis of his style has remained unaltered throughout most of his career, and has a lot in common with the way he writes.

For example, one of the characteristics of a Zappa tune is its mathematical divisions of the beat — notes tied over, triplets juxtaposed with semi-quavers, phrases repeated as a cross-rhythm etc.

"Uncle Meat Variations" is one of the most highly developed instances.

This kind of rhythmic clarity is also noticeable in his solos.

The picking is fast and accurate, the stresses and divisions clean; most of all his playing depends on symmetry. Zappa uses lines like balanced sentences, posing a question and then answering it, or building on an idea by playing it slightly differently several times in a

row.

It's a strangely formal style, full of patterns and elaborations, based on the blues but interspersed with scales, simple reiterated tunes and his favourite 9th and 11th chords. Although not warm or 'felt' in the blues sense, it can be hypnotic in its absolute precision.

The classic Zappa guitar sound is the exaggeratedly electric wah-wah that he's employed almost exclusively for the last few years. My favourite solo in this style is still the 'live' "Get A Little" on "Weasels Ripped My Flesh." But in earlier days, although playing a less exposed role, his playing had far more range. He used many different sounds and styles, and had a unique way of combining parody with more modern thinking.

It's worth listening to all the early albums after "Freak Out" for little touches in the backing on numbers like "Status Back Baby," "Duke Of Prunes," "You didn't Try To Call Me" and "Cruising For Burgers."

As far as solos are concerned, two instrumental tracks

stands out: "Invocation And Ritual Dance Of The Young Pumpkin" on "Absolutely Free" and "Nine Types Of Industrial Pollution" on "Uncle Meat." In fact they are not so much solos as sound pictures in which the separate elements create something new.

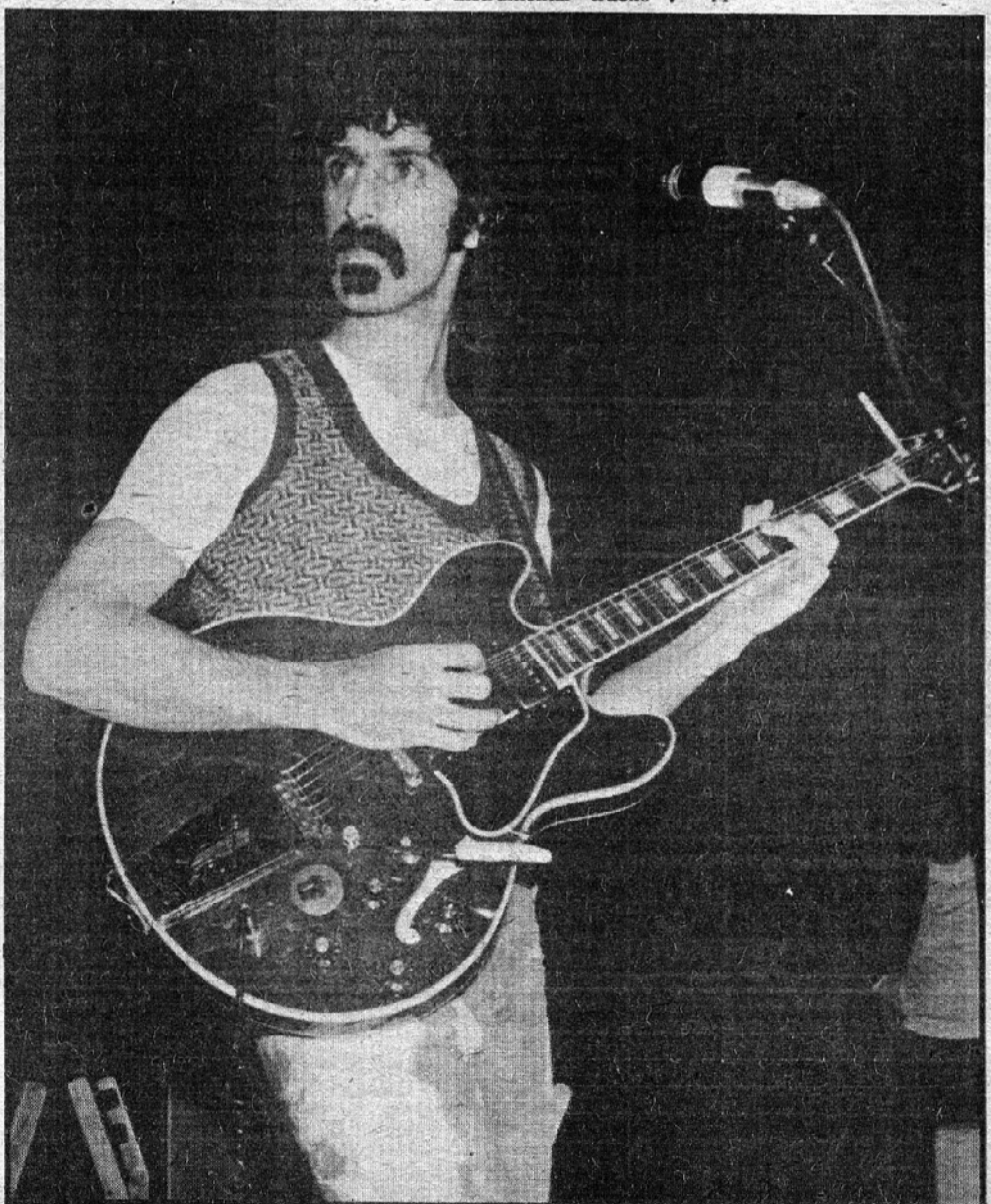
"Invocation" consists of a 4/4 bass drone in E with rigid rhythmic accompaniment, over which guitar and sax blow simultaneously.

The seminal use of repetition in modern music has had many outlets in rock. The mantric idea — 'repeat something often enough and it becomes interesting' — almost has the status of a cliché, and there's the Terry Riley 'infinite and tiny variations' movement, or the obsessive full volume barrage of the Velvet Underground/German school. Zappa shows himself here to be one of the first to use one note, one rhythm to underpin other musical events; "King Kong" is another, later example.

On "Nine Types Of Industrial Pollution" the technique is seen at a very removed stage. The track consists of three main strands. First there is a slow 4/4 bass and drums pulse, loosely played; all but obscuring this is a large variety of random percussion noise; and sunk in between the two is the most beautiful, expressive guitar-playing.

The slow pulse is gradually augmented with chords and becomes clearer, and other instruments emerge briefly and disappear again; the total effect is accumulative and textural. While none of the strands appear at first to be relevant to each other, they come to assume a completely fresh identity.

The guitar line in particular is given meaning by the context in which it appears; and while containing all of the familiar traits that I mentioned, makes a stronger impression than any of Zappa's more histrionic efforts.



ZAPPA on Gibson Stereo

FOUR PAGE PULLOUT EXTRA

## BENYON



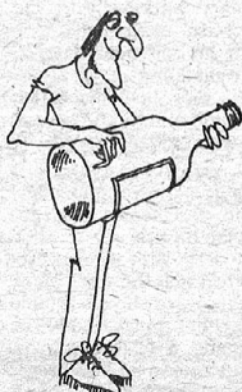
THE JAMES TAYLOR GUITAR.



THE SLIDE GUITAR



THE MOTHER SUBSTITUTE



THE BOTTLENECK GUITAR.

## BENYON



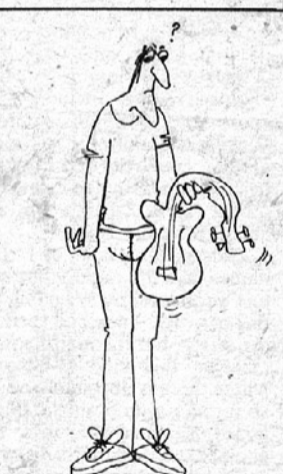
THE LEFT HAND GUITAR.



THE CONCEPTUAL GUITAR.



THE DEATH WISH GUITAR.



THE SOFT ROCK GUITAR.



THE LAID BACK GUITAR.

STARTING in the 50s, there has been a movement in serious music away from strict organisation and towards more freedom. In 'straight' music there have been the chance experiments of Cage, the development of the graphic score in which the musician is a free interpreter of a system of shapes, lines or whatever; and now even composers as interested in notated form as Boulez are opening up choices to the player, loosening him or her from formal restraints.

In jazz, the experiments of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor have led by many routes to the fruitful European free music scene, flourishing under Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, Han Bennink and countless others.

Rock, being mostly concerned with 'having a good time', commercialism, and 'the song', which doesn't have much to do with improvisation, has not been greatly affected by such advances. There are some groups, especially in Germany, who have taken ideas from the 'straight' avant-garde; and a few others interested in free music in the jazz sense.

Indian classical music, an improvised form, and the work of Terry Riley, have both made an important impact. Mostly however, freedom for rock musicians is expressed in the shift from the written and arranged qualities of '50s pop towards the 'feeling', the looseness, of black music. Not so much total freedom as variations on certain stylistic ideas — 'blues licks', 'country licks', a set of drum patterns, Tamla bass runs, etc.

As Ron Wood said the other week, "The magic is in playing it slightly different", and the 'it' is usually pretty closely defined.

One effect of the increasing confidence of rock players in their ability to feel their way, to play to chords and not parts, is the virtual extinction of a particular pop tradition — that of the Instrumental.

For many years the Instrumental was a staple of the pop scene; there's nowt like a good tune, as they say, and if it wasn't that, then it was a special atmosphere, or a 'sound'. Johnny and the Hurricanes, Elias and his Zig Zag Jive Flutes, The Surfaris, The Tornadoes — there really were an enormous number of people at it.

From a guitar point of view we should particularly note Duane Eddy (see last week). Starting in the same year, 1958, was Link Wray, who had the same line-up but whose style was much closer to '60s rock than to his own time. (His distinctively rough, loud rhythm guitar sound had a strong influence on for example Pete Townshend.)

In more polite mould were The Ventures, the ultimate commercial group, still selling thousands of albums with what their publicist calls 'solid sounds and neat unpretentious musicianship'. Dawk. They're a bit like a rougher version of The Shadows, who probably started out copying them, but ended up better, I reckon. Hank Marvin had an inimitable tone and touch, and a lot of ideas in the early days.

These people are what the instrumental was all about — dead straight, no frills, close arrangements and evocative as opposed to emotional playing.

Instrumentals since then show clearly the movement away from the 'written'; even those that are have a very different energy or feel — Clapton's "Got To Hurry", "The Ox" by The Who, "Big Noise From Spunk" by the Lovin'

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



JEFF BECK: getting right down to it...

*Remember the Instrumental? The Ventures? The Shadows? This week FRED FRITH of HENRY COW charts the development of the idiom and finds an ace modern exponent in JEFF BECK.*

## JEFF BECK: 'Beck's Bolero'

Spoonful; and later Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross" and The Beatles' "Flying".

One guitarist who is supremely talented in the field of instrumentals, and who paradoxically does hardly any of his work in that field, is Jeff Beck.

Despite being a blues-inspired player and being pushed on his 'flash' image, he's nearly always at his best in a closely worked out or written context — for example, on the

second Jeff Beck Group record here are two instrumentals, the Tamla number "I Can't Give Back The Love I Feel For You", and his own "Definitely Maybe".

They're both showcases for Beck's superb slide work, and in spite of the fashionably laid-back and rather anonymous accompaniment, there are moments, notably at the climax of the second, where the playing is ecstatic — layers of guitars

soaring effortlessly to a high point followed by a subdued piano fade. Histrionic perhaps, but easily the best tracks on the record.

In the Yardbirds, the solos and guitar work in general were full of invention and yet contained, controlled — the Indian modal solo and driving rhythm playing on "Shapes Of Things" or the dramatically unfolding ascending line in "Mister You're A Better Man". Later

there's the solo in "Hi Ho Silver Lining", simple but exciting with the Jeff Beck 'edge' and out-of-sync double-tracking. A classic.

The instrumentals take the above qualities a step further; they're also in some respects reminiscent of Les Paul, about whom a word before continuing. Les Paul was a great innovator. He helped to pioneer the electric guitar, and to develop recording procedures right through to multi-tracking. On top of this, he was a fine jazz guitarist in the 40's modern style.

His thing, however, was doing standards either alone or with his wife Mary Ford singing — numbers like "How High The Moon" or "Bye Bye Blues". He had what I think we can describe as a highly developed sense of humour, manifested in "Flying Trapeze" or "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles"; and in his classic period he was multi-tracking himself in some very curious arrangements using speeded up tapes, repeat echo and any other trick he could come up with.

His interest in the sound possibilities of the electric instrument, although it could be said to have been misapplied, was years ahead of its time. The result is a kind of Mike Oldfield meets Django Reinhardt meets Woody Woodpecker — kinda weird.

Where Jeff Beck figures in this is that he too is not afraid of using recording tricks, is not concerned with what can or cannot be reproduced on stage.

Obviously he has certain traits as a player. He's another good user of the wah-wah, sometimes surprisingly subtle, sometimes producing a sort of extrovert belch as an accent in a line. He's one of the best slide players around, and shares with Harvey Mandel the technique of building up a fast run by hammering off while playing high up the fingerboard.

He uses the lower register more than most, and in the middle of a series of fairly ordinary blues phrases will suddenly produce something searing and melodic.

But whatever his playing idiosyncracies, much of his strength lies in the studio. At his most imaginative he uses all the resources at his disposal, sometimes with a kind of self-deprecating wit, especially on the outrageously flashy stuff; he has a flair for arranging parts, building up tracks, finding and organising the right sounds to make a sound 'portrait'.

The best example of the flash/humour combination is still "Jeff's Boogie" on the Yardbirds second album — ridiculous licks, odd quotes and silly little phrases (not unlike Les Paul's "What Is This Thing Called Love"); it's a bit dated now, but I remember being stunned when it first came out.

However, if anything suggested a possible direction for the Instrumental in rock, it was "Beck's Bolero". Structured and arranged, yet with moments of improvisation; hypnotically repetitive yet containing development and a strong melody; and deeper in content than first appears — the backing is full of little touches that you don't notice till a few times around.

The whole track has a unity of conception and sound, and though credit should go to Jimmy Page, who wrote it, and producer Mickie Most, Beck's playing is beautifully relaxed and fluid without losing any urgency.

It's an example of making the maximum possible use out of the minimum possible resources, the opposite of what a lot of rock music is about, and I still find it Beck's best and most suggestive work.

■ From previous page

and see what I mean.

Duane's style broke the accepted pattern of guitar playing, and especially in his technique of extravagantly bending the notes — the "twang".

The fact that the sound was such a hit is, in retrospect, not so surprising. But the actual recordings are also worthy of mention. No multi-tracking and hours in the studio in those days... at most, they had three tracks — the basic, plus one for vocals and one for sax or strings. And most records were cut with the minimum of studio time and the minimum of gadgetry.

"Peter Gunn", for instance, was all recorded through one overhead mike! But this and Duane's other discs still sound as good today.

"As far as the recording technique goes, Lee was responsible; but for the guitar playing itself, I just play different." That is true. The full Duane Eddy sound has not, to this day, been successfully copied.

"It's my concept, how I should sound, and I've been helped by always having a very good amp. For it's time, the one I started with was very fine, and it had a very good, clear sound to it which I liked. I never went for the fuzzy, distorted sound. I liked it bright and clear."

The Gretsch he still has, and this is the guitar that has been used on most of his recordings; and it is this one that he brought for the very recent sessions, cut last month in London.

The Guild so often photographed on the sleeves of his albums was made especially for him around 1959/60, by the

Guild Guitar Co. Called the Duane Eddy Guitar (surprise, surprise!), it never quite captured his Gretsch sound, and was and is only used to any great extent on live performances.

Other instruments he has used include — as quoted above — a Dan Electro on a couple of recordings; an acoustic guitar and banjo used on softer recordings, such as "Songs Of Our Heritage"; and a 12-string, notably on "Duane Does Dylan".

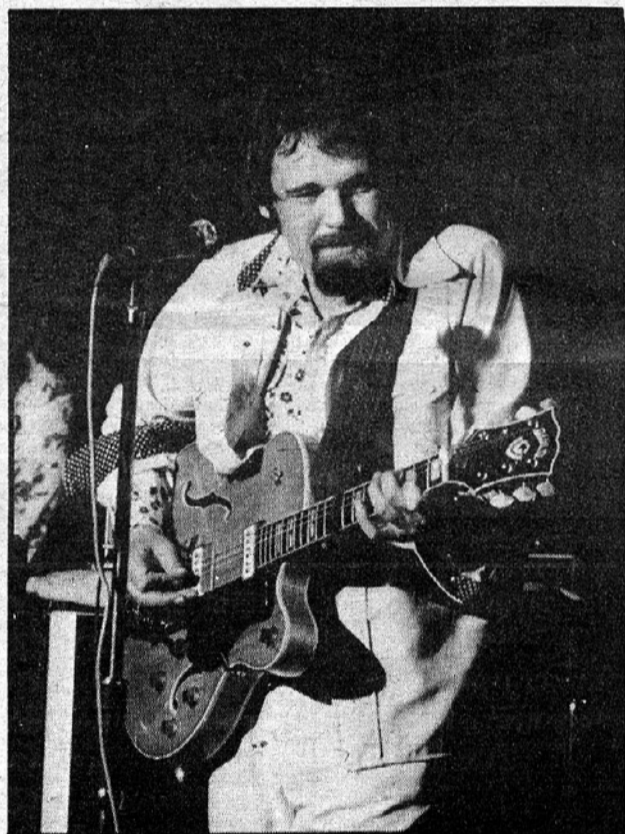
To hear Duane play acoustic is a real eye-opener for anyone weaned on his twangy style. His proficiency is impressive, and shows just how little he is stretched on his hits.

What other guitarists does he rate?

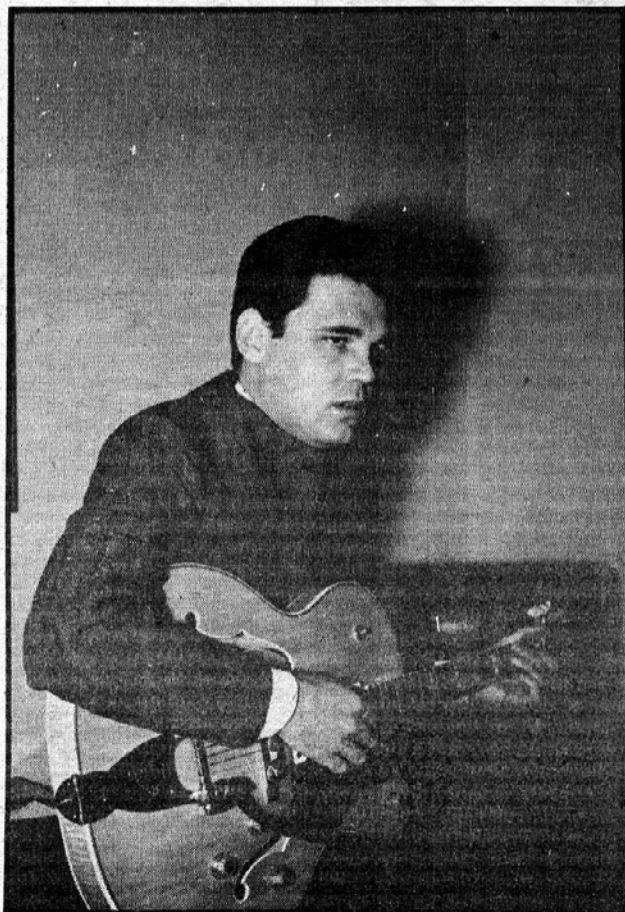
"There's so many, I tell you! Young players in groups who do phenomenal things with guitars. And I don't even know their names — I just hear their records. Of course there are a lot of country players that I like; and some of the bigger names of course... Eric Clapton, and I like George Harrison's playing very much. Of course Chet Atkins is an all-time favourite, and I like Steve Stills too."

Standards of guitar playing have improved very much over the past 15 years. So would he be scared of starting afresh now?

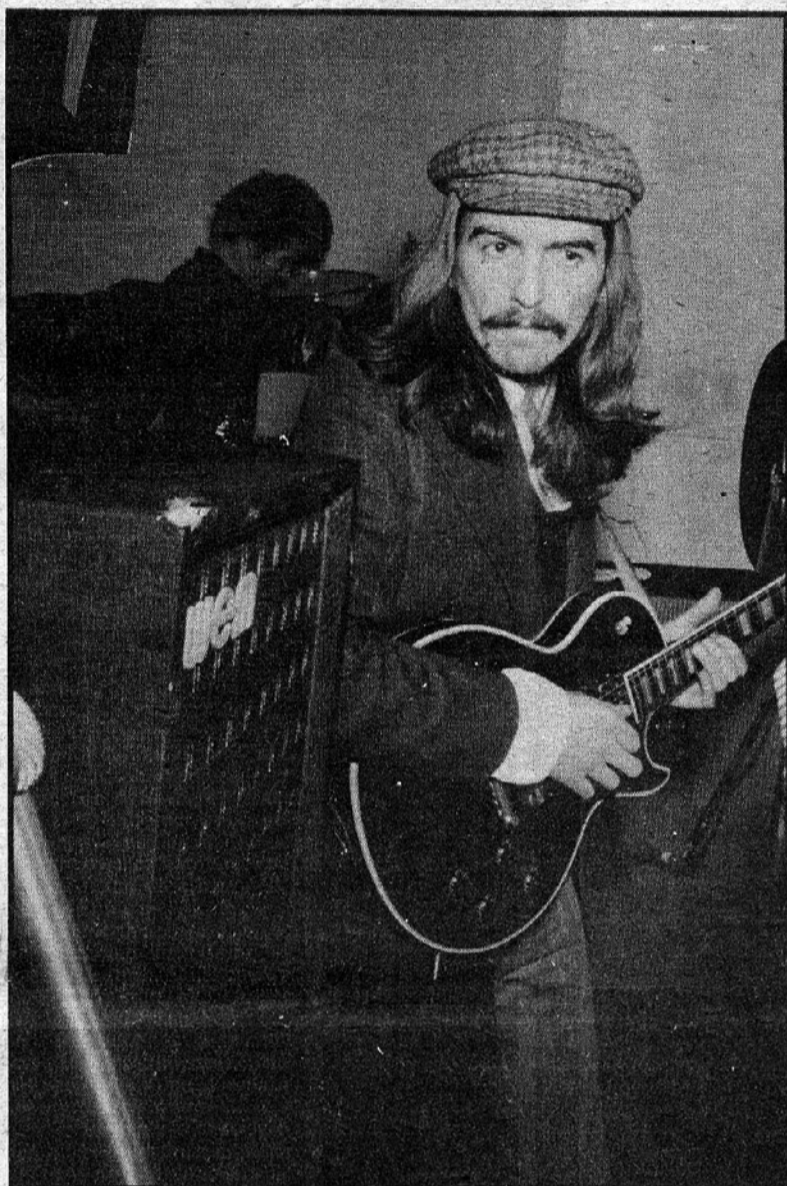
"No I wouldn't, because what I do is still unique. And playing is much more exciting now because there's so much you can do. Things are so much easier now than they were in the old days, and I approve of the higher standards."



DUANE EDDY now... and then (below), pictured with the Guild slim-line cello guitar he uses mainly for stagework.



# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



GEORGE HARRISON, hiding behind amp while working out tasteful solo...

*This week a less-acclaimed type of virtuosity... guitarist FRED FRITH of HENRY COW examines the work of a player whose particular talent lies not so much in high-speed technique or improvisation but in creating solos that fit perfectly in context.*

THERE ARE of course many styles other than the blues constituting an essential background for rock. A lot of them have come from the black communities — soul, Tamla, reggae, funky music in general — and on the white side there has been the profound effect of American country and western music and country rock, mostly originating from their re-establishment under the influence of Dylan and The Band.

Many of these styles relate to or derive in some way from ethnic sources — the blues self-evidently, soul in its relation to gospel and religious music, and country music as the folk tradition of the white communities of the Western USA. Then there are the styles that are created by the record companies, who necessarily depend on having new products to sell. Most of these disappear but some, like Tamla, produce a lasting movement that becomes part of the rock make-up.

But aside from people working under particular stylistic labels, or those trying to make it on the back of whatever's

## GEORGE HARRISON: "Revolver"

been made fashionable, the mainstream of rock development seems to have become very hung-up in the area of 'style' altogether.

Sophisticates like Lou Reed, Bowie or Ferry are constantly turning the medium in on itself, employing parody and cross-reference, commenting on and using style in all senses of the word and yet rarely getting beyond it.

Similarly, for groups with top-line recording or instrumental ability, the way something is said, metaphorically speaking, often appears more important than, or even constitutes, the message itself.

Just about everywhere else, in the enormous and very various middle of the road, a kind of international stylistic vocabulary has evolved. In instrumental music this might involve the appurtenances of jazz-rock — funky rhythm sections, textural electronics, speed or whatever; but elsewhere there are equally fixed ideas about what's possible, permissible

or desirable on one's instrument or in a group.

This is not especially new or surprising; music usually develops in movements, during which the time is spent expanding an idea through every avenue that it suggests until it is no longer workable. Nor is it to say that the music made in such a situation is necessarily bad — this is far from being the case.

But the most creative and vital moments in any kind of music happen when someone actually 'starts again', maybe using quite simple means to completely transform the possibilities inherent in a medium. The early work of the Incredible String Band, "Moon In June" by Robert Wyatt, the songs of Syd Barrett, Captain Beethart's "Trout Mask Replica", the first album of Faust — all completely different and yet all examples of pioneering originality.

One group who rather less obviously had this attribute, because they were already established in a field where everyone has to be 'new' and 'unique', were The Beatles. In a comparatively short period, 1966-67, they produced "Revolver", "Sergeant Pepper" and great singles like "Strawberry Fields", and produced a similar effect to Cream from another angle, lurching the pop song

into the realms of art in the eyes of the critics, and generally setting musicians everywhere on a new course.

All of this has an important bearing on guitar playing; because if it's true, as I believe, that the context you choose to play in is all, that doing things right is less important than doing the right things, then such moments as I described must produce great playing.

It's certainly a fact that Syd Barrett and Zoot Horn Rollo, whom I'll be talking about later, are geniuses of the guitar. In rather less iconoclastic vein, Robbie Robertson is an example of a brilliant contextual player, a master of understatement. And one of the most gifted guitarists of all in this light is undoubtedly George Harrison.

The main element in Harrison's approach is his studied attempt to fit. In three weeks so far we've seen an expression of R-and-B energy, an example of searing inspiration, and in the case of Hendrix the results of commuting from Venus. George Harrison represents something altogether different.

For a start he's not an improviser, he doesn't constantly try to expand the form of a given piece; one of the great characteristics of a Beatles solo is its completeness and logic, the feeling that it's been worked out even when it's in an improvised mode. Secondly, great care is taken to find exactly the right sound; there are constant experiments and changes.

Compare the guitar tones on different early tracks; thin and piercing on "Words Of Love", soft and subliminal on "Michelle", electric and full of presence on "Nowhere Man"; or listen to the interaction between the two guitars on "I Feel Fine", the swelled harmonies on "Yes It Is", the 12-string on "If I Needed Someone".

Of course there are a lot of duff songs and inept solos — even on "Rubber Soul" there's some rosey stuff like "What Goes On" and "Run For Your Life". But good or bad, it all bears witness to the same 'written' quality, the same search for a specific and right sound.

On "Revolver" however, where The Beatles material finds new life and direction, the guitar playing really blossoms and takes on a positive identity. The use of the conventional group line-up on this record is often stunning, apart from the increasing experiments with studio effects and other instrumentalations; the sound as a whole is more uniform and coherent.

All the features of Harrison's late style are to be found here — the unusual skill at using chords in solo passages; the introduction of sitar technique and phrasing with those elastic bent notes and slurs, the thick orchestral sound which later gave way to a thinner, more plaintive tone that is equally typical. The solos on "Taxman", and "Your Bird Can Sing", the one second break on "Got To Get You Into My Life", are especially fine.

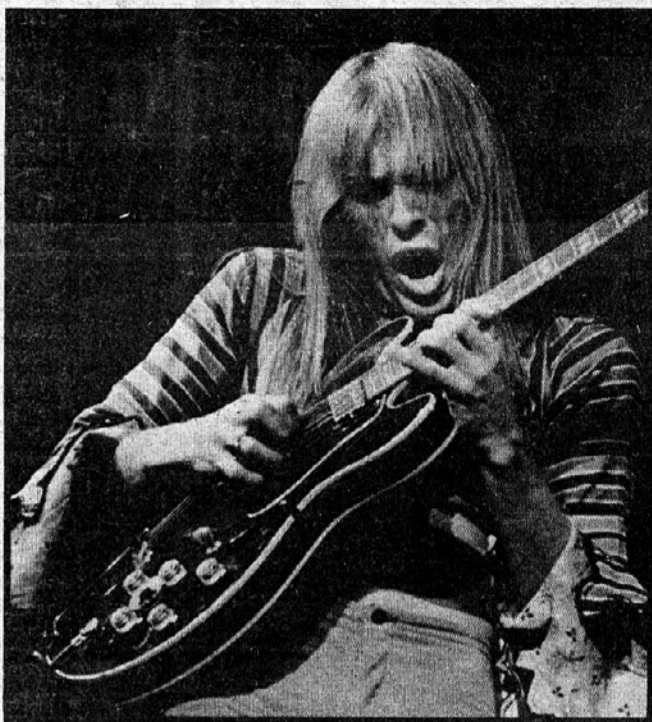
The expansion of the ideas suggested on "Revolver" extends over "Sergeant Pepper", the great singles, the first side of the "White Album", "Magical Mystery Tour" and "Yellow Submarine".

As The Beatles' energy dissipated and Harrison got to play with other musicians, so the playing began to be less arresting or at any rate took on more of the international vocabulary aspects that I spoke of earlier.

There is a beautiful solo on "Abbey Road" — "Something" — which is an example of another of his habitual strengths; apart from the 'finished' qualities and fluid phrasing, it has an assured harmonic feel, showing the ability to derive something new out of a very simple chord sequence.

Still, it's "Revolver" that contains the best examples of great guitar playing that is totally at one with and subservient to its context; a demonstration of a kind of virtuosity that has little initial influence on other guitarists, and yet is as highly developed and difficult to achieve as any of the most obvious and imitated techniques.

# STEVE HOWE



## How to keep lead runs together

■ From previous page

"It is much easier to improvise when you have one line that you can use as a base. One way to do this is to have a short passage that keeps repeating, leaving a gap for improvisation — which is what I did in this case. The repeated pattern gives the mind a solid link with the music."

He proceeded to play me an example — a little five-note sequence on harmonics that he can repeat at intervals and use as a base point for his mind to return to.

This, hopefully, is a hint that may be useful to rhythm players who can't seem to get lead runs together.

Says Steve: "When you start

to play you don't know your own potential. I think I'd have been quite happy if my abilities had only taken me as far as rhythm."

"You can use rhythm guitar in recordings and — it's a good motion. When you can get something strong it's nothing like rhythm on organ — it has a different kind of momentum."

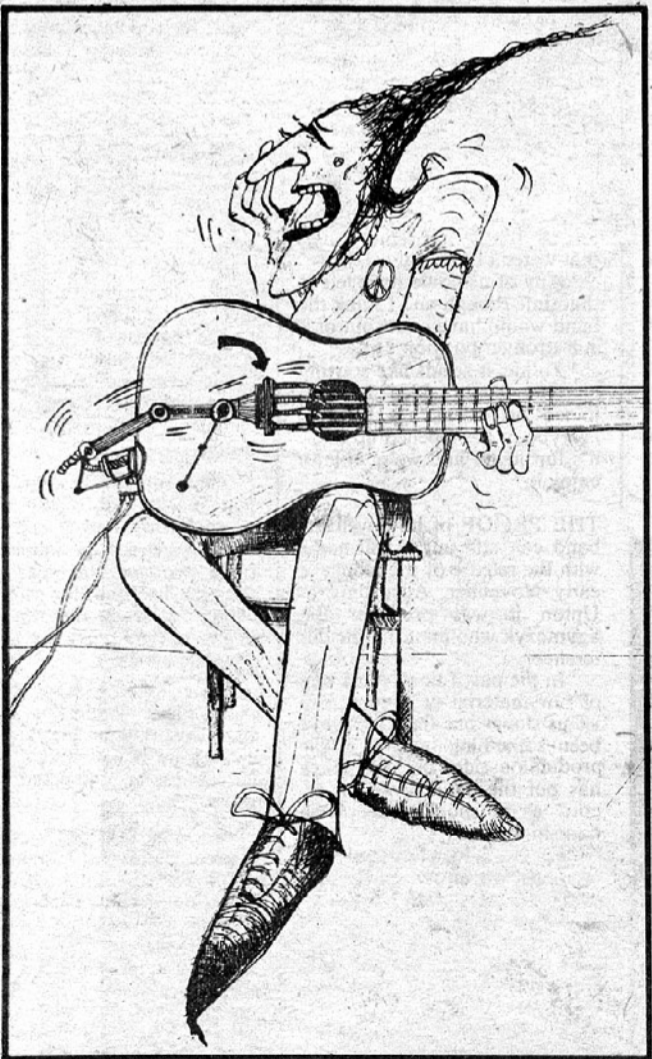
"In Yes I've often been left very free to play around. On 'Close To The Edge' I was sitting in the studio on my own and played something that led into a kind of guitar prelude."

"All our songs have taken hours of work, but they always start with the simplest idea. I don't think we've ever really set out with a 'let's be clever' attitude. If you start with a really simple basis then it's far more effective."

The main problem I can see in this kind of system is that everyone in the band must have his own favourite riffs which he keeps on returning to when constantly called upon to improvise a new number.

So the trap you may fall into, once you have overcome the problem of leading at all, is that every lead sounds like the last one.

Howe, however, dismissed this one except to say: "We sometimes feel we are doing an idea that is an extension of another song."



Set up a continuing rhythm pattern...

THE OTHER great influence on rock guitar playing to have emerged from the blues tradition was Jimi Hendrix; in terms of what they actually stood for, he and Clapton couldn't be further apart. If the latter, especially with Cream, came to be identified with artistic respectability, the "rock is real music" school, then Hendrix was just as surely on the opposite side of the fence; the side to do with rebellion, with incurring parental disapproval and the wrath of authority in general.

His music and manner were anarchic enough anyway, but he exaggerated it to absurd extremes. His stage act has been described as that of "an outrageous ham showman" who "camped it up like mad". In fact this approach probably stemmed from his having worked with the Isley Brothers and James Brown; he was acutely aware of the importance of putting on a show, of being part of the flamboyant showbiz tradition, pretty extraordinary at a time when rock musicians were concerned with wearing denims and being the same as everybody else.

This aspect should be considered separately from his approach to the music itself, which was often more conscientiously and carefully worked out than it might appear, especially in the studio.

Anyway, a large part of the measure of his influence should be seen in the terms of revolt. A lot of people wanted to play like Clapton; but a lot of people wanted to be like Hendrix.

As far as the music is concerned, the difference is equally marked. Clapton followed his chosen path fairly single-mindedly — the expansion of a particular and strongly identifiable style in a particular way. Having taken it as far as it would seem to allow, he returned to the discipline of song-form.

Hendrix's playing was more incoherent — he dabbled with a lot of bits that made up a rambling sort of whole. As a straight blues guitarist he was brilliant. I can well remember a breathtaking and unusually disciplined eight chorus solo in "Red House" at the Woburn Festival in 1967, played to an audience at least a third of whom were letting forth such cries as "Wot abaht the feeling", "Eric is God" and other gems.

Variations on his basic blues roots include the countryish double-stopping that featured on numbers like "The Wind Cries Mary" and "Little Ivey"; melodies in octaves which occur all over the place; and the habitual stressing of a note by bending up to it on the B string while simultaneously playing the same note on the E string, a fairly old technique anyway, which has been tediously copied ever since.

He also made use of modal, as opposed to blues, scales, and delicate chord-work.

In the studio he showed a childlike fascination with any kind of sound effect. The studio albums are riddled with the use of crude panning, phasing, echo and other electronic devices which often seems excessive and directionless.

The most interesting aspects of his playing are firstly that he redefined the expressive possibilities of the wah-wah pedal, using it to add attack, to stress notes in a run or to give precision and edge to a riff, as in the "Voodoo Chile" introduction; secondly that he reinstated the respectability of the tremelo-arm and considerably expanded its range.

The greatest exponent of the tremelo-arm before him was Hank Marvin, who used it more as an occasional means of embellishment than as something integral to the whole sound of the instrument.

Hendrix made of it a kind of flexible glissando device, giving the guitar an alarming elasticity. He could reproduce the sound of a bottleneck, lurch

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



HENDRIX with Strat and hand on the vital tremelo arm

**Henry Cow guitarist FRED FRITH continues his series of analytical articles on some of the watershed solos that have made their mark on the development of rock guitar.**

## '3rd Stone From The Sun,' by JIMI HENDRIX

chords around at will, change the colour of notes with the subtlest of touches. Mostly he used it to make feedback a controllable and viable force.

Feedback, as I'm sure you know, is what happens when you turn everything up full, strike the guitar in any manner you choose (you may not need to in fact), and then preferably face your loudspeakers, the closer the better.

There are many ways in which to control and direct the resulting sounds. For example, you can "damp" some of the strings and let others vibrate; move your position relative to the speakers; employ finger tremelo with differing degrees of violence; use a tremelo arm to alter the pitch and intensity

and create rhythmic patterns (which is what Hendrix did); place objects on the strings and move them about in different ways; throw things at the guitar or throw the guitar at things — the list is endless. Or you can just let the sounds take their own course, which is sometimes quite entertaining.

It is possible to control feedback on specific notes, and with some fuzz-boxes you can as a result sustain any note for any length of time, a technique perfected by Randy California of Spirit.

Sometimes a note that is sustaining through feedback will produce one of its harmonics, which will take over from the note itself. This can be very dramatic and is a favourite device with heavy-metal guitarists. Of course feedback had been used to good effect before, notably by Pete Townshend, but never as a recognised part of a complete style.

Hendrix's approach was not one of inense, concentrated musicianship; ideas were thrown out like sparks, at random and in all directions. He was certainly capable of playing worse than any other comparably great figure that I can

think of. In fact a lot of his career appeared to be taken up with self-parody. Still, he wrote a succession of rock classics, borrowing from Dylan the monotonous delivery of "half-comprehensible" imagery, and surrounding it with the loosely phrased blues licks, aggressive smashing chords, incisive wah-wah, manic wails and clicks, and pure noise, that have become so familiar in the work of others.

It's difficult to choose any definite tracks from the huge jumble that is daily being added to by the greed and insensitivity of record companies. I particularly like "I Don't Live Today" on the one hand, and "Star Spangled Banner" on the other. However, I've chosen "3rd Stone From The Sun" from "Are You Experienced", which contains many of the elements of his style and is at the same time curiously unlike anything else he ever did.

There are echoes of The Beatles in the background electronics, of The Who in the chord sound, even of Wes Montgomery or the tradition of the instrumental; but the substance of the piece is in the controlled use of feedback, the sinister reprise of the tune, the violent ending and crazy coda.

The two snatches of spoken vocals are half-audible and the rhythm track has the effect of a light anachronistic drone.

Of course there's a lot of double-tracking and trickery, but for me this is beautiful guitar playing — and there's no question of aptness — the track is the guitar.

## BUYING A GUITAR

■ From previous page

off buying a good acoustic steel and sticking a pick-up on the sound hole.

To begin with I'd advise a semi-acoustic guitar of fairly conventional shape. It should have two pick-ups — which should be adjustable — a three-way selector switch (so you can use either pick-up or both), individual tone and volume controls for each pick-up and some sort of adjustment at the bridge for each string independently.

I don't think you can buy an electric or steel-strung guitar today that doesn't have an adjustable truss rod in the neck.

To keep the price down, it should have no tremolo arm (unless you particularly want one) no mother-of-pearl inlay, no gold-plated fittings and in fact no fancy bits at all.

Rule Six: Now I don't mean literally smash it up. That defeats the whole exercise. You can't really be very fussy either if you're not spending a great deal of money. Incidentally, you are fairly safe if you're prepared to spend £30 on a classical guitar; £40-£50 on a steel-strung acoustic; over £70 on an electric.

There are amazingly good electrics for as little as £30 if you can find them, and I've seen at least one £18 acoustic that was phenomenally good value.

You'll probably be buying something second-hand. If there are no obvious faults, here are some things to look for. First, give all the strings a good tug. If it goes wildly out of tune then the machine heads or the bridge fixing or tailpiece is duff and you'll be continually tuning the thing up.

Ask the salesman to remove whatever plate there is over the electrics and check thoroughly for stray wiring. Also make him remove the little plate behind the nut to see if the truss rod really is adjustable and to make sure that the adjusting key fits.

If it has lousy strings then insist that a decent set be fitted in the shop. This is essential because it may throw the neck adjustment right out and it is better to put the onus for this on the shop. You want to leave with a perfectly playable guitar — not one you have to rebuild.

Rule seven. Right. Buzzes. These can be due to loose fittings, dodgy strings, bent frets, a nest of bees in the soundbox, too low an action and all sorts of things. Have whatever it is cured before you finally decide.

Action means the nearness of the strings to the fingerboard. This needs to be playable, but not so low that you can get no volume without the appearance of buzzes caused by strings touching the frets. The height of the E string above the 12th fret, when all the faults have been ironed out, should be less than a quarter of an inch. Scrutinise the neck for any bends or warps and play every string at every fret to check for uneven fretwork. Lay a straight edge down the fingerboard if you can find one.

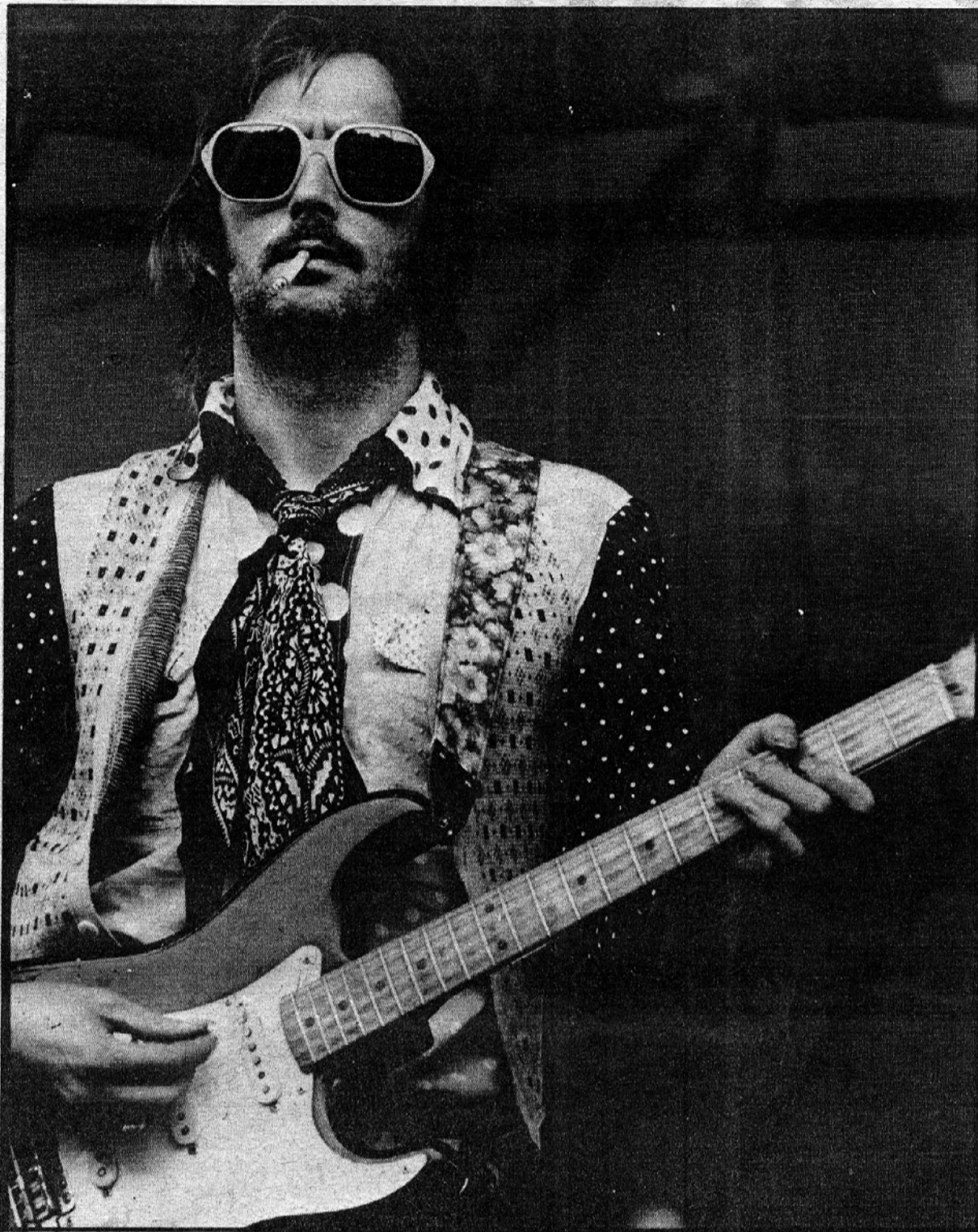
You can get harmonics at the 12th fret by lightly touching the string there as you pick it. Compare that note to the ordinary note at the 12th fret. They should sound the same. Guitars that sound perfectly in tune in the lower positions often go wildly out half-way up. You need to learn a chord that you can play all the way up the neck to test for this.

Rule eight: Obviously it's pointless trying to compare different guitars through different amps. It doesn't matter if the amp and speaker you use are good — as long as you use the same set-up for each guitar. Preferably buy a little practice amp and cart it round the shops with you. The actual sound of the guitar is the most important thing.

Rule nine: It doesn't matter how much you're prepared to spend... there's always a better guitar for more money. But in the medium price range it is always worth considering spending just that little bit more.

Rule ten: This rule shouldn't be taken seriously — unless you're a poofah.

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME



ERIC CLAPTON with Stratocaster

BEFORE I go any further there are a couple of points to clear up, namely (1) although the title of this series is "Great Rock Solos of Our Time", my aims are far more to do with a broad discussion of guitar-playing and music in general than with analysing particular solos or teaching people how to play them; and (2) last week's musical examples became, through an editorial error, transformed into "Chicago blues licks" — where as they were in fact merely notations of a part of a scale in 3rds and a part of a scale in 5ths.

Now read on. The primary source material — the biggest single influence that rock has known — has been the blues.

This influence has been diverse, covering both purist "art" music and pop "entertainment" music.

In England, R&B started with musicians at the jazz end of things — another form of black music. The Marquee, then a jazz club, ran an R&B night once a week; here Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies, backed by jazz musicians, made the first British R&B record, a compilation containing most of the Muddy Waters classics that sustained the ensuing movement.

This was in 1962. The R&B period runs from here to about 1965.

**Henry Cow guitarist FRED FRITH continues his series of analytical articles on some of the watershed solos that have made their mark on the development of rock guitar.**

## 'Have You Heard' by ERIC CLAPTON

MOST OF THE PEOPLE who started off involved in it moved at varying speeds into more commercial areas, depending on the shrewdness of their managers, the realisation that they had to write their own material to make any money from record sales, and, less cynically, the rapidly expanding wealth of ideas about what the group format was capable of producing.

In any case, R&B was pop music for a time. Later, as the last strains of "Hoochie Coochie" and "I Got My Mojo Working" disappeared, real blues fans set out to copy the genuine article — the purer tradition in which B.B. King, Elmore James, Robert Johnson and their ilk were working. Out of this grew the John Mayall, can't fail, Chicken Shack, Fleetwood Mac, can-blue-men-sing-the-whites-period.

It was at this time that rock music finally established itself as an entity separate from pop when, in commercial terms, the

album began to prevail over the single.

The blues movement, was largely tedious and unproductive; but it did produce Cream.

NOW I REGARD Cream as being of literally devastating importance in rock music. Because before Cream, neither pop nor blues had anything much to do with being technically competent on one's instrument.

Cream (note the name) set out primarily to demonstrate their skill, whatever other musical intentions they might have had. In doing so, they introduced the notion of "respectability" into the music. Just as jazz, previously treated as a form of entertainment, had become accepted as an art form by the cultured establishment, so Cream, lauded by serious critics and the likes of Leonard Bernstein, opened up the possibility that you could be a

"real" musician and play rock.

The repercussions were widely felt.

As has been pointed out, this approach can involve a sense of cultural guilt — the justification of ELP in musical terms when they have far more to do with the showbiz tradition; or the tendency to accord a disproportionate respect to the appearance of "credentials" like classical training — "if Mozart were alive today he would be playing in Yes" school, about which the less said the better.

More specifically though, I believe that the main effect of Cream has been to raise the general standard of ability among rock players — more people are playing more competently than ever before. This is, of course, positive and encouraging, but it's also had the effect of helping to stifle the invention, imagination and purposiveness that rock has manifested at various times — it's easy to be distracted by competence.

YOU'RE PROBABLY wondering, as the man said, why I'm here — what has all this got to do with great guitar playing — and the answer of course is not much, except that one figure spans the early R&B period, pure blues, Cream and all steps west — Eric Clapton. And, ironically, in the light of what I've been saying, he's not a dry or technical player at all.

Clapton is the original in a long succession of guitar-heroes, and one of a handful of players who have dominated rock through their influence.

With Cream he developed

and refined a style of extraordinary fluidity — there were often so few holes that it was reminiscent of a saxist's technique of "circular breathing", carrying on playing while breathing in through the nose — a kind of agonising continuity.

This was based on exploiting the Gibson/Marshall finger-tremolo sound, which Jimmy Page mentioned last week — and Clapton's tremolo, in terms of the purity of tone and degree of sustain he can generate, is in itself remarkable.

Finger-tremolo is a slight movement from side to side — at varying speeds depending on the desired effect — of any or all of the fingers of the left hand, which meanwhile retain their downward pressure on the fret. It comes in two basic varieties — *parallel to the string*, which is the kind violinists or classical guitarists use, or *at right-angles to the string*, which is the blues tremolo.

It's possible to do the latter in a variety of ways — you can, for example, tremolo a note on the fret at which it's played, or bend up to as much as a tone-and-a-half or more above the fret before applying the technique.

Either way it helps to create a pure sound and to sustain the note for much longer — almost indefinitely with practise and a little help from your amplifier.

The style originated with players like B.B. King and Buddy Guy, and has dominated rock guitar styles for nearly ten years.

Nevertheless, Clapton's sound is instantly recognisable. He has an uncanny ability to phrase slightly in front of and across a beat while soaring up to a sustained high note — there's a beautiful example of this in one of the breaks on "Abbey Road": his timing in general is exhilarating, often completely reorientating the basic rhythm he's playing over.

BUT MY favourite Clapton record remains the John Mayall "Bluesbreakers" album which, along with "Alexis Korner At The Marquee", is one of the very few British blues records I find even half-way convincing.

Though unusual for its *swinging* (as opposed to *shuffling*) rhythm section, it is dominated by Clapton, as if he'd just become aware of what he could really do.

With The Yardbirds his sound, on record at least, never did him justice — it was more in the thin, polite B.B. King mould. With Mayall he developed that driving, distorted, clapped-out speaker sound (later to be considerably smoothed out).

It generates incredible impetus on this record, partly because he's restricted by the form of the songs — one-verse solos that are models of structure and economy, and yet give the impression of bursting at the seams with controlled power.

What's important, apart from sound and timing, is the instinctive mastery of internal and external dynamics. The best example of this is the classic slow blues "Have You Heard".

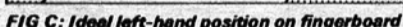
It opens with a sax solo, and during this and the two sung verses the guitar fills are brilliant, moving gradually from evocative restraint to increasing attack.

Then the solo bursts in, phrase piled against phrase — pure energy.

In the second line he holds back slightly — leaving one particularly aching space — builds up flurries of notes, then surges to a climax ending with two dramatic sustained high notes, followed by the release of a series of notes in even rhythm, unwinding the tension again.

It's an example of playing in which the emotional aspect is almost painful, but which contains the considered touches of a master — not just the control of the overall dynamic of the solo, but the way each phrase varies in volume and attack through subtle differences in pick-pressure and finger-control.

The incidental noise, buzzes and crackles from the equipment, also contribute to the whole sound picture. A masterpiece.



Now you've learned what a chromatic scale is, and before you can learn to build up melodies and chords you should learn what major and minor scales are. C Major is the simplest because it contains no sharps or flats and gives you the blueprint for all the other major scales. It is simply: C D

Meanwhile it's worth noting the evolutionary aspects of the

A little intelligent deduction will show you that you can use this fingering to play any scale in any position. Use the chromatic scale to work out where A and D are, for example.

# GREAT ROCK SOLOS OF OUR TIME

**FIG 1: Chicago blues lick in 3rds**



## 'You Really Got Me'

by THE KINKS

A good guitarist is likely to experiment with his amplifiers or learn to control a particular

This song is written around an archetypal repeated chord riff — the same one that John

Also at about this time the Stones made "It's All Over Now", which contains a similar and equally fine solo. In fact Keith Richard in particular, of the many players who began their meteoric careers at this time, has developed into one of the best guitarists in rock precisely because of his ability to play what's appropriate rather than what's impressive.

