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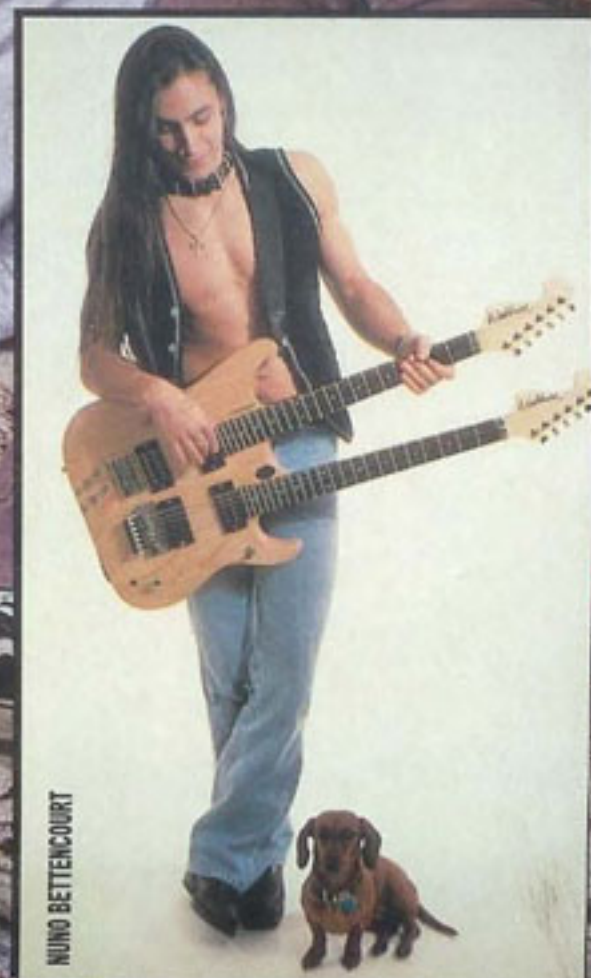
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NUNO BETTENCOURT

RETURN OF THE SIX-STRING BEAST

Hot on the heels of last year's *Guitarmania* comes *Guitarmania 2: Return of the Six-String Beast*. In the spirit of things here at *Canadian Musician* magazine we have endeavoured to bring to you, the gentle reader, musings, reflections, insights and advice from some of the guitar community's pre-eminent practitioners. Variety was a theme this year — guitarists from all levels of success and various musical genres are presented for your reading pleasure. It's not often that so many viewpoints on the world's most popular instrument can be expressed in one forum, so get ready for a treat! Education was another important theme as well; the passing on of musical traditions has often been referred to as a process of a "laying on of hands", a gradual transfer of knowledge that comes from years of continual exposure to players who have developed their craft and their personal musical vision. Each of the players presented in *Guitarmania 2*, at some point, decided to follow his or her own 'drummer' after years of watching, learning, and of course, listening. Another thing that these players share is their common admiration of Jimi Hendrix's iconoclasm and enduring influence.

So throw away your pick, toss the slide and let these players inspire both the head and the heart. The rest is up to us.

NUNO BETTENCOURT

Nuno Bettencourt is the resident guitarist in Boston's Extreme. Their latest album, *Waiting For the Punchline* features powerful funk rock riffing, in-your-face production, and (of course) incendiary guitar playing. We spoke hours before a recent gig in Toronto.

Gear

"I'm just using a Fender Vibraverb and a couple of ADA pre-amps. I've always been using the ADA stuff and I just recently added the Vibraverb. I think it brings a bit of a cleaner edge to it. I also think that Phase 90s and Phase 100s by MXR are pretty cool. I'm still working with Washburn guitars. Lately, I've been playing a double neck for a small portion of the set."

Beginnings

"It was more of a family thing, you know? A couple of my brothers were great guitar players, so pretty much just being around them got me exposed to it. Just being able to play songs that you like was a trip for me. When I first started, it was mostly acoustic. I grew up on a lot of Beatles stuff, and early Bread, and even early Bee Gees — you know; a lot of strumming, songwriting stuff. I got into the funkier stuff through the love of percussion and drums. I'm a drummer as well, but only on weekends! Al Dimeola also influenced me in the more percussive playing. Listening to him was like listening to a percussionist playing the guitar."

"Then I started to get into more of the heavy stuff; early Aerosmith, early Van Halen. At the time, I started to get together with some friends. We'd learned four songs and played those same four songs for about

a year! I also got into a lot of progressive stuff, listening to Yes, Kansas and UK with Holdsworth. The left hand and right hand techniques came together as a result of a love of both styles."

"I've always been attracted to the funkier stuff; I've always looked to Aerosmith and Zeppelin as sort of rock/funk bands at times. Most of the rock bands I dug had a funkier vibe to them, even Van Halen. Talking about funkiness, Pat Travers is probably at the top of



BY BRUCE ADAMSON

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the list, I'd say. I really liked the *Go For What You Know* album. The energy and the care-free-ness of it was great. That record had an aggressiveness and rebellious attack to it for me."

Hendrix

"The Hendrix influence was more of a 'second generation' thing for me. I discovered Hendrix through Van Halen and Stevie Ray Vaughan. As a kid, he really affected me from a song, more than a guitar, point of view. If I was seventeen when he came out, he would have completely blown my mind; that's for sure. It would have been shocking."

Woodshedding

"I was basically getting things off records. Between fifteen and twenty I was practicing constantly — just obsessed with the instrument, you know? Good six- or eight-hour days... some days even longer. But it was never really a routine. It was more just learning other people's stuff — you only become your own player, if you ever become your own player, gradually. It's something that you don't notice, you just start doing."

"As the band became more successful, there was less practice. It wasn't so much because of the time factor, but just the lack of wanting to practice. Whenever I tend to pick up the guitar wanting to practice, I tend to take a left turn and start writing songs. Songwriting just dominates the desire to practice. I have a four-track or an eight-track that I usually bring on the road."

Songwriting

"Up until the last record, we had a backlog of songs that we were sort of dipping into here and there; but we've pretty much used them up. There's a lot of new stuff."

"I never sit down to write. It always just comes out when it comes out, so it always works. I'll sit down, play a little bit, and if something comes out that's worth being a song, it's worth it. I've never sat down and played something I thought was a little crappy and just kept playing with it."

Studio

"Everything, at some point, starts spontaneously. When you hear something you like, you just tend to keep doing it. Sometimes it works out in one or two takes, or sometimes I'll do five or six takes and listen to each take and do a comp and get the best sections together. It's not really that important to me whether it's one take or a thousand — if it's on record for the rest of your life, you might as well make it enjoyable to the listener."

"I've been recording some stuff for a record that I'll be putting out some time next year. It'll be the furthest thing from an instrumental record. It's just a bunch of songs that I did for myself over the years or tried with Extreme that just didn't work out."

Live Playing

"Just do it; it's really just a state of mind. The first time I played an arena stage, I just freaked out because I couldn't believe how distant the band was, and how distant they sounded. It's all about knowing how to manipulate monitoring

to recreate the band being close to you. From night to night, the sound can change pretty drastically. Basically, it's about getting louder! Even in some of the smaller places it's ridiculously loud — the ring in my ears after a show, or even the next day is pretty amazing. The Fenders have to be on ten in order to get the distortion."

The Freddie Mercury Tribute

"It was overwhelming from every aspect — from the people that were there, to being able to give something back to a band that you grew up on, to the emotional side. Brian (May — guitarist for Queen) knew that we just loved every record. Initially, we weren't going to do any of our own stuff. I got into a little bit of an argument with Brian — he was disappointed that we weren't planning on doing any of our own stuff. But at the last minute, we went into 'More Than Words' spontaneously. The camera crews flipped out, because it wasn't even in the schedule."

The Most Important Thing

"I think that too often, guitar players don't pay attention to what else is going on. The biggest asset I had was to ask 'why?' whenever I heard something I liked — why does this particular guitar riff sound good? What's happening with the rhythm section, or the song? Or, what's going on beyond? You get a better understanding, musically, of what's happening. I think it helps your playing a lot more. It's wrong to focus too much on the technical side of guitar playing. If you think too much, you're already in trouble. Play things 'cause you enjoy them, knowing that they sound good. It's all about moods, you know? Make up your own rules as you go along and do what you want; that's what I did."

ALEX LIFESON

What Canadian rock guitar player hasn't been influenced by Alex Lifeson? From the bars and high schools of Toronto to the arenas of the world, both he and his bandmates in Rush have been an inspiration to musicians all over the world. Currently working on a solo album while the rest of the band takes a well-deserved break, Alex reflected on his career from his home studio in Richmond Hill.



Gear

"I've been using Paul Reed Smith Artists for about three or four years. Beautiful instruments, beautifully made. In the studio I have a whole array of guitars: a Les Paul, my original 335, another 335, a reissue '62 Strat and a re-issue Tele. Amps are Marshall Anniversary series with 4x12s loaded with Celestions. A couple of the heads I had modified at Paul Reed Smith to make them warmer in the lower-mids."

"As far as effects go, we haven't been on the road for almost a year, so I have to refresh myself. I have a couple of T.C. Electronic 2290 delays and a T.C. Electronic 1210 spatial expander which I use for chorus. I have a Digitech GSP 2101 tube preamp with effects that I haven't had a chance to try out live. In the studio it's been very effective; it's got some really good sounds in it and they're quite warm. I run them through Palmer speaker emulators, so going right to the desk they're sounding quite good. I've got a Digitech TSR 24 multi-effects unit that I use for reverbs and tape delays, and a Digitech PPM 55, which is a harmonizer. I have my good old CryBaby wah wah pedal that I've had for 24 years — it's got to be one of the originals. In the early days, I had to save up for that wah wah pedal! When we recorded the first album in 1973, there wasn't that much around. I used the CryBaby and a Maestro Phase Shifter."

"I have a Bradshaw switching system that I've had for seven or eight years now. The workmanship is spectacular; it's never gone down over the years."

The Sound

"I always heard sounds in my head, although I was never always sure about how to achieve them. The whole sound of Pink Floyd in the early '70s — I wanted to get those sounds and have that kind of impact. Steve Hackett always had very interesting tones. Being in a three-piece, there's greater pressure on a guitarist to make interesting sounds. In the past few years, there's been a move towards plugging straight into the amp and recording, and I'm getting off on that whole thing — Alice In Chains, Stone Temple Pilots, the impact and impression of a wall of sound. Most of the stuff I've been doing in my studio is like that."

Keeping Busy

"I'm starting to work on my own solo project. We finished the last tour in May, and Geddy and his wife had a baby a week after — talk about timing! He really wants to be home for a bit and spend some time with his new daughter, which we all understand and gratefully accept."

"We've been so busy over the years that you come home after a tour or recording and kick back and veg out. But after a lengthy summer of just hanging around, I thought that I had to do something. I have a recording studio at home. Bill Bell, a guitarist who works with Tom Cochrane and a lot of other local people, is helping out. We met at the first Kumbaya and played together, and really got along quite well and thought that we'd get together. We had fun on Guitar World's *Guitars That Ruled the World* compilation CD, and just continued writing. I've been doing it since the end of October; I get up in the morning, grab a coffee and go down and I'm there 'til about 7:00 p.m., when I come out all bleary-eyed and shak- ing! But I'm really enjoying it alot, and it af-

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fords me a little bit of freedom, but with it comes responsibility that I wasn't quite prepared for (laughter)! I've come to appreciate what we do in Rush, where everyone takes on a share of the workload through the course of writing and recording. Here I'm on the line — some days I think it's terrible and other days I think it's great — I'm going through one of those terrible periods right now (howls of laughter)! Tom Cochrane came in, and Sebastian Bach put down a vocal on one song. I'm enjoying it — it's been quite challenging and satisfying so far."

Beginnings

"Initially, I wanted to play classical guitar. I used to bug my parents to get me a guitar and some lessons. But at the time, it was difficult; guitars were expensive, lessons were expensive — so they got me a cheap little Kent guitar. It was eight dollars and the strings were surplus Bell Canada wire and they sat as tall as telephone poles off the neck! Then I got a Kenora electric guitar and by that time, I was getting into other kinds of music — Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Clapton, Beck. When Zeppelin came out, that was my next big shift. Jimmy Page was a long-time favourite of mine. His playing sounded so cool and so hip for the time. It was big, heavy and macho — it was sexy in a lot of ways. The fact that it was a trio with a singer made me think, 'hey, I could do this'... or at least I could try!

"Cream got us practicing and wanting to become better. Ged and me would get together

every day after school and learn 'Crossroads' and 'Spoonful', things like that. Later, we shifted towards the British progressive stuff. It wasn't music we wanted to play, but we really enjoyed listening to it because it was very sophisticated to our ears at the time.

"Once we started touring on a big scale, we started to focus on what we were doing, developing our own sound and ideas about writing and how we could be different. By the time we got to *A Farewell To Kings*, we were trying a lot of different things — 'Cygnus XI', for example — the tone on that album and the variety on it."

Writing

"Geddy and I book a local studio that's quite comfortable. We'll set up and work in our little nook while Neil writes lyrics in the main house. We get together before dinner and discuss direction and how things are going. This will go on five days a week, with weekends off. We're creatures of habit; the mechanics of our writing style haven't changed in years. The whole availability of digital recording in a compact mode has made things much easier, as well as being able to lift and use things that you do at the demo stage at the final stage. On the last couple of records, we've probably used 25-30% of the guitar stuff from demos — most of my solos, in fact. We'll run a track of SMPTE and fly them in. We'll become very used to the solo I've done at the demo stage and it becomes... THE SOLO. Quite often, Neil starts to work his drum patterns around the solo, putting in little accents and things — so it's sometimes something that has to stay by necessity."

Rhythm Work

"In the pre-synth days, I thought that the problem with a three-piece was that the sound wasn't full enough, and I knew that it was basically down to me. I experimented with a more suspended feel so that there was an illusion of two guitars. When the chorus effect became available, I fell in love with it and had a fairly long love affair with it. It gave me that detuned kind of width that I had always heard.

"Pete Townshend was a terrific influence because of his strumming ability and his selection of chords and how he used them. He could get a tone that was on the lighter side of heavy, but was always very tough and masculine. I learned that there was a real quality to rhythm playing and really tried to develop that."

Hendrix

"He was such a terrific influence on music, let alone guitar. Here's a young teen listening to the Beach Boys and the British bands that were around; suddenly Hendrix came, and when he said, 'you'll never hear surf music again' he meant it! We played 'Fire' and 'Foxy Lady' in the first incarnation of Rush, which started back in 1968."

Woodshedding

"I'd come home from school and the first thing I would do was play guitar until dinner, have dinner, play more guitar and then do my homework for five minutes, and then play my guitar until I went to bed. I did this every day, and just couldn't play enough. For a year and a half, I studied classical guitar with Elliot Goldner, who had studied with Eli Kassner. He had a motor-

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cycle accident, so we fell out of the pattern of lessons, although I tried to practice as much as I could. This all ended when we started playing bars alot.

"When we started touring, our schedule was pretty heavy, so we'd do soundcheck if we were lucky enough to get it and then I'd sit in the dressing room and play until we went on. I did that for years. I became a little more regimented later on, where I would set aside at least 45 minutes before the show to warm up, and I did that for years. Over the past few years, I've cut that back a bit. It's become more of a dream that I've set on the backburner, that one day I would start taking classical lessons again and try to pick it up. I enjoy playing it, I like the discipline of it, but I'm not a really disciplined person, so I have to get a good hard kick in the pants to get me going with that."

The Most Important Thing

"It's great to find out the background of other players — what motivates them, what other interests they have. Whenever I meet another guitarist, I like to get to know them as a person just to find out where their playing comes from. Eric Johnson was a great example. He played with us a couple of tours ago and we got to know each other. We're a year apart, our birthdays are very close, and there are certain similarities to our character. When I listen to him play, there's structure and intricacy — he's very fluid and accurate, which is a tough combination. When I met him, I found him to be a gentle soul with a really good heart. There's a connection in his heart and soul that enables him to play the way he plays; when I listen to him play I get a very clear picture of him as a person, and that's a great thing to convey."

"This last year has been a very reflective time for me. When I look back on my career, I think that I have reflected my personality and the way I am as a person."

MIKE KENEALLY

Talk about being the man for the job! Mike spent his formative years in San Diego learning the entire Frank Zappa. Little did he know that in a few short years, he would be playing guitar and keyboards for the man himself. With the release of *Hat* in 1992 and *Boil That Dust Speck* in 1994, Mike has established himself as a cutting edge writer and instrumentalist. He is currently working with Dweezil and Ahmet Zappa's band, 2, as well as his own project, *Beer For Dolphins*.

Gear

"My main guitar is a Fender Eric Clapton Signature Stratocaster. Others include a Telecaster '53 reissue, a Heartfield Talon, a Fernandes Sustainer, a Duotone, a Stephens LJ which came out of the Fender Custom Shop, a couple of Heartfield RR's and a Washburn acoustic/electric that's on loan from Dweezil. Onstage, the amp setup is a Rivera 2x12 100 watt combo and a Fender Blues Deluxe, which I run simultaneously. I use SansAmps a lot in the studio; *Hat* was done entirely with SansAmps. On *Boil That Dust Speck* I used them in tandem with amplifiers."

"Effects are bull-headedly not state-of-the-art. I've got this pedal board that is a modular Korg thing. It's got four tiny spaces that you can plug various effects into — I've got a flanger, chorus, EQ and compressor in there. I also use a CryBaby Wah Wah and a volume pedal."



Beginnings

"The Beatles got me into it. My sister was very into them during the heat of Beatlemania. She had all the records and I would play them when she wasn't home. For my seventh birthday, my parents bought me a little organ that was about the size of a slightly large shoe. In 1970 I heard Frank Zappa for the first time and was starting to get antsy about getting a guitar. I got an acoustic and started figuring out Beatles and Frank stuff."

"I perceived in both of them a high quality of songwriting and a really singular vision. I saw excellence in both cases. Specifically from Frank, I was getting the element of humour; I was a maniacal little kid with a weird sense of humour that wasn't being reflected in popular entertainment at the time, beyond *Mad* magazine. He was unique and unaffected by anybody else's ideas about what a popular music group should be doing."

"Absorbing is everything, and it's a years-long process. I had a few years of keyboard lessons, but I've never had a guitar lesson, so anything that I know about guitar technique is from trial and error. The fact that I was listening to Frank and other progressive music helped make the complex rhythmic patterns involved very second nature to me; before I could identify something as being in 17/8, I could tap my foot to it. When I started composing, it wasn't difficult to apply the stuff to my own music."

"When I was learning 'The Black Page' and stuff, it wasn't by writing it down; it was by listening to the record over and over and figuring it out. The fact that I have developed my ear that strongly has put me in good stead with what I do and what I've done with the Zappa family. With Frank, none of the material we were doing was charted, so you had to have a good ear and quick pattern recognition. His melodies were very non-linear, so pattern recognition means being able to hear a sequence of notes that don't sound the least bit natural, and being able to grasp them right away through having a good ear. Having approached

the music as a fan, Frank could name any of his songs and I'd be able to play it for him. I developed myself in kind of a peculiar way, but happened to end up in a job situation where it was very appropriate (laughs)."

Songwriting

"One way I like to compose is by improvising something onto a piece of tape, and then orchestrating that initial improvisation. There is no formula; it is completely arbitrary and subject to my whim. There are endless combinations of chords and melodies and things that I can do at this point, and it's just a question of what am I going to do? Is it going to be major or minor? Is it going to be some perverse, wide harmony or something really tight? Is it going to be three notes a half tone apart from one another? It's just a series of choices for the hundreds of notes in that song."

"I rarely write out charts. Writing music on a piece of paper is torture for me, but I won't deny it if someone really needs it. I'll do the demo at home and then make tapes and give them to the drummer and the bass player and they take it home and learn it. We rehearse it in the garage as a three-piece and work out changes until it starts to flow smoothly. Then we go into the studio with the goal of getting a good bass and drum performance. Then I take that and start recording all the guitars and keyboards on top of it. There's a lot of freedom at this stage, because if I have an idea, I can do it myself."

"Occasionally I will compose on a piece of paper; other times it will be something that is just built up on tape. We just put down a basic track of rhythmic patterns and then orchestrate and overdub on that. We can play in unison, use counter-rhythms, or do arrhythmic effects."

Woodshedding

"Since I didn't develop the ability to sight-read, I had to develop an ear in order to survive. You just have to listen to records and figure out what's on the records. Set a high standard for yourself and don't settle for something that sounds pretty close. CDs allow you to hear just a couple of notes and press pause. Even the weirdest, most insane, fast, illogical-sounding melodies can be listened to a couple of notes at a time and be figured out. It just takes diligence, time and a lot of patience."

"I found I was dissatisfied if I felt I was doing a half-assed job of something. I would set tasks for myself when I was learning these songs off records. My sense of satisfaction was only achieved when I had learned that piece of music. Through setting these goals, I got the memory thing happening and the ears thing happening, and that's something that just doesn't go away. I guess I was fortunate that when I was young, my idea of fun was learning how to play 'The Black Page' on guitar."

Vibrato

"What I like about vibrato is how many million ways you can shake a note. When I hear someone doing that wide modern rock vibrato consistently, it leaves me cold. It works if you do it sparingly. My development here is very independent; I guess I'd feel like a dope if I was doing research into vibrato. It's like learning to talk, and I feel that it's something that I really have to work out on my own."

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