





WORKING CLASS HERO

Joe Bonamassa Tells How Loud Amps, Heavy Strings, and Hard Work Created His Best Record Ever

BY MATT BLACKETT

AT A GUITAR MAGAZINE, YOU GET A LOT OF PARENTS PUSHING a lot of would-be guitar star kids in your face—children not even in their teens who can play a Satriani tune or a Stevie Ray Vaughan solo “note-for-note” (they always say that). Despite the fact that some of these kids actually can play, it’s very rare for any of them to rise above the level of a trained monkey. They know the notes, but they get very little of what’s behind the notes: the sound, the personality, the soul. And most of them never do, because if they did, we would know about them.

One promising young kid who somehow managed to run the gauntlet of the music biz while getting his chops, tone, and tunes together is on our cover this month. Joe Bonamassa was one of those youngsters who could blaze through an SRV tune when he was 11. He possessed technique and knowledge that so belied his youth that it was only natural that if people didn’t curse him with the dreaded label of “The Next Stevie Ray,” they would at least burden him with the “child prodigy” tag that dragged down so many of his contemporaries.

When the discussion turns to the idea that he was some sort of wunderkind, Bonamassa

gets thoughtful. “As far as me being a prodigy,” he says, “I listen back now to myself when I was a kid, and I think I was on the line between being a prodigy and just being good for my age. There were times when I was really good and I excelled and there were times when I was pretty bad.”

If he was ever pretty bad, B.B. King didn’t see it. King talked about Bonamassa being the kind of one-in-a-million talent that would be “legendary before he’s 25.” Another guy who managed to catch some of Bonamassa’s good days was Danny Gatton, who saw such a unique artist that he took a 12-year old kid under his

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK GOULD

wing and out on the road, providing lessons and advice. The guidance Bonamassa got from these two kingpins, along with jam sessions with a who's-who of blues gods, spurred him on to practice his ass off, study his music history, get his sound together, and make a go of it.

Bonamassa is more right than he knows when he says he's good for his age. That was true when he was 11 and it's even truer now. Even though he's just in his 30s, he's been gigging for 20 years and he has the depth and power in his playing of someone with a lot more miles on him. He's an old soul, and that comes through in his bends, vibrato, singing voice, and note choices, which—with each passing year—get more restrained and refined.

Bonamassa is also good for his age in the sense that he's good for his era. He embodies a refreshing work ethic and outlook on life that says no matter how fortunate you are, how many breaks you're given, or how much god-given talent you possess, it doesn't mean you don't have to work at it. He knows there is no free lunch (despite the fact that B.B. King once gave him half of his sandwich). He's a dude who is willing to work for a living. He's not chasing fame or glitz or glam.

He wants to get a good sound, take a good solo, and hopefully make people happy along the way.

His formula is paying off. He has worked with celebrated producers Tom Dowd (Coltrane, Cream, Clapton, Allmans, etc) and Kevin Shirley (Black Crowes, Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin). His last two albums have debuted at number one on the *Billboard* blues chart. He has won *GP*'s Readers' Poll award for Best Blues Guitarist two years running, famously tying none other than Buddy Guy one of those years. His tours have gotten stronger every year, although he still prefers the B.B. King-approved theater circuit to stadiums. It makes perfect sense that Bonamassa's new record would be called *The Ballad of John Henry* [J&R Adventures], because Bonamassa is a modern-day working-class hero. Conducting this interview from the very bedroom in upstate New York where he learned how to play guitar at the age of four, Bonamassa obviously has not forgotten where he came from. He's good for his age. He's good for this age.

Lots of guys can play good blues in a bar, but very few can make a studio blues record that has 1/10th of that energy or vibe. How do you pull it off?

It is very difficult to capture that energy in a studio. The studio tends to be a very sterile environment by design. Every track is separated. You get perfect separation of the toms, the kick and the snare, perfect separation between the guitar and the bass, and obviously the vocal. And that's not really what blues music sounds like. There are people out there who believe that what I play is not blues, but think about blues-based music, like Jeff Beck's *Truth*, *Tons of Sobs* by Free, *Led Zeppelin I*, *The Hard Road* by John Mayall's Bluesbreakers with Peter Green, the "Beano" album. These are my favorite albums of all time in the blues-rock genre and they all have this one common trait: Everything melts together. The drums melt into the bass, the bass and drums melt into the guitar, the vocal is panned to one side with the reverb return on the other. To Kevin Shirley's credit, he allows for all that. Kevin deserves most of the credit on these albums. He's the guy who spearheads the vision, takes me out of my comfort zone, and forces me to play different stuff. He also engineers the whole thing so that it has the sound of a live band in a room, but is separated enough that it doesn't sound lo-fi. So, that's my secret: I hire a guy named Kevin Shirley.



1958 Gibson
ES-140T



1950 Gibson ES-5



1961 Guild X-375



Early-'60s Airline



1953 Hoyer
Regent

Joe Bonamassa

COVER STORY





BONAMASSA'S LIVE RIG

AX Gibson Inspired by Joe Bonamassa Les Paul.

RACK (top to bottom) Monster Power conditioner, Solid State Logic XLogic Alpha Channel (for acoustic), Peterson VS-R Strobe Rack tuner, Electro-Voice wireless unit, drawer with Keeley-modded Boss DD-3 delay, Boss RV-5 reverb, T.C. Electronic chorus, Diaz Vibramaster.

AMPS (left side) Van Weelden Twinkle Land, Carol Ann JB-100, (right side) Category 5 JB Custom, Marshall Silver Jubilee. Cabs—Mojo Musical Supply 4x12s perched atop Auralex

PEDALBOARD (top row, left to right)—Voodoo Lab Pedal Power (2), Whirlwind Selector, Fulltone tremolo; (bottom row, left to right) Boss DD-3 delay, Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer, Gaspeds Carb, Custom Dunlop Fuzz Face (originally made for Eric Johnson), Lehle 1@3 A/B/C box, Vox wah.



The *Ballad of John Henry* has a real depth to it, not just in the playing but in the singing too. What do you attribute that to?

I went through some personal problems this year at home, and this record is more autobiographical than my past work, which I think is a good thing. I've always been shy about exposing too much of my own life on albums. This time, I just threw that out the window and wrote about true events. I used to get really indignant as a kid when people would say that I was too young to play the blues. I'd say, "No I'm not! My heart's been broken too!" But now, at 31, after having gone through some more years of living, I know that there's a sound that comes from experience, from being in the world a little bit. Hopefully I'll sound even deeper when I'm 51. We'll see.

How did you create the tone that opens the record on the title track?

That was my live rig: a Marshall Silver Jubilee, a Category 5 Super Lead-type of amp, a Two-Rock, and a Carol Ann JB-100, which is basically a big clean amp. We set up a couple of room mics, four mics on the amps, and

I just hit a big dropped-*D D* chord with a wah pedal and a Fulltone tremolo. The main rhythm tone is an Ernie Ball John Petrucci baritone. It's a strange choice for my style of playing, but these are fantastic guitars. I think people tune them down to *B* with lighter strings, but we tune them to *C* and put heavy strings on them and they sound fantastic. It's almost like a Danelectro tone.

When the Dobro comes in at 0:45, there's a spooky little part that sounds like harmonics.

That's rhythm guitar underneath the Dobro. Kevin grabs bits and pieces from different takes and he does a lot of this stuff without telling me. He puts these little textures in the songs. He might take something from the end of the song and put it in the verse. It's not necessarily something I played right in that spot. We talk about this a lot. We make records for people who buy songs off of iTunes, but we also make records for the audiophiles, who buy them on vinyl and spin them on really expensive systems with \$2,000 headphones. We make sure we put in these little interesting things underneath what you'll hear on computer speakers.

Your slide solo in "The Ballad of John Henry" takes the song to an all-new place. How did that come together? Are you in standard tuning?

It's standard, but down two full-steps to *C*. Tom Dowd used to tell me that I would cheat because I play slide in open tunings. Over the years I've forced myself to play more in standard. When we cut that lead, I was just going to play a regular solo, but then I happened to see a slide sitting on a music stand. I grabbed it and went for it, and I think it has a cooler texture than if I had just done my normal blazing over the top of it. That's the cool thing about how we record. We do most of it live, and you're reacting the way you would in a gig situation. It feels more like you're playing in a venue than a studio, which is good.

Your lead tone on "Jockey Full of Bourbon" sounds like it has a lot of room on it. Is that the same rig?

No. I had a bunch of my old amps in my folks' basement—probably 15 or so: my blond Bassman, a blond Tremolux, old Vibroluxes, etc. We shipped them out to California and I started setting them up. The



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only two that still functioned after 15 years in the basement were the Bassman and the Tremolux. I hooked them up and they sounded great with a Les Paul. I turned the amps up to 9 and miked them with Sennheiser 421 room mics and a couple of Shure SM57s and Beyer condensers on the cabs. All of a sudden this massive tone came out of the control room monitors. I ran those with a tube Echoplex and an Arion chorus pedal.

The tone doesn't sound very chorused.

This company called Xotic Effects sent me this thing called an X-Blender, which is an effects loop for amps that don't have loops. It's got controls for bass, mid, treble, and overall volume. So I ran the tube Echoplex and the chorus through this external loop and blended them in subtly. You don't really hear the chorus, but it added this low end because you can EQ the loop, which EQs the overall sound. So the bottom end, delay, and chorus were kind of melting into the overall sound, giving it this bigness and dimension without an over-chorused sound.

How did you get the boxier tone that's on "Story of a Quarryman"?

That's the same rig. Once we got the two Fender amps working, I used them exclusively for the rest of the sessions, which included the songs "Story of a Quarryman," "Jockey Full of Bourbon," "Happier Times," and "Last Kiss." Getting those amps working, though, wasn't easy. There were times where you would have to walk into the amp room, hit them on the top to get them to stop crackling, and then cut the track. I had to leave them on standby overnight, to just run some current through them. Basically, the first half of the record was cut with my live rig. Then we discovered this great tone with the Fenders and the room mics and we used it for the second half.

Was that a Les Paul?

It was. I have a couple hundred guitars, but I'm so proud of these Gibson Inspired by Joe Bonamassa Les Pauls that I primarily used them on the whole record. I don't plan on breeding, and these goldtops are like my children. I played some other guitars. I used an ES-335, I played an ES-175 on a couple of things, to double certain parts for a different texture so it's not just the midrange-y, wall of Les Paul sound. I also played a Gibson Lucille, but no Strats or Teles on this record. They were there, but they just sat there. There was no reason other than the fact that the goldtop sounded so good, and the sound we were going for on the record was somewhat bigger than what the Fend-

ers were willing to give. I was in a Les Paul frame of mind. I've really gotten to where I can finesse the Les Paul. If I want a nice clean sound, I can get that by working the volume and tone controls. Then, if I need a solo tone, I can turn up and it's there.

How do you set the controls on your Les Pauls?

The switch is in the middle and it's 75 percent lead pickup and 25 percent rhythm pickup. It doesn't do that two-pickup thing, the Steve Cropper sound. This gives you more lead pickup, but it mellows out the sound just a bit so it has a different tone.

If I didn't know better, I'd say the harmonics in "Funkier than a Mosquito's Tweeter" were a nod to Mr. Edward Van Halen.

That was a nod to Van Halen. I always liked his playing, but I was more into the English guys. It took me until later to really appreciate how good he was. As I got more into rock, I listened to him some more and saw that he always came back to the blues in a weird way. His voicing was very bluesy. That song was also a nod to Jeff Beck. I hooked up what I call my Jeff Beck rig—not that he owned it—but this is Jeff Beck circa 1972. A 50-watt Marshall head, which was actually a Park 75, and an old basket-weave cabinet. I plugged into a Colorsound Tonebender (which I bought in a shop in Manchester England), a wah pedal, and a Les Paul. It's more like his *Rough and Ready*-era rig.

Do you have a favorite tone on your new record?

The solo tone on "Happier Times." It's the most expressive and the warmest, and it's the closest to the sound that I always envision in my head. Everybody has a sound in their head. Achieving it is always a work in progress, at least for me. When I hear that song, it has the right kind of complex mids that I like, but it's bright—not too dark like a jazz tone. It also has a big bottom end. That tone makes the solo very expressive and heartfelt. I think some of that is in the hands, and some is in the way I approached the solo. It's also the way the amps happened to be on that particular day. That was my live rig.

Has your live rig changed since you made the record?

It has changed subtly. I'm using one Marshall Silver Jubilee. There's also a Category 5 Joe Bonamassa model. Those guys down in Texas at Category 5 wanted to build me an amp, and so I said, "Okay—build me a 1968 Marshall Super Lead with a Dumble mid boost." About six months later this amp shows up and it's exactly what I envisioned. It's got that Billy Gibbons Super Lead tone, but with a mid boost to bring it forward. It



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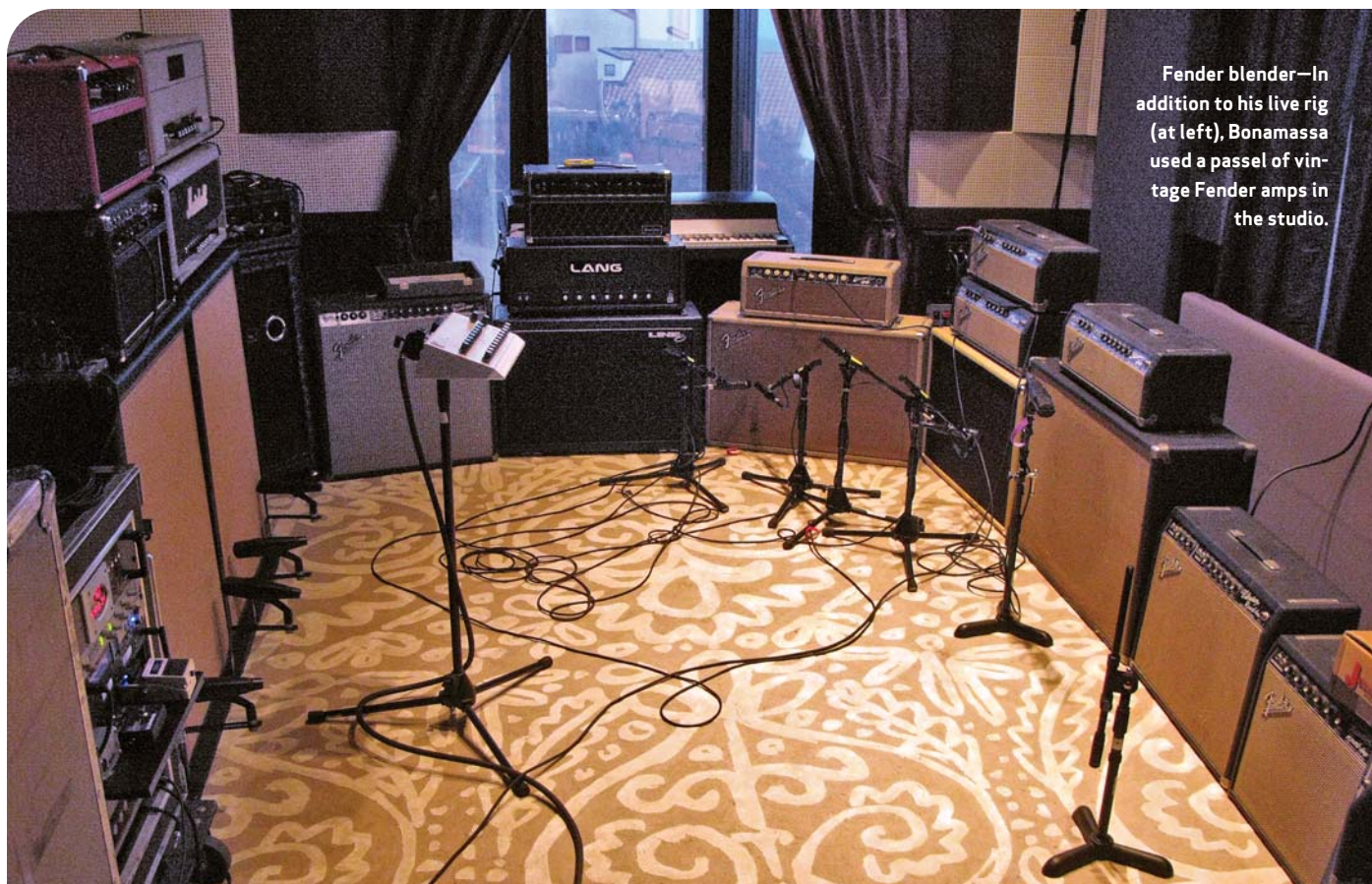
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Fender blender—In addition to his live rig (at left), Bonamassa used a passel of vintage Fender amps in the studio.

sounds fantastic. I have a Carol Ann JB-100. It has four 6L6s, it's a 100-watt amp, and I use it for a lead tone. It's a really nice midrange amp. There's not a lot of top or a lot of bottom, but it's really complex in the mids and blends well with the Silver Jubilee. I sometimes switch the Carol Ann out with a Two-Rock Custom Signature Reverb. Finally, I just got my second Van Weelden Twinkle Land. I use that for my semi-distorted clean thing, blending it with the Marshall.

And there are two amps on at once?

There are two heads on at any one time, and the Silver Jubilee is always on. The Carol Ann and the Marshall is one tone. The Marshall and the Category 5 is another tone, etc. The oversized 4x12 cabs I use are split vertically so it's two 12s for each head. Each pair of 12s is baffled and sealed separately. It's like having 4 2x12 cabs without having to lug all those 2x12s.

Do you set the controls the same way every night?

I set them the exact same way every night and there are two reasons. I use these things called Auralex Great Grammas, which are studio-designed foam pads that the amps sit on. You put your 4x12s on them to decouple them

from the stage. You don't get the rumble from the stage, which is sometimes hollow, sometimes not. It varies every day. The Great Grammas make it much more consistent by taking the stage out of the equation. I also use these shields in front of my cabs—angled Plexiglas baffles that are shaped like an "M." The Plexiglas has to have angles in it. If you just use straight Plexiglas across the front, it's going to sound very harsh and it's not going to do much good at all. So I set my amps the same every night because they're always in their own little environment. The tone and the volume don't vary from room to room.

Are certain amp combinations louder than others?

The volume differences are not that great. There are *perceived* volume differences because some amps have more midrange than others. Some amps have more gain than others, and some have more or less top end. The more midrange-y amps come out forward more. Here's the deal: The Van Weelden and the Carol Ann are 6L6, Fender-based circuits. The Marshall and the Category 5 are Marshall-based circuits. The Marshall

types will break up sooner than the Fender types. I like the tone you get by combining them, because you get all the articulation from the Fender type and then you get all the saturation you need for solos from the Marshall. You get the best of both worlds.

What are some examples of a good multi-amp rig, and what mistakes do players commonly make?

Eric Johnson is certainly an example of a guy who got it right. He had three separate rigs: He had a clean rig, he had a semi-distorted rig where he used the Dumble Steel String Singer, and he had his Marshall rig, and he would switch between the three. The people who get it wrong are the ones who think that because they have an A/B box they have a multi-amp rig. It's not that simple. You've gotta get your phasing correct. You have to make sure the ground is proper. If you plugged in my four heads with normal three-pronged cable, it would buzz like crazy. You have to go through the rig with ground lifters and painstakingly figure out what to lift and what not to lift to get it as quiet as possible. Speaker choice is also critical, because the key is to use the amps for different frequencies. I use EV EVM-12Ls because

they're true—no extra coloration, no extra overdrive. Whatever the amp gives you, the EV spits out. If I'm running a lot of mids on the amp, the EV is going to give me those mids. The other pitfall is people just use two of the same amp in stereo, and that to me is not a multi-amp setup. That's just twice the power. Another problem is a *lack* of power. People are constantly showing up with amps that are 18 watts, 20 watts, maybe 50 watts, and they say, "My 50 watts will beat that Jubilee's 100 watts." Well, I'll take that Pepsi challenge any day. Maybe you're going to get close in perceived volume, but in clean headroom—no way. You have no clean headroom. The amp's collapsing before you even begin. It takes a lot of power to drive the mids the way they need to be driven. Keeping the low end tight takes a lot of power. That's why I use 100-watt amps, and that's why I use amps with different frequency bands.

Do you ever like playing through just one amp?

I'm not a firm believer in one amp being able to do it all. Every manufacturer has what they think is the ultimate amp—I think I saw that they're up to six channels now.

Who needs six channels and 50 knobs? I walk up to an amp like that and think, "I don't even know how to turn this thing on, let alone set it so it will work." There are some exceptions. You plug into an old Marshall Super Lead, put a reverb on it, and it's just magic.

Go back to your first album. What do you hear in your playing and what do you hear in your tone when you spin that record now?

I know people really dig that album. It's one of my biggest thrills in life and one of my biggest regrets at the same time. The biggest thrill was that I got to work with Tom Dowd, who was like a father to me and really set the tone for the rest of my career. My biggest regret was that I didn't have the skills at the time that were worthy of working with a guy like him. When I listen to it, I can tell that I didn't have my rig together. I hear a kid who was still trying to find himself and his sound, just plugging anything into anything with no idea of how it worked. I was using two Marshalls and it was more volume and less sound. You can put amps in a room and get really loud and you think it sounds

big, but when you mic it up, it sounds really small. I never got that concept back then. I didn't get it until I started really listening to what each amp was doing. I've learned a lot since that album, and that's what I hear when I listen to it. I cringe a little bit with the vocals, too. I wasn't that great of a singer. I wish I could make that album now. I think I could do a lot better and I could achieve more of the stuff I would want to hear.

For your fans, that record is a crucial document of where you were as a musician, warts and all.

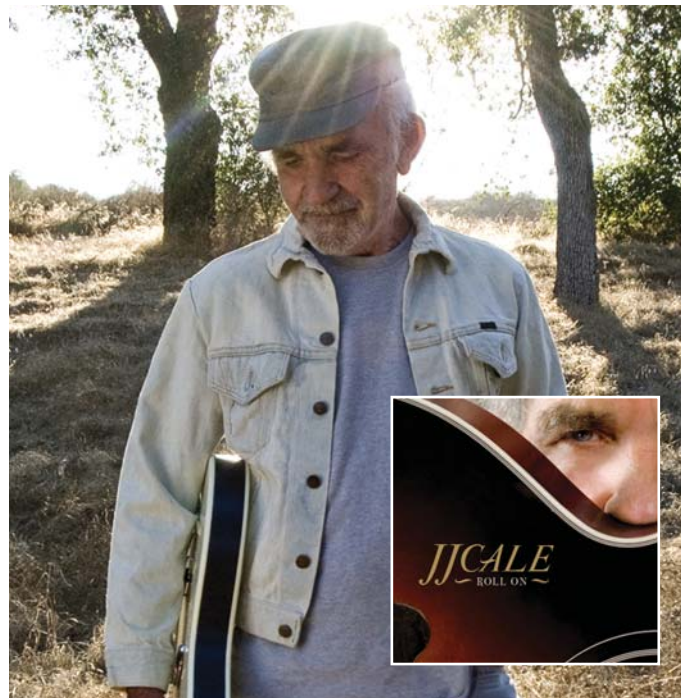
I used to wonder why people might like it over some things that I think are better, but I've learned that there's a certain charm in the struggle. When I hear my early work, I hear the struggle to get the notes out, to sing the parts, and the struggle of writing the tunes. I think that's why some people are drawn to it: It's real. I've always toyed with redoing the vocals on that whole album, but I haven't because people do like it. I read an interview with Clapton where he said he hates the way he sounded with John Mayall. I think, "How can you hate that? You were on fire!" But that wasn't what he envisioned



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for himself. That's just where he was in 1966. The grass is always greener for all guitarists.

When the great players no longer have to struggle, it's usually bad for their music.

It really is an interesting concept. For an artist, there's the struggle to make it, and there's a fire and a hunger that fuels that. Then, if you make it, the challenge is to keep the fire and the hunger that in reality don't exist anymore. The whole reason those players *did* make it is because of that fire. It's a very strange phenomenon. If things get too easy, it definitely translates into recordings and live shows.

Speaking of struggling, do you still string your electrics with .011s?

I do. My electrics and acoustics have the

same gauges: Ernie Balls, .011-.052.

How does using heavier strings on your electrics affect your tone and your technique?

From a tonal standpoint, you get this very nice connection between the wound strings and the unwound strings. The transition between the wound and plain strings can sometimes get a little strange because you're going from this nice warm and inviting tone with low end to having no low end and a very bright, fretty kind of sound. The .011s give me a smooth transition between the wound strings and the plain strings, so it doesn't sound like you're playing a different guitar. It's very even. I also think that when you're bending the high strings, it gives you a creamier sound that's not as strident. I

think the added mass drives the input of the amp a little more and you get a little more overdrive. That matters more when you're going for natural power amp gain. If you plug into a Boogie Dual Rectifier, there's plenty of gain for everyone and you can use whatever strings you want.

On a technical level, I look at it like this: I'm not a shredder guy. I'm not fast enough to be a shredder guy, but I have shredder *tendencies* that I think get in my way. I have a tendency to put in a million notes and show off to the world, and that's not usually my best solo. So, the .011s keep me from going there all the time. I can ramp up to it but I'm not living there, overplaying all the time.

Tell the story of when you were at a gig as a

kid and some band's guitarist didn't show up.

It was a blues festival in upstate New York that got rained out and moved indoors. One of the bands' guitarists didn't show, so they did this open call on the mic, the classic, "Does anybody play guitar?" My dad asked me if I wanted to go have some fun. I was an adventurous 11-year old, so I went up there and played. The crowd liked it, partly because it was a little kid playing, but I did pretty good. The promoter of the show came up and introduced me to James Cotton. I sat in with James Cotton that day and things started to snowball from there. That year I got to sit in with Duke Robillard, Albert Collins, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. A year later, I'm on stage with B.B. King and Buddy Guy and John Lee Hooker. What a year! I had pretty much run the gamut of blues heavyweights, sharing stages with them. I was completely blown away. And that rained-out blues festival was sort of the beginning of it all.

All that led to you meeting Danny Gatton. What's a good story about him?

He ultimately became my quasi-mentor and guitar teacher for the last four years of his life. For a while there I was like the Mini-Me version of Danny. I had a Tele, I was pudgy, I slicked back my hair. The coolest story is this: I'm sitting in his Winnebago, which is parked outside the Cat Club in New York City. He said, "C'mon kid. I'm gonna give you a guitar lesson." I loved his butterscotch '53 Telecaster. It was perfectly worn and just a perfect guitar. I always wanted to play that, but this time he said, "I'm not going to let you play the Tele. I have another guitar you can play." He goes into the back and brings out Scotty Moore's ES-295—the guitar Scotty recorded "Heartbreak Hotel" and all that stuff on. He said, "Today we play jazz. You're not allowed to play blues." I was nervous because I didn't know anything about jazz. So he starts teaching me these chords and how to walk a bass line, etc. He looked at me and said, "You know kid, you don't know anything about jazz. You don't know anything about rockabilly, you don't know anything about real rock and roll like Buddy Holly, Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps, and Chuck Berry." So here I am, a 13-year old kid sitting in Danny Gatton's Winnebago and suddenly my life went from mono to stereo. A week later, he called and said, "Write these records down." I wrote them down and bought them. It was stuff that influenced me for the rest of my life: Charlie Christian, a guy named Howard Reed who played with Gene Vin-

cent, Merle Travis, James Burton, Doc Watson, and all of a sudden I'm playing jazz, country, and bluegrass. It's hard to quantify Danny's influence on my playing.

Lots of promising guitarists who came up around the same time as you have seen higher highs and lower lows. What's your take on that?

I have this theory called the Sir Edmund Hillary Effect. I would rather be three quarters of the way up the mountain and stay there for 35 years than shoot for the top of the mountain and fail. A lot of people in this genre who make that last leap to see the mountaintop of pop stardom—where they no longer want to play 2000 seaters and want to sell out arenas and get radio—ultimately end up back at base camp. I've seen it with friends back in the '90s. They were in these cult hippie bands and they had a couple of big hits and now they're playing smaller venues than I am. How did that happen? They sold millions of albums. But once you get into the hit business, they want another hit. It's a cruel, fickle business. I'm not in the hit business or even the blues business. I'm in the entertainment business. I've gotten a reputation for putting on a good show, so people don't come to hear one particular song. That freedom is awesome. I'm happy to be at three quarters. I want to do this for the rest of my life. I want to keep making quality records. I never had a radio hit and I probably never will and I'm fine with that. If radio wants to play one of my songs, fine, but there will be no pretense about it.

Have you heard any youngsters that you wanted to take under your wing, to pay it forward for what Danny Gatton and B.B. King did for you?

I've done that with a couple of people. There's a kid in England named Scott McKean. He's really good. He plays a Stratocaster but I don't hold that against him [laughs]. He plays it in a way that's sort of a cross between Doyle Bramhall and Rory Gallagher. Really cool. I like his style, so I let him open a couple of shows. There's a German guy named Hendrik Fleischleiter and he's also really good. My favorite, though, isn't a guitar player at all. He's a harmonica player named L.D. Miller from Indiana. L.D. will be 15 this year, and I feel I can say this with certainty: He's one of the top two or three harmonica players in the world at any age. He plays like John Popper, Little Walter, and James Cotton all in one. He's got the fire and the soul. He's a true prodigy. I've kind of helped him, like Danny helped

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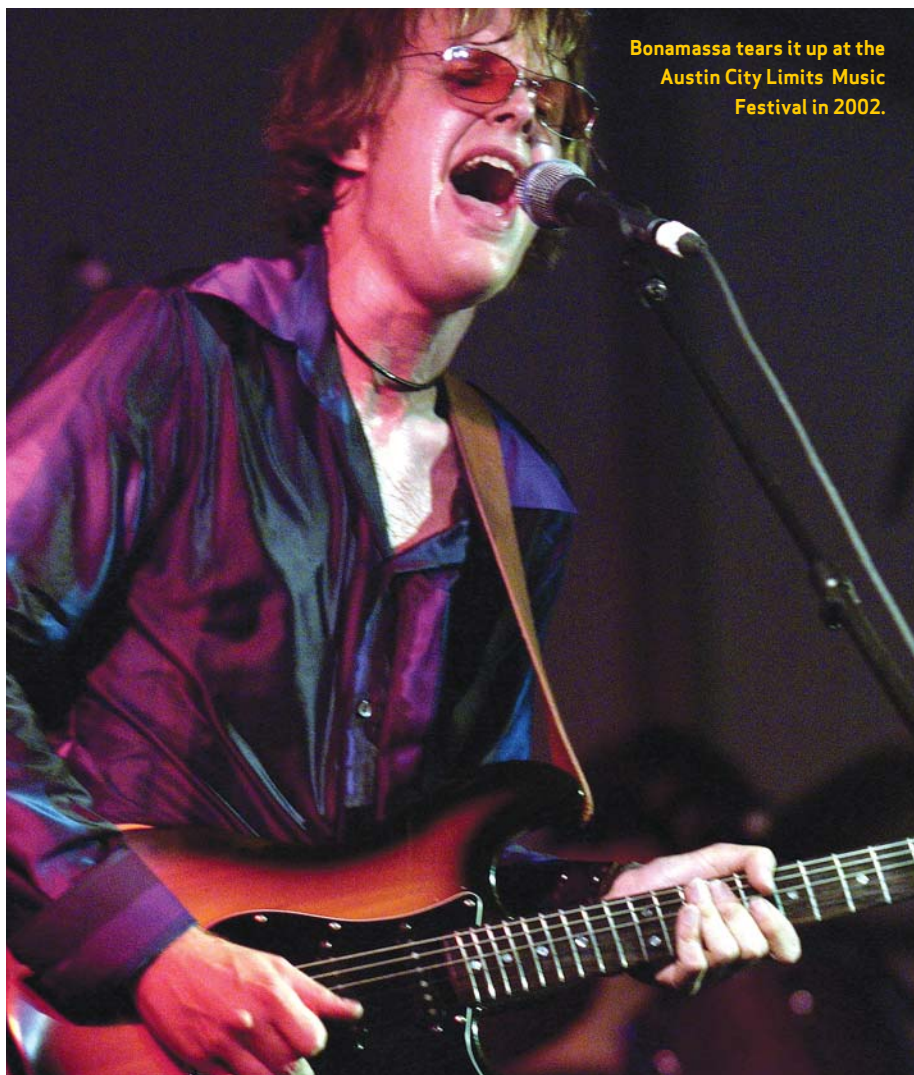
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COVER STORY

Joe Bonamassa



Bonomassa tears it up at the Austin City Limits Music Festival in 2002.

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me. When we go on tour and pick the opening acts, I try to get young kids. I think that's the greatest thing because if there's not a new generation of kids playing this music, there won't be a new generation of fans. And that will ultimately hurt guitar music and roots music in general.

Of all the gigs you've played, is there a moment you can point to where you thought, "That might be the best solo I've ever played"?

A lot of times, when I'm up there thinking that this is the coolest feeling in the world, I listen back to the tapes and it's not as good as I remembered. But there was a time on this last tour. It was in Manchester England, a sold-out show at the Academy One. We were doing "The Great Flood" off the new album. I remember hitting the solo—my band came up with this great arrangement under the solo—and I'm out there on this big stage with perfect lights

and everything. We ended the song and the audience just kind of gasped, and then there was this eruption of applause and I got chills. I really felt like everyone in the audience was feeling the emotion that I was feeling, and vice versa. It was the most perfect moment on a concert stage I've ever had. We have a tape of it, and I won't watch it because I think it's going to look different and not be as cool as I remember it. I really only care if the fans think I played well, though. It's nice to satisfy yourself, but money's tight for people and they're paying good money for tickets. If they think they got their money's worth, I've done my job and we can move on to the next one. When it happens to coincide with when I think I played well, then it's perfect—win win. There are probably four or five gigs out of ten where that happens, and that's not a bad batting average. 🎸