

Review and interview with GuitarGearHeads.com
Daniel Halberg (Principal Partner)

Some time ago, I was sent a new CD (titled "Beggars, Rogues, and Thieves") from Jeff Scheetz and asked to review it as part of our Artist Spotlight. Well...as the gear rolled in - Jeff's CD kinda got lost in my desk drawer until one day I popped it into my CD player. So actually I now owe two apologies - one to Jeff for being slow to review and one to myself for being slow to listen! This CD is a perfect example of great indie rock and blues music missing on modern radio (but that's another rant...)

Even if you don't immediately recognize the name, I bet you have learned a thing or two from Jeff already. He continues to pound out great lessons and articles for Guitar Player and other media - and is one of the key instructors at Truefire.

As I listened to the CD, a bunch of things popped out at me and I fired Jeff off an e-mail. Here are his responses....

GH. I've spend a lot of time with your CD in my car's CD changer. It was really tough to pin down your influences. While listening to your CD, I heard strong vibes reminiscent of Jimmy Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughn. But on a couple of tunes I heard a few grooves that reminded me of the Jeff Healey band and Lenny Kravitz. I could be insane, but I could of sworn I heard a Spin Doctors funk riff in one of those songs. So this is really two questions, a) what are your strongest influences; and b) where'd you pick up all that other crazy stuff?

JS. Well, first off thanks for spending the time with the CD!! I started out playing listening to mostly rock stuff – AC/DC, Rush, Jimi – etc. And then I got into more of the shredder guys like Vai, as well as other stuff like Charlie Parker, B.B. King, so I guess it has been pretty diverse. I listen to a lot of funk stuff as well, so whether it is rock, metal, funk, or blues that I am writing, I really like to have a strong “groove thing” going on. I like so much stuff that I am sure everything will raise its head as an influence sometime.

GH. Your songs are really guitar focused. You are really an awesome guitarist. Did the guitar come naturally to you or did it come with time?

JS. I was not very musical at a young age. I tried to play cornet in school and I was terrible at it and didn’t like it at all. Most people would have said I didn’t have much natural ability I would suppose. But when I started the guitar, it was like I had found my voice. And while it didn’t come easily, I just poured myself into it and that was all I did. So just like with anything, if you put in the time, you get the reward.

GH. I really enjoyed your entire CD but for some reason Track 4 - "You Captivate Me" sounded the most "radio ready" of all your songs. It's got a great slow groove that reminds me a bit of "Los Lonely Boys". What's the story behind that song, and how'd you get that great smooth distortion tone?

JS. Yeah, that song is certainly the most accessible. We had one girl come up to our merchandise table after we played that song and ask our person which CD it was on. Then they said “I have to go to an ATM to get some cash and I will be right back” and she walked out of the club right in the middle of the show to go get money because she had to buy that CD right then!! So it is the one that most people can really relate to. The tone on that one it just my Strat into a Yamaha Soldano head and then into a 69 Marshall 4x12 cab. Real straight forward.

GH. You got some great chops, I can tell you really pay attention to not just speed but also finesse. At about 4:19 on Track 2 - "Longest Night of My Life" you are in your solo and use a technique that results in blistering speed. Give us the secret, what are you doing there?

JS. Well that solo sort of epitomizes how I like to play. It has a clean funk beginning and then does some bluesy riffs and then about the time you mentioned there is a bit of shredding. I get bored with just one thing all the time so I really try to incorporate different styles and techniques into my playing, and if they all come out in the same solo – so be it! But the finesse part is indeed important to me, I strive for actually playing cleanly and saying something musical even if I am playing fast. My favorite players are the ones who blend it all together seamlessly and it all has a flow to it. So back to the question, what am I doing? Well it is just a riff out of a G Dorian scale that is pretty quick. You learn those by starting out really slow and then building up speed. I think on that one I just wanted the end of the solo to kind of explode – and fast is usually good for that! :o)

GH. While we are on secrets, you use some kind of chorus or octave effect at 1:58 on "Longest Night" as well that sounded awesome! What is that?

JS. Yeah, I love that solo – good ear to hear what is going on there! It came out kind of southern sounding. That part is just a doubled guitar and a harmony that I played on it. It was inspired by the fact that my keyboard player when up on the B3 on that section just as the change in the solo came so it fit really nicely in there. I thought it had a real Allman’s feel to it – which is always a good thing! :o)

GH. Track #11 - "Free My Soul" is surely meant as a tribute to the late great Stevie Ray Vaughn. It certainly had the vibe and the power. The groove is reminiscent of a number of SRV tunes but for some reason I heard "Crossfire". Am I dreaming?

JS. Oh it is definitely a SRV feel. I love to do that type of stuff. There are so many guys out there that do the Stevie thing well but that is all they do. It would be fun to do a whole record of that type of thing because I dig it, but I also really like to stretch out and do other things. So this one is a chance to get that big blue groove on! The way I look at it is I, or anyone else can never be Stevie because HE was Stevie – so you have to find yourself and follow your own path and be the best YOU that you can be. So we can occasionally tip the hat to lots of the great players who have gone on before and helped blaze the trail thus far.

GH. Many people don't know how sacred the white buffalo is to Native American peoples. You transition through many styles on Track 12 - "Buffalo Jam", but you start and end with traditional Native American rhythm and flute playing. Where did the idea for this song come from?

JS. I LOVE native American music. I play the 6 hole Native American flute, and it is such a tranquil sound. The title actually came from many trips to Montana and into Yellowstone where there are still decent sized herds of buffalo, or bison – and when they decide to cross the road you get a “buffalo jam” with cars backed up forever. So since this was a jam type of song, a bit of a play on words and there you have it! I love to read about the great bison “jams” of yesteryear when there were herds of over 4 million animals near Dodge City, KS that would stop trains for hours as they passed by. But then greed and stupidity wiped them all out, so this song is inspired a bit by the bison’s legacy.

GH. Our site has guitar players from beginning to experienced. Let's ask two questions for those two poles. What advise can you give the beginning player who is struggling with those first chords? What advise can you give to the player who is trying to get into the industry and make a living out of playing music?

JS. For the beginner, keep your eye on the prize. Don’t worry that it is hard now or that you don’t sound great now – just think that if you keep practicing then you will sound much better in 6 months – and then much, much better in a year! So if you work at it, it will happen! And for the guys trying to make it, keep your eye on the prize! The more you have going on the more valuable you become. Too many players get discouraged because they are only focused on the “making it big” aspect of the biz and then they see guys selling millions of records who can’t play any better than they can. It can be disheartening if you just look at it that way. So you have to do it because you love the music! If there was no chance of EVER making any money, would you still play? If you would then you are doing it for the love of the art, and that is a great reward in itself. So if we can then turn that into a living, so much the better. But prepare yourself – you can’t control who gets the big record deals, but you can control your practice time, having your chops together, working on your songwriting, networking with other players, having your gear in good shape, trying to get gigs playing, teaching, recording etc etc – Focus on what you yourself can change and you will set yourself up to be in a good position if an opportunity should come your way.

GH. Your biggest influence is clearly the blues. Blues are great, but it's so easy to be cliche' for original artists because of the structure. How do you keep your style fresh?

JS. I am not sure I would say that my biggest influence is necessarily the blues as a style of music, but more the concept or the vibe of the blues. I think that it is great that you think my blues playing sounds good enough to sound like my main influence, because the authenticity, the heartfelt aspect of music, the true art – that is what I strive for. And it just so happens that blues has lots of that. So whatever I am playing I try to put that vibe in it. My first several records were guitar instrumental stuff that was not that bluesy, but I like to think I still captured the sense of it being honest and genuine. That is way more important to me when listening to music. That is why the business is so frustrating because of the pure trash that you get on corporate radio. It is all manufactured and stamped out to the point of being lifeless. And then after awhile people don’t know the difference between good art and bad commerce. But when you listen to old blues or jazz recordings, or early celtic or Scottish music, or the early bluegrass that came from there – then you see the “real deal” – but society doesn’t reward art, it rewards celebrity so then we get the pap that we have now. So I just am trying to create art – and hopefully sometimes I am successful at it.

GH. If you were trapped on a desert island - that also happened to have an electrical outlet - and you were only allowed to bring one guitar, one amplifier, and one effect, what would you bring?

JS. I would probably bring my Frankenstrat because it is pretty versatile. A ’96 Deluxe body and a ’93 neck with the rollerball, with Fralin blues specials in the neck and middle and a Fred in the bridge. Then – if I had headphones I would be tempted to bring my POD since it is also versatile, but I really can’t go wrong with my 100 watt Yamaha Soldano head and a 4x12 cab. I don’t use many effects so maybe just my Keeley Compressor, cause it just rocks, or the VHT valvulator – even though it’s not an effect per se – it just makes things sound better! Could I just bring my computer???? :o) Is the island wired for the internet???

GH. I'll part with a quote from Jeff's website. It's from IE magazine and they say “Jeff is a combination of Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray all in one. ‘Beggars, Rogues & Thieves’ sounds like the lost Eric Clapton album. These players are so good it’s almost too much. Although this is not a major label release, it should be!”

Couldn't have said it better myself. Do yourself a favor and check it out!