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Tom Guerra

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Tom Guerra

by Brian M. Owens

Singer-songwriter-guitarist Tom Guerra is a world class musical tour-de-force. Boasting high profile credentials playing with the likes of the Mambo Sons, the Delrays and the Dirty Bones during his esteemed career, Guerra has earned his journeyman status. On his latest solo release, Trampling Out The Vintage, Guerra displays his mastery for songcrafting while giving listeners a healthy dose of his impressive playing and singing. Make no mistake ladies and gentlemen, this is one of the best new records you'll hear all year...

METRONOME: Where are you from?

Tom Guerra: I was born and raised in Hartford, Connecticut.

METRONOME: You're clearly an accomplished music vet. When did you catch the music bug?

My folks were big Beatles fans, so I guess it was always there. The first album that I had was Revolver, which I had my Grandmother buy for me.

METRONOME: Who were some of your early musical influences?

Of course, The Beatles, The Stones and Bob Dylan. As far as guitarists, I loved Mick Taylor, Jeff Beck and Jimi Hendrix, though it wasn't until I first heard Rory Gallagher that I knew what I wanted to do.

METRONOME: What are some of the early bands you played with? Any groups of note?

Up until 1999, I played in Connecticut bands including The Dirty Bones Band, The Easton Bros. Band, Second Son and The Delrays, which all were relatively busy on the club circuit during those days.

In 1999, I formed Mambo Sons with Scott Lawson Pomeroy. Our first album featured the great Rick Derringer, also on guitar. We had about a 15 year run, releasing four albums that were very well received, on Omnicide Records, including a few that charted in Europe.

Our last effort, Heavy Days, was a double album set. For the past 18 years, I have written for Vintage Guitar magazine, so I have been fortunate enough to learn first hand from many of the greats regarding how they choose their instruments, get their tones, how they go about writing, etc. I recently did a show with the great guitarist, Jack Sonni from Dire Straits. That was a gas.

METRONOME: What came more naturally to you, singing or playing the guitar?

I always loved singing, though I was very shy about it. I wanted to sing like Otis Redding, but it came out sounding

like Bob Dylan (laughs). I think it was (producer) Jim Chapdelaine who told me that our styles are formed not only by our influences, but also by our limitations. I think there's a lot of truth in that. I know my many limitations and try to work around them; you have to be creative when you have a five note vocal range (laughs). With that being said, playing the guitar in the style that I play, came pretty natural as well.

METRONOME: Do you play other instruments?

I do, and when I'm writing I typically will demo a song by playing all the instruments to try to get the arrangements together.

METRONOME: Did you ever take formal music lessons?

I have not. I pretty much learned by trial and error. I definitely think that lessons are a great way to get up to speed quickly though, and it amazes me at the level of

technical proficiency some of the young kids I see on YouTube have.

METRONOME: What kind of guitar(s) do you play?

I love all types of old instruments, but my main guitars are older Fender Stratocasters. I think they're the perfect electric guitar, and the one that allows the player's style to come through the most. You look at Richard Thompson, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Holly, Stevie Ray... they all played the same guitar, but all sound vastly different.

METRONOME: How old were you when you wrote your first song?

I wrote my first song when I was a Freshman in high school- so what's that, 14? Looking back on it now, I think I understand what happened. I was always very into visual art, drawing, painting in particular, and took advantage of the art programs in my public schools. After eighth grade, I was sent to a private high

school, which had no real art program to speak of. As such, I started really getting into music as a form of expression. Writing it seemed like a good idea.

METRONOME: How many original songs do you have in your catalog?

I think between the Dirty Bones, Delrays, the four Mambo Sons albums, my two solo records and the stuff I've done for other people, I have ninety or so copyrights.

METRONOME: You just released an outstanding new album called Trampling Out The Vintage. What inspired the name?

The name is from the first verse of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" - "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of The Lord / He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored."

It's a play on words since the album was recorded with a bunch of vintage guitars and amps that I beat around in the process (laughs).

METRONOME: How many songs are on the recording?

There are ten songs.

METRONOME: Are they all original and did you write them yourself or did you co-write with someone else?

I wrote all the originals myself, and this is the first album where I also covered other artists' songs, not for a lack of songs, but because I wanted to interpret someone else's music in a certain way. One of the covers, is "Pay in Blood," written by Bob Dylan for his recent Tempest album. The first time I heard it, I got real excited about doing it in a rock and roll arrangement, using open G tuning.

Bob's songs are a great blueprint for interpretation. So I cut it, and it sounded like a demo until I added that Hammond organ to it. I played something that I envisioned Al Kooper might have played and it became the glue that holds that track together.

It's funny, I was taking a long ride the other day and put Tempest on, and I had honestly forgotten what the original version sounded like when it came on. I didn't realize I had changed it that much.

The other cover is a rocked up version of Mann / Weil's "Make Your Own Kind of Music," made popular by Mama Cass.

METRONOME: Where did you record the CD?

I recorded Trampling at my home studio.

METRONOME: How long did it take to record from start to finish?

It took about 10 months, from the first demos through the finished songs.



METRONOME: Did you produce the record?

Yes, I recorded, mixed and produced the record. Mastering was done by Massive in Chicago.

METRONOME: Who else played with you on the album?

Trampling features Kenny Aaronson on bass, Mike Kosacek on drums, and Morgan Fisher and Matt Zeiner on keyboards.

METRONOME: How did you meet Kenny?

I've known Kenny for twenty something years. He played bass on the first Mambo Sons albums and I always enjoy our chats.

METRONOME: Who is Morgan Fisher and how did you meet?

Morgan Fisher is probably best known for his keyboard work with Mott the Hoople and Queen. His presence gave the proceedings a certain level of British class. He's a great player.

METRONOME: Your drummer Mike Kosacek was outstanding on the album. How did you meet him?

He'll be glad to hear that. Mike Kosacek is a drummer from Austin, Texas. He owns a studio down there. He's great to work with. Besides being a great drummer, he and I have a really good communication about what the song calls for.

METRONOME: Can you tell me a little about your Hammond player, Matt Zeiner?

Matt Zeiner is probably best known for his work with Dickey Betts. I've always been wowed by Matt's playing, regardless of who he is playing with - he's an absolute monster. We first jammed about 20 years ago and he blew me away. Anytime I ask him to play on something, I almost have to apologize to him for the simplicity of my music, but he always brings some great ideas to the table.

METRONOME: I dug the jangly Traveling Wilburys inspired, "Tell The World." Can you tell me about the making of that song?

We just shot a video for that song. It's funny, you're the second person this week that told me that it is "Wilbury-esque." That song was important because it got Kenny onboard. I was talking to him last winter and told him that I'd just written a little Byrds-like pop tune and he said he'd love to have a go at it. What he gave me was so beautiful, it was like a little song within a song. He ended up making some great contributions to the rest of the album.

Regarding the song, it is about a guy who finally finds happiness in a relationship, but feels guilty being happy when all he sees on TV is a world gone mad. It features a 12-string electric to give it that jingle-jangle feel.

METRONOME: "BYOB" is a full tilt rocker that features some fierce guitar work by you. That must have been a lot of fun to record?

That was a blast to record and has



some of my favorite guitar sounds on the record. The funny thing about that track is when we went to track it, I had the worst cold that I've had in years, and was very hoarse. I recorded the vocal and thought "Oh, I'll fix that when I feel better." I got used to the rougher sound of it and ended up really liking the sound of the vocal, so I kept that first take.

The song is about the NYC rock scene in the 1970's and the great parties that were had. That's why I name-checked David Johansen, Arthur Killer Kane, Syl Sylvain, The Planets and the New York

Dolls. It's how I imagined those days to be.

METRONOME: You transformed "Make Your Own Kind of Music" into a superb pop-rocker. Does it hold any introspection for you?

I've always loved that track ever since I was a kid when I saw Mama Cass perform it on the Sammy Davis Jr. show one night. I could absolutely relate to the message, as that's what I always wanted to do. When I went solo after the Mambo Sons went on hiatus, I knew that to forge ahead, I'd be doing things on my own. I guess

it's a kind of declaration of independence, after working for so many years with other people.

METRONOME: "Grow On Your Own" had a trippy, tremolo-drenched vibe. How did you come up with that one?

That one has the greatest dynamic range, from all-out heavy distorted power chords to the mellow, pretty piano played by Morgan. "Grow" is about a lady that jumps from relationship to relationship without even getting to know herself and what she wants out of life.

METRONOME: Do you have any other CDs out under your name?

In 2014, I did my first solo album, All of the Above. That too is a rock and roll song-based record.

METRONOME: I heard hints of Delbert McClinton and Robben Ford in your singing and playing. How would you describe your sound to someone who has never heard you before?

Oh, I'm sure you did. They are great at what they do and I have seen both of them live. I think there is a huge difference between rock vs. rock and roll, as I think the latter has roots that can be traced all the way through Sun Studios to the blues. I consider myself a rock and roll guitarist and songwriter.

METRONOME: How often do you play live?

In the old days, it was all the time. Nowadays, because I choose to play original music, there are significantly less venues out there. At this point in my life, I get so much more pleasure in creating new music in the studio, but I understand that there are pockets of people that still want to hear it live, so I try to stay out there.

METRONOME: Do you have any big shows coming up in November or December?

On Friday, November 11th, I'm getting together with my buddies in Mambo Sons to do a Trampling Out the Vintage CD release party. It will be an early show, starting at 8pm, at Blackeyed Sally's in Hartford, Connecticut.

METRONOME: Do you ever tour outside of the New England area?

I have played in many states outside of New England, and a couple of different countries, but have no plans to play beyond New England at this point.

METRONOME: Do you have any music videos on YouTube for your songs?

I do, both with Mambo Sons and solo. Also, be on the lookout for a video that is being produced for "Tell the World." That should be out in a month or so.

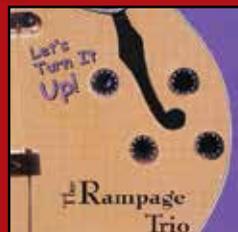
METRONOME: Where can people go to find out more about you on the internet?

While you can buy the disc from all the usual suspects online, I have a web site where you can checkout my original music, the original music of the Mambo Sons, as well as the interviews I've conducted of great guitarists. It's at www.TomGuerra.com.

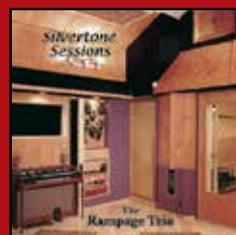
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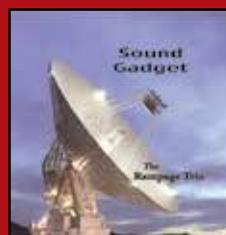
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