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Tom Guerra

Musician, songwriter, music journalist, session player and vintage guitar preservationist, Tom Guerra, wears lots of hats. Whether he's appraising someone's vintage axe, penning an article for Vintage Guitar Magazine, or producing and performing his own music, Guerra does it with skilled enthusiasm. So when his CD, Sentimental Junk landed, we jawed about the genesis of the new album and some of the musical friends that helped make it...

METRONOME: How long was Sentimental Junk in the making?

Tom Guerra: I recorded the last album, and released it the month the world shut down. I couldn't do any gigs to promote it, but I was doing a bunch of videos that Jon Butcher produced and directed. At that same time, I thought, I'm going to keep writing. That's what I did. I got working on new music and as I went along, it became all about electric guitars. That's what we've got here.

METRONOME: Are these songs newly written?

It's all new material. Right around the time of Covid, I picked up this old, beatup, Stratocaster. It was never far from my hands these past two years. There's something so funky about it. I just started playing it and coming up with these riffs. That guitar helped me come up with a lot of the stuff.

METRONOME: What year is the Stratocaster and where did you buy it?

It's a 1957. I found it through a strange situation. I got a call from a guy in Texas right around the time that Covid started. His dad had just passed away. His father was a Texas roadhouse musician. He said, "I have some guitars here, will you help me appraise them?" I said, Absolutely (I wasn't going to charge him). He had just been through this thing and he just wanted to sell the guitars to make some money.

I appraised the guitar(s) and shortly after, he said, "Thanks, we're really appreciative. We're going to sell *this* guitar, are you interested?" I said, Yes, I'm interested in it. So I bought the guitar.

It had three coats of paint on it. It was hideous and the paint was falling off. So one day I took a guitar pick and started chipping away at the paint on the edge. I saw there was a Sunburst finish still under there.

METRONOME: Did they spray paint the guitar or did they brush it?

This is what it was. It was a RAL can gray primer, a gold RAL can on top of that, and then a red clearcoat on top of that. The

red clearcoat, by this point, had become all discolored... gummy almost. So I took a Scotchbrite pad and a razor blade and was able to chip all of the paint off the front of the guitar. It still had the two color Sunburst underneath and that's what you see on the album. When I got it all back together, I started playing this thing and said, Oh my God, this sounds like Roy Buchanan's Telecaster. It's a very special guitar.

METRONOME: The album opener, "Autumn Eyes" is sheer, pop-rock brilliance. How did you come to pen that song?

That was one of the first songs I wrote with that guitar. I was playing it through an amp loud and came up with a riff. I made a demo tape of that and then started putting a melody on top of it. That became the chorus of the song. It's cool because it changes keys from the verse to the actual chorus. I really



like the way that worked.

METRONOME: Was it inspired by someone? Your wife? Daughter?

Well, yeah, any songs that I write about a woman are inspired by my wife. It's the same with, "She Don't Believe in Memories" as well.

METRONOME: Jon Butcher joined you for a duet on the song, "California's Got to My Girl." It's a great tune and very different. What inspired the writing of that?

A friend of mine had just written some songs with Steve Cropper. I was thinking, I'd like to write an R&B type of thing like a Stax or Memphis kind of tune. So I was messing around with some chords and wrote, "California's Got to My Girl" in demo form. I

was talking to Jon and he asked, "What Are you working on now?" I said, I just wrote this R&B tune. I'd like for you to hear it.

He heard it and said, "Dude, I could sing that song." I was like, okay, cool. Meanwhile, Kenny Aaronson, who is my musical cohort on this thing said, "This song needs some horns and some strings." I said, Do you want to take a stab at it? He helped me develop the arrangement for that song while Jon and I worked on the vocals. Jon came up with some cool secondary vocal parts and I did too. Jon sings the first verse, I sing the second verse, he sings the bridge and we split the last verse up. I think it came out really good.

METRONOME: Was the vocal arrangement planned from the beginning, or did it morph organically?

I recorded the demo and sent it to him. I

of it and on the bridge... We've got strings, we've got horns. It was a tough song to mix as you could imagine because there were all these parts and I didn't want it to sound like a mudfest. It was a challenge.

METRONOME: You turned "Clean Cut Kid" into a real lighthearted rocker. What made you choose to cover that Dylan tune?

Bob Dylan wrote that in 1983. He released it on an album called Empire Burlesque which was a very '80s sounding/produced album. I loved the song, but hated the production of it. My version is very different. It almost sounds like a Chuck Berry song. His does not. I wanted to do it as a straight forward rocker and use his verses in a way that he didn't use them. It was a fun song to play.

METRONOME: Did Kenny Aaronson have any influence in you choosing that song?

That's a great question because he was playing with Dylan during that period. He didn't play on the studio version because he joined Dylan's band right after it was released. When I sent it to him, I said, Do you recognize this song? He said, "No." I said, It's a Dylan tune. Then he said, "I think we may have played that back in the day." I said, I'm sure you played it back in the day because it was one of the best songs from that period.

Dylan wrote it about a guy returning from Vietnam. I'm singing it about any soldier that comes back from war and is all screwed up. We've seen plenty of that from Iraq and Afghanistan.

METRONOME: "Sat-O-Lite was a cool tune. Where did that come from?

I have no idea (laughs). It's a poppier tune, and I have the guitar tuned in open E. It has a Rolling Stones kind of chordal sound on it. I was talking to my drummer the other day, Mike [Kosacek], and he said, "That's one of the fastest songs you've ever released." I said, Really, I thought it was like 90 bpm? He said, "No it's 180 bpm." We were laughing about that, but it came out good.

It's got a sense of humor about it because it's about a guy who's paranoid that his girl friend is following him around. She's stalking him. He's talking to a friend down at the market and then he spies her spying on him in the produce section (laughs).

METRONOME: Did it happen to anyone you know?

It's happened to everybody I know (laughs). I guess though, if you're behaving yourself, there's nothing to worry about, right?

METRONOME: "Eyes of The World" is a wonderful song. Who sang that?

Scott Lawson Pomeroy is singing that one. Right after Leslie West died, I was in the studio and playing a bunch of old Mountain songs on my guitar. I came up with some riffs and it reminded me of something that Leslie West would play. I built the song around that and came up with these spur of the moment lyrics. I liked the arrangement and I liked what it sounded like, but thought, This could really use a killer vocalist. I wonder how Scott would sing this? So I called him up and said, I just wrote this tribute to Leslie West. He said, "I'd love to sing it." We close miked him, but we also miked the room, so it's got this mysterious sound on the vocal. He nailed it in one take.

METRONOME: When did you and Scott first meet and how long have you known him?

We met over 40 years ago. We were both freshman in college at Eastern Connecticut State University. Me being the obnoxious punk that I was, I had a whole stack of amps in a dorm room with two other guys. The dorm room was probably 10' x 12'. I would play whenever I wanted to. To this day, people say, Yeah, I remember you used to keep me up in the dorm. I'd say, I'm so sorry.

One day, I was playing this old song by Free on the guitar. This was at concert volume and all of a sudden I hear a knock on the door. It was Scott and he said, "I know that tune." I said, Who are you? He said, "I'm Scott Pomeroy. I live in the next dorm. I can hear you all the way over there."

We became fast friends. We always worked and wrote music together. Then towards the end of the '90s, we got the Mambo Sons together. We did four albums together as the Mambo Sons. To this day, we still play together.

METRONOME: Was he singing when he left college and before joining the Mambo Sons?

Oh yeah. He's a full-time musician right now with two or three bands. The most prominent one he's working with now is a band called the Savage Brothers. He was also with a band for the past 20 years called Orange Crush. They were very big on the New England college circuit.

He's a consummate vocalist. He sounds fantastic. He's very, very creative. I am blessed to have worked with him.

METRONOME: Your guitar work on the "Eyes of The World" was superb. Were you in the zone that day?

Again, with the whole Leslie West thing in the back of my mind, the thing I loved about Leslie's playing was that he always got a fantastic, thick sound. He wasn't one of these note peddler guys. Some guys can play a million notes and sound great, but that's never been my thing. I've always liked the slower, melodic guys. I was just trying to channel Leslie West on that song.

METRONOME: What did you use for a guitar and amp for that tune?

Leslie used to use a Gibson Les Paul Junior with one P90 pick up, so that's what I used. I used a Marshall amp, but Leslie was more known to use Sunn amplifiers. By the time I saw him, he was using Marshalls, but he still sounded like Leslie West. That's what I was using right there.

METRONOME: Did you use any effects pedals?

Yes, on the second solo, right towards the end of the song. A local guy built me a fuzz pedal. The guy's name is Jimi Photon. He has become quite the boutique pedal builder. He built it and gave it to me. I sent him a copy of the album and thanked him.

METRONOME: How many guitars do you use when you play live?

I'll bring three or four guitars out. Beside the tonal differences, I'll keep two of them in different tunings. I could bring just one guitar out, but then I would have to radically change the tuning between songs. This way I can just grab one off the rack and say, Ah, this is my open G guitar.

METRONOME: The keyboard and guitar interplay in "A Song for Mark Easton" was outstanding. How did that song come together and who is Mark Easton?

Back in the early days with Scott, we hooked up with a guy named Mark Easton. He was in a band in Connecticut called Avalanche which was a pretty big deal in the late '70s. They opened for AC/DC and AC/DC said, "You guys were louder than us."

Mark was a great friend and a great guitar player. He was 10 years older than me and a mentor to me. We always loved each other's playing and he really encouraged me. I was 19 years old and he was 29 when we first started playing together. He had played all over the world. He was the first guitarist in the Shaboo Allstars. He sat in with the Mambo Sons and we wrote a bunch of stuff together.

A month into Covid I got an email from him. He said, "Just wanna let you know, I'm going in and out of the hospital. I have some health issues." Two weeks later, I got an email from his brother saying that Mark had passed away from Covid.

They had a memorial service for him in October 2021, over a year after he had passed. The Mambo Sons were invited to play and we did one of his songs. There wasn't a dry eye in the house.

Mark and I used to jam on a lot of songs that were instrumentals. I wrote this song with Kenny Burrell in mind. I dedicated it to Mark. Keyboardist Marc Zeiner does the second solo on the B3. It's really funky.

METRONOME: When you start playing this music live who will you use for players in the band?

I'm going to use the guys in my band, the Mambo Sons: Scott Lawson Pomeroy on vocals & bass, Joe Lemieux on drums, guitarist Russ Waesche and myself. We're all totally up for it.

-- Brian M. Owens

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