

ANA POPOVIC

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From her early days as a budding teenaged musician in Serbia to her current status as a world class leader among modern blues/rock guitar stylists, Ana Popovic is a unique success story. Her latest album, *Can You Stand the Heat*, blends sultry Memphis soul with jazz, rock and blues for a sonic stew that is sure to satisfy.

What strides have you made to become better at your craft?

Whenever I have time off I'm taking some kind of guitar or vocal lessons. And I'm obviously writing too. A lot of people who come out to see us say they can't believe how much better everything sounds. But when fans buy tickets I want them to know when they come back next time to see our show it's gonna be even better.

What's the first thing you notice when you listen to yourself from the recent or distant past?

Well, first of all I don't listen to any of my previous recordings or watch the videos. I do have some favorite songs that turned out the way I wanted them and I'll listen to them if I need to. But I've never really sat back and enjoyed listening to my own recordings. When I listen to something I did when I was 18 and living in Serbia, just starting out, I think about what a long journey it has been for me. I first played in

What kinds of guitars and effects have you been using?

I'm mostly a Strat player. I do have a Telecaster as well. I have a '64 Strat that I've used on recordings. As far as amps, I use Mesa Mark IV and Fender as well as an old Bassman. So it's a combination of things. As far as pedals, I use two Tube Screamers. I like a lot of pedals that people don't make anymore, like the Vox British Flag wah-wah pedal. I know why they don't make them—because they would break often. But I think they sound incredible. All they have to do is break once. But when you fix it, they'll work forever. I also use an old Boss chorus—the one with two knobs that they don't make anymore. It's got a great sound as well as the Line 6 delay units.

Who are some of the artists who have significantly influenced you?

Elmore James, Bukka White, B.B., Albert and Freddie King. I like a lot of modern players, like Robben Ford, John Scofield and Kevin Eubanks. Also, American rock like ZZ Top and Joe Walsh, and some other kinds of rock, like Thin Lizzy. And I can't forget Stevie Ray Vaughan and Ronnie Earl as well.

What would you say is your most underappreciated quality?

I would say it is my vocals. I think my vocals sound different from a lot of people out there. I grew up listening to Koko Taylor, Etta James and Mavis Staples and I think I have a more manly sounding female voice. I think I have a tougher approach that fits with jazz and blues, but not so polished.

through. I think people like to see you sweat, especially American audiences.

Conversely, can you describe a highlight?

I would, in recent years, have to say the Experience Hendrix tour. I was the only female artist on that bill, along with Zak Wylde, Eric Johnson, Buddy Guy, Kenny Wayne Shepherd and many, many more. And they've had only a few female players over the last 12 years, so it was an honor to share the stage with all those great guitar players.

What is your secret to blending in, yet standing out, with various people as a player?

When you first start to jam, you don't have a whole lot of time, so bring everything you know and put it into two rounds of a solo. When I started, I learned a few things from my dad. He said to have a great intro lick and a great outro lick. And in between doesn't really matter. Also, don't copy anybody—always try to come up with your own stuff.

ROBIN TROWER

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From classic tunes like Procol Harum's "Whiskey Train" to the solo sensation "Bridge of Sighs," Robin Trower is a living legend who has defined modern rock guitar for several generations of fans and players

alike. Trower continues that thread of musical innovation on his latest album, *Something's About to Change*, on V12 Records.

What have you done in recent years to become a better musician?

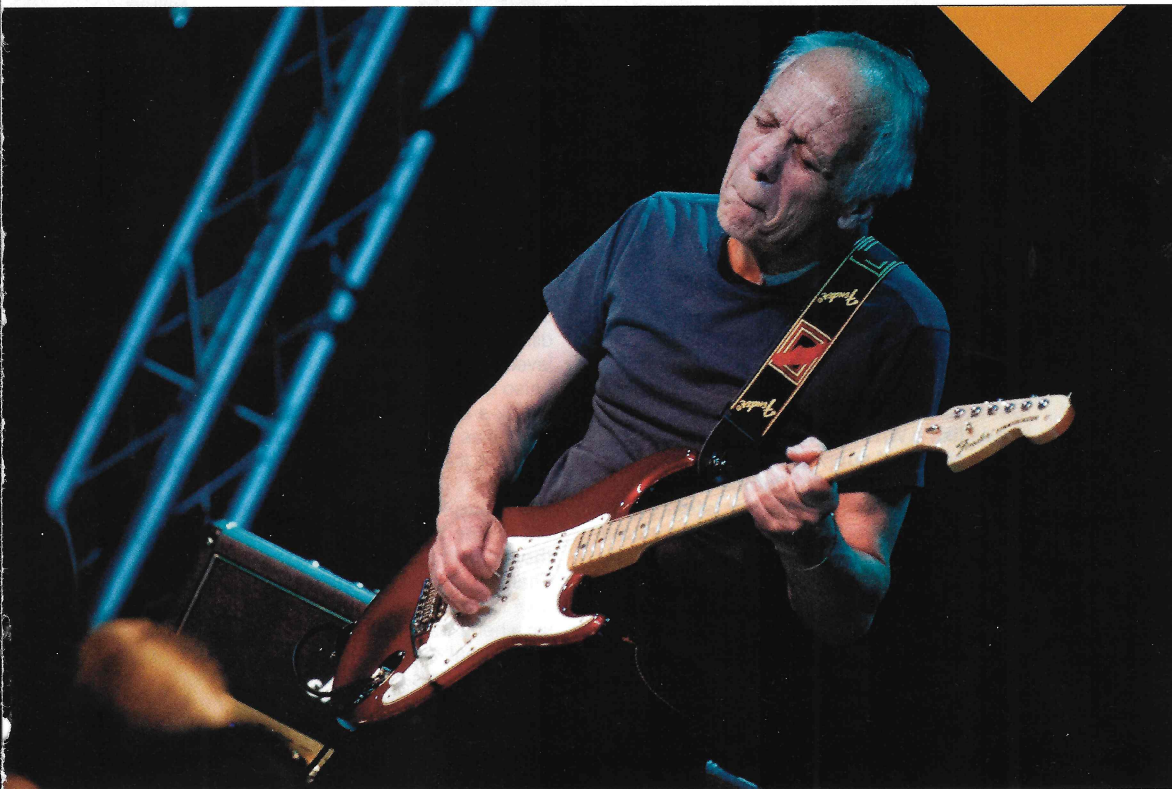
I try to pick the guitar up every day. And I've found it has brought great rewards in terms of writing more songs and exhausting my ability to play leads. It's paid off, I think.

What are your impressions when you listen to things you've done from five, 10 or 20 years ago?

I actually try not to listen to things I've done in the past, because I could be doing better sorts of things now. There are some good things from the past and then some things I'm not very happy with. That's the kind of occurrence that forces you to improve and move forward. I'm still as fired up about playing guitar as I ever was and looking forward to the next tour or in the studio.

What guitar, effects and strings are you using right now?

My signature Strat that I co-designed with Todd Krause at Fender. I use all Full Tone pedals and have been since the early '90s. On my new album *Something's About to Change* the main basis of the sound that I get is from my signature model overdrive that Full Tone makes. And I still use Marshall amps as well.



Holland with Dutch blues bands, which is totally different from American blues. And then finally I came over to America and played on the festival circuit. I think moving to the States really helped me to be more self-assured as a player. Also, the longer I lived here I started learning English better and was able to write lyrics and develop my songs in a more personal way.

Can you recall an onstage mishap that stands out?

I remember we were recording a live DVD and we found out the cameras were not on. We had to do it all over again. I freaked out at first and said I can't do this. But, once we did it, we got an even better response. The audience was even more excited the second time

With strings, the two top ones are the only ones I would consider heavy. But I use really high action to get them ringing properly. The acoustic sound of the guitar is really important to me—to get a good, clear ringing sound from each string. I use Ernie Ball strings and tune down a whole step to D so I can really get some good vibrato.

What has been your worst onstage mishap?

I did some shows with Jack Bruce in Europe a few years ago and I was using a small amp. It caught fire during the set! I was just pushing it too hard. But I usually hook up two backup amps, at least, so there's always one going if one goes down.

Conversely, can you recall a highlight that stands out playing live?

I've often been asked that question, as you can imagine, and I have to go back to the first time we played "Bridge of Sighs" live at Winterland in San Francisco around '73 or '74. I hadn't finished writing the lyrics so Jimmy (Dewar) had to sing the same verse twice. It was the first time anyone had ever heard the song and the reaction to it was astonishing. We knew then that we had something really powerful.

Are there any specific requests that you ask of your roadies or techs regarding gear set-up?

The main thing is the string nut on the Strat, because it's very hard to keep them in tune. But I've developed a way of doing it that works for me, although it's not perfect. On my signature model Strats I do have the locking tuners. And I teach my roadies to string my guitars one string at a time and pull it until it stops stretching. It's pretty important that that's done correctly because I change my strings before every show.

Does your practice regimen vary from when you're on tour to working in the studio?

I don't really practice so much as play for my own amusement. When I'm working on a new song I'm also working on how the lead works in it. I usually put those two things together in tandem, as it were. And one of the main requisites of a new song is if it's something I want to play lead on. If it's not working I usually don't pursue it and just drop it. It has to have some sort of potency, either atmospherically or in its rhythmic charge.

In the past you've always worked with other singers, like James Dewar, Davey Pattison and Jack Bruce. But now you're singing as well. What was behind the decision to make that leap?

A lot of the songs were becoming much more personal to me. It started to get more and more important to me how the vocals sit in the track. So I thought I should sing them.

You still sound very distinctive no matter who you're playing with. What is the secret to blending in but also standing out?

I'm not sure I know the secret to that. There is a certain amount of creativity that is a gift you're born with. And a huge part of what I do is coming from a number of influences that start with my love for black music—blues and soul. There's Howlin' Wolf, James Brown, Son House, Hendrix—what they created is definitely inside me. There's no doubt about it. You've got to give credit where it's due.

I was introduced to the Gary Grainger model PRS bass about 2-3 years ago at their shop in Burbank. I needed a loaner bass, and Gary was nice enough to let me borrow his and see how I liked it. It had different kinds of tones that my other basses didn't have, and I was very much attracted to it. I am also a fan of 24-fret necks and being able to stay in tune for traveling, and this bass was great for that. So I've been endorsing them.

Right now I'm a little in flux about what kind of amp I'm going with. But I use a ton of



RHONDA SMITH

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Canadian bassist Rhonda Smith's resume reads like a Who's Who of popular music. She's provided support for luminaries such as Prince, Chaka Khan, Patrice Rushen, Beyonce, and many more. Her latest gig for the last few years has been with the incomparable Jeff Beck. With two solo CDs under her belt and a busy touring schedule, Smith is certainly a player on the rise.

How have you become a better musician?

Practice like crazy, my dear, and respect the music. I try to give it 120 percent when I learn someone else's music. It's the same as I would want from someone I would hire for my project.

What are your impressions when you hear things you've done from years past?

Sometimes I like it. Sometimes I might think that I would play something differently. I'm proud of everything I've done and the opportunities I've had. But as musicians we're never really satisfied or else we're never gonna go any further.

Discuss some of the gear you're currently using and why?

effects, which started when I was working with Prince. I use MXR phasers and the Mutron. I use Dunlop delays. With Jeff Beck I use three different instruments with three different output levels; an acoustic, a fretless and an electric. I also use a Danelectro Fab Tone distortion pedal, a Seymour Duncan Déjà vu tap delay as well as some other MXR and T.C. Electronics gear. It's a big board!

One thing I've noticed is that you are as fluent on the acoustic upright bass as you are the electric bass guitar.

Thank you. I've always loved acoustic. I was able to be around a lot of jazz and fusion music when I was first starting to play in my teens in Montreal, Canada. And I've been very lucky that I've always been able to bring it along with the major artists I've worked with for extended periods of time. I think I was the only bassist that played acoustic with Prince when I worked with him in the New Power Generation.

Who are you influenced by, and who are you listening to now that you really like?

I'm really in a jazz phase because I'm trying to go back to bebop and learn a lot. The Miles Davis Legacy collection *Kind of Blue* was on my rotation for a long time. I've been listening to a lot of pianist Bill Evans and just think his bass player was incredible. He liked to give the bass player a lot of space. When I