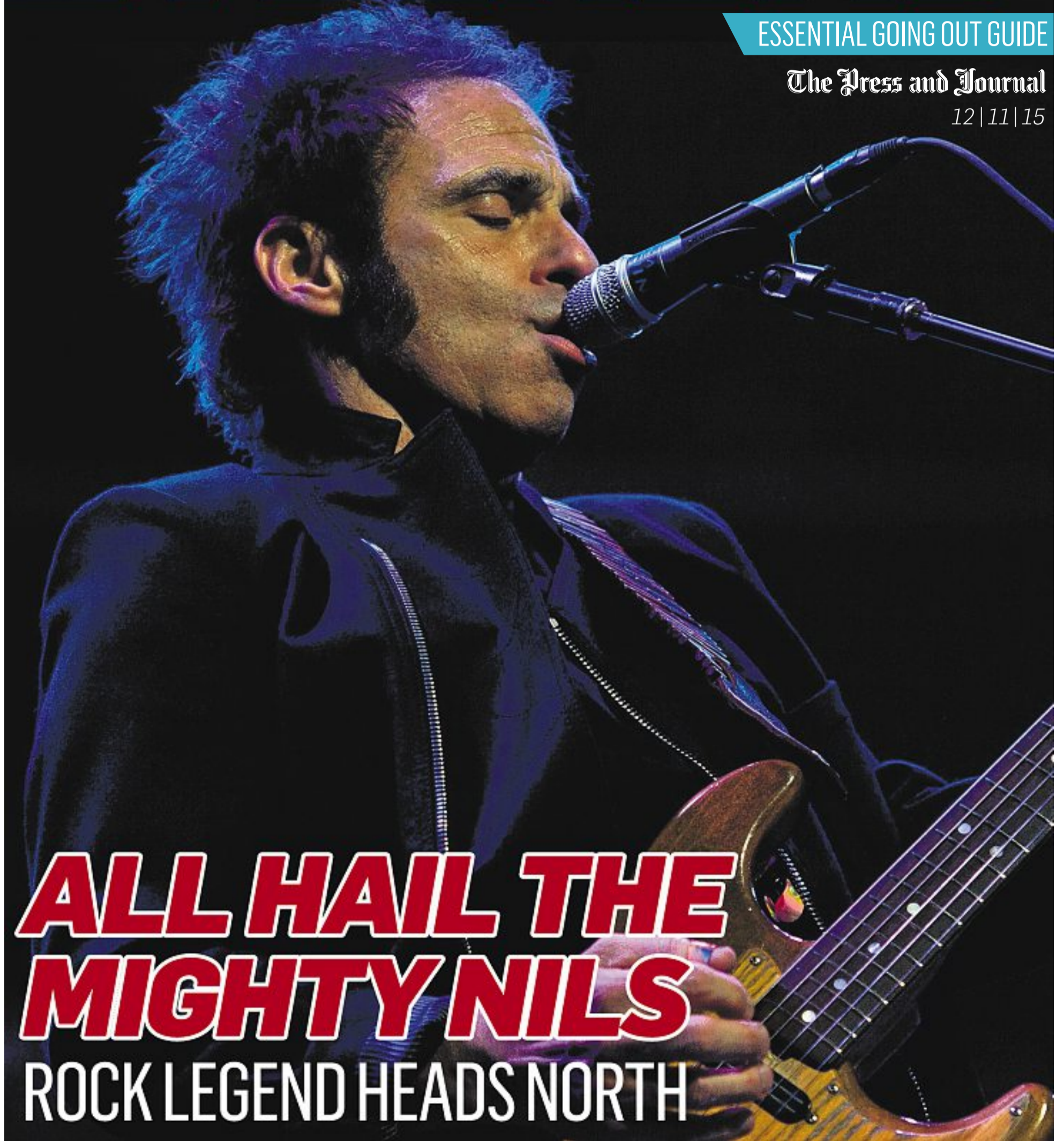


YOUR WEEKEND

ESSENTIAL GOING OUT GUIDE

The Press and Journal

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ALL HAIL THE MIGHTY NILS

ROCK LEGEND HEADS NORTH

ALL HAIL THE MIGHTY NILS

Ahead of his forthcoming concerts in Inverness and Aberdeen, legendary musician Nils Lofgren shares some of his fascinating memories with **Susan Welsh**

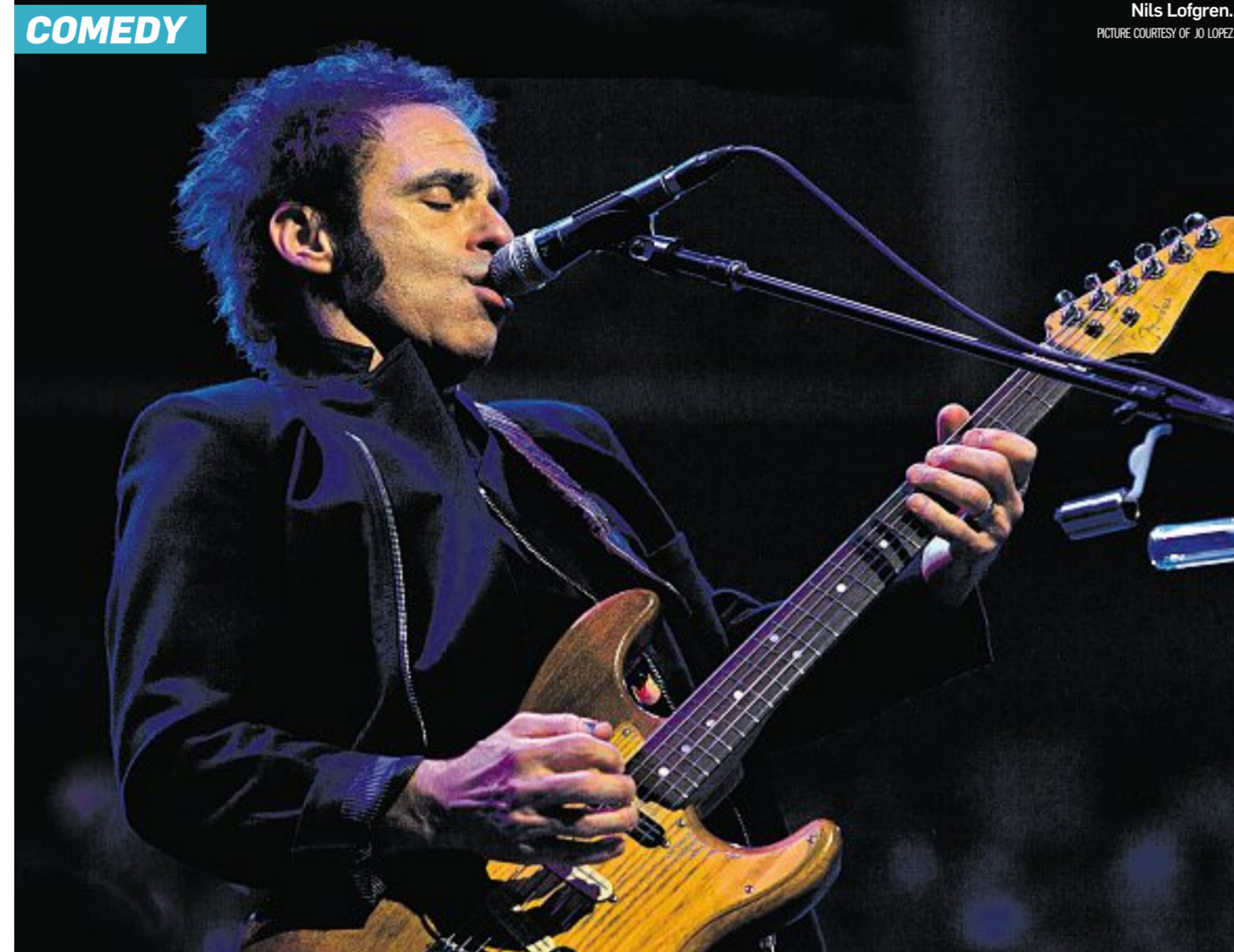
Sometimes, you get an image stuck in your head that's difficult to remove. Such was the case after discussing ways of keeping fit with legendary American rock musician, recording artist and multi-instrumentalist Nils Lofgren, who visits Inverness and Aberdeen over the next few days.

Now aged 64 and sporting a pair of swish new hips, the artist who was inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame last year as a member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band helped prepare for his upcoming tour of the UK in a rather unusual way - by tap dancing outside in his swimming shorts.

"On this tour of Scotland, I'll be joined by Greg Varlotta, who is a spectacular multi-instrumentalist. Greg is a serious percussionist, but also very good at tap dancing. I played serious basketball my whole life and of course used to do stage flips off a trampoline, but that destroyed my hips. Six years ago, I had to have both hips replaced," said Nils.

"The doctor said I couldn't do backflips off the stage or basketball or I'd cripple myself, so I started tap dancing. Greg gave me my early lessons and I'd describe myself as an enthusiastic beginner.

"I live in Arizona and sometimes it's 115 degrees and the sun is brutal, but



Nils Lofgren.
PICTURE COURTESY OF JO LOPEZ

I get out a plywood board, throw it down on the front yard, put on a pair of swimming trunks and sun lotion and start tap dancing away while listening to music on a boom box and singing along.

"It's very aerobic, especially in the hot sun, and you really sweat. But although I'm a bit of an adrenalin junkie, I'm not good at going to the

gym, so this suits me. There will be some tap dancing in the show. If I'm bad, it will be hilarious, but if I'm good it will be fairly musical."

Discovering his passion for the soft-shoe shuffle is just one of many surprising things I learn from Nils, who is regarded as a musical living legend. After touring with Bruce Springsteen as a long-time member of the E Street Band on both the 2012-13 Wrecking Ball tour and the 2014 High Hopes tour, he is back once again, performing his own legendary live show, in which he'll be joined by the aforementioned Greg.

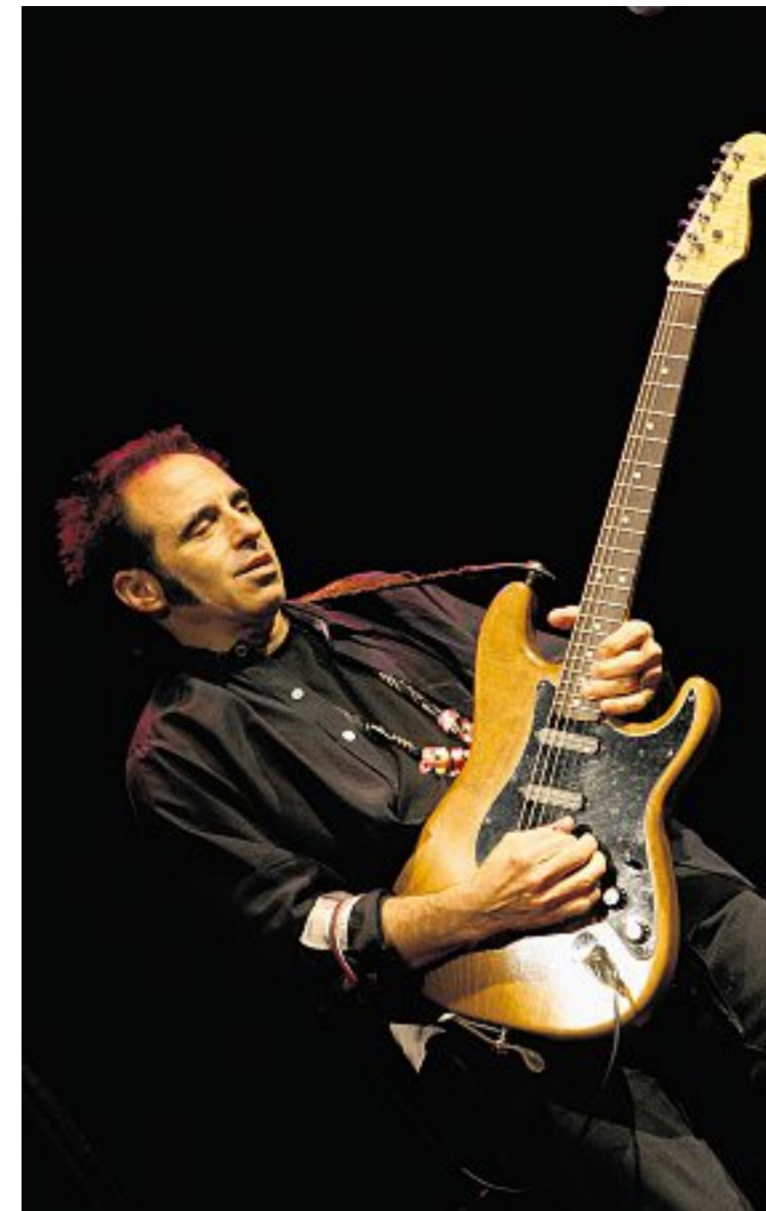
Nils is known for his world-class guitar playing and being a superb frontman, so the show is a must-see for his fans, who can expect favourites like Shine Silently, I Came to Dance, Keith Don't Go and many others from his vast back catalogue.

"I spent a couple of years putting together a special box set called Pace the Music, a 10-disc retrospective. It's a great collection to draw on for the shows, which are different every night. I'll also tell a story or two. After having spent some 47 very colourful years on the road touring, I've no shortages of stories," said Nils.

Some of my favourites include hearing him speak proudly of his skills on the accordion and how, having been inspired to get into rock music by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, how excited he was at being asked to join Ringo Starr's band.

"In the south side of Chicago, where I was born, it seemed like every kid on the block played the accordion. My mum and dad went dancing every weekend, so there was always music in the home and they were tuned in to the healing properties of music.

“*I was invited to Ringo's birthday party and, afterwards, he had a room set up for jamming. He gave me his phone number and said stay in touch and, over the years, we established a solid friendship*



When I asked for an accordion, they said yes, so long as I practised, which I did.

"We had no idea that would lead to 10 years of lessons. After mastering waltzes and polkas, I moved on to classical studies and entered very serious contests. My last teacher, Sunny Murphy, was a brilliant teacher and some of the things I learned from him I still apply today for my guitar playing and studying while on the road.

"Through accordion I discovered the Beatles and the Stones, then blues guitar, which opened the floodgates to everything else that happened. I still play the accordion, though, and I'm currently practising Flight of the Bumblebee, which I used to be able to play really fast."

The Beatles, he says, were the band that lured him from classical music to rock.

"I was invited to Ringo's birthday party and, afterwards, he had a room set up for jamming. My goal was to jam with him and it finally happened about three in the morning. He gave me his phone number and said stay in touch and, over the years, we established a solid friendship.

"In 1989, he decided to put his first band together since The Beatles and contacted me to say he was picking his favourite musicians and wanted me in the band. I was stunned and grateful and on cloud nine for months.

"It was a very democratic band, in which everyone had a go at taking the lead. Ringo really wanted to play the drums rather than take the lead, as that's where he felt at home. He told us: play whatever you want, wear whatever you want, sing whatever you want and go wherever you want. Just

be in it; whatever it takes to be in the band, just do it. It was a glorious time."

Nils carved out a name for himself playing for some of the biggest boys in rock, including Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young.

"Very long story short, I became friends with Neil Young when I was 17. My band was going to LA and, while we were making our rocky ups and downs there, Neil invited me to play with him on the After the Gold Rush album and the first Crazy Horse album. Neil was one of my greatest mentors at a young age and continues to be. He stamped my life in a positive, musical and friendship way that I'll never be able to repay.

"As for Bruce, I had always followed his career and was a big admirer of his music. In LA, in 1984, he needed a guitar player, so I got a call to go and jam with the band. I knew it was an audition. After two days of playing together, he asked me to join the band, which was another giant moment for me."

With an impressive back catalogue and hours of stories to tell, you could forgive Nils for wanting to disappear at the end of a show, but that's just not his style.

"I like to look people in the eye, shake their hand and tell them thanks for coming along, so I'll be there to meet them after each show at the merchandise stall which my wife, Amy, will be running."

● **A favourite musician for thousands, Nils Lofgren is at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness, on Monday, November 16 (01463 234234), and Aberdeen's Music Hall on Tuesday, November 17 (01224 641122).**



Daryl Sinclair

This month sees a stunning collection of artwork go on display for the first time at Eden Court, Inverness.

The Art in Transition exhibition showcases a range of artwork created by local young people with autism through an art therapy programme at Leonard Cheshire Disability's Cheshire House in Inverness.

Now in its second year, the programme supports 16 young people, aged 18-25, using art to increase their confidence, self-esteem and enable them to communicate with the world around them.

The artwork on display ranges from striking painted canvases to contemporary sculpture and photography.

Art therapy has proven to be an effective way of encouraging individuals with autism to imagine and think symbolically, improving their ability to recognise and respond to facial expressions, as well as helping them to develop better relationships.

According to the service manager,

ART IN TRANSITION

Freda Murray, the project has seen the young people involved gain greater independence, improve their social skills and develop better relationships with other young people and their family, friends and carers.

One of the budding artists, Daryl (pictured), said: "I enjoy modelling in clay and playform. I have fun when Hazel (the art therapist) comes to Cheshire. I like to try different things in the art group, I have good ideas and I get help to turn them into something I can be proud of; I like the model I made."

Stacy, who has created a striking art print, said: "Art is one of my favourite things to do at Cheshire House. I had to get an idea from my head and get it on to paper, and I turned it into a print of a horse. It looks lovely in the frame now and I'm very proud of it."

The project has been funded primar-

ily by The Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation, which provides financial support to charities across the north of Scotland, and the exhibition also includes a selection of artwork from the late, distinguished artist Ena Baxter's own portfolio.

Although best known for her role in Scotland's most famous food company, Baxters Food Group, Ena's biggest passion was painting. She was a graduate of Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen, where she studied drawing and painting, and her oil paintings are renowned for their careful brushwork and vivid colour.

● **The exhibition is running throughout November and is free to visit. See www.eden-court.co.uk/whats-on/shows/art-in-transition-for-more-details.**



Graeme Colgan