

# Architect Of Sound

Phil Manzanera has never taken the easy path, the slick lick or the obvious manoeuvre. Joe Matera meets the guitarist who's once again out on the road with Roxy Music... with better gear this time

Returning to the road after a 10 year hiatus, Roxy Music are set to reclaim past glories. 'Essentially, we're playing music from the '70s,' says Phil Manzanera, the group's long-serving guitarist. 'It's a music that's driven us back together. If we don't play these songs, nobody else will. The band recorded over 80 songs, but you never hear more than a couple of Roxy Music songs on the radio these days. And today, you have all this great gear, so the sound on stage is so much better and much more controlled. The experience for the punters is so much better than it ever was.'

With an intoxicating mix of avant-garde, über-cool and electronica, Roxy Music crafted a cinematic aural approach and a visual template for the 1970s. They permeated the roots of punk - the Sex Pistols cited them as an influence - and informed the new wave, synth-dominated sounds of the 1980s. Holding all those layers together was Manzanera's clever guitar work, informed largely by his passion for Latin American rhythms, experienced first hand while growing up.

'The great thing about South American music,' begins Manzanera, 'and the reason why it took so long for rock'n'roll and pop music to have any impact in South America is



*'I'd never seen a Firebird before, but I thought it was beautiful... and perfect for Roxy Music. It cost about £160'*

that they had a very strong indigenous music with a great groove of their own. Those rhythms have always stayed with me. So whenever a Roxy Music track was put forward to play on, or something I or we wrote, I'd always try to have double time in it, or 16ths, to make the whole thing speed along.'

Manzanera's red Gibson Firebird has been his trademark for the past 38 years. 'When I joined Roxy in 1972 I had a 335,' he says. 'They wanted me to have a white Strat, so I borrowed some money and bought one. Soon after, I looked in the *Melody Maker* and

there was an ad, "Red Firebird for sale." The seller was a young American who had come over from Kalamazoo with his parents. I'd never seen one before, but I thought it was beautiful... and perfect for Roxy. It cost about £160.

'I've got one other red Firebird, which was made for me by Gibson a couple years ago. They were going to bring out a signature version, but it never went into production. My main Firebird is unlike any other Gibson, particularly the mini-humbuckers, which Gibson weren't able to replicate in that newer version. They give a very controlled type of distortion which sits very well in the recording medium. I used it pretty much for all of the second, third and fourth Roxy albums. It's a distortion which finds a space without spilling over into other areas and instruments.'

Photo: Steve Gillett / Livepix



## Catalogue

PHIL MANZANERA  
DIAMOND HEAD

Prog, pop, Latin; Manzanera's first solo outing. New edition out on 31 January along with a re-release of *Quiet Sun* by Mainstream, Manzanera's first band



ROXY MUSIC  
STRANDED

First post-Eno album sees the group moving on from art-rock. Manzanera's blistering solo on *Amazona* is one of the album's finest moments



PHIL MANZANERA  
FIREBIRD VII

Largely instrumental; in this LP's rich and diverse aural landscape and rhythms Manzanera shows why he's the architect of sound

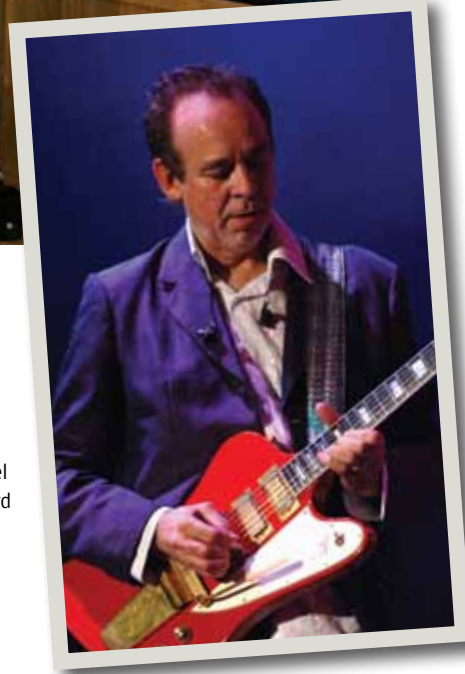


## Gear

Guitars: Gibson Firebird, Custom Les Paul, Fender Strat  
Amps: Fender DeVille  
Effects: Roland VG-99, Digidesign Eleven guitar processor, Line 6 G90 wireless system, Roland FC-300 MIDI foot controller, Line 6 M13



Some of Manzanera's tools: Hofner, Levinson Blade, Strat, customised non-reverse Firebird, Tele with humbucker, LP Custom, Firebird VII, two Deans and a Rickenbacker 12



Manzanera has always been a sonic experimenter. In the mid-'70s his short-lived outing with 801 introduced 'direct injection recording' to the live arena. 'We wanted to record a concert,' recalls Manzanera. 'So we brought along a mobile studio. It seemed obvious to us that what you did was just stick a mic in front of the speaker and go straight into the tape recorder. It turned out nobody had done it like that before; all recordings had been done coming out of the desk in front of the hall, where you had all the acoustics of the hall to deal with too. But Brian [Eno] and I had been messing

around with tape recorders for years, so by the time we came to record that album we'd been doing demos and stuff for 10 years, and we knew a lot about tape and semi-pro recording.'

Manzanera agrees that modern technology's unlimited potential can fuel a perfectionist streak. 'Roxy Music record every show onto Pro Tools - it's so easy today,' he says. 'You just press a couple of buttons and because it's all linked up with the onstage mics, you're able to capture every night. But because every night is different, like the solos, you're always trying to get that perfect version of *Love Is The Drug* or *Do The Strand*.'

In recent years Manzanera has forged a relationship with David Gilmour, co-producing his last solo album and playing with his touring band. 'For a guitarist, it's a dream. You couldn't be in a better place,' he says. 'David has the best guitars and equipment and has the most amazing things sent to him all the time! He spends a lot of time on the sound, and that's something

I've always been into as well. His tone is beautiful, but it just doesn't happen like that. He's got very good ears and is very in tune. He has a strobe tuner onstage and always keeps one eye on it, so when he's bending the notes he wants those notes to be beautifully in tune.' With all the sonic palette at his disposal and ingenuity, one thing has always underscored Manzanera's guitar playing philosophy. 'Less is more, really,' he says. 'I always prefer sound and economy over ridiculous technique.'

*'Cheap mics can be good. You want some of that roughness and excitement'*

## RECORDING: THE MANZANERA METHOD

Manzanera has good advice on recording guitars. 'Position one mic in the middle and one to the side of the speaker cone, then mix the two and you should get a good sound,' he says. 'The type of mic is crucial. Some are good for vocals, some are better for guitars, but that's where it starts to get specialized. For electric guitar, a cheap mic is probably better - you want some of that distortion and roughness and excitement, especially if you're going into digital. If you only have one microphone, stick it in front of and in the middle of the speaker cone but a little bit back, to allow air to flow between the mic and the speaker. Ultimately it's a series of choices of what sounds good to your ears... so if it sounds good to you, then it is good.'

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Manzanera's hands appeared playing a solo in an episode of *Red Dwarf*

Before joining Roxy Music in 1972, Phil was the band's sound engineer

Since 1980 he has owned and operated his own recording unit, *Gallery Studio*

At the age of 18, he rejected a university place to pursue music full-time