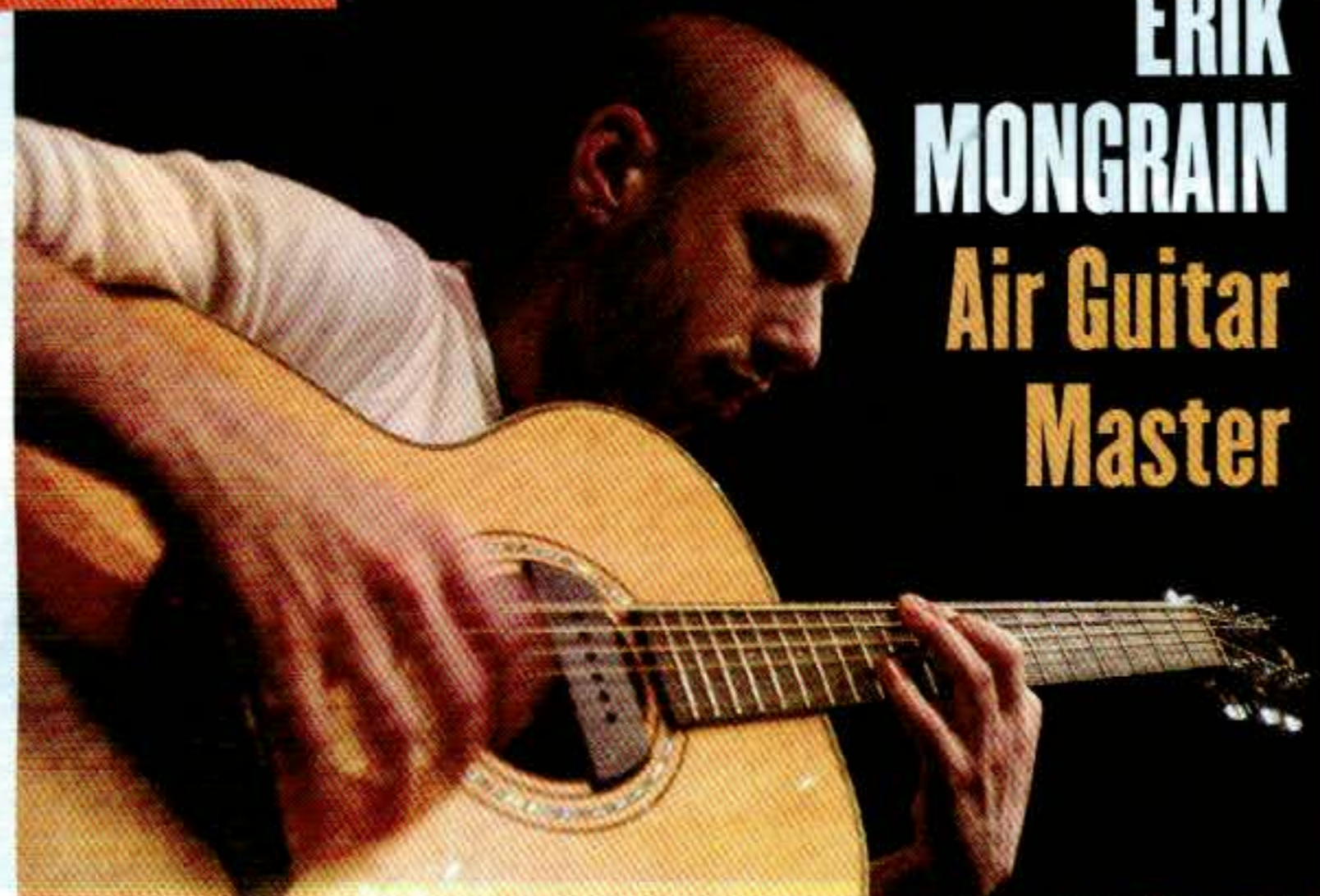


ACOUSTIC



ERIK MONGRAIN
Air Guitar Master

Guitars: Kingslight K-38, PRS, RainSong, Guild
Pickups: Fishman (internal mic) with Sunrise (magnetic pickup)
Effects: D-Tar Equinox and Solstice preamps, Boss GE-7 EQ, Boss RV-5 reverb, Pendulum SPS-1 preamp
Fingers: Acrylic reinforcement on thumb and index finger every month
Strings: Elixir Nanoweb light-gauge
Picks: Dunlop nylon .60 and .73 gauge

“I’m not the kind of guy who wants to be the best or the fastest or the most accurate,” says Montreal guitarist Erik Mongrain.

“I’m trying to maintain a degree of precision, but at the same time, I’d rather trade some of that for emotion—for feeling it.” When you spin Mongrain’s new record, *Equilibrium*, you definitely feel it: thumping bass, rapid-fire harmonics, driving percussion, meditative moodswings, and deep grooves. Of course, the scary part is that he produces all of this on solo acoustic finger-style guitar, which requires ultimate precision. And, while Mongrain reaches beyond technique in his guitar pieces, he’s well aware that technique can put you on the map: his live performance of “AirTap!” on YouTube has nearly four million views to date.

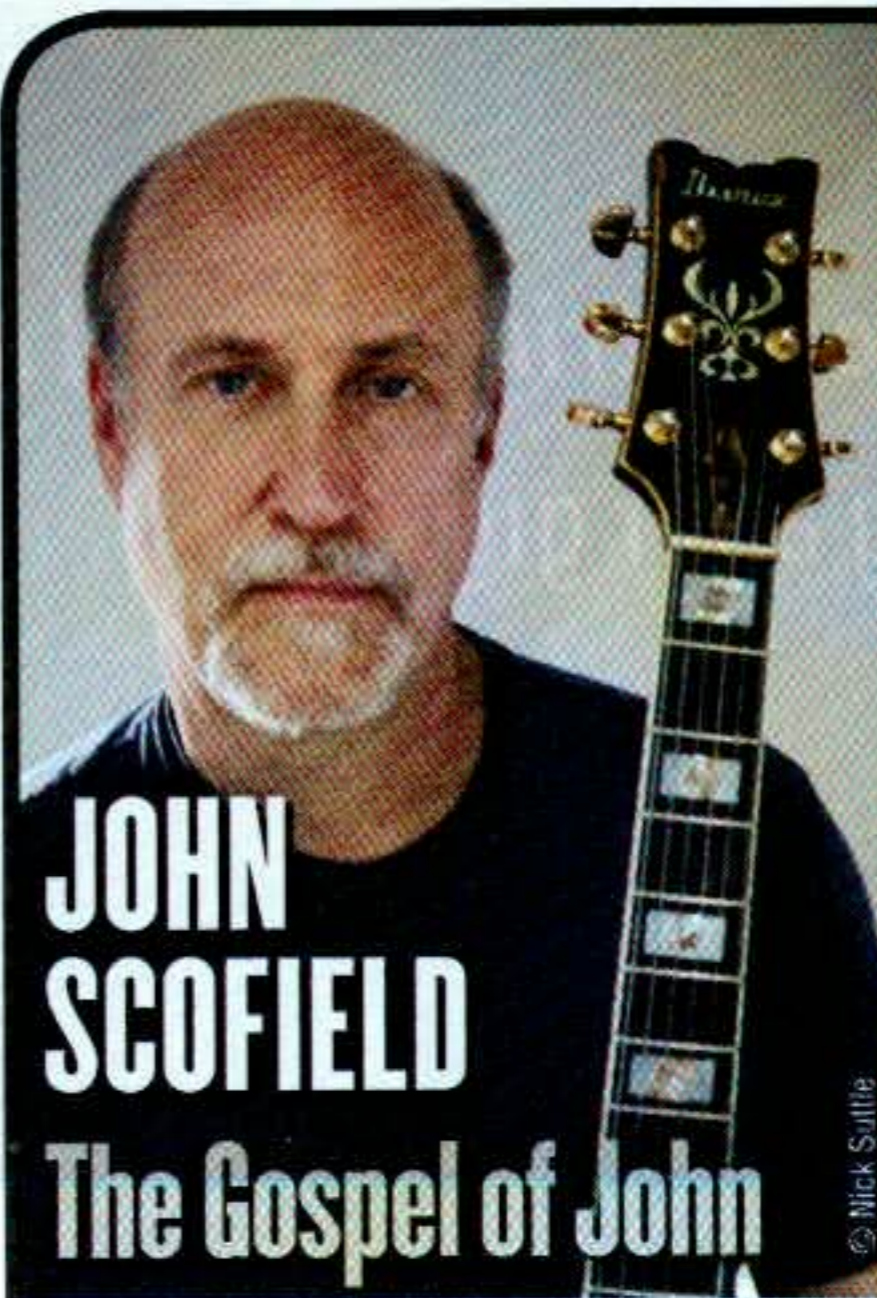
Equilibrium features Mongrain’s expert tapping via a guitar held upright in standard position. But tapping is only one of Mongrain’s tricks: the title track floats dreamy harmonics on top of a rumbling sub-bass, using an ultra-low G–A–D–E–A–E tuning. There’s not a standard-tuned track to be found on the whole CD. Mongrain hates to play favorites, but he’s currently using B–F#–D–F#–A–C# the most. “I like the harmonics it produces, the possibilities,” he says.

While Mongrain envies guitarists who can compose a song in three hours in a hotel bedroom, he carefully crafts his pieces over long periods of time. “The more you dig,” he explains, “the more likely it is you’re going to find the one part, the one chorus, the one little harmonic at the right part that shoots you with an adrenaline rush right in your spine. That’s what I’m looking for.”

Even though Mongrain can play circles around most guitarists, it’s the music itself—and not the technique—that drives him. “I don’t want to be qualified as a ‘guitar player.’ I’d rather people just call me a ‘musician,’” says Mongrain. “Guitar is just the tool I’m using to render what is inside of me.”

—ANDREW DUBROCK

JAZZ



JOHN SCOFIELD
The Gospel of John

Guitars: Ibanez AS200, Ibanez JSM100VT
Amp: Music Man, Matchless DC-30, Vox AC-30
Effects: DigiTech, Whammy Wah

John Scofield has played fusion with Miles Davis, jam-band blowouts with Medeski, Martin & Wood, and even recorded an entire album of Ray Charles’s material. *Piety Street* (Emarcy) finds the brilliant jazz guitarist applying his gritty tone and sinewy lines to eternal gospel sounds.

“I wanted to do a blues guitar record,” Scofield says from his Katonah, NY home. “Then I realized there are eight zillion blues guitar records. But I have always been a fan of gospel music and Fifties R&B, which is the evil twin brother of gospel. So these are gospel standards that I am playing guitar on.”

Performing gospel both popular and obscure, Scofield exposes some of his warmest, most fervent playing ever. On such slow burners as “The Angel of Death” and “Motherless Child,” Sco unleashes his inner Albert King, resting on notes and burnishing them clean.

“I wanted to make a record where I played hardly any eighth notes,” he explains. “The thing that can really ruin gospel music is if you just play a bunch of notes. I wanted to play soul guitar—make the guitar speak and sound more like a voice, which is what B.B. King does. But I brought my jazz sensibility to it.”

“That is the cool thing,” he continues. “These old gospel songs are more than just a three-chord blues—not a whole lot more, but enough to give a little bit more harmonic interest.”

“Just a Little While to Stay Here” is the most ethereal song on *Piety Street*, and the most compelling. The tipsy feel of the tune forced Scofield to lay back—way back. “Playing slow is where listening to horn players or to Ray Charles helps. If you play metronomically in that rhythm, you’ll sound stiff. So you’ve got to either phrase over it or under it. It’s harder to play slow than to play fast, in a strange way.”

—KEN MICALLEF