



ALLAN HOLDSWORTH

LEVEL 42, SOFT MACHINE

CONTACT: Altitude Digital Productions Inc., Eric Dorris, eric@altitudedigital.com

Thanks to his musician father, Allan Holdsworth got a head start, but no one could have predicted how incredible his technique would prove to be or how much he would influence other, more famous, musicians. Holdsworth's brand of progressive fusion jazz has influenced players like Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, and Eddie Van Halen, who helped him get a Warner Bros. deal back in 1983. He is known for his amazing command of the fretboard and his use of the SynthAxe, but the axeman has also logged time with respected artists such as Level 42, Tempest, Tony Williams, Soft Machine, and Jean-Luc Ponty. Aside from newly recorded material coming soon, you can get his latest DVD, *Allan Holdsworth & Alan Pasqua: Live At Yoshi's*, at www.altitudedigital.com.

EARLY ABILITY

I picked things up rather quickly on the guitar. I would just remember things easily. For example, my dad would say, "Okay, we're going to look at page 10 now," and I'd just play it. And he'd call me out by going, "Okay, that was cool," but he'd give me a look as if to say he knew I wasn't playing to the book at all, but had just memorized it.

I was probably about 17 or 18 when I started to figure out the fretboard. I would ask him questions about why this one particular chord shape had four different names, and he explained how it was because when you play the guitar, you don't play all of the notes of a chord, you only play parts of the chord, and they're called something different depending on what key you're playing in. I started thinking about it completely differently. I started to think of the chord notes coming from particular scales rather than just shapes in a book.

INFLUENCES

First I learned the pop songs of the day and then I got interested in playing in these blues-type bands, where we would jam on the blues all night long, and I got really fed up with it, so my dad said, "Hey, that's not the blues, check this out," and he played me some jazz-blues as opposed to the rock-blues. And then I got into his great records, that had some great players, and not all of them guitarists. At first I was really inspired by Charlie Christian I just loved the unique sounds he made. It's like

most of the other modern jazz players sound more muted, with flatwire strings; I don't really like that sound. Charlie's guitar sounded more like a horn.

Also, Jimmy Raney had that sound — it was more punchy and lively. What was also good for me is that I started to listen to what people were playing, rather than what they were playing it on; I could pick up phrasing from anywhere. I was also moved and motivated by a lot of classical music, but especially Ravel's and Debussy's periods. I think till this day the modern composers continue to have an effect on me.

RECORDING GUITARS

I mic up my amps only for the grunge sounds, but for my clean sounds I just go straight in and I put in the effects later. I usually only use one mic, even though I've had some luck with using more than one — especially if you have some analog phase-alignment tools that you could mess with — but I usually like the mic in one location, which is pretty close to the speaker.

CREATING A BOX

I used to always get a lot of sounds that I like from just using multiple single-ended delay lines, and then I just modulate them differently. I've co-designed a box with Yamaha called the UD Stomp [it's eight separate delays in one box, and the technology also went into their follow-up box called the Yamaha Magic stomp, [Holdsworth uses several in concert] and they discontinued it after a while because I think people found it was too hard to use. That may be true, but for me it was the easiest thing to use, because I came up with it. I really liked it because you could create a chorus where you don't hear the sound move. I hated that sound where you could hear motion on one side and nothing on the other, and where you could hear the pitch move all over the place. But since we have multiple delays we've got multiple motion, so the sound gets really dense and you can't hear the movement.

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—Allan Holdsworth

SYNTHAXE

When I was doing *Metal Fatigue* my friend Biff Vincent, who owned Front Page Recorders, had one of the first Roland guitar synths. I tried it and loved the fact that I could get all these different sounds, but I hated that I couldn't get it to work properly. I know it has come a long way since then, but at the time I asked Tom Roland [of *Guitar Player Magazine*] if he knew anyone who made a guitar synthesizer that didn't work on pitch, and he said there's this thing from England called the SynthAxe.

I ended up being somewhat of a spokesman for that instrument. I thought it was unbelievable, but the problem is it was a little too weird and nobody liked it except for me. The true genius about that instrument was having the keys on it: there were six strings for the left hand and six for the right hand,

and there were six keys that were each attached to a string; so if you wanted a high E, it would be the first string, and the low E would be the 6th string. The keys were also totally velocity controlled, and as long as you had the keys down you could get a seamless keyboard part, which was more of a pain before because the sound would die off in between the notes.

HIS LEGATO STYLE

I remember listening back to recordings I had made and thinking that I like what I'd just done and I should try it some more. I liked it because it was like hearing a violinist playing. If every note was staccato, it wouldn't sound so good. But hearing it roll makes it sound so fluid. When a sax player is playing lines, they don't blow for every note. That wouldn't sound so good, would it? I think psychologically it appealed to me because I always wanted to play a horn. •



DONITA SPARKS

L7

CONTACT: It's Alive Media, Josh Mills, josh@itsalivemedia.com

1992's *Bricks Are Heavy* put Los Angeles band L7 on the map, even if they were associated with the incoming grunge from Seattle. The truth is, frontwoman and guitarist Donita Sparks' tune "Pretend We're Dead" helped put the nail in the coffin for the old L.A. glam scene and introduced some combat boots to go along with the makeup, fishnets, and dyed hair. Her new album, entitled *Transmiticate* (Sparksfly), offers a completely new and multi-dimensional look at the artist, as Sparks' music is more personal, and is as groovy and dancey as it is punky and sludgy.

PICKING UP THE GUITAR

I saw my sister learn guitar and I thought, wow her hands look so cool. So I took lessons from my brother-in-law, and after he taught me a power chord I was like, "Cool, I could play Ramones songs," so I stopped taking lessons. I've kinda been at a plateau for years, so I'm not really a musicians' musician. The only album I've ever played along to was the Ramones' *Rocket To Russia*.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

In the past it was that shitty Flying V (and I'm saying shitty because it's a cheap knock-off brand, but I can't remember which one so I won't offend all the other knock-off brands)