

# Gary Moore

talks of  
technique  
and tape  
echo to  
Jeffery  
Pike

'I find when you stick with one guitar, you get a personal relationship with the instrument. It becomes *part* of you, more than it would if you were using different ones all the time.' The exciting Irish guitarist Gary Moore was talking about instruments and the collecting bug that infects some guitarists.

'You know, Eric Clapton is reputed to have about two hundred guitars! He has about nineteen Les Pauls, he's got the very first Flying Arrow ever made, serial number 1 on it, you know? That to me is just ridiculous. I remember seeing him playing with Cream and he had four or five Les Pauls with him, all different colours. But though he broke three strings during the night, he carried on playing the same guitar. I couldn't believe it: he had all these spare guitars – for what?'

During the last four or five years Gary himself has gone through enough guitars, but usually one after the other. 'I've had three Strats, a 335, about three different Les Pauls, a Les Paul TV, two SGs, a Firebird . . . but the guitar I always wanted was the one I've got now. It's a '58 Les Paul sunburst, which I bought from Peter Green about eight months ago. It's such a good instrument that whatever amp you play it through it's got its own sound. Peter had it wired so that one of the pick-ups is reversed, it's permanently out of phase with the other. So you can get this very chunky, cutting sound. It also has all the other tones characteristic of a Les Paul – the waily, very bassy, sustaining tone that Clapton used to use, and also that very sharp, distorted sound with lots of sustain on it. So it's got all those tones and this extra one as well, and it's so clear that you could put it through a transistor radio and you'd get a good sound. I use this guitar all the time; in fact, it's the only guitar I've got now.'

Gary first caught the ears of British audiences with his dazzling lead guitar work with Skid Row, a band he joined when he was only 16. He left them to lead his own band, which wasn't a great success, musically or commercially; recently he's joined the three-piece group Thin Lizzy, replacing guitarist Eric Bell, and playing with as much speed and style as ever. What's the secret of his ultra-fast technique? He puts it down to ignorance! 'When I started playing, there were not many guitarists around to teach me anything, so I didn't have any formal training. I found that helped a lot – for one thing, I never learned that there was any such thing as a left handed guitar. I'm left-handed, but I play right-handed, which is an advantage, because I use my stronger hand for fretting. I think I'm lucky I didn't know about that, because left-handed guitars can be such a hassle. I mean, you can't get one of those [*indicating his Les Paul*] that's left-handed.'

'Then my first guitar, an acoustic cello model, had a horribly high action but I didn't realise it. I think that helped

me too: all my first guitars had actions with the strings way up *here*. And for years I was using normal gauge strings, not realising you could use light gauge strings to bend on. So that all helped to develop my left hand. Actually, my lower strings are still normal gauge Gibson Sonomatics, only the top three are light, because I like that Les Paul bass sound. Anyway, I got a Telecaster after that and I just took off! It was so easy to play.'

The trouble with guitarists who can play fast is that they sometimes play fast all the time, without much thought for what they're playing. Gary admits that he fell into this trap with Skid Row. 'The whole emphasis with that band was on very fast things; the pressure was on me to play millions of notes all the time. I've grown up a bit now and I've learned to space out my phrasing more. And I've listened to people I really like and learned from them. Since I've got this guitar a lot of Pete Green has rubbed off on me! It's an amazing thing: I always wanted to play in his style, but I couldn't do it with my other guitars. When I got this one, with this special tone, it gave me the inspiration to space out my solos more, the way he does. For the first time too I think I can play the blues properly now, instead of just copying, you know? Having the solid rhythm section of Lizzy has helped in that direction.'

One new member in a three-piece band can cause great upheavals. Has Gary had any difficulties in replacing Eric? 'Not at all. Philip (Lynott) and Brian (Downey) and I were all in Skid Row together, and I've known Eric for eleven years, so we knew each other inside out. I just stepped into the band. We rehearsed once, then did a whole tour of Ireland — on four hours' rehearsal! When we came back, we did another three or four days' rehearsal, to get together some new material, then went off on tour again. The gigs have been great: we got 1000 people in the Marquee when we played there — and that's dangerous! We also packed out the Roundhouse, and that's 1800 people. We're trying to get to the stage where we can do the Rainbow: that's the next step up for the band.'

Is Gary's presence in Thin Lizzy going to make much difference to their music? It's too early to say, he says, except that they're aiming to build their programmes more subtly, starting with more melodic numbers and building up a head of steam towards the end. They're also giving a bit more thought to the visual side of their stage act — not turning up in silver satin suits, but using interesting lighting (it's Family's old light show) and moving about more imaginatively on stage.

Gary has also introduced one new musical effect, with unexpected results. 'I've got an Echoplex now, and I've got into this thing of walking off stage at the end of the set and leaving the tape playing. The first time I did it, some guy started booing and accusing me of miming all night! And I thought the Irish were supposed to be stupid. He just didn't understand; the DJ had to come out and explain it to him. The thing about the Echoplex is that one revolution of the tape lasts for two minutes, everything you play is recorded for two minutes. So I can walk off stage and leave this playing. The first time I used it, even the band didn't know what was happening. I just left it playing and they heard the guitar and thought I was still on stage with them: I was standing back behind the amps laughing. The drummer came back in on the beat and it sounded great, so I walked down to the front and started rapping with the bass player: I wasn't even touching the guitar, just chatting, while the drums and guitar played together. This was when the guy decided I'd been miming all night! Who did he think had recorded the tape in the first place — Eric Bell? Anyway, then I plugged in again and came back in and the whole thing worked out perfectly.'

Thin Lizzy is not a quiet band, but Gary recalls that Skid Row was even louder. 'I used to use an Acoustic amp, with the volume set at 1½ — and still it blew people's ears off, it was so trebly. Now I play with a fatter, more mellow sound, and I'm back to using British amps. I've got an H/H and a couple of Hi-Watt cabinets, and I'm getting a really good sound through it. But as I said, with that guitar, the amp doesn't make that much difference. The amazing thing about amps today is that all the American guitarists want to use British gear, and everyone over here wants American gear. If you could get Hi-Watts over there you'd make a fortune selling them. Whereas a kid taking up the guitar in the States has a Fender Reverb to practise on. It's a joke.'

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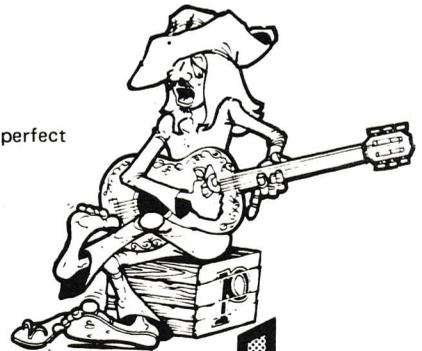
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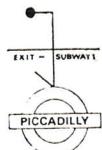


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