

Regarding Guitarists

By Mats Johansson, composer

All of a sudden guitarist/vocalist Mariette Hansson (featured on MIND Vol. 4) says that it's not strange to have a strong relationship to your guitar.

- It's just hanging there waiting to be hugged!

Sure, it's a known fact that instruments that you interact with physically are something special. Now there are guitars specifically designed for women. These instruments have lighter bodies and thinner necks. About time too, but let's hope we won't see a scenario where the women do all the work with their guitars on stage while the men take a step back and take the profits and the rights. There are reasons for worrying when men organize the way things are run when big money is involved. The music business has been organized and run by men since the beginning and still is, of course. But all suggestions to change this are most welcome.

The guitar, guitarists and I

My relationship with the electric guitar is closely related to a great deal of love. No other instrument has given me musical experiences on the same level. It is surprising that the instrument hasn't got an obvious place in – for instance – a large orchestra. The electric guitar has superior dynamics and can easily feature in the background (Steve Hackett or Janne Schaffer with a volume pedal) or explode with shimmering diamonds (Jeff Beck or Jonas Christophs).

I can't recall meeting a guitarist who hasn't informed me that they are considering changing amps, buying a new guitar or replacing old effects with new ones. It wasn't until I started using distortion pedals in conjunction with my synthesizers that I understood the situation. Small changes made big differences and sensitivity became a natural part of the soundscape that appeared.

I've read somewhere that Robert Fripp kisses his guitar before performing and that he thinks the way you hang your

guitar around your neck is important with regard to the performance. When playing, Fripp claims that the way you hold your pick is the way you organize your life. Another Fripp quote is: "First, be careful about the beginning. Then, be careful about the end. Then, be careful about the middle." How can you not love a guy with qualities like that? Because it's the details that make the guitar and the guitarist interesting.

Kill your darlings?

While Mariette Hansson is hugging her instrument with great love, others seem to enjoy banging their instruments, abusing them, setting fire to them and so on. To me, it would look pathetic to see a trumpet player setting fire to his or her instrument in public. This deed is reserved for the electric guitarist – the king or queen of the rock stage – who make absurd actions look completely natural within its context.

People are generally upset when electric guitarists smash their instruments to pieces, but in most cases the instrument is only a copy. The real culprits can be found elsewhere. I'm talking about the mail, airlines and shipping companies that lose or wreck valuable instruments without batting an eye. As a keyboard player, my closest encounter with the ugly art of sabotaging instruments was when the Dutch airline KLM completely unromantically managed to crack one of my synths in two during a flight between Gothenburg and New York.

Just as unromantically, but fortunately for me, the insurance company solved the problem. Meanwhile, the barbarians can continue without any interference. The fact that some insurance companies and airlines share the same owner doesn't help, of course.

These thoughts pass through my head when I hear about another guitar abuser. But there are more considerate guitarists out there. Jeff Beck supposedly rarely bends his strings simply because he thinks it hurts! Is he referring to the guitar or his fingers? Not that it matters, the guitarist and the guitar mostly live in

sympiosis with each other and it follows that any possible pain is mutual.

The electric guitar is a relatively young instrument and I am completely convinced that we have only seen the beginning of the instruments development of what is possible to achieve within product development and musical inventions in music of the future. A while ago I saw an electric guitar with 48 strings! A prototype, of course, but nevertheless...

A response

By Thomas Olsson, guitarist and musicologist

The guitar and I

When I was four years old, I wanted a guitar for Christmas (my mother still has my incorrectly spelled wish list). I had to wait seven years until I eventually got a cheap acoustic that I treasured. That was the beginning of my ongoing love affair with the guitar.

Through the years, I have noticed and later studied the behaviour of my fellow guitar players. There are two major traits that I think most guitarists have.

Me! Me! Me! Me! Me!

The first trait is very well known amongst musicians, in fact, there are jokes about it. For instance: How many guitarists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is: One hundred. One to change the light bulb and 99 watching with their arms crossed saying: I could have done it better myself. The – true? – point of this story is, of course, that guitarists are egocentric and quick to criticize other musicians, particularly other guitarists. I have seen this happen too often to deny it, and I have to admit to having said things like that myself.

The strong ego of many guitarists comes a long way to explaining the long, some would say overly long, guitar solos that are so prominent within certain types of music. When I was between 15 and 25 years old, many of my favourite guitarists played looooooong solos.

Want names? OK. Gary Moore, Robert Fripp, Jeff Beck, Ritchie Blackmore, Michael Schenker, Steve Morse, Brian May, Jimmy Page, Tony Iommi, Frank Zappa, Allan Holdsworth, Mike Stern, John Scofield and Steve Vai spring to mind. I still enjoy a good guitar solo tremendously, but from my later 20's onwards, I begun to value other things when listening to guitar players. I admired dynamics, inventiveness and the ability to decide when not to play. Some of my old favourites still fit and became even bigger favourites (Fripp, Beck and Holdsworth for instance), others didn't. New ones came along, like Derek Bailey, Bill Frisell, Steve Topping and Christian Saggese.

The nearness of you

The other thing I have observed is that many guitarists seem to be closer to their instruments than many other musicians. Many players give names to their instruments, Eric Clapton's Blackie and B. B. King's Lucille for example. How many drummers name their instruments? The affections for the guitar frequently result in pictures where a fondness for the guitar is obvious, like Mats mentions. There are countless pictures of guitarists hugging their guitars. On occasion, you even see them kissing their instruments, sleeping with them or buying them a ticket when travelling by plane.

The attitude of closeness is also reflected in the way the guitar is referred to and used. You will hear guitarists talk about the guitar being an extension of their body, voice, heart or brain. Going even further, some blues guitar players used to put the tail of a rattlesnake inside their instruments as a good luck charm. Try putting a rattlesnake tail inside a synthesizer and see what happens! Having said that, some guitarists are considerably more down to earth, like Joe Satriani who came close to sacrilege when he stated that "a guitar is just a piece of wood with strings attached".

Since guitarists are so fond of their instruments, we tend to commit ourselves and make it into a lifestyle. In Sweden, there are several magazines for

musicians in general, but only one major magazine for a particular instrument. Guess which instrument! That's right, the guitar. The magazine is called Fuzz, which inevitably leads me to another of Mats' points, that of constantly tampering with the set up. For all but the hardcore conservatives among guitarists, checking out new equipment is second nature. For me, it's effects. I am very happy with my guitar (a Paul Reed Smith Classic) and have amplifiers to suit every occasion. But I can't seem to get enough effect pedals. For some years now, I have been looking for a really great loop device, like Lexicon's deleted JamMan or the Boomerang, but to no avail. So far. Guitar synthesizers are also a field that I would like to investigate in future.