



King Of The Blues

GARY MOORE TALKS TO DARREN EDWARDS ABOUT HIS NEW ALBUM, HIS TONE AND HIS LOVE OF THE BLUES, WHILE WE GET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH A FEW OF THE GREAT MAN'S GUITARS. PHOTOS BY SAM SCOTT-HUNTER

... Jack Bruce called him a national treasure. Albert King called him the best guitar player in Europe. He's played with B.B. King, Albert Collins, John Mayall, Thin Lizzy, the Traveling Wilburys and a host of other rock, blues and jazz legends, as well as pursuing a long and fruitful solo career. He is, of course, the one and only Gary Moore.

Despite the rock swagger of his early work, Gary Moore's first love and enduring inspiration is the blues. With the recent release of his latest studio album *Close As You Get*, he's further cemented his place as one of the finest bluesmen in the business. Comprising covers of blues classics by the likes of Son House, Jimmy Witherspoon, John Mayall and others, along with newly penned tracks by Moore himself, *Close As You Get* is a journey through the history of the blues.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

"I really enjoyed making the new album," explains a jovial Moore. "It was probably the easiest record I've ever made. I always record some covers, because if you're going to do a blues album, there's such a great wealth of songs to draw on. The

thing that was a little different on this album was that I was doing a radio show for the digital radio station Planet Rock and I had to come up with two hours of material every week for six weeks. So I had to really dig deep and find some stuff I hadn't listened to for a long time. Through that research I found some really good tunes, like 'Thirty Days' by Chuck Berry, and the Son House track 'Sundown'."

The last couple of years have seen Moore continue to hone his craft, and his fretwork on the new album is better than ever. "I made a real effort to work on my phrasing on this record," he says. "I was recently looking at some old footage of myself, and the playing is just chalk and cheese compared to my playing now. I leave a lot of space now, and I think I've matured as a player. Albert King told me how to do it but it took me a while to get my head around it."

Moore cites the track 'Trouble at Home' as an example of his more considered approach to soloing on the new album. "I was really happy with the solo in that song because it shows that I've learnt to leave enough space. Most guitarists are like boring dinner guests who want

to talk all the time. The secret is not to do that unless you have something to say."

GARY'S GUITARS

In the very early days of Moore's career he played in the bars and clubs of Belfast with a certain Mr Rory Gallagher. The two penniless guitarists could only afford one guitar each, so they would use each other's guitars as a backup in case either of them broke a string. As you'd expect, things are very different now: Gary's star-studded guitar collection would make the most avid collector green with envy. But what guitars did he play on *Close As You Get*?

"I used my '59 Les Paul Standard, which is the same one I played on the *Still Got The Blues* album, a 1968 Fender Telecaster and an early-'60s Gibson ES-335. I got the Les Paul in 1989," he explains. "My guitar tech, Graham Lilley, got it for me. I really liked it but I was playing rock at the time and didn't think it would be that suitable, so I put it in a case and didn't use it for a while. I was doing the *After The War* tour, so it didn't really see the light of day until we did *Still Got The Blues* the following year. ➔



"I think the first track that I ever recorded with it was 'Still Got The Blues', and then on that same day we did 'Oh Pretty Woman'. We did 'Still Got The Blues' in one take and 'Oh Pretty Woman' in two. We were going to come back and do them again properly a few weeks later, but then they kind of grew on us, so we ended up keeping them."

SUNBURST SERENADE
The 1959 Les Paul Standard is revered by guitar lovers everywhere. Renowned for its sustain and tone, the '59 Les Paul is guitar perfection... at least, that's the theory. "I had another '59 Les Paul that I sold in the '90s and that one sounded like shit," Moore laughs. "It's the one that's on the cover of the *After Hours* album, and I only kept it for a year or two. It had a nice light body, looked really good and played really nice, but it wasn't until I tried it in the studio that I realised it just didn't sound very good. It sounded very flat and dull and was probably the worst-sounding one that I'd come across in a long time. "I'm sure when these Les Pauls were brand-new it would have been



the same as it is today – you walk into the store and there might be 20 guitars in there, and you can find some really good ones and some that aren't so good. The thing that's really indefinable about the '59 Les Pauls has to do with the fact that they are so old. You can't measure how much is to do with the age of the guitar or how the pickups have aged, because they all age in a different way. That kind of gives them that mystique. Nobody really knows why they're so good – they just are." Most of them, anyway!
So what's so special about Moore's current '59? "It's a little bit different from others in that if you use both pickups it sounds almost Fender-y – some people think it's a Strat on the new record. It's a very bright, quite hard-sounding guitar. It's not like some of them that are fatter sounding – this one's quite treble and really cuts through."
Does it still see any action on the road? "Sometimes, but don't tell anyone that," says Moore with a grin. "I don't really like taking it out too much because it's getting a bit scary now – I don't think I'll find another Gibson Les Paul that could replace it. I'd have to get one of the

same vintage, because no matter what new ones I get they're never going to be like that. If I wanted to replace it I'd just have to go with a different guitar altogether. I've just bought a Gibson Firebird actually. It's kind of a new one and I'm quite excited about that. Maybe that could be a replacement for a while, but it's not the same guitar."

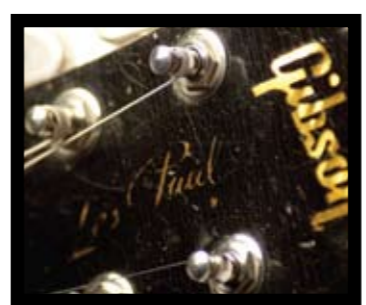
BACK TO THE BEGINNING
Close As You Get also features the brilliant acoustic track 'Sundown', a cover of an old Son House song that Moore re-discovered while researching for his radio show. This was the first time in his long and illustrious career that Moore has recorded using an acoustic guitar – in this case, a resonator.
"I never liked acoustic blues when I was young", he explains. "Like most kids who were playing the guitar I didn't like acoustic guitars, I never listened to the lyrics and unless it had loads of screaming guitars I just didn't want to know. But after hearing that song I felt that I'd really like to do something different and do an acoustic track for the album."
"I got drawn into that one song and really wanted to do it right, so I practised it a lot before I recorded



it. I tried recording on a laptop in my kitchen, as I thought it would be a nice relaxed way to do it, but it just didn't work. I also tried it in the big room in the studio, but it felt like too much of a production, so we all went out to the pub one night and when we got back to the studio I sat on the couch in the back of the control room and did it in one take. We mixed it there and then and the whole thing took about 10 minutes."

For the recording, Moore used a thin-bodied Ozark resonator. "I bought it in a little store about two minutes from my house in Hove," Moore explains. "The guy said to me, 'Try this little Ozark – they're so cheap but they sound great'. I really liked it, so I bought it on the spot and took it home. I love the way if you hit it a little harder it gets twice as loud. It's really dynamic – if you dig into it, it just suddenly shouts out at you. The weight is there, but it's got a much skinnier body than most resonators, so you can hold it much closer to you and it's not cumbersome to use."

So much for the guitars – what about Moore's amps? "On the most recent tour I used two amps. One is



a Marshall DSL100 that I've been using for 10 years – it's the one with the spring reverb, and all the reverb on the album is from that amp. For the drier stuff I use another Marshall, a 1959 model. It has a lot more bottom-end, so I use that for the heavier stuff."

DINOSAUR TONE
"Effects-wise, I've recently taken delivery of a bunch of T-Rex pedals. I was having problems with my old pedalboard – it started crackling in the middle of a gig in Dublin and it was driving me mad. So when I got off tour I called the guys at T-Rex and asked if they could make me up a pedalboard. They did it that day and I've been using it ever since. It's got a Møller overdrive, which is the dual pedal that has a clean boost and an overdrive. You can use them separately or together, which gives it a real kick up the ass. I've got a Mudhoney distortion pedal and then I've got the great Replica delay pedal, which isn't too noisy, so it doesn't mess up your signal. It's brilliant – you can tap in the tempo while you're playing, which is what I do on the song 'Thirty Days' for

MOORE ON MOORE

GARY MOORE

THE MAN HIMSELF TALKS US THROUGH A FEW CHOICE CUTS FROM HIS NEW ALBUM, *CLOSE AS YOU GET*

'IF THE DEVIL MADE WHISKEY'
"I woke up one morning and I had this riff in my head, and we just went into the studio and did the whole track live. I used an old Telecaster guitar and tuned it down, like an open E chord tuned down to D, and then used the bottleneck on it to give it a very earthy feel. I was hitting the pickup on the intro to give it that kind of raw sound in between the notes. You can hear this clank of the bottom E string hitting the pickup."

'HAVE YOU HEARD'
"Have You Heard' was on the *Bluesbreakers with Eric Clapton* album, which was what turned me on to the blues. It was quite a challenge, because I was trying to get away from the guitar approach of the original. The first few times we did it I kept playing Clapton's old licks, so I came in late one night and instead of using the Les Paul I tried it with the ES-335. It gave me a completely different feel, so I did a much more subtle guitar track on it until it gets to the solo, and then it lets rip. It's a beautiful song with great lyrics, and it's one of my favourite ever songs on a *Bluesbreakers* album."

'NOWHERE FAST'
"That's one of my new ones. It's got a tremolo effect on the rhythm guitar part that gives it that dreamy feel, and it's basically telling someone to sort themselves out because everything they're doing is going nowhere fast. I kept the solo from the original take but re-did the rhythm track with a cleaner sound because there was some distortion on the original one."

'I HAD A DREAM'
"Another one of my new songs. It's got a kind of *Still Got The Blues* feel to it, but it's more melodic and has a nice solo that goes out at the end. It's basically about a dream I had and I just woke up and wrote the lyrics. It almost has an Otis Redding feel to it with the arpeggios, and I used the '68 Telecaster on it to give it a more country feel."

BELFAST BOY BLUES

HOW DID GARY MOORE'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE BLUES GET STARTED?

"It started really in the '60s when I was about 13 or 14 and first heard the Eric Clapton Bluesbreakers album," remembers Moore.

"The one with Clapton reading *The Beano* on the cover. That was a huge record for people of my generation, especially guitarists. It was the first time that anyone had ever heard the combination of a Les Paul through a Marshall. I remember going round to a friend's house one Sunday afternoon. I'll never forget it because it was such a big thing for me. He had the album and a lot of people were talking about it, but I hadn't actually heard it. He put on 'All Your Love', which is the opening track, and it changed my life in a second.



It was an unbelievable epiphany for me. It was only a little stereo but the guitar was screaming out of the speakers – I'd never heard a guitar sound so big and passionate and full of so much energy and emotion. Every track on the album is just a mind-blowing guitar track – Eric's playing is phenomenal. If he had never done anything after that it wouldn't have mattered, because he still would have done a hundred times more than anybody else."

EARLY-'60S GIBSON ES-335

"This one used to belong to Johnny Fean from the Irish band Horslips, who was an old friend of mine," says Moore. "That made me very keen to buy it, because I knew Johnny would want me to have it, as he was a big fan of mine when we were kids. The great thing about it is that it just sounds amazing. It's an incredible guitar and sounds a bit like a Les Paul. It's got the original pickups in it and I've been playing it on stage since I got it."

"I LEAVE A LOT OF SPACE NOW AND I THINK I'VE MATURED AS A PLAYER"

a bit of rockabilly slap, and I also use it with a longer delay on 'All Your Love'. It's got a really rich, warm sound, like an old analogue delay."

STILL GOT THE ROCK?

One last question for the man who gave us gems like 'Out In The Fields', 'Wild Frontier' and 'Over The Hills And Far Away': will Moore ever record a full-on rock record again?

"I started to record one about three years ago," he says, "and then I just went off it. When I did the Monsters of Rock tour about five years ago it really felt like being dragged back about 20 years. All the things I fought to get away from were present on that tour and I just didn't feel comfortable with it. There are so many great young rock bands around and, to be completely honest with you, I don't think it's very dignified to be playing that kind of music at my age – it's a bit sad. I went to see Muse at Wembley Arena before Christmas last year and I realised that I was doing the right thing. I thought to myself, unless you can do it better than that, there's no point." **GB**



1968 FENDER TELECASTER

"I've had the '68 Tele for years," Moore explains. "I used it on 'Moving On', which was the first track on the *Still Got the Blues* album. It was tuned to open A, and I did all the slide stuff on it. It's always had a really good sound, but the intonation's not incredible and it's quite hard to play. It's got a later neck on it that someone put on before I bought it, but it's got character and it really works. You can get some very mournful sounds out of it as well as a hard, in-your-face sound. It's a real old battle-axe."