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GREATEST SOLOS OF THE '70s!

Tommy Lamb's Bicentennial Blast

BY DAN DICKERSON

The Bicentennial Summer wouldn't have been quite so star-spangled without Rockfinger's good-time rock anthem, "Feel It." And a big part of what made the song worth saluting, both then and now, is the killer solo by guitarist Tommy Lamb, who is also the twin brother of Rockfinger vocalist Jack Lamb.

So many would-be axmen have air-guitared their way through Tommy's classic solo that it's easy to forget it also inspired many guitarists of the non-air variety. (It was certainly a huge influence on this writer!) This is truer than ever now, with the young denizens of the Grunge Rock Revolution signaling a return to the hard-hitting, no-b.s. aesthetic Rockfinger originally championed. In fact, many people (including this writer) would argue that it's all coming full circle.

Alright Tonight, the album that included "Feel It," was, tragically, the only LP ever released by Rockfinger. But sometimes one album is enough, if the album in question says it all as eloquently and succinctly as this one. And as you will see, my recent phone conversation with Tommy at his home in Indiana reveals that he's as pas-

sionate about his music nearly a decade-and-a-half later as he was then.

Q: Snickers Keith from Leather Tiger once said that playing a great solo is like telling a great story. Do you think that's true?

A: I do now and I always did before. The problem is, Snickers was always trying to tell my stories.

Q: What do you mean?

A: What I mean is this: Rockfinger's "Feel It" comes out in April '76, right? Then Leather Tiger's "Win Your Stripes" comes out in November '76. Okay? With pretty much the same exact solo, I might add.

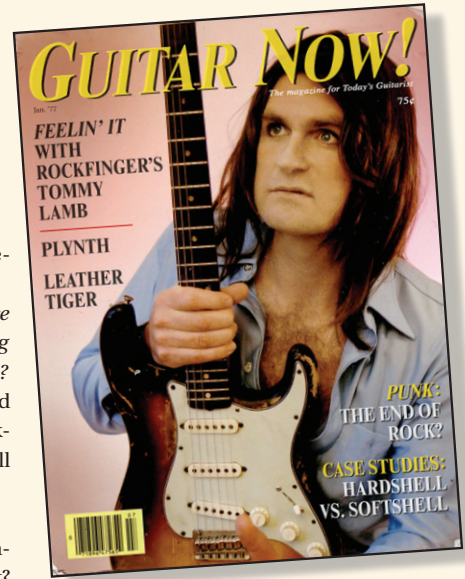
Q: Are you saying he copied your solo?

A: All I'm saying is look at the calendar, man. Just look at the calendar. I remember Snickers was always sneaking around backstage at Rockfinger gigs. We were friends back then. We'd talk about guitar stuff, like how often we change our strings and if you can really make a guitar pick out of a beer-can tab. We talked about great solos being like stories too, probably.

Q: Do you think it's true, then?

A: I told you: I'm not accusing anyone of anything here. I'm just letting you know what kind of guy I found out Snickers Keith

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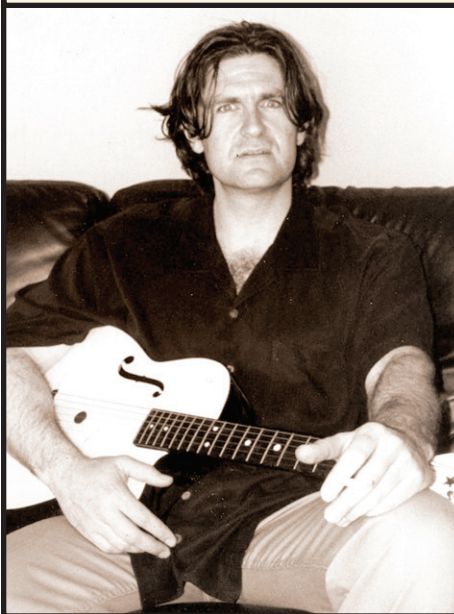
Twenty-five-year-old Tommy Lamb graced our Jan '77 cover. Below: Tommy today

is, that's all.

Q: No, I mean is it true about solos being like stories?

A: Oh. I thought you were still talking about the rip-off thing. Because that happens all the time in this business. All the time. It happened in Rockfinger, that's for sure. I mean, if a guy can rip off his so-called brother, then it can happen to anyone. Trust me, man. Anyone, anytime.

Q: I guess the point is that some guitarists say great solos have a beginning and a middle and an end, like great stories.



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A: Oh, I agree 100%. You have to start with the beginning. That's your foundation. Then you build it up from there. And then finally you tie it all off with an ending. At least that's how I always did it. The problem with a lot of these young bands now is they don't really understand the basics like that. But I can't blame them. Someday this grunge thing will be over, and then they'll get to be the old guys saying, "You kids don't respect the basics." That's how life is. You don't know how it really is till it's too late.

Q: Do you craft every solo special for the song? Or are you a one-style-fits-all man?

A: No, you definitely have to play the solo for the song. I hate the kind of guitar players who use the same kind of solo for everything. I mean, the song could be "I Love You Forever" or "I Hate You Forever," and you get the same exact kind of solo. What's the point of that? No, I've always seen myself as the sort of player who plays for the song. Not just for my ego, or to be all flashy, like some people I could mention. For me, the song always comes first. Like with "Feel It," it was originally supposed to be about feeling good, right? Not just feeling whatever, but feeling good, specifically. So that's what I did, when I first wrote that song, was play something that made you feel good. Too bad that message didn't rub off on some other people in my band.

Q: Yeah, I would have guessed you like to make the solo fit the song like that.

A: Well, you'd be right. I mean, look at the other stuff I did on *Alright Tonight*. Some players would do pretty much the same thing on every solo, but when we started to make that record, I had a whole other vision in mind. I wanted to take the listener on a musical journey, so that's what I did with the solos. Like on "Night Life," I play this slinky bluesy solo that sounds real late at night. I used a lot of restraint. On the other hand you have a song like "Play the Game," where I go ape-shit on the guitar. I mean, you have to — it's about playing a game, so it should be fun, and have a lot of playing on it.

Q: Or like you did on "Up for Anything." I

noticed that a lot of those guitar melodies go up.

A: Yeah. Actually, not a lot of people catch details like that. Are you a player, man?

Q: Yeah. I play in this group called *Deep Mist*.

A: I think I might have heard of you guys. Are you from Chicago?

Q: No, we're in California. I heard there's a couple of other *Deep Mists* around.

A: Cool. I'll have to check you out sometime. But seriously, you guys should talk to your lawyer. Protect yourself. I wish someone had said to me, "Tommy, talk to your lawyer" when I was coming up with all the ideas for *Alright Tonight*. Because I tell you, man, I've been talking to my lawyer a lot since then!

Q: What's your favorite guitar of all time?

A: That would have to be the Hoxton Custom Premiere Special I had when we were doing *Alright Tonight*. She was a honey, man — the limited edition 25-fret model with the flying buttress tailpiece and extra-long ferrules, and the herringbone binding across both bouts.

Q: The one in the photo on the back cover of *Alright Tonight*?

A: That's her. What a honey. I never knew a lady could sing so sweet as she did.

Q: Judging by the picture, you have it set up pretty heavy. Real thick strings, super-high action.

A: Good eye! That's another detail a non-guitar player wouldn't notice. You're right. I always felt like you should have to work a little for your notes. Maybe it's just the Protestant work ethic I had growing up. Actually, we were Catholic, but our folks taught us you should work for what's yours, and respect what's not yours. Which is funny, because I thought me and my brother had the same parents. Anyway, that's what I took from my upbringing.

Q: Do you still keep it set up that heavy?

A: I don't keep her set up at all. I had to sell her. That just about killed me. But sometimes you have to do what you have to do, and what I had to do was pay my lawyer. But once this court thing is over — and it's going to be over any day now — I'll buy her back. First thing, day one. You can bank on that. ●



One of Tommy's signature innovations: the beer-can pull-tab pick.



"Here's how I play an F#7 chord," reveals Tommy. "A lot of other players have stolen my fingering."