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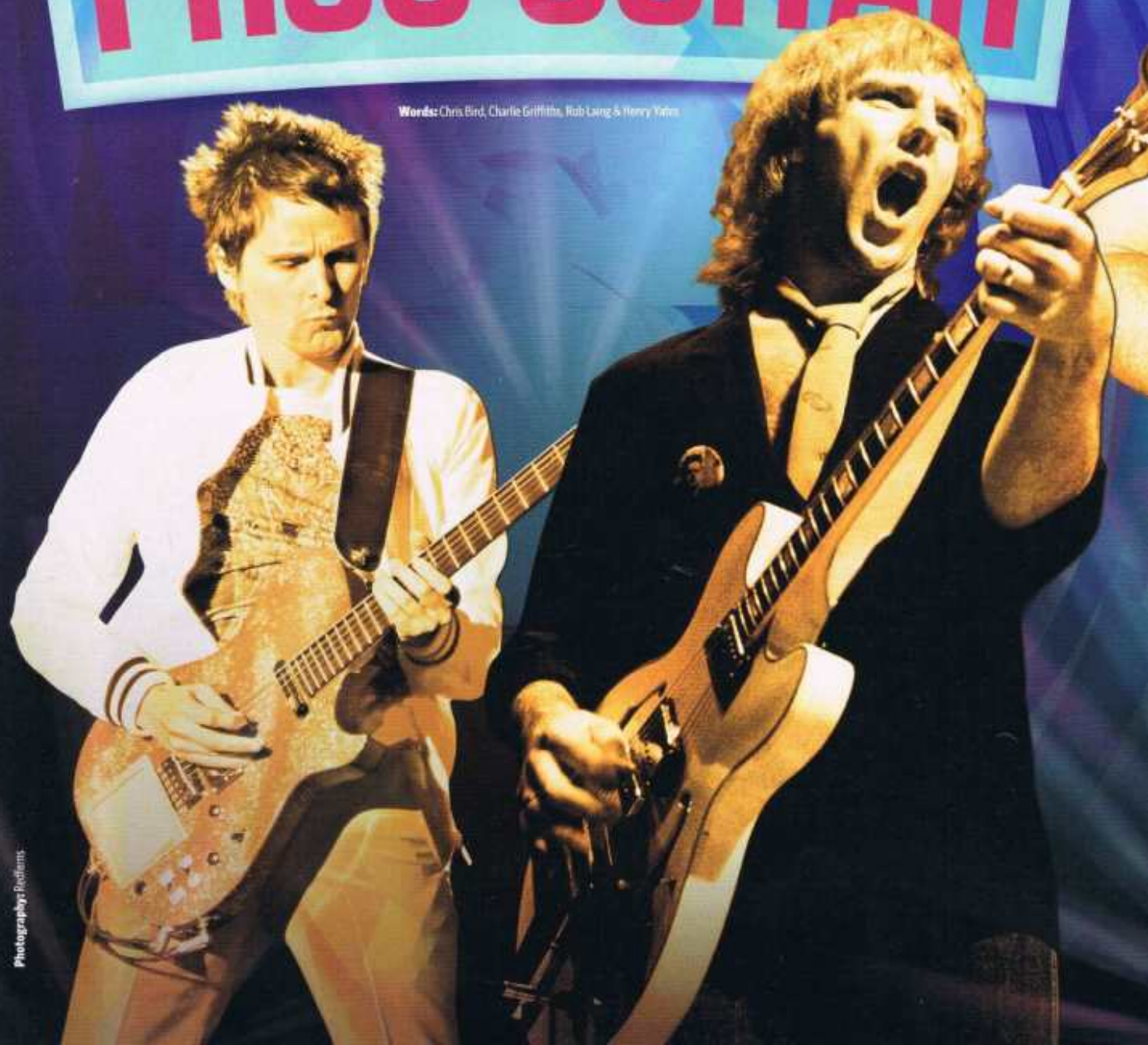
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THE A-Z OF PROG GUITAR

Words: Chris Bird, Charlie Griffiths, Rob Laing & Henry Yates



J JETHRO TULL

Knights of the sound table

"I never listened to other guitar players," Martin Barre once noted, "or I'd play the same style." Rather than follow the blues-rock pack, Jethro Tull's multi-instrumentalist had his own palette, mixing up jazz with European folk and medieval whimsy (and selling millions of records along the way). If you're arching a dubious eyebrow, just listen to the guitar work on 1971's *Aqualung*, including a solo of such fiery eloquence that it's astonishing to learn that it was played off-the-cuff.

J is also for...

Jarzombek, Ron

K KRAUTROCK

A healthy side of Powerkraut

The British press coined the term circa 1968, in a doomed attempt to contain West Germany's wildly experimental alt scene in a pigeonhole. Rejecting rock's prescribed three chords for sprawling psychedelia and free-roaming jazz inflections, Krautrock had a strong electronic bent, but guitar players such as Michael Karoli and Rudolf Sosna still sprinkled serious improvisational chops over their 16-minute marathons on albums such as Can's *Tago Mago* and Faust's eponymous debut. Sneer all you want at Germany's miserable contribution to modern rock, but the vision of the Krautrock brigade lit the fuse of everyone from David Bowie to Radiohead.

K is also for...

Karnivool; Katatonia; King Crimson; King's X

L LIFESON, ALEX

Making permanent waves

Of all the monsters of prog, Rush have now been striding across the Earth the longest. A whopping 19 studio albums and countless breathtaking live shows have earned them an army of dedicated fans, and they've done it all as a trio on their own terms. Lifeson's guitar sound is a vital part of this huge sound and legacy with shimmering cleans, righteous heavy riffs and leftfield moments of genius (hear the solo in *Limelight* – who needs the Edge and Page?). Lifeson has shown a great ability to move through eras while never losing sight of serving the overall composition, while retaining an inherently personal and frequently emotive touch. Indeed, his style is so immediately recognisable that even his chord voicings have a signature stamp...

L is also for...

Lake, Greg (King Crimson, ELP)

M MUSE

Supermassive

When a passing moron declares prog to be sexless noodling for geeks and anoraks, Muse are the perfect one-word comeback. Back in 2010, TG crowned Matt Bellamy the Guitarist Of The Decade, and with good reason. It's not just that he's taken the instrument to the outer limits, juggling neo-classical motifs with metal heaviness, or that in his Manson signature models, he officially owns the world's ultimate boys' toys. It's also that Bellamy made ambitious guitar playing cool, managing to sell out Wembley Stadium without bending his vision. All that, plus he smashed 140 guitars on the *Absolution* tour. Respect.

M is also for...

The Mars Volta; Mastodon; Meshuggah; Moog >>>

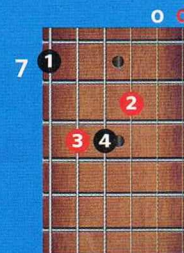
A Lifeson Less Ordinary

Essential chord shapes as used by the Rush man himself

Those classic mid-to-late 70s Rush albums introduced many a rock guitarist to Alex Lifeson's chiming sus chords and open string shapes. Notice how Badd11 and F#11 (from *Cygnus X-1 Book II: Hemispheres* and *The Spirit Of Radio* respectively) use the same shape. By moving the shape around, you get different chord types as different relationships develop between the fretted notes and the unchanging open strings. The sus2 chord, found in loads of Rush songs, has an ambiguous sound, which means you can move it around the neck, almost like a powerchord. The jangly Cadd9 chord from *La Villa Strangiato* is simply an open G chord moved up the neck.



F#11



Badd11



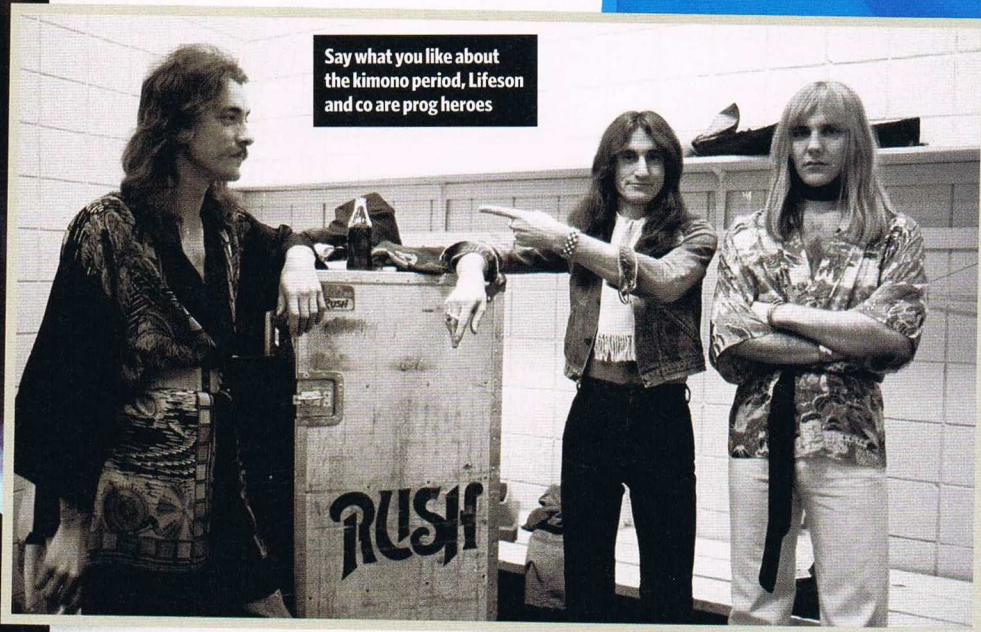
Dsus2



Cadd9



Matt Bellamy proudly flies the progressive flag in modern rock guitar music



Say what you like about the kimono period, Lifeson and co are prog heroes

UNSUNG HEROES

Under the radar

Originality is one of the things prog rock players have in common, and with so many unique players it's inevitable many don't get the widespread attention they deserve. Take Andy Latimer, a cult figure who's influenced Mikael Åkerfeldt, and is back touring with Camel this year. Then there's the highly experimental Steve Hillage who brought psychedelia and fusion to a space-rock feast, pioneering riffs built around waves of delay and blurring the divides with electronica in System 7.

Representing the younger set is Mike Vennart of now-defunct indie progressives Oceansize, an underappreciated but fascinating band with three talented guitarists. Mike can still be found on stage as Biffy Clyro's touring guitarist.

U is also for...

UK; Uriah Heap

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR

Hard graf

In the early 70s, the Manc proggers' output

tanked everywhere except – weirdly – the Italian market, but Van Der Graaf Generator's jet-black beauty and gothic vocals have since won tributes from 'artier' axemen, including John Frusciante and Graham Coxon.

Founding member Peter Hammill was no slouch on acoustic and slide, Robert Fripp made cameos on *Pawn Hearts*, and although Hugh Banton was technically an organist, he played the instrument like Hendrix ("He wanted his organ to have a whammy bar and six Marshall stacks," noted Hammill).

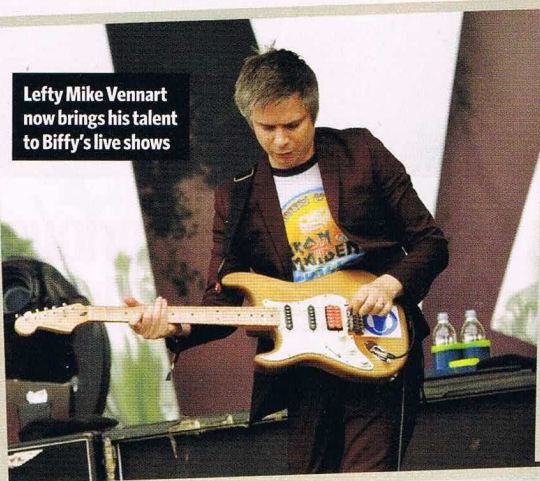
V is also for...

Vildhjarta

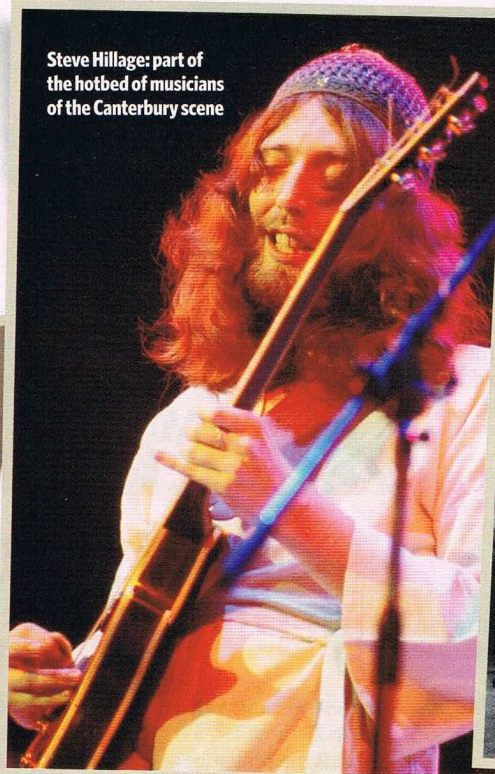
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Genesis in 1973 peaked with a flurry of puns and visionary guitar

Lefty Mike Vennart now brings his talent to Biffy's live shows



Steve Hillage: part of the hotbed of musicians of the Canterbury scene



Andy Latimer's leads with Camel sang with a passion (for prog)

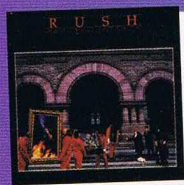


Photography: Getty Images Redfems via Getty Images x2



6 Drive Home STEVEN WILSON

Guitarist: Guthrie Govan Pigeonhole Guthrie at your peril. Anyone who had Guthrie down as a 'shredder' when it was announced he was joining Wilson's band for this album and tour were much mistaken. This singing solo is a building, Gilmour-worthy piece of emotive communication.



7 YYZ RUSH

Guitarist: Alex Lifeson Prog is home to plenty of great instrumentals, but this is still our favourite: four and a half minutes of dynamic perfection without an ounce of fat. That fluid second solo with its Arabic feel (in the Phrygian dominant scale, played mostly on the B string) is extra juicy.



8 Paranoid Android RADIOHEAD

Guitarist: Jonny Greenwood They're so over the guitar riff now, but once upon a time the overdrive that kicked in at 2:42 on a highly infectious guitar riff followed by a wild crackling guitar solo signalled Radiohead arriving as a generation's Pink Floyd.



9 Echoes PINK FLOYD

Guitarist: David Gilmour The solo to *Comfortably Numb* is so essential we shouldn't have to remind you about it. Same goes for *Money* – Gilmour's note choice makes him a master of the solo. But here, rooted in human expression, he conjures an otherworldly composition over 23 minutes. What a trip!



10 Future Breed Machine MESHUGGAH

Guitarists: Fredrik Thordendal, Mårten Hagström Finding a groove in polyrhythms is one thing, but incorporating jazz-fusion into solos and bringing the eight-string to a whole new wave of prog metal bands – as they did on *Destroy Erase Improve* – is another.



11 Knights Of Cydonia MUSE

Guitarist: Matt Bellamy The prog-mainstream crossover! There are plenty of riffy prog moments in Muse's catalogue, but the best comes after the build-up. At 4:13 Bellamy launch into the riff most likely make you headbang in car, Wayne's World style since *Bohemian Rhapsody*.



A true multi-talent:
Steven Wilson of
Porcupine Tree

WILSON, STEVEN

Top of the tree

Porcupine Tree, No-Man, IEM, Bass Communion, Blackfield, Storm Corrosion, producing, mixing and now a solo band... Steven Wilson never stops creating music. As one of the most talented progressive rock musician today, he's an incredibly self-effacing guitarist, seeing it as just part of what he does as an artist who draws from influences as diverse as ABBA and Meshuggah.

W is also for...

Wesley, John

'XANADU'

X marks the prog

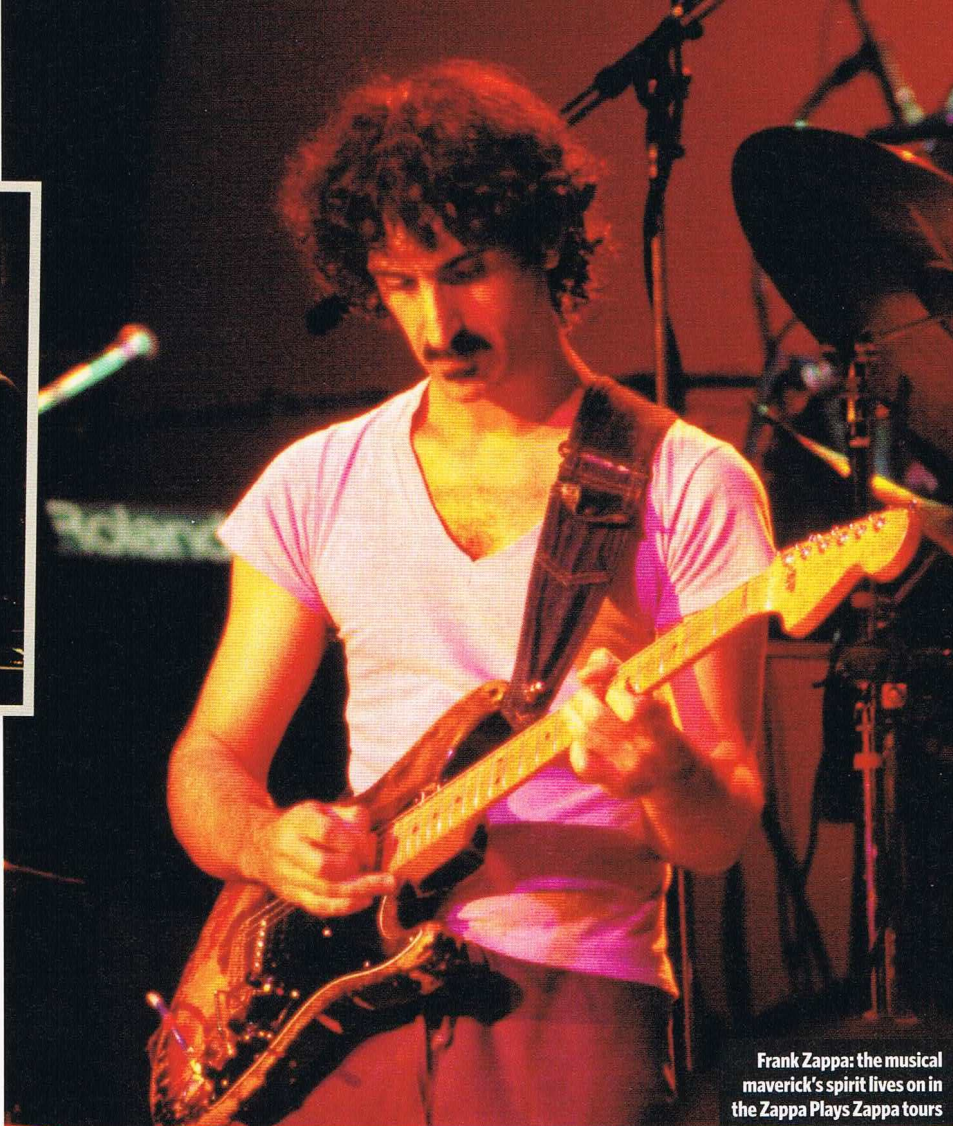
Over 10 minutes long: check. Narrative theme inspired by classic literature: check. Doubleneck guitar and bass instruments required for live performance: check. Tubular bells, wind chimes, glockenspiel, synth: check. Sublime musicianship: check.

If you wanted to show an alien how glorious prog rock can be, this Rush song would be a good one to blast through ET's headphones. Kicking off with a five-minute instrumental (they weren't looking for radio play), this cut from 1977's *A Farewell To Kings* sees the Canadians incorporating synths for the first time but without losing grip of the natural synergy between Lifeson's glimmering guitar, Geddy Lee's busy bass and Neil Peart's drum masterclass. The tempo is constantly shifting (the main riff is in 7/8), keeping you guessing. It's prime Rush.

YODELLING

Focus on a kind of magic

You should be getting the gist by now that when it comes to prog, the limits are only in your imagination. The idea of mixing unhinged yodelling with riffage and polka beats, then, seems



Frank Zappa: the musical
maverick's spirit lives on in
the Zappa Plays Zappa tours

If you want to show an alien how glorious prog rock can be, play Rush's 'Xanadu'

perfectly reasonable, even if the fact it became a Top 20 hit in 1973 is much less expected. Such is the brilliance of Focus's classic song *Hocus Pocus*. Written in a castle (of course) shortly before leaving for England to record their second album, the Dutch band's guitarist Jan Akkerman kicked off the whole idea with an improvised riff because drummer Pierre Van

Der Linden jumped in with a two-bar drum solo. Hyperactive flute solo, accordion and Thijs Van Leer then chipped in to create a very odd but thrilling classic.

Y is also for...

Yes

ZAPPA, FRANK

Frankly brilliant

"Frank would write music for me to play that just had no business being performed on a guitar," Steve V told TG of his years as Zappa's 'stunt guitarist'. Jumping from classical-inspired sound collages to extended jazz-fusion improvisation, this was a band who lived without rules, helmed by a songwriter who played without limits. Though the moustachioed one died of prostate cancer in 1993, his son Dweezil's Zappa Plays Zappa tribute tours bring that questing spirit back from the grave. ●

Z is also for...

Zappa, Dweezil



Hocus Pocus proved
yodelling need not be
confined to 'the hills'!