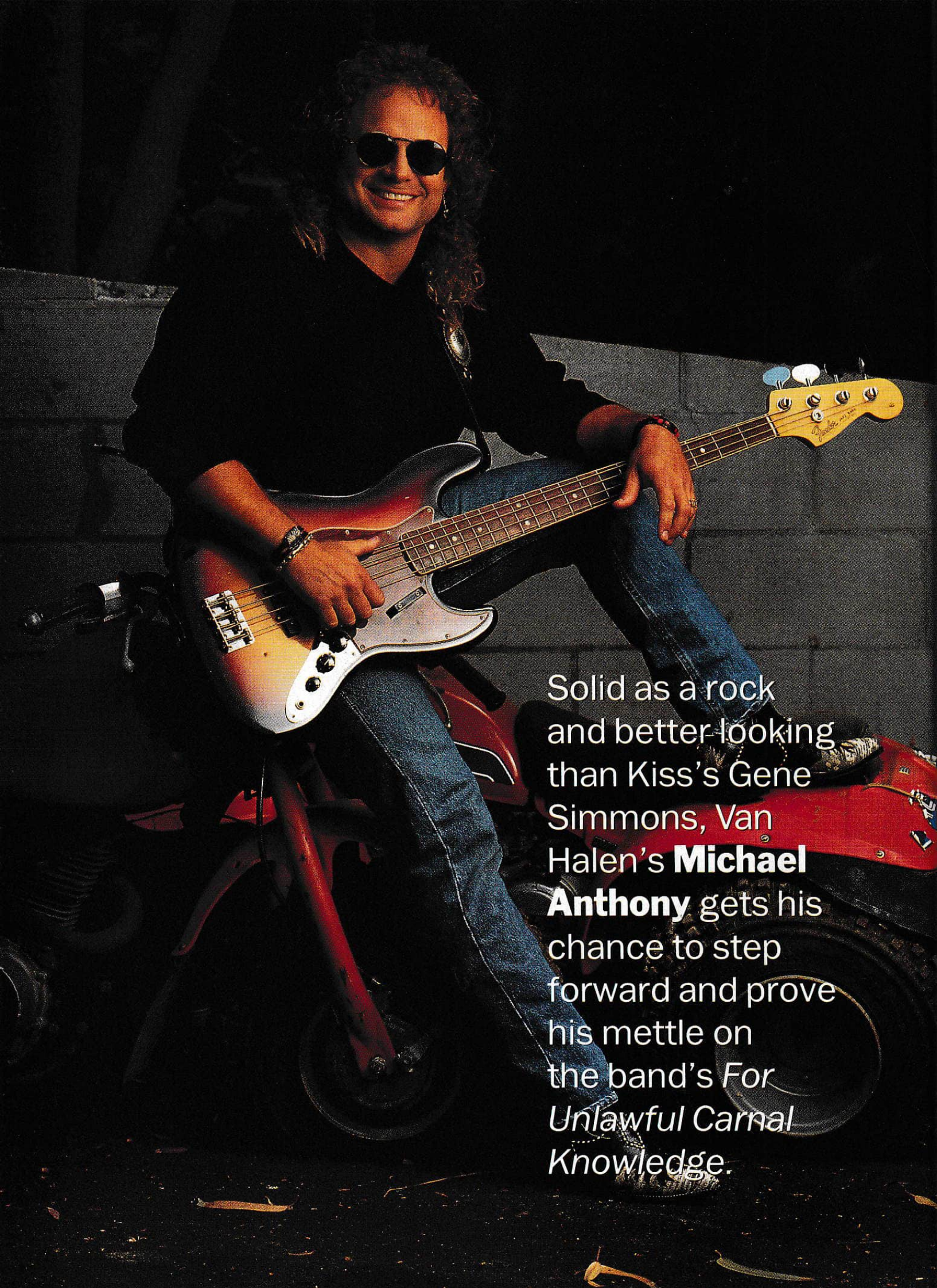


A full-page photograph of Michael Anthony of Van Halen. He is sitting on a red motorcycle, leaning forward with his legs spread wide. He is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and dark sunglasses. He has long, curly brown hair and is smiling at the camera. He is holding a Fender Telecaster guitar with a sunburst finish. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall or a night scene. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his face and the guitar.

Solid as a rock  
and better-looking  
than Kiss's Gene  
Simmons, Van  
Halen's **Michael  
Anthony** gets his  
chance to step  
forward and prove  
his mettle on  
the band's *For  
Unlawful Carnal  
Knowledge*.

When Van Halen emerged like an eruption on the American airwaves in the winter of 1977, they were almost too hot to handle. David Lee Roth's Indian war cries, Edward Van Halen's out-of-control psychotronic whammy work and Alex Van Halen's primal stomp comprised the heart and soul of the band's second generation heavy metal. But the glue that held Van Halen together—the straw that stirred their drink—was bassist Michael Anthony. With his steady stream of simple, yet effective, bass lines, Anthony continues to provide a solid foundation for the band's poten-

# IRON MIKE

tially chaotic pyrotechnics. ⚡ While it is true that the bassist's approach is not as flashy as that of Rush's Geddy Lee or Mr. Big's Billy Sheehan, anyone doubting Anthony's rock-'em, sock-'em technique need only crank the volume on *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*'s galloping "Pleasure Dome" or listen carefully to his frighteningly precise pulse on the hit "Poundcake." This is gut-pulverizing, brain-damaging bass playing at its best. ⚡ Along with his solid musicianship, the stubble-faced bass-man also projects a strong image of normality in a band of extravagant individuals. Resembling a cross between a circus strong-man and a beer-

**BY BRAD TOLINSKI**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANN SUMMA

## MICHAEL ANTHONY

drinkin' bud, Anthony is the approachable Van Halen member—a shootin'-the-shit dude who is genuinely enthusiastic when expounding on the merits of local pizza joints.

*Knowledge* is a pivotal album for Michael Anthony—the fuse that should rocket him to the top of the critic's polls. Thanks to the engineering wizardry of Andy Johns, it is the first Van Halen recording in which the bassist emerges as a bold and vital contributor. In the past, his presence was minimized in order to provide Eddie's guitar with more sonic elbow room. Unfortunately, this often served to obscure the band's muscular rhythm section, particularly on such roof-raisers as "Panama" [1984]—a song which clearly could have benefitted from a little more oomph in the bottom-end. Happily, Johns's innovative production on *Knowledge* has broadened the band's spectrum, allowing plenty of room for Anthony's Fender Jazz Bass to romp, making this Van Halen's most dynamic outing to date.

For years, Michael Anthony has stood quietly in the eye of the Van Halen juggernaut, a tranquil figure in their musical maelstrom. Now it's his turn to rip it up.

**GUITAR WORLD:** You must be psyched about this record. The bass is really kicking.

**MICHAEL ANTHONY:** I don't want to knock our former producer Donn Landee, but he was always a little bass and drum shy. This album is much heavier. It captures how the band sounds in live performance.

**GW:** Did you enjoy working with Andy Johns?

**ANTHONY:** He had a refreshing air of confidence and authority. Andy walked in and sat behind the console like it was made for him. Within minutes he was able to dial up the best bass guitar sound I'd ever heard; we were all pretty amazed. He just takes charge because he knows what he likes. And fortunately, we were usually in agreement. I mean, this was the guy who engineered *Led Zeppelin IV*.

**GW:** This album is more adventurous than some of your past efforts. Was that by design?

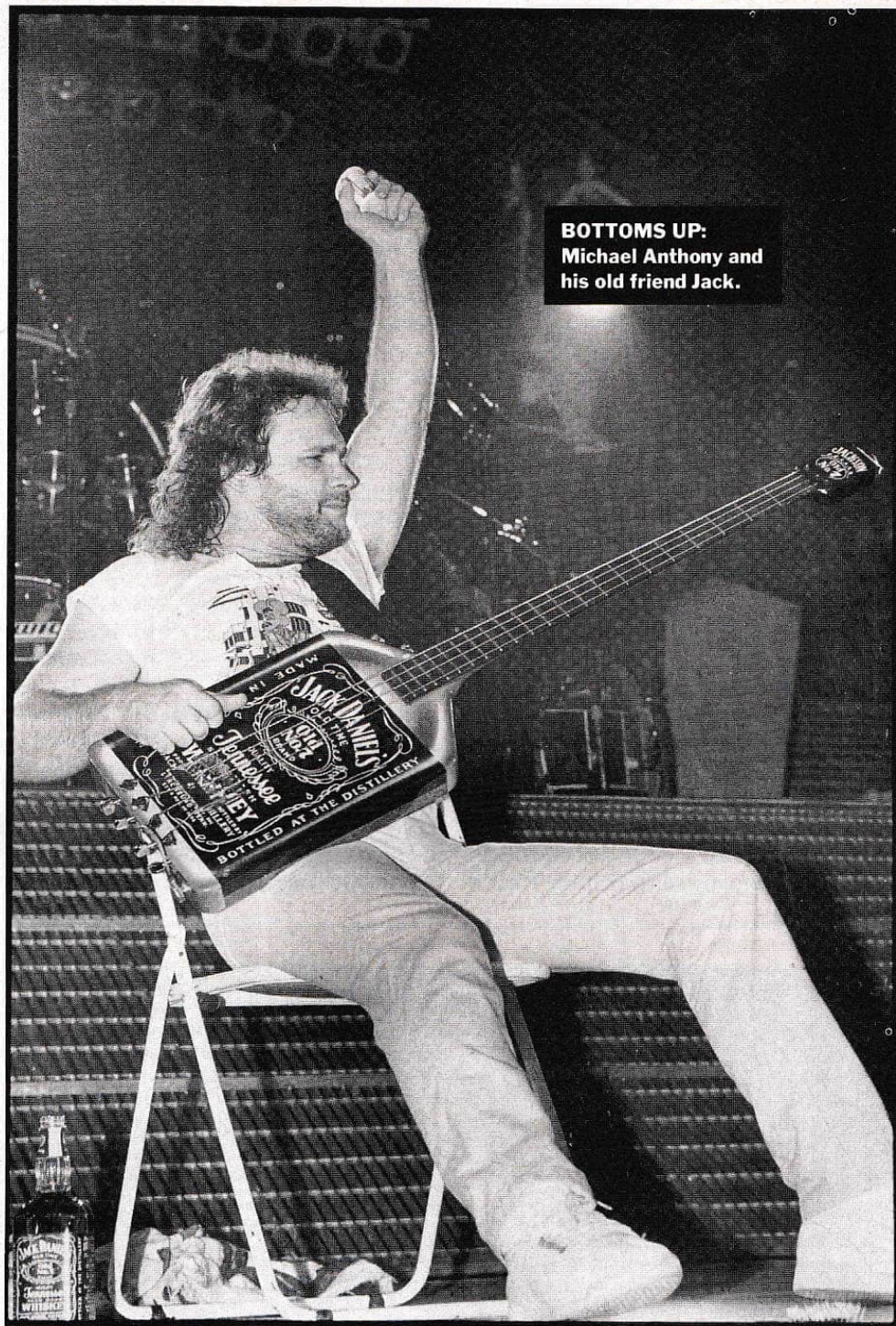
**ANTHONY:** Not really. I don't think we do anything consciously [laughs]. I think the sound really sparked us—it opened us up.

**GW:** Through the years, how has your role in the band changed?

**ANTHONY:** My role has always been to try to tie everything together. It's real tempting, especially in live performance, to get carried away when Ed and Al start jamming. But someone has to be the anchor, or else it would sound like we were playing three different songs.

**GW:** Are you a "one-take" kind of guy?

**ANTHONY:** That's a very difficult thing to accomplish, especially on an album like



this, where the material is a little more complex. We usually lay down all the rhythm parts as a band unit, and work until we get a great drum track. Once Al is satisfied with his feel, Ed and I will go back and redo our tracks until they are completely locked in. We never set out to make our tracks "ass-hole" perfect, because if that's what you want, you might as well work with a sequencer.

**GW:** Do you ever use a pick?

**ANTHONY:** Every once in a while I'll use an extra-heavy Fender or Dunlop pick, but primarily I use my fingers. For example, I used a pick on "In & Out" because I wanted a certain kind of attack. I play really hard, so anything less than an extra-heavy cracks or busts.

**GW:** What bass did you use on *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*?

**ANTHONY:** I used a Music Man four-string and five-string and a Heartfield six-string on "Spanked." For everything else I used my '64 Fender Precision or an old '64 Fender Jazz bass. I've had both for years and could never get them to sound good in the studio. I had resigned myself to the fact that I would only be able to use them as practice guitars or collector's items. Then Andy came in and made them sound great. I used the Jazz bass on "Pleasure Dome," "Man On A Mission," "Right Now" and "Poundcake"—pretty much the majority of the album. It turned out to have a lot of punch.

I also just switched to Ernie Ball bass strings, which helped give the tracks their clarity. I used Rotosounds for years, but when Sterling Ball sent me a five-string Music Man bass, I fell in love with his

## MICHAEL ANTHONY

strings, too.

For amplification I used an SWR setup and an Ampeg. It's funny: it's taken me 12 years to come full-circle back to Ampeg. I'm going to be using their stuff live, as well. Their reissues are amazing. I have an old '72 SVT stack, and I placed it right next to their reissue—they sounded exactly the same.

**GW:** Do you use many effects?

**ANTHONY:** Not really. I use a little chorusing live, but that's about it. During my solo I use a lot of effects. I'm a big fan of those cheap, \$50 pedal effects—ADA Flangers, Electro-Harmonix Micro-Bass Synthesizers—all those goofy little boxes. I recently checked out the Steve Vai model Eventide Harmonizer—you know, the one with 125 instant death presets—and it just didn't sound good with my bass.

**GW:** How do you activate all those little stomp boxes during a show?

**ANTHONY:** I've always hated having pedals on stage, so I work out what I want activated with my tech beforehand, and have him turn on the appropriate effect at the right moment. That way I'm free to do what I want.

**GW:** Do you use any outboard EQ?

**ANTHONY:** I took a trip down that lane once. I finally came to my senses during a show

on our '84 tour. My power supply blew, so I had to ditch all my outboard gear and plug directly into my SVT. What I heard was a revelation! I said, "Holy cow, this sounds good!"

You can really get sidetracked with equipment. I just kept collecting more and more stuff. Before the '84 tour, I had racks of parametrics. I was tri-amping and I found that I really didn't need it. But it does get confusing, because the bass is one of the most difficult instruments to amplify in an arena situation. It always sounds terrible. I've had sound guys suggest all kinds of things, and it's hard to ignore them because they're supposed to be experts. You know, it's like, "Here, try this parametric, then we can filter out the 250 in this hall and lose a little of that 100 and bring up the 500...."

**GW:** Are you doing anything else with Ampeg?

**ANTHONY:** I'm designing a speaker cabinet with them. It's basically a standard SVT cabinet with two added high-frequency horns. It sounds dynamite.

**GW:** What wireless system are you using?

**ANTHONY:** An old Vega wireless. I've tried a few other things, but I keep coming back to the Vega because it just seems to sound the best.

**GW:** How did you record your bass?

**ANTHONY:** I record three different signals

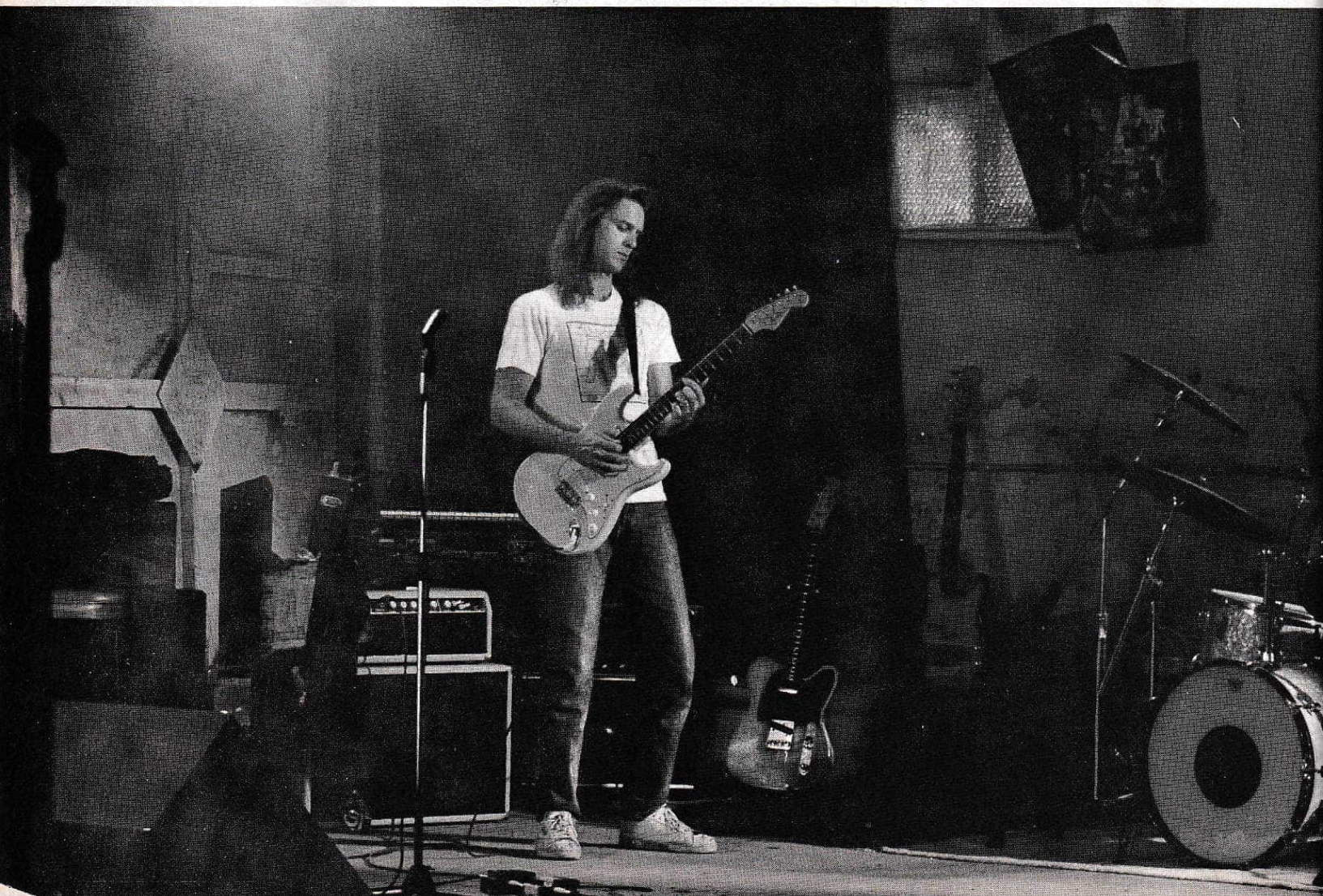
simultaneously. I mike two separate cabinets: a 15-inch bottom for low-end and a 4 x 10 bottom for mids and highs. Then I take a direct from the guitar itself. The three signals give you plenty of mixing options. But the most important thing is to get a good sound on tape. We're real conscious of starting out with a good sound on this record.

**GW:** Which song gave you the most headaches?

**ANTHONY:** "In & Out," because I had to use a pick to keep the rhythms from sounding mushy, and I rarely use one. That song was difficult in the first place, because I had to play a steady stream of sixteenth notes throughout. I started by using a lot of wrist action, but the sound wasn't powerful enough. It wasn't until my whole arm and wrist completely tightened up that I was able to really lay into the string and get the heaviness and consistency that I wanted. I was using my whole arm as a hammer. My bass really took a beating on that one, and my arm hurt like hell after every take.

**GW:** What's your musical background?

**ANTHONY:** I picked up the trumpet in second grade, and played until the first year of junior college. I was kind of following in the footsteps of my father, who had played trumpet in several big bands. Then I joined my first rock group and it was like, "See ya later, marching band."



**GW:** Did you study any theory?

**ANTHONY:** Yes. I wanted to major in music in college, but my parents were against the idea. So I majored in psychology for a couple of years. Finally I wore them down, and I studied music for the next two years. But then I started thinking, what am I going to do? Teach song-flute to kindergarteners? I was just a couple of credits away from getting my A.A. when I dropped out. The band was starting to play a lot and things were just getting too hectic and complicated.

**GW:** What did your dad think of that?

**ANTHONY:** He kicked me out of the house! But the band was getting huge, locally, and it was either now or never. I would've shot myself if the band had made it without me. After we played our first tour, I bought my parents a car and they became my biggest fans.

**GW:** Did the guys ever tease you for going to school?

**ANTHONY:** No! It was just the opposite—they thought it was good. Actually, before I joined the band, Alex and I would run into each other as he was leaving his jazz improvisation classes.

**GW:** When did you first become aware of the Van Halen brothers?

**ANTHONY:** Back in '73, when the band I was with at the time opened for them. It's easy to

remember because their P.A. blew up and Ed asked me if they could use ours. Later, a mutual friend told me they were looking for a bass player, and were wondering whether I'd be interested.

**GW:** Was David Lee Roth in the band at that point?

**ANTHONY:** Yeah, he had been with them for about a year. That was one of the reasons I joined Van Halen. I was the lead singer in my band and I didn't really feel comfortable in that role. I just wanted to concentrate on my bass playing. I thought, "These guys are great and they all sing. I won't have to worry about a thing." Then one day they asked me if I sang harmony, and I said, "Yes." That was the biggest mistake of my life [laughs]. They really liked my voice and started giving me all this background stuff to sing.

**GW:** Did Ed have a big reputation back then?

**ANTHONY:** Pretty much. People would tell me, "You've gotta see this band. This guy, Ed Van Halen, man, he can play the shit exactly like the record." When you're young something like that is really impressive.

**GW:** Do you remember your Van Halen audition?

**ANTHONY:** It was really strange. I met Ed and Al in this garage in Pasadena, and they just started playing all this crazy stuff in odd

time signatures. I'd never heard a rock band get off on that kind of outside stuff before and it really excited me. All the bands I played with were always very straight ahead. I guess I surprised them, because I hung right in.

**GW:** What are some of your favorite Van Halen songs?

**ANTHONY:** I've been listening to *Fair Warning* a lot. Every now and then I'll go out with some people and they'll pull out a Van Halen record and I'll say, "Naah, don't listen to our stuff." But somebody put on "Mean Streets" and it sounded great. I actually got the CD for my car and I play it all the time. I also like 1984—"Drop Dead Legs" in particular.

After completing this album, I found myself wishing that we could go back and recut some of the earlier songs with what we know today. They would sound so much better. Actually, it would be cool to rerecord the whole second album! There was a lot of good material on that record, but it didn't come across as powerful as it could have.

**GW:** We recently heard some bootlegs of your demos from the first record and there were a couple of pretty good tunes that never made it on to any of your records. "Dark Star," in particular, was interesting.

**ANTHONY:** We've written a lot of good stuff

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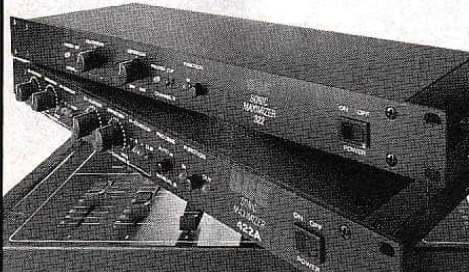
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## MICHAEL ANTHONY

that never made it on records. But regarding that bootleg, I don't know how that stuff gets out! Just last month I was driving in Arizona and I heard something vaguely familiar blasting from the stereo of the car next to me. I suddenly realized that it was us! It was some old song that never made it on to any of our records. I stopped the guy, and asked him for the tape. I wasn't mad or anything, I was just curious. He was real nice and gave it to me and said he'd just bought it from some guy in the street. I try to collect all that stuff. I've got some great shows from the old Starwood in Hollywood.

**GW:** Who are some of your bass influences?

**ANTHONY:** John Paul Jones is my primary influence. He's a perfect example of someone who plays with taste. I also like Jack Bruce's work with Cream, Tim Bogert's playing on the *Beck, Bogert and Appice* album, and the late Felix Pappalardi—Mountain's *Nantucket Sleighride* is one of my all-time favorite records. I listen to some jazz, but when I play, I'm a *rock and roller*.

The first bass player I got excited about was Dick Peterson of Blue Cheer. He used to wear his bass down around his knees and play through huge stacks of Marshalls—he

looked incredible. When I saw him I said, "That is what I want to do—sling my bass low-and-crank that shit up!" I wear my bass a lot higher these days. Maybe I should rethink that.

**GW:** I saw Duff McKagan with Guns N' Roses the other day, and....

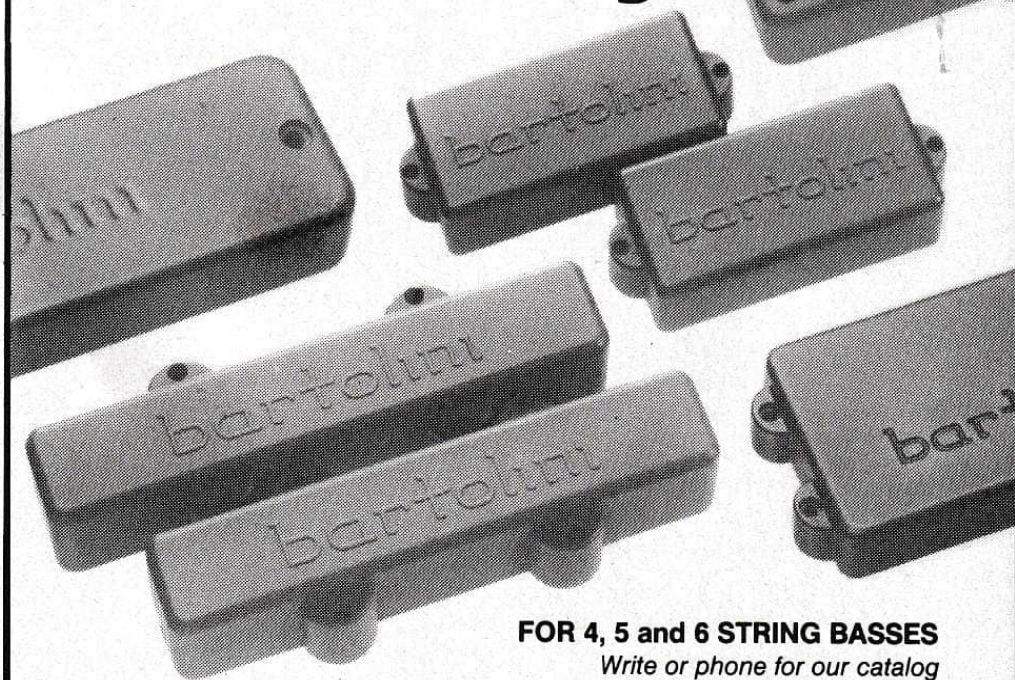
**ANTHONY:** Yeah, Duff basically wears his bass on the floor [*laughs*]!

**GW:** Of your contemporaries, who do you find impressive?

**ANTHONY:** I like Metallica. They are real honest. Their music is what they are. I've partied with them several times, and besides being able to drink more beer than any other band I've ever seen in my life, they are for real. Their music is admirable because it is extremely difficult, and they have incredible endurance. I don't like everything that they do, but they totally win you over with their conviction. Personally, I think most of what I see on MTV is complete shit—tax write-offs for record companies. It seems like you can remove the head of any given hard rock band, paste it on another band's shoulders and it wouldn't make any difference. They all look the same and sound the same.

**GW:** When Van Halen debuted, you guys went against the grain of the traditional "leather and chains" look associated with hard rock.

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**ANTHONY:** Yeah, we were probably a little more influenced by the glitter movement. Bowie was real popular back then. I fell off my platform shoes more than once while drinking between sets [laughs]. If you look closely on our first record you'll notice we are all wearing platforms! We were pretty cocky back then. Our attitude was, "Let's do our own thing and see if people follow that."

**GW:** Gene Simmons, Kiss's bassist, produced the band's first demo. What was that like?

**ANTHONY:** Well, Gene is huge and I'm only 5'6," so I couldn't even see the dude's face [laughs]. My first impression of him was that he was a great business man. He had a real, no-nonsense, business-oriented look about him that's hard to describe. When he first saw our band he came up to us and said, "I can make you stars."

We actually learned a lot from him. After talking to him for an hour, he made me really wonder whether I wanted to be a musician. He started talking to us about accountants and lawyers and it all sounded pretty heavy and a little scary.

**GW:** Your bass style is similar to Gene's in that you're both very solid players.

**ANTHONY:** I like to think I'm a little better looking [laughs].

**GW:** How would you describe each member of the band?

**ANTHONY:** That's really hard, because when you know people as long as I've known them, it's difficult to be objective. The guys in the band are my best friends. But let me try to give it a shot:

Edward never basks in his own glory. He's always been down-to-earth. He also never restricts himself to any rules. When I first joined the band I visited him at his house and he was cutting up a guitar. I said, "Hey, what the hell are you doing?" Man, I've seen him buy these beautiful vintage guitars and just tear 'em up. He's always been like that.

Al is Mr. Rock Solid. He's the leader and that's the way a drummer should be. A lot of drummers play with bands—Alex makes you play with him.

Sammy—he's a lead singer, what can you say? Lead singers are all the same. Sammy is the guy with the endless energy. If it ever gets too dull in the studio, we just give him a call. He always has an attitude, and gets his 20 licks in before you even have a chance to open your mouth. That's what makes a lead singer. If they're quiet or withdrawn, they might as well play bass [laughs]!

**GW:** You don't seem too shy and retiring.

**ANTHONY:** I'm pretty quiet, until I get on stage. That's when I really open up.

**GW:** That's true—you look scarier than shit up there.

**ANTHONY:** Sometimes I scare myself! ●

*continued from page 92*

**VAN HALEN:** No, my reference was my ear. It depends on what side of the bed you wake up. I mean, I just played through the Peavey earlier today and I thought, "Hmmm, this sounded better yesterday."

Occasionally, when I'm recording and can't get the sound I want out of the amp, I'll just turn the studio monitor down so all I hear is the unamplified guitar. And I'll lay the parts down that way.

**GW:** Why isn't there a Van Halen live album?

**VAN HALEN:** What's the point?

**GW:** You're one of the few bands that could make a legitimately great live record, because the band is so spontaneous.

**VAN HALEN:** I've never heard a tape that I've been completely satisfied with. There's always something that goes wrong during the course of a show. It's usually not until the last show of any given tour that we finally eliminate all the bugs. I'm always yelling at the road crew to change something. It's always, "Sorry, we'll nail it next gig." And they never do until the last couple of shows, which are usually perfect. Then the comment is something like, "Don't worry, we'll nail it next tour."

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