

Lyle Workman

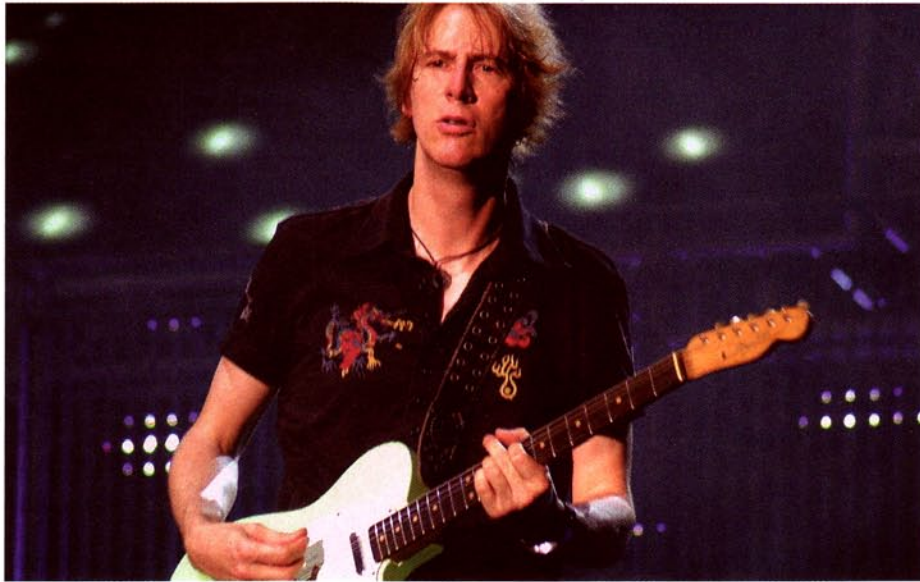


BY MATT BLACKETT

LYLE WORKMAN IS SOMETHING OF A MULTI-tasker. Or he's schizophrenic. Or maybe he just can't say no. How else can you explain a career path that has taken him from pop funksters Bourgeois Tagg to playing wingman for Todd Rundgren to sessions and gigs for Jellyfish, Beck, Frank Black, Sting, and many others?

And that doesn't take into account his most high-profile work over the past few years: scoring smash-hit movies such as *40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Superbad*, and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*.

But that still ain't all. There's the Lyle Workman we see here. The guy who releases elaborate, intricate solo albums where he combines complex string and percussion arrangements with massive guitar layers and



textures and chops that call to mind Jimmy Page, John McLaughlin, and Jeff Beck. That's what listeners are treated to on Workman's latest, *Harmonic Crusader* [Infrared], a record that features tons of Workman's guitar work, but also the drumming of monsters such as Simon Phillips, Gary Novak, and Vinnie Colaiuta.

How did you find the time to make this record?

I worked on it on and off for about eight years, in between touring and movies. Basically in between all of my income.

What was the evolution of the songs, from the writing stage to the demos to the finished product?

Some songs were written and recorded in a very short period of time. For example, most of the song "Ode to the Gypsy King" was done in a few days. And "Devotion" came together pretty much in one day. It's essentially just one acoustic guitar, one electric guitar, and my voice. I played a really old Washburn parlor-sized gut-string guitar from the 1800s, and overdubbed the second half with my '72 Thinline Tele through my '66 Fender Princeton.

"Ruckus Maximus" was a tune that took a long time to finish. It required a lot of work to embellish it the way I wanted and I didn't have enough time to do it start to finish when I wrote it. I basically fleshed the whole thing out—the chord progression and the melodies—with just one guitar and a click. Then I started to add instruments like drums and bass. That song has Simon Phillips on drums. When I came up with the A section, I just heard Simon playing it. I had him in the back of my mind,

because I had been listening to all those Jeff Beck records.

That tune has some pretty wild lead work.

I believe the solos on that song were tracked to a click. My plan the entire time was to replace the solos. But there's something about the relaxed state I'm in when I know it's not for real, when I know I'm going to come back to it and replace it. There's an ease to my playing. I'm not too precious about it and that's what happened there. When I listened back after Simon played on it, I ended up keeping my rough solo.

What kind of direction did you give him on the track?

I sent him an mp3 of the basic version and a chart, because there were several meter changes. I didn't know how he was going to feel some of the sections, because they can be felt a couple of different ways. If you were to listen to this song with a click track, you might be surprised where the click is.

Like a lot of tunes on this record, the guitar on "Ruckus Maximus" is doubled with other instruments. Talk about your approach to those layers.

That doubling usually happens toward the end of recording. Once I outline the basic harmony and outfit it with the meat and potatoes guitar, then I'm always looking for textures that I can add to give it some variety. On that song, there's a guitar melody that's being doubled by vibes and marimba—sort of a Frank Zappa-style thing. I wrote all the notes out for the percussionists and it's a fairly elaborate chart, with some of the notes flying by pretty quickly. I love the sound of guitar being doubled by percussive instruments like vibes. I also love the sound of

guitar and strings, and there's a fair amount of that on this record, as well. I'm a huge fan of classical music, where you've got brass, strings, horns, and woodwinds. Within that framework you can get a lot of textures, and I like to apply that concept to the music I write. I'm always into a wider sonic scope than what electric guitar, bass, keyboards, and drums can provide, even though a lot of great music has been written with that instrumentation.

At about 5:00 in "Burning of the Brightest Flame," there's a really fast, intricate passage that kind of sounds like guitar but kind of doesn't.

I'm doubling that line in octaves. That was my modified 1969 100-watt Marshall that I just love the sound of. I use that a lot.

What other gear did you rely on?

I used a lot of Divided by 13 amps. On the guitar front, I played my '63 Strat, a '58 reissue Les Paul, and my '72 Thinline Tele—a lot of the lush chordal stuff is that guitar. I miked the amps with a Shure SM57 and either a Royer R-121 ribbon or this Heil PR30 that I really like on guitars. I tend to use those microphones in combination, and I blend them pretty much half and half.

"Pieds-en-l'Air" has some incredible EBow work. How did you put that together?

Dave Gregory from XTC told me about this composer, Peter Warlock, who wrote a piece called *Capriol Suite*. I got the CD and there was this one movement, "Pieds-en-l'Air," that I just loved. I got the score and recorded the parts one by one with an EBow. Then I tripled or quadrupled each track to give it the sound of a guitar orchestra. That's 21 tracks of EBow guitar.

Did you take steps to make certain parts sound more like clarinets, oboes, or cellos?

I did. For the cello parts, I didn't want such a vibrant top end, so I rolled the tone off the guitar a bit and changed the EQ on the amp. I wanted to give each part its own space as much as I could.

Your resume is pretty varied. Was there a guitarist that you modeled your career path after?

No. I don't know if it's because I get bored easily or that I have an interest in all aspects of music, but any time I was anywhere near an opportunity, if I was asked, I would just say yes, even if I didn't know what I was doing. Yes, yes, yes. I'm doing orchestral stuff for films now. I don't have any background in that. I'm relying on my ears and my abilities, and I'm constantly surprising myself with things. It's amazing how much you can do that you never knew you could do. 🎸