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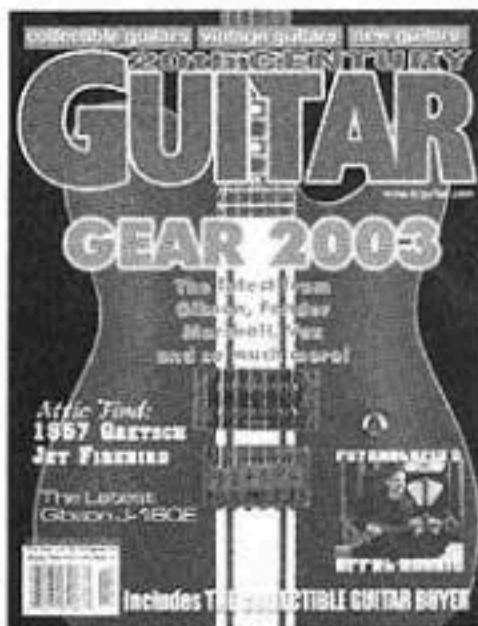
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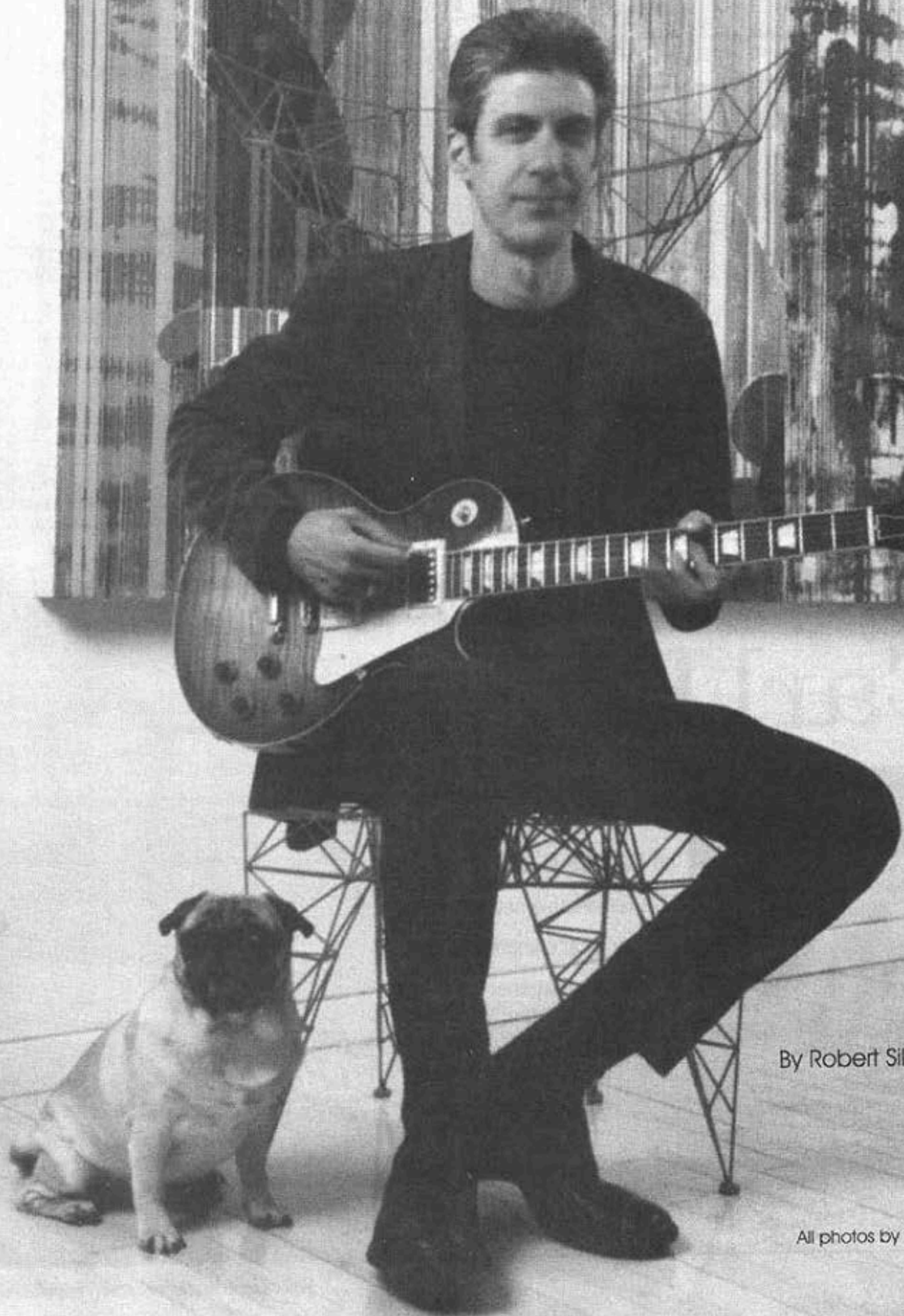
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U T O F



By Robert Silverstein

All photos by Rich Cervone

a conversation with guitarist
ERROL ANTZIS

The 1990's was a watershed era of sorts—a bridge connecting the great musical styles of the 20th Century, from TV and soundtrack music to '50s rock and roll, '60s pop and '70s progressive jazz-rock. Truly the decade of the independent, self-contained recording artist, the '90s ended with musicians gaining more control over the music and more importantly, the way it is manufactured and distributed. One of the truly gifted independent artists to emerge during the '90s, NYC guitarist Errol Antzis made a sizable musical breakthrough with his 1999 debut CD, which he titled *Psychoteria*. With Antzis performing everything, the first *Psychoteria* album is an all instrumental, rockin' guitar fest spotlighting nine originals and two choice covers. Making significant musical inroads since his first album, Antzis returns in 2003 with a second *Psychoteria* CD called *The Hard And The Soft*. Expertly performed, produced and engineered entirely by Antzis, *The Hard And The Soft* also marks Errol's emergence as a lead vocalist. The vocal tunes add a welcome pop edge to the festivities, but make no mistake about it—*The Hard And The Soft* is yet another fine Antzis outing strewn with savvy electric guitar work and melodic arrangements. Braced by an abundance of original vocal and instrumental tracks, and highlighted by animated intro covers of Led Zeppelin, '70s prog-rockers Focus and soundtrack legend Henry Mancini, *The Hard And The Soft* is Antzis at his best and clearly establishes him as a guitarist for the new century. For his January 16, 2003 interview with 20th Century Guitar, Errol was quite enthusiastic as he spoke about his extensive guitar influences, growing up just outside of NYC and *The Hard And The Soft*.

TCG: *The Hard And The Soft* is an excellent progression from your first solo album *Psychoteria* back in 1998. How long have you been working on these tracks for the new album?

ER: Quite frankly, about 3 years. The two CDs were recorded in different studios, so the recordings, as well as the compositions and performances, reflect a number of different times and places.

TCG: You released the album under the group name *Psychoteria*. How did you come up with that name?

ER: I woke up one morning just thinking of this name *Psychoteria* and how interesting it would be for a CD. And it coincided with an idea I had for the cover of the first album. Everyone who heard the name thought it was very memorable so I decided to keep it, not only as the name of the first CD, but as the name of the band as well.

TCG: The new CD has great cover artwork. Any special significance behind the title of the album *The Hard And The Soft*?

ER: Yes, it's meant to be interpreted on many different levels. I'd been writing songs in a number of different genres, from heavy metal to more pop-rock oriented pieces. So that's hard and soft. The cover of the CD pictures my dog, on a soft shag rug, juxtaposed with the aluminum guitar.

TCG: Like the first *Psychoteria* album, you play all the instruments on *The Hard And The Soft* including drums, only this time you've expanded to have almost half of the songs contain vocals. The vocals feature a pretty unique mix of rock and pop songs. I was trying to compare the influences but it still sounded pretty original.

ER: I appreciate your saying that it's original

because that's really what I believe every true artist strives to attain. Obviously everyone has influences, and on the guitar mine range from Jan Akkerman and Michael Schenker to Jimmy Page, Jimmy Herring and Frank Gambale. That being said, the more I compose, the more I find my work to be not only an amalgam of my influences, but to truly have a unique voice.

TCG: From the new album, I thought the track "Fall", which is just great, had a strong Beatles influence.

ER: I would say that of all the musicians I listen to The Beatles are the artists I love the most. While I've typically listened to many heavily solo guitar-oriented bands, the compositional style of The Beatles transcends virtually all other artists. Quite frankly any comparison of my music to that of The Beatles is to me the supreme compliment.

TCG: Another great song from *The Hard And The Soft* is the lead off track. What inspired "I Don't Care"?

ER: It's very funny because the first time I played that for my wife, she looked at me a little bit funny (laughter) and said, "Honey, what is this about?" And the answer is it's actually about the stock market. I wrote that song during late 2000. I'd been watching the rise of stocks for quite a few years. When the market began to tumble I decided that the best thing for my mental health was to stop watching with such morbid fascination and focus on other things. That's when I wrote that song. I obviously wrote the lyrics in such a way as to disguise their true intent, and the song can therefore be interpreted on different levels.

TCG: I thought the best vocal track from the new album is the song "Change".

ER: That was a song I began writing when I had some feelings of a mid-life crises creeping in and that's how those lyrics came about. The performance really came from the heart!

TCG: Is that the Jackson guitar on the cover of the new album?

ER: The guitar on the cover is a Jackson Roswell Rhodes, of which I think there are 130 or so. One evening, my wife, Deborah, and I were watching TV, and I was leafing through a book about guitars. Out of the corner of her eye, Deborah saw a photo of the Roswell, and said "Honey, what's that guitar? It's really beautiful." Of course, that's all I needed to hear (laughter)! I immediately went on a quest to find one. The blue guitar that's on the back cover is called the Lace Helix. The neck has a twist from the nut to the bridge that makes it more comfortable to play.

TCG: You list a lot of the guitars in the CD booklet. How many guitars do you have?

ER: There are quite a few (laughter)! Each one is unique and each evokes a different emotion when I play. I typically have a specific guitar in mind when I want to start practicing or writing and I'll go immediately to that guitar, thinking, "This guitar is perfect for the emotion I'm attempting to convey." That being said, I will not own a guitar, or any piece of equipment for that matter, that I don't play or use often. Guitars are meant to be played and not kept locked up in their cases.

TCG: On the first *Psychoteria* album, among the originals you had guitar instrumental covers of the Badfinger pop classic "No Matter What" and the theme from the '60s TV show "I Dream Of Jeannie", which in and of itself is a great choice for a cover.

ER: To me the best way to pay tribute to my influences is to cover some of their works.

ERROL ANTZIS

And as with "I Dream of Jeannie", they don't necessarily have to be guitar-centric. With "I Dream of Jeannie", I've always been a fool for beautiful blonds (laughter) whether it's Barbara Eden, Grace Kelly, Elizabeth Montgomery or my wife. When I thought of some instrumentals to do, "Jeannie" just popped into my mind and I thought, 'you know I've never heard a cover of that song.'

TCG: You have a few covers on the new album—Led Zeppelin's "The Song Remains The Same", Henry Mancini's "Peter Gunn" and the Focus classic "Hocus Pocus". That's a pretty interesting choice of covers. What makes a song a good cover for you?

ER: If I love it to death! (laughter) Because if I love the song enough and it's ingrained in my being to a certain degree then I feel I can devise my own version of it that will be somewhat true to the original but at the same time have my own stylistic influence.

TCG: Your Focus cover of "Hocus Pocus" is great, and you replace Thijs Van Leer's yodeling with some varied styles of keyboard and guitar sounds. I think it sounds better the way you did it.

ER: That song, in and of itself, was one of the songs that got me playing guitar in the first place. I wanted to do something with "Hocus Pocus" that was a little bit different and that's when I set the song to the Bo Diddley beat. In addition, rather than attempt to imitate yodeling I thought, 'let me do something...I certainly won't say more creative, but creative in a different way.' A funny story about that song occurred when I had Bob Ludwig master the CD. Bob's playing through my CD prior to mastering and we get to that song. Suddenly, he got this kind of interesting smile on his face. And I said to him, "You probably know this song, it was a very popular song in the '70s." And he looked at me and he said, "Oh, I know this song very well. I remember when I mastered it for Focus." And I was so impressed to be working with such a legend.

TCG: Another great instrumental track from *The Hard And The Soft* is the song "Mystere". It's kinda jazzy. Which guitars were used on that track?

ER: Actually that had a lot of the Roland VG-8 on it with one of my Roland ready guitars, if you will. Each string is processed individually, which opens up a lot of avenues. I don't know where I came up with the original concept for that song. I think I was in a very, I won't say dark mood that day, but certainly it's not a light sounding song. And I'd been listening to a lot of John McLaughlin at the time, when he was with the Mahavishnu Orchestra and I think that's what inspired the acoustic guitar solo.

TCG: Could you speak a little bit about your musical background? Where were you born?

ER: I was born in Westchester County, New York, in a town called Yorktown Heights, about fifty miles north of Manhattan. At the time, it was farms and cattle crossing the street, but now I think it's become a general

part of suburbia.

TCG: Do you recall when you started playing guitar?

ER: My mom was a professional performer. She was a great operatic singer and a fantastic pianist. Her piano playing was very full, very orchestral in nature. I'm sure I inherited some of my talent from her—I started taking piano lessons when I was about six or seven years old. And I took classical piano for quite a few years and then a neighbor of mine started playing accordion and I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. So I said, 'let's get an accordion'. And my folks were very smart. What they did is, they said, 'let's rent an accordion' (laughter). And so we rented an accordion. I dutifully took accordion lessons to keep up with my neighbor. And about six months later he decided, 'Ah, no more accordion, I'm going to play the electric guitar'. This was when I was about 14. So I had to buy an electric guitar and I got an old Hagstrom 3, which was my first electric guitar. And something about the electric guitar really grabbed me and I found myself just bowled over by the possibilities—sonically and visually with the electric guitar. Over time, by desire and sometimes necessity, I've taught myself bass and drums and then began singing.

TCG: I'm interested in knowing how you evolved into a self-contained recording artist. I guess when you were younger you played in bands.

ER: Yes, when I was in high school I played in numerous bands and because of my interest in electrical engineering I got involved with the technical side of music and recording very early on. And when I was in college at MIT I started to buy and build musical recording equipment. So at the same time I was honing my musical chops I was also learning how to operate a studio and produce music.

TCG: Could you mention some of your other musical influences?

ER: I would say that, besides Michael Schenker and Ulrich Roth when he was with The Scorpions, Jan Akkerman, Jimmy Page, Hendrix, Alex Lifson, Marino and Trower. They were certainly my earliest influences. And I always try and incorporate new influences into my playing. I never stop Steve listening to and learning from others, like Steve Vai and Joe Satriani. I also was always a big fan of John McLaughlin, Frank Gambale and Jimmy Herring, Joe Pass and Les Paul. Fairly diverse and I would like to think that my style is an amalgam of all those and yet unique in and of itself.

TCG: When I played your albums, I can hear how you skillfully blend your pop influences with your jazz guitar influences in a well rounded way that makes it very easy to listen to.

ER: Exactly! I mean, I really do

love any style of music as long as it's played well. What I've tried to do in my music is to have plenty of guitar playing, but still have a balanced arrangement while utilizing interesting structures, rather than a simple 1-4-5. Each song should be a journey and evoke an emotional response in the listener. If it doesn't, then it's not successful.

TCG: Could you divulge any plans for your next album?

ER: Yeah, I think that the third CD is going to be even more diverse than *The Hard and the Soft* in terms of style and substance. I know that the standard adage is to hone in on a particular style to be commercially successful, but I thrive on diversity. I have to play what I feel and what I enjoy listening to.

TCG: Being that you so expertly play all the instruments on *The Hard And The Soft*, where do you see your music heading?

ER: I have to say, I get a huge kick out of doing almost everything myself. I find it extremely rewarding to have put out two CDs and be able to say I did everything from composing to performing and engineering. And it's not so much self-gratification as it is just a real sense of accomplishment. I do enjoy performing with others as much as possible, and that sometimes leads to ideas for new compositions. I find performing live and recording in a studio to be different experiences, though. It's certainly possible that I'll have collaborators on the next CD.

TCG: So what's the plan for the next album? Are you looking to expand into a new musical direction?

ER: First and foremost, I play and record what I love. And my greatest hope is that other people will listen and enjoy it as much as I do, and be moved in some way. Because I listen to so much other music as well, my influences continue to expand. And so, besides the artists I mentioned earlier, I'm constantly trying to digest new influences going forward. I try to assimilate everything. Resistance is futile. ■

Thanks to Errol and Deborah Antzis, www.psychoteria.com - Photographs by Richard Cervone - richardcervone@rcn.com

