



Trey Alexander BY MICHAEL MOLEND

IT WAS A THRILLING AND TOUCHING MOMENT when, after surviving the cut amidst thousands of entrants and then going riff-to-riff against nine talented finalists, Trey Alexander stepped onstage at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall as the winner of *Guitar Player's* Guitar Hero 2006 competition on September 23, 2006. The Pennsylvania native leapt into the brink bolstered by the support of his family, the best wishes of his guitar students and friends back home, and the devotion of his fiancée, Talia Drennen. Starting out slinky with jazzy note flurries, Alexander built tension by traversing soaring melodies, shred passages, tremolo-bar shrieks, atonal nattering, rhythmic riffery, and blatant guitar craziness. The stunning performance knocked out the near-capacity crowd *and* the judges (Joe Satriani, Steve Lukather, Richie Kotzen, Rafael Moreira, Shredmistress Rynata, and Musician's Friend's Steve Read), and the evening reached a moving coda when a tearful Alexander accepted the GH06 crown with a tribute to his late father.

What is your current gear setup?

My main guitars are an Ibanez JEM7VWH with DiMarzio Evolution pickups, a '96 Fender Jeff Beck Signature Stratocaster, and a Taylor 814ce acoustic. And, of course, I have the First Act "Guitar Hero 06" guitar of which only two were made, and the Fender Stratocaster signed by all the GH06 judges that I won at the competition. My amps are a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe modified by Rick Coberly—a.k.a. "Rixmixnfix"—and the Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier Roadster that was given to me at GH06. My main effects are a Robert Keeley compressor, an Ibanez TS9DX Flexi-4X2 and a Boss DS-1 both modded by Robert Keeley, a Budda wah, a Radial Classic Tube distortion, and a DigiTech Delay. I use Ernie Ball, D'Addario, and Elixir Nano Web strings—usually .010 and .009 sets—and Dunlop Delrin 500 Series picks.

What is your tonal ideal?

There are so many beautiful tones! Greg Howe, Steve Vai, Eric Johnson, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jason Becker, Shawn Lane, Brent Mason, Allan Holdsworth, and Yngwie Malmsteen all have incredible tones, and what I think makes them so beautiful is that they are unique. Each set of ears is different, and we all gravitate to the tones that raise the hairs on our arms. However, I think that tone is very much a part of the player's fingers, so I feel that the best tones are the ones that reveal the way an artist sounds on an unamplified instrument. For example, I practice most of the time on an unplugged electric guitar. I feel this produces the truest form of my playing, as there are no bells or whistles to help me sound better.

Who are your main influences?

Steve Vai is, by far, one of my biggest influences. I was blown away by his guitar duel in the *Crossroads* movie. Not only was he the best guitar player I'd ever heard, he was also the coolest looking guy on the planet. I wore out two VHS tapes learning that song, and, to this day, I can recite most of the film's script from memory. Steve ignited a whirlwind of practicing, and I studied everything he recorded.

The first time I heard a track from Greg Howe, I was driving a big gray van, and I was so flabbergasted by his playing that I had to stop the vehicle and take a breath. His runs were impossible to figure out, and his feel was unbelievable. Stevie Ray Vaughan channeled something out of this world, and he showed people the true meaning of playing with heart and soul. Every time I watch a video of Jason Becker's playing, his amazing music re-inspires me.

Passing Notes

BY KEVIN OWENS

Robert Lockwood, Jr., the pioneering Delta bluesman who learned to play guitar under the tutelage of Robert Johnson, died November 21, 2006, at the age of 91. The Turkey Scratch, Arkansas native became a professional musician at age 15, playing for sharecroppers and cotton workers throughout the Deep South. In the late 1930s, Lockwood moved to Chicago, where he became a regular in the city's vibrant blues scene, playing with such luminaries as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Sunnyland Slim, Roosevelt Sykes, and Little Walter, and eventually signing on as a session guitarist for Chess Records. In 1970, Lockwood left Chicago for Cleveland, where he launched a solo career, along the way receiving two W.C. Handy Awards, a National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship award, and a Grammy nomination for Best Traditional Blues Album for his 1998 release, *I've Got to Find Me a Woman*.

Grammy- and Tony Award-winning singer **Ruth Brown**, dubbed "the Queen Mother of the Blues," passed away November 17, 2006, at a Las Vegas area hospital. One of the top-selling R&B singers of the early 1950s, Brown was forced by a changing musical landscape to take a variety of menial jobs to support her family during the '60s and '70s. In 1988, financed by a settlement with Atlantic Records, Brown helped create the Rhythm and Blues Foundation, and spent the last two decades of her life fighting to get unpaid royalties and musical credits for R&B and blues musicians. Brown was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993.

Ahmet Ertegun, the founder of Atlantic Records who helped define popular music in America by breaking such acts as Ray Charles, Big Joe Turner, and Aretha Franklin—and later the Rolling Stones, Cream, and Led Zeppelin, among countless others—died in New York City December 14, 2006, at the age of 83. Ertegun, the son of a Turkish diplomat, never recovered from a head injury suffered in a fall backstage at Bill Clinton's 60th birthday party at the Beacon Theater in New York on October 29.

Veteran publicist and manager **Ronnie Lippin**—who represented such rock heavyweights as Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler, Brian Wilson, and Prince—died Monday December 4, 2006, of a rare form of breast cancer at the age of 59. A Brooklyn, New York native, Lippin began her career as a publicist for film and stage, but switched to music when she moved to Los Angeles. "Ronnie was one of the most loving, thoughtful, sensitive, and caring people I've ever met," said Wilson in a statement to the Associated Press. "God only knows why she has been taken all too soon."

RIFFS

Guitar Hero 2006 Winner

Finally, Ray Holiday is one of the finest guitarists I've ever heard. I discovered him at a small club called McFly's, and for the next two years of my life, I spent all of my free time hanging out with him. Through his beautiful compositions, Ray showed me his versatility, his incredible tone, and his complete control over his instrument. I only hope that, someday, other people will hear his music. I will forever be in debt to him for the guidance he has provided me throughout my career.

As you're also a guitar teacher, could you detail your approach to teaching, as well as what you feel are the most important elements for a guitarist to master?

We all learn differently, so I feel the only way to truly captivate and inspire students is to customize lessons to their individual needs. I'll evaluate the student's musical level, and then I'll put a series of different lessons together to help them progress. Some of these lessons involve theory, harmony, phrasing, technique, composition, ear training, reading, improvisation, and the importance of listening, as well as designated "enjoyment time" where the student can just have fun learning some of their favorite songs.

What is your concept of a well-written guitar instrumental?

Music is made to touch the soul of the listener, so I think what makes a great instrumental piece is the same thing that makes you want to scream the words to your favorite Queen song—something in there has to move you. I don't think there's a formula for what makes it all work, but I really feel that God gives us these small treasures to share with the world, and that we must strive to perform at a level that presents these gifts in the right way. For example, I think one reason why people are obsessed with the guitar icons of the past is that those musicians really wanted to make an impact on society. They wrote songs that expressed their true emotions. They tried to reach people, and helping change the world meant more to them than having a hit record. Today, we need to spend more time using our music to do something good.

How did you prepare for the GH06 competition?

I was so elated to be part of such an awesome event that I wanted to work as hard as possible to show how appreciative

I was to be involved. I knew this meant it was time to work harder than I ever did before, so I put together a daily training regimen that consisted of these key elements: 15 hours of musical practice, five to ten miles of running, one hour of stretching, and one hour of weight training. I also worked on Greg Howe and Dave Weiner lessons once a week. In retrospect, the only thing I would have changed was to have spent more time with my beautiful fiancée, who has been so supportive of my career.

What has happened to you since winning the GH06 crown?

The event changed my life forever. It made me realize how lucky I have been, and how thankful I should be for everything that I have. When I was growing up, I had the most supportive parents in the world. My dad spent countless hours listening to me play, and taking me to open mics all over town. When I was 18 years old, I saw Steve Vai perform live, and I was in complete awe. I went home to try to explain the experience to my father, and he stayed up and listened to me play for hours that night. Before he went to bed, he hugged me, and whispered, "Trey, I want you to know that you will be one of the best guitar players that has ever lived." Those words stay with me to this day, because they were the last words he ever spoke to me. He died of a brain hemorrhage that very night.

So I feel that the night of September 23, 2006, fulfilled my father's biggest dream. In that short moment of my life, I was able to reconnect with my father. How can I ever repay *Guitar Player* for that? It was the greatest night of my life, and a ton of really incredible things have happened since the event. I am currently teaching more than ever, and I was also featured in more than 13 publications. In addition, one of my favorite pickup companies—DiMarzio—has hugely helped me out, and I'm so happy with all the cool gear I won from First Act, Musician's Friend, Mesa/Boogie, and Fender. Finally, it was wonderful to meet Joe Satriani, Steve Lukather, Richie Kotzen, Rafael Moreira, Steve Read, and Shredmistress Rynata. You have all made the biggest dream of my life come true!

Be sure to watch the video of Alexander's GH06 performance at guitarplayertv.com.