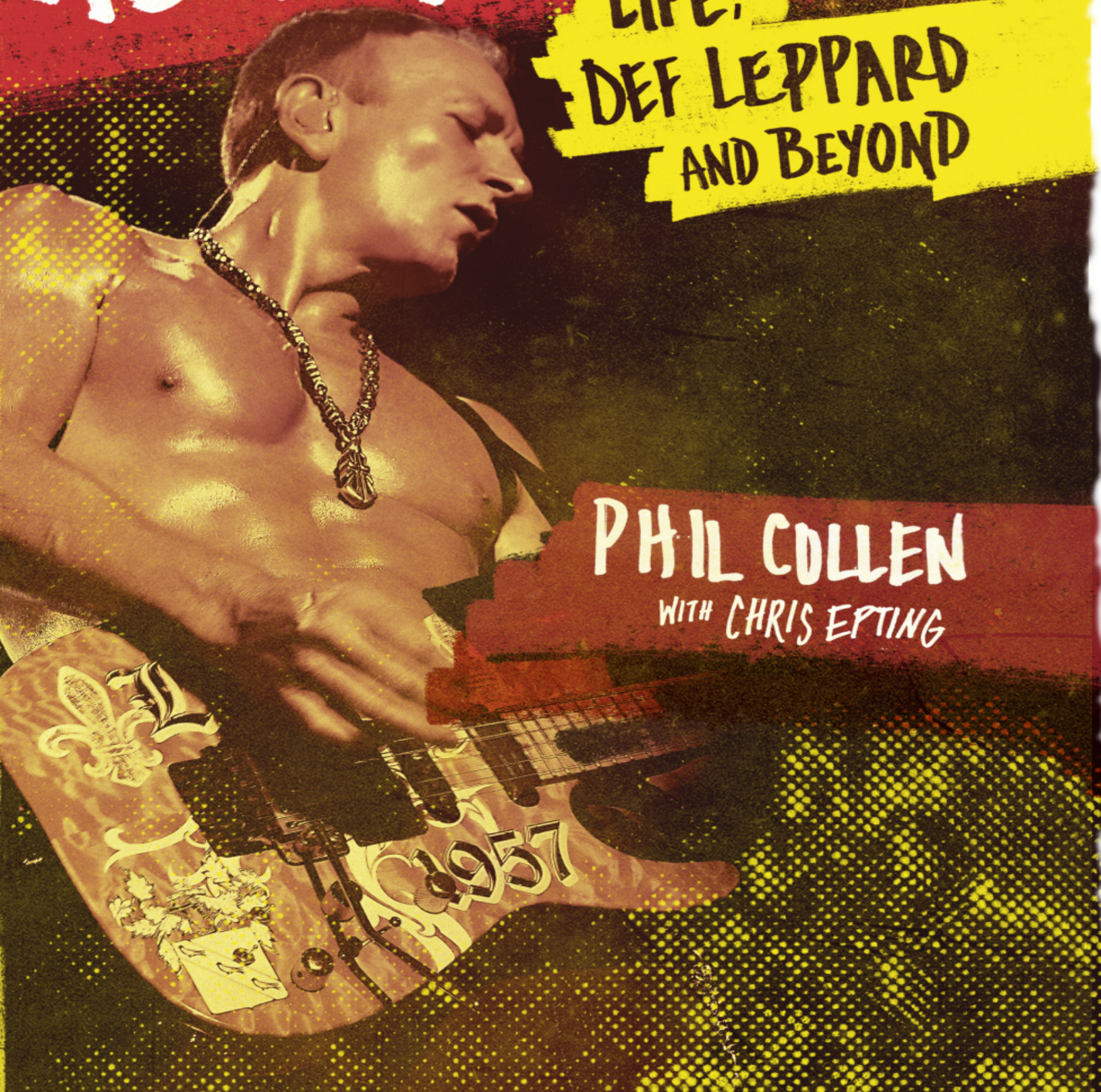
ADRENALIZED

LIFE, DEF LEPPARD AND BEYOND



PHIL COLLEN
WITH CHRIS EPTING

About the Book

***Adrenalized* is a revelatory and redemptive memoir from the lead guitarist of the legendary band Def Leppard − the first book ever written by one of its members − chronicling the band's extraordinary rise to superstardom and how they've stayed at the top of their game for three decades.**

Meet Phil Collen. You may know him as the lead guitarist in Def Leppard, whose signature song 'Pour Some Sugar On Me' is still as widely enjoyed now as when it debuted in 1988. Maybe you've heard of him as the rock star who gave up alcohol and meat more than twenty-five years ago. Most likely you've seen him shirtless − in photos or in real life − flaunting his impeccably toned body to appreciative female fans.

But it wasn't always like this. Collen worked his way up from nothing, teaching himself guitar from scratch as a teenager by imitating his heroes. Overnight success is a myth – for years he slogged it out with bands in London pubs, long before Def Leppard formed and transformed unknowns to icons (all thanks to a little album called *Pyromania*), from playing openers in near-empty arenas to headlining in those same stadiums and selling them out every night. Overcoming incredible obstacles – such as drummer Rick Allen losing an arm in a car crash and the tragic death of guitarist Steve Clark, Phil's musical soulmate − in the end, he says, 'Our work ethic saved us.' Just as it still does.

This is Collen's story, starting with his first taste of success and wild rock and roll excess with the seminal glam rock outfit Girl. Then, as a member of Def Leppard, it's also an

amazing underdog tale featuring a bunch of ordinary working-class lads who rose to megastardom. Featuring personal, never-before-seen photos of Collen and his bandmates on stage and off, *Adrenalized* is a fascinating account of the failures, triumphs, challenges and rock-hard dedication it takes to make dreams come true.

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For my dad, Ken, and my mum, Connie

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I CAME INTO this world on 8 December 1957, in Hackney, a London borough located in East London. A day or so after being born at the Mothers' Hospital of the Salvation Army on Lower Clapton Road, I was brought home to 223 Boundary Road, London, where I would spend a large chunk of my life until 1983, when I went on tour with Def Leppard. It was a small row house in a working-class neighbourhood that was considered to be pretty rough. It didn't seem like that at the time because I had nothing to compare it to. My dad, Ken Collen, was actually born in Wales, even though he grew up in East London. He was a lorry driver (or a trucker, as they're known in the States) his entire life. He loved driving, so even when he wasn't working, it wasn't a chore for him to drive us all over the place. We'd call it a 'busman's holiday'. That's an old British phrase that describes a vacation on which you still do the same kind of activity you'd normally do in your job. My mum, Connie Collen (née Wheeler), was from nearby Leytonstone. She became a housewife as soon as I was born, and we spent lots of time together while my dad was off on his frequent driving trips for work. I was the only child they'd ever have. As far as my mum was concerned, the sun rose and fell on my arse. My grandmother, my mum's mother – Nan, as I called her – stayed with us because my mum needed a bit more help. My mum's two older sisters, Dorothy and Rosie, were really strong women. (My wife, Helen, and I recently went to visit my auntie Dorothy. She was ninety-two, vegetarian and doing great.) My mum was weaker physically, suffering from a variety of

ailments, including asthma (which I think I psychologically inherited from her) and scarlet fever. So my nan was there to lend a hand even after my mum got married.

All of East London was very working class – Hackney, Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone. Our small house and these surrounding neighbourhoods became my universe as a youngster. I had a paper round, like a lot of other kids, so each day I would set off on foot around the neighbourhood delivering a variety of different papers to dozens of families.

Early on, I lived what I think was probably a very similar experience for lots of other English kids of that period. I had a dog, Coffee, who was a Jack Russell–beagle mix. I was about four or five years when I got Coffee. I was always so paranoid that he'd run out the door and get hit by a car. This compounded the asthma. As a kid in school I played a lot of football (or soccer) like everyone else, and we played in the huge area of grassland on the western bank of the River Lea called the Hackney Marshes. In fact, Hackney Marshes is where my dad first took my training wheels off my bike. The place was later to become a part of the 2012 Olympic stadium. Talk about expanding your universe. The West Ham (my team), Arsenal and Tottenham teams were all within striking distance, and all the kids supported one of those. Leyton Orient, another football club, was walking distance from my house, but no one supported them because the poor fuckers were in the Third Division. My dream – like that of all British kids – was to play professional football.

One of my fondest memories of growing up is of the weekends and holidays that we would take to Southend, Jaywick, Clacton-on-Sea or Canvey Island, places at the end of the Thames Estuary, where the Thames filters into the North Sea. Even though these places were barely an hour away from home, people of limited means could escape there from the city and feel as though they had entered

some exotic playground. I've read recently that Jaywick is today considered one of the most deprived areas in the country, but at the time, those trips represented adventure, escapism and my love of travel.

My parents smoked like troopers. They were completely unaware of the hideous side effects this would have on their sickly child and how it was probably making my asthma worse. Swimming was suggested by my doctor to relieve my asthma because he refused to place me on an inhaler for fear of me becoming reliant on the drugs. I loved to swim and was swimming about a mile by the time I was eight years old. I actually became a fairly decent swimmer and diver, and joined several swim teams while I was in school.

As I was growing up, my parents taught me (like many other post-Second World War kids) to appreciate what you have and not to harp on about what you don't have. They were very frugal and I know a lot of that stems from the lean years they spent during the war in England. That mentality seeped everywhere, even down to what we ate. As with most families at the time, our diet wasn't quite what I would call healthy, but, then again, we managed to survive on British sustenance. That is to say, lots of braised beef, along with plenty of mashed and boiled potatoes. Then of course there was also what we Brits called pork scratchings or pork cracklings (also known as pork rinds), which were just basically fried and roasted pork fat; another pig delicacy was dripping, which was congealed fat spread on a slice of bread. So once again, I had nothing to compare all of this to until I had my first curry.

I would have conversations with my mum, sitting in our small kitchen while she peeled potatoes for dinner. I would sit there quietly as she told me stories about the war with a certain love and pride in her voice even as she recounted in great detail what it was like to be a child and live through the Blitz in 1940 and 1941, when the Germans launched

massive and sustained strategic bombings all across the United Kingdom, when more than one million London houses were destroyed or damaged and more than 40,000 civilians were killed. My mum and her family would hop from bomb shelter to bomb shelter throughout her neighbourhood, and by forces of both luck and common sense they managed to survive.

As the adage goes, what didn't kill everyone made them stronger, and my parents were living proof of that, as were many other people in our neighbourhood. My mum always stressed to me how the war and severe rationing made people pull together and how proud she was of her country's ironclad patriotism. To this day, this is a big part of who I am. I will always go around my house looking for lights and/or water to turn off and such, due to the fact that both of my parents instilled in me this sense of never wasting anything. When you grow up taking one bath a week to conserve water and rationing your meals because you never knew when things could be taken away from you, it reminds you that it's always a good idea to conserve and not take anything for granted.

One of my closest friends, Gary Saint, lived in the next street over. I'd known Gary since we were about eight years old. He'd be at my house all the time. He'd even come on my parents' weekend trips to Jaywick and remained a loyal friend well into our adult lives together. There was a group of us that hung out together, like kids do. I remember it being a wonderful childhood where members of our little gang were within shouting distance of each other's houses.

To anyone passing by, Boundary Road and the surrounding area looked like the countless other grey and dreary English cityscapes. But it was a thriving, colourful place, inhabited and enhanced by people of many cultures. We all lived alongside many immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean, including a huge influx of

Jamaicans, who brought with them the sound of reggae, which would influence many musicians in the 1960s. As I walked home from school each day, the air was thick with the aromas of many different and wild-smelling foods. All the various kinds of pungent curries and spices, fresh ginger, and those mouthwatering, aromatic smells gave our neighbourhood a rich, ethnic flavour (both figuratively and literally). That is not to say we didn't have our fair share of racism on our streets. Many Brits harboured deep anger toward the influx of Indians and Pakistanis, who were encouraged to come to the country for work. They called it Paki-bashing. I knew kids who were singled out and attacked simply because they were Indian or Pakistani. I never understood it.

Being around people of different ethnic groups was nothing new to me. My mum's oldest sister, my auntie Dorothy, had three daughters – my first cousins. They were all married to black men. So a part of my family is multiracial. To me it was strange to see the separatism of races pushed by propaganda. Nothing new there. It was no surprise that white-bread Britain, with its strong Anglo-Saxon foundation, would have a problem with the newly integrated brown population.

By the early 1960s, when I was just seven or eight years old, I started listening to the radio as if it were this great and brilliant discovery. It was the radio that opened a whole new world, and that world was named the Beatles. I became obsessed with Paul, John, Ringo and George, pretty much like every other kid with a pulse back then. I loved their songs, how the guys looked, everything. I remember that thrill of sitting in our front room waiting for any song by the Fab Four to come on the radio. As soon as it did, my friend Terry from next door and I would go to the shed (aka 'the stage') behind my house and pretend that we were John Lennon and Paul McCartney, substituting tennis rackets for guitars and donning plastic Beatle wigs that

were popular then. Often to the annoyance of our neighbours, we'd cry out our own strangled versions of 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' and 'Twist and Shout'.

The mid-1960s were absolutely mind-blowing in terms of what one could find on the radio, and not just the Beatles. And not just on the BBC, which actually had a fairly limited selection of music. No, to find what was really going on, we tuned in to underground broadcasting outlets. There was Radio Luxembourg and pirate radio stations that offered some remarkable sonic lifelines from America, including artists like the Beach Boys, Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, and all of the big Motown artists of the day. Pirate radio was broadcasted illegally, without a licence, by ships anchored miles off the coast of England. Radio Caroline, Wonderful Radio London, Swinging Radio England – these fantastically mysterious stations kept us all completely plugged into music that was part of the 'Swinging London' scene that had begun to flourish in the mid-1960s. You had the British Invasion, which included the Beatles, Stones, Kinks, the Who and the Small Faces. You had psychedelic rock from Jimi Hendrix (I'm claiming Hendrix because he broke in England first) to Cream and Pink Floyd and others. And you had mod fashions and sexy pop tarts like Jean Shrimpton, Penelope Tree and Twiggy. All of these converged in London Town in one huge, swirling orgy of culture, fashion, and especially music.

It was in this atmosphere that you felt something important was shifting. One day you would hear 'Like a Rolling Stone' for the very first time. Then you might hear 'Satisfaction', or 'My Generation'. It was the 1959 Colin MacInnes novel about London, *Absolute Beginners*, brought to life. The ground was shaking. There was something charged and intoxicating in the air. London seemed to be the centre of it. Living in Walthamstow, and with it being a suburb, we did not have direct contact with all the glittery, seductive charms of Swinging London, but it

did trickle down to us in the way of music. I had a partner in crime who explored this new amazing world with me, my cousin Dave Wheeler.

It's hard to measure the influence Dave had on me. He was two years older than me, so it was a bit like having an older brother. Being an only child, I never had that sort of older sibling to influence me, shape me, or even to corrupt me musically. But thankfully Dave did all those things. Dave was my mum's oldest brother Georgie's son and he lived in one of three tower blocks just paces off Boundary Road. This was our social centre. We played football, went out with girls, and just got up to no good in general. Dave and I actually went out with two sisters who were two years apart. My girl's name was Kim Taylor. She was dark-haired and I considered her to be my first girlfriend. Dave was going out with her older sister, Pat. But even more important than that, Dave exposed me to a wild, all-you-could-eat musical buffet that affects me to this very day – he was an amazing connoisseur of music, especially guitar-driven rock. But he wasn't just a big fan of music – he also had access to rare and wonderful under-the-counter bootleg albums back then, trawling vinyl shops throughout London's East End to procure some of the finest illegal concert recordings known to man. These vinyl treasures announced themselves differently than regular albums. Forget the slick packaging. We're talking a plain white cardboard sleeve, usually with a colour-mimeographed piece of cover art scotch-taped on the front. They looked and felt like contraband – sonic taboo – and Dave treasured his hot wax. I always preferred the real recordings, but the artists that he exposed me to were the real magic – Hendrix, Zeppelin, the Stones, Floyd and of course Deep Purple, all of which he blasted out of his stereo. A bunch of us would go up to his mum and dad's flat and greedily absorb it all.

When I was about fourteen years old, I had an epiphany. I remember seeing David Bowie and the Spiders from Mars on *Top of the Pops*. They were playing this type of music that just spoke to me. It seemed that Bowie was directly writing songs for my group of friends. I had never heard or seen anything like Bowie in my life. It was all brand new – totally androgynous. Since I was a sponge, it was ultimately cool. Although Bowie spearheaded the glam rock movement, along with Marc Bolan of T. Rex, the real hook was the amazing songs and melodies that Bowie wrote. Then there was the fact that he obviously didn't give a fuck about how people perceived the way he looked, even though it was a very contrived concept. When I first saw Little Richard, I was too young to know that he was effeminate. But when I saw Bowie, he overdid the androgyny and was wearing glitter, coloured hair and girls' clothes. It was certainly nothing anyone in England had seen before. As a teenager trying to discover myself, I thought that this seemed like a gang I could belong to. Then there was the amazing look and playing of his guitarist, Mick Ronson, which totally hooked me.

When I later saw David Bowie and the Spiders from Mars on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, it further sealed the deal for me. *The Old Grey Whistle Test* was a music television show that ran on BBC Two, and I'm sure that, besides me, it influenced many other kids of my generation. The beauty of *The Old Grey Whistle Test* was that it was all very low-key. Bands would perform their songs in a very plain-looking studio without lots of production, which forced you to really focus on the music. There was no studio audience, so you could practically hear a pin drop between songs. To this day I love looking up clips from the show on YouTube. It's sort of like time stands still. As soon as I hear the opening title music – a cool, groovy harmonica-based song called 'Stone Fox Chase' by the Nashville band called Area Code 615, I'm back to being that wide-eyed boy in the living

room. The sound of that opening was just so rootsy. You knew you were going to get an untarnished view of whatever artists happened to be on the programme that week. The show's original host when it started back in 1971 was Richard Williams, but on this magical night in 1972, the laid-back 'Whispering' Bob Harris (as he was known) by then had taken the helm. The programme took its strange name from an old Tin Pan Alley phrase. According to legend, agents would have the doormen for the building come in and listen to a song and see if it was worthwhile – the 'test' was whether the 'old grey' folks could whistle the tune.

All I remember is Bowie playing an acoustic guitar and Mick Ronson playing his famous Les Paul, banging out 'Queen Bitch'. The interesting thing was that as different and new as his image was, he didn't look like some dude wearing make-up. He looked like David Bowie. The whole visual thing Bowie gave off combined with his expression of the music made him seem like part of some exclusive club I desperately wanted to belong to. Of course Bowie was speaking to me. The first line of 'Queen Bitch' was, 'I'm up on the eleventh floor and I'm watching the cruisers below …' and Dave's family lived on the eleventh floor.

The Old Grey Whistle Test, by the way, would go on to host lots of other legendary performances as I got older. It's where Bob Marley and the Wailers made their very first British TV appearance. I also remember seeing Stevie Marriott and Humble Pie and Bill Withers, amongst many other legendary performers, not to mention, later, a performance by a band called Girl, of which I would soon become a member. But of all of the artists that I saw on the *Whistle Test* no one dazzled, dazed and amazed me the way David Bowie did. Thanks to him, in one single moment, my world went from black-and-white to colour.

If seeing Bowie on television was a landmark moment for me, then so was the day that Dave and I went to our first

live rock concert. Neither one of us had ever seen a live show, so this was a big deal. We went to see Deep Purple, who in 1972 were one of my favourite bands. They were out on the road for their *Machine Head* tour, and they were playing at the Sundown Brixton (now known as O2 Academy Brixton), a former movie house that dated back to 1929. It was (and still is) a classic-looking theatre, held about 3,000 or so and was built to feel like an amphitheatre set in an Italian garden. It had just been refurbished for concerts and this night, 30 September, was actually to be the very first rock-and-roll show held at the venue. A christening of sorts, in more ways than one, and we were going to be there to experience it.

I don't remember queuing up, but we stumbled in and were front row propping up the stage. We were totally excited. Even the opening act, Glencoe (crap name, crap band), freaked me out because I had never seen a live band before. So when drummer Ian Paice, bassist Roger Glover, singer Ian Gillan, keyboardist Jon Lord, and especially lead guitarist Ritchie Blackmore strolled onstage, it honestly left me breathless. Ritchie Blackmore stood right in front of me. It was surreal. I think people tend to forget that in the pre-MTV world rock stars truly were godlike, mythical figures of lore that were quite different than mere mortals. There they were, just as they appeared on the album covers and in the magazines. Flesh and blood. Deep Purple. I was just trying to take it all in.

From the opening number, 'Highway Star', I was completely mesmerized. They played everything. 'Smoke on the Water', 'Space Truckin'' and more. It was loud, thunderous and energizing. Pushed up front against the wooden stage I could see, feel, hear and practically taste each note as it was played. What I saw Ritchie Blackmore do that night – the range of styles he displayed – was stupefying. He played classical, jazz, blues, rock and roll –

he just blew me away. As I reached up toward him, he slapped my hand.

At the end of the show, as they plowed through the encore, 'Lucille', Blackmore smashed his Fender Strat on the stage. I was euphoric. Actually, sitting here now thinking about that night, words can't really describe how I felt. I may have left my body. *Oh my God*, I thought. *That's what I want to do! I want to be that guy up there!*

Many professional musicians will reflect upon a specific time when they saw their future, their destiny, their fate, whatever you want to call it, all converge in one spectacular and explosive moment. This was mine. Ironically, it wasn't until many years later when Def Leppard played the Brixton Academy that I realized it was the same building as the former Sundown and that the reason I played guitar on that side of the stage was because that was where Blackmore had played. It was actually really freaky looking out on the audience and remembering that this was the first place I had ever been to a show. Then there I was, on the same stage, looking out at the audience. Years after attending my first show, I was looking at *Made in Japan* – a live Deep Purple album recorded in Japan – and I said to myself, *Hey, these fans don't look Japanese!* referring to the audience members. Upon further inspection, to my joy, I saw me!! There I was, front row, propping up the stage at my very first concert.

The intensity and creativity that Ritchie displayed that night completely convinced me that I had to go home and persuade my mum and dad that they needed to buy me an electric guitar. But guitars were expensive, and it would take two years of pestering.

So I began my pestering routine for an electric guitar. I didn't know my parents would go into debt to get me this guitar. Although when I was younger I knew it was a sacrifice, as an adult the gravity of what they did really hit home. While I waited it out, I'd go over to my pal Steve

Hewer's house and play air guitar pretending to be Bowie, Slade and T. Rex. Steve showed me my first barre chord and taught me how to play songs like Hawkwind's 'Silver Machine' on his guitar.

I also filled my time seeing more shows: the beauty of living in London was that everybody played there. So I got to witness a plethora of amazing bands, especially – and finally – David Bowie on his *Aladdin Sane* tour at Earls Court in London on 12 May 1973. I vividly remember my mum and dad dropping me and Martin Blackman off at the venue. The whole night – from how the audience dressed to Bowie and the Spiders onstage – was a spectacle. Even though I think Martin and me were the only two out of 18,000 fans that didn't dress up in some crazy outfit, it was strange to be part of the alienesque Bowie tribe. His fans were so obsessively dedicated to looking like him, dressing like him and adopting his persona that it was as if we were within the colourful bowels of some glittery cult. But we loved it. We felt special and anointed. And when he finally hit the stage I almost couldn't believe it was really him. In the flesh!

Bowie at this point was at his creative peak. The make-up, the glam, the glitter, the killer songs were dazzling, with Broadway-like precision and energy. But as captivating as Bowie was, it was his guitar player, Mick Ronson, who all but stole the show. It was amazing to me how he could stand out as he did without ever upstaging Bowie. There was this ultimate confidence just oozing off the stage, yet he still remained a team player. He knew how to be seen without being over-the-top. So many musicians fail to master that art.

I also saw Mott the Hoople at Hammersmith Odeon, along with then up-and-coming supporting band Queen, who blew the lid off the place. Another killer show was Led Zeppelin at Earls Court. From what I remember, when I first went inside, it sounded like some big monster had

come roaring into the arena. I couldn't even tell what they were playing at first, but then it hit me: it was 'Rock and Roll', from their fourth album. Now, Earls Court is a horrible toilet. Its massive sound just bounces off really high ceilings and walls. But, back then, these shows were pure magic.

I was in awe watching the masters play their electric guitars. I loved the really flashy playing of Ronson and Blackmore, but I never thought I'd be able to play like that. To me they were superhuman. I wouldn't even know where to start. I would go to this place in the West End of London called the Fender Sound House, and sit and stare at the Fender Stratocasters and Gibson Les Pauls hanging on the walls. I would literally be drooling. Those sparkly blues, reds and purples. And the sunburst-coloured wood grains. They looked delicious to me. In quite a pervy sort of way I would touch the guitars. This was a big deal because 1) I couldn't play and 2) you weren't supposed to touch the merchandise, as the militant shopkeepers were always keeping watch. I felt that if I were to pick up one of the guitars I'd be pummelled to the ground by one of the staff. This made the guitars all the more desirable.

And then came that monumental day: my sixteenth birthday, 8 December 1973. The day I got my first guitar – a red Gibson SG. My life was about to change. This instrument represented what I dreamed would be my future. (Seriously, I would put the guitar against the wall and stare at it until I nodded off to sleep.) But as my parents told me, nobody was going to make that happen but me. True.

Along with the guitar came another birthday present – an album called *The Guitar Album*, featuring songs by both current and classic blues guitar players. Jimi Hendrix was on there, as was Duane Allman, but the tune that really jumped out at me was B. B. King's 'Sweet Sixteen'. King's playing was so sparse and intense and emotional. I felt like

I could identify him after just one note, it was just that distinctive. I played his track on the record over and over, plus it was my sixteenth birthday. Ironically, in a very cool twist of fate, exactly forty years to the day, I went to see the late, great B. B. King in concert for my fifty-sixth birthday. I got to meet him. When I told him the story about my sixteenth birthday and the album I received with him singing 'Sweet Sixteen', he remarked, 'Then I should sing "Happy Birthday" to you.' And he did. (Almost a year and a half later, in 2015, he would be gone. RIP, B. B.)

Apparently, when learning how to play guitar, you're supposed to learn your chords first, which I did. But I was shocked to discover that I could play lead guitar, or solos, almost immediately. And that's really what I wanted to do. I didn't want to play 'finger-style' or 'chordal-style' backing musician. B. B. King never played chords. Like him, I wanted to be a lead guitar player straight off the bat. This was almost like being able to fly. The self-expression that I had in my head I could manifest through my fingers. Pretty fucking cool. My guitar teachers were Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix, Mick Ronson, Ritchie Blackmore and a host of jazz rock pioneers like Al Di Meola and Larry Coryell. Even though he was a bass player, Stanley Clarke was a big influence, too. I obviously couldn't play all of this shit they were doing, so I would take the odd phrase that really stood out to me and incorporate it into my own style. Before long I would have a collection of my favourite licks that would come to represent me. I didn't so much sit down and learn songs in their entirety – just the parts that I really loved. I did the same with singing as well. I'd just sing along to the odd line or chorus, and before you knew it, I could actually sing. This was the same thing with guitar playing. What had seemed like unattainable magic was all of a sudden within my grasp.

I had barely graduated at sixteen, and went straight to work at a burglar alarm factory. It was the first real work I

had ever had, but it was the best way for me to pay back my mum for lending me three hundred quid to get my second guitar, which was a wine-red Les Paul custom. There's a picture of me playing it on the Girl album *Sheer Greed*. I didn't really know what to expect from this job. I just knew that I wasn't going to be there for long. It was a means to an end for me; otherwise it would have been really depressing. I was convinced I was going to be a rock star.

My workday started at 8 a.m. I would take a bus each morning (until I got my Honda 250 motorcycle) to the AFA burglar alarm factory, a huge building in Walthamstow. I learned a variety of different things that I never really needed to know again, except for the soldering wires part. I rotated through several departments of an assembly line, the first of which was putting screws into a plastic base. That was fairly mind-numbing. Then I was placed in the paint factory for a while, basically colouring the wires. Next I was moved into the soldering department, which I thought I had down pretty well until a few years ago, when I tried to solder a wire for one of my guitars and found that I had completely lost my soldering mojo. I knew I was colour-blind when I failed all those tests in school when you have to guess the number inside the coloured dots. But I hadn't really thought too much about it until some of these burglar alarms would fail the test – that was just me getting the coloured wires mixed up, as I'm pretty sure my soldering skills were solid back then. Pretty ironic that a colour-blind guy would be putting coloured wires into a burglar alarm. I didn't last in that department for too long. I was with AFA for only a year.

I wasn't alone – I soon found others who were also obsessed with playing and, before I knew it, we decided to form a band. And you never forget your first band. We couldn't actually play all that well, but that wasn't important at the time. I played guitar, Martin Blackman

was on bass, Tony Torres did vocals, and Gary Dewing hit this drum kit that we bought for five quid.

Many houses in Britain's working-class neighbourhoods had a 'room for best'. It was for company only, and there'd be plastic over the furniture and a record player and maybe a small bar. My good friend Rudi Riviere lived in a house that was almost identical to mine, plastic covers included, but his family was from the Caribbean, so I don't know where this craze originated. My first band rehearsed at my mum's house at 223 Boundary Road in the room for best, which, thankfully, she had no problem with. We managed to get through the Hendrix version of 'Wild Thing', being that it was only three chords. In our heads, we sounded great. We did a world tour of my mum's front room. We were like a garage band with no garage. Eventually friends would come over and watch us. We also started writing our own songs, so it seemed this was as good a time as any to give ourselves a name. So I did what any naïve musician did – I closed my eyes, opened an atlas and put my finger on a page. We said wherever the finger landed, that word would be the name of the band. So our name became Moosejaw, after Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada. The name was short-lived: we disbanded after a few months over some kind of silly drama, which sort of makes you think, *Whoa! If there's drama now and we can't even play, what happens later when there is really something at stake?* I would one day find out. My first live performance would happen the very next year. I'd be seventeen years old.

London was always influential, be it in fashion or music, and had been the centre of the civilized world. It was always a hang – the Swinging Sixties; Carnaby Street, which was the fashion epicentre; and you had all of these amazing bands like the Stones, the Who, the Small Faces, the Kinks, and later Jimi Hendrix, all calling London their home. The amazing cornucopia of jazz, reggae, soul, rock,

and all the cultures that music brings with it made London an encouraging and inspirational scene. The fact that you could have all of this stimuli coexisting was the reason people from all around the world flocked to this amazing city. London wasn't just the capital of England – it had been the capital of the world. Everyone would want to come there. Even the Beatles, who hailed from Liverpool, set up their own Abbey Road Studios (where Def Leppard were honoured to record a live TV show). So London really had a lot going for it. Later I was grateful to have come from such a great city – not just as a reference point, but also for the fact that you do take some of it with you wherever you go. It's an attitude/confidence thing. Then I was fairly uncultured, but after I'd travelled around the world a few times, when I went back to London I really appreciated the culture, art, architecture, etc.

But by the mid-seventies, London had gone through a whole new transformation. The seeds had been sown in the late sixties by Iggy Pop and had later taken root in New York City, thanks to bands like the New York Dolls and the Ramones, who were responsible for a new, raw, do-it-yourself attitude, which was completely stripped down and about not giving a fuck.

The punk rock explosion in London, which kinda started in 1975 but didn't really hit the masses until the Sex Pistols appeared on Bill Grundy's *Today* programme on 1 December 1976, changed everything. It changed fashion in general, political ideals, social commentary and even how record companies operated. I don't think I ever felt as musically energized as the first time I heard the album *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*. To this day, that album announces itself as something radically different. It seemed pure and raw. Although everyone said these guys couldn't play, the first Pistols album had something that every rock album that had come before it couldn't get close to. It was the voice of a generation, but

you had to be in England to experience it. In fact, when the Pistols album came out, all the streets were stinking due to the trash collectors going on strike because they were being taken advantage of. Their strike had nothing to do with the album, but it was all in the timing really. Everything was just fucked up. It was a time of economic depression. Unemployment was at its highest since the Second World War. State control through nationalized industries seemed to be well on the way to fulfilling George Orwell's prophesies so boldly stated in his novel *1984*. All of this rage manifested itself by kids using music as a voice because they were not being heard. With that said, it was the perfect time for a new train of thought. *Never Mind the Bollocks* was a howling buzz-saw of a record that didn't just throw down the gauntlet – it pissed and puked on it as well.

It wasn't just the Pistols' message, but the guitar was how I imagined rhythm guitar should be played in my head. The drums were how I wanted to hear them. All of this with a rather upset Johnny Rotten screaming over the top of it. Brilliant.

I could still really dig a Genesis album as well as a Pistols album. It all just broadened my horizon.

By late 1976, London was awash, with music pouring out of club after club. In addition to the Pistols, the Clash and the Damned, dozens of other musical upstarts were rebelling against the perceived pomp of bands like the Stones, Zeppelin, Floyd and the horrendous pop that was being regurgitated on the radio. This was also the era of disco, which had, like any other genre, pure genius and real shite, but was the opposite of punk. Like the mods, rockers and any counterculture groups within the same culture, it allowed kids to choose their sides.

The first live gig I ever played was with my next band, Lucy. We played for a nurses' party on Mile End Road in East London – an all-female audience. I was the youngest one onstage. I was seventeen and had moved on from

burglar alarms to being a motorcycle dispatch rider for Profile Typesetting. All the other guys in the band were like twenty-three and upward. We were kinda punk without the attitude. I was scared shitless and didn't look up from my fret board all night. Even though I was petrified, once it was all over I had that first gig under my belt. I wasn't a stage virgin any more. We played mainly original songs, and I don't remember how long the set was, but I'm sure it was the longest thirty-five minutes or so of my life. At least we didn't get booed offstage. That would come later. Lucy released an EP called *You Really Got Me Going* … I think. After that we recorded a bunch of demos, but the real highlight for me was performing as an opening band at the Marquee Club on Wardour Street in London. The Marquee had played host to some of the most famous bands in the world. At its original location on Oxford Street, the Rolling Stones played their very first official gig in 1962. But in 1964 the club moved over to Wardour Street, where it played host to the Stones once again, the Who, Jimi Hendrix, Deep Purple, Stevie Wonder, Pink Floyd and many others. The Stones even came back to the famous club in 1971 to film a television special, and Bowie filmed *The 1980 Floor Show* there, where he famously sang the duet 'I Got You, Babe' with Marianne Faithfull dressed as a nun.

In addition to playing the Marquee, something else happened in my life at this time. My parents got divorced. I was kind of bummed that they hadn't said anything to me prior to that and that they would do this ultra-British thing and not communicate with each other. So they drifted apart until it was unbearable for both of them. They kept it from me for the sake of not wanting to upset me. When we eventually spoke about it, I remember saying that I would have been cool if they had just mentioned it to me. I'd have said, 'Don't stay together for my sake.' What ended up happening was that my dad, being on the road so much as a lorry driver, was always gone for weeks on end, driving to