
June 2014

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Jake Frye

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Recommended Citation

Frye, Jake (2014) "Walking Through the Guitar Capital of the World," *The Laureate*: Vol. 6 , Article 21.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol6/iss1/21>

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WALKING THROUGH THE GUITAR CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

JAKE FRYE

I.

A '78 Guild saunters past me, and a peal white Telecaster and his All-American-Stratocaster-of-a-cousin mingle at the water cooler—"Hey, have you heard who Floyd Rose is running around with these days?" I brush past them, past pictures of their ex-lovers, Townshed, Hammett, Van Halen. Hendrix lights a comrade on fire and roasts marshmallows over her flaming frets and humbuckers that would no longer buck the hum, a Tibetan Monk blossoming and curling at the edges.

II.

A Valhalla of musical instruments, their blue-steel, Ernie Ball, TNT-gage electric vocal chords muted. Muted, but not silent. That manic, throttled, 10,000-watt, coyotes-on-Neptune howl buzzing under thin lacquer and ebony, just begging for an exorcism, even if that exorcism lights the body on fire. Instead, every fifteen year old that has ever learned the first bar of "One" will pick each up by the scruffs of its neck, play a note or two and then toss it into the corner, where they will be swept away.

III.

I dash to the front desk, say breathlessly—“Have...show...in half hour...need amp...fixed...” He asks me what kind of band I am in. Here is where I say salmonandbeastman—I say it real quicklike, just like that, embarrassed that I am embarrassed, and I can see disapproval tip-toe into his eye: he knows, I know, we never say that I do not (a) play in a death metal band (b) have pre-natal experience on a stringed instrument or (c) care about death metal. “Sure you can write a song, and maybe I wanna sing along,” he says to me, “but the real question is: Can you play it in a Mixolydian pentatonic minor fragment with the alternating arpeggio over the top, backwards to forwards with a slight impression of Malmsteen’s second measure in the fourth movement, up and down, up and down until your hands become positively translucent?”

IV.

I am suddenly silly. His eyes tear across my fret board and I crumble, the ashes of my precious band scatter. My whole life is an annoying skip on his Megadeath album. I sulk in the corner, between the 18 piece kit with the double kick and 36 cymbals of every sonic pitch known to the human ear (SPECIAL OFFER: BUY TODAY AND GET THE Z-SERIES HAND HAMMERED ULTRA-HIGH-PITCHED DOG-FREQUENCY CYMBAL FREE!!!!) and a cardboard cutout of Dimebag Darrell tongue-kissing Rob Zombie. Darrell takes a moment away from his busy schedule to lay a single corrugated hand on my shoulder and offer me sage advice: “Hey kid, why don’t cha scam? This area here’s for adults.”