

GUITAR WORLD

November 2015

5 SONGS
GUITAR & BASS TABS!

- VAN HALEN**
"Can't Stop Lovin' You"
- GHOST**
"Cirque"
- RUSH**
"Tom Sawyer"
- ROYAL BLOOD**
"Little Monster"
- THE DOORS**
"Riders on the Storm"

NEVER SAY DIE!!

SLAYER

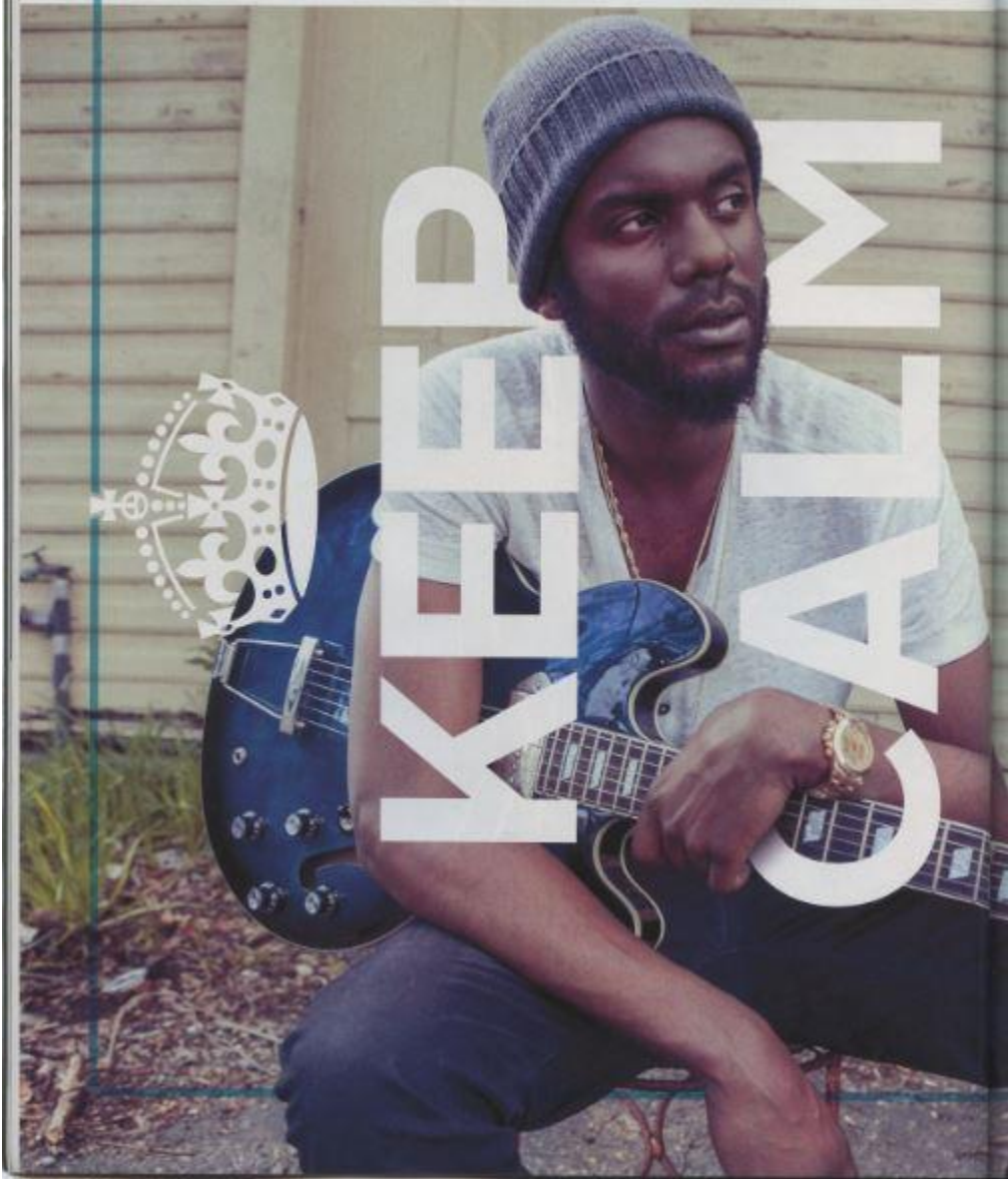
BACK FROM HELL WITH THE OF THE YEAR!

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH
CHILDREN OF BODOM
GARY CLARK JR.
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HYBRID HEAVEN: THE BEST ACOUSTIC-ELECTRIC GUITARS!

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GUITAR WORLD
NOVEMBER 2015





AND

GARY CLARK JR. ON

He's one of the coolest cats in the business, and on his second major-label album, *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim*, ace guitarist **GARY CLARK JR.** continues his steady march toward blues-rock nirvana.

BY CORBIN REIFF

IT'S

ONE IN THE MORNING BACKSTAGE AT THE HOUSE

of Blues in Chicago and the pride of the Austin, Texas, blues scene, Gary Clark Jr., is sitting forward in an overstuffed chair slowly rolling the lit end of his cigarette around the inside of a plastic cup filled with a brown liquor. An hour before, he'd been onstage closing out a raucous 90-minute set of fan favorites, historic covers and new songs for a heavily adoring crowd, but there wasn't any time to dwell on it. His mind was already fixed on tomorrow where he is slotted to play just before Paul McCartney at Lollapalooza.

If the 30-year-old were feeling the pressure, he certainly wasn't showing it. His presence is the definition of calm, and when he speaks, his voice barely raises above a whisper. Bandmates, managers and other unnamed people swirl around him, all action, energy and volume, but he hardly seems to notice. It's just another day in the life of an artist that has been described by no less than Barack Obama as "the future."

Clark broke through onto the national scene three years ago with his major label debut album *Blok and Blu*. Since then, he's jammed with some of the biggest names in the industry, including the Foo Fighters, Eric Clapton and the Rolling Stones, performed on some of the biggest stages on the planet, appeared in a major feature film *Chef* and even had a son. Last year he put out a highly acclaimed live album to quench some of the burgeoning thirst for new material and has been working diligently ever since on his studio follow-up, which he's now ready to present to the world.

As the producer as well as the artist, Clark had total freedom to explore whatever sonic direction he pleased this time around and, as a result, *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim* is a funk- and soul-inflected contemporary take on the kind of blues and rock music that he was weaned on. The guitarist readily admits that his tastes have evolved over the years and that he now listens to just as much rap music from the likes of Kendrick Lamar and Post Malone as he does the blues greats like T-Bone Walker and Jimmy Reed. His new album is a surprisingly solid union of those two predilections. It's a marriage of the old and the new, a modern update on classic roots music.

Clark is steadfast in his goal of remaining a part of the times—he readily points out that it is 2015 multiple times throughout our interview—and has little design on becoming a throwback to a past that he was never a part of. While talking in Arlyn Studios in Austin, Texas, to create the new sounds that make up *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim* he felt compelled to simply trust in his instincts and create the kind of music that he wanted to hear. "I just try to tune in, pay attention and translate the message as best I can," he softly declares. There's little boast in him, but if he isn't ready to admit, many others will. The future is now.



Clark onstage with his signature Epiphone "Blok & Blu" Casino

Your new album is called *The Story of Sonny Boy Slim*. Who is that?

Sonny Boy Slim can basically be anybody. My mom called me Sonny Boy when I was a kid and Slim was the name some of the guys down at the blues clubs used to call me; I was tall and pencil-thin. That kind of stack and I felt embraced. It's comfortable and I wanted to come home with it and get back to where I came from. That's what that is.

What was the main creative motivation behind the music on the record?

At the end of the day I just play soul music. Call it whatever you want, really. I wanted to come in and not play music that was based just around guitar solos, as much as I love them. I wanted to play soulful, funky, booty-shakin', mind-bending, soul-searching, reflecting, inspiring music full of hope and

DALE BRONKHORST



BLU SMOKE

GARY CLARK JR. TELLS US WHY HIS SIGNATURE EPIPHONE "BLAK & BLU" CASINO IS HIS GUITAR OF CHOICE.

TALK ABOUT A VERSATILE INSTRUMENT. FIRST WIDELY heard in the mid Sixties on recordings by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the Epiphone Casino has been a go-to guitar for a diverse array of artists including Paul Weller, the Edge, Dave Grohl and Dwight Yoakam.

But perhaps no other guitar in recent years has popularized the howlingly responsive sound of the Casino as much as blues-rock kingpin Gary Clark Jr. His first introduction to a hollow-body electric was a Gibson ES-125, but as a young musician in his hometown of Austin, Texas, he found himself checking out the thinner-bodied Casinos in music stores.

"It always stood out, but I never had the money to get one," he says. "Finally, I scraped up some change and got one, and the Casino changed my life. I knew that was what I needed to have. I had my eyes on it before I even really got

familiar with it. And it just kind of stuck. I'm good with that."

Clark has recorded and toured with a number of Casinos (workhorse axes have been '66 and '68 models), but he recently partnered with Epiphone for a signature Ltd. Ed. Gary Clark Jr. "Blak & Blu" Casino (so named after his debut album, *Blak and Blu*). Featuring the classic Casino design, Gibson USA P-90 pickups and a unique Blak & Blu burst color finish, the model comes in two versions, one with a trapezoid tailpiece and the other with a Bigsby.

"Blak and Blu with a Bigsby!" Clark says with a laugh. "They're a dream. To have the guitar I've always wanted and to be able to customize it—it's surreal. The paint job to me was everything. I could have painted it myself, but I went the professional route and let the guys who made it do the painting. [Laughs] Everything is pretty much as it would be." — **JOE BOSSO**

faith because that's the stuff that made me. To deny that would be a disservice to myself.

The album was recorded in your hometown of Austin, Texas. How much did your surroundings play a role in the recording?
All of Austin did, really. As far as the process and how it was made, I spent all my time at Arlyn Studios. If I wasn't there I would go back to the house, which was very close, or I'd go down to the Continental Club, go down to C-Boys, pop over down to 6th Street, pop over to the spots that I used to play to kind of figure things out. That was kind of all in the air. I was inspired by all of that: all the sights and sounds I was soaking up. Then reflecting on where I'd been, where I come from, taking new experiences and bringing them back home and adding that perspective. It all came full circle I guess.

Seeing as you produced the album yourself, would you say it was a more introspective recording experience?

Yeah, definitely. There was a lot of self-discovery, a lot of reflection, a lot of things that I wanted to get off that I wasn't able to in other recording processes. I felt very comfortable; I felt like a kid when I first started out back in the garage trying to figure it all out. I was open. I didn't go in thinking I need to make a record like this, or I need to make a song like this, or I need to make a single that will hit here. I walked into Arlyn and said, "Hey, I'm just gonna let loose." It was all me and a higher source.

You've always been a champion of the blues, but on this record there are a lot more Seventies-era soul and funk flavors at work. Were those styles important to you when you were growing up, or are they newer discoveries?

I think it goes along with coming back home and going through my dad's record collection and remembering the times he put on Parliament, remembering the times

he put on James Brown and he would dance around and we'd all be embarrassed. Listening to the Jackson 5 and Stevie Wonder, those are hometown memories. So, listening to those records and that style of music along with hip-hop and the things I learned as I started to get older, those are really the records that shaped the way my life went. I took them very seriously. It was like church to me.

Speaking of hip-hop, how do you feel like you fit into the general motif of artists like Kendrick Lamar, D'Angelo and Prince, who are also contemporizing soul and funk sounds and infusing their music with a message of social justice? Do you see yourself as a part of that general movement?

Yes, absolutely. I definitely connected with Kendrick Lamar's latest album *Ty Popp a Butterfly*. On that one it was like, "Man, he's reaching back!" He's got like a jazz/hip-hop/spoken word badass album to go along with the hard beats, the hard blues and the whole L.A. west coast thing. When I think about my music, it's definitely rooted in

Texas blues, but at the same time I can't go and recreate Lightin' Hopkins. I can't recreate Freddie King's "Goin' Down." It's already classic and I tip my hat to that, but it's 2015 and I can't deny that I'm a product of that and am influenced by all of those sounds that have come since.

The *Story of Sonny Boy Slim* opens with a track called "The Healing," where you repeatedly sing, "the music can heal us." What can the music heal us from? From whatever. I'm speaking personally from my experience. When I go back

and listen to those albums from when I was a kid, like Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* and Curtis Mayfield's *Movin' On Up*, it's inspiring soul music and that's the stuff that in high school when I was trying to figure it out...you know, I grew up in Texas where racism was right in my face, so I would put my headphones on and listen to that, listen to Bob Marley. I was sitting around in the studio and I recorded all of these songs like "Church" and "Gladiator" and "Star" thinking about my dad, thinking about my son, and after every song I recorded I felt lighter. Like, "Okay, I've

expressed that." "The Healing" just came to me. It was an outlet.

You mention thinking about your son in the studio and you're a pretty new father—how has that role affected or changed the way your approach your music?

Oh yeah, and it's very complex. Him being born happened while I was in the studio so after being gone for so long and being back home, I was not necessarily forced to, but it hit me like this is real. I think I got older and wiser and realized it's time to man up and do something. It's not just about me going out and running around the world seeing new places and making noise, I had to think about what I was doing it for. I became selfless and a lot more aware of what I was singing into the microphone.


The album closes out with a song called "Down to Ride," which is a total extended psychedelic trip that kind of stands apart from everything else stylistically. Where did that come from?

That came from me just trying to push myself as an artist and honestly I needed a keyboard in the house. I love to play piano and a lot of my ideas come from that but I didn't have one in the house so I went out and bought this Korg SV-1 and it's got this synth kind of setting on it, so I sat there just like, "Do-do-do," and went, "Oh my God, I have to do something with this." So I got on the [A&A] MPC [music production controller] and tried to get the best production out of that. I love the process of programming. I think it's really cool to take sounds, sync them and make some badass grooves. It was one of those unexpected turns that came out all right.

What's it like to see yourself referred to in the media as "the chosen one" or "the future of blues"?

I mean, it's cool. It used to kind of freak me out, but it's the business I chose. And I mean, thank God people are saying good things about me because it could be completely different. I definitely feel that pressure, but I need that fire under my ass otherwise I can get lazy and content with where I am. I just want to get better.

Did you feel any added pressure making this record since it was the follow-up to your breakthrough release?

When it comes down to it, this music stuff is supposed to be fun. It's supposed to be open. It's supposed to be free. Having the ability to do that, there was a lot less pressure because I was like, "You know what? If this doesn't go the way that people think it should, at least I did what I wanted to do," and I can sleep at the end of the day knowing that. 



139TH

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