



PLAYING IN THE DARK

*Deftones' new release, 'Gore', has been called a departure from the group's recent albums—somber and a little less optimistic. **Stephen Carpenter** and **Chino Moreno** discuss filling different guitar frequencies with different numbers of strings, tone modeling, and keeping the inspiration alive for more than two decades.*

by TZVI GLUCKIN

edit by: deftfan ([DeftonesZone](#))

March 10, 2016

Grammy-winning rock group deftones is a guitar-centric, riff-driven band. Since their 1995 debut, *adrenaline*, the alt legends have been revered as extremely passionate masters of sonic layering. And *gore*, their eighth studio release, is a guitar tour de force, featuring low-tuned 8-strings, swirly delays, sonic soundscapes, and bone-crushing chunk. Stephen carpenter is the band's primary guitarist, while lead singer chino moreno started adding additional guitars with their third release, 2000's *white pony*. Together, they create a dense, colorful, musical wall. "it's like the bulldozer effect," carpenter says. "you just get in where you fit in."

Carpenter is the consummate gearhead. He runs his signature esp guitars through a wall of fractal processing, engl preamps, and orange cabinets. He likes to tinker, experiment, and modify gear—something he's been doing since his days as a tech. "i did everything: guitars, drums, and bass," he says about his time working for a local sacramento band before deftones took off. "i took a guitar apart and put it back together the best i knew based on all

the knowledge i had read up on, was told about, and absorbed from others." Deftones new album—two years in the making—builds on carpenter's experience, experimentation, and vast tonal awareness. Moreno adds a different perspective to the mix. "if it sounds good in a little room with all of us in a circle then there's a good chance it should sound good on tape or recorded," he says.

Gore, produced by the band in tandem with Matt Hyde, is a guitarist's feast and is replete with swagger, low-end rumble, and ambient textures. It also features Alice in Chains guitarist Jerry Cantrell on the song "Phantom Bride."

"It was one of those things that was meant to be," Moreno says. "It doesn't sound contrived, like we tried to do something outside of the box. It just sounds like something that was very casual and really nice."

PG spoke with Carpenter and Moreno (see sidebar) about 7- and 8-string guitars, low tunings, click tracks, Carpenter's battle with his digital rig, and Moreno's need for simplicity. (And no, we didn't ask about the flamingos.)

When was the last time you played a 6-string guitar?

Stephen Carpenter: It was about 15 years ago.

What drew you to the 7- and 8-strings?

The lower registers. Having that option to drop down to the lower stuff—it's just fun, really heavy to play, a little darkness. *Darkness!*

How do you tune them?

Nothing fancy, by any stretch. On my 7-string tunings I used Ab or G#—whichever you desire—and that was for the self-titled [2003] record. On the *Saturday Night Wrist* record I just drop-tuned the bottom string down to F#. I started playing the 8-string on [2010's] *Diamond Eyes*, and that's just the standard tuning that came on the guitar: F# on the bottom and then your standard B–E–A–D–G–B–E. All I did for the next record, *Koi No Yukon*, was drop-tune the bottom string down to E. That was about the time I met the guys from Animals as Leaders and Periphery. Tosin [Abasi] told me they were into dropped-E tunings. He said, "Hey you should check that out." So I did.

That's basically the bass register.

Yeah, of course, and it's actually been quite tough for me. Not actually playing it on the guitar, but the coupling in the band—because I wish I had an equal on the bass. It's just not possible with the actual bass. To match it, you really need to have a synthesizer or something where you can actually go down to that octave. My biggest difficulty is really trying to mess with the bass without sounding like me and the bass are playing a dual part. I haven't given a great deal of thought to it, but whenever I'm jamming out, that's the wall I run into. But that's largely in part because I don't play in a metal band—I am the metal ingredient of my band [*laughs*]. I think if the other guys were more interested in the metal side they'd probably do what it takes to get that register for me.

And you have both standard- and baritone-scale guitars.

Yes. I have both a standard-scale 7-string and a baritone. Throughout *White Pony* I used a standard scale 7-string. I had it set up like my 6-strings, but I was using an extra high-E string on the top, just like a drone.

How do you come up with riffs?

I'm not trained in any type of theory. I'm just noodling around until I find something I like.

And you like to play to a click track?

I play to a click track all the time. I love it. The band doesn't play to a click track, but personally, I'll write to a click track anytime.

Do you keep the click on the downbeat, or do you put the click on the backbeat and play games with it?

I really just put it on either eighths or 16th beats. I don't have any skills in it, but it's on my very soon to-do list—to improve my abilities in making a tempo map. That way I can really start going with whatever crazy ideas I want and just change it all the time, because that's what I love.

Do the clicks get in the way when you start playing things in odd meters?

No, because I think all odd meters still float around the exact same time. It's just where you're starting at—where you're starting and stopping, right?

And what's the guitar?

The guitar is like the ribbon around the present. You get the drums doing this time, the bass is going, everybody can be rotating around each other and can come together, play the exact same thing, and create this one effect. It's up to the creative individuals at that moment and how they want to manipulate the sound and time. That's what is so awesome about music and what's so amazing



Stephen Carpenter (photo by: Ken Settle)

about modern music. I love so many of the new bands that are coming out. I think everybody is just killing it. Just amazing players out there. Everybody is just shredding it.

Anybody in particular?

Man, the list is long.

How have things evolved musically since Chino started playing guitar as well?

Well, it's been a mix. On one hand there's a part of me that loves it, because I love the sound of two guitars. On the other hand, I've been marginalized because of it—because everything we do is just based around what he does all the time. If he don't like it, we don't do it.

Do you write together or do you each show up with different parts and learn the other guy's part?

We all jam it out together. If somebody's got an idea—if everybody is interested in it—we work on it. This has been the toughest process I've gone through in making a record because I was coming out of the backend of fixing my rig while we were in writing sessions. I'm just getting myself

dialed-in to where I'm excited to play on my rig again and the stuff everybody was coming up with at the time—I wasn't very interested in. I pretty much battled everybody the whole time.

There are some killer riffs on there though.

Oh no, it's great. It's blood, sweat, and tears—that's what it was for me. I wasn't living the dream on this process *[laughs]*.

What problems did you have with your rig and are they solved?

When I first switched over to the Axe-Fx from my old rig, I actually had no problems whatsoever. When I made that transition I was using the Axe-Fx Ultra—the II hadn't come out yet. I went into it just like it was a preamp: I set it up, got on with the business of making my presets, built my tone in it, and made it sound great. That was, like, September or October of 2010. Later that year, we got our IIs. I spent about three months playing around with all the factory presets—we were just starting to write for the *Koi No Yukon* record—so I wasn't too worried about tone because we were going to make it up from scratch anyway. We wrote the songs, had a great time, went in the studio, and went through the whole process of tracking. When it was my turn to do guitars we mic'd up the cabs with the sounds we were using—I was barely using cabs at the time—and we came to the conclusion that the tone we were running with, the whole time we were writing, pretty much *sucked*. We were like, “Oh great, now what? I'm about to start guitar tracks and I've got no tone *[laughs]*.”

[Fractal] shot us over the quick beta of [their new Tone Match] before it came out. We loaded it in, matched my tone from the *Diamond Eyes* record, and we were like, “Damn, there it is.” We had all these amps in the studio and we started tone matching every amp. We did the

whole session through tone matching of all the amps we had there.

I was fucking stoked on that. I was like, “Alright man, I'm going to go back through the whole catalog and get my sounds and this is going to be awesome.” I got all my presets built with all these tone matches and my mentality at that time was that I didn't want to use cabinets—I wanted to go purely DI off the units. We go into rehearsals, get ready to go on tour, and immediately it was like my guitars vanished. They didn't even exist. It was missing all of the frequencies of being a guitar amp *[laughs]*. I had it set up for all of the recordings—when recording you are losing everything below 80 Hz. So all of the feeling—all the body of a guitar tone—was nonexistent.

What had complicated that situation more for me was that my tone-matched block was set up as a stereo cab sim. My rig had forever been left and right, but it's always been mono-mono until I've thrown any type of stereo effects onto it. But when we were building the presets, we didn't want to consider that it was always going to be mono-mono and I only set up the stereo cab sim. We didn't even audition it that way to find out, you know what I mean? I went that whole period of time—a little over a year—just being completely frustrated. The absolute obvious was just completely oblivious to me. I was over saturating my gain and my bass to try to fill in the hole that didn't exist because of the signal I've got spread real wide because of the stereo sim. One day I was just sitting there in frustration, just staring at my rack like, “This is not rocket science. Why the hell am I so damn destroyed by what seems to be apparently so simple?” I thought, “It's got to be something easy. Let me throw it down to mono and see what happens.” *Bam*. Instantly, I had my guitar signal. Problem solved. What had plagued me for nearly a year-and-a-half had been banished in the turn of a simple knob *[laughs]*.

How is it set up now?

I said, “Look. I live in the real world, still, as a musician. I need a cabinet. We need to dial that cabinet in and have my DIs as close as possible.” I decided that my DIs would become secondary to the actual tone that was coming out of the cabinet. I went back to setting it up like an actual amp. I also run through my Engl power amps and I'm running those out into my Orange cabs—but I'm also going through a Radial JDX 48 for the DIs off of them. My signal is the left and right out of the Axe-Fx, it's left and right off of my two cabinets, and it's also each cabinet mic'd up. Every cab I've ever heard plugged into these Radial boxes has sounded like you've mic'd your cabinets up perfectly. We matched the DIs and the mics until we had what we had coming out of the Radials.

The older version of your signature ESPs used to have a single-coil in the neck position. You don't use that anymore?

No. I just have the bridge and the middle pickup.

What do you get out of the middle pickup?

The middle pickup is pretty much a toy. I don't have it for anything other than when I want to take the edge off, less attack, a more rounded tone.

You don't solo much. Is sitting on a groove more your thing?

I'm about the groove. But like I said, I've been really inspired by all these new bands man—everyone's just killing it. I would personally like to just manage for a bit and go work on my skills and try to get my game up. I don't need to do it to fit in; I just want to do it because personally, man, it's just so inspiring. Everybody makes it seem so easy.



Chino Moreno (photo by: Ken Settle)

Left Brain, Right Brain

Deftones' frontman Chino Moreno discusses his double duties as vocalist and rhythm guitarist.

You first started playing guitar on *White Pony*?

Yes sir, around 2000 is when I officially started playing onstage in front of people.

What inspired you to start playing guitar with the band?

I think the catalyst was that Stephen had moved from Sacramento to Los Angeles. We had a studio in Sacramento for a few years at that point. We always rehearsed and wrote our records there—and he wasn't there. We started writing songs after the *Around the Fur* record cycle and Stephen wasn't really around so I started picking up the guitar and jamming. He'd come down and we'd do little sessions and we wrote some of the record there—although a lot of the *White Pony* record was written in the studio. I forgot the guitar I used—I think I had an SG. I might have had one of Stephen's old Jacksons that he gave me.

How has your playing changed and developed since that time?

I hope it's gotten a little bit better. Honestly, I just really like to play.

You can put out emotions through the guitar without having to speak words or having to talk about something specific. Being a singer and the lyricist of a band, sometimes the difficult part is trying to communicate what it is I'm trying to say—but a lot of times I don't know what I'm trying to say. The guitar has always been a way to express emotion without really understanding what you're doing or trying to do. Nowadays—especially with this new record, where I play guitar pretty much on every song—I've switched to the opposite of that. I love writing the songs and love playing them, but now I'm almost restrained a little bit because I have to pay attention to what I'm doing on guitar [laughs]. I really have to use two sides of my brain, coming from a singer's standpoint and a guitar standpoint.

So you'll be playing a lot more guitar onstage this tour?

I believe so. Honestly, when we write setlists, the most important thing for me is spacing out the songs that I play on guitar and the songs that I don't play on guitar, because live I really like to just sing. I do like to play guitar, but I know that I'm a way better singer than guitar player. I kind of put myself in this corner and Stephen is pretty adamant: "You play this on the record. You're playing it live." And he's always been that

way. When I first started playing on the *White Pony* tour, I was sort of scared. I was like, "Should we hire somebody to play this stuff?" And he said, "No. You played on the record, you're going to play it live." He was like a coach in a way. "You're going to do it. You can do it." And I had to figure it out. Slowly but surely, I did.

You aren't what I consider a classic two-guitar band—you're not like Iron Maiden, for example. How do you divide up the duties?

We don't, really. We don't really communicate that well as far as what we're going to do or should do. And I honestly think that's a good thing. What ends up happening is that we fill up the space. If it's a song Stephen's starting out, I fill up the space that he's not. And I feel like he does the same thing, vice versa—and with Sergio [Vega, the current bassist], too. What's crazy is that on this new record, Sergio played a Bass VI on maybe 70 percent of the record. So frequency-wise there was more of a feeling like, "What area do we take up?" For instance, with Stephen, our sounds in general are really different because of what guitars we play. We both play distortion and clean, but what makes our sound so different is Stephen plays the 8-string guitar, with way heavier-gauged low strings that, to be completely honest, aren't my favorite—that's not really what I listen to in my off time. He loves that kind of stuff.

Do you mean extreme metal bands?

Yeah, I mean guitars with that low tuning and that tone. To me, my problem with that is the bottom strings—whatever they are, I don't even know what it's tuned to—you can play that same top string like seven frets apart and it all kind of sounds the same. So when I hear him play on that low string, I try to juxtapose that with something higher. I think Vega does the same thing. We all play around each other and it fits together, but we're not canceling

each other out—because honestly that could happen so easily.

For one example, if Vega played on a 5-string bass, which is something we've never done... When a lot of those bands of the '90s were coming out and people were starting with 7-string guitars, as soon as you put a 5-string bass on that thing it sounded like every other band that was out at the time. I begged Chi [Cheng, Deftones' original bassist], "Please never play a 5-string bass." Even though it sounds good with the 7-string guitar, having that frequency going all the time takes away from the dynamics. I think the main thing we try to do is keep it dynamic. The way to do that, if Stephen is going to play those 8-string guitars, is for Sergio and myself to fill up those other frequencies.

Stephen has that Fractal digital rig. Have you experimented with that?

No. It's over my head. It's awesome. You can do so much with that thing. But for me everything makes so much more sense if I know how to work my own gear. I can easily look down at my delay pedal and turn the little knob and know where I want it. And the same thing with my chorus pedal and the front of my amp. It's just way more comfortable for me to know what I'm doing. I think it's neat that he can do all that stuff, but I'm sort of a minimalist when it comes to gear.

What do you use in the studio?

I pretty much just use the live rig. I bring my little pedalboard, my Rivera head and cabinet, and put a mic in front of it.

How much is tracked live and how much is overdubbed?

We pretty much overdub everything. We go in there and play together as a band—but we're doing that for the drum track, which is pretty typical I

guess. After that we redo all the bass first, then I do my guitars, and then Stephen does his guitars. I then put the vocals over that and there you go.

Any standout guitar moments on the album?

I don't know, to me it's one of those things where there are a lot of happy accidents—it's those little things, nuances, which are pretty rad. We haven't gone into rehearsals for the new record yet, so I still have a little nerves going in, hoping I can pull it off. I didn't write my vocals until after the full songs were written and recorded, so now I have to go through the two sides of my brain type of thing. Usually it works out. Like now, if I just had to play the songs, I know I can just play them. And if I had to just sing them, I know I can sing them. It's getting in that head space where I'm doing both at the same time. It will be a challenge, but it should be good though.

CHINO MORENO'S GEAR

GUITARS

- Gibson SG
- Knaggs Keya T2

AMPS

- Rivera Knucklehead Tre Reverb
 - Rivera 4x12 cab with Celestion Vintage 30s

EFFECTS

- MXR Carbon Copy Analog Delay
- Boss DC-2 Dimension C chorus
 - Eventide H9 Harmonizer Effects Processor
- TC Electronic Ditto Looper

STRINGS & PICKS

- Currently experimenting with strings
- Jim Dunlop White Tortex Triangle

SHOP THIS RIG



STEPHEN CARPENTER'S GEAR

GUITARS

- ESP Signature Guitars: Stef B-8 Fluence, Stef-T7B Fluence, Stef B-7 Fluence

AMPS

- Fractal Axe-Fx II (he uses 8)
- Engl Tube Poweramp E850/100 (he uses 4)
- Orange 4x12 cabinets

EFFECTS

- Fulltone True-Path ABY Splitter
- Eventide H9 Harmonizer Effects Processor
- TC Electronic Ditto Looper
- Radial JDX 48 Reactor Amplifier DI Box

STRINGS & PICKS

- Jim Dunlop Heavy Core (.011–.069) 8-string
- Jim Dunlop Heavy Core (.011–.050) 7-string
- Jim Dunlop Tortex 1 mm picks

SHOP THIS RIG

