

## favourites, popular and otherwise

I bought a 24-track recording studio, the Zoom R24, as a Christmas present in 2019, and to break it in and learn the ropes, I decided to record some of my favourite tunes written by other artists. I figured that laying down a few covers would give me the latitude to mess up, if nothing else. Along the way I've gotten to know the R24's features, come to terms with its quirks and learned a lot about recording technique. I have made music on a computer in the past but found the workflow rather maddening, not to mention the frequent crashes and application hang. Using a standalone unit limits you in some ways, to be sure, but it also keeps things simple and compact. For me, having hundreds (or thousands) of plug-ins and virtual instruments at my disposal would only confuse and complicate matters. You can judge the results for yourselves, but I've found that with a dash of savvy and patience I've been able to produce quality recordings on the R24. And when necessary, I can transfer a track into Audacity via USB for trimming, limiting, time- and pitch-shifting, and so on.

These songs were recorded at The Grinning Zone from December 2019 to July 2021, and for each track I've included a list of the instruments I used. In keeping with the quest for simplicity, my outboard gear consists of a Line 6 Pod 2.0, Line 6 Pocket Pod, Line 6 Bass Pod XT, Zoom MS-60B Multi-Stomp for bass, Vox Mini3 G2 practice amp and an Apex 430 condenser microphone. In addition, my Korg X3 comes with its own built-in set of DSP effects, as does the Zoom R24 itself. It's been such a blast creating these fine pieces of music one track at a time, and I hope you enjoy hearing them as much as I enjoyed making them.

## shake some action

Written by Cyril Jordan and Chris Wilson. ©1976 Warner Chappell Music, Inc.

**Instruments used.** Fender Stratocaster electric guitar, Epiphone Les Paul Standard Pro electric guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Casio SA-46 mini-keyboard (patch 12, chamber organ), Roland TD-11K electronic drums, Rhythm Tech Studio shaker, Rhythm Tech tambourine, handclaps, vocal.

These songs were recorded along a continuum. On what I'll call the far end, some were reinvented and rearranged, top to bottom. Certain parts may even have been completely rewritten, words and/or music. On the near end are those tunes that needed little if any tweaking or improvement. My goal with these was to faithfully reproduce the original as accurately as possible. This one falls in the latter camp.

I did write a second guitar solo so as not to duplicate the first, ditched the slapback echo on the solo but kept the phaser on the rhythm guitars, and added an organ in the chorus and a tasty feedback burst over the intro. Confession time—I pitch-shifted my backing vocal in order to hit the high harmony.

It's a rockin' little record you'd want your jockey to play, and my tribute to one of the greatest moments in power-pop history. Seek out the Flamin' Groovies original if you get the chance. It sounds nothing like your standard fare of 1976. Critic Ed Ward wrote that the Groovies were "years behind the times or years ahead of the times, depending on who you asked." Now, that's my kind of band!

## love story

Written by Ian Anderson. ©1968 Rare Blue Music, Inc.

**Instruments used.** Fender Stratocaster electric guitar, Epiphone Les Paul Standard Pro electric guitar, Seagull M6 Cedar acoustic guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Midnight Special teardrop dulcimer, Strad-O-Lin mandolin, Clarke Meg tin whistle (D), Korg X3 music workstation (patch A35, TTR-100 1), Roland TD-11K electronic drums and percussion (bongos), Zoom R24 Elemental Studio percussion (shaker), Rhythm Tech tambourine, vocal.

You heard plenty of Jethro Tull if you grew up in the '70s, and they were kind of hit-and-miss for me. I liked their prog-rock excursions okay except when they veered too close to heavy metal. But it was their distinctive folk leanings that really spoke to me. This was—note the pun, Tull fans—their second single (it flopped), released in December 1968 on the eve of original guitarist Mick Abrahams' departure. See, Mick loved the blues, and he and Ian were bound to butt heads over musical direction. I'm more with Ian than Mick, but to honour his contribution to early Tull and this song, I created a custom preset for the guitar solo and called it "Mick A." The organ, a departure from the original, evokes '60s British R&B. Very Graham Bond, I think.

This is the first song I recorded on the R24 in January 2020, just before the dreaded p-word crossed our collective lips.

## freight train

Written by Elizabeth Cotten. ©1957 Sanga Music.

**Instruments used.** Seagull M6 Cedar acoustic guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Zoom R24 Elemental Studio percussion (shaker), vocal.

You'd think that with such sparse instrumentation, this would've been a cinch to record. Well, not so much. I don't finger-pick, yet to record this song I had to grow my nails and fake my way through. My initial efforts weren't very good; it quickly became clear that my only hope was to record the thing one chord at a time and stitch it together later. The R24 has a looping feature, and that saved my bacon. If I could finger-pick a chord just once, in time, that was sufficient, as I could loop and strategically drop it into the song. That I did, with impunity. Anyway, imagine my dismay when, just when I thought I was done with the finger-picking, I realized there were *two* guitar parts. Let's just say it took a while.

As you may have guessed, I didn't choose this song because I'm a finger-style aficionado. I learned it from the Peter, Paul & Mary version, and it's their harmonies that sucked me in. I also wanted to duplicate their vocal separation, with Paul in your left ear, Peter in your right, and Mary in the middle. Happy to report that I didn't pitch-shift my vocal for Mary's part (let's hear it for contraltos). PP&M bring me back to my childhood, their early albums being one of the very few bits of my parents' music that I liked.



## sounds from the street

Written by Paul Weller. ©1977 Stylist Music Ltd./BMG Music Publishing Ltd.

**Instruments used.** Epiphone Les Paul Standard Pro electric guitar, Rickenbacker 360 electric 12-string guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Roland TD-11K electronic drums, Rhythm Tech tambourine, vocal.

I first started recording this, one of the all-time great mod anthems, as an exercise to answer a burning question. Could I make my Epiphone Les Paul sound like a Rickenbacker 330, which is what Paul Weller used in The Jam's original? I'd recently purchased a Vox practice amp that had an AC-30 Top Boost setting, so I figured I had half the battle won right there. Midway through recording I acquired my dream guitar, the Rickenbacker 360 electric 12-string. Redoing all the guitars on that would've cluttered things up—there are layers of guitars on this thing—but I did add one Rickenbacker track through the Vox amp just to help things along.

For this one, my goal was to faithfully reproduce the original, right down to the busy, crazy drum fills and that chaotic, Who-style break in the middle. For those who are wondering, that stuttering Morse code effect is achieved by turning your treble pickup up 10 and your rhythm pickup to 0, then toggling the pickup switch. Simple but very effective.

Oh, and the answer to my question? Not quite, but pretty close. I'm thrilled with how this turned out.

## the way love used to be

Written by Ray Davies. ©1971 EMI Film & Theatre Music.

**Instruments used.** Seagull M6 Cedar acoustic guitar, Korg X3 music workstation (patches AQ1 Piano 16', B67 A.Bass 1), vocal.

Have you ever come across a song that, when you sing it for the first time, seems like it was written just for you to sing? That was my response when I discovered this long-lost Kinks gem, tucked away on an obscure film soundtrack. It fits my voice, range and style perfectly.

I stayed fairly true to the original, apart from some odd vocal phrasing that may have suited good old Ray but had me tripping and stumbling. I also ditched the orchestration in favour of the "doo-doo-doo" vocal and added a simple piano line, recorded in stereo and drenched in reverb. The keyboard acoustic bass was a little experiment that I decided to keep 'cause it worked out so well. This is one of the rare pop songs written in the key of F-minor, which is fine to play in if you remembered to bring your capo along to the session. (I did.)

In a fascinating twist, this song has a tenuous tie to the previous track, as I'm convinced that it served as the jumping-off point, both lyrical and musical, for "Country," a similarly gorgeous Paul Weller tune that appeared on his *Wild Wood* album in 1993.



## throwing the election

Written by Scott Miller. ©1988 Rational Music/Sousaphone Charlie Songs.

Administered by Bug Music (BMI).

**Instruments used.** Korg X3 music workstation (patches A01 Piano 16', A28 TTR-100 Z, A61 Tappern, A62 Slowwave, A71 Hackbrett, A94 Starless, B88 Violin), Seagull M6 Cedar acoustic guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Roland TD-11K electronic drums and percussion (congas, cabasa), Zoom R24 jazz kit (snare and toms), Zoom R24 Elemental Studio percussion (bell tree), Rhythm Tech tambourine, vocal.

This is the first song on the reinvented/rearranged side of the continuum. The original, recorded by Scott Miller's band Game Theory, is a power-pop masterpiece—so good it seemed pointless to replicate it. So, I slowed the song down, went with sampled brush drums and used piano, organ and synthesizers in place of the jangly guitars. I'm especially proud of the organ line here. Eat your heart out, Al Kooper!

Scott Miller was a genius—lyrically, musically, everything-ly—and a great guy. I wrote him a gushing fan letter during the Game Theory years and he sent me a charming little postcard, saying he hoped my indie band would become "the geological event it portends to be." It didn't, but I'll always recall his kind words. And brilliant music nerd that he was, he'd surely appreciate my tacking on the coda of Badfinger's "Day After Day" to conclude my version of his song.

Scott is loved and missed by many, and if you're into popular music you really owe it to yourself to check out his masterful book, *Music: What Happened?*

## summer comes sunday

Written by Mike Gregory and Tommy Murray.

©1969 Copyright Control/EMI Records Ltd.

**Instruments used.** Seagull M6 Cedar acoustic guitar, Takamine EF-396R acoustic 12-string guitar, Rickenbacker 360 electric 12-string guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Hohner Special 20 harmonicas (D, G, A), Yamaha YRA-302B III alto recorder, Roland TD-11K electronic drums, Rhythm Tech Studio shaker, Rhythm Tech tambourine, vocal.

My tastes tend toward the obscure, as I think is evidenced by my choice of covers. But this one wins the obscurity sweepstakes gold medal. I came across it quite by accident. In my day job as a closed-caption editor, I was assigned a British crime drama called *Heartbeat*, set in mid-'60s Yorkshire. The show's soundtrack is full of British Invasion gems, and if we can make out the lyrics we're obligated to transcribe them. So, I dutifully hunted for said lyrics online and came up empty. I finally found a YouTube video, which enabled me to hear things more clearly *and* appreciate what a magnificent song this is. Turns out it's a Swinging Blue Jeans outtake, of all things, that first appeared on a compilation album in the '90s. What a pity it languished in the vaults for so long.

For the most part I stayed true to the original, right down to the gobs of *Surrealistic Pillow* reverb on the backing vocals. But I changed a few lyrics, added the harmonicas and substituted a recorder for their celeste. Oh, and to paraphrase Dr. Winston O'Boogie, there's two 12-strings in this. I hope you appreciate it.



## kyrie

Written by Richard Page, Steve George and John Lang.  
©1985 Warner-Tamerlane Pub. Corp./Entente Music.

**Instruments used.** Seagull M6 Cedar acoustic guitar, Rickenbacker 360 electric 12-string guitar, Epiphone Jack Casady Signature bass, Midnight Special teardrop dulcimer, Strad-O-Lin mandolin, Stentor 1401 Harlequin violin, Roland TD-11K electronic percussion (bongos, guiro, claves), Zoom R24 Elemental Studio percussion (djembe), World Beat 6" hand drum, Rhythm Tech Studio shaker, Rhythm Tech tambourine, vocal.

I don't know what's more unlikely—me covering a number-one song (this topped the Billboard Hot 100 in March 1986) or me taking on something from the big-hair, overproduced '80s. Anyway, I liked the chorus of this tune enough to do both in one fell swoop. But their verse was lame, if I may say so as the author of exactly zero number-one hits. So, I rewrote it. In the process, I showed the synthesizers the door and kicked out the thudding drums; in came the jangly guitars, dulcimer, mandolin and a wide array of percussion. I thought their cold ending quite effective, so I kept that. And let's hear it for Kick-O-Sound, that wonderful feature of Rickenbacker 360s that allows you to route the bass and treble pickups through separate effects chains. On your left, it's the Black Panel + Trem preset on the Pocket Pod; on your right, the Vox AC-30 Top Boost. The result? A glorious electric 12-string in wide stereo.

For those who don't know, "Kyrie elieson" means "Lord, have mercy" in Greek and is a part of many Christian liturgical rites. I find this most succinct of prayers welcome in such uncertain times.

## the king

Traditional, arranged by Vern Nicholson.

**Instruments used.** vocal.

In March of 2020, a curb I didn't see came between me, my bicycle and the cold, wet pavement. In the process I injured the ring finger on my left hand (the one I fret with). Several months and hand therapy appointments later, it's getting better but is still somewhat wonky. For a time I had a hard cast on that finger, which meant I couldn't play any of my stringed instruments. It was time for either a wind-and-keyboard opus or a stab at an a cappella recording. Wisely, I think, I chose the latter.

My arrangement isn't terribly different than the Steeleye Span record from which I learned the song. I had no chance of matching Maddy Prior's soprano, so had to invent a new high harmony. The boys' choir threatens to veer off-pitch once or twice but mostly nails it, and this struck me as a fitting farewell song to close out the EP.

That said, what in the world is this about? Who's "the king"? From Steeleye Span's liner notes, "The wren traditionally symbolized winter and the robin summer. On St. Stephen's Day in Pembrokeshire, where the song was collected, a wren was hunted and killed to symbolize the death of winter and then placed in a garlanded box and taken from door to door. At each house this song was sung and the occupants asked to pay to see the dead wren with the words, 'Please to see the king.'" Those zany Brits.