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# GUITAR WORLD

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## U2's THE EDGE

The Heart & Soul Of  
The World's Most  
Powerful Rock Band

## DWEEZIL ZAPPA

I Was A Teenage  
Guitar Hero

## VINNIE MOORE

Can He Escape  
Yngwie's Shadow

## STEVE STEVENS

On Stage  
With Billy Idol

Hot Solos:  
STEVE VAI  
GEORGE LYNCH





# Studio Rats



We present a gallery of players who get the least fanfare, but the most work—the session stalwarts.

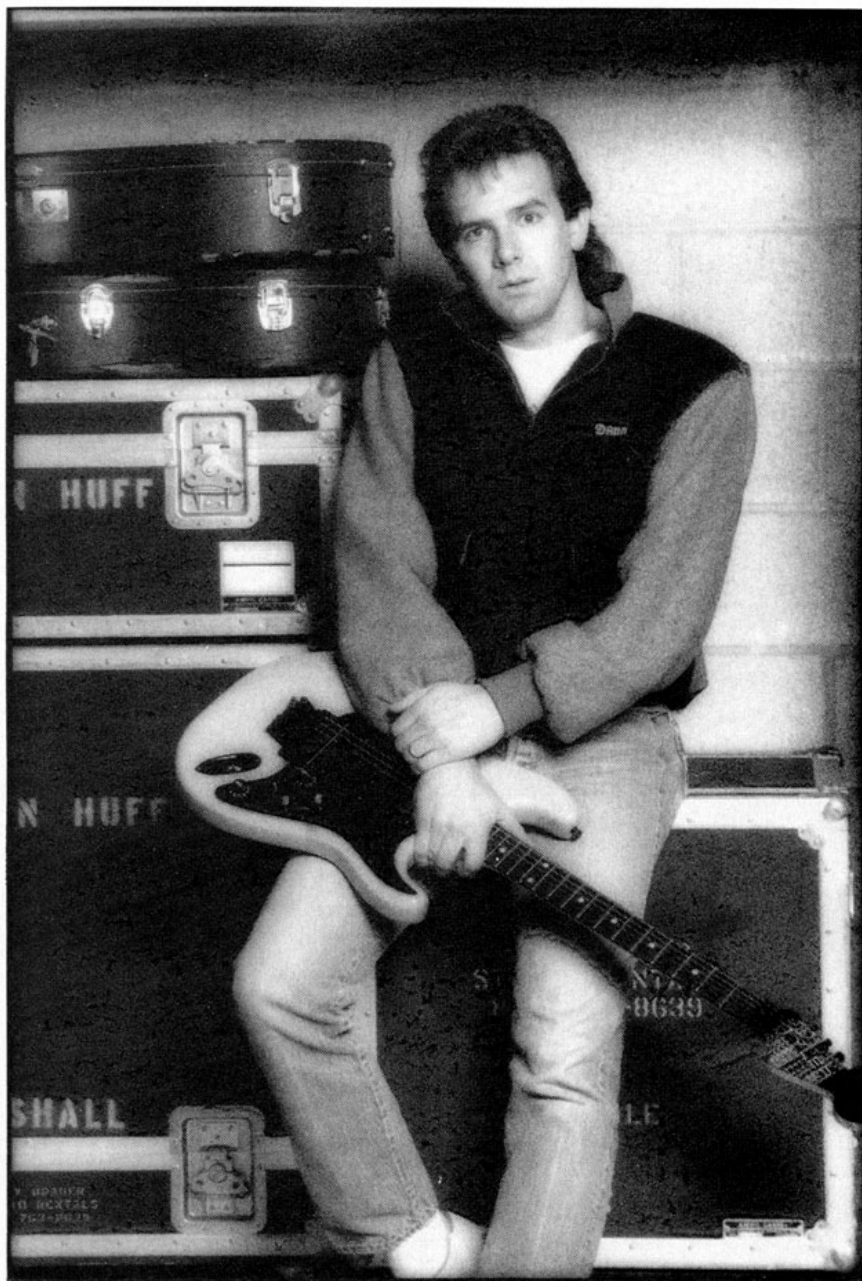
By Steven Rosen  
Photos by Glen La Ferman

The five players portrayed in this gallery of L.A. sessionmen—Dann Huff, Paul Jackson Jr., Mike Landau, Steve Watson and Dean Parks—have several things in common. They work constantly in the studio, and all have chops galore. All of them first made it into their respective working situations on the recommendation of an already-established player or producer.

They all stress feel and sound as opposed to sheer speed or agility as the main qualities needed for making the grade. There are other players who could have been included here—

Carlos Rios, Kevin Dukes—but this fivesome offers a strong across-the-board sampling of every style from rock 'n' roll dates to film work.

Many of these interviews took place between sessions (Landau had to race off to a Joni Mitchell date) or even in the studio (Huff finished our talk and walked into the next room for some overdubs on the *Over The Top* soundtrack). Every participant was honest and forthright in his comments. The remarkable guitar skills that each possesses earns them a special place in the guitar firmament.



## **DANN HUFF**

*"Producers want to hear the sound they hear on radio every day."*

While Dann Huff enjoys the notoriety and excess of playing three sessions per day, five days a week, he only jumped into the studio circuit three years ago. At that time, he was cutting demos in Nashville when he came to the attention of producer Robbie Buchanan. Claiming he "lucked out," Huff moved to Los Angeles and within two months he had the scene wired. The work came easy—finding the right guitar sounds did not.

"When I came here, what I needed was totally different from what I thought I'd need. I didn't even know how to use a vibrato bar."

Huff learned quickly. His main calls were to record electric rock guitar solos, but to find consistent work he realized there was a need to be a proficient rhythm guitarist as well. Taking his cues from the likes of Paul Jackson, Jr. and Dave Williams, Dann soon developed strong rhythm chops to match his staggering soloing abilities. Huff's gear was still, shall we say, second class. It wasn't until he traded his custom Stratocaster, built by a Nashville luthier, for a 1963 Fender Strat (which he had wizard Jim Tyler rework), that he truly entered the age of modern guitar.

"I hated Strats in the beginning, but that's all I play now."

In addition to customizing his main studio Stratocaster, Jim Tyler has also built two custom Strat-style guitars for Dann. The guitarist feels that the Stratocaster is the only style of instrument capable of cutting through the barrage of MIDI-ed synthesizers present on virtually every record. Dann, like virtually every working sessioneer, works with the Bob Bradshaw rig, a signal chain organizer which gives the guitar access to ultra high-end and heavy bottom-end, two essentials in the battle against synths. While Huff had no choice but to modernize his sound, his true tonal love lies somewhere else.

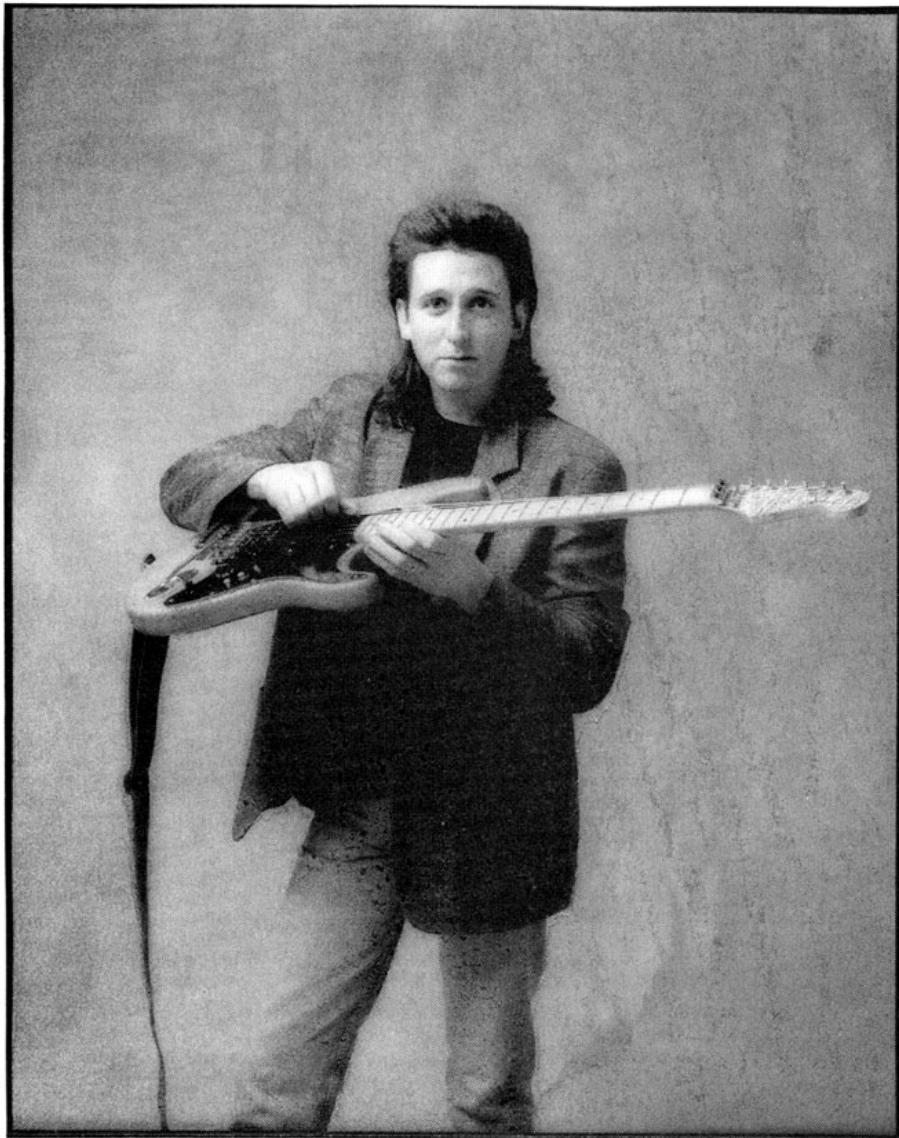
"I still think the best sounds are those that you get when you plug straight into the amp. If I sat and played you the sound that I liked, and that sound were totally preserved on record, it would sound great. But I'm sure you've heard records where the guitar sounds like a little bzzzz with a lot of bottom-end. And that's the problem."

"For the most part, producers want to hear the sounds you hear every day on the radio. I like my rack and I like my sounds, but I tend to get bored because everything sounds the same. Part of being an L.A. session player is giving up rights to individuality at any given time. They pay you a lot of money to be able to pick their brain and insert more of what they hear than what you're hearing.

"People like Mike [Landau] and Paul Jackson are great players and we're pretty much all interchangeable. But, at the same time, we're all different personalities and we hear music a little differently."

# MIKE LANDAU

*"Develop a sound—don't worry about being the fastest."*



Like Dann Huff, Mike Landau still believes in the purity of the instrument. He loves plugging his 1959 Fender Strat straight into a plexi 100 Marshall top and two 4×12 cabinets. Landau loves taking chances and does not settle for standard fare. A good example of a Landau tone is Rod Stewart's "Infatuation," on which Mike played rhythm. While he admits the sound was generated from simple use of harmonizer, there is an intensity and an expanding of the guitar's tonal boundaries that one doesn't hear often. But like these other players, he is not always given the freedom.

"I like to take chances, but on a lot of dates they just want you to do the part and move on. It's fine with me because the music is usually lacking, so I don't really care that much about it. I love using Marshalls instead of a stereo guitar and the rack with the same old effects on it."

From the beginning, Landau's approach differed from the Gibson 335 crowd in that his first sessions were played on various Stratocasters. And his first licks were shaped around the style of longtime friend Steve Lukather. It was through the Toto superstar that Landau first entered the studios.

"Steve helped me a lot. We grew up together and played in bands together. He started doing sessions before I did. Then he joined Toto and got real busy doing that. He started doing less dates and threw me a few bones here and there. And it just kind of snowballed. He was definitely a major help."

Landau's first major gig was playing in Boz Scaggs' road band (replacing Lukather), a situation through which he generated work. Calling the early dates "jive," Mike knew he could play and concentrated on coming up with the "right sounds." He was one of the first cats to use a Bradshaw system and realized early on the importance of a quality tone.

"A major thing for me is a good sound. And a good feel is more important than chops and being able to shred."

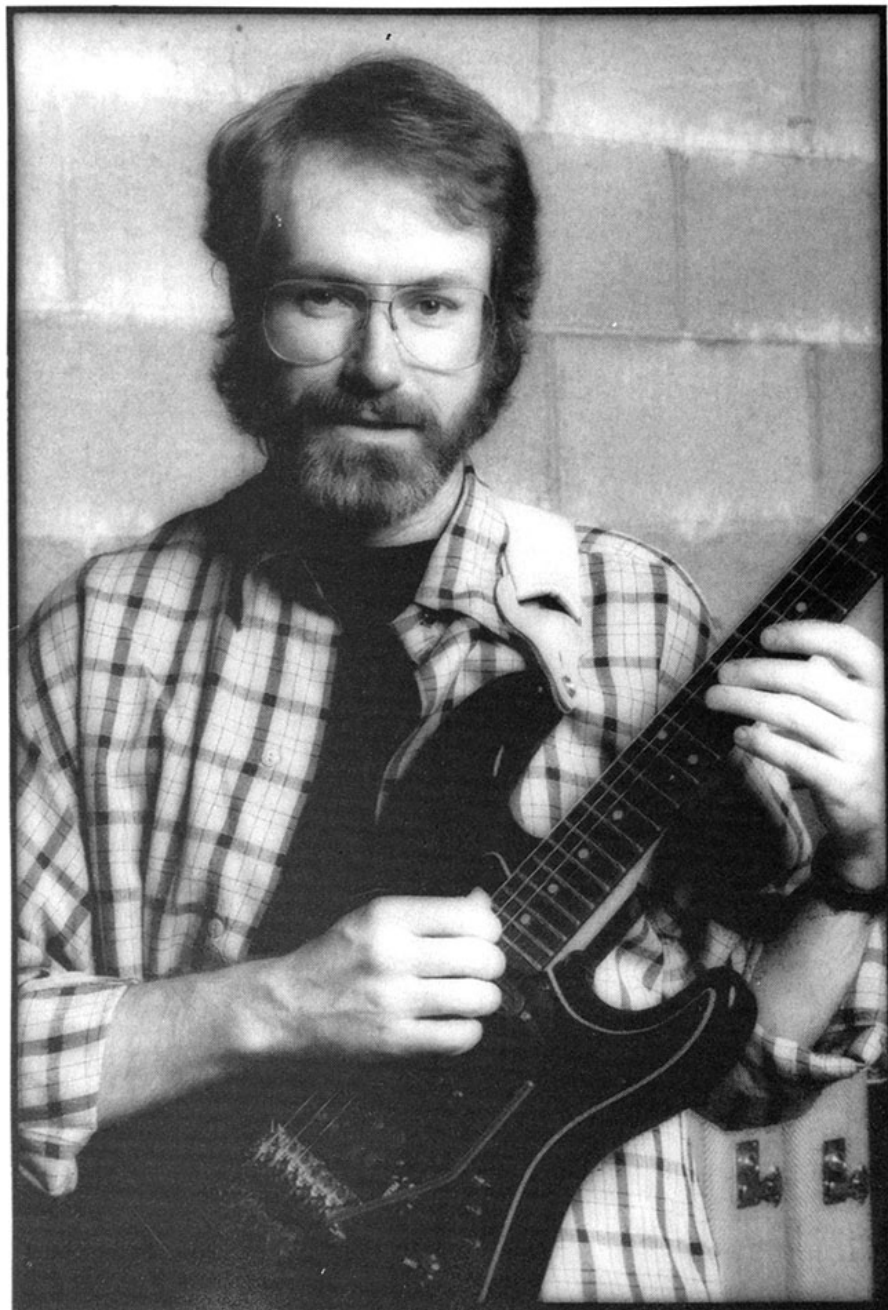
Landau calls it "feel"; Watson named it "interpretation." Whatever the term, it is this element, as opposed to sheer technique, that budding young players should concentrate on. Mike remembers more than one date when the guitar part made the track simply because of the human element involved.

"As a guitar player, producers have a microscope on you when you're trying to lock in with a track. Everything else is sequenced and about the only thing on there that's human is the guitar track. And they're trying to figure out why it's not completely perfect, which is annoying sometimes. But then again, one of the reasons they call a guitar player is because there's a little bit of the human element on there. If I had any advice for a player, it's to develop a sound and don't worry about being the fastest guitar player on earth."



# DEAN PARKS

*Dean knew that if he blew the Sonny & Cher spot, there would be no second chance.*



Dean Parks is the veteran of this wild bunch, having been a staple in the studios for 15 years. But like every other member of this elite club, Parks had the doors opened for him by an already-established player: Larry Carlton.

"Sonny and Cher had come through Texas and hired my band as their back-up rhythm section. We were about the only rhythm section in town who could read. They later called me to play guitar for them in Las Vegas. I moved out to L.A. to audition for their summer show and they actually pulled big strings to get me a tryout, because using a road musician on a tv show, where time is money, was unheard of. On that first show, Larry Carlton was the established guitar player that they had as sort of a spy to see if I could cut it or not.

"We became friends and he recommended me for a lot of demos and I played second guitar on a lot of his dates. That was the best recommendation I could have."

Parks went on to become the lead guitarist on the Sonny & Cher Show. Working with established players in this situation, his reputation grew via word of mouth. He began covering all the Motown dates (Jackson Five; Diana Ross) and actually "turned down twice as much work as I was able to do." Dean knew that if he blew the Sonny & Cher spot, there would be no second chance.

At that time (mid-seventies), there was only a handful of players qualified to meet the demands of a studio situation by playing rock-oriented music quickly and efficiently. Parks was in the proverbial right place at the right time: he now realizes with schools like Musicians Institute and Dick Grove turning out an abundance of qualified players, there are far more guitarists than gigs.

"The big difference today is if a young player comes in who plays great, finding an opportunity to prove it is hard. If established players are already doing the gigs, it's tough."

For Dean, the role has changed drastically. On the early dates, there were always two guitarists on a date and sometimes (as in Motown) as many as four. Now, the guitar is "more an afterthought than a solid building block," producers and arrangers relying on sequencers and synthesizers as a foundation. The demands for sound have similarly changed; he has hung up his Gibson 335 for a Jim Tyler-assembled instrument incorporating a Kramer neck; Strat body; Floyd Rose; and Seymour Duncan (Classic Stack and Hot Rail) and Jim Tyler pickups. Parks' strength lies not in his speed (though he's capable) but in the spirit of what he plays.

"I can't say I'm like a Lukather or a Landau, who are incredible rock soloists. I like my style to be compositional. If I play a fast run, when you slow it down I still want it to make good sense."