

CURVE

*Painful, Icy
and Brutal*

In another life, Dean Garcia's guitar playing could have served as the soundtrack to Boris Karloff's most horrific movies. Teeming with menace and sensory overload, Garcia creates guitar textures best listened to in the dark with the doors locked. If the peasants in those old horror films had heard the sounds that Garcia ripped from his guitar, they would have burned him at the stake. Or put a silver bullet in his brain.

Garcia forms one half of Curve, the sinister spawn of the texture world. His counterpart is Toni Halliday, a woman whose lethally cold voice would have given Bela Lugosi the chills. Together, Garcia and Halliday are responsible for the guitar and bass onslaught that puts the texture-based Curve just as close to Al Jourgensen's Ministry as to Kevin Shield's My Bloody Valentine.

While Halliday cut her teeth by singing backup on Robert Plant's solo albums, Garcia learned his craft as the bass player for the Eurythmics. He also did numerous studio sessions for Eurythmics' Dave Stewart, from whom he learned the art of studio experimentation. But Garcia didn't like session work, which he

Dean Garcia and Toni Halliday

Steve Haskins



found too limiting, and even blew off a Bob Dylan recording session because he didn't like the music.

In the late 1980s, Garcia teamed up with Halliday in an ill-fated band called State of Play, and then reunited in 1991 to put out their first offerings as Curve. From the outset, the aggressiveness of Garcia's guitar textures separated the band from others like MBV or Lush. Song titles such as "Die Like a Dog," "Horror Head," and "The Colour Hurts" were indicative of the attitude that Curve embraced: painful, icy, and brutal. Like other texture bands, however, Garcia built Curve's sound from the bass up.

"For us, the bass is the main thing of the song, since I'm primarily a bass player. The pulse of the bass dictates the chord changes in the music," explains Garcia. "Then Toni's singing follows off the bass. If the song works with those three things then we have the basis for adding guitars." That's the easy part. Getting the guitars to fit into this pattern is the hard part. "I'll record a basic guitar track that Toni can hear, but we don't like to emphasize the chords. So I try to avoid anything specific like major and minor chords. Instead, I use basic fifths all the time. Once we've got all that in place, we'll try putting guitar things over the top, and even change the bass if we come up with something better on the guitar."

Garcia, who prefers to record in a basement studio in London, is willing to try almost anything to get the perfect sound for his guitar layers. "We record the guitars quite randomly. My guitar sounds are really elements of noise and feedback; consequently you can play different things three or four times until something happens that works. I build up things in different ways, like tuning the guitar open, or tuning it to the pitch of the track. I also do random stuff like using strange tunings. The final song can be a combination of different bits of



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the track, things I messed about with, which I might have added sweep or distortion to."

As for specifics about his techniques and equipment, Garcia laughs. "I'm giving away trade secrets here. It's all quite grubby, actually. There's an Eventide Ultra-Harmonizer, a couple of Akai 1100 samplers, a Morley wah pedal, a bunch of delay units and Boss pedals, a Zoom box, some flangers and EQs, and a DigiTech sweep thing that dips the pitch, which we use so the guitar doesn't go out of tune. There's a line of all of them, and then it goes into a Marshall." As for the instruments themselves, Garcia plays his parts on an old Fender Jazzmaster guitar and a Music Man bass.

It gets weirder. "I have a MiniMoog which is quite old. I send guitars through it and process the sounds with the oscillators of the Moog, using the guitar as a trigger. There's also this sound on *Cuckoo* [the band's most recent album] that has this swooping guitar made from two slide guitars and two voices that went into this funny whammy pedal, which sounds like we're kind of singing with the guitars."

As for the recording aspect,

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Garcia handles all the musical chores, including the drum machine. "Most of my ideas were born from sound-on-tape machines that I toyed with when I was 14 or 15. I'd play with tape loops when I was a kid, just seeing how you could take voices and record them over and over and over. When I worked with Dave Stewart on Eurythmics' stuff—I was always interested in looking over his shoulder—I found that you could do the same tape loop thing in a similar sort of way with instruments in a recording studio. You really have to start with an idea of what you want to achieve while you're recording and then you have to decide on how many tracks you'll need to accomplish that."

Garcia's jackhammer bass playing bears a resemblance to "My Generation"-era John Entwistle and even some of the roundly fluid Motown-era bass players whom he claims as inspiration. His guitar playing is patently unclassifiable. "Missing Link" features a punishing guitar that owes as much to industrial metal as it does to overheated diesel engines, while "Left of Mother" has an otherworldly acoustic guitar that sounds like vintage Steve Howe. Strange, but it all works.

Live, Curve replicates their studio madness with the aid of guitarists Debble Smith and Alex Mitchel, and drummer Monti. Their shows are nightmarish blends of piercing white light, smoke, and whammy-bar perversion. As in the studio, Garcia holds the live act together with his thudding bass lines, allowing the others to explore unlimited guitar abuse. In the end, listening to what Curve does with guitars is a pleasure/pain experience well worth seeking out. The chorus line from the band's "Fait Accompli" sums it all up quite succinctly: "I've come to crush your bones...I've come to make you feel good." —HP Newquist