

# VIC FLICK

by HP Newquist

**F**rom James Bond to the Pink Panther. From London to Los Angeles. From Jimmy Page to Eric Clapton. This is the journey of Vic Flick, the man who created the guitar sound that launched a thousand spy movies.

Flick was among the handful of top session guitarists in England during the early 1960s when the whole concept of electric guitar as a lead instrument caught fire. Generally, the only available guitarists who could read were trained in classical or jazz, and they weren't interested in playing sessions with a "rocking" feel. This gave rise to a whole generation of players, especially in Britain, who contributed guitar parts to recordings ranging from The Kinks to Engelbert Humperdink. In addition to Vic Flick, these session men included the likes of Jimmy Page and Big Jim Sullivan.

"I had switched from piano to guitar at age 14, and joined a folk group that was opening up for Paul Anka," recalls Flick. "His backup band was The John Barry Seven. After the tour, John Barry tried to get his group hired on as the regular band on a TV series, but they were rejected because the band's guitarist couldn't read music." Barry hired Flick, and shortly thereafter, The John Barry Seven was hired to do the theme music for the James Bond movies. The rest is history, as Flick churned out what would become one of the most famous guitar riffs of all time.

With a distinctive sound, Flick soon found himself in demand for studio dates beyond those he did as part of Barry's group. "For many years there was so much work that three and even four sessions a day was normal, day in and day out, every week," says Flick. "Record companies expected that as many as five or six songs be cut in a single three-hour session, and then you would head to another studio to repeat the process. Versatility in the studio was essential, so I always carried a Stratocaster, a Les Paul, a Martin D-28, an Ibanez gut-string, a 12-string Epiphone, and a banjo in case of emergencies. I also used a Fender Vibrolux amp and an assortment of archaic pedals. The original guitar for the Bond sessions was a big, blonde f-hole Clifford Essex acoustic with a DeArmond pickup. Later, on the theme to *License To Kill*, however, I used a Strat and a Peterson amplifier when the original sound couldn't be duplicated with the original equipment. And even though Eric Clapton and I did that session together, the producer killed it in favor of Gladys Knight and the Pips.

"I did sessions in addition to getting live gigs, which were an experience in and of themselves. The U.K. had not yet built a com-

prehensive highway system in the '60s, so being on the road usually meant many miles stuck behind a truck traveling at 25 MPH with a decidedly unenvironmental exhaust system. Plus, the venues were often dangerous, with curtains falling, electrical systems installed around the time of Adam and Eve, and stages with holes in them. We even had an electrician commit suicide while we were rehearsing on stage."

Flick survived, winding up as the guitarist on recordings by Tom Jones, Nancy Sinatra, Burt Bacharach, Diana Ross, Cliff Richard, Herman's Hermits, and Henry Mancini (of *Pink Panther* fame), amongst countless others. Such diversity brought him into contact with two guitarists who would later decide to swap sessions for the stage: Jimmy Page and John McLaughlin. "Early on, I became friendly with Jimmy and John from the sessions we did together," says Flick.

"John played acoustic guitar on a lot of sessions, even though his heart wasn't in it. At that time he had to earn money. He was always doodling with those fantastic runs and arpeggios of his in-between takes. That habit of John's used to bug some engineers as they were forever having to open and close his mic. Perhaps they should have recorded John's doodlings and forgotten about the main track.

"Jimmy was quite busy on the session scene at the same time even though he couldn't read—and didn't really want to. His inventiveness made him popular with arrangers who were looking to absorb any new sound or lick. Jimmy was kind enough to acknowledge at one time the help I gave him on recording dates, when I used to play for him the odd few written parts he had; he listened a couple of times and had them down. A great musician.

"Interestingly," Flick continues, "I also happened to be on a session with Jimmy when he told one of the U.K.'s biggest session contractors that he was giving up session work to form a group with John Paul Jones, another session musician. The contractor told him that he was making a big mistake, and should consider the future and his career before he went off and did something foolish."

Flick has since forsaken the life of a British studio musician and moved to Los Angeles, the current world capital for film session work. He continues to work on various TV and film projects in addition to arranging his own compositions. Despite his role as the man whose guitar playing defined the marriage of electric guitar and movie soundtrack, Vic Flick is not content to rest on his reputation as being "the guitar behind 007." Like the ever intrepid Bond, Flick, guitar in case, is always moving on to the next assignment. **E**

