

# Jeff Richman

## The Royal Dan Plan Man

A mainstay on the L.A. fusion landscape, guitarist Jeff Richman's list of credits includes more than a dozen solo releases, many guest-player appearances, and film and television scores. Plus, he has recently toiled as producer and performer on a number of tribute compilations for Mike Varney's Tone Center label.

All-star salutes to John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and The Mahavishnu Orchestra preceded the newest tip of the hat, *The Royal Dan*. This one features the music of Steely Dan and a backing band consisting of ex-Zappa keyboardist Peter Wolf, Jimmy Haslip on bass, Vinnie Colaiuta on drums, and Ernie Watts on sax. Richman and nine other incredible guitarists each take a turn on the disc; Robben Ford, Steve Morse, Jay Graydon, Al Di Meola, Steve Lukather, Mike Stern, Jimmy Herring, Frank Gambale, and Elliott Randall. We recently spoke with Richman to get the skinny on how it all came together.

### Vintage Guitar: Why Steely Dan?

**Jeff Richman:** It was Mike Varney's idea – he's a big fan. But I love them, too, so this was an exciting challenge.

### How do you approach a project like this?

First, I spend a lot of time working on the arrangements, because I don't want to do a straight cover album. It took about two months to dissect everything – of course, I was doing other types of work at the same time. But the recording session took about a week, and then we did overdubs, which spanned a period of about two months.

### Who chose the songs for each player?

I did. I was originally going to do "Aja" myself. In fact, I had already recorded my solo. But I was trying to get Al DiMeola for the project, and I thought it would be hard to pitch this to him because he just doesn't do stuff like this. But he said, "Oh, Steely Dan? Yeah, they're cool. I love that song 'Aja'." And so I thought, "Okay, he's going to do it. I'm going to give it up." So I did "Josie" instead. Everything just worked out the way it was supposed to. And when the band was rehearsing "Peg," I said to Jimmy Haslip, "This one has to

go to Robben Ford." And "Bothisattva" was just perfect for Steve Morse. I think he's the genius of the album. That guy scares me!

### He really does tear it up on that tune. And Mike Stern's version of "Dirty Work" is just beautiful.

Mike's a close friend of mine. He was very helpful to me when I was younger. He was way better than I was and he was one of my teachers, so I really wanted to take great care when it came to him. I have a vision for him: I'd like him to do a pop album one day, because of the way he plays a melody. He lays it down with such... charm. So anyway, "Dirty Work" was just tailor made for him.

### How about Frank Gambale?

He's a Steely Dan *freak!* He can sit down at the piano and sing all the lyrics to almost every Steely Dan song! And then Jimmy Herring was perfect for "The Fez," and Steve Lukather was perfect for "Pretzel Logic" – right up his alley.

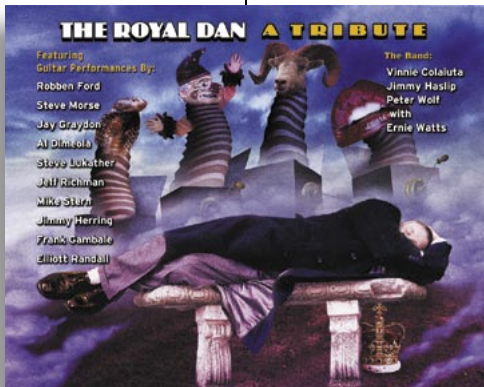
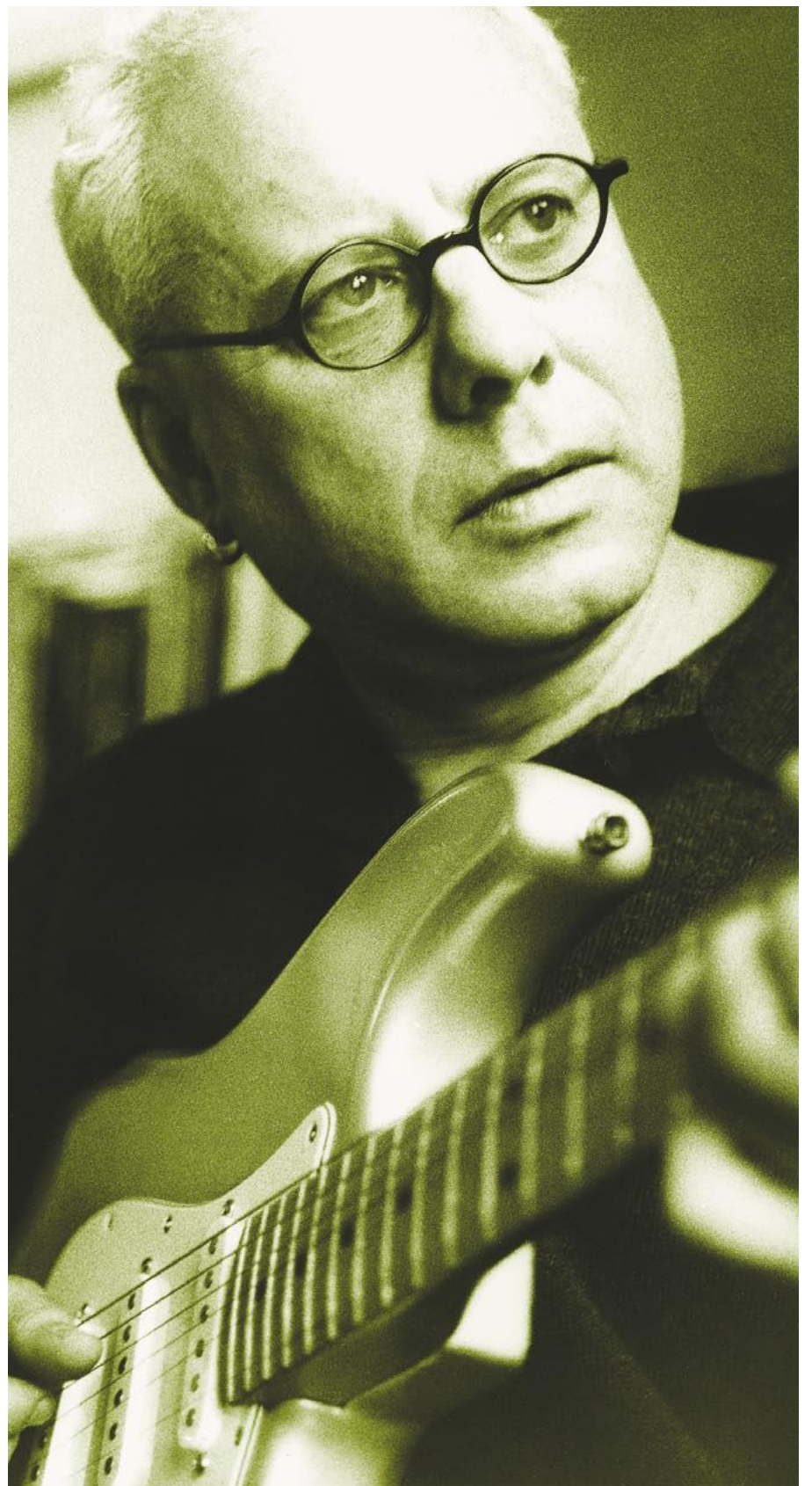
### Is that him doing both of the dual lead parts?

Oh, yeah. And that was his idea. As a producer, I try to get people to do the very best they can, but then I do as little as possible and let them do it and just get out of the way.

### Can you give a rundown of the guitars and amps we hear on the album?

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Well, I remember *most* of them. Robben Ford used a Les Paul and an old Dumble-modified Super Reverb. He always gets the greatest tones. Jay Graydon used his Valley Arts guitar and a Vox Tonelab. Al DiMeola used a nylon-string. Steve Lukather used his Music Man signature model, The Luke, and his son's tiny little Marshall amp, which was engineered by Simon Phillips. It's got all these reverb and delay effects – it sounds incredible. I used a relic Strat through a '65 Fender Super Reverb and a Deluxe for the rhythm parts. And for my solo, I used



my Yamaha AES 1500 archtop and a Naylor amp. Jimmy Herring used a 335, sort of trying to go for that Larry Carlton sound from the old Steely Dan records. And he used a '67 Super Reverb, a '76 Marshall JMP 100-watt, and a Hughes and Kettner Tube Factor. Frank Gambale used a Yamaha just like mine through a tiny Marshall. Mike Stern used his Yamaha Pacifica signature model, and my Super Reverb.

Each of the players really brought their own voice to the songs through their tones, too... their tones just permeated the arrangement of the tracks. To me, what really makes this album cool – besides the great guitar playing of course – are the arrangements. It took a lot of thought... and prayer, really! You know, Steely Dan tunes are so perfect the way they are, and it

almost felt wrong to dissect them. But hopefully I did it in a respectful way and added to their music rather than subtracting. I really put a lot of time and energy and love into making these arrangements special.

### Are there any more of these tribute CDs planned?

We're talking about doing a Santana one, and I'd really like to do a Jeff Beck one. Santana really cornerstones the whole Latin thing, and some of his songs are such immense standards. He is really a viable musical entity. And Jeff Beck – I mean he's like everybody's favorite guitar player! On one hand it's like, "Why do a Jeff Beck record? No one sounds better than him, so why do it?" But there are so many great players who love him, so it would be a cool one to do. – **Ann Wickstrom**