

# t r e y     g u n n

**T**rey Gunn is one-sixth of the new King Crimson double trio featuring Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew on guitars, Tony Levin on electric upright bass, electric basses, and Chapman Stick, Bill Bruford and Pat Mastelotto on drums, with Trey on Warr Guitar. I was fortunate to see the band live at Town Hall in NYC and I got a chance to speak with Trey prior to the show. § Trey has toured and recorded with David Sylvian, Robert Fripp, Sunday All Over the World, Toni Childs, and the California Guitar Trio. He has also just released his first solo album *One Thousand Years* on Discipline Records. The album is a true showcase of the myriad playing possibilities of the Chapman Stick. § I was struck with Trey's honesty and good humor during our interview. By the time you read this, Trey will be back on the road with King Crimson and if you get the chance, you should make a point of seeing them live. After this interview, I was treated to one of the finest musical experiences I have witnessed in a long time. Not only was the band exciting to watch, but the sound quality was truly remarkable. The music was challenging and the musicians provoked one another, and after all, isn't that what it's all about?

—David C. Gross

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*You first picked up Emmett Chapman's Stick in 1987?*

After many, many years of being fascinated and avoiding it.

*Were you primarily a guitarist or a bassist?*

Neither and both—I started on piano when I was a young child—the Stick was always fascinating to me partly because I knew there was something wrong for me with the guitar. One day I had the hunch it was the tuning and at the same time, I again saw the Stick and said “hmmm.” And then I met Robert (Fripp). This was in 1985 and he showed me a new tuning on the guitar, and when I first played that I realized I was right about the tuning, but not yet time for the Stick, “I’m going to go with this for awhile.”

*Tell me about the Warr. Who builds it?*

Mark Warr, he lives in Southern Califor-

nia. He's the Captain of the Topanga Canyon Fire Dept. He works ten 24-hour shifts a month and builds instruments the rest of the time. He really loves it. I first heard about it from a Stick player named Randy Strom.

*Sure, he was in Kittyhawk.*

He's been around a long time. I wanted to meet Randy. I like to meet other Stick players, particularly the older guys. Randy said “I have this new instrument that you have to check out” and I thought the Stick was so simple, although there were some things I was stretching for on the instrument, I thought what could he do, what could it be, and I walked in saw this thing. You wear it with a strap. It's perfectly balanced.

*That's one of the questions I wanted to ask you about the Stick—how did you practice, sitting or standing? It can be awkward because of*

*the belt hook.*

You can put it between your legs. When I first picked it up, Robert Fripp leant me his, which was an old one, about '76, I'm not sure. The first minute was like “grrr, here I go” because once I realized it was the time to play it, I just said I'm going to go for it. The frets kind of go at an angle to your body so you can't just move straight across like you think you're going to move to another fret and then an hour later I realized everything I was trying to do on the guitar, bass and piano for years, I was just not on the right instrument.

*Who were your influences? Before Stick and since?*

Well I grew up in Texas in the hard rock scene which was really big there. Actually King Crimson played there a lot, but from Black Sabbath to Aerosmith, to all sorts of

## TREY GUNN

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newer one and it doesn't work the same way. It works more like a wah-wah. I was able to crank this one down so it doesn't open all the way, and that's how I do it.

*What is your gear like?*

I've simplified my setup. I have two SansAmp preamps, the programmable racks, the PSA-1's, one for each side, and I go through them all the time, not necessarily changing anything, it's just the way I wire it. I have an ART Mach 2, a Korg A-2, and an Eventide 4000. I have a Behringer compressor as a safety on the bass side. I just started using the ADA Ampulator which is quite a cool little thing. It has speaker simulation, and a power amp simulator.

*Do you use it on both sides?*

I use it on both sides when I'm using distortion. I haven't recorded with it yet so I think I can do more with it. It isn't programmable. On the Stick it was quite pronounced, and it is still noticeable on the Warr. You get a more midrangey sound that I find useful between Tony and the rest of the guys.

*On the song The Gift I felt like I was in church.*

*Why?*

*I felt like I was sitting in St. Patrick's in NYC or a church up in Cape Cod, there was something reverent about it and I could hear it being played in church as well. Am I off base?*

No, it was actually recorded in a church. It was recorded at the David Sylvian and Robert Fripp sessions in Woodstock at Dreamland Studios, which was a church. It was the end of a long miserable day where everything went wrong and everything we tried to do was not happening. Robert just went away and started practicing. David Sylvian and I were in the control room and it was about 9 pm and I just started playing something and we started to roll the tape and David really liked it and wanted to do something with it, but he didn't feel it was right for the record we were doing.

*I really like it. It's very understated. It's a special moment. Were you thinking, or more importantly not thinking, and stepping back and letting someone else lead?*

For me it's usually you just go with the flow of the music, and when it goes really, really well, then there is something else going on. Because it usually doesn't go really, really well. It usually is a lot of hard work. With Crimson it's like pulling teeth writing the music. An idea might appear, but then it's all struggle and this song was not any struggle.

*How does the Stick affect your composing and stylistic approach?*

I think it has been a very successful, excruciatingly limiting instrument. I don't mean instrument like something that you play, but

a focal thing.

*Do you write away from your instrument?*

I don't, but I'm beginning to do it now. When I first began to play the Stick I said OK I'm going for it, this is my instrument. Robert Fripp and I had just started working with this band Sunday All Over the World and he said "Go for It" so I took it, put it in its case, this is my instrument, take it or leave it. The way I actually learned the instrument was I came back to NY and went on about 200 auditions and said this was my instrument, take it or leave it! That's how I began with the instrument. I didn't have much knowledge about the instrument and I still don't have a lot of knowledge about it. It has only been 8 years.

*Do you use your effects to bring about new ideas for songs?*

Most everything on the record started as an improvisation.

*I hear loops. My feeling is that there is some "better living through technology" here. Do you ascribe to that as well?*

Yes in general, although the whole "looping" thing is something I have gone away from. I just love the sound of it and it's a lot of fun to do. In fact I had a TC and Robert had a TC and I knew I couldn't touch what he was doing. His loops didn't even sound like loops, it's like the sky is exploding! I decided to go away from that for a while although there is a new sample card coming out for the Eventide 4000. I have a friend who programs for them and he's thinking about designing some different kinds of loops to play around with. There's a guy in California who has been transcribing Robert's loops from the past couple of years and orchestrating them. I also have a friend in Italy that I gave a loop to who is also orchestrating it.

*When I'm listening to Thrak I hear a number of double bass lines. I hear you and he trading more in the bass department than say, you and Adrian Belew in the upper register. Is this true or am I not hearing it?*

You're not hearing it. On the heavy instrumentals I'm in on the bass, although what we've tried to do is, he plays a lower clean part and I'm playing an octave fuzz part above him. On the first tune the bands are hard left and hard right.

*What is the difference between Thrak and Vroom?*

There are four of the same pieces but different recordings. Vroom was recorded after two weeks of rehearsals without playing live. We then went to Argentina to play live for a month and then recorded Thrak. I think it's really interesting. You have the same pieces but in a different state.

*It's like a window on your rehearsals.*

Yes, that was what the first one was going

to be. The pieces are faster and a lot hotter. Vroom is slower and knocks you out, and Sex is slower and with less overdubs.

Back to your earlier question, I am usually in the guitar register, more of a baritone guitar. It's an unusual role.

*Are you working your parts out with Tony or the guitars?*

It depends on the piece.

*Did you do a lot of overdubbing on One Thousand Years?*

A number of things were overdubbed. A lot of it was done on 8-track or 16-track ADATs. Some of it was played live with drums but most was overdubbed in my apartment.

*Are you going to tour in support of your CD after the Crimson tour is over?*

I'm going to do another record. I'm a little bit wary of solo artists but I like the record and I can do things that I can't do anywhere else. I like to perform live but I don't see the Stick as a solo instrument, I don't like it as a solo instrument unless you have loops, it just doesn't carry it for me.

*It strikes me that you would need a couple of players to pull it off.*

Yes. The last thing I want to do after this tour is go back out on the road. The next record is going to have a little more collaboration.

*Anyone in particular?*

I want to do some recording with Pat Mastelotto (one of the King Crimson drummers), I have two pretty interesting tracks done with a tabla and percussionist named Bob Muller. It's a great sound we discovered many years ago but could never get it going in a duo. The sound of the tabla and the low Stick is as complete as a drum kit.

*It really has a nice sound to it. The early Eno and Fripp recordings as well as middle period King Crimson feature a similar trance music quality to your Stick and tabla recordings.*

It's interesting that you said that. Someone actually called my record Funk Trance music.

*That's bizarre!*

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(cont'd from pg. 17) brought the tenor sax into the forefront of jazz, and on *A Retrospective 1929-1963* we can listen to a variety of Hawkins' works starting with the Mound City Blue Blowers, Fletcher Henderson's Orch., Lionel Hampton and his Orch., and Coleman Hawkins' own bands. Listen to the masterful *Body and Soul*. Altoist Johnny Hodges is best known for his work with Duke Ellington but on *Passion Flower 1940-1946* we see Hodges both in and out of the Duke's band. It's always great to hear *In A Mellotone*. *Sonny Rollins & Co. 1964* was a challenging period for tenor saxist Rollins. Considered incidental in his personal discography, these recordings show a man in transition. I find the recordings satisfying. What can you say about Fats Waller? He was not only a great pianist and writer, he was a jazz personality with incredible charm and wit. *The Early Years Pt. 1 1934-1935* is a 2-disc set featuring Waller and a rhythm section on tunes like *Sweetie Pie*, *Honeysuckle Rose*, and *Lulu's Back in Town*. *The Middle Years Pt. 2 1938-40* includes tunes like *Two Sleepy People*, *Undecided*, and *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*.

RCA has also released a number of CDs on their French Jazz Tribune label. All are 2-CD sets, and my favorites include *The Indispensable Jack Teagarden*, the great trombonist and singer; the first jazz ever record belongs to *The Complete Original Dixieland Jazz Band*; the great alto saxist, arranger, and band leader *Benny Carter 1928-1952*; and finally the fabulous and wild *Cab Calloway & Co. Hi Dee Hi Dee Hi Dee Ho!*

#### BOOKS

Reading about CDs will probably spark some of you to search out recordings by other artists. I have found a book that will give you a good start to locating them. *The All Music Guide*, published by Miller Freeman, features all styles of music from World, Jazz, Rock and Classical. I find this a useful compendium and I think you will too! A number of great biographies and discographies have been coming out from the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University. *John Coltrane-A Discography and Musical Biography* lists all of the recordings made by Coltrane starting with his days in the Navy in 1945 and ending with his avant garde recordings in 1967. It also chronicles his live appearances throughout his life. *Tommy Dorsey-On the Side* takes you through the life of the great trombonist 1905-1956. *Tram-The Frank Trumbauer Story* is the story of an American Music Legend. His recordings influenced many musicians including Lester Young. This book includes letters, diaries, and interviews. Another interesting discography is *Art Tatum-A Guide to His Recorded Music* which takes us from 1932 to 1956. Speaking of Tatum, *Too Marvelous For Words* by James Lester is a wonderful biography on this great pianist's life. A truly

great read! Da Capo is always releasing great jazz bios and histories. *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington*, by John Edward Hasse, draws on the Ellington archives from the Smithsonian Institution tracing his childhood in Washington, DC, through five decades of hits. *Talking Jazz: An Oral History*, by Ben Sidran, is interviews with 43 jazz greats including Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Betty Carter, Dizzy Gillespie, and many others. *Good Morning Blues* is the autobiography of Count Basie as told to Albert Murray. Like Ellington, Count Basie was one of the most important big band leaders the world has ever known. Jazz became "famous" again in the 1980s and Stuart Nicholson

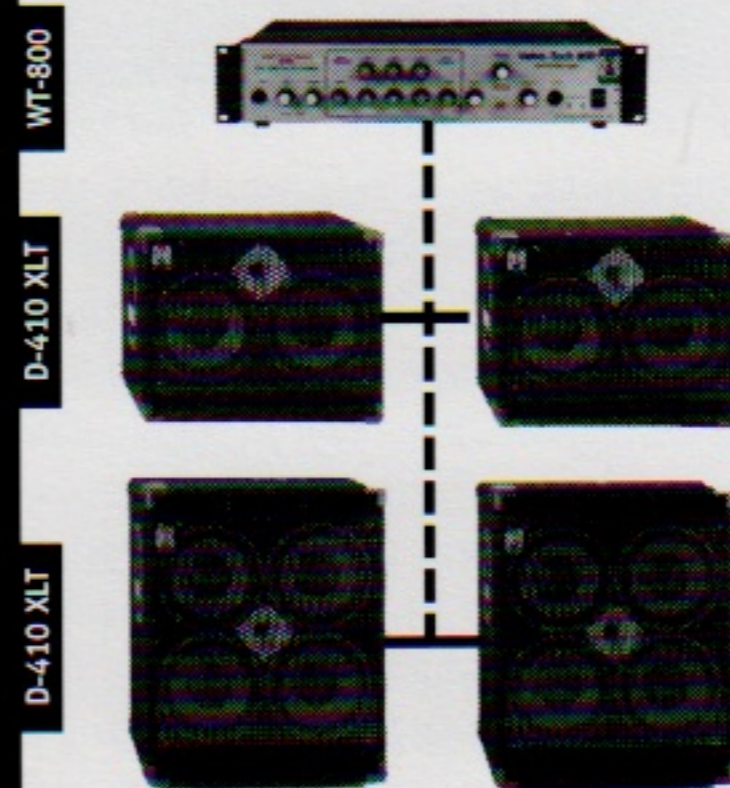
describes exactly what happened in his tome *Jazz: The 1980s Resurgence*.

Duke University Press has released two books edited by Krin Gribbard—*Representing Jazz* explores the impact that jazz has had on novelists, filmmakers, painters, biographers, and photographers; *Jazz Among the Discourses* brings together scholars from an array of disciplines to question and revise conventional methods of writing and thinking about jazz. Bob Thiele is world renowned for producing all of John Coltrane's work for Impulse! records, but he has had a long and varied career in the music industry. *What a Wonderful World* is a great read. I had no idea how much this man has accomplished!

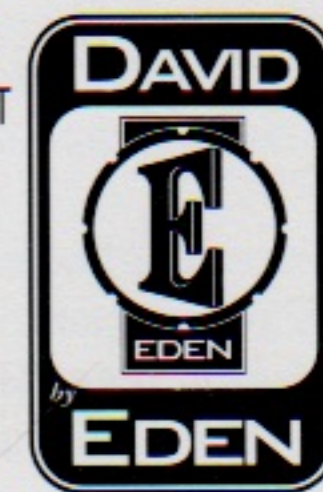


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