

11. Back in the New York Groove

Life Life Life

Nothing about life in Boston was working. Not for Amy. Not for me. The hope that I'd remain gainfully employed had failed miserably. I was getting laid off regularly. That was a stressor. The situation with my parents' decline was getting worse by the month. That was a stressor. I was trying to keep an eye on them, and keep them out of trouble, but they fought me every step of the way.

On top of all that, Amy despised Boston. Despised the lifestyle. Despised having to drive everywhere. I was used to it, but once I'd lived in NYC, I realized how much I also hated the Boston lifestyle, too. Now, with the band over, there was really nothing good about living there.

Even before FEINTS ended, we'd started taking long weekend getaways in Providence RI, once a month. Providence was a much more fun city than Boston, and had a way better food scene. We looked at Providence as sort of a sanctuary from the dreariness of what life had become in Boston.

Picking Up the Pieces

Musically, FEINTS had put me at the top of my guitar game, but with the band over, I had no musical outlet. After FEINTS, I had no heart or desired to return to instrumental guitar music. I had no idea what to do next.

One day, I found a video series on YouTube from a guitar player named Troy Grady. The series was called [Cracking the Code](#). Grady was a guy who'd made it his mission to figure out how the super-fast shred guys like Yngwie Malmsteen, Paul Gilbert, and others, had developed their jaw-dropping speed, and picking techniques — abilities that seemed well beyond anything mere mortals could achieve.

I found *Cracking the Code* fascinating and mind-blowing. It should be *required viewing* for any Rock/Metal guitarist. The series provided several revelations for me. The first was something very basic: *the way you hold the guitar pick*. Grady discovered most of the shred guys had — *largely subconsciously* — developed what he called a *downward pick slant*. Instead of keeping the pick perpendicular to the string, most of the fast guys angled their pick forward towards the floor.

This seemingly subtle change, Grady *demonstrated*, let players get in and out of the strings more efficiently when picking fast runs. This is *pure, picking mechanics*, and physics. Grady broke it all down in the video so it was easy to understand.

Downward pick slanting wasn't what Robert taught me when I'd started. Robert had come into his own as a guitarist in the 1970s, and in those days, you were taught to keep your pick as perpendicular to the strings as possible. That's what Robert did. That's even what I saw Michael Schenker doing in videos, and he was a picking machine.

When guys like Van Halen, Randy Rhoads, and others raised the guitar technique bar in the 1980s, Robert initially had a hard time keeping up, and playing at those 80s speeds. He *got there* through sheer determination, but he might have had an easier time if he'd known about pick slanting.

The problem was *no one knew*. *Even the guys using downward pick slanting were largely unaware they were doing it — or that it mattered*. Plenty of players had stumbled onto it by accident. Certainly some of them were probably aware they were slanting the pick, but they weren't necessarily aware of why they benefited by doing so. It took Troy Grady breaking it all down — 30 years later in 2015, to make it common knowledge.

I had always tried to keep the pick perpendicular, but failed. I always tended to downward slant my pick *a little* anyway. I'd just considered that another *flaw* in my picking. Grady suggested I should slant the pick more than I did. That was easy enough to try. When I did, I thought I *maybe* felt *a little* of what Grady was talking about, but it certainly didn't make me a shredder. *I was still missing a piece of the puzzle*.

To be fair, *Cracking the Code* covers *all* the puzzle pieces in gory detail. There is certainly more to it than just pickslanting, but most of it didn't apply to the way I played guitar.

For what it's worth, *shred guitar — as a style* — as practiced by guys like Yngwie Malmsteen, and Paul Gilbert never really appealed to me (and I like Paul Gilbert). That was never my goal, or what I wanted to achieve as a player. Too many of these players are more speed than substance. I much prefer the earlier, 80s melodic Metal style that featured *plenty of speed*, but also conveyed melody, attitude, and emotion.

The lead players I admired most were guys like Gary Moore (when he still played Rock and Metal), Michael Schenker, and John Sykes. These guys were *plenty* fast, but they also played *slow*, brilliantly, and dynamically contrasted the two. These players had a *lot* more to say on guitar than just *I can play fast*. I'd have been quite happy to be able to play at their level. But as I said in a prior chapter, I never became a great alternate picker, so these areas remained out of reach for me.

I'd become a *good, tasty*, lead player using the tools I had: *melody, attitude, emotion*, and the limited *chops* I had. I'd just recorded two FEINTS albums containing really *tasty, memorable* guitar solos. I *know* they were memorable, because my bandmates would sing them back to me. But no one was ever going to confuse me with a shredder. I had a couple of flash licks, but I was mostly a *70s style* guitarist. I didn't have the chops of the 80s guys. I'd accepted that at age 50, I was *fully cooked* as a guitarist. I'd made my bones with knowing I'd never really be fast.

Old Dog, New Tricks

Several of my Dinosaur Rock Guitar guys are friends I speak to regularly outside of the forum. One day, I was talking to my friend Andy, who's an absolute *monster* guitarist. Andy lives in Sweden and in the pre-Zoom days, we used to video call each other on Skype.

One day, we started talking about *Cracking the Code*. Andy had cracked the code on his own, long before Grady, but like most players who had, he hadn't articulated it in a definitive video series on the subject.

I told Andy that I found Grady's stuff fascinating, but also said there wasn't much I could take from it other than the pick slanting. Andy asked me why that was. I told him *because I don't play that way*. For example, a lot of the Grady examples talked about pertains to playing *notes in groups of sixes*, and whether you start the pattern on the downstroke or the upstroke. I told Andy, "I've never really played sixes." Andy said, "You have to play them to play like the guys we love. It's not hard."

After a bit of back and forth, Andy realized what I never had. That *I'd never had all of the puzzle pieces to put it together*. As such, no matter how long or hard I worked on my picking, I was *never* going to get to that 80s level of guitar technique I'd wanted.

Andy said, "Look, Dave. This stuff isn't *that* difficult. I can show you exactly what to practice, and *I promise you, if you work on it*, you'll get it. You'll be able to play it." I said, "Nah. *I'm too old*. My fingers just don't move that fast. They never will." Andy said, "Bullshit. You can do this! *I'll help you. Will you trust me on this?*"

I thought about that for a second. Andy and I love all the same guitarists, but unlike me, Andy really *could* play like all of them. He'd know *exactly* the right things to feed me to get me there. I respected Andy's playing and musicianship tremendously. I also respected his opinion. He was 100% *convinced* I *could* achieve these goals. There wasn't any *maybe* in *his* mind. If Andy believed I could do this, shouldn't I trust him? *Hell yes!*

I had nothing to lose. I would never have had the time to work on this stuff while FEINTS was active. I was always too busy working on songwriting, solo composition, and production. But with FEINTS over, and nothing else going on, if there was ever a time to work on *just improving*, it was now. I said, "OK, Andy. I trust you. Let's do it!"

Andy started feeding me things to work on. He made me charts. He made me videos. He made me audio files to play along to. All I had to do was practice his lessons with a metronome. So once again, every day on my lunch break at work, I'd bust out the guitar and drill the exercises for an hour. I tracked my progress in a notebook.

It didn't happen overnight, but day by day, week by week, my speed increased. As it did, I experienced what Troy Grady had been on about. Combining downward pickslanting with note patterns that end on an upstroke — like sixes — facilitated alternate picking speed ergonomically, and efficiently across strings. Even for an old dog like me.

Nothing motivates me more than success. The better I got, the more I practiced. I kept asking Andy for more stuff to work on. He was happy to give it to me. I soon found that once I could play one lick at a fast tempo, if Andy gave me a new, similar lick, I could immediately play that lick at that fast tempo, too, *because* it was similar. The notes on your fretting hand varied from lick to lick, but to your picking hand, it was exactly the same picking pattern.

In a few months, I was playing faster stuff than I'd ever played in FEINTS or in my life. It felt like magic, but I could see that it wasn't. After decades, I finally had the *key* puzzle pieces I'd been missing all those years. I now knew *what* to work on and *how* to work on it. After that, as Andy had said, it really *was* just a matter of pure picking mechanics, and relatively dumb, repetition through practice.

I was finally on my way to being the kind of lead player I'd always wanted to be. Whether I'd ever play guitar again in any meaningful way, *I had no idea*.

Doom and Gloom

In the fall of 2016, I was laid off from yet another job. I'm a *really good* tech writer, but when the sales people at these companies I worked for didn't meet their numbers, the first place companies looked to cut costs was high-priced technical writers like me.

I'd now been laid off from three companies since 2012. Each time had caused long months of unemployment because the job market for tech writers in Boston was oversaturated. Every morning, I'd apply for the jobs as I could, but I still had *loads* of free time to practice my lessons from Andy — and I did. Making progress there was the only upside to a dark time.

On top of that, the situation with my elderly parents had worsened. My mother's short term memory was fading fast. My father survived a heart attack and triple bypass surgery in 2015, but his dementia worsened afterward. I took him to a neurologist who diagnosed him with Alzheimers.

I adored my father. He was a truly *brilliant* man. A physicist, and *literal* rocket scientist who'd worked at NASA in the Mercury years. Now he was going to lose his marbles. So I had that hell to look forward to as well.

Both parents were getting cognitively worse every month. Yet, they still clung to the idea that there was nothing wrong with them but a *little old age*. They swore they didn't need help around the house, but they certainly did. They insisted they could still drive their cars safely — *they couldn't*. My father had become downright dangerous behind the wheel — when he could remember where he was going. My mother was a little better, but she was 87 and dealing with a myriad of her own serious health issues. She had no business being behind the wheel, either.

They were either going to kill themselves or somebody else while driving, but they were in full denial. When they wouldn't give up driving on their own, they forced me to be the bad guy. I had to have their doctor revoke both of their licenses.

Around this time, Amy suggested we sell the house and move to Providence. Her reasoning was excellent. If we sold the house, we'd have money to make it through my unemployment, while still banking a considerable amount of cash. We both wanted to go back to apartment living, and rent instead of buying. We loved Providence, and it was only 40 minutes south of Boston. If I had to get there for my parents, I'd still be close by. I loved my parents, and felt an enormous responsibility to take care of them, but if they were going to fight me on *everything*, I decided maybe I *didn't* need a front row seat for it. We'd move.

We took an exploratory weekend in Providence to look at apartments. We found a *lot of* mediocre apartments at luxury apartment prices. Way too much money for the kind of places 20-somethings moved into as their first place. At 53, I was well past that level of spartan living. Who the heck was paying those prices for mediocre crap? *In Providence RI, no less?*

The more we looked at places, the more depressing it got. It also sank in to me that *Providence didn't have any high tech industry for me to work in*. The only company there is Hasbro toys. The rest are colleges and cooking schools. That meant that even if we moved there, I'd *still* have to work in Boston/Cambridge, in the same oversaturated job market, with its increasingly common layoffs. That also meant that — *by car or train* — I'd spend at least two hours commuting every day. I'd rather perform an unanesthetized, self lobotomy with scissors. Providence was a nice getaway from Boston life, but everything about moving there felt wrong. Amy and I hit *Pause*, and temporarily shelved the idea.

No Sleep Till Brooklyn

Along with our monthly Providence getaways, Amy and I still went to NYC a couple of times a year as well. We usually stayed in Manhattan, but in February 2017, we decided to take our getaway in Brooklyn. I used some Christmas gift money, because I was still out of work.

We almost didn't go. We'd had another big fight about something the day before the trip, and almost canceled it. We patched it up enough to try and make the best of it.

We stayed in The William Vale, a terrific hotel on the northside of Williamsburg. As we were strolling through the neighborhood, we passed a real-estate agency with listings in the window. We both stood there, looking at the listings for a moment. I said, "Amy, aren't these pretty much the same prices we were seeing in Providence?" She said, "I was just thinking the same thing." I said, "The square footages may be a *little* smaller, but not much, and these places look much nicer for the same money. Amy agreed. I said, "Let's go back to the hotel for a minute. I want to check what the job opportunities look like here. Because if they're decent, *we're moving here.*"

Back in the room, I got on my laptop and did a quick job search. When we left NYC in 2009, there hadn't been much high tech in NYC at all. That had changed dramatically in the eight years we'd been away. *12 suitable* jobs popped up immediately. In Boston, the suitable jobs had dwindled to *one, every couple of weeks*. After a few minutes, I said, "Amy, I just applied to 12 jobs in NYC. We're going home! This time to Brooklyn!"

Amy was so overjoyed she was in tears. She missed NYC more than I can ever adequately express, and she'd wanted to live in Brooklyn specifically since before we met. I was thrilled, too. We were getting out of Boston!

Even before we left Brooklyn that weekend, I started getting requests for job interviews from the companies I'd applied to. I hadn't been on a job interview in Boston in months.

Amy said, "What about your parents?" I said, "*They're just gonna have to deal with it.* Whether it was Providence or Brooklyn, they'd still have to deal with it. I can still get there in a few hours from NYC when I need to." I'd need to make that trip a *lot*, in the coming years.

More than that, and even with the FEINTS stress behind us, our marriage had reached a crossroads. I knew Amy just wasn't going to stay in Boston much longer. I didn't blame her. It had already become nothing but miserable there for both of us, and the future looked even worse. I had let the situation go on too long. Amy was at the end of her rope. She was eventually going back to NYC with me or without me. *I wasn't losing my marriage to take care of my parents.*

I had to tell my father, "Sorry, Dad. It's not going to be Providence. It's going to be Brooklyn. I'll still do my best for you and mom, and visit as often as I can. But *I can work in NYC.* I can't seem to get or keep a job in Boston." At that point, Dad was still with it enough to understand that.

Midnight Mover

This was February, 2017. Trump had just taken office the prior month. We were afraid he was going to fuck up the mortgage rates or the housing market, so we wanted to get our house sold as quickly as possible while it was still a good, *sellers market.*

It was a mad dash to get the house ready to sell. We were moving from a three bedroom house in the suburbs to a 1300 square foot apartment in Brooklyn. That meant that one way or another, *we had to get rid of a ton of stuff, fast.* We sold what we could, gave away more, and had the rest hauled away as junk.

We drove U-Haul truckloads out to Long Island (three separate trips), to put stuff in my in-laws' basement for storage. On the first of those trips, I squeezed in a job interview at a software company in Manhattan.

We ended up renting the first apartment we saw in Brooklyn. We didn't plan it that way, but by the end of our first day of looking, it became clear that the first place was ideal for us. We'd even be able to have a small music studio.

We'd done it all — from that day in Brooklyn when we decided to go home, until we moved into our Brooklyn apartment — was only ten weeks! Shows what you can do when you're motivated!

Two weeks after moving in, I got the job I'd interviewed for. *I'm still there, six years later.* Things were looking up! Maybe our luck was finally turning around! Or maybe not.

Rock Bottom

My parents were definitely getting worse, but I now had a two hundred mile buffer zone. Amy and I had a year of being able to enjoy our new Brooklyn life, with me gainfully employed at a really good job. We were *finally* just starting to get back to being something like *the old us* again, when life dealt us another awful dick punch.

Amy was rushed into emergency surgery with the first of what would be two, brutal intestinal surgeries, and lengthy recoveries she had to endure. There's no playbook for that. Neither of us was equipped to handle what something like that puts you through. Neither of us handled it well.

Amy had to endure physical pain and enormous emotional trauma. I tried my best to take care of her. I handled the tactical stuff fine, but I had no idea how to handle her emotional trauma, and failed badly at doing so. I largely felt helpless to help my wife.

At this very same time, my parents finally ceased being able to take care of themselves. They needed the beginnings of live-in care. They needed me to start managing their finances, and paying all their bills. They had planned *nothing*. I had to find people to take care of them, get those systems in place, get access to their bank accounts and credit cards.

This nightmare fell in my lap *at the exact same moment* Amy needed me *most*. Amy resented that, *and my parents*, and I certainly get why, but still I had to do my best to take care of all of them. That put even more stress on our marriage.

Life seemed hellbent on making me pay *dearly* for having one, truly joyful, care-free year with Amy back in 2007. There was no end in sight.

Bad Company (band)

During this horrible time, the one thing that *was* working out was my new job. I was finally in a great, stable company that actually *valued* its tech writers. Management was extremely supportive of me when I needed time off to take care of my family. As a company, they truly understood that *family comes first*.

Everything else in my life had turned to shit. Having the job was a godsend during this time. It was the one place I actually had *calm*.

A month or so before Amy actually went down, I'd heard that the company had a *company band*. One of the company's leaders was a music guy, and he wanted the company to have a band. The deal was the company would pay for the rehearsal space so the band could rehearse. Then, the band would get to play at the company's huge, summer and winter parties as the entertainment. That seemed decent enough.

The only catch was that *everyone in the band had to be an employee*. That was a pretty big catch. It means you're fishing for musicians in an extremely limited pond. What's worse, is that when someone sucks, you can't really fire them from the band. I certainly saw this quite clearly *before* I joined the damn band.

Still, I was new at the company, and didn't know a lot of people. I figured if nothing else, it would be a good opportunity to meet new people and socialize. Maybe make some new friends. I didn't have any real friends in NYC, so I went for it.

The guy who ran the band was named Paul, but went by the initials PB. PB told me to learn four specific songs and I'd audition in a week. That sounded serious, but when I showed up for the audition, I found out what a joke that was.

I was the only one who knew those four songs. Why? Because people came and went from this band all the time. There were a few constants, like PB and the drummer, but every season, the band had a new lineup. The four songs I'd learned were from the band's last season lineup. Nobody but me, and maybe PB knew them. Even the drummer didn't remember them.

The drummer. God. He *sucked so bad*. He thought he was such hot shit, too. Sitting behind his kit, puffing stupid plumes of blue smoke out of his vape. He hit the drums like — there's no polite way to say this — he hit the drums like a pussy.

He couldn't hold a tempo if it'd had a handle, and when he got lost in a song — which was frequently, instead of just *playing straight through*, he had a habit of *just stopping, mid-song* for a second or two. Then he'd figure out where he was and start again.

Remember when I said *any band is only as good as its drummer?* The drummer is *the engine of the band*. Nothing like having a sputtering, lawnmower engine as the engine of your band. Aside from this guy's lack of meter, his wimpy sound, the stopping/startating thing, his stupid vape, his smug personality, and his over-inflated opinion of his musical capabilities, he was *fantastic!*

The first rehearsal was a free-for-all. Remember when I said *the person with the most power in the band typically becomes the leader?* PB was the de facto band leader, but because of this underlying *company band* structure, PB had very little power. He couldn't make people show up on time. He couldn't crack the whip when they didn't. He couldn't make them learn their parts. He couldn't fire them when they didn't.

We rehearsed in one of NYC's many pay-to-play rehearsal spaces that provided all the backline band gear. There were drums, guitar and bass amps — usually shot to shit. Keyboards, PA, as many mics as you need. Everything a band needs to rehearse. There was also a camera in the room so you could record your rehearsals and review them later. The drummer took this as his cue to critique everyone else in the band by email the day after rehearsals.

Imagine my surprise when after the first rehearsal, I received an email from the drummer saying something to the effect: *Dave, I've reviewed the tape. You played well last night, but could you maybe use a less distorted, less Rock tone?*

Are you fucking kidding me? This jerk-off, *hack* drummer was complaining about my glorious, *Dinosaur Rock Guitar* tone. Still, it was *the company band*, so I couldn't really say: *fuck you, and the kit you can't play to save your life*. I had to be *polite*. My return email said, "Dude, I'll adjust my guitar tone the day you can show up on time, and hold a steady pocket through an entire song — without stopping in the middle. Until then, I don't want to hear from you."

I asked PB to join me for a drink after work. I wanted to get the scoop on this mess of a band and see if there was anything to be done about it. I found that PB had been running the company band for *eight years*. It was a truly *thankless* job, replete with all the problems I've just mentioned.

We took stock. On guitar — not trying to toot my own horn — I was in *another league* from the rest of them. PB was a great utility man. He could sing lead, or back up vocals. He could play rhythm guitar, bass, drums, and keys. He was *pretty good* at all of them, but — by his own admission — not *great* at any of them. PB could fill in anywhere that was needed. In the current lineup, he was the bassist.

We had another guitarist named Joe. Joe was a *bedroom, hobbyist* guitar player. His problem was we'd agree (as guitarists), *you play this part, and I'll play that part*, but I could never count on him to play the part he'd agreed to play. As a bedroom player who'd never been in a band (other than *this mess*), he'd never had to commit to playing his designated part all the way through a song.

We had an African American, female singer who had the strongest voice in the band. She sounded like she probably grew up singing in church. Another girl had a very quiet, mousey voice. This was her very first musical experience. Yay!

We had a gay guy who had a decent voice. Before you think ill, know that *I have quite a lot of gay friends*, and he remains one of them. The only reason I mention his being gay is because it affected his song choices for the band.

I said, "PB, the drummer is . . . *weak*, to put it politely. He *really limits* what songs we can play." PB said, "Yeah, drums aren't his first instrument. His first instrument is guitar." That explained why he sucked, but it didn't help much.

I continued. "Joe doesn't play the parts he's supposed to play. I can't count on him being where he's supposed to be. That throws *me* off. And we can't hear Mousey Girl sing unless she deep throats the mic. If she's going to sing lead on a song, we've got to get more volume out of her."

These problems seemed insurmountable. You might think: *Sure, it seems bad. But with a little bit of ingenuity, and some good ol' elbow grease — why — everything will be right as rain!*

No, no, no, no, no. These problems *were not* surmountable! Yes, we'd still play the company parties, but these problems were always gonna be part of it.

Every band member nominated two cover songs. The band then voted on them. The winning songs comprised the set for that season.

Given the band's limitations, I nominated *extremely simple* stuff. Of mine, they picked T-Rex's *20th Century Boy*. It didn't require much skill to sing or play. It would be hard to screw it up.

The gay guy chose Lady Gaga's *Bad Romance* — because *of course he did*. Not a bad song, especially once we rocked up with slamming guitars.

Joe chose The Eagles' *Already Gone* — a song with *two separate guitar parts*. He couldn't decide which he would play.

The good singer picked Janelle Monae's *Electric Lady* — modern R&B nonsense that isn't even a song. It's just a descending progression that loops endlessly. Mousy Girl picked *Many the Miles*, by Sara Bareillies. Three chord, pop-tart pop.

Somehow, we also ended up playing Heart's *Barracuda*, the only truly *great* song of the bunch. One that required really good pipes to sing. Instead of giving it to the girl who could really sing, they gave it to Mousey Girl with her five year-old girl's voice. Yay.

A Hot Mess

In a situation like a company band, I didn't really have too much issue with playing with lesser players. *I expected that*. You work around or through it. I had a *big* issue with them not being prepared. I learned these crap songs I cared nothing about in like a half hour each, and ran them through a couple of times on my own. Nobody else did.

We'd get into the rehearsals, and the shitty drummer clearly wouldn't know the songs. He'd be fudging his way through them, trying to learn them *at* rehearsal. Joe, the other guitarist, was a sales rep who missed most rehearsals because he was on the road a lot. I liked Joe. But he couldn't hold down a rhythm or play lead. He just noodled and liked to play with his effect pedals. He was the classic bedroom hack. He knew *just enough guitar* to be dangerous and fuck shit up.

The singers — *when they'd show up* — were still reading their lyrics off cell phones while they sang. I knew they'd never *learn* the words until they stopped reading them as a crutch.

We'd fumble our way through a song. It would sound lousy, and need a ton of work, but when it was over PB would say, "Next." PB was being too nice. I'd have to say, "No, we need to do it again. Joe, play the part you said you'd play — not my part. Mousy Girl — get closer to the mic — right up on it, so your lips are touching it. Drummer, try not to speed up. Now, again from the top."

It was awful. I'd have quit, but because it was the *company band*, I felt there'd be negative repercussions. Outside of the band, I had to work with these people professionally. Instead of quitting, I became *the glue guy* holding everything together. When I started that, PB started backing me up, and agreeing with me.

The other side of this mess was I'd committed to doing the band before Amy went down with her surgeries. When that happened, I probably should have just bowed out due to my family emergency. That would have given me a legitimate *out*, and no one would have blamed me. But even Amy said, "You made a commitment, and this is a company thing. You should probably see it through."

One night, when I *should* have been home taking care of Amy, I showed up at rehearsal, on time. Everyone besides me and PB rolled in about 45 minutes late. About a half hour before we finished rehearsal, I finally lost it on them.

I said, "Listen up. *You all know* I have a sick wife at home recovering from surgery. *I shouldn't even be here*, but I'm here, on time, waiting on you lazy assholes to roll in 45 minutes late. When I get on stage with a guitar in my hands, I take it seriously. I don't need to look like an asshole in front of the whole company because the rest of you are too lazy to learn your parts and show up on time. We're *two weeks* from playing in front of 800 people in our company, and most of you still don't know your damn parts yet."

"Singers. Off your phones, now! No more *reading* your lyrics. Joe, stop trying new shit and *play the damn parts you're supposed to play*. If you guys are late and unprepared at our next rehearsal, I'm out." Then I walked out, a half hour before rehearsal ended.

The next day, I cleared the air with Joe. I had singled him out, but I told him, "I was frustrated with *a lot of people* in that room." I don't know what was said after I left, and didn't ask, but Joe said, "Don't worry about it. I get why you were pissed. And *nobody said you were wrong*."

After my outburst, things actually got better. They straightened up and the songs started coming together.

Our final rehearsal was a dry run show for the band's family and friends in the rehearsal space's big, showcase room. We'd run through the songs once for ourselves, and then play them again when the friends and family arrived.

After the practice set, the band started having beers and pizza. I busted out my flask of bourbon, and poured myself a nice drink. That loosened me up, and immediately improved my mood. I realized this show *was gonna be what it was gonna be*. I might as well make the best of it and try to enjoy it. So I had another bourbon while we were waiting for the audience to show up, and chatted with the good singer about whisky. I was good and loose now!

The audience arrived and we played the set. It went OK. There were a few minor glitches that they didn't pick up on. They seemed to enjoy it.



Company band after dry-run gig. L to R: Mousey Girl, Joe, Gay Guy, PB, Terrible Drummer, Good Singer. Dino Dave in front.

The Show Must Go On

It was December, and the coldest day of the year so. We arrived around 3pm at Manhattan's *huge*, cavernous GOTHAM HALL. Very Batman!

The stage wasn't very big for seven of us, but not too bad. The sound guys already had most things set up. The company picked up the tab for the sound system, and our rented gear. I'd rented two 1x12 cabs to run my stereo rig. I used my own two lunchbox-sized amps. It was basically my FEINTS rig.



Gotham Hall

We began soundchecking. Within 15 seconds — *as always*, the sound guy told me I was too loud. We sorted that out, and worked on the sound for the next two hours. The longest I've ever done. Everyone got their own monitor mix with whatever they needed in it. When the huge room was *empty*, things sounded good out front and we could hear each other reasonably well on stage.

We hit the stage about 7:15 and played the set. Most of the sound we'd configured at soundcheck went out the window. The room sounded totally different with hundreds of people in it, so it was much harder to hear each other. Still, it mostly went ok.

There was the odd botched moment or two, but nothing the audience would have noticed or cared about. No major train wrecks. Our performance feedback was quite good. Several people told me they enjoyed the show and my playing.

For some masochistic reason, I signed up for another run of this madness, and stayed on to play the Summer party of the next year. That went smoother, in part, because Joe switched to bass, and left the guitar work to me, but after that party, I bowed out.



Winter Party, Gotham Hall: Dino Dave, Mousy Girl, Gay Guy, Good Singer.



Oooh, Barracuda!



Dave and PB, Company Summer Party

Epilogue: A year after I left, the company band found a better drummer. This allowed the hack drummer to go back to his first instrument, guitar. They played that year's holiday part. He sucked on guitar, too. A year later, he dropped dead unexpectedly. It was a catastrophic loss to the music world.

Kashmir

Around this same time, I had an idea for a little side project. About three years before FEINTS, when we'd first moved to Boston, Amy started a musical project with two guys from Cincinnati. One guy, Toby, was a drummer, a DJ, and Bootsy Collins' producer. The other guy was a funk bassist, who was well known in Cincy, but not much outside of it.

During that project, Amy and I flew out to Cincy for her to record some vocals in Toby's studio. One of the songs they wanted to do was an updated version of Led Zeppelin's classic, *Kashmir*. Their idea was to have modern, electronic sounds, real drums, and the main riff being played on the bass. No guitar, because the trio didn't have a guitarist.

They had the backing track recorded, and Amy came in and sang the shit out of *Kashmir* in just two takes. Her vocals were absolutely stellar.

When the sessions were over, we flew home. Amy soon had a falling out with the bassist, and the project folded.

I never forgot how well Amy sang *Kashmir*. Ten years later, when we were back in Brooklyn, I contacted Toby, and said, “Would you be interested in redoing and finishing Kashmir? I’d love to track guitars on it.” Toby seemed interested in the idea, but he was always too busy with other work, so nothing happened.

A while — *probably another year* — later, I reached out again and asked, “Hey Toby, if you’re not going to have time to work on Kashmir, can you please send me the session files? I’d like to do something with them.” Toby was fine with that and sent the files to me.

I brought the session up in my studio, and there were Amy’s two glorious vocal takes, sounding just as great as they had the day she sang them ten years earlier. The backing tracks were another matter. I didn’t know it at the time in Cincy, but Toby’s drums tracks — though real drums, were apparently scratch tracks he intended to replace later. All the drums were on just one, stereo track. As such, there was no way to control or produce the individual drums (kick, snare, etc.) from the kit. The other electronic backing tracks that provided the main riff, and string parts didn’t have anything about them I wanted to keep.

I was not dissuaded. I called Rob, from FEINTS, who had moved to Washington, D.C shortly after Amy and I moved to Brooklyn.

I explained the situation and asked him if he wanted to work on *Kashmir* with me. Rob had nothing else going on, so he was game. I invited him to spend a weekend with us in Brooklyn, where he and I would track new guitars and bass to *Kashmir*.

This was easily five years post-FEINTS. When I started tracking my guitars, Rob hadn’t known about the work I’d put in on my playing after FEINTS. He said, “Dude! Your timing is so much better now than it was in FEINTS.” While I’d mostly worked on improving my lead guitar playing, all of that time I’d put into it involved metronome work. That work had improved my timing, as well.

I tracked several electric and acoustic guitar parts. Rob, as always, tracked excellent bass parts quickly. We did a quick, rough mix, and what we tracked sounded really good. We still didn't have any solution for the drums and backing tracks.

I would have *loved* to have had Tim track the new drums, but once we'd left Boston, Tim had no way to record his own drum kit. We had neither the space, nor capacity record drums in our scaled-down, Brooklyn, apartment studio. Drums for *Kashmir* would have to wait.

BandMix

With the company band behind me, and *Kashmir* on indefinite hold, once again, I had nothing going on musically. It was late January 2019. I put an ad on an internet, musical bulletin board called BandMix — offering my services as a guitarist. At that point, I had zero interest in playing anything other than the kind of heavy Rock I really wanted to play. If that never happened again, so be it.

I spelled it out as boldly, and as bluntly as I could to cut down on all the dross I didn't want:

Classic Rock Lead Guitarist. I will make your band sound BIGGER, BALLSIER, and will rip out memorable guitar solos. Seeking a REAL ROCK BAND. Not the "alternative" to that, or the Indie version of that. The real thing, with the big-boy pants, and the associated swagger.

It was a complete shot in the dark. I didn't expect anything to happen, and it didn't.