

ON THE CD
TRACKS 19-20

Steve Morse

ON ARPEGGIOS

Deep Purple's guitarist, Steve Morse, is one scary picker! Here he talks about DP and guitar playing, with a special piece recorded for TG...

Towards the end of last year, legendary UK hard rockers Deep Purple came to England to complete a tour that they had previously postponed due to bad health. So we headed off to Bristol to meet up with the band's American guitarist, Steve Morse...

Armed with recording equipment and cables, we shot the breeze for over an hour, covering his work with the band, his playing approach, and a few insights into how he manages to play things few other guitarists would even dream about (let alone attempt on stage in front of thousands of fans). What follows are a few highlights from our time with him.

Guitar sounds

TG: How often do you change pickup selections on a DP gig?

SM: When I'm soloing on the higher frets I prefer the fatness of the neck pickup and when I'm lower down I'll use the bridge pickup so the notes cut through better. I don't tend to like that searing bridge pickup sound on high notes. I do use other selections occasionally, like at the start of *Woman Of Tokyo* I use the middle pickup for a thinner sound to clean up the distorted amp.

TG: Has playing with DP inspired more rock playing in your work outside the band?

SM: Sure, no doubt about it. It's like when I was working with Kansas, I was more

focused on playing and creating concise, easily digested themes. At the same time, it distances me from broader explorations that I enjoy with my own band [The Steve Morse Band]. So it's a give and take situation.

Guitar playing

TG: You're one of the few rock guitarists that use arpeggios as an intrinsic part of their playing, without them occurring as a by-product of techniques like sweep picking or two-hand tapping.

SM: The reason why you don't see many guitarists playing arpeggio-based motifs in a conventional manner is they often require wide string skips and difficult picking patterns. However, I've worked on this a lot and positioned my picking hand to facilitate this approach. Where I've paid for this though is through sheer speed as I'm moving my wrist through two different axes at the same time. This means my hand's quite strained – and I can pick faster with a more conventional pick technique – but it all pays back when I'm playing wide intervals and keeping string noise at bay.

TG: But the facility to play more intervallic guitar parts surely appeals more to you and listeners than going for top speed scalic-based passages?

SM: Sure, and I believe control over whatever you play is very important. For instance, I like playing on the



Steve Morse:
an alternate-
picking wizard!

STEVE COLLETT

bottom strings a lot with some notes 'popping out' over others in a 16th note passage. That's where good right-hand technique and string muting comes into its own.

Steve's Well Dressed Guitar

TG: Let's discuss the short excerpt you've recorded for us.

SM: Sure. We [Deep Purple] were doing an orchestral tour playing Jon's concerto for group and orchestra which included a couple of dates at the Royal Albert Hall. It worked really well and having an orchestra there meant we could do a couple of other pieces. So I brought a piece in called *Night Meets Light*, but it felt really weird when we played it with the band and the orchestra. We just couldn't sync up what the orchestra was playing with what I was doing, so I abandoned it after a few days of rehearsals. What I thought was missing for the gig was something really straight ahead, a mixture of rock and the orchestra. So I wrote a mini

concerto that the orchestra could sync up with, and was really straight ahead for the audience to follow. This piece became known as the *Well Dressed Guitar* and I've recorded an excerpt of the intro for you.

TG: How many performances have you done of *Well Dressed Guitar* so far?

SM: We've done it on every gig this tour. It only lasts for a few minutes, so nobody has time to get bored, especially the critics!

TG: It's full of your trademark wide string skips and a classical-sounding chord progression.

SM: Yes! [laughs] It goes from the A string to the B string, basically outlining tenths. For tonal consistency, I hop around the fretboard rather than skipping string groupings to keep at the same fretboard position. I organised it so the bass, drums and the orchestra have punchy stops – the guitar would get lost by frequency masking if the band were just chugging away.

JASON SIDWELL

PERFORMANCE

STEVE MORSE: 16th-note arpeggios

TRACKS 19 & 20

$\text{♩} = 84/144$

Dm A/C# Dm C/E F C/E F D/F#

PM throughout

T
A
B

V V V V etc.

Gm D/F# Gm F/A

1.
B^b A sus⁴ A

T
A
B

2.
B^b C C sus⁴ F

T
A
B

BU

Steve uses strict alternate picking for these arpeggios. To play it as well as Steve, practise very slowly so that each note is picked with authority and the best fingering is determined (tip: use all four fingers for this). Once sorted, increase the tempo over several weeks (or more) until you reach four notes per click @ 144 bpm. Tough, eh?