

Technically Speaking with Steve Prior Jeff Beck's Main Man

by Adam St. James

For this installment of Technically Speaking Guitar.com editor Adam St. James spent time backstage with Steve Prior, Jeff Beck's guitar tech for the past five years, during the recent B.B. King Music Festival. Prior walked us through Jeff's gear and even demonstrated some of Jeff's techniques, as well as shed light on some of the likes and dislikes of his other famous clients, Brian May of Queen and David Gilmour of Pink Floyd.

Guitar.com: How long have you been Jeff's tech?

Prior: Five-and-a-half years now, between my other clients.

Guitar.com: Who else do you work with?

Prior: I work regularly with Brian May, David Gilmour, and Graham Coxon from Blur...and anyone else who can afford me really. I live in London, and most people can't afford to live in London, so I generally get a lot of call-backs from various people. The difficult thing for most musicians is to get a good tech into town and not have to play ridiculous hotel costs, etc. The more Jeff gets busy and the more the others get busy at the same time, I'm kind of split between three camps: the Queen camp, the Floyd camp, and Jeff. But Jeff's the main man.

Guitar.com: How did you get into this line of work?

Prior: My dad was basically a singing, songwriting guitar player in Scotland in the late '50s and early '60s. And from the time that I was 10 and my hand was big enough to start picking up and playing his guitars... And just always being involved in music, I kind of gradually found my way falling into looking after, and being a psychiatrist if you like, for more noted and more respected players, rather than pursuing my own playing. It was a more stable, mortgage-paying kind of situation to look after them and consistently make a bit more work. But it's only through having an understanding of guitars and being able to second-guess certain situations...

It's really a fine art, the whole thing about stage craft, that most people don't appreciate, that keeps you getting repeat work. There's a lot of very capable luthiers and guitar technicians out there that kind of don't apply the right amount of common-sense to the live situation and second-guessing what can go wrong on stage. You've got to have eyes in every orifice if you like. I was gonna say eyes in the front and the back and the sides of your head. When you're busy, doin' somethin' else, you've got to know what's going on the whole time. It's a sixth-sense thing

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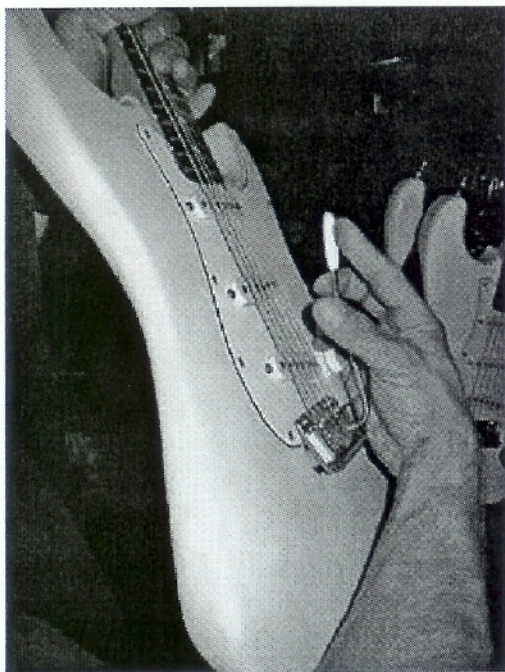
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that can only be reached through experience. It's nothing you can actually learn or be shown by somebody else. It's just something you just gradually acquire. And that makes the difference between a good tech and a bad one really.

Marshall Amps

Guitar.com: What does Jeff do to these guitars? What kind of strings is he using? What kind of pickups is he using? Are they coming straight out of the Fender Custom Shop with everything, or do you upgrade them?

Prior: No, I tweak them when they come out of the Custom Shop. When they come, they're fairly standard in terms of the setup the Custom Shop guys would give them. They come with a flat-tremolo...that's half of what Jeff's style is all about: the acute angle of the tremolo, which he plays in a multi-faceted sort of way. He will play vibrato with the heel of his palm. He will then use the pinky of his right hand to violin and change the tone and temperament through all of the electrics, while at the same time maintaining a thumb for picking, a fingernail for upward motion of the tremolo, and that finger there for downward motion of the tremolo. [Editor's note: See photo of Prior demonstrating Jeff's hand position.] So he's always doing three things at once with his right hand.



Tech Steve Prior demonstrates Beck's right hand technique. Note pinky on volume knob. Thumb is ready to pick or strum. Beck keeps his hand on the tremolo arm much of the time while fingerpicking with thumb and fingers.



Another view. Notice heel of hand on bridge.

Sometimes when he's chicken picking, he will be basically picking these three fingers in that motion, and then be playing down and up with the hand that way. When he does his really fast playing, depending on what he's playing, it will either be the second or index finger that he will actually be doing the speed picking with, and then using either the ring

finger of the right hand or the... it really depends what he's playing, which tune he's playing, how fast he's playing, and also selecting pickup and volume control at the same time.

Guitar.com: He's got a five way selector on these Strats?

Prior: Five way selectors, yeah. On the main guitars, his main guitar being a Frankenstein guitar – it's been many different things at various points, and will be again quite soon, as you can see the stress fractures that are happening in the body. What happens is, he plays them to destruction. They're just tools to him. He doesn't get very precious about any of these modern instruments. Obviously he has all the precious legend guitars all stored back at home.

Guitar.com: And how are the backup guitars set up?

Prior: All of these are just compromises. I just get them as close as I possibly can to this main guitar. The main problem with this is you have Jim Suhr pickups in the main guitar and one of the backups. He was the original pickup designer for the Fender Custom Shop, in terms of their – basically doing custom rewinds and trying to match older pickup styles to modern manufacturing techniques. And I understand he's now dead, so that's the reason we can't get any more. The more modern guitar, I think the pickups are Bob Lawrence...

Guitar.com: Bill Lawrence?

Prior: It's not Bill Lawrence either. I can't remember the name, I'll try to dig out the name of the guy that makes all the custom pickups for the Custom Shop now. These are the Fender vintage noiseless, which have been overwound to Jeff's specs to meet the – they still don't sound the same because these Jim Suhr pickups have totally different magnets in them to the more modern version of them. They still have the same amps per ohmage. But these sound a little more harsh than those. The magnets in those particular pickups are older, so they've got this really weird, almost corroded – there's a higher – whatever the alloy is that these original pole pieces are made from, Fender can't source them. They can't find any more of these, the bobbins of these to even wind on. Though I do have one other scratch plate (pickguard) with a set of these in, but I'm keeping that as a spare for if ever something horrible happens to this (main guitar). There's no point in me taking those out and putting in another guitar at this point, if I can just quickly take the entire (main) guitar apart, throw a loaded scratch plate in it, and just get it set up for the next show. So these Jim Suhr pickups are Jeff's preference, but Fender can't get them anymore.

Guitar.com: So these pickups are really old, '60s?

Prior: No, no, they're probably.

Guitar.com: Oh, well they opened the Custom Shop in the mid-'80s when Bill Schultz and his investors bought Fender back from CBS...

Prior: Well, they were Lace Sensors that went in the original signature models. These are more recent than that, they're probably '92 or '93 vintage. But this guitar was another guitar previously which was...

Guitar.com: Yeah, Jeff told me.

Prior: It was the surf foam green. Little Richard's

Guitar.com: Sea foam green...

Prior: Sea foam green, and Little Richard engraved his signature into the body of the guitar. But at one point – and they do get thrown around a little bit. The truss rod's just about ready to jump out of this one. That one's got a healthy crack. He does give them a really good wallop. The place where they usually go is through the neck block. What he'll do is he'll throw the guitar in the air, it'll spiral, he'll catch it, and then he goes boing... If he's not doing that then he'll grab it all of the strings in his right hand, and pull all six strings up at once. So when he does that is when the [truss rod starts to break through] because the neck obviously tries to jump forward and then the truss rod tries to pull back at the same time.

And then if it lands heavily enough on the strap button, as the Little Richard guitar did, the neck sheared the bolts and just traveled further. It took out that bit of bridging wood in the body there (between the neck cavity and the neck pickup slot), it took out the neck pickup, which collapsed into the guitar itself, and then the strap button shot up through the middle and split the guitar in half. And the guitar still exists. It became another guitar when we managed to glue it back together again. That one still lives.

Guitar.com: What kind of strings and what gauge strings is Jeff using?

Prior: We have a deal with Ernie Ball basically, and that's been an existing deal for some time. We use them, plus we get other... it's all just part and parcel of just getting loads of goodies from them.

Guitar.com: What gauge?

Prior: At the moment he's playing a .009 to a .052.

Guitar.com: So kind of a light to a heavy set.

Prior: Yeah. It's not the gauge I would like. Normally we start the tour fairly light and then by the middle of the tour we're at a .010 to a .052. But this is .009, .012, .017, .028, .038, .052 that are on there at the moment. We need the heavier, lower end because of the de-tuning factor, otherwise you just have rubber bands on the guitar when you start going down to a low B from a D#. So heavy on the bottom end, reasonably light on the top end, but getting heavier as we go on.

That's kind of it. Nothing special there at all. It's a Strat, a wah-wah pedal, and a 50 watt head. And that's the essence of all his playing. That's what people don't understand really. "How can I get that tone like Jeff Beck?" You can't because the amplifier you'll never find anywhere else. If anything ever happened to that amplifier he'd be lost anyway. There's just no amplifiers that sound like that one. Even Marshall don't know why it sounds the way it does. There's a couple little extra components in the pre-amp gain stage, which shouldn't really account for the sound of the amplifier. The amplifier is more bassy than any other DSL50. There are another DSL50s that don't sound anything like it.

Guitar.com: How old is it?

Prior: It's the first proto-type, so it's circa 1994. He, alongside a few other guitarists, was given that one about 10 months before they revised the circuit board three or four times and then actually put that one into production. To this day that one still survives. The other nine that everybody else had all caught fire or developed faults, went straight back to Marshall, and then they fault-found as well as they could and ended up cleaning up the

circuit board manufacturing techniques. Plus, when the boards came out printed there were lots of parts of the boards that would snap off the main mother board and become other things. So they had faults with them catching fire because of the heat on the preamp side of the boards, and then the biasing controls, which you can take the back grille off and you've basically got two little appendages which you can then dial to match the pairs of output [for the tubes].

Guitar.com: What's he using as a backup amp?

Prior: Another Marshall DSL50, but it's nothing like the original one. It'll only be a backup for 10 seconds while I have the back off and put new tubes in. If it's any more involved than that, he'll have to just play that. Any one of the spares would be [suitable, but not as good] for the rest of the show. That's the problem. We can't, having tried and having researched the situation at great lengths with all the designers at Marshall, they can't find any tangible reason why that amplifier sounds different to any other one.

Guitar.com: How does Jeff set the amp?

Prior: Very trebly, no bass.

Guitar.com: No bass? No bass at all?

Prior: None whatsoever.

Guitar.com: That seems unusual.

Prior: Yeah. That's the way it is.

Guitar.com: That's why he talked about rolling the high-end off on the guitar.

Prior: And he's rolled a lot off on the amplifier today. The last few shows have been quite trebly. It depends on the show and the venue. This is a very muted, bassy kind of room today [Editor's note: Beck was playing in Chicago's Arie Crown Theatre that night.], so you'd expect him to add a bit more treble just to get that kind of clarity. It's a fairly old-school setup.

With a lot of the older players they need volume on stage. They need to feel their fuckin' flares (jeans) flappin' in the wind from a whole stack of speaker cabinets behind them, which kind of gets them nowhere, apart from deaf. So what I've been able to do over the few years I've been working with Jeff is to drop him from stacks of 100 watt heads, Super Lead Plexi heads, with 6x12 Univox cabinets, to a single 50 watt head and a single 4x12. I use a separate DSL50 power amp stage to power a pair of 2x12 wedges downstage. Depending on the size of the stage sometimes I'll go for four. But these are custom made, Marshall 2x12 cabinets, which you won't see anywhere else. Marshall don't make them for anybody else. But it gives him the same kind of harmonic reference downstage, having a pair of 2x12 green backs staring up at him, or rather four green backs.

Guitar.com: Marshall made those for him?

Prior: Yeah. It's basically a 4x12 split between two boxes. They're a lot more directional because of the design of the box.

Guitar.com: Is that coming out of the amp or the P.A.?

Prior: That's actually coming out of the amp.

Guitar.com: And how does he set his volume on his amp?

Prior: It rarely creeps above four. So it's a very, very high-output guitar, with a very unique head, and then very, very big side fills. So everything comes through the side fills. It's effectively dry signal, which comes from the cabinet, the cabinet hits the monitor system, and we have a TC 2290 for his delays, and then a Lexicon for two big old plate reverbs, one at 1,600 milliseconds, another at 3,200 milliseconds. So it's a short-ish reverb and a lush reverb, and then just a couple of delays.

Guitar.com: And are those on all the time?

Prior: No. Just on certain songs.

Guitar.com: And do you control those?

Prior: No, the monitor engineer does that.

Guitar.com: He knows right where to put them?

Prior: Yeah, they're only in certain places in certain songs. They're just to take a lot of the dryness out of the stage. There's more 'verb than there is delay. And with side fills, when you're looking at four MT-4s a side, which are fairly archaic, big, old side fills...

Guitar.com: Those are Jeff's? Those aren't B.B.'s?

Prior: No.

Guitar.com: So he always plays with side fills like that?

Prior: Yeah.

Guitar.com: Wow!

Prior: Old school.

Guitar.com: That is a lot of power!

Prior: So he hears everything. His range, even though over the years he's developed a little bit of tinnitus – as all the...any seasoned campaigner, whether it be drummers or otherwise, having come from an era when there wasn't really a great deal of monitor fold back systems to basically bring the stage volume down – the only way you ever got any tone was by cranking it so loud that the quietest thing on stage was the drum kit. These days, the loudest thing is the drum set. So we try to bring everything up to a bearable level above the very harsh and overpowering frequencies that are generated by cymbals, which is where most hearing deficiency comes from. Having too much drum set things going on where you've got all kinds of spurious, nasty, harmful frequencies bleeding across everything. That's what really nails your top end first. Most proper drummers have got no high-end left in their audible spectrum. If you sent them off to have their hearing measured, they'd be missing huge chunks from 2K upward.

And the low end thing is the other problem that guitarists suffer from, from having stood in

front of massive cabinets for so long, you basically end up with a letter box of what most people normally hear. So the low end gets on Jeff's nerves, and the high-end is what he needs for definition above everything else that goes on. And obviously with modern P.A.s you've got much more low end coming from big cabinets that just nail everybody. It's the type of thing that makes your ribs rattle and makes you want to go to the toilet altogether.

Guitar.com: So these big side fills will only be on during Jeff's set, not B.B.'s set?

Prior: Well, no, they're there for a little bit of fall back for B.B. But generally just the downstage pair for a little bit of vocal across the front. Jeff has that all the time.

Guitar.com: Do you work in the studio with Jeff, or with other people? **Prior:** Yeah.

Guitar.com: What do you suggest in terms of capturing the guitar tone that a player is used to hearing live?

Prior: You can never replicate. One can never be the other. You can't generate the same sort of volumes and tonality of playing in very large airspaces (rooms). That can never be replicated in the studio. And likewise, you can never get the studio sound on stage, regardless. You can Pro Tool yourself up the *yahtse* and play it back as it would have been played back in the studio on a pair of NS-10s, fired through a couple of stacks of MT-4 like we've got, and it's going to sound completely different anyway. So the two, basically there's an ideal world, which you try to achieve. But at the levels you need to achieve, particularly with your monitor system, it's just a different ballpark altogether. There's very little similarity between either environment. So it doesn't really happen.

How we get a great tone in the studio is down to the expert art of miking, which, in the advent of everybody going on to Pro Tools and digital technology, that has just become a redundant philosophy. There are very, very few engineers now that know what to do with a microphone. Pro Tools and the bedroom recording sound – and that's basically what that is, a glorified version of your computer home setup with Logic, Cubase, whatever it is, you name it – it doesn't do anything like tape.

Guitar.com: Do you get into mic placement yourself?

Prior: A little bit, yeah. But that's the recording engineer's domain, really. There's only so much you can tell those people. They haven't got a clue what to do live, with microphones. And if you tell them what you use live in terms of mic selection for certain sounds and certain things, they'll go, 'I don't care what you use live. I'm using this.' It's a compromise in that respect.

Guitar.com: What mics is Jeff using live?

Prior: Well, at the moment we're using a [Shure] SM57 on one side of the cabinet and then a Sennheiser 609... But traditionally it would be a 57 and a... That gives you the top end, being a general purpose microphone. But in terms of recording and live, never the twain shall meet, unless you're mixing a live album in the studio environment. That's as close as you get. But trying to replicate guitar tones outside of that closed and very kind of clinical environment that is the recording studio... as soon as you're out on the road and playing in different air spaces every day, with different air densities and different temperatures... there's so many different criteria



Jeff's pedal board circa 2003: A Snarling Dogs wah, and a channel switcher for his Marshall DSL50. That's it.

But the same rig, with the same settings, and the same guitar, and the same everything except the same battery in the wah wah pedal is absolutely uniform. It never changes day to day, and yet the rig will sound completely different in some venues. If you're out in baking hot sheds at 105 degrees, as we have been on various points on this tour, and he thinks it sounds a little bit strange, and it's very warm...it's all down to how sound moves through different air spaces.

And his ears will pick it up and he'll ask, 'Why does that sound different?' And you have to have a reasonable answer for him, and if you've got no idea you just have to be honest and say, 'Look Jeff, I have no idea – other than the fact that it's 110 fuckin' degrees out here and I'm fuckin' dying! Come see the sweat coming off of me! Of course it's going to affect the sound.' So yeah, humidity, pressure – all of those kind of things – do affect things.

Guitar.com: Are there any things that you do when you go in the studio with Jeff that he just wants for comfort?

Prior: Umm...yeah – but I don't really know what they are. Because that's a fairly organic thing all the time, and as soon as he's got a nice cup of coffee and he's got nobody smoking anywhere near him, and as long as he's got all that kind of stuff. As long as you keep him happy as an individual then you'll get the better performance out of him.

That's half of what being a guitar technician is all about: It's having the ability to be almost a psychoanalyst at the same time – or at least be reasonably clairvoyant. (laughs) And that really is most of it. The major difference between being a tech that gets a lot of work... And that's where I feel I've gotten most of my work from. Your reputation precedes you. I've never had to seek work anywhere. I've only had to turn down work. And in 16 years of being a professional guitar tech, I've worked with some of the greatest guitar players who've ever lived: Brian May, Rory Gallagher – bless him, God rest his soul. And a lot of crap guitar players as well, which is the frustrating thing: When you know you're a player of reasonable standard, and you've got to look after somebody that's kind of like all ego and attitude and sadly lacking in the personality department. That gets a little frustrating.

But I've been very lucky to work with some of the greats – some of my favorites. Jeff being my ultimate favorite. I'm very lucky being able to say he's me boss! It's a very privileged and incredible position to be in, and I haven't a clue how I got there! (laughs) So when people ask, 'How did you get into this?' I have no fucking idea! (laughs) It's not my fault. You've got to be good to keep the job, so I must be all right somewhere down the

line. But it's really only just a misspent youth for having a guitar in me hands, for most of that youth.

Guitar.com: So is this for me...

Prior: Yeah. So you understand. Unless you've actually been there and done it yourself, it's difficult to describe. It's an experience that's difficult to achieve. You can't go to school and learn what to do with an amp when it catches fire, or Brian May – with 12 AC-30s on all at once, and then the first three in the first row, which are the only ones with microphones on them – when they catch fire, and then you've got to switch from three screaming AC-30s to another set of screaming AC-30s while he's screaming at you for them having caught fire – which of course is my fault! You know, how do you get out of that situation and retain your job? I don't know.

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But these things happen, and they do. You'll have major power outages. You'll have things blowing output tubes, or preamp tubes giving up the ghost. They look like they're on and they're working, but there's no physical way of testing them while the artist is still trying to play through the bloody thing. But all you can do is just be as fast as you can and give them something to play through, and then remedy the fault and put them back to how they were. 'Cause you know, the way they sound to themselves is so precious that you won't get a performance out of them if they have to play through something that's shit or sounds alien to them.

So yeah, that really is about it. It's really about trying to get a good nights rest and trying to do as much as you can without being seen to be too fussy or overpowering the artist or trying to confuse them with technology. 'Cause that's the other thing: You can't tell them because they've experienced so much more in their 30 or 40 year career than you could ever learn. So for that reason, particularly working with Queen, where they've all got Ph.D's – you can't tell them nothing. You can only say "sorry" if something's caught fire. 'I'm sorry, Brian, but it's not really my fault. You've had this amplifier 35 years and it's just decided to...'

Guitar.com: You see Brian, it got hot, and the flammable material caught on fire.

Prior: (laughs) Yeah, that's it! That's it. The thing is basically giving up the ghost, and after 30 years, I think that's long enough (laughs). But you know, it is what it is. A lot of weird and wonderful things come with the territory, but it's not all as glamorous as people tend to think. And when you have to spend months and months away from home and loved ones, it's not the most ideal way of earning a living, but there's something unique about it, which I wouldn't find it anywhere else.

But that's it: The essence of Jeff's fantastic-ness is the fact that he has fingers that do things that other guitar players can only dream of. And as you've seen, there's nothing complicated about the rig – well there is, but it's only just routing that's slightly different. But it's a Stratocaster, a wah-wah pedal, and a 50 watt head. There's nothing more fancy in it than that. There's some sneaky little routing things which go on, basically as we're transforming signal from one amplifier to another just to avoid ground loops. And effectively we just keep it as clean, pure, and simple as it should be, and let him do the rest. Because it is him, it's his fingers.

I have a saying that, if you can't find it in your fingers, you ain't gonna find it in a rack. You see all these players with fucking racks full of shit and processing and all you end up with is a thin, nasty, digital sound. At the end of the day what you want is a couple of dirty great big tubes, and a decent guitar in your hand with some heavy strings on it. Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jeff Beck – all the great players have all basically had the simplest of setups. And they've been great because their fingers do what it is that made them great.

Guitar.com: You said that you start up with .009s at the beginning of the tour and move up to .010s?

Prior: Yeah, well I prefer a heavier set on it because it makes the tremolo behave more as it should. And when the tremolo is so aggressively pitched as that one, one string breaks the whole thing goes jazz extremely quickly. That thing goes almost a half-step
... teeth as soon as you lose that sixteen pounds per square inch pressure on any

one string. So with slightly heavier strings on the treble end, it makes the tremolo... it insures that when he's screaming back, when the tremolo is pulled back – obviously every string is different – but the low string (tuned down ½ step) will go from a D# to an F. You'll get an A# to a C, and you'll get an F# to what would normally be your C there, which for us would be a B. And so each of the strings perform slightly differently under different types of tension. But basically the main criteria is that if you can get from a D# to an F with just doing that (pulls back on tremolo bar), it gives him another half-step up here (pushes down on string behind nut), so that increases the tension even further to bring that pitch up even more. So if you lose one of those strings, you lose the tension there, and you go a half-step sharp very quickly. So if he breaks a string you're fucked, and I just have to do the quickest guitar change ever.

Guitar.com: How many springs do you use in the back?

Prior: Just three.

Guitar.com: Do you put a rubber band in them to keep them quiet, or anything like that?

Prior: I keep them all together with some heavy gauge solder [wound through the strings]. Rubber bands perish over time. At least with solder, it's reasonably malleable and it basically just locks the strings together.

Guitar.com: And you've got the springs all right next to each other?

Prior: On the spring tree you've got three, which go to the two outers and the center. And they do, over a period of time, they'll weaken as well. They give up their tension, and then you have to basically re-assess what's going on with how much, how reliable they are in pulling back. That's where you lose it. So if the guitar is progressively becoming flatter each time you re-string – and sometimes I re-string two times a day – if you're noticing that the angle of the tremolo is increasing as you bring the guitar up to pitch, then you know that the springs are getting tired in the back, or something has come undone in the back, which is the other factor.

Guitar.com: How often do you replace the tremolo springs on Jeff's Strat?

Prior: On this guitar, the last time I did them was when – generally the last time – whenever he snaps the arm off in the block.

Guitar.com: (laughing) And how often does that happen?

Prior: Quite often.

Guitar.com: Really.

Prior: Oh yeah.

Guitar.com: He's pretty rough isn't he.

Prior: Oh yeah. He plays them to destruction. That is the thing. They are workhorses to him. He's not particularly.... That is the one guitar he loves (his main Strat) out of the guitars that I have on tour. We've got a big body Gibson ES-175, 'cause he thought that might be something he might be playing, 'cause he guests with B.B. from time to time. And they're all on big Hofners, Gibsons – obviously Lucille. And then the 175 that Leon [King's long time second guitarist] plays

But that, with his rig – 'cause I have to take that entire rig apart, bring it over here (side stage), reset it up again. 'Cause we've gone the route of trying other DSL50s and just using them just for the one song. But he hates them. They don't sound anything like his main rig. So in the changeover (to B.B. King's set), I have to strip that rig (Beck's main rig), move it over here, reset it again, and then reset everything else, and then pack away the rest of our shit – 'cause I'm crew boss and stage manager for us as well. So there's a lot of stuff to go on in a 15-minute changeover. But he won't have anything else.

That one head sounds like nothing else. We tried to wean him off that and put him on something else, just for the convenience – so we could pack the truck at the same time as guesting on another show, but he wouldn't have it. So unfortunately I've got to keep everything out of the truck, and once the B.B. set comes down, we then lash his stuff to the truck and make way for the lights and sound to come down. So every day it's a big old lump of work.

Guitar.com: So he hasn't been sitting in with B.B. every show then?

Prior: For the East Coast shows, maybe, but the West Coast shows it was every two or three nights.

Guitar.com: Will he sit in tonight in Chicago?

Prior: Oh he'll definitely do it tonight. [Editor's note: He didn't; B.B.'s call.]

Guitar.com: So I understand Jeff went out to Buddy Guy's Legends here in Chicago last night to check out the club and the band. Are you guys going out tonight?

Prior: We are driving back to Wisconsin. Another show date tomorrow, West Bend. It's the Washington County Fair Ground. We're bailing to there tonight. It's 140 miles from here so it's not that far, but we'll crack out right after the show. Jeff will probably stay in a hotel in Chicago and then they'll drive out tomorrow.

Guitar.com: Do the artists you work with – Jeff, Brian May, David Gilmour – feel OK about you talking about their gear?

Prior: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It's rare for Jeff to come up to me like he did today and ask me to talk to you about the bits, because traditionally there's nothing to tell. But still some artists do revel in their kind of anonymity to a certain degree, or what is behind the scenes is privy to those that are closest to it. And it's not necessarily to be discussed or divulged by those without permission. Particularly if the management were here. If the management were here, you'd be having a very hard time getting anywhere close to me at all. But as we've just a tour manager and it's getting toward the end of the tour, and it's all been reasonably free and easy. But Jeff's management, as a rule, won't let anybody anywhere near him. So you've actually had quite a, a result, as we say in England. Normally Jeff hates giving interviews. Absolutely hates it.

Guitar.com: Well, it seemed like we had a good time. He spent far more time with me than I expected.

Prior: Oh yeah, absolutely. That's the thing, if you catch him on a good day, it's a good day. But generally... He's quite shy. He's very much his own man. And he's had 38 years of being bombarded by questions about 'How do you do this, how do you do that?' It's like, 'Oh God, don't you read? Whenever I do give an interview, don't you ever read it?' 'You wouldn't have to be asking me for the fiftieth time.' And that's just you know.

artists', over a period of time do get touchy about certain things.

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