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PETER FRAMPTON

The cast assembled for *Fingerprints*, the upcoming all-instrumental recording from Peter Frampton, is as diverse a group of musicians as you will ever find. Yet, Peter pulls them all together for what should be the guitar record of the year. As diverse as the musicians are (Warren Haynes, Mike McCready, Paul Franklin, Bill Wyman, Charlie Watts, John Jorgenson, Gordon Kennedy, Hank Marvin, Brian Bennett and more), so, too, is the music. From the decidedly Django-esque "Souvenirs De Nos Peres" duet with Jorgenson to the blow-off-the-roof assault of "Black Hole Sun" with Mike McCready and Matt Cameron, the 14-track CD on A&M Records is the perfect vehicle for Frampton and guests to properly display their six-string prowess. One listen to *Fingerprints* should lay to rest any lingering doubts that Peter Frampton is clearly among the top guitarists in rock.

By Lawrence Acunto

PETER FRAMPTON

TCG: Was it a brave decision to come out with an instrumental CD as your first one back with A&M Records?

PF: Not in my mind because I don't think in those terms. It was the next record that was slated in my mental list of what I was to do next. I had made the decision to do this after speaking with Hank Marvin and that we would get together. As soon as I got Hank, the record had started as far as I was concerned. This was before A&M offered to take me back officially. So, when I spoke to Bruce Resnikoff and he asked what I thought about coming back to the label, or as I put it on the CD, "Thank you for begging me to come back to A&M," I said I was absolutely thrilled but that he might take back those words because the next record was all instrumental. He said that was the best thing he had heard and they have been into it since the word go. Bruce said he thought it was a great career choice, but it really isn't a career choice, it's what I had to do. It wasn't brave at all, it's just what was next. Some people have said that it's not a commercial move, well, that's not the way I think. To be honest, I've grown as a musician from doing it. It's completely out of the ordinary for me. I've realized that playing it safe, though I don't think I ever really played it safe, but I'm a creature of habit and sometimes it's nice to feel safe. I just wish I had done this a lot sooner. Each track was really a challenge. I could have just put together a band, written a bunch of songs and it would have come out like a record with everything sounding the same. It has always been a plan of mine that a CD like this would be a trip through my influences. All musicians are influenced by many different types of music because there is good in everything. Everything influences me, from the rhythm of the train on the tracks to the singing from an Eastern religion. That is what I wanted to do and in order to do that it couldn't be done with all the same people.

TCG: One of the aspects of the CD that stands out is how well tailored the songs are for those you chose to play. Which came first, the artist or the song?

PF: Well, the songs came and then as they would come I would think, 'Well, this one would be perfect for me and Hank.' I would never write to order, but I knew, for example, that I wanted a slow blues but I didn't know when I wrote it that Warren Haynes would be performing it. I knew that it would be perfect for a blues player and once we cut the track, I thought, 'Oh, I'd love to hear Warren's slide on this one.' The music came first, knowing full well what styles I wanted on the CD. There are things that were written that didn't make the CD because they didn't fit anything.

TCG: You play a lot of different guitars on the CD but one of the stand-outs is the Tacoma Chief.

PF: This is one of those guitars that has just been very lucky guitar for me. I was showing my daughter music row, actually we were



walking down Broadway and came across Gruhn's. I told her that this was one of the most famous guitar shops in the world and she asked then why aren't we going in? I said because we would never come out! She forced me in and George came out from the back and all the guitars started coming out and I'm drooling all over my shirt! In the end we went upstairs and George said that he just started carrying these Tacoma guitars and wanted my opinion. George said, 'I just feel that this guitar couldn't sound any better, it could look a little better, but it couldn't sound any better.' He called it the Telecaster of acoustics. He handed me one and it just floored me! I tried out about four of them, they all sounded really good and I finally picked one. Everyone that I played it for from then on loved it. It's just got a great tone. It's very reminiscent, well, up until that point, it was the closest thing I had to a Django-sounding guitar, if you use a half a pound of concrete for a pick, as Django did. I actually used the Tacoma for the rhythm track on the song with John (Jorgenson) against his 1942 Selmer. John was amazed at complimentary sound of the guitars. John then spoke with David Gartland (Gitane) and told them I was about to record the lead on the track and they sent me the Gitane DG-255. I had already gotten some of the really heavy picks. John had given me the interim, try-this-it-will-get-you-ready-for-the-big-picks.

TCG: Training picks.

PF: That's exactly what he called them. It literally does feel that you are playing the guitar with a book. I've been listening to Django since I was eight years old because that was the music my parents listened to, but to sit with John, Django reincarnate, my jaw was on the floor every time he picked up a guitar. I've figured out a lot of the Django stuff over the

years, but working with John was such an eye-opener for me. I love a challenge and he was just great to work with.

TCG: It's a really powerful piece and a great one to close the record. I guess it was about eighteen months ago when you told me that you were planning this record and had you asked me then to pick one song as a cover, "Black Hole Sun" would probably have been about number 3 million on the list. Where did that one come from?

PF: Well, it's one of my all-time favorite songs, way up there in the top five, I think. I love chords, the way they can send the melody in different directions. And I love melodies that stay on the same note as the chords change four or five times. I think there is something very haunting about that. Chris Cornell has this wonderful sense of melody and chord structure. I am probably his biggest fan. He is a wonderful, wonderful writer, as well as everything else he does. He has an amazing voice and he always has terrific bands. That is just one of those songs that when ever I hear it, I get goose-bumps. It just always gets me. It's so unusual, it doesn't go anywhere you'd expect it to go. It's a brilliantly written song. I'm the one that usually says that if you do a cover song, change it up a bit, much like Joe Cocker did with "A Little Help From My Friends." But, I couldn't with this one, it was perfect the way it was. Just the fact that Mike (McCready) is on there and we sort of went to the moon with the guitars...

TCG: As you get towards the end of the song, I think I would have been a little frightened to be in the studio while you were recording.

PF: It's so out there. The day before we cut "Black Hole Sun," we did "Blowin' Smoke" which was a song in which I had the riff and Matt Cameron, Mike and Gary Westlake all contributed. I suggested that Mike and I go back and forth, you know, you play, I play, You play, etc. So, when we got to "Black Hole Sun," Mike said that instead of doing the same as on "Blowin' Smoke," on the original there are two things going on at once and it gets kind of hectic. Why don't we try doing that - playing over each other. I thought what a great idea. And when we were doing it, if I didn't say it, Mike would say, 'Want to do it again?' We must have done it at least eight or ten times. We just didn't want to stop playing. Everybody else was in the booth cheering us on. It was just out there. Very reminiscent of the Humble Pie days, just going for it and the band cheering you on when you're doing it. I really felt like I joined the band for the three days we were recording. I love the input of everybody. I'm always open to input from other players, I'm not a Hitler who says you've got to play this way or that. In fact, I don't say anything at all. I want to see what they are going to play first. And, that's how the happy accidents happen.

TCG: "Float" is one of my favorites on the CD and that introduces Gordon Kennedy on guitar. You co-wrote a number of songs with Gordon

on the *Now* CD. I didn't realize what a really fine guitar player he is.

PF: Yeah, Gordon is my secret weapon! Apart from being one of the nicest people you would ever want to meet. He has a sort of peace around him and he creates a wonderful situation in which to work. He played some guitar on *Now*, but not like he does on "Float." And he is a wonderful guitar player. That was the first number I finished and I remember going up and playing it for my wife and she just went, "Wow, this is amazing." She is my biggest critic as well as my biggest champion and she tells it exactly like it is. I thought we had something that was really, really good here and then I gave it the old test and she gave it a big thumbs up and that was it. So, I knew we were on the right track. Gordon's playing is amazing, his writing is phenomenal and his singing, too. When we lost Bob (Mayo), Gordon and Blair Masters both said that they knew we were in a terrible bind and that they would come and help out. It was just for a specific time period because Gordon couldn't be away from writing for too long. I asked Gordon if he could do a couple of these orchestral dates I was doing because I needed another guitar for "Black Hole Sun." So, of course, as soon as Gordon started playing with us I said, "Gordon, you can't leave now otherwise we can't do "Black Hole Sun!" He said, "I thought you'd never ask," or something like that. So, Gordon has pretty much joined the band, which is phenomenal. He brings so much to the band. I've never really had a five-piece band that worked. The more people you have in a band, the more people have to play less. And Gordon has that built-in sense of what not to play and when to play. We love having him in the band.

TCG: Just about every English guitar player cites Hank Marvin as a big early influence and I know he was one of yours as well.

PF: Absolutely. He was the reason I started playing the guitar.

TCG: So, it must have been pretty cool to record "My Cup of Tea" and get to hang out with Hank.

PF: It just doesn't get any better. We had finished an Australian tour at the same time that Hank and the Shadows were touring in England. We finished our tour in Auckland, New Zealand two days after Hank finished their tour. At that point I knew that Brian Bennett and Mark Griffiths were going to play on it. I asked Hank if he could hang on in England for a day so that I could fly in from Auckland so that we can do the session. We actually had two days to do the record, one for set-up and one for recording. Mark Knopfler lent us his incredible studio which is only for his personal use but is built like a full-on commercial place. Chuck Ainlay from Nashville couldn't make it so he recommended that I call Hugh Padgham. Hugh jumped at the chance. So I got Hugh Padgham engineering. I'm playing with the Shadows in Mark Knopfler's state-of-the-art studio! It couldn't have been a better situation. I brought over a tape of two acoustics and a click track that Gordon and I had laid down as

the basis of the track and Hank and Brian added the intro, so we all wrote that basically. Not only did we record together but we all wrote it. It doesn't get better. I keep saying that, but, it was wonderful.

TCG: On "Cornerstones," you bring in a real old friend.

PF: Yeah, Mr. Wyman. Bill has always known that when ever I did an instrumental record he'd be on it. I asked him if he thought that Charlie (Watts) might play on it as well. So, Bill got Charlie and also suggested Chris Stainton for keyboards, another nice choice. He's back playing with Eric (Clapton) and so is Derek Trucks. Derek Trucks is playing guitar with Eric on his next tour.

TCG: Well, I guess if you need to work, you need to work.

PF: Oh my God. Having now sat in with the Allman Brothers at the Beacon in New York and sitting between those two (Trucks and Warren Haynes), now there's something that will give you a kick up the you-know-what. Derek is absolutely phenomenal. We all know how great Warren is but I had no idea how great Derek was. Anyway, back to Bill, we had



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actually done another number but I preferred "Cornerstones" because we all wrote that together. And we've got that classic Wyman bass slide. It was so great to see Charlie and Bill playing together again.

TCG: Who is playing the slide on "Shewango Way"?

PF: That's me.

TCG: I don't think I've ever seen you playing slide guitar before?

PF: I've never really played slide on stage but I've always loved to mess around with it in the studio.

TCG: Two things stand out on the track, "Double Nickels." The first, and most obvious is Paul Franklin on pedal steel, and the other is the wonderful sounding 1959 ES-175.

PF: I just got that recently.

TCG: What a sweet sounding guitar. It shows up again on "Smoky" which showcases it beautifully.

PF: I actually tuned down a tone for that and it made it sound richer. It's just one of those guitars. I got that from Gary Dick (Gary's Classic Guitars) who lives nearby, which can be dangerous.

TCG: Very. He's got some nice instruments.

PF: Oh yeah. I told him I wanted a 175 because I used to have one. He said he had a 1959 and a 1957 but the '59 is the most beautiful sounding jazz tone that I could ever have wished for. It can cover Wes, Kenny, Joe Pass, just about anything depending on how you set the amp.

TCG: You are currently on the road, which songs from *Fingerprints* are in the live show?

PF: Right now we are doing "Float" and "Black Hole Sun" and the next one to work up is "Boot It Up." We can't do too many instrumentals, I'd like to play the whole thing, especially until people know it.

TCG: I'm sure we could still go on about the CD for another two hours but I know you are on the road right now and a bit pressed for time, but, lastly, what about the symphony shows?

PF: We did "Something's Happening," "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," "Lines On My Face," "Show Me The Way" and then we brought out "Oh, For Another Day" and "Fig Tree Bay" from *Wind of Change*. Sten Rinake wrote these incredible charts, especially for "Float." We can't wait to record it. We did two nights, one in Cincinnati and one in Atlanta. What an experience! ■

