

## Vintage Guitar Magazine First Fret Feature August 2024 by Pete Prown (transcript)

Paul Benjaman is a bad, bad guitar man. The Tulsa twanger serves up a mean, funky stew on *My Bad Side Wants a Good Time*, mixing rockin' funk and blues with a side of bayou bite. Aided by lap-slide ace Jesse Aycock (VG, July'21), Benjaman's gritty vocals, riffs, and speedy leads are undeniably fierce and fun. Better yet, he recorded the album in Leon Russell's old studio.

*You seem to embrace the less-is-more aesthetic of ZZ Top, Bad Company, and Blackberry Smoke.*

Angus Young once spoke of the long hours AC/DC worked on riffs, and I took that to heart. A great riff is more effective than any guitar pyrotechnic. The memorable ones have some sleight of hand involved with how the notes are made, so after you get the basic idea, experiment with adding slides or bends and play with the timing on or behind the beat. More time can be spent perfecting a riff than it takes to master positions o dominant or whatever.

*The title track mostly lays back, but at the end, there's*

*ferocious picking. Who are your influences?*

Jimi Hendrix is always somewhere near the heart of what I do, and the lick at the end of "My Bad Side" was inspired by Steve Pryor, a Tulsa legend who was the most-magical guitarist I've ever heard. Beyond that, I got a lot from the great Texas players like Freddie King, Billy Gibbons, and Eric Johnson. There's also some Audley Freed, Jerry Cantrell, Cream-era Clapton, Tom Scholz, Marty Friedman, and Wayne Krantz in there. I look for new ideas every day, and my guitar-book collection is out of control.

Also, I studied with Junior Brown, and he taught me that blues, country, rock, and jazz come from the same place. So why not put them into the same song?

"Detroit Train" has a quintessential Tulsa

*"Detroit Train" has a quintessential Tulsa beat - laid-back and funky without being straight-up funk.*

The original Tulsa players told me they were trying to play Jimmy Reed songs they heard on the radio - some were swinging the beat, while others played straight. That mash-up was eventually called "the Tulsa Sound." The "Detroit Train" groove came to me after opening

for Tony Joe White in the Netherlands. He and J.J. Cale could turn one chord grooves into meditative 10-minute epics.

*"Local Honey" is a groovefest with funk guitar. How did you get that quack tone?*

That's my '59 Stratocaster; when I bought it, the paint had been removed and it had non-original electronics, so I put the Fender Eric Johnson Strat set in it with a five-way switch. On that track, you hear the middle-and-bridge combo. Also, I've been a fan of Nile Rodgers since I was a kid, and was trying to get that vibe.

Do you have a vintage collection?

The star of the record is the Strat, it's on almost every track. You'll also hear a '60s Silvertone 1446, '56 ES-125, 1990 Les Paul Custom with Lollar Imperial humbuckers, '78, Taylor, Seth Lee Jones Custom with TV Jones Magna'Trons, an. Ed O'Brien Stratocaster with the sustainer

Highway One Strat with a DiMarzio Super Distortion in the Bridge.

*What other Gear?*

The amps were a 100-watt Bogner Helios Eclipse head, Bad Cat Cub V, Magnatone Twilighter, and a '72 Super Reverb. Effects included a vintage Univox PHZ-1 Phazer, Beetrone Octahive fuzz, Bogner Oxford fuzz, MXR Carbon Copy Deluxe, Xotic SP compressor, '80s Ibanez Stereo Chorus, and a Leslie chop-top cab.

Listening to "La Serpentine," a question comes to : Do you still mic amps in the studio, or do you use digital IRs, like everyone else?

I try to keep the guitar sounds analog. Fortunately, with everyone switching to IRs, you can find used isolation cabinets. I found one for \$150 that had a Celestion Heritage speaker, so I put an SM57 on it and closed the door. I could plug any of my amps into it, and if I needed to vary the tone, I nudged the axis of the mic. This streamlined the changing of amp setups and kept the sounds organic and belonging to me - not someone else's IR.

*Tell us about recording at The Church Studio, In Tulsa, once owned by Leon Russell.*

I had three days there with the band, and recorded basic tracks for 23 tunes, 12 of which ended up on the record.

Everything had a flow in there, and our musical decisions came as easily as if Leon was whispering over our shoulder. - Pete Prown