



Guitar Clinic

by Nick Bowcott

Playing with clean guitar tones

"CLEAN" METAL! WHAT'S THAT?

Well old chum, let me explain...

Although heavy metal is synonymous with loud guitar distortion, a fair percentage of the genre's classics feature clean (non-distorted) electric guitar sections. In fact, a number of truly great metal anthems are based around the acoustic guitar. Clean sections can be found in "Stairway to Heaven" (Led Zeppelin), "Beyond the Realms of Death" (Judas Priest), "Diary of a Madman" (Ozzy Osbourne), "Don't Fear the Reaper" (Blue Öyster Cult) and "One," Metallica's latest epic.

Although many of these songs use acoustic guitar for their clean sections, an electric will suffice. A clean sound is best achieved with your set-up by altering your amp settings. However, in live situations, this isn't so practical, unless you have a programmable amp or one with channel switching, or, of course, your own sound person. The next best way to get a clean sound is just to turn your guitar down and switch off any distortion/overdrive/boost pedals you may have in line.

In many cases, you'll discover your best clean sound employs the rhythm (neck) pickup. Try experimenting with various tone settings on the guitar, too. You may further sweeten and fatten your sound by adding chorus, echo, flange and phase effects. In short, our best advice is to use your ears and experiment until you get the sound best suited to the clean section.

Below are transcriptions of three clean-sounding sections. The first comes from that much-missed guitar talent, Randy Rhoads, and is the opening to "Diary of a Madman." I strongly suggest that you listen a few times before tackling it because, although I've given each note a time value, Randy plays it in 'free time' (not a strict tempo. He probably approached it like that to enhance the tension of the section.) The second example is the opening repeated



PHANTASM

"The greatest musician I had ever known" is how Ozzy Osbourne describes late bandmate Randy Rhoads (above), killed in a freak plane crash in 1982.

phrase to B.Ö.C.'s "Don't Fear the Reaper," and the third is taken from a song called "Watch the Children Pray," penned by that criminally underrated band, Metal Church.

Use alternate picking for all three examples and pay close attention to achieving (and maintaining!) an even sound when you perform each one.

I've drawn your attention to this because playing with distortion can often hide or mask an uneven picking technique. So, if you find you have one, don't despair—work on it!

Nick Bowcott, former guitarist for RCA recording artists Grim Reaper, is currently forming a new band.

"Diary of a Madman"

Freely letting all notes ring

TAB: 4 3 1 1 3 4 2 3 1 1 3 2 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 1 3 2 4 2 3 1

TAB: 1 4 2 2 4 1 2 4 1 1 4 2 3 4 2 1 4 2 1 2 4 2 4 2 3

"Don't Fear the Reaper"

Let all notes ring

TAB: 2 4 2 4 1 4 1 1 (2/3) 1 1 2 1 1 3 2 1

"Watch the Children Pray"

Let all notes ring

TAB: 1 4 2 1 3 1 2 1 1 4 2 1 (2/3)

↑ means a 'slow motion' strum achieved by a backward pick stroke thru all six strings.