

Whatever happened to...

ALEX SKOLNICK

A TESTAMENT TO PERSEVERANCE

NOW A recent graduate of New York's prestigious New School University, guitarist Alex Skolnick has spent the better part of the past decade honing his jazz chops to razor sharpness. But how did this former long-haired hard rocker go from inspiring mosh-pit mayhem in thrash trendsetters Testament to blazing over bop standards? "I'm a big fan of music, first and foremost," Skolnick explains. "I just realized that jazz was where my heart was, and I wanted to learn as much as I could. It's been 10 years since I left Testament, and only now does it feel like my playing is coming together for what I really want to be doing."

Skolnick's latest release, *Goodbye to Romance: Standards for a New Generation*, drips with both facility and taste, recalling pickers ranging from John McLaughlin and Al Di Meola to Pat Martino and George Benson. Plus, there's an intriguing twist. The entire CD, save two Skolnick originals ("Skol Blues" and "Ofri"), revolves around dramatic reworkings of '70s and '80s metal tunes, including inventive jazz trio arrangements of songs like "Detroit Rock City" and "War Pigs." And it actually works! "The response has been overwhelming," Skolnick says. "People in the jazz world who are closet metalheads are coming out. I'm hearing from heavy-metal fans who never liked jazz before that they can actually relate to the forms of this music. They're starting to open up to jazz because of it. That is such a great feeling." The Alex Skolnick Trio will be maintaining a busy national touring schedule this fall and winter. Check alexskolnick.com for the latest info.

THEN Frustrated by a lack of like-minded—let alone technically compatible—musicians in his peer group, Skolnick set his sights on joining an established band at the tender age of 16. On a tip from a roadie friend, the Randy Rhoads-inspired axe-slinger scored an audition with thrash-metal mavens Testament. "To be honest, I wasn't the biggest thrash fan; I was coming from a slightly different place. I asked my teacher, who at the time was Joe Satriani, and he said, 'Go for it. Maybe something will come out of it. If nothing else, it'll be experience.'" Skolnick landed the gig and hit the road with his new bandmates. "To go from playing in the garage to playing on stage really pushes you. As soon as we started playing live, and I heard tape recordings of myself, I was utterly horrified! I started practicing a lot more [laughs]." For the next three years, Skolnick shredded onstage and woodshedded offstage, all the while gaining a considerable reputation for his awe-inspiring rock chops. Then



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the jazz bug bit him squarely on the arse. "I was 19, recording the second Testament record, when I saw Miles Davis on TV. That changed everything." In the ensuing years, though he enjoyed his commitment to Testament, it became clear that Skolnick and the band were going in two different

directions, and he left in 1992. "Everything happens for a reason. It was a unique situation for a group like that to have a guitarist like me. And it really helped me get my playing together. I think one of the reasons I'm able to do what I'm doing now is because of that experience." —DALE TURNER