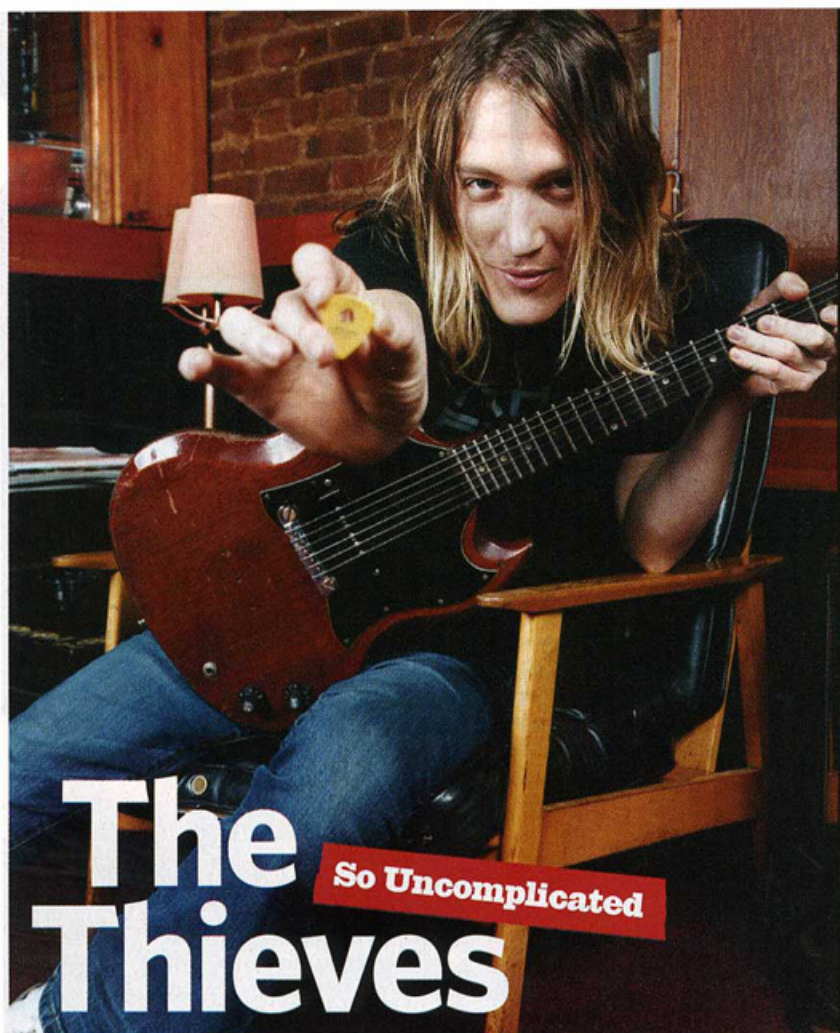


Guitarone™

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The Thieves

So Uncomplicated

If you've got the confidence to rely on one chord, it's just brilliant," says Hal Stokes, guitarist and frontman for the Thieves, a British trio that originated in Oxford and has since relocated to sunny Los Angeles. "People can listen to that one chord and really feel the vibe. When you listen to Angus Young, it makes you wanna party. If you listen to Steve Vai, it makes you wanna practice. Well, I decided I wanna rock 'n' roll again."

For a time, Stokes and his band, which includes Jamie Dawson on drums and brother Sam Stokes on bass, went through a stage in which they attempted to make very technical music. And get this: their name was *Vade Mecum*—whatever that means. "We got into weird timing and strange chords," admits Hal, "but we realized the average listener couldn't grasp it." So they scrapped the offbeat tack and moved closer to what *sounded good*—plain and simple. "It was our AC/DC influence," he says. "Even if you're playing that one open chord, you can make it sound amazing by letting it really ring out. I'm pretty much going back to that—letting the guitar do all the work."

On the band's latest release, the five-song project *The White Line EP*, Stokes & Co. explode with adrenalin-filled linear rock starring the guitarist's jarring power chords and a bone-crunching rhythm section. It seems that time spent bunking together in a small house in L.A.'s Shadow Hills has given the band an almost edgy tightness.

"We abide by a strict rehearsal schedule," says Stokes, who's been playing in bands with his brother since he was 13. "We do, however, set aside a lot of time for jamming. For a while, my ability to create good musical ideas got stuck in scales and modes, and I discovered that the only way to break out of that was to feed off each other while jamming."

That jamming has led Stokes to color his straight-ahead rock chords with subtle changes and moments of flair that keep the band's chug both hypnotic and melodic, even mesmerizing. It's a sound that calls to mind rock-solid acts like Free and the Cult, and perhaps the Stooges, before the band even breaks a sweat. And when they do start to sweatin'—one chord or not—watch the hell out.

—BOB GULLA

GEAR BOX GUITARIST Hal Stokes ALBUM *The White Line EP* (Liquor and Poker) AXE 1969 Gibson SG Junior with P-90s, Everly strings (.010-.046) AMP Cornford MK50 FX Electro-Harmonix Big Muff, Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere, Dunlop wah, Fulltone Supra-Trem, Boss delay