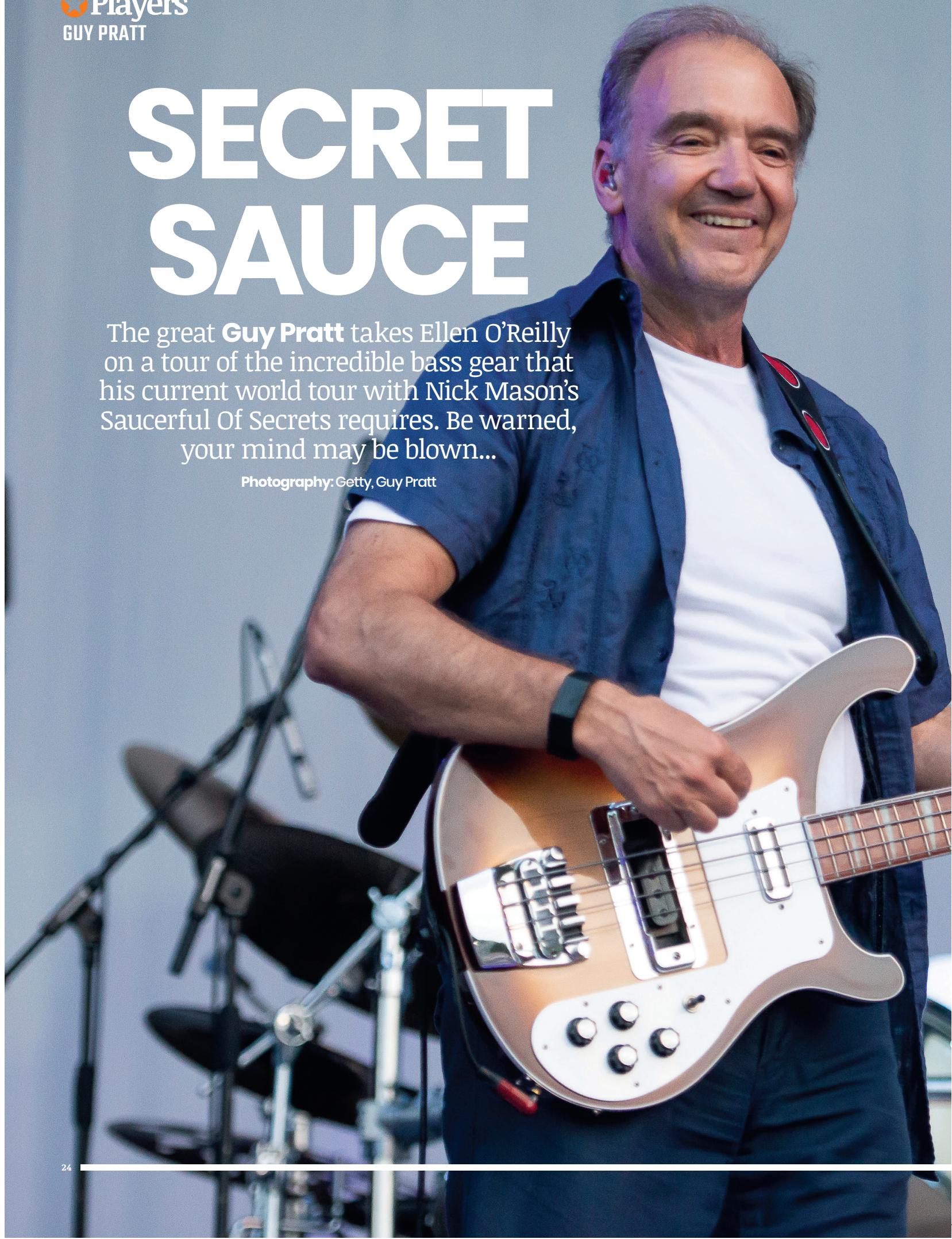


SECRET SAUCE

The great **Guy Pratt** takes Ellen O'Reilly on a tour of the incredible bass gear that his current world tour with Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets requires. Be warned, your mind may be blown...

Photography: Getty, Guy Pratt



Who could have predicted that one of the most acclaimed rock bands of recent years would be devoted to playing the early, vividly psychedelic music of Pink Floyd? Led by that legendary band's drummer Nick Mason, who is joined by Spandau Ballet's Gary Kemp (guitar, vocals), Guy Pratt (bass, vocals), Lee Harris (guitar) and Dom Beken (keyboards), Saucerful Of Secrets have been met with rapturous approval since their pre-pandemic formation back in 2018.

The fact that this unique group has been met with such a keen universal response may be down to the musicianship of its members; it might be because the music, taken from Floyd's unnerving but brilliant Syd Barrett era, is so powerful; or perhaps it's because real music, delivered by real musicians, always finds its niche.

Pratt in particular does a lot of work in this ensemble, trading vocals with Kemp while navigating a sea of bass effects and anchoring the group through arrangements and time signatures that would defeat most of us. Little wonder that the band has international dates lined up throughout this year and beyond: they will be on tour in North America in September and October.

"I'm very excited about this amp: Ashdown and I have been talking about doing this for years"

Pratt guides me to his impressive signature Ashdown Engineering bass rig, made up of his signature Interstellar 600 head and two CL-310 DH cabs. "I'm very, very excited about this amp," he says. "Ashdown and I have been talking about doing something like this for years. It all started back in 2006, on a David Gilmour tour, when I had WEM logos put on my Ashdown cabs. We always had this joke about old WEM cabinets, because in the early days, it was all WEM gear and PA equipment."

Readers of a certain age will remember that gear by WEM, or Watkins Electric Music, epitomised a certain Sixties

and Seventies bass sound. As Pratt points out, "Roger [Waters, original Pink Floyd bassist] used to use a WEM PA speaker and a WEM bass amp, so the idea that Ashdown and I had was to build something that was a bit like that. It's basically an ABM head, but the EQ is slightly different and it's got a much pokier valve in it, because I never really used to use drive at all, but on this stuff I do. It also has a Taurus input on the back, which I'm actually using!"

I ask him if the Taurus pedal input was built specifically for Saucerful Of Secrets. "Yes, it's for this tour – but it's part of the ethos. The joke is, what's the most prog thing you could have? The cabs are based on the old WEM PA cabinets: each of them has three



10" speakers, with a tweeter on top." That's right – three speakers. "They're concise and punchy, and they work really well, especially now that I'm on in-ears. You always want something that you can really hear."

We move on to his arsenal of basses, and in true prog fashion there are a couple of Rickenbackers in the mix – a 2003 Montezuma and a 2018 Jetglo. Pratt also brings out a 2007 Bill Nash bass, which Nash built especially for him.

As he tells us, "On everything Floyd from '67 to 1970, I play a Rickenbacker bass, and on everything from 1970 onwards, I play a Precision. The year 1970 was when they had their gear stolen in New Orleans, so that's when Roger got his famous black Precision. Mine is an American Professional P-Bass: it's the first new Fender instrument that I've played for years, and it's really great."

He then shows me his pedalboard, although – as you can see from the photos, shot especially for *BP*

while Saucerful Of Secrets were on tour in Europe earlier this year – it's more like a pedal patio, laden with all kinds of weird and wonderful stompsboxes. While he's tap-dancing on these, the show also requires him to sing lead, employ incredible playing technique in different time signatures – and still stay true to the Barrett-era spirit of the band.

No mean feat, we think you'll agree, and when Pratt demonstrates a complex bass-line that doubles up on Taurus pedals, chorus and octave effects at the same time, it sounds beyond epic.

"My previous tech, Mike Clement, had this pedalboard built," he explains, "but I now

have to have this exact amount of pedals – because I have to have a full board!"

Pratt does literally mean a full board; to his right he has Studiologic Taurus pedals, a TC Electronic Alter Ego Vintage Echo, and a Moog Minotaur Bass Synth. Directly in front of him he's got a Chicago Parachute Wah and a Dunlop DVP1 Volume pedal.





Bass: how high
can you go?



What about the infamous early-Floyd delay sounds? He has those covered with a Foxgear Echosex, a Boss DD-500, a TC Electronic Hall Of Fame reverb, a Boss Dimension C DC-2W Chorus and his signature Foxgear Knee Trembler tremolo.

As for drive, that's sorted too, with the Ashdown footswitch to kick in the valve when needed, and a Boss OD-200 to give it more bite. Pratt demonstrates the various effects configurations for us, depending on which classic song from the early Floyd repertoire he's playing, including some impressive cinematic soundscapes.

With all this mayhem going on, pretty much any bassist would need a hell of a lot of compression, as the touring bass players reading this will agree. Pratt has



not one but three compression pedals in tow: these are an Origin Effects Cali 76, his signature Ashdown Macchiato, and a Demeter Compulator at the end of the chain.

All of this is topped off with two octave pedals, a Boss Super Octave OC-3 and a TC Electronic Sub'n'Up. Why, we ask? "Well, it just wouldn't be me without one!" he chuckles.

At this point I'm buzzing – and I can't wait to go and see Saucerful Of Secrets play live. Make sure that you see them if you can: it'll be a bass masterclass that you won't forget in a hurry. ■

Saucerful Of Secrets are touring the USA in 2022.

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