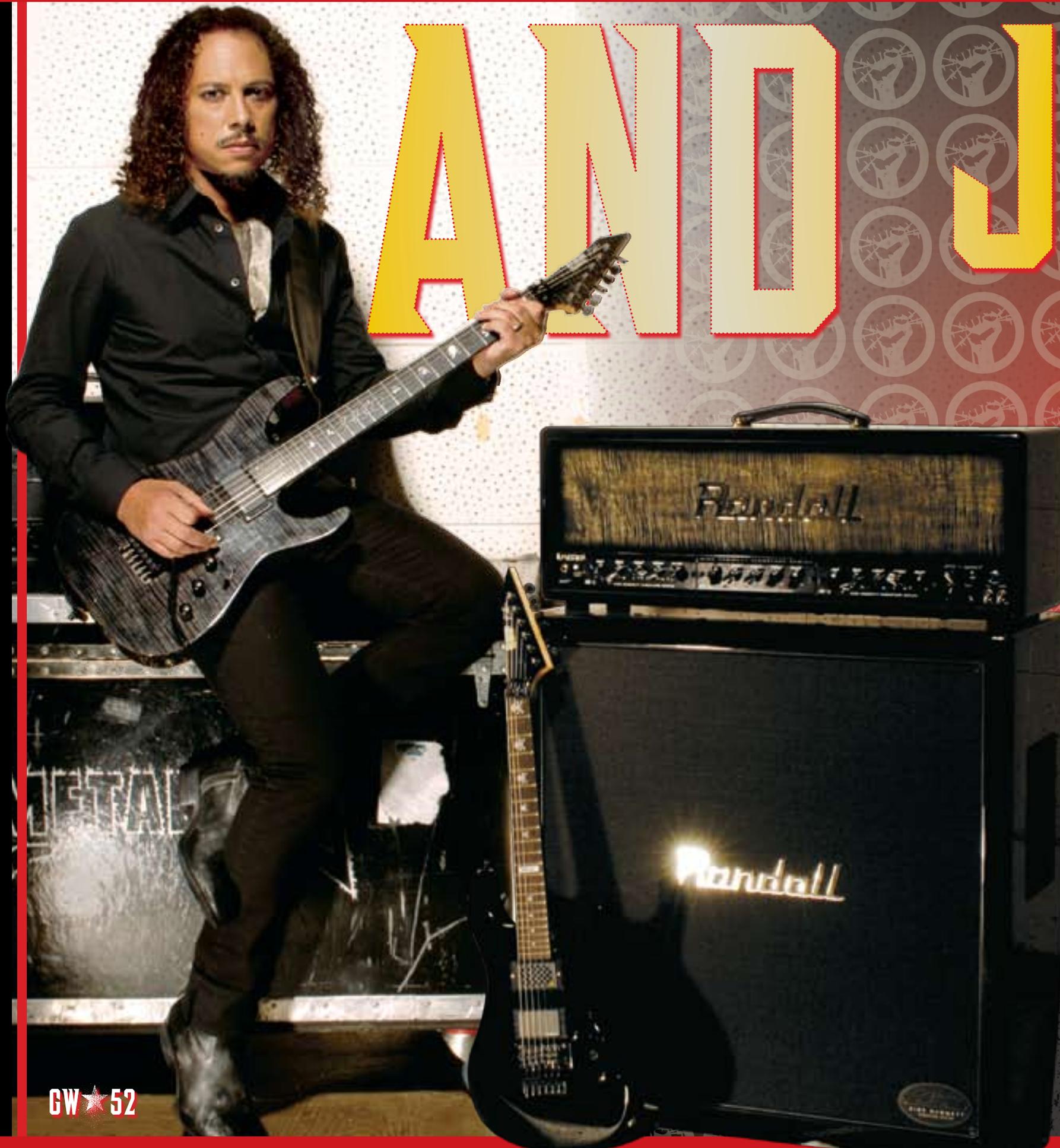


# AND JUSTICE



# FOR ALL



WITH HIS BRAND-NEW SIGNATURE MODEL RANDALL AMPLIFIER, KIRK HAMMETT MAKES THE KEY AMP TONES FROM HIS CAREER AVAILABLE TO GUITARISTS EVERYWHERE. IN THIS *GW* EXCLUSIVE, THE METALLICA AXMAN TELLS HOW RANDALL'S ENGINEERS DID RIGHT BY HIS COLLECTION OF VINTAGE AMPS.

**INSIDE THE BIG RECORDING ROOM AT L.A.'S SOUND CITY STUDIOS, IT LOOKS AS IF A VINTAGE AMP CONVENTION IS IN PROGRESS. NEARLY THE ENTIRE STUDIO FLOOR IS COVERED WITH HIGHLY COVET-ABLE GUITAR AMPLIFICATION GEAR: EVERYTHING FROM AN ULTRARARE, MID-SIXTIES MARSHALL 8x12 "COFFIN" SPEAKER CABINET TO A DUSTY, YET COLORFUL, SELECTION OF SMALL, STRANGE FIFTIES COMBOS. BUT THIS IS NO AMP SHOW, AND IT'S CERTAINLY NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. IT'S A RHYTHM GUITAR TRACKING SESSION FOR THE FORTHCOMING NEW METALLICA ALBUM. YES, IT TAKES A TON OF GEAR TO PRODUCE THAT LEGENDARILY HEAVY METALLICA SOUND. AND NOT JUST ANY GEAR: LEAD GUITAR MONSTER KIRK HAMMETT IS NOTORIOUSLY PICKY ABOUT THE AMPS BEHIND HIS RAGING RIFFS.**



"I'm all about vintage, bro," he says, sipping a celebratory Friday afternoon flute of Veuve Cliquot champagne. In matters of the finest wines and tones alike, Hammett is a man of discernment and style. "I have almost every year Marshall that was ever put out," he elaborates. "I have Kitchen-Marshalls, Parks...I have one of the first Hiwatts, so old that it doesn't even look like a Hiwatt. I'm a big-time fanatic."

But the amp that has Hammett most excited today is not some eminently collectible old eBay treasure; it's his brand-new signature model Randall amplifier. "The ironic thing about this is that the very first amp I had, back in 1978, was a Randall bass amp," he says. "It wasn't great sounding at all, but it was loud and it was cheap. It was a start. And I could get it to feed back. That's all I was interested in."

"And now here I am, 30 years later, back with Randall. I was really kind of nervous when we started; this is the first time I've really done any kind of amp endorsement. I knew that there's a lot of work that goes into it, and I'm really picky anyway. But things have turned out great. This is one amazing amp."

Hammett's signature model is based on a design by amp guru Bruce Egnater. Having originated in Egnater's own boutique amps, the model was then modified to form the Randall Modular Tube System, or MTS, Series. This, in turn, was tweaked to create an amp meticulously dialed in to Kirk's exacting specifications. The design incorporates three separate preamp modules: one for clean tones, one for crunch rhythm sounds and one for super overdriven leads.

"Basically, the modules plug into the main amp head chassis," Hammett explains. "You can pull them out and put in different modules if you want. You can run up to three modules in a head. After talking to the Randall guys, it turns out they can pretty much get any sound that I'm looking for or copy any sound that I need to get



from my setup. I wanted one amp that I could lug around to a friend's house and play jazz and blues for three or four hours and then take the same amp over to Metallica HQ and rehearse with the band and have all my metal tones in there, too. The versatility of this amp is great."

The preamp modules are all tube units with two 12AX7s each and analog circuitry tweaked to suit Kirk's musical needs. The task of tweaking fell to Randall division manager Doug Reynolds, aided by the company's artist relations rep, Dave Karon. The first module that fell into place was the crunch rhythm unit, the KH-2.

"Kirk told us he loved that old Van Halen tone," Reynolds explains, "but he wanted something cleaner and with more pick attack so you could hear individual notes more. We had an existing module that makes the most of mid-to-high-gain sounds. We used the same circuit board layout. Then we just put in different capacitors, resistors and pot[entiometer] values to get the exact sound Kirk was looking for."

"There were a lot of meetings over food and booze," Hammett recalls, "because we'd generally meet at a restaurant. After talking about what I was looking for in an amp, the

Randall guys started sending out modules based on our conversations. I would tell them, 'We need a little more of this or that.' They would send me two or three modules a week, and I would pick the best. That became the basis for the KH-2."

"Once we nailed that preamp," Reynolds continues, "and once Kirk gave us the green light and we found out he was really liking it, we just gave him a little higher-gain version of that for his lead module, the KH-3. So the KH-2 and KH-3 are roughly the same circuit. The same parts make up the tone circuit. But the KH-3 has an additional gain



**CHECK OUT THIS MONTH'S CD-ROM TO SEE VIDEO OF KIRK AND HIS NEW RANDALL AMP!**

stage, which gives it a little bit more compression and a little fatter tone, because it's so much higher gain than the rhythm module."

As for the clean-tone module, the KH-1, it's based on a very special old Fender in Kirk's possession (more on this below). "The KH-1 is similar to our Randall MTS blackface module," Reynolds says. "But it's voiced a little cleaner, because the active pickups that the guys in Metallica use have a little more output to them. So we tried to pad the input a bit, so the module will stay nice and clean even at higher volumes. You can play pretty hard on it without distorting."

The three modules fit into an amp head that has three more 12AX7s that serve as a first amplification stage before the signal hits the modules. The 100-watt power amp stage is fueled by four 6L6 tubes: Kirk's choice: There are two straight-front 4x12 cabinet options. One combines two Celestion vintage 30s with two 75-watt Celestion G-12T75s. The other cabinet option is loaded with four 100-watt speakers that Randall codeveloped with Celestion.

"The 75/30 cab has about 260 watts of RMS power-handling capability," Reynolds says, "whereas the cabinet with four 100s is about 400 watts. So it holds a lot more power and a lot more low end, which Kirk really likes. This cabinet can produce more of the low-end thump that he was looking for."

There's also a limited-edition model of the amp, fully pimped with chrome hardware and solid maple cabinetry done in a blackburst finish that matches Kirk's 20th Anniversary signature model ESP guitar, released earlier this year. "It's a great look," Hammett says, "I'm really proud of how these modules and amps have turned out. There are a lot of great features. You can adjust the tube bias by yourself, which is a cool thing. There are two effect loops—series and parallel—and it's set up for MIDI switching."

The advent of Hammett's signature model Randall amp coincided neatly with the birth of Metallica's forthcoming new album, their first studio recording since 2003's *St. Anger* (see sidebar on page 58). It is also their first project with überproducer and music-biz "guru" Rick Rubin (Slayer, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Tom Petty, Danzig, AC/DC).

"In comparison with *St. Anger*, this album is a lot more riffy, a lot more dynamic, a lot tighter in arrangement and a lot more to the point," Hammett says. "It's more traditional Metallica. And there are a lot more guitar solos on it, I have to say. One song cycles through so many changes, it feels like I'm soloing for a full minute."

Hammett and the band had completed tracking the drums and were focused on recording rhythm guitar and bass tracks when *Guitar World* caught up with the guitarist. The album was still very much in the formative stages, with goofy working titles like "Casper" and "Grass Cow" still in place for most of the tracks. But when the final project is released, you can be sure that Kirk's new Randall amp will be in the mix.

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**GUITAR WORLD** What was the genesis of your collaboration with Randall on your new signature model amp?

**KIRK HAMMETT** It goes back at least two or three years. I was hanging out with [*Anthrax guitarist*] Scott Ian. We've known each other a long time; we go back to 1983. And it was Scott, ironically enough, who turned me on to ESP 20 years ago, and they make my signature model





Hammett's signature head has a slight bass boost compared to Randall's stock RM100 model.

guitar. So Scott and I were joking around one night, playing acoustic guitar in my backyard in Hawaii. And I said to him, "How's your guitar sound these days?" He thought I was joking around, but when he realized I wasn't, he said, "Well, I'm on these Randall amps now." And I said, "Randall?" 'Cause when I think of amps I tend to think more of the classics like Marshall, Fender, Boogie and Hiwatt. But apparently Scott was jamming with Dimebag a few years back, and he plugged into one of Dime's spare Randalls and instantly got a sound that was an improvement on his normal sound.

I'm always searching for new sounds. I love my Boogies. They totally deliver what I'm looking for. But I use my Boogies in my rack, and it's hard for me to just haul my rack anywhere. So I thought, Well, I'll check out these Randalls. Scott put me in touch with the Randall guy, Dave Karon, and Dave instantly sent a bunch of Randalls down to the studio. I plugged into one and I was amazed at how much power and response

it had. It seemed ideal because, over the years, I've been slowly adding midrange to my sound—getting less scooped, more filled out. I have a tendency to blend amps, too, and the Randall blended really well with my rack and with this other Marshall that I had. I was just completely blown away.

**GW** So what was your initial brief to the Randall guys? What did you tell them you wanted?

**HAMMETT** I told them I was looking for a sound that had a lot of midrange thud. And then what happened is Doug Reynolds and the Randall technicians showed up with all these scopes, meters and other test equipment. They analyze the tonal spectrum of any amps you have that you like, and they figure out how to recreate it. I'm very fussy about midrange. You know how midrange can sometimes soften and muddy the attack? Well, the midrange on these modules don't do that at all. And you also have the option of just rolling out all the midrange on the



Controls and test points let you adjust the bias for each of the head's 6L6 power tubes.

KH-2 module in particular and it sounds really scooped. And when you turn down the volume on your guitar, it cleans up really well.

**GW** I noticed the controls on the module, which are written in your handwriting, right? And there's of course high, mid and low.

**HAMMETT** Yeah, they're in my handwriting. And I kept telling the Randall guys, "The less knobs the better. So make those knobs really count." So the sweeps on the knobs are really super sensitive, especially between three and five o'clock. But yes, it's just your standard bass, treble, mid and volume controls. I get intimidated when I see amps with 32 knobs and all these push-pull buttons. I like simplicity. I have a short attention span.

There's also a knob for the two effect loops on the back. And on the main amp chassis, to the far right of the modules, there are two controls: presence and density. The presence control does what all presence controls do on amps, but density dials in more low end. And what that does in conjunction with the midrange is add a little more low mid

to the sound, which is really the midrange I'm looking for: the low mids rather than the mid or high mids. And those two knobs, density and presence, work in conjunction with every single module.

**GW** And the speaker cabinets can really handle all the low end, apparently.

**HAMMETT** Definitely. In Metallica, we've used Celestion Vintage 30s in all our cabinets ever since 1988 or '89. But the addition of those 75-watt Celestions has given me more of that midrange punch without having to dial too much into the actual tone on the amp. And the cabinets with those four 100-watt Celestions are super, super loud, but super tight. You can really push the cabinet. You know how certain amps don't sound good until you turn them up to a certain volume and both the amp and cabinet start to work hard? Well, these amps go to 11. And because they're 100-watt speakers, the low end is tight, not farty. It doesn't sound like the cabinet's about to fall apart. *(continued on page 62)*

(continued from page 57) I hate that squeakiness certain cabinets get when you turn them up.

**GW** Are you just as obsessive about clean tones?

**HAMMETT** Of course! The clean module, the KH-1, is based on my very favorite Fender amp that I own. It's this Fender Twin from 1959. I got it as a fluke as part of a package deal—a bunch of Fender and Marshall amps that I bought from this one guy. First of all, I was blown away by the sound of this amp: super punchy, really good for jazz and blues—a really warm sound. And when you turn it up, it breaks up nicely. It kind of sounds like a Bassman: it has just as much punch but it's not over the top like a Bassman.

When I researched it, I found out that this amp is super rare. There were only four or five of them made. It's Keith Richards' favorite Fender amp. Eric Clapton uses one, too. And it turned out to be my favorite Fender amp as well. So the Randall guys came down, brought their spectrum analyzers and other devices and were able to get a reading on the amp. So the KH-1 module is based on that Fender. It has aspects of a really clean Roland amp, but it has that high end like an old Fender. It really shines when you play a Strat through it, or a jazz box like a [Gibson] Super 400 or even a 335.

**GW** What were your goals with the high-gain lead module, the KH-3?

**HAMMETT** I didn't want that static, crunchy distortion, like when you turn on a fuzz box or something. I wanted more of a genuinely distorted tone, rather than just distortion on top of your tone. And this module does it.

**GW** And you're using your Randall amp on the new Metallica album?

**HAMMETT** Oh yeah. So far I've used the prototype for the KH-1, the initial module I picked out from all the other modules they sent over. At the time, we were calling it the Bone-J, for want of a better name. We didn't know what to call it, so Dave at Randall said, "Oh, let's name it after some champagne." So we called it the Bone-J, which is kind of a play on Bollinger [pronounced Bollin-zhay]. And that module is all over the album. At this point, I'm still doing rhythm guitar tracks. I know I'll be using the other Randall stuff once it's time to get a lead sound.



But, again, I really like blending amps, so not only is there the Randall amp—there's also an early Eighties Marshall, there's my rack which consists of a bunch of Boogie stuff and there's also a Boogie Stiletto that my friend John Marshall modified for me. I'm also using a lot of this one amp I like, a Snyder. It's super clean. It's there just to add a little bit of shimmer to the clean sound.

And I'm playing my old standard ESP guitars that I use on every album, and some vintage guitars here and there.

**GW** So that would include your ESP Skully guitar and all of those?

**HAMMETT** Yeah, the Skully guitar, the Mummy guitar and the 20th Anniversary guitar are all on there. One of my old Les Pauls is on there. But a lot of the older vintage guitars I tend to break out only when it's time for solos. I tend to stick with my older ESPs for rhythm stuff, only because they're workhorses and I know the sound is there.

**GW** Have you continued adding to your vintage guitar and amp collection?

**HAMMETT** Unfortunately, the vintage market isn't as much fun as it used to be. Everything's too expensive. It's being cranked out of musicians' hands. I feel lucky that I'm fortunate enough still to be able to afford the stuff. But for your regular working musician, getting just an old Strat these days is crazy.

**GW** It's the new economy of global greed. There's the rich and then there's the ultra-insanely-obscenely rich. And unfortunately that's mainly CEOs. It used to be rock stars.

**HAMMETT** Yeah, and what bothers me is that a lot of these guys put these guitars up on walls and in warehouses. My thinking is that this stuff was built to be played. Built to make music on and not be put on



The KH-1 module is based on the clean tone from Hammett's 1959 Fender Twin.

a pedestal. I have a vintage Les Paul Standard. I love the thing to death, but I also play the hell out of it. I think that ultimately the more you play a guitar the better it sounds over the years. I just wish that this stuff was more accessible to your standard working musicians. I just saw an article in a British guitar magazine about Keith Richards' sunburst Les Paul that he had in the mid Sixties. The going price for it is now something like two million dollars. That's what a Stradivarius goes for, isn't it? Has the electric guitar finally reached that status? That apogee? It's crazy to hear about.

**GW** The positive side is that it validates rock as an art form [no wonder rock is dead—GW Ed.]. It's an acknowledgement that, okay, these instruments are just as important as the instruments that created Mozart and Beethoven's music.

**HAMMETT** That's certainly true. I see the electric guitar as one of the great modern American inventions that totally changed popular culture. And it is thoroughly an American invention, just as American as baseball and apple pie. In my mind, it's such a wonderful thing. It continues to make a big impact on popular culture. It changes so many people's lives in so many ways. I just owe so much to the electric guitar. It makes me misty eyed. And I'm really aware of the next generation of guitar players, how influential young people are. These kids who are learning guitar right now are the music of the next five, 10, 20 years. And I'm always waiting for that next Jimi Hendrix or that next Van Halen.

**GW** Seems like it's been a while, a long time between drinks.

**HAMMETT** Well, Eddie Van Halen really was one in a million, like



KH-2 preamp module (above left) achieves Hammett's early Metallica sound, from *Kill 'Em All* to *Master of Puppets*. The KH-3 (above right) produces his high-gain tones from *St. Anger*.

Hendrix was before him and Django Reinhardt was before him, and Beethoven, Bach and Mozart before them. It's just astounding to see.

**GW** Is there anyone since Van Halen who you'd put in that category?

**HAMMETT** I'd definitely put Yngwie in that category, although Yngwie has a completely different thing going altogether. I would also put somebody like Muddy Waters in that realm, too. And Carlos Santana, John McLaughlin... I could just go on and on.

**GW** In the right hands, a great electric guitar and a great amp are an unbeatable combination. And now you've got your own signature models of both.

**HAMMETT** Having a signature guitar was such a big thing when ESP made their first KH model in 1987. I thought, Oh my God, this means as much to me as putting out an album. Reaching the 20th anniversary of that guitar this year was a milestone for me. And to finally have a signature amp as well really means a lot, too. These initial three modules are just the beginning. Hopefully we'll be able to put out a module or two a year. And I also have an idea of blossoming out and maybe doing some effects with Randall. Maybe we'll do a more effect-based module. The possibilities are endless with the technology they have these days.

But here's the important thing: these amps were designed to be able to appeal to your standard working musician, from the total professional who's playing arenas way down to the kid who's first starting out on a cheap guitar and a practice amp. I love practice amps. I'm really aware of the fact that if there's a Kirk Hammett practice amp out there and kids can buy it at an affordable price, plug into it and get a sound like mine instantly, it will help them on the road to becoming musicians or expressing themselves in a musical way. If that happens, I feel like I've done my job. ✨