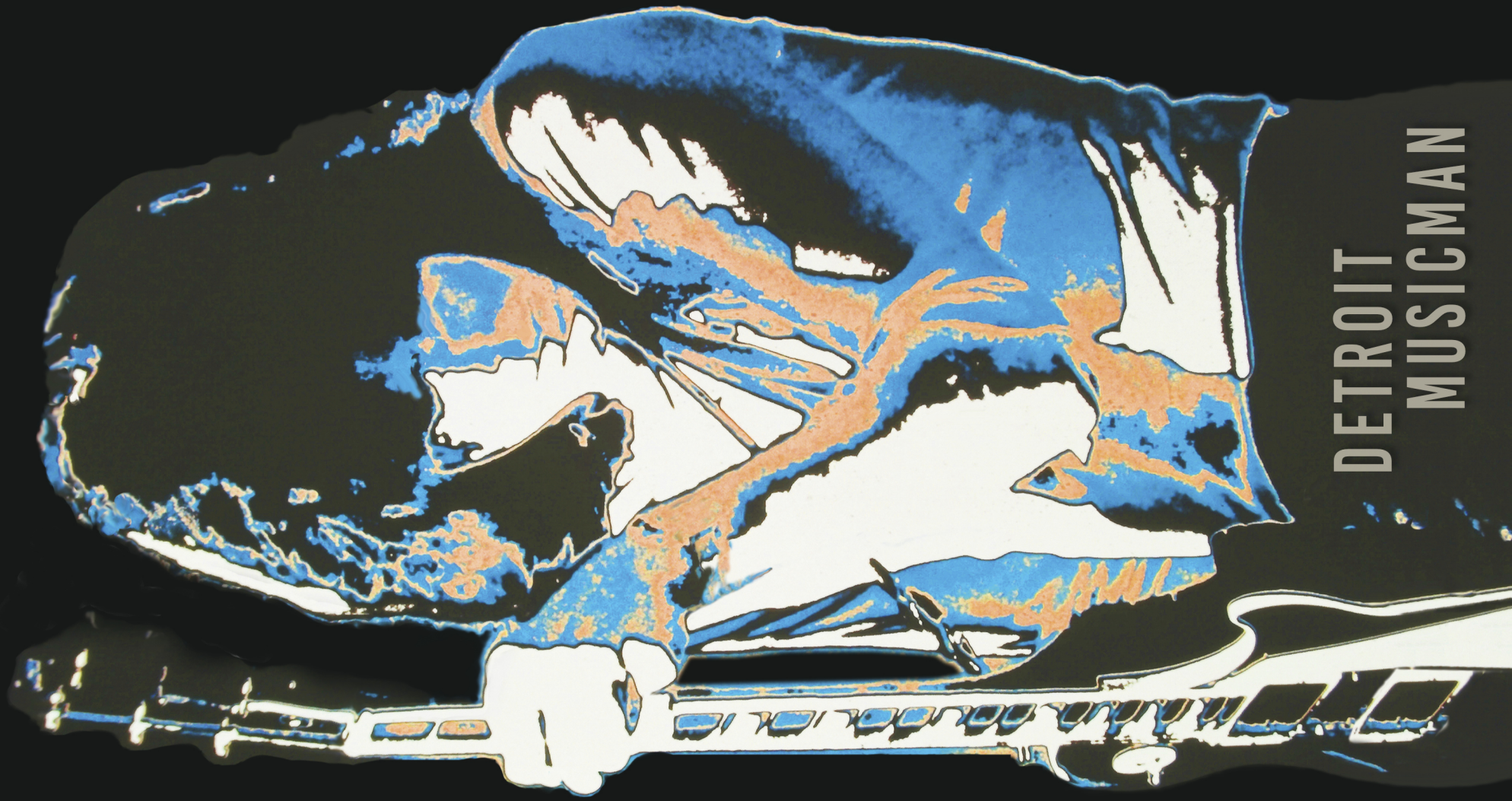
MOMENTS

GARY SPANIOLA



DETROIT MUSICMAN

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Written by: Gary Spaniola

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BSA • Cobo Hall

What: Gary, My Amp's Broken!
Where: Detroit, Michigan
When: Fall 1982



Backstage Cobo Hall - Detroit, MI
Rich Nelson • Bill Pilipchuk • Tim Marko • Gary Spaniola • Dave Gersztyn

Everyone in Bitter Sweet Alley grew up going to concerts at Cobo Hall. We would go there to absorb the musical magic of our icons, such as Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, The Who, and so many others. I remember sitting in the audience, staring at the stage, thinking how cool it would be to hit a guitar chord and hear it blast out of the wall of speakers towered high on each side of the stage. I imagined looking out from the stage into the audience and seeing thousands of lighters illuminating the arena. We were all dreamers. It was part of what kept us going, something we all fantasized about, and on this day, one of our dreams was about to come true.

After countless hours of practicing and thousands of shows, Bitter Sweet Alley was driving south on I-75 heading to Cobo Hall. This time we weren't going there to watch another band perform; we were going there to stand on the same stage that so many of our musical giants have graced!

We pulled into the back entrance at Cobo Arena and were escorted to our very own dressing room. I tried to keep the 10-year-old guitar player that still lives inside me from screaming with joy, but that was a losing battle.

From backstage, you could hear the echo of the sound check from the empty arena. A couple of us walked out to the side of the stage to see people starting to fill the hall.

I then went backstage to try to keep my nerves under control. I remember needlessly tuning my guitar an extra three or four times. I could hear Tim tapping his drumsticks on a vinyl chair seat. Dave was checking to make sure his hair was standing up just right. We had done this thousands of times before, but not on the stage of Cobo Hall.



Gary and Dave tuning backstage, while watching the Detroit Lions lose... again!

The stage manager walked in to announce, "You guys are going on in five."

Strangely, the room became silent. We just looked at each other. No one said a word. The moment had arrived. We headed to the side of the stage to wait for the stage manager to give us our cue. This was something we'd done many times. You walk out, plug in your guitar, turn on your amp, check the microphone height… *I got this!*



Royal Oak Music Theater • Bill Pilipchuk • Dave Gersztyn • Gary Spaniola • Tim Marko • Rich Nelson

Standing on the stage, I witnessed a sea of people and heard the roar that defines why so many legendary rock stars are still playing today. It's one of the most powerful drugs any human can experience. The moment was surreal.

Just as I was etching this gift into my memory, my lifelong buddy, Dave Gersztyn, the guy who started this dream with me when we were just 12 years old - the guy who lives life burning high-octane, the guy who I often wonder if he truly sleeps, ran up to me frantically screaming… "Oh my God!!! Gary, my amp's broken!"

I was ready to go into panic mode with Dave. I immediately started thinking, *could it be the cords? Where can we get another amplifier? We aren't gonna have enough time!*

As I glanced down at Dave's guitar, I slowly raised my head to look him right in the eyes and said, "Dave, you have to plug in your guitar."

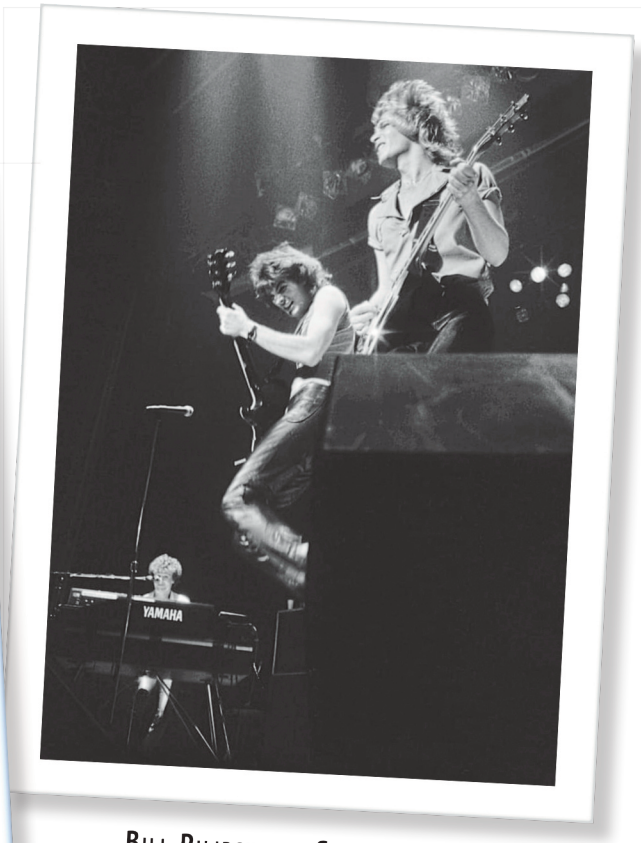
He looked at his guitar, fluffed his hair, and replied, "Oh yeah. Thanks, man!"

He ran back to plug in his guitar.

I never told Dave, but that mishap was one of the greatest moments I have ever had on stage. Dave brought me back to reality just for a moment. It was long enough to solidify where I was and who I was with.



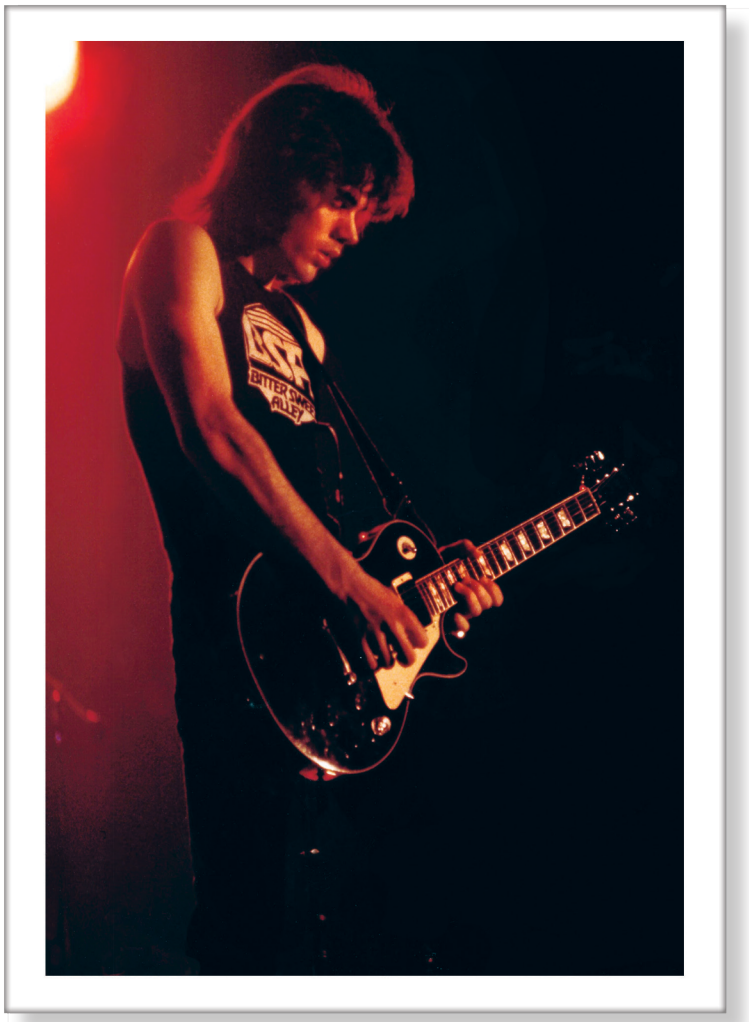
Poor Dave!



Bill Pilipchuk • Gary Spaniola
Dave Gersztyn

The event was everything and even more than I could have imagined. The highlight for me was our final song, "Time to Move," the song Detroit radio proclaimed as the song of 1982. It's a song that I start off with a guitar riff, all by myself.

The stage was black. I heard the crowd screaming, waiting for the next song. As I walked to the edge of the stage, ready to start playing the guitar riff for "Time to Move," I paused for a moment. My mind flooded with memories from many years ago: sitting in the audience, wondering what it would be like to hit a guitar chord on the same stage that Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, and so many others have done. Well, this was my moment! As the spotlight illuminated me, I gathered the 10-year-old boy in my head, the one who sat on the edge of his bed wondering how to tune a guitar. I said, "Hold on, here we go!"



Me and my trusty Black Les Paul

It was truly mind-blowing! Playing a Les Paul through a vintage Marshall stack, mic'd through a tower-high wall of speakers at Detroit's Cobo Hall feels like you're flying a 747, with one exception… you're standing on top of it.

With so many experiences in a single night, it took some time to unpack. I will end by trying to put things in perspective (as I always try to do). I understand I'm no superstar. I have more ambition than talent, and thousands of people have played on stages in front of much larger crowds. However, I have learned it's not about the crowd or the lights. It's about achieving a dream with good friends who have pursued that dream alongside you for many years. Such an amazing gift to be given! I thank the Lord for every turn!

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