



Joe Gooch

Takin' It To 'Em With Ten Years After

To some, it would be intimidating to jump into guitarist/vocalist position in a legendary rock band. But not to Joe Gooch, who for several years has proven his mettle onstage and in the studio with Ten Years After.

Growing up on the border of England and Wales, Gooch was influenced by Jimi Hendrix, Cream, Led Zeppelin, and Frank Zappa.

"My parents were big on jazz, so I listened to a lot of Stefane Grappelli," he said. "But I also listened to older blues records. And Hendrix really turned me on to the guitar when I was in my early teens.

"I played in bands all through school," he added. "And played whenever and with whoever I could; the same old story. But I only ever worked semi-professionally – not in any 'name' bands, and I kind of got lucky with the Ten Years After thing."

Gooch's affiliation with the band began in 2002, when he got wind of a slot opening up with the legendary band made up of Leo Lyons (bass), Ric Lee (drums) and Chick Churchill (keyboards). Original guitarist Alvin Lee had opted to not participate in a reunion tour with the band.

"My first communication was with Ric," said Gooch. "I heard through a friend that they were looking for someone. I sent a CD to Ric, but I didn't think anything would come of it. Then he called me because he liked what he heard. He'd played it over the phone to Leo, who also liked the sound of it. And it moved on from there; it was quite a quick thing. I rehearsed with the guys, and within a few weeks after sending off that CD, I was gigging with them."

Gooch's initial gigs with Ten Years After didn't necessarily assure his permanent employment as the guitarist/vocalist, however. "They had their reservations, and they were basically trying me out – even through some live

gigs in Germany – to see how it went. I had to listen to a lot of Ten Years After material pretty quickly, but I wasn't trying to mimic Alvin, with a few exceptions like the intro to 'I'm Going Home'. I kind of interpreted the material in my own way, and they liked that because it had a kind of freshness to it. And the audiences were blown away by what they heard."

His compatibility with Ten Years After has at least a little to do with his love of improvisation.

"I always liked jamming, just to see where things went," he said. "Getting into a groove, and I think that's why it works in this band."

As for guitars, Gooch recounted "I've always liked Fender, and my first guitar was a Fender Squire Strat. I've tried

other styles of guitars, but they've never really worked out. I don't actually have any vintage Strats, but I would like to have a '60s model, of course; they're beautiful.

"But I'm playing a Fender-style guitar that was made for me by a guy from Munich who makes maybe 10 instruments a year,"

the guitarist continued. "The body is made from 25-year-old swamp ash, from a violin manufacturer. It's got a great tone – bright and glassy – but it can also get a warm sound. I was lucky enough to meet the guy when we were playing a venue that has a capacity of



maybe 300. We've played there a few times, and whenever we're in town, he brings down some of the most recent guitars he's made. I've only got one of his guitars. It's got Kinman single-coil pickups. They're an Australian brand. And I've found that I get a better tone when I keep the bridge bolted down."

Pictures in the 2005 Ten Years After live double CD, *Roadworks*, show Gooch with an early-'90s U.S.-made Fender Strat, but that instrument was stolen in France. He also uses a Mexican-made Nashville Telecaster (with a third pickup), explaining, "There are some elements of country in some of my playing, and I like that twang you get from a Telecaster, but you can get some Strat tones with that single-coil in the middle; it's quite a versatile instrument." He also uses a Takamine acoustic onstage, which can be heard on the intro to "I'd Love To Change the World."

Amp-wise, Gooch said, "Basically, I use Marshall JCMs with EL34 valves, but I've experimented with things like Fender DeVilles, which are great amps. But I've found some Fenders that were a little sloppy for me on the low-end. I like the Marshall/Strat combination."

Gooch's tally with Ten Years After to date includes two live albums, *One Night Jammed* (an early "official bootleg" to reintroduce the band) and *Roadworks*, plus a studio album, *Now*. The live material on *Roadworks* showcases TYA classics done, as Gooch noted, in a modern interpretation. In particular, the old Blues Project chestnut, "I Can't Keep From Crying, Sometimes" is a highly listenable riff fest, especially since a 10-minute segment of it is billed separately as "Jammin' On One Chord."

Interestingly, *Roadworks* opens with "King of the Blues," one of four modern tracks found in studio form on *Now*, which also dates from '05. Gooch uses the track to display his guitar prowess in the studio, which is just as potent as in concert, as he pulls off fingerpicking, hammer-ons, and Steve Morse-type rapid-fire flatpicking, all with ease.

Many of the songs on *Now* were co-written by Gooch and other TYA members – another indication that he has settled into the gig. Moreover, Chick Churchill's liner notes offer a chronology of how the new incarnation of Ten Years After evolved, including "face-to-face" recording in the studio.

"Joe is a hard task master," Churchill writes. "But his youth and creativity kicked us into the 21st century."

Ten Years After continues to tour Europe, and was slated to bring their classic music to the U.S. in March of 2006, for a seven-gig promotional tour.

Gooch plans to keep working hard with his unexpected musical assignment, but it's obvious he is relishing his dream-come-true gig.

"Sometimes I have to pinch myself!" he says with a chuckle. – **Willie G. Moseley**