

Peter Frampton,
1977



PERFORMER

PETER FRAMPTON

HIS PHENOMENAL SUCCESS WITH *COMES ALIVE!* IS ONLY ONE ASPECT OF THIS SUPERB GUITARIST'S SIX-DECADE CAREER.

BY SCOTT B. BOMAR

It was like Peter was strapped to the nose cone of a rocket," Cameron Crowe once said of the dizzying success of the 1976 double live album *Frampton Comes Alive!* "They shot him out into space, he landed on the moon, he got off, and there was nobody else there." Indeed, Peter Frampton blazed a new path. The album spent ten weeks at the top of the charts, earned a Grammy nomination for Album of the Year, and became the best-selling live album of all time up to that point – eventually surpassing more than eight million copies in America alone. The singles "Show Me the Way" and "Do You Feel Like We Do" hit the Top Ten, with "Baby, I Love Your Way" at Number Twelve. With his flowing locks and boyish good looks, Frampton took over the world as an instant arena-rock guitar god. And a reluctant sex symbol. He rode the waves of the aftermath of his mid-1970s success and remains, nearly fifty years later, a journeyman musician at his core.

Born in 1950 and growing up in South London, Peter discovered a banjo in his grandmother's attic as a child. "My dad tuned it up and played a couple of songs on it," he recalls. "I said, 'I want to learn how to do that!'" The following Christmas, he received his first guitar. "From the time I was 9 years old, all I wanted to be was the Shadows' guitarist Hank Marvin," Peter says. He soon grew to love his father's Django Reinhardt records as well: "The one thing Hank and Django had in common

was that they could both play the hell out of a melody. They could pour their heart out with a single note, and that became a template for me. The highest possible compliment is when someone tells me they can sing my guitar solos."

It was at Bromley Technical High School that Frampton got to know David Bowie. "At the first lunchtime," Peter says, "I made a beeline for Dave." The pair bonded over a shared love of Buddy Holly and spent their lunch breaks jamming on their guitars. Soon, at around age 12, Peter formed a group called the Truebeats and began playing gigs.

At 14, Peter was recruited into the Preachers by Tony Chapman, who had been the original drummer for the Rolling Stones. Bill Wyman produced the Preachers' Stax-influenced single called "Hole in My Soul," released by Columbia in the U.K. in August 1965. Wyman then recruited Peter to play on other recording sessions and took him to local clubs. "I'm way underage and Bill's returning me home way too late," Frampton says. "My mom wasn't thrilled!" But Peter was preparing for his career. "It was kind of like an apprenticeship," he wrote in his memoir. "I was learning as I went."

Peter was then recruited as a guitarist for the Herd. The band's handlers thought his good looks would be a selling point for teen girls. They were proven right when "From the Underworld" reached the Top Ten on



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Hitting the road, 1971; the
Herd: Frampton, Gary Taylor,
Andrew Steele, and Andy Bown
(from left), 1967; onstage with
Humble Pie, 1970.



the U.K. charts in 1967 and “I Don’t Want Our Loving to Die” reached the Top Five the following year. But his unwanted role as a teen idol contributed to tension in the band, and the group eventually unraveled. “I got pushed out front because of the cute factor,” he says.

After meeting the Small Faces’ Steve Marriott at a recording session, the pair formed Humble Pie. It was then that Peter synthesized all the influences he’d been soaking up over the previous few years, including what he’d observed during the Herd’s time touring with the Who, the Kinks, and the Hollies, as well as the melodic jazz influences of Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery. “I woke up one morning,” he wrote in his memoir, “went to a rehearsal, played a gig with Humble Pie, and came off and said to myself, ‘Wow, that’s me now. I can feel it, I’ve invented me, by listening to the world.’”

Initially, Humble Pie covered wide musical ground, from folk-influenced acoustic songs to hard-edged rockers. On their first two studio albums, however, producer Andy Johns focused the group on their rock impulses. Their breakthrough came with the 1971 live LP *Performance Rockin’ the Fillmore*, which was certified gold. By then, Frampton had walked away. “I was feeling restricted in the band, creatively,” he confesses. “Humble Pie was the best band I could have ever been in. It was just time for me to start my own.”

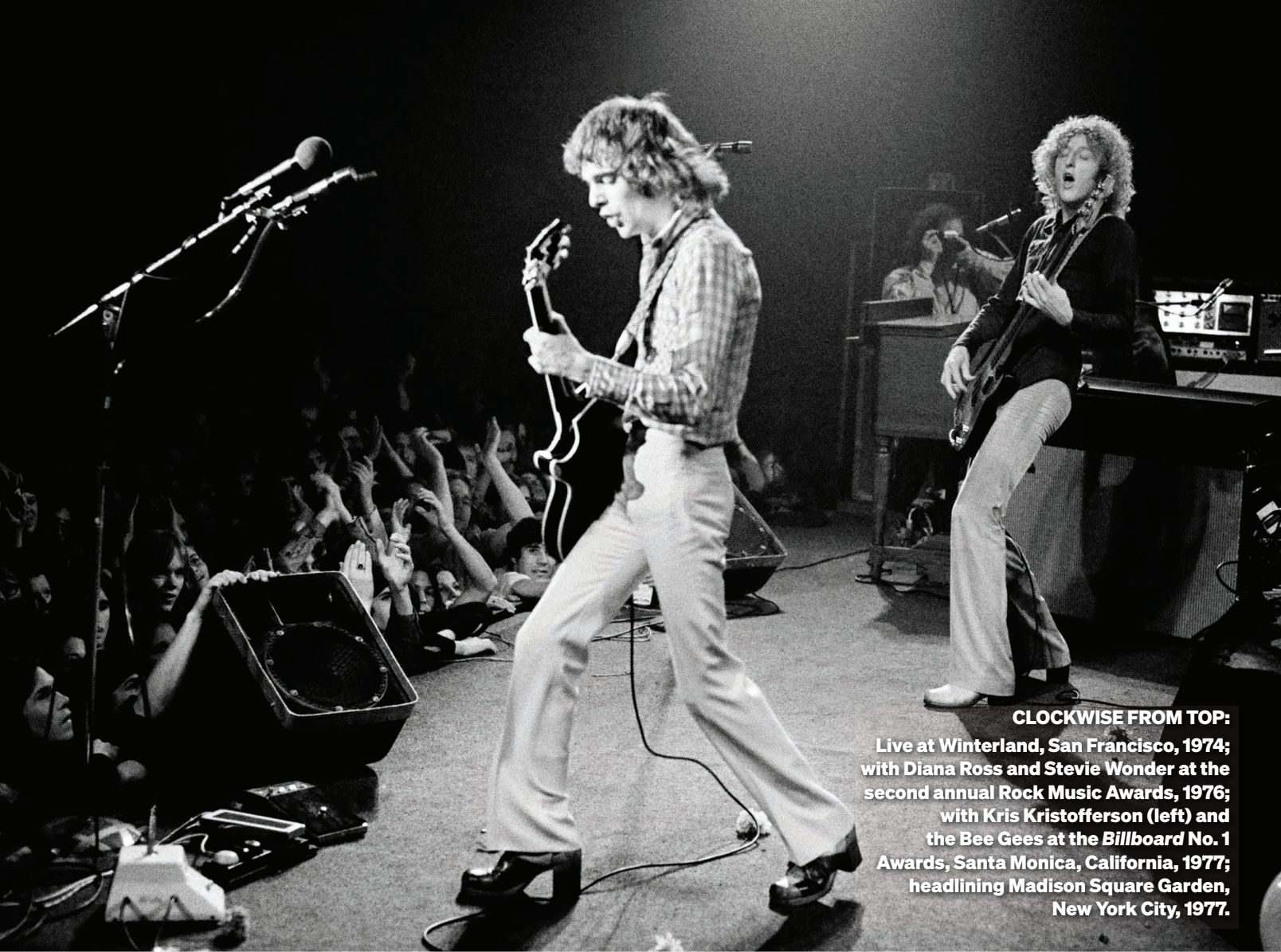
Frampton’s debut solo album was released in 1972. “Recording *Wind of Change* was exactly as I’d hoped it would be,” he recalls. “I could do whatever kind of mu-

sic I wanted.” He followed it up with *Frampton’s Camel* in 1973 and *Somethin’s Happening* in 1974. For the next effort, to be titled *Frampton*, he escaped to the Bahamas for a songwriting retreat that produced “Show Me the Way” and “Baby, I Love Your Way” on the same day.

Recorded in 1975 during the tour supporting the *Frampton* album, *Comes Alive!* included Humble Pie’s “Shine On” and a few songs from each of his four solo albums. One of the highlights was the use of the “talk box,” which became a signature of Frampton’s style. He’d been introduced to the device by pedal steel guitarist Pete Drake when they were working together on George Harrison’s *All Things Must Pass* sessions. “It was a humorous way to communicate with the audience,” Peter wrote of the distinctive effect. “It’s very funny.”

“My theory,” Peter says regarding the album’s success, “is that, by the time we got to San Francisco promoting the *Frampton* record in 1975, we’d taken all those songs from those early albums and made them something much more powerful than what was on the original record. Each one of the songs on the live albums is like a best-of performance of the best songs I’d written over the last six years.

“The whole thing was surreal,” he explains. “I was just 26 years old. I didn’t want to be the biggest of anything because I knew the pressure brought with it is enormous. The thought of how to follow it up was absolutely daunting.” On top of the creative pressure, Peter was plagued by image problems. He felt manipulated into



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Live at Winterland, San Francisco, 1974;
with Diana Ross and Stevie Wonder at the
second annual Rock Music Awards, 1976;
with Kris Kristofferson (left) and
the Bee Gees at the *Billboard* No. 1
Awards, Santa Monica, California, 1977;
headlining Madison Square Garden,
New York City, 1977.



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”



Defying gravity, Oakland,
California, 1976

agreeing to a shirtless photo that was, much to his horror, used for a *Rolling Stone* cover story that dubbed him “the pretty power rocker.” While the title track to his follow-up album, *I’m in You*, became his biggest single to date, Frampton was dissatisfied with the rest of the LP and was again frustrated by his visual image on the cover. “In ’77, I went to England to tour the album,” Peter remembers, “and when I arrived, the Sex Pistols were on the front page of all the music papers. And here I am in my satins and my Little Lord Fauntleroy outfit. Things had drastically changed.”

Frampton signed on to appear in the 1978 *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* film alongside the Bee Gees. By the time it premiered to widespread critical disdain, he was in the hospital recuperating from a near-fatal car accident. The missteps led him deeper into substance abuse. “The early Eighties were not great

for me,” he admits. “I got dropped from the label and it took me a while to even start writing because I was so demoralized from what was happening.”

Things turned around when David Bowie recruited him as a guitarist for his *Never Let Down* album and subsequent tour in 1987. “David basically pulled me out of the quicksand, put me on the shore, and said, ‘Now you can start again,’” Frampton explains. “It was such a gift.”

As the 1990s dawned, he continued to reclaim his identity as a musical force. He released the well-received *Peter Frampton* album in 1994. He toured and recorded with both Bill Wyman’s Rhythm Kings and Ringo Starr’s All-Starr Band. Drawing on his personal expertise, he was heavily involved as a consultant for Cameron Crowe’s 2000 film, *Almost Famous*.

After getting sober in the early 2000s, Frampton earned his first Grammy – for Best Pop Instrumental

Onstage in Oakland, 1977





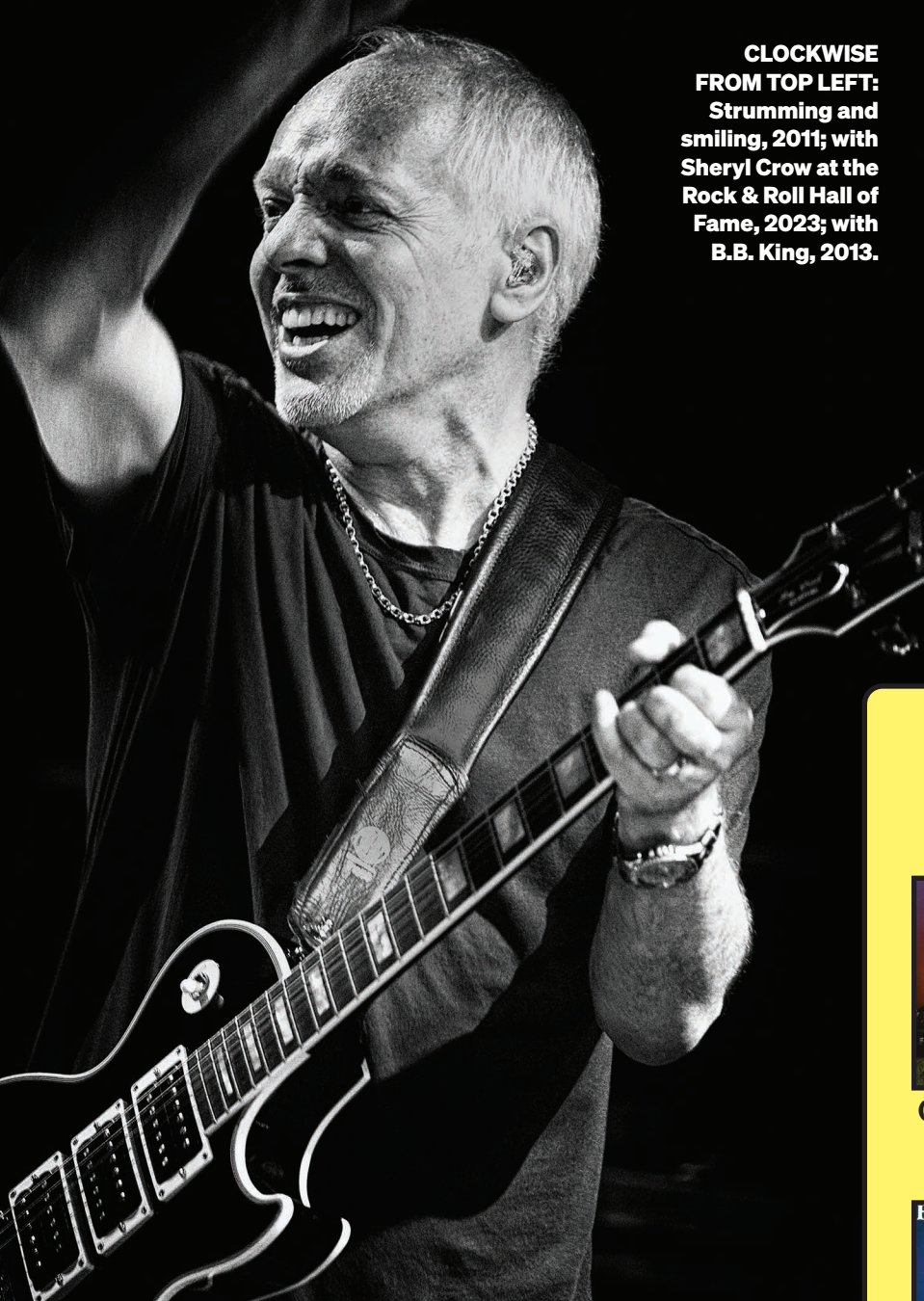
FROM TOP: On tour with David Bowie, 1987; recording with Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts (hidden), London, 2005.



Album – for his critically acclaimed *Fingerprints*. The instrumental project featured guests that included members of Pearl Jam and the Rolling Stones. “Feeling demoted from musician to teen heartthrob always bothered me until the *Fingerprints* album,” Peter wrote. “I was finally able to say goodbye to that feeling.” It was a creative high point that opened the door to additional exploratory projects, including *Hummingbird in a Box*, a 2014 song set commissioned to accompany the Cincin-

nati Ballet, and *All Blues*, a 2019 album that debuted at Number One on *Billboard*’s blues chart.

Despite the progressive muscle disease inclusion body myositis, Peter continues to perform. He is more focused than ever on the importance of emotion that he first learned from Hank and Django. “For me,” he explains, “every note is now the most important note because one day, one of them will be the last note. But, depending on my health, I’m going to play as long



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Strumming and smiling, 2011; with Sheryl Crow at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, 2023; with B.B. King, 2013.



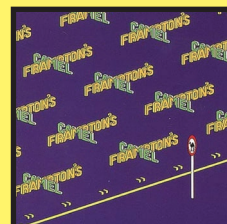
as I can.” He is at peace with the wild ride that was the *Comes Alive!* phenomenon. “Wherever you put the needle down on that record, it makes you smile,” he says. “I don’t know why, but it does. And it doesn’t matter whether you’re 12 years old in 1976 or you’re 12 years old in 2024. It will make you smile.”

Thanks to his decades of excellence as a performer, there are also plenty of smiles as tonight Peter Frampton takes his rightful place in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



**(With Humble Pie)
Rock On**
1971 (A&M)



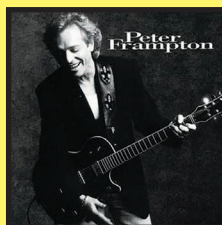
Frampton's Camel
1973 (A&M)



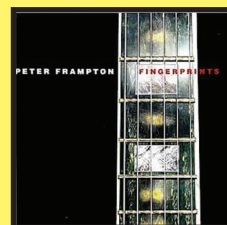
Frampton Comes Alive!
1976 (A&M)



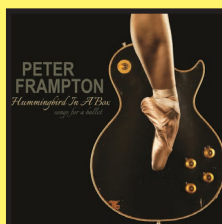
Breaking All the Rules
1981 (A&M)



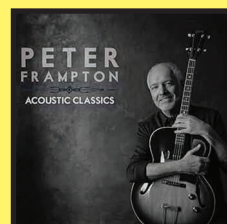
Peter Frampton
1994 (Relativity)



Fingerprints
2006 (A&M)



**Hummingbird in a Box:
Songs for a Ballet**
2014 (Red Music)



Acoustic Classics
2016 (Phenix
Phonograph)