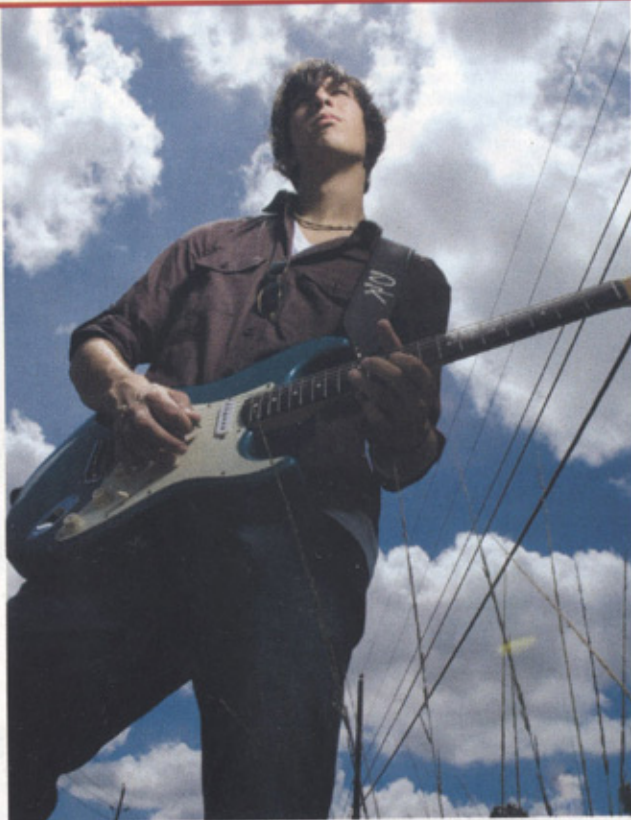


BACK DOOR SLAM

YOUNG MAN BLUES [By TED DROZDOWSKI Photo by JACK THOMPSON]

BACK DOOR SLAM'S Davy Knowles faces a hell of a challenge: walking in the footsteps of Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Mick Taylor, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck—the gods of British blues rock. And he brought it on himself. Nobody asked this 21-year-old from the tiny Isle of Man to be the most ferocious roots guitarist from the U.K. since the Yardbirds and the Bluesbreakers gave a foreign accent to America's über-souful sound.

But there he is: wailing like a natural-born son of the South on his trio's debut, *Roll Away* (Blix Street Records), his hands seemingly covered with the dust Duane Allman wore. Live, he amps it up. Knowles often cocks his wah-wah down deep, like Jimi and Stevie did, to make his Stratocaster sail on an attenuated ribbon of sound a micron away from feedback. Then he tosses off chorus after effortless chorus of gracefully bent, vibrato-dappled strings in epics like his band's "It'll All Come Around" and "Outside Woman Blues," the "Blind Joe" Reynolds blues song once covered by Cream, Clapton's late-Sixties power trio. It helps that Knowles and his school-chums Adam Jones (bass) and Ross Doyle (drums), both also 21, perform with the telepathy common to musicians that grew up playing together.



For Knowles—who has the looks, voice and presence, but not the attitude, of a rising star—it all began a decade ago when he heard Dire Straits' "Sultans of Swing" on a car radio. Then his dad took him to see Robert Cray, whose song "Back Door

Slam" gave the band its name, and he was hooked. "I played a few years on two cheap acoustic guitars, including a nylon-string. Then my dad got me a Peavey Raptor," he says. "From there, it was on."

Knowles attributes his fluency to nearly constant practice. Like young Clapton, however, he plays with the command of a natural who has assimilated and tweaked nearly everything he's heard.

"I love Knopfler's finesse and tone, and when I saw Cray I was taken by the energy and heart of his playing," Knowles recounts. "When next I heard Clapton on the [John Mayall] *Blues Breakers* album, his aggressiveness and rawness really appealed to me, so I jumped ship. From reading interviews with him I found out about Robert Johnson and Buddy Guy. As a player, I've made it my business to learn about the blues backward and forward."

And his business is good. ☐

AXOLOGY

- **GUITARS** '62 Reissue Fender Stratocaster with noiseless SCN Strat pickups, Gibson J-45 acoustic
- **AMPS** Vox AC30, '65 Fender Twin Reverb
- **EFFECTS** Fulltone Distortion Pro, Dunlop Cry Baby
- **STRINGS** Dean Markley (.010-.052)

INQUIRER [By RANDY HARWARD]

TRAVIS STEVER of COHEED AND CAMBRIA

What inspired you to pick up a guitar?

My father had guitars lyin' around the whole time I was growin' up. And he was in a lot of bands, so I was the baby in the corner at rehearsal for years. I didn't even wanna do music until I was around 10 or 11. I would pick up guitars here and there, and one day I picked that thing up and really wanted to learn it.

What was your first guitar?

I don't even know. That's how much of a piece of shit it was. My dad got it at a garage sale for, like, 10 bucks. He said, "If you can actually make this sound good, then you can have another guitar."

I joined a band with my friend Rory, who introduced me to Claudio [Sanchez, singer]. I couldn't play that well—none of us could. I used that piece-of-shit guitar for four months, and then my dad, once he heard that we were actually doin' this, got me a Les Paul Studio Lite for, like, 150 bucks. And Rory and Claudio took it upon themselves to take that 10-dollar guitar and do some Pete Townshend shit with it.

Do you recall your first gig?

It was at school. I played Zepelin's "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You." For an 11- or 12-year-old kid, it really was pretty cool, but the guitar was so out of tune. And the vocal—I was a prepubescent boy doin' Robert Plant, but I did it fairly well. The funny thing was, they didn't have a microphone for me. And when they put one up, it was right up to my crotch. Like it was gonna sing or somethin'.

Ever had an embarrassing onstage moment?

A few years ago, I just got too loaded. My fuckin' mind couldn't catch up to the music and my hands weren't going along with what my mind wanted to do. It was pretty bad, man. I never really drink at



shows anymore. If you're doing something you enjoy, you don't need to mix anything else with it. ☐