

# Triple Rippin'

by Baker Rorick

**T**he triple guitar madness of the Hellecasters is some scary stuff. "But it's even scarier when you're doing it!" says co-member Will Ray. Scarier still is the combination of his ring-slide/stringbender craziness with Jerry Donahue's awesome banjo rolls and behind-

## The Hellecasters ARE BACK!

the-nut bends, and John Jorgenson's Jeff Beck-meets-Django Reinhardt fusion. Even weirder is the fact that this band is something they do in their spare time! And doing it just for fun has brought them greater recognition than their impressive solo credits and regular gigs. In January of '97, Fender also unveiled three new Limited Edition Hellecasters guitars: the Jerry Donahue Stratocaster, John Jorgenson Hellecaster, and Will Ray Jazz-a-caster, which the devil-dog string stranglers used to fiery effect while recording their latest offering of guitar impossibilities, *Hell III: New Axes to Grind*.

*Hell III's* opening salvo is titled "T.W.P.E.L." When asked what the acronym stands for, Ray says, "You'll have to ask John, though he might not tell you. *Hell III* was the race track to try out our new Signature Series guitars. I mainly used my Will Ray Model Jazz-a-caster. It's basically a Tele, with a basswood body finished in gold foil, a rosewood fingerboard and small Strat headstock, with two custom Seymour Duncan Jazzmaster pickups, reverse-wound with ceramic magnets, and a HipShot Will Ray Model B-Bender. My B-Bender's a slimmed down model, pre-drilled with screws on each side of the strap button to absolutely lock her down, 'cause using the strap button only, if you abuse the B-Bender like I do, it just wiggles out of there." He has a mess of other Teles, all modified with different necks or pickups, and added HipShots, and all refretted with Dunlop 6100 or 6150 fret wire, plus three early-'60s Fender Strats, each one left stock. He strings his electrics with GHS Progressives, Boomers, or Super Steels, gauges .010, .012, .016, .024, .032, and .046 or .048. Will offers a string-care tip, saying, "A few years ago we discovered Squeakies. All of us use them. Like little baby wipes for guitar strings, cotton soaked in alcohol. I can keep my strings forever with that stuff. It transformed my life, 'cause when

you've got a lot of guitars it's a pain to be always re-stringing." His picks are Fender Delrin .73 gauge, the big yellow triangles.

On the song "Riddler's Journey," Will plays a "sitar solo" on a bastard Tele with EMG pickups and a B-Bender, plus a Bi-Axe Retrofits Ragamaster, a device that slaps on over the bridge and makes your guitar buzz like a sitar. On that song, says Will, "It was such a joy to be done with the hard parts, I left my solo for last and allowed myself to have fun with it. I used this homemade envelope filter that I got from this judge out here, Charles Horan, who tinkers with electronics on the side. It's really cool and gives the weirdest of sounds; just perfect for that sitar thing. Then I ran it through a compressor and my M-100 amp."

The Rivera M-100 with a 1x12 cabinet—Will's live amp—was used the most on *Hell III*, but he also used a Vox Cambridge, a Matchless Lightning, and even went direct on a few songs. As for effects, he says, "I'm a pedal guy. All the Hellecasters for some reason are pedal guys. We don't like the rack stuff, makes you sound kind of like a weenie, y'know? My BOSS pedalboard contains a BOSS CS-3 Compressor, a new Carl Martin Compressor/Limiter—i.e. Electronics distributes it, really clean, great for direct, lots



PS-2 Pitch Shifter, Ibanez TS-5 Tube Screamer, BOSS DD-2 Digital Delay, and BOSS RV-2 Reverb. I also used a BOSS AW-1 AutoWah on the record, and has a Vox wah-wah as well."

Will's acoustic guitars are an older Sigma DR-28H, a 1950s National flat-top "with a really big neck," and a Carvin AC175 acoustic/electric that's "really fun to play." There's also a Dobro listed on *Hell III*, which is actually an early-'60s Supro Folk Star resonator guitar with a red fiberglass body. He strings them all with GHS White Bronze, either True Lights (.012 to .050) or Extra Lights (.011 to .048).

Jerry Donahue's years of experience and experimentation have given him an incredible depth of knowledge concerning wood, wiring and pickups, resulting in a less-is-more approach to gear. Unlike his cohorts, he's stripped down to just a few perfect, all-purpose tools. "I used my new Limited Edition Strat quite a lot, and my Teles from time to time, too. My ballad 'Almost Dawn' is a good showcase for my new Strat; the whole thing was done on it." The Hellecasters Jerry Donahue Stratocaster looks like a fairly standard, vintage maple-neck, except for the blue finish and blue sparkle pickguard on its basswood body. But looks can be deceiving. There's a Seymour Duncan Tele-voiced bridge pickup with a steel toneplate under the pickguard, a pair of Duncan APS-2 Strat

custom wiring with a 5-way switch, master Volume and Tone controls, and a 2-position rotary switch replacing the middle Tone knob. The rotary accesses two different tone circuits: the A mode is a refined version of standard Strat wiring; the B mode contains Jerry's special, custom-voiced combos developed with Seymour Duncan, as used on Jerry's USA Custom Shop signature Tele. "I've always used Strat pickups for the neck on Teles," Jerry explains. "It's a marriage made in Heaven: Strat neck rules. Tele bridge rules."

Jerry uses custom-gauged Ernie Ball Stainless Steel strings, .010, .012, .017, .024, .032, .042. "There's better string balance that way," he explains. ".009s are too plinky on top, though I like a .042 on the bottom. It's got enough tension so it doesn't flop around, but still allows me to bend a fourth on the low E. I can bend the bottom E, behind the nut, up to an A, but I couldn't do that on a .046 or .048." He uses a flatpick-shaped Herco thumbpick, "Fairly heavy," he notes, so he can use his fingers as well. Ernie Ball Earthwood bronze strings go on his 1954 0-18 and new 000-16 Martin acoustics.

Donahue doesn't use an amp in the studio anymore; he goes direct through his signature model Morley JD10 preamp pedal. "I like the edginess of tubes, but prefer the clarity and distinction of solid-state for my style, with lots of open strings, banjo

mation for tubes to handle and comes out an indistinct blur. Solid-state reproduces all the info clearly, and the JD10 has tube and speaker emulation for added edge, plus warmth and touch sensitivity. I also used a Lexicon PCM 80 Digital Reverb in the studio, especially for that lush sound on 'Almost Dawn'—a quite magnificent sound," he says. Live, Jerry uses his JD10, a Vesta Fire R-1X Digital Reverb, and a Carl Martin Compressor through a Fender Hot Rod DeVille 4x10 amp. "The only other compressor I like is the dbx 160, but it's too fragile to take on the road. It's more of a studio unit."

Multi-instrumentalist John Jorgenson, on the other hand, has way too many toys. He played most of the keyboards on *Hell III*, plus vibes, 6-string basses, banduria, 5-string electric mandolin, and plenty of guitars. His new Fender John Jorgenson Hellecaster was used about half the time. It's a black sparkle, maple body Strat with a rosewood fingerboard and reverse headstock, with three Seymour Duncan custom, split-coil, hum-cancelling pickups, a custom-wired 5-way switch with a push/pull control for 7 different sounds, Volume, Treble and Bass controls, plus a 2-point vibrato and Sperzel locking tuners. Other solidbodies were a '53 Tele, a '62 reissue Tele Custom, and his old G&L John Jorgenson model guitar.

On "Ghosts of 42nd Street," John's rhythm parts were done on an old Gretsch Synchronic archtop, and a c. 1941 Selmer

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## The Specs from Hell!

## Fender's Hellecasters Signature Series



**HELLECASTERS "JERRY DONAHUE" STRATOCASTER**

**Body:** Basswood  
**Neck:** Satin finish, one-piece maple  
**Scale:** 25½" (648 mm)  
**Fretboard:** Maple (7¼" radius/184 mm)  
**Frets:** 21  
**Pickups:** One Seymour Duncan Custom Tele-voiced single-coil (bridge), two Seymour Duncan "APS-2" single-coil (neck and middle)  
**Controls:** Master volume, two-position rotary "A/B" tone selector switch and 5-way pickup selector, vintage-style tremolo bridge with brass saddles  
**Price:** \$1,150



**HELLECASTERS "WILL RAY" JAZZ-A-CASTER**

**Body:** Basswood  
**Neck:** Satin finish maple  
**Scale:** 25½" (648 mm)  
**Fretboard:** Rosewood (7¼" radius/184 mm)  
**Frets:** 22  
**Pickups:** Two Seymour Duncan special designed reversed-wound Jazzmaster pickups  
**Controls:** Master volume, concentric tone knob (for setting each pickup individually), vintage-style tremolo bridge with brass saddles, 4-way pickup selector  
**Price:** \$1,550



**HELLECASTERS "JOHN JORGENSON" STRATOCASTER**

**Body:** Maple  
**Neck:** Maple  
**Scale:** 25½" (648 mm)  
**Fretboard:** Rosewood with gold-sparkle inlays (7¼" radius/184 mm)  
**Frets:** 22  
**Pickups:** Three Seymour Duncan custom "split coil" hum-cancelling pickups  
**Controls:** Master volume, treble and bass (with push/pull feature for a total of seven tone variations), custom two-pivot-point tremolo, 5-way pickup selector  
**Price:** \$1,300



acoustic, with a French Steamer pickup (the type used by Django Reinhardt, similar to a DeArmond) and Savarez Argentine silver-plated copperwound strings was played through an old Gretsch amp with an 8" speaker for his solo.

A vintage Epiphone 6-string bass with added bridge pickup was used for a solo on "Mad Cows At Ease." It's strung with regular .010 gauge guitar strings, but baritone with the low string anywhere from an A to a C# depending on the song. The other 6-string bass used on the record was a Fender Bajo Sexto with "heavier-than-normal" strings tuned down an octave. Both it and his Fender electric 12-string have Tele bodies with binding and were built for him by Fred Stewart at the Fender

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—Jerry Donahue

USA Custom Shop.

John's main stage acoustic is a red, mahogany Takamine FP325SRC(A) cutaway. A 1963 Martin D-18 is high-strung with the octave strings of a Markley light gauge 12-string set, and used on "Riddler's Journey" in a "weird modal tuning with plenty of open B's and D's."

Ernie Ball, Dean Markley, or Vinci strings go on John's electric guitars: .010s on Teles, .009s on Strats and whammy guitars, and usually D'Addario phosphor bronze for acoustics. He uses a Fender medium pick for electrics, though he may choose a lighter or heavier one depending on the song. A thin nylon Mosrite Ventures pick is preferred for high-strung guitar or mandocello, and very thick, real tortoise shell picks for playing his Selmer and mandolin. His live amp is a Matchless John Jorgenson model, used for maybe 90% of the record. An older Matchless SC30 was also used, sometimes with its regular speaker and sometimes with a Vox Blue speaker in a separate Matchless cabinet. A Vox Cambridge Reverb (tube), Vox Royal Guardsman (solid-state), Trace Velocette, and a vintage Oahu with 8" speaker and covered in orange "mother of toilet seat" were also used on *Hell III*.

Jorgenson's live pedal board contains two Ibanez Tube Screamers: "A cheap TS-5, my favorite, and an old TS-808 with a smoother sound. I like both, though I use the TS-5 more, and both together sometimes. Also, an old BOSS Dimension-C chorus/flanger/spatial enhancer, BOSS DD-2 Digital Delay, BOSS RV-2 Reverb, and a Carl Martin compressor. It's the first compressor *pedal* I've really liked. Will copied me on that. You know how it was, 'Hey, look what I got!'... 'Oh, I want one, too!'"

Other toys used on *Hell III* were a Matchless Hot Box and Matchless A/B/Y box. Colorsound Tone Bender and Super Tonebender, old E-H Electric Mistress flanger, and an old Roland 501 Chorus Echo. A Vox Stereo Fuzz/Wah is used on his solo on "Riddler's Journey," and a Vox Repeat Percussion was used on the 6-string bass on "Mist Beyond Delhi." "It's a little box that clamps right on your guitar," explains Jorgenson. The "Nuclear Guitar" backing tracks on "As We Know It" used a combination of an old Roland JP16 and a Quadverb.

Though Jorgenson would detail every combination of instruments, strings, effects, and amplifiers he used on each song, track by track, when I asked him what "T.W.P.P.T." stands for, he said, "I can't tell you. We may have a contest, though, to see what other people come up with." How 'bout "Three Wild 'n' Pugnacious Pickers with Telecasters?" Oh well...we tried.

Write to Camp Hellcaster, P.O. Box 1150, Burbank, CA 91507 for their newsletter that's "Dedicated to the study of Abnormal Guitar Behavior." The trio's web site is [www.hellcasters.com](http://www.hellcasters.com).

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