

# CLASSIC ROCK REVISITED

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## Another Brick in the Wall: An Interview with Dave Kilminster



By Jeb Wright  
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Dave Kilminster, outside of guitarist circles, is far from a household name, yet millions of people have seen him standing atop the wall, playing guitar for Roger Waters on *The Wall – Live* tour over the past few years.

In addition to Waters, Kilminster has also performed with heavyweights John Wetton and Keith Emerson, to name a few. Musicians know how talented Dave is, so he has never had to go long without a gig.

Kilminster has, now, released a solo album titled *Scarlet: The Director's Cut*. The album is something the six string guru is very proud of, as this is all him. He is not playing the hired gun, having to recreate other iconic guitarist's parts. Instead, he is stretching out on his own and concentrating on the musical passages inside of his soul.

In this interview, we discuss *Scarlet*, as well as what it is like to play for Roger Waters, night after night. Read on to discover a long known talent to the music world, as he takes off on a solo flight of his own.

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**Jeb: It is great to see a solo album from you. Before we get into it, my first question has to be what the experience of playing for the Hurricane Sandy benefit was like. What was backstage like? Let me be a fly on the wall.**

Dave: Well firstly, it was an incredible honor to be asked to do it; to be part of such an amazing collection of bands and artists for such a heartfelt and worthy cause. It's a shame that events like that only happen occasionally, and usually due to some disaster, or worldwide catastrophe, but despite the rather daunting 'two billion plus' audience, it was a lot of fun.

As for backstage, I guess everyone imagines this romantic scenario where all the artists are just hanging out with each other, chatting and swapping stories, but, unfortunately, everyone stays in their own dressing rooms and pretty much keeps to themselves, either due to press/photo/interview schedules, or just generally getting ready for the show. Or, in the case of the Rolling Stones, who drove in, played and then drove straight back out again, they were only in the building for about twenty minutes.

**Jeb: *Scarlet* is a great album. You have a very unique way of playing. Why is it called the *Director's Cut*?**

Dave: I was unhappy with the original mix and mastering, so I ended up taking the album to a friend of mine named Jamie Humphries, who helped me to crystallize my vision of how it should sound. I felt like a director that finally had complete control over the whole project, thus, 'The Director's Cut.'

**Jeb: Tell me the inspiration behind the opening song "Silent Scream."**

Dave: Hmm, musically, I'm not really sure where that one came from. It's a heavy funk track with detuned guitars, some Arabic things, mixed up with classical guitars, violins and a whole bunch of other nonsense, but I don't think it sounds like anyone else, so that's very cool.

As for the lyrics, they're autobiographical and fairly self explanatory, although I guess it's for anyone that's ever found themselves in an uncomfortable or difficult situation and, looking back, wishes that they'd spoken out at the time instead of remaining silent.

**Jeb: Same question about "Rain (On Another Planet)."**

Dave: There are a lot of very damaged woman out there, hurt by previous relationships and unpleasant experiences. When that happens, they generally become withdrawn and far more guarded and less trusting. The lyrics are about trying to get close to someone like that; someone that's been hurt in the past and has a metaphorical defensive wall around them as protection.

Musically, again I have no idea where it came from. I was messing around with some open voiced triads, the sort that violinists use, and fell upon the intro. I love the voices at the start, which are essentially singing the same lines as the guitar plays during the verses. I think the solo is one of the best I've ever played.

**Jeb: Talk about the songwriting for "Chance," as I find this to be a great musical moment.**

Dave: Really? That's interesting. I wasn't even sure whether to keep it on the album, as it seems a little incongruous with the rest of the tunes.

It was one of the two tunes, the other being "Static," that I was considering using for what was supposed to be the Keith Emerson Band album. Unfortunately, we never got around to recording that, so I gave it more of a Latin vibe, complete with a 'George Benson-esque' solo in the middle, where I'm singing along for the first few lines. For the end solo, I mixed up a bunch of different influences.

I used to spend so much time teaching and transcribing other players' guitar parts, that I can switch in and out of them fairly easily, so I thought it might be interesting to do something like that on the outro.

The lyrics were written for a friend of mine that was struggling with serious depression and feeling very suicidal. Quite a dark subject matter for such a happy Latin rhythm, but I guess that was the idea, to try and help them through the darkness.

**Jeb: How is approaching an album like this different than approaching music that you have to play with guys like Waters and Emerson?**

Dave: Well, when you're employed you try and keep the boss happy, but as this was my album, I could do anything I liked. The only problem, really, is that I have such eclectic tastes. There could have been pretty much anything on there...a Country tune; bagpipe solos, but I tried to keep it as focused as possible.

**Jeb: All the Pink Floyd tunes you have been playing with Waters must have an effect on your creativity. Would you say that is true?**

Dave: No, I don't think so. I tend to write things that are a lot more funky, heavy and syncopated with big rock choruses. But ask me again after I've recorded my next album.

**Jeb: You are playing more David Gilmour solos these days than Davis is. When you have to recreate these parts then what do you learn about the musician you are emulating? What have you learned about Gilmour, as a player?**

Dave: I used to write and transcribe for a magazine called *Guitar Techniques*, and every month I had to write out, and record, a scary guitar piece--everyone from Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen, Michael Hedges, Allan Holdsworth, Eddie Van Halen, John Schofield, Paul Gilbert, etc, etc. When you do that, you learn what sort of licks and phrases that they like to use, their favorite scale shapes and musical approaches and, also, any particular techniques that they favor.

I guess the most significant thing I learnt from David was this kind of 'double bend' technique, where he bends up to a note and then, instead of letting the bend down, he bends up to a note even higher. It's a really lovely effect and there are some great examples of this near the beginning of his solo in "Another Brick in the Wall, pt 2."

**Jeb: Will you tour the new album? What are the plans?**

Dave: I'm hoping to tour Europe in May with my friend Murray Hockridge to promote our acoustic album *Closer to Earth*, which is out on iTunes at the moment and will be out on CD next month. Then, I have some more *The Wall - Live* shows with Roger Waters July-September 2013. After that I'd love to tour and promote *Scarlet*.

**Jeb: In my review, the only critique I had was that I know you're an amazing guitar player. You are so subtle at times with your solos. I want to hear you, balls to the wall, let your inner Eddie Van Halen out!**

Dave: My inner Van Halen [laughter]...Brilliant! Well, the next album is definitely going to be darker, more raw, powerful and heavy. I've been writing new music since we got back from our last show in Quebec and, actually, I have enough material for the next two albums, so look out for fretboard fireworks aplenty in the future.

**Jeb: I have a few questions about your history. Legend holds you naturally play guitar left handed. But you now play it right handed. Explain yourself, Dave!**

Dave: I'm naturally left handed, although I've always been pretty ambidextrous. After playing left handed for a while, I broke my right wrist really badly and when the plaster finally came off a few months later I found that I couldn't get my wrist back into a proper playing position anymore, in fact I found out years later that there's a bone in my wrist that's still broken. I did the only thing I could, I swapped to playing right handed....

**Jeb: Were you really in a Barbershop quartet?**

Dave: Yes I was. It was when I was still at school. I was in the school choir and also in the barbershop harmony club. Later, they took the four best voices and put together the barbershop quartet, which I sang in for a year or two. I have a freaky range, so I could sing any of the four parts, even the bass. It was such great ear training, plus we got to wear funky waistcoats too [laughter].

**Jeb: Here is one from way back...did you really work for IBM? Are you a computer nerd?**

Dave: IBM was my last 'real' day job, although I was only a temp job, so nothing very technical. I actually spend more time on a computer now than I did when I had a day job.

**Jeb: What is the greatest challenge of writing the perfect guitar solo for a piece of music? You have many weapons at your disposal that you're proficient in, including two hand tapping, sweep picking etc. How do you know that you've nailed it?**

Dave: All the techniques are just tools really, and they're only really there to enable me to play what I hear in my head. I try and write at least some of the solo away from the instrument. I listen to the track, maybe sing along and find some musical lines that I like, and approach it more like a producer than a guitarist. Although we may just have to let the inner Van Halen out to go a little crazy on the next album!

**Jeb: You used to do a lot of guitar instruction. What did you learn from your students?**

Dave: I don't teach much any more, but when I did, it was always nice to see the progress in a young player and to help with those 'light bulb' moments. In fact, I picked up a copy of *Guitar Techniques* the other day and, after an old modes lesson of mine that they'd reprinted, there was a letter from someone saying that they'd always struggled with understanding that particular concept, but they finally got it after reading my article. It was really nice.

When I first started teaching, I actually learnt a lot, partly from needing to have all the techniques, scale shapes, arpeggios, etc, and general musical theory at your instant disposal, but also because a student will sometimes say "How do you do that?" You have to analyze what it is that you're doing, and then work out a way of explaining it. It was also nice to be introduced to all the latest players that the students are listening too.

After a while, you realize that teaching, especially classes at a private school, is just cyclical...the same thing year after year. Every April you start the term with a C major chord and maybe an A minor pentatonic scale. And, to be honest, I never picked up the guitar to show other people how to play. I'm at the stage now where I'd much rather go out and play, and hopefully inspire people that way.

**Jeb: Okay, I want to know what Roger Waters is like? He is a musical hero of mine and you get to hang with him. Tell me what the world doesn't know about Roger.**

Dave: He's funny as hell, incredibly intelligent, sharp witted and a great story teller. He's also amazing with accents. When Ian Richie played saxophone with us on the *Dark Side* tour, he used to say that Roger's Scottish accent was better than his... and he's Scottish!

**Jeb: When doing *The Wall*, how odd is it to have the actual wall come between you and the audience? How does this affect the live vibe of a concert?**

Dave: It was tough at first, because I love to see the audience and make eye contact and most of the time they're either too far away, or I'm wearing dark glasses, or there's a bloody great big wall in the way.

*The Wall - Live* probably has more in common with a West End show than a typical rock concert, but the show is all about the Wall. The visuals and messages that are projected onto it are totally breathtaking. *The Wall - Live* tour feels like history in the making and we're all incredibly proud of this thing that we do.

**Jeb: Tell me a funny story of the wall gone array? I mean, there has to be a few Spinal Tap moments with such a complex stage show.**

Dave: For such a crazy technical show we've actually had very few problems. I guess the worst one was one night in Oslo when the hotel room door, which is built into the wall, didn't open during the track "Nobody Home." Roger just stopped the show and told a joke about President Gorbachev. He was known as the "Wizard of Oslo" for a little while after that [laughter].

**Jeb: You have worked with some of my favorite musicians in the past. Tell me what the experience with Ken Hensley was like.**

Dave: Ahh...my experience working with Ken wasn't very pleasant. The last thing he said to us, the band, at the airport, was "I promise I'll send you your tour money when I get home." That was the last time I ever saw or heard from him. But with Pete Riley on drums and Andy Pyle on bass it was a great band.

**Jeb: Will you do more work with John Wetton? He is an amazing singer. What does he bring to the table, creatively, in your eyes?**

Dave: I don't have any plans to work with John again. I saw a quote the other day that said "If you don't build your dream, then someone will hire you to help build theirs," so I think it's time for me to focus on my own music and career. But yes, he's very creative and obviously has a great ear for melody and harmony. You can also hear this wonderful classical influence in his songwriting and I was a huge fan of the stuff he did with U.K.

**Jeb: Keith Emerson...the knives in the keyboards... is he as wild as he seems? Any favorite memories playing with Keith?**

Dave: He's a pussycat [laughter]. I have some wonderful memories of our time together. One of my favorites is of the very first time we ever met. He turned up unexpectedly at a Qango gig in London and was waiting in the wings as we were walking off stage. He came up and gave me this huge hug, and said, "Do you mind if I get up and play during the encore?"

So, there I was, standing on stage and playing with Keith Emerson, Carl Palmer and John Wetton with the biggest smile imaginable on my face. My Mother and her two brothers, Tony and Peter, who introduced me to ELP when I was very young, and were HUGE fans, were there in the audience. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

**Jeb: Back to the new album, was this an easy album to make? Did it come natural?**

Dave: It was a long and difficult birth and a huge learning curve for me. I still have the stretch marks! There were a whole bunch of things that I'd never tried before, like singing lead vocals, and I learnt a lot. After that experience, I know the next one will be much quicker.

**Jeb: Any hint of what direction the next album it will be, musically?**

Dave: I'd actually planned to start recording my next album with Pete [Riley] and Phil [Williams] again, and had already booked the studio, engineer, etc, for the week of the 10th December. Obviously, all of that was postponed when I was asked to play at the 12.12.12 benefit concert.

I've written all the music and melody lines for the next album already, and I'm ridiculously happy with it so far. After recording *Scarlet*, I have a much clearer idea of the direction I'm heading in now. Some of the new ideas seem a little reminiscent of Led Zeppelin too, which is never a bad thing.

**Jeb: Last one: When you are on the top of the wall playing, what is it like? I mean you have a viewpoint that no one EVER gets to see. Is it safe? I would think it would be hard to concentrate!**

Dave: Is it safe? No, not really, some nights it's pretty terrifying actually. I remember in San Francisco last year it was so windy that the wall was swaying hard and actually bashing against the wobbly platform that I was standing on! And it was SOOO cold too...but the thing is, I've seen it on YouTube and it looks amazing. It's like the second coming up there [laughter]. So, I just grin and bear it, because I know it's a pretty intense part of the show.