

## **INTERVIEW: David Kilminster, Guitar Virtuoso on The Wall**

BY AL CARLOS HERNANDEZ ON JANUARY 28, 2013

**HOLLYWOOD (Herald de Paris)** – David Kilminster is a British guitarist, vocalist, songwriter and music teacher. He is known for touring with Keith Emerson (since 2002) and with Roger Waters on his *The Dark Side of the Moon 2006–2008* tour, performing much of the guitar and vocal duties that are originally David Gilmour's. He also played alongside with John Wetton (ex King Crimson), Ken Hensley (ex Uriah Heep), Qango (an Asia spin-off), The Nice, and Carl Palmer.

Kilminster is touring as first guitarist with Roger Waters on his *The Wall Live 2010–2012* tour. Recently, at the benefit concert for Hurricane Sandy, Kilminster performed a show stopping guitar solo in front of a worldwide audience of over 200 Million people.



Kilminster began playing piano at an early age and later, in 1976, he chose to play guitar. During his youth he also experienced singing in a barbershop quartet which gave him a strong background for future involvement as a vocalist.

In 1991 he won the award 'Guitarist of the Year' in a competition run by Guitarist Magazine with the instrumental Sundance – at that time he was working on computers for IBM. Shortly after, Kilminster was asked to teach at the Guitar Institute in Acton (London). This also involved writing exam material and preparing courses for Trinity College and Thames Valley University. That recognition propelled him on a super-charged career as a multi-faceted guitarist, vocalist, engineer, producer, writer and instructor. Credited by keyboard legend Keith Emerson for inspiring him to go on the road again, Dave is a familiar figure to fans of progressive rock worldwide. Dave continued to play, collaborate and tour with Emerson through the first half of 2006.

Kilminster was teacher at the Academy of Contemporary Music in Guilford and also with Guitar Break who ran weekend guitar events around the UK. He has launched a series of instructional DVD's for Roadrock's Lick library after the success of his global satellite series named Killer Guitar. A prolific writer, he has written over 200 articles for Guitar Techniques magazine.

These past two years Dave was on the road with Roger Waters as lead guitarist and vocalist in the extraordinary global staging of *Dark Side of the Moon*. Fans know Dave from his work along side rock luminaries John Wetton, Carl Palmer, Ken Hensley, and John Young, among others. Dave was a founding member of Qango, the band that featured Wetton, Palmer and Young and which introduced him to Emerson. He helped form the Keith Emerson Band then Kilminster joined Emerson in a highly regarded reunion of Emerson's The Nice. The reunion resulted in the live recording of the CD *Vivacitas* and launched the Keith Emerson Band.

Kilminster used to play left-handed (he is naturally left-handed), but after damaging his wrist in a go-kart accident, he started playing right-handed. Despite that, he is widely known both as a proficient teacher and as an outstanding performer in the techniques of pull-off, tapping, hammer-on and sweep-picking. His instructional DVD's are available through his website and Licklibrary guitar community. Dave re-released his acoustic guitar album *Playing with Fire* in 2004. *Scarlet*, a rock album featuring Dave on guitar and vocals along with Keith Emerson Band mates drummer Pete Riley and bass player Phil Williams, was released in 2007. Kilminster writes all the music and lyrics. Both *Playing with Fire* and *Scarlet* are available from Kilminster's website [www.davekilminster.com](http://www.davekilminster.com).

**Herald de Paris** Deputy Managing Editor Dr. Al Carlos Hernandez was privileged to get this exclusive interview thanks to my great friend Billy at Glass Onyon PR.



**AC: Tell us about growing up. Did your family encourage your interest in music?**

DK: They couldn't have been less interested!!! Ha ha ha . . . no seriously, they really weren't into music at all. One of my uncles played piano and he introduced me to the music of Emerson, Lake and Palmer. A few years later I returned the favour and introduced my uncle to Keith Emerson personally!!! :O))

**AC: What kinds of things were you listening to that helped form your musical palate?**

DK: Well the radio was SO good back then!! I used to listen to it every day and during a typical two hour program they would play all kinds of music – anything from Queen, 10cc, Black Sabbath, Fleetwood Mac, David Bowie, Stevie Wonder, Bob Marley, The Who, The Sweet, Marc Bolan, Steely Dan,

The Eagles, Wings, The Detroit Spinners, Billy Joel, Supertramp, Led Zeppelin, Joni Mitchell, Bread, The O'Jays, The Carpenters, The Hollies, Free, ELO, The Jackson 5, Elton John, Deep Purple, Heatwave, Simon & Garfunkel, The Police, etc, etc, etc. All these amazing bands, thrown together in the same program and I loved it all!!! It was only later that music became segregated into stylistically specialised programs.

**AC: Why guitar and are you really left handed? Who were your early guitar heroes? Who are some of your heroes now?**

DK: Why guitar? Because we didn't have a piano at home!!! Seriously, I naturally took to the piano and played it whenever I could (at school, at my grandmother's house) but I wanted to play music ALL the time!!! I got so frustrated at home without an instrument that I ended up getting a guitar just so that I could still create and compose.

And yes, I'm naturally left handed. When I originally picked up the guitar I played left handed, but I broke my right wrist really badly in an accident. Months later when it finally healed I found that I couldn't bend my hand around the neck to play barre chords anymore. So I decided to swap to playing right handed instead. It didn't seem that big a deal at the time as I still really wanted to play piano.

When I finally got into playing guitar though, my early guitar heroes were people like Rory Gallagher, Pat Travers, Brian May, Gary Moore. Then I discovered Eddie Van Halen!!! Ha ha . . . everything changed after that. As for guitarists now, there are actually very few that I like!!! Jeff Beck is amazing though . . . and still getting better!!! He's definitely someone to aspire to. The best guy out there at the moment though, is undoubtedly my good friend Guthrie Govan!!!

**AC: What was high school like? Where you in a band and where there any music teachers who encouraged your interests?**

DK: Oh I hated school and was rarely there, as the teachers were truly awful (in fact I found out years later that one of them is now in prison for child molesting!!). I did sing in the choir and in a barbershop quartet, but later when it came time to pick specialist classes, I didn't actually take music because the music teacher was so utterly hopeless. I remember very clearly one of my first music lessons where he got everyone to clap on the downbeat. Well, as everyone was clapping on the downbeat I thought I'd be 'clever' and clap on the upbeat (in the gaps). He told me off and basically accused me of being a total idiot!!! I suppose I've always been pretty independent, though, which is why I taught myself the guitar and how to read and write music.

**AC: What did it feel like the first time you ever hit the stage? Do you remember your first song and/or first solo?**

DK: I remember very clearly the very first time I was ever on stage . . . it was a complete and total disaster!!! I'd changed the strings on both my guitars, one of which was a 6/12 string double neck but I didn't know about stretching strings in!!! So I walked out on stage (having tuned the strings earlier that day), and the very first chord I played sounded like the end of the world!!! Ha ha ha! It was absolutely horrendous!!!! Earlier that day my friend had dropped the speaker cabinet onto the amp plug when we were loading in and (without telling anyone) had just decided to push the cracked plug into the wall anyway. During the second number my amp actually blew up!!! Probably a welcome relief for the audience though . . .

Actually I checked the plug the next day and found that the live wire had come loose so my first gig could easily have been my last!!!! But I remember we were nothing if not adventurous. One of the numbers we used to play was Led Zeppelin's No Quarter with my friend Tony playing the keyboard lines on his bass and me recreating the solo from the live version on The Song Remains The Same note for note... that's such a great solo!! :O)



**AC: You stopped the show at the Hurricane Sandy benefit. How does it feel to play not only in front of 200 million people, but in front of the baddest music cats in the world backstage?**

DK: Thank you! It was pretty terrifying actually and I was really glad we were on early!!! Roger was very smart there – the organizers wanted us to play later in the evening but that would have meant us turning up for sound check the day before the show and then having all our equipment moved off the stage. So, we sound checked for the gig late that afternoon and, as it was a revolving stage, we were already set up and ready to go

when Bruce Springsteen was on.

**AC: What were you thinking when you were pulling off those legendary riffs that day?**

What was I thinking? Being broadcast to over two BILLION people!!! iTunes already taking presales on the concert soundtrack and YouTube about to be inundated with clips and comments!!! I was thinking, "This is forever Dave, please don't mess it up!" I just felt very responsible and I really didn't want to let anyone down. Roger, the rest of the band, the techs & crew, the management, the concert organisers, my friends and family back home . . . it was just such a big deal for everyone, and the pressure (although admittedly, mostly self-imposed) was pretty intense. But I think I played okay and I actually enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would.

**AC: When you got off the stage Roger hugged you. What did he say?**

DK: I have no idea!! I really don't remember, my head was just racing like crazy!!! It was such an adrenalin rush!!! I do know he was incredibly happy though, which is always a good thing. It felt like it went pretty well. I saw it a couple of days later and thought the TV mix could have been better, but I know that at the venue it sounded amazing!!!

**AC: How has life been since the Sandy show-stopping performance?**

DK: Well the week of the Sandy concert I was actually booked into a studio to start recording the follow up to Scarlet!!! But I obviously postponed all my plans when the charity event came up, as I really wanted to contribute. So I've been trying since to rearrange the musicians/studio/engineer again . . . but then there was Christmas and New Year . . . and the snow . . . and of course everything always grinds to a dismal halt when it snows in England!!!

**AC: What was your first real break into the professional business of music?**



DK: I won a guitar playing competition back in 1991 called 'Guitarist of the Year' and I had a big feature in 'Guitarist' magazine so I thought, "This is it, I'll just wait for the phone to ring." Two years later I get asked if I'd like to teach guitar at a private music school called 'The Guitar Institute' in West London. I thought, "That's actually the very last thing in the world I want to do!!!" I'm actually pretty shy and the thought of standing up in front of a bunch of people and talking terrified me. But a couple of days later I found that my temporary contract at IBM wasn't going to be renewed, so . . . there have been a couple of times in my life where it feels like I'm being 'steered' in a particular direction . . . I started teaching and I guess that's where it all started.

**AC: What kinds of jobs did you do to support yourself during the lean years?**

DK: I did all kinds of jobs!!! Office jobs, warehouse jobs, cleaning jobs, delivery jobs . . . at one point I was driving around in a huge van delivering frozen chickens. Before I left home though, I worked with my father in his shop repairing clocks and watches. I was very good at it but I knew I had to move to London to try and make it as a musician.

**AC: You are touted as a vocalist, engineer, producer, writer and instructor. How important is it to be multi-faceted in order to make a living in the modern music business?**

DK: I think in some ways it's a double edged sword. If you want to improve your chances of making a living then of course it's good to be versatile and to cover a lot of different skills and disciplines. But I know that if I just concentrated and put all my effort solely on one thing then I could be really great at it instead of being okay at a whole bunch of things!!!

**AC: What are some of the perils of rock stardom? The lead guitar player is always the show stopper, true?**

DK: I guess there's a lot of pressure on being the lead guitarist. Especially on something like the Wall tour with Roger when you're balancing forty feet up in the air on a wobbly platform while playing the Comfortably Numb solo to 70,000 people. And I can totally see why a lot of guitarists would turn to the standard 'perils' such as drugs and alcohol to help them through. But it's really not something I would ever do. I guess the only 'peril' I face (apart from certain death if I fall off the platform) is on the outdoor shows when it's sometimes really cold outside. I really hate trying to play with cold hands. Everything just feels wrong.

**AC: What is the good and bad in the life of a rock star? Any regrets?**

DK: All I ever wanted to do was to travel and make music. Because I'm single, the touring life is absolutely perfect for me. :O) I guess the only downside is that I've missed certain family stuff like my niece getting married, my cousins having babies, my grandmother's funeral. But it's the life I've chosen and I wouldn't change it for anything.

**AC: You have worked with Keith Emerson. What were the circumstances around getting that call for the big time? When did you know you really made it?**

DK: I was playing in a band called Qango (with John Wetton, Carl Palmer and John Young) and Keith turned up unexpectedly at a show in London to surprise his old bandmate Carl. Thankfully I didn't know he was in the audience until we're walking off stage and he's standing there, arms outstretched and gives me a huge hug. Anyway, he asks if he could get up for a jam during the encore as we were going to play Fanfare For The Common Man and it was just so much fun.

So a couple of years later I'm talking to my friend at Korg about this particular gig and he said, "Well, I have Keith's number and email address if you want to call or write to him." So I did. I wrote an email and about ten minutes later I got one back saying, "Do you want to form a band?"

As for 'making it' though, I remember when I first told my mum that I'd got the job with Roger Waters she said, "I'm so glad you've finally made it." I understood what she meant but for me I'd 'made it' in 1993 when I started teaching because I was actually making a living from playing the guitar. It wasn't a great living admittedly, but I was surviving and things gradually got better from there.

**AC: Legend has it that you convinced Emerson to go back on the road and continue his musical career.**

DK: I think 'inspired' is more accurate than 'convinced.' He loves to jam and improvise and I think he was excited by the prospect of having a musical sparring partner. Kind of like Jeff Beck with Jan Hammer or Richie Blackmore with Jon Lord. :O))

**AC: How do you define 'progressive rock?' Have you always been a fan?**

DK: I think the line between 'rock' and 'progressive rock' is blurry at best. I used to think it was just a term to describe rock bands with some kind of classical influence but I think that's branched out considerably now. Are 'Radiohead' considered 'prog?' Or Muse? Does anyone actually care?!! Ha ha! I used to listen to prog favourites like ELP, UK, and Yes when I was growing up but I was also listening to Led Zep, Queen, and Black Sabbath too. Again, to me, it was all just music.

**AC: What did you think of Pink Floyd as you were growing up?**

DK: I wasn't really very aware of them to be honest!! I loved the bits that I'd heard. *Dark Side Of The Moon* is a wonderful album as is *Wish You Were Here*. But apart from hearing those two albums (and *Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2* which they played on the radio a lot) that was the only Floyd music I'd heard until fairly recently.

**AC: How did you hook up with Roger Waters?**

DK: Roger had committed to doing a tour but Doyle (Bramhall II, who played on the *In The Flesh* tour) was out playing with Eric Clapton. So Roger asked Snowy and Andy Fairweather to look around for a replacement. I heard about the audition through my manager and contacted Andy and he asked me to record some demo versions of *Wish You Were Here*, *Comfortably Numb*, etc. The next thing I know I'm in a rehearsal studio in London with Roger, Andy, Snowy, Graham Broad (drums) and Harry Waters (Roger's son) on keyboards. I think we started with *Money* and, being (what I thought was) the 'consummate professional' I'd worked out all three rhythm guitar parts and all the solos. So the first thing Roger says is, "Are you okay with the lyrics to this?" And I'm thinking whoa! I didn't know I had to sing it too!

They're not difficult guitar parts, but they're a little syncopated and then when you're reading the lyrics and singing it at the same time . . . It's the sort of thing you practice a couple of times and it's okay but you really don't want the first time you ever try it to be in front of the person that actually wrote it. Oh well, I guess they liked me anyway.

**AC: How is life on the road with the *Dark Side of the Moon*? Does Roger give you the space to take the guitar solos to another level with your signature?**

DK: NO! Ha ha! No, I'm there to faithfully recreate what's on the album. I do take liberties in certain places, especially with my tone and vibrato, but essentially I'm sticking pretty close to the guitar parts on the record. I think that's what the fans want to hear too.

**AC: Tell us about your past solo projects and the project you are working on right now. Would you rather front your own band or be a featured player?**

DK: The album I'm working on right now is undoubtedly the best thing I've ever done. I really can't wait to record it. I learned a lot of things from *Scarlet* and so now I have a much better sense of the direction I'm heading in. On *Scarlet* it was the first time I'd ever sang lead vocals and I know my voice has improved a lot since then too. As for fronting a band or being featured, I really don't care. I don't have an ego about that sort of thing. I would happily have been Jeff Buckley's rhythm guitarist just to hear that amazing voice every night and to be a part of the wonderful music that he created.

The music is THE most important thing, and so if I'm involved in making great music then I don't really care what I'm doing . . . within reason.



**AC: You have said you are on the computer now more than you were when you worked for IBM. How has New Media informed the way you do music and market your recordings?**

DK: Hmmm . . . this is a huge subject but I'll try to answer your question succinctly.

As far as making music is concerned, I've tried to avoid the 'digital' path as much as possible. It just doesn't sound as good!!! To people that only listen to music through their computer (or even worse, on a pair of cheap & nasty earbuds) then they really won't be able to tell the difference. But I care, it really matters to me and I want to make the best sounding music I can; something that will still be around long after I'm gone. So, at the moment, that means recording using as much analog stuff as possible and putting out CD's. I'll still make my

music available as a download, as it seems to suit a lot of people in this desperately digital age, but for me I like to have something in my hand.

I actually miss albums where you would take the record out of the sleeve, put it on the player, place the needle on the vinyl, look at the artwork and read the liner notes as it was playing. It was a tactile, visual and visceral experience too. Not just audio. It was almost a ritual. And as much as it's very handy to be able to just click on a button, it's just so impersonal. Which I guess is how most modern music feels to me today anyway.

As far as marketing goes, I worked very hard on getting over 100,000 friends on MySpace page, and now no one even bothers with MySpace anymore!!! Everything changes so quickly these days so any marketing decisions I'm leaving to my management office in the future. Ok, so much for 'succinctly.'

**AC: Tell us about your work as a writer – you have done hundreds of columns and articles.**

DK: I used to write and transcribe for a magazine called 'Guitar Techniques' so every month I had to write out and record a particular guitar track. And as the magazine knew I had pretty good technique, they would give me the hardest pieces imaginable. Eruption and Spanish Fly by Van Halen, For The Love Of God and Boston Rain Melody by Steve Vai, Black Star by Yngwie Malmsteen, Cause We Ended As Lovers and Nadia by Jeff Beck, In The Dead Of Night by Allan Holdsworth, and The Happy Couple by Michael Hedges. Jimi Hendrix tunes, Jimmy Page tunes, Eric Clapton tunes, Paul Gilbert licks, Eric Johnson licks, John Schofield licks. I had to write them all out (in music and tab), write performance notes, including gear advice on getting the right sound, and then re-record the whole piece, note for note.

And it wasn't just other peoples tunes either. I was also asked to write lessons on pretty much anything!! Gypsy jazz, bluegrass, bottleneck, country, fusion, classical, you name it. Any style you can think of, I probably did a lesson on it.

It was a very interesting experience, although I always felt like my reputation was on the line every month, trying to recreate those iconic guitar parts, sonically and playing wise. A lot of times I didn't even know whether I could physically play them until I was actually in the studio about to record.

**AC: I understand that you no longer teach, but I have to ask: how satisfying is teaching music to young people? Is continuing your work as an educator something you would like to pursue again in the future?**

DK: Yes, it's very satisfying actually, especially when you occasionally see a past student on TV and you get that warm 'proud Father' type glow. But after teaching in private music colleges for about thirteen years, all those aforementioned articles for 'Guitar Techniques' and 'Guitarist,' filming quite a few instructional DVD's (not to mention a TV series!!) I feel like I've done my bit for teaching.

Nowadays I'd much rather try and inspire people with my music and live performances the same way that I was inspired when I first saw Edward Van Halen and bought Van Halen I.

**AC: Who are some of the musicians you would like to work with?**

DK: I always love collaborating, but no particular names spring to mind. I was really looking forward to the 'Live Earth' concert in India in 2008 as we (Roger Waters and myself) were due to perform with (Ravi Shankar's daughter) Anoushka Shankar. That would have been amazing, but unfortunately the event was cancelled a few days before due to the Mumbai terrorist attacks.

I'm still hoping to record an album with Guthrie Govan. We've played loads of gigs together, and we have a special connection – kind of like ESP – and I've written some tunes for that already. But I think I'm probably at the stage now where I need to concentrate on my own music. I've always written lots of music and I need to start getting it recorded.

**AC: What have been some of your best collaborations?**

DK: I recorded an acoustic album last year with my good friend Murray Hockridge called Closer to Earth and it's definitely one of the best things I've ever done. It's on iTunes at the moment, but we're releasing it on a CD in March. I'm very very proud of that and I really can't wait for people to hear it.

**AC: What can people expect on your latest project Directors Cut?**

DK: Expect the unexpected!!! Ha ha ha! I sang lead vocals on it, played a little piano, and scored for a string quartet so it's not a typical 'guitarists' album. It's just a song based, funky, rock album really. I want to make music for normal people, not just guitarists!!!

**AC: Do you plan on touring?**

DK: I'm hoping to tour with Murray Hockridge sometime in May. Then July to September I'll be back on tour in Europe with Roger Waters for what will probably be the last leg of the Wall – Live tour. So the end of the year is still open. I'm hoping to record that CD with my friend Guthrie Govan if both our schedules permit, otherwise I'll be looking to go out and tour Scarlet.

**AC: What are some personal and career objectives you still aspire to attain?**

DK: Well, a house on a beach would be nice! I guess career wise it's just to continue advancing, really, in all ways. I'm still working on improving my guitar playing and singing, and I also feel like I have some wonderful music inside me that needs to be recorded so I'm looking to get back into the studio asap.

**AC: What advice would you give a young person who saw you rip off that incredible Sandy benefit solo and tells himself, 'I want to be exactly like Dave?'**

DK: I'm afraid this might sound a bit 'Zen' but I would say to them: make sure that you play guitar for the right reasons. Play because you love it. Play because it makes you happy. Play because you have music in your head that you want people to hear. If you're only playing because you think it looks cool, or you want to be on stage, be famous, get laid, whatever, then there's a very strong possibility that you'll be sorely disappointed. On all fronts. I would never ever discourage anyone from following their dreams but realistically the chances of attaining those sorts of dreams are so incredibly remote. So the main reason you should play is because it makes you happy. That way, if you never actually achieve your dreams, then at least you'll still be happy anyway.

**AC: How can people contact you?**

DK: Through my website. Emails addressed to [dave@davekilminster.com](mailto:dave@davekilminster.com) come straight to me – although if it's a question about 'modes' or a particular guitar technique, then I probably won't answer!!! Ha ha!

Edited by Susan Aieves