

# TUNE-UPS



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"We've really had to stand our ground and be bitches about it."



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## RIP: Alvin Lee

**GUITAR WORLD BIDS FAREWELL TO THE TEN YEARS AFTER GUITARIST.**

By Chris Gill



### THE WORLD LOST

one of the great guitarists of the classic-rock era on March 6 with the death of Alvin Lee, best known for his work with Ten Years After.

Why Alvin Lee never achieved the same guitar-legend status as his late-Sixties British blues-rock peers is one of modern rock music's great mysteries. His talent was evident to the millions who'd seen his jaw-dropping performance of "I'm Going Home," performed with Ten Years After, in the 1970 *Woodstock* documentary, or heard his playing on the band's perennial 1971 hit, "I'd Love to Change the World." As a guitarist, he was the complete package, with tone and tasteful licks comparable to Eric Clapton, the fiery energy of Jimmy Page at his fiercest, and the pyrotechnic fretboard flash of Jeff Beck, but with a distinctive voice that was all his own.

Born December 19, 1944, Lee started playing guitar at age 13 and started a band called the Jaybirds when he was 15. The group changed its name to Ten Years After →



in 1966 and released its debut album the following year. Although he established his reputation as a guitarist with “I’d Love to Change the World” and the Woodstock performance of “I’m Going Home,” Lee recorded numerous blazing solos with Ten Years After on songs that include the early FM radio staple “Love Like a Man,” “Woodchopper’s Ball,” “Uncle Jam” and the psychedelia-soaked “Bad Scene,” which also features a fuzz-tone riff undoubtedly plundered by Lenny Kravitz for “Are You Gonna Go My Way.”

Lee went solo in 1973 and enjoyed a productive career during which he released more than a dozen studio and live albums. Still, he never matched the heights of his former glory with Ten Years After. *On the Road to Freedom*, his “solo” debut (billed as the duo Alvin Lee and Mylon LeFevre), he explored a laidback country rock direction and featured an impressive roster of supporting guest artists, including George Harrison, Steve Winwood, Ron Wood and Mick Fleetwood.

In 1986, he had the greatest

success of his solo career when the title track from his album *Detroit Diesel* reached Number 24 on *Billboard*’s Mainstream Rock chart. He brought his solo career full circle in 2012 with *Still on the Road to Freedom*, a retrospective of the various directions he pursued throughout his entire career.

Lee’s main instrument since the early days of Ten Years After was a highly modified 1959 Gibson ES-335, which the Gibson Custom Shop duplicated and issued in 2008 as the Alvin Lee “Big Red” ES-335. The guitar

**“He was the first badass, super-fast lead guitarist I remember hearing as a kid.”**

—SLASH

originally had a Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, which Lee initially replaced with a standard stop tailpiece and later with a TP-6 stop tailpiece (with fine tuners). Sometime in the early Seventies he replaced the original dot neck with a neck that featured block inlays. He also mounted a single-coil pickup from a Stratocaster between the two humbuckers and added a separate volume control for the pickup so he could dial it in with any of the traditional humbucker settings.

Lee passed away on March 6 at the age of 68 from complications that arose during a routine surgical procedure after he was admitted to a hospital near his home in Spain. He inspired numerous guitarists over the years, including his good friends Peter Frampton and Tony Iommi as well as players from later generations like Joe Satriani and Slash. “He was the first badass, super-fast lead guitarist I remember hearing as a kid,” Slash said.

