



lucasz gottwald: saturday night livewire

IT'S SUNDAY, and Saturday Night Live guitarist Lucasz Gottwald is recounting how he spent the previous night: "It was the first show of the season. Besides playing in the house band, I wrote three compositions for this week's show, and Eminem rapped over one of them. Things got hairy in a few places – remember, the show really is live. Last night they were changing the order of the sketches while the show was in progress." Gottwald pauses, then adds, "People regularly lose it."

Does Lucasz? "I get attacks of the nerves all the time," he admits. "I mean, all the time. One time I played the wrong cue during the Rock and Roll News sketch, and I got yelled at. It's definitely nerve-racking."

Those who recall the days when SNL's Chevy Chase would mimic Gerald Ford will be excused for feeling ancient when Gottwald points out that he, at age 28, is only a year older than the show itself. Lucasz landed the gig four years ago after hearing of the

auditions from his guitar teacher at the Manhattan School of Music and winning out over 80 rival applicants. "It was my first break," he says. "I couldn't even believe it was real for the first three or four shows."

Gottwald suspects his experience doing jingle sessions had a lot to do with snaring the gig. "I had done hundreds of commercials," he says, "and that prepared me for the idea of going into any situation without knowing what to expect and having to figure out a way to make things work in a hurry. But this gig is so much cooler than doing commercials. I'm playing with the best musicians in the world, and there are no ad execs lurking around saying things like, 'Hey, we're trying to emphasize the potato here!'"

In a typical week the SNL band works Saturday from 10:30 A.M. to 1:15 A.M. They might also spend a few hours on Friday pre-recording sketch themes. So what does Lucasz do during the rest of the week?

"I make dance music," he answers. "I record fun, groove-

based stuff in my home studio with sequencers, drum machines, and a Yamaha A3000 sampler." Gottwald also makes hip-hop backing tracks, and he has crafted remixes for such acts as Mos Def, Blackstar, Bon Jovi, and KRS-One & Zack de la Rocha.

"I use guitar in my own music too," says Gottwald, "but how I use it has a lot to do with the way my attitudes about guitar are changing as I get older. I'm less interested in being a guitar hero than in being someone who simply uses guitar to make good music. When I was younger I would listen to bad music just to hear a good guitar player, but I don't do that anymore."

Gottwald relies on a separate guitar for each of his dual pursuits. "At Saturday Night Live," he says, "my main guitar is a Yamaha Pacifica, pretty much an off-the-rack model. I use it because it's so versatile, and since the show music tends to be based on either old soul music or classic rock à la Hendrix and Zeppelin, a solidbody is a good way to go. For most of my own music, I use a hollowbody Yamaha SA2200. My stuff is very

rhythmic, and for any kind of funk or James Brown-style R&B the 2200 is the guitar. I got turned on to it by one of my teachers, Rodney Jones, a serious jazz guy who now plays on the Rosie O'Donnell Show." Gottwald usually records the guitar via the line-out jack of his Yamaha DG80-112 digital-modeling amplifier.

Gottwald says that as much as he appreciates great music of the past, he feels the guitar's future is wedded to new technology: "When it comes to music played on just guitar, bass, and drums, I don't know what you can say that hasn't already been said better by the Stones or the Beatles or Led Zeppelin. Same with jazz – there are some amazing people doing amazing things, but it's become like classical music: something fixed, with lots of rules. But there are always interesting new things emerging, the way hip-hop has emerged during my own lifetime. As technology develops, music develops, and there will always be something vibrant and fresh."