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MEEGS

OF COAL CHAMBER:

HOW LOW

LOW-TUNED GUITARS HAVE BECOME TERRIBLY TRENDY AMONG HEAVY ROCK bands, but few players dare to go as low as Meegs, ax man of the L.A. metal quartet Coal Chamber.

Meegs details his descent. “I started out tuning down to D. Then I went down to C, then to B, then to B with the sixth string dropped to A, and then all the way to A with the sixth string dropped to G. Now I can’t even stand the sound of a normal-tuned guitar. It sounds so thin—like a banjo, or something.”

Meegs—who went by his given name of Miguel Rascón until band buddy Elijah Blue Allman bestowed his nickname—sails the low Cs on a Yamaha Custom Shop Drop-6 with a matte-black finish, no tremolo, a custom pickguard, and Duncan JB humbuckers. “This guitar has completely changed the way I play,” he enthuses. “As soon as I tried it out, I said, ‘I have to have it!’ The neck feels like butter, and for the first time I can really hear what I’m playing. This guitar has made me more musical, and I’m proud of that.”

In the process, Meegs learned that you don’t necessarily need heavy strings to get heavy tones. “I used to play with super-high action and heavy strings gauged .070 through .020,” he says. “It was like having bass strings on a guitar! I thought that was the only way you could get a heavy tone, but as soon as I played the Yamaha, I knew that wasn’t true. The strings weren’t so fat, and the guitar is made from lighter woods than what I used to play. But because of the guitar’s long scale, it sounds fatter and heavier. My old tone had impact, but it just seemed to hit you in the center. The Yamaha’s sound still has impact, but the sound surrounds you.”

Meegs clarifies another misperception that you can generate powerful tones simply by pouring on distortion. “That’s a mistake for amateurs,” he insists. “The problem with that super-saturated, scooped-mid distortion sound is that it can be completely drowned out by bass and drums. In order to keep the groove

going, you have to hear the highs, the lows, the mids—especially when you’re in a band with just one guitar. You have to push air, so you need some clarity.”

For that reason, Meegs pays a lot of attention to his clean sounds. “I don’t like the clean channels on a lot of tube amps,” he says. “They just sound like you’re playing through the dirty channel with your volume turned down. I’d rather have a sound that’s super-clean, like there’s no way it’s ever going to distort. I want a clean tone that’s like chrome or liquid mercury. That’s why I like the clean sound of the Yamaha DG130 amp so much.”



And how does the DG130 stack up on the crunch side? “Some of those sounds—oh my god!” raves Meegs. “The amp is digital, but it doesn’t sound digital. I prefer a natural type of distortion—the kind that sounds like you’re just hitting the guitar harder. I also like that sort of old-style distortion that sounds a little ‘broken.’ The DG130 can be fuzzy and messed-up or super-pristine and clean, and I have total control. It’s the best of both worlds. And it’s important to me that you can change the sounds with MIDI. I use about a million pedals in a MIDI switching system, and I’m really into programming different combinations of pedals and amp models. My gear

has to be as flexible as I want it to be.”

Meegs maintains an unpretentious attitude about his music. “Face it,” he says. “We’re really just a heavy metal band. We don’t try to say we’re ‘progressive,’ or whatever.” Nevertheless, he’s searching for innovative tones as Coal Chamber prepares to record the follow-up to their self-titled debut disc. “I’m going for a lot more experimental sounds, instead of just an onslaught of the same guitar tone,” he says. “Some of the things I want to try are really crazy—so crazy that I don’t want to talk about them until I get to try them!” The album’s tentative title is *Dark Days*. Forewarned is forearmed.

CAN HE GO?