

It's September 13, 2021, inside the Leader Bank Pavilion in Boston, and Megadeth just finished their set when frontman Dave Mustaine gets an unexpected message in his ear monitor. His daughter Electra is urging him to turn around. "Here I am singing and playing guitar and used to just hearing myself and all of a sudden I hear my daughter saying 'Dad look behind you,'" says Mustaine. "I just thought the world was coming to end or something, and I was waiting for a giant meteor to hit."

When Mustaine turned around the video screens on stage were switched back on, playing a collection of recorded birthday wishes from friends like Slash, Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne, Slayer guitarist Kerry King, Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx, Trivium, Ice-T, KORN's Brian "Head" Welch, and Lamb of God, who co-headlined with Megadeth on The Metal Tour of the Year that evening. Mustaine turned 60 that day and was touched by the surprise, the heartfelt sentiments, and the audience singing "Happy Birthday."

"That was absolutely the best ever," says Mustaine. "I have my favorites with my friends and I have my favorites with my friends that are artists, and to see Sharon and Ozzy [Osbourne] wish me a happy birthday was the greatest thing ever. I absolutely adore Sharon, and what can you not say about Ozzy? I love them. I just want to give them a hug."

For Mustaine, celebrating this particular birthday milestone with his family and friends in tow, was an especially momentous and emotional moment for the singer, who revealed that he was diagnosed with throat cancer in May 2019, and underwent extensive treatment involving 51 radiation treatments and nine chemotherapy treatments throughout the year, resulting in the band canceling their shows. Determined to beat cancer, the thought of not singing or performing again was not an option for Mustaine.

"I wasn't really involved in the state of affairs the world was in at the time," shares Mustaine on his treatment and recovery from cancer in 2020 during the onset of COVID-19. "My voice was on the line, and we were in the middle of what I believe is one of our better records in a long time."

Less than a year after being diagnosed, Mustaine got the all-clear from the doctors on October 16. Cancer-free, Mustaine went back to work on Megadeth's 16th album and the follow-up to their 2016 release *Dystopia*, titled *The Sick, the Dying... and the Dead!*. "I know a lot of you guys know that I pray," Mustaine said during his show at the SSE Arena in London on January 31, 2020, just months after getting the news that he had beat cancer. "I say that in 'Peace Sells' [referencing the *What do you mean I don't believe in God? I talk to him every day* line in the 1986 track]. I pray every day. I say that in the song. I've said it since the second record. But I thought about you guys every day, too. And I thought about my family. And I got this power from you guys."

Set for release in spring 2022, Mustaine says the title track is about the plague, but not solely centered around the current pandemic. A broader, more historical scope of the diseases that have plagued humankind throughout time, "The Sick The Dying... and The Dead" covers the

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Photo Courtesy Gibson

current virus, swine flu, and other epidemics from centuries past.

"The song itself was a historical journey of how the plague started and where it went, starting with rats on ships carrying the disease, coming ashore in Sicily," says Mustaine, who references the Black Plague of 1347-1350, which killed a third of the European population, and the nursery rhyme "Ring Around the Rosie," which is linked to the Great Plague of London in 1665. "*Ring around the rosie* was the ring on your cheek, the [rash] that would show on your cheeks from the plague," says Mustaine. The *pocketful of posies* references the flowers people carried around to fend off death and its smell, while the line *ashes, ashes, they all fall down*, referred to those that had died and were often cremated. "It was a lot heavier than anybody ever thought," adds Mustaine.

Throughout its afflictions and other reflections, the album is assembled from riffs and music Mustaine has had archived for years, some as far back as his teens. "A lot of the riffs have been saved over time," says Mustaine. "A brand new song can be made up of something I wrote when I was 15 or 55. If it's a good riff, I'll save it."

Working on the tracks, along with guitarist Kiko Loureiro and drummer Dirk Verbeuren, formerly of Swedish metal band Soilwork, who joined the band full time in 2016, Mustaine says everyone was involved in piecing together the songs on the album recorded partially in the U.S. with Loureiro working on his parts from his home in Finland.

Mega V Necks

Megadeth's Dave Mustaine challenges Gibson with Flying V, acoustic designs

"Once you make that move to the studio, you start to notice all the idiosyncrasies of your playing strengths or weaknesses anywhere," says Mustaine. "It's also the time when you see the caliber of the musicians you're working with day after day, week after week."

Now, 39 years since Megadeth first formed, releasing their debut *Killing Is My Business... and Business Is Good!* in 1985, the band's history has not been without its tumult within the band, and personally. Mustaine overcame addiction to drugs and alcohol, finally finding sobriety, and faith, in 1997. In 2002, he was also diagnosed with radial neuropathy and told he would never play guitar again, and had to put the band on hiatus to undergo intense therapy and recovery, which involved teaching himself how to play guitar again. The band eventually released their 10th album *The System Has Failed* in 2004. Most recently, Mustaine came under fire for calling mask mandates "tyranny" at a show and has had an ongoing feud with former Metallica bandmates—Mustaine was the band's original lead guitarist from 1981 through 1983—which has simmered down over the past decade, with the two bands even sharing the stage with one another on several occasions.

Megadeth band members have also come and gone, then went away again. In the spring of 2021, co-founding member and bassist Dave Ellefson was released from the band following a controversial private video that was leaked online. In the interim, James LoMenzo, who replaced Ellefson when he first left the band, 2006 through 2010, and is featured on Megadeth's 2007 release *United Abominations* and *Endgame* in 2009, was enlisted for recent touring commitments. Ellefson's bass parts were also re-recorded by an unidentified musician for the upcoming album.

Navigating all the ebbs, there were many flows since Mustaine formed Megadeth in 1983. The band picked up a Grammy for Best Metal Performance in 1990 for *Rust in Peace* and released several platinum and multi-platinum albums, including *Countdown to Extinction* in 1992.

Throughout it all, and the band's nearly 40 years, one thing has remained intact: the songs. For Mustaine, lyrics still come to him the same. The structure hasn't shifted, only the sources of inspiration. "I like to read a lot, and I watch the news quite a bit, and there's a lot of things I get entertainment from, whether it's education or historical, or telling someone what 'London Bridge is Falling Down' is about. I like getting a lot of my lyrical stuff from history because I find that when you tell somebody something that's true, they walk away better for it." ★

The back of *Alive!*, the first live album Kiss ever released in 1975, and also one of the first LPs Dave Mustaine ever purchased, read "Kiss uses Gibson Guitars because they want the best." This was all the Megadeth frontman needed to spark a lifelong love of the instruments. Never able to afford an authentic Gibson early on in his career, Mustaine purchased a fake V neck for \$200. "It was what we call a copy guitar, but it played wonderfully," says Mustaine, who got a Gibson sticker from a Gibson repair person and stuck it on the guitar so it looked like the real deal.

Climbing the food chain of guitar companies shortly afterward, first working with B.C. Rich, and briefly with Jackson and ESP, Mustaine later landed with Dean Guitars, with who he remained for 14 years before officially partnering with Gibson in 2021. "I enjoyed my time there [with Dean]," says Mustaine, "but the opportunity to be with the best guitar company in the world presented itself, and that to me was an absolute miracle."

First approached by Gibson in 2020, Mustaine began working with the company to design the Dave Mustaine Flying V EXP, available in Antique Natural and Silver Metallic. The 25.5" scale mahogany neck features 24 medium jumbo frets, mother of pearl "teeth" inlays, an Explorer-style headstock with Grover Mini Rotomatic tuners with Kidney buttons, a Graph Tech nut, a pair of Dave Mustaine's signature Seymour Duncan Thrash Factor pickups, a Tune-O-Matic bridge, and Stop Bar tailpiece.

"The flying V is essentially designed like a

lot of the other guitars that I've played," says Mustaine. "The legs of the guitar went to a point instead of being rounded like a Gibson."

The other change Mustaine made was to the Gibson headstock, which typically has three tuners on each side. "When I play live, sometimes I get a little nervous when I'm fiddling with tuners since my hands are really strong, and I can't do it very well with all the adrenaline surging on stage," he says. "So instead of having three on one side, that can twist in one direction, and then three on the other side that you twist in the opposite direction, I have all six of them on one side going the same direction."

Mustaine also designed four acoustic guitars—available April and May of 2022 to coincide with the release of Megadeth's 16th album, *The Sick, the Dying and the Dead*—including two Dave Mustaine CF-100 models in Bloodburst and Blacked Out, and two Kramer Flying V Vanguards in Metallic Silver and Black. The acoustics feature 24 frets and were constructed differently internally with a heavier bracing inside the guitar, shifting the tone of guitars.

"Those are the designs that I brought to Gibson," says Mustaine, "and rest assured they know how to make guitars."

Under the partnership, Mustaine will also be featured in content and projects across Gibson, Epiphone, and Kramer, and will join the Gibson Artist Alliance, the philanthropic arm featuring mentorship, research, and development programs curated by iconic musicians and newer artists, as well as industry executives.

A long way from his not-so-real model decades earlier, Mustaine insists the Flying Vs won't last long.

"The strategy the company has for the rollout of this model and beyond is mind-blowing to me," says Mustaine. "I think that the demand for these is overwhelming. I think fans and guitar aficionados interested in getting this guitar better preorder because the waitlist for these is going to be wild... but that's a great problem to have." —TBE

