

# Vince Martell

## Fudge Forever

**T**he Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, considered by many music fans and critics the most important rock album ever, was released June 1, 1967. But it could very well be argued that an album released the next day had greater impact—at the time—on aspiring musicians.

While *Sgt. Pepper* was a milestone in regard to recording techniques, songwriting, arrangements, the "album concept," and the band's use of unique instrumentation, the self-titled debut by Vanilla Fudge showcased a New York-area quartet's abilities to cover songs—including Beatles material—in ways that used alternate tempos, dramatic stops and starts, soaring vocals, and even Beethoven-inspired licks.

Among the fans who were influenced by Vanilla Fudge in the late '60s were musicians who achieved great success in their own right, including Ritchie Blackmore, Jon Anderson, Mick Box, Robert Plant, and others.

The Fudge's guitarist, Bronx-born Vince "Vinny" Martell, started playing as a kid; one of his first instruments was a Gibson archtop with a DeArmond pickup. He kept up with the instrument while in Navy, and after serving moved back to New York, where he formed a band called The Pigeons, which included Tim Bogert on bass and Joe Brennan on drums, who would later be replaced by Carmine Appice. Martell bought a '63 Gibson ES-335TDC and a Fender Twin amplifier. At the time, he was influenced by successful area bands such as the Young Rascals and the Vagrants.

"(The Young Rascals') Gene Cornish had that big double-cutaway Gibson Barney Kessel, and a Standel with two 15s, so he had a big sound," Martell recalled. "Leslie West (of the Vagrants) was using a Guild with the same body style as the Gibson 335."

The Pigeons were influenced by the dramatic music of the Vagrants, but devised arrangements even more unique. Following a name change to Vanilla Fudge, the band broke out in '67 with a reworking of the Supremes' "You Keep Me Hangin' On." Focusing on heavy covers, Vanilla Fudge pioneered progressive rock on five albums in the late '60s. They headlined concerts in the U.S. and England, and Martell jammed with guitarists including Jimi Hendrix. He's especially fond of an invitation from a blues legend...

"In 1969, the night Woodstock began, Vanilla Fudge had a gig with Joe

Cocker and B.B. King in Connecticut," Martell recalled. "B.B. invited me onstage to jam and close the show. He said, 'You play great, man.'"

"We had a groundbreaking sound," Martell said of Vanilla Fudge. "Management put us in a position to be seen and heard around the world. We influenced a lot of people—especially other musicians."

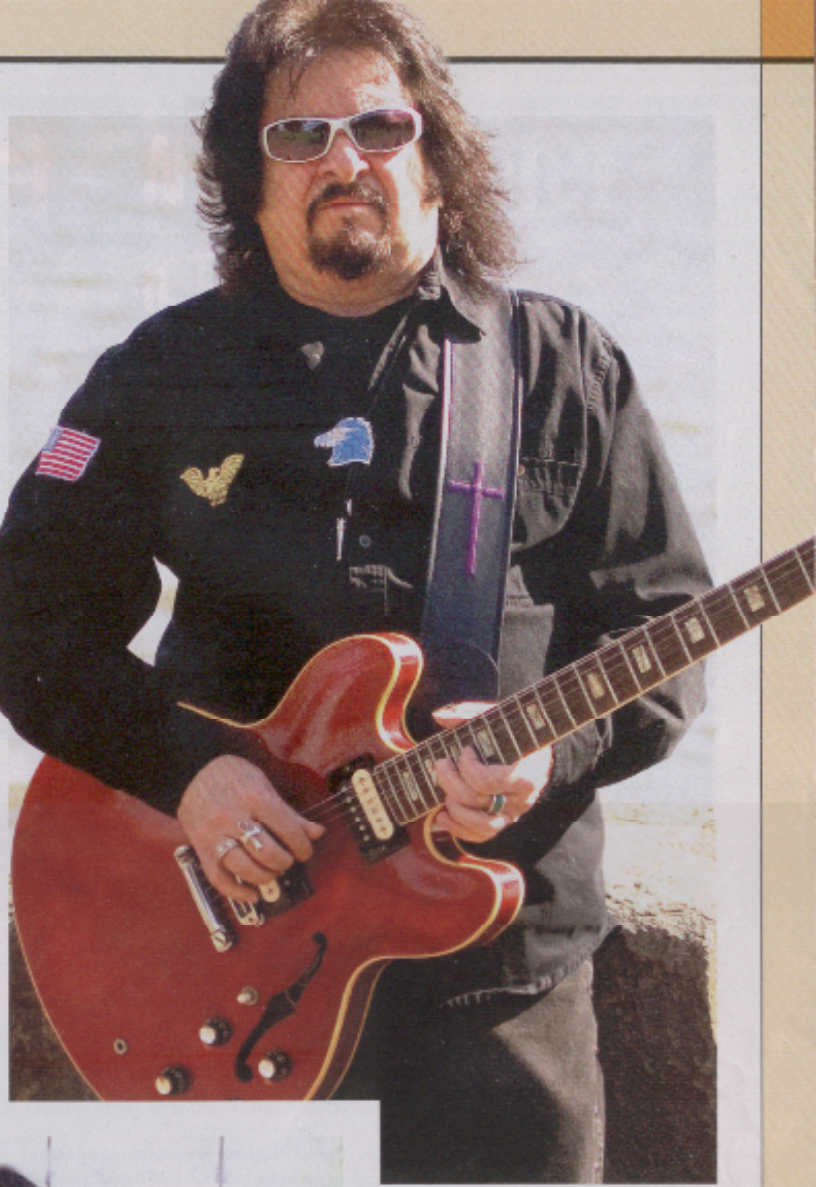
The Fudge's success allowed Martell to assemble a collection of instruments. At some point, he sold his ES-335.

"Unfortunately, I sold that guitar in late '68 and picked up a few old Strats and a '64 SG," he recalled. "I used that SG when I jammed with the Rolling Stones in '69. I still have that guitar!"

Another guitar Martell played in the glory days of the Fudge was a modified Les Paul.

"I saw somebody playing it at a club in Canada. It had a V-neck, two soapbar pickups, and a wooden bridge. I think it was a '52, and it had a magical sound."

Martell's amplifiers included a Standel on the first album, and later,



Vince Martell and his Les Paul with Vanilla Fudge in the late '60s. Shown from left are Mark Stein, Tim Bogert, and Carmine Appice

Fenders. He tried numerous distortion devices and stompboxes, and his use of wah on a cover of "Shotgun" is considered by many to be a definitive example.

Following the dissolution of the Fudge, Martell earned a degree in History, did private guitar instruction, and backed Danny and the Juniors.

"I had a chance to get away from my ego," he said with a chuckle.

Over the decades, incarnations of Vanilla Fudge have formed from time to time, but like most veteran musicians, Martell, Appice, and Bogert go at their own pace these days. Their most recent collaboration is an album of Led Zeppelin covers called *Our*

*Through The In Door*—a tribute to their old friends and former opening act.

"I like the first track—"The Immigrant Song"—very much, and "Black Mountain Side" turned out nice. "Rock and Roll" is cool—I got the chance to do the vocal on that one. And I got a nice solo on "Dazed and Confused."

Martell used an ESP single-cut on the album, as he endorses the brand. "It's a beautiful guitar, with EMG pickups," he said. "I also used a reissue '60 Les Paul."

The most recent Vanilla Fudge release is the four-CD/41-track boxed set, *Box of Fudge* (Rhino Handmade). Original studio tracks on the set have been remastered, and it includes the Fudge's New Year's Eve '68 concert at the Fillmore West, in San Francisco. The final live track was a spur-of-the-moment idea.

"Like a Rolling Stone" was something we just kinda threw out there, and I'm glad we did it!" he said.

Martell also stays busy with the Vince Martell Band, and just completed an autobiography. He has also been reunited with the Gibson ES-335TDC that served him so well during that decade, which will be profiled in the April issue of *VG*. —Willie G. Moseley