

ALLAN HOLDSWORTH COULD BE DESCRIBED as a journeyman. From Fusion with bands like UK and Bruford to Pop/Funk with Level 42, he's always been regarded as one of the few true guitar innovators of the last 15 years, mainly due to his remarkable solo albums that feature ethereal chord work, subtle harmonic movements and his hugely influential legato soloing style.

Not much has been heard from him since the string of dates with Level 42 in 1990, so on the eve of his latest tour *The Guitar Magazine* tracked him down to bring us up to date on developments in the last year or so. Talking of Level 42, his involvement with them came as a surprise to people familiar with his own music, and I wondered how he felt about it now?

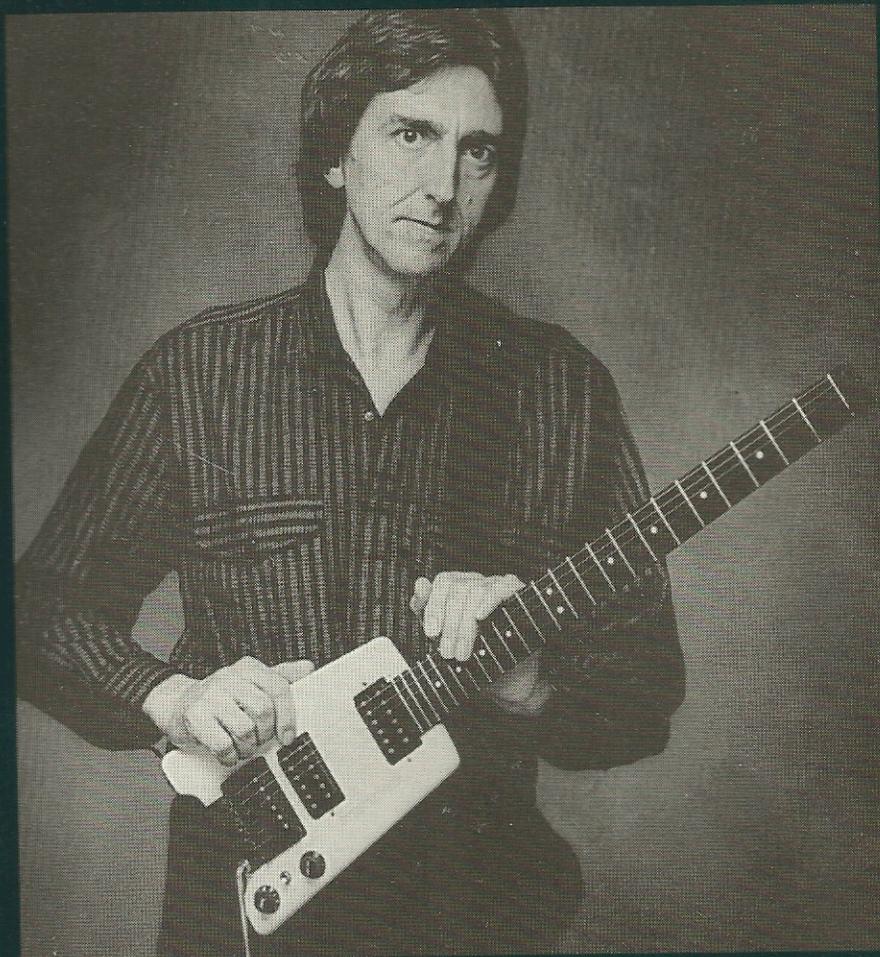
'I enjoyed it. They were all really great guys, and it was good fun. I didn't think I did a particularly good job, because the whole of my set up, my equipment and the way that I use things is geared for me to do my own things. I changed a few things and said to myself, 'OK, I'm not going to be doing that so I won't need this sound, I don't need that sound,' and I broke it down to only what I really required for myself, but sometimes when you play for other people they want something different.

'My whole rig is based around doing big, fat sustained chords as opposed to little chunky rhythm things, that's why I say that I don't think I did as good a job as I could have done if I'd been doing the gig longer. But I enjoyed it and I was glad that I could help them out while they were looking for somebody.'

Since then there have been a few ups and downs, as he explains: 'I came back to the States and recorded another album, did a tour with my own band, and now we're getting ready to go out and do some gigs in California, then we'll come over to Europe. The album will be called *Warden Cliff Tower*, but I haven't finished it yet. I mixed it but I didn't like it so I'm going to mix it again. It'll be out on the Restless label which is the record company that took all of the older albums that I'd done which were all deleted for a while.

'What happened was the big conglomerate horseshit again. Capitol bought Enigma, which was the label I was on, and then proceeded to get rid of everybody who wasn't big - which included me!

'A few of the guys that were the remainder of Enigma put the Restless thing together, took back the old Enigma catalogue which included all



allan holdsworth

Guitarist extraordinaire Allan Holdsworth has kept quiet since his string of live dates with Level 42, but now he's back on the scene with a new band, a new record company, and a UK tour.

Mo Nazam investigates

of my old albums. So they have all been re-released just now, but there was about a six month period over here where none of the albums I'd done were available at all, which was pretty bad, especially when there's other big record companies putting out unbelievably crap reissues of shit from the '70s. But anyway, that's life.'

For the last few years, Allan has used Jimmy Johnson as his regular bassist but this tour sees a change in personnel, with newcomer Skuli Sverrisson taking over the low end.

'Jimmy does a lot of studio work and sometimes he's not available. When we go on the road sometimes he loses money and so it's difficult for him to do them all because he has to make a living like all of the guys.

'Most of the guys who have played with me do it because they want to rather than just to make money out of it. We'd been looking for a bass

player for a long time to do some of the gigs when Jimmy was not around but then we found this guy who's unbelievable, so I think he's going to be around for as long as he can do them. For me he's great. The way he plays the bass is just what I like in a bassist, he doesn't do any of the thumb crap and although he plays fretless he doesn't play fretless with the band.

'I always like bass players who play notes because for my music that thumb thing doesn't work. That style is great for some types of music and a good example is Mark King, who's great, but it's more of a rhythmic thing and in my music you really need to hear the notes.'

Allan Holdsworth plays Leeds Irish Centre, 26 Mar; Bloomsbury Theatre London, 27 Mar; The Thekla, Bristol, 29 Mar, with a venue for 28 Mar to be confirmed.