



## PAUL GILBERT

**THE GUITAR VIRTUOSO – AND LET’S NOT FORGET MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST – ON SHREDDING, HEARING LOSS, AND PLAYING PIANO VERSIONS OF ENUFF Z’NUFF SONGS AT HOME!**

### ASKING GUITAR GURU MIKE VARNEY FOR A GIG WITH OZZY AGED 15

“When you’re a 15-year-old kid living in rural Pennsylvania, and you know that Ozzy needs a guitar player, what else are you going to do? I was already ripping up the fretboard with some authority in my covers band and I was a big fan of Randy Rhoads. I’d seen a magazine article where Mike Varney promised to listen to any cassette he received. I figured that he lived in California, so there might be a chance he could get in touch with Ozzy. I knew that it was very unlikely I’d be considered for the gig, but I also knew that I’d regret it if I didn’t at least try. So I tried. Mike did listen to my cassette. He liked my guitar playing, but thought my songwriting was terrible. He also thought I was too young to play in Ozzy’s band. So I worked on my songwriting.”



Paul (second left) with Racer X in 1987

**“IT’S NOT A SECRET HOW TO PLAY THE GUITAR. AFTER MAKING 11,000 VIDEO EXCHANGES FOR MY ONLINE SCHOOL I HAVE TO SAY THAT THE INFORMATION IS THERE!”**

### THE GUITAR INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

“I did well in high school, so my mom took the next logical step and started taking me to universities to decide which one I should attend. I distinctly remember walking through the chemistry lab at [well-respected university] Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and suddenly thinking, ‘This could really happen! I’d better figure out how to get out of this. I’m a musician!’ I remembered that I’d seen an ad for the Guitar Institute Of Technology in a guitar magazine, so I dug that out and showed it to my parents. I’d done nothing but practise guitar since I was nine years old, so they knew I was serious about music. My grandma generously paid the tuition fees. So on 10 September 1984 – I just looked up the date in a diary I kept back then – I flew from Pittsburgh to Los Angeles.

“It was a huge relief to put my time into guitar and music with no distractions. I immediately joined four bands – two in school, two outside of school – practised all the time, and ate lots of cherry pies and cookies. My main goal was to put a band together so I could make a record for Mike Varney’s label. I met bassist John Alderete, who was a student at the Bass Institute Of Technology, and drummer Harry Gschoesser, who was at the Percussion Institute Of Technology. John, Harry, and I would meet at the school every morning at 7am so we could grab a rehearsal room before classes started at 10am. Very few students were willing to get up that early so we could always get the best room. The G.I.T. staff had to walk past our rehearsals to get to their offices, so they

heard me playing every day. They also knew that I was good at getting up early in the morning. So as soon as I graduated I was asked to work at the school as a teacher. That was great. It paid some rent and also gave me a chance to stay in an inspiring musical environment with many great musicians.”

### SHREDDING

“Imagine someone with a bow and arrow. Actually, they have *lots* of arrows. Hundreds of arrows! And they can shoot the arrows all over the place. Most go into the sky. One occasionally hits a target, but not intentionally. It just hits the target because there are so many arrows going all over the place in every direction, really, really fast! It’s an amazing thing to watch. And then one guy walks up with a single arrow. He aims straight at the target. And with one shot the

arrow hits the bullseye. That’s pretty cool to watch too. Is one better than the other? Well that’s the argument about shred right there. My answer? Not everyone has to play the same way. Play what you want. Listen to what you want. After establishing myself as an ‘arrows everywhere’ guy I’m happy that I’m finally learning to aim and hit some targets on purpose.”

### RACER X

“Mike Varney helped us find vocalist Jeff Martin. I loved Jeff’s vibrato, his tone, and his writing style. Plus he turned out to be really funny, creative, and a great friend. Harry Gschoesser was in the US on a student visa and it ran out in 1986, so we needed a new drummer. We did a couple of gigs with Todd DeVito, because I’d played with him in a band called Black Sheep [in 1985]. I’d been trying to get Scott Travis to join for a while, but he had a paying gig with Doug Marks’s Hawk. He was unsure about Racer X, because we couldn’t offer a salary. Finally our music won him over, plus our gigs were starting to draw a lot of people. Bruce Bouillet was a guitar student of mine at G.I.T. and he had this amazing ability to play anything I showed him. We started playing some of our super-fast phrases in harmony and we’d never heard anyone do anything like that before. So I asked Bruce to join and the line-up was complete. We played chess, went bowling, and rehearsed like crazy. Lots of big record companies came to see us and didn’t like us. But the shows were amazing. We were an intense

Photos: Jason Quigley; Getty Images/Paul Natkin