

# Michael Landau

BY ANDY WIDDERS-ELLIS

dd, isn't it? While many guitarists dream about becoming an ace session jock (money! fame! glory!), the guy who copped Best Studio Guitarist in our '94 Readers Poll doesn't particularly dig the work. "I'm ready to sell everything and give it up," says Michael Landau. "It takes a certain mentality, and I'm definitely not into that world. I'd rather not deal with session playing at all these days."

For over a decade, Landau has been a first-call L.A. player, adding fire to records by Miles Davis, Pink Floyd, Joni Mitchell, Jon Anderson, Roger Daltrey, David Crosby, B.B. King, Boz Scaggs, James Taylor, and dozens more. Michael began his career while still in his teens. "Steve Lukather was doing a lot of dates, and he started referring me. Calls started coming in, then a few records and 12 years later I went, 'Wait a minute, why don't I make a record?'"

Rather than cut a happy-jazz disc in the tradition of many other sessioneers, he formed Burning Water, a loud, riff-driven band. Featuring brother Teddy on bass, the group gives Landau ample room to work his toe-curling, Hendrix-drenched Strat magic. Burning Water's eponymous first album was recorded piecemeal in Landau's 24-track home studio. "We recorded for about three years off and on. It's a thrown-together thing, but we're proud of it." Independently released last fall, *Burning Water* features ripping riffs and hardbody grooves. It's a spectacular showcase for Michael's freak-flag solos and hulking rhythm textures.

A second album is in the final mixing stages. Yet unnamed, it came together quickly. "We'd been playing live and were ready to go in and do it," says Michael. "We rented a large studio, so I got to bring all my nice big amps and open up. Way more fun. We cut all the tracks in about three days; I did my overdubs in a day-and-a-half." (Both *Burning Water* CDs are available from Lon Cohen Management, 12826 Martha St., North Hollywood, CA 91607.)

"It's definitely a Strat thing for me," says Landau describing his guitar arsenal. "My main one is a Fiesta Red '63." His two strat-style Tyler Classics sport Fralin single-coils. One features a maple neck, an ash body with shoreline gold paint, and a Wilkinson VS-100 trem, the other a rosewood fretboard, a seafoam green alder body, and a Wilkinson Vintage trem. Michael's Tyler Studio Elite has two Tyler single-coils and a Fralin humbucker, a custom Jim Demeter mid-boost/preamp, a body of mamywo (a resonant, lightweight southeast Asian hardwood, explains Jim Tyler), and maple top and neck. When tuned a half-step down, Michael plucks strings gauged .011-.049; at concert pitch, it's .010-.049.

## Studio Sharpshooter Goes Solo