

2022
FOCUS ON
GUITAR



PHOTO: PEXELS FROM PIXABAY

few. I've been using an [Apogee] Duet 2 for a long time, but I'm ready to move to something bigger than that. I will make that decision in the next couple of weeks for what I'm going to go with.

HILL KOURKOUTIS

Hill Kourkoutis is a multi-instrumentalist, as well as a producer, mixer and sound engineer. In 2022, she became the first woman to receive a Juno Award nomination for Recording Engineer of the Year. In addition to creating her own music and producing work for several other artists, she was the guitarist in the house band on CTV's *The Launch*.

CM: Could you run me through your usual guitar rig set-up?

Hill Kourkoutis: In the studio, I have all of my many pedals set-up with the option of routing them directly through my UA Apollo system via the Unison amps or through my Fender '59 Bassman, which is usually mic'd with a ribbon and/or dynamic mic. Tone options are very important to me so I have about a dozen guitars to choose from depending on the music I'm working on.



PHOTO: LISA MACINTOSH

When I play live, my rig may vary depending on what the project is, but I generally have a live show pedalboard that includes a Boss FV-500L volume pedal, TC Electronic Spark Mini Booster, Ibanez Tube Screamer, Electro Harmonix Big Muff, Deme-ter TRM-1 Tremulator, Dunlop MXR Carbon Copy Delay, Electro Harmonix Cathedral Reverb, and a Boss RE-20 Space Echo. I also usually play through a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe. I purchased a Squier Classic Vibe '70s Jaguar that I had set up very nicely for live gigs. That has since become one of my primary live guitars since I don't like traveling with my vintage guitars anymore. It plays really well and I love the smaller neck on it.

CM: Do you have any specific favourite guitars or pieces of gear?

Kourkoutis: I love all my guitars so much. They all have their own little personalities but there are a few that I tend to favour in the studio: JV-era [Squier Telecaster], Gretsch Streamliner with a Bigsby, a vintage Gibson Les Paul Junior double cutaway, and my 1950 Gibson LG-2 3/4 size that I had outfitted with a Bill Lawrence humbucker. I can play that guitar through a pedalboard for a unique tone option or acoustically. I have a thing for parlor-size guitars and thinner necks.

My latest favourite pieces of gear include an Acme MTP-66 Motown tube preamp and a Hologram Electronics Microcosm pedal. The MTP-66 is so gorgeous sounding. I used to spend hours trying to replicate that amazing Motown guitar and bass tone with plug-ins and now I just plug straight into this tube pre and *that sound* is instant! The Microcosm is something I am still exploring. I feel like I've barely scratched the surface and have never had a pedal like this before. It's definitely inspiring me immensely in my creative process and is making me create a bit more outside of the box.

CM: Do you follow any set practice regimen? If so, what does your routine look like?

Kourkoutis: I do not practice scales or technique much anymore. I stopped touring a few years ago but I play in the studio every day, so I guess that's as close to a regimen as it gets. Every day is different for me, playing-wise. If I do the odd one-off show, I will practice the songs I need to learn for that particular set and that is really the extent of my practicing. Usually, I'll sit down with a coffee and a guitar, play the songs over speakers, and chart them out by ear. Then I will practice along with the recordings so they become as close to muscle memory as possible before I have to rehearse with an artist or band. I like to be over prepared when I play as a musician-for-hire, so the prep time is important for me.

CM: Tell me about your differences in approach when playing for TV vs. composing and producing your music.

Kourkoutis: The differences in approach are akin to using a pen versus a pencil. When I am playing for TV or for a live show, I come rehearsed and knowing the repertoire inside and out. I'm using a pen. No room for errors or too much flexibility. When I'm songwriting, composing, or producing, my process is way more fluid. I write in pencil. I can sketch things out. I can develop and explore ideas.

If we're not vibing with those ideas, I can easily erase them and go back to the drawing board until I find the thing that fits. It's less rigid. I try to stay as open as possible until I catch that muse in the creative process.

CM: Why do you think you were drawn to all your areas — playing, production, composition, songwriting, etc. — instead of specializing in one or two?

Kourkoutis: I think all of these areas are simply various forms of creative expression that are interconnected. I can easily fuse any combo of these skill sets to enhance that mode of expression. They are symbiotic to me. They build off of and enhance each other. That was the initial appeal to me... to create by any means necessary. I also come from a DIY background, so a lot of these skill sets were further developed out of necessity. As a result, I didn't have to depend on people to get things done as an artist. Now, I can offer any of these skills whether I am writing for an artist or film or TV, producing a track, or playing any instrument. In a lot of the cases, I am combining all of them on one project. It allows me to have a one-stop-shop over here at [my studio] The Lair. The bonus is that I can create endlessly.

CM: And finally, what is the next piece of gear you have an eye on?

Kourkoutis: I have an extremely long running list that includes guitars, amps, pedals, and a ton of microphones and outboard gear that would also complement my guitar game, so this is hard! These days, I'm more interested in character pieces that will heighten the sonic 'scapes I create, so I think the next thing I'd love to add to my studio setup in the guitar realm is an old '50s/'60s low-watt Silvertone (1431) or Magnatone tube combo amp or something of that character. Nothing beats that tone and I have a lap steel that's screaming to be recorded through one!



Manus Hopkins is the Assistant Editor for Canadian Musician.