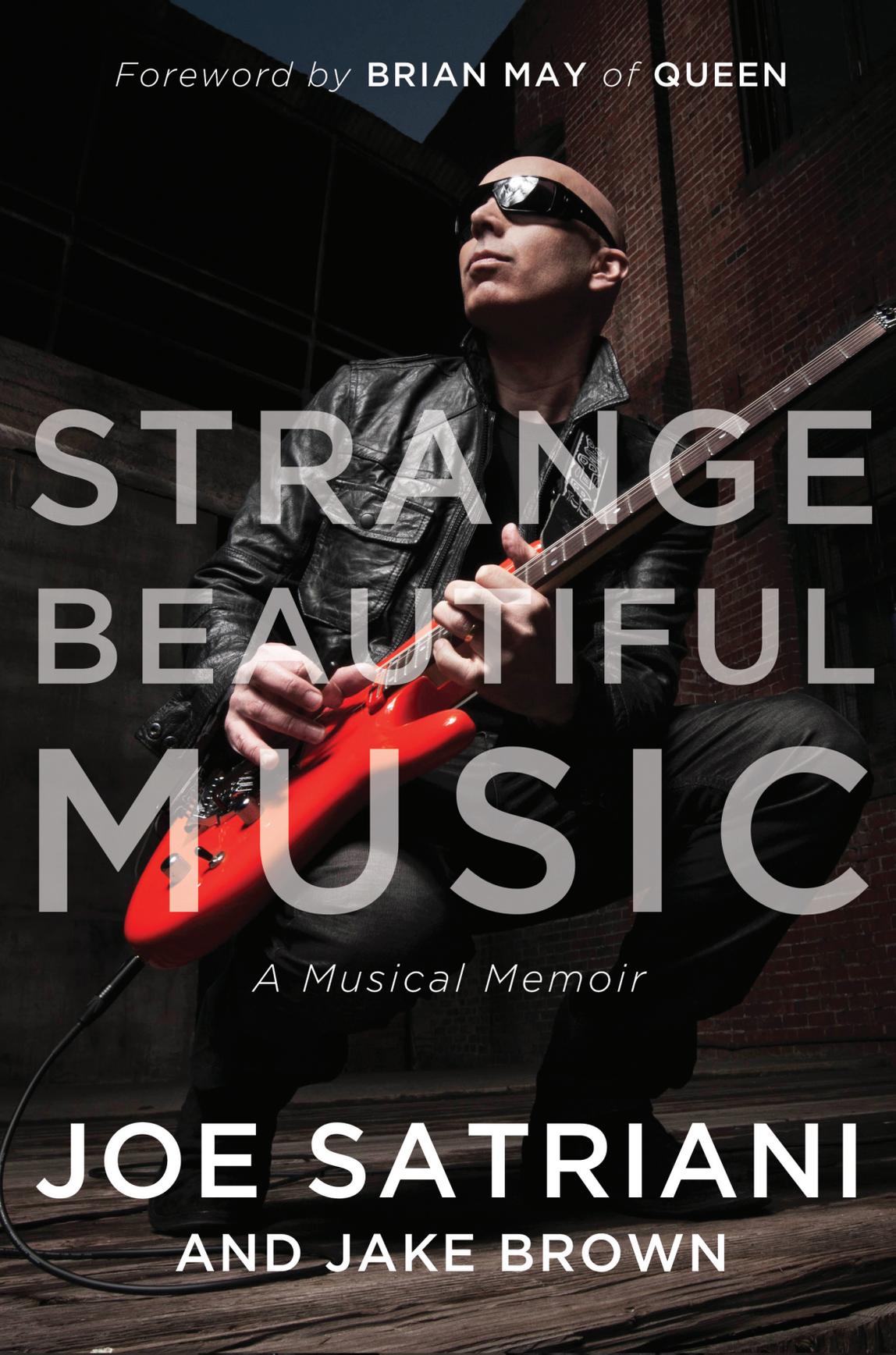


*Foreword by* **BRIAN MAY** of **QUEEN**

A photograph of Joe Satriani, a bald man wearing sunglasses and a black leather jacket, sitting on a wooden ledge in a dark alleyway. He is playing a bright red electric guitar. The background is a brick wall. The title 'STRANGE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

**STRANGE  
BEAUTIFUL  
MUSIC**

*A Musical Memoir*

**JOE SATRIANI  
AND JAKE BROWN**

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## The Hendrix Experience

**Jimi Hendrix was** my biggest influence growing up, and on September 18, 1970, the day that Jimi died, I was crushed, for reasons I can't fully explain. It's impossible to go back in my mind to that moment as a teenager. Even now I can't quite say what happened in my head, but I know that because he died, I decided to become a guitar player. That moment of decision was immediate and profound. It changed my life and everything about me.

That same day, I quit the football team and announced to my coach that I was going to become a musician. At home that night, I told my family I had decided what I was going to do with my life: be a *Professional Guitar Player*.

After all the dust settled at the dinner table, my sister Carol offered to donate her first paycheck from working as an art teacher at the local high school to buy me an electric guitar, which speaks to the extremely supportive and musically inclined family I came from.

When I was growing up, my mom would spin classical music records as we played, with the intent of educating us, but the music she and my dad listened to was jazz. Mom would play the most popular classics, so we heard Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Puccini—all the usual suspects. Then we would hear Miles Davis and John Coltrane, all the way to Dave Brubeck and, later on, Stanley Turrentine and Freddie Hubbard when the seventies

began. She was also a big Wes Montgomery fan (I think she had all his records), so we listened to him, too. My dad was a bit more big band-ish, but he listened to all styles of music throughout his life. He would tell me great stories about going to see all the great swing bands for a nickel as a kid growing up in New York City. He said he'd walk into these places, and it would be free half the time—you could get a beer for a nickel and watch the greatest big bands of all time. When my parents hosted parties they would spin all kinds of music and dance to all of it. They were both very open-minded and progressive in their appreciation of music.



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*Me at 15 with my first electric, a Hagstrom III*

PHOTO BY SATRIANI FAMILY ARCHIVES

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Being the youngest kid in the house, I grew up listening to what my older sisters and brother listened to, so that's how I heard early

rock 'n' roll, Motown, and all the pop music that was around. Then, during the mid-sixties, when rock really started to become a thing, they brought that home, and as a little kid I was exposed to all of it. In 1966, when the first straight-ahead rock albums were being released by the bands who used to play pop, I was on the verge of turning ten, and being ten years old in the mid-sixties was a lot younger than being ten years old today. There was no Internet or anything like it, so my only new-music influences were what was on the radio and the music my siblings were bringing home.

I think the first time I connected with music was when we were on a summer vacation up in Vermont, and my sisters were going to a dance. So they let me stand inside the door of the dance hall for, like, half a minute, and I'm maybe eight or nine years old, and when I heard this band playing "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," by the Rolling Stones, it was a life-changing moment. It was the best-feeling and best-sounding thing I'd ever experienced in my life. That feeling never left me.

I think when I started to see the Beatles and the Stones on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, that sort of awakened my desire to play drums, so that's how I started out on drums. There was a piano in the house that my mom played jazz standards on. My three sisters struggled unsuccessfully with piano lessons, but my brother and I were somehow given a free pass—we never had to suffer through that. I think they had just given up on forcing us to take music lessons. Once I started playing drums at nine, I took lessons for a year or so, but that was really my whole musical education at that point. I was basically left to my own devices.

I remember quite clearly the first time I heard Jimi Hendrix, the Who, Led Zeppelin—these were the bands that my sisters were listening to. Their boyfriends would bring albums over, and they would get a kick out of the fact that I, just this little kid, had an appetite for this new music. I guess they thought it was cool, so they would say, "Hey, look at this, Jimi Hendrix, when he plays this part"—I think it

was on *Electric Ladyland*—“no one knows how he does it.” I’d listen to it obsessively. As my sisters would stop listening to their old 45s and LPs, they would pass them on to me. I also inherited a portable record player, the little suitcase kind. I would go to a quiet corner of the house, plug it into an outlet, put on the records, and listen to them constantly. So I assume my family witnessed this—me, just hanging out with the record player, listening to records over and over again and not playing with my toys while the music was on. I would just sit there staring at the record player and the LP jackets.

The conflict early on with that was that every time I would try to participate in making my own music, it was a bit of a failure. I couldn’t play the piano as well as my mother; I could never get my brain around the left-hand/right-hand thing. Then I had my year of drum lessons, but I reached a wall where I recognized that I wasn’t really progressing. So then I moved on to guitar, which was also a struggle, but I saw hope because I made these small, incremental steps forward every time I would play. I’d love to say that in 1970 I knew I was going to be an amazing guitar player, but I think it was more of a desire than a confirmation of any talent I recognized in myself.

My older sister Marian was a folk guitarist, so as a kid I got to hear her play, write songs, and even perform at her high school. Her acoustic guitar was the first one I started playing—she told me that I could play it whenever I wanted. She also showed me the chord chart she had in her guitar case, and explained it to me by telling me to just put my fingers where the dots were and to follow the numbers. That was it. She was very encouraging and just left me alone with the guitar, so I taught myself the first basic ten or twenty chords based on that chart. The next step came when a friend of mine told me about a guy he knew who could teach me barre chords. So I went over to this kid’s house and he wrote them out on a piece of loose-leaf paper. I took them home and taught myself how to play those chords.

By that point, my parents had decided that if I was determined to play the guitar, I was going to have to take lessons. They were

not adverse to one of their kids becoming a musician, because they knew that it could be done, that not everyone needed to go the conservative route of getting a college degree in order to survive. But they did have a hard-knock attitude toward it, sort of like, “If you’re gonna do it, you’re gonna do it.” So I took three lessons from a guy in town. He was the epitome of what you would call a square guy who was quickly being left behind by the current generation. He looked square, he played square, and he was teaching guitar as a secondary thing while he studied to become a chiropractor. So after three lessons where he tried to teach me to read the sheet music to “Jingle Bells” while I was bringing him Jimi Hendrix’s first album, asking to learn “Purple Haze,” we parted ways.

For the next three years, I just taught myself. My parents had no interest in spending a lot of money on a guitar (especially since I’d just washed out on the drums!), so, with my sister Carol’s offer to buy me my first electric, I was on my way. There was this white Hagstrom guitar at a local music store that looked like Jimi’s—I was so naïve at the time that I didn’t even really know what a Fender Stratocaster was!—and it was only \$125, so I thought it would do. Once I got home and sat down with it for the first time, I quickly realized it was a completely different animal from my sister’s acoustic. The art of electric rock guitar is really learning how to play all over the neck. I quickly started to realize how difficult it was to get the sound right, too, because I didn’t have an amp back then. This was due to the understandable fact that there was no way my parents were going to buy me an amplifier just yet, because they were waiting to see if I was going to progress musically and stick with the guitar.

As a substitute, I managed to fashion my first guitar amp out of this old Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder my parents had at home. I don’t know how I figured out that I could plug my guitar into it, but it made a cool little amp. I also found the only way I could hear the sound come out of its small, built-in speaker was to put on a reel of tape and push the RECORD button. So by the nature of the

process, after I would play for fifteen minutes, I could listen back to what I had just played.

This discovery had a very big impact on me. It was really funny how it worked out, because once I started listening to myself play, I remember thinking how horrible I sounded, so I started to work on trying to “sound” good. The tape recorder also had a function that allowed you to play on top of what you had just recorded, essentially giving me my first exposure to multitrack recording. Once I discovered that, it also helped me work out this idea of playing solos on top of a rhythm, so that was what I did for about six months or so. After listening to me work like that for a few months, my dad broke down and bought me a small Univox amplifier. I’d turn it up to 10 and it sounded all distorted and I remember feeling like I was in heaven! My first effects pedal was an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pie fuzz box that I bought through the mail after seeing an advertisement in *Circus* magazine, and it was the biggest, fattest fuzz ever created. This was the first of many pedals to come.

It was very confusing when I first played with these pedals because I had no idea how to use them, or how to make myself sound like Hendrix! There was no YouTube back then to instantly instruct you on how to set things up, or on what sounds you could get out of a new piece of gear—you were pretty much on your own. After starting with the Big Muff, the next thing I got was a Maestro Phaser unit with the three buttons on it, and then the MXR, another phaser unit, and then a wah-wah pedal showed up eventually. I really didn’t have a whole bunch of pedals back then. I was still trying to get my amps—which were small—to sound really big, and so I would turn them all the way up. Besides the Univox, I eventually used a few small Fender amps that I would borrow from friends. I wish I still had those amps from the early days . . .



Thanks for checking out this preview of:

# STRANGE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

*A Musical Memoir*

By: Joe Satriani  
and Jake Brown

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