

MY FIRST GUITAR

When I was a kid, my uncle Paul was super cool. He was the good-looking younger brother of my mother. All the girls loved him. He was working at a theater; he played music in bars. And he was kind of like my father and hero. He taught me A and D chords when I was 8 years old. He just loved to play, and he brought me to my first concert, the Police, in 1980. U2 opened up for them. They were all we talked about all day long.

it. I was going in pretty deep; it is a fingerpicking song. Amazingly, I took on this challenge and figured it out. A year ago, I saw Leonard play in Sydney, Australia, and I watched his hands. I was only wrong by two chords, but the rest I got right! B minor, B, A minor, F sharp minor.

So that was the beginning. Pretty soon after that, I started busking.

When he got out of prison, my uncle freaked out,

“On the street, you meet everyone; you know who the pickpockets are, you know where the whores are, you know who the drug squad are. You figure them all out.”

He, unfortunately, took a job where he drove a car across Europe with some dodgy guys, and it turned out that the car had stuff in it that shouldn't have been in it. Classic story. He got locked up for a couple years, in prison, in Turkey.

All of his stuff basically got left in Ireland, and I discovered his guitar. His instrument was, if I remember correctly, a Hummingbird — but it wasn't a Gibson. I think it might have been, like, an Ibanez, some knock-off copy. Beautiful at the time; he adored it.

I discovered it, and learned some Bob Dylan songs on it. The first song I ever picked up was “Bob Dylan's Dream.” I remember getting a harmonica and picking up the chords . . . it was A, D and G.

And then I did something very ambitious. I listened to “Famous Blue Raincoat,” by Leonard Cohen, over and over and over until I figured out how to play

because I'd knocked his guitar around. I didn't realize! I was dragging it across the floor and doing all the things you don't do to a guitar. It's only now I can appreciate that, but, at the time, I was like, “What is he getting mad at me for?” I didn't understand.

HEROES

As a kid, I was always interested in Angus Young. I grew up a Catholic, and they make you take confirmation, which is kind of like your bar mitzvah. You take on a new name — a saint's name or whatever. At, like, 9 years old, my confirmation name was Angus — he was my god! I guess, if I had guitar heroes, it would be him; Dylan, because his guitar playing is completely underrated; Dave Gilmour, the most amazing player; and maybe Peter Green, J.J. Cale. These are all the people that I really adored.

OPPOSITE: Hansard and his storied Takamine NP15 relax for a bit at Kells Irish Restaurant & Pub in Seattle.