

# A tribute to the legendary jazz guitarist Allan Holdsworth

By **John McLaughlin**

My Dear Richard,

Thanks for your mail and request for a few words on the death of Allan Holdsworth.

Allan and I go back to 1970–1 when I met him for the first time in New York. He had replaced me in the Tony Williams Lifetime group. Even though he was British, I'd never heard him play. Somehow we'd moved in different circles in London. Already by this time he was a phenomenal guitarist. He had actually created a new style of guitar technique that was adopted by Eddie Van Halen, and many others subsequently, although no one had the musical gift Allan had.

We never played together, to my regret, even though I'd invited him to participate on a recording 14 or 15 years ago.

He was excessively humble and extremely self-critical. I'll never forget one night after seeing him in concert I went backstage to congratulate him. He dismissed my compliments on the spot to which I replied: 'Allan, if I knew what you were doing I would steal everything, only I've no idea how you play like that'. He will be sorely missed.

John McLaughlin  
18 April 2017

**P.S. The video [link you sent] is a powerful testimony! – see [goo.gl/Tdmm4d](http://goo.gl/Tdmm4d) [13 mins]** – 'Allan Holdsworth with The Pat Smythe Trio' – British Rail (Live video, 1974)

Editor **Richard House** adds: Coming from one of the world's greatest-ever guitarists, this is a tremendous and characteristically modest tribute from John. I first became aware of Allan in the early 1970s with the release of the first album by drummer Jon Hiseman's first post-Colosseum band, Tempest. There was something about the incredible speed, fluidity and sheer beauty of Allan's playing that blew me away. And when he joined the legendary jazz-fusion band Soft Machine soon afterwards, I was comprehensively blown away by his playing on their 1975 album 'Bundles'. I posted a review of 'Bundles' on Amazon in 2012, which was for some years the most favoured review of the album. Then when Allan died in 2017, I posted another comment, and Amazon then proceeded to remove my review – despite concerted protests from me. Thankfully,

however, I had a copy of the review, which I reproduce below.

## **One of the great bands with a guitarist from the Gods**

\*\*\*\*\* By Richard House on 1 Jan. 2012

Format: Audio CD

An historical retrospect. When I was at university in the mid 1970s (1974 or 1975, I believe), I went down to London to see the Softs with a group of mates who had always been Softs fans going back into the late 60s. We got seats near the front – and as other reviewers have said here, hardly any of us had heard of Allan Holdsworth before then. When Allan took his first solo (dressed all in white – echoes of another guitar legend, Mahavishnu John McLaughlin), he wondered to the front of the stage and proceeded to solo for maybe 12–15 minutes (this was probably Hazard Profile), and we were all utterly stunned in disbelief at the virtuosity of what we were hearing. I looked around me, and complete strangers were falling out of their seats in droves. None of us had ever heard guitar playing like this – it seemed superhuman – technically impossible, and awesomely beautiful. Today, when I put on 'Bundles', my skin creeps just as it did that first time I ever saw Holdsworth. If you've never heard the extraordinary Allan Holdsworth before, this is certainly a good place to start. It's just such a shame that Allan's joining of the band led to such dis-ease and ill-feeling. I suppose it's some kind of salutary lesson about how the electric guitar can dominate a band, with the other world-class musicians being cast in its shade. Having been a huge Mike Ratledge fan (e.g. try the magnificent album 'Soft Machine 3'), I just wish Mike and Allan could have found a way to play together over a period of time, both egos intact (like McLaughlin and Jan Hammer famously managed for at least a few years in the first Mahavishnu Orchestra). But if you're a jazz or jazz-rock fan who values virtuosity, you just can't go to your grave without hearing this.

And finally, an excellent obituary of the great man can be found at the link below: [www.theguardian.com/music/2017/apr/19/allan-holdsworth-obituary](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/apr/19/allan-holdsworth-obituary) [[goo.gl/gNcTgV](http://goo.gl/gNcTgV)]

## **Allan Holdsworth obituary**

**Spellbinding jazz, funk and fusion guitarist dedicated to the art of improvisation who played with Soft Machine and Gong in the 1970s**

Rest in Peace, Allan.