

# FEATURES

MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2009

PAGE 13



From left: Robert Trujillo, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield of Metallica. PHOTO: AP

## Hard rock made easy

*Metallica's Kirk Hammett is thrilled with the latest version of 'Guitar Hero,' a popular video game that simulates performing with a live band*

BY RICARDO BACA  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, AUSTIN

Of the four men who make up the legendary heavy metal band Metallica, guitarist Kirk Hammett is the subtlest and most deliberate.

His bandmates have made careers out of outwardly channeling their angst — musically, politically and artistically — but Hammett has always been in the background playing sick lead guitar and laying down searing riffs.

Whereas singer James Hetfield embodies the band's jockish, defiant spirit, Hammett embodies its musicality, an intelligent mix of pop hooks disguised as punk-infused metal.

Metallica is the crossover metal act that has been easy to love for more than 25 years, and the newly inducted Rock and Roll Hall of Famers have grown with their audience and adapted to a new generation of fans — so much so that they just released their first video game, *Guitar Hero: Metallica*.

Hetfield, Hammett, drummer Lars Ulrich and bassman Robert Trujillo star in their own *Guitar Hero*, the popular rhythm-based video game that gives players the full-band experience. Players can rock out as Ulrich on the game's drum-controllers, sing Hetfield's leads on a mic and play Hammett's solos on a guitar-joystick. And sure enough, Hammett, the real-life guitar hero behind *Enter Sandman*, *Sad But True*, *Master of Puppets*, *One* and so many others, digs the game's presentation.

### SOUND SELECTION

"It's a completely different thought process," Hammett said here during the South by Southwest music festival last month. "The whole execution of *Guitar Hero* is all brought down to [five] little buttons ... as opposed to hundreds of thousands of variations on your left hand and right hand [on a real guitar]."

"It's compounded to simple movements, and it's super cool, I have to say."

While these video games had included real-life musicians as characters before, it wasn't until the mid-

2008 release of *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* that a game was formed around an entire band. Nothing against Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry, but *Guitar Hero: Metallica* makes for a better game-play experience, if only for the richness of Metallica's catalog.

And some of that is the game programming itself. Through various mock performances, the band's exact movements were logged and replicated in the virtual world.

"[The game] is very, very accurate," Hammett said. "It is us playing the song when you watch it. It's Lars doing the whole theatrical drumming deal. It's James with his swagger. It's me with my weird, headbanging style. And it's Rob with his particular, heavy-handed approach. It's all there, and they did such an accurate job in capturing the way we move and the way we move together as a group."

### CLASSIC ROCK

The music is a tight compilation of Metallica songs mixed with a catalog of music that was handpicked by the band, including songs from Queen, Slayer, Mastodon, Foo Fighters, Alice in Chains and others. Whether you like video games or not, it's easy to see the educational value in these games, something that hits home when your five-year-old nephew asks you to take him to see Rush, AC/DC and Iron Maiden.

"I love that aspect of it," says Hammett. "This younger generation is being exposed to a lot of great classic rock and classic metal that they wouldn't otherwise know, especially if they're just listening to the radio ... It's a great musical education for them. And I'd like to think that it's inspiring enough that maybe one of these kids would buy a guitar and learn how to play it."

That's exactly what's happening. Guitar sales are up. Many of these kids (and some adults) are starting bands and writing original music. And all this was inspired by a hard-plastic, guitar-shaped controller with colored buttons on its neck. The *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* guitars are easy targets. They're miniature-sized,

rudimentary and as rock 'n' roll as a Q-Tip. That said, it's an effective introduction to the real deal, according to one of the biggest names in the real-life game.

"[The game's controller is] more like reading music than it is playing guitar," Hammett said, "because you're reading notations on the screen and you're doing the corresponding fingering."

The band was in Austin for the media launch of the game — and to play a secret show at Stubb's Bar-B-Que, a large venue by South by Southwest standards but a tiny venue by Metallica standards. (Stubb's holds around 2,500, and Metallica can sell out 18,000-seat arenas in most mid-size markets.)

### 'SMALL' SHOW

The show was supposed to be a surprise, but even Hammett's mom had read about the "secret show" in the weeks leading up to the event.

"Obviously [South by Southwest] is a great launching platform for something like this, and it's always great for us to be able to sneak into a small club and play a small show."

Hammett said the band isn't yet writing for the next record. They're too busy completing the tour cycle for their latest, 2008's *Death Magnetic*.

"We still have a year and a half worth of touring to do, and we're going to make it through this tour in one piece and then think about coming up with new music," said Hammett.

Of his band's induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Hammett can't help but feel a little old.

"Twenty-five years have to have gone past since the release of your first album [to be eligible for the rock hall], so I feel a little bit like a dinosaur," Hammett said. "[But I'm proud] that we're still a valid band, still making music. A lot of bands that get inducted are in the winters of their careers, so to speak. We're still making music and we're still on tour, and it's cool that we're still a band and still creating and trying to be somewhat relevant."

[ THE WEEKENDER ]

## Nightmares and other neuroses on parade

*'La Fin des Terres' worked magic with its technical wizardry, but lacked finesse as a work of contemporary dance*

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

*La Fin des Terres* (Land's End) by the Compagnie Philippe Genty opened on Thursday of last week to a rather lackluster reception at the National Theater. It was difficult to get away from the impression that many in the audience were uncertain about what aspect of the show they were supposed to appreciate in Genty's combination of dance, circus and puppetry.

The look created by the company had a simplicity and versatility that was clearly the result of enormous technical wizardry. A series of sliding panels and trap doors in a false floor let performers appear and disappear as if by magic, and allowed the cropping and juxtaposition of images that gave some movements in the piece a hypnotic kaleidoscopic feel. While the magical effects made possible by the innovative set were an important part of the production, Genty showed considerable restraint, rarely letting the technical wizardry obtrude into the performance. Given the complexity of the set up, there were few technical hiccups other than the occasional loud rumble when panels were supposed to slide soundlessly across the stage.

Genty's mixture of different art forms to take audiences into a dreamland of human-headed insects, people getting sucked into the floor and monstrous tumors that threaten to engulf the performers and the stage, certainly has plenty of visual appeal, and the handling of the giant puppets was a peerless exhibition of stagecraft, but there was, for this reviewer at least, an excessive flavor of the circus about the production. As a work of contemporary dance, *La Fin des Terres* lacked finesse, and the beauty of the scenes relied on creating an overall effect rather than a focus on the performers themselves. This also gave the show an air of coldness: It was more of a presentation of Genty's vision rather than a performance given by the actors.

*La Fin des Terres* explores the relationship between men and women, and a scene in which a woman's legs turn into a pair of scissors and chops off a male puppet's penis (which was represented as a literal "one-eyed trouser snake"), left little doubt about the Freudian subtext, and may well have rather shocked some parents who had brought young children the show in the expectation of Muppet-like entertainment. The puppetry, with the use of a number of beautifully crafted over-sized puppets manipulated by numerous puppeteers were spectacular pieces of ensemble work, but such was the insistence on wowing audiences with showmanship that it was hard to settle down to what Genty might be trying to say. Most of the time, the visual spectacle was almost enough.

At the end of *La Fin des Terres*, technical support staff dressed in black boiler suits and strapped up with communication equipment were invited up on stage to take the curtain call with the performers. They had contributed as much as anyone to the show, and it was good to see them get their due.



No Muppets here.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PASCAL FRANCOIS

## PLANET POP

A day after Billy Bob Thornton said Canadian audiences were like mashed potatoes without gravy, the actor professed his love for the Great White North.

"I love Canada, absolutely," said the 53-year-old actor.

Thornton talked quickly to reporters on Thursday night before a performance with his band, the Boxmasters, in Toronto, Ontario. The group was opening for Willie Nelson.

The proclamation was a sharp contrast to



comments Thornton made on Wednesday of last week when he was an uncooperative guest on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Q radio program.

During that appearance, the Oscar-winning star of *Sling Blade* sparred back and forth with host Jian Ghomeshi and found time to insult Canadian crowds.

Thornton, who was interviewed alongside his Boxmasters bandmates, took issue with Ghomeshi's introduction, which included references to the star's career as a Hollywood actor, director and screenwriter.

For much of the interview, Thornton refused to answer any of Ghomeshi's questions directly, instead mumbling "I don't know what you're talking about," or some variation thereof in response to most questions.

Thornton said Ghomeshi's producers had been instructed ahead of time not to talk about his film career at all.

Thornton mainly seemed sensitive to any comment that implied that his band which he described as "cosmic cowboy music" was not his full-time passion. When pressed for details on



Above: Stephen Colbert has put NASA in a difficult position. PHOTO: AP  
Left: J.Lo is the latest celebrity to have successfully ousted a cybersquatter. PHOTO: AP  
Right: Billy Bob Thornton might be going the way of Joaquin Phoenix. PHOTO: REUTERS

his musical influences, Thornton elliptically provided a non sequitur about a magazine he subscribed to called *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and a model-building contest he once entered.

The actor's belligerent appearance on the show has already become a veritable viral sensation. More than 1.2 million viewers have watched the clip on YouTube.

From cosmic music to exploring the cosmos, NASA's sense of humor is being put to the test. The US space agency is facing a serious dilemma after a popular television comedian, Stephen Colbert, hijacked an

online contest sponsored by NASA to pick a name for a new module on the International Space Station.

Colbert's suggestion for a name? His own.

His victory may have had something to do with his repeated appeals to fans of his show, *The Colbert Report*, to vote for him.

With the help of his fans — called the "Colbert Nation" — the comedian's name easily won the online poll at nasa.gov, rocketing past NASA suggestions "Earthrise," "Legacy," "Serenity" and "Venture." NASA announced on Friday that astronaut Sunita Williams will unveil the name tomorrow on Colbert's television show.

The space agency declined to reveal the name until the show and is not obliged to bow to popular demand. The contest rules state that while NASA will take into consideration the results of the voting they are not binding.

Voting online is also a way for people to choose their favorite Simpsons character. The US post office wants folks to vote early and often among the five new stamps honoring the nation's funniest dysfunctional cartoon family.

The Simpsons stamps will be issued May 7, portraying Homer, his wife, Marge, their son Bart, daughter Lisa and baby Maggie. The characters, created by

cartoonist Matt Groening, have become pop culture icons in 20 years on television.

The US\$0.44 stamps are on display at www.usps.com/simpsons and votes can be cast at that site until May 14.

American singer and actress Jennifer Lopez has won a cybersquatting case against a US Web operator who registered two Internet addresses that used her name for commercial profit, a UN agency said on Thursday.

The disputed domain names, jenniferlopez.net and jenniferlopez.org, directed users to a Web site that generated paid advertising revenues, according to the ruling issued by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

An independent arbitrator ordered the domain names transferred within 10 days to the Jennifer Lopez Foundation, which filed the complaint. The charitable foundation promotes better access to healthcare for women and children.

The Grammy-nominated singer, widely known as J.Lo, joins other celebrities in ousting

cybersquatters through the dispute procedure, including Pierce Brosnan, Tom Cruise, Celine Dion, Scarlett Johansson, Nicole Kidman, Madonna and Julia Roberts.

Lopez registered her name as a trademark in the US in May 1999.

—AGENCIES

