## Allan Holdsworth, Guitarist Revered in Both Jazz and Prog-Rock Circles, Dies at 70

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By DAVID R. ADLER • APR 17, 2017





Allan Holdsworth, a spellbinding guitarist who influenced generations of jazz and

His daughter Louise Holdsworth announced his death on Sunday, prompting an outpouring of grief as well as high praise for an artist who not only changed the

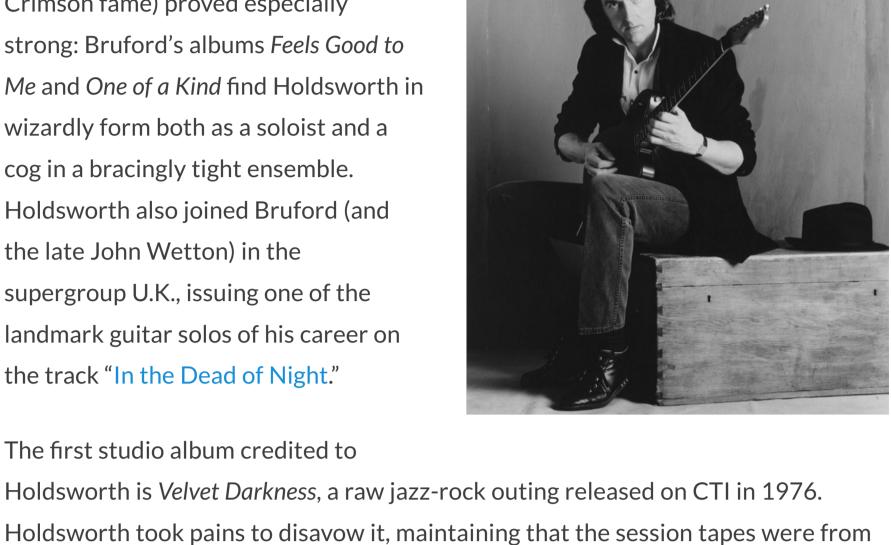
rock musicians with his innovative sound, has died unexpectedly at age 70.

guitar, but also created a musical language entirely his own. Holdsworth emerged as a promising and original player in the late 1960s and early '70s. But he hit his stride in the mid-'70s,

with sideman appearances in major groups on the jazz-fusion and prog-rock circuits. He succeeded John McLaughlin in a new incarnation of the Tony Williams Lifetime, and also worked with Soft Machine, Pierre Moerlen's Gong, and fusion violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. His late '70s collaborations with drummer Bill Bruford (of Yes and King



Crimson fame) proved especially strong: Bruford's albums Feels Good to Me and One of a Kind find Holdsworth in wizardly form both as a soloist and a cog in a bracingly tight ensemble. Holdsworth also joined Bruford (and the late John Wetton) in the supergroup U.K., issuing one of the landmark guitar solos of his career on the track "In the Dead of Night." The first studio album credited to Holdsworth is Velvet Darkness, a raw jazz-rock outing released on CTI in 1976.



a rehearsal, and released without his permission. He made his proper debut in 1982 with I.O.U., and was soon winning ecstatic praise from Eddie Van Halen, among others. In Holdsworth's liquid, legato line playing, Van Halen no doubt heard a combination of blinding speed and patient, highly musical phrasing, not to mention a harmonic language like no other. Eidolon (Remastered) Collection



To me, he's the only guitarist dealing with the kind of language Coltrane was dealing with — those long Slonimsky patterns that evolve differently through different registers in a very precise way, but pure like a prism. That's a big part of what I hear, that clarity of harmonic unfolding and melodic intricacy.

Holdsworth's chordal language, in its sheer imagination and otherworldliness, set

his music even further apart. Unlike the solos, the chords were voiced with a clean,

glass-like reverberating tone. They involved extreme finger stretches required in no

other kind of music. They brought out strange intervallic combinations: on "Looking Glass," from Atavachron, two notes on the lowest strings and two on the highest strings, with nothing in between. Reaching for the Uncommon Chord was the title of a 1987 book of Holdsworth transcriptions, and for good reason. While Holdsworth's music could produce searing heat (hear "Peril Premonition" from Secrets), it could also be disarmingly tender and intimate: His acoustic guitar

solo on "Home," a lyrical ballad from *Metal Fatigue*, is arguably one of his finest

its wickedly surreal qualities.

Ronnie Scott's.

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moments. He went after all kinds of sounds, famously experimenting with a guitar

synthesizer called the SynthAxe, now consigned to the '80s dustbin but not without

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jazz-guitar influences were Joe Pass, Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian. He

was working widely on the club circuit in England by his 20s, catching the ear of

Holdsworth never stopped touring and recording, and had been in the midst of a

tenor saxophonist Ray Warleigh, who brought him into the jazz scene, at places like

creative resurgence roughly since the release of his 2000 album The Sixteen Men of Tain. Earlier this month, Manifesto Records released a 12-CD boxed set titled The Man Who Changed Guitar Forever, as well as a new best-of collection, Eidolon. Holdsworth is survived by three daughters — Lynn, Emily and Louise — as well as a son, Sam, and one granddaughter. He was married twice; both marriages ended in divorce.

In the hours following Holdsworth's death, tributes came in from guitarists

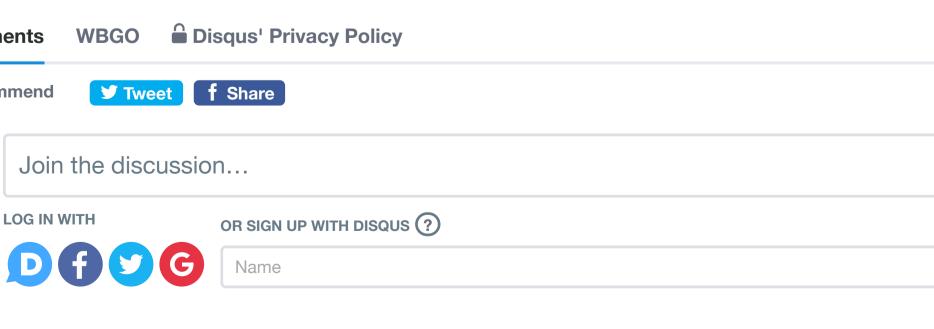
including Steve Lukather, Vernon Reid and Joe Satriani. But not just guitarists:

Pianist and keyboardist Geoffrey Keezer called Holdsworth "one of my biggest

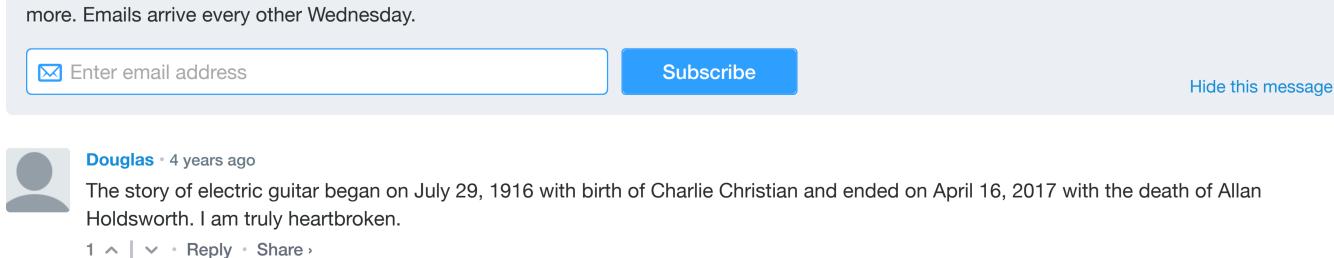
musical heroes, and a true unsung genius of our time." Drummer Vinnie Colaiuta

wrote that playing with Holdsworth was "a major highlight of my musical life." Rosenwinkel's Twitter tribute was particularly moving: Kurt Rosenwinkel





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discovered Allan when he played for UK, and then couldn't get enough of his work for the next 30 years. I got to interview him for the UCLA Daily Bruin in 1985 and share a couple of pints with him; it was the highlight of my journalistic career. Unfortunately I hadn't seen him perform live in 20 years, and then passed up a chance to catch him in Venice just a couple of weeks ago. I'm heartbroken, but so glad I saw him perform so many times. He was truly a master. 

Considering that "The Un-Merry-Go-Round" was composed as a tribute to his late father, a crying guitar is indeed an apt description. I

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