

IN THE STUDIO

Tom Morello Cranks It Up on New Nightwatchman Disc

The Rage guitarist gets loud on the third album by his folky alter ego

EIGHT YEARS AGO, WHEN Tom Morello invented his Nightwatchman alter ego, he wanted “a clear line of demarcation.” He would sing political songs with an acoustic guitar; he would not do Rage Against the Machine-style skronky metal solos. Things change. “This isn’t your grandfather’s Nightwatchman,” he says with a grin, before cranking “It Begins Tonight,” a fist-pumping rocker with an insane solo.

“I figured I can play guitar like that, so I should,” Morello says, wearing a CBGB T-shirt and sipping Johnnie Walker Black in his Hollywood Hills home studio. For his third Nightwatchman album, *Worldwide Rebel Songs* (out in early 2011), he has recorded 15 tracks, some shredding, some strumming. The title tune was written for striking workers at a Korean guitar factory. Other sources of inspiration: embittered American soldiers in Iraq (“Stray Bullets”), a fantasy of Mexican drug cartels bent on societal overthrow rather than profit (“The Dogs of Tijuana”), the crowd-rallying power of his steel-string acoustic guitar



MELLOW LIKE MORELLO
The guitarist in his L.A. home studio

(“Black Spartacus Heart Attack Machine”). “Half the record is to be listened to at night when you’re plotting revenge,” he says. “And the other half is to be played when you’re lighting the Molotov.”

Between touring with Rage and releasing a new Street Sweeper Social Club EP, Morello spent three weeks recording

with his live band, the Freedom Fighter Orchestra. Ben Harper sat in for “Save the Hammer for the Man,” a duet about Morello’s favorite subject: “Politics, apocalypse/Start to look the same.” “I don’t have qualifications as a singer other than my sincerity,” he says. “But I’m dead serious about every single fucking word.”

GAVIN EDWARDS