



**COURTNEY BARNETT**

On pedals, self-doubt  
& Creature of Habit

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AUSTRALIAN

THE REAL PLAYER'S PICK

# guitar



# The Beatles

# ROCK GUIDE

**THEY'RE SO HEAVY: EIGHT  
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FAB FOUR'S GRITTIER SIDE**

+

**10**

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EVH

## EVH updates the Wolfgang Special line with baked maple necks and 'boards, and colors to dazzle

EVH Guitars has given its famed Wolfgang model a choice makeover with new fingerboards and some glorious finishes to boot. The Wolfgang Special Baked Maple and Wolfgang Special Baked Maple TOM, which offer new tweaks to Eddie Van Halen's signature guitar, bring baked maple fretboards to its refreshed lineup, with a choice of Eddie-approved and whammy dive-ready Floyd Rose bridges, as well as stoptail bridge and tailpiece designs.

Both models feature quarter-sawn, baked maple necks with matching 22-jumbo fret fingerboards. They're bolted onto their quirky bodies and reinforced with graphite, and the new standard, heel-mounted truss rod adjustment wheels. As expected, they stay true to Eddie's preferred Wolfgang Backshape neck profile, delivering a 12"-16" compound radius with a hand-rubbed satin urethane neck finish.

Their basswood bodies get one-ply cream bindings, regardless of their color, and atop them sit twin EVH Wolfgang humbuckers, with many getting a Zebra colorway, nodding to their creator's DIY modding days (which never really ended, in truth). Those pups are wired with 500K EVH Bourns Low Friction Volume Pots, a Treble Bleed Circuit, and 250K Tone Pots, as well as a three-way toggle switch which takes the Les Paul-like upper-horn position. Although the lack of glow-in-the-dark inlays is a minor oversight, it's a well-spec'd, mid-price axe that gives players the choice of a Floyd Rose R2 vibrato, or an adjustable hardtail bridge with tailpiece and a Graph Tech TUSQ XL nut.

PHIL WELLER

GETTY / TIM MOSSENFELDER



## NEWS

## Court rules in favour of Dean Guitars in Dimebag Darrell legal dispute

A US federal court has issued a major ruling in the ongoing legal dispute between Dimebag Darrell's estate and Dean Guitars owner Armadillo Distribution Enterprises, granting a summary judgement in favour of the defendant.

In 2021, the late Pantera guitar great's estate sued Dean Guitars, citing unlawful use of the Stealth and Razorback guitar body shapes, and "unauthorized fraudulent trademark registrations" for the two. In Dime We Trust, headed by Dime's longtime girlfriend and estate trustee, Rita Haney, also accused Armadillo of breaching their terms of contract.

At the time of the original lawsuit, Dean Guitars' then-CEO & President Evan Robinson released a statement on behalf of the company, calling the claims were "without any merit".

Now, in a new ruling, a federal court has issued in favor of Armadillo, granting a summary judgement that dismisses "the majority" of the Dimebag estate's trademark, fraud, and breach of contract claims. That includes In Dime We Trust's claims regarding the ownership of Dean's guitar models.

"For almost two decades Armadillo was proud to work directly with the Abbott family under a relationship built upon mutual respect, shared purpose, and a genuine love for Darrell Abbott's music and his love for Dean Guitars," a press release from Armadillo reads.

"The... order is confirmation of what we have known all along: Armadillo's ownership of the Stealth and Razorback trademarks, the Razorback guitar design, and related intellectual property was earned through years of prior use and good faith commercial activity." **MATT OWEN**

## Turnstile co-founder and former guitarist Brady Ebert faces potential life sentence

Former Turnstile guitarist Brady Ebert has been indicted by a Montgomery County, Maryland grand jury on the charge of attempted first-degree murder, a crime that carries with it a potential life sentence in prison.

First reported by the Baltimore Banner, the indictment follows Ebert's arrest in March on charges of attempted second-degree murder and first-degree assault, after he allegedly hit former Turnstile bandmate Brendan Yates' father with his car.

According to Montgomery County police, on March 29, Ebert drove to the Silver Spring, Maryland home of 79-year-old William Yates, and intentionally struck him with his car after

yelling obscenities and honking his horn at both Yates and other members of his family.

Ebert maintains that he is innocent, reportedly telling a district court commissioner, "This is pure self-defense. They're the attackers."

Ebert co-founded Turnstile in 2010, and remained with the group until 2022, when they parted ways with the guitarist due to "a consistent pattern of harmful behavior affecting himself, the band, and the community." Earlier this year, Ebert was fired from his new band, The S.E.T., after he accused Turnstile of – among other misdeeds – misusing benefit show funds in a series of social media posts.

JACKSON MAXWELL





# Great. Advice



Courtney Barnett discusses how her pedalboard changes off stage, asking Waxahatchee to guest, and being inspired by Cobain, Hendrix, and McCartney.

WORDS BY CHERI AMOUR

In the decade since Courtney Barnett released her debut album, *Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit*, she's done very little sitting. The North Melbourne ambassador has put out three studio records, a live LP with Kurt Vile, and a soundtrack to 2023's anti-rock biography *Anonymous Club*. Slacker rock by sound, but not by nature.

For her latest record, she and her band recorded in Joshua Tree, California, experiencing a desert-inspired renaissance after years on the road. *Creature of Habit* finds the Aussie songwriter returning to fuzzed-out fretwork on single, *Stay In Your Lane*, while tracks like *Same* fire up the chorus pedal for a synth-fuelled, sunshine ode.

We spoke to Barnett from her home in LA about her latest studio stint and trusting your instincts.

You've recently been playing in small indie venues like the Punters Club in

Melbourne, a contrast to supporting Foo Fighters in stadiums in 2023. How does your guitar rig change depending on the size of the show?

The only time I change it is for a solo show. If it's a band show, we keep everything pretty consistent, no matter the stage size. My front-of-house engineer was using a through box, so he caught the line after, but it still captured the amp sound. It gives more control than mic'ing it up, which can pick up other things.

The new single features Waxahatchee. What made Katie Crutchfield's voice right for *Site Unseen*?

I wrote the harmony part assuming I'd sing it, throw some reverb on, and that would be it. But we re-recorded it a few times, and by the third or fourth version I realized her voice would be perfect – especially for that high range. I was honored she took the time to sing on it.

You began writing songs when you were 10. When did you first pick up a guitar?

My brother and his friends played. He was four years older, and I was always eyeing it up. I borrowed a neighbor's guitar but didn't know what to do with it. Then a family friend gave me this old three-quarter nylon string acoustic that was falling apart – the fretboard was coming off the neck. It was rattly, but someone restrung it left-handed, and that's when I started lessons.

When did you shift to electric guitar?

I got some sort of black Ibanez. I begged my parents for it for a couple of years. It was a beginner pack with the guitar, a Peavey amp, and a soft case.

Which guitarists first made you want to write songs?

Definitely Kurt Cobain. It was all the lefties: Kurt, Jimi Hendrix, and Paul McCartney. My guitar teacher taught









me Purple Haze, which felt impossible at first, but it was such an accomplishment once I got it. He also taught me Blackbird, which is still my mom's favorite. If I'm playing, she's like, "Play Blackbird. It's so much nicer than all those loud songs!"

**This new record sees you reunited with longtime collaborator, producer, and Warpaint drummer Stella Mozgaw. How has your creative relationship evolved?**

She's an inspiring musician with a great producer brain. She introduced me to a lot of music, which really opened things up for me. My first time in the studio with Stella was

with Kurt Vile. We also did the instrumental album *End of the Day*, where we improvised for two days to a film on the wall. It's always an inspiring process working with her.

**You've said writing on an acoustic guitar can make it easy to fall into the same chords or strumming patterns. How do you break out?**

It's hard to notice those patterns on your own. I try to stay aware and then set myself little exercises, like writing a song without a chorus, or using more than four chords. Just small challenges to push outside the box.

**During that songwriting process in the desert, you mentioned you were tapping into other forms of creative expressions, exploring Georgia O'Keeffe's artworks and cooking. What was on the stereo?**

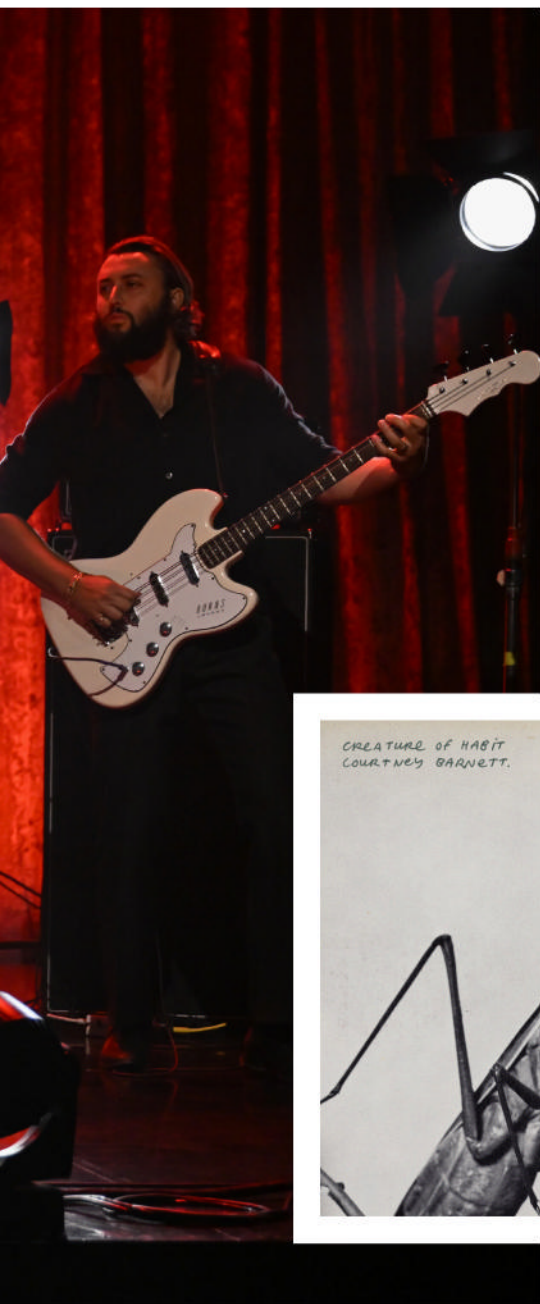
I was listening to *McCartney II* a lot – I'm obsessed with that album. I had Marvin Gaye's *Midnight Love* on vinyl, and Harry Nilsson. At the same time I was diving back into classics: Nina Simone, Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen.

**You've said: "Sometimes you have to spend a few hours going in the wrong direction to find the right version of the song." Which tracks on this record took the longest to find their final shape?**

Great Advice has gone through so many versions. I had one in 2017 when I was making *Tell Me How You Really Feel*, but it

**"I've had a few Stratocasters over the years, but I've never played them live. I always go back to the Jaguar. It's such a workhorse; it does everything I want."**





never got finished. In 2020 it transformed again, and I thought it might work for *Things Take Time Take Time*, but it didn't. It went in the "too hard" pile until this album. It's very different now, but I really like where it ended up.

A lot of the songs got to about 70 percent and then I struggled with them – except *Stay In Your Lane* and *Sugar Plum*, which came later. There was a lot of self-doubt in finishing them, knowing they'll live forever.

#### **How do you balance self-doubt with knowing a song isn't finished?**

It's interesting to feel both at once – to feel both and to know that they can coexist. Eventually it's about trusting yourself. I don't really know what that means! But I know in the moment where something doesn't feel right, and then something does. It's a real thing.

#### **Studio footage shows you recording *Sugar Plum* on a classic Olympic White Fender Stratocaster, a favorite of Jimi Hendrix – but you're usually seen with a sunburst Jaguar. How do the tones compare?**

I've had a few Stratocasters over the years, but I've never played them live. I always go back to the Jaguar. It's such a workhorse; it does everything I want. I forget when I got the Strat, but I did some writing on it. I was set up making the demo for *Sugar Plum*, and that's probably the guitar I had here. I ran it through my Roland JC-40 with the chorus on.

#### **We also spotted a Boss Digital Delay, a Fulltone OCD, and an MXR Micro Amp on your board.**

Someone gave me the OCD years ago – it's always been a good multi-step

overdrive. In the studio I mix things up a fair bit, but I definitely used that, the Roland Jazz Chorus, the Avalanche Run Stereo Reverb, and an EF-P3 Chorus Vibrato Pedal. John Congleton's studio had some fun pedals lying around.

#### **You're heading out on a huge North American tour soon. How will you translate the record to the stage?**

The nice thing is we recorded these songs as live as possible, with very few overdubs. Usually, you rehearse the songs and think, 'How are we going to play this thing?' But we got together and it already sounded good. Songs like *One Thing At A Time* with big guitar moments will be really fun to play live. ▶

■ *Creature of Habit* is out now.





# Sydney Guitar Show '26

This year's show left Melbourne for the first time to mingle with its rival. Steve Henderson went to check it out.

On March 7 and 8, Olympic Park was host to the Sydney Guitar Show '26. The show was organised by Alex Masso, Executive Officer of the Australian Music Association, and his team, and they did a superb job of creating an environment free from the competitive attitude that usually pervades trade shows.

The show presented, in equal share, the familiar (the usual suspects) and the not so familiar, highlighting the fact that tradition is still important but there's plenty of room for innovative ideas to find their niche.

It would be easy to reel off a list of products and their apparent value, from Fender's seemingly-endless variations to super-clever boutique pedals, as well as the current (and important) focus of local luthiers on local timbers. Certainly, there was much to be excited about. While legacy brands had some great items on display, such as Maton's superb 80th Anniversary models and the clever Boss

PX-1 pedal system, the show demonstrated that local innovation is still very much alive, competing with the best overseas product, with creative ideas and quality sounds. Australia is producing world class guitars like never before, and effects pedals that truly tap into the creative spirit.

The Guitar Show also presented a range of performances that put into context everyone's reason for being there. There were "best-in-show" type discussions, informative but unavoidably subjective, as well as various artists doing their thing, like Ray Beadle and Hussy Hicks. Educational workshops focused on guitar building, performance values, songwriting, and audio production. There was something for everyone...without any pesky keyboard people getting in the way!

The most important element of the event was the friendliness that seemed to be everywhere. Players of all ages were

mingling, chatting, sharing ideas, and generally having a great time; people bring their kids along to share the passion – that's gotta be good for the industry. Attendees were clearly accepting of the various levels of ability of their fellow enthusiasts and many stopped to listen to someone test driving some new device, enjoying the moment. I know I did. I witnessed a 40-something guy trying a new Cort electric when an 18-year-old (whom I know) sat down to politely wait his turn to try a different Cort guitar. The older player nodded for the young guy to join in and they played together for about 20 minutes – complete strangers participating together in the craft, demonstrating what the guitar does best: bringing people together.

Alex and team should be very pleased with what they have achieved with this event. Even competing exhibitors, many of whom I know, were happily chatting to each other in between talking enthusiastically to punters. Everyone was 18 again. The Sydney Guitar Show demonstrates that the guitar still reigns supreme as the friendliest instrument ever made and that this friendliness is infectious. It seemed like everyone left with a smile, satisfied with a day well-spent. 🎸

SPENCER HARRIS

**"Players of all ages were mingling, chatting, sharing ideas, and generally having a great time; people bring their kids along to share the passion – that's gotta be good for the industry."**







Khruangbin's Mark Speer (left) and Laura Lee Ochoa with their new signature Fender axes (and drummer Donald "DJ" Johnson). "I'm in the midst of working on what will be my first solo rock album," Tom Morello says



Views of the front and back [facing page] of Prince's Mesa Boogie Coliseum 300 amp, now owned by Eddie Martinez. [right] Prince during the Purple Rain era, December 26, 1984



# When It Rains, It Tours

How session guitar legend Eddie Martinez wound up with Prince's Purple Rain-era Mesa Boogie Coliseum 300 amp

BY ANDREW DALY

**Songs like "Let's Go Crazy," "When Doves Cry" and "Purple Rain" prove that Prince was a pop-music maestro. But Prince — born Prince Rogers Nelson — was also one hell of a guitarist.**

Fellow Eighties hitmaker Eddie Martinez (Run-DMC, David Lee Roth, Robert Palmer, Mick Jagger), who knew Prince before he hit paydirt, plays a mean six-string, too. So it's kind of poetic that Martinez ended up — albeit unintentionally — with Prince's most beloved amp from 1984-85 (the Purple Rain era), a heavily modified Mesa Boogie Coliseum 300.

Below, Martinez explains how a

sudden case of Gear Acquisition Syndrome led him down this Princely path.

**When you came upon Prince's amp, were you even in the market for an amp, let alone an amp with provenance?**

It was May 29, 2011. I was at home playing my guitar, and for some reason, acquiring another amp popped into my thoughts. Mind you, this was quite unusual, because when I go to guitar stores, I'm first looking for guitars; so looking back on that day, I believe it was more of a divine impulse.

**Why do you think that is?**

I already had killer amps, but I was

playing clubs locally with my band and needed a combo that wouldn't be a back-breaker; plus, I'm big on redundancies. I also needed something practical for small clubs.

**Where did you find Prince's Boogie amp?**

I decided to visit one of my local guitar shops and began looking for amps. I had looked for a good while and didn't see anything that caught my interest. As I was exiting, something caught my eye — a Boogie head that reminded me of the Simulclass series from the Eighties that I'd rent along with a Soldano and modded Marshalls from Andy Brauer



when recording in L.A. I asked what model Boogie it was, and the salesperson didn't know. When I saw six 6L6 tubes, I knew it wasn't a Simulclass. The only thing the salesman said was that they bought it at a Seattle guitar show — and that it was allegedly once owned by Prince.

### Did you know Prince in the Eighties, and did you know anything about the amps he used?

I had known Prince a bit from when we shared the bill when I was playing with Lenny White and Twennynine. We both had opened for Rick James in 1980, and we became friends with Dez [Dickerson], Andre [Cymone] and Prince. I recall seeing Boogie amps on that first tour. I was becoming familiar with Boogie because Nicky Moroch, my bandmate and a brilliant guitarist, used a Mark 1 when we played with drummer Lenny White. But I digress!

### Getting back to the amp in your local guitar shop, how did you confirm that it was Prince's Boogie?

I took a peek at the back and saw Prince's corporate logo, "PRN Music." It was also written in a marker on the chassis — "PrinceNumber 1." And there's a sticker that reads "last tubed 11-88." There's also "Prince I" [Roman numeral 1] written on some duct tape. I also knew Prince's middle name was Rogers and his surname was Nelson, hence the "PRN." So I called my friend Artie Smith and he suggested I call JD Dworkow.

### Why JD Dworkow?

JD worked closely with Prince and Wendy Melovin with stage gear and the guitar tech backline vibe for the entire Purple Rain tour. Plus I've known JD for years, and he's worked with so many huge artists and bands. He's a total pro. I described the amp to JD and told him

## MESA/BOOGIE LTD.

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"I owe Mike Bendinelli a huge debt of gratitude for providing a letter of provenance," Eddie Martinez says

September 30, 2019  
To Mr. Eddie Martinez, Portland Or.

This letter is to confirm the authenticity of the Mesa Boogie Coliseum Series 300, serial number K303, owned by Eddie Martinez to be one of two amps modified at the Mesa factory for use on the 1984/85 Purple Rain Tour. Both of these unit were originally purchased by Prince for use on the "1999" album support tour. For the Purple Rain Tour they were both modified and tested by myself, from MK 2 B version to the then current MK 2 C+ version preceding the November 84 start of the tour.

The other of these two units was written up in Guitar Player magazine in 2016.

*Michael Bendinelli*  
Michael Bendinelli  
Chief Technician, Mesa Engineering, Petaluma Ca.

the serial number, "K303." His mind was blown; he said it was Prince's number one amp on the Purple Rain tour. The dots were starting to connect because it was correlating to everything I was seeing written on the chassis of the amp. After JD told me that, I knew it was the real deal and bought it.

### You went from looking for a backup amp to most likely owning Prince's most-used amp on his most iconic tour.

Yes! And although it wasn't a backup combo amp that I was looking for, it was quite historically significant. I had "fallen upstairs" with such an incredible, iconic find. [Laughs]

### Once you bought it, did you reach out to Mesa Boogie for more info?

I reached out to Mesa Boogie and to my Boogie rep — who shall remain nameless and who is no longer there. He confirmed that it was an amp that — at one time — had belonged to Prince. He also asked if I knew Prince. I told him I did but it had been years since I'd seen him.

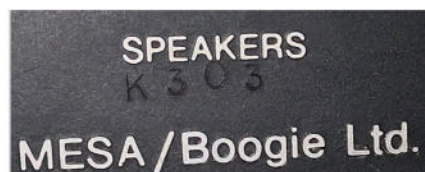
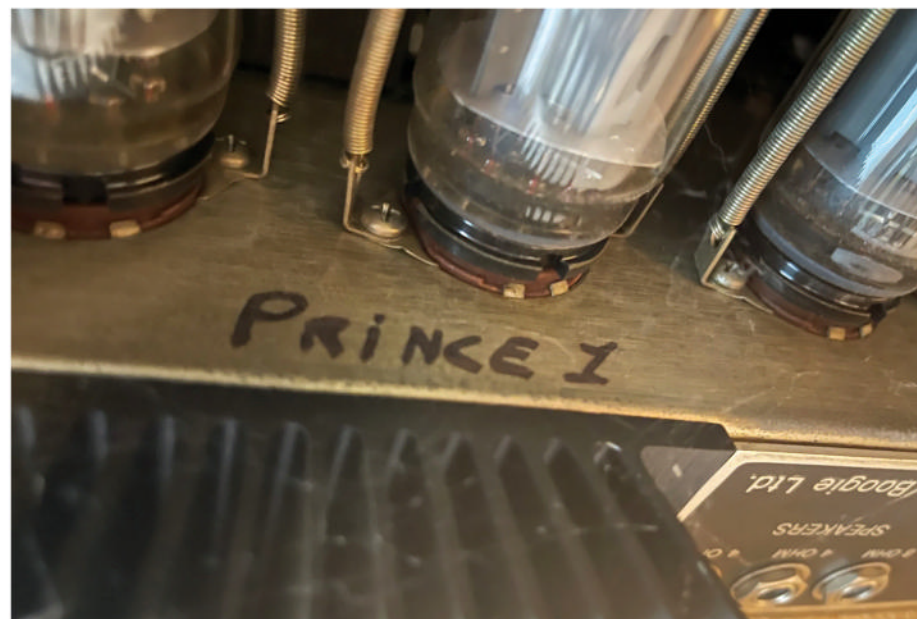
My rep suggested that I don't let Prince know about the amp because [Prince] preferred the clean sound on the amp in my possession.

### What did he mean by that?

There was a tone of reticence in his dialog with me about digging deeper into the amp's history. That's what I felt, so I stopped communicating with him. Remember, Prince [1958-2016] was very much alive when I first communicated with Boogie about the amp.

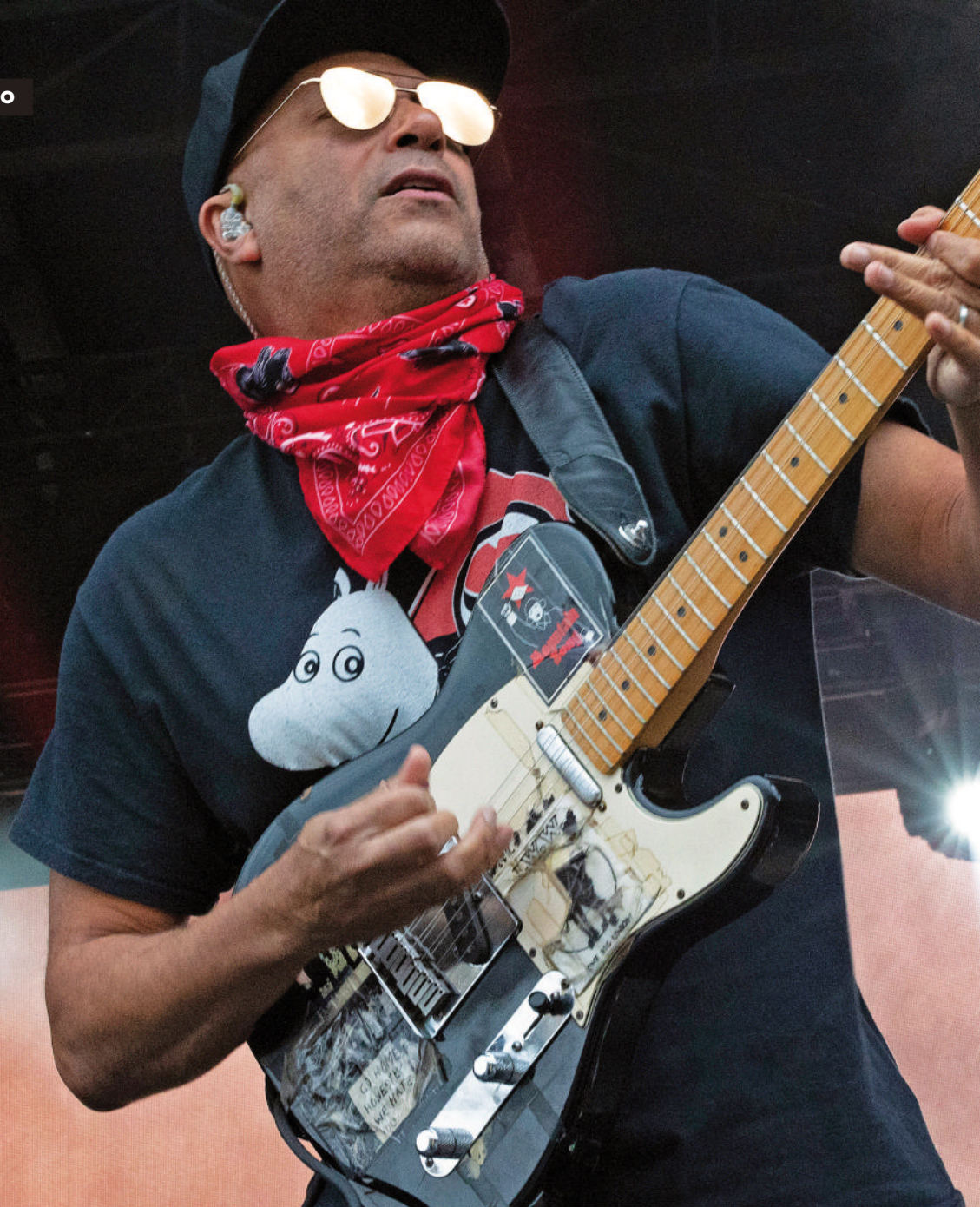
### Did you dig deeper after Prince died?

It wasn't until 2019 that I reached out to Mike Bendinelli at Mesa, and he gave me the full story. The model is in the Coliseum 300 series. It was later modified by Mike himself to the 2C+, a coveted mod. It's a beast, packing 6x6L6s and delivering 180 watts. The clean sound is so good, and I can see why Prince dug it so much. The crunch side is monstrous. I owe Mike a huge debt of gratitude for providing a letter of provenance and the historical context for such an iconic and important amp.





Khruangbin's Mark Speer [left] and Laura Lee Ochoa with their new signature Fender axes (and drummer Donald "DJ" Johnson). "I'm in the midst of working on what will be my first solo rock album," Tom Morello says



## Morello's Got Game

How — with an out-of-nowhere, 36-hour deadline — Tom Morello contributed a ready-to-go track (with a fearsome riff) to the latest Final Fantasy XIV update

BY JOE BOSSO

**"It happens all day," Tom Morello says, speaking about the number of requests he gets from artists looking for him to sprinkle his secret guitar sauce on new pieces of music. "I do a lot of it, too," he says. "I've donated guitar solos to younger bands. They're fans of Rage Against the Machine or Audioslave, and they want me on their songs."**

He admits he can't accept every request that comes across his desk. "Hey, I've got a lot going on," he says with a laugh. "These days, I'm driving my kids to a lot of high school baseball games."

Recently, the guitarist received an offer he couldn't refuse when noted

video game composer Masayoshi Soken reached out and asked if he'd consider contributing a song for the latest update of Final Fantasy XIV. Morello admitted that he wasn't much of a gamer, but he understood the significance of the Final Fantasy franchise, and he was delighted at the prospect of working with Soken.

There was just one problem, however; Morello would have to turn in a ready-to-go track within 36 hours. Fortunately, the guitarist was already working on some new music with producer Tyler Smyth, so the prospect of banging out a banger wasn't out of the question. "I said to Tyler, 'I've got a hot riff, and you've got some beats. Maybe we can do this,'" he says. The

producer then rang up his friend Caleb Shomo, singer with the metalcore band Beartooth, and asked, "Do you want to make a song with Tom Morello right now?"

In no time at all — 48 hours, to be exact — the collaboration yielded the monster jam "Everything Burns," a feral blend of rap-metal and electronica that features, one might expect, one hell of a gargantuan riff.

When you're noodling, do you have some sort of litmus test that makes you go, "That combination of notes does the job?"

It's not overthought. Sometime around maybe 1991 [or] '92, I began to be able to write music that I loved, and was able to tap into some of the essence of the Tony

DEAN CHALKLEY, LISA DRAGANI/GETTY IMAGES





"That's something I'm most excited about — continuing the collaboration with my son, Roman," Morello says

**"While it doesn't have a solo, this song is about as guitar-y as anything I've ever done. There's no lack of guitar on this one"**

Iommi and Jimmy Page-ness of it all. From that time, these big-ass riffs have kind of been low-hanging fruit. It's like, "Stick to the dots, try a little syncopation and don't be afraid to be equal parts funky and heavy."

**Is it deceptively easy? One wrong note could make all the difference between a classic riff and one that's just "eh."**

Oh, sure. Some of the longer riffs through my history, like "Testify" or "Down Rodeo," where there was sort of a more simple version of the riff, I said, "Well, if it's going to happen four times in a row, perhaps it's a journey that stays true to coming back to the one, but then adds some extra heavy metal flavor along the way."

**So in the case of "Everything Burns," you already had the riff.**

It was around in a rudimentary way, and it was sort of looking for a home. I have a lot of riffs hanging around, and this was

one that Tyler and I had been tinkering with. When this opportunity came up, I was like, "Okay, hold on one second. Let's see if Beartooth wants to jump on."

**At what point did you realize that the combination of you, Tyler and Caleb was working?**

It was maybe two hours after Tyler reached out to Caleb. Caleb dropped everything to do this. He's a great singer, and he's also a producer himself. He's got a studio. He wrote and produced the vocals to it, came back in about two hours with a first draft, and I was like, "Holy shit, that's a jam!"

**I did notice the lack of a solo. Is that something you wrestled with?**

I wouldn't say "wrestle." There was, however, a version of it that had sort of a more expansive middle section. At the end of the day when we were mixing, it felt like it didn't add to the power of the song. It felt more like I was just sticking a solo in. When I was A/B-ing in my car, I liked the version that, while it doesn't have a guitar solo, it's about as guitar-y as anything I've ever done. There's no lack of guitar on this song. As for solos, there will be plenty more to come, let me tell you. I'm in the midst of

working on what will be my first solo rock album. I made some Americana albums and some EDM-influenced records, but I want to make a record that is going to be an unabashedly Tom Morello solo rock record.

**Any idea when we might see that?**

In this day and age, what is an album? We've released three singles from this album over the course of the year and a half. There's a lot of intense work ahead.

I hope I've got maybe three or four songs in the can and another sort of five or six in the hamper. I've got a lot of touring coming up this summer. I'd love to try to get it out before then.

**And you've been touring with your son.**

That's something I'm most excited about, continuing the collaboration with my son,

Roman, who has become quite a technical guitarist. He's been a collaborative partner on a couple of songs, and that will continue. [Laughs] One of my favorite parts about working with Roman is that if we have disagreements, I'm able to send him to his room.

**You can't do that with everyone.**

No, I can't. [Laughs]





"I've always been a nighttime man," Kurt Vile says. "After a certain point, everybody's asleep, and then you've got the whole nighttime to yourself"



## From Dusk Till Dawn

Kurt Vile's 10th album, *Philadelphia's Been Good to Me*, was written by night — but the prince of indie-psych tells us these songs chart his journey out of darkness

BY JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

It's a dreary april afternoon, and we're getting ready to talk to slacker indie hero Kurt Vile about his new record, *Philadelphia's Been Good to Me*. The lead single, "Chance to Bleed," begs to be blared from a car stereo at dusk on a humid August night. Here in Michigan, a few 20-degree days in March had us hopeful we could place ourselves in Vile's snapshot of Philly summers by taking the call from our back porch. But with grey skies and temperatures well below 10, we opt for the living room — a space mostly commandeered by this writer's one-year-old daughter. As we clear the books and toys she's scattered across the floor to make room to move around during the call, we're

reminded of how often Vile has written about his own daughters.

"Girls are the sweetest and the best," he says. "As soon as the kid shows up, life is completely changed. It's psychedelic and beautiful, because that kid is part of you. They go through all the phases that you went through, and you watch through them."

As we pace up and down our living room, we talk gear — we had to ask about the Gretsch Tennessean he picked up from Travis Good of the Sadies — but the conversation keeps circling back to a word Vile uses more than once to describe the record — "homespun." Much of it was written and recorded after dark in his basement studio, when he could lean into

what he calls the natural cycle of life — catching up with himself and creating the loose, sprawling music he's known for. That balance between family life and the habits of the past shows up in the lyrics, too.

**On "Zoom 97," you sing about trading substances for time with your girls. Are you sober?**

I quit drinking in 2018. Alcohol is a tough one. You think it's casual — which it is, because it's ingrained in us — but before you know it, that's kind of the nastiest one. That concept — "my baby girls, they keep me high. Ain't on no trips, no LSD, pure love drug for me" — it's true. I definitely don't party the way I used to, but

YUSUKE NAGATA



I'm not straight edge. I like weed, probably because it makes me hear music like I was in high school. I don't do it all the time, but it's a nice vacation for anyone who plays music.

### How do you come up with lyrics?

Sometimes the lyrics come out fast, but obviously it's my trade. "Zoom 97" is one I'm really proud of, because that one is actually the first song we got for this album that I knew was a quality song. I had that Gold Tone mandolin riff on a recorder. The people at Gold Tone down in Florida, they've hooked me up a few times. They gave me this little, tiny guitar. It sounds like a mandolin, but it's just six strings.

Anyway, it was summertime. My new bandmate, Matt [Jugenheimer], was there — there's always got to be something new to keep you going, or a new guy in the fold — and I just heard [the riff] back. I had some melody in there, but then I didn't have the words. I just said, "I know this is catchy; let's add synth here." And then, literally, just because I was there and because the mics were on, I sat out back and wrote the lyrics. They came to me because I was there to catch them. It turned out cool. If my brain is open, one thing leads to another once I start writing.

### What do you do to try to get your brain open?

Ideally, you want to be present. There are so many different ways to write a song, and there's no rules. In the old days, I'd think about it too much. "Why am I not writing a song?" You can't force anything.

### What about when you're in the middle of recording and have to pick up the kids?

Yeah, that happens. You get used to that. You've got to embrace that. I've always been a nighttime man. After a certain point, everybody's asleep, and then you've got the whole nighttime to yourself. But the reality is that during the day, ideas come. It might be fragmentary. There are times in your life where you've got to think ahead or you're just tired. In those interruptions, you get ideas from being in flux.

### You're at a point in your career where some of your heroes have become your collaborators. What's it like to make that transition from fan to peer?

I'm definitely a shy person, so whenever I meet somebody at first, I'm nervous. I can't help it, but you've got to make yourself uncomfortable. It's similar to playing live; you've got to fuck up in front of lots of people to get it right. You've just gotta be a sponge — take it in and try to be chill.

### What was it like recording with John Prine?

John came into the studio last minute. I know people that work for his label and I had played with him on stage enough times. He heard my version of "Speed of the Sound of Loneliness," and I knew he liked it. Over time, he would remember who I was. When he showed up at the studio, he was so nice. He said, "You know, I'd love to sing with you, Kurt," and we recorded that song ["How Lucky" from 2020's *Speed, Sound, Lonely KV EP*] in two takes. That's the way they do it over there in Nashville. It was unbelievable.

### How did you meet Neil Young?

I finally did see Neil up in Toronto with my friend Travis from the Sadies, who's one of my favorite guitar players of all time, and a good friend of mine. Neil loves Travis. Travis was the first person I ever was standing next to who knew me while Neil was around and actually said, "This is Kurt." The beauty of Neil is he's 100 percent his own world. He's got friends, but he's just in his own realm. So you just say hi when you can, and you assume he won't remember who you are until maybe one day he does. You see Neil on stage — he's the same Neil Young he ever was.

### Is that Travis' Gretsch Tennessean you're playing on the new record?

Yeah, and if you ever see him play, he just shreds so hard. When you watch him play, it's unreal. If you look at the fretboard of this guitar, it's just so worn in from his playing. He sat in when we played Toronto and lent me the guitar to see if I wanted to buy it. I immediately laid down something with the band. Some guitars just sound and feel great and play themselves. It's a genuinely great guitar. I just kept playing it. It sounds so good in the studio. It's got really hot pickups. It's the lead guitar on "Zoom 97," "99th Song" and "Every Time I Look at You." It really cuts through.

### Are you bringing it out on the road?

Yeah, I've started bringing it on the road. One of my favorite live guitars — I'm not sure if it made the record — is a sunburst 1965 Jazzmaster that J Mascis put into my hands when I was working on his record up in Massachusetts. He went to some store and the guy was trying to peddle this Jazzmaster, and J has so many of 'em. He actually showed up at J's studio and put it in my hands, which was the coolest part of all. I have reissue Jazzmasters that are made to

seem vintage. I got them from Fender and I love them — but to have an old one is... it really plays. That was another example of a guitar that plays itself.

As far as guitars on the record that I played, shit, there were so many. I'm spacin'! [Laughs] There's another Gretsch, an orange 6120. That's my favorite lead guitar that I've played. I was playing the Travis guitar nonstop, but I wasn't changing the strings, so they were dead. Rob Schnapf came down to my studio and put the orange on the lead guitar in "99 bpm" because the strings on the

Tennessean were so dead, and he was right. The lead guitars really cut through and shine. We've since changed the strings on the Travis guitar.

### Do you prefer the sound of dead strings?

I do. I have this Gibson J-45 that was my main acoustic at the start of the Watch My Moves tour. We had a new

guitar tech, and the first thing he did — I wasn't thinking about it — but the first thing he did on the first day was cut all the strings off. It was devastating. [Laughs] Rob Schnapf is all about that too; I sort of learned that about him. New strings take a while to break in, especially when you're playing live. When you've got to change the acoustic strings, you're gonna have a weird show at first. They just sound so different, like bells or something.

### What about practice? What does your practice routine look like?

I kind of just pick up and play whenever I want when I'm feeling psychedelic. Lately, I feel weird because I haven't, but then you just get a show and you're forced to play again, and your fingers get blistered. That's all part of it. It's interesting now, because I have a career, there's going to be a moment where all of a sudden I have to play. My music's not like Led Zeppelin or anything too technical. In some ways, my songs feel a little more simple all the time, so I don't sweat it.

### What's on the horizon?

I put everything into this record. It did take a lot out of me by the end. They always do. It's my most organic record. It was homespun. I worked with other studios, people I really liked, who similarly work in an organic way. I'll definitely try to make other records, but I do feel in another way that this might be my last conventional record for a long time, and I'll just get weird for a while. But yeah, you never know. 🎸







# Jethro Tull

Martin Barre discusses the making of the U.K. prog-folk-rock legends' transitional third album, 1970's *Benefit*

BY ANDREW DALY

**Jethro Tull's first album with Tull, 1969's *This Was*, featured guitarist Mick Abrahams and leaned in a decidedly bluesy direction. That approach didn't work out for the British soon-to-be-prog rockers, and neither did Abrahams, leading to a short spell during which some guy named Tony Iommi took up six-string duties in Tull before bandleader Ian Anderson found his long-time running mate in Martin Barre.**

Barre's first album with Tull, 1969's *Stand Up*, was a harbinger of things to come, meaning less blues, more flute from Anderson and undertones of prog-rock mastery. But there was heaviness, too; the record featured riffs that stood up to anything Iommi, Ritchie Blackmore or Jimmy Page were doing.

"We'd recorded *Stand Up*, and that was a new direction for Ian because Tull was a blues band," Barre says. "And then suddenly we were this other animal you couldn't put a title to." Barre did his best to put a title to said animal by kicking the riffs-meet-prog into overdrive for Tull's third record, 1970's *Benefit*, showing that he, too, was on the precipice of guitar-god greatness. Of course, Barre didn't know that at the time — and doesn't necessarily see it that way today.

"I just played," he says. "We didn't really investigate tone and sounds. We just got in there, and the sound of Jethro Tull was there, needing to be examined."

Examine it they did. Songs like "With You There to Help Me," "To Cry You a Song" and "Teacher" showcased Barre's open-minded approach as well as Anderson's

status as a guitar maestro. "I guess it was what was going to become prog," Barre says. "The birth of prog sounds stressful, but it was exciting. We didn't know if people were going to like it. Jethro Tull was a blues band, and they were like, 'What's happened to you?' But slowly, we won them over. We had what people would call a 'blank canvas' because nobody knew what to expect. It was a relief in many ways."

The relief didn't last long, as *Benefit* was disregarded upon its release in April 1970. Rolling Stone even called the album "lame and dumb." But as time has gone on, Tull did more and more of that winning people over that Barre talks about, and in retrospect, time has been kind to *Benefit*.

**By the time *Benefit* came out, Tull were moving away from blues and toward prog — but interestingly, the album also has a ton of heavy riffs.**

At that point in time we'd been touring, and we'd met bands like Led Zeppelin and all these great bands. We knew Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck and Cream; they were bands we loved and listened to, so we were going to be influenced by them. That's what everybody was doing. When I play, I think, "There's a riff that hasn't been invented, and it's probably not difficult." I love the power of a great riff. There are classic riffs that were immortalized by Hendrix, Beck and Jimmy Page, but I love the concept that music can be so simple but so important because the riffs are so dynamic. I guess everybody fed off everybody else.

**The general understanding of Tull's music is that Ian played the acoustic parts and you the electric, but that wasn't entirely the case on *Benefit*. Ian is a better player than he's credited.**

Yeah, he is. He was a guitar player before Tull, and he told me he started listening to Clapton, Beck and Hendrix and realized he was never going to be as good as them, so he turned to the flute, but he is a great guitar player. It's a very focused area of play, but what he does — because I've learned his acoustic parts — is really good. They're fun to learn, demanding and very, very precise.

**Do you remember recording "With You There to Help Me," which has a distinctive guitar flare and features you and Ian?**

We both played electric. Ian played a rhythm track, and then I put all the riffs, bits and pieces. It was all live in the studio, so the whole band played that track live to record it.

**Were there many overdubs on *Benefit*?**

No, it was nearly all live. Maybe we used some overdubs, and I don't know if [we had] an eight- or 16-track, but there weren't many, so you didn't have the luxury of doing 20 takes and then taking the best bit from each one. Even when you overdubbed

a solo, it was a live solo from beginning to end. You couldn't drop in and repair it, so we mainly recorded it live in the studio.

**"To Cry You a Song" has an incredible harmonized guitar riff. Was that you and Ian together?**

Yeah, that's me and Ian again. It was fun. It was inspired by Blind Faith's "Had to Cry Today." It's a similar feel and riff, and we just had a lot of fun with it. I think it shows in the recording. You can tell it was something that was really easy and positive to put together.

**What guitars were you using while recording *Benefit*?**

Well, it wasn't good stuff! *Benefit* was done on a Les Paul that I bought, and I'm ashamed to say that it was a fake. [Laughs] I didn't know it then, and I loved it. I just wanted a Gibson Les Paul because when I was at college and starting in bands, it was the Holy Grail. Just to see one was like, "Oh, my God," you know? You wouldn't even need to touch it; it was this... thing. You couldn't have it, and you couldn't find them, so you couldn't play them, but they had this mystique about them, which, I guess, they still do. Not in my mind, but they still do.

**Where did you get the Les Paul copy from?**

*Stand Up* was done on a Les Paul Special, a really beat-up thing I bought from a shop in London. But then, I bought this [fake] Les Paul from a dealer in America, and that was the one guitar; it's all I used for the whole record. Nobody had two guitars in those days; you couldn't afford it! But yeah, it wasn't a great guitar. [Laughs]

**You used Hiwatt amps in the studio.**

The Hiwatt amps weren't particularly good, either. [Laughs] They didn't drive easily; they weren't really rock amps. Marshall began doing that well and [were available] at the time, but we all used Hiwatt, so that side of it was against everything, with the formula of a fake guitar and Hiwatt amps that weren't very good and didn't inspire. I didn't really know anything about amps or guitars at the time, so you just made the best of what you were given. And I had a sort of treble boost pedal to get a bit of sustain at the Hiwatt.

**How do you feel about *Benefit* now?**

We were really happy with it. Going back to the way *Stand Up* was received, we knew we were going to make a good album. Whether it sold tens or hundreds of millions of copies, that was never the formula. We were just so confident, enthusiastic and positive about making more music in that direction. That's what rock bands did. They just went in their own direction. It was great fun to make. If it had failed and sold nothing, I still would have been happy with it. 🎸



“I bought this [fake] Les Paul from a dealer in America, and that was the one guitar; it’s all I used for the whole record. Nobody had two guitars in those days; you couldn’t afford it! But yeah, it wasn’t a great guitar.”





A photograph of three men sitting on a dark surface, possibly a car, against a bright orange background with palm tree silhouettes. The man on the left has long dark hair and a mustache, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. The man in the middle has dark curly hair and a beard, wearing a white shirt with suspenders. The man on the right has long dark hair, wears sunglasses and a striped shirt, with his arms crossed. Large white text is overlaid on the image.

# SU

# DREA

"ON A DARK DESERT HIGHWAY, COOL



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WIND IN MY HAIR..."

Mexican reggae!  
Gunslinger duels!  
Chainsaws!  
Fifty years after it  
was recorded and  
released, Don  
Henley  
and producer Bill  
Szymczyk revisit  
the making of  
the Eagles' 1976  
masterpiece,  
*Hotel California*

BY BILL DEMAIN

**I F YOU TAKE** a night drive through the Mojave Desert, you will see the glittering sprawl of Los Angeles appear on the horizon to the west, 90 miles out. It hovers there as an otherworldly dome, mirage-like, beckoning. Technically, its hazy golden glow is a result of light pollution intensified by water vapor and clouds, which reflect the city's eight billion watts of power. But a century's worth of dreamers and small-town escapees know the real reason for the glow. It's the promise: the promise of palm trees and perpetual sunshine, of being in the movies or on hit records, of achieving the big American Dream.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



The Eagles on the U.K. leg of the *Hotel California* tour in early 1977; [from left] Randy Meisner, Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Don Felder and Joe Walsh



"The desert is where mirage and myth are created, and so is Hollywood," Eagles founding member Don Henley says. "We are just as susceptible, now, to illusion as the pioneers were — if not more so."

That mirage, myth and illusion was immortalized on *Hotel California*, the Eagles' big American dream-come-true. "*Hotel California* was obviously our creative peak," Henley says. "Every band, every artist, has one." Released 50 years ago — on December 8, 1976 — it's not only their personal best, but the third-best-selling album of all time, at 32 million copies and

counting (the Eagles' *Their Greatest Hits* (1971–1975) is Number 1). The epic title track inspired a thematic album about the toll of dreams, touching on fame ("New Kid in Town"), the high life ("Life in the Fast Lane"), relationships ("Victim of Love") and westward expansion ("The Last Resort"). The message throughout was that dreams often look different up close and have a way of vanishing in thin air.

"We were always keenly aware of the transitory nature of fame and fortune," Henley says. "The entire *Desperado* album was basically about that. We had witnessed

all the wreckage alongside the Yellow Brick Road. Pop culture, for lack of a better term — and which might be an oxymoron — is all about the new. You grind away for seven or eight or 10 years, and suddenly, boom, you're on the radio; your face stares out from a billboard on Sunset Boulevard. Then your sophomore album flops, your record label drops you, and you're right back to square one — 'Please drive through.'"

While square one wasn't part of the Eagles story, chasing the new was. And the turmoil and pressure to keep outdoing themselves led to substance-fueled power struggles that turned once-close friends into rivals and led to a breakup three years after *Hotel California*. As Glenn Frey once said, "We made it, and it ate us."

Significantly, the mythic desert passage is one that all five band members on the album had made respectively in the late

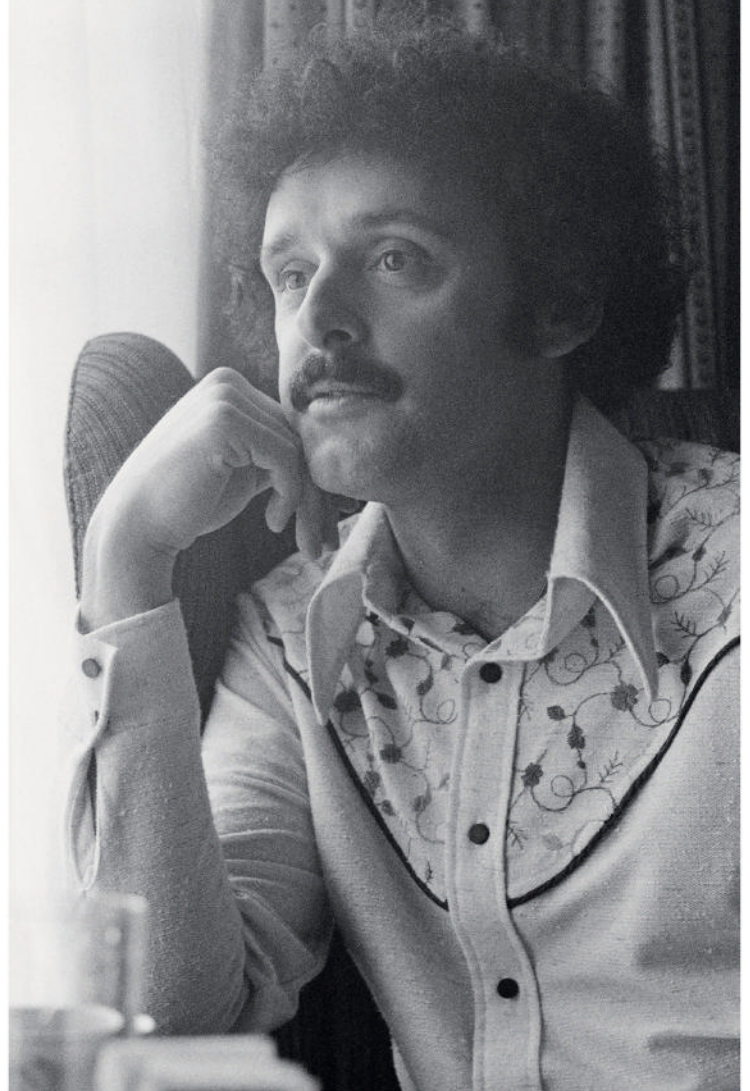
**"HOTEL CALIFORNIA WAS OBVIOUSLY OUR CREATIVE PEAK. EVERY BAND, EVERY ARTIST, HAS ONE"**  
DON HENLEY



Don Henley steps out from behind his drum kit in April 1977



*Hotel California* producer Bill Szymczyk in October 1974. "The great thing about Bill was that he was willing to let us follow our own instincts," Henley says



Sixties and early Seventies. It was a more innocent time, as they relocated from the South and Midwest with hopes of being part of the burgeoning hippie country scene in and around Laurel Canyon and nightclubs like the Troubadour.

The spot where everyone from Kris Kristofferson to Carole King made their debut is where Henley first joined Glenn Frey for a beer, starting a friendship and the creative nucleus for the Eagles. Back then, the two would ride around L.A. in Frey's '55 Chevy, nicknamed Gladys, "plotting and planning." It took a while for things to take shape. Both were already in groups signed to the same indie label. Henley's Shiloh made one album, produced by Kenny Rogers. Frey's Longbranch Pennywhistle (with J.D. Souther, a key collaborator on *Hotel California*) did one that included Wrecking Crew cats James Burton and

**"OPENING FOR JETHRO TULL AND YES WAS SUCH A MISMATCH, MUSICALLY, BUT IT DID HAVE THE EFFECT OF TOUGHENING US UP"**

**DON HENLEY**

Larry Knechtel. Neither record troubled the charts.

The duo joined Linda Ronstadt's touring band in 1971, which soon added bassist Randy Meisner of Ricky Nelson's Stone Canyon Band and guitarist Bernie Leadon of the Flying Burrito Brothers. The proto-Eagles quartet played together only once, during Ronstadt's engagement at Disneyland, on the Coca-Cola Terrace in Tomorrowland. It was a prophetic spot for the birth of a band that would become as ubiquitous — and successful — as America's favorite soda.

Within two months, thanks to help from Jackson Browne, they'd signed to David Geffen's Asylum Records. Their first two albums — *Eagles* and *Desperado* — produced by Glyn Johns, were released in 1972-73, inside 10 months. And thanks to "Take It Easy" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling," the group quickly climbed to the top of the country-rock heap. But they craved a bigger heap, especially when they found themselves on the bill with arena rock acts.

"Opening for Jethro Tull and Yes was odd because it was such a mismatch, musically, but it did have the effect of toughening us



Joe Walsh plays slide on a heavily customized Gibson EDS-1275 in 1976. "Joe, being a bona fide rock 'n' roll guitar slinger, was the perfect foil for Don Felder," Henley says



up," Henley says. "But our main problem was that we didn't have a repertoire. We had released only one album, and 'Take It Easy' was our only hit song at that point. But somehow we survived. Glenn was right saying so-called country rock had its limitations in terms of commerciality, but I think we defied those limitations as we expanded our stylistic perimeters to include more different veins of music. Ronstadt did that, too."

In the studio, the toughening up got a boost from a new producer. "My first thought was, 'I don't want to do a cowboy band!'" *Hotel California* producer Bill Szymczyk says. "But they wanted to rock. They'd started their third album with Glyn, who was one of my heroes. But they weren't happy. Glyn was a taskmaster and had rules about no drink or drugs in the studio. Meanwhile, the guys had heard *The Smoker You Drink, The Player You Get*, which I did

with Joe Walsh [in 1973], and said, 'Who produced this?'"

"Bill was — and is — a lover of rock 'n' roll, blues and funk music," Henley says. "He had produced Edgar Winter and B.B. King, among others. After a long day of grinding away on our own material, Bill would put an Ohio Players or a Parliament album up on the big playback speakers in the studio, and we'd kick back and listen. It was fun. The great thing about Bill was that he was willing to let us follow our own instincts, which, at that time, were leaning more toward rock and R&B."

Szymczyk called Johns to get permission

to take over the album. "The answer was, 'Better you than me, mate!'" A week later, they cut "Already Gone," a rousing rocker that gave Frey a chance to bust loose with some razor-tooth lead guitar. Suddenly, the band was getting the edge they wanted. "It was the beginning of a great marriage," Szymczyk says, "with each album doing better than the one before, and then *Hotel California*, which was the high point of their career — and mine."

For 1974's *On the Border*, they added hotshot guitarist Don Felder, who'd been touring with David Blue and Crosby & Nash. Bernie Leadon, who'd played with

**"MOMENTUM IS IMPORTANT. ONCE YOU'RE ON A HOT STREAK, IT'S WISE TO TRY TO MAINTAIN IT, OTHERWISE YOU GET FORGOTTEN"**

**DON HENLEY**

RICHARD CREAMER/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES





## THE ULTIMATE ONE-TWO PUNCH

Hey, why release one multi-platinum album in 1976 when you can release two?

BY BILL DEMAINE

**A MONTH BEFORE** the Eagles started recording *Hotel California*, Asylum Records released *Their Greatest Hits (1971-1975)*, a compilation of 10 songs from the band's first four albums. Four LPs into a career might not seem like the moment for a "greatest hits" compilation, but, as the band's manager, Irving Azoff, put it, "We decided it was time to put out the first greatest hits — because we had enough hits." Except there was no "we" in the decision.

"All the record company was worried about were their quarterly reports," Eagles founder Don Henley once said. "They didn't give a shit whether the *Greatest Hits* album was good or not. They wanted product."

The album — released February 17, 1976, the same year as the massive *Hotel California* — was the first ever to receive RIAA's Platinum certification. It is now the best-selling album of all time, quadruple Diamond — more than 40 million copies. "The numbers are staggering, and I try not to look at them any more," Frey once said, pointing out that greatest-hits albums are for "kids and people who don't usually buy records."

It boosted sales of all previous Eagles albums and primed the pump for *Hotel California* to be the most anticipated release of 1976. While there's no question that *Hotel California* is a classic, it certainly didn't hurt to have *Their Greatest Hits* riding shotgun.

Felder in high school bands, said, "Felder was a really great guitar player, but when he joined, I could see the writing on the wall for me. I thought, if I'm going to leave, better that a friend of mine gets the gig." Leadon stayed for 1975's *One of These Nights*, which further upped the ante on extended solos (the title track and the underrated "Visions" were both six-string showcases). "We were balls to the wall on that album," Szymczyk says. "They wanted to rock, and we proceeded to damn-sure rock."

With each album came more fame, more pressure to outdo themselves and more substances. In the mid-Seventies rock world, cocaine was the drug of choice. "It was a writing tool, but one that brought out the worst in everyone," Frey once said. But even without drugs in the mix, there was always creative friction between Henley and Frey. "It was the Lennon and McCartney thing," Szymczyk says. "Don

writes this way, Glenn writes that way, but together they write better than they do separately. There was always a lot of competition. Frey was competitive in everything! Darts, shooting pool, you name it. He wanted to win. Henley wasn't as up front about it, but he knew very well what he had, talent-wise. We called him Golden Throat."

Since the days of cruising around in Gladys, there was one thing the two leaders did agree on; they wanted their band to be the biggest on the planet. And that meant pushing the rock sound to the limit. As Leadon predicted, that put him in their crosshairs. The guitarist had played lead on "Take It Easy" and "Tequila Sunrise." He'd co-written "Witchy Woman." His background with the Flying Burrito Brothers had imbued the Eagles with country-rock cred.

For all that, his relationship with them

was never easy. Exhaustive touring (he'd already logged five years of roadwork before he joined) and the drug use (he'd kicked those habits) only deepened his discontent. "None of it sat well with Bernie," Szymczyk says. "The further we went into rock, the less he liked it." He remembers asking the guitarist what he thought of a take of "One of These Nights" with Leadon replying, "I think I'm going to go surfing." Things came to a head one night in 1975, backstage at the Orange Bowl. As Frey was rallying the band, Leadon poured a beer over Frey's head and walked out.

Enter Joe Walsh. Late of the James Gang, Walsh was three albums into a successful solo career in 1975. He was already friendly with the Eagles from crossing paths on the road. When they approached him, his response was, "Being part of a group would take a whole lot of weight off my shoulders."



## "DON FELDER AND I WORKED REALLY WELL TOGETHER. IT WAS COMPETITIVE. WE LIKED TO KICK EACH OTHER IN THE BUTT!"

JOE WALSH

But it's easy to forget what a mismatch it seemed. Walsh recalled in *The Guitar Greats*, "I think 80 percent of people said, 'That's stupid — there's no way it's going to work.'"

Not only did it work, it changed the band's energy level. "For starters, things got louder," Henley says. "Joe, being a bona fide rock 'n' roll guitar slinger, was the perfect foil for Don Felder. They propelled one another in a friendly-but-competitive sort of way. We had upped our horsepower. This is not to take anything away from Bernie, who was — and still is — a highly skilled musician."

"As we got into *Hotel California*, it was like, 'This is a match made in heaven,'" Szymczyk says. "The friction with Bernie was gone, and it was replaced with somebody that could just blister with a forceful edge."

Speaking of forceful edge, in Walsh, the Eagles now also had a resident bad boy and gleeful wrecker of hotel rooms. His instrument of choice was a chainsaw. Dressers, chairs, tables got sliced, diced and tossed from windows.

"Keith Moon and Joe were good buddies, and that, of course, led to some mischief," Henley says. "It was amusing for a little while, but it eventually became a very expensive hobby, and we were beginning to get barred from some of the hotels we liked to stay in. So, after a while, the chainsaws got locked away in storage and other kinds of dramas replaced the 'remodeling' of rooms and hallways."

He adds, "But, at least Joe got a hit song out of it," referencing 1978's "Life's Been Good."

In 1976, the Eagles played 68 shows worldwide, from Tucson to Tokyo. For most bands, that would not be a year to make a new album. But the Eagles did, grabbing studio time whenever and wherever they could. "

The demands of touring definitely made it more difficult for us to stay in a creative space, particularly in terms of songwriting," Henley says. "But, because we were young — and driven — we managed to learn how to juggle. Did the work suffer? Probably, but we did the best we could, given the circumstances we were in. It's a demanding job, feeding the machine. The machine is always hungry."

"But momentum is important," he

continues. "Once you're on a hot streak, it's wise to try to maintain it. Otherwise, you get forgotten or replaced pretty quickly. Back in the Sixties, the Beatles had set an impossibly high bar, both in terms of quality and quantity. So record companies had come to expect an album or two every year. But the Beatles had been able to stop touring and focus solely on recording. Touring was a necessity for us so that we could pay for rent and gas."

The first sessions for *Hotel California* were in March at Studio C, the coveted big room at the Record Plant in Los Angeles, with Szymczyk back behind the board. "We'd do two or three weeks, then the band would go back on the road," he says, recalling they had only one finished song — Meisner's "Try and Love Again." Beyond that, just a "handful of fragments, licks and phrases." As Walsh said in *Buzz Me In*, "We took all of that, put it on a table and said, 'Okay, let's pretend this is a jigsaw puzzle,' and we started piecing things together."

The jigsaw puzzles could be complex. On the surface, the album's first single, "New Kid in Town," is a soft-rock sigh. But structurally and harmonically, it's one of the most-involved Eagles songs. Henley says, "That one was mostly J.D., with some essential input from Glenn in terms of words, melody and arrangement, and a few lyrical contributions from me. It's a great piece of work."

Modulations, shifting choruses, meticulous ornamentation from Felder on electric and Meisner on the guitarrón Mexicano, wrapped in a harmony cascade that earned a Grammy for Best Vocal Arrangement ("It had parts out the wazoo," Szymczyk says). How did those beautifully complex arrangements get written?

"Well, nobody 'wrote' anything; it wasn't that formal," Henley says. "We did everything intuitively, including vocal harmony arrangements. First, we'd decide who was going to sing the lead vocal and then assign harmony parts around that, depending on the key of the song and where the melody sat within the chord progression."

In the studio, they worked from "2 to 2, with a dinner break at 7," usually at Dan Tana's, a favorite red-boothed old Hollywood eatery, next door to the Troubadour. Though friends dropped by the studio, mostly it was the band and

Szymczyk, who they nicknamed "Coach."

They said I was the Don Shula of rock 'n' roll," he says, referencing the Miami Dolphins' legendary honcho (who was at the helm for their perfect 1972 season). "I was a player's coach more than Shula," says Szymczyk with a laugh. He kept a keen eye and ear on the sessions and was a wizard with a tape-editing razor. And on *Hotel California*, he had to lay down what he called "the six o'clock rule" to make sure recreational activities didn't derail progress, including his own.

"Everything was getting a little out of hand by three in the afternoon, so I was like, 'Okay, enough of that. No beer, no blow, no reefer, no nothing until six.'"

That worked for a few weeks; then the grumbling started. Szymczyk says, "I'd be changing reels in the control room, and I'd hear them muttering, 'Is it six yet?' followed by 'It had better be.'"

On the initial pressings of the album, "It is six o'clock yet?" was etched into the runout groove of Side A.

On Side B, the etched phrase was, "VOL is five-piece live."

"That's because we were proud that we got that song, 'Victim of Love,' in one take without any edits," Szymczyk says. The rocker began with a Don Felder guitar instrumental that he passed to Henley and Frey. They brought in J.D. Souther again, who came up with the concept — that having a broken heart is like being a victim of a car crash. In that scenario, all three were frequent car crashers, burning through relationships. "Dudes on a rampage" was how Henley described it.

When it came time to do an album, he and Frey would usually move in together. Before *Hotel California*, they were briefly ensconced in a Beverly Hills house that once belonged to actress Dorothy Lamour. With panoramic 360-degree views, it was nicknamed "the Eagles' nest." They were an odd couple — Henley the tidy one, Frey the lovable slob, leaving mountains of cigarette ash everywhere. The togetherness might not have helped their friendship, but it was great for songwriting.

"Victim of Love's" tale of betrayal and disillusionment was paired with a stuttering, crunchy groove. Felder had assumed he would sing lead, but after a week's worth of takes, his vocal was deemed "not up to band standards." Henley recorded the lead while manager Irving Azoff took Felder out to lunch to break the bad news.

In the summer, Szymczyk moved the sessions to Criteria Studios in Miami. "The guys were actually quite happy to be out of L.A. and away from all the partying and the hangers-on," he says. The only challenge





Don Felder with his 1959 Gibson Les Paul in May 1977. "I played that on just about every Eagles record that I recorded with a Les Paul," he says

## EAGER FOR ACTION

A guide to Joe Walsh and Don Felder's *Hotel California* gear

BY BILL DEMAINE

"**JOE WALSH AND Don Felder** would show up for a session and unpack a minimum of 30 guitars and five or six amps apiece," *Hotel California* producer Bill Szymczyk says. "It was, 'Let's try this with that.' What I remember most, though, throughout *Hotel California*, was a whole lot of Gibson Les Paul with a lot of Fender Telecaster."

No one can be sure exactly how many — or which — Les Pauls make appearances on *Hotel California*, but we do know about one of them: Felder's famous 1959 Burst, which was painstakingly reproduced by Gibson in 2011. As he told *Guitarist* around that time, Felder bought the original guitar from a traveling dealer who was famous for his superb stable of vintage axes.

"His name was Tony Dukes," he said, "and every time we'd go through Texas, Tony would show up. He was a horse trader, and he always had something in his truck you wanted. He would show up in a station wagon or a truck

that was full of Les Pauls, Teles and Strats, and I bought probably 20 pieces from him over the years. It must have been about 1974 or something, right after our first big hit, *One of These Nights*, when I started making money. He came round, and I think I bought three or four pieces from him — the Les Paul, a Tele, a Strat and some other stuff." And, as he told *Guitar World* in 2013, he plugged his LP into a Fender Tweed Deluxe — "just kind of cranked up, with just the guitar into the amp."

"The acoustic guitar in the intro to 'Hotel California' is a Takamine 12-string with a DeArmond pickup," Felder added. "We mic'd the acoustic and put that in the center of the mix. Then we took the pickup's output and ran it through a [Maestro] Echoplex and a Leslie. We mic'd that in stereo so it has this left-to-right kind of swirling, ethereal characteristic."

"For recording acoustic guitars, I usually used a Neumann KM84," Szymczyk says.

"Don had a pickup on his guitar running to a pair of little Orange amps, and we mic'd them in stereo. The initial opening-guitar intro is an acoustic guitar in the middle and an amp on both sides, with a chorus that is flowing back and forth between the two amps."

"Felder and I always found that if we both used single-coil or double-coil [guitars], there wasn't enough contrast to give the songs any personality," Walsh told *Total Guitar* in 2012. "It just turned into a guitar wall." That's why he famously played a Telecaster on "Hotel California," which was perfectly paired with Felder's Les Paul.

"I played a Tele, through — I think — the Roland Cube, which I used a lot back then," Walsh added. It was most likely the same Roland Cube he and his Strat used on "Life in the Fast Lane." On the *Hotel California* tour, Walsh also used a Fender Black Panel Deluxe Reverb, a Fender Tweed Deluxe and a Mesa Boogie Mark I.





The Eagles (probably singing Steve Young's "Seven Bridges Road") in the Netherlands, May 11, 1977

in Miami was the occasional ear-splitting squall coming from the studio next door, where Black Sabbath were recording their 1976 album *Technical Ecstasy*.

Meanwhile, in the world outside the studio, the United States was basking in its bicentennial. On the surface, the country's 200th birthday was all stars and stripes, but that was tainted by a Watergate hangover and relentless dark stories in the news.

"The 'peace and love' idealism of the Sixties had faded by the beginning of the decade," Henley says. "The so-called counterculture, due in part to its own excesses, had disintegrated. The U.S. was trying hard to focus on the bicentennial, but the Cold War continued and the Boomer generation had slowly realized that

the same corporate forces that had always been in charge were still, in fact, in charge, and there was an air of capitulation. There were now the realities of jobs and families to consider. Gone was the dream of a new kind of America; gone was the appetite for rebellion. 'We haven't had that spirit here since 1969.'"

One of the album's standout tracks was both a celebration and critique of L.A.'s decadence and the band's own excesses — "Life in the Fast Lane" could've been subtitled "Nervous, Edgy Feeling."

"There are a great many of our songs that could be retitled 'Note to Self,'" Henley says. "Excess — too much of a bad thing or a good thing — was a subject we examined, both from a personal perspective and an American cultural standpoint."

The song's classic riff began as what Walsh called his "coordination drill."

"I had this lick that I played that I would warm up for a show with," he told Paul Shaffer on *Plus One*. "It's an exercise between your right and left hand, faster and faster. I was just playing, warming up for the show, and Glenn comes busting in my dressing room and says, 'What the hell's that?' 'I don't know, it's just this lick I warm up with.' He said, 'No, that's an Eagles song, dude!'"

On *In the Studio with Redbeard*, Frey said the title came one day after a crazy car ride with a drug dealer nicknamed "The Count." Going 90 mph, Frey asked the dealer to slow down, and the answer came — "It's life in the fast lane!" With that title, he and Henley wrote the lyrics and melody together.

"We knew it was going to be the most rock 'n' roll thing the Eagles had attempted so far," Walsh said. "They turned me loose on that one."

And what guitar was he using? "That's a Strat," Walsh said, "and the amplifier was

**"WE KNEW 'LIFE IN THE FAST LANE' WAS GOING TO BE THE MOST ROCK 'N' ROLL THING THE EAGLES HAD ATTEMPTED SO FAR"**

**JOE WALSH**





probably this little orange Roland Cube I was using a lot back then. I found it to be a pretty darn good little amp for recording with a Strat, by turning it up pretty good to make it work."

The killer riff doubled with guitar and bass, cliff-hanging power chords and trademark four-part harmonies on the chorus. This was a classic Eagles record, yet one that sounded like nothing they'd ever done. And as sonic icing, Szymczyk employed a Jimi Hendrix trick — the "Electric Ladyland two-track flange technique" — to add a whooshing sound to the song's off-ramp exit. "When I suggested phasing at the end of the song, Henley and Frey were skeptical," he says. They thought it might sound too much like the Small Faces' "Itchycoo Park," which Szymczyk says was the inspiration. "I just wanted listeners to feel the rush of the wind in their hair!"

An ocean breeze was in Don Felder's hair the afternoon he got the idea that would become "Hotel California." In his Malibu beach house, noodling on a 12-string Martin acoustic, he hit on a

## A WEALTH OF RICHES

Former Eagles guitarist Don Felder throws open the vault to celebrate a 50-year anniversary of his own

BY ANDREW DALY

**DON FELDER IS** used to pain when it comes to music. I mean, the guy was in the Eagles, a band that epitomized the idea of seemingly seeking pleasure through agony. He took that to a new level when he was carted off the stage in February 2025 due to a pretty serious case of dehydration.

"My phone has never blown up so much in my life as it did when I had that little thing," Felder says with a laugh.

That laugh is key, as it shows that at 78 — and now incredibly well-hydrated — Felder isn't about to curb his touring career. "I'm going to rock until I drop," he says. "But I didn't think I'd be dropping in the middle of 'Tequila Sunrise'! I thought I'd be dropping during 'Life in the Fast Lane,' and they'd just drag me off the stage."

Happily, there will be many more stages to drag Felder from. He has a slate of shows planned in 2026 and released a new record — *The Vault 1975-2025: Fifty Years of Music* — last year. There is, however, a bit of a gray area when it comes to the word "new," as some, though not all, of the tracks from *The Vault* are, well, vintage. For example, Felder wrote "Move On," which features some tasty slide work, as an offering to Don Henley and Glenn Frey when he joined the Eagles. Henley and Frey didn't dig "Move On," but Felder did — especially when he recently rediscovered the original 1973 demo in a storage cabinet. He loved his slide work on the track, the roots of which date to an evening spent with Gregg and Duane Allman.

"We became friends," Felder says. "One night, Duane was sitting on the floor playing slide. I said, 'You've got to show me how to do that.' He showed me the open tuning and how to pull down the fifth, slide up to the third and have a flat seventh on it. You know, the basics."

After that lesson, as evidenced by "Move On," Felder made the technique his own. "I've never

tried to copy or emulate Duane," he says. "He was so far ahead of me. I just felt like, 'Now that I know how to get around on the instrument, I've got to learn to sound like me.' I can't sound like him; no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't do that. But I stole as much as I could from him, watching him play in the old days."

*The Vault* is actually a perfect marriage of old and new — a middle ground, if you will. And that's just the right fit for Felder, who's sometimes overlooked when it comes to Seventies guitar titans. Not that he cares.

"I never did it for the money, the fame or the legacy," he says. "I did it because I was fascinated with music. I love to play and write. I love to go to the studio when it's dark, turn it on and have no idea what I'm gonna do. I pick up a guitar, see what comes out and put it on record. I don't know what I'd do if I retired; I'd be bored to death! It's fun to have something to be excited about, and I always hope somebody else will be excited, too."

**YOU RECENTLY RELEASED *THE VAULT 1975-2025: FIFTY YEARS OF MUSIC*.**

**WHAT'S THE STORY WITH THAT?**

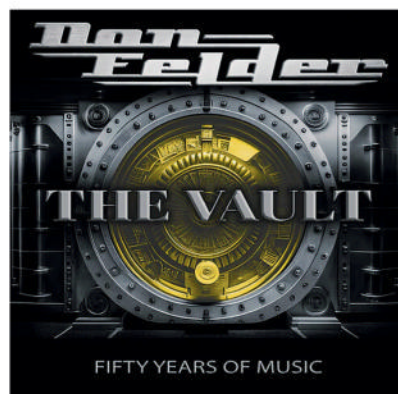
I moved out of Malibu in 2000 after going through five major fires — and all the mudslides and road closures — and moved into town. I had a little studio I dismantled and put into storage, and all my tapes and demos were in storage, too. I hadn't seen that storage locker for 20-some-thing years, so it was time to go through it. There were boxes of cassettes, CDs and DAT machines that recorded half-inch four-track, half-inch 24-track, 16-track and all the stuff I'd been working on since 1974 and 1975 as demos. I said, "I don't even know what this stuff is!"

**ONE OF THE DEMOS YOU MENTIONED IS "MOVE ON."**

I'd just been invited to join the Eagles, and [ex-Eagles guitarist] Bernie Leadon told me, "If you want to write songs in this band, just worry about song structure — don't write lyrics or melodies. Give those ideas to Don and Glenn, and they'll write lyrics if they like the track." So one of the very first things I did was, with a four-track, I recorded myself playing on a cardboard box for the drum track, and then I played bass and slide. It was a very basic, raw demo of the idea. I hadn't heard it for 50 years.

**WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU HEARD IT AGAIN?**

I went, "I remember that slide part! I loved that





slide part." When I submitted it to Don and Glenn, they went, "I like the slide, but there's really not much of a song there," so that's what I heard, the slide part. I said, "I like that track. I'm gonna finish this." I finished it, reproduced it, re-recorded the slide part, did the lyrics and harmonies and brought new life to an old idea.

#### STEVE LUKATHER PLAYS ON "DIGITAL WORLD." WHAT'S IT LIKE WORKING WITH HIM?

When he comes over — and he's played on just about every solo album I've made except for the first one, *Airborne* [1983] — we spend the first 45 minutes to an hour just laughing, telling stories and having a great time before we plug in and tune up. It takes 30 minutes for us to walk through an idea, trade solos and create harmonies. I enjoy working with Steve. He's brilliant, and a lot of fun to hang out with.

#### YOU RE-RECORDED 1981'S "HEAVY METAL (TAKIN' A RIDE)." HOW'D YOU APPROACH IT?

When I hear the original recording, it sounds technically dated. It was all analog, and just the echo chambers; it doesn't sound up to the level of technology today. I decided I'd re-record it in today's technology, which sounds 100 times better. If you were to play the old two-track version of the stereo version and compare it to today, there's a massive difference.

#### YOU'VE BEEN AT IT FOR A LONG TIME, WHICH PROBABLY MEANS YOU'VE GOT GEAR YOU'VE HAD FOR JUST AS LONG. IT WOULD BE EASY TO FALL BACK ON ALL OF THAT, BUT YOU'RE LEANING INTO WHAT'S NEW. WHY?

I use vintage microphones, and I have a rack of classic outboard gear I use to record. I just think the process of recording at 96 kHz with high-resolution, quality analog gear on the front end is a wonderful combination. I use some great new guitars and amps, and I've got six or seven amps that Alexander Dumble re-did for me. I've got Bogners and tons of different amps and guitars. It's easy to go in and multi-track. I was looking at something yesterday; I think it's "I Like the Things You Do." There might be 30 guitar tracks on that.

#### WHAT'S THE REASON BEHIND THAT?

Some of them are doubles; some are split left or right. Some are effects I use. There's just a lot of different ideas and approaches to making a track. Instead of just playing a thing top to bottom with the same rhythm guitar, that, to me, is old school. I was trying to explore, taking old ideas musically and making them sound modern with new techniques and approaches.

#### DO YOU STILL FALL BACK ON YOUR GUITARS FROM YOUR EAGLES DAYS?

I have close to 300 guitars. They've all been photographed and given a name. They're



separated by manufacturer; everything by Gibson is in one rack, everything from Fender is another. If I want to pick up my '57 Strat from the locker, I can open up my spreadsheet, walk into the vault, pull the guitar off the shelf and bring it back — or have somebody go get it.

#### OF THOSE 300 GUITARS, WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT?

My '59 Les Paul. I played that on just about every Eagles record that I recorded with a Les Paul. I've recorded with it a lot for my albums, and I used it on a couple of tracks on this record, too. I used it on "I Like the Things You Do" and "Free at Last." It feels like home.

#### DO YOU SEE YOURSELF WORKING WITH GIBSON ON MORE SIGNATURE GEAR?

No, not right now. I've dealt with Gibson since I started playing music, and they released the Don Felder *Hotel California* copy of my '59 Les Paul and the white *Hotel California* [EDS-1275] double-neck guitars, probably 10 or 12 years ago.

They sold out immediately. I don't know that I'll do many more endorsements. I really respect the fact that Gibson did it, and was honored that they asked me to do it. I work very closely with them; their Custom Shop makes things for me that are spectacular.

#### YOU TALKED ABOUT ROCKING UNTIL YOU DROP — AND YOU'RE STILL WRITING SONGS.

I write all the time — almost every day. I write, scribble down a little something while listening to something on TV. I'll hear an orchestra and go, "That was a beautiful change, back that up..." I'll grab an acoustic and figure out what chord progression this orchestra was playing, put it on my phone, record it and collect bits and pieces. When I'm on the road, it's hard to write music; I can write lyrics, but not necessarily music. So when I come back home, I'm in the studio writing, recording, producing and coming up with ideas. Not all of them will become finished products, but you never know what's going to come out until you step into it.



Spanish-sounding chord progression. He put it down on a reel-to-reel four-track, then layered on syncopated electric guitars and a samba beat from a Rhythm Ace drum machine. He sent it off to Henley and Frey on a cassette with another dozen snippets. They liked what they called “the matador in Mexico” vibe of it and experimented with lyrical and melody ideas.

Henley took the cassette in the car, his favorite place to write. He says, “I think it has something to do with movement and a constantly changing view. Just sitting in a room and trying to find inspiration can be stifling; it’s a static situation. Driving, if you’re not in heavy traffic, creates a feeling of flow that can free the imagination and call up memories and images while the music’s playing.”

After a week or two, the song took shape. “The hotel concept came first, and then the melody,” Henley says. “Sometime in May of ’76, Glenn and I had gone to see Neil Simon’s play *California Suite* in Los Angeles.

**“FELDER AND WALSH  
WERE IN THE CONTROL  
ROOM WITH ME, ONE  
TO THE RIGHT, ONE  
TO THE LEFT, LIKE  
GUNFIGHTERS”  
BILL SZYMCHYK**

But that was after we had come up with the hotel concept; seeing the play was a ‘field research’ trip, just to see if it would help us to flesh out our initial idea. But it wasn’t very helpful; it wasn’t dark and spooky enough for what we were after.”

Or maybe the title influenced them, because their spooky inn became the Hotel California, and in turn, a metaphor for everything from the myth-making of the American Dream to an artist’s search for the muse and spiritual meaning.

The recording of the song took some

searching, too. “We cut the track several times, first at Criteria Studios, shortly after Felder had given me the demo,” Henley says.

“The Miami recording was a rough arrangement with the working title ‘Mexican Reggae.’ The second time we cut it was at the Record Plant in L.A., after Glenn and I had come up with some ideas for lyrics and melody, but that recording turned out to be in the wrong key, at least for singing. There was often a schism between what key was best for the guitars and what key was best for the lead vocal. At the end of the day, though, the vocal has to take precedence. There are workarounds on the guitar — tunings, capos, etc — but you can’t capo a voice. Or at least you couldn’t then. So we ended up cutting the final track in Miami in the key of B minor with the choruses going to G major.”

Szymczyk recalls that the final version consisted of “33 separate tape edits from five different takes.”



The Eagles on stage in 1977, with Felder [center] and Walsh [right] sporting the Les Paul/Telecaster combo heard on “Hotel California”



Felder [left] and Frey on stage in Los Angeles in 1976



Aside from being the album's thematic centerpiece and the Eagles' best song, it also rode out on one of rock's most iconic guitar duels, with Felder and Walsh trading sizzle and sting, one-upping each other, then finally merging in triumphant two-part harmony. "We worked really well together," Walsh told *Guitar World* while promoting *Analog Man* in 2012. "It was competitive. We brought out the best in each other. We liked to kick each other in the butt! He would play something, and I'd get an attitude, like, 'Oh yeah? Listen to this.' And he'd go, 'Wow, listen to this!'"

"For two days, we workshoped the hell out of that," Szymczyk says. "We had amps out in the studio, but Felder and Walsh were in the control room with me, one to the right, one to the left, like gunfighters!"

Felder was the ultimate technician, always a tad on top of the beat. And Walsh was the ultimate 'feel' guy, always a tad behind it. Together, they were phenomenal. Those two days were one of the high points of my career."

"There are at least half a dozen guitar

**"THERE ARE AT LEAST  
HALF A DOZEN GUITAR  
TRACKS ON 'HOTEL  
CALIFORNIA' — DON  
FELDER HAD TO PLAY  
A DOUBLE-NECK LIVE"  
DON HENLEY**

tracks on the original recording," Henley says. "In live concert settings, this required Felder to play a double-neck guitar, with the 12-string neck being capo'd on the seventh fret for the intro and the breakdown, and the six-string with no capo for the single-line phrases and the tag solos. One of the unique things about the song is that it ends with extended dual guitar solos. Skynyrd had done something like that a couple of years earlier."

Another thing it shared with Skynyrd's "Free Bird" was a length that wasn't exactly radio friendly — six and a half minutes, to be exact. "The label wanted us to do a single edit, and we all said no way," Szymczyk says. "Obviously, we were right to."

After seven months of off-and-on recording, the album wrapped in October.

RICHARD CREAMER/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



The cover artwork, designed by John Kosh (who also handled *Who's Next* and the Beatles' *Abbey Road*), featured a photo of the Beverly Hills Hotel taken from a cherry picker 60 feet above Sunset Boulevard at dusk. Built in 1912 in a Mediterranean Revival style, the pink stucco hotel had hosted famous guests from Marilyn Monroe to Frank Sinatra. A month after the album came out, when the hotel learned that the Eagles had used the image without permission, they threatened a lawsuit, then dropped it when they realized their bookings had tripled because of the record's success.

*Hotel California* was released December 8, 1976, and certified platinum in its first week. It went to Number 1 on the *Billboard* 200, where it stayed for eight weeks. Reviews were glowing. *Creem* said there were "no weak tracks; the music flows majestically every step of the way." *Phonograph Record* praised its "peerless harmonies" and said it was "pretty and punchy, as the best albums of fellow troubled hedonists Steely Dan and the Beach Boys are." *NME* said, "There's no laurels-resting, and a lot has gone into its meticulous crafting."

While Szymczyk calls the record a "quantum leap forward," Henley's estimation is more modest. "I don't know if I'd call it a 'quantum leap,'" he says. "One of *These Nights* had three big hits on it. But, in terms of growth and consistency and range, I'd agree that *Hotel California* was an improvement."

But the 10-month, 72-date world tour that followed was grueling, so much so that the band's road crew nicknamed it "The Prison California." Everyone traveled with their own little entourage. Walsh and Felder had their faction, briefly entertaining the idea of forming their own band.

In *History of the Eagles*, Henley said, "Glenn and I saw ourselves as the leaders, but other people saw us as dictators. You just cannot have five leaders in a band. It doesn't work." But according to *To the Limit: The Untold Story of the Eagles*, even the two leaders had stopped talking and would only communicate through second parties. There were also cocaine-induced physical ailments. Stomach ulcers all around. Henley suffered back pain. Frey's nasal lining was shot (he'd have two surgeries before getting his nose repaired with teflon). By the end of the tour, Meisner had become persona non grata after refusing to sing "Take It to the Limit" at one show; he left the band shortly after.

The Eagles managed one more album, 1979's difficult *The Long Run* ("We called it 'The Long One,'" Szymczyk says) then

broke up after a benefit concert where Frey and Felder openly threatened to fight each other on stage during the performance. It would be 14 years before they reunited.

Despite one album of new material in 2007, the Eagles have become a heritage act, playing the hits — albeit one of the highest-grossing ones on the circuit. After Glenn Frey died in 2016 at age 67, they soldiered on with his son Deacon and Vince Gill taking his place. And so it's gone over the past decade. Meanwhile, there are at least 10 high-profile Eagles tribute bands who are on the road as much as the Eagles were in their Seventies heyday. And though classic rock radio has mostly disappeared, subscription services have kept the music playing. "Hotel California" alone passed

**"DON FELDER WAS  
THE TECHNICIAN,  
AND JOE WALSH WAS  
THE 'FEEL' GUY.  
TOGETHER, THEY  
WERE PHENOMENAL"**  
BILL SZYMCHYK

two billion streams on Spotify in October 2025.

During the Eagles' 2026 residency at Las Vegas's Sphere, Henley confided to CBS *Sunday Morning* that "This year will probably be it. I've said things like that before, but I feel like we're getting toward the end."

Meanwhile, their Sphere setlist contains the three key tracks from *Hotel California* — "New Kid in Town," "Life in the Fast Lane" and the title song. With sold-out audiences singing along to every word and guitar lick, this is music that is now an indelible part of musical culture. It's a reminder of how the world felt and sounded in the mid-Seventies, and also how the American Dream continues to roll along that desert highway, toward the light, but surrounded by the dark.

It makes the album sound just as relevant as it did 50 years ago. "I could make a case for it," Henley says. "The political chicanery, the national delusion, the undoing of decades of environmental progress, the rebirth of the military-industrial complex. I've lived long enough to see that we go around in circles. I think it was Mark Twain who said, 'History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes.'" 



Joe Walsh performing live onstage on *Hotel California* tour 1977



# DEVO

In the early 70s, when Devo touched down, they immediately weirded out their arena-rock contemporaries, bringing a new sound and message to the scene. Guitarist Bob Mothersbaugh joins us to explain why this “very misunderstood band” is still making waves today

Words Andrew Daly





When Devo arrived out of Akron, Ohio, the world didn't know what to do with them. After all, Ohio was part of the so-called American 'Rust Belt', an area known for adoring acts such as KISS, Ted Nugent and Grand Funk Railroad. But Devo, with their weird guitars and even weirder music and looks, weren't like those acts. In fact, they were deliberately something else entirely. The band comprised guitarists Bob Mothersbaugh and Bob Casale, bassist Gerald Casale, vocalist/keyboardist Mark Mothersbaugh, and drummer Alan Myer. "We didn't like the arena rock kind of sound," Bob Mothersbaugh says. "We wanted to make fun of it. We wanted to do anything but arena rock. We just wanted to do anything weird."

And the band did just that – but not without consequence. "We were very misunderstood," says Bob. "We didn't try to produce hits... we wanted to be artistic. We'd play around Akron and people hated us!"

He recalls: "In the Devo/documentary [streaming on Netflix], there's footage of what it was like. People hated us, bullied us, threw stuff at us and even threatened to beat us up. But they didn't leave... we knew we might have been upsetting them, but we had something."

Although Mothersbaugh and company wanted to create unconventional music with an off-kilter aesthetic, his influences were decidedly run-of-the-mill. "I had favourite guitar players. Players like Chuck Berry, George Harrison, Jeff Beck and Muddy Waters."

Those influences were not unique, but Mothersbaugh soon found that no matter the influence, his mind and body wouldn't let him be anything other than himself.

"I never took lessons," he says. "I'd play what I felt. And when I tried to play those players' parts, I always sounded like me. And now, I've been doing that for long enough that people try to emulate me! [laughs]"

It's not just about longevity, though, as Mothersbaugh has played a huge role in the success of new wave music in general, as well as its adjacent guitar stylings. One listen to Devo's first four records – 1978's *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!*, 1979's *Duty Now For The Future*, 1980's *Freedom Of Choice*, and 1981's *New Traditionalists* – will tell you that. The records contain far-from-arena-rock-but-still-halcyon hits, a cover of The Rolling Stones' (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction*, *Girl U Want*, and *Whip It*, among others.

And then there are the records that came after – 1984's *Shout*, 1988's *Total Devo*, 1990's *Smooth Noodle Maps*, and the latter-day – and probably final Devo – record, 2010's *Something For Everybody*. These records all proved critical to establishing Mothersbaugh's legacy. The same can be said about his partner in guitar-related crime, Bob Casale.

Sadly, Casale passed away in 2014 and so Josh Hager joined the ranks, holding down the fort with style and grace. To Hager's credit, Mothersbaugh calls him "a good player," while joking... or lamenting the fact that many of Casale's off-the-rails rhythm parts have fallen to him to execute, such as the idiosyncratic licks with Devo's rendition of *Satisfaction*.

In August this year, Bob Mothersbaugh will be 74, but he's not slowing down as Devo hits the road in the States. While he reveals that getting ready for gigs is tougher these days, he will "play just enough so he's



L-R: Bob Casale (rhythm guitar), Mark Mothersbaugh (vocalist), Alan Myers (drums), Gerry Casale (bass), and Bob Mothersbaugh (lead guitar), pictured here with a 2x4 La Baye

PHOTO BY ROBERT MATHEU



not in excruciating pain" on tour. "I'll rock till I drop," Mothersbaugh says.

Elsewhere, the band – whose current line-up is now Bob and Mark Mothersbaugh, Greg Casale, Josh Hager and another relative newcomer (who's been with Devo since '96) drummer Josh Freese – are surging after the recent Netflix documentary, *Devo*, shone a light on the band. With a new generation of fans loving the band, Mothersbaugh is thankful: "As soon as we walk out, people are cheering," he says. "I'm lucky to go out and do that every night. We're having a resurgence."

This has not caused Mothersbaugh to rethink his playing but to double down on what he's always done, aka the thing that makes Devo so damn lovable in the first place. "I think of my guitar like a shovel," he says. "I'm just digging ditches with the rest of the band. I just play whatever there is and see what I can do to make it sound good."

**Devo came of age in the 70s and presented an alternative to classic rock, which you almost seemed to be making fun of.**

"It's funny... yeah. I always think back on that and it was just like a groundswell. You know, there were all these bands that weren't doing arena rock, like the Ramones, the Sex Pistols, Blondie and the Talking Heads. Everything was cool for a short while."

**If Devo were to land today and not in the 70s how do you think it would go?**

"I think we would be well received with a larger audience because of the internet. I'd like to try it."

**Early in Devo's career, you and Bob Casale were a formidable guitar duo. But you were songwriters first. How did you bounce off each other?**

"Bob Casale was a great guitar player, but he didn't like to play leads, so I got the job. Often, I would play both guitar parts on the album, and then we would work out who played what live. Bob was an easy person to get along with and one of the funniest people I've ever met. He was just a great bandmate. [Our dynamic] came really naturally. He didn't play leads. But you know,



1. Bob Mothersbaugh (left) and older brother Mark, California, 1980

2. Mark on stage at Lollapalooza, 1996. Note the 'built-in' effects unit duct taped to his Strat!

there's a difference between playing good rhythm parts and then playing a lead where you don't know where it's going, you know? So he didn't play many leads, but the big thing was we wrote songs."

**What gear did you use for songs such as *Satisfaction*, *Whip It* and *Girl U Want*?**

"For *Satisfaction*, I used a Gibson L6-S guitar and an Acoustic model 470 solid-state amp. For *Whip It* and *Girl U Want*, I played the Ibanez 'Cloud Guitar' through a tube amp that Roland was developing; they loaned me a prototype. And Bob Casale is the one who came up with the riff for *Satisfaction*.

"We were doing a tour where we did all the really early

**"BOB [CASALE] WAS EASY TO GET ALONG WITH AND ONE OF THE FUNNIEST PEOPLE. HE WAS JUST A GREAT BANDMATE"**



stuff. Bob had passed, so I played his part on *Satisfaction* and it was really hard every night, because I hadn't played it every night for years [laughs]."

**Devo is known for oddball guitars. Was there a reason for that as far as sound goes, or was it more for aesthetic purposes?**

"No reason as to the sound... I just wanted to look different! Back in Akron, I saw a La Baye 2X4 guitar in a pawn shop and decided I had to play it live. It didn't sound great or play great, but it was cool to play it on stage at club gigs in Akron and Cleveland."

**After *Whip It* became a big hit, along with its kooky music video, how did your life change?**

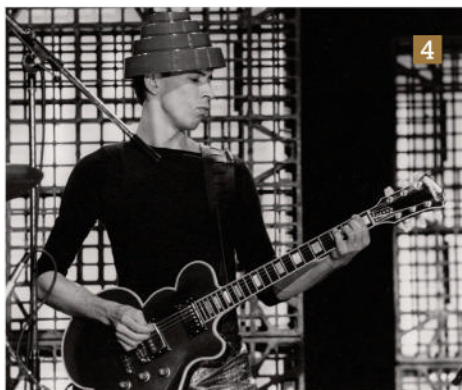
"We got to do whatever we wanted for a couple of years [laughs]. But with the video, we actually made that because the song was taking off. We just thought *Whip It* was going to be another song on the album and actually expected *Girl U Want* to be the hit."





PHOTO BY PETER NOBLE/REDFERNS/GETTY

PHOTO BY RICHARD CREAMER/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



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3



PHOTO BY PETER NOBLE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

3. Bob Mothersbaugh (left): "I saw a La Baye 2X4 [pictured] in a pawn shop. It didn't sound great or play great, but it was cool to play it on stage"

4. Bob Mothersbaugh, on stage with his Ibanez 'Cloud Guitar'

5. Mark displays his preference for Fender Telecasters – heavily modified, of course



**Did you have a tried-and-true process for tracking guitars that you can look back on as essential to Devo's albums?**

"I knew very little about the tracking process. In the basement in Akron, we just stuck a Shure SM57 in front of the amp. Our first four albums were recorded with producers and engineers who knew how to mic an amp."

**You often used solid-state amps in the studio and live. Why did you favour those as opposed to big clunky valve amps?**

"I didn't know much about guitar amps, and the Acoustic 470 had a five-band graphic EQ, which I would configure in patterns for each song. And the cabinet had 2x 12-inch speakers and a high-frequency horn. I later disconnected the horn – too much high-end for me."

**What gear do you rely on these days while touring?**

"At some point, I wanted a guitar that felt *good*. So what I'm playing now is a Les Paul that's a Gibson Custom Shop recreation of Mike Bloomfield's '59 Les Paul. I've one of those, and I've a Line 6 modelling amp, so that we don't have to have amps with speakers. But apparently, a lot of places have stuff under the stage, and that was affecting and making noise, so our sound guy said, 'Bob, you gotta get a guitar with humbucking pickups...' I went to the guitar store, and I was just like pulling down all these Les Pauls, and going, 'Boring. Boring. Don't like this...' And then I grabbed the Mike Bloomfield one and I was

6. Gerald Casale, Mark Mothersbaugh and Bob Mothersbaugh, Michigan, 2025. "I think people needed reminding about how fun Devo is live," says Bob about their recent Netflix documentary

like, 'Oh my God, this feels perfect!' So I bought it and then took it home, plugged it in and said, 'Oh, and it sounds perfect, too!' I just wanted something that feels good in my hands.

"With the amps, I like a really clean sound, where I can plug the Les Paul in, and go, 'Oh, yeah, that's the Les Paul sound.' And then I can grab my Tele, plug it in, and go, 'Oh, yes, there's the Tele sound.' I appreciate all of that. But like I said, I don't really use amps that much when we're on stage any more. I mostly just use amps now when I'm back in LA and I'm working on TV shows, you know, mostly cartoons. But it really just takes too long to mic up an amp, so even then oftentimes I just plug right into the computer."

**Talking now about the recent Netflix documentary, *Devo*, has its success altered your view on the band's legacy or your influence as a guitar player? It offers a pretty full-frontal look at the band's journey.**

"The documentary has allowed people some insight into what Devo was doing all these years. It has not altered my viewpoint on legacy or influence as a guitar player. I'm still doing what I've always done."

## "DEVO IS LIKE THE MUSICIANS ON THE TITANIC WHO KEPT ON PLAYING. WE ARE TRYING TO DO OUR PART"

"[Director] Chris Smith did a good job with it. He found a lot of really old footage that I've never seen or just didn't remember. It was a lot of fun to watch. And, really, it's a feel-good kind of documentary, you know? I felt good at the end of it. And that's what everybody else has told me, too."

**As someone who was put through the wringer early on and came out the other side a huge success, what's your best piece of advice for would-be guitarists or bands looking to succeed?**

"I didn't know I was in the wringer at the time; I just thought record companies were insane. I've always enjoyed writing music and playing guitar, so being successful is an added bonus. If you don't enjoy the process, you're in the wrong business."

**The general vibe seems to be that Devo has no intent to stop. What's next and why, in your eyes, does the world need groups like Devo?**

"You're right! Devo has no intent to stop. And starting in April, we will be touring the world. Devo is like the musicians on the Titanic who kept on playing as the ship was sinking. We are just trying to do our part."

"The documentary has brought a new audience to our shows. I think people needed reminding about how fun Devo is live. I take nothing for granted and am truly grateful for Devo's continued success." 



PHOTO BY SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES



The Devo documentary is available to stream on Netflix now

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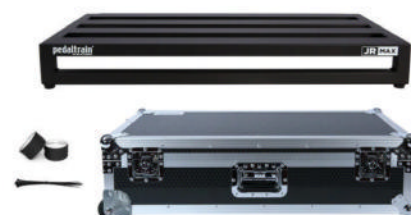
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# the prodigal sunn

Washington-formed doom-metal duo Sunn O))) return with an album of crushingly low frequencies. We ask Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson to explain how they unleash their floorboard-loosening sounds

BY JOEL MCIVER

**T**EN ALBUMS SINCE their formation in Seattle in 1998, Sunn O))) have built an intimidating and intellectually rigorous catalog of music based on subterranean riffing, currently in trouser-flapping drop-A tuning.

A wide range of alternative musicians have performed with them over the years, including *Joker* soundtrack composer Hildur Guðnadóttir, Japanese experimentalists Boris, singer Attila Csihar of black metal ghouls Mayhem and the avant-garde songwriter Scott Walker, whose collaborative 2014 album, *Soused*, was one of many high points of the duo's prolific career so far. Still, their new album, *Sunn O)))*, a monstrously edifying piece of work, might well match that highlight.

We met Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson for a discussion of all things downtuned.

**The press release for *Sunn O)))* claims there are 130 guitar tracks on the album.**

**Is that true?**

**GREG ANDERSON:** Maybe more, actually. The producer that we worked with, Brad Wood, developed this concept of recording us almost as you would an orchestra, with a microphone or two on every instrument, to get a really detailed documentation of the sound. There was a microphone on every single speaker that was used in the tracking. In the past, on a 4x12 cabinet, we've had one, maybe two microphones on it. Brad put a microphone on all four speakers, and we're playing with multiple cabinets.

**STEPHEN O'MALLEY:** It was an incredible way of doing it. I think there were about 20 mics per person per take, so with that, all of the variety of color of each speaker, and even location of each mic, it was great. It was Brad's concept that he brought to the table.

**And you were reamping, too.**

**ANDERSON:** We did a lot of that on this record, so there was a direct signal that

was recorded while we were tracking, and then we ran that back through a different pedal setup or different amplifiers, but the speaker cab remained the same. One of the things that we also did on this record was take Stephen's signal and run it through my setup, and then we'd take my signal and run it through Stephen's setup, just to get some different sounds and different textures. We had many, many layers to work from, hence the absurd amount of tracks.

**Presumably 130 guitar tracks is quite a challenge to mix.**

**O'MALLEY:** That was our only hesitation — like, "Can you manage this?" Because if we do one take of one guitar part, that's 40 tracks. And then if we re-amp it, it's adding another 40 tracks, and then there's the other instrumentation as well. If someone was playing a bass track through the backline, that'd be another 40 tracks of bass. It adds up quite quickly, and the management of all that takes a lot of skill. Another question was, "Are there enough



**“Our live performances are something you can feel in your bones”**

GREG ANDERSON

Neve preamps to handle this?” Fortunately, the studio had them, and to Brad’s credit, the entire mixing process was totally smooth, with no issues.

**If you’re going to do this, you might as well go big, right?**

**ANDERSON:** Yeah. That’s actually part of the story of this group. Our backline is enormous, and so is the sound we’re making.

**Just as well you weren’t recording to tape.**

**O’MALLEY:** That would have been a lot of tape machines. I mean, our last two records that we recorded with Steve Albini [*Life Metal* and *Pyroclasts*, both released in 2019] were on tape, and it was exactly that — like, “How many channels do we have to work with?”

**Can you take us through the gear you used on the record?**

**O’MALLEY:** Yeah. I need to pull up some photos. We had someone come in and take

them for this specific purpose.

**For when guitar mags call?**

**O’MALLEY:** Yeah — exactly! My main guitar on the record was my signature silverburst Travis Bean TB1000A.

**ANDERSON:** I played two Les Pauls — a 1972 Custom and a 2005 Deluxe. One has P100s in it and the other has Lollar humbuckers.

**O’MALLEY:** On the bass guitar tracks, I was playing this amazing vintage Gibson Thunderbird. The guy we rented it from, I asked him if he could do a drop-A tuning with a .140 string on the A, and he was like, “Well, I’ll have to put a new nut on, but I’ll do it,” and he set it up like that. It was great.

**How about effects?**

**O’MALLEY:** My board had my ProCo Big Box Rat with the Keeley mod. There’s a Zvex Super Hard On, which I’ve had since the early Nineties. There’s a J. Rockett Silver Archer, a Dallas Rangemaster, a Black Ash from EarthQuaker Devices, an Aguilar

Octamizer, an EarthQuaker Swiss Things, a Peterson StrobeStomp tuner and an Echo Fix EF-X3 Chorus Echo. The Sound Shank by EarthQuaker was used a lot, as well as a few Big Muffs.

**ANDERSON:** We brought a shit-ton of different distortion and fuzz pedals and a few other pedals as well. Stephen tends to be the one who uses more echo and reverb in his sound; I leave that out of mine. I was using a Big Muff Civil War fuzz. That runs through the EarthQuaker Devices Life pedal, whose circuit is based off the Rat and has an octave and boost in it as well. Those are the two main pedals as far as the sound for me.

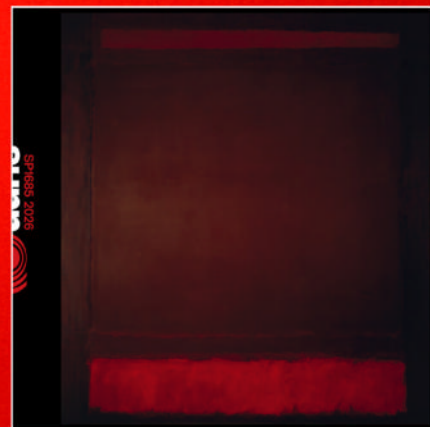
**And amps?**

**O’MALLEY:** On my side, the amplifier wall was four Sunn Model T tube heads, vintage. Two of those were Super Ts, with Fender Soldano and Marshall cabs. For the bass, we had a vintage blue-line Ampeg SVT and an 8x10 cab. That was all for the primary tracking. For reamping and some of the





Greg Anderson [left] and Stephen O'Malley with some vintage Sunn Model T heads, O'Malley's signature Travis Bean TB1000A and more



### Is it physically exhausting to play your stuff?

**ANDERSON:** Somewhat, but it's also exhilarating, like jumping into a frozen lake. Our live performances are typically around 90 minutes long, and it's definitely something you feel, like a great hike through the woods. You can feel it in your bones. I like that feeling.

### Is there a limit to how low the guitars can go, frequency wise?

**ANDERSON:** There are limitations to the instruments and amplification when it comes to producing sounds. On some of our earlier recordings, we experimented with low tones that only dogs can hear. I'm sure there's recordings that have that, but I think as far as an expression of what we're doing, it can't be captured correctly, or in a way we would present it.

### It's a great album. From the Mark Rothko picture on the cover to the guitar tones, it's one hell of an artefact.

**O'MALLEY:** Thanks. It's taken a lot of development to get here, and what's exciting about it is that it always feels fresh, and we're working with a new label, Sub Pop. Greg and I grew up in Seattle, and we started playing music there in the Nineties, so to be working with Sub Pop is really cool. This is a life's-work kind of artistic project, and it's really been a blessing, considering where it's brought us.

**ANDERSON:** I'm really excited about *Sunn O)))* — and very proud of it. This is the first record we've made with just the two of us. We've gone back to the beginning, in a sense, but in a way that this project has turned into its own beast. After 10 albums, we're still moving forward.

*Sunn O)))* was released April 3 on Sub Pop.

overdubs, I also had to create a Fender wall, which had a Champ, a Deluxe, a Twin and another one with a 12" speaker that I can't recall. Those were all vintage.

**ANDERSON:** Of course, we had the Sunn Model T heads, and on my side we also set up a bass setup with an 8x10 and a bass head. Typically for us on a live performance, that's done with an Ampeg SVT head and cabinet, but this time I used an Orange OD120.

**O'MALLEY:** We called one of the guitar cabs, a Fender 4x12, "the Black Hole." It had an insane bass response, much more than the Ampeg, even. It was pretty juicy on the bass — actually, a little bit too much, which is kind of good for our songs. We're kind of about having too much.

### That's a lot of gear.

**O'MALLEY:** That's about half of what we usually use. [Laughs] I mean, recording full stacks isn't really necessary, so it was primarily half-stacks in the studio.

### How do you two divide up the recording?

**O'MALLEY:** Obviously, we're both playing electric guitar, and the way that works is pretty old school and pretty democratic. We'll introduce parts to each other and work on them and create arrangements, and then try different variations and make suggestions. It's pretty open in that way. We've been playing together for so long

that we have a vocabulary that we go back to, but at the same time, each time we work together, it seems like we have to find new paths to communicate. I find that to be really positive and stimulating.

### Do you guys play the riffs in unison?

**ANDERSON:** Oftentimes, yeah. There's moments, too, especially on this record, where we were experimenting with contrast and one person would riff and the other person would lay out, and we would take turns on that. Sometimes there were moments where we were playing slightly different variations of the same thing in unison. But oftentimes it is in unison, or one player played an octave up to give it some depth. We did a few overdubs, but not many: most of the album is a singular performance. What you hear is what was played in that moment. There's different things happening in reaction to the riffs, where each player is adding their own thing. To me, that's what makes up the entire sound. It brings in the character of each player.

**"We called one of the cabs 'the Black Hole.' It had an insane bass response"**

**STEPHEN O'MALLEY**



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# ULTIMATE TELECASTERS

It seems strange to say, but a literal lifetime has passed since the Telecaster (initially named the Broadcaster) debuted at the NAMM Show of 1950. Remarkably, its relevance has only grown during the seven decades that have passed since then. Perhaps that's because the Telecaster's simplicity has always meant that it becomes what you bring to it, meaning it could never truly go out of style.

What began as a niche guitar developed for Californian country musicians has become the musical equivalent of a universal wrench: from metal to jazz, from bubblegum pop to grindcore, the Telecaster is all over the map of modern music. Gadgets and gimmicks arrive in a fanfare and leave in a commercial hearse – but raw utility never dates.

In the following pages, we examine the technical evolution of the Tele.

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Words Jamie Dickson Photography Matt Lincoln





2024  
*Fender*  
TELECASTER  
*Limited Edition Custom Shop*  
*'59 Telecaster Custom*  
*Super Heavy Relic*



# TELEVISION

The Fender Telecaster remained a work in progress throughout the vintage era, and as part of our 75th anniversary celebration we chart the changes in construction, controls and electronics

Words Huw Price

## THE PROTOTYPES

In 1943, Leo Fender and his future business partner Doc Kauffman built their first lap steel, and applied to patent a pickup design the following year. This instrument is now known as the 'Radio Shop guitar' and more refined lap steels followed. Leo assembled his first six-string guitar prototype during the summer of 1949. The laminated two-piece pine body shape was almost identical to the production models, with a bolt-on neck and top mounted metal control plate. However, it featured a three-per-side 'snake head' headstock that was similar to those of Fender's lap steels. Leo completed the second prototype around the autumn/winter of that year, complete with the now iconic headstock shape and cut-down bass-side-only Kluson tuners.

Both 1949 Fender prototypes were single-pickup guitars, but Leo gifted a two-pickup prototype with a lap steel pickup in the neck position to Sam Hutton, who was one of Fender's amp technicians. He apparently kept it hanging on a nail in his workshop for testing purposes.

## PRODUCTION BEGINS

Fender's first production guitars were made during the spring of 1950 and the model was dubbed the 'Esquire'. These days the Esquire is considered a single-pickup Telecaster, but shortly after its release, Fender began offering Esquires with an optional neck pickup. The earliest models had black lacquered pine bodies and white fibre pickguards. By the summer, Fender was using ash for the bodies with a translucent blonde finish and a contrasting black fibreboard pickguard.



Fender sprayed and polished the 'guards, and while the earliest ones were glossy front and back, the team soon realised it was wasting lacquer on the side nobody would ever see. Instead, the 'guards were placed on a paint tin for spraying, leaving a circular lacquer 'shadow'. The 'Blackguard' era lasted from 1950 to 1954.

## SPARE THE ROD

At first, Leo Fender was convinced that chunky maple necks would be sufficiently robust to remain straight under string tension. However, touring musicians who were road-testing the earliest Esquires began reporting problems. Travelling from the heat of the deep south to the Canadian cold caused the necks to flex, with string action becoming uncomfortably high and buzzingly low, depending on conditions. Leo bowed to the inevitable and purchased truss rod tooling in October 1950.

1. Roy Buchanan on stage as part of a show with Albert Collins and Lonnie Mack at Carnegie Hall in New York City, 1985. Buchanan's yearning, weeping bends on Telecasters remain among the most emotive in all guitar music

*"Everything about the Tele is so simple. Everything you need is right there. I just have an instinct for all of them"* **BILL FRISELL**

PHOTO BY EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

## NAME CALLING

Esquire production was paused between late summer 1950 and January 1951, and Don Randall came up with the name 'Broadcaster' for the dual-pickup model. When Esquire production resumed, the name was reserved for single-pickup guitars.

In his book *The Blackguard*, Nacho Baños estimates that no more than 250 Broadcasters were produced between October 1950 and February 1951. Fender received Gretsch's telegram asserting an infringement of its trademark and scissored off the 'Broadcaster' section of the remaining decals, rather than waste them. Guitars with these chopped decals became known as 'Nocasters' and, once they had run out, Fender began using decals bearing a new name devised by Don Randall – and the first guitars with 'Telecaster' logos appeared during the late summer of 1951.

Broadcasters, 'Nocasters', early Telecasters and Blackguards continue to occupy top spots for vintage Telecaster fans. We turned to busy session player

Eddie Tatton and rockabilly virtuoso James Oliver for some owner insights.

"I ended up buying a '52 from ATB," Eddie recalls. "It was relatively affordable because it's an Esquire with a factory added neck pickup. GE Smith also has one like mine, and Fender apparently charged around \$15





### 1950 FENDER BROADCASTER

"They're rarer than 'Bursts,'" says Steve Hove of vintage guitar retailer ATB, where this grandfather of the Tele family currency resides. The period in which the 'Tele' was named the Broadcaster was brief (around four months) but influential. "I think they made less than 300 during that time, something like that," Steve says. "So, yes, they're rare beasts. And it was the model that kicked everything off for Fender – not something we see every day, certainly. There's quite a prominent midrange. It sounds quite ballsy

– it does have that twang, but it's not like the later models, which can be a bit glassy, very direct. I think this Broadcaster has a more well-rounded sort of tone – more even across the strings. It's tricky to describe generic [characteristics] of Broadcasters because they do vary quite a lot. The one we have is a really lightweight one, but they can be quite heavy. And the neck profile is not as chunky as you might think. It's got a nice soft V to it – really, really playable." [JD]



for the upgrade. It's an incredible working instrument and it's probably my favourite guitar."

James's '54 example is his favourite, too, and it's been his main gigging guitar since its purchase three years ago. "Although it's a refinish, the parts are original and it's fairly light," James tells us. "The bridge pickup died while I was touring Scandinavia and I finished the tour on the neck pickup. Most of what I play is twangy rockabilly and blues, and I like a bright and clean sound. The wiring has been updated, so I use the middle position if I'm playing T-Bone Walker-type stuff, but I'm usually on the bridge pickup and I never use the neck on its own."

*Like 50s Les Pauls, there is no definitive look for Blackguards – much depends on environmental factors and amount of playwear*

## BODY BUILDING

Body construction evolved throughout the vintage era. To get the neck pickup wires to the controls, Fender's first method was drilling a hole from the neck pocket straight through to the bridge pickup cavity. The radio repair guy in Leo Fender must have baulked at having to remove the strings and bridge for maintenance.

Towards the end of the Broadcaster run, Fender began making a one-inch 'doughnut rout' halfway between the two pickup cavities. One hole was then

2. Arguably the greatest Tele player of all, Danny Gatton puts a beer bottle to alternative use while performing with Robert Gordon at The Ritz, New York, in 1981



## 1954 FENDER TELECASTER

"1954 was right at the transition where they were going to the 'Whiteguard' models," says Steve Hove of ATB of this beautiful late-period Blackguard. "But the '54 doesn't have that kind of wheaty, yellowy sort of finish [of the earlier Broadcasters]. There are a few other details that had evolved in terms of the nerdy elements, so things like Phillips versus flathead screws, plus the earlier Broadcasters didn't have a channel rout [a wiring pathway to the control cavity] in between the two pickups. That was first introduced as a doughnut rout and then the channel that the '54 would have. The neck profiles – from memory – are fairly similar, not too chunky – a soft V-shaped neck profile but very playable. The one that we've got, the very late Blackguard model, has got transitional elements. It's not like a '52 Telecaster or a Nocaster; it's in a slightly different place from a collector's point of view." [JD]

drilled from the neck pocket to the doughnut, and a diagonal hole was drilled from the doughnut to the control cavity. By this time, Fender was also cutting a notch between the neck pocket and neck pickup rout.

Fender eventually settled on a diagonally routed channel connected to the neck pickup and control cavities by drilled holes. This lasted until 1968 when the company began drilling the wire channel from the corner of the neck pocket through to the control cavity – catching the treble side of the neck pickup cavity along the way.

Fender routing templates were pinned onto body blanks and the holes were plugged with dowels prior to finishing. These plugs were on the rear centre line and started out with a  $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch diameter before reducing to  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch in 1953. Fender also struggled

with through-body stringing, and it took a while to get ferrule holes lined up and evenly spaced.

There was considerable weight variation, and fully assembled Blackguards range from just over 6lb through to 9lb. Finding reasonably light ash in sufficient quantities became an issue during the late 1960s, and Fender tried removing wood under the pickguard area for weight relief. Guitars with these chambered bodies became known as 'Smugglers' Teles'.

## IMMORTAL COILS

The bridge pickup was basically a Fender lap steel pickup with a three-screw bottom 'flat' and an inductance plate to increase output. Early Blackguard bridge pickups read between 6kohms and 9k, but higher values do not indicate overwinding. Fender transitioned from 43 AWG plain





### 1955 FENDER TELECASTER

"The most significant change for the 1955 Telecaster was simply the colour of the pickguard," says Steve Hove of ATB, "which is relatively small change, but it does affect how collectible it is and its value – but, sonically, there's not too much difference between a '54 and a '55.

Neck profiles might vary a little, but they're quite similar. The Tele was obviously available in a blonde finish, but in the mid-to-late 50s it became a white blonde [tint], rather than the wheaty, yellowy blonde that we see on earlier models." [JD]



enamel wire to thicker 42 AWG during 1951, and thinner wire offers higher resistance for the same number of turns.

Flat-pole Alnico III magnetic slugs were used until Fender changed to Alnico V in 1955. Shortly afterwards, the slugs became staggered, bringing Tele bridge pickups in line with Stratocaster pickups. White parcel string was wrapped around the exposed coils for protection, which turned black in the potting wax.

Unlike the bridge pickups, the neck pickups remained largely unchanged. Plain enamel 43 AWG was the magnet wire of choice along with non-staggered Alnico V slugs. Lacquer was used for

### *The Esquire's wiring had a certain logic, providing owners with the potential for three sounds from a single-pickup guitar*

potting, rather than wax, and a chrome-plated brass cover protected the coil.

A significant change occurred around 1965 when Fender ceased the practice of hand-guiding magnet wire and fully mechanised the process. This coincided with the appearance of grey bottoms, and during the late 1960s Fender transitioned from wax to lacquer for potting coils, which solidified them and changed the tone.

#### **CONTROL TWEAKS**

Wiring Esquires with a preset treble-roll off in one position, a tone control connected in the middle position, and no tone control in the back position had a certain logic. It provided owners with the potential for three sounds from a single-pickup guitar, although most found the pseudo 'bass' setting excessively dark.

Leo Fender clearly thought otherwise because he retained the treble roll-off with dual-pickup models. At first, the settings were neck pickup with treble cut, then neck and bridge pickups with no tone control. There was a volume control, but the second knob blended the bridge and neck pickups in the back position. "My

'52 has the blend knob and it's a super-cool thing to [use]," Eddie says. "You can just add in a bit of neck pickup to soften the sound. Having the bass setting is fun, but it's too dark, even for jazz solos."

Fender introduced a second wiring scheme in 1952 with a conventional tone control that worked on both pickups. But the 'bass' setting was retained, and getting both pickups working together meant finding the switch's in-between position.

Despite widespread unpopularity, this wiring lasted until around 1968. CBS's management made one of its rare popular decisions and standardised the factory wiring to neck/both/bridge with master volume and tone controls. Unfortunately, they simultaneously changed to bright-sounding 1mega-ohm pots with a treble bleed capacitor on the volume control. James has reservations: "I have a rosewood-board '69, which I don't think is very good. The neck feels very nice – it's actually thicker than my Blackguard – but I'd describe it as harsh and shrill-sounding."

#### **BLONDE ON BLONDES**

Like 50s Les Pauls, there is no

definitive look for Blackguards and much depends on environmental factors and how hard they have been played. Some of their finishes have a dirty and brownish look that is commonly referred to as 'butterscotch'; others are more of a yellowish cream, and there are all shades in between.

An absence of tan lines under the pickguard on early guitars suggests that Fender sprayed translucent colour coats but little or no clear lacquer over the top. The amount of visible grain varied, and the blonde was generally applied more thickly around the edges to disguise body joints.

During 1954, Fender introduced the Stratocaster and Forest White was recruited to run the Fender plant and oversee an increase in production. Big changes were made to the Telecaster, too, with a modernised facelift bringing an end to the Blackguard era. With a white blonde finish and a single-ply white plastic pickguard, Esquires and Telecasters from this era became known as 'Whiteguards'. Again, Fender sprayed the translucent coats heavier on the sides and edges to create a subtle white 'burst. Not all Whiteguards were blonde, and starting in 1955



## **BILL FRISELL ON TELECASTERS**

"My first guitar I ever got was in the summer of '65 – a Fender Mustang – but soon after that I went into the pawn shop and saw a late-50s Esquire that was \$75. I thought, 'Oh, that looks cool, I'll get that.' With the Telecaster, it's like, they got it just right at the beginning, y'know? Everything about it is so simple. Everything you need is right there. I have a number of Teles now, and some of them have different pickups or whatever. But I just have an instinct for all of them. I know where the volume knob is, where the pickup switch is – I don't have to reprogram my brain if I switch between them.

"Some of my guitars are just straight Telecasters, but the design is so easy to mess with. With my main instrument, it's basically a Telecaster, but it comes from a bunch of different models, all put together by JW Black, who was one of the first guys that worked at the Fender Custom Shop. So he's serious about Telecasters, knows them inside out and restores old ones. We have a sort of a dangerous relationship because he'll always get some idea, like, 'Oh my God, what if we

put this pickup in this guitar...?' So my main Telecaster is a shorter Gibson scale and the neck pickup is made by TK Smith – I guess he was inspired by those old Bigsby pickups. It's painted by my friend Terry Turrell, and the bridge pickup is a Seymour Duncan, a Little '59 or something. That Telecaster was the only guitar I used on my new album, *In My Dreams*.

"I have to say, I love playing archtops. Like, I have a Collings I-30 that I love. But it's harder to travel with those. I don't have a crew and roadies, or a truck with 50 guitars. When I travel, I carry one guitar and I end up checking it in under the plane. With a Telecaster, you can pretty much just throw it down there in the hold and it'll survive somehow. And even if it doesn't survive, you can just get a screwdriver and screw it back together. So there's this practical thing about the Telecaster for travelling. I'd love to go out with a Gibson L-5 or something, but you just know it would be destroyed in a matter of minutes by the airlines!" [HY]





### 1959 FENDER ESQUIRE

“There are a lot of players who just love the single-pickup thing and the simplicity of it – and the Esquire obviously sits in that bracket,” says Steve Hove of ATB. “I mean, they’re pretty versatile things. Even without the neck pickup you can get lots of different sounds out of them. A lot of people think the absence of a neck pickup has an impact on the way that the string oscillates and, ultimately, the sound that

you get out of them. So they sort of do their own thing away from the Tele. The ‘59 neck profiles are pretty skinny – it’s right on the sort of transition into rosewood fingerboards and they generally have quite slim profiles. So it’s got a very different feel to the 1955 model or the Broadcasters, for example.”



Fender would occasionally spray Telecasters sunburst.

## HARDWARE-ING

Early guitars feature flat-head screws throughout – including the truss rod adjuster. Fender began a slow transition to crosshead screws during 1951, and by 1952 it was common to see a mixture of both as the company used up its remaining stock. The transition was complete by the end of 1953.

Fender fitted Kluson tuners from the 1940s until the late 1960s. Those used up to 1951 had 'Patent Applied For' stamps on the undersides and the closed shell cover. The following version lost the cover stamp and the single-line Kluson Deluxe lettering, and

*Roger Rossmeisl and Phil Kubicki devised a semi-hollow bodied Telecaster to use up heavier ash and mahogany blanks*

they were used up to 1952.

Kluson then changed to an open shell cover, with the gear shaft protruding from one side, and the Kluson Deluxe stamp was reintroduced in 1956. A patent number stamp began appearing in 1958 and, starting in mid-1964, the Kluson Deluxe lettering appeared in two lines, rather than one. Fender stopped using Kluson tuners during 1967 and began having its own 'F'-stamped tuners manufactured by Race & Olmsted using machinery purchased by Fender.

Until mid-1954, 'Fender' was stamped on each bridge plate with a serial number. That wasn't an option for Stratocasters, however, so serial numbers were stamped on the spring covers instead. Eventually, somebody realised that stamping neckplates would resolve the problem for every Fender instrument.

The only significant change Fender made to the chrome-plated cold rolled steel Telecaster bridge occurred between 1958 and '59 when Fender abandoned through-body stringing. Instead, strings were threaded through holes drilled into the bridge's rear lip, adjacent to the intonation screws. Knobs went through several

changes, with variations in the knurl, the domed top and the diameter of the flat spot in the centre. These changes were mostly manufacturing inconsistencies, but things settled in 1957 when Tele knobs were changed from milled brass to moulded zamak with flat tops.

The earliest saddles were cut from 5/16-inch steel rod with the bottoms ground flat, but Fender changed to brass around the autumn of 1950. In 1954, Fender reverted to steel saddles, with a 1/4-inch diameter, and they lasted until 1958 when threaded steel saddles appeared. Opinions differ regarding their impact on tone.

"A '63 was my main guitar before I bought my Blackguard," James Oliver recalls. "I think its steel saddles sound different from my '54's brass saddles, but on gigs I barely notice."

"To my ears, saddle material does have an influence and brass has a really nice smooth sound," Eddie Tatton observes. "I also have a '55 with a flat-pole Blackguard-style pickup and steel saddles, rather than brass. It sounds thinner than my '52, but it has more top-end."

In 1968, smooth saddles with string grooves appeared. They're often assumed to be steel, but

since they're non-magnetic, they're more likely plated zamak.

## LOOKING ROSEY

The first significant change in the way Telecaster and Esquire necks were constructed occurred in 1959 when they acquired rosewood fretboards. The necks lost their 'skunk stripes' because truss rods were installed from the top, rather than the back – and Eddie is a fan of the era: "My 1960 is amazing and sounds more like a classic Telecaster than my Blackguard," he contends. "With Blackguards, there's something going on that's just otherworldly, but the 1960 sounds a bit fuller and the top-end is more prominent. It's not as easy on the ear as the '52, but the '60 cuts through very well and it's nicely balanced with a non-muddy neck pickup. It's basically the Robben Ford sound."

In 1962, the fretboards changed from a thick slab to a thin veneer, but maple fretboards remained an option and were applied in the same way as rosewood. "My maple-cap '66 Tele sounds a lot twangier than my Blackguard, and it's really topdy," James assures us. "A few serious Tele players have told me they think mid-60s maple caps are the best



## GEAR THAT GOES WITH TELES

The Telecaster has such a distinctive voice that it's no surprise that certain amps, overdrives and effects really seem to click with it. In fact, some bits of gear were designed specifically with Teles in mind (though they work great with other things, too), such as Analog Man's sought-after King Of Tone overdrive, designed by tone maven Mike Piera for Tele-wielder Jim Weider, who joined The Band as Robbie Robertson's replacement. Weider had been using a TS808 Tube Screamer but disliked how it shelved off too much low-end. Piera designed him a new two-channel drive, based in part on an 18-volt Marshall Bluesbreaker overdrive, that played nicely with Teles, sounding natural and amp-like.

The many versions of the KoT can be pricey on the used market (we're talking usually well over a grand), and there's a multi-year waiting list for new ones. If you don't fancy that, you can get the tonal essence of Piera's masterpiece in the single-channel Duke Of Tone pedal built in collaboration with MXR for \$279, though it often streets cheaper. Also worth a look is Free The

Tone's RJ-1V 'Red Jasper' low-gain overdrive (around \$399), designed to be a good organic-sounding match with Teles.

As far as amps go, it's hard to beat a black-panel Fender Deluxe Reverb – tremolo and reverb being ideal companions for any Tele – and the current '65 reissue can be had for \$3,099 from mainstream stores. If classic rock is more your thing, the bright voice of the Tele also makes a juicy match with lower-wattage, vintage-voiced Marshalls that are easy to push into natural break-up – the company's Studio JTM ST20H head (\$1,849) really impressed us with its swampy, 60s tones that should balance nicely with the cut of a Tele.

Speaking of tremolo and reverb, while there are abundant all-in-one-pedal examples, notably the Strymon Flint (\$639), real springs can't be beat – unleash your Tele's wild side with the Third Man Hardware x Anasounds La Grotte spring reverb pedal. We've never heard such stormy, visceral reverb sounds, so if you like your Tele tones raw and Link Wray-approved, it's well worth trying out. [JD]





### 1968 TELECASTER THINLINE

"Thinlines sit in their own bracket, in terms of Telecasters," Steve Hove of ATB says. "Obviously, you've got the semi-hollow body construction and that has its own impact on the sound when it's plugged in. There's a different aesthetic here – the Thinline marks a period of experimentation for Fender with the Tele Deluxes and Customs slightly later on. It was Fender branching out, increasing

their product range, and trying to put a new kind of spin on the Telecaster, which wasn't at its most popular during the 60s because of the prevalence of the Strat. This is the Type 1 [Thinline Tele] design, which transitioned to the Type 2 [with Dual Wide Range humbuckers] in 1972. We have examples with both ash and mahogany body construction." [JD]



Teles Fender ever made.”

From 1956, Fender offered custom colours at a five per cent upcharge, but they are rare. Fender’s first colour chart appeared in 1960, with 14 options, and it was revamped in 1963. Fashions shifted to natural wood during the late 60s, and by 1974 there were only six finish options.

From late 1956, Stratocaster bodies were made from alder, but Fender continued making ash Telecasters throughout the 50s and into the 70s. Alder Tele bodies were also made, but many would have been concealed under sunburst and custom colour finishes.

*“My early ’69 Custom has a lovely sustain and resonance. It’s great for jazz – the neck pickup sounds so solid”* **EDDIE TATTON**

“Alder-bodied Teles haven’t got that classic Tele sound,” Eddie believes. “They’re a bit darker and more rounded, but they don’t have the sweet top-end zing of the ash-bodied ones.”

## THE CUSTOMS

Telecasters and Esquires with front- and rear-bound alder bodies appeared in June 1959. They also featured the new three-ply green nitrate pickguard and subtly altered decal reading ‘Custom Telecaster’ in a slightly gothic font. Two ‘Tuxedo’ Customs models followed; Syd Barrett played a black one with white binding. There was also a white version with black binding and some ever rarer custom colour Customs were made.

“I’ve got an early ’69 Custom with an alder body and a nice thick U-shaped maple neck,” Eddie tells us. “It has an early poly finish and it’s just glorious with a lovely sustain and resonance. Funnily enough, it’s great for jazz because the neck pickup sounds so solid and it isn’t too bright or bold.”

## FLOWER POWER

Fender’s response to the hippy era was its ‘Blue Flower’ and

3. Rory’s Gallagher’s 1969 Telecaster, with a rosewood fretboard, was a much-used counterpart to his black Esquire, which was modded for two pickups. Both guitars saw heavy use in his hands, typically for slide work



‘Paisley’ models. These were stock Telecasters with patterned paper covering the front and back of their alder bodies. The Blue Flower got metallic blue sides and the Paisley metallic pink, which lipped over the edges for a ‘burst effect. Clear gloss was applied, along with clear pickguards for the patterns to show through. Made between 1967 and ’69, the Blue Flower version is the rarest.

## THINLINES

Roger Rossmeisl and Phil Kubicki worked on special projects for Fender and devised a semi-hollow bodied Telecaster to use up heavier ash and mahogany blanks. The Telecaster Thinline appeared in 1968, with a specially designed pickguard, slanted controls and a single f-hole. Unlike George Harrison’s solid rosewood Tele, the production versions of these were constructed much like Thinlines, with a rosewood sandwich body and a thin maple filling.

## WIDE RANGERS

CBS commissioned Seth Lover, the man behind Gibson’s iconic Patent Applied For pickup, to design a humbucker pickup.

His ‘Wide Range’ humbucker featured CuNiFe magnets with offset pole screws and first appeared in the double-humbucker version of the Thinline Tele in 1971, featuring in the company’s catalogue in 1972, its first full year of production. Also in 1972, Fender acknowledged the popular preference for humbuckers in the neck position and introduced a redesigned Telecaster Custom with a Wide Range humbucker and a traditional bridge pickup. A Telecaster Deluxe with two humbuckers, a Stratocaster-style headstock and a hardtail bridge followed in 1973. These were the final Telecaster variants of the vintage era and, since James Oliver owns both, we’ll leave the last word to him.

“I bought my ’74 Tele Deluxe because of Mick Green from The Pirates. I love it because the pickups sound so clear and bright. Mick actually played a Custom, so I got a ’76, but I don’t like the bridge pickup and the instability of the three-screw neck attachment drives me nuts.” 

With thanks to ATB Guitars, James Oliver ([www.jamesoliverband.co.uk](http://www.jamesoliverband.co.uk)) and Eddie Tatton (Instagram @eddiattonguitarstuff)





### 1974 TELECASTER CUSTOM

"This is a really good example and it has a nice light weight," says Steve of the Tele model made famous by Keith Richards. "With the 70s Teles, the weights can be a big thing in terms of value and desirability because some of them can weigh an absolute ton. The Wide Range pickup at the neck gives a really interesting sound. It has quite a hi-fi kind of sound quality and it was quite

a departure from anything Fender made up until that point. They found favour with a lot of the shoegaze bands back in the day, and they're great pickups. The string-to-string definition is really good, and that was part of the design; having individual magnets for each of the strings aided that string separation, so you get a lot of clarity." [JD]





### LOU REED'S CIRCA 1992 'GOLDIE' TELECASTER

Lou Reed and Danny Gatton aren't two names you see mentioned in the same breath as guitarists too often. But they are united in this beautiful Tele built in Fender's Custom Shop in the early 90s. Clad in what Fender dubbed Frost Gold, the instrument is in fact a Gatton signature model – minus the twin-rail Barden pickups the Maryland virtuoso was known for using. Reed, who doesn't strike one as a natural Gatton fan, nonetheless enthused about the instrument in a 1993 *New York Times* interview, in which he described it as “a really great guitar” (he'd just bought it, along with a blonde-finish Gatton Telecaster) and he liked it enough to use it

for live performances on his Ecstasy World Tour from March to November 2000.

Dubbed 'Goldie', the guitar is accompanied by a hardshell case inscribed with the following words in silver pen: “Gatton Tele Gold / Lou Reed DG0036” and “Lou Reed / Locker #15”, giving (one presumes) his techs an easy time when storing and retrieving the guitar. This Tele was, until it went under the hammer at Christie's, part of the late Jim Irsay's mega-collection of historic instruments. It fetched US\$330,200 when it was sold in New York in March. [JD]



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# The Beatles rock out

## Play like the fab three!

This issue Jon Bishop examines this groundbreaking group's heavier side, from early rockers up to their later, more experimental work. From mop-tops to rock gods!

The aim of this lesson is to learn and apply some of the concepts behind the rockier side of the three guitar-playing Beatles. With a body of work as iconic and influential as theirs, studying and learning from their approach can benefit your own musicianship no end. The Beatles were rockers first and foremost, with influences like Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Scotty Moore and Carl Perkins. Blues and R&B were also key elements for their music. All three guitarists in The Beatles (John, George and Paul) went on to become fine players and their individual musicianship is often overshadowed by the sheer enormity of the group's success. Paul, although nominally the bass player due to nobody else wanting the role, was a guitarist at heart and played some of the band's best solos, such as Taxman (Revolver) and Good Morning (Sergeant Pepper). John was famed for his electric and acoustic rhythm work, but his lead style took centre stage on tracks like Get Back, Yer Blues, and The End jam.

George's official role in the band was as

lead guitarist, contributing memorable solos on songs like his own Something, plus All My Loving, and Happiness Is A Warm Gun.

As a vehicle for our studies, we have recorded five contrasting performance tracks complete with full tablature. These are all in guitar-friendly keys, and the chord progressions are moveable to any key once you have them under your fingers.

Our first track is inspired by John and George's rhythm guitar work on songs like Paperback Writer and I Saw Her Standing There. Example 2 takes a look at Paul's lead style on numbers such as Taxman, and also draws inspiration from classics like Drive My Car and I Saw Her Standing There, with example 3 nodding to John and George's rhythmic interplay on Come Together and I Want You (She's So Heavy).

Our fourth example examines Paul's lead work on tracks like Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and his and George's slide guitar on Drive My Car and Run For Your Life. In fact all three

**Ability Rating** Moderate



**Info** <https://bit.ly/3TvS8gf>

**Key** Various **Tempo** Various

**Will improve your...**

- ✓ Harmony and theory knowledge
- ✓ Early rock rhythm and lead guitar styles
- ✓ Fretboard knowledge

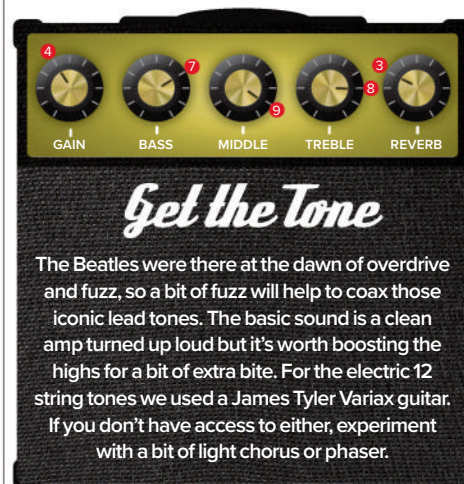
of The Beatles' guitarists recorded slide guitar parts at one time or another, and George more or less made a career out of it, post Beatles.

Our final example takes its influence from George's electric 12-string Rickenbacker work on early tunes like I Call Your Name, and John's notable riff playing on songs like I Feel Fine. The combination of catchy riffs and rhythmic chord stabs is very much a Beatles trademark and provides the backbone for these examples.

Once you have played through the mini pieces and been through the jam tracks, why not try composing your own songs using some of your favourite Beatles techniques. Have fun with your ticket to rock! ■



The Beatles larking around at the time of the Sergeant Pepper sessions



**TRACK RECORD** Beatles recordings are littered with super rock guitar work. For starters, check out albums like Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Rubber Soul, Let It Be, and Abbey Road for inspiration. For a career overview, the greatest hits compilation 1, features all the group's number one singles and is an unmissable listen. The red and blue compilation albums have also recently been remastered.



“None of us wanted to be the bass player. In our minds he was the fat guy who always played at the back.”

Paul McCartney





## TRACK 1 JOHN & GEORGE'S RHYTHM STYLE

Our first track, inspired by John and George's rhythm on *Paperback Writer* and *I Saw Her Standing There*, starts with a single-note riff punctuated with D7 chord stabs. The combination of riffs and stabs is a Beatles trademark. The A7 chord shifts up a Minor 3rd to C7 then the D7 moves up a Minor 3rd to F7. Classic Beatles fare. The D7#9 is particularly effective for chord stabs. The track finishes with some signature ascending chords played in a quarter-note triplet rhythm.

Musical score for guitar, featuring a bridge pickup with a light crunch. The score includes a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tempo of 138. The bridge pickup is marked with a "Count In" and "N.C." (No Chord). The score is divided into measures, with guitar parts and bass lines. The guitar part includes a bridge pickup with a light crunch, marked with a "Count In" and "N.C." (No Chord). The bass line includes a bridge pickup with a light crunch, marked with a "Count In" and "N.C." (No Chord). The score includes a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tempo of 138. The bridge pickup is marked with a "Count In" and "N.C." (No Chord). The score is divided into measures, with guitar parts and bass lines. The guitar part includes a bridge pickup with a light crunch, marked with a "Count In" and "N.C." (No Chord). The bass line includes a bridge pickup with a light crunch, marked with a "Count In" and "N.C." (No Chord).



## TRACK 2 PAUL'S LEAD STYLE

Our second track is inspired by Paul's lead work on songs like Taxman, and also draws inspiration from classic rockers like Drive My Car and I Saw Her Standing There. As no single scale will fit over these chords it is easier to establish a motif that can be moved around to follow the chord changes. To keep the interest up the basic motif can be changed and developed each time it's moved, in a structural question and answer fashion. It's an approach The Beatles used a lot.

♩ = 138

Count In

Bridge Pickup With Fuzz Tone

N.C.

D7

A7

BU

C7

D7

F7

BU

BU

A7

G7

C7

D7#9

BU

Em

C7

PM

A7

B7

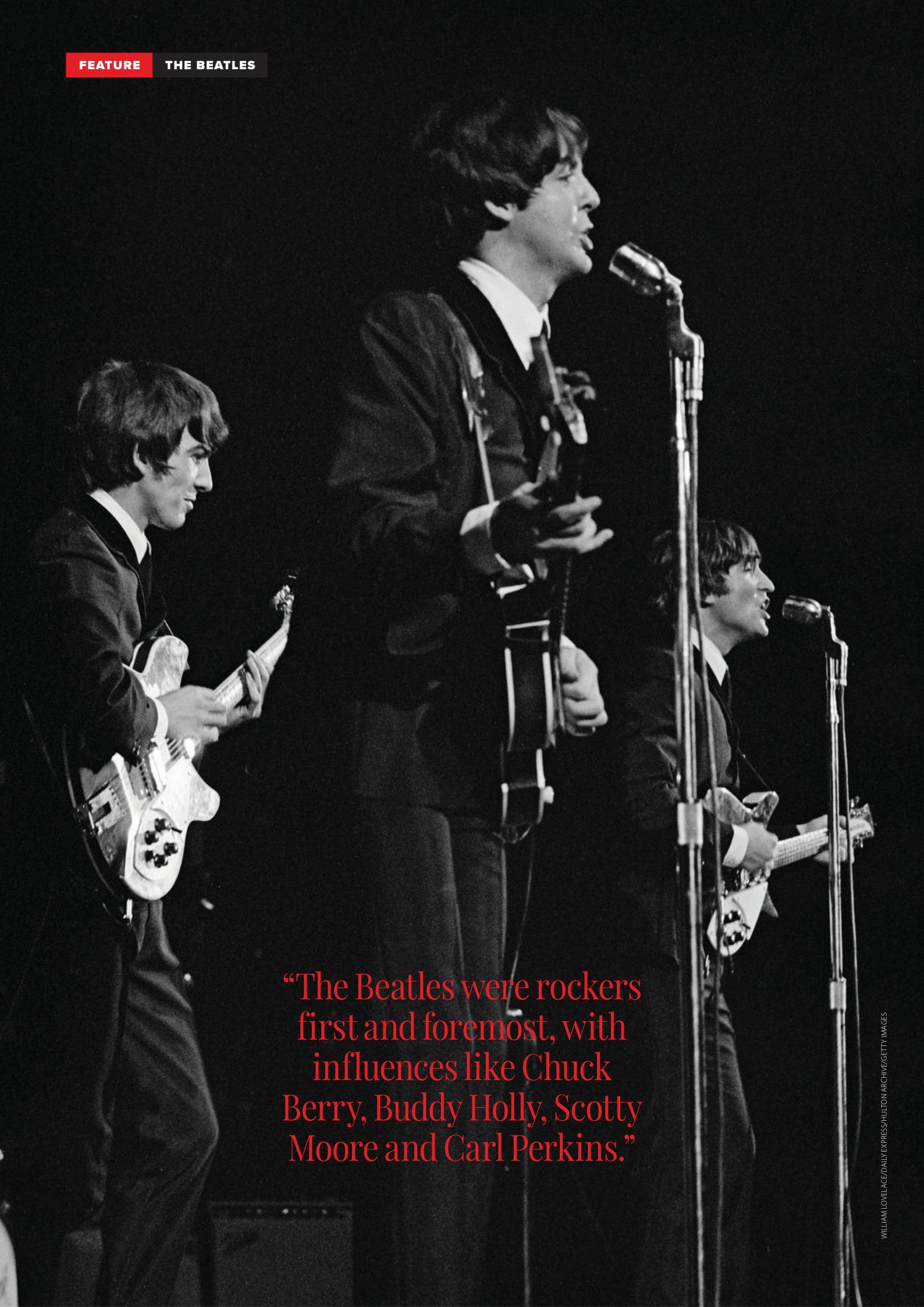
D7

Eb7

E7

PM





“The Beatles were rockers first and foremost, with influences like Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Scotty Moore and Carl Perkins.”



### TRACK 3 JOHN & GEORGE'S RHYTHM STYLE PART 2

This looks at John and George's rhythm work on tracks like *Come Together* and *I Want You (She's So Heavy)*. The tempo is a little more relaxed and we again use the tried and tested idea of alternating riffs and chord stabs. The C7 and D7 chord stabs are played slightly short by lifting the fretting pressure off just after the chords are strummed. This was the band's default method for filling out the rhythm track, right from the early days when one guitar would be an acoustic.

[illegible]



## TRACK 4 PAUL &amp; GEORGE'S SLIDE STYLE

This looks at Paul's lead work on tracks like Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and Paul and George's slide work on Drive My Car and Run For Your Life. We'd recommended wearing the slide on the fourth finger of your fretting hand. This way it's possible to move between playing the lead fills and slide licks. A biting overdrive tone works best here, so select the bridge pickup and dig in hard with your pick.

$\text{♩} = 90$  Count In 2

Bridge Pickup With Light Crunch

**E7**

*f*

BU

7 8 9 7 9 9 7 8 9 10 (12) 10 8 10 8

3, 9

1 C7 D7 2 C7

With slide

7 8 5 9 7 5 8

6, 12 7 13

D7 F7 G7 E7

No slide

7 8 9 7 9 9

14

BU

7 8 9 10 (12) 10 8 10 8

7 8 15 15

18

**E7#9**

australian  
**guitar**  
MAGAZINE

**WE'LL MAKE YOU A BETTER PLAYER!**



## TRACK 2 GEORGE'S 12-STRING STYLE

Our final piece takes influence from George's electric 12-string guitar work on tracks like *I Call Your Name*, and John's riff work on hits such as *I Feel Fine*. The idea is to establish a catchy riff and then move it around to fit the chord changes. The 12-string electric guitar helps to create an authentic vibe, but it's not essential for you. This type of jangly riffing would become highly influential in the indie guitar world later on with bands like The Smiths using it often.

**Bridge Pickup 12 String Electric**

**Count In**

**E9**

**B9**

**D9**

**A7**

**E7**

**B9**

**D7**

**A7**

**E7**

**17**

The score is written for a 12-string electric guitar using a bridge pickup. It is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 140 BPM. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The score is divided into five systems, each with a treble clef staff and a six-string guitar staff. The guitar staff includes fret numbers and string numbers (1-6). The chords are E9, B9, D9, A7, and E7. The score includes a 'Count In' section and a 'Bridge Pickup' section. The final measure of the fifth system is a whole rest.



# Go global! Scales from around the world

John Wheatcroft shows how to expand your harmonic and melodic potential by exploring some of the exciting and unusual sounding scales that the world can show us.

As creative musicians, we're always on the hunt for fresh and unique sounds. One way to introduce new musical ideas and reinvigorate our playing is to look at incorporating less familiar sounds. As most pop, rock, blues and even jazz utilises a well-worn set of scales and chords, a great way to do this is by studying scales that popular western music rarely employs. We can cover new ground either by exploring a completely

new concept, revisiting an old musical friend to search for new ideas, or by slightly modifying something we already know well. Our brief today is to help us expand our playing by focusing in on 10 different scale sounds, with a range of five, seven and eight-note

options coming from all over the world. These will allow you to add sophistication, edge and beauty to your playing. You'll expand your knowledge of harmony along with your melodic phrasing, fluency and compositional options along the way.

There are 10 musical examples for your perusal. Each consists of a new scale definition, an intervallic or triadic exercise to establish some of the harmonic possibilities using this sound

exclusively, a harmonised chord scale with a suitable chord from each available note, and a full solo consisting of licks, melodies and appropriate musical phrases derived from each scale entirely and exclusively.

To really assimilate each sound I'd suggest you spend some time with each in isolation and become as familiar as you can with the intervallic content. Begin with the fingerings as listed but it's

also a good idea to find these notes in as many positions as you can, including mapping the scale out along the length of a single string. This will give you the best physical distance-to-interval relationship and will really assist you in internalising the sound. With this in mind, I'd also

suggest singing what you play. Start with just the ascending and descending scale patterns and work up to the arpeggio and interval exercises outlined in the musical examples. It's also a great idea to try to sing each line and lick, either out loud or just to yourself in your head. Even if you get things slightly wrong, it may still help your phrasing to sound more like the music you imagine, rather than what you fingers are capable of reaching without necessarily being in control

**"I went through five, six, seven, eight and nine note scales. I catalogued them and filed them away and threw away all the ones that had more than four semitones in a row"**

ALLAN HOLDSWORTH

## TECHNIQUE FOCUS

### Shaping your scale melodies

While it's valuable and immensely helpful to run through scale exercises, both sequentially and in intervals leaps, the real secret to bringing these to life and out of the world of dry academia is to shape your melodic choices into cohesive musical phrases. Consider the rhythmic shape of each idea, where and when the pauses occur and the balance between long and short notes. How about the melodic contour of each melodic fragment? Also, how does what you have just played influence what you are about to play in the next moment? It's importantly that you 'play' the scales, rather than let the scale play you. We should still be able to hear your musical personality shine through, with the rhythmic vocabulary, dynamic preferences and other aspects that make up your personal style in tact, irrespective of which scale you have chosen.

**Ability Rating** Moderate/Advanced



**Info** <https://bit.ly/GTMAG332>

**Key** C Major/C Minor **Tempo** 100bpm

**Will improve your...**

- ✓ Application of different sounding scales
- ✓ Melodic and harmonic connections
- ✓ Phrasing and punctuation

internally.

Working on scales in this focused way, by establishing the fingerings and sound, defining the harmonic options within each sound and then by creating a vocabulary of useable melodic options from each, is an immensely useful strategy. It's also a whole world away, in terms of application and motivation, from just passively ascending and descending each scale from top to bottom to a metronome click, with little attention or comprehension to when and where this sound might be applied in an actual musical context. You could give yourself the goal of creating a short number of original musical phrases or composed licks; say three to begin with, for each scale. Create a chord progression for each scale using the chords listed and try these ideas out in a contextualised way and you'll be using these ideas in your playing in no time. As always, enjoy. 🎸







Allan Holdsworth: a master musician with a vast repertoire of unusual scales



Pat Martino: the great jazzman had an encyclopaedic knowledge of scales



Marty Friedman is a rock guitarist who loves to explore less common harmony



Guthrie Govan instinctively added different scales to his improvisations



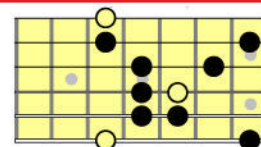
**TRACK RECORD** Marty Friedman loves unusual scales, so try *Tokyo Jukebox 3* (Mascot 2021). Allan Holdsworth's knowledge of harmony and melodic connections was as legendary as his technique. Check out *IOU* (Enigma 1985) for its breathtaking playing and beautiful compositions. Berklee professor David Fiuczynski incorporates many of the sounds we're exploring. Try *Planet Microjam* (Rare Noise 2012).



# EXAMPLE 1 CHINESE SCALE (R-3-#4-5-7)

Our first collection of notes is the Chinese scale, essentially a Major Pentatonic scale, although the raised 4th (F#) and Major 7 (B) allude to connections to the Lydian mode. You could see this as Lydian Pentatonic, as the intervallic

numbers are exactly the same as the more common Minor Pentatonic (Root-3rd-4th-5th-7th), although the intervals are shaped to fit into a Major tonality (R-maj3-#4-5-maj7, rather than the more familiar Root-3-4-5-7).



**1a) Scale definition** **Cmaj7**  $\text{♩} = 100$

**1b) Interval skips** **Cmaj7**

**1b) Chords** **Cmaj7** **Emadd9** **F#7sus4** **Gmaj7 (no 5th)**

**1d) Solo** **BSus4** **Cmaj7** **Cmaj7** **Gmaj7 (no 5th)**

**Emadd9** **BSus4** **Cmaj7**

**Gmaj7 (no 5th)** **Emadd9** **BSus4**

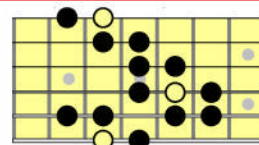
68 guitar



**EXAMPLE 2 BYZANTINE SCALE/DOUBLE HARMONIC MINOR SCALE (R-B2-3-4-5-B6-7)**

You might recognise the sound of our second (Major) scale from the theme tune to one of Quentin Tarantino's legendary blockbusters. There's a dark sophistication to this sound, due to the flattened 2nd (D<sub>b</sub>) and flattened 6th degree (A<sub>b</sub>), although this is offset a little by the brightness of the Major 7th (B). The Byzantine scale is also palindromic, so the intervals are the same distance from the root upwards (semitone, 3rd-

semitone, etc.) as they are from the octave downwards. This has certain implications for contrary motion and any melodic idea can be echoed with a reflected phrase in the opposite direction. A key harmonic point here is the parallel chords available, with C Major and D<sub>b</sub> Major, along with both E Minor and F Minor all being present.

**2a) Scale definition**

Cmaj7

♩ = 100

Diagram showing the scale definition for the Byzantine/Double Harmonic Minor scale (Cmaj7) on a guitar fretboard. The scale is defined by the sequence of notes: C, D<sub>b</sub>, E, F, G, A<sub>b</sub>, B. The fretboard is shown with strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The scale is played in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The fretboard shows the scale starting on the 1st fret (C) and ending on the 11th fret (B).

**2b) Triads**

C

D<sub>b</sub>

Diagram showing the triads for the Byzantine/Double Harmonic Minor scale (Cmaj7) on a guitar fretboard. The triads are defined by the sequence of notes: C, D<sub>b</sub>, E, F, G, A<sub>b</sub>, B. The fretboard is shown with strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The triads are played in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The fretboard shows the triads starting on the 1st fret (C) and ending on the 11th fret (B).

**2c) Chords**

Em

Fm

Gmaj7<sub>b5</sub>A<sub>b</sub>augB<sub>sus2</sub><sub>b5</sub>

C

Cmaj7

D<sub>b</sub>maj7

Em

Fm/maj7

Diagram showing the chords for the Byzantine/Double Harmonic Minor scale (Cmaj7) on a guitar fretboard. The chords are defined by the sequence of notes: C, D<sub>b</sub>, E, F, G, A<sub>b</sub>, B. The fretboard is shown with strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The chords are played in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The fretboard shows the chords starting on the 1st fret (C) and ending on the 11th fret (B). A note indicates "\* Enharmonic respelling".

**2d) Solo**G7<sub>b5</sub>A<sub>b</sub>maj7<sub>#5</sub>G7<sub>b5</sub>

Cmaj7

Cmaj7

Em

Diagram showing the solo for the Byzantine/Double Harmonic Minor scale (Cmaj7) on a guitar fretboard. The solo is defined by the sequence of notes: C, D<sub>b</sub>, E, F, G, A<sub>b</sub>, B. The fretboard is shown with strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The solo is played in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The fretboard shows the solo starting on the 1st fret (C) and ending on the 11th fret (B).

Fm/maj7

D<sub>b</sub>maj7

Cmaj7

Diagram showing the solo for the Byzantine/Double Harmonic Minor scale (Cmaj7) on a guitar fretboard. The solo is defined by the sequence of notes: C, D<sub>b</sub>, E, F, G, A<sub>b</sub>, B. The fretboard is shown with strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The solo is played in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The fretboard shows the solo starting on the 1st fret (C) and ending on the 11th fret (B).

Em

Fm/maj7

D<sub>b</sub>maj7

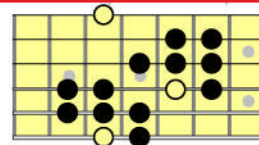
Diagram showing the solo for the Byzantine/Double Harmonic Minor scale (Cmaj7) on a guitar fretboard. The solo is defined by the sequence of notes: C, D<sub>b</sub>, E, F, G, A<sub>b</sub>, B. The fretboard is shown with strings E, B, G, D, A, E from top to bottom. The solo is played in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 100 BPM. The fretboard shows the solo starting on the 1st fret (C) and ending on the 11th fret (B).



## EXAMPLE 3 ORIENTAL SCALE (1-2-3-4-5-6-7)

This interesting collection of notes outlines the sound of Major, albeit with a flattened 7th (B $\flat$ ), implying a Dominant 7th tonality, along with the lowered 5th (G $\flat$ ). Once again we see some parallel triads, here in the form of A Minor and B $\flat$  Minor,

although these separate to Am7 (A-C-E-G) and B $\flat$ m/maj7 (B $\flat$ -D $\flat$ -F-A) when considered into their four-note chordal forms. As with many of our scales, only a few notes differentiate it from something much more 'regular' sounding.



**3a) Scale definition**  $\text{C7}\flat 5$   $\text{Cmaj}\flat 5$   $\text{D}\flat\text{aug}$

$\text{E} \text{ B} \text{ G} \text{ D} \text{ A} \text{ E}$

**3b) Triads**

**3c) Chords**  $\text{C7}\flat 5$   $\text{D}\flat\text{maj7}\sharp 5$   $\text{C7}\flat 5/\text{E}$   $\text{Fmaj7}$

**3d) Solo**  $\text{C7}\flat 5$   $\text{C7}\flat 5/\text{E}$

**3e) Solo**  $\text{Fmaj7}$   $\text{D}\flat\text{maj7}\sharp 5$   $\text{C7}\flat 5$

**3f) Solo**  $\text{C7}\flat 5/\text{E}$   $\text{Fmaj7}$   $\text{D}\flat\text{maj7}\sharp 5$

**\* Enharmonic respelling**

**7**

**13**

**18**

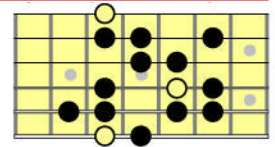
**21**



**EXAMPLE 4 HIJAZ SCALE (R-2-3-4-5-6-7)**

You may already be familiar with this Major based scale (C-D<sub>♭</sub>-E-F-G-A<sub>♭</sub>-B<sub>♭</sub>), as it has a number of aliases, such as the Phrygian Dominant or Spanish Phrygian. You may also recognise this familiar but sophisticated sound as the fifth mode of F Harmonic Minor (F-G-A<sub>♭</sub>-B<sub>♭</sub>-C-D<sub>♭</sub>-E). Whichever title you so choose, it's a sound

that is associated with Dominant 7th chords with the dark sound of the flattened 9th (D9), such as C7<sub>9</sub> (C-E-G-B<sub>♭</sub>-D<sub>♭</sub>). It's possible to make the connection with Diminished 7th, by considering four components of this five-note chord (E-G-B<sub>♭</sub>-D<sub>♭</sub> = Edim7).



**4a) Scale definition**  $\text{♩} = 100$  **C7**

**4b) Triads** **C** **D<sub>♭</sub>**

**4c) Chords** **Edim** **Fm** **Gdim** **A<sub>♭</sub>aug** **B<sub>♭</sub>m** **C** **C7** **D<sub>♭</sub>maj7** **Edim7** **Fm/maj7**

**4d) Solo** **C7** **Edim7**

**Fm/maj7** **A<sub>♭</sub>maj7#5** **C7**

**Edim7** **Fm/maj7** **A<sub>♭</sub>maj7#5**

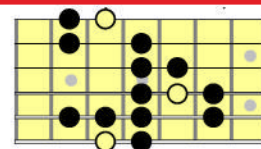
The diagram shows the scale definition, triads, chords, and solo lines for the Hijaz scale. The scale is defined as R-2-3-4-5-6-7. The triads shown are C and D<sub>♭</sub>. The chords shown are Edim, Fm, Gdim, A<sub>♭</sub>aug, B<sub>♭</sub>m, C, C7, D<sub>♭</sub>maj7, Edim7, and Fm/maj7. The solo lines show the scale in various positions, including a 13th fret position and an 18th fret position. The scale is played in a descending and ascending pattern, with various bends and vibrato indicated.



## EXAMPLE 5 PERSIAN SCALE (R-2-3-4-5-6-7)

Our final Major scale is the mysterious sounding Persian scale, once again featuring both the flattened 2nd (D<sub>b</sub>), flattened 5th (G<sub>b</sub>) and flattened 6th degrees (A<sub>b</sub>). As this scale features a Major 7th (B), it's possible to repurpose both  $\flat 5$  and  $\flat 6$  degrees into  $\sharp 4$  (F $\sharp$ ) and  $\sharp 5$  (G $\sharp$ ), to allow us to create Ima $\sharp 7$ 4 (no 5th) (C-E-F $\sharp$ -B), or Cma $\sharp 7$ 5 (C-E-G $\sharp$ -B). It's a good idea when looking at such scales to get

into the habit of considering enharmonic alternatives, to see if there are any more familiar harmonic constructs available within any less familiar melodic material. Spend some time familiarising yourself with the sound of every component note here so any work spent on chromatic interval recognition will be duly rewarded.



## 5a) Scale definition

## 5b) Triads

$\text{♩} = 100$  Cma $\sharp 7$ 5

E B G D A E

1 8 9 7 8 9 11 9 10 11 9 10 7 9 7 8

Cma $\sharp 7$ 5 D $\flat$

8 7 9 9 8 11

## 5c) Chords

Esus2 Fm G $\flat$ sus4 A $\flat$ aug Bsus2 $\flat 5$  Cma $\sharp 7$ 5 Cma $\sharp 7$ 5 D $\flat$ ma $\sharp 7$  E6 Fm/ma $\sharp 7$

\*Enharmonic respelling

E B G D A E

7 9 9 8 11 9 9 11 10 9 9 11 10 9 7 5 6 4 5 4 3 9 9 6 9 9 10 8

## 5d) Solo

G $\flat 7$ sus4 A $\flat 7$  $\sharp 5$  Bdim/e Cma $\sharp 7$ 5 Cma $\sharp 7$ 5 D $\flat$ ma $\sharp 7$

\*Enharmonic respelling

E B G D A E

12 13 17 17 10 10 11 13 10 10 11 13 14 13 16

Fm/ma $\sharp 7$  A $\flat 7$  $\sharp 5$  Cma $\sharp 7$ 5

8va

E B G D A E

16 12 16 16 12 16 12 14 13 14 14 12 14 12 14 12 12 9 8 12 9 7 9 6 5 9 6 4

D $\flat$ ma $\sharp 7$  Fm/ma $\sharp 7$  A $\flat 7$  $\sharp 5$

8va

BU

E B G D A E

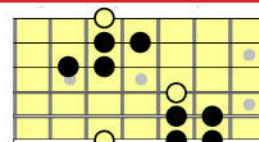
2 4 3 2 4 2 4 7 3 4 3 7 7 11 9 8 12 13 12 8 13 14 13 19(20)



**EXAMPLE 6 HIRAJOSHI SCALE (R-2-3-5-6)**

For our first Minor example we're looking at the Hirajoshi scale, essentially another Pentatonic option that alludes to a Natural Minor or Aeolian tonality (R-2-3-4-5-6-7: C-D-E-F-G-A-B<sub>b</sub>), albeit with no perfect 4th (F) or flattened 7th (B<sub>b</sub>). Rather like Example 1, where the Chinese scale

can be seen as a similar template to Minor Pentatonic with modified intervals, Hirajoshi can be visualised as the same numeric content as Major Pentatonic (R-2-3-5-6), but with the intervals changed to reflect this Minor tonality - so instead we find the Minor 3rd (E<sub>b</sub>) and flattened 6th (A<sub>b</sub>).

**6a) Scale definition**

**6a) Scale definition**

♩ = 100

**Cm**

**6b) Interval skips**

**6b) Interval skips**

**Cm**

**6c) Chords**

**6c) Chords**

**Cm D7sus4 (no 5th) Cm/E<sub>b</sub> Gsus4 A<sub>b</sub> maj7 Cm**

**6d) Solo**

**6d) Solo**

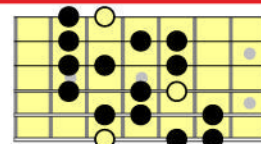
**Cm Cm/E<sub>b</sub> A<sub>b</sub> maj7 Gsus4**



## EXAMPLE 7 ARABIAN SCALE (R-2-3-4-5-#5-6-7)

Our next unusual scale, the Arabian scale, also has a number of other potential titles, such as Whole-Half Diminished, Symmetrical Diminished and even the Octatonic scale, as it's an eight-note scale. Regardless of the name, the construction is always the same, based upon a repeating pattern of whole-tone (two-fret) and half-tone (one fret) leaps. As it's an eight-note scale, there

is a large number of potential chords found here. From the root you can find Diminished 7th chords, and these repeat symmetrically in Minor 3rds throughout (Cdim7, E $\flat$ dim7, G $\flat$ dim7 and A $\flat$ dim7), whereas from the 2nd, 4th, #5 and 7th (D-F-G $\sharp$ -B) you can find Major, Minor or Diminished triads, along with Dominant 7th, Minor 7th and Diminished 7th four-note chords.



## 7a) Scale definition

$\text{♩} = 100$   
Cdim7

E B G D A E

1 8 10 11 8 9 11 7 9 10 7 8 10 7 9 10 7 8

## 7b) Triads

C dim D dim E $\flat$ dim Fdim7 G $\flat$ dim G $\sharp$ dim

E B G D A E

6 8 11 9 10 8 11 11 9 7 8 11 9 9 7 10 11 9 7

Enharmonic respelling throughout

## 7c) Chords

A dim B dim C dim Cdim7 D7 E $\flat$ dim7 F7

E B G D A E

10 7 10 8 9 7 10 10 8 7 4 7 2 5 4 7 3 5 7 10 5 8 7 10 6 8

Enharmonic respelling throughout

## 7d) Solo

F $\sharp$ dim7 G $\sharp$ 7 A $\flat$ dim7 B7 Cdim7

E B G D A E

15 10 13 8 11 10 13 13 16 11 14 13 16 12 14 16 15

D7 E $\flat$ dim7 8va D7

E B G D A E

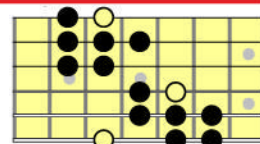
20 11 10 13 10 13 10 14 14 10 16 17 16 14 13 16 15 13 12 14 13 11 10 13 12 10 12 9 7 10 8 11 11 10



**EXAMPLE 8 HUNGARIAN GYPSY SCALE (R-2-3-4-5-6-7)**

One way to consider the Hungarian Gypsy scale is like a Harmonic Minor scale (R-2-3-4-5-6-7: C-D-E<sub>b</sub>-F-G-A<sub>b</sub>-B), but with a raised 4th (F#). With this in mind, the chords that you find within this scale are the same until we factor this F# into the equation. Again, there are some useful parallel triads here, such as the G and A<sub>b</sub> Major chords,

along with B Minor and C Minor triads. It's also a good idea to acknowledge the available semitone connections, such as the 2nd-3rd (B-C), #4-5 (F#-G), 5-5 (A<sub>b</sub>-G) and maj7th-root (B-C). So, when soloing with this scale, you'll notice it provides a lot of chromatic options.



**8a) Scale definition**  
Cm/maj7

$\text{♩} = 100$

**8b) Triads**

Chords: Cm, Dmaj<sup>b</sup>5, E<sup>b</sup>aug, F#sus2<sup>b</sup>5, G, A<sup>b</sup>

**8c) Chords**

Chords: Cm/maj7, D7<sup>b</sup>5, E<sup>b</sup>maj7#5, D7<sup>b</sup>5/F#

**8d) Solo**

Chords: Gmaj7, A<sup>b</sup>maj7, Bm, Cm/maj7

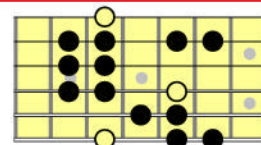
Chords: E<sup>b</sup>maj7#5, A<sup>b</sup>maj7, Gmaj7



## EXAMPLE 9 ROMANIAN SCALE (R-2-3-#4-5-6-7)

One way to consider the Romanian scale is as a Dorian mode with a raised 4th degree (R-2-3-#4-5-6-7). You can also perceive this scale, along with all the associated fingerings, as the fourth mode of the Harmonic Minor, so for the C Romanian scale, we can think of this as G

Harmonic Minor (G-A-B-C-D-E-F#), although rearranged; or that the C note and the associated harmonised Cm7 chord become our tonal centre (C-D-E-F#-G-A-B). Notice the Cm and D arpeggio possibilities.



## 9a) Scale definition

Cm7

♩ = 100

## 9b) Triads

Cm

D

Eb

F#dim

Gm

Adim

## 9c) Chords

Bbaug

Cm

Cm7

D7

Ebmaj7

F#dim7

## 9d) Solo

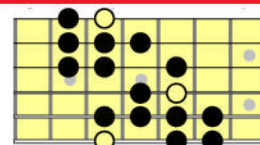
Cm7



**EXAMPLE 10 ALGERIAN SCALE (R-2-3-4-5-5-6-7)**

Our final scale, the Algerian scale, is another eight-note structure. One way to perceive this sound is as C Harmonic Minor (C-D-E<sub>b</sub>-F-G-A<sub>b</sub>-B) with an added  $\flat 5$  (G<sub>b</sub>). This adds a bluesy feeling to proceedings and from a chordal perspective, you get everything you would expect from Harmonic Minor with further options when you

throw this note into the mix. One useful addition is the  $\text{II}7,5$ ; in this example you can see it expressed as  $\text{D}7,5/\text{F}\sharp$ , a chord not normally available within the Harmonic Minor sound. Make sure to explore the enhanced semitone motion here (D-E<sub>b</sub>, F-G<sub>b</sub>, G<sub>b</sub>-G, A<sub>b</sub>-G, B-C), along with all the associated arpeggios.



**10a) Scale definition**  
Cm/maj7

$\text{♩} = 100$

**10b) Interval skips**  
Cm/maj7

**10c) Chords**

Cm/maj7   Dm7 $\flat 5$    E $\flat$ maj7 $\sharp 5$    Fm7   D7 $\flat 5/\text{F}\sharp$    G7

\*Enharmonic respelling

**10d) Solo**

A $\flat$ maj7   Bdim7   Cm/maj7

Fm7   Dm7 $\flat 5$    G7



# HOT GEAR



1

**Tone City Durple**  
RRP: \$129 • [egm.net.au](http://egm.net.au)

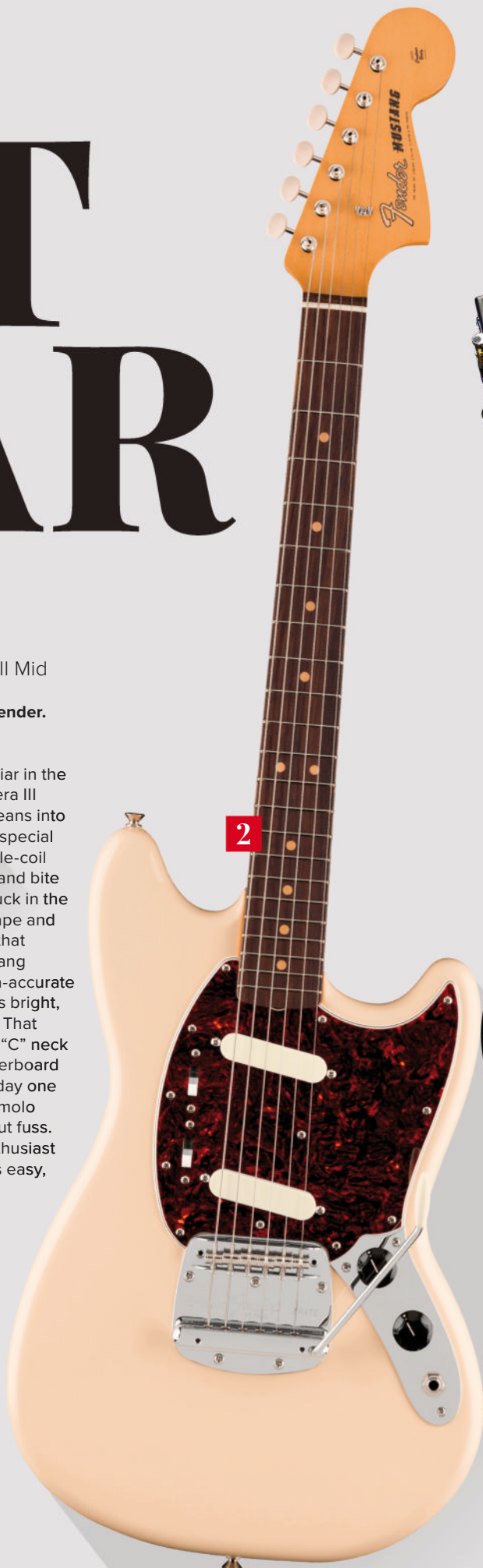
The Durple is a versatile mini overdrive pedal that offers rich and responsive low-to-medium gain sounds. It is based on Tone City's best-selling Mandragora overdrive with notable audible tweaks. These tweaks include the 'Mid' control, which has replaced the 'Pre' (presence) knob found on the Mandragora. Letting you cut or boost the amount of mid-range, this thoughtful EQ parameter allows you to attain anything from a smooth and scooped drive sound to a punchy, aggressive crunch.

2

**Fender Vintera III Mid 60s Mustang**  
RRP: \$2,099 • [au.fender.com](http://au.fender.com)

This one feels familiar in the right way. The Vintera III Mid-60s Mustang leans into what made the era special - clear, punchy single-coil tones with warmth and bite - without feeling stuck in the past. The offset shape and alder body deliver that unmistakable Mustang character, while era-accurate pickups keep things bright, woody and honest. That comfortable maple "C" neck with rosewood fingerboard feels worn-in from day one and the floating tremolo moves easily without fuss. Being a vintage enthusiast has never been this easy, seriously.

2



3





3

**Katoh Evolution Series EV5****RRP: \$329****dynamicmusic.com.au**

The Katoh folks have addressed issues that have frustrated both beginner and experienced players for decades: the bulky and unadjustable neck of the humble classical guitar. The EV5 is a wonderfully simple solution for these issues. It is as playable as any steel string guitar and doesn't frustrate the beginner. The EV5 is also budget friendly and comes in a very nice gig bag. For the novice, it offers an easy entry to guitar; for the experienced player, it offers great classical tone with a familiar feel. With their innovative EV5, Katoh has produced a real winner for players at any level, in a road-ready package, and at a bargain price.

4

**Tone City Wildfro****RRP: \$129 • egm.net.au**

The Tone City Wild Fro is an aggressive-distortion pedal with dangerous levels of gain on tap! It is based on the popular Wild Fire stomp box. The Wild Fro has been slightly modified to very specific tonal demands, delivering a sizzling modern distortion, yet still remaining tight and focused.

5



5

**Fishman Airlock****RRP: \$TBC****dynamicmusic.com.au**

AirLock is Fishman's wireless instrument system that connects any pickup-equipped instrument to your amp or recording setup. Guitar, bass, violin, keyboards – just plug in and play with no cables, no limits. AirLock delivers true analog cable tone, not simulated. Your pickups, your amp, your carefully crafted sound remains exactly as it should be, just without the wire connecting them. Advanced interference management adapts to your environment. Coffee shops, crowded venues, WiFi-heavy spaces – AirLock cuts through the noise while other systems drop out.

4



6

**EVH 5150III Hypersonic™ 6L6 2x12****RRP: \$2,599 • evhgear.com**

Built for high performance, the all new EVH 5150III Hypersonic digital amp recreates the legendary sound of the EVH 5150III tube amp, all while preserving that unmistakable EVH tone and volume. The result? It's virtually indistinguishable from the all-tube original. Added perks and modern upgrades include concentric EQ controls for channels one and two, independent noise gate controls for each channel and a new footswitch that allows both reverb and effects-loop selection. Super light-weight and easy to get from gigs to rehearsals – this one is a pretty sweet addition to any player's collection.

6





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SPECIAL FEATURE

## The making of Sea Change

Beck's surprising 2002 pivot was defined by its immaculately-recorded acoustics, and is often cited as a choice reference test by audio enthusiasts.

WENDY REDFERN/REDFERNS



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ROCK 'N' ROLL

# The making of Sea Change

Beck's surprising 2002 pivot was defined by its immaculately-recorded acoustics, and is often cited as a choice reference test by audio enthusiasts.

WORDS BY ANDY PRICE

**Imagine you're a radically inventive, off-the-wall troubadour Beck at the turn of a new millennium. You've won countless plaudits and a devoted audience by being one of the most creatively audacious genre-fusers of the era. With a penchant for melding hip-hop with lo-fi rock elements, your wry artistic persona is driven by a playful wit.**

After seven records (four of which on a major label) of flavoursome stylistic smushing, everyone is keen to see what fresh aural adventures you'll embark upon as a new century dawned. But, instead of a record of upbeat, primary colours, your first album of the 2000s rebukes everything that the world previously thought they knew about you. Gone was the slacker-coded irony. Gone were the weird, filtered sonics and excavated-from-a-record-shop samples. In came wistful acoustic guitar, emotive strings, lyrics from the heart and an overarching sense of resignation and self-reflection. This was a sea change in more ways than one.

Yes, *Sea Change*, Beck's cherished eighth album, could easily have been the debut release of an entirely different artist. Some still hail it as Beck's strongest song collection to date (it certainly triggered a side-strand of his career, which continued with the bucolic *Morning Phase* over a decade later). It's also a record that's frequently held up for its exquisite recording quality and sonic fidelity, with a sparkling production ably helmed by producer Nigel Godrich, most famous for his work with Radiohead.

Beck's pull toward penning the album's tranche of contemplative songs was triggered by the dissolution of his relationship with longtime girlfriend Leigh Limon in 2000. By all accounts, the final nail in the coffin of their slowly fading partnership was the discovery that she had been cheating on him. After a bitter split, Beck's feelings of rejection, resentment and heartbreak were met with no small amount of soul searching, and a pinch of self-loathing. The wind had very much been knocked out of Beck Hansen's proverbial sails.

Clearly, mustering the energy to take

on 'the enchanting wizard of rhythm' mantle once again was going to be a tall order. But, in time-worn, singer/songwriter tradition, the then-30 year-old musician was compelled to document how he felt. Before we take a closer look at *Sea Change's* recording story, we must first briefly look at this array of songs themselves, and the themes that would come to permeate the record.

From its serene, stately opener *The Golden Age* to wonky, slide guitar-laden epilogue, *Side of the Road*, Beck traversed a ragged psychological terrain questing for resolution. A journey of emotional penance. There's the hard mirror stare of the 'living lies' in *Guess I'm Doing Fine*, and there's the sheer exhaustion of the dramatic *Lonesome Tears* - a crucial song which lurched dynamically from its beaten-down verse into quite the most passionately-charged chorus of the record. It led to a climax that ascended ever upward via a soul-touching swell of strings.

Then of course, there's key track (and the most well-known cut on *Sea Change*) *Lost Cause*. Now a Beck staple, this gem found Hansen looking back to the dying days of his ailing relationship, bottling the feelings of surrender he felt as it neared its terminal phase. Lyrically, Beck framed himself in the context of a soldier, fighting a battle he knew deep down that he was doomed to not survive.

Weapons, and destruction, often recur throughout *Sea Change*. Another reference comes on the more existential *Round the Bend*, which depicted a pulled-back view of life rocketing by at uncontrollable speed; 'faster than a bullet from an empty gun'. Meanwhile, album highlight *Paper Tiger* situated the fragile titular construct being torn apart by 'idle hands'. It's not all violence and acrimony, though. The sumptuous *Sunday Sun* painted the protagonist at the 'acceptance' stage of his grief.

It's clear, then, even from a cursory listen to this set of songs, that this was the work of a wholly different facet of Beck's persona. The mischievous master of ceremonies who once impishly proclaimed 'I've got two turntables and a microphone' had left

the stage.

For Beck though, this candid honesty wasn't in any way a rapprochement of his prior incarnations. "I've always challenged the idea that serious material is more indicative of who a person is," Beck told *Time* following the record's release. "I don't think the laughing side of a human being is any less than the side where they're depressed."

Beck realised that in his creative outpouring, he had the germ of an



"In came wistful acoustic guitar, emotive strings, lyrics from the heart and an overarching sense of resignation and self-reflection. This was a sea change in more ways than one."

album that could resonate beyond the specifics of his own personal life, and communicate on a universal level. Yet his material for this more stripped-back album would stand quite markedly aside from anything else in his kaleidoscopic canon.

"I just wanted the record to be simple and clean," Beck told *Time*. "I wanted economy in the lyrics, and I wanted the songwriting to be very, very straightforward."



Although the majority of *Sea Change*'s songs were written in quite brisk fashion, Beck's desire to build the new album would take a frustrating two years to realise. Eventually, with *Mutations*' (Beck's country-infused 1998 record) producer Nigel Godrich again signed up to helm the album, the much-delayed recording sessions began at Ocean Way Studios in Hollywood, California on March 6th 2002.

"I think we originally wanted to do this record a year and a half ago, but it took a while for people to line-up," Beck told *Record Collector* in 2002.

Godrich was struck by how Hansen had matured as a songwriter over the intervening years, and was impressed by the timbre of his voice.

"Before we recorded [*Sea Change*] we listened to *Mutations*, and his voice sounded like Mickey Mouse," Nigel recalled in an interview with *Time*, "His range has dropped. Now when he opens his mouth, a canyonesque vibration comes out. It's quite remarkable. He has amazing tone."

*Sea Change*'s central theme of

through, and James Gadson stepped up to the stool to fill in.

Key to the album's widescreen soundscape were those dazzling string arrangements. These were overseen by Beck's father - noted composer and conductor David Campbell - working in tandem with his son to wring out the underlying emotion and elevate the compositions onto a cinematic plane. It was a musical universe not a million miles from the imperious heights of Scott Walker and Serge Gainsbourg.

"He'd have a rough sketch out, some chords and some melodies," Beck told *Record Collector*. "I think the idea with the orchestra was that we really wanted to feature the orchestra and not just use it to augment a pop song. Really use it dramatically, not just as padding. Use it for all its worth."

Aping the same brisk approach that they'd adopted during the *Mutations*' sessions, Beck and Godrich agreed to try and track a song a day - omitting the demo stage entirely. However it soon became better to aim for a two-day recording timeframe for each song, to guarantee that the intricacies of the arrangements were captured as organically as possible without needing to spend too long overdubbing.

*Change*'s sound.

Hailed by some as one of the most impressive desks on the planet, the Dalcon's simple analogue circuitry prioritised pristine transparency yet its three internal amplifier stages could still be felt within the harmonic fidelity of the output audio. A rack of API 550A EQ modules could be routed to any channel. These were frequently deployed by Godrich (in conjunction with the desk's own EQ capabilities) to bring out just the right balance of treble and bass in both acoustics and vocals.

Godrich tended to ride the Dalcon's faders live, approaching his role more akin to an instrumental player, reacting and adjusting instinctively to what he was hearing. The Dalcon was so beloved by Nigel that he'd eventually

"Aping the same brisk approach that they'd adopted during the *Mutations*' sessions, Beck and Godrich agreed to try and track a song a day - omitting the demo stage entirely."

heartbreak was an easy one for Godrich to zone in to. After all, he himself had just been through his own breakup. "The producer, Nigel Godrich, had just broken up with his girlfriend [as well]," Beck told *The Guardian*. "So he was really devastated and heartbroken, too, and we were making the record together in that sense."

While the album would retain the 'simple and pure' philosophy in terms of song construction, Godrich and Beck chose to augment the arrangement with both live band and luscious strings.

The live band largely consisted of the same players who'd worked on the more multi-hued precursor, *Mutations*. On bass was Beck's longtime bassist Justin Meldal-Johnsen. Synth, keys (and clavinet) was handled by Roger Joseph Manning Jr. while providing some of the icy lead guitar lines was another Beck mainstay; bluesy licks-man Smokey Hormel.

On drums for the first half of the three-week recording sessions was Joey Waronker (now currently serving as Oasis' drummer). Unfortunately, Joey had to leave the sessions half-way



Despite this slight adjustment to plans, Godrich soon clicked into an easy working relationship with Hansen. "Everything with him is that simple," Godrich told *Time*. "Because unlike most people, he always seems to know exactly what he wants to do."

Recording the album at an iconic studio like Ocean Way allowed Beck and Godrich to harness some typically top-notch, iconic recording gear, to capture instruments with authentic analogue clarity, warmth and punch.

Beck's most prominent acoustic guitar was a Martin HD-28, the recording of which was entirely the job of one Neumann U 47 FET microphone, owned by the studio's well-travelled owner Allen Sides. Beck's close-mic'd vocal was captured via both a AKG C12 and a Telefunken ELA-M 251 E.

The recorded signal was run directly into Ocean Way Studio B's impressive Dalcon console. This customised classic console had been purpose designed way back in 1970 by engineer Dallas Jorden for the studio's owner, Bill Putnam, and had been used on some of the most celebrated records of the pop age. Still in play in 2002, this remarkable feat of analogue desk design was key to the depth of *Sea*

buy it himself from the studio in 2011 (the desk currently resides in London's Strongroom Studios.)

Compression was left to the reliable studio mainstays of the Universal Audio 1176 and Teletronix LA-2A. This pair of rack-mounted icons made every facet of the frequency range sing, and infused their authentic harmonic distortion and midrange presence onto the tape-recorded takes, emphasising the organic nature of the album.

Providing much of the record's haunting ambience were Ocean Way's classic reverb chambers and plates. These had been custom built by original studio founder Bill Putnam, and used by the hallowed likes of Frank Sinatra and the Beach Boys to provide a classic smooth decay. You only have to listen to *Sea Change*'s very first track





to hear their spacious presence on the vocal of the transcendent *The Golden Age*.

Beyond the authentic Ocean Way kit, there was another ingredient in the *Sea Change* recording arsenal which was presented to Nigel Godrich by Allen Sides as a gift.

As Justin Meldal-Johnsen recalled in an insightful forum thread on Gearspace, "[It was] this very bizarre three-knob digital reverb from the early '80's that Allen Sides gave Nigel as a gift. Awesome tone. Combining that with a chamber or plate reminds me of some of the sounds you can get with a Publison Infernal Machine."

Speaking of Johnsen, in that same forum conversation, he revealed that his chosen bass setup for *Sea Change* rotated a Guild Starfire and an American Standard Fender Precision. Johnsen plugged these into an Ampeg B-15R reissue, with his output captured via a Neumann U 47.

"No DI was used on this record," Justin shared on Gearspace. "We tried and abandoned it before we cut the first song. [Bass] compression was 1176, and API 550A for some EQ. Sometimes pick, sometimes fingers, I alternate between song sections."

To keep things crisp, the drums were largely recorded dry and often

set-up within Ocean Way's small vocal ISO booths to guarantee an ultra-clear sound, before being blended with the studio's aforementioned reverb chambers. Some of the more spacious sounding tracks (such as the dreamy Sunday Sun) were captured within bigger rooms in the studio.

To maintain a retro-leaning vibe, Waronker and Gadson's respective kits were equipped with vintage snares. In particular was Gadson's 1970's Pearl snares, all routed into the Dalcon. This resulting impactful snare sound was tailored by Godrich to suit the song in question.

*Sea Change*'s drum sound has latterly been cited by some as a solid yardstick for comparison tests, you only have to listen to the tightly-tuned snare of Paper Tiger, the intimate Lost Cause and the more full-blooded rock punch of Little One to understand why it's been held up as such a benchmark.

Although live instrumentation was the order of the day, there was still space for some surprising digital colouration. While some surrounding sonic shading was provided by the likes of a heavily-treated Wurlitzer, other regions of the soundstage were often peppered by a soft synth that came bundled with an early version of Pro Tools, performed on a small

Yamaha MIDI controller.

Being so rooted in authentic analogue production, the record was suitably tracked in tape, layering an authentic, un-processed dynamic range and depth across the spectrum, as well as imparting a dreamlike, classic 'Hollywood' sound on the strings.

Ocean Way's Ampex 24-track tape machines were deployed for this purpose, while further overdubs and mixing was completed in Pro Tools.

The resulting record wasn't just a bountiful set of some of Beck's finest ever songs. It was an audiophile's dream.

Though eschewing many of the more showy production quirks of previous records, Beck (and Godrich) crafted an album of immense sonic quality in record time.

Across its 12-song narrative, Beck managed to alchemise a personal low into a towering artistic accomplishment - and revealed an endearing new facet of himself.

*Sea Change*, released on September 24th 2002, remains a special record for a lot of people. An engaging journal of struggle, the death of love and personal penitence, it was an album that a massive array of listeners could find comfort and catharsis.

Now healed, Beck but would re-don his quirky experimentalist hat for 2005's Dust Brothers' reunion Guero. But Hansen would venture back to this more intimate plane with *Sea Change*'s spiritual successor *Morning Phase* in 2014. An album recorded once again at Ocean Way (now owned by EastWest) with the same team, albeit without Godrich.

"I don't talk too much about my personal life," Beck told the Guardian. "You'll get a thousand times more of me from my music than anything I could say in an interview." 🎸





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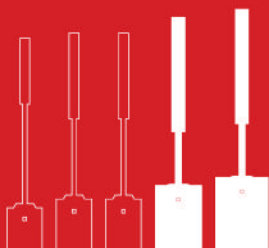
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# Shure SE215 Pro

Experience high-fidelity sound for less with a pair of Shure's excellent SE215 in-ear monitors.

Review by **James Farmer**

Shure has been one of the biggest names in live music gear for as long as we can remember. If you play, sing or go to live gigs, you've probably heard the sound of a Shure vocal microphone or guitar mic - and while Shure is primarily a microphone manufacturer, they also create some next-level studio headphones and in-ear monitors for us all to enjoy. If an in-ear monitoring system is something you've been considering and you're on a budget, then the Shure SE215 Pros should be very near the top of your list.

So, in-ear monitors then. Not to be confused with the humble earphone, a great pair of in-ears will do an awful lot to help you sound and play better. There are many different manufacturers all vying for your attention and hard-earned cash, and many different price points for you to explore when looking for a pair of in-ear monitors. Obviously if you pay more, you get more - but do you really need more? That answer is probably no.

Out of the box, the SE215 Pros look like a pretty smart, lower profile in-ear. The construction is pretty basic, with either clear, black or blue plastic 'phones on offer. They're nothing groundbreaking, but perfectly adequate for something that is going to sit in your ear for a few hours at a time. The box also contains some added extras - a zippered carrying case, cleaning/fitting tool and various different sizes of foam and silicone sleeves to ensure you get a comfortable and tight fit.

The cable is detachable, to allow for easier packaging and to avoid any damage or over-bending when wrapping them up after a performance or rehearsal. If your cable does get damaged - as can happen with earphones and headphones of all price brackets - then the cable is easily replaceable. No stress, huh?

Speaking of the cable, it's just your standard 3.5mm mini jack connector - making it ideal for most applications. Lined with wire, the cable stays pretty straight

during use, without excessive tangling or twisting. A rubber sleeve and extra wire reinforcement makes sure the cable doesn't move around too much, and that the fit around your ears is sturdy. Having cable wrapping around the tops of your ears can feel a little alien at first - particularly if you're brand new to in-ears - but we had forgotten it was there within the first 10 to 15 minutes of use.

The SE215 Pro's main focus lies within the earpiece itself: a single, high-definition driver. Considering a vast majority of in-ear monitors contain at least two (sometimes more) drivers, this is remarkable in itself - but what is more remarkable is the soundstage that this single driver creates.

In all of the musical scenarios we've been able to put the SE215 Pros through - heavy touring with rock bands, lounge jazz gigs and studio recording sessions, to name a few - they sounded smooth and capable, and not noticeably pokey or tinny. Like any pair

**"If an in-ear monitoring system is something you've been considering and you're on a budget, then the Shure SE215 Pros should be very near the top of your list"**

of earphones or IEM's, a little distortion was noted in some slightly more manic areas or when the volume was boosted just that little bit too high, but the SE215 Pro came out from that barrage of testing largely unscathed.

One of the issues we always run into with in-ear monitors is the issue of ambient noise cancellation and sound bleed. The SE215 Pros offer some really useful and effective isolation from the sounds around you. This is thanks to the shape and size of the casing itself, which forms a fairly decent seal when sat in your ear. Especially when playing live, you want a decent amount of separation between your own in-ear mix and what's

going on elsewhere, without feeling like you're playing on your own. The Shure's fit in that middle ground very well, with small but reassuring ambient levels of sound passing through.

## Verdict

Now, it's absolutely worth bearing in mind that the SE215 Pros are not high-end in-ear monitors. As an entry to the world of IEM's they're a very respectable choice, but they won't quite capture the spacious ambience of a multi-driver setup, or the wide frequency range of more expensive in-ears. That being said, what do you expect at this price? We can't think of another pair of budget in-ear monitors that combine audio and build quality with reputation and comfort like Shure does with the SE215 Pros. For those who are newbies to the world of IEM's - take a good look at these. We don't think you'll be disappointed. 

**Pros** Decent Bass; Great Value for money; Shure has excellent reputation; Most parts are replaceable

**Cons** Only one driver

**RRP** \$199

**Contact** Jands

**Web** jands.com.au







## Fender 75th Anniversary American Professional Classic Cabronita Telecaster

The Tele's "asshole cousin" trades traditional twang for a boutique growl that looks as sharp as it sounds

Review by **Matt McCracken**

Despite the sentiment that Leo Fender "got it right the first time," we've seen hundreds of different versions of the Telecaster over the years. And the Cabronita might just be one of the boldest. The first Cabronita was a Custom Shop model created by Mike Eldred. In his own words, it was created to be the "asshole cousin" of the regular Tele, combining a simpler aesthetic with a style that was more aggressive than a standard T-type. A prototype was sent out to names such as John Mayer, Keith Urban and Billy Gibbons, and when the first concept was released, many players opted to copy the design with their own mods as the price wasn't accessible for most.

This Fender 75th Anniversary American Professional Classic Cabronita Telecaster is the odd one out in the lineup of five instruments Fender has launched to mark 75 years of one of the most popular electric guitar designs in the world. It's the only one that eschews the classic dual-single-coil pickup format (or the HS of the Ultra II model) in favor of two TV Jones TV Classic humbuckers.

It's also the only one to feature the diminutive Cabronita pickguard and come in a choice of colors, with Candy Apple Red and Ice Blue

Metallic finishes. The deluxe tuners feature striking pearloid buttons, and interestingly, there's just a single master volume knob paired with a three-way toggle switch to change between bridge, neck and both pickups. On the back, a limited edition 75th Anniversary neck plate boasts an engraved diamond with the dates 1951 to 2026, and a small hole for Fender's Micro-Tilt adjustment to change the neck angle.

This Cabronita is certainly a stunning-looking guitar, and this model is impeccably finished. The metallic, Candy Apple Red looked resplendent in the early spring sunshine beaming through our patio doors, and the combination of the maple neck, chrome hardware, and those pearloid tuner buttons makes it stand out in a different way from the garish Liquid Gold of the Ultra II model.

Plugging into a Mesa Boogie Mark VII combo amp, we started on the clean channel with the bridge pickup engaged to begin sound testing. With the amp settings replicating a Fender-esque mid-scoop and a touch of spring reverb, the sound was articulate and chimey, with every note of the open chord progression we played ringing out superbly. Switching to a country-inspired pedal note lick, the feeling was the

same, a lovely balance that didn't get drowned out by the drone notes.

In the neck position and moving to some jazzy, descending arpeggio licks, the trademark light/dark balance Teles are well known for was still present. Here, the tones are on the warm side of dark, with a bit more presence than you'd get in the typical Tele neck pickup position. It sounds wonderful, and there was a nice bite when we dug in with our pick on triads further up the neck.

With the crunch channel of the amp set with all the EQ knobs just shy of the 12 o'clock mark, brash open chords were again nice and articulate on the bridge setting. It's low-gain drive heaven here, those TV Jones pickups letting us chug aggressive palm mutes without getting so hairy that they delved into metal territory. However, backing off the volume knob revealed a flaw; the lack of a treble bleed circuit dulled the tone a little too much for our tastes. We could recoup a bit of this with the treble knob on the amp, but then when we pulled the volume back up, it was too trebly.

Trying the middle position for the first time, it felt a little dull on softer playing, but we could eke out more of the attack of the bridge pickup by striking the strings harder with our pick. Played aggressively, the treble bloomed really nicely, giving a nice balance of the darker neck position and bright bridge sound. It was a bit lackluster when we switched back to the clean channel, as the neck pickup slightly overpowered the bridge, resulting in a sound that was skewed darker rather than balanced between the two.

Finally, we moved to the high-gain channel of the amp to see if the Cabronita Tele could get heavy. It wasn't bad at all for rhythm playing, and we found ourselves able to coax out Rage Against the Machine-inspired single-note licks in the neck position, and even some Mastodon-esque palm-muted power chord riffing that sounded great in the bridge. Lead work with the bridge humbucker was overly bright, however, and here we found ourselves wishing for a tone knob to dial it back a touch. In the neck position it sounded incredible, with a nice bite to it, enshrouded by an overall feeling of thick warmth that never descended into overpoweringly muddy, no matter how far we moved down the fretboard.

### Verdict

This Tele delivers a high-octane character that's sometimes stubborn, but it stands out thanks to the bright attack of the TV Jones pickups. It'll reward players who love aggressive tones and like to dig in with their picking hand, but could frustrate those who like to ride their tone and volume knobs. **D**

**Pros** Incredibly playable neck profile and low action out of the box; TV Jones pickups deliver super articulate tones

**Cons** Some will wish for a master tone knob; The middle position was a little underwhelming

**RRP** \$3,399.99

**Contact** Fender Australia

**Web** au.fender.com



# Fender 75th Anniversary American Ultra II Telecaster

This golden wonder is helping to commemorate the Tele's birthday, but it's confidently breaking from traditions.

Review by **Connor Flys**

Without wishing to belabor the point that every guitar writer will make at some point this year, it really is remarkable that the first commercially produced solid-bodied electric has survived 75 years with so few changes.

It must surely be one of the world's greatest pieces of industrial design. Simple but with understated visual flair, durable but with modular components to allow for repair and reconfiguration, and, as you'll know if you've heard an early Tele in the right hands, it had hugely potent musical qualities right from the start. A timeless design, its essential "rightness" is as clear today as it was in decades past.

Consequently, those who'd seek to modernize the blueprint can only really do so much. Yes, you can contour the body, make some ergonomic adjustments, try different woods and pickups, but many players in 2026 will still happily take a Tele as it comes — more or less how it came in, say, 1956.

Where does that leave Fender and its top-end American Ultra range? One of the highest rungs on the fiscal ladder before the Custom Shop, it's best understood as Fender's own riposte to the posh Fender-derived modern guitars from Suhr, Tom Anderson and the like. These are not your grandad's Fenders; it's the same silhouette, but with all the accouterments of modern design.

That's what you see here, but with an added celebratory twist. To mark the Telecaster's 75th year, multiple anniversary models have been announced; at \$5,099, this special American Ultra II model is top of the tree. First impressions are dominated by the colour, a new Fender concoction called Liquid Gold. It's cool in photos, but it's absolutely stunning in person.

In different lights, it takes on vibrant shades of metallic gold, green, orange and bronze, and, to car enthusiasts, calls to mind the vivid

pearlescent finishes adorning TVR sports cars. The application is as excellent as you'd expect for the price — including the matching headstock. Build quality in general is near faultless, with the caveat that the neck fit leaves a small but perceptible gap on the bass side of the pocket.

The hardware is similar to the high-quality stuff used on the standard American Ultra II Tele, but in a classy Black Chrome finish to complement the black anodized aluminum scratchplate. The usual cutting-board slab of a Tele body has been sculpted into something more ergonomic, and the weight is in the right ballpark for a Tele.

Fender boasts that the quartersawn maple neck features "Ultra Rolled Edges" on its 22-fret ebony fingerboard. These mimic the broken-in feel of a vintage neck and are always a good thing to see listed on a spec sheet. They feel superb here. The neck is a slim modern D-profile with a smooth, tactile satin finish; this, plus the comfort contours, make this Tele a joy to play.

At the neck there's a gold-finished Noiseless single-coil pickup along the same lines as that of the normal Ultra model, but the bridge pickup breaks some new ground for Fender. Called the Fastlane, it's the company's first in-house single-coil-sized humbucker. This is the first guitar to receive it. It probably won't be the last, however; Fender has stated that it has big plans for this pickup. Powered by rail magnets, it's also linked to two of Fender's S-1 switches — one puts it into parallel operation for a cutting twang; the other runs both pickups in series for thicker tones.

In its standard humbucking mode, though, the Fastlane certainly displays promise. It's notably fatter-sounding than a normal Tele

bridge pickup, of course, but with abundant clarity and definition, as well as a healthy output that punches through but doesn't overwhelm a clean amp. When running in parallel mode, it thins out and dials up the twang noticeably. It still doesn't sound like a trad Tele, but it's a fun and useful sound nonetheless.

That Noiseless single-coil provides a more conventional neck pickup sound, which should deliver the goods for most players short of vintage tone buffs. The middle setting is interesting when combined with the S-1 switching for series/parallel at the bridge.

Then, of course, there's the ability to run both pickups in series — and to change the polarity of the Fastlane in this setting, too. There are lots of sounds, and not necessarily the ones you'd expect, but all of them are worthwhile.

## Verdict

This new Tele won't be one for traditionalists, but it's a cool prospect for anyone looking at a high-end modern Tele-type guitar. It has the 75th Anniversary kudos, the versatile electrics and that show-stopping finish. It's also an amazing-feeling, wonderfully playable instrument. 

**Pros** The American Ultra spec enhances the Tele's usability to cutting-edge standards; The new Fastlane humbucker is excellent, and the switching is very versatile; That exclusive finish is jaw-dropping

**Cons** If you still want your super-Tele to do a traditional Tele sound, you might struggle here

**RRP** \$5,099

**Contact** Fender Australia

**Web** [au.fender.com](http://au.fender.com)



MATT LINCOLN





## Jackson Pro Plus Pure Metal KE1A Kelly

Because the original Jackson Kelly was just not metal enough, right?

Review by **Jonathan Horsley**

The Kelly is one of those Jackson guitars that looks like the sort of instrument Conan the Barbarian might play at an open-mic night, its headstock and lower horn serving as examples of how electric guitar anatomy could be used as a means of impalement.

Popularized by Marty Friedman in his early-Nineties Megadeth days, with signature guitar variants in today's lineup for Brandon Ellis and Jeff Loomis, the Kelly is unapologetically a metal guitar. But clearly not metal enough. And so, for the second year running, Jackson has given it the Pure Metal treatment, stripping it down to a single pickup, giving it a stealth black finish and a Floyd, gray binding on the body, neck and headstock, gray Jackson logo to make it dark and brutal.

This year's version swaps out the Fishman Fluence for a Bare Knuckle Holy Diver humbucker and swaps nickel/chrome hardware for black. Jackson has also performed a Linda Blair in *The Exorcist* move on this Kelly and reversed the headstock for extra "heavy" points.

This Kelly has an all-over shell matte finish that makes it feel like it was turned out of a

mold — or is of extra-terrestrial provenance like the Monoliths in 2001: A Space Odyssey. We are assured there is wood under it, and that wood comprises poplar wings glued to a three-piece maple neck that runs through it. While Jackson necks such as this are super-thin, they're tough as old boots, with graphite rods reinforcing them. The jumbo stainless steel frets are immaculately installed.

The Pro Plus range is Jackson's premium Indonesian line, and it's meticulous when it comes to the fit and finish, even if that Satin Black is murder for attracting fingerprints. There is no heel-mounted truss rod wheel as found on the American Series and some other Pro Plus models (i.e. Christian Andreu's Rhoads). Adjustments need to be made the old-fashioned way, at the headstock.

The Floyd Rose 1000 Series is largely similar to the 1500 Series vibratos found on U.S. Jacksons, only the latter has the push-in tremolo arm and stainless steel screws. The Floyd Rose website sells these parts if you want to upgrade it yourself. They share the same smooth action.

It's a common complaint we have for Pro

and Pro Plus series Jacksons, but the gig bag really is a little on the flimsy side. These are serious guitars, and this is not one of those super-padded gig bags that are really soft cases in name. Talk to your local music store. They might cut you a deal.

In profile, the Kelly is a lot of guitar; you've got to be mindful of what's behind you. But at a bit over 3.4kg, this is a good weight. Minimalism is the order of the day. The electronics are super simple. That Holy Diver humbucker is wired to a single volume control. Turn it up and play.

You get full access to the fingerboard. The neck is the lowest of lower-case C profiles, barely there, flat behind the thumb, reminding us how Jackson guitars can take a bit of getting used to when you've been playing a thicker vintage-style neck. The tendency is to rush, to overplay, to speed ahead of the beat, and it's remarkable what those slinky stainless steel frets can do for adding an extra bit of zip, and a greasiness for string-bending. Like the Rhoads, the Kelly is an odd shape that balances perfectly on a guitar strap. Unlike the Rhoads, you can sit on your backside and work through the Tomb of the Mutilated tab book in comfort.

Bare Knuckle describes the Holy Diver as "a celebration of the original Eighties hot-rod humbuckers," and with its Alnico V design, it struck us as more in the style of a Seymour Duncan JB than the DiMarzio X2N that Vivian Campbell preferred when performing "Holy Diver" with Dio.

There might be some progressive metal players who are disappointed that we don't have an active humbucker, or who miss the Fishman, but this does not lack muscle, and with the stripped-down controls, this dynamic, slightly mid-forward electric guitar pickup might be the perfect choice. It cleans up better than you might expect.

Still, the Kelly is for those who park themselves at the bridge position and run everything on 10. Through a Blackstar tube amp, with extra juice from a Fulltone OCD overdrive pedal and a little squeeze from the compressor pedal, it eats the gain up. We don't miss a neck pickup, but a tone control would be useful for rolling some top-end off on busy lead passages. Sweep-pickers might well agree.

### Verdict

Just when you thought the entire Jackson catalog was already "Pure Metal," the Californian high-performance specialist goes and makes something like this — a pro-quality limited-run beast with speed, with firepower, with everything you could want from a metal guitar — just as long as you don't need a neck pickup. **D**

**Pros** Top-quality Bare Knuckle humbucker; Good weight and super-quick neck; Reverse headstock gets extra metal points

**Cons** Matte finish attracts fingerprints; You'd want to upgrade the gig bag

**RRP** \$2,465

**Contact** Jackson

**Web** [au.jacksonsguitars.com](http://au.jacksonsguitars.com)





## Katoh Evolution Series EV5

Stage-ready classical tones for the rock player. Is that even possible?

Review by **Steve Henderson**

Katoh Guitars, renowned builders of hand-made classical guitars, have developed a wide range of instruments within the classical guitar genre. The genre might more accurately be described as “nylon strung guitars” since some of their instruments, such as their amazing Hispania Series, have features that traditional classical players would likely reject, such as slim bodies and radiused fretboards. Tradition can be a two-edged sword, often providing a comfortable familiarity while quietly (or actively) avoiding beneficial new ideas. The intersection of traditional values and innovative ideas often involves some level of tension.

But some developments are too useful to ignore, such as Thaduis McHugh's adjustable truss rod (allowing for slimmer necks) or the radiused fretboard – both innovations from the earlier 20th century. The new Katoh Evolution Series EV5 incorporates both of those ideas to create an instrument that updates the nylon string guitar for a more useful and contemporary instrument.

Initially, the EV5 looks like a standard classical guitar. A spruce top on a Sapele mahogany body with a Nato mahogany neck. The bridge and fretboard are rosewood, the nut and saddle are actual bone, and the whole package is wrapped up in a satin finish. The scale length is a traditional 650mm (25.6”) but the clever folks at Katoh have addressed the difficulty many people, especially younger players, have with wide, flat classical necks by giving the EV5 a radiused fretboard and a 48mm nut, rather than the normal 52mm nut.

The narrower width and curved board make for a more modern playing experience, and even those pesky barre chords are easily achievable. While radiused fretboards were

not unknown in the 19th century, they seem to have been largely overlooked or outright rejected by almost all classical guitar builders until more recently. Indeed, the classical guitar community has continually rejected the idea, much like classical violinists insisting on friction pegs rather than geared tuners.

The EV5 is a pleasure to play, and the string width and curved board contribute enormously to this. The feel is smooth and positive, and the fretwork is perfect. The sound is clear and bright, and very even across the spectrum. Treble notes have a bright but rounded tone while the mid and bass notes are focussed, with a narrower Q than many classics. Consequently, the harmonics don't cross talk and collapse over each other. This is important, especially for fingerstylists, because separation between the fundamentals, and the early order

harmonics, allow for clarity; strings can ring longer and clearer, even when playing complex chords. Play a 1st position Emin9 on most classics and the 3rd and 4th strings will clash.

The fretwork is first rate and the fret ends are beautifully bevelled – quite surprising at this price point. There's

a healthy slab of rosewood on the mahogany neck and dot markers along the edge of the rosewood but not, as tradition would dictate, on the face of the fretboard. Like the body, the neck has a satin finish, which is very playable, with only the rosewood headstock overlay having a different finish of low-sheen gloss. Even the machine heads have a classy look, as well as a very positive feel. Importantly, the EV5's adjustable truss rod makes it perfect for the on-the-go player (whatever the environment) and also allows the player to experiment with various string types and

gauges to find that perfect set-up.

The EV5 has a traditional de Torres-style fan bracing system for the spruce soundboard and a wide ladder back bracing arrangement. Inspection of the internal structure reveals that the braces are a touch lighter than usual but made of spruce. This tried-and-true bracing, paired with the lighter structure, offers tone and projection way beyond the price point. This is not an expensive instrument and yet it offers so much in sound, feel and construction.

While entry-level guitars are traditionally classics, mainly due to a) their cheaper cost and b) nylon strings being easier on beginner fingers, the contradiction is that the neck is wide and flat, which is especially difficult for young players. The EV5's truss rod means that the neck can be considerable slimmer (front to back) and the radiused board is way friendlier. Playing barre chords (some see them as proof of personal progress) on a wide flat board is, for the novice, brutally difficult. No wonder so many simply give up in frustration.

The Katoh folks have addressed issues that have frustrated both beginner and experienced players for decades: the bulky and unadjustable neck of the humble classical guitar. The EV5 is a wonderfully simple solution for these issues. It is as playable as any steel string guitar and doesn't frustrate the beginner. The EV5 is also budget friendly and comes in a very nice gig bag. For the novice, it offers an easy entry to guitar; for the experienced player, it offers great classical tone with a familiar feel. With their innovative EV5, Katoh has produced a real winner for players at any level, in a road-ready package, and at a bargain price. 

**Pros** Beautifully and innovatively built; Great tone and feel; Road-ready gig bag (included); Outstanding value

**Cons** None

**RRP** \$329 incl. gig bag

**Contact** Dynamic Music

**Web** [dynamicmusic.com.au](http://dynamicmusic.com.au)

**“The EV5 is a pleasure to play, and the string width and curved board contribute enormously to this. The feel is smooth and positive, and the fretwork is perfect”**



# Taylor Gold Label 710e

As part of an ongoing revision to its esteemed catalogue, Taylor has introduced a deep-bodied dreadnought into the fold.

Review by David Mead

Taylor is continually reviewing and tweaking its instruments in the search for sonic nirvana. When you're a fast-moving, upwards-spiralling manufacturer such as Taylor, a practically continuous programme of re-evaluation of the catalogue is going to be whirring away in the background. Enter the 710e, a deep-bodied square-shouldered dreadnought, which Taylor claims "offers a playing experience that combines traditional acoustic sound with modern innovation". It's part of Taylor's Gold Label Series, introduced around a year ago, which draws inspiration from past eras of traditional, non-cutaway guitars; hence a 'new' body shape in the company's range. And you can't really get any more traditional than a dreadnought, can you?

But what's all this 'deep-bodied' designation about? Obviously it's there to add punch and heft to the guitar's sound, but is it all that new? If you take Martin's D-28 as an industry standard then we'd be looking at a body depth of 123mm, whereas the 710e comes in at a smidge under, at 122mm. On the other hand, a D-28 has a lower bout of 397mm and the Taylor comes in at 403mm. So deep and wide seems to be the order of the day with the 710e, promising a robust volume level with good bass and singing mids. But let's not skip ahead too far; if the 710e is a nod of the head towards celebrated acoustic designs of yore, we'd better have a quick look in the builder's yard to see exactly how traditional things are.

To begin with, we have a torrefied Sitka spruce top, backed with East Indian rosewood and so we are spot on, as far as tradition is concerned as this mimics, again, the D-28's winning formula. While we're here, it's worth noting that the 710e's top wood is very attractive with plenty of shimmering chatoyance that dances when the light hits it. Currently, of course, the colour is a very pale amber, but is sure to darken to that more familiar hue as the years pass. The Indian rosewood is no slouch in the looks department, either, with a nice straight grain pattern and that distinctive chocolatey bloom.

The body is bound, front and back, in

black and white, the pattern reflected in the rosette. The pickguard is a 'firestripe' pattern and the bridge and string pins are Honduran rosewood.

Moving on to the neck, we have tropical mahogany, with an incredibly subtle scarf joint below the headstock. Turning the guitar over, we find a West African Crelicam ebony fingerboard with what Taylor refers to as "cream dot" inlays in all the accustomed places.

The headstock has Taylor's own tuners and the new-old Taylor logo – we're used to seeing the distinctive 'block' logo from Taylor, but more recently we're seeing this new cursive variation, which looks 'old' in the manner of Gibson's earlier acoustics.

Other highlights include the aforementioned Action Control Neck mentioned earlier, whereby your action is kept stable via a simple adjustment through the guitar's soundhole. A simple bolt on the neck block will tilt the neck to compensate for climate irregularities – think Fender's neck-tilt idea. Add to this another variation on Andy Powers' V-Class bracing – here it's fanned to "increase volume and sustain".

The final piece of the puzzle is the LR Baggs VTC pickup and preamp system, with controls secreted within the upper arc of the guitar's soundhole. So the guitar is all set and ready for the stage, but first we'd better explore its unplugged voice and find out how it handles.

We'll never tire of saying how user-friendly Taylor acoustic necks are. It really is like shaking hands with an old friend every time. And it's good to note that Taylor has decided not to go 'full vintage' and change the profile to one of the more vintage-inspired chunky variations. In any case, the

neck here is that familiar C-shape, the satin finish adding that essential finishing touch for neck excursions.

We should mention the 45mm nut width, too, as just a couple of millimetres here makes an enormous difference to fingerstyle players. Needless to say, sitting down with a dreadnought is not to everyone's taste as they do tend to be a bit of an armful, but we're happy to report that the 710e is very well

balanced and comfy either sitting or standing.

With everything shipshape in the feel department, it's time for those first exploratory chords. Now, it's very hard to sum up the sound of a dreadnought. We'd even question whether there is a definitive dreadnought sound. Is there that much of a similarity between Gibson's J-45 and Martin's D-28, for instance? The characteristics they share would be a robust midrange with plenty of volume and a good amount of bass – and that's virtually what we find here, give or take. If you take the aforementioned models as a reference, we'd say that the 710e lacks some of the 'woodiness' of the J-45 and leans more towards the sing-song musicality of the Martin.

There's certainly a lot of volume to hand and without that dreadnought muddiness that you sometimes find in the lower midrange. Plenty of sparkle at the top end as well. We tried a range of campfire chords, a bit of fingerstyle, a smidge of blues and the only bluegrass licks we could remember and everything passed muster with panache.

Plugged into our Boss Katana-50 EX on the Acoustic setting, the 710e came to life. This writer's acid test for plugged-in acoustics is the intro and verse to Pink Floyd's Wish You Were Here. If that particular combo of plectrum-fuelled blues and lusty chords sounds stadium rock-worthy, then you're on to a winner. And let's just say the Taylor shone like a crazy diamond...

## Verdict

Naturally, this level of build quality and sound performance doesn't come cheap and \$5k might be a determining factor in one's prospective purchase stakes. But we've looked around a few online dealers and the 710e is also available for around \$4.5k if you're smart about where you click your mouse. That being said, if you did decide to go down the deep-bodied Taylor dread route then you'd be getting a fine, gig-ready instrument with a very good array of sounds on tap as well as premium build quality. And you can't really say fairer than that. 🎸

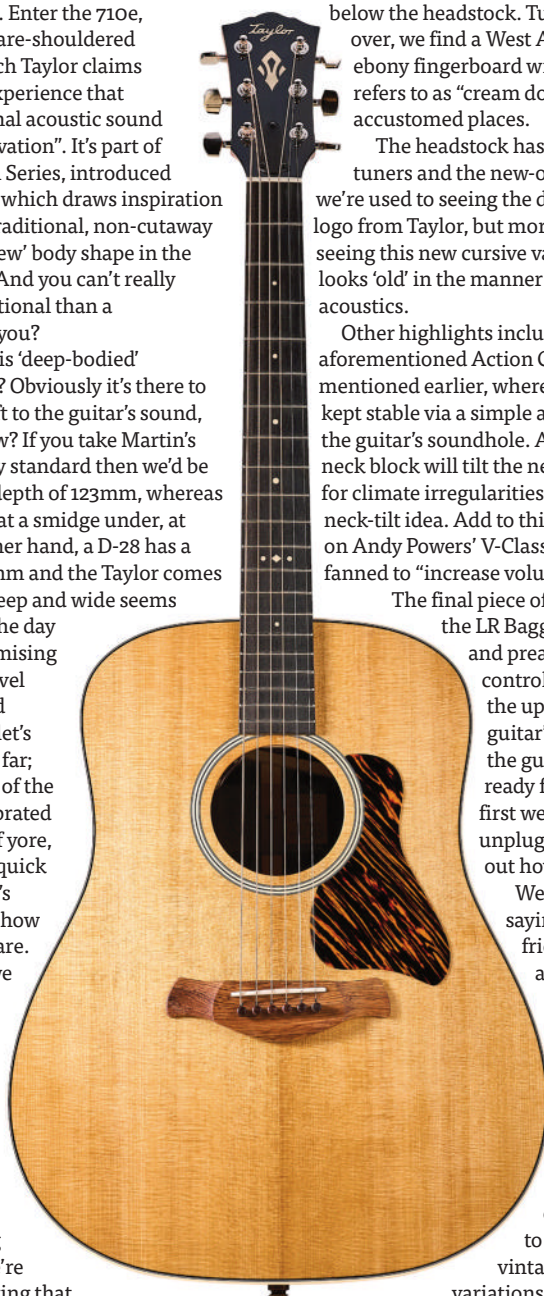
**Pros** A great-sounding, well-built, good-looking dread from a renowned builder

**Cons** Not much. Dreads aren't for everyone and the price may deter all but the more serious acoustic players

**RRP** \$5,499

**Contact** Taylor Guitars

**Web** [www.taylorguitars.com](http://www.taylorguitars.com)





# Gibson L-00 Century 12-Fret

Gibson harkens back to its past with a 12-fret version of an acoustic classic.

Review by **Daryl Robertson**

To mark 100 years of acoustic guitar design, Gibson has launched the Century Collection, a family of instruments that reaches back to the very roots of the company, pairing retro aesthetics with a vintage tone to match. The series spans everything from an L-1 to a J-45 and J-185, plus the L-00 we tested here. This parlor-style can often fly under the radar when discussing Gibson's famous flat tops. Dating back as far as the Thirties, the Gibson L-00 has found favor with blues players and folk singers thanks in part to its compact feel and mid-forward tone.

As you'd expect, the compact body sticks to the tried-and-tested formula of a mahogany back and sides, a Sitka spruce top and a single-ply cream binding running around the perimeter. Where things get interesting, though, is the shift to a 12-fret neck-to-body joint rather than the familiar 14-fret layout. That change nudges the bridge into a more central position on the soundboard, and Gibson reckons it makes a real difference, helping the top work more efficiently, improving playing comfort and delivering a warmer, more articulate, livelier tone. Let's find out for ourselves.

The satin nitrocellulose finish looks the part for this lightweight 4 lb. instrument, lending the guitar an understated, almost worn-in quality straight out of the box. We can already imagine how good it'll look with a few years of honest playing on it. That said,

the black satin finish does have one notable weakness: it picks up grease and fingerprints at an alarming rate. A quick wipe-down after every session is going to become part of the routine, whether you like it or not.

When we sat down with this L-00 on the sofa, and it just felt right. The compact body tucked in naturally, the scale length felt effortless to maneuver around on, and the SlimTaper neck profile was comfortable and familiar from the first chord. It's a guitar we found ourselves constantly going back to, meaning to noodle for 10 minutes and then put down an hour or two later.

The 12-fret neck join does change the geometry slightly compared to a standard L-00, and if you spend a lot of time above the 12th fret, you'll notice the body gets in the way sooner than you might expect. We think fingerstyle players in particular will love this guitar the most, though. Everything about the way this guitar is set up feels tailored to that style of playing.

If you're after something that'll fill a room and compete with a belting singer, look elsewhere. That said, what it lacks in volume it more than makes up for in character. The mid-range sits in a frequency range that supports rather than overwhelms a vocal, and the natural compression of the small body means your voice can sit on top of the guitar without having to fight for space.

The tone is warm and woody, with a

mid-forward quality that sits beautifully for blues and fingerstyle playing. The mahogany back and sides give the low-end a rounded, mellow thump rather than a booming bass response, and the Sitka spruce top adds just enough brightness to keep things from getting muddy. For blues players, it's almost unfairly well-suited. Play a slow Delta shuffle on it with your fingers, and it sounds like it was built for exactly that purpose, because, in many ways, it was.

## Verdict

This new L-00 is a handsome, small-bodied acoustic that sings with a retro voice. This model is effortless to play and makes the perfect sofa companion. Okay, yes, it's not the loudest guitar in Gibson's lineup, and it certainly doesn't have the depth or body of something like a J-45, but it has bags of character and plenty of charm. 

**Pros** Very playable; Perfect tone for blues and fingerstyle; Comes with a nice tweed case

**Cons** The black satin finish gets greasy quickly; Fret ends on our test model could be better (needed additional dressing)

**RRP** \$4,499

**Contact** Gibson

**Web** gibson.com



PHIL BARKER/FUTURE





## Fender Hot Rod Deluxe 30th Anniversary

Fender celebrates 30 years of the Hot Rod Deluxe with an edition that boasts a speaker change and a classy aesthetic.

Review by **Pete Emery**

The Fender Hot Rod Deluxe is a guitar amp almost every guitarist will be familiar with. Famed as a high-headroom pedal platform, it is a common sight in venues all over the world, as well as within the rigs of the serious hobbyist and the professional guitar player. This year, the Hot Rod Deluxe turns 30 years old, and — given its impact — it deserves to be celebrated. So Fender has marked the occasion with a limited, 30th Anniversary edition.

This version takes the current 40-watt 1x12 iteration (the Hot Rod Deluxe IV) and spruces it up a bit with what Fender calls a “Black Western” vinyl, but also swaps out the Hot Rod Deluxe IV’s usual Celestion A-Type speaker for a Celestion G12M-65 Creamback. So the question is, is it worth the extra \$500?

The lightweight pine chassis felt up to the challenges of a hard-gigging life. We say “lightweight,” and that is relative. This is a tube amp, and as such is a hefty 41 lbs., but, as the “lightweight pine” moniker would suggest, it is on the lighter side for tube-driven, 1x12 combos.

The appearance of the 30th Anniversary Hot Rod Deluxe is striking in a classy sort of way. This is completely subjective, of course, but we much prefer the Western stylings of the black, textured vinyl and the brown grill cloth here compared to the understated, plain black and grey of

the original, though the textured finish is slightly lost in the black of the material. We’d have liked to have seen the footswitch reflect the anniversary styling, though; it’s the same as the usual IV model’s.

The joy of the good ol’ tube amp is that, in general, they are fairly simple beasts. This holds true with the Hot Rod Deluxe, as it’s a case of plug in, tweak the four EQ controls to your liking and go. Switching between the clean and drive channels is facilitated by the Channel Select button, the Normal/Bright button added more high-end, the More Drive button added, well, more Drive to the Drive channel, and the amount of reverb is adjusted via a single Reverb control. So far, so self-explanatory.

Of the amp’s two inputs, most of us are going to be using Input 1, while Input 2 is a low-gain input, primarily for the purpose of preventing the preamp from breaking up too early when using high-output pickups. While this is understood to be the usual function of multiple inputs on a tube amplifier, there’s nothing on the front panel to indicate this is the case.

The Hot Rod Deluxe’s clean channel is renowned as a high-headroom, incredibly loud amplifier, perfect for showing off your pedalboards, and this held true with the 30th Anniversary edition. Standing around seven feet away, and using a Fender Telecaster, we were hitting roughly 103dB

with the Volume control at three, and the channel didn’t break up until around seven. But there are some real changes when it comes to tone. The standard Hot Rod Deluxe is known for a mid-forward sound, with a tight bass that perhaps lacks a little life in the highs, but is great for showing off your carefully curated collection of pedals.

In the 30th Anniversary edition, the Celestion G12M-65 Creamback speaker results in a less mid-forward and more open sound, making the high end feel a little more lush. By the time the clean channel started to break up for us, it was way too loud for all but the biggest of stages, so it was time to get some overdrive pedals out. In our case, a T-Rex Mudhoney II and RYRA Klon, supplemented with the Wampler Cory Wong Compressor and an MXR Carbon Copy Delay. The 30th Anniversary version did an even better job of the pedal platform thing than the standard model, as, due to that more open nature, it allowed extra detail to be heard. If the special edition aesthetic here appeals too, it could be well worth the extra outlay.

However, just like the standard model, we found the Drive channel usable but far from the highlight of the Hot Rod Deluxe IV as it can verge on bright and spikey with single-coil pickups, especially. That said, the low end is tight, and you’ll be heard in a live mix.

### Verdict

The 30th Anniversary Hot Rod Deluxe sports a speaker change that enhances what the well-renowned amp was already good at — showing off lovingly constructed pedalboards. It’s the same loud, high-headroom sound but with a more open, clean tone that boasts a little extra life. 🎸

**Pros** Loud!; Excellent pedal platform; The Celestion G12M-65 Creamback speaker results in a more open sound compared to the standard model; Classy aesthetic

**Cons** The drive channel will still be a bit too spikey for most; The carry handle is a little uncomfortable; The footswitch does not reflect the limited edition colors

**RRP** \$2,299

**Contact** Fender Australia

**Web** au.fender.com



# Victory MKX Lunch Box Head

The British amp specialist unveils its most advanced lunchbox amp to date.

Review by **Amit Sharma**

Victory has certainly come a long way in just 13 years. The brand launched by Chief Engineer Martin Kidd — whose prior work with Cornford resulted in partnerships with six-string luminaries including Guthrie Govan, Justin Hawkins and Dweezil Zappa — now sits among the big players of the guitar-amp world.

This latest lunchbox head, inspired by 2024's handwired flagship MK Overdrive, is undoubtedly his most daring design to date, squeezing in the most functionality we've seen on an amp head of this size. The company says the MKX "redefines what a compact amplifier can achieve," and although it's a bold statement, Victory has proved that it's not a brand to be underestimated.

The overall design is exactly in line with the other Victory lunchbox heads. There's a classy cream-on-black aesthetic with the upper grill giving users a glimpse into the magic encased within. If you like seeing tubes glowing next to a big transformer, this will put a smile on your face. More importantly, this is one robust piece of gear. The metal chassis will protect the circuitry well enough on the road and should guarantee many happy years of playing.

Although the MKX is very much a three-channel amp, its two overdrive channels share the same three-band EQ located directly underneath the clean controls. The interface is pretty straightforward, perhaps a bit much for the kind of player who wants an ultra-streamlined two-knob design, but we think the majority of users will welcome the possibilities for tonal shaping. That said, this amp isn't trying to compete with the digital world. It's an old-school tube amp at heart, so you won't find any USB connectivity

or direct-recording outs.

A big plus with all of the Victory lunchbox heads is the ability to run them in high or low power modes, this particular model coming all the way down from 50 watts to just nine, which means it will be loud enough for live shows while also being quiet enough to use comfortably at home. And at just over 6kg, it's pretty light and easy to move around, so you won't need the additional gym membership to help you get around from gig to gig.

For this review, we plugged a Schecter USA Nick Johnston HSS into a Kingtone The Duellist twin overdrive, with the head going into a Victory 2x12 cabinet loaded with Vintage 30 speakers, as well as a Boss RE-202 Space Echo providing some delay in the loop. The clean channel is impressively punchy with the gain set fairly low, but as you increase the amount of signal running through the three ECC83 preamp tubes, it becomes even more lively. If you want that glassy Stevie Ray Vaughan sound heard on famous tracks like "Lenny," this is a high-gain amp that can actually do it — and even provide the right kind of reverb at the same time.

That sense of depth also runs through both overdrive channels, the first of which focuses on more of a crunch variation that will suit all of your favorite AC/DC and Guns N' Roses riffs. If you are more accustomed to metal riffing and screaming leads, OD II will probably be your go-to.

With a pair of EL34 tubes in the power section, the MKX has a distinctly British voice that harks back to the modded Marshalls of the '80s, but you could always scoop the mids and use a pedal in front to get a more American kind of flavour.

This is undoubtedly the most versatile lunchbox amp Victory has ever made, and we're pleased to report it performs incredibly well across the board. High-gain amps rarely come with clean channels this good — many have tried to house the sounds of Fender and Marshall inside one product and very few have come this close.

The functionality is very impressive, given how you get four footswitchable controls plus two types of stunning digital reverb, high and low power modes, plus more knobs at the back.

Another plus is just how sonically tidy everything is; even when you have the gain high up, there's very little buzz or electronic interference but still plenty of sustain, feedback and saturation. In short, it screams every bit as well as it sings.

## Verdict

Given that the handwired MK Overdrive retails for over three times as much, it's amazing just how close Victory has got here. The MKX Lunch Box combines the same kind of features and controls with breathtaking tones at a fraction of the cost, while also adding in two types of reverb. 

**Pros** Uncompromised versatility; Lots of footswitchable functions; Two built-in digital reverbs

**Cons** May have too many features for some users; Still probably best suited to higher-gain players

**RRP** \$3,499

**Contact** Victory Amps

**Web** victoryamps.com



PHIL BARKER/FUTURE





## Strymon Fairfax Class A Output Stage Drive

Strymon's unexpected departure from its usual DSP-led design is a recreation of Randy Bachman's Garnet Herzog — and the result is something rather stellar.

Review by **Matt Owen**

Strymon is one of the biggest names in the digital effects world, but the Fairfax we have here represents a completely different prospect. Why? Well, because it's the company's first-ever all-analog pedal.

This isn't just a drive pedal; Strymon itself wouldn't call this strictly an overdrive. The Class A Output Stage Drive was modeled after a vintage Garnet Herzog tube drive, famously favored by Randy Bachman on the Guess Who's "American Woman." In essence, it's a miniaturized tube circuit in a pedal, and who doesn't love those?

The Fairfax is one of Strymon's smallest, most streamlined pedals to date, with a sole footswitch, three controls for Drive, Level and Sag, and an On/Off Bright toggle switch for accessing more pronounced higher frequencies. The Drive knob is the largest of the three, which makes sense, given it probably gets the most use here.

The source material utilized a 12AX7 and 6V6 layout, and here Strymon has aimed to capture that using JFETs and a transformer-based power supply that gives the Fairfax some serious juice.

There are no entry barriers to dialing in tones here, which is always a telling sign of a good workhorse pedal. As mentioned, the control layout is streamlined and it requires little work to get some nice Bachman-aping amp tones from the get-go.

On the whole, the controls are nicely

responsive with decent sweeps, but we found the Bright switch to be something of a passenger on the pedal. In our testing, it didn't add too much, nor did it provide anything drastically different, and we think the pedal could have done without it.

An additional tone-shaping knob — for tailoring some of the frequencies, for example — would've been nice. That said, the OG Herzog had only two control knobs, so we can't be too harsh here.

What we like about the Fairfax is, because of its design brief, it delivers an overdrive flavor that conventional drive pedals can't really recreate — especially with the added Sag control. Unlike the classic mid-boost gain and high-distortion pedals that are absolutely everywhere, the Fairfax focuses more on the old-school amp tones that inject a really unique dimension to a pedalboard.

With Sag rolled all the way off and the Drive around the 2 o'clock position, you can get some fiery gain tones that sound like a cranked vintage amp. Roll back Drive and bump the Level and it tidies up nicely — not really to the point where it can be used as a clean boost, but great for gritty rhythm playing.

Dimming Drive, knocking back level will give you proto-distortion tones, but not to the extent where things become overly gain-y. You still get the clarity and character of your clean signal, but it gets dressed in a really

nice, thick coating that is infinitely inspiring and fun to play with.

But it's the Sag control here that is the real MVP. The higher you crank it, the spittier the tone becomes. When it's maxed up, you get that lovely dying-battery-esque tone that sounds like your signal is fighting for its life. Paired with a cranked Drive knob and you get some wonderfully strangled, almost gated fuzz-like effects, while knocking back the gain gives it a lo-fi sound that offers plenty of character. It brings something completely different to the table, and in a world of clones and copies, Fairfax feels like a breath of fresh air.

### Verdict

Strymon's first all-analog pedal is a triumphant success, offering a unique approach to tube-style drive tones that will breathe fresh life into your gain staging. **D**

**Pros** Unique drive tones that offer something fresh; Sag control is a great addition; Versatile selection of tones, from gritty drives to spitty fuzz; Foolproof control layout

**Cons** Bright switch could be more reactive; Wouldn't say no to an additional tone knob

**RRP** \$359

**Contact** Strymon

**Web** strymon.net



# Neural DSP Quad Cortex Mini

All the power, less than half the size — so what's the compromise?

Review by **Rob Laing**

Well over five years after Neural DSP debuted its first piece of hardware at the 2020 NAMM Show, it remains at the forefront of amp modeling and capture technology. But delivering the sounds for players is only half the story when it comes to hardware, which is why its Quad Cortex remains so popular for professionals and home players alike. It was the first to bring the combination of a touch screen, modeling and capturing to a sleek platform with an intuitive UI. Now, following the capture-only Nano Cortex it has its second Quad Cortex model, the Mini.

So what's changed? In terms of power — nothing. The mini benefits from five years of meaningful firmware updates and the same processing power as the larger (over twice as large) model. The seven-inch screen is the same size but now takes up most of the top space. So the key questions are, what does it lose and why is smaller better?

The biggest change is six less rotary footswitches, and Neural tries to negate limitations by allowing one to be held down to activate tap-tempo and doubling up the four switch's roles where they can be assigned to activate four additional options in Scene or Stomp modes. The compromise is that to activate the other four footswitch actions, you have to hold down footswitch B. Not ideal in the middle of a song.

If you need more than four switchable effects or amps regularly, we think it makes sense to go for the bigger Quad Cortex, but this is where the mini poses an interesting proposition for pedalboards; because it's so much smaller, it fits in better alongside other pedals you may own to make its four-switch

layout far less of a compromise. For example, we used the Mini alongside a UAFX Astra for modulation sounds.

And you might be wondering about all that glass. Neural assures us it's up to the rigors of life on the road and beyond, and even though it surrounds the rotary footswitches, we saw no reason to doubt them. While the touchscreen technology is the same as the 5-year-old Quad, Neural also offers the option to change parameters onscreen or with the rotary footswitches like an Etch a Sketch.

The intuitive feel of this user interface is an ace up the Mini's sleeve in a world where the learning curve with modelers and multi-fx pedals can be steep enough to turn players off. Instead, the Mini soon became the workstation at the heart of our compact but hugely versatile pedalboard. In 15 minutes, we captured two of our favorite overdrive pedals in their go-to usual set-and-forget control positions, then stacked them with a plexi model on the Quad. You can easily add your favorite physical delay pedals into the onboard effects loop too so they're part of your signal chain.

The Quad Cortex's modeling and capture tech is still world-leading, and the price here reflects that. In return the features are considerable. Alongside a wealth of effects and utilities, including Transpose and Doubling, there are 90 amp models and more than 1,000 factory IRs covering recognizable classics from iconic builders including Dumble, Fender, Marshall, Bogner and Mesa Boogie, and the online Cortex Cloud community is constantly adding to its selection of thousands of amp and drive

pedal captures every day. These are easy to favorite via the Neural app or web-based service, and then download with the QC mini's Wi-Fi connectivity. This is a huge strength with the Quad Cortex, because it allows players to sample and record with captures of rare and dream-list amps they might never get access to otherwise.

Neural's regular firmware support continues to add effects, amps and enhanced usability — including ongoing compatibility with Neural's acclaimed software plugins. The XLR input positioned at the side also makes it a good solution for players/singers who are looking for an all-in-one live solution.

The Mini's compact dimensions make it suitable for a draw in a rack or desktop, but we think it's more desirable as part of a pedalboard. It comes with an AC adapter that locks into the input with a twist for onstage security, unlike the original's. So in that respect, it's an upgrade!

## Verdict

The Quad Cortex Mini is the most powerful compact amp and effects modeler right now — and it's not even close. **B+**

**Pros** Top-tier modeling and capture technology; Compact form factor without compromising processing power; Still plenty of I/O options

**Cons** The reduced number of footswitches will be a dealbreaker for some; Two-button volume control is less precise

**RRP** \$2,599

**Contact** Neural DSP

**Web** [neuraldsp.com](http://neuraldsp.com)



LUCY ROBINSON/FUTURE



# Maestro Phase Shifter

## PS-1, PS-1A, PS-1B

1971–75

CATEGORY PHASE SHIFTER  
BY CHRIS GILL

During the late Sixties, Tom Oberheim earned notoriety among Los Angeles musicians for the ring modulators he built for everyone from the experimental electronic psychedelia band the United States of America to film composer Leonard Rosenman, who used Oberheim's ring modulator on the soundtrack for 1970's *Beyond the Planet of the Apes*. By 1969, Gibson's Maestro division contracted Oberheim Electronics to build his ring modulator for them, which was marketed as the Maestro RM-1A.

The ring modulator had limited appeal to the masses (especially after the U.S. government outlawed LSD in 1970), but Oberheim's follow-up was an incredible success — the PS-1 Phase Shifter, introduced in 1971. The PS-1 technically wasn't the first phase shifter on the market (the Shin-ei/Univox Uni-Vibe preceded it by four years), but it was the first effect unit called a "phase shifter" as well as the first to produce the steady rising and falling sweep effect that musicians now recognize as the standard phase shifting effect.

Oberheim designed the PS-1 as a compact substitute for a Leslie rotating speaker cabinet for keyboardists. As a result, it was housed in a rather large, boxy enclosure with only three large rocker switches on the top panel for selecting slow (blue), medium (yellow) and fast (red) sweep speeds. One especially cool characteristic of the Maestro phase shifter effect is how the LFO speed ramps up or down to the selected rate (similar to the mechanical function of a Leslie) instead of changing abruptly. The unit itself had no bypass switch, but an optional foot controller provided bypass/slow, medium and fast footswitches.

Despite its bulky, keyboard-centric design, the Maestro Phase Shifter quickly gained popularity with guitarists, who were mesmerized by the deep, trippy swirling textures produced by the six-stage circuit where six JFETs provide a cascading all-pass filter network.

Maestro produced three different versions of the Phase Shifter — the PS-1, PS-1A and PS-1B. The PS-1A is basically an improved version of the PS-1 that fixed a flaw with the input buffer amplifier that produced popping noises. The PS-1B features a variable speed knob, which is a very useful upgrade, but because this version was introduced near the end of Oberheim's contract with Maestro these units are very



George Harrison on German TV in 1977 promoting late 1976's *Thirty Three & 1/3*. [below] A vintage Maestro PS-1A

Maestro sold an estimated 60,000 units to guitarists and keyboardists alike during its brief four-year lifespan

rare and command significantly higher prices on the vintage market.

Maestro sold an estimated 60,000 units to guitarists and keyboardists alike during its brief four-year lifespan. When smaller phase shifter pedals emerged around 1974 that were much more guitar rig-friendly, the bulky Maestro unit was soon rendered obsolete. However, it still sounds great today and is great for studio applications. If you don't want to bother with a vintage unit, Heptode Virtuoso replicates the Maestro's vintage tones for players who want a modern pedalboard-friendly update.

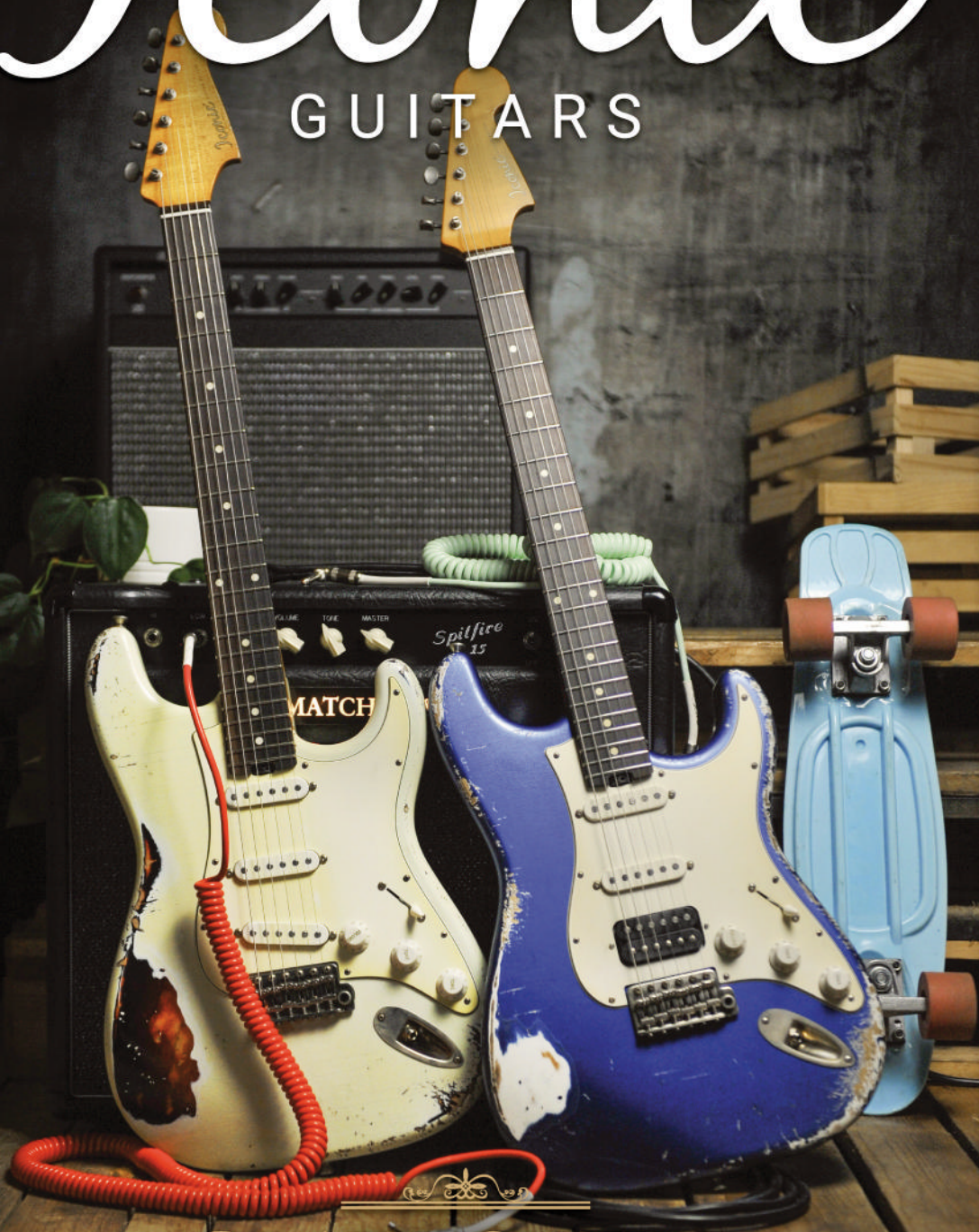
Some of the most dedicated early fans of the Maestro Phase Shifter included Ernie Isley, who ran an Electro-Harmonix Big Muff in front of his to create the synth-like lead tone on Isley Brothers classic "That Lady"; Alex Lifeson, who used his Maestro on the first four Rush albums up to and including 2112; George Harrison, who plugged into a PS-1A on his *Extra Texture* and *Thirty Three & 1/3* albums; Waylon Jennings on numerous mid-Seventies outlaw country singles, plus John Cipollina, Steve Howe and Terry Kath. 





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