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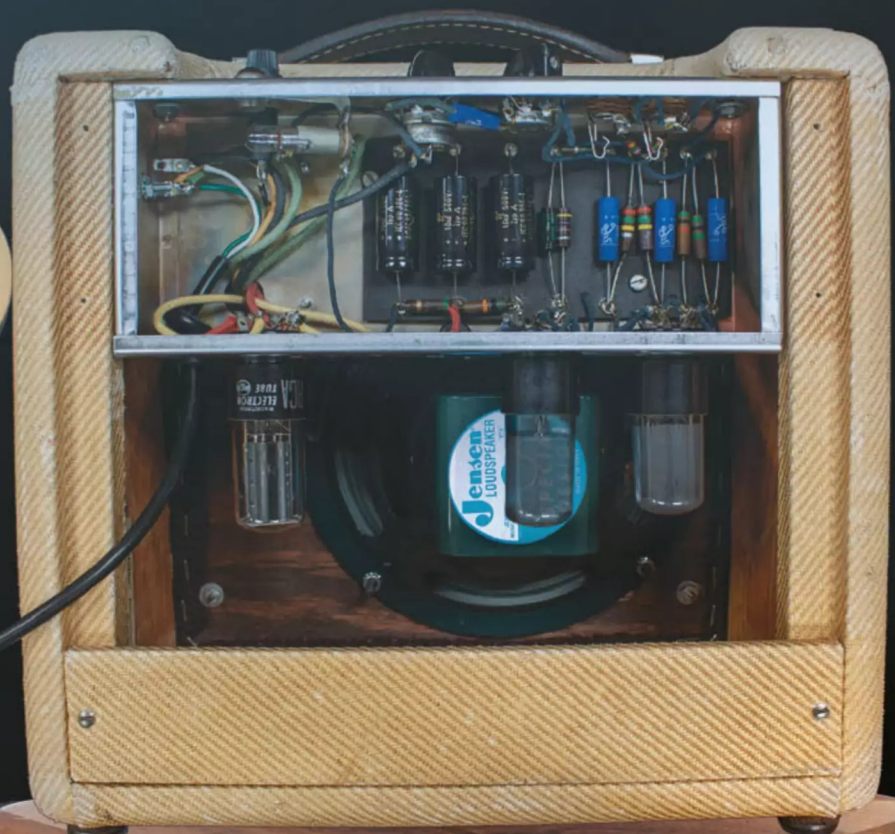
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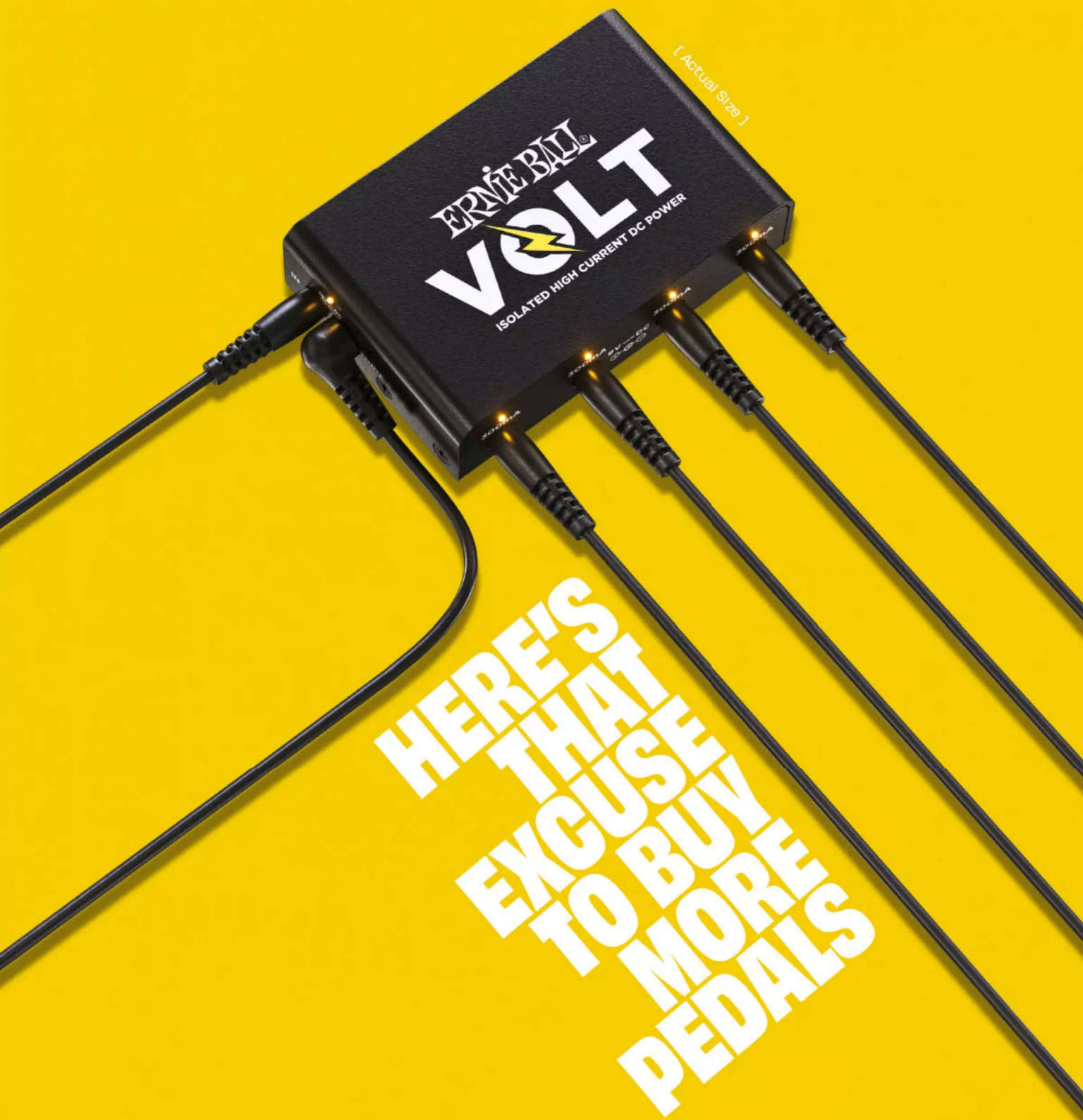
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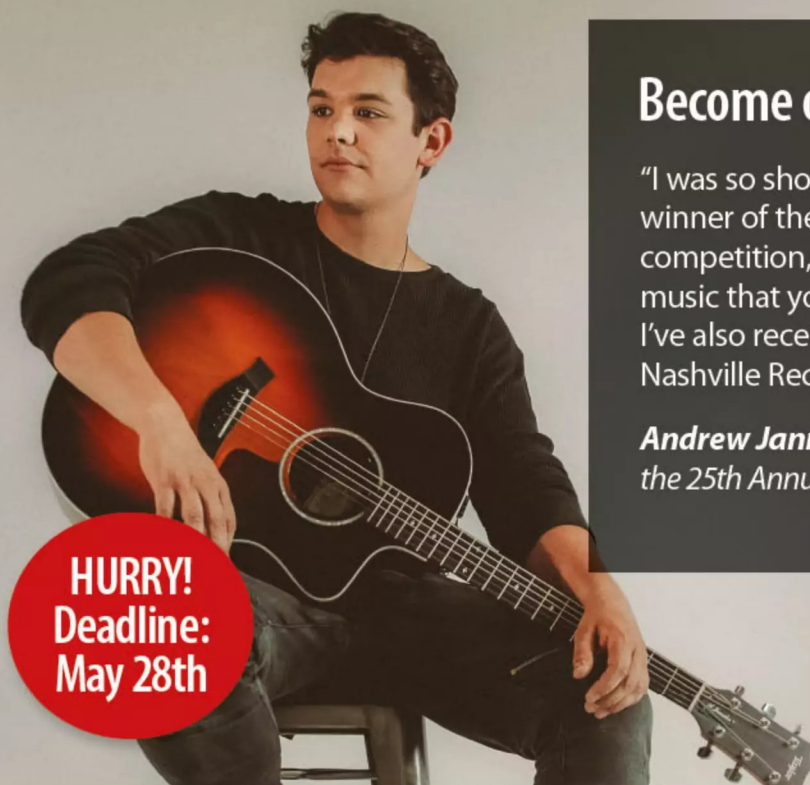


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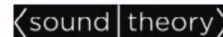
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{ From the Editor }

Queen Forever

WHEN FREDDIE MERCURY passed away 30 years ago, it might have seemed like the end for Queen, the remarkable rock group he fronted. Instead, the British rock band has grown into an unstoppable phenomenon, performing onstage again since 2005 and enjoying a massive resurgence courtesy of the 2018 Mercury biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Part of the group's enduring appeal is due to its timeless songs, of course. But it's also down

to the fact that Queen always had *two* incredibly distinctive lead singers: Mercury and Brian May's lead guitar, a resonant calling card that continues to beguile fans and will do so again once the world is safe for concert tours.

It's been 50 years since May, Mercury, bassist John Deacon and drummer Roger Taylor first got together. While the group's music underwent changes in those early years, moving from prog and heavy metal to the glam-rock sound with which they found fame, May's distinctive tone arrived virtually fully formed. His remarkable layered guitar harmonies would follow soon after as the band, aided by producer Roy Thomas Baker, developed into seasoned studio pros. As the guitarist explains to Richard Bienstock in this month's cover feature, "It was all there. We dreamed of these big vocal harmonies and guitar harmonies, and we were reaching into a place where we could visualize that."

To celebrate Queen's 50th anniversary, we had Brian take us back in time to the group's beginning and how he crafted his indelible guitar tone with his homemade Red Special, Vox AC30 and Dallas Rangemaster treble booster (not to mention his idiosyncratic use of a British sixpence for a pick). He discusses the group's formative tour with Mott the Hoople, and explains how Queen managed to maintain their sonic identity even as their music transformed over the years.

And we weren't content with just a feature. This celebratory issue also includes a lesson in Brian's style courtesy

of Dave Colquhoun, who coached May's and Mercury's *Bohemian Rhapsody* counterparts to convincingly mimic the musicians onscreen. In addition, Charlie Griffiths breaks down Brian's style with a lesson that hits on the key aspects of his virtuoso technique, from tapping and expressive string bends to scale runs and emotive playing.

But Brian isn't the only venerable British guitarist in this issue. The legendary Vic Flick also graces it with his memories of performing the distinctive lead guitar motif on "The James Bond Theme," and working with Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, George Martin and John Barry. Best of all, he shares with writer Martin McQuade details of the two guitars central to his greatest sessions: the Clifford Essex Paragon on which he performed the Bond theme's electrifying riff, and the Fender Stratocaster he played on countless hit records from the 1960s as well as the soundtrack album for the Beatles' 1964 debut feature film, *A Hard Day's Night*.

And — speaking of guitarists with a distinctly vocal-like approach — Neal Schon joins us to discuss his new instrumental album, *Universe*. In his in-depth interview with Jude Gold, the Journey guitarist discusses how he developed both it and his impeccable sense of groove.

Chris Scapelliti

Guitar Player

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Brian May at the Forum, Los Angeles, September 15, 1982

By Jeffrey Mayer Photography/
Atlas Icons**JOIN THE GP COMMUNITY**

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A full-page photograph of Travis Adams, a member of the band Tracii Guns, performing on stage. He is wearing a black tank top and has extensive tattoos on his arms and neck. He is holding a black Kramer electric guitar and making the rock-on hand gesture with his right hand. In the background, there is a large banner with the band's name 'TRACII GUNS' and a skull logo. The scene is lit with warm stage lights.

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Bacon's Bits

I enjoyed Tony Bacon's tale of Eric Clapton's missing Beano Les Paul in the March issue. That's a thorough bit of investigative work, and the rare photos of Clapton with the guitar in hand were the crowning touch. That guitar has got to be out there somewhere. Hopefully this will encourage someone who knows where it is to come forth and reunite Clapton with what is rightfully his. —PAUL ROMANS

Paul Bearer

Regarding Clapton's Beano Les Paul: I get the historical significance of the guitar, but why are you celebrating a guitar when it's the player who made it special? The Eric Clapton who played that Les Paul was a blisteringly sharp player who turned the world on its head for a few years before becoming a "singer-songwriter." I'm much less interested in what happened to the guitar than I am in what happened to that guitar player. —R.J. MATHERS

I was a Yank in London in 1966 who had the great opportunity to witness Eric Clapton perform with the Bluesbreakers with that lost Beano Les Paul. And I can tell you first-hand that the tone of that guitar live was unbelievable. But never forget it was Clapton who created it. The magic tone continued even after the guitar was stolen, but it makes for a highly entertaining story nonetheless. Thanks for shedding light on this mystery. Here's hoping someone finally cracks the case. —TERRY MATHISON

Digging the New Breed

Fantastic issue, from the Clapton guitar story to the Eric Johnson "Cliffs of Dover" piece. I've enjoyed the retrospective coverage you've been giving to albums and artists lately, but it's great to get an issue about new albums and artists too. Great piece too on Lee Ritenour and his incredible loss — 100 guitars! But I really dug learning about new guitarists Tash Sultana, Gwenifer Raymond and Sierra Hull. And thanks for the Recommended Listening entries in your stories. It's been a great way to discover new music. —PHIL WILCOX

Substitute Teacher

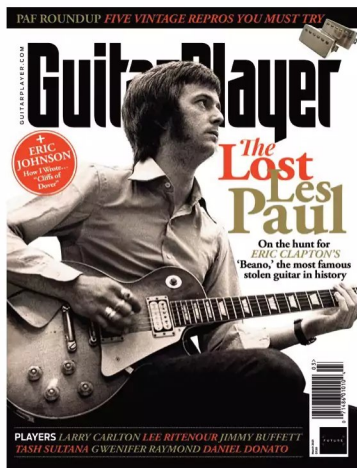
Thanks to Tom Kolb for the Pentatonic Substitutions lesson [March 2021]. That was hands-down the most useful instruction piece I've read. It opened up the fretboard in amazing ways, and now I can see my soloing really taking off. —PAUL GRAVIUS

Oldies But Goodies

Larry Carlton! It was awesome to see Mister 335 in your pages. He talked about five amazing songs he's played on, but man, I for one would love to read more. Bring him back for another five... or 10! Seriously, two of my favorite things in *Guitar Player* are My Career in Five Songs and How I Wrote. These are valuable, enlightening and entertaining stories that I look forward to every issue. Keep 'em coming. —JOE DEL VECCHIO

Pickup Lines

My hat's off to Dave Hunter for his excellent roundup of PAF-style pickups in your March issue! I've been on the hunt — once again — for *that sound*, and his article was extremely well timed for my search. Please give us more pieces like this. I promise you, not one reader won't be interested. —THOM HEWITT



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“BILL COLLINGS COULD PUT HIS FINGER RIGHT ON IT ALMOST WITHOUT TRYING. THE I-35 LC VINTAGE IS AN EXTENSION OF THE WAY THAT HE LOOKED AT GUITARS”



Past Perfected

Collings took its best-selling electric back in time. The result is the I-35 LC Vintage.

BY DAVE HUNTER

AS IF IN some space-time-continuum-defying feat, Collings' latest electric guitar is a reinvention of one of its longstanding models. It's been upgraded by being back-graded, if you will, to more accurately represent a vintage classic of the late '50s and early '60s. As such, it's undoubtedly new, and the first strum confirms that it's also one of the coolest things going for upmarket guitar releases in the first half of 2021.

The builders at Collings Guitars have been firing on all cylinders lately, and many players who have experienced their wares will tell you that the Austin-based company is turning out some of the finest production guitars of any American maker in recent years. The late Bill Collings began making guitars in 1973 and established his reputation on the backs of finely wrought acoustic instruments, a



foundation that foretold the quality of his electrics when they were added to the stable beginning in 2006. The new I-35 LC Vintage provides a further reminder of the depth of quality that the company is achieving, while revealing an expressive and inspiring guitar that's simply magical by any measure.

Amid a lineup of solid-body, semi-hollow and fully hollow-body electrics, the company's existing I-35 LC has traditional laminated-wood construction but is rendered to a slightly more compact 15-inch lower-bout width, rather than the original's 16 inches. It has been Collings' best-selling electric for several years, so why mess with the formula?

“When we're making music, I think we're all striving for the same thing, which is, in a way, emotional and technical efficiency,” says Aaron Huff, director of electric instruments at Collings Guitars. “And then there's this third



component that none of us can really put our finger on. It's like this 'magic' thing.

“Bill Collings could put his finger right on it almost without trying. We learned a lot from everything that he did, and the I-35 LC Vintage is really, I think, an extension of the way that he looked at guitars. When you choose a guitar, it's not just about whether that note is on or off; it's a question of, What is the dynamic of that note, and how much control can I exert over that? There's an enhanced third dimension in the music of an excellent instrument, and that's what we were striving for with the Vintage: How do we make a guitar have even better access to the nuance that's available in Bill's approach.”

The result is a guitar that feels a bit looser and more acoustically resonant, with a more dynamic response that translates to the sound in a blend of clarity and character, bite and girth. Rather than being tight and firm and immediate — like many modern guitars

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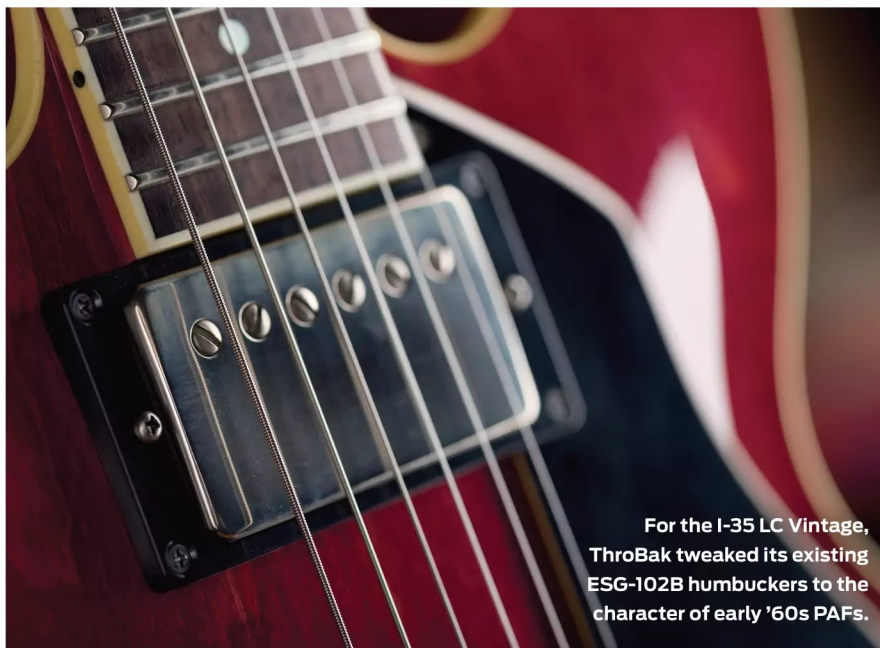
— there's an ever-so-slight lag to the response that thickens up the notes and, as Huff puts it, helps it "feel like you have room to stick your fingers between the notes." In other words, the I-35 LC Vintage feels and sounds more like a well-played vintage guitar.

The means of achieving this were multifarious: a very slightly thinner neck profile and depth (now .845 inch at the first fret rather than the company's standard .865 inch), a change of truss-rod curve and tension, a new formulation of the body's maple-ply top and back to allow more flexibility and of its maple center block to enhance its vibrational transfer, plus a total change-up of electronics. Most importantly, Huff tells us, "It is built from the inside out. All of our acoustic work has led to our electric work, meaning that you voice the guitar acoustically first and then you electrically try not to take away from that."

Specs and materials not already covered above are pretty standard from the existing I-35 LC, including a mahogany neck with a bound rosewood fingerboard configured to a 24 7/8-inch scale and attached with the company's extra-long mortise-and-tenon joint, a 12-inch fingerboard radius, a 1.73-inch width at the nut and an ebony face atop the back-angled "haircut" headstock. Hardware includes a traditional nickel Kluson ABR-1 bridge, a stop-bar tailpiece and enclosed Gotoh tuners. Buckle it all together and the entire guitar comes in right around the seven-pound mark, where many semis will hit the scales at closer to Les Paul—style weights.

Collings has used acclaimed ThroBak pickups in many of its higher-end guitars, but they went back to the drawing board with the company to tweak their existing ESG-102B humbuckers to better suit the I-35 LC Vintage. "It's aimed at the early '60s characteristics of some old [PAFs]," Huff says, "but we tried to go a little softer and a little smoother with the bridge pickup than his standard offering." These are paired with Luxe reproduction '50s Bumblebee tone caps and DiMarzio 500k potentiometers to enable a broader range of control settings, exponentially increasing the guitar's versatility.

"I feel like the guitar begs you to roll it down," Huff says. "Not turn it off but find that spot where you're just barely attenuating the clip and you can really dial in that attack, whether you want it to be super buttery



For the I-35 LC Vintage, ThroBak tweaked its existing ESG-102B humbuckers to the character of early '60s PAFs.

without masking itself, or you need it to be quite articulate and really show its teeth."

The I-35 LC Vintage really looks the part, too, with more period-correct non-grained ivoroid binding and black or gold reflector knobs. The guitar is available in Faded Cherry (as reviewed), Blonde and Tobacco Sunburst, all in nitrocellulose lacquer, and dressed in what Collings calls its "soft aging" process, which give a little checking to the gloss finish and some light patina to the hardware.

So how does it all come together in the hand? The I-35 LC Vintage is a very welcome reminder of how inspiring — and how addictive — a really good guitar can be. I've owned and played several Collings guitars over the years, but rarely has the arrival of a test guitar transitioned so quickly and dramatically from "Oh, it's their latest X-inspired thing" to "Holy crap, this is a great guitar, and I have to have one!"

Tested through a custom tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab with a variety of overdrive pedals, the I-35 LC Vintage proved to be one of the most versatile new electrics I've played in a long time. It's also one of the few that never made me say, "If it were mine, I'd change..." Its core tonality is an enticing balance of elegant and raw, sweet and nuanced, yet with enough granularity to bark and bite when you need it to.

For jazz, mellow blues, or a broad range of rock and gnarlier roots styles, it delivered everything from rich and lush to stinging, singing and aggressive with ease and grace. Combined with utterly inspiring playing dynamics, the I-35 LC Vintage proved its quality and class with every note. 🎸

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Julien Baker with her
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and Orange Rocker 32

Stomp-Box Fever

Julien Baker broadens her indie-rock sound, and her pedalboard, on *Little Oblivions*.

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

JULIEN BAKER HAS built her reputation on mesmerizing solo performances where she manipulates an arsenal of loopers and reverbs to create layers of guitar textures from her deft finger work. On her third album, *Little Oblivions* (Matador), that approach blossomed into lush full-band arrangements, all played by Baker herself.

"For the last two records, I would just show up to the studio, do a bunch of takes for a week and that's how the song was," Baker says of the sparse, cathartic *Sprained Ankle*, recorded in 2015 when she was just 20 years old, and 2017's *Turn Out the Lights*. "With these songs, it was fun to build layers and experiment. I feel like I've grown to appreciate the intricacy of production and just making interesting sounds."

Baker's adventures in looping and layering began simply, with just a Fulltone OCD

overdrive and a Line 6 DL4 delay. "Then all of a sudden I switched and went the other way, and now I have a crazy spaceship to run," she says, laughing. "I looped because I wanted more layers, and I started experimenting with how to build a soundscape that really is expansive with just one instrument."

The left turn into broader instrumentation on *Little Oblivions* was liberating for Baker, whose complex solo-guitar arrangements could sometimes paint her into a corner. But performing while singing, without a click as a safety net, can get dicey if everything isn't triggered just right.

"When the loops were off, I would be counting three different rhythms in my head

so they would pick up on the right spot," she says. "And I was just like, Why do I do this? It felt like the musical version of when I try to carry all the grocery bags inside at once, even though I could just have someone help me."

She'll have a full band to help carry the songs on *Little Oblivions* when she returns to the stage, but there will still be plenty of "tap dancing" on her pedalboard, she says. Baker guides us through the stomp-box nirvana that brought her here.

"HOW IS EVERYONE NOT BORED? I'M JUST PLAYING GUITAR FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF"

The instrumentation on *Little Oblivions* is a departure from your previous work. Why did your approach change?

I guess it was a conscious decision, but it didn't feel

monumental. I wasn't like, "I'm going to do drums now and it's going to be a huge shift for me," because I exist most comfortably in bands and have since I was 14. I've missed that dynamic so much. Playing with Boygenius [a trio with Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus] and getting to have musical chemistry with a whole organism of moving parts was so soul feeding to me, but before that tour I had been writing full-band stuff. I played all the instruments on *Little Oblivions* because I'm a control freak. But what I'm really excited about is when we can go back to touring and getting to have a much less nerve-wracking live experience. Because in the context of a live band, there's so much unpredictability that you almost have to have a threshold of grace for what you're watching. When it's just me singing, it's like the entire crowd can hear if I'm a semitone off, and I'm just like, Better not mess up, the whole time in my head.

On new songs like "Hardline," the choruses reach outward, whereas your previous songs tended to draw listeners into a more intimate moment.

There's a weird push/pull with the intimacy of being an artist performing solo, where you can get really intimate and emotional. But then there's a limit to the dynamic you can have, which is why I kept adding other instruments, like bass, which I can control with my feet, and piano. I used to stand onstage and think, How is everyone not bored? I'm just playing guitar for an hour and a half. I wanted to play something where I could move around a bit and have a little wider palette.

Your pedalboard has been central to your performances, with multiple reverbs as your secret weapon. Could you walk us through that setup?

I used to have four reverbs on my board. Now I just have the Walrus Descent Reverb and Octave Machine, which I use as more of an octave. I almost exclusively use the shimmer setting and make that a pad. And then I finally broke down and got the Strymon BigSky,



Performing at O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire, in London, September 29, 2018

and I have extremely dialed-in patches for every song instead of just a universal wash over everything. If I need a really specific tank reverb, a tile-room reverb or something really huge just for one song, I just make a little patch on the [Line 6] HX Effects. I feel like I'm outing myself as a lazy musician, because for so long I didn't know how to do patches or have dry and wet separated channels. Now I'm like, Why haven't I been doing this the whole time? It's really so helpful.

Have you downsized or simplified your board?

It's the same size, and I guess in some ways it's complicated, because I have a multi-effects unit with six stomp switches that can be assigned to six different effects. There's a wet/dry switcher, and then an [Electro-

Harmonix] Superego [Synth Engine] to make pads with, and the Walrus and the BigSky.

Then I have this new thing that I love that I bought on impulse. It's a Hologram Dream Sequence, and it makes a synth-sounding sequence out of your guitar signal. It's awesome. And I guess it'll make what I do simpler in some ways.

You typically play Telecasters. What else are you playing to bring these new sounds to life?

I have a modded blue Telecaster with classic Tele

neck and bridge pickups, but it doesn't have a vintage bridge. I have another butterscotch Tele that has a big soap-bar pickup. I love that guitar, especially for the rock stuff. I think for so long I liked the Telecaster because it felt really versatile. The first one that I played for a long time, the blue one, is road worn and I felt like I could be really agile with it. For this record, when I tour, I got a Fender Acoustasonic Strat. I thought, It's not going to sound like a good electric or acoustic guitar; it's going to sound like an okay version of both. But I played that at a whole bunch of our sessions and it was awesome. You can get a really weird Guided By Voices/Neutral Milk Hotel acoustic guitar sound if you want it, and then you can do Tele leads.

What role does your amplifier choice play in your inventive approach to creating guitar textures?

I used to do stereo Fenders onstage because I wanted to be able to kick one on and off, but there was no real loop and effect separation. I have an Orange Rocker 32, and you can run the two speakers as independent channels with a send/return loop. I run the left speaker dry and the right speaker wet, so if my reverb or one of the pads or effects or shimmers is too much and it's drowning out the regular signal, whoever's doing sound can pull it back. I also have a kill switch on my board when the wet signal needs a hard cut. I'm really fascinated by it all. During the time in quarantine, I've just been gear nerding and learning more about my craft and my instrument. 🎸



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Little Oblivions
 "Hardline," "Faith Healer,"
 "Ringside," "Favor,"
 "Heatwave"



Soul Survivor

J.D. Simo improvises live, in the studio and in life.

BY MICHAEL ROSS

MANY MUSICIANS HAVE had to cope with Covid-19's impact on their career, but J.D. Simo had to deal with its effect on his body as well. The guitarist fully recovered to face the chore of developing tools to deal with these challenging times.

In the decade since he left Nashville's legendary Don Kelly Band, Simo has released more than half a dozen recordings. On his latest, *J.D. Simo* (Crow's Feet), he continues to explore his love of roots music in both its pure and modulated forms, with tracks that range from a slightly twisted take on Earl Hooker's "Anna Lee" to the full-on psychedelic soul of "The Movement."

Along the way, Simo leaves plenty of room for spacey guitar jams. Thousands of hours spent onstage as the main soloist for Don Kelly supplied him with the chops to jam with the best of them, but his pre-pandemic tour with the Grateful Dead's Phil Lesh, as part of Phil and Friends, took him to a new level. That seemed a good place to start this talk.

Did you learn anything new about jamming from touring with Phil?

Luther Dickinson, who recommended me to Phil, said, "You might think you know how to improvise, but Phil is the main line to the source of inspiration."

Before working with Phil, I was always editing my playing in the back of my mind. You have moments where you're riding the wave and there's no thought, but others where you're like, Was that transition

okay? Where should we go now? The point with Phil is to be completely immersed in the moment. His influence has been about trying

"I NOW HAVE THE BEST FAN INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT EVER BECAUSE I'VE PUT A LOT OF TIME INTO IT"

J.D. Simo onstage at City Winery in New York City, August 27, 2018

to stay connected to purity, taking a deep breath and going to the joy. It's like learning to meditate. Phil's got this beatific smile and this way of playing that's actually funny at times. It jostles you.

You're using more effects these days, as opposed to your earlier straight-into-the-amp rig. Talk about the evolution of your sound.

I found there are two sides to me. One has an utter respect for blues in its purest sense, and the other is psychedelic. From [2017's] *Rise & Shine* forward, I've been obsessed with the Muddy Waters *Electric Mud* record, and *Live Evil*—era Miles with John McLaughlin and Pete Cosey. Cosey also played on *Electric Mud*.

I also love Michael Toles, who played with Isaac Hayes on *Hot Buttered Soul*, and Eddie Hazel with Funkadelic.

What gear are you using to achieve this new sound?

I have had an old Fuzz Face and this old Jax Fuzz Wah since *Rise & Shine*, and those are now my two main effects. I just have those and tape delay. After the first several records, I got tired of mining the '60s Marshall sound, so I went back to using mostly Fender amps. More recently, I fell in love with the Ampeg amps — the 20-watt Gemini II and the 30-watt Gemini II with a 15-inch speaker — because Tommy Brenneck from the Budos Band and my buddy Jimmy James from the Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio are into them. There are also photos of Otis Rush and Magic Sam using them. I got rid of all my Fenders.

No more cranked 100-watt Marshall or Fender Dual Showman?

My volume has come way down. It's never been about being loud; it's whatever you need to do to achieve the sound. Overdriven sounds have gradually taken a back seat to either fuzz or varying degrees of clean. When it comes to a clean sound, Leo Nocentelli is



my biggest influence. His tone is very filtered, which I get by using the wah as a filter.

How was *J.D. Simo* recorded?

We cut it in just two days at Sound Emporium, but we had a lengthy pre-production process. I wanted to work with a producer for the first time and chose Eddie Spear [*Brandi Carlisle, Anderson East, Rival Sons*]. I'd wanted to work with him for 10 years.

What guitars were you using?

I used my '62 Gibson ES-335 on most tracks. I also used an old Jazzmaster with a humbucker in the bridge and a rewind single-coil neck pickup. I put on really heavy strings and tuned down to B. That's on "Help" and some overdubs. I used my Custom Kraft on "Anna Lee." But that was it. Just a couple of guitars.

The instrumental, "Take That," harks back to your Don Kelley barn-burning, train-beat days.

I've always wanted to include something along those lines, but it never seemed appropriate. I had done a version of that song in my studio that was a bit longer. It was already fast, but Eddie suggested I play it even faster and make it only a minute long as an interesting palate cleanser. He felt that would accomplish what we wanted but not be taken too seriously. I loved that. We set up my little Alamo Model 3, which is like a five-watt Fender Champ. That's just one mic for everything.

What is that weird effect on "Anna Lee?"

I was playing guitar through this little Casio boombox, which had a drum machine. We had the drum machine going and did two takes with Adam playing drums on the trash bins. The left side and the right side are take one and take two. Because of the drum machine we were able to sync them and go back and forth. Afterwards, we mutilated the tape machine, speeding it up, slowing it down, and putting erasers in it to make it skip. In the end, it's probably our favorite track.



That sounds like an octave fuzz on "One of Those Days."

That's the Jax Fuzz Wah. I think it's the same as the circuit in the Companion, which has a little bit of octave in it. It's the one Tony Joe White used. I bought it from Carter Vintage. I went in looking for a fuzz that sounded like Michael Toles' fuzz on Isaac Hayes' version of "Walk on By." It had that sound.

With the moratorium on live playing, YouTube and social media have become vital to an artist's career. How have you been navigating them?

I tried to adapt as quickly and as efficiently as possible. I started the weekly live stream [Greasy Time], which has done far better than I thought it would. I also started a podcast that goes up roughly once a week and started

doing some full band live streaming. I debut a new track with a music video every week on *Greasy Time*. I taught myself how to edit video and have been working on my engineering as well, with the help of a mentor like Gabriel Roth from Daptone Records. As a result, I've done a lot of scoring work for Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Had you done much movie and TV work prior to the pandemic?

I had started working on an Elvis biopic directed by Baz

Luhrmann, with Tom Hanks playing Colonel Tom Parker. I've been able to rekindle my love of Scotty Moore, which was how I originally learned to play guitar. I've been really fortunate to be able to pivot and be okay through a lot of hustling.

Do you think YouTube and Instagram are currently replacing touring as a way of promoting a new record?

Without a doubt. I now have the best fan interaction and engagement ever because I've put a lot of time into it. It takes effort and time to do it correctly — learning what your audience likes, the spacing of posts and overall vibe.

It's not just all about you though, is it?

Much of my content is based on the record collector/Spotify junkie in me wanting to spotlight other people. Every day, I'm trying to find new stuff I wasn't aware of. Though every video and post is promoting me and my music, it feels good that the majority of content is exposing the great music of others. I've found through the analytics of my most popular posts and episodes of *Greasy Time* that the ones that truly connect are when I'm really into what I'm talking about at that moment. It has been fascinating how people get that it is completely genuine.

Are *Greasy Time* T-shirts in the offing?

I've waited on purpose because I wanted the show to get better and more refined. And now a *Greasy Time* American Apparel shirt is available. 🇺🇸





John Sebastian performing at the NAMM Convention in Chicago, June 20, 1983

My Career in Five Songs

Sound-effects records and Mussorgsky!

John Sebastian reveals what went into a handful of amazing tracks from his long, hit-making career.

BY JOE BOSSO

FEBRUARY 9, 1964, launched an untold number of rock bands in the U.S., one of them being the Lovin' Spoonful. That night, folk guitarist John Sebastian dropped by the Greenwich Village apartment of his friend Cass Elliot to watch the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Elliot, who would soon rise to fame in the Mamas & the Papas, was something of a North Star for local musicians, and she introduced Sebastian to another young guitarist, Zal Yanovsky.

"Cass liked pairing people up. It was just one of the talents that she had," Sebastian recalls. "That night, I played guitar with Zally, and we clicked immediately. Cass took Zally aside and said, 'What do you think?' He said, 'John's a really great fingerpicker.' She asked me what I thought of Zally, and I said, 'Man, he's such an unusual player. He's smearing Elmore James and Floyd Kramer and the

Buckaroos all into the same box.' It was obvious that we should do something together."

A year after their first meeting, Sebastian and Yanovsky, along with bassist Steve Boone and drummer Joe Butler, were on the charts with the Lovin' Spoonful's first hit, "Do You Believe in Magic." The shimmering and exuberant track (which, unbelievably, was turned down by every record label in town) kicked off what would be a string of mid-'60s pop-rock radio smashes for the band. One after the other, they included "You Didn't Have to Be So Nice," "Daydream," "Did

You Ever Have to Make Up Your Mind?," "Summer in the City," "Nashville Cats," "Darling Be Home Soon" and "Six O'Clock."

"It was an amazing time. We definitely had a good period when we were on the radio a

lot," Sebastian says.

"Being famous had its benefits, and we were fortunate to be friends with a lot of people in that higher echelon of fame. But to me, the best element to being in the public eye was that it was a conduit to putting more songs out there. The acceptance

and fame stimulated us, but we put in the work, too. This stuff doesn't just happen on its own."

"IT WAS THE FIRST SONG THAT WE RECORDED, AND IT'S THE SONG THAT GOT US TURNED DOWN BY EVERY RECORD COMPANY IN NEW YORK"

Tracing his musical influences, Sebastian brings it all back to playing acoustic guitar at summer camp as a kid. "You have to start with learning to play 'Tom Dooley,'" he says. "Getting into the Kingston Trio was huge. I was very naïve about American music before I discovered them. And then I have to mention Johnny Cash: 'I Walk the Line' was an important record for me, not just because it was cool and dark but because that song taught me the relationships between tonic, dominant and subdominant chords. When I played it, I said, 'I think I discovered something.'"

After the Lovin' Spoonful folded in 1968, Sebastian embarked on a successful solo career, releasing more than a dozen albums that continued to span the waters of pop, rock, folk and blues. He had something of a surprise hit in 1976 with the good-natured "Welcome Back," his theme for the TV Series *Welcome Back, Kotter*, which reached Number One on *Billboard*. Throughout his career, he's distinguished himself as an ace multi-instrumentalist, equally adept on piano, organ, harmonica, autoharp and guitar. Rating his own six-string skills, he says modestly, "I usually know what a song needs. I'm kind of a trencherman guitar player. I love playing big figures, but I also understand support. It's one of the things I do well."

Lately, Sebastian has been collaborating with guitarist Jimmy Vivino (known to TV audiences for leading Conan O'Brien's house

The Lovin' Spoonful in the recording studio, in New York City, 1966. From left: Joe Butler, Sebastian, Zal Yanovsky and Steve Boone



bands) on a series of projects. "I can't figure out why Jimmy is using me," he says with a laugh. "He keeps asking me to play lead guitar on these things, and I keep telling him, 'No, no, you're the lead guitarist.' But he's singing, so he keeps asking me to play more. It's kind of comical, but it's very enjoyable."

"DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC" THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL, DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC (1965)

"It was the first song that we recorded, and it's the song that got us turned down by every record company in New York. I wrote it one night after the Spoonful played a gig at the Night Owl Café. We had been playing the place for a while; our audience was mostly old Italian men playing cards and drinking espresso. But we started to get more electric

and bought bigger amps, and girls started coming in. This one night we played the place, and in the back of the club I could see this young girl dancing to us.

"That was the moment when it started to come together, seeing that girl dancing. The next time I sat down, I had the song pretty much written. I had been fooling around trying to play 'Heat Wave' on the autoharp, and I realized, Oh, these climbing chords... They could do other jobs. There it was: 'Do You Believe in Magic.'"

"The recording came together quickly. It didn't hurt that [session drummer] Gary Chester, who happened to be in the building, played tambourine on the track. He kept us from speeding up. I played my Les Paul on the song, but I also played autoharp, which covers a lot of mistakes. We really thought we had a hit, but no one else did. It took this little label, Kama Sutra, to hear what was there. Pretty soon, everything changed. We went to California to play our first West Coast gigs. The moment we got in our rent-a-car, the song came blaring over the radio. Yanovsky just started hitting me — "Listen to that!" It was brilliant."

"YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BE SO NICE" THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL, DAYDREAM (1966)

"We spent a week playing this nasty topless club in San Francisco. Each night, we went back to our cramped living quarters — we weren't rich enough to have our own hotel rooms yet — and it seemed like half of the women from the club would come back with us to be entertained by Yanovsky. Steven and I went off to a corner with our guitars, and he



Sebastian during sessions for "Summer in the City," in New York City, 1966



said, 'I've got something. It's not a song yet.' He played me the rudiments of what he had, and I said, 'Whoa!' I filled in the words, and in half an hour we had a song.

"This was another song that was a breeze to record. We had these very well-defined Duane Eddy-ish guitar parts that worked so well, especially the way they moved one phrase to the next. I again used my Les Paul through a Fender Super Reverb. It's funny — Yanovsky was hard to maneuver into position in rehearsal, but in the studio he became a force. He saw this set of orchestral chimes that were waiting to be picked up from a previous session, and he said, 'We've got to try those.' They were such a perfect overdub for the guitar parts.

"So now we had our second hit. We didn't have a lot of time for patting ourselves on the back, because we had Kama Sutra as our big force and we had to compete with bands on Columbia. We were moving fast, and we accomplished a lot in just a few years."

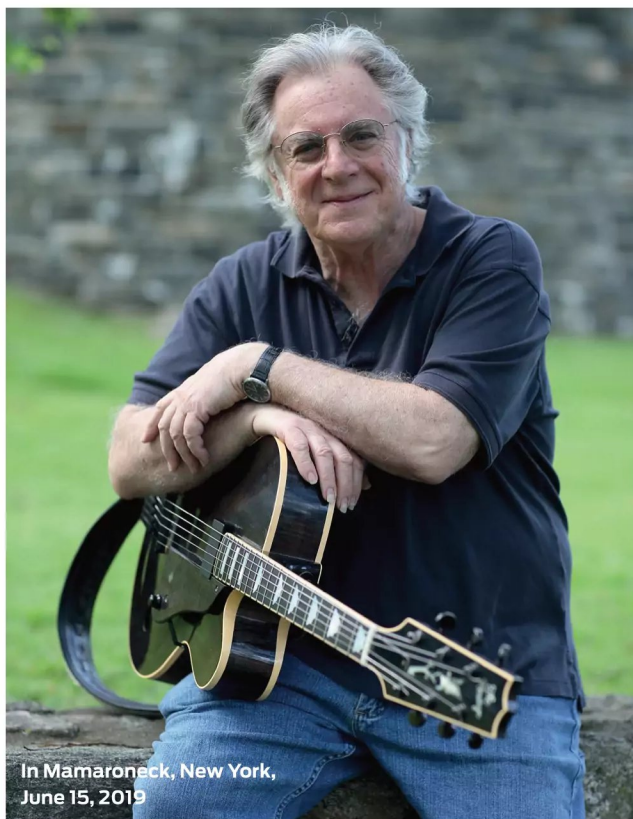
"SUMMER IN THE CITY" THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL, HUMS OF THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL (1966)

"I wrote this primarily with my brother, Mark. He played me this song about summer in the city, and I was struck by how it went from one subdominant to the next. I wanted to create tension, so that's how I wrote the piano figure in the beginning. It was like [*Modest Mussorgsky's*] 'Night on Bald Mountain.' It was dark. 'At night it's a different world' — the words started coming out.

"For months, Steven would play this keyboard figure on the black keys, and we'd go, 'Steven, that's not a fucking song. Get off that thing.' Suddenly, though, that silly keyboard figure was perfect for this song. It became what the Beatles would call their 'middle eight.'

"The sound of the song had to be tough.

It wasn't a pop sound. As usual, I played my Les Paul, but I might have put it through a



In Mamaroneck, New York,
June 15, 2019

Magnatone. The record was very involved. Zally was a running dialogue of ideas. He said, 'The snare can't sound like a snare. It has to sound like a garbage can falling down a set of cement stairs.' Our producer, Roy Halee, miked the snare on an eight-story metal stairwell to create this enormous backbeat. And then we went bananas with a trunk full of sound-effects '78s — car horns, jackhammers...you name it. It was wild.

"The song really worked. It came out in the summer of '67 and spent three weeks at Number One. I still didn't think we were pushing anything on the scale of the Beatles — that's unfathomable. But we were doing the day-to-day work of being in the game, and with this song we hit it at the right time."

"FACE OF APPALACHIA" JOHN SEBASTIAN, TARZANA KID (1974)

"Lowell George and I had been trading home tapes. He had found a radio compressor — it wasn't meant to be a guitar effect — but he used it to compress the sound of his acoustic guitar beyond belief. He sent me a tape of something with that guitar effect, and I

said, 'Man, that is cool! That has mystery. It sounds like the face of Appalachia or

something.' And he said, 'Yeah, that's it. Write that.' The music was pretty much done. My musical contribution was as a lyricist.

"On that level, it was a hard song to write because it was a complicated subject, and I wanted to get all the thoughts in. My grandfather used to talk about walking the Appalachian Trail, and I got all excited about it. Those first couple of verses are about that — 'Dreadful sorry, my beloved. Such a promise could not keep. All my dreams of Appalachia are just an old man's memory.'

"I recorded it with Lowell. He played a white Stratocaster with a motorcycle wrench for slide. It's just a festival of slide prose — there's Lowell, Ry Cooder and

David Lindley. It was just incredible. I played a Gibson J-45 on it, but I was really the foundation-type player. When Lowell would start those long phrases of his, the sound was like butter. He had such delicious tone."

"GRUMPY LITTLE CHRISTMAS" JOHN SEBASTIAN, GRUMPY LITTLE CHRISTMAS (2015)

"This is one of my most recent songs, so I'm partial to it. I was working with Happy Traum, who, as many people know, is a tremendously positive force. When he gets a solstice show going, they're just the happiest Christmas songs you ever heard. So I had my own reaction to them, and I called it 'Grumpy Little Christmas.'

"Recording it was very straightforward. I played guitar on it, but I was intelligent enough to bring David Grisman in and have him do his thing. I love working with David. We go back to when we were 18 together. I've always enjoyed his humor and his approach to guitar playing. You never need to give him any kind of direction. He instinctively knows what to do, and it's better than anything you could think of.

"In fact, I was given some direction. At one point, I remember looking at the engineer, and I asked, 'Could I be a little louder in my phones?' He looked at the console, then turned back to me and said with a big smile, 'Play louder!'" ■

"IT'S JUST A FESTIVAL OF SLIDE PROSE — THERE'S LOWELL, RY COODER AND DAVID LINDLEY"

NOT NEW!



SansAmp GT2 (1993)

Affectionately referred to as the "desert island" pedal, the SansAmp GT2 is unchanged [except for the DC input very early on]. Consistently in production since introduced, it enables you to "architecturally" create your own rig in seconds.

SansAmp Classic (1989)

B. Andrew Barta's unique invention was the catalyst for the whole "going direct" movement over 30 years ago. Since then, SansAmp has evolved into an extensive line of pedals and racks, as well as being the heart of our Fly Rig® Series. Of the pedal formats, the SansAmp Classic is the most sophisticated.

EXCITEMENT
NEVER GETS
OLD



SansAmp Bass Driver DI (1994)

Often unseen, it's hardly a secret that the SansAmp Bass Driver is the secret weapon behind mammoth rigs on arena stages around the globe. It is also widely recognized as a studio staple for virtually every genre, and will make any FOH engineer smile.

DOES SOMETHING HAVE TO BE "NEW" TO BE EXCITING?

In a world of planned obsolescence and constant upgrades, it's rare an electronic music-related product can survive a lengthy lifespan. Yet these 3, in particular, have done just that. [We have more, such as the MIDI Mouse since 1995, but let's stay focused on SansAmp.]

For over 30 years, SansAmps have been used for every kind of music style from hardcore metal to commercial jingles and with all kinds of instruments, not just guitar and bass. Engineered for both recording and live applications, all SansAmps are 100% analog, multi-dimensional, user-friendly devices that deliver the warm, rich, organic tones of the most desirable mic'd up tube amplifiers on the planet. Is it any wonder SansAmp is regarded as the standard of the industry? Now go check out which one is right for you.

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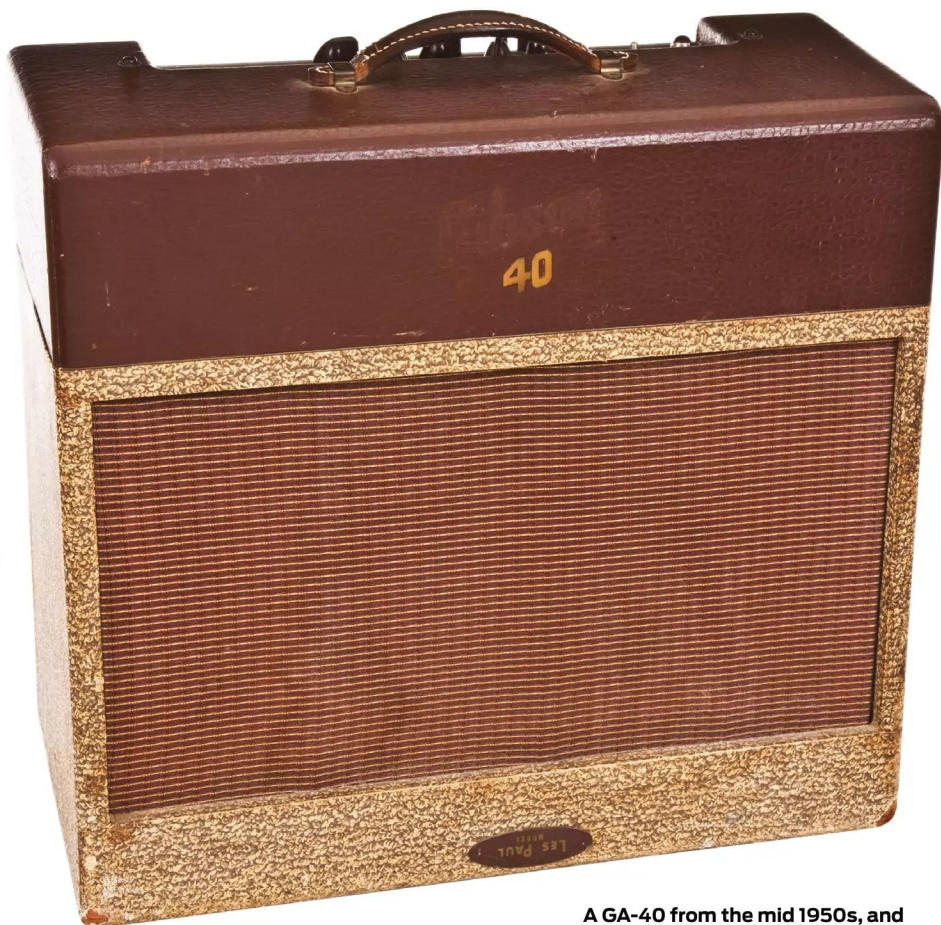


Vaya Con Combos

In its late-'50s incarnations, Gibson's Les Paul GA-40 amp laid a path to heavenly tone.

HOW CAN YOU acquire a genuine 1950s Gibson Les Paul for one-fiftieth to one-hundredth the price of the iconic vintage guitar? By buying the amp, of course! Like most comparable manufacturers of the day, Gibson often partnered electric guitars and amplifiers as "sets." The 1x12 GA-40 Les Paul amp debuted in 1952 alongside the signature goldtop guitar, and remained in the catalog until late 1962 or early '63, when Les Paul terminated his deal with Gibson and the radically altered, double-cutaway guitar of the early '60s became simply the SG. While few vintage amps have attained the values of the better-known guitars that were their contemporaries, the GA-40 Les Paul is an interesting and desirable combo that has become something of a classic in its own right in recent years.

It's all too easy to look at any vaguely similar '50s guitar combo with a top-mounted control panel and say, "Oh, it's a tweed Deluxe, only a little bigger and with tremolo." In reality, the GA-40's circuit and construction make it almost nothing like Fender's ubiquitous 5E3 of the late '50s,



A GA-40 from the mid 1950s, and (below) the amp's backside.

other than in its use of two 6V6GT output tubes and a 12-inch speaker. The truth is, as the leaders in guitar amplification in the '50s and early '60s, Fender and Gibson exhibited great pride in their own original designs and never seemed to chase each other's success with copies or wannabe amps.

For many contemporary players who have enjoyed the sonic charms of the most popular rendition of the GA-40 from the mid to late '50s, the rather unusual 5879 preamp tube plays a big part in forming the amp's unique character. Rather than being a dual-triode tube like the more common 12AX7 and its brethren, the 5879 is a pentode, which means it uses five elements within the tube to get the amplification job done, much like many output tubes, rather than merely three. As such, it's akin to the EF86/6267 pentode preamp tube famously included in the '60s Vox AC15 and revived in many boutique amps

by Dr. Z, Matchless, TopHat, 65amps and others — although the two are also slightly different and have different pin connections, so don't try replacing one for the other.

What really matters, though, is the bountiful goods the 5879 delivers tonally. Whereas the familiar 12AX7 leans bright, is a bit biting and goes slightly fizzy in the high end as it starts to break up, the 5879 is thick, meaty, rich and bold. Like the EF86, it also has more gain than the 12AX7, but that isn't saying its use indicates a high-gain circuit, by any means. Instead, this pentode in the preamp helps to ensure that a full, stout signal is passed along to further stages of the amp,

and that the guitar tone doesn't easily fold over into mush within the preamp stage itself.

What does all this translate to when you plug your guitar of choice into the front of a good GA-40 and let it rip? Like the 5879 preamp tube, the Les Paul combo leans into

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- > 15 watts from two 6V6GT output tubes
- > Two 5879 pentode preamp tubes, with a 12AX7 phase inverter
- > Lush 6SQ7 tube-driven tremolo
- > Single 12-inch Jensen Alnico speaker
- > Two-tone and tweed cabinet cosmetics

CLASSIC GEAR

BY DAVE HUNTER



The earliest incarnation of the GA-40 had a fretwork grille. The tweed '60s-era model (far right) had a full-frontal grille.

a rich, thick, meaty and predominantly warm tone, but with enough clarity and definition to help individual notes cut through — at least relative to the general performance of amps from that era. When pushed into overdrive, it exudes a throaty growl that makes it a great lead amp for trenchant blues, roots rock or garage rock, and really packs a lot of girth around the notes. The 5879 also has the benefit of being less microphonic than the EF86 pentode, which is infamously prone to rattle noise and other detrimental sonic artifacts after being subject to too much vibration (when used in a combo, in particular). This, alongside its sonic features, is one reason Fred

Taccone of *Divided by 13* embraces the 5879 in the 21st century.

In addition to its core tonality, the GA-40 has a great tremolo circuit, driven by an odd eight-pin 6SQ7 tube. Looking something like a stubby 6V6GT, the 6SQ7 actually packs a triode and two diodes within one shell,



ITS THROATY GROWL MAKES IT A GREAT LEAD AMP FOR BLUES, ROOTS-ROCK OR GARAGE-ROCK

although only the former is used in the GA-40's tremolo, which delivers a lush, atmospheric rendition of that popular effect.

The GA-40 Les Paul amp evolved both cosmetically and electronically through the 10 years of its existence. The debutante combo arrived in 1952 with a fancy grille cover with fretwork, a single channel with multiple

inputs, and somewhat different complements in both features and tubes (the latter including three octal 6SJ7s and one 6SN7). The most popular rendition

— which we're mostly discussing here — settled into itself around 1955, when a slightly taller cabinet emerged, still covered in two-tone cosmetics but with chocolate-brown covering on the upper section and something resembling a photo print of tan rug fibers adorning the lower three-quarters or so.



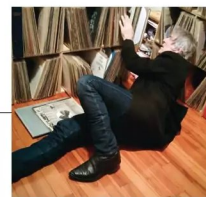
A couple years further into its run, the Les Paul amp adopted a more standard tweed covering over the lower portion of the cabinet, with a darker brown buffalo-grain material on the upper quarter. In 1960, the cabinet featured a full-frontal grille cloth, with a diagonal tweed — similar to that used by Fender for most of the '50s — covering the rest of the box. Shortly afterward, the official model name changed to GA-40T, following a nomenclature Gibson used to denote its tremolo-equipped amps. The Les Paul combo disappeared entirely after 1962.

The GA-40's desirability has led to escalating prices over the past decade and a half, so they aren't quite the easy-money finds they used to be. The sibling-brand Maestro GA-45T accordion and bass combo of the late '50s has a similar circuit, driven through an odd 4x8 speaker configuration that can easily be swapped out for a 1x12 baffle, and it is usually less expensive on the used market. If you're looking for the general sound and look in a newer creation, Victoria calls its Electro King combo "an idealized recreation of the classic McCarty-era GA-40." Either way, it's a fat, juicy rendition of the '50s tweed tone that's worth tasting, if you get the chance. 🍷



VINYL TREASURES

BY JIM CAMPILONGO



The Prophet of Excess

Tom Scholz' taste for the extreme made Boston's debut a stunner.

BOSTON'S SELF-TITLED debut album was released in 1976 on Epic Records and went on to become the eighth best-selling long-player in rock history. Not a bad way to start your career.

I've loved *Boston* for 20-plus years, despite initially having had a complicated relationship with the album. The opinionated snob in me aside, it ranks in the Top Five of my guilty pleasures, even though it has ingredients I might historically dislike. The guitars sometimes sound totally effected, each song has numerous kitchen sinks thrown in, and many of the ideas are drawn upon rock clichés. It's not as unlawful as Randy Bachman stuttering on "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet," a Bachman-Turner Overdrive classic that finds Mr. Bachman inappropriately channeling the genius of "My Generation," but some well-traveled contrivances abound. Numerous pick slides against the string, commonplace guitar licks, canned arena cheering and prog rock that pops out of nowhere are a few of the music's hurdles I eventually jumped over. I wondered if Boston bordered on being too informed to be real — *real* in the sense of the Ramones.

And yet, it's a friggin' great album. Would the harmony guitars sound better if Scholz and Barry Goudreau imitated Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner on their fantastic live version of "Sweet Jane" from Lou Reed's *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*? Would an Angus Young AC/DC guitar tone make *Boston* better? Would roping

in the magnitude of ideas have improved the record? Absolutely not. I love *Boston* for exactly what it is, and at this point in my life it's an old friend. When I listen to it, I'm almost



overwhelmed by the full menu of things to listen to — the great lead vocals and harmonies, the twin guitars, the flying-finger organ playing and solid-as-a-rock drumming. It's a hearty musical feast. The only possible downside to *Boston* might be its perfection, but that's what makes it perfectly wonderful.

There is no shortage of ideas. "Smokin'" has a repackaged John Lee Hooker boogie riff that's infectious and iconic. The organ solo leads into an "In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida"—style interlude before entering seamlessly into an organ breakdown, then into the big chorus

outro. If I were speaking this, I'd be out of breath. This is a carnival ride of rock ideas. "Foreplay/Long Time" begins with an arena prog-rock section before settling into a monolithic

festival of melody. I'm at a loss to understand how these guys could have made this song bigger. It's humongous, with pretty harmonies and a wonderful vocal performance by Brad

Delp. The track speeds along on a high-stimuli highway. "Hitch a Ride" is stripped down in the context of a Boston album. The song is a gem, bursting with melodic ideas and hooks. At around 1:33, it enters an arena-rock section that I wait for, and yet sometimes I wonder: If Tom and the boys had held back on this section, we might have lived without it. Nitpicking aside, it's a lovely song.

"More Than a Feeling" has another perfect vocal performance by Delp and a melodic rock-anthem chorus. It's a home run, but "Peace of Mind" might be my favorite track on the album, as it encapsulates a great classic-rock song with a noteworthy atomic clock, pre-Pro Tools drum performance by Sib Hashian. Sib could really hold down the fort — or should I say mansion?

"Rock & Roll Band" plays like a naïve Hollywood biopic about "making it," with an overdubbed arena crowd cheering. To me, it perfectly sums up Boston: They can be performers and rock fans simultaneously.

If Tom Scholz were a pal, I might ask him to come over and help me paint. I'd say, "Hey, Tom, come over Sunday morning around 9 a.m. It's a small bathroom, and we should be done by 12 noon at the latest." But Tom wouldn't stop. He'd paint the bathroom, the bedroom, the kitchen and the living room, and on Monday at 5 a.m. Tom would be painting the outside of the house. I'd shout to him, "I just wanted the bathroom painted and planned for the outside to be yellow. But, man, this looks terrific!"

Boston was a great band, and to my ears they played like they truly loved what they did, while feeling lucky to be doing it. Their first record is a study in craftsmanship that emanates the joy of being human. 

**THE DOWNSIDE TO BOSTON
MIGHT BE ITS PERFECTION,
BUT THAT'S WHAT MAKES
IT PERFECTLY WONDERFUL**

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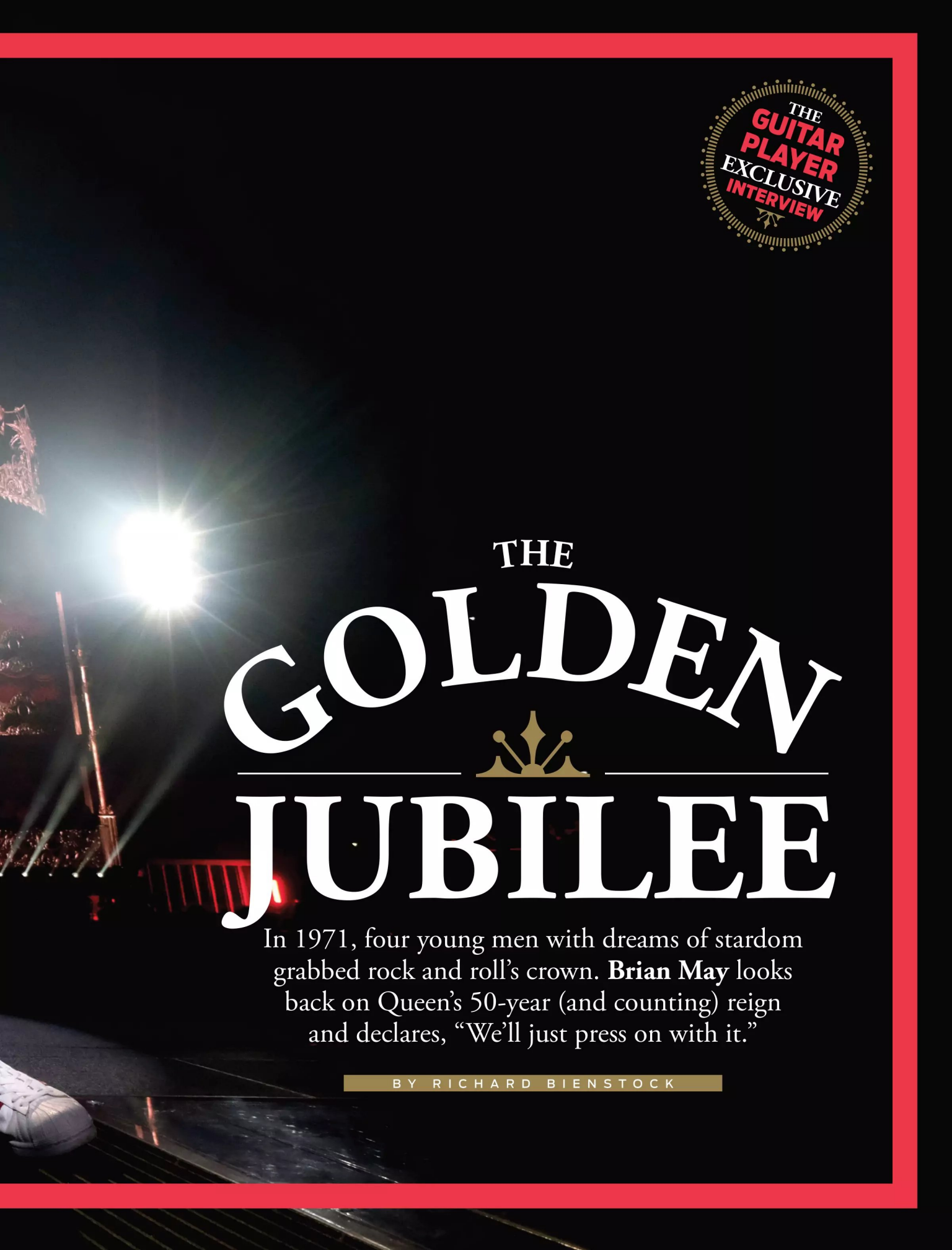
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THE GOLDEN JUBILEE

In 1971, four young men with dreams of stardom grabbed rock and roll's crown. **Brian May** looks back on Queen's 50-year (and counting) reign and declares, "We'll just press on with it."

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK



BRIAN MAY DOESN'T recall particulars about every Queen show. But there is one — almost 50 years ago at London's Imperial College, where the guitarist had previously studied physics as an undergrad — that sticks with him.

Why? For one, it was Queen's first gig to be reviewed in a newspaper — and if you're wondering, yes, it was a positive write-up. For another, because, in the 73-year-old guitarist's words, "We had our full complement — we knew we finally had the right people in the band." These people, of course, were drummer Roger Taylor, with whom May had previously played in the late-'60s rock-pop-blues-progressive outfit Smile, Zanzibar-born singer Farrokh Bulsara, who by that time was answering to the name Freddie Mercury, and fresh-faced bassist John Deacon. "So that was a big deal, for starters," May says.

But beyond the good reviews and winning combination of players onstage, May also recalls that performance being a standout thanks to the audience's reaction.

"We had our first album coming out, and it felt like, for the first time, people knew what to expect from us," he says. "The effect was phenomenal, because instead of going onstage and trying to persuade people that they might like what we do, we went onstage to a crowd of people who knew our music and wanted it. And they were giving us the energy to propel us to make those sounds that they'd cottoned on to."

"The feeling was incredible — it was like having your finger in a dam and a little trickle of water is coming out, and then suddenly the whole thing breaks down and you have this great, wonderful flood of energy."

Today, Queen may not look quite the same — Mercury passed away from AIDS-related complications in 1991, and Deacon retired from music toward the end of that decade. But that flood of energy persists, with May and Taylor continuing to rock arenas the world over with current singer Adam Lambert. Lest there be any doubt, 50 years after Deacon joined the band, in March 1971 — thus cementing the "full complement," as it were — Queen remain as resonant, beloved and popular as ever. The 2018 film *Bohemian Rhapsody* smashed box office records to become the all-time highest-grossing music biopic, with worldwide receipts of nearly \$1 billion and a quartet of Academy Awards to its name.

As for the music? Using just one metric, Spotify, as an example, "Bohemian Rhapsody" has racked up close to a billion and a half streams on its way to becoming the most-listened-to classic-rock song on the service, but Queen's next four top-streamed tracks — "Don't Stop Me Now," "Another One Bites the Dust," "Under Pressure" and "We Will Rock You" — all handily dwarf the numbers of anything by the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones and many of their other rock-legend peers.

It's a "phenomenon," as May puts it, and one that seemingly has no end. As for how he explains it? Despite Queen's much venerated flair for grand and wildly dramatic musical gestures, "our songs were never elitist," May says. "At their core, they were songs about the joys and the sorrows and the pain that every man, woman and child feels. They express the extreme emotions of non-extreme people — people that think they're ordinary. And I think that's why they have aligned with listeners."

In honor of Queen's 50th anniversary, May sat down with *Guitar Player* to look back on some of these songs, as well as recall key moments (the recording of their 1973 self-titled debut; their eye-opening 1974 tour with Mott the Hoople) and the various components — including his legendary Red Special guitar, homemade amps and modded pedals — that have been crucial to the band's development.

But even with so much history behind him, May is still firmly focused on the present. Late 2020 saw the release of the Queen + Adam Lambert concert document *Live Around the World*, which compiled performances from the group's past six years on tour, and the

plan going forward — pandemic permitting, of course — is to continue that around-the-globe jaunt once the world is safe for arena-sized pomp-rock spectacles again.

So May is quick to say that while the golden anniversary is a nice milestone, it presents at least two of the band's members with a dilemma. "Roger and I asked, 'Do we really want to be celebrating the fact that we've been here for 50 years?'" May says, and laughs. "Instead, we decided, 'Why don't we just celebrate the fact that we're here, that we're still alive and, potentially, still performing.'"

The show, as a great British rock band once sang, must go on.

"The past is there, but why get all nostalgic?" May reasons. "We'll just press on with it."

**"I COULD HEAR THE SOUND
IN MY HEAD, BUT I COULDN'T GET
IT UNTIL I WENT TO THE MARQUEE
CLUB ON WARDOUR STREET
AND SAW RORY GALLAGHER"**

Queen
rehearse for
their first
major tour,
July 8, 1973.
(from left)
John Deacon,
Freddie
Mercury,
Roger Taylor
and Brian May

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



The characteristic Queen sound is a complex thing. But it's all there — if perhaps in somewhat embryonic form — right at the beginning, on your 1973 self-titled debut. From the

harmonized guitars to the stacked vocals to the epic compositions, you were already enacting some fairly advanced ideas, both musically and technologically.

You're right, yeah. It was all bottled up in our heads and unable to get out. And even with the first album, it was a hard job getting it out because we were doing that record in little bits and pieces of time. The people at the studio [*Trident Studios in London*] gave us the crumbs from the table. We would work during the cancellations or at three o'clock in the morning: "Come on boys, do a couple of hours!" So although we had the run of a good studio, we didn't really have the opportunity to flex our muscles until the second album, when we actually had studio time booked.

But yeah, it was all there. We dreamed of these big vocal harmonies and guitar harmonies and we were reaching into a place where we could visualize that. Also, we were inspired by what was around us. Nobody creates in a vacuum. So we were looking at bands like the Who. And I remember going to see [*Scottish pop group*] Marmalade at a local gig in Twickenham and hearing those amazing harmonies with the guitar behind it and thinking, How far could you take that? What would it sound like if you went to an entirely new place with it? And we were ready to do that. We just needed to

get the canvas to paint on and a decent amount of colors to use.

You didn't have much studio experience as individuals or as a band, and yet you were able to realize these big, layered productions — "Liar," "My Fairy King," "Keep Yourself Alive" — right off the bat. How?

We had some good help. We had [*producer*] Roy Thomas Baker, who was the technical rock that we could bounce off of. Roy was a very different person in those days. He was highly technical, but not very interested in the art, if you like. But we had the art. We knew what we wanted it to sound like. We just needed someone who could make it happen. Roy was very good at doing that. Also, we had our textbooks — we had the Beatles, we had Jimi Hendrix. We immersed ourselves in those records and figured out how the studio was being used, how those toys were being brought to bear and how they were employed as an augmentative factor in the songwriting. And, of course, we came along a little bit later, and so instead of 16 tracks we had 24 tracks, and then 48 tracks. We had better compressors, limiters — you name it. We were there, waiting to get our hands on every new toy.

By the same token, your guitar approach is more or less fully formed on *Queen*. On the very first song, "Keep Yourself Alive," we're introduced to the Brian May sound and style that we would hear for the next five decades.

I played then not very differently from the way I play now, I think. I suppose there was this kind of

immersion in what we wanted to be, and you can see it in Freddie as well — all of Freddie's amazing range and power and range of emotions was there, too. It just needed a chance to get out and be polished.

As for my guitar, I could hear the sound in my head, but I couldn't get it until I went to the Marquee Club on Wardour Street [*in London*] and saw Rory Gallagher. My mates and I used to go every Thursday, I think it was, to the Marquee to see Rory, and one night at the end of the show we hid away while everyone was being taken out of the place. Then we snuck out and talked to Rory. We were just boys, but he was so polite and gentle, like, "Yeah, I'll show you how I do this." So I said, "Well, what is your sound?" He told me, "It's very simple. It's just this guitar, this

An authorized replica of May's Deacy amp created by Knight Audio Technologies. The original was built by bassist John Deacon circa 1972 from parts found in a dumpster and incorporated into a hi-fi speaker cabinet.





beautiful amp” — which was a Vox AC30 — “and this little box here between the two,” which was a [Dallas] Rangemaster [treble booster]. And so I went out and got an AC30, got a Rangemaster, and plugged my own homemade guitar [the Red Special] into it.

And glory be, the sound was there! It sang. I had always wanted it to sing, because I wanted it to be my voice. And it sang from that moment on. It hasn’t really changed in all these years. It’s slightly polished up, but it’s the same thing.

The Red Special, of course, is today one of the most famous guitar designs in rock history. But back then it was just something you and your father had built together in the early 1960s. Add in the fact that you prefer a sixpence for a pick, and that, while you had a Vox and a Rangemaster, you would also occasionally record with a rudimentary amplifier — the “Deacy” — that John Deacon built from parts he found in a dumpster. It’s amazing to think that, given the elegance and high production value of a Queen song, you were using a fair amount of homemade gear.

Well, you know, you don’t need to spend a fortune on gear — you just need to know what you want and beaver away until you get it. And Queen songs, I mean, they are big productions, but I think we were also very conscious that the production wasn’t us

— the songs were. We were about conveying emotion and making contact with people.

One of your first major tours, in support of 1974’s *Queen II*, was as the support act for Mott the Hoople. It was also your first time in America as well. What was that experience like?

It was mind-blowing. I mean, we were kids. We’d never done any of this stuff. We’d spent most of our youth at home dreaming of what it might be like to travel and play music, but what happened was way beyond anything that we could have imagined. And Mott the Hoople were the perfect people to go out with because they were the model of how a rock band can be on tour. I remember when somebody told us we were going out in support of Mott, I thought, Eh, they’re not bad, I suppose. I didn’t think of them the way I thought of the Who or Led Zeppelin. But once we went out with them and we were

able to see what happened every night and every day, it was like a master class. Those guys knew how to communicate with their audience. And they knew how to enjoy themselves without being in any way destructive to anyone. They lived the life to the full. We learned a lot every day.

Now, the other thing that was happening on that tour is that people were actually responding to us, which nobody really had anticipated. People started to

May’s 1963 AC30 and original Dallas Rangemaster


**“YOU DON’T NEED
TO SPEND A FORTUNE
ON GEAR. YOU JUST
NEED TO KNOW
WHAT YOU WANT AND
BEAVER AWAY UNTIL
YOU GET IT”**



PLAYERS

LIGHT DUTY

Brian May's solo catalog returns, one album at a time, starting with *Back to the Light*.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK



IN 1992, BRIAN MAY set out on his own with his debut solo album, *Back to the Light*. Released less than a year after Freddie Mercury's death, the album was a welcome gift to Queen fans, and May did not disappoint, delivering a strong set of tracks that included the Top 10 hits "Too Much Love Will Kill You" and "Driven By You." Out of print for several years, *Back to the Light* will return soon in an

expanded reissue overseen by Brian. "I'm working night and day right now to bring back this album," he says. "It's quite tricky under lockdown — but it will soon be ready — all remastered and polished and with a nice little package of bonus tracks."

You've spent part of lockdown working on the reissue of your 1992 debut solo album, *Back to the Light*. How is that coming along?

Yeah, that's my new thing and I'm very excited about it. The first idea was, "Should I do a box set?" Because my solo stuff isn't out there — it's all been deleted and I don't have a record contract. But then

I thought, Why don't I tackle one project at a time? So I'm starting with *Back to the Light*. We've unearthed a few outtakes and bits and pieces, and I'm writing some new retrospective liner notes. And we remastered it to make it what it needs to be in the 21st century. And it's really produced a big effect in me. I find

myself getting very emotional listening to that stuff because I put my heart and soul into it at the time. Also, I sang on it. I never became the greatest singer in the world, but I did get good enough to express the emotions I was feeling at the time.

In addition to handling vocals on the album, you went out on tour and sang these songs onstage. Did assuming the role of frontman give you a renewed appreciation for Freddie and what it means to be the guy everyone's eyes are focused on, in particular, seeing as this album was

released soon after his passing?

It did. It was heaven and hell, but mainly hell because I never felt I was good enough. But it was also heavenly because I had the chance to be out there and just be me and express myself. There's an enormous amount of grieving in my solo career, because, first of all, I'm grieving

for Freddie. And then I was also grieving for Queen. I was determined not to look back and not to be defined by the band. I was out there being Brian May of the Brian May Band, and people would ask me about Queen and I would say, "No, I don't want to talk about Queen. That was then and this is now." But you know, it's like, "He doth protest too much." Because I was part of Queen, and I had to go back in and reappraise that at some point.

But singing was tough, and eventually I gave it up. I realized I would rather play alongside someone else who was singing. And luckily that happened. Roger and I got back together with Paul Rodgers, and we went and did some stuff. And then we found this precocious boy named Adam, and Adam was able to do things that... well, he's able to do anything we throw at him! So that's been an extraordinary voyage of rediscovery and re-interpretation. We've been lucky. I've been lucky. And I no longer want to be that frontman. I did it for a while, and there were some great rewards. But I prefer to play my guitar, honestly.



Onstage in the Netherlands, November 1980

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

turn up to the shows dressed how we had started to dress — in the white theatrical costumes and things. And people of all sexes turned up being very proud of who they were. It felt like a very liberated audience that came to see us, and that in turn allowed us to go out there and learn how to be ourselves. America taught us how to be rock stars, without a doubt. Mott did, too. That's a big thing to say, but I think it's true.

On that tour you also experienced severe health issues — you were diagnosed with hepatitis, and you collapsed in New York and had to be rushed back home to Britain. Is it true that you were worried you would be sacked from the band?

Oh, yeah. I also thought I might not pull through at one point. It was pretty serious. I had a very serious condition of the duodenum, and it was by no means certain I would pull through. Then when I had an operation, it seemed like a very slow recovery, and I thought, Maybe the band needs to move on. But Freddie came to the hospital and said, "Don't worry, darling, we're waiting for you." And then they brought stuff in to play for me, including "Killer Queen." And I got very critical, being the arrogant person I am. I went, "Yeah, but this is too harsh. You need to redo it." And Freddie said, "Okay, we'll redo it when you come out." And we did.

You said that to him from your hospital bed?

I did. But then they also tried to make me laugh. Because that was one the thing I couldn't do, recovering from the massive stuff I was recovering from. So it was kind of funny. But not funny for me. It was painful.

You wrote the song "Now I'm Here" [from 1974's *Sheer Heart Attack*] about that whole experience — the Mott tour, going to America.

Yes, I did. That song describes the experience of that first tour better than I can do it in words. It's the feeling of, I think, this kind of Technicolor romp through a new kind of space, a new universe. It was an amazing time for us.

That album kicks off with "Brighton Rock," which features an extended guitar break that replicates a portion of your unaccompanied solo spot from the *Queen II* tour. That's a rather unorthodox move, and maybe every guitar player's dream — putting your live solo spot into a studio recording. [laughs] Well, Van Halen did it, a little bit later.

Sure, but "Eruption" was sort of its own thing, rather than something fully inserted into the middle of what is otherwise, relatively speaking, a straightforward rock song.

Again, it was ideas locked up in a bottle waiting to get out. And that whole solo came together live, really. I had wanted to be able to do guitar harmonies onstage, and I thought, How do we do that? So I did it with delay, taking an Echoplex apart and building a new box with a longer rail and more tape to make a longer delay time.

And then I thought, Well, if I have another delay, then I can do three-part harmonies, which are always much better than two-part harmonies... So I built another one. And that of course opens the door to all this other stuff, because you're essentially playing a kind of fugue with yourself. So by the time we got to making the *Sheer Heart Attack* record, I had been playing the solo live, so it wasn't that difficult for me to go into a version that could be in that song. But it didn't start off in that song. It started off in "Son and Daughter" [from *Queen*] I think, on the first tour. But it just seemed to work better in what was then a new song, "Brighton Rock."

You mentioned Van Halen, which brings to mind one of my favorite solos of yours, from "It's Late" [from 1977's *News of the World*]. You do some two-handed

tapping in that, about six months before "Eruption" was released.

Yeah, I picked it up from... I wish I knew who it was that I saw. I went into a bar in Texas when we were on tour, and I saw this guy playing. And he would be bending strings, like we all do, but then he'd put his right hand onto a fret and make this kind of singing sound. And I thought, Oh, that's a beautiful thing to do; he creates a completely new dimension. I went up to him after the show and I said, "I'm telling you now, I'm going to nick that from you." He said, "Great, go for it." I asked him,

"How did you figure out how to do that?" And he told me, "I got it from Billy Gibbons." Now, I ought to talk to Billy about it, because I can't put my finger on the piece where Billy did it. But somewhere in the murky past, somebody thought up that technique.



Onstage at Ahoy, in Rotterdam, January 29, 1979


"MOTT THE HOOPLE WERE PERFECT TO GO OUT WITH BECAUSE THEY WERE THE MODEL OF HOW A ROCK BAND CAN BE ON TOUR. IT WAS LIKE A MASTER CLASS"



**Onstage with
his Ovation
Pacemaker
1615 12-string
at the Oakland
Coliseum
in 1977**



Did you ever talk to Eddie about it?

I did talk to Eddie about it, and he said, “Yeah, I copped that.” [laughs] But I think he was already onto it. Strangely enough though, I recently came across a live recording of Van Halen doing “Now I’m Here.” It’s great. They’re sort of doing us. And I think the blurb that went along with it online said something like, “Edward hadn’t developed his style yet.” But I don’t agree. You listen to what he was doing and he’s already him. He’s already doing his own thing. But he’s doing it on my song, which makes me very happy.

Those early Van Halen live recordings and demos are available online, and I would agree with you — he sounds exactly like the Eddie we all know and love.

Oh yeah, genius. He was genius from birth, I think. And he’s no longer around, which is so painful, so hard. I just wish he was here.

Looking at Queen’s career more broadly, one thing that I’ve always felt sets the band apart is the diversity of the music. For some people, “Bohemian Rhapsody” is the defining Queen song. For others it might be “We Will Rock You” or “Killer Queen” or “Another One Bites the Dust.” And yet, each tune could be the work of an entirely different group in terms of sound and style. How were you able to shapeshift so expertly while at the same time

maintaining a distinct “Queen-ness”?

Probably because we had four writers competing for rotation. We had a collective vision, but we also had visions which were uniquely personal. Also, there was a realization at a certain point that we could do anything we like. We could explore any frontier. And we’re lucky that we have an audience that has allowed us to do that. They didn’t want to put us in a box.

So the writing is a big part, but there were some points where we would question it, particularly with Roger and John, who were at opposite ends of the spectrum. John was very much leaning toward funk from the beginning, whereas Roger was leaning toward the more extreme end of rock and roll. And it was questionable sometimes whether that could all be contained under the umbrella of what Queen is. But somehow we were able to do it. And somehow it all counted, and all became part of us.

To that point, it’s amazing how “what Queen is” continues to be redefined. For example, “Don’t Stop Me Now” [from 1978’s *Jazz*] was not a huge hit, and yet it has become one of your most popular songs, with close to a billion listens on Spotify.

It’s a phenomenon, that song. I’ve seen it played at all sorts of functions. It’s become the most requested song at hen parties and stag parties and marriages and weddings and funerals, just because it brings joy. And I think this is well known, but I didn’t really take to it in the beginning. I didn’t feel totally comfortable with what Freddie was singing at the time. I found it a little bit too flippant in view of the dangers out there of AIDS and stuff. But as time went on, I began to realize that it gave people great joy. So I don’t think you need to look any further than that. And I think that’s what Freddie had the amazing knack of doing. He could put his button on things that make people feel a bit more alive.

So I don’t have any quarrel with it now. And I enjoy playing it onstage. I just put a little bit of extra rock in it, ‘cause that’s the way I am. You can hear it on our new album, *Live Around the World*, and the audience is so loud singing along that it was hard to even mix it. But it’s wonderful that everybody wants to sing that. And in singing it with us, they express their own joy and their own determination to make the best out of their lives, and to keep on and not get knocked down by things. It’s an amazing kind of spiritual lift. That’s what the song has become.

It’s remarkable that a song you once viewed as dangerous has become, interpreted through the lens of your audience decades later, a life-affirming statement.

You know, I had to give in. [laughs] It’s a great song — there’s no getting around it. It moves people, makes them smile and jump up. What more could you ask for?



**“I DID TALK TO EDDIE
ABOUT IT AND HE SAID,
‘YEAH, I COPPED THAT.’
BUT I THINK HE WAS
ALREADY ONTO IT”**

up. But up to this point we haven’t felt that anything we’ve done has hit the button in the right way. So it’s not like we’re closed to the idea, it’s just that it hasn’t happened yet. And to be honest, life has now taken a turn in which it’s very difficult to explore an avenue like that. Things may change, but I don’t think they’re going to change very fast.

I know you get asked this a lot, but could you ever see a new Queen record happening?

I always say, “I don’t know.” It would have to be a very spontaneous moment. Actually, Adam, Roger and myself have been in the studio trying things out, just because things came



Arielle with the BMG Arielle, based on her homemade Two-Tone guitar

KILLER QUEEN

Arielle arrives with a retro-leaning debut album and a signature axe made in collaboration with Brian May Guitars.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

APPARENTLY, NO ONE told Arielle it's difficult to come up with something unique in the world of rock guitar. For years now, the singer-songwriter and six-stringer has followed her own singular path in the music universe, from appearing in the London stage production of Queen's *We Will Rock You* musical to working with artists like Nuno Bettencourt, Eric Clapton and Vince Gill. And it's all culminated in the release of her brand-new solo record, *Analog Girl in a Digital World*, as well as her signature guitar, the Arielle, a uniquely designed offset that represents Brian May Guitars' first foray into a model that's not the Red Special.

The guitar represents a full-circle moment for Arielle, given that it was Queen, and Brian May, that led her to the instrument. "When I was six years old, I was living in Northern California, and a babysitter showed me a video of *Live at Wembley*," she recalls. "I saw the band, and I saw this guy with cool hair and a neat guitar, making cool poses, and it moved me to where I needed to be a guitarist, and that needed to be my life. I had to be like him."

By the age of 10, Arielle was playing guitar and graduated high school early in order to attend Musicians Institute in L.A. It was during this time, in 2007, that she befriended May while he was out promoting his astrophysics book, *Bang! The Complete History of the Universe*, in Hollywood. Arielle went to a book signing and brought along her guitar, a homemade creation (much like May's Red Special) named Two-Tone. "We started talking and connected pretty quickly, and we became pen pals," Arielle says.

She would occasionally send May videos of her performing. "He told me, 'That's really good — you should audition for my musical.' So at 18, I got a visa, packed a suitcase and a couple of guitars, moved to England and landed a spot in *We Will Rock You*."

Afterward, Arielle came back to the U.S. and launched her own career in earnest. Bettencourt, she said, "took me under his wing for a while,"

producing songs and helping her land her first record deal. From there she moved to Nashville, was mentored by Vince Gill, and toured and worked with Clapton, Gregg Allman, Graham Nash, Heart, Joan Jett and others.

Despite her talent for six-string shapeshifting, at heart Arielle is her own artist, as exemplified on *Analog Girl in a Digital World*. The new effort is rooted in her love for '60s and '70s rock, but with a fresh and decidedly modern approach. She cut half of the album's songs in analog and half in digital, with the basic tracks recorded live, in single takes. The result is a record that runs the gamut from straight-up classic rock ("You're Still a Man"), sparkling power-pop ("Digital World") and Byrds-like jangle (the first single, "Peace of Mind") to intimate, acoustic folk ("Living in a Fortress"), slow-burning balladry ("Inside & Outside") and wild, Queen-like guitar freak-outs ("I'd Rather Be in England"), all of it informed by Arielle's distinctive songwriting and guitar perspective.

Much of that perspective comes courtesy of her original Two-Tone, as well as a prototype of the new BMG Arielle. She was inspired to build her own guitar after learning how May had constructed his Red Special as a teenager. When fans asked where they could buy one, she and a friend decided to build a few per month, by hand.

"That's when Brian suggested, 'Why doesn't Brian May Guitars do it?'" she recalls.

The result is a true collaboration. While the new Arielle features the Two-Tone's body shape, color scheme and other elements, it also boasts a very

Red Special-like headstock, pickup set and switching system. "We changed a few specs, but I think overall the really relevant features have stayed the same," Arielle says. "It's not called Two-Tone because it's not a replica of my original guitar. It's its own thing."

"I NEEDED TO BE A GUITAR PLAYER AND THAT NEEDED TO BE MY LIFE. I HAD TO BE LIKE HIM"



PLAYERS

GUARANTEED TO BLOW YOUR MIND

Here are 10 Queen songs you never hear on the radio... but should.



GOIN' BACK (LARRY LUREX SINGLE, 1973)

The artist name on the single was Larry Lurex, but this languid cover of a Carole King classic was really a pre-fame Freddie

Mercury, Brian May and Roger Taylor doing a favor for Trident Studios' house engineer Robin Geoffrey Cable. If Phil Spector had produced Queen, it would have sounded like this.



MY FAIRY KING (QUEEN, 1973)

The cogs of Freddie Mercury's musical imagination were working overtime even on their first album. A multi-part mini-epic arriving in a swirl of

leather, chiffon and black nail polish, "My Fairy King" kicked off the journey that eventually culminated in "Bohemian Rhapsody."



SOME DAY ONE DAY (QUEEN II, 1974)

Queen veered close to prog on their second album, but Brian May's otherworldly semi-ballad took off somewhere else entirely. Hazy and unknowable,

they never sounded like this again.



TENEMENT FUNSTER (SHEER HEART ATTACK, 1974)

Queen's third album was an entire musical universe in itself. Amid the dandy pop, playful ragtime and proto-thrash

metal aggro was Roger Taylor's love letter to the aspirational power of rock and roll.



THE PROPHET'S SONG (A NIGHT AT THE OPERA, 1975)

"Bohemian Rhapsody" grabbed the headlines, and just about everything else, but Brian May's eight-minute epic is

no less ambitious or insane, not least in the fever-dream chorale at its center. It kicks back in with a killer riff, too.



"ONE OF THE GREAT QUEEN TRACKS: SIX MINUTES OF ESCALATING SEXUAL TENSION SET TO A BLOCKBUSTING BRIAN MAY RIFF"



DROWSE (A DAY AT THE RACES, 1976)

No member of Queen seemed as happy in their own skin as Roger Taylor, and "Drowse" reflected that. This was the

drummer as an old man looking back at his younger self and saying, "Wasn't it brilliant?"



IT'S LATE (NEWS OF THE WORLD, 1977)

One of the great Queen tracks: six minutes of escalating sexual tension set to a blockbusting Brian May riff, it builds and

builds before exploding in a big sweaty mess. When it's done you'll be reaching for a smoke.



Queen onstage during the *News of the World* tour, circa 1978



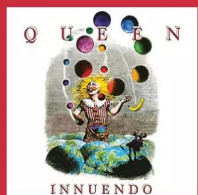
RB/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGE



PRINCES OF THE UNIVERSE (A KIND OF MAGIC, 1986)

Part of the soundtrack to cult classic *Highlander*, this sword-swinging monster

sees May and Taylor cranking up the volume and having a blast doing it — although not as much as Mercury when he hollers “Bring on the girls!” with his tongue jammed firmly in his cheek.



RIDE THE WILD WIND (INNUENDO, 1991)

It's hard not to view Queen's swan song through the prism of impending mortality.

“Ride the Wild Wind” pulses with lust-for-life romance,

but a current of sadness swirls beneath it. The line “Gonna leave it all behind, get out of the rat race” is defiant and heartbreaking.



TIME TO SHINE (THE COSMOS ROCKS, 2000)

May and Taylor's union with Paul Rodgers worked better when they weren't trying to sound like Queen, as this

soaring highlight from their sole album together proves. It makes you wonder what would have happened if they'd stuck it out.



FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

Until you can play your guitar on a stage again, you've kept yourself busy on social media. Over the past year I've watched you give lessons on how to play the “Bohemian Rhapsody” solo, perform virtually with guitarists like Nuno Bettencourt and Zakk Wylde and also jam with Queen fans around the world. I've even seen you take part in a TikTok challenge. You've been visible in a way that I imagine is very heartening to your fans. And you also seem incredibly comfortable operating in the online world.

Well, I'm a performer, and performers are all struggling to be heard, aren't they? And in this new situation that we're in now, the only way to be heard is on the social media sites. And so Instagram has become a little platform for me to play on. I don't get instant applause, but I get a lot of response in the comments, and I get people actually participating. People take up the challenge of jamming along with me, and then they put it out there so I can see it. It's very interactive. So it's great. Sometimes I look at it and I think, Yeah, that's become what I do.

After 50 years, that's sort of a wild place to wind up.

It is. Now, I do other things as well. I'm pretty deeply into science, as you probably know. I'm working on various different projects with different NASA teams, and I'm editing a new book on the birth of stereoscopy. So it's not like I'm stuck for things to do with my time. Also, I had real physical problems last year. I had a long period of being out of action because of a heart attack, and various weeks of repercussions that came after that.

But at the heart of it, I'm a musician and I need to play. And in a sense, I suppose, I need to see people's faces. I need to feel that I can get a response and do the thing that musicians do, which is communicate. Right now, the only thing that is different is in the way we do it. But other than that, it never changes. ■

Onstage at
The Forum,
Inglewood,
California, July
19, 2019



“I SAID, ‘TAKE IT DOWN AN OCTAVE. MAKE IT GRUNGY.’ THAT AND THE BRASS PUNCHED THE BOND FILMS TO SUCCESS”

License to THRILL

BY MARTIN McQUADE

As the guitarist behind “The James Bond Theme,” **Vic Flick** has left an indelible mark on pop culture. But he also had brushes with Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton and the Beatles, to name a few.

ANY HISTORY OF the British Invasion would be incomplete without recognition of Vic Flick, a guitarist whose name has as much sizzle as his playing. Flick made a splash on the London scene with the Bob Cort Skiffle, drawing the attention of arranger/composer John Barry, who hired him in 1958. By 1960, the John Barry Seven had amassed fans via *Juke Box Jury*, and Flick’s 1961 composition “Zapata” was a hit for the septet. While arranging 1962’s “The James Bond Theme” for *Dr. No*, the first film in the spy-thriller series, Barry incorporated a motif utilizing the raw wallop of Flick’s Clifford Essex Paragon. With one electrifying riff, a decade came alive.

Flick was a prolific session guitarist, working alongside Jimmy Page, Big Jim Sullivan and Eric Clapton, with whom he recorded the unused (and since lost)

theme to the 1989 Bond film *License to Kill*. Sir George Martin frequently enlisted him as well — that’s Flick’s Fender Strat underscoring the instrumental “Ringo’s Theme (This Boy)” in *A Hard Day’s Night* — and his 12-string accents can be heard on Peter and Gordon’s “A World Without Love.” For that matter, Flick made himself indispensable on recordings for Tom Jones, Cliff Richard, Dusty Springfield, Shirley Bassey, Petula Clark and Herman’s Hermits, to name a few.

His 2014 memoir, *Vic Flick, Guitarman: From James Bond to the Beatles and Beyond*, chronicles a career that merited the National Guitar Museum’s 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award. The honor cites Flick’s “contribution to the history of the guitar,” aspects of which he reflected upon recently when he took time to chat with *Guitar Player* about his years in the business.



Vic Flick plays the circa-1950 Clifford Essex Paragon De Luxe used on "The James Bond Theme."



How did you start playing guitar?

My father taught music. I played piano at seven. After attending a dance, my dad got upset because the band was bad, so he decided to form his own. He played piano, neighbors played saxophone and drums, and my brother played bass. That left me nothing to play until a neighbor provided a Gibson Kalamazoo, a small-bodied acoustic guitar. I practiced until my fingers bled. I developed listening to Tal Farlow, Les Paul, Freddie Green and Charlie Christian. Being able to read music opened doors, but back then you couldn't hear the guitar, so I found a tank commander's throat mike and strapped it on the guitar's machine head. I played it through the big speaker of my father's radio. Later, I met a bassist who introduced me to Bob Cort and his skiffle group. His guitarist was leaving, and I passed the audition with flying colors. That's how I entered the guitar-playing world.

What led to you joining John Barry?

Bob Cort's Skiffle shared the bill on Paul Anka's first European tour, and the JB7 accompanied Anka. That's how I met John Barry. He could see I could play. Six months later, he asked me to join.

How did you come to play on "The James Bond Theme"?

Peter Hunt, the Bond films' music editor, told the producers that Monty Norman's original theme didn't represent the film. Peter had seen a 1960 Adam Faith film, *Beat Girl*, whose music J.B. composed and performed, and which heavily featured my guitar. Based on that, Peter recommended J.B.

The piece of music we recorded, which J.B. arranged, was something Norman had first recorded in Jamaica, and it featured bongos. It didn't have a whack to it. He dug it from his piano stool. J.B. played it for me and asked, "What do you think?" I said, "Take it down an octave. Make it grungy like *Beat Girl*. Get that sound going." That and the brass punched the Bond films to success.



Flick (second from right) with the John Barry Seven, April 3, 1959.

What guitar and amplifier did you use?

Some hooligans stole my Strat after a gig in North London. At the time of the Bond recording, the only other guitar I had was the Clifford Essex Paragon, a cello *f*-hole acoustic. This guitar was manufactured in London. Diz Disley, a wonderful guitarist, was experiencing hard times in 1961 and sold it to me. I used that to record the theme. The recorded sound was due to the plectrum I used and the guitar's strings. I placed the DeArmond pickup near the bridge. I put a crushed cigarette packet underneath it to get it nearer the strings. That helped to get that round sound.

Most important, sound wise, was the Vox AC15 amplifier. I used it on tour. It wouldn't let me down — until it fell eight feet into a music pit and disintegrated. Also important was the way the guitar was recorded. It was picked up by the mics for the orchestra, and it gave the guitar a mysterious, powerful sound. It was a sound we created, to a certain extent, and it had a bite that they loved. It was all go, go, from then on. The first few Bond films were recorded at Cine-Tele Sound Studios [commonly known as CTS Studios].

Did *Dr. No*'s success surprise you?

Yes. The producers were on their last penny and didn't know whether they'd be able to pay the band. At first, cinemas weren't taking it. Suddenly word spread, and bingo! It took off like a rocket. It was a chance for J.B. to show what he could do with film music.

What were your subsequent James Bond films?

I did about six, with a couple of different composers. They kind of went orchestral; they didn't feature guitar so much.

I used about three Strats, a Gibson Les Paul and an L-7C, which later a good engineer electrified for me.

"SOME HOOLIGANS STOLE MY STRAT. AT THE TIME OF BOND, THE ONLY OTHER GUITAR I HAD WAS THE CLIFFORD ESSEX PARAGON"

Did you play on Shirley Bassey's *Goldfinger* theme?

Yes. There was a funny moment when J.B. told her, "That last note isn't long

enough. You've got to keep going on it." So Shirley slipped behind a studio partition, took her bra off and threw it over the top of the partition. She said, "Okay, let's take this last note again."

Describe John Barry's style.

Thinly orchestral. He'd have a melody played on one instrument, then two or

three others would come in. Now there's so much film music with nothing to do with what's onscreen.

Did you ever meet Sean Connery?

Connery only came to the studio once. He seemed very quiet and sat in the corner of the control room. I never got to know him. I once had a few beers with Timothy Dalton [*who played 007 from 1987 to 1989*]. In 1989, I did *License to Kill* with him, a film in which the music wasn't used.

Was that your elusive recording with Eric Clapton?

Yes. A guy called me from the studios in South London to do a couple of hours work on the title. When I arrived, there were a few guys with suits. I said, "What the hell is all this about?" There was also Eric Clapton and conductor/composer Michael Kamen. We video-recorded it twice in an apartment on the River Thames. It had quite an impact, with drums, bass, percussionists, Clapton and me. It was a good, basic guitar thing. After we finished, one of the suits said, "We'd like to sign you up to be a featured soloist." Off they went back to America with their briefcases. I waited and waited. I eventually phoned: "What's happening about my being a star?" Kamen said, "Sorry Vic. That's all off. You're not going to believe this. Gladys Knight and the Pips are doing it." Nobody else has heard our recording. It's something everybody's been searching for. The two cassettes have disappeared. That would be like finding the Holy Grail.

Does Peter and Gordon's "A World Without Love" feature your 12-string?

I had a 12-string acoustic and a 12-string electric — the Vox 12-string guitar that they put on the market, which I hated. I used that on "A World Without Love." There was a phase when the 12-string guitar appeared on everything. It became tiresome if you played the 12-string guitar six hours daily.

What was your relationship with the late George Martin?



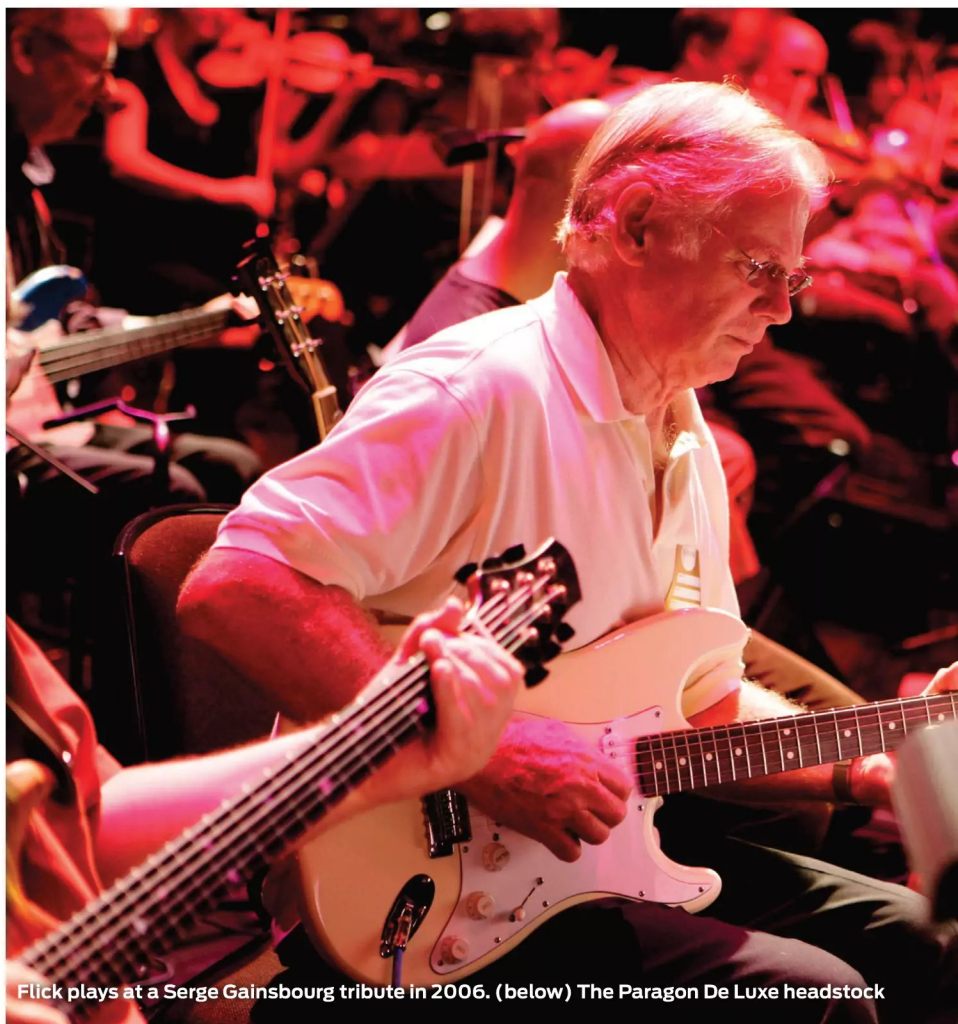
Flick's 1961 Fender Stratocaster, used on "Ringo's Theme (This Boy)," Shirley Bassey's "Goldfinger" Petula Clark's "Downtown" and Tom Jones' "It's Not Unusual," among others. Originally finished in Olympic White, it was repainted non-factory white and the three-way pickup selector swapped for a five-way switch.



I knew Sir George when he was working at Abbey Road EMI. He had a bit of an attitude, a bit of, “I say, old chap, come on.” He’d ask the fixers, or contractors, to line up session musicians. We got on well together except once. I heard George being interviewed on the radio. There was controversy about session musicians doing the music part for successful groups like Peter and Gordon. George said, “Yes, and there’s some other trouble with session musicians. They don’t think. They’ll do something if you tell them. If not, they’ll just play what’s written. Sometimes they’re just more trouble than they’re worth.”

I couldn’t believe it! It wasn’t true at all. Other session guys also disliked it. Nothing was done about the matter until I got a call from a fixer to work on a recording with George. Prior to the session, the other musicians and I agreed to just play exactly what was written, without adding any bits. George put the music in front of us with the usual layered guitar parts and said, “Okay, let’s do it: two, three, four...” So we played exactly what was in front of us. Finally, George said, “Okay, stop. I shouldn’t have said that. I apologize.” It was a little slap on his hand.

He was the last producer to audition the Beatles, and he signed them to Parlophone. He was a good producer, and he sorted them out. At EMI, there was a coffee room. Sometimes we’d say, “Hi” or “How are you doing?” to one another — stuff like that. Mostly, the Beatles kept apart, sitting at the table in the corner, unlike the session guys who would come in and spread themselves all over the place. I did some special pieces, like [the instrumental] “This Boy” theme in *A Hard Day’s*



Flick plays at a Serge Gainsbourg tribute in 2006. (below) The Paragon De Luxe headstock

Night, where I play my Fender Strat when Ringo is walking along the river. And I play elsewhere in that film too.

Were you on other Beatles recordings?

When they were first recording, there were some unidentifiable sessions I was on with George Martin that were more like backing tracks than actual recordings.

I can’t remember more than that, as it was the Beatles’ early days. The Musicians’ Union allowed musicians to record four tracks without a singer, and as many titles as 20 minutes would allow with a singer.

At the end, you don’t really know what you’ve done. You follow instructions, make stuff up and play solos. It’s like film work with just audio cues. You turn over another page, without the film’s name on the music. That was like a factory job, but very good.

What was your involvement with McCartney’s album *Thrillington*? [Released in 1977, *Thrillington* was an instrumental version of McCartney’s 1971 *Ram* solo album.]

I don’t think it was very successful. There were a couple of sessions, one with an orchestra and one with a small group. I joined about five other musicians. We laid about nine tracks. Then Paul had people lay on tracks. Paul didn’t come to the studio. He was in the control room. We went there to listen to some titles. He’s a nice guy.

On the other side of the British pop divide, you worked with Cliff Richard?

I knew Cliff before I recorded with him, when we were both performing at Butlins Holiday Camp in Clacton. He had a little band in the Rock and Calypso Ballroom. He would sit alongside the swimming pool with a guitar, and all the girls would be “oohing” and “aahing.”

You’ve also performed with Engelbert Humperdinck.



MARC BROUSSELY/REDPERNS/GETTY IMAGES

He was on a tour with the JB7 as Jerry Dorsey. His manager said, "We're going to make a star out of you. We'll give you a name and off you'll go." So they called him Engelbert Humperdinck, and it was under that name that we re-recorded his first five hits.

Another legend you've accompanied is Tom Jones. Which guitar did you use on "It's Not Unusual"?

I was on all of Tom's first hits. I probably used a Strat. I usually used a Strat, except on the Bond theme. Maybe I should have stayed on the Clifford Essex. I also had a Martin D-28. A nice guitar. I sold that. I've sold most of my guitars by now.

You sold a Fender Stratocaster on *Pawn Stars*. Tell me about that.

The host was very impressed. I got quite a bit of money for it because of the people I accompanied on it, like Tom, Petula Clark and Nancy Sinatra. I also sold at auction the Bond film guitar. It paid its way. Some people asked, "How

can you sell guitars?" I said, "They're tools." You get attached to them, but that's how it goes.

And what about Jimmy Page?

I worked with Jimmy. He's a nice guy and a great guitarist. He was born around the corner from me in southwest London. Jimmy couldn't read a note of music. I helped him several times with that. I did quite a few recordings with him. A lot of it happened in Decca [Studio] 2, in the basement. That was the place where a classic exchange of words between a musician and a fixer took place. Jimmy and I were sitting next to each other with our guitars. This fixer said, "What's this I hear about you joining a group?" Jim said, "Oh, yes, we've got a tour coming up." He said, "Well, what about these sessions?" Jim said, "I don't know. I'll do them if I can." "Oh," the fixer said, "you're going to live to regret this." Now, of course, Jimmy is sitting in a castle in Scotland worth about 68 million, or something. We usually got paid with money in a little brown envelope. I once asked him, "What are you doing? Putting your money in the bank?" He said, "No. I'm gonna put it under the mattress."

What is your advice to aspiring guitarists?

Don't forget to make every note music. Guitarist Jim Hall said, "I don't know what's happening to the guitar world. Some of these guys sound like there's a lot of notes looking for a tune."

And may I share this to say goodbye to you? Once the Moody Blues were on a television show. I was in the orchestra. Justin Hayward came up to me and said, "Can I shake your hand? If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be here now." Afterward, one of the group said, "He saw you on television several times and said, 'I've got to do what Vic's doing.'" That was nice. ▀



JULIEN'S AUCTIONS

The circa-1950 Clifford Essex Paragon De Luxe that Flick played on the James Bond theme song, which was used in the first few 007 films, including *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball*.



Neal Schon performing with Journey
in Reno, Nevada, December 16, 2018

The BODY ELECTRIC

BY JUDE GOLD

Neal Schon casts his guitar in the role of lead singer on *Universe*, his new instrumental album.

YOU CAN'T LOCK Neal Schon down. Sure, his band, Journey — one of the highest-grossing rock groups of all time — has put touring on pause as the world struggles with its first major pandemic in a century. But as you can tell from the epic solos and backing-track jams Schon posts nearly every day on Instagram, nothing gets between him and quality time with his favorite guitars.

"I love doing that, man," Schon says. "Playing every day is something I need to do. And I think as a guitar player, the more you use your muscles in your hands and everything that is attached to them, the better they work. It frees you up. I believe playing everyday has helped me avoid joint problems, carpal-tunnel problems, and all that."

But if you think rocking out like a teenager on social media is all Schon has been doing since lockdown, think again. The San Francisco-based guitarist's impressive career — a wild ride that earned him national renown in 1971, when, at age 17, he joined Santana

— continues. And, pandemic or not, he's been quite busy.

First, Schon has partnered with the "augmented reality" scanning app StraxAR. "It's a brand-new thing that reacts to images," Schon says. "When you hold your phone up to the image of, say, one of my solo records or a Journey record, I appear in front of you, updating you on stuff happening that day, or playing something for you. I think it's going to be great for artists on tour, because it will be a cool way to fill people in on where you are, how things are going or what you're working on."

Second, he's been making some exciting investments. In addition to purchasing a residence in Nashville to complement his West Coast digs, he has added several vintage guitars to his stable, including Gibsons — "everything from Les Pauls to jazz boxes" — and various Fenders.

"One cool acquisition was getting back my late-'70s Les Paul Pro, the guitar I used in Journey all those years, from the guy I sold it to," Schon says. "I'm so glad he still had it. I have a lot of



PLAYERS

fun picking up one of my old axes after I haven't played it for a while. This one is a '77 or '78 model I got from Don Wehr's Music City, and it had P-90s on it, but I had never paid much attention to its construction. Turns out that the neck, which I had always assumed was mahogany, is maple, and the fretboard is ebony. That's the guitar on a lot of *Frontiers*, *Escape* and other albums, and on solos like 'Who's Crying Now.' It has a nice, natural compression to it."

For guitar players, though, the most exciting Neal Schon news is that he opened up an arsenal of his favorite guitars — some of which are outfitted with guitar-solo-friendly accoutrements such as Floyd Rose locking tremolo systems and/or Fernandes Sustainer circuits — and released *Universe*, a new album comprising 15 blazing guitar-powered covers and original tunes. Many of the songs were written and produced by one of Journey's new members, famed drummer/producer Narada Michael Walden.

Even if you casually keep up with the latest rock news, you probably know Schon announced last year that, going forward, Walden and former Journey member Randy Jackson will take over the drum and bass chairs, respectively. This comes after lawyers for Schon and longtime Journey keyboardist Jonathan Cain filed a lawsuit alleging that former drummer and bassist Steve Smith and Ross Valory attempted "a coup to assume control of one of the band's corporate entities, Nightmare Productions, Inc."

"The legal stuff has lasted a lot longer than I wished it would have, but I believe we're very close to coming up with an amicable, fair resolution for all," says Schon, who offers this free legal advice to anyone who's in an up-and-coming band: "Make sure you meet up with a great trademark attorney and that everything is done correctly from the get-go, because people like to do handshake deals in these kind of situations," he says. "Even going back to '72 or '73, our trademarks were never really done correctly. Get those things tied down."



Performing on the Journey Through Time tour at the Fox Theatre, Oakland, California, February 23, 2019

You're known for your melodic, highly singable solos. But having been to a few of your soundchecks and watched you alone on

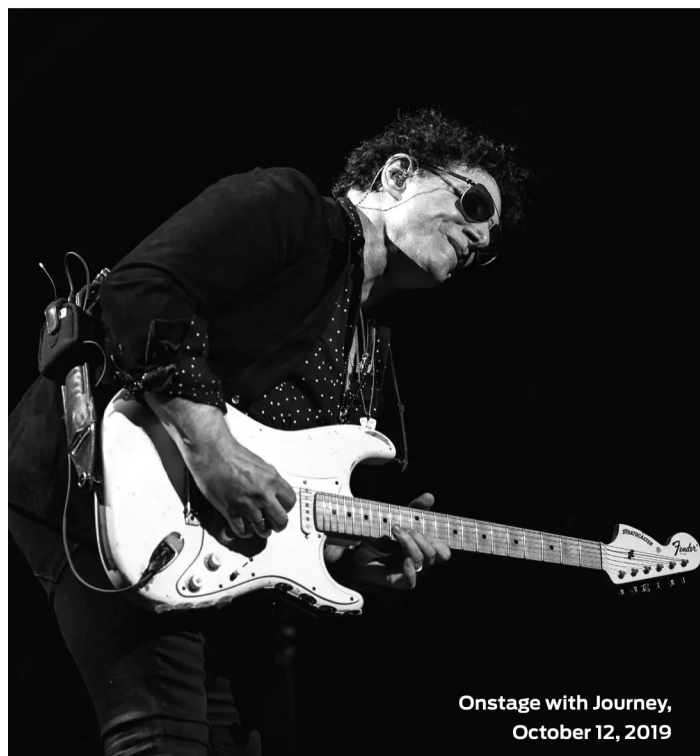
big stages playing rhythm parts to songs such as "Lights," "Don't Stop Believin'" and "Mother, Father," I'm also amazed by your great pocket as a rhythm guitarist. Can groove that deep be consciously developed, or is it something you have to be born with?

For me, I think the groove comes from playing with great drummers, and it goes all the way back to playing with Santana, which featured an army of great drums and percussion. The beauty of being on stage with that band is that the rhythm section was led by [José] Chepito Areas, the multitalented timbale player. He was the cat, man. Back then, lots of bands were using click tracks or machines to make the time sound perfect on records, but we had Chepito. He sounded like a metronome with soul.

He was the one driving the groove for us, and we all had to fight to keep up with him. And though everybody was good in their own right, not everybody has the impeccable timing that he has,

"MY GROOVE COMES FROM PLAYING WITH GREAT DRUMMERS, AND IT GOES ALL THE WAY BACK TO PLAYING WITH SANTANA"

so there was magic in some of the discrepancies here and there between the different players. There was this whole energy that arose from that, and I started to see why it was working. Being in a group like that teaches you how to put people together in ways that will make musical sense. Sometimes you see cats try to put together superstar bands with famous players who all have chops beyond belief, but while the result doesn't sound bad, it doesn't make magic, you know?



Onstage with Journey,
October 12, 2019

ERIK KABIK

It now seems only fitting that your new album is produced by a great drummer.

Tell us about Narada Michael Walden.

Narada was first known for being a great fusion drummer. I learned about him when he got the Mahavishnu Orchestra gig with John McLaughlin after Billy Cobham left. And back in the early days of Journey, we actually opened up for McLaughlin on a couple of dates when Narada was on drums.

And of course, with both of us living in Marin County, Narada and I would run into each other over the years, whether it was Christmas time at the mall or at Starbucks, and we even jammed from time to time. And I watched his career bloom beyond drums into becoming a phenomenal songwriter. I knew he wrote well, but I had no clue what a great producer he was until I started working with him.

He approached *Universe* differently from other records I've done in the sense that he treated me as a vocalist. Most of the original songs on the record are his, so he gave me demos to take home and learn. He's a fantastic keyboardist, but as for the melodies he wanted me to play, he just sang those, and that's how I learned them.

At first, I took his vocal melodies to be just a roadmap for me to veer off of and do my own thing, and I started





doing that almost immediately. That's when he stopped the session and said, "What are you doing, man?" And I said, "Well, I'm playing." He goes, "Where's my melody?" And I go, "Well, I think it's there." He says, "No, no, man, we're going to go back learn this melody exactly. Why do you think I sang it?"

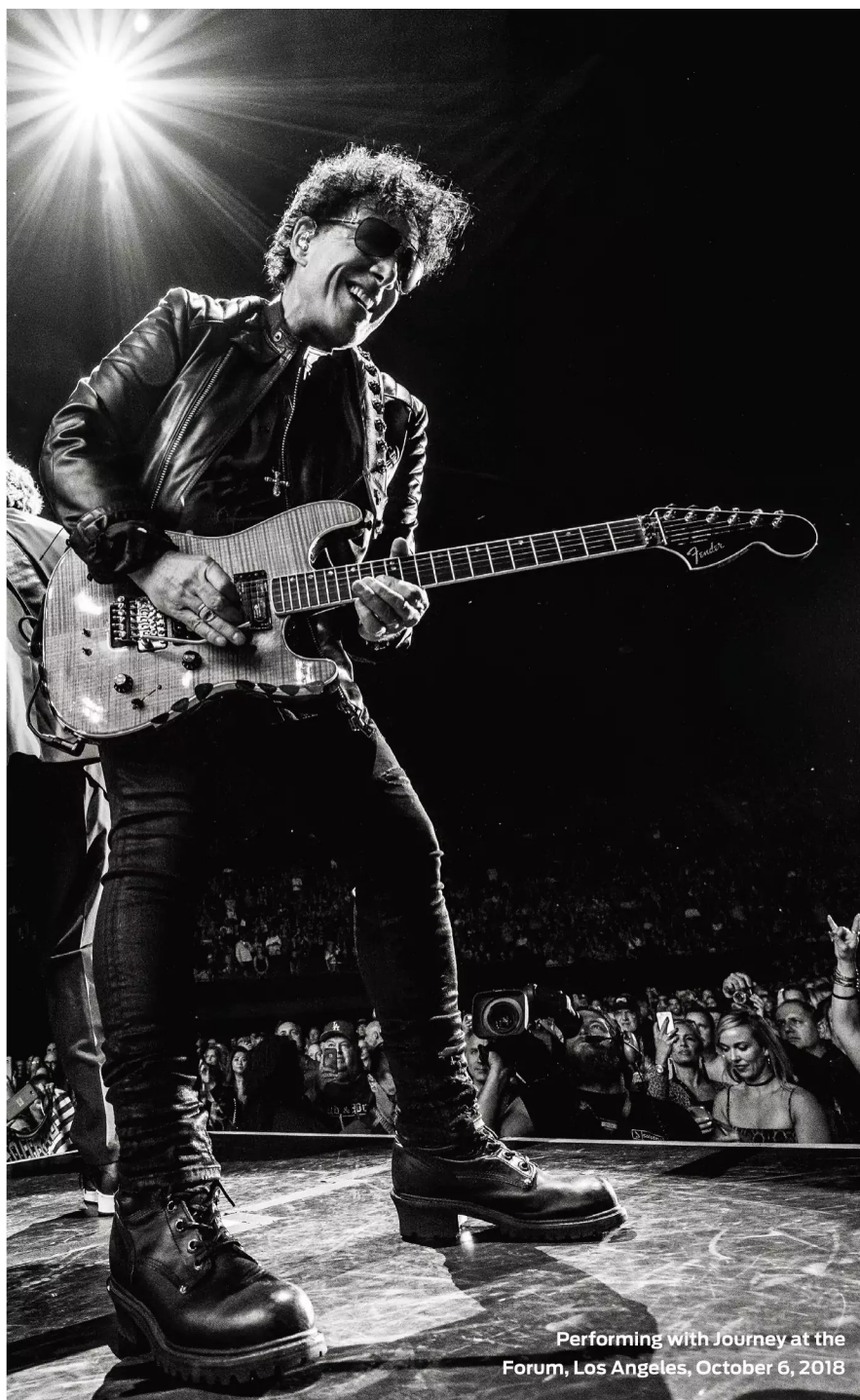
It was the first time anybody had done that to me, because usually I'm working on Journey material where there are songs with a vocalist. Doing *Universe*, I learned a lot about how to simplify things and stay really tuned in to the melody. When I came in to do the first song, "Something in the Heart," it wasn't hard, but it wasn't super easy, either, because there aren't a lot of notes to it, which means you really have to stretch those notes out — you have to play everything in the right place phrasing- and intonation-wise, with the right vibrato and the right tone.

Of course, you've had a distinctly vocal style of lead guitar since the beginning, it seems. Did you actually sit down and learn to play vocal melodies when you were a teenager?

Yeah, I did, but I was more trying to cop the vibrato of a vocalist — like Aretha [Franklin]. I'd sit there for hours trying to capture that soulful vibrato of hers

"HE STOPPED THE SESSION AND SAID, 'WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MAN? WHERE'S MY MELODY?'"

and some of those blues turns she would do. She sings blues over the top of everything, you know, and I really love the blues. So she was really prominent in inspiring me. And when I was 12 or 13, I started going to see her at the old Fillmore West in San Francisco, and in her rhythm section would be Cornell Dupree, Bernard Purdie and Chuck Rainey. I'd be like, "Wow, this is insane. This band is so good." Of course, it wasn't until much later that I learned how really good these guys were.



Performing with Journey at the Forum, Los Angeles, October 6, 2018

MIKE SAVIO

The covers on *Universe* are powerful, too — like your "Voodoo Child"/"Third Stone from the Sun" medley, which has a lot of wild feedback on it. Were you in the room with an amp?

Actually, there are no amps on the whole record. Aside from a mini pedalboard that pretty much just had a Dunlop Cry Baby wah and a Dunlop Fuzz Face on it, I did most of the album with the Fractal Axe-Fx — version II, I believe. And that feedback you're talking about is the Fernandes Sustainer. I think at the time

I started using Sustainers, nobody else really was, and I was installing them in all kinds of different guitars. I love Fernandes. I'm fortunate that they've been cordial enough to keep making them for me like they did years ago. I know Satch and Vai and Phil Collen use the Sustainiac — which sounds great and does its own thing, but it's completely different than the Fernandes. To me, the Sustainiac feels more like you've got an EBow right on the strings. I mean, when you turn it on, it really vibrates, as if

there's a motor on in there. But I can roll back the Fernandes with a tone knob — like if I want to barely turn it on.

I love that you did “Purple Rain” all the way through, including the psychedelic, floating-in-space end section.

For that song I played my Paul Reed Smith NS-15 — a beautiful semi-hollow guitar with a Floyd — into a Kemper. The inspiration for doing that song came from playing a Journey concert in the Twin Cities area, Prince's hometown, in 2016, not long after he had passed. Since I'm always creating loops on the fly in my solo sections and playing over them, I decided that night that I would lay

“I WAS MORE TRYING TO COP THE VIBRATO OF A VOCALIST — LIKE ARETHA”

down some “Purple Rain” chords and see what happened. The audience loved it, and I think they were really moved by it. The moment stuck with me, so I decided to record a version of it as a dedication to Prince. I contacted [*Nashville producer*] Gary Cirimelli, and said, “Can you please orchestrate this? Let's do the long version.”

Nowadays, I use my Fractal to do spur-of-the-moment loops onstage, but that night in St. Paul, I was using a Boss Loop Station pedal. It's fun to do things like that live — like the “Hey Jude” bit, which is also on the new album — because audiences recognize what you're playing and start singing along.

What stage are you, Narada and the rest of the guys at in the creation of the next Journey record?

We've got three songs mixed and ready to go, and plan to gradually release them this year. And then, by the end of '21, we plan on bringing the whole album out, followed by a worldwide tour in '22. Even though we're talking about my record today, I'm very excited about this new Journey record. It's sounding very, very strong. 🎸



Onstage at the Colosseum in Caesars Palace Las Vegas with his PRS NS-15 signature model

STEVE ROSE



Rehearsing for the Journey Through Time tour, February 20, 2019

ERIK KABIK



Brawnier STOMP

More than a quarter of a century after Lovetone's first pedals launched, designer **Dan Coggins** explains how this tiny British brand's effects ended up on U2 and Radiohead hits and acquired legendary status.

BY ROD BRAKES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEIL GODWIN

IN A CLASSIC “brain meets brawn” story that began in 1994 in the small English town of Henley-on-Thames, Lovetone gained near-mythical status as a milestone on the road of effects pedal evolution. Merging art and technology to a degree of originality accomplished by few, Lovetone's intrepid arrival during the “birth of boutique” in the mid '90s was welcomed with open arms and nurtured by a music culture that was ripe for sonic experimentation.

Lovetone pedals are coveted now more than ever for their inimitable (and often unpredictable) sounds, their virtues extolled by sincere word of mouth among a cult following of guitarists, producers and engineers. Similarly, in the late '90s, as the Lovetone buzz gathered momentum with each new unveiling, the company grew organically and injected life into a relatively staid marketplace dominated by cautious, utilitarian pedal designs.

Lovetone's statement was both well timed and striking. Unique, independent

and with boundless possibilities, it embodied the spirit of innovation and artistic freedom. Together, Dan Coggins and Vlad Naslas pushed their own creative boundaries with sparks of ingenuity that captured the imaginations of music makers worldwide. In turn, an inspired online community of pedal fanatics began to emerge as people opened their eyes, ears, minds and wallets to a dazzling new era of effects.

“Looking back, we were just doing effects in a slightly different way,” says Coggins, who today works with Adrian and Georgia Thorpe at ThorpyFX. “I suppose that's what Lovetone could be credited with retrospectively. We knew we were on to something, but I couldn't foresee that the pedals would become what they are now, or that the pedal market would go the way it has.

“In the first paragraph of the 1995 manual for the Meatball [*Lovetone's debut pedal*], we said, sort of facetiously, that it was ‘required reading. After that you can bin it if you really want, but bear in mind that these could be collectors' items in

30 years' time!’ We did say that, but I was confident the pedals were good, and people really did seem to love them. I just wanted to make some good gear for a short while, although, in the end, it lasted for well over a decade.”

According to Coggins, Lovetone pedals were originally available to buy from 1995 through to 2007, albeit sometimes intermittently. Officially founded on April 1, 1995, the company went on to release four pedals later that year. They included the Meatball envelope filter in May, the Big Cheese fuzz and Brown Source overdrive in July, and the Doppelganger phaser/vibrato in September. Early the following year, all four pedals were made available to order as a set that included a pedalboard, flight case, power supply and cables.

By selling direct to customers and advertising in publications like *Loot*, the U.K.'s popular free classified-ads newspaper, Lovetone steadily increased sales. The range continued to expand with the Wobulator stereo tremolo/panner, which appeared in mid 1997,



"The colors were inspired by Henri Matisse paintings," Coggins says.
 "Vlad was 100 percent responsible for the graphics and font."



"I named the Big Cheese after the song on Nirvana's *Bleach* album," Coggins says, "and the Brown Source after one of my favorite meals: baked beans on toast with brown sauce."



Dan Coggins. "*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* was a big influence," he says. "It's about the pursuit of quality, and what quality means."

and the Ring Stinger ring modulator/octave fuzz, which followed in late 1998/early 1999. In 1999, the Big Cheese and Brown Source circuits were enclosed in Lovetone's larger-format enclosure and offered as the Cheese Source fuzz/overdrive, while the ?/Flange With No Name stereo flanger made its appearance in the summer of 2000. That same year, a Mk II version of the Wobulator was released, along with a Mk II version of the Doppelganger. By then, Coggins was ready to move on.

"In October 2000, I bailed out, and we announced that Lovetone weren't going to be making pedals any more," he says. "And by 2003 they were all sold out. At which point Vlad said to me, 'Shall we make another X amount of the Meatball and Cheese Source?' I didn't really want to do it, but I had bills to pay, so I agreed. I built roughly a few hundred of each by hand in my conservatory."

It was a busy time. Coggins was into a new venture, Dinosaural, which launched in late 2003 with the Tube Bender overdrive. In addition to providing its own line of pedals, Dinosaural serviced Lovetone products.

Lovetone's final production runs sold out again a few years later, and in March 2008, while pursuing a career in hi-tech

electronics, he threw in the towel at Lovetone for the last time before hanging up his soldering iron at Dinosaural. But it wasn't long before inspiration struck once more and, in 2012, Coggins resumed servicing and repair duties at Dinosaural while launching two new pedals: a smaller high-gain version of the Tube Bender, called the OPA-101 Overdriven Pre-Amp, and the OTC-201 Opticompressor. Along with a black reissue of Dinosaural's original silver Tube Bender and the rare DMB-301 Dual Mode Booster treble boost, both pedals were discontinued in 2016 after a series of brief reruns.

"Dinosaural was mainly a repair business and I didn't do as much with pedals as I'd planned to," Coggins says. "My initial idea was to make simple,

unpretentious pedals, and I kind of made my statement: Less is more. In the same way, if it was all down to me, the Lovetone pedals would all have had three or four controls at the most, but Vlad was

a smart guy. The whole thing would never have happened without him.

"Vlad and I originally developed the prototype Meatball together because he was producing some sample libraries called Funk Guitar and Funk Bass for

Ed Stratton's Zero-G label. Vlad and Ed had a Top-10 hit record in 1988 called "The Jack That House Built" with [British house music pioneers] Jack 'N' Chill. Vlad's 10 years older than me, and I looked up to him. It was very much a case of me having the technical know-how but not really believing it, and him coming along and kicking me up the arse."

Having teamed up, the pair worked tirelessly, day and night, on a mission to perfect the Meatball. "When I met Vlad in 1994, I was working nights as a shift engineer at the BBC World Service in Caversham," Coggins recalls. "I knew from my experience of working at the Beeb that certain components had better qualities than others, so I applied that knowledge, and that was when I really started getting into the nuances of what was going on in the Meatball circuit. At night, I'd have Radio 4 or the World Service going through it, and I'd be adjusting the attack and release times to make it work on the voice. And in the daytime — if I wasn't asleep — I'd be calling Vlad and telling him, 'Come round and have a listen to this!'"

"Vlad and I were testing it with a guitar in the daytime, and we'd be saying things like, 'It needs more attack,' or 'It needs more resonance. The frequency is wrong.' Vlad wanted all these things up on the front panel so you could adjust everything, and I was fighting against that saying, 'People don't want to get that technical if they're standing on stage trying to figure out what chord to play.' I thought people wouldn't want to

"I KNEW WE'D ARRIVED WHEN WE WENT TO ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS AND STEVE ALBINI WAS RECORDING WITH THE BIG CHEESE AND BROWN SOURCE"



The Flange With No Name. “I got really into analog synths and lived like a monk in seclusion for about 18 months designing stuff.”

be fussing about with all these switches and knobs, as well as trying to perform. But Vlad was adamant. In the end, I said, ‘Okay, I’ll do it. I’ll put all these things on, but we won’t need them all.’ We knew the Meatball was eventually done when a cat started meowing back at us every time we made a sound with it!”

“BIG PEDALS TO TRIP OVER”

While an abundance of knobs, switches and jacks facilitated the Meatball’s kaleidoscopic choice of sounds, they also dictated its large console-like appearance, something clearly attested to by Lovetone’s advertising slogan: “Big Pedals to Trip Over.”

“We made them fairly large because we wanted to evoke that thing about old pedals,” Coggins explains. “But we were equally inspired by the look of the prototype, which had a steel-console-shaped case from an old power-supply testing box I rescued from a skip, and that translated to the smaller [*Big Cheese* and *Brown Source*] pedals as well. The only change we made to the look were the fins at the back, which were inspired by the rear lights on my Triumph Herald, and I guess there was also a nod to Roger Mayer’s Rocket effects.

“I suppose the grunge scene helped get people interested in vintage effects again. There were people walking around in those Electro-Harmonix/Mudhoney Superfuzz Big Muff T-shirts with the Big Muff on the front, and Kurt Cobain almost single-handedly resurrected the Small Clone. I’d been to the Reading ’91

and ’93 festivals and saw many bands who were into that kind of stuff that ended up buying and using Lovetone pedals, like Sonic Youth and Dinosaur Jr.

Coggins’ “eureka” moment came toward the end of 1992. “I started reverse engineering old pedals and was listening to a lot of ’60s psychedelic rock like ‘Darkness, Darkness’ by the Youngbloods and ‘In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida’ by Iron Butterfly,” he recalls. “The guitar solos sound amazing — chaotic and thrilling. I was thinking, Why can’t people make fuzz boxes that sound like that and not anodyne, like most of the newer pedals were at the time.

“I’d been playing in a band with a BC109C silicon-transistor Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face, but because I was broke, I figured I should sell it and build myself a fuzz pedal. Eventually, the BC109 fuzz I built became the Big Cheese. In fact, that was how I met Vlad. I’d put an ad in the local *Henley Standard* and he called me up to ask about the Fuzz Face”

Although Lovetone’s designs drew inspiration from vintage effects pedals and were primarily aimed at guitarists, they soon attracted wider attention from producers and electronic artists.

“A lot of producers also put drums and keys through Lovetone pedals,” Coggins recalls. “Norman Cook/Fatboy

Slim bought two Meatballs, and there’s a photo of him holding one up to each ear and a caption saying that they were his ‘secret weapons.’ Our pedals were used on pedalboards, but producers liked them because they had this console thing where you could stick them next to the desk and use them for mixing.

“I knew we’d arrived when we went to Abbey Road Studios and Steve Albini was recording with the Big Cheese and Brown Source. [*Producers*] Alan Moulder and Flood got the whole Lovetone set, and Flood turned The Edge on to us. He had a Meatball, a Doppelganger and a Big Cheese on his ‘board. When I heard U2’s [*1997 No. 1 single*] “Discothèque,” I thought, That has to be the Big Cheese. And it was!

“I was chatting to [*Radiohead guitarist*] Ed O’Brien at a Johnny Marr gig, and I was telling him I loved what Radiohead

did with the Meatball and Doppelganger on *OK Computer*. He said the Ring Stinger was used for vocals on *Kid A*, which made me laugh. It’s such a bizarre album, so it’s fitting they used the most bizarre

pedal we ever made. I was thrilled to know that Radiohead made exemplary artistic use of their Lovetone pedals.

“I had a set of my own Lovetone pedals, but I sold them all in 2012 so I could take my kids to Disneyland. The nice thing now is that when I get repairs, I can show my kids, ‘This is what I used to make. Check this out!’ It’s nice to put a line under it and move on to something else. I just love designing circuits and I’m honored to now be collaborating with Adrian and Georgia Thorpe and their team at ThorpyFX. The new Deep Oggin chorus was very much a joint design, and we’re looking forward to releasing more modulation effects soon.” ■

“I HAD A SET OF MY OWN LOVETONE PEDALS, BUT I SOLD THEM ALL IN 2012 SO I COULD TAKE MY KIDS TO DISNEYLAND”

Thanks to Dan Coggins (dinosaural.com and thorpyfx.com), Seni Chanapai and Vintage ‘n’ Rare Guitars (vintageandrareguitars.com).



HEART OF STEEL

Ben Harper reveals intimate details about his solo lap-style affair, *Winter Is for Lovers*.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

WHEN YOUR VOICE is as strong as Ben Harper's, it's only natural to sing with all your heart, all the time. How many other guitar aces could fathom winning a gospel Grammy singing with the Blind Boys of Alabama? So maybe it's not crazy to consider how Harper waited this long to record an instrumental showcase of his other divine gift, a signature sound on lap steel. Sophisticated, sexy, revealing and rewarding, *Winter Is for Lovers* (Anti-) was worth the wait.

The two-time *GP* cover artist has a long history in these pages, and in 2018, when he announced that an instrumental record had been on his mind for a long time, he also said he had a new lap steel created by archtop icon John Monteleone. No one figured it would completely win the day in the studio over the two lap steels he's most famous for playing: the Weissenborn acoustic and his signature electric Asher. Imagine a jazzy vintage archtop combined with a bountiful Hawaiian lap steel, plus the sparkling richness of a traditional flattop, and you'll start to understand the essence of the Monteleone Radio City Special Deluxe. Now imagine what a guitarist who grew up in a historic folk music shop — Claremont, California's Folk Music Center — and was exposed to a whole world of influences might do with such an instrument.

Composed like a solo lap-steel symphony, *Winter Is for Lovers* is an ode to some of Harper's favorite places, as reflected in song titles like "Joshua Tree," "Paris," "Montreal" and "Istanbul." These sonic snapshots were taken with no flash, and that's an impressive exercise in restraint coming from a cat with razor-sharp chops. Harper's prowess is often overlooked because he plays overhand and sitting down, rather than in the more familiar bottleneck style.

But make no mistake — Harper owns the lap steel as much as Robert Randolph does the pedal steel. This new passion project is all about touch,

"THE WEISSENBORN IS ONE OF MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE ACOUSTIC GUITAR SOUNDS. BUT THE QUEST IS NEVER OVER"

nuance, tone and melody. The mood varies widely, but it's generally chill. In fact, *Winter Is for Lovers* may be the best meditation/yoga guitar album ever. It sounds as if Harper is right there in the room as he plays tour guide on a trip around the world, with one tune spinning seamlessly into the next for about a half hour, all in the same deep,



MATHEU BITTON

hypnotic tuning. Anyone can appreciate such an experience, especially players, and it's quite unlike anything this one has ever encountered.

Is there another album in history that you looked to for inspiration?

I love that you even had to ask, because it's proof the answer is no. If neither of us knows of another one, then it's not out there. I'm hopeful that it stakes its claim. History will tell, but for now I'm excited that it's singular in that way.



Ben Harper playing his Weissenborn acoustic. He switched to a new lap steel made by celebrated archtop maker John Monteleone for his new album.

Playing the Weissenborn was at least part of the original intention for doing a solo lap-steel album. What happened along the way?

I met John Monteleone, and it was game on. Since the beginning, I had been reaching for a sound. Growing up in a music store, you get to hear what instruments have which qualities. The Folk Music Center has instruments from all over the planet. There are instruments with bowl backs of all sorts, from ouds to sitars to lutes. You

recognize the power and projection in an arched back as well as a resonance and reverberation that flat instruments just don't have. Flattops have a certain sonic complexity. I've always chosen archtops and flattops that have at least a toe, if not a foot, in each camp. I had never found one that spoke both languages until the Monteleone.

Where does that story start?

I was playing at Rudy's [*Rudy's Music in SoHo, New York City*] when Rudy handed

me an instrument mid-chord while I wasn't even looking and said, "Try this." I didn't even look down, but I could tell something was different from the first note. It was an archtop that had the depth and breadth of a flattop. It wasn't just about the projection of the frequencies but the richness. It flipped the script. I said, "I have to go see the maker of this guitar."

I would imagine it was different for Monteleone to work with a lap-style



player coming from an extensive Weissenborn background.

I actually sent John a Weissenborn, because we were in discussions about going the distance and giving the guitar a hollow neck. John kept me on track. He reminded me about the tone I'd heard at Rudy's. He believed that with a half inch longer scale of 25.5 inches and a properly carved back and top, he could go beyond that and bring me a new sonic palette. All hail the Weissenborn's roar on the low end, but I needed more bell-like chime in the high end, and I found it with John's instruments.

Weissenborn made a model early on with a longer scale that was just less than 25 inches, so I had that to experiment with, and I still have it in my archive. The longer the scale, the tighter the pitch, the more pronounced the frequency range.

"THIS RECORD HAD TO BE A CONVERSATION WITH JUST ME AND THE MONTELEONE"

But I tried heavier strings on this long-scale Weissenborn, and I still wasn't able to pull out the sound I heard in my head. The Weissenborn is one of my all-time favorite acoustic guitar sounds, but the quest is never over. I am not indebted or devoted to any instrument; I am indebted and devoted to tone and the living quest that it presents to all of us players. That's my gospel. The Indian cats like Debashish Bhattacharya and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt were onto that bell-like quality, which affirmed it was possible. John promised there was a way to get it without losing an ounce on the low end, and, thank goodness, he nailed it.

Can you detail its special combination of specs and features?

It's an archtop made of figured maple back and sides, with an Italian spruce top, that's 16 inches wide at the waist, with a solid, square neck that has a little stand on the back to make it more



Harper with the Monteleone lap steel

suitable to lap-style playing. There's an extra tone port that sets it all the way off in a couple of ways. When you open up its little metal door and place a microphone in front, the port brings you inside the instrument in a unique way. With the door closed, it adds just a tiny bit of the shimmer of a metal-bodied instrument. I asked John to add the cleanest-sounding humbucker, and he found one made by Kent Armstrong. We wound up putting the volume and tone knobs in the tailpiece, which John was super proud of, and it was a revelation for a lap-steel player like me to have those handy and accessible without having them in the top.

It appears that the biggest technical difference between playing lap steel and bottleneck slide is having to skip over the bottom strings so that the bass notes can ring freely, and therefore having to angle the solid bar down, sometime severely, to focus on a single string.

The angle is everything. You have to tip the bar at exactly the right angle to focus on a single string or double strings, either to get specific chord structures involving the open strings, or even just the harmonies between two single strings. You're always ducking and dodging the bottom two strings.

Isn't that inherently harder than flipping it up the other way, where you encounter the treble strings first?

I highly recommend no one ever try to do it. [laughs] It's crazy. In addition to the angle, the weight of the bar on the strings has to be just right. I'll get used to one nickel-plated brass Sheerhorn bar in medium thickness and use it until I've worn it out, because if another one is just a nano-ounce lighter, it makes a difference. I find just the right touch with light D'Addario EJ16 Phosphor Bronze strings. Using heavier strings with a longer scale was a little too much work. Lighter strings got me moving a bit faster without having to think about pressure.

It seems the upside of sitting down playing lap-style with the strings high above the fretboard is plucking-hand freedom. Watching your thumb and index finger is kind of like watching a figure skater bouncing up and down on the ice, occasionally incorporating a fancy twist involving another digit. That's it!

What would you call the sound that happens on tunes including "The Inland Empire" that's like a slide whistle

ascending while your slide melody descends?

I know what you mean. A reverse harmonic, maybe? It happens when you're doing something you technically shouldn't do: lifting the back of the dampening hand from the strings. But I do it to create those every so often. Sometimes they just jump out and get you.

The extended, melodically meandering glissandos, such as the one at the outset of "Lebanon," are exotic and can sound almost like a Theremin. Are those easier to execute on lap steel?

They are there for the taking on all slides, but I can focus that bouncing around on an individual string on the lap steel in a way I couldn't on a bottleneck.

Can you explain how you arrived at a more driving acoustic sound on the subsequent track, "London," which seems to reflect more of a Celtic, Bert Jansch type of tone?

That's it, 100 percent. Once we got set up to re-record the album at the Carriage House, producer Sheldon Gomberg had a close mic about a foot and a half off the soundboard, plus an ambient mic, and a mic in another room on a Fender Deluxe



Reverb. We used the same settings and mic positions for the entire album. Even the tuning is the same. It's open D, and from strings six to one that goes: D A D F# A D. The difference is that I played the rest of the album fingerstyle, and I played "London" using a Fender medium pick.

What was the original recording like?

The first version of the record was a larger production and more of an exploration. I used different instruments, acoustic and electric, in different tunings with different reverbs and textures on the original sessions, which were done over a week at Capitol Studios. I was all over the place and needed to get out of my own way. I ended up reeling all that in for the final recordings. The original sessions also had bass, piano, percussion, string orchestration and the whole nine. I'm equally proud of those tracks, and I'm excited that Anti- is going to release two of them as B-sides, hopefully soon. It was a difficult decision, but not an exercise in ego. It was an exercise in figuring out what was best for the music, period. I knew I had to bring it down to just guitar, but I had no plans on it being one instrument. That was Sheldon's idea. This record had to be a conversation with just me and the Monteleone. ■



LOIC VENANCE/GETTY IMAGES



LESSONS

STYLE

How to Play Like Brian May

Our insider's guide to emulating the unmistakable style of Queen's legendary guitarist.

BY SIMON BRADLEY

DAVE COLQUHOUN HAS toured and recorded with a number of diverse artists, but one of the highlights of his career was working with Brian May for the 2018 Freddie Mercury biopic, *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Dave was responsible for coaching actors Gwilym Lee and Rami Malek to convincingly mimic May and Mercury's guitar styles for the hugely successful film.

Under the circumstances, it's possible that, Brian May aside, no one knows the Queen guitarist's stylistic idiosyncrasies better than Dave. We asked him to share his insider tips to understanding and integrating May's style into your playing.

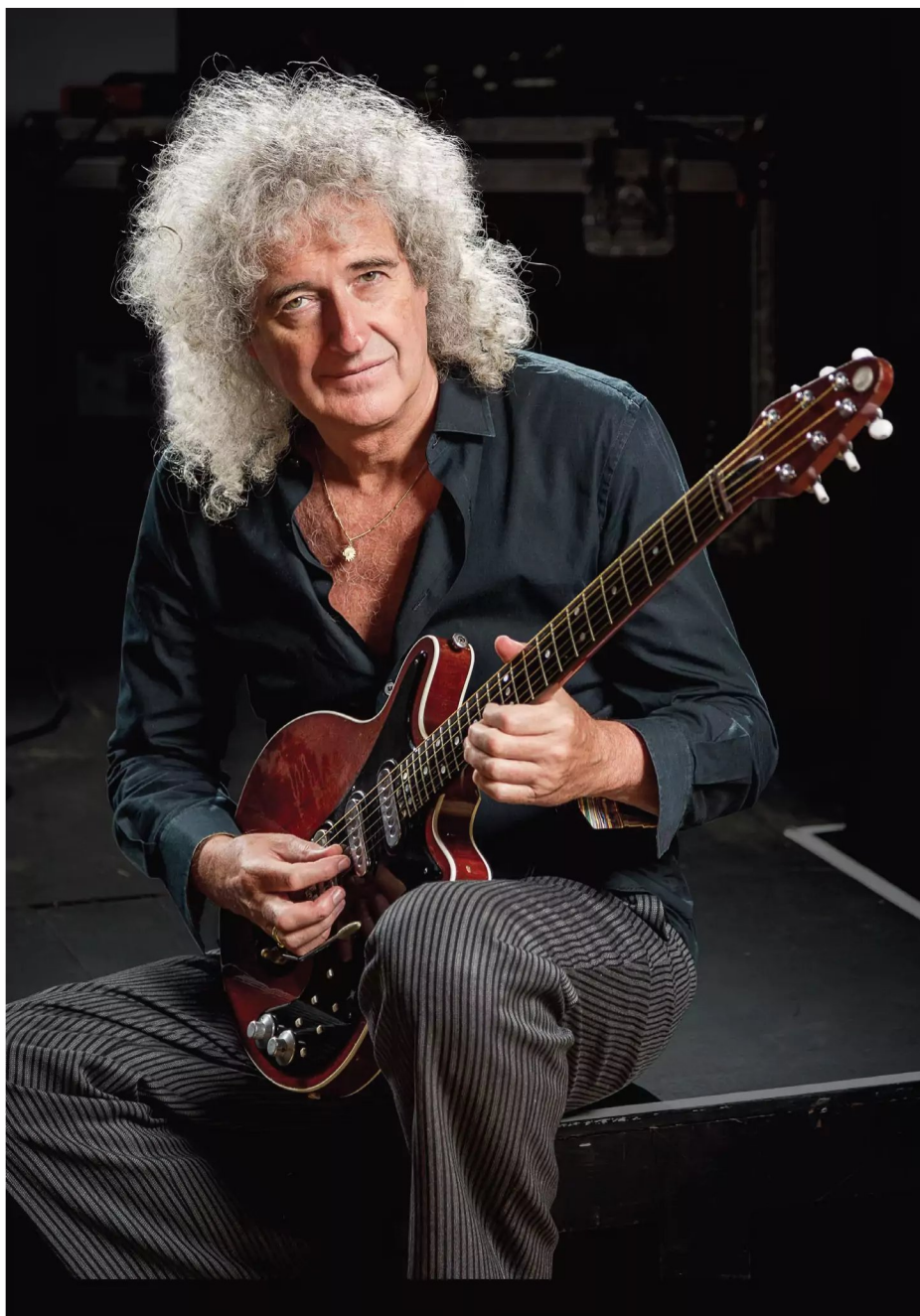
PHRASING AND FEEL

Practice makes perfect in this vital area.

BRIAN MAY IS a master of injecting his playing with feel, and in this regard at least, he's up there with just about anyone who's ever picked up the instrument. Phrasing and feel are fundamental facets of his style that, as Colquhoun stresses, take technique and skill to accommodate.

"The most important thing to do is switch the phrasing around," Colquhoun explains. "If you take the 'Bohemian Rhapsody' solo apart, you've got what I refer to as an 'acceleration' when it runs between 16ths and triplets and then back again [from 2:44–2:47]. It makes you play the same pattern; you just change the note grouping of it.

"It's actually a simple concept, but it can be tricky, as you're always looking for the downbeat, so just try repeating the pattern in 16ths and in triplets. It's challenging to slow down to go out of a triplet back to a 16th note, but just learn to phrase and you can bend and hang onto a note to give yourself time to



think. I try to imagine it while I perform it, and somehow my hand makes that sound. But as always, it's all about effective practice."

BEST EXAMPLE: "Love of My Life" (*A Night at the Opera*, 1975) 2:18–3:00

SOLOING WITH MELODY

Always apply melody and space to solos.

"MAY'S SOLOS ARE among rock's finest, and he'll always construct them around a melody so that they properly serve the song. An interesting thing with Queen recordings is that it's almost as if the solo is a complementary piece within the song," Colquhoun observes. "If you look at 'Somebody to Love,' the guitar is given a lot of space, and when it's featured, it becomes the focus of the song. Afterward, it pretty much disappears from the mix altogether. When Brian is given a moment to shine, he's given the space in which to do it. Yes, it's a solo, but then it's also like a separate piece of music sitting within the song."

BEST EXAMPLE: "Somebody to Love" (*A Day at the Races*, 1976) 2:01–2:22

FINGER VIBRATO

A fundamental part of any player's technique.

MAY'S ELEGANT VIBRATO is unmistakable, and it's a cornerstone of his playing that he adjusts to fit the differing styles, tempos and vibes of the songs and guitar lines with which he's made his name.

"The main thing is to be able to bend up to a note and vibrato just under the pitch you've bent to, then drop down and back up again," Colquhoun explains. "Try not to ever let it go sharp."

"I think it's really important to play standing up, as hand position is critical. So my two tips in this area are to practice standing and to tune into the tempo of the vibrato, as it obviously needs to be different for 'Hammer to

MAY'S ELEGANT VIBRATO IS UNMISTAKABLE, AND IT'S A CORNERSTONE OF HIS PLAYING

The Red Special. Dave Colquhoun (below) worked with May and coached the actors of *Bohemian Rhapsody* in his unique style.

Fall' compared to, say, 'These Are the Days of Our Lives.'"

BEST EXAMPLE: "Killer Queen" (*Sheer Heart Attack*, 1974) 1:40–2:00

GUITAR VIBRATO

How to add vibrato to chords to aid the guitar's musicality.

IF YOU WATCH May perform, you'll notice that his right hand rarely strays from the guitar's vibrato arm. He'll often have his fingers and palm wrapped around it close to where it meets the bridge and manipulate it to slightly move the tuning when playing chords. This allows the guitar to fit in more musically with the rest of the band. A light touch is required, and the technique is simple to re-create with versions of Fender's

Synchronized tremolo, a Bigsby or, as long as you're careful, a double-locking system.

BEST EXAMPLE: "One Vision" (*Queen – Live at Wembley*, 1986) 5:00–5:32

PICKING DYNAMICS

How using a coin as a pick can add texture and color.

ANOTHER INTRINSIC PART of May's tone is his use of an English sixpence as a pick. He likes the intimate connection its inflexibility gives, and he will either delicately stroke the strings to give a metallic character to the sound or minutely alter the angle of his hand to



dig the coin's serrated edge into the strings, resulting in a more aggressive and gnarly tone. There's a great example of the latter technique at 0:42 during the song "Death on Two Legs."

Sixpences aren't too difficult to find online, but if locating a stash of these old U.K. coins proves difficult, try using the slightly smaller and thinner U.S. dime.

BEST EXAMPLE: "It's Late" (*News of the World*, 1977) 0:00–0:15

CLEANING UP

Every guitar has a volume control. Use it.

WHEN A CLEAN tone is required, May will reach for the guitar's volume knob. His amps are always run flat out, and he's never used any type of channel switching, so it's up to him to manipulate the pot to quickly go from full-throated overdrive to lilting clean.

"It's just the way that it goes from distorted to totally clean, and it sounds like he's changed the amp," Colquhoun

says. “The volume Brian plays at is pretty intimidating, and just touching the guitar like he does, stroking the strings and coaxing sounds out of it, makes you realize how good he is at being so sensitive with it. Practice with some amount of volume if you can, although I’m sure your neighbors won’t love me for saying that.”

BEST EXAMPLE: “Spread Your Wings” (*Live Killers*, 1979) 0:53–1:07

BENDING

Practice bends to add some vital emotion.

MAY USES LIGHT strings and a very low action, so he needs to be in full control when bending up to a note.

“If you’re practicing bends, you need to consider which string it is that you’re bending and where on that string you are,” Colquhoun advises. “I’d suggest that the easiest place to practice and learn control is on the G, somewhere from the middle of the string length to about the 12th fret. Of course, as you get closer to the bridge or the nut, the tension changes significantly, so although you’re trying to reach the same pitch, you’re going to have to apply a different amount of pressure to get the same result, depending on where you’re bending from. With the high E, you need an awful lot of pressure. You’re trying to achieve the same sound across all the strings, wherever you are on the neck.

“For practice, play over a drone of whatever note you choose and then try to get the pitch exactly the same as you bend up from different parts of the string. You’re trying to make musical dissonance between where you’re bending from and how long it takes that bend to get up to the note. Another great way to practice is to bend to the note as a pre-bend and then listen to where your pitch is when you get to it. That will teach you about the pressure required.”

FOR A SOFTER SOUND HE’LL PALM THE SIXPENCE AND USE HIS INDEX FINGER TO ENTICE NOTES FROM THE STRING

like he was stroking it. What I took from that was, when you normally pick a note, it will initially go sharp until it starts to

BEST EXAMPLE: “We Are the Champions” (*News of the World*, 1977) 2:40–2:58

USE YOUR INDEX FINGER

A signature pick-hand technique to add expression.

WHEN MAY NEEDS a softer sound, he’ll sometimes palm the sixpence and use his index finger to entice notes from the string. It’s a subtle, yet very effective way of adding dynamics and expression for heartbreaking emotion.

“I asked Brian about this,” Colquhoun says. “He explained that he does it to get direct contact with the string. He said he was picking along the length of the string, so it’s almost

settle again, but if you pick it more gently and along the length of the string it will stay at pitch. So if you pick it really gently, you’re almost fine tuning it, and it’ll be very sweet sounding.”

BEST EXAMPLE: “Bohemian Rhapsody” (*A Night at the Opera*, 1975) 5:33–end

KNOW YOUR LEGATO

A well-used part of the tonal arsenal.

LEGATO IS AN essential technique for smooth and swift lead work, and Brian has often used it combined with alternate picking and a hybrid of tapping and string bending.

“Brian is predominantly a legato player, so any hammering-on needs to be smooth,” Colquhoun explains. “Use the weight of your hand rather than thinking of it as being just your finger that’s hitting the string. Use it for a musical reason, and think about where the accent is within the beat, too. I’ll play the same patterns and look for the offbeat or downbeat. Then the battle is to make the



The Brian May Guitars Super will get you closest to the sounds of Brian's original guitar.



May's hand never strays far from the vibrato arm, aiding his musical sound.

hammered-on notes as loud as the picked notes. You've got to increase the intensity of the hammer-on, then lower the volume of the picked notes. Again, it's about control."

BEST EXAMPLE: "It's Late" (*News of the World*, 1977) 3:33–3:49

TAMING FEEDBACK

How to make your feedback sound musical.

THE RED SPECIAL'S semi-acoustic construction and colossal neck, not to mention the sheer volume at which Brian runs his amps, means that he has a surprisingly musical feedback on tap.

"It's about proximity, but it's not easy at domestic volumes," Colquhoun observes. "As a place to start, if you

point the guitar at the amp, there will be a spot where it takes off somewhere, but you've got to walk around the room until you get it to feed back. It's so much a part of Brian's sound, but it's not a distortion sustain; it's more like a feedback that's always there. With Brian's style, it's more about stopping the feedback than trying to get it when you want it."

BEST EXAMPLE: "We Will Rock You" (*News of the World*, 1977) 1:21–1:32

FINDING HARMONY

Wonderful harmonies are a Queen signature.

"BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY" IS of course the ultimate illustration of how Queen skillfully multitracked vocals to stunning

X 0 X

D/A

LEARN THE D/A CHORD
Simple, but effective.

One of May's anchors is D/A, where he plays the notes of a D chord over the open A string. He's used it on countless occasions in both solo passages ("We Will Rock You" and "A Kind of Magic") and rhythm sections ("Put Out the Fire" and "One Vision"). "Hammer to Fall," a true go-ahead rocker, is built upon D/A, and it's a chord that's essential to nailing May's playing style.

BEST EXAMPLE: "HAMMER TO FALL" (*THE WORKS*, 1984) 0:00–0:07 AND THROUGHOUT

effect, and Brian always applied many of the same recording techniques for his unique and staggeringly inventive guitar orchestrations.

When tackling the daunting task of re-creating such musical confections, consider the full chords that underpin the core melody you've come up with, and then experiment with inversions and finger positions to identify effective harmonies. Build the chords with one note per track and try to ensure that the harmonies entwine rather than simply follow each other up and down in step.

Be warned: This is a highly technical and laborious process that will make you wonder how Queen managed to do any of it in the pre-digital era.

BEST EXAMPLE: "All Dead, All Dead" (*News of the World*, 1977) 1:42–2:13 ■



Sheer Guitar Attack

Breaking down Brian May's lead guitar style

BY CHARLIE GRIFFITHS

QUEEN'S BRIAN MAY is a nimble-fingered and technical player with a keen grasp of harmony, but his melodic, singable approach to both riffs and solos means any player can learn from his style. In this lesson, we'll highlight the key elements of Brian's signature lead playing voice, which is informed by a diverse mix of musical influences ranging from blues, metal, classical and even traditional Dixieland jazz. The licks presented herein demonstrate a variety of techniques, including the kind of single-string tapping, scalar picking approaches and soulful, melodic lead work that Brian is noted for applying tastefully in such songs as "Bijou" and "Who Wants to Live Forever," all delivered with singing finger vibrato and string bends. We'll also take a look at May's clever use of a delay effect to create harmony leads live.

TAPPING

Ex. 1 employs a single-string tapping approach inspired by what Brian plays in "One Vision," the opening track from *A Kind of Magic* (1986). To perform the repeating bend lick on beats 1 and 2, use alternate picking and your fret hand's middle finger to bend the B string, supported one fret below by the middle finger (3+2 reinforced bend fingering). Then move your pick hand's middle finger into position to repeatedly tap and pull-off from the A note on the high E string's 17th fret as your fret hand continually shifts down the neck to catch each pull-off from a successively lower



Brian May performing on the Rhapsody Tour at the American Airlines Center, Dallas, July 23, 2019

RICK KERN/GETTY IMAGES

fret. Be sure to fret each lower note before pulling off to it. And when releasing each tap, flick the string slightly downward (toward the floor), in order to keep the string vibrating and maintain a good, even amount of volume note to note. The descending notes are derived from the E blues scale (E, G, A, B $\flat$, B D), so this lick works well over most E-based rock riffs.

ALTERNATE-PICKED LICKS

Ex. 2 is a classically flavored Brian May-style ascending run performed with alternate-picking, using notes from the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A). If you want to play a harmony part above it, use diatonic 3rds or 5ths in the key of C, starting on E or G and walking up the scale in lock-step fashion. Notice the position shift on beat 3 of bar 1, which is crucial for continuing the climb, and the use of vibrato with a half-step bend on the final note. This type of vibrato, which is called *bend vibrato*, is the most expressive and vocal-like guitar technique, and it's a hallmark of May's guitar voice and touch. The key to performing this technique well is to first bend up to the prescribed target pitch, which in this case is C, then proceed to partially release the bend, by about a quarter tone (which is half of a half step), then bend it back up to the target

pitch. Do this repeatedly in a quick, even rhythm, but not too fast. (Recall the sound of a great singer holding and shaking a note.)

EXPRESSIVE STRING BENDS

May is a master of using a *pre-bend* to add great expression to a melody note, as he does so beautifully throughout his solo in "Bohemian Rhapsody" (*A Night at the Opera*, 1975). The lick in **Ex. 3** similarly makes effective use of the technique. As its name implies, a pre-bend is performed by bending a note silently, before it is picked. This is indicated in the tablature by a straight vertical arrow above the fret number, and in the standard notation by a grace note enclosed in parentheses.

The technique takes a bit of practice to master, as you need to acquire the muscle memory to accurately anticipate the precise amount of push pressure to apply against the string in order to bend it up to the intended target pitch without the benefit of hearing what you're doing until it's too late — meaning until after you've already bent then picked the string, in that order. And so it takes some trial and error for your ear and brain to train your fingers to feel and blindly respond to the string tension to achieve the desired result. Each bar of our featured example begins with a

pre-bend that is then gracefully shaken using the bend vibrato technique detailed earlier. Mastering this technique is a key to copying Brian's celebrated touch and style.

DELAY EFFECT FOR HARMONIES

A signature effect-based trick that May is famous for employing brilliantly is the use of a delay unit to add either one or two prominent repeats, the timing of which the guitarist sets to match the tempo of what he's playing, so that each note he plays echos in a pronounced quarter-note rhythm at the same volume. May originally employed a Maestro Echoplex mechanical tape delay machine for this effect back in the 70s, most famously in his breakdown guitar solo in "Brighton Rock" (*Sheer Heart Attack*, 1973). The trick involves playing an ascending or descending scale-based melody, with the echoed notes providing a rhythmically synchronized harmony to the notes played in real time, like a melodic canon, or round, as in "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." Set the rate, or speed, control on your analog or digital delay pedal accordingly for the lick shown in **Ex. 4** to create a harmonious waterfall of notes.

BLUES INFLUENCE

Inspired by May's solos in songs such as "Headlong" (*Innuendo*, 1991) and "Dead on Time" (*Jazz*, 1978), **Ex. 5** presents a descending lick that's based on the B blues scale (B, D, E, F $\sharp$, A). Notice the cascading melodic contour, as the notes zigzag and work their way across the strings, and the use of a pull-off from the first 16th note of each beat, which creates a smooth legato articulation.

When pulling off, pull the string in toward your palm slightly as you let go of it, so as to pluck it slightly, which will keep the vibration going and maintain an even volume note to note. The objective is the same as with the tapped pull-offs detailed earlier with **Ex. 1**. The only difference is that now we're pulling-off from a fret-hand finger. And, as always, be sure to pre-fret the lower note that you're pulling off to, so that it's ready to catch the pull-off.

Ex. 1 Tapping

(Em)
♩ = 100

Ex. 2 Alternate picked licks

♩ = 110 C

Ex. 3 Expressive string bends

(Am)
♩ = 90

Ex. 4 Delay effect for harmonies

♩ = 100 (Am)

w/tape delay, set to quarter notes at this tempo

ORCHESTRATING GUITAR LINES

Among his many talents, May is a skilled and accomplished audio engineer and producer who knows how to make great use of a multi-track recording studio to

craft ambitiously orchestrated arrangements. Inspired by the baroque-tinged "The Millionaire Waltz" (*A Day at the Races*, 1976), **Ex. 6** will help steer you in new musical directions and think

about effective ways to construct guitar parts. Notice the use of arpeggios and targeted chord tones, as well as the contrast between sustained, vibratoed notes and quick triplet flourishes.

SCALE RUNS

The lick in **Ex. 7** is inspired by Queen classics like “Bohemian Rhapsody” and the *Jazz* cut “Bicycle Race,” two tracks that feature Brian playing long, winding scale runs. You’ll need to learn some scale shapes to take the idea further, but this lick, which uses notes from the E major scale (E, F $\sharp$, G $\sharp$, A, B, C $\sharp$, D $\sharp$) will get you started. It’ll also help you improve your finger dexterity, and you’ll develop your ear too. Again, note the use of finger vibratos, pre-bends and a position shift, in this case after the bend in bar 2. Also noteworthy are the *staccato* articulations (indicated by the little black dots) leading up to the final note. These notes are to be muted with the fret hand immediately after they’re picked, to create a short, clipped sound.

EMOTIVE PLAYING

Brian's playing can be incredibly emotive, as you can hear in tracks like "Who Wants to Live Forever" (*A Kind of Magic*), "These Are the Days of Our Lives" and "Bijou" (both from *Innuendo*). For our final example (**Ex. 8**), you'll use pre-bends and bend vibratos to emulate Brian's magic touch. You'll need to shift your fret hand down the string for each successive bend, so that it is performed with the ring finger, supported one fret below by the middle finger. Note that the first two pre-bends are whole-step bends (as indicated by the "1" in the tab), which is the equivalent pitch of an unbent note two frets higher, and the final pre-bend is only a half-step bend, matching the pitch of the unbent note one fret higher.

The phrase concludes with a *legato finger slide* down the B string, from C to A, for which only the C note is picked (as indicated by the slur connecting the two notes). The A is gently shaken, then the whole sequence repeats, providing worthwhile practice for these invaluable rock lead playing techniques. 🎸

Ex. 5 Blues influence

♩ = 105 (Bm) (G)

The first staff of music is in treble clef, key of B minor (two sharps: F# and C#), and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 105. The key signature is Bm, and the final chord is G. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some beamed eighth notes. The notes are: B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C#4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C#3, B2, A2, G2, F#2, E2, D2, C#2, B1, A1, G1, F#1, E1, D1, C#1, B0, A0, G0, F#0, E0, D0, C#0, B-1, A-1, G-1, F#-1, E-1, D-1, C#-1, B-2, A-2, G-2, F#-2, E-2, D-2, C#-2, B-3, A-3, G-3, F#-3, E-3, D-3, C#-3, B-4, A-4, G-4, F#-4, E-4, D-4, C#-4, B-5, A-5, G-5, F#-5, E-5, D-5, C#-5, B-6, A-6, G-6, F#-6, E-6, D-6, C#-6, B-7, A-7, G-7, F#-7, E-7, D-7, C#-7, B-8, A-8, G-8, F#-8, E-8, D-8, C#-8, B-9, A-9, G-9, F#-9, E-9, D-9, C#-9, B-10, A-10, G-10, F#-10, E-10, D-10, C#-10, B-11, A-11, G-11, F#-11, E-11, D-11, C#-11, B-12, A-12, G-12, F#-12, E-12, D-12, C#-12, B-13, A-13, G-13, F#-13, E-13, D-13, C#-13, B-14, A-14, G-14, F#-14, E-14, D-14, C#-14, B-15, A-15, G-15, F#-15, E-15, D-15, C#-15, B-16, A-16, G-16, F#-16, E-16, D-16, C#-16, B-17, A-17, G-17, F#-17, E-17, D-17, C#-17, B-18, A-18, G-18, F#-18, E-18, D-18, C#-18, B-19, A-19, G-19, F#-19, E-19, D-19, C#-19, B-20, A-20, G-20, F#-20, E-20, D-20, C#-20, B-21, A-21, G-21, F#-21, E-21, D-21, C#-21, B-22, A-22, G-22, F#-22, E-22, D-22, C#-22, B-23, A-23, G-23, F#-23, E-23, D-23, C#-23, B-24, A-24, G-24, F#-24, E-24, D-24, C#-24, B-25, A-25, G-25, F#-25, E-25, D-25, C#-25, B-26, A-26, G-26, F#-26, E-26, D-26, C#-26, B-27, A-27, G-27, F#-27, E-27, D-27, C#-27, B-28, A-28, G-28, F#-28, E-28, D-28, C#-28, B-29, A-29, G-29, F#-29, E-29, D-29, C#-29, B-30, A-30, G-30, F#-30, E-30, D-30, C#-30, B-31, A-31, G-31, F#-31, E-31, D-31, C#-31, B-32, A-32, G-32, F#-32, E-32, D-32, C#-32, B-33, A-33, G-33, F#-33, E-33, D-33, C#-33, B-34, A-34, G-34, F#-34, E-34, D-34, C#-34, B-35, A-35, G-35, F#-35, E-35, D-35, C#-35, B-36, A-36, G-36, F#-36, E-36, D-36, C#-36, B-37, A-37, G-37, F#-37, E-37, D-37, C#-37, B-38, A-38, G-38, F#-38, E-38, D-38, C#-38, B-39, A-39, G-39, F#-39, E-39, D-39, C#-39, B-40, A-40, G-40, F#-40, E-40, D-40, C#-40, B-41, A-41, G-41, F#-41, E-41, D-41, C#-41, B-42, A-42, G-42, F#-42, E-42, D-42, C#-42, B-43, A-43, G-43, F#-43, E-43, D-43, C#-43, B-44, A-44, G-44, F#-44, E-44, D-44, C#-44, B-45, A-45, G-45, F#-45, E-45, D-45, C#-45, B-46, A-46, G-46, F#-46, E-46, D-46, C#-46, B-47, A-47, G-47, F#-47, E-47, D-47, C#-47, B-48, A-48, G-48, F#-48, E-48, D-48, C#-48, B-49, A-49, G-49, F#-49, E-49, D-49, C#-49, B-50, A-50, G-50, F#-50, E-50, D-50, C#-50, B-51, A-51, G-51, F#-51, E-51, D-51, C#-51, B-52, A-52, G-52, F#-52, E-52, D-52, C#-52, B-53, A-53, G-53, F#-53, E-53, D-53, C#-53, B-54, A-54, G-54, F#-54, E-54, D-54, C#-54, B-55, A-55, G-55, F#-55, E-55, D-55, C#-55, B-56, A-56, G-56, F#-56, E-56, D-56, C#-56, B-57, A-57, G-57, F#-57, E-57, D-57, C#-57, B-58, A-58, G-58, F#-58, E-58, D-58, C#-58, B-59, A-59, G-59, F#-59, E-59, D-59, C#-59, B-60, A-60, G-60, F#-60, E-60, D-60, C#-60, B-61, A-61, G-61, F#-61, E-61, D-61, C#-61, B-62, A-62, G-62, F#-62, E-62, D-62, C#-62, B-63, A-63, G-63, F#-63, E-63, D-63, C#-63, B-64, A-64, G-64, F#-64, E-64, D-64, C#-64, B-65, A-65, G-65, F#-65, E-65, D-65, C#-65, B-66, A-66, G-66, F#-66, E-66, D-66, C#-66, B-67, A-67, G-67, F#-67, E-67, D-67, C#-67, B-68, A-68, G-68, F#-68, E-68, D-68, C#-68, B-69, A-69, G-69, F#-69, E-69, D-69, C#-69, B-70, A-70, G-70, F#-70, E-70, D-70, C#-70, B-71, A-71, G-71, F#-71, E-71, D-71, C#-71, B-72, A-72, G-72, F#-72, E-72, D-72, C#-72, B-73, A-73, G-73, F#-73, E-73, D-73, C#-73, B-74, A-74, G-74, F#-74, E-74, D-74, C#-74, B-75, A-75, G-75, F#-75, E-75, D-75, C#-75, B-76, A-76, G-76, F#-76, E-76, D-76, C#-76, B-77, A-77, G-77, F#-77, E-77, D-77, C#-77, B-78, A-78, G-78, F#-78, E-78, D-78, C#-78, B-79, A-79, G-79, F#-79, E-79, D-79, C#-79, B-80, A-80, G-80, F#-80, E-80, D-80, C#-80, B-81, A-81, G-81, F#-81, E-81, D-81, C#-81, B-82, A-82, G-82, F#-82, E-82, D-82, C#-82, B-83, A-83, G-83, F#-83, E-83, D-83, C#-83, B-84, A-84, G-84, F#-84, E-84, D-84, C#-84, B-85, A-85, G-85, F#-85, E-85, D-85, C#-85, B-86, A-86, G-86, F#-86, E-86, D-86, C#-86, B-87, A-87, G-87, F#-87, E-87, D-87, C#-87, B-88, A-88, G-88, F#-88, E-88, D-88, C#-88, B-89, A-89, G-89, F#-89, E-89, D-89, C#-89, B-90, A-90, G-90, F#-90, E-90, D-90, C#-90, B-91, A-91, G-91, F#-91, E-91, D-91, C#-91, B-92, A-92, G-92, F#-92, E-92, D-92, C#-92, B-93, A-93, G-93, F#-93, E-93, D-93, C#-93, B-94, A-94, G-94, F#-94, E-94, D-94, C#-94, B-95, A-95, G-95, F#-95, E-95, D-95, C#-95, B-96, A-96, G-96, F#-96, E-96, D-96, C#-96, B-97, A-97, G-97, F#-97, E-97, D-97, C#-97, B-98, A-98, G-98, F#-98, E-98, D-98, C#-98, B-99, A-99, G-99, F#-99, E-99, D-99, C#-99, B-100, A-100, G-100, F#-100, E-100, D-100, C#-100, B-101, A-101, G-101, F#-101, E-101, D-101, C#-101, B-102, A-102, G-102, F#-102, E-102, D-102, C#-102, B-103, A-103, G-103, F#-103, E-103, D-103, C#-103, B-104, A-104, G-104, F#-104, E-104, D-104, C#-104, B-105, A-105, G-105, F#-105, E-105, D-105, C#-10

Ex. 6 Orchestrating guitar lines

♩ = 150

(C) (G/B) (Am) (G/C)

8

10 9 12 10 9 10 9 8

(Am) (Bm7b5) (E7) (G)

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

Ex. 7 Scale runs

(E)

TAB

7 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 8 8 9 11 9 10 12 9 11 12 12

Ex. 8 Emotive playing

♩. = 80

Am Dm

8va

(play 4 times)

TAB

15 (15)(15) 13-12 13 (13)(13) 12-10 12 (12)(12) 10 13 10



6 & 12 String Acoustic
Guitar, 6 & 8 String
Acoustic Baritone,
Classical Guitar,
Cuban Tres Guitar,

Jazz Electric/Acoustic Guitar,
Electric Guitar, 4 & 5 String Electric Bass,
Hi-Strung Guitar, Tenor Guitar,
Pedal Steel Guitar, Resophonic Guitar,
Nuages® for Manouche Guitar,
Weissenborn® Guitar & Ukulele,
6 & 8 String Hawaiian Steel Guitar,
Irish Tenor, Tenor & 5 String Banjo,
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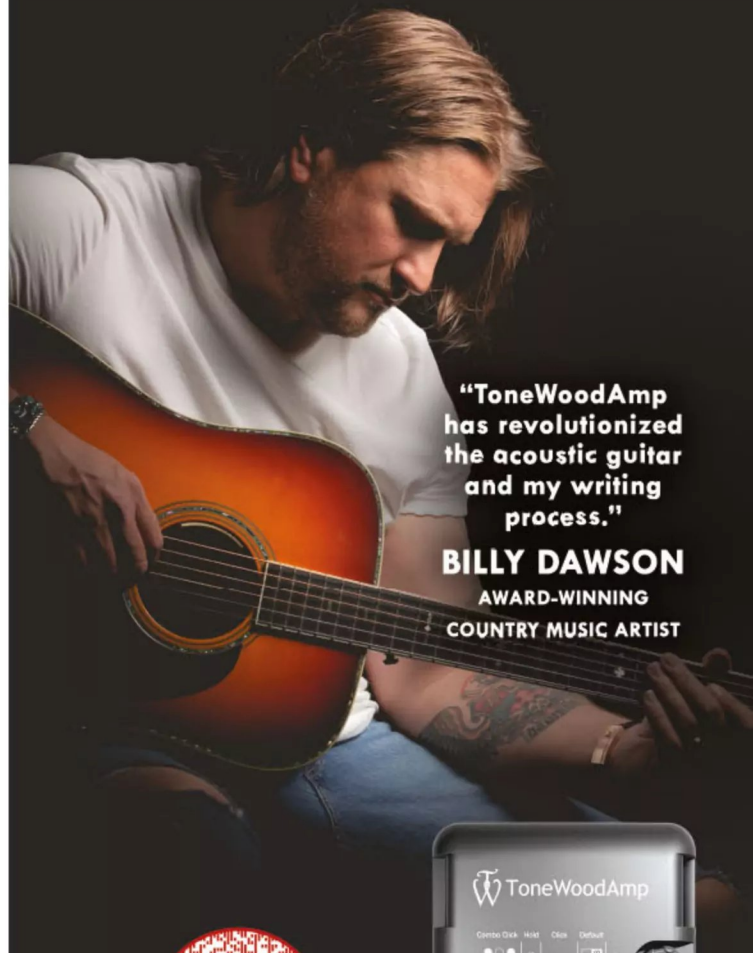
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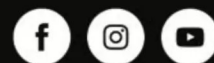


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Melodic-Harmonic Framework, Part 1

An introduction to triad and 7th-chord arpeggios, focusing on the top three strings

BY TOM KOLB

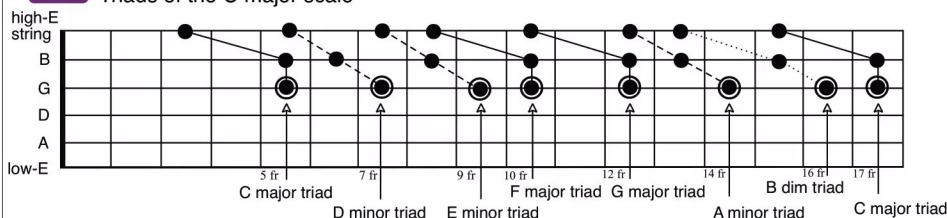
IN A LEAD guitarist's world, so much attention is given to scale patterns that it's no wonder the topic of arpeggios is often put on the back burner. That's unfortunate, as these little three- and four-note wonders — *triad*- and *7th-chord arpeggios*, respectively — can be used to create flowing and highly appealing single-note lines that can be used to describe the underlying chord changes or to create the illusion of non-existent background harmony. Arm yourself with a handful of arpeggio patterns and you'll never be at a loss when faced with even the most complex chord progression. Or apply a syncopated rhythm to a simple arpeggio to generate an instant riff idea!

In this first installment of this two-part lesson, we'll focus on the top three strings only. Part 2 will cover the bottom three strings and put everything together. For the sake of continuity and comparison, we'll concentrate on the arpeggios of the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B). So remove your low-E, A and D strings... just kidding! Tune up those six-strings and let's have at it.

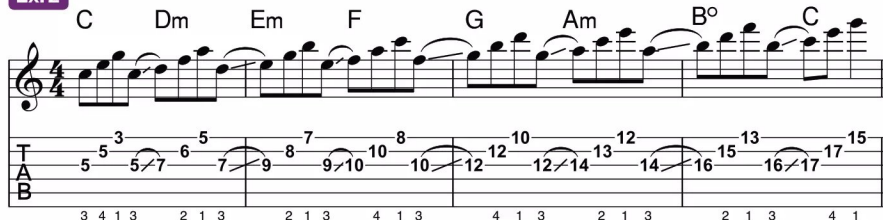
TRIAD ARPEGGIOS IN ROOT POSITION

We'll start by surveying the three fundamental types, or *qualities*, of triads that exist within the major scale: major (1, 3, 5), minor (1, ♭3, 5) and diminished (1, ♭3, ♭5). **Ex. 1** illustrates the guitar fretboard from the nut to the 17th fret. The three-dot groupings represent the shapes of harmonized triads of the C major scale: C (C, E, G), Dm (D, F, A), Em (E, G, B), F (F, A, C), G (G, B, D), Am (A, C, E) and Bdim (B, D, F). Solid

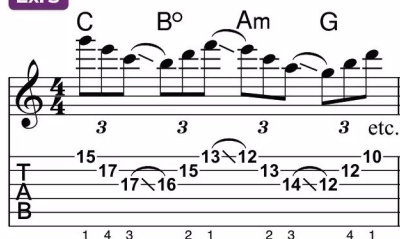
Ex. 1 Triads of the C major scale



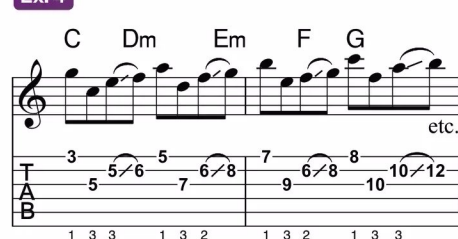
Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Ex. 4



lines are used to connect the dots that form the shapes of the major triads (C, F and G), dashed lines connect the notes of the minor triads (Dm, Em and Am), and dotted lines join the notes of the Bdim triad. All triads are voiced root-3rd-5th, with their roots on the G string. These shapes make all of the triads playable as chords (all notes sounded together), but the object here is to play them melodically — one note at a time. You can, of course, let the notes ring together, if you like.

Ex. 2 is a musical exercise that takes you all the way through the triads, in ascending order, with finger slides on the G string creating a smooth transition from root to root. Experiment with the following articulation and phrasing techniques: *legato* (allowing the notes of each triad to ring together), *staccato* (dampening each note immediately after picking it), and *melodic* (sustaining each note for its full rhythmic value). **Ex. 3** is almost the reverse image, descending the triads but linking them with legato

finger slides on both the G string (roots) and the high-E string (5ths). Feel free to follow the established pattern all the way down the fretboard. **Ex. 4** is yet another linking example that segues from the 3rd of each triad with legato slides on the B string. All three of these patterns include maneuvers that will be used in one form or another in the licks that follow.

Ex. 5 is an extended passage that uses all the triads and legato maneuvers we just covered, except Bdim. The setting is a retro R&B ballad with jazz-fusion elements; think John Mayer meets Larry Carlton and Reggie Young. The chord progression is simple, just Cmaj7 to Dm7, but the lines use triad substitution tactics — triads that don't necessarily align perfectly with the underlying chord tones — to cast a liquidy landscape of sweet soul licks and phrases.

TRIAD INVERSIONS

We've covered root-position triads on the top-three string set, but there are two other voicing possibilities. They are *1st inversion*, where the 3rd is the lowest note, or "in the bass," as illustrated in **Examples 6a–g**, and *2nd inversion*, where the 5th is in the bass, (see **Examples 7a–g**). As with the root-position triads, these inversion shapes can be used as chord voicings, as well as single-note melodic arpeggio patterns. It's actually helpful to understand their correlation to standard chord voicings. For instance, each of the 1st-inversion major and minor shapes in Examples 6a–f can easily be visualized as being the top-half of a standard barre chord (C/E aligns with a C barre chord at the 8th fret, and the Dm/F is the top half of a 10th-position Dm barre chord). The 2nd-inversion major and minor triad shapes in **Examples 7a–f** resemble open-position D and Dm chord voicings. Once understood, it's just a matter of sliding the shapes up or down the neck, so that the root "plugs into" the appropriate fret.

As we know, the C major scale can be realigned to create seven modes [C Ionian (C, D, E, F, G, A, B), D Dorian (D, E, F, G, A, B, C), E Phrygian (E, F, G, A, B, C, D), F Lydian (F, G, A, B, C, D,

Ex. 5

(neck single-coil pickup w/mild overdrive)

♩ = 92 N.C. Cmaj7 Dm7

Ex. 6

1st-inversion triads (3rd in the bass)

a) C/E 8fr 2 1 1
b) Dm/F 10fr 1 1 1 (3 3 3)
c) Em/G 12fr 1 1 1 (3 3 3)
d) F/A 13fr 2 1 1
e) G/B 15fr 2 1 1
f) Am/C 5fr 1 1 1 (3 3 3)
g) B°/D 6fr 2 1 3

Ex. 7

2nd-inversion triads (5th in the bass)

a) C/G 1 1
b) Dm/A 2 3 1
c) Em/B 2 3 1
d) F/C 1 3 2
e) G/D 1 3 2
f) Am/E 2 3 1
g) B°/F 1 3 1

Ex. 8

(neck & bridge humbuckers)

♩ = 100 G6

E), G Mixolydian (G, A, B, C, D, E, F), A Aeolian (A, B, C, D, E, F, G), and B Locrian (B, C, D, E, F, G, A)]. We can use triads in this same way. Check out **Ex. 8**: This chord riff uses a variety of root-position, 1st-inversion and 2nd-inversion triads in a keyboard-like modal vamp over a G6 tonality (G, B, D, E). The triads are derived from the C major scale, giving the passage a G Mixolydian flavor. (As the notes of G Mixolydian are relative to the C major scale, so too are all of the harmonized triads, just in a different order of succession.)

Ex. 9 gives the D Dorian mode the triadic treatment in a progressive-rock ballad setting. These voicings are all 2nd-inversion triads found in the chord frames in Examples 7a–f. The legato-slide maneuvers are from the exercises and patterns introduced in Examples 2–4. Follow the suggested fingerings carefully, as the point is to let all the notes ring together.

We're back to G Mixolydian in **Ex. 10**, with a rock-shuffle romp over a classic I - ♭VII - IV progression (G - F - C). (The pedaled tonic bass note, G, reinforces the modal vibe.) Virtually all of the triad inversions are present and accounted for in this active example.

TWO-STRING TRIADS

Many rock solos feature dazzling triad displays played along the B and high E strings. Take a look at the fretboard diagram in **Ex. 11a**. This illustrates the matching shape of the three major triads in the key of C — C, F and G. The root is on the B string, followed by the 3rd and 5th on the high E. These shapes are easily fretted using your middle finger for the root note, index finger for the 3rd and pinkie for the 5th.

The neck diagram in **Ex. 11b** illustrates the shapes for the three minor triads (Dm, Em and Am) and the “oddball” diminished (Bdim). Notice that the minor triad arpeggio shapes form a wider span than the major ones, requiring the index finger to reach back a fret to grab the lowest note on the high E string. The Bdim shape is probably best fingered using the ring finger on the

Ex. 9 (neck & middle single-coil pickups w/dist. and delay)

♩ = 50

Dm⁷ Em/D Dm⁷ Em/D Dm⁷ G/D Dm⁷

C/G triad (partial) Dm/A triad -----| F/C -----| G/D -----| Am/E ----| G/D -----| F/C triad

let ring throughout

TAB

1 3 1 2 1 3 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 2

Ex. 10 (bridge humbucker w/overdrive and delay)

♩ = 132

(bridge) backbucker w/overdrive and delay)

(♩ = ♩^3)

1

G F/G C/G G

G major triad (1st inversion) F major triad (2nd inversion) C major triad (1st inversion) G major triad (1st inversion) 3 D minor

2 1 2 1 2 3 2 1 3 4 3

4

triad - C major triad G major triad G major triad F/G C/G

(1st inversion) (1st inversion) (2nd inversion) (1st inversion) Am triad Am triad (1st inversion)

10 10 8 8 7 8 0 4 4 0 2 1 0 5

4 3 3 2 2 1 2 1 2 2 1 2 1 2

7

G

Am triad (2nd inversion) G major triad (partial) Ami triad - G major triad F major triad F major triad (2nd inversion) G major triad (1st inversion partial)

7 8 12 14 13 12 10 12 12 10 8 5 6 7 5 5 5 3 3 0

3 3 2 1 4 3 4 1 2 3 3 3 1 1

B string instead of the middle finger (ring, index, pinkie) but experiment and use whichever combination of fingers works best for you.

Although these two-string triad pairs can be played in succession up and down the fretboard, they are often used in cycled form (repeated several times) during a solo. **Examples 12a-g** offer a variety of legato-fueled repeating patterns used over each triad shape. You can hear Jimmy Page employ the patterns

in **Examples 12b** and **12c** in many Led Zeppelin solos, such as “Stairway to Heaven,” “Rock and Roll” and “Dazed and Confused.” **Ex. 12d** is the pattern that Mark Knopfler employed in his dizzying triad blasts during the climax of his solo in the classic Dire Straits song “Sultans of Swing.” **Ex. 12e** is built for speed, and **Ex. 12g** is a great “mini-sweep” lick. Find a pattern that speaks to you personally and try applying it to any and all of the triad shapes you’ve learned.



Mark
Knopfler

7TH-CHORD ARPEGGIOS

If you know your basic music theory, you're aware that to create the triads of the major scale you essentially stack diatonic 3rds on top of one another. Go one step further and stack a 3rd above the 5th of the triad and you have a 7th chord or arpeggio, as in C, E, G, B = C major 7th, or Cmaj7. Instead of starting from scratch and learning brand new shapes for these 7th-chord arpeggios (which we will henceforth simply refer to as *7th arpeggios*), we're going to combine some of the voicings covered in this lesson.

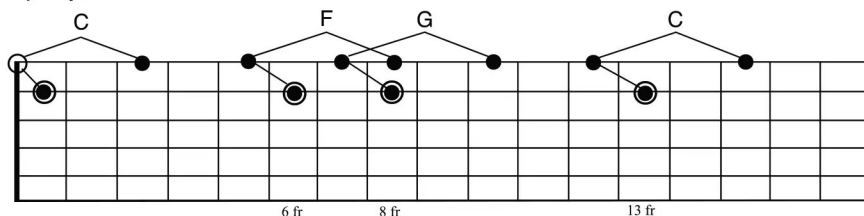
Take a look at the neck diagram in **Ex. 13a**. The first four-note shape is a Cmaj7 arpeggio (C, E, G, B). You'll recognize the first three notes as the root-position major triad shape we started with back in Ex. 1. Now look at the shape of the second, third and fourth notes (E, G and B) of the same Cmaj7 arpeggio. Look familiar? It should. This is the minor triad shape we just met in Ex. 11b. Specifically, an Em triad (E, G, B).

What does this mean? Well, this concept can be used as a type of speed learning. When tackling something new, try not to go back to the drawing board. Instead, try to find an element of the new material that you know well or are familiar with, and build from there. In

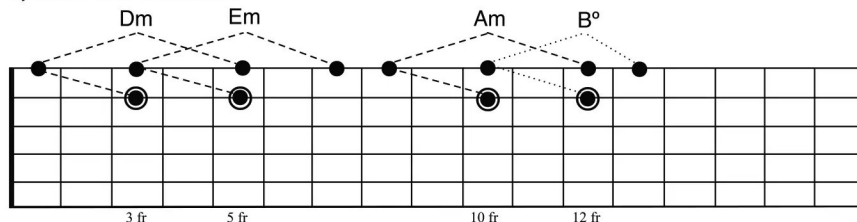
Ex. 11

Triads of the C major scale

a) major



b) minor and diminished



Ex. 12

a) C *play 4x*
C major triad
T A B: 1 0 3
1 3

b) Dm *play 4x*
Dm triad
T A B: 5 1 3
4 1 2

c) Em *play 4x*
Em triad
T A B: 3 7 3
1 4 1 2

d) F *play 4x*
F major triad
T A B: 8 5 6
4 1 2 1

e) G *play 4x*
G major triad
T A B: 7 10 7
1 4 1 2

f) Am *play 4x*
Am triad
T A B: 10 8 10
2 1 2

g) B° *play 4x*
B° triad
T A B: 12 10 13
4 2 1

this case, we can view a Cmaj7 arpeggio as a blending (or marriage) of two triads; C major and Em, or one overlaid on top of the other. From this aspect look at the Cmaj7 arpeggio on the fretboard diagram again. The solid line from the root to the next note signifies a major 3rd interval (the launching pad of a major triad). From there, a dashed line connects the remaining three notes, designating a minor triad shape.

The Fmaj7 arpeggio (F, A, C, E) has the same contour, but the G7 arpeggio is

slightly different. Like a G7 chord, it has the formula root - major 3rd - 5th - b7th. The use of the dotted line clarifies that this arpeggio is a G major triad with a Bdim triad overlaid on top (again, starting from the second note of the G triad).

The diagram in **Ex. 13b** displays the 7th arpeggios constructed from the minor triads and the diminished triad. (The Am7 arpeggio appears twice; once in open position, and again an octave higher at the 12th fret.) Study the minor



7ths first (Dm7, Em7 and Am7), as they all share the same voicing shape. In a sense, they are the “upside down” versions of the major 7ths, in that they begin life as a minor triad and morph into a major triad on top. The B minor 7 flat-5 (Bm7 $\flat$ 5: B, D, F, A) is unique, in that it wears a minor triad “hat” on top of its diminished triad foundation.

That’s a boatload of theory to digest in one fell swoop, but it is the reason this lesson is concentrating on the top three strings. If your head is swimming, just memorize the shapes of these 7th arpeggios for now. But by all means, try to comprehend the triad pairing concept while you’re learning them. The benefits and rewards will pay off in a big way for you musically and creatively, and in understanding the guitar fretboard in general.

If you’re intrigued by the triad “piggy-backing” concept, here’s a quick, helpful formula to use for reference: (Remember, the top triad begins on the second note of the bottom triad.)

- Major 7 = major triad + minor triad
- Minor 7 = minor triad + major triad
- Dominant 7 = major triad + dim triad
- Minor 7 flat-5 = dim triad + minor triad

Ex. 14 is a lick-oriented exercise that combines several 7th arpeggios. Bar 1 aligns with a Cmaj7 chord harmony, while bar 2 is designed for the Am7 chord change. Put the example together very slowly and try to connect with the “overlapping triad” theory presented in the last few paragraphs.

Ex. 15 puts a caper on this lesson with an array of triads and 7th arpeggios spread out against a funk-reggae A minor groove inspired by the classic guitar duel between Don Felder and Joe Walsh in “Hotel California” by the Eagles.

We’ve barely scratched the surface of the topic of triads and 7th arpeggios here, but this is a good starting point. Next month, in the conclusion of this lesson, we’ll hit the lower strings and tie all six together. Until then, happy arpeggiating! 🎸

Ex. 13 7th-chord arpeggios of the C major scale

a)

b)

Ex. 14

Ex. 15 (bridge humbucker w/overdrive)



Acoustic Relativity

Does your guitar fit your body?

BY JIMMY LESLIE

INTERVIEWING TAYLOR'S ANDY POWERS about the diminutive Grand Theater (see review page 86) got me pondering the evolution of body sizes, proportions and why a player might settle on a particular model. When I was a teen, the only readily available steel-string was a big old dreadnought. It looked hilarious on my small frame and was a challenge to wrap my arms and hands around. As I grew up into a small cat with a fully fledged Napoleon complex, I was either too stubborn or too stupid to find a guitar that fit. Nowadays, acoustics are readily available in every size and shape, with an ever-growing number of options more suitable to hobbit-sized men like me, as well as woman and children. Here are a few theories of relativity about how proportions play out in a variety of situations.

SIZE MATTERS, IN CONTEXT

Three factors play crucial roles in determining an appropriate acoustic body style: your physical body, the style you play, and the context of your ensemble. If you're a large person or one that plays aggressively with a pick, a dreadnought or jumbo is probably on point. For everyone else, a smaller fiddle may be perfectly suitable. Sure, a dreadnought's booming bass is awesome if you're playing in a strictly acoustic bluegrass ensemble, but how much bass does one truly need if you usually play with a bassist?

This month's Frets feature artist Ben Harper (see page 66) had this to say in a previous interview: "When you're playing folk hip-hop with the Innocent Criminals bringing the funk, there's a lot of low end kicking around onstage. I couldn't have too much bottom coming out of my instrument, but I didn't want

to sacrifice all of it. For my signature model Martin, we resurrected the M-style body, which is actually a 0000. It's a little bigger than a triple O, but not as big as a dreadnought and not quite as elongated either. I went with the shallower depth of a triple O to limit feedback onstage."

Bob Weir echoed a similar sentiment. "I got a smaller guitar with a tighter low end, a 1939 Martin 00-17, when I started doing a duet with Rob Wasserman," he said, "because all the famous big-bodied guitars were developed to sound full as an accompaniment instrument without a bass. As soon as you add a bass to a mix, you're in a pissing match with it."

If you mostly play solo, then it's all about what makes you most comfortable in the place you play most often. If it's your couch or office, then a small guitar is suitable, and you'll certainly reach for a petite model more often, simply because it's more manageable.

HISTORIC PROPORTIONS

Today's trend toward smaller acoustics is actually a case of history repeating itself. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the most accomplished guitar players were primarily women who entertained men in parlors, hence the name associated with smaller guitars to which they were well suited. The parlor itself acted like a resonance chamber, filling out the sound. Check out Martin's De Goni Authentic 1843 to see how tiny a traditional size 1 parlor acoustic is by today's standards. Acoustics grew consistently over time, but it took about 75 years until the advent of dreadnought-sized guitars allowed bigger players to get massive sounds in large ensembles. Ever-improving electronics and amps eventually leveled the playing field.



Martin Guitar's
diminutive
De Goni
Authentic 1843

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTIN GUITAR

When Eric Clapton went unplugged with a 1939 Martin 000-42 in 1992, modern players were intrigued. A perfect example of a mid-sized acoustic, it has body dimensions identical to those of an orchestra model, but with a shorter scale length that makes blues bends easier to play. Clapton sat on a chair, bringing the neck closer to his body and adding to the relaxed nature of his performance. His triple O's shallow depth made it fit even closer to his body, and he didn't have to worry about any lack of bass because the bottom end was in the very capable hands of Nathan East. A "medium" guitar relative to your body size is usually ideal in upright situations as well, because you want an axe you can wield with confidence and really dig into, but not anything too cumbersome.

Bottom line: Find a fiddle that suits your size, style and situation. With all the options available at the click of a button, there's no excuse not to enjoy a perfect fit. ■



Eastman

ROMEO LA

TESTED BY DAVID HUNTER

BY NOW, THE Eastman String Company should need no introduction to the American guitar community. You might say it's the company that finally and utterly defied the "budget-brand" preconceptions of Chinese-made guitars by consistently turning out a range of acoustic and electric instruments that compete well against quality guitars of just about any origin. The original Romeo, released about a year and a half ago, landed in *GP*'s Gear of the Year selection for 2019, and Eastman has just added to the range with the Romeo LA, a companion model with

SPECIFICATIONS

Romeo LA

CONTACT eastmanguitars.com

PRICE \$1,399 street

NUT Bone, 1 11/16" wide (prototype, as reviewed, is slightly wider)

NECK Maple, 24.75" scale length, Traditional Even "C" profile

FRETBOARD Ebony, 12" radius

FRETS 22 medium-jumbo

TUNERS Göldo locking tuners

BODY Semi-hollow archtop body made from a laminated spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides, with partial solid center block

BRIDGE Göldo three-point Tune-o-matic-style bridge and LT2 vibrato tailpiece

PICKUPS Two Seymour Duncan Phat Cat P-90s with radiator gold foil covers

CONTROLS Two volume controls, master tone control, three-way selector switch

FACTORY STRINGS D'Addario NYXL .011–.049

WEIGHT 6.9 lbs

BUILT China

KUDOS A fun, hot-rodded take on a clever original Eastman design. Very well made for the money, fun to play, and surprisingly versatile in use

CONCERNS Pickup selector switch might prove an awkward reach for some players

hot-rodded looks, sounds and features.

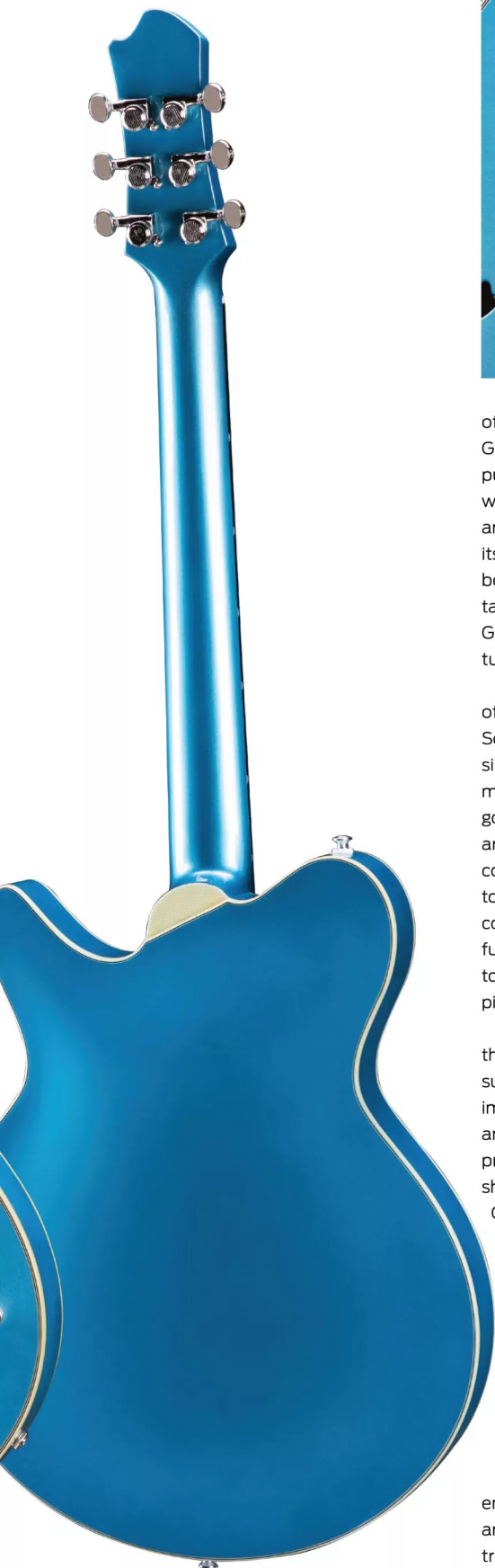
Eastman sent us a Romeo LA prototype — one of just two in existence — to put through its paces this issue.

The Romeo LA represents a fundamental rejigging of the formula. Eastman turned once again to Los Angeles-based master luthier Otto D'Ambrosio, who designed the Romeo. Like that original, the Romeo LA is a thinline archtop but made with a laminated spruce top, rather than one of solid spruce. This takes it closer to traditional semi-acoustic characteristics. While laminated maple might seem a more obvious choice for a guitar in the ES-335 mold, the laminated spruce adds some sonic enhancements that help differentiate the model. It follows form again, however, with its laminated mahogany back and sides, partial solid-mahogany center block, and maple neck with unbound ebony fingerboard, all of which were found on its predecessors in the Romeo range.

Like the original Romeo and the SC with its Tele-like single-coil neck pickup, the LA has the distinctive body shape. At 14.75 inches wide across the lower bout, it's slightly narrower than other popular compact semis such as Gibson's ES-339 and Collings's I-35 LC, both of which are 15 inches wide. With a depth of 1.75 inches, it's just a shade deeper at the edge than those downsized benchmarks. But the real difference in perception and playing feel seems to lie with the positioning of the neck joint deeper into the unique offset double-cutaway body, which shifts all the action further toward the tail end and draws the neck closer to the player's body as well.

Dress-wise, D'Ambrosio selected a striking Celestine Blue, finished with a nitrocellulose top coat and elegantly complemented by five-ply top binding and three-ply back binding, with a grained ivoroid outer layer and matching ivoroid heel cap. The use of a Göldo LT2 vibrato tailpiece (courtesy





of Dieter Goelsdorf, founder of Duesenberg Guitars) adds visual flare, and it solved a puzzle when a more traditional Bigsby B-3 wouldn't correctly fit the Romeo LA due to its arched top and the scant real estate between its bridge and tail pin. It has the further benefit of mounting on traditional stop-bar tailpiece studs. The ToM-style bridge is Göldo's three-point Vario bridge, and the tuners are locking Göldo K-Lines.

To change up the humbucker-fueled tone of the original Romeo, the LA carries a pair of Seymour Duncan Phat Cats, a P-90-style single-coil pickup in a humbucker-sized mount, both under radiator covers with gold-foil inserts to dress up the styling. These are wired through independent volume controls, a tone control and a three-way toggle selector. Because the tone control is connected only to the bridge pickup, it functions in the middle position as a master tone control but has no effect when the neck pickup is selected on its own.

The Romeo LA impresses right out of the case. It is beautifully set up and plays superbly in all positions. The frets are impressively well dressed and polished, and Eastman's "traditional even 'C'" neck profile feels comfortable and natural. It should appeal to a wide range of players.

Our prototype was about 1 3/4 inches across the nut, slightly wider than the final target spec of 1 11/16 inches.

Unplugged, the Romeo LA exhibits a surprisingly bountiful acoustic ring, with bold and clear lows, balanced highs, and appealing detail and liveliness all around. The only critical note is that the pickup-selector toggle is rather far from playing position and requires a slightly awkward (and not entirely intuitive) reach past both the vibrato arm and the row of control knobs, making it tricky even with the whammy arm folded

back. As for the vibrato, the Göldo bridge and LT2 are a great pairing, and the guitar stayed in tune with moderate vibrato use.

Tested through a custom tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a Friedman Small Box head and 2x12 cab, the Romeo LA revealed a versatile and characterful guitar that's likely to acquit itself well across a relatively broad range of genres and playing styles. It exhibited an appealing blend of girth and articulation, all couched in traditional P-90 midrange punch, with enough grit to give it some character. This is a hip-looking newcomer whose tone harkens back to some classics of the '50s and early '60s.

The use of laminated spruce seems to add a lively, raucous complexity to the tone, making the Romeo LA something all its own, rather than just a compact 335 cut to a different shape. Played clean, it isn't "Strat pickup bright" into a tame amp but has clarity enough for unsullied pop ballad work or gritty-edged country.

However, it really excels into a cranked lead channel or overdrive pedal (I tested it with a JHS Bonsai and Wampler Tumnus Deluxe), where the combination of pickups and semi-hollow build deliver muscle and aggression that contain air and roundness within their core. Get too close to a loud amp and it will start to howl, of course, but it's manageable with sensible distancing, and that propensity adds to the lively, edge-of-excess feel of scorching solos or big, crunchy rhythm playing.

Although the Romeo LA took well to blues and even some jazz on the neck pickup, it really thrives in roots rock, contemporary-minded rockabilly, indie rock and romping garage rock, where its gritty, raw, hot-rod nature is allowed to roar through naturally. As such, it's a fun new offering amid an impressive Eastman lineup, and should find a home with plenty of adventurous players. ▀



Taylor

GT 811E AND GT K21E

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

SMALL IS THE big new thing at Taylor, which announced two Grand Theater models at NAMM's Believe in Music Week, and dropped big news about transitioning ownership to its employees. The novel GT body falls in between a GS Mini and a full Grand Concert size, and the GT 811e and GT K21e join the line-founding GTe Urban Ash, which earned an Editors' Pick in December. Its new siblings offer premium woods, including the hallmark rosewood-and-spruce combination of the flagship 800 Series, while the GT K21e is pure solid koa from the island of aloha like its cousins in the Koa Series. All GTs feature Taylor's new C-Class bracing system, designed to deliver bodacious tones from petite bodies. Being a rather petite dude, I was stoked to put these little lovelies through a few paces.

GTs come in a featherweight AeroCase, which this player prefers to a hard case for a

SPECIFICATIONS

GT 811E

CONTACT taylorguitars.com

PRICE \$2,999 street, AeroCase included

NUT WIDTH 1 23/32" (1.72)", Tusq

NECK Tropical mahogany

FRETBOARD West African ebony, 24 1/8" scale, Element inlays

FRETS 20

TUNERS Taylor nickel mini

BODY Solid Indian rosewood back and sides, solid Sitka Spruce top with C-Class bracing

BRIDGE African ebony with Micarta saddle

ELECTRONICS Taylor ES2 with volume, bass, and treble controls

FACTORY STRINGS Elixir .012-.053

WEIGHT 4 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Robust tone from compact, cozy body with relaxed playability and casual feel

CONCERNS Larger players may find quarters a bit cramped

compact fiddle. Taking the instruments out revealed two distinctly different aesthetics. The 811e appears familiar and classy, with a single abalone rosette and Element inlays. The K21e, on the other hand, is stunning and exotic. A shaded edge burst radiates like a jewel in sunshine to highlight the rich koa wood grain, while Spring Vine inlays and antique gold tuners add elegance. I was a little hesitant to lay hands on the striking beauty, especially considering there is no pickguard, but as lead designer Andy Powers explains, "The material of this full-body gloss finish, while very thin, is actually more durable and scratch resistant than most pickguard materials, especially when applied over a tougher wood like koa."

The overall feel of the two is quite similar, with the koa model being smoother, silkier and slinkier. The immediate gratification factor is off the charts. The first thing you notice is a lack of tension compared to a full-scale instrument, as if the strings were slightly slacked, a gauge lighter or even nylon. By coupling a short scale length (24 1/8 inches) with a short body length (18 1/2 inches), Powers conjured a uniquely chill vibe, which naturally relaxes the approach in both hands. I usually go for the snappy feel and pronounced sound of a full scale, but I appreciate the change of pace on these GTs. The fretboard action feels a heck of a lot like an electric. With less distance between the frets and a unique, slightly more narrow than standard nut width (1 23/32 inches), it made challenging chords and licks easier to play. String bending is such a cinch that one winds up using more vibrato. That's especially true on the K21e, which offers an ocean of nuance in every note. Due to the altered angle of the rhythm-hand dangle on the compact body, I found myself playing more fingerstyle, with a

light touch going a long way. The standing "hang" is spot on. It was a blast walking down the street serenading the cats with a guitar that feels less like a beast of burden and more like a natural body extension.

The volume is of course a bit softer than that of a full-size guitar, which my wife noticed right away because it was easier for her to sing over, but she also enjoyed the full tone, saying, "It sounds just like one of the bigger guitars, only quieter." I compared the



GT 811e directly to an 814e Grand Symphony (same wood combination), and while the latter certainly sounded bigger, less boxy and more spread out, there wasn't a bunch more bass. Powers attributes that in part to GT's C-Class bracing. Before any eyes roll about another new "magic" bracing, understand that this is simply a modified version of V-Class bracing.

Powers explains: "C-Class is an asymmetrical variant of V-Class bracing designed specifically to bring out the bass. The C stands for *cantilevered*. Think of a diving board: It's anchored at the steps and at the fulcrum point, but from there on out is free to fluctuate. The main brace in the GT uses a similar principle; it's less supported at one end. The extra flexibility helps mitigate the inherent quality of a smaller guitar having a higher resonant frequency. A smaller sound hole helps bring out the bass as well. Finally, building a shorter body with modern curves means it doesn't look or function like a parlor guitar. Notice that unlike the Grand Concert [Taylor's smallest "full" size], the Grand Theater doesn't have the narrow, elongated look of parlor guitar at all. This is going the opposite direction. It's actually based on a scaled-down version of our largest guitar,

SPECIFICATIONS

GT K21E

CONTACT taylorguitars.com

PRICE \$4,699 street, AeroCase included

NUT WIDTH 1 23/32" (1.72)", Tusq

NECK Mahogany

FRETBOARD West African ebony, 24 1/8" scale, Spring Vine inlay

FRETS 20

TUNERS Gotoh mini 510 antique gold

BODY Solid Hawaiian koa back, sides, and top with C-Class bracing

BRIDGE West African ebony with Micarta saddle

ELECTRONICS Taylor ES2 with volume, bass, and treble controls

FACTORY STRINGS Elixir .012–.053

WEIGHT 4 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Vibrant, dynamic, articulate tone. Silky smooth nuanced playability on ergonomic body. Stunning exotic look.

CONCERNS Pricey

the Grand Orchestra, with proportions maximizing the amount of interior air volume, kind of like a baby grand piano."

Getting a full-figured sound from a petite box is a big part of the GT story, but the takeaway is ultimately about sonic integrity, not bass or volume. Each of these two models sounds holistic, and the K21e is truly special. It has Lincoln-like integrity, practically plays itself, and is resonant, with fabulous sustain. I normally prefer the wooly warmth of rosewood, but it sounded slightly stuffy in the low mids compared to this crystal clear koa. The K21e is simply one of the most pleasing production guitars to pass through my hands in any size, and somehow sounded preferable to my experiences with larger all-koa instruments.

"Having less string tension allows for more of the body sound to shine through," Powers says. "Koa is a hard wood. A solid koa top will always have a natural compression effect that trims off the initial attack like a limiter. But the K21's unique build re-sets the whole mix and allows the koa body's best characteristics to come through. It's surprisingly responsive, and the sweet, colorful tone is strong, articulate and lively. Koa's natural clarity helps mitigate the boxy quality inherent in small guitars."

Both new GTs offer a ton of cool qualities in a small package that not only travels well but also is truly stageworthy. Taylor ES2 electronics faithfully translated their distinct personalities through a Fender Acoustic Junior GO and an AER Tommy Emmanuel signature. At a rehearsal in a spacious room, the 811e compared favorably to a Taylor 514ce Grand Auditorium.

Little folks will surely appreciate Taylor's diminutive Grand Theater. Viking-sized players might find the quarters a bit cramped or feel a bit self-conscious about wearing one well onstage, but it's easier for anyone to handle around home, and studio applications abound for all. Players with repetitive stress injuries should certainly audition a GT because it requires so little torque to make it sing.

Creating an exceptional guitar on a small platform presents a huge challenge and

requires only slightly smaller amounts of materials than a large one, so we can't expect it to cost much less. The Taylor GT 811e is a versatile workhorse suitable to practically any style or situation, and it delivers plenty of bang for the buck. The Hawaiian koa GT K21e costs a lot of *kālā*, but I can't imagine any fingerstylist or koa enthusiast who has the cash regretting the decision to spend it on this dream machine. Both deservedly earn our Editors' Pick Award. 🎸





PRS

SPECIAL SEMI-HOLLOW

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

THE LATEST PRS model introduced this year is the Special Semi-Hollow, which is special indeed, thanks to its hum/sing/hum pickup configuration, which uses a PRS Narrowfield unit in the middle position flanked by two 58/15 LT humbuckers in the bridge and neck routs. The Narrowfield is designed to deliver single-coil clarity and bite, but without the hum, and the whole idea is to enhance the versatility of this elegant design. The Special's amplified performance centers on an electronics package consisting of a five-way blade switch that provides the usual pickup selections (neck, neck/middle, middle, bridge/middle and bridge), along with two mini toggles that independently tap the humbuckers to provide single-coil flavors. It adds up to 12 pickup combinations, and, coupled with master volume and tone

SPECIFICATIONS

Special Semi-Hollow

CONTACT prsguitars.com

PRICE \$4,200 base, molded hardshell case included. \$4,860 as tested with 10-Top

NUT WIDTH 1.687"

NECK Mahogany, Pattern shape

FRETBOARD Rosewood, 25" scale

FRETS 22 PRS Standard

TUNERS PRS Phase III locking tuners

BODY Flame-maple top with violin-carve, mahogany back

BRIDGE PRS Gen III trem

PICKUPS Two 58/15 LT humbuckers, one Narrowfield single-coil

CONTROLS Volume, tone, 5-way selector, mini-toggles for coil-splitting the humbuckers

FACTORY STRINGS PRS Signature .010-.046

WEIGHT 6.78 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Excellent range of sounds. Righteous playability. Drop-dead looks

CONCERNS None



controls, the system offers easy access to a ton of sounds. The way that the Narrowfield pickup is situated a little lower than the humbuckers makes it more accommodating to picking without feeling cramped for space.

A beautiful guitar with its violin-carved striped-maple top — a 10-Top on our review sample — the Special Semi-Hollow wears a new and striking Purple Iris nitro-over-cellulose (CAB) finish that really shows-off the purple-ish colorations in this highly figured piece of wood. The guitar is available in 19 other colors, and you can subtract \$660 from the price for a standard maple top. The carved-out mahogany body enhances the guitar's vibrational qualities and is a big factor in its light weight and nimble feel.

The Pattern set neck has an ideal shape for those who like the girth of vintage-Gibson necks, and it's topped with a rosewood 'board with 22 PRS Standard frets and sweet-looking abalone Birds inlays. A smooth synthetic nut and an excellent factory setup make for righteous playability and accurate intonation.

Hardware consists of a PRS patented Gen III tremolo with a push-in arm, and a set of open-gear PRS Phase III locking tuners that turn easily and keep the strings from slipping on the winding posts. From a functionality standpoint, the bridge is a cool piece of machinery that offers butter-smooth operation, has no sharp edges to interfere with your hand, and looks neat with the nickel-plated steel body and brass saddles and screws. Strings load from the back into the brass inertia block, and the unit is set up to float with four springs attached. The system has a light bending feel that makes it very expressive to the touch, and it returns to pitch reliably when worked hard.



We tested the Special Semi-Hollow using a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a Matchless Chieftain combo, as well as a variety of OD pedals. It has a resonant acoustic sound, and the pickups do a fine job of capturing that airy character at all volume levels, particularly when the guitar is up loud enough to enjoy the singing, edge-of-feedback sustain that semi-hollows do so well.

The PAF-style, low-wind 58/15 LT humbuckers are a great match, as they sound super clear and detailed when played cleanly, and they're smooth and sinewy, with plenty of bite when pushing a distorted amp or pedal. The sweet-sounding neck pickup is superb for rhythm and jazzy solos, and it also sounded cool with the coil-tap switch activated (where its slimmer response was dynamite with a lower-gain pedal) and used like an overdrive to get more amp grind. What a killer SRV-style blues tone with the Deluxe!

Sounding like a big single-coil, but rounder and more even sounding than, say, a P-90,

the Narrowfield pickup has an output that matches well with the humbuckers, so there's very little loss in level when you flick it on. The Narrowfield is also great in positions two (neck/middle) and four (middle/bridge) when you want a funkier tone, especially with the humbuckers in tapped mode, which is where the Special Semi Hollow yields its chimiest and most Strat-like tones. The fourth and fifth positions provide instant access to a lot of cool tones for rhythm and lead, and

depending on how much gain you're running, that bridge 'bucker covers a ton of ground, delivering everything from fat, bright Tele-style snap to super buttery sustain, with plenty of stops along the way for dirty/clean textures, all of which respond beautifully to how the volume and tone controls are voiced.

The bottom line is, anyone looking for a superbly playable, do-it-all axe that's armed with great tones and looks sexy as hell should take the Special Semi-Hollow for a spin. **N**



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Fender

70TH ANNIVERSARY ESQUIRE

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

DEBUTING IN 1950, the Esquire was Fender's first practical electric guitar and featured a body made of pine, a bolt-on maple neck with 21 frets and a repurposed lap-steel pickup mounted in the bridge position. While having only one pickup might have seemed like a shortcoming (and Fender quickly addressed this by introducing the two-pickup Broadcaster/No Caster), the Esquire had a trick up its sleeve — an

SPECIFICATIONS

70th Anniversary Esquire

CONTACT fender.com

PRICE \$1,999, tweed hardshell-case included

NUT WIDTH 1.650", bone

NECK One piece maple, thick U shape

FRETBOARD Maple, 25.5" scale with 7.5" radius

FRETS 21 Vintage Tall

TUNERS Fender vintage style

BODY Roasted pine

BRIDGE 3-Saddle American Vintage Tele with barrel-steel saddles

PICKUP Fender Tim Shaw–designed Esquire single-coil

CONTROLS Volume and tone. Three-way blade switch. Position 1 (neck): tone control off, preset treble-rolloff. Position 2 (middle): tone control on. Position 3 (bridge): tone control off

FACTORY STRINGS Fender USA 250R .010–.046

EXTRAS Available in 2-Color Sunburst, Lake Placid Blue, Surf Green and White Blonde

WEIGHT 6.62 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

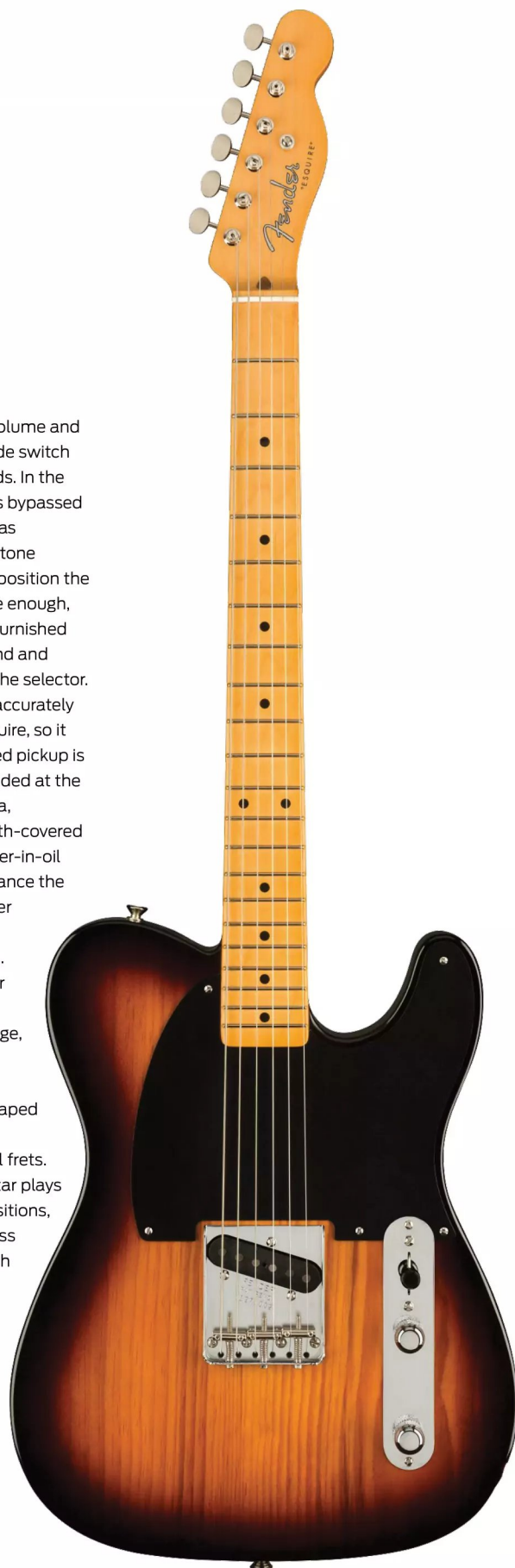
KUDOS Light and toneful. Old-style electronics yield a broad range of sounds from one pickup

CONCERNS Neck has to be removed to adjust the truss rod

electronics system comprised of volume and tone controls and a three-way blade switch that provided three different sounds. In the neck position, the tone control was bypassed and a preset treble rolloff circuit was engaged. In the middle setting the tone control was active, and in the rear position the tone control was bypassed. Simple enough, but it provided everything from a burnished “jazz” tone to a blistering lead sound and anything in-between via a flick of the selector.

Fender went to great effort to accurately replicate the 70th Anniversary Esquire, so it follows that its Tim Shaw–designed pickup is inspired by a 1950 Esquire that resided at the Songbirds Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It's connected with cloth-covered wiring, and the circuit sports a paper-in-oil tone cap — cool touches that enhance the Esquire's old-guitar vibe. And, as per vintage spec, all of the screws are slot-head (or Fillister, if you prefer). These include the various diameter and length specs for the black phenolic pickguard, neck joint, bridge, control cover, the tuners and the aluminum output-jack cup.

The Esquire has a chunky U-shaped neck with a 7.5-inch-radius maple fingerboard carrying 21 Vintage Tall frets. The setup is excellent, and the guitar plays easily and sounds tuneful in all positions, which underscores the effectiveness of the vintage-style Tele bridge with its three adjustable solid-steel “barrel” saddles. Leo Fender certainly got a lot of things right with the Esquire, and this primordial piece of hardware is a big part of why the Esquire delivers a vibrant and sustaining acoustic sound. The roasted-pine body also contributes to the lively response, as does a thin nitrocellulose-lacquer finish. The





flawless 2-Color Sunburst of our review model reveals the nice graining of the pine, and the guitar is available in three other colors if you prefer a non-vintage look (see specs).

Tested with a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a selection of boost and drive pedals for grind, the Esquire proved a vibey-sounding guitar, with a lot of tones on tap. It's great to be able to switch from a deep, round sound on the neck position to a snarling lead tone on the bridge setting, which is also a little louder due to the tone cap being out of the circuit. In the middle position, the tone control lets you adjust the highs as needed to dial in sounds between the darker and brighter timbres of the other settings, such as clear, open rhythm

flavors or a buttery lead tone that retains single-coil stringiness and bite.

I used the switch constantly, and it does give the effect of having two pickups. So again, Leo came up with a clever way to use a single pickup to deliver the tonal range that would allow guitarists like Jeff Beck — who played a '54 Esquire on early Yardbirds recordings — to go from ripping rock and roll to blues and anything else he needed, with a flick of a switch — or, in Beck's case, probably just by adjusting his attack. Bottom line: The 70th Anniversary Esquire is a fitting tribute to a groundbreaking design that helped shape the future of the solid-body electric guitar and the music that it helped create. ■



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Supro CHORUS

TESTED BY DAVID HUNTER

SHORTLY AFTER RE-ESTABLISHING

their amp line a few years ago, Supro's new owners set about introducing some solid and great-sounding pedals. The fact that they are the same people behind the prolific Pigtronix effects undoubtedly has something to do with their success. That wealth of design experience and creativity is felt strongly in the new Supro Chorus, a feature-laden and fully analog pedal with stereo inputs and outputs, and several bonus functions.

The Chorus sits in the same rectangular, folded-steel box as the rest of the Supro pedal range, this one adorned in something akin to Daphne (or Carolina) blue, and topped by four knobs, a mini-toggle switch and a true-bypass stomp switch. Speed and depth knobs control the usual chorus parameters of modulation frequency and intensity, while the next two do something quite different, delivering impressive soundscape-crafting potential.

Time increases the chorus delay time in one channel while decreasing it in the other, dramatically enhancing the differentiation in the stereo spread when used with two amps. Dimension variably intermingles the left and

SPECIFICATIONS

Chorus

CONTACT suprousa.com

PRICE \$249 street

CONTROLS Speed, depth, time, dimension. Vibrato switch

EXTRAS True-bypass switching, LED indicator, center-negative 9-volt DC adaptor input

SIZE 4.5"x 2.375"x 1.875" (excluding feet and knobs)

BUILT Assembled in USA

KUDOS A lush-sounding analog chorus with impressively versatile features, especially when used in stereo

CONCERNS It issues a little white noise when on, though not abnormally so



right signal paths to produce further depth-defying aural stunts. The vibrato switch takes the clean signal out of the output, inducing a warbling, vibrato-like signal. The four quarter-inch jacks for stereo input and output are on the front face of the enclosure, although you can also input a mono signal and have it split into the stereo effects described above.

Inside, a pair of genuine MN3007 bucket-brigade ICs in the engine room promise good things for fans of seminal vintage chorus pedals of the late 1970s. That said, it's worth resisting taking a look for yourself, as there's no internal battery, and accessing the interior requires the removal of the nuts securing the jacks, pots and switches, and risks damaging components on the circuit board.

I tested the Chorus pedal into a Friedman Dirty Shirley Mini and a custom tweed-Deluxe style affair — individually and together — using a Collings I-35 LC Vintage with humbuckers and a Novo Serus J with P-90s. While this is a great-sounding mono chorus pedal by any measure, it's hard to go back to a single amp once you've spent time with it in stereo. Either way, the lush, rich, watery analog tone at the heart of this Supro pedal is its real strength, whether you've got the benefit of two amps to give it room to breathe or just one, but the creative potential of the time and dimension knobs blows up in a big way once both outputs are in play.

If you're just looking to replicate some of the classics, the Supro Chorus can do all of



that with ease, from the textured "Message in a Bottle" arpeggio enhancer to emotive Small Clone-like "Come As You Are" movement. One of its great plusses is that the stereo bonus features work just as well at inducing a sense of subtle motion and thickening that doesn't overtly scream "chorus effect on." While the vibrato options on many chorus pedals are often ignored, this one can be used subtly enough that it's not as immediately sea-sickening as some, and becomes a valid and appealing option.

There's a little white noise amid it all when the pedal is switched on, which is standard for most analog chorus pedals, but it's really not intrusive when you start playing. Otherwise, there's little to fault here, and while chorus flavors can certainly be a matter of taste, this is one that many fans of the cuisine will likely want to sample. 🍷

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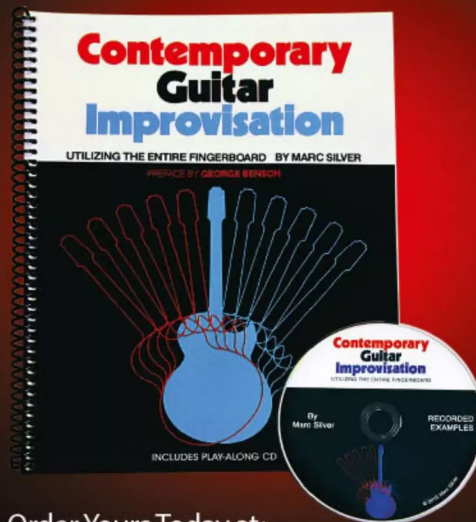
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How I Wrote...

“Far Beyond the Sun”

Yngwie Malmsteen shreds Beethoven and invents neoclassical metal.

BY MARK MC STEA

THE ARRIVAL OF *Rising Force*, Yngwie Malmsteen's 1984 debut album, gave birth to a new genre known as neoclassical metal. Of all the album's tracks, “Far Beyond the Sun” best demonstrated the guitarist's unprecedented technical chops and melodicism, cementing his place in the annals of shred legends.

Yngwie was unaware he was about to launch an entirely new genre of rock. In his eyes, he was simply playing his way. “When people ask why I play in the style I'm known for, I explain that this is natural for me. I'm not putting it on,” he says. “Blues is part of me as well, but my natural style is predominantly what I like to call ‘symphonic metal.’”

REINVENTING THE STEAL

Although Yngwie had worked up most of the album's songs many years before, he wrote “Far Beyond the Sun” specifically for the record. “I was thinking a little bit about Beethoven's Fifth, rhythmically. I was shamelessly stealing from the greats,” he says, laughing.

Considering Yngwie's love of classical music, it's not surprising that “Far Beyond the Sun” is jam-packed with all of the tropes of the genre: light and shade, tension and release, and crescendos that explode into flurries of cascading notes. “When I was young, I realized that so much rock music was based on five notes, and I wanted to break out of that,” he explains. “Improvisation is the

“I WAS SHAMELESSLY STEALING FROM THE GREATS”

root of all of my compositions. People forget that all of the great classical composers were improvisers, because nowadays everyone sticks to the written music when they play classical pieces.”

HERE COMES THE SUN

The track was recorded with Stevie Wonder's mobile recording unit and came together quickly. “I knew exactly what I wanted the bass and keyboards to play,” he says. “The only thing that we had to do a couple of times was the ending.”

Yngwie's setup for the recording consisted of a Fender Stratocaster, Marshall 50-watt stacks and a DOD overdrive. “I found my sound in the '70s, almost by accident,” he explains. “Everybody wanted 100-watt Marshalls, so the 50-watt heads were very cheap. That's why I started to use them. But I realized that they delivered exactly what I was looking for. My sound and equipment have basically been the same ever since.”

In retrospect, Yngwie isn't completely happy with “Far Beyond the Sun.” “I think the drums sound terrible,” he admits. “That was then, though, and it's easy with hindsight to pick up on things that I would do differently today. The thing that I am happiest about for all of my albums is that I never released something where I didn't give it my all. If my playing is better or worse on something, that was always the absolute best that I could have done at that time.”

SHOW OF FORCE

Yngwie has played “Far Beyond the Sun” at every show since it appeared on *Rising Force*, and, in the spirit of the classical composers who inspire him, “I never play it the same,” he says. “I always have a long improvised intro, and then an adagio before the big opening riff. I also play parts of the runs and the solo differently, never note-for-note.

“I never expected ‘Far Beyond the Sun’ to become the huge piece of music that it has become. I guess that's my legacy. You can take it or leave it, but that's who I am, and it comes from within me.”



Yngwie Malmsteen circa 1986 with his signature Fender Stratocaster

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