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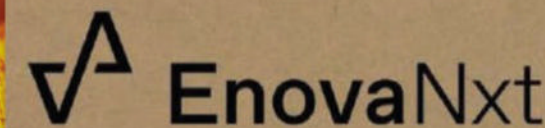
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BRINGING THEM ALL BACK HOME

I'M SURE I'VE told you this before, but with more than five years of *Guitar Player* under my belt, I can't be completely certain. Besides, this issue's cover story is a good reason to tell it again.

Roughly 10 years ago, *Guitar Aficionado* ran a story about George Harrison's guitar collection. I was the publication's managing editor at the time. For the page showing George's Gibson J-160E — the acoustic-electric he played on many of the group's early songs — we included a photo of George and John Lennon holding their Gibsons. As the story goes, Harrison and Lennon bought their matching Jumbos at the same time and eventually, perhaps accidentally, swapped them. Lennon's was stolen in late 1963 and presumed lost forever by the time our issue came out. That changed after a reader saw our story and thought one of the guitars in that photo of George and John looked a lot like a second-hand early '60s J-160E owned by his friend. Long story short, the guitars were a match. Lennon's missing guitar had been found.

Ever since, it hasn't been lost on me that the media can play a passive, but very important role to help solve mysteries around historic instruments simply by reporting on them and, where possible, providing photographs and descriptions. So when news broke last September that a trio of sleuths behind the Lost Bass Project were trying to find Paul McCartney's stolen 1961 Höfner 500/1 bass, it seemed obvious we should do our part as soon as our publishing schedule allowed. That time is now.

As Beatles gear goes, McCartney's '61 Höfner violin bass is legendary. It's the one heard on nearly all the group's 1962–1963 recordings, when Beatlemania was being birthed across the U.K. and Europe. For years, no one has known exactly how or when it disappeared. But as you'll read in this month's cover story, the Lost Bass Project has quickly learned several key aspects about the theft — including the news that McCartney himself prevented any initial investigation from occurring.

It's a fascinating story — and there's a very likely chance it may have all come to light by the time you read this. As I spoke with the Lost Bass Project in late November, they revealed that they were very close to finding the bass and anticipated it would be discovered before the end of the year. I hate to get scooped, but if it means Paul McCartney gets his bass guitar back for Christmas, I can live with that.

In addition, we're honored to present Lisa Johnson's beautiful photos of Randy Bachman's 1957 Gretsch, which he recovered in 2022, 45 years after it was stolen. You can read the full story in this issue, along with details about a few other historic rock guitars still at large. Who knows? Maybe we'll get closer to bringing them home.

And while we're on the subject, take time to write down your guitars' serial numbers and take photos. You'll be happy you did should your gear have the misfortune to meet up with bad characters.

Chris Scapelliti

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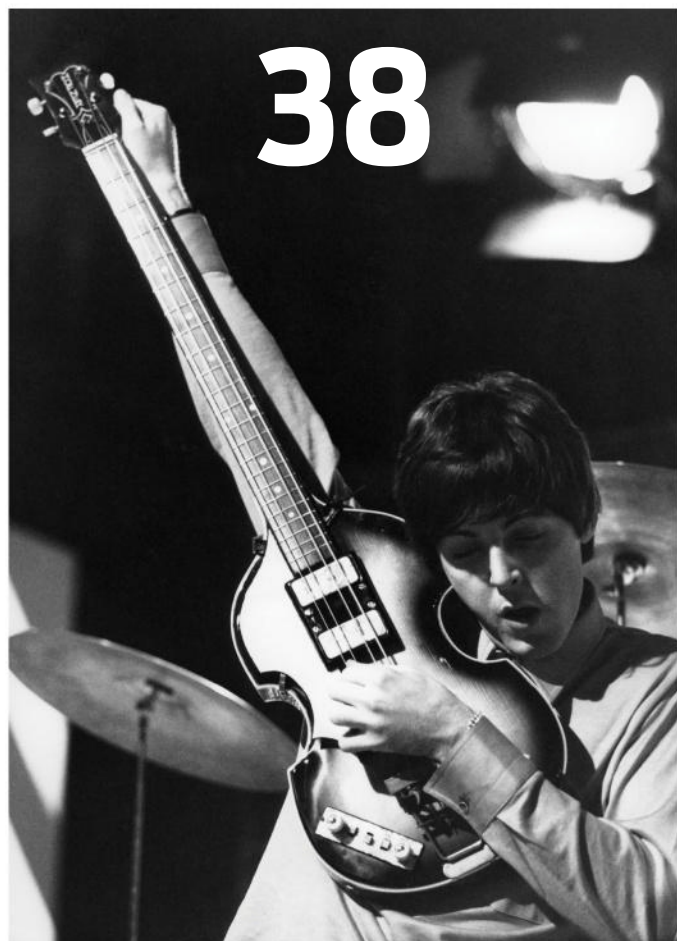
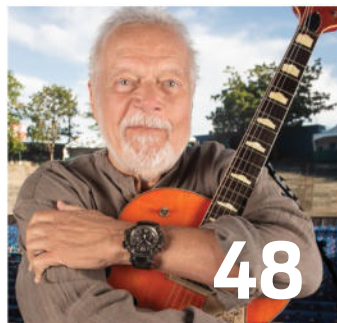
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Paul McCartney, 1964, Getty Images. Cover illustration and treatment by Magictorch



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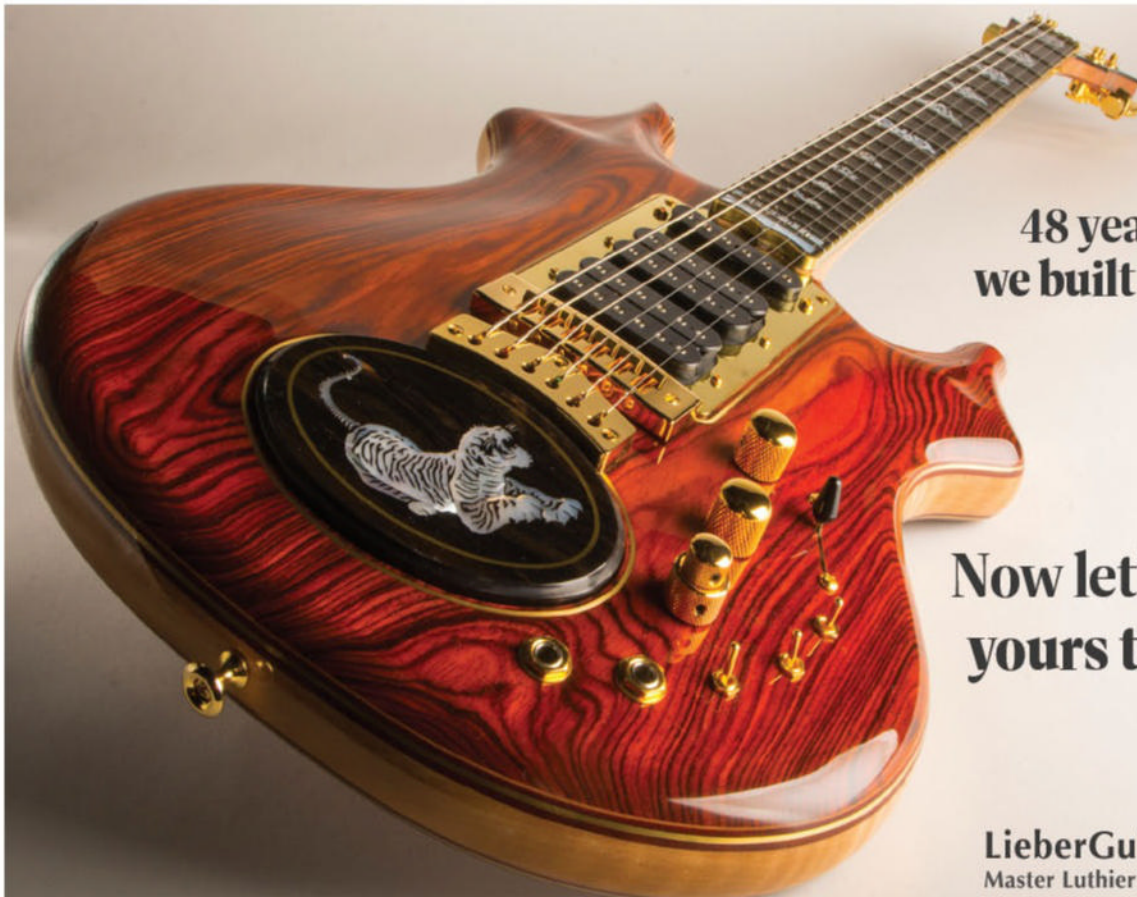
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The Gibson Falcon 5 (left) and Falcon 20.

WHEN A FALCON IS A PHOENIX

Gibson's storied **Falcon** line flies again with two modern, but vintage-inspired combos.

BY DAVE HUNTER

AFTER DELIVERING SEVERAL classic amplifiers in the 1940s, '50s and early '60s Gibson struggled for a consistent foothold in the market. The company's purchase of Mesa/Boogie three years ago seemed a sure way to bring about the return of G-brand amps. After all, Randall Smith and his team boast some 50 years of experience manufacturing high-end tube amps. The acclaimed lords of California high-gain amplification were clearly primed to help rejuvenate a Gibson lineup if called upon to do so, and now they have, with two new combos that honor the past while reconsidering the blueprints for the needs of today's players.

The debutantes in the revived American-made Gibson range include the Falcon 20 1x12 combo and Falcon 5 1x10 combo. In broad terms, these amps — the Falcon 20 in particular — pay homage to a short-lived version of the GA-19RVT Falcon from 1961. That combo had onboard reverb a good two years before any Fender amp did, and it provided a range of features and a power level perfectly suited to club gigs and studio dates. Unfortunately, Gibson evolved the Falcon into the Crestline range, and it's been downhill for the company's amps ever since.

As it happens, the vintage Falcon line has a lot of fans at Gibsons, all of whom were eager to return it to glory.

"Myself and maybe half a dozen other guys here are obsessed with Gibson Falcon amps," says Mat Koehler, vice president of product at Gibson Brands, "especially tweed-era amps from 1960 to 1962. That era of GA-19RVT Falcon amp, we just swear by it. It's a fantastic amp. They're very rare and you don't see a lot of them in the wild, so we would fight over the ones that we do find." Indeed, Gibson shipping records show just 204 Falcon amps were made in 1961, the target era for these reissues. "All of us have at least one. So when we were pursuing this and had this opportunity with Mesa/Boogie, it was in the back of our minds that the opportunity was here: 'Let's aim for the Falcon!'"

As Koehler sees it, the only shortcoming of the original amp is age. "Because of that, they have different temperaments," he says. "We wanted to home in on what was the original intention of the amp. It was a game-changing amp. It was the first reverb combo amp, so it has this great story, as well as the perfect proportions and power."

The update was not without its challenges, particularly when it came to voicing the amp for the present day. "Unlike a lot of the original reverb-combo amps from

the '60s, the original amps have a lot more dirt," Koehler says. "They have that perfect mixture of what you'd expect from a '50s tweed-era amp and a '60s reverb amp, so they represent the gap between those eras. We wanted to play up that character, but we also wanted it to be pedal friendly and expressive and nuanced. Very touch sensitive.

"Really the key is just keeping it simple, and probably the greatest challenge [*Mesa/Boogie founder*] Randy Smith has ever faced is keeping it simple. But he had an absolute blast, and he definitely believes that's the character of this amp: single channel, short signal paths and just a very basic amp, with some modern advancements, like the power switching. There's a lot this amp can do. It's really versatile."

FALCON 20 1x12 COMBO

A 12-watt combo, the Falcon 20 is driven by two 6V6GT output tubes with four 12AX7s in the preamp, reverb and tremolo stages. The compact 20 by 17.5 by 8.85-inch Baltic-birch plywood cabinet houses a 12-inch Jensen

Blackbird Alnico 40 speaker. Rather than the tweed of its namesake it's covered in cream bronco vinyl, with an oxblood grille cloth. The retro-leaning chromed control panel and hinged steel-and-Lucite handle admirably echo the '61 Falcon, with the panel featuring a triangular set of jacks for high and low inputs and foot switch, followed by controls for volume, tone, reverb, tremolo depth and frequency (speed).



Updates are seen in the control panel's cooling vents and the full/half/low-output switch at the end of the knobs. Accessing the Falcon's rendition of Mesa/Boogie's patented Multi-Watt and Duo-Class power-reduction circuits, it yields 12 watts in push-pull pentode Class-A at full power, five watts of the same in triode mode for half power, and one watt of single-6V6 output at low power. No re-biasing is necessary for power changes, or tube replacement for that matter, since it's a cathode-biased output stage. As such, and given the tolerances of the rest of the circuit, the Falcon 20 can also handle a substitution of two larger 6L6GC output tubes, which generates power levels of 15, six and two watts, respectively, along with a slightly more full-throated tone.

The underside of the upper rear-mounted aluminum chassis carries dual four-ohm speaker outputs and one eight-ohm connection for the reverb spring pan, and a monitor (D.I.) out. The circuit itself is high-quality PCB construction, much in the Mesa/Boogie mold.



Unlike its vintage counterpart, the Falcon 20 features cooling vents and an output power switch on its control panel.



The Falcon 5 repeats the Falcon 20 formula in a smaller format, sans tremolo.



Falcon 5

FALCON 5 1X10 COMBO

The Falcon 5 repeats the formula in a smaller 16 by 16 by 8.85-inch cab with one 10-inch Jensen Alnico speaker and a circuit that delivers seven watts from a single 6V6 output tube, or three watts with the built-in attenuator engaged (eight watts and four watts, respectively, with a 6L6 installed). This one also carries the tube-driven spring reverb — tapped from among the amp's three 12AX7 preamp tubes — but no tremolo.

It's a great-looking, fun-sized combo primed for studio use or basement jams, yet I suppose the greatest argument against it is posed by its bigger sibling. For just \$300 more, it delivers greater power (with a wider array of power-reduction options), a bigger speaker and tremolo. Both still fit in the front seat of a

Mini Cooper, and you gain only five pounds in weight over the Falcon 5's 26. Then again, the Falcon 5 is a great amp in and of itself, and undoubtedly many players will find its size and output just right. There's also something special about driving a single-ended tube combo with a mic in front of it.

IN USE

I tested both amps with Gibson Les Paul and Firebird V reissues and a 1966 Fender Telecaster, and they revealed an enjoyable rewind to the toothsome tones of their early '60s namesakes. The Les Paul into input 1 on either amp stayed impressively clean and together up to nearly noon on the volume but really started to sing beyond there. The juicy grind kicked in about three-quarters of the way up the dial, with the Telecaster and the Firebird digging in the dirt just a little later. Moving the Les Paul to input 2 (a trick too often ignored) cleaned it up again beautifully. Both amps deliver convincingly vintage-voiced performances, which will likely become even more so with some breaking-in of their Jensen Alnico speakers. Each is crisp and articulate, yet with a texture and richness couching even their cleaner settings, while

merging extremely well with any of several overdrive pedals I tried in the front end.

Surprisingly, with their volumes set similarly, the Falcon 5 on full power is quite a bit louder than the Falcon 20 on half power. There's definitely more gusto in the bigger amp overall, and very usable headroom and punch on its full-power setting. There can be a certain magic to vintage single-10 combos, and the Falcon 5 reflects that in the detail and immediacy of its sound. Overall, I probably preferred the fuller midrange and overt throatiness of the Falcon 20's 12-inch speaker once I start to push it a little. And again, it's

hard to avoid noticing that you get a lot more out of the larger combo for a mere \$300 extra. Topping all that, the Falcon 20's tube-driven reverb and tremolo are lush and evocative and a ton of fun to play with. It adds

up not to the detriment of the Falcon 5 but to further confirm what a deal the Falcon 20 is at this price for a USA-made tube amp that recaptures Gibson's vintage glories while being perfectly usable in 2024. **B**

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ROAD TESTED

Daniel Donato runs his career like he tours: with no destination in mind. With *Reflector*, he shines a light on his cross-genre journey.

BY ALAN PAUL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON STOLTZFUS

DANIEL DONATO IS one of the freshest, most exciting young roots guitarists of recent years. He has played hundreds of shows with his Cosmic Country, while also performing the Allman Brothers Band repertoire with Trouble No More, alongside fellow young gun Brandon “Taz” Niederauer. Donato’s growing acclaim has led to sit-ins with luminaries that include Billy Strings, Widespread Panic and, individually, the Grateful Dead’s Bill Kreutzmann and Bob Weir.

On his new album, *Reflector* (Retrace Music), the 28-year-old Nashville-based guitarist stretches beyond his first two releases, *A Young Man’s Country* and *Cosmic Country & Western Songs*, with his first full collection of original material. His songs glide effortlessly across genres, fueled by his sturdy, rhythmic Tele picking and high, keening vocals. On the road and on his new recording, Donato is fulfilling the promise he’s shown since he became the youngest

musician to be a regular member of the Don Kelley Band at the iconic Nashville honky-tonk Robert’s Western World, at age 16. There he mastered playing “super-fast, hard, clean” covers of a wide range of music, performing four hours a night, four nights week. It was a kind of basic training that prepared him to be the road warrior he is today. We caught up with Donato in the midst of his endless tour.

A press release describes *Reflector* as your first fully realized album. What does that mean to you?

I wouldn’t say it is fully realized, because nothing that exists in this dimension is fully realized. I think the watchword is “progress,” and *Reflector* is a great beacon for such an ideal. Many people are solely destination-based, which seems devoid of logic, faith and imagination. I’ve fully committed my life to the service of truth, beauty and goodness through creating music. A lot has happened in the last few years that awakened me.

You and the band have put a lot of miles on your van and played a lot of shows in those years. Can you describe the growth as a musician and a person that comes with that?

You never step in the same river twice. I believe that every time you play a show, it is literally the only show that has ever happened. Each moment, each note, each beat, every second of your life has led up to that moment. Playing all of these shows taught me that.

How has your musical vision changed?

It's the same as when I was pickin' honky-tonk songs down at Robert's Western World. But I've come to discover the true potential of what music can be for people: the conduit for reverential potential in people's lives. For the longest time, I thought that was just for folks onstage, but I always try to take time to shake hands, give hugs, receive and give love. That energy transfer has been very informative.

How has your guitar playing changed as you've logged so many shows?

It's grown immensely. The guitar is the vehicle for intention, and the expression of eternally enduring sentiments that exceed the

bandwidth of spoken language. The way I think, play and feel as a guitarist has continued to express itself and realize its potential with each show Cosmic Country plays.

Your road band is on *Reflector*. Were you tempted instead to use Nashville

studio pros, which would be more the norm down there?

Music, for me, is a personality puzzle, and it's a special experience to bring songs to life through personalities that are harmonized with each other. This kind of music is a vehicle for human expression with high-frequency ideals, so the music demands that the same personalities show up each day and bring it to life through our lives.

You've had the opportunity to play with quite a crew of people over the past year.

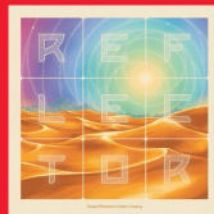
Being able to play with some of my heroes has been a transcendent blessing, enforcing my faith in my imagination, and its capacity to produce scenes from my mind into external realities that I actually live.

Give us some thoughts on playing with each of the following: Bill Kreutzmann, Billy Strings, Bob Weir and Widespread Panic.

Kreutzmann was insistent that playing in [*his group*] Billy & the Kids was fun for everyone. He's been doing this his whole life, and I was curious to see what he considered important. He didn't care about any aesthetic signals, minutia of composition or anything like that. The main value that he was seeking was that the music was truthful and living, and that this was recognized when everyone was having fun.

I see Billy Strings as an exceptional source for our generation to love and learn from. He is the personification of the very spirit of American music and its ideals. Playing with him, I was reminded not to overthink anything — to dive in headfirst, much like a child, with total faith, vision and personal expression. Essentially, no fucks given — aside from the music herself.

I cemented *Reflector* as the title for this record after playing with Bob Weir. Bob



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Reflector

"Lose Your Mind," "Rose in a Garden," "Sugar Leg Rag," "'Til the Daylight," "Faded Loving"

listens internally, and externally he reflects the emotions and sentiments of himself and everyone onstage. And most importantly, he bestows himself with the eternal pleasure of surrendering his will to the will of the music and the service of bringing it to life.

Playing with Widespread

Panic was a great integration of imposter syndrome for me. You can't kill the ego, but you can give it a proper place at the table. I just played my solo section on "Surprise Valley," and the entire arena was in joyous celebration, and Jimmy Herring peeked behind my amp and asked, "What speakers are you using?" The fact that the environment of thousands of people cheering for us was secondary to his imagination of hardware and tools allowed me to see both sides of the coin clearly.

Is anyone your alpha and omega as a guitarist?

Django Reinhardt is tough to beat, but James Burton, Don Rich, Grady Martin, Danny Gatton, Brent Mason, Johnny Hiland, Eldon Shamblin, Roy Buchanan, Roy Nichols, Jerry Reed, Chet Atkins and Redd Volkaert are all coming to my mind, too.

What is your essential road gear?

There are two categories of gear outside of collecting, and those are Fixed and Variable, or Exploit and Explore. My Fixed gear pieces consist of a Telecaster and a vintage pre-CBS-era Fender amplifier, preferably a blackface, as well as Mogami cables and Gravity Jazz III acrylic picks, Ernie Ball 10–52 strings and my Cosmic Country phaser made by Keeley Electronics. On the road the amp is a 1966 Pro Reverb, and in the studio it is a 1966 Princeton Reverb.

The Variable gear is extensive. I use a wide array of pedals: The Plus by GameChanger Audio, the Eventide H90, the Keeley Noble Screamer, the Ego Compressor by Wampler, the Timeline by Strymon and the Walrus R1 reverb. These are pedals I love using, but I also change them in and out with other elements that my imagination might require on any given day. 🎸



Daniel Donato performs with Cosmic Country at Emo's Austin, February 3, 2023.

GARY MILLER/WIREIMAGE

TIP SHEET

Gigs, grooves and grandma. **Mark Tremonti** offers his five rules for better playing.

BY JOE BOSSO

THE WAY ALTER BRIDGE guitar virtuoso Mark Tremonti sees it, you can never know too many cool licks. “A great guitar lick is like part of your personality,” he says. “It shows something about you. It’s almost like your vocabulary. And just like no two people are the same, no two guitar licks are alike. There’s always something a little unique about each one.”

Whenever he’s around another guitarist, Tremonti makes it a point to soak up some new licks. “I come right out and say, ‘Give me your two or three favorite, most useful licks,’” he says. “By that I mean not the hardest, most technical thing you can play; just show me the things that you play all the time, even the ones you don’t think about. It’s a form of communication. And don’t show me some crazy arpeggio. I’ve got enough of that stuff. I want the licks that you always fall back on — the stuff you don’t even think about. To me, those are the things that you really assimilate into your playing, and they often make it into songs.”

Whether he’s backstage, hanging out at a guitar shop or conducting a clinic, Tremonti says he’s never shy about asking other players for tips. “You can always learn something from another player,” he says. And in the spirit of sharing information, he’s given us five tips of his own.

1 PLAY FOR YOUR GRANDMA

“I find that improvising is the best way to get warmed up. When I’m playing without trying too hard, everything seems to fall into place — my bending, my vibrato, my feel. It’s just pure music. I almost think of it as if I were playing something for my grandma. I’m not trying to show off and impress a bunch of dudes by how fast I can shred; I’m just letting my mind go free while I play nice melodies.



“When you slow down and improvise, you’re speaking what your heart feels through your strings. That’s not to say that you can’t play with heart when you’re burning, but I tend to think too much when I’m playing fast. I’m overly concerned with my fingering and precision. More and more, I’m trying to get to the other side of that by just letting things roll. Guys like Larry Carlton and Warren Haynes are like that. They can just pick up the guitar and play beautiful, emotive stuff, but it doesn’t look like they’re overthinking.

“I like to go on YouTube and jam along to backing tracks. There are all kinds of five-minute tracks that you can just play along to. I pick things randomly and just start playing very leisurely. Shredding is the last thing on my mind. I feel like it helps get my juices going, and then when I want to burn, I go for it.”

2 FOLLOW THE “NINE-MONTH RULE”

“This is a rule I made up a while ago. If I find a new technique that’s really challenging, I give myself a period of nine months to master it. That’s a very realistic amount of time to practice something and study it from all sides. It gives me a goal to work toward, and I won’t get all bummed out if I can’t play something perfectly by next week.

“I came up with the nine-month rule when I was younger and wanted to be a shred player. I stumbled upon my friend Rusty Cooley’s *Shred Guitar Manifesto* CD-ROM — that tells you how long ago it was — and he opened with something that changed my life: the Legato Workout. It’s an exercise that goes through all the different finger patterns on the guitar. It takes about an hour to go through the whole thing, but it’s worth it.

“I stayed with that exercise for nine months, and it really changed the way I play. My left hand now is very different from before I started the Legato Workout, but it’s

LIEF THOMPSON

"I came up with the nine-month rule when I was younger and wanted to be a shred player," Tremonti says. See how tip 2 can work for you.

only because I stuck with it and didn't give up. That's how I feel about anything that's challenging: Give yourself a realistic period of time, don't expect perfection right away and you'll eventually get there."

3 GO WEIRD

"To me, one of the most inspiring aspects of playing the guitar is exploring alternate tunings. Once I started to use a Drop D, though, everything changed for me. I loved the sound I would get when I played rhythm. I'd play power chords and mute with my palm. What an incredible sound!

"That made me think, What if that G string was now part of that big power chord? What if the B string was now part of that chord? What if the E string... So now one of my favorite tunings is Open D5 [D A D A D D]. I've shown that tuning to a lot of people over the years, and it really opens their ears when they hear it. It's hard to make this tuning sound bad, because it's a big power chord. But you can play simple fingerstyle patterns all over the neck and get really interesting licks and melodies with it.

"People are afraid of open tunings because they've learned so much in

"MAKE THE WORST-SOUNDING CHORD YOU CAN IMAGINE. YOU'LL FIND SOMETHING COOL IN IT, IF YOU HAVE PATIENCE"

bad for a minute, but you're going to find something cool in it if you just have a little patience and aren't afraid to try something new. And it works. They sound terrible for a minute, but pretty soon they're playing something interesting."

4 BEFORE GIGS, STAND UP WHEN YOU WARM UP

"I noticed a while ago that I would sit down

standard tuning, and they think that all of their knowledge won't apply. When I would do guitar clinics, I'd tell people, 'Make the worst-sounding chord you can imagine.' Weird is good. Yes, you might sound



while practicing at home, but the moment I went on tour and hit the stage, so many things that had felt easy suddenly felt strange and uncomfortable. It dawned on me that the angle of my picking hand was one way when I was seated — my wrist was perfectly aligned with the strings — but when I stood up, the angle of my hand and wrist was totally different. That's when I realized I should spend some time standing up while I play, because that's how I'll perform my stuff live.

"I don't enjoy practicing while standing up. But at a certain point, I have to make that transition from playing while sitting to standing up while playing. Rehearsing with the band is good for that. When we're on tour, I'll stand up and play for a good 15 minutes right before the show. I'll make sure to play some of the more difficult patterns that I need to perform. Whether you're playing clubs or you're playing big places, it's a good habit for anybody to get into."

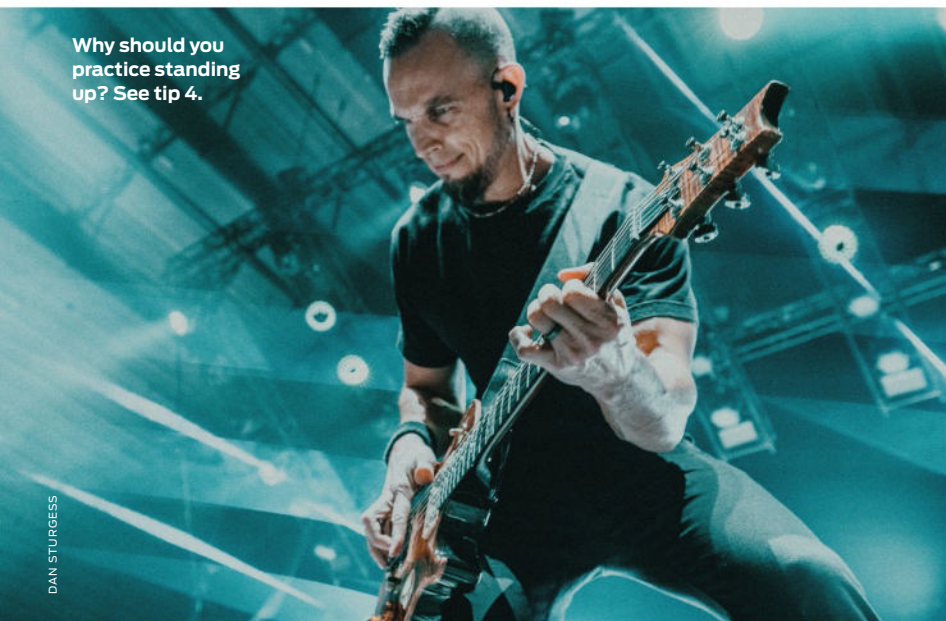
5 FIND THE RIGHT DRUMMER

"There's a big difference between playing guitar alone in your bedroom and playing onstage with a band. When I'm onstage, I'm thinking about so many things other than how precise my guitar playing is. I'm trying to enjoy myself and make sure the audience is having a good time. That means I need to feel confident and comfortable with the rest of my band, and so much of that rests on the drummer's shoulders.

"I'm pretty spoiled to have played with Scott Phillips for so many years. He's got one of the best pockets I've ever heard. When I play with him, it's like putting on a well-worn baseball glove — it just feels natural. We have a chemistry that I've never experienced with another drummer. I never really have to worry about what he's going to do. He's always carrying the weight of the music, which allows me to loosen up and perform at my best.

"It can take some trial and error to find the right drummer, and sometimes the most accomplished technician isn't the drummer for you. I've played with some truly brilliant drummers, but I've found that they're a little ahead of the beat, and that throws me off. A player like Scott is right there in the groove. He owns the pocket. When you find a drummer like that, stick with him." ■

Why should you practice standing up? See tip 4.



DAN STURGES

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Everyone's go-to sideman, **Lyle Workman** reflects on five cuts that showcase the power of his six-string assist.

BY JOE BOSSO

DOES LYLE WORKMAN have one of the most apt surnames, or what? Since making his debut in 1986 with the Bay Area–based band *Bourgeois Tagg*, the versatile guitarist has been one of the most in-demand players around, recording and/or touring with the likes of Sting, Beck, Todd Rundgren, Michael Bublé, Sarah McLachlan, Bryan Adams, Sheryl Crow and Frank Black. And that's just scratching the surface of his credits. When he's not collaborating with top stars, Workman has an enviable second day job as a film composer, having scored numerous Judd Apatow pictures, such as *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Superbad* and *Get Him to the Greek*.

"I've always wanted to play with rock bands and make records, but film scoring came out of left field," Workman says. "I met a film executive who needed guitar playing on one of his personal projects, and after that I won the lottery and did Judd Apatow's first film. It's nothing I planned on, but I applied myself and studied a lot. I took a film scoring course at UCLA and got my orchestral chops together. When the opportunity comes around, you have to be ready."

In many ways, it mirrors how Workman approaches recording sessions. "I always want to find out as much as I can about a record date," he says. "I'll ask the producer beforehand, 'What's the vibe? What are you looking for?' If I'm told, 'He's a rock and roll singer and he likes these kinds of bands,'

then I'll decide what gear will best fulfill those needs. I've done a few records with Michael Bublé, so I know what he likes, but sometimes a producer will say, 'We're going to do something a little different,' and I'll modify what I bring to a session."

For most recording dates, Workman tries to "cover all the main food groups" by bringing a Stratocaster, Telecaster, ES-335, Les Paul and an SG. "Of course, I've got Silvertones, Jazzmasters and Jaguars. You never know when you might need them," he says. "I don't see myself as having a particular sound. I'm more of a music creator, and guitars are my tools. I just try to be prepared for any job."

At the same time, Workman has learned to expect the unexpected, like the time he

flew to New York to audition for Sting's band. "The first thing Sting said to me was, 'This isn't a Police cover band. These are the songs. Just do your own thing,'" Workman recalls. "Fortunately, Sting liked what I did. That was the opposite of how I usually worked, which was to learn the songs and replicate them as best I could. But that's how things happen — you have to be able to throw everything you know out the window and go with it."

Workman has recorded four solo albums, his most recent being 2021's *Uncommon Measures*, which included the pull-out-all-stops, nine-minute-plus masterpiece "North Star," in which the guitarist weaves soaring slide melodies and thunderbolts of wicked shred in and around a 63-piece orchestra



recorded at London's Abbey Road Studios. "I'm essentially a sideman, and I love helping somebody fulfill their vision," he says. "But when I do my own music, I'm able to use various experiences I've had and tailor them to how I want to come across to other musicians. I always want to feel as good about playing my music as I do when I work with other people. In the end, I think it all comes across in how something sounds."

"I DON'T MIND AT ALL" BOURGEOIS TAGG — *YOYO* (1987)



"This is a song I wrote with Brent Bourgeois. He and Larry Tagg were the co-leaders and central songwriters of Bourgeois Tagg. When I joined the band,

I would submit ideas to the guys on cassette tapes. 'I Don't Mind at All' was a little guitar thing I had. I didn't have actual words to it; I think I mumbled 'I don't mind at all' at the refrain of the chorus. Brent loved it and turned it into a song with lyrics. He and I did a string arrangement. It was the first time I'd done something like that.

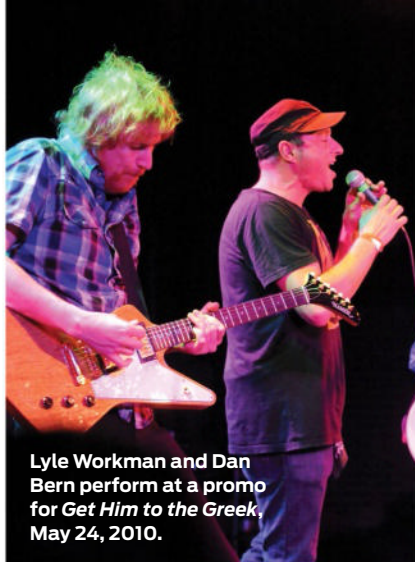
"There's no crazy solo, but I played nice stuff on it. I used my main acoustic-electric at the time, a six-string Ovation in standard tuning. You could just plug it in and get a good sound with it. This was my first time working with Todd Rundgren, who produced the album. I think he was pretty happy with what I played, because he didn't have much to say. He was very focused on the lyrics. It was a fun night putting that down, and I emerged unscathed."

"CAN'T STOP RUNNING" TODD RUNDGREN — *NEARLY HUMAN* (1989)



"I did this record right after the Bourgeois Tagg album. The band had become a four-piece, and we all played on Todd's album. Halfway into

the sessions, we basically broke up. Todd was pretty hands-off about what I needed to play. I think he just likes to cast the right people



Lyle Workman and Dan Bern perform at a promo for *Get Him to the Greek*, May 24, 2010.

"I'M ESSENTIALLY A SIDEMAN, AND I LOVE HELPING SOMEBODY FULFILL THEIR VISION"

and he lets them go. With this song, he had a demo that had guitar all the way through it, including a solo. Todd wanted to record it live, and he told me, 'You play the solo.' I was like, 'Oh, my gosh,' because, you know, he's a great guitar player himself. In the end, we did three solos in the song, all recorded live with no overdubs.

"It was especially daunting for me, because not only did I play all of these solos but this track also saw a reunion of Todd's band Utopia. I was a huge Utopia fan — I had all their records — and here I was meeting them and playing with them. No pressure, right? [laughs] But I had a great time. There was one moment during the session when Todd looked at me and gave me a big smile because he liked what I was doing. That made me feel pretty good.

"There's a little intro that Todd had for the song. I took maybe 50 percent of his thing and added my own flair to it. When it came to the solos, it was like, 'Here's eight bars, or 16 bars,' and off I went. I stood in the control room as I played. I used a Hamer Chaparral with a Floyd Rose, and I went into a Mesa/Boogie Studio Preamp right into the board. It came out great. After this record, I went on tour with Todd, and then we did another record called *Second Wind*. I had a couple of years with him."

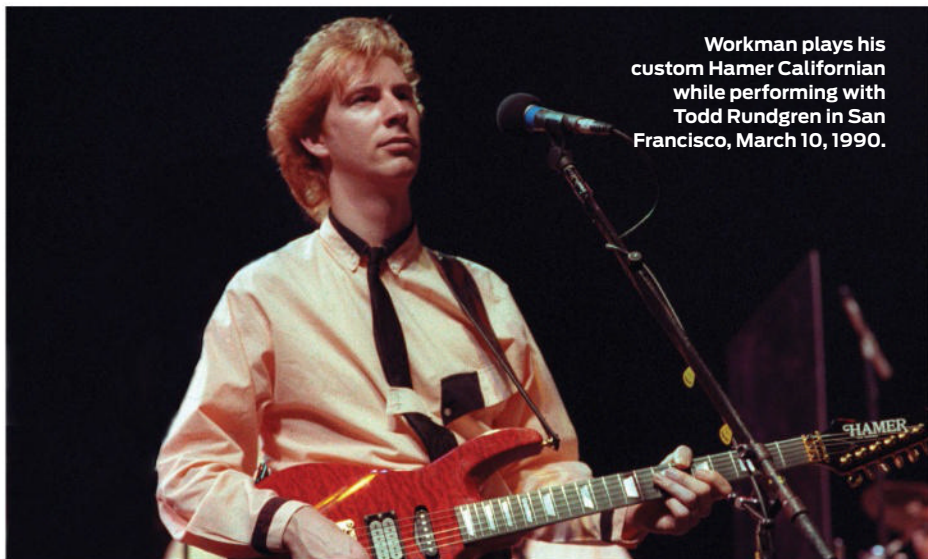
"NEW MISTAKE" JELLYFISH — *SPLIT MILK* (1993)



"The guys in Jellyfish used to have a band called Beatnik Beatch that opened shows for Bourgeois Tagg. At the time, we were a big fish in the Bay Area pond.

Later on, when they morphed into Jellyfish, [band founders] Andy Sturmer and Roger Manning were looking for a guitar player, and they called me.

"This was for their second album, *Split Milk*. This situation was the opposite of how I worked with Todd Rundgren or Frank Black in that they had very specific guitar parts laid down in their demos. They basically needed somebody to play them a little bit more expertly and to add little embellishments. I did a solo that I came up with on the spot, and then I doubled it. I used a Gibson ES-335



Workman plays his custom Hamer Californian while performing with Todd Rundgren in San Francisco, March 10, 1990.

for it, which we rented from a great vintage guitar shop in Los Angeles. We rented about 15 guitars and amps, and I felt like I was in a candy store.

"I didn't mind replaying a lot of their parts. If I really love the music, I don't mind being the smallest cog in the wheel. I just like being able to participate in any way, even if it's a buried part that's very minimal and isn't showcased. Just to be a part of good music is enough for me. *Spilt Milk* was full of very good music, so it was an enjoyable experience."

"SOLID GOLD"

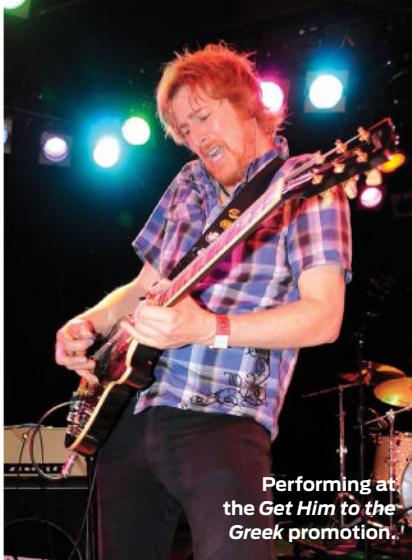
FRANK BLACK AND THE CATHOLICS — *FRANK BLACK AND THE CATHOLICS* (1998)



"At the time, I didn't really listen to the Pixies that much. The drummer in Bourgeois Tagg turned me on to Frank Black's first solo album, and I fell in love

with it. I played it nonstop in my car. Then I turned Joel Danzig from Hamer Guitars on to it, and one day he called me and said that Frank was doing some recording in our neighborhood. It was a tribute record to [rock and roll songwriter] Otis Blackwell. I told Joel, 'I've got to meet Frank Black.'

"Joel knew the producer of the record. He made some calls, and it was worked out that I would go to the studio to do some background vocals. So now I'm standing at



Performing at the *Get Him to the Greek* promotion.

"I WAS A HUGE UTOPIA FAN, AND HERE I WAS PLAYING WITH THEM. NO PRESSURE, RIGHT?"

the mic with Frank Black, and he said, 'I hear you're a really good guitar player. I'm actually working on a record. What are you doing in September?' And I said, 'I'm playing with you!' He hired me to do some overdubs on his next record, *Teenager of the Year*, and that led to five years of recording and touring with him.

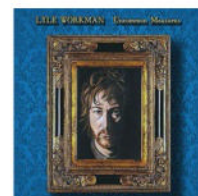
"One of the tracks we did was 'Solid Gold.' This was another live-to-tape-with-no-overdubs thing. I think we might have even done this live to two-track. I used a '57 Les Paul Jr. into a Mesa/Boogie Rectifier. The song has a pretty cool extended solo. There was never any discussion about what I would play. Frank liked my choices. He'd play what he played, and I'd make up my own parts. I think he liked to be surprised.

"Frank was interesting in that he allowed

for a lot of soloing, which wasn't really the thing with alternative music or college music. He always gave me a lot of room to play. I'm sure there were a few folks who said, 'He's no Joey Santiago,' and I agree — I am not Joey Santiago. He's a completely different player, and I love his style and sound. I come from an older rock-and-roll thing. I grew up on Hendrix and the Who, Queen and 10 Years After. From there, it was into John Scofield and Robben Ford. That's what you get from me."

"NORTH STAR"

LYLE WORKMAN — *UNCOMMON MEASURES* (2021)

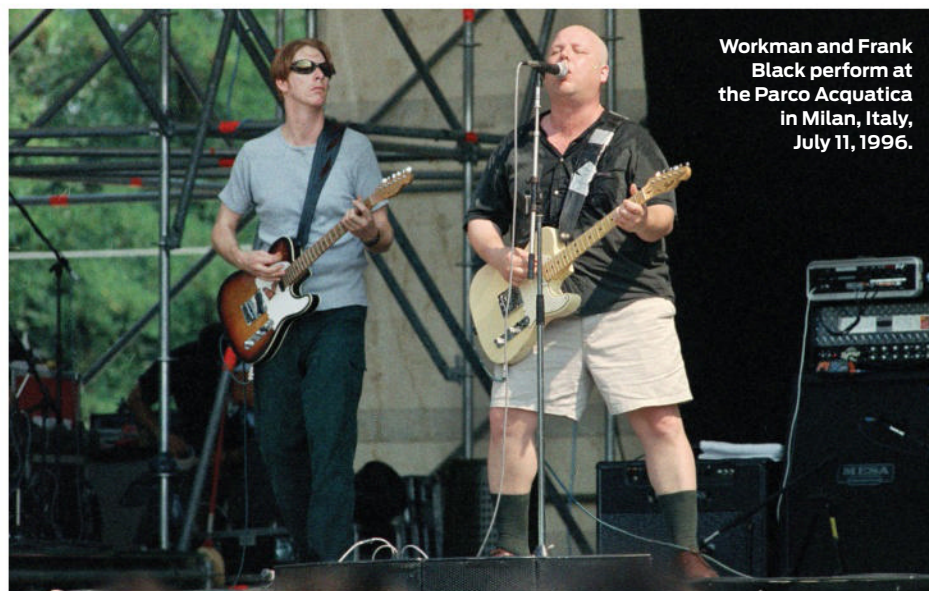


"I wanted to make a record that encapsulated my journey through music, and the biggest element of that was orchestral music that

I had the opportunity to dive into through film scoring. I knew I wanted John Ashton Thomas, my film orchestrator, involved in this. He and I have bonded over a lot of music.

"'North Star' took a while to write and put together. It's over nine minutes long, and it shifts from section to section like movements in classical music. I broke it down, playing riffs to a click track, and then I listened back to see what it needed — usually a new melodic idea. We were going to use a full orchestra, but I had to have a basic track recorded first — that's when I did my guitar parts. There's a slide melody part on which I used my Gibson Trini Lopez. Then there's a section with a lot of fast changes. For that I played my 1966 Fender Electric XII with a Gumby headstock. And finally, there's the main solo section, where I kind of go wild. For that, I played my '63 Strat.

"We recorded the orchestra at Abbey Road, which was the pinnacle for me. Number one, we were doing my music. Number two, we were working with arguably the best orchestral musicians in the world — these people play on top soundtracks. And three, we were doing it at Abbey Road, which is ground zero for me — it's where the Beatles recorded. It was a long day with the orchestra — I think it took nine hours. I got nice compliments from the musicians, which was incredibly validating. It was challenging for everybody, but we had fun with it." 🎸



Workman and Frank Black perform at the Parco Acquatica in Milan, Italy, July 11, 1996.

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Beauty Contest

Despite its glammed up features and appearance, **Gibson's "Black Beauty" Les Paul Custom** was no match against the glitzy Goldtop.

GIBSON'S ICONIC BLACK Beauty, the Les Paul Custom, has long represented top-flight elegance in the solidbody electric guitar. Yet as it evolved from its origins as a black-tie-worthy accessory for the dinner-club set, it proved its versatility in the hands of some heavy rockers too.

Guitar star and inventor Les Paul said on several occasions that when he sat down with Gibson in the early 1950s to devise the revolutionary instrument that would carry his name, he envisioned two versions of the Les Paul Model: a standard iteration with a goldtop finish and nickel-plated hardware, and a custom model that would be the *crème de la crème*. This Les Paul Custom would be dressed in formal wear, like the tux a jazz artist might put on for a major performance. The so-called Goldtop was the first model out of the box in 1952, with the Custom on the back burner for further development. Once the first model was off and running, Gibson turned its attention to designing the Les Paul Custom in 1953, planning for a release the following year. In addition to Paul's desired appointments, they gave the guitar the best of Gibson's new developments in hardware and electronics, too.

In a taped interview for the *Gourmet Guitars* DVD series in 2009, Paul spoke of

meeting with CMI chairman Maurice Berlin. "The first thing he asked me was the color, and I said 'Gold,'" he reported. "Other people jumped up and said, 'Don't pick the color gold, it's going to turn green on you. You're going to have a lot of problems with a gold guitar.' But the chairman of the board of Gibson says, 'He wants gold, gold it is! ... What's the other color going to be, because we're going to make two of them?' I picked black."

In addition to the striking ebony-black finish on its body and the back of its neck, the Les Paul Custom received an ebony fingerboard, larger celluloid block inlays, seven-ply binding around its top, and five-ply

binding around its back and headstock. The latter was also larger than that of the Goldtop, with a large split-diamond inlay. All hardware was, naturally, plated in gold. At its introduction in 1954 the Les Paul Custom was priced at \$325, a full \$100 more than the standard Les Paul Model with gold finish.

Looks aside, several other features made it sound and feel somewhat different from its sibling. For one, the Les Paul Custom of 1954 was the first guitar to receive Gibson's revolutionary new ABR-1 Tune-o-matic bridge, which was partnered with a stop-bar tailpiece or optional Bigsby vibrato. Its



The Alnico V pickup gave the Custom a bright tone with plenty of snap.



The Custom's deluxe treatment extended to its five-ply headstock binding.



inclusion marked a major step forward in the evolution of the Les Paul in general. Though not a guitarist himself, Gibson president Ted McCarty had seen the need for a more efficient and adjustable bridge, and had personally designed this new piece of hardware, which had individual string saddles for precise intonation adjustment and easy height adjustment via a pair of thumb wheels on its body-mounted bolts. Perhaps less impactful were the Custom's Sealfast tuners with pearloid buttons, which were somewhat different from the Klusons on the Goldtop.

Two other changes rendered it a guitar that both felt and sounded entirely different from the Goldtop. First, at Paul's request, the Custom was fitted with low, narrow frets, a feature that the artist felt made it faster to play and which earned it the nickname the Fretless Wonder. This feature failed to excite many guitarists, especially some years later, when heavy string bending became a big part of the blues-rock repertoire. The frets left some players feeling that they didn't have enough meat to grab onto without bottoming out while pushing strings hard.

Second, the Custom carried an entirely new pickup in its neck position. Developed by Seth Lover in late 1952 or '53 at the behest of McCarty, the Alnico V pickup looked somewhat like a P90 but was constructed entirely differently and intended as an upgrade. While the P90 (and the PAF humbucker to come) had bar magnets beneath the pickup's coil, the Alnico V pickup used six individual rectangular Alnico V magnets as pole pieces. These were placed within the pickup's coil, an alteration that lent it a crisp, bright tone with plenty of snap and clarity. The appearance of those six pole pieces on the pickup's front led to it being referred to as "the staple pickup."

Employed on several of Gibson's high-end archtop electrics of the mid '50s, including

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

- Single-cutaway solid mahogany body with a carved arched mahogany top
- Solid mahogany neck, 24 3/4-inch scale length
- Bound ebony fingerboard with block inlays
- Seven-ply top binding, five-ply back and headstock binding on enlarged headstock.
- One P90 pickup bridge position, one Alnico V pickup neck position
- Gold-plated Tune-o-matic bridge, stopbar tailpiece and Sealfast tuners

the L-5CES, ES-5 and Byrdland, the Alnico V pickup made its debut on the original Les Paul Custom of 1954 and helped enhance string definition in the neck position. With its individual, height-adjustable alnico poles, the Alnico V has much in common with the DeArmond Model 200, then best known as the Dynasonic pickup, and used in Gretsch guitars. It seems clear that McCarty and Lover were chasing that sound with the design. Fender's pickups also had individual alnico poles, although they weren't

adjustable. Years later, Lover as much as said in several interviews that the only reason he used rectangular bar magnet segments rather than round rod segments was to differentiate Gibson's pickup from others on the market.

There was one more very significant difference between the Goldtop and Custom. While the opaque finish of both models hid

BY DAVE HUNTER



the wood used for the top, the Custom was made entirely of mahogany, with a carved mahogany top rather than the Goldtop's carved maple top. The variation in timber also contributed to further slight differences in tone between the two, with a little more warmth in the Custom, and less of the Goldtop's maple-fueled snap and clarity, although some of that was made up for by the hard ebony fingerboard and the Alnico V pickup in the neck position.

The specs of the Custom bring up yet another Les Paul irony, and there would be more to come: When designed and constructed precisely as Les himself preferred it, the guitar often appealed to fewer players. Gibson shipping records show that 1,912 single-cutaway Les Paul Customs were sold between its introduction and its deletion from the line at the end of 1960, compared to around 7,000 Goldtops sold in the same period, not including the Goldtop sales from '52 to '53.

As Les himself put it to *Gourmet Guitars*, "It made me happy, and of course I thought whatever made me happy's gonna make everybody happy. I didn't think it out. I just knew that's what I liked." Nearly two decades later, this phenomenon would play itself out even further with the release of the Les Paul Personal, Professional and Recording models, which never attained much popularity.

It's difficult to conjure many notable players of the early Les Paul Custom. The

most famous, perhaps, is Peter Frampton, although he acquired his '54 Black Beauty only after it had been modified to '57 specs with the addition of three humbucking pickups. Robby Krieger

of the Doors also played a '54, but his was modified with a '70s-era mini-humbucker in the neck position. Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols is best known for his white '74 Custom, but he also owned and occasionally played an original '54. Once the humbucking pickup hit town, though, the Les Paul Custom had a far greater uptake. ■

**"I THOUGHT WHATEVER
MADE ME HAPPY'S
GONNA MAKE
EVERYBODY HAPPY.
I DIDN'T THINK IT OUT"**

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

You Haven't Heard Merle

The magic of **Merle Travis** is captured in these 22 solo recordings.

IF YOU'VE PLAYED fingerstyle, rockabilly, the Beatles' "Blackbird" or Fleetwood Mac's "Landslide," you're familiar with Mr. Merle Travis. Merle defined alternating-bass guitar, pioneered the design of the solidbody electric, played a key role in shaping rockabilly guitar and handed his stylistic torch to the likes of Chet Atkins and Lenny Breau, who both brought his style to new heights and discoveries. Despite this, I've taught Travis picking at least 500 times, and whenever I've asked a student, "Do you know who Merle Travis is?" I've never heard, "Yes!"

Well, ladies and gentlemen, *Walkin' the Strings* is Merle Travis. Capitol released it in 1960, drawing its tunes from a selection of casual and intimate solo recordings he made for radio broadcast beginning in the mid 1940s. Despite its cover showing the guitarist with his Gibson Super 400 electric, Merle used his Martin D-28 acoustic for all but one of these 22 tracks. The performances, which range from full songs to brief snippets, are filled with dynamics, driving rhythms and stunning guitar work that always has an eye on the audience.

The album opens with the title track, a showcase of jaw-droppingly fast arpeggios that seals the deal immediately. "Little David Play Your Harp" features a Travis vocal that is reminiscent of Josh White and drips with gospel soulfulness. The instrumental "Saturday Night Shuffle" follows with classic American Songbook harmony as well as charming bends and captivating breaks that speak to the listener. "Thumbing the Bass" is played at breakneck speed and demonstrates



Merle's ability to play the guitar like a piano. A personal favorite of mine is "Cane Break Blues," which clocks in at a brief 1:15, during which Merle delivers a masterclass on the 12-bar blues, with dozens of iconic licks and turnarounds. On "Darby's Ram," he tells a story before he launches into the tune, and it feels like a bedtime story for the masses. "Everly Rag" is a tribute to Ike Everly, father of

the Everly Brothers and a mentor to young Merle. Though just 38 seconds long, it's not the shortest track here. Up next is "Rose Time," where Merle ventures into lovely unexpected harmony reminiscent of 1920s

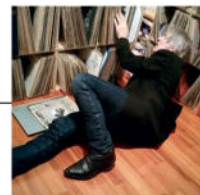
guitar pioneers like Eddie Lang, Nick Lucas and Dick McDonough. "Old Aunt Dinah" brings us back at an almost shocking, flashy tempo where Merle rips and entertains. "My Old Kentucky Home" is a midtempo piece with sledgehammer alternate bass that leads to the showstopper, "Pigmeat Stomp."

Side two opens with the classic "Blue Smoke" before Merle plays "Dry Bread," which starts with a spoken-word introduction about

hard work and tough times. "Louisville Clog" lifts the spirits with an uptempo groove, flash and great harmony, after which we get the album's sole electric guitar track, "On a Bicycle Built for Two," where Merle plays the melody under the accompanying chords via an overdub. Thankfully, we get to hear his use of the vibrato bar when playing a melody. We return to solo acoustic on the 53-second "Green Bay Polka" and move on to "Jordan Am a Hard Road to Travel," a biblical story that is followed by the action-packed "Travis Trot," which, at 29 seconds, is the shortest performance on this satisfying LP. It's followed by Merle's centerpiece, "Cannon Ball Stomp," which he was known to pick using only a thumb pick and index finger. "Fuller Blues," "Blue Bell" and "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" end this eventful LP, that feels like a great Merle Travis concert.

Merle Travis is everywhere in our guitar lives. If you're looking for a record to meet the man, *Walkin' the Strings* is a great place to start. I feel uplifted by its music and I walk away feeling like I made a new friend.

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.



BY TERRY CARLETON



Everyone Knew Her as Nancy

By any of its names, the 1970 Kimberly Deluxe is a Made in Japan classic to keep your eye on.

IT SAYS “KIMBERLY” on the headstock, so why does it look more like a Teisco? But if it's a Teisco, why does it play and sound so nice and look so cool? Because, technically, this guitar is neither a Kimberly nor a Teisco. It was actually made in the Kawai factory shortly after the company purchased Teisco and its different nameplates circa 1967. In fact, most collectors of Teisco guitars know the late-'60s specimens will likely play better than the average department store guitar.

Even so, the name game for '60s-era Japanese and European guitars gets tricky due to the many brands that wholesalers and importers attached to their models. For example, this Deluxe is often referred to as the Bison because it resembles the English-made Burns Bison, which was also offered in a green finish and had four pickups. But whatever you call it, the Kimberly Deluxe is one of the cooler and more sought-after models of its ilk.

WEIRDO FACTOR

Green guitars never sell well, but that didn't stop Kawai from going all-in on this green machine. Indeed, the color is the most striking thing here. Still, it's hard to overlook all those pickups, not to mention the rather aggressive body shape.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

The Kimberly Deluxe has a lot going for it. The maple neck sports a rosewood fingerboard with 22 frets and is slim, friendly and fast. The four fabled gold-foil pickups are wired in series, resulting in a very hot output once you start combining pickups. Each has a white kill switch that

allows for all the variations and provides a great way to dial in the perfect sound or add a boost on the fly. Additionally, each pickup has a dedicated volume knob, but there is only one global tone knob.

The roller bridge is a nice addition that helps ensure that the vibrato bar comes back smoothly and accurately, but, sadly, it doesn't allow individual string intonation. Fortunately, this guitar stays pretty true up and down the neck. With a clean setting, the tones are fairly nondescript, but with overdrive or distortion, those gold-foils scream in a very rock-and-roll way. I got this guitar from my buddy Dave Ristrum, who has played in Luke Bryan's band, and he used it for slide, in open tuning, with overdrive.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the lack of string tension. The “towel rack” string retainer behind the nut doesn't provide quite enough force, a common problem on M.I.J. guitars from this period. There is a definite lack of sustain, which is another reason to use it with some overdrive or light compression.

VALUE

The 1970 catalog shows this guitar retailed for just \$44.95, with the case setting you back another nine bucks. The street price as of this writing is between \$600 and \$1,200, which is a bargain. Heck, the pickups alone are easily worth \$125 each.

WHY IT RULES:

This guitar sounds as aggressive as it looks. It's light, easy to play and has tone for days. 🎸

Thanks to Dave Ristrum for letting me watch over his Kimberly, and Frank Myers for his well of information.

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it!



CLASS ACT

She's an indie-rock original with formal training in jazz and classical. On *Untame the Tiger*, Mary Timony shows the full range of her guitar talents.

BY TOM BEAUJOUR

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PRISILLA CHAVEZ SCOTT

ALTHOUGH MANY GENRES — metal, jazz and classical, to name a few — embrace the fluidity and erudition of the guitarists who top their respective fields, punk and indie rock have always had an uneasy relationship with formal training and technical mastery. Isn't it easier to break the rules if you don't know them in the first place?

Can authenticity, innocence and raw emotion survive in a player who spends too much time in the woodshed? In short, can you be cool *and* go to school?

For Mary Timony, studying jazz and classical guitar in a specialized high-school program and college provided her with the ability to make artistic decisions with an intent unfettered by limitations. It's a talent the Washington, D.C., native has exercised since the early '90s while blazing a fiercely original path as a solo artist and in bands like Autoclave, Helium, Wild Flag and Ex Hex. As a result, when Timony embraces indie-rock tropes, like a predilection for Fender Jazzmasters and alternate tunings, it's by choice, not default. As her many fans will agree, it's no wonder she was ranked in the top 100 of *Rolling Stone's* recent "250 Greatest Guitarists of All Time" list.

Untame the Tiger (Merge Records), Timony's first solo album in more than a decade and a half, was recorded during a challenging period for the guitarist. "Both of my parents got sick, and I was

caretaking," she says. "My dad got dementia, my mom got cancer, so I was the primary caregiver for both of them. And a long-term relationship had ended right before that, so suddenly my life just was very different and really stressful."

Despite what could seem like insurmountable challenges, the full breadth of Timony's musical, vocal and disarming lyrical skills are on display on *Untame the Tiger*. From the expansive, orchestrated guitar workout of the album opener "No Thirds" to the propulsive new wave of "Dominoes" and the crunchy baroque riffery of "Summer," there's no lack of inspired playing, but never to the detriment of the songs themselves. "I love guitar," says Timony, who teaches the instrument as well. "But I've always

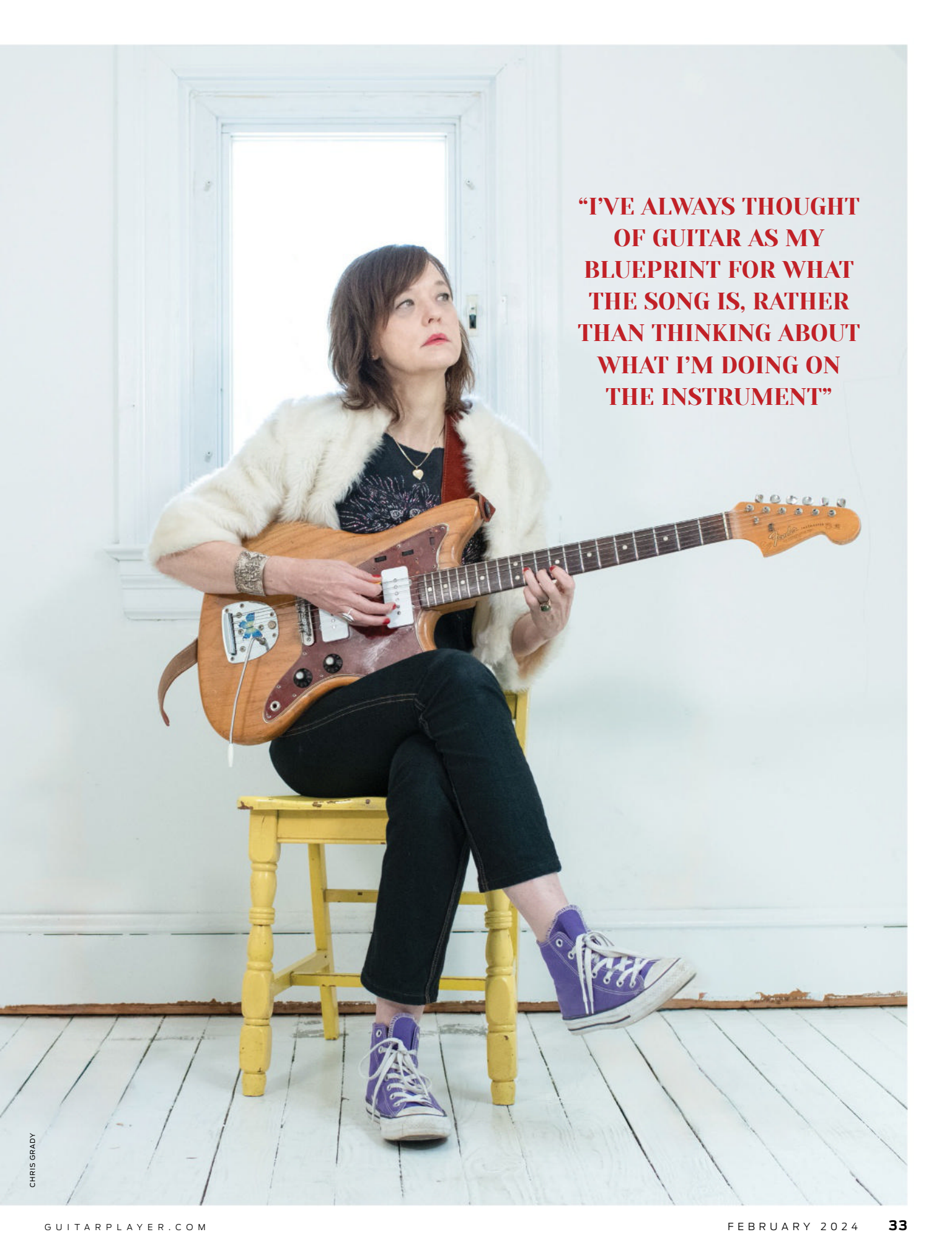
thought of it as my blueprint for what the song is, rather than thinking about what I'm doing on the instrument. Songs and lyrics are way more important to me."

Let's start at the beginning. When did you discover the guitar?

I started viola lessons in third grade, and I played in the quartet at school, but I was a typical kid, just like, "I don't like practicing. This is boring." Then, my brother was really getting into rock music, and my parents gave him a guitar for Christmas, and he started writing songs. Suddenly, I was like, "Oh, you can write songs with a guitar! Music can be really fun, because you can be creative with it and you can use it to sing and accompany yourself." But I was still just a super-depressed kid and always sick and stuff. My mom realized I would probably like this public music high school called Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and that was the best experience. As soon as I started going, everything changed.

Life turned from black and white to color?

Yeah! Once I started being able to play guitar all day, I was like, "Whoa, life can be kind of exciting and fun!" We'd just hang out in the room and jam with other kids, and my teacher was this awesome R&B and jazz guy. We had a masterclass with Joe Pass, and we went to see Stanley Jordan and meet him. There was a music business seminar with Maurice White, I believe, from Earth, Wind & Fire. And we had an instrumental guitar band that played at the local supermarket and at the post office pavilion. Oh — and Dionne Warwick spoke at our graduation!



**“I’VE ALWAYS THOUGHT
OF GUITAR AS MY
BLUEPRINT FOR WHAT
THE SONG IS, RATHER
THAN THINKING ABOUT
WHAT I’M DOING ON
THE INSTRUMENT”**

TOP AND OPPOSITE: Mary Timony at work on *Untame the Tiger* in Studio 606 in Los Angeles.

RIGHT: In Studio 606 with engineer Joe Wong (left) and drummer Dave Mattacks. Timony calls working with Mattacks “one of the highlights of my life.”

BELOW: Tracking with her 1966 Fender Jazzmaster.

Did you go to college for music?

I went to Boston University for classical guitar for one year. It was a great place for orchestral instruments, but to be honest, the guitar program was terrible. All the teacher did was talk about Rhode Island history and furniture. I was like, “What the fuck is this?” Then I had this total meltdown. I was like, “I am so sick of studying music. This is bullshit. I just want to write and play three-chord songs and be at punk shows.”

Were you a fan of the D.C. punk and hardcore scene during the period when you were studying guitar?

I don’t think I would’ve done music without being around that. There were kids who were 15 and were going on tour and making their own records. It was super-inspiring, and also it was kind of spiritual and religious, because nobody cared about making money.

That said, I was never a fan of hardcore music. I liked some of the D.C. bands, but it was way too masculine and not musical enough for me. That’s

the negative side to punk that I resent: When you’re in a community of people who don’t really learn from history or are making things up, the bar is low for how good you’re supposed to get at your instrument. There’s



“WHEN YOU START OUT WITH DISTORTED GUITARS, THINGS ACTUALLY START TO SOUND REALLY SMALL”



this amateurism thing, which can sometimes be great, but it’s annoying when it’s not good.

As someone with formal musical training, did you think it was possible to fit into that scene as a guitarist?

I feel like people that are under a certain age, maybe 35, have no idea what it was like before the internet, when you had to really search things out and genres were much less fluid than they are now. I felt like I had to choose one and had a real meltdown about, “What is my music? What is the music that I’m learning, and how does it relate to this punk stuff?” And I just couldn’t figure out how to make it all make sense. I felt very compartmentalized. I was going to this high school, and practicing a lot, and that was one personality I had. And then there was the person that went to punk shows, and they didn’t match. And then my real true self is someone who loves Neil Young and Joni Mitchell and Jimi Hendrix. It just took me a second in my early 20s to be like, “Wait, what is my voice? And do I have to join one of these groups, or can I just be myself and combine them?” It definitely took gaining some confidence to figure out what I would make if I were going to make something.

Where does Richard Thompson figure into the equation of your musical heroes? You used the drummer Dave Mattacks, who played with Fairport Convention and on Richard and Linda Thompson’s *Shoot Out the Lights*, on several tracks on *Untame the Tiger*.

Richard Thompson is absolutely one of my favorites. A friend of mine does a drum podcast and had interviewed Dave Mattacks and was like, “Dude, you should totally get him on your record.” I was like,



“What the fuck? That’s not possible.” I was almost too scared to do it, but part of getting older, and also part of dealing with my parents’ illness, is that everything went into perspective. I stopped letting all of my hang-ups guide me. So I was able to be like, “Yeah, okay, let’s call up Dave Mattacks.” And it happened, and it was fucking amazing; I would say one of the highlights of my life. We recorded at Studio 606, which is the Foo Fighters’ place in L.A.

But most of the guitars for the record were recorded in your basement?

Yes. My friend Dennis Kane and I would try every guitar I had until we got the right sound. We didn’t have a time limit. We would do two weeks of tracking, throw it out, start over again. I can’t even tell you how much stuff I threw out.

What were the main guitars and amps you used?

The main electric guitars were my 1966 Jazzmaster, which I’ve had since Helium, a Saul Koll Junior Glide, a 1964 Epiphone Sorrento, a 1977 double-cutaway Les Paul Special, and a Mulhauser Designs Bravo with a TV Jones T-Armond in the neck and a Suhr Thornbucker in the bridge. The main amps were my silverface Fender Champ, my blackface, mid-’60s Bassman, an Orange Rockerverb and a Swart STR-Tweed. And then in terms of microphones, we used a Neumann TLM 103 condenser mic and a Shure SM57.

The sounds are very pure, and it doesn’t sound like many pedals were involved.

I don’t like pedals. I’ve gone through a lot of phases with them and definitely had a huge pedalboard at



SMART GUITAR

Snail Mail’s Lyndsey Jordan got more than guitar lessons from Mary Timony.

ALTHOUGH ONLY 24, Lyndsey Jordan of Snail Mail has already accomplished more than most guitarists will in a lifetime. Snail Mail’s two albums, 2018’s *Lush* and 2021’s *Valentine*, have received universal critical praise, and the guitar skills that she has developed since starting to play at the age of five earned her a spot on *Rolling Stone*’s recent “250 Greatest Guitarists of All Time” list, alongside Mary Timony. Here, Jordan explains how taking lessons from Timony set her on an upward trajectory.

How did you come to take lessons from Mary?

I had a friend who was taking lessons with her, and I was like, “That’s cool, I would love to do that.” I’d already been playing guitar for a really long time, but Mary’s a hero of mine. I’ve never been anywhere near a teacher that makes that kind of creative shit. So much open-tuning stuff and innovative stuff.

What did you work on in the lessons?

I told her, “I know my basics and then some, but I feel like I have so much to learn from you.” So, there was different stuff. We were doing the Beatles’ “And Your Bird Can Sing” guitar-monies at some point. We also worked on “See No Evil” by Television, and we did a lot of jamming. I also was showing her a lot of the stuff I was writing in open tunings. And then, of course, I copied some Mary Timony guitar tunings on our album *Lush*, ‘cause it got to a point where I was getting tired of open D and standard.

Did she give you any career advice?

I came to her with every single problem when Snail Mail was coming up, and she’s just super-insightful. I felt really lucky to have her in my corner, because she’s also just the nicest person I’ve ever met. If I can have a lasting career that keeps the integrity the way hers has and keeps the flame of creative passion alive, then I’m doing good. — **TB**

one point. You have 15 pedals on your pedalboard and your tone sucks. I was like, “Oh, this is too much. Dial it back.” Joe Walsh, who I love, and Hendrix and all these guys, they didn’t use a bunch of pedals. So I just like being very careful about which ones I use. In a way, pedals are their own instrument. It’s like a synthesizer, basically.

***Untame the Tiger* isn’t what you’d call an “acoustic record,” but a lot of the rhythm guitar parts on the album are played on acoustic. How did you decide that was the way to go?**

I think I had overdone the distortion a little bit in the past, and I wanted to dial it back and get a cleaner sound. I had a big realization that all my favorite records by bands like the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers and Fairport Convention had a lot of acoustic guitars on them. I wanted this record to be more real sounding. Also, when you start with distorted guitars, things start to sound really small.

Was there a specific acoustic that you favored for the rhythm tracks?



ABOVE: Timony lays basic tracks at Studio 606 with a Martin 12-string borrowed from engineer Joe Wong.

I had gotten my grandmother’s 1931 Gibson L-0 — she even scratched her name in it — from an aunt. It was just sitting in an attic, like, for 60 years, and she shipped it to me in the mail. She doesn’t know anything about guitar, so it was in a box without a case, just rattling around, and it was kind of messed up. But I got it worked on, and it sounds amazing! It’s the main acoustic on the record.

Why did you choose to use an EBow on *Untame the Tiger* where you might have used keyboards or strings?

I’ve done it on other records. I like it because it’s like feedback, but it’s more controlled, and it’s really fun. Another reason is because my right arm was extremely tense for the past seven years, and I’d almost gotten to where I felt I couldn’t play guitar anymore, because when I recorded, everything was ahead of the beat, and it sounded shitty. I almost got to the point where I was like, “I guess I just suck on guitar.” I would try to practice, and not get any better. And then last year, I got the chance to work with a friend of mine who is a really incredible classical player, and he was watching me play and he fucking figured out what I was doing. It was so dumb — I just wasn’t resting my arm on the guitar enough! I was so anxious, and worked up, but as soon as I realized what was wrong, started loosening up and went to a chiropractor, my arm started working better and I just redid all the stuff I’d been struggling with. And I got it in just a few takes.

You recently ranked 95th in *Rolling Stone*’s 250 Greatest Guitarists list. What was your reaction?

I was incredibly honored, because that means a lot to me. It was super-amazing. I’m glad to see that the qualities people use to pick who is on there are not just flashiness. So I’m glad it’s changing, but I’m also really, really aware of all of the gender stuff that goes on around a list like that. But also, these lists are baloney. Because my favorite guitar players are, like, below me? Give me a fucking break. Everyone knows Rory Gallagher and Joe Walsh are the best! ■





HAIL MARY

Need a guide to Mary Timony's extensive catalog? Start here.

AUTOCLAVE

AUTOCLAVE (1997)
A compilation of the 1990 and 1991 EPs released by the D.C. quartet featuring Christina Billote, later of riot grrrl legends Slant 6.



"Christina and I had tried to do a band in high school, but we couldn't find a drummer," Timony explains. "We attempted to play with one guy at my school, but he was like, 'I'll only do this if we play Rush covers.' Christina was a genius songwriter with a real prog bent, and I was practicing guitar a lot and playing a PRS copy. I had a lot of leeway to just make my own parts and basically play leads over everything. We were just like every other D.C. band: You'd do one record and then you'd break up."

KEY TRACKS: "I'll Take You Down," "Dr. Seuss"

HELIUM

THE DIRT OF LUCK (1995)

The debut from Timony's legendary '90s group.



"A big influence for the sound of this record was the cassette four-track I was using to track all the time. But I was also really into Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre and how the frequency range is just so massive on some of those hip-hop records. So I wanted to somehow, in my own fucked-up way, try to do that. I also remember feeling like I wanted to deconstruct everything I had learned and just play a solo with one finger or by bending the string, or just do weird artistic

stuff instead of trying to shred."

KEY TRACKS: "Pat's Trick," "Superball"

MARY TIMONY

MOUNTAINS (2000)

Her first post-Helium solo album saw Timony playing all the instruments, apart from the drums.



"I was really depressed, so all the songs are about depression, and I was actively trying not to play the music-business game, intentionally just putting out a crazy record. Honestly, I think the rock music world and being in a band and going on tour was so stressful that I was just like, 'Fuck it. I just want to be an artist.' There are a lot of very roomy sounds on this record because Christina Files, who recorded it, had a massive loft in downtown Boston, so we'd set up three mics and record in there."

KEY TRACKS: "Valley of One Thousand Perfumes," "Poison Moon"

WILD FLAG

WILD FLAG (2011)

The studio album from this supergroup featuring Timony and Sleater-Kinney's Carrie Brownstein and Janet Weiss.



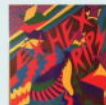
"I had been mostly teaching for about six years and I was just burnt. So when they asked me to play, it was really exciting. That was the first time I was like, 'I'm going into this as a guitar player.' And that was really fun. We made the record really fast, with no edits. I made some mistakes, and I was like, 'Can I fix them?' And the guy we were recording with was like, 'Nope, no punch-ins.' It felt extremely uncomfortable, because I'll want to take three years to do something. I'd been playing in this other tuning forever, which is D A D G A E, but it just didn't work here, so I went back to standard. I was like, 'Standard tuning is cool and weird!'"

KEY TRACKS: "Romance," "Racehorse"

EX HEX

RIP (2014)

From the ashes of Wild Flag comes a killer power-pop album and band.



"I had written a bunch of pop stuff, which was what worked best in Wild Flag, but then Wild Flag wasn't going to do another record, so I was like, 'Well, I'll put it on my own record.' And then I was like, 'Oh, well, maybe I'll start a band!' I was basically thinking of all of the music I loved when I was 12, just trying to emulate Rick Springfield, the Knack and anything else that was on the radio in 1982."

KEY TRACKS: "Don't Wanna Lose," "Waste Your Time"

FIXING A HOLE

The theft of **Paul McCartney's** 1961 Höfner bass is a 50-year-old mystery that spans from Hawkwind to the Who. *Guitar Player* tells how the Lost Bass project filled a gap in rock and roll history.

BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

MOST FANS KNOW it simply as “the Beatle bass.” To Paul McCartney, it’s “the Ancient One,” the instrument that dates back to the guitarist’s musical rebirth as a bassist, at age 19. The 1961 Höfner 500/1 violin bass is the first bass guitar he owned and the one he played as he helped lead the Fab Four to international fame in 1962 and ’63. Its round, resonant tone was the indelible pulse that drove the group’s earliest hits, from “Love Me Do” to “Please Please Me” to “I Saw Her Standing There,” where McCartney nimbly plucked out the arpeggiating riff he lifted from Chuck Berry’s 1961

B-side “I’m Talking About You.” With a shape as distinctive as the early Beatles’ mop-top haircuts, the 500/1 became McCartney’s signature instrument. To this day, the Höfner is the 81-year-old’s bass of preference in the studio and onstage.

But for more than 50 years, the Ancient One has been missing, stolen presumably in January 1969, while the Beatles rehearsed and recorded the music for *Let It Be*. Like Eric Clapton’s “Beano” Les Paul, the celebrated electric guitar that graced the grooves of 1966’s *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton*, McCartney’s Höfner has taken on mythic proportions, becoming a holy grail for those who think, talk and dream about rock’s lost treasures.



OPENING PAGE: Paul McCartney holds his 1961 Höfner 500/1 bass, July 4, 1964, after it received extensive repair work, including the black bracket that holds the pickups.

BELOW: McCartney with his then-new bass at the Beatles' first professional photo shoot, December 17, 1961. (from left) John Lennon, George Harrison, McCartney and Pete Best.

That fanbase has grown considerably since the launch of the Lost Bass project, a global search for the '61 Höfner that brought the cold case to the masses this past September. At the head of the search are one-time Höfner GmbH marketing manager Nick Wass, former BBC journalist Scott Jones and television producer Naomi Jones.

Although McCartney is not involved, he instigated the hunt with a simple question to Wass in 2019. "Höfner were making a backup bass for him," Wass explains, "and we were just sitting drinking coffee in the studio when he suddenly popped the question: 'Do you know what happened to my lost bass, the one that got pinched?'"

Wass didn't know, but he was intrigued enough to launch

a search for it on Höfner's website and in the German media. The buzz drew few leads, but it attracted Scott and Naomi Jones, who brought, respectively, useful journalistic and research skills to the effort. Relaunched this past September as the Lost Bass project, the search garnered extensive international attention, thanks in large part to Scott Jones' journalistic background. (Jones led an exhaustive study into the 1969 death of Brian Jones that provided new insights, as revealed in the 2019

documentary *Rolling Stone: Life and Death of Brian Jones*.) Within weeks of its announcement in the U.S. and U.K. media, the Lost Bass delivered not only reliable leads but also new insights to when and how the theft occurred, and even who was behind it.

"I WAS LEFT-HANDED, SO IT LOOKED LESS DAFT, BECAUSE IT WAS SYMMETRICAL"

— PAUL McCARTNEY



MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/REDFERNS



The Beatles pose in Abbey Road Studios, March 5, 1963. McCartney holds his '61 Höfner, while Lennon and Harrison stand with their Gibson J-160E acoustic-electrics. Lennon's was stolen during the group's December 1963 Christmas shows and recovered in 2014.

Most remarkable, though, is the discovery that, when the bass was stolen, McCartney declined to report it to the police. Less a decision than a sacrifice, his inaction allowed the bass to vanish without a trace into one of 1970s England's most notorious, but musically rich enclaves.

The Höfner 500/1 was an attention getter well before it was a Beatle bass. Walter Höfner was a second-generation violin luthier who applied his skills to the hollowbody creation, which he modeled on the upright double-bass. Designed in 1955, the German-made Höfner 500/1 had its public debut at the Frankfurt Musikmesse the following year.

McCartney's 1961 500/1 dates back to the Beatles' pre-fame days in Hamburg, as the Liverpool rock-and-roll group transformed from a five-piece to a quartet in the grubby clubs of the city's Reeperbahn nightlife district. When bassist Stu Sutcliffe quit the band to pursue his career as an artist in July 1961, it fell to McCartney to take over from him; George Harrison was too skilled as a lead guitarist to do the job, and John Lennon had neither the desire nor the ability. McCartney had already filled in for his bandmate during his many absences from the group's long, late-night gigs. Although left-handed, he was adept at playing Sutcliffe's Höfner 500/5 bass upside-down, without changing the string order, so that it would still be playable by Sutcliffe when he did show up.

But after Sutcliffe announced he was leaving, McCartney began looking for a bass of his own. Although he strongly desired a Fender, they were hard to come by outside of the U.S., and expensive.

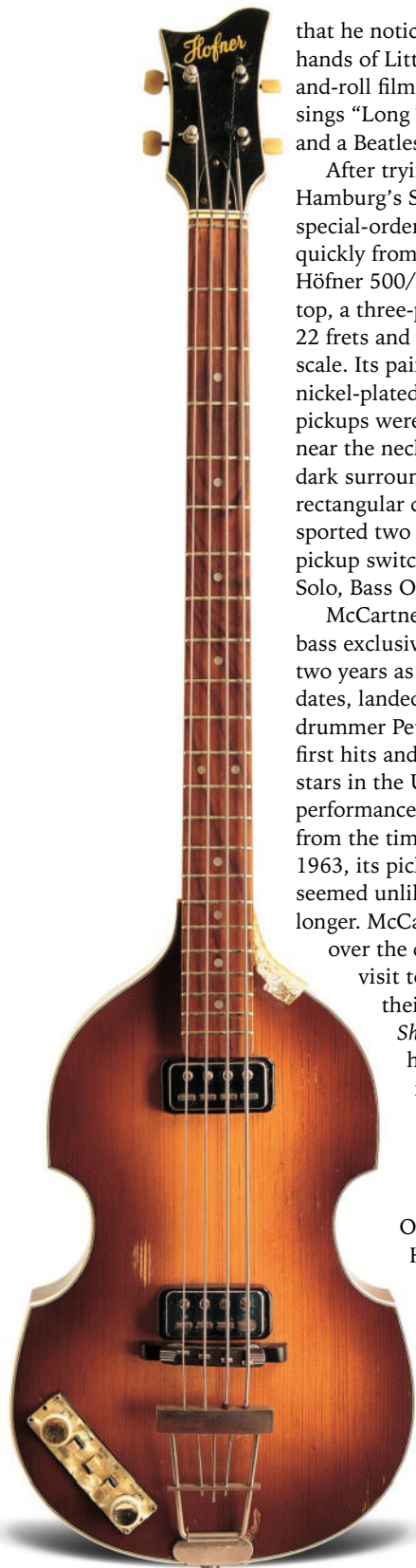


Paul mimes with the '61 Höfner during the Beatles' October 4, 1963 debut appearance on *Ready Steady Go!* Photos from the rehearsal show him using his newly acquired '63 500/1. The '61 Höfner was sent to Sound City for renovation shortly afterward.

"I couldn't afford a Fender," he reflected in 1989. "Fenders, even then, seemed to be about £100." Accounts of what the Beatles were paid for their performances vary, but each of the five appear to have earned around £20 per week.

The Höfner 500/1 certainly fit the bill. Costing the equivalent of just £30 in 1961, it was within McCartney's budget (although he still had to pay in installments). Just as important, he liked its shape. "Because I was left-handed, it looked less daft, because it was symmetrical," he explained in 1989.

In fact, he may have intentionally sought out the model, since he would have seen one played by the bassist for the Jets, the first of the Liverpool groups that made the trek to Hamburg. It's possible as well



that he noticed a violin-shaped electric model in the hands of Little Richards' bassist in the 1956 rock-and-roll film *Don't Knock the Rock*, where Richards sings "Long Tall Sally," a favorite of McCartney's and a Beatles cover from their early years.

After trying out a right-handed 500/1 at Hamburg's Steinway-Haus Music Store, McCartney special-ordered a left-handed model, which arrived quickly from Höfner's factory in Bubenreuth. The Höfner 500/1 he received had a solid spruce carved top, a three-piece maple neck, 22 frets and a short, 30-inch scale. Its pair of Höfner nickel-plated diamond-logo pickups were set close together near the neck and mounted in dark surrounds, while its rectangular control panel sported two volume knobs and pickup switches for Rhythm/Solo, Bass On and Treble On.

McCartney would use this bass exclusively for the next two years as the Beatles played their Hamburg dates, landed a recording contract with EMI, fired drummer Pete Best, hired Ringo Starr, tracked their first hits and two full-length albums, and became stars in the U.K. and Europe. Given the group's performance schedule, the bass was in constant use from the time he took possession of it. By autumn 1963, its pickups were falling out and the bass seemed unlikely to remain playable for much longer. McCartney ordered a second 500/1 to use over the coming tours, including the group's visit to the United States, where they made their American debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, on February 9, 1964. He received his new left-handed 1963 model 500/1 in early October of that year as the Beatles were completing their second U.K. album, *With the Beatles*, just prior to their debut showing on the British TV music program *Ready Steady Go!* on October 4. This new model had a pair of Höfner "staple" pickups (so called for their rectangular pole pieces), which, unlike his 1961 500/1, were placed further apart, with one just below the end of the neck and the other just above the bridge. The 1963 model would be McCartney's main bass in the studio for the next two years and onstage through 1966.

In the meantime, the '61 Höfner was sent to Sound City in London for

extensive rework. In addition to respraying it in a polyurethane sunburst finish, the shop re-affixed the loose-fitting pickups in a mounting plate made of what appears to be black plastic, giving the bass an appearance unlike any other 500/1. The existing pickguard was recut to accommodate the plate, and the controls received new cream-colored knobs. McCartney gave the rehabbed bass its debut at the Beatles' July 11, 1964 appearance on the British pop music TV show *Thank Your Lucky Stars*.

"THE ROADIES HAD BEEN WORKING VERY LATE AND LEFT THE VAN PARKED OVERNIGHT IN NOTTING HILL, WITH THE GEAR STILL INSIDE"

— NICK WASS

Although the 1961 Höfner was relegated to backup duties upon its return in 1964, it subsequently made two noteworthy appearances, both preserved on film. The first was in the promo video for "Revolution," made on September 4, 1968, with future *Let It Be* movie director Michael Lindsay-Hogg, where McCartney uses it while miming to the pre-recorded backing track. The second was in Peter Jackson's celebrated 2021 documentary, *Get Back*, created from Lindsay-Hogg's *Let It Be* footage, where it's seen while the Beatles rehearse at Twickenham Studios on January 3, 1969, and later at their own Apple Studios, at 3 Savile Row, in West London. The bass's appearance at Apple is revelatory, since for years it was assumed the instrument disappeared from Twickenham a week or so earlier.

"Nick had found this chap who worked at 3 Savile Row," Scott Jones says, "and he was telling him the building was basically a 24-hour party. So it seemed likely someone walked off with it."

That tip gave credence to an earlier lead that the Lost Bass received from a former roadie for the Who, now living in Massachusetts, who claimed he stole it from Apple in late January 1969. (Like all Lost Bass sources, the man's identity has been protected.) His story was backed up by two witnesses, and Wass confirmed his identity through Who performance footage in which the man can be seen. Concert archives also show that the Who played in West London, at Borough Road College in Isleworth, on January 25, around the same time that the '61 Höfner is last seen at Apple Studios in Jackson's film.

"It was amazing how much this chap fitted the bill," Jones says. "We know he worked for the Who, we know he's stolen things, you know? We basically decided that this guy was guilty," he says with a laugh.



LEFT: The Who perform in 1969. One of the group's roadies from this period claimed to have stolen the '61 Höfner during a visit to Apple when the Who were playing in West London.

"We even had a retired local police commander from the area interested," Wass adds. "He was getting ready to go round and knock on the door."

But that theory was quickly abandoned when the Lost Bass project received a critical lead from an authoritative source: Ian Horne, a former roadie who was part of McCartney's crew in 1972, during the early days of Paul McCartney and Wings. As Horne explained to Wass and Jones, the 1961 Höfner was among the gear he and his fellow roadie Trevor Jones were carting in a van on the night of October 10, 1972 — nearly three years after it was presumed stolen.

"Ian and Trevor had been working very late, to 10 o'clock at night," Wass explains. "And they left

the van parked up in a street in London, in Notting Hill, near Ladbrooke Grove, with the gear still inside." By the time they returned, the vehicle had been vandalized. "Somebody broke into the van and stole some of the gear, including the bass.

"This," Wass says, "was our first clear lead."

The date certainly jibes with McCartney's recording history. McCartney and Wings were making their album *Red Rose Speedway* at the time, working in a number of studios, including Island, located in Notting Hill. Furthermore, Horne's story clicked with something Wass had heard in the earliest days of his hunt. "When I was still doing the search through the Höfner site, I got a slightly strange email from a guy giving me a story about

OPPOSITE: McCartney's 1963 500/1, minus its pickguard. Note the wider pickup spacing compared to the '61, and the script Höfner logo running across, rather than down, the headstock. This was his main bass for recording from late '63 until late '65, when he began using a left-handed Rickenbacker 4001S bass.

RIGHT: Paul and Linda McCartney bike to Abbey Road Studios on October 8, 1972, just two days before the 1961 Höfner was stolen.

BELOW: Hawkwind pose in Bristol, England, April 1972. When the bass went missing, Ian Horne immediately suspected Dik Mik, (front left). Bassist Lemmy Kilminster is second from right.

the lost bass that he'd heard from somebody else," Wass says. "The story actually pinpointed a particular house in Notting Hill, Ladbroke Grove, and said the bass had been taken from this particular address and then sold to somebody in a pub in West London. I didn't actually pay a lot of attention to it. It all seemed to be far-fetched, so I just archived the story. About six months later, we got the email from Ian Horne."

Notting Hill today is an affluent neighborhood where Goldman Sachs bankers own five-million-pound homes, the place from which Conservative politicians like future prime minister David Cameron emerged in the early part of this century. There is little to show it was once a ghetto for Indian, African, Caribbean and Asian immigrants. "But go back to 1972 and those same houses, most of them were squats," Wass says. "Lots of bands and writers and graphic designers lived there."



JORGAN ANGEL/REDFERNS (HAWKWIND); KENT GAVIN/MIRRORPIX/GETTY IMAGES (MCCARTNEYS)



McCartney plays the '61 Höfner at Twickenham Studios on January 3, 1969, in this still from the 2021 documentary *Get Back*.

Given his line of work, Horne knew many of those musicians. And when the bass went missing, he had a strong idea who took it. “Their first thought was that it was a chap named Dik Mik,” Jones says. Michael Davies — a.k.a. Dik Mik — was a keyboardist and electronics manipulator who was among the many musicians in Hawkwind, guitarist Dave Brock’s infamous space-rock group, which in one of its early 1970s incarnations also included Dik Mik’s pal, future Motörhead bassist Lemmy Kilmister. “Ian Horne thought Dik might have stolen the bass because he lived nearby and he knew Ian worked for McCartney. They got a wrench and tried to force Dik to tell them where the bass was. We know now that Dik wasn’t involved.”

Even so, the Lost Bass project was able to begin piecing together an accurate history of the bass’s journey in the first days after it was stolen. Naomi Jones dug through newspaper archives, looking for reports of criminal activity on the night of October 10, 1972. Remarkably, three major British newspapers — *The Daily Mirror*, *The Times* and *The Evening Standard* — all carried news of the theft. As Scott Jones explains, “None of those newspapers have digitized those news stories. The clippings only exist in the British Library, stored away. That’s where we found them.”

These facts gave focus to the project’s efforts. It was now clear that whoever stole the bass was almost certainly in need of cash and quickly sold it. That increased the likelihood it was still in England

“THEY GOT A WRENCH AND TRIED TO FORCE DIK TO TELL THEM WHERE THE BASS WAS”

— SCOTT JONES

and in the hands of some unsuspecting owner, rather than hidden away within the society of rare-guitar collectors, who could be just about anywhere in the world. “Now that we’ve got particular addresses from that area, we can go back to the electoral

register from ’72 and get names and profiles of people who lived and worked there,” Scott says. “It’s a slow process, but it’s forensic.”

Slow, perhaps, and yet it has delivered results faster than anyone imagined. Within two months of the project’s launch, the team had even learned who stole the bass, although that person’s identity — like that of the former Who roadie — remains confidential. When contacted for this article in late November, Wass was all but certain the bass would be found within weeks. “I think it’s fair to say that. I think you’ll see this bass after Christmas,” he said cryptically and with barely concealed joy.

If so, perhaps the only question that remains is what took so long? Had McCartney reported the theft to the police when it happened, the ’61 Höfner might have been found within days rather than decades. His silence, it turns out, was an act of kindness.

“The roadies were very loyal to Paul, and they were very good roadies,” Wass says. “And Paul’s feeling was that if this was published or made to be a big, big story, the newspapers would say, ‘Oh, these two idiots lost Paul McCartney’s bass!’ And he didn’t want that to happen. So he just kept the story quiet. Forever.” ■

STILL AT LARGE

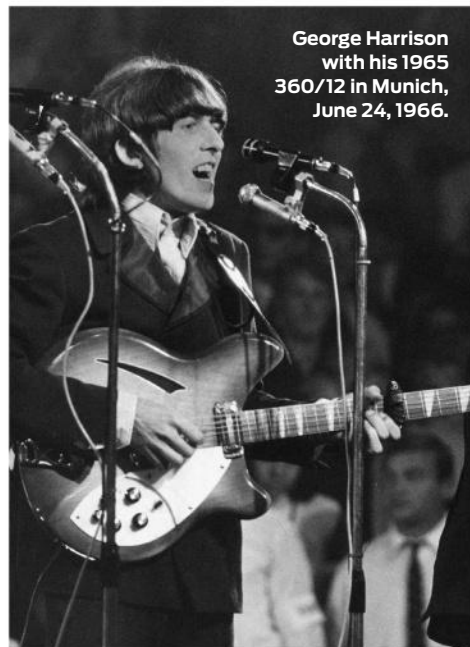
The stories behind six famous purloined axes.

GEORGE HARRISON'S 1965 RICKENBACKER 360/12

STOLEN: Circa September 1966, possibly London

GEORGE HARRISON WAS the owner of two Rickenbacker 360/12 12-strings, both gifts to the Beatles guitarist. He received the first — allegedly the second ever made — from Rickenbacker president Francis C. Hall on February 8, 1964, after rehearsals for the group's *Ed Sullivan Show* appearance, and went on to make it an integral part of the early Beatles sound on *A Hard Day's Night*.

The second was gifted to him by Minneapolis music store B Sharp Music, prior to the Beatles' August 21, 1965 show at Old Met Stadium. After learning from another visiting Liverpool rock band, the Remo Four, that Harrison might like the guitar, the shop



George Harrison with his 1965 Rickenbacker 360/12 in Munich, June 24, 1966.

custom ordered it for him. The guitar featured Rickenbacker's newly introduced style, with rounded edges, rather than the sharp corners seen on the 1964 model, and checkerboard binding on the back, instead of white binding on the front and back.

According to Andy Babiuk's *Beatles Gear* book, Harrison put the guitar to use in the studio on the Beatles' next album, *Rubber Soul*, where it can be heard on the chiming lick to his song "If I Needed Someone." He played the guitar in concert on many occasions over the next year, the Beatles' last as a touring act. It's been suggested over the years that the '65 Rick was stolen along with his Gretsch Tennessean and Paul McCartney's '61 Höfner bass — a theory now debunked — during the January 1969 sessions for *Let It Be*. Most likely, the guitar was lifted sometime after the Beatles concluded their 1966 tour on August 29, at San Francisco's Candlestick Park, and prior to Harrison's first trip to India to study sitar with Ravi Shankar.

Finding the guitar has been difficult in part because B Sharp Music didn't record the serial number. Rickenbacker CEO John Hall has said five 1965 360/12 guitars could be candidates, based on shipment records. A guitar bearing one of the five serial numbers



Joe Satriani performs with Pearly, June 27, 2000. The guitar is identifiable by the headstock clip, which holds a plate to help improve resonance and sustain.

has surfaced, but whether it's Harrison's or not is unknown.

JOE SATRIANI'S 1990 IBANEZ JS-2 "PEARLY" PROTOTYPE, BLUE DONNIE AND RAINFOREST

STOLEN: Pearly, on August 21, 2000, Clearwater, Florida. Blue Donnie and Rainforest, sometime in 2000, San Rafael, California

JOE SATRIANI'S JS2 model was the second signature guitar Ibanez created for the virtuoso. Introduced in 1990, the guitar had a basswood body with a chrome finish, something Ibanez had never attempted before. As it turned out, the finish was prone to cracking, and therefore very few were produced. "Unfortunately, they used real chrome, and any fissures created when the finish lifted the sealant off the body would crack and create a knife edge," Satch told *Vintage Guitar* in its January 2012 issue. As a result, the guitar didn't go into production, and Joe's three prototypes — dubbed Chrome Boy, Refractor and Pearly (so named for its pair of Seymour Duncan Pearly Gates pickups) — were given a thick plastic coating to protect

C BRANDON/REDFERNS (PEARLY); PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES (BLUE DONNIE); ALERT/ULLSTEIN BILD (HARRISON)

BECK DIED IN 2023, ADDING A NEW WRINKLE TO THE MATTER OF HIS LES PAUL'S FATE

his hand from getting sliced open by a crack in the finish. "At first, when the guys delivered the guitars, I remember thinking, Boy, these sound compressed or something," Satch commented, "and I put them in the rack." That changed as the guitars aged. "Later, they became my favorites, especially the Chrome Boy."

The guitars were used heavily on record as well as onstage, which is how Pearly came to disappear during load-out following a show at Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater, Florida, on August 21, 2000. Within days, news of the theft was swirling across the internet, along with the promise of a \$500 reward. To date, Pearly hasn't been found.

Sadly, Pearly isn't the only guitar Satch has lost. Two others include Blue Donnie and Rainforest, both stolen from a rehearsal facility in San Rafael, California. Satch describes Blue Donnie as "my favorite hand-painted Donnie Hunt guitar, used extensively on the *Flying in a Blue Dream* tour." The other is "my one and only Rainforest guitar, dedicated to me by my sister Carol."

ERIC CLAPTON'S "BEANO" GIBSON LES PAUL

STOLEN: Summer 1966, in northwest London
WHEN GUITARISTS TALK of stolen guitars, the one that most often comes to mind is Eric Clapton's first Les Paul Standard, the 'Burst he used on the 1966 release *Blues*

Breakers With Eric Clapton. The guitar has the distinction of being the instrument with which Clapton practically defined blues-rock guitar tone and stands as the epitome to which many players strive. The fact that it was stolen and remains lost only furthers its iconic status.

Clapton bought the Burst at the Lew Davis music store at 134 Charing Cross Road, in London, sometime between Sunday, May 30, 1965 — when he was last photographed playing a Fender Telecaster — and Friday, June 4, when a local newspaper photographed him wielding his newly purchased Les Paul at the Ricky Tick club in the Plaza Ballroom in Guildford, Surrey. The guitar was used, but in nice condition. He modified it by replacing the original Kluson tuners with a set of Grovers and, toward the end of 1965, removing the metal pickup covers to reveal the bobbins: double-white at the neck, double-black at the bridge. This was at the height of Clapton's prowess with the Blues Breakers, and it's lucky he was captured for posterity playing the Les Paul at the *Blues Breakers* sessions between March 27 and 31, 1966, at Decca Records studio in northwest London.

But by the time of the album's release that summer, Clapton was rehearsing with his new blues-rock trio Cream at a church hall in Brondesbury, northwest London. It was from there the Les Paul was stolen before Clapton had played a single lick on it with the new band in public or on record.

The theft got some publicity that August in the *Record Mirror*, where a downcast Clapton described the guitar as "five or six years old, small and solid. It has one cutaway and is a red-gold color, with Grover machine heads. The back is very scratched and there are several cigarette burns on the front." He replaced it that month with a 'Burst purchased from future Police guitarist Andy Summers, then bought another that he gave to Free guitarist Paul Kossoff in the summer of 1969 when that group supported Clapton's new group, Blind Faith.

But finding Clapton's original 'Burst may prove impossible. Its serial number and year of manufacture are unknown, and only some 20 or so photos of the guitar exist, most of them grainy, making it difficult to match the figuring of the wood and patterns in the fretboard markers, as well as telltale dings and damage. If ever there were an elusive stolen guitar, this one is it.

JEFF BECK'S SUNBURST 1959 LES PAUL

STOLEN: July 21, 1969, Tamarack Lounge, Ellenville, New York
BEFORE HE WAS Cheap Trick's guitarist, Rick Nielsen was a vintage guitar dealer at a time when his wares were more commonly known as "used" guitars. Among his star customers was Jeff Beck, who purchased from Nielsen a 1959 'Burst that he went on to use with the Jeff Beck Group. On July 21, 1969, the band — consisting then of Beck, singer Rod Stewart, bassist Ronnie Wood and drummer Tony Newman — was performing at the Tamarack Lounge in Ellenville, New York, in support of Beck's album *Beck-Ola*, released that June, with the 'Burst among the guitars onstage. According to Newman, Beck riled up the audience by spraying them with a fire extinguisher, after which security quickly rushed the band offstage. While the gear was unattended, someone made off with Beck's 'Burst.

In 2000, the guitar was finally located by Perry Margouleff, a Long Island musician and vintage guitar dealer to the stars. Margouleff was eager to purchase the 'Burst but wanted Beck's blessing, which he says was received via a phone call. Margouleff subsequently paid \$75,000 to an undisclosed dealer for the guitar. In January 2018, Beck's manager notified Margouleff that his client wanted the Les Paul back. When the parties failed to reach a resolution, Margouleff filed suit, seeking a declaratory judgment that Beck had abandoned and waived any claim to the instrument. David Baum, Beck's lawyer, has denied the 2000 phone conversation with his client ever took place.

Thus began a "he said—he said" over who is the 'Burst's rightful owner, a question that, to date, has not been settled. Beck died in January 2023, adding a new wrinkle to the matter. The guitar remains in Margouleff's possession. ■



YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET

Stolen 45 years ago, **Randy Bachman's** prized 1957 Gretsch 6120 is back in his hands and the focus of a new documentary.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LISA S. JOHNSON

A **S A GUITAR-OBSESSED** teenager in Winnipeg, Canada, in the late 1950s, Randy Bachman would make weekly Saturday pilgrimages to the local music store, Winnipeg Piano, which is where he met two lifelong friends. One was another budding area musician named Neil Young; the other, a used 1957 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins Hollow Body electric guitar that would become his closest and most treasured musical companion.

"Neil lived on one side of town, I lived on the other, and we would both take the bus downtown and look in the window of Winnipeg Piano at this guitar and go, 'Man, if we could ever play that...,'" Bachman, now 80, recalls. "We had seen Duane Eddy play 'Rebel Rouser' with a 6120 on *American Bandstand*, but that was black-and-white TV, right? So when we saw the actual guitar in the window, and it's orange, it's in the sunshine, it's glowing... It was stunning."

Bachman bought that stunning Gretsch, managing the \$400 price tag with money he earned mowing lawns, babysitting, delivering newspapers "at six-in-the-morning in 40-below-zero weather" and doing other odd jobs. Young, meanwhile, picked up another '57 6120 that came into the store around the same time. "In the middle of '57, Gretsch switched from DeArmond

pickups to Filter'Trons," Bachman says. "So I bought the DeArmond one and Neil bought the Filter'Tron one. He took that guitar and played it with Buffalo Springfield on *American Bandstand*."

Bachman did okay with his Gretsch as well. After playing in several local bands, he joined local-area group Allan and the Silvertones, who went through several name changes, scored a number one hit in Canada with their version of Johnny Kidd & the Pirates' "Shakin' All Over," and ultimately solidified as the Guess Who. Bachman played his 6120 on that chart-topping recording and employed the guitar in the writing and recording of a

subsequent string of classic Guess Who albums and hit singles, among them "These Eyes," "No Time," "Undun," "No Sugar Tonight" and the indelible "American Woman."

After parting ways with the Guess Who in 1970, Bachman formed the hard-rocking Bachman-Turner Overdrive and continued his charmed collaboration with the 6120. He penned more hits — "Let It Ride," "Roll On Down the Highway," the classic-rock radio staples "Takin' Care of Business" and "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet," and others — and

recorded numerous Gold- and Platinum-selling albums. "From the moment I got that guitar, it was like Dumbo's magic feather to me," he says of the Gretsch.

But one day in 1976, that magic disappeared — literally. For years, Bachman had routinely gone to extreme, almost comical lengths to keep the Gretsch safe on the road. He describes an elaborate process of securing the guitar to hotel-room toilets via a combination of sandbags, tow-truck chains and two bike locks, "so if somebody wanted to steal it, they had to rip the toilet out of the wall or have

a hacksaw, which most guys don't when they're stealing from a hotel room," he says.

But after he left the Gretsch in the care of a roadie while checking out of a Toronto-area Holiday Inn, the guitar vanished.

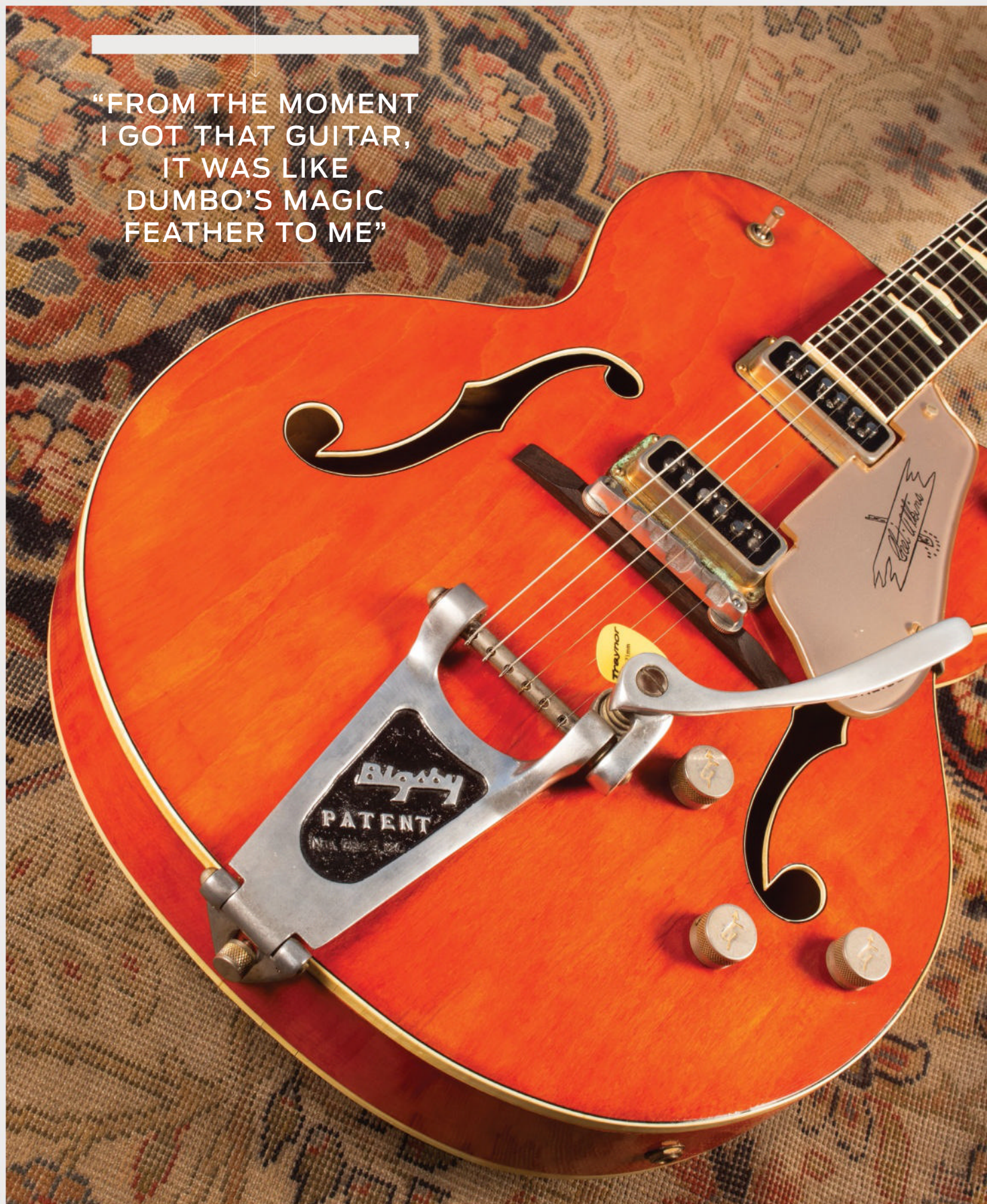
"The roadie said to me, 'I left it in the room, I went to pay the bill, I came back, it was gone,'" Bachman recalls. "I felt like somebody had cut off my hand."

Thus began a years-long, and ultimately unfruitful, search for the 6120, one that pulled in the Canadian Mounties, the Ontario Provincial Police, vintage instrument dealers throughout Canada and the U.S., pawnshops, mom-and-pop stores, private collectors, mainstream music magazines like *Rolling Stone* and, basically, anyone that Bachman could tell his story to in the

"IT WAS GONE.
I FELT LIKE
SOMEBODY HAD
CUT OFF MY HAND"



"FROM THE MOMENT
I GOT THAT GUITAR,
IT WAS LIKE
DUMBO'S MAGIC
FEATHER TO ME"





Bachman's 1957 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins is incredibly rare, with fewer than 40 made in that year.

Despite its mysterious journey — which took it from Canada to Japan and who knows where else — the Gretsch is in beautiful condition, as these photos attest.

hopes of garnering the slightest lead on his Gretsch's whereabouts. The guitarist was distraught and unable to sleep. He received a call from Chet Atkins — one of his idols and the man most closely associated with the 6120 — during which the legendary picker empathized with Bachman's loss. Afterward, Atkins surprised him with a brand-new Gretsch Atkins Super Axe prototype, but even that couldn't fill the "giant, Grand Canyon-sized hole in my heart," he says.

And so Bachman filled it another way, spending the ensuing decades purchasing every Gretsch he could get his hands on. Fans even began bringing their old Gretsches to shows, which

Bachman would buy on the spot for a few hundred dollars or less and have shipped home. His searches and purchases led him to rare models, unique finds, one-of-a-kind prototypes, and more than a few 1957 6120s — just not his 1957 6120. Eventually, he had amassed upward of 350 examples. "I ended up," he says, "with the world's largest Gretsch collection."

When the Gretsch family regained control of the brand from Baldwin in the mid-1980s, new president Fred Gretsch approached Bachman about using his collection as a basis for re-creating storied guitar models. "There had been a huge factory fire years earlier, and he had



“ONE DAY A MESSAGE CAME IN THAT SAID, ‘I FOUND YOUR LOST GRETSCH GUITAR’”

no templates,” Bachman says. “So Fred flew to my house in White Rock, B.C., and said, ‘Can I borrow your guitars, one or two or five or six at a time, and copy them?’”

The result was that “almost every Gretsch you see now is a copy of one of mine,” Bachman posits. What’s more, his collection was quickly increasing in value. “In the late ’80s, the Traveling Wilburys came out, and all of a sudden these legendary guys are playing Gretsches — they’ve got Country Gentleman and Sparkle Jet and orange 6120 models,” he explains. “Now my guitars that I paid 250 bucks for are suddenly \$2,500. A year later they’re \$12,000. They just go up and up because there aren’t that many around. Combined with Fred Gretsch copying my collection, it was a Cinderella story for me.”

But that story was far from over. Eventually, Fred Gretsch asked Bachman to sell him the entire collection outright. “Fred said, ‘They’re my history. Can I buy them?’” Bachman recalls. “And I sold him all 350 of them, which are now in his museum in Savannah, Georgia.”

By then, Bachman had moved on to another obsession: midcentury German

hand-carved archtops. “I got one for Christmas one year and I went, ‘Wow, this is amazing! It’s so light. Plays so great.

Look at the neck joint — it has a screw and a bolt, like a church key. What is this?’ It was a Hoyer, and I fell in love with that guitar,” Bachman says.

With help from his daughter, who speaks a bit of German, Bachman began buying up German archtops online. “Every night we would go on German eBay, find an old guitar, buy it for 300 or 400 Deutsche Marks, get it home and go, ‘This is incredible!’” Bachman says. Soon, he had procured well over 100 of these instruments. “And they’re all hand-carved, with beautiful wood, incredible bindings, unique features like lightning-bolt f-holes, scalloped tops. And with wonderful stories — I’ve got pictures of fathers and sons and grandfathers making them in their attics or little sheds on their farms, with wood from the Black Forest. They’re all so unique. I have 150 of them on display now in Calgary, and they’re going to be

auctioned by Julien’s.”

As for what drives his guitar thirst? “I’m an obsessive collector, what can I say?”

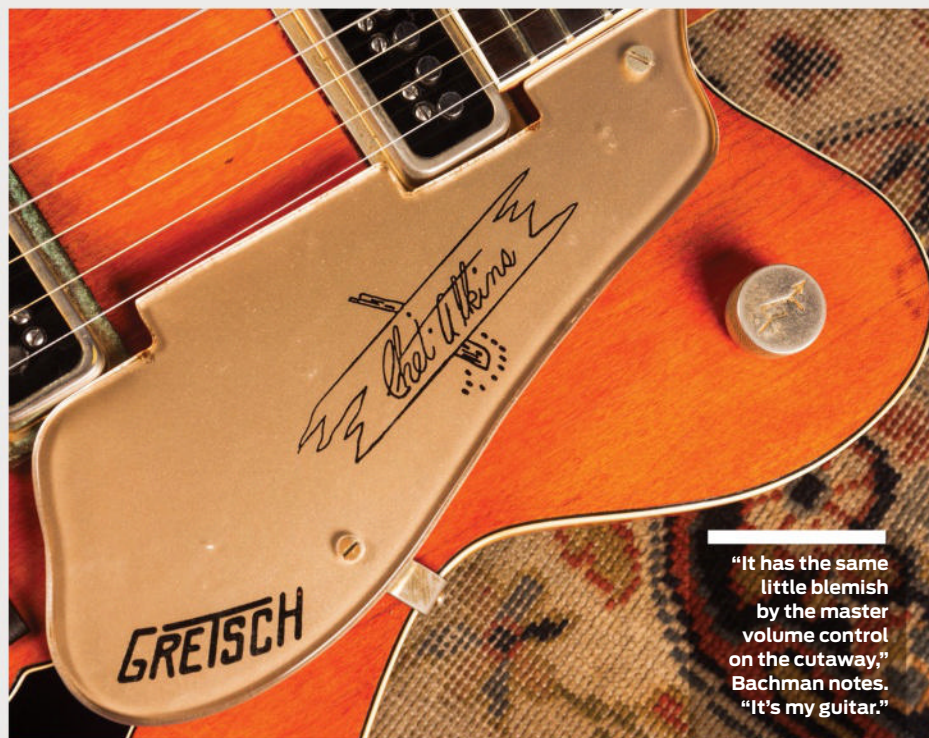
Bachman explains, and then takes a friendly dig at his old Winnipeg mate. “I mean, collecting guitars is easier than collecting cars, right? Because Neil Young does that, and now he has three barns full of ’em!”

But at the end of the day, all the Gretsches and German archtops Bachman procured over the years were only a Band-Aid for the guitar that got away. A 1957 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins in Western Orange with a Bigsby vibrato and black DeArmond pickups is already a highly valued and incredibly rare find — fewer than 40 were actually produced in that year. Add in the special bond Bachman shared with the instrument — “I used to fall asleep with it on my chest,” he says — and it’s literally a one-of-a-kind, unreplaceable keepsake. Decades on from that Toronto Holiday Inn in 1976, it appeared lost forever.

Until it wasn’t.

In 2019, a neighbor of Bachman’s in White Rock named William Long reached out to him online. A Bachman fan and something of an amateur internet sleuth, Long had undertaken his own search for the missing 6120, “and one day a message came in that said, ‘I found your lost Gretsch guitar,’” Bachman recalls. “So we called this guy and he said, basically, ‘I watched the video for [the 1975 Bachman-Turner Overdrive single] “Lookin’ Out for #1” on YouTube, which shows you playing the Gretsch. And then I Googled every other orange Gretsch 6120 sold on the internet in the last 15 years.’”

Employing retooled facial-recognition software to help him identify and match unique wood grain patterns and distinctive wear-and-tear and markings, Long spooled through hundreds of internet photos and videos and eventually matched Bachman’s 6120 to a guitar in an obscure 11-minute YouTube clip of a man and a woman performing



“It has the same little blemish by the master volume control on the cutaway,” Bachman notes. “It’s my guitar.”



Bachman poses with *Lost and Found* director Tyler Measom (left) and William Long, whose sleuthing found the lost 6120.

songs like Johnny Marks' "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" in a Tokyo bar, the man strumming what appeared to be the long-lost Gretsch.

That man, it turned out, was a well-known musician and songwriter named Takeshi — "he's like the Japanese Brian Setzer," Bachman says — who had purchased the 6120 in a Tokyo guitar shop eight years earlier. A video-conference call, brokered by Takeshi's PR rep and Bachman's Japanese daughter-in-law, Koko, was quickly set up, allowing the two musicians to meet and for Bachman to lay eyes on the 6120 for the first time in more than 40 years. "I look at it, it has the same little blemish by the master volume control on the cutaway. It's my guitar," Bachman says. "It took my breath away. And Takeshi tells me, 'Well, I'm an honorable man. I'll give you back your guitar.' I told him I'd give him a new Gretsch as a replacement. He said, 'I don't want a new Gretsch. It

must be another '57. No mods, no repairs, nothing.' And I go, 'Are you kidding?'"

But if anyone knows how to find a rare Gretsch, it's Bachman. With help from Gary Dick at Gary's Classic Guitars in Ohio, he procured an all-original 1957 6120 with DeArmond pickups — no Filter'Trons — and a serial number "two digits off from mine," he says. "I told Takeshi, 'Not only do I have you a '57 Gretsch, but it was made in the same week, probably by the same guy. It's a puppy from the same litter.'"

And so, with replacement guitar in tow, Bachman headed to Japan. On July 1, 2022 — Canada Day — he and Takeshi met onstage at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, where, in a special ceremony, the two exchanged Gretsches (and hugs), told stories and even jammed together on BTO's "Takin' Care of Business" and other hits. The moment was an extraordinary one for Bachman. But

it wasn't until later that night that he truly reconnected with the 6120. "At two in the morning, back in my room, I opened the case and put the guitar on a chair," he says. "And I said to the guitar, 'Hello, old friend, it's been a long, long time. You've got some wrinkles and cracks. So have I. Let's play.'"

Bachman then proceeded to "play every song I ever learned on it, every song I wrote on it. I played for over two-and-a-half hours, until I was all played out." He pauses. "Then I started to play something else. And I said to the guitar, 'Are we making up another new song?' I took out my iPhone and I started recording. And I called the song 'Shadows of Yesterday.'"

If this turn of events sounds almost too perfect to be true, seeing is believing. And amazingly, Bachman has the entirety of his reunion with the 6120 — from speaking with Takeshi on video conference to their emotional onstage meeting in Japan — preserved on video. "We were filming everything for YouTube, so we have all this footage," Bachman explains. The material has now been compiled into a new documentary, *Lost and Found*. Directed by Tyler Measom, the film has recently been completed. "It should be shown at Sundance," Bachman reports, "which is coming up next spring, and then the Toronto International Film Festival, the Tokyo International Film Festival — because they're crazy over this thing in Japan — and anywhere else we can show it," he says.

And the song that closes *Lost and Found*? The newly penned "Shadows of Yesterday." "My son [musician *Tal Bachman*] said to me, 'Dad, let's be real — with this guitar you wrote number-one hits. And you haven't had one since,'" Bachman says. "I told him, 'Yeah, but I'm not chopped liver!'"

"So now that I have the 6120 back, there are more songs. And maybe something magical will happen. And it doesn't have to be with a song. Even if it's getting a number one on Rotten Tomatoes for the documentary, the guitar will have done its magic one more time." ■

THE *art* of BEING

OZ

WHILE SOME GUITARISTS are adept at tweaking their tones through a variety of effects from song to song, Israel-born fusion maverick Oz Noy is like a virtuoso tap dancer on his pedalboard, meticulously coloring with tones and textures, often from bar to bar. It's an intuitive skill that he's developed since moving to New York in 1996, the sonic equivalent of an unassisted triple play in baseball.

Growing up in the '80s in Tel Aviv, Noy gravitated toward American jazz and blues, as well as a bevy of shredders that includes Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Eric Johnson, Richie Kotzen and Greg Howe. He came to New York as an experienced pro, having held down a regular TV gig and performed numerous studio sessions around Tel Aviv. Rather than bursting on the Big Apple scene right out of the gate, he laid back and observed, taking in performances at Small's, the West Village hipster subterranean club, by regulars like organist Larry Goldings, pianist Brad Mehldau, tenor saxophonist Joshua Rodman and guitarists Kurt Rosenwinkel and Peter Bernstein while sitting in at the late-night jams that commenced at 2 a.m. Gradually, Noy began making an impression through his unique vocabulary that organically blends rock, funk, R&B and jazz. Within a couple of years, he had built a fanbase

His gigs are laboratories for sonic experimentation. As he drops his new powerhouse album *Triple Play*, Oz Noy tells us how looping and pedal precision became central to his process.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY YOSSI ZWECKER

through his Monday night residency at the Bitter End in the heart of Greenwich Village, as well as an inner circle of musicians on the scene who admired his fresh energy and ideas.

Oz's first release as a leader, 2005's *HA!*, featured the rhythm tandems from two popular TV shows at the time — bassist Will Lee and drummer Anton Fig from *Late Night With David Letterman*, and bassist James Genus and drummer Keith Carlock from *Saturday Night Live*. With it, Oz garnered favorable comparisons to such guitar heroes as Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jeff Beck, Scott Henderson and John Scofield (in jam-band mode). Another guitar hero, Mike Stern, gave his stamp of approval by appearing on the track "Downside Up" (a clever rewording of the 1986 classic track "Upside Downside," which featured Jaco Pastorius, from Stern's second album as a leader). Clearly, this Israeli six-stringer was on to something.

A dozen albums later, the 52-year-old Noy has released *Triple Play* (Abstract Logix), a powerhouse live recording featuring super-drummer Dennis Chambers and former Yellowjackets bassist Jimmy Haslip. Recorded over two evenings at Stages Music Arts, a performance space, recording studio and

educational facility in Maryland, *Triple Play* shifts from the slamming opener "Zig Zag" to the decidedly jazzy tribute number "Groovin' Grant" to a trippy take on Thelonious Monk's "Bemsha Swing."

From there it's on to a roadhouse blues ("Boom Boo Boom"), a jazzy shuffle ("Chocolate Soufflé"), a drum and bass-fueled number ("Looni Tooni"), an evocative and lyrical solo piece ("Twice in a While") and a nasty-toned funk workout ("Twisted Blues"). Along the way, Oz dances on the pedals, adding

loops, new tones and textures so seamlessly that it sounds like overdubs. But it's all live and in the moment.

Guitar Player talked to Noy by phone a couple of days before he embarked on a tour of Italy with Chambers and Haslip in support of *Triple Play*.

I caught the trio on your stateside tour this past summer when you played Infinity Hall in Hartford. It's such a powerful, flexible group. How did it come together?

Jimmy's been touring with me for a really long time, maybe 10 years or so, mostly with [drummer] Dave Weckl. The first time I played with Dennis was in the Moshulu Band, a short thing that went down in 2019 with me and him, guitarist-keyboardist David Sancious and bassist Jeff Berlin. We did two tours — Europe and the States — and that was it. After that, Dennis started to play in my band and we did a European tour. Then I called him in 2020 when I was doing *Snapdragon*, my last studio album. Right after that, the pandemic hit, and when it started to loosen up, we did a bunch of tours.

And that's really pretty much the reason I recorded *Triple Play*, because we had just finished this European tour and the band sounded really good. And I was



like, “Man, this is a good chance to record this before it goes away.” You hit a peak with a band. It can come back as something else, but I didn’t want to lose it, and I didn’t know when the next tour would be. So I just forced them. I was like, “Hey, we gotta do it like before the end of the year.” We went into the studio between Christmas and New Year’s.

One of my first observations after seeing you play live was that you have such great facility not only with your fingers but also with your feet on the pedals; and a facile mind that allows you to make quick decisions about coloring with different tones and textures. Where does that vocabulary come from?

When you play in a trio setting, which I’ve done for a really long time, there’s a lot of sonic space to cover, especially depending on what kind of music you’re doing. My music has changed over the years, but it was always based on groove, and it was never too busy. I don’t like when people play too busy behind me. There should always be enough space in the music to create.

The thing with the pedals came about because I had that space to play with. And sometimes things happened when I pushed a pedal by mistake, and I’d go, “Oh, that’s cool!” But it’s not all accidental. A lot of it has to do with the compositions. Some sections might ask for a certain chord or note or texture.

“I DON’T LIKE WHEN PEOPLE PLAY TOO BUSY BEHIND ME. THERE SHOULD ALWAYS BE ENOUGH SPACE IN THE MUSIC TO CREATE”

I might think, I’ll put a tremolo here or a Leslie sound there or a delay here. So that became a part of the composition for me. And it’s easier to do because there’s space in the music for it.

Like on your tune “Chocolate Soufflé” from the new album: You have that Leslie effect going on, so it sounds like you’re playing an

Jimmy Haslip



organ, comping for yourself.

Yeah, exactly. The Leslie effect happened because I was actually thinking about organ players, where they can comp with the left hand and play these great lines with the right hand. You can’t really do that on guitar, but you can fake it, where you can play the chord before the line or after the line, and it will have the same effect. So I put the Leslie on the chords, just to divide between the two. A lot of people think that my Leslie has a momentary

switch, where you just hold it down with your foot and it works, and then you lift your foot up and it stops. But actually, every time I engage the Leslie, I have to tap twice to turn it on and off. So it’s a lot trickier than it seems, and it takes a certain technique to do it. But I got used to, as you say, “dancing on the pedals.” It became second nature.

Was that something you developed in Israel or did it happen in New York?

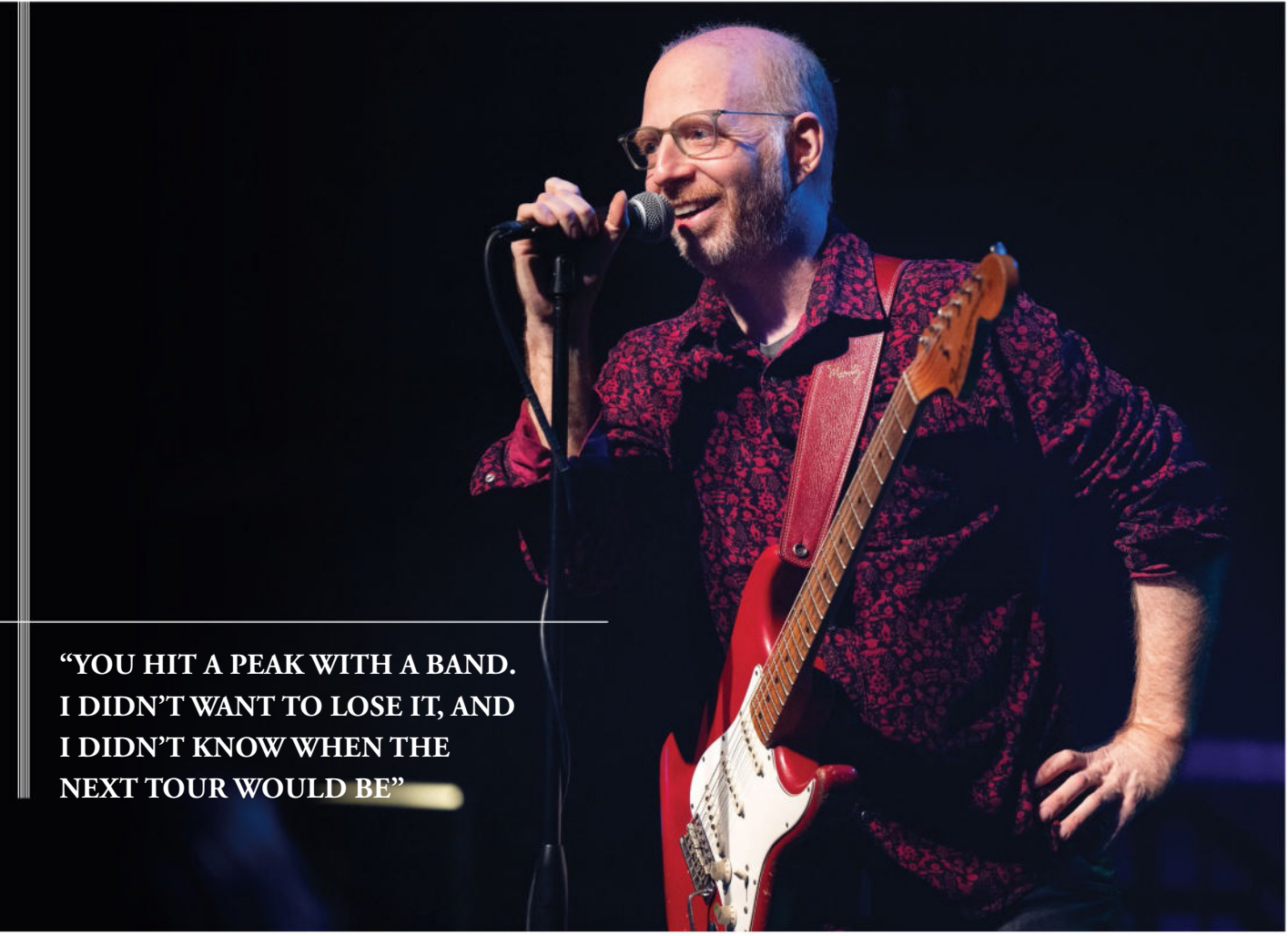
All that stuff was developed in New York, and specifically at the Bitter End. I developed all the music for all my albums there. I used to play there every Monday night, so a lot of stuff just happened from playing live there every week and from doing tours.

So the Bitter End was like a laboratory experience for you?

Oh, absolutely, 100 percent. Still is. I would never be able to do my records without that.

You’re in and out with the effects, meticulously painting with sonic textures and colors. It’s quite a juggling act.

I guess so. I’m used to it. But you gotta find your balance. And those things are almost a part of the music for me. Like on “Chocolate Soufflé,” there’s a couple of chords that I always put the Leslie on, and just for those two chords. So that Leslie sound in each particular place is almost like part of the composition now.



“YOU HIT A PEAK WITH A BAND. I DIDN’T WANT TO LOSE IT, AND I DIDN’T KNOW WHEN THE NEXT TOUR WOULD BE”

And if it’s not there, it sounds to me like something’s missing.

You’ve adapted a nimble ability to switch back and forth between a roadhouse blues feel and a jazz feel, sometimes within the same tune. It’s a very organic balance between an earthy thing and a swinging thing, with elements of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Wes Montgomery. How did you so seamlessly incorporate those styles into your playing?

I don’t know. Growing up, I was studying bebop, so I was heavily into Charlie Parker and Wes Montgomery. But on the other hand, it was the ’80s, so I was playing Van Halen’s “Eruption” too. So that didn’t really click together at all. And I remember people telling me, “Oh, you have to decide what you want to do.” But I liked both. I think what put things together is that when I moved to New York and started to do my trio, I wasn’t playing swing music; the grooves were more like R&B or blues grooves. But harmonically I could have gone wherever I wanted.

And at some point I just let it go and thought, Well, I’ll just play everything I know on this groove. And that liberated me to go for whatever I wanted. To me, it’s all one thing now. So wherever I want to go to now, whether it’s more bluesy or more jazzy, it’s the same thing. And I try to make it just one thing.

Talk about the opening track to *Triple Play*, “Zig Zag.” There’s a bit of a Stevie Ray—meets—John Scofield vibe to that tune.

To me, it’s more like I wanted to write my own version of the Meters’ “Cissy Strut.” Harmonically, it’s a minor blues. So I basically wrote a “Cissy Strut” minor blues in my head.

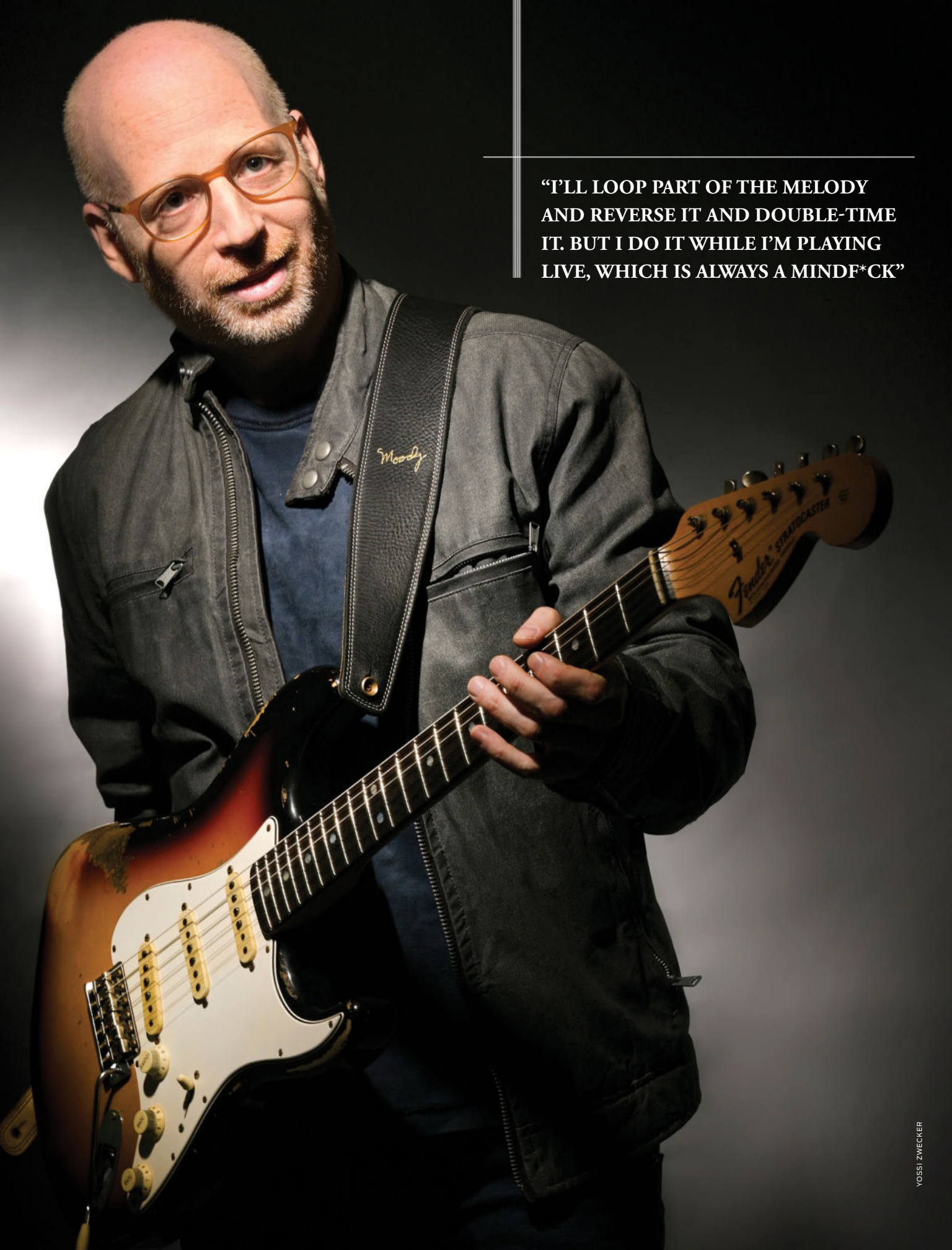
You seem to slip a Monk tune into your albums every once in a while. “Blue Monk,” “Evidence” and “Five Spot Blues” have all appeared on your records.

I love Monk for many reasons, but the one thing that is cool is that his compositions can go in many different directions. With Charlie Parker tunes, for instance, they sound really good

when you swing them, but when you try to put other beats on them, they sound a little cheesy. Somehow with Monk and the way he writes, it can go so many ways and still sound good, not forced. So I’ve always found Monk tunes that I can manipulate to put into my own band. I just thought it sounded organic, even if it wasn’t swinging.

You take some great liberties with “Bemsha Swing” on the new album.

Exactly. The other thing with Monk is you can twist the harmony a little bit. Maybe we’re playing the wrong chord here or there, but I don’t really care. To me, it still sounds organic and it works in the concept of what I do, bending it a little bit here and there. On the solo section to “Bemsha Swing,” for instance, I’m not actually playing Monk’s changes. I simplified it. I wanted to make it more like a *Bitches Brew* vibe. When I play the melody, it’s still Monk’s changes, but when it goes to the solos there’s a vamp section that’s more open, where I do all these loops and stuff. And on the solo

A man with a beard and glasses is playing a Fender Stratocaster guitar. He is wearing a dark jacket over a blue shirt. The guitar has a sunburst finish and a black pickguard. The headstock of the guitar is visible, showing the Fender logo and 'STRATOCASTER' text. The background is dark with a subtle light gradient.

“I’LL LOOP PART OF THE MELODY
AND REVERSE IT AND DOUBLE-TIME
IT. BUT I DO IT WHILE I’M PLAYING
LIVE, WHICH IS ALWAYS A MINDF*CK”

Dennis Chambers



section, I simplify the chords to I and IV. That's what I like about Monk — you can morph it into what you need it to be, if you find the right tunes. It doesn't work on every Monk tune, obviously.

How are you generating those loops on “Bemsha Swing”? It's like you're holding a chord, then soloing over it.

I do it all live with a Line 6 HX [multi-effects processor]. It's sneaky, because you don't notice when I'm recording the loop. Sometimes I'll record a loop while I'm in the middle of a part, and then I manipulate it with my foot and put it into a section. For example, I'll loop part

what I really like about it is it's always going to be random — it's never going to sound the same. Sometimes it's great, sometimes it's not so great. But at least what comes out is mostly surprising. So then, if you just commit to those loops, it's cool. And on the new album there were some cool moments where I was like, Oh wow, how did I do that? And that's always cool.

Your chord melody playing on the intro to “Snapdragon” is very accomplished. That was the title track of your previous studio album but it has an almost kind of “Manic Depression” vibe... a little Jimi Hendrix

Experience influence coming into play.

Yeah, but I actually wrote that tune over Joe Henderson's “Black Narcissus.” So basically, I took

those chord changes and added a “Manic Depression” vibe to it.

What was your approach on the solo guitar piece, “Twice in a While”?

That's a tune that I recorded with a full band [Lee, Weckl and keyboardist Chris Palmaro] on my fourth album, 2009's *Schizophrenic*. It's a really catchy melody and I always liked the composition, but I'm at the point now where I didn't want to play it with a band anymore. Actually, a lot of people at the Berklee College of Music and on YouTube have transcribed my solo on it from the original album, and a lot of times people ask me to play

it at gigs. But I'm so over it in terms of where I'm at now. So I thought it would be both a challenge and a nice thing to play the tune solo, because I think the melody and the composition are strong enough to hold up.

What guitars are you playing throughout this live album?

I'm switching between two Fender guitars: a Stratocaster and a Telecaster. But I would say that it's 60 percent Strat, 40 percent Tele. Both are from the John Cruz Custom shop.

How did you get that nasty tone on the *Triple Play* closing track, “Twisted Blues”?

I'm playing a Telecaster with a signature pedal that Xotic made for me called the RC/AC Oz pedal. It has two different gain stages, so one is always on and the other one is the solo section. It's essentially their RC booster into their AC booster. I use the RC/AC Oz pedal on most of the album.

And actually, I haven't played “Twisted Blues” in a long time because it's the title track of an album I did 12 years ago. I try to play the latest stuff. But that tune has such a funky groove, and I had a feeling Dennis was going to really sound great on it. He brings his own thing to it that's really strong.

You're very particular about your sound and meticulous about your tone. What amp will you take with you on tour?

I don't take amps on tour. I have amps at certain places in the U.S. For example, on the East Coast and in California I have Two-Rock amplifiers. Everywhere else, I have to rent stuff, which is a bummer. I was thinking of leaving an amp in Europe at some point, because it's really challenging when you rent amps. It makes life harder.

When we were doing our last tour in the U.S., we played a bunch of shows where I had to rent an amp, and it sounded fine. But then we did a show and I brought my Two-Rock amp, and Dennis was like, “Wow! What a difference. It's like night and day.” So it is what it is. You just have to deal with it. ■

“THAT LESLIE SOUND IN EACH PARTICULAR PLACE IS ALMOST LIKE PART OF THE COMPOSITION NOW”

of the melody and then reverse it and double-time it. And then when it comes back in it, because it was in a weird spot, it doesn't sound like anything that you heard before. But I do it while I'm playing live, which is always a mindfuck.

I can imagine. You're already busy playing the tune, but you're also acting like an engineer at the board.

Yeah. And there's a certain amount of planning in advance to pull that off. It's like, Okay, if I loop here, it's going to come there. So it's something that you have to get used to. But I've been doing the looping thing for a long time, and



ROCK AND ROLL FANTASY



He's played alongside Paul Kossoff, Mick Ralphs, Jimmy Page and Brian May. As he releases a new solo album, **Paul Rodgers** reflects on his charmed guitar life, his famous axe partners, and the stroke that nearly killed him.

BY KEN SHARP

As the lead singer of Free, Bad Company, and the Firm, Paul Rodgers is hailed as one of the greatest vocalists in music. He's the singer's singer, with fans that include Robert Plant, Rod Stewart, Bryan Adams and Chris Robinson, to name a few. Inspired by the likes of Otis Redding, Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, Rodgers has put his rich and vibrant voice to use on timeless hits like "All Right Now," "Can't Get Enough," "Feel Like Makin' Love," "Shooting Star" and "Rock And Roll Fantasy."

While his place in the pantheon of greatest vocalists of all time is assured, Rodgers is less celebrated for his accomplished and underrated guitar work. After all, he crafted the bruising riffs on "Rock Steady" from Bad Company's self-titled 1974 debut, and played the exquisite acoustic guitar textures that frame "Seagull" and "Crazy Circles." He also laid down the lead guitar on "Rock & Roll Fantasy," the

harmony lead solo on “Can’t Get Enough” and the solo on the Firm’s “Radioactive.” As with his singing, Rodgers’ guitar playing favors economy over flash, and swagger and soul over studied technique. Through the years, working alongside Paul Kossoff in Free, Mick Ralphs in Bad Company, Jimmy Page in the Firm and Brian May in Queen, Rodgers has partnered with his share of rock’s elite six-string slingers and can lend witness to their creative brilliance. Despite this, he remains modest about his guitar playing.

“Well, I have to be humble, because I’ve been in such amazing guitar company,” he tells *Guitar Player* when we catch up with him. “When you look at the guitarists I have played or sang with — whether it’s Paul Kossoff or Jimmy Page, Mick Ralphs or Jeff Beck, Brian May or Neal Schon — they’re amazing people and amazing personalities.”

But the 74-year-old’s days as a rock and roller nearly came to an end a few years ago. He suffered a stroke in 2016. It was followed by 11 minor strokes and another major stroke in 2019 that left him unable to play guitar or sing. Surgery and therapy saved him, but as his wife, Cynthia Kereluk Rodgers explains [see page 68], it was ultimately the guitar that gave him back his spirit, not to mention a new release, *Midnight Rose*, his first new solo album of original material in almost 25 years. The record was made with guitarists Ray Roper and Keith Scott, bassist Todd Ronning and drummer Rick Fedyk, with additional assistance from onetime Allman Brothers Band pianist Chuck Leavell, among others. Notably, *Midnight Rose* has been released on Sun Records, the legendary label that was home to Howlin’ Wolf, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins, among others. For Rodgers, who found his

Paul Rodgers performing with Queen in 2008.



calling through classic rock and roll as a youngster growing up in North Yorkshire, becoming a Sun Records artist is a bit of a pinch-me moment.

“My experience with Sun Records was Howlin’ Wolf and Elvis Presley,” he explains. “My best friend across the road up in Middlesbrough, we sneaked his older brother’s ‘Heartbreak Hotel’ record out and put it on the player. It comes on and I’m like, Wow! I’m still sort of starstruck, to be honest.”

***Midnight Rose* is your first record of original material since you released *Electric* in 1999, almost 25 years ago. What led to it?**

During the pandemic, I was sitting at home, just noodling about with an acoustic guitar, and I thought, Well, I’m just going to pull all the songs I’ve got and see what I have. I had quite a bunch, so I got the guys together and we went in the studio to see what we could do. We did “Coming Home” first, and to see everybody and make eye contact while cutting a track was just wonderful.

When did your health problems begin?

About the same time. It was almost as if God said, “Okay, you! There’s a slap round the back of the head. Wake up and do something!” And that’s what I did. It was very humbling to be in hospital and down for the count. You get to rethink everything and think about what life’s all about, and do something worthwhile. So that’s what I tried to do.

Quite a few songs on the album are infused with a sense of spirituality and mortality. Was that lyrical



ABOVE (THIS PAGE): Rodgers plays a Gibson Flying V as he and Tetsu Yamauchi perform at a 1972 Free concert in the U.K.

TOP (OPPOSITE): Free sit backstage in 1972. (from left) Rodgers, Andy Fraser, Simon Kirke and Paul Kossoff.

ABOVE (OPPOSITE): Free perform in Newcastle, January 1972.

thread inspired by your health issues?

Yes. I always was interested in meditation, way back in my hippie period, when George Harrison got into the Maharishi and meditation. I meditated all the way through Free, Bad Company, the Firm and Queen. It always centered me and kept me balanced. I called on that strength, that spiritual aspect of life very much during my hospital period.

And music was very therapeutic. It has been, because that's all I've ever done — just follow the music and see where it takes me. And it's taken me from my little hometown in Middlesbrough all the way around the world many times. And it still takes me on a journey, and for that I'm very grateful.

On "Melting," the lyrics are powerful, touching on the emotional struggle that you were going through.

Well, yeah, I think it's the blues influence — John Lee Hooker and that kind of thing. I came up with the riff, first of all, because I like to leave notes ringing that will harmonize with the next note. I'm playing acoustic on the record, and the lyrics just kind of flowed out.

"Highway Robber" taps into your fascination with the outlaw, the outlaw life, and that goes back decades, starting with Free, and then with Bad Company.

All my life I've been a bit of a rebel, all the way back to school. I've always felt a bit of an outsider, and I feel a great rapport with outlaw kinds of figures,

especially in the Wild West — such a lawless, wild country that is finding its way in the world. I'm influenced by that.

What was your first guitar?

Well, my father — we call him "my old man" in England — bought me an acoustic guitar. I can't remember what it was, because I knew nothing about guitars. He handed it to me and said, "There you go, son!" and that was it. He didn't say where he got it from, why he had it or anything, but that made me eligible to join my school class band. Any instrument you had, you're in the band. Different people came and went, but four of us stuck it out. I became the bass player, because I sold my acoustic guitar and bought a Vox Bassmaster. I actually got a copy of it, in my later years. It's nice to have and it's really beautiful.

What musicians inspired you?

Well, I think that experience set me on the path to music. Rock and roll got really big, and the Beatles turned up, and then it really exploded. In the course of listening to the Beatles, I discovered the blues, and my fellow bandmate, Colin Bradley, who was a singer and guitar player, showed me the 12-bar blues, which I really took to. I thought, What a magical structure it is! There are millions of songs already written on it, and you can still write a million more. It's so handy, because it means any bunch of guys can get together and do a 12-bar. It's very versatile.

Who was the first guitar player that blew your mind?

That would be Jimi Hendrix. I saw him on a TV show called *Scene at 6:30* when he wasn't famous at all. Pete Murray, a DJ, introduced him and said, "Here he is, Jimi Hendrix!" And he held his arm out and the camera cut to Jimi and the guys in the Experience, and they went into "Hey Joe," and it just blew my freaking mind! There was this guy with this great big hair, and he had a wonderful song, which was really bluesy, and he played amazingly. Then he lifted the guitar and started to play the solo with his teeth. Fuck, it just blew my head off, really.

Did you ever see him live?

No, not really. When I was with the Wildflowers in Finsbury Park and Jimi was just starting out as the Jimi Hendrix Experience, there was a pub down the road that had gigs in the upstairs room. It was the

"KOSS WAS TEARING HIS SOUL OUT WITH EVERY NOTE THAT HE PLAYED"

height of summer and they had all the windows open, and Hendrix was playing there, but we couldn't afford to get in.

All of a sudden, a cab pulled up and out jumps Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding, and then another cab pulled up and out jumps Hendrix himself in full regalia — hair and vest, the beautiful clothes he used to wear — and everybody was just blown away. He walked through the crowd and up the stairs and started to play. That's as close as I got. We could hear him, but it wasn't the greatest sound because it was coming out the windows and there's a whole audience inside soaking up the sound. But, yeah, we heard him, all right.

Who was the first guitar hero you saw live?

Peter Green with Fleetwood Mac at the Marquee. Very impressive indeed, because he would sing as well, and he had Mick Fleetwood on the drums and John McVie on bass. Brilliant. Peter Green used to sing, and then he'd look at the guitar and he'd play a phrase to answer himself, and then he would look down again and he would just alter the tone fractionally, and play another phrase. Every phrase was unique, and it was so amazing to watch him.

You were starting to find your voice as a singer even before Free and continued pushing forward with guitar.

Yes. The Beatles were writing their own songs. Songwriting and playing is a thing you had to do, and songwriting was very much to the fore for me. So I found acoustic guitar was very good to work with because, in the little bedsits I inhabited, you could not play an electric guitar at any volume level at all. The first song I wrote was "Walk in My Shadow." That was on the first Free album [1969's

Bad Company pose for a photo that appeared in the gatefold sleeve of their 1974 debut album. (from left) Boz Burrell, Rodgers, Mick Ralphs and Simon Kirke.



Tons of Sobs], and that was my first foray into writing acoustically for electric.

Leaving space is part of your signature as a singer. I also hear that economy in your guitar playing. Was that way of playing an adjunct to your singing voice and translating when you would play guitar?

I think it was very much so, because I learned economy of notes from listening to great singers like Ray Charles and Aretha [Franklin]. You know, they don't overdo it. I try to bring that economy into my playing. That was the whole basis of Free. Alexis Korner was our mentor. He was like a father figure for us, because he was an old jazz guy and he was really wise. You'd go to him for advice, and he did the same thing with the Stones. He taught me a lot of things.

Economy of notes is something that he stressed: It's not what you play, it's what you don't. That's something that comes naturally to a band like Bad Company. What you need to remember is the instrument you play, whether it's guitar or voice, is a vehicle to express an emotion. It's not to prove how clever you are on an instrument; it's knowing how to deliver an atmosphere and a mood. The point is to put across what you're saying, and you don't really put that across by playing too much. You put that across by delivering the emotion, and then you leave the space for the listener.

"All Right Now" is one of the most enduring songs in the classic-rock universe. How did you and Andy Fraser come up with it?



ABOVE (THIS PAGE): Rodgers and Ralphs harmonize at Municipal Auditorium, in Atlanta, Georgia, May 11, 1975.

TOP (OPPOSITE): Rodgers and Ralphs onstage at Madison Square Garden on Bad Company's *Burnin' Sky* tour, July 31, 1977.

ABOVE (OPPOSITE): Burrell, Rodgers and Ralphs perform on the *Straight Shooter* tour in 1975.

We used to always play [Albert King's] "The Hunter" and we could not get off the stage, especially in Newcastle, without doing it. I said to Andy, "We need a song that's at least sort of as good as 'The Hunter,'" because we were trying to do all our own music and have a voice and be an entity that wrote its own songs and had its own message. So I said, "We've got to have something really simple like [sings] 'All right now.'" And then I said, "Maybe that's it! Let's work on that as the chorus." Andy took that away and came back with all the big arena chords. And I thought, Okay, I'll write the rest of the lyrics to this.

My thought process for that song was, something's been going on and now it's all right. So what's been going on? Well, a guy meets a girl in the street: [reciting lyrics] "There she stood in the street." What was she doing? She was "Smiling from her head down to her feet." And the lyrics just flowed out from there. We did it that night and it was a monster, straight away.

In the studio, every member of the band really contributed to that song. Andy played great bass on it. He actually stayed out for the first verse and doesn't come in until later. I mean, talk about economy! Then he does that sort of bass solo and of course Simon's drums are fantastic too. I'm very grateful for it, because it's known throughout the world, and who would have believed that could

happen? We were just teenagers. I was 19 and Andy was 17.

How did you and Paul Kossoff work together in Free, and how did his guitar playing affect your own development on guitar?

When Free first got together, Paul and I would listen to Albert King, B.B. King, Cream and Hendrix, and we could hear the question-and-answer that went on between the musicians and the space required in order to have a conversation musically. And then there's room for the listener to step inside the music. There's a certain amount of suggestion that something is about to happen and you have to wait for the moment. I think we listened to the right people. We were fortunate in that, because John Lee Hooker and Aretha Franklin and those great masters of the genre created emotional music that touches peoples' hearts. We listened to that and soaked it up, and we tried to emulate that. Some of it was 40 years old, but it was new to us and it sounded so different from everything else we were listening to that was around.

So I think our influences were very similar. Paul loved to do "Born Under a Bad Sign" and he suggested we do "The Hunter," which became a huge song for Free. Koss was economical in his approach and that rubbed off on me.

The first couple of songs I wrote, like "Walk in My Shadow," he put some real balls into that riff. Also, there was a song called "Moonshine" [from *Tons of Sobs*]. He had written the music to that and asked me to write lyrics to it. That was the song that we were playing when the rest of us met Alexis Korner, because he was a friend of Andy Fraser's. Alexis walked into the rehearsal room and sat down,

and we took a break and he said, "Well, you're a group now. All you need now is a name." And we came up with Free.

"MICK GOES, 'WHAT IT NEEDS IS THIS,' AND HE CAME UP WITH THOSE BIG POWER CHORDS"

Paul wasn't able to go to Japan with Free on its July '72 tour. As a result, you not only sang but also played all the guitar parts.

I remember speaking to [drummer] Simon Kirke and saying, "Well, we could just go and wing it." I knew the parts because I'd written it on acoustic, so I had to translate that over to electric and just did that.

Your solos tapped into a vein of expressive emotion. I think strapping on a guitar and being in a band with Kossoff is just going to inspire you.

Absolutely. With the economy of his guitar playing,



Rodgers and Jimmy Page perform onstage in an undated photo. Says Rodgers, "His technical ability is second to none."

I think that's definitely related to the way I sing. That's how I hear music. But that's why I don't sing and play too much. There are people that can really do that, but if I'm going to sing, I want to focus on the vocals.

You've created some indelible guitar riffs. What inspired the riff in "Rock Steady" [from *Bad Company's* self-titled 1974 debut]?

That was actually written on a bass. I had an Echo bass. It was acoustic, but you could plug it in as well, so it was nice to sit around and play because it was loud enough. I wrote "Wishing Well" for Free with that. I learned a lot from Andy Fraser, the bass player in Free, just from listening and being around him. His bass playing was masterful.

"Rock Steady" has a big guitar riff. I played it to Mick [Ralphs], and Mick could take my guitar riff ideas, even if I played them acoustically, and translate them into electric. So Mick came up with a great addendum to the riff by sliding his finger up a couple of strings instead of just playing the bass notes. He did that with all his playing. If you listen to "Silver, Blue and Gold" [from 1976's *Run With the Pack*], he plays to the song, and it really enhances it. His sound is unique and his chordal focus is impressive. So you could imagine "Silver, Blue and Gold," and then you go to "Burning Sky" and the guitar part is very growly.

"JIMMY COULD TAKE A SOLO AND LIFT THE WHOLE BAND, THE AUDIENCE AND THE AUDITORIUM INTO OUTER SPACE"

And then with "Electricland," his sound becomes magical. It's like you're in another world. Mick was always great at that.

Tell me about that huge riff that underscores your acoustic playing in "Feel Like Makin' Love" [from 1975's *Straight Shooter*]. Who came up with that?

I started to write that song when I was with Free and we were touring America. I was in San Francisco and I met up with a whole group of hippies. We got real friendly and hitched north about a hundred miles from Frisco. We were in an area with these big beautiful, almost cathedral-like redwood trees in the forest. It was absolutely beautiful. I started to write

that song there and it never got finished. It just stayed somewhere on file in my mind.

We sat down to write songs for our second album, *Straight Shooter*, and Mick said to me, "So what have you got?" And I said, "Well, I've got this idea and I don't know quite what to do with it," and I started singing and playing the verse.

And Mick goes, "What it needs is this," and he came up with that big chorus riff, those big power chords. It didn't have a chorus, but Mick's guitar riff inspired me to sing the words "feel like makin' love," and that became the song. On the song "Deal With the Preacher," from that same album, I came up with the original idea and Mick really enhanced it and took it to another level.

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

**“YOU NEED TO
REMEMBER THAT THE
INSTRUMENT YOU
PLAY, WHETHER IT’S A
GUITAR OR VOICE, IS A
VEHICLE TO EXPRESS
AN EMOTION”**



'THE GUITAR WAS HIS HEALING INSTRUMENT'

Cynthia Kereluk, Paul Rodgers' wife and collaborator on his new record, opens up about his strokes and his long road back to health.

PAUL RODGERS CAN

certainly keep a secret. Little did anyone know until this past autumn that he spent much of the previous seven years dealing with serious health issues that nearly killed him. As his wife Cynthia Kereluk Rodgers tells *Guitar Player*, his problems began in 2016 with a near-fatal heart attack.

"We caught his would-be widow-maker heart attack before it actually happened," she recalls. "He had a stent put

in. We got to the hospital with 10 minutes to spare, and we're lucky we got there." The scare was followed by a period in which Rodgers had 11 TIAs — transient ischemic attacks — "which were really sneaky," Cynthia explains. "We didn't know that they were TIAs. He'd just have a bad headache, or he felt like the band was out of tune behind him."

Rodgers then suffered two strokes: one in 2016 and another in 2019. The second

left him non-verbal and physically impaired. "He couldn't read, couldn't write, had to learn to walk, had to learn to talk, had to learn everything, how to eat," she says. "All the basics were gone, including how to sing and play."

His doctors determined that Rodgers needed an endarterectomy to remove plaque from his left carotid artery. "They told him that he may or may not come out of it," Cynthia says. "But his left artery was 95 percent blocked. So it was surgery or death. We had no choice in that matter."

Rodgers emerged from surgery just fine, but recovering his ability to play guitar and sing took about

a year and a half. "I knew that music would bring him back," Cynthia says. To encourage him, she left his guitar out for him on the sofa, in its case, with the lid up. He walked by it for a few months, but eventually he began to pick it up. "I saw him on the couch sitting with the guitar on his lap after probably eight or nine months, and he was strumming the guitar away from his body with both hands, like a slide guitar," she says. "And then he started playing and got his dexterity back in his hands. And then after quite

a few months, the voice came back as well. The guitar was his healing instrument." —KS

"IT WAS SURGERY OR DEATH. WE HAD NO CHOICE IN THAT MATTER"





Rodgers holds the body plate for the first Gibson Les Paul guitar.

Did you come up with the epic riff for “Shooting Star” [from *Straight Shooter*]?

Yeah, that was me, actually. Pretty powerful stuff. “Shooting Star” was written about all the casualties in rock and roll. A lot of people ask me if it was written about Paul Kossoff, and yeah, it was, but it’s also about Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Brian Jones and all of those casualties of the business. I didn’t think it would run so deep and be so meaningful in the sense that it applies to so many people, in a more general way.

Let’s touch on a few of your classic guitar solos. One is the harmony solo you played on Bad Company’s breakthrough smash hit, “Can’t Get Enough.” Do you recall laying that down with Mick Ralphs and working out the part?

We recorded the first Bad Company album at Headley Grange [*the former workhouse in Headley, Hampshire, where Led Zeppelin frequently wrote and recorded*], using Ronnie Lane’s mobile unit. We had done a lot of rehearsing and we were bursting at the seams to put this stuff down. Our first album had a very rough edge and natural ambiance. We didn’t have a lot of toys to play with, but it was a mobile studio and we were in this huge mansion. The sound had a natural ambiance. If you heard echo it tended to be natural echo, and I think that’s a good thing. Mick came in with the whole solo in “Can’t Get Enough” and he taught me my part. We did it in the living room at Headley Grange. It was a great big living room with all this furniture in it, a big log fire at the end, and we put the solo on there. Once we’d

got the track down, we overdubbed the solo together. It was great playing it together, because there was a kind of edge to the distortion and it jelled really well, much better than a clean overdub. We also did the vocals for “Rock Steady” there, with all of us doing the backing vocals.

Many readers may not be aware that it’s you playing lead guitar on “Rock and Roll Fantasy” [from 1979’s *Desolation Angels*].

We were living a rock and roll fantasy at the time. When [*Led Zeppelin manager*] Peter Grant started to manage us, and Led Zeppelin got behind us and actually introduced us to America — which was great of them — it was really fantastic.

Actually, I played guitar throughout “Rock and Roll Fantasy,” including the solo, and Mick very kindly let me go ahead. He added some unique touches, as only Mick Ralphs can. The solo was just part of the composition. I thought, Well, I’ll just stick it on myself. I used what was at the time a new cutting-edge Roland synth guitar. It was very exciting. It was the ultimate rock and roll guitar sound that really inspired me. You could play all sorts of sounds on the guitar: You could have bass, you could have harpsichord... And I thought, Well, wouldn’t it be crazy just to put them all in? And so let’s see how that sounds. I thought, Christ, this is a rock and roll fantasy! And that’s where the idea for the song came from.

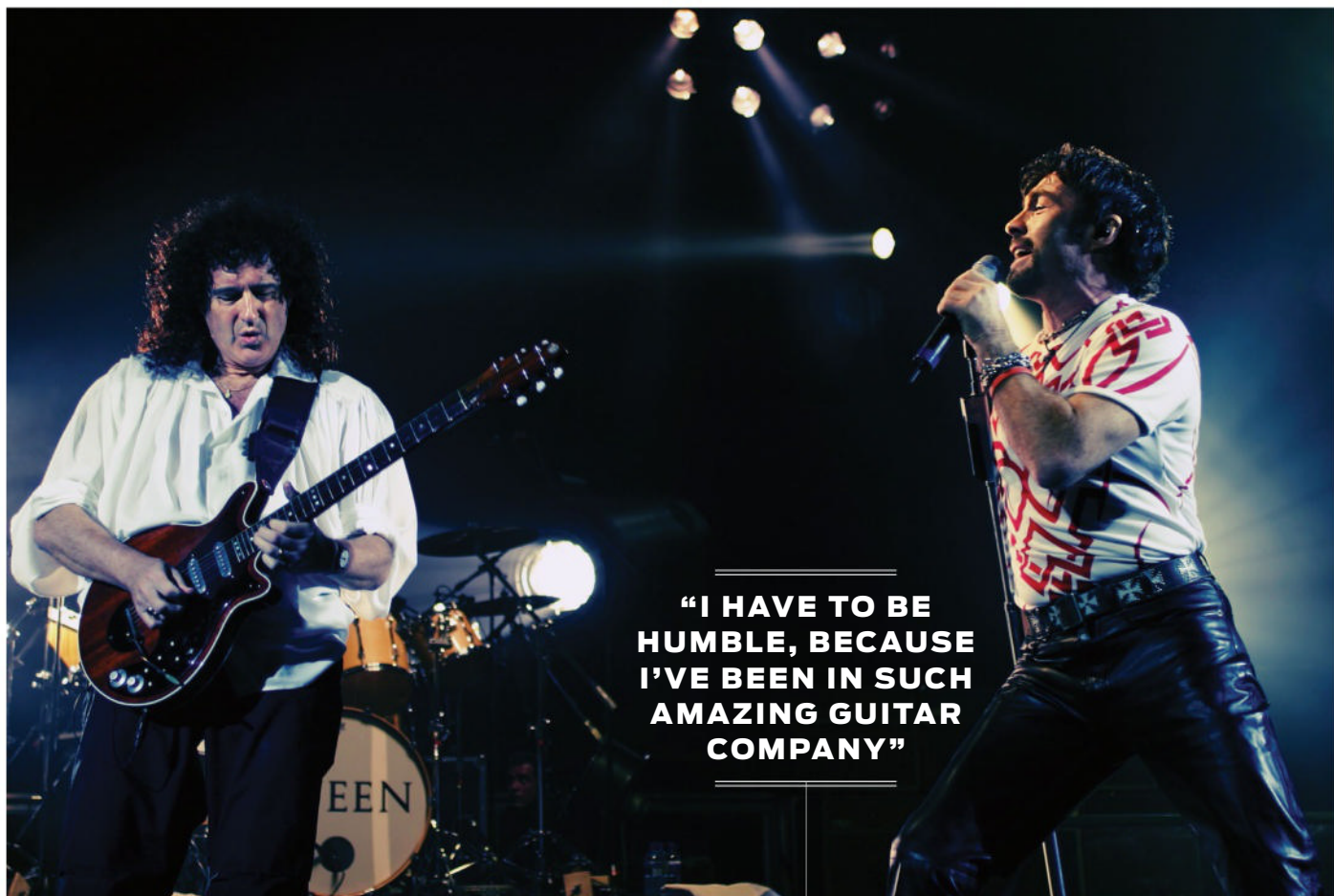
As for the guitar solo on that song, I think if anyone influenced me it was George Harrison. George always had solos that were very in tune with whatever track he played on — something that was very suitable and always hit the mark. So I think I might have been influenced a little bit by George.

You’ve been fortunate to work closely with four gifted guitar players through the years. Tell me what makes each special, starting with Paul Kossoff.

He put everything he had into every note. He was tearing his soul out with every note that he played. There’s a song that Free did called “Come Together in the Morning,” and the solo just rips my heart out. It’s just such a beautiful solo. I love Koss’s playing.

How about Mick Ralphs, who, out of all the guitarists you’ve played with, may be the most unheralded player. But he’s incredibly creative.

Well, I think he’s very versatile and his sound is very versatile, and he locks into a song perfectly. If it’s “Can’t Get Enough” or “Bad Company,” or “Feel Like Makin’ Love” or “Shooting Star,” you can immediately recognize his playing and go, “That’s Mick Ralphs.” But it’s different each time, and you



“I HAVE TO BE HUMBLE, BECAUSE I’VE BEEN IN SUCH AMAZING GUITAR COMPANY”

Brian May and Rodgers kick off Queens’ European tour at Carling Academy Brixton, in London, March 28, 2005. It was the band’s first tour since 1986.

hear that they’re different from each other. On “Silver, Blue and Gold,” he’s got just the sweetest sound, and it’s very appropriate to the song.

Jimmy Page is one of the greats. What impressed you most about his playing when you began working together in the Firm?”

He could take a solo and lift the whole band, the audience and the whole auditorium straight into outer space, and everybody was with him. He could do that, and it was just tremendous. We were just along for the ride sometimes. It was so amazing.

You played the very avant-garde solo on “Radioactive.”

I got a few looks from Jimmy on that one. [laughs] I did a demo of the song and went, “This is how I want the solo to go,” and I sort of expected him to play that. He said, “Why don’t you play it?” and so I did. It’s a finger exercise Alexis Korner showed me. It’s really, really difficult, even when I try it now. But I put that on, and then I put it on backwards against itself, and it sounded suitable for a track called “Radioactive.” I think I was using Paul Kossoff’s [1958 ‘Burst] Les Paul on that one.

How about Brian May?

Brian May is a superb guitar player. Before we got together for Queen, he played for me on my Muddy Waters album [1993’s *Muddy Water Blues: A Tribute to Muddy Waters*]. He told me, “I don’t really play

the blues,” and I said, “Well, I’m sure you do, Brian. It’s just the same as anything else. You just have to feel it, right?” So he comes into the studio and he played a guitar solo, and it was great. And he said, “Is that all right?” and I said, “Yes, it’s really fantastic!” And he said, “Well, do you think I could put some harmonies on it?” I said, “Yeah, absolutely.” And he put a harmony on it and I said, “Wow, there’s Queen right there!”

I’ve always felt that Paul Rodgers is not a rock and roll singer — he’s a soul singer who sings rock and roll.

That’s lovely. I like that, and I think it’s very true. I identify with the soul singers very much and their pain and the blues and soul.

I know you love Wilson Pickett. I recently heard his cover of Free’s “Fire and Water.” Being such a staunch fan of soul singers, you must have had your mind blown when he covered it.

It was unbelievable. I certainly didn’t solicit him to do the song; they just chose to do it. And it was such a feather in my cap, because he’s one of the people I was aiming at. He set the bar with “In the Midnight Hour” and all that kind of stuff. Even now, when I listen to “In the Midnight Hour,” it is amazing the band has got all the time in the world, and it’s moving along and he just nails it. I met Wilson near the end of his life, and you know what he said to me? “Write me some more songs.” ■



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HOLY WOOD

Santa Cruz captain **Richard Hoover** cracks open the Vault and applies his ultimate artistic expression to a historic series making its debut at NAMM 2024.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSHUA HUVER

[1] The FireFly 310 shown here is the sister guitar to the Vault Series FF 311, which likewise has back and sides of microflame walnut (see page 76 for more details).

“THESE FOUR GUITARS represent a lot,” Richard Hoover explains. “Everything that has happened to me, everything I believe in, the people with whom I have been associated, et cetera. I want to promote certain concepts, because there is too much bias against them.”

Whether he’s dispelling myths about wood, championing small body styles or epitomizing boutique success without compromising ethics, Hoover is a wellspring of know-how. His top passion topics include acoustic physics, the rich history of how we got to today’s guitars and how to manifest a brighter future with better guitars for everyone. The captain and his elite crew are leading by example and pouring lifetimes of experience into the Vault Series, from which he will display four models — the D 7882, H13 1854, FF 311 and OM 6134 — in the Santa Cruz Guitar Company’s booth (#5102) at the 2024 NAMM show.

“In the beginning, guitars were made out of rosewood, mahogany and maybe maple,” Hoover notes. Since then, he explains, we’ve come to embrace a wide variety of species, from koa to walnut, and Hoover remains a key catalyst for progress. *GP* listened at length to the bearded guru with the self-described “wood problem” in his most sacred space: the vault where wooden treasure is kept at his headquarters in Santa Cruz, California.

Hoover has accumulated a bounty of top-shelf tonewood booty, sustainably resourced via deep-root connections with fellow wood enthusiasts around the globe. Imagine talking to Willie Wonka in the cocoa vault at the chocolate factory. Like a kid in a candy store, Hoover beams over each precious piece, tapping for tone and offering insights about color. However, he understands that he’s in the twilight of a golden career that has significantly raised the guitar bar. It’s time to crack open the vault and put his wooden jewels into crowning achievements.

Although his work was still in progress at press time, Hoover plans to combine the best woods with ultimate artisanship from the stalwart staff at Santa Cruz Guitars, which is a true custom shop where each instrument is handmade according to orders from dealers and clients. The key difference is that Vault Series instruments are being customized to company specs,

representing personal tastes, preferences and beliefs. It starts at the top, and Hoover is widely recognized as the Stradivari of steel-string guitar lutherie. It’s no coincidence that he draws heavily from the violin-making tradition. As an upstart in America’s bicentennial year, Hoover dreamed of treating every creation as a passion project. He’s living proof that a positive attitude is key to realization. All the words that follow are his own.

CRACKING THE VAULT

“I no longer have the luxury of looking at a beautiful piece of wood and saying, ‘It’s too nice. I’ll wait until later,’” he says, explaining the Vault Series. “I didn’t want to just cash ‘em in, and I didn’t want to just use it without applying the power of the principles instilled in me by my mentors, which is that you can become successful by doing the right thing. So the idea of using some precious wood in this series is a way for someone to support that cause going forward and have a piece as a testimony to being part of our success in that regard. Vault guitars represent not only the best of the best but also the culmination of decades of trust. The idea is to capture that while I still can and allow people to get in on it. Each wood has a beautiful back story.”

TRAVEL LOG

“The Bryn Athyn Cathedral in Pennsylvania was built around 1913 to 1919. They called me about

a stack of leftover Brazilian rosewood that would have been a living tree, possibly in the 1700s. It's like finding a Stradivarius in the attic. Interestingly, Brazilian rosewood must go through a process after it stops living to get the beautiful color and so forth. When wood is in a board that long, it will oxidize. When you see Brazilian with that beautiful black inky stripe, sometimes spider web-y, it's part of that process. If you leave it long enough, it'll all turn black. This is advanced, so it's got a lot more black, which is kind of spooky. But within that are subtle little golden flames, and some sections have a bright golden part. It's a profound story of a beautiful, well-traveled wood that fell into our hands.

"So what do you do with that? Charge an extra hundred bucks for it? I don't think so. What is right is to put it into a project like this, where the different components of the story amplify each other and you end up with an object that represents way more than the value of the sum of its parts. This wood is like once in a lifetime for me, and this is the perfect place to put it."

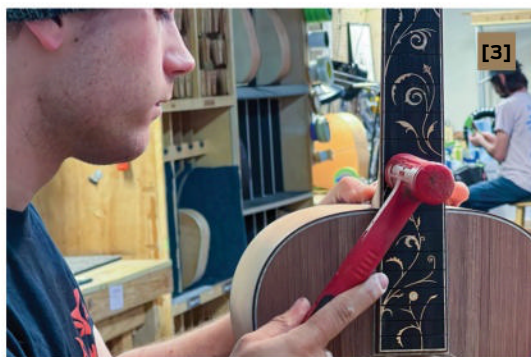
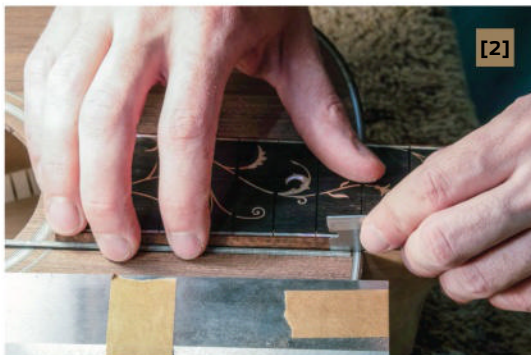
THE D 7882: AN ARTISANAL CUSTOM DREADNOUGHT

"We chose to make the top out of redwood from Fort Ross Chapel. Russians coming through Alaska built it around 1820 in Northern California as their southern outpost. Judging by the growth rings, we

[1] Richard Hoover, captain of the good ship Santa Cruz, shown here in the Santa Cruz Redwoods.

[2] An artisan works on a 45-style fingerboard extension with gold awabi shell inlay and 14k gold purfling. The fingerboard is destined to be used in the making of an H13 1854, a quintessentially Santa Cruz custom H13 model (see page 75 for more information).

[3] The 45-style fingerboard is fitted to the H13 1854 body, featuring ancient kauri back and sides and a top of Purple San Lorenzo sinker redwood.

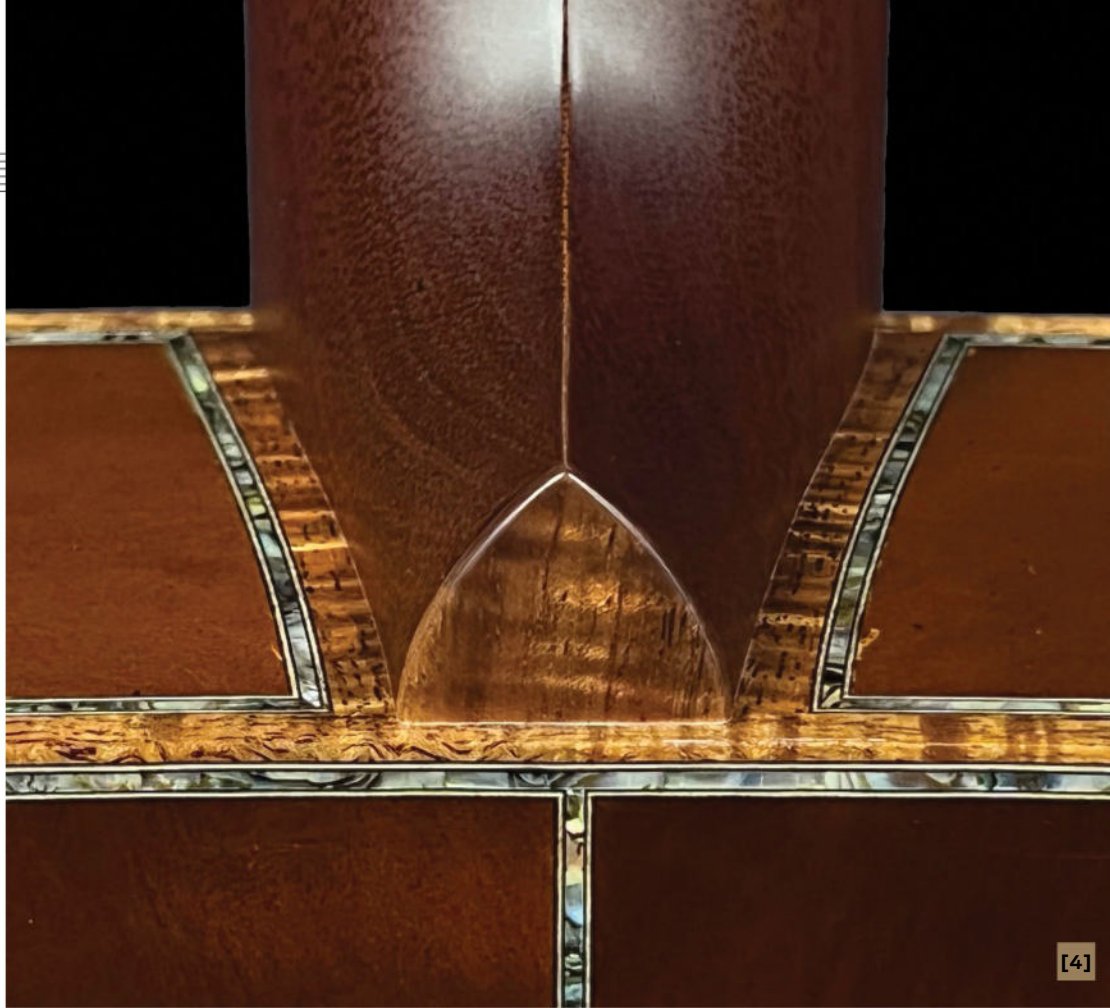


can determine that this wood is a couple of millennia old. Old woods are cool. They sound better, they look better, they have more stability, and you're doing a better thing by using responsibly harvested tonewoods.

"Brazilian rosewood is easy to explain. It's going to add clarity, so you'll hear the notes clearly and separately, with a lot of nuances. It's great for a pro player who wants to showcase their style and technical proficiency. Redwood is one of more difficult tonewoods to put into words, but it has a bright, clear sound too. The common misconception is that it's close to pine, which it isn't. Redwood is close to cedar and its properties of sound. But redwood is astounding. Within the structural physics of the guitar, redwood is superb. The other misconception about redwood is that it has a short tonal life and that you can overdrive it if you play hard. Those are myths based on the association with cedar, and they are not true in either case.

"Ultimately, this is going to be a very articulate dreadnought. Let's make a bluegrass analogy: In the old days, the dreadnought was the drums. It was a rhythm machine, and for that a warmer tone would be desirable. The first guitar we built for Tony Rice was a dreadnought with a cedar top, because I knew it would nail the older sound he was after. But today, with players using the dreadnought for leads that were formerly played by the violin or mandolin, more articulation is desirable, and this guitar will be perfect for that contemporary dreadnought sound.

"The fact that both woods on this guitar came from chapels is a nice connection. I like to think of these guitars representing a whole lineage and



[4] The 45 style neck joint on a Santa Cruz OM made of the same ancient kauri that will be used in the Vault Series H13 1854.

[5] SCGC luthier Forrest McCoy voices the D 7882 Fort Ross Chapel redwood top.

history of people living and dying for causes or faiths and so on. It's a big deal to be a shepherd of that material, and then to pass it on to somebody else that truly feels the full weight."

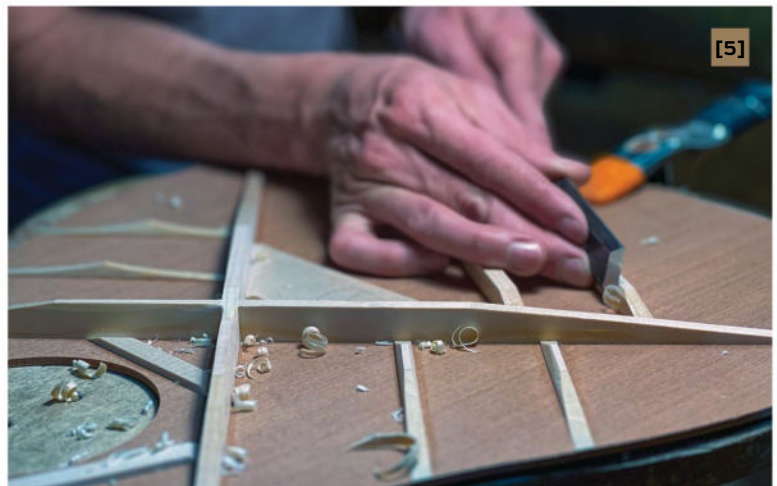
THE H13 1854: A BACK STORY WITH AN ANCIENT HISTORY

"These back and sides are made of ancient kauri, which comes from New Zealand and is huge, like our sequoia. When a natural mega-disaster hit ancient New Zealand, this kauri forest was buried instantly, without any oxygen, meaning it wouldn't oxidize and decay. So, it's preserved, almost as if it were frozen. It took 45,000 years to ooze its way to the surface. Ancient kauri is so unique that there isn't a true comparison to a familiar wood. I'm not even sure that it's still wood after 45,000 years. I know it's not petrified or fossilized. It's very hard to bend. I'm confident of its structural stability because there are kauri instruments dating back millennia.

"One might not assume it would make a great-sounding guitar, but it does. It's akin to a warmer-sounding mahogany. The H13 is my favorite Santa Cruz body style of them all because it's the most versatile. The EQ is more even, so it sounds credible playing practically anything. The H13 is the guitar any player can get the most overall value out of on the market or in their hands without having to specify all their own custom specs. And the H13 looks so cool. It's very symmetrical."

SMOKE UNDERWATER: "DEEP PURPLE" SAN LORENZO SINKER REDWOOD

"This gorgeous redwood was probably approaching 1,500 to 2,000 years old as a tree in our local area. I can tap on it and hear the exact tone that will resonate as an H13 guitar top. It's bright, clear and glassy. Judging by the decay at the ends of the log, it was probably underwater at least 300 years in the San Lorenzo River before dislodging. It's some of the densest, clearest-sounding stuff I've ever come across. The vendor called it 'deep purple,' and it is



much darker than most redwood because of the mineral content that would have leached in and oxidized over hundreds of years. At the right viewing angle, you can see a crystalline purple sparkling in the grains. That's very unusual, and it will become much more prominent when finished, as do the cosmetics of any piece of fine old wood. This is going to shine like crazy and have a sense of movement. My source cuts wood like a jeweler cutting stone. There's good wood, good wood treated well, and then good wood treated with exceptional care to make it perfect. And that's the idea of going into these guitars."

THE FF 311: WALNUT IN A NUTSHELL

"I've never seen anything like the microflame walnut we're putting into the FF 311 Custom FireFly. It's highly unusual and crazy beautiful. It's almost like it's dripping. Walnut is a spectacular tonewood. Like koa and mahogany, walnut is as good as any wood you could choose to achieve a particular player's tone. Unfortunately, walnut and mahogany were put into cheaper, less-decorated guitars, and therefore people associated them as lesser, budget woods. But it's not true. One of my career goals is to promote mahogany and walnut for the spectacular tonewoods that they are, so they get that respect. Like mahogany and koa, walnut populates the middle of the tonal spectrum, from dark to bright. They are my favorites because their versatility allows you to please so many people.

"I'm enmeshed with redwood — the environs, the tree itself and the whole story behind it. I feel the same way about walnut because I grew up with it. Before the interstates, the highways in my part of California were all lined with black walnut trees. When they aged out or fell down, they were used for

[1] SCGC luthier Jacob Oliveira sands the D 7882 peghead, featuring a new Moderne inlay design with a window on Bryn Athyn Brazilian rosewood overlay.

[2] SCGC luthier Adam Rose sets the H13 1854 peghead with a ruby gemstone to float in an oval ivoroid window and ancient kauri overlay.



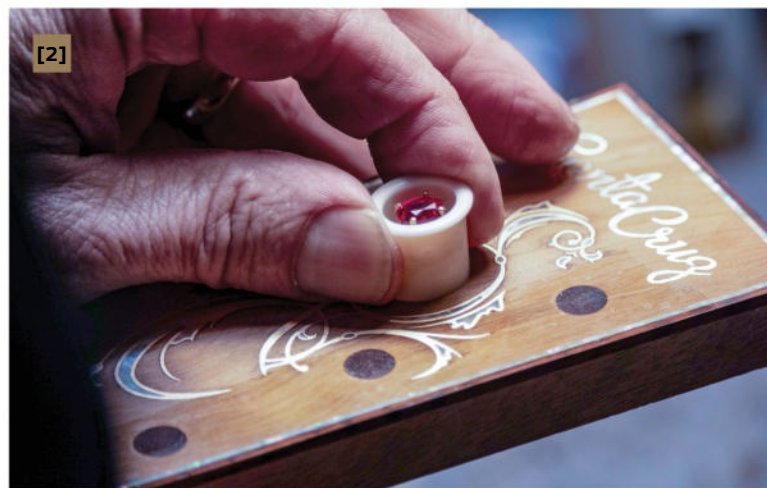
firewood and fence posts. Occasionally, there would be one with a flare that looked like an old lady's permanent wave. I could get walnut when I was a kid pretty readily. Today, it is so locked in. There really is a walnut mafia that knows where every piece goes, because it's super-prized for gunstocks, decorative work and things like that. Getting quality wood for a guitar is difficult, and this has a unique flame. So this is a way to present a beautiful piece of walnut that's highly valued for its tonal potential in a super-expensive guitar for people to appreciate."

AND TO TOP IT OFF...ANCIENT SINKER BALD CYPRESS?

"Nobody has heard of using cypress on a guitar because it's nearly extinct. That's why we're using reclaimed cypress that's 1,400 years old. It's not extremely bright and clear, or particularly warm. It's kind of in-between, which is great on the tonal scale. And the density is high — it's extremely stiff. Cypress is a beautiful wood that looks like spruce with more of a chartreuse green sparkle and shine to it, colors you wouldn't expect in wood."

THE OM 6134: THE EPITOME OF A CLASSIC

"Everybody can understand an OM made with Brazilian rosewood and Sitka spruce, and here's one that'll knock your socks off! We're not trying to convince anybody of anything, because those woods are already well established as standards for everything good, pure and holy. What we're showing is that we can make it the best possible through the way we control it. And you can have that too. It doesn't have to be six figures or whatever. It can





[3] SCGC luthier William Ostrander voices the side bracing of Brazilian rosewood on OM 6134.

“THIS IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING THE WORLD’S BEST GUITAR; THIS IS ABOUT ALLOWING THE WORLD TO MAKE THE BEST GUITAR”

be made of Indian rosewood and Sitka spruce and still sound really good because of the quality added in by what we do to the wood. So the OM 6134 is the baseline, the control element among all these experimental-looking things. The other Vault guitars are showcases, like a cheap visual trick to get people to listen to the story about these guitars. They’re all fancy as heck. This one is a known quantity.”

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

“I’m after this to raise the whole boat of acoustic lutherie. My selfish goal is to be able to train people to make accurate measurements, rather than simply tapping on a piece of wood and saying, ‘Did you hear that?’ The big thing would be if this new measurement system could apply to the cheapest guitars made, accelerating their quality of sound. Can you imagine how many more beginners would stick with a starter guitar that played well and sounded rich with lots of complex overtones and great sustain? This is not just about making the world’s best guitar; this is about allowing the world to make the best guitar. The goal is to do the research and supply the knowledge so that the starter guitars of the future are like the custom guitars of today, with the quality that will make you bloom as a musician and inspire you to write a song that will change the world.”

A PUBLIC PREVIEW AT NAMM

“These four guitars showcase what we do, in a dramatic way. We did some things that are just shameless attention-seeking devices, and one came about when we made a custom guitar for a friend: We made a little oval window in the center of the peg head, lined with a faux ivory frame and collar. A gem was suspended with two tiny gold pegs, so it floated in the middle. You didn’t notice it at first, but when you did see it, you jumped out of your seat. It’s not a cheap gimmick — it’s expensive, but it’s not gilding the lily, where you plate a common object in gold. It’s amplifying the importance of this piece, and it makes an onlooker say, ‘This is something important. I’ll look a little deeper.’

“We’ll see more Vault Series guitars in the future, but for now I would love for people to come see these first four at the NAMM show in January. I’ve got a lot that I want to accomplish, and guitar making is my vehicle. We’re completely redesigning our booth for this showcase, featuring one of the four new Vault guitars displayed in each corner. I want the attraction to tip people into thinking, ‘Yeah, I’ll go this year. I’ll come see it.’”

You can view more Santa Cruz Guitar Company Vault Series photos, including pictures of the finished guitars, at guitarplayer.com in the weeks ahead.



Mark Knopfler



Nuno Bettencourt

VARIATIONS ON CLASSIC LICKS

Instead of pilfering your heroes' signature lead phrases, learn how to harness your creativity and spin your own similarly appealing ones.

BY JEFF JACOBSON

THERE'S ONE PARTICULAR Eddie Van Halen quote that has stayed with me since I first read it as a kid in the November 1978 issue of *Guitar Player*. It was Eddie's first appearance in the magazine, and then-assistant editor Jas Obrecht was trying to figure out just what made this legend-to-be tick.

"Sometimes people think I'm spacing off, but really I'm not," Eddie explained to him. "I am always thinking of riffs and melodies."

Here, the guitarist was likely referring to the time he spent away from the guitar. "I am always thinking music," he would add. But what if we applied this same approach to the time we spend with our guitar, so as to actively explore, or "practice," our creativity?

Sure, it can seem more comfortable to practice something technically challenging, in order to work it up to tempo, which is certainly worthwhile and time well spent. Often, this is

because it's much easier to gauge our improvement: one day we're at 80 beats per minute on our metronome, and the next we're at 82. Progress!

Expanding your creativity, however, requires a bit more of an unstructured approach to practicing. But that doesn't mean there aren't specific ways to go about it. For this lesson, we're going to focus on what specifically draws us to the licks we love, and how, by doing this, we can find some brand-new licks of our

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS (KNOPFLER); NEIL LUPIN/REDFERNS (BETTENCOURT)

own. So let's take a few examples inspired by some of the greats, home in on their inspiring overall concepts and see where our imagination takes us.

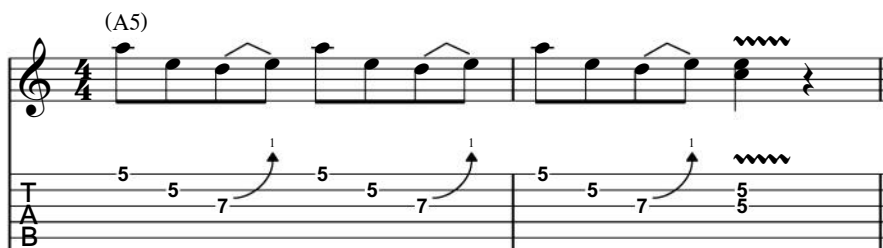
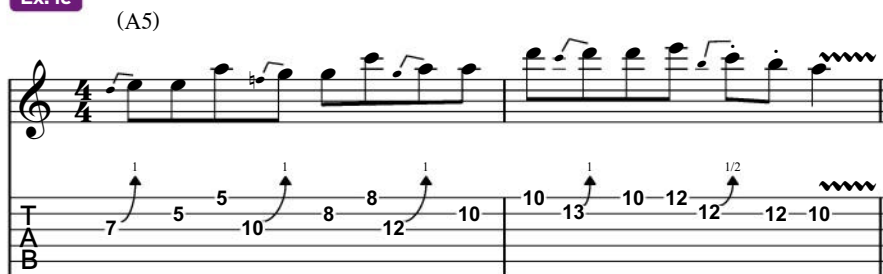
Let's begin with the classic Chuck Berry-style lick in the first bar of **Ex. 1**. Just looking at it on the surface, an easy thing we can do is simply reverse the direction of the notes, as in **Ex. 1a**. Technically, this is known as *melodic inversion*. Notice how the bends are now performed more slowly, and the final note has become a double-stop.

A close relative of melodic inversion is *rhythmic displacement*, which is just a fancy way of saying "start the lick on either a different part of the beat, or a different beat entirely." I'm noticing that I like the slower bends of **Ex. 1a**, so for **Ex. 1b**, let's keep that while displacing the very same four-note group, starting it on beat 1's eighth-note upbeat, which shifts the subsequent repeats forward as well. As before, this inspires a slightly different ending.

Now, let's go a bit deeper and ask ourselves, "What's one cool thing about these licks?" I like how they each take a group of notes and repeat it for dramatic effect, so let's apply that overarching concept — repetition — but in a less literal way, as we move the same shape up the fretboard (**Ex. 1c**). Now we've succeeded in creating an entirely new, expansive lick from the original.

We can apply some of these same approaches to most any of your favorite licks. Concentrating on the concept of choosing an exciting element of a lick that stands out to you is a great way to go about it, and doing so often brings the other two in tow, as we'll see later.

As a young guitarist, I couldn't get enough of the rolling legato scales that the late metal master Randy Rhoads would effortlessly incorporate into his solos, typically using three-notes-per-string patterns with double hammer-ons and pull-offs. **Ex. 2** is inspired by the one such lick he played in Ozzy Osbourne's "Mr. Crowley." The thing is, as I got

Ex. 1**Ex. 1a****Ex. 1b****Ex. 1c**

older, I found myself often playing for singer/songwriters, and in that context long scales like this one sounded out of place. Still, I loved Rhoads' legato sound and wanted to incorporate it into my playing. Let's see how we can harness it to create phrases of a different sort that can be used over the same chords.

Toto guitarist and session legend Steve Lukather is a great player to look

to for this. Lukather effortlessly draws from a wide variety of licks and techniques, but he evokes them in subtler ways, mainly by using just bits and pieces. **Ex. 2a** takes this approach, using Rhoads-style legato playing less conspicuously. Instead of playing a lengthy scale pattern, just three quick legato notes are used at a time, as a double hammer-on, and only twice. This

enables us to transform a technique generally associated with a shreddy style of playing into one that can seamlessly fit into all sorts of different musical situations. Notice how rhythmic displacement also makes an appearance here: While the initial pick-up notes occur on the upbeat of beat 4 (a weak beat), in bar 2 the opening notes to the second phrase begin on the upbeat of beat 3 (a strong beat). The result is some unexpected rhythmic excitement and a less predictable way of following up our opening phrase with a variation. Having this mindset can lead to more cohesive and memorable solos, whether you're deliberately composing one or freely improvising.

Joe Walsh is another master of subtlety (see my full lesson on him back in the May 2023 issue). **Ex. 3** is inspired by a section of the epic outro solo in the Eagles' "Hotel California," where he takes turns trading licks with then-fellow guitarist Don Felder. The cool descending chromatic (notes that are out of key) phrase in bar 2 always caught my ear. Let's take this concept of using chromatic notes to create the new licks in **Ex. 3a**. While we take a similar tack to Walsh's in bar 1, bar 2 incorporates some melodic inversion, as this time the notes move in the opposite direction. Plus, those very same notes are rhythmically displaced, as they begin a 16th note earlier.

Let's take a quick break to discuss a more philosophical consideration when creating your new licks. If doing this sort of thing is new for you, you might find it a bit intimidating to step into uncharted waters, but it's important that you remember to trust yourself. You know what sounds good to you, so always go with your initial instincts and see where they lead. You might not find what you're looking for on the first try, but that's just part of the process. Plus, you never know what you'll stumble onto that you can use later.

Ex. 4 is a new lick inspired by the iconic tapping section of Eddie Van Halen's solo guitar masterpiece "Eruption." In the original, all of the tapped notes fall directly on either the

Ex. 2
Ex. 2a
Ex. 3
Ex. 3a

downbeats or eighth-note upbeats. This example uses EVH's melodic approach of arpeggiating a classical-style chord progression, but here, some of the tapped notes fall on the 16th note that

directly follows a downbeat or upbeat. This type of rhythmic displacement adds a bit of a Latin-type feel, resulting in a new lick, despite our simply having borrowed Eddie's same overall approach.

Recently, much ado has been made about Nuno Bettencourt's solo on the new Extreme song "Rise," and rightly so! It's brash and bold, immediately commanding our attention. The most talked-about section (at 2:50) involves widely stretched intervals, open strings and legato playing. **Ex. 5** borrows some of these same elements but with note choices that make it more accessible. Remember, our main goal here is to find some great new licks that sound like you. See if you can come up with one on your own. Ours is based on the A minor pentatonic scale (A, C, D, E, G), although in bar 3 we've borrowed a B note from the A natural minor scale (A, B, C, D, E, F, G) to effectively describe the underlying G chord (G, B, D) implied by the bass. Lastly, be sure to include the indicated palm-muting (P.M.), as it's



essential to capturing the Nuno-style bursts of percussive energy. **Ex. 6** features some tasty licks in the style of Mark Knopfler's playing on the Dire Straits classic "Sultans of Swing." Examples 6 and 6a are indicated to be played fingerstyle, as Knopfler does, but you can certainly use your pick if you'd prefer. However, if you haven't played much fingerstyle, you might want to give it a shot, as a change in technique can often lead to even more new and different ideas. There are more than a few ear-catching musical approaches involved in Ex. 6, which we'll once again borrow to create some new licks. Let's keep the same rhythm while using different voicings for some of the raked arpeggios (**Ex. 6a**). This is where your knowledge of the fretboard comes into play.

Ex. 4

(D/F#) (F#m)

(E#°) (F#m)

Ex. 5

(A5)

(G5) (F5)

Knowing your triad inversions up the neck and on various string groups will allow you to instantly see more options to play over each chord. It's also noteworthy that we've changed the

overall direction of the phrase here so that now it ascends as the chords descend. The above is but one musical path that you can take to effectively engage

and broaden your creativity. Bear in mind that when the red “record” light goes on in the studio, or you hit the stage, you’re going to play whatever it is you’ve been practicing. Depending on the style of music, most of the time your best musical choices will likely not involve overt displays of technique or how well you can play a scale. So why not spend a good chunk of your practice time focusing on creating new riffs and melodies, as Eddie had talked about back in 1978? It worked out pretty well for him, and it can be a gateway to finding your own voice on guitar. 🎸

Jeff Jacobson is a guitarist, songwriter and veteran guitar transcriber, with hundreds of published credits. For information on virtual guitar lessons and custom transcriptions, feel free to reach out to Jeff on Instagram @jjmusicmentor or visit jeffjacobson.net.

Ex. 6

(C) (Bb) (A)

fingerstyle P.M.-I

Ex. 6a

fingerstyle *gva*



THIS CAN REBUILD A COMMUNITY.

At the D'Addario Foundation, we believe the most effective instrument for creating lasting, positive change for children and their communities is music education. That's why we work with over 200 successful, diverse community-based programs to help bring music to kids who may never have access

otherwise. And 100% of your donation to the D'Addario Foundation goes directly towards giving music education to children. So every dollar you give makes a real difference.

[Learn more at daddariofoundation.org](http://daddariofoundation.org)



The Big History of Small Acoustics

Richard Hoover unravels the history and mystery of parlor guitars.

BY JIMMY LESLIE



The Santa Cruz FireFly: little guitar, big sound.

AFTER I SPOKE with Richard Hoover for our Frets feature about the new Vault Series from Santa Cruz Guitars [see page 72], he went particularly deep on a few pet subjects, including parlor guitars, which are generally smaller and narrower than a Martin single 0. What got us rolling was a discussion of the FireFly, the first Santa Cruz model that truly spun my head around. Circa 2008, one came into *Guitar Player* headquarters for review, and it earned a unanimous, enthusiastic Editors' Pick. We were all perplexed. How could such a full sound come from such a small acoustic? Apparently, Hoover had been waiting a long time to prove his point on this subject close to his heart, and he's still on his mission to educate the masses about the glory of a great parlor guitar. We'll let Hoover take it from here.

SMALL USED TO BE BIG

"People have a bias against parlor guitars," Hoover opines. "They think a guitar that size is a toy. They say, 'That's really cute. I love small guitars, but they're so mellow,' meaning they just don't sound very good. Well, that size guitar was the epitome of the luthier art going back a century and a half. And if

they had a need to make big guitars, they would've, but they didn't. They just had the need to improve upon the quality of sound — all the crucial characteristics you'd want — with millennia to practice. It was all there in the parlor guitar: the sonority, depth and inspirational tone. The only reason guitars got bigger was to compete with barking dogs and juggling children in vaudeville. That required something louder and more brash. It never improved the sonic quality. It just made it louder. But go back to the heyday of the parlor guitar, and why would you make it louder? Everybody was right here in the parlor. And even in performance, it was in a context where people could hear it. The guitar didn't need to be bigger."

HOW WE GOT HERE

"The reason people have that biased perception now is because they've been misled. When they play a parlor-sized guitar from way back that was handmade by some of the same companies that are still around today, people are astounded at how good they sound, because their experience had been the reproductions that the larger companies have made of those instruments over, say, the last 40

years. Those are made out of woods that come from the same machine, whether it's a dreadnought, an OM or whatever. They're way heavy built, so of course they sound limited and dull. I had to wait for the right time to show people."

SUPER FLY

"Eventually, the touring guitarist with the *Phantom of the Opera* orchestra approached me, saying, 'I need a guitar I can travel with, but when I get to the gig, it's got to be a real guitar with quality acoustic sound. I don't want something with a fold-up neck, or a little guitar that has to be plugged in.' I said, 'Great, here's the chance to do our prototype.' I knew how the old guitars were made, with great consideration for sizing wood dimensionally in proportion to this little instrument. I saw an opening in the marketplace where we could position the FireFly, and we've been making players happy with it ever since." 🎸

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player- and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.



EPIPHONE

Joe Bonamassa 1963 SG Custom

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

EPIPHONE'S LATEST LIMITED-

edition release focuses on a particular 1963 Gibson SG Custom that was special-ordered and obviously treasured by its original owner and is now part of Joe Bonamassa's collection of prized vintage guitars. Finished in Dark Cherry Red to match the rare color worn by the original guitar, the JB 1963 SG Custom features a mahogany body and a glued-in neck that's carved in a SlimTaper C profile that melds into a smoothly contoured heel unique to this guitar. As such, the playing feel is very comfortable and bending strings is glassy smooth, courtesy of an ebony fingerboard with 22 medium-jumbo frets that offer even crowns, a silky polish and nicely beveled tips. A white Graph Tech nut with rounded corners enhances it all and helps make the guitar inspiring to pick up and play.

The SG Custom was a class act in 1963, and Epiphone's version is every bit as appealing. The attention to detail is impressive, as evidenced by the flawless multi-ply binding and split-diamond mother-of-pearl inlay on the headstock, and by the single-ply binding around the fretboard, which has mother-of-pearl block inlays that are set without a trace of epoxy visible. Other details include a white three-ply pickguard and a plastic "Custom" badge between the neck pickup and the end of the fretboard. A plush-lined hardshell case and a booklet with a certificate of authenticity sporting Bonamassa's signature are included.

The gold-plated hardware consists of Kluson Waffleback tuners, a LockTone Tune-o-matic bridge with nylon saddles, and an engraved Maestro Vibrola tailpiece with an arm that rides in a nylon bushing and can fold out of the way when not being used. The action of the unit is smooth and positive, and it didn't knock the guitar excessively out of tune when used to its limits. The long tailpiece likely

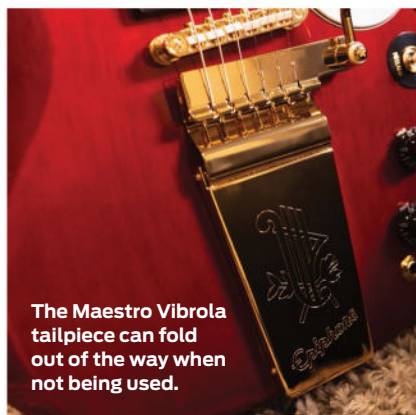


Epiphone's 1963 SG Custom is based on a prized guitar from Joe Bonamassa's vintage collection.



contributes to the SG Custom's piano-like sustain too, and the guitar sounds lively and resonant when played acoustically.

In the electronics department, Epiphone ProBucker 2 pickups with alnico poles are fitted in the neck and middle positions, along with a ProBucker 3 at the bridge. A three-way toggle switch selects neck, middle-plus-bridge and bridge, and it's noteworthy that the dual-pickup combination is wired in-phase, unlike most SG Customs and Black Beauty Les Pauls, according to Bonamassa. Far from sounding nasal, the tones are full and have a cool twanginess that's very usable since you're able to blend and EQ things to your heart's content with the dual volume and tone controls. The neck and bridge pickups offer everything from rich, clean jazzy sounds to meaty rock tones when revved up with distortion from pedals or pushed straight into an amp for classic PAF-style grind that's controllable from the guitar for clean and dirty tones. The CTS pots and Mallory caps used in the circuit certainly contribute to the guitar's sound and the fact that it doesn't lose



The Maestro Vibrola tailpiece can fold out of the way when not being used.

A GREAT GUITAR THAT PLAYS AND SOUNDS WONDERFUL AND LOOKS LIKE A MILLION BUCKS

guitar that plays and sounds wonderful and looks like a million bucks. An obvious choice for anyone who's priced out of the market for a vintage Gibson, it nails all the points that made the top-shelf SG of the time such an amazing guitar, and it is well deserving of an Editors' Pick Award. **E**

crispness and definition when you turn down, or get muddy when you back off the tone knobs.

Epiphone's Joe Bonamassa 1963 SG Custom is a great

SPECIFICATIONS

Joe Bonamassa 1963 SG Custom

CONTACT epiphone.com

PRICE \$1,399, with custom hardshell case

NUT Graph Tech, 1.692" wide

NECK Mahogany, SlimTaper C profile

FRETBOARD Ebony, 24 3/4" scale, 12" radius

FRETS 22 medium jumbo

TUNERS Kluson Waffleback

BODY Mahogany

BRIDGE LockTone Tune-o-matic with nylon saddles, Maestro Vibrola tailpiece

PICKUPS Epiphone ProBucker 2 (neck and middle) ProBucker 3 (bridge)

CONTROLS Two volume, two tone, three-way pickup switch

EXTRAS CTS potentiometers, Mallory caps, Switchcraft pickup selector and output jack. Hard case with plush goldenrod interior and "Nerdville" graphics. Joe Bonamassa certificate of authenticity

FACTORY STRINGS Gibson, .010-.046

WEIGHT 7.94 lbs (as tested)

BUILT China

KUDOS Impressive tone, playability and build quality

CONCERNS None



Highway Series
Parlor (left) and
Dreadnought

FENDER

Highway Series Parlor and Dreadnought

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

FENDER IS GOING all in on hybrid guitars, and the company's new Highway Series additions are designed to bring more of the masses to the hybrid table. The Highway Series is clearly aimed at players who are hybrid curious but want something more along the lines of a traditional acoustic than Fender's groundbreaking, yet polarizing, Acoustasonic Series. Highway Series guitars are thinline acoustics featuring a specially designed Fishman Fluence Acoustic magnetic soundhole pickup. They promise electric playability with acoustic tone via a more straightforward and streamlined system than the DSP-driven Acoustasonic, at a nicer price point and with a more conventional aesthetic.

The Highway Series consists of two models, Parlor and Dreadnought, each available in mahogany or mahogany with a solid Sitka spruce top. Our review units were an all-mahogany Dreadnought and a spruce-topped Parlor. All Highway Series guitars have the iconic Fender six-in-line headstock design, and a more traditional look from the neck down.

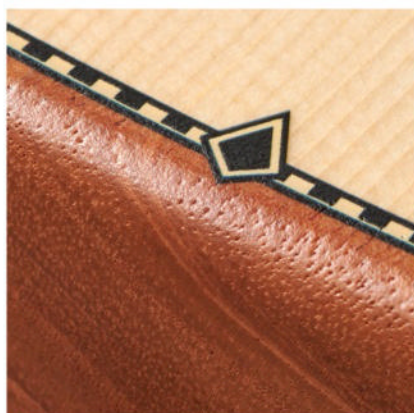
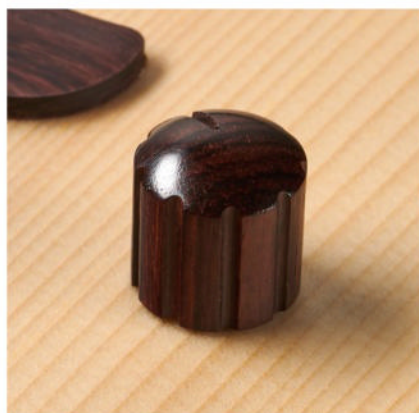
A Fishman Fluence Acoustic pickup is stealthily tucked up near the top of the neck, with a curve that follows the lip of the soundhole. The volume and tone knobs are the only other obvious indication of a hybrid design.

To my eyes, the all-mahogany Dreadnought appeared almost too plain, while the natural spruce top with checkered rosette and top binding brightened up and nicely highlighted the Parlor.

Interestingly, there's no indication of the Highway Series or a model designation anywhere. The headstock



The natural spruce top with checkered rosette and top binding brightened up the Parlor.



simply has the Fender logo etched into the wood. A plaque on the back indicates an origin of Ensenada, Mexico. Craftsmanship on both guitars was smooth and blemish free, which is especially impressive given the price of about a grand.

Both instruments feel comfortable, with beveled arm rests and contoured backs. The fully chambered bodies measure a mere 2.25 inches deep, just slightly thicker than a typical solidbody Strat. For that matter, the bolt-on C-shaped neck measures a mere 1.69 inches wide at the nut and feels more like an electric, even if the frets are narrower and taller than the jumbo frets often found on a Strat. The Parlor and the Dreadnought are lightweight and ergonomic, and that's especially awesome when playing standing up.

Getting the slightly lower action I prefer was easily achieved with a quick turn of the truss rod via the included hex wrench. The extra-light phosphor-bronze strings deliver an

acoustic feel to the otherwise electric-like situation. Fender nailed the best-of-both-worlds target on both instruments. The playability is wonderfully easy, yet still authentically acoustic enough to feel appropriate for fingerpicking as well as plectrum playing. True to their body styles, the Dreadnought is a natural strummer, while the Parlor is more organically suited to fingerpicking.

The Highway Series exists in its own lane sonically. These guitars aren't going to win any campfire competitions, but they do deliver enough acoustic oomph to work well in a van, a hotel room or backstage, and they are significantly more full and natural sounding than an Acoustasonic. Both feature

SPECIFICATIONS

Highway Series Parlor

CONTACT [fender.com](https://www.fender.com)

PRICE \$999 street, with deluxe gig bag

NUT WIDTH 1.69", Tusq

NECK Mahogany, 12" radius

FRETBOARD Indian rosewood, 24.75" scale

FRETS 20, narrow tall

TUNERS Fender ClassicGear

BODY Thinline tapered parlor. Chambered mahogany back and sides with beveled arm rest and contoured back. Solid Sitka spruce top with polyester satin-matte finish

BRIDGE Rosewood with Tusq saddle

ELECTRONICS Fishman Fluence Acoustic active magnetic soundhole pickup system with top-mounted volume and Contour controls. Runs on 9-volt battery

FACTORY STRINGS Fender Dura-Tone 860CL coated phosphor bronze gauges .011–.052

WEIGHT 5.4 lbs (as tested)

BUILT Mexico

KUDOS Fabulous analog amplified acoustic tone without fear of feedback. Ergonomic, excellent playability, attractive and attainable

CONCERNS None

THESE GUITARS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE FULL AND NATURAL SOUNDING THAN FENDER'S ACOUSTASONIC MODELS

a tapered floating X bracing pattern that seems to bring out plenty of top resonance. Obviously, the Dreadnought, with its bigger body, delivers more boom than the Parlor, and in the case of our review units, the

mahogany top on the Dreadnought gave it a balmier wooden quality, while the spruce-top Parlor had more articulation.

Primarily designed to be plugged in, both guitars came into their own when coupled with amplification.

They sounded remarkably large even when run through the 100-watt Fender Acoustic Junior GO, with its eight-inch woofer, and then went up to a whole other level when run through the Acoustasonic setting on the new Tone Master Pro [see review, January 2024]

SPECIFICATIONS

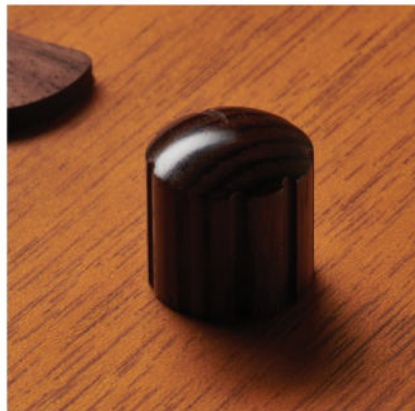
Highway Series Dreadnought**CONTACT** fender.com**PRICE** \$999 street, with deluxe gig bag**NUT WIDTH** 1.69", Tush**NECK** Mahogany, 12" radius**FRETBOARD** Indian rosewood, 25.5" scale**FRETS** 20, narrow tall**TUNERS** Fender ClassicGear**BODY** Thinline tapered dreadnought. Chambered mahogany back and sides with beveled arm rest and contoured back. Mahogany top with polyester satin-matte finish**BRIDGE** Rosewood with Tusq saddle**ELECTRONICS** Fishman Fluence Acoustic active magnetic soundhole pickup system with top-mounted volume and Contour controls. Runs on 9-volt battery**FACTORY STRINGS** Fender Dura-Tone 860CL coated phosphor bronze gauges .011–.052**WEIGHT** 5.5 lbs (as tested)**BUILT** Mexico**KUDOS** Fabulous analog amplified acoustic tone without fear of feedback. Ergonomic, excellent playability, attainable**CONCERNS** The all-mahogany body is rather plain looking

coupled with the 1,000-watt Fender FR-12 powered 1x12 cabinet. Talk about a huge acoustic stage sound! I was able to crank up with zero feedback.

Fishman designed the Fluence Acoustic pickup specifically to give the Fender Highway Series a uniquely natural acoustic-electric signal, and they hit the bull's-eye. These magnetic pickups have none of the quackiness associated with traditional piezo undersaddle pickups, and they don't suffer from the somewhat dull, midrange focus associated with most magnetic soundhole designs. The tone is beefy in the bottom and balanced in the middle, with a nice top-end



The Fluence Acoustic magnetic pickup uses analog technology to deliver pure amplified tone.



THE PLAYABILITY IS WONDERFULLY EASY, YET AUTHENTICALLY ACOUSTIC ENOUGH TO FEEL APPROPRIATE FOR FINGERPICKING OR PLECTRUM PLAYING

sparkle. The curved pickup is located up near the top of the neck, so the sound certainly has the throatiness of a neck pickup. If you feel the tone has too much junk in the trunk, you can roll it back via the contour knob from the

full-bodied sound of Voice 1 to the tighter, more mid- and top-focused Voice 2, for more clarity and articulation that sits better in a band mix.

The only thing I found missing was a strong sense of percussiveness from the top, the kind that the middle position on

the Acoustasonic Series delivers in spades. It would be cool if Fender and Fishman could incorporate that into future designs, and I'll bet they will.

The bottom line is that the Highway Series is an excellent crossover option for players who want a killer acoustic stage sound from an instrument with the comfort and playability of an electric guitar. The aesthetic is still traditional enough that most onlookers wouldn't think to look twice, yet it has enough of a modern hybrid vibe that folks who have any musical sense will likely do a double take. Whether you choose the Dreadnought or Parlor is a matter of personal preference. Whichever you select, both instruments deliver excellent playability and tone.

You're not supposed to be able to conjure an authentic acoustic sound from such thin bodies, but Fender and Fishman have found an analog way forward, free from the worries of digital component durability.

For continuing to break new ground while maintaining mass appeal and attainability, both Highway Series guitars earn an Editors' Pick Award. 🏆

BENSON

Delay Pedal

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED the work of amplifier and pedal maker Chris Benson of Portland, Oregon, while reviewing his Monarch amp and Tall Bird reverb unit for *GP*. That hand-wired tube amp impressed me immensely and has since become widely regarded as among the upper echelon of today's boutique creations, along with everything else Benson has brought to market since. On the pedal front, the new Benson Delay is the fifth stompbox in the company's lineup, but it's the first to deviate from the gain-based boosts and fuzzes in the range.

One of the first questions asked and answered in any delay-pedal review must be: Is it analog or digital? The Benson Delay is actually a clever combination of both worlds. Benson calls it "a PT2399 [digital] chip in a bucket-brigade delay wrapper, drawing the best from both technologies which has resulted in an extremely wide-ranging and versatile design." At the heart of it all is the Bontempo open-source delay technology developed by Antoine Ricoux. Together, these devices allow the pedal to produce from 30ms to 1,250ms of delay — fast enough to produce a chorus effect and long enough for extremely atmospheric echoes. In addition, the Bontempo tech provides a controllable LFO for modulation effects.

The Benson Delay isn't overly capacious in its compact metal box, and the controls for LFO speed, LFO depth, feedback, time and



mix, plus foot switches for bypass and tap/hold (the latter an oscillation hold) present enough control for creative modern soundscaping without requiring so many fiddly parameters to turn off the purists. Use of both foot switches together (thoroughly explained in the manual) accesses the tap divisions menu and your choice of sine, square or random waveforms for the LFO. "We are all about function here," Chris Benson tells us. "The Delay, for me, is my ideal tool for studio and stage. It's designed to get great sounds quickly when needed, but it can be weird and extreme for experimentation as well."

I tested the Benson Delay with a Fender Jazzmaster and a Gibson Firebird V Reissue into a 65amps London head and 2x12 cab, a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo and a Fractal FM9 modeler. Throughout my testing, the Benson Delay delivered rich, characterful echoes and modulation couched in a deceptively wide-ranging and versatile control interface. In terms of its sound, the Benson Delay reminds me how easy it is to sink into a good analog unit and roll with it, vibing off the warmth and dimension this type of echo provides. Just a touch of LFO adds the subtle modulation that gives depth and texture to an otherwise straight echo sound. Beyond there, you'll find nearly limitless note-bending and deep-warbling modulation that constitutes a creative tool in and of itself. It can all be too much at the extremes, but better than too little. For that matter, there's an astounding range of

sounds lurking between the two LFO controls.

Given the delay's wide range — and the ranges of the LFO and feedback controls, for that matter — the knobs can be a little hair trigger, taking you to unexpected depths and lengths surprisingly quickly. Of course, the tap button helps in one regard there, but the others require a fine touch. But that's a small price to pay for the tons of functionality on offer in this pedal.

All in all, the Benson Delay is a great addition to the market, and is well deserving of an Editors' Pick Award. **B**

SPECIFICATIONS

Delay Pedal

CONTACT bensonamps.com

PRICE \$279 street

CONTROLS Time, mix, feedback, LFO speed, LFO depth. Foot switches for bypass and Tap/Hold

FEATURES Built-in LFO/modulation effect, oscillation Hold foot-switch, center-negative 9V input

SIZE 4.5" x 3.5" x 1.35" (WxDxH)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Great sounding analog delay with surprising versatility in a relatively simple package

CONCERNS Given the wide range of most parameters it takes a delicate touch to fine-tune some control settings





MARTIN

DJR-10E Bass

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

ONE OF THE more intriguing items Martin introduced at NAMM '23 was a little acoustic-electric bass that seemed ideal for guitar players interested in doing a bit of bottom end grooving without the heft or freight of a full-scale bass and requisite amp. The DJR-10E isn't even the size of a full dreadnought — it's a Junior — and the street price is pretty junior as well. That wouldn't mean much if it didn't play or sound good, so I made sure to put my hands and ears on it at the show. The first impression was impressive, so a second look was surely in order.

The DJR-10E is available in natural spruce or sunburst, and the 'burst looked a bit more beautiful to these eyes, so that was the review unit requested. It's dusky, handsome and sports a flashy mother-of-pearl pattern rosette on a solid spruce top, with matching 28-style dot inlays on the Richlite fretboard. Big Gotoh chrome tuners on the headstock and bold white bridge pins on the far side of a Tusq saddle bring a bit of bling at either end of the strings.

A short scale length and a fine factory setup on its high-performance tapered neck make the D Junior a joy to play. Having the modern standard for a dreadnought nut width of 1 3/4 inches delivers comfortable bass string spacing while feeling wonderfully familiar to acoustic guitarists. Even players with smaller hands who are accustomed to electric instruments will find this acoustic bass guitar very manageable under the fingers. In fact, you have to put on the governor and not go too "guitar player" on this compact bass.

SPECIFICATIONS

DJR-10E Bass

CONTACT martinguitar.com

PRICE \$749 street

NUT WIDTH 1 3/4", white corian

NECK Select hardwood, Dreadnought Junior shape with high performance taper

FRETBOARD Richlite, 24" scale, 28-style mother-of-pearl pattern dot inlays

FRETS 20

TUNERS Gotoh chrome bass

BODY Solid sapele back and sides, solid spruce top, satin finish

BRIDGE Richlite with compensated white Tusq saddle and plastic bridge pins

ELECTRONICS Fishman Presys VT Bass with soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls

FACTORY STRINGS Martin M4750 Junior Bass Short Scale Phosphor Bronze Custom Light gauges .045–.096

WEIGHT 3 lbs (as tested)

BUILT Mexico

KUDOS Comfortable, portable and super playable, the attractive DJR-10E looks and sounds great for its compact size and comes at a pretty nice price

CONCERNS Fourth string sounds slightly less brilliant

The scale is a mere 24 inches, but Martin's custom Junior Bass strings delivered plenty of snap, and I didn't get that spongy feeling you get with some smaller-scale instruments. However, the fourth string sounded a bit thuddier and muted compared to the other three, although it's not something I or others caught right away. It seems the scale length is barely enough for the low E. Trying a Drop D tuning made that clear, because it just thudded out. Playing with a pick or fingers with a bit of nail growth worked well in a variety of styles. Slapping away on that fourth string isn't exactly percussive, nor what one would be inclined to do on a little acoustic bass. I was fine though, because having the lowest string a bit less brilliant compared to the others can actually be kind of warm and welcoming as you ride along, hitting most of the notes down there and bouncing up and back as one tends to do when playing bass.



White bridge pins on the far side of the Tusq saddle add some bling at either end of the strings.

THE 1 3/4-INCH NUT WIDTH WILL FEEL FAMILIAR TO ACOUSTIC GUITARISTS

Sonically, the DJR has a nice, warm acoustic tone, with enough bite in the middle-to-higher range to provide adequate articulation. The back and sides are made of solid sapele, which is in the same family as mahogany. Of course it's not as loud or robust as a full-sized acoustic bass, but it certainly delivers an impressive punch for its diminutive body, which sounds not at all boxy. I brought it to Yosemite, where some friends and I took turns playing guitar and bass, and it held its own pretty well against guitars that were actually larger. I kind of dug playing guitar while a buddy played this bass, because it



didn't overwhelm the guitar and vocals as some acoustic basses do.

When you want more juice, it's nice to be able to plug in and play. The onboard Fishman Presys VT Bass electronics do a fine job of bringing more bump, especially through a PA

and even when simply running it through the little Fender Acoustic Junior GO guitar amp that I keep handy. I happened to be working on some new recordings at the time of this review, and the DJR-10E was the perfect thing to grab when I wanted to work on bass parts.

I thought the Martin DJR-10E might be ideal for a bit of bottom-end grooving without the weight of a full-scale bass or amp, and it turned out to be exactly that. I did spend a dozen years as a staff writer for *Bass Player*, so I've got more low-end experience than many guitar players, but even so, I felt it was a good idea to share the DJR-10E with a couple of bass pros. They agreed that it was indeed a badass little bugger. Comparisons to the popular Kala Uke Bass came up a few times, all in a favorable fashion. If you've got an itch to have a junior acoustic bass around, to put a little low-end love in your life, give the Martin DJR-10E a try. I'll bet you'll dig it too. **B**



SOLDANO

Astro-20

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

THE AMP WORLD issued a collective groan of mourning when Mike Soldano appeared to hang up his soldering iron in 2019. But the uptake of Soldano soon thereafter by Boutique Amps Distribution (BAD) — the California-based manufacturer of Friedman, Tone King, Morgan and Synergy amplifiers — promised a robust continuation of the legacy, bolstered by further design input from the high-gain master himself. Having ramped up the line with the return of the legendary SLO-100 and lower-powered SLO-30 and Mini, Soldano now presents the Astro-20, an entirely new model built from three years of his own design work. If the name tips it off as a successor to the popular club-sized flamethrower of the past, the Astroverb 16, it's worth stating upfront that this is also an entirely new beastie, packing traditional Soldano lead voicing into a 20-watt head primed to fit today's diverse performance and recording needs.

On its face, the Astro-20 is a traditional three-channel, all-tube head (also available as a combo) delivering 20 watts from a pair of 6V6GT output tubes, with four 12AX7s in the preamp and phase-inverter stages. Scaffolded around that, however, are several

features designed to help it meld seamlessly with the hybrid rigs that power so many players' stage and studio needs in 2024. An internal cab load means it can be used without a speaker attached, tapping one of six internally stored impulse responses (IRs) to send hi-res speaker-cab tone to the XLR DI or stereo headphone jack. The seven-pin DIN input can receive MIDI switching in place of the included four-button foot switch, loading up to 128 channels as well as Galaxy and cab presets (more on this below). There's even a good old-fashioned effects loop! In a first for this maker, the Astro-20 includes a free download of the Soldano Editor software, an easy-to-use interface by Synergy that allows uploading of third-party IRs and full MIDI preset and functionality programming.

As for the traditional tube-amp parameters, Soldano has parsed the Astro-20 as a three-channel amp with an independent clean channel plus two overdrive channels with independent gain and volume controls and shared three-band EQ. Following the single input, the control set includes volume, tone, gain 1, gain 2, bass, middle, treble, vol 1, vol 2, master and presence. Channel 1 includes a three-position bright switch, and there are global switches for channel/store, Galaxy, depth and cabinet (IR).

Each of these little toggles expands the Astro-20's versatility exponentially, but the Galaxy feature requires further explanation. It offers Blue, Purple and Red Galaxy gain voicings on the overdrive channel selected — mainly distinguished by ascending levels of saturation — and a Green Galaxy voicing on the clean channel. If it all sounds like a potential mess of channel/IR/preset confusion in the making, the nifty Galaxy logo at the right end of the panel lights up in the proper color to show the Galaxy selected, and the six little planets illuminate to indicate the cabinet IR preset in use.

The quality of construction is indicative of what we've come to know from Soldano

and the other BAD brands. Custom USA-made transformers join a sturdy printed circuit board, chassis-reinforced output tube sockets and other robust touches in an amp that should prove roadworthy for years

I SUSPECT MANY USERS WILL LIVE IN ONE OF THE TWO OVERDRIVE CHANNELS, WHICH IS WHERE I HAD THE MOST FUN

to come. It's all given a none-more-black styling that declares its rock intentions, although I'd perhaps like to see numbers around the control knobs, or at least some sort of gradation.

I tested the Astro-20 with a Les Paul and a Telecaster via all the routes this flexible head enables, using the headphones, DI'd to a recording interface into Pro Tools and into an FRFR cab for "in the room" IR-based tones,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOLDANO AND BAD



and into a traditional 2x12 cab with Celestion G12M Creambacks and a 1x12 with Eminence DV-77. No matter how you connect the back end, this little thing rocks! And no surprise there, given the Soldano pedigree.

It might be tricky to fully extrapolate the legendary SLO lead sound to a different amp with smaller 6V6 output tubes, but the Astro-20 does a great job of delivering three variations on that juicy, saturated sizzle. There's gain, sustain and bite aplenty for just about any breed of lead playing, along with impressively pummeling crunch tones for power-chord rhythm work and tight low-string riffing. The three Galaxies go from raw-edged rock and roll in Blue, to a more aggressive grind with guttural midrange bark in Purple, to serious shred-worthy sizzle in Red, and each can be further dialed in to taste with the respective gain control. The clean channel, with the Green Galaxy, is very clean, but that's what most players are seeking from

channel one in any multi-channel head, and it does take overdrive pedals very well if you want to juice it up. I suspect many users will live in one of the two overdrive channels, though, which is certainly where I had the most fun.

Although it's a three-channel amp, the programmable four-button foot switch makes four entirely different tones available by assigning, for example, different Galaxy settings to either of the overdrive channels. The result renders quite a bit of variation even before you consider hooking up full MIDI implementation for a whopping 128 presets, which is where the easy-to-use Soldano Editor software comes in. Once it was installed on my Mac, I was loading my own IRs and linking those, plus channel and Galaxy selections, to my presets in no time.

Having first tested the Astro-20 via headphones to explore the IR options, I was floored by how much volume this modest

20-watter put out when connected to a live guitar cab. The individual overdrive channel volumes and global master still enable hot lead tones at relatively low decibel levels, but when you need it, this head has more than enough firepower to keep up with a heavy-fisted drummer.

As with his X99 preamp, Mike Soldano has embraced technology with the Astro-20's MIDI-switching capabilities and IR loading features, and I think any fully featured tube amp maximizes its chances of surviving the digital age by doing likewise. In addition to the IRs' utility for recording and silent-stage/in-ear-monitor performances, one of the great bonuses is that you can carry a lightweight 1x12 for onstage monitoring while ramming a stout 4x12 tone through the front-of-house PA thanks to the onboard IRs. Win-win! For all of these capabilities, as well as its solid foundation as a scorching old-school high-gain amp suited to modern playing situations, the Astro-20 earns an Editors' Pick Award. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Astro-20

CONTACT soldano.com

PRICE head, \$1,999; 1 x12 combo, \$2,299

CHANNELS 3

CONTROLS Volume, tone, gain 1, gain 2, bass, middle, treble, vol 1, vol 2, master, presence; Ch 1 bright switch, global switches for channel/store, Galaxy, depth, cabinet (IR)

POWER 20 watts

TUBES Four 12AX7 preamp tubes, two 6V6 output tubes

EXTRAS Four-button foot switch/MIDI input, USB port, stereo headphones jack and level control, effects loop send and return, five speaker outs for 4Ω to 16Ω

WEIGHT 26 lbs

DIMENSIONS 19" x 9.5" x 8" (WxDxH)

BUILT USA

KUDOS A great-sounding, lower-powered high-gain tube amp made extra versatile with onboard IRs for a wide range of live and studio demands

CONCERNS The clean channel is a little sterile, and some form of gradations on the controls might be nice

The free Soldano Editor software allows uploading of third-party IRs and full MIDI preset and functionality programming.



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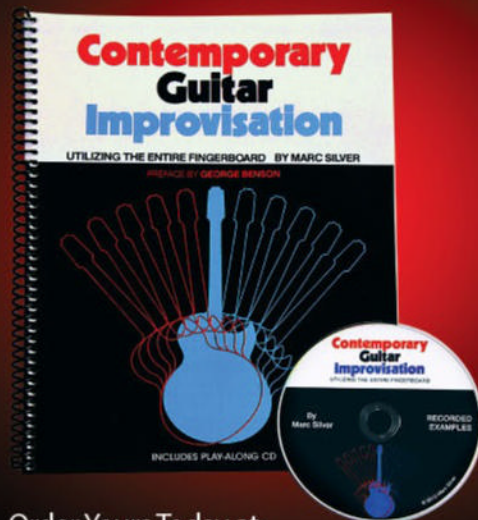
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How I Wrote...

“Owner of a Lonely Heart”

“That empty feeling.”
Trevor Rabin reveals the origins of the 1983 song that put Yes on top of the charts.

BY GARY GRAFF



Trevor Rabin performs with Yes in Dortmund, Germany in 1984.

WHAT DOES THE song “Owner of a Lonely Heart” mean to Trevor Rabin 40 years after Yes recorded it for their 1983 reunion album, *90125*? “Age,” the South African-born guitarist and composer says with a laugh. “Forty years. Oh my God! I can’t believe it.”

Yet the song still ranks as the biggest hit Yes ever had. Following a brief breakup in 1981, the band had reunited as Cinema, with Rabin, bassist Chris Squire, drummer Alan White and Yes’s founding keyboardist Tony Kaye. Once frontman Jon Anderson joined, everyone agreed it was both proper and commercially advantageous to take the Yes name. Ironically, when choosing a producer, the group turned to Trevor Horn, who had replaced Anderson in 1980 and pursued a production career after Yes broke up.

ONE IN THE CAN

As it happens, “Owner of a Lonely Heart” was written well before the lineup existed. Rabin had composed it years earlier while living in England. The song started life where many great ideas come from. “I was on the toilet with my acoustic guitar,” he recalls, “and I just started playing the riff. At first I thought, Wow, that’s either something or it’s just a bunch of irrelevant notes. The next day the riff came back. So I thought, That’s gotta be something good, ‘cause it didn’t just disappear.”

For Rabin, the song’s sentiment came “from the feeling I’d had when girlfriends dumped me, and I was just driving around with that empty feeling. And it sounds better than ‘broken heart.’ It’s simple as that, really.”

Rabin included the tune on a demo tape he circulated while looking for a record deal in the U.S., where he’d moved in 1978, but it failed to make a positive impression on those who heard it, including famed record exec Clive Davis, who was then at Arista. “He said, ‘We feel your voice has Top 40 appeal, but this song is very weird and left field,’” Rabin recalls. “And that was the end of it with him.”

IT TOOK A WHILE

Despite being written and demoed years earlier, “Owner of a Lonely Heart” was a late addition to *90125*. “I think there was a consensus it was gonna be on the album at some point,” Rabin says. “It just took a while.”

Prior to recording the song, Anderson

changed the verse lyrics to reflect his belief in self-empowerment. “It got to be this philosophical diatribe,” Rabin says. “‘Owner of a Lonely Heart’ is a pretty simple sentiment, but I think Jon’s lyrics worked with it because

they ended up meaning something deep.”

For the recording, Rabin recalls, “We did the bass and drums and guitar first. I said, ‘I want to start with this massive reverb

version of the riff, and then go completely dry.’ They thought I was nuts, but I said, ‘That’s what’s gonna kick it off.’ You expect this large thing to carry on, but then it kicks into this dry, almost club funk. It was very dynamic.”

“When it came to the solo, I said, ‘I want to do something a little weird. I’m gonna add notes a fifth above to harmonize with what I’m playing.’ Trevor cranked it so loud in the control room, I almost couldn’t play. The minute I finished, I said, ‘Let’s do a couple more.’ But Trevor said, ‘No, no, we’ve got it.’”

“LONELY” AT THE TOP

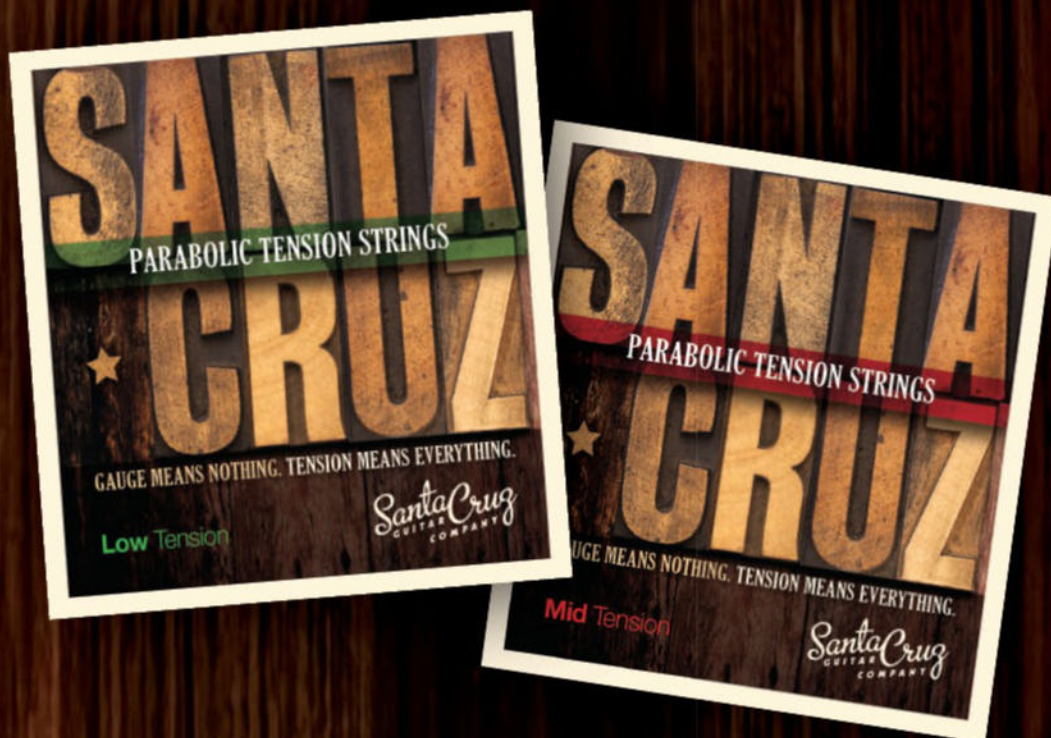
Released on October 24, 1983, two weeks before *90125*, “Owner of a Lonely Heart” became Yes’s first and only number one hit on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and also topped the Hot Mainstream Rock Tracks chart. It placed number eight on *Billboard*’s 1984 year-end chart, a testament to its impact at the time.

Rabin says he first heard the song on the radio while tanning at home in Los Angeles. “It didn’t sound too good,” he says. “I thought, ‘Ooh, I think we might be in trouble.’ But then I began hearing it all the time on the radio in the car, and I started to think it could be a hit.”

He learned it had reached number one while vacationing in Miami. As he celebrated with a glass of champagne by the hotel pool, a woman whisking down a water slide slammed into him and ruptured his spleen. The accident required emergency surgery and postponed Yes’s support tour, but once he’d recovered, Rabin sent a souvenir to Clive Davis: a photograph of the *Billboard* chart showing “Owner” at number one. ■

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