

75 YEARS OF THE *Fender* TELECASTER

VOL. 47 NO. 8
AUGUST 2026

GUITAR WORLD

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The first commercially successful solidbody electric guitar is 75 but doesn't look a day over 18. *Guitar World* explores the life and times of a guitar that'll never go out of style, the model that inventor Leo Fender nailed right out of the gate



A full-page photograph of Ed Sheeran, a man with short, light brown hair and a slight beard, wearing a white t-shirt and black pants. He is holding a PRS Hollowbody I Piezo Baritone guitar, which has a vibrant orange-to-purple gradient finish and two f-hole cutouts. The guitar has a dark fretboard with bird-shaped inlays and a black headstock with the PRS logo. He is standing against a solid teal background. In the top right corner, there is a red rectangular logo with the letters 'SE' in white. On the right side, there is vertical text that reads 'Photography by Stephanie Lemus'. At the bottom right, there is a quote from Ed Sheeran and the PRS logo with 'PAUL REED SMITH' and 'GUITARS' written next to it.

SE

FOR SONGWRITERS AND SHREDDERS

Photography by Stephanie Lemus

ED SHEERAN

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— Ed Sheeran

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The Doobie Brothers are still *What's Happening!!*



I LOVE ASSIGNING *Guitar World* stories about TV shows and movies that meant a lot to me when I was younger — if there's a natural "guitar" angle, of course. For instance, one of my favorite movies of all time is 1986's *Back to School*, and, during "the Damian era," we've interviewed Bruce Kulick and Oingo Boingo's Steve Bartek about their respective musical roles in that, um, legendary film. Point is, there was no way we weren't gonna ask Patrick Simmons about the Doobie Brothers' classic appearances on *What's Happening!!* For some reason, that famous *gasp!* moment — when the hidden tape recorder falls out of Rerun's coat — weirdly defines a generation, and it's so cool that Simmons was happy to talk about it. It's also cool that Michael McDonald —

who was in the band when they guest-starred on *What's Happening!!* — is a Doobie once again, so this is a perfect time to see those guys.

IF YOU STAY AWAKE AT NIGHT wondering when a Fender Telecaster first appeared on the cover of *GW*, it was the March 1981 issue. There were actually *two* firsts with that issue, because Chrissie Hynde was holding said Tele, thus becoming the first woman to appear on our cover. Now get some sleep!

SPECIAL THANKS to the gang at Some Neck Guitars in Dublin (Ireland, not Texas) for the Ampeg Reverberocket pics on page 110.

CORRECTION: In the June 2026 issue, we stated that Randy Bachman played the solo on the Guess Who's "Share the Land," "Hand Me Down World" and "Hang On to Your Life." We're not sure why we said that because Bachman wasn't even in the band when those songs were recorded. Kurt Winter and Greg Leskiw — both of whom replaced Bachman in 1970 — played the guitars. Winter even wrote "Hand Me Down World" and co-wrote "Hang On to Your Life" with Burton Cummings. *Guitar World* regrets these errors.

DAMIAN FANELLI

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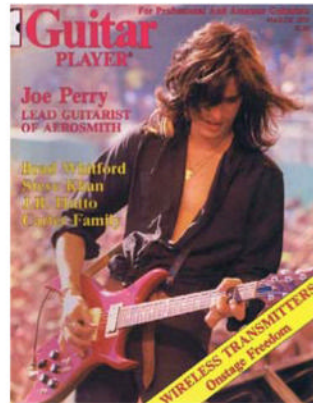
Keef is still a rich source of new info

WHAT A GREAT interview with Keith Richards in the May 2026 issue! I mean, the dude's been interviewed like a billion times and he still has new and fascinating things to say. Thanks, *Guitar World*, for throwing sharp questions at him too.

MARC RICE

Does Brian Jones keep getting the shaft?

I LOVE THE Stones and Keith Richards and have gone to more than 30 years' worth of their concerts, all thanks to my mom's old vinyls. I appreciate your interview, but I just do not get the fixation he has on calling the band (pianist) "Ian Stewart's group" that Brian Jones merely joined up with. Brian was the clear founder of the band; just ask Bill Wyman, who always sticks up for him, or read Paul Trynka's 2014 book, *Brian Jones: The Making of the Rolling Stones*. Brian had a visionary concept of a white blues band, booked their early gigs, got their name from a Muddy Waters song and had years of experience playing in bands that relative "living room pikers" Mick and Keith did not have when they answered his ad. It was only manager Andrew Oldham's pushing him out of the songwriting nexus – and endless police harassment – that turned Brian into the wreck that



drowned in his pool, and into a footnote over the decades by the others. Keith probably still feels some residual guilt taking Anita Pallenberg from him and leaving him to the wolves when they fired him, but it's getting pretty late in the day not to give credit to the man where credit is due.

STEPHEN CONN

Hey, that guitar mag cover looks familiar!

IT'S PRETTY HARD to top the original *Guitar Player* magazine photo taken 47 years ago [March 1979] with Joe Perry playing his red B.C. Rich Bich. I believe you have – with last month's *GW* cover [April 2026]. Great stuff.

RICHARD BENSON

Feeling convivial about Corey Congilio

I'M REALLY ENJOYING the columns by Corey Congilio. As an



"intermediate-beginner," I find the way he breaks things down are simple, clear and – above all – useful. It's not that I don't like Joe Bonamassa and Jared James Nichols, but they can be a little too advanced for us beginners. Good choice to bring Corey's lessons onboard!

PAUL HINCHMAN, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

I'm grateful – but put Bob Weir on the cover!

NICE TRIBUTE TO Bob Weir [April 2026] but shame on *GW* for not giving him the cover. Joe Perry? He was so wasted in last year's Joe Perry Project tour that you felt bad for the rest of the band. I've lost a little respect for you not giving the most inventive rhythm guitarist in rock history his rightful place on your cover.

RAY HOGAN

A request for standard notation in *GW*

I WAS A previous subscriber to *Guitar Player* for many years, and I opted to switch to *GW* to finish out the subscription. I enjoy the features, gear reviews and ads in your magazine and recently re-upped my subscription for another year. The columns and transcriptions, however, are not so engaging for me. I'm a 67-year-old working guitarist. My main gig is Broadway musicals. In San Diego, where I live, I've played in the pit for several shows that had premier

runs here before going on to Broadway. Also I'm hired by touring shows that use local guitarists – *Suffs*, *Back to the Future* and *MJ the Musical* among others. When I'm not doing a musical show, I like to play jazz in various groups.

I realize that, for 90 percent of your readership, tablature is the most accessible form to get your columns and transcriptions across. I would be thrilled to see a transcription of a Micheal Brecker or Sonny Rollins solo transcribed in standard notation. Or maybe a column by a jazz guy with examples in standard notation? That would get my copy of *GW* out of the magazine rack and up on the music stand!

VINCE COOPER

Give us some Grand Funk Railroad!

I'D LOVE TO see a full feature on Grand Funk Railroad, an influential band in my younger years and still, to this day. On June 5, 1971, they sold out their July 9 concert in just 72 hours, breaking the previous ticket-selling record set by the Beatles. I feel that Mark Farner, Don Brewer and Mel Schacher are worthy of an article, despite the contentious breakup.

RICHARD ADAMS, SHOREACRES, TEXAS

The spookiest of keys?

ASK [GW TRANSCRIBER]

Jeff Perrin if he was playing his Jimi/Stevie Strat when he transcribed Atlanta Rhythm Section's "Spooky" [April 2026]. All recorded versions by ARS I have access to are in the key of E, minor, not Em!

FRED MANTEGHIAN, CONNECTICUT

[Hi, Fred: The guitar and bass parts in the 1979 studio recording of "Spooky" by Atlanta Rhythm Section, from *Underdog*, which is the version we transcribed, are played in standard tuning.

The song begins in E minor then modulates up to F minor.

— Jimmy Brown]



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READER ART OF THE MONTH

If you've created a drawing, painting or sketch of your favorite guitarist and would like to see it in an upcoming issue of Guitar World, email GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com with a .jpg or screenshot of the image. And (obviously...), please remember to include your name!



Keith Richards

BY ALEXANDREA POVIS



Rivers Cuomo

BY AVERY CASWELL

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH



Brandon Werner

AGE: 29

LOCATION: Salmo, British Columbia, Canada

GITARS: Fender Joe Strummer Campfire acoustic, first-edition Peavey EVH Wolfgang Special

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Chevelle "The Red," the Rolling Stones "Paint It Black" and my own riffs

GEAR I WANT MOST: Mesa Boogie Dual Rectifier head & Positive Grid Spark Cab



John Morales

AGE: 33

GITARS: Fender "Squier series" Stratocaster, MIM Fender Telecaster, Eighties MIJ Contemporary Stratocaster

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: R.E.M. "Sitting Still," Kate Bush "Wuthering Heights," Sparks "Amateur Hour"

GEAR I WANT MOST: MIJ Fender Contemporary Series Telecaster



Gene Olivarri

AGE: 44

LOCATION: San Antonio, TX

GITARS: Schecter Omen Elite 7-String, Dean Zelinsky Strettavita

SONGS I'VE BEEN PLAYING: Dirigiri "Creature of Sin," Gojira "Stranded," Angelmaker "Silken Hands," Slaughter to Prevail "Viking," Unprocessed "Thrash"

GEAR I WANT MOST: Schecter C-7 Apocalypse

Send a photo, along with your answers to the questions above, to GWSoundingBoard@futurenet.com. And pray!



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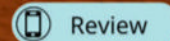
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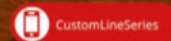
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Is Baxty the Future?

The 26-year-old YouTuber is tipped as the next evolutionary leap for alternate picking. But can his Satch-bolstered debut album turn "likes" into real-world domination?

BY AMIT SHARMA

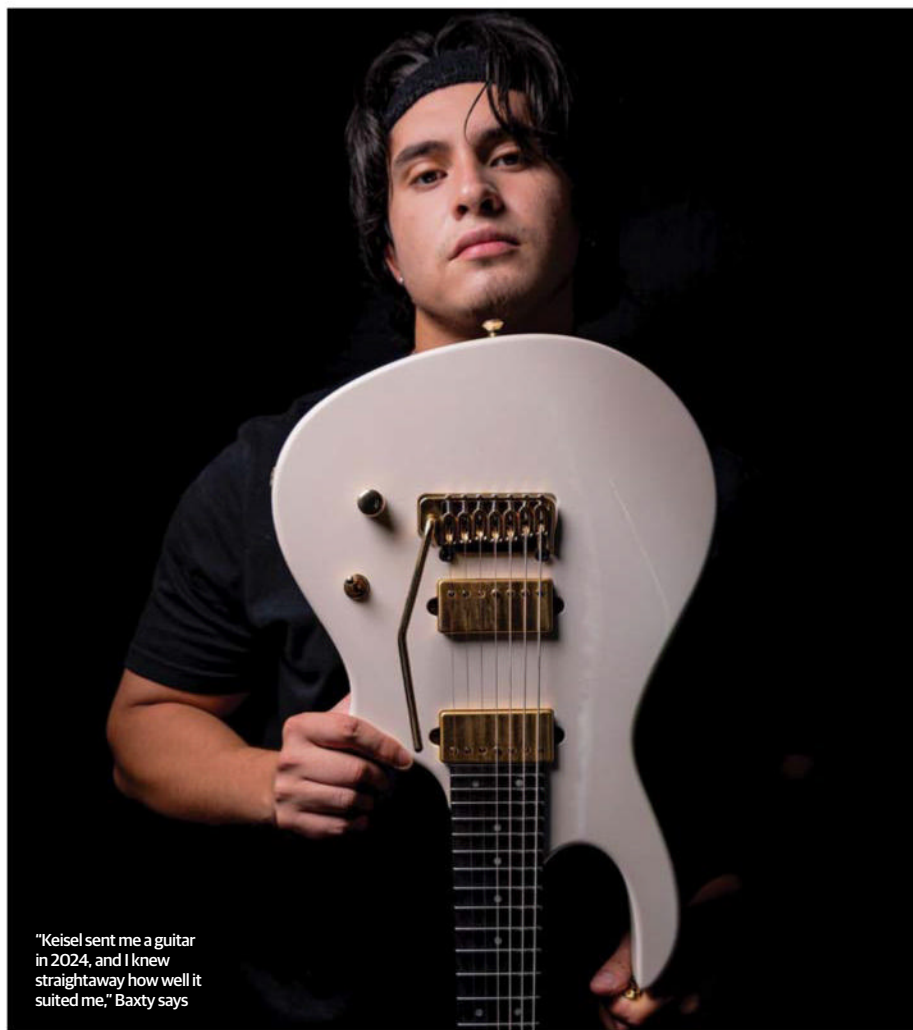
▶ **IN ANY DISCUSSION** concerning the greatest alternate pickers to walk the earth, names like John Petrucci, Paul Gilbert, Al Di Meola, Jason Becker, Chris Impellitteri and Shawn Lane will never be far from people's lips. These are the players that set the bar impossibly high with their near-perfect storm of precision, dexterity and control — at times often sounding like they've beamed in from a different planet altogether.

If there's one name out of the younger generation that could undoubtedly sit among the ultimate pickers and super shredders, however, it's 26-year-old Chilean guitarist Bastian Martinez, better known to the online community as Baxty. Having already inked up deals with Neural DSP, Jim Dunlop and Ernie Ball, this year he announced his debut signature model through Kiesel, and he's now adding the final touches to a debut album featuring high-profile guests such as Joe Satriani. It only takes a quick scroll online to see the likes of Tosin Abasi, Misha Mansoor and Rick Graham praising Baxty's incredible musicianship and flawless delivery, and — having been invited to teach at John Petrucci's Guitar Universe camp last year — it would be fair to say the Santiago-based prodigy now has a lot of friends in high places.

It was perhaps inevitable that Baxty, whose father and grandfather played guitar, would one day pick up the instrument. By age six, he'd grown accustomed to hearing the music of Ozzy Osbourne, Symphony X and Yngwie Malmsteen around the house. The greatest ▶



"I'm still trying to find my own voice, but if someone thinks I sound like John Petrucci, I'm fine with that," Baxty says



"Kiesel sent me a guitar in 2024, and I knew straightaway how well it suited me," Baxty says

education came in the form of a *G3: Live in Tokyo* DVD that he'd watch religiously, basking in the magnificence of Satriani, Petrucci and Steve Vai — three musical magicians who each had their own otherworldly quality when it came to touch and feel.

"I fell in love with how they made their guitars sound," Baxty says from his home studio. "Steve had all these whammy tricks while Joe had this strong melodic voice. John was even more out there technically, which made me want to work harder."

Besides those guys, who else ended up influencing you?

When I was 15, I saw Guthrie Govan on YouTube. It was inspiring to see how far he had taken the instrument, and it made me want to practice more. Later on, I got into Nick Johnston, who likes to blend piano with guitar on tracks like "Gemini." He doesn't just write guitar music, which is why I find him interesting. I also love how Fredrik Åkesson from Opeth plays; there's so much feeling and intensity in his lines, especially in the note choices and bends.

A guitarist of your caliber could pick any company in the world for an endorsement deal. What made you choose Kiesel?

They sent me a guitar in 2024, and I knew straightaway how well it suited me in terms of comfort and sound. I visited the factory in 2025 and Jeff Kiesel handed me a guitar. I think they were like, "Let's see if this internet guy can play!" I'm not faking anything because my dad always told me to be myself. Give me any guitar and I'll be happy. It's like a disconnect from the world. Playing guitar makes me feel alive.

It must be wild to see players like Misha Mansoor and Tosin Abasi saying how brilliant you are.

The first mind-blowing moment was when

"It's great if you can alternate pick crazy lines, but if you can't bend, you're a bad player"

Joe Satriani commented on a post in 2022. I also couldn't believe it when Tosin sent me a guitar and started sharing clips of me. Then John Petrucci inviting me to Guitar Universe was insane. He and his wife Rena had seen my masterclasses online and thought I'd be a great fit. I thought it was someone impersonating John; I didn't fully believe it until I saw my photo on the Guitar Universe website. At the camp, I met Chris Broderick, who is guesting on my album. All these guitar legends are paying attention to what I'm doing. I don't know why! It feels weird, but I'm happy about it.

Joe Satriani will also be appearing on your album. What can we expect?

I'd written one track that represented a dream, which felt like a good place for Joe — because of his 1989 album [*Flying in a Blue Dream*] and the fact that it's a dream come true. What's interesting is that it's almost what Dream Theater would sound like with Joe on guitar. This album will be like a natural connection between ambient stuff and heavier ideas. I love songs with a melodic climax. Sometimes simplicity can blow your mind more than the technicality. It's great if you can alternate pick crazy lines, but if you can't bend, you're a bad player.

You're playing in real time on your videos, but you still get accusations of faking it.

People say things like, "This is sped up," but I'm kinda grateful because it means they find it impressive. One guy commented on every post saying I was a Petrucci copy that didn't have my own sound. I'm still trying to find my own voice, but if someone thinks I sound like John Petrucci, I'm fine with that.

What's the secret to alternate picking so fast?

I've seen some *Cracking the Code* YouTube videos [hosted by Troy Grady] and felt stupid after watching them. I didn't understand. I'm not reading a biology book. What I will say is that alternate picking is a 3D movement from the wrist rather than straight up and down. If you want to go fast, you need to test your body. New things will feel uncomfortable, but keep pushing. See where the tension is, slow down, then eventually build back up. It takes time.

What exercises would help people build up speed and precision?

Try playing a line that goes up the 16th, 19th and 22nd frets of the G-string followed by the 15th fret of the high E and back. Once you have that going, occasionally add in the 19th and 22nd on the E. It's good because you are mixing stretches with fast alternate picking and string-skipping. **GW**

Deth Jam

Boasting 36 star players — including a fistful of his fellow Megadeth alumni — Chris Poland's debut fusion album as Nuclear Messiah has the songs to match the payroll

BY ANDREW DALY

▶ **CHRIS POLAND IS** best known as the original guitarist for Megadeth, appearing on the group's first two records, 1985's *Killing Is My Business... and Business Is Good!* and 1986's *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?* He's the archetype for that group's style, if you will. Beyond that, Poland's oddball style — which stems from a nasty hand injury he suffered before he turned pro — is a pillar of Eighties thrash. But that's not all there is to Poland's playing.

"I came from a rock background — guys like Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Leslie West," Poland says. "When I heard Jeff Beck's *Blow by Blow*, I went down the rabbit hole of bands like Weather Report, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return to Forever, Tony Williams with Allan Holdsworth and bands like that. My Ohm project and any other of my solo instrumental records are just me being influenced by this music."

That said, going into *Black Flame*, Poland's new album with Nuclear Messiah — which, by the way, features fellow former Megadeth men Marty Friedman, Glen Drover and Chris Adler — his rock and metal roots collided with his fusion sensibilities, creating an amalgam of six-stringery only Poland could conjure.

"Am I a fusion player? I don't know," Poland says. "But it was the Mahavishnu Orchestra's 'The Dance of Maya' on *Guitars That Destroyed the World* [a 1973 compilation album featuring the fretwork of John McLaughlin, Carlos Santana, Leslie West and more] that really turned my head. When I first heard it, I hated it but couldn't stop revisiting it. Until one day I got it." Poland has been down this path before, like on 1990's *Return to Metalopolis*. And, by the sound of *Black Flame*, Poland has still got it. It's with that in mind that the 68-year-old virtuoso beamed in with *GW* to dig into the record.

How did Nuclear Messiah get off the ground?

It was the brainchild of Brian Perera, president of Cleopatra Records. I had worked with Brian on several projects before this and knew that if he was involved, it was going to happen. When he explained who was involved, I was



"Am I a fusion player? I don't know," says former Megadeth guitarist Chris Poland



blown away. I was amazed by who he got to contribute to the album. That's why it came out so great.

Nuclear Messiah seems to have been built around you, with others coming on board to pitch in. What was the process like?

Original song ideas started with Derek Hughes and Jürgen Engler. They'd send song ideas to me and I'd add parts to those, then other players would add their parts. That's the beauty of the internet and ProTools. Then Derek and Jürgen would mix everyone's parts, and what you hear is the end result. Derek and Jürgen did such an amazing job mixing. It's

hard enough to mix one band. But on *Black Flame*, each song was different – with a different vibe and different artists. They need to be commended.

What was your rig like for this recording?

I used my Custom Audio Electronics rig that I've had for decades. I used an Egnater IE4 red face preamp with a modded Peavey 120/120 tube power amp with 5881 tubes in it, plus assorted pedals and rack effects. Bob Bradshaw's system is my palette.

Fellow Megadeth alumni Marty Friedman, Glen and Shawn Drover, and Chris Adler appear on this record.

Yeah! Wow... between Marty, Chris and Glen and Shawn, that's a lot of Mega talent. [Laughs] Each of them is legendary in their own right. Each of them brought their vibe to the record. It was my honor to be on this record with them and everyone else.

Pat Travers and Vinnie Moore also appear, adding more six-string firepower.

Oh, my God! Pat Travers! "Snortin' Whiskey"? Holy shit, man... I loved that song and record. Pat's phrasing and tone is peerless. And Vinnie Moore is the same. He has a lot of blues in his playing, but at the drop of a hat he can sweep and pick some impossible phrases. Both have perfect bend pitch as well. All the other guitarists brought their own sound and feel. And then there's Bumblefoot [Ron Thal], Joel Hoekstra, Lance Lopez and Mick Box; they're all world-class players. Add Jürgen Engler to this list as well!

"Electric Burn" is a song from *Black Flame* that's cited as

"I learned a lot making this record, such as when to let your instincts take over"

a highlight. What's the story there?

"Electric Burn" is such a great track. I feel it has a lot to do with Chris Adler's drumming. It's relentless and at breakneck speed. Add Marty's incredible soloing, especially the end of main solo ascending harmony section, and Marc Lopes'

intense vocal performance and you have a song that never gets old. But my favorite moment is Arthur Brown's performance on "Ride the Sky." It gets me every time I hear it. But all the other songs are just as good. But that vocal – I just love it.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention William Shatner's spoken-word introduction...

William Shatner is a force of nature. He's an amazing actor, but when I heard his spoken word back at the studio – which is the first of two takes, by the way – I realized he was speaking in perfect 3/4 time. I really don't think he planned it. It just came out that way. That's how good an orator he is. That is how I wrote the music around his spoken word. By the way, Brian Perera wrote the words that Mr. Shatner spoke. I want to mention how welcoming he was when we went to his home. He's such a great person with a great sense of humor. It's something I'll never forget.

What excited you about this project most?

I learned a lot making this record, including how to realize what works and what doesn't work on the spot and when to let your best instincts take over. That said, I admit I asked to revisit a couple of solos I did after I turned them in. That was a luxury not often given. As far as my playing and writing goes, I hope it's always evolving. I guess time will tell. **GW**

COVER MODELS

GUITARIST
BRAD GILLIS

GUITAR
CUSTOM 1985
HAMER S-STYLE

GW COVER DATE
FEBRUARY 1989

THIS INTERVIEW
MARCH 2026

PHOTOGRAPHER
GLEN LA FERMAN

BY ANDREW DALY

Q Where did you get this guitar?

Oh, yes, my 1985 Hamer Strat that appeared on the *Guitar World* cover!

Night Ranger

had hooked up with Paul Hamer, and he wanted to build us a few different guitars. I started playing this guitar live, but I'd always revert back to "Bubba," my main 1962 Fender Strat.

Q Did you modify the Hamer at all?

In some ways, it was similar to Bubba. In 1983, after I left Ozzy Osbourne, I rejoined Night Ranger, and in the mid-Eighties, I started using PJ Marx pickups. At one point in the mid-Eighties, my brother built me a wireless switching unit that we mounted inside my guitars. At that time, it switched delay, chorus and lead/rhythm on my Mesa Boogie Mark IIC [Simulclass]. That gave me the freedom to walk anywhere on stage and switch components. Ronnie Montrose caught wind of my brother's wireless system, which I also had in Bubba, and he built Ronnie one for his guitar strap.

Q Did you use this guitar on any recordings or tours?

Well, Paul Hamer also built me a Hamer Scepter, which appeared on the cover of my solo record, *Gilrock Ranch* [1993]. I used the Hamer live a bit, but I played Bubba on all of the Night Ranger records and live around the world. We were playing more than 200 shows a year.

Q Why did you choose this guitar for your *Guitar World* cover shoot?

I was just stroking Hamer, to be honest! [Laughs]

Q Do you still have this guitar?

No, I sold it years back. **GW**

Ancient GW typo alert! On page 4 of the February 1989 issue, Gillis' guitar (above) is misidentified as his 1962 Fender Strat, aka Bubba. BTW, Jeff Watson is holding the prototype of his custom signature Hamer Watson. Watson and his namesake guitar would start appearing in full-page Hamer ads by the early Nineties.





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



From Dusk Till Dawn

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

BY JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

▶ IT'S A DREARY April afternoon, and we're getting ready to talk to slacker indie hero Kurt Vile about his new record, *Philadelphia's Been Good to Me*. The lead single, "Chance to Bleed," begs to be blared from a car stereo at dusk on a humid August night. Here in Michigan, a few 70-degree days in March had us hopeful we could place ourselves in Vile's snapshot of Philly summers by taking the call from our back porch. But with grey skies and temperatures back in the mid-40s, we opt for the living room — a space mostly commandeered by this writer's one-year-old daughter. As we clear the books and toys she's scattered across the floor to make room to move around during the call, we're reminded of how often Vile has written about his own daughters.

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

As we pace up and down our living room, we talk gear — we had to ask about the Gretsch Tennessean he picked up from Travis Good of the Sadies — but the conversation keeps circling back to a word Vile uses more than once to describe the record — "homespun." Much of it was written and recorded after dark in his basement studio, when he could lean into what he calls the natural cycle of life — catching up with himself and creating the loose, sprawling music he's known for. That balance between family life and the habits of the past shows up in the lyrics, too.

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

I quit drinking in 2018. Alcohol is a tough one. You think it's casual — which it is, because it's ingrained in us — but before you know it, that's kind of the nastiest one. That concept — "my baby girls, they keep me high. Ain't on no trips, no LSD, pure love drug for me" — it's true. I definitely don't party the way I used to, but I'm not straight edge. I like weed, probably because it makes me hear music like I was in high school. I don't do it all the time, but it's a nice vacation for anyone who plays music.

How do you come up with lyrics?

Sometimes the lyrics come out fast, but obviously it's my trade. "Zoom 97" is one I'm really proud of, because that one is actually

ELEANOR PETRY

the first song we got for this album that I knew was a quality song. I had that Gold Tone mandolin riff on a recorder. The people at Gold Tone down in Florida, they've hooked me up a few times. They gave me this little, tiny guitar. It sounds like a mandolin, but it's just six strings.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What was it like recording with John Prine?

John came into the studio last minute. I know people that work for his label and I had played with him on stage enough times. He heard my version of "Speed of the Sound of Loneliness," and I knew he liked it. Over time, he would remember who I was. When he showed up at the studio, he was so nice. He said, "You know, I'd love to sing with you, Kurt," and

we recorded that song ["How Lucky" from 2020's *Speed, Sound, Lonely KV EP*] in two takes. That's the way they do it over there in Nashville. It was unbelievable.

How did you meet Neil Young?

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

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

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

Are you bringing it out on the road?

Yeah, I've started bringing it on the road. One of my favorite live guitars — I'm not sure if it made the record — is a sunburst 1965

"This might be my last conventional record for a long time, and I'll just get weird for a while..."



Jazzmaster that J Mascis put into my hands when I was working on his record up in Massachusetts. He went to some store and the guy was trying to peddle this Jazzmaster, and J has so many of 'em. He actually showed up at J's studio and put it in my hands, which was the coolest part of all. I have reissue Jazzmasters that are made to seem vintage. I got them from Fender and I love them — but to have an old one is... it really plays. That was another example of a guitar that plays itself.

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

Do you prefer the sound of dead strings?

I do. I have this Gibson J-45 that was my main acoustic at the start of the *Watch My Moves* tour. We had a new guitar tech, and the first thing he did — I wasn't thinking about it — but the first thing he did on the first day was cut all the strings off. It was devastating. [Laughs] Rob Schnapf is all about that too; I sort of learned that about him. New strings take a while to break in, especially when you're playing live. When you've got to change the acoustic strings, you're gonna have a weird show at first. They just sound so different, like bells or something.

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

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

What's on the horizon?

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

Commander In Mischief

Co-written with an ex-president and AI, Paul Gilbert's *WROC* is the renegade shred concept album that "made it impossible for me to go to the same old places..."

BY JOE BOSSO

▶ **"WHAT COULD BE** more of a concept than this?" Paul Gilbert asks rhetorically, speaking about his new solo album, *WROC*. "It's as concept album as it could possibly be, but hopefully, with repeated listenings, the music will take over and the concept will fall like the scaffolding of a beautiful building."

The guitarist certainly has a point: *WROC* (which stands for "Washington's Rules of Civility") is indeed one wild and wacky concept album, an utterly unique and unorthodox set of tunes based around a French etiquette guide from the late 1500s that America's first president copied as a school penmanship exercise.

"It was an English translation called *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*," Gilbert says. "George Washington wrote it all down, and he took the ideas to heart. While everybody around him behaved like ruffians, he was decent and stoic, so people were like, 'Well, we've got to listen to George.' I think that's why the book became attributed to him."

Gilbert had first read the book decades ago, but on a flight home to Portland, Oregon, from Tokyo, where Mr. Big concluded their farewell tour, he poured through it again — and was seized by a crazy idea. "I kept thinking, 'Does a record have to be about something in the first place? And if it does, what should that be?'" he says. "I've never been particularly enamored with that part of songwriting and record making. My favorite part is the melodies and the guitar riffs and what pedal I'm using. But I decided that if the record had to be about something, I ought to try to do it as well as I could."

Drawing on his own experiences as the basis for songs has never been Gilbert's forte. "I'm just not that interesting to myself," he says. "Either that or the things I think about in my daily existence just aren't great food for material." For years, he had been looking for a proper lyricist — "my own Bernie Taupin or Neil Peart" — and he jokes that "George Washington became my collaborator."

"It was so much fun to take this archaic English, and its meaning, and put it to a rock groove"

The rules of a centuries-old etiquette book is an unusual place to draw from, but something about it puts a smile on my face."

Gilbert notes that such an uncommon collaboration yielded another, totally unexpected but convenient benefit: No need to pay royalties to a co-writer. "Public domain!" he laughs. "That worked out nicely."

He admits that he turned to another source — AI — for lyric-writing assistance, which delivered mixed results. On the one hand, the technology rendered elaborate and cumbersome lines from the book as actual song verses and choruses — to a point. "AI did provide some structure, but it's not a real song-writer," Gilbert says.

"I would have a conversation with it and say things like, 'We need to work on this. It needs more repetition in the chorus. So it did that, and I'd say, 'Okay, but it's too long and it needs a bridge.' After a while, I realized what needed to be done to make the words feel like song lyrics, and I didn't need AI anymore."

There's nothing genteel about

"George Washington became my collaborator," Paul Gilbert says



SAM GEHRKE



the music on WROC — these are some of Gilbert's hardest rocking tunes yet. "Go Not Thither" is a heavy artillery loadblower that sees the guitarist knocking out Billy Gibbons-esque blues riffs, while "Keep Your Feet Firm and Even" is a stomping and raging twin-lead guitar behemoth. "George Washington Rules" is a double-musket boogie burner, and for madcap, blitzing prog-rock there's "Maintain a Sweet and Cheerful Countenance." Throughout the set, Gilbert sounds fresh and alive, and it's no wonder. Most of the time, guitarists are rehashing their usual routines; the tunes are stiff and dead before they're even laid down. But Gilbert is way out of his comfort zone on these songs, and he's having the time of his life.

"I'm like anybody else; I pick up the guitar and play what I know," he says. "But these tunes made it impossible for me to go to the same old places, and it all started with the writing. I mean, 'Let your discourse with men of business be short and comprehensive, be not tedious unless you find the company pleased there with' — I can only remember that because I figured out a melody for it. Oh, my God, I was tearing up laughing when I sang that. It was so much fun to take this archaic English, plus the meaning of it, and put it to a rock groove."

Gilbert convened a tight team of players — drummer Nick D'Virgilio, bassist Timmer Blakely and guitarist Doug Rappoport — at Portland's Hallowed Halls Studios and ripped through the album's 13 songs in four days.

"Budget-wise, the temptation is to record everything at home, but I just find it harder to rock that way," he says. "I like playing with a band. Making music is a lot more fun in the studio, and the other benefit is, it forces you to decide and move on. You go in and hear it, and you're like, 'Oh, absolutely. This is great.' At home, you're tempted to tinker and go over the top with everything. It's constantly, 'Well, I don't know... Maybe if we put on another double guitar part — that'll fix it.' You can spend forever making a song worse." **GW**



Kyle Thomas with his metallic blue Gibson SG

King Tuff

The Vermont rocker talks embarrassing Uber rides and broken headstocks

BY JACOB PAUL NIELSEN

▶ SHARING AIRSPACE WITH someone while they listen to your music is among the most mortifying things a working musician can experience. It often happens at the most unsuspecting moments, and it never gets any less embarrassing.

During our call, Kyle Thomas — aka King Tuff — recounted an example of this humiliation ritual during an Uber ride. The former L.A. but now Vermont-based singer/guitarist is one of those insanely prolific rock 'n' roll lifers who always seems to be recording or touring in one of his bands: King Tuff, Witch or Ty Segall's backing band, the Muggers. Naturally, Thomas had his guitar in tow. It's a late-Nineties Gibson SG that Thomas painted with metallic blue craft paint.

"I don't tour with this guitar anymore," Thomas says. "It has a broken headstock that was fixed with this Frankenstein bolt. I snapped the headstock while trying to do a throw-it-over-my-shoulder move. I brought it to an idiot who tried to fix it with epoxy. Within weeks it peeled away and ruined the joint so you couldn't even use wood glue. I brought it to Reuben Cox at Old Style Guitar Shop in L.A. He's a genius. He just drilled a bolt through it and put it on either side and it stayed ever since. A lot of people might think it was ruined, but I think it's like 10 times cooler because of that."

"I snapped my SG's headstock while trying to do a throw-it-over-my-shoulder move"

The Uber driver, noticing his guitar case, probed Thomas about its contents. Rather than let the driver imagine some Antonio Banderas-in-*Desperado* gunslinger fantasy, Thomas told the truth.

"I told him the name of my band and he wanted to listen to it. I'm like, 'Oh, God... here we go,'" Thomas says.

It gets worse.

"He turns it down and says, 'Okay, here's my review: The band is good. It's got a good groove, but you've got to get a new singer,'" he says with a laugh. Thomas agreed completely.

"I sound kind of like a demented child, but there are people out there that relate to it or like it," he says. "There are some songs where I do think I sound great. A lot of the singers that I love don't have technically great voices, but I love them because they're unique. You've got to embrace it all. You're not gonna win over every Uber driver, and you're not gonna win over everybody on the planet." **GW**



Amani Burnham
with his homemade
"Warren Blues Maker"

Amani Burnham

Channeling the old masters but burning down the fingerstyle playbook, this Connecticut bluesman has traded the socials for the studio

BY JIM BEAUGEZ

▶ BLUES-ROCK NEWCOMER AMANI

Burnham's love of full-step bends, trills and pentatonic fills leads to inevitable Jimi Hendrix comparisons, but his style isn't outright mimicry — the 20-year-old happens to draw inspiration from the same well of artists as the guitar icon.

"Chuck Berry was my first guitar hero," he says on a call from his Connecticut home, where he also grew up listening to the Beatles, Little Richard and Fats Domino records in his father's collection. "But the stuff Hendrix was feeling in that moment was coming out of his guitar," he says. "I was very intrigued by that and also the sort of lyrics he came up with — and the chord changes."

The guitar playing on his debut album, *Roots & Wings*, owes a lot to this lineage, including downstream players like Stevie Ray Vaughan and the funk that arose in Hendrix's wake. Burnham's twist is his picking-hand style; instead of using a pick, he thumbs single notes and strums chords by joining his index and middle fingers, letting the other fingers fall in line behind them. While his tone is somehow every bit as bright and sharp



AXOLOGY

Guitars

Fender Stratocaster,
Epiphone Les Paul,
Warren Blues Maker

Amps

Fender Frontman 25R

as if he used a pick, his fretting-hand dexterity helps him pull off tricky licks. "There are certain things I have to compensate for," he says. "If I want to play really fast, it's a lot of hammer-ons and pull-offs."

Burnham deploys all this through a fairly straightforward rig. His main guitars are a Fender Strat and a "Warren Blues Maker," a Jazzmaster-style ax he assembled from parts with help from friend Ty Warren. On *Roots & Wings*, he played those through a Fender Frontman with a 10-inch speaker, occasionally augmented by a Fuzz Face and Dunlop Cry Baby.

Social media has played a big role in Burnham's rise, exposing his playing to a wide audience and netting him a deal with Blind Pig Records. Videos like the breakout clip showing him playing the Willie Dixon tune "Hoochie Coochie Man" have amassed 30 million views across platforms. "With that video blowing up, the sort of comments I got were from people digging the way I was playing or asking, 'What song is this?,' which I thought was funny. But it's also important for people to know where modern rock started." [GW](#)

Friko

Pairing one-off pedals with lunchbox amps “set to explode,” the indie-rockers’ second album is a masterclass in atmosphere

BY ADAM KOVAC

▶ WHEN CHICAGO-BASED INDIE rockers Friko were writing and recording their first album, 2024’s *Where We’ve Been, Where We Go from Here*, it wasn’t hard to keep the sound lo-fi. Singer Niko Kapetan was the band’s lone guitarist, so there wasn’t much that could be done to stretch out the sound.

“That’s what we stuck with, because it was honest for that time,” Kapetan says. “But on this one, we could kind of expand on ideas and go to some places that we wouldn’t have been able to go with the first record.”

This time around, Kapetan was joined in guitar duties by newcomer Korgan Robb. Having a second player to bounce off allowed the band to expand its sonic palette. The result is a fuller, more complex sound that really highlights the band’s biggest strength — its ability to create dynamics that ebb and

flow. While there are moments of quiet-to-loud, *Something Worth Waiting For* truly shines when the shifts aren’t sudden, but rather build slowly, until a song that started with simple strummed clean chords has built to an all-out fuzzy freakout.

The key to getting the huge tones that define the album turned out to be keeping it small. Alongside their Fender Deluxe and Princeton amps, the duo depended on tiny lunchbox amps to get their outsized sounds. Kapetan and Robb pushed those small amps with some rare pedals from New

“I love using loops, but I don’t loop things to be in time”

KORGAN ROBB

York-based musical gear wizard Jay Andersen, particularly a pedal designed to emulate the warm, fuzzy tones of a Tascam pre-amp.

“It’s just a white box pedal with, like, Sharpie on it, and it is the crown jewel of my little board, definitely,” Kapetan says.

“If it sounds like we’re really loud, I bet we both have it on,” Robb adds. “Once I got one of those pedals, it was just like, ‘That’s the sound.’ It feels like your amp is about to explode.”

Adding to the explosive sound was Robb’s Red Panda Tensor, a bizarre pedal that allows users to mimic tape loops, with the added bonus of reversing or modulating them, or even just randomizing them for extra chaos.

“I love using loops,” Robb says. “I have a looper as well that I loop in real time, but I don’t loop things to be in time. I loop drones or stuff like that.”

While modern boutique pedals played an integral part in getting Friko’s sound, they went with the classics when it came to guitars. Both guitarists have Jazzmasters in their arsenals, though Kapetan’s is unique; it was pieced together with his dad.

“That’s just my go-to. It’s consistent — and a really good sound.” **GW**



[from left] Friko's Korgan Robb, Niko Kapetan and David Fuller



LOST CLASSICS

Jethro Tull

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

BY ANDREW DALY

▶ **JETHRO TULL'S FIRST** album, 1968's *This Was*, featured guitarist Mick Abrahams and leaned in a decidedly bluesy direction. That approach didn't work out for the British soon-to-be-prog rockers, and neither did Abrahams, leading to a short spell during which some guy named Tony Iommi took up six-string duties in Tull before bandleader Ian Anderson found his long-time running mate in Martin Barre.

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

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

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

Examine it they did. Songs like "With You There to Help Me," "To Cry You a Song" and

Jethro Tull at the Royal Albert Hall, October 13, 1970; [from left] Clive Bunker, Martin Barre, Ian Anderson and Glen Cornick



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

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

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

At that point in time we'd been touring, and we'd met bands like Led Zeppelin and all

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

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

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

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

really good. They're fun to learn, demanding and very, very precise.

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

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

Were there many overdubs on *Benefit*?

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

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

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

"Ian's guitar parts are fun to learn, demanding and very, very precise"

was really easy and positive to put together.

What guitars were you using while recording *Benefit*?

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

Where did you get the Les Paul copy from?

Stand Up was done on a Les Paul Special, a really beat-up thing I bought from a shop in London. But then, I bought this [fake] Les Paul from a dealer in America, and that was the one guitar; it's all I used for the whole record.

Nobody had two guitars in those days; you couldn't afford it! But yeah, it wasn't a great guitar. [Laughs]

You used Hiwatt amps in the studio.

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

How do you feel about *Benefit* now?

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



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LONG TRAIN RUNNIN'

On the eve of their summer tour with Carlos Santana, longtime Doobie Brothers guitarists Tom Johnston, Patrick Simmons and John McFee discuss their classic songs, working on harmonies — and *that* nautical term

BY JOE BOSSO

THEY GO BY names like the Doobie Others, Listen to the Music and the Brothers Doobie. These are just some of the myriad Doobie Brothers tribute bands currently circulating. There's even a group called the Doobie Doubles, who apparently specialize in playing only uptempo rock songs (mellow soul ballads are a no-no with these guys).

Neither Tom Johnston nor John McFee have witnessed these outfits ("I guess I'm missing out," Johnston says with a laugh), but Patrick Simmons has checked out a few of them online, and he admits they're not bad. "They've got some great musicians," he says. "They never sound exactly like us, but I don't think that's important. It's great that musicians would want to take the time to learn those songs and perform them. I can't fault people for trying to make a living and coming up with a novelty idea, and if they enjoy the music, that's flattering for the rest of us."

Guitarists Johnston and Simmons have been playing together off and on (mostly on) ever since they founded the Doobie Brothers in San Jose, California, back in 1970. McFee, who has something of a Swiss Army Knife role in the band (in addition to guitar, he also plays mandolin, banjo, violin, cello and pedal steel — basically, anything with strings), joined the Doobies in 1979 but still refers to himself as "the new guy."

Collectively, they represent each era of the hit-making, Rock and Roll Hall of Famers. There's the funky, boogie-rock Johnston period of the early Seventies that yielded AM/FM radio gems like "Listen to the Music," "China Grove," "Black Water" and "Long Train Runnin'," along with the late-Seventies/early-Eighties mellow soul phrase during which second-wave frontman Michael McDonald delivered crossover smashes like "Minute by Minute," "Real Love" and the Grammy-winning chart-topper "What a Fool Believes."

The latter song is widely seen as a key example of the genre known as "yacht rock," the very mention of which elicits good-natured chuckles and eye rolls from the group's guitar trio. "I've never even been on a yacht," McFee says, to which Johnston adds, "I don't even know what the term is supposed to mean — 'yacht rock.' It just seems kind of absurd to me."

There have been breakups and reunions, and in-between it all McDonald established himself as a solo star, but Johnston, Simmons, McFee and McDonald have been together as Doobies since 2019. They released a solid studio recording, *Walk This Road*, last year, and this summer they join guitar legend Carlos Santana on his Oneness Tour. "We've toured with Carlos before," Johnston says. "I've known him since 1971, '72. I hardly

"I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THE TERM IS SUPPOSED TO MEAN — 'YACHT ROCK.' IT JUST SEEMS KIND OF ABSURD TO ME" TOM JOHNSTON



CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE

[from left] Doobie Brothers
Michael McDonald,
John McFee, Tom Johnston
and Patrick Simmons



[from left] Johnston, Simmons and McFee in action in New York City, June 12, 2025

INTERVIEW



ever see him unless it's on the road, but he's such a good guy. I love playing with him and his band. We have a ball."

Whatever differences contributed to the band's various hiatuses (the longest was between 1982 and '87) seem to have been ironed out long ago. "We have disagreements like anybody else," Simmons says. "We've certainly had our moments when we've gotten on each other's nerves, especially at the end of a tour when it's like, 'Oh, my God, is he gonna keep snoring when I'm trying to sleep?' But we've been lucky enough to sustain our relationships, and really, it's all about the music. We've got great writers and players, and people love what we do."

"We had our conflict in the Seventies," Johnston says. "As time goes by, you learn what to do and what not to do. You learn to take care of yourself and not be destructive. We all get along now, and we just want to keep on moving forward. I think if you keep moving forward, things have a way of fixing themselves."

The Doobies have something like 300 songs, and a lot of them are hits. Who decides the set list each night?

TOM JOHNSTON: Pat and I do a lot of that, and then we bring Mike in on it. It's really based around the guys who are going to sing, but we also look at the set and tailor a lot of it to what the crowd wants to hear and the songs we're okay with playing. Obviously, we want to play the hits for the audience. We've been playing a lot of stuff off the new album, and we'll probably do one or two new songs when

we open for Carlos. The rest will be stuff everybody knows.

The new album is the first one the band has recorded with Michael in four decades. Does it feel like you've got two eras of the group comfortably accounted for in this line-up?

JOHNSTON: I think it's a good idea to look at it that way, because that's what we're doing, whether it's on record or live. We put it all out there. All the eras of the band are represented, and the people love it.

JOHN McFEE: I think the music integrates from all the different eras. I love it.

PATRICK SIMMONS: It's more than two eras, I think. We've always had multiple writers, multiple approaches and different influences. The biggest influences, of course, would be Tommy and Mike. They're both prolific writers and great singers. You're going to feel their influence over and above everybody else just by virtue of their... what's the word? Their energy!

John Shanks produced this one and the album before it, *Liberté*. He's also a notable guitar player.

JOHNSTON: A really good guitar player.

"I GREW UP IN THE STUDIO. I WASN'T STANDING IN FRONT OF A MARSHALL STACK"

JOHN McFEE

Does he ever get really granular with suggestions for guitar tracks, to the point where it's annoying?

JOHNSTON: No, not in that way. He did play on the album — and quite a bit — but everybody contributed all the stuff they normally would. Mostly John was involved with a lot of the writing. He co-wrote every song on the record.

Was it a smooth process writing with him?

JOHNSTON: It went fine. Albums can be smooth and not smooth at any given time with pretty much anybody, but I thought it went pretty well. The only difference about working with John is that whoever co-wrote is the one that's in the studio. The whole band is hardly ever in there. You work on it to a certain point, and then you bring in guys to sing and play parts and what not.

That's not the way you've always recorded.

JOHNSTON: Before this one and *Liberté*, we've kind of had the whole band in a lot of the time, especially doing basic tracks. You come up with ideas as you're hearing them — everybody throws stuff out there. That's kind of how the band worked for a very long time. So this one and the last were different in that aspect.

Let's talk about the guitar frequency puzzle. John, I know you play a lot of other instruments, but at any given time the three of you are playing guitar on stage. How do you divide up the sonic real estate?

JOHNSTON: We don't look at it like that,

THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES FOR SONGWRITERS HALL OF FAME

at least I don't. I think if it sounds good and everybody has their own parts, that's just what naturally works itself out. John uses a digital rig, which is different from amplifiers. Pat uses an amp, but he plays Strats. I use PRS. All of that creates different sounds on stage as far as the guitars go.

McFEE: I think it's got a lot to do with the parts that are being played. A lot of the time it depends on who played what on the records. Obviously, Tom is going to start "Long Train Runnin'" with that rhythmic hook of his. The other parts get divided up depending on how the record was done. A lot of times on the records there's more than two guitar parts, so live we're able to cover those parts without anything being missed. It's a song-by-song situation.

SIMMONS: I don't think we analyze it too heavily. I just want everybody to have fun and feel good. If I'm sitting there criticizing — "There's too much going on" — it starts to become contentious. I'll certainly confront something if it's important, but I would never go, "What can I find wrong with this?"

Do you feel obligated to try to recreate the sound of the records as much as possible?

JOHNSTON: I think everybody kind of does the same thing they've been doing for years. We have changed songs' arrangements here and there, but it basically kind of adheres to the way the song sounded originally. Sometimes there's a different way of looking at a song, like having Marc [Russo] on sax, for

"TOMMY PREFERS IT WHEN I PLAY ARPEGGIATED PARTS, WHICH I DO A LOT"

PATRICK SIMMONS

instance — he plays quite a few solos throughout the set. And then Mike's on keys, so he's got his own take on how parts are played. I haven't changed my rhythm parts on these songs, except sometimes they get expanded.

John, you brought up "Long Train Runnin'," which is a perfect example of Tom's right-hand rhythm technique.

McFEE: I had the hardest time teaching that to him, by the way. Just kidding! [Laughs]

JOHNSTON: I think they call it "chunka-chunka."

Exactly. Tom, where did that come from? Who were you listening to?

JOHNSTON: I think it came from writing songs and playing acoustic a lot in the late Sixties. I didn't always have people around, like a drummer or bass player or whatever. In order to implement the kind of rhythm I was thinking about, I would do it on the guitar. It's basically like playing drums and guitar at the same time. I mean, not exactly, but the idea is to get the rhythm structure across to somebody if you're going to end up playing it in a band or if you're going to end up

recording it. I used that rhythm on quite a few songs, but it just happened naturally. I didn't think about it; I just started doing it.

Patrick, have you always found Tom's rhythms easy to play along to?

SIMMONS: I think you either play along with somebody and try to complement what they're playing in terms of mimicking the part, which I've done before, or you can break it up and play counter rhythms. I've done that, too — it's sort of my go-to place. I think Tommy prefers it when I play arpeggiated parts, which I do a lot. John does that, too. Tommy and John have different voices within the context of what they play. John is a little more sophisticated in terms of his choice of notes and his ability to play a little more "outside." I won't say it's jazz, but it's more complementary outside chords, which I think really helps us to create a larger palette, if you will.

That rhythm guitar playing is a big part of "Listen to the Music."

JOHNSTON: Sure. I was sitting there with an acoustic, coming up with chord changes — the rhythm and the chord changes set the tone for what I was thinking about. It reminded me of a utopian thing. I was thinking, "Can the leaders of the world just sit down and shut up and listen to the music instead of what they were doing?" This was the Vietnam era.

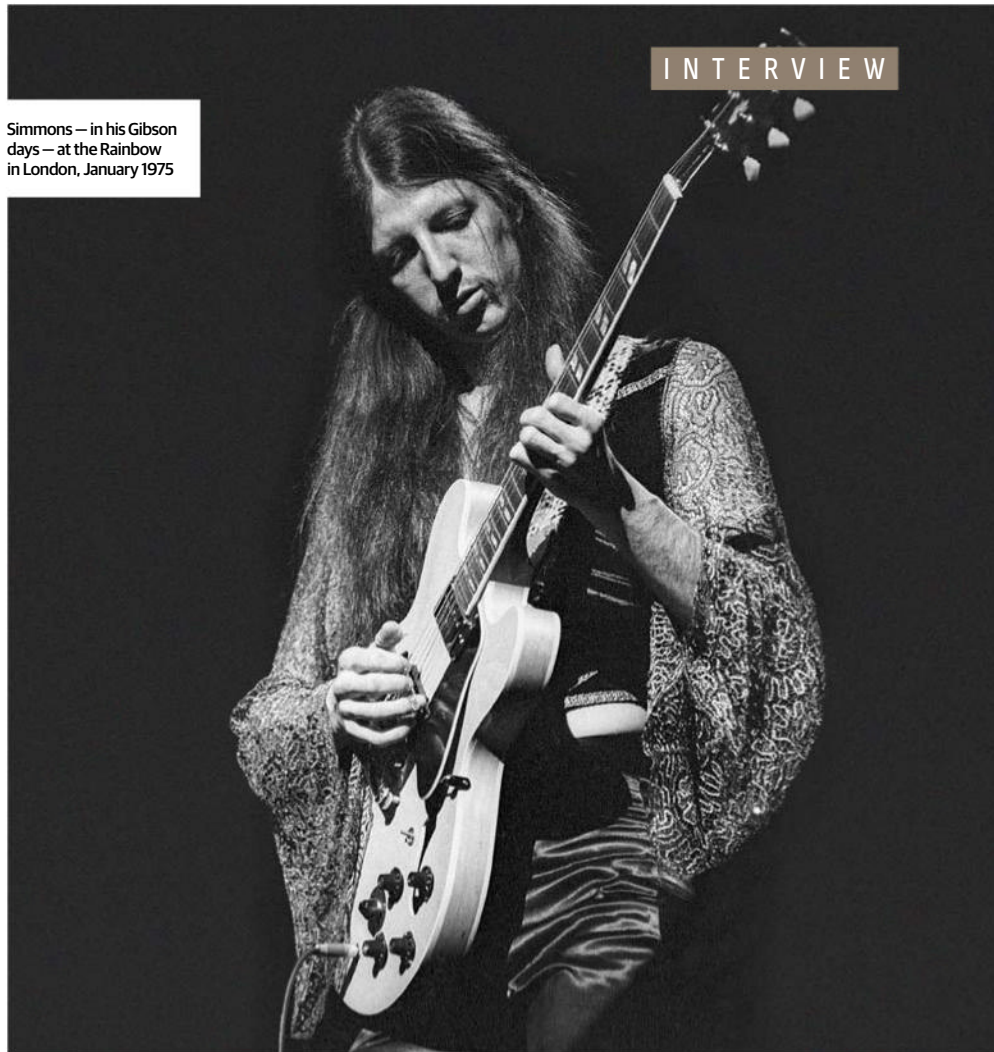
SIMMONS: That was a funny track for me. We'd played it for a year and a half, two



[from left] McFee, Simmons and Johnston during their farewell show in Berkeley, California, September 11, 1982

Simmons — in his Gibson days — at the Rainbow in London, January 1975

INTERVIEW



years, in clubs, and I'd always played kind of an arpeggiated, banjo-ish part. When we cut the song in the studio, I played my part, but it just didn't kill me. The other guys sounded great, but I didn't know what I should do. I thought, "Maybe I'll just sing on it." Then I started listening to the Eagles and what Bernie Leadon played on "Take It Easy." He played the banjo. I mentioned it to producer Ted Templeman, and he said, "Let's rent you a banjo and see what you can work out." I didn't have anything in mind at first, but I went in the other room and worked out a banjo part. Ted said, "Let's lay it down." We laid it down, and he said, "That's it. That's the part — you did it."

What do you guys remember about recording "Long Train Runnin'?"

JOHNSTON: That was a jam.

SIMMONS: Tommy had that song when I joined the band. It was basically a jam with the same riff throughout the whole song. We played it that way and made it really long. He'd take a solo and I'd take a solo — we'd stretch it out. We had the "without love" part. Every night he'd make up some lyrics, and I'm going, "Man, don't you have a song for this?" He'd say, "No, not really." Every night he'd make up lyrics. I was like, "Well, it's a good

song, but whatever."

JOHNSTON: I even questioned Teddy — "Are you sure you want to record this?" Because I said, "It doesn't even have lyrics at that point." And he said, "Yeah, we've got to do this." Because we'd been playing it for two or three years at that point, and it was just a jam we did live. It had various names, but it didn't have words. I would just make 'em up every night. Finally, we did the track and it got honed in. I wrote lyrics and tried 'em out, and away we went.

SIMMONS: We cut the track, and Ted said, "It works, I like it, but it needs some arrangement. As it is now, it's a Latin blues with no form." So he came up with the stops — that real break at the end before it commences again. I thought that was brilliant, because it gave the song so much more life.

JOHNSTON: The same sort of thing happened with "China Grove."

"PEOPLE ASK IF I GET TIRED OF PLAYING THE HITS, AND THE ANSWER IS 'NO'"

TOM JOHNSTON

Another song with a brilliant rhythm guitar riff.

JOHNSTON: It's a little different because it's more of an edgy rock and roll thing. I wrote it on an acoustic, same as the others, and came up with the chord changes. Then I grabbed [drummer] John Hartman and started blasting away. We came up with an idea for the song, and then I had to write the lyrics once again.

When you wrote these songs, did you think, "These are hits"?

JOHNSTON: The only one I've ever felt correct about was "Listen to the Music." I called Teddy up in the middle of the night and told him that, which he wasn't really thrilled about. But the others I didn't push as singles at all.

Live, you guys still perform tunes like "Rockin' Down the Highway" and "Jesus Is Just Alright." They must be fun songs to play on guitar.

JOHNSTON: It depends on how long we've been out! [Laughs] No, really, they're still fun to play. What really makes them fun is the crowd. The crowd's reaction drives your exuberance for a song, because we played these songs to death. We've been playing them for over 50 years. When the crowd gets up and starts singing along and dancing and stuff, that makes it all worthwhile.

There's a lot of muscle memory that goes into playing those solos, but do you ever just say, "Screw it. I'm playing something totally different tonight"?

JOHNSTON: Yeah, usually that's not a great ending from my experience with it.

McFEE: We have a fair amount of improvisation that's available to us in the course of the show.

JOHNSTON: People always ask me if I get tired of playing the same songs, and the answer is "no." They're hits, and I don't get tired of them because every night is different. The challenge is to just do my best every time we go out on the stage.

I think you'd get tired of playing non-hits that nobody wants to hear.

JOHNSTON: We try to weed those out.

[Laughs]

Let's talk about your guitars. Tom, you played Gibsons back in the day...

JOHNSTON: Les Pauls, SGs, ES-335s, stuff like that.

You're pretty much a PRS player now, though.

JOHNSTON: Yeah, they're really



DOOBIE OR NOT DOOBIE?

Patrick Simmons on why some Doobies weren't originally gung-go about appearing in those classic 1978 episodes of *What's Happening!!*

BY JOE BOSSO

THE GROUNDBREAKING 1970S ABC sitcom *What's Happening!!* followed the adventures of three Black teenagers — Raj, Dwayne and Rerun — as they navigated school life, adolescence and romantic pursuits in Watts, Los Angeles. One of the series' more memorable storylines unfolded in a 1978 two-part episode, "Doobie or Not Doobie," in which the Doobie Brothers returned to Jefferson High School (portrayed as Patrick Simmons' alma mater) to perform a concert — only to discover that Rerun has been coerced into illegally taping the gig.

Simmons recalls being "all in" for doing the show. "I was a fan," he says. "I watched the show and loved it, so I wanted to do it immediately." Trouble was, nobody else in the band was interested. "They weren't familiar with the show, so they were nervous about doing it."

He remembers then-bassist Tiran Porter as being especially dubious (pun intended). "He thought the whole thing might be a little *cliché*," the guitarist says. "For me, it wasn't even a question that we should do it. I thought the writing and acting was great, and the show was hilarious."

Beyond his affection for the series, Simmons saw the potential of the band's appearance on the series as a great opportunity for them to spread their music to a wider audience. "I was a devotee of R&B and soul, and by virtue of having Mike [McDonald] in the band at the time, we were leaning more in that direction, though we hadn't yet crossed into a real appreciation from Black audiences," he says. "There were more people of color showing up to our gigs, but we were still seen as this white rock 'n' roll band. Doing the show was positive on so many levels, certainly for ourselves, but also for the country in terms of bringing people together. Our fans could tune in and see us in this wonderful presentation with an acclaimed acting troupe."

How did you eventually sell the band on doing it?

I sold Mike on it. He was like, "I don't know. I'm not sure." I told him I thought we could reach other audiences and what a great show it was. He hadn't seen it yet. Finally, I told him to watch it — "It'll tell you all you need to know." I think that worked with him, and it worked with [drummer] Keith [Knudsen].

The then-current lineup of the Doobie Brothers with the cast of ABC's *What's Happening!!* in the late Seventies; [from left] Haywood Nelson, Fred Berry, Patrick Simmons, John Hartman, Jeff Baxter, Bobby Lakind, Shirley Hemphill, Danielle Spencer, Tiran Porter, Michael McDonald, Ernest Thomas and Keith Knudsen

When the band was approached to do the show, was the bootlegging plot already written into the script?

The script was basically an outline at that point. They were still writing it as we stepped into the studio to work on it, which I think is kind of the way it is with television anyway. Within an hour of us being there, they said, "We think this is going to be so good that we'd like to make it a two-parter." And we went, "Yeah, of course."

It was a pretty big deal when Rerun's tape recorder drops out of his raincoat and hits the floor, and everything stops.

Then it was like, "Tune in next week."

At the time, was it a big concern among bands that fans were sneaking tape recorders into concerts?

People were always doing that. We didn't really care. I mean, we'd rather they didn't because the recordings sounded like shit. The Dead's fans were doing it every night. We would hear this stuff, and it would bug us. It bugged us more if somebody recorded us and then tried to sell it.

Of course, there's the famous line that has entered the lexicon — "Which Doobie you be?" Had you heard that before the show?

No, that was one of the lines somebody wrote. There's another one, where [Raj's bratty sister, Dee] asks Tiran, "What are you, a half-brother?" [Laughs]

After the shows aired, did the rest of the band come around and feel good about doing it?

I think everybody felt good about it in the end. It was a good experience. The people on the show were so nice to us, and we became friends. We were always doing benefits in those days, and we got some of the people to come and do shows. They'd come and speak and help raise money for the United Way. There were so many rewards to doing the show.

It's a shining moment in TV history.

It is. People will forget everything else about us except that we were on that show.

dependable. You can get pretty much any sound you want using humbucking-type pickups. If you're playing a guitar a lot, you want to know what to expect from it.

What amps are you using?

JOHNSTON: I've been using Mesa Boogie for the last five years, I guess. Prior to that, I used a whole bunch of different amps. In the early days, it was all Fender stuff, and that kind of slid over into Ampegs for a while. Live, I try to get a similar sound to the records. You gotta mess around to get the right punchy rhythm tone. For soloing, you want to get something that sings a bit.

Patrick, you also played Gibsons in the Seventies and Eighties, but you're playing something different these days.

SIMMONS: It's sort of a variation of a Stratocaster. What happened was, I fell in love with Jeff Baxter's Strat, which he built himself. I played it in the studio occasionally — it was great. A friend of mine who worked as our guitar tech for a while said, "I'm building guitars, and I'd like to build you one. What do you want?" I said, "Build me a Strat like Jeff's." That's what he did. We used a lighter wood for the body. Jeff has a maple body, but I used ash. It's a lighter wood. I used Seymour

Duncans originally, and then I switched to different pickups [Ed note: EMGs].

What kinds of amps do you play that guitar through?

SIMMONS: Mesa Boogie Mark Vs. I've got two amps — one for my clean to mid-range "Keith Richards sound," as I call it, and another for overdrive and leads, my "Santana sound."

John, you're pretty much a Line 6 Variax guy, right?

McFEE: For Live performances, for sure. I use them in the studio a lot, too. I started using them because I need to be able to get different sounds and different tunings and even different instruments. Like on "Listen to the Music," there's a banjo in the chorus, and so my role in the band requires me to have these things available. It would be very difficult to achieve that without something like the Variax.

"WE KNEW WE WANTED TO ROCK, BUT WE ALWAYS WORKED ON OUR SINGING"

PATRICK SIMMONS

Did it take you a while to get used to playing without an amp?

McFEE: Not at all. I know a lot of people who transition to in-ear monitors have difficulty, but I grew up doing session work in the studio, and I was always on headphones. That's how I heard myself. I wasn't standing in front of a Marshall stack, letting it blast.

You guys know your way around a guitar, but you're also an impeccable vocal group.

SIMMONS: That was always important to us. When we got together, our template was Moby Grape; everybody in the band sang. We knew we wanted to rock, we wanted to play the blues, but we loved Moby Grape and their harmonies. And the Beatles! All the bands we admired were harmony bands — Chicago; Crosby, Stills & Nash... We've always worked on our singing. We spend hours figuring out parts. We'll have things all worked out, and then somebody will say, "There's one note here..." We'll put things under a microscope. I love harmony, especially the kinds of things Mike brings to our singing — close harmonies. It's nice having a guy who really hears that and can come up with cool parts. Our harmonies really opened up, and I think it's true now more than ever. We've really stepped up our game. **GW**

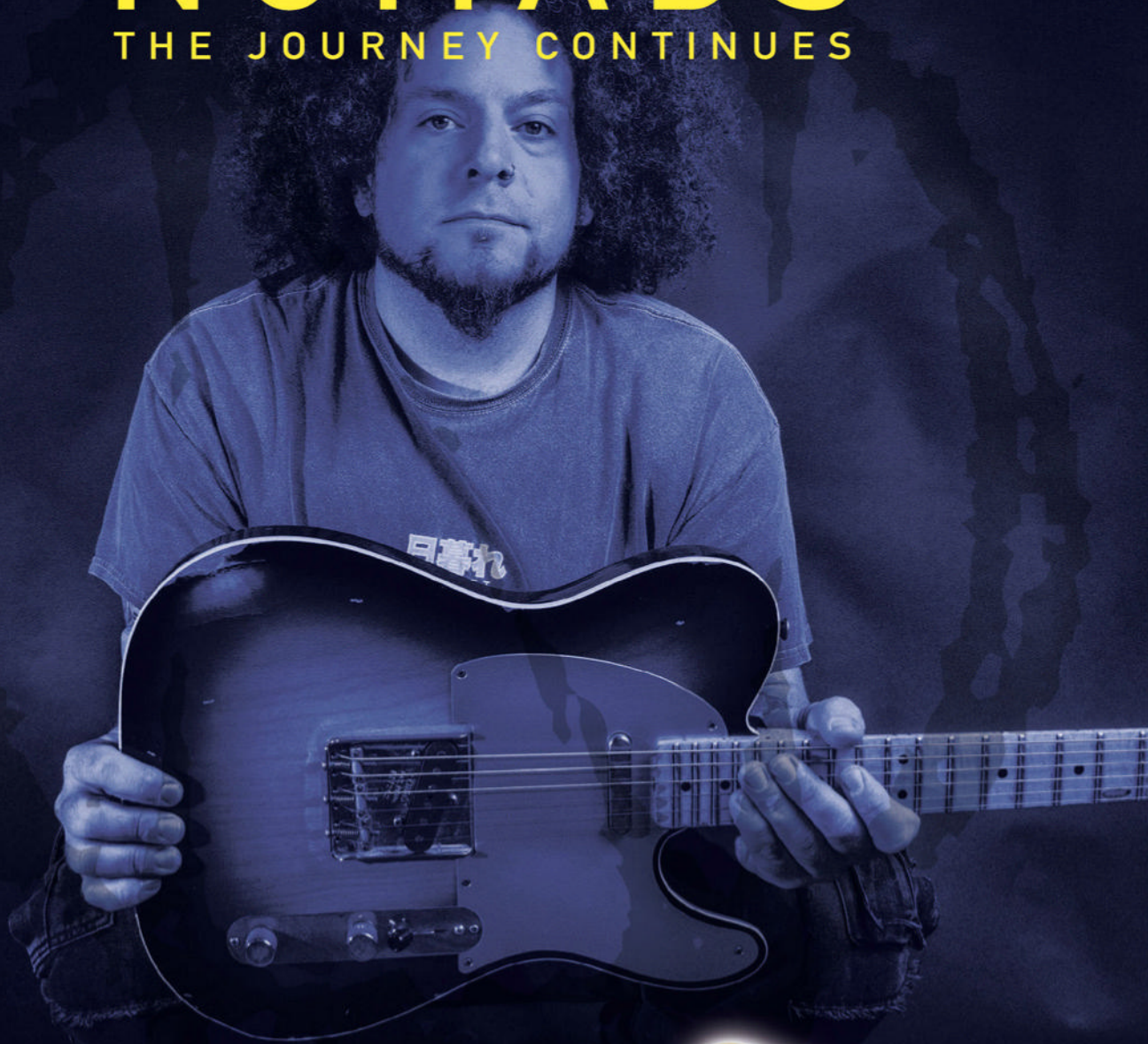


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THE AGELESS WONDER

The Fender Telecaster is 75 years old this year. But, unlike other living legends who lie about their age, the Tele doesn't look a day over 18

BY DAMIAN FANELLI

IN 1849, ENGLISH poet Walter Savage Landor wrote an introspective little poem as he approached his 75th birthday:

*I strove with none; for none was worth my strife,
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.*

If the Fender Telecaster were to write its own 75th-birthday poem, it'd probably be similar to Landor's (although I can't imagine a Telecaster saying "strove"). The only line that'd really need to change is that last one – "I am ready to depart" – because the Telecaster isn't going anywhere. In fact, sometimes it feels like it's just getting started. And who knows? It might even be invincible. To quote Greg Koch, another legendary poet, "In a post-apocalyptic world, there will be Telecasters and cockroaches, and the Telecasters will be in tune."

You're seeing references to 75 years, but it's actually been 76 years since the Tele – still with a year to go under its sly "Broadcaster" alias – debuted at the 1950 NAMM Show. It's safe to say that even the most omniscient

of 1950 NAMM attendees didn't fathom the model's importance; they had no idea that the relevance of that simple slab of wonder – aka the first commercially successful solidbody electric guitar – would grow exponentially during the nearly eight decades that've passed since that July weekend. The Tele's simplicity has always meant that it bends to the player's desires and personality, so it's immune to fads. Novelties and shiny contraptions wind up in landfills and junk heaps, but plain ol' utility always survives.

What started out as a guitar for "poultry pluckers" (another Koch-ism) has become a veritable Swiss Army knife; from indie to jazz, from pop to metal, from blues to red-hot shred, from Instagram influencers to affluent buyers and sellers, the Tele is everywhere

– and it's always been that way; in the classic-rock era, whether you dug the Beatles, the Stones or Led Zeppelin, they all relied on a Tele. Whether your hero was Clapton, Beck or Page, a Tele had left its mark.

In the following buttload of pages, we examine some of the Tele's most important technical evolutions; revisit the twisted histories of specific guitars; check in with John 5, Mike Campbell and John Osborne; and find out who'd be carved into the "Telecaster Mount Rushmore" of a host of pros, from Brent Mason to Christone "Kingfish" Ingram to Marty Stuart to Joanne Shaw Taylor to Graham Coxon. We also review a brand-new 75th Anniversary Tele and transcribe – for the first time ever, kids! – Danny Gatton's "Harlem Nocturne." Strap yourselves in! ▣

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TELEVISION

The Telecaster remained a work in progress throughout the vintage era. We kick off our 75th-anniversary festivities by charting big-bang moments in the model's construction, controls and electronics

BY HUW PRICE

The Prototypes

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

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

Production Begins

Fender's first production guitars were made during the spring of 1950, and the model was dubbed the "Esquire." These days, the Esquire is considered a single-pickup Tele, but shortly after its release, Fender began offering Esquires with an optional neck pickup. The earliest models had black lacquered pine bodies and white fiber pickguards. By

the summer, Fender was using ash for the bodies with a translucent blonde finish and a contrasting black fiberboard pickguard. Fender sprayed and polished the 'guards, and while the earliest ones were glossy on the front and back, the team soon realized it was wasting lacquer on the side nobody would ever see. Instead, the 'guards were placed on a paint can for spraying, leaving a circular lacquer "shadow." The "Blackguard" era lasted from 1950 to 1954.

Spare the Rod

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

Name Calling

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

In his sought-after book, *The Blackguard*, Nacho Baños estimates that no more than 250 Broadcasters were produced between

October 1950 and February 1951. Fender received Gretsch's telegram asserting an infringement of its trademark and scissored off the "Broadcaster" section of the remaining decals, rather than waste them. Guitars with these chopped decals became known as "Nocasters" and, once they had run out, Fender began using decals bearing a new name devised by Don Randall — and the first guitars with "Telecaster" logos appeared during the late summer of 1951.

Broadcasters, Nocasters, early Telecasters and Blackguards continue to occupy top spots for vintage-Tele fans. We turned to busy session player Eddie Tatton and rockabilly virtuoso James Oliver for some owner insights.

"I ended up buying a '52 from ATB Guitars in the U.K.," Tatton says. "It was relatively affordable because it's an Esquire with a factory-added neck pickup. G.E. Smith also has one like mine, and Fender apparently charged around \$15 for the upgrade. It's an incredible working instrument, and it's probably my favorite guitar."

Oliver's '54 example is his favorite, too, and it's been his main gigging guitar since its purchase three years ago. "Although it's a refinish, the parts are original and it's fairly light," he says. "The bridge pickup died while I was touring Scandinavia, and I finished the tour on the neck pickup. Most of what I play is twangy rockabilly and blues, and I like a bright, clean sound. The wiring has been updated, so I use the middle position if I'm playing T-Bone Walker-type stuff, but I'm

Star of the 1950 NAMM Show? This '50 Fender Broadcaster was photographed in 2019 with its original case

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This 1954 Telecaster is one of the last to be produced during Fender's brief "Blackguard" era





The most significant change for 1955 Teles (like this one) was the color of the pickguard

usually on the bridge pickup. I never use the neck on its own."

Body Building

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

Toward the end of the Broadcaster run, Fender began making a one-inch "doughnut rout" halfway between the two pickup cavities. One hole was then drilled from the neck pocket to the doughnut, and a diagonal hole was drilled from the doughnut to the control cavity. By this time, Fender was also cutting a notch between the neck pocket and neck pickup rout.

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

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

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

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

Immortal Coils

The bridge pickup was basically a Fender lap steel pickup with a three-screw bottom "flat" and an inductance plate to increase output. Early Blackguard bridge pickups read between 6k ohms and 9k, but higher values do not indicate overwinding. Fender transitioned from 43 AWG plain enamel wire to thicker 42 AWG during 1951, and thinner wire offers higher resistance for the same number of turns.

Flat-pole Alnico III magnetic slugs were used until Fender changed to Alnico V in 1955. Shortly afterwards, the slugs became staggered, bringing Tele bridge pickups in line with Stratocaster pickups. White

"The Tele will do anything you want it to do. It's a workhorse"

MIKE CAMPBELL



TELE TALK:

MIKE CAMPBELL

BY ANDREW DALY

"The Telecaster always works.

It always seems to find a spot in the band that works, and it just sounds right. If I'm stuck in the studio, I can grab the Tele and I know it's going to work — I'll find something that'll fit the track. They're easy to play, and they're not heavy. You pick it up, it sits on your lap and feels balanced. Then, when you stand up with it, it still feels balanced! You can hit it hard, and it won't go out of tune. And between the two pickups, it's got a range of tones where you can get a really clear sound or you can get really nasty. It'll do anything you want it to do. It's a workhorse. Actually, my first Telecaster was my Broadcaster, which is from a few years before they changed the name. That's an irreplaceable guitar. Now I have a couple; I've got a '59 and a '56 that's got a string bender on it. But to be honest, back in the day, I always thought Telecasters were kind of ugly. [Laughs] Strats had that great shape, and Les Pauls have those beautiful curves, but the Telecaster always looked like it was thrown together with leftover parts! [Laughs] Now, I think that's kind of the beauty of it."

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packing twine was wrapped around the exposed coils for protection, which turned black in the potting wax.

Unlike the bridge pickups, the neck pickups remained largely unchanged. Plain enamel 43 AWG was the magnet wire of choice along with non-staggered Alnico V slugs. Lacquer was used for potting, rather than wax, and a chrome-plated brass cover protected the coil.

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

Control Tweaks

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

Leo Fender clearly thought otherwise because he retained the treble roll-off with

“Teles have such a unique sound. They have a brightness and brilliance”

GINA GLEASON

dual-pickup models. At first, the settings were neck pickup with treble cut, then neck and bridge pickups with no tone control. There was a volume control, but the second knob blended the bridge and neck pickups in the back position. “My ‘52 has the blend knob and it’s a super-cool thing to [use],” Tatton says. “You can just add in a bit of neck pickup to soften the sound. Having the bass setting is fun, but it’s too dark, even for jazz solos.”

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

Despite widespread unpopularity, this wiring lasted until around 1968. CBS’s management made one of its rare popular decisions and standardized the factory wiring to neck/both/bridge with master volume and tone controls. Unfortunately, they simultaneously changed to bright-



TELE TALK: GINA GLEASON

BY DAN BRADLEY

“Teles have such a unique sound.

If you have a trained ear and listen to a lot of music, you can probably start to equate different sounds with gear. With the Tele, there’s no question. It cuts through and has a brightness and brilliance. And the players who started using them — the Danny Gattons and Jimmy Bryants — appeal to this sense of virtuosity. The iconic sound is so crisp and clear it gets associated with a high level of playing. There’s nothing to really hide behind. Danny Gatton knows what’s going on!

“Of the new 75th Anniversary models, the Liquid Gold American Ultra II was a standout. I liked the neck’s compound radius. In Eclipse, I play a Jackson with a 12-16-inch radius and like the flat, fast feeling. The Ultra II definitely had that going on with its 10-14”, and the Fastlane pickup paired with the noiseless sounded great for high-gain scenarios. Fender is always going to be great at the classics. The modern upgrades are cool to check out. They’ll always be innovating — but that classic Butterscotch ‘51 Tele is always going to be 10-out-of-10 incredible.”

MATT LINCOLN, MIKKA SKAFFARI/REDFERNS

A 1955 Fender Esquire
— three sounds from
a single-pickup guitar



The Telecaster Thinline appeared in 1968, with a specially designed pickguard, slanted controls and a single f-hole



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1974 Telecaster Custom, a model made famous by Keith Richards, as seen on our February 1996 cover



sounding 1 mega-ohm pots with a treble bleed capacitor on the volume control. Oliver has reservations: "I have a rosewood-board '69, which I don't think is very good. The neck feels very nice – it's actually thicker than my Blackguard – but I'd describe it as a harsh and shrill-sounding guitar."

Blonde on Blondes

Like Fifties Les Pauls, there's no definitive look for Blackguards, and much depends on environmental factors and how hard they've been played. Some of their finishes have a dirty and brownish look that's commonly referred to as "butterscotch"; others are more of a yellowish cream, and there are all shades in between.

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

During 1954, Fender introduced the Stratocaster, and Forest White was recruited to run the Fender plant and oversee an increase in production. Big changes were made to the Tele, too, with a modernized facelift bringing an end to the Blackguard era. With a white blonde finish and a single-ply white plastic pickguard, Esquires and

"There's no hiding on a Telecaster; no extra features to lean on..."

CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM

Telecasters from this era became known as "Whiteguards." Again, Fender sprayed the translucent coats heavier on the sides and edges to create a subtle white 'burst. Not all Whiteguards were blonde, and starting in 1955 Fender would occasionally spray Telecasters sunburst.

Hardware-ing

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

Fender used Kluson tuners from the 1940s until the late 1960s. Those used up to 1951 had "Patent Applied For" stamps on the undersides and the closed shell cover. The following version lost the cover stamp and the single-line Kluson Deluxe lettering, and they were used up to 1952.

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

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



TELE TALK: CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM

BY ANDREW DALY

"The Telecaster proves you don't need much to say a lot. It's about as stripped down as it gets. Two knobs, two pickups, a switch. That's it! There's no hiding on it, no extra features to lean on. It's just you and your hands. Somehow, with that simplicity, you can get way more out of it than you probably should be able to. It forces you to be real about your playing. If your timing is off, you hear it. If your tone isn't right, you hear it. But when everything lines up, it feels like the guitar is working with you, not for you. It made me want to get better instead of more complicated. It's the attack and the clarity. There's a snap to it that cuts through anything, but it still has warmth if you know how to get it. As far as another workhorse like it, I don't know. A lot of guitars now are designed to do everything, and that's cool, but the Tele already does that without trying. It came from a place where the goal was just to make something that works every night, and it still does."



Detail of a 1969 solid-rosewood Tele similar to George Harrison's late-'68 model

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resolve the problem for every Fender instrument.

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

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

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

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

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

In 1968, smooth saddles with string grooves appeared. They're often assumed

to be steel, but since they're non-magnetic, they're more likely plated zamak.

Looking Rosey

The first significant change in the way Telecaster and Esquire necks were constructed rosewood occurred in 1959 when they acquired rosewood fretboards. The necks lost their "skunk stripes" because truss rods were installed from the top, rather than the back – and Tatton is a fan of the era "My 1960 is amazing and sounds more like a classic Telecaster than my Blackguard," he says.

"With Blackguards, there's something going on that's just otherworldly, but the 1960 sounds a bit fuller and the top end is more prominent. It's not as easy on the ear as the '52, but the '60 cuts through very well and it's nicely balanced with a non-muddy neck pickup. It's basically the Robben Ford sound."

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

From 1956, Fender offered custom colors at a 5 percent upcharge, but they are rare. Fender's first color chart appeared in 1960 with 14 options, and it was revamped in 1963. Fashions shifted to natural wood during the late Sixties, and by 1974 there were only six finish options.



TELE TALK: GRAHAM COXON

BY ANDREW DALY

"It's one of the first designs for an electric guitar, and there's nothing on there that you don't particularly need. If I had a perfect Strat, I'd take off a volume and a tone knob – because I'm a dreadful man – just to make it stripped down like a Tele. The Tele is a stripped-down hot rod. It's easy to play, simple and really versatile. It's a funny-looking thing, but I think people who actually settled down with a nice Tele as a wooden wife saw this incredible thing that Leo Fender decided to make. He made it out of bits of old tin and wood and put strings on it, and it was one of the best things ever – and it still is one of the greatest guitars ever built. Maybe because the design was too perfect in the first place, compared to the Strat, which came after... it was an absolutely perfect design. But it's a funny old shape. And the headstock isn't quite like a Strat headstock. With the Tele, it's like, "What's happened to your headstock?" And it's like, "Man, I was born this way..." [Laughs] It's kind of weird and not quite formed. It's strange, but it fucking does the job!"



A 1968 Telecaster in Red Paisley (with a Silverface Fender Champ thrown in for good measure)

JOBY SESSIONS

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From late 1956, Strat bodies were made from alder, but Fender continued making ash Telecasters throughout the Fifties and into the Seventies. Alder Tele bodies were also made, but many would have been concealed under sunburst and custom color finishes.

"Alder-bodied Teles haven't got that classic Tele sound," Tatton says. "They're a bit darker and more rounded, but they don't have the sweet top-end zing of the ash-bodied ones."

The Customs

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

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

Flower Power

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

Thinlines

Roger Rossmeisl and Phil Kubicki worked on special projects for Fender and devised a semi-hollow bodied Tele to use up heavier ash and mahogany blanks. The Telecaster Thinline appeared in 1968, with a specially designed pickguard, slanted controls and a single f-hole. Unlike George Harrison's late-'68 solid-rosewood Tele, the production versions of these were constructed like Thinlines, with

a rosewood sandwich body and a thin maple filling.

Wide Rangers

CBS commissioned Seth Lover, the man behind Gibson's iconic Patent Applied For pickup, to design a humbucking pickup. His "Wide Range" humbucker featured CuNiFe magnets with offset pole screws and first appeared in the double-humbucker version of the Thinline Tele in 1971, featuring in the company's catalog in 1972, its first full year of production. Also in 1972, Fender acknowledged the popular preference for humbuckers in the neck position and introduced a redesigned Telecaster Custom with a Wide Range humbucker and a traditional bridge pickup. A Telecaster Deluxe with two humbuckers, a Stratocaster-style headstock and a hardtail bridge followed in 1973. These were the final variants of the vintage era and, since Oliver owns both, we'll leave the last word to him.

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

"If I had a perfect Strat, I'd take off two knobs to strip it down like a Tele"

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TWICE-TOLD TELES



How a humble 1959 Fender Telecaster became an everlasting icon in the hands of legends Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page

BY CHRIS GILL

*The following feature contains excerpts from **Blow by Blow: The Jeff Beck Story** by Brad Tolinski & Chris Gill, which will be released by Da Capo on July 14, 2026.*

ICONIC GUITARS AREN'T necessarily dime-a-dozen (as proven by the results of Christie's recent Jim Irsay Auction where several instruments sold for astonishing prices that beat previous records), but they are relatively plentiful as almost every player of note is associated with a particular famous guitar, or several. However, instances where two or more legendary guitarists are associated with one single guitar are much rarer, with the 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard that once belonged to Peter Green and Gary Moore (and is currently owned by Kirk Hammett) and the red "Lucy" Les Paul that passed from John Sebastian to Rick Derringer to Eric Clapton to George Harrison being notable examples.

A certain 1959 Fender Telecaster also enjoys legendary "two-timer" status for the roles it played in the early careers of Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page — two titans of the highly influential Sixties British blues-rock triumvirate, which also included fellow Yardbirds alumnus Eric Clapton. This was the guitar that Beck played as he rose through the ranks of London's burgeoning blues-rock/R&B club scene during the early Sixties through his beginnings with the Yardbirds and that later became Page's main instrument on Led Zeppelin's 1969 debut album and was featured on select later recordings, including the solo for "Stairway to Heaven."

How or when this particular 1959 Telecaster ended up in England is unknown, but its earliest known history can be traced to sometime in late 1960 or early 1961 when John Owen purchased it as a used instrument for £107. This was a late-1959 example,

featuring a slab rosewood neck, white eight-screw pickguard, light blonde finish that looked almost white and an ashtray bridge with six holes for top-loading the strings (a short-lived, poorly conceived feature), although the late-'59 model also had holes for anchoring strings through the body.

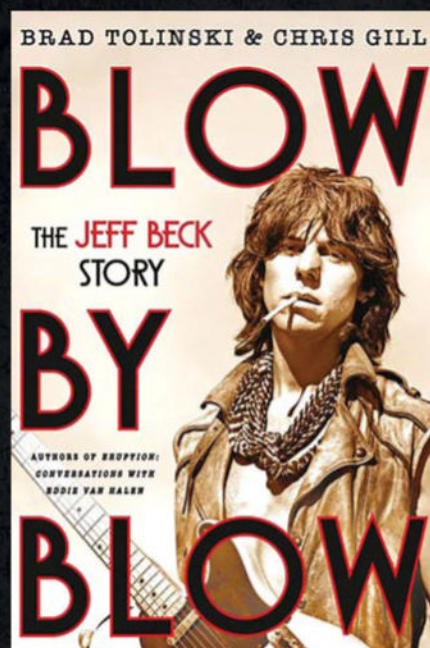
Owen was a good friend of Jeff Beck during their teenage years, and when Beck got an offer to join a band called the Deltones he accepted only under the condition that they also hire Owen on rhythm guitar. It was a bold move, but Beck's loyalty ran deep. Owen had been one of his biggest supporters, often lifting his spirits during moments of

self-doubt. And then there was a more self-serving reason: Beck coveted Owen's '59 Tele.

During his tenure with the Deltones, Beck experimented with several different instruments, including a Hofner Futurama III and a 1960 sunburst Fender Stratocaster, the latter purchased in 1961 with his mother's reluctant help as a guarantor. Although both were solid, professional-quality instruments, he gravitated toward Owen's Tele, borrowing it so frequently that it became less of a loan and more of a permanent arrangement. Eventually, Beck convinced Owen to part with it for good, most likely shortly after Beck traded his Strat for a 1953 Ford Zephyr in late 1962 or early '63.

The '59 Telecaster remained Beck's trusty companion as he joined various bands during the early Sixties, including the Nightshift and the Tridents. "When I first heard Beck, I just thought, 'What the fuck was that?'" Tridents lead guitarist Mike Jopp, who Beck replaced, later recalled. "There was this guy with a Telecaster and a Binson Echorec, and the notes were flying everywhere. Nobody at that point was doing anything like it. He was incredibly flashy, pressing the strings behind the nut, detuning them, making sounds that were just otherworldly. He was on a whole different level."

At some point, Beck swapped the Tele's original white single-layer pickguard for a black pickguard. Beck idolized the early Fifties black-guard Esquires he first saw as an impressionable 13-year-old in the hands of the guitarists in Little Richard and Gene Vincent's bands in the film *The Girl Can't Help It*. This simple cosmetic modification brought the Tele closer to those guitars of his dreams.





Jeff Beck [second from left] with his '59 Telecaster (and the rest of the Yardbirds) in action on *Ready Steady Go!*, March 19, 1965

The Telecaster remained in this state when Beck replaced Clapton as the lead guitarist for the Yardbirds in March 1965. The guitar appeared in Beck's highly capable hands in his early television appearances with the Yardbirds on shows like *Ready Steady Go!* and *Top of the Pops*. It also appeared in a promotional film shot on June 16, 1965, for American television where the band campily mimicked a performance of "For Your Love" while dressed in Renaissance Faire regalia. Beck played the Tele on his earliest recordings with the Yardbirds, including the seminal raga-rock hit "Heart Full of Soul."

When the Yardbirds returned from Paris, where they opened shows for the Beatles on June 20, 1965, the Telecaster temporarily went missing. While on a previous tour with the Walker Brothers, Beck noticed a 1954 Fender Esquire that belonged to Walker Brothers guitarist John Maus. The Esquire had a blond maple neck – a feature rarely

seen on Fender guitars imported to Britain as most Fenders that made their way to U.K. shores were later models with rosewood fingerboards. Needing a quick replacement for the lost Tele, Beck made a beeline to Maus and bought the Esquire for £75. When Beck later replaced the white pickguard for a black one, he finally had an Esquire that cosmetically matched the ones he lusted after in *The Girl Can't Help It*.

When the '59 Telecaster was eventually recovered, Beck lost interest in it in favor of his new ax. That interest waned even further when Beck bought a 1959 Gibson Les Paul

"Jeff Beck gave me his '59 Tele as thanks for getting him in the Yardbirds"

JIMMY PAGE

Standard in early 1966 and the Les Paul became his main guitar. When the Yardbirds' newly hired manager, Simon Napier-Bell, distributed funds from a large advance he negotiated for the band from EMI Records, Jeff bought a 1963 Corvette Stingray. The next day he drove it to his good friend Jimmy Page's house along with the '59 Telecaster.

"I was still living with my parents at the time in Epsom," Page said. "And I heard this car come roaring up. I looked out the window and I saw this blue Stingray outside... and Jeff's coming out and he's holding this guitar. [I thought] 'Oh, he's come to have a play.'"

"He knocked on the door and explained that [the Yardbirds] had just done a new deal and he bought the Stingray with it. Then he said, 'Here, this is yours' and gave me his 1959 Telecaster. He said, 'This is yours for getting me in the Yardbirds.' Well, obviously, I was really moved, you know, because there was a lot of love in that gesture of giving it to me." ▣

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Jimmy Page onstage with the Yardbirds in January 1967. The '59 Tele is in its "mirror" phase

When Beck gave Page the Tele, Jeff had restored it to its original cosmetic appearance by replacing the black pickguard with either its original white pickguard or one he made himself. Later, when Page joined Beck in the Yardbirds — first on bass and soon as a second lead guitarist — he played the Tele with the band. Page perfected his signature use of the violin bow on this guitar while performing alongside Beck.

The '59 Tele got the first of two significant cosmetic modifications Page performed to the guitar shortly after Beck left the Yardbirds in late 1966. First, Page acquired eight small circular mirrors and glued them to the guitar's top on the upper bout and below the bridge as well as to the pickguard.

"After Jeff left, I started to think much more about my visual image with the band," Page wrote in *Jimmy Page: The Anthology*

(Genesis Publications, 2020). "I wanted there to be more to the Telecaster than just the sound it made. I thought that maybe I could do something with light, maybe reflecting light from the guitar onto the audience to make a kind of kinetic sculpture. It started to become an art piece in its own right."

Eventually, Page decided to make a second, even more dramatic modification to the Tele's appearance by stripping off its finish, installing a custom reflective pickguard that displayed changing colors under bright

"I painted it over the course of an evening. Now it was the 'Dragoncaster'"

JIMMY PAGE

spotlights and painting a multi-colored dragon image on the body.

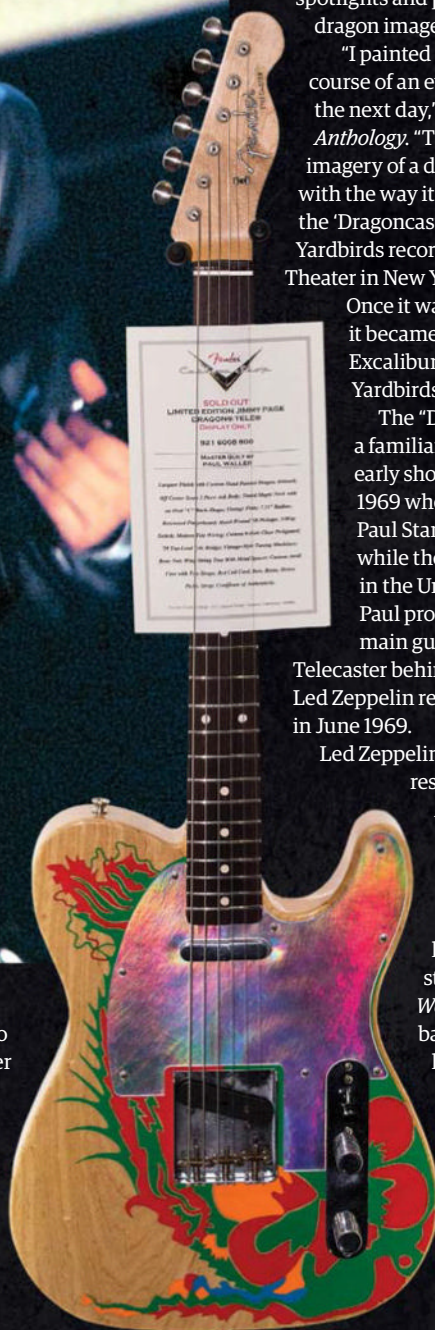
"I painted it in one go over the course of an evening, finishing it the next day," Page recalled in *The Anthology*. "The pattern took on the imagery of a dragon. I was quite happy with the way it ended up. Now it was the 'Dragoncaster.' I played it on the last Yardbirds recordings at the Anderson Theater in New York and on *Led Zeppelin*.

Once it was created and painted it became like the legendary Excalibur as it traveled from the Yardbirds to Led Zeppelin."

The "Dragoncaster" became a familiar sight at Led Zeppelin's early shows up until April 1969 when Page bought a Les Paul Standard from Joe Walsh while the band was on tour in the United States. The Les Paul promptly became Page's main guitar, and he left the '59 Telecaster behind at his home after Led Zeppelin returned to England in June 1969.

Led Zeppelin's North American tour resumed during July and August 1969, and when Page came back home in September he was greeted with an unwelcome surprise from his house sitter. "It's a tragic story," Page told *Guitar World* in 1998. "When I got back, a friend of mine had kindly painted over my paint job. He said, 'I've got a present for you.' He thought he had done me a real favor. As you can guess, I wasn't real happy about that. His paint job totally screwed up the sound and the wiring, so only the neck pickup worked."

In despair, Page stripped off the paint once again. He managed to repair the wiring and used the Tele for one last hurrah in 1970 when he recorded his solo for "Stairway to Heaven." "I salvaged the neck and put it on my brown (string bender) Tele that I used in the Firm,"



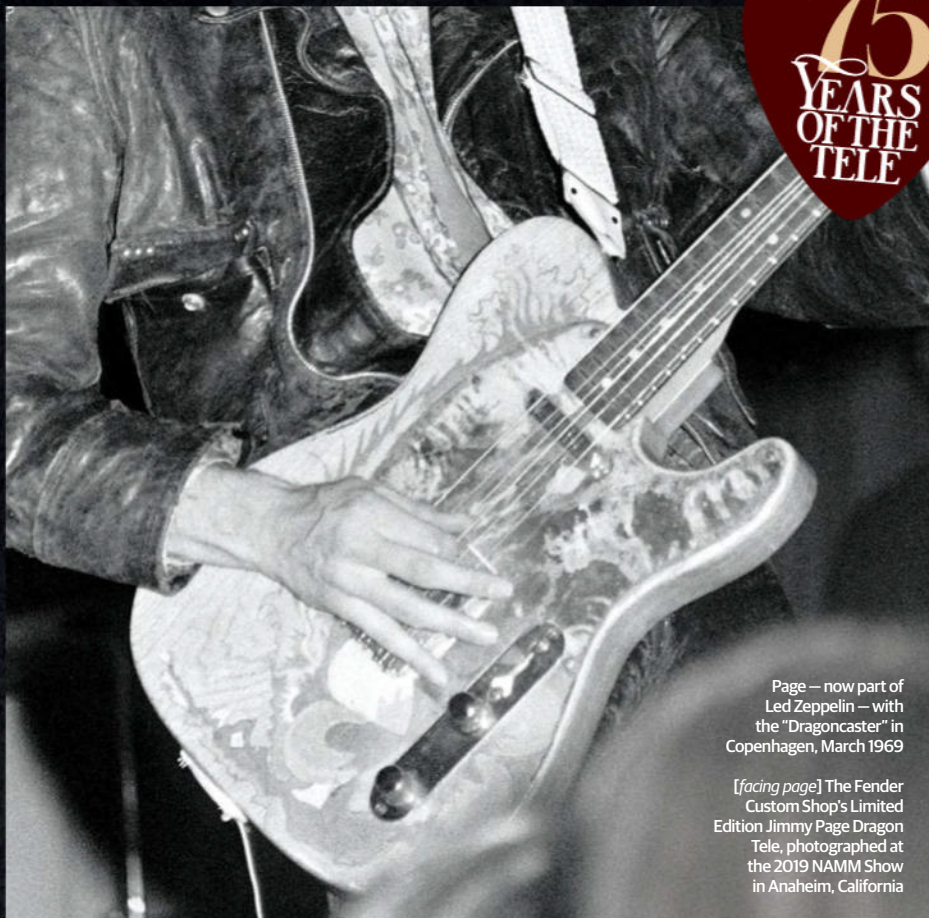
he told *GW* in 1998. "As for the body, it will never be seen again!"

That statement led many guitar fans to believe that the guitar had joined the list of legendary "lost Teles," a rumor that still persists to this day. Fortunately, Page broke his controversial promise in 2019, not only by resurrecting the Tele but also by painstakingly reproducing his original dragon artwork from detailed photos and his own memory.

"It was the Met (the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City) wanting to include this guitar in the Play It Loud exhibition that gave me the motivation to get it repainted," Page wrote in *The Anthology*. "I'd been meaning to do it at some point but had had so many projects to do and now was the time."

Later that year, Fender released signature models based on the "mirrored" and "dragon" versions of this legendary 1959 Telecaster, each offered as both a production model and as a limited-edition Custom Shop release. The Fender Jimmy Page Dragon and Mirror Telecasters were long-overdue tributes to a truly iconic guitar that played a massive role in the historic British blues-rock movement during the Sixties by inspiring the development of hard rock and heavy metal, which made the electric guitar the leading voice of rebellion and free expression ever since. **GW**

JORGEN ANGEL/REDFERNS



Page — now part of Led Zeppelin — with the "Dragoncaster" in Copenhagen, March 1969

[[facing page] The Fender Custom Shop's Limited Edition Jimmy Page Dragon Tele, photographed at the 2019 NAMM Show in Anaheim, California

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FIVE FOR FINDING

The whys and whereabouts of famous Teles (and Esquires) played by Muddy Waters, Syd Barrett, Roy Buchanan, George Harrison and Danny Gatton

BY CHRIS GILL

WHAT HAPPENS TO iconic guitars after a famous (or cult hero) guitarist dies? These days it's common to see instruments sold at high-profile auctions and vanish into the clutches of anonymous collectors with deep pockets. However, some guitars live on in museum collections, remain under close guard as family heirlooms or pass along to famous player friends, where they continue to make history. We decided to take a closer look at five of the most celebrated Telecasters (actually, one is an Esquire) played by guitarists we've loved and lost and figure out where those instruments are now.

George Harrison's 1968 Fender Rosewood Telecaster Prototype

Sales of electric guitars skyrocketed in the mid-Sixties shortly after Beatlemania reached the U.S. However, American guitar companies were initially hesitant to capitalize on the phenomenon by striking deals with the Beatles, even though the Gibson, Gretsch and Rickenbacker (and later Epiphone and Fender) guitars they played instantly became desirable icons. Rickenbacker did make an early effort by giving George Harrison a prototype of their 360/12 electric 12-string, which made that model an instant success, but the relationship didn't go much further than that. The generation gap between the marketing/artist relations departments of American guitar companies and young rock 'n' rollers was apparently still too wide, as manufacturers preferred to align with more "respectable" jazz, country and pop performers at the time.

However, that attitude started to change during the late Sixties. In July 1968, Fender's

director of sales, Don Randall, met with Paul McCartney and John Lennon at Apple Corps hoping to convince the Beatles to sign an endorsement deal with Fender. As a symbolic gesture of trust, Randall gave the band Bassman and Twin Reverb amps, a Jazz Bass and Bass VI, a Rhodes electric piano and a Fender PA system. Lennon and McCartney greatly appreciated the gesture but remained reluctant, so Randall decided to sweeten the deal by giving lead guitarist George Harrison a very special instrument that was already in the works: a prototype of the Rosewood Telecaster model that Fender was planning to introduce.

Fender designers Philip Kubicki and Roger Rossmeisl built two prototypes each of the planned Rosewood Tele and Strat models, choosing the best example of each for Harrison and Jimi Hendrix, respectively (Hendrix died before Fender could give him the Rosewood Strat). Coincidentally, Rossmeisl already had an indirect relationship with the Beatles as the designer of the body shapes for the Rickenbacker 325 and 360/12 guitars and 4001 bass played by Lennon, Harrison and McCartney.

The Fender Rosewood Telecaster did not depart too radically from the standard Telecaster's design other than its two-piece rosewood neck and body construction, which consisted of two slabs (top and back) of Indian rosewood with carved chambers and a very

thin layer of maple in the center. Beyond that, it retained the two single-coil pickups, three-way blade selector switch, master volume and tone knobs and other standard Tele features. A clear satin finish preserved the rosewood's natural root beer brown color and grain figuring, and a black pickguard was chosen over the usual white version because it complemented the rosewood's deep, rich hues better.

Rossmeisl had already developed both the short-lived "smuggler's" variant of the Telecaster body, where a huge hollow cavity was hidden underneath the pickguard to relieve excess weight, and Telecaster Thinline model that made its debut in 1968. Rosewood was even heavier than the dense variety of alder supplied to Fender during this time period, so the chambered designs that Rossmeisl devised became a necessity to produce a guitar that was even remotely comfortable. Regardless, Harrison's Rosewood Telecaster still tipped the scales at more than 10 lbs.

The Rosewood Telecaster occupied a seat next to Randall when he flew to England in December 1968 to personally deliver the prototype to Harrison. Although he never felt fully comfortable with the guitar's excess weight, Harrison loved the Tele's looks and tone, and he immediately put it to use for the *Get Back* sessions in January 1969. It remained his studio companion from February through August 1969 as the Beatles worked on *Abbey Road*. The Rosewood Tele can be heard on several classic Beatles songs, including "Don't Let Me Down," "Get Back," "I've Got a Feeling," the single version of "Let It Be" and the solo-tradeoff section of "The End."

Most importantly, it is the guitar that Harrison played during the Beatles' final

Harrison loved the Tele's looks and tone and soon put it to use for the early 1969 *Get Back* sessions

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Delaney Bramlett in the late Nineties with the "rooftop" rosewood Tele — a gift from George Harrison

live performance on January 30, 1969, on the rooftop of the Apple Corps headquarters at 3 Savile Row in London, captured for the feature film *Let It Be*. Fender probably hoped to capitalize on the film to promote the Rosewood Telecaster, but they released the model prematurely in 1969 well before the film was released in May 1970. Public response to the model was passive, mainly due to its then-expensive \$375 price tag. By the time *Let It Be* reached theaters, dealers lost interest in stocking the model, even though a few eagle-eyed Beatles fans sought the distinctive Tele they saw Harrison playing. The Rosewood Telecaster appeared on and off in Fender catalog and dealer price lists until 1972 when they finally shipped all of the remaining stock.

Harrison also lost interest in the Rosewood Telecaster well before the film came out. In December 1969, he gave the Tele to Delaney Bramlett while he briefly toured as a member of Delaney & Bonnie. Bramlett played the guitar often on stage during the Seventies and beyond. He even famously loaned it to Jerry Garcia in 1970 when the Grateful Dead

guitarist joined Delaney & Bonnie on stage for a jam when their bands were on tour together. Bramlett made a few modifications to the guitar over time, including routing the body for a humbucking pickup in the neck position and sanding the finish off the back of the neck.

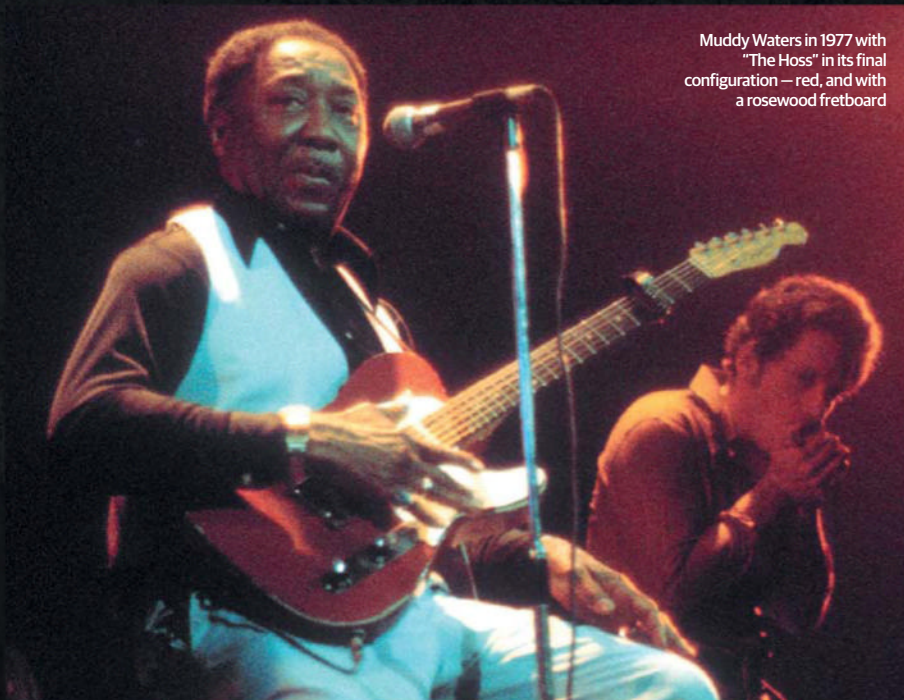
In 2003, Bramlett sold the Rosewood Telecaster through Odyssey Auctions in

Hollywood on September 13. The winning bidder was actor Ed Begley Jr., who snagged the instrument for \$434,750. Apparently, Begley was meant to act as a distraction from the real buyer, which was Harrison's widow, Olivia. The news of the guitar's return to the Harrison family became public knowledge anyway, and it still remains in their possession, often seen in the hands of George and Olivia's son Dhani.

Muddy Waters' circa-1957/58 Fender Tele, aka "The Hoss"

Rightfully revered as the "father of modern Chicago blues," Muddy Waters greatly inspired blues guitarists as well as rock players in England and America during the Sixties and beyond. From the mid-Sixties when he gained prominence and acclaim from white rock audiences through his death on April 30, 1983, at the age of 70, Waters was regularly seen and photographed playing a bright red Telecaster on stage. This Tele, which Waters nicknamed "the Hoss," became almost a holy relic among devotees of electric blues.

Waters acquired the Tele, probably as a brand-new purchase, sometime during the late Fifties. It was a standard 1957/58 model with a maple neck/fretboard and light blonde-finished ash body that looked almost white. Despite numerous accounts claiming that Waters painted the guitar red and swapped the maple neck for a later version from a Telecaster Custom with a rosewood fretboard during the early Sixties, a photo shot on May 7, 1964, while Waters was filmed in Manchester, England, for the Granada Television special *Blues and Gospel Train*



Muddy Waters in 1977 with "The Hoss" in its final configuration — red, and with a rosewood fretboard

Though Waters played a variety of other guitars, his "Hoss" Tele became an icon

ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS, IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS

Waters with the same Tele (before some major changes) in Manchester, England, May 7, 1964



INSITIVE
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of Fame museum in Cleveland starting in the Nineties. George Blanda of the Fender Custom Shop closely examined the guitar in 1999 when Fender developed the Muddy Waters Artist Signature Series Telecaster produced from 2001 to 2008. In 2017 after Cameron's death in 2015, Cameron's widow gave the guitar back to Waters' family, where it remains to this day. Most recently it was displayed in 2019 at the "Play It Loud" exhibit at New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Danny Gatton's 1953 Fender Telecaster

If there were any justice in this world, Danny Gatton would have been a superstar. He more than lived up to his nicknames "The Telemaster" and "The Humbler," thanks to his spectacular technique and mastery of multiple styles, including jazz, country, rockabilly, blues and more – an amalgamation he called "redneck jazz" and fellow guitarists described as mind-boggling. Despite earning a heap of acclaim, releasing a handful of albums on major labels and appearing on the cover of guitar magazines, Gatton never surpassed cult-hero status.

Gatton worked his way from playing clubs in the Washington, D.C., area during the Seventies to the public spotlight backing rockabilly revivalist Robert Gordon and classic country icon Roger Miller during the Eighties. During this period, his main guitar was a 1953 Telecaster (serial number 4883) 

shows that the Tele was still in its original blonde/maple neck configuration.

By the summer of 1965 (as verified by credibly dated photos), Waters had performed several significant modifications to the guitar. The original 1957 body remained, but it was now painted in a vivid, metallic red hue, and the aforementioned circa-1959-61 Telecaster Custom neck with slab rosewood fretboard also made its debut. Waters also replaced the chrome-plated metal flat-top control knobs with a set of skirted and numbered plastic knobs from a Fender amp, a mod that may have inspired Fender's switch to these knobs on Telecaster Custom and Deluxe models starting in 1972.

At some unknown point during the Sixties, four extra screws were added to the original five-screw pickguard to keep the pickguard from warping. Finally, in 1980, Waters swapped the original ashtray bridge with three smooth steel saddles to a gold-plated flat-plate brass bridge with six adjustable saddles.

Although Waters played a variety of other electric guitars earlier in his career, including a goldtop Les Paul, his "Hoss" Telecaster with its red finish became an icon thanks to its appearances in numerous photos and television appearances from 1965 onwards. This was the guitar Muddy played at several Montreux Jazz festivals from 1972-77, on his 1977-81 "come-back" albums produced by Johnny Winter

and at high-profile concerts with Eric Clapton, Robert Cray and the Rolling Stones.

After Waters died in 1983, his manager Scott Cameron took possession of the "Hoss" Telecaster. It appeared in public occasionally and was displayed at the Rock and Roll Hall



Danny Gatton (also shown on page 55) in 1981 with his '53 Tele

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that featured several highly personalized modifications. Gatton refretted the neck and installed cubic zirconia side markers on it, replaced the original knobs with a pair of custom heavily knurled stainless steel knobs made by Jay Monterose and bent down the pickup selector switch to keep it out of the way when manipulating the volume and tone knobs.

The '53 Tele's electronics provided the essence of Gatton's unique, multi-voiced tones. His pickups were custom made by Joe Barden, featuring a humbucking design in a standard Tele-size single-coil pickup featuring two side-by-side bobbins with blade polepieces. The pickups were wound to deliver single-coil tones without hum. Gatton used a standard audio-taper 500k ohm pot for his volume control, but his tone control had a linear-taper 1-megohm pot and a .05µF capacitor that enabled him to create wah effects.

Other distinct features included a stainless steel plate behind the bridge that was the mount for Gatton's "Magic Dingus Box" remote effects controller, a trophy plate from the October 1988 Greasers Halloween Car Show placed below the high E string and autographs that Willie Nelson and Roger Miller carved into the finish. Gatton used this Tele to record his acclaimed independent solo album *Unfinished Business*. It can also be heard in its full glory in a recording of his live performance in the early Eighties at Berkeley Square with Robert Gordon that was released in 1996 as *The Humbler*.

During the early Nineties after Gatton signed a record deal with Elektra and the Fender Custom Shop began collaborating with him on a Danny Gatton signature model Telecaster, Gatton traded his '53 Tele to his good friend Jack Jensen for a 1934 Ford four-door sedan. Although the '53 Tele had served him quite well, he couldn't resist the offer to trade it for the car of his dreams. After Gatton's tragic suicide, Jensen returned the Tele to Gatton's widow, Jan. On October 24, 2015, Heritage Auctions sold Gatton's '53 Tele for \$62,500. The winning bidder was private collector and Gatton fan Nathan Lefcowitz, who planned to continue playing, performing and recording with the instrument.

Roy Buchanan's 1953 Fender Telecaster, "Nancy"

The enigmatic and highly influential blues-rock guitarist Roy Buchanan inspired hundreds of players to pick up Telecasters during the Seventies, including the aforemen-



Roy Buchanan with "Nancy" in Newport, Rhode Island, July 1973

tioned Danny Gatton and even Jeff Beck, who returned to the Tele in 1974, after favoring Les Pauls and Strats for nearly eight years, to record his tribute to Buchanan, "Cause We've Ended As Lovers." Buchanan owned a variety of early Fifties black-guard Telecasters during this period, but he was best known for a 1953 model nicknamed "Nancy" (serial number 2324) that appeared on most of his Polydor and Atlantic album covers.

Guitarists who managed to track down an early Fifties Tele often wondered why their instruments never matched the sharp, biting treble, voice-like crying midrange and subdued bass of Buchanan's signature tone. The secret wasn't any special effects, a particular amp or studio trickery, but rather a very simple quirk or flaw. At some point, perhaps even before Buchanan acquired the Tele in the late Sixties while attending barber school, a winding in the bridge pickup became broken. Although the pickup's resistance didn't register on an ohm meter, it still operated normally, albeit with a distinctive tonal character that mystified pickup designers for years (not unlike the humbuckers in Eddie Van Halen's *Frankenstein* and 5150 guitars).

Buchanan had a few other tricks up his sleeve that guitarists quickly caught on to. The guitarist often placed a penny underneath the center saddle of the Tele's three-saddle bridge, which raised its height without extending the screws excessively. Many players feel that extending the saddle screws too far can make the tone thinner and affect sustain as the string vibrations don't transfer as well when the screws aren't embedded fully in the saddle. At some point, Buchanan drilled a hole through the headstock, but this was done only so he could hang it from a protruding nail on the

wall (similar to the practice of many Spanish flamenco guitar luthiers) and not for any tone or performance reasons.

According to Seymour Duncan, the wiring in the "Nancy" Tele was 100 percent stock, providing the era-correct bridge, neck, neck dark/bass settings. A .1µF capacitor in series with the output performs like a high-pass filter to roll off some of the bass frequencies. Although the volume and tone pots were allegedly stock, they had the short on/off throw of linear taper pots, which made it easier for Buchanan to perform his signature volume and tone control swells.

Buchanan toured and gigged with "Nancy" up until the early Eighties when the value of vintage Teles soared. Worried that someone would steal his increasingly valuable ax and needing a sizable influx of cash to support himself, Buchanan sold it. His '53 Tele circulated among a few vintage-guitar shops and buyers over the years until collector Mac Yasuda purchased it in the Nineties. Since then, Yasuda has loaned it to occasional exhibits at the Fullerton Museum Center's Leo Fender Gallery in Southern California.

Syd Barrett's circa-1963/64 Fender Esquire

The life and times of Pink Floyd co-founder Syd Barrett is filled with much mystery and weirdness, so it's fitting the guitar most closely associated with him also has a similar reputation. This guitar was a Sixties Fender Esquire often called the "Mirror Disc Telecaster" that Barrett modified by covering the body with silver-colored mylar foil wrap and polished circular metal discs that reflected light (but weren't actually mirrors).

Pink Floyd guitar enthusiasts often describe this guitar as a 1962 model due to its laminated rosewood fretboard (identifiable by the straight angle of the edge of rosewood protruding past the nut). However, highly detailed photos and video that have emerged recently clearly show that the headstock

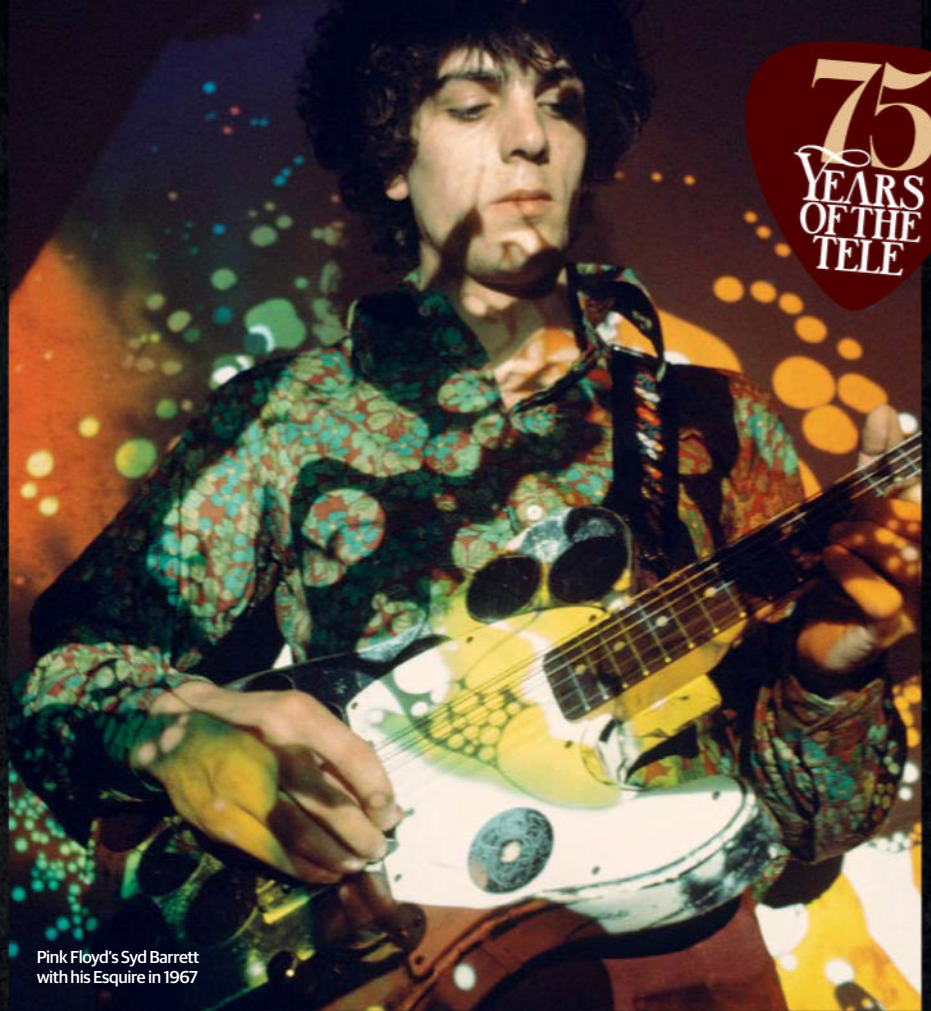
It's possible that Syd's Esquire might be gone forever, but, as he once sang, "Isn't it good to be lost in the wood?"

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decal has three patent numbers below the "Esquire" (damaged to read "Esquie") name, which didn't appear on the Esquire until 1963. Allegedly Barrett bought this guitar brand new in either 1964 or '65, so it's most likely a 1964 model. The Esquire originally had a stock light blonde (almost white) finish before Barrett covered the body.

Barrett used this Esquire almost exclusively on Pink Floyd's first singles and debut album, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. It became famous in its own right during Pink Floyd's early concerts, where the metal discs reflected lights and colors from the psychedelic light show. Barrett played it on *A Saucerful of Secrets* as well, but shortly after the album's release he stopped using it for shows, preferring a white Tele he recently purchased.

In late 1968, after the release of *A Saucerful of Secrets*, Barrett traded his "Mirror Disc" Esquire for a black Telecaster Custom. From that point onwards, the guitar's whereabouts have remained unknown. It's possible that Barrett or the person he sold it to removed all of the distinctive modifications, so even if the guitar were discovered today it would be very difficult to verify as actually being the Pink Floyd founder's guitar. It's possible that Syd's Esquire might be gone forever, but, as he once sang, "Isn't it good to be lost in the wood?" **GW**



Pink Floyd's Syd Barrett with his Esquire in 1967

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JOHN 5'S TOP 5

The player whose name has become synonymous with Telecasters chooses five favorites from his personal stash

BY ANDREW DALY PORTRAITS BY JEN ROSENSTEIN

LEO FENDER COULDN'T have foreseen John 5 when the first Telecaster rolled off the line 75 years ago. But since going public in the late Nineties as the chalk-faced sideman for Marilyn Manson, the Michigan-born shredder has been arguably the heavy mob's greatest ambassador for the model. As 5's career has twisted and turned — from early shifts with David Lee Roth, Manson and Rob Zombie to his solo career and recent stunt-guitar duties for Mötley Crüe — his appreciation of the Tele has evolved in lockstep.

Scan 5's rack through the years and you'll find a musician plainly in love with the Tele foundation but constantly pushing the envelope. From his paddle-headed, Bigsby-fitted custom curio of the post-millennium, and early Fender and Squier J5 signature models, all the way to 2023's top-dollar Ghost and recent lava lamp-inspired models — few modern players have done more to keep this ancient design so eye-poppingly relevant.

Now, choosing just a fistful of favorite Teles from his personal arsenal is a challenge that 5 gladly takes up for *Guitar World*. "It's funny,"



John 5
with his Custom
Fender Ghost

he says. "I have different guitars, like Les Pauls and things like that. But aside from the Tele, I don't know what I would play. I try to think about it, and I really don't know! Maybe a Strat? [Laughs] It's so strange because when you've done something a certain way your whole life, it's so weird to think, 'What would it be like?' It's so hard to think about because I've always played a Telecaster."

2022 Fender Custom John 5 Ghost Tele

My Ghost is Number 1. It was put together when Fender did a collaboration with [NYC skateboarding and streetwear brand] Supreme. I thought, "This guitar is strikingly beautiful. I want to do a guitar like this." That's where we came up with it, and it's by far my favorite. I even named a record after it! [2025's Ghost] I feel safe with the Ghost. I know I'm not gonna have problems live or in a studio. It'll stay in tune and sound and feel great. It's like when you're getting on an airplane, and you're like, "I don't know about this," but then you get on a really nice one, a beautiful double-decker, and you think, "This is gonna be amazing." [Laughs] That's how it is with the Ghost! I travel with it everywhere. In fact, I'm driving home right now from Joshua Tree, and I have my Ghost in the back seat. So yeah, it's important.

2025 Fender Custom Tele, aka "The Phantom"

Number 2 is the Phantom. That's my 100-percent Number 1 guitar with Mötley Crüe. It's just a monster. It sounds and feels so good. It's got this beautiful cutaway and this contour, and a Floyd Rose, of course. ▣

John with "The Phantom," his "100-percent Number 1 guitar with Mötley Crüe"



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John with Goldie
in San Francisco in 2020.
"We did a kill switch for the
first time. That guitar was
an epiphany for me; it
changed my life"

Fender Custom Shop Tele, aka "Goldie"

Goldie's been on a zillion recordings, and it's one of those special guitars. I've played it so much, so I'm always worried about getting him re-painted or re-fretted or something. So whenever it's time for a really major re-fret, I just retire it and search for another. I got Goldie after I stopped using my black-and-chrome Telecaster. I wanted a gold Tele, but I wanted the Shoreline Gold Fender used in the Sixties when they used car paint on guitars. Alex Perez [at Fender] found that paint — and it's still the real paint — and now Goldie has chipped so much that you can see the wood. When it was put together, we did a kill switch for the first time — that guitar was an epiphany for me; it changed my life. I played it until it wasn't safe to play anymore because I don't want anything to happen to it. It's on so many records and was used at countless shows.

2003 Fender J5 Telecaster

I had this black Tele with a chrome pickguard for so long, 13 or 14 years. I used it forever. It was just that amazing connection you have with an instrument. I really enjoyed playing that guitar, and it's when I knew I wanted a beefed-up Telecaster. I was thinking, "I really love this sound," and when it came down to how it would look, I was thinking of a beautiful Harley-Davidson motorcycle that'd shine up strong. I would see chrome and black and think they look just gorgeous together. When it all came together, it had this double

MIUKA SKAFFARI/FILMMAGIC



John (and friend)
with his '03 Fender J5.
"You couldn't tell the
difference between
the Squier and the
Fender... If you find
one, grab it!"

binding because I love the Sixties Teles that had that, and I thought, "This is beautiful."

This was before the kill switch, so it was an early Tele for me. I played it on everything, a lot with Marilyn Mason and Rob Zombie. It was a monster guitar that could also do jazz and country. Squier did a version of that guitar and Goldie. In fact, they were closing their doors, and I'm proud of the fact that they kept open for another year because they had so many orders for those two guitars. You couldn't tell the difference between the Squier and the Fender. I played the Squiers live, and I couldn't tell because they were so well done. If you find one, grab it!

1990s Fender '52 Telecaster

I used this '52 reissue through my David Lee Roth and Rob Halford eras. It's exactly like a '52. It was just that magical thing where you walk into a Guitar Center, which I did in Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard, and said, "Let's just look at the Teles." This was before I was endorsed by Fender. I saw this Tele and thought, "This is incredible." I took it off the shelf, bought it, put a stack pickup in it and that was it. I played it forever, and I still do. It's the guitar that really got me endorsed with Fender because I'd play it so much that they had a picture of me playing it and put it up at the NAMM Show. It was this big display with all their other endorsees – but I wasn't an endorsee! [Laughs] I went to the Fender booth, and they said, "We want to give you an endorsement deal." I was like, "Yes!" **GW**



John with his '52 reissue. "It's the guitar that got me endorsed with Fender"

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HIGHWAY COMPANION

Mike Campbell chooses his top five Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers tracks recorded with his Fender Broadcaster

BY ANDREW DALY

WHEN IT COMES to Mike Campbell's sound in and out of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, there's a common thread — his 1951 Fender Broadcaster, a guitar he picked up in 1975 at Nadine's Music in Hollywood for \$600. Given the sheer number of iconic tracks this guitar has appeared on, it's safe to say it was worth the investment. "All my Teles sound good," says Campbell, who has his own namesake Fender Stories Collection Red Dog Tele. "But that one is still bright and has a nice midrange. It's got a warm tone underneath there, and that makes it sound different from other Teles." You can decide for yourself as you check out Campbell's picks for his five favorite Broadcaster-enriched Heartbreakers tunes.

"American Girl"

We didn't have a 12-string, but we wanted one on the song. Well, I did! I took my Broadcaster and played octaves — because a 12-string is multiple notes and octaves on one string. I tried to simulate a 12-string on that riff throughout the song. At the end, where I do that triplet thing — that was an afterthought. I didn't like it, but Tom said, "No, it's great. Now you've got to double it." So I doubled it, and that became the end of that song. "American Girl" is kind of just the sound of that guitar. It was the harmonics between the rhythm and the Broadcaster on top of it. That became the Heartbreakers' sound.

"Breakdown"

We had only two guitars during the first couple of albums. Tom had been playing bass up until then, so I let him borrow my '64 Strat,

and that was his guitar for the first few years. Then I got the Broadcaster and, eventually, a Les Paul. But with "Breakdown," all we had was my Strat and the Broadcaster. It was about a six-minute take one night at Shelter Studios in Hollywood. I said, "Let me put some guitar on it." It didn't have the lick; it was just the chords, so I noodled for six minutes — and then I got bored. I couldn't think of anything, so I picked up a slide and played that lick. I didn't think much about it and went home. An hour later, the phone rang. Tom said, "You've got to come back. We want to put that lick you played at the end at the front of the song." I got up, drove back down, and I had to hear it to remember what it was and learn it. I ended up playing it without the slide, but I played that melody. That became the hook of the song.

"Mary Jane's Last Dance"

I think I had my Ampeg Rocket set up in the garage while we were working with [producer] Rick Rubin. Tom picked up my Broadcaster. He was working on a rough idea for the song, and he just started playing that rhythm through the Ampeg. That's what ended up on the record — the sound that set up the song. The Broadcaster just keeps popping up throughout our whole career! It was like, "What goes here? The Broadcaster

will work!" It's a workhorse. But yeah, "Mary Jane" was Tom playing the rhythm on the Broadcaster, and I played a goldtop Les Paul against it, which created that sound.

"You Wreck Me"

"You Wreck Me" was just a bolt of adrenaline. I was writing it in E, and I got bored with it. So I put a capo on the first fret just to change the tone a bit, and I got those three chords. It was all written in the key of F with a capo on the first fret. It's just open chords like that on the Broadcaster — but they sounded really raunchy, full and exciting.

"Here Comes My Girl"

When we played this one live, I used a 12-string, but in the studio, I used the Broadcaster and doubled it for those suspended chords. The cool thing about the Broadcaster is that you can play a chord, and if you're set up right, you can hear every string clearly. On "Here Comes My Girl," we needed the clarity of those chord suspensions going up. And it couldn't be cloudy because you have to hear each string ring clearly. So it was written and recorded on the Broadcaster, and then it was doubled here and there. So, yeah, it's a good guitar. Talking about it makes me wanna go play it! **GW**



Mike Campbell (left) and Tom Petty in 1981

STEVE RINGMAN/SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE VIA GETTY IMAGES

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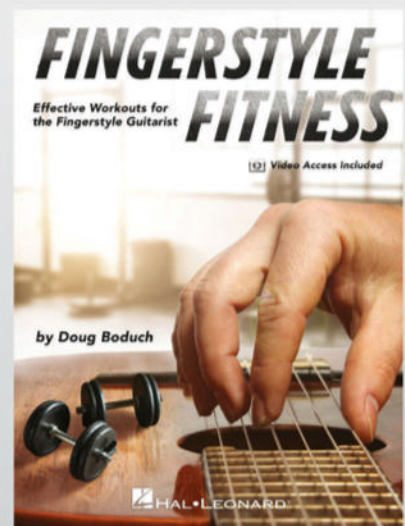
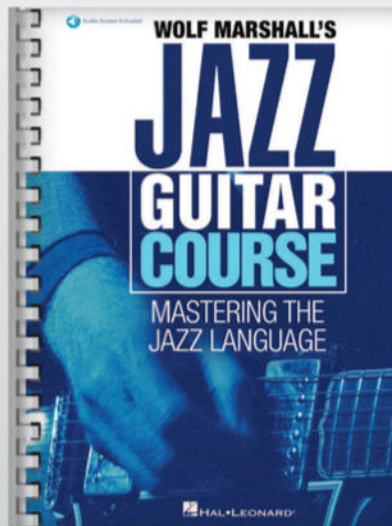
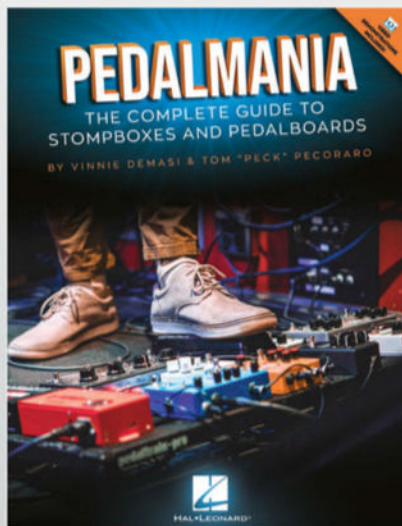
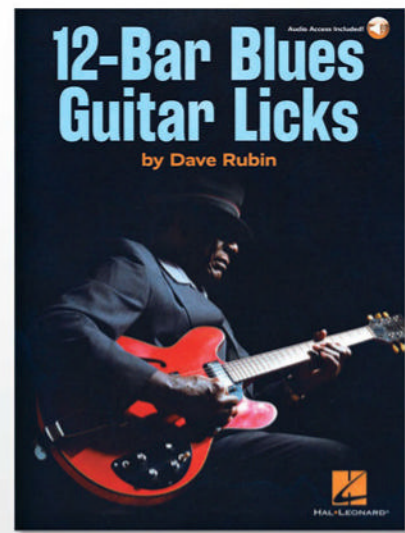
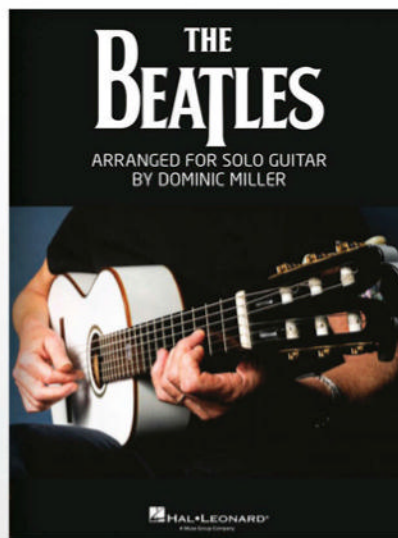
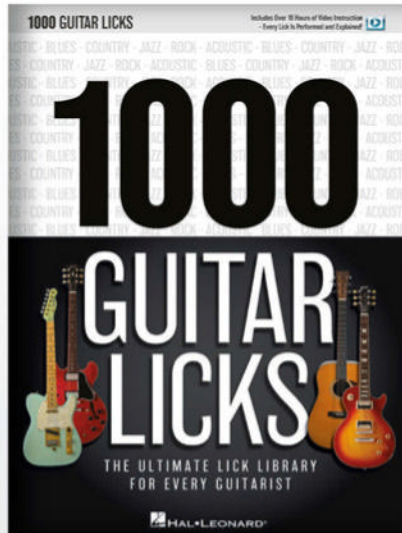
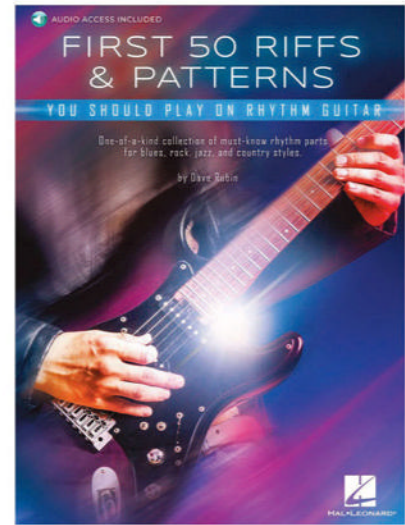
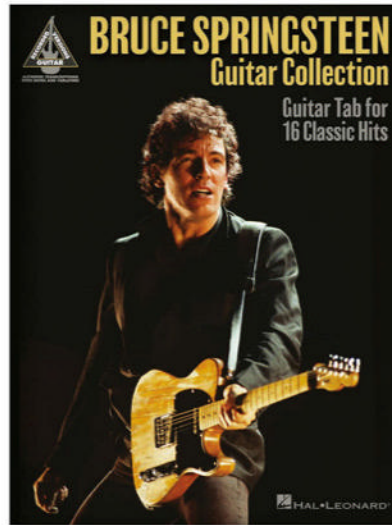
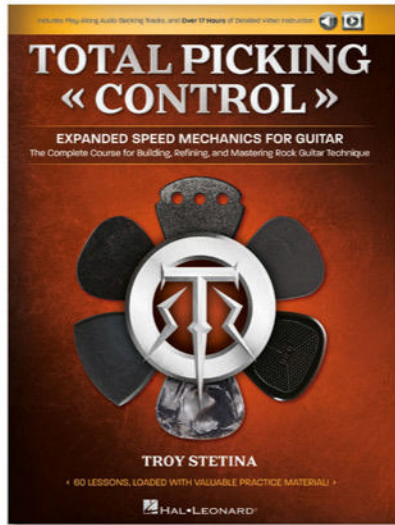
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John Osborne's '68 saved him from a life of grind. Now, the country-rock star salutes it with his maverick new signature model – and reveals why the Tele is still his favorite wrench

BY RYAN REED

MY DAD'S A plumber, and I did plumbing with him as a kid," says John Osborne, guitarist and co-songwriter behind acclaimed country-rock duo the Brothers Osborne. "I wanted to not be a plumber so bad that I practiced guitar every damn day. Then, the older I get, the more I realize, 'I'm just a plumber with a guitar!' [Laughs] I'm just showing up to do a job, hoping I do it well."

If you've ever heard this man play, it's clear that obsession paid off. Across their four LPs, he and singer/sibling T.J. pair classy Nashville twang with pop hooks, elevated by the kind of blazing musicianship suited for an arena stage flanked by pyrotechnics. It's no surprise Fender tapped him for this year's signature John Osborne Telecaster, inspired by his own modded-out '68 – B-bender and all.

The design draws on many years of his own tweaking, experimentation and "aha" moments. There's the maple neck, the "lifeblood" of the instrument. The quirky pickguard, which "lends itself to the almost outlaw era of Teles." The custom pickups, which nail that sweet spot of "spank." Then there's that B-bender, which channels classic pedal-steel sweetness by raising the B string's pitch a whole step to C#.

"You're trying to make it an emotional thing," he tells us of the device. "When you get it, it's so much fun. You get to create a sound you've never made before. Once you get through the honeymoon period, you realize, 'Now I have this other tool to use when it's necessary – emphasis on when it's necessary.'"



John Osborne
with his new
signature Tele

Osborne gave us an overview of his signature Tele, shared his history with the B-bender and mused about finding the perfect balance of craftsmanship and technique.

You've talked about how you constructed your current guitar, making modifications over the years to the '68 Tele you bought at age 21. Was the idea with this signature model to recreate that precisely?

The idea was to replicate it as precisely as possible, with all of the slight – and maybe

large – modifications I made over time. This is where the guitar has ended up over 20 years of experimenting. I wanted to recreate that because it really is a unique Tele in so many ways. I wanted whoever picks it up to realize, "This is very classic but also very different."

Tell us about your history with the B-bender.

When I was in late high school, I became obsessed with Brent Mason. That's after I did my long stints of wanting to be a rock



"My signature Tele replicates all of the modifications that I had made – over 20 years of experimenting"

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player and a blues player and all the different genres I've encountered. I heard a solo on the radio on an Alan Jackson song, and I thought, "Who is bending that note so perfectly?" The song is called "Who's Cheatin' Who?" It has these bends that are so snappy, and I couldn't figure out what was going on. I learned how to do it with my fingers, but could never quite get the sound right. I remember watching a Brad Paisley video and seeing this contraption attached to his strap: "What is going on here?" Through that and a little investigating – the Internet was still in its infancy and you really had to dig – I heard of this thing called the B-bender.

I never had enough money to put one on my guitar. For the longest time, I just had one guitar, the '68 Tele. I remember opening up for Brad Paisley in his early career, and his tech was joking with me, "Don't do the B-bender thing. That's Brad's thing." Then he looked at my guitar and was like, "Wait, you don't have one!" I was like, "Yeah, I had to learn how to do it like this." But I was always obsessed with that sound. When we recorded our second record, [2018's] *Port Saint Joe*, a phenomenal Tele player/artist/songwriter/producer named Keith Gattis – a dear friend of mine who passed away [in 2023] – let me borrow his B-bender. At the time, he was playing it on a lot of Dwight Yoakam's stuff. His B-bender playing is otherworldly – it's got so much stank on it. And when I played that on the record, I realized, "This is so much fun." I finally could get all of the sounds I heard, and it came very naturally because I learned how to do a lot of those things with my hands. After that, I became obsessed with B-benders. I don't know if I know how to bend a B string in tune anymore because I have a contraption that does it for me. [Laughs]

Dead Man's Curve is considered a modern-guitar classic. Does it feel like a signature moment for you?

It does, and it doesn't. At the end of the day, I love that moment. I love the song "Muskrat Greene" that goes into "Dead Man's Curve." It's a time to show off and step out there as a player, but first and foremost I consider myself a songwriter, and the song is paramount to anything else. If the song lends itself to more or less guitar, that's what's needed. The older I get, the more I believe that. I grew up listening to Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan – the kings. But as you grow up, you

"I became obsessed with B-benders," Osborne says

realize there has to be a reason for that guitar, and it's the song. We have songs with zero solos because I didn't think it was necessary. I thought it would be too much icing on the cake. I just play rhythm and make it a textural thing. At the end of the day, the guitar is just a tool for the song – even though, when you're young, you think the song is just the tool for the guitar. [Laughs]

The reason the "Stairway to Heaven" solo is so great is that it's a tension release.

Yeah! I love jamming and jam bands, listening to the Allmans and anything Derek Trucks is involved in. I love bands that solo, and I'm hanging on to every note. The format we're in, you have three to four minutes to have a song and maybe a moment like that. I've always treated the solo as its own mini-song, something you can sing along to. I'm just trying to service the song. But we do have a few moments in the set where we unwind and let our fingers go. We need those as players. It's so much fun to stretch out.

I know the original Tele neck was the heart and soul of your guitar. What makes it so special?

The first thing you notice when you pick up a guitar is what the neck feels like. The back of your hand touching the back of the neck, it immediately informs what is about to happen with you and the guitar. It's this subconscious thing. Every time I picked up my guitar, it felt like putting on your favorite pair of jeans. It's like, "Damn, these things fit like a glove." It has a lot to do with how smooth the neck is. We did our best to get there. You can't beat 60 years of playing on the back of a neck, but it's very, very close. But also the rounded edges of the fingerboard indicate there's a lot of natural hand wear on it. It becomes a little more contoured and ergonomic on your hand.

The last thing you want is to feel like you're fighting your guitar to get sound out. That can be fine, but you want to enjoy it and have it be really comfortable. You can talk body woods all day, but you're not touching the body – you're holding on to that neck; that's where the expression comes from. It's got the maple cap, and I've always found '68-era Teles to have an interesting spank because of that. I found out that Brad Paisley's original is a '68. There's something special about that year. **GW**

"Every time I picked up my guitar, it felt like putting on your favorite pair of jeans, like, 'Damn, these things fit like a glove'"

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MOUNTAIN JAM



Pros choose their favorite Tele riffs and solos and decide who should be carved into that massive “Telecaster Mount Rushmore” that exists only in our deranged minds

BY ANDREW DALY

Who'd be carved into your Telecaster Mount Rushmore?

MIKE CAMPBELL: James Burton, Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. But also Mike Bloomfield because he killed it on that first Paul Butterfield Blues Band album [*self-titled*, 1965]. I wore out that record. He burned that Telecaster all over the place there. He's the main one who turned me on to that sound.

JOHN 5: Jerry Reed – and Brent Mason because he had that weird-looking Tele and was a huge inspiration to me. Jerry Donahue, who I love so much with those behind-the-nut bends, and, of course, Keith Richards.

JOHN OSBORNE: Brent Mason introduced a lot of people to the Tele by what he did – and is still doing – on these country records. Then Vince Gill, Danny Gatton and Steve Cropper. Bonus pick? Albert Lee.

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR: Albert Collins is an absolute legend, and his vibrato is one of the most distinctive in the history of the instrument. Then Prince, one of the most underrated players ever. Keith Richards; I don't think there's a guitar player alive who's come up with as many iconic riffs as Keef. And Jeff Buckley, who gets overlooked, but he created some beautiful guitar parts in his short career.

GREG KOCH: Jimmy Bryant because he's the O.G. James Burton because he was the first and finest of the poultry pluckers. Albert Collins because he was a true original with the tone and chops of doom. Roy Buchanan, just because. And Danny Gatton, because, because... [*Laughs*]

KIRK FLETCHER: Prince, Bobby Womack, Eddie Hinton, Albert Collins, Reggie Young, Cornell Dupree, David Spinozza, Al McKay, Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, Jesse Ed Davis,

John Leventhal, Roy Buchanan, Roy Nichols, Brent Mason, Guthrie Trapp, Mike Stern – and I definitely still missed a huge amount. And, hands down, Robben Ford!

KEITH URBAN: James Burton, Keith Richards, Ray Flacke and Brent Mason.

BRENT MASON: Jerry Reed, James Burton, Roy Nichols and Danny Gatton.

JIM WEIDER: Roy Buchanan for his tone, touch and expression; James Burton for his finger-picking style with country bends; Steve Cropper for his rhythm playing, which set the standard; Jesse Ed Davis for his touch, tone, feel and liquid bends.

HUGH CORNWELL: James Burton epitomizes the Tele. Then there's Steve Cropper, a lesson to us all in longevity, and Wilko Johnson. His style was so unique.

J MASCIS: D. Boon from Minutemen for being lovable, energetic, trebly and inventive. Keith Richards... just riff after riff, song after song, and cool solos. “Cousin” Kenny Vaughan from Marty Stuart's band for his ripping country and rock licks and always serving the song. And Terry Reid. I loved seeing him with a Tele in his hand at Glastonbury [1971].

CHRISTONE “KINGFISH” INGRAM: Prince for the way he approached the guitar. Albert Collins for that icy, cutting tone. “Frosty” says everything you need to know. It's raw, direct and unmistakable. Cornell

“Keith Richards made the Telecaster sound like a band by itself”

CHRISTONE “KINGFISH” INGRAM

Dupree for taste and feel. The way he sits in a groove is unreal. He shows you how musical a Tele can be without ever overplaying. Keith Richards – the riff side of it. Open tunings, rhythm playing, just that attitude. He made the Tele sound like a band by itself. Roy Buchanan and Danny Gatton stretched the instrument in ways that still don't make sense. Honorable mentions to Bill Kirchen and Freddie Stone!

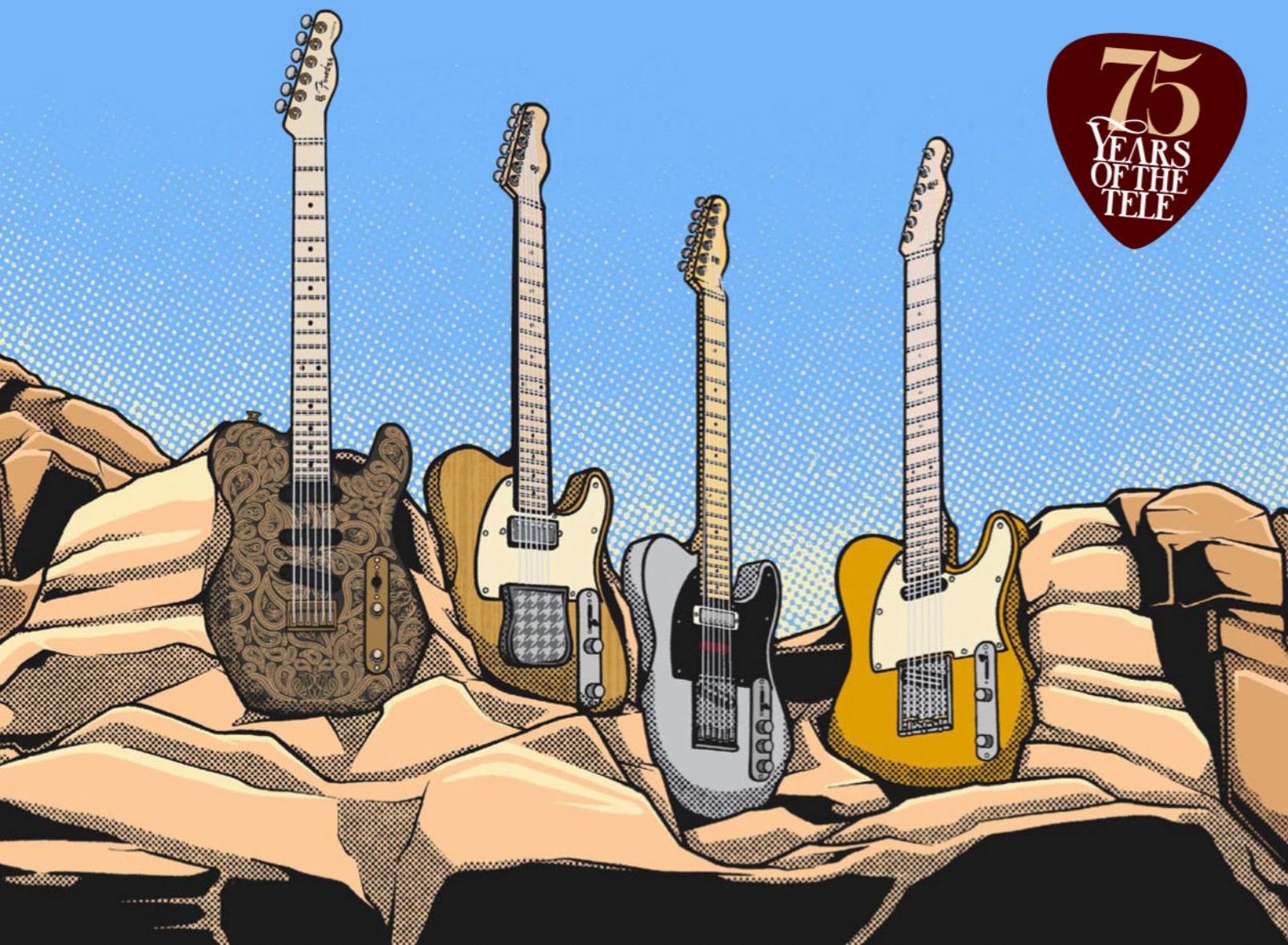
GRAHAM COXON: Wilko Johnson and Albert Lee. And then Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. Albert Lee was insane because he was 16 and playing with all these people, like the Everly Brothers, doing that chicken pickin'. And Frank Black from the Pixies, because *Surfer Rosa* was amazing. But there's also Paul Weller, David Gilmour and George Harrison, who you saw playing that solid-rosewood monstrosity at that point where they seemed to be allowed to play something other than Rickenbackers and Gretsches through Vox amps. [*Laughs*]

MARTY STUART: Clarence White, Roy Nichols, Luther Perkins, James Burton, Ralph Mooney, Don Rich and Jimmy Bryant – all with a fun, accessible California vibe. Living in Mississippi, I could close my eyes and see palm trees when those guys played. There was a cool factor. They could dazzle you, but they could also lay low with three notes. I've heard the songs a thousand times over, but they still light my heart up the same way they did the first time I heard 'em.

What are your favorite Tele riffs or solos?

MIKE CAMPBELL: My first thought is me going to the first Led Zeppelin record – all those riffs on “Dazed and Confused” and

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"Good Times Bad Times."

JOHN 5: Jimmy Page played the "Stairway to Heaven" solo on a Tele – and how incredible is that? And I love those Rolling Stones songs where Keith Richards plays a Tele, like "Honky Tonk Women," and when Jerry Reed did "Jerry's Breakdown" on a Tele.

GREG KOCH: "The Nightrider" by Jimmy Bryant & Speedy West, "Ice Pick" by Albert Collins, Albert Lee's solo on Dave Edmunds' version of "Sweet Little Lisa," "Roy's Bluz" by Roy Buchanan and any version of Danny Gatton doing "Harlem Nocturne." [Head to page 92.]

BRENT MASON: "Two More Bottles of Wine," which has Albert Lee soloing on Emmylou Harris' single. "Workin' Man Blues," specifically James Burton's solo and intro. "Alabama Jubilee," but the original version with the Jerry Reed intro and solo. "Goodnight, Irene" with Jerry Reed's solo and intro. And "Honky Tonk Night Time Man" with Roy Nichols' solo. All these tunes inspired me to play a Tele as a kid. I also watched my Uncle Terry play his white Tele with his blackface Super Reverb and coil cord. With tons of reverb!

KIRK FLETCHER: "Rainy Night in Georgia" by Brook Benton, "I'm in Love" by Wilson Pickett and "Memphis Soul Stew" by King Curtis, but I like the live Fillmore version with Cornell Dupree *and* the studio version by Reggie Young. "Done Change My Way of Living" by Taj Mahal with Jesse Ed Davis, "Natural Anthem" by Jesse Ed Davis, "Frosty" by Albert Collins, "Jesus Just Left Chicago" by ZZ Top, "Sweet Dreams" by Roy Buchanan, "Swinging Doors" by Merle Haggard, "Start It Up" by Robben Ford and so many more!

KEITH URBAN: "Guitars & Cadillacs" by Dwight Yoakam (Pete Anderson on guitar), "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" by Queen (with Brian May playing the solo), "Country Boy" and "Chattahoochee" by Alan Jackson (featuring Brent Mason) and "Highway 40 Blues" by Ricky Skaggs.

TAYLOR GOLDSMITH: "Brown Sugar" by the Stones, "Born to Run" by Bruce Springsteen, "Paranoid Android" by Radiohead, "Breakdown" by Tom Petty, "Mama Tried" by Merle Haggard and "Let It Be" by the Beatles.

JIM WEIDER: Paul Burlison's "Train Kept a-Rollin'" with that thumb and first finger;

Roy Buchanan's "Sweet Dreams," which is so beautiful and melodic; Jesse Ed Davis on Jackson Browne's "Doctor My Eyes" – his solo, tone and double-stop bends. Any live James Burton with Elvis Presley, any Ricky Nelson with his pick-and-fingers country bends, and Clarence White doing the Byrds' "Eight Miles High" live with his B-bender.

J MASCIS: "Happy" by the Stones. It's got a ripping riff right outta the gate, and it goes on from there. "Communication Breakdown" by Led Zeppelin because it's punishing and awesome. "Last Word" by Youth Brigade for its buzzsaw mayhem. "American Girl" by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers because it's classic, and the lead at the end is magic. "Cut" by Minutemen because it's relentless and piercing, yet harmonic.

HUGH CORNWELL: James Burton's solo on Ricky Nelson's "Just a Little Too Much." I had the record in my teens, and the solo was my favorite part of the song. You can't get a more perfectly composed solo.

CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM: The live "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" by Prince. It didn't feel like he was playing a Tele; it felt like he was playing everything ▣

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at once. [Ed. Note: Prince is actually playing a Hohner Madcat in that classic 2004 video. There was a Tele on the scene, but it was played by Jeff Lynne.] Plus "Frosty" by Albert

Collins, "Hey Joe" by Roy Buchanan, "Brown Sugar" by the Stones and "Hot Rod Lincoln" by Bill Kirchen. They're all from different worlds, and that's kind of the point.

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR: "Iced Over" by Albert Collins, "Grace" by Jeff Buckley, Prince's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" – and "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Tumbling Dice" by the Rolling Stones.

GRAHAM COXON: "Country Boy" by Head Hands & Feet with Albert Lee. He's just going insane. I'll send that off to people because it makes people happy, and it's just brilliant. And then there's early Zeppelin, where Jimmy Page had that Dragon Tele. This was before he got his Les Paul and all his sperm were going nuts. [Laughs] And then, early Eric Clapton with the Yardbirds. That stuff... what an experience that would have been to get that flipping amp and just dime it. As far as others, in America – in Nashville – there are people. Those people will read this and think, "Who is this asshole, Graham Coxon?" And those people are playing Teles properly, you know, just doing it nicely.

MARTY STUART: If you go to Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three, there are several versions of "Folsom Prison Blues," but if you go to the live recital version, what Luther Perkins played on that takes me back to when I was 9 and got my first guitar. It reminds me of everything I love about the guitar. Merle Haggard's "Workin' Man Blues" with James Burton playing the solo; if they recorded that song one more time, it would not have sounded the same. They caught lightning in a bottle. Clarence White's solo on "This Wheel's on Fire" from *Dr. Byrds & Mr. Hyde* – go figure that one out! [Laughs] "Love's Gonna Live Here" by Buck Owens and the Buckaroos. If [Buckaroos guitarist] Don Rich had lived – same as Clarence White – there's no telling where he would have taken it.

Why do you play a Tele?

JOHN 5: When kids are growing up, they see something and are drawn to it. I saw that guitar and loved it. I had an acoustic when I was six, but then I saw the electric guitars on *Hee Haw*. I was like, "Wow!" They looked so shiny

"The Tele is perfect for any situation... and it's practically indestructible!"

BRENT MASON



Albert Collins in action in Chicago, October 12, 1977

– and the shape... I didn't think there was any other shape for an electric guitar besides a Telecaster. They all used Teles on that show, and I was so taken aback by it.

GREG KOCH: It was the only Fender that was available to me in my formative years, and it just so happened to be the perfect tool for what I do. I love other guitars, but the Telecaster and its variants are always home for me. If I have to bring one guitar into the breach, that's the one I'm reaching for.

BRENT MASON: It's perfect for any situation. Whether it's country, rock, jazz, blues... the tone, the pickups, the wood all play into its character. And it's practically indestructible!

KEITH URBAN: It's like meat and potatoes, and it's built to take any player's style, from a light touch to beating the hell out of it.

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR: I started on a Strat, and while I still enjoy it for rhythm parts, I prefer the Tele for its bite. That and its versatility seem to suit me best.

JIM WEIDER: It was popular in the Sixties and used by the guitar heroes I watched, like Steve Cropper, James Burton, Rick Nelson, Jeff Beck, Robbie Robertson and Roy Buchanan. I also loved – and love – the look and feel of the Tele.

J MASCIS: I just like the leads I play on a Tele better than other guitars. It sounds more inspired and less generic.

GRAHAM COXON: It's light, and it seems to disappear when you play it. I was this Les Paul person when I was young, and it felt kind of sharp, and it was hurting my ribs. Then, in the early days of Blur, while we were recording the first few records with [producer] Stephen Street, he had this lovely old Tele, and I was like, "This is so comfortable." I didn't have to think about bruised ribs. I've never used Teles nicely. I've put them through tons of pedals to get what I need out of them, but it's such a beautiful and easy instrument to play, so that's why I used them, just as a tool to get the sounds I needed. But I've realized that proper Tele players don't really do that. [Laughs]

MARTY STUART: When I was falling in love with guitar and putting my first band together when I was 9, I'd look around on TV and magazine covers, and it was the guitar my heroes played. I just wanted to get into the parade, wear cool cowboy clothes and boots, play a Telecaster through a Fender amp and play the kind of songs that I loved. **GW**

Ryan Reed contributed to this story.

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Fender 75th Anniversary American Ultra II Telecaster

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

BY CONNOR FLYS

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

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

timeless design, its essential "rightness" is as clear today as it was in decades past.

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

The gold finish is cool in photos, but it is absolutely stunning in person

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

That's what you see here, but with an added celebratory twist. To mark the Telecaster's 75th year, multiple anniversary models have been announced; at \$2,999, this special American Ultra II model is top of



MATT LINCOLN





the tree. First impressions are dominated by the color, a new Fender concoction called Liquid Gold. It's cool in photos, but – holy smokes – it's absolutely stunning in person.

In different lights, it takes on vibrant shades of metallic gold, green, orange and bronze, and, to car enthusiasts, calls to mind the vivid pearlescent finishes adorning TVR sports cars. The application is as excellent as you'd expect for the price – including the matching headstock. Build quality in general is near faultless, with the caveat that the neck fit leaves a small but perceptible gap on the bass side of the pocket.

The hardware is similar to the high-quality stuff used on the standard American Ultra II Tele, but in a classy Black Chrome finish to

complement the black anodized aluminum scratchplate. The usual cutting-board slab of a Tele body has been sculpted into something more ergonomic, and the weight is in the right ballpark for a Tele.

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

At the neck there's a gold-finished Noiseless single-coil pickup along the same lines as that of the normal Ultra model, but the bridge pickup breaks

STREET PRICE: \$2,999.99

MANUFACTURER:
Fender, fender.com

PROS

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

CONS

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

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

some new ground for Fender. Called the Fastlane, it's the company's first in-house single-coil-sized humbucker. This is the first guitar to receive it. It probably won't be the last, however; Fender has stated that it has big plans for this pickup. Powered by rail magnets, it's also linked to two of Fender's S-1 switches – one puts it into parallel operation for a cutting twang; the other runs both pickups in series for thicker tones.

In its standard humbucking mode, though, the Fastlane certainly displays promise. It's notably fatter-sounding than a normal Tele bridge pickup, of course, but with abundant clarity and definition, as well as a healthy output that punches through but doesn't overwhelm a clean amp. When running in parallel mode, it thins out and dials up the twang noticeably. It still doesn't sound like a trad Tele, but it's a fun and useful sound nonetheless.

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

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



Taylor Jacob Collier GS Mini 5-String

A compact, sweet-toned five-string that's as quirky as its namesake

BY JAMIE DICKSON

IT'S FITTING THAT one of the most idiosyncratic artists of this decade, Jacob Collier, is a fan of the seldom-seen five-string guitar. His route into it, however, is not that of a six-string guitarist seeking a simpler, more direct expression of the instrument (like Keef, for example). In fact, Collier says he grew up playing the four-string tenor guitar and “used to dream of augmenting the tenor guitar with an extra string.” Well, now he need dream no more, because Taylor has done the honors.

The five-string GS Mini is one of two new affordable signature guitars Taylor has released with Collier. There's an Academy Series 22E five-string made of walnut and smoked eucalyptus (if that were a salad, we'd buy it) plus the Jacob Collier GS Mini we have here, which features a torrefied Sitka spruce top and layered sapele back and sides, Taylor's genteel term for “laminated,” though – by any name – it's a perfectly good material for acoustic bodies.

Like other guitars in the popular GS Mini range, the guitar has a 23.5-inch scale length and a body that's essentially a 7/8th scale version of its Grand Symphony (GS) guitars, hence the name.

Styling-wise, the Jacob Collier GS Mini is a mixture of plain, functional elements – it has no binding at all, for example – mixed with a flash of Collier-esque flamboyance via the colorful geometric rosette design, which appears to be a well-executed decal applied under the topcoat.

As always, the 20-fret Taylor neck is easy playing and electric-like, with a hint of a soft V to its profile. The string spacing feels quite natural under the fingers and there are surprisingly few fumbles getting used to it. The only time we reached for something and missed was when we went to use the tuners on the lower side of the headstock. You'll search in vain for the third tuner there.

The GS Mini is not a D-35 by any stretch, but it definitely jabs above its weight. In its intended tuning, the guitar's sound is full, warm and surprisingly loud, and – with fingerstyle in particular – notes really pop without losing composure. The top end is slightly attenuated but in a pleasant, sweet-toned way. And then there's that Collier-approved DAEAD tuning that avoids thirds to offer a kind of airy, open canvas for chordal improvisation.

We found it easy to get modal sounding, drone-like riffs going and

In its intended tuning, the guitar's sound is full, warm and surprisingly loud

make mercurial shifts between major and minor moods – and while there's a learning curve, it's quite an approachable, attractive tuning scheme.

This is a hard guitar to categorize – and perhaps Collier likes it that way. Its big voice (for its size) and no-frills build quality are impressive, and the torrefied top works brilliantly, but the advantages of the unique tuning and the five strings are harder to buy into. Collier has said he wants new players to be able to conjure unique and inspiring chord voicings more easily, and that is possible on this guitar – but it also disconnects you from the body of established guitar traditions and the ability to learn directly from them.

Nothing's stopping you from tuning your six-string differently, either, if you want to try something new. At this price, we'd love to feel this unusual platform offers something undeniably, uniquely valuable. In that much, at least, it feels like a beguiling solution in search of a real problem. **GW**

STREET PRICE: \$699

MANUFACTURER:
Taylor Guitars,
taylorguitars.com

PROS

- ✦ Sweet, warm tone
- ✦ Easy playability
- ✦ A fresh take on guitar

CONS

- Five strings might feel restrictive
- Intended tuning is niche
- Styling could be divisive

VERDICT: The Jacob Collier GS Mini 5-String is quirky, great-sounding and unique – but it's hard not to feel its limitations are at least as great as the musical vistas it opens up. For the right player, though, it could be the key to experiencing guitar anew.

Nux MG-50Li

This new multi-effects and amp-modeler pedal is a significant leap forward for the brand

BY PAUL RIARIO

AS THE CURRENT flagship of Nux's MG series of floor processors, the MG-50Li has the potential to stand out by offering an extensive array of features typically absent at this price point. And we haven't even mentioned the convenience of its rechargeable, battery-powered operation, offering up to six hours of use.

As its name suggests, the MG-50Li Modeler & Profiler is a feature-rich unit that offers state-of-the-art amp and pedal profiling. It includes support for open-source Neural Amp Modeler (NAM) capture files, plus

It offers an extensive array of features typically absent at this price point

a new hardware platform with three dedicated DSPs for effects, amp modeling and split-amp simulation, all powered by Nux's proprietary TS/AC-4K Amp Modeling (White Box Physical Modeling algorithm).

The MG-50Li boasts a large library of amps (60 split between White Box and profiling types), cabs and effects, all accessible via a 5-inch color LCD for quick, intuitive editing, and which also can be accomplished using the free Nux Audio app. Additionally, it supports complex setups with 14 simultaneous effect blocks, flexible signal chain routing and a UR Cyber IR cab simulator for virtual mic placement control.

Finally, the MG-50Li is equipped with a USB audio interface, dual send/return loops, loads of I/O connectivity and Bluetooth control. Ultimately, the advanced capabilities of the Nux MG-50Li allow users to create



everything from simple pedalboards to elaborate multi-amp and stereo rigs for stage and studio, potentially making it a very impressive spec for value in the sub-\$500 price range.

Visually, we were impressed by the MG-50Li's portable, grab-and-go form factor. In your hands, it's lightweight and roughly the size of an elongated laptop. Also, its design is intuitive, and the unit feels built to last. The heavy-duty metal casing, durable footswitches and sturdy, smooth-turning encoder knobs and buttons speak to its ruggedness.

A big advantage for usability is the spacing of the footswitches, which are far enough apart to avoid accidental mis-hits. Here, the MG-50Li's well-placed switches simplify managing presets/banks, activating the looper/tuner, toggling stoms and switching scenes.

MATT LINCOLN



STREET PRICE: \$499

MANUFACTURER:
Nux, nuxaudio.com

PROS

- Impressive amp and effects modeling with NAM profile expanding potential further
- Up to 14 simultaneous FX blocks
- 5-inch HD color LCD for intuitive onboard editing
- Built-in rechargeable battery for added flexibility

CONS

- Amp models and capturing not quite as close to some of the (pricier) competition

VERDICT: For now, we believe the MG-50Li is an extremely sensible choice, because it delivers performance and profiled tones that are highly impressive — and without a premium price tag.

The large 5-inch LCD is superb, offering a beautiful color display that makes it very easy to view parameters and presets, and to scroll between various screens. Even better, navigating the streamlined MG-50Li feels intuitive considering the lack of a touchscreen. We also found the Nux Audio app (for mobile devices and computers) vital for efficiency in streamlining workflow, enabling quick, on-the-spot editing, parameter adjustments, preset organization and file management.

We found a few of the White-Box and DeepImage amp models, like the Marshalls, Mesas, Soldano, Friedman, Vox and Fenders, all sound like approximations. Not that that is a bad thing, but we can't declare they sound authentic. To our ears, the profiled amps on units like the Kemper, Tonex and Quad Cortex sound remarkably

closer to the actual amplifiers. But like anything you want to get good at — like having washboard abs or creating killer guitar tones — you're going to have to invest some time with it.

Which brings us to the silver lining. Even though some of the MG-50Li's amp models and effects might not be exact reproductions, they serve as excellent foundations. In fact, many of the factory presets, particularly those in the first half, are solid starting points for crafting your own signal paths and custom presets. For instance, the Soldano capture delivers thick sustain and heavy tone, and certain DeepImage Fender models offer rich, full-bodied cleans that sound lush when combined with effects like pan delay and shimmer reverb. Speaking of which, it already offers a variety of effects, and we're

sure that will expand as the MG-50Li's ecosystem continues to grow.

One thing Nux absolutely nails is delivering the natural response and feel of analog pedals and tube amps, thanks to its TS/AC-4K White-Box physical modeling engine and tri-DSP processing architecture. So while we're not all that concerned whether Nux's Diezel model sounds exact, we're more excited that it behaves like the actual amp with its crushing saturation and distinct chug.

Even better, the MG-50Li's capture ecosystem, with its DeepImage tech and external NAM support, allows you to compensate and refine profiles with onboard EQs and power amp tube models. And to be fair, we believe future firmware updates will only enhance the power and impressiveness of the MG-50Li's modeling and captures. **GW**



Jackson Pro Plus Pure Metal KE1A Kelly

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

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

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

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

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

This Kelly has an all-over shell matte finish that makes it feel like it was turned out of a mold — or is of extra-terrestrial provenance like the Monoliths in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. We are assured there is wood under it,

and that wood comprises poplar wings glued to a three-piece maple neck that runs through it. While Jackson necks such as this are super-thin, they're tough as old boots, with graphite rods reinforcing them. The jumbo stainless steel frets are immaculately installed.

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

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

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

STREET PRICE: \$1,599

MANUFACTURER:

Jackson,
jacksonguitars.com

PROS

- Top-quality Bare Knuckle humbucker
- Good weight and super-quick neck
- Reverse headstock gets extra metal points

CONS

- Matte finish attracts fingerprints
- You'd want to upgrade the gig bag

VERDICT: Just when you thought the entire Jackson catalog was already "Pure Metal," the Californian high-performance specialist goes and makes something like this — a pro-quality limited-run beast with speed, with firepower, with everything you could want from a metal guitar — just as long as you don't need a neck pickup.

For those who park themselves at the bridge position and run everything on 10

In profile, the Kelly is a lot of guitar; you've got to be mindful of what's behind you. But at a hair over 8 lbs., this is a good weight. Minimalism is the order of the day. The electronics are super simple. That Holy Diver humbucker is wired to a single volume control. Turn it up and play.

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

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

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

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



MATT LINCOLN



Walrus Canvas Volume

The newest addition to the Canvas family is a versatile, feature-rich volume pedal loaded with capabilities you never knew you needed

BY DARYL ROBERTSON

▶ AT ITS CORE, the Canvas Volume ditches the old-school string-and-pot setup of traditional volume pedals for a cutting-edge position sensor and pro-grade VCAs. So there's nothing mechanical inside, such as gears or pots to wear out. The sweep promises to be wickedly smooth and responds exactly how you want, so you can nail those violin swells, dial in subtle ride-the-fader dynamics or just keep your volume changes seamless and silent.

It also frees the Canvas Volume to being tied to one kind of taper like the traditional volumes. It includes seven models of the most popular volume pedals on the market, including Ernie Ball, Boss and Lehle – and yes, this just shows you how far modeling has come: we're now recreating volume pedals!

The Canvas Volume is basically a Swiss Army Knife for your pedalboard's signal path. Walrus made sure it can slot into just about

any rig without too much trouble. You get Mono In/Mono Out, with a dedicated Tuner Out for quick, silent tuning, Stereo In/Stereo Out for those lush ambient rigs or Mono In/Dual Mono Out if you want to split your signal two ways from a single input.

And it's not just a one-trick pony, either. At toe-down, you can set the max output level. Leave it at unity gain for classic, transparent volume work or crank it up in 3dB steps, all the way to +9dB, if you want your solos to stand out. And here's a feature you don't see every day – Lag control. This lets you decide how quickly the pedal reacts to your foot moves. You can dial in up to two seconds of lag.

Day-to-day usability is a tale of two halves with the Canvas Volume. On one hand, the pedal feels instantly familiar to use: the sweep is smooth and highly responsive, making expressive volume swells, subtle fades and sudden cuts a breeze.

The low-profile design means it sits comfortably on most pedalboards.

However, things get a bit more complicated when it comes to changing settings. Walrus has tucked the controls away in a clever spot



LUCY ROBINSON

**STREET PRICE:** \$299**MANUFACTURER:**
Walrus Audio,
walrusaudio.com**PROS**

- + Does everything you need a volume pedal to do and more
- + The different tapers mean you can hone in on what suits your own playing style
- + Just as at home for keyboard and pedal steel players as guitarists

CONS

- Having it on a pedalboard makes changing settings awkward
- We'd prefer top-mounted jacks
- It's a significant outlay if you don't need features like the Lag control

VERDICT: Walrus has gone all-out with the Canvas Volume, even if it might be overkill for the majority of players. The multiple taper options are a nice touch, and the 9dB boost is very useful, but needing two hands to change modes makes it awkward to operate while it's on a 'board — or while you're holding a guitar.

under the heel, which keeps them safe from accidental bumps mid-performance, but actually accessing them can be awkward.

Adjusting the pedal's functions, like selecting different taper models or tweaking the lag control, requires you to press two buttons at the same time and use both hands. If the pedal is already installed on your 'board, and you've got a guitar strapped on, this turns a simple tweak into a bit of a juggling act. You'll likely need to either remove the pedal from your 'board or unstrap your guitar to make changes, which isn't ideal for quick adjustments onstage or in a band practice. In fact, while testing this pedal for review, our awkward attempts to make adjustments in the rehearsal room resulted in a few questionable looks from our bandmates and more than a few jokes at our expense.

On the plus side, once you have everything dialed in, the Canvas

More than just a passive tool, it's a genuinely creative, interactive part of your signal chain

Volume is a set-and-forget device. It delivers seamless operation in use, but just know that making on-the-fly changes is best left for setup, not the middle of a gig.

One of the most surprising joys of the Canvas Volume is how much the taper selection shapes the pedal's feel and response. Honestly, we hadn't given much thought to taper options on a volume pedal before, but cycling through the eight available models made the differences obvious. Each taper offers its own distinct volume curve, from gradual to more abrupt transitions, letting you find the sweet spot for your playing style.

The boost function is another genuinely useful addition. You get up to 9dB of clean, transparent boost, which is more than enough to push

your amp into solo territory or give your sound a little extra presence in the mix. During our tests with a Vox AC30 and a Gibson Theodore, the boost was consistently handy, offering a clear and punchy lift without coloring our core tone. Whether you want a subtle nudge or a bold step out front, it's got you covered.

The Lag feature is more divisive for us — the idea of adding a programmed delay between our foot movement and the pedal's actual response just doesn't appeal, but could be attractive for ambient styles.

Taken together, the sound-shaping options on the Canvas Volume make it far more than just a passive tool; it's a genuinely creative, interactive part of your signal chain. **GW**

Electro-Harmonix Pico Intelligent Harmony Machine

EHX shrinks another pedal into its Pico range, this time to add harmonic layers to your sound

BY TREVOR CURWEN

THE PICO INTELLIGENT Harmony Machine is a pedal that puts some of the functionality of its larger namesake into a diminutive Pico chassis, which could easily slip into any vacant pedalboard gap. Its function is to create two- or three-part harmony in any key over a range of different intervals.

Volume and wet/dry Mix knobs complement two more rotary knobs that set the Key and Interval. These two are not detented, but each different pitch or interval resides in a particular segment of their arc of travel and the LED will flash briefly as you move from one segment to the next. The Key knob has the keys clearly marked, but there is no

labeling around the interval knob for the eight single intervals between the octave-down and octave-up at the two extremes of its travel. A button determines whether a natural or sharp key is selected, and it has a secondary function that brings in Dual mode where the Interval knob selects two different intervals simultaneously.

First impressions are that the tracking seems really good – instantaneous and solid, with no lag to the pitch-shifted notes. The pedal is designed to work with single notes only but will go polyphonic if you choose an octave interval, which means you can dial in an approximation of 12-string jangle with the upper

STREET PRICE: \$149

MANUFACTURER:
Electro-Harmonix,
ehx.com

PROS

- Tight tracking. Solid collection of harmonies
- A compact way to add this kind of pedal to your 'board
- Reassuring EHX build quality

CONS

- Selecting the correct key and interval can be a bit awkward

VERDICT: If you want to bring harmonies into your playing, this'll do the job without breaking the bank or eating up too much of your pedalboard real estate.

octave and the Mix knob set appropriately low. Choose the octave down, turn the Mix knob up full and you'll be able to play basslines if needed.

The main attraction, though, is the harmonies. For the single harmonies you can choose 6th, 4th and 3rd down, plus 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th up. There is a metallic tonality to the pitch-shifted voices in isolation, but the pitching is close enough and, in the proper context, mixed proportionally with your dry sound, they are very effective in the blend.

We particularly liked the musicality and extra thickness of the Dual harmonies, most notably the ones that combined pitched-down with pitched-up intervals. Pick your key, stick to the notes in it, and you'll be rewarded with tight harmonies that can sound like two (or three!) guitars playing together. **GW**

The tracking here is really good – instantaneous and solid, with no lag to the pitch-shifted notes



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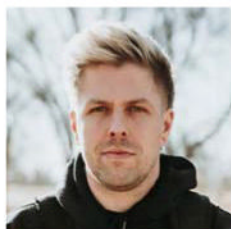


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THE DEEP END BY MIKE STRINGER

Bittersweet Harmony

Exploring atonal chord voicings

ONE OF THE great benefits of playing 7- and 8-string guitars in various tunings is that they continually inspire me to discover cool and unusual chords and voicings. A great example of this is the song "Keep Sweet," which I recorded with Spiritbox for 2025's *Tsunami Sea*.

For this track, I play a 7-string guitar tuned to drop-A, transposed down a whole step, what's often referred to as "drop-G" tuning (low to high: G, D, G, C, F, A, D). This is not a tuning I use often, but it turned out to be perfect here.

FIGURE 1 illustrates the song's initial, primary riff. This part is not played very fast and is fairly easy to navigate. The tonal center for the song is B minor (concert key of A minor, due to the whole-step-down tuning transposition), and I begin with an unusual B5♭6 chord voicing on the 6th, 5th and 4th strings, which requires a finger stretch between the 9th and 5th frets (allow your wrist to rotate as needed).

As shown in **FIGURE 2**, the G note sounded on the 4th string serves as the ♭6 (flatted 6th) above the foundational B5 chord and lends a dissonant and somewhat atonal quality to the chord.

I then shift to a bass line-like riff on the 7th string that includes a whole-step bend from B to C♯ at the end of bars 1, 3 and 5. At the ends of bars 2 and 4, I play D5 power chords that set up the return to the top of the phrase. After playing bars 1-4, bars 1 and 2 repeat and are then followed by the second ending (bar 5), which culminates with natural harmonics (N.H.) sounded at the 5th fret of the 5th string.

The key to playing this song well is to have clear separation between the dissonant B5♭6 chords and the consonant D5 power chords. Additionally, when playing the B octave notes at the 2nd fret on the 7th and 5th strings, you

Seven-string guitar, in drop-A tuning, down one whole step (low to high, G, D, G, C, F, A, D).

All music sounds one whole step lower than written.

FIG. 1 B5♭6 D5 1. B5♭6

FIG. 2 B5♭6

FIG. 3 D5 B5♭6 D5 B5♭6

FIG. 4 D5 A5 B5 N.C. D5

N.C. D5 1. N.C.

2. (Bm) (A) 3. N.C. 4. (Bm) (A) Bm Asus4 N.H.

want to keep them separated. The trickiest part of playing this riff is transitioning smoothly between the D5 chord and the B5♭6. This is highlighted in **FIGURE 3**. Strive to keep the transitions clean so that each chord will sound sharply defined.

FIGURE 4 shows the riff I play during the first verse. In bars 1-6, I shift between referencing the chords D5, A5 and B5, starting with full power chord strums and then following with arpeggiated chords and two-note voicings.

In bars 7-9, I outline Bm and A chords with arpeggios and, on beat 3 of bar 10, make brief reference to Asus4, followed by a 5th-fret natural harmonic on the 5th string, ending the phrase with an open low A note.

I like to present "themes" as I structure the guitar parts for a song. In this case, the initial theme is based on the contrast between B5♭6 and D5, and the second theme is the balance between B5 and A5. Another theme is the reiterations of the whole-step bends on the 7th string, which serve to tie the riffs together. **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/august2026

Mike Stringer is the guitarist for Grammy-winning Canadian metallers Spiritbox. Their latest album is 2025's *Tsunami Sea*. For more information, check out spiritbox.com.



TALES FROM NERDVILLE

BY JOE BONAMASSA

Articulation Manipulation

Varying your note attacks to present a broader guitar "voice"

ONE THING THAT has always appealed to me about blues guitar soloing is that it can express emotions much in the same way as the human voice. A key factor in making the most of what the instrument has to offer is *articulation*. It's all about the many variables in the pick attack, as well as fret-hand technique. But another option is to "hide" the pick and incorporate a fingerpicking approach. I do this by tucking the pick into the flexed knuckle joint of my index finger and then pick the strings primarily with my thumb and middle finger.

To demonstrate, **FIGURE 1** is a fingerpicked phrase based on the F minor pentatonic scale (F, A $\flat$, B $\flat$, C, E $\flat$). I use my thumb to pick the lower strings and my middle finger to pick the higher strings. There is a "pop" to the notes and a breadth of tonal variations that can only be achieved with fingerpicking.

One of the greatest purveyors of fingerpicked blues soloing is Albert King, and you'll find yourself in A.K. Land pretty fast when taking this approach. In **FIGURE 2**, I begin by thumbpicking the G string then use my middle finger to pick the B string, leading into a big, two-step "overbend" and release, from A $\flat$ to C to A $\flat$. On beat 4, I bend and release the B $\flat$ note on the 1st string's 6th fret with my index finger (practice those index-finger bends!) and then slide the finger down to the 4th fret.

In bar 3, I make reference to the V (five) chord, C, via the C major pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A), with some chromatic passing tones added. In bar 4 I reference the IV (four) chord, B $\flat$, by playing a few notes from B $\flat$ major pentatonic (B $\flat$, C, D, F, G), before

FIG. 1 (F or Fm)

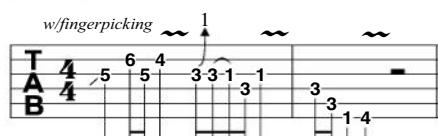


FIG. 2

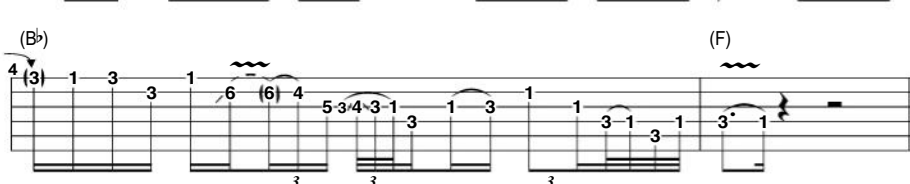
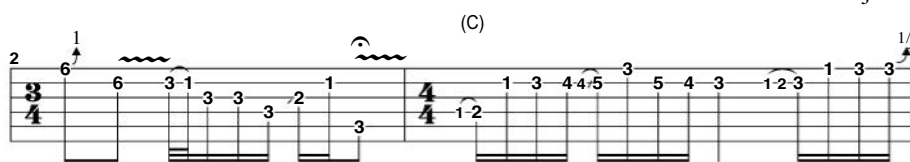
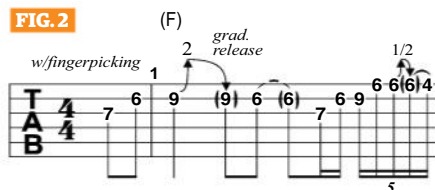


FIG. 3

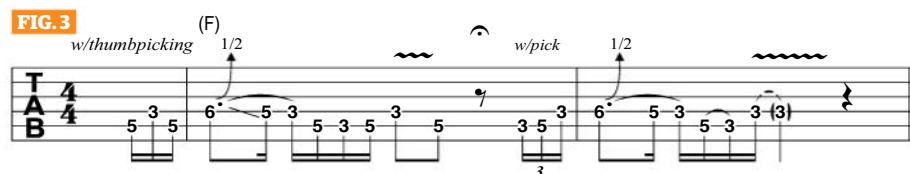


FIG. 4 (Em)

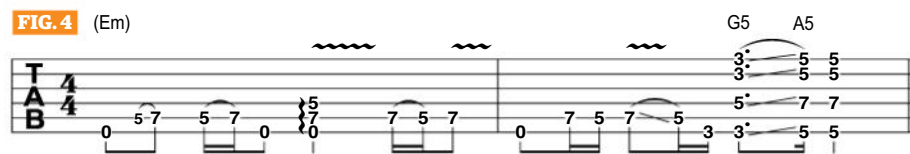
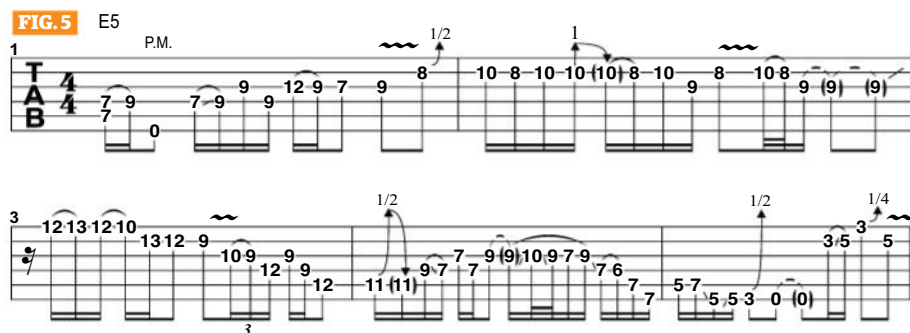


FIG. 5 E5



wrapping up with a return to the I (one) chord, F with lines based on F minor pentatonic.

By fingerpicking a note, you can greatly vary its volume, tone and character, more so than when using a pick. In **FIGURE 3**, I stick to picking only with my thumb on the low strings to demonstrate just how much warmth this way of playing can produce.

Herein lies the beauty of the blues: each simple melodic line can be phrased and articulated in so many different ways, which is dictated by how you feel. And this is greatly impacted by how you perceive the audience to feel. When performing live, there's a rapport between you and the audience. You know it's right when you hear

cheers, and you know something's not right when everyone heads for the bar.

A good example of how I build from a blues approach to branch off into other sounds can be heard on "The Ballad of John Henry." As shown in **FIGURE 4**, there's an E minor pentatonic lick (E, G, A, B, D) that alternates with G5 and A5 power chords.

When soloing over it, I can start with the blues element by fingerpicking, as I do in bars 1-2 of **FIGURE 5**, then shift to using the pick (bars 3-4) and incorporating the more exotic sound of the E Phrygian-dominant mode (E, F, G $\sharp$, A, B, C, D) before returning to straight blues. You can start with rock and end with B.B. King! Or vice versa. **GW**



WORKIN' MAN

BY CHARLIE STARR

The Almighty Riff, Part 2

Crafting a "song within a song" guitar solo

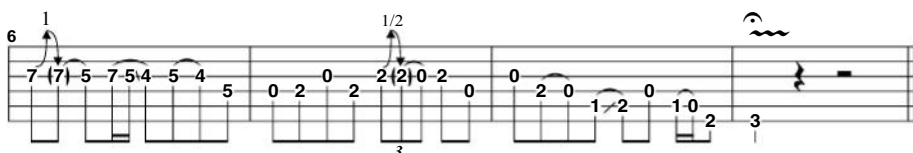
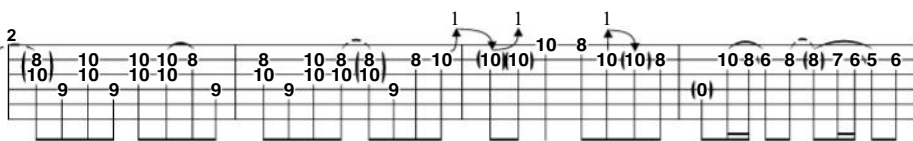
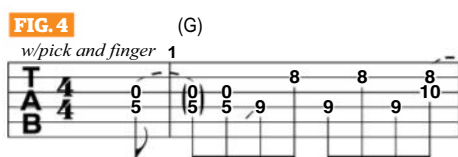
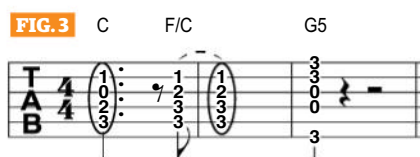
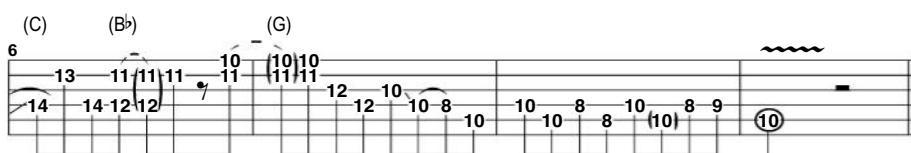
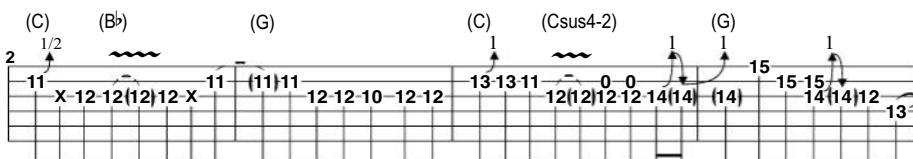
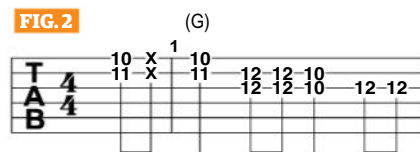
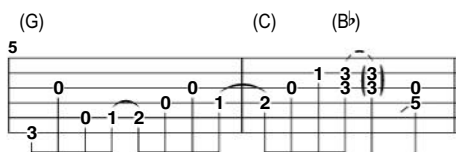
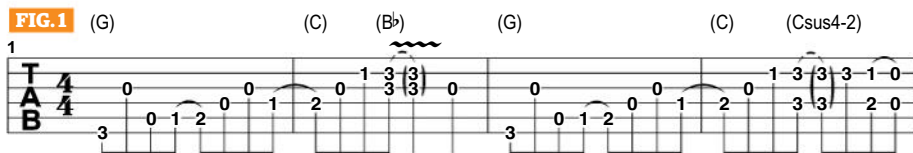
LAST MONTH, I talked about how coming up with a great, catchy lick or riff can inspire an entire song. Great riffs have the power to do that, and the best ones do it instantly. From the Beatles' "I Feel Fine," to the Rolling Stones' "Honky Tonk Women," to Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama," these are all songs that pull the listener in immediately. A great guitar solo can do the same thing, offering the listener an unexpected journey to a new place before steering the music back to familiar territory. Many players refer to this as the "song within a song" approach to crafting an effective, memorable solo.

The song we covered last month was "Let It Burn," from our 2017 album, *Like An Arrow*. This song is built from a rock-and-roll-meets-country feel, and the solo needed to stay in that wheelhouse while elevating the music to another level.

Right before the solo, we play a bridge/breakdown lick that serves as a hook of its own. As shown in **FIGURE 1**, I arpeggiate the notes of an open G chord into a C chord, followed by a reference to B $\flat$. In bar 4, I incorporate 6th intervals into the phrase. The guitar solo is then played over that lick and similarly blends the sounds of rock and roll and country.

I like to envision my guitar solo as being another voice that's singing a new melody. To my ears, a melody is a great place to start, as opposed to just a flurry of notes. The solo needs to "sing," so I thought, "What would I sing over that breakdown lick?" **FIGURE 2** shows the solo.

In bars 1-4, I play a singable melody based on the G minor pentatonic scale (G, B $\flat$, C, D, F), starting with two-note double-stops played



3rds apart. At the end of bar 4 into bar 5, the solo is based on G major pentatonic (G, A, B, D, E), and in bar 6 I play a couple of 6th intervals. The solo then wraps up with a return to G minor pentatonic.

The solo is concise so that it gets out of the way and brings us back to the big chorus, shown in **FIGURE 3** with the ringing C, F/C, G5 chords.

Those initial 3rd intervals work really well over the feel of the breakdown lick underneath. Following the return to the chorus, we reprise the song's intro lick in order to wrap up the song, with all its elements pulled together in an effective way.

When we play "Let It Burn" live, I like to stretch out the intro by soloing in this style. Sometimes I stretch it out so much that our bass player will yell, "Hey, start the song!"

FIGURE 4 offers an example of the types of licks that live in that world where the lines between country music and rock and roll become blurry. In this example, I begin with hybrid-picked double-stops that shift to straight country/blues in bar 3.

There really are countless ways to craft a solo by drawing upon one's various stylistic influences, so never be afraid to push the envelope in your quest for a captivating and expressive feel and sound. **GW**

For video of this lesson, go to guitarworld.com/august2026

Charlie Starr is the frontman and lead guitarist for Blackberry Smoke, an Atlanta band that's been country-rocking its way around the universe since 2001. Their latest albums are 2024's *Be Right Here* and 2025's *Rattle, Rumble & Roll: The Best of Blackberry Smoke, Volume 1*.



BLUES EXPANSIONS

BY COREY CONGILIO

In the Mix

Using Mixolydian triad arpeggios to inspire soloing ideas

WHEN I FIRST learned the Mixolydian mode, I found it elusive to incorporate into my improvised solos. For those unfamiliar with Mixolydian, it is one of the seven modes of the major scale. Each mode is derived from the same sequence of half steps and whole steps that make up the major scale's structure, but starting on a different note, which serves as the root of that unique mode.

For example, the C major scale comprises the notes C, D, E, F, G, A and B. The formula for the major scale is based on the intervallic distances between these notes. As there is a whole step between C and D and another whole step between D and E, the formula for the scale begins "whole," "whole," often indicated as "W W." If we reckon all the intervals of the major scale, the resulting formula is W W H W W W H, with H signifying a half step. The harmony inherent in the scale/mode is derived from the first, third and fifth notes (1-3-5). So, in C major these notes are C, E and G, which form a C major triad.

The C major scale is also known as the C Ionian mode. If one were to start on the second scale degree, D, and think of that as the root note, or tonic, the note sequence would be D, E, F, G, A, B, C. This is known as the D Dorian mode. Continuing this process, D Dorian is followed by E Phrygian, F Lydian, G Mixolydian, A Aeolian and B Locrian.

FIGURE 1 shows the G Mixolydian mode: G, A, B, C, D, E, F. The harmonic color, or flavor, conveyed by it is G7. For myself, I did not find it appealing to just play the notes of G Mixolydian over a G7 chord; it was not a sound I found to be compelling. I was aware of all of the modes and thought that, since G is the fifth degree of the C major scale, maybe I can superimpose all or some of the triad arpeggios built from C major over a G7 chord

FIG. 1 G Mixolydian mode G7



FIG. 2 Dm C Bdim Am

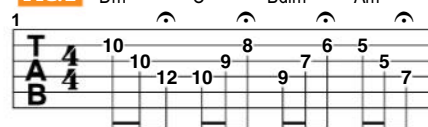


FIG. 3 (G7)

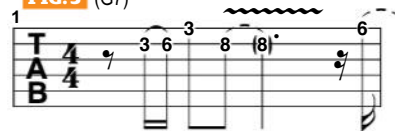
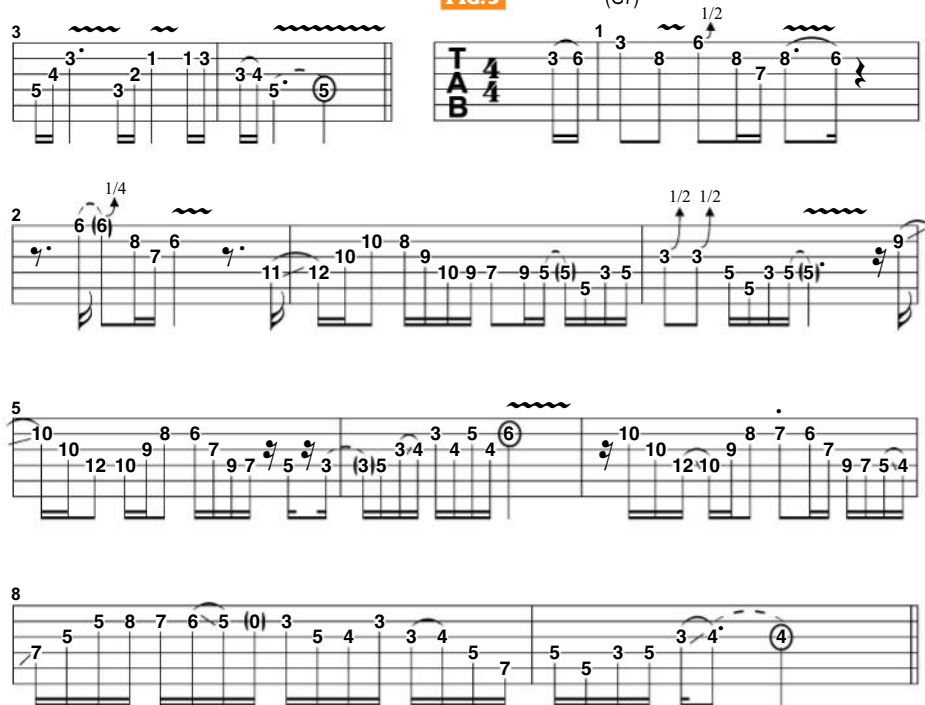


FIG. 4 (G7)



FIG. 5 (G7)



in order to find another approach to using G Mixolydian.

FIGURE 2 illustrates the seven triad arpeggios that live within the C major scale, followed by a bluesy lick built around a G major triad (G, B, D). These are also the triad arpeggios of G Mixolydian.

A great way to explore using this approach is to jam over a G7 vamp and alternate between playing familiar blues licks in G and short phrases that outline these triadic forms.

FIGURE 3 presents a stock G blues lick. In **FIGURE 4**, I improvise over a G7 vamp,

purposefully moving through the related triad arpeggios, starting on bar 1 with Dm and C, then descending to Bdim, Am, G and F. I then wrap up the phrase with a G7 blues lick.

FIGURE 5 offers a more ambitious example of this approach, again alternating between bluesy G7-flavored licks and the related G Mixolydian triadic forms, with a little chromaticism added in for a more interesting sound. This approach offers a great way to unlock new sounds based on G Mixolydian while also opening up your fretboard vision and knowledge. **GW**

A man with short brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, blue jeans, and large black headphones, is seated in the cockpit of a small aircraft. He is wearing aviator sunglasses and has a microphone clipped to his shirt. He is playing a white Traveler guitar. The cockpit has a vintage aesthetic with various gauges and controls. The view out the window shows a dramatic landscape with snow-capped mountains and a blue lake. The text "Flying Solo" is written in a white, cursive font in the upper right. The Traveler logo is in the bottom right, and the slogan "THE WORLD'S MOST ADVENTUROUS GUITARS" is below it, with the website "TRAVELERGUITAR.COM" at the very bottom. Musical notes are overlaid on the image.

*Flying
Solo*



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BETWEEN THE LINES

BY JIMMY BROWN

DANNY GATTON

"Harlem Nocturne"



THE LATE DANNY

Gatton was one of the most creatively brilliant masters of the Fender Telecaster and used the iconic instrument's bright, muscular tone to

boldly express his eclectic musicality. Danny was well-versed in the broad electric guitar vocabulary of Americana, equally at home playing traditional and modern country, blues, jazz, soul and rock and roll. His inventive reading of this smokey, 1940s-era minor-key "jazz noir" instrumental, performed with his single-coil bridge pickup driving a class AB, spring-reverb-drenched Fender tube amp to a richly saturated and compressed tone, tastefully showcases his technical and stylistic diversity and talent for making his guitar sing.

Throughout the track, Gatton performs precise pedal steel-like string bends and

releases, which, along with using his bridge pickup, is an unusual and novel approach for a guitarist do when playing a jazz standard, albeit one with a more bluesy feel, with this arrangement's $\frac{12}{8}$ groove and backbeat. Danny does so comfortably and lyrically, keeping his phrases rhythmically in the pocket, which is something that bending can often interfere with in the hands of a less polished picker.

Note the guitarist's use of an unusual middle-finger push bend in bar 7, as he bends up to the root of the underlying Am chord from a half step below ($G\sharp$ to A), then proceeds to smoothly shake the note. In bar 15, he performs a similarly unorthodox push-bend, exactly 12 frets lower on the same string, here using his index finger to bend and shake the string at the 1st fret. Ouch! Also note that Danny used a set of .010-gauge strings, with a lighter .015 for his G string, which is slinkier than the usual .017.

Another way in which Gatton exploits the bright timbre of his Tele's tone is by playing

ringing arpeggios across the strings with various types of harmonics, such as the pinch harmonics (P.H.) in bars 12 and 15, natural harmonics (N.H.) in bar 14 and artificial "harp" harmonics (A.H.) in bar 18.

The key to sounding any harmonic is to set the string in motion while precisely and lightly touching it at a *node*, which is a specific point that mathematically relates to a multiple of the vibration frequency of the underlying fundamental ($f \times 1$, $f \times 2$, $f \times 3$, etc.). The goal is to sound a pitch that's at least one octave above the fundamental and corresponds to the root, perfect 5th, major 3rd or some other interval.

Pinch harmonics are the most elusive to nail consistently, as you need to pick a downstroke while touching the string with the tip of your pick-hand thumb at a node that resides past the fretboard. This is essential, in order to sound a specific harmonic. You'll need to "hunt and peck" along the string to locate the sweet spots, which differ for each fretted note. **GW**

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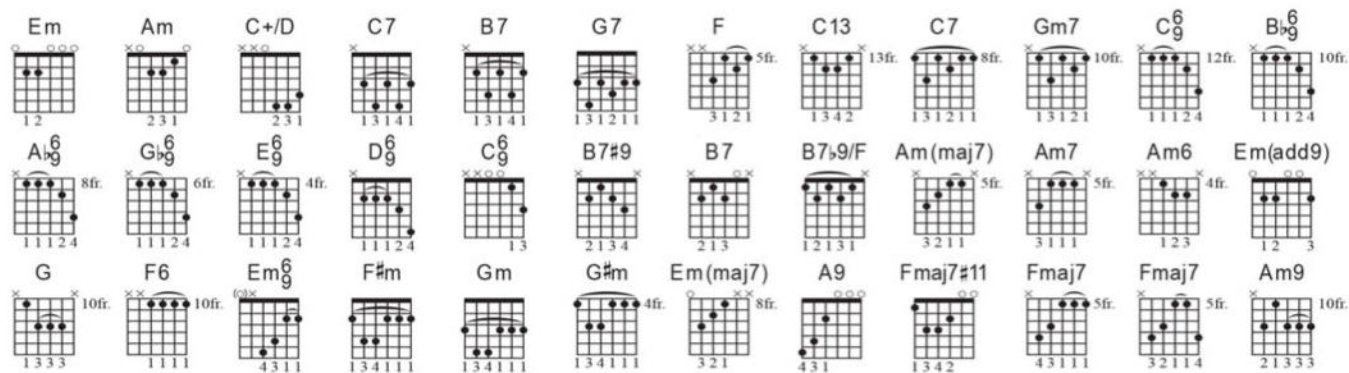
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102SVG
(102SV Series)



DANNY GATTON

"Harlem Nocturne"

AS HEARD ON **CRUISIN' DEUCES**WORDS AND MUSIC BY **EARL HAGEN** AND **DICK ROGERS**TRANSCRIBED BY **JEFF PERRIN****A** Intro (0:00)

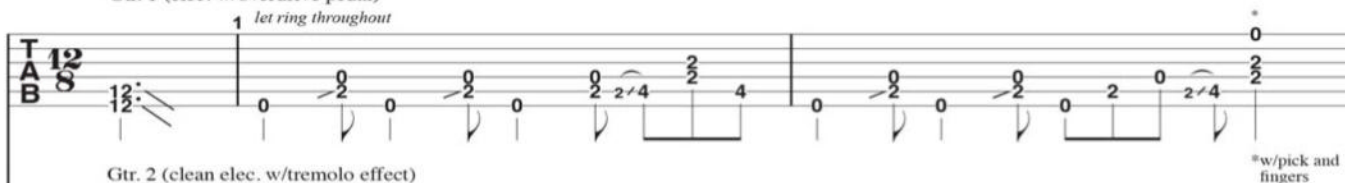
Moderately ♩ = 176

N.C.

Em

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/overdrive pedal)

1 let ring throughout

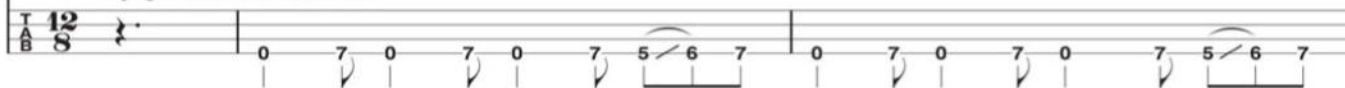
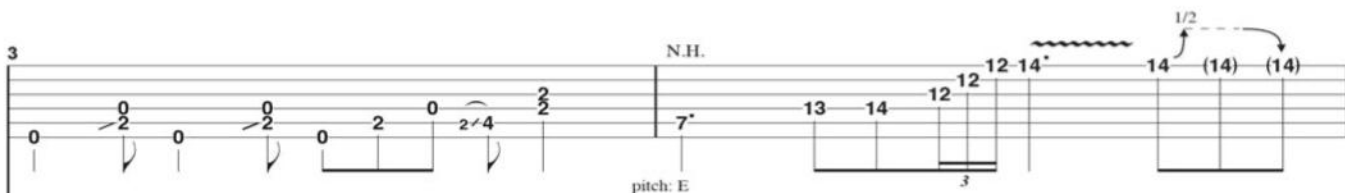
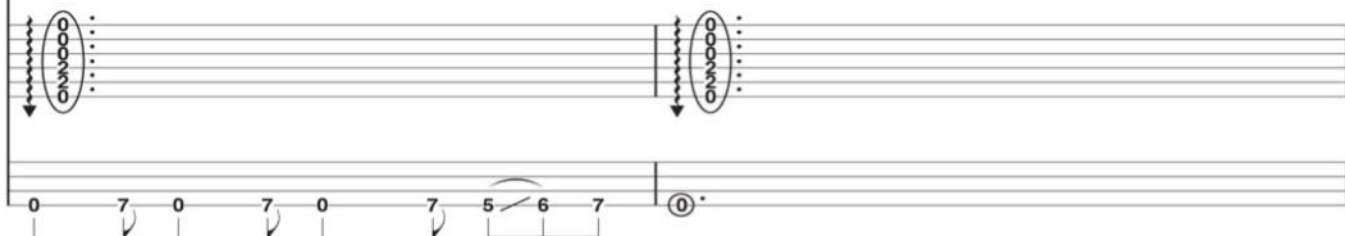
GTR. 1

Gtr. 2 (clean elec. w/tremolo effect)

*w/pick and fingers

GTR. 2

Upright bass arr. for elec. bass

**GTR. 1****GTR. 2**

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"HARLEM NOCTURNE"

Em

GTR.1

5 11* (11) (11) (11)* (11) w/fdbk. 15 (15) 14 (14) 12 14 (14) 12 14* (14) 16 12 14

*Note played slightly 'behind' the beat.

GTR.2

Rhy. Fig. 1

Diagram showing rhythmic figure 1 for GTR.2, consisting of a series of eighth notes.

Bass Fig. 1

Diagram showing bass figure 1, consisting of a series of eighth notes on a single string.

Am

GTR.1

7 14 14 15 14 (14) 12 14 12 13 13 (13) (13) (13)* (13)* 18 19 16/17 17 17-19* 19 (19)

*Note played slightly 'ahead' of the beat.

GTR.2

Diagram showing rhythmic figure 2 for GTR.2, consisting of a series of eighth notes.

Diagram showing bass figure 2, consisting of a series of eighth notes on a single string.

C+/D

C7

B7

GTR.1

9 (16)* (16) (16) 15 (15) 12 15 14 (14) (14) 12 14 12 14 (14) 10 (10) 8 9 7 9

GTR.2

Diagram showing rhythmic figure 3 for GTR.2, consisting of a series of eighth notes.

Diagram showing bass figure 3, consisting of a series of eighth notes on a single string.

TRANSCRIPTIONS

GTR.1 Em Am Em

11 *w/fdbk.* 1 *1/2* 7 (7) (7) (7) 5 7 5 7 (7) 5 7 5 7 (7) 7/11

P.H. 0 2 4 0 0 2 4 (4)

pitch: B A# G B A F#

vol. swell

GTR.2

0 4 5 4 0

end Rhy. Fig. 1

end Bass Fig. 1

C (0:50)

Em

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see bar 5)

Gtr. 1

13 *w/fdbk.* 4 (4) (4) (4)

N.H. 12 12 12 7 7

pitch: E B G E B

slight P.H. 0 2 0

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see bar 5)

Am

slight P.H.

15 2 3 2 (2) 0 1 1 (1) (1) (1)

A.H. (19) 7 (17) 5 (17) 5 (17) 5 (19) 7

1/2 7 (7)

**Artificial "harp" harmonics: Holding the pick between the thumb and middle finger, pick a downstroke while lightly touching the string with the tip of the index finger directly above the fret indicated in parentheses.*

C+/D C7 B7

slight P.H.

17 4 3 (3) 0 3 2 (2) (2) 0 2 0 2/4 3 2 (2) 0 2 0 2

Em Am Em

let ring

19 0 2 2 (2) 0 1/2 7 5 8 5 8 5 3

P.M. (pick w/fingers) 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 2 0 0

"HARLEM NOCTURNE"

D (1:23)

G7

F

G7

F

Gtr. 1

w/pick and fingers throughout

21 N.H.

GTR.1

pitches: A
G

*Notes originally played as overdub on recording. See Fill 1 (below bar 63).

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Bass

G7

F

G7

G13 G#13 A13 A#13 B13

(w/pick)

GTR.1

GTR. 2

C13

Gm7

C7

Gm7

GTR.1

pitch: F#

*Note dip produced by bending guitar neck forward slightly.

Rhy. Fig. 2

GTR.2

Bass Fig. 2

TRANSCRIPTIONS

(grad. decrease tempo)

C⁶₉ B⁶₉ A⁶₉ G⁶₉ E⁶₉ D⁶₉ C⁶₉ B7#9 B7 B7b9/F

w/pick and fingers

GTR.1

GTR.2

(♩ = 176)

(1:57)

Em

GTR.1

GTR.2

E (2:06)

Em

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see bar 5)

Gtr. 1

GTR.1

"HARLEM NOCTURNE"

Am Am(maj7) Am7 Am6
Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 1 (see below bar 61)

GTR.1

33

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 3 5

15 (15) (15) (15)

X 7 (7) (7) (7) 5 4 5 4 7

5 0 5 3 4 3 2 3 3 3 2 3 2 3

C+/D C7 B7

GTR.1

35

4 5 4 5 5 4 5 (5)

X 3 (3) 0 3 3 2 0 2 0 2 0 3 0 1 0 0 3 0

5 5 2 5 5 5 2 5 3 3 3 3 2 3 2 3

Em(add9) Am Em

GTR.1

37

vibrato w/neck

2 2 (2) 0 0 2 0 0 2

11 (11) 11 7 (7)

0 7 7 5 7 5 7 7 0 (0) 5

F (2:38)

Em
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile (see bar 5)

GTR.1

39

0 0 2 3 2 0 0 0 2 3 2 0 1 0 2 3 2 0 1 0 2 3 2 0 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 0 2 3 2 0 8 8 (8) X

0 3 2 2/4 5 4 2 2

TRANSCRIPTIONS

Am Am(maj7) Am7 Am6
 Gtr. 2 substitutes Rhy. Fill. 1 (see below bar 61)

GTR.1

GTR.1

GTR.1

G (3:11)

G Gtr. 1 w/pick and fingers throughout

GTR.1

Gtr. 2 let ring

GTR.2

Bass

"HARLEM NOCTURNE"

48

G

F

P.M.

GTR.1

GTR.2

let ring

10*

3*

5*

3*

5

5

[illegible]

GTR.1

G

50

10 12 12 10 12 12 10 12 12 10 12 0

10 10 8 8 0 0 1 0 4 4 5 5 6 6 7

4:3 4:3

G G# A A#

GTR.2

G

let ring

12 12 10 12 12 10

12 12 10 12 12 10

7 3 3 2 4 4 3 5 5 4 6 6 5 7 7 6

3 5 3 5 3 3 4 4 5 5 6 7

4:3 4:3

G G# A A# B

"HARLEM NOCTURNE"

I Outro (4:18) (♩ = 114)

(grad. decrease tempo)

Freely

E5 F#5 G5 G#5 (A5) (B5) (C5) (D5) (E5) (F5) (G5) (A5) Em(maj7)

Gtr. 1

GTR.1

63

*Chord symbols in parentheses reflect implied harmony.

Em F#m Gm G#m (G#) (A5) (A#) (B) (C) (D) (D#) (F) Em

Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Bass

GTR.1

66

GTR.2

(A)

Fmaj7

Am9

GTR.1

69

GTR.2

A9 let ring throughout

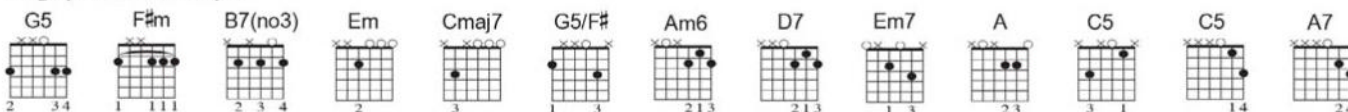
*Let note ring while reaching over with pick hand and tuning 4th string down one and one half steps.

THE BEATLES

"Yesterday"

AS HEARD ON **HELP!**WORDS AND MUSIC BY **JOHN LENNON** AND **PAUL MCCARTNEY**TRANSCRIBED BY **ASKOLD BUK**Acoustic guitar, tuned down one whole step (low to high: **D, G, C, F, A, D**).All notes and chords sound in the key of **F**, one whole step lower than written.

Fingerpicked chord shapes

**A** Intro (0:00)

Moderately ♩ = 98

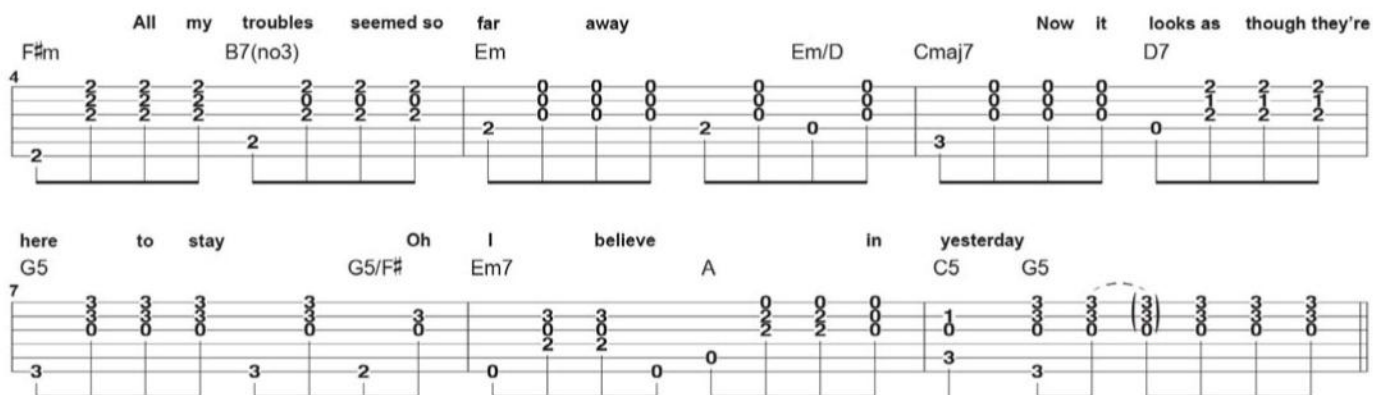
G5

fingerstyle

let ring throughout

**B** 1st Verse (0:05)

Yesterday

**C** 2nd Verse (0:22)

Suddenly

I'm not half the man I used to be



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D Bridge (0:40, 1:17)

suddenly Why she had to go I don't

C5 G5 F#m B7(no3) Em D C5 Em/B

16

know She wouldn't say I said

Am6 D7 G5 F#m B7(no3)

19

something wrong Now I long for yesterday

Em D C5 Em/B Am6 D7 G5

22

E 3rd Verse (1:00, 1:37)

Yesterday love was such an easy game to play

G5 F#m B7(no3) Em Em/D

25

Now I need a place to hide away Oh I believe in

Cmaj7 D7 G5 G5/F# Em7 A

28

1. yesterday 2. yesterday Slower

C5 G5 C5 G5 Hmm

31

LINKIN PARK

"The Emptiness Machine"

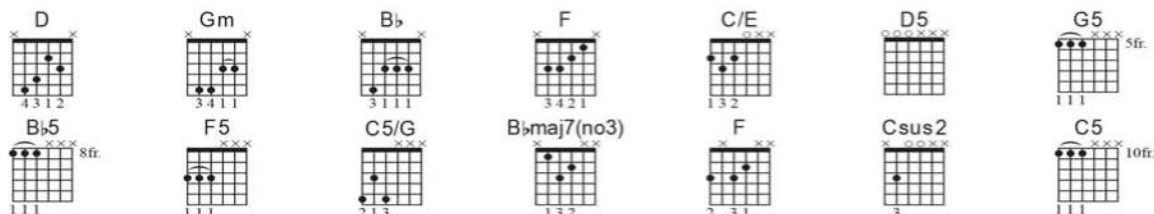
AS HEARD ON FROM ZERO

WORDS AND MUSIC BY BRAD DELSON, JOE HAHN, MIKE SHINODA, DAVE FARRELL,
COLIN BRITTAIN CUNNINGHAM AND EMILY ARMSTRONG

TRANSCRIBED BY JEFF PERRIN

All guitars are in drop-D tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G, B, E).

Bass tuning (low to high: D, A, D, G).

**A** Intro (0:00)

Fast ♩ = 184

B 1st Verse (0:05)

Your blades are sharpened with precision (Precision)

flashing your favorite point of view (Your point of view)

N.C. (D5)

(G5)

(D5)

(C5)

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

*T (play 4 times)

GTR. 1

*Tap notes w/pick-hand index and middle fingers to emulate sound of production edit heard on recording.

Piano arr. for bass

I know you're waiting

in the distance

(Distance)

Just like you always do

Just like you always do

(Just like you always do

(D5)

(G5)

(D5)

(C5)

Gtr. 1 (piano arr. for clean elec.)
(pick w/fingers)

Fill 1

(repeat previous two bars)

GTR. 1

C 1st Pre-chorus (0:26)

Already pulling me in

Already under my skin

And I know exactly

how this ends I

let you cut me open

(Bb5)

(F5)

(C5)

Gtr. 1 plays Fill. 1 four times (see bar 10)

Bass

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TRANSCRIPTIONS

F 2nd Verse (1:08)

Going around like a revolver
'Cause there's a fire under the alter
D5 Gtr. 1 N.C. (G5)

43 (1st time only)

GTR.1

It's been decided how we lose I keep on lying to
I keep on lying to

(D5)

(C5)

47 Bass

G 2nd Pre-chorus (1:28)

Already pulling me in Already under my skin

Bmaj7(no3)

F

Gtr. 1 (piano arr. for clean elec.)

51 let ring

GTR.1

And I know exactly how this ends I let you cut me open

Csus2

N.C.

55 let ring

Gtr. 2 plays Fill 2 (see below)

GTR.1

Fill 1 (1:35)

GTR.2 Gtr. 2 (w/dist.) (prod. overdub)

Bass Fill 1 (2:32)

C5

"THE EMPTINESS MACHINE"

H 2nd Chorus (1:39)

just to watch me bleed
for what I won't receive

Gave up who I am
Falling for the promise

D5

G5

Gtr. 2 plays Riff A (see bar 35)

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 on repeat (see bar 35)

59 Gtr. 1 (w/dist.)

GTR.1

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 35)

for who of you wanted the emptiness me to be machine

Don't know why I'm hoping

B $\flat$ 5

F5

C5

GTR.1

I Bridge (2:02)

I only wanted to be part of something

*D5

B $\flat$

67 Gtr. 1 (piano arr. for clean elec.)

GTR.1

*Chord symbols reflect overall harmony.

I only wanted to be part of part of

D5

G5

GTR.1

J (2:13)

I only wanted to be part of something

(on repeat, skip ahead to bar 85)

D5

G5

Gtr. 1 plays first four bars of Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 35)

Gtr. 2

77 Riff B

end Riff B

GTR.2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice (see bar 35)

1. (go back to bar 77)

I only wanted to be part of part of

B $\flat$ 5

F5

C5

Gtr. 2 plays Riff B (see bar 77)

81 Gtr. 1

GTR.1

TRANSCRIPTIONS

2. I only wanted to be part I let you cut me open

B♭5 F5 C5/G

85 Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Gtr. 1

GTR.1

Rhy. Fill 1 -----

Bass substitutes Bass Fill 1
(see below bar 56)

K 3rd Chorus (2:34)

just to watch me bleed Gave up who I am
so fucking naive Falling for the promise

D5

Gtr. 2 plays Riff A (see bar 35)

Gtr. 1

G5

first time: Gtr. 2 cont. last 6 bars of
Riff A (see bar 37)

89 (All guitars silent, first time only) -----

GTR.1

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 on repeat (see bar 35)

first time: Bass cont. last 6 bars of Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 37)

for who of you wanted the emptiness me to be machine The Don't know why I'm hoping
of the emptiness machine

B♭5

F5

C5

93

GTR.1

L Outro (2:55)

I only wanted to be part something
(The emptiness machine

D5

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 35)

G5

97 Gtr. 2

GTR.2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 35)

I only wanted to be part of The emptiness machine

B♭5

F5

C5/G

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fill 1 (see bar 88)

101

GTR.2

M (3:05)

N.C. (D5)

105

GTR.2

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POWER TOOLS

1961-64 **Ampeg** R-12R Reverberocket and 1965-67 GS-12R Reverberocket II

CATEGORY: COMBO AMPLIFIER

BY CHRIS GILL

▶ ALTHOUGH HAMMOND INVENTED spring reverb way back in the late Thirties, reverb did not become a standard feature on guitar amps until the early Sixties. That's because reverb tanks were too large to fit into an amp chassis until Hammond developed the compact Type 4 dual-spring tank in 1960, which they immediately licensed to numerous amp manufacturers.

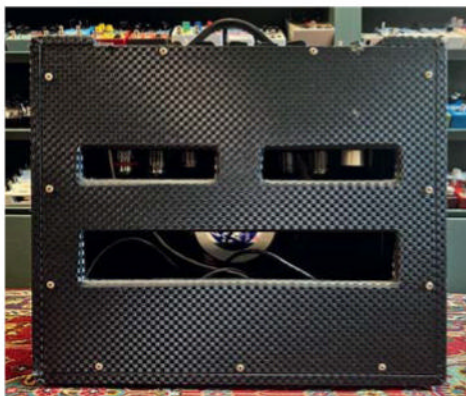
Google's AI search engine claims that the 1963 Fender Vibroverb was the first guitar amp with reverb, but this is woefully incorrect as a wide variety of amp models with reverb from other companies like Ampeg, Danelectro, Magnatone, Premier and more emerged much earlier in 1961. Fender only offered its standalone 6G15 Reverb Unit at the time and didn't introduce its famous reverb combos until 1963, starting with the Vibroverb.

Because the Hammond Type 4 reverb tank was made available to so many different amp companies at the same time, it's impossible to determine which amp model was actually the first. However, the Ampeg Reverberocket, which prominently announced the new reverb feature front and center in the product's name, undoubtedly was the first popular, commercially successful guitar amp with reverb.

Ampeg Reverberocket amps went through frequent circuit modifications during the product's initial lifespan. The first version had a circuit similar to Fender's Princeton and Deluxe amps that delivered an estimated 12 watts of output, featuring a pair of 6V6 power tubes, octal preamp tubes and a 5Y3 tube rectifier. This circuit distorts pretty quickly as the volume level is turned up, and because Ampeg's main clientele was primarily jazz players they quickly modified the circuit to provide higher clean headroom and never really stopped making changes. The 6V6s were abandoned in favor of 7591 or 7868



**"Reverberocket amps
still remain desirable today
for their lush, deep reverb
effects with smooth tails.
Ampeg really got it right
from the start"**



[above] Front and rear views of a well-preserved 1962 Ampeg R-12R Reverberocket. Not too many famous guitarists have used these amps, although we know Portishead's Adrian Utley had one at some point

tubes, the octal tubes were replaced by 12AX7, 7199 and 6C10/6BK11/6U10 compactron tubes and the tube rectifier was ditched in favor of a solid-state version. If you compare three random Reverberocket/Reverberocket II amps, you likely won't find any with matching tube configurations.

The first Reverberocket iteration has a top-facing control panel with knobs for volume, tone, dimension (reverb depth), speed and intensity (tremolo), while the Reverberocket II switched to a front-mounted control panel with six knobs where individual bass and treble controls replaced the solitary tone knob and "dimension" was shortened to "echo" but functioned the same. Both versions retained an input labeled "accordion" — a concession to more conservative times when musicians wore suits and bowties.

Ampeg Reverberocket amps still remain desirable today for their lush, deep reverb effects with smooth tails. Ampeg really got it right from the start. Early Reverberockets with 6V6 tubes are preferred by blues players and raunchy rockers for their gnarly distortion, while the later versions are better for pedal-based rigs thanks to their clean headroom, although they also deliver delicious gritty overdrive when cranked up. One caveat: the original CTS and ceramic Jensen speakers supplied with the amps are underpowered, so the output level is low and the speaker can easily be blown out. A modern replacement speaker is highly recommended if you want to kick out the jams or simply want a louder amp.

Reverberocket amps rarely appeared on stage with pro bands due to their relatively low volume output, so the list of famous Reverberocket players is essentially non-existent. However, these amps were a common recording-studio fixture, especially in Manhattan where session players used them to record many classic pop, rock and jazz songs during the Sixties. **GW**

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