REVIEWS » WE LOOK BACK AT THE BEST OF 2024 & MORE

Interactive Guitar

109

G3

REUNION

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WELCOME TO ISSUE

109

SATRIANI, JOHNSON, VAI & TON OF GREAT GEAR... WELCOME TO GI ISSUE 109 Guitar Interactive Magazine!

The band's back together! Nearly 30 years after their first run, Joe Satriani, Eric Johnson and Steve Vai—the legendary original G3 trio—have reunited for a thrilling new tour and a brand-new live album, G3 Reunion Live. In this issue, they sit down to talk about the excitement of bringing G3 back, the energy of playing together again, and so much more. Along the way, they share incredible stories from the road, reveal players who almost joined G3, and the deep respect they have for each other's craft. As always, these three icons deliver plenty of guitar insight—as well as a few surprises.

I had an absolute blast putting this together, and I think you'll love it too. Oh, and don't miss our exclusive competition—you could win you're very own limited-edition box set of G3 Reunion Live!

Elsewhere, we mark a major milestone for Peavey Electronics, celebrating 60 years of innovation. From its humble beginnings in Mississippi to shaping the sound of countless genres, Peavey has been a driving force in guitar and pro audio. We take a deep dive into its legacy and highlight some of the exciting new gear set to make waves in 2025.

Speaking of new gear, Nick Jennison, Sam Bell, and I have assembled a bumper selection of the best guitars, amps, and pedals from the past year—along with some new releases straight from NAMM 2025. Whether it's cutting-edge effects, high-end boutique builds, or rock-solid stage-ready workhorses, our team of world-class reviewers brings you expert takes with their usual mix of knowledge, personality, which as usual, I hope you'll enjoy.

Guitar Interactive

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109 Contents

INTERVIEWS

JOE SATRIANI, ERIC JOHNSON AND STEVE VAI:

the legendary original G3 trio—have reunited for a thrilling new tour and a brand-new live album, G3 Reunion Live. As always, these three guitar icons deliver plenty of insight—as well as a few surprises.

08

FEATURES

PEAVEY:

Celebrating 60 years of Peavey Electronics

024

COMPETITION

Win a G3 – Reunion Live: 4xLP, Multi-Coloured Vinyl Limited Edition Boxset

Win a Shergold Masquerader Standard

036

REVIEWS - GUITARS, AMPS & FX

New for 2025

042_Music Man StingRay II

046_Donner Hush X-pro

050_Orange Baby Range

054_Editor's Choice - Best of 2024

060_Gibson Theodore Standard

066_Ciari Ascender P90 Duo

072_Sterling JV60CB James Valentine Signature Chambered Bigsby

076_Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton

080_Vintage ProShop

084_Godin Stadium Pro

090_Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom Les Paul Custom

094_Kramer Nightswan Vintage White

098_Rapier 44

102_Danelectro Longhorn Baritone

106_PRS MT100

112_Hiwatt Leeds 150 Head

116_Orange Oriverb

120_Fishman Loudbox Range

128_Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups

134_Takamine LTD2024

138_Cort Abstract Delta

144_Nick Jennison's Choice -Best of 2024

148_PRS NF3 SE

154_Mesa/Boogie Mark VII

158_Music Man "Bea" Sabre

164_SSL 2+ MKII

168_Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set

172_Fishman Fluence Mick Thomson Signature Pickups

176_Sam Bell's Choice - Best of 2024

180_Spira S-507 QGY

184_Jackson Pro Series Signature Jeff Loomis Kelly HT6

188_Sterling String Ray Ray 2 Bass

192_PRS SE CE24

196_Boss Katana Air EX

202_Mooer Ocean Machine II

AD INDEX

ARIA 109
CIARI 143
DANELECTRO 183
ERNIE BALL 13
FISHMAN 2
ORANGE 3&151
MOOER 65&131
PEAVEY 22-33
RAPIER 69
SENNHEISER 199
STERLING 101&161
VINTAGE GUITARS 69&115
VINTAGE AMPS 183
XVIVE 115

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THE INTERVIEWS

Since its inception in 1996, G3—Joe Satriani's Avengers-level team-up of guitar heroes—has united onstage some of the world's most accomplished players in a celebration of pure six-string mastery. Over the years, the lineup has evolved, featuring guitar greats like John Petrucci, Paul Gilbert, Yngwie Malmsteen, Steve Lukather, Uli Jon Roth, Steve Morse, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and Michael Schenker. However, the original trio—Satriani, Steve Vai, and Eric Johnson—remains the gold standard of G3.

Now, nearly 30 years later, that legendary lineup has reunited for a new series of electrifying live performances, culminating in the release of *G3 Reunion Live*—out now via earMUSIC. In an exclusive interview with Guitar Interactive Magazine editor **Jonathan Graham**, Satriani, Vai, and Johnson look back on the original tour, discuss getting the band back together, share their favourite tracks from one another, and reveal some of the legendary guitarists who almost joined the G3 lineup.

IN-DEPTH CHATS WITH GUITAR'S BIGGEST NAMES

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

SATRIANI / JOHNSON / VAI: G3 REUNION

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"IT is déjà vu all over again," Satriani says with a smile, referencing Yogi Berra's famous phrase. "Every time we do G3, there's this wonderful feeling of camaraderie. It's like seeing family again. It's always a joy to play with these guys."

Vai echoes the sentiment. "G3 is definitely a little blessing. Every time it comes back around, it's something special. I get to play with such incredible musicians, and I don't have to run the whole show myself," he says with a laugh. "Joe is the guy who really steers the ship, which is great because I can just focus on playing and having fun."

For Eric Johnson, the reunion was just as seamless. "It's like no time had passed," he reflects. "You're back on stage with two guys you've played with decades before, and it just clicks. There's an ease to it, and that's what makes it so special."

While this most recent run of shows that led to G3 Reunion Live, from curtain up through to the legendary G3 jams, felt effortless, Apparently, getting the original tour off the ground back in '96 was a bit more of a challenge.

For some, a shred-heavy show like G3 wasn't an easy sell in the mid-1990s. Instrumental rock, along with other genres that had once been a force in the '80s, had largely been pushed out of the charts by grunge, alternative rock, and hip-hop. Promoters were sceptical—who would buy tickets for a tour featuring three guitarists and no lead singers?

"That first show in '96 was the culmination of over a year of arm-twisting," Satriani admits. "It didn't seem like anyone really wanted to see young guitar players get together and play. The hardest thing was convincing promoters that it was worth the risk."

For Satriani, it was a no-brainer; he knew who he wanted on board—Steve Vai and Eric Johnson. But making it happen wasn't so simple.

"Those are the two guys I wanted without a doubt for the maiden voyage," Satriani recalled. But locking down schedules proved to be a logistical nightmare. "Even back then, artists booked a year or more in ad-

"THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF G3—WE DON'T DO IT BECAUSE WE HAVE TO. WE DO IT BECAUSE WE LOVE IT. AND WHEN THE TIME FEELS RIGHT, WE'LL DO IT AGAIN." – JOE SATRIANI

vance. You couldn't just call someone and say, 'Hey, can you hold your schedule open for me for the next year and a half?'"

Months of negotiations followed before the dream lineup finally came together, committing to 23 shows booked across North America from October to November 1996. The tour culminated in select performances toward the end of the run being recorded and released as an album and home video G3: Live in Concert the following year.

After that first show, any doubts about the project quickly faded, as Satriani recalls, "We all walked off stage and said, 'Wow, the audience is with us, and they think just like we do. They're so happy that we're doing it. So let's do it.'"

The fan response was undeniable, and G3 was officially a success.

To keep the project fresh—and improve the chances of aligning everyone involved's schedule for additional tours that could be taken to a global stage—Satriani initially envisioned G3 as a rotating lineup.

Over the years, the tour has welcomed an ever-evolving lineup of world-class guitarists, each bringing their own unique style to the mix. But it's not just about big names—it's about chemistry, the magic that happens when the right players truly complement one another. That's where Satriani comes in. "My job as the G3 leader," he explains, "is to make everybody comfortable and to see what it is they really need to make them sort of step out of their normal path and join in with everybody else."

"I TRIED TO GET PROMOTERS ON BOARD WITH ALLAN HOLDSWORTH, AND I COULD NOT SELL HIM TO THEM." – JOE SATRIANI

John Petrucci, who was a part of the lineup for the first time in 2001, was initially hesitant to get involved. "He said, 'But I don't have a solo career. I don't have a solo album,'" Satriani recalls. "I told him, 'Well, you've got time to make one.' And John, being the awesome character that he is, said, 'Yeah, okay, I'll do that.' And that's exactly what he did."

Other successful tours have been electrified by Paul Gilbert's lightning-fast picking, Kenny Wayne Shepherd's raw blues power, and Yngwie Malmsteen's neoclassical fury—each adding a distinct flavour to the mix.

Despite his somewhat unfair reputation for not always playing nicely with others, Yngwie, according to Satriani, embraced the collaborative nature of G3 better than almost anyone. "I remember when we had Yngwie out with us. I was surprised at how seamlessly he adapted. Because he's such a dynamic solo performer."

"When Yngwie takes the stage, it's just Yngwie, you know? He doesn't really

Steve Vai - *Interview*

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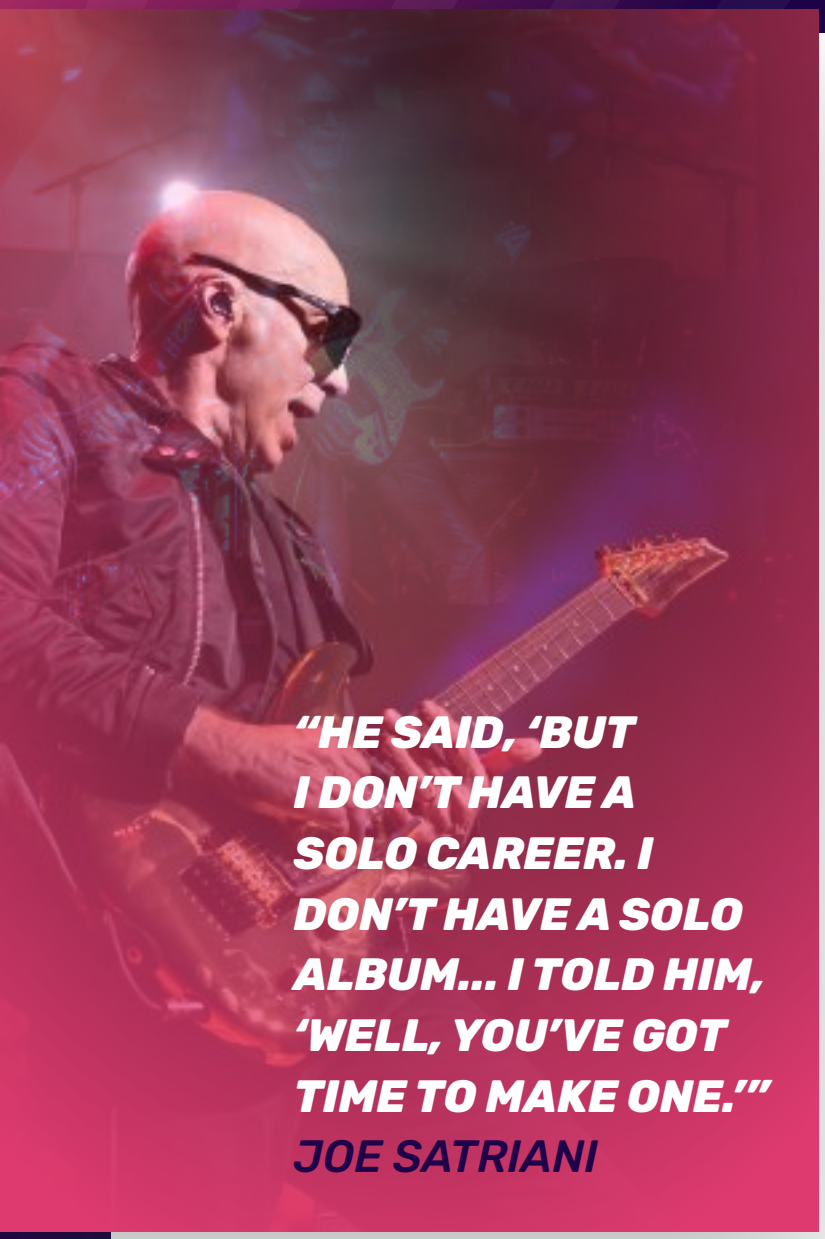


"HE SAID, 'BUT I DON'T HAVE A SOLO CAREER. I DON'T HAVE A SOLO ALBUM... I TOLD HIM, 'WELL, YOU'VE GOT TIME TO MAKE ONE.'"
JOE SATRIANI

have a lot of experience jamming with lots of people. But he's actually really great at it."

Of course, not everyone makes the cut. Satriani, without naming names, admits that some players simply don't fit the mould—more "not to be" than "G3."

"Some players are great in their bands, but they have no solo vibe, so to speak."

Although the lineups of G3's past read like a who's who of the instrument's finest, not everyone Satriani desperately wanted to include made it to centre stage—chief among them jazz-fusion virtuoso Allan Holdsworth.

"I tried to get promoters on board with Allan Holdsworth, and I could not sell him to them," Satriani reveals. "That was a shock to me. It really broke my heart because I had to be on the phone explaining what a genius he was. And they were like, 'Yeah, but he was here last month, and he sold 200 tickets. So we're not interested.'"

Upon hearing about this, Vai was a little stunned at the prospect.

"That would have been fantastic. But it would have also been a little odd, I think. Only because Allan is a very individualized type of player. He had such a particular sound and approach. He's my favourite guitar player!"

Unprompted, he continues, "When people ask me who the greatest guitar player is—which is a ridiculous question because it's not like sports—I used to go into this big explanation about personal preference, but now, I just say, 'Allan Holdsworth.' Or Tommy Emmanuel. You know, very different, but both incredible."

Then, there was the Jeff Beck tour that never materialized. He was apparently fully on board—until he wasn't.

"Jeff Beck almost did one. We had Jeff Beck and Billy Gibbons all lined up for a G3 tour. It was so close—just about to go to ticket sales, and then Jeff pulled out at the last minute," he recalls.

When asked why Beck pulled out, Satriani added:

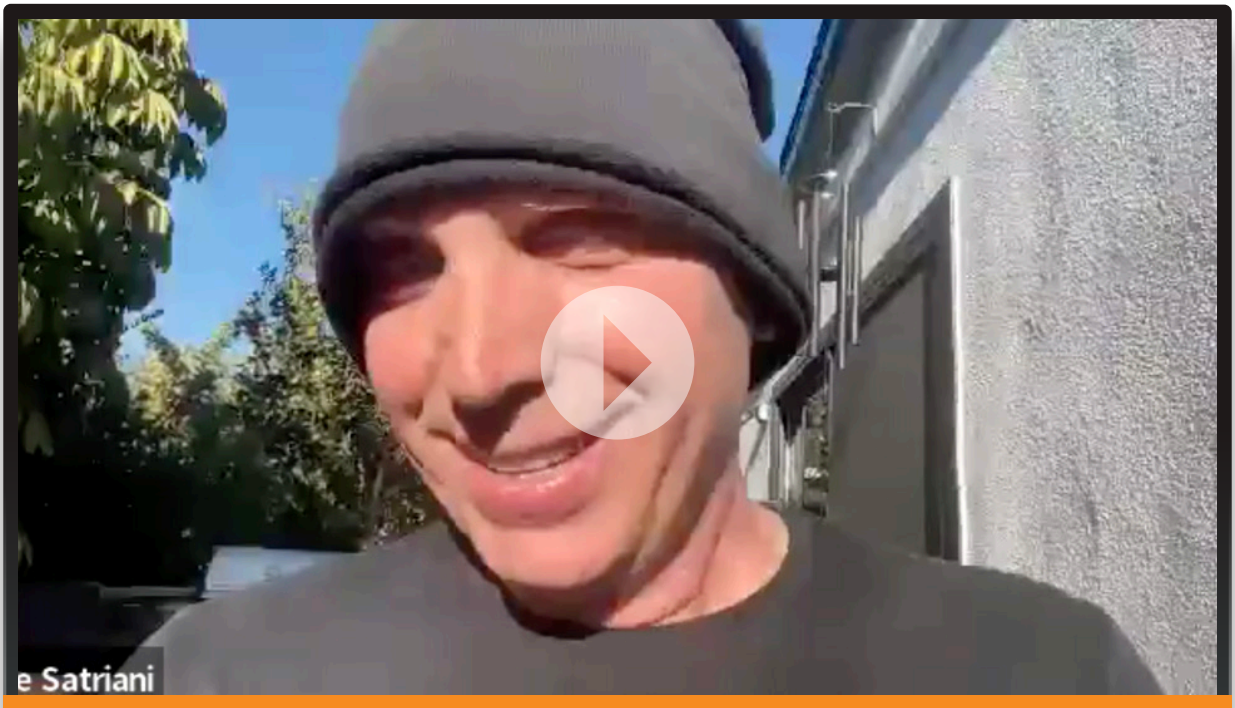
"At the time, the reason was he decided that he thought Prince would be a better addition to G3 over Billy," Satriani says with a laugh. "And we were like, 'Well, that's obviously never going to happen.' So, I guess that was his way of saying, 'I'm not doing it.'"

Holdsworth and Beck's near involvement stands as fascinating "what if" moments in G3 history. But while the lineup has shifted over the years, one thing has remained constant—the fans.

And it's not just the audience in awe of these performances. It turns out these guitar legends are just as captivated by what each other brings to the table night after night.

As Vai puts it, his admiration isn't just for the notes his long-time touring partners play but for the intent behind them and the way they're delivered.

"Joe has this way of making the guitar sing, of taking something technically complex and turning it into a melody that sticks with you," he says. "It's that kind of playing that's always resonated with me."



Joe Satriani - *Interview*

Though his own catalogue is nothing short of remarkable, when asked if there's a Satriani-penned song he'd claim for his own if he could, Vai doesn't hesitate.

"There's that song Crying that Joe does," Vai says. "It's a pretty remarkable piece of music. When I watch him play, I see a human expressing himself beautifully and authentically through an instrument—through melody, through touch, through control. It's transparent, it's seamless, and it's just profoundly beautiful… Joe is a melodic genius, you know? I really feel that he's got a limitless well of inspired melody within him."

When it comes to Eric Johnson, Vai is equally moved by his refined, lyrical, and precise approach.

"Watching Eric play Manhattan—so beautiful! I mean, he's just got such an elegance and tone, and he takes such care of every note."

"Every time he hits a chord, every note has its own little zip code," Vai jokes. "I'm like, 'Wow.'"

Satriani is also quick to acknowledge Johnson's melodic mastery, as well as Vai's almost supernatural ability to shape sound with absolute control, no matter the track or multi-necked instrument in his hands.

"The way Eric navigates a song and the melody is just beautiful," Satriani says, before revealing a track of Vai's that he's relieved isn't a part of his own setlist. "The one that I'm so happy I didn't write would be Teeth of the Hydra. Because every time I watch Steve do that, I think, 'That's totally insane!'

Eric Johnson - Interview

"IT'S LIKE NO TIME HAD PASSED... YOU'RE BACK ON STAGE WITH TWO GUYS YOU'VE PLAYED WITH DECADES BEFORE, AND IT JUST CLICKS. THERE'S AN EASE TO IT, AND THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SO SPECIAL." – ERIC JOHNSON

Something he's mentioned to Vai on more than one occasion as he explains, "We were just talking about that the other day, how I said, 'You know, for me, the perfect situation is I have a guitar on, maybe I'm plugged into a pedal—one pedal, it's always on, it's straight into the amp, the amp's up loud, and I just walk around and play.' I said, 'To me, that's the perfect world.'

I told him, 'When I look at you playing the Hydra, I go, "Why would Steve do such a thing to himself?"' It's so detailed, but it's so natural for Steve to do it. And once he starts doing it, he completely communicates the heart and soul of the song through it. But, I mean, who else could have done such a thing? Memorized when to play each of the three necks and all the switches and buttons he's got to push to make it work? That's so remarkable."

Johnson, for his part, admires both Satriani and Vai's ability to create something so technically advanced yet always in service of the song. But for Johnson, you don't have to be the likes of Satriani or Vai to connect with him; just having something to say with the instrument is enough.

"You just start getting that global feeling that there's a connection to all musicians and particularly guitar players," Johnson reflects. "There's always something you can learn from anybody—no matter what, there's always something they do that is unique and beautiful."

Of course, Satriani and Vai's friendship long predates the early G3 shows. The two first crossed paths as teenagers, with Satriani even serving as Vai's hometown guitar teacher in Long Island, NY, for a time.

Now, almost 50 years later—with a long list of studio albums, world tours, and countless accolades between them—their careers have run parallel, both becoming world-renowned solo artists, constantly pushing the boundaries of instrumental rock with absolutely nothing to prove. But one lingering question from fans has always remained: when will they record a studio album together? Well, with the SatchVai project, that album is officially on the way.

"Steve and I have been joined at the hip," Satriani admits. "We've toured together, played together, been on records together. But we've never formed a band and written music together… until now."

"WATCHING ERIC PLAY MANHATTAN—SO BEAUTIFUL! I MEAN, HE'S JUST GOT SUCH AN ELEGANCE AND TONE, AND HE TAKES SUCH CARE OF EVERY NOTE." – STEVE VAI

Vai shares in the excitement for the long-awaited project, calling it "something I've hoped for my whole life" and emphasizing that he "would never miss an opportunity to work with Joe like this. It's fantastic."

For both of these guitar virtuosos, the yet-untitled SatchVai album is proving to be a particularly rewarding experience. As Vai puts it:

"It's a lot of fun. It's nice to work with a friend like that. 'Cause I don't collaborate usually."

"What I'm hearing now is so different from anything that I've ever done or ever heard," Vai explains. "It's a little frustrating because it's so compelling. You just want to stay in the music. You just want to stop everything you're doing and go do it."

Satriani, meanwhile, describes the process of piecing together the yet-untitled album as refreshingly open-ended:

"A lot of times, you just start playing, and suddenly, you realize you've got something magical. That's what's happening here."

The first taste of the SatchVai album came with Sea of Emotion Part One, a track released in 2024.

Vai confirms that two additional parts to this trilogy of singles are on the way—however, that's just the start of it:

"We have three tracks that are ready. One that's already finished, mixed, and released which is Sea of Emotion Part One. Then we have Sea of Emotion Part Two and Part Three, which are done. We've probably got about eight or nine other new tracks in the building mode right now."

While both Satriani and Vai have strong signature sounds in their respective solo music, the project is seemingly pushing them into new creative spaces.

"Steve and I have left so much open to whatever feels fantastic in the moment that I can't really say there are parameters yet on exactly how this album's going to pan out," Satriani says. "The music just has to be great. It has to really reflect us and our long history together."

That excitement lies in the unpredictability of the song craft—an exercise in creative spontaneity that, at times, may be reminiscent of the countless jam sessions from their high school days.

"Every once in a while, one of us will say, 'Hey, I wrote this crazy song,' and the other one says, 'Let's just do it. Let's figure it out later... That's the beauty of this project—we're doing it because we love it,'" Satriani says. "And when the time feels right, we'll take it on the road and share it with the world."

Though both Satriani and Vai have stepped in front of the mic from time to time, the majority of their combined back catalogue remains instrumental. However, the SatchVai album will feature some singing—just not from them.

"So far, there's one guest vocalist coming in," Satriani confirms. While he can't share more details just yet, he adds, "We're working with a lot of great musicians to help us put this thing together."

While Satriani and Vai are diving deep into their collaboration, Eric Johnson has also been working on new music. Known for his perfectionist approach to recording, Johnson is cautiously optimistic about releasing his next album sooner rather than later.

"Well, I just started on one," Johnson says. "I just did a tour, but right before that, we went in for a few days and cut a bunch of basic tracks.

Now that I'm back off the road, I'm going to listen to them and see if any of it was any good or whether I need to spend the next 10 years redoing it."

Given Johnson's reputation for painstaking attention to detail, it's hard to take that as a joke. However, hinting at a blues-rock-based album, there appears to be a chance its delivery may take on a more raw, immediate approach.

"This one's kind of a blues-rock thing—so it's not like a huge amount of production. Maybe it won't be quite as long... hopefully."

With the SatchVai studio album in the works, Joe Satriani and Steve Vai are preparing to take their collaboration on the road

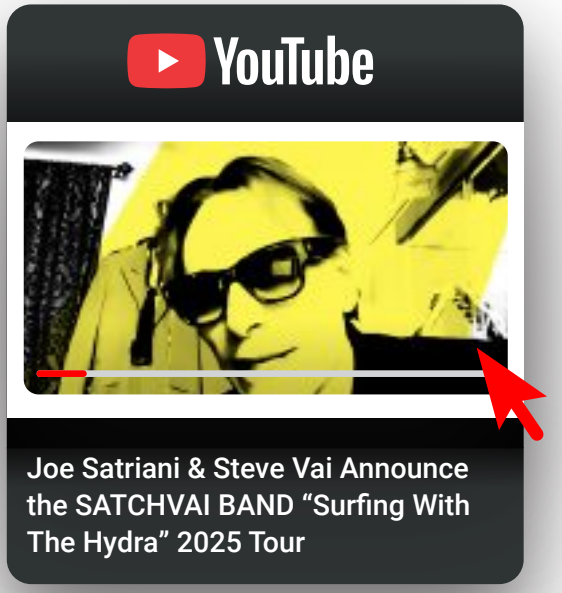
with a 2025 UK and European tour this summer.

Dubbed the SatchVai: Surfing With The Hydra tour, the first show kicks off on June 13 at the York Barbican and will hit major cities like London, Glasgow, Wolverhampton, and Manchester before heading across Europe with stops in Paris, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, and more, including the Guitare en Scene Festival in Saint-Julien, France.

Joining Satriani and Vai on stage will be drummer Kenny Aronoff, bassist Marco Mendoza, and guitarist Pete Thorn. Fans in attendance can expect a setlist blending classic solo material, brand-new tracks from the upcoming album, and, of course, just like G3, extended jams.

As the original G3 trio of Satriani, Vai, and Johnson wraps up their triumphant return, what's next for G3? As the longest-running guitar-centric tour of its kind approaches its 30th anniversary, there's clearly no reason to stop the train anytime soon.

Once again, as instrumental rock shifts and adapts in the modern age, a new generation of guitarists is emerging—players redefining what it means to be a guitar hero. And Vai, for one, is more than optimistic about bringing new blood into the lineup:



"You look at guys like Polyphia, Plini, Mateus Asato—they've taken the torch and are doing something fresh with it."

Joe's the boss, of course, and while he hints that nothing is set in stone for the next chapter, the real question isn't if G3 will return—it's when and who will be in the lineup.

"That's the beauty of G3—we don't do it because we have to. We do it because we love it. And when the time feels right, we'll do it again."

For more information on G3 Reunion Live, and the SatchVai: Surfing With The Hydra tour, visit ***g3tour.com*** *and* ***satchvaiband.com***

THE FEATURES

2025 marks a significant milestone for Peavey Electronics as the storied Mississippi-based brand proudly celebrates six decades of shaping the sound of modern music. In honour of its diamond year, Guitar Interactive Magazine takes a closer look at Peavey's influential history—from its humble beginnings in Meridian to its status today as one of the most groundbreaking names in instruments and pro audio. Gi also previews the exciting new gear that promises to rock stages for years to come.

HIGHLIGHTING THE BEST FROM THE WORLD OF GUITAR

EXCLUSIVE FEATURES EXCLUSIVE FEATURES

Legends Aren't Born, They're Made:

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Celebrating 60 years of PEAVEY®

ONE of the music industry's most important and innovative manufacturers, Peavey Electronics, celebrates its 60th Anniversary this year. However, to tell the story properly, we need to wind the clock back almost a decade earlier to 1957 in Mississippi, when a teenage Hartley Peavey walked into a Bo Diddley concert and walked out with a new obsession. The guitars, the raw volume, the way the sound hit him in the chest—it was everything. He went home and told his dad he wanted to be a guitar player. His father, a practical man who owned a music store of his own, wasn't having it.

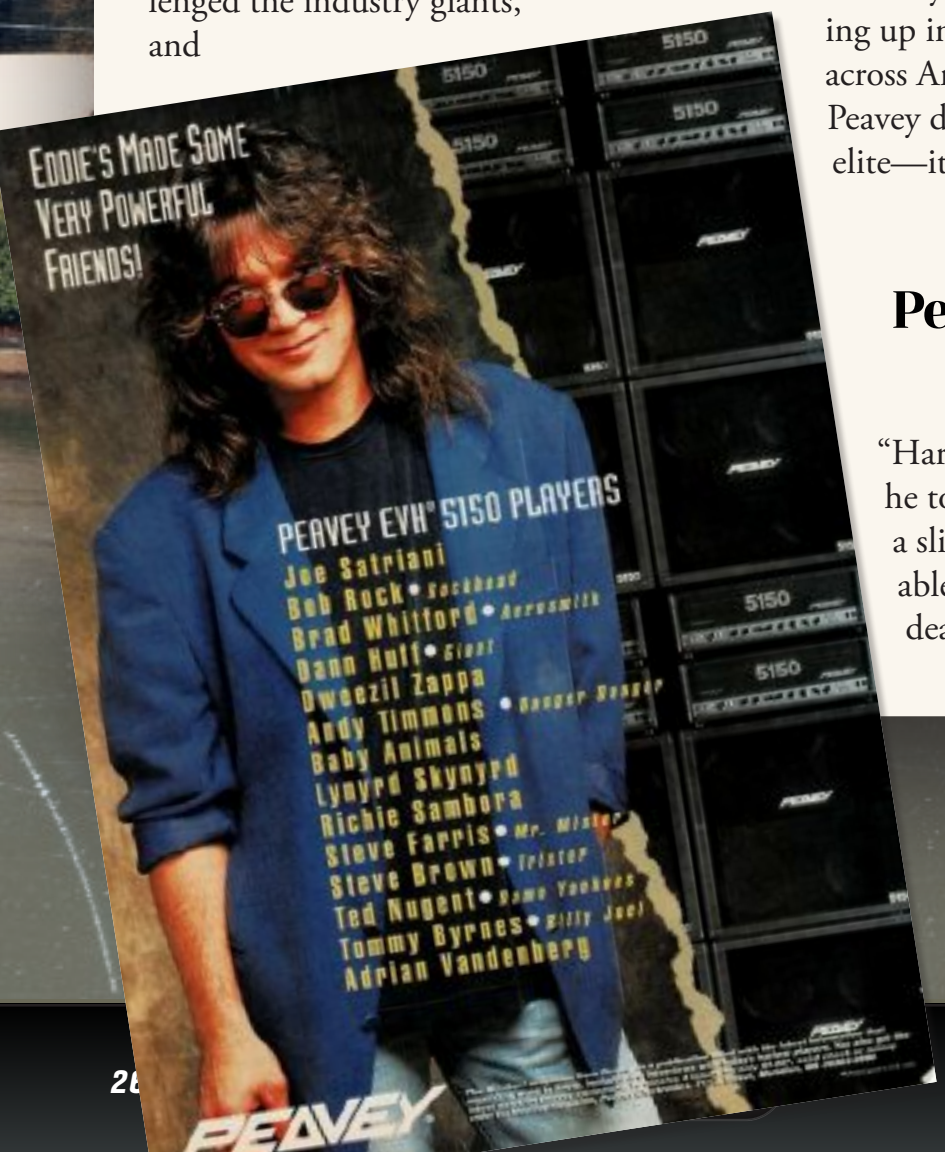
"He told me I shouldn't do it," Peavey recalls. "That guitar players were sorry and didn't pay their bills. Sometimes, I think I should have listened to him." He didn't, though.

Like most kids in the South at the time, Peavey tried to start a band. He had the passion, he had the ability—but he also

had something else: a talent for building things. When his band needed gear, he built it. Amps, cabinets, anything to make them sound bigger and louder. There was a problem, however.

"By the time I finished building all the gear, they kicked me out and hired another guitar player," he says with a laugh. "After the third time that happened, I looked in the mirror and said, 'It looks like you're not going to be a rock star. So what are you going to do?'"

That question led to one of the most important gear companies in rock history being born—one that brought affordable, road-ready amplifiers to working musicians, challenged the industry giants, and helped shape the sound of rock, metal, and country for decades to come.



In 1965, Hartley Peavey officially founded Peavey Electronics—not in a sprawling factory or a corporate office, but in a tiny room above his father's music store in Meridian, Mississippi. He was a one-man operation, designing, assembling, and testing every amp himself.

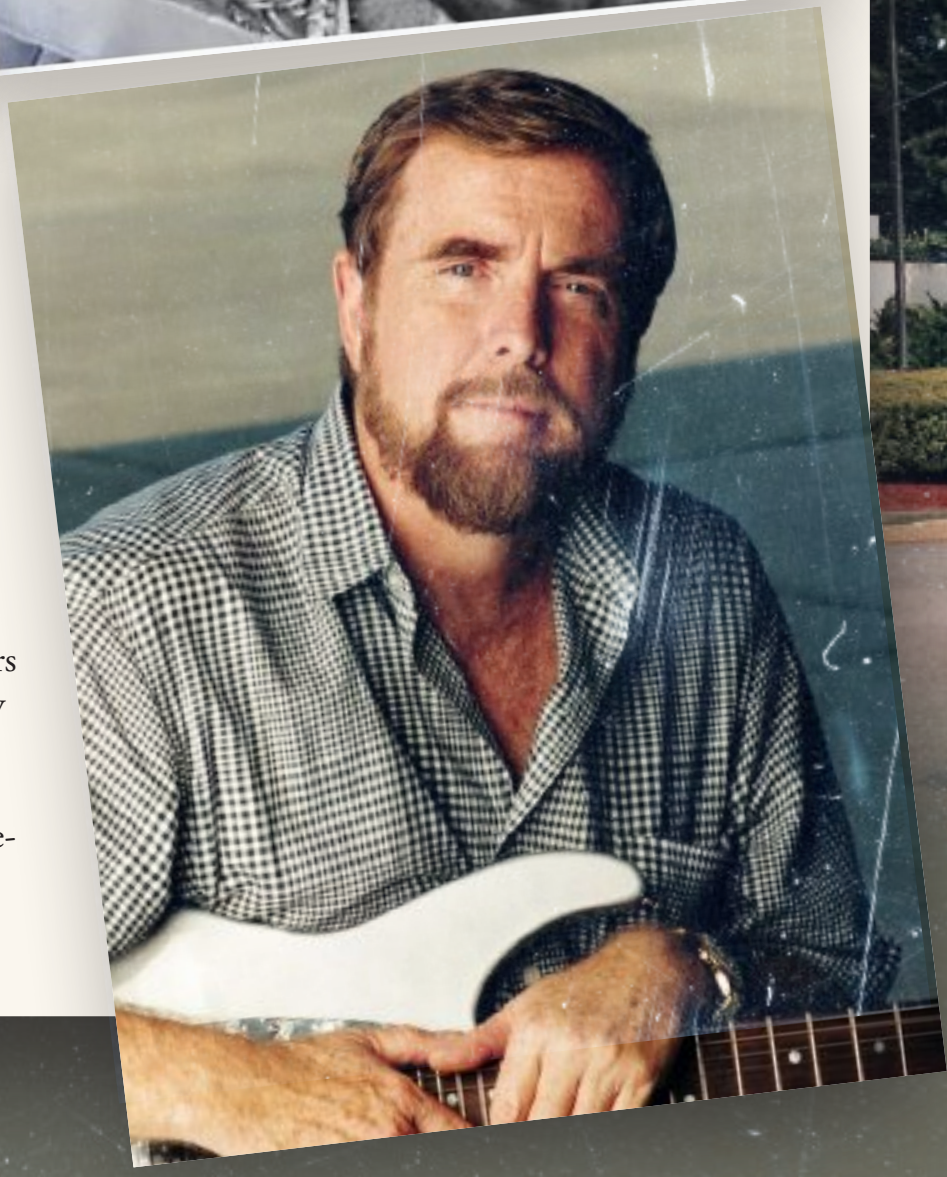
His philosophy was clear from the start: make gear that was built to last, sounded great, and—most importantly—was affordable.

That idea—top-quality gear without the boutique price tag—caught on quickly. By the early 1970s, Peavey amps were turning up in small clubs and local music stores across America. Unlike Fender or Marshall, Peavey didn't market itself as a brand for the elite—it was gear for the people.

Courtland Gray, Peavey's current COO, explains:

"Hartley's father had a music store, and he told him, 'Take your cost and do a slight markup, and you should be able to get by on that while giving the dealer what he needs to make a

"I wished somebody would make good gear at a fair price. I decided to do it the best way I possibly could." – Hartley Peavey



good profit.' He probably left a lot of money on the table, but it got the brand well-established and supported by dealers worldwide. We don't skimp on components—we put in the best we can get."

While Peavey was making a name for itself in amplifiers, Hartley had a bigger plan.

At a time when most guitar makers still relied on handcrafting, Peavey introduced CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machining to instrument manufacturing—something that had never been done before.

"We were the first ones to use CNC computer-controlled processing for making guitar necks and bodies, Gray says. "People said it couldn't really be done for guitars, but Hartley realised that the same precision used in gun stocks and barrels could be applied to guitars. Now, that's how all guitars are made."

The result was the Peavey T-60, launched in 1977, the first mass-produced guitar built with CNC technology. An American-made electric guitar with pro-level craftsmanship at a price working musicians could actually afford.

Hartley remembers the moment well:

"I wished somebody would make good gear at a fair price. I decided to do it the best way I possibly could."

If you played guitar in the 1980s or '90s, you either owned a Peavey Bandit or knew someone who did.

Released in 1980, the Peavey Bandit became the ultimate everyman's amp—affordable, loud, built like a tank, and used on everything from blues to heavy metal.

In the early 1990s, Peavey introduced TransTube technology, an innovation that made solid-state amps sound and respond more like traditional tube amps. It was a game-changer, and for many musicians, the Bandit became their first real amp—one that never let them down.

But if the Bandit was Peavey's workhorse, the 5150 amplifier was its steam train.

In 1992, Peavey teamed up with Eddie Van Halen to create the most aggressive, high-gain amplifier of its time. The 5150 didn't just shape the tone of Van Halen—it defined a whole new era of rock and metal.

The 5150 became a global phenomenon. It was the go-to amp for metal bands from Pantera to Machine Head, helping set the standard for tight, crushing distortion with unmatched sustain.

After Van Halen left Peavey in 2004, the 5150 was rebranded as the Peavey 6505, which remains one of the most widely used and respected high-gain amps in history.

As the 2000s rolled in, guitar technology was changing fast. Amp modelling and compact gear were on the rise, and Peavey had to adapt.

While some competitors were already starting to abandon traditional amps altogether, Peavey continued to innovate in both analogue and digital realms. The 6505 series remained the king of metal, and in 2017, Peavey introduced the Invective.120, a signature amp for Misha Mansoor of

Courtland Gray - *Interview*

"We were the first ones to use CNC computer-controlled processing for making guitar necks and bodies... Now, that's how all guitars are made." – Courtland Gray

Periphery that merged brutal high-gain tones with modern refinements like built-in noise gates and MIDI control.

"We think there's always a place for the traditional guitar amp, and we'll continue making them," Gray acknowledges. "But we're also adapting, changing product design, weight, and form factor.

Beyond amps, Peavey was also making waves in pro-audio.

Gray points to MediaMatrix, Peavey's game-changing digital signal processing platform:

"One of the products I'm most proud of is our MediaMatrix line. It was the first to bring digital signal processing to big venues, convention centres, and airports. We've got tens of thousands of installations worldwide, including Wembley and Disney parks."

Despite shifts in the industry, Peavey's mission remains the same.

Hartley Peavey reflects on what's kept the company going for 60 years:

"We still have the same goal: to be the best. And we know that to be the best, we have to be different. I guess I could exemplify that by the fact that we've earned over 180 patents worldwide. We've never done a study of it, but I believe that's probably more than all of our competitors put together."

What truly separates Peavey, though, isn't just its patents or products—it's the people, and that's "One of the things that set

Peavey apart," as Hartley puts it ", I have people who have literally been with me for over 40 years, and they're still here... and they still have the passion."

For six decades, Peavey has built gear for musicians who don't need hype, just something that works—whether it's a Bandit that's been through hell and still sounds great, a 6505 roaring through a club PA, or a MediaMatrix system running the sound at a major stadium.

As Peavey enters its seventh decade, Hartley Peavey's original mission remains intact. The company continues to produce hard-wearing, great-sounding gear at fair prices, ensuring that musicians everywhere—from bedroom players to arena rockers—have access to the tools they need to make music. And in that spirit, Peavey is kicking off its 60th anniversary in style, unveiling a lineup of innovative new products at NAMM 2025—from modernized classics to a few unexpected surprises.

Josh Homme Decade Too & Decade Pedal

One of the biggest highlights is the Josh Homme Decade Too, an amp that's bound to make waves among Queens of the Stone Age fans and tone chasers alike. Inspired by an overlooked gem of a practice amp from the early 80s—the original Decade—this new version brings modern enhancements while staying true to its cult-favourite roots.

"A video came out a few years back—Josh was talking about his Queens of the Stone Age tone, pulled out this old Decade amp, and suddenly the internet blew up," Courtland Gray explains. "These little practice amps started selling out on the used market. We thought, 'That's insane. Let's bring it back.' Josh was all on board."

Peavey made a few refinements to the design, including a bass boost, treble boost, and a transformer-isolated DI output, making it ideal for both live and studio settings. Adding to the package is an extension cabinet with a metal stand, giving it both a practical and aesthetic edge that aligns with Homme's vision.

To complement the amp, Peavey is also launching the Decade Pedal, a

preamp-style stompbox designed to capture the amp's signature tone in a pedalboard-friendly format.

Bandit Supreme Teal Stripe, Rock Master, and VTM Preamp Pedals

For decades, Peavey has been synonymous with rock-solid, high-gain tones, and this year, they're bringing back some of their most legendary preamps in pedal form.

The Bandit Supreme Teal Stripe Pedal is inspired by the beloved Bandit amplifier, a staple in both the heavy music scene and studio recording circles. Meanwhile, the return of the Rock Master Preamp Pedal marks a revival of one of Peavey's most revered preamps, offering classic tones with modern reliability.

Also making a comeback is the VTM Preamp Pedal, based on the VTM heads that Adrian Vandenberg used during his time with Whitesnake. These amps, known for their dip-switchable modifications, allowed guitarists to replicate the hot-rodded Marshall mods that defined late '80s rock and metal tones. By reintroducing these preamps in pedal form, Peavey is making classic tones accessible to today's players.

Session-LTD 400 Preamp Pedal – A Gift for Pedal Steel Players (and More!)

Peavey has long been one of the few major manufacturers actively supporting pedal steel players, and that tradition continues with the release of the Session-LTD 400 Preamp Pedal. While primarily designed for pedal steel guitarists, this preamp is also an excellent option for clean tones across multiple instruments, making it a versatile addition to Peavey's lineup.

Super Festival Mini Head – A Reinvented Classic

Another standout from Peavey's 60th-anniversary collection is the Super Festival Mini Head, a reimagined version of a classic amp from the 1970s. The original Su-

per Festival amp was a massive, heavyweight head that gained an underground following for its gritty, distorted bass tone.

Gray explains the challenges of bringing it back:

"The original was 600 pounds—just way too big. So, we took that preamp, shrunk it into a mini head, gave it 1,200 watts of power—four times the power of the original—and put it into a modern amplifier package with a 6x10 cabinet instead of an 8x10."

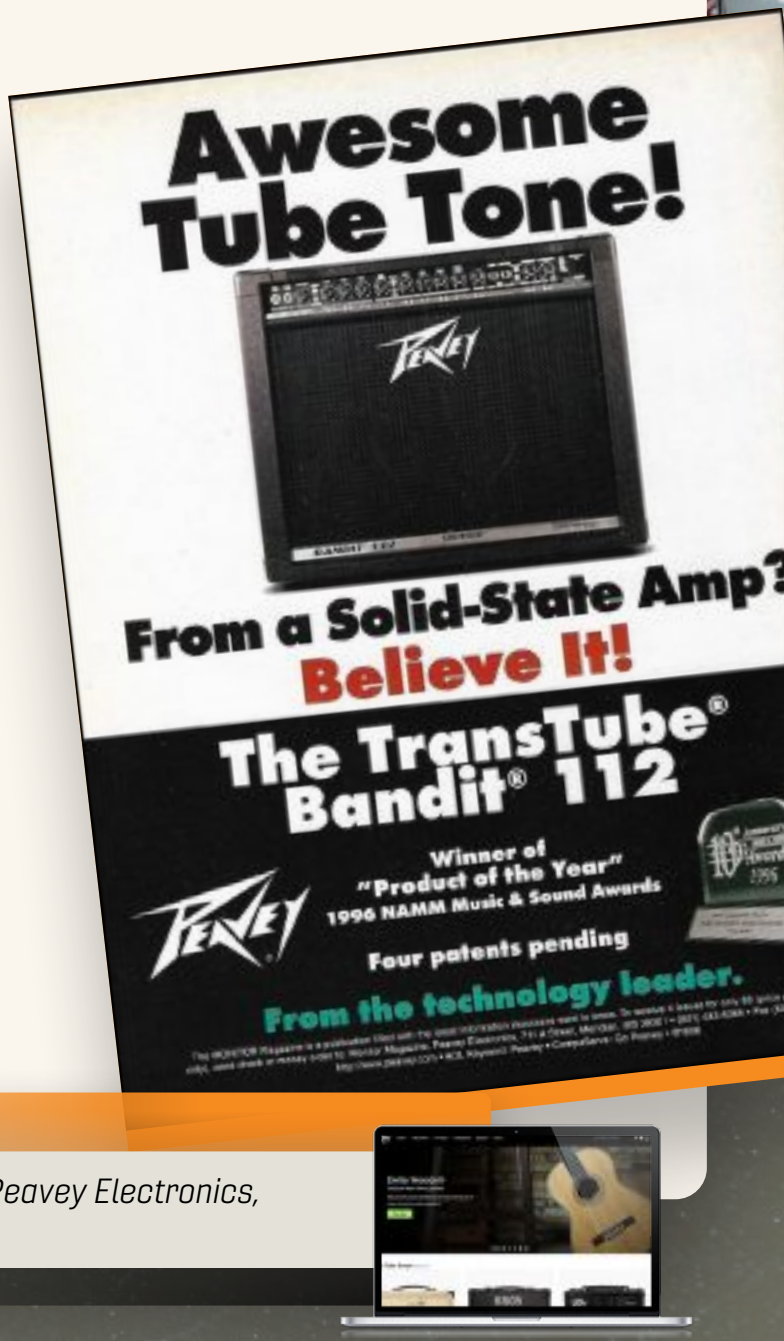
This modernized version keeps the retro aesthetic of the original while making it far more practical for today's musicians.

Beyond amplifiers and pedals, Peavey is also reintroducing some of its most iconic guitars and basses in 2025. The Cirrus bass line, a highly respected series from Peavey's past, is making a comeback, delivering the same premium craftsmanship that made it a favourite among bassists.

Guitarists will also be thrilled to see the return of the Vandenberg guitar, a high-performance shred machine from the late '80s, now updated with modern specs. And with the Invective amplifier continuing to lead Peavey's lineup, the company is reaffirming its place in the high-gain amp market with an amp that offers crystal-clear cleans and crushing distortion in one package.

Peavey's 2025 releases will begin rolling out imminently, with the Bandit Supreme Teal Stripe Pedal and Josh Homme Decade Too arriving first, with the rest of the lineup expected to hit shelves by late April or early May.

For Peavey fans—old and new—2025 is shaping up to be an unforgettable year.



For more information of Peavey Electronics, visit ***Peavey.com***

THE COMPETITION

*With each new edition of **Guitar Interactive Magazine** comes the chance of winning a fantastic prize in our free to enter competition.*

YOUR CHANCES TO WIN

YOUR CHANCE TO WIN YOUR CHANCE TO WIN

WIN! a G3 – Reunion Live: 4xLP, Multi-Coloured Vinyl L

In this issue's competition, we are giving one lucky winner a chance to get their hands on a G3 – Reunion Live: 4xLP, Multi-Coloured Vinyl Limited Edition Boxset — Courtesy of earMUSIC. Europe's Leading Rock Record Label

About the G3 – Reunion Live: 4xLP, Multi-Coloured Vinyl Limited Edition Boxset

G3 "Reunion Live" reunites three guitar giants for a sonic celebration that renews a tradition stretching back to 1996.

Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, and Eric Johnson inaugurated the G3 concept 28 years ago which put them on stage together for the first time ever. The G3 tour line up changed over the years, but in 2024, the original G3 reunited for a sold-out run of dates in the US. That experience is embodied in G3 "Reunion Live" a(nd much more than "just" a live album).

The format of the tour is mirrored here with a full set from each guitarist with their own band, followed by a full-on jam featuring all three. Each Deluxe Edition artist LP will be a different color and the "jam" LP will be a splatter combination of all three. Fans get a "new" album from each artist plus a new LP from a certified supergroup, The Media Book will also be divided into separate artist and jam chapters. The individual repertoire is comprised of signature tunes from each guitarist such as Joe's "Sahara," Steve's "For the Love of God" and Eric's "Cliffs of Dover." The encore jam features covers from the likes of Hendrix and Clapton.

How do you win? It's easy.

*Send us an email with the subject "**G3 – Reunion Live: 4xLP, Multi-Coloured Vinyl Limited Edition Boxset**" to competitions@guitarinteractivemagazine.com One winner will be selected random*

imited Edition Boxset in our free entry competition.

LP1 Steve Vai

A
1. Gravitas
2. Avalancha
3. Little Pretty Intro
4. Little Pretty
5. Tender Surrender

B
1. Zeus in Chains
2. Teeth of the Hydra
3. For the Love of God

LP2 Eric Johnson

A
1. Land of 1000 Dances
2. Righteous
3. Trails of Tears

B
1. On-Ramp Imrpov
2. Freeway Jam
3. Desert Rose
4. Venus Reprise

LP3 Joe Satriani

A
1. Raspberry Jam – Delta V
2. Surfing with the Alien
3. Satch Boogie

B
1. Sahara
2. Nineteen Eighty
3. Big Bad Moon
4. Always with Me, Always with You

LP4 Encore Jam

A
1. Introductions 2. Crossroads 3. Spanish Castle Magic **B** 1. Born To Be Wild 2. Summer Song

ENTER

Good Luck!

"SHERGOLD CONTINUE TO IMPRESS WITH EXCELLENT GUITAR AFTER EXCELLENT GUITAR - ALL SUPER AFFORDABLE & ALL WITH THE SAME OVERWHELMING SENSE OF MID-CENTURY COOL"

Nick Jennison
Guitar Interactive Magazine Issue 108

WIN!

SHERGOLD

MASQUERADER STANDARD

ASTRAL BLUE

WORTH £409.00

ENTER HERE

Worldwide entries accepted.
There is no fee for entering this competition.
Closes 23:59 (GMT) 20th March 2025

THE REVIEWS

*At **Guitar Interactive**, we pride ourselves on bringing you in-depth reviews and demonstrations for only the best products the world of guitar and audio electronics has to offer.*

If it's in Gi, then it's gear we'd buy! All of our written reviews and breakdowns are accompanied by a detailed video — so you can see and hear for yourself if it's right for you.

GUITARS, AMPS AND EFFECTS

NEW FOR 2025

BEST OF 2024

Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay II

Nick Jennison gets his funk on with the Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay II, designed in collab counterpart, the iconic StingRay—featuring the signature oval pickguard, enlarged and slee tribute, this guitar is a groove machine with its own personality, built to be snappy, articulat your playing.

FOR a certain breed of player, clarity isn't just a preference—it's a necessity. That's where a guitar like the Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay II comes in. Designed with Cory Wong, this instrument is all about articulation and precision. It's not a fire-breathing rock machine or a vintage throwback—it's a high-performance guitar that's crafted to make every note stand out.

At first glance, the slightly enlarged headstock might catch your eye, an ever-so-subtle tweak to the classic 4x2 layout that somehow makes the whole instrument feel a little more refined. It's an aesthetic choice more than anything, but it works. The roasted maple neck is everything you'd

Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay II

oration with Cory Wong and inspired by its bass
ek double-cutaway body. ` Far more than just a
e, and incredibly responsive to every nuance of

PRODUCT RECOMMENDED

Ernie Ball Music Man StingRay II

MSRP: *(Standard) $2999 | (Deluxe) $3299*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Superb Playability*
- *Killer design*
- *Cory Wong HT humbuckers*

For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk/collections/vintage

expect from Music Man—smooth, fast, and supremely comfortable, with a slim C profile that feels substantial without ever getting in the way. The rosewood fretboard and 22 medium-profile frets add to the effortless playability, striking that perfect balance between vintage and modern. Whether you're hammering out percussive funk rhythms or digging into expressive lead lines, this neck feels alive in your hands.

Tuning stability is rock solid, thanks to Schaller locking tuners and a Music Man compensated nut that ensures every chord rings out with perfect intonation. The two-point tremolo is set flush from the factory, meaning it's dive-only—an intentional decision that keeps everything locked down during aggressive rhythm playing. Of course, if you want a more floating feel, a quick setup adjustment will get you there, but as it stands, it's perfectly suited to the kind of playing this guitar was built for.

Then there are the pickups—Cory Wong HT humbuckers that deliver exactly what you'd hope for in a guitar bearing his name. Unlike the high-output HT pickups found in other Music Man models, these are designed for openness and dynamic response, with a beautifully wide frequency range. The bridge pickup is bright, articulate, and perfectly voiced for cutting through a mix, while the neck pickup is smooth, round, and warm without ever sounding muddy. The middle position blends both for a beautifully balanced, chimey tone that works just as well for comping chords as it does for lead playing.

Visually, it's a stunner, with a selection of finishes that range from understated to bold.

There's no coil-splitting, but frankly, you don't need it—these humbuckers have enough clarity and airiness to get into single-coil territory without losing their body. Roll back the volume, and the tone stays intact, never dulling out or losing definition. This is a guitar that responds to every touch, rewarding players who rely on dynamics and feel rather than brute force.

Visually, it's a stunner, with a selection of finishes that range from understated to bold. There's even a limited-edition white model with a matching headstock and maple fretboard—only 30 of them exist, making it a collector's piece for those lucky enough to snag one. But make no mistake—this isn't just a showpiece. It's a workhorse designed for players who demand an instrument that moves with them, responding to every touch, every nuance, every dig-in and roll-off.

It's a guitar that feels just as good at home on a clean channel as it does driving an amp into breakup, capable of everything from glassy funk cleans to rich, harmonically complex leads.

The StingRay II is a guitar that rewards players who care about touch, articulation, and dynamic control. It's a Cory Wong signature model in spirit, but it's far from a one-trick pony. Whether you live in the world of funk, fusion, blues, or even rock, there's something in this guitar that feels like it was built just for you. And that's the mark of a truly great instrument.

Donner HUSH X Pro Multi-Effects Portab

When it comes to travel guitars, finding the right balance between portability, playability, an HUSH X Pro, Donner aims to do it all—delivering sleek aesthetics, pro-level features, and bu made waves at NAMM 2025, but does it live up to the hype? Here's Sam Bell to tell us more.

RIGHT off the bat, I've got to say Donner has done something pretty remarkable with the HUSH X Pro. It blends great looks, versatility, and functionality into a package that doesn't break the bank. On top of that, it features a built-in amp simulation system that's surprisingly comprehensive for the price.

Looks-wise, the HUSH X Pro is a sleek, headless, 24-fret guitar with a roasted maple neck. Its flat neck profile and jumbo frets make it easy to play, especially for fast and technical styles. It comes with both single-coil and humbucking pickups, which can be re-voiced through the onboard software.

Donner HUSH X Pro Multi-Effects Portable Guitar

le Guitar

d tone can be tricky. With its latest model, the
uilt-in amp simulations, all at an affordable price. It

PRODUCT RECOMMENDED

Donner HUSH X Pro Multi-Effects Portable Guitar

MSRP: *(UK) £469 | (US) $469*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Lightweight guitars*
- *Built-in effects*
- *Portability*

For more information, please visit:

donnermusic.com

One of its standout features is its modular design: the metal parts of the body are detachable, making it even more portable. That said, keeping them attached makes seated playing more comfortable, as they help stabilize the guitar on your lap. If you prefer to stand, the guitar has strap buttons. The ergonomic headless design and lightweight build make it easy to carry and play for long stretches.

Despite its compact size, it doesn't compromise on quality. It comes with a sleek, high-quality gig bag about the size of a snooker cue case, making it incredibly easy to transport. Donner also includes a solid set of accessories: a strap, tools, a pick, headphones, a guitar cable, a USB-C cable (for charging and connectivity), and a cleaning cloth.

What really sets the HUSH X Pro apart is its built-in amp simulation system. Right inside the guitar, you can access a variety of amp models, from vintage clean tones to modern high-gain setups. It also comes with effects like delay, reverb, and modulation, so you can shape your sound on the go—no extra gear needed.

Despite its compact size, it doesn't compromise on quality.

Another impressive feature is its guitar emulation. Whether you're after the twang of a Strat, the warmth of a Tele, the punch of a Les Paul, or the resonance of an acoustic, the HUSH X Pro delivers. The emulations are surprisingly good, letting you explore a wide range of tones without extra pedals or amps.

For players who want even more control, the guitar supports custom impulse responses (IRs), so you can load your favorite cabinet simulations and tweak your sound exactly how you like it. Whether you're practicing in a hotel room, jamming backstage, or even performing live, this guitar is ready for anything. You can plug it straight into a DI box or PA system with its built-in amp sims, or bypass them entirely and run it through traditional pedals and amps.

As a travel guitar, the HUSH X Pro nails its main purpose: portability. It's lightweight, compact, and effortless to carry, but it's also much more than just a practice tool—it's a legit performance-worthy instrument.

The biggest surprise? The price. Retailing at under £500, it packs an impressive set of features for the price. Whether you're a beginner looking for a travel-friendly guitar or a pro who needs a portable workhorse, this is a seriously impressive option.

The Donner HUSH X Pro sets a new standard for travel guitars. It's stylish, innovative, and packed with useful features—all while being fun to play and easy to take anywhere. For a guitar this capable at this price point? That's pretty hard to beat.

Orange Baby 100 Series Amplifiers

Looking for a compact, gig-ready amp head packed with classic Orange tones? The new Bab need. Introducing the Gain Baby 100, Dual Baby 100, and Tour Baby 100—a trio of British-des musicians who need power and portability. Whether you prefer pristine cleans, tight moder a versatile foundation for your effects. Compact enough to fit in a rack yet powerful enough the Baby series is an ideal solution for guitarists who want to travel light without compromi

ORANGE is well known for crushing British rock tones through its range of fire-breathing valve amps. In this issue of Guitar Interactive, I had the pleasure of checking out a new range of compact transistor amps from Orange. Whilst these might be small and feature the name Baby, these amps pack a hell of a punch.

There are three amps in the Baby range, each of them 100-watt transistor amps with an A/B channel, FX loop, XLR out, and weighing in at only 3kg—complete with a soft case. It's hard to say which of the three amps came first; however, they all have unique combinations of channels. Let's take a look at each one:

Tour Baby 100

y series from Orange might be just what you
signed solid-state mini amp heads built for serious
n distortion, or anything in between, these amps offer
to hold its own against even the loudest drummers,
sing on sound. Here's **Sam Bell** to tell us more.

This features a pristine, clean channel with a simple Bass/Treble control and built-in compression. The clean channel has tons of headroom, making it great for pedals—super clean and punchy. Orange have some of the nicest clean tones in the industry! The B channel is a crunchy/classic rock channel with plenty of sustain. The Bass, Mid, and Treble controls are super interactive, allowing users to shape their tone.

Dual Baby 100

The A channel on this is based on Orange's Rockerverb amp—it picks up where the Tour Baby's channel B left off, with a bit more sustain and a unique Tubb switch which, to my ears, tweaks the midrange a bit. The B channel is a high-gain beast, with a Tight switch allowing users to get classic and modern tones with a beautiful organic edge.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Orange Baby 100 Series Amplifiers

MSRP: *(each): (UK) £459 / (US) £599*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Studio — Stadium

Specialised — Versatile

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Portable 100-watt head*
- *Versatile tones*
- *Orange quality*

For more information, please visit:

orangeamps.com

Gain Baby 100

I'm not sure why this is called the Gain Baby, but it seems to feature the clean A channel of the Tour Baby and the high-gain channel of the Dual Baby—the very best of both worlds!

These combinations will appeal to many different players. For hard rockers, the Dual Baby's two shades of grit could be a great bedrock for their tone. The Tour Baby would be a great pedal amp for the musician looking for all-round versatility. The Gain Baby offers the extremes of both super-clean and super-dirty sounds, which could appeal to players of alternative/progressive genres and beyond!

I wasn't sure what to expect. I love a good valve amp, and I also appreciate great digital gear. When it comes to making a speaker move and playing with an amp as part of the instrument, I've always thought valves were where it's at. However, these new Baby Orange transistor amps not only sound phenomenal and pack a huge punch in a small package, but they also respond incredibly musically. Rolling the volume down on my Strat on a gainy sound cleans up beautifully. Orange amps have a great round punch and bloom, with a unique treble range that cuts and a truly distinctive midrange—and these amps have that in spades.

100 watts is very loud! Plenty of headroom to play with a full band. I imagine these will really appeal to regularly gigging guitarists looking for something lightweight, great-sounding, and reliable. Studio musicians aren't going to miss out either—at lower volumes, the Baby amps retain their punch, and you can even take a line out the back via XLR for silent recording and use with IRs, etc. Amazing stuff.

I'm excited to see these on more stages. I'm lucky to review some amazing gear, and there's a lot of brilliant stuff out there, but I'm personally very excited by these tiny yet powerful amps, full of attitude! Try one out!

Orange *Baby 100 Series Amplifiers*

EDITOR'S CHOICE:

BEST OF 2024

Jonathan Graham presents his choices for Guitar Interactive Magazine's Best of 2024

ANOTHER year, another huge wave of incredible gear! With the bar set so high over these past 365 days, it's getting harder to give anything close to a negative review, but some releases still manage to rise above the rest. Between Nick, Sam, and myself, we've compiled our Best of 2024 list—without duplicating picks—to highlight as many standout products as possible. Let us know if you agree or if we missed a must-have!

Gibson Theodore Standard

The 2024 Gibson Theodore Standard redefines vintage charm with some added modern innovation. Featuring a distinctively shaped mahogany body, nitrocellulose finish, and Custom P-90 pickups, this guitar delivers the signature Gibson punch with warmth and clarity.

Ciari Ascender P90 Duo

True innovation—the Ascender P90 Duo is a full-sized, stage-ready electric guitar that folds for travel. Featuring a satin basswood body, ebony fretboard, locking tuners, and dual P-90s, it offers pro-level tone in a portable package.

Gi
TOP PICK

Sterling JV60CB James Valentine Signature Chambered Bigsby

With its White Ash slab body, roasted maple neck, locking tuners, and a 12dB push-push boost, this Sterling James Valentine signature model refines the formula with a chambered design and Bigsby for enhanced resonance and versatility.

Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton

A modern twist on a classic, the Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton pairs an alder body with Alnico-5 pickups for bright, articulate tones. The vintage tremolo and smooth playability make it a perfect all-rounder.

Vintage ProShop

Since 2019, Vintage Guitars has built one-of-a-kind Vintage ProShop models, blending classic aesthetics with unique finishes, hardware upgrades, and boutique craftsmanship.

Godin Stadium Pro

Finished in Ozark Cream, the Godin Stadium Pro combines a rock maple neck, rosewood fretboard, and a Custom Cajun single-coil with a Godin humbucker for an expressive tonal range.

Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom Les Paul Custom

Featuring a mahogany body, ebony fretboard, and ProBucker pickups, this Epiphone Les Paul Custom is a refined take on the classic, complete with gold hardware and an open-book headstock.

Kramer Nightswan Vintage White

A late-'80s shredder reissue, the Nightswan sports a compact double-cut body, Seymour Duncan JB pickups, and a Floyd Rose 1000 Series tremolo for fast, articulate playing.

Rapier 44

An homage to British rock 'n' roll, the Rapier 44 features three single-coil pickups, a versatile tonal palette, and modern upgrades to its vintage tremolo system.

Danelectro Longhorn Baritone

This baritone version of the classic Longhorn delivers rich, resonant tones with vintage lipstick pickups, perfect for deeper sonic exploration.

PRS MT100

Expanding on Mark Tremonti's successful MT15, the MT100 offers three channels (Clean, Lead, and a new Overdrive channel) with 100 watts of pure tube tone, refined over five years with PRS.

Hiwatt Leeds 150 Head

The Hiwatt Leeds 150 delivers British power and clarity, offering massive 150-watt headroom with 3-band EQ and master volume control, perfect for big stages.

Orange Oriverb

Designed with Orianthi, the Orange Oriverb Signature Combo refines the Rockerverb MKIII 50 NEO, featuring Celestion Creambacks and EL34 valves for a warm yet powerful sound.

Fishman Loudbox Range

Fishman's Loudbox acoustic amp series remains a top choice for gigging players, with multiple models offering clean, articulate amplification for acoustic instruments.

Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups

These high-output ceramic pickups for Strat and Tele models bring aggressive, harmonically rich tones—ideal for rock, metal, and high-gain styles.

Takamine LTD2024

Celebrating Takamine's 60th anniversary, the LTD2024 boasts a solid spruce top, exotic tonewoods, intricate inlays, and a sound that is as refined as its craftsmanship.

Cort Abstract Delta

Inspired by 2018's Abstract Limited Edition, the Abstract Delta introduces new geometric inlays, premium tonewoods, and meticulous craftsmanship in Cort's Masterpiece Series.

Gibson Theodore Standard

Introducing the 2024 Gibson Theodore Standard, a guitar that redefines vintage charm with
founder, this limited-edition electric guitar features a sleek mahogany body with a nitrocellu
The Theodore Standard boasts a pair of Custom P-90 pickups, delivering that classic Gibson
its comfortable rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets, and a Tune-O-Matic bridge, t
precise intonation. **Nick Jennison** tells us more

THERE are few ideas more romantic than a long-lost work from one of the great masters. A forgotten Picasso under your great aunt's bed; a Ferrari prototype in a Maranello shed; a Ted McCarty guitar at the bottom of an old desk drawer…

Informed readers will no doubt have picked up on the latter as a reference to the Gibson Theodore. This Art Deco-inspired, tulip-bodied double-cut was almost lost to history: sketched by McCarty in 1957 at the apex of his most creative period and filed away for 65 years until its release in 2022 as the high-end Custom Shop "Theodore."

Gibson Theodore Standard

modern innovation. Named after Gibson's visionary
ulose lacquer finish, exuding timeless elegance.
n punch with enhanced clarity and warmth. With
the Theodore ensures impeccable playability and

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Gibson Theodore Standard

MSRP: *(UK) £1999 | (US) $1999*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Art Deco design;*
- *Clear and open humbucker tones;*
- *Slim, comfortable neck*

For more information, please visit:

gibson.com

There's less of an obvious midrange "honk" and more openness and sparkle.

Made in limited quantities and priced at an eye-watering five grand, this controversial and visually stunning instrument was out of reach for most players until now.

The Theodore Standard retains the same tulip body style and "scimitar" headstock but costs less than half the price of the custom shop model. The format is quintessentially "Gibson," with a Tune-O-Matic bridge, 24.75" scale length, and a pair of PAF-style humbuckers - a 57 Classic in the neck position and an ever-so-slightly hotter 57 Classic Plus in the bridge position. Given how fashionable it is right now to reduce the sound of a guitar down to the pickups, you'd be forgiven for assuming the Theodore might sound just like a Les Paul, but this isn't the case. There's less of an obvious midrange "honk" and more openness and sparkle. The neck position has great extension in the highs and lows, which gives the impression of a midrange scoop - perfect for articulate lead lines and rich, sparkling cleans. The bridge position has a similar evenness and clarity but with a little more punch and growl for classic rock riffs and stinging blues.

Despite being a '50s design, the Theodore Standard sports a slim, '60s-style neck with slightly squared-off shoulders. It's a very comfortable shape, especially for "thumb-behind" playing styles and low-slung strap heights. That's not to say you can't use the "baseball bat" grip if you prefer it, but the Theodore's neck carve definitely rewards deftness and subtlety of touch over "grip and hit" brutality.

Available in a trio of classic Gibson colors, the Theodore Standard is a slice of mid-century guitar history at a relatively affordable price. More importantly though, it's a guitar that plays effortlessly and sounds as beautiful as it looks.

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With MOOER OTG you can record directly onto a compatible device making the Intelligent Amp Series the perfect choice for content creators who depend on immediate results. With MOOER Cloud you can download the latest MOOER signature artist presets as well as uploading your own sounds.

SD30i

HORNET 05i

HORNET 15i

HORNET 30i

Ciari Ascender P90 Duo

Nick Jennison reviews the Ascender P90 Duo — the latest in Ciari's collection of stage-qua patented folding technology. This folding electric guitar features a surf-forward, satin bassw finish with ebony fingerboard, Ciari locking tuners, master tone and volume electronics and

REGULAR readers of Guitar Interactive Magazine will no doubt have seen the Ciari Ascender gracing our pages in the last 12 months. When we first came across this completely unique instrument at the NAMM show in 2022, we (like many others) were skeptical. You encounter quite a few gimmicks at NAMM, and we were ready to file Ciari's folding guitar in the same category as "a guitar that's also a functioning unicycle" or "a guitar with a built-in blood oxygen monitor"... until we played it. In that instant, we knew Ciari was onto something, but who could have predicted how much they'd explode in popularity in the 12 months that would follow? Well, us actually, but who's counting?

Ciari Ascender P90 Duo

ality, full-size professional electric guitars with
wood body, "wave top" 3+3 headstock, natural-neck
a killer pair of P90s.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Ciari Ascender P90 Duo

MSRP: *(US) $1699*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Studio — Stadium

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» *Taking your guitar with you wherever you go!*

» *P90 Growl*

» *Superb playability*

For more information, please visit:

ciariguitars.com

As the name suggests, the P90 Duo is a version of the Ascender loaded with a pair of P90s—in this case, a pair of Fishman Fluence Greg Koch "Gristle Tone" signature P90s, although models with Seymour Duncan pickups are also available. Like the Ascender Standard we looked at in a previous issue, it's a guitar that literally folds in half.

Yeah, you read that right. It features a unique mechanism that's derived from technology used in the medical industry, which allows the guitar's neck to fold 180 degrees at the 12th fret. This means it'll fit in a backpack, which you can carry on an aircraft, a bicycle, a motorcycle, the tube, you name it. The whole procedure takes about 10 seconds, you don't need to take the strings off, and it even comes back completely in tune. It's bonkers, but it's also brilliant. So much so that I'll be taking an Ascender Standard with me to all my European festival shows this year.

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Alan Entwistle
Elixir STRINGS
Wilkinson
graphtech

If you play blues, classic rock, country, soul, or any other rootsy style, this guitar will deliver the goods in spades.

Apart from the sheer ease of the folding mechanism and how well it works, what sets Ciari apart from the "travel guitar" crowd is the quality. This is a legit pro-level instrument. It has a full-scale, 22-fret mahogany neck with stainless steel, Plek'd frets, and it plays like butter. The factory action is low and rattle-free, and thanks to the locking bridge and tailpiece, it'll stay that way. The neck profile is a very comfy "medium C," and the metal "hinge," while chunky, is something you completely forget about when you're playing (except if the room you're in is really cold!).

The big difference between the Ascender Standard and the P90 Duo is, of course, the tones. The Fishman P90s loaded in this guitar offer no fewer than nine distinct tones, with three voices available in each pickup, accessed using push-pulls on the master tone and volume. With both pots pushed, you have a vintage-wound bridge pickup and a slightly underwound neck that's clear and chime-y. Pull the tone pot, and the pickups transform into a hot, mid-pushed voice in the bridge that has tons of great P90 "honk," while the neck pickup becomes fat and vocal without losing clarity.

Pull the volume pot, and you get a very convincing Telecaster voice inspired by Greg Koch's signature Tele set. It's a whole library of vintage-style tones, but with the added benefit of that famous Fluence clarity, and the fact that they are dead quiet. No hum, no microphonics, no interference from passing taxis. If you play blues, classic rock, country, soul, or any other rootsy style, this guitar will deliver the goods in spades.

The Ciari Ascender P90 Duo brings the performance, quality, and convenience of the Ascender with the vintage, gritty tones that only P90s can provide. It's a one-of-a-kind instrument, and something no traveling musician should be without.

Sterling JV60CB James Valentine Signat

The Valentine Collection is known for effortlessly combining the best of iconic guitar feature installation in the legacy is no different. The Sterling JV60CB James Valentine Signature Cha specs that made it stand out — White Ash slab body, 12dB push-push boost, roasted maple innovating. **Sam Bell** tells us more.

THE Music Man Sterling Series aims to offer guitarists high-quality instruments at an affordable price. In this review, I'm examining the James Valentine signature model, now included in the Sterling Series.

This uniquely designed and versatile guitar is easy to play and rich in tone. Notably, James Valentine of Maroon 5 has commendably kept his signature subtle, with only the model name, 'Valentine', on the headstock, which could easily be mistaken for a generic model name at first glance.

One of the first things you'll notice is the butterscotch body with a Bigsby vibrato system. The semi-hollow design enhances the mid-range airiness of the tone and sustains beautifully. According to Music Man,

Sterling JV60CB James Valentine Signature Chambered Bigsby

ture Chambered Bigsby

es into the perfect package, and the newest
ambered Bigsby stays true to the original
neck, and locking tuners — while elevating and

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Sterling JV60CB James Valentine Signature Chambered Bigsby

MSRP: *(UK) £1149 | (US) $899*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Iconic Bigsby B50 tailpiece*
- *Roasted maple neck and fretboard*

For more information, please visit:

sterlingbymusicman.com

Music Man guitar designs are compact, high-quality, and very playable, with the Valentine being no exception.

the white ash body offers a clear bass response and scooped lower mids. The Bigsby vibrato not only looks cool but also adds shimmer and modulation to chords and single-note lines.

The roasted maple neck is a standout feature, increasing stability across different environments and ensuring reliable tuning stability. The unique 42mm nut width brings the strings closer together, enhancing playability similar to that of a Les Paul, especially on the fretboard. The Valentine features a 22-fret neck over a 25.5-inch scale length and is incredibly addictive to play. It arrives with a deluxe gig bag, perfectly set up with no buzz and stable tuning.

Electronically, the guitar features two SH pickups, which seem to be Seymour Duncan humbuckers, based on the classic PAF design. This setup provides warm, clear tones that blend superbly with the chambered body for a uniquely resonant and sustaining sound. The guitar offers a wide dynamic range with simple controls: a tone knob, a volume knob with a push/push boost for driving the amp harder, and a 3-way pickup selector switch.

Music Man guitar designs are compact, high-quality, and very playable, with the Valentine being no exception. The Sterling range provides high-quality instruments at a more affordable price. As a signature model, it's slightly pricier, likely due to the pickups and the Bigsby, but it offers excellent value. It's a fantastic choice for pop, rock, funk, and blues. James Valentine's influence is evident, reflecting his excellent taste.

If you admire James Valentine's style or seek a classic yet modern guitar that is versatile and classy, the JV60CB is definitely worth considering. I absolutely love it!

Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton

Nick Jennison reviews the Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton — a standout instrument that comb
This guitar features an alder body for a balanced tone and a maple neck with a rosewood fin
comfortable feel. Equipped with Alnico-5 single-coil pickups, the 714-GTR Fullerton delivers
musical styles. The vintage-style tremolo bridge allows for expressive playing, while the 22-
precise intonation and easy navigation. Ideal for players seeking a blend of tradition and inn

IT'S no secret that I've been championing Aria guitars for many years now. I have no official relationship with the brand, I'm not an endorsee, they don't pay me or give me free stuff — I just think they're some of the best budget-friendly guitars out there today.

This enthusiasm of mine all started with the Fullerton 714: the first Aria guitar I reviewed here at GI. I was flabbergasted at the quality and spec being offered for a price that rivaled many "starter pack" guitars — the sort with a neck you could fire arrows from. That's not to say it was a perfect guitar though.

Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton

bines classic design with modern enhancements.
ngerboard, providing smooth playability and a
bright, articulate tones perfect for a variety of
-fret fingerboard and 25.5-inch scale length ensure
ovation, the 714-GTR Fullerton is designed to inspire.

PRODUCT RECOMMENDED

Aria Pro II 714-GTR Fullerton

MSRP: *(UK) £299 | (US) $409*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» *Sparkling single coil tones;*

» *Fat humbucker punch;*

» *Easy playability*

For more information, please visit:

ariaguitarsglobal.com

Aside from the attractive black-and-aluminum aesthetics, the most obvious improvement is the frets.

While the roasted maple neck was a great profile and finished in lovely satin, it was let down by the teeny tiny fretwire which made it very hard to play. Similarly, while the neck and middle single coils sounded great, the "Classic Power" humbucker was a little lackluster.

But that was then, and this is now, and Aria is offering this very appealing and super affordable S-Type in a whole range of fun colorways inspired by legendary players, complete with some quiet updates to the recipe.

Aside from the attractive black-and-aluminum aesthetics, the most obvious improvement is the frets. Gone are the super-low, narrow vintage wires (always a little weird on a flatter fretboard like this) in favor of 22 gleaming medium jumbo frets, immaculately dressed to allow for a very comfortable action right out of the box. It's a little thing, but it's elevated what was a "very good guitar for someone who's not me" to a "guitar that I would take to the gig."

Now, from the player's perspective, it can be difficult to separate tone and playability: if you enjoy playing a guitar, you'll play better and wind up sounding better as a result. Even still, it feels as though the Classic Power humbucker in the bridge position has more life and sparkle than on previous models. Whether it's a new design, or simply a change to the wiring (HSS wiring can be notoriously hard to balance), I don't know. All I can say is that it sounds great, with a potent midrange and smooth highs that work great for higher-gain tones without sounding stifled. It also balances really well with the bright, vintage-voiced single coils, giving you access to everything from spanky funk to throaty leads and everything in between.

The 714-GTR Fullerton is more than just a cosmetic update. It fixes the little flaws that hampered the original, and the result is a genuinely superb guitar for very little money.

Vintage ProShop V75 Unique

For years, the talented luthiers and builders in the Vintage workshops have been listening t ideas and blending them with their own concepts and visions, in January 2019, Vintage Guita — featuring one-off, master-built instruments created with love, care, and the traditional V **Nick Jennison** examines an amazing example of that in action as he reviews this awesome V

I THINK it's common knowledge that I really like Vintage guitars. They offer well-made instruments at a price accessible to everyone, and their range is broad and diverse, with an instrument to suit every player. Perhaps the only gap in their lineup was, up until recently anyway, some high-end "premium" guitars. I think you know where I'm going with this.

Vintage's "ProShop" is yet another masterstroke from Trev Wilkinson and the team at JHS. With a philosophy of "if you can imagine it, we can build it," they're making one-off, UK-made custom instruments based

Vintage ProShop V75 Unique

o suggestions from players worldwide. Taking those
ars launched the Vintage ProShop Unique concept
intage values of high specifications. In this review,
Vintage V75 ProShop Unique, finished in Neon Pink.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Vintage ProShop V75 Unique

MSRP: *(Price varies to spec)*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Custom builds*
- *Outrageous finishes*
- *Affordable prices*

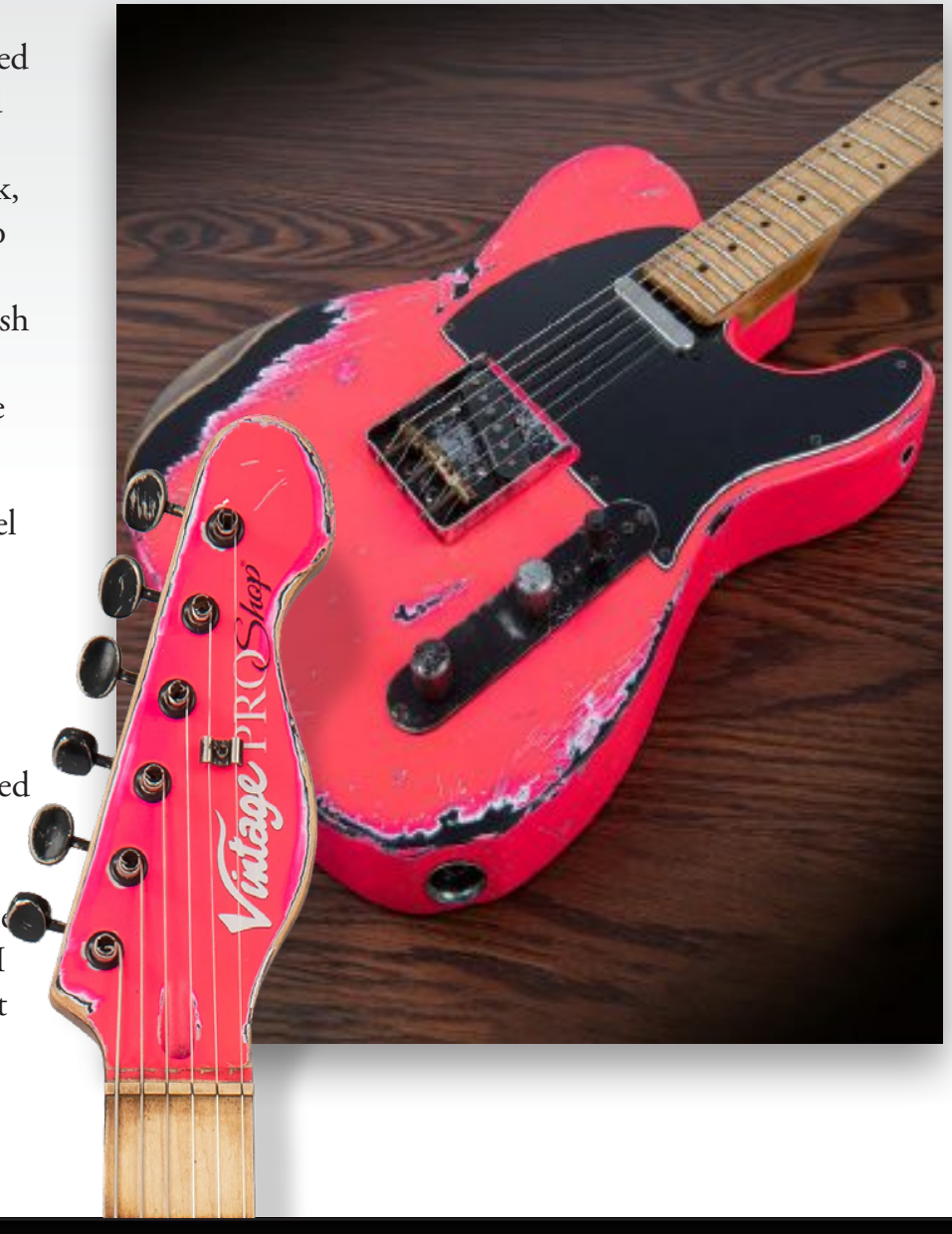
For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk/collections/vintage-proshop

The V75 Unique is an insight into what the ProShop can do, and it's

on the various Vintage guitar styles, but spec'd exactly how the customer wants. As such, it's hard to give an exact overview of what to expect from one of these guitars, but we can take a look at one of the models I had the pleasure of playing at NAMM this year: the V75 Unique in Neon Pink.

At its core, this guitar is a fairly traditional "T" style model, decked out in an eye-catching pink-over-black relic finish hand-applied by the ProShop team over several days. The neck and hardware are all similarly aged, and the whole thing has the look and feel of an old guitar that was re-sprayed by an '80s road warrior and played hard, night after night, for decades. The neck, in particular, feels similar to many "player" guitars I've laid hands-on, with the finish sanded off and a reassuring level of dirt rubbed into the bare wood.



That "'80s player guitar" feel extends to the neck profile and frets too, with a shred-ready slim taper and frets that are wide but not very tall, like 6100s that have been leveled and dressed several times over. Now, this wouldn't be my fret wire of choice, but here's th thing: were I to order one, I could order it with different

s very impressive.

frets! The neck shape, frets (both number and size), scale length, heel style, and everything else about the guitar are completely up to you. This is a level of customization I've previously only seen offered by expensive "custom shop" instruments and small luthiers making one guitar every six months, but with a ProShop guitar, you can get an instrument made to your specifications for less than the price of a USA Strat. It's nuts.

The pickups on this model are a Seymour Duncan STL-1 and STL-3 set, a punchy '50s-inspired set with plenty of body and character, but once again, the sky is the limit with this stuff. Perhaps you want some Bareknuckles? Wilkinson R Series? Fishman Fluence Greg Koch signature set? Or maybe you want three EMG81s in there! Whatever you're into, you can have it.

The V75 Unique is an insight into what the ProShop can do, and it's very impressive. This feels like a premium, hand-aged instrument because that's exactly what it is… but it costs less than an off-the-peg model from some of the "big boys." That's a very appealing proposition. I'm off to spec one up right now…

Godin Stadium Pro Electric Guitar - Ozark

Step into the spotlight with the Godin Stadium Pro Electric Guitar in stunning Ozark Cream. T
modern playability, featuring a rock maple neck and a rosewood fretboard for smooth, comf
single-coil pickup at the bridge and a Godin humbucker at the neck, it offers a versatile rang
The high-gloss finish not only looks great but also enhances durability. **Nick Jennison** tells

I HAVE a friend who swears by Teles. They're all he'll play, and he sounds fantastic playing them. Shred, jazz, blues, fusion, country - with a Tele in hand, he can do it all. I'm forever envious of his killer twangy tones and the clean, rugged lines of his guitar of choice. "So why not play a Tele," I hear you ask? Because, dear reader, they're brutally uncomfortable. Call me a princess, but I cannot make that slab body work for me. The lack of contours and low-profile bridge makes it feel impossible to find a comfortable picking hand position, and I keep stubbing my fingers on the volume pot when I try to switch pickups in a hurry.

Godin Stadium Pro Electric Guitar - Ozark Cream

k Cream

This guitar combines classic aesthetics with
fortable playing. Equipped with a Custom Cajun
ge of tones from bright and twangy to warm and full.
us more.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Godin Stadium Pro Electric Guitar - Ozark Cream

MSRP: (UK) £1799 | (US) $1799

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Tele twang;

» Comfort and playability;

» Clean modern styling

For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk/collections/godin

This comfort extends to the neck, which has a comfortable "Goldilocks" profile that's thin enough for fleet-fingered shred, but with enough meat for a thumb-over grip.

Godin may have the answer to my T-type woes in the form of their Stadium Pro. At its core, it's a T-style guitar, but every detail has been pored over to improve the "quality of life" for the player. The lightweight Canadian basswood body is gently contoured - not so much that it looks or feels alien, but enough to make it a much more comfortable playing experience. The compensated 3-saddle bridge has recessed grub screws so it doesn't eat your hand up on palm-muted lines. The neck joint and lower horn allow for easier upper fret access. The control plate is massively elongated, allowing for much wider spacing between volume and tone controls and an angled selector switch. All of these little upgrades add up to a much more comfortable playing experience.

This comfort extends to the neck, which has a comfortable "Goldilocks" profile that's thin enough for fleet-fingered shred, but with enough meat for a thumb-over grip. The 12" radius allows for a low action without bends choking out, and the satin finish feels very fast and tactile.

The Godin Stadium Pro is an elegant, comfortable, and killer-sounding take on the classic Tele platform. If, like me, you love the tone of this kind of guitar but can't get along with the body style or playability, the Stadium Pro might be the answer.

It's available with rosewood and maple fretboards, which is more than just a cosmetic difference. It's become trendy to suggest that wood types make no difference to a guitar's tone, but whatever your stance on this contentious topic is, one thing that's undeniable is that these woods feel different under your fingers. Having this option at no extra cost is a blessing if, like me, you can't stand the feel of a finished maple fretboard - or maybe you're the opposite! Either way, Godin has you covered.

While the wood debate is controversial, what's unquestionable is the importance of the guitar's electronics. The pickups on the Stadium Pro are legitimately top-shelf, with a Lollar T Special in the bridge position and a TV Jones Starwood in the neck. It's not terribly common to see a mix of pickup brands in a new "off the shelf" guitar (usually for economic reasons, and not necessarily tonal ones), but this combination is absolutely killer. The Lollar in the bridge is muscular and twangy with a robust low end that fills out clean tones and adds authority to dirty sounds. T-style neck pickups can be very hit or miss, but this one is excellent, with lots of clarity and chime.

The Godin Stadium Pro is an elegant, comfortable, and killer-sounding take on the classic Tele platform. If, like me, you love the tone of this kind of guitar but can't get along with the body style or playability, the Stadium Pro might be the answer.

Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom Les

The Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom Les Paul Custom seamlessly blends iconic design w open-book style headstock, this guitar features a mahogany body and neck paired with an el playability. Equipped with ProBucker pickups, it delivers rich, vintage tones. Gold hardware, elegant aesthetic. Perfect for any genre, this guitar combines timeless design with modern bank. Here's **Nick Jennison** to tell us more.

WHILE the list of players we associate with the Les Paul Standard is long and storied, the roster of "Les Paul Custom players" is just as long and just as illustrious. Randy Rhoads; Mick Ronson; Steve Jones; Adam Jones; Mick Jones (and the OTHER Mick Jones); John Sykes; Peter Frampton; Zakk Wylde; and (lest we forget) Les himself, with his black and gold beauties and matching tux.

They're beautiful, elegant instruments that simultaneously exude both class and rock & roll, but they're not cheap. Enter Epiphone, with their new "Inspired by Gibson Custom" range. As the name would imply, these guitars are made in close collaboration with Gibson's Custom Shop in Nashville but produced in Epiphone's own East Asian plant. They're made with the highest care and attention to detail using premium woods

Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom Les Paul Custom

Paul Custom

with top-tier performance. Showcasing the classic bony fretboard for unparalleled sustain and smooth block inlays, and multi-ply binding elevate its craftsmanship at a price that doesn't break the

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Epiphone Inspired by Gibson Custom Les Paul Custom

MSRP: (UK) £1199 | (US) $1299

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Authentic Les Paul Custom looks
- Powerful, tight gain tones
- A lot of guitar for your money

For more information, please visit:

epiphone.com

and electronics, but despite occupying the absolute apex of the Epiphone range, these guitars are still very reasonably priced - at least in the grand scheme.

Undoubtedly the first thing you'll notice is the headstock. These are among the first Epiphones to feature a Gibson-style "open book" headstock shape, and I'm shocked at how much of a difference this makes to the overall aesthetic of the guitar. The "Kalamazoo" Epiphone headstock is a very attractive design for sure and looks great on a Casino or a Sheraton, but somehow it never seemed "right" on a Les Paul.

Of course, there is still a version of the Les Paul Custom available with the Epiphone headstock, and it's significantly cheaper than the "Inspired by…" model.

This might lead some to suggest that the Inspired by Gibson Custom is just a £500 headstock upgrade, but that could not be further from the truth. For the extra spend, you're getting a full-thickness maple cap, a one-piece mahogany neck (so no scarf joints), a genuine ebony fretboard with genuine MOP inlays, a hard case, and (perhaps most importantly) Gibson USA electronics throughout in the form of CTS pots, Mallory capacitors, and a set of Gibson 490R/498T pickups. Considering the case and the pickups alone will set you back over £500, it's actually something of a bargain.

This leads us neatly onto the sonics, which are excellent. This guitar exhibits all the hallmarks of a good Les Paul Custom and excels at medium to high-gain tones. The

bridge position is muscular and punchy with plenty of high-end bite, but the extreme highs are a little rolled off in comparison to, say, a Burstbucker Pro. Similarly, the neck position is round and fat without being excessively dark and is just made for those creamy lead tones we all covet. There's a reason Gibson has been putting these pickups in their Les Paul Customs for decades - they're tight, aggressive, and articulate, and while the Custombuckers in the new "Inspired by…" 1959 Les Paul Standard might be a better choice for folks seeking the most authentic vintage PAF tone, the "49s" are a great choice for those of us who live at the heavier end of the tone spectrum.

It's no secret that Epiphone guitars have been the equal of their USA-made counterparts in terms of playability and fit-and-finish for some time now, and there were even a handful of difficult years for Gibson in the late 2010s where high-end Epis were eclipsing all but the most expensive Gibsons when it came to play feel. The "Inspired by…" Les Paul Custom is no exception, and while the factory setup was a little on the conservative side, a quick bridge height adjustment was all it took to get this guitar absolutely ripping with an effortlessly low action and not a hint of buzz or rattle. The neck shape (which Epiphone is calling a "Modern Medium C") sits in the "goldilocks zone" between a slim '60s neck and a fat '50s carve. It's very fast, but there's still plenty of meat if you're a "thumb-around" kind of player who likes a guitar you can wrestle with.

The Epiphone "Inspired by Gibson Custom" Les Paul Custom represents a significant step forward for Epiphone's already excellent Les Paul Custom range. If you handed me this guitar and told me it was a Gibson Les Paul Custom, I'd believe you on feel alone - and it has the tone and playability to match. It's very much the "rocker's guitar" of the "Inspired by…" range, and vintage purists might prefer the 1959 Les Paul Standard, but for everything from the heavier end of blues through to roaring high gain, this guitar is superb.

Kramer Nightswan Vintage White

Step back into the world of late-'80s rock with the Kramer Nightswan Vintage White, a reiss
dream. This guitar combines a compact double-cutaway body with dual Seymour Duncan JB
fast 24.75" scale neck, with an ebony fingerboard and 24 jumbo frets, invites rapid playabilit
keeps your tuning locked down. **Nick Jennison** tells us more.

WHILE the Baretta is considered by most to be the definitive Kramer design, the NightSwan has always been my personal favourite. Originally conceived by Buddy Blaze as "The Shredder," it was first released under the Kramer brand in 1987 as a signature model for then-Whitesnake guitarist Vivian Campbell. It sports a deeper cutaway than other "superstrats" of the era, allowing for full access right up to the very top of the 24-fret neck, with an original Floyd Rose tremolo.

There are several unique features that set the NightSwan apart from other similar instruments of the era. It has a 24.75" "Gibson" scale length and a two-

Kramer Nightswan Vintage White

ue that captures the essence of a shredder's
pickups for a tone that's bold and articulate. Its
y, while the Floyd Rose 1000 Series tremolo system

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Kramer Nightswan Vintage White

MSRP: (UK) £899 | (US) $899

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Screaming shred solos;

» Aqua-Net hair spray;

» Doing cartwheels on the bonnet of David Coverdale's Jag...

For more information, please visit:

www.kramerguitars.com

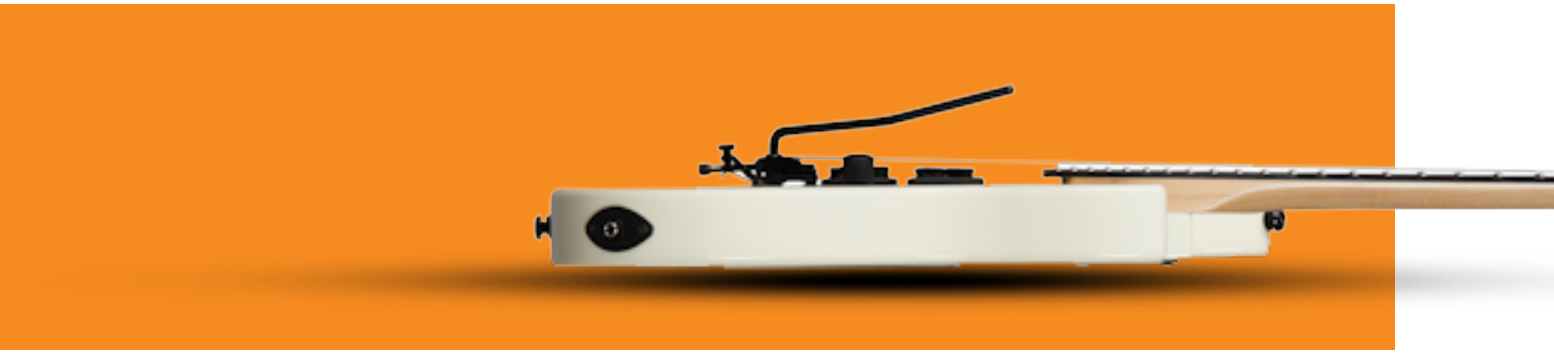
The Kramer NightSwan brings an all-time cult classic back to li

humbucker configuration that places the "neck" pickup in the position where you'd usually expect to find a middle pickup (leading many Kramer enthusiasts to refer to the pickups as "bridge" and "middle").

The current iteration of the NightSwan may not carry Campbell's endorsement, but it's a very authentic rendition of the '80s classic design. It features a three-piece maple neck with an ebony fretboard and "ping pong" dot inlays. The neck profile is slim and super fast, with a 16-inch radius that allows for an incredibly low action without choking out on bends. It's different from the compound radius found on the very earliest models, but it feels great. It features an R2 Floyd Rose nut rather than the very narrow R1 found on the originals – not a faithful recreation, but a string spacing that will feel more familiar to most players. Another slight departure is the pair of Seymour Duncan JB humbuckers, as opposed to the Full Shred/JP pairing found in the originals.

Kramer are currently offering the NightSwan in a variety of finishes, including the classic Polka Dots and the Aztec Graphic on the model shown here. Interestingly, the Aztec Graphic is considered the rarest of the classic NightSwan finishes, with many enthusiasts refinishing used NightSwans in an attempt to recreate this finish – let's just say, "to varying levels of success."

Sonically, the NightSwan is a fire-breathing '80s shred machine. It's mid-forward, hot, and aggressive, and absolutely screams through a distorted amp. The bridge position is where you're likely to spend the majority of your time, but the other two pickup positions offer some unique and very cool tones. The "both pickups" position is like a thicker, phasier take on the "Strat position 2"



fe, and I'm very much here for it.

sound, and works really well for heavily effected '80s cleans and stringy, wiry lead tones.

The 1000 Series Floyd Rose is set up for a slight upward travel (unlike the originals, which had a flush-mounted tremolo), allowing for smoother vibratos and access to the suite of "tricks" like gargles, flutters, and reverse scoops that can only be performed on a floating trem. It's rock solid in terms of tuning stability and a lot of fun to use.

The Kramer NightSwan brings an all-time cult classic back to life, and I'm very much here for it. Whether you're a Vivian Campbell fan or just a player who enjoys the '80s aesthetic, the NightSwan is an extremely fun guitar, and one that absolutely rips.

Rapier 44

Nick Jennison steps into retro cool with the Rapier 44—a guitar that pays homage to the B body, the Rapier 44 boasts three single-coil pickups, offering a versatile range of tones from enhancements, like the improved tremolo system, this guitar merges vintage charm with co

THE Rapier 44 is a guitar that immediately stands out. With its retro 60s-inspired look and an impressive range of tones, it's the kind of instrument that's as much fun to play as it is to admire. But don't let the vintage styling fool you—this guitar is packed with modern features that make it incredibly versatile.

Let's start with the build. The Canadian Rock Maple neck has a medium C profile that's thick enough to feel substantial but slim enough to let you move easily. It's paired with a rosewood fretboard featuring 23 frets (including a zero fret), which helps keep your open and fretted notes consistent in tone. The Wilkinson EZ-Lock tuners ensure everything stays perfectly

Rapier 44

ritish rock 'n' roll era. Sporting its distinctive offset
n mellow blues to searing rock. With its modern
ntemporary performance.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Rapier 44

MSRP: (UK) £499.00 | (US) $649.00

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Retro British rock and classic offset designs
- Tonal depth and high-end clarity
- Smooth action vibrato system

For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk/collections/rapier

in tune, and the overall build quality feels solid and reliable.

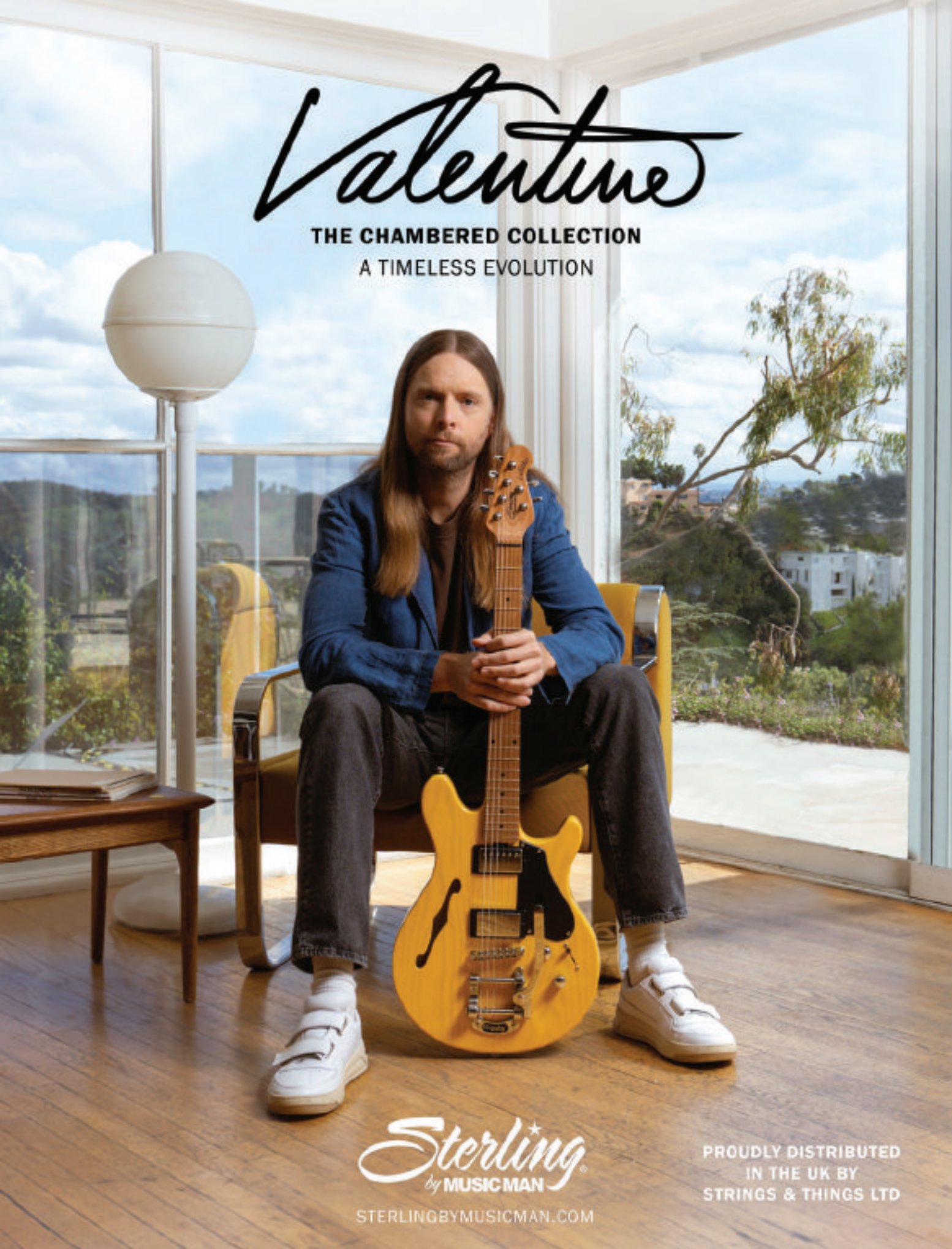
Where the Rapier 44 really shines is in its tone. Designed by Alan Entwistle, the dual-blade EWR 64 pickups are mini-humbuckers that deliver a rich, punchy sound with a lot of clarity. You can cover everything from bright, clean tones to warm, gritty lows. What really sets this guitar apart is its pickup configuration—you've got a three-way toggle switch to select your basic pickup combinations, but there are also two rocker switches to blend the extra pickups. This gives you a huge range of tones to play with. Whether you're looking for something sharp and focused or a fuller, layered sound, the Rapier 44 has you covered.

The high-low tremolo system adds to the vintage feel, offering subtle vibrato without the complexity of a floating tremolo. It's great for that old-school shimmer, and the roller bridge keeps the tuning stable even with frequent tremolo use.

In terms of sound, this guitar does it all. Clean tones are bright and chimey, perfect for funk or surf. Add a little gain, and you get rich, punchy rock tones. The mini-humbuckers are articulate enough to handle everything from delicate picking to aggressive riffs, making it a perfect fit for players who want a wide tonal palette in one instrument.

Perhaps most surprising is the price. The Rapier 44 offers a ton of features without breaking the bank. It's well-built, easy to play, and has a wide range of sounds you can get out of it, which makes it worth every penny. Unlike some vintage-styled guitars that are all about looks but lack playability, this one feels smooth and modern in your hands, with flawless fretwork and comfortable action.

In short, the Rapier 44 is a guitar that combines vintage looks with modern versatility. Whether you're into clean tones, high-gain rock, or experimenting with a wide range of sounds, this guitar delivers in spades. Plus, it's affordable, making it a great choice for anyone looking to expand their tonal options without compromising on quality.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Danelectro Longhorn Baritone

Danelectro Longhorn Baritone takes the iconic retro silhouette and adds a lower register fo creativity, its smooth playability and vintage lipstick pickups make it a must-have for player ing the bank. Nick Jennison tells us more.

IF you're a regular reader of GI, you'll know that I really, really like baritone guitars. Not your typical "modern metal" multi-scale monsters, but old-school vintage baris that evoke Glen Campbell, Peter Green, classic Surf, Nashville "Tic Tac"… and that kind of bari doesn't get much more bari than the Danelectro Longhorn Baritone.

This eye-catching, head-turning monster is a stone-cold classic, and the recipe has not changed since its birth in the 1950s to its resurrection just last year. It's a massive 29.75" scale beast with a full two-octave fretboard and a pair of high-powered lipstick pickups running into dual concentric controls that look like what I imagine Stallone might find in the bathroom in an alternative draft of

Danelectro Longhorn Baritone

or rich, resonant tones. Perfect for genre-bending
s in need of some low-end goodness without break-

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Danelectro Longhorn Baritone

MSRP: *(UK) £669 | (US) $569*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» *Vintage baritone sounds*

» *Huge range*

» *Head-turning looks*

For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk/collections/danelectro-1

The "two lipstick" pickup configuration is common on many Danelectro guitars and has a few quirks that make it so special.

Demolition Man. It's a bizarre setup, but you can't help but love it.

The sharply contoured "Masonite" body is semi-hollow, meaning this guitar feels exceptionally resonant and offers some of the best upper fret access you'll ever find—slightly unusual for a baritone, but it does mean you can get right up into the dusty end for high chordal work, or even shreddy lead lines if the urge takes you. Unlike many baritones, it actually sounds great all the way up there. Of course, the magic is in the low notes—beautiful, breathy piano-like tones that sing with metallic clarity and offer clanky articulation through dense fuzzes and modern high-gain tones.

The "two lipstick" pickup configuration is common on many Danelectro guitars and has a few quirks that make it so special. First, the "both pickups on" setting is the loudest and most powerful voice, with a broad pseudo-humbucker sound rather than the slightly

hollowed-out parallel tones usually found in a middle position. It's my go-to setting for most things on this type of guitar, but the Longhorn Baritone allows for blending not just the volumes but the tones of the two pickups. This means you can dial in some otherwise impossible blends, including one of the most haunting slide tones I've played in a very long time.

It's my contention that everyone should own a baritone, and the Longhorn Baritone is one of the quintessential baritones of the previous century. I'm over the moon to see it back in production, and you can be sure I'll be picking one of these up to add to my own collection.

PRS MT100 Head

Clocking in at more than six times the wattage of Mark Tremonti and Paul Reed Smith's first MT100 100-watt tube amplifier head is a stage-ready update to the immensely popular MT15 Lead and Clean channels found on the MT15, with the addition of an all-new medium-gain Ov tweaking between PRS and Mark to capture the rich and organic saturation of Mark's favorit

WHEN it comes to signature equipment, neither PRS nor Mark Tremonti mess around. One of their first and longest-standing signature models, the Tremonti signature spawned the now-iconic PRS singlecut body style. It was also one of the very earliest SE models, offering guitar players on a budget a way to get in on the PRS action with a high-quality instrument for very little outlay. Years later, the MT15 signature amp followed suit as a legitimately pro-level high-gain amplifier with a price tag that appeared to be missing a digit… and almost immediately, folks began clamouring for a 100w version.

Well, here we are, six years (and many screenshots and sneaky fan photos of the prototype Mark has been road testing) later, and the MT100 is upon us, and my word, is it good. To be honest, I'm not surprised in the slightest, given how fantastic the MT15 sounded, but the MT100 takes

amplifier collaboration, the PRS Mark Tremonti
. This three-channel head features the same
erdrive channel—the result of five years of tone
te D-style amps. **Nick Jennison** reviews

things to another level. It's a three-channel head with dedicated Clean, Overdrive, and Lead (read: high gain) channels, each with its own gain, volume, three-band EQ, and presence control, and no fewer than EIGHT 12ax7s in the preamp, providing world-ending levels of gain with even the weediest of pickups.

Folks familiar with the MT15 will know what to expect from the Clean and Lead channels; the cleans are sparkly, expansive, and piano-like, with a Fender-y scoop in the midrange and a little touch of hair even at moderate volume settings—something all truly great "clean" amps exhibit. It has fabulous compression under the fingers but still sounds very clean and articulate to the listener. The Lead channel, by contrast, is a volcano of American-voiced high-gain goodness. It's a perfect blend of tightness and thickness that stays in the pocket on tight chugs and complex lines while still sounding absolutely massive with a distinctive midrange "roar". Smooth, wailing lead tones, and aggressive metal riffs are only separated by the turn of the treble knob, and while there's so much gain it's positively comical, it never "folds" or becomes unusable. This is a very impressive balancing act, and a testament to the rigorous testing and tuning that PRS and Tremonti have committed to in the last six years.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

PRS MT100 Head

MSRP: (UK) £1599 | (US) $1849

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Studio — Stadium

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Luxurious F-style cleans;

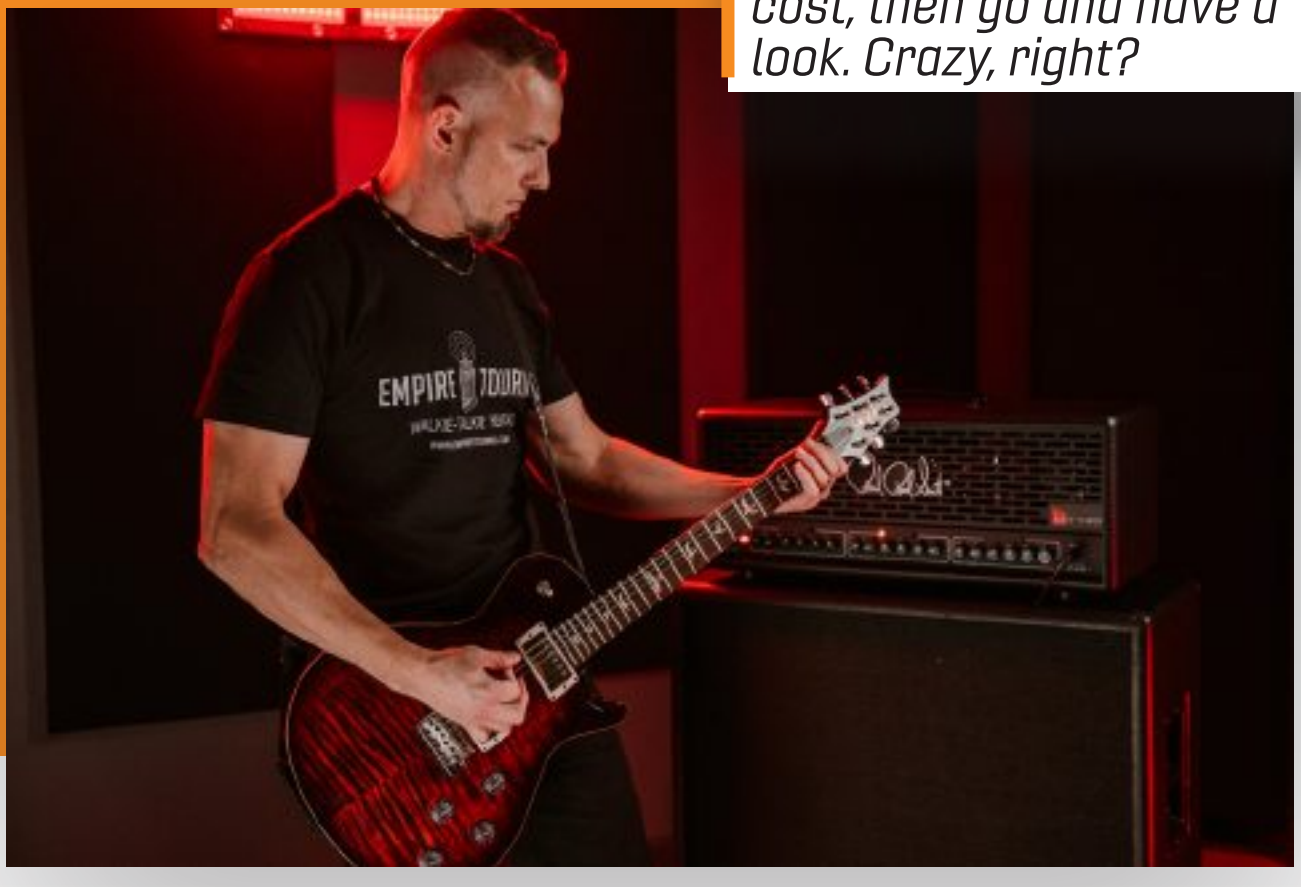
» Monstrous high gain;

» Gorgeous D-style overdrive

For more information, please visit:

prsguitars.com

Trust me — have a think about how much you'd expect this thing to cost, then go and have a look. Crazy, right?



A new addition to the MT100 is the inclusion of the Overdrive channel, which sits between the Clean and Lead channels in terms of available gain but has a voice all its own—or rather, two voices, depending on where you set the gain control. In the first half of the gain range, this channel is thick, bouncy, and smooth in a way that you might call "Dumble-esque"—a troublesome term given how wildly different each Dumble sounds, but you get the picture. Having spent a good amount of time with the J-Mod, the Overdrive channel on the MT100 is very reminiscent of the overdrive sound on that amp… until you turn it past 12 when the next gain stage kicks in, and it all changes. Suddenly, the amp sprouts hair and teeth with a mid-gain classic rock voice that's somewhere between a JCM900's thick bark and the massive midrange of a cranked Brownface Fender. It's a real chameleon of a channel, and takes an amp that would otherwise be a none-more-black metal monster and turns it into a super versatile platform for just about any kind of player.

i HATE
ONDAYS!
Aria Pro II
Got To Rock
Introducing the latest series within the Hot Rod Collection
Find us at your local dealers
ariaguitarsglobal.com

MT 100
SPEAKER JACKS
FOOTSWITCH
EFFECTS LOOP
SEND
RETURN
BIAS JACKS
MT 100

Of course, no amp is perfect. It is quite a big and heavy beast, and the choice to use a proprietary footswitch cable instead of regular TRS jacks is frustrating—hopefully, PRS will address this in a future revision like they did with the most recent Archon models. But where it counts — namely the tone, the feel, and the build quality — the MT100 is flawless. This leads me to potentially the best part: the price.

Now, we know that PRS has a reputation for being on the pricey side, but the MT100 is an absolute steal. Trust me — have a think about how much you'd expect this thing to cost, then go and have a look. Crazy, right? I think we're going to see a LOT of these gracing stages and studios in the not too distant future.

PRS *MT100 Head*

Hiwatt Leeds 150 Head

The Hiwatt Leeds 150 Head delivers powerful amplification with the hallmark of British tone head provides both clean punch and roaring overdrive, complete with a 3-band EQ and mast serious volume, the Leeds 150 is ideal for players in search of both clarity and depth in their

THE iconic British amp brand Hiwatt is best known for its high-end, all-valve amplifiers – specifically the stadium-filling cleans which powered players like David Gilmour and Pete Townshend, along with basically anyone who plays Stoner or Doom. Plug into a DR103 (or any of its derivatives) at an appreciable volume, and you'll see what the fuss is about – these thunderous amps are true forces of nature.

So why don't we see more players using Hiwatt compared to other British brands? Aside from a somewhat bumpy history, I think it's mostly a question of access. How many players start their journey with an affordable solid-state Marshall, Orange, or similar, and just keep going with that brand? You can't exactly ask your parents for a four-grand Super-Hi (and matching

. Known for its robust 150-watt output, this amp
ter volume controls. Designed for larger stages and
r tone. **Nick Jennison** reviews.

cab) for Christmas, three months after your first guitar lesson…

Enter the new Hiwatt Leeds range: an affordable line of solid-state amplifiers with the iconic Hiwatt look and tone, but at a price point that's within reach for players on a budget – and at the top of the line is the mighty Super Leeds 150. This 150w firebreather (and its even bigger brother, the Super Leeds 300) is a two-channel, three-sound amplifier with a gorgeous Hiwatt clean, paired with two overdrive circuits ranging from raucous to world-ending. Each channel has its own three-band EQ and volume, along with a master volume and genuine spring reverb.

The clean channel does the "Hiwatt trick" as well as any amp I've played – that trick being somehow having incredible high-headroom sparkle while still being flattering to fuzzes and overdrive pedals. These qualities are usually mutually exclusive, but I've yet to play a Hiwatt that didn't excel at both piano-like cleans and pedal-friendliness. The low end is particularly impressive – it's breathy, percussive, and three-dimensional in a way that solid-state designs usually aren't, and I think this could be down to the massive transformer lurking inside the amp. Big iron equals big lows!

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Hiwatt Leeds 150 Head

MSRP: (UK) £369 | (US) $374.99

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Studio — Stadium

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Beautiful breathy cleans;
- Devastating high gain;
- Not breaking the bank, or your back!

For more information, please visit:

britampco.co.uk/hiwatt/

The distortion channel is equally impressive and anything but subtle. Gain 1 has a bubbly, glassy bounce that's a lot of fun to play and would constitute a "high-gain" channel on most other amps. Gain 2 is not just more gain, but more aggression, bigger lows, and a harder feel, along with a "contour" control that sculpts the midrange from a vocal, forward lead sound to a tone so scooped it would make '90s Kerry King blush. To be honest, it's more than a bit much, and all the best tones are in the last quarter of the knob's travel, with all the usable ones in the first half. Still, if you need a more-Dime-than-Dime riffing tone, you'll find it here. What stands out on this channel is the playing feel: it's immediate and articulate, but with a joyous bloom in the lows that fills the room at even modest volumes.

Other features include an effects loop, an aux-in for jamming to your favourite backing tracks, along with a headphone out on the front and a DI output on the back. These are not speaker-emulated, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Analogue speaker sims are usually a bit rubbish, and leaving the DI output raw will allow users to record their guitars direct and apply their own IRs of choice after the fact.

The Hiwatt Super Leeds 150 is a truly mighty-sounding amplifier with a price tag that steals tonal fire from the gods and puts it in the hands of every player. If you're after an affordable, robust, and reliable amp with killer gain and clean tones – and enough power to flatten cities – this is a great choice.

Hiwatt Leeds 150 Head

Custom-built instruments created with love, care, and the traditional Vintage® values.

YOU CREATE IT... WE BUILD IT!

BUILT IN THE UK
IN THE VINTAGE® PROSHOP®

Vintage® PROShop®
30th ANNIVERSARY 2015

What the press are saying about Vintage ProShop

Very impressive. This feels like a premium, hand aged instrument because that's exactly what it is! I'm off to spec one up right now...
Guitar

A very endearing old, played-in vibe. The UK ProShop team has raised its level.
9/10
Guitarist

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2.4 GHz wireless system
with a 142 dB SPL supercardioid microphone

ACOUSTIC GUITAR WIRELESS SYSTEM

U8 Acoustic Guitar Wireless System

Includes transmitter, receiver, microphone, clip, USB-C cable, foam windscreen and windshield, carry case

Also available: **U7** Saxophone and Trumpet Wireless System
U9 Violin Wireless System
RRP £229

www.xvive.com

Orange Oriverb Orianthi Signature Comb

Crafted in collaboration with Orianthi, the Orange Oriverb Signature Combo is a sonic powe NEO Combo but voiced to capture Orianthi's "dream tone," it features Celestion Creambacks character with incredible versatility. Here's Nick Jennison to tell us more.

HAILED by many as the "British SLO," the Orange Rockerverb is one of those amps you have to experience for yourself. It boasts a staggering level of gain that rivals the greatest excesses of its early-2000s contemporaries, but with a distinctly "classic" flavour. It's fat and fuzzy, yet hugely articulate and expressive.

Why am I writing about the Rockerverb, you may ask? Because the Rockerverb 50 Combo is the platform on which the new Oriverb is based. The signature model of virtuoso guitarist

0

rhouse. Inspired by the Rockerverb MKIII 50
s and EL34 valves, delivering classic British amp

Orianthi, this white-clad beauty is a two-channel 50W 2x12 combo capable of high-headroom cleans and absolutely brutal distortion at any level down to a whisper, thanks to the built-in attenuator—a blessing, given how devastatingly loud this thing is at full tilt.

Aside from the obvious cosmetic changes and some tonal tweaks to suit Orianthi's preferences, the most drastic change is the speakers. A pair of Celestion Neo Creambacks replaces the Vintage 30s found in previous iterations of the Rockerverb 2x12, shaving a good 6kg off the weight of what is still a fairly hefty amp. While the weight saving is welcome, the tone of the Neo Creambacks also complements the Oriverb's voice beautifully, with their percussive transients and laid-back upper mids providing a pleasing balance of attack and smoothness.

Sonically, the Oriverb's overdrive channel is very much the star of the show. It's a gloriously chewy affair, outrageously good for bold lead lines, but it also handles more polite tones with grace, either by lowering the gain or rolling back on your guitar's volume pot. The EQ is highly interactive, as you'd expect from an Orange amp, but it's very hard to dial in a "bad" tone—short of rolling the bass control all the way to zero. The clean channel is much nicer than I remember from older Rockerverbs, offering a very pleasant chime and sparkle without becoming too harsh or scooped to take pedals well.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Orange Oriverb Orianthi Signature Combo

MSRP: (UK) £2399 | (US) $2799

The Breakdown

Vintage	Modern
Studio	Stadium
Specialised	Versatile
Affordable	High-end

For fans of

- Huge high gain lead tones
- Head-turning aesthetics
- Cranked tones at any volume

For more information, please visit:

orangeamps.com

The Orange Oriverb is a fitting signature model for a very deserving artist...

The "verb" part of the Oriverb name comes in the form of a glorious long-tail spring reverb. It features a super-long decay with some subtle distortion in the tail and a pleasantly dark tone that doesn't interfere with your playing, even at extreme levels. There's enough mix available for surf tones, but it doesn't get trashy or splashy like so many classic American designs.

The Orange Oriverb is a fitting signature model for a very deserving artist. It's an expressive and toneful amp that excels at high-gain lead sounds but will do everything from chimey cleans to classic rock bark with poise and grace—and you won't curse too much when it comes time to load it in and out of your car!

Orange *Oriverb Orianthi Signature Combo*

Fishman Loudbox Acoustic Amp Range

Nick Jennison presents an in-depth look at the Loudbox range, Fishman's award-winning lin at home or are out on the road, Nick explores why you might need an acoustic amp and help your needs.

THE Fishman Loudbox acoustic amplifiers are truly impressive — offering a range of options that cater to various needs and preferences. However, with some models sharing features and others boasting unique specifications, the toughest challenge in using one of these amplifiers is deciding which one is right for you in the first place. Whether you need the ultra-portable Micro for on-the-go practice, the battery-powered Mini Charge for versatile busking, the powerful Artist for serious gigs, or the robust Performer for maximum output and flexibility, there's a Loudbox model designed to meet your specific acoustic amplification needs. Let's dive into each model, starting with the smallest.

Fishman Loudbox Micro

The Fishman Loudbox Micro is the tiniest in the range, weighing just 8.7 pounds and measuring a compact 12" H x 13.7" W x 9.7" D. Despite its size, it boasts the same preamp circuitry as its larger counterparts, making it an excellent practice amp. Its 40-watt power and XLR-DI output mean it can also function as a gigging amplifier when connected to a larger PA system. This compact amp packs a punch volume-wise, making it perfect for small, discreet performances such as wedding gigs or intimate venues. It includes built-in reverb and chorus effects, and you can plug in both a guitar and a microphone, offering versatility in a compact package. Whether practising at home or playing in a small venue, the Micro has you covered.

Fishman Loudbox Mini

Next is the Loudbox Mini, with 60 watts of power and a larger speaker for fuller bass response and more projection. Weighing in at 19.8 pounds and with dimensions of 12" H x 13.7" W x 9.7" D, this model is suitable for gigs and rehearsals, providing

For more information, please visit:

Fishman.com

ne of acoustic amplifiers. Whether you only play
s you decide which of these five models suits

Fishman Loudbox Micro

Fishman Loudbox Mini

enough power for louder settings while still being a practical home practice amp. The Loudbox Mini features Bluetooth connectivity and an aux input, allowing you to play tracks through the amp. It also has an XLR output to send a combined signal of both channels to a front-of-house system. One notable feature is the IEC inlet, which replaces a wall wart power supply, making it easy to use standard power cables globally. For musicians needing a bit more oomph, the Mini is an excellent choice.

Fishman Loudbox Mini Charge

The Loudbox Mini Charge is essentially a Loudbox Mini with the added benefit of a built-in battery, offering up to 18 hours of playtime without being plugged in. This is ideal for busking musicians or gigs where power access is limited. It includes a 12-volt car charger, ensuring you can charge it on the go. With all the features of the Loudbox Mini, including Bluetooth and aux input, the Mini Charge provides the ultimate portability without compromising sound quality. Despite its extra features, it remains portable, weighing 21 pounds and maintaining the same dimensions as the Mini. Whether on the streets or in a venue without easy power access, the Mini Charge delivers.

Fishman Loudbox Mini Charge

Fishman Loudbox Artist

Fishman Loudbox Artist

The Loudbox Artist steps up the game with 120 watts of power and a bi-amp design, suitable for serious gigs even with a drummer. It features two identical channels that can function as either instrument or microphone inputs, each with a combi TRS input, a three-band EQ, and dual feedback control. The Artist offers a wider range of effects, including two reverbs, a delay, an echo, two choruses, a flanger, and a slap echo. It also has Bluetooth connectivity and phantom power. One standout feature is the independent XLR outputs per channel, allowing separate mixing for instruments and vocals, which is invaluable for professional musicians. This model, though more powerful, remains manageable at 25.5 pounds and 15.5” H x 13.5” W x 11.5” D. For the gigging musician who needs flexibility and power, the Artist is a top contender.

Fishman Loudbox Performer

The Loudbox Performer is the largest and most powerful, with 180 watts and a three-speaker design (tweeter, mid-range, and woofer). This amp delivers detailed mid-range and high volume, suitable for any stage setting, from small venues to larger gigs. It shares most features with the Loudbox Artist, including dual independent channels and a variety of effects, but with more power and a three-speaker system for enhanced sound quality. The Performer is versatile, handling acoustic and electric instruments with ease, making it a robust choice for professional use.

Despite its power, it remains portable at 30 pounds, with dimensions of 21" H x 14" W x 15.5" D. By plugging in an electric guitar with a Fishman power bridge, you can even achieve impressive acoustic and electric tones independently. This added versatility ensures that the Performer can adapt to various musical needs, offering a comprehensive solution for diverse performances without having to cart around more gear than necessary. If maximum power and versatility are what you seek, the Performer will not disappoint.

Fishman Loudbox Performer

Fishman Loudbox Performer

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Fishman Loudbox range offers a solution for every acoustic guitarist's needs, from the ultra-portable Micro and Mini models to the professional-grade Artist and Performer. Each model delivers exceptional sound quality, user-friendly features, and robust build quality. Whether you're playing at home, busking, or performing on stage, Fishman Loudbox amps provide unparalleled flexibility and sound excellence. Hopefully, this overview has helped you decide which one would be best suited to your needs. For a hands-on experience, visit your local guitar store and try them out for yourself.

Fishman *Loudbox Acoustic Amp Range*

Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups

Nick Jennison reviews the Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups. Available in both Strat an for players seeking aggressive, punchy tones with outstanding clarity. Featuring Alnico 5 ma harmonically rich sounds. Expect crisp highs, tight lows, and a pronounced midrange, makin Transform your Strat or Tele with the dynamic, searing tones of Seymour Duncan Hot Chicke

WHEN I say "country guitar," what sort of tone springs to mind? If you're like most guitarists, you'll think of a twangy, heavily compressed clean tone that's closer to a pedal steel than a typical clean amp sound. Maybe there'll be some slapback echo (ok, who am I kidding, there's no "maybe" about it), but the beautiful, round clean sound is non-negotiable, right?

Thing is, country guitar has changed a LOT since the days of "classic country." A modern country player needs to be able to turn up

d Tele sets, these high-output pickups are crafted
agnets and overwound coils, they deliver powerful,
g them versatile for both rhythm and lead playing.
en Pickups.

the heat, whether that's for Brad Paisley-style bite or full-on Dann Huff scream, and many of the vintage single coils that are treasured for their clean sounds just won't cut it for the dirty stuff. That's before we talk about noise - if you're a working player in Nashville and you turn up to a session with a guitar that goes "bzzzzzzzzz" as soon as you hit your green overdrive of choice, you can be sure you aren't getting a call back.

Enter Seymour Duncan, with their new Hot Chicken pickups. Aimed squarely at the modern country player, these noiseless single coils are available in both Strat and Tele formats, and have the best of both worlds when it comes to tone. They're round, twangy, and characterful for clean sounds, but have enough output and punch to work equally well with high-gain sounds - and thanks to their stacked construction, they're totally noiseless.

It's important to say at this point that the spec sheet on these pickups will likely deceive you. The stated DC resistance numbers on these pickups are frankly preposterous, but in reality, they're only slightly hotter than "vintage" spec. It just goes to show, you can't judge a pickup by the resistance alone. They're also very well balanced across the two sets that are available, with slightly hotter bridge pickups for a little extra punch and bite.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups

MSRP: (Strat) $129 | (Tele) $129

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Vintage country cleans;

» High gain lead tones;

» Noise-free performance

For more information, please visit:

seymourduncan.com

Whether you're a Strat or a Tele main, the Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken set delivers beautiful vintage clean tones with enough beef to handle the high-gain demands faced by the modern country player...

The Strat set has a little more low end and low midrange than I'd expect from a legitimate vintage single coil set, and that's a good thing. After all, there's a reason Teles are the weapon of choice for classic country players, and it's the muscle and punch the bridge pickup provides. The Hot Chicken Strat bridge pickup is a little closer to this, but is still distinctly "Stratty" in its character. The neck and middle pickups are fat and tubular, and balance very well. The "in-between" tones aren't quite as sparkly

Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups Strat

MOOER

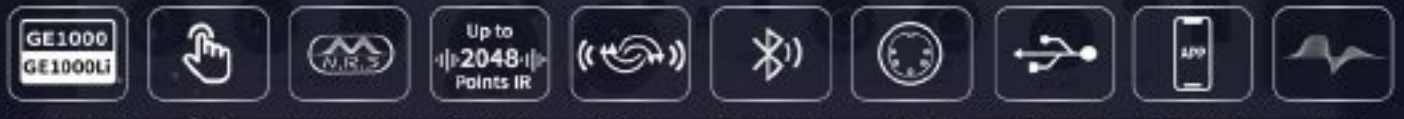
GE1000/GE1000Li

Intelligent Multi Effect Pedal

The GE1000 comes preloaded with an impressive bank of guitar effects and amp simulations, but this is augmented further through MNRS GE Cloud support.

GE1000 also includes a cutting-edge AI-driven automatic equalizer, a first for MOOER. This automatically adjusts a 5-band EQ based on the user's playing and music style choice, providing further possibilities for creativity whilst still providing the flexibility of a manual-controlled EQ interface.

MOOER has always excelled at providing innovative UI experiences, and the GE1000 is set to continue this trend. The pedal features a 5-inch high-quality colored touch screen designed for intuitive multi-effect workflows while keeping some fan favorites from previous GE pedals. The pedal will be sold in two formats: the standard GE1000, and the GE1000 Li. The latter option is installed with a Lithium-ion battery, enabling guitarists to use the pedal even when mains power is unavailable.



Optional Battery Version | 5-inch Touch Screen | Numerous MNRS Files Available | Up to 2048 Points IR | Stereo FX LOOP | Bluetooth Audio | MIDI Features | ASIO USB AUDIO | Support for Mobile App | AI EQ MASTER

Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken Pickups Tele

and quacky as some vintage spec singles out there, but they do have a very healthy output that works great with gain sounds.

The Tele set, by contrast, is overtly "classic," with a muscular bridge pickup that's reminiscent of the "Broadcaster"-style models I've tried. It's quite hot, but not monstrously so. The neck pickup, by contrast, is dark and full - a little too much for my tastes if I'm being honest, but that's the nature of classic Tele neck pickups. It'll do jazz and western swing tones very convincingly, with plenty of meat when it's time to lay down some thick lead lines.

Whether you're a Strat or a Tele main, the Seymour Duncan Hot Chicken set delivers beautiful vintage clean tones with enough beef to handle the high-gain demands faced by the modern country player - but they're also versatile enough to hang at your rock, blues, or metal gig too!

Takamine LTD2024

Nick Jennison reviews the Takamine LTD2024—part of the Japanese guitar manufacturers' ing excellence. Featuring a solid spruce top and exotic tonewoods, this acoustic guitar offer intricate inlays and high-end finishes, it's not only a feast for the ears but also for the eyes.

IF you're looking for an acoustic guitar that combines stellar craftsmanship with cosmic-inspired design, the Takamine LTD 2024 might just be what you need. This limited-edition masterpiece is handmade in Japan to celebrate 2024, a leap year, and Takamine took that concept to a whole new level by pulling inspiration from the planets and their orbits. Yeah, it sounds pretty wild, but it's not just about the looks—this guitar delivers when it comes to playability and tone, too.

Let's start with the first thing that'll catch your eye—the Penumbra Blue finish. Inspired by the transition from sunset to twi-

Takamine LTD2024

' celebration of Takamine's 60 years of guitar-build-
rs incredible tonal clarity and depth. Designed with

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Takamine LTD2024

MSRP: *(UK) £2,499.00 | (US) $TBC*

The Breakdown

Traditional — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- » *Stunning looks*
- » *Premium acoustic craftsmanship*
- » *Exotic tonewoods*

For more information, please visit:

takamine.co.uk

light, it's a striking blend of deep blues and warm hues that instantly grab your attention. The solar system inlay on the rosewood fingerboard is another standout feature, with the orbits of the planets beautifully detailed, making this guitar a real work of art.

Takamine's NEX body style—a slightly smaller jumbo cutaway—adds to the guitar's appeal. It's comfortable to hold and play, offering a big sound without feeling bulky. The symmetrical headstock, finished in that same Penumbra Blue, ties the whole look together seamlessly. Simply put, it's a guitar you'll want to show off.

The LTD 2024 doesn't skimp on materials. It's built with a solid spruce top and Indian rosewood back and sides, a classic combination that offers a balanced tone with clarity and warmth. Whether you're strumming or fingerpicking, the sound comes through rich and full.

One of the more modern touches is the carbon saddle. It's a subtle but significant upgrade from the usual bone saddle, giving the guitar a bit more punch and clarity. It's especially noticeable when plugged in, helping the guitar stand out in a live setting.

When it comes to playability, the mahogany neck with its rosewood fingerboard feels just right. It's slim enough for fast playing but still substantial if you're into thumb-over-the-neck techniques. The guitar is versatile, handling everything from big, open strums to delicate fingerpicking with ease.

For fingerstyle players, the slightly larger body and string spacing might take a little getting used to, but once you're comfortable, the tone is rewarding. It's a guitar that feels just as good in your hands as it sounds to your ears.

Takamine's reputation for great sound is well-earned, and the LTD 2024 continues that legacy. Acoustically, it delivers a clear, balanced tone with tight lows, bright highs, and a warm midrange. It's perfect for a range of styles, whether you're playing solo or in a band.

But where this guitar really shines is when you plug it in. Equipped with Takamine's CTF2N preamp system and Brownie FET preamp, the LTD 2024 has that signature Takamine plugged-in sound that's been heard on countless stages. The tone is punchy, clear, and articulate, with enough control over treble, bass, and volume to shape your sound exactly how you want it.

The built-in tuner is a practical touch, allowing you to check your tuning without mut-

ing the sound. It's a small feature, but one that any performer will appreciate during live gigs.

The Takamine LTD 2024 is more than just a pretty face—it's a high-quality acoustic guitar that delivers in both looks and performance. The Penumbra Blue finish and solar system inlays make it stand out visually, while the solid spruce and rosewood build ensures it sounds as good as it looks. The carbon saddle adds a modern touch, and the CTF2N preamp system guarantees that classic Takamine sound when plugged in.

Whether you're a player who loves strumming big chords, diving into fingerstyle, or performing on stage, the LTD 2024 will meet your needs. It's a guitar that's as versatile as it is beautiful, and it's one you'll want to keep in your collection for years to come.

Cort Abstract Delta Masterpiece Series

Nick Jennison reviews the Cort Abstract Delta. Inspired by the Abstract Limited Edition intr
developed in response to the growing demand for a follow-up model. New design elements
shapes that form geometrical designs on the headstock and fretboard position markers. Us
building techniques, the new Abstract Delta marks the beginning of the premium acoustic li

I'M lucky that, as part of my job, I get to play a lot of guitars. Many are very good, some less so. But if there's one range of guitars I've been consistently impressed with, it's Cort's acoustic guitars. Their Flow OC remains one of the best playing acoustics I've ever had hands-on, and I frequently depend on a Gold-D6 for plugged-in tones both live and on our regular Monday live streams.

Cort Abstract Delta Masterpiece Series

roduced in 2018 — the new Abstract Delta was
were developed using combinations of triangular
ing only the finest materials and highest guitar-
ne-up Cort has labelled the "Masterpiece Series."

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Gi

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Cort Abstract Delta Masterpiece Series

MSRP: (UK) £1349 | (US) $1810

The Breakdown

Traditional — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Beautiful OM tones with a little more punch;

» Organic, arty aesthetics;

» Easy, modern playability

For more information, please visit:

cortguitars.com

As part of their "Masterpiece" series, the Abstract Delta sits at the very top end of Cort's acoustic line and represents the best-of-the-best in terms of both aesthetics and performance. It's a deeper-bodied OM-style guitar made of super high-grade solid woods throughout. The top is master-grade spruce, with AAA Pao Ferro for the back and sides. The neck is mahogany with an ebony fretboard and beautiful Padouk binding that carries onto the body. All of these beautiful-looking woods are combined in an elegant geometric headstock overlay that is striking and very classy. This is paired with some beautiful Gotoh tuners that are very similar to the ones found on a high-end Californian brand, as well as offset pyramid fretboard inlays. It's a very beautiful look, but it's still a very traditional looking (and sounding) instrument.

The neck is a comfortable slim taper with a fast satin finish, and the jumbo fretwire is similar to those found on the Flow OC, making for a play feel that's something of a hybrid between electric and acoustic. If you want to burn with rapid single-note lines, it'll feel like a breeze, but this doesn't come at the expense of more traditional styles. It's easy to keep chords in tune, and the intonation is precise and accurate.

Sonically, the Abstract Delta is beautifully balanced, with a rich and detailed character that rivals some of the best modern acoustics I've played. It has the full and silky character you'd expect from rosewood and the sweetness inherent to the OM body style, but with added projection and low-end power thanks to the deeper body. Fingerstyle lines shimmer and sparkle, and there's plenty of headroom to withstand aggressive flatpicking and strumming with a heavy pick.

Electronics come in the form of an LR Baggs Anthem system - a favourite among gigging acoustic players for good reason! It's a very simple and visually unobtrusive system that can sound exceptionally natural with a blend that leans more heavily towards the condenser mic, but it can also get super punchy and direct by blending in more of the undersaddle piezo. There's no ugly shoulder-mounted preamp either, which would be criminal with woods as beautiful as these!

The "Masterpiece" title feels pretty appropriate for the Abstract Delta. It's visually stunning without being gaudy, and sounds poised, detailed, and powerful. It's also a LOT more affordable than similar top-end offerings from the big American brands, despite being every bit as good. If you're looking for an acoustic that makes a statement both visually and sonically without being too offensive on your bank statement, the Cort Abstract Delta might well be the one!

Sonically, the Abstract Delta is beautifully balanced, with a rich and detailed character that rivals some of the best modern acoustics I've played.

Ciari GUITARS
Nashville craftsmanship meets medical-grade engineering for the first and only stage-worthy, full-size folding guitar.
Greg Suran
(Lionel Richie, American Idol, The B-52's)
www.ciariguitars.com

NICK JENNISON'S CHOICE:

BEST OF 2024

Nick Jennison *presents his choices for Guitar Interactive Magazine's Best of 2024*

WHAT a year it's been for guitar gear! We've seen some incredible releases from industry giants and a few surprises from new contenders. With so many standout products, narrowing down my top picks wasn't easy, but these are the ones that truly impressed me. Whether you're looking for inspiring tones, cutting-edge features, or just something shiny and new to add to your ever-expanding collection (wait… I'm talking about myself here), I'd love to hear your thoughts—let us know which pieces have captured your attention!

PRS NF3 SE

The PRS NF3 SE is a major addition to the PRS lineup, marking the first time Narrowfield pickups have appeared in the SE series. With a poplar body, bolt-on maple neck, and 22-fret rosewood fretboard, this guitar is built for versatility. The Narrowfield DD "S" pickups provide a powerful, focused tone, while the PRS patented tremolo offers smooth control. Whether you're into rock, blues, jazz, or country, this is a true workhorse that's hard to put down.

Gi
TOP PICK

Mesa/Boogie Mark VII

Touted as Randall Smith's magnum opus, the Mesa/Boogie Mark VII is a tonal powerhouse. With three channels, three selectable modes per channel, and the ability to recreate classic Mesa tones, it delivers everything from warm cleans to searing high-gain. The 5-band EQ, Multi-Watt power reduction, and Simul-Class power section provide endless tonal shaping. This amp is Mesa/Boogie's crowning achievement—and an instant classic.

Music Man "Bea" Sabre

The Rabea Massaad Artist Series Sabre is a dream for players who love progressive rock and metal tones. Featuring Rabea's signature Bare Knuckle "Silo" humbuckers, a custom Ernie Ball Music Man tremolo, and push-push split-coil electronics, it offers incredible versatility. With 22 stainless steel frets, a roasted maple neck, and an alder body with a thick maple top, this signature model delivers premium build quality and massive tone.

SSL 2+ MKII

The SSL 2+ MKII interface brings Solid State Logic's legendary studio sound into any recording setup. With SSL's renowned 4K Legacy preamps, 24-bit/192 kHz conversion, and a rugged build, it ensures professional-grade clarity. Whether you're tracking in a home studio or on the go, this interface delivers the punchy, detailed audio quality that SSL is known for.

Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set

Hand-wound for authentic late-'50s PAF tones, the Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set blends vintage warmth with modern precision. Designed with Adam "Nolly" Getgood, these pickups offer articulate highs, creamy mids, and a balanced low end, making them ideal for everything from classic rock to contemporary styles.

Fishman Fluence Mick Thomson Signature Pickups

Designed for Slipknot's Mick Thomson, the Fishman Fluence Mick Thomson Signature Pickups deliver brutal clarity and power. With two switchable voices, you get everything from modern high-output aggression to a passive, vintage-style response. Featuring Fluence Core technology and a rechargeable battery pack, these pickups provide consistent output, noiseless performance, and the perfect balance of precision and punch.

PRS NF3 SE

Nick Jennison reviews the PRS NF3 SE — the new standout in the PRS lineup. Featuring thr series), the NF3 SE's poplar body, 22-fret bolt-on maple neck, and rosewood fretboard ensu pickups deliver a focused, powerful tone with taller bobbins and extra metal pieces betwee tremolo, it offers smooth bending and fluttering. Perfect for rock, blues, gospel, country, or hard to put down.

BEFORE we go any further, allow me to address the elephant in the room. As avid GI readers will be aware, I'm a PRS artist. I love PRS guitars, and they're very good to me. That said, no guitar maker is perfect, and I've never shied away from criticizing things I don't like about PRS guitars, and if I'm not into a guitar I won't say otherwise.

One such guitar that I've been critical of in the past is the original PRS NF3. As much as I wanted to love this guitar, it just felt like "neither nowt nor summat". The tone struck me as having the worst aspects of single coils and humbuckers: a rare "swing and a miss" from PRS.

PRS NF3 SE

ee PRS Narrowfield pickups (a first for the SE
re versatile playability. The Narrowfield DD "S"
n the magnets. Anchored by PRS's patented
jazz, the NF3 SE is a versatile workhorse that's

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

PRS NF3 SE

MSRP: *(UK) £799 | (US) $799*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *The best aspects of single coils and humbuckers;*
- *Exceptional playability;*
- *Massive versatility*

For more information, please visit:

prsguitars.com

So I approached the SE NF3 with a cynical mind, expecting another guitar that didn't do it for me. I am very happy to report that this instrument proved me very, very wrong. In fact, it might be the best SE guitar I've ever played.

The SE NF3 is a bolt-on design with a maple neck and a body style that's in the vein of the older EG guitars which informed the Silver Sky (among others). It sports a PRS SE floating tremolo, and a trio of Narrowfield DD "S" pickups - the "DD" meaning "Deep Dish", while the "S" refers to the East Asian construction. These pickups are fully hum-canceling, but PRS claims they sound just like single coils. We'll get to that, but what I will say is that they are unquestionably this guitar's biggest strength - in the same way that they were the biggest letdown in the original NF3. Whatever PRS has changed between the original Narrowfield pickups and the "Deep Dish" versions, it worked!

Do they sound like traditional single coils? Honestly, not really. In a direct comparison to an SE Silver Sky, the SE NF3's tone is significantly fatter and louder, with a robust low end that's similar to a good PAF, combined with a bright and sparkling high end that is very "single-coil-esque", but a little smoother and more refined. If I had to liken the sound to anything, I'd probably compare it to Andy Timmons's "Strat but bigger" tone. All five positions sound beautiful and elegant when played clean, powerful and characterful with overdrive, and completely noiseless. It's trivially easy to coax throaty blues,

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spanky funk, country twang, and punchy high-gain tones out of this guitar, despite the minimalistic control layout. It just works.

Playability is exactly what you'd expect from PRS, in that it's flawless. Notably, the factory setup is significantly more "friendly" than you'd find on PRS guitars from a few years ago. I could never understand why PRS would opt for a fairly stiff action from the factory, given how immaculate the fretwork is on their instruments, but I'm pleased to see them moving away from this spec toward something more immediately playable. The neck has a great feel that's listed as "Wide Thin", but feels just a hair fatter to me, putting it in a sweet spot for a wide variety of playing styles.

The PRS tremolo is one of the best in the business, and the one on the SE NF3 is a great example of this. It's set up floating, but with only enough room to pull up by about a semitone. That's not a huge issue though, since there's still plenty of travel for chord shimmers, bar vibrato, and even

The PRS tremolo is one of the best in the business, and the one on the SE NF3 is a great example of this.

Jeff Beck-style flutters. Tuning stability is predictably excellent, even without locking tuners (although PRS does sell drop-in locking tuners to fit this guitar for a relatively small price).

Available in four attractive solid finishes, each with the option of maple and rosewood fretboards, the PRS SE NF3 is a guitar for all seasons. It's perfectly at home in just about any musical setting, plays beautifully, and looks sharp as a dart. Is it the best SE that PRS has made to date? I think so.

Mesa/Boogie Mark VII 1x12 Combo

Billed as the "Magnum Opus" of Randall Smith's five-decade career in visionary guitar amplif
This tube combo amp includes three channels with three selectable modes per channel, ena
Boogie tones, including two modes new to the Mark VII. Each channel sports independent Ga
and you get a 5-band EQ for extra sound-shaping power. Beyond that, Multi-Watt power redu
distinct characters across three wattage ranges. The Mark VII is truly Mesa/Boogie's crown

MESA/BOOGIE was the first amp brand that I ever properly fell in love with. In a spectacular three-way trade involving a Carvin Legacy and a Marshall TSL100, I came into possession of a TriAxis preamp and Fifty Fifty power amp. I was staggered by not just the tone, but the playing feel—the three LD2 modes (derived from the Mark IV, Mark IIC+ and Mark III respectively) all had the same extraordinary "touch" that communicated every tiny nuance in my playing while still being flattering and super easy to play. If it hadn't died in a fire, I'd probably still be playing it. My next Boogie was a Mark IV—an amp I played to the exclusion of all others for years. It had everything I loved about the

fier design, the Mesa/Boogie Mark VII has arrived. abling you to re-create the full gamut of classic Mesa/ ain, Treble, Mid, Bass, Presence, and Master controls, uction and a Simul-Class power section offer three ing achievement. **Nick Jennison** tells us more.

TriAxis and more, but it was fiddly to dial in, and it was nigh impossible to dial in a good high-gain lead tone and an excellent high-gain rhythm at the same time. I loved it, but it was impractical.

Enter the Mark VII—the culmination of fifty years of expertise and (in my opinion) possibly the best Mark series amp ever made. Like the Mark V that came before it, it's a three-channel, nine-mode amp with power scaling and a host of switching options. But while I personally felt the Mark V was a little too "safe" and lost a lot of what makes Mark amps so special, the Mark VII is the real deal and more.

Channel 1 features two clean voices: "Clean," a sparkling hi-fi clean that's Mark through and through, and "Fat," a gorgeous blackface-esque clean with more compression and a massive and expansive low end. It also features an updated take on the "Crunch" voice from the Mark V. Historically, British-style mid-gain tones were the Achilles heel of the Mark amps, but the VII delivers these tones with authority and authenticity.

Can't decide which of these three sounds you want on the gig? Fear not—you'll find exactly the same "Fat" and "Crunch" sounds in Channel 2, alongside the all-new "Mark VII" mode. This voice is a massive and modern high-gain tone that can hang with (and even surpass) the aggressive tones found in Channel 3.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Mesa/Boogie Mark VII 1x12 Combo

MSRP: (UK) £4199 / (US) $3799

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Studio — Stadium

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Unsurpassed versatility
» Classy and refined cleans
» God-tier gain sounds

For more information, please visit:

mesaboogie.com

It's an absolute monster, with the hyper-articulate attack and clarity of the Mark amps of old, married with a dash of Rectifier grind.

Channel 3 brings the Mark magic in droves, with voices derived from the Mark IIC+ and Mark IV, and these respond precisely the way you'd hope they would. Dime the treble, cut the bass to zero and engage the graphic with the classic "V" curve, and you have John Petrucci, Master of Puppets, and Lamb of God—all within a few millimetres of travel on the 770Hz slider. Unlike the Mark V, though, it's not all high gain all the time on this channel.

Mesa/Boogie Mark VII 1x12 Combo

The new "Mark IIB" mode is a stunner, full of glassy clarity and rich harmonics that does everything from singing blues to EVH.

The upshot of this is that there isn't just "a sound for every player" here—there's a sound for every player on every channel! This means that no matter what your preferred style or guitar of choice, you'll be able to dial up three distinct sounds to cover all your bases, and have each one be absolutely world-class.

In addition to all of this tonal versatility, you have per-channel power scaling, from a bold and punchy 90w through to a compressed and saturated 25w with a 45w middle ground that offers the best of both worlds. There's reverb on each channel that's tuned to give more 'verbs on the clean sounds than on the higher gain voices for a given value on the pot, and you can assign the reverb's on-off status per channel, along with the graphic EQ and the FX loop.

Round the back, there's another huge update in the form of the built-in load box and Cab Clone IR. This means you can go directly to FOH with any one of 8 IRs, which you can load yourself via USB. You can also run the whole amp without a speaker connected for silent recording, and there's even a headphone out if you want the greatest "practice amp" money can buy.

The Mark VII is a worthy successor to the Mark crown. This amp promises big things and more than lives up to them. Expect to see one in my collection as soon as I can find a buyer for this kidney…

Ernie Ball/Music Man Rabea Massaad A

The Rabea Massaad Artist Series Sabre guitar is Music Man's first collaboration with the mu Rabea Massaad. Equipped with a custom compact Ernie Ball Music Man tremolo, Rabea Mas and push-push split-coil electronics for access to single-coil tones in the 1 and 5 positions - the same specifications as the regular Sabre model, with 22 stainless steel frets, a roasted top. **Nick Jennison** reviews

DOES anyone, and I mean anyone, do signature guitars like Music Man? Their commitment to giving the artist what they want in a guitar is second to none, but even the more outlandish designs (like the supercar-inspired Majesty, hyper-futurist Kaizen, and the more-pickups-than-thou switching madness of the Morse) are still beautiful, practical, and immensely playable. They just seem to get it right every time, and the Rabea Massaad Artist Series Sabre is no exception.

First, we need to take a moment and acknowledge how thoroughly deserving Rabea Massaad is of having such a killer instrument bear his name. Quite apart from being a monstrous player with incredible taste, timing, and tone, he's the very model of the modern "working guitarist," and this is reflected in his signature guitar. Based on the Sabre, an offset "S" style guitar with a look that's clean and modern while still evoking the classic Californian designs of the '50s and '60s, the Rabea signature model appears at first glance to be a simple re-skin of the Sabre model, but as you'd expect from Music Man, the devil is in the detail.

The most obvious change (but one you'll only notice when you pick this guitar up) is the neck shape. It tapers in thickness, but the opposite way to how you'd expect in that it starts out thick and chunky down towards the headstock and thins out up towards the body. While this may seem a little counterintuitive at first, it's actually really smart—you get a beefy neck that you can really wrestle with down at the "riffing end" and a slimmer, more shred-friendly profile in the higher frets when it's time to rip some blistering leads. This upper-fret playability is enhanced even further by a recessed lower horn and a very slimmed-down neck joint that we're reliably informed is about as slim as it's possible to go without sacrificing stability. Of course, stability isn't something you should be concerned about, since any guitar that can survive Rabea's huge mitts and devastatingly heavy pick attack can hold up to just about any punishment we mortals are likely to subject it to.

Another notable change is the inclusion of Rabea's signature Bareknuckle Silo humbuckers in lieu of the Music Man pickups usually found in the Sabre model.

Artist Series Sabre

ulti-talented guitarist, composer, and producer
saad signature Bare Knuckle "Silo" humbuckers,
— the signature guitar also shares some of
maple neck, and an Alder body with a thick maple

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Ernie Ball/Music Man Rabea Massaad Artist Series Sabre

MSRP: (UK) £TBC | (US) $3999

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

» Crushing modern tones

» Loads of coil-splitting options

» Music Man's legendary build quality

For more information, please visit:

music-man.com

Given just how good the current Music Man HT pickups are, you can be sure that it's going to take a very special pickup to warrant swapping them out, and the Silos are just such a pickup. Symmetrically wound and with a ton of output and upper mid "clank" along with the signature Bareknuckle silky, airy high end, the Silos excel at aggressive, hyper-articulate high-gain tones. You'll hear every note in complex chords and riffs, and lead lines bloom and howl with rich harmonics and tons of character.

Ernie Ball/Music Man Rabea Massaad Artist Series Sabre

Sterling
by MUSIC MAN
INTRO · SERIES
StingRay
RAY 2
Cutlass
CT20
PROUDLY DISTRIBUTED IN THE UK BY STRINGS & THINGS LTD

Equipped with a dive-only Music Man tremolo, locking tuners, and glow-in-the-dark side dots, the Rabea signature model is a true workhorse instrument perfect for one of the busiest and most in-demand modern players.

They're far from one-trick ponies, though, and thanks to the plentiful coil-splitting options available, you can get everything from gorgeous ambient cleans to percussive funk and even pseudo-Tele tones that are perfect for blues, country, and other roots styles.

Equipped with a dive-only Music Man tremolo, locking tuners, and glow-in-the-dark side dots, the Rabea signature model is a true workhorse instrument perfect for one of the busiest and most in-demand modern players. It comes in two beautiful transparent satin finishes: Frenzied Flame Burst, available exclusively via the Ernie Ball Music Man Vault, and Vileblood Burst, available through your favorite local retailer.

Solid State Logic SSL 2 MKII and SSL 2+ I

Nick Jennison reviews the SSL 2 MKII and SSL 2+ MKII interfaces. Bringing Solid State Logic these compact units feature SSL's renowned 4K Legacy preamps and a durable design. With capture, these interfaces are perfect for mobile recording or home studios, offering profes

WE guitar players have an interesting relationship with audio interfaces. We place so much importance on "vibe," "mojo," and "sonic integrity" in our guitar gear — the right diodes in our green overdrive, the right vintage capacitors on our tone pots, and the right Celestion Greenbacks from the right month of the right year in our speaker cabinets — only to record this meticulously curated collection of guitar esoterica through whichever two-input USB interface was cheapest on Thomann.

Okay, I'm being slightly facetious here. We live in an era with countless high-quality, low-cost audio interfaces that sound perfectly clean and linear, and will get your guitar signal into your DAW accurately with minimal fuss. But is that really what we want in a guitar recording?

There's a reason practically every notable producer and engineer values "vibey" equipment like vintage consoles, mic pres, outboard EQs, and compressors over the cleanest-of-the-clean modern interfaces. The "color" (harmonic content, subtle saturation, and gentle EQ curves) these devices impart is as much a part of a great recording as the instrument, amplifier, and microphone.

MKII Audio Interface

c's studio-quality sound to any recording setup, 24-bit/192 kHz conversion for pristine audio sional clarity for serious creators.

One of the most revered pieces of "vibey" studio equipment is the venerable SSL 4000 series console.

Now, as much as I'd like to say, "just go out and buy a 4000E," the current used price is around £25,000 — and it requires something resembling a life support system to run. Fortunately, SSL offers a line of reasonably priced 2-channel interfaces that bring the same color and vibe as their iconic consoles, but at literally 1% of the price: the SSL 2 MKII and SSL 2+ MKII.

Housed in a beautiful, rugged metal enclosure, these interfaces support 32-bit recording at sample rates as high as 192 kHz and are as clean and high-fidelity as they come — until you hit the "4K" button. This switch is a game-changer, adding a high-end push, a little richness in the lows, and subtle harmonic saturation and grit that's downright addictive. Truthfully, it's something I'd leave on 99% of the time. This feature alone makes these interfaces worth the small additional expense over similar offerings from other brands. It took our slightly sterile-sounding modeller and gave it the aggression, depth, and three-dimensional quality that define all our favorite recorded guitar tones, without requiring any additional processing.

There's more to the SSL 2 and 2+ than just gritty, colorful sound, though.

PRODUCT RECOMMENDED

Solid State Logic SSL 2 MKII and SSL 2+ MKII Audio Interface

MSRP: (2 MKII) £195 | (2+ MKII) £278

The Breakdown

Studio — Stage

Specialised — Versatile

Straightforward — Feature-rich

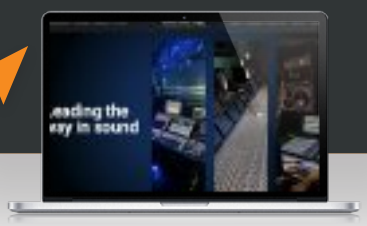
Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Beautiful console sounds in an affordable package
- Class-leading clean preamps and converters
- Ease of use

For more information, please visit:

solidstatelogic.com



When clean audio is needed, the class-leading preamps and converters handle just about anything you throw at them beautifully. There's plenty of gain for even the famously low-output SM7B without any appreciable noise, and the instrument input has exceptional headroom for high-output pickups like Fishman Fluences, while still handling a quiet passive P-Bass like a champ.

The main difference between the two models lies in the outputs. The SSL 2 features a single pair of 1/4" outputs and a pair of headphone outputs that share the same mix. The 2+ offers a second set of outputs, which can be used to set up an additional monitoring mix (sent to the second headphone output), to feed a reamp box, or even to send control voltages to a hardware synth if that's your thing. The 2+ also includes MIDI in and out via traditional 5-pin DIN sockets — a must-have in my book!

It's my contention that the SSL 2, and particularly the SSL 2+, are among the best interfaces for home-recording guitar players. They offer both crystal-clear, class-leading audio and vibey, vintage-style coloration in a package that's untouchable at this price point. Were I in the market for a simple, bus-powered 2-channel interface, I'd get one of these in a heartbeat. Oh, and yes — the volume knob goes to 11.

Solid State Logic SSL 2 MKII and SSL 2+ MKII Audio Interface

It's my contention that the SSL 2, and particularly the SSL 2+, are among the best interfaces for home-recording guitar players.

Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set

Hand-wound to evoke the tones of the late 1950s, the Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set a PAF pickups with the added precision of modern construction. Created in collaboration with articulate highs, creamy mids, and balanced lows, making them ideal for everything from vir tells us more.

I have a complicated relationship with Bare Knuckle Pickups. The company's main man, Tim Mills, is a hugely impressive individual — both as a person and as a pickup-building megamind. Their small team consists of some of the coolest, nicest folks in the industry, and their pickups are among the highest-quality (and most innovative) passive pickups I've ever played.

"What's complicated about that?" I hear you ask. Well, despite the high regard in which I hold Bare Knuckle, I've never played a set of their pickups that I've personally bonded with. To be clear, this is not for lack of trying. I want to have a Bare Knuckle set in my life, but none of them have been quite right for me — until now.

Enter the PolyPafs. Designed in collaboration with golden-eared British producer Adam "Nolly" Getgood, these pickups are a follow-up to his excellent Polymath signature set, but with a more "vintage"

aims to capture the warmth and detail of classic
Adam "Nolly" Getgood, The PolyPafs provide
ntage rock to contemporary styles. **Nick Jennison**

output and a classic PAF sonic signature (as the name suggests). Far from a simple PAF clone, these pickups represent an optimized take on the classic Seth Lover recipe, emphasizing the qualities Nolly appreciates in a PAF while minimizing or eliminating the characteristics he doesn't. Considering my all-time favorite neck pickup is essentially a "modernized PAF," I was more than a little excited to fit these into a guitar — and my word, did they deliver!

To give the truest evaluation of the PolyPafs, I decided to install them into my "old faithful" PRS Custom 22 — a guitar I've played for nearly 20 years and know intimately. What immediately struck me was the evenness of the upper mids and highs, which are clean, extended, and glassy, rather than the slightly gritty qualities of my favorite PAF clone. It's a stunning tone, reminiscent of the best modern mini humbuckers, but with the solidity and low-end weight of a full-size PAF. For modern styles, this is priceless — the even, "non-spiky" response smooths out aggressive gain tones, creating a pleasant, bubbly hand feel and reducing unpleasant resonances that might otherwise require a notch filter in mixing. They also chug better than any PAF I've ever played. This is a game-changer for my playing with Blitzkrieg, where I often have

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set

MSRP: *(Set) From £377*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *"Optimised" PAF tones*
- *Exceptional playing feel*
- *Clarity without sacrificing character*

For more information, please visit:

bareknucklepickups.co.uk

to choose between the PAF-like lead tones I love and a hotter pickup capable of handling heavy rhythm work.

Cleans are graceful and refined, offering a "mix-ready" quality that remains crystal clear even with heavy compression and ambient effects, without losing the classic PAF character. This clarity extends to low and mid-gain tones, where the brightness and articulation evoke the "big fat Telecaster" vibe that original PAFs were famous for — but with a cleaner, more modern texture.

As with every Bare Knuckle set, the PolyPafs are crafted to the highest standard and are visually stunning from every angle. The four-conductor construction allows for a variety of wiring configurations, including phase flipping, series/parallel, and the increasingly popular coil split. This leads me to my only criticism: the split-coil tone. This isn't a design flaw but rather an inherent limitation of low-output pickups, where each individual coil lacks enough output to produce a convincingly full single-coil sound. This issue is easily addressed by using an in-line resistor for a "partial split" (as found in modern PRS guitars), but it's worth noting that the more common coil-splitting method may yield less-than-impressive results. That said, the full humbucker tones are so good it's hard to imagine wanting anything else.

Bare Knuckle PolyPaf Humbucker Set

The Bare Knuckle PolyPafs are a genuinely superb set of pickups. They deliver classic PAF output and character with an optimized response tailored for the modern player. More importantly (to me, at least), they're a set of pickups I can see myself using in a variety of contexts — and I'll almost certainly be ordering a set of my own.

Fluence 6 String Mick Thomson Signature

The Fishman Fluence 6-String Mick Thomson Signature Pickups are engineered to deliver th
Mick Thomson demands. These active pickups feature Fishman's innovative Fluence Core te
voices. Voice 1 offers a modern, high-output sound with tight bass and crisp highs, ideal for
passive, classic tone with dynamic range and clarity, offering noiseless performance and co
installation and a rechargeable battery pack for long-lasting power, the Fishman Fluence Mi
metal guitarists seeking precision and versatility in their sound. **Nick Jennison** tells us mor

FISHMAN'S roster of Fluence artists reads like a "who's who" of hard rock and metal players, with heavyweights of heavy music like Killswitch Engage, Rammstein, Tosin Abasi, Polyphia, and Devin Townsend all ditching their traditional wire-wound pickups for the clarity and versatility of Fluence. As a longtime Fluence user myself, I can see why.

e Pickups

e uncompromising tone and power that Slipknot's chnology, providing two distinct and switchable aggressive playing styles. Voice 2 delivers a more onsistent output across all strings. With easy ick Thomson Signature Pickups are perfect for e.

> *So yes, the Fishman Fluence Mick Thomson Signature Set absolutely rocks.*

The latest in this long string of home runs is the Fluence signature set, made for none other than Mick Thomson of Slipknot. Casual listeners may know Thomson primarily as a riffing juggernaut, but there are many strings to the man's bow, and this is clearly reflected in his signature pickups.

Finished in satin black metal with the distinctive "swoosh," both neck and bridge pickups feature three distinct voices. Voice 1 is a bruising, tightly focused active-style tone, while Voice 2 is a classic "vintage hot" style voice, with a little more punch and aggression in the bridge position compared to the "vintage plus" neck pickup. Voice 3 is a true single coil, but rather than simply being a coil split, it revoices the whole pickup and balances the output for a much more authentic tone than you'd get simply by shutting off a coil on a traditional humbucker.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Fluence 6 String Mick Thomson Signature Pickups

MSRP: (UK) £289 | (US) $289

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Straightforward — Feature-rich

Specialised — Versatile

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Crushing metal tones;
- Punchy passive humbuckers and single coils;
- Unparalleled versatility

For more information, please visit:

https://www.fishman.com/

It should come as no surprise that the metal tones these pickups can produce are second to none. They're clear, articulate, and hyper-aggressive, with that signature Mick Thomson "fullness" around the 1k region, and can retain their composure under frankly preposterous amounts of gain—or sound absolutely vicious through a more "classic" Marshall-style amp. There's even a switchable "bass boost" feature on the bridge pickup for when you need a little extra mass in your tone. What came as more of a shock were the low-gain tones. The single-coil sounds are some of the best I've ever heard from a humbucking pickup, no matter if you're going for gorgeous clean sparkle, tight and percussive funk, or gnarly country twang. Similarly, the passive humbucker sounds in Voice 2 are killer for fat classic rock tones, vocal leads, and old-school metal alike.

So yes, the Fishman Fluence Mick Thomson Signature Set absolutely rocks. They deliver monstrous, aggressive tones for when it's time to melt faces, and a plethora of characterful passive sounds for everything else—all at the flick of a switch. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to do a shootout between these and my Devin Townsend set. I may be some time…

Fluence 6 String Mick Thomson Signature Pickups

ESP

SAM BELL'S CHOICE:

BEST OF 2024

Sam Bell presents his choices for Guitar Interactive Magazine's Best of 2023

I always feel lucky to review incredible products for Guitar Interactive, and every so often, a piece of gear has that extra mojo—something you can't quite put your finger on. When Jonathan asked me to round up my top five from this year, I didn't have to think too hard! For me, the best gear is the kind that makes me lose track of time while playing. Each of these pieces did just that, bringing something out in me that I didn't expect. It's all subjective, of course, but I highly recommend checking them out—though I take no responsibility for your bank balance afterward!

Huge thanks to Jonathan and the Gi team—it's always a pleasure. I hope everyone is safe and well. Here's to the quest for tone and all things musical!

Spira S-507 QGY

Extended-range guitars have evolved from niche instruments to essential tools for modern metal and prog players, yet finding one that balances quality, affordability, and killer tone is still a challenge. The Spira S-507 QGY nails it. This 7-string beast offers playability, style, and power in equal measure—an excellent choice for both newcomers and seasoned shredders.

Gi
TOP PICK

Jackson Pro Series Signature Jeff Loomis Kelly HT6

Designed in collaboration with Jeff Loomis, this Jackson Kelly HT6 is a precision shred machine. Its alder body, neck-through maple construction, and ebony fretboard provide sustain for days, while the Seymour Duncan Jeff Loomis Signature Black-outs deliver aggressive, high-gain tones with crystal clarity. A hardtail bridge keeps tuning rock solid, making this an unstoppable force for speed and precision.

Sterling StingRay Ray2 Bass

The Sterling StingRay Ray2 brings iconic low-end punch to an accessible price point without cutting corners. Featuring a narrow 38mm nut width, contoured body, and satin-finished maple neck, it's supremely comfortable to play. Whether you're laying down funk grooves or thunderous rock lines, this bass delivers classic StingRay tone with modern versatility.

PRS SE CE 24 Satin

The PRS 2024 SE CE 24 Satin merges classic PRS quality with a modern, ultra-smooth satin finish. With a mahogany body, maple top, and PRS 85/15 "S" pickups, it delivers everything from warm humbucker growl to crisp single-coil sparkle. The PRS patented molded tremolo ensures rock-solid tuning, making this a top pick for players who demand both tone and reliability.

Boss Katana Air EX

The Boss Katana Air EX is a game-changer for wireless practice amps. Packing twin 5-inch speakers, 35 watts of stereo power, and Boss's renowned amp models and effects, this compact amp punches well above its size. The Boss Tone Studio app lets you fine-tune your sound, and with its advanced wireless tech, you can jam anywhere without tripping over cables.

Mooer Ocean Machine II

For those who love ambient textures and sonic exploration, the Mooer Ocean Machine II—developed with Devin Townsend—is a dream come true. It features dual delays, a reverb module, MIDI compatibility, and 120 seconds of looping, making it a powerhouse for experimental players. Whether crafting lush soundscapes or intricate rhythmic echoes, this pedal is pure inspiration.

Spira S-507 QGY

Extended-range guitars have come a long way from niche novelties to essential tools for mo one that balances affordability, build quality, and tonal excellence can still feel like a quest. I that doesn't compromise. With its distinctive style and formidable sound, this guitar has the extended-range players and seasoned pros. **Sam Bell** tells us more

WHEN I first joined Gi Mag, I was brought on as the 'Extended Range' instrument specialist. At the time, quality 7- and 8-string guitars existed, but they were often hard to find—either due to their high price tags or limited availability. So, when I discovered Spira Guitars, I was thrilled to learn about a company dedicated to crafting modern metal-style instruments, offering a fantastic 7-string guitar that not only performed well but also looked and sounded amazing—all at an accessible price.

The Spira S-507 QGY is a 26.5-inch scale 7-string guitar with a striking reverse headstock, a hardtail bridge, and high-output Villain™ pickups. Its sleek, transparent gray finish gives it a modern, eye-catching look.

Spira S-507 QGY

odern metal and progressive players. Yet, finding
Enter the Spira S-507 QGY—a 7-string powerhouse
potential to meet the needs of both aspiring

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Spira S-507 QGY

MSRP: *(UK) £449 | (US) $TBC*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

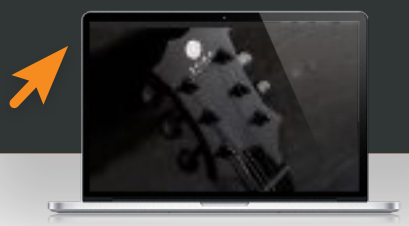
Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- » *Extended range guitars*
- » *Superb playability*
- » *Value for money*

For more information, please visit:

spiraguitars.com



The guitar features a beautifully crafted Canadian roasted maple neck and an ebony fingerboard with offset fret dots and a 14-inch radius, making it a joy to play. The design is particularly well-suited for technical playing styles, with easy access to the lower B string—essential for extended-range guitars. The body is made of mahogany with a quilted maple top, adding both visual appeal and tonal warmth. Right out of the box, the guitar feels perfectly balanced, both in terms of weight and appearance.

In terms of electronics, the Spira S-507 features an HH (humbucker/humbucker) pickup configuration with custom-designed 12k ceramic magnet pickups, which Spira calls Villain™ pickups. These aggressive, high-output pickups are ideal for heavy music and lower tunings. The controls are simple and intuitive, with a single volume and tone knob, while the pickups are selected via a 3-way toggle switch.

Where this guitar really shines is in high-gain, modern tones. The bridge pickup is voiced for tight, focused lows with a quick attack and excellent clarity, even with saturated distortion. The neck pickup, while still high-output, has a slightly lower gain, offering more warmth and smoothness—perfect for melodic lead lines. When used in combination with the bridge pickup, it delivers a well-rounded, midrange-heavy tone that's great for lower-gain crunch sounds or clean passages.

Had this guitar been available during my early days with 7-string instruments, I would have snapped it up without hesitation. As an extended-range player, I would highly recommend this guitar to anyone serious about starting their 7-string journey or to seasoned players looking for a quality, affordable option. While it's priced as a budget guitar, don't let that fool you—this instrument offers outstanding value for the money.

I truly wish Spira had been around sooner, and if you're in the market for a quality 7-string, I'd highly recommend checking this guitar out. In fact, I'd suggest exploring the entire Spira lineup if you're into modern progressive, heavy, or alternative styles of music. These guitars look great, offer excellent value for the price, and most importantly, they sound and play fantastically.

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Jackson Pro Series Signature Jeff Loomi

Unleash your inner shredder with the Jackson Pro Series Signature Jeff Loomis Kelly HT6. D himself, this guitar boasts a sleek, angular body with a stunning gloss black finish. It feature and an ebony fingerboard for exceptional sustain and playability. Equipped with powerful Se pickups, it delivers crushing tones with incredible clarity. The hardtail bridge ensures rock- the studio, the HT6 is built to meet the demands of high-speed, high-gain performance. Sam

JEFF Loomis needs no introduction; he's a highly influential musician in the metal sphere of guitar. His searing guitar work can be heard in Nevermore, Arch Enemy, and in his solo projects. Jackson has released a Jeff Loomis signature guitar which is incredibly slick to play and looks like it means business.

The Jeff Loomis Signature Kelly is based on the Kelly design. Think of an extreme version of a Gibson Explorer, just way pointier and meaner looking. The gloss black finish, accented by the white binding, makes this guitar look startling. It's certainly eye-catching but also subtle. It looks like a sci-fi weapon.

Jackson Pro Series Signature Jeff Loomis Kelly HT6

is Kelly HT6

Designed in collaboration with the metal maestro
s an alder body, maple neck-through construction,
eymour Duncan Jeff Loomis Signature Blackouts
solid tuning stability. Whether you're on stage or in
Bell reviews.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Jackson Pro Series Signature Jeff Loomis Kelly HT6

MSRP: (UK) £1399 | (US) $1549

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

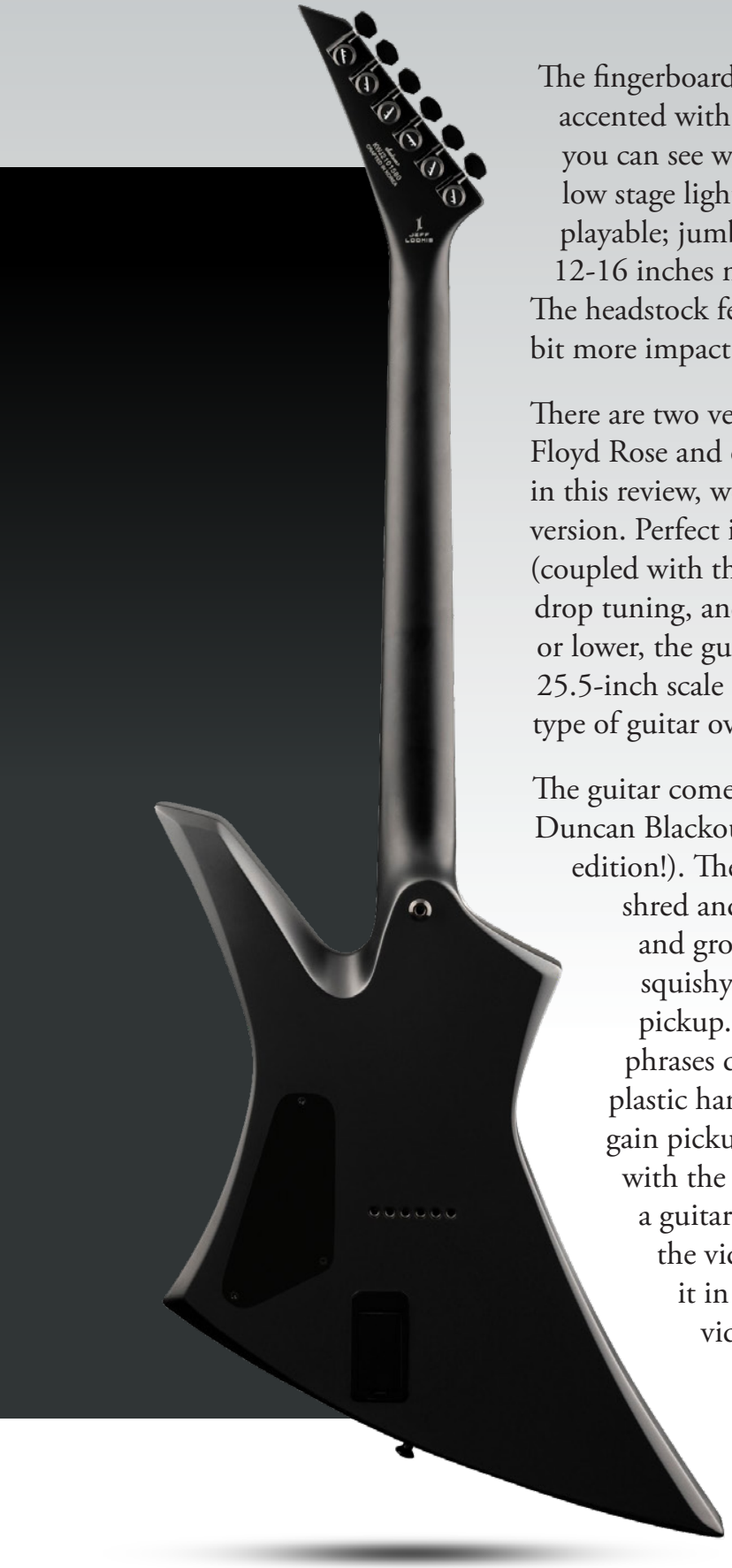
» Exceptional sustain and playability

» Sleek design

» Jeff Loomis

For more information, please visit:

jacksonguitars.com



The fingerboard is made from ebony and is accented with Luminlay fret dots on the side so you can see where you are on the fretboard in low stage light. The neck itself is dangerously playable; jumbo frets and a compound radius of 12-16 inches make soloing and riffing a breeze. The headstock features a 3D Jackson logo, adding a bit more impact to the design.

There are two versions of this guitar. The one with a Floyd Rose and one with a hardtail Hipshot bridge; in this review, we're taking a look at the hardtail version. Perfect if you want superb tuning stability (coupled with the Jackson locking tuners!) great for drop tuning, and if you want to tune to D standard or lower, the guitar will take it. The guitar has a 25.5-inch scale length, which is standard for this type of guitar over 24 frets.

The guitar comes loaded with some Seymour Duncan Blackout pickups (Jeff Loomis signature edition!). These pickups are phenomenal for shred and metal riffing. Super tight low end and growl on the bridge pickup, high gain squishy warmth, and clarity on the neck pickup. Giving high gain riffs and speedy phrases definition, and clarity without any plastic harshness that can come out of high gain pickups. These pickups in combination with the neck make this an absolute beast of a guitar to play. I got a bit carried away on the video with various shred licks. To hear it in action, check out Jeff's promotional videos for this guitar! Wow.

The electronics are very simple, with a three-way switch (bridge, both, and neck). The bridge is great for riffing and soloing (legato and sweeping come to mind!).

The middle position is great for clean tones, and the neck is perfect for searing leads and picking runs. This guitar is so metal that it doesn't have a tone control, just a volume. The volume isn't super responsive; it can be rolled back a bit to tame the gain if needed. But I feel like the volume on this guitar is more of an off-and-on switch than a 'tone' shaper, which is cool! It's designed for metal.

What else have I missed? Well, it has cool shark tooth inlays. But aside from that, I really feel it has to be heard and played to see how great this guitar is. Maybe the 'Explorer' design might be a put off to some players who might opt for a traditional shape, maybe due to practical reasons of traveling with the guitar (cases/damage etc.) or because they may find that where the arm rests on the guitar for picking may feel unusual. However, as a seasoned Strat/Tele player, I found this guitar very comfortable and natural to play!

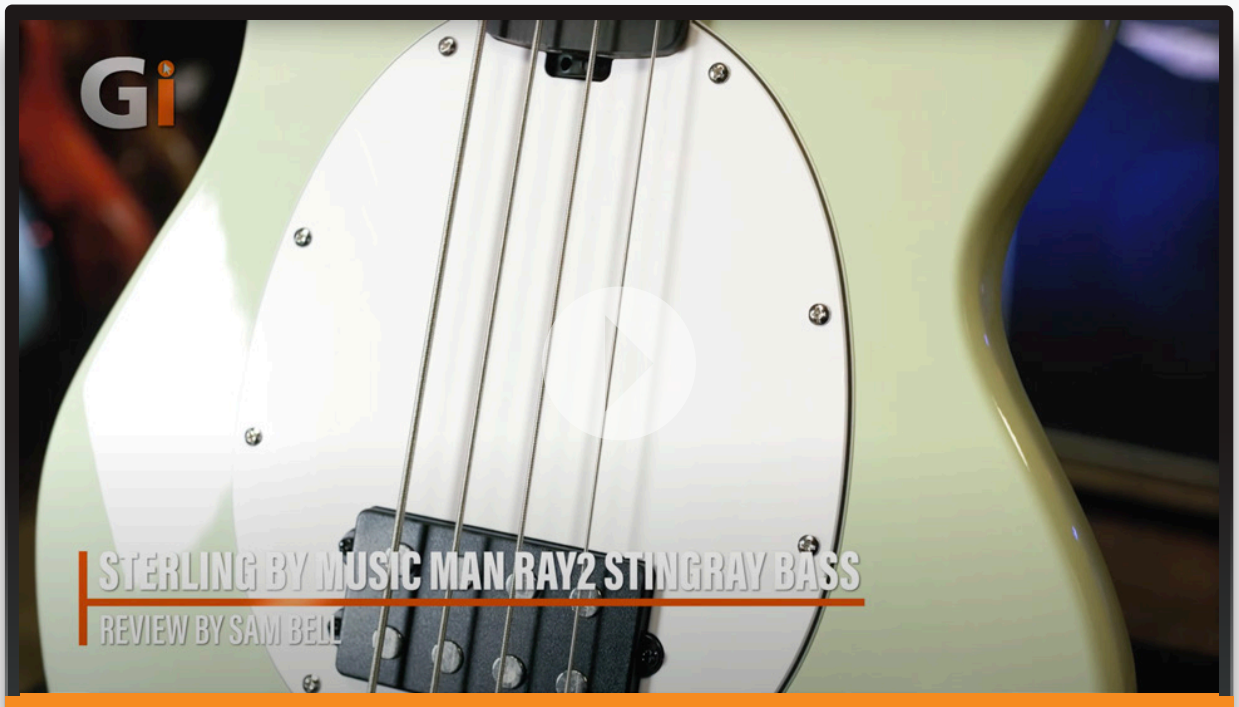
If you're looking for a mean, keen, shred metal machine, check out the Jeff Loomis Jackson Signature Kelly!

Sterling Stingray Ray2 Bass

Punchy, powerful, and effortlessly playable — the Sterling StingRay Ray2 Bass offers classi choice for low-end groove enthusiasts. Part of the Intro Series, the StingRay Ray2 features contoured body, and satin-finished maple neck ensure exceptional comfort and playability. musician, the StingRay Ray2 is one to check out. **Sam Bell** tells us more.

THE Ray2 Bass Guitar is a solid instrument that combines quality materials and playability, making it suitable for both beginners and intermediate players. The Ray2 features a poplar body that provides a balanced weight, offering comfort, whether standing or sitting. The fixed bridge ensures stable tuning and solid sustain. The body is available in several colours, including Black, Electric Blue, Misty Green, and Sunrise Orange, providing a good range of finishes to suit personal taste.

The 34" scale length (86.4cm) is slightly longer than a traditional 32" scale, allowing for more string tension and clearer note articulation. This scale length is ideal for bass players who prefer a bit more definition in their sound. The neck is made of hard maple, a standard choice for its durability and



Sterling Stingray Ray2 Bass

ic tones with modern versatility, making it a perfect
an iconic design. The narrow 38mm nut width,
Whether you're a beginner or an experienced

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Sterling Stingray Ray2 Bass

MSRP: *(UK) £349 | (US) $249*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *Classic looks*
- *Comfortable neck*
- *Affordable*

For more information, please visit:

sterlingbymusicman.com

Overall, the Ray2 is a fantastic bass guitar that balances quality craftsmanship, aesthetic appeal, and solid sound performance, all within a very affordable package.

fast-playing feel. The 9.5" radius (24cm) offers comfortable playability, particularly for those who prefer a medium-level curve on the fretboard.

With 21 medium frets and a neck width of 1.57" (40mm) at the nut, the bass provides a fairly traditional setup for ease of play, especially for those accustomed to modern bass necks. The neck feels smooth and fast, enabling quick position changes and easy fretting. The dual-action truss rod allows players to adjust the neck for optimal setup.

At the heart of the Ray2's sound is its H-1 Ceramic Humbucker pickup, which delivers a tight, punchy tone with excellent clarity. The humbucker produces a rich low end, and while it's not as aggressive as active pickups, it offers plenty of growl and warmth. The single volume and tone controls provide essential tools for shaping the sound, from smooth, mellow tones to punchier, brighter sounds for more aggressive playing styles.

The open-gear tuning machines on this bass are reliable and maintain tuning stability well, even through extended playing sessions. This setup makes the bass ideal for live performances or studio work where consistent tuning is critical.

The 6-bolt neck attachment ensures the neck is firmly secured to the body, facilitating efficient transfer of vibrations from the neck to the body. This feature enhances the overall resonance and tone quality.

The inclusion of black dot fret markers (on the Black and Sunrise Orange models) and white dot markers (on the Blue and Green versions) improves visibility while playing, particularly on stage or in low-light environments.

Overall, the Ray2 is a fantastic bass guitar that balances quality craftsmanship, aesthetic appeal, and solid sound performance, all within a very affordable package. It's versatile enough to suit a wide range of playing styles, from groovy bass lines to melodic solos. The humbucker pickup ensures a rich sound that can be easily dialled into a variety of tones, while the solid construction and reliable tuning hardware make this a dependable instrument. If you're looking for an affordable yet high-quality bass, the Ray2 should definitely be on your list.

PRS 2024 SE CE 24 Satin

Sam Bell reviews the PRS 2024 SE CE 24 Satin. Combining classic PRS quality with a sleek, m mahogany body and a maple top, providing exceptional resonance and a smooth, comfortabl range of tones, from warm humbucker sounds to crisp single-coil clarity. The maple neck wi playability, boasting 24 frets and a 25-inch scale length. Equipped with a PRS patented mold precise pitch control and stable tuning, making it a reliable choice for any guitarist.

THE PRS CE range has become well-recognized in the PRS lineup, giving a range of versatile tones and quality features. In this issue, I'm going to take a look at the new PRS SE CE 24, which promises to make the quality of the CE range more affordable.

The guitar features a full mahogany body with a maple bolt-on neck and a thin satin finish on the body. The turquoise finish looks awesome, and the guitar feels great to sit with. The satin finish looks, smells, and feels lush. The guitar comes loaded with two PRS 85/15 "S" humbuckers, which bring clarity and warmth to our tone. These can be further controlled via the push/pull tone knob, which allows us to split the humbuckers for a coil-tapped sound.

PRS 2024 SE CE 24 Satin

modern finish, the new SE CE 24 features a satin
le feel. The PRS 85/15 "S" pickups deliver a versatile
ith a rosewood fingerboard offers excellent
ed tremolo system, the SE CE 24 Satin ensures

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

PRS 2024 SE CE 24 Satin

MSRP: *(UK) £489 | (US) $499*

The Breakdown

Vintage — Modern

Specialised — Versatile

Warm — Bright

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- *PRS quality*
- *Stunning looks*
- *Value for money*

For more information, please visit:

prsguitars.com

Next up is the amazing neck: 24 frets, 25” scale length, maple neck with rosewood fingerboard. A modest 10” fretboard radius with the Wide/Thin neck shape makes this guitar very natural to play. Great for a mix of classic and contemporary playing styles, from fast runs to bluesy bends and complex chords, the guitar allows it all without any compromise. And, of course, it features the classic PRS bird fretboard inlays. The guitar also comes loaded with a quality tremolo system and chrome hardware.

First of all, how does it sound? The pickups offer plenty of clarity, and the guitar feels resonant but not too bright when unplugged. When plugged in, it feels as if the pickups are adding a lot of clarity to the sound. The humbuckers are well balanced, with the classic setup of the bridge being tighter and

> *I'm amazed by the price of this guitar, and I'm in two minds about whether to snap one up myself for my collection!*

higher output, and the neck being warmer and lower output.

There's a whole host of tones that can be accessed by using the coil tap on the tone control; the tones are bright and clear. This guitar could be used in many different settings, hence why the PRS CE is popular in the first place. It is equally at home in smooth blues as it is in hard rock and metal contexts.

Playability-wise, it's super smooth. It feels well balanced. The 25" scale length and the Wide/Thin neck give it the potential to be an absolute shred machine. This is nicely offset with the 10" fretboard radius, which allows us to get a grip on notes for vibrato and bending in a natural way.

I'm amazed by the price of this guitar, and I'm in two minds about whether to snap one up myself for my collection! It has everything, even a stylish PRS gig bag. My only reservation might be the tuners; they are good, but if I were to gig this, I'd probably replace them. Having said that, that's the only thing I'd replace! Everything else feels fantastic. There are quite a few of these popping up in guitar stores around the world, so do pick one up if you see one to feel it for yourself! The quality is excellent: no jagged edges, great playability, versatile tonal range, and superb looks.

Boss Katana-Air EX Wireless Guitar Amp

Katana-Air EX is a powerhouse wireless desktop amp that delivers big stereo sound and aut twin five-inch speakers, a custom wood cabinet, and 35 watts max power, this everyday pra rival amps much larger in size. A large variety of onboard amp characters and effects suppo setups and enhance daily sessions with the companion Boss Tone Studio app for iOS and An technology, you have complete freedom to move around with no instrument cable to trip yo

THE kings of pedals, BOSS, are back with a new range of Katana amplifiers packed with tons of new features and possibilities. This time, we're taking a look at an awesome new stereo desktop amp, which is part of the Katana Series. There is so much to cover here, so be sure to watch the video review to hear it in action and check out BOSS's website and manual. Is there anything this range of amplifiers can't do!?

The Katana Air EX is a desktop guitar amp solution with BOSS wireless technology. You could have this beast of a practice amp on your desktop, coffee table, or kitchen work surface and have a perfect practice solution wherever you are, without cables

thentic Katana tones in a compact footprint. With ctice companion dishes rich, resonant tones that ort every musical style, and you can customize droid. And thanks to advanced Boss wireless u up. **Sam Bell** reviews.

flying around (aside from the power). The wireless transmitter can last up to 12 hours on a full charge and is simply charged by plugging it back into the top of the amp itself.

This amp features a powerful-sounding 35-watt dual five-inch speaker, giving the user a nice wide-range sound, making this also a very powerful 'Bluetooth' speaker for playing tunes. The amp sounds themselves are based around five versatile amp 'models' from neutral amp character for acoustic-electric/bass to a Jazz Chorus-style clean, Crunch, Lead, and Brown amp models. These can be further tweaked via bass, middle, and treble controls. There are also several FX controls, giving us access to different types of boosts, drives, reverbs, delays, modulation, and other special effects. While most of this can be accessed from the top panel, the amp is designed to be used alongside the BOSS Tone Studio App (available on Apple and Android). This app can be used to further tweak the onboard FX, and we're treated to 60 of BOSS's world-class effects. If you want a DS1, it's got it; if you want an SDE-3000 Stereo Delay, it's got it! And you can get detailed with the parameters for each effect via the app. Super cool. Once you've got your sounds dialed in, you can save them to one of the six onboard memories to recall your presets. You can use the app to store

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Boss Katana-Air EX Wireless Guitar Amp

MSRP: (UK) £489 | (US) $599

The Breakdown

Straight-forward — Feature-rich

Specialised — Versatile

Studio — Stage

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Quality tones
- Ultra-low latency
- Wireless fun

For more information, please visit:

boss.info

Trust me — have a think about how much you'd expect this thing to cost, then go and have a look. Crazy, right?

and download presets from the 'Tone Exchange.' It's all very easy once you get started.

There's so much that can be done with this compact desktop amp, and it sounds amazing! It fills the room nicely; it's not too 'pointy' as some practice amps can sound. It gives you an almost 'recorded' presentation of your sound to go along with any backing tracks you may be playing along with.

If you want to take it to a gig, you potentially could by wiring it up to the PA system via the stereo jack line outs with mic'd cab emulation. If you are taking it live or want a bit more control at home, you can control your sounds via BOSS's wireless foot control (EV-1-1WL and FS-1-WL, both not included with the BOSS Katana Air EX). This footswitch can operate functions you assign with the Tone Studio app, controlling volume, wah, patch changes, and triggering the

SENNHEISER

MD 421 KOMPAKT

The mic that fears nothing.

MD 421 Kompakt delivers the legendary performance of the original MD 421 and MD 421-II but in a truly multipurpose package — including a completely redesigned mounting clip. Just like the originals, it offers remarkable dynamic range and pristine sound reproduction to handle whatever the creative process requires in live sound and recording applications.

sennheiser.com

app's practice tools as well! Very nice. Home recording enthusiasts will enjoy the fact that you can also record tracks directly to most computer music software via USB.

If you fancy taking this unit down to the beach for some sunglasses guitar solos, you can power this unit with 8 AA batteries. I'm not sure how long they will last, but I'd imagine it's subject to your overall volume and time spent playing. Another commonly asked question is, "Do you have to use the wireless feature only?" and the answer is no; you are able to plug in, old-school style! I do feel the wireless feature is very practical for home practice, though. If charged up and then left in the guitar and left alone, the Katana will go into standby and turn on when you pick up the guitar and play. I love this feature.

Can I recommend it? Certainly, I can! It's one of the best practice amps

on the market. I own the smaller Katana Air, and that sounds great and has served me very well at home and out and about, at jams, lessons, rehearsals, and when traveling. The AIR EX, of course, is bigger and more powerful, has much more bass response, and seems a little bit more sturdy than its younger sibling due to its construction. If you're looking for an all-in-one practice amp solution that can also promise a bit more, the Katana AIR EX is a must!

Boss *Katana Air Wireless Guitar Amp*

Mooer Ocean Machine II

For players who seek sonic exploration and experimental soundscapes, the Mooer Ocean M unit developed with Devin Townsend, the Ocean Machine II includes dual delay engines and a texture. With tap tempo, MIDI compatibility, and up to 120 seconds of loop recording, it comb **Sam Bell** tells us more.

I had the pleasure of reviewing Devin Townsend's amazing reverb/delay pedal from Mooer when it first appeared on the market. Now, Mooer is back with a second edition of this affordable, compact, and versatile ambience machine! What makes this pedal different from the first edition? Let's find out.

The improved DSP algorithms deliver a superior delay and reverb experience, making this pedal capable of producing pristine, lifelike effects. The nine delay types—including digital, analog, tape, echo, liquid, rainbow, crystal, low-bit, and fuzzy—offer a rich palette for experimentation. Whether you're after the warmth of vintage analog delay or the quirky texture of a low-bit effect, the Ocean Machine provides a tone for every style and mood.

The nine reverb types are equally impressive, ranging from classic room and hall reverbs to more experimental options like

achine II could be your dream come true. The second
a reverb module, providing endless layers of ambient
bines all these features into a serious creative tool.

> *For those who like to integrate their gear into more complex setups, the MIDI In and Thru support is a huge bonus.*

distorted reverb and flanger reverb. The filter and reverse reverb settings open up new sonic landscapes, making it easy to sculpt atmospheric soundscapes for ambient, post-rock, or experimental music. With the Freeze feedback feature, you can sustain your delay or reverb effect indefinitely, allowing for creative builds and sound manipulation.

The looper functionality is another new feature of the Ocean Machine. With up to 120 seconds of recording time, you can easily capture your performance and layer sounds, making it a great tool for live performances or practice sessions. The looper also supports overdubbing, half-speed, and reverse effects, giving you even more ways to manipulate your recorded loops.

The inclusion of a tap tempo footswitch makes syncing your delay effects to your performance

RECOMMENDED PRODUCT

Mooer Ocean Machine II

MSRP: (UK) £225 | (US) $299

The Breakdown

Straight forward — Feature-rich

Specialised — Versatile

Studio — Stage

Affordable — High-end

For fans of

- Sonic experimentation
- Great design
- Devin Townsend

For more information, please visit:

mooeraudio.com

effortless, while the customizable order of effects—either in a parallel or series chain—gives you full control over how your signal is processed. Whether you want to run delay and reverb in parallel for an ethereal sound or combine them in series for a dense, layered effect, the flexibility here is top-notch.

The large LCD screen is a welcome feature, making it easy to see your settings at a glance, even in low-light environments. The twelve physical knobs allow for real-time adjustments to each parameter, providing tactile control over your effects without needing to dig through menus. This makes the Ocean Machine an intuitive choice for both beginners and experienced players who want to fine-tune their sound quickly and efficiently.

Build-wise, the Ocean Machine feels rock solid, designed to withstand the rigors of both studio and live use. The durable construction is backed by true bypass and DSP bypass options, ensuring a transparent signal when the pedal is off. Full stereo inputs and outputs also allow you to take full advantage of the pedal's spacious, wide-ranging effects.

Mooer Ocean Machine II

Build-wise, the Ocean Machine feels rock solid, designed to withstand the rigors of both studio and live use.

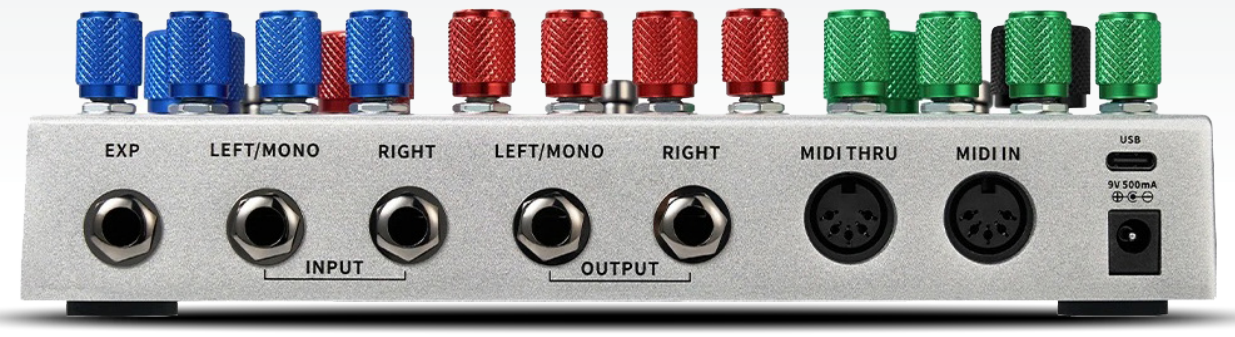
For those who like to integrate their gear into more complex setups, the MIDI In and Thru support is a huge bonus. The pedal can sync with other MIDI-enabled devices, opening up new possibilities for controlling effects via external gear. The USB-C port for firmware updates ensures that the Ocean Machine will remain up-to-date with the latest features and improvements, future-proofing your investment.

In addition to MIDI control, the Ocean Machine supports an external expression pedal (via TRS cable), giving you

hands-on control over parameters like delay time, feedback, or reverb depth. And if you want to further streamline your live setup, it's also compatible with the Mooer F4 wireless footswitch (sold separately), allowing you to control the pedal remotely without the hassle of cables.

The Mooer Ocean Machine is a stellar choice for musicians who want to push the boundaries of delay and reverb effects.

With its high-fidelity sound, extensive range of effects, powerful looper, and intuitive controls, it delivers everything you need for both studio and live performance. Whether you're a solo artist creating ambient layers or a band looking to add atmospheric depth to your sound, the Ocean Machine is up to the task. It's a must-have for anyone looking to explore new sonic territory.



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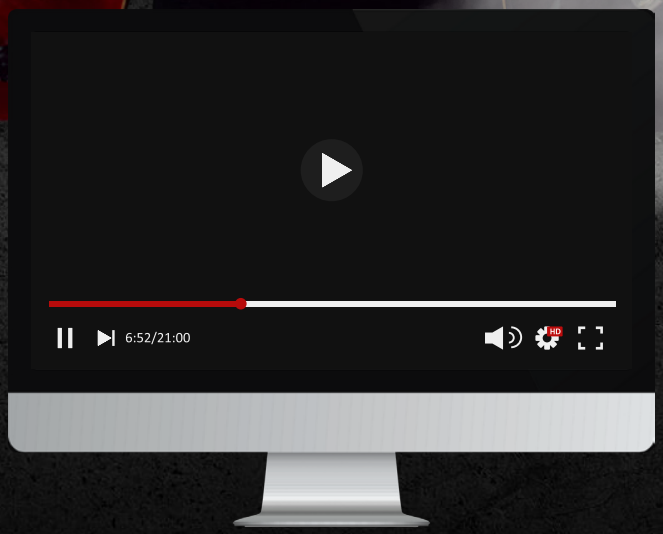

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