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Guitar

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WELCOME TO ISSUE

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JIM ROOT, JOHN PETRUCCI, ORANGE AMPS & MORE...

Editor
Jonathan Graham

As one-half of Slipknot's twin guitar towers, Jim Root has been a driving force behind the band's crushing riffs and evolving sound for over two decades—and he's not done yet. As the band celebrates the anniversary of their groundbreaking debut, #4

himself sat down with Guitar Interactive's Jonathan Graham to discuss revisiting early songs, chasing authentic tones on tour, vintage guitar obsession, potentially taking off the masks, and why the work never really ends.

Meanwhile, prog metal titan John Petrucci joins us to talk Dream Theater's latest epic, *Parasomnia*, the return of Mike Portnoy, the latest additions to his Ernie Ball Music Man Majesty line and why he's always game for another G3 tour if t

he call comes. Expect some deep dives into tone, technique, and a few surprises.

Also, from a derelict shop in London's West End to stages across the globe, Orange Amplification has stood as one of the most iconic names in British tone for nearly six decades—and for good reason. We chart the story of one of the UK's most iconic Amp brands and check out some of their newest releases for 2025.

Plus, as with every issue, we review the latest and greatest guitars, amps, pedals and more shaking up the guitar scene right now. Whether you're a veteran tone chaser or just starting out, this issue's packed with world-class demos and wall-to-wall insight that we hope you will enjoy.

Until next time...

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THE *INTERVIEWS*

As one-half of Slipknot's twin guitar towers, Jim Root has been a driving force behind the band's crushing riffs and evolving sound for over two decades. As Slipknot came through London to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their landmark debut album, #4 himself sat down with Guitar Interactive's **Jonathan Graham** to discuss revisiting early songs, chasing authentic tones on tour, vintage guitar obsession, potentially taking off the masks, and why the work never really ends.

It's hard to believe, but for 40 years, John Petrucci has been shaping the sound of progressive metal and pushing the boundaries of electric guitar — one aggressively picked note at a time. With Dream Theater's latest full-length release, *Parasomnia* (out now worldwide via Inside Out Music), Petrucci sits down with Guitar Interactive's **Jonathan Graham** to discuss the new album, Mike Portnoy's long-awaited return to the lineup, the latest additions to his Ernie Ball Music Man Majesty signature line, getting emotional on tour — and why he's always ready for another G3 tour if Joe Satriani comes calling.

IN-DEPTH CHATS WITH GUITAR'S BIGGEST NAMES



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JIM ROOT:

As one-half of Slipknot's twin guitar towers, Jim Root has been a driving force for over two decades. As Slipknot came through London to celebrate himself sat down with Guitar Interactive's Jonathan Graham to discuss guitar obsession, potentially taking off the masks, and why the work

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'TIL WE DIE

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e the 25th anniversary of their landmark debut album, #4
s revisiting early songs, chasing authentic tones on tour, vintage
never really ends. ▶

"JIM, you're back on tour and playing the band's debut album. How has it been revisiting some of these tracks you haven't played for a while — and is it hard to believe it's been 25 years since it dropped?

"It kind of is. So much can happen in that amount of time, yet it feels like a blink of an eye. Time is funny like that.

Some of these songs, we literally haven't played in 20-plus years. When we started, it's all we had. Now we have so much more, but when you revisit old songs, you realise, 'Wow, that was a crowd favourite. That was a great song to play live.'

Some songs you think are great on the album don't always turn out great live — too many time changes, too many parts, or they're just too fast."

What's an example of a song that was difficult to revisit?

"Some of those songs are fun for us but might not translate live. Anything that's higher tempo without a breakdown can be tough. 'Metabolic' from Iowa — that's a good example. We loved playing it, but it didn't always hit live the way others did."

Talk us through your process of getting authentic tones from the records live.

"I used to build a new rack for every record. 100-watt heads with backups, GCX switching systems, MIDI switchers, custom wahs — it took up a lot of space, and touring kept getting more expensive.

I tried digital processing before. It has its place.

Now I can't find anything that beats the Quad Cortex with a specific IR of a Bogner amp I've been using. It's blowing my mind. I was always an analogue guy — tube amps only — but this Quad Cortex has been a solid tool for downsizing without sacrificing sound."

You never had problems with the feel of a digital rig?

"That's the tricky part. I don't use in-ears; I still use wedges. By the time the sound hits me, it's been through cab sims, boards, EQs, compressors — you lose some nuance. Even if it was a Helios head, it'd still get processed. And with eight guys on stage, so much is going on that you hear everything in context.

"I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WOULD BE COOL TO PLAY WITHOUT CLOTHES. BUT IF WE EVER DID THAT, I

At home, I'm playing through a little Roland digital amp on the couch. It's the same vibe — so I justify it that way in my head."

What about guitar-wise? What have you got out with you on the road for this tour?

"A lot of Charvels, Jacksons, and Fenders. Most of them are ones I picked up off

Reverb, The Music Zoo, or Diablo Guitars. I also went down this wormhole trying to find Model 5s like I had in the late '80s. I think I have seven or eight of them now.

Then I started getting DK Series Jacksons — the bolt-on neck ones — and had some custom builds made. ▶

LAY ONE HALLOWEEN SHOW JUST IN REGULAR IT MIGHT FEEL LIKE THE END TO ME."

But man, when I pick up a Strat or Tele, I'm like, 'Oh, I love this too.' It's a disease."

The idea of '90s or '80s guitars being vintage now still seems a bit crazy, but that's what they are. What draws you to older instruments?

"It comes down to the wood. A lot of guitars from the '80s, '90s, and earlier — even cheaper models — were made with old-growth wood.

You can find a £200 guitar, swap the pickups and hardware, refret it if needed, and you've got something incredible. There's a difference in the tightness of the grain and the porousness of the wood."

If you find an old piece of mahogany that's really light, it's crazy. Did it fall into a river

and fill with ice holes, making millions of tiny tone chambers? Or was it just the soil it grew in? It's bananas."

Taking things back to the start, Jim — that first audition with Slipknot. What are some memories of it?

"Well, it wasn't really an audition as such. Des Moines had a big scene. I'd played with everyone already — Heads on the Wall, Vex, Modifidious. When I met Clown and heard what they were recording, I was hesitant. I'm an only child, pretty set in my ways. But Clown said, 'We've all played with you before,' and it clicked. The hardest part of the whole thing was quitting my job at the t-shirt shop without notice. ▶



Jim Root - Interview

Jim Root



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We rehearsed in Sid's basement — loud as hell. The energy was electric.

Learning songs like 'Surfacing', Joey pointing out when I missed parts — nose to the grindstone. That mentality still drives us."

Was there a feeling the band would get as big as it did?

"No. Joe was the first who thought it would blow up. At Ozzfest, he was pissed about the monitors, saying, 'This band is going to be bigger than you think. We need to get our shit together.' He was intense about it — and right.

Good enough isn't good enough. If you want something, you work for it. The work never ends."

After the global success of the band's first album, did you feel the pressure when writing and recording Iowa?

"The mindset was: screw the sophomore slump. We wanted the heaviest record ever. We rehearsed riffs like 'People = Shit' at soundchecks before they became songs. As soon as we got home, Paul called and said, 'Get to Tony's house. We're writing.' There was no downtime.

We never stopped working."

Anonymity was a big part of the band's story in the early days. That would surely be impossible now?

"I don't know if it matters now. We're already talking about the vibe and wardrobe for the next album."

Taking off the masks?

"I don't know. I always thought it would be cool to play one Halloween show just in regular clothes.

But if we ever did that, it might feel like the end to me. I sometimes wonder how differently I'd act on stage without the mask and coveralls. I guess we'll never know."

25 years in, and a new generation is coming to the shows. Are you feeling that younger crowd energy from the stage?

"Yeah, a little bit. It's good to see. For young people with all this energy, metal music is an outlet. It was for me and my friends. Metal shows are aggressive — you can get into a pit and work out all that emotion. It's therapeutic.

"WE'RE ALREADY TALKING ABOUT THE VIBE"



It's still true today, but now I look out and see people in the pit facing themselves with their phones — probably doing an Instagram Live. Reminds me of that Chappelle bit — I'm in their dream instead of them being in mine."

Does that energy remind you of anything from Slipknot's early days?

"Definitely. The first time I saw people really going crazy at one of our shows, it was unreal. It felt dangerous, but in a good way. You could feel the energy bounce off the walls.

Even now, seeing younger fans come out, it's like we're watching the cycle start over. They're just discovering this thing we ▶

E AND WARDROBE FOR THE NEXT ALBUM."

built 25 years ago, and it's wild to be part of that."

What advice would you give a young fan going to their first Slipknot show — or any metal show, for that matter?

"Man, it's going to be information overload — not just from the show, but from the crowd, the vendors, even just walking up to the venue. It's a full experience. In America, it used to feel like tailgating. You'd see the tour buses and go, 'There they are.'

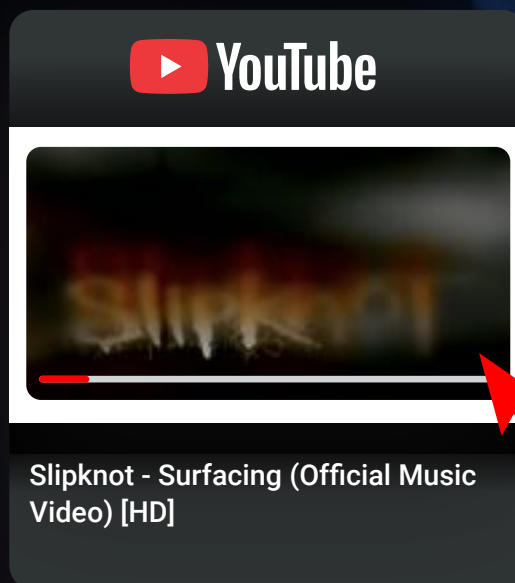
Back then, you didn't have instant access to artists. If they weren't in a magazine or on MTV, they basically didn't exist. I remember being at Vets Auditorium — Megadeth was opening for Alice Cooper — and I saw Dave Mustaine on a skateboard by the buses. I completely lost it. I was like, 'This is insane. He's real.' I'd only ever seen him in magazines and videos, and suddenly, there he was, just skating around.

Then he came out on stage with that shiny Jackson King V, lights bouncing off it, and I was like, 'Holy shit — a King V!' That kind of moment sticks with you.

I'd tell a kid to try to absorb it all. Take it in. The crowd, the atmosphere, the sound, the characters... let it all hit you."

Is Slipknot working on new music right now?

"Not diligently. We've been touring so much that my inspiration's nearly zero. There's a bunch of stuff written during



COVID that I'm honestly not interested in anymore, and I think the rest of the band feels the same way.

We probably need to sweep all that under the rug and start fresh. What I really need is to get touring behind us and take at least a month off to shut my brain off, get some sleep, and reset.

Once I find myself heading out to my little home studio and putting riffs together, that's when I'll know it's time to start again." ▶



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"I'M AN ONLY CHILD, PRETTY SET IN MY WAYS. BUT CLOWN SAID, 'WE'VE ALL PLAYED WITH YOU BEFORE,' AND IT CLICKED."

You have the 25th anniversary reissue of the self-titled album coming up. What can you tell us about it?

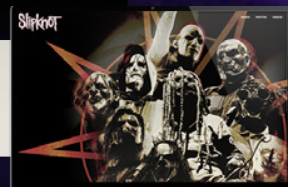
"There's vinyl, different covers — everything you could throw at it. It looks really cool. I kind of want all of it."

There are so many biopics in the works these days. If there were ever a Slipknot

one, Jim, when the credits rolled, what track would play?

"Oh shit. 'Till We Die', probably. Just like the end of the show. Certain shows — not this show, because it's the 25th anniversary — but any normal show, we usually play 'Till We Die' because I think it'll end up being that way." 🍷

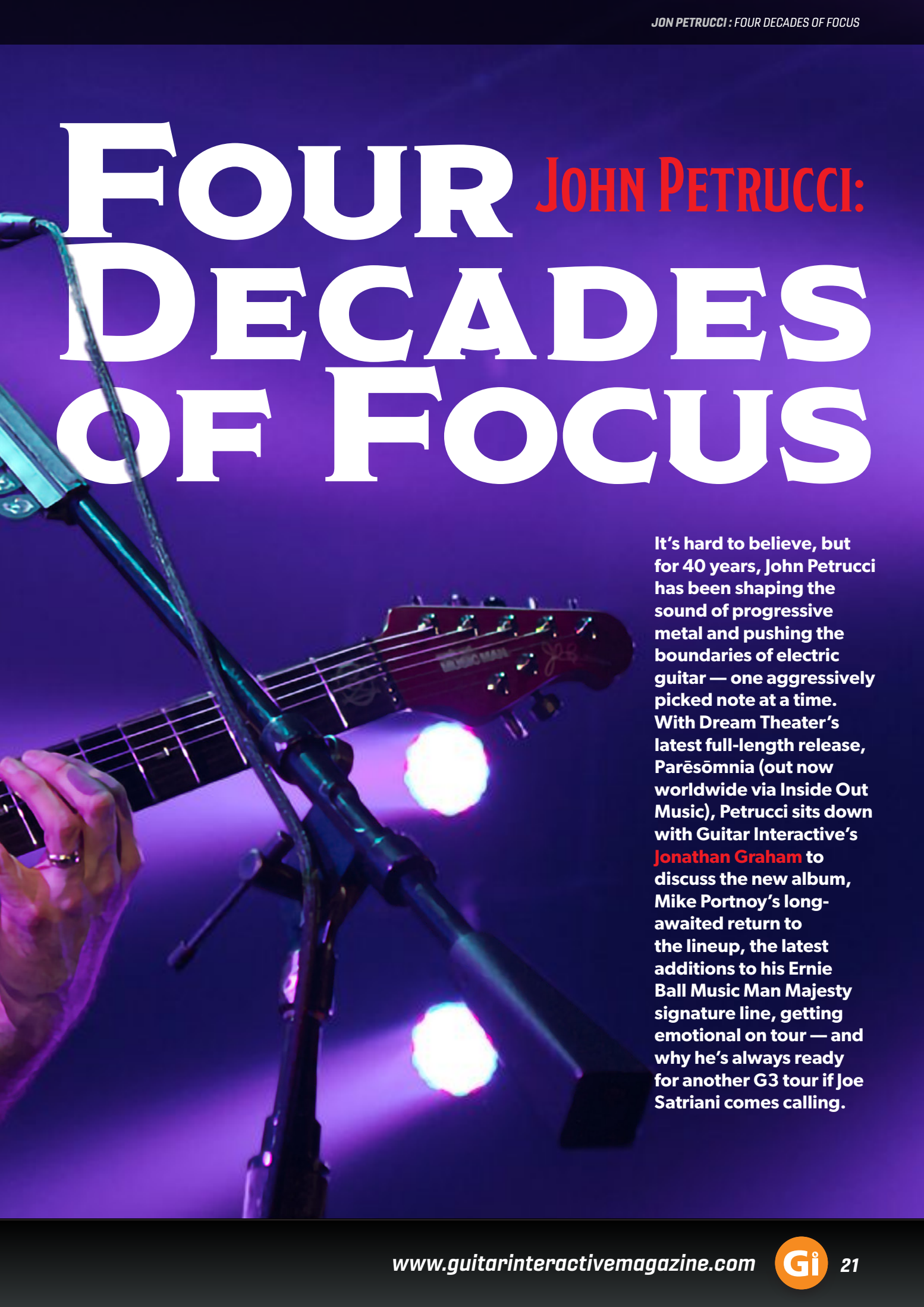
For more information on Slipknot, including new releases, tour dates and ticket information, **visit slipknot1.com**



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FOUR JOHN PETRUCCI: DECADES OF FOCUS



It's hard to believe, but for 40 years, John Petrucci has been shaping the sound of progressive metal and pushing the boundaries of electric guitar — one aggressively picked note at a time. With Dream Theater's latest full-length release, *Parasomnia* (out now worldwide via Inside Out Music), Petrucci sits down with Guitar Interactive's **Jonathan Graham** to discuss the new album, Mike Portnoy's long-awaited return to the lineup, the latest additions to his Ernie Ball Music Man Majesty signature line, getting emotional on tour — and why he's always ready for another G3 tour if Joe Satriani comes calling.

“JOHN, congratulations on *Parësōmnia*. Could you tell us a bit about how special it was putting this together from your perspective? The band is clearly so energized.

“Absolutely. Well, first of all, *Parësōmnia* is a term — it’s a weird word — but it’s very appropriate for Dream Theater because it means sleep disturbances: night terrors, sleep paralysis, sleepwalking.

The album is thematic and conceptual and has to do with characters going through these different events. It was a really special album to make because, as most people know, it’s the first one with our original drummer, Mike Portnoy, rejoining the band since the *Black Clouds & Silver Linings* days — so it’s been like 13 years.

We entered the studio in February of last year, and it was just like... your brother’s back. John Myung and I met Mike when we were 18 at Berklee College of Music — we were kids. So, having him back in the band has just been amazing.

We’re also at the point where — this hurts me to say in some ways, but it’s also fun to

say — it’s the 40th anniversary. We’re really fortunate to have had a career that long. So this is the 40th-anniversary tour. There are so many milestones: Mike returning, the first record with him in many years, and us celebrating this huge anniversary. It’s been incredible.”

Did you always feel like Mike Portnoy would rejoin the band?

“You know, it’s hard to say. It’s not something that you really predict or plan. Everything aligned — the stars aligned — and it was the right time to do it.”

As expected, the new album’s full of great solos. Picking out the solo section in “Night Terror,” what’s your process for putting something so challenging together like that?

“It’s insane — you wouldn’t play that unless you felt it. There are actually three sections to it. One is this crazy unison that Jordan and I are doing, which was me firing up this new technique I’ve been working on — this crazy, hyper-speed picking thing. I always wanted to do something like that. The main guitar solo section really drew inspiration from our

“I MET MIKE WHEN WE WERE 18 AT BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC – WE WERE KIDS. SO HAVING HIM BACK IN THE BAND HAS JUST BEEN AMAZING.”

favourite band of all time, which is Rush.”

And just to get nerdy for a second — when I played this guitar solo, I limited myself to only using the notes of the certain scale that the song is based on. Not going out of it at all, which was a total challenge.

It’s called Super Phrygian, and it has a really exotic, weird sound. Then the third part goes into a more melodic, thematic thing — which is something I really love to do. And that’s when you hear everybody singing along in the audience.”

This tour and reunion record has been an emotional one for you, right? Especially that opening night at London’s O2. Did the intensity of it all surprise you?

“It did. We all feel it every night — from that first O2 show. As soon as our Kabuki thing dropped and we hit the beginning of ‘Metropolis,’ I mean, the looks on people’s faces in the audience... just seeing everybody hugging and

crying, and us kind of doing the same thing on stage — pinching ourselves.

There’s a definite, palpable energy and elation in the audience — and that feeds through to the stage. It’s been incredible, man.”

John, you just dropped some new additions to the Ernie Ball Music Man Majesty signature line. How involved do you get with the new tops and finishes? Do you just trust the Music Man team to surprise you these days, or do you still give input?



“Yeah, it’s a little bit of both. I do trust them. Like, they’re so incredible at it that I’m, you know, I’m like, ‘You guys just do your thing.’ And then at the same time, I’ll have suggestions — ‘I’d like to do something like this,’ and then they’ll make that happen as well. So it’s a combination of both.

But I have a hundred percent trust that they’re going to come up with something stunning. I always look forward to the call — like, ‘Okay, you’re on FaceTime, we’ve got the new one.’ And I’m just like, ‘Oh my God’ — I’m drooling.”

Just like with Music Man, in your Ibanez days there were some iconic finishes on those JP models. Do you know who owns the rights to those early graphics? Is it possible those designs could ever be

used on a Music Man guitar?

“That’s a good question. Yeah, it was certainly an artist who did that, so I don’t know what the ownership of it is. I don’t think so. I think that stuff will have to stay in its own realm.”

Is it true that agreeing to do the G3 tour was the catalyst for your first solo album, *Suspended Animation*?

“Absolutely was, yeah. In fact, when Joe Satriani asked me — it was 2001 — we were actually recording *Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence*, and I got the call from my manager. I was like, ‘Of course I want to do it.’

Then it hit me — ‘What the hell am I going to play?’ I didn’t have any solo material.



Jon Petrucci - Interview

ERNE BALL TIM HENSON

SIGNATURE STRINGS

Tim Henson



CLASSICAL



ELECTRIC

So yeah, I wrote a few songs for that tour, and those songs ended up being part of *Suspended Animation*. Joe completely lit a fire under me to get some solo guitar instrumental music out.”

Would you be up for doing another G3 tour if Joe asks the question?

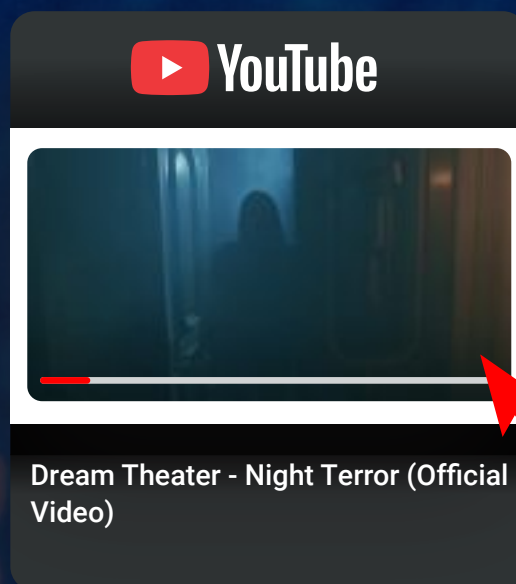
“Well, you know, for me — I would say yes to a G3 invite in a heartbeat. I love Joe, and I love all the guitar players — Steve, and everybody who’s always involved with it. So yeah, if Joe asks me, I’m there. I always say that. Absolutely.”

How about another solo record down the line?

“Yeah. My last one was *Terminal Velocity*, which I wrote during the pandemic — when everybody was home.

I thought, ‘If I don’t do it now, I never will,’ because the space between that and *Suspended Animation* was, I don’t know — 15 years?

That was the Eric Johnson thing — except I think I beat Eric with the space between records.



So, hopefully, I won’t wait as long to do another one, but I’d love to. It’s just a matter of opportunity, because Dream Theater’s got so much going on. With all the touring, it’s hard to find those pockets of time.”

Dream Theater’s latest album *Parasomnia* is out now worldwide via Inside Out Music.

For more information, visit www.dreamtheater.net.



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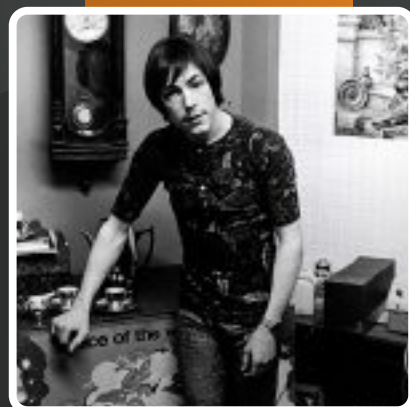


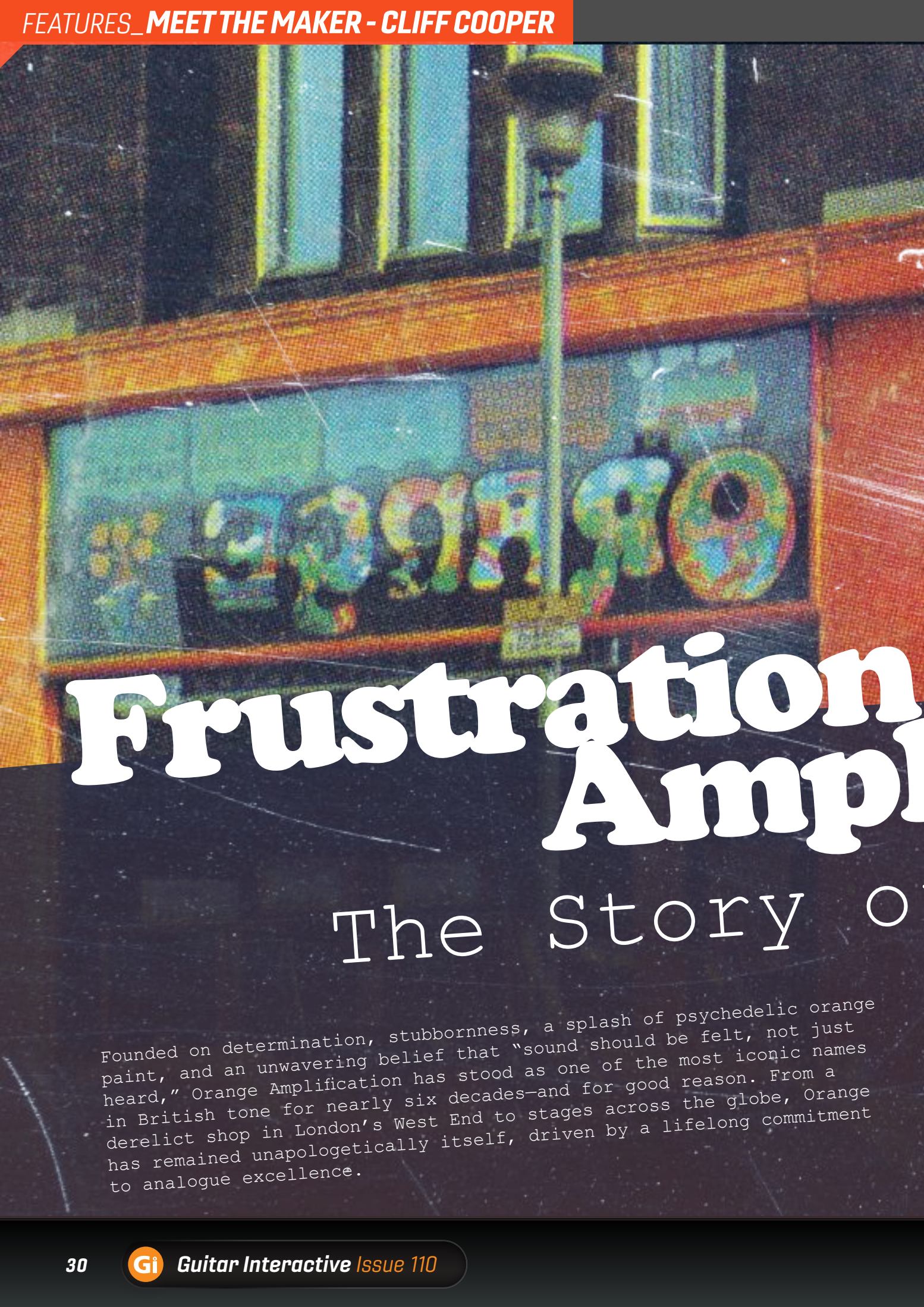
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THE FEATURES

Founded on determination, stubbornness, a splash of psychedelic orange paint, and an unwavering belief that “sound should be felt, not just heard,” Orange Amplification has stood as one of the most iconic names in British tone for nearly six decades—and for good reason. From a derelict shop in London’s West End to stages across the globe, Orange has remained unapologetically itself, driven by a lifelong commitment to analogue excellence.

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Founded on determination, stubbornness, a splash of psychedelic orange paint, and an unwavering belief that "sound should be felt, not just heard," Orange Amplification has stood as one of the most iconic names in British tone for nearly six decades—and for good reason. From a derelict shop in London's West End to stages across the globe, Orange has remained unapologetically itself, driven by a lifelong commitment to analogue excellence.

to Amplification: Cliff of Orange Amps

In this edition's Meet the Maker, Guitar Interactive's **Jonathan Graham** sits down with founder and owner Cliff Cooper to take a closer look at Orange Amplification's unconventional rise, the personalities that helped shape its unmistakable sound, and the gear that continues to inspire musicians across generations—as the company begins rolling out a bold new chapter in 2025. ▶

“WHEN we started the shop in 1968, the truth is, nobody would supply us,” recalls Cooper. “We couldn’t get Fender, Gibson, Marshall—nobody. So, with my background in electronics, we decided to build our own amplifier.”

At the time, Cooper had taken over a run-down premises in London and transformed it into a studio, a hangout, and ultimately a beacon for a new kind of musician—one unbothered by suits and sales pitches. His vision was community-first: a creative hub where artists could jam, sip coffee, and find gear that felt built for them.

A chance encounter with Matt Mathias of Matamp in Huddersfield

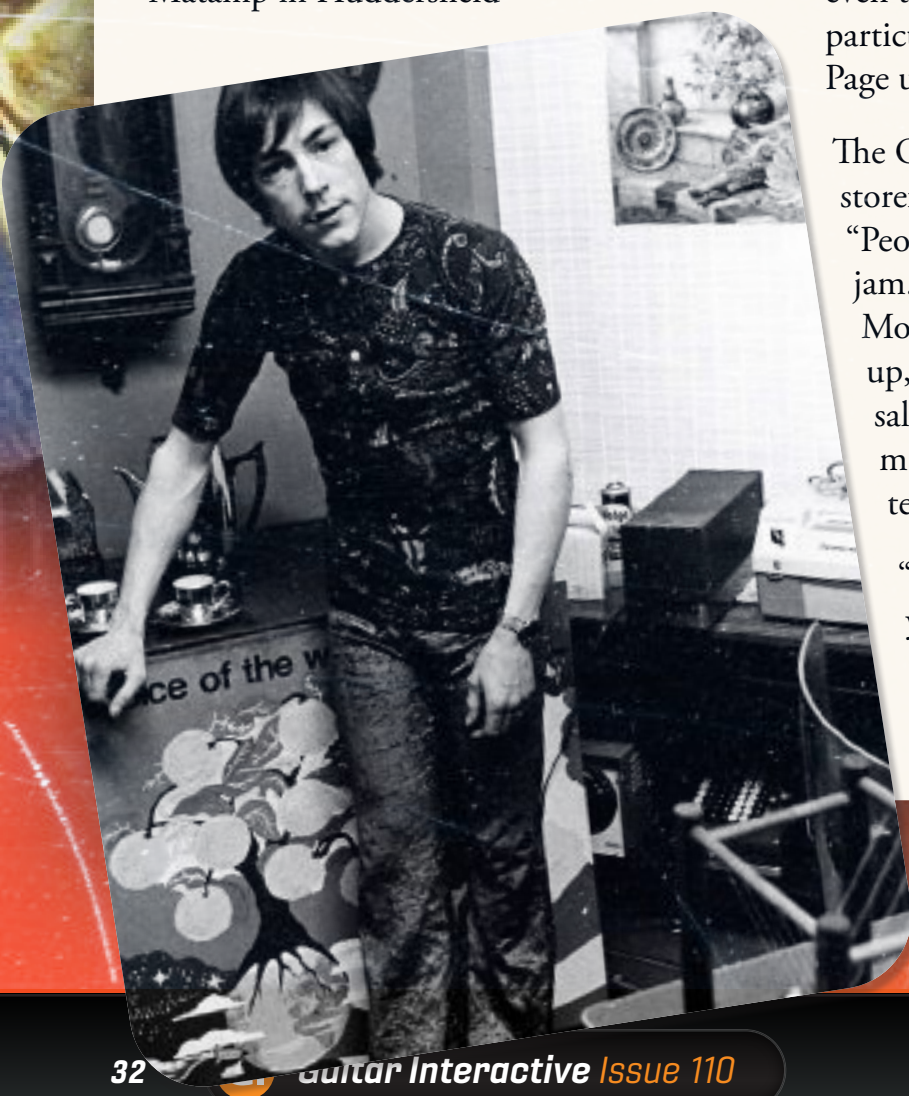
changed everything. “Matt was a lovely guy,” Cooper says. “He made beautifully built amps—but they were a bit too hi-fi for what we wanted. So we modified them, gave them more bite, more edge.”

“I painted the shop orange. It was my favourite colour. Everything was so drab back then—black alleys, grey buildings. I wanted something bold. So we called the amp ‘Orange’ too. It just made sense.”

The first amps bore the co-branded name “Orange Matamp,” and quickly found fans in London’s emerging blues-rock scene. “We got lucky,” Cooper says. “Peter Green’s Fleetwood Mac were one of the first to use it. They took it on tour in America—even though it cost a fortune to ship. That particular 200-watt head over there? Jimmy Page used that one.”

The Orange shop was never just a storefront—it was a cultural magnet. “People would come in, hang around, jam. Paul Kossoff would pop in. Gary Moore. Even John Lennon once showed up,” Cooper laughs. “Other shops had salesmen in suits. Ours had long-haired musicians playing guitars and drinking tea.”

“Peter Green was one of my favourites, you know,” he adds. “The fact that he was one of the first to use our amps—it meant the world.”



“When we started the shop in 1968, the truth is, nobody would supply us... We couldn’t get Fender, Gibson, Marshall—nobody..” – Cliff Cooper

One visitor in particular changed everything. “When Stevie Wonder started using our studio—that really launched us globally. That’s when I knew we had something special.”

That “something special” soon had a name: the OR120. With its signature “Pics Only” control panel—symbols instead of text—it became a defining part of Orange’s identity.

“At the time, we were exporting to places where people didn’t speak English,” Cooper explains. “Even road signs were switching to symbols. So I thought, why not amps? Some thought it was silly, but now those hieroglyphics are part of who we are.”

Downstairs from the shop, Cooper had built a small studio that quickly became a creative sanctuary. “We weren’t just selling amps,” he says. “We were recording artists. Stevie Wonder, Gary Moore, members of Fleetwood Mac—

they all passed through that basement.”

It eventually became Orange Studios, and briefly Orange Records—a DIY label that mirrored the brand’s ethos: break rules, serve artists, and do things your own way.

Throughout the ‘70s, Orange remained fiercely independent, developing amps that were as visually distinctive as they were sonically unique. The Hustler, OMIC, and Jimmy Beans transistor models followed—each representing





Orange's attempt to adapt without losing character.

"I never liked transistor amps all that much," Cooper admits. "But we tried. Jimmy Beans, for example, sounded about as good as a solid-state amp could at the time."

But tubes remained at the heart of the Orange philosophy.

"Well, I'll tell you a secret," Cooper grins. "The real Orange sound? It's in the output transformer. Most amps have three windings—primary and secondary. But that design causes these transients—high-frequency pulses that kill the tone. Adrian [Emsley, Technical Director] developed one

with eight interleaved windings to eliminate that. Even our small amps like the Tiny Terror have five. That's why they sound so rich."

One band that brought heavy credibility to Orange in the early days was Black Sabbath. Though never an exclusive artist deal, Sabbath's use of Orange heads in rehearsal and studio environments helped cement the brand's then underground reputation for brutal, unfiltered tone.

For Cooper, that connection to the heavier side of rock was never the plan—but it became part of the Orange DNA. "I didn't ever think our amps would be known for high distortion. Back then, I was just pissed

off no one would supply me,” he laughs. “I look back now and think—why wouldn’t they? I was ready to pay.”

By the early ‘80s, Japanese manufacturers dominated the affordable amp market. Tube amps were expensive, and digital was on the rise. Orange quietly scaled back operations—but the flame never fully went out.

In the mid-’90s, a new generation of guitarists—raised on grunge, stoner rock, and vintage tone—rediscovered Orange. Demand surged for used models. Soon, the OR series and AD30 were back in production.

A major part of Orange’s modern resurgence can be traced back to one

man: Adrian Emsley, the company’s long-standing Technical Director. Since the early 2000s, Emsley has played a pivotal role in reshaping the tonal identity of Orange’s second era—blending vintage valve character with modern reliability and player-focused features.

“He just gets it,” Cooper says. “He knows what a great amp should feel like. Sometimes I can’t even explain it—I just say, ‘That’s it, you’ve nailed it.’ And he always does.”

Emsley’s design fingerprints are all over Orange’s most important contemporary releases. He masterminded the Tiny Terror, the compact 15-watt head that redefined what a small amp could do. “It was the first of those lunchbox amps that didn’t



Cliff Cooper - Interview

sound small,” Cooper notes. Emsley also developed the Rockerverb, a flagship model known for its touch-sensitive cleans, versatile EQ, and punishing high-gain tones.

He’s behind the Dual Terror, the high-wattage AD series, and most recently, the Marcus King Signature—a stripped-back head built around pure feel and harmonics. But it’s his uncompromising approach to tone that defines his legacy most.

His obsession with output transformer quality and circuit simplicity ties directly back to Cliff’s original ethos. As Cooper

puts it: “We’re not chasing complexity—we’re chasing feel. And Adrian knows exactly where to find it.”

By the 2000s and 2010s, Orange had gone from cult to cornerstone. The Crush series brought its tone into practice rooms and bedrooms. Artists like Jim Root, Brent Hinds, and Geddy Lee carried the flag into new genres.

Today, Orange amps are everywhere—from boutique studios in Nashville to festival stages in Japan.

And while modeling amps flood the market, Orange remains committed to analogue craftsmanship.



"You can say it sounds the same," Cliff shrugs. "But it doesn't feel the same. And for a musician, that feeling is everything."

After nearly 60 years, Cooper has heard his amps brought to life on thousands of great albums—but there are a few "favourites," as he puts it.

"Stevie Wonder used Orange on *Superstition*. I couldn't believe it. That still makes me proud... then there's B.B. King and so many more."

But that doesn't mean he's stuck in the past—he's just as tuned in to the new generation of players flying the Orange flag.

"I idolise Marcus King," he says. "The guy is a genius. We made him a signature amp—just three knobs. He wanted it simple. Like Page, like Phil Lynott. They don't want to tweak. They just want to play."

In 2025, Orange has a new wave of gear in its catalogue that honours its well-earned reputation while embracing the new. To start, there's the Marcus King Signature Amp—a stripped-back little powerhouse



that nails that rich Orange tone without overcomplicating things. The OR120 Reissue brings back one of their most iconic models—same "Pics Only" face, but with modern reliability baked in. The Baby Series combos focus on portability without sacrificing that signature growl, while the Outturn bass heads give players a compact but seriously punchy option for ▶

"Peter Green was one of my favourites, you know... The fact that he was one of the first to use our amps—it meant the world" - Cliff Cooper

“I hope Orange is still here in 50 years’ time—we’ll always back our gear. There’s no reason an Orange amp should ever be thrown away” – Cliff Cooper

the low end. The Signature Reverb 20? Already sold out and on back-order—no surprise, really, given how good it sounds. Also joining the line-up are the Orianthi Signature Crush 35, delivering vibrant cleans and searing lead tones in a portable format, and the Glenn Hughes Signature Crush Bass 50—a punchy, road-ready combo built to meet the demands of one of rock’s most powerful bassists.

So what does the future for Orange look like in Cliff Cooper’s eyes? Well, the mission remains the same—build amps that last, inspire, and never compromise on tone. But also, potentially, with a digital twist.

“We’re doing some great things with the new amps,” Cliff says. “The latest models are as good as they’ve ever been. The Baby Series is fantastic. The Outtern range has taken off nicely. And the new Signature Reverb—we can’t keep up with demand.”

But he’s also eyeing new territory. “We’re probably going to bring out digital amps—but under a different name: Omeg,” he reveals. “They’ll be black instead of orange, and they’ll live separately from the main line. We’re going to keep Orange Amps analogue the way they are now. That

way, we don’t compromise the identity of Orange.”

It’s a decision that reflects Cooper’s ongoing balancing act—honouring the core values of the brand while carving out space for innovation in an industry that’s evolving fast.

“Yeah, I think it’s going to be very, very changeable,” he says. “There are so many things happening—not just in the UK, but all over the world. Politics and everything else now plays into business in a way it didn’t years ago. It’s all interconnected now.”

Some of those shifts give him pause—particularly the rise of throwaway culture and tech that prioritises convenience over quality.

“Some of these new trends, everything’s expensive and disposable. That’s not us.”

So what is them, then? Reliability. Longevity. Craftsmanship. A quiet defiance of the fast-paced, short-lifecycle mindset in favour of something that lasts.

“The valve technology—it’s already about as good as it gets,” Cooper says. “It’s not going to evolve much more. So there’s no



reason these amps shouldn't double, triple, even quadruple in value over time. And that, to me, really means a lot."

Sixty years on from that first splash of psychedelic orange paint, Cliff Cooper's original mission still holds true—and long may that be the case, as he adds with a note of optimistic pride:

"I hope Orange is still here in 50 years' time. And we'll always provide spares, support—we'll always back our gear. There's no reason an Orange amp should ever be thrown away."



*For more information on Orange Amplification and its latest products, visit **orangeamps.com***



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- *Musical freedom for everyone. No music background required.*
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THE REVIEWS

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GUITARS, AMPS AND EFFECTS

PRODUCT RECOMMENDED
Gi
PRODUCT RECOMMENDED

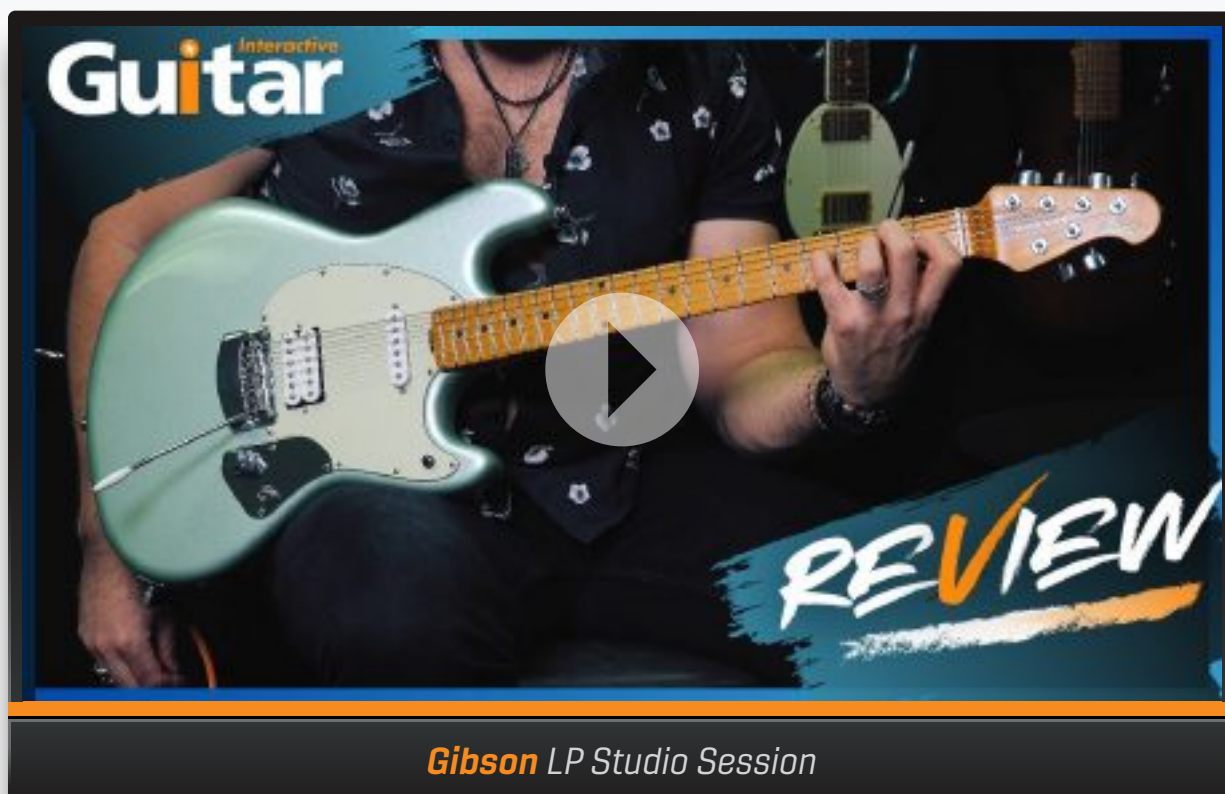


Music Man Dustin Kensrue Artist Series

Nick Jennison reviews the Dustin Kensrue Artist Series StingRay—a stripped-back yet innominate guitar designed in collaboration with Thrice frontman Dustin Kensrue. With a lightweight okoumé body and stainless steel frets, it offers smooth playability and rock-solid tone. A custom humbucker/single-coil selector switch for expanded routing options. Available in Dark Satin Tobacco, TV Blonde, and the new

THE new Dustin Kensrue Signature StingRay from Ernie Ball Music Man is a perfect example of how an artist model can strike a balance between vintage aesthetics and modern functionality. Built in collaboration with the Thrice frontman, this guitar builds on the StingRay platform and adds a host of smart, player-focused updates that make it more than just a pretty face.

Let's start with the looks—because let's be honest, it's hard not to. The finish is called Daiquiri Ice, and it's gorgeous. Think somewhere between surf green and Daphne blue, with just enough sparkle to catch the light without going over the top. Paired with a mint pickguard, it nails that classic '50s California vibe while still feeling fresh and unique. ▶



StingRay

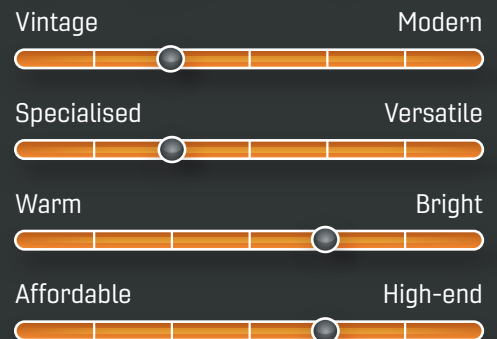
ovative guitar from the folks at Ernie Ball Music
ume body, roasted maple neck, and 22 stainless
combo runs through a clever stereo push-button
v-for-2025 Daiquiri Ice. Fancy!



Music Man Dustin Kensrue Artist Series StingRay

MSRP: (UK) £3,299 | (US) \$2,999

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Offset StingRay ergonomics with roasted maple feel
- » Stereo and bi-amping capabilities
- » Thrice

For more information, please visit:

music-man.com





At the headstock, you'll find Music Man's familiar 4+2 tuner layout, designed for straight string pull and rock-solid tuning. Flip it over and you'll see a set of Schaller locking tuners, which make restringing fast and fuss-free. The neck features an ultra-thin satin polyurethane finish—a departure from Music Man's usual oil-and-wax treatment, but it still feels smooth and comfortable in the hand.

The profile is a little chunkier than you might expect from Music Man, offering a bit more grip without ever feeling cumbersome. Whether you're digging in hard or playing something more delicate, it's a neck that accommodates both. The

rosewood fretboard has 22 medium frets and large black dot inlays, continuing the understated vintage feel.

Plug it in, and the custom HS pickup configuration reveals its flexibility. Designed specifically for this model, the pickups are voiced to cover a lot of ground. The control setup includes a three-way selector switch and a stacked concentric volume and tone knob. But the standout feature here is the bypass button, which sends the bridge humbucker straight to the output, bypassing the volume and tone controls entirely. It's not a boost in the traditional sense, but it does give the sound a bit

more brightness and bite—ideal for cutting through in a live mix or bringing out the natural aggression of the pickup.

And then there's the stereo routing option. With a TRS cable and the bypass engaged, the guitar can send the neck and bridge pickups to separate outputs. That opens up a ton of creative possibilities—running each pickup into its own amp, splitting them into different pedal chains, or using something like an octave pedal on the neck pickup to create a faux bassline under your main guitar sound. It's a feature that may fly under the radar at first but has huge potential in the right rig.

Around the back, the okoume body keeps the guitar lightweight and well-balanced. The Music Man two-point tremolo comes set up for dive-only action out of the box, but you can float it easily if that's more your thing. There's also a recessed backplate for easy trem adjustments and a battery compartment neatly integrated into the design.

Tonally, the guitar is just as versatile as the specs suggest. Clean tones are crisp and clear, while the bridge humbucker delivers tight, focused drive with enough punch for heavier genres. The 22uF tone cap offers a subtle, smooth roll-off—perfect if you like to fine-tune your highs without dulling the signal too much.

All in all, the Dustin Kensrue Signature StingRay is a seriously well-thought-out guitar. It looks great, plays effortlessly, and offers a level of tonal control and flexibility that goes way beyond what you'd expect from most artist models. Whether you're a Thrice fan or just someone looking for a rock-solid offset with studio-ready smarts, this guitar hits the mark.



Fret-King Elise Custom with Vintage Vibr

If you love the vibe of a semi-hollow but want something a bit more adventurous than the usual ES-style clone, this is your next crush. With a chambered body, offset styling, and a clever pickup configuration—this one covers a lot of tonal ground. Throw in the Wilkinson vibrato and signature Fret-King finish, and the Elise is versatile. **Nick Jennison** tells us more

THE Fret-King Elise Custom with Vintage Vibrato is one of those guitars that catches your attention with its looks, then keeps you hooked with its thoughtful design. It's a semi-hollow with vintage character, modern wiring, and a few clever tweaks that make it feel refreshingly individual in a world of familiar silhouettes.

The Elise isn't trying to be another ES-style clone. Its offset body shape gives it a slightly more aggressive edge, and the carved maple top paired with a mahogany back and center block gives you that perfect blend of resonance and feedback control. The gloss cherry finish ties it all together with a classic, high-end feel. ▶



ato

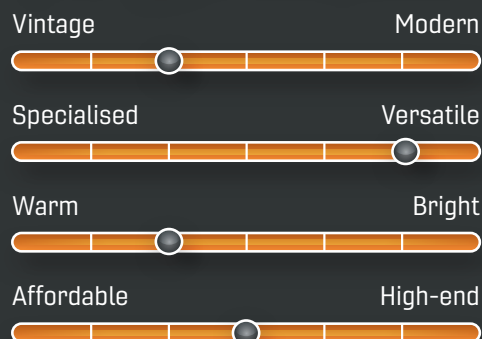
ual suspects, the Fret-King Elise Custom might be including a P90 and a vintage-voiced humbucker—mojo, and you've got a guitar that's as unique as it



Fret-King Elise Custom with Vintage Vibrato

MSRP: (UK) £1,099 | (US) \$N/A

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Maximum tonal versatility
- » Classy semi-hollow looks
- » Vintage tremolo shimmers

For more information, please visit:

jhs.co.uk/collections/fret-king-guitars



From clean jazz runs to raunchy slide lines, the Elise handles a surprising range of styles. Jazz tones feel open and airy, especially with the Vari-Coil rolled halfway down.

The mahogany neck is slim and fast — comfortably in that 60s-style carve zone — and it's topped with a bound rosewood board and low-profile vintage frets. They may not be ideal for players who live for big bends on jumbo wire, but for expressive, articulate playing, they suit the guitar's voice perfectly. Combined with a contoured heel and the offset lower horn, upper fret access is genuinely impressive for a semi-hollow.

Visually, the headstock leans into Fret-King's own identity with a six-a-side "rake" design that feels right at home on this guitar. It's functional too, offering straight string pull — a detail that matters when you're using a vibrato.

Speaking of which, the Wilkinson locking roller bridge and VW vintage vibrato setup is one of the Elise's most interesting features. The roller bridge eliminates friction and keeps tuning stable, while the vibrato unit adds a soft shimmer and a subtle metallic air to the guitar's tone. It's not a dive-bomber, and it's not trying to be — but it adds something musical and distinct to both clean and driven playing.

The electronics are where this guitar really shines. Fret-King's custom-wound 55 humbuckers sound warm, articulate, and full

of character. But it's the switching options that set things apart. A push-push tone control flips the pickups out of phase in the middle position, delivering that unmistakable Peter Green-style hollow tone. And the Vari-Coil — Fret-King's take on a continuously variable coil-split — lets you blend between full humbucker and single-coil with precision. Want just a touch more brightness? Roll it back a notch. Want full single-coil clarity? Keep going. It's a brilliantly simple, endlessly usable feature that adds real versatility without any tonal compromise.

From clean jazz runs to raunchy slide lines, the Elise handles a surprising range of styles. Jazz tones feel open and airy, especially with the Vari-Coil rolled halfway down. Blues players will love the out-of-phase middle setting, which responds beautifully to touch and dynamics. The bridge pickup with some gain delivers a classic rock grind that can shift from barky to jangly in seconds, depending on how you set the Vari-Coil. While it's not aimed at high-gain metal, it can still handle saturated lead tones with surprising clarity and sustain — especially with a little delay and compression.

Out of the box, the setup leans a little conservative — around 1.9mm action on the treble side — which gives it a bit of stiffness, ►



It's classy, clever, and full of character — a real player's guitar.



but also makes it ideal for slide. If you prefer a lower action, the bridge can easily be adjusted thanks to its locking design.

In short, the Elise Custom with Vintage Vibrato feels like a guitar built by people who actually play guitars. It's vintage-inspired but not stuck in the past, offering tones that are classic, flexible, and deeply musical. The Vari-Coil and phase switch alone make it a standout in its category —

not just cool features for the sake of it, but tools that genuinely expand what the guitar can do.

If you're looking for something that sits somewhere between traditional semi-hollow tone and forward-thinking versatility, the Elise Custom more than earns its place in the conversation. It's classy, clever, and full of character — a real player's guitar.



MOOER

GE1000/GE1000Li

Intelligent Multi Effect Pedal



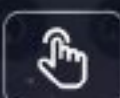
The GE1000 comes preloaded with an impressive bank of guitar effects and amp simulations, but this is augmented further through MNRS GE Cloud support.

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.

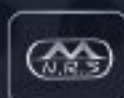
MOOER has always excelled at providing innovative UI experiences, and the GE1000 is set to continue this trend. The pedal features a 5-inch high-quality colored touch screen designed for intuitive multi-effect workflows while keeping some fan favorites from previous GE pedals. The pedal will be sold 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



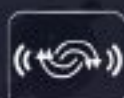
5-inch
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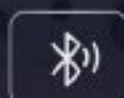
Numerous MNRS
Files Available



Up to 2048
Points IR



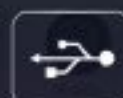
Stereo
FX LOOP



Bluetooth
Audio



MIDI
Features



ASIO USB
AUDIO



Support for
Mobile App



AI EQ
MASTER

Cort X200

Shredders on a budget, take note: the Cort X200 is built to move fast and hit hard without breaking the bank. It sports high-output pickups, a speedy jatoba fingerboard, and an aggressively styled body that, when flying through solos, the X200 delivers the kind of performance you'd expect from guitars twice its price.

THERE reputation as the quiet giant behind many big-name guitar brands is well-earned, and the X200 is a great example of what happens when they put that experience into their own instruments. Designed with the modern player in mind, this guitar combines sleek looks, killer playability, and a shockingly affordable price tag.

Let's start with the first thing you'll notice: the look. The X200's sharp-edged body and

redesigned six-in-line headstock give it a bold, aggressive vibe. The Candy Blue finish really sells it—striking under lights and sharp enough to stand out without being over the top. It's available in other finishes too, but this one feels just right for the guitar's character.

Flip it over and you'll find a hard maple neck bolted on to the poplar body. The neck is slim and flat—ideal if you're into fast leads or complex riffing—and it just feels effortless ▶



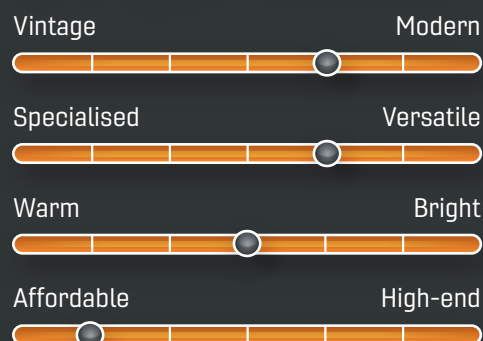
Breaking the bank. This sleek, double-cut machine that screams metal. Whether you're chugging riffs or twice its price. **Nick Jennison** reviews.



Cort X200

MSRP: (UK) £299 | (US) \$299

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » 24fret speedmetal playability
- » HSS pickup layout that covers clean to highgain
- » Value for money

For more information, please visit:

cortguitars.com



In the end, the Cort X200 offers a ton of guitar for the money.



under your fingers. The 24-fret Jatoba fingerboard, with its medium jumbo frets and a flat 15.75-inch radius, makes it easy to set the action nice and low, straight out of the box. And here's the kicker: it doesn't buzz or need a full setup right away. That's rare at this price.

The body shape isn't just for show either. It's contoured for comfort, which makes a real difference during long playing sessions. Whether you're sitting down or strapping in for a gig, it feels balanced and easy on the hands.

Tonally, the X200 is far more versatile than its looks might suggest. It's loaded with Cort's Powersound pickups in an HSH configuration—two humbuckers and a middle single-coil—giving you five pickup combinations via a simple five-way switch. Whether you're chasing high-gain riffage, glassy clean tones, or warm bluesy leads, it's all there. A single volume and tone control keep things intuitive and fuss-free.

One of the standout features here is the two-point floating tremolo system. Tremolos in this price range are often more trouble than they're worth, but Cort has nailed it. This one's smooth, responsive, and—most importantly—stays in tune. You can go for expressive vibrato or even some dive-bombing without fear of the dreaded pitch drift.

It's a legit, functional trem, not just there for show.

Plugged in, the X200 delivers. The bridge humbucker gives you plenty of bite and punch, great for tight rhythm work or cutting through a mix. The neck humbucker warms things up nicely for solos, and the middle pickup adds some classic sparkle. Everything feels usable across clean and dirty tones, which makes this a great all-rounder—not just a metal-only machine.

From a player's perspective, the neck profile hits a sweet spot. It's fast, but with enough substance to feel comfortable for chord work or thumb-over playing styles. The factory setup is solid, and with just a quick tweak to bridge height, it plays like a guitar that costs twice as much.

The body shape isn't just for show either. It's contoured for comfort, which makes a real difference during long playing sessions. Whether you're sitting down or strapping in for a gig, it feels balanced and easy on the hands.

In the end, the Cort X200 offers a ton of guitar for the money. It looks the part, plays beautifully, and delivers tones that work across genres. Whether you're a beginner aiming for your first serious guitar, a metal player on a budget, or someone looking for a dependable backup, this is a guitar that deserves a closer look. Cort's built something special here—and at this price, it's kind of a no-brainer.



Spira T-420

Nick Jennison dives into Spira Guitars' new 420 Series, starting with the standout T-420 — all wrapped in a bold Metallic Purple gloss finish. It features a roasted poplar body, a satin-fretboard with 24 jumbo frets for a fast, natural feel. Spira's Villain high-output humbuckers locking tremolo system delivers pitch control and divebombs without losing tuning. Locking

SPIRA Guitars has made a name for itself building sleek, modern instruments that look great, play fast, and don't break the bank. The T420 continues that trend—but also steps things up. With a double-locking trem system, a set of custom pickups, and a fresh approach to design and detail, this model feels like a bit of a turning point for the brand.

The most obvious change is the tremolo system. For the first time in a Spira model, we're getting a Korean-made Sung-Il double-locking unit. It's not a Floyd Rose, but it behaves a lot like one—smooth action, responsive feel, and strong tuning stability even under heavy use. That stability gets extra support from a locking nut and a stock string dampener, which helps clean up unwanted 



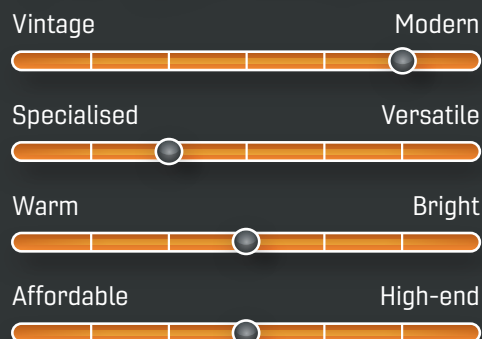
a six-string built for speed, power, and control, finished roasted maple neck, and an Ebony Tech handle heavy rhythms and sharp solos, while the tuners and solid hardware keep everything stable.



Spira T-420

MSRP: (UK) £420 | (US) \$N/A

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Unbelievable quality-to-price ratios
- » Tremolo histrionics
- » Not having to swap pickups

For more information, please visit:

<https://spiraguitars.com>



Aesthetically, the T420 stands out.

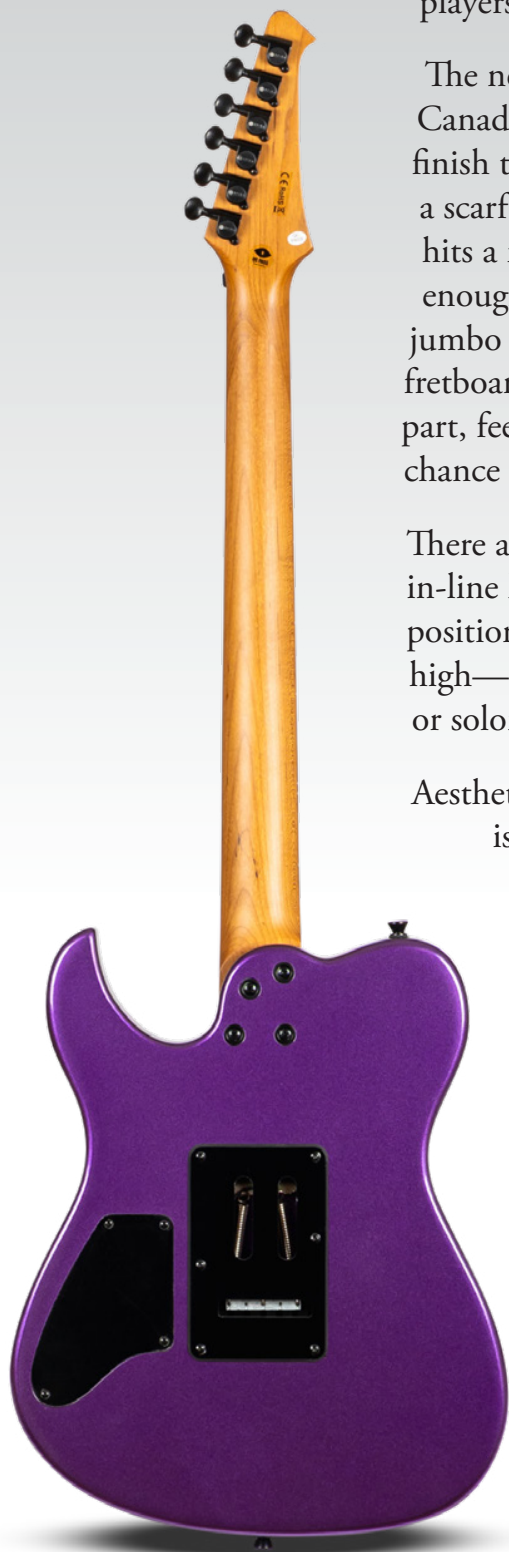
overtones behind the nut. It's a smart setup, especially for players who like to dig in or use a lot of gain.

The neck is a real strong point here. It's made from roasted Canadian maple, shaped into a slim modern C with a satin finish that feels fast and comfortable all the way up. Thanks to a scarf joint, it's strong where it counts, and the overall profile hits a nice middle ground—quick and playable, but still with enough substance for players who like a bit of grip. The 24 jumbo frets are well-finished and smooth, and the Tec Ebony fretboard does a great job standing in for real ebony. It looks the part, feels good, and is more resistant to shrinkage, meaning less chance of fret sprout down the line.

There are some thoughtful visual touches too. The reverse six-in-line headstock suits the guitar's modern style, and the split-position inlays—on the bass side down low, and treble side up high—make it easier to see where you are whether you're riffing or soloing. It's a small feature, but a clever one.

Aesthetically, the T420 stands out. The T-style body shape is given a more aggressive look thanks to a scalloped Florentine-style cutaway, and the sparkle purple finish adds just the right amount of flash. This version only comes in purple for now, but the sibling model, the S420, is available in a few other colours, including a very cool chameleon flip-flop option.

As for electronics, things are kept nice and straightforward: master volume, master tone, and a three-way blade switch. No coil-splitting here, but the Villain pickups are four-conductor wired, so if you wanted to mod the guitar later, the groundwork is there. Out of the box though, you've got more than enough tonal range. The bridge pickup clocks in at 12.6K and uses a ceramic magnet—tight, aggressive, and well-



suited to rhythm work and saturated lead tones. The neck pickup, at 8K, has a more open and chimier character that works great for clean tones and smooth, expressive leads. The middle position offers a nicely balanced clean sound that handles funk and ambient textures better than you might expect from a guitar with this look.

The T420 doesn't just lean into metal or shred territory—it's far more versatile than it appears. It handles blues, funk, hard rock, and '80s-inspired tones with ease. Whether you're after tight rhythm tones, clean sparkle, or saturated, effect-heavy leads, this guitar rises to the occasion. The trem even encourages you to get expressive—flutters, scoops, and divebombs all feel natural and musical.

And perhaps the most compelling part? The price. Spira has managed to pack a ton of value into this instrument without sacrificing build quality or playability. It's easily competitive with guitars costing much more, making it a great option for gigging musicians, students moving up to a more serious instrument, or anyone who wants solid performance without emptying their wallet.

All told, the T420 is a standout in Spira's growing lineup. It's well-designed, fun to play, and loaded with thoughtful details that reflect real-world use. Whether you're a modern metal player, a lead guitarist looking for stability and feel, or just someone who wants a good-looking, high-performing guitar at a great price, the T420 delivers.



Orange O-Tone 40 Combo Amp

Orange's legendary British growl meets modern clarity in the new O-Tone 40. Designed for practice and gigging, the 40-watt 2-channel combo blends rich valve dynamics with transparent cleans and punchy overdrive. For jamming at home, the O-Tone 40 brings that unmistakable Orange mojo in a refined, all-purpose package.

ORANGE might be best known for its iconic valve amps and fuzzy British rock tones, but with the O-Tone 40, they've delivered something that's refreshingly practical without sacrificing personality. This is a 40-watt, solid-state combo with a 12" Voice of the World speaker, a single channel, and a few cleverly chosen extras—all packed into a compact, lightweight design that makes it ideal for players on the go.

The O-Tone 40 is, at its heart, a clean amp. And not just clean in tone, but clean in execution. You've got a three-band EQ that's simple to use and responsive enough to shape your sound without letting you stray too far off track. The clean tone itself is punchy, snappy, and well-balanced. There's enough low-end available to shake the floor if you want it, but at noon, everything sits nicely in the mix—tight, clear, and present. The treble



players who crave both character and control, this overdrive. Whether you're gigging, recording, or just those package. **Nick Jennison** reviews.

Push the volume, and the amp will break up into a gritty, vintage-style overdrive that's perfect for bluesy riffs or old-school rock.

control can round off any excessive brightness (handy if you're using certain pedals or pickups), and the bass has real authority without ever getting muddy.

Built-in effects often feel like an afterthought, but not here. The digital reverb sounds convincingly springy, adding space without cluttering your sound. The bias tremolo is particularly impressive—it's the real thing, not a digital imitation—and it delivers everything from smooth pulses to sharp, choppy stutters. Both effects are footswitchable and feel genuinely useful rather than decorative.

Push the volume, and the amp will break up into a gritty, vintage-style overdrive that's perfect for bluesy riffs or old-school rock. It's not going to give you modern high-gain tones on its own, but that's not what it's built for. The O-Tone 40 is designed to be a pedal platform—and in that role, it excels.

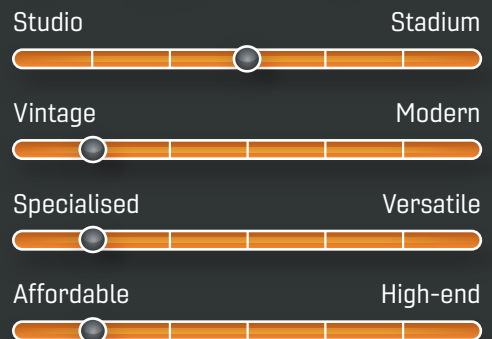
Whether you're stacking a TS-style boost, a silicon Tone Bender, or even something high-gain like a Friedman BE-OD Deluxe, the amp ▶



Orange O-Tone 40 Combo Amp

MSRP: (UK) £329 | (US) \$399

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Pedal-friendly clean tones
- » Solid-state reliability
- » Easy portability

For more information, please visit:

orangeamps.com



handles it with ease. Fuzz, in particular, sounds great through the O-Tone's clean channel—something that's not always the case with solid-state designs. And if a pedal is a little too bright, the amp's EQ gives you enough flexibility to dial things in without compromising your core tone.

Round the back, there's an effects loop—great for modulations and delays—or for

bypassing the preamp entirely. Plugging a modeler like the Neural DSP Quad Cortex straight into the return turns the amp into a clean, responsive power stage. We tested it with ambient cleans and lead tones, and it handled both beautifully, with no loss of clarity or punch.

Add in the aux input and headphone out, and you've got a setup that works just as well



Orange O-Tone 40 Combo Amp



at home as it does on stage. The size and weight make it incredibly portable—perfect for rehearsals, small gigs, or even navigating public transport. It's the kind of amp you don't think twice about taking with you, which is exactly what a working musician needs.

The Orange O-Tone 40 isn't flashy, and it doesn't pretend to be all things to all players. But if you need a reliable, great-sounding

clean amp that takes pedals well, fits in the boot of your car, and doesn't break the bank, this one's hard to beat. It's practical, musical, and thoughtfully designed—proof that solid-state doesn't have to mean soulless.

For players who want clean tones with character, easy portability, and the flexibility to build their own sound, the O-Tone 40 quietly gets the job done—and does it well.



Positive Grid Spark MINI Vai Amp

Nick Jennison goes full 'Passion and Warfare' as he plugs into Positive Grid's latest addition to the Spark Special Edition. Designed in collaboration with legendary guitarist and 3-time Grammy winner Steve Vai, the Spark MINI Vai attempts to bring Vai's distinctive style to the compact Spark format. Featuring unique design details, the Spark MINI Vai combines signature looks with the versatile performance the series is known for.

THE Spark Mini already has a solid reputation as one of the best small-format practice amps out there. It's portable, versatile, and surprisingly powerful for its size. But with this Steve Vai Limited Edition, Positive Grid isn't just adding a bit of cosmetic flair—they're giving players a direct window into Vai's sonic world.

Let's start with the looks. The amp comes wrapped in deep maroon Tolex with a custom mandala-patterned grill, and it's probably the best-dressed Spark Mini yet. The included braided cable with 24-karat gold plugs and Vai's logo feels more like a premium accessory than a throw-in. It's flashy, sure—but it works, and it sets the tone (pun intended) for what this edition is all about: thoughtful, detail-driven design.



to the Spark MINI family—the Spark MINI Vai
er Steve Vai, this 10-watt portable smart amp
gn details and an exclusive burgundy weave cable,
nown for

Where things really get interesting is with the four exclusive presets—Fresh, Mild, Hot, and Fire—each crafted by Steve Vai himself. These tones aren't available anywhere else—not on the Spark Cloud, not in the standard Mini—and they cover a lot of ground. “Fresh” is your pristine clean, “Mild” gives you edge-of-breakup crunch, “Hot” brings the heat with rich distortion, and “Fire”... well, it lives up to the name.

The Fire preset especially stands out. It's a great example of how to build a fluid, expressive lead tone using the Spark's existing amp models and effects. It starts with a noise gate, goes into a compressor, then a green-style overdrive cranked hot, feeding into a high-gain American amp model—topped off with EQ, delay, and reverb. It's a tone that sings, with just enough bite and saturation to keep things interesting without getting messy.

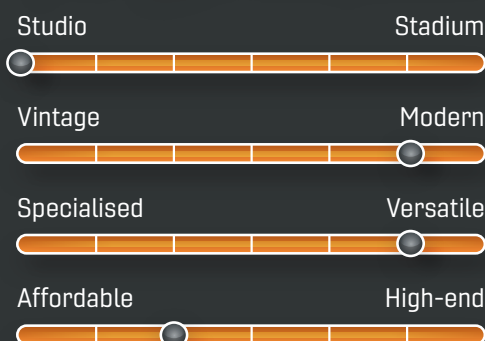
What's cool is that these presets don't use anything you can't find in the standard Spark Mini. But the way they're put together shows off Vai's deep understanding of tone—everything is deliberate, balanced, and musical. If you've ever wanted to peek behind the curtain of how a player like Vai dials things in, this is about as close as you'll get without borrowing his rig. ▶



Positive Grid Spark MINI Vai Amp

MSRP: (UK) £249 | (US) \$249

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Steve Vai approved looks & presets
- » Al powered app tones and Smart Jam practice tools
- » Battery powered 10 W portability

For more information, please visit:

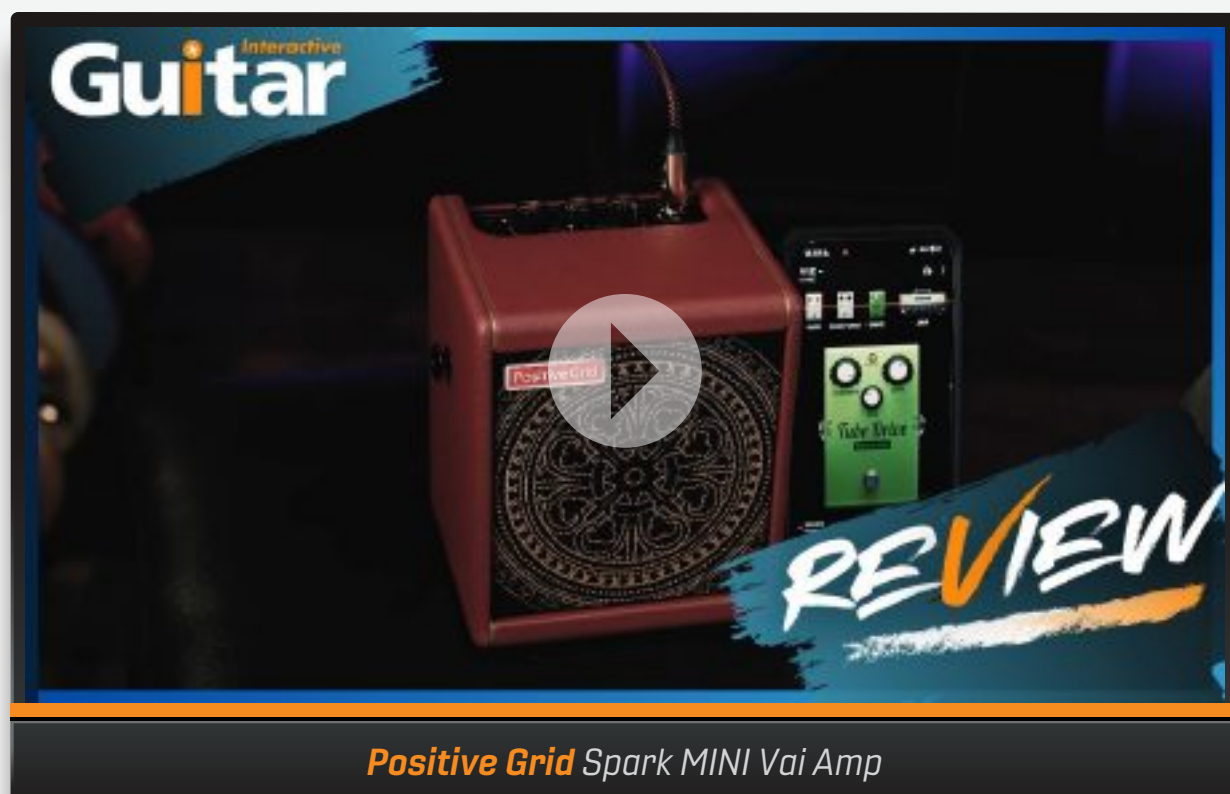
positivegrid.com





And then there are the backing tracks and jam loops, also exclusive to this edition. You get tracks like “Dust,” “Avalanche,” and even “Building the Church”, giving you real material from Vai to jam with. Whether you’re a longtime fan or just looking for inspiring grooves to practice over, these tracks add serious value.

The rest of the Spark Mini’s strengths are still here, of course. Bluetooth audio, all-day battery life, and the powerful Spark app let



Positive Grid Spark MINI Vai Amp



you edit tones, download user presets, and tweak your signal chain with ease. There's also a tuner, metronome, and a surprisingly handy video sync feature for recording and sharing your playing directly to social media.

As for sound, it still punches well above its weight. Whether you're running it through the stereo aux out or just listening via the built-in speaker, tones are full, articulate, and room-filling. We mic'd it up with a Shure SM57 for demo purposes, and even in mono, it held its own. That said, the stereo spread from the onboard speaker is where this thing really shines—especially if

you're playing with wide delays or ambient effects.

Bottom line: this isn't just a Spark Mini in a new suit. With the exclusive presets, artist-created loops, and tasteful design upgrades, the Steve Vai Edition feels like a well-curated, tone-forward tool that also happens to look fantastic on your desk.

Whether you're a Vai superfan, a tone chaser, or just someone who wants an inspiring, portable amp with a bit of character—this little box delivers.



Gibson J-45 Special Acoustic

Few acoustics have the legacy of the J-45, and the Special edition keeps that tradition alive with the rounded tone of a solid spruce and mahogany combo, with vintage-inspired satin finishes and a classic look. It's soulful, understated, and unmistakably Gibson. Here's **Nick Jennison** to tell us more.

THE Gibson J45 is a name that carries serious weight. This iconic model has been favored by everyone from Bob Dylan to John Lennon. Now, the J45 Special in Satin Wine Red brings that same classic feel with a few thoughtful tweaks, all while being more accessible price-wise.

What's different with this model? For one, the body depth is slightly shallower than a standard J45. This means a leaner low-end response, which can be a huge plus for players who prefer a less boomy sound or for those with a smaller frame who might find deeper-bodied guitars awkward to hold. It's a subtle change, but one that makes the guitar feel more comfortable in a variety of playing situations. ▶



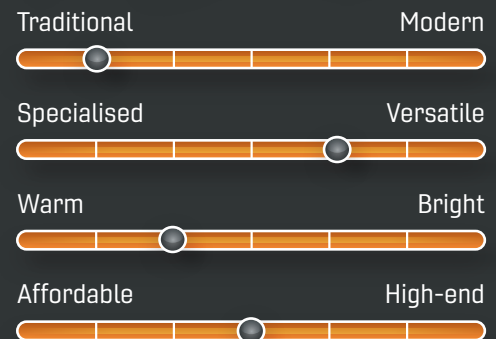
with some stripped-back style. You get the warm,
and a dovetail neck joint that feels broken in from day



Gibson J-45 Special Acoustic

MSRP: (UK) £1,699 | (US) \$1,999

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Warm, balanced "workhorse" slope-shoulder tone
- » All-solid spruce/mahogany
- » Vintage aesthetics with modern LR Baggs electronics

For more information, please visit:

gibson.com





These little details add up to a guitar that feels premium without the hefty price tag

Then there's the satin finish. While a glossy finish is pretty and all, satin lets the wood breathe more naturally. It gives the guitar a smoother, more organic feel under your fingers and will age beautifully, developing a character all its own over time.

The tone is everything you'd expect from a solid Sitka spruce top and mahogany back and sides. Whether you're flatpicking or playing more delicate fingerstyle, the J45 Special delivers clarity and warmth, with great dynamic range. And when it's plugged in, the LR Baggs Element pickup system captures that natural acoustic tone beautifully, making it perfect for live gigs or studio work.





ECLIPSE

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faithguitars.com

Whether you're gigging or just taking it to rehearsal, the case provides protection without being bulky or cumbersome.

As for the feel, this guitar is built for comfort. The slim taper neck makes it super easy to play for long hours, and the rosewood fretboard is smooth and responsive. You also get Grover Rotomatic tuners, which you'll usually find on more expensive models. These little details add up to a guitar that feels premium without the hefty price tag.

The J45 Special comes with a premium soft-shell case, so it's ready to go wherever you need it. Whether you're gigging or

just taking it to rehearsal, the case provides protection without being bulky or cumbersome.

To wrap it up, the Gibson J45 Special in Satin Wine Red is a fantastic choice for anyone looking for that classic J45 sound and feel but at a more approachable price. With its comfortable playability, rich tone, and stage-ready electronics, it's a guitar that's made to be played—whether you're strumming at home or rocking out on stage.





Gibson L-00 Special Acoustic

Nick Jennison tries out for size the compact, punchy, and dripping with bluesy charm Gibson L-00 Special. With its smaller body and vintage satin finish, it's incredibly comfortable to play and sounds like a classic acoustic for singer-songwriters.

THE Gibson acoustic lineup has long been associated with rich tone, premium craftsmanship, and, let's be honest, some pretty serious price tags. But the new L00 Special, part of Gibson's Special Range, shifts that dynamic a bit. Built in the same Bozeman, Montana factory as their top-end acoustics, this guitar gives you that genuine

Gibson feel and sound—without breaking the £2000 mark.

At its core, the L00 Special is everything you'd expect from a real-deal Gibson acoustic: solid Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides, and a rosewood fretboard sitting on a slim taper neck. The build includes a dovetail ▶



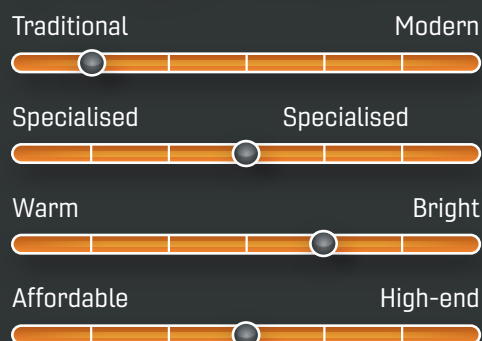
n L-00 Special — the little acoustic that could.
bigger than it looks—ideal for fingerstyle players



Gibson L-00 Special Acoustic

MSRP: (UK) £1,699 | (US) \$1,999

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Gibson quality for under 2K
- » Couchfriendly parlour comfort
- » 1930s sunburst vibe in an allsolid build

For more information, please visit:

gibson.com



If you're near Gibson Garage London, do yourself a favour: pull one of these off the wall and give it a go.



neck joint, the kind of construction that's standard on their higher-end models. It's available in Wine Red and Vintage Sunburst, and if you're eyeing something flashier, the Hummingbird Special in Cherry Sunburst might be worth a look.

What sets the L00 Special apart is its satin nitro finish. It's part of how Gibson keeps the price down, sure—but it's not a compromise. In fact, for many players, it's a feature. It feels great under the hand, especially on the neck, and gives the guitar a more organic, broken-in vibe. Some even argue it helps the wood resonate more freely compared to a thick gloss finish. Whether that's tone science or just personal taste, it works.

The mini Grover Rotomatic tuners keep things stable, and the guitar proudly wears the classic Gibson logo on the headstock, with a stamped-in serial number on the back. These details matter—they're subtle, but they reinforce the fact that this isn't some stripped-down version made elsewhere. It's the real thing, through and through. ▶



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

The best part? The price. At under £2000, this is one of the most accessible U.S.-made Gibsons you can buy—without cutting corners where it really counts

Sound-wise, the L00 Special does exactly what a smaller-bodied Gibson should. It's focused, mid-rich, and incredibly responsive. Fingerstyle playing feels articulate and clear, while strumming with a pick brings out surprising punch and warmth. It's not the loudest acoustic on the wall, but what it might lack in volume, it makes up for in nuance and personality.

It's also built for the stage, thanks to the L.R. Baggs Element pickup system. Plugged in, the guitar retains its character without sounding overly processed. Whether you're performing solo or slotting into a band mix, it's a solid plug-and-play setup that just works.

The best part? The price. At under £2000, this is one of the most accessible U.S.-

made Gibsons you can buy—without cutting corners where it really counts. You're getting premium tonewoods, traditional construction, a great pickup system, and that unmistakable Gibson feel.

As Nick Jennison put it in his demo for Guitar Interactive: "100% a legit Gibson acoustic." And he's not wrong. This isn't a "budget Gibson"—it's just a smarter, more focused one. No bling, no gloss, just quality where it matters.

If you're near Gibson Garage London, do yourself a favour: pull one of these off the wall and give it a go. The L00 Special may not shout for attention, but once you play it, it doesn't need to.





LAVA *Genie*

If traditional acoustic guitars feel a little too... traditional, the LAVA Genie might be just what you need. It looks like a bit of fun, but with built-in effects, loopers, a touchscreen interface, and no amp or pedals required, it's perfect for players who want inspiration on tap wherever they go. **Nick Jennison** reviews.

AT first glance, the Lava Genie might look like some kind of futuristic, headless guitar. It has a fretboard, a strap, and even comes in a sleek case. But let's be clear—this isn't a guitar, and it's not pretending to be. What it is, is a smart, approachable, and genuinely fun way to

make music without needing traditional playing skills. And for a lot of people, that's exactly what makes it so exciting.

Designed by Lava Music, the Genie is aimed at beginners, songwriters, young learners, and anyone who wants to create music quickly and intuitively—without the usual ▶



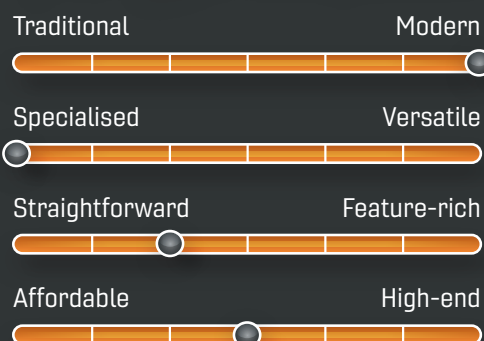
t you're after. This ultra-modern smart guitar may
or pedals required, it's a great tool for tech-savvy



LAVA Genie

MSRP: (UK) £349 | (US) \$399

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Avoiding the guitar learning curve
- » Sleek, minimalist vibes
- » Easy music making;

For more information, please visit:

[jhs.co.uk/collections/lava](https://www.jhs.co.uk/collections/lava)





hurdles. Instead of strings, you get a backlit fretboard-style interface with seven labelled blocks, each representing one of the diatonic chords in a major scale. You press a block, tap a thumb pad, and you're instantly playing music. Lava promises "60 seconds to musical freedom," and honestly, it delivers.

In his hands-on walkthrough, Nick Jennison from Guitar Interactive jumps straight into the built-in tutorial and is playing his first chord within moments. He even demos "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" using a color-coded guide—simple enough for a child, but cleverly introducing the basics of the

Nashville number system. It's intuitive, and more importantly, it's fun.

Pair the Genie with the Lava+ app, and things get a lot more flexible. You can expand the fretboard from 7 to 21 blocks and assign different chord voicings—major, minor, 7th—to each one. There's also an onboard control to shift keys up or down, which is great for singers or anyone exploring different tonal centers. The app's chord mapping can be a bit unconventional in places (certain blocks might behave differently depending on the scale degree), but once you get the hang of it, it becomes ▶

MOOER IAMP - INTELLIGENT AMP SERIES

POWERED BY iAmp



MOOER's iAmp app was designed for you - the modern guitarist. We have channeled decades of research into the creation of a system that puts 52 amplifier models 49 effects at your fingertips with ultimate control through your tablet or smartphone using the MOOER iAmp app.

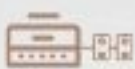
MOOER's Intelligent Amp Series comes loaded with the latest technology to give you what you need as a player wherever you are in your journey. From huge vintage amp tones with touch-sensitive response to dreamlike modern clean textures based on powerful delay and modulation algorithms, each MOOER Tone Library sound is fully customizable to your needs.

For the practicing musician the Intelligent Amp Series offers 40 drum machine varieties and 10 metronome types which sync effortlessly with a colossal 80 second looper so you can explore ideas over your own chord structures or nail that tricky lick you've been working on.

Each model in the Intelligent Amp Series can be paired with the MOOER GWF4 wireless footswitch for preset changes and full control over the looper and drum machine making them powerful tools for practice too.

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.


SPECIALIZED APP
FOR MORE ENJOYMENT


101 AMP MODELS
AND EFFECTS


40 DRUM GROOVE
AND 10 METRONOMES


INTEGRATED APP TUNER


80-SECOND LOOPER


OTG DIRECT RECORDING


SUPPORT WIRELESS
FOOTSWITCH
(SWITCHING PRESET/DRUM
OR LOOPER CONTROL)


BLUETOOTH 5.0
HIGH-QUALITY
AUDIO INPUT


MOOER CLOUD
FOR TONE SHARING



SD30i



HORNET 05i



HORNET 15i



HORNET 30i

But for everyone else—especially people who’ve always wanted to make music but didn’t know where to start—the Lava Genie feels like a door opening.

a useful tool for experimenting with progressions.

The Genie also comes loaded with a range of sound presets. There’s acoustic, electric, synth pads, layered drums—each tied to different colours and playable via two responsive thumb pads. You can trigger different patterns depending on which pad you touch, and a dedicated stop button lets you instantly mute everything if things go off the rails.

For more expressive control, Creative Mode lets you strum across pads, layer beats, and essentially jam with the device like a performance instrument. It’s activated by pressing multiple pads together and really adds another dimension for users who want to go beyond just pressing chords.

The hardware feels well-designed and premium. It folds in half for portability, fits into a compact case, and even

powers on and off with a sci-fi-style lightsaber sound (a small touch, but a fun one). It ships with a strap, charger, and everything you need to get started.

It’s worth repeating: this won’t teach you how to play guitar, and it won’t replace one. But that’s not what it’s trying to do. The Lava Genie is about removing the friction between having an idea and turning it into sound. Whether you’re writing songs, jamming casually, or helping a student explore harmony without the physical demands of a traditional instrument, this thing makes music accessible in a way that very few devices can.

For guitarists, it might seem like a novelty. But for everyone else—especially people who’ve always wanted to make music but didn’t know where to start—the Lava Genie feels like a door opening. And sometimes, that’s all it takes.





Dreamtonics Synthesizer V Studio 2 Pro

No vocals? No problem — the Dreamtonics Synthesizer V Studio 2 Pro brings you lifelike singing expression that's ideal for producers, composers, and anyone crafting modern digital music. It's a note (or needs a coffee break). Here's **Nick Jennison** to tell us more.

EVER wish you could just sketch out a vocal idea, tweak the delivery, and get it sounding polished—all without a singer in the room? That's exactly what Synthesizer V Studio 2 from Dreamtonics lets you do, and the results are seriously impressive.

This latest version builds on what made the original so exciting: realistic AI voices, a user-friendly interface, and loads of creative potential. But now, it's even better. The rendering is up



nging voices with deep control over pitch, tone, and
e. It's like having a virtual vocalist who never misses

Whether you're tweaking the sound or changing speaker modes, the app gives you full control, making it easy to adapt to different environments.

to 300% faster, the voices sound more natural, and the level of control you get is genuinely next-level.

The workflow feels familiar if you've ever used a DAW. You draw in MIDI notes on a piano roll, add your lyrics, and pick a voice. That's it—you're up and running. From there, it's all about shaping the performance. You can move notes around, adjust their timing, change the pitch, and decide how each syllable is pronounced. It's all super intuitive and surprisingly quick to dial in.

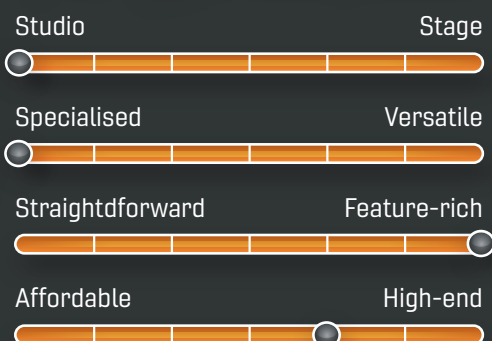
The voice selection is a real highlight. Singers like Felicia, Natalie, Kevin, and Hayden each bring their own unique character to a track. Felicia has that modern pop polish, Natalie leans more soulful and smooth, Kevin's got a bold, brassy tone, and Hayden ▶



Dreamtonics Synthesizer V Studio 2 Pro

MSRP: (UK) £95 | (US) \$99

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Exceptionally lifelike vocals in the box
- » Limitless tweakability
- » Not having to deal with singers

For more information, please visit:

dreamtonics.com/synthesizerv/



is softer and more understated. You can push their styles even further by selecting different vocal modes—like airy, operatic, bright, or powerful—and the changes are genuinely musical. These aren't just filters—they actually shift how the singer interprets the part.

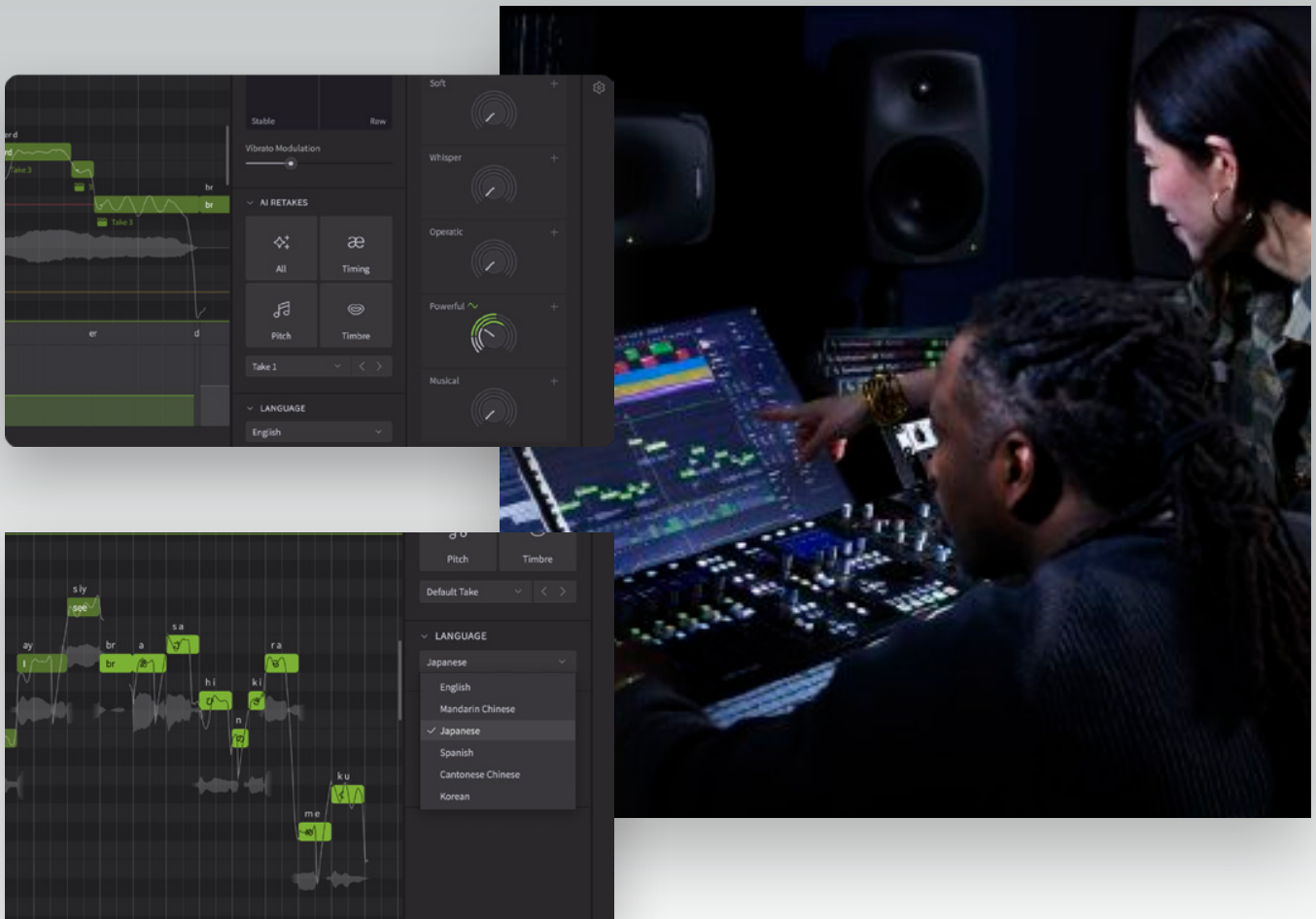
What makes this tool feel so much like working with a real vocalist is the AI retake feature. You can ask for alternate versions of a phrase—changing the pitch, timing, or tone—and it'll give you new takes without erasing the original. So if you love the timing but want a slightly softer delivery, you can get exactly that. You can even toggle between takes until you find the one that feels just right.

And it's not just for leads. You can layer vocals for harmonies or backing parts, and because each take can be varied with slight timing and pitch shifts, they sound like different performances—not copy-pasted clones. Nick stacked up seven virtual singers in one project, creating lush BVs and ad libs with realistic pitch flams and spacing that you'd usually only get with a real session.

Where it really gets wild is in the detailed vocal editing. You can fine-tune vibrato, tension, loudness, pronunciation, and even how wide the virtual singer's mouth is "open." That last one might sound gimmicky, but it genuinely affects the tone. You can shape delivery to sound tighter, more relaxed, or even mimic that quirky indie vocal style



Dreamtonics Synthesizer V Studio 2 Pro



where it feels like the singer's barely opening their mouth.

If you're working in multiple languages, you're covered there too. Synthesizer V Studio 2 supports English, Japanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish—with Korean on the way. It doesn't translate lyrics for you, but if you're writing in those languages or producing global pop tracks, this feature is a big deal.

What's great about all of this is that it's not just fun to play with—it's genuinely useful. Whether you're building a full track on your own, experimenting with harmony ideas, or creating a demo for

another artist, this software delivers clean, convincing results that could easily pass for a real singer in the right mix. And if you're a vocal coach or arranger, it's a brilliant tool for demonstrating phrasing, harmonies, or vibrato in a super controlled way.

Dreamtonics has really delivered with this one. Synthesizer V Studio 2 isn't just a cool bit of AI—it's a seriously powerful creative tool. It gives you the flexibility and nuance of working with live singers, but with instant control and zero scheduling headaches. Whether you're a producer, songwriter, or just someone who loves experimenting with vocals, this is absolutely worth checking out.



Xvive U8 Wireless System

If you're an acoustic player who loves to move around the stage but hates the leash of a cable waiting for. Designed specifically for acoustic and classical guitars, this compact wireless system captures your tone naturally—no mods or pickups needed. With low latency, clean 24-bit audio, and professional-level sound without tying you down. **Nick Jennison** reviews

FOR acoustic guitarists, getting your tone right on stage or in the studio can be a bit of a juggling act. Pickups are practical but often sound flat or harsh. Mic'ing up gives you that sweet, natural sound—but comes with stands, cables, feedback risk, and zero mobility. The Xvive U8 offers a smart middle ground: a compact, wireless mic system that sounds great, sets up in seconds, and won't mess with your guitar.

What makes the U8 stand out is that it's purpose-built for acoustic guitar. The setup includes a small gooseneck microphone, a transmitter that clips onto your guitar with a spring-loaded mount, and a receiver that plugs into your desk, amp, or interface. It's entirely non-invasive—no drilling, no tape, and no risk to your guitar's finish. Just clip it on and play.

Everything comes neatly packed in a rugged flight case, including the transmitter, receiver, mic, USB charging cables, foam windshields, and channel stickers for multi-unit setups. Both the transmitter and receiver charge via USB and deliver around five hours of battery life, which should cover most gigs and sessions comfortably. There are four wireless channels, and latency is essentially imperceptible.

Setup is genuinely quick—power everything on, pair your channel, and you're good to go. As with other gear in Xvive's lineup (like their well-regarded in-ear system), the U8 is designed to be intuitive and dependable. Once it's in place, it just works.

The real highlight, though, is the sound. The gooseneck mic captures a detailed, natural tone with none of the harshness or 

Whether you're a seasoned player seeking a compact addition to your collection or a beginner looking for a quality start, the Performer Series Parlour fits the bill.

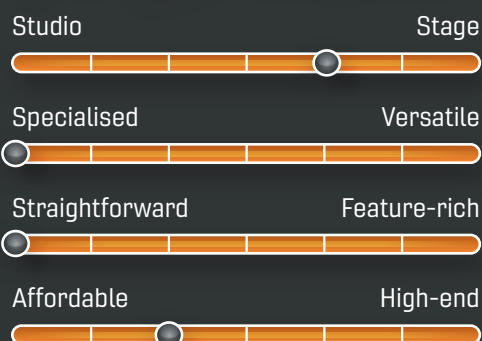
le, the Xvive U8 could be just what you've been
system uses a supercardioid mic on a gooseneck to
dio, and a solid 90-foot range, the U8 delivers pro-



Xvive U8 Wireless System

MSRP: (UK) £189 | (US) \$219

The Breakdown



For fans of

- » Clean signal on the move
- » Easy live acoustic mic'ing
- » Rock solid wireless performance

For more information, please visit:

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Even in a loud studio setup, it stayed clear and stable—no screeching, no drama.

plastic-y feel that onboard pickups often deliver. Better still, the mic's position can be adjusted on the fly. Move it closer to the neck for a crisper, more delicate tone, or swing it toward the soundhole for a fuller, warmer response. It's a simple but powerful way to dial in the sound that fits your playing—or even change it mid-song if you want to get fancy.

If your acoustic already has a built-in pickup, you might be wondering why you'd bother. But in a direct comparison with the Taylor Expression System 2 (a very good pickup system, to be fair), the U8 comes out sounding more open and lifelike. The pickup tone is clean but compressed; the mic tone feels like the actual guitar. And if you want the best of both worlds, you can always blend the two for a rich, studio-worthy mix. ▶







One common concern with mics in live environments is feedback, especially when monitors are involved. But the U8 holds its own here, too. Even in a loud studio setup, it stayed clear and stable—no screeching, no drama.

From a gigging perspective, the system is incredibly portable. Everything fits into the included case and takes up almost no space in your bag. It's quick to mount,

quick to remove, and requires no special tools or permanent modifications. That makes it ideal not just for performers, but also for teachers, buskers, or anyone recording acoustics at home who doesn't want to mess around with a traditional mic setup.

Reliable, flexible, and surprisingly affordable—this one's easy to recommend.



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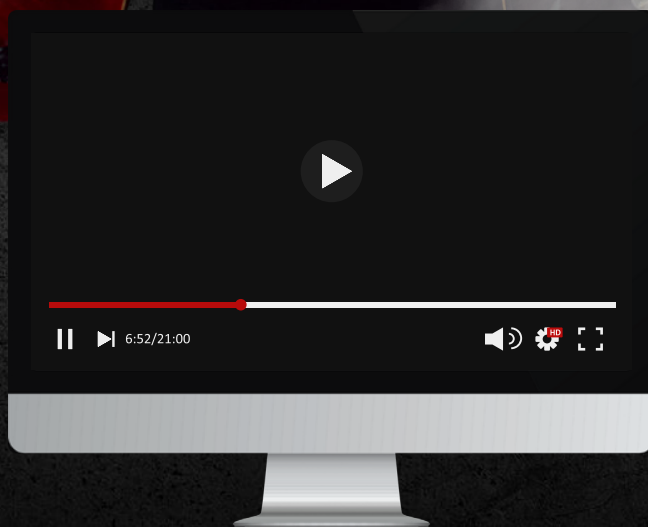
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