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THE GUITAR MAGAZINE

ISSUE 391

Guitarist

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PRS

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EDITION

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from Santana
to Singlecut

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CARL VERHEYEN
SHOWS YOU HOW

P58

INTERVIEW

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PAUL
GILBERT

JOHNNY
MARR

REVIEWED

Suhr Badger & Corso

Fender 2015 Stratocasters

Taylor 600 Series acoustics

Cort Manson Matthew Bellamy

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The Personal Touch



We got a real kick out of talking technique with Carl Verheyen (see interview, p58) for this month's issue. He's a monster player, but it's interesting how important mentors were to his early development. As a teen, he sought out veteran pickers

who could show him how to raise his game – and they were happy to pass on some of what they knew, as great musicians often are.

Today, Carl's played every kind of high-level gig going but, as he says, the lessons of those early conversations still form part of his daily routine. Now, we're not knocking the wealth of instructional books, videos and apps that players can turn to today for private study – they've undoubtedly made learning much easier and more fun. But how many of us still take time to approach expert players to glean something from their experience directly? A textbook might give you all the information you need, but you'll never 'look up to' a book – and so it'll never make you want to try harder in quite the way a living mentor might. So, if you come across a blinding guitarist, why not wait for a quiet moment after their set and tell them how much you enjoyed it? Buy them a pint and ask a few polite questions and they might just share some perspectives on playing that change the way you look at the instrument forever, and for the better.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

Behind The Scenes

You may have noticed we have gratefully sampled fine beers on our Welcome page in the past couple of issues. This month, the generous folk at **Honest Brew** have gone one better to extend a special offer to you, the reader! Honest Brew match craft beers to people's tastes and deliver monthly boxes to their homes. Anyone in the UK or Europe buying an 'Honesty Box' selection of nine, 12 or 18 beers quoting the code 'GUITARIST' can get £10 off their first order. Visit honestbrew.co.uk/honesty-box for details...

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Finally, a digital panacea for guitar tone which actually works: I never thought the day would come, but the sound and feel of this magic black box are so "real" that witchcraft would appear to be the only logical explanation... Most pleasing!

—Guthrie Govan

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I HAVE A TON OF GUITARS.
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CATEGORY. AS THE BRAIN
OF THIS EVER-EVOLVING
GUITAR WORLD IT'S IN
POLE POSITION FOR THE
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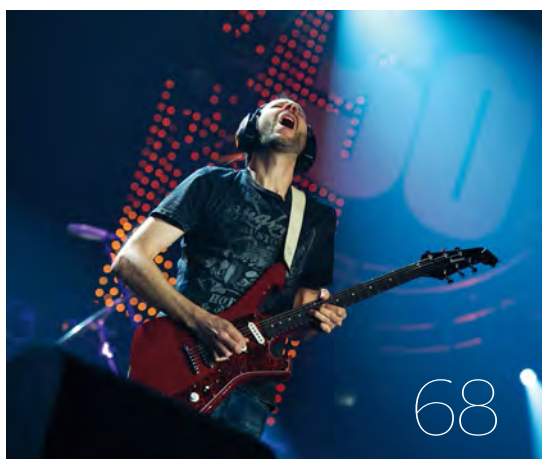
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30 YEARS OF PRS

It's 30 years since Paul Reed Smith Guitars entered the marketplace with the PRS Custom. We look back at the history of the Maryland company, and chart the path of PRS's unique instruments and the players who have put them to use. We also run the rule over the 30th Anniversary Custom 24 and give you the chance to win a one-off Guitarist-spec version, worth £4,500

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How to watch

You can stream all of the video content for this issue from a YouTube playlist, accessible via the short web link below. Simply type it into the address bar of your PC, tablet or mobile device's web browser (typing the link into a search engine won't work) and watch it all from there. In the case of audio files, you'll find a separate direct download link on the page. And fear not, all back-issue Vault content remains available online at vault.guitarist.co.uk.

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Play and enjoy. Simple!



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FIRST ▶ PLAY



**CORT MANSON MBC-1
MATTHEW BELLAMY
SIGNATURE**
£499

WHAT IS IT? Affordable version of
Muse man's Manson custom axes

MANSON'S MUSE

The artist/guitar-maker relationship has rarely produced more out-there innovative designs than that of Muse's Matt Bellamy and Hugh Manson. Now they've made a guitar for the masses

WORDS **DAVE BURRLUCK**
PHOTOGRAPHY **JOSEPH BRANSTON**

Fuelled first by a record company advance and subsequently by global stadium-filling success, the Manson/Bellamy (or should that be Bellamy/Manson?) collaboration has, according to Hugh Manson, produced nearly 30 custom guitars that often include additional sonic artefacts such as Korg's Kaoss pad, ZVex's Fuzz Factory and Fernandes' Sustainer. Of course, many of us could create a similar dream guitar with Hugh, at a cost, and while Manson Guitar Works has offered us more production-like electrics in a similar style, such as the MA-1 EVO & MA-2 EVO reviewed in issue 385, they have a more standard appearance and still cost around £1,500. For the legion of Bellamy wannabes, or normal people who just love their guitars, that's still a serious purchase. Off the record, Manson had been whispering to us for some time that "something big, but I can't tell you what," was around the corner. Finally, after three years of development, it's here: a £500 Manson/Matt Bellamy signature guitar.

Now, before you skip this review because you're not a Muse acolyte, hang on. Neither party would put their name to anything sub-standard, and that's just not a word you can

VIDEO DEMO



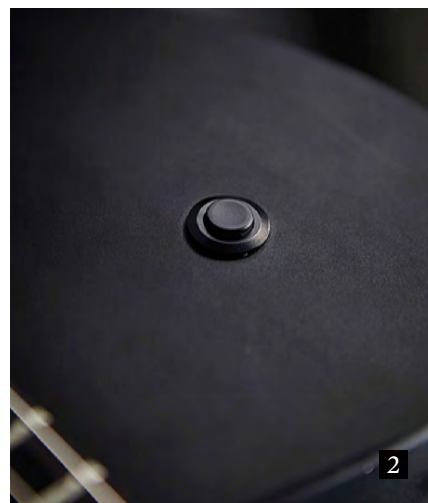
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Cort Manson MBC-1 Matthew Bellamy Signature **FIRST ▶ PLAY**





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apply to the MBC-1. It's quite simply a corker of an electric guitar – whatever your style.

The leading name, Cort, in the guitar's lengthy title is the key to its price point. As one of the world's largest manufacturers, Cort not only makes under its own name but for a lot of other brands, too. Chances are, if you've played in the past couple of decades an 'import' guitar, as the Americans refer to the mass-market Asian makers, you'll have played one made by Cort, even though you didn't know it. Like any serious guitar maker, Manson's reputation is based on quality, and if Cort's Indonesian factory satisfied him then you know it's going to be good.

Feel & Sounds

Good is what you get here. Very good. Okay, the MBC-1 is a pretty simple guitar – especially compared to the majority of Bellamy's custom Manson guitars – but from the first strum there's that lively ring that is hallmark Manson, and here it is achieved by careful body and neck wood selection, not to mention the Gibson-like tune-o-matic/stud tailpiece setup not usually found on a 25.5-inch Fender scale

bolt-on. While your ears are listening to that ring, your left hand should be enjoying the neck – full but not big with a chunky, well-shaped deep C profile and sloping shoulders that tell your hand it's thinner in depth than it actually is. Add into the brew a compound radius 'board – pretty unusual at the price – that's really nicely fretted with not over-high jumbo frets, and the impression is quite simply that you're holding a guitar that should have a higher price.

Not everyone buys with their ears, though, which is fair enough, and the MBC-1's enhanced bass-side shoulder won't be to everyone's taste, nor the Matt Black-only finish – even though it's not your normal easy-to-mark chalkboard black but a hard and thin coating developed especially for this guitar.

The purposeful simplicity of the design is reflected by the bridge humbucker and neck single coil, three-way toggle selector and master volume, tone and kill button. The alnico-loaded pickups are made by Cort to Manson's design; the humbucker is based on the ballpark style of those used by Bellamy, while the single coil is voiced to provide an

1 It's a simple setup without a coil-split on the bridge pickup, so for any modders out there it's an excellent 'chassis'. You could, of course, load in your own effects, too...

2 Almost *de rigueur* for the modern rocker, this nipple-esque kill button is very fast in use and essential for those machine-gun staccato effects

3 One of the many subtle features is these excellent rear-locking Cort tuners with staggered height posts that do away with string trees

4 Many Manson guitars, custom or production, use this Gibson-style setup. Why? Hugh just likes the sound and adjustability



<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



'open', clear sound. Needless to say, many prototypes were created before the Manson team, and ultimately Mr Bellamy, were happy. And to our ears, that thorough musical evaluation is present in the sounds we hear. Starting with a cranked Fender-style clean amp, the MBC-1 rings like the proverbial bell and would justify its cost as a great tracking guitar alone for any recording player – and that's before we start adding some reverbs, delays and modulation effects. Huge is an accurate description. It also means you might find yourself using less gain than you would on a lesser guitar, and it really blurs the ground between traditional 'Fender' and 'Gibson' goalposts. The bridge pickup has plenty of power and cut for anything from classic rock to more saturated tones, and the easy, but not over-slinky, playability – not to mention the relatively light weight and strapped-on feel – means it's more than stage-ready.

Verdict

Released at the tail end of 2014, Hugh Manson told us that initial interest in the MBC-1 was exceptional. And if that first rush is undoubtedly from the many guitar-toting fans of Mr B, we wouldn't be surprised if the next wave of interest is from lovers of good guitars, irrelevant of their style. The MBC-1 is simply a carefully designed, excellent-sounding rock-aimed axe that will surprise experienced players just as much as novices. It might not be rocket science compared to many of Bellamy's complex custom guitars, but then not all of us have the chops of Bellamy or the environment to use them in. Nope, this is the craft of a master, aimed at the masses. **G**

The MBC-1 is a pretty simple guitar, but from the first strum there's that lively ring that is hallmark Manson



Cort Manson MBC-1 Matthew Bellamy Signature

PRICE: £499 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Indonesia; designed by Manson Guitar Works (UK)

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Basswood

NECK: Maple, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Black friction reducing/42mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 305-406mm (12-16") compound radius

FRETS: 22, jumbo

HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge and stud tailpiece, Cort staggered height rear-lock tuners – all chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: Manson bridge humbucker and neck-placed single coil, three-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and master tone; kill button

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.52/7.75

OPTIONS: None

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Matt Black

PROEL International Ltd

0208 761 9911

www.cortguitars.com

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★	
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sounds	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Super design, construction, playability and sound. A modern rock guitar par excellence

FIRST ▶ PLAY



SUHR CORSO
£849

WHAT IS IT? A stylish and sophisticated five-watt head aimed primarily at home and project studio users



SUHR BADGER 35
£1,699

WHAT IS IT? A single-channel class A head with a wide range of classic Brit-rock tones on offer and built-in power scaling

SUHR THING!

Suhr doesn't just make sumptuous electric guitars, as this pair of heads prove. But what's under the hoods?

WORDS **NICK GUPPY**

PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**





<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



There are many great boutique guitar, amp and pedal builders today, but the number of those equally adept and revered in all disciplines can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand.

One name you would definitely have to include would be John Suhr, who made his reputation at the legendary Rudy's Music Store in New York City, building the Pensa-Suhr MK guitars for Mark Knopfler in the mid-1980s. Suhr headed west to LA around 1991 to develop the Custom Audio range of amps with Bob Bradshaw and work in Fender's custom shop as a senior master builder, starting JS Technologies in 1997. Today, the Suhr range of products includes guitars, pedals, and some very tasty amps; we're looking at two of them this month, the Corso recording amplifier, and the British-influenced Badger 35 head.

While they look completely different, both amps share Suhr's high build quality and exquisite attention to detail. The Corso head is intended for home and studio use, and has a distinctive design, with a seven-ply wood cover topped with a cocobolo-effect laminate, teamed with a choice of two laser-cut anodised front panels. Inside the aluminium chassis, the electronics are mounted on two printed circuit boards: one sat behind the control panel that holds all the knobs and switches except the Power control, and a main board that holds most of the pre- and power-amp circuitry. The amp is an innovative single-channel design driving a pair of 12BH7 output valves, with controls for drive, power, bass and treble, and five tone-altering switches: presence, bright, mid, gain and deep, which between them can be used for subtle fine tuning or more drastic changes.

Lurking behind the power control is a large wire-wound pot that acts as an attenuator, allowing full control of the Corso's output



It may not have the Corso's high-end looks, but the Badger 35 is still beautifully put together

wattage from zero to five watts. Turned fully anti-clockwise, it also functions as a load, so the Corso's line out can be used without the need for a loudspeaker cabinet.

While the Corso is intended to grace someone's living room, study or studio, the Badger 35 is for stage use, with its electronics surrounded by a tough ply sleeve. It may not have the Corso's high-end looks, but the Badger 35 is still beautifully put together, with the gold Perspex badge and control panels offering a clue to the amp's sonic inspiration. Inside the aluminium chassis, there are two quality PCBs, one holding most of the pre- and power-amp components, the other holding the power scaling circuit, used under licence from London Power.

All the front- and rear-panel components and valve bases are chassis-mounted and connected to the PCBs with high-quality hook-up wire. Two large transformers and a similarly heavyweight choke mean that, despite its compact dimensions, the Badger 35 is no lightweight. The front panel is relatively straightforward, with controls for drive, gain, bass, mid and treble, along with a power control that connects to the power scaling section, proportionately varying key voltages in the circuit to achieve real power stage clipping at any volume level.

Sounds

The Corso's recording tag means that above all else it needs to be as noise-free as possible, and thanks to good design and high-quality



- 1** Modern, stylish and very versatile, there's a choice of two grille patterns
- 2** The power control is basically an attenuator that also functions as a dummy load for silent recording
- 3** The Badger 35's power scaling feature allows power amp clipping at any volume level
- 4** Dual speaker outlets and an impedance switch allow connection to a wide range of cabinets



2

components, it's practically silent, with no hum and just a little hiss in the higher-gain region. Unlike with some other similar designs, all the mini toggle switches contribute something meaningful to the Corso's sound, adding brilliance and snap, fat midrange or extended bass, along with a serious 12dB gain

boost that will please heavy rock and metal players. Combined with the smooth, predictable response of the treble and bass tone controls, you can shape practically any tone you want with consistent precision, from vintage tweed and 'blackface' cleans that flatter single coils, through to fat medium-gain classic-rock crunch and lead tones that work superbly well with PAF-style humbuckers, all the way up to modern high-gain stuff with extended bass that can handle baritone and detuned instruments.

The Badger 35's gold perspex control panel should give a clue that this amp is aimed at vintage 60s Brit-influenced tones, and while it doesn't have the Corso's flexibility, there's more than enough range to travel from Hanwell all the way to Dartford and back, with sparkling chimiey rhythm tones at lower gain levels giving way to a harmonically rich crunch and singing leads that are perfect for blues. We loved this amp's dynamic response and the way it cleans up just by backing off the volume control a little. Both amps sound great at lower volume levels. However, the Corso's wire-wound volume pot jumps slightly from zero to on, with 'on' being just a touch too loud for late-night practice, while the Badger 35's sophisticated power scaling feature means you can dial in just the right amount of output stage clipping at any volume level.

Overall, the Corso's sonic transparency and wide-ranging EQ means it can sound quite close to any amp you want, while the Badger is definitely dialled in to the classic rock and





3



4

blues invasion tones of the late 1960s and early 1970s, sounding incredible with our PAF-loaded Les Paul, with plenty of volume for live gigs using the matching Suhr 1x12 extension cab.

Verdict

Two superb amps from Suhr then, with very different purposes, but both built to the same exceptionally high standard, delivering a quality of tone that's in a different league to most of the competition. It goes without saying that this kind of quality doesn't come cheap; both amps are expensive, but they're not completely out of mortal range. Considering they're handmade in the USA, we'd say the price is fair for what's on offer. Aspiration is a key driving force of the MI industry, with many beginners dreaming that one day they'll be playing through amps such as these. Does the reality of this Suhr duo live up to that? We say, emphatically, yes. **G**



Suhr Corso

PRICE: £849

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp, with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: 5 watts, variable down to zero

VALVES: 1x 12 AU7, 2x 12AX7 preamp, 2x 12BH7 power amp

DIMENSIONS: 225 (h) x 330 (w) x 175mm (d)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 5/11

CABINET: Aluminium/ply

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Drive, bass, treble, power. Toggle switches for presence, bright, mid, deep and gain boost

FOOTSWITCH: None

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in attenuator (power control) functions as a dummy load fully anticlockwise. Unbalanced line out

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The Suhr 1x12 extension cabinet, as reviewed, costs £499

Select UK dealers

www.suhr.com



Suhr Badger 35

PRICE: £1,699

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp, with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: 35 watts, variable down to zero

VALVES: 3x 12AX7 preamp, 4x EL84 power amp

DIMENSIONS: Head: 240mm (h) x 220mm (d) x 520mm (w)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 14/31

CABINET: Aluminium/ply

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Drive, gain, bass, mid, treble, power. Toggle switches for presence, bright, mid, deep and gain boost

FOOTSWITCH: None

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Power scaling feature allows power amp clipping at any volume, series effects loop

OPTIONS: Cream and black vinyl are standard, various custom colours are available for a £99 upcharge

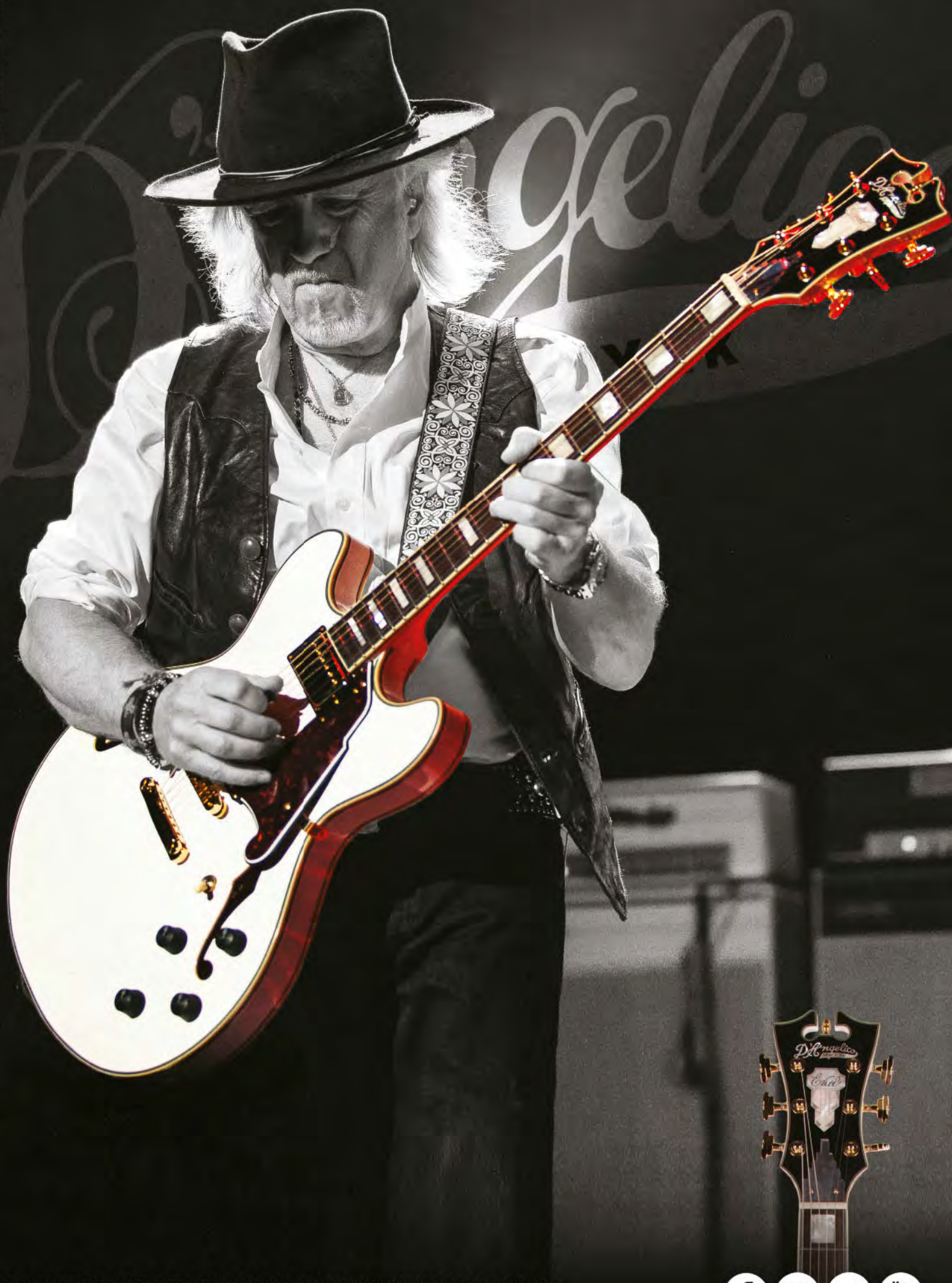
RANGE OPTIONS: The Suhr 1x12 extension cabinet, as reviewed, costs £499, there is a 2x12 cab for £699, while a 1x12 combo costs £2,099

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A fantastic recording amp that looks good in any setting

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A versatile head that conjures up superb classic rock and blues tones



BRAD WHITFORD OF AEROSMITH WITH HIS D'ANGELICO EX-DC
With the power of the D'Angelico EX-DC and his series of 3 Monkeys full-stacks,
Brad Whitford brings the massive, iconic sound that defines Aerosmith.



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FIRST ▶ PLAY



VICTORY V40
'THE DUCHESS'
£829

WHAT IS IT? An all-steel, small head that uniquely captures the low-gain overdrive nuance that's often lost on higher-gain amps

FLAWLESS VICTORY

Less gain, more tone. The revolution starts here...

WORDS **NICK GUPPY**
PHOTOGRAPHY **JOSEPH BRANSTON**

Victory Amplification is rapidly carving a reputation as *the* British amp company to watch out for, and with no less a player than Guthrie Govan endorsing its products, that's hardly surprising. Now the first amps are out in the marketplace and receiving well-deserved critical acclaim, Victory looks set to enjoy a busy 2015, but what's coming down the pipeline to keep up the momentum? Well, the answer is an amp that has taken us a little by surprise.

Based on the same all-metal package as the V30 head, with a large high-quality PCB inside, 'The Duchess' might look like a typical modern rock amp, but sonically it's very different. The V40 expands the elusive low-to-medium gain range, putting a wide spectrum of subtly shifting overdrive textures under your fingers. There are rotary controls for gain, EQ and master volume.





<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>





The real fun starts with a two-position voice switch, which subtly changes the V40's character. Voice 1 is centred more on the early 60s 'blackface' tone; Voice 2 is edgier and a touch more aggressive, evoking the tweed amps of the 1950s. A small toggle switch called 'mid kick' adds a touch of extra gain in the midrange, not least to give weedy single coils a lift for solos. There's also a digital reverb with a front-panel level control and on/off switch.

As usual, there are a few extras: a series effects loop, switchable bias to take EL34 and 6L6 valves, a single-ended mode with a switch to even out the wear on both valves, and a couple of defeat switches that remove the reverb and the effects loop if needed. Then there's the standby switch, which has two 'on' positions for high power (approximately 40 watts) and low power (seven watts). This

switch also works in the V40's single-ended mode, offering a choice of around 1.5 watts in the high-power position and 0.5 watts in the low-power setting. The V40 is a serious piece of work, built to a high standard and just as ready for non-stop professional touring as it is for your bedroom or study.

Feel & Sounds

The V40's sonic palette made us sit up and take notice. By reducing the gain, all the mildly overdriven and chime effects normally squeezed into a fraction of the gain knob's travel now occupy the whole range. From sparkling cleans to smoky, touch-sensitive 'just on the edge' drive and on to a reasonably aggressive crunch, the V40 can be edged into tweed or 'blackface' territory, with a smoother treble and somewhat tighter bass than those

1 Easy to understand and use – the V40 manages a wide range of tones from a simple layout

2 The V40's digital reverb and effects loop can be defeated if required





<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



The V40 has effectively carved out its own niche, and looks set to become popular for blues, roots, jazz and country players

benchmarks. Along with our usual PAF-loaded Les Paul Standard and an old Strat, we bring along an Ibanez AFJ95 archtop to check out the amp. What never fails to impress us is the way each instrument's character is faithfully reproduced, from the Fender's twang to the woodier growl of the Ibanez's heavier flatwound strings.

Reducing overdrive and distortion has the effect of pushing the guitar forward in a mix – it's more noticeable even when played quietly. The only downside to this enhanced clarity is that the amp becomes less forgiving – fluffed notes and buzzy strings are reproduced with equal precision. However, as you modify your technique to dig in a little more, the V40 rewards with a dynamic response and sustain that's simply stunning.

Verdict

The V40 Duchess is a unique design – many of its competitors feature high-gain lead channels, teamed with high headroom and often uninspiring clean channels. By focusing on those often-overlooked but highly effective low-to-medium overdrive sounds, the V40 has effectively carved out its own niche, and looks set to become popular for blues, roots, jazz and country players. There are a few other amps that fall into the same category, but often they're vintage reissues that require some degree of compromise due to a lack of features. But the V40 is bang up to date, and costs substantially less than USA-made boutique exotica, while giving nothing away in the tone department. If that's your kind of amp, check one out as soon as you can, but be quick: the V40 is likely to have a long waiting list. **G**



Victory V40 'The Duchess'

PRICE: £829

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp, with solid-state rectifier

OUTPUT: 40 watts, switchable to 7 watts, 1.5 watts or 0.5 watts

VALVES: 3x 12AX7 preamp, 2x EL34 power amp

DIMENSIONS: 185 (h) x 342 (w) x 185mm (d)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 8/18

CABINET: Steel

CHANNELS: 1

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid and treble, master volume, voice 1/2 switch, mid kick switch, reverb on/off

FOOTSWITCH: Single-button footswitch supplied, toggles reverb effect

ADDITIONAL FEATURES: High- and low-power switching, single-ended mode, series effects loop, digital reverb

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Also available as a 1x12 combo (£1,199)

Victory Amplification

www.victoryamps.com



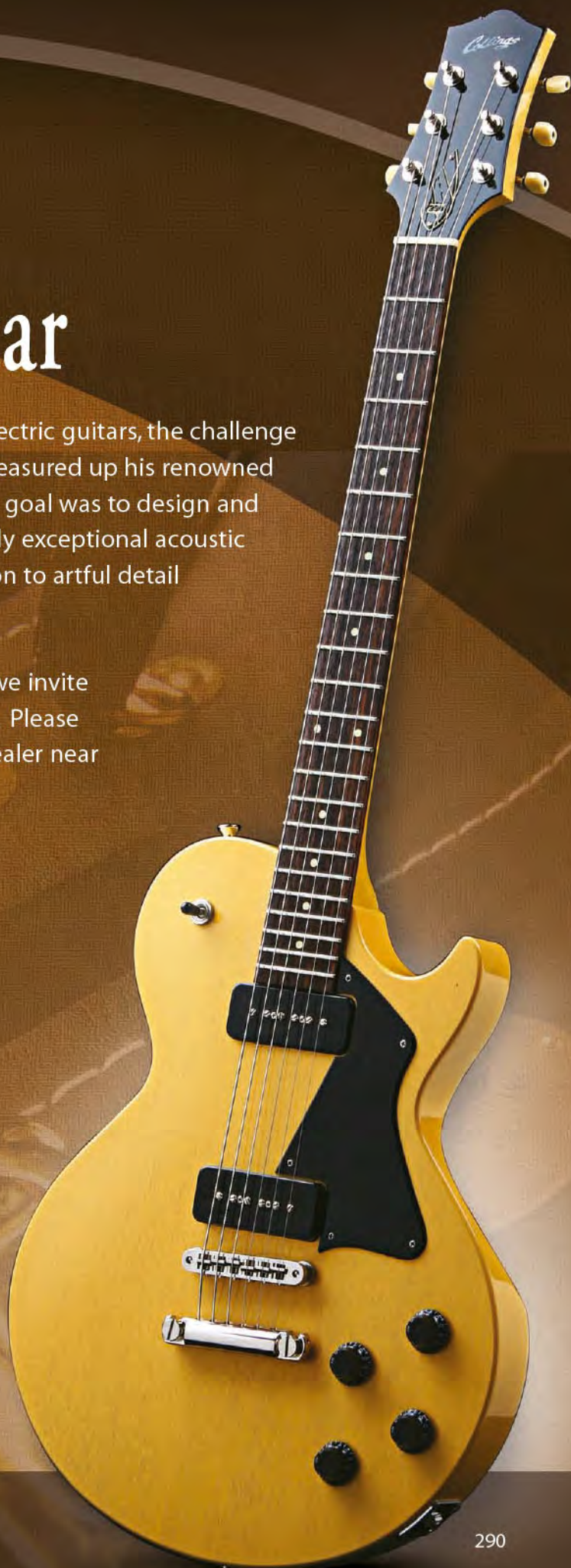
GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★	
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A very portable head with stunning low-gain tone that's in a class of its own

serious guitar

When Bill Collings set out to build electric guitars, the challenge was to craft instruments that fully measured up his renowned reputation in the acoustic world. His goal was to design and build electric guitars with consistently exceptional acoustic qualities and the meticulous attention to artful detail that continue to set Collings apart.

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Collings

collingsguitars.com 01227 832558

290

Frontend

Don't miss it! Must-see guitar goings-on for the coming weeks...



Fender National Learn To Play Day

Royal Festival Hall, London, 21 March

Fender's National Learn To Play Day is a free event in March in London, where budding guitar, bass or even ukulele players can bag themselves a free lesson. Taking place on Saturday, 21 March on the sixth floor of Royal Festival Hall, visitors will receive a free introductory lesson from qualified Registry Of Guitar Tutors instructors, meet Fender's team, and watch acoustic performances. Last year's event was visited by various Fender-affiliated musicians; keep an eye on the website of the Music For All charity at www.musicforall.org.uk for announcements about this year's celebrities. Details of how to sign up for the event will be posted on Fender's social media channels at www.facebook.com/fendergbi and www.twitter.com/fendergbi.



Andy Timmons Band/ Godsticks tour 15-17 March, various UK venues
Fans of tasty fretmanship should book tickets for the Andy Timmons Band's UK tour. Support comes from Godsticks, featuring *Guitarist's* test pilot, Darran Charles. See www.andytimmons.com for info.

Matt Schofield UK tour 3, 6 & 8 March, various UK venues

Guitarist favourite Matt Schofield is back in the UK next month, on his *Return Of The Trio* tour. Catch him at The Jazz Café in London on 3 March, The Guildhall in Lichfield on 6 March and Bristol Jazz Festival on 8 March. See mattschofield.com.

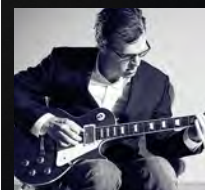


New Toto album 24 March

Steve Lukather and Toto return in March with their first studio album in nine years. According to the guitarist, *Toto XIV* is "a complete, huge massive production. If you like what we do, you're going to love this record." It's reviewed on p41, and you can catch Toto's UK tour in May.

Joe Bonamassa live Hammersmith Apollo, London, 17-21 March

See Joe Bonamassa on his four-night stint at London's Hammersmith Apollo. Modestly dubbed *The Guitar Event Of The Year*, the gigs will showcase songs from Joe's latest record, *Different Shades Of Blue*. See www.eventimapollo.com.



Beginner's Practice Amps

Here are six ideal companions for beginners, to go with that new guitar you got for Christmas



1 Blackstar ID:Core

From £89

www.blackstaramps.com

Blackstar's ID:Core range is aimed squarely at beginner guitarists, but it packs a varied feature set into a relatively small and excellent value-for-money package. The ID:10 has two three-inch five-watt speakers, onboard effects, reverb and an array of tones; plus, it's programmable, too.

We said: "A superbly featured first amp – a no-brainer. A lot of fun for the cash!"

2 Yamaha THR-10C

£299

www.yamaha.com

Yamaha's THR is intended as a 'third amp' for experienced guitarists, but there's no reason why beginners shouldn't also make use of its excellent stereo

sound and range of onboard amp models and effects. It's a superb practice tool, too, with an aux input and specially designed iPhone app that enables you to play along to (and even manipulate playback of) your favourite tunes.

We said: "For home and practice, the quality of sound is truly outstanding."

3 Fender Mustang

From £118

www.fender.com

Fender's beginner's amp range offers superb value for money, and its digital amp models and effects have recently been updated to include more emulations of classic hardware, along with superb onboard digital reverb.

We said: "Pretty much every sound you can imagine, and a whole load more that you can't."

4 Vox Soundbox Mini

£179

www.voxamps.com

The styling has a hint of 80s boombox about it, and the Soundbox Mini can be powered by batteries and used as a music player on-the-go. But it also adds modelled guitar, bass and keyboard presets (including its maker's AC30), as well as effects, reverb and Korg's 'Acoustage' technology to the mix.

We said: "A serious desktop-amp contender, thanks to the broad range of tones and the impressive 3D effects of Acoustage."

5 Peavey Vypyr VIP

From £155

peavey.com

Peavey's affordable and innovative range of practice combos is built for use with acoustic, electric or bass guitars,

and each one comes packed with tweakable digital models of amps and effects, plus an optional heavy-duty foot controller.

We said: "Decent tones for the money. Light and compact. Endlessly tweakable."

6 Orange Micro Crush Pix

£38

www.orangeamps.com

If you're on a real economy drive but still want to make some noise, you could do worse than test out the teeny, yet surprisingly throaty, Orange Mini Crush Pix. Its four-inch speaker offers clean and crunchy tones with a slightly fuller bass response than most of its rivals, and it has a built-in tuner, too.

We said: "Best-suited to crunchy indie sounds and gritty tones, the Micro Crush Pix is a decent mini amp."

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1985-2015



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In the decade before PRS Guitars opened its doors, founder Paul Reed Smith made a living as a repairman and custom luthier working tirelessly on creating a guitar that he felt worthy of taking to market. 30 years after founding the company, Paul maintains the passion to discover and experiment with new theories, concepts and designs that continually make our products better.

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Holy Grail Up For Sale

Les Paul's original 1954 prototype for the models that bore his name is to be auctioned this month



The grandfather of all Les Pauls: this 1954 prototype is going under the hammer in February

One of the most significant instruments in the history of the guitar is to go on sale at auction on 19 February at Guernsey's auction house in New York City. The instrument is the forerunner to the iconic Les Paul Custom model and was created based on refinements to early design collaborations between the star guitarist and Gibson earlier in the 1950s. Nicknamed 'Black Beauty' on account of its tuxedo-like appearance and gold binding, it left the Gibson factory in late 1953 and was delivered to Les Paul in 1954.

Over the next 22 years, Paul made restless modifications and refinements to the instrument, including changing the pickups, their position and the pickguard configuration, changing the control layout and the impedance of the circuitry,

adding different vibratos, altering the tune-o-matic's height to add sustain, and even adding a microphone socket with volume control on the bass bout of the guitar. He played 'Black Beauty' for years on various recordings and in performances, including on his *Les Paul And Mary Ford* TV show, before he gifted it to his personal friend and luthier Tom Doyle in 1976.

Doyle has now brought it to auction along with other items from his personal collection, which include another historic prototype guitar: a one-off black Gretsch 6120 nicknamed 'Dark Eyes', made for Chet Atkins. There's also an original Ampex recording machine from Paul's home; his stage stool from Fat Tuesday's in New York City; hand-written setlists; cassettes of live Les Paul recordings and a collection of other memorabilia on offer.

The Les Paul has no pre-auction price estimate. In a two-day auction back in June 2012, items from Paul's personal collection raised nearly \$5 million to benefit the Les Paul Foundation, his charitable organisation dedicated to musical education and medical research. For further information see:

www.guernseys.com

This 1956 prototype 6120 is the guitar that started the long association between Gretsch and Chet Atkins



Les Paul's recording experiments were true innovations, and this Ampex recorder is from his home studio



"One of the finest guitar straps in the world"

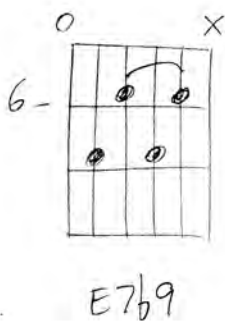
Guitarist Magazine

Substitute

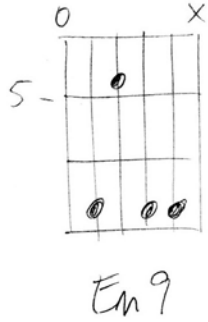
Tired of using the same old chord shapes? These substitutions will freshen up your playing in seconds

This Issue: The Hendrix Alternative

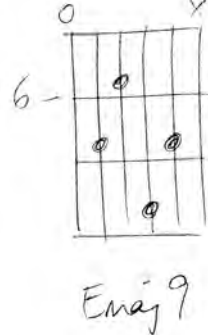
The traditional 'Hendrix chord' is E7#9. This E7#9 has a similar shape, but is miles away in terms of sound. Add some lines from the double harmonic scale (E F# G A B C D#) and it all starts to get a bit John Zorn.



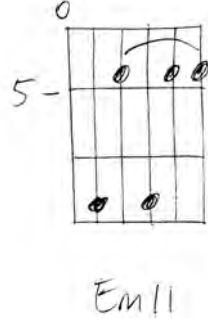
Both the E7#9 and E7b9 are dominant 7 chords, but what happens if we go for a straight minor 9 chord? A bit of cool bossa nova, maybe? Alternate this with an A7 chord and jam your brains out on the Dorian mode (E F# G A B C# D).



Or go full-on major instead. The major 9 was popular with the jazzier end of Motown in the 70s. They'd often move them around in parallel, so try following this with Dmaj7 or C#maj9. Or just jam the major scale (E F# G# A B C# D#).



Finally, what does this one make you want to do? Add some delay, like Andy Summers? It has quite an open sound, with no immediate urge to resolve to another chord... time for a 20-minute Dorian jam?



And also...

RIP JEFF GOLUB

Guitarist Jeff Golub died in January, aged 59, following a long illness. Ohio-born Golub's versatile jazz-and-blues-influenced style served him well as both a band leader and sideman, and he played with the likes of Rod Stewart, Tina Turner, Robben Ford and Sonny Landreth, among others.

BROKEN BONO

U2 frontman Bono fears he may never play guitar again, following a motorcycle accident in November in which he fractured his eye socket and broke his arm in six places. "I personally would very much miss fingering the frets of my green Irish Falcon or my Gretsch. Just for the pleasure, aside from writing tunes," he said.

PRIDE AND JOY

2015's inductees into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame are to include Green Day, Lou Reed, Bill Withers and Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble. A new exhibit dedicated to the 2015 inductees will be opened at the museum in Cleveland, Ohio.

Guitarist Picks

Highlights from last issue



Electrics

St Blues
Mississippi
Bluesmaster
£1,149

"Tidily made with good sounds – a gigging workhorse"



Acoustics

Waterloo WL-14X
£1,999

"The Waterloo may divide opinion, but its tone is pure vintage country-blues nirvana"



Amps

Matrix Elements
VB800
£549

"An Immensely portable amp with good looks and great tone"



Effects

Empress Vintage
Modified
Superdelay
£389

"Some of the best tape-echo sounds around"



Positive Grid
BIAS Desktop
\$99

"If you want open-ended, quality amp modelling to expand your tonal horizons, you'll find it here"

And Finally...

While plenty of players have been blithely described as "the hardest-working guitarist in showbusiness", only one has formally earned the title – and that man is **Bruce Rickerd**, who has entered the archives of **Guinness World Records** for the **Most Theatrical Performances By A Male Musician**. Ottawa-born Rickerd earned his gong thanks to playing guitar in every single one of **10,000 performances** of the Las Vegas show, **Mystère**, an unbroken sequence which took the 62-year-old musician **21 years to complete**. Speaking to the Associated Press, Rickerd shared the key to his success: "It's very simple," he said. "You turn up."



NEW FOR 2015



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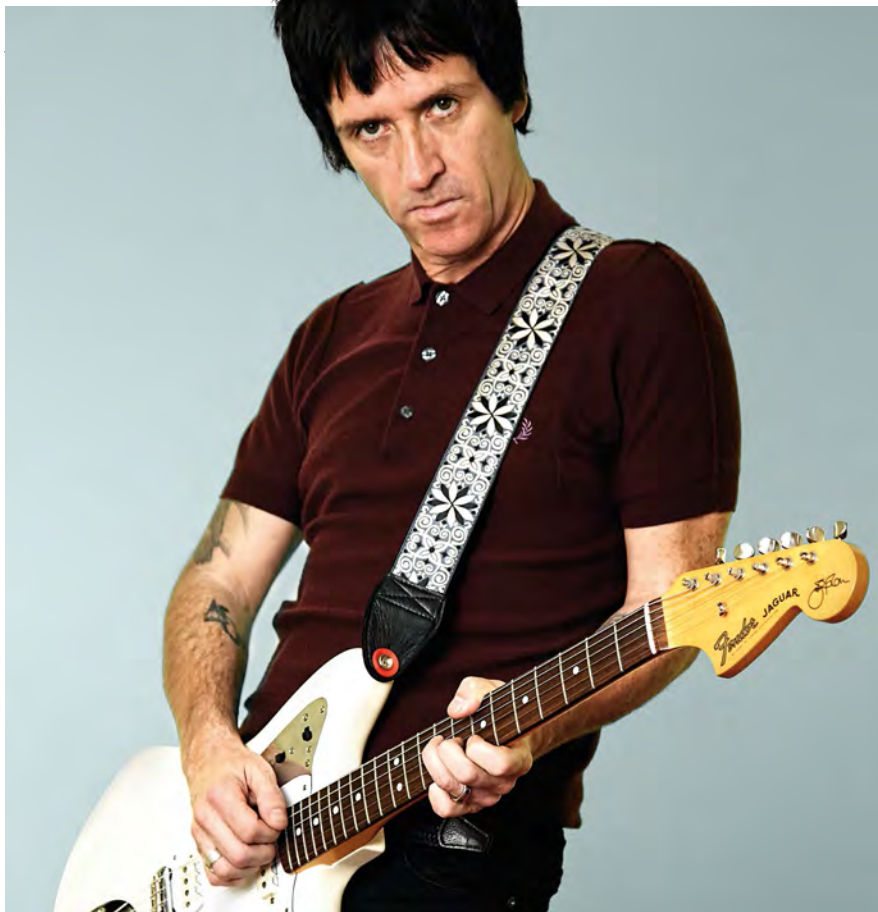
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Johnny Marr

From Smiths wunderkind to national treasure, Johnny Marr's indie-rock and pop guitar legend status is undoubted, but how will he handle the...

10 Questions We Ask Everyone

1 WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST GUITAR AND WHEN DID YOU GET IT?

"My first guitar was a little wooden toy thing, bought in a haberdashery shop in Manchester in 1967, when I was four years old. Humble beginnings, as they say..."

2 THE BUILDING'S BURNING DOWN – WHAT GUITAR FROM YOUR COLLECTION WOULD YOU SAVE?

"My red Gibson ES-355. It's the most famous of the guitars I own, so I'd have to grab that one."

3 WHAT SONG WOULD YOU PLAY ON ACOUSTIC AROUND THE CAMPFIRE?

"Hmm, a campfire song, eh? I'd have to go with *That's The Way* by Led Zeppelin. That would sound pretty good at night round the campfire, I think."

4 IS THERE A GUITAR YOU REGRET LETTING GO?

"[Laughs] That's a tricky one. Noel Gallagher's got my black Les Paul that I used on the album *The Queen Is Dead*. But he's a good boy, so I'll let it go. There's another answer to the Noel thing: I was drinking a lot in those days! But I like to help other musicians out. I know that I got a lot of helping hands when I was starting out. Some people were very generous to me; without them, I wouldn't have gotten to where I am. What goes around comes around. With Noel, the guitars went to a

"Noel Gallagher's got my black Les Paul that I used on 'The Queen Is Dead'. But he's a good boy, so I'll let it go. With Noel, the guitars went to a good home. He wrote some great stuff with them"

really good home. He wrote some great stuff with them, so it all worked out. I've given quite a few away over the years. I gave one to Chrissie Hynde, and Bernard Butler has my ES-335 12-string that I used on *Strangeways, Here We Come* and with the Talking Heads. I've given [The The singer-songwriter] Matt Johnson a guitar, too. I've been very happy to hang out with the Radiohead guys, and I loaned them guitars for *In Rainbows*. You recognise kindred spirits. I'm proud of that kind of thing."

5 WHAT'S THE NEXT PIECE OF GEAR YOU'D LIKE TO ACQUIRE?

"I wouldn't mind having a 1968 doubleneck Gibson EDS-1275 six- and 12-string. I'm not joking – I'd love to have one."

6 WHAT ARE YOU DOING FIVE MINUTES BEFORE YOU GO ONSTAGE...

"Painting my nails. And I'm not joking about that, either! [Laughs]"

7 ...AND FIVE MINUTES AFTER?

"I'm hugging the bass player and kicking the drummer."

8 WHAT'S THE WORST THING THAT'S EVER HAPPENED TO YOU ONSTAGE?

"Having the singer walking off and not coming back. That's a bad thing to happen, right?"

9 IS THERE AN ASPECT OF GUITAR PLAYING THAT YOU'D LIKE TO BE BETTER AT?

"Yeah. I'd like to get better at expression through vocabulary. There's always something new to learn."

10 IS THERE A MYTH ABOUT YOU, OR YOUR GUITAR PLAYING, THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SET STRAIGHT?

"Sure. I'd like to dispel the notion that everything I do is either 'jangle' or 'jingle'. I'm not one of Santa Claus' elves, man – I do kick in. But there's something else: there's this idea that The Smiths were fey. We weren't fey at all. Even when we were light, we were still heavy."

Johnny Marr's latest album, *Playland*, is out now on New Voodoo Records.

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- John Smith

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Star letter



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FEELING LEFT OUT

Here's a story to get you all thinking. I'm a left-handed player, and last summer my high-school mate's daughter came to stay with us for a month. She was very admiring of my instruments and made a comment about wanting to learn, so I said to myself: 'let's have an experiment'. And, like Baldrick, I hatched a cunning plan. I sat two similar electric guitars next to each other, one of my lefties and my daughter's abandoned right-hand guitar. I said "pick the one you like". At first, she grabbed the right-hand Strat, and holding it the right way she said: "I tried one of these before, but I feel more comfortable with it this way" (and she duly flipped it over a la Jimi). So I said, "why not try the lefty instead?" She duly did, and said: "Yeah, I like it," so the lesson began. The young lady is naturally right-handed. I wonder how many right-handed people out there are struggling with the wrong guitar because it's the only option they're presented with as beginners.

Dan Orlandea, via email

It's an interesting point, Dan – although, with an estimated one per cent of the market belonging to left-handed players, it's easy to see why left-handed variants are, sadly, far scarcer on the high street than lefties could wish. We'll look into a round-up review of the best options, as it seems one may be overdue. Intriguingly, many players, including the editor of this tome, are natural lefties who play right-handed. Would such players be more comfortable if they'd played a left-handed instrument as a beginner? Have any readers made the conversion to 'natural' left-handedness after years of right-hand play? And is anyone fully ambidextrous on guitar?

RUBBER BANDMATE

So we get to our gig Saturday night and set up the gear. As I go to tune my guitar, to my horror the string tree and retaining screw holding down my top two strings have gone missing. We search the stage, guitar case and so on, but to no avail.

After a panic session, I realise I need something to put downward pressure on the top strings, as the strings are not sounding properly. I search around, find a rubber band, twist it round the headstock and with just the right pressure, the strings ring true and I'm ready to rock – just shows how resourceful we guitarists can be in survival mode. Cheers!

John Reid, via email

Nice improvising, John. Has anyone else out there saved a gig with similar quick-thinking but unorthodox gear repair?

REVIVING AN OLD FRIENDSHIP

I've been playing for 15 years or so, and for the majority of that time I've owned a Mexican-built Fender Tele and we've been through a lot together. However, in recent years I'd become a bit frustrated with it. It didn't excite

me anymore, and a recent pickup upgrade didn't really ignite it like I thought it would.

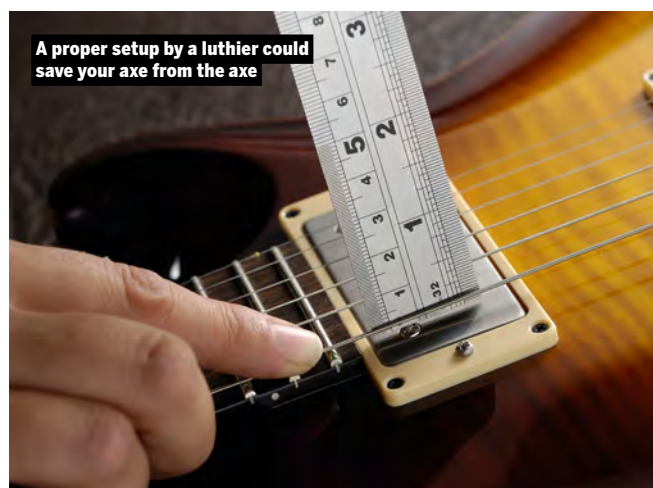
I was considering trading it in for something a little more upmarket, when I had a brainwave. I took it to my local repair shop, and booked the old girl in for a setup. It needed a fair amount of work, a fret dress was required after 14 years of abuse, and the bill was probably half of what the guitar is worth.

But the result? My old friend is alive again, and now has a humbucker, thanks to a four-way switch that I had fitted. I almost feel ashamed that I ever considered letting it go, and it's my Number One guitar again.

So my advice for anybody who's thinking they need a new guitar, is to consider having your current axe set up by a professional. You might be surprised by how much extra you can get out of that old plank...

Chris Ruggles, via email

It's very easy to fall into the trap of thinking we need to buy a new instrument when in fact some proper fettling would achieve the desired effect. In this age of sleek, anonymous electronic devices



with 'no user-servicable parts inside' we should celebrate the fact that most electric guitars – and many amps – are widely adjustable, 50s-tech devices that drift out of top condition if neglected, but respond very well to TLC. So before you wave goodbye to an old friend, have a full setup performed by a reputable luthier, ensuring everything from the condition of the frets to neck relief and

intonation is looked at, while any little serviceability gremlins are banished.

HIGH PROFILE

Dear *Guitarist*, last year was a revelation for myself, gear-wise. I was fortunate to pick up a Kemper Profiling Amp and PRS Custom 24 25th Anniversary, which is beautiful. When I first had the Kemper, I was playing it through Yamaha studio monitors.

They were great for home use, but if you need to use the KPA outside the bedroom you may want a cabinet. For months, I was looking at an Orange 2x12 cab while trying to weigh my options – however, I also came across Zilla Amps. It was fate: I purchased the 'Studio Pro' 2x12, which came with a huge list of options – exciting! It may have worked out slightly more expensive, but having a personal

touch for my own cabinet meant more to me. I was able to choose my own colour, grille cloth, hardware, and whether to have an open or closed back. I spoke to Paul Gough [of Zilla Cabs] for this transaction, and I can't speak highly enough of his hard work, bearing in mind I ordered it the Sunday before Christmas, it was on my doorstep delivered on Christmas eve.

Tim Ward, via email



1. The donor guitar
Dave takes up the story of his Santana SG: "A bog-standard, black SG200 from 1982. It's well-worn and battle-scarred, but otherwise straight and functioning."

2. The timber
"Enter the Somerset Elm that I have had stockpiled for some years (mostly in anticipation of making a table top and some window sills for my house), always with a background thought that a piece could be used to create the coveted SG Yamaha..."

3. Brass bars
"Much progress, even machined and fitted a brass sustain bar under the bridge, as per the great CS's version."

4. Getting close to finishing...
"Almost there – just a few final touches needed to complete the guitar."

5. The end result
"We figured that 'Yamaha 200-and-2000' wasn't going to fit too well on the truss rod plate, so elected for a simple Kanji script for the word Elm, bringing the guitar's origin and the west country link happily together!"

SALUTE TO SANTANA

Just thought I'd write to share a recent Yamaha SG guitar conversion project which may be of interest to readers thinking of undertaking a similar project. The design and desire were born of a very clear specification in my mind's eye – to build a faithful replica of the natural-finish Yamaha SG2000 that was Carlos Santana's preferred instrument up until 1982. The design of the replica was executed largely by

my wife's cousin, Tony Long. A fair degree of the project was created via email and phone, with the cutting and crafting being carried out in a very unassuming garden shed in Birmingham.

Although I was never a lover of the 'Buddha' mother-of-pearl inlay, Carlos' SG2000 was where it all began for me, and I hope we've done it justice with this home-built tribute to a great guitar. I've enclosed some images showing how the project

unfolded, including the finished instrument. Best regards,

Dave Morris, Curator of Aircraft, Fleet Air Arm Museum, via email

Many thanks, Dave, for sharing this fine work in reviving the spirit of an often-overlooked instrument from Carlos' long career. Quite a change from naval aircraft, too! Have any other readers undertaken a similar labour of love?



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WISH LIST

Photography by **Joe Branston**

VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>

Buscarino Corey Christiansen Model Archtop **£7,500**

Two names you may not yet be familiar with have helped to inspire this issue's Wishlist choice. Luthier John Buscarino is the creator of this beautiful slice of jazz heritage. Based in Franklin, North Carolina, he's unusual even in the rarified world of archtop luthiery for having learned guitar-making from two masters – classical guitar maker Augustino LoPrinzi and, later, the revered archtop maker Robert Benedetto.

While John's output includes exquisitely crafted solidbody guitars and progressive nylon-string acoustics, his heart clearly belongs to the timeless world of the fine archtop. This particular

instrument was made to meet the needs of lauded US jazz picker Corey Christiansen, and you'll find intelligent tweaks to the classic hand-made archtop formula made to suit his needs – although rockers such as Steve Morse also number among Buscarino players. The guitar has a solid carved, aged Sitka spruce top that is married to a carved Big Leaf flame maple back and sides in a generous 16-inch body with an 'antique violin' finish. To make the guitar as well-mannered as possible on stage, Buscarino has incorporated a feedback-suppressing block inside the body, in what he dubs a 'Lock Top' design, while the amplified voice

is based on an Alnico III pickup wound by Kent Armstrong.

Meanwhile, the flawless three-piece neck is made of rock maple with walnut veneers, and has a custom width "slightly narrower than 1 11/16 inches for a super-fast action". Like many such guitars, it's a relatively rare bird – but uncompromising jazzers can scope out this magnificent example of the luthier's art in the showroom of Ivor Mairants' Musiccentre in London, slumbering peacefully in a top-end Ameritage case with built-in humidification system. 

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1 Narrow stainless steel frets have been fitted to the three-piece rock maple neck for "long life and perfect intonation"

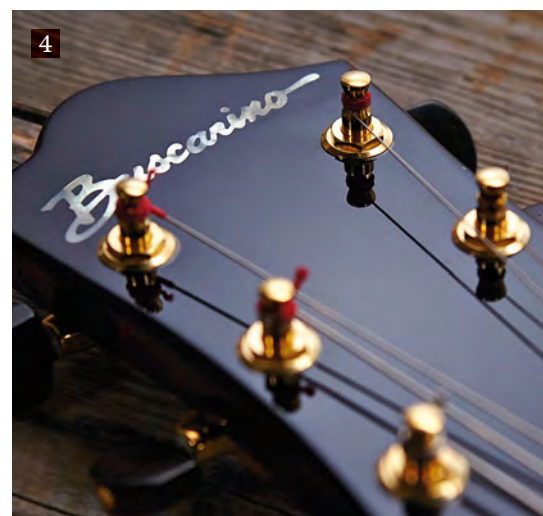
2 The 16-inch body features medium-depth 2.25-inch sides of gorgeously figured Big Leaf maple

3 The top-drawer spec continues in details such as the solid ebony tailpiece with a brass hinge machined

from a solid quarter-inch billet of brass

4 The headstock is faced with a solid 0.125-inch ebony veneer, with mother-of-pearl Buscarino logo

5 Ebony is the tonewood of choice, from which the fingerboard, bridge, tailpiece and pickguard are all made



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Frontiers Records

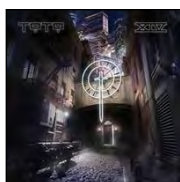
Lukather offers sparkling accompaniment to rich dessert of rock

Any cynics among our readership should look away now, because the reformed Toto's new studio album is a full-fat, knickerbocker glory of irony-free melodic rock.

Let's be clear: it's the sort of music that will send enough lighters aloft to alter the Earth's climate. Subtle it ain't, but allow yourself to be carried away on the Toto tide and it has some great moments, too. It has flaws,

certainly: some of the tracks are cloyingly sentimental, verging on mawkish. But the overall effect is like the guilty pleasure of watching a summer blockbuster with an enormous box of popcorn and a bucket of Pepsi to hand. The high point of the whole thing, for us, though, is Steve Lukather's playing – he's on quite exceptional form here.

It's Lukather who kicks the record off with a darting melodic run that becomes the central hook for the propulsive *Running Out Of Time*, a big, flashy speedboat of a song that thrums along on the powerful engines of Steve's riffs, trailing a wake of



glittering synth. Lyrically, it's a seize-the-day hymn to self-realisation that sets the tone for the rest of the album, which dwells on coming to terms with

private tragedies and scoring victories over inner demons in a very post-therapy, Californian way. Indeed, self-parody looms in places, as in the knight-in-armor romantic bombast of *Burn*, which promises its fictional heroin "there's no force on earth to keep us apart" as a thunderclap of expensively produced rock happens in the background.

We're on far stronger terrain elsewhere, as in the LA-sophistication of *Chinatown* –

a kind of Steely Dan-esque story about seeking oblivion as "a woman pours the absinthe, where the paper lanterns glow". Lukather's concise yet beautifully melodic solo is a treat on this track – seriously, does anyone deliver such well-formed doses of fretboard magic as this man? In every solo he plays on this album, you'll find quicksilver shifts in dynamics, tasty note-targeting over chord changes and great tone. He's the real star here for us.

By all means come for the stadium-ready MOR – but stay for Steve's masterly guitar **[JD]**. **Standout track:** *Chinatown*
For fans of: Dream Theater, Steve Lukather, Bon Jovi, Aerosmith

On
the
Record

ALBUM: *Revolution Saints*
STUDIO: Westgate Las Vegas
 Resort & Casino, Nevada
PRODUCER: Alessandro
 Del Vecchio

"At times it makes it
 refreshing to not be eating,
 drinking and breathing
 the music"



Revolution Saints

Doug Aldrich's split from Whitesnake is vindicated by his new band's debut. We talk recording in Elvis's bar and why rhythm's more important than lead...

The Sessions

"We all had our schedules going, so we recorded the majority of this record remotely in different studios. Deen Castronovo [vocals/drums] recorded in Portland, Jack Blades [bass/vocals] was in California, and I recorded the guitars in Las Vegas. I was doing the *Raiding The Rock Vault* show at the Westgate Hotel, which was previously the International, where Elvis did his last shows. Under the stage, there's this secret bar, where back in the day, between songs, Elvis would go down and have a drink and a smoke with his

friends, hang out with girls. That's where I recorded all the rhythm guitars. The bar is inoperable now – but I had lots of coffee! This is a very melodic record, with songs like *Way To The Sun*. It's funny, because we thought Neal Schon wasn't gonna do the solo on that, so I played one – and I really loved it. Then we found out Neal was gonna do it, and I was like [guttured] 'Oh man!'"

The Guitars

"There was the Goldtop I've had for years, but the other Les Paul – that I used primarily for the rhythm – was the first

prototype of a signature model I'm working on with Gibson USA. It's kick-ass. It's got everything I've done to my original guitars. Most likely, it'll have a TonePros bridge and tailpiece – just because they make it really easy to keep a Les Paul in check – and my signature pickups by John Suhr. They're very similar to Burstbuckers, but they sound more vintage than a super-heavy distorted pickup. The other thing is that Les Pauls are expensive, man. I want to keep costs down to where it's not gonna kill you if you stick it on a credit card!"

The Tones

"I have an old JMP from '79 that I've used on every recording I've done. I bought it in 1981, and everybody knows about this amp. Joe Satriani rented it for *The Extremist*. Godsmack rented it once. Eventually, I got it copied by John Suhr, and that was the main one on this record. There was also some stuff I did with the Pro Tools 11 plug-in. When I'm recording rhythm guitar, I just want to use the shortest lead and go straight to the amp. Then, for solos, I have a signature pedal by Majik Box [the Rocket Fuel], and it's the



“Even though there’s shredding, I really enjoyed the opportunity to play more for the song”

greatest overdrive I’ve ever had. It’s got a clean boost, but the other side is an overdrive that boosts the midrange and low-end. It’s killer. The Dunlop Custom Audio MC404 wah is another one I used a lot.”

The Mix

“With Whitesnake, everything was ‘more, more, more’. It sounded awesome, but David [Coverdale] wanted everything to be doubled, tripled, quadrupled. We’d get to the mix, and he’d go, ‘Let’s turn up the arpeggio guitars’. I’d turn them up, and then he’d be like, ‘We’re losing the rhythm guitars, so let’s bring them up’. Then he’d be like, ‘Now we’re losing the drums!’ The difficult thing is finding a way to make all the tones work. Alessandro did an amazing job on this record. I just wanted it as minimal as possible, because the more tracks you record, the more difficult it can make it for different things to be heard.”

The Lessons

“When you’re working on a record from the get-go, and when you write the songs, you can get really deeply involved – and then it’s hard to let go. But because Alessandro wrote the songs, I just hit the stuff really fresh. I wasn’t attached to it the

way you are when you wrote the song. With this record, it just seemed that I was a little more disconnected, and at times it makes it refreshing to not be eating, drinking and breathing the music.”

The Verdict

“I’m really pleased with this record. Even though there’s shredding, I really enjoyed the opportunity to play more for the song. The most important thing was making sure the rhythm guitars hold the song up. Even as a kid, I loved to listen to what Randy Rhoads was gonna do when a solo came up, but the thing that got me off was the song and the rhythm. The guys that read the magazine, I want them to know that it’s not just about how fast you play or how cool the guitar solo is, it’s from the ground up. Y’know, the bass playing is super-important to how cool the guitar sounds. I’ve been shocked by the great response to the record. Time will tell if this band keeps going. I would love it to...”

Revolution Saints’ self-titled debut album is released on the 20 Feburary 2015 through Frontiers Records

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Albums

JD McPherson *Let The Good Times Roll*

★★★★★

Rounder Records



Head-nodding, toe-tapping, hip-shaking thrills from former schoolteacher

Tele-toting Oklahoma songwriter JD McPherson blew up in 2012, thanks in no small part to the thunderbolt of 50s R&B perfection that was *North Side Gal* – a track from his debut album *Signs & Signifiers*. Far more than just a retro fetishist with a great record collection, McPherson is the real thing – a wonderful singer and guitarist, who understands the timeless vitality of the 50s trailblazers and fuses their influence here with a contemporary muscularity. Special stuff. **[CV]**

Download: *Let The Good Times Roll*

For fans of: Big Joe Turner, The Black Keys, Chuck Berry

Steven Wilson *Hand.Cannot.Erase*

★★★★★

Kscope



Poignant portrait of a death

Following Wilson's *The Raven That Refused To Sing*, with its giant flights of virtuosity from Guthrie Govan, *Hand.Cannot.Erase* is a more intimate album altogether. Inspired by 'the unexplained death of London resident Joyce Vincent', Wilson peeks through the chinks in normal life to glimpse the mystery and fear of existence on moving tracks such as *Perfect Life*. And with Govan again taking on guitar duties for this record, there are plentiful moments of guitar virtuosity to enjoy here, too – not least the spellbinding excursions into full-flight prog soloing on *Regret #9* and *Ancestral*. Absorbing and moving, this is an enigmatic treat. **[JD]**

Download: *Regret #9*

For fans of: Opeth, Pink Floyd, Porcupine Tree, Massive Attack

Sleater-Kinney *No Cities To Love*

★★★★★

Sub Pop



Riot grrrl legends return to storm the barricades

Reuniting after a 10-year hiatus during which you've been canonised as one of the most important acts of your generation would put off most bands. But Sleater-Kinney aren't most bands, and here they show time hasn't dulled their knack for crafting energetic, indie-rock with a message. Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker's down-tuned guitars fill the bass-free space with scuzzy pentatonic riffs that are drilled through with punk-rock urgency, while effects junkies will want to take note of *No Anthems* for its tasteful use of ring modulation – a rare find indeed. **[JG]**

Download: *No Anthems*

For fans of: Sonic Youth, Le Tigre, Bikini Kill

Whit Smith *On The Nature Of Strings*

★★★★★

Flying Fortress Records



Cool retro pickin' from a master of Western swing

Keen-eyed readers may recognise Whit Smith as the talented guitarist behind Hot Club Of Cow Town, the sprightly US Western swing outfit. He's on smoother form here, swapping his cowboy boots for a smoking jacket on this solo album of suave instrumentals, which blend the country-club-clean pickin' style



JD McPherson's Tele is in fine form on his latest LP

of Chet Atkins with the smokier blues-jazz sensibility of Kenny Burrell. It's beautifully performed and wonderfully retro. Our only regret is we wish it were longer than its 20-minute duration. **[JD]**

Download: *Pet Names*

For fans of: Chet Atkins, Kenny Burrell, Jim Campilongo

The Dodos *Individ*

★★★★★

Morr Music



Complex sonic landscapes with affecting melodies

San Franciscan indie-rock duo The Dodos first registered in our consciousness thanks to 2008's excellent *Visitor* LP. Clever rhythmic interplay between fuzzy acoustic guitar and drum patterns is the group's sonic calling card, with singer-guitarist Meric Long's understated vocals tugging heartstrings. Originality is in short supply where two-piece bands are concerned, but these guys have it by the truckload. **[CV]**

Download: *Bubble*

For fans of: Grizzly Bear, Fleet Foxes, Neutral Milk Hotel

Ian Siegal *One Night In Amsterdam*

★★★★★

Nugene



Brit bluesman firing on all cylinders

Ian Siegal's solo acoustic live album, *Man & Guitar*, earned *Mojo* magazine's Blue Album Of 2014 gong for its stripped-down passion and maturity. This sprawling live set, recorded in Holland in April 2014, showcases Siegal's all-new electric line-up putting in an impressive shift, studded with taut performances and hot Tele licks. Catch him live when he tours the UK in March. **[BW]**

Download: *I Am The Train*

For fans of: Matt Schofield, Tom Waits

Bethia Beadman *Chinatown*

★★★★★

Rosélie Records



Angelo Badalamenti meets Stevie Nicks on album number three

From reading theology and Sanskrit at Cambridge University to a stint in Courtney Love's band, it's fair to say that Bethia Beadman isn't your average singer-songwriter. Here, on her third long-player, Beadman manages to once again imbue her songs with a sense of intimacy and mystery, while creating a windswept, cinematic landscape embellished by reverb and tremolo-drenched guitar. **[CV]**

Download: *Lady London*

For fans of: PJ Harvey, Fleetwood Mac, Anna Calvi



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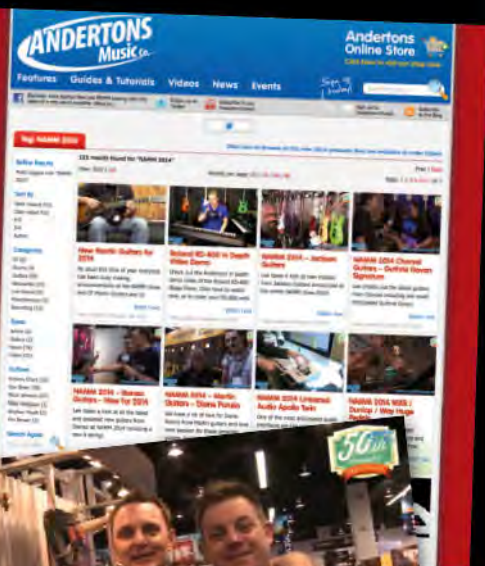
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Two-Rock







Wayne Krantz

When it comes to pioneering improvisation, ear-catching fusion and astounding jazz chops, they don't get much better than Mr Wayne Krantz. The six-string virtuoso gives us a few lessons in the key of life...

Words Matt Frost **Portrait** Rob Monk

Wayne Krantz is one of those guitarists who simply dazzles, leaving numerous other axemen wallowing in his wake.

The jazz fusion genius's fretboard mastery and edgy improvisational exploits have gained him a more than lofty reputation on the New York jazz circuit since he first emerged back in the mid-1980s. Carla Bley, Billy Cobham, Michael Brecker and Steely Dan have all called on Wayne's pioneering skills, while his own trios have wowed crowds wherever they've trodden the boards. *Guitarist* catches up with Krantz as he releases his 10th solo album, *Good Piranha/Bad Piranha*. The long-player features two different trio line-ups, each tackling the same four tracks by MC Hammer, Ice Cube, Thom Yorke and Pendulum. It's safe to say you've never heard a record quite like this, with musicians at the very top of their game showcasing truly electrifying improvisational skills. You can surely learn a lot from visionaries such as Krantz...

1. Some things are meant to be

"I was forced to take piano lessons as a child and I hated it, but my father had this acoustic guitar, which had literally just been left in the attic. Nobody pointed it out to me and nobody mentioned it, but I just kind of found it and started plucking around on it. I was immediately interested, and that was when I was 13 or 14 years old, I guess."

2. Great guitarists appreciate the band as a whole

"As I was playing through high school and so forth, I wasn't really very guitar-player conscious. I was very, very band conscious. As much as I loved Zeppelin and Jethro Tull, I never really focused on the guitar, and – even with the limited exposure I had to Hendrix at that time – I was really more thinking about the songs and the sounds of the songs and the band element rather than isolating the guitar. The thing that changed that, really, was when I started listening to jazz players, because jazz is much more about the players, and that's when I started recognising, 'Oh wow! That's a good guitar

player... okay, so that's what's possible!' That was after I went to Berklee [College Of Music, Boston]. That's when Joe Pass, George Benson and John McLaughlin, and then Pat Metheny, Mick Goodrick and Mike Stern – the younger players from the East Coast – started to figure really hugely."

3. Practice can be a creative endeavour

"I didn't really focus on guitar very much at Berklee for various reasons. I was studying classical composition and biding my time because I didn't know what else to do but, when I got out of Berklee, I started really practising the guitar. I studied with a teacher, Charlie Banacos – who was a pianist – for a year in Boston after I got out of school, and he really taught me how to practise. He inspired me to think that if I was having some kind of problem or if I wanted something musically, then there were ways for me to come up with an exercise to develop what I wanted. That led me on to spending my 20s and 30s locked in a little room somewhere practising my



The power of improvisation was key to the making of Wayne's new album, *Good Piranha/Bad Piranha*

guitar whereas, before that, practising was just something that was impossible for me. I just found it so boring, but figuring out that I could turn the whole thing into a creative endeavour was very, very interesting."

4. It's important to be where the action is

"When I was in Boston, I was just playing stupid gigs to make money because there was nothing creative happening in Boston per se. It's too small a town for the number of schools that are there, so basically it is just a student town. It wasn't really until I moved to New York years later that things changed. Suddenly, I was playing with some of the people I'd always wanted to, and then I was playing with a lot of the people I always wanted to. I began working as a sideman in New York and got that whole part of the thing started. I'd made this record, which was never released, but I was using it as a demo to give to people for a while. I gave it to Steve Swallow, the bass player, and he gave it to Carla Bley. Then my friend Hiram Bullock was supposed to play with Carla one summer but he wasn't able to and – because of that tape – I was asked to audition. Playing with Carla's sextet was really my first professional gig. We were touring around Europe mostly, and through

"Practising was impossible. I found it so boring, but figuring out I could turn the whole thing into a creative endeavour was very interesting"

that I started meeting lots of other people, one of whom was Leni Stern. She had this regular gig down at The 55 Bar [Greenwich Village, New York] every Sunday night, and she asked me to play in the band. Just about every good bass player and drummer that was playing in New York at the time came through that band at one time or another, and that's really how I established a whole bunch of friendships and connections that then led to a whole bunch of other work."

5. Improvising onstage can be a truly amazing experience

"It's hard to explain, but you just lose yourself. It's this beautiful sort of super-heightened self-awareness, but then there's also a complete abdication of self. You know, the stuff's just unfolding in real time like a planet being born or something, and you're basically just right in the middle of this birth. That energy that comes from improvisation – and the fact that improvisation allows that energy – is the

true value of it to me. That's a different thing to playing a song really well. I went and saw James Taylor the other night and they played *You've Got A Friend* and it was just incredible... you know, how many times has he played that now? But he knows how to access whatever he needs to access emotionally to make it every bit as great to hear him do it now as it was 40 years ago or whatever. That's one kind of energy, and that's fantastic, but that's not improvising. In my mind, it's compositional playing, but then there's also improvisational playing and, for me, some combination of those two things is necessary. I would never want it to be all one or the other but, at least in recent history, I think I'm definitely inclined towards the improvisational side."

6. Writing requires a different frame of mind

"For me, writing requires a different frame of mind than practising or playing. The whole bebop sensibility of writing, which

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then became the fusion sensibility of writing, is to write songs that are basically like improvising would be. To do that, you compose in a way that is more congruent with how a band would play and practise and jam... but my stuff's not like that. It's not really a transcription of a solo that everybody plays in unison or anything, so it requires a different awareness, or attitude, or frame of mind or something, to get to the place where that stuff is. It's a real challenge because, with a guitar in your hand, you want to play it but it's really not about that. It's about being struck by an idea that you can then try and develop into something that's more or less identifiable as a song."

7. Older effects can give more tonal edge

"[With effects pedals] I guess I'm drawn to more sort of funky, organic-sounding stuff. That's why I still use an old Boss Digital Delay [DD-3]. Even though just about every other delay that exists now is much cleaner and nicer and more beautiful, there's just something kind of raunchy about it. For better or worse, I'm stuck with this raunchy sound. I've never been comfortable refining it the way that technology has allowed as the years have passed, and I don't know why that is. I don't know whether I'm just self-destructive, but there's just something about when [the effect] gets too nice that it just doesn't really lend itself to the kind of edginess that I'm looking for."

8. Covering songs can give you inspiration

"The cover ideas [on *Good Piranha/Bad Piranha*] started a little while ago actually, when I was playing somewhat regularly again at The 55 Bar with my band, not every week like we used to, but often enough so that I was getting kind of bored with what I was doing. I had the idea of almost arbitrarily choosing an artist and going through their stuff and coming up with eight songs of theirs that I thought we could improvise from, just taking themes from those songs and using them as vehicles to play from. For example, there was a Strokes night, a Joni Mitchell night, an Ice Cube night and a Thom Yorke night. I just grabbed some songs from my records or from iTunes with the idea a) to see if it were possible to make them work and whether we could improvise as we like to, and b) to see what the effect of it would be and whether it would be any different from



Wayne describes his sound as 'raunchy' – and no modern digital delay pedal is going to change that

© VIKAS NAMBIA

when we improvised with my stuff. It was an interesting experiment and a few songs ended up sticking with the repertoire."

9. Editing can be an essential skill on improv albums

"I've been doing this for a really long time, taking a live recording – even though it's been recorded in the studio – and sifting through it looking for the magic. I'm really good at that now and I can instantly tell whether something has that feeling in it that I need or not. It's really easy to make those choices. I think [on *Good Piranha/Bad Piranha*] we only did about two takes of each track, although a few of them might have been three. It's so exhausting to improvise like that because you can't just go in and play for 12 hours. After you've done something twice, it's kind of diminishing returns. With editing, one of the hard parts is sometimes just trying to fit it all on a record, because sometimes there's just a little bit more than the record can tolerate... but the harder part is probably just figuring out how to edit the thing as a constructive

process. You have 16 bars of something and you know you want to use it, but you're not really sure how it's going to work with the track. Where is it going to work? How do you get in and out of it? It is quite creative actually, and I started learning how to do it with the record *Greenwich Mean* in 1999."

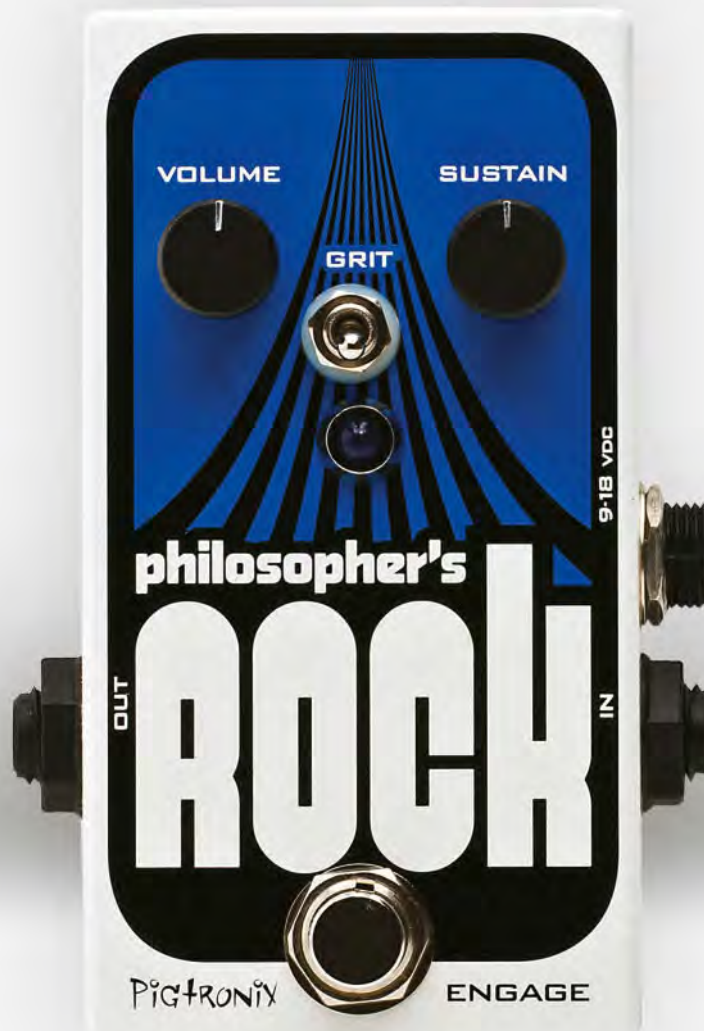
10. Every guitarist improvises to some extent

"[Improvisation] is like anything else. You just have to figure out how to make it sound good but you have to figure out how to make blues sound good, too, and how to make rock sound good, if that's what you're covering. I shy away from calling things more difficult or higher or lower-level, because all that matters is that somebody is playing something that gives some kind of pleasure or relief or inspiration to somebody else, or at least to themselves. At that point, it doesn't really matter what you do. I think everybody does improvise anyway. If somebody's out there playing a show every night that's exactly the same, there's still going to be some tiny thing they do differently, a little moment of going for something or, 'Let me try this'. It's just some people bring that out and focus on it." 

***Good Piranha/Bad Piranha* is out now on Abstract Logix**

"I had the idea of almost arbitrarily choosing an artist and going through their stuff and coming up with eight songs we could improvise from"

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BLUES TRAVELLER

Having Gibbons, Green and Kossoff as your heroes at 18 is one thing, but wielding the raw talent to channel them is a very different proposition. Meet Blues Pills' Dorian Sorriau, the teenager with vintage class

Words **Rob Laing** Photography **Adam Gasson**

Many young bands attempt to rekindle the spirit of late 60s and 70s blues-rock in their sound, some get close but few sound as if they inhabit the soul of that golden era in a way that goes far beyond any pastiche. Transatlantic four-piece Blues Pills do. Swedish frontwoman Elin Larsson recalls Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane's Grace Slick with her powerful presence, and her writing dynamic with American bassist Zack Anderson yielded last year's assured self-titled debut. It was a vintage throwback that sounded truly heartfelt, rather than merely authentic. But their guitarist proves to be another ace in the pack.

At just 18, Frenchman Dorian Sorriau sounds like a guitarist with blues blood flowing through him. His emotive vibrato recalls Peter Green and Paul Kossoff with a groove and swagger, while his blend of lead and rhythm work nods to Cream. But maybe the maturity we're hearing isn't so surprising; he's been on this blues journey since he was five.

"It began with Billy Gibbons, basically," Dorian remembers. "My dad was listening to ZZ Top in the car and I loved it right

away. That's when I really started to love blues-rock music."

Dorian's path would eventually lead him to the equally soulful sounds of Free's guitarist Paul Kossoff, and the style of the late icon clearly made its mark on the young Bretton's ideology. "It's having those solos that are less about technical abilities and more about the feeling and what it brings to the song," notes Dorian. "And Paul Kossoff was a player who did that really well. There's a lot of feeling, with the big bends he did and the vibrato. I like Peter Green for that, too; really tasteful blues guitar."

Blues Pills, the album is full of that. Live favourites *High Class Woman* and the funky *Jupiter* roll out of the traps with rhythmic stabs and tasty breaks; but *No Hope Left For Me* and the sorrowful slide of *River* showcase a sense of space and depth that is very early Fleetwood Mac. That's something reflected in Dorian's less-is-more approach to gain and gear, too.

"With Blues Pills, we have a lot of minor chords, so I like a clean that has push," he explains, "so I can still play minor chords and have it sound clear."

Dorian's amp of choice is an unusual one – a chance find on the advice of album

producer and, to some extent, mentor Dan Alsterberg. "My main amp, other than the Orange Rockerverb I hire for touring in the UK, is an old amp that was distributed in Sweden, called a DNS – it stands for Denmark Norway Sweden. It's from the early 70s, and kind of a mix between an old Fender and a Vox AC30.

"Dan really likes those amps. And people don't really know about them, so if you're lucky you can find them really cheap on Craigslist in Sweden. I have two of those that I bought for £200, and they sound amazing. The DNS has a really clear sound, but it's that clean sound with some gain. It's not flat clean, it's like an old Fender in that way. The Orange is a bit more midrange."

We suspect Dorian has a love of vintage guitars, too. And for the album recording, at least, that was very much the case...

"From early on, I was wishing I could have a 1963 Stratocaster and 1959 Les Paul," laughs Dorian. "But I don't know if I'll ever afford one of those guitars! But I definitely like vintage equipment."

"For the album recording, I used a Firebird non-reverse with P-90s from 1965. It belonged to the guitar player from Soundtrack Of Our Lives. He's a good friend >



The '72 Custom SG used by Dorian on the album

DORIAN'S PEDALBOARD

MXR Micro Amp: "I use it to get a bit more gain on some leads. It's not distortion, or overdrive even. It's the feeling of having the amp on 10."

Velvet Minotaur: "It's a copy of a Klon Centaur. It sounds really good, but it's always breaking down. I think I need to get another Klon copy. For the solos, it really cuts through, though."

Chicago Iron Octavia: "It's an octavia fuzz, which I really like. I use it for the crazier solo tones. It's that out-of-control sound. I'm thinking of getting a new overdrive because that Velvet Minotaur is not reliable. I would like a nice old Klon Centaur one day, but it's a 1,000-dollar pedal."



Dorian's custom-made lightweight LP-style guitar

of Dan's. I also used my SG with mini humbuckers [a '72 Custom], and Graveyard's [another blues-rock band Dan has produced] SG that I got to borrow for some of it. That's a 1969 with P-90s. Also, a Les Paul Custom for some of it. I have a Strat that I used for some rhythms, but mostly it was P-90 and humbucker guitars."

But Dorian's main guitar today is not a Gibson. And it's not vintage either, though it certainly nods to the past. The demands of Pills' relentless touring schedule have led him on a different path, to US brand Corsa.

"I was thinking that I'd really like a Les Paul with P-90s," explains Dorian. "But the older Les Pauls are really expensive but also really heavy. It's almost painful how heavy they are. That's what I really liked about the Firebird – it's light. But I liked the Les Paul shape, P-90s and Sunburst, so I wondered where I could find something."

"This guy Dieter came to a show in Switzerland and showed me a Corsa guitar. It was a LP-style, but a double-cut, with humbuckers. A really nice guitar. So I asked whether he could make one with P-90s. But he actually had one already. So the next show, he brought it. I played it through the

"I was thinking I'd like a Les Paul with P-90s, but older Les Pauls are expensive and really heavy. I liked the Les Paul shape, P-90s and Sunburst, so I wondered where I could find something"

amp and I basically played for four hours straight because it was just so nice to play on. Then I did a show with it. He gave me a good deal on it, so I bought it."

The 'PG' in his LCPG-PO39 also stands for Peter Green, and recreating the former Fleetwood Mac and Bluesbreaker's tone is Larry Corsa's *modus operandi*. The inspiration goes as far as the guitar's Manalishi P-90 pickups. So why are they right for the Blues Pills tone?

"It's not so muddy or thick as a humbucker, and P-90s are good for the clean minor chords. They work especially well in Blues Pills with minor chords because the Strat would be a bit thin."

We're looking forward to hearing where Dorian's playing will go on album number two. When he joined the band at just 16

after a fateful encounter with bassist Zack and former drummer Cory Berry (now replaced by André Kvarnström) when he supported their band in France, Dorian's role in the songwriting process was limited. Now things are changing. "On the first album, a lot of the main ideas came from Zack and Eli, like the chords, melodies and lyrics," he explains. "Then we arranged it together. On the second album, it seems like it will be more of a band thing, where I'm going to be more involved from an earlier stage of building the song together." For a band whose star is clearly in ascension for 2015, it sounds as though Dorian's blues journey is only just getting started. **G**

Blues Pills tour the UK in April. For more info visit bluespills.com



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A stylized, handwritten signature of Paul Brady in white ink.

The Paul Brady Signature model





Fretboard Locksmith

Carl Verheyen is a US session ace and solo artist who just happens to be one of the most formidably expressive guitarists out there. He's forgotten more than most of us will ever know about playing richly melodic solos, improvising with complete freedom over songs of any style. We tracked him down and persuaded him to give up a few of his secrets...

Words **Jamie Dickson**

Carl Verheyen's latest album, the fiery fusion workout *Mustang Run*, demonstrates powerfully why he's one of the finest guitarists working today. But he's played oodles of top-drawer gigs over the years, from the Django-style soundtrack of the Pixar movie *Ratatouille* to stadium tours with Supertramp and a string of acclaimed solo albums. Largely self-taught, Carl's spent years methodically unlocking the hidden potential of the fretboard. We join him to discuss the crucial breakthroughs that have helped him to become such a great player – and how you can apply those lessons to your own playing today.

We wind things up with a fascinating tutorial on how to summon spellbinding licks from simple melodic ideas (see p64). But, first, we find out why Carl's keen to get his hands on any vintage Hiwatts you may have lying around...

Your soloing is always very listenable because it's so melodic. How did you first develop that skill?

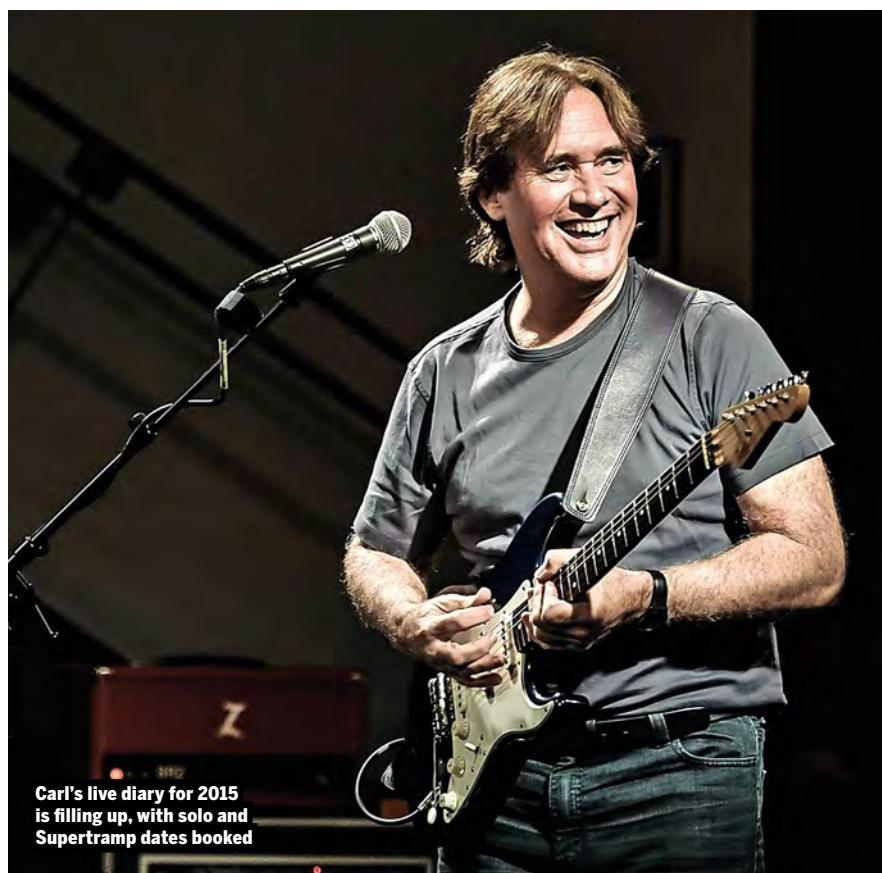
"When I was about 18 years old, I got a job playing and singing in a nightclub. I got the job when I was 17, but they wouldn't let me start in a bar in California until you turn 18. And so, before getting into being a real serious improviser, especially in the world of jazz, I was a singer-songwriter kid, you know? With a Martin guitar, singing songs. So I think the vocal side probably kept me more in touch with it [melody].

"Also, I had a real eye-opening experience. I was playing at age 18 at this little nightclub in Pasadena, California. And this guy walked in and said, 'I like the way you play – do you want to get together and jam?' And he was an older guy, and I said, 'Sure'. So I went over to his house and we sat down with some sheet music and the first chord was Fmaj7, and I knew that chord. But the second chord was Dm7^b5, which I'd

never seen before. So I kind of went up the scale and went, okay let's see; D, E, F, G, A... so if that's the fifth, so a₅ is A₅, right? And so I played him a little voicing that I'd made up right on the spot, just trying to figure it out.

"But he proceeded to show me about 25 or 30 other ways to do that chord. And it was completely mind-blowing. I'd never heard of this chord before and now I'm seeing that there's all these places on the neck to do it. So it opened my eyes to playing jazz and trying to be a real serious improviser. And that's how I got into Miles Davis and all those guys. Listening to that stuff, I think you get a sense of melody. I mean, I remember transcribing entire Sonny Rollins solos and getting more out of those choruses than a whole lot of other things you practise."

If you had to coach a complete beginner on how to play a good solo, but you had only 60 seconds, what would you advise? ➤



Forward, Mustang...



Carl's most recent solo album, *Mustang Run*, was a tour de force of melodic magic on electric guitar (see review, issue 386). But he's always busy, so we asked him what's in the pipeline next. Turns out he's yanking out the cable to go unplugged...

"I've got a solo acoustic album coming out in February, and I did my first one way back in 2001, and it's called *Solo Guitar Improvisations*; ever since then people have been saying, 'You gotta do a volume II – this was really wonderful'. It was just little arrangements of tunes and stuff like that for solo guitar. So, I finally got around to collecting enough stuff to do it, and it's coming out in February. And then I'm going to do a few festivals next summer with the band, and then Supertramp is gonna tour in the Fall I believe – so that'll be fun. We'll probably play the O2 Arena again, which we did in 2010. But meanwhile I've already started on the follow-up to *Mustang Run*, which is gonna be more of a vocal-oriented record. I've got four songs written, so I'm constantly keeping stuff in the pipeline."

"I generally tell people to start somewhere simple and then build up from there. Start somewhere where you can really just sing every note, and where you're not playing a lot of notes – you're playing a simple amount of notes, maybe three or four in that bar at the most.

"Then I always try to tell people to take the full range of the fretboard in – in other words, don't be a top-three-strings, one-position player, but actually let's go somewhere with the instrument, you know? It's got a lot more range than some people give it credit for."

Which living musician influenced you most? And what lessons about playing guitar did you learn from them?

"In the 70s, I'd heard about this guy named Joe Diorio [an extraordinary US jazz guitarist – Ed], and when he moved to town I remember being a fan already, and I picked him up at the airport with another guy and took him to his gig that night and then I started studying with him. And he gave me two huge points that I still follow today.

"One of them is that intervals are much more melodic than sequential scales. And so he got me into thinking about intervals – in other words, thirds, fourths, sixths, sevenths and beyond. Using intervals more in your playing seems to be an approach

"I always tell people to take the full range of the fretboard in – don't be a top-three-strings, one-position player, but let's go somewhere"

that brings out more melody, because anybody can shred: going up and down a pentatonic scale, or a minor or major scale. But to choose the notes within those scales melodically involves intervals... So that was the number one thing he taught me.

"And then the second thing he taught me was my whole 'lickbook' concept. He said, 'If you come up with any good musical idea, write it down – and that will serve you so well'. For example, I can just be playing in the air for the sheer joy of hearing the notes – say, in the key of B major – and all of a sudden I'll just come up with something that I've never heard myself do, but it really sounds like me. And I'll write that down – and finger it of course, so I always know how I did it and where on the neck I did it, what slides I did and what bends I did."

You've played a lot of big sessions – how do you analyse what kind of guitar lines a tune needs when you hear it for the first time?

"Well, as a sideman, you make your living as a rhythm guitarist – so I spent a lot of time

working on rhythm guitar styles. And you have to realise as a studio guy, or any kind of a sideman, you're basically working to facilitate the musical vision of the songwriter or the producer that you're working for. So the way I kind of do it is, I think, 'What would I do on my own album?' And that's my first instinct – what do I want this to sound like? I think that it's really important to have that first natural instinct.

"But it's also very important to have a huge bag of tricks, so you can keep ideas coming until they like it. Because, a lot of times, producers don't know what they want until they hear it. In that case, you just have to have all these rhythm guitar styles. So, for me, there's the Jimi Hendrix/Curtis Mayfield style, and the other R&B styles of people like Steve Cropper, the Atlantic guys and the Muscle Shoals guys. There are those styles to be familiar with. And then you can say, 'Okay, maybe this song needs something more like the style that The Edge plays, or maybe an Andy Summers kind of a vibe'. And then there's my own styles, that



LEFT: With upwards of 30 amps, Carl uses pedals flexibly to get the best from different rigs for different gigs. For playing bars, he'll opt for a Fender Twin with a minimal 'board that lets pedals add all the drive to a good clean base tone. Larger gigs see him divide clean and dirty tone between two specialist amps, with drive pedals hitting an already crunchy amp and dedicated modulation effects for the clean amp.



often involve chords where you take the middle note out: you take any triad and put the middle note up an octave – those kind of chords occur all over the guitar and you can get amazing rhythm parts based on that stuff, you know? So it's just about maintaining a lot of stylistic options."

A lot of guitarists want to improvise better, but get cold feet at the thought of learning theory. What is the practical benefit of working on theory, to you?

"One of the things that I learned at Berklee College of Music was that my teacher said 'harmonise the major scale'. And so we did – we took the C major scale and made a Cmaj7 chord, then a Dm7, Em7, right up the neck – and then at the end of that class he said, 'Okay, get yourself a piece of 12-stave music paper and harmonise the major scale in all 12 keys. And I raised my hand like a smart-ass and said, 'Why do we have to? I mean the II chord is always going to be minor and the III chord is always going to be minor and the IV chord is always going to be major... you know?' And he goes, 'Okay,

what's the VI chord in B_b?' And I had to think about it and go, 'Let's see... is it a G minor?' And he goes, 'Yeah, but you should know that instantly'. In other words, you should instantly know that the II chord in E_b is an F minor and a VII in A is gonna be a G#m7_b5. If you do, then you can play any song in any key and just have that knowledge instantly available. And that has been really important in my career as a sideman."

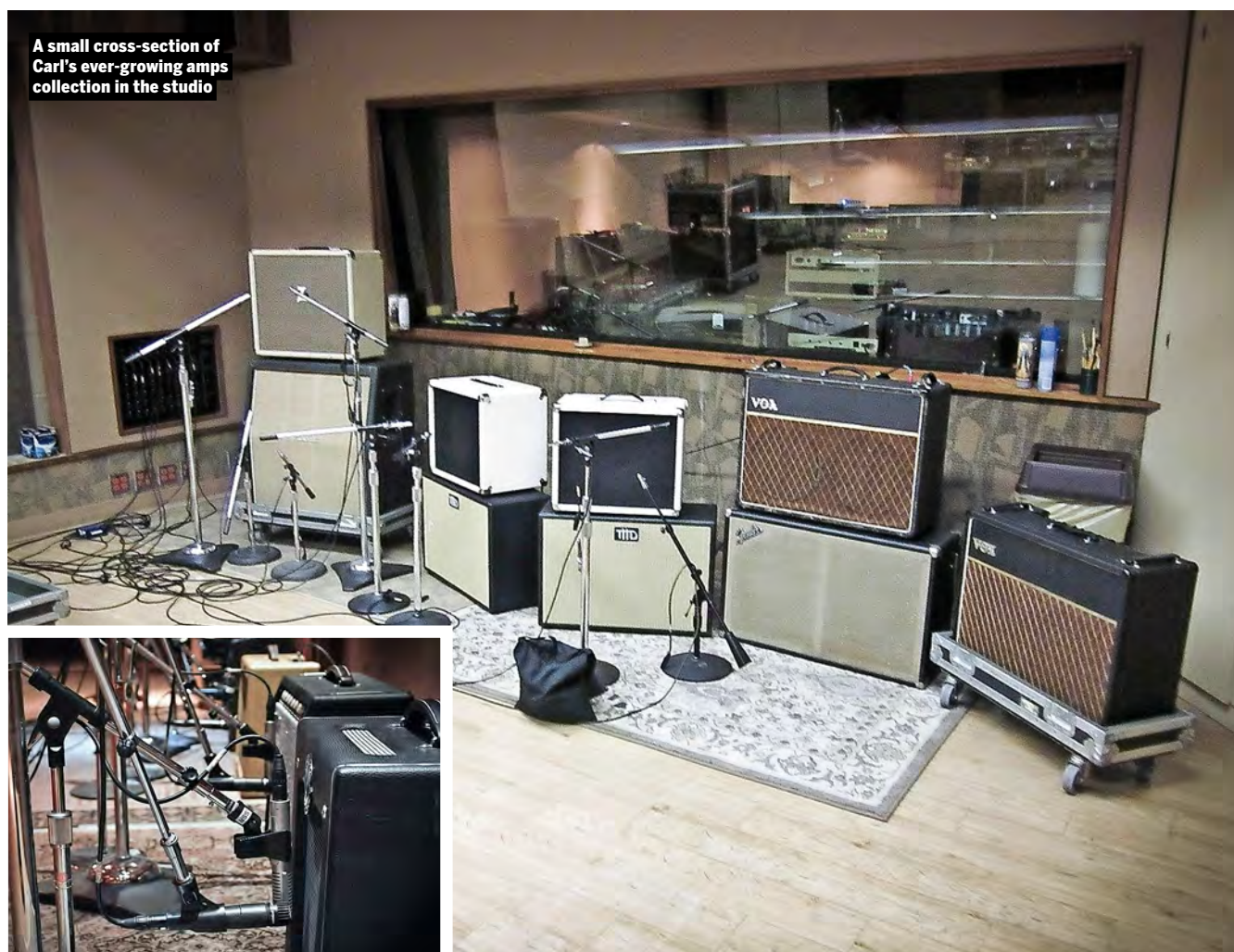
How about breaking out of ruts – we've all been there, you hit a wall and can't seem to find anything new in your own playing. What then?

"When players ask about how to break out of a rut, I always tell them to play a C major pentatonic scale from the lowest note in the key of C major on the guitar, which is gonna be E, to the highest note, which is gonna be a C on a Fender or a D on a Gibson, on the neck. So just go with just those five notes: C, D, E, G, A, from the bottom of the guitar to the top of the guitar and then all the way back down. And then do that in all 12 keys.

But don't learn a pattern – instead, go up and down differently each time. And once you've mastered that it becomes this wonderful mental exercise to run through when you pick up the instrument. You're not working on your chops, you're just placing everything where it's supposed to be. And then once you've done that, you can do it with the entire major scale and it's great."

What about tone? What things are you picky about?

"I like my pickups to not be too powerful. I've got about 13 or 14 Strats, and the old ones seem to have something... My signature guitar is made by a company called LSL, and those guys try to copy the pickups from the '61 Strat or the '58 Strat and get that same amount of output, because a whole lot of output doesn't really give you great tone. And then I like light guitars – I try to keep my guitars in that 7.3lb range, so they're not just heavy. I find that they resonate more, you know? And have just better tone."



"The other thing is that I don't think string gauge has as much to do with tone as action height. You can have... 0.009-through-0.046 is kind of what I use, roughly, and you can get the same tone as a guy that's using 11s or something like that. But if you're playing a guitar all day long like I do, you're really pushing those strings around and 0.011s are going to tear the skin off your fingers! I mean, you gotta have enough action to where you can dig in. You don't want it down on the neck so hard that it's just gonna ping out everywhere. So by just dealing with a higher action, you've got much more ease of bending and I think you have the same tone, really."

How about amps and effects?

"I'm a big pedal guy because I basically love the clean sound of a Strat, you know the way it cuts through a track and the way it works in a band situation? But I love the distortion sound of humbuckers, right? So I believe if you're playing single-coil guitars, you have to jump through a lot more hoops to make your tone fat and saturated. Whereas with a humbucker-equipped guitar, you can plug straight into an amp, turn it up and you get

"It was just a wonderful experience to be driven around in the tourbus with your only worry being 'how can I make tonight better than last night?'"

that sound, right? So, I use distortion pedals and I use an A/B system in my live playing, which means my clean amps have their own signal chain of delay and maybe chorus and reverb. And then my distortion amps are already slightly distorted, and then I use pedals in front of that. It's crazy – at this point in my life I seem to have at least 50 guitar amps! They've multiplied [laughs].

"I play out of Princeton Reverbs at home – I have four of those, and I keep two in a little studio. And lately I've been using a Gibson Falcon at home a lot, too – it's a 60s-era amp. It sounds great. But I have a bunch of old Marshalls and I love Dr Z's amps: I have three of those. I also have three old AC30s, and I recently picked up a 1976 Hiwatt that I'm really crazy about – a 100-watt Hiwatt head. Which, believe it or not, is fantastic for clean tones – just beautiful. I want to get another one so I can run a stereo pair of

those, so I'm actively looking for another 100-watt Hiwatt. And I have about nine Fender amps: Twins, Tremoluxes, all kinds of different Fenders."

What aspect of playing guitar gives you the most pleasure these days?

"I think the greatest pleasure for me has to be performing. I really love to get up on stage and play, and that's been super-rewarding. We just finished two months on the road – with Stu Hamm on bass and a wonderful drummer named John Mader. It was just a wonderful experience to be driven around in the tourbus every day with your only worry being, 'How can I make tonight better than last night?' That's just a real privilege, I think." 

Mustang Run by Carl Verheyen is out now on Cranktone Entertainment



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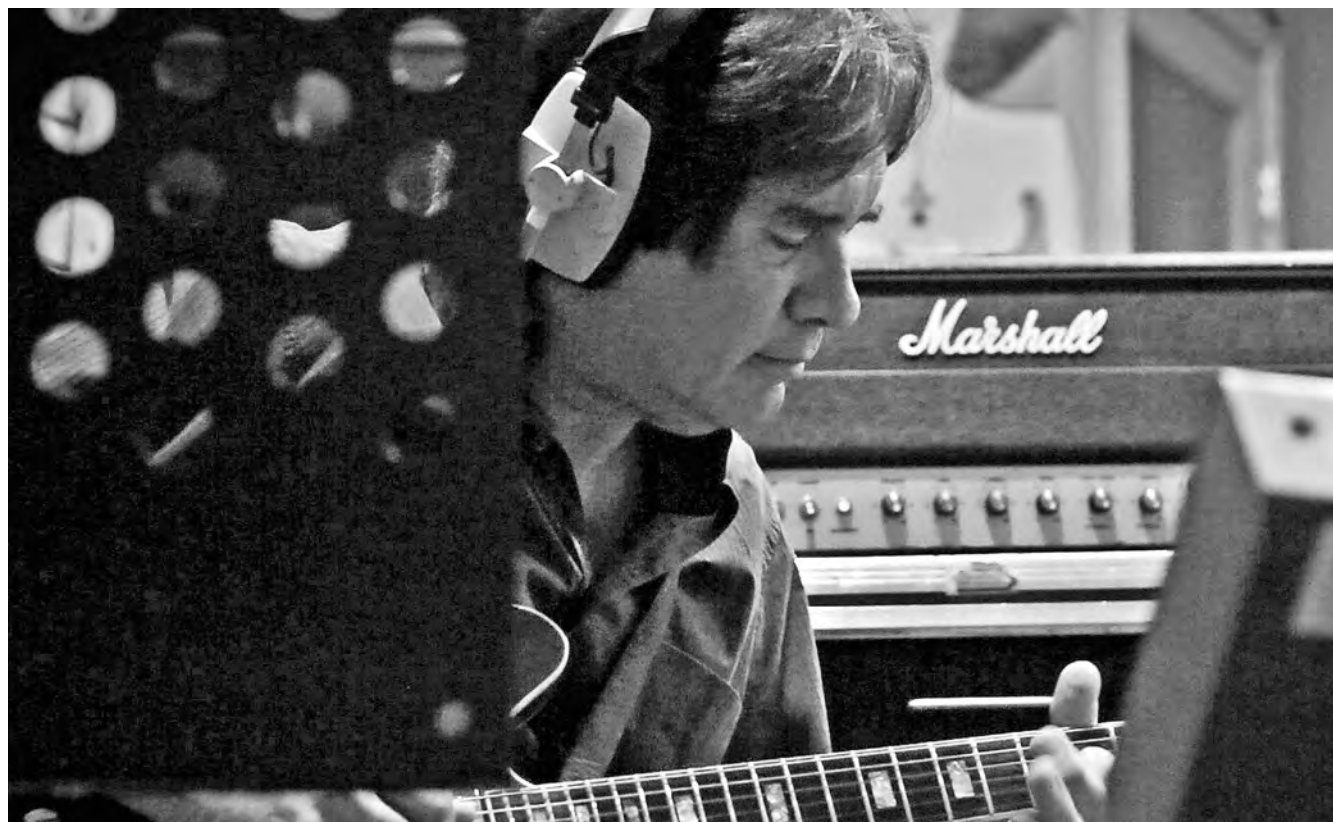
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Secret Weapon Licks

STYLE FILE

Carl Verheyen is one of the great 'hidden gem' players. He just gets on with his career without undue fuss or fanfare, but anyone prepared to pay attention is usually rewarded with some truly jaw-dropping guitar playing! Get these session-grade licks under your fingers to supercharge your soloing...

IN keeping with his reputation as one of the very best session players around, Carl Verheyen is comfortable with a huge variety of musical styles, but his distinctive soloing style is usually easy to spot. He prefers to look

beyond the guitar's obvious scale patterns, working with intervals based on the underlying chords. As a result of that approach, he's able to get much more melodic range, and is well known for his

daring string-skipping lines. In this lesson, he shows how a simple six-note string-skipping idea can be applied to minor, dominant and major contexts, giving you a starting point for further exploration. **[AC]**

Example 1

CARL starts with a blues line in F minor. At the start, he's using the minor pentatonic (F A $\flat$ B $\flat$ C E $\flat$) with that semitone bend up to the 5th (B). He then adds the 2nd (G) as a pivot to shift to a lower position, leading into his feature lick. This suggests the Dorian mode (F G A $\flat$ B $\flat$ C D E $\flat$).

BU

1/4

15 (16) 13 16 15 16 13 15 12 11 12 9 10 11 9 10 8 10 10 8 10 13 10 11



Example 2

HE then starts in the same F minor pentatonic framework, but with an ascending line. Here, the added 6th (D) of the Dorian is used to pivot to the next shape in bar 1. Note the amount of string-skipping throughout this example... one of Carl's signature sounds!

Example 2 shows a guitar lick in F minor pentatonic with an ascending line. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb), and a 4/4 time signature. The lick is divided into two measures. The first measure contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a string-skipping pattern indicated by a slash and a dot. The second measure continues the ascending line, ending with a double bar line. Below the staff, a fretboard diagram shows the fingerings for each note, with string numbers (1-6) and fret numbers (1-20) indicated. A dashed line labeled '8va' indicates an octave shift.

Example 3

BY changing the high Eb of our feature lick to D, it now works nicely in a Bb Mixolydian context. The notes of the Bb Mixolydian (Bb, C D Eb, F G Ab) are exactly the same as the F Dorian, but the root is different, and so each note has a different function within the scale.

Example 3 shows a guitar lick in Bb Mixolydian. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb), and a 4/4 time signature. The lick is divided into two measures. The first measure contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a string-skipping pattern indicated by a slash and a dot. The second measure continues the ascending line, ending with a double bar line. Below the staff, a fretboard diagram shows the fingerings for each note, with string numbers (1-6) and fret numbers (1-20) indicated. A dashed line labeled '8va' indicates an octave shift.

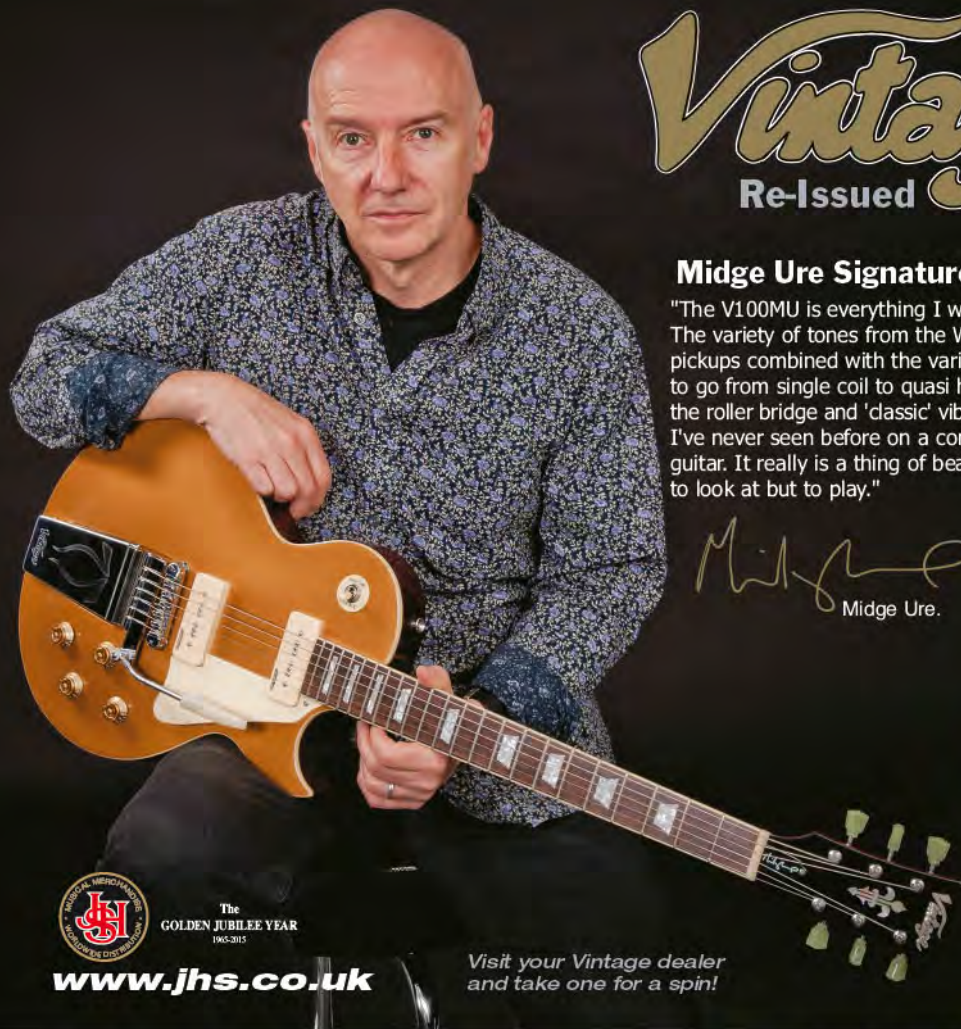
Example 4

IN this lick, Carl mixes up the straight Mixolydian sound with more of a standard blues approach. He starts with B_b minor pentatonic (B_b, D, E, F A_b), switching to the Mixolydian in bar 3.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a piano part with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a key signature of one flat. The guitar part features a complex melody with many triplets and a descending line. The piano part provides a harmonic accompaniment, including a prominent bass line with many triplets and a melody in the right hand. The score is divided into two systems, each with four measures. The first system includes a guitar solo in the first measure. The second system includes a guitar solo in the first measure and a piano solo in the second measure. The score is written in a standard musical notation style, with a key signature of one flat and a time signature of 4/4.

Example 5

THE original feature lick (with the E_b as in example one) will also work in a straight major (or major 7th) context. To make it easier, Carl drops it a semitone, so it'll now fit over a C major chord. All the notes here are from the C major pentatonic (C D E G A).



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Midge Ure
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TECHNOLOGY OF TONE



Paul Gilbert

Since the mid-1980s, Paul Gilbert has continually blown minds with his genre-bending high-speed fretboard heroics. The Racer X and Mr Big lead axe man, who has released 13 stunning solo albums in the past 16 years, has also passed on his genius to hundreds of budding players through his teaching exploits. This is the story of his life...

Words Matt Frost Portraits Jesse Wild

Fab Force

"A *Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* made me want to be a musician. I didn't know what instrument I wanted to play, but I knew that I wanted to be a musician, and all that came from my parents' Beatles records. At first, I wanted to be a singer and – for maybe my fifth birthday – I got a little cassette player. I recorded myself singing and listened to it back, and it was so disappointing because I didn't like the way my voice sounded... so I thought, 'Well, maybe I should play an instrument, then...'"

Uncle Inspiration

"My uncle Jimmy was – and still is – a stunning rock and blues guitar player. I didn't see him that often, but he'd visit once in a while. Just seeing somebody play up that close was really inspiring. He'd always recommend albums for me, too.

He'd say things like, 'You've got to buy *War Heroes* by Jimi Hendrix', and I would also always sneak into his room and look at his record collection. He had albums like David Bowie's *The Man Who Sold The World*, Rush's *All the World's A Stage* and Pat Travers's *Putting It Straight*. It was him and The Beatles and hearing that music that got me into guitar."

Just One String

"My first ever guitar was an acoustic Stella, and I think my babysitter gave it to me. I started having guitar lessons when I was six, but I gave up almost immediately. The teacher tried to show me how to sight read with a little Mel Bay book... but reading music seemed like such a slog, so I quit, but then a few years later I started playing by ear. I just picked out a major scale on one string and I was doing all upstrokes, only using

one finger. I then just started picking out riffs that I knew in my head. I figured out really primitive versions of *Heartbreaker* [by Led Zeppelin] and *25 Or 6 To 4* by Chicago. I played everything just using one string for about two years."

Chord Moment

"One of the most amazing moments for me was when I actually learned a chord. At 11, I started going to another guitar teacher and he showed me how to tune and how to read chord diagrams. I had a book called *The Beatles Complete*, but I didn't know that the little Xs and Os meant that some of the strings were muted and some were open. The teacher showed me – 'When you play a D chord you don't play the bottom two strings!' He also showed me how to do a downstroke, which I'd never done before, and how to use the other fingers."

No More Toys

"I was fortunate because my first electric guitar was a Les Paul Custom. I saved up \$150 from mowing the lawn and doing jobs for my parents. Before Christmas, they found an ad in the paper, there was a used Les Paul for \$300, so they said, 'We'll pay the other \$150... but, if we do, we can't afford to get you any toys – that's going to be your only present!' I was only 11, so for me it felt like a passage into adulthood."

All The Rage

"I had no amp at first, so I plugged [the Les Paul] into the input on a cassette player and cranked up the input levels all the way and got this horrible distortion... but at least it was distortion! I ended up getting a used Fender Vibro Champ two months later. A friend of mine got one first and all I remember is the woman at the music store

"I remember the third Racer X show was sold out... and that was the first moment where I felt in my heart, 'I think I'm going to have a career – I think this is going to work'"

saying, 'Don't turn it past three!'. We were terrified! My friend and I were like, 'Oh my god – if we turn it past three, it's just going to blow up in a puff of smoke!'... but it sounded so much better when we turned it up a little more. After about a week we had it on 10. There was hardly any distortion, but to us it was like raging stadium rock!"

Under Control

"I was always in bands as a teenager, and that was really some of the best training I ever had. At this point, I had a 4x12 cabinet that my dad built and an Ampeg V4 head and a couple of pedals. We would play in a little rehearsal room and it was loud and distorted and I was two feet away from the amp, so I had to control the feedback. That forced me to develop a lot of muting techniques with my left hand and right hand. When I see 'bedroom player' students today, that's the most important thing missing. With rock guitar, you may only be playing one string, but you've got to control the other five strings, too!"

Dear Mike

"I was a big Randy Rhoads fan, but then he tragically passed

away in that plane crash [in 1982]. I was 15 at the time, but I'd learned a lot of his parts and I just figured Ozzy [Osbourne] would need a new guitar player. I had to go for it somehow... and then, in one of the guitar magazines, Mike Varney [Shrapnel Records founder] had done an interview and he mentioned at the end that he would respond to anyone who sent him a cassette. I made a cassette and sent it to him and he called me up the instant he got it. He said, 'I love your playing!' and he asked me a bunch of questions, and the last question was, 'How old are you?' I said, '15' and he said, 'Oh, I don't think Ozzy's going to want you as his guitar player... but I'd love to record you, so send me some original stuff.' That was one of the most exciting moments of my life."

LA Riffing

"After I graduated from high school, I moved to LA to start at GIT [Guitar Institute of Technology], and it was just fantastic because I could put all my time into playing guitar. The teachers were great and the students were great and, in my class, there were guys like

Jimmy Herring and Jeff Buckley. It exposed me to so much in terms of style. I'd never really heard jazz before and I didn't know much about fusion, and also I got a handle on music theory. After I graduated, they hired me as a teacher."

Heart Racing

"I formed Racer X in LA. I had met Juan [Alderete, bassist] already when he was a student, and the original Racer X drummer Harry [Gschoesser] was also studying there. Bruce [Bouillet, who joined as the band's second guitarist after Racer X's debut 1986 album *Street Lethal*] was actually a student of mine when I was teaching. It was the mid-80s, so everything had to be big and fast and loud and extreme, and I just

wanted to form kind of a super-group with the best musicians I could find. It was really exciting, but it was very gradual. I remember the third Racer X show was sold out... and that was the first moment where I felt in my heart, 'I think I'm going to have a career – I think this is really going to work!'"

Big Opportunity

"I'd been doing the odd jam session with Billy [Sheehan, future Mr Big bassist] when he used to show up at GIT and he used to come to Racer X shows, too, and we'd always be excited. I was a huge fan of his and I used to go see his old band, Talas. He was actually a really big influence, even though he played the bass. He was doing some really amazing two-handed stuff and I used to copy that. Anyway, one day he called up and said, 'I'm putting a band together – would you be interested?' I was kind of torn because Racer X was my baby, and the guys in the band were



Speed Drills

PAUL Gilbert's latest Mr Big live pedalboard packs some great tone: an MXR Phase 90; MXR Distortion+; MXR Bass Compressor; TC Electronic MojoMojo Overdrive; TC Electronic Corona Mini Chorus; TC Electronic Stereo Chorus Flanger; Dunlop Jimi Hendrix Wah; and an Empress Effects ParaEq... but Paul's also been turning heads with an old tonal friend – his infamous cordless Makita power drill (with mounted plectrums, natch!).

"I started using that when my band Racer X were doing well and we started getting some magazine coverage. Everybody was promoting that I could pick really fast, and I was happy about that –but, at the same time, I just felt that the whole athletic aspect of it was kind of funny. You know, I wanted to be a musician not an athlete, so it just makes fun of the whole fast playing thing. Sometimes on my solo tours, people say, 'Why don't you play with the drill?' and I'm like, 'Oh, I forgot to bring it!' It's like Angus Young forgetting his shorts!!"



Paul with his Trans Red
signature Ibanez Fireman



really tight and we were like family, but then he mentioned Eric Martin on vocals and I was like, 'Oh man, I know this band is going to be big!' One of the worst days of my life was when I had to break the news to the Racer X guys."

Harmonic Surprise

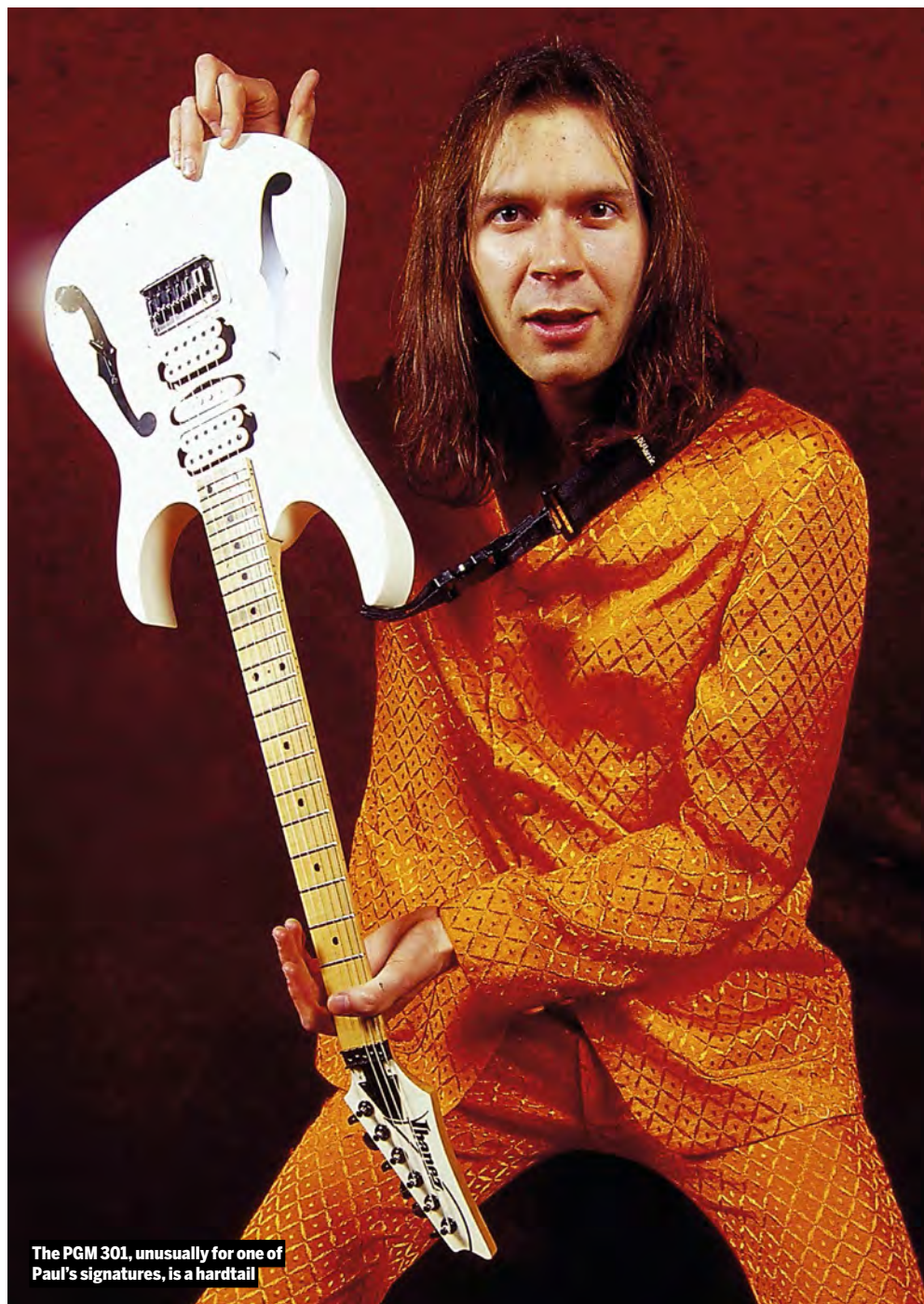
"The thing that I didn't really plan on [with Mr Big] and that turned out to be great, was the vocal harmonies. Everybody in the band sang well together and, the more we played, the more we realised how good this vocal harmony element in the band was. It became something that really opened up so many doors for us, and we ended up having this big acoustic hit with *To Be With You* [1991]. I was totally happy with that because The Beatles were my first inspiration, and I always wanted to be in a vocal group. If anything, it was just an interesting balance because a lot of our fans were shred fans... but somehow we put it all together."

Pushing Technique

"Recently [check out Paul's 2014 album *Stone Pushing Uphill Man*], I've really got into playing people's lead vocal lines on my guitar, and I learn so much from doing that. I grew up with sort of a Van Halen style of playing, where the vocals carry the melody and the guitar tends to back up with a really cool rhythm part and then flashy solos. That's the sort of format I grew up with and I just always felt, 'Oh, melody – that's a singer's job!' But I started to realise that the technique I've built is really lacking when it comes to melody. I've really had to work on the inflection, the dynamics and all the little things that a vocalist does. It gets more complicated the deeper you get into it, and doing that last record was like a guitar lesson for me."

Opening Up

"I'm more excited about guitar playing than I've ever been. The musical world has opened up so much with me learning these vocal lines, but then I've also realised how enjoyable good



The PGM 301, unusually for one of Paul's signatures, is a hardtail

improvisation is. With Racer X and Mr Big, a lot of the solos are very worked out and they're short, so there's not much room for improvising. More recently, I've done a lot of guitar clinics where I'll do a cover of *Light My Fire* by The Doors and play the keyboard solo or something like it. It will be a five-minute-long improv solo, and I really hadn't done a lot of that before." 

Mr Big's latest album ...The Stories We Could Tell is released by Frontiers Records. For details, see www.mrbigsite.com and www.frontiers.it

The F-Hole Truth

WHEN it comes to signature guitars, Paul Gilbert has a stackful of different Ibanez axes. In the last five years, he's launched the Fireman, while his long-running PGM series guitars are proving as popular as ever. The latter are, of course, easily recognisable due to their fake f-holes...

"The first stock guitar I had from Ibanez was an RG, which I got around the time of the first Mr Big album, and I still have it. It's kind of red/orange and I put dinosaur stickers on it. It sounded great and played great, but it made me realise that I really wanted my guitars to look different than the Steve Vai guitar, which was basically the same shape. I thought, 'What can I do to this to kind of make it my own?' I came up with the f-holes. Even though they were fake and they were painted on, they gave the guitar a unique look."



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MAN IN THE MIDDLE

Is it just us, or does PRS Guitars still seem like the new boy? Can it really be 30 years since the world – or at least a few interested people – saw the PRS Custom for the first time? It's time to take stock of a modern classic, its legacy and what the future holds

WORDS
DAVE BURRLUCK

“**Y**ou’re right, it doesn’t feel like we’re a 30-year-old company... but in a good way,” laughs PRS president Jack Higginbotham. Jack is one of a handful of PRS employees who have been there since, virtually, day one – a brief departure aside, he’s been an ever-present face at the company. “We don’t stand still for very long and things are always changing – a feeling of not being stagnant probably makes the time go by very quickly. We are always starting something new.”

Inside the bubble of PRS, it’s an accurate statement that reflects the continuous improvement and evolution of the instruments it creates. Outside, however, many look at the outline of the Custom – the basis of the majority of PRS’s instruments over three decades – and think, ‘what’s changed?’. Until the first EG, PRS had used the same body outline since it started. The second-series EG changed it and then the pre-factory body shape, known now as the Santana, reappeared in 1995. PRS’s most controversial body shape appeared halfway through its history, in 2000: the Singlecut. With those early EGs long since consigned to history, today’s 30-year-old core line-up features just two primary outlines, with minor new shapes such as the Brent Mason – based on the NF-3 – and Neil Schon’s NS-14 enlarged, semi-hollow Singlecut.

Put simply, as many say Leo Fender ‘got it right’ with the first Stratocaster, Paul Reed Smith got it right with the Custom – a design that appeared in 1985, fully formed. But it was no accident. It was informed by the prior decade of making and repairing guitars, learning what was great about the classic models of the ‘golden era’ of the electric guitar and where they could be improved: a better tool. ➤

KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

History is littered with guitars that ‘seemed like a good idea at the time’, models that designers thought the musician wanted but, ultimately, they didn’t – certainly not enough to keep a brand in business over a 30-year period. There’s little doubt that we wouldn’t be writing these words if Paul Reed Smith hadn’t created the Custom. It certainly wasn’t in fashion back in the big-hair days of the mid-80s. The ‘superstrat with a Floyd Rose’ ruled the roost, yet the Custom bucked trends with its evolutionary ‘hybrid’ design and mix of classic Gibson and Fender ingredients.

Not everyone got it, of course, and when we refer to the Santana-shaped, pre-Custom design – that got the twenty-something Reed Smith noticed by the likes of Carlos Santana and Al DiMeola – as a ‘double cutaway Gibson Les Paul with a vibrato’, Reed Smith today seems a little prickly. “It was a heavily carved, curly maple topped, tremolo guitar and I’ve still never heard it called a double-cutaway Gibson!” There’s an awkward silence before a hint of a smile appears on the guitar maker’s face and a memory pops into his mind. “I did actually tell Ted McCarty that the PRS McCarty was the double-cut they [Gibson] should have come out with back in the day. He didn’t like that very much! But he loved the guitar and the fact his name was on it.”

Ah, yes, the McCarty Model, to give it its original name, is often seen as a more ‘vintage’ take on the original PRS design. But, in fact, the Custom was heavily informed by what we now class as ‘vintage’ instruments. The Custom’s outline isn’t a million miles from the Stratocaster, and the often-called ‘modernistic’ PRS design was drawn virtually exclusively from the experience Reed Smith had gained building and repairing guitars in the decade before he opened his factory doors. “If you take all from one place it’s stealing. If you take from 10 places it is ‘research’. I saw this guitar more as research to me,” he says.

“It was like the tremolo,” he continues. “I didn’t completely draw that, it came from the heritage of Fender; the string spacing on it came from the heritage of Gibson.” The Custom slowly evolved from those early instruments he made for Peter Frampton through to the now-famous early maple top guitars he made for Heart’s Howard Leese and Carlos Santana. By the end of 1984, the Custom was pretty much fully formed, drawing from the past but very much a new design.

“What was proprietary was the body shape, the scoop in the lower horn, the top carve, the type of belly carve, the shape of the back plates, how the electronics system worked with the five-way rotary [pickup selector switch], how it was wired, the knife-edges in the six screws in front of the tremolo, the way the [tremolo] arm didn’t break, the fact that you could put bullet-style strings in the bridge (which ended up long-term not working because I couldn’t get anyone to make them), the headstock shape, the headstock angle. The inlays were proprietary, the sweet switch was proprietary, the nut material, the tuners...” Smith pauses for breath, “Erm, how close the headstock was into the nut so the headstock wouldn’t break off if the guitar fell over...”

“That was how I made my living at the time: there were these stands called Hamiltons, and it said on the stand ‘It’s a Hamilton’. Every time a [Gibson] fell off one

“ We put the birds on because my mother was a birdwatcher, but I didn’t think anyone would order them. I later realised there are birds in every yard in the world, there’s not a dog in every house ”

of those stands I had a headstock to glue back on. I was making my living from ‘It’s a Hamilton’! I didn’t want that to happen with my guitars. It needed to be fixed.”

The smallest detail wasn’t overlooked either. “The fact that the jackplate on our guitars was made of brass so that if you walked out with the jack still plugged in you didn’t break the plastic plate that other people used. How many jack plates did I replace on guitars back then? It was all the things I’d found in the old repair shop that I thought needed to be fixed. Locking tuners and low-friction nuts so the tremolo stays in tune...”

Unlike the classics, the PRS Custom didn’t contribute to what many players think is ‘the rule book’: those iconic recordings and performances of early electric blues, through rock ‘n’ roll to the golden age of classic rock. Hendrix didn’t play one. Yet, the upside is that those classic designs could be evaluated by Smith and others in retrospect: what did players really want?

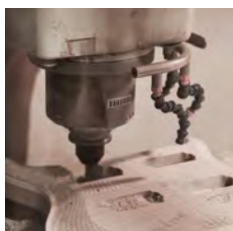
“The neck shape, for example, was a combination of an old Tele and a Les Paul,” says Smith. “There was the 10-inch radius on the fingerboard, which I thought was proprietary at the time, but it turns out it wasn’t. I’ve measured a lot of old Les Pauls and it turns out they’re 10-inches: they were advertised wrong. Like the scale length. The Gibson scale length is 24 9/16ths of an inch, which is not what they advertise, but I measured it.

“If I hadn’t done all that repair work there’s no way I’d have put all these things on the one guitar – I wouldn’t have had the experience base. Fact.”

THE ‘POSH’ GUITAR

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and irrelevant of the improvements that led to the Custom’s design, its look can be polarising. For everyone who loves its fabulously coloured and carved maple top, its natural edge ‘binding’ and bird inlays, there are the others who see it as a posh, ‘furniture’ guitar. But the company sells way more guitars with bird inlays than without, and the ‘prettier’ the top, the easier the sale.

“Yeah, but I’ve finally figured out why people like ‘em!” exclaims Smith of his famous bird inlays. “I never figured it out before. What the hell’s that all about? We put the birds on because my mother was a birdwatcher and it made sense, but I didn’t think anyone would order them. I later realised, well, there are birds in every yard in the world, there’s not a dog in every house but there are birds in every yard, right? Even in the desert you’ll find a bird every once in a while. The birds made sense on a visceral level at the time but I honestly didn’t think they would catch on. I thought it would be the moon inlays – fancy dots, if you like. Now, it’s the birds that seem to make sense to the world.”



GOOD, BUT IT COULD BE BETTER...

So, if Smith created the Custom way back in 1984, what has driven him to constantly alter and improve so much of the original's design? We compare the original '84 prototype with a 30th Anniversary Custom elsewhere in this feature, and virtually every detail – the shape of the body and headstock aside – has been re-evaluated over the past three decades.

“Well, the control knobs kept breaking, let's start with that,” says Smith. “They were made out of Plastiglas and they would crack, and so we had to start playing around with our own design, and when you do that, well, I wanted them to be serrated around the edges and a little smaller in diameter so you can get your little finger around them. We've actually redone the moulding three times over the years before we got to what we have today. Now we think they're perfect; all the edges are rounded, right? We're not going to touch 'em. See, they're not really very different to those,” he says, pointing to the standard speed knobs on the '84 Custom prototype, “but with these new ones I never, ever struggle to get the volume to the right place. And if the knobs were breaking why would you keep using them? Is that fair to your customer?”

Once PRS started producing guitars it was its own instruments that were under the spotlight and being assessed. “Take the original five-way rotary pickup selector switch,” says Smith. “People complained about it. They said it was difficult to control; so we put on

a three-way [pickup] switch, but they said ‘but that doesn't give us all the sounds we want’. We finally figured it out and got a five-way lever switch company to make it right, so we have the rotary-switch type sounds but on a more conventional five-way switch. It's [virtually] the same wiring as the five-way rotary, but on this lever or slide switch. So it's not that we changed it for the sake of it, it was because people asked us to change.”

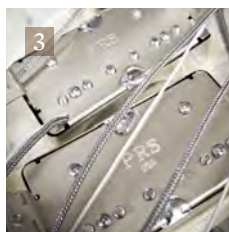
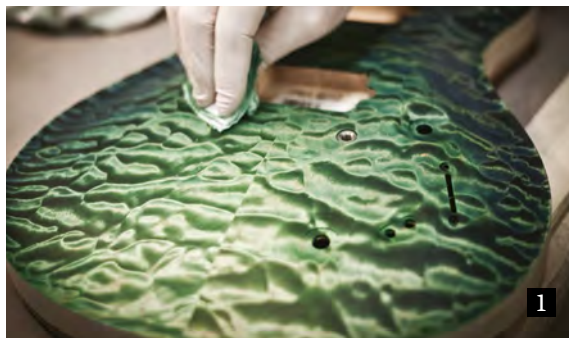
The original cam-locking tuners are another example. “Those original tuners were hard to make, and people would send their guitars in for repair and half the time they didn't have 'em strung up right. Now when people send their guitars in with these new tuners on, a way smaller number aren't strung up right and it's usually that people put just too many winds around the string post – defeating the entire purpose of locking it down on the shaft.” The lighter-weight, open-backed Phase III tuners that grace the modern Custom do appear a much more thoroughbred version of the original Schaller M6s with their cam-locks. “Getting the gearing right, seemingly little things, it all takes time and money, but we finally got that right, too. The worm and the gear sit together beautifully.”

Yet it's this attention to detail, combined with the quality of the craft, that from day one gave PRS a reputation: a high-end guitar that ‘normal’ people couldn't afford. Throw in those ultra-curly maple tops, a wide colour choice, and the far from classic bird inlays and the posh-looking ‘furniture’ guitar was with us.

TOP ROW: Since the mid-90s, PRS bodies have been cut on CNC routers, while the PRS pickups are all wound in-house, too

BOTTOM ROW: Machines may play their part in the process, but hand-sanding is still the major part of the time spent making any PRS guitar





QUEST FOR AFFORDABILITY

PRS has never forgotten the everyman. Two years into its history, the company released the Classic Electric, a more affordable bolt-on, followed by the lower-cost EG series. Neither are made today and remained in the shadow of the higher-ticket guitars, such as the Custom, Standard and McCarty. A decade and a half ago, the SE series launched, made in Korea: lower-cost replicants of the USA guitars aimed at a different player. There was still a big gap in the middle of the range, however, and that took 28 years to sort, until PRS launched its S2, in 2013, a range that's virtually half the price of the core models but still made in the Maryland factory.

"The S2 is more thinking about satisfying someone else's desire – I want to talk to *that* guy," muses Higginbotham. "Being able to have a conversation with someone that I couldn't because we didn't have the right style or price point. S2 is about a new artist, new customer and price point – almost a new business after nearly 30 years of making and selling guitars."

"It's almost a second-generation PRS for those coming into this business; it's a different tone and look – it's what we want to play," says Judy Schafer – one of PRS's younger staff. "The one doesn't have to play the other: the S2, I believe, will become its own thing."

"What does the future hold?" asks Jack, repeating our question. "30 years is just a moment in time. We'll celebrate, of course, but it wouldn't be PRS if it wasn't the dynamic, moving company it is. For our customers'

sake, we're doing a better job but I think, in the future, we'll be a bit more consistent in terms of what we offer. If we think something is an improvement then we'll do it. We can't help it: it's not a choice."

But how much can you improve the instrument? "How far would you have thought it would go 25 years ago? I remember that 1,000th guitar party," says Jack of the 1986 celebration. "I remember saying to Paul: 'there can't be too many more people that want this... so what are we going to do?'"

NEW DIRECTIONS

PRS makes acoustics and amplifiers, too. The decision to push the new S2 line centre stage means the intended expansion of acoustics has been put on hold; PRS seems content enough to make a small number of acoustics at high-dollar prices within its Private Stock programme. "That's the market where they see the advantage," reckons Smith. "At one point, we lowered the price 35 per cent, it caught on for one minute then people went back to wanting the high-end piece."

Its amp production has hit pay dirt with the Archon. "People said the 100-watt amp head market was dead," says Reed Smith. "I said, 'no it's not: the problem is people don't want to buy the 100-watt heads out there.'"

But regardless of any new directions it might take, to misquote the song, PRS really has built this city on the Custom. What of the next 30 years? **A**

1 Every coloured top is hand stained, as on this Private Stock model

2 Paul Reed Smith cradles a 408

3 'PRS USA' is stamped on every in-house-made pickup

4 PRS president Jack Higginbotham with an SC 245

5 For a while, PRS used robotic buffing machines; not anymore

FEATHERED FRIENDS

As well as being gorgeous examples of the luthier's art, you'll hear PRS tones on plenty of stonking recordings from the past 30 years...



DAVID GRISSOM
WAY DOWN DEEP

The Texan guitarist is a session legend who's played as sideman with John Mayall, The Allman Brothers Band, Robben Ford and others. But he's done some incredibly tasty solo work, too. His DGT signature PRS is rated by a lot of players as the best electric the company's made, and you can hear it on this 2011 album. The rich harmonic voice of the instrument is used to full, grinding effect on the title track, which typifies Grissom's blend of bluesy Texas grit and slick songcraft. If you like this, also check out the later *How It Feels To Fly*, which saw Grissom using PRS DG Custom 30 and DG Custom 50 amps. But the more gutsy work on this record makes it the go-to Grissom guitar album.

Standout track:

Way Down Deep

For fans of: ZZ Top, Eric Johnson, Warren Haynes



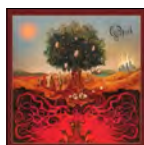
CARLOS SANTANA
SHAMAN

Santana's gift for richly lyrical solos is to the fore here, and his tone is smoking hot. Although this 2002 album is polished to a synth-slickened sheen that fans of his earthy *Abraxas*-era work may not appreciate, it's impossible not to admire the fire and poise of his solos on the samba shakedown *Foo Foo* and the instrumental *Victory Is Won*. Some songs near FM-friendly self-parody, but there's no denying the soulfulness of Carlos' playing on *The Game Of Love*, which sees Michelle Branch croon along as Carlos ignites a generic Latin-pop track with his incredible playing.

Standout track:

The Game of Love

For fans of: Carlos is a one-off!



OPETH
HERITAGE

It may not have pleased the metal purists among their fans, but the Swedish band's move to 70s prog territory saw them produce some of their most spellbinding work yet. Fredrik Åkesson is one of our favourite metal players – there are no frenzied, sterile displays of technique in his playing. He has a captivating talent for melodic sorcery on the fretboard, always giving his solos structure as well as brooding intensity. Although he and frontman Mikael Åkerfeldt also used old Fender Strats and 70s Les Pauls on the album, check out Åkesson's magnificent playing on a Mark Tremonti signature-model PRS on *Nepenthe* for a taste of how bright Nordic metal can shine.

Standout track:

Nepenthe

For fans of: Steven Wilson, Ritchie Blackmore, Guthrie Govan



MARTIN SIMPSON
VAGRANT STANZAS

Reminding us that PRS also makes damn fine (if expensive!) US-built Angelus acoustics, Martin Simpson – one of the finest troubadours of earthy, honest song this country can boast – recorded this excellent album at Paul Reed Smith's ludicrously over-specified home studio (he has reverb tanks once used by Elvis and a phalanx of classic amps). The sound of tracks such as the nostalgic British seaside folk of *Jackie And Murphy* is as British as a bag of chips, and Simpson's playing has the clarity and life of a mountain stream.

Standout track:

Delta Dreams

For fans of: Bert Jansch, John Renbourn



SIMON MCBRIDE
CROSSING THE LINE

He's often been compared to Gary Moore, but the Northern Irish guitarist is his own man, and is one of the sharpest blades in the blues-rock drawer. As this forceful 2012 album (also recorded at Paul Reed Smith's studio using HXDA 100-watt heads and guitars from his personal collection of instruments, including single-coil equipped 305s) attests, he's got the complete set of virtues: great articulation, but with plenty of guts to back it up, superb phrasing and an ear for melodic structure that makes the Celtic-blues inflected solos on tracks such as *One More Try* devastatingly effective. The songcraft may break little new ground, but the playing is unimpeachable.

Standout track:

One More Try

For fans of: Eric Johnson, Joe Bonamassa, Gary Moore

CRIMSON TIDE: WOULDN'T IT BE NICE TO PLAY LIKE THESE GUYS?

As regular readers may recall, a recent – and very fine – addition to the roster of PRS-playing artists is stellar British guitarist Jakko Jakszyk, now a full-time member of King Crimson (see interview, issue 387). He was joined by an old friend, 80s pop legend Nik Kershaw (no slouch in the

playing department) in the studio recently, where the pair recorded a one-off track for *Guitarist*. To hear Nik and Jakko discuss playing, tone and the instruments they rely on – and perform an exclusive track of captivatingly melodic guitar – check out the video at bit.ly/guitarist391.



THIRTY PRS LANDMARKS

We trace the history of PRS, from before Paul Reed Smith opened his first factory to the present day. It's been quite a ride...



Paul Reed Smith's first guitar, built in 1975 at the age of 19

1. PAUL'S FIRST GUITAR

Although he'd made his first fretted instrument, a rather odd-shaped electric bass guitar, in 1972, Paul Reed Smith completed his first electric guitar on 20 May 1975, aged 19, at St Mary's College, Maryland. He earned four credits for the instrument and his college deemed it was "of professional quality".

2. FRAMPTON GUITAR

A year later, Paul Reed Smith completed a custom guitar for Peter Frampton; it was the first to feature what *The Evening Capitol* newspaper called "wildlife figures" running down the fingerboard. We, of course, now know them as bird inlays.

3. SANTANA GUITAR

Smith literally banged on backstage doors to show off his instruments: he managed to show the Frampton guitar to Carlos Santana after Al DiMeola had seen it and had ordered his own, a 12-string. A couple of years later, Santana did order one, modelled on the first maple-topped guitar Smith had built, for Heart's Howard Leese. It was completed in 1980, maple top No 3.

4. CUSTOM

Smith's huge-selling 'hit single' was written and refined into a finished article by the end of 1984. The majority of the features we know today were in place, including the unique new body outline and headstock shape, the vibrato system with locking tuners and the dual humbuckers with single-coil switching. Oh, and those bird inlays, of course...

5. STANDARD

When PRS started producing factory-built guitars in 1985 it offered the maple-topped Custom and all-mahogany 'PRS Guitar', which became known as the Standard in 1987. Aside from the all-mahogany body, it was the same guitar. The striped 'graphic' finish Metal was short-lived. "We couldn't give them away!" said Smith. If you own one, you might find it's worth a bob or two...



Carlos Santana is one of Paul's most high-profile customers, playing models such as this

6. SIGNATURE

By '87, PRS was certainly on the radar. It had also established a quality-led reputation and a price to match. When a friend remarked, "you don't charge *enough*," Smith went upmarket further with the then ultimate-quality Signature, produced until 1991. The 'posh' PRS had arrived... along with the 'doctors and dentists' put-down, referring to the only people who could afford them.

7. E G

Introduced in 1990, the EG – as in 'Electric Guitar' – lowered the price of PRS guitars, as well as being the brand's first 22-fret guitar and flat-front instrument. Despite selling well in Europe, it wasn't liked domestically and was updated (in '92) by the EG II – the first PRS to have body parts made outside of the factory on CNC machines, and the first lefty PRS.

8. CLASSIC ELECTRIC

Along with the 'too expensive' reputation that has dogged PRS for 30 years, its inability to produce a more affordable guitar in the USA (until 2014's S2 range) has been another constant. The Classic Electric was not only PRS's first bolt-on but a nod in the direction of a more 'Fender'-toned guitar with an alder body and maple neck. But Peavey objected to the name, which was changed to 'CE', and the market said it wasn't PRS enough. Maple tops and rosewood fingerboards were swiftly added; by the mid-90s, the alder bodies were changed to mahogany. "The CE was an accepted bolt-on guitar from us," reflects Smith, "but it came to a point where they weren't selling, so we stopped making 'em. People don't look at us for making bolt-on guitars, but it doesn't mean we're not good at them. The Brent Mason is wonderful; I don't like DC-3s... I love them!"

The original Classic Electric was the first bolt-on PRS



9. DRAGON

Since his teens, Smith had dreamt of creating a guitar with a dragon inlay down the fingerboard. He actualised that in 1992 with the Dragon I, a 50-piece limited edition that cost \$8,000! Behind the inlaid fingerboard, however, lay a desire to improve the acoustic sound of the PRS guitar; it was the first 22-fret set-neck instrument, and the first to feature the non-vibrato Stoptail bridge.

10. CUSTOM 22

Aside from the 22-fret bolt-on EG, all PRS guitars had featured a longer 24-fret neck, until the Dragon I. The '93 Custom 22, therefore, became the production version of the Dragon, also offered with the new Stoptail bridge and PRS's biggest 'wide fat' neck profile. By the following year, all the PRS range had 22-fret options.



11. McCARTY MODEL

Theodore ‘Ted’ McCarty was president of Gibson during its 1950 to ‘66 ‘golden era’, presiding over all the classic electric solidbodies and ES semis. But nearly three decades later, he’d been all but forgotten. Smith got to know Ted, and he became a friend and mentor, famously “downloading the hard disk” on how Gibson made instruments and carried out its business.

But when PRS introduced the McCarty Model in ‘94, Ted was back in the limelight: clever marketing (which didn’t go down well at Gibson) reflecting a more vintage-style PRS: it had a deeper body, thinner headstock, lighter tuners and revoiced pickups. Some of the McCarty’s features were already there and some were suggested by Texan guitarist David Grissom. The original McCarty typically used ‘red’ Michigan maple for its tops – the same kind that Gibson used in the 50s, as opposed to the more striped, ‘curly’ West Coast maple used by PRS. For the first time on a production PRS, the McCarty used a Gibson-style three-way toggle to switch the pickups, that reverted to original PAF-style covers. A pull/push switch was later added for coil-splits – this new set-up became known as the ‘McCarty electronics’.

“I didn’t contribute anything to the design,” said McCarty at the time. “The PRS McCarty is his [Paul’s] design.” “The reason we called it the McCarty Model,” said Reed Smith, “is because everything Ted was teaching me is incorporated.”

12. GUITARS OF THE MONTH

A high-end 12-guitar run of one-offs that were produced between late ‘94 and early ‘96, the Guitars of the Month became the precursor to PRS’s Private Stock programme: a ‘custom shop’ making one-offs for customers and artists, prototypes and small runs of unique instruments. A masterstroke for those wanting the best, and who could afford to pay for it.



The Hollowbody (pictured) and Archtop were launched in 1998

13. ARCHTOP & HOLLOWBODY

One of the Guitars of the Month was PRS’s first f-holed hollow-body. Master luthier Joe Knaggs made two more in the new Private Stock programme. Describing himself as a keen “ex-jazz guitarist”, Knaggs was the architect behind the Archtop and the thinner-bodied Hollowbody, which both launched in 1998. PRS had been using computer-assisted routing machines and design software since the mid-90s, and these modern tools helped create these innovative guitars, which were entirely hollow save for a block under the bridge that connected the top to the back and helped reduce feedback. The backs were hollowed out from a large slab of mahogany and certain models were capped with a

maple back, while the tops were either spruce or maple-carved, like a violin, inside and out.

While both designs added depth to the PRS shape, the outline remained the same as the original Custom. Ultimately, it was the Hollowbody that caught on, and with LR Baggs, PRS designed a (optional, but now standard) piezo system, enabling players to add an acoustic-like sound to the more conventional magnetic Archtop humbuckers. Even the Hollowbody was a bit of a sleeper. “David Grissom demo’d the Hollowbody for 10 years on our booth – 10 years! – and finally we started to sell them. That surprised me, our industry is very slow to move,” Smith said recently.



The 20th Anniversary Dragon 6/12:
Not one for the traditionalists

14. SINGLECUT

Fifteen years into PRS's history and the company still had, primarily, one outline design augmented by the earlier 'Santana' shape (which didn't become a PRS production guitar until 1995) and the EGs, which had been discontinued in '95. That changed in 2000 with the launch of the single-cutaway, Les Paul-inspired Singlecut. Famous legal action with you-know-who followed...

15. SE

The Santana SE introduced the 'Student Edition' line, which debuted in 2001. Made in Korea, the SE finally solved the 'affordable PRS' quandary. The highly successful and constantly evolving range, which includes numerous signature models from Carlos Santana to metallur Mark Tremonti, has put PRS's style and quality into a completely different market.

16. 513

Providing both single-coil and humbucking tones on the same guitar was one of the Custom's design keys, but in 2004 PRS introduced the 513 Rosewood with five single-coil pickups and a potential 13 sounds. The more simple 305 (as in three single-coil pickups and five sounds) followed in 2010.

17. 20TH ANNIVERSARY DRAGON 6/12

Arguably the most outlandish PRS ever made, this very rare 6/12 double-neck features two fighting dragons drawn by Jeff Easley and comprises 863 different inlay pieces. Like previous Dragons, the inlay work was handled by Larry Sifel and his Pearlworks team... "with a lot of help from the Private Stock team," said Joe Knaggs at the time.

18. SE CUSTOM

There was always a resistance to mirroring the cosmetics of the USA models within the SE line. It wasn't until 2005 that the first maple-topped Custom 22-fret appeared. It used a proper maple top with a figured maple veneer facing to provide both the sound of the classic maple/mahogany body and the look of a highly expensive figured maple top, but at a fraction of the cost.

19. SC 245

Always popular with artists, the Singlecut proved less popular with the general public. One of the first changes was the 2007 SC245, which reduced the 25-inch scale length to 24.5-inches (closer to Gibson's *actual* scale length of 24.6-inches). This shorter scale is used on numerous Singlecuts, including the SC245, new P245 and numerous SE models – the 245, Zach Myers, Santana and Bernie Marsden.

20. MIRA

Once again, the "affordable" PRS guitar entered the fray, this time made in the USA. The all-mahogany 2008 Mira, designed primarily by Joe Knaggs, created a new body shape with bevelled contours – a nod to players who wanted a less 'posh' aesthetic. Along with the '09 Starla, it laid the foundation for the S2 line.



The 513: five pickups
and 13 sounds



The Burnt Gold PRS
"Paul's 28" from 2009:
all £29,995 of it

21. DAVID GRISSOM TREMLO (DGT)

2008 saw the introduction of many players' favourite PRS guitar, the DGT – finally a David Grissom signature, a result of his years of PRS playing. It added a second volume control, new-design pickups, lighter 'faux' bone tuner buttons, Grissom's own neck shape and a nitrocellulose top-coat finish.

22. SUNBURST SERIES

This mini series of nitrocellulose-finished models – a Sunburst 22, Sunburst 245 and Smokeburst McCarty – were classed as "extremely vintage guitars" by Reed Smith. Among their details were new 1957/2008 (aka 57/08) covered humbuckers made using the same coil wire as Gibson had used back in the 50s. 59/09 and 53/10 'buckers followed, resulting in the latest 58/15 and uncovered 85/15 'buckers.

23. PAUL'S 28

"I went out on the floor and made guitars for the months of November and December [2008] so people could have Christmas bonuses. It was fun; I enjoyed it. The pernambuco necks were new," said Smith of this high-end, 28-only run. "Everything we'd learnt up to that date, we did. But I had my hands on them. Guitars from my old 'shop [pre-1985] are going for \$40,000, minimum, so it just made sense."



24. A M P S

When PRS moved to its current home on Kent Island, Stevensville, the size of the facility seemed extraordinary; it was soon expanded to allow both amplifier and acoustic guitar production. The late-2000s financial chaos put the brakes on, but with amp specialist Doug Sewell onboard, PRS has gained a reputation for quality amps, not least the Archon series.

25. A C O U S T I C S

PRS acoustics have gone upmarket and entered the boutique market. "We took a certain amount of money to create the acoustic line," says Smith, "and we were going to build up the line. But when it became evident we could make the S2, we took all of that money and put it into that."



PRS entered the acoustic market at
the boutique end of the spectrum



The PRS 25th Anniversary guitar built for **Guitarist**

26. 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Battling a worldwide global financial crisis, PRS came out fighting in 2010 with more than 20 new models. There were 13 Anniversary guitars and an Anniversary amp and acoustic. The McCarty Model and the Special returned, and the 513 Swamp Ash, Starla X and all-korina versions of the SE One and SE Singlecut were added. Limited-run models included the ‘Ted McCarty’ SC and DC 245, a special 1959/2009 run and the 100-only SE Santana Abraxas. From Private Stock came the ‘Violin Guitar’ and a 100-only 25th Anniversary Dragon. Phew!

27. JA-15

With a couple of exceptions, PRS had largely ignored the hollow and semi-hollow markets since the launch of the Archtop and Hollowbody back in the late 90s. The single-cut JA-15 hollowbody, a collaboration with Paul Jackson Jr, appeared in 2011, a year that brought a swathe of new features across the USA line: the hybrid V12 finish, new ‘pattern’ neck shapes, a two-piece bridge and new tuner design.

28. S2

Classed as “an engineering project” by president Jack Higginbotham, PRS finally cracked the ‘affordable’ USA-made dilemma with the S2, made at the USA factory but on a different and faster production line and using a combination of USA and offshore parts and pickups.

Launched in 2014 with three models – the S2 Custom, Starla and Mira – the range has expanded quickly to include semi-hollow models (Mira, Custom 22 and Singlecut) and the latest S2 all-mahogany-with-scratchplate Standards (22, 24 and Singlecut); a new guitar is promised for early 2015, the third instrument in the Mira/Starla lineage.

But aside from being approximately three-fifths of the cost of the now-called



The S2 range marked a successful foray into ‘affordable’ USA-made territory

‘core’ USA models, the S2 is aimed at a different customer. “I’ve come across people that frankly hate what we do,” says PRS’s Jim Cullen, one of the leaders of the S2 charge. “I’ve heard this of our core guitars: people love the neck shapes, they know they stay in tune, it’s a great tool but they don’t want to hang a piece of furniture around their necks. A guitar is a fashion statement to many people. A Rickenbacker might be a bit of a weird instrument, but it looks awesome!”

“I’d play an S2 any day,” states Smith today. “An all-mahogany Standard, I’d play one of those. It sits well on the strap; it plays really well. If I want a curly maple top, I’d want a Private Stock grade. So yeah, I’d play a mahogany S2 any day.” So, back to where you started? “Yeah!”

29. SIGNATURE LTD

While implementing gradual and subtle changes in the way PRS guitars were made, as the 25th anniversary passed Smith still aimed for the ‘ultimate’ pickup system. A new design appeared first on the Private Stock Signature Ltd, then eventually on the 2013 408, that combined a smaller-aperture neck pickup with a wider bridge pickup –

both with ‘zero volume loss’ single-coil switching. This concept goes back to the ‘Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ guitar that predated the Custom in the early 80s.

30. BRENT MASON

Sessioneer to the stars, not to mention country legend, Brent Mason is the latest PRS signature artist, but his choice of guitar is rather unusual, based on the korina-bodied NF-3 with its bolt-on maple neck. The pickup system is inspired by the 408, and it’s one of the most versatile bolt-ons we’ve ever played. Rumour has it PRS is continuing to develop a ‘three-single-coil’ guitar. “I’m not answering that,” replies Smith.





CUSTOM CONVERSATIONS

The original prototype of the PRS Custom, built in 1984 by Paul Reed Smith's own fair hand, is a lovingly-crafted, oft-imitated guitar, but is the 30th Anniversary model even better?

WORDS
DAVE BURRLUCK

The PRS Custom, a still-to-be-beaten hybrid of the world's most classic solidbodies, the Gibson Les Paul and the Fender Stratocaster, is one of the few modern solidbodies that can rightly be called a 'classic' alongside those guitars that fuelled its design. It's all the more extraordinary that Paul Reed Smith was only 28 at the time it was created and had never had a single lesson in how to build an electric guitar. 30 years on, he remains an extraordinary fellow: part guitar-making boffin, part businessman and 100 per cent a key figure in the development of the electric plank – as influential to makers of the past 30 years as his original 'teachers', Leo Fender and Ted McCarty, were to him.

Looking at the prototype of the Custom that remains in the PRS archive at its rather sizable Kent Island, Stevensville, factory a few weeks before the end of 2014, it looks as though little has changed. But anyone who has followed PRS's rise knows differently: everything has changed... and it's not for the worse.

Handmade in Smith's original workshop, in 1984 – a year before he opened his factory for business – the old Custom prototype has a wonderfully personal feel. Today, it's unquestionably a fine piece, yet the modern Custom is so much more refined in virtually every detail. We suggest it looks even more elegant than the not-unelegant original. "That would be very nice, but I was hoping you'd say they were equal, not that one is better. That guitar," says Paul, pointing to the prototype, "is worth a lot of money now. It's got a lot of elegance to it by itself, right? We're looking at the prototype to this entire business, so it's gotta be worth some coin."

And, yes, the guitars Paul hand made with a couple of employees, especially the maple-topped one-offs from the early 80s, have to be among the most highly-prized 'vintage' pieces made after 1965. Even the early-year

production models have been elevated way beyond their original cost.

We start comparing the two guitars. Has the headstock shape changed, we wonder? "No. It's now closer into the nut than it was originally and it's thinner by a few thou... the back angle is different, yes, we weren't getting enough string break over the nut, so we wanted more of the sound to originate at the front of the nut. We used to have two angles, one for tremolo guitars and one for Stoptail guitars, but we made it universal. We never stated it as an angle, but it's about a drop of one inch over a six-inch length."

The original's nut seems very different. "Yes, originally the nut was a Delrin. This here," he says, pointing to the 30th's nut, "is a bearing plastic loaded with bronze and glass powder: we got the nuts to sound better. Originally, too, the truss rod was a single-action type; it's been double-action for a long time."

"We still use the same fretwire we've always used," notes Paul. "It wasn't on the prototype because we hadn't come up with it then. It's in-between medium and jumbo-size wire. I split the difference so people wouldn't refret their guitars unless they needed to because of wear."

More obviously, the new top carve is different – though not a million miles away from the prototype. "In fact, the Private Stock 30th Anniversary Custom has what we're calling a 'retro' carve – just like this prototype." It's as if the 'hills' of the carving are a little higher and the 'valleys' a little deeper. "Originally, it was really difficult to train a hand sander to make the edge so sharp and not cut it down, so we made the carve a little less radical, I guess. It's still very contoured compared to many other people's carved tops. It was always more like the contouring on a violin than the carve of other electric guitars."





Another PRS feature that's joined the lexicon of modern guitar making is the natural edge of the maple top, on certain colours, that imitates a plastic edge binding.

"I remember the exact day I did it," says Paul. "It was the guitar for Howard Leese, what he calls the 'Golden Eagle'. It was the first one where I didn't stain the edge of the top; I left that unstained, and the natural maple edge looked like binding. I remember very clearly doing that. Putting plastic around the edge of a guitar seemed like a whole waste of time. So long as you can control the thickness of the top, at the edge, it works. I was trying to save work. Can you imagine how many tops we'd have had to bind if we didn't do this? And look, on the original prototype the 'binding' seems thinner because the top carve was deeper."

PRS's finishing and colour stains have, again, been copied by many makers – new and old. The new V12 finish came online in 2008, but that wouldn't have been possible back in the mid-80s, would it? "The stuff was available but the understanding wasn't," reckons Paul. "It turns out these guys that made the original finish were really good chemists. It was the same stuff they used on Alembic and Tobias basses. It felt like nitro, but was impervious to melting; it was good stuff."

"The biggest problem has been the bumpers on cars," says Smith of the change in finish materials over the past decades. "They used to be made from metal, but when they made them out of rubber the paint had to be pliable – so if you bump into something, it didn't crack the paint. That was the worst day in guitar-making

history, in my opinion, because all the paint manufacturers started to add flexible plasticiser to all their paint so those bumpers wouldn't crack. That's not good for a musical instrument. We finally have a chemist who is building us paints we really like. I actually liked what was on the original guitars a lot, but this feels very close."

Many makers are looking back to past triumphs, and it's perhaps a little surprising that PRS has never reissued, for example, a replica of this original guitar in its first-year specification. "If you believe what you made 30 years ago is better than what you make today then, yes, you produce that in small numbers and at a high price and call it a reissue," comments PRS president Jack Higginbotham. "But if you think what you make today is *better* than what you did make, why would you ever do it? Yes, there's a sentimental, 'I've got my '85 Custom and I love it'; I love the neck shape on that guitar (the '84 prototype). I actually made those neck shapes when I started at PRS but, as a guitar, it has flaws that are just inherent and over the last 30 years, one at a time, we've removed. You remember the original Standard Treble and Standard Bass pickups? There aren't many around because people pulled them out and replaced them. People aren't doing that with our current pickups: in fact, they're trying to find them to put into their other instruments."

Perhaps old isn't always best. Either way, it's hard to dispute, and as our 30th Anniversary Custom 24 proves, PRS doesn't make 'em like it used to – PRS makes 'em even better. **G**

ABOVE The original prototype of the PRS Custom, hand-made by Paul at the tender age of 28, with its Delrin nut, gentle hand-sanded contours, lovingly sculpted heel and the ubiquitous bird inlays

COMPETITION

Win a unique, Guitarist-spec 'Wood Library'
30th Anniversary Custom 24 worth more than £4,500!

HERE'S your chance to win a very special PRS Custom, a unique one-off 30th Anniversary Custom 24, with all the woods chosen by our reviews editor, Dave Burrluck, from PRS's fabled wood library.

But when you're presented with 'bookcases' of some of the world's finest woods and told to "pick what you want", it's not easy to imagine what a couple of slabs of raw, flamed maple will look like once they've been turned into a guitar. We pulled out some tops, wet them to see the grain enhanced, and still couldn't make up our minds.

With PRS's experienced eye for guidance, we finally selected our top, and another... "just in case something goes wrong," we were advised. We then pulled out back woods – South American figured mahogany – and stumbled on some Honduran rosewood for the fingerboard and headstock facing. The next time the woods are seen will be when the lucky winner receives the guitar...

HOW TO ENTER

For a chance to win the sensational *Guitarist*-spec Anniversary Custom 24 electric, now being hand-made in Maryland, all you have to do is choose the correct answer to our prize-winning question from the multiple-choice options below. Get our brain-teaser on PRS hardware correct and you might end up the owner of a real bird of paradise...

What year did the five-way lever switch become standard on the PRS Custom?

- A) 1984
- B) 2004
- C) 2011

To enter, visit:
www.futurecomps.co.uk/git391prs

The closing date for entries is 13 March. For T&Cs, see www.futuretcs.com

PLEASE NOTE
THIS IMAGE IS OF THE STANDARD MODEL, THE ACTUAL PRIZE WILL BE A CUSTOM-MADE, HIGHER-SPEC'D GUITAR – SEE DETAILS BELOW

STELLAR SPECIFICATION

Here are some of the special features the prize-winner's 30th Anniversary Custom 24 will boast:

- Faded Whale Blue finish with natural back
- Pattern Regular mahogany neck
- Honduran rosewood fingerboard and headstock veneer
- 30th Anniversary inlays
- Hand-picked '10' top, in flame maple
- Flame mahogany back
- Hybrid hardware
- 85/15 pickups (exclusive to the 30th Anniversary Custom 24)
- PRS vibrato
- 5-way lever switch
- Black Tolex case



PRS 30TH ANNIVERSARY CUSTOM 24 £3,125
ELECTRICS





LIFE BEGINS AT 30

The Custom is Paul Reed Smith's signature guitar, so naturally it takes centre stage for this year's 30th anniversary celebrations. Let's lift the hood on three decades of tweaking and refinement...

WORDS DAVE BURRLUCK PHOTOGRAPHY JOSEPH BRANSTON





PRS 30th Anniversary Custom 24 £3,125

What We Want To Know

1 Not another PRS Custom, surely?

It can look that way, as PRS, despite its 30 years of guitar making, still has only two main body outlines in its 'core' USA-made production range. Customs from year-to-year, however, can be very different in terms of their spec and detail.

2 What's new here, then?

Well, the new 85/15 humbuckers for starters, the latest in PRS's ongoing PAF-style pickup development that kicked off in 2008 with the 57/08 'buckers.

3 Who's going to play one?

With extremely classic humbucking and single-coil sounds, not to mention all of PRS's carefully designed features, any guitarist – from jazz to metal players – could use one. Never cheap, of course, but a guitar for life.

This year's Anniversary puts the original Custom centre-stage, with four 30th Anniversary models in PRS's SE, S2, Private Stock and, as here, the core USA line. Although the quartet spans a very wide price range, all use the 30th Anniversary bird inlays, slightly offset as they fly up the 'board, with a double bird at the 12th fret.

Our core Custom 24 keeps Anniversary bling to a minimum – just an Anniversary logo on the truss rod cover and a thick, inlaid line inside the

fingerboard and rosewood veneer-faced headstock edges. Hardware is 'hybrid' – a mix of gold- and nickel-plated parts.

Originally, the Custom was all about combining humbucking and single-coil tones in one instrument, and it's the way that is achieved, along with the specific recipe of the dual humbuckers, that has evolved constantly over the years. And while this 30th version retains the master volume and tone control, along with the five-way lever pickup selector switch that became standard on the

Custom in 2011, it's the pickups here that are brand new.

The latest in the 'date' series, they continue Paul Reed Smith's ongoing quest to nail the 'best' PAF-style 'bucker. Available covered on this year's SC 245 and new P245, and called 58/15s, the uncovered versions here, which show off their proprietary square-edged bobbins, are called 85/15s. Covers aside, the internals are identical. Typically tight-lipped about what's under the hood, Smith prefers to discuss the sonic differences. "They are a step clearer [than the 57/08]," he begins. "If you listen to a set of old PAFs, they almost sound like Strat pickups – they are very clear-sounding pickups. As a matter of fact, sometimes some PAFs with their covers removed can be brighter than Strat pickups – really bright but still





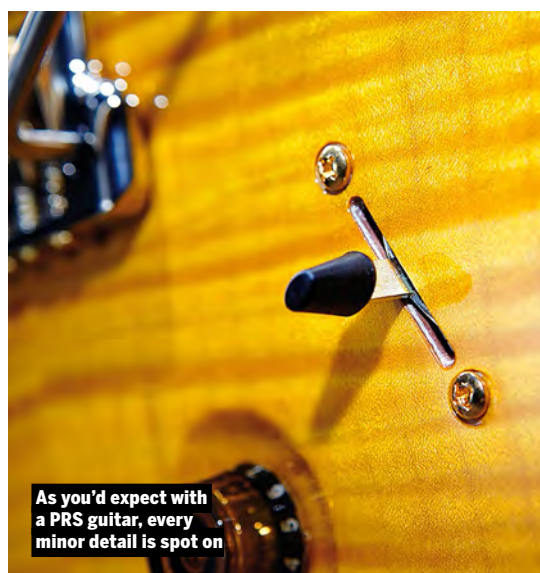
<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



The ubiquitous bird inlays on the one-piece mahogany



The truss rod cover logo is one of the few Anniversary flourishes



As you'd expect with a PRS guitar, every minor detail is spot on

in a musical way. See, some people just don't remember how bright they [original PAFs] could be. There's a real trick to making them bright and musical and not bright and ice-pick-y. We have a machine that we test our pickups on – it has really helped us to 'see' the sound: it tells us exactly how the pickup will sound before we plug it in. It's wonderful."

Plugging pickups into his testing rig, Smith shows us the tonal effect of covered versus uncovered humbuckers – the latter, as here, have noticeably

more output and a slightly higher resonant frequency, which results in a subtly brighter tonality compared to the covered version.

Of course, the pickup can hear only what the instrument is producing, and PRS's blend was certainly unique back in 1985. The offset double-cut body with its halfway-between-Gibson-and-Fender scale length, its vibrato with notched pivot screws and originally all-brass casting, now, as it has been for a considerable time, a two-piece design. While the vibrato has

remained very true to the original vision, the locking tuners have evolved and today we're onto the third generation of top-locking types with open backs and a total absence of any nylon washers. The nut material has evolved, too; always friction-reducing, the latest recipe adds bronze and glass powder to the material.

What has barely changed in 30 years is the construction style. The 49mm-thick Custom's body uses a one-piece 28.5mm mahogany back topped with a 20.5mm-thick, book-matched and centre-jointed carved maple cap. The extended tongue of the 24-fret, one-piece mahogany neck sits under the neck pickup, while the compact heel and the hallmark cutaway

While the vibrato has remained very true to the original version, the locking tuners have evolved

The Rivals

Not too many makers have taken on PRS directly – Patrick Eggel tried in the UK and failed – but its influence is ever-present with more maple-topped, colourful guitars than we had in the eighties. **Fame** guitars are made in Poland and closely ape PRS (see review next issue) but start around £500. **Nik Huber** was helped early on by Paul Reed Smith, and makes some fine guitars, such as the **Orca** and **Dolphin** (approx £4,500). More obvious inspired-by instruments include the **Vintage VRS 150** (£349) and **ESP E-II Mystique** (approx £1,500)



Construction is familiar: a 28.5mm mahogany back with a 20.5mm maple



PRS is onto the third generation of the top locking tuners on the Custom 24

'scoop' allow easy access to the top frets. Everything is perfectly executed high quality – words that have been associated with PRS from day one.

It's super-sharp today, too: comparing fit and finish to a 1988 PRS Classic Electric, you can see and feel the differences as though every fine detail has been subsequently honed to perfection.

This year's Custom is offered with two neck profiles: pattern thin or pattern regular, as here. Dimensionally, it measures 42.33mm at the nut, 52.02mm at the 12th fret; 21mm deep at the first fret and 23.2mm at the 12th. It's extremely mainstream in shape, a sloping shouldered 'C' that doesn't feel big or small, just right, in the hand.

Sounds

The Custom's hybrid halfway-between-Gibson-and-Fender reputation has not always connected with the player wanting to really nail those sounds of yesteryear. Earlier Customs have a pronounced midrange focus, invariably a hotter output too. Listening to a '94 Custom 22, even with its retrofitted, less mid-focused Dragon II humbuckers, the modern Custom sounds very different, and for players chasing more classic tonalities it's for the better. The neck pickup doesn't have the low-end depth of, say, a PRS Singlecut or a Les Paul, but it's extremely balanced – articulate without being sharp. Through a clean amp, it's an easy jazz fix

The bridge has clarity and bite, but without that midrange 'cloud' of many earlier PRS pickups

or soulful blues lead voice; the bridge has clarity and bite, but without that midrange 'cloud' of many earlier PRS pickups. Adding a little hair to the amp, it's ringing, chiming classic roots rock we hear – not perhaps what everyone would expect. The dual-humbucker mix is equally classic, and with some volume reduction cleans up for thick, more single coil-like chunky rhythm fills. The two 'single coil' selections sound thinner; position two, the bridge humbucker and the slug inside-

coil of the neck humbucker, is a little darker and more direct compared to the slug inside-coils of both 'buckers; position four is the most Fender-like selection. Typically, there's a small treble bleed cap on the volume control, so volume reduction retains clarity and dials in some subtle voice shaping; likewise, the tone control is beautifully graduated and handy to roll off that high-end detail if required.

The most classic voicing of the Custom yet? We think so.

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The sloping shouldered C-shape neck feels perfect in the hand



The Custom 24's stable tuning and excellent intonation make it a guitar you can trust

Certainly, the 30th performs in all manner of musical styles, stopping short perhaps of ultra-high gain, although classic rock and earlier metal tones are easily achieved with a clarity that's not over-sharp but clear and defined.

And, yes, if you know of another guitar that stays in tune this well and is so perfectly intonated all over the neck, then

let us know. The smallest detail is considered, such as the feel of those control knobs and the perfect placement of the volume control, making subtle changes second nature.

Verdict

Guitars mean very different things to different people. For some, owning a PRS is more a statement of status, for others

they are just impossibly pretty things. Then there are the quality obsessives... on it goes. But the thing about this Custom is just how fit for purpose it is. From the effortless playability through to the intonation, tuning stability and hugely versatile sounds for a really wide range of styles, it never lets you down. And to our ears this is the most classic-sounding Custom to date: underneath the oh-so-pretty appearance is simply, if you can afford it, one of the best working tools that money can buy. **G**

Underneath the oh-so-pretty appearance is one of the best working tools money can buy

PRS 30th Anniversary Custom 24

PRICE: £3,125 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway, carved-top solidbody electric

BODY: One-piece mahogany with carved figured maple top

NECK: One-piece mahogany, pattern regular or pattern thin profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/42.3mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with purfling, 30th Anniversary bird inlays (mother of pearl), 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: Hybrid-plated PRS vibrato with PRS Phase III locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x PRS 85/15 humbuckers, 5-way lever pickup selector switch, volume and tone.

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.3/7.28

OPTIONS: See website

RANGE OPTIONS: See website

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Faded Vintage Yellow (as reviewed), plus wide choice of translucent colours with natural edge binding, plus Opaque Black, Antique White and Gold Top

PRS Europe

01223 874301

www.prsguitars.com

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Subtly upgraded over the standard Custom 24, a super, classic-sounding take on PRS's solidbody electric classic



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Two channels of the world's finest passive DI in one compact package! Jensen™ transformers deliver absolute purity at any signal level.



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Captures the sound of the amp head and cabinet perfectly and consistently without a mic. Works great on bass guitars too.



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TAYLOR 618E & 614CE £2,721 & £2,922
ACOUSTICS





Maple chiefs

Taylor makes significant updates to its 600 Series for 2015, urging us all to take a fresh perspective on the magic of maple

WORDS **MICK TAYLOR** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**





Taylor 618e & 614ce

£2,721 & £2,922

What You Need To Know

- 1 The new Taylor 600 series: how so?**
2015 brings new top bracing, new back bracing, torrefied spruce tops, a new finish, ES-2 electronics and a host of new visual appointments.
- 2 And 600 Series guitars are all about maple backs and sides, right?**
Indeed they are, and necks, too. Bob Taylor and Andy Powers (Taylor's master luthier) are singing the sometime-maligned wood's praises as a sustainable, desirable choice for the future of acoustic guitars.
- 3 But they're brown – where's the blinging blonde flame?**
The flame is there, but it's within a more subtle 'Brown Sugar' stain, evoking a more elegant, understated vibe with a nod to classical instruments such as the violin.

Try as we might, it's hard to imagine a future where Taylor would produce a vintage reissue guitar. Instead, the company history charts a path of consistent evolution in product design that rarely – if ever – glorifies the way something used to be done. It's not just products, either; 2012 and 2013 were watershed years for the company, as top man Bob Taylor slowly but surely handed the chief designer/luthier's mantle to one Andy Powers who, for 2014, went about a belt-and-braces redesign of the company's heartland 800 Series guitars.

Next on Powers' project list were the subjects of this review: Taylor's solid maple back-and-sides 600 Series, all-new for 2015. "The 600 has a forward-thinking component," he explains as we ask about the motivation behind the redesign. "As we look forward 10, 20 or 30 years, at the condition of forests around the world and wonder what our wood supply will be like, it's not all that rosy. If we still want to be building good guitars out of wood 20 or 30 years from now, what are they going to be made of? For us, one part of that answer is maple."

Powers goes on to explain how maple is grown not just in

the United States but also in Europe and Asia, and is very well managed and harvested, meaning a good prognosis for its ongoing use for the backs and sides of acoustic guitars. However, maple has a certain reputation in flat-top acoustic guitars that, while loved by many players, is undoubtedly not as popular or well regarded as the more 'classic' mahoganies and rosewoods.

"Maple, to me, has a few limitations in the way that we've traditionally used it," continues Powers. "It does have some great attributes; it's super-linear, it's really transparent... it's got all these cool things going on for it, but it seems that the most kind thing that guitar players say about a maple flat-top is, 'They amplify well', or 'it's a great stage guitar'. To me, that's not really fair. In the violin world they've insisted on nothing *but* maple and spruce for the last, well, 400 years!"

"I also have all this archtop building experience, and I insist on nothing but maple for that... and with mandolins. It's known as this first-class instrument wood in lots of ways, so in order to make a more gratifying [flat-top] guitar, I needed to change the design and the architecture and some details."

The Rivals

If we're talking big bodies and solid maple back and sides, the **Gibson SJ-200 TV** (£3,499) is a must-audition. The smaller-bodied **J-185s** are lovely too, but they're currently hard to find in the UK. **Guild's F-50** (£2,470) is also a classic, beautiful maple jumbo. We'd suggest a look at **Lowden**, too; walnut and myrtle are among its back and sides options; an **F35C** (from £4,220) would be a great alternative to the 614ce

618e & 614ce

Our two review guitars are the 618e Grand Orchestra and 614ce Grand Auditorium; the former is Taylor's newest and biggest body shape, the latter is the 1994 design, that has become most synonymous with the brand.

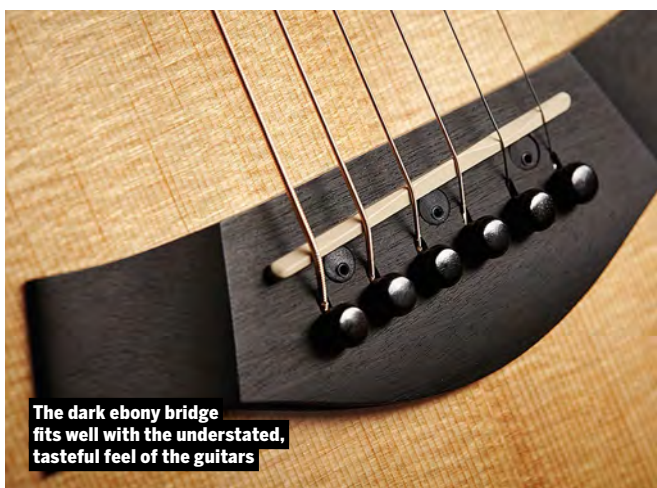
The first surprise is that the maple backs and sides are dark brown-coloured, not the very pale, or indeed brightly coloured hues of Taylor's previous 600 Series. Instead, Powers developed a hand-burnished process to apply the colour that adds no measurable thickness to the overall finish. The 'Brown Sugar' hue is visually closer to what you might expect on a violin (albeit underneath Taylor's newest ultra-thin gloss polyester topcoat), and while we weren't expecting it to look like this, there's no doubt it's a stunningly beautiful finish that shows off plenty of the tiger-stripped



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The winged ivory inlays epitomise these classy instruments



The dark ebony bridge fits well with the understated, tasteful feel of the guitars



We were bowled over by the Sitka spruce tops and striped ebony pickguards

figuring in the timber, without being over-ostentatious or gaudy. Seen from a few feet, you'd have no idea these were maple-bodied guitars, which may be a good or bad thing depending on your viewpoint.

The backs and sides are bound tastefully in ebony and figured ivory, for some extra, understated class, and it's worth mentioning Taylor's superb level of craftsmanship at this point. We've come to take it for granted from the brand, but these guitars are incredibly well made and finished: a blend of precision and consistency, yet with a strong sense of approachability, too.

There are significant changes inside the guitars. Just as he did

with the 800 Series redesign, Powers has focused intently on the back design of the 600s, most significantly by designing the bracing structure to stop short of the rims on all models except the Grand Orchestra (618e). "I was stealing a page out of my archtop building book," he explains of how shortening the back braces enabled him to "get more" out of the maple and produce more of the sounds he wanted from a flat-top guitar.

The 614ce also has the slanted back bracing pattern and side struts we saw first in the 800 Series redesign, while the 618e's back is braced more conventionally; Powers tells us he designed the GO shape from the ground up a few years ago

and had maple very much in mind when doing so.

The new 600 Series solid Sitka spruce tops are interesting for a couple of reasons: firstly because they use the latest, model-specific 'Advanced Performance' bracing patterns developed for the 800 Series last year – including the forward-shifted design with relief rout and hot-hide glue construction for better resonance and tone transfer, according to Taylor – and secondly because they've been, er, cooked! Powers explains that he experimented with torrefaction for the tops, whereby they go through a high-temperature process that ages them slightly, but also makes them go a slightly darker hue that, along with the tasteful, striped ebony pickguard, dark ebony bridge and fingerboard, fits perfectly with the understated, classic aesthetic of

the whole guitar. Again according to Powers, the torrefaction process is to a 'medium-rare' level to continue the cooking analogy; enough to effectively "put a year or two's playing on them" in terms of ageing, but not so much to overdo it tonally and produce a much darker, more homogenous colour. "That would be well done," he laughs.

We also like the grained ivory wing-like fingerboard inlays, echoed on the back of the headstock, which is faced front and back with glossed ebony: again, tremendously classy.

There's not much to say about Taylor necks that hasn't already been said; a superbly inviting blend of grown-up acoustic playability in terms of string spacing and nut width, and the very subtlest of hints of V in the profile towards the lower frets, in this case made from maple and with a tinted satin finish to

These guitars are incredibly well made: precision and consistency, with a sense of approachability



match the backs and sides. Taylor rewrote the book on modern acoustic guitar playability, which might suggest they're too slinky or aimed too much at beginners. Not a bit of it – you can still engage properly with either of these guitars, but it never feels like hard work. They're joined to the body with Taylor's proprietary NT bolted/shimmed/pocket design, while headstocks and heels are scarfed on. A set of nickel tuners, ebony bridge pins and Taylor's elegant ES-2 electronics package rounds things out.

Sounds

The 618e has the biggest, strongest, clearest bass of any 'normal' acoustic guitar we've played in recent memory: it's

absolutely colossal, rendered all the more surprising as it's not to the total detriment of the midrange or top-end strength. Clearly, the combination of the Grand Orchestra's cavernous body, the particular sonic character of the maple, and of course the all-important bracing, has produced a preconception-changing instrument here. Your eyes say 'jumbo' but your hands, brain and ears compute something new and unique; pick it, strum it, flatpick it – it's a genuine all-rounder, despite the size.

The 614ce sounds slightly more focused in the midrange, yet still has oodles of bass. A perennial fave at *Guitarist* is a 2012 714ce model, and by comparison the 614ce is slightly brighter sounding with less of

the colour and plumminess around the mids, though it has notably more piano-like depth and clarity to bass notes; in that sense the 600 is probably the better contemporary fingerstyle guitar. It also shows up the value of the latest Elixir HD Light phosphor bronze strings; nothing new in the metallurgy or construction, but the hybrid gauge – 0.013, 0.017, 0.025, 0.032, 0.042, 0.053 – really does add some authority and fullness to the top strings compared with a regular 0.012 to 0.053 set.

More generally, both guitars have something of maple's brightness and zing about them – it would be a real shame if they didn't – but there's no doubt that it's a vastly different experience compared with a Gibson J-185 or J-200, to cite

two very famous examples. We didn't have a previous 600 Series Taylor to hand for comparison, but if the difference between the new and 'old' 800s is anything to go by, you can be sure of a big change.

Plugged in, the ES-2 electronics package provides a very different ride from the original Expression System. Gone are the body sensors and the pickup in the neck pocket, replaced with three adjustable pickup sensors mounted in the bridge, behind the saddle, not underneath it. The sound is closer to what you might expect from an under-saddle pickup (where the original Expression System is vastly different), with a good, healthy output for your amp or PA. Despite the ostensibly simple controls (bass,



Model Shown...
LTD EC-1000 FM ASB
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The 618ce has the biggest, clearest bass of any 'normal' acoustic guitar we've played in recent memory

treble and volume), the way they interact means you can coax a wide range of sounds from the guitar. Do you want a parametric mid in the guitar? We don't – it's much better to keep the guitar clean and classy and do that kind of tone shaping via an external box or mixing desk, if indeed you need it at all.

The colossal bottom end of the 618e in particular needs some taming when plugged in – it will howl into body resonance feedback very easily, as you'd expect of such a big guitar. The internal phase switch helps a great deal – a superb inclusion on any electro-acoustic system – but there's obviously a point when the laws of nature take over. Nevertheless, we'd be happy to gig either of these with absolute confidence.

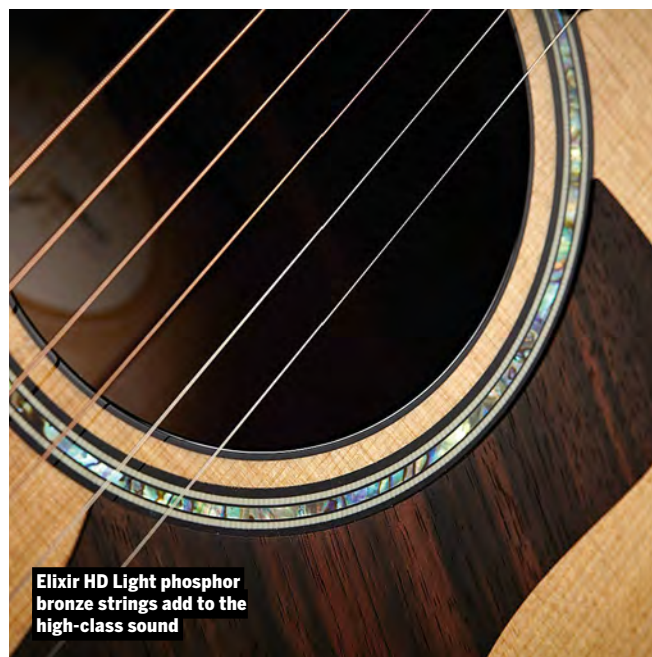
Verdict

We're often quick to point out that the guitar world moves slowly, with little real 'progress'. When it does move, however, players are quickly cynical; it's a cul-de-sac (albeit a popular and profitable one) in which the famous heritage brands have

found themselves for many years. Taylor doesn't have the vintage cross to bear, so is 'free' to evolve carefully but consistently, something it has done with great judgement, over the last decade especially. Just like last year's 800 Series update, then, these new 600 Series instruments will surprise and educate in equal measure and do indeed offer a new way to consider maple as a serious alternative to the all-conquering rosewoods and mahoganies of the acoustic world.

The 614ce should definitely be auditioned alongside the 5-, 7- and 814ce models as a serious all-rounder for contemporary styles and playing. Clear, deep bass, a joy to strum and satisfying to pick, it has a voice all of its own without doubt.

The 2015 618e, meanwhile, is simply a storming guitar; a preconception-changing, powerhouse jumbo that you can strum or pick with confidence. It's every bit a modern classic and demands an audition, even if it's only to say that you've played one. **G**



Elixir HD Light phosphor bronze strings add to the high-class sound



Taylor 2015 618e

PRICE: £2,721 (inc Taylor hard case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Grand Orchestra electro-acoustic

TOP: Solid torrefied Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Solid Big Leaf maple

MAX RIM DEPTH: 127mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 425.5mm

NECK: Maple

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Taylor enclosed, nickel

NUT/WIDTH: Tusq, 44.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 381mm

(15") radius

FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with Micarta saddle/56mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.2/4.85

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge

OPTIONS: None as yet – see

Taylor website

RANGE OPTIONS: Also launched in January are the 616e Grand Symphony (£2,922) and 656ce Grand Symphony 12-string (£3,023)

FINISH: Gloss polyester body, satin neck. Natural top, 'Brown Sugar' stained back, sides and neck

Taylor Guitars

+31 (0) 20 667 6033

www.taylorguitars.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Powerhouse jumbo with astonishing bass that you can also pick. A preconception changer



Taylor 2015 614e

PRICE: £2,922 (inc Taylor hard case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Grand Auditorium electro-acoustic

TOP: Solid torrefied Sitka spruce

BACK/SIDES: Solid Big Leaf maple

MAX RIM DEPTH: 117.5mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 406.4mm

NECK: Maple

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Taylor enclosed, nickel

NUT/WIDTH: Tusq, 44.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 381mm

(15") radius

FRETS: 20

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with Micarta saddle, 56mm

ELECTRICS: Taylor Expression System 2

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.1/4.6

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge

OPTIONS: None as yet – see

Taylor website

RANGE OPTIONS: See left

FINISH: Gloss polyester body, satin neck. Natural top, 'Brown Sugar' stained back, sides and neck. Other finishes available – see Taylor website

Taylor Guitars

+31 (0) 20 667 6033

www.taylorguitars.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Thoughtful evolution of Taylor's stalwart 14ce mould, making brilliant and beautiful use of solid maple

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GO FIGURE

Maple is traditionally thought of as a tight, bright-sounding wood when it comes to acoustic guitars, fit for archtops and big, boomy jumbos, but not much else.

But, with its new 600 Series (see review, p100), Taylor wants to persuade you that maple can sound as warm, well-balanced and sweet as any rosewood or mahogany guitar. But why? The answer concerns the future of guitar-making itself.

We travel to America's Cascade Mountains to find out more...

Words & photography
by Jamie Dickson

Do you have straight or curly hair? Whichever it is, the reason your hair looks a certain way lies in your genes. If your parents both have curly hair – guess what, you probably have it, too.

But what has that got to do with guitars? Well, the figured maple that adorns many beautiful instruments is, like curly hair, a product of genetics. Split open the right kind of maple log lengthwise, and figuring is visible as an undulating ripple in the grain. But not many maple trees contain figured wood because, strictly speaking, it's a growth defect – albeit a harmless one that looks attractive when you make it into a guitar, where it manifests itself in subtle visual patterns, including the famous 'flames' seen on the maple tops of old sunburst Les Pauls.



Maple Country

The Cascade Mountains, not far up the highway from Seattle, are home to temperate-climate tonewoods including Big Leaf maple





Herein lies a problem – in fact, a series of problems – that Taylor would like to solve. The reason the Californian company is taking a fresh look at maple is because the supply of tonewoods traditionally used to make acoustic guitars is growing harder to obtain. Mahogany, rosewood and ebony trees take many decades to mature and, when they are allowed to grow to full size, they become enormously valuable.

The sad reality is that in many of the tropical regions where such trees flourish, illegal logging, corruption and conflict all hamper the chances of harvesting old-growth trees in a responsible way. Where there are no controls on logging, ancient forests tumble with frightening rapidity. The scarcer such trees become, the higher their value rises – making them ever-more tempting targets for illegal logging, keeping the whole vicious circle spinning like a sawblade. Certainly, there are verifiable ways to obtain tropical hardwoods from sustainable sources, and increasing numbers of makers, such as Martin, Walden and Taylor, are making good use of them. So it's not the case that all such woods are 'bad', but Taylor thinks it might also be possible to make beautiful-sounding acoustic guitars from trees that aren't under any logging pressure at all.

Take maple, for example. In the Cascade Mountains of the Pacific Northwest of the United States, maple suitable for making guitars grows "like a weed" to quote Steve McMinn, founder of Pacific Rim Tonewoods, a forward-thinking company that provides sustainable timber to many top guitar makers, including Taylor. It's plentiful, not in much demand and grows all the way from California to Alaska, right on the back door of

PIONEERS

The men who want to make more from maple [from left to right]: Eric Warner, general manager of Pacific Rim Tonewoods; Andy Powers, Taylor's master luthier; Steve McMinn, founder of Pacific Rim Tonewoods; Bob Taylor, co-founder of Taylor Guitars

many revered guitar firms. The only trouble is, nobody quite believes you can make a good, all-round acoustic guitar from it. Taylor's innovative master luthier, Andy Powers, explains the problem:

"Maple has been, in a way, a 'side dish' kind of wood in the guitar world," he says. "In the past, you might see a maple jumbo: a big, boomy guitar that could work with a real bright, stiff-sounding wood. Well, that can be a fun maple guitar but it's the only one that's really 'stuck' and become accepted among players.

"I feel that's because we've traditionally done the same things to maple that we would do with a rosewood or a mahogany guitar – and that's not fair. Maple has its own personality. I'm not going to cook a steak the same way I cook a piece of salmon – they're two different ingredients and you have to treat them in ways that suit their personalities."

It was the perception that acoustics with maple backs and sides must *always* sound stiff and bright that Andy most wanted to challenge with Taylor's new 600 Series guitars, so he altered their internal design to allow maple to exhibit warmer, more balanced tones.

"In this case, I've treated maple more like I would if it were being used in a violin or an archtop guitar," he says. "One of the most notable details in this design is that if you look on the inside, the back braces don't extend all the way to the rim of the instrument. That's a critical point in these guitars. By doing this, I can help control the back of a maple guitar and allow it to move more like an archtop guitar. Out of these instruments, you're not going to hear the same bright, almost nasal quality that a lot of us associate with maple flattop guitars."



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GOING DARK

Nonetheless, if you look at a typical maple acoustic guitar, with its shimmering blonde sides, it's difficult not to think 'bright'. It even looks trebly. So, even if you do succeed in designing acoustic guitars made of maple that sound well-balanced, open and warm, how do you convince people to give them a try?

"Make them brown. Make them not so bright-sounding and make more of them," is Bob Taylor's blunt assessment. Bob and co-founder Kurt Listug established Taylor Guitars in 1974. Now, 40 years on, he's convinced that if guitar makers don't become less dependent on a narrow selection of tropical hardwoods, the future won't be very bright for conservation or guitar-making.

Half the battle, he argues, is in challenging players' preconceptions. He cites the example of ebony: a scarce, slow-growing tropical hardwood that became a byword for the colour black itself in the 20th century due to its use on piano keys, among other things. Less well-known is that not all ebony trees yield timber that is pure black. Many contain beautifully patterned wood with swirling amber and coffee-cream tints.

But because we all grew up expecting ebony to be a pure, deep black, that's what most instrument makers have continued to use. The only trouble is, you can't tell which shade of ebony you're going to get until you chop a tree down – often with the result that centuries-old trees were being felled, only for timber to be left to rot on the forest floor because it turned out not to be sufficiently black in hue, though otherwise perfectly suitable as tonewood.

ABOVE [Clockwise from left] Steve McMinn of Pacific Rim Tonewoods shows off samples of timber, including – in the middle – the characteristic wavy grain of figured maple. Pacific Rim doesn't just handle maple – timber for fine spruce tops is processed here too. A Pacific Rim staff member expertly splits a spruce log into suitable sections prior to further milling. As far as maple goes, however, the only way to tell the full extent of figuring is to split open the log and take a look.

So, instead of rejecting the lighter ebony, Taylor started making guitars with it, setting up its own sustainable ebony operation in Cameroon.

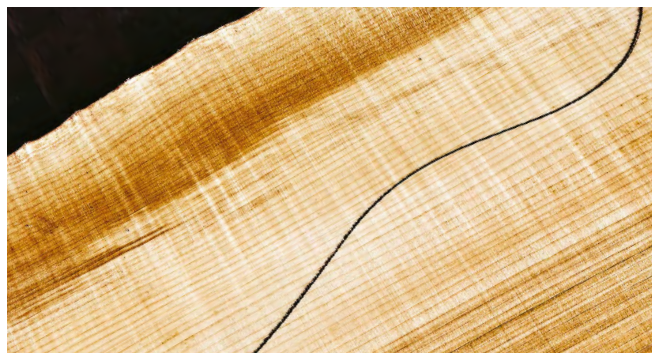
"We found that all we had to do is tell people that ebony doesn't come pure black; that we didn't want to throw away brown ebony and that we're going to start using it," Bob Taylor explains. "And customers would say 'Nobody told us this before. But we're happy to use that ebony'. And, in fact, we've seen a huge swing – it's amazing the number of people who ask us for that now."

Having worked on players' perceptions of ebony, Bob Taylor would like to do the same for maple – though in this case giving the maple backs and sides on the new 600 Series guitars a translucent auburn 'Brown Sugar' stain is the solution. It seems that 'dark maple' equates to 'darker tone' for many of us, regardless of what our ears are hearing. So the new maple Taylor guitars not only sound well-balanced but look that way, too. Appearance, as it's often said, counts for a lot.

POPULAR FIGURE

Which leads us to the second of Taylor's problems. When maple is used on a guitar, most players like it to have attractive figuring. Steve McMinn, of Pacific Rim, explains the quandary:

"You can make a good guitar without figure; you can make it from just plain maple. But guess what? We all like to be charmed. All the same, it's hard to find the maple tree that has figure in it. We are in the midst of a great forest where there's a lot of it. But it is often found as by-catch [timber located while logging for other species of tree]. So, usually, we're able to find some in an



area where alder and other hardwoods are growing. It's still a real challenge to get it, though – but we have a couple of different strategies for that. One of them is, we'll go to a big mill and look through their piles. And that works. We get some there and we pay them three times what they paid for it. But the problem with that is it's often baked in the sun. This is fish country, so we know fish, and there's one salmon called a pink, or a 'humpy', that starts to deteriorate almost in front of your eyes after you've caught it. And maple's kind of that way, too. The sugars will turn colour and it will change."

Steve is working closely with Taylor on the new 600 Series guitars, and agrees that Western Big Leaf maple has good potential as a sustainable tonewood. But finding figured timber in tip-top condition remains challenging. Like ebony trees, it's extremely difficult to find out if a maple tree will yield figured wood without cutting it down.

"We buy really nice alder logs and sell them to veneer slicers in the Midwest. But in the course of that, we go into the woods, and we see what's being cut and get hold of [chance finds of figured maple] early. And then the third strategy is, it just comes to us. When you start paying enough for it, people will bring it in on a boat trailer or the back of a pickup or something. So we get a little bit that way as well."

But although these methods will suffice for building maple guitars in relatively modest numbers, Taylor has big ambitions for using maple as a sustainable tonewood for acoustic guitars in the future, as Bob Taylor explains:

FROM TREE TO TONE

Above, the outline of a guitar back panel has been pencilled on a freshly split maple log. Careful judgment is required before any cutting takes place, as certain natural defects have to be scrupulously avoided. Distortions in the grain where major branches intersect with the trunk are a problem, as are burls – warty protuberances on the trunk of the tree that sprout fine branches that penetrate into the trunk. There's also a class of defect known as 'inclusions', which can range from insect damage to resinous deposits in the grain. All these defects and more must be spotted when logs are split and expertly worked around, meaning only the finest, cleanest wood is made into beautiful, sonorous backs, sides and tops for acoustic guitars.

"At Taylor now, we design everything for the future. If there's not a sustainable component or a sustainable reason for the choices that we're making, then we feel like we've missed the mark. Not all the guitars are maple, but more need to be maple. And it's a long, long game we're talking about."

CLONE THEORY

The bottleneck is obvious. Finding attractively figured maple is, currently, a needle-in-a-haystack job – yet building maple acoustic guitars in really large numbers will require lots of it. So Steve McMinn of Pacific Rim Tonewoods approached Professor Jim Mattsson at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, who is a specialist in tree genetics. Their goal was to find a way to grow trees that will reliably yield figured maple.

The answer they've turned to is cloning. Although it sounds like the stuff of sinister science-fiction, plants have been cloned by farmers for the past 10,000 years – all the bananas we eat, for example, are clones, because they have been cultured over generations to contain lots of edible fruit but no seeds. But, without seeds, how do you get more bananas? At the most basic level, all you need to do is take a cutting from a healthy plant, relocate it to a fertile environment where it can develop roots of its own, and then nurture it to maturity. Genetically identical to the plant it was taken from, it will likely have the same characteristics as the donor plant, including – in the case of certain maple trees – a predisposition towards figuring. Just to be clear, this is *not* the same as genetically modifying plants, which involves directly altering the DNA of an organism in the ➤



laboratory. Instead, it's more like taking a chip off the old block, as Professor Mattsson explains.

"It's very similar to what your grandmother might do with an African Violet. You cut off the leaves, stick them in moist soil, you wait for a while and it will make roots. It's a little bit more tricky in maple, though."

Professor Mattsson's team take cuttings from maple trees known to possess good figuring, and these are carefully grown on under sterile lab conditions. At a certain height, further cuttings are taken from these young plants, from which yet more cloned plants can be grown. Finally, the cloned saplings are introduced to soil, where they will mature into fully grown trees over a number of years. As they grow, the university team will examine tissue samples from their twigs to determine if the clones are developing figuring like the original donor tree. Along the way, they'll be gathering scientific insights into why maple has figuring at all.

"We think it is due to defective transport of a plant hormone that is very important for keeping things straight," says Professor Mattsson. "When the cells divide, they should elongate and they should be straight. Here, we have cells that elongate – but they wiggle on the way."

"This is an interesting project, because there's a tremendous amount known about Western Maple – but only how to kill it or get rid of it, because it's regarded as a weed [by loggers] who are after alder or douglas fir," adds McMinn, "But we don't yet know much about how to grow it."

But isn't it a worry that figured maple that's been cloned will all look the same? Professor Mattsson

ABOVE Here's what the whole complex issue of tonewood conservation finally boils down to: the art of making a well-balanced instrument that delights the player's ear as well as eye.

argues that, due to environmental factors, each cloned tree will each grow in a different way and produce quite different types of figuring – or even none at all.

"It's not a given that if Steve finds a tree and we bring it to the lab, we clone it, put it in a nice field, that it will produce the same phenotype [figuring]," he says. Bob Taylor continues: "What we're trying to do is get more trees that have figure. But there's going to be variation because one of them is going to be blown in the wind and one of them is going to be behind the one that's blowing in the wind, one of them is going to get more sun while another will be in the shade, and so on. Also, we might end up with 20 different 'mother' trees, so you would have a lot of variation."

Although the project is in its infancy, everyone involved hopes it will one day provide a lifeline of sustainable, figured tonewood that will relieve pressure on tropical forests decimated by uncontrolled logging. To get even this far has required a fresh look at guitar design, pioneering science, extensive teamwork between companies and acceptance that achieving a sea-change in players' use of maple guitars might take decades, with no absolute guarantee of success. All the same, Bob Taylor thinks it's worth shooting for.

"The end goal is your kids, or maybe your grandkids, will be living in a world where more people play maple guitars. They like them, they're used to them, they like the sound of them – and the whole industry has developed, from the laboratory to the sawmill, to the musician, to the factory, to the marketing – the whole thing – to where the world doesn't even think twice about it. Because they just buy a maple guitar." 



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Twang Of Four

Since the post-war trade embargo that kept them from our shores, the Stratocaster has held a special allure for British guitarists. Fender gave us an early sneak peak at the new 2015 crop...



<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



Looking for an American Stratocaster, but fancy something a little outside the norm? Fender's class of 2015 was launched at the Winter NAMM show in Anaheim in January [see our full report next issue – Ed] and each of this quartet of new instruments brings something different to the menu, though the Californian giant has resisted the urge to make the kind of sweeping specification changes that have seen its rival over in Nashville draw considerable social media heat.

This cross-section of new, American-built Strats sees Fender blend vintage and contemporary features, adding yet more depth and choice to an already near-bewildering catalogue that includes the dual-humbucker instruments we looked at last issue. Always wanted a USA Strat with a big 70s headstock and sandblasted finish? How about an American Standard model with a one-piece rosewood neck? A 70s-style hardtail with a modern feel? A super-tweaked Deluxe HSS? Read on to find out more...





Limited Edition Sandblasted Strat w/ Ash Body

We kick off with an instrument in a finish so contentious that it has even caused eyebrows to be raised in the jazz-fusion corner of the office. Seeing the Sandblasted Strat's ash body on the page doesn't fully prepare you for the heavily textured feel of the finish treatment in the flesh, as it were. In order to create this effect, a transparent urethane paint is applied, then sandblasted, leaving grooves in the grain behind, in which a black filler coat is visible. Obviously, due to the natural variance in ash, no two instruments will have the same grain pattern. It's similar to a finish we've seen on Jens Ritter's high-end basses, but it's certainly uncommon in the mainstream world inhabited by the Fender Stratocaster. It'll make purists shudder, for sure, but there's hardly a shortage of Strats in more conventional finishes, should your tastes be more traditional.

Aside from that, the Sandblasted Strat has a lovely, light weight and – in common



The radical Sandblasted finish won't be to all tastes

with the three other guitars here – features a modern C shape neck profile that, while lacking in vintage character, provides a neutral platform for a variety of styles, particularly in combination with the 241mm (9.5-inch) fingerboard radius and jumbo frets.

Interestingly, this guitar comes loaded with American Standard single-coil pickups, despite the fact that since 2012 these units have been superseded by Custom Shop Fat

price of just under a grand. As a result, we're a little disappointed that, as per the substantially more affordable, Mexican-made Classic Series models, Fender supplies a Deluxe gigbag rather than a hard shell case in which to transport your instrument.

Limited Edition American Std Strat w/ Rosewood Neck

Although we had all available appendages crossed in the hope that Fender would send us the gorgeous Daphne Blue incarnation of this particular model, there's no doubt that it's still a looker in Three-Colour Sunburst. Every inch an American Standard Stratocaster, apart from its one-piece rosewood neck with a hand-rubbed oil finish, there's a special vibe here that sets this instrument apart from its siblings – the neck's sumptuous feel and lightly-rolled edges giving this 'Standard' much more of a Custom Shop or boutique flavour.

With a feature set that's otherwise identical to the American Standard Stratocaster

'50s pickups on the American Standard guitars themselves. The rear, 'no-load' tone control for the middle and bridge pickups bypasses the tone control circuitry when wide open, and wound down should provide a useful way to tame any excess treble you might expect to encounter when using the bridge pickup of a maple fingerboard, ash-body Strat.

At the time of writing, this instrument was available from several retailers with a street



since the 2012 overhaul – bent steel saddles, Custom Shop Fat '50s pickups, parchment scratchplate and aged plastic parts – the fruits of which we subjected to scrutiny back in issue 357 – the overall level of fit and finish is tidy, as expected, and it really is all about that neck. The light figuring of the rosewood looks as good as the neck feels, and the etched headstock adds a further touch of elegance. We can't wait to plug it in...

The overall level of fit and finish is tidy, and it really is all about that neck

Limited Edition American Vintage 70s Hardtail Strat

The other models in Fender's American Vintage series zero in on specific model years, and an overhaul in 2012 saw the company track down vintage examples, restore original tooling dies, reformulate

vintage colours and much more in the name of vintage accuracy. This 70s Hardtail Strat is a different animal altogether, and feels more like a nod to an era rather than an attempt to create a period-correct replica.

Roughly half the price of the other Strats in the American Vintage series, you get a Deluxe gigbag rather than a hard case and – big headstock, black scratchplate and a trio of American Vintage '70s Strat Single-Coil pickups aside – there are plenty of features here that deviate from the period. Of course, that isn't necessarily a bad thing; though we've played some very good examples from the early part of the decade, we've also had experience of some Fenders from the tail end of the 70s that might be better used as a ship's anchor than a musical instrument. Shockingly, not every vintage guitar is a classic!

Back in 2015, Fender's 70s Hardtail finds itself equipped

with a satin urethane rather than high-gloss-finished maple neck, with a very similar profile and dimensions to the other guitars here. Unlike the other American Vintage models, there's no nitro finish, but then there wouldn't have been in the 1970s either. There's no truss-rod 'bullet', a four-bolt neck rather than three, contemporary sealed tuners instead of the 70s F-stamped units, dual 'T' Roller string trees rather than butterflies... you get the picture. To all intents and purposes, this is a contemporary hardtail Strat with a 70s flavour rather than a slavish reissue, and many players will find it all the better for it.

American Deluxe Strat HSS Shawbucker

Fender's American Deluxe range sits on a high branch of the tree when it comes to USA production instruments outside of the Custom Shop, and while the cosmetics are classic, there's an emphasis on pro-spec features that offer contemporary guitarists the kind of smooth ride that smaller boutique builders are famed for. ➤



The American Standard's beautiful etched headstock



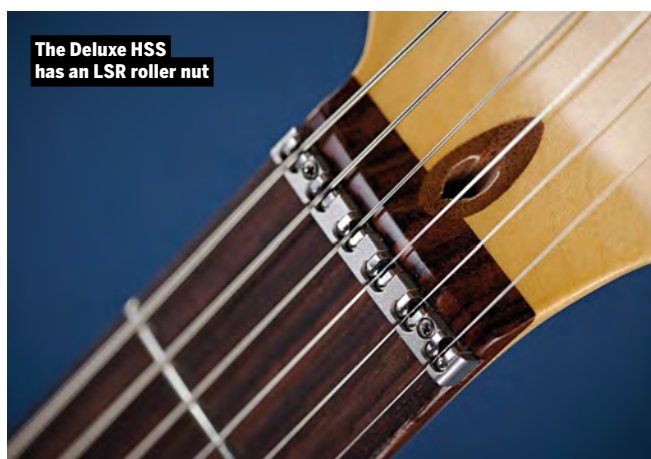
This HSS model benefits from a compound radius rosewood fingerboard, a treble-side heel contour for easier upper-fret access, an LSR roller nut, S1 switching options, a 'Passing Lane' switch, noiseless N3 stacked 'single coils' and Schaller strap locks as standard.

Compound or conical radius fingerboards are nothing new, of course – violin makers have been doing it for centuries – but for many guitarists it's still rather more novel. In practice, the 241mm (9.5-inch) to 356mm (14-inch) 'board here means that chordal work feels comfortable at the lower end, but there's no choking when you bend up at the top, and indeed a lower action is possible overall. If you haven't tried a guitar with a compound radius fretboard, you really should.

The push-push Passing Lane switch situated between the instrument's tone controls is similar to the John Suhr 'blower switch' or the 'straight out' function on the 2015 Les Paul

Standard in that it routes the bridge pickup signal to the output jack, bypassing the pickup selector; volume and tone circuitry – although it's much easier to engage on the fly here than pulling up the bridge pickup's tone pot on an LP. What you get is an instant jump in volume and bite – but more on that later.

The neck and middle pickups are Fender's noiseless N3 units, which appeared on the American Deluxe Stratocaster in 2010 (reviewed in issue 335), while the bridge humbucker is the Shawbucker that appears in the model name. Tim Shaw was the engineer at Gibson in the early 1980s who was tasked with replicating the PAF for its sought-after Heritage 80 Les Pauls, and his forensic analysis of 1950s humbuckers yielded a pickup with a big voice that now commands serious money on the second-hand market. Shaw has been working behind the scenes at Fender, and designed the Shawbucker that carries his



Shaw has been working behind the scenes at Fender, and designed the Shawbucker that carries his name

name here, which appears along with a clever volume pot that operates at either 500k or 250k to suit the pickup selection. The Shawbucker in our guitar is a pre-production unit – Fender says the instruments will ship with a pickup that's a little brighter and spunkier.

Sounds

Unable to resist the allure of a one-piece rosewood neck, we turn first to the Limited Edition American Standard. While its tonal identity is still firmly rooted in classic Stratocaster territory, there's a warmth and a woodiness to the midrange and a slightly softer high end, thanks in no small part to the aforementioned timber choice and the voicing of the high-

quality Custom Shop pickups. As always, having a tone control for a Strat bridge pickup is a real boon for faux-humbucker tones with high gain, and the natural voice of this instrument helps those sounds out a lot, too.

Switching to the ash body and maple neck of the Sandblasted Strat, there's a somewhat predictable hike in the amount of treble and a little less sophistication and depth as we move through the tones on offer from the American Standard pickups. They aren't bad tones by any means, though, and there's plenty of scope for this instrument's cutting, percussive character in reggae, funk and 60s pop contexts. Whether or not it has the right look for those genres, however, is another question entirely...



<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>

The Deluxe HSS Shawbucker is several orders of magnitude more versatile than that. Although its Noiseless N3 pickups aren't quite as alive, dynamic and spanky as the others on offer here – perhaps because the stacked coils are by definition cancelling some of the whole picture you get with a great set of true single coils – as you wind up the gain and volume, the noise-cancelling benefits are palpable. That's especially true if you record in close proximity to a computer monitor. Though Fender says our guitar's Shawbucker isn't quite right, it certainly sounds good to our ears, and the Passing Lane switch kicks the door down and brings more than enough ammo for hot-rod lead merchants.

Received wisdom suggests that overtones from vibrato springs are part of a Stratocaster's sonic signature, and it's certainly true that their absence, in combination with the additional body mass behind the bridge that comes with the lack of a vibrato rout, has a subtle influence on any hardtail Strat's tonality. It's definitely the case here, too, although there's absolutely no doubt that it's a Strat you are listening to, and one with a nice medium-vintage output and a direct, choppy attack that's as

usable for Nile Rodgers-isms as it is Texas blues.

Verdict

Anyone who usually finds a maple-neck Strat too brittle and glassy, and likes a little luxury into the bargain, should check out the Limited Edition American Standard Strat with Rosewood Neck fast – it's drop-dead gorgeous in its Daphne Blue incarnation, and justifies the additional outlay. While the Sandblasted Strat's looks will undoubtedly limit its appeal, the '70s Hardtail's all-black cosmetics and lack of vibrato contribute to a stripped-down utilitarian vibe that helps make it an excellent no-nonsense rhythm machine that's very keenly-priced for an American Vintage series model, averaging at around £750 street at the time of writing.

Given the American Vintage models are so specific elsewhere, its position in the catalogue is a little confusing, but it's a cool guitar nonetheless. Finally, the Deluxe HSS Shawbucker is another example of Fender's ongoing attempts to reclaim the 'Superstrat' and beat off competition from the Suhrs and Tom Andersons of this world. If you're a jobbing session musician or pragmatic modern rocker, then it comes highly recommended. **G**



The Hardtail's extra body mass subtly affects the tone



The N3 single coils keep the noise down on the Deluxe

Fender USA Strat dimensions



SANDBLASTED STRAT



HARDTAIL STRAT



RW NECK



DELUXE SHAWBUCKER

	SANDBLASTED STRAT	HARDTAIL STRAT	RW NECK	DELUXE SHAWBUCKER
Nut width (mm)	42.8	42.8	42.8	42.8
12th-fret width (mm)	51.5	51.5	51	51.5
1st-fret neck depth (mm)	19	19	19	19
12th-fret neck depth (mm)	22	22	20	22
Weight (kg/lb)	2.9/6.6	3.1/7.0	3.2/7.1	3.7/8.2
String spacing, bridge (mm)	52.3	55.5	52.5	52.5
Fretboard radius	241mm (9.5")	241mm (9.5")	241mm (9.5")	241-356mm (9.5"-14")



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Fender Limited Edition Sandblasted Stratocaster With Ash Body

PRICE: £1,246 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Ash
NECK: Bolt-on, one-piece maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT: Synthetic bone
FINGERBOARD: Maple
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: 6-saddle, chrome vintage-style synchronised vibrato bridge, cast/sealed machineheads
ELECTRICS: 3x American Standard Single-Coil Strat pickups, 5-position blade pickup selector switch, master volume, neck pickup tone, bridge/middle 'no-load' tone
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Sapphire Blue Transparent (as reviewed), Crimson Red Transparent
Fender GBI
01342 331700
www.fender.com

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Some won't get past the finish, but this resonant axe has some usable tones



Fender Limited Edition American Standard Strat With Rosewood Neck

PRICE: £1,606 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Bolt-on, one-piece rosewood
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT: Synthetic bone
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: 2-point synchronised vibrato bridge with bent steel saddles, Fender Deluxe cast/sealed staggered machineheads
ELECTRICS: 3x Custom Shop Fat '50s Single-Coil Strat pickups, 5-position blade selector switch, master volume, neck pickup tone, bridge/middle 'no-load' tone
OPTIONS: The maple neck American Standard Stratocaster is available in numerous incarnations, with a base price of £1,438
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Three-Colour Sunburst (as reviewed), Daphne Blue



GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A sumptuous neck, with a unique voice; we like it in sunburst but love it in blue!



Limited Edition American Vintage '70s Hardtail Stratocaster

PRICE: £982 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Bolt-on, one-piece maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT: Synthetic bone
FINGERBOARD: Maple
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: 6-saddle, chrome vintage-style hardtail bridge, cast/sealed machineheads
ELECTRICS: 3x American Vintage '70s Strat Single-Coil pickups, five-way blade pickup selector switch, master volume, neck pickup tone, bridge/middle tone
OPTIONS: Various American Vintage Stratocasters available from £2,074
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black (as reviewed), Three-Colour Sunburst

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A dark horse that we like a great deal, just don't expect vintage accuracy



American Deluxe Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker

PRICE: £1,822 (inc hard case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: Alder
NECK: Bolt-on, maple
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: LSR roller nut, 2-point Deluxe Synchronised vibrato with pop-in arm, Deluxe Staggered cast/sealed machineheads
ELECTRICS: Shawbucker bridge humbucker, Noiseless N3 middle and neck pickups, 5-position blade selector switch, master volume with S-1 switch, neck pickup tone, middle/bridge tone, Passing Lane push-push switch
OPTIONS: Various American Deluxe Stratocasters start at £1,702
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Three-Colour Sunburst (as reviewed), Black, Olympic Pearl, Sunset Metallic (all £TBC) also all available with maple necks

GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: A versatile Strat that's subtly tuned for the modern rocker

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JAM pedals

£165-£255

Boutique and Greek!

BY **Trevor Curwen**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Joseph Branston**

JAM pedals are handmade in Greece using only high-quality materials, including rare NOS chips, specially selected matched NOS transistors, tropical fish capacitors and carbon comp resistors. For the most part, they are based on classic pedals from the past and designed to deliver vintage tones, particularly the sounds of classic 60s and 70s rock. Users include Billy Gibbons, Brad Whitford, Dweezil Zappa, Bernie Marsden, Bill Frisell and Nels Cline. Custom artwork is available at extra cost, as are point-to-point wired versions.



JAM RetroVibe

PRICE: £255

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Vibe pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Depth, speed, 2x internal trimmer (level, intensity)

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC supply (65mA)

DIMENSIONS: 94 (w) x 119 (d) x 53mm (h)

440 Distribution
01132 589599

www.jampedals.com

We've seen quite a few Uni-Vibe-style pedals lately, including Korg's up-to-the-minute take on the original with totally redesigned circuitry. By contrast, JAM's take on the 'Vibe goes back to the original sound creation method of using four photocells surrounding a pulsating light source. You don't get the switchable vibrato and chorus modes or treadle-operated adjustment, but, between them, the depth and speed knobs provide plenty of variation. The pedal doesn't lack volume when kicked in and there's an internal trimmer (factory-set to max) to reduce the output. Another internal trim pot adjusts the maximum intensity. We'd like to resist the temptation to name-check Hendrix and Trower in a vibe review, but the RetroVibe will sound so familiar if you're a fan of either – not just the modulation but a gloopy reduction in the top end, too.

Verdict

It's not too big, sounds authentic and has purple chicken head knobs!

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Authentic sound delivered via the simplest interface



JAM TubeDreamer 58

PRICE: £165

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, tone, gain

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC supply (6mA)

DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 111 (d) x 32mm (h)

JAM has four different versions of the Tuedreamer in its range. All are based on the Tube Screamer but vary in their circuitry to produce a different tonal response. This TD58's variation is that it uses the JRC4558D chip, as in the original TS808, but has three diodes for asymmetrical clipping instead of symmetrical. The TD58's control knobs have largely the same range as a vintage TS808 and the sound naturally has a little extra added in the midrange area to help its prominence in a mix. What you are getting is a natural amp-like overdrive that responds really well to picking dynamics and is endowed with plenty of clarity so that every note in a chord rings true. It's a great asset in front of any valve amp, adding a natural leg-up whether you want a lead sound to complement your clean or to get a driven amp to sing.

Verdict

Everybody's doing one these days, but as Tube Screamer-style pedals go, this is one of the best we have played through.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Organic overdrive with real clarity





<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



JAM Fuzz Phrase

PRICE: £219

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, gain, internal BIAS trimmer

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC supply (5mA)

DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 111 (d) x 32mm (h)

Designing a vintage-sounding fuzz pedal has a lot to do with choosing the right transistors and matching them. For this Fuzz Face-style pedal, JAM has chosen the rare CV7003, military-spec version of the OC44 germanium transistor, which it says is consistent and heat-resistant (germanium transistors can be susceptible to temperature changes) — more so than the more commonly used AC128 and NKT275. We liked the sound best with the level knob on max while dialling in the dirt with the gain knob through a nice overdrive at mid settings to the last bit of travel, which brings out the top end and a richer fuzz. It's about finding the sweet spot, though, and edging the gain back worked for us, although running it flat-out and controlling things with your guitar volume may be the way to go, as it cleans up really well.

Verdict

Expressive fuzz. Worthy of that afro/purple background artwork.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Sweet-sounding fuzz, but it doesn't come cheap.



JAM Rooster

PRICE: £185

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Treble boost pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, treble/mid/bass switch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC supply (5mA)

DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 111 (d) x 32mm (h)

The Rooster is a treble booster inspired by the Dallas Rangemaster, used by Rory Gallagher, Brian May, Tony Iommi and, perhaps most famously, by Eric Clapton on the Bluesbreakers' 'Beano' album. JAM has strived to get the vintage sound right by again calling on the services of the CV7003 transistor — the original Rangemasters also made use of the OC44. As well as a knob to dial in the amount of boost, starting with unity gain at about 12 o'clock, you get a three-position switch that focuses the frequency range of the boost. The bass setting is more of a full-range fat-sounding boost, while treble loses some bottom for a brighter presence, and mid is between the two. Whatever setting of the switch, the Rooster will excite the top-end frequencies of an overdriven amp, bring out the harmonics and send sustained notes into singing feedback.

Verdict

This Rooster will certainly wake up your amp in a vintage-inspired fashion.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: 1960s-style vintage treble booster with tonal options





JAM Rattler

PRICE: £169

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Distortion pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, tone, gain

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC supply (6mA)

DIMENSIONS: 60 (w) x 111 (d) x 32mm (h)



Anyone wondering where the inspiration for the Rattler came from should check out the first three letters of its name. Yep, it's based on a vintage Pro Co RAT pedal. Featuring the rare NOS LM308N chip and an asymmetrical clipping circuit, the Rattler offers a range of sounds from a clean boost, through various driven amp scenarios to an all-out distortion with a fuzzy edge. This is all delivered via a tone knob with a huge strident top-end presence fully clockwise that reduces as you wind it back to a mellower, although never dull, vibe. It's no bad thing that the Rattler can pretty much nail the sound of a vintage RAT (we checked it against our 1980s model), but we reckon that its wide range of harmonically-rich distortion tones, combined with dynamic responsiveness, make it a great asset for anyone's pedalboard.

Verdict

It might be a RAT-inspired pedal, but the Rattler proves itself to be a distortion for most occasions.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Who said you should never step on a rattler?

JAM Big Chill

PRICE: £229

ORIGIN: Greece

TYPE: Tremolo pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Level, depth, speed 1, speed 2, square/sine/triangle switch, 2x internal trimmer (CHOP effect level, speed 2 level), CHOP footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, 2x expression pedal input

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC supply (15mA)

DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 94 (d) x 30mm (h)



The Big Chill offers vintage-style sounds with a range of practical features. You can choose from three tremolo waveforms — sine, triangle and square — and have the option of two speeds, selectable by a second footswitch. Each speed is set with its own knob, while there's an internal control to set the second speed quieter or louder than the first. There's also a knob for tremolo depth and one for the output volume that offers a useful boost (set the trem depth to zero for boost only); you can also use external expression pedals to control tremolo depth and the second tremolo speed. A third footswitch brings in the CHOP effect, a more brutal square wave on/off tremolo that chops the audio into segments. The classy range of sounds, including vintage Fender, should suit most players' tremolo needs, but it's the switching and control that set this apart from other pedals.

Verdict

While the vintage tone hits the spot, versatility is the key word here.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A practical feature set makes this a great trem for live work



Gibson

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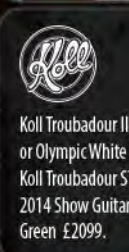
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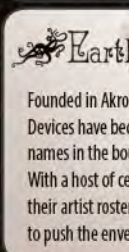
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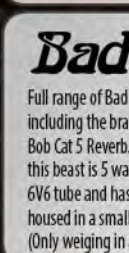
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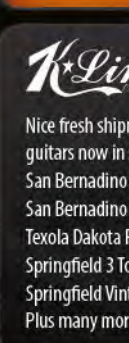
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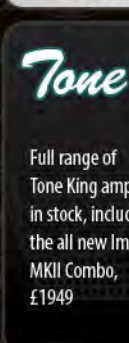
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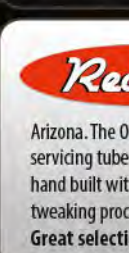


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RedPlate Amps, established in 2006 is a sole proprietorship located in Phoenix Arizona. The Owner, Henry Heistand has been involved with playing and servicing tube amplifiers for over 41 years. Redplate are true boutique amps, hand built with an uncompromising attention to detail combined with a final tweaking process that gives the player that last extra amount of tonal excellence. **Great selection in stock, prices start at £1699**



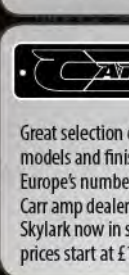
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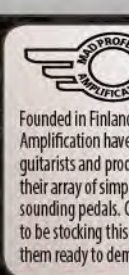
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Design Retro Works Pedals **£129-£159**

Shiny bright boutique Brits

WORDS **Trevor Curwen**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Joseph Branston**

Design Retro Works (DRW) aims to provide quality pedals based on classic vintage designs. Its pedals are hand-built in Lancashire by Dave Willetts, who has a history of working for high-end studio gear companies such as Neve, AMS and Calrec. The pedals are constructed solidly using metal jack sockets and feature milled aluminium knobs. They can be ordered directly from DRW or from POSH Guitars, who give 10 per cent of their profits to a charity that supports AIDS orphans in Africa.



DRW Ge Fuzz Ace

PRICE: £129

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Germanium fuzz

FEATURES: True-bypass, numbered limited edition of 200

CONTROLS: Bias, shape, fuzz, level, internal voltage adjustment

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery (80 hours)

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 112 (d) x 50mm (h)

POSH Guitars

01254 826523

designretroworks.co.uk

Based on a classic Arbiter Fuzz Face, with a few original tweaks, the Ge Fuzz Ace features germanium transistors – not the typical NKT275s, but a type that DRW believes have not previously been used in this design. These PNP transistors would need reversed polarity to run from a standard 9V power adaptor, so the pedal eschews a power socket for battery power only. Besides standard fuzz and level controls, you get bias – which adjusts the input impedance, useful for matching it to various pickup types – and shape, which dials in some midrange boost. The experience is typically vintage germanium Fuzz Face with amp-like overdrive at low levels of the fuzz knob, up to a sweet singing fuzz with an aggressive trebly edge, cleaning up smoothly with guitar volume.

Verdict

If you want a Fuzz Face-type pedal, this has the sound and is compact, robust and reasonably priced, with the ability to focus its fatness with the shape knob.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: A 60s-style fuzz with extra options



DRW 4 Knob Compressor (CA3080)

PRICE: £149

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Compressor pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Attack, trim, sustain, level

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 112 (d) x 50mm (h)

Lots of compressors are based on the MXR Dynacomp and the Ross compressor, with a CA3080 OTA at the heart of the circuitry. Those are regarded as the classic vintage guitar compressor stompboxes, so if it ain't broke... Well, you might not want to fix it but you may want to tweak/modify it, which is what DRW has done with the 4 Knob Compressor. Besides the knobs for turning up the compression and output level, it has added an attack knob and a trim knob that adjusts the input gain to match the pedal to different guitars, or to its position in the signal chain (a two-knob version loses the attack and trim knobs from the top panel, replacing them as internal trim pots). What you get is a pedal that delivers great compression for the usual tasks of sustaining, keeping a consistent level and adding snap to note envelopes, while offering a transparency of tone.

Verdict

Classy guitar compression with plenty of tweakability.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Brit guitar compression to rival some of the American brands





<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



DRW Jerry Donahue Compressor JD-01

PRICE: £159

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Compressor pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass
CONTROLS: Attack, blend, sustain, level

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 112 (d) x 50mm (h)



Produced with the help of Jerry Donahue, the JD-01 adds a blend control to the DRW compressor circuitry. This takes the place of the 4 Knob's trim knob, which is relegated to being an internal trim pot – fine if you are using the pedal with one type of guitar: just set it and forget it. Not everyone likes their whole signal compressed, and stompbox manufacturers have picked up on this, as we are seeing more compressor pedals that allow some of the original signal to be blended in to keep some of the playing dynamics and original tone intact. Here, with the blend control fully anti-clockwise you get only the original guitar signal, while fully clockwise only the compressed signal. Between the two lies a sweet spot where the parallel compression adds some mojo to your tone without sounding overly processed.

Verdict

A versatile compressor that lets you add as much compression to your sound as you wish: well worth the extra £10.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Telemaster's preferences increase your sonic options



DRW Si Fuzz Ace

PRICE: £129

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Silicon fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Fuzz, level, internal voltage adjustment

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 112 (d) x 50mm (h)

There are three fuzz options in the DRW range. The Ge Fuzz Ace Plus (£129) adds an extra transistor to the design with the aim of creating a more intense fuzz, delivered via just two front-panel knobs: level and the aptly-named crank. Then there's this Si Fuzz Ace, again with two knobs: fuzz and level. This is the Fuzz Face revisited, based around a set of NPN Silicon transistors (that DRW believes are unused in this type of design), meaning that it's possible to run the pedal from a standard 9V adaptor as well as a battery. The Si's natural sound has a little more in the lower midrange and seems gainier, yielding a fatter and rounded character akin to what you'd get from turning up the Ge's bias and shape knobs. Clean-up by guitar volume doesn't work as well as with the Ge, but for full-on fuzz it's just as great.

Verdict

With a different feature set and voice, the Si is a solid alternative to the Ge, and it's good to have a choice.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Consistent fuzz with an easy two-knob interface





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Quicktest



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Three delays running at the same time

CONTACT: TC Electronic **PHONE:** 0800 917 8926 **WEB:** www.tcelectronic.com

The Flashback Triple Delay offers up to three delays running simultaneously, and all synchronised, too, if you wish. Three footswitches recall settings stored for the corresponding delay engine (Delay 1, 2 and 3), that you set using the knobs. Besides being able to set the standard parameters of delay time, repeats and dry/wet mix, you can choose from 12 delay types – Tape, Tube, Space, Analog, Analog Mod, Reverse, Dynamic, 2290, 2290 Mod, Slap, LoFi and Ping Pong. In addition, the Triple Delay offers four different TonePrints as delay types – allowing you to load the pedal with sounds created by TC's roster of artists and/or create your own using the software TonePrint Editor. You also get a Tap Tempo footswitch linked to a subdivision selector that offers 11 different musical

intervals, and you can store a different one with each of the three presets. The multiple delays can be run in parallel, with the three mixed together at the output, or in serial where Delay 1 feeds into Delay 2 and the signal then feeds Delay 3. You can also connect an expression pedal to control a combination of parameters.

Sounds

While you can use the pedal as a source of three independent delays, the Triple Delay's unique selling point is that it offers massive potential for sound creation using layered delays. Mixing up different delay types and timing subdivisions means that with two or three of the delay engines active you can create intricate textural repeat patterns and immense ambient echoes, especially as you can

use sounds that you create in the TonePrint Editor, with its adjustable modulation options for dreamy soundscapes.

To create delays that are all synced and rhythmically-related you can program appropriate delay time values, you can feed the pedal with MIDI clock, or you can hit the tap tempo footswitch to tie them all together. How that latter feature operates, however, may not suit some users who utilise rhythmic delays in time with the music onstage. The tap tempo works only for the active delays: if all three are on and you hit tap tempo they will sync perfectly. Any that are bypassed will not be included and will not be in sync if you then switch them on. Obviously, that will be frustrating for some, but fine for those who, say, don't want slapback sounds to be affected by tap tempo. We would have

liked the option of selecting two different tap modes, and at the time of writing TC is looking into the feasibility of an update.

Verdict

Make no mistake, three delays in one pedal is awesome. The Triple Delay is brilliant at creating stacked delay sounds; it's great for recording and will keep you amused for hours. However, if you need to set a live tempo on the fly, then bring synced delays in and out, you'll have to re-tap each time or add a tap tempo MIDI clock generator. If it wasn't for that restricted functionality, this pedal would get a Guitarist Choice award. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Three delays working together in a single pedal offers huge sonic potential

St Blues Delta Blues Box 4 String 'Montesino' Cigar Box Guitar £249

A quality, 'ready rolled' cigar box guitar from the USA

CONTACT: Guitarguitar PHONE: 0800 456 1959 WEB: www.saintblues.com

While the rock world seems to be creating more and more extended-range instruments, those of us working in the acoustic world might well be looking for fewer strings. The four-string tenor guitar is making a bit of a comeback and there are a host of fewer-string 'folk' instruments that can all add texture and interest to your music, either live or recorded. And that's where this neat cigar box guitar (CBG) fits in. For many, a CBG is a simple, DIY instrument that's ideal for old-style gnarly blues and slide. There's nothing wrong with that, but St Blues has made this one properly, which extends its use considerably.

By design, a CBG is a simple beast. The long, thin neck has a Fender-style head, decent Grover tuners and a nicely cut bone nut. Fretting is very good and although the neck profile is pretty square, it is nicely finished. There's no bridge as such, just a bone saddle held in place by the string tension. But once set correctly, the overall intonation was really very good, making upper-fret chord voicing sound a lot more in-tune than many cheaper CBGs we've played.

This one is also electro, via a custom piezo transducer mounted in the cigar box body, with a side-mounted volume control and jack output. We even get proper strap buttons, too!

Sounds

Designed to be tuned to 'open G' (G, D, G, B), the St Blues is supplied with a custom D'Addario string set, a 0.045 wound bass string, a 0.026 wound, then 0.017 and 0.013

plain top strings. Of course, you don't have to stick to this tuning, or the string gauges; raising the top two strings was easy enough to produce a 'fifths' tuning – G, D, A, E, like a tenor guitar, banjo or mandolin. Whatever tuning you choose, you'll have to get used to the odd feel – strapped on, it's very unbalanced but light in weight, so it's actually quite easy to hold it in place and play, either standing or seated.

Unplugged, there's enough volume for practice and, plugged in, while the body becomes very microphonic, albeit handy for right-hand percussion; the sound is really quite acoustic-like with a little banjo-like ping and percussive attack. Lower tunings slacken the string tension and induce a slightly more Eastern flavour, or more African desert blues-like tonalities, especially into a lightly crunchy valve amp. If you're into your roots and world music, it's a very useful tool, not least if you play slide – the supplied setup is a little low for that, but the bridge saddle can either be shimmed or you can just move it upright.

Verdict

It's far from the cheapest cigar box guitar out there, but it's the best one we've come across in terms of build and playability. Certainly if you're interested in exploring a slightly left-of-mainstream musical world, it's far from a daft choice. Oh, and you have a choice of different brands of cigar box, too! [DB]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A cigar box guitar you should take seriously? We think so...



DigiTech Drop £129

Instant dropped tuning

CONTACT: Sound Technology PHONE: 01462 480000 WEB: www.digitech.com

The Drop is a dedicated polyphonic pitch-shifting pedal that allows you to drop your tuning from one semitone all the way down to a full octave, allowing instant dropped tunings even in the middle of a song. A spin-off from the Whammy DT, the Drop is compact and comes with its own 9V DC power supply.

In Use

You set the dropped tuning with a rotary knob that offers one to seven semitones or a full octave, with an extra setting that offers one octave down plus dry sound for an octaver effect. A toggle switch lets you set the footswitch so it operates either in normal bypass function or as

a latching switch to introduce the effect for as long as it is held down. Tracking is flawless and the pitch-shifted sound is glitch-free, albeit losing a little treble on the way. The momentary switch is really cool for either instantly adding an extra bit of fretboard range or toggling between two notes for effect, although there can be a little bit of footswitch noise.

Verdict

If you use down-tuned guitars heavily, the Drop is probably no substitute, but if you want to do the odd song in a set drop-tuned, with less hassle, it will do the job admirably, whether that's just dropping down to D or calling up A-tuned baritone

or bass. With the added octaver function and those momentary shifts, it's a very practical tool that's reasonably priced for the functionality it offers. **[TC]**

VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist391>



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Pedalboard-friendly dropped tunings to extend your guitar's range down

Line 6 Sonic Port VX £139

Combined mic and guitar input device for iOS, Mac and Windows

CONTACT: Sound Technology PHONE: 01462 480000 WEB: www.digitech.com

Line 6's new Sonic Port VX is designed to provide everything you need for recording to an iOS device or a Windows computer. Not just a 16-bit/48kHz audio interface with a guitar input, the VX also incorporates both stereo and mono condenser mics with preamps, plus it includes a mini-jack stereo input. On top of that, you get another stereo mini-jack for headphones, plus left and right jack outputs to connect to a monitor system. The VX comes with Lightning and USB connector cables, is instantly compatible with iOS devices and Macs, and can work with Windows machines if you install the drivers. You also get Line 6's Mobile POD iOS app for free.

In Use

The VX can either screw onto a mic stand or camera tripod, or can sit on your tabletop on its own easily-angled stand. Simply choose between guitar, stereo mic or mono mic inputs, set the gain with the knurled wheel and you are away, maybe after setting the direct monitor switch for zero-latency monitoring. The guitar input

has 120dB of dynamic range, so translates your tone and playing dynamics really well, the stereo mic is cool for room recording – such as gigs and practices – while the mono mic is suited to capturing vocals or close-micing an acoustic guitar.

Verdict

Line 6's Sonic Port VX covers all of the bases, from connecting

your guitar to amp sims, through to recording. Easily portable and bus-powered, it will let you play or record wherever your laptop or iPad is. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Practical and portable do-it-all widget for computer and iOS recording



Guitarist
CHOICE



AER Compact 60/3 Slope £799

The Compact 60 gets a wedge-shaped makeover

CONTACT: Westside Distribution PHONE: 0141 248 4812 WEB: www.aer-amps.com

This wedge-shaped 'Slope' isn't a new amp as such, just a reconfigured version of the well-loved Compact 60, now in its third generation. It's a highly transportable, lightweight (6.5kg) two-channel acoustic amp with 60W of output from a single eight-inch twin-cone speaker. As usual, all the controls run along the top, back edge of the amp. Channel one has a standard jack input with three-band EQ, plus a colour switch (a mid-cut/treble-boost), high/low input selection and LED clip monitor. Channel two features an XLR/jack combi input, with line/mic input selection, LED clip monitor and two-band EQ. The four digital effects (two reverbs, delay and chorus) are global via the pan control, which also

allows you to mix in any external effects. Finally, we have an overall master output control. On the back are outputs for headphones, tuner, line and DI outs, plus an effects loop.

Sounds

Crisp, clean and highly detailed are all terms we associate with AER, and this is no exception: a superb acoustic amp. It's such a well-sorted amp that getting a sound from virtually any instrument we had to hand was easy. It doesn't have a huge number of bells and whistles in the EQ department, but the colour switch adds an instant modern edge to steel strings and the EQ overall sounds very guitar-specific.

It's worth mentioning the effects, too: two clean and

spacious reverbs – the second with a longer tail, a delay with a 320-millisecond repeat, ideal for adding a little 'air' to solos, for example, and a perfectly usable 'rock' chorus. Via a footswitch, you can switch the effects (either the internal effects or any you have in the external effects loop) on or off.

The wedge format proves highly useful. It's ideal as an onstage monitor (you don't have to suspend your amp on a mic stand or chair), as it's throwing the sound to your ear. On bigger stages, it proved handy to complement the onstage monitor mix. We used it as a personal monitor and adjusted the volume when things got louder without affecting the out-front balance or bothering the soundman. Having an

accurate, quality sound helps your playing, too – not always the case with a PA's monitors!

Overall, then, it's an easy amp to use, either as backline or a monitor, or both, with an excellent sound. Being picky, a channel mute would be handy on channel one if you're changing instruments a lot. Just a thought...

Verdict

Many of us are perfectly happy to plug into a PA and trust its EQ and monitors to produce the sound we want to hear. But if you want more control over your sound, an acoustic amp is definitely the way to go. Placement of any acoustic amp is always important to prevent feedback, but in this wedge format the Slope really could be a life-saver on stage as both a powerful amp and monitor in one. Be heard! [DB]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Reconfigured wedge version of AER's Compact 60/3: an essential stage buddy!



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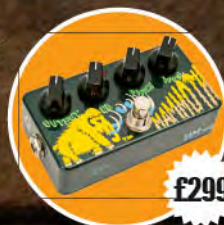
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Joseph Branston

Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to *Guitarist's* longterm test reports

Strymon BigSky

Gary Walker

INTERMEDIATE The BigSky soars majestically through its first rehearsal



After an absence of more years than I'd care to admit, I returned to the murky underworld of rehearsal rooms this month, with my band, Gun Vs Head, now boasting a drummer and bassist. The BigSky front and centre of my

pedalboard, I approached the first practice session in confident mood, and Strymon's regal reverb pedal performed faultlessly throughout.

With 300 presets, there's a dizzying array of sounds at your disposal – before you even start editing – so naturally you'll

gravitate towards your go-to choices. For this rehearsal, I limited myself to three, saving my preferred choices to the A, B and C footswitches in bank one to avoid complicated tap-dancing.

The dreamy Cloud algorithm has become the central pillar of my sound, while a Swell setting,

with the decay cranked high, and a Shimmer selection to add pitch-shifted tones to tremolo-picked washes, occupied the other two switches.

The BigSky's practicality in a live setting became immediately apparent in the practice room – it gives you so much control, with so many parameters to tweak. At first, the huge Swell setting proved overwhelming when switching from Cloud, blasting our singer Tom out of the mix. That's where the BigSky's +/-3dB boost/cut function came in handy – a quick alteration, along with a tweak of the volume on my Fender Starcaster, levelled things out nicely. Engaging Spillover, which allows reverb trails to bleed from one setting into the next, made transitions smoother still.

With my three reverb machines underfoot, I had no problem cutting through the mix, with crystalline cleans and ample headroom when I kicked in the distortion. I've barely scratched this remarkable pedal's surface, and for band and BigSky, this is merely an exciting beginning.



Strymon BigSky



First reviewed: 377

Price: £429

Type: Digital reverb stompbox

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www.strymon.net

Guitarist's test products



**TC Electronic
Alter Ego X4**
Chris Vinnicombe



**Larri  e OM-03
Silver Oak**
Dave Burrluck



**Strymon
BigSky**
Gary Walker

Fender '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb

Joseph Branston

FINAL REPORT Our in-house snapper is all starry-eyed... it must be love!



So, we've come to the final report on the Deluxe and I suppose the question from

those of you who have been following this is, "What's the catch?" The answer is, not much. I had a recording session planned, which unfortunately fell through, so instead I invited a few friends around and we spent a day in my basement going through some gypsy swing, jazz standards and a little country.

I close-mic'd the Celestion with a Shure SM57 and used a pretty decent condenser in the room to see how the Fender held up to a

slightly closer sonic inspection, and the one thing that really jumped out at me was the low end. Some reviews I've seen have talked a lot about the top-end cut on the Vintage channel, but after the session we played, I listened back to the recordings and was incredibly impressed with the sound we'd got.

Playing some slightly quieter, bouncy gypsy tunes really brings out the compact bass sound that this amp produces. It's tight, warm and rounded. This is getting a bit sexual, right? To be honest, that's pretty much how I feel about this bit of kit!

The original 'blackface' Deluxe Reverb is rightly heralded as a classic – and I believe that this newest incarnation might be something of a modern gem, too. It handles subtle, nuanced playing but is equally happy busting out of its own box and letting rip on 70s country rock. The Deluxe is eminently portable and the build quality seems to be exactly what you'd expect from a 'workhorse' amp. In the three or four months I've had it, I've looked forward to gigs more than I can remember – even turning up to soundchecks early to get a bit more playing time. Awesome.

Fender '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb



First reviewed: 382

Price: £1,198

Type: Valve combo with onboard reverb and tremolo circuits

Output: 22 watts @ 8 ohms

Valves: 4x 12AX7, 2x 12AT7 (preamp), 1x 5AR4 (rectifier), 2x 6V6 (power amp)

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This issue we're discussing more strings, more volume, more gain, more freedom and, of course, less money. You have the questions, we help...

Q&A

Guitarist's expert panel



Dave Burrluck

is *Guitarist's* assiduous reviews editor and is also the author of numerous guitar books. Very handy with a fret file and indeed any aspect of a finely fettled six-string.



Mick Taylor

ex-editor of *Guitarist*, has wielded Allen keys, screwdrivers and sandpaper and from an early age; he also has a worrying obsession with pedalboards.



Neville Marten

edited *Guitarist* for 13 years, after working for both

Fender and Gibson as a repairer. From desirable Les Pauls to dream Strats, he's owned and worked on the lot.



Nick Guppy

is *Guitarist's* amp specialist with a wealth of experience gained from

collecting, repairing and restoring all kinds of guitar-related audio.

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com or write in to *Guitarist* magazine, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. If you can include photographs of the problem area, so much the better!

Cordless phony:
are modern wireless
devices any good?



Wireless wonders?

Don't call the taste police, but I'm thinking about going back to using a wireless guitar system, having long since given up using one in the 1990s. That one was pretty awful; it sounded thin and harsh and would constantly have signal issues. More recently, I note that more and more manufacturers are producing digital wireless systems, rather than the old VHF ones. What is your opinion: should I get one, and if so, which one please?

Dave Forester, via email

It'd be worth picking up a copy of last month's magazine (issue 390) Dave, as in it we had a What You Need To Know About feature on the latest wireless systems. Our opinion is that VHF is old tech and best avoided, UHF works okay, but the best performers are the latest 2.4GHz digital devices. Line 6 is currently offering the

best bang-for-buck option; numerous *Guitarist* staff and alumni have used them, reporting vastly different playing and tonal experiences than that horrible old junk of yore. Yes, we too remember using up a lifetime's worth of swearies on various systems that, well, sucked.

Downsides? For VHF and UHF systems it's worth noting that you may require a licence issued by Ofcom to legally operate a wireless guitar system within certain UHF frequency bands. Others are exempt, and the legislation has changed quite a bit in recent years, so seek out the latest updates via the Ofcom website.

Digital systems don't require a licence, but they can be susceptible to interference from other devices that operate in the 2.4GHz area, such as wifi, mobile phones and so on. We've not had a problem yet.

Seventh hell

I used to dread re-stringing any of my whammy-equipped axes, but compared to a seven-string they're child's play! I seem to be forever unlocking, tuning, tensioning and relaxing springs. These frustrations only usually happen if I've bought a 'cheaper', licensed Floyd, but this is a Dime Razor that has the Floyd TM. It's driving me nuts, so would a Tremsetter cure the problem?

Tony, Australia

We feel your pain, Tony, but the quality of the bridge shouldn't make a colossal difference to how easy they are to re-string and re-balance – you're battling strings and springs, as you know, and it all just takes a while to settle down. Doing one string at a time (instead of taking them all off) is the best general advice we can give.

After that, a Hipshot Tremsetter will work with a

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com or write in to *Guitarist* magazine, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. If you can include photographs of the problem area, so much the better!

What Should I Buy?

The occasional bass

Q Like many mainly home-based guitarists, I enjoy recording music using my computer and, more recently, my iPad. I have borrowed bass guitars from friends, but the time has come to get my own. I have a budget of around £250 to £300, as I want to get something above the very most budget options. I'm leaning towards some sort of Squier, but is there anything else I should be aware of? The music I record is roughly in the bluesy/singer-songwriter/folk-pop area, so I need something to cover those... wait for it... basses! Your help would be appreciated.

James Montrose, via email

A **Good decision, James** – not only is a bass useful for the obvious reasons, but it can also provide a whole other source of creative inspiration when writing or working things out. A Precision Bass (or one of its derivatives) is a great place to begin; we use one for pretty much everything in the *Guitarist* studio. They're so simple and versatile, and have been used on everything from Motown to punk, metal and beyond; the sound is almost hard-wired into our musical consciousness. That said, you may want something entirely different, to wit...



2. (Not) hard to handle

Players coming to bass from electric guitar can find them unwieldy, so it's worth trying a shorter-scale instrument. The new **Gretsch Electromatic Jr Bass II** (£298) has an easy-to-live-with 30.3-inch scale as the starting point for its more overtly retro styling. Two mini dual-coil pickups provide the tones.



3. The wild card

An electro-acoustic bass isn't an obvious choice, but they offer a unique tone, with the added benefit of not needing an amp for round-the-house playing. The **Ibanez PCBE12MH-OPN** (£199) is an all-laminate mahogany example with a built-in pickup and preamp. It might fit well with the folkier end of your folk-pop.



1. The no-brainer all-rounder

The latest version of the **Squier Vintage Modified Precision Bass PJ** (£322) adds a Jazz Bass pickup to the Precision's customary split-coil unit; you can blend them for a huge variety of classic and modern sounds, thanks to separate volume controls. It comes in Candy Apple Red, Lake Placid Blue and Sunburst.

seven-string, although they are an acquired taste with the change in feel, tension and the sensitivity of the vibrato itself.

With that in mind, it'd be worth looking at the Tremol-No device, that's designed primarily to change your guitar between vibrato and hardtail operation (you can also have down-only operation). It seems logical that it might help with restringing, too, but it's not what it's designed for, and gauging the tension on the tuners is always going to be a slight guess for when you lock it all off again and release the Tremol-No. Like GAS, then, there is no cure as such, only strategies to live with the condition.

Grissibons?

I was hoping you could point me in the direction of an amp that will give the David Grissom/Billy Gibbons swampy, thick distortion sound. I am thinking 15 to 30 watts for small/medium gigs. I would like a single channel and I would like it to clean up a bit as I roll off the Les Paul/PRS's volume knob. I would also like it to cost less than a grand, if possible.

Perry Denyer, via email

First off, Perry, turn to p18 and read the review on the new Victory V40: we think that may fit the bill exactly. A cranked, vintage Marshall and/or Tweed Fender fed with extra distortion

is where those sounds originate, but the volumes (and cost) involved are prohibitive. The Suhr Badger 35 on p12 also does a brilliant job of it, but costs a lot more.

Secondly, we'd say don't expect the amp to do the whole job; both Grissom and Gibbons are avid pedal users and will often use either one overdrive into a cranked amp, or perhaps two chained together into a cleaner amp, to get that sagging, compressed, sound you're talking about. If you don't have the luxury of getting your amp's power stage into near-meltdown (part of where the swampy thing comes from), you can do a good impression of it by severely overloading the input stage with a couple of pedals. We get good results by using a marginally higher-gained pedal first – whatever flavour you like, for example, perhaps a Fulltone OCD, Boss Blues Driver or MXR Custom Badass Modified OD, followed by something that both drives and boosts, for example an Ibanez 808 Tube Screamer, EHX Soul Food or our latest fave, the J Rockett Archer. Magic sounds indeed, and so much fun!

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with compensated nuts, and I'm hoping you can explain how they work, because I'm puzzled. If a string is played open, then any compensation required can be made at the bridge, and if a string is fretted then the nut isn't involved. What am I missing, please?

Phil Norman

It's a logical point of view, Phil. To help explain it, think about what's going on when you fret a note. The string stretches firstly from its open state to the top of the fret, and secondly with the excess pressure taking the string from the fret to the fingerboard. The amount of that stretch is related to the entire length of the string, not just the bit between the fretted note and the bridge.

As you rightly point out, varying the string travel distance between the fret and the bridge can counteract (compensate for) the effect of the string stretch, and that is of course how we commonly set intonation on guitars. However, so it follows that varying the string travel distance between the nut and the fretted note also has an effect. Ergo, proponents of compensated nuts would claim that making adjustments at both nut and bridge enables more precise intonation across the whole fingerboard, and their tests would seem to prove it.

The massive fly in the ointment, however, is human variance. How you push down the B string at the third fret, for example, is not the same as how anybody else does it; it's part of why you sound how you do. So, arguing over the microtonal differences of a perfectly fretted note may well be scientifically observable, but whether it's useful in how you experience an instrument is very much a personal matter. Do try one, though – you might love it.

Change & boost

In my new band, I need to switch guitars quite often during the set. Basically, I need to mute the 'pop'

and 'buzz' of the cable being pulled out and switch to another guitar, but would prefer not to have to walk over to the amp and put it on standby every time.

Also, one of the guitars has a much higher output than the other, so I find myself engaging lots of boost pedals, etc, to help the single-coil guitar (an S-type guitar, used clean) not sound impossibly quiet next to the P-90-equipped guitar (an LP Special). So a lot of tap dancing is going on. What are my options for: a) muting while changing over, and b) conveniently balancing levels without altering tone too much?

Jack Montgomery, via email

The muting bit is easily solved with the right cable/jack, er, Jack. We've had great results with the Neutrik SilentPlug in either straight or right-angled formats. It has an integrated sleeve using a 'Reed Switch', that makes the connection when it's plugged into the guitar, but breaks the signal (and therefore mutes) when it's unplugged. There are leads available with the plug already fitted, or you can buy and make up your own. You need a SilentPlug only on the guitar end of the lead.

Another option would be the Radial Engineering Big Shot i/O pedal/switcher. It toggles two instruments via a footswitch and has a handy level attenuator for the louder source. It's passive, so there's no battery

required. Be aware, though, that attenuating your LP's signal is going to change the way it hits your pedals and amp, and therefore the gain and tone; you might like its effect or you might not.

Nevertheless, attenuating the Les Paul rather than boosting the Strat is the way we'd go. A decent clean boost pedal right at the end of your pedal chain can work well, too – on for the Strat, off for the LP, as long as it's not driving the amp harder than you want. The MXR MC-401 and Suhr Iso Boost both come highly recommended.

Another option would be to use some kind of volume controlling device in your amp's serial effects loop, assuming it has one. This could be a volume pedal or either of the boost pedals mentioned above, or indeed a product that we used to recommend all the time, before it was taken out of production... The good news is that the Award-Session Solo Booster is on its way back (according to the Award-Session website) and is designed to do pretty much exactly what you need. It attenuates rather than boosts when 'on', and your amp must have a series/serial effects loop (or a loop that can be mixed 100 per cent 'wet') in order to use it.

Left Perry

Seeing Joe Perry pose (confusingly) with a righty-strung

lefty this month [issue 389] got me thinking: what do you need to do to a Strat to make it okay for playing the other way around. Let's say I wanted to buy a left-handed Strat and Jimi-ise it – what would I need to do?

PS: If anyone wrote in saying the Joe Perry picture was reversed, look harder! The tattoo on his arm has the writing the right way, and 'volume' on the knob is the right way, too.

Richard Wood, via email

Good spot Richard. You can just imagine the discussions that image caused when we saw it first, though Joe has used that guitar for a long time now. As he explains in the piece, he is naturally left-handed (though plays right-handed, so his lefty S-type is upside down in the pic), so there's some sense there.

As for lefty-righting a Stratocaster, if you want the strings in the conventional order, you'll need to have a new nut fitted, and of course reset the action, intonation and pickup heights.

On the subject of pickups, if the guitar has staggered polepieces, you'll get optimum performance by fitting a set of 'normal', ie, 'right-handed' pickups, too, to make sure the magnet staggers are right for the strings. If it's a flat-pole pickup, there's no need to change anything.

There are some issues relating to which way your pots rotate for 'normal' operation, too (depending on what's fitted to the donor guitar), hence the references to 'left-handed' pots you'll see here and there. No, this isn't a joke. Any pot can be wired up to work in either direction of rotation, however with audio-taper pots (logarithmic taper), swapping the direction of on/off has a dramatic effect on the way they work so, helpfully, lefty players can get reverse-log pots for use in left-handed guitars. We'd advise you to start off by getting the strings sorted first, then delve deeper as and when you feel the need.

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OLD GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY NEIL GODWIN

1961 Fender Jazzmaster

When Fender debuted the Jazzmaster at the 1958 NAMM Show, it was the company's new top-of-the-range electric, ahead of the Stratocaster. Designed to be a hit with the jazz market, it featured a comfortable 'offset waist contour body', a new vibrato system, mellower pickups and a tone circuit that allowed players to switch between preset rhythm and lead sounds. While jazz guitarists across the globe didn't unanimously hurl their archtops to the ground, stamp them into matchwood and rush to music shops to get a hold of this new solidbody design, it wasn't long before the Jazzmaster was embraced by the surf rock scene of the early 60s. Whether in the hands of Elvis Costello, Thurston Moore or J Mascis, it's remained an outsider choice in the decades since, but perhaps the tide has finally turned – 'Jazzmaster' was the most popular search term of 2014 on the huge Stateside buying and selling site, Reverb.com. This '61 example is a beauty, with a dark, strong natural voice, while the presence of a Buzz Stop (whizzobuzzstop.com) heightens string tension over the retrofitted Mustang bridge, increases sustain and makes for a more stable experience.



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Hitting The Target

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30 mins per example

Tutor: Neville Marten | **Gear used:** Fender Custom Shop '53 Relic Telecaster (w/ '66 neck), Vox AC15C1

LAST month, we looked at four intro or turnaround ideas. Today, we have another quartet of licks, the aim of which is to get you thinking about the intervals in the chords you're playing over. This stemmed from a conversation with music editor Jason Sidwell, who mentioned that he was amazed at how many blues guitar students began and ended their licks on the root note. This led to predictability on the part of the listener and probably a lack of fulfilment in the player.

So, our four licks this month begin and end (loosely speaking) on the root, 3rd, 5th and ♭7th of the I and IV chords in a quick-change blues in G. These chords are G and C, and to help you visualise the target notes, each one is highlighted with a symbol in the tab.

The whole point of the exercise is to show how the solo itself can frame the chord sequence, so you can hear the underlying harmony even when there's no backing. I've used all the traditional techniques, such as string bends, so the licks hopefully don't sound like exercises. And while you wouldn't necessarily want to deliberately begin and end all your licks on a predetermined note, to do so as we are here is a great way to get yourself thinking about the intervals.

As an exercise, can you play the root, 3rd, 5th and ♭7th of all three chords in a simple blues, wherever you can find them all over the neck? I bet a lot of players would struggle with this – something we should all be able to do.

Learn my licks if you like them – or twist them around to suit your preferences. Whatever you do, please have a go at the general exercise – try starting on the 3rd and ending on the ♭7th, and all the other permutations, too – because I think you'll suddenly find your solos beginning to sound much more wholesome and coherent.

Have fun. See you next month.



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Example 1

HERE, our target note is the root of our two chords of G and C. The trick, of course, is to land on the correct note just as the chord changes; or even to pre-empt it, which can sound even more sophisticated. As we guitarists know, there are many ways to create notes – slides, bends, hammer-ons and the like – so add these permutations to those of note choice and there'll never be any reason to sound predictable.

Three systems of musical notation for guitar, each with a treble clef staff and a bass staff. The first system is for a D7 chord, the second for a C7 chord, and the third for G7 and A7b9 chords. Each system includes a treble staff with notes and a bass staff with fret numbers and fingering. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingering numbers.

Example 2

HERE, we are looking at nailing the 3rd in the two chords. A great help is to mentally envisage the chord on the fingerboard so that you know exactly what frets to target. There are three obvious and very strong positions of the major 3rd in an E shape chord, and I target them all here – on the first, third and fifth strings.

Example 2 continued

Example 3

THE 5th is potentially our most awkward interval, as it can sound tense and unsettled unless used deliberately for a specific sound – Albert King and Jimi Hendrix were great 5th fans, so listen to them to see how they employ it. In fact, here I use the old Hendrix trick of the unison bend; another great trick is to use the $\flat 7$ to root bend on your V chord, and leave it for the change so it becomes the 5th of your IV chord.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. It is divided into three systems, each with a guitar part on a single staff and a vocal part on a five-line staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 12/8.

System 1:

- Guitar:** Starts with a D7 chord. The melody begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4. The second measure contains a G7 chord and a melody of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Vocal:** The first measure has a D7 chord and a vocal line with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4. The second measure has a G7 chord and a vocal line of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The lyrics "BU BU BU BU BU" are written below the vocal line.

System 2:

- Guitar:** Starts with a C7 chord. The melody consists of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The second measure has a G7 chord and a melody of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The third measure has an Ab7 chord and a melody of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Vocal:** The first measure has a C7 chord and a vocal line of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The second measure has a G7 chord and a vocal line of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The third measure has an Ab7 chord and a vocal line of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The lyrics "BU BU BD" are written below the vocal line.

System 3:

- Guitar:** Starts with a G7 chord. The melody consists of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Vocal:** The first measure has a G7 chord and a vocal line of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. The lyrics "BU BU RP BU BU BU" are written below the vocal line.

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Example 4

THE $\flat 7$ is perhaps the most evocative interval in a blues, as it stamps bluesiness all over a piece. A major 6th to $\flat 7$ th semitone bend is one of my favourites; also notice how the $\flat 3$ rd of our I chord (played via a pull-off from the 4th) neatly becomes the $\flat 7$ of our IV chord. Musical tricks such as this are always great to employ.

$\text{♩} = 55$ D7

G7

BU BD

BU BU

C7 $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$

G7

A $\flat$ 7

BU

G7

C7

BU

tr

tr

5

The musical notation for Example 4 is presented in three systems. Each system includes a guitar staff (treble clef, key of D major) and a bass staff (bass clef, key of D major). The first system (measures 1-2) features a D7 chord and techniques labeled BU (bend) and BD (bend down). The second system (measures 3-4) includes C7, G7, and A $\flat$ 7 chords, with techniques like PB (pull-off) and BD. The third system (measures 5-6) features G7 and C7 chords, with techniques like BU and tr (trills). The notation includes various fret numbers, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Hear it here

Jimi Hendrix Experience *The Cry Of Love*

One of my favourite Hendrix albums, it's full of real songs and superbly concise playing from Jimi. There are no rambling pentatonics on show here, but there are loads of neatly constructed solos that target chord tone after chord tone – *Ezy Rider*, *Dolly Dagger*, *Angel* and *Hey Baby* (*New Rising Sun*) are all superb tracks. If this is an album that has passed you by, it's certainly worth seeing where Hendrix was headed before his untimely demise.

Joe Bonamassa *Different Shades Of Blue*

Bonomassa's latest album really shows how he's matured, even in the last five years or so. Coincidentally, he opens the album with *Hey Baby* (*New Rising Sun*) in tribute to Hendrix. There's lots of variation on the album (hence the title), from the slow-burning *So, What Would I Do* and the powerfully emotive *Oh Beautiful*, to the Bad Company-esque *Never Give All Your Love*. It's certainly Joe's most mature album to date, and also quite possibly his best – and does he nail those target notes!

Matt Schofield *Far As I Can See*

Players such as Schofield make it their business to outline the harmony in every solo they play. Matt's recent work is some of his best, and *Far As I Can See* probably tops the lot. His singing has really come of age, and his playing just gets better and better. Albert King's *Breaking Up Somebody's Home* is stunningly covered, while *Oakville Shuffle* is the grooviest of instrumentals (aided by Jonny Henderson's amazing Hammond), and the funky shuffle of *Clean Break* shows Matt absolutely in his element.

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