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Guitarist

THE GUITAR MAGAZINE

ISSUE 393

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

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VINTAGE RHYTHM & BLUES

Learn JD McPherson's
slickest T-Bone era licks



TONE TITANS

Two-Rock + Tone King
amps go head to head

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05>



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Dustie Waring
Between The Buried
And Me

Mark Tremonti
Alter Bridge

The Archon was designed to leave you with just the essentials for killer tone. Five gain stages deliver a full and lush distortion while the clean channel's ample headroom is a perfect platform for pedals. The Archon is a powerful, imposing and articulate amplifier that caters to the needs of any player.

100/50W (Switchable)
2 Channels
6L6GC Tubes

Archon 50w and 25w combos
now available

Pure Archon tone, powering
a Celestion G12-75T



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Raising The Tone



This issue's cover story got me thinking about the restless kit adjustments many of us make in pursuit of that elusive beast, 'tone'. How to define it? Jaime Campbell, who makes excellent pickups at The Creamery, says he finds the term unhelpful

when assisting customers in their attempts to find their perfect sound. Why? Because 'tone' is an ideal that is personal to each player, not a measurable value such as DC resistance.

Also, it's all too easy to forget that the player is actually the biggest part of the tone equation. How many times have you heard anecdotes about great guitarists plugging into dilapidated rental equipment and still sounding amazing? It's all in the fingers, as they say. It's true that when you really gel with a guitar, amp or effect, the result can be inspirational. But if you do hit upon a piece of gear that lights a fire under your playing, remember that it's *you* that's being inspired to a higher level – because when the gear is packed away at the end of the gig, it makes no music at all. Enjoy the issue.

Jamie

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

Behind The Scenes



This month, Jamie spent some quality time with a fine bunch of chaps from *Guitarist's* readership on a trip to Guitars: The Museum in Sweden. Josh had fun and games with the world's most quick-fire dentist, and we consumed our own body weights in fine Indian cuisine. Meanwhile, the kindly folk at Manchester's Marble Brewery treated us to a selection of their ales – not least CAMRA's 2014 Champion Bottled Beer, the superlative Chocolate Marble.



STEVE VAI
Solo Artist

The flexibility of the Axe-Fx II is supreme. I did extensive tone testing and found it to be flawless.... It's exceptional and I'm grateful.



DWEEZIL ZAPPA
Zappa Plays Zappa

The new Axe-Fx II made my head spin. Amazing amp feel & endless tone. This is a quantum leap — a major milestone in guitar technology.



JOHN PETRUCCI
Dream Theater

The Axe-Fx II has completely changed the way I think about guitar processing. It does an incredible number of things astonishingly well.



ALEX LIFESON
Rush

The quality of all the FX is superb... Great depth and transparency. Take it for a test drive, you won't be disappointed. Das Awesome.



GEORGE PAJON
The Black Eyed Peas

I freakin' love this thing! I haven't used an amp in the studio for months, and now I've built a live rig around it too. Tone is second to none!



BRIAN NUTTER
Keith Urban

The Axe-Fx II is simply the most useful and flexible tone tool you could ever have. It's like it's custom made for every guitar player.



NEAL SCHON
Journey, Solo Artist

I've tried every modeller on this planet and Fractal is miles ahead in every area. It's also flawlessly dependable on stage and in the studio.



MARK TREMONTI
Creed, Alterbridge

The tone is simply amazing, and that is coming from a self-admitted amp junkie. This thing delivers amps, cabs, effects, and total control!



DAVE MUSTAINE
Megadeth

With the Axe-Fx II, you can literally do anything. For me that means an intense history of crushing metal tones spanning three definitive decades.



NGUYEN LE
Player, Composer

The Axe-Fx II is... fantastic! The sound has body, complexity, presence, purity, width and warmth. This is virtuosity in tone technology.



CHRIS BRODERICK
Megadeth

Unbelievable on every level! The flexibility is so great that every player on earth could have one and I'd still be able to have my own unique tone.



PETE THORN
Chris Cornell
Melissa Etheridge

The Axe-Fx II is a mainstay of my rig. No matter how I use it live or in the studio, it always delivers stunning results.



RICHARD FORTUS
Guns & Roses

The Axe-Fx II has been a total game-changer for me. Hard for me to admit to, after all the money I've spent collecting vintage amps!



GUTHRIE GOVAN
The Aristocats etc.

The sound and feel of this magic box are so 'real' that witchcraft would appear to be the only logical explanation. Most pleasing!



DEVIN TOWNSEND
Devin Townsend Project

You've heard rumors about this alien black box? Believe them! My recent records and live sound are direct Axe-Fx II.



DEVIN BRONSON
Avril Lavigne, Kelly Osbourne

The quality of amp modeling and FX in the Axe-Fx II are insane! It's exceptional and I'm grateful.



MONTA PITTMAN
Madonna, Prong

Adding the Axe-Fx II in my rig is one of the wisest things I've ever done. It's completely changed my playing, ideas, and career for the better.



TOSIN ABASI
Animals As Leaders

The Axe-Fx inspires me to create sounds that transcend the conventional guitar amp. I consider it another instrument, and indispensable.



CHRIS TRAYNOR
Bush, Gavin Rossdale, Helmet, Orange 9mm

When it comes to tone, I will not compromise. Axe-Fx II is my big rig in a small box. This thing is seriously powerful.



LARRY MITCHELL
Grammy-Winning Producer & Guitarist

One my best purchases ever. With my Axe-Fx II I can now tour the world with my ultimate tone rig — and it's a carry-on!



MISHA MANSOOR
Periphery

The Axe-Fx II is way beyond just amp modeling or effects processing! This is the new standard for guitarists...The new "must have."



ADRIAN BELEW
Solo Artist, King Crimson

World-class tone at its best! Powerful. Pristine. Flexible. Monstrous. Deep. Dead quiet. This is literally all I need.



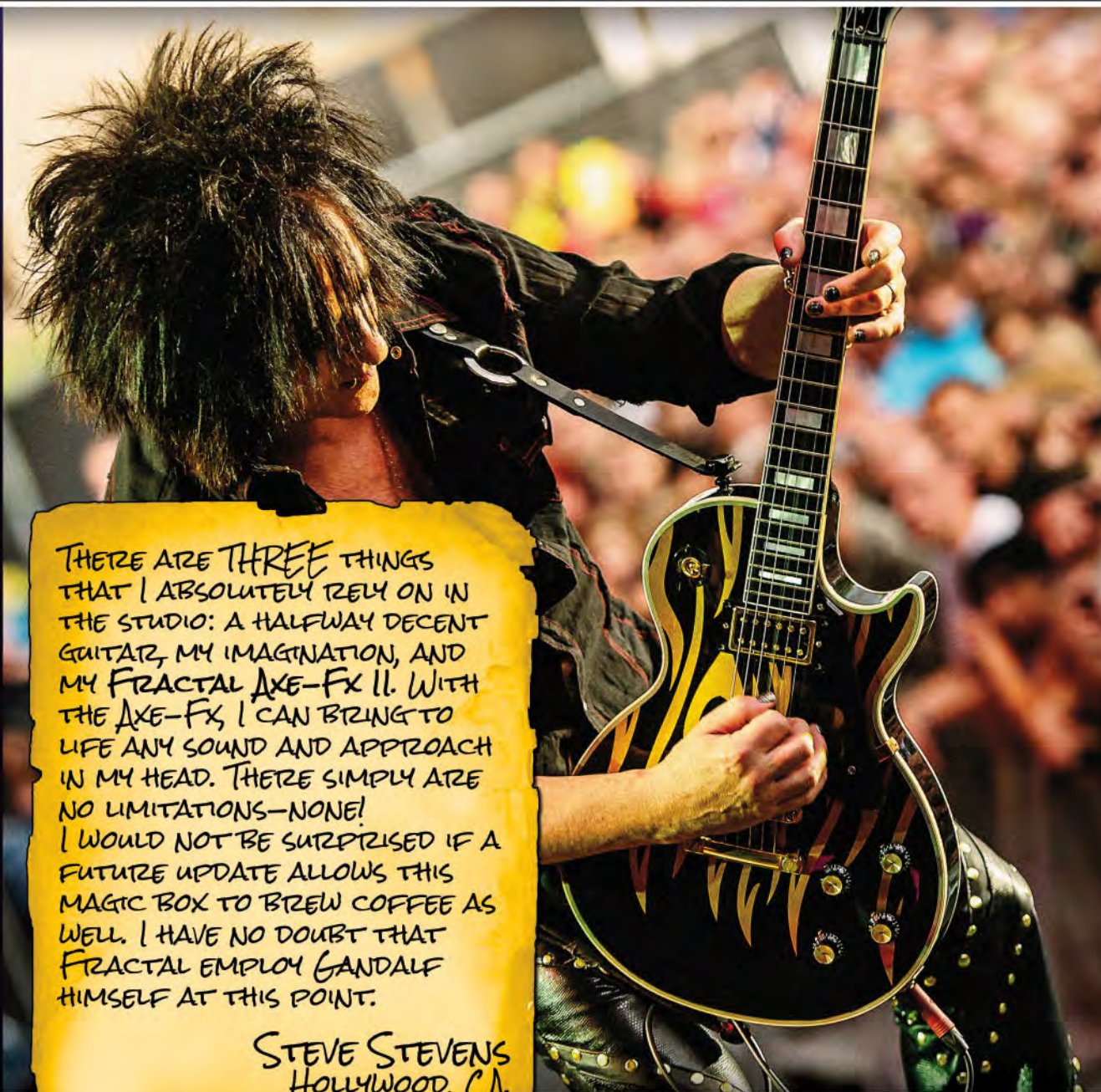
NORDEGG
Living Legend, Guitar Tech to the Stars

Beyond beyond. Really wonderful performance, total world class. Really amazed by ... everything!



TIM FOREMAN
Switchfoot

My Axe-Fx II eliminates the barriers between imagination and what is possible. Finally a piece of gear that never says "No!"



THERE ARE THREE THINGS THAT I ABSOLUTELY RELY ON IN THE STUDIO: A HALFWAY DECENT GUITAR, MY IMAGINATION, AND MY FRACTAL AXE-FX II. WITH THE AXE-FX, I CAN BRING TO LIFE ANY SOUND AND APPROACH IN MY HEAD. THERE SIMPLY ARE NO LIMITATIONS—NONE! I WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF A FUTURE UPDATE ALLOWS THIS MAGIC BOX TO BREW COFFEE AS WELL. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT FRACTAL EMPLOY GANDALF HIMSELF AT THIS POINT.

STEVE STEVENS
HOLLYWOOD, CA



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The A-Z of Pickups

Some of the finest pickup makers in the world join us to lift the lid on a subject that's been at the very heart of electric guitars for the last 80 years. From American Wire Gauge to zebra coils, via humbuckers and P-90s, we leave no stone unturned in exploring this fundamental factor in guitar tone. PLUS! Win three awesome pickup prizes!

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VIDEOS



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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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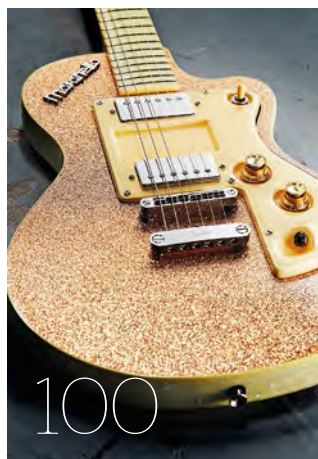
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FIRST ▶ PLAY



PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON
£2,995

WHAT IS IT? PJE's contemporary
take on the double-cut Les Paul





MACON MUSIC

Once the great hope of the UK's production electric guitar industry, Patrick James Eggle reinvented himself as an acoustic maker par excellence. But now he's plugged back in and is crafting electrics anew...

WORDS **DAVE BURRLUCK** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**



1

A guitar maker's instruments don't always reflect the style of music they like, or indeed play. Patrick James Eggle – he of the Berlin, fabulous archtops and acoustics – admits to having a rock 'n' roll heart and, he tells us, “the Macon is loosely based around my own guitar that I play out, a slightly over-sized Junior or Special. If I was a guitar collector I'd be going for those late 50s TV Juniors and Specials – I prefer the double-cuts. But I also wanted to build guitars that weren't over the top. Having said that, you know me, I'll probably make some with more exotic-looking tops. But I wanted it to be well built, look cool but not overly pretty.”

In line with an increasing number of contemporary 'boutique' makers, PJE's Macon – available solely from World Guitars – comes in a low-gloss nitrocellulose finish and the back, sides and neck back are a semi-translucent primer-grey colour, aka 'Dirty Blonde', with aged metal parts. The top, fingerboard and headstock facing are more unusual: bog oak excavated from the fenland



1 The guitar's Dirty Blonde-finished back is a single piece of mahogany, chambered for both sound and weight considerations

2 Old-looking Bare Knuckle Crawler and Mississippi Queen pickups are used here. PJE is also using Fralin P-90s for his guitars

3 Light weight, open-backed Waverly tuners are aged like the ABM bell-brass wrapover bridge: a more open-sounding aluminium wrapover-type bridge is also available



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>

basin of East Anglia, we're informed. Apparently, some 7,000 years ago a rise in sea levels flooded the fens and trees died standing then fell into the silt of the forest floor, where many have been anaerobically preserved. Once excavated, the wood is slowly kiln-dried – a process that removes some three gallons of water per cubic foot – producing a very dense material. Its black colouring is the result of a chemical reaction that occurs between the tannins in the oak and soluble irons present in the mineral subsoil. Bog oak excavated from the same area and depth as that used in this instrument has been carbon dated to 3,300BC.

It's not quite that long since Patrick last dabbled with the electric guitar – he made a few Zemaitis-style instruments for the USA market back in the late 90s – but the Macon signals a proper return. "It's more than a toe in the water, it's definitely a foot, and I'm really enjoying building electrics again, a bit like being back on terra firma again."

Feel & Sounds

We only have our trusty '57 single-cut Gibson Les Paul Junior to hand as a reference, but while the Macon initially felt a little bigger (expanded in outline by about 6mm), and with a different strapped-on hang, everything about it feels more 'tuned in'. The neck shape is dimensionally a little bigger, too, but thanks to a superior profile, more comfortable. Tuning is very stable; intonation is excellent. As supplied, an over-low action gave a little too much buzz and zing, but the pre-intonated wrapover bridge allows easy height adjustment to raise the action and let the guitar ring a little more.

Plugged in after the iconic sound of the Junior's lone bridge P-90, so many guitars disappoint, but that's the thing about this Macon: it's not meant to be a Junior/Special clone, it has its own voice, and it's monstrous. With some light gain and plenty of power amp, the bridge-placed Crawler humbucker nails a slightly cocked wah, Mick Ronson-like voice with midrange grind aplenty. There would have been many gigs back in the day when that was all this writer would need. But the Macon's not just for hoary old rockers. Switching to a clean Peavey Delta Blues combo, pulling down the guitar's volume and knocking back the tone, the neck-placed humbucker-sized P-90 Mississippi Queen takes us right back to Kenny Burrell and Grant

That's the thing about this Macon: it's not meant to be a Junior/Special clone, it has its own voice, and it's monstrous



2



3



4

Green, albeit with less hollow-body 'bloom'. But then select the mix and, although the Crawler dominates in full-coil mode for a slightly mid-heavy jangle, in split mode, combined with the neck pickup, it's certainly alt-rock-friendly and surprisingly Fender-like. Roll back the tone a little and there's more Rickie character: crank the power amp up to bone-shakin' and smile – Mike Campbell or Johnny Marr could use this.

It certainly sounds like its construction: not 100 per cent solid. There's a whiff of semi here with spring and life that really works for those gritty but not over-laden sounds that are the Foo Fighters' bread and butter. Inspirational.

Verdict

Patrick James Eggle may have been absent from the electric guitar market for a while, but this Macon is perfectly in tune with the modern boutique builder. The un-showy aesthetic mixes classic style with a chambered body and unusual wood choice to produce something different – far from a clone, yet dialled in to a very contemporary style that's rich, ringing with real rock 'n' roll roots. By design, each one is unique, but custom orders can always be accommodated. No, it ain't cheap but neither is the build, sound or feel. Nice to have you back, Patrick!

4 The guitar's top is made of bog oak, which is glossed but otherwise natural. The fingerboard, which has a PRS-like 25-inch scale and 10-inch radius, is also made of bog oak. With well-finished frets and a beautifully shaped neck, it's an excellent playing experience all over



Patrick James Eggle Macon

PRICE: £2,995 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: 1-piece mahogany back with flat bog oak top

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, with 'big C with softened shoulders' profile

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Black friction-reducing/42.85mm

FINGERBOARD: Bog oak, small pearl dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium (Dunlop 6105)

HARDWARE: ABM wrapover

1-piece bridge, Waverly open-backed tuners – aged nickel plating

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.2mm

ELECTRICS: Neck placed BK Mississippi Queen with a Crawler at bridge. 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with push/push switch to split the bridge pickup)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 4/8.88

OPTIONS: A 'contoured' top, various exotic top woods, and Bare Knuckle and Lindy Fralin pickup options

LEFT-HANDERS: Not currently

FINISHES: Dirty Blonde (sides, back and neck back) with low-gloss natural front. All nitrocellulose

World Guitars

01453 824306

worldguitars.co.uk

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

Guitarist says: Un-showy boutique electric with vibrato chambered tone and highly contemporary rock 'n' roll voice



THE
J-29

Play one today at your Gibson
dealer and experience the
next American Legend.

Gibson[®]
Acoustic

FIRST ▶ PLAY



PRS ARCHON 50 HEAD
£1,450

WHAT IS IT? Pro-spec, dual-channel 50-watt head aimed at the modern rock and metal player



PRS ARCHON 25 COMBO
£1,249

WHAT IS IT? The baby of the range, it still packs a fearsome punch



ROYAL BLOOD

The latest Archon additions prove that PRS amps are finally ready to rule

WORDS **NICK GUPPY** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

With the arrival of the Archon amps, PRS finally appears to have a backline product that could well become just as coveted as its guitars. Back in issue 387, we looked at the Archon 100 head. Now, it's time to introduce the rest of the range: the Archon 50, which is available in head and combo format, and the Archon 25, available as just a compact 1x12 combo.





<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>





The Archon 50 head swaps the flamed maple fascia of the 100-watter for a brushed aluminium trim with a matching silver logo; the 25 combo has a purposeful 'none more black' look with silver logos and a thin strip of silver piping over the top of the speaker grille. There's no cut-out in the top panel of the combo's cabinet, making the controls difficult to see when you're standing over the amp. That aside, the styling and build quality are very good.

Inside their aluminium chassis, these Archons have heavy-duty PCB strips – emulating a turret-board-style of layout – with chassis-mounted valve bases and hand-wired front- and rear-panel components. This robust

construction keeps the heat of the valves away from the circuit boards and should add considerably to the Archon's long-term reliability. It also means there's a lot of hand wiring and soldering, which is all very neat, clean and consistent on both samples – that's quite important, because wiring changes can have a profound effect on performance.

Both amps follow the same topology: a single input jack feeding two independent channels featuring separate gain controls, bright switches and three-band EQs. The individual master volume controls for the clean and overdrive channels are joined by presence and depth controls to fine-tune the output stage response.

1 A two-button footswitch changes channels and engages the Archon's series effects loop

2 The half-power option turns the head down to 25 watts and the combo down to around 13 watts

3 The Archon's logical two-channel layout is easy to understand and use





3

With a hot humbucker, the Archon really sings, with a fluid response that almost plays the notes for you

Around the back, there are sockets for the footswitchable effects loop, external speaker outlets with an impedance switch, a half-power switch and bias test points. The impedance switch is a standard toggle – we'd prefer to see a screwdriver type that can't be accidentally changed quite so easily. Oversized transformers and quality Ruby Tubes valves complete the picture. The 50 comes with 6L6s as standard and can be re-biased for EL34's; the Archon 25 uses 5881s to drive a Celestion G12-T75 loudspeaker.

Overall, the Archons look lean, mean and ready to rock, with the kind of solid build and reliability that's needed for constant touring. It's an amp that would sit comfortably on the professional stage alongside PRS's guitars.

Sounds

As usual, we test the Archons with a range of different guitars, including an old Strat, a Fender Custom Shop Nocaster, an early 70s Les Paul Custom and a PAF-loaded Les Paul Standard, together with a selection of 4x12 and 2x12 cabs for the head. Both Archon amps sound sonically almost identical with a high-headroom clean channel that can be pushed into distortion, although it works best at lower gain settings, providing a tight, fast bass

response, balanced mids and a bright but not ear-piercing treble. The bright switch adds a little top-end sparkle, which is handy for guitars with higher-output pickups. It's an airy open tone, not quite the syrupy sweetness of a classic 'blackface', but great with a touch of chorus and delay.

In contrast, the Archon's lead channel has a superb modern lead voice, with rounded mids and a warm treble that retains just enough bite for those 'off the pick' pinched harmonics. There's a lot of drive on this channel, too. Players looking for mild overdrive effects might be disappointed, but for full-on in-your-face lead and crunch rhythm, it's easy to see why the Archon is beginning to take over as the amp of choice for many modern rockers and metal players. Even standard single coils can really sing, but to unleash the full fury of this channel, a hot humbucker is what's needed. Then the Archon *really* sings with a fluid response that almost plays the notes for you.

The footswitchable fixed-level effects loop works well with modulation and delay effects. Another method that adds considerable versatility is to use a graphic EQ with the mids dipped out then switching the loop in for rhythm on the lead channel and taking it out for leads. Adding a touch of short delay-time



4



5

reverb also helps magnify the Archon's fast bass response, and sounds great for choppy rhythm playing.

The only real difference between the beefier head and the combo is the amount of spare headroom that's available – the 50-watt output stage has plenty of power to spare and will easily overpower most drummers in an unmic'd gig situation. The Archon 25 sounds better at lower volume, making it a worthy candidate for studio work, but make no

mistake, it's still plenty loud enough to handle small gigging environments. There's a small but noticeable difference in sound between the high-power (pentode) and the lower-power (triode) switch settings, with the lower-power setting on both amps sounding a little less distinct in the treble area. On balance, we preferred the higher-power setting on both amps. Overall, both the head and combo more than match our expectations with great tone and faultless performance.

4 The Archon's two channels can be selected using a two-button footswitch, which also selects the effects loop

5 A sign of quality and craftsmanship in guitars that now also applies to amps

6 The business end – the Archon 25 uses two 5881 power valves to drive a Celestion G12T-75 speaker



After a number of near misses, it looks as though PRS has finally hit the bullseye with the Archon range



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



Verdict

After a number of near misses, it looks as though PRS has finally hit the bullseye with the Archon range. These amps have the right image to appeal to modern rock and metal players all over the USA and Europe with bomb-proof build quality and a solid no-frills design that focuses on the tone rather than a long list of sometimes pointless features.

Being Paul Reed Smith amplifiers, you'd expect a premium price. It has to be said that these Archons aren't cheap by any stretch of the imagination, but considering the quality of what's on offer compared to the competition, we'd say the price is quite reasonable – these are serious pro-standard amps that are made to handle life on the road, as well as look smart in your home studio.

If modern rock and metal is your cup of tea, then the PRS Archon could well be the amp you've been waiting for. **G**



PRS Archon 50 Head

PRICE: £1,450
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp, with solid-state rectifier
OUTPUT: 50 watts, switchable to 25 watts
VALVES: 6x 12AX7 preamp, 2x 6L6 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 255 (h) x 520 (w) x 265mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 15/34
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKER: 1x Celestion G12-T75
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Gain, bright switch, bass, mid, treble, 2x master volume
 Presence and depth
FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch supplied, toggles channels and effects loop
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: High and low power switching, series effects loop, external bias test points, can use EL34 output valves
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: Also available as a 1x12 combo (£1,495), while the all-powerful Archon 100 head costs £1,799
PRS Guitars Europe
01223 874 301
www.prsguitars.com

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

Guitarist says: A PRS amp that's worthy of the name? We think so: powerful and portable with superb clean and rock tones



PRS Archon 25 Combo

PRICE: £1,249
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Valve preamp and power amp, with solid-state rectifier
OUTPUT: 25 watts, switchable to 13 watts
VALVES: 6x 12AX7 preamp, 2x 5881 power amp
DIMENSIONS: 520 (h) x 470 (w) x 265mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 15/34
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKER: 1x Celestion G12-T75
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Gain, bright switch, bass, mid, treble, 2x master volume
 Presence and depth
FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch supplied, toggles channels and effects loop
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: High and low power switching, series effects loop, external bias test points
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: See Archon 50

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

Guitarist says: The junior of the range is ideal for space-starved stages and would make a great studio amp, too

FIRST ▶ PLAY



**FAITH PJE SIGNATURE NEPTUNE
HONEYED SYCAMORE**

£1,499

WHAT IS IT? All-solid wood,
mini-jumbo acoustic guitar



**FAITH PJE SIGNATURE NEPTUNE
CUTAWAY LONDON PLANE**

£1,499

WHAT IS IT? All-solid wood,
mini-jumbo cutaway acoustic

VIDEO DEMO



[http://bit.ly/
guitarist393](http://bit.ly/guitarist393)

PLANE SPEAKING

One of the UK's most dynamic luthiers creates a pair of modern yet subtly unusual acoustics with interesting wood choices

WORDS **ISOBEL MORRIS & JIM KIMBERLEY**

PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMON LEES**

Of the many UK-designed acoustic brands, Faith has a major trump card: its instruments are designed by Patrick James Eggle. The revered maker has been associated with the brand from around two years after its launch in 2003. While Patrick's own line of high-end acoustics and new electric guitars (as we saw on p8) come with hefty price tags, the Faith guitars are made in Indonesia and thus occupy a much more real world slot in the guitar market.

The PJE Signature series currently consists of four models that all use back and side woods indigenous to these fair Isles. As with Patrick's latest electric project, Fenland bog oak is featured on the two Mars Signatures, while







our two review Neptune ‘baby’ jumbos use similarly unusual woods.

Even quite seasoned players would cast a look at the back and sides of the non-cut Neptune and think it’s maple rather than sycamore, which has a history of being used broadly as a tonewood. In fact, pre 20th century, it was a native wood of choice (it’s debated, but not confirmed, that the Romans imported it). But since the exotic, denser and more powerful-sounding tropical hardwoods became easier to access for instrument makers, it’s barely had a look in. In the steel-string world there’s been a somewhat snobbish body of anti-maple (sycamore’s botanical twin) opinion, which Taylor for one has begun to address. So, let’s hear it for sycamore, too.

Our cutaway Neptune uses a more left-field choice for its solid back and sides: London plane. In recent years, it has occasionally been used by early instrument makers, but we can find no reference to it being used in the world of modern guitar making before this signature.

Wood choice asides, it’s immediately apparent that there is a great deal of really nice craft in these instruments. They have an invitingly classy look evidenced by the super tidy neck binding, the small dot position markers along the edge of the fingerboard, and the mother-of-pearl logo inlaid into the ebony fingerboard at the 12th fret. Care has clearly been taken with choices of wood throughout: the rosewood binding, head veneer and back strip complement the honeyed sycamore, while Macassan figured ebony is used with the London plane. Both tops are high-grade Englemann spruce, and inside the woodworking is pristine. The X-brace and strutting is quarter-sawn ‘piano-grade’ spruce, with mahogany side reinforcements, and you get unbleached bone nuts and saddles. It’s very classy, yet understated. The only ‘bling’ is the green abalone used for the soundhole decoration and the dots on the ebony bridge pins. Reflecting the modernistic design, both models feature bolt-on necks and two-way adjustable truss rods.

Feel & Sounds

Faith says that London plane, “when matched to high-grade Englemann spruce, produces a tone that is crisp and clear with a sound akin to sapele and other mahogany variants” and that sycamore sounds “similar to maple with a relatively dry, crisp tone that offers both power

This pair of acoustics boast state-of-the-art designs that centre on quality woods and a crisp, contemporary build



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>

1 The solid London plane used in the back and sides is responsibly sourced in the UK. This unusual tonewood is beautifully stained here giving it a rich coffee colour

2 The back strip and binding are solid Macassar figured ebony, outlined with ivory-coloured purfling; it's beautifully executed

3 An attractively shaped headstock features Grover tuners that work very well, especially if you're changing tunings constantly

4 The overall feel of these instruments is understated but the green abalone soundhole (shown overleaf) adds a touch of sparkle



3

and clarity [with] a little more resonant response than regular flamed maple". To our ears, however, despite the different woods and cutaway-versus-non-cutaway shapes, the sounds produced are remarkably similar. They have what we increasingly find ourselves referring to as a 'very modern tone': bright and shiny, if a little light in the bass. There's a rather present top end and a constrained 'newness' about the sound of both, which is hardly surprising, and we'd expect some of that to mellow with playing. As is, neither suggests itself a first choice for a solo instrumentalist, but playing in an ensemble we find a tightness and power that really maintains its presence.

Both instruments are satisfying to strum and demonstrate a broad range of subtle tonal shades and dynamics as we experiment with different types and thicknesses of picks. With a Dunlop 0.73mm, for example, strumming over the soundhole there's a midrange warmth and click that's nicely old school, particularly on the full-bodied Neptune. Indeed, the cutaway Neptune has a suggestion of more grunt in the lower mids, but also sounds a little more airy and open, which is particularly noticeable fingerpicking in a drop tuning. All the notes of even harmonically dense chords are nicely audible, but when playing inversions in upper positions, the top strings showed up the cutaway as sounding a little bit thinner compared with the subtly rounder, bell-like chime of the non-cutaway guitar.

As acoustics only, a challenge might be to find a pickup system, should you need one. The contemporary high-end presence of the guitars married to the sometimes overly hi-fi tonality of many modern systems could end up a little ear-wearing. Something to consider...



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



Still, there's a confidence-boosting weight and scale to the handling of both guitars. They feel solid but not chunky. The high-glossed mahogany necks have good depth and sort of rounded 'U' profile, giving a sense of substance and comfort. The 55mm string spacing at the saddle means fingerpicking – even for those of us with fatter digits – is a pleasure. The action feels a hair lower on the cutaway guitar, and seems set to accommodate hearty strumming and easy capo use without fretbuzz, but remains low enough to enjoy the snap of string on fret, John Martyn style, with the gentlest extra pull. A bigger, higher fret wire is helpful here, too: it lessens friction between the finger and the 'board when bending and makes for an easy swap between electric and acoustic mid-set. The Grover tuners are smooth and responsive, so tuning between regular and relatively extreme open tunings was drama free. All good!

Verdict

It's hard to think what has been overlooked with this pair of acoustics. They are state-of-the-art designs that centre on quality woods and a crisp, contemporary build. As we're seeing throughout the industry, different woods are increasingly being trialled, and on the evidence of this pair, if you like a modern balanced voicing as opposed to the earthier grunt of your vintage Martin, then add sycamore and London plane to the list. Yes, they certainly lean on the Taylor side in terms of voicing, but not in price: you simply won't get this all-solid specific at these prices from our friends in San Diego. So, pro-spec guitars for the real world musician? We think so.



Faith Signature FSGNHSY Honeyed Sycamore

PRICE: £1,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Mini-jumbo
TOP: Solid Engelmann spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid British honeyed sycamore
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 408mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Nickel-plated Grover Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassan ebony, m-o-p 'F' at 12th fret, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Macassan ebony/55.5mm
ELECTRICS: None
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.2/4.85
OPTIONS: No
LEFT-HANDERS: No
Barnes & Mullins
01691 652449
www.faithguitars.com



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

Guitarist says: Subtly innovative, it certainly lives up to PJE's reputation for dependable and quality instrument making



Faith PJE Signature FSGNCLPT London Plane

PRICE: £1,499 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: 14-fret mini-jumbo cutaway
TOP: Solid Engelmann spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid British London plane
MAX RIM DEPTH: 115mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Nickel-plated Grover Rotomatic
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Macassan ebony, m-o-p 'F' at 12th fret, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 20, medium
BRIDGE/SPACING: Macassan ebony/55.5mm
ELECTRICS: None
WEIGHT (KG/LBS): 2.25/4.96
OPTIONS: No
LEFT-HANDERS: No



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

Guitarist says: An extremely consistent instrument, with quality at the fore. Excellent attention to detail throughout

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With a killer combination of Fender Custom Shop Fat '50s single-coil pickups and a brand-new Shawbucker pickup designed by industry heavyweight Tim Shaw, this unbelievably versatile instrument is the ultimate way to bring your music to life. Experience the next level in sound today.

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www.epiphone.com

Frontend

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



Clapton's Last Hurrah

14-23 May, Royal Albert Hall, London

There are still tickets available to see Eric Clapton's farewell tour dates at London's Royal Albert Hall in May. Sadly, this seven-date stint is strongly rumoured to be Clapton's last major tour – the occasion not only marks his 70th birthday, but is also the 50th anniversary of when EC first put slowhand to string on 7 December 1964, when he played as part of the Yardbirds for the BBC Two show *Top Beat*. He's since compared performing at the venue to “playing in my front room” and Cream's farewell concert and reunion both took place at the Hall.

Eric's band for the string of dates will be Paul Carrack, Steve Gadd, Nathan East, Chris Stainton, Sharon White and Michelle John. For more info see: www.royalalberthall.com.



Oz Noy At Ronnie's 15 April, Ronnie Scott's, London

Fans of advanced technique should book a table at Ronnie Scott's on 15 April. The Oz Noy Trio, featuring Etienne Mbappe and Gary Novak, will be tearing it up with their unique brand of jazz. For more information head to www.ronniescotts.co.uk.

Whitesnake Return

15 May

The 'Snake's 12th studio LP, *The Purple Album*, is set for release on 15 May, and sees the current band line-up reimagining classics from David Coverdale's time as lead singer for Deep Purple. A UK tour is also in the offing. See www.whitesnake.com.



British Summer Time 18-27 June, Hyde Park

BST is a series of outdoor concerts at Hyde Park. Headliners include The Strokes, Blur and The Who, with support from Beck, Paul Weller, Johnny Marr, Chic Featuring Nile Rodgers and many more. Tickets are on sale now, see www.bst-hydepark.com for info.

Gilmour Tour Sept-Oct, 2015, Royal Albert Hall

David Gilmour has announced he will be touring in support of his new solo album, his first since 2006's *On An Island*. He's already added two dates due to demand but they've sold out, too, so keep up with developments at www.davidgilmour.com.



Round-up Quirky Alternatives

These recent guitars may be variations on classic models, but they all offer something unique – which you may just prefer...



1 Fender Reclaimed Old Growth Redwood Stratocaster

£1,717

www.fender.com

The use of California redwood for this special-edition Strat's body offers a warmer character, and American Vintage '65 single coils and a Diamondback humbucker at the bridge give a mellow tone with a classic-rock kick.

We said: "While the redwood adds visual and sonic interest, this is a great-sounding Strat"

Try before you buy: Fender American Vintage Stratocaster

2 Guild Newark St Starfire IV

£1,029

www.guildguitars.com

Guild's diverse range of reissues, under the Newark St Collection monicker, included the semi-hollow, laminated-mahogany Starfire IV. A distinctive addition to the twin-cutaway market

dominated by Gibson's ES-335, the Starfire IV has a wide range of voices and a competitive price.

We said: "The Starfire does a fantastic *Revolver*-era Beatles impression, and travels forward through time, via Cream and Jimi, into hard-rock territory"

Try before you buy: Gibson ES-335

3 St Blues Juke Joint Mississippi Bluesmaster

£1,149

www.saintblues.com

Made in Memphis, this stripped-down single-cut differs from more Fender-y Bluesmasters, with an inclination towards classics such as the Gibson Les Paul Junior despite the thru-body stringing, T-style six-a-side headstock and bolt-on neck.

We said: "A Gibbo for Tele players, or bolt-on twang for Les Paul owners? It sits in the middle"

Try before you buy: PRS S2 Mira

4 Case J2 Semi-Hollow Double Cutaway

£3,500

www.caseguitars.co.uk

The J2 is handmade by Kent's John Case, and its superlative design incorporates stylised f-holes, wave inlays and a smaller overall footprint than an ES-335. A warm, dark voice and juicy tone make it an inspiring alternative.

We said: "This isn't an ES-335 clone, and its slightly thicker voice reveals that touch-sensitive, juicy tone that is older-style Robben Ford, or Larry Carlton"

Try before you buy: Collings I-35LC

5 G&L Tribute Series ASAT Deluxe II

£410

www.glguitars.com

Fender's Telecaster has been appropriated over the years by hard-rock players, and for over 30 years Leo Fender's ASAT has been a cultish alternative. This

mahogany/maple rock machine has twin coil-tappable humbuckers for a broader range of tones.

We said: "The ASAT Deluxe II plays quick and sounds lush and thick; it's a tough cookie that's something of an individualist"

Try before you buy: Fender Telecaster Deluxe

6 Gibson Memphis ES-390

£1,849

www.gibson.com

This thinline shaves 50cm off the width of the ES-330, but shares the 19th-fret neck join and hollowbody P-90 tones. High-gloss lacquer keeps the price lower than VOS, and the compact body makes for a lightweight and balanced playing experience.

We said: "If you're not obsessed with the size of original models, this has characterful sound and playability in a tidy package"

Try before you buy: Gibson ES-330

NEW FOR 2015



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Try The Vela

PRS releases a new, vintage-vibed S2 guitar

PRS has added to its S2 range with a new design, the S2 Vela. A bold aesthetic departure for the Maryland company, the Vela's retro-futuristic offset body shape is a nod to vintage creations from the 60s, and is the least typical PRS yet. The Vela follows in the retro-inspired tradition of S2 stablemates the Mira and Starla, and has a Starla humbucker in the bridge, with an S2 Type-D single coil in the neck. These are controlled via a three-way toggle, alongside a volume and a push-pull tone control, offering plenty of tonal range, including combined single- and dual-coil tones, and coil-tapped selections for the Starla pickup. The Vela's body and neck are mahogany, with a 22-fret rosewood fingerboard (birds optional), a 25-inch scale and PRS's Pattern Regular neck shape.

Another change is the introduction of a new plate-style bridge, which incorporates two brass saddles intended to aid sustain and intonation, and is top-loading for ease of restringing. The Vela is available in Antique White, Black, McCarty Tobacco, Seafoam Green, Sienna, Vintage Cherry and Vintage Mahogany, and is available this month for £1,199. See www.prsguitars.com/s2vela for video demos and more.

In other news, 2015 marks the company's 30th Anniversary, and PRS has announced the opening of a new West Street East museum and retail outlet, as well as introducing guided tours of its Maryland facility.



The striking S2 Vela represents a totally new design for PRS

Andy Fraser

1 9 5 2 - 2 0 1 5

It was with sadness that *Guitarist* learned of the death of Andy Fraser, known best for his work with blues-rock legends Free, particularly as the composer of their hit *All Right Now*. The London-born bassist formed Free aged just 15, along with vocalist Paul Rodgers, drummer Simon Kirke and Paul Kossoff on guitar. Having been 'adopted' by British blues legend Alexis Korner, through whom he'd already bagged a stint with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, it was Korner who put him together with the other future Free members. Classically trained on piano, Andy was prodigious

and was gigging in London clubs while barely a teenager. Inspired by Cream's Jack Bruce, he used a Gibson EB-3 to provide a dark but melodic foundation to Free's sound. He co-wrote many of the band's best tracks, including *My Brother Jake* and *All Right Now*. He quit Free in 1971, rejoined then left again in 1972, reuniting with Rodgers for Woodstock 94. While he continued to write and record, he never matched his former success with Free. Andy died on March 16, 2015. He was known to have recently battled both AIDS and a related form of cancer, but at the time of writing the cause of his death was unconfirmed.





Plain Jane, Super Brain

Futuristic Swiss guitar design pushes the envelope

Relish Guitars Switzerland is a new luxury guitar brand headed up by Pirmin Giger and Silvan K  ng and based in Lucerne. Its first model, Jane, prompted technology magazine *Wired* to proclaim: "If Apple made a guitar, it would look like this." The reason for the excitement is Jane's unusual pickup selector system, which incorporates touch sensors built into the body to turn the pickups on and off without touching the volume control. The sensors are accompanied by tasteful white LED indicators, and coupled with the guitar's extreme contouring, the overall effect is indeed quite futuristic. Feedback from players has been positive so far, according to K  ng: "Players love to switch the pickups with the palm of their hand. Also, they love to mute the guitar on stage without having to turn the volume down; instead, just turn off the signal with the sensor and no signal goes out!"

Each Jane is handcrafted, and the body design comprises three layers. Sandwiched between two layers of walnut, cherry or ash wood is an aluminium frame, designed to provide more intense

vibration and longer sustain than a traditional wood body. The back panel can be removed using a plectrum to access the battery pack for the lights, and to restring the guitar.

Jane has a quartersawn maple neck with a 24-fret, 25.6-inch radius bamboo fingerboard, and a pair of Swiss-made Good Tone

humbuckers. There are three Janes to choose from – Ashy, Cherry and Walnut – and the retail price is £3,600. Relish describes Jane's sound as "warm and vibrant" – head to www.relishguitars.ch to see a video of the inimitable Greg Koch putting her through her paces and decide for yourself.



Relish Guitars' Silvan K  ng (left) and Pirmin Giger with the Jane



"One of the finest guitar straps in the world"

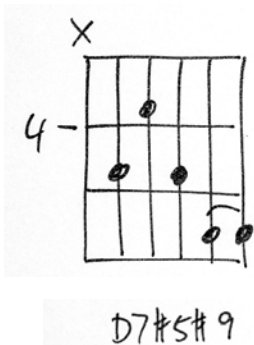
Guitarist Magazine

Substitute

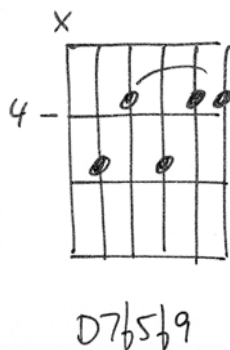
Tired of using the same old chord shapes? These substitutions will freshen up your playing in seconds.

This Issue: Altered reality

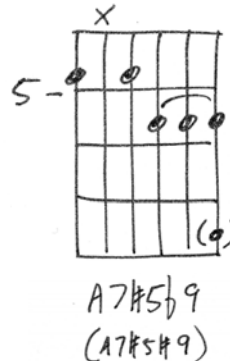
To start with, let's take an innocent little D7 chord and twist it into the much scarier D7#5#9. That means we've taken the basic chord (D F# A C), added a #9 (E#) and also sharpened the 5th (A to A#).



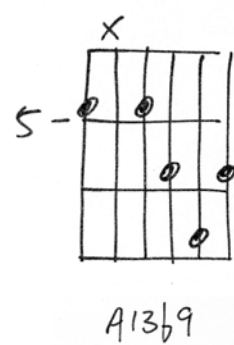
Or we could do the opposite, flattening the 5th and 9th. It's a totally different sound, but like the previous chord, it creates tension, yearning to be resolved to a G or G minor. And they both work well with the popular Super Locrian mode (D E, F G, A $\flat$ B, C).



Moving to the E-shape chords (ie, with a 6th-string root), here are two for the price of one. Start with the A7#5#9 (barring the top strings with your 3rd finger) and then try adding the top note for A7#5#9. Both versions work with A Super Locrian (A B, C D, E $\flat$ F G).



This is tricky, but it sounds lovely. Try using your thumb for the bottom note, or barring the top three strings with your third finger. Unlike the others, it fits the half/whole diminished scale (A B, C C# D# E F# G, alternating semitones and whole tones).



And also...



HENDRIX KNIGHTS

After years of legal skirmishing over contracts Hendrix signed in his pre-Experience days, Experience Hendrix has acquired the rights to his recordings with Curtis Knight, and has just released 14 of them on *You Can't Use My Name: Curtis Knight & The Squires (Featuring Jimi Hendrix)*. See www.jimihendrix.com for more details.

RIP BRIAN CARMAN

Chantays guitarist Brian Carman passed away in March, aged 69. The surf-rock pioneer co-wrote the genre-defining hit *Pipeline*, and continued to play in the band until recently. He also worked in the guitar industry, at Rickenbacker and Music Man.

SERVOBENDER

The ServoBender is an ingenious new creation that attempts to meld the worlds of pedal-steel and regular six-string guitar. It does so via four servos on a metal plate, sustain pedals and 3D-printed parts, and it's ingenious. See how it was done at imgur.com/a/aOZIw.

Guitarist Picks

Highlights from last issue



Electrics

Fender Classic Series '60s Jaguar Lacquer
£1,054

We said: "A beautiful-sounding, looking and playing Jag"



Amps

Matchless Nighthawk 1x12
£2,350

We said: "A stunning small combo built by one of the ultimate boutique makers"



Acoustics

LTD TL-6N
£469

We said: "A nylon-string stage electro that offers great value and has immense crossover appeal"



Effects

DigiTech Mosaic
£109

We said: "A great pedal for adding 12-string flavour with no faffing"



Misc

Noiise FLUX:FX
\$19.99

We said: "Audio-sculpting iPad app for experimental players and recordists"

And Finally...

The recent sale of the **Les Paul prototype** shows that the gear of famous guitar players still makes for a reliable auction favourite. The latest intriguing slices of history up for grabs are, firstly, **George Harrison's 1963 Maton Mastersound** electric, played onstage at various UK venues by the Beatle while his trusty Gretsch was in for repair; and a circa-**1962 Gibson SG/Les Paul Standard** owned by **Eric Clapton**. The George guitar has an estimate of **\$600,000 to \$800,000**, and the EC specimen is expected to go for **\$30,000 to \$40,000**. Both will be sold at **Hard Rock Cafe New York** on 16 May, and further info can be found at www.juliensauctions.com.





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- Eric Church

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www.elixirstrings.co.uk/phosbronze

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Your new voice in Phosphor Bronze**



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Mikael Åkerfeldt

The Opeth main man's progressive death metal credentials are beyond doubt, but will he cower in fear when confronted by the...

10 Questions We Ask Everyone

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

"It was a Levin nylon string. I got it from my grandmother. I was very young – I was probably seven or eight. I smashed that one up but then got another one from her! I wanted an electric guitar. In those days, to have an acoustic guitar was wimpy! I felt ashamed. I had a guitar but it was like not having a guitar because it was not electric. I remember painting knobs on it. But it was a good guitar; all solid wood."

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

"I don't have my guitars in my home. I have a few. I have a '74 Strat that looks like The Duck [Yngwie Malmsteen's 1972 Strat], so it's kind of yellow. And I have a Trameleuc – it's a very obscure acoustic nylon-string –

and a Martin 000-16. But I'd probably take the Strat."

3 WHAT'S THE OLDEST GUITAR THAT YOU OWN?

"It's a Gibson. An SG with the 'lollipop' vibrato and two P-90s from 1966. That would be the oldest."

4 WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU PRACTISED AND WHAT DID YOU PLAY?

"Yesterday. I didn't practise, I played. For some reason, because of that Trameleuc nylon string, it's so nice, I picked out the acoustic mid-section from Yngwie's Suite...

"In those days, to have an acoustic guitar was wimpy! I felt ashamed. I had a guitar but it was like not having a guitar because it was not electric"

Opus... whatever it is! [*Trilogy Suite Op: 5 – Ed*] I always wanted to learn it and now I know how to play it."

5 WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU CHANGED YOUR OWN STRINGS?

"Again, on that guitar, yesterday. I do it all the time but on tour, never."

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

"As a collective, we shake hands when the intro's rolling. That's the only thing we have to do. Depending on how my voice is, I warm up the voice a little bit. I know this is a guitar magazine, but voice comes first for me when I play live – I need it to be in as good shape as possible. It's probably in a toilet, usually someone has just taken a s**t..."

7 ...AND FIVE MINUTES AFTER?

"I'm having a cigarette and a beer. Right away."

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

"We played a beautiful festival in southern Germany. I was going to go down to the barrier to rock out with the crowd – one of the very rare moments I do that – but that day I was in the zone! The fence had bars I didn't see, so I was walking and just tripped over... it really hurt and both my shins started bleeding."

9 WHAT SONG WOULD YOU PLAY ON ACOUSTIC AROUND A CAMPFIRE?

"Well, the whole purpose of that is that people are going to join in, so it would be something easy that you can play when you are drunk. *Knocking On Heaven's Door*, or some s**t like that!"

10 WHAT'S THE CLOSEST YOU'VE EVER COME TO QUITTING MUSIC?

"Every day. Not listening to music, but playing... sometimes I don't want to do it any more. It's not that I don't love it, because I do. It's *because* I love it. It sounds weird and it's hard to explain. I have confidence issues and sometimes I feel like I should not be doing this! But also, on the other hand, it's what makes me me. It's a weird feeling to be honest."

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Star letter



KORG

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BLOCK HEADS

A while ago you published my letter pointing out that, despite the PT Barnum-like fanfare, there was nothing intrinsically new in the PRS Narrow Field Humbucker, since most manufacturers had been making single coil-sized and P-90-sized humbuckers for yonks.

Recently, we were treated to a similar kerfuffle with Gretsch and its 'all-new' centre-blocked guitars. Presumably they've forgotten their own history? In 2001, Gretsch introduced a guitar called the 6120N Nashville, a thinline semi (1.7-inch) with a spruce centre block and (uniquely for Gretsch, I think) a deep Florentine cutaway affording good access to the dusty end. Despite being built like a 335 with a 175 outline, in all other respects it was a proper Gretsch: humped block inlays, Filter'Trons, Bigsby, orange stain, gold bling, and the usual price tag.

It was only made for about a year, but pre-dates the current much-publicised range by well over a decade. More Barnum, methinks!

Richard the Professor, Charing, Kent.

Well, they say there's nothing new under the sun, Richard, and it's probably more true of guitar design than anything else. But, even though it smacks of lack of imagination, the recycling of old ideas into 'new' selling points could have an upside. After all, when our other halves ask, "But why do you need another one?" you have to have *something* to say, right?

MIGHTY MANZANERA

The Pink Floyd cover feature (issue 390) made fascinating reading, not least because it looked beyond the final product and gave insight into the process that led to its creation. To use an aerospace analogy (I work for a well-known helicopter maker), it was far more 'repair, modification and overhaul' than 'new build', effectively using artefacts recovered from an archaeological dig to create a new work of art!

To perform that kind of task requires a person with a different mindset to those initially creating any object of value; it demands a multi-talented, simpatico enthusiast/restorer with an ultra-flexible approach. This is because the ultimate deliverable isn't specified anywhere, and at any point the customer (in this case David Gilmour) can decide that the direction must change.

It takes a very special guy to take on a project like that, and for *The Endless River*, Phil Manzanera was there to do it – and he's done a brilliant job in selecting, patching, linking and sequencing the surplus unused material so that it has, effectively, taken on a life of its own without including anything unauthentic.

Having briefly known Phil in his *Quiet Sun* days pre-Roxy, I was always impressed not only with his musicianship, but also by his calmness, reasonableness and his ability to listen to other people's opinions – one of the politest and most self-effacing and most talented people I have ever met. From your interview, he is still that same great guy. What a contrast to others! I hope that his contribution to the album is given the full recognition it deserves by those that listen to it. Thank you, Phil!

Mike May, via email

Phil Manzanera is indeed a bit of a national treasure, Mike. Listening back to Roxy Music, you realise what an unselfish yet imaginative player he's always been, supporting and elevating the song: from the sawtooth howl of his wonderfully concise solo in *Virginia Plain*, to the caviar-smooth melodic licks he plays in the outro of that hymn to the high life, *More Than This*. We doff our hats to him.

BLACK AND WHITE ISSUE?

I know the main specs for producing a quality guitar are good playability, sound and build. However, closely following those parameters must be aesthetics. Which is why, I can't for the life of me understand why a premium guitar producer like Suhr would fit a black humbucker to their white Classic Pro (issue 392). It looks awful and spoils the whole appearance of what is otherwise a very smart instrument. It's not even as if they've had to make do with another maker's product, it's their own pickup. Surely they could make it in white! If QC at Suhr actually looked at the Classic Pro and said, "Yeah, that looks the business" then I just don't get it.

Baffled of South Shields, via email

There is no accounting for taste, Baffled. Actually, we don't mind the black 'bucker, but, yes, it does stand out. That can be good or bad according to viewpoint. Suhr is no slouch when it comes to styling, of course, but it's even more certain that the sonic performance of the pickup was their first concern – because, after all, the look of a guitar is such a personal thing. So we'd say *Vive La Différence*. But,

just out of interest, can anyone suggest any other guitars that they feel have been spoiled by a single styling detail?

HANDMADE 'UN

I am an old dude now, and having played guitar since my teens, recently decided to have a go at building one and so had a crack at a Les Paul-inspired single-cut.

Although, at times, the sweat poured off my brow in fear of producing a bin job, overall it was a very rewarding experience. And I now have a guitar, which cannot be compared to a Gibson, but I feel is better than many an entry-level equivalent out there. And all for a £240 outlay, including the strings, and a bit of patient graft. It sounds and plays well, too.

I originally intended the back, neck and headstock to be a Georgian mahogany colour, but having applied a water-based wood stain, I had all manner of trouble applying a nitrocellulose lacquer spray. A lot of sanding later, I applied a normal black stain, and then finished in numerous coats of poly varnish. I then circled with 0000-grade wire wool soaked in beeswax, followed by a final polish with Gerlitz guitar polish. The front, I simply sanded, applied a few coats of Danish oil to bring out the lovely grain, and then sprayed three coats of nitrocellulose lacquer, again finishing off with the Gerlitz. The fingerboard, I treated with boiled linseed oil.

The tuners are Klusons, and I wired and soldered vintage-style. By the way, the detail on the front of the headstock I did using stick-on door numbers I had in the shed! I would recommend readers to have a go at a build. You'll be a wiser guitarist for it. And depending on how it turns out, be proud to say, "I made that!"

Ken Willis, Norwich

Great work, Ken – making your own guitar really brings fresh admiration for the masters of this difficult craft, as well as informing your own buying decisions ever after. Keep the homebuilds coming, folks, and maybe we'll run a competition later in the year to find the most talented homebuilders out there. What do you think?



LONG WAY HOME

I was having a think after a recent discussion of why the guitar has become such a popular instrument, compared to others, and realised that my own interest in it derives from a really diverse range of influences.

Actually, getting a guitar was never a God-given. My first ever instrument was a recorder, but it was a plastic thing from Woolworths because my parents were sceptical about paying £30 (a fair amount in the late 60s) for a wooden-boxed one like all the other kids had. It appealed because when several friends got together and we played 'armies', they played them in unison (of sorts) as we walked to the dumps to play and it made it feel like we were marching to war!

My second instrument was a Gazoo – a round Kazoo – in a nice green translucent plastic. It resembled a flying saucer! I loved the 'bzzz-ness' and drone-like capability if hummed subtly. A bit like a Moog...

My third instrument was a jaw harp, and again I was bought a bass version by my parents (in ignorance) and consequently it didn't make that 'wow-wow-wow' in quite the same way. I also learned violin and was a top chorister in the Temple Church Choir in London in the day – and so I must also add voice as another instrument.

I very much wanted a synth in 1972 and '73, and lusted after a Mini Korg 700, but it was the

same price as a moped and I so wanted freedom and to impress girls! So I flirted with the idea of maybe a bright-coloured Farfisa or Bontempi organ – the ones on those flimsy chrome tube collapsible legs – and a moped. I think I saw their limitations, though – organs, that is. But I just loved the 'sit up and pay attention' effects that synths produced at that time. How cool would I be if I had those?!

So, after being entrapped in the Roxy/Bowie thing and going to my first concerts, I had to have something to express my musicality, and an acoustic was *not* going to cut it... a Cherry Red SG copy and big red wah pedal had to do... and that purple moped, of course!

So, can you see a thread in my musical influences? I seemed to be attracted to bright stand-out colours and ear-catching tones...

Mark Gardiner, Farnham

Mark, you are a veritable musical magpie – we recommend you now buy one of those riotously coloured Zoot Suit SG models that came out a few years ago, fit it out for use with a Roland guitar synth or similar, and then strap the lot to the back of a Vespa. That way you'd have all the bases covered! We wish you well on your technicolour odyssey through music, sir, but are glad you finally settled on the guitar as your main squeeze.

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WISH LIST

Photography by **Joseph Branston**

Gretsch Professional Collection Limited Editions

£3,370 & £3,130

No guitar turns heads like a Gretsch hollowbody. And few can compete with the visual thrills on offer from these limited-edition 2015 additions to the company's Professional Collection: the G6120-1959LTV Chet Atkins Hollow Body Limited Edition Quilted Maple and the G6136T Falcon Limited Crème de Marine.

The Crème de Marine in the Falcon's name is a reference to its unusual soft blue hue. It comes kitted out with the same hardware and top-class touches of the existing G6136T, including High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups, Space Control bridge and Bigsby B6GB vibrato – and as you'd expect, it's all gold-plated.

The latest in a long line of Chet Atkins models adds a quilt maple top for a top-of-the-line hybrid of old-school playability and visual flair. This hollowbody still features a nitro Vintage Orange lacquer, while it opts for a pair of TV Jones Classic Filter'Tron pickups, plus a rosewood-base Rocking Bar bridge and Bigsby B6C.

Professional Collection models are made in limited numbers in the small Terada factory in Kanie, Japan, where many processes are still done by hand. That explains the wallet-worrying price, but it's this dedication to instrument craft that ensures the company's reputation continues to be held in such high regard. 

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VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>





1 A pair of Gretsch High Sensitive Filter'Trons grace the Falcon and have a slightly more brash voicing than the TV Jones units in the Chet Atkins 6120

2 The Falcon features an ebony fretboard with 'Neo-Classic' thumbnail inlays

3 Aside from the snazzy quilted maple top, the rest of the 6120 is the classic Chet Atkins three-ply maple recipe

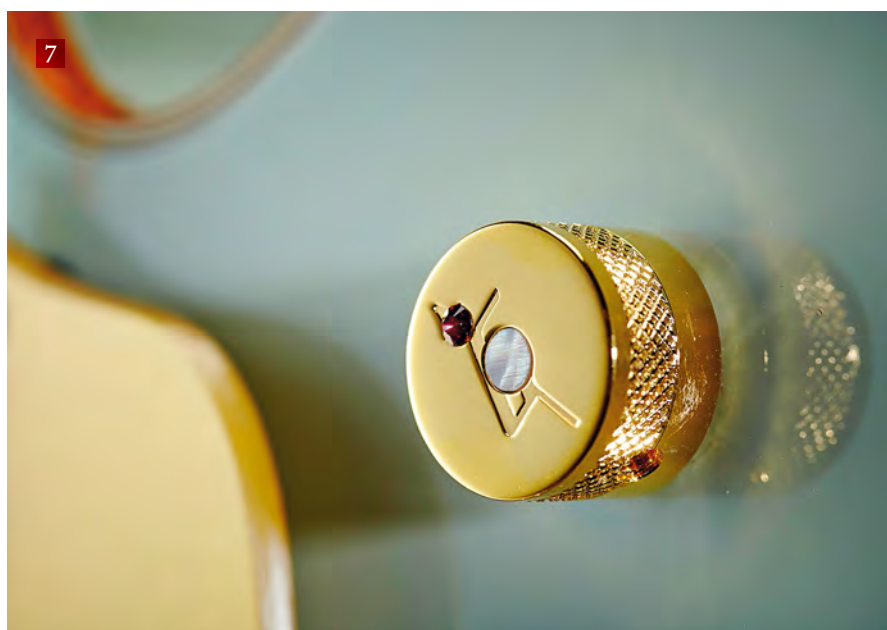
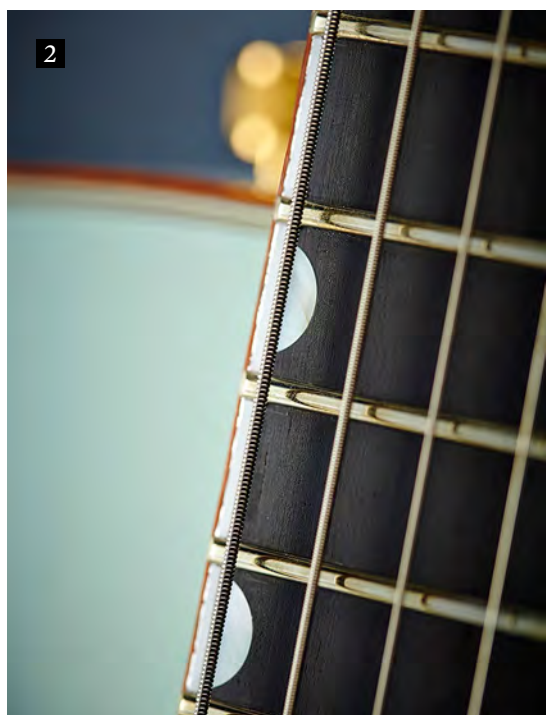
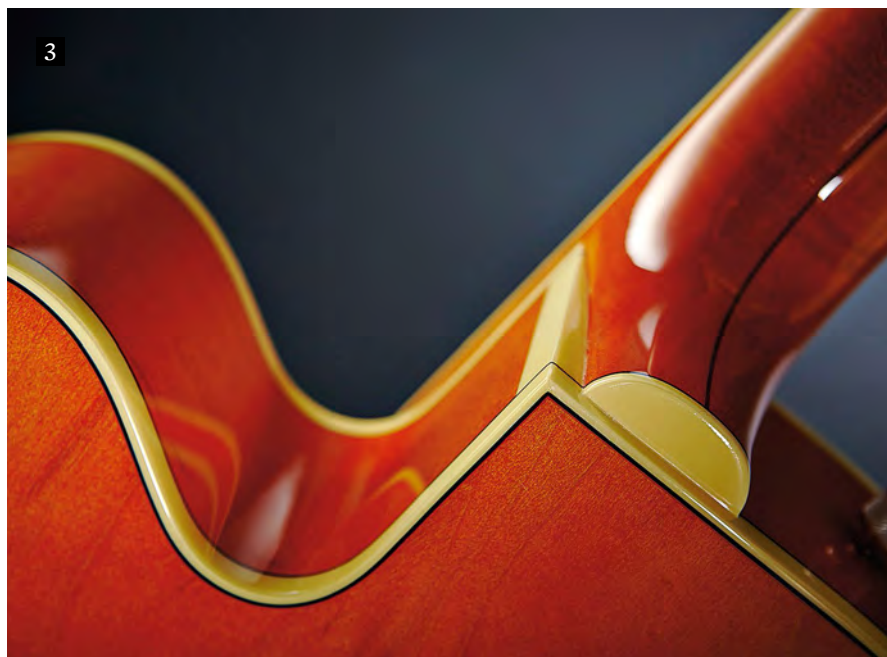
4 The chrome-plated aluminium Bigsby B6C vibrato certainly looks the part, and paired with the Rocking Bar bridge, provides all the

wobble and shimmer you could possibly wish for

5 Despite the blingy top, things are typically understated at the headstock end of the Chet Atkins 6120

6 This limited-edition bird is finished in a Crème de Marine polyurethane – a kind of baby blue take on the Falcon aesthetic

7 The Falcon's glam 50s styling is very much apparent, from the bejewelled gold-plated knobs to the gold sparkle binding, and falcon motif'd gold pickguard



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Music



Robben Ford

Into The Sun

★★★★

Mascot Records

Ford's latest expands his range beyond going back to his roots, and it's an upbeat record packed with tasteful chops and lively cameos

No doubt Robben Ford's fans would happily hear him endlessly channel his influences, and 2013's *Bringing It Back Home* is the go-to record for that. Yet on *Into The Sun*, his rule was "to not have a lid on things", to challenge his horizons by enlisting a fresh set of collaborators, and to create something forward-looking. The

result is a varied set, with an improvised feel to the soloing and a crisp, live-band vibe. It's more diverse than his other records, with more variety, and Ford coaxes a broad spectrum of tones out of his '63 and '64 SGs, his 1960 Telecaster, a Gibson B-25, his Dumble Overdrive Special and a smattering of effects, including a Strymon TimeLine and a Hermida Audio Zendrive.

Opener *Rose Of Sharon* is a loping acoustic blues with a cinematic feel; the chord changes show Ford's mastery of blending blues, jazz and folk. Soon, the album yields its most intriguing compositions and collaborations.



On *Justified*, Robben trades vocals with Keb' Mo' and gritty licks with pedal-steel guru Robert Randolph over a Southern-flavoured barrelhouse blues;

while *Breath Of Me*, co-written with vocalist ZZ Ward, is a moody soul duet with a faint after-hours jazz ambience. Check out, too, Ford's legato runs on his SG.

High Heels And Throwing Things is mid-tempo funk with great interplay between Ford and Warren Haynes. Slide players seem to bring out the expressive side of Ford's phrasing, and the sparse *So Long 4 You*, with Sonny Landreth, spotlights the record's most unrestrained, fluid playing.

Cause Of War is a heavy diversion, and there's a touch of Keef about *Same Train*'s sleazy doublestop runs. *Stone Cold Heaven* sees Robben trading licks with young guitarist Tyler Bryant.

Ford calls *Into The Sun* "upbeat, with a positive vibe and a good-time feel," and though he claims it's a record of the times, it has the sunny, 'musicologist' approach of an early 70s Clapton record such as *461 Ocean Boulevard*, where nothing outstays its welcome, and you can't predict where it's going to go next. He thinks it's one of the best he's ever done... he may well be right. **[BW]**

Download: *So Long 4 You*
For fans of: 70s Clapton, Sonny Landreth



On the Record



ALBUM: *Primrose Green*
STUDIO: Minbal, Chicago, Illinois
PRODUCER: Cooper Crain

"Most of the record was improvised. I had bits of lyrics and riffs and then I just kind of worked them out as it came"



Ryley Walker

He may channel UK folk's fingerstyle greats, but on the stunning *Primrose Green*, Ryley Walker treads his own path

The Sessions

"This record was made here in Chicago at Minbal Studio and my friend Cooper Crain [of the band Cave] produced it. He had a big hand in recording and a big influence on it, and definitely with the weird instrumentation and the fuzzy sounds.

"The studio is on the West Side of Chicago in this industrial wasteland. There's garbage everywhere. You can walk a mile and maybe you'd find a liquor store and a cheque-cashing place. We recorded it in May of last year and I remember it was the first day I could wear shorts. I don't know how it is

everywhere else, but in Chicago, you really can't wear shorts until May. So the day that we started it was the first day I could wear shorts and I felt incredibly happy."

The Mix

"Cooper works at a fast pace, and we aren't really the type of band to sit on our asses all day looking for a magical tone. The first record [2014's *All Kinds Of You*] sounded like a winter album and it feels like we've maybe produced more of a summer record here. That first one was recorded in winter and they were very insular

songs [in both sound and lineup], whereas these were very collaborative, as I was playing them with my friends."

The Guitars

"I've got this Guild D-35 that I love and swear by. That's the one I've used exclusively for the last few years. She's a warhorse. She's been all over the world with me. It's really old, too – a '73 or '74. Those are really easy to come by in the States and they're still not that popular.

"On the last track [*Hide The Roses*] there's a Gibson Hummingbird that I played that was really not in good condition.

The strings had to have been like five years old, but at that exact moment in time I liked it. But for the most part I'm playing that Guild D-35.

"Then Brian Sulpizio [who plays electric guitar on the album] has this cool, super-modified 2002 ES-135. He's super into electronics, so he's switched the guts out of it, like, 10 different times. He has this super-fried 60s West Coast sound, but a really nice smooth jazz sound as well."

The Tones

"The acoustic was mic'd with a Neumann U87 and two small



Ryley's budding talent blooms on *Primrose Hill*

"I've got this Guild D-35 that I love and swear by. She's a warhorse"

condensers on the bridge and 12th fret. We also put a Fishman Rare Earth soundhole pickup in the guitar and played it through a Twin Reverb. Mixing the two sources gave some of the best heady acoustic tone I've had.

"Brian used a modified MXR Blue Box and this small vintage Gibson practice amp the studio had, with the clean channel turned all the way up [and mic'd with a Royer R-121]. The amp's god-given distortion is always a better choice in my opinion – just beat the amp to s*t and nice things will come out of it!"

"Cooper then re-amped some of the electric tones through a Maxon Organic Overdrive in the mixing process. The fried electric guitar sounds on *Sweet Satisfaction* are probably the best examples of that."

The Lessons

"All of this is thanks to engineer and producer man Cooper Crain. Minbal is a small room that Cooper built and he knows every square inch of it. It was 'get in and get out'. Having a really good trust and vibe in the room made everything go smoothly. There wasn't too much trial and error and, fortunately for us, it fell into place very easily.

"Most of the record was improvised. I had bits of lyrics and riffs and then I just kind of

worked them out as it came. That comes from playing with those jazz guys who are just brilliant improvisers... Brian Sulpizio's playing all of the electric parts and we've got a good playing relationship. That comes from living with him for a long time. I mean, I could tell you what the guy's going to eat for breakfast every day."

The Verdict

"The album's named after a cocktail of whiskey and morning glory seeds [with absinthe-like hallucinatory properties – Ed]. It reminds me of a point in my life where I didn't have a lot of cares in the world and I was pretty happy, just making that cocktail. It's a nice light, heady trip. I wanted to incorporate that in the record and I think that kind of applies to [the feel of] it.

"I'm always in the studio making new records and I'll hopefully make another in the summer. If I could have a record out every year it would be nice. To always be playing new stuff is therapeutic for me." [MP]

Primrose Green by Ryley Walker is available now on Dead Oceans



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Parlophone



Britpopers' first studio LP with Coxon since 1999

Five days in a Hong Kong sweatbox plus a month of post-production spit 'n' polish has delivered an eighth Blur album that vindicates the reunion. Playing a cobbled-together Strat, Graham Coxon is typically adventurous: try the intergalactic fuzz of *Go Out* and *Thought I Was A Spaceman*'s trippy washes. Fortunately, Damon Albarn's melodies ensure it's never atonal, with *Ong Ong* and *Lonesome Street* channelling the spirit of 1995. [HY]

Download: *Lonesome Street*

For fans of: Syd Barrett, The Kinks, My Bloody Valentine

Joe Bonamassa Muddy Wolf At Red Rocks

★★★★

Provogue



Live tribute to a pair of blues legends

The freight train that is Brand Bonamassa keeps a-rollin' and here, JoBo doffs his cap in the direction of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Also available on DVD and Blu-ray, this two-CD set features the songs of Wolf and Waters alongside Joe's own material. What he lacks vocally in comparison to the velvet growls of two of popular music's greatest, he makes up for with the sheer quantity of notes wrung out of an array of desirable guitars. [CV]

Download: *Stuff You Gotta Watch*

For fans of: Eric Clapton, Gary Moore, Rory Gallagher

Dan Patlansky Dear Silence Thieves

★★★★

Self-released



Propulsive, classy modern blues-rock

Award-winning South African Dan Patlansky brings some much needed spark to an over-subscribed genre on his seventh album. Opener *Backbite* fuses Stevie Wonder Clavinova funk with a hard-charging chorus that really elevates the track at a point when others would simply let it grind along. Similarly powerful is the smouldering *Hold On*, which showcases Patlansky's top-drawer, SRV-meets-Moore soloing to stunning effect. It seems churlish to call a player so far into his career 'one to watch', but he is. [JD]

Download: *Hold On*

For fans of: Joe Bonamassa, Philip Sayce, Simon McBride, Gary Moore

Curtis Knight & The Squires (featuring Jimi Hendrix) You Can't Use My Name

★★★★

Legacy



Studio sounds from before Jimi took over

Jimi's time as a sideman with Little Richard and The Isley Brothers is well known, but it was his stint with Curtis Knight in 1965-66 that resulted in contractual problems that dogged him throughout his career. The pair of original Hendrix instrumental compositions here – *Hornet's Nest* and *Knock Yourself Out* – provide a fascinating insight into a Duo-Sonic-toting pre-Experience Jimi already experimenting confidently with screaming fuzz tones (the former) and funky, elastic R&B (the latter). [CV]

Download: *Knock Yourself Out (Flying On Instruments)*

For fans of: The Jimi Hendrix Experience, The Isley Brothers



JoBo pays tribute to two blues legends on his new LP

The Boom Band The Boom Band

★★★★

Self-released



Brit blues collaboration bears fruit

Comprising some of the leading lights of the UK blues scene – Marcus Bonfanti, Jon Amor and Matt Taylor – and former England cricketer Mark Butcher, *The Boom Band* is a mixed bag of blues, southern rock and country. Bonfanti stars; his weatherworn vocals and guitar providing notable highlights. [CV]

Download: *Diamonds In The Rust*

For fans of: Aynsley Lister, Gov't Mule, Danny Bryant

The Vintage Caravan Arrival

★★★★

Nuclear Blast



Intricate retro riff-rock from young Icelandic trio

The Vintage Caravan formed in 2006 when Óskar Logi Ágústsson (guitar, vocals) and Guðjón Reynisson (drums) were just 12 years old. Their psychedelic, proggy blues-rock is heavy on riffs with a real 70s flavour. Ágústsson is no slouch when it comes to lead work and has an ear for a hook, too. [CV]

Download: *Shaken Beliefs*

For fans of: Black Sabbath, Rush, Deep Purple

Robin Adams The Garden

★★★★

Backshop Records



Pastoral Glaswegian folk with a heavy heart

An album about a tortured artist who died 125 years ago may sound unpalatable, but *The Garden* is a work of meditative beauty focused on the life of Vincent van Gogh. Despite the subject matter, the acoustic playing is a delight, with thoughtful chords and fingerpicking decorating sparse arrangements. [GW]

Download: *Holy Smoke*

For fans of: Nick Drake, Bert Jansch, John Martyn

Jules Carter Trio Done Misbehaving

★★★★

Self-released



Dan-infused blues with a touch of Brit grit

There are many nods to Steely Dan here, plus a cameo from Elliott Randall on *The Purdie Shuffle*. Carter's bluesy playing across jazz-rock changes is accomplished, while his rhythm chops are cleaver-sharp. The lyrical dissection of romantic conquests is either brutally honest or too much information, but if you enjoy Carlton and Herington, check it out. [JD]

Download: *Bedroom Eyes*

For fans of: Donald Fagen, Jon Herington, Larry Carlton

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STEVE EARLE

As a protégé of Texan songwriters Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clarke – artists looked upon as founding fathers of Americana – Steve Earle has consistently served up Southern music as real as grits and greasy greens. Now, 15 albums down the line, new LP *Terraplane* finds him stalking his own dusty blues backroads

Words Julian Piper

Steve Earle's breakthrough 1986 album, *Guitar Town*, was a Nashville epic reeking of rhinestone suits and cowboy boots, with more than a hint of *Born In The USA*. Marked down as some kind of revved up 'country Springsteen', two years later *Copperhead Road* appeared. Loud and edgy, with The Pogues onboard and a song about a dope growing Vietnam Vet, it conclusively ended any suggestion that he was just another product from the Nashville assembly line.

Earle's career has seen him explore everything from bluegrass and honky tonk country rock, to an album of material by his mentor Townes Van Zandt, with a chameleon-like ability to change direction. And along the way he's found time to act in the acclaimed HBO series *Treme*, written books and plays, battled alcoholism, and been married seven times. His latest album, *Terraplane*, was written over five weeks spent backpacking around Europe, and finds him rediscovering his Texas blues roots, with a little Chicago thrown in for good measure.

1 The blues is nothing new
"I grew up in Houston and used to hear acoustic guys like Mance Lipscomb and Lightnin' Hopkins playing in clubs around town, so although the electric side is more intimidating, I've played fingerstyle

blues for years. But they were both very different – Mance played solo and what he came up with was really dance music, even though he never used a band, but Lightnin' was the kind of guy happy to play with whoever came along. So I've tried to incorporate a little bit of each of them in the acoustic songs. Then I also heard Johnny Winter, Freddie King and ZZ Top, and the British bands, so the blues has always been part of my DNA.

"People don't always recognise it as such, but the British take on blues is a huge part of rock 'n' roll history; those bands thought they were playing the stuff just like the records, but of course they weren't. What they did was to come up with blues rock. I remember seeing a band in Austin during the early 70s called Krackerjack, with Uncle John Turner on drums and Tommy Shannon playing bass. They were both in Johnny Winter's original band, but back then they sounded like Free. Cross pollination made this golden era of rock that I come from and I'm not sure that it's over."

2 Go where the action is
"I've been really lucky to have good teachers and get to hang out with some of my heroes. I arrived in Nashville in 1974, when it was still wide open. I went because I knew that was where all the songwriters were, and you'd find singers like me and

David Olney, guys who were at street level, but sitting around in the same hotel room, playing music with Neil Young. I was 31 when *Guitar Town* came out, and there were a lot of misconceptions about me that came about around that time, not that it was anyone else's fault."

3 Time is not on your side
"I always knew that one day I would come up with a blues album; the emotions are about human experience, democratic, and something we all share. I'm beginning to feel pressed for time and that I should produce anything I want to see out there – like my book and this album – while I still have the energy!"

4 The bar is really high
"I named the album after the Robert Johnson song, but what I was trying to do was to write new blues songs based on records I grew up listening to – Howlin' Wolf, the first ZZ Top records and Canned Heat. I heard them all at the same time in 1968, but was immediately drawn to the Chess Records cut in Chicago. They were great songs, and the Chess brothers' way of recording made them the only records being cut in the States that were sonically close to British records. They sounded as good as Beatles records: everything is in place and they had a very special vibe."



Steve's early days on acoustic helped shape his future sound

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"Nowadays, you hear blues guitar players and harmonica players playing long extended solos, but that never came from recording, it came from live performance, and the whole 60s mentality of bands jamming. The original records were pop records, two minutes and 30 seconds long, designed to be played on jukeboxes. Those records were recorded short on purpose so people had to keep putting money in the f**king machine! But when blues bands played live it was the opposite, extending the songs so people stayed on the dancefloor. A different deal. It was a whole art form and I naturally returned to that idea when I wrote songs like *You're The Best Lover [That I Ever Had]*. I'm trying to recreate that feel but I know the bar is really high. And I've got Chris Masterson playing guitar in my band, who's from Texas and cut his teeth playing electric blues. I'm pretty comfortable on acoustic guitar, but it was good having his encouragement when it came to playing the electric numbers."

5 Roots are the core

"Tradition has always been very important to me, and I made the bluegrass record [*The Mountain*, 1999] with the Del McCoury band as a kind of experiment in musicology. I was trying to write songs that bluegrass bands might play at festivals after I was dead, and I think that came through because several of those songs have been covered by some great bluegrass bands since. But I still get called the Bluegrass Antichrist by people out there!"

6 It's all in the meter

"I take a songwriting camp each summer, I call it Camp Copperhead, and I get my students to write in haiku, giving them a specific form to adhere to. You might write a great verse and chorus, but that's when the work really starts: once you've established a meter and a rhyme scheme, you have to adhere to that in the verses that follow. And having to make second verses as good as the first verses is the challenge in great songwriting, the hardest part of the job. Allen Ginsberg said, 'Meter's not important until you learn to write meter in the first place.'"

7 Embrace your limitations

"I started off wanting to play like Hendrix but ended up being a folkie because my dad wouldn't buy me an electric guitar. I didn't start playing electric until I was in my 20s and heard people like Elvis Costello and Bruce Springsteen who were using the electric guitar in a whole new way with their songwriting. I know my limitations as a guitar player, and from the beginning I've had to work around it to the point where it's been a very natural thing in my music. I write most of my songs in G or A, and just move the capo to where they sound good."

8 Admit that you're a guitar addict

"I've got a bunch of instruments and I'm addicted to buying them! I bought my first Martin in 1969 for \$150, a pre-war D-18 that

somebody had been keeping under a bed. But I moved on to playing Gibsons because I was hitchhiking around a lot, and someone pointed out that they had an adjustable truss rod. That gave me a little confidence because I felt it was something I could attend to myself. Now, I collect guitars made in 1955 because it was the year I was born, and also 21-style Martins; I like the rosewood and the fact that they're really quite plain, no frills. When I'm touring and playing every night, I use new guitars rather than taking any old instruments out on the road.

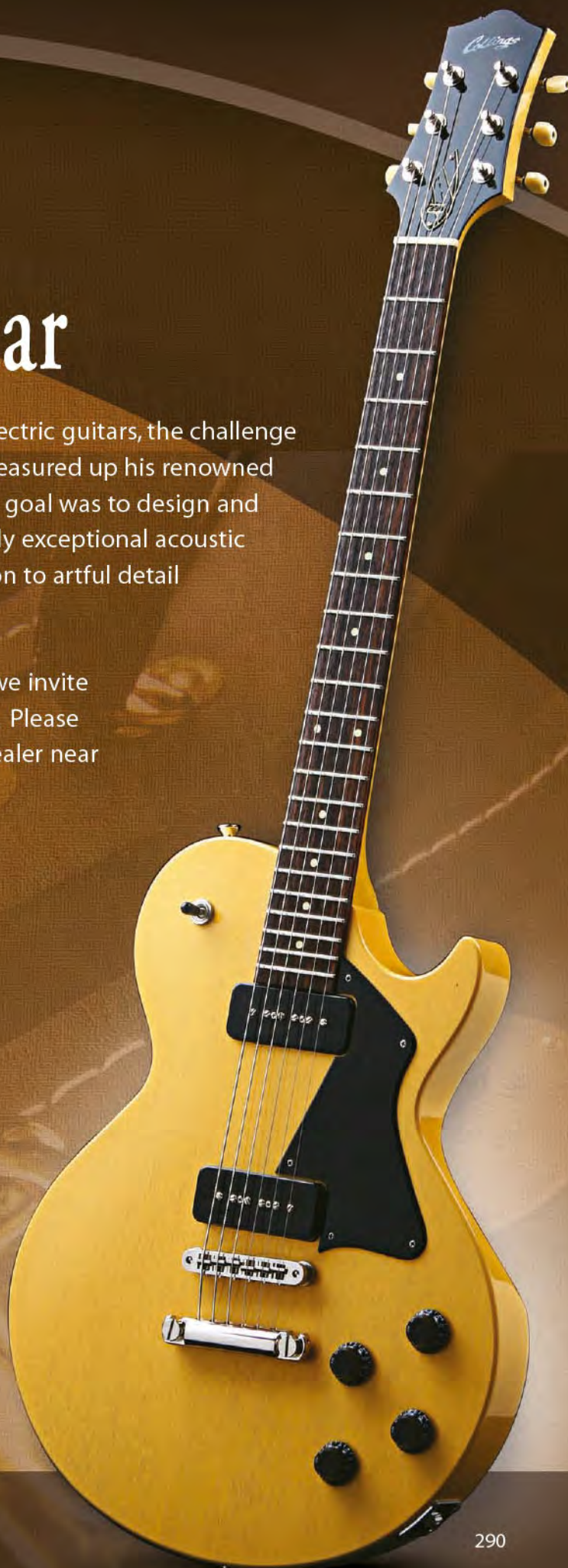
"I use a lot of vintage amps in the studio and on *Terraplane* I used a 1959 Fender Bassman, but on the road I use a Peavey Classic 50 with four 10s. They're really reliable and I've never blown one up except one I pushed over at the end of a show!

"I collect a lot of different things, Gibson flat-tops with a pickup in them like a J-160E, and variations made by people like Harmony and National. They're not great acoustic guitars but electrically they're great. I'm using a Gibson J-160E on *King Of The Blues* on this album, because when I used to see Lightnin' Hopkins play in the early 70s, it was the kind of guitar he was using, a Gibson J-50 with a DeArmond pickup. Then there's also a 1955 Tele, 1955 Les Paul Custom, and a lot of old Martin and Gibson acoustics in the mix. There's no real logic to why collectors collect what they collect – it's a disease and I sometimes feel guilty about owning as many instruments as I do!"

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Let The Good Times Roll

Eschewing the slavish-yet-stylish retro worship of his first album, *Signs And Signifiers*, JD McPherson's second record, *Let The Good Times Roll*, loosens the tie with a mad melding of rhythm 'n' blues, Black Keys and bad medicine

Words Matt Parker **Photography** Joseph Branston

“I don’t tend to take a lot of medication. It’s not a thing – I just don’t,” says Oklahoma’s R&B rocker JD McPherson. “But then one night I was in pretty bad shape, so I found some cold medicine and I just took it – no big deal.”

Or so he thought. “It turns out that it was a couple of years expired and I just went on this horrible, horrible trip. Time slowed down; I could hear my heart beat, like ‘clunk... clunk’; I had cold sweats; I had this hyper-focus and I felt like I wasn’t blinking.”

Lest you wonder where this is going, JD is sat with *Guitarist* pre-gig in Band On The Wall, Manchester, recalling the inception of his second album’s title track, *Let The Good Times Roll*.

“I was watching this episode of *Frasier* where they’re doing Shakespeare,” he chuckles. “And I had this whole alternate storyline to *Romeo And Juliet*, where Romeo’s dead and he’s expecting to see Juliet’s ghost. So I wrote that song in a cold medicine stupor about that. Isn’t that square? Some jazz guys were on heroin, The Beatles were smoking grass and I’m writing stuff on over-the-counter cold medicine!”

The story is neatly representative of the new record’s direction. While JD’s first album, 2012’s *Signs And Signifiers*, saw the Broken Arrow, Oklahoma man slavishly fashion a vintage-correct 50s-style rhythm ‘n’ blues collection, *Let The Good Times Roll* is about taking that clean-cut base and getting just a little weirder with it.

“It was just loving all of these different sounds but wanting to write better songs and experiment a little more, which is what I think it’s all about,” he says. “I wanted to take rock ‘n’ roll to art school a little bit and see what happens.”

Retro freaks need not, err, freak, however: it’s still a lush, analogue record packed full of honeyed Fender tones, stunning vintage outboard gear and bold, unobscured songwriting – and, in that sense, it’s truer to the spirit of rock ‘n’ roll.

“It can be argued that it’s still 100 per cent this idea of vintage recording,” explains JD. “But I pulled a lot of influence from Allen Toussaint’s production with Irma Thomas, some of Owen Bradley’s productions with Roy Orbison, plus a lot of country music influences. Maybe not in the singing or the songs, but in some of the sounds – the weird

fuzz guitar sounds that were on early 60s country. It was like picking and choosing the weirdest stuff that happened pre-1964.”

Second Time’s A Charm?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the more experimental nature of the writing and recording, attempts to recreate the atmosphere of *Signs And Signifiers’* straightforward sessions did not go smoothly. The first record was produced by Hi-Style Records honcho Jimmy Sutton in his Chicago studio, an experience that led to Sutton playing bass in the band full-time, but this time around it wasn’t working.

“It completely crashed and burned,” recalls JD. “It became apparent that we needed another treatment. That’s when we started looking at outside studios and producers and we found the right one in Valdosta, Georgia with Mr Mark Neill.”

Mark Neill is the engineer/producer behind The Black Keys’ 2010 breakthrough *Brothers*, the man who designed both London’s Toe Rag Studios and Dan Auerbach’s Nashville base and, before any of that, the creator of numerous garage-rock and psych hits.







© KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

“Mark Neill has one of, if not the greatest vintage analogue studios in the country,” says JD, with some authority. “He’s been doing it since the 70s when it was cheap and no-one wanted that stuff any more. Capitol Records was auctioning off, like, [jazz/swing great] Louis Prima’s conga drum, and he got it. Microphones, microphone stands, he built his own console, he’s got all the Ampex [reel-to-reel] stuff, he’s got two EMT plate reverbs... It’s like recording with Owen Bradley.

“And it’s not just the equipment,” JD emphasises. “Studio equipment is important, of course, and you should be pragmatic, but it’s really about the engineer and the knowledge of how to record and how to make sounds happen. And Mark definitely has that.”

A disciple of the oldest arts of recording know-how, Mark Neill is of the ‘read a f**king book’ school of production. A believer in designing rooms according to the rules of the golden ratio, he quite

literally knows the maths behind a mind-blowing kick drum sound. Recording with this kind of personality at Neill’s Soil Of The South studio was, as JD says, an “intense” experience.

“Valdosta, Georgia is a sultry Southern town with hot, damp air,” says the songwriter. “You go into Soil Of The South and it’s like a municipal building from the 1950s. It’s got wood panelling on the walls and old stuff everywhere, but it’s very clean and orderly. Mark is very meticulous. A lot of his stuff is modded and he makes you feel like anything could explode at any moment. It’s always like: ‘Don’t touch that, for God’s sake! Don’t you turn that amp knob! You wanna get shocked!’”

Under My Thumb (Piano)

Guitarist pictures a scene akin to Marty McFly laying down tracks, while Doc Brown mans the desk, but JD says it was also Mark Neill’s attitude that made him a good fit for *Let The Good Times Roll*.

Turning on the Tele

How JD got bit in a Strat attack

When we last spoke to JD McPherson, he was as strong a Telecaster devotee as any we’d met, but as *Guitarist* has learned time and time again, it only takes one instrument – the right one – to change the habit of a lifetime.

“If you would have asked me before making the record what I was going to use, knowing now what I used, I would have denied it,” laughs JD. “I never would have thought this would happen to me, but I completely fell in love with the Fender Stratocaster on this record. That was almost like a posture thing for me, like: ‘I don’t do Strats. I will never play a Strat.’ I’ve said that before! But I completely went bonkers over this Strat. Mark had this Blackie copy and I played 60 per cent of the record on that thing. I didn’t use any of my own guitars!”

“He understood that we didn’t want to make reenactment records. He was into this stuff, but he’s not afraid to push the envelope a bit.” Which is good, because this is an album that reels in everything from African thumb pianos (*Bossy*), to Auerbach-ian staccato riffing (*Head Over Heels*), and on the soulful *Bridgebuilder*, Brian Wilson levels of tenderness.

“That one was a lot of fun to make,” says JD of *Bridgebuilder*. “It was probably the first one I wrote after *Signs...*, and Dan from The Black Keys helped me write that song, but it wasn’t working until we went to Mark’s... He really instilled a lot of confidence in me about my singing and songwriting, made me feel a bit more confident in what I had to offer.”

That new-found confidence in the songwriting is apparent in the simple palette of instrumentation. Thumb pianos aside, JD – a lifelong Tele devotee – became totally enamoured with a Blackie-style Stratocaster owned by Neill, a fact he’s still recovering from.

“I used that and a Rickenbacker, and I fell in love with both of them,” explains JD. “The Rick was a really nice one. I don’t know the model number [likely a 300 Series], but it was a 50s or early-60s style – one of the great big semi-acoustic ones with checkerboard binding. It’s one of the most versatile guitars I’ve ever seen. I was getting Link Wray sounds out of it, Mickey Baker sounds. You can play almost everything. That guitar and the Blackie Strat through a 50s Magnatone amp is it. That’s all I used! And a Gibson acoustic.”



“Studio equipment is important, and you should be pragmatic, but it’s really about the engineer and the knowledge of how to record and how to make sounds happen”



JD kept things simple for the album's instrumentation

Magnatone has been making something of a comeback since the brand was revived in 2013, but Neill is a longtime convert, meaning that despite JD hauling his 15-inch speaker, hand-built Fender Pro-style Textotica combo nigh-on 1,000 miles from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma to Valdosta, Georgia, it still didn't get a look in.

"It's the only amp in Mark's studio and that's the only amp anyone's allowed to use!" says JD of the mystical Magnatone. "We brought a van full of amps down there and we didn't use any of them. Mark might let you compare them, but I tell you, I wish I had that Magnatone in my collection, because it was just magic. He just moves it, so it's either in the hall or in the room, or another part of the room, or facing one way, facing another way – and it totally changes. He knows it inside out."

One of *Guitarist's* favourite tones on the record is the soul-shaking tremolo sound on *Precious* and, having conjured up images of a beaten-up AC30 ageing gracefully in a

studio corner, we're now somewhat perplexed about its origins.

"That's actually one of Mark's pedals. It might have even been a Boss [TR-2], which you would never think!" reveals JD. "If Mark likes the sound of something, he'll use it, it doesn't have to be period-correct. He had this weird little fuzz box that plugs directly into your amp and then you plug into it. The paint had worn all off of it, but it's just the size of a matchbox. It's some little thing he bought for 20 bucks in the 70s, but that's his fuzz."

The Thrive Is Right

While the gear decisions were, er, streamlined by Mr Neill, *Let The Good Times Roll* was still a challenging record

The Auer Of Power

When desperate, turn to Dan

In Mark Neill, JD may share a producer with The Black Keys, but the two acts crossed paths during the early stages of *Let The Good Times Roll*, resulting in the co-written ballad *Bridgebuilder*.

"Dan [Auerbach] came to a gig in St Louis," explains JD. "He had a night off with the 'Keys and we hung out and listened to music, and we have very similar tastes. He invited me out to Nashville to do a little songwriting and I was grateful for that, because I didn't really know what to do next. We were halfway through the cycle of the first record and it felt like something needed to be happening. I think he's one of the best singers out there and I really like his songs. He's really tapped into this like mid-60s to mid-70s regional soul thing and he's turned that into a cottage industry."

to make. Despite the help of Dan Auerbach, the aforementioned *Bridgebuilder* had about three or four lives before it was finalised, while *Let The Good Times Roll* was recorded at three different studios.

"When we first did that, everybody said, 'That's going to be the first single' and I was like, 'Well, that's really great, but I really wish we could get it right!'" laughs JD. "We went into the studio with no demos. Nothing was fleshed out. Everything was up here [points to head] and we were trying to get things worked out, and sometimes it happened and sometimes it didn't... They say – and this is a terrible analogy for a man to make – but they say that with childbirth, you don't remember the pain!"

It nevertheless feels like a hit, as though *Let The Good Times Roll* could do for rhythm and blues what The Black Key's *Brothers* did for blues-rock. So, despite the accidental trips, Mark Neill's "intense" genius and the maddening re-writes – what made him realise that he'd birthed a worthy successor to *Sigs...*?

"My wife," he concludes after a pensive moment. "When I would play her tracks back. She's the last editor for me. I put the headphones on her and played her the tracks and she looked up and was crying. That was when I was like, 'Okay! We're good!' That was the best review I could get. I don't care what anyone else says!" 

"In the studio, it's always like: 'Don't touch that, for God's sake! Don't you turn that amp knob! You wanna get shocked!'"



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On The Bone

STYLE FILE

If you love those glorious 40s-era T-Bone Walker rhythm & blues licks, step this way – JD McPherson is a master of the style. And he wants to teach you his secrets

HE might not be so well known in the UK, but Oklahoma's JD McPherson is quite the rising star across the Atlantic, with two successful albums and even a *Late Show Letterman* appearance behind him. Brought up on modern rock, punk and alternative bands,

JD then developed a deep love for 1950s rockabilly, R&B and country styles. As he once said, "I can't really be an English punk-rock in... Oklahoma, on a cattle ranch."

On a recent visit to the UK, JD showed us some examples of his playing, all of which

come from his 1950s influences. You'll need to keep the overdrive fairly low for this sort of stuff, although JD used a cleaner tone on our video than he'd normally utilise on stage. Think classic 'tweed' amp sounds and you'll be in the right ballpark. **[AC]**

Example 1

HERE'S a classic T-Bone Walker-style lick, the type that you can also hear in Chuck Berry's playing. The notes here are all from G Mixolydian (G A B C D E F) with the exception of a B $\flat$, which is quickly hammered to B for that characteristic ambiguous major/minor bluesy sound.



Example 2

ALSO influenced by T-Bone Walker, this is a great way of enhancing a static G7 chord with an ascending sequence of substitute chords. This would work very well as the first four bars in a G blues (note how JD then goes to the C chord to illustrate this).

Example 2 shows a sequence of chords: G6, G7, G7/B, G9/F, and C. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The G6 and G7 chords are played with a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a triplet of eighth notes on the bass staff. The G7/B and G9/F chords are played with a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a triplet of eighth notes on the bass staff. The C chord is played with a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a triplet of eighth notes on the bass staff. The notation also includes a guitar-specific notation for the G7/B and G9/F chords, showing the fret numbers for each string.

Example 3

MOVING to more of a country or rockabilly style in the key of A, this is a great riff for various blues or country-related styles. Use a tiny bit of palm muting at the bridge to keep things crisp and punchy. This pattern can be easily applied to E and D chords, with a slightly different fingering in the latter case.

Example 3 shows a riff in the key of A. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The riff is played with a triplet of eighth notes on the treble staff and a triplet of eighth notes on the bass staff. The notation also includes a guitar-specific notation for the riff, showing the fret numbers for each string.



Wolf Brother

As the lead guitarist in UK prog legends Genesis, Steve Hackett's pioneering style and technique was hugely influential on a whole generation of guitar virtuosos, from Brian May and Steve Rothery, to Edward Van Halen and Alex Lifeson. Now he's back with a hugely impressive new solo album, *Wolflight*, which proves once again that Hackett is the leader of the pack...

Words Matt Frost **Photography** Joseph Branston

Steve Hackett has long been regarded as one of this country's most innovative and influential guitar players. The prog rock legend – who spent seven years as lead guitarist in Genesis between 1970 and 1977 – is even widely credited with inventing two-handed tapping and introducing sweep picking to rock 'n' roll electric guitar. Hats off.

Hackett recently released his 23rd solo album, *Wolflight* – four decades since his debut solo record, *Voyage Of The Acolyte* – and it is arguably one of his most ambitious works to date featuring a “tag team” of metal, progressive rock, folk and blues with classical orchestral arrangements and music from across the globe, all gelled together with stories and residuals from centuries of the world's cultural history. Indeed, the central theme for the new record is the fight for freedom, whether this be the struggles of Afro-Americans in the Deep South or the fierce battles of nomadic horsemen long ago in Asia.

As ever, Steve's guitar playing never strays from the sublime, whether he's plugging in an electric, picking at one of his beloved nylon six-strings or even trying his hand at an Arabian lute. *Wolflight* sees a more primal side to the musician (and not just on its cover artwork); it's a joy to behold...

***Wolflight* not only espouses a central theme of freedom across its 10 tracks, but there is also a definite sense of musical freedom in terms of genres explored, your own diverse playing and the record's overriding primal energy...**

“It's interesting that you discern it as primal energy, because that puts it in a different category, I think, to a lot of the other albums that I've done. I think my writing has been getting steadily more primal and slightly more elemental and a tad more Slavic, and all things belonging to Norse regions have been part of it. There's the odd borrowed harmony from Grieg or Tchaikovsky, and those guys from cold climates – people who were able to inform the orchestra as one instrument. They call classical music that tells a story ‘program music’, but of course, in rock we call music that tells a story ‘progressive’. There's a correlation there somewhere with all of that.

“I'm hugely proud of this album – it's what I've been trying to do for a very long time, but I didn't necessarily have the means and the platform. It's not the kind of album that could have been done in the 80s, because at that time you could fall foul of record company politics by doing exactly what you wanted to do. The 70s was more of an era of doing exactly what you wanted, but I think now we're at that time again.”

You have mentioned previously that this album breaks the rules in many ways. Could you elaborate on that?

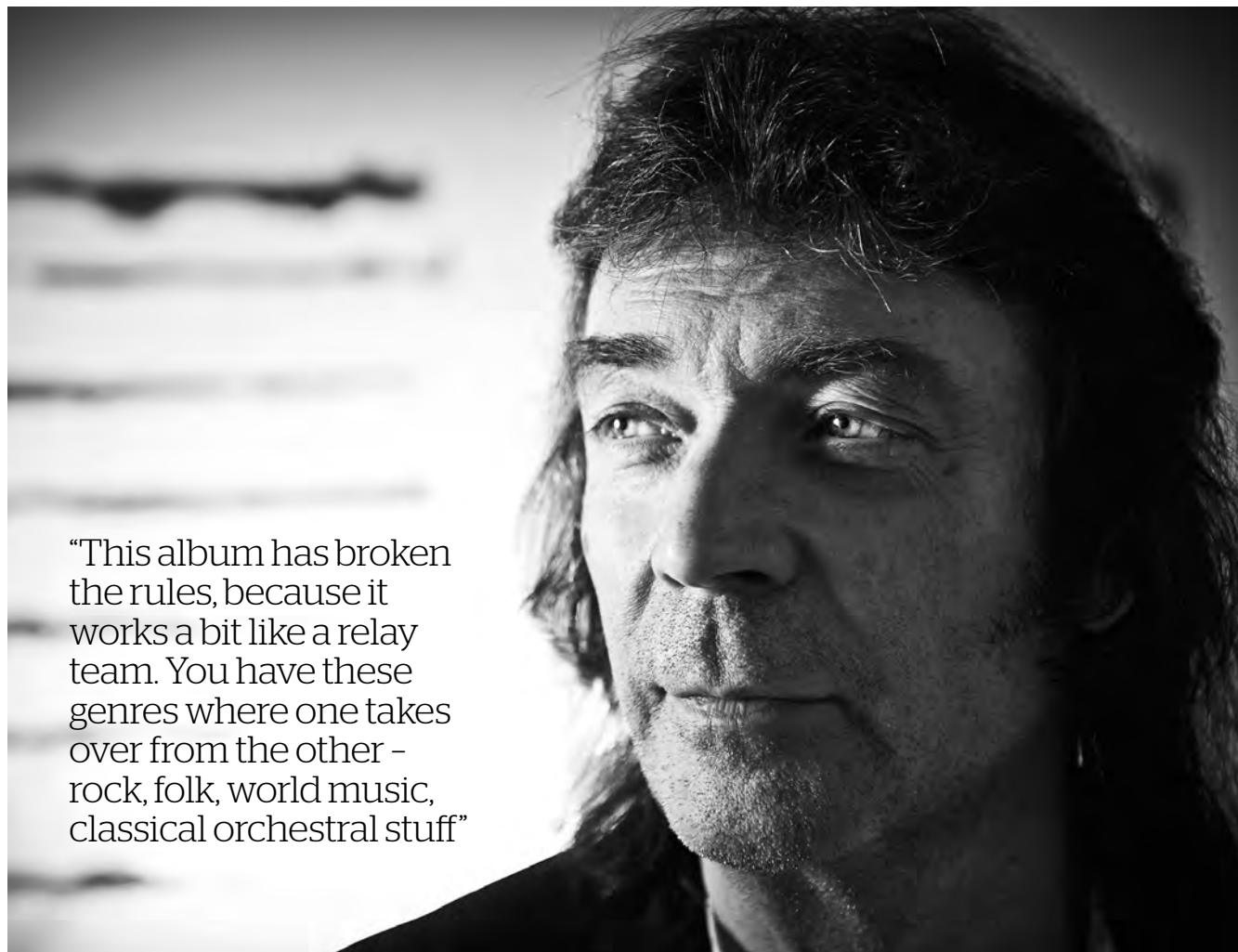
“Yeah, the way I think this album has broken the rules is because it works a bit like a relay team. You have these different genres or setups where each is a relay team or tag team where one takes over from the other. You've got the team that play rock and then you've got the team that do folk and then you've got the team that do world music and you've got the team that do the classical orchestral stuff. They're all different schools of thought, they all work in different ways and I wondered if it was possible to keep interrupting each team with something new, like if you stopped the rock band for a minute and suddenly had an orchestra doing a few bars.

“The danger is that you don't pull it off because it might just sound frumpy for a bit, but if it ends up coming across with the right amount of severity, it can be as incisive – I think – as rock.”

How much of this album was actually composed on guitar?

“Most of it's written on acoustic, but then some of it's written in the imagination. Obviously, I do get ideas when I'm playing a guitar and that might come out when I'm playing electric at home or at soundcheck





"This album has broken the rules, because it works a bit like a relay team. You have these genres where one takes over from the other – rock, folk, world music, classical orchestral stuff"

or practising in the dressing room. Those are good times for coming up with ideas when I'm not expecting to get anything out of myself. But then great ideas sometimes come at five o'clock in the morning, which is wolflight time! That's the time when you're not fully awake, which is a good thing, because you're in an altered state and you're just coming to, and so you can have certain odd perceptions."

Do your solos tend to be written out or more improvised?

"I tend to improvise them as I go along but certain phrases – and I might think of those as voice phrases – can be written. It's a mixture sometimes. In Genesis, I was always writing solos. There were a few improvised ones, but there were not that many, because there was always such an emphasis on writing with the Genesis team. It is hard to move away completely. I think I probably erred more on the side of blues than any of the other guys in the band. I did always have the ability to be able to go into a blues... and I still do. I'm grateful to blues for that, because I think of it as non-harmony and chord-dependent. It's something you can share on stage with somebody else's band and I often have, where I don't know the tune but I just wing it as a blues player. It's stood me in very good stead."

As ever, your lead playing on the album features some wonderful phrasing. Could you explain your approach to forming such eloquent phrasing?

"I think the approach is really refined jamming. In terms of phrases, I stop and start a lot when I'm recording, no matter what I'm playing. It's a lovely feeling if I get a take all in one and it does sometimes happen, but the process is one of dealing with error in a way. I'll try it roughly and decide it's roughly right, but then realise it would be better if the tuning was something else or the tone could be slightly better or the timing could be better."

"We can use all the technology available to enhance things, but essentially the performance has got to be there and it's got to be passionate. If there's any secret to my phrasing and what's driven me the whole time, it has been the passion for it and that doesn't go away. I have to get the right sound for a start, and if I get that it will be inspiring. Some days, I'll get the perfect sound and think, 'I can go anywhere with this sound – it's so wonderful!'"

Did the Fernandes electric with the Sustainer pickup play a prominent part on *Wolflight*?

"Yes. On the album, it's a mixture of the Burny model Fernandes with the Sustainer

pickup, which has the addition of a Floyd Rose tremolo, and my old 1957 Les Paul. They're both beautiful things and they're both great guitars. I have never actually found an electric guitar that did it all – funny that, isn't it? There are just certain tones that I can get with the Les Paul and there are certain tones that I can only get with the other one."

"On record, I have been known to switch between them seamlessly in the middle of a single solo. Perhaps I'm after a thick cut from the Les Paul or maybe something that's very driven by upper harmonics. I wouldn't say either had the superior tone. They've both got different properties and they're both magic. If the Fernandes has a drawback, I would say that it doesn't have as much roll off at the top as I would ideally like because the Sustainer pickup interferes with that. If I want to get a very mellow tone, then I've got to use a wah with it or I have to set it in a certain way so it's not too bright. We can always find a happy compromise. Electric guitars are all about compromise, I think."

What approach to amplification did you take during the recording sessions?

"Well, live I use two 50-watt Marshalls, but in recent years, I've been going straight into the computer and I've been surprised at the



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amount of weight and cut that I can get doing that. You know, I can still get it sounding like a beast spitting fire in the corner of the room! I've used various modelling devices, but one of the most recent ones was an Orange virtual amp, which sounded wonderful.

"I've actually just been doing a guitar workshop thing in Paris and they provided a Marshall combo, which I believe was 50 watts with a single 4x12 cabinet in it and it was one of those amps you plug into and just go, 'Wow, great sound!' I've been meaning to get one and that may well colour how I record in the future.

"But one of the nice things about going straight into the computer is there's no tyranny of volume. The sound is not volume dependent, whereas for centuries guitarists have been dependent on cranking up loud. I'd like to get a combo again though, because you always find that you're going back to basics, and you know, how basic is using just a Marshall combo? It's almost back to John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, isn't it?"

As always, there's some incredible acoustic technique across this album. Which acoustics did you pick up and play?

"In the main, I used the Yairi nylons, which are Japanese. I've got one that's the loudest nylon guitar I've ever heard and so it does sound a bit like a piano. That's the one that you'll mostly hear on *Wolflight*. When I'm working live, I tend to use a cutaway and the sound is not dependent on the body and projection as much as the pickup and how it's treated live. I use a Fishman Aura acoustic modelling device, which makes it sound like it's mic'd up even though it's a pickup. I also played a Tony Zemaitis 12-string guitar on there. There are one or two other models of 12-strings on the album – a Farida and a Gibson – but that's the main one. I sometimes use the Farida live and I use the Zemaitis live, too. In recent years, it's been fitted with a bridge pickup and it hasn't destroyed the sound. It's a very good beautiful, balanced-sounding guitar."

The nylon guitars ring with such clarity and rich tone. How were they recorded?

"With nylon guitar, I sometimes seek out a piano tone, but it's always been so hard to translate that to record. But after years of searching for it, we used some subtractive EQ on this album to back off the top and back off the bottom so you get the sweeter area in the middle. We then tried to use reverb that wasn't too topky and I'm really happy with what we've discovered and the results we've got.

"I did an album called *Tribute* some years ago [2008], and it was essentially the most demanding stuff to play and record.



"If there's any secret to my phrasing, it has been the passion for it. I have to get the right sound for a start, and if I get that it will be inspiring"

I remember that Roger King [recording engineer, keys player and co-songwriter] had done some spectrum analysis on some Segovia stuff overnight, on tracks recorded in the 20s and the 30s. He played it back to me with some processing on top of it and I said, 'Yes, that's the sound that I've been looking for!' – this non-bright lugubrious tone that minimises finger squeaks but still has this solidity when you're playing brightly up at the bridge. I'd been searching for these sounds all my life.

"Whenever you're recording nylon, any slight rustle or sound of breathing can ruin it. It's like photographing fairies' wings in a gale!"

Do you think your acoustic work has been overshadowed by your electric playing?

"Actually, I think it's probably the acoustic guitar that got me the job in Genesis in the first place! Even if I hadn't have been able to play a note of electric, I think they would have hired me anyway on the basis of the acoustic stuff, because we shared a love of the 12-string and six-string steel. Nylon really came later for me, from about 1973 onwards. I certainly became more involved with nylon and it started to creep in more and more. I was determined to try and get an aspect of nylon into rock, because it is the least rock 'n' roll of all the guitar options... and I think I achieved that!" 



“We truly are in the golden age of the acoustic instrument and, yes, there is plenty of choice out there.”

The thing is that Larrivée, in terms of sounds, build and price, is becoming a very hard act to beat.”

Guitarist Magazine

**Guitarist
CHOICE**

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Steve Hackett

STYLE FILE

Blending soaring soloing with far-out experimentation, Steve Hackett's playing fizzles with invention. Here, he teaches us some of his most effective techniques...

THROUGH classic English prog with Genesis and diverse solo albums covering both rock and classical styles, Steve Hackett has always squarely avoided the obvious blues-rock guitar traits. Joining Genesis at a time when the blazing Marshall stack was king, Steve

preferred to add fuzz pedals to a clean amp sound. Hackett works with a huge palette of tones, always looking beyond the traditional 'lead or rhythm' attitude to the guitar, and placing melodies, tones and textures precisely with the arrangements.

In this lesson, Steve shows us some of the techniques he uses to create fast streams of notes without too much effort. Fittingly, he uses a guitar with a Fernandes Sustainer pickup – something that perfectly fits the Hackett approach. **[AC]**

Example 1

STEVE starts with the principle of this whole lesson: finding ways to increase fluency, but without too much effort. Picking every note in this way is quite an inefficient use of your energy, especially if you're employing a distorted sound that creates natural sustain.

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

Example 2

AN obvious solution is to use legato techniques, including tapping. It doesn't really matter who invented tapping, but there aren't many recorded examples earlier than Steve's solo in *The Musical Box* from the 1971 Genesis album *Nursery Cryme*. This lick takes its inspiration from Steve's work of a couple of years later, on *Dancing With The Moonlit Knight*.

9 0 3 5 9 5 3 0 9 0 3 5 9 5 3 0 9 3

STEVE has produced several albums of nylon-string guitar, and here he applies a classical fingerstyle approach to a series of chords. All of the chords are on the same set of strings, meaning that your picking hand can remain fairly static while cycling through the repeating pattern.

Example 4

THIS short flourish sounds almost like flamenco guitar. Pick upwards through the chord using your thumb, index, middle and ring fingers (p i m a), then reach over to the top E string with your index finger and rake down through the full chord.



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PICKUPS

WORDS JAMIE DICKSON, CHRIS VINNICOMBE & NICK GUPPY

{from A-Z}

They are the beating heart of your electric guitar's sound. Pickups first arrived on the scene in the 1930s, but pickup makers are still refining the art of squeezing more from magnets. But what really makes them tick? From eddy currents to DC resistance, American Wire Gauge to magnet strength – a pickup's voice is a symphony of interlocking influences.

Understanding how these factors shape your electric sound is essential if you're going to get heavenly tones from your guitar. But there's a lot of snake oil swilling around the subject that can slip up the unwary. So that's why we've created this feature to give you the true word, from A to Z, with expert insights from some of the world's best pickup makers, such as Thomas Nilsen of Cream T, who makes custom pickups for the likes of Billy Gibbons and Keith Richards; and Kevin Beller, who is head engineer at Californian giant of pickup design Seymour Duncan. We're also joined by Brit

magnet-meisters such as Tim Mills, founder of Cornish pickup pugilists Bare Knuckle Pickups, and Jaime Campbell of boutique Manchester makers The Creamery, who argues that if you want to find the perfect pickup, you have to go beyond the term 'tone' to ask serious questions about the sounds you want to make music with:

"Tone is the feeling a player exhibits whilst playing; what pickups have is a sound," he says. "Now, that sound is either bright or warm, crunchy or sweet, attacking or plummy. All these kinds of descriptions are of sound."

It's into that world of sound, and the pickup features that shape it, that we venture now. Note that we're confining our discussion to magnetic pickups for electric guitars here – there's plenty to talk about in that area alone – leaving the question of acoustic and MIDI pickups for another feature.

So plug in the soldering iron, get the amp warmed up and the strings singing, as we guide you on the way to pickup nirvana...



A

ACTIVE PICKUPS

Compared with the passive magnetic pickups fitted to most electric guitars, active pickups require an additional energy source (usually a nine-volt battery) to power a preamp, active filters and EQ that sculpt the pickup's sound. Their design offers benefits such as reduced string pull (see p86), increased clarity and reduced treble loss when you roll off volume.

Rob Turner, founder of market leaders EMG, explains: "We treat the two coils separately. They're not in series or parallel; they actually get summed together electronically. You get the benefits and stability of having a preamp, but it's still a magnetic pickup. We tend to use taller, skinnier coils. We don't put them right next to each other – that way you get a cleaner sound. Because the coils aren't interacting, there's not a big midrange bump.

"The first pickup I designed was strictly for LA, Nashville and New York studio players. The reason metal guys like EMGs is because they are cleaner than a lot of other designs. When you play with that much distortion and volume, you need definition. But when I test a pickup, I don't play it through a Marshall and some freaking fuzz pedal, I play it through a 'blackface' Princeton Reverb. That tells me what it should sound like.

"I'm here for benefits and features. I make a product that some people don't like. Not everybody wants to drink a Coke. Not everybody wants to drink Jameson's. It's fine. It's no skin off my nose!"

AGEING

You'll sometimes hear it argued that a pickup's magnet can lose strength over decades due to being repeatedly leant against amplifiers and the powerful electromagnetic influence of their speakers and transformers. Thomas Nilsen of Cream T, who

designs pickups for players such as Billy Gibbons and Keith Richards, says this could happen in exceptional circumstances, but argues that other environmental factors have a more dramatic influence, including temperature.

"If you have a guitar you've been using for 30 years on the road, and you have put the guitar close to the amplifier where you have big magnets on the speakers, that can be one factor. But you'd have to be touring with one guitar each and every day for years," he explains.

"Another factor is that when you're travelling around the world, you're playing in different weather conditions and both temperature variations and humidity can affect the performance of pickups. When the Winter Olympics were held in Norway in 1994 we were playing outside and it was minus -20C. And the output of the pickups dropped about 1.5k! So,

temperature changes can affect the pickups and over time that will affect the magnet as well."

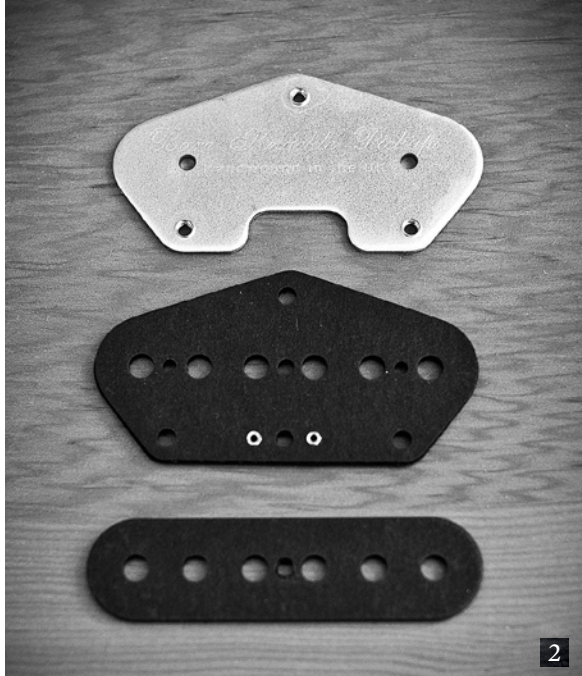
AWG

AWG is an abbreviation for American Wire Gauge, an early engineering standard using numbers to indicate the diameter of electrically conducting wires. It originated from the number of times a bar of copper would be drawn through forming dies to reduce its diameter, so the larger the number, the smaller the wire. Despite being invented in the 1850s, AWG is still in common use, especially in the North American electrical industry. The most common gauge of wire used in pickup making is 42 AWG, although finer wires such as 43-gauge are also used in Rickenbacker pickups. Pickups with very high DC resistance values often use even finer wire.



1

1. Active pickups, such as EMG's various models, offer enhanced clarity and hum-free operation that makes them well-suited for use in high-gain applications



2. The metal baseplate of a Telecaster's bridge pickup is integral to its classic twang-rich voice

3. The look of battered old pickups can be recreated as well as the sound, as on this aged Gibson Robby Krieger SG. Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle explains how he does it: "We'll use ranges of acid treatment and various abrasives and powders. Our most popular non-standard finish is Battleworn, which is literally meant to look like it's been ripped off an old tank! Again that's primarily a grinder, with a bit of acid, and a bit of water-repellent just to seal it off at the end"

4. The width and height of the bobbins that house the coils helps shape the pickup's tone

5. Capacitors form part of the tone equation and are bewildering in their variety, as Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig explains: "The most common capacitor type in new electric guitars is polyester film, but there are many different types of capacitors: vintage ceramic disk, silver mica, tantalum bead and so on. So which one is best for our guitar? The reality is that the capacitor type really doesn't make that much of a difference. What does make a difference is the tolerance between the values. A 33nF silver mica capacitor and the same value ceramic disc capacitor will have a different tolerance so the value could be +/- 10 per cent in value. This is what the difference most people are hearing, not the type of capacitor"

B

BAR MAGNET

A bar magnet is a flat bar of magnetic material, usually alnico or ceramic, commonly oriented horizontally under the strings and sat beneath the coil. The magnetic field extends through ferrous pole pieces, which contact the magnet and rise through the coil to sit just beneath the strings. Gibson's single-coil and humbucking pickups use bar magnets, while Fender's traditional single coils use vertically-mounted rod magnets.

BASEPLATE

Anyone who's examined a Tele bridge pickup will have spotted the metal plate on the underside of the unit – and more than a few custom Strat bridge pickups now sport a similar plate. So, what does it do?

"Essentially, it shifts the resonances towards lows and creating a few more eddy currents [see p77], and therefore a bit more in the midrange to roll off that brittleness and that natural Tele brightness a bit," says Jaime Campbell, founder of Manchester pickup makers The Creamery.

However, as essential as the plate is to classic Tele tone, care needs to be taken to ensure it doesn't introduce a high, sibilant warble to the pickup's voice due to loose fitting.

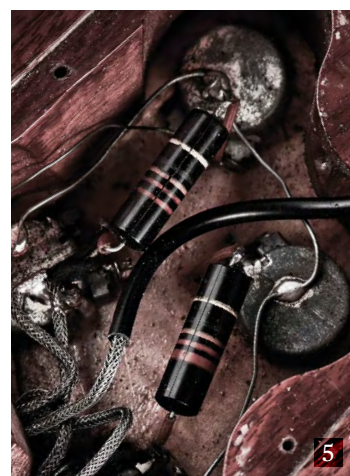
"The metal plate can start to vibrate independently of the rest



of the pickup during playing, which means you get this very thin, metallic sound from the bridge pickup. So I prefer to wax-pot the whole pickup with the bracket on, because that dampens that vibration," adds Cream T's Thomas Nilson.

BOBBINS

Bobbins are the part of a pickup that holds the turns of wire in place. Vintage PAF humbuckers used butyrate, which can warp when potted, whereas polycarbonate is more common in modern humbuckers. Traditional Strat and Tele single-coil pickups have a separate bottom plate and top plate, made from Forbon vulcanised fibre, while one-piece plastic bobbins have been common in mass-produced Strat single coils since the 70s. The physical tallness and width of the bobbin naturally affects the coil shape, which influences the pickup's sound (see Filter"Tron, p77).



C

CAPACITORS

Capacitors, an integral part of the tone control of your guitar, come in lots of forms: from the fabled 'bumblebee' caps of 50s Gibsons to high-end silver mica versions. A little experimentation in this area can transform your pickup's amplified voice.

Daniel Steinhardt, audio electronics expert at switching and effects specialists TheGigRig, explains: "Your tone control is simply a capacitor connected to a potentiometer, between the signal of the pickup and ground, effectively creating a low-pass filter. The tone pot is exactly the same as the volume pot, just with an added capacitor in circuit. But when the tone pot is all the way up, the capacitor is effectively removed from the circuit. It's only >



6



when you start dialling in the tone control that the value of the capacitor comes into play.

“The most common single coil value for a capacitor is 0.047uF. For the record, 1uF (microfarad) is equal to 1,000nF (nanofarads). So if you have a 0.047uF capacitor and you find the sound too dark as soon as you start to roll off the tone pot, try a lower value, a 0.033uF or 0.022uF. You’ll find the effect more subtle. If we do the opposite and increase the value of the capacitor, the tone control will have a dramatic [darkening] effect on the sound.”

COILS

When you wind copper wire around a magnet it becomes a transducer, or a means to convert one type of energy into another. Disturb the magnet’s ‘flux field’ with vibrating, ferrous strings, and a small but usable current is generated that corresponds to the string’s vibration, thanks to inductance (see p79). This is your signal. The physical shape of the coil, the strength of the magnet inside it and the winding (see p88), all contribute to the sonic

character of the pickup as expressed by that signal.

COVERS

Ever since blues-rock heroes started taking the covers off their PAF humbuckers in the 60s, there’s been a bit of rock ‘n’ roll mojo surrounding this classic mod. But how does it really affect tone? Tim Mills, the founder of Bare Knuckle Pickups, explains: “It’s said Eric Clapton was one of the first to take them off, because he thought it gave him a little bit more juice. The type of covers that were knocking around then – you’d probably have noticed quite a difference in the high end when you popped one off.

“When it comes to putting covers on pickups, the cover material will probably be of more importance than anything else. Using brass as your base material – which is an easy material to draw into a deep cover – can create a lot of extra capacitance. In other words, it knocks a lot of highs out. Change to nickel and that effect isn’t anywhere near so pronounced, but it’s a much harder material to draw in a tool.”

D

DC RESISTANCE

This term refers to a pickup’s resistance to the flow of direct current when it is at rest (namely, when the guitar is not being played). The more turns of wire that are applied to a pickup, the higher its DC resistance will be, with a high reading of 14k or more typically indicating a hot, loud pickup. But you shouldn’t make *too* many assumptions based on DC resistance alone.

The Creamery’s Jaime Campbell explains: “A Gibson PAF humbucker will generally have an output reading of around 7.8 to 8.3k and it will be wound with 42 AWG wire. Because it’s a well known pickup, people know roughly how loud – in terms of audible loudness – a Gibson PAF with an Alnico V magnet sounds at that reading, so it tends to get used as a benchmark. Based on that, you might look at a lower resistance reading from a Strat and conclude that it’s a weaker

6. Cover material not only shapes tone but also, in the case of replica PAF pickups, needs to be shaped carefully to match the 50s originals. The cover on the right is much closer to the ‘real thing’, as Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle explains: “The top should be perfectly flat, and the actual holes for the pole screws should have a slight lip on the inside when you run your finger over it, so they’re actually punched in, whereas [modern humbucker equivalents] are absolutely raw, almost laser-cut. The original is squarer but with a more subtle draw: less of an edge radius and a completely flat top. We’ve tried very hard to get that right in our pickups”

7. The unique Gretsch Filter Tron humbucker sound – clear and bright but with a useful amount of body and low-mid growl – is a product of powerful bar magnets and narrow coils



8. Measuring the DC resistance of a pickup can give a broad idea of its character but beware of making sweeping assumptions based on that reading alone, because wire gauge, magnet strength and even winding patterns can all influence the perceived volume and sound of a pickup in ways that DC resistance alone won't inform you of

9. A completed coil. Many hundreds of turns of wire are wrapped around a bobbin which gives a specific shape to the coil, which in turn dictates some of the sonic characteristics of the pickup

pickup. But the strength of the magnet plays just as much of a role in perceived loudness: a strong magnet can increase output, too – and the geometry of the coil also has an influence.

“So the DC resistance reading suggests roughly what the pickup can do, but it’s not actually the be-all and end-all.”

E

EDDY CURRENTS

Eddy currents, one of the more arcane aspects of pickup design, occur when metal components are placed in close proximity to the pickup’s magnet, affecting the voice of the pickup.

Daniel Steinhardt, audio electronics expert at TheGigRig explains: “Eddy currents happen when metal is near the magnetic field of the pickup. Most of the effects are thought to be destructive to your tone, but sometimes the eddy currents created from a metal pickup

cover, for example, are very handy for taming a bright, brash-sounding pickup.”

The Creamery’s Jaime Campbell adds: “Essentially, eddy currents create opposing magnetic fields, and the practical effect of that is that if you create a lot of eddy currents in your pickup design, you can bring the sound down more to the midrange, or you can make sure there are none whatsoever to get a much brighter, clearer sound – a kind of high-fidelity, focused sound.”

F

FILTER'TRON

Gretsch’s hallmark humbucker was designed by Ray Butts at the behest of Chet Atkins, who disliked the DynaSonic pickups fitted to many Gretsch semis before the introduction of the Filter'Tron in late '57. The Creamery’s Jaime Campbell explains how their bright and

articulate sound is shaped by the narrow coils employed in the design: “A Filter'Tron is, in some ways, like a standard humbucker: with two coils and a bar magnet underneath. But the coils are under-wound so you’re talking about an output of only 5 to 6k, so the coils are thinner and that means the pickup is more focused: you’re going to get a brighter sound because it’s an underwound coil.

“It’s not going to be as midrange-y as a normal humbucker, but the magnet is big and powerful, so even though the output reading is only about 5 to 6k, it’ll sound roughly the same volume as a standard humbucker – because the power of that magnet increases the perceived output. But it’s a much brighter and more focused sound that has an attacking quality. “Just by way of illustration, you can think about what the opposite of that would sound like – in other words, if you took a very *weak* magnet and made a very *over-wound* pickup with it. By comparison with the Filter'Tron, doing that would give you a very soft, midrange-y sound with a lot less clarity.”

G

GOLD FOIL PICKUPS

Gold Foil pickups based on original Teisco and DeArmond units are very much the pickup *du jour* with players looking for something more leftfield in the Ry Cooder or Dan Auerbach-style.

British pickup winder Marc Ransley of Mojo Pickups gives us the skinny: "Fender pickups use Alnico rod magnets as poles and generally have much taller bobbins. Gold Foils, by contrast, have rubberised ferrite/ceramic magnets and narrow bobbins. The narrow bobbins mean the traditional 42 AWG wire used on most guitar pickups is too thick for the Gold Foils. So Gold Foils use very fine 44 AWG wire, which allows reasonable resistance levels to be achieved within the constraints of the small bobbins. The small, narrow bobbins are necessary as most Gold Foils are surface-mounted and need to be low for string clearance.

"The Teisco style of Gold Foil pickup offers great clarity and dynamics, but with a fuller sound than, let's say, a Fender single coil. DeArmond-style units still have good clarity but are rawer and grittier than a Teisco, similar perhaps to a P-90 but with more edge. Both types have powerful magnets and a steel base plate, this widens the magnetic field, this helps enhance tones you just don't find with normal single coils."

H

HUMBUCKER

One of the drawbacks of the single-coil pickup (see p86) is its susceptibility to hum picked up from electromagnetic radiation (see Shielding, p84). The humbucker, as the name suggests, tackles this problem by wiring two coils together magnetically out of phase. One coil is oriented



so it has the south pole of its magnet topmost; the other has the north pole of its magnet topmost. When the outputs of the two coils are merged, hum frequencies picked up simultaneously by both coils cancel each other out, and thus the hum is bucked.

HEIGHT

To get the best out of your guitar, it's important that the pickups are adjusted to the right height. The closer they are to the strings, the louder they will sound, but as always, it's not just a case of louder is better...

As a rule of thumb, humbuckers can sit as close as you want for the volume you want. To begin, fret the top and bottom E strings at the final fret. Using a steel rule, adjust the humbucker's height until its treble and bass sides both sit evenly 2.5mm beneath the fretted strings. A Strat-style single

coil, meanwhile, should be adjusted to sit with the treble side slightly higher than the bass for a good tonal balance. Fret the two outer strings at the final fret, then adjust the pickups so the pole piece tops sit 2.5mm and 3.5mm from the treble and bass E strings respectively. Watch out for wolf notes – these occur when the pickup's magnetic field is too close to the string's field of movement, preventing it from vibrating naturally. Step away from the strings, sir!

Strings vibrate more freely near the neck than they do at the bridge, meaning neck pickups sound louder for a given height. A little experimentation with relative height settings may be necessary to establish a good balance in volume between pairs or trios of pickups, and if you have adjustable poles you can fine tune things further once you have a good overall balance.

10. Gold Foil pickups are making a bit of a comeback currently. Jaime Campbell of The Creamery explains their allure: "They're under wound in the sense that they use a much thinner coil wire than is usual. The magnets used in them are rubberised ferrite magnets, which are actually quite weak, so it's a bright sound, but it also has a real warmth and sweetness, because of those weaker magnets there's not as much pull on the strings so they can vibrate that much more freely"

11. If you're unhappy with the sound of your pickups, try adjusting their height before taking other measures. You may just find they suit you a lot better after a little setting up



12

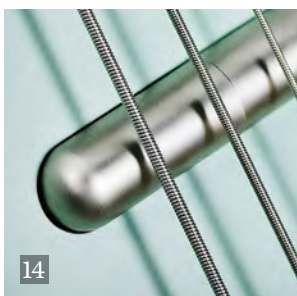
12. Gibson's original PAF is still the benchmark for nuanced humbucker tone. Hidden elements of its design helped shape its tone, as Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle explains: "The two coils of the PAF were actually slightly different shapes. I think they originally designed just a slug-coil former [bobbin], and used two of those, but quickly decided to add adjustable poles. A new tool was therefore needed to make that former, and the central island that the wire wraps around was slightly different in dimension. Those two things there are probably more important than anything else when it comes to actually getting that fabled PAF tone"

13. Bright, jangly and linked forever with surf guitar sounds, the Jaguar's pickups are a close relation to the single coils found in Stratocasters

14. The shallow-but-wide coil of the Jazzmaster's pickups is key to their open, but not overly bright sound



13



14

IMPEDANCE & INDUCTANCE

Pickup output is sometimes defined by DC resistance (see p76), which is gauged by putting a multimeter over the coil's output wires and measuring resistance to direct current in ohms. But this isn't the whole picture, because when a pickup is doing its job, the coil generates AC electricity, not DC. Inductance is how a coil of wire generates an electric current. When a string vibrates over a guitar pickup, it causes fluctuations in a magnetic field and those fluctuations induce an alternating current to flow in the coil. Inductance is measured in a unit called a 'henry': the more turns on a coil, the higher the inductance. Coil cross-section and length also affect inductance, as does the core material.

Impedance, meanwhile, is a measure of how the pickup coil opposes, or impedes the flow of alternating current. Unlike the

simplicity of DC resistance, impedance is complicated because the AC is also opposed by capacitance and inductance, which vary with frequency. The influence of these factors are combined under a common name: reactance. So, in simple terms, a pickup coil's impedance is a product of its resistance, which is nominally fixed, and its reactance, which is variable.

JAZZMASTER & JAGUAR PICKUPS

Fender's celebrated offset electrics have carved out their own niche in rock history, often associated with surf-style clean tones and the gnarly drive tones of New Wave pioneers. But the models' respective pickup designs are in fact very different, accounting in part for their difference in tonal character.

"The original Jazzmaster pickup had a really shallow but

wide coil," Jaime Campbell of pickup maker The Creamery explains. "It has a warmer, fatter take on the single coil sound. It has short – and therefore weaker – Alnico V magnets, while the wider coil means it has a wider magnetic field. A vintage Jazzmaster bridge pickup typically has around the same output reading as an old PAF humbucker: around 8k.

"The Jaguar's pickups are much closer to a Strat's in design, with the exception of the metal 'claw' surrounding the base. It was an attempt to try and stop some of the usual 60Hz hum you get with single coils. The claw acts as a kind of shielding device, because it's effectively wrapped around the pickup. It has a more attacking, brighter sound than a Jazzmaster pickup because it has a taller, narrower coil."

K

KILO-OHMS

The DC resistance of a pickup (see p76) is typically expressed in kilo-ohms (units of 1,000 ohms), hence you'll hear people talk about an 8k pickup or a 12k pickup, for example.

L

LIPSTICK TUBE PICKUPS

The original pickups used on Danelectro and Silvertone guitars were called lipstick tubes, because the cases were actually purchased from a lipstick tube manufacturer. There's no bobbin or coil former inside, instead the coil is wound directly around an alnico bar magnet. Lipstick pickups are known for having a jangly treble response, mostly due to the original pickup's resistance of around 4.5kohms – about two thirds that of a standard Stratocaster pickup.

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M

MAGNETS

While magnets don't have an inherent 'tone', the influence of various magnet types on the performance of a given pickup can be categorised in broad tonal terms. These range from the various grades of Alnico (a magnet made principally of aluminium, nickel and cobalt) to more powerful ceramic types. Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups explains:

"Take a humbucker wound with 42-gauge wire as a benchmark. With an Alnico II magnet, it would have a warm, soft bass response, a very sweet high end and a slightly pronounced midrange. Alnico III, funnily enough, is not quite as strong as Alnico II. So, the highs tend to be more muted and rounded. Probably the best way to imagine the sound of Alnico III is to think of the early 1950s, when this form of magnet was very common. Think of the sounds of the jazz and clean guitar tones from that time – that plummy roundness. Move up to Alnico IV and the power rating comes up and the frequency response flattens out – you get a balanced and natural-sounding response

from the coils, but not so it's boosting the treble. The midrange stays quite constant as well. And then you go to Alnico V, which has the highest power. Then the bass and treble do get boosted and the sound starts to get more aggressive – more 'rock 'n' roll', for want of a better term.

"Ceramic is a much more powerful magnet again [than Alnico V]. The bass and treble get boosted significantly. A lot of people think ceramic magnets scoop the mids out, but when you analyse it you find the mids tend to stay where they are – it's just that the bass and treble get boosted so much you get a V-shaped taper in the EQ. Ceramic pickups tend to suit players who need a very fast and percussive pick attack."

N

NOISELESS PICKUPS

Single-coil pickups tend to pick up hum, and although single coil-sized stacked humbuckers exist, they have drawbacks of their own, as Seymour Duncan's head engineer Kevin Beller explains.

"In a traditional stack structure, you've got two evenly sized coils



and one of them is picking up the strings mainly and both of them are picking up hum. But the problem in a traditional stack is that the [lower, hum-cancelling coil] also picks up string signal and it's cancelling some of the string signal in the top coil. The only reason that it works is that the bottom coil is farther from the string where the string signal is weaker.

"But we've now developed a design called the Stack Plus in which the upper coil has the same tall profile as a normal Strat coil – and then we have a very small bottom coil that does the actual hum-cancelling. Usually, you wouldn't be able to get away with that unbalanced design but we've developed a circuit that intercepts a lot of the hum field that's on its way to hitting the top coil and channels it into the bottom coil."

15. Magnet spec is an important factor when determining a pickup's performance and sonic character

16. So-called 'noiseless' single-coil pickups rely on two coils stacked one on top of the other to emulate the single-coil sound while making use of a humbucking design's noise reduction. But in a stacked design, the two coils can't be oriented with their north and south poles in opposing directions as in a normal humbucker. So the two coils not only cancel hum but some of the string signal you want to keep, meaning early stacked designs were a compromise. Newer designs have tackled that problem

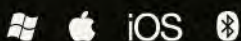
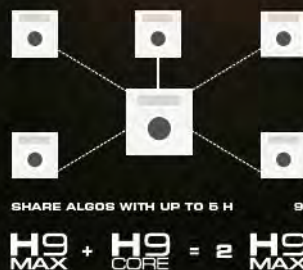
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O

ORIGINS

In the early 1920s, jazz big bands were becoming increasingly popular, and bandleaders were adding more brass so they could play to bigger audiences. During hard times, it was usually the guitarist who was first to get the sack, as their contribution was often inaudible. Where pickups are concerned, necessity was the mother of invention. Throughout the 1920s, players and inventors tinkered with combinations of microphones, magnets and coils, searching for the magic combination. One of the earliest pioneers to succeed was virtuoso player, inventor and bandleader Alvino Rey. In 1935, Gibson's Guy Hart approached Rey for help developing a guitar version of a home-made pickup he had been using on his banjo. That pickup went into Gibson's first electric guitar, the ES-150, used by jazz legend Charlie Christian. It's ironic that the ES-150's pickup is now referred to as the 'Charlie Christian' – Rey's contribution has been mostly forgotten.

Hawaiian music was also popular; the 'Frying Pan' lap-steel designed by Rickenbacker's George Beauchamp is often credited as the first solid electric guitar. However, both were preceded by Stromberg's 1928 Electro guitar, which also had an electromagnetic pickup. The humbucker's origins date back to early telephone research by Bell Labs, and possibly a patent for a humbucking piano pickup, awarded to Baldwin around 1938. Seth Lover's PAF and Ray Butts' Filter'Tron owe some of their success to that one. Leo Fender's 1940s lap-steel pickup designs were later refined into the elegant single-coil units fitted to the Telecaster – the first successful solid-bodied guitar. The first successful guitar pickups were invented almost simultaneously by several people – we remember the 'winners', but many significant contributions came from less well-known names.



P

P-90

The P-90 is a famous Gibson single-coil pickup, introduced in 1946. Until the humbucker arrived in 1957, the P-90 was used on most Gibson electrics; afterwards, it continued to be used on lesser instruments. A P-90 comes in one of two packages: the dog-ear or soapbar, both named after their appearance. Dog-ear P-90s were typically used on Gibson's 'student' guitars – the Les Paul and SG Junior, and hollowbody guitars such as the ES-330, or Epiphone's famous equivalent, the Casino. Soapbars were used on Les Pauls, sometimes teamed with the Alnico V pickup – a hotter version of the P-90, used on other premium instruments, such as the ES-5 and Byrdland. P-90s have a flat, wide coil, combined with two bar magnets. They're warmer than Fender single coils and more powerful, however they're prone to feedback and hum. Several humbucking replacements that retain the look and, to a certain degree, the sound of the original are also available.

POLEPIECES

Polepieces – which may be rod-shaped magnets as in the case of Strat pickups, or simply ferrous conductors of a bar magnet's field, as in the screw poles of P-90 pickups – serve to focus the pickup's magnetic field on the strings, although more modern blade-type pickups have their own advantages, as Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups explains:

"The difference between individual polepieces and blades is to do with the focus of the magnetism under the string. Obviously, a magnetic rod focuses very directly onto the string. A blade will take that magnetism more evenly across the strings, so you will get, ironically, a better string-to-string balance and it actually produces more drive, I find, whereas an individual rod magnet is very powerful underneath that one specific string."

POTTING

Wax potting is a pickup manufacturing technique that involves dipping the pickup coils in liquid wax (often a beeswax- or paraffin-based compound) to ensure that the finished pickup is resistant to unwanted microphonic feedback.

17. The P-90 has produced some of the most magical sounds in rock – just listen to Leslie West's spellbinding performance with a Les Paul Junior with Mountain at Woodstock. It's warmth and sonic girth sets it apart from slimmer single coils, as Jaime Campbell of The Creamery explains: "A P-90 has two magnets underneath [the coil], which gives a stronger magnetic field with more attack to it. And that can really push a n amp"

"The wire that you wind a pickup with is round in cross-section, and so when you wind a pickup, air pockets are created in the spaces between turns of wire sitting on top of one another," Thomas Nilsen of Cream T explains.

These tiny air gaps mean the coils of fine wire wrapped around the bobbin of the pickup can vibrate when exposed to the sound of a cranked, distorted amp, causing microphonic feedback. Dipping the coils in wax reduces those tiny air gaps, and thus reduces the pickup's susceptibility to such feedback, making potted pickups a must for players who like loud, dirty tones, as Tim Mills, of Bare Knuckle Pickups, outlines:

"As a general rule, most players that use a lot of gain, and a lot of volume, will be better off with a potted coil. Anything gained by dynamic sensitivity in an unpotted coil [see p87] is generally lost at that kind of volume level anyway. It's normally in high-end detail and

touch response – but if you are using a lot of volume, touch response is over in a split second. You'd be better off with a more controllable pickup to start with at those kind of levels. For the pure tone hounds, an unpotted pickup does give you this touch-sensitivity; it gives a more vocal tone and arguably a little bit more high end as well."

"Sometimes when you wax-pot a pickup, it can make it sound very thick and compressed-sounding. It's as if you put a blanket in front of the amplifier," Thomas Nilsen of Cream T adds, "but I researched different mixtures of wax, such as mixing beeswax with other ingredients, so I could have the pickups actually sound as if they aren't potted – and yet work with high-gain amps as well."

The actual manner in which pickups are potted, and the blend of wax used in the process, varies from maker to maker. Seymour Duncan, for example, pioneered vacuum wax potting, which is used by many mainstream pickup makers to ensure all the coil is penetrated with wax; others encapsulate the coils in epoxy.

Some pickups are double-potted. For example, covered humbuckers are wax potted before and after the cover is installed in order to prevent microphony at high levels that can be caused by any air gaps between the actual pickup and the cover.

POTS

The other electronic components of your guitar have a role in shaping the signal generated by the pickups, including the potentiometers, or control pots, which are used to adjust levels of volume and tone on your electric guitar. Among other things, the type of pot used determines the total amount of top end signal that's available.

"There are two common pot values," explains Daniel Steinhardt of TheGigRig. "You've got your 500kohm pot, which is mostly used with humbuckers, and then you've got your 250kohm pot, which is mostly used with single-coil pickups. The pot values show its resistance, and in a passive guitar circuit these different values allow a little bit of top end to bleed to ground. The higher the value of the pot you're using, the less top end will bleed to ground."

"Single coils are generally much brighter than humbuckers, so 250k tends to allow just enough top end through to sound right. Humbuckers generally have a warmer sound, so 500k pots keep most of the top end intact. If you have a particularly dark-sounding pickup, you can try increasing the resistance of the volume pot to see if it retains more of the pickup's natural top end. A little bit of resistance can be good, as it helps suppress some of the noise that flies around in the high frequencies."

18. Changing pickups in the conventional soldered way is quite simple with a little practice, but you need a powerful iron to solder earth wires to the back of volume pots quickly, so the pot isn't 'cooked'. But that same heat can melt, or burn the insulation on conductors, resulting in full or partial short circuits. The answer is a soldering station, with variable power to suit different jobs – but they're not cheap

19. Pickups being potted to proof them against microphonic feedback at Bare Knuckle Pickups





20

Q

QUICK-CHANGE PICKUPS

Quick-change pickups use solderless connectors that enable you to rapidly and easily swap the pickups on your guitar. Several major manufacturers offer quick-change options, including Seymour Duncan (Liberator pots), Gibson (QuickConnect), Fender (Solderless), while others, such as Di Marzio, offer complete pre-wired harnesses, including pots and controls, with solderless connectors. They're pretty widely available, although the choice is sometimes more limited.

R

RADIUS & STAGGER

Pickups with vintage-correct staggered polepieces, in which the central poles rise higher than the others, hark back to a golden era of tone – but beware if your guitar's fingerboard has a flatter modern radius than the guitars those pickups were designed for. What was intended to provide a balanced sound may end up unbalancing it, because the heights of the poles won't conform to the edge-to-edge rise and fall in string height associated with a curvier vintage 'board.

"If you've got a flatter neck profile, such as a 12-inch radius, a vintage stagger Strat pickup will emphasise some strings at the expense of others," says Jaime Campbell of pickup makers The Creamery. "Adjusting can't fix that because you've got two different things in play: a flat-radius 'board but staggered radius pickup polepieces."



21

RESONANT PEAK

When evaluating pickup spec, DC resistance should not be confused with impedance, which is the resistance to the flow of alternating current, and which varies according to frequency. The frequency at which a pickup's impedance reaches its highest level is called the resonant peak. A resonant peak of around 3kHz to 4kHz will tend to sound more midrange-heavy with a lot of 'punch'. The higher in frequency the resonant peak, the clearer and brighter the pickup's tone will be.

Many pickup manufacturers publish the DC resistance *and* resonant peak of their pickups. You might expect a vintage Strat-style single coil, such as Seymour Duncan's SSL-1 Vintage Staggered, to have a higher resonant peak (quoted as 10kHz) than, say, a humbucker, such as Seymour Duncan's well-used JB, which has a resonant peak of 5.5kHz.

The former has a much brighter tone, the latter a more midrange-intensive tone. Combined with DC resistance, the resonant peak figure can give a good indication

close to one of these culprits and you'll usually hear a nasty hum.

Shielding can help reduce this, making a guitar more usable in environments with a lot of electrical noise. The shield intercepts the electromagnetic signal causing the noise and carries it to ground, away from the wire conducting the audio signal. An electric guitar's shielding can be improved upon by lining control cavities with copper or aluminium foil, or painting them with a special electrically conductive paint.

However, Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups urges caution if you're considering this kind of shielding work.

"If you've got good integrity through your metal choice, your wire choice, your magnet choice, and your paths to ground are all good, then noise really shouldn't be an issue with a humbucker. So I don't advocate massive amounts of screening, because you can end up causing problems with eddy currents [see p77] that suck tone out. When we see old 70s coils come in for rewind, you find single coils all wrapped up in copper foil or tin foil, aluminium foil, and the customer's saying, 'It's got no high end.' It's like, 'I wonder why that is!'"

Something often overlooked in hum reduction work is the role of tone capacitors. Some trendy paper-in-oil aftermarket capacitors are very inductive – they collect noise just as a guitar pickup does. It's a straightforward task to swap these out for more boring but non-inductive types. The 'pink brick' foil/film capacitors made by WIMA are among the best you can buy, although they're made for PCB use and need a little adapting for guitar tone pots.

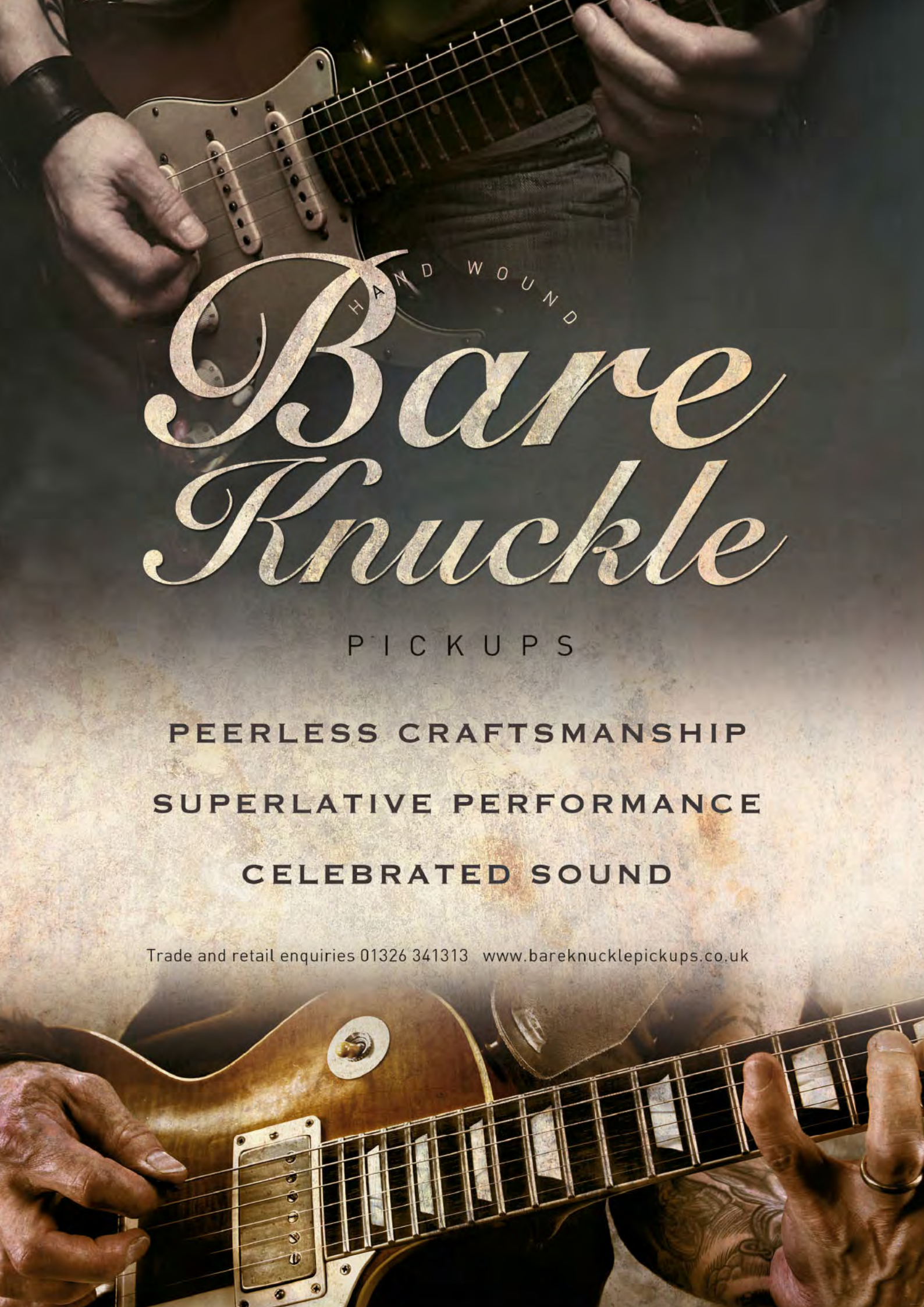
20. Shielding helps to cut down on audible hum caused by nearby electrical devices, but has to be applied carefully if you are to avoid altering the sound of your pickups. It's equally important to make sure that the grounded parts of components (such as pickup covers and potentiometer backs) are properly soldered. The key here is good grounding. A poor solder joint on a ground connection decreases grounding efficiency, resulting in increased noise. Check continuity between various points on the guitar using a digital multimeter set to the lowest scale, where you can measure resistances of 10 ohms down to zero. Anything over 5 ohms can usually be improved on with a little attention to detail

21. Although quick-change solderless pickups seem like a sensible idea, allowing rapid pickup swaps, they haven't been adopted very widely yet. The idea is nothing new; Dan Armstrong's Plexiglas Ampeg instruments featured interchangeable Bill Lawrence-designed pickups back in 1968

S

SHIELDING

A guitar pickup – especially a single-coil pickup – is also a pretty good directional aerial, and easily collects noise from electrical devices that generate it. Typical sources of EMR (electromagnetic radiation) include fluorescent tube lights, dimmer switches and the mains transformer in your guitar amp. Move a guitar pickup



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SINGLE COIL

Single-coil pickups, by definition, have one coil of wire, unlike humbuckers, which have two or more. Early pickups, such as those on Gibson's ES-150, or Fender's Telecaster, were all single coils. A single-coil pickup usually has lower impedance, while the narrower coil samples a smaller portion of the string, typically resulting in a brighter and purer tone than a humbucker.

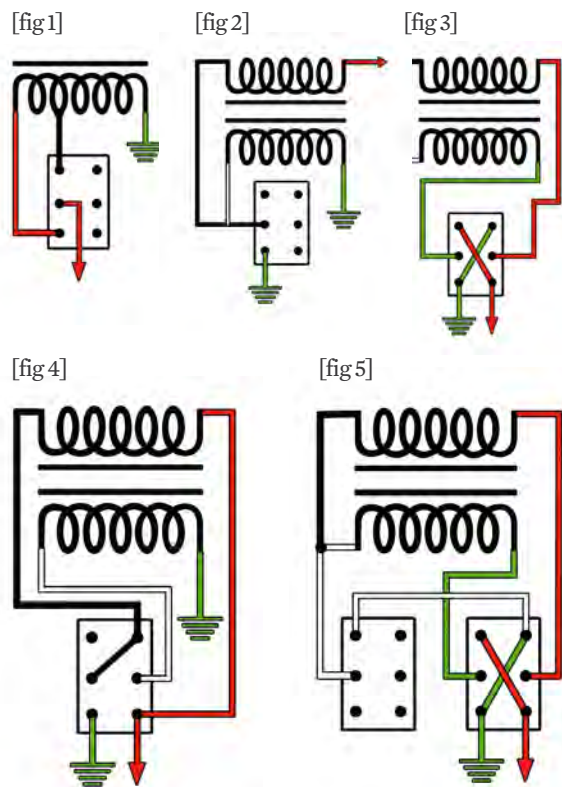
STRING PULL

The magnetic field generated by a pickup influences how freely the strings can move, which in turn influences their amplified sound. Jaime Campbell of The Creamery explains: "The strength of the magnet will either allow the strings to vibrate more freely, if the magnet is weak, or less freely if the magnet is strong. And that affects the warmth, sweetness and attack of the amplified sound. For example, when someone asks for a warm, vintage humbucker sound, I'll often suggest an Alnico II magnet in the bridge, because it's slightly weaker and it 'holds' the string a little bit less, so it can vibrate more freely and deliver a sweeter, warmer bridge-position sound. But I'll suggest a stronger magnet – an Alnico V – at the neck because it'll hold the string more and give a bit more clarity."

SWITCHING

There are many ways to mod the switching of guitar pickups to give extra tonal options. In the early days of custom pickups, single-coil pickups were 'tapped' – adding a second conductor to a 'hot' overwound coil partway through its length, with a switch to select the high-output full coil, or the normal-output tapped section [fig 1]. Tapping is often used to talk about switching off one coil in a humbucking pickup, although this is more accurately called coil splitting. Taps or coils can be switched using small toggle switches or rotary potentiometers, for a variable effect. Two pickups are commonly wired in parallel and in phase with each other, but as in Danelectros, they can be wired in series and/or out of phase [fig 3]. Both pickups need to be on to get the thin, wiry out-of-phase sound.

Positions two and four on a Stratocaster are often called 'out of phase', but the coils are actually in phase. That distinctive 'quack' tone is down to the spacing between the coils and the string harmonics they 'hear'. Connecting a separate conductor to all four coil ends in a humbucker gives the maximum choice of wiring options, allowing the two coils to be wired in series (normal) or parallel, for a slightly brighter sound that remains



humbucking [fig 4], or split, turning off one coil [fig 2]. Split-coil switching is most effective on bridge pickups, where the string harmonic nodes are closer. Put two DPDT (double-pole, double-throw) switches on a single four-conductor humbucker and you can pull even cooler switching tricks. Here's a diagram that lets you combine coil splitting and phase switching [fig 5]. The cool bit is that using the pickup on its own in split-coil mode, the phase switch determines which coil stays on. Used on a bridge pickup, there's usually an audible difference between the two split-coil modes.

22. Single-coil pickups may be more susceptible to noise but their bright, clear character is an essential part of the electric guitar's classic palette of tones



TREBLE-BLEED

A treble-bleed circuit is a filter consisting of a resistor and capacitor, wired in parallel across the hot tags of a guitar's volume control. As the control is turned down, the loading effect of the pot's resistance reduces high frequencies. The treble bleed circuit progressively removes low frequencies to balance this out. Typical resistor and capacitor values are 150kohms and 1,000pf.



23. Unpotted vintage pickups aren't easy to use in high-gain applications but modern unpotted pickups can be carefully tweaked to minimise squeals

24. There's more than one way to wire a pickup selector switch but a steady hand is always a prerequisite

25. To many, Gibson's original PAF humbucker is still the Holy Grail of pickup tone, but not every surviving example lives up to the hype

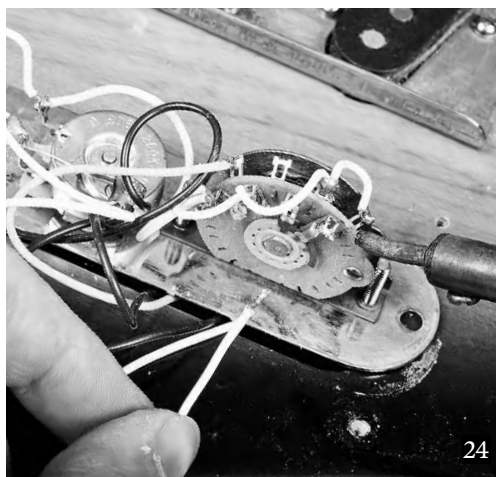
U

UNPOTTED PICKUPS

If the ultimate touch-sensitivity of an unpotted pickup is your goal, it's advisable to be aware that there are lots of things pickup makers can do in order to maximise their resistance to microphonic feedback, as Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle explains:

"There are various things we will do that will reduce microphony without losing that sensitivity in the coil, which is what you actually want. If the magnet has got a lot of movement in it, that'll cause issues. We'll be checking the baseplate screws are tight, and how much air is trapped underneath the cover.

"If you rap your knuckle on it and it's knocking around like an old Datsun Cherry car, then you know damn well that it is going to be as vocal as anything once you are above talking volume – and when you've got a little bit of grit on the amp it'll go beyond touch sensitivity into uncontrollable. But a little bit of tape under the cover can help with that, a dip of lacquer on the magnet can just help set it and make it more stable under the coils, without immersing the pickup in wax."



V

VINTAGE PICKUPS

While age in itself has a minimal effect on pickup performance (see Ageing, p74), an undeniable mystique surrounds old pups. The most revered vintage pickup of all is Gibson's PAF humbucker, designed at Gibson by engineer Seth Lover. The patent was filed in June 1955. For many, PAFs represent the Holy Grail of pickup tone, but they were made by hand often quite haphazardly – so not all examples live up to the legend. Tim Mills explains:

"Probably the biggest myth is that they all sound great – they don't. I'd probably say most of

them sound average to poor. But when you get a good one, it's like: 'Oh my God! That's incredible.' That normally comes down to a clarity through all of the frequencies, and this sensitivity, this response, this dynamic that they have. I've repaired loads over the years and some were just absolutely breathtaking when you put them into the test guitar, while others just sound flat. You'll look at some, and you'll look at the coil size, and it'll literally almost be bursting out of the sides and you'll think, 'this is going to sound pretty rough,' and it doesn't! It's one of the good ones. I've learnt a lot about the tension in the coil based on that. You certainly don't want the coil windings to be over-tight. It needs to have that space, that air in the coil to give that beautiful bloom."



W

WINDING

While the bobbin (see p75) helps define the shape of the coil, the way in which turns of wire are wound onto the bobbin also has its influence on tone. Pickups can be either machine-wound, in which the bobbin is mechanically rotated while another machine feeds turns of wire onto it; hand-wound, in which the bobbin is mechanically rotated but the wire is fed onto it by hand; or scatter-wound, in which the bobbin is rotated mechanically while wire is fed onto it by hand in an intentionally irregular pattern. The economic and practical benefits of having machines doing the winding are obvious, but why would you want to employ the intentionally irregular effect of hand- or scatter-winding? Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups explains:

“By scattering the wire as you put it on the bobbin, you’re essentially adding to the insulator effect of the wire insulation itself by putting in tens of thousands of microscopic little air gaps – just by making the wire go in at a more random pattern. What you’ve got to be careful of is that you don’t actually lose the shape of the coil and end up with a huge knot in the middle of it. I’ll do this scattering two thirds or three quarters of the way through the coil, and then the final third I’ll try to get the wire to lay on a lot more uniformly. Sonically, by scattering the wire like that it’s going to reduce capacitance build-up

within the coil, and so it should sound cleaner, more dynamic and have the perceived effect of sounding louder.”

WIDE RANGE

Seth Lover, who designed Gibson’s feted PAF, also designed the Wide Range pickup for Fender. Jaime Campbell of The Creamery feels that it’s an unsung classic. “It has 12 individual CuNiFe (copper, nickel, iron) magnets – though six are hidden beneath the cover – which were used because you can machine them with a thread and a flat-head groove on the top, so they can be adjusted for height and thus find the sweet spot for each string. I love them: they really cut through the mix.” Note that some later reissues of this pickup retained the Wide Range’s offset look but not its unique internal design, which is key to the original’s sonic character.

X

X-RAY

Okay, we’re cheating a bit here. Some airport security scans use not X-ray machines but magnetic resonance imaging devices in security scans of carry-on luggage. These can, purportedly, damage pickups. Thomas Nilsen of Cream T pickups reports that Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top once had a set of pickups totally drained of magnetic charge by such a scan at a Russian airport. So, if in doubt, check it in the hold!



Y

YBARRA, ABIGAIL

Abigail Ybarra, whose pickup-winding skills have become synonymous with some of the best Fender pickups, was hired by the company in 1956 and retired in 2013 after over five decades working there. Abigail began winding and building pickups in 1958 and her hand-wound and signed single coils are highly prized, and known as ‘Abbys’.

26. Winding is a crucial part of the pickup-maker’s art. Bare Knuckle pickups are hand-wound using modified lathes, while Thomas Nilsen of Cream T pickups keeps a detailed record of the profile of his most successful hand-wound pickups so the winding pattern can be replicated en masse using a CNC machine

27. An under-celebrated pickup, the Fender Wide Range humbucker was designed by Seth Lover. Fender’s own reissue versions have often deviated from the original specifications

Z

ZEBRA COILS

The story goes that zebra coils – a humbucker with one white and one black bobbin – first appeared on PAFs because Gibson’s supplier ran out of black pigment. Gibson wasn’t too bothered because nobody could see the bobbins beneath the pickup covers, so raw cream coils were used as well as black ones. Some PAFs had ‘zebra coils’ – a combination of black and cream – while some were double cream, discovered only when players took the covers off (see p76).



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1



PRIZE ONE

Win your choice of any Seymour Duncan pickup set*

Few makers know pickups like Seymour Duncan. The company started out in the 70s and is a huge hitter in the world of magnet-powered tone. The knowledge this company commands when it comes to making pickups is staggering, so it's all the more exciting that Seymour Duncan has kindly offered you the chance to win any set of pickups from its main range. Will you go classic with a set of California 50s SSL-1 Strat pickups, or plump for girthy drive tones with the Whole Lotta Humbucker set? The choice is yours...

***NB: prize does not include pickups from the Custom Shop range, and a set comprises either two humbuckers, or two or three single coils**

2



PRIZE TWO

Win a unique Cream T Mash humbucker signed by ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons!

If you want your guitar to be a real eliminator, check out this unique humbucker designed by Thomas Nilsen of Cream T pickups in Norway. Thomas hand-makes pickups to order for Billy Gibbons, Jeff Beck, Keith Richards and many other legendary players, and his work sounds truly stunning. Now you can own one of his incredible Mash humbuckers – to fit the bridge position – which he developed with input from Gibbons, and which provide a sweetly dynamic yet biting take on classic 'bucker tone. This pickup, number 50, is even more special because it's signed by Billy himself and comes with a certificate of authenticity signed by Thomas Nilsen.

3



PRIZE THREE

Win a set of The Creamery's Sonic '60 pickups for S-type guitars

The ability to take the sound of the guitar in electrifying new directions is one of the most exciting things about boutique pickup makers who really know their stuff. Jaime Campbell at The Creamery is one such maker, and he's offered us a set of his stunning Sonic '60 pickups. Inspired by the liquid howl of Brian May's solos and the famous Burns Tri-Sonic pickups, this hand-wound, custom take on that heritage fits S-type guitars and comes in a choice of Alnico II or V magnet spec, so you can fine-tune your tone from soulfully warm to crunching rock bite. They're very special indeed – so stand out from the crowd and put yourself in the running for a set by answering the question below.

TO ENTER, SIMPLY ANSWER THE QUESTION BELOW CORRECTLY

In what year was the Seymour Duncan company founded?

- A) 1979
- B) 1971
- C) 1976

To enter visit:

www.futurecomps.co.uk/git393seymourduncan

What vehicle were ZZ Top waiting for on their 1973 album *Tres Hombres*?

- A) Car
- B) Bus
- C) Yacht

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www.futurecomps.co.uk/git393creamtmash

Brian May's home-made electric guitar is known as...

- A) The Red Baron
- B) The Red Rocker
- C) The Red Special

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No Holding Back

He's been dubbed the 'British John Mayer' and he's bringing powerfully soulful songcraft back to the charts with an old Epiphone Century in hand. We meet rising star James Bay to chew the fat about hollowbody tones, keeping his rig simple and why he's keeping his powder dry on the solos...

Words **Matt Frost** *Photography* **Will Ireland**

Last year was a big break for 24-year old Hitchin-born singer-songwriter James Bay – but all the indications are that he's headed all the way into pop's stratosphere in 2015. The past 12 months saw him tour the US with Hozier, secure his first Top 10 hit with *Hold Back The River*, come second in the BBC Sound Of 2015 poll, and then topped it all by winning the prestigious 2015 Critics' Choice Award at the BRITs, whose previous winners include Sam Smith, Adele and Jessie J.

As we go to press, Bay's debut album, *Chaos And The Calm* – produced by Kings Of Leon producer Jacquire King at Nashville's Blackbird Studio – has just hit the shops. And while James's soulful voice and forceful songwriting have rightfully gained plaudits, the former BIMM student's six-string playing is wonderfully concise and effective, too. From elegant acoustic fingerstyle subtleties through to incisive electric rhythm playing, there's no doubting that the two hard years James spent in Brighton busking and playing countless open-mic nights have more than paid off handsomely.

We caught up with James to find out what keeps the creativity flowing on guitar...

How would you sum up your approach to tone on *Chaos And The Calm*?

"As a kid, I was always nerding out about details and electronics and parts. But recently I finally started to nail down what it is I like. My sound starts with P-90s, and

the other thing to my sound that I like the most is that air. I'm all about the f-holes and a completely hollow body. You get feedback issues, but I just want to ride with that in the moment and see how I can control it. I like finding that sweet spot of crackle with the air that's moving through.

"I also tune down a whole tone because I love open chords and open strings, and I can't sing in C as well as I can in B $\flat$. With open strings, I love getting that sort of twangy jangliness, but where you can still feel the air in the sound of the P-90s, so it's not indie jangle. It's more like a kind of Motown soul jangle."

What electric guitars did you play when you were laying down the tracks at Blackbird Studio?

"I played my Epiphone Century guitar the most, but I also played some other cool things. There was a gorgeous old '54 Strat that I played slide on, and then an old Silvertone Jupiter, which my producer Jacquire King had there. I was loving that guitar and it had these funny little old pickups and some changed parts on it like brand new tuning pegs, so it was a bit of a 'Frankenstein' but it sounded great, man. That thing felt a bit like a toy guitar and it was definitely in that slightly Jack White kind of vein.

"There was also a gorgeous Custom Shop Telecaster I played and then a John Lennon Casino I used on a couple of tracks. That was gorgeous, too, and had a very sort of rich, crackly P-90 tone again."

And what about acoustics?

"I have to say that one of the greatest, most wonderful benefits of recording at Blackbird is all the old guitars they have. There was this beautiful 1941 Martin D-28, which was very warm and that went down on a few tracks. There was a Gibson J-50 and basically all of the paint and lacquer had come off the front. John McBride, who owns and runs the studio, has a famous line: 'For the first 25 years of its life, a guitar still thinks it's a tree, so it needs that time to age.'

"My go-to acoustic that I play all the time is a J-200, but at Blackbird there was a 1949 J-200. It hurt to play it but it sounded like a piano. It was just the most ring-y beautiful sounding guitar."

What amps did you use on the album compared with what you choose onstage?

"In the studio, I used a late-60s 'silverface' Twin most of the time and then I played through Jacquire's Selmer amp a little bit, too, which was a big old glassy clean thing. Having made the record and discovered some sounds I loved, particularly that P-90 sound through the 'silverface' Twin, I really wanted to replicate that, but – my God! – is it impossible to get a decent Twin and cart it round everywhere without it breaking every five minutes?

"But then I found Tone King amps, which are made by a guy called Mark Bartel in Baltimore. I now play live through a Tone King Sky King. It's so clear but warm, and it breaks up just in the right way. I do like break-up, but I don't like it to be too





James and his beloved P-90 loaded Epiphone Century

aggressive. I like to work to get it to feel aggressive. It also has a built-in [Ironman] attenuator, which is this beautiful thing that allows you the same tones when you click down to different volumes. This amp has some of the greatest sounds ever."

Do you utilise many pedals and effects?

"No, I don't have many. I have been using an MXR Carbon Copy delay because I wanted a simple decent go-to delay pedal and I like the modulation button on it. There are loads of great delays, but I can only get so deep or else I'll fall into this endless cycle of options. I also use an [Electro-Harmonix] Holy Grail reverb at times, but the reverb on the Tone King really is pretty beautiful. I guess I take that Derek Trucks approach of 'let's just go straight into the amp', because the amp does so much. I don't even do anything with the tone knob on my guitar, and I barely do anything with the reverb. I'm just all the way up and it's about my hands. That's where volume comes from."

Could you summarise your approach to writing and where the guitar fits in?

"I ended up writing a lot of the album on the Century, but before that I was writing most things on acoustic. I love the fact that, with the Century, I don't even have to be plugged in. It's hollow so I get a response from it sonically, and it also inspired me to stand up and dig in, in a Springsteen/Keith sort of way."

"But all my songs are born out of guitar and vocal, but then there can be different versions. Clapton and John Mayer have done it a lot where they'll take these really quite big guitar parts and put them into a full band arrangement. They'll totally work in that environment, and I essentially write some songs with the intention of recording

them in that environment... What I love about it is you can bring them right down into that *MTV Unplugged* sort of vibe."

Many guitarists don't seem to take songcraft as seriously as their playing but you seem to have struck a rare balance...

"Thanks. And do you know what helped me do that? This is a big discipline – but I ruled out solos. All I want to do is play solos! My band's soundchecks and rehearsals get overwrought with jam sessions, because I absolutely love it. But, you know, I listen to people like George Harrison on *All Things Must Pass* – an album full of beautiful, brilliant songwriting, vocals and lyrics – and there are very solid, structured guitar parts.

Sale of the Century

James tells us how he got his mitts on that treasured Epiphone Century axe...

"AFTER seeing this YouTube video of me playing an open-mic night, my label [Republic Records] asked me and my management to fly to New York. While I was there, I wandered around Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village and played this really cool hollowbody in Umanov Guitars. It sounded kind of funky and cool and I was like, 'Yeah, man. If I ever come back to New York, I'm going to get this dream guitar!' I told everyone, but when I got home, I went up on the website and it said 'SOLD'. A few days later, my managers asked me to go to the office to pick up some post. There was a big box in the office and I was like, 'What?' The label had bought and shipped me that guitar!"

Less is more. So that was a simple rule, and when I was writing, instead of putting a solo in a certain space, I would try and write a middle eight and add a little bit more emotional information.

"I had to really discipline myself because I spent so many years in my bedroom soloing and learning riffs, but I realised I didn't want to just get lost in noodling. If I wanted to create some sort of prolonged career, then soloing just had to be one small part of that. Having said that, we've got the Shepherd's Bush [Empire] gigs coming up and there's no chance I'm going two nights there without playing a solo onstage, man! I won't wander too far outside of the box, but I will find my places to bend some strings!"

There seem to be a lot more singer-songwriters playing great guitar these days. You've come at the right time...

"Well, I guess in the early 2000s, people were strumming three chords and singing a great song. I'm thinking of singer-songwriters like Damien Rice and Ray LaMontagne. Then it seemed there was a huge popularity in electronic dance music and stuff like that, but now that's dying away a little bit and this more organic sound is coming back through. There's room for everything now and I feel like I have a great window to play electric guitar parts and to be a songwriter and singer at the same time. Once upon a time, it existed in a different way, with guys like Springsteen and Clapton and George Harrison, because they were all mainstream back then. It's really cool to feel like people are up for that again now and I'm going to jump at that chance..."

James Bay's *Chaos And The Calm* is out now on Virgin Records

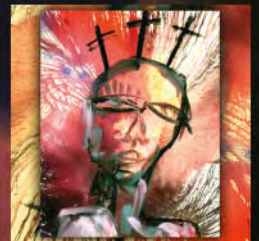
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Talking Meds

Vancouver's Dan Mangan returned from a short hiatus this year with plenty to say alongside his band, Blacksmith. Slicing through the January gloom came the album *Club Meds*, a brooding masterpiece that looks set to earn greater recognition on both sides of the Atlantic. We hear how they did it and talk Dave Grohl cameos, free-form jazz, breaking Bryan Adams' amps, and how even vocals sound better when you put them through guitar pedals...

Words Gary Walker Portraits Shimon Karmel



Just 13 days into 2015, Dan Mangan + Blacksmith fired a compelling early salvo in the album of the year stakes. Depicting Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette surveying the wreckage of the global financial meltdown, exploring 18th century German etymology and dystopian Canadian literature, and imploring the listener to find light in a modern world cloaked in existential uncertainty, *Club Meds* – Mangan’s fourth studio album – finds the Vancouver singer-songwriter in articulate form, alongside a pioneering guitarist.

Immersive, beautiful and baroque, the album is also something of a departure. *Club Meds*, a pun on the sedated, self-medicated travails of 21st century life, was the first release to bear the name of Blacksmith, members of whom played on 2011’s *Oh Fortune* and 2009’s *Nice, Nice, Very Nice*.

It marked a conscious decision to give the band a collaborative role in a darker, more intricate sound than anything in Mangan’s 12-year recording career.

It was a brave move, putting the two-time Juno Award winner’s considerable reputation in his homeland on the line, with Gordon Grdina’s experimental guitar to the fore, alongside bassist John Walsh and drummer Kenton Loewen. Four years after the release of the more traditionally folky *Oh Fortune*, did Mangan fear alienating the audience he’d spent a decade building?

“We’d gone a long time running off the fumes and momentum of some records we’d made,” he explains. “We took some time away and everyone got to exhale. When we reinstated what was going on, it felt like a new page, a new era in the project. There was no fear of holding on to the audience we had. We wanted to make a statement and get expansive.”



Grdina, a fellow Vancouver resident who has played alongside Dan since 2010, has a guitar CV that mixes jazz and blues with Arabic classical music and oud playing, juggling Blacksmith with several more esoteric projects. Mangan is a more conventional acoustic player, yet *Club Meds* sees their styles dovetailing seamlessly.

"I'm a street-learned, clumsy rhythm guitar player, and Gord makes up for it in that he is a guitar player through and through," says Mangan. "I'm a songwriter who has become an adequate guitar player. One of Gord's powers is doing what's right for the song rather than what seems good for him to shine.

"I grew up on the classic songwriters: Van Morrison, The Beatles and Nick Drake. I came up appreciating simple chord structures. When I was younger, I had a boxy idea of what guitar playing was, and everything fit nicely into a mould of first-position chords, and if you get daring you move up the neck, but it's been amazing for me playing with the band.

"All of the guys come from more of an experimental, improvisational free-jazz background, and this is probably the straightest, most pop project they play in,

playing in all kinds of chaotic trios, quartets and bizarre Nordic sextets.

"There was a long time when I was travelling around alone with an acoustic guitar, so I learned how to use voice and guitar to grab people. It was a real transition when I started playing with a band of really fine musicians; I had to relearn what it was to listen because I was so used to leading the charge."

Under The Influence

Grdina's restlessly inventive playing illuminates *Club Meds*, feedback loops, tape echo and piano-like arpeggios embellishing Mangan's acoustic rhythm work amid a heady haze of mournful strings, regal brass and fizzing electronics. At times, it evokes what Radiohead might sound like if they were still making guitar-focused records.

"Guitar from the beginning, for me, was always rock and blues guys," recalls Grdina. "Stevie Ray Vaughan was huge, Jimmy Page, and then Bill Frisell and Jim Hall were huge influences. Then I got into jazz – Pat Metheny, John Abercrombie, John Scofield... then I got into piano players, so trying to play piano on guitar was a lot of what I've been into.

"Keith Jarrett, Paul Bley were huge influences, and I studied with Gary Peacock, who's a bassist who played with Keith Jarrett. I think 'guitarist', I hear the whole fretboard in my head, but I see the notes everywhere and I'm trying to not sound like a guitar player."

So, how have these two guitarists from very different parts of the playing spectrum managed to find some common ground, particularly live where almost everything is improvised? It's something UK audiences will soon witness when the band arrive on these shores for a six-date tour in April.

"There's a natural tendency for Dan to play acoustic and me electric," explains Grdina. "I've always loved that sound, ever since old Zeppelin records, where there's acoustic guitar mixed with electric, because it sounds so full. But the connection and communication through it has been more harmonic, not planned.

"When we play it live, all that stuff is improvised. All those guitar parts are not parts, it's a constant moving, floating development of the harmony. There's a fundamental going on, which is Dan's part, and then I dance around it, which makes it fresh and new every time."



Dan + Band (l-r) Gord, John Walsh, Dan and Kenton Loewen

There's some interesting gear in the Mangan and Blacksmith arsenal, too. Dan plays a '57 Gibson J-45 and his "Frankenstein hollowbody", a late 40s Harmony with P-90s installed, through a '65 Princeton clone made by Californian boutique builder Headstrong. Vancouver's Union pedals – who made the Third Man Bumble Buzz for Jack White – are represented on Dan's 'board in the More preamp and Buzz Bomb fuzz, alongside an Empress ParaEq.

Gordina's main guitar is a '68 Gibson ES-125, and he also utilises a three-pickup '72 Gibson SG Custom, a hollowbody built by Seattle's Steve Andersen and a '77 hardtail Strat into a '71 Fender Vibrolux and '63 Gibson Falcon. While recording *Club Meds* in Bryan Adams' Warehouse studio in Vancouver, Gord borrowed some of his fellow Canadian's amps, too. "I used his little Supro and a little Champ, and one other amp I can't remember... but I broke two of them," he laughs. Gordina's 'board also houses a Union More, an OCD Overdrive and a Fulltone tape echo.

Guitar pedals were behind *Club Meds'* hot, distorted vocal sound, too: "We used this Wampler Black '65," says Dan. "It's like a mock Fender amp head. It imitates a '65 'blackface'. We'd run the vocals through that. On some of the tracks, we'd do weird s**t like run the vocals through some guitar pedals and into the house at the Warehouse, this big live room, and then re-record it through that."

A Different Class

That rasping vocal sound is an appropriate vehicle for a lyrical set that's rapier-sharp in its observational insight – most notably on the doleful waltz *XVI*, with its acerbic "let them eat cake" pay-off.

"During the Occupy movement I had this image in my head of unshowered activists in the park and your leading bank dudes in the towers," explains Mangan. "They went about their business and were maybe mildly inconvenienced by it all... and how that related to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in Versailles while France is in riots and burning and people are starving – and there's such a disconnect. People use the term class war, and I don't think that's what it is, it's like human disconnection and both sides of the coin can't understand the kind of humanity on the other side."

"I'm a street-learned, clumsy rhythm guitar player, and Gord makes up for it... he is a guitar player through and through. I'm a songwriter who has become an adequate guitar player" **Dan Mangan**



Gordon Gordina handles electric guitar duties

"That song is like a letter home from a Wall Street banker," Dan offers, "and his family's watching the news unfold back in Ohio, and they're saying, 'This recession's hit us. We're not sure if we're going to be able to keep the home, and all we hear on TV is how you guys f**ked us over – is it true?' And so the banker's writing them a letter from this crippled office, full of dust, and he says, 'Yeah, absolutely. We totally f**ked you and we're going to continue to f**k you forever.'"

"Empathy, compassion and kindness come from feeling connected to human beings, and the further we disconnect and turn off and say 'the world's hard, I'm just going to focus on my little thing,' the easier it is to cast people aside."

Have Mangan and his band lost faith in humanity and surrendered to that darkness? Conversely, there's immense optimism in their music. There's also a subtle cameo: Foo Fighter Dave Grohl, a teenage hero of Dan's, sings backing vocals on *Vessel*, written for the soundtrack to the film *Hector And The Search For Happiness*,

starring Simon Pegg, for which Mangan co-wrote the score.

"The world is chaos, everything is f**ked up, and people are screwed up and everything's insane, and yet everything is totally beautiful and amazing," asserts Dan, "and I didn't want people to get lost in the darkness. Hopefully, people see the light that is in the record. It's not just darkness, it's appreciation for the darkness and therefore being able to see the light as well."

As we leave Dan to embark on a globe-trotting tour that will span much of 2015, *Guitarist* wonders whether he feels a sense of vindication, having produced his most acclaimed, yet also politically outspoken and expansive work, without compromising by making a more commercially palatable record?

"One of the pros of having taken the long journey is appreciating every little step along the way," he concludes. "If we had just come out with a record like this out of the gate and stepped way up, I don't know if I'd have such an appreciation for all the little things that have gone on. We're very appreciative of all the amazing things that have come our way." 📺



Dan Mangan + Blacksmith's UK tour starts on 24 April 2015 in Manchester. *Club Meds* is available now on Arts & Crafts records

ALTERNATIVE SINGLE-CUTS £649-£799
ELECTRICS



Single Minded

Like your single-cuts but want something a little different?
We track down four affordable alternatives to *that* classic design

WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Adam Gasson**



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



Our readers come in all shapes, sizes and ages, not to mention differing musical tastes. But rarely does a day go by when we don't receive an email request for info or a gear-related dilemma. Often we're accosted in our local hostelry or at a gig. "I'm getting my old band back together," said a gentleman of a certain age, recently. "I've still got that old Les Paul from the 90s but I fancy a new guitar. Now, I love that Les Paul, but we're planning on playing some broader stuff, a bit more bluesy,

and I've just starting recording some original ideas, too, so I fancy something like that... but a bit different, if you know what I mean? I've got about £700. What do you recommend?"

The majority of Les Paul-inspired single-cuts, especially in this price area, are more often than not simply the time honoured Gibson recipe with a different cosmetic twist, a different pickup set or maybe a couple of additional frets. Not exactly different. Our suggestion that a Telecaster might satisfy was met with a





negative “I can’t get on with those” response. Hmm.

Okay, well the logical place to start is with Gibson itself, whose 2015 USA production range is, ahem, certainly a little bit different. Back in issue 389 we caught up with the Studio model, which is a bit over our price limit, but the LPM (Les Paul Maple) is closer. Other options? Well, one single-cut that impressed us last year was Zach Myers’ PRS SE signature. Once again, it’s different courtesy of its semi-hollow body, light weight and, of course, PRS’s avian aesthetic. It was originally only offered in a polarising Trampas Green finish, but now it’s available in a more classic Sunburst, and it’s the right price, too. ‘Different’ is definitely something we can apply to Italia’s range of often wacky, out-there retro designs, too. The company celebrated its 15th Anniversary last year with the release of the fabulously OTT Maranello Classic.

Our final suggestion centres on pickups. Trying to find a P-90-equipped single-cut in

this price wasn’t easy, PRS’s SE 245 Soapbar being an exception. Godin’s retro Richmond range, meanwhile, offers quality Canadian build and despite being a bolt-on, like the Maranello, its all-mahogany construction with soapbar single coils looks like a modern take on a Les Paul Special.

Gibson 2015 LPM

The ‘maple’ in this Gibson’s abbreviated name refers to the LPM’s neck, a pretty unusual choice over the mahogany usually used on an LP. It’s the most affordable ‘proper’ carved-top Les Paul, and like the majority of models in this year’s line-up, employs the ‘robot’ G Force tuners, height-adjustable brass zero fret and wider neck dimensions along with a gloss nitro finish and the blingy gold moulded case – our other three contenders come with pretty sturdy gigbags.

There are no options (colour aside) in the 2015 line-up, but each model has its own specific recipe. Here, for example, we get the densest grade of

mahogany for the back wood selection and consequently one of the heaviest ‘Pauls’ we’ve ever played, despite the quoted nine-hole weight relief. We suggest Gibson makes those holes bigger! The maple top has the least dished top carve of the range and is of the lowest grade that Gibson offers, which certainly works under the see-through red and black finish options, but does look very plain under this vintage sunburst.

It’s quite an unusual ‘burst, too. While the main shading is applied just to the top, the dark black outer colour is sprayed over the sides, the natural edge ‘binding’ of the maple top at the waist and base, and over the heel – leaving the maple neck back natural. If we’re honest, it looks like a mistake.

The fingerboard is supposed to be the lightest colour rosewood, but it’s pretty rich

looking with some vibrant orange-y streaks that offset the classic inlays. The satin chrome-finished bridge and stud tailpiece look classy, while the uncovered 61 Zebra pickups, with Alnico V magnets and slightly unmatched coils, are controlled in the usual fashion.

The neck profile is ‘rounded’ and it also has quite a taper from the lower positions up to a pretty chunky curve by the 12th. Obviously, along with the added width, the overall girth factor is... Well, let’s just say it’s an acquired taste.

PRS SE Zach Myers

We’re 15 years on from the PRS Singlecut causing huge legal furore between the Maryland firm and Gibson, but with the Zach Myers on a stand next to the LPM, it’s clear that these two guitars are very different beasts indeed.

Unlike many of Godin’s higher-end modern designs, the Empire is a beautifully simple guitar



It hardly matters whether his band Shinedown are a fixture on your playlist or not, because Zach Myers has got a sharp design sense and this, his second SE signature, is a corker. The aforementioned new Vintage Sunburst finish really enhances the flame maple-veneered, solid maple top – it's not as deeply carved as the LPM, more contoured really, and there's no nitro here but the pin-sharp finish can't be faulted.

The neck, by contrast, has a satin finish, which will burnish with playing to a smooth gloss, and the wide fat profile (deeper than the LPM in its lower positions) just feels older, more classic. Some see these Korean-made PRSes as starter guitars for younger player, but the lightweight feel and overall vibe would really appeal to many a well-seasoned player. Well, apart from the control layout, which takes a little getting used to: the pickup volumes are closest to the bridge (neck uppermost, bridge below) with the corresponding tones closest to the guitar's edge. Not the

ideal guitar to change to from a classic Gibson mid-set.

The USA adjustable Stoptail wrapover bridge is Myers' preferred choice over the one-piece aluminium PRS bridge. It means you can intonate heavier string gauges more accurately, even wound thirds. Like the LPM, we get a pair of open zebra-bobbed humbuckers based on PRS's USA-made 245s, a slightly hotter and thicker PAF-alike.

Italia Maranello Classic 15th Anniversary

Squarely based on a Hagstrom P46 Deluxe, including its finish, the Maranello also closely apes a Les Paul outline (despite its slightly fuller waist and less hooked treble horn), along with its dual-covered humbuckers, tune-o-matic-style bridge and more original flat-topped stud tailpiece. It has the longest scale of our foursome at 635mm (25 inches), but that shouldn't ruin the party. And dressed like this it's clearly party time! An alder body with a very slightly dished

top and overall depth of 51mm (thinner than both the LPM and Zach Myers, which measure 57mm and 56mm, respectively) is entirely encased in thin plastic: mother-of-toilet-seat to the back and sides, a drum-covering-like gold sparkle to the cream bound top.

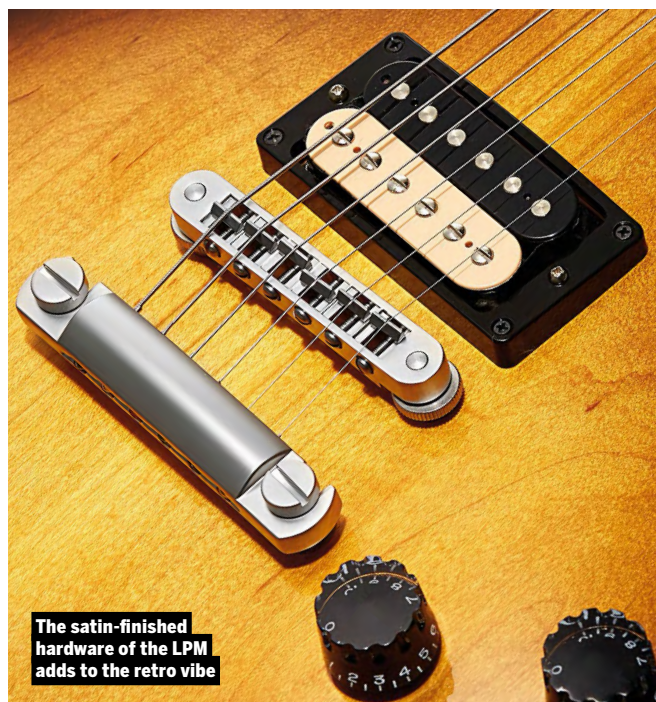
The neck (also encased in the same plastic as the back) is actually maple and attaches to the body with a very Les Paul-like wide tenon, but instead of being glued in, there are two Allen-key'd machine bolts under a cover plate that thread into inserts in the neck creating a very stable, rigid join.

All the electronics are mounted on a mounded acrylic-like clear plastic, which is cream-painted on its underside. Underneath this assembly, the body is hollowed to a depth of around 25mm – adding almost as much air to the design as the Zach Myers. While the controls are very standard, the humbuckers, according to Italia designer Trevor Wilkinson, use ceramic magnets and the bridge pickup especially has a

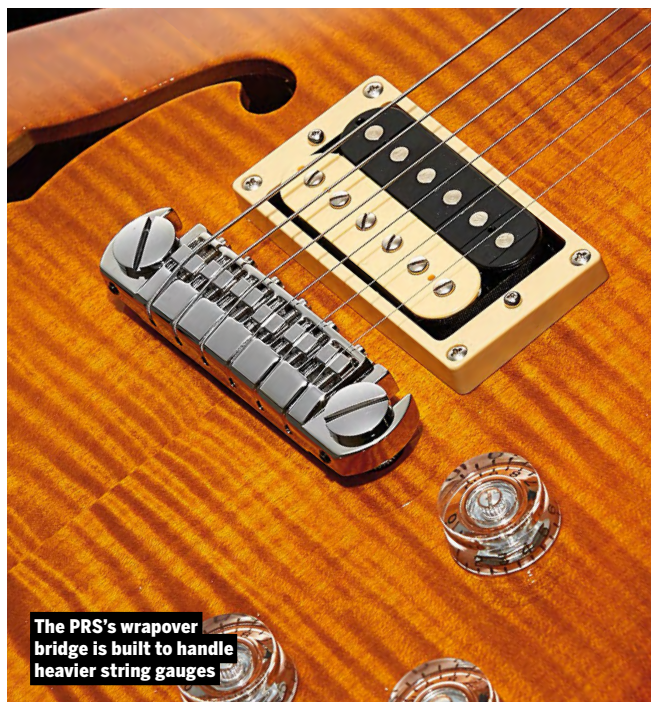
lot of wire – and consequently a high DC resistance reading – to tame the highs of the strong ceramic magnet.

Godin Richmond Empire P-90

Originally, Richmond was simply a brand made by Godin with (not unlike Italia) a strong retro design theme. More recently, it's been brought into the expansive Godin guitar line – hence the overlong name – which remains the most diverse of any North American manufacturer. Unlike many of Godin's higher-end two- and three-voice modern designs, this Empire is a beautifully simple guitar. Its flat-based single-cut body recalls Ovation's UKII solidbodies, among others, with a simple slab body made from light weight, apparently Honduran mahogany with a slim SG-like depth (38.5mm) and chamfered edges. The neck is once-piece mahogany, too, save for the headstock splice, and the thinnest in width and depth of our foursome. While the neck



The satin-finished hardware of the LPM adds to the retro vibe



The PRS's wrapover bridge is built to handle heavier string gauges

has a slightly open-pore satin finish, the body is stained a mid brown with a gloss coating. A simple dot-inlaid rosewood 'board continues the no-frills vibe. With a thin width and black face, the curvy back-angled headstock places the individual Kluson-style tuners at quite rakish angles. The bridge, by contrast, is a much more straight-forward intonation-ridged wrapover.

The Kingpin soapbars are made to Godin specs by G&B in Korea, the same company that makes PRS's SE pickups. Like all our single-cuts, the pickup selector here is shoulder-mounted, and aside from the Italia, all the output jacks are side-mounted on metal plates.

Sounds

The LPM kicks us off with an energetic rock assault that recalls many a fiery Les Paul. Classic PAF tone it ain't, but then it doesn't take us down the death-metal rabbit hole either. These pickups seem powerful with quite a crisp high end, no doubt helped by the maple neck. As we concluded in our previous test of these 2015 Les Pauls (issue 390), the wider neck – albeit with standard string spacing – does take some getting used to. But we have to

be honest and say that, with playing, you do adapt. If you like a chunky rounded feel, especially in the upper positions, this has it.

The tuning system needs its own review with its host of features and open/alterd tunings. Simple retuning (certainly when we'd fully charged the battery) was actually faster than we remember from our previous test, but if only they'd make the on/off button a different colour – black on black isn't going to be particularly helpful on the sort of pub/club stages most of us get to play on. And, as before, when we switched to one of the other guitars on test we had that "oh, you mean we've got to tune it manually!?" moment.

Our second single-cut, the Zach Myers, certainly feels much more classic, both in terms of neck shape and weight – everything feels right. Although, unlike a pukka USA core PRS, its tuning stability isn't as good. Whereas our reference USA PRS Singlecut has that huge clouting solidity and a beautiful Kossoff/Ralphs kind of classic rock voice, the Myers is lighter, more airy in the mids with that whiff of a ES-335. Cleaner tones ape a BB King clarity, while crunchier

If you like a chunky rounded feel in the neck, especially in the upper positions, this Les Paul has it

and quite gained tones have less midrange snarl. Clean, there's plenty of clarity without sharpness, too, for more classic Beatles/Stones R&B. As we said before, roll back both the volume and tone a little and that neck pickup is pretty jazzy.

Strapped on, the Maranello feels slightly neck heavy but nothing serious. The neck has a nicely full deep-ish 'C' profile and the plastic covering feels like a gloss finished all-maple Fender neck, if we're honest. Starting where we left the Zach Myers on our clean amp, we checked the tone was full up. It's not the clearest sound we've ever heard – some way from an original PAF – but there's good balance to the pickups and some actually quite round-nosed Ricky-like jangle with both on. Show Signor Maranello a cranked amp, however, and we get thumping midrange sizzle that certainly recalls DiMarzio game-changing Super Distortion. With the current 'less output is more' being the hipster's choice, the Maranello

is not only polarising in its dress sense, but will be in its voice, too. For some of us of a certain age who remember those 70s Super Distortion tones, however, it's a crackin' slice of guilty pleasure pie.

The Empire's light weight and single-cut SG-like feel, married with the narrowest and slimmest neck on review, means its *very* different from the classic Les Paul vibe – much more early 60s SG or late 50s double-cut Special. There's a lively, vibrant ring to the guitar that's enhanced by the pretty clean, low-ish output P-90s, which have a 60s jangle and early Clash/Libertines punk-y scratch. Up the wick a bit and tune to open G, and there's the cleaner crunch of classic-era Stones or the raunch of Bad Company. The Empire seems a little under-powered, though, especially the bridge pickup.

That said, a little lift from our ancient MXR Micro Amp does the trick nicely. It's a neat rhythm guitar, not to mention a SG-meets-Special slide axe and

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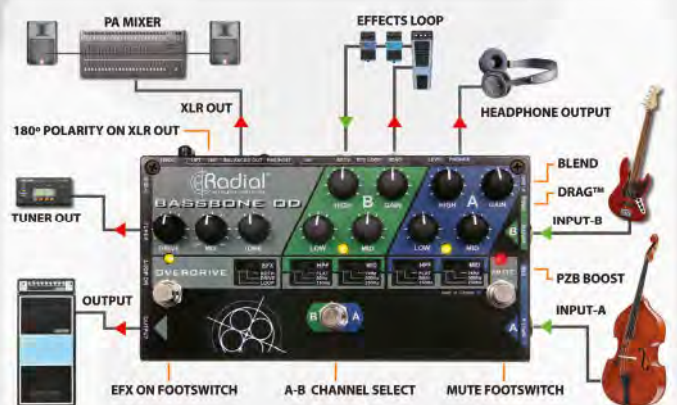
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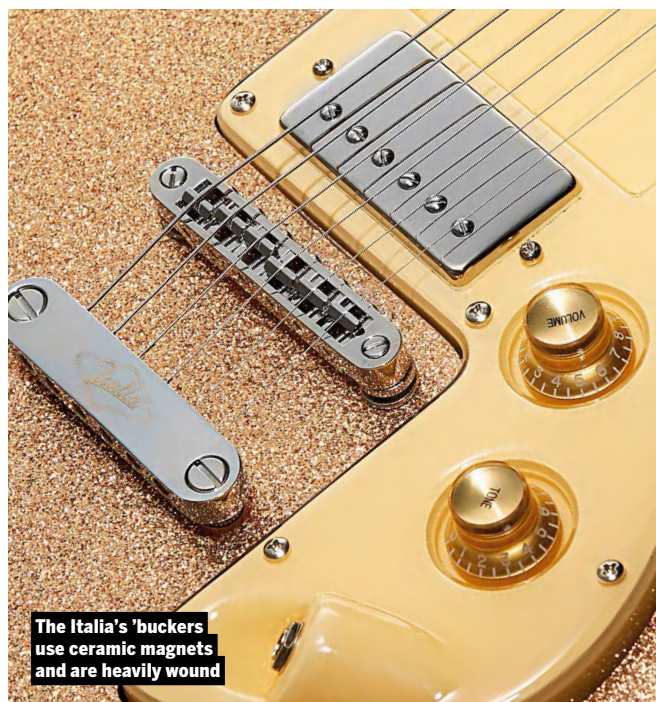


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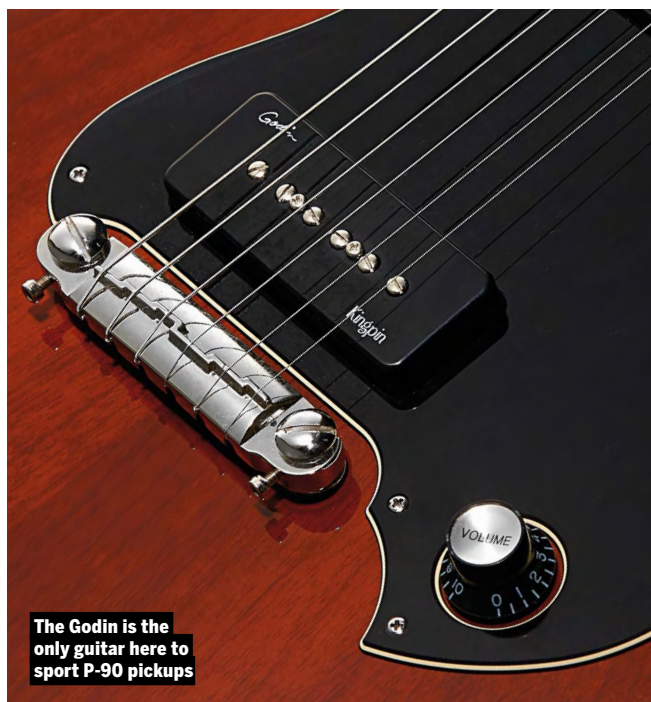
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The Italia's 'buckers use ceramic magnets and are heavily wound



The Godin is the only guitar here to sport P-90 pickups

a great sonic foil for a thicker-toned Les Paul.

Verdict

Sitting in the pub or scouring the internet is all well and good but experiencing the actual (rather than the imagined or assumed) feels and sounds of different instruments is essential. We wonder, for example, how many people have rubbished Gibson 2015 guitars without ever playing one? Well, we've played a few

now and, yes, they're not for everyone, but spend some time with that tuning system – especially if you're into altered tunings – and, like us, you'll begin to see the logic behind it. The LPM is no slouch on the energetic rock front either, but we'd save a little more and go for the slightly more classic Studio, especially if we wanted to cover more tonal bases.

Being different is the mantra that's sustained Italia over the past 15 years. Even the standard

Maranello comes in some pretty wacky colours, but who says we all have to play sunburst single-cuts? A fun guitar to pick up mid-set with that 70s power-rock tone and a slightly funky edge. Not as daft as it looks!

The Empire is typically Godin: well made, fit for purpose and although we'd swap the bridge pickup for something a little hotter, this could be a keeper, especially open-tuned for slide or some garage/Stones-y riffage.

When we previously looked at the PRS SE Zach Myers model last year, pretty much the only question mark was its original faded bluey-green finish. But in this much more palatable honey-hued sunburst, for any mainstream blues or even jazz player; classic rocker or contemporary player, it's stylistically versatile and, all things considered, the most sensible choice, especially bearing in mind its lower on-the-street price. **G**

Alternative Single-cut Dimensions



GIBSON 2015 LPM



PRS SE ZACH MYERS

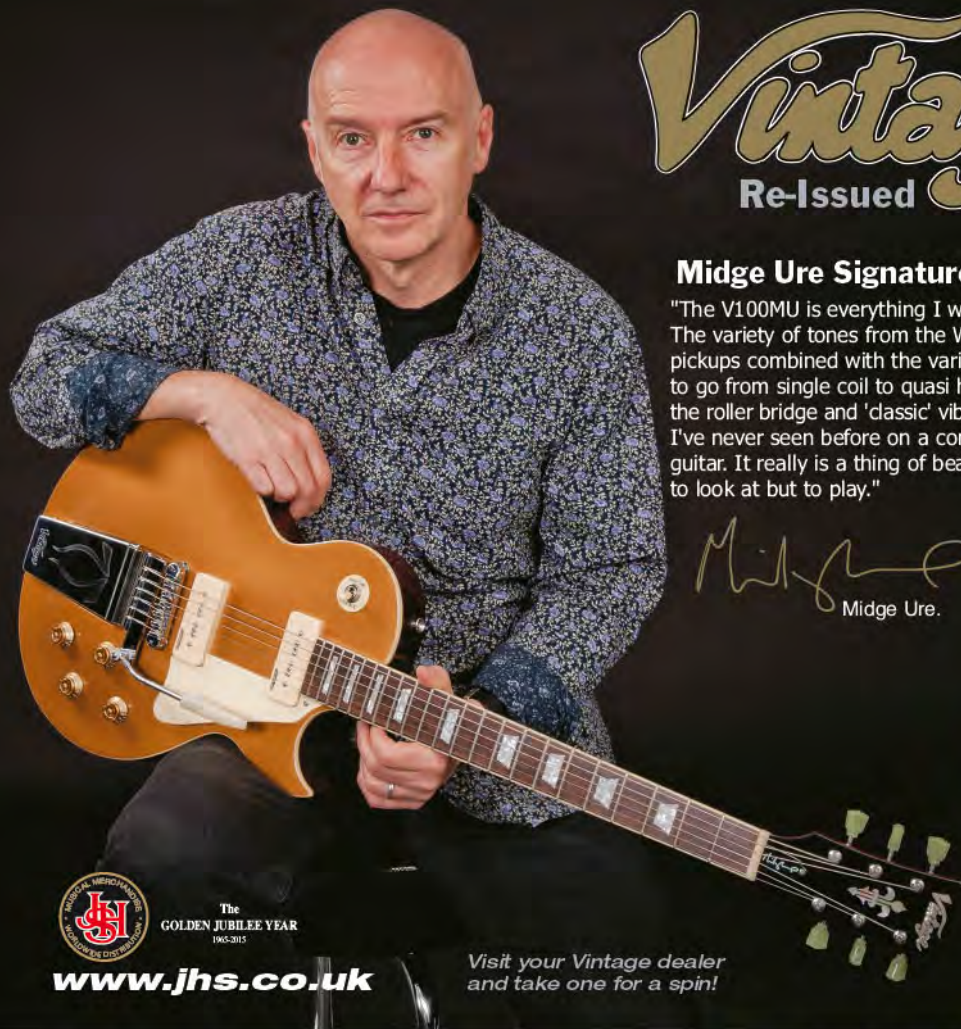


ITALIA MARANELLO



GODIN RICHMOND EMPIRE

	GIBSON 2015 LPM	PRS SE ZACH MYERS	ITALIA MARANELLO	GODIN RICHMOND EMPIRE
Scale length (mm/inch)	624/24.6	622/24.5	635/25	629/24.75
Nut width (mm)	45.6	43.5	43	41.87
12th width (mm)	55.25	53.5	52.8	51.74
1st fret neck depth (mm)	20.85	22.2	21.85	19.8
12th fret neck depth (mm)	24.15	23.7	24.2	22.2
Bridge String Spacing (mm)	50.5	52.5	52.5	52.5
Weight (kg/lb)	4.4/9.7	3.1/6.84	4/8.83	3.1/6.75



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Gibson 2015 LPM

PRICE: £799 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric
BODY: High-density mahogany, C-grade figured maple top
NECK: 1-piece maple, rounded profile, glued-in
NUT: Brass zero fret
FINGERBOARD: Light rosewood, m-o-p trapezoid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Satin nickel-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge and stud tailpiece, G Force 'robot' tuners
ELECTRICS: 2x 61 Zebra uncovered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume and tone controls
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: In a similar price area are the Junior Single Cut (£699), Special Double Cut (£799) and Studio (£899)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Trans Ebony, Heritage Cherry, Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed) gloss nitrocellulose
Gibson
www2.gibson.com

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

Guitarist says: A lot of guitar for the money with a ballsy rock voice. You might love it at first listen but we'd choose the Studio



PRS SE Zach Myers

PRICE: £709 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Single-cutaway, semi-solid electric
BODY: Mahogany with bevelled maple top with flame maple veneer
NECK: Mahogany, wide fat profile, glued-in
NUT: Black friction reducing
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid bird inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: PRS Adjustable Stoptail wrapover bridge, Kluson vintage-style tuners – nickel-plated
ELECTRICS: PRS SE 245 Treble and Bass humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickups selector switch, individual pickup volume and tones
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: SE 245 Soapbar with twin P-90 single coils (£689)
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed), Trampas Green
PRS Europe
01223 874301
www.prsguitars.com



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

Guitarist says: It can certainly rock but there are also some bluesier, jazzier voices under the hood. In this colour, it's a keeper



Italia Maranello Classic 15th Anniversary

PRICE: £789 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Alder with pearloid back
NECK: Maple, bolt-on
NUT: Black friction reducing
FINGERBOARD: 'Goldplexi' plastic, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge, Italia logo'd stud tailpiece
ELECTRICS: Italia Premier IPCb & IPCn humbuckers (by Wilkinson), 3-way toggle selector switch, master volume and tones
OPTIONS: The standard Maranello Classic (£749) has an agathis body, block inlaid rosewood fingerboard and 'Vintage-Voice' Wilkinson humbuckers
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gold Mist Sparkle
JHS
0113 286 53831
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GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★☆
Playability	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Highly detailed retro design and fits our 'different' brief. Those pickups won't be for everyone though, nor the livery



Godin Richmond Empire

PRICE: £649 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solidbody electric
BODY: Solid 2-piece mahogany
NECK: Mahogany, bolt-on
NUT: White synthetic
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 305mm (12-inch) radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Ridged wrapover bridge, individual Kluson-style tuners
ELECTRICS: 2x Godin Kingpin single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone
OPTIONS: Available with humbucker at bridge and mini humbucker at neck (£599); dual Godin humbuckers (£649). All colours apart from Mahogany HG use silver leaf maple center and poplar wings body construction
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Black HG, Cream HG or Natural Mahogany HG (as reviewed)
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01132 589599
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GUITARIST RATING	★★★★★
Build quality	★★★★★
Playability	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

Guitarist says: Aside from the slightly under-powered bridge pickup, this simple lightweight axe has 'garage rock' in its DNA

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Two-Rock



FANO ALT DE FACTO ML6 £2,749
ELECTRICS

VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



Fano Fare

Another elegantly-distressed collision of classic designs from the golden era of the electric guitar with an embarrassment of options. Dennis Fano is a menace to the wallets of retro guitar lovers everywhere...

WORDS **Chris Vinnicombe** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joseph Branston**





Fano Alt de Facto ML6 £2,749

What You Need To Know

1 So, what's the story with Fano?

Guitar repairer and luthier Dennis Fano struck out on his own in 2000. His Alt de Facto instruments have since been used by the likes of Nels Cline, Jeff Tweedy, James Valentine of Maroon 5, The 1975's Adam Hann and Kings Of Leon's Matthew Followill.

2 New guitars that look old are one thing, but these guitars were never actually old in the first place...

That's the point: Fano envisages an alternate reality where the first generation of great American electric guitar builders put their heads together to create cool hybrid designs.

3 Are there any concessions to modernity here?

Yes. Locking TonePros hardware and conical fingerboard radiuses aim to make these guitars usable for contemporary gigging musicians.

We first encountered Pennsylvania luthier Dennis Fano's Alt de Facto guitars in issue 312 back in February 2009. Later that year, Fano joined the Premier Builders Guild collective, meaning that his designs could be manufactured in greater numbers under the close eye of PBG master builder Gene Baker in Arroyo Grande, California.

Fast-forward to January 2015, and while enjoying a cold post-show beverage away from the noise terrorism of the Winter NAMM show floor, one member of the *Guitarist* team remarked that they had to be escorted out of the Premier Builders Guild room in the Anaheim Convention Center, such was the inappropriate extent of their lust for all things Fano, Tone King, Koll, Two-Rock and the like.

While that may have been a joke, it's no exaggeration to state that Mr Fano's vision of what might have happened if all of the great American guitar makers of the late 1950s and early 60s had collaborated has produced a succession of instruments that make the entire *Guitarist* team rather weak at the knees. If we remove any fiscal concerns from the equation for a moment and appraise Fano's designs purely on the basis of their looks, sound, vibe and sheer

unadulterated cool then frankly, the results are off the chart.

Launched earlier this year at the aforementioned NAMM show, the ML6 is the latest addition to the Alt de Facto range. Fano says the ML6 was "discovered on the road somewhere between Kalamazoo and Fullerton", representing "the missing link between the working man's slab guitar from the 50s and the refined contours of an early 60s SG/LP." Fender and Gibson influences aside, the ML6's symmetrical double-cutaway outline is also reminiscent of the Epiphone Wilshire circa 1959 to '62 and it's a resemblance

that's given further credence here by the presence of a pair of P-90s, a tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece.

As ever, Fano's relationship with the past is a pragmatic one. The bridge and tailpiece are contemporary TonePros locking units while the guitar's fingerboard has an on-trend 254 to 406mm compound radius that, in combination with the set neck join (which looks slight but feels robust enough) and generous cutaways, makes for a highly playable experience even in the highest registers. The guitar's 22 neatly installed frets are quoted in the official spec as "Jescar 6105", which, given that



Fano's headstock design lets the maple peek out



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



The Fralin P-90s are top-notch units that really sing

The Rivals

For a big slice of old-school set-neck, double P-90 raunch, check out **Gibson Custom's** reissue of the **1960 Les Paul Special Single Cut** (£2,699). From the Fender Custom Shop camp, the new-for-NAMM 2015 **Caballo Tono Telecaster** (£3,574) has a similar hot-rodded vintage hybrid vibe and relic treatment to the ML6, albeit with a much higher proportion of Fullerton heritage in its DNA. For a dramatically more affordable option, audition the **Epiphone Frank Iero Wilshire Phant-o-Matic** (£369), which features the asymmetric Wilshire outline adopted in 1963



The 'light' distressing adds to the retro vibe



The hardware is also aged to burnished perfection

6105 is Dunlop nomenclature, means that the fretwire is most likely Jescar 55090, which shares the 6105-gauge wire's 2.29mm width and 1.4mm crown height. It's the same nickel-silver alloy wire found on Gibson USA instruments and as such will make for a familiar ride for most players, as will the late-50s 'roundback' neck shape that fattens out to 24.6mm at the 12th fret. It's reassuringly chunky in the palm rather than being a monster.

Our ML6 features a swamp ash body – the typically pronounced grain pattern of which is nicely visible through the nitrocellulose Mary Kaye White finish – with a glued-in maple neck. The total weight is a light 2.84kg that balances nicely when strapped on and doesn't suffer from neck dive. The combination of ash and maple is much more common on bolt-on designs but if it doesn't suit then there are numerous custom options, of

which the swamp ash here is one. Mahogany and korina bodies and necks are also available for a premium. The base model is £2,449 and comes with an unbound fingerboard, dot inlays and an alder body – the swamp ash, bound fingerboard and trapezoid inlays here account for a significant proportion of the extra 300 notes.

Although the spec sheet lists the level of finish distress on display here as "extra light", in reality the ageing seems closer to Fano's definition of "light" distress given the presence of dings, wear and light hardware ageing. The gloss nitrocellulose on the back of the neck remains

intact; our absolute favourite Fano necks are those that have had much of the lacquer removed to simulate heavy play wear, such as that of the mouth-watering RB6 Thinline that featured in issue 384, but there's definitely still an old, lived-in feel here that's instantly appealing. Though artificial ageing is still an issue that gets some guitarists more than a little het up, we're of the mind that it's a finish option that, aside from any aesthetic concerns, has huge playability benefits when done thoughtfully. In any case, Fano will make you a clean ML6 if you so desire, so the choice lies firmly with the buyer.

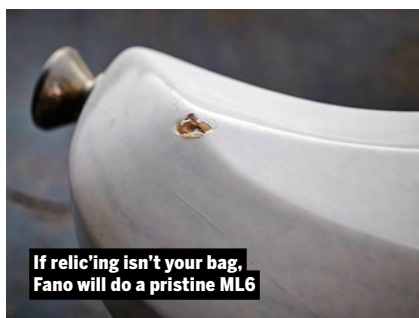
Fano says the ML6 was "discovered on the road somewhere between Kalamazoo and Fullerton"



The ML6 is handmade by the PBG in Arroyo Grande



The ML6's pearloid 'plate' is our only real issue



If relic'ing isn't your bag, Fano will do a pristine ML6



Fano Alt de Facto ML6

PRICE: £2,749 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Swamp ash with 'German' carve

NECK: Maple, set, late 50s round-back 'C' shape

SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: GraphTech Tusq/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, trapezoid inlays, 254-406mm (10-16") compound radius

FRETS: 22, Jescar '6105' profile

HARDWARE: Light-aged nickel TonePros tune-o-matic-style bridge and anchored tailpiece, Gotoh vintage-style tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Fralin P-90 single-coils, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume controls, master tone

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.84/6.25

OPTIONS: The base price for an alder body dot-inlay model is £2,449.

Options available include a variety of pickup configurations, bridge and vibrato types and body and neck materials. See website for more.

LEFT-HANDERS: (£POA)

FINISHES: Distressed nitrocellulose Mary Kay White (as reviewed) plus numerous others available to order

Coda Music

01438 350815

www.fanoguitars.com

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Build quality ★★★★★

Playability ★★★★★

Sound ★★★★★

Value for money ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Customisable retro chic with modern stability and versatile, great tones

Sounds

When it comes to the pickups that he selects for his instruments, Dennis Fano has very good taste indeed. Options for the ML6 include TV Jones, Lollar humbuckers and single coils and the Fralin P-90s installed here. Straight off the bat, this ML6 screams *Live At Leeds* through our revved-up tweed combo. Although there's a little less midrange push than you'd expect from an all-mahogany 50s or 60s Gibson, there's no shortage of raunch for vintage R&B, Brit-rock and Americana. Step on a drive pedal or two at volume and it's easy to summon musical feedback, but happily proceedings can get wild without collapsing into a mess of unwanted microphony. This is a guitar you want to gig and no mistake – our only minor gripe in use is that we'd prefer it if the volume pots were swapped around. For our money, it would feel more natural for the bridge potentiometer to be the closest control to the tailpiece.

Straight off the bat, this ML6 screams *Live At Leeds* through our revved-up tweed combo

Clean things up and a quality pair of P-90s in a well-built chassis again proves to be immensely versatile – the swamp ash and maple combination helping the ML6 cross the border into Fender country with a slinky, slippery array of neck pickup tones. Flip over to the slightly hotter bridge unit and you get a little extra hair for rootsy snap and twang, while the twin-pickup mix is light and funky.

Verdict

Initially, we were a little sceptical of the ML6's ability to deliver on Fano's 'missing link' promise as the instrument is steeped so heavily in Gibson and Epiphone styling cues, especially in this twin-P-90 and hardtail configuration. But aside from the bridge volume

control position and the scratchplate colour – we'd take black over pearloid every time – everything else here is on the money, and playing time really does see both sides of the ML6's sonic personality emerge. Mid-rich dirt brings out the SG/Les Paul Special leanings of the instrument, while cleanliness and spring reverb ushers a little southern Californian flavour into this fine blend.

It isn't cheap, of course, but the quality of build and tone on offer from Fano is consistent with Team Built Fender Custom Shop and Gibson Custom instruments that are similarly priced in store, while the sheer number of options on offer allows you to tailor the instrument to your specific requirements. **G**



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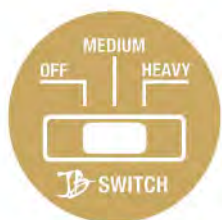
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Premier League

Meet two of the world's finest, impeccably built boutique tone machines, brought to life in the same facility for very different experiences

WORDS **Nick Guppy** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joseph Branston**

VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>

TWO-ROCK AKOYA & TONE KING IMPERIAL MKII £2,899 & £1,949
GUITAR AMPS



Two-Rock Akoya & Tone King Imperial MkII £2,899 & £1,949

What You Need To Know

1 So what is the Premier Builders Guild?

Tone King and Two-Rock are both brands within the USA's Premier Builders Guild, along with guitar makers such as Fano. The shared resource ethos of PBG includes manufacturing – Tone King products are designed and prototyped by Mark Bartel in Baltimore, Maryland, then built in Two-Rock's state-of-the-art facility in Rohnert Park, California.

2 One uses point-to-point wiring, the other PCB?

The Two Rock uses eyelet boards and a lot of wiring; the Tone King uses PCBs. Both options can sound superb and they last a lifetime if properly designed. PCBs make it easier to produce amps that sound consistently good, and for complex circuits, they're really the only logical option.

3 But which is best?

Eyelet boards offer more freedom for placing components and wiring; they're cheaper than a PCB but take more time to build up, so they work better for small production runs. Neither is superior to the other. Hand-wired point-to-point is no guarantee of quality, while PCBs don't always mean cheap and nasty – it's all down to good design and craft.

Boutique amp brands Two-Rock and Tone King are as different as chalk and cheese, but they have more in common than simply being built in the same workshop (see left). Both are coveted by legions of players the world over – and they're very expensive. They also unveiled new amps at the start of this year. Two-Rock debuted the Akoya, a model influenced by classic Fender 'blackface' tones but with the classic Two-Rock lead channel, while Tone King re-released its MkII version signature amp, the Imperial, which is influenced by classic 50s amp sounds and features a built-in attenuator. What better time to try out both of them?

On first sight, it's obvious that these two amps are very different, despite being made in the same factory. The Tone King Imperial is compact and portable, with pleasing proportions and beautifully executed joinery. The brown and cream vinyl and matching control panel graphics are strongly evocative of 50s America, with extreme attention to detail. Everything from the perfectly applied cocoa vinyl to the concealed chassis bolts has been carefully thought through and executed flawlessly, apart from the carry handle, which we reckon should be brown rather than black. But that's purely a cosmetic observation...

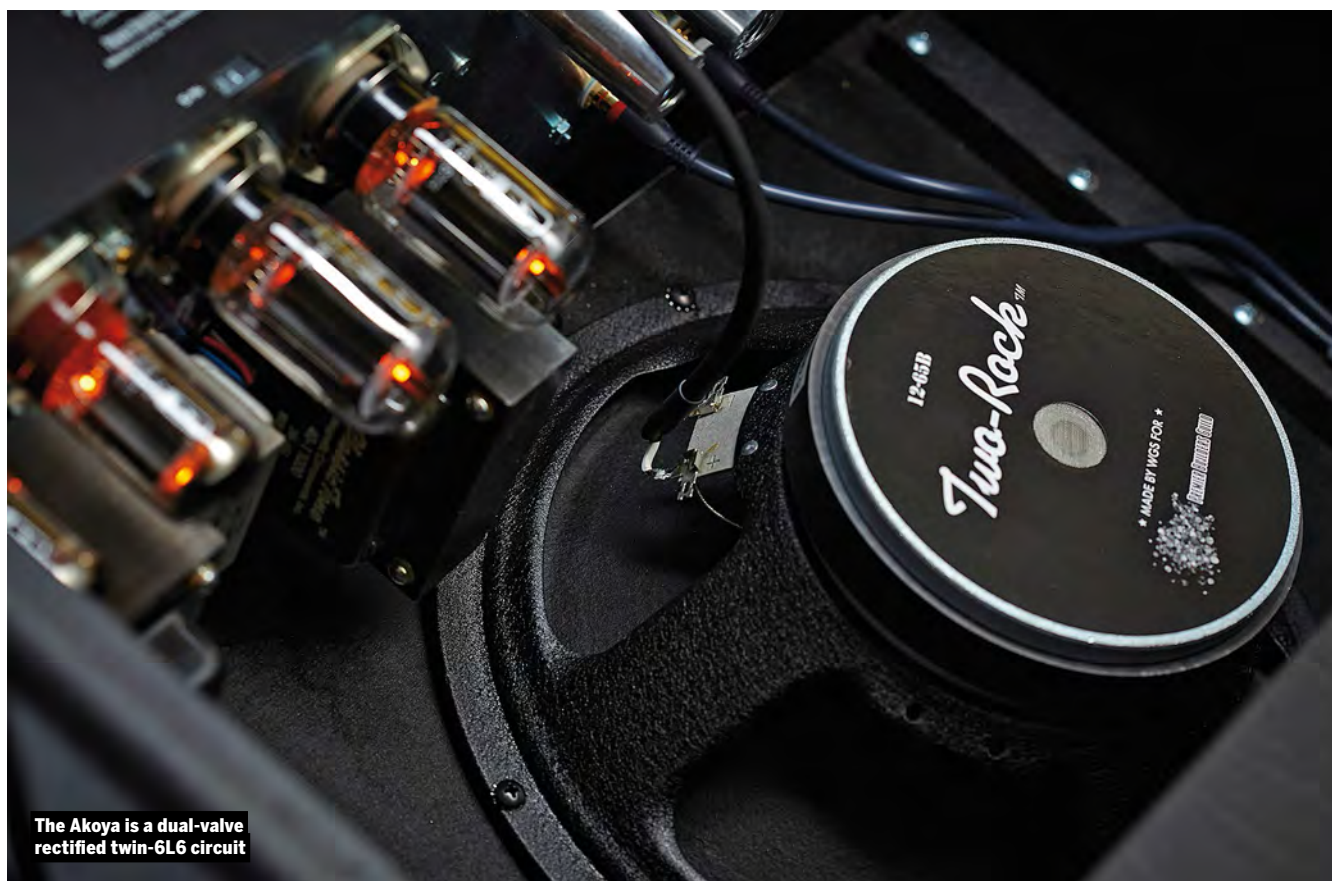
The Rivals

It's not so easy to find competition for these great amps, but **Steve Carr's Slant 6V** (£2,899) features two footswitchable channels, a ton of gain, true point-to-point circuits and superlative joinery. Also look to the **Fuchs Tripledrive Supreme**, a three-channel version of Fuchs' take on the 'D' amp. If you can find one, expect to pay around £3,000. **Magnatone's** mono version of the relaunched **Twilighter** combo features super-cool styling and classic 50s tone yanked up to date for around £2,399





<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



The Akoya is a dual-valve rectified twin-6L6 circuit

Two-Rock's Akoya is very different – it's possibly the biggest, heaviest 1x12 we've ever seen. The simple black and white trademark colour scheme is broken by a thin strip of aluminium between the control panel and speaker grille. It looks almost utilitarian, and a single carry handle on top of the cabinet to heft its 30kg is no concession for weekend warriors. To be fair to Two-Rock, its amps are aimed at the top end of the professional market, where they're likely to be flown to venues and wheeled on stage by burly road crew, rather than hauled out of the back seat of a dentist's Mercedes. Nevertheless, it would have been nice to see a pair of flightcase-style grab handles on the sides of the cab.

The internals are equally different. The Akoya's electronics are housed in a steel

chassis supporting gargantuan transformers. A paxolin eyelet board holds the power supply, with another for the rest of the small components, including some smaller PCBs, which carry relays and several trim pots.

Tone King's Imperial is mostly PCB based, with one large board carrying most components including the valve bases, and a smaller board behind the rear panel holding the attenuator electronics. The front panel pots are all hand wired, with other cabling routed and suspended in 'P' clips to ensure it stays put.

Both amps are two-channel designs and both feature reverb and tremolo. The Akoya has two sets of gain, master and reverb controls sharing a three-band EQ, with an old-school presence feature, and speed and depth controls for the tremolo circuit. The Imperial is a non-master



The tone controls are shared between the two channels

volume design: the lead channel has controls for volume, tone and mid bite; the rhythm channel has volume, bass and treble controls, with speed and depth for the trem effect and a reverb level knob. Its secret weapon is on the rear panel, in the shape of a built-in Ironman II attenuator, which can switch down the amp's output in five steps. This can be set to operate on both channels or just the lead

channel, so you can dial in the perfect blend of volume and distortion for lead and flip to the full headroom of the clean channel. There's also a high frequency compensation switch to balance out the treble at lower volumes.

The overall impression is one of superlative craftsmanship – they're both built to handle any amount of use and deliver great tone, night after night.

The impression is one of superlative craftsmanship – they're both built to deliver great tone, night after night



The Tone King's power controls are discreetly positioned at the back



You can get cranked amp performance at low volumes

Sounds

Both amps have exceptionally low noise floors, with no audible hum or hiss. The Akoya's big cab and super-sized power supply deliver a huge, expansive clean sound, with headroom that outperforms many 100-watters. The overdrive channel's bright switch adds extra sizzle for humbuckers, and there's enough gain for decent crunch. But it's a bit of work to set up, as the clean channel's gain and master volume cascade into it. There are four knobs to balance, along with the shared tone controls, which means some compromise between clean and overdrive channel sounds is necessary. It's the classic Two-Rock lead voice, drawing heavily on the Dumble ODS, albeit extended and improved it to the point where it's no longer a clone. Still, medium gain and a sweet, vocal overdrive leave you in no doubt of the inspiration.

Tone King's Imperial is also influenced by classic Fender sounds, with a sparkling rhythm channel that boasts a full bass out of all proportion to the cab,





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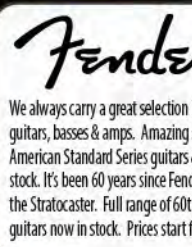
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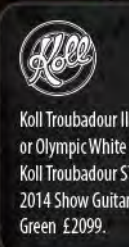
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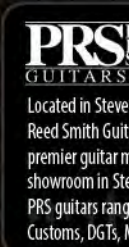
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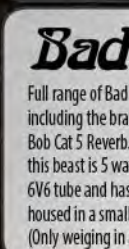
Two-Rock

Two-Rock are incredible sounding, hand built boutique guitar amps, made in Rohnert Park, California. Two Rock Bi Onyx Head, Two Rock Studio Pro Plus Heads & Combos, Two Rock Sensor Heads & Combos. New Two Rock Akoya head and combo's due soon, prices start at £2629



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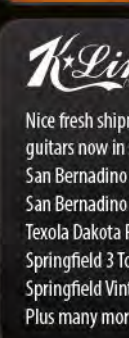
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Full range of Bad Cat amps always in stock, including the brand new for 2015 Bad Cat Bob Cat 5 Reverb. Handwired in the USA this beast is 5 watts, powered by a single 6V6 tube and has a 12" Bad Cat speaker housed in a smaller, lighter poplar cabinet (Only weighing in at 30lbs).



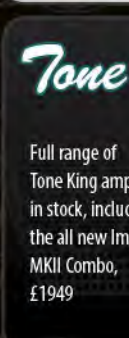
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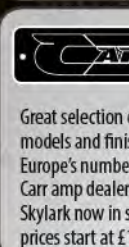
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Coda Music bring you the finest guitar effects pedals money can buy!...ready for you to demo with a your choice of amplifier and guitar!!!





The Tone King's built-in Ironman II attenuator gives added control

combined with balanced mids and a wonderful, chiming treble. The lead channel's mid bite control sweetens the tweed-inspired voice or adds an aggressive edge, going from *Royal Scam*-era Carlton to *Tres Hombres* Gibbons in a single twist. The Imperial's multi-layered, highly touch-sensitive overdrive is a product of preamp and power amp distortion, and the attenuator makes balancing volume and drive intuitive and easy.

It's only rated at 20 watts, but the Imperial should handle smaller gigs with ease. Meanwhile, the Akoya's dual valve-rectified 50 watts have more than enough clout to deliver effortless clean punch; once dialled in, the medium-gain lead channel sustains, sings and growls with fabulous definition. While the Imperial sounds great at any volume, the Akoya's magic appears at gig levels – the response at lower volumes is rather flat compared with the unearthly sustain and vocal quality of the lead channel when it's wound up.

Both amps produce excellent tremolo and great reverb. The Akoya's is modern, spacious and warm; the Imperial stays true to its 50s roots with an almost chamber-like decay.

Verdict

The Akoya is primarily aimed at pro stage use, while the Tone King's lounge-friendly looks and attenuator make it perfect for the home, as well as live and studio work. The ultra-low noise floor and frequency-compensated attenuator record superbly. And the illusion of playing through a maxed-out amp at conversation volume is both inspiring and very useable.

Predictably, both amps are expensive. The Imperial's flexibility, looks and build quality make it easier to justify. But we're on shakier ground with the Akoya: is it really worth almost a grand more? That's for you to decide, but pro players will love the Two-Rock's clarity and bouncy response. If you can afford it, you're truly spoilt for choice! 



Two-Rock Akoya 112 combo

PRICE: £2,899
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp, with dual valve rectifier
OUTPUT: 50W RMS
VALVES: 6x 12AX7, 2x 6L6, 2x 5AR4
DIMENSIONS: 560 (h) x 630 (w) 280mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 30/66
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x WGS Two-Rock Custom 12"
CHANNELS: 2, footswitchable
CONTROLS: Bass, mid, treble. Gain, 2x master reverb, tremolo speed and depth
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Pull bright switch on clean channel gain, footswitchable boost and tremolo circuit, built-in spring reverb, series effects loop, external bias test points
OPTIONS: Also available as a head and 4x10 combo, call distributor for details
Coda Music
01438 350815
www.two-rock.com



Tone King Imperial MkII 112 combo

PRICE: £1,949
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp, with valve rectifier
OUTPUT: 20W RMS
VALVES: 4x 12AX7, 1x 12AT7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5AR4
DIMENSIONS: 490 (h) x 570 (w) 265mm (d)
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 16.5/36
CABINET: Ply
LOUDSPEAKERS: 1x Eminence Tone King 33
CHANNELS: 2
CONTROLS: Lead: volume, tone, mid bite. Rhythm: volume, bass mid & treble. Tremolo speed, intensity, reverb level
FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch toggles channel and tremolo effects
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Built-in Ironman II attenuator can be switched to operate on lead channel or both, with HF compensation switch, built-in spring reverb and tremolo
OPTIONS: Available in a range of colours – call distributor for more info
Coda Music
01438 350815
www.toneking.com



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

Guitarist says: A bruiser of a 1x12 with an improved D-inspired lead channel and immense clarity for the pro stage. Top quality, but a bit steeply priced

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

Guitarist says: Outwardly old-school, with tones to match, it's the attenuator here that heaps on the versatility. Easier – almost! – to justify its price, too



Attention! Your guitar is not a fridge

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AMI0236

Pigtronix Pedals **£139-£319**

Six quirky new effects boxes from the porcine US maker

WORDS **Trevor Curwen**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Simon Lees**

Based in Long Island NY, Pigtronix has been producing effects pedals since 2004, the first being its EP-1 Envelope Phaser – a modulation pedal with a phaser that could be controlled by an envelope follower. That set the mould for a range of pedals that are different from the norm: colourful, quirky and feature-laden, with many offering extra control options over their basic effect. Pigtronix pedals are endorsed by Andy Summers, Adrian Belew and Guthrie Govan, among others.



Pigtronix Tremvelope

PRICE: £189

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Tremolo pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Sensitivity, depth, speed acceleration switch, depth switch, speed switch, waveform switch, envelope footswitch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, stereo output, trigger input, speed exp, volume/pan exp

POWER: 18V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 145 (w) x 119 (d) x 38mm (h)

The Tremvelope can be used conventionally, but its standout feature is a switchable envelope follower that lets you control the speed and depth of the effect with your playing dynamics. As a basic tremolo, you get a choice of two waveforms – a sine wave and a ramp (sawtooth) wave with controls to set the speed and depth.

A sensitivity knob determines how the tremolo changes in response to picking dynamics and there are several options as to how it changes the tremolo. Speed and depth both have three-way switches to determine whether they speed up, slow down or don't react to the triggered envelope, while a third selects whether the speed of acceleration/deceleration is slow or fast. More versatility is available via expression pedal and trigger inputs. Once you've set it up, having your picking alter the tremolo creates interesting and musical shading for song parts.

Verdict

Cool tremolo with an extra layer of nuanced expression.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A tremolo pedal with a difference – dynamic control

Pigtronix FAT Drive

PRICE: £139

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, gain, tone, hi/lo gain switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9-18V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 61 (w) x 112 (d) x 25mm (h)

JHS

01132 865381

www.pigtronix.com

While most of the Pigtronix pedals are bedecked with multiple controls, the FAT Drive looks like your standard pedal with volume, gain and tone knobs plus a More switch for extra welly.

But the tone knob is actually a low pass filter and has no effect at all on your sound when fully clockwise, rolling it back, though, reduces the top end for a smoother/darker sound, although it's never dull. With the gain knob down, you can get useful clean boosts from about two o'clock on the volume knob. Advancing the gain knob starts bringing in dynamically natural amp-like overdrive that doesn't get much more distorted at its extremities than Tube Screamer-style pedals. Engage the More switch, however, and an alteration in the gain structure brings in a more saturated tone that puts this into stack-in-a-box distortion territory.

Verdict

Can't decide on a mild or full-on dirt pedal? You'll get both here.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A nice-sounding overdrive with two levels of gain





<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>



Pigtronix Keymaster

PRICE: £239

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Switching pedal (series/parallel true-bypass effects mixer)

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Out boost, in boost, crossfade, series/parallel switch, loop A & B footswitches

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, sends A and B, returns A and B, XLR in, XLR out, exp pedal input

POWER: 18V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 145 (w) x 119 (d) x 38mm (h)

The Keymaster is an interface to connect any audio source (instrument, line level, mic) with pedals and return the signal at the correct impedance. Basically, what you get is a pair of true bypass effects loops, each with its own footswitch, that can be run in series or parallel. In parallel mode, there's the option of crossfading between the two by adding an expression pedal.

On a pedalboard, the most obvious use is to bring in two different groups of pedals at any time. But you can also get creative by running two different dirt pedals in parallel for an interesting blend, or with one loop muted, utilising a cross-fading expression pedal as a blender to turn up delay, for example. For recording, the Keymaster is great for re-amping – running the recorded signal out to your pedals and back, or to an amp.

Verdict

A flexible tool that has a variety of applications – invaluable in the studio and something that could add real flexibility to your pedalboard.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A well-thought-out utility switching pedal

Pigtronix Gate Keeper

PRICE: £149

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Noise gate pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Threshold, release

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output,

POWER: 18V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 61 (w) x 112 (d) x 25mm (h)

The Gate Keeper is a noise gate designed to keep all unwanted noise from your rig: it basically shuts down the signal when you stop playing and opens up again as soon as you hit a note. Just two knobs control the action – the threshold knob controls how much signal is needed to open the gate, while the release knob determines how long it takes the gate to close after it's fallen below the level set by the threshold, albeit with a limited range. A mute LED shows when the signal has fallen below either threshold.

The pedal certainly works fast and efficiently and doesn't seem detrimental to tone, but you have to be careful to get your knob positions just right, especially so if you're playing sustained notes and don't want them truncated. For certain types of music, perhaps high-gain metal riffing and chords, it can certainly keep your sound tight and controlled.

Verdict

If you have a hissy or hummy rig, this can unobtrusively keep the noise at bay.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: An open and shut case for cleaning up your sound





Pigtronix Rototron

PRICE: £319

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Rotary speaker simulation pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Ramp, slow, fast, depth, slow/fast footswitch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: 2x standard input, 2x standard output, high rotor control input, low rotor control input, brake input

POWER: 18V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 145 (w) x 119 (d) x 38mm (h)

A dedicated rotary speaker simulator, the Rototron is an all-analogue design that combines various effects to achieve its goal. Operation can be mono or stereo, and fast and slow speeds are selectable with the second footswitch. We get knobs to set the depth (intensity) of the effect, fast and slow speeds, plus the ramp time between the two. The third mode of operation, where the rotating parts are left stationary, can be facilitated by connecting an external footswitch.

First impressions are that it's quite brightly voiced, which helps it cut through, though some may find it a little too trebly. The rotary sounds are pretty authentic, but you can go beyond the traditional by adding expression pedals for remote control of the simulated low and high rotors independently.

Verdict

A decent rotary speaker effect with plenty of hands-free control. We would have liked controls for the high/low rotor mix and/or the tone, though.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Rotary speaker sim with all the foot control you'd ever need



Pigtronix Philosopher King

PRICE: £299

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Envelope generator sustainer pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Swell, Fade, hold, sensitivity, volume, compression, treble, sustain, grit, One Shot, speed range, auto reset, swell, fade & bypass footswitches

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, CV in, loop out, loop in, trigger in

POWER: 18V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 188 (w) x 117 (d) x 38mm (h)

The PK combines a compressor, sustainer, distortion and a polyphonic amplitude synthesizer. It creates a guitar sound with the compression and distortion and then feeds that into an amplitude modulation section for reshaping. Without the envelope-shaping, there's a neat range of compression, with added distortion via the Grit knob, all delivered via a knob that mixes it in with the dry sound for some great blends from really subtle to blistering high-gain sustain.

Hitting the Swell or Fade footswitches brings in the envelope, allowing pick-triggered volume swells that can be controlled nicely by playing dynamics. The synth functionality adds granular textures with variable timing there's quite a range of tones such as backwards tape-style envelopes, stuttery on/off tremolo and staccato single notes.

Verdict

The compression and distortion alone is great, but the tone and envelope-shaping opens up new sonic horizons.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: A great choice for bringing something new to your sonic palette





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- See Thru Black



Gretsch G6120 Brian Setzer Hot Rod -
Regal Blue Played by Simon Neil of Biffy Clyro



Gretsch G6136T Falcon
- Creme De Marine



Rickenbacker 360
- Midnight Blue



ESP Eclipse I CTM (with Bigsby)
- Vintage Black



Fender Yngwie Malmsteen
Stratocaster - Vintage White



Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar
- Sherwood Green



PRE-OWNED Fender 1978 Stratocaster
- Natural



PRE-OWNED Fender 1978
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Fender Telebration Mahogany Tele
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Quicktest

VIDEO DEMO


<http://bit.ly/guitarist393>

**Guitarist
CHOICE**

Orange Crush 35RT £199

The UK amp legend aims to make practice perfect

CONTACT: Orange Amplification **PHONE:** 0208 905 2828 **WEB:** www.orangeamps.com

Introduced at this year's Winter NAMM show, Orange's smart new Crush range of practice amps shares the same distinctive looks as the company's bigger all-valve products. The top of the range Crush 35RT includes a digital reverb and a built-in chromatic tuner, while the core tone comes from a two-channel analogue preamp with four gain stages, pumping 35 watts into a heavyweight custom-made 10-inch loudspeaker. There's also an aux in and a speaker-emulated headphones output featuring Orange's all-new Cabsim circuit. Around the back, you'll also find a fully

buffered effects loop, and a footswitch socket to flip between the 35RT's clean and dirty channels. With all these features wrapped up in Orange's classic late-60s styling, the Crush 35RT looks lean, mean and purposeful, and more than capable of dealing with live gigs as well as home use.

Sounds

The Crush 35RT's fat clean sounds can be tweaked by the classic passive EQ to flatter single coils or humbuckers, while a touch of reverb sweetens each note's decay. There's plenty of spare loudspeaker headroom to

handle the Crush's bouncy response too, giving the impression that you're hearing a much bigger enclosure.

Switching to the dirty channel unleashes the Crush 35RT's four-stage preamp, which has been cleverly engineered to give a very wide range of distortion sounds. Below halfway you're in the classic 60s and 70s era, with some great nearly clean and crunch tones that will more than satisfy players looking to emulate early Led Zep, Free and Fleetwood Mac. Push the gain control past 12 o'clock, add a little more bass and a little less midrange, and the 35RT goes from classic Oasis into the Dark

Terror metal zone that's made Orange the amp of choice for many bands in that genre.

The cool thing about the Crush 35RT's tones is that they don't sound processed; there's an organic quality that closely emulates the feel and response of playing an all-valve Orange amp, with a very good digital reverb effect that's superior to most other competitors.

The new Cabsim speaker emulation is similarly realistic, giving a decent approximation of the woody thump of a PPC 4x12 through the headphone socket, which does double duty as a reasonably quiet unbalanced DI/recording output. The 35RT's onboard chromatic tuner is quick, accurate and hangs on to the note for long enough for hassle-free tuning. It can either be left on or turned off, if the flashing lights become a distraction.

Verdict

It's amazing how far the humble practice amp has evolved over the past decade – at the cutting edge, products that were once barely more than amplified fuzz boxes have evolved into sophisticated rehearsal and recording tools. By keeping Orange's Crush 35RT firmly in the analogue domain, Orange has gone a step further and given us a practice amp with enough power for small gigs and a tone that's not too far removed from the kind of sounds you'd expect from one of their all-valve products. All this at a price that's less than you'd pay for a top-drawer overdrive pedal. **[NG]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Serious tone at an amazingly low price





**Guitarist
CHOICE**

Mesa Engineering CabClone £219

Get a load of this...

CONTACT: Westside Distribution **PHONE:** 0844 326 2000 **WEB:** www.mesaboogie.com

The humble load box has recently been re-invented by the clever folks at Mesa Engineering, and the result is a small, beautifully designed and indispensable product called the CabClone. It has three functions: a load box, a speaker emulator and a balanced DI output. The built-in resistive load works for amps up to 100 watts and auto-activates if a loudspeaker isn't plugged in. The DI output is fully adjustable from mic to pro line level, ensuring the CabClone will interface with practically everything you'd care to throw at it. Finally, the speaker emulator has three settings to approximate open, closed and vintage closed back cabinets. On the back there are jack in and out sockets, an XLR for the balanced DI, plus an unbalanced line out, and a headphones socket.

In Use

The CabClone works without drama and has plenty of reserve power handling capacity. The

real surprise, even by Mesa standards, is the quality of the CabClone's speaker emulation, which is practically a dead ringer for the real thing. We compared it to three different 4x12s and an open-backed 2x12; used direct into a PA system it was impossible to tell when the CabClone was in use – you can almost hear the ambience and air of a real enclosure being pushed.

Verdict

Beyond doubt, Mesa has taken the load box/speaker emulator to the next level and created a product that's practically essential for any regularly gigging guitar player. As you might expect from Mesa, it's not cheap, but the superior build and tone quality more than justify the price. **[NG]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A totally professional tool that can sort out any number of recording and mic'ing issues

**Guitarist
CHOICE**



Dunlop Cry Baby Mini Wah CBM95 £89

Tiny baby, fully grown tones

CONTACT: Westside Distribution **PHONE:** 0141 248 4812 **WEB:** www.jimdunlop.com

It had to happen eventually: hot off the back of its Mini Fuzz Faces, Dunlop has chopped the Cry Baby in half, but without sacrificing spec. As well as true-bypass switching, a smooth-riding Hot Potz potentiometer and red Fasel inductor, the Mini also packs an internal three-way switch, which shifts between low, vintage and GCB95 voicings. Finally, it's powered by either a nine-volt battery or power supply.

Sounds

On first sweep, there's a surprising amount of travel on the Mini, more akin to a full-size Cry Baby than similar mini wahs. Your heel moves further back than on a regular wah, though, so best get that ankle in shape! On the middle 'vintage' setting, the pedal's sweep is full and wide – it's closer to Dunlop's higher-end 535Q or CAE wahs than the standard-issue GCB95, thanks to a gradual transition from bass to treble that does away with harsh high-end in the toe-

down position. However, if you want to engage the GCB95's wiry upper range, flicking to the right on the three-position switch does the trick, while the low position gives you a throaty, resonant tone for synth-y lower string sweeps.

Verdict

The Cry Baby Mini injects new life into the age-old wah formula, and any complaints we have about the lack of LEDs, the ease of battery access and the internal voicing switch pale into insignificance when you consider the boutique-level tone and high-quality construction on display. For downsizers, mini-'boarders and anyone searching for a reasonably priced, classic-sounding wah, the CBM95 is a must-try. **[MB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The Mini's size does nothing to diminish the Cry Baby legacy thanks to top-class sounds and functionality

VIDEO DEMO



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Avian Skylark Fan Fret £1,199

The radical Skylark gets more radical...

CONTACT: The North American Guitar **PHONE:** 0207 835 5597 **WEB:** www.avianguitars.eu

Everything about Avian seems cutting-edge. British-owned with a head office in Hong Kong, the instruments are made in China but designed by US luthiers Michael Baskin and Harry Fleishman. Its range of instruments is characterised by the innovative and the downright quirky, especially this Skylark (first reviewed in issue 386), with its modernistic design, unusual soundhole, armrest and demi-cutaway. Here, however, another forward-looking concept is introduced: fan fretting.

The fan fret concept is not as daft as it may appear (and can apparently be traced back to the 16th century). Instead of a regular guitar's single scale length, like a piano the scale increases from treble to bass. So here, for example, we go from a standard scale of 25 inches on the treble side to 25.75 inches on the bass string, which accounts for the offset bridge and nut angle and the resulting 'fanning' of the frets.

Sounds

Some argue that ergonomics and playing comfort are improved, but the startling difference is in the tone created by a more uniform tension across the strings. The definition of harmonics is enhanced, and non-harmonic overtones and unwanted noise are diminished. The G and B strings – the point at which the change from wound to plain strings occurs – is often a problem area for intonation and tuning. This is seemingly improved by the more even tension. In addition, the envelope of decay is stretched too, giving quite a different, conveniently, piano-like quality to the sustain.

This model is fitted with the B-Band A2.2 dual-source

pickup, and it's not without issues. There's a transducer under the saddle (UST) and another on the underside of the top (AST). A preamp is Velcro'd inside, next to the battery, and a pair of discreet controls – for volume and balance of the two sources – are mounted on the inner rim of the soundhole. The restrictive shape and size of the hole, however, makes it impossible for this writer to reach into the guitar to remove/replace the battery or the preamp. Initially, we found the signal to be a little thin and a little noisy, though not unusably so. The application of some smaller hands, however, allows the preamp to be removed and the outputs of the two pickups adjusted, which immeasurably improves the sound.

Verdict

The vanilla Skylark impressed in our earlier review. Imaginatively designed and beautifully built, the instrument is very refined and if an instrument can actually improve your playing, this one did! Built with scant regard for the past, the whole ethos of this guitar is unapologetically forward-looking and that is gloriously apparent in its sound: where it counts. The fan frets may seem unconventional, intimidating, even pretentious – but from the outset, chord shapes simply fall under our fingers and the clarity of tuning and sound that multi-scaling achieves is beautiful. For this reviewer, the fan-fret idea absolutely sells itself. **[JK]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Other fanned fret instruments are available, but not at this price: an eye-catching and relatively affordable way to test the concept





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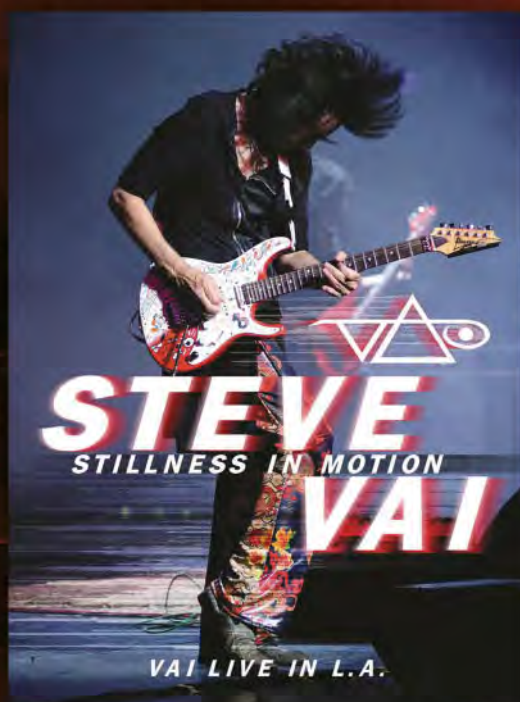
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Gibson Custom Collector's Choice #18 1960 Les Paul 'Dutchburst' Neville Marten



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Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to our longterm test reports. This month, it's a pickup special...

Mojo Pickups 'Vintage' PAFs

Chris Vinnicombe

SPECIAL REPORT Our content ed's Gibson needs to get its mojo back. Luckily, we know just the man who can help...



After hundreds of gigs and recording sessions over a 10-year period –

not to mention two headstock breaks – I recently began to feel that my Gibson ES-335 was deserving of a little TLC. This included a wonderful fret dress courtesy of luthier Richard Meyrick in Abergavenny (richardmeyrickguitars.co.uk), but my main focus was on the electronics. Although the stock '57 Classic humbuckers have

served me well enough, recent encounters with Gibson Custom and Memphis guitars left me feeling a little underwhelmed at the way my ES-335 sounded, particularly in the high-end, where everything seemed a little blunt and constricted.

Hearing fine things about his work, I contacted Marc Ransley at Mojo Pickups in Calderdale. After much dialogue over email, Marc set about building a pair of PAF replicas that would hopefully give my guitar some of the

high-end detail and airiness that I craved. The spec sheet was more than sufficient to make fans of vintage accuracy go weak at the knees: butyrate bobbins, 42 AWG plain enamel wire, rough cast Alnico III (neck) and IV (bridge) magnets, a maple spacer, vintage-correct base plate, steel keeper bar, two-strand braided hook-up wire... the list goes on! I also opted for unpotted pickups, as per original PAFs, and a Mojo wiring harness (£70) with a Switchcraft

three-way selector switch and jack, 500k CTS Premium True Vintage Taper pots and Marc's own paper-in-oil capacitors – themselves miniature works of art. Aesthetic icing is provided by aged DMC covers that look accurate enough even to meet the approval of our in-house pickup cover obsessive, *Guitar Techniques* ed Neville Marten.

Of course, all of this attention to detail would matter not a jot if I didn't think the sound of my guitar was improved with the Mojo Pickups installed. I'm happy to report that I do; there's more clarity and articulation in the high-end, as I'd hoped, and the overall voice is more classic, more sophisticated, with more of that elusive bloom that people look for from PAF-style pickups. Unpotted they may be, but microphonic squeal has not yet been an issue at volume. Nice job, Marc!



Mojo Pickups 'Vintage' PAFs

First reviewed: N/A

Price: Uncovered, non-aged £169; covered, non-aged £179; covered with DMC replica PAF covers £229 (all prices per set, ageing optional – enquire for a quote)

Type: Hand-wound humbucking pickups

info@mojopickups.co.uk
www.mojopickups.co.uk



**TC Electronic
Alter Ego X4**
Chris Vinnicombe



**Fender Road Worn
'60s Jazzmaster**
Josh Gardner



**Larivée OM-03
Silver Oak**
Dave Burrluck



The original Fender neck pickup (front) alongside Cream T's Custom NoC

Cream T Custom NoC pickups

Jamie Dickson

SPECIAL REPORT Light, sweet pickups with good potting make a happy Tele-twanger...



When Thomas

Nilsen of Cream T sent along a set of his NoC Tele pickups, my early 80s Thinline Tele seemed the ideal candidate for an upgrade. The NoCs promised to offer something I had need for: a vintage-voiced set with Alnico V magnets charged to only 70 per cent, potted sensitively using Thomas' proprietary wax mixture, in which the pickups are dipped for two hours. After the usual poking about with soldering iron and screwdriver, I gave the new pups a whirl and found them an interesting improvement on the stock pickups that came out of my Japanese reissue. There was an extra sweetness and airiness that evoked vintage

country in particular. It made me think of grades of pencil – if the old pickups were a standard, all-purpose 'HB', the NoCs would be an 'H', capable of light work but a little more pointed and delicate.

This feeling was born out at a gig in Bristol, at which our band were supported by The Blue Aeroplanes guitarist Rita Lynch. During an energetic set, Rita broke a string on her black 70s Tele and to save time changing strings, I proffered my Tele as a quick replacement. Standing in the audience, I was given a rare chance to hear how my own guitar sounded in the hands of a good player. While Rita's hot-sounding Tele excelled at chunky, Stones riffage played straight into the amp, my Tele sounded

relatively quiet and 'pale and interesting' by comparison. But then, when it came to our own quieter and more country-clean tones of the NoCs really shone. And with a decent drive pedal in front of them, I was also surprised at how well they carried a smooth, sustaining lead tone.

It's worth noting that quality pickups with a relatively low output often bulk up well if you drive them with decent pedals, with their dynamism and detail being simply enlarged by a good boost or drive, rather than sounding reedy or thin. But plugged straight into the amp, it was back to that pencil analogy – Rita's Tele was like a soft 'B' in that it had all the heft and

bluntness it needed to drive an amp nicely for chunky riffs, whereas my 'H' NoCs sounded a little light and airy in that role. But the NoCs, used in a cleaner role with pedals, were more flexible overall, I'd argue.

After a year, the potting has been great – fending off squeals for no appreciable lack of sensitivity and detail in the treble. So, this experiment in changing pickups has been successful, but to keep things interesting I'm going to swap them out soon for a set sent in by UK maker Roger Bentley. I'll let you know how we get on in a future issue...

Cream T Custom NoC pickups

First reviewed: N/A

Price: £169 per set

Type: Matched set of retrofit Telecaster-style single-coil pickups

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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.

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To The Bridge?

I'm the proud owner of a Fender Classic Series '50s Telecaster and I would like to change the treble pickup. I want to do this on one hand out of a desire for a stronger, fatter tone. On the other, it's also because I'm curious to see how it's done. I've found some good information online, but I don't know who to trust and there are a lot of conflicting opinions that I'm not experienced enough to wade through. Can you help, *Guitarist*?

John McAlister, via email

Indeed we can, John. To whit we offer up the much-messed-with Fender Highway One Texas Tele as the mule. You'll be pleased to hear that it's not a particularly complicated job. As you already know, the pickup is mounted directly in the bridge plate, so that needs to

come off – a couple of things that you'll need to be aware of there – followed by the usual wiring fun.

Just for kicks, we'll also put some new pots, a new capacitor and a new switch in the Tele. Partly because it's lovely to work with nice new terminals, and partly because the new and

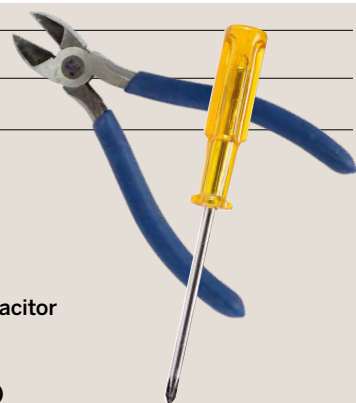
existing pickups deserve them. So then...

1 Work in a clear, well-lit area. Put something underneath the guitar body to protect both it and whatever surface you're working on from any damage. We find that a kitchen worktop or island are an ideal solution.

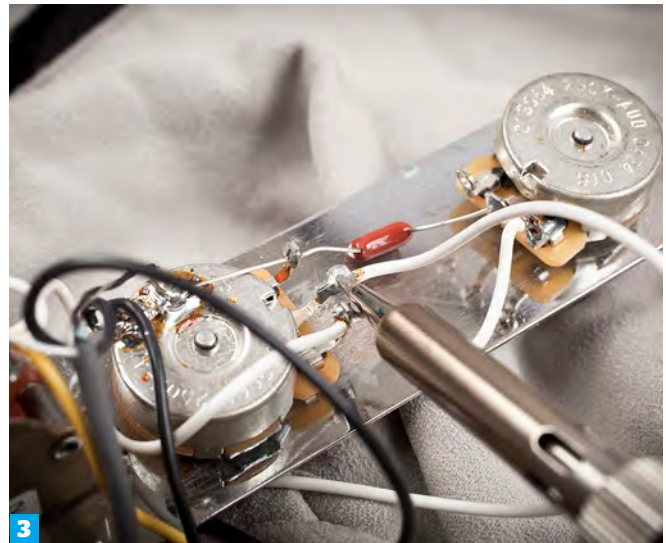
What you need

People get ready

- ✓ Relevant screwdrivers
- ✓ Spanner for the pot nuts
- ✓ Wire cutters/strippers
- ✓ Soldering iron and solder
- ✓ New pickup (of course!)
- ✓ New pots, switch and capacitor if you're changing them
- ✓ Relevant wiring diagram
- ✓ New strings (yes, you do!)



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Remove your old strings and chuck them away.

2 Using the right-size screwdriver, carefully unscrew the outermost screws on the control plate and lift carefully from the guitar. Put a cloth on top of the guitar so you don't scratch it with various components, tools and so on.

3 If you're replacing only the bridge pickup, locate its hot and

ground wires on the selector switch and the back of the volume pot and unsolder them. If you're doing a full gut and replace job, unsolder and remove the neck pickup wires and the wires to the jack socket, too.

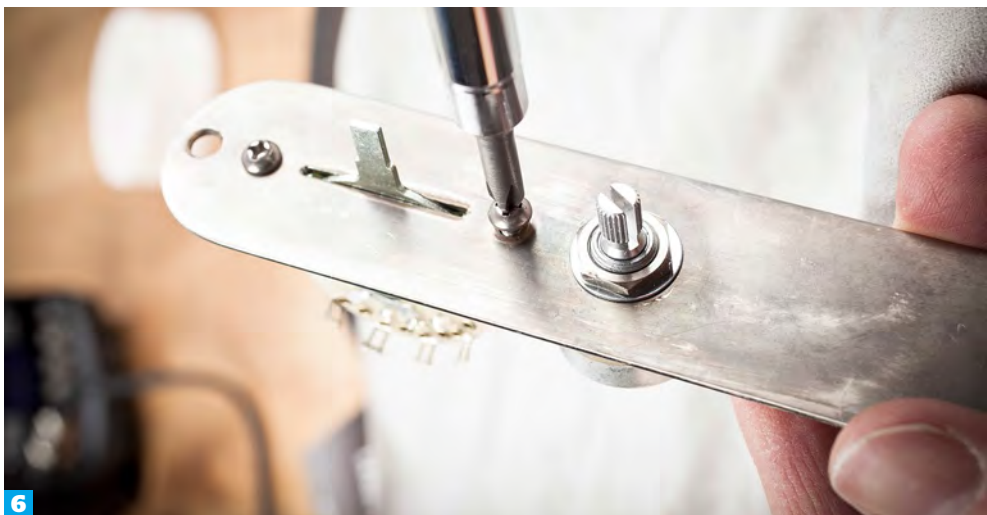
4 If you're also replacing the pots and switch, detach them from the control plate, leaving it ready for the new components to be installed.

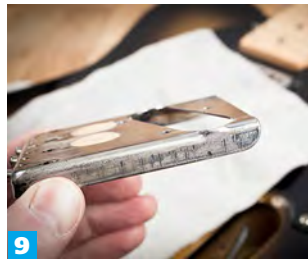
5 When fitting your new pots, it might take a minute or two just to get the spacers in the right place. This is important firstly to make sure the pot is held securely, and secondly so that the knob sits at the right distance off the plate when it's all assembled – that can vary depending on your knob type and also the shaft length (missus!). Take the time to check it now, don't wait until later.

6 Which way around should the three-way switch be mounted on the plate? It really doesn't matter, electrically speaking. Vintage boffins tend to prefer it when the spring side of the switch faces 'up' towards the pickups. It doesn't matter, so with the switch and pots mounted but not wired, let's move on to the pickup...

7 Unscrew the bridgeplate screws. On vintage-style Teles, these four screws are the only method of attachment. As you remove the plate, some of the finish might come with it: it's an occupational hazard.

8 This is a good time to check how the guitar is earthed. Vintage-style Teles tend to be earthed via the bridge pickup's own baseplate, as you can see in the image. Others may use a wire that comes from the control cavity and earths beneath the bridge. It's worth knowing/checking this now so you can make sure the guitar is grounded when you wire it back up.

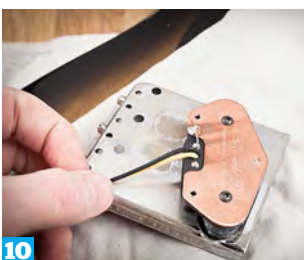




9 Another thing worth checking at this point is how flat your bridgeplate is. Teles are notorious for squealing, and one potential culprit is the bridgeplate not sitting flat on the body. The temptation can be to pad it – you might see very thin felt or paper discs – but many people would argue it takes away from that vintage Tele sound. If it's not flat, consider buying a higher

quality replacement, or take steps to make it so.

10 Once you're happy with the bridgeplate, mount the new pickup. The good news is that it will fit only in one way (remember that the pole pieces need to be on the same side as the saddles, m'kay?). A more useful bit of advice is that the plastic/rubber spacers (or springs) go between the



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11



12



13



14



15



And what do we think?

Mick Taylor, pickup mule



This Fender Highway One Texas Tele had its original bridge pickup before we made the change. It was a very mid-rich, thick-sounding pickup, that while plenty full and fat, to my ears lacked some of the presence, snap and twang of a good 50s-style Tele.

To replace it, I chose a Bare Knuckle Pickups Blackguard Series Flat '52. After a quick email to BKP's Tim Mills, he suggested the Flat '52 variant would work better in a slightly heavier-bodied guitar than a featherweight (for which he'd choose the Flat '50 version).

I'm really pleased with the results. It sounds more like a vintage Tele now, with less compression into a decent valve amp or pedals. It's more dynamic with less midrange dominance, that just seems to give me more variety and versatility through various drive pedals, too. Happy days.

bottom of the bridgeplate and the inner edge of the pickup flange: next to the windings.

11 Carefully feed the new pickup wires through the internal guide holes and into the control cavity, then place the pickup and bridge assembly into its home.

12 Screw the bridgeplate back down, keeping in mind that you don't need to be all World's Strongest (Wo)Man about it. If you over-tighten, you increase the risk of the front of the bridge lifting, so you want it just tight enough to be in there.

13 So, now your bridge and new pickup are in place, your control plate has its new pots and switch... you're ready to start wiring. Two bits of advice: one, don't think about wiring anything until you've checked the relevant wires are travelling

inside the guitar and not over the top of the cavities. Two, make sure you have a trusted wiring diagram in front of you. Now – solder! If you need advice on this, the internet is full of good tutorials: Seymour Duncan's is particularly good.

14 When it's all wired up, you should have something vaguely resembling this. Your chosen capacitor may be different, of course.

15 However excited you are at this stage, the time to test

everything is now. So plug the guitar into a quiet amp and, tapping a screwdriver on the poles, test that the volume and tone pots function correctly. You'll get quiet/loud/dull/bright clicks as appropriate. Check the switch and the other pickup while you're there. Needless to say, if something isn't working, go back over the wiring diagram.

16 Once you're happy that everything is functioning correctly, carefully refit the control plate into the guitar, making sure that you don't damage any connections or trap any wires in doing so. Once you've done this, it's a good idea to check everything is still functioning correctly before you string up.

17 String up and adjust the pickup to roughly the correct height. Now, twang! 🎸



17

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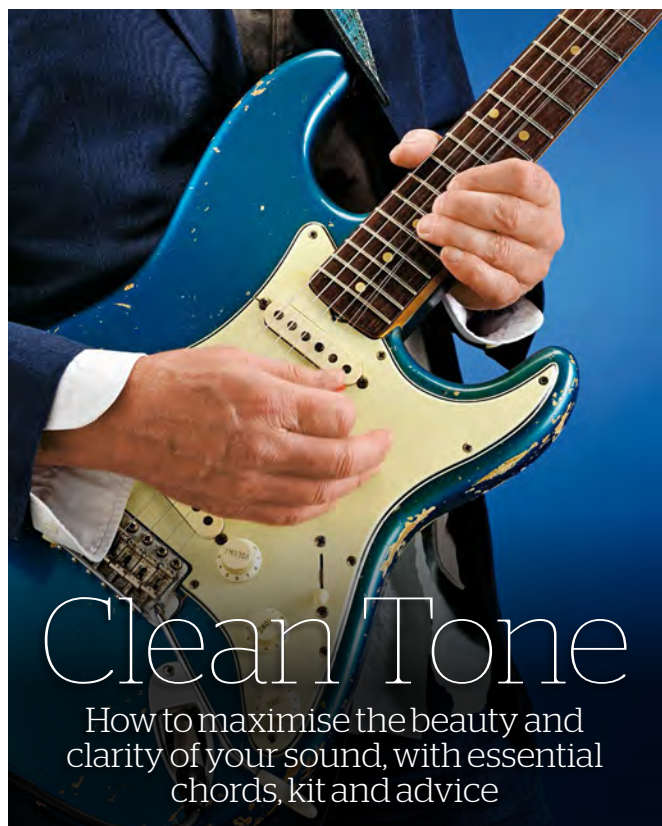
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Tutor: Neville Marten | **Gear used:** Fender Custom Shop '53 Telecaster, Vox AC15

LAST issue, we looked at pre-bends, where a note is bent before being picked. It's a style of bend that's very expressive, adding emotion and often suspense to a lick or run. Another of my favourite bends – and one that players often seem to overlook – is the semitone bend. Although the commonest bends of all are probably tone bends from 4th to 5th on the third string, and ♭7th to root on the second, there's a plethora of lovely 'crying' semitone bends lurking in or around all our favourite shapes.

As with any type of string bend, of course, you can push the string up, let it down, let a pre-bent string down, and even break larger

bends up into semitones by bending up or letting down in semitone stages (compound or step bends).

Obviously, within the minor and major pentatonic there are no semitone intervals, so you could view the use of semitone bends as pulling in notes from other major or minor scales, including Mixolydian and Dorian (in which they abound), or perhaps as introducing chromaticism (non-scale tones) via bends. It won't have escaped your notice that the major and minor blues scales (which add the ♭5th between the 4th and 5th, and the ♭3rd between 3rd and 2nd) present several that are immediately usable.

In this lesson, I've pulled out a few semitone bends that I particularly like, or that one tends to hear in other people's playing, and put them into four licks that you can use for inspiration. What I'd suggest you do in terms of finding which bends work for you, is to play scales that you know and see how they sound when bending or letting down by a semitone into any of their constituent notes. Of course, semitones that exist within these scales will work, but often it's the semitone bends from non-scale tones that sound the most cool.

We're in B minor and the chord sequence is as follows: Bm, Em, Bm, Bm, Em, Em, Bm, Bm, A, F#m, Bm, Bm. See you next month.

Example 1

AS with last issue's pre-bends, I've incorporated semitone bends alongside other types in this shape 1 idea, so it sounds more real-world and less like exercises. I've always loved big interval leaps, and this one from the 5th to the ♭3rd via a semitone bend from the fret below is particularly striking. This is followed by another favourite, where the 5th of the I chord (F# here) is bent up a semitone and becomes the ♭3rd (G) of the next chord (Em here). I also love the 2nd-♭3rd-2nd bend and let-down that follows.

♩ = 80

Bm Em Bm

BU RP BD BU (hold) BD BU BD BU BD

9 (10) (10) (9) 7 10 7 (8) (8) (7) 7 9 (11) (9) 7 9 6 (7) (6) 9

E B G D A E

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Example 2

STAYING in shape 1, this time those two most common whole-tone bends are broken up into semitone let-downs and sound really cool. The first takes us from root (B) through the A# and down to A – again, notice how the A is now neatly the root of the A chord we land on. The second step bend mirrors this on the next strings down, here going through F#, F and E (now the 7th of the V chord, F#7). The final bend is much like that in the first lick, only an octave down.

Bm **A** **F#7**

Release bends in two steps

BU BD BD BU BD BD BU BD

E 7 10 7 10 (12) (11) (10) 9 (11) 11 (10) (9) 6 (7) [7] (6) 9 7 9 7

B G D A E

Bm

BU BD BU BD

E 9 9 7 4 (5) (4) (5) (4) 7 5 7 [7]

B G D A E

Example 3

A BIT of chromaticism creeps in here with the use of a 2nd (C) semitone bend to the 2nd (C#) let-down back to the C and then resolving to the root (B), all on the first string. Dropping down to the second string, the move is mirrored with a bend from F to F#, let-down to F and finishes on the E (root of Em). We finish with another variation on our 9th (or 2nd) bend to the 3rd, let-down and finishing on the root (B).

Bm

BU BD BU BD BU BD

E 8 (9) 9 (8) 7 [7] 6 (7) [7] (6) (7) (6)

B G D A E

Em **Bm**

BU BD PB 6 BD BU BU BD

E 9 6 (7) [7] (6) (7) (6) 9 8 (9) 8 (9) (9) (8) 7 [7]

B G D A E

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Example 4

THIS final lick came right out of the blue. Played over the Em to Bm sequence, it snakes its way up the first string with semitone bends based around the 7th (D), root (E), 9th (F#) and 4th (A) of the Em chord, resolving to the root of Bm (B) with a final step bend let-down from root (B) to 7th (A) via A#.

8va — Em

BU BD BU BD BU BD BU BD PB 16 BD BU

10 9 (10) (9) 12 11 (12) (11) 14 13 (14) (13) 17 16 (17) (16) (17) (16) 14 17 (19)

(8va)

BU BU Partial BD

17 (19) 17 (19) [19] (18) 17 [17]

Hear it Here

Amos Garrett *Amos Behavin'*

You might not know this man, but if you've ever heard Maria Muldaur's hit, *Midnight At The Oasis*, you'll recognise one of the most extraordinary guitarists around. Amos's use of all types of string bend is possibly unsurpassed – he'll displace the string by anything from a semitone to a 4th (five-fret bend!), simultaneously bend several strings (by different amounts), and all kinds of other amazing stuff. You could, of course, simply listen to Muldaur's wonderful song.

Roy Buchanan

Sweet Dreams, The Anthology

Another phenomenal guitar player and staggering string bender, Roy's best known tracks are *Sweet Dreams* – his instrumental cover of Patsy Cline's country smash hit – and *The Messiah Will Come Again*, covered by Gary Moore in tribute to one of his true idols. Buchanan's searing Telecaster on the title track outlines semitone bends as well as anyone could, Roy somehow managing to make his fingers sound like the levers on a pedal-steel guitar. A must for anyone's music collection.

Django Reinhardt

Anthology

While he's hardly a blues guitar player *per se*, Django's extraordinary gypsy jazz playing abounds with bluesy licks. His heavy-strung Selmer Maccaferri guitar precluded anything but semitone bends, and no blues guitarist should bypass the opportunity to lift a few tricks from this unbelievable guitarist. All the big numbers are on this compilation album: *Nuages, Minor Swing, Sweet Georgia Brown, Just One Of Those Things, Tiger Rag* and a host of others. Another indispensable collection.

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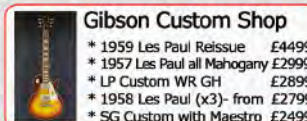


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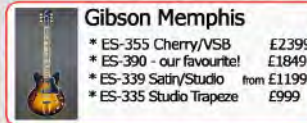


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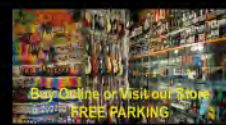
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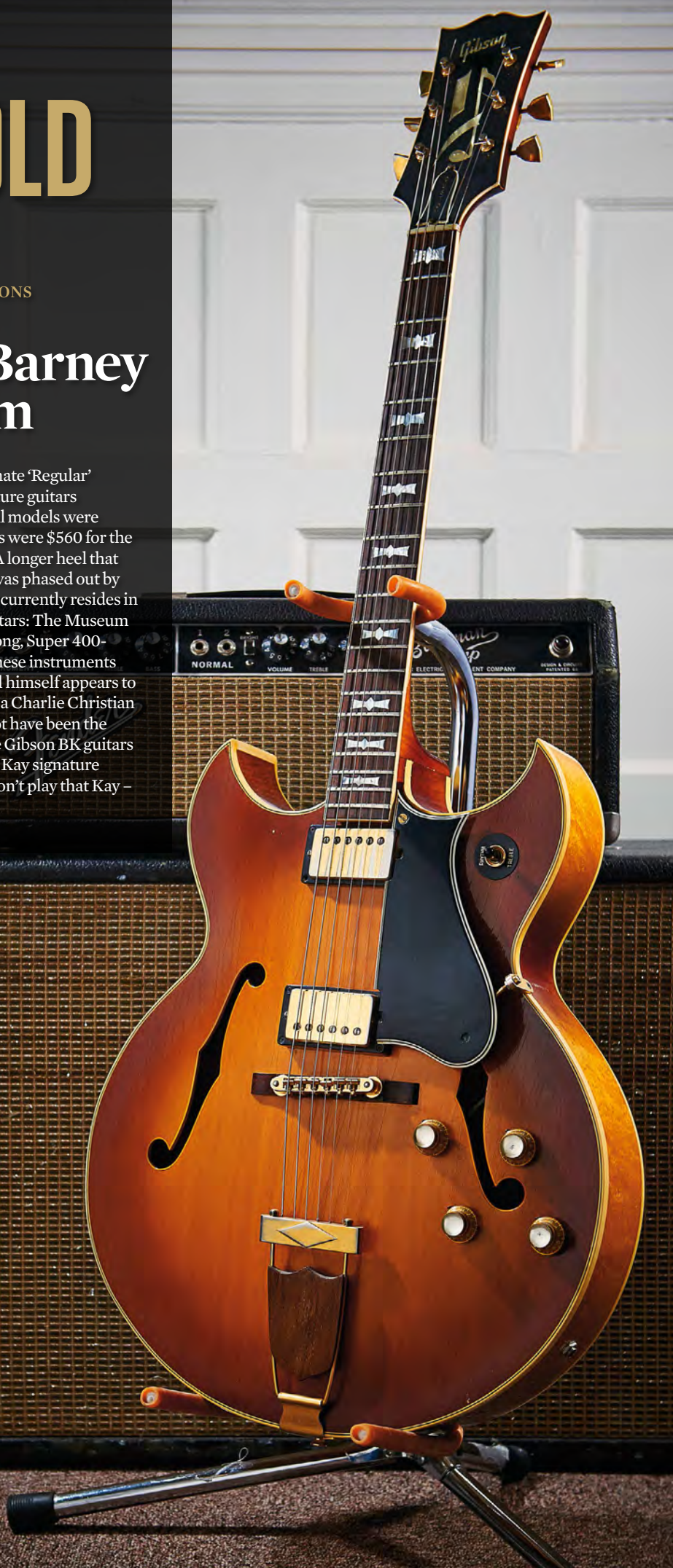


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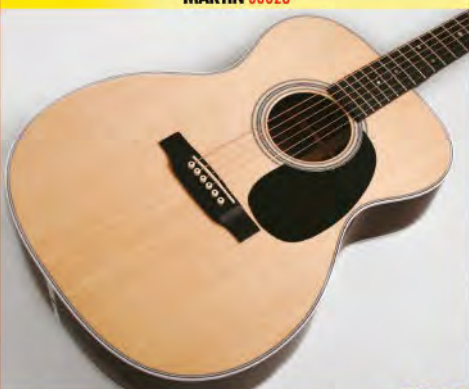
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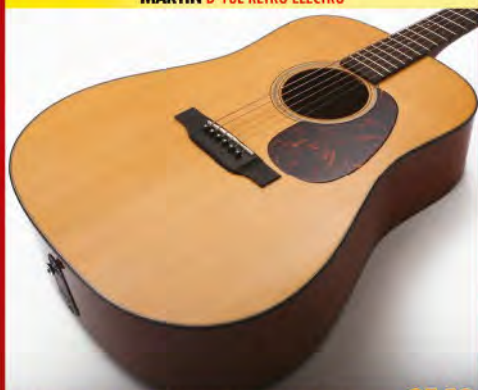
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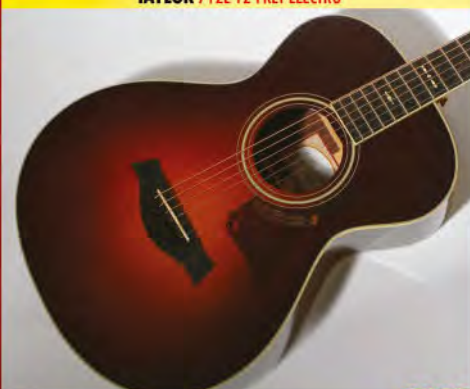
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