

A TRIBUTE TO THE KING OF THE BLUES

Guitarist

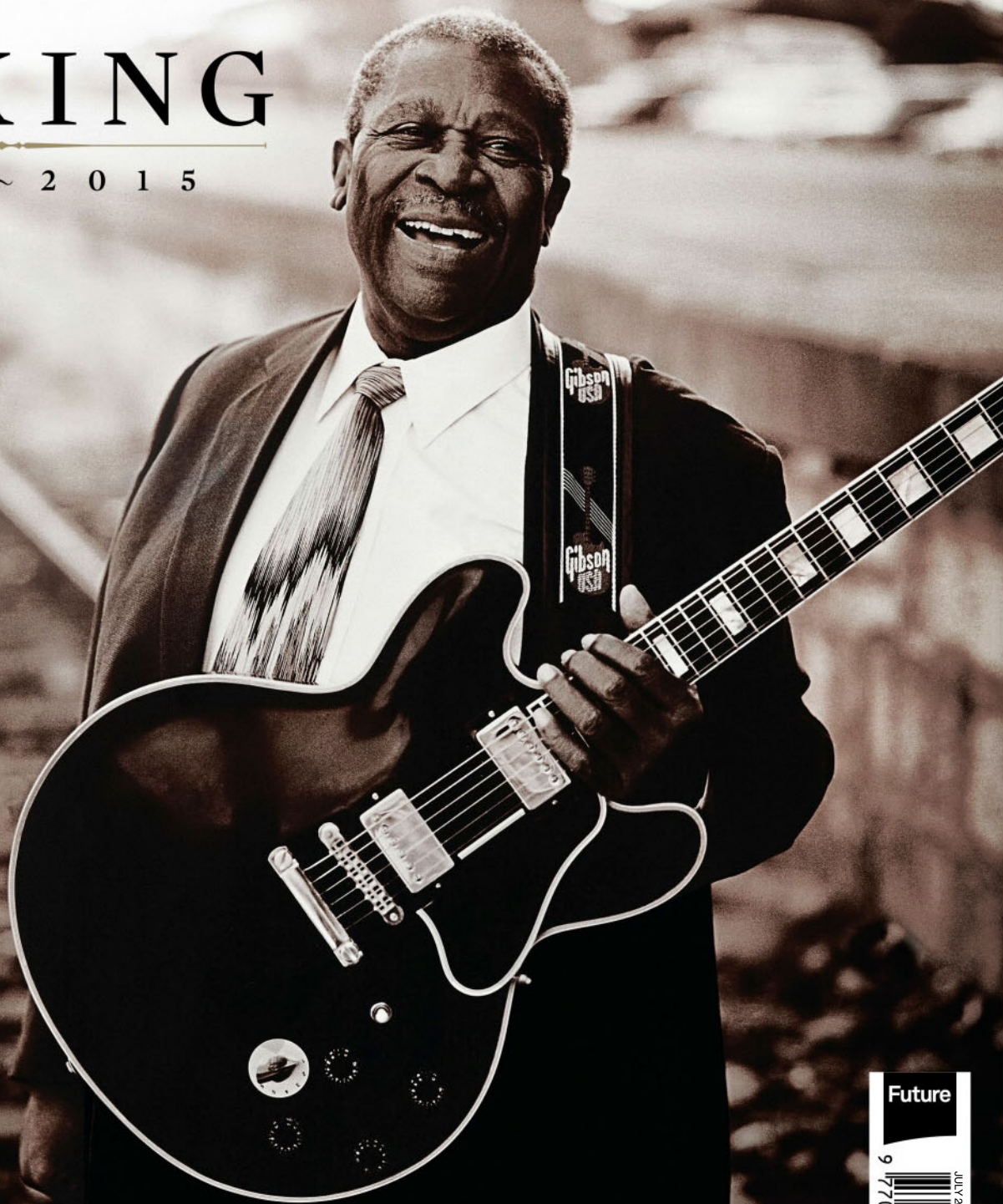
THE GUITAR MAGAZINE

ISSUE 395

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BB KING

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*"A guitar is like an old friend
that is there with me"*



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Singing His Praises



It was as easy a departure as BB King's many friends could wish for, as quiet as a chapter in the book of music history gently being turned. The king of the blues died in his sleep aged 89, after a long and extraordinary life.

Here at *Guitarist*, we literally stopped the press rolling on our latest issue – the first time we've ever done so – and began putting together what we hope is a fitting tribute to a musician who inspired so many to pick up a guitar.

As we worked, we listened to BB's music and were once again struck not only by the eloquence of his playing, but the soulful power of his voice. How majestic, how moving BB was on tracks such as *The Thrill Is Gone* or *Three O'Clock Blues*. Even if he had never picked up a guitar at all he would still have been known as one of the great blues singers.

And the more you listen, the more you realise that his voice and guitar were just different channels for the same fundamental connection with music. Great guitarists will often say they look to vocalists for their inspiration for phrasing and for feel. Think of Eric Clapton's version of Freddie King's *Hideaway* from the Beano album, for example – although it is a bravura performance on guitar, you could sing every note. And Eric, of course, has been a lifelong admirer and student of BB King's music.

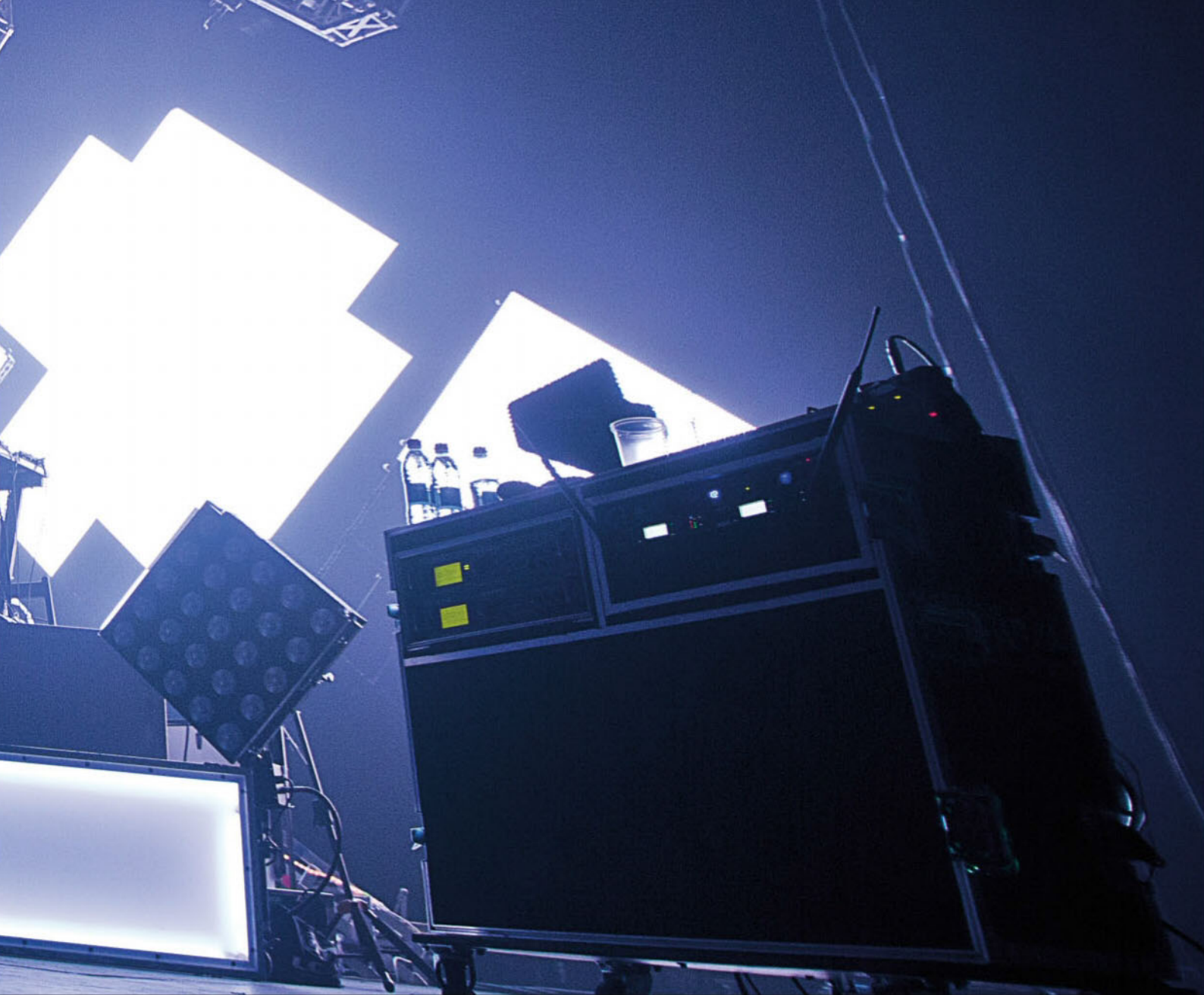
Next time you play, think of BB's amazing way of singing, straight from the heart and yet unhurried and eloquent. It all comes from the same place, and perhaps it's to there that all great music returns. Rest in peace, BB.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**



Zach Filkins from OneRepublic on stage with his Axe-Fx II rig.





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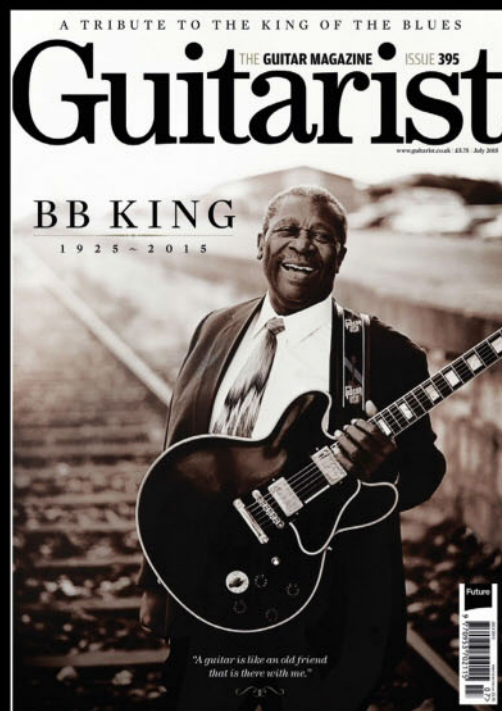
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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN WESTENBERG/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

56 BB King 1925-2015

Guitarist was deeply saddened to learn about the passing of the legendary BB King. In tribute to the great man, join us as we chart King's remarkable journey from a poor Mississippi sharecropper to the undisputed king of the blues

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New gear this month

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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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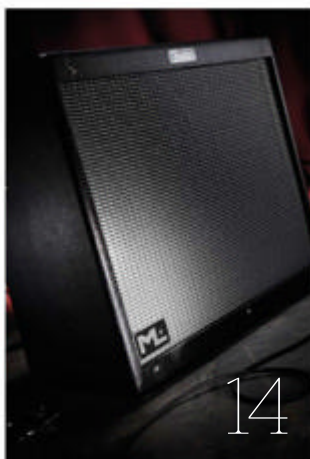


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FIRST ▶ PLAY



PRS S2 VELA
£1,289

WHAT IS IT? USA-made, retro-flavoured solidbody electric

BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

PRS's affordable USA S2 line gets a new original design that just might make the 30-year-old company cool, at long last!

WORDS DAVE BURRLUCK

PHOTOGRAPHY ADAM GASSON

Introduced in 2013, PRS's S2 line is made in the same USA factory as the now-called and higher-priced 'core' models, but on a completely different production line. These new production techniques are aimed at producing a top-flight guitar but one that is, from conception, more affordable.

At the original launch, two of PRS's more 'modern retro' designs, the Mira and Starla, took centre stage. Now it's time to introduce the third in that 'original series', the Vela: the first S2-specific original design that's not a reworking of a previous or existing core model.

If Vela's outline looks like an offset Custom, that is actually how the design came about. The Custom's outline was cut up the middle, the bass side was moved upwards and the design team filled in the curves. Other than that, the body is very similar to the Mira: overall depth is 42mm, thinner than the Custom by about 6.5mm, or a quarter-of-an-inch. Again, as with the Mira, Starla and the S2 Standards, the body is all mahogany, like the neck. While the core models use one-piece necks and body backs, the S2 guitars retain a thinner one-piece body but with a three-piece neck with a spliced headstock, cut from the



VIDEO DEMO



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PRS S2 Veld **FIRST ▶ PLAY**





1



2

1 Look, no birds! The Vela is one of the few PRS guitars to come with dots, though twitchers will be glad to know that bird inlays are available as an optional extra...

2 The volume control features a treble-bleed cap to retain highs as it's turned down, and the tone control has a pull switch to voice the single coil of the bridge humbucker

3 The Vela makes use of PRS's seldom-seen 'plate-style' bridge, which features a pair of Tele-style brass saddles for the strings

same thinner-but-wider slab of mahogany (which doesn't need extra headstock wings like the core models), plus an additional piece for the heel. Even through the Vela's old-school translucent Vintage Cherry you can barely see any joins.

But if the style of the construction is different, the feel really isn't. The pattern regular neck has a deep-ish, rounded C profile – 21.8mm at the 1st fret, 23.5mm at the 12th – and the unbound rosewood 'board has standard plastic 'clay'-like dots (bird inlays are optional extras). The fretwire is the same as the core models, we have the same 254mm (10-inch) radius and, of course, the 'halfway' scale length of 635mm (25 inches).

The Vela, however, moves the S2 into a different tonal area. Instead of using the brand's Stoptail wrapover bridge or its industry-standard vibrato, along with the top-locking tuners and friction reducing nut we get a new bridge design – actually based on a bridge PRS designed some years ago – referred to as a 'plate-style'. Imagine a non-vibrato Strat bridge but with top-load strings that sit in roomy key-hole cut-outs in the aluminium base (they don't pass through the body), and instead of six saddles we get just two Tele-like





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3

While the bridge pickup certainly sounds like a clean humbucker, the neck pickup is much more hot single coil - not a million miles away from a Gold Foil

brass rods acting for the top three and bottom three strings. There's a large machined grooved under each string, height adjustment is via a small screw at the ends of each saddle, and there are two intonation screws per saddle controlling the overall tilt, necessary for the different intonation required by the increasing diameters of the wound and plain strings. Top loading (as opposed to strings-through-the-body) bridges are known for their bass-light, brighter character, and that's immediately apparent from the first unplugged strum.

The differences continue with the pickups. Okay, yes, the Starla bridge pickup with its 12 visible pole pieces isn't new, albeit only used on the eponymous S2 model, but the neck pickup certainly is. Like the old DeArmond-made Gretsch 'Dynasonic' pickups, we have magnetic pole pieces that appear to be height adjustable via six smaller diameter slot head screws. They don't actually adjust anything, but they are magnetic so could play a subtle part in the pickup's sound.

While the Mira uses a three-way lever switch to select its two pickups, the Vela swaps that for a Gibson-style toggle placed at the base of the nicely retro scratchplate onto which all the electrical components are fixed apart from the side-placed, metal-plate-mounted output jack. We do get the very comfortable and practical proprietary lampshade knobs,

though, and the tone control has a pull switch to turn the Starla Treble pickup to single coil, voicing the bridge-facing coil.

Feel & Sounds

With the change in body geometry comes a change to the feel of the guitar when it's played, both seated and strapped on. Seated, the necks sits further into your body, the nut or 12th fret positions feel less elongated than a Custom 24, and the Vela hangs more like a Stratocaster on our strap.

Acoustically, there's a different tonality before we get near an amp: a slight upper-mid push and a subtly hollowed character as opposed to a more balanced ring from our 30th Anniversary Custom 24.

Plugged in, 'different' is an apt description. Compared with a Fender Roadworn Strat, for example, the Vela has a hotter output from the bridge 'bucker: thicker and considerably - though not excessively - darker with a smoother nose to the note. The neck pickup has less spike, again thicker than a Strat's more recognisable voice. Swapping back to the most classic-sounding Custom we've heard, a 30th Anniversary Custom 24, gives us a hotter tonality that's more rock. Back to the Vela, though, we drop back a decade or three: it's immediately more characterful on lower gains and clean/crunch tones. While the bridge



pickup certainly sounds like a clean humbucker, the neck pickup is much more hot single coil – not a million miles away from Lollar's Gold Foil, for example. It certainly doesn't have the high-end sparkle of a tougher Texas Special Strat single coil, and with a similar DC resistance to the bridge humbucker and Lollar's Gold Foil, it's little surprise we're hearing a rounder high end.

That balance of edge-to-girth is what gives Vela its character. On perhaps a maple neck/alder body platform, combined with the top-load bridge, there just might be too much high-end. Here it's more balanced and creates a wide sonic palette, from cutting Elmore James slide, through to *Exile*-era Keef, abrasive early Who, any Tom Petty record and the raw raunch of Springsteen and Lil' Steve. It's a Rickenbacker, Gretsch, Dano... and quite a few others all rolled into one. A superb rhythm guitar but equally good for those crunchy SG-meets-Telecaster gnarly leads.

Verdict

Let's face it, with their 'doctors and dentists' association, bird inlays, vibrantly-coloured maple tops and high prices, core PRS guitars aren't for everyone. But if the S2 Mira and Starla releases put some retro-cool back into the brand, then the Vela kicks it out of the park... and beyond.

Now, S2 guitars are supposed to appeal to a new audience of younger bands but there's plenty for the, ahem, more mature player here in a simple, no frills – but typically classy – fashion. Enough words. Back to playing. **G**

4 With its big pole pieces and Gretsch Dynasonic vibe, the new Type D single coil is a departure for PRS, and has a Lollar Gold Foil sonic quality to it



PRS S2 Vela

PRICE: £1,289 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Offset double-cutaway, solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: Mahogany, 'pattern regular' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")

NUT/WIDTH: Friction reducing/42.8mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

HARDWARE: PRS Plate-style bridge with brass saddles, S2 locking tuners

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: PRS S2 Starla Treble humbucker (bridge) and Type-D single coil (neck), 3-way selector switch, master volume and master tone (with pull/push coil-split for humbucker)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.04/6.7

OPTIONS: Bird inlays (£100)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Antique White, Seafoam Green and Black opaque; McCarty Tobacco, Sienna and Vintage Cherry (as reviewed) translucent

PRS Europe

01223 874301

www.prsguitars.com

Guitarist would like to thank

Wildwire Music and Audio (01757 701996) for the loan of this guitar

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

Guitarist says: The first all-original design in the S2 range, the Vela could appeal to a broad range of players with an anti-posh, retro sensibility



SE[®]

ALEX LIFESON THINLINE

The new PRS SE Alex Lifeson is a roadworthy guitar for players looking for the ideal stage and studio instrument.

With a solid spruce top and figured dao back and sides, the guitar features the same hybrid bracing as Alex's PRS Private Stock model, giving it a warmth and resonance rarely found in shallow-body acoustics.

"This is a guitar of stunning quality. The carefully selected materials, expert craftsmanship and smart approach to the concept have resulted in a guitar that is both beautiful and rewarding to play." – Alex Lifeson

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FIRST ▶ PLAY

FENDER HOT ROD DEVILLE ML
£1,054

WHAT IS IT? Michael Landau's revision of the standard DeVille with one very big clean channel... and not a lot else!



CLEAN MACHINE

A Hot Rod DeVille, but not as we know it, after Fender has tweaked it to service the needs of session legend Michael Landau...

WORDS **NICK GUPPY** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAM GASSON**

Michael Landau is one of the most prolific session players to come out of the LA studio scene, with an almost endless list of album credits for some of the world's most revered artists, including Pink Floyd, Miles Davis, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor, to name but a few. Landau started playing guitar at 11, and by the age of 16 was already an established part of the LA club scene, touring the west coast with Yellowjackets' founders Robben Ford, Russell Ferrante and Jimmy Haslip, before joining Boz Scaggs for a world tour in 1977. Today, in addition to engineering and producing for many other high-profile artists, Landau fronts his own group and has released

several solo albums, all of which are full of eclectic and sometimes challenging music that demonstrates the depth and breadth of his astonishing talent.

A long-time Fender aficionado, Landau was recently honoured with a signature guitar and now Fender has released the 'Inspired by' Hot Rod DeVille ML 212 combo. Landau's stage rig has incorporated a pair of DeVilles for several years, and the signature version incorporates some significant tweaks.

The ML fits into the same cabinet as a regular 2x12 DeVille combo; it's nicely proportioned and one of the most compact 2x12s you can buy thanks to the diagonally-arranged loudspeakers. However, that doesn't



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escape the fact that it's also very heavy, quite a bit more than a regular DeVille thanks to uprated transformers and Celestion G12 V-Type loudspeakers. In the standard DeVille style there's just one carry strap on the top, but that's not really enough for a box of this weight. The tweed styling of the regular DeVille has been replaced by black vinyl with a silver grille

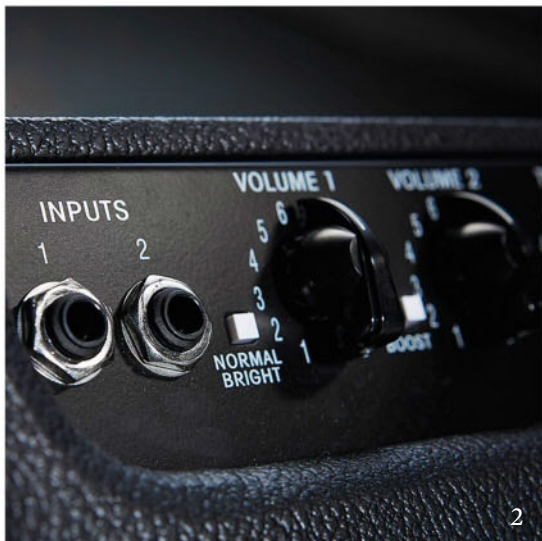
cloth and a white-on-black control panel instead of polished chrome.

Inside the DeVille's tray chassis, the electronics are standard modern Fender with a pair of PCBs holding most of the components, including the valve bases. Fender has chosen two premium Sovtek 12AX7WCs for the preamp; both valves are held in a special foam





1



2



3

1 The two-button footswitch swaps volume levels and toggles the DeVille's boost function

2 White-on-stainless on the normal DeVille changes to white-on-black for the Landau version – the controls still go to 12!

3 The ML has just one channel, but offers a footswitchable dual-master volume layout

anti-shock collar to reduce any acoustic interference and extend their life.

Possibly the ML's biggest difference is the lack of a drive channel. Instead, the DeVille ML is based on the original's clean channel, with a footswitchable dual-master volume arrangement that includes a footswitchable pre-set boost on volume two. There's a conventional shared bass, mid and treble EQ section, along with global controls for presence and reverb. Landau is an effects user with a fairly simple but much evolved wet/dry setup, and his overdrive effects often come from pedals. To aid this, there's a simple series effects loop with a pair of send/return jacks on the top panel. Overall, the ML is typically Fender: nicely built and styled.

Feel & Sounds

The DeVille ML's clean sound is big, warm and airy, with excellent headroom thanks to an uprated power supply and high-efficiency

Celestion drivers. The treble is bright, but not too piercing, the midrange is warm and balanced with no nasal peaks, and the bass is fat and well-defined.

The decibel levels are way up on a standard DeVille, to the point that most players will have difficulty taking the volume controls past four, let alone engage the boost, which adds around 6dB of extra volume! There's just a hint of an edge and some mild compression with the volumes up to around one o'clock, at which point the DeVille ML is loud enough for festival stages. The reverb is good but not great – it's fairly free of noise but there's a high-mid sheen to it that doesn't complement the amp's warm tones so well.

Verdict

Signature models can sometimes turn out to be two-edged swords: association with a high-profile and well-respected artist is a proven selling tool, but ultimately, a product has to



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The clean sound is big, warm and airy, with excellent headroom thanks to an uprated power supply and Celestion drivers

4 Two heavy duty Celestion V Type loudspeakers deliver a lot of volume

5 The ML logo signifies this amp is very different to a standard Blues DeVille

have a purpose and be practical if it's going to sell. The DeVille ML is a superb platform for pedals, no doubt there. However, it's also cumbersome, expensive and somewhat limited compared with the standard model.

The clean sound is undeniably great but we can't help but wonder, what if Fender had taken the concept further? For example, a parallel main loop with a mix control, a series loop in front of the preamp, both switchable, and a quality digital reverb to rival the best outboards, could all add up to a serious stage tool for many pedalboard drivers.

Nevertheless, professional users and dedicated amateurs should check out the Hot Rod DeVille ML – if you use pedals, it could be your perfect choice. **G**



4



5



Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

ORIGIN: Mexico

TYPE: All-valve preamp and power amp

OUTPUT: 60 watts RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 2x 6L6

DIMENSIONS: 533 (h) x 616 (w) x 273mm (d)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 28/60

CABINET: Ply

CHANNELS: 1, with 2 footswitchable volume controls

SPEAKERS: 2x Celestion G12 V-Type

CONTROLS: Volume 1, volume 2, bass, mid, treble. Global reverb level and presence. Boost switch adds 6dB boost to vol 2

FOOTSWITCH: 2-button footswitch toggles volume and boost function

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Footswitchable boost function on volume 2, series effects loop, spring reverb

OPTIONS: The standard Blues DeVille costs £982

Fender GBI

01342 331700

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

Guitarist says: One great clean channel makes this an ideal amp for pedal users

HANDMADE
AMERICAN
LEGENDS



THE
J-29

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

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FIRST ▶ PLAY



COLLINGS 360 LT
£3,525

WHAT IS IT? Mahogany body-and-necked version of Austin's latest solidbody model

VIDEO DEMO



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FULL CIRCLE

Retro, offset and ready for rock 'n' roll - can Collings' latest single-cut get the blood pumping in old-school hearts?

WORDS **NEVILLE MARTEN**

PHOTOGRAPHY **SIMON LEES**

Vibe, feel, soul and personality are all essential in the guitars we love, and yet all are subjective. Be as objective as you like about spec, build quality and price, but if that guitar doesn't make you feel great, it should never go home with you.

With that in mind, while well made and wonderful to play, many a modern flamed-maple, glass-finished dream can be hard to bond with, as they're less suited to the rough and tumble of regular gigging. In short, if you feel it's too posh to rock, it's unlikely to move you... so here's a guitar that challenges all that. It has a boutique price but a working man's character; it boasts impeccable build, yet has a very old-school feel.

The 360 LT debuted at the 2015 NAMM show as a variation on Collings' 360 model. 'LT' denotes the flat 'level top' of the offset, solid mahogany body (ash is also available). It looks more familiar than it actually is. Offsets - where the upper bout waist is forwards of the lower bout waist - tend to be double-cuts, on







the whole. This arrangement does make guitar stand placement a whole new challenge.

Collings' detailing and finish quality always deserves admiration. From the precise, modernistic bevelled belly and leg body 'contours' to the classical beauty of the tapered 15-degree bank-angled 'Haircut' headstock, it drips craft from every pore. Not that you'll see any pores, as the whole thing, including the back of the set mahogany neck, is finished in flawless solid cream gloss nitrocellulose.

The 360 LT is available with various options, including the TV Jones Filter'Trons and Bigsby B5 vibrato fitted here. If you'd prefer a stoptail and humbuckers, that's fine, too. The Bigsby is sited so there's good downward string pressure across the bridge – good for sound and for keeping the strings in the saddles under heavy hitting. And hit it you well might, because it feels fit for some serious rock 'n' roll.

Feel & Sounds

The 360 LT's almost-slab flat-top body and tune-o-matic bridge results in a shallow neck pitch; it wraps around you slightly more than a Telecaster but definitely less than a Les Paul. The scale length is a smidge longer than Gibson standard, but coupled with the 12-inch radius 'board, it's going to feel immediately comfortable to Gibson players.

After an indeterminate number of identikit modern mid-price C-shape necks, playing an expertly profiled, vintage-inspired neck is always a treat. This one feels less chunky than the Collings 290 DC S we have for comparison, with a subtly noticeable increase in thickness as you venture towards the cleverly shaped heel. Very lightly rolled fingerboard edges and a perfect complement of medium jumbo frets make it all instantly inviting, and while you'd expect that at this price, you have to smile at how Collings gets it right so consistently.

The action is set 'manly' on this example with 0.011 to 0.049-gauge strings, and there's not much down-bend in the Bigsby. All of the above are adjustable, but after playing some Duesenberg Bigsby-style vibratos of late, the old clunky bar does feel very, er, old and clunky.

This 360 LT's tonal stamp is meatier than a Strat, not as mid-thick as a Les Paul and not as twangy as a Tele, nor the aforementioned P-90-loaded 290 DC S for that matter. The TV Jones pickups are warmer and more brooding than you'd get in a hollowbody Gretsch, and sit perfectly in classic or country rock, especially with some drive rolled on the bridge pickup. Conversely, the neck's clear bass and warm mids would definitely suit jazz.

The humbuckers give welcome girth to lead playing further up the neck where single coils

1 Our 360 LT comes with TV Jones pickups; Lollar Gold Foils are available, too

2 The maple neck is set into the body with a long tenon, enabling the heel to be shaped in line with the offset body for unhindered upper-fret access

3 Simple, classy and elegant: this is an ebony peghead face with pearl inlaid logo and vintage-style pearloid buttons

4 The Bigsby B5 is an optional upgrade on the 360 LT, contributing £300 to the price, as do the TV Jones pickups. The standard fitment is a stop tailpiece



<http://bit.ly/guitarist395>



4

We keep coming back to rootsy, rocky crunch from classic valve amps every time. It feels like it was built for that stuff: Sheryl Crow, Tom Petty, The Rolling Stones... you get the idea

can become brittle. The slightly hotter-than-standard bridge pickup takes stacked Texas-style gain well, so Billy Gibbons-style tones are well within the 360 LT's capabilities.

Separate volume/tone controls open up a whole world of blended dual-pickup sounds for anything from quacky blues to punchy fingerpicking, but we keep coming back to rootsy, rocky crunch from classic valve amps every time. It feels like it was built for that stuff: Sheryl Crow, Tom Petty, The Rolling Stones... you get the idea.

Verdict

If you want to make no-compromise high-end guitars in the USA with this much handwork out of a small production facility, they're going to cost at least this much, often quite a bit more. So, if you like the idea of modern boutique guitars but don't care for fussy styling, we'd urge you to give the 360 LT a whirl. The craft and detail in the build and finishing are impressive enough, but that it all translates into a seriously classic-sounding, professional-feeling rock 'n' roll guitar is what really gets the heart pumping. Trouble is, now we want an ash-body, maple necked one, too...

Thanks to Peach Guitars of Braintree for the loan of this review guitar (www.peachguitars.com).



Collings 360 LT

PRICE: £3,525 (inc case)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Single-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Mahogany

NECK: Mahogany, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 632mm (24.875")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/42.86mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood with ivoroid dots, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Bigsby B5 vibrato, Tone Pros Nashville tune-o-matic bridge, nickel-plated Gotoh enclosed tuners with ivoroid buttons

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:

52.2mm

ELECTRICS: TV Jones Classic Plus humbucker (bridge), TV Jones Classic humbucker (neck) 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way pickup selector

WEIGHT(KG/LB): 3.6/7.93

OPTIONS: The base price is £2,699.

There are numerous options including ash or alder body, maple neck, various pickup choices, stop tailpiece (£POA)

RANGE OPTIONS: The 360 and 360 ST come with a wealth of options (£POA) – see website for more

LEFT HANDERS: Yes, to order

FINISHES: Cream nitrocellulose (as reviewed). Various colours available – see website

Guitar XS

01227 832558

www.collingsguitars.com

GUITARIST RATING

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

Guitarist says: True boutique quality, unique vibe and modern classic tones... for a price

A close-up photograph of a wooden guitar body, showing the grain of the wood. A single nail is driven into the wood, casting a shadow. The image is framed by a white, wavy border.

THE MAN WHO DROVE A NAIL *with a dream.*



MARTY DODSON WAS AN ASPIRING SONGWRITER. ONE DAY, HE DECIDED TO HAMMER A NAIL INTO A WALL. "THIS IS WHERE I WILL HANG MY FIRST GOLD RECORD," HE DECLARED—WHICH WAS A BOLD PROCLAMATION, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM A GUY WHOSE NEXT BEST OPTION WAS A JOB WRITING TOASTER MANUALS. FOR SIX LONG YEARS HE WALKED BY THAT EMPTY NAIL. AND SO DID HIS WIFE AND THREE KIDS. THIS TOOK OUTS. PARTICULARLY AFTER EATING MASHED POTATOES COVERED IN 69-CENT GRAVY. BUT MARTY PERSEVERED. FOCUSED ON SUCCESS. UNTIL ONE DAY, A GOLD RECORD HUNG ON THAT NAIL, AND THEN A PLATINUM NEXT TO IT. HIS STORY REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD COULD USE MORE DREAMERS LIKE MARTY. FOR MORE ON MARTY AND OTHER STORIES OF COURAGE THAT INSPIRE US, *visit taylorguitars.com*

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NEW TO THE FAMILY – '68 CUSTOM VIBROLUX®
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Frontend

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



Santana

25 July 2015, 02, London

He's such a fixture of the guitar world, it's easy to forget what a stellar career Carlos Santana has had. Since his breakout 1969 Woodstock appearance and the release of his debut album in the same year, he's won 10 Grammy Awards and sold over 10 million records. His latest album, 2014's *Corazón*, features collaborations with the stars of Latin music (surprisingly enough, it's the first Latin music record of his career), yet it's in the live arena that Santana shines, with a back catalogue of over 40 years' worth of material to choose from and a touring schedule that'd be intimidating for a 20-year-old performer, let alone a 67-year-old. If you want to catch him live on a rare UK appearance, tickets are on sale now for his show at the O2 on 25 July. See www.santana.com for tickets.



Latitude Festival

16-19 July, Suffolk

An eclectic but guitar-packed programme is in store for Latitude's 10th birthday, featuring Alt-J, Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds, Manic Street Preachers, The Vaccines, Seasick Steve, The Charlatans, and a varied comedy line-up. Tickets are on sale at latitudefestival.com.

IGF Guitar Summit

23-26 July, London

Fancy studying with some of the world's best guitar players? Then sign up to the IGF Guitar Summit, where courses include Flamenco with Juan Martín, Classical with David Russell and Xuefei Yang, and loads more. For info, see www.kingsplace.co.uk/igfgs or email info@igf.org.uk.



Aynsley Lister

From 4 June, various UK venues

Following Lister's excellent recent Blues Headlines contributions with Neville Marten, you now have the chance to see him in person. Aynsley tours various UK venues in June across a series of seven dates, in either band or duo formats. For tickets and more information,

point your browser at www.aynsleylister.co.uk

Pierre Bensusan 40th Anniversary

From 11 June, various UK venues

As part of the celebrations marking his 40th Anniversary of being in the music business, fingerpicking acoustic maestro Pierre Bensusan is bringing his eclectic fusion of styles to the UK across 16 dates in June. Tickets and information can be found on Pierre's website at www.pierrebensusan.com

© ARYANNEBILHAM/RCA RECORDS

Round-up Get A Head

Check these recent amp heads, delivering serious power and versatility



1 Orange Rockerverb MKIII

£1,499

www.orangeamps.com

Orange's new Rockerverb comes in 50-, 100-watt and 50-watt 2x12 formats. It's as road-worthy as ever, but features a chimier clean channel with more headroom, a reworked, valve-powered spring reverb and a new attenuator.

We said: "Easily swaps from classic rock and blues to modern rock and metal"

2 PRS Archon 50 Head

£1,450

www.prsguitars.com

The 50-watt, two-channel Archon has individual master volumes, a series effects loop and half-power option. It comes with 6L6s but can be rebased for EL34s. There's a lot of drive on board,

with a harmonic-rich response.

We said: "Powerful, portable with superb clean and rock tones"

3 Mesa/Boogie Mark Five: 25

£1,379

www.mesaboogie.com

Mesa upholds its illustrious history with a compact 25-watt amp head that includes effects loop send and returns, CabClone speaker emulation and the famous five-band EQ.

We said: "Mesa's Mark Five: 25 is a serious pro tool – as hard as nails beneath a beautiful exterior"

4 Matrix Elements VB800

£549

www.matrixamplification.com

The UK-made 'Vintage British' 800 is one of the lightest heads

we've plugged into, at just under two kilos. Its Brit-rock tone is usable from the off: there's gritty aggression aplenty. Delivering 420 watts into four ohms, 300 watts into eight ohms or 150 watts into 16 ohms, there's enough output for any stage.

We said: "Breathes with the kind of dynamic response you'd expect from a good valve amp"

5 Victory V40 'The Duchess'

£829

www.victoryamps.com

The Brit-built, single-channel 40-watt Duchess lives up to her elegant name by providing a wide spectrum of subtly shifting overdriven tones that belie her 'rock amp' looks. Instead of teaming a high-gain lead channel with a relatively uninspiring clean channel, it focuses on dynamic,

low-to-medium overdrive sounds.

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

6 Magnetone Super 59

£2,499

www.magnetoneusa.com

This revived US boutique brand's flagship head was designed in conjunction with Billy Gibbons, and sounds stunning, with raunch midway between a Plexi and a hot-rodged Bassman. Its 45 watts sound phenomenal when cranked around the seven o'clock mark on the master, and its superb vibrato, with switchable modulation type and expression-pedal option, is the icing on the cake.

We said: "Could easily become one of the most aspirational amps this decade for blues and rock players all over the world"



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Show Report Frankfurt Musikmesse 2015

America has NAMM, Europe has Frankfurt Musikmesse - and you have *Guitarist*, on hand to guide you on a whistle-stop tour of the highlights

Electrics

Nik Huber's Surfmeister semi with Bigsby (price TBC) was a tempting place to start our new-gear voyage from the Frankfurt show floor - see next issue for a full review. Equally drool-worthy was **Huber's Krauster II [9]**, with its metal-based 'White Trash' finish.

Gibson Memphis has come up with a slew of new models: the '63 **ES-335 TDC**, for example, comes in 60s-accurate Cherry Red with dot inlays; there's a very limited run of '61 **ES-335s [8]** in natural - which, originally, were never made. There's a '64 **ES-345**, again in 'wrong' natural but without the Varitone. The downsized **ES-349** is based on the ES-345, sans Varitone - they couldn't fit it into the body! The semi-solid **ES Les Pauls** get better by the day: new examples include a gloss Goldtop, a Black Beauty with three MHS gold-plated 'buckers, and the **ES Les Paul Slim Taper** with a subtly smaller neck. Nice.

Meanwhile, **Schecter USA** continues to plunder its past successes. A Candy Red S-type named the **Sultan [3]**? Ring any bells with a recent *Guitarist* cover star? Elsewhere, shredder's favourite **Caparison** is celebrating its 20th Anniversary with a **Horus-M3 Anniversary** model (£1,999). While the M3 is its 'classic', the more PRS-style **Angelus Custom Line** is one for high-end fans at around £3.5k. Also check out the new carved-top **Dellinger Prominence**.

From the Eastwood stable, **Supro's** prototypes of the **Tri-Tone**, **Kingston**, **Ozark Hardtail [4]** and **Ozark Trem** were on show, with prices TBC. **Hofner** is focusing on its classic **Verythin** thinline **[7]** for 2015, with limited-edition models - including Matt Black, Matt Olive Green, Dark Walnut, Metallic Gold and Metallic Blue, with either Hofner 'buckers or P-90s, and hardtail or Bigsby vibratos. New colour options appeared on the **Verythin**

Special and **Verythin Singlecut**, too - great retro guitars with proper heritage.

Acoustics

Martin's additions include the new **Ed Sheeran Signature [6]** (£579, join the queue, demand is apparently overwhelming), two X Series additions, the **OOX1AE** with Fishman Sonitone and USB (£559), and the **GPX1AE [2]** (£559) non-cut jumbo. The **D-35E 50th** (approx £4k) uses East Indian rosewood sides and a three-piece back with torrefied spruce top and D-Tar electronics, while the **Road Series** gets the **GPXSGT** (£959, including case) with its Performing Artist shape. **Godin's** typically diverse range has a new **A6 Baritone** (£799) and new-design **acoustic mandolin** (approximately £350).

Guild is rejigging its acoustic range under new owner, Cordoba. The **Westerly** series will replace the long-running GADs, though they will still be made in China. They'll retain the typical M, F, D and OM sizes but add more vintage-correct features such as the Chesterfield headstock logo, along with a gloss-finish neck. Prices start at around £500.

Along with its annual Limited model - for 2015, it's the flowers and snowflakes-clad **Renge-So [10]** (£1,999) - **Takamine** has updated its CoolTube preamp to the CTP-3, which will be available on all Pro 5, 6 and 7 series guitars. Among the upgrades is the ability to add a contact soundboard



transducer (which can be fitted by Takamine), or a magnetic soundhole pickup.

There's plenty of affordable acoustic action from **Tanglewood**, with the **Sundance Delta Historic** series [5] – comprising a slope-shouldered dread, parlour and OM – at £399. The cutaway **Nashville V** series, a super-folk and dread, comes in a vibrant amber gloss finish with hard case at £299 (acoustic) and £349 (electro). The super-jumbo **Evolution Viscount**, £499 with Fishman Presys preamps, comes in Gloss Black, White or Orange finishes.

Yamaha's Silent Guitars have had a serious makeover for 2015. Along with new styling, they now feature the digital S.R.T (Studio Response Technology) designed to: "create the body resonance of an acoustic guitar in bodiless guitars", says Yamaha. Both steel- and nylon-string versions are available – reviewed next issue.

Farida's new **Soundboard** series aims to reposition the brand as a higher-level maker. It's an interesting range of (mainly) all solid-wood guitars with often unusual back and side woods such as ziricote, cocobolo and figured koa. Estimated prices are around £1.5k. Fan-fret fans should take also note, as an affordable prototype six-string fan-fret should be in production later this year.

Amps

Alongside **Marshall's** unveiling of its much-vaunted new **Astoria line** [1] of vintage-

voiced, retro-styled Classic, Custom and Dual 30-watt combos and heads (available in the summer), **Carl Martin**, the well-established Danish amp and effects maker, took the wraps off the **Roadie** [11] – a Chinese-made combo aiming for boutique-like quality without the price tag. It's a simple EL84 amp with 15-watt output, with both volume and tone options on the long Accutronics reverb tank. Another new amp is the **Vox AC10** (£359), which the company tells us is like an AC15 "with a little less grunt". A lot of amp for the money.

Pedals

As ever, there were pedals galore at Musikmesse. Some new ones we spotted came from **Carl Martin** in the form of the **Andy Simmons Compressor**, a low-gain version of the Plexitone, a brand-new **MkII** version of its **Octa-switch**, and a new version II of the **Pro Power** power supply. Bass pedal and amp specialist **EBS** has branched out to produce its first guitar-specific pedals: the **MultiComp**, **Red Twister** chorus and **DynaVerb** stereo reverb. **Valetron's Coral** series [12] boasts a fulsome 16 new nano-pedals, while its **Loft** series consists of cheeky mini versions of Boss's compact effects. **DigiTech** added the **DOD Gunslinger** overdrive (£89) and digital **Obscura** delay (£129).

Watch this space for reviews of as much of the above as we can fit in the mag soon!



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Guitarist Magazine



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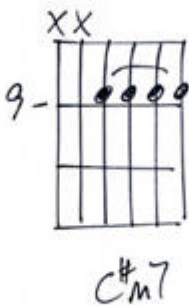
www.heistercamp.co.uk

Substitute

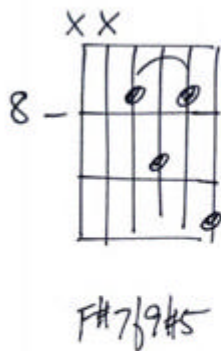
Tired of using the same old chord shapes? These substitutions will freshen up your playing in seconds

This issue: Chromatic Turnaround

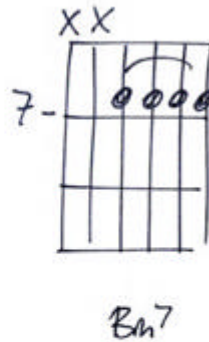
There are loads of turnarounds in jazz and blues. But this one is cool because it doesn't just shift a single shape in parallel. In a 12-bar jazzy blues in A, we've just played the E7 and D7 in bars 9 and 10. Instead of returning to the A7, we're going to drop just a semitone to C#m7...



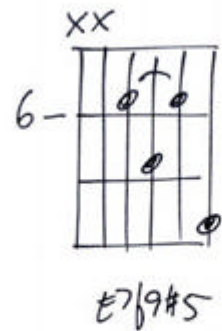
Next, we start a little trip backwards round the cycle of 5ths, continuing with F#7. For added interest, the #5th and #9th create a more complex motion – notes ascend, descend and remain static.



What, no bass notes? We're using quite small voicings here in order to maintain a consistent tone and clear movement between the notes. There's also another cool thing, but first, try this chord.



The E7, 9#5 completes the pattern. This leads to A7, starting the next 12-bar sequence. Here's a cool trick: the obvious bass line is C#-F#-B-E, but you can also use C#-C-B-A#. The chords stay the same, but now function as C#m7, C9, Bm7, A#9...



And also...

HAMMETT LOSES RIFFS

Metallica lead player Kirk Hammett revealed on *The Jasta Show* podcast that he recently lost an iPhone that contained around 250 of his unused musical ideas. His advice? "All you musicians out there who use your phone, make sure it's backed up, right?"

GORDON SMITH GUITARS

UK guitar company Gordon Smith has announced that its future has been passed to Auden Guitars. Co-founder John Smith, his wife Linda and associate Chris Smith are set to retire after 40 years of guitar building, though John will remain involved in the business over the next couple of years. Gordon Smith Guitars Ltd will continue to trade as a standalone business. For more info, see www.gordonsmithguitars.com.

CRÜE CUT

Last bastions of hair metal Mötley Crüe have embarked on their final tour, and are set to play their last-ever live gig on New Year's Eve in Los Angeles. The show will be the culmination of a 34-year career that saw the band sell over 80 million records. Head over to www.motley.com for details.

Guitarist Picks Highlights from last issue



Electric

Gibson Memphis ES-339 Satin 2015
£1,699

We said: "Compact dimensions with classic tone and styling"



Acoustic

PRS SE A15 AL Alex Lifeson
£899

We said: "A classy thinline electro that makes a great at-home guitar"



Amps

Blackstar ID:Core BEAM
£229

We said: "Serious sound quality for both guitars and music – a living-room essential"



Effect

EHX Pitch Fork
£113

We said: "Packs a tremendous range of sounds for the money"



Misc

Fishman Fluence
£115

We said: "One of the most innovative pickup concepts in decades"

Win! A custom set of Van Damme Silver Series instrument cables worth £200

Van Damme's premium Silver Series instrument cables (see Meet Your Maker, p124) have been used by the likes of **Jeff Beck** and **Gary Moore** and are a tone-tweaker's delight, offering a choice of capacitance values so you can brighten up muddy humbuckers or tone down sizzling top-end like a pro. The good people at VDC Trading have offered the chance for one lucky

prize winner to have a bespoke set of these delectable conduits of tone **custom-made to suit their personal requirements**, including two instrument cables and your selection of pedalboard patch cables (**up to a value of £200**) that'll help unlock tailor-made tone from your rig.

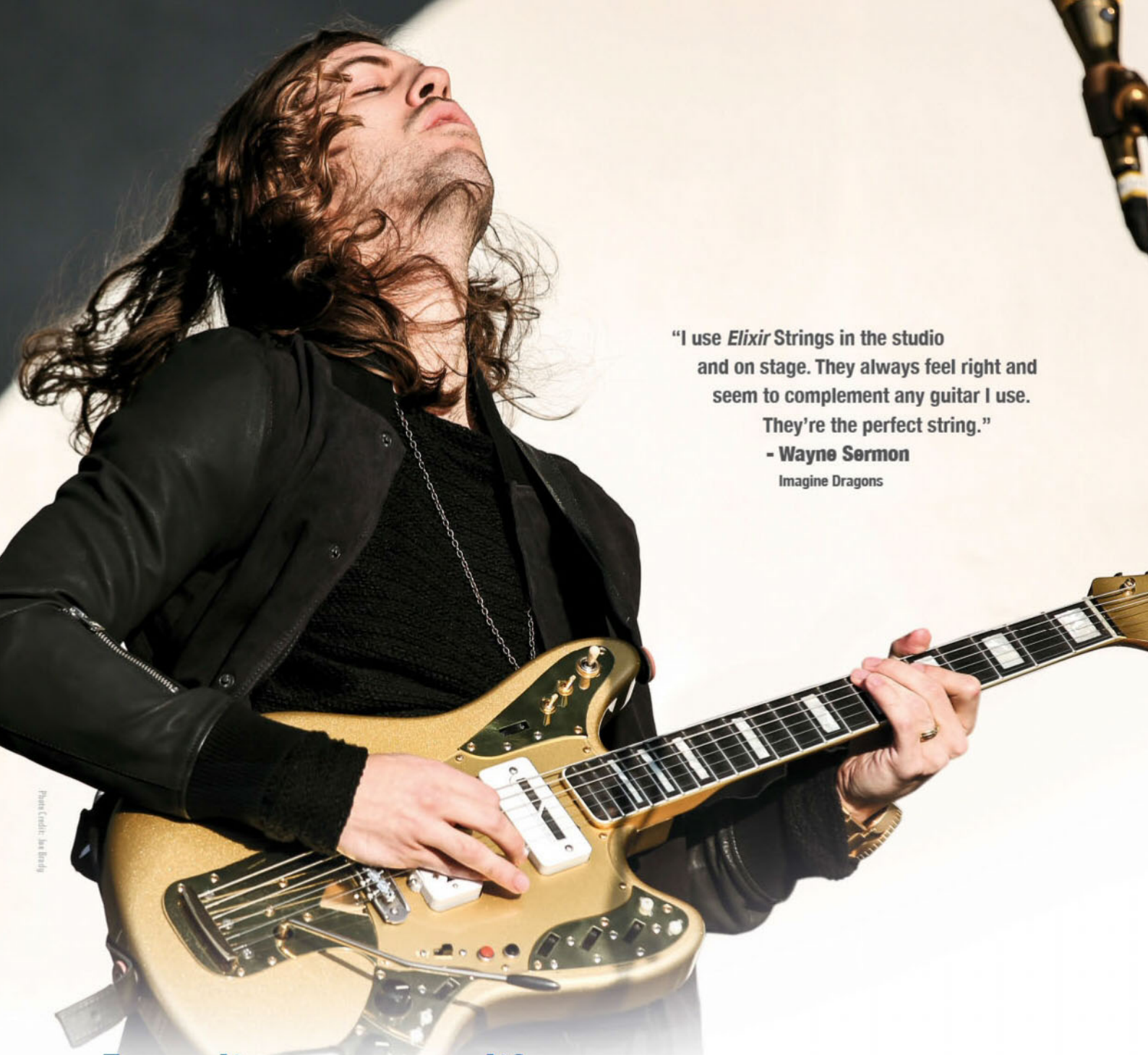
To enter, simply answer the following question correctly:

Jeff Beck was formerly a member of which avian-related band?

- A) The Byrds
- B) The Yardbirds
- C) The Eagles

To enter the competition, visit:
www.futurecomps.co.uk/git395vandamme





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Wayne Sermon plays *Elixir* Strings Electric with NANOWEB® Coating, Custom Gauge .011 .014 .018 .032 .042 .052



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Reb Beach

The Whitesnake and Winger man reveals his special Suhr, Alice Cooper woes and why he gave up trying to pick every note as he takes on the...

10 Questions We Ask Everyone

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

"An Aria Strat, it was a light-coloured wood. It had two pickups and I wanted it to have three, so I bought a mailbox sticker that kind of looked like a pickup. It was a letter 'T' and I stuck it right in the middle so it looked like another pickup. But it was really a good guitar, actually."

2 THE BUILDING'S BURNING DOWN, WHAT GUITAR WOULD YOU SAVE?

"I only have seven or eight guitars and they're all Suhrs. I sold all the Ibanez guitars when Winger took a dive in the 90s. The first Suhr I got was actually a Pensa-Suhr in 1986, it was when John Suhr was working for Rudy Pensa on 48th street [New York]. There was this one guitar that they had. It's still the guitar I play today. I paid \$1,200 for it in 1986, I took out a loan."

3 WHAT ARE YOU DOING FIVE MINUTES BEFORE YOU GO ONSTAGE?

"I'm drinking a beer, warming up. I have to warm up before I play, because I'm getting older. I just jam, I don't have any specific thing that I do to warm up."

4 AND FIVE MINUTES AFTER THE GIG?

"I'm usually exhausted and talking to the guys about the show. We'll be all ramped up and just backstage talking about who screwed what up and how funny it was when this happened, and how bad it was when that happened. We laugh a lot."

5 WHAT SONG WOULD YOU PLAY ON AN ACOUSTIC AROUND THE CAMPFIRE?

"*Rocky Raccoon*, it's the only song I know."

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

"I've fallen off the stage quite a few times. Once, I fell into the audience and my guitar broke in half. They handed it back to me, which was really nice of them, but it was in two pieces; the neck was just snapped right off."

7 WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU PRACTISED, AND WHAT DID YOU PLAY?

"In terms of [formal] practice, I stopped a long time ago. There was one lick I was trying to play, burning up a scale picking every night, and I saw Kip Winger at a rehearsal 15 years later and he said, 'Are you still trying to pick every note!? You've been trying to do that for 20 years. You can't do it, just hang it up.' So I did! [laughs]"

8 IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT A RECORDING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

"With Winger or Whitesnake, and Dokken for that matter, there's no regrets. Alice Cooper, though... the first album I did with Alice was a live record at Sammy Hagar's club Cabo Wabo [1996]. His organisation decided to record the first show we ever played together; all new guys, a whole new band, and we'd never played together apart from rehearsal. I never listened to the whole thing because I was so embarrassed."

9 WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF ABOUT THE GUITAR?

"Practise. I wish I had practised more so I was more well-rounded. But I'm very good at improvisation."

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

"People that have worked with me know that if you give me a beer, I'll tell funny stories, I'm pretty easy to be around and I don't make waves. Which is why I've kept this particular job for as long as I have."

Whitesnake's *The Purple Album* is out now on Frontiers Music SRL.

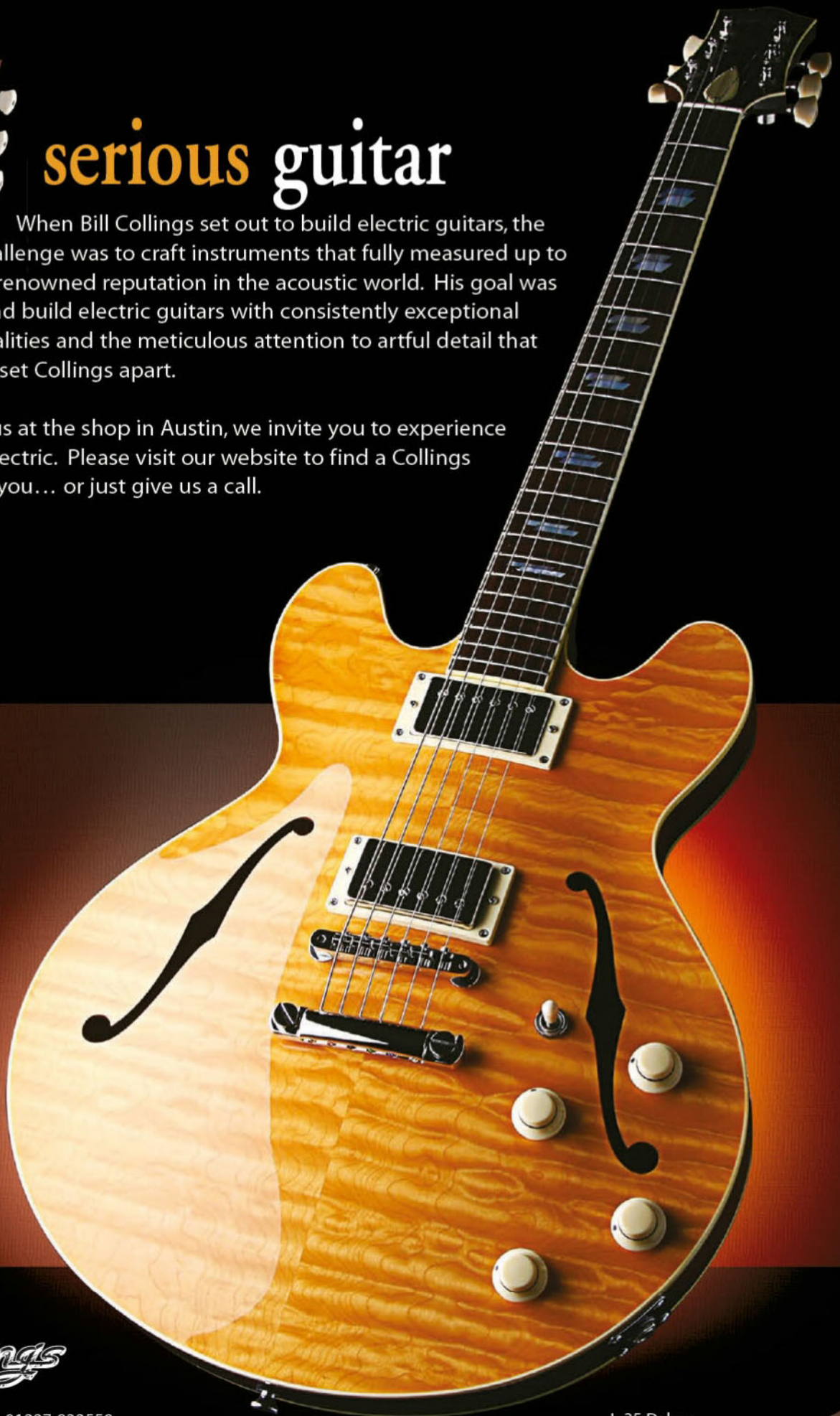
"Once, I fell into the audience and my guitar broke in half. They handed it back to me, which was really nice of them, but it was in two pieces"



serious guitar

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

From all of us at the shop in Austin, we invite you to experience a Collings electric. Please visit our website to find a Collings dealer near you... or just give us a call.



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Feedback

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Star letter



KORG

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UNCHAINED MELODY

Dear *Guitarist*, You asked for 'one that got away' stories, Feedback issue 394. Well... in the late-60s, when I was in my teens, I had raked together enough cash to buy my own first electric guitar. I went down to Newcastle (my nearest dealer), to buy it. I had my eye on a Shaftesbury Les Paul copy, which was priced at £66, and after playing it I decided it was fine.

However, the guy who was serving me then said: "Before you settle for that, can I show you this?" and he brought out a used single-pickup, Sunburst Gibson Melody Maker. He wanted £60 for it. It was dinged, scratched and the action was a bit high, so, yes, I plumped for the shiny new Shaftesbury! It didn't take long for the realisation to creep in, and I've been haunted and seriously embarrassed by it ever since!

Geoff Tate, via email

Don't worry Geoff, we've all done it. Neville Marten, editor of *Guitar Techniques* often tells us about when he went down to Denmark Street in the early 70s looking for a Strat and was offered Clapton's old Firebird I instead. Similarly, he turned it down because he didn't want a single-pickup guitar. Probably a bit tatty from the previous owner gigging it a lot, too!

SOUND ADVICE

Hi, just read the letter from Marc Biefnot (Q&A, issue 394) and your helpful response. Just wanted to add that the inconsistencies Marc is experiencing could also be exacerbated by the difference between the spaces in which he practises, and the spaces in which he performs.

I use the same amp at rehearsals as I do at shows, but the way sound travels around the practice room emphasises low end and suppresses higher frequencies, by comparison to the open and untreated nature of most of the stages we play on, which make more of the treble frequencies audible.

It would be wonderful if we could leave our gear set up a certain way to ensure sonic consistency from gig to gig, but sadly that's not the reality.

James Scott, via email

Thanks, James – certainly on the pub circuit there's plenty of clattery, angular rooms with less acoustic treatment than an even an average rehearsal room. On a good night those unforgiving sound environments can become a bit less clattery and harsh when the pub starts filling with punters eager to bop to your band. But surely we've all played gigs where that didn't happen, too! The odd night when – for all your best efforts during soundcheck – your stage sound feels alien, uneven and unsatisfying, goes with the territory. But that makes the venues that do really have their acoustics and monitoring properly sorted all the more enjoyable. After that, all they've got to do is pay you properly to make your bliss complete!

DANCING IN THE STREET

Some time ago, my mother-in-law asked my wife for ideas for a birthday present for me and received the suggestion of a subscription to *Guitarist*. I responded enthusiastically, and since then, my copy of your magazine has since fallen through the letter box with a reassuring thump every month.

Last year, my band (Fat Chance) performed at a local street party and my mother-in-law announced her intention to come and see us play. We're a bit loud and raucous, and she is well over 80, so I had some doubts. Halfway through a set which proved to be a triumph of hope over experience, I looked into the crowd and saw my mother-in-law bopping away enthusiastically, with daughter and grandchildren, and thoroughly enjoying herself.

Proof positive that the energy and appeal of live music really does span the generations!

Martin Rands, via email

That's great to hear, Martin. In the words of Captain Beefheart and bluesmen before him, as long as you can boogie, you ain't too old.

SHE'S SO HEAVY

I read with interest Matt Bedford's letter (issue 394) about needing a quality amp for small jazz gigs. I've had good results with the Fender Hot Rod Deluxe. I bought mine around 12 years ago when I played with a 'jazz co-op' – around a dozen horns, keyboard, bass and the drummer from The Muppets (sorry Richard – just joking!). It was easily loud enough to cope without a hint of distortion, giving beautiful bell-like notes. It's still going strong all these years later on the same valves and still sounds brilliant. Sadly, the jazz

co-op has long gone and I no longer need the volume, so I use it through a Weber Mini Mass attenuator which, when engaged, gives some superb driven tones at reasonable volume levels. There is one drawback, however. It weighs around 48lbs, which matters when you're carrying it up four flights of fire-escape stairs in the pouring rain!

Nigel Whiting, via email

We agree that the Hot Rod Deluxe is a great-sounding and extremely capable all-rounder, which accounts for its huge popularity. But while it's by no means the heaviest amp of its type – this magazine's editor regularly grapples with a 68lb Marshall Bluesbreaker reissue with no side handles. It's a vexing fact that quality, twin-speaker combos with a useful amount of headroom ain't all that easy to hump in and out of venues. Fitting castors is one solution, but they won't help with steps or uneven surfaces and will add to the total weight. So the current generation of so-called 'lunchbox' amps may actually provide a better answer for many gigging players. Mini heads such as Victory's V40 Duchess (see review, issue 391) pack a lot of punch into a relatively lightweight perforated-metal enclosure. And although the amp's accompanying cabinet is just one more thing to carry, you have the option of choosing a compact 1x12 cab with an efficient driver, adding up to a portable but potent rig that can at least be carried into the venue in easy pieces.

WHAT A WAIST

I have always wondered about why it is I struggle with some guitars when playing sitting down. In particular, I often get

wrist cramps playing a single-cut Les Paul. This never happens when playing my SG-bodied '61 Les Paul. Having thought about it for some time, I decided to measure the distance from the lower waist to the 12th fret on a few guitars. The results are very interesting, as the ergonomics are largely driven by the fact that when seated, the lower waist is locked onto the players right thigh (assuming a right-handed player). If the distance between the higher part of the neck and the waist is too low, the player's body gets in the way of the playing more than the guitar body does. Anyway, the variation was huge: a standard single-cut Les Paul is 22.5cm from waist to 12th fret. On my '61 SG Les Paul, it is 30cm, a huge difference. A PRS Custom 22 is 27cm, closer to the SG than the Les Paul.

When standing up, this is not an issue, but as most of us practise sitting and mainly record sitting, differences as large as 7.5cm from one guitar to another are going to have a big effect on playability. That's a three-inch difference in where your left hand is sitting! I've always been aware there are some songs I can't play properly on a single-cut. Now I've figured out why. Has anybody else observed this?

Nigel Greening, via email

Thanks for your interesting observations, Nigel. It'd be interesting to know if you're a particularly long-limbed player, too – as ergonomics are a very personal thing. Of course, one thing a few readers may have found as the years advance is that one's waist tends to get further away from the guitar as a well-fed belly intervenes. However, if that's the case, you can always fall back on Howlin' Wolf's droll advice, when he sang, "I'm built for comfort, I ain't built for speed..."

"The current generation of so-called 'lunchbox' amps may actually provide a better answer for many gigging players, as they pack a lot of punch into a relatively lightweight enclosure"

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Photography by **Adam Gasson**





Martin OM-28

Authentic 1931 **£4,449**

Martin's Orchestra Model (OM) shape was refined through a series of experimental tenor guitars, the aim being to produce an instrument with 14 frets clear of the body and likely to appeal to the era's banjo players. By 1930, the 14-fret 'folk' size flat-top was born, and this OM-28 recreates an actual instrument from the following year.

Lifting it out of its deluxe lined case, the 31 is feather light. The lacquer finish is treated to a process that leaves it satin in appearance and to the touch. Running hand and eye over the guitar it looks and feels amazing (and will even more so, once the anaemic white top tames to a subtler caramel).

The satin works its magic on the neck, too: totally drag-free, you hardly know it's there. Action is perfect on a

neck that's shaped for all, and if you thought a high-century-old design would play like an orange box strung with cheese wire, think again; this is the first truly modern acoustic, and it plays like a dream.

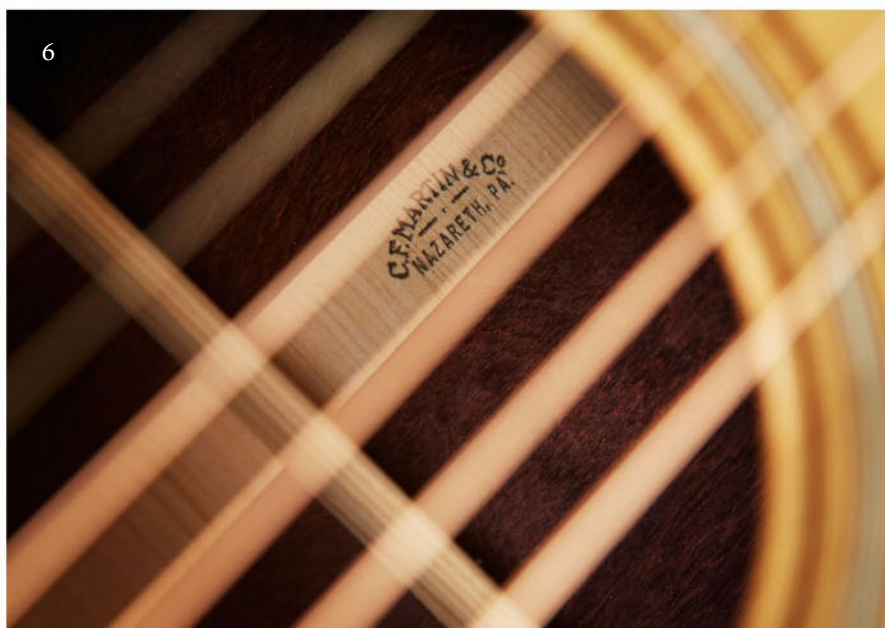
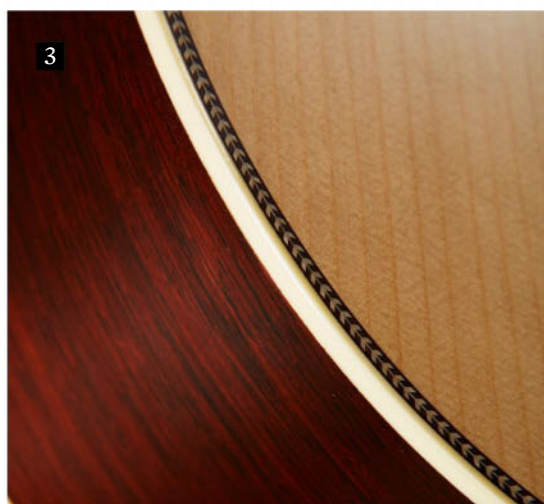
Using Martin's Vintage Tone System, which aims to replicate the exact age of top and braces, the sound is clear, rich and articulate. Every tonal centre is covered but none stands excessively proud. Projection is stunning, and the dynamic range and balance match far exceed anything we've played.

In the final analysis, Martin's OM-28 Authentic 1931 is a fingerpicking folkie's dream. How many of them could actually afford the four-and-a-half grand price, though, is a matter for others to discuss. Meanwhile, it's eyebrow-raisingly good.





- 1** Due to restrictions on its use, Madagascan rosewood replaces the original's Brazilian – note the appropriate zig-zag style purfling
- 2** Martin's headstock decal didn't arrive until late in 1931, so the Madagascan rosewood cap on this one remains barren – some will like the accuracy, others will miss the bragging potential (the nickel Waverley tuners look and work a treat)
- 3** The Authentic's top, bracing and tone bars are of Adirondak spruce – note the wood's typically wide grain pattern, and the grained ivoroid binding with classic herringbone inlay detail
- 4** The bevelled Delmar tortoise-style pickguard, 1921-31 28-style soundhole rosette, abalone-inlaid bridge pins and long bone saddle are all authentic vintage appointments
- 5** Beautifully finished frets on an ebony board with abalone split diamond inlays imbue this genuine player's guitar with understated excellence
- 6** Along with a subtle stamp on the headstock's rear, the internal CF Martin & Co, Nazareth PA brand are the only giveaways to the guitar's origin





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(Bob Dylan, Roger Waters, Hall & Oates, Mick Jagger)



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~ John Jorgenson
(The Hellcasters, Bob Seger, Johnny Cash, Barbra Streisand)



"The Elevator can do any number of cool things. It drives my amp without adding too much gain or artificial character - like a hi-fi Tube Screamer."

~ Scott Sharrard
(The Allman Brothers, The Gregg Allman Band)



"The Elevator is the cleanest, most dynamic boost pedal I've ever used. It heats up the amp just enough to growl, yet pushes the gain channel enough to soar above the mix! And here's the kicker...it leaves the tone you worked so hard to get intact! This thing's amazing!"

~ Jeff Bihlman
(Bihlman Brothers)



"The Elevator is now THE boost pedal in my touring rack. It's absolutely great. Very flexible sonically.... the perfect solo boost pedal."

~ Steve Stevens
(Billy Idol, Michael Jackson, Vince Neil)



"YES! I wanted a clean Strat tone with more sustain, but retaining the inherent sparkle and shimmer of the guitar. The Elevator worked perfectly as a boost and made the sum of the parts better than anything on its own."

~ Carl Verheyen
(Supertramp)



"The Elevator is the ultimate clean boost. It sounds fantastic. As soon as I turned it off, I was shocked at how wimpy everything sounded! I'll be leaving it on from now on."

~ Michael Thompson
(LA Session guitarist - David Foster, Babyface, Seal, Michael Buble)

"The Elevator... it's a gain changer!!"

~ John Jorgenson

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Music



Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard

Django And Jimmie

★★★★

Legacy Recordings

The outlaws ride out together again in this new tribute

This may be Nelson's sixth album in three years for Sony, but any collaboration with his old friend Merle is always an event worth hearing. They last teamed up on 2007's *Last Of The Breed* alongside Ray Price, a telling title indeed. Because with Waylon Jennings and Johnny Cash sadly no longer with us, the country

legacy that the surviving outlaws are still crafting becomes even more precious. And they do themselves proud here, on a mix of new songs with a couple of classics thrown into the deal.

Understandably, they're often in reflective mood. But rarely maudlin. The title track is a charming tribute to the two idols they feel indebted to: Reinhardt and Rodgers. Another ode to an influence, *Missing Ol' Johnny Cash*, is as upbeat as a lament for a compadre can be. Though *Unfair Weather Friend* and *Live This Long* are touchingly sincere ballads to friendship and colourful careers, the mischievous spark

is never far away with these two. *It's All Going To Pot* sizzles with Mexicana spice in its cannabis haze, a riotous nod to their favourite tour-bus pastime.

Nelson's voice has aged remarkably (Haggard himself marvelled that he "sang like he was a teenager" in the sessions), and the dynamic with his co-conspirator's seasoned timbre carries these songs a long way, with some of Nashville's finest onboard, too. The strum of Nelson's iconic Trigger guitar is richly framed by Mike Johnson's pedal steel and Bobby Terry's tasty electric runs on Dylan's classic *Don't Think Twice*,

It's Alright, a track's painted a brighter shade by the duo treatment here.

They sing each other's classics on *Family Bible* and *Somewhere Between*, but whether it's a touch of Hawaiian steel to Nelson and Buddy Cannon's *Alice In Hulaland*, or grittier country blues with Johnson's dobro and Terry in *It's Only Money*, the new compositions have the effortless flow of standards. Such is the gravitas these musicians carry, and long may they ride. **[RL]**

Standout track:

It's All Going To Pot

For fans of: Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan



On the Record

LAURENCE JONES
WHAT'S IT GONNA BE



ALBUM: *What's It Gonna Be*
STUDIO: Headline Music Studios, Cambridge
PRODUCERS: Roger Inniss & Laurence Jones

"We are a live band and I like that it came across on the record. It's a studio album but you can feel the energy"



Laurence Jones

The 23-year-old British bluesman comes of age with a self-produced third album that boasts versatility and growing confidence

The Sessions

"I wanted to get across what we do live – melodies, hooks, melodic guitar parts – but still have that blues feeling. A lot of the songs were written about experiences I've had on the road. I got to tour with the Blues Caravan last year, a package that the label put together. We went to 10 different countries in five weeks. I saw a lot of different things – it was a culture shock, a different world out there, and it really inspired me.

"We all got together as a band in hotel rooms when we got the chance and I'd say, 'I wrote this song. What do you think?' and

they'd put their parts to it. Roger [Inniss, bass], Miri [Miettinen, drums] and I are a team and they seem to know what I'm going to play, even when I improvise. In the studio we were all in the same room and laid down the backing track live, then I'd record solos or the acoustic over that. We are a live band and I like that it came across on the record. It's a studio album but you can feel the energy."

The Guitars

"I used my Custom Shop '62 Strat a lot. It's a 2000 model that I bought from a friend of mine.

I'd been after that guitar for years. We were at a gig, playing Maryport Blues Festival, and he sold it to me. I went off in the van and two seconds later he said he regretted it. I turned round and said, 'No way!' [laughs]. I'm endorsed by Bare Knuckle and use the Custom '62 in the bridge. They're really clean and crisp, even when you've got the distortion on.

"A lot of the rhythm guitars were played on a standard American Telecaster. And I'm lucky enough to have Luther Allison's 70s Gibson Les Paul Goldtop, lent to me by the record label. It's got so much

history in it... I love playing that guitar. I used that on *What's It Gonna Be* for the solo."

The Tones

"I've never been a fan of distortion from the amp. I've tried loads of amps – Marshalls, Mesa/Boogie, Blackstar – and I just can't get the sound I want through the distortion. I like to just have a clean amp, and there's one pedal I use all the time religiously: the Analog Man King Of Tone. It's like two Tube Screamers in one pedal and that is my sound. I was using the Dr Z EZG-50 head and the main amp I used on



Jones is all about capturing a raw live vibe on record

pretty much all the songs was a PRS Custom 50. That's a nice bit of kit that belonged to the studio. I didn't know how it would sound live, but I trusted it to sound good in the studio.

"I like to keep it quite simple. I have two overdrives, an MXR Carbon Copy delay and a wah. I also use the Mad Professor Deep Blue delay. The other distortion is a Mojo Hand Rook, which is a really cool pedal. I can hit the left channel on the King Of Tone for a solo or if I want to go a bit more crazy I add all three distortions. It's like three Tube Screamers at the same time!"

The Mix

"We mixed and mastered it at the same studio, which is something I haven't done before. And we actually mixed the album twice, which was important because we got to take it home and listen. When you're in the studio for 12-hour days your ears gets used to the sound, so it's good to take it home and have a listen on the stereo. That was a vital part of the album. Rome wasn't built in a day so we didn't listen to any music for three days and then came back to it and all we could say about some parts, 'Oh, wow. That needs to be changed.'"

The Lessons

"There's only two solos that I wrote out and they're *Set It Free* and *What's It Gonna Be*. The rest are improvised and that's what I love, because that's where the blues is for me. I started out on the classical guitar and that's very structured. The reason I went to the blues is because it was very free and I could play how I felt at the time.

"Every solo, we used either the first or second take. Every one after that we kept it underneath but because the energy was so raw from the first or second one we went with that every time."

The Verdict

"It was a great experience to produce my own album on a record label I've always wanted to be on, with the band I've always wanted. The label had a lot of trust in me. They said, 'It's on your head.' But I was really positive of the outcome and I wasn't going to let anyone down. At the end of the day, it's what I naturally do the most: creating and playing music is what I do." [RL]

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Albums

Al Di Meola

Elysium

★★★★

Inakustik



Latin-jazz fusion from one of the genre's greats

Al Di Meola's *Elysium* largely picks up where 2011's *Pursuit Of Radical Rhapsody* left off, with a rough 50/50 split between electric/acoustic lead. However, where *PORR* was more diverse and eclectic, a 'world jazz-fusion' album taking in Latin, Middle Eastern, Afro-Caribbean sounds and more, *Elysium* is slightly more balanced on the Latin side, and it's the stronger, more appealing album for it. Di Meola's weaving modal melodies do the talking, with his not inconsiderable shred skills displayed only in flourishes. Needless to say, this may not be for the pentatonic rockers among you! [CB]

Standout track: *Tangier*

For fans of: Return To Forever, Weather Report

Vennart

The Demon Joke

★★★★

Superball Music



Oceansize and Biffy Clyro maverick goes solo

Since cult prog-rockers Oceansize split up back in 2011, Mike Vennart has been busy lending his guitar chops – and pedal collection – to Biffy Clyro's live show, and, judging from his debut solo album, studying Simon Neil and co's material has had a profound effect. *The Demon Joke* is still awash with Oceansize's trademark unconventional chord progressions and outlandish fuzz textures, but channels a more immediate quality, thanks to hard-hitting tracks that range from the most delicate of ballads (*A Weight In The Hollow*) to blockbuster anthems (*Infatuate*, *Operate*), all of which make a convincing push for the rock mainstream. [MB]

Standout track: *Infatuate*

For fans of: Oceansize, Biffy Clyro, Faith No More

Sonny Landreth

Bound By The Blues

★★★★

Provogue



Eclectic Mississippi slidester returns home

Bound By The Blues may be the title, but as slide players go, Louisiana's Sonny Landreth's typical output is anything but restricted by the ancient Delta roots underpinning his fretwork – he's just finished expanding his last fusion-flavoured album into an orchestral format, for example. However, Sonny's latest is a stomping return to the joys of the blues form. The hallmarks of his playing are all on display – jazzy inflections, a throaty, midrangy drive tone and unique phrasing – and his approach here is a fascinating mix of the intellectual and the guttural that's a must-listen for blues fans. [BW]

Standout track: *Firebird Blues*

For fans of: Ry Cooder, JJ Cale, Johnny Winter

The Darkness

Last Of Our Kind

★★★★

Canary Dwarf Limited



They still believe in a thing called rock

Any celebration of the majesty of classic rock should always be savoured, and the Hawkins brothers have made no



The Darkness: back on form, and back on tour in November and December, too

secret of their love of Young, May, Perry and Gorham in their work. There's even some Billy Duffy influence stoking the flames of *Open Fire* here. Battle rocker *Barbarian* and the tight blues licks of *Mudslide* are immediate hard hitters; *Mighty Wings* the furthest they've ventured into Queen's progressive cave. Their serious skill at pouring their stew of influences into joyfully diverse rock craft remains undiminished; which still makes it kind of baffling why anyone would dismiss them as a 'joke' band. [RL]

Standout track: *The Last Of Our Kind*

For fans of: Queen, Thin Lizzy, AC/DC

The Aristocrats

Tres Caballeros

★★★★

Boing!



The three horsemen of The Aristocrats amaze

Tres Caballeros sees The Aristocrats come of age as a recording group, with the band resisting the urge to record strictly as a trio and experimenting more with multi-tracking and textural parts. Most of the nine new compositions explore American musical influences, taking in Texas blues, up-tempo country, and even a Morricone Spaghetti Western-style track – all interpreted with the fusion sensibilities of the genius hive mind of Govan, Beller and Minnemann. Guthrie is on fire throughout, and those seemingly effortless shreddier moments in *The Kentucky Meat Shower* and *Through The Flower* simply astound. [CB]

Standout track: *Jack's Back*

For fans of: King Crimson, Frank Zappa, Alex Skolnick Trio

Tremonti

Cauterize

★★★★

Fret12



The Alter Bridge man continues his solo journey

Mark Tremonti doesn't seem to put his PRS down for very long, and his dedicated work rate and practice regime has yielded results again here. Taking on the lead vocal role again for this second album, there's a clear growth in his singing that seems to have filtered through to his solos. While some may have viewed this as his heavy 'pure metal' outlet – and there are plenty of syncopated riffs to savour – that's not the whole story. His keen sense of anthemic melody is always present and correct, while the ringing U2-ish arpeggios of *Sympathy* and *Dark Trip's* use of delay feel like new ground for his songwriting. [RL]

Standout track: *Sympathy*

For fans of: Alter Bridge, Sevendust, Metallica

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DigiTech
by HARMAN





STEVE VAI

In his 35-year career, the blur-fingered New Yorker has given instrumental guitar a good name and raised the technical bar to where other virtuosos fear to tread. Now, as he returns with a new live release, Vai talks pressure, misconceptions and the dangers of listening to your critics...

Words Henry Yates

Vai isn't just a surname. It's a byword for virtuosity, chops and the kind of technical prowess that makes eyes pop and jaws clank open. Practising for an unfeasible nine hours each day as a teenager, honing his craft at the Berklee College Of Music and hitting the radar in 1980 as Frank Zappa's so-called stunt guitarist, there's no doubt that Vai, in his own words, can "tear it up". Yet it was 1990's solo breakthrough, *Passion And Warfare*, that revealed the New Yorker's flair for melody and mood, with classics such as *For The Love Of God* helping him transcend his natural audience of axe obsessives. Now, aged 54, Vai's latest live release, *Stillness In Motion*, proves he can still do it for real in the age of AutoTune. "I always loved the idea of having command of the instrument," he tells us, "so there's an effortless, flowing, virtuosic, ripping, elegant approach that's beautiful, baffling and fulfilling for the people watching..."

1 Every gunslinger has to grow up

"There was a time when I put a lot of pressure on myself to be the guy that was able to blow everybody away. There was a period when something in me said every song should, at some point, have some kind of display of my chops. But you go through changes whenever you do something for a

long time. Your perspective changes. After time, you shift, and the songs would tell me what they needed. At times, there's still a little bit of pressure, because a lot of people just want to see me tear it up. I do some of that. But I'm not a perpetual shredder. I don't do it for my whole show. I never did."

2 Impulse is overrated

"When I record a solo, sometimes I just play one pass, on the fly, and see what happens. But what I usually do is play something a bunch of times. Like, I'll sit and take one section, loop it, and play over it until something bizarre and interesting and quirky and lyrical comes out. It's like a meditation. If I take four bars of a solo section and loop it for two hours, and just search for something, then it's an investment of attention and from it comes something deeper. If I just hit record, something will come out, and it could be inspired or it could be crap. But when I sit and work on something, I raise the bar."

3 Go deep

"I always knew that one day I'd come up with a blues album; the emotions are about human experience, 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

"Modes are just colours. They're harmonic atmospheres. If you say the word 'Mixolydian' to me, it's not a scale any more, it's an atmosphere. Same with 'Super Locrian'. Whatever scale you say, sure, I can give you the academic breakdown of what it is, but it's really a colour and it creates its own moods. If I could only play in one mode? [laughs] Well, some people think I do only play in one mode. I'm very fond of the Lydian mode, and the Lydian #5."

5 Technique isn't just about speed

"When most people say 'technique', they're referring to fast playing. But technique goes much deeper than that. It's the control of all aspects. It's how you pick. It's where you pick. It's your tone. It's the way you bend notes. It's the way you vibrate them. It's your ability to be really dynamic: really soft then really loud. On my last record, *The Story Of Light*, there's a piece of music called *Creamsicle Sunset*. There's incredible technique on that – but no fast playing whatsoever. People say to me, 'I was waiting for you to break loose.' But they're completely missing the point. The technique is in the bends with the bar, in the chords, the vibrato – that's where I applied the intense technique. Technique is a big word that people have homogenised."



Technique isn't about speed... but Steve can certainly do that, too!

6 It's all in your mind

"A guitarist's tone is in their head. It's the product of the way that they hear themselves. For some people, that means it's in the equipment, because if it's in their head that their tone is in the equipment, that's where they're gonna be looking for their tone: in their equipment. But if it's in their head that their tone is in their fingers, then that's where they're gonna be looking for it: in their fingers. When I designed the JEM 30 years ago, it was out of my desire to do things that the other guitars that were available were limited at. It's definitely helped to create my idiosyncratic style."

7 Be unique

"I had such great musical role models when I was a kid during the 70s. I was a huge fan of Zeppelin, Queen, Hendrix, Deep Purple, Jethro Tull: very cool, progressive rock stuff. I tried to learn every Zeppelin song. I cut my teeth on chord playing through listening to that beautiful flourishing chord soloing that Hendrix did. But I always drew a line. I never felt

compelled to follow any one artist or style. First of all, I never thought I'd ever be good enough. Also, it was just a natural pull to be more interested in things I could play that were unique to me. So I'd play my Hendrix and my Page. I'd try to sound like Brian May, Carlos Santana, Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin, Joe Pass. But when I actually wrote my own music, I was only looking for things that were unique to me – which were obviously built upon all of those influences."

8 Lessons aren't for geeks

"That's an antiquated way of thinking. Everything you do is a f**king lesson. If you're gonna sit and learn a Led Zeppelin song, you're taking a lesson. And you know what? I see a lot of players that hit brick walls because they never had anybody to give them just a little guidance on technique, or in some simple music theory that'll really help you, like, knowing the names of the chords and the notes on the guitar. I took lessons from Joe Satriani, and whenever he put his fingers on the guitar, whether he was playing scales or showing

me an exercise or a Bad Company song – it was enchanting. I would look at his fingers, and they just looked so beautiful on the guitar. It was just a special touch. That had a big impact on me. Still does."

9 It takes two

"Collaborating is actually more intimate than most relationships. We all have relationships with our parents, children, friends, co-workers, siblings, lovers – but when you go into a relationship with another songwriter, it's different. When you collaborate to write music, the best thing you can do is to accept somebody for who they are and let them feel able to express themselves. And they will do the same thing for you. And that's how all the good s**t starts to happen. An illusion that people have about Frank Zappa is that he'd push you. Frank didn't push. Frank allowed you to give. He was like a magnet. He didn't push – he pulled. Frank allowed you to be the best you could be, at things you didn't even know you were good at. He recognised my ability to play complex guitar parts and transcribe complex music, and he said, 'Okay, here's a platform...'"

10 Ignore the critics

"There's times when I enjoy playing fast. I always loved the idea of having command of the instrument, so there's an effortless, flowing, virtuosic, ripping, elegant approach that's beautiful, baffling and fulfilling for the people watching. Why not? It's a beautiful thing to see, y'know, and people really enjoy that, and as long as my fingers are capable of doing it, and it works in a piece of music, I'm gonna do it. And there's nothing that can stop that, no matter what anybody says or thinks about it. That's a beautiful point that I hope gets across. Do what you want if it feels right, regardless of what anybody thinks. Now, when you're doing that, a lot of times, you might feel resistance or agitation. You'll be criticised no matter what. But the bottom line is, that will eventually fade away, as long as you just stick to what you really enjoy doing."

11 The guitar is infinite

"If you can even conceive of the idea that everything that can be played on the guitar has already happened, then you're really missing the point of what the creative process is. The process of creation in any field is infinite. Nothing is gonna run out. That's like telling the universe that it's not infinite. It's like saying, 'Okay, this is the end of time and space...'"

Stillness In Motion: Vai Live In LA is out now on CD and DVD, from Sony Music Entertainment and Legacy Recordings

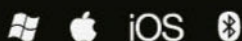
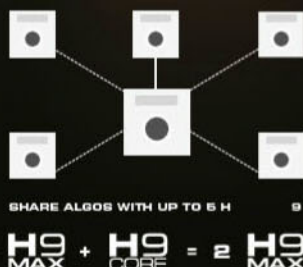
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Hidden Charms

Dr John's music teacher smashed up his first guitar and a stray bullet nearly ended his six-string career altogether. So why is the fretboard still his first love? We meet the king of voodoo blues to find out...

Words Matt Frost

Since he first burst into the public consciousness with his psychedelic voodoo-dripping debut solo album, *Gris-Gris*, in 1968, Malcolm John 'Mac'

Rebennack (aka Dr John The Nite Tripper) has carved out his own eccentric sub-chapter in the history of American music – and New Orleans-style music, in particular.

His inimitable skills as a piano player are just as recognisable as his gravel-rich voice and necromantic 70s stage garb, but the six-string guitar was Mac's initial career instrument of choice.

Before nearly losing a finger during an on-tour gunfight, the future Doctor had been a prevalent guitarist on the New Orleans session scene and the US's vibrant 1950s Chitlin' gig circuit. This accident ultimately forced Mac to concentrate more on his keys playing and he went on to become a significant member of LA's Wrecking Crew session scene during the 1960s, before his solo career kicked off in such exuberant style towards the end of that decade.

Earlier this year at Ronnie Scott's, we were lucky enough to witness Dr John's incredible axe skills in person as he strapped on a hired Tele to bang out a

suitably soulful string-bending version of Earl King's *Mama & Papa*. The big man's still got it, that's for sure. And that Dr John guitar album will hopefully just be round the corner...

You're most widely known for your skills on the piano and as a singer and songwriter, but you did a lot of session work as a guitarist back in late-1950s New Orleans. Did you start playing the piano or the guitar first?

"I played the guitar first before I played the piano. My sister played the piano and two of my aunts played the piano. One auntie played for the silent movies in New Orleans. I know my mother used to love to hear me play the piano, but I only knew this one [piano] song back in the game, *The Texas Boogie*, and that was something my Uncle Joe and my Aunt Audrey taught me, and that was a blessing... But I was the first one that played guitar in my family."

Did you have guitar lessons?

"Well, I remember I took lessons from Al Guma first and Walter 'Papoose' Nelson second and Roy Montrell third. They were all my guitar teachers. My father knew Al Guma and he recommended that I go learn

how to read music from somebody. Walter 'Papoose' Nelson was my second guitar teacher and he taught me how to play like T-Bone Walker and a lot of guys that were popular in that day, you know. Later, Roy Montrell took me to hear flamenco guitars and classical guitars – all kinds of different stuff that I would've never heard before. My father, back when he sold records, didn't sell records like that. This guy, Roy Montrell, brought me to hear a lot of great guitar players at the Loyola Field House back in the game. He knew most of the guys, you know, even if he couldn't speak the same language as them."

It sounds like you were absorbing a lot of different guitar stylings back then...

"Yeah, I learned a lot of jazz stuff and I learned a lot of different kinds of music from this guy, Roy Montrell, because he not only had played on a lot of jazz records, he had also played on a lot of other things. He played on some really great records. I remember he taught me how to play *Rhapsody In Blue* and that's a very difficult song to play on a guitar. Wow, that took me a lot of years to learn, but he used it to con me into taking some more lessons because that was his hustle. My friend was taking



Dr John wrangles notes from a Tele at Ronnie Scott's in March

lessons from him, too, and he said to me, 'This guy's ahead of you and he's playing better than you.' He used all of that to get my head screwed on straight and that was a good thing."

Who were your favourite guitarists when you were growing up?

"There was a guy that Brigitte Bardot discovered but I don't even remember his name now [Dr John is most likely talking about famed French Gypsy flamenco player, Manitas de Plata, a close friend of Bardot's]. Roy Montrell took me to his concert and sort of told me, 'This guy is gonna make some mistakes but he's got the fire!' and I knew what he meant immediately – that guy was the fire! He played some of the hippest things that I ever heard on a guitar ever. I just thought, 'Wow, this guy's slammin'!' I couldn't think enough about the guy. I just never heard a guitar player play that way.

"I love to hear guys that are really unique, that speak out. I also loved Snooks Eaglin... and there were certain other guys that always stuck out like Johnny Smith, the guy who made *Moonlight In Vermont* a very popular song. He was special, you know."

When did you start going on the road with your guitar?

"I had learned enough to win a high school talent show, but they kicked me out of the

school because I won the show. I played [The Kinks'] *Hide And Seek* and they thought it wasn't cool. I'd got kicked out of three schools and my pa said, 'Kid, you should take that gig on the road with the Chitlin' circuit with them old men' – and that's what I did. I never met more guys named Slim than when I was on that tour. I met Guitar Slim, Memphis Slim, Polka Dot Slim, Sunnyland Slim, on and on. I met so many guys named Slim on that tour, I never thought I would stop meeting them. Then all of a sudden, I realised, 'Wow, Slim's an unusual name!'"

How much did you learn from the other players on that circuit?

"Oh, I learned a lot! Elmore James and a lot of great guitar players were on that circuit, and even T-Bone Walker was on that circuit. That was special to me. I would try to listen to everybody that I admired and see the way they played. 'Papoose' had taught me to play like T-Bone so I kind of knew his stuff, but I could learn better about his playing from seeing him."

You released a killer rock 'n' roll guitar instrumental, *Storm Warning*, on Rex Records in 1959 under your own name, Mac Rebennack. What do you remember about that recording?

"Even though it was kind of a weird thing to do... I remember we actually were doing a

session at Cosimo [Matassa]'s [J&M] recording studio in New Orleans, and there was a hurricane that went outside of it and we were actually cutting that song. It was weird... but Allen Toussaint was playing the piano on it and a lot of great musicians were playing on it. 'Red' Tyler was playing the bari sax and Lee Allen was playing the tenor sax."

In the early 60s, you were involved in a tragic incident in Jacksonville, Florida where you got shot in the finger. What actually happened, and how far did that affect guitar being your main instrument?

"Well, this guy was pistol-whipping the singer of my band and his mother had told me, 'If you let anything happen to my son while he's on the road with you – because he was very underage – I'm gonna cut your cojones off!' And his mother left a picture in my head of her doing that!

"I was trying to get the gun out of his hand and I had my hand over the barrel, not over the handle, and it went off and I saw my finger just hanging by a string. I got put in jail because we was in Florida and this guy was a bookie guy... and that was how life went back in them days.

"It shortened my days down as a guitarist, but I still got some work. Gretsch gave me a guitar and I started endorsing Fender guitars, but I couldn't really play it good, so I concentrated more on piano."

Smash And Tab

Dr John remembers how his first six-string was unceremoniously trashed by his guitar tutor...

"The very first thing Roy [Montrell] did as a guitar teacher was broke my guitar up! I had a Harmony guitar and he said, 'You can't use that instrument! You have to play something better than that! I'm not gonna teach you on this instrument.'

"I hadn't even paid my pa back the money I owed him for the guitar and I just thought, 'Oh my God, this is gonna be a nightmare!' But my pa understood why he did that.

"When he talked to my pa, he said, 'Mr Rebennack, this kid needs a better guitar and I broke the guitar up to help him!' He told my pa just what he did and he threw it in the yard next to his. The next guitar I got was a Gibson Byrdland, and actually, Bobby Hebb sold me that guitar. I was working some sessions with Bobby before he wrote *Sunny*. It was the first guitar I owned that Roy would teach me on, and that was

"I was trying to get the gun out of this guy's hand, and it went off and I saw my finger just hanging by a string"

After moving to LA, you became part of the famous Wrecking Crew. Were you solely contributing piano to recordings, or were you still also playing some guitar?

"When I was in California, I had no idea the band was called The Wrecking Crew. I was really trying to be the best kind of versatile musician I could be in them days. You know, when you're working sessions with Barney Kessel and Howard Roberts and Don Peake, you've got to be taking care of business. There were so many guitar players I played sessions with. At the time, I was playing piano, I was playing a guitar and a bass... and three guitar players were playing the same instruments. That was how we got a lot of sessions, you know."

How much guitar did you play on the first two Dr John albums, *Gris-Gris* (1968) and *Babylon* (1969)?

"I remember I got a great guitar player that also played mandolin on the sessions,

and I had another guitar player just playing some rhythm stuff, but I was playing another guitar. I probably played [guitar] on most of the tracks on *Gris-Gris* and *Babylon*. Then 'Didymus' Washington was the congo player with the band back then. Him and John Boudreaux played phenomenally hip drums and percussion on those records. That was a long time ago, but they're still my favourite drummer and percussionist."

The Meters backed you on two albums, 1973's *In The Right Place* and 1974's *Desitively Bonnaroo*. What made you approach them, and what do you think of Leo Nocentelli as a guitarist?

"Well, they were like the hippest band in New Orleans. I loved those guys and I used to go and see them on the gigs when I was in town, you know. They were special... and oh man, I think [Leo] was badass! There was nobody like him in the history of guitar that could have played like he did. He always

had a volume manoeuvre, and that was something else with him."

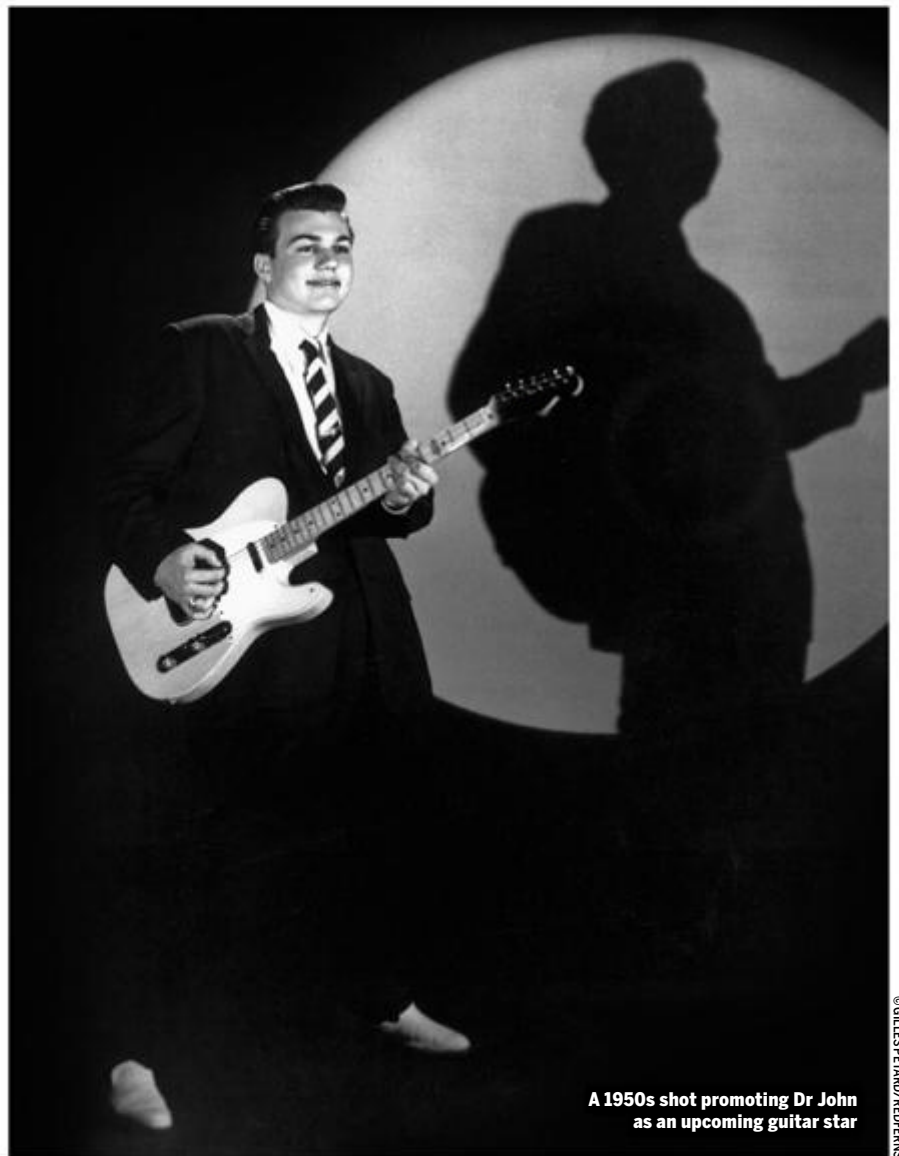
Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys produced and played guitar on your 2012 long player, *Locked Down*. What was it like playing and working with him?

"Oh, he's cool. I like that album and I think the world of him as a guitarist. I just did some sessions with him recently. But, right now, I don't have a clue in the world what's gonna happen with them [sessions]. Whatever it's gonna be, it's gonna be."

Lastly, is there any guitar advice you'd like to give to the readers of the magazine?

"Hey, listen... you know what? If you're gonna play the guitar, play your ass off! And if you're gonna jive around with the guitar, it ain't the thing to do!" 🎸

Visit www.nitetripper.com for more information on Dr John.



A 1950s shot promoting Dr John as an upcoming guitar star

© GILLES PETARD/REDFERNS



THE THRILL HAS GONE

We say goodbye to the greatest bluesman of them all, Riley B King,
whose music turned hard times into joy, solace and inspiration

Words Jamie Dickson **Portrait** Jim McCrary/Getty

Just a handful of notes. That's all that BB King needed to share the contents of his heart. It was all he needed to connect deeply with strangers, to make them feel as if they'd shared his troubles too. Such was the magical gift that this greatest of all bluesmen possessed and such is the loss to music, as we absorb the sad news of his passing.

Riley B King passed away on 14 May 2015, after a period of declining health, at the age of 89. He came from poor roots in America's Deep South, where he was born on 16 September 1925 among the cotton plantations of Mississippi during the benighted era of racial segregation. His mother died when he was barely out of childhood and he worked to support himself picking over 400 pounds of cotton a day when he was in his teens.

And yet somehow the emotional power he commanded when he picked up a guitar took him places, carried by a river of music – a strong current that bore him away from the muddy banks of the Mississippi and into the great concert halls of the world. He rarely stood still, because he played more than 300 shows a year for most of his life. Yet he took up residence in the hearts of millions of fans and could always be found at home there, at least.

Among those fans were guitarists such as Eric Clapton and Peter Green. During the 1960s, through

the music of these British blues lovers, the spirit of BB's playing and those of his contemporaries, such as Albert King, took fresh root in a land thousands of miles away from the birthplace of the genre. Across the Atlantic, guitarists who were inspired by BB King, such as Mike Bloomfield, also helped re-awaken America to its own musical heritage and turned on a generation of guitarists to the power of blues.

And so what began as the music of cotton fields and rural hamlets became the spiritual wellspring of rock music, music that soon crowded the airwaves of the world with a sweet, soul-nourishing sound. With characteristic generosity, BB embraced those who drew inspiration from his style, perhaps because he was so grateful to the players who had inspired him in turn, such as T-Bone Walker.

"We all have idols," he once remarked. "Play like anyone you care about, but try to be yourself while you're doing so," he added.

It's an extraordinary story, and its hero was a humble yet remarkable man. In the following pages, we celebrate BB King's life: the glowing ebullience and generosity of spirit that he possessed to the end. He once released a fine song called *To Know You Is To Love You* and, as we learned of his death, millions of us could say we knew BB King through his music. Rest in peace, Riley.



FROM RILEY TO BB

The story of Riley B King's early life is every bit as uplifting as it is heartbreaking. From farm to stage, here's how it happened...

Words Neville Marten **Portrait** Michael Ochs Archives/Getty

When *Guitarist* last sat down with BB King, backstage the Royal Albert Hall in 2011, the impression was of a man with incredible warmth and compassion. He seemed truly thankful for all he was been able to see, achieve and enjoy in his career, and you couldn't detect so much as an ounce of cynicism or negativity in his outlook or demeanour. Perhaps it's the preserve of an octogenarian to be worldly and wise; perhaps the passing of time grants a person an increasingly sagacious perspective. As the man himself admitted, however, what was on the outside is only part of the story. Riley B King's childhood, upbringing and teenage years brought him more than their fair share of tragedy and uncertainty that, while not twisting him into adulthood bitterness, nevertheless had a profound effect on his life that followed. There are differing accounts of dates and the exact chronology of events, but the story remains.

❖ BENA BORN

Riley B King took his first breath on 16 September 1925 near the village of Itta Bena, around 20 miles from Indianola, born to Nora Ella and Albert Lee King (not to be confused with famous bluesman Albert King). His parents separated when he was around four or five years old, so Nora Ella headed back some 50 miles east to the Kilmichael hills to her family with Riley B, taking up work on a hill farm owned by one Flake Cartledge.

While black families were subjected to what would be considered extreme racism today, Cartledge was a fair man by all accounts, including King's; a world away from the slavery endured by the boy's great grandparents. As a child of six and seven years old, Riley worked the corn and cotton fields,

and also milked cows in between the long walks to his school, opposite the Elkhorn Baptist Church.

It was through the church and preaching that he had his first up-close encounter with the instrument that would come to define his life. His uncle William's wife had a brother named Archie Fair; Reverend Fair in fact, who played the guitar. Nearly 80 years later, King remembered the days where Fair and his wife would visit. "Before they would go into the kitchen to eat," he recalled, "he'd lay his guitar upon the bed." Unable to resist a small boy's temptations with this fascinating new object, the young Riley would gingerly touch the guitar, just to see how it felt.

Noticed by the Reverend, Fair didn't scold or beat the boy as he might have expected, instead encouraging him to pick it up – he even helped him through his first few chords. Riley's mind was made up: he'd be a singing preacher, just like the Reverend. You could say he eventually achieved his dream, albeit as a slightly different kind of preacher.

Aside from the blues singing he'd heard coming from the fields as a child (King later opined that they were often songs of specific communication and warning between workers), his other early musical influence was from Aunt Mima's wind-up gramophone player. It was here he heard the sounds of Blind Lemon Jefferson and Lonnie Johnson; one the booming blues belter, the other altogether more refined. It's no small coincidence that BB King's own later style would sit squarely between the two, perhaps less in direct sound and technique, more in note choice, song structure and variety. The third piece of that early musical jigsaw was Booker T White – Bukka White – a cousin of his mother's, who greatly impressed Riley with his sharp dress sense and mesmerising slide guitar.







❖ ALONE IN THE WOODS

Riley soon found himself seeking solace in music for intensely personal reasons. Two tragedies struck within relatively short succession and, while the exact dates aren't certain, it seems he had lost his mother, and then his grandmother, before he'd reached his 10th birthday (some historians say his grandmother died later). Nevertheless, he was basically alone. Riley had experienced death close in the family once already – his younger brother had died aged around two, reportedly by eating glass.

Moving to Aunt Mima's was an option, but in an age long before social services (black families barely had access to basic medical care at this point) this boy instead took himself off and essentially self-subsisted in a cabin in the woods, working and paying his way. Exactly how long he was living like this is not known, but in that cabin Riley was able to draw back from the world, put his head down and work through his grief. He was not a natural communicator, often stuttering his words and feeling uncomfortable. This suited him, and he even went so far as to say that he preferred the company of animals to humans at that point, referring to them as his friends to whom he'd talk and confide in.

Mercifully, Cartledge had agreed to advance him some money, deducted from his wages on the farm, so he could buy his first guitar, a red Stella acoustic. BB later recalled being around 12 years old or thereabouts when he got it, and was overjoyed. But just when he really didn't need another heartbreak, it was stolen from the cabin the following year.

Meanwhile, in Lexington, around 50 miles away, Albert Lee King had heard that his son was for all intents and purposes living alone. He drove to the farm and brought Riley 'home' to live with his new family. BB King always spoke respectfully of his father – a hard-working man of very few words – but he was nevertheless unhappy in that environment. So, remarkably, one day he simply got on his bicycle and rode back to what he regarded as his true home: firstly Cartledge's farm, then sometime later he moved on back to the Delta. There he settled with an aunt and uncle, and worked picking cotton, baling hay and ploughing fields with a mule.

When he first moved back to the Delta, there was a guitar in his heart, but not in his hands. But the regular farm work enabled Riley to save for another six-string, which he put to use in a group he had joined, The Famous St John Gospel

Singers. It's worth noting that, depending on who you talk to, there was considered to be a strict line between gospel and blues music; the former was God's music, reverent and good, something sung in polite company. The latter, however, was the devil's music, sung in the fields, away from wives and grandmothers. BB King's later memories don't make the distinction so heavily – to him it was all music, and it was all good.

❖ RUNNING THE TRACTOR

What came next was another big move. Riley had copped a break as a tractor driver working on the farm, which brought him in a much better pay packet. By day he'd work the farm and at the weekends travel to Indianola to see and hear the fabulous music that was being played there. He also did what any aspirant musician would do, and went busking, singing gospel and blues songs and getting a pocket full of change for his trouble.

It's a stark juxtaposition to think that World War II was raging in Europe at this point, and as the USA waded in, Riley B enlisted for service as soon as he was eligible in 1943. He went through the basic training but, though he was ready to serve, key agricultural workers were ordered to stay at home and produce food. By the end of the war in 1945, he'd been married for a couple of years and was feeling the pressures of that, alongside a welling dissatisfaction with his life as a sharecropper and tractor driver. That tractor, however, would prove to be more significant than he ever thought.

Returning from the field one day, he pulled the tractor up as he'd done countless times before. Switching off the engine, he jumped off and to his horror the tractor leapt backwards as the engine clunked to a stop. The exhaust struck the top of the barn door opening and broke. Fearing what would happen next – panicking – Riley B gathered up what he had and ran.

He ran to Memphis, a city he'd dreamt about, complete with its famous Beale Street. Hooking up with his cousin Bukka White, Riley was able to find work by day and continue his music into the evenings and weekends. It was an eye-opener for sure, but wracked with guilt at his leaving, he soon returned to the farm, approached the owner, Johnson Barrett, apologised for his actions and started work again.

Having already been mesmerised by the electric guitar sound of Charlie Christian, it was about this



“

By day he'd work the farm and at the weekends travel to Indianola to see and hear the fabulous music that was being played there

”

As a DJ, Riley's first nickname was Beale St Blues Boy. It ended up being shortened to Blues Boy, then Bee Bee, and finally BB

time that he picked up on Django Reinhardt and T-Bone Walker: together these three are giants of guitar who would shape so much music that was to follow. The burning for six strings simply wouldn't abate, so weighing up his options – and this time with nothing to run away from – Riley said goodbye to Mr Johnson and headed back towards Memphis. There, he would seek out one Sonny Boy Williamson who, as the now 23-year-old King knew only too well, had a spot on the radio.

Riley managed to get in front of Sonny Boy and play for him. He was suitably impressed enough to give him a slot, and also recommend him for a regular gig at the 16th Street Grill in West Memphis. The only conditions from the owner were that Riley himself needed to get some radio exposure and mention the Grill when he did. The challenge was big, but the reward bigger – he'd earn \$72 per week with one night off, which was a significant step up from the \$22.50 he pocketed as a tractor driver. So, how to get on the radio?

❖ RADIO BEE BEE

WDIA radio started broadcasting in 1947 from Memphis, owned by John Pepper and Dick Ferguson. In 1948 the station broke new ground in airing the first program targeted at black people, called Tan Town Jubilee. In the world of 1940s America, the inherent racism in the name was the norm, yet there was perhaps some progress in that blacks and whites at least worked together. In any case, the uptake was significant to the point where WDIA eventually became an all-black station in terms of programming, elevating it to the biggest station in Memphis. 'Bee Bee King', as the name on his amplifier proudly stated, was part of that success.

Following his meeting at the 16th Street Grill, Riley made his way over to WDIA to meet whoever was in charge. As things turned out, he ended up with a 15-minute spot every day including a commercial jingle for Pepticon, a health tonic – so healthy it contained a goodly slug of booze! Still, tonic or not, things were looking up, even if Riley still had to pick cotton in the mornings to supplement his income.

It was at this point that Riley B King started to become BB. Each of the radio DJs had nicknames for

themselves, and the first of Riley's was Beale St Blues Boy. It ended up being shortened to Blues Boy, then Bee Bee, and finally BB. Promoted to full time DJ it was finally time to say goodbye to the farm work on a regular basis. Now surrounded by music, and fast developing as a guitarist and singer, he was out playing regularly. Then, in 1949, he called a guitar Lucille for the first time – a Gibson L-30 archtop by all accounts. As BB recalled to us in 2011: "The first one that was named Lucille was because of a fight in a little nightclub in a place called Twist, Arkansas. And in that little nightclub, it got pretty cold in winter, and it used to have something like a big garbage can, and they would half fill it with kerosene, light that fuel and that's what we had for heat.

"But this particular night two guys started to fight and one knocked the other one on that container. And when they did, it fell over and spilled on the floor. And everybody in the little club who was dancing started to run outside – including me. When I got outside, I found out that these two guys was fighting about a lady that worked in the nightclub. I learned that her name was Lucille and they was fighting over her because one of them had said something...

"But then I realised that I'd left my guitar inside. So I went back in for it – a lot of people tell me that I was fighting because of a lady... I was not [laughs]. I didn't even know who the lady was! But then after that I found out her name was Lucille, so I named my guitar Lucille to remind me not to do a thing like that again. And I haven't!"

❖ ABOUT TIME TOO – THREE O'CLOCK

Through his contacts at WDIA, BB King began his recording career in 1950, managing to cut a few sides at the studio. Nothing was particularly successful – a less than auspicious start, you might say – but it was just the beginning and now at least he was fully immersed in music. Sun Studios was in the offing – BB would meet and work with the legendary Sam Phillips, a meeting made possible by perhaps the most influential person in King's career: Jules Bihari of Modern Records in LA, and Meteor in Memphis. That friendship gave BB King his first recording success, his seventh release. Among a number of cuts was *Three O'Clock Blues*, a song made popular by Lowell Fulson four years previously. Joe Bihari (Jules' brother) later explained they recorded the song at the Black YMCA in Memphis in 1951, using some portable recording equipment, with blankets at the windows to deaden the noise of the traffic. Something was in the water that day, however.

The track scored the 26-year-old his first number one hit on the Billboard Rhythm & Blues chart in February 1952. With that kind of success, he was now in a position to book bigger venues and was soon on the road. In a few short years, a handful of dollars as a sharecropper had turned in to thousands as a performing and recording blues artist. 10 more singles hit the Top 20 of the R&B charts by 1955: now he was motoring, quite literally in a big red bus, all over the country...



THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

By the mid-1950s, BB King's career was in full swing in terms of workload, if not so much in terms of income. We pick up the story...

Words Mick Taylor Portrait Michael Ochs Archives/Getty

BB's 1952 hit, *Three O'Clock Blues*, was a massive stepping stone. Hitting number one on the Billboard R&B chart, it afforded him the profile to move up the ladder of his career and the music business in general. While America was still largely divided along race lines when it came to music – King was playing to black audiences only at this point – his shows now took in the East Coast cities to which he'd never been before.

The first big step was signing to a booking agent in New York, Universal Attractions, via his new manager, Robert Henry. BB had his own small band by this point, but due to UA's existing roster of musicians they wanted BB alone, and that's what they got. What followed was a demanding schedule, compounded by the pressure of playing with musicians he didn't know, night after night. There were other musicians, however, all carving out their own careers too: he'd rub shoulders with trumpet-legend-to-be Dizzy Gillespie, and sax virtuoso Charlie Parker, not mention Nat King Cole and Sarah Vaughan with whom he was performing for various shows. Musicians today might be used to playing a few nights on the hoof, others sporadic dates in the month, but these travelling shows were over two months or more back to back; play, travel, play, travel, repeat ad nauseam. Not only that, but you'd often be looking at multiple shows in a single day.

Eventually, however, the gigs became less frequent, and the money was scaling back, so the following year BB headed back to Memphis to reconsider his plans.

❖ BETTER BAND

One of Memphis's most influential musicians was Bill Harvey. The saxophonist and band leader had a strong reputation in the city, respected for his music as much as his connections. He helped BB hook up with new management and a booking agent in Texas, while Harvey himself supplied the new band, who would travel and play all over. Again, the culture of the day is barely believable today. Steps forward with race issues were significant in the late 1940s, albeit far from ubiquitous. Segregation in the US Army ended in 1948, for example, yet by the following year less than half of the US States had dispensed with segregation in public accommodations.

What this meant for BB King on the road, was that neither he nor his band could stay in motels. King said they instead stayed with friends, or in their cars – by this time, BB had his first Cadillac at least. But even basic, everyday tasks such as getting food could be a problem if you were black. As a child, finding something to eat wasn't always easy for King. Now they could find all the food they wanted, but they often weren't allowed to buy it.

That was one factor of many that made the road hard for BB and his band. The money that was coming in was coming from shows, not from hit records, and it wasn't enough. So he decided to point his Cadillac back to Memphis once again, followed by the two other cars that carried the band. BB wanted his own band for real – not Harvey's – and to take this thing on again to the next level.







❖ ONE YEAR, 342 NIGHTS

After a deal with the Texas booking agent, Evelyn Johnson, to continue getting the shows, BB had also put the funding together to buy his first bus in 1955. Right from his early yearnings to drive the tractor on the farm, it was as much about status as it was a practical solution for being on the road. It's impossible to imagine fully just how BB must have felt, having come from literally nothing to owning his very own bus with his name down the side. New band assembled – many of whom remained lifelong friends and colleagues – that bus carried the show coast to coast and up and down the country once more. The staggering figure comes from 1956 with BB working the network of black clubs and venues known as the chitlin' circuit: 342 'one-night stands' as they were referred to, in one single year. That number is impressive enough, but then consider that he then went on to average well over 300 dates a year for the next four decades. There must have been some pretty serious calluses on BB's fingertips.

Back in 1956, however, and despite the efforts of his management and booking team to get his music heard in the areas he was playing – by paying DJs to play his records – big success on the road was hard to come by. It was even alleged by Evelyn Johnson, BB's booking agent (in *The BB King: Treasures* by BB King with Dick Waterman) that rival record companies

were paying DJs to not play the records to protect their own artists. Popular music and culture were changing fast in the US as well. The arrival of rock 'n' roll doubtless made rhythm and blues seem like yesterday's news in certain situations. Elvis had released *That's All Right Mama* in 1954, the same year eager ears first heard Bill Haley's *Rock Around The Clock*. By the time 1956 rolled around – bringing Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins to prominence – popular white music had changed radically. The following year Buddy Holly also shot to stardom. Black music was changing too; venues and scenes were still largely divided along race lines, although Ray Charles, Bo Diddley, Little Richard and Chuck Berry started to attract the attention of white teenagers. They were taking rhythm and blues in a distinctly rock 'n' roll direction, and creating a popular musical revolution in the process. The physical barriers remained, but nobody could stop anyone listening to whatever they wanted on the radio – if you were young, chances are you were more excited by this new music than the rhythm and blues of the early 50s.

As it turned out, by one Saturday in 1958 a changing music scene was the least of King's worries. On a road near Dallas, Big Red – the bus of which he'd been so proud – was involved in an accident with a butane truck, leading to a huge fiery wreck. Two people in the truck were killed, and while

all of BB's band survived (BB wasn't on the bus), it transpired that the insurance was invalid because the company that had provided it was stopped from trading by the government only the day before. King had been informed, but had not yet bought new insurance, assuming he'd wait until Monday. The subsequent lawsuit was a huge sum for which King was personally liable. According to King's account in his autobiography, it left him in debt for years after. He also needed a new bus, using up all of the money he'd had earmarked for taxes. Now, not only were the lawyers after him, but so was the IRS (America's tax collection department). Agents would show up at gigs and demand money – BB said he was down to paying himself just \$75 a week for the best part of a year.

❖ REGAL FOR REAL

As the 1960s got under way, BB King was – and always would be – working relentlessly on the road. His ambitions were growing and his business relationship with the Bihari brothers came to an end, switching instead to ABC Records in 1962. Bigger, more successful and with greater influence, he hoped they would be able to take him to the next stage. The black blues audiences were tailing off, however, as rock 'n' roll's net was cast wider than white-only audiences. Folk music was also in a period of revival and, while blues was arguably at the heart of it all, blues music itself wasn't winning young audiences.

There was nothing wrong with the audience on the afternoon of 21 November 1964 at the Regal Theater in Chicago. King remembers it as much the same as any other show, and later commented that there was nothing particularly special about the performance. What was special was that it was being recorded for a live release – his first – that would sound and feel very different from King's studio recordings to date. The 1965 release, *Live At The Regal*, won wide critical acclaim and is considered among the best live albums of all time. Pervis Spann, a veteran of black radio and friend of BB's, introduced him that day. Before the band kicks into BB's *Every Day I Have The Blues*, Spann says, "How about a nice warm round of applause to welcome the world's greatest blues singer, the king of the blues, BB King!" It was a term Spann had recently started using, even going as far as to officially crown King at his nightclub in the city. The term stuck; and he would be the king of the blues for the rest of his days.

Live At The Regal remains a landmark recording with its star in commanding vocal and guitar form and the band as tight as you'd expect given how long

they'd been on the road. Put it on, play it loud and soak in the sheer energy of the performance.

More significant for BB personally, however, was the 1967 show at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco. King had played the Regal in Chicago countless times before the live album recording – it was a familiar venue for him and one for which he had great affection. He'd also played the Fillmore on plenty of occasions too, but in February of 1967, it was promoted by rock music legend Bill Graham, and the audience profile on the night was very different to that BB had experienced to date: they were white. A standing ovation before he'd even played had King in tears – white hippie kids appreciating the rhythm and blues of a black man was entirely new territory.

King's exposure to this new audience received a helping hand via a new generation of electric blues guitarists. Eric Clapton had re-energised the blues with his own interpretation in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, likewise Michael Bloomfield in the USA with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. Both hip young players – and quite a few others to boot – were giving lots of credit to this man called BB King who had influenced them both so much. It did no harm for BB's profile in a whole new audience group. Coupled with a new manager in Sid Seidenberg – "the smartest career move I ever made," according to King – the endless hard work and financial hardship of the late 1950s and 1960s showed signs of turning around.

❖ WHAT A THRILL!

The pay-off came in 1970. The touring continued as usual, but in mid-1969, King had gone into the studio with producer Bill Szymczyk to record his album *Completely Well*, released that year. One of the tracks was a song written all the way back in 1951 by Rick Darnell and Roy Hawkins, *The Thrill Is Gone*. A blues song at heart, it was nevertheless a long way from the I-IV-V chord structures of many R&B standards. Szymczyk was also keen to add strings to the arrangement, which was a significant departure in King's sound and gave it true mainstream appeal. The result was his highest ever position in the Billboard pop charts, giving King true crossover appeal. He also received a Grammy for the song in 1970: Best Male R&B Vocal Performance. 20 years into his career, BB King had finally reached the top, and things would never be the same again.

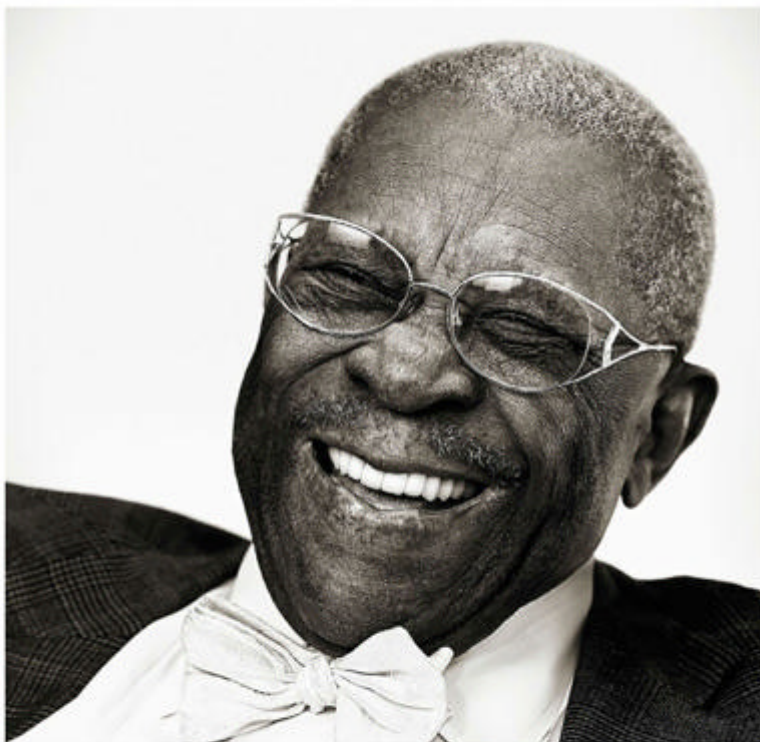
Much of the factual information in this feature was cross-referenced with BB's autobiography, *Blues All Around Me*. A must-read for any fan of the King.



“

'Live At The Regal' remains a landmark recording, with its star in commanding form. Put it on, play it loud and soak in the energy

”



HIS FINAL BOW

Words Jamie Dickson Portrait Kevin Nixon

As I write, I'm watching the moving tribute to BB King that Eric Clapton posted on social media. The words used to describe the loss of his friend are simple, but powerful. And I'm given pause by Clapton's assertion that beyond his personal thankfulness for BB's encouragement and friendship there was "not a lot left to say, because this music is almost a thing of the past now and there are not many left that play it in the pure way that BB did".

In other words, with BB King's death, one more piece of blues heritage passes from living, breathing experience and into the pages of history. That sense of his contribution to music gaining historic status began in the later phase of BB's career, when he began to gather the accolades he richly deserved. In 1987 he was awarded a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and was also inducted to the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Further stardom arrived a year later with *When Love Comes To Town*, a duet sung by BB King and U2 on the band's album *Rattle And Hum*. He later toured the world with the Irish megastars and played to a colossal audience.

This success was nothing less than his due, but it marked the beginning of a process that all too often sees a great artist enshrouded in myth, until, after death, they are wrapped in it like a mummy. All the immediacy and joy in music that they embodied is then in danger of becoming a museum exhibit, sealed behind the glass of posterity. So perhaps the most fitting tribute any guitarist can make to BB King is

to emulate the musical values he embodied in life whenever they play guitar. It's often said that BB King could say more with one note than others could with 1,000. One of the contributors to this magazine commented that while the sentiment behind those words is understandable, 'less' is only better in the right hands. Simply put, BB King had something to say because he opened his heart when he played. His playing wasn't for posturing or showing off, it was simply a freely flowing expression of his character and the wellspring of melody within him.

"I've never been a real hot player – and a lot of kids I hear are hot players," he told me when I had the privilege of interviewing him in 2012. "And I've never been like that: I'm slow because I walk slow, talk slow, sing slow – the whole works. It isn't because I feel that way – that's just the way I am."

"I don't think that I ever sounded exactly like I wanted to," he added. "But I think sometimes the sound that I hear has never been the sound I wanna hear, if that makes any sense to you. I haven't done that yet."

In other words, after 70 and more years of playing, BB was still striving to bring that perfect music of the soul out into the world: the notes we all hear in our head but struggle to convey with as much beauty and clarity as we hear them in dreams. It was that generosity of spirit that people loved in his music. If the universe granted encores he'd surely be listening to cheering from the auditorium now. 



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Tales Of The Unexpected

In a career of curveballs, Steven Wilson has never created a more fearless release than his immersive concept album *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* which was inspired by the true story of a woman whose death went unnoticed for two years. *Guitarist* meets the ultimate nonconformist rock star...

Words Henry Yates **Photography** Will Ireland

It is a story nightmares are made of. On 25 January 2006, officers from the Metropolitan Housing Trust bang at the door of a North London bedsit. They've been called to investigate the rent arrears of the flat's tenant: a troubled young woman named Joyce Vincent. Drilling through the double-locked front door, they step over piles of unopened post. Entering the living room, they find Vincent's decomposed corpse, surrounded by the Christmas presents she was wrapping when she died, lit by the flicker of the still-operational TV. The pathologist's report concludes that Vincent's body has lain undiscovered for over two years.

It's not an obvious jump-off for a rock album. But then Steven Wilson has never dealt in the obvious. Since appearing on the radar in the 90s as leader of "conceptual rock band" Porcupine Tree, the 47-year-old has stood apart from his peers: a producer and multi-instrumentalist who tears up the tech rulebook and demands you listen to his concept albums sequentially, in the age of

the shuffled playlist. Wilson's latest is *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* – an engaging fourth solo album that takes in hushed piano, aching acoustic, screaming electric work and spoken-word narrative inspired by Vincent's tragic tale.

The album's backstory is upsetting...

"Yeah, it is. Unfortunately, it was upsetting in a way that made some sense to me. It tells you a lot about living in the 21st century. Here is a woman who died in her apartment, in the heart of a metropolis, and it was two years before she was discovered. What was more bizarre is that she wasn't some little lonely old lady. Quite the contrary: she was a young, attractive woman. But it wasn't completely illogical to me. I lived in London for years myself, and I never knew the name of my next-door neighbours. That says a lot about living in the city in the age of the internet and social networking. All these things that supposedly bring us closer together... they almost disconnect us."

How did the concept grow from there?

"I had this idea to tell the story of this girl's life, to the point where she disappears at the end. We kinda followed her life, from being born, growing up, adolescence, until the point she moves to the city and effectively begins this process of erasing herself. For me, that became a vehicle to explore a lot of different things. The way that we use the internet and social networking. Loneliness, nostalgia for childhood, anger, isolation, alienation. Which ultimately are all things that I'm personally interested in or concerned about."

How do you juggle the roles of producer and guitarist?

"It really all comes from the idea of me being a producer, rather than a player. I think there's a very strong distinction. There are a lot of guitar players who produce themselves, and producers who play guitar. The distinction, for me, is that the producer is ultimately interested in the overall sound world, and doesn't necessarily





think like a guitar player. For me, the sound is paramount. What you play is actually a consequence of that. A particular sound will encourage you to play a certain way."

Of course, you've had Guthrie Govan in your solo band for the last two albums...

"Working with Guthrie has enabled me to think in different ways about the guitar. So now, I don't think of myself as the 'guitar player', in that sense. I tend to do all the acoustic stuff and a lot of rhythm parts. Guthrie is almost like the icing on the top, although that trivialises what he does. But you see what I mean: he comes along and does all the dazzling solo parts. Then Dave Gregory did some fantastic old-school 60s Rickenbacker stuff. So, I'll make the demo, which usually has some lame version of what I'm looking for. But Guthrie never plays the same solo twice, so every time he steps up, it's improvised from scratch. So it's really a question of giving him an indication of the vibe and the approach."

Is it hard to relinquish control?

"The challenge of working with guys that are capable of extraordinary technical things is reining them in and doing what's right for the music. Which is something

"For me, the sound is paramount. What you play is actually a consequence of that. A particular sound will encourage you to play a certain way"

I never had to worry about before, because I was the writer and the guitar player. Sometimes, their natural inclination is what you might term 'shred'. Now, I'm not a fan of shredding. So I have these little moments with musicians."

Did you have any creative disputes?

"Guthrie is an extraordinarily gifted and diverse player. But even with all that range, there were a couple of moments when I was saying things like, 'Can you do it more like on the demo?' At which point, he quite rightly said, 'Why don't you just do it yourself then?' I actually ended up doing one of the solos myself – on *Happy Returns* – just because what I was basically saying was, 'Can you stop playing like you and play like me?' Guthrie rightly got the hump because of that. But 90 per cent of the time, I was pleasantly surprised by what the players brought to the table. It's just that rare occasion when you know exactly what you want. But they were the exceptions."

What was the core hardware?

"We were switching guitars, amps and pedals... we had Guthrie's old 335, which he doesn't take out on the road because it's too precious. I tend to use a PRS Custom 22. We had a 1986 Marshall 50-watt standard lead head, modified by Dave Friedman to be two channels of master volume – clean and gain channels – plus his Fat Brown Eye mod and effects loop. We borrowed a Leslie cabinet and put Guthrie's guitars through that, because he usually plays with a very clean tone, and one way to get him out of his comfort zone – in a good way – is to give him sounds that are not so familiar. There was a Diamond Vibrato pedal to give my guitar parts more colour. The Micro POG. The Strymon TimeLine and BigSky..."

The acoustics sound really dynamic. Do you have a method for recording them?

"Yeah, I record all the acoustics using a clone of the Neumann U47, and I always record the picked parts by double-tracking,



Wilson's studio is a treasure trove of analogue and digital recording gear

an Ovation in Nashville tuning, and my PRS acoustic. I used that on *The Raven [That Refused To Sing (And Other Stories)]*, 2013], too. I absolutely love that sound."

You've always been a fan of plug-ins...

"I'm not a purist. There's nothing like a guitar going through an amp, if that's the sound you want. But sometimes you want to be more impressionistic with guitar, and that's when plug-ins come into their own. My studio these days is pretty much a computer. I'm a big fan of the analogue simulations from Universal Audio, and Logic Audio has some fantastic plug-ins. Pretty much everything on the record will be one of those. Logic has some great virtual instruments, and I love the old spring reverb simulator on Amp Farm. You know how sometimes plug-ins give you so many options, and it's great, but when you're actually working, it slows you down? On that, there are only three reverb settings, so it's very intuitive and I just dial it up. So I use that, and Universal Audio's EMT 140 plate reverb simulation. I find they free up a lot more space in the mix. I also developed my own virtual instruments which came out last year, called Ghostwriter, and I put those sounds on, too."

How did these songs tend to take shape?

"I don't think of myself as playing one particular instrument. I'm surrounded by instruments, and I'll move between them, even within the same song. I do sit down at a piano, or with a guitar, and that's usually

my starting point. But I have a bass guitar that I write on. I have my Mellotron, and that's all over this record. *Home Invasion* starts off with a death-metal riff, then you phase into this funky [section], which was obviously written on the Fender Rhodes. There's even a banjo. I'm rubbish. But I go back to the beginning of my ambitions as a musician, which were not necessarily being a virtuoso on any instrument, but at least

Production Values

Wilson selects three albums every aspiring guitarist/producer must hear

"I think you have to listen to Pink Floyd's *Animals*. Gilmour has got some of the greatest guitar tones I've ever heard on record. Also, John McLaughlin on Mahavishnu Orchestra's *Inner Mounting Flame* album, which is one of the most furious and incendiary jazz-rock records ever made. The guitar sound on that is brutal, in a good way. And Nick Drake on *Five Leaves Left*, just for the beauty and the organic, warm, golden quality. The way he played and the way it was recorded on that album, that's really been a touchstone for me, certainly for acoustic playing. But just listen to records. And not just in one genre. Take it all in. I sometimes feel when I hear records, that people just haven't listened to enough music and absorbed the lessons."

being able to get a good sound. I can make the banjo sound okay, and in the context of my music, that's enough."

Do certain voicings evoke certain moods?

"I have favourite chords, but I'm one of those guys where I don't know what they're called. So the guys will say, 'What's the chord there?' and I'll say, 'I don't know, but it looks like this.' And they'll say, 'Ah, that's an E diminished 9th with a flattened 5th.' And I'm like, 'Whatever.' I know there are certain things I come back to time and again. I do know my major 7ths."

Let's talk about some key guitar tracks...

"Well, you're spoilt for choice with Guthrie. But there's one solo he does about five minutes in on *Routine*, with a very clean tone. It just breaks my heart, and that's what I'm always looking for. Someone who can play one note and really touch me – not a hundred notes that go in one ear and out the other. It's the most simple I managed to get him to play on the record, but to me, that's Guthrie in a nutshell, because if you get him to play really slow, he can play as beautiful as anyone on Earth. It's not his natural inclination, but that's just how versatile he is. You can put Guthrie up against any shredder in the world, and he'll match them, but I think that's where his real genius is."

Which other tracks stand out?

"It's not the most significant thing, in the sense of the most dazzling, but there's a



He may love plug-ins, but this hand-wired Bad Cat Hot Cat still has its place in Steve's recording setup



Wilson's eye-catching AlumiSonic is an all-aluminium guitar



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See Me, Feel Me

Hand. Cannot. Erase. is more than an album. It's a whole multi-sensory world

"We've done special editions for the last three records, and this time I wanted to raise the bar. It was a great opportunity to create this almost scrapbook-like piece. And that begins in the form of a blog that this woman is writing. Then she goes back and traces her childhood, so there's also a teenage girl's diary, which is hand-written. And as you go through the book, there are these various loose inserts. There's a birth certificate. There's a love letter. A school report. Newspaper cuttings. And all of these things are done as accurately and authentically as possible. Similarly, there's a cassette insert for a mix tape. All of these things, we tried to recreate them to be as authentic as possible. So it's a really tactile experience. And it feels authentic, I hope."

moment when he plays a few bars of slide on *Home Invasion*, and it's one of the most beautiful and telling moments on the album. Just sublime. It's what they always say about players like Gilmour and Peter Green: they're not doing anything dazzlingly impressive, but it's just the choice of notes."

Do you have any other favourite guitar moments on the record?

"The solo on *Regret #9*. It's a soaring Gilmour-esque solo, and Guthrie makes it his own. Again, it's not the natural way for him to play, but he totally understood what I was looking for, and gets his personality onto the tape. Often, the first take with Guthrie is the one you go with, because it's the one where he's almost still searching. On the last album, we had this song called *Drive Home* where he just played this sublime solo, and it was the first take on a guitar that he'd only just picked up. The more he plays, the more he goes back to being Guthrie Govan, and this is what I do and I play fast..."

Inevitably, this will be dubbed a 'prog' album. How do you feel about that?

"This idea of being 'progressive' is misleading. I don't like the word anyway. I certainly don't like the word 'prog'. There's nothing on this record – there's nothing on anyone's record – that you cannot relate back to something from the past. I'm aware of that, and I kinda embrace it. What we're doing is trying to invest that musical vocabulary with enough musical personality that it still sounds fresh. For this record, I would say it's conceptual rock music, with all the implications that may or may not have."

Do you impose any rules on yourself?

"Only that it's interesting to me. If there's one rule I do have, it's to not think about what your audience expects. That's creative death, if you start worrying about expectations. I write to please myself – and that really is my only rule." **G**

Steven Wilson's *Hand. Cannot. Erase.* is available now on Kscope Records

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Seventh Heaven

The ideal instruments to play classic covers on? How about rare vintage guitars that span 70 years of rock...

Words Matt Frost **Photography** Rob Monk

Standing strong in London's East End since the mid 1800s, Wilton's Music Hall is the world's oldest surviving grand music hall – a building that oozes musical history from its very foundations. And this year, it's home to a prestigious collection of some of the rarest guitars known to man, as it plays host to *Seven Decades*, a hugely impressive two-hour live music spectacular.

The show is the brainchild of guitar-adoring best friends Phil Hylander and Michael Ross. Combining stunning video projections and voiceover from Fun Lovin' Criminal Huey Morgan with a top notch rock 'n' roll band, *Seven Decades* charts the history of the humble electric guitar from the 1950s right up to the present day. Ultra-rare vintage Fender Stratocasters and Telecasters, Gibson ES-335s and Les Pauls all take centre stage, as they bring the music of the last seven decades to life.

While Michael and Phil co-wrote and directed *Seven Decades* together, it's talented guitarist Mike who fronts the live band and chucks out fiery virtuosic versions of axe classics from every conceivable genre – Elmore James to The Police, Led Zeppelin to the Sex Pistols. *Guitarist* meets the men behind the music to find out how the show came together and how this collection of gorgeous instruments arrived on the stage.

What inspired you to put the *Seven Decades* show together in the first place?

Phil Hylander: "Well, Mike and I had been building up this really amazing collection of guitars and we always used to get really frustrated about, 'How do you make the most of this superb collection of guitars?' It's so unrewarding having them on a wall somewhere because they shouldn't just be static pieces of art. We started to write the show three years ago as a working

exhibition of guitars and, of course, we have this obsession with these four guitars in particular [Fender Stratocasters, Fender Telecasters, Gibson ES-335s and Gibson Les Pauls]. So, the show has partly been driven by the guitars we love but then also by the music we love as well. It has a really beautiful appeal because it's about the history of an instrument that 70 years ago was created in a certain way and looked a certain way and, 70 years later, we still play pretty much identical aesthetics."

Do you two own all the beautiful guitars that are featured in the show?

PH: "Mike and I own the bulk of them but then we have two other really good friends that also contribute to the collection, which includes some of the Strats."

Michael Ross: "It's a chance for collectors to actually hear their guitars cranked up through a '59 Plexi head, which is like a dream for a lot of them!"

PH: "There's a real culture with classic cars of collectors having professional drivers to race them. That similar approach hasn't really ever existed with guitar collections."

And how did you come up with the format for the show?

MR: "With the show, we didn't just want to be delivering it as, 'Oh, this is this guitar and this is another guitar...' We wanted to play them for real and make it emotional and make it really mean something, so the guitars are coming alive. They've all got stories to tell. If you pick up a guitar from 1954, it's got a big history and that has got to come out."

PH: "We thought that the right format was this kind of hybrid between the musical concept and a documentary with historic images and a beautiful abstract light show. That means you're telling a proper story







with proper words and proper archive footage. We wanted to make sure that the links between songs were informative and interesting and educational, but they also had to look pretty. That was quite a task."

It must have also been a challenge to choose the tracks...

MR: "I think it was quite easy to decide on the artists, but then to pick the actual tracks was more of a challenge because we had to balance the songs we love and want to play with songs that we know the audience wants to hear. Sometimes, we did want to get a little deeper with it. We do a Roy Buchanan song and a lot of people who aren't guitar heads won't know anything about Roy Buchanan. We do *Sweet Dreams* and people come back to us afterwards and ask, 'What was that song? That was really beautiful.' It's lovely to help reinvigorate interest in an artist like him, where he's largely been forgotten. That's really a buzz, you know."

"Another thing is that we can recycle the whole show by just having a whole different set list of songs and that's great, too. Like with Hendrix, we're currently playing *Purple Haze* and *Little Wing* but we could be playing *Freedom* by him instead."

PH: "Yeah, Mike and I basically have 50 per cent more songs and visuals prepared, so on three different nights, the show could be completely different."

MR: "We could probably do the Strat all night if we wanted – 'Seven Decades Of The Single-Coil Pickup!'"

PH: "Or 'Seven Decades Of Out Of Phase!'"

How far did the guitars tend to pick themselves for a particular track?

PH: "Well, you begin by knowing that you've got to cover the decades and respect each one. Then, you have an idea of a setlist and then that setlist informs the right guitar choices. It all tends to solve itself in that process. There's always a right song for each guitar but – just to be clear – the guitar choice isn't designed to match the year of the song. It matches the guitar the player would have used on that song."

MR: "With Red Hot Chili Peppers, for example, John Frusciante played *Under The Bridge* on a '56 Strat, so we've got a '56 Strat."

Have you managed to match all the guitars all the way through the set?

PH: "Bar one or two guitars, I think we've matched everything."

MR: "We do The Shadows on a '61 Fiesta Red because there are very few '59 Fiesta Reds around."

PH: "But we will buy one of those one day – that would be perfect! Then Mike plays David Bowie on a '68 black Les Paul but Mick Ronson would have stripped it back to wood. We haven't done that because we prefer it in black."





3

1 Classic guitars need some classic amps to play through – not least an original 1959 Marshall Plexi head

2 Where it all started – an original '52 Tele, used to play *Gimme Shelter* in the show

3 This gorgeous '55 Goldtop "just makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end!" says Michael

4 This '57 Goldtop is notable as being the first year the Les Paul swapped the P-90s for humbuckers. "Humbuckers on a Les Paul – it's just a match made in heaven, isn't it?" Michael enthuses. "It's a great guitar and has almost a sort of Allman Brothers vibe to it. This is one of the guitars I play for the encore on *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*"



4

5 Michael says of the stunning '59 Les Paul: "It's the most treasured asset of the whole collection. It just sounds killer. It's absolutely mint and as clean as you could ever believe. It's the most beautiful Les Paul I've ever played"

"You're taking 25 guitars and you're going up there and having to play all of them like you really mean it on every one!" **Michael Ross**



5

>



Michael (l) and Phil (r) own most of the classic guitars used in the show



Tonally, do you find every vintage guitar has its own unique sound and feel?

MR: “Hugely! If they’re right and if they’re good, they just sound amazing. They all have their own personality so they’re all very different. You can feel when you’re playing an alder body compared to an ash body. It can all depend on the quality of the build, the type and age of the wood, and the quality of the pickups and the way they’re hand-wound. As with any quality instrument, they get better over time, just like a great violin or a great piano.”

Playing around 20 different classic guitars across 40-plus stylistically diverse tracks must be an incredible challenge...

MR: “From a technical point of view, it’s the most unnatural ground to be in, because you’re taking 25 guitars and you’re going up there and having to play them like you really mean it on every one! We all have our favourite guitars. I mean, we’ve got a ’57 Goldtop, which is a stunning guitar, but personally I could just play the ’57 Strat all day long!”

“This show is like dodging bullets every second because you’ve got guitars coming at you all the time. The transitions can be hard work, but our crew have just come off tour with Foo Fighters. You can trust these guys and they do a great job passing me the guitars and looking after them all. Also, no matter how much you rehearse for it all,

these guitars have different output levels and, technically, you’ve got to be able to handle all of that. It is literally like crossing no man’s land and then you’ve actually got to arrive at something that is presentable!

“When we were writing the 335 section, we got to a certain point and we were like, ‘We’re going to have to play *Cliffs Of Dover* by Eric Johnson...’ and the thought of that was daunting, in terms of delivering it on a guitar that you don’t expect it to be on. But that is the story and that’s why you’ve got to do it.”

Mike, is there a song in the set that you find the most difficult to play?

MR: “The hardest one for me is *Heaven Knows I’m Miserable [Now]* by Johnny Marr [The Smiths]. It beats me up every time. It kills me...”

PH: “But then you didn’t grow up listening to The Smiths like I did...”

MR: “You say, ‘Can you stop playing it like Nile Rodgers?’”

PH: “Yeah, I have said, ‘It’s not meant to be that funky!’”

How much improvisation is there during the show?

MR: “It’s all about that, because if there’s no improvisation, what’s the point? None of the songs you’re hearing were played the same live as they were in the studio by all these artists. With *Whole Lotta Love* –



1 This '61 Strat is used for *Apache* and *Miserlou*, and Michael's a fan. "This is like Eric Johnson's, and Jesus Christ it's an amazing guitar! It's hard to explain what it gives you but it's got great tone..."

2 This stunning Surf Green Strat is a 1967 model, and is appropriately used to play *Purple Haze* and *Little Wing* in the show

3 This original 1954 Strat is in good nick for a guitar of its age, but its showing some wear on the Bakelite pickup covers. It's used to play Buddy Holly's *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* in the show

4 This Sunburst '63 Telecaster is used to play The Police track *So Lonely*

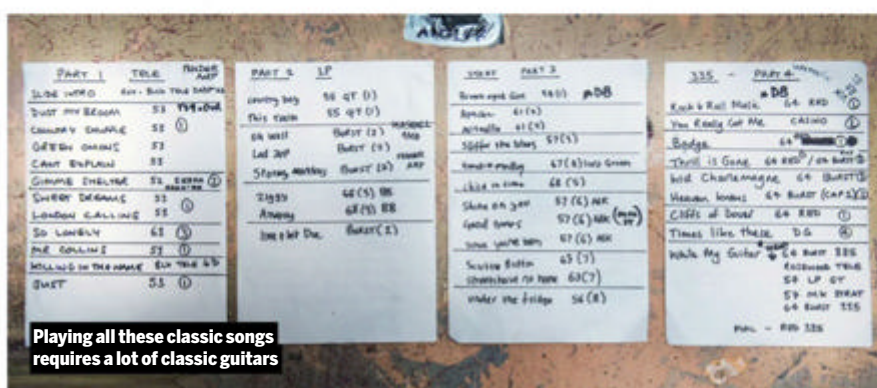
5 This '57 Strat isn't your average guitar, as Michael explains: "This one is one of the rarest we have. It's a 'Mary Kaye' with the gold hardware and it's nicely worn. Even though Gilmour didn't play one, I use it for *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* because it's just got the best clean sound"



"We got to a point where we were like, 'We're going to have to play *Cliffs Of Dover*...' and the thought of that was daunting" **Michael Ross** >



1



Playing all these classic songs requires a lot of classic guitars

1 This '64 ES-335 is one of two used in the show, used to play Eric Johnson's *Cliffs Of Dover*, among several others. "This is my favourite 335. I love it!" Michael enthuses. "It's had a refret and there are a couple of things that aren't quite original on it, but it's a player's guitar – the real deal! You pick up and, bang, you're in!"

2 This '63 Casino is an unusual Iced Tea hue, and that's not all: "It's 100 per cent original and in immaculate condition," says Michael. "It's exactly the same as Dave Davies had and a lot of those guys from that era played them. It's beautiful for *You Really Got Me*, but it's not beautiful for everything. It's beautiful for what it does"

listen to the recorded version and then listen to Zep do it live. It's all over the place, it's mental and that's what it's all about!"

PH: "The show is meant to be quite edgy. Any live band performance is meant to be edgy and that's where this differs from a pure West End kind of show."

Where are you aiming to take Seven Decades in the future?

PH: "We think that this nexus between the history of the guitar and the history of music, and the incredible sustainability of this design and this invention has really, really big appeal beyond just guitar players and guitar fans."

MR: "We've played here [at Wilton's Music Hall] seven times and pretty much sold it out seven times and the audience reaction has been really encouraging. We've had children coming to see it right the way through to 70 year olds. It's an education for many people."

PH: "We think this show really lends itself to big theatres, but theatres where people will take the time to listen to the story as well as just the music, places like the Royal Albert Hall and Carnegie Hall... big venues that have a kind of legacy of respect for what's happening onstage. That really makes sense to us." 

For more info on *Seven Decades*, check out www.sevendecades.com



2



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Wes Montgomery

A Player's Perspective

With the recent release of *In The Beginning*, a double-album set on Resonance Records that features newly discovered 'live' recordings and studio sessions, we ask: what makes Wes Montgomery so special? Why is he still relevant today? And what can all guitarists, regardless of style, learn from this humble genius?

Words Denny Ilett

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, guitarists were faced with a major challenge: how to adapt the 'language' of jazz on to the fretboard. From its seedy beginnings in the Red Light District of New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century, jazz had been a horn players' music. So much of the basic vocabulary centred around the way trumpets, saxophones, clarinets and trombones slid, bent, glissed and sustained their phrases.

For years, the humble guitar languished in the rhythm section, where it thumped along with the bass and drums while horn players wailed out front. Early solo pioneers such as Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson and Django Reinhardt paved the way for the single-string genius of Charlie Christian who, blessed with the new-fangled electric guitar, was able to forge its place in the 'front line' of jazz ensembles. Christian's contribution started a revolution. Guitarists were finally liberated – and among them was Wes Montgomery.

The Thumb

Wes was entirely self-taught and early on decided to sacrifice speed for tone by using

the right-hand thumb instead of a plectrum. The fat, warm sound he was able to produce with the thumb created a very vocal, soulful 'voice' that's very difficult to obtain with a pick. Most players who try this technique find it stifling, as upstrokes are so difficult to articulate. Jim Mullen, himself a thumb player, points out that Wes "had a double-jointed thumb, which meant he could play both up- and downstrokes like a pick player". Ultimately, Wes became so good with the thumb that any drop in speed became irrelevant, as Steve Howe points out: "His technique seemed to allow him to play anything he wanted."

Listening now, over 50 years after some of his most celebrated recordings were made, the velocity Wes could generate when needed is still astonishing. A prime example is his solo on the John Coltrane tune *Impressions*, which he takes at a breakneck speed. In fact, there isn't a single moment in any Wes recording where you would think he'd do better with a pick!

"His technique shouldn't have allowed him to play fast, but... he could play fast!" says John Etheridge, although speed-for-speed's-sake was the last thing on Wes's mind. He always seemed to play exactly

what was right in any given musical moment and was much more interested in generating a 'mood'. The tone produced by his magic thumb was a prime ingredient in Wes Montgomery's emotional arsenal. On top of this, Wes had his own way of emulating the horn style of jazz phrasing by, in the words of Nigel Price, "constructing a huge vocabulary of slides, hammer-ons, pull-offs and slurs, which set him apart from all the other guitarists of the day".

Herein lies a major component of what makes Wes so great. He was, arguably, the first jazz guitarist to fully incorporate the legato approach of the horn players, and we can speculate as to how much the thumb approach contributed to that. Adrian Utley makes the point that the thumb gave Wes "a great 'connection' with his instrument... no plastic pick to get in the way". This also played a large part in his beautiful, relaxed phrasing, which, coupled with his innate musicianship, produced playing that is as moving as it is awe-inspiring.

The 'Formula'

"I first saw Wes on a BBC TV show in the 60s," recalls Martin Taylor. "I was immediately struck by the energy,



sophistication and sheer joy in his playing.” It’s difficult to imagine the impact that Wes had when he first came to prominence. As Steve Howe says: “The newness of the sound that Wes brought to us in the 1960s was so refreshing.”

What was it, then, that set him apart from other great guitarists of the day? The answer, perhaps, lies in his unique approach to soloing, which became something of a ‘formula’ and ultimately defined his art. The formula itself? Single-line passage, octave passage, block-chord passage was a beautifully simple way of building subtle intensity as the solo developed and yet another indication of his genius. Horn players – having a broader palette of range, dynamics and tonal colours – were able to build their solos by introducing those elements as the solo developed.

Certainly in those days, guitarists had just one sound at their disposal, making it more difficult to maintain interest and intensity when they played. Wes found a brilliant and simple way round this problem by, as John

Etheridge points out, “reinforcing” and “thickening” his lines as his solo progressed. After a passage of fluid, bluesy, always relaxed single-string licks, Wes would move onto octaves for the next stage, and play them so effortlessly that you would hardly notice the transition. Yet, the line is now doubled and intensity is added to the solo. The last phase of the solo would see Wes move from octaves to full chords – known as ‘block’ chords – which would further increase the drama and excitement. John Etheridge elaborates: “All three were used strictly melodically, the single line reinforced with octaves, essentially thickening the line. Then, his chord improvisations – and this is very important – were also used melodically. It wasn’t like, ‘Look, I can do this harmonic inversion of this substitution.’”

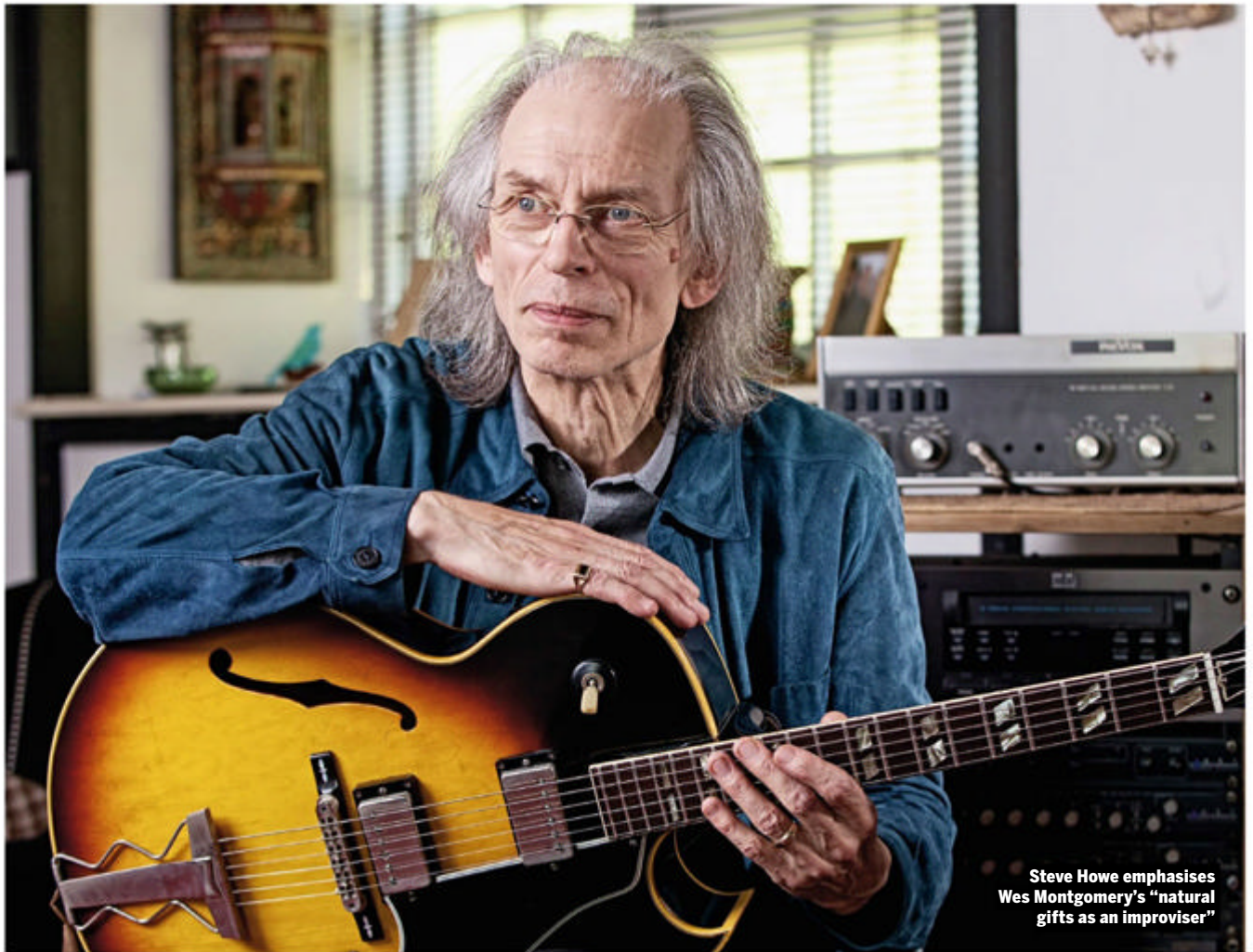
Each device follows as a natural progression from the other. There are countless examples of Wes employing the ‘formula’, although *West Coast Blues* epitomises the technique. The key, as

Etheridge points out, is melody and melodic drive. Jim Mullen adds: “His octave playing was an imitation of the trumpet-tenor sax frontline and his improvised chord solos were beautiful, melodic inventions.”

Steve Howe describes Wes as a “brilliant, naturally gifted improviser”, and Nigel Price emphasises how one “rarely gets the feeling that Wes is forcing through pre-learned patterns, unlike many jazz guitarists today”. Natural is a key word. Wes played in a way that is increasingly absent from jazz these days. He sounds like he doesn’t care about scales, modes, substitutions or clever little ‘guitaristic’ devices. His playing exists solely in the pursuit of melody. As Adrian Utley says about another Montgomery masterpiece, *D-Natural Blues*: “You can sing the whole thing: it’s so melodic, perfect and succinct.”

The Blues

Wes Montgomery was a master of the blues. Regardless of how complicated the chord changes or melody of the tune he was



Steve Howe emphasises Wes Montgomery's "natural gifts as an improviser"

Creating momentum with subtle but brilliant rhythmic devices, holding back, pushing forward – there's such a vocal quality to Wes's playing

playing, it was always laced with the blues. Wes recorded many variations on the 12-bar throughout his career: the aforementioned *D-Natural Blues*, as 'down-home' as it gets; and the loping waltz time of *West Coast Blues*, with its lovely 'twist' in the chord pattern. Other prime examples are *Blue 'N' Boogie*, a medium-up-tempo swinger, and *Cariba*, a minor blues with a Latin feel. Then there's the unusual 16-bar *Twisted Blues*, which features some fabulous alterations to the standard sequence, as its title suggests. Regardless, Wes played real blues on everything – meaning 'blues, the attitude' rather than 'blues, the pentatonic scale'. John Etheridge reminds us that Wes "sounded so effortless, his rhythmic feel was so 'in the pocket', relaxed and flowing. Everything he did was beautifully played and phrased, it was so sensitive... he makes you 'feel' the song, which is very important... he really does tell a story."

Of course, telling a story has its roots in the blues. When you listen to old live recordings of, say, BB King, you can hear the

crowd responding vocally to phrases he plays – call and response – and you can hear the jazz equivalent with Wes. He'll put a 'full stop' on a phrase at the perfect moment before picking up the next idea. Subtle use of space was as powerful a tool in Wes's hands as all the blistering single lines, octaves and chord melody he'd mastered. Knowing when not to play, creating momentum with subtle but brilliant rhythmic devices, holding back, pushing forward. There's such a vocal quality to Montgomery's playing that you could almost fit lyrics to his lines – "you can sing the whole thing!"

In some ways, he was the most un-guitar-like of guitar players. His musicianship transcended his chosen instrument. Martin Taylor reinforces this point when he says: "Django has gone down in history as a great guitarist but I always think that Wes was a musician first, a guitarist second. Wes would have been a great musician whatever instrument he chose to play." Transcribe a Wes Montgomery solo for a sax player and

what you will hear is a great jazz solo, exactly as Taylor describes. Nigel Price adds: "Wes played everything for the music. His improvisations were always in keeping with the vibe of the material." This was most apparent when Wes played his beloved blues.

The Guitar

Wes owned and played a variety of Gibson archtops over the years that would have us all drooling. A Gibson L-4 with a 'Charlie Christian' pickup, an ES-175 and an ES-125 are all guitars he was photographed with in the early days. The instrument he'll be forever associated with, though, is the L-5. Later in his career, Gibson made him a 'custom' model with a single neck humbucker and a metal tune-o-matic bridge to replace the traditional wooden one. This was Wes's request, as the metal bridge brightened the tone, offsetting the dark sound produced by his thumb. At some point, Wes had the pickup reversed. Contrary to popular belief, he was constantly looking for ways to brighten the sound. His strings were, in the words of Russell Malone, "cables!" – 0.014 to 0.058. His choice of amp fluctuated between Fender Super Reverbs and Twins, before he switched to a Standel Super Custom in the mid 60s. Regardless, Wes never cared too



Wes performing in New York with his brothers Monk and Buddy in the Montgomery Brothers Trio in 1961

© SAM FALK/NEW YORK TIMES CO./GETTY IMAGES

much about gear and saw his equipment as nothing more than a tool to get the job done, once saying, “I got a standard box. I don’t never want nothing special. Then, if I drop it, I can borrow someone else’s.”

He also dabbled with a Fender electric bass. His brother Monk Montgomery is credited with being the first to play jazz on a bass guitar, so it was close to Wes all along. He even recorded some solos on bass for the *Movin’ Wes* album, which Steve Howe describes as a “hidden gem in his crown”.

The Legacy

For someone who was quite content honing his craft in jazz clubs around Indianapolis while supporting his wife and seven children by also holding down a full-time day job, Wes probably wasn’t as ready for the limelight as much as the jazz world was ready for him to be there. He was 37 years old when he was ‘discovered’ and signed to Riverside Records but had been quietly “reinventing jazz guitar” for over a decade, as Jim Mullen says, with nightly gigs on his local scene. The recordings just released by Resonance come from these times. Here, we can get close to the ‘real’ Wes, playing effortless jazz to a relative handful of clubgoers. We can hear him in a relaxed and informal setting playing for the sheer joy of it and clearly having the time of his life. The

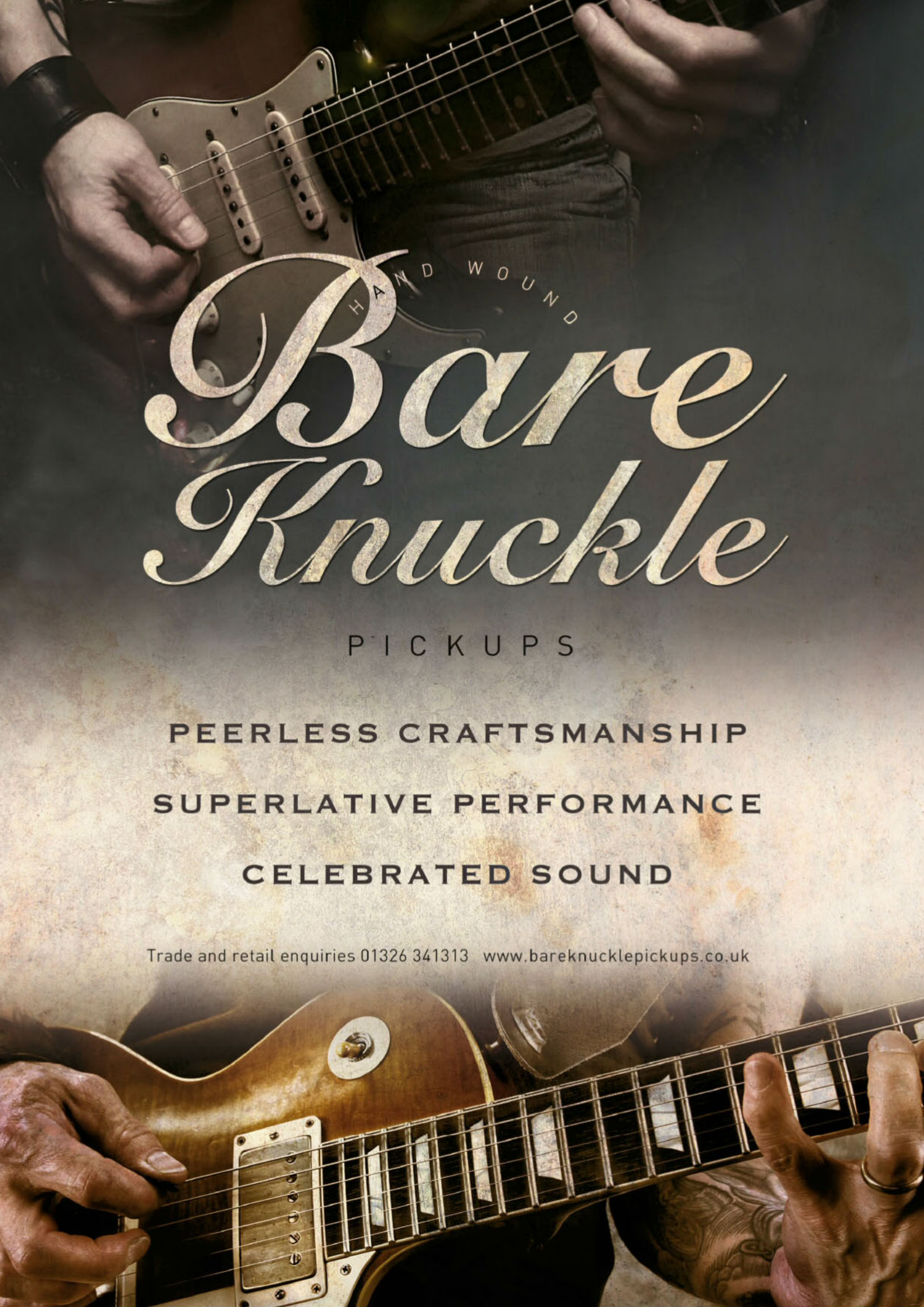
From Jimi Hendrix to Eric Johnson; from Steve Vai to SRV; from Joe Satriani to Steve Lukather... Wes has never been just a jazz guitarists’ favourite

“relaxed but ferocious energy” that Adrian Utley describes is in evidence on these amateur recordings.

The years in the clubs meant that Wes arrived on the international scene fully formed, making him seem even more incredible when his albums first appeared. The fact that he lived fewer than 10 years between his first major album and his death only serves to add to the intensity. That he chose, admirably it would seem, to ‘sell out’ to a major label and become a Grammy Award-winning ‘pop’ act toward the end allows us an insight into his philosophy on music and the guitar. He only ever saw it as “a hobby” and remained humble and down-to-earth while blowing everybody away with his incredibly joyous music. He claimed not to practise, saying, “I don’t practise. Every now and then I open the guitar case and throw a piece of raw meat in!” On another occasion, he elaborated: “If I know it, I don’t need to practise it. If I don’t know it, I ain’t risking it!”

The fact is, Wes Montgomery was a man who genuinely did play for the love of it. He never allowed himself to be tortured by any technical shortcomings or threatened by the new generation of great players coming up in the 60s, such as Joe Pass or George Benson. He merely turned up at a gig or a studio and played heartfelt, honest, soulful and beautiful music before going home to his beloved family. Guitarists of all genres have repeatedly acknowledged their admiration for Wes Montgomery. From Jimi Hendrix to Eric Johnson; from Steve Vai to Stevie Ray Vaughan; from Joe Satriani to Steve Lukather... Wes has never been just a jazz guitarists’ favourite. His music has, and always will, defy categorisation and transcend musical boundaries. Perhaps this should serve as the ultimate lesson taught by this great man. **G**

Many thanks to John Etheridge, Steve Howe, Jim Mullen, Nigel Price, Martin Taylor and Adrian Utley.



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Taylor Big Baby Taylor-e £514

Taylor adds its ES2 pickup to the start-up full-scale Big Baby. The ultimate open-mic gigger dreadnought? We investigate...

WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Joseph Branston**

What You Need To Know

1 That's not a lot of money for a Taylor...

Right on. The Big Baby is the most affordable full-scale dreadnought Taylor currently makes.

2 It looks a bit bare bones, doesn't it?

That's the point. Taylor challenged itself to see what was the absolute minimum it could put into a guitar and still have it function properly and sound good. The company has sold an awful lot of them over the past 15 years.

3 So, it's not new, then?

Yes and no. Taylor is constantly updating and improving its instruments and while the Big Baby has been offered with an optional electro package for some years, for 2015 it's offering the new ES2 pickup from its high-line models. With that in mind, we thought we'd take another look...

Time flies, eh? It's hard to believe that Taylor's diminutive three-quarter-size Baby was introduced back in 1996. It's a much copied 'travel' or 'mini' guitar that is arguably more relevant today thanks to the likes of Ed Sheeran. 'But he plays a Martin,' you say. Yes, a small one, and this year Martin launched the Dreadnought Junior, which, with its 15/16th size is, ahem, rather similar to the Big Baby. Taylor hasn't rested on its laurels, however, and for 2015 the Baby gets an optional electronics upgrade to the ES-B system, which employs the ES2 pickup rolled out on 2014's 800 series.

When the Baby model launched, especially the Big Baby, many guitar watchers wondered just how much more basic an acoustic guitar could be. Not everyone liked the aesthetic. There's no binding on the body or neck, so the neck is secured to the body with two large, visible cross head screws between the 15th and 16th fret. Also, the layered (laminated) back is arched, meaning no back braces are necessary; there are only minimal linings. Yet, for many, the Big Baby remains a

near bomb-proof working guitar, perfectly fit for purpose. Viewed today, the 2015-spec Big Baby remains shockingly minimalist, especially alongside a pair of new 600 series Grand Concerts. But while they retail around £2.8k, our electro BB Taylor-e costs, at full retail, just a smidgeon over £500.

The 15/16ths size is only subtly smaller than Taylor's standard dreadnought: 381mm (15 inches) as opposed to 406mm (16 inches) wide and 102mm (four inches) deep

compared with the full-size dread's depth of 117.5mm (4.625 inches). Both have 14-fret neck joins and share the same 648mm (25.5-inch) long 'Fender' scale length, although the BB's nut width is spec'd at 42.9mm (1.69 inches), narrower than the 44.5mm (1.75 inches) of the dreadnought. The neck itself seems over-long and skinny, a mainly visual construct as there's no heel. It's screwed directly onto the neck block, the two screws highly visible but unobtrusive to the finger. The



Two large screws hold the neck in place



The BB is Taylor's most affordable full-size dread'



No binding here – this is as spartan as Taylors get



The ES-B preamp is basic but works well in practice

lack of heel means high fret access is rather good for a non-cutaway guitar. There's no synthetic fingerboard material here, just a slightly brown-streaked ebony with perfectly fitted and fettled frets.

The spruce top has strong, quite wide striping; the sapele/poplar/sapele layered back and sides is a light, rather bland mahogany colour. Despite the absence of binding, the cream-coloured poplar centre lamination creates a binding-like stripe around the edge.

For our test, we have a well-used example Big Baby from

2006 for comparison. You can see a few slight indentations around the unbound edges but the primary visual difference (aside from the early laser etched rosette decoration, which lacks the bold contrast of the current black-centred ring) is the colouration. While the new, natural BB looks rather bland, the older one has aged to a rich amber colour (even the nut and saddle have adopted a nicotine hue), and the ultra-thin satin 'varnish' finish has burnished to a deep, lustrous gloss, especially on the neck back. Rather nice.

Its strident projection and trim low end make it sit very well in a mix, both in the studio and live

Sounds

Only subtle changes have been made to the Big Baby over the years, yet the neck shape seems slightly more grown-up. There's less of the earlier edge as the shoulders roll into the fingerboard, and we understand that the top has been ever-so-slightly reduced in thickness. We imagined the well-used

older BB would give it the edge tonally, but we're wrong. The 2015 guitar has a little more looseness, depth and give. Acoustically, yes, it has quite a hallmark Taylor tonality: strong, clean and quite brightly voiced with a condensed bass end. On the one hand it lacks the complexity and subtlety of a higher end all-solid wood



<http://bit.ly/guitarist395>



The ES2 pickup comes from Taylor's 800 series



The screwed-in neck means no heel – good for access!

Taylor, but, conversely, its strident projection and trim-for-a-dreadnought low end make it sit very well in a mix, both in the studio and live.

The ES2 is a very well sorted pickup that really doesn't sound very piezo-like. The three piezo elements sit behind the saddle, not underneath, and can be adjusted to balance the response. It's paired here with a small side-mounted preamp with a pretty accurate tuner and simple volume and tone controls (think treble roll-off). It's very clean, very balanced, and straight into a flat channel

and outboard EQ it produces a very good modern sound. Yes, the bass end is a little clouded for fingerstyle and the new-string highs can be a little crispy, but, put simply, it's a league above virtually all of the similarly priced electros we've listened to recently.

Dimensionally, it might only be subtly smaller than a full-size dread, but it certainly feels noticeably more compact played seated. Bare bones? Yes, but all the essentials – not least great intonation paired with electric-like playability – are present and correct.

Verdict

If you appreciate quality but don't like or can't afford a 'posh' guitar, then you should try this 2015 Big Baby electro. We'd be more than happy to take it on a gig, especially with a band, though an experienced player may want a little more for intimate solo shows. Regardless, it's a highly contemporary sound and, full scale, really suits drop and altered tunings. While it doesn't sound like an old Martin dreadnought, there's a directness and purity to its voice that is highly credible. **G**



Taylor Big Baby Taylor-e

PRICE: £514 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: 15/16th body size dreadnought electro-acoustic

TOP: Spruce

BACK/SIDES: Layered sapele (sapele/poplar/sapele)

MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 381mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Enclosed, chrome, die-cast

NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech

Nubone/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Ebony, unbound with pearloid dots

FRETS: 20, slim

BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with compensated Nubone saddle/56mm

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 1.82/4

ELECTRICS: Taylor ES2 piezo pickup, ES-B preamp w/ volume & tone knobs plus onboard tuner

OPTIONS: The acoustic Big Baby (also available left-handed) is £425

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, same prices

FINISHES: Natural matte

(as reviewed)

Taylor Guitars

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www.taylorguitars.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: 15 years on, and now with the ES2 pickup, the 2015 Big Baby is better than ever. An excellent introduction to Taylor, and an ideal second, starter or traveller guitar, too



Not Such A Baby

The Big Baby is well into its teenage years. Taylor's design guru Andy Powers looks back over its life so far...

"IT'S an interesting concept," muses Andy Powers, reflecting on the Big Baby today. "In some ways I liken it to a Telecaster. A guitar that took a fresh look at what was absolutely necessary. It's like a real minimalist form of a guitar. The Baby and Big Baby are in keeping with that mindset: how little can we use and still have a good, functioning guitar? For as little as there is there, a lot of thought has gone into making a stable and very robust instrument."

One thing's for sure, Taylor has made a lot of these minimalist guitars: around 200,000 Baby and 100,000 Big Baby models, primarily in its Tecate, Mexico factory. But it's not just its appeal as a 'travel' or starter guitar that's key to the Big Baby's success. Before Andy joined Taylor he had his own workshop where he handcrafted instruments and repaired plenty, too. "I would see good players bring Big Babys to the 'shop, often requesting

pickups – originally it wasn't offered with one. It was such an affordable guitar they could take it touring, or flying, and it wasn't so precious if it got damaged by baggage handlers on an airline or something. It would be disappointing, but it wouldn't be the end of the world."

The lil' Baby also played a big part in the creation of the NT (New Technology) neck joint, fundamental to Taylor, first used in 1999. "With the Baby, we saw the ability to machine the neck joint to really high tolerances every single time and that's what allowed that guitar to exist in a really good form. The idea of using a spacer [between the neck and body] that allows the precise adjustment of the neck angle to a very exacting tolerance, I mean, that's straight out of a [metal] machinist's tool box."

The 2015 spec Baby uses a side-mounted ES-B preamp, which Taylor's David Hosler tells us is "OEM, good and well designed

from someone I have known for a long time. But what makes it special is the ES2 pickup. It's the same pickup as we use in the [USA] El Cajon guitars. I think of it as starting with a good microphone, and that changes everything. The ability to place the [piezo] elements in the correct position for the functioning of the saddle, and controlling the pressure on the elements makes a really big difference."

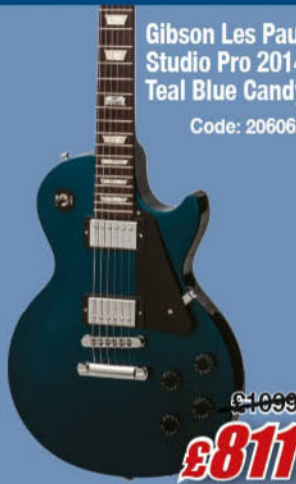
"Bob [Taylor] and I are always committed to trying to build a better guitar," says Andy, "it's just what we love doing. I want the guitar to continuously improve. That's true for everything we make whether it's a Baby, Big Baby, GS Mini or any of the higher level guitars: the desire is to always make a better guitar than the last one you made. So, if we can make a small improvement, however tiny, we're gonna make it. We've never been content to sit back on our laurels and say, 'That's good enough.'"

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Size matters

Fancy going smaller in body size or scale? There are plenty of options for the modern strummer. Here are six choices, in ascending scale length order...



Tanglewood Roadster TWR TE £189

One of the many copies of the Little Martin/Baby Taylor, Tanglewood's value-for-money 'travel folk' electro is a 580mm (22.8-inch) scale, non-cut travel guitar that features solid spruce top and laminate mahogany back and sides with TEQ-2BT preamp and under-saddle pickup. Like the majority of guitars in the genre, it comes with a padded gigbag.

Takamine GX18CE-NS approx £250

Colloquially known as the a Taka-Mini (geddit?), this little series has been with us for quite a while. But a new addition is this gloss finished, fully bound electro cutaway. Classed as 3/4 size, it features the TP4T preamp, solid spruce/laminate mahogany construction and a 578mm (22.75-inch) scale length.

Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature Edition £579

Sheeran's use of his 584mm (23-inch) scaled Little Martin, now in its second signature edition, certainly proves that small guitars are extremely valid. Specs include solid spruce top, koa HPL textured finish back and sides, and like the Baby Taylors, you'll not find any binding here.



Taylor GS-Mini from £503

Sitting between the Baby and Big Baby with a 597mm (23.5-inch) scale, the GS-Mini is less austere-looking than the Babys with a choice of solid top woods (spruce, mahogany or koa) with layered sapele, rosewood or koa back and sides. The basic acoustic model accepts the ES-Go magnetic pickup, while the other models come with the ES-T system.

Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG £299

The start point of the Canadian Seagull range is a parlour-sized 'grand' body shape. It has a full 631mm (24.85-inch) scale length with a 330mm (13-inch) body width. Originally all-laminate (wild cherry), it now comes – for Europe only – with a solid spruce top. The electro version costs £369.

Martin Dreadnought Junior £663

Announced earlier in 2015, the Dread is the sole model in a new Junior series. Classed as being down-sized, approximately 15/16th of the full Martin dread, it has a body width of 362mm (14.24 inches) and a scale length of 610mm (24 inches), slightly smaller than Taylor's Big Baby. Powering is from Fishman's Sonitone and we even get some binding!

SIMON & PATRICK SHOWCASE ROSEWOOD & SEAGULL MARITIME SWS SG £1,199 & £699
ACOUSTICS





IN CONCERT

Godin's acoustic empire manufactures a vast number of instruments in Canada, but its various brands have never included an OM-style model. Until now...

WORDS **Isobel Morris & Jim Kimberley** PHOTOGRAPHY **Simon Lees**





Simon & Patrick Showcase Rosewood Concert Hall & Seagull Maritime Concert Hall SWS SG

£1,199 & £699

What You Need To Know

1 Godin, Seagull, Simon & Patrick... Explain!

Godin was established by Robert Godin in 1972, and alongside its eponymous brand, in a number of factories in a relatively small area around La Patrie, Quebec, it makes Seagull, Simon & Patrick (named after Robert's sons), Art & Lutherie, Norman and La Patrie acoustics and electros, plus Richmond electrics. Godin also manufactures its own TRIC cases.

2 Different names but the same guitars?

There are plenty of shared resources, but as our review models illustrate, each brand has its own identity and style.

3 What's new here, then?

Primarily, it's the new Concert Hall body style – the first OM-style acoustic under the Godin banner.

Despite their different brand names, the shared Godin heritage of these two acoustics mean they share plenty of DNA. That being said, there are a lot of differences, too, not least in price. It's also immediately clear that these guitars have a very different manufacturing style to many others out there. For example, there's a lightness of build to them and an airy resonance, a character that has a whiff of the classic early Gibsons: a stark contrast to many over-built, Asian-produced designs that dominate the lower/mid-price markets. A very encouraging start.

Both guitars are classified as 'Concert Hall', Godin's take on the classic Martin 000/OM 'medium' body. The body shapes are near-identical, slightly squarer at the shoulder and at the bottom than some of this style. Dimensionally, things are pretty similar to the Martin 000/OM blueprint, albeit trimmer across the lower bouts, very slightly bigger in depth with a similar taper to the sides. Both display what an increasing number of us appreciate about

the OM-style: a sort of halfway house, all-rounder feel that sits between the smaller parlours or 00's and larger dreadnoughts of the acoustic world.

There are a number of technicalities shared by these instruments, regardless of their differing brand names. On both, the top is 'pressure-tested' solid spruce and is constructed with a compound curve. This light arching is found on virtually all

steel-strings, and Godin's subtly different recipe aims to increase structural integrity, allowing the top to be thinner and more lightly braced. The bracing itself is Adirondack or red spruce – known for a more 'dynamic' character compared with Sitka spruce – which should result in an impressively lively top. Both feature an 'Integrated Set Neck' said to work in conjunction with the compound curves of



The B-Band A6T electronics provide a sophisticated, stage-ready system for the Showcase



Gibson

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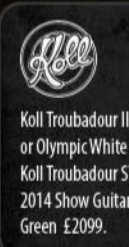
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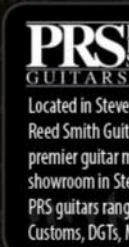
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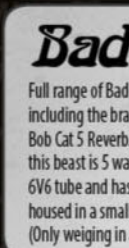
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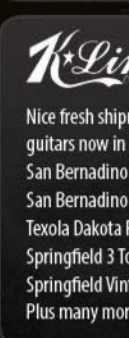
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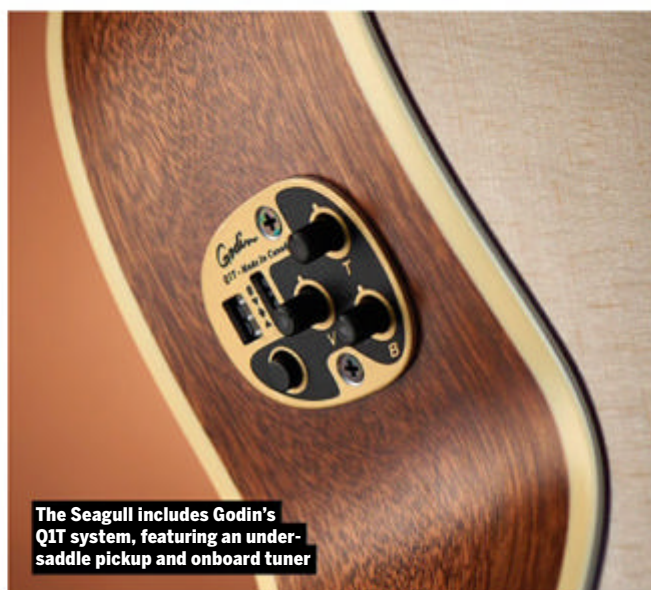
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The high-gloss finish of the Simon & Patrick wonderfully showcases the solid rosewood



The Seagull includes Godin's QIT system, featuring an under-saddle pickup and onboard tuner

the top to eliminate downward pressure from the fingerboard onto the top. It simultaneously reduces any tendency the neck may have to twist or warp over the years. Maple dowels have been inserted into the base of the heel of the neck, which Godin believes makes the neck several times stronger.

The lower-priced Seagull uses solid mahogany for neck, back and sides. All binding and purfling is sharply executed and there's a neat herringbone back stripe and rosette. The fingerboard is rosewood as is the calm, unfussy bridge. The nut and compensated saddle are Tusq, a nod to the modern, while the finish is a thin satin coating, which we certainly prefer over thicker, heavier gloss finishes. Does it affect the guitar's tone? Well, even on first strum, you can't miss that lively

resonance. The tapered headstock of this longer-scaled Seagull, meanwhile, gives a straighter string pull, designed for easier tuning and to minimise potential neck twist.

In comparison, the Simon & Patrick shares much of the design ethos as the Seagull, and is built from at least some of the same materials. Yet it costs just shy of double the money. Why? In a word: class. This guitar has an understated but undoubted air of the upmarket about it. The rosewood body is bound and purfling in solid woods; there's the always-classy slotted headstock with its open-gear vintage-style tuners; ebony and maple layered veneer facing; and mother-of-pearl inlaid logo. The finish is a serious high gloss, beautifully emphasising the rosewood's figure. It shares compound curve spruce top

and the integrated set neck, but the neck is quite different in profile, more of a shallow 'U'. Although the string spacing at the bridge is identical on both guitars, the spacing at the nut is almost 3mm narrower – a huge difference to your hand. The masculine half of this writing duo, with his chunky digits, found this more of a problem, but everything sat happily for the feminine half. All the more reason to try before you buy.

Sounds

The Seagull is a folkie's delight. Its tone has a strong midrange, great for the fingerpicker. We weren't expecting the low end

of a dreadnought, and fresh out of the case the tone is starchy, unforgiving and rather thin. Pulling the neck forward a hair (increasing the relief) via the two-way truss rod restored some of the missing heft and cleared up the fretbuzz that our open tunings had exposed. As the strings lose their newness, the tone develops a dry, breathy, almost papery character, particularly noticeable when strumming with a pick. This is not a loud guitar; the tone is not at its best given the strong arm either, but the balance and dynamics are impressive.

The neck has a fairly shallow C profile, again with the satin

Everything about the Simon & Patrick has a refined quality and that certainly applies to its sound



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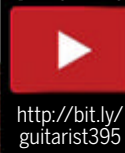
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A herringbone stripe and rosette are nice touches on the Seagull model

The Seagull is a folkie's delight – its tone is great for the fingerpicker

finish, and – diverse as our playing styles are – we both felt very comfortable with it. There's top quality fretwork with sweet intonation all the way up the fingerboard, which results in trouble-free capo'ing and drop tuning. For an extra £100, as here, you can get the Godin Q1T pickup system factory-fitted. It uses a simple under-saddle pickup, which delivers a strong signal true to the guitar's character, and has a built-in tuner. It compensates for the underpowered bass end, too: it's worth the extra outlay.

Everything about the Simon & Patrick has a refined quality and that certainly applies to its sound. It's rounder, richer and more invitingly dynamic. Where the Seagull gets a tad barky when you lean into it, the S&P keeps a healthy amount of strength in the lower mids and stays punchy. Gentle fingerpicking, especially with nails or fingerpicks, showcases the resonant qualities of that top, too. This guitar is a dream to record: it sounds enormous and placing it in a mix is a breeze, because there's no booming low end.

This model is fitted with a B-Band A6T pickup system with onboard chromatic tuner

as standard. It's a sophisticated setup with an under-saddle pickup plus a soundboard sensor and a fader to mix the two. A three-band EQ sits alongside a feedback-busting notch filter and phase switch. Much more of a thoroughbred compared with the Godin Q1T, it's a highly versatile, stage-ready system.

Verdict

All-in-all, these two guitars are refreshing and stimulating to play, harking back to some classic early instruments with their lighter North American-style build sensibilities. The OM-style Concert Hall bodies certainly have some of the petite 'small body' appeal you get in a parlour guitar, but with a much broader sound.

Though the Simon & Patrick wins out overall (as you'd expect with the price and spec difference), both are great value for the money, rising above a market crowded with 'me-too' solid wood guitars that often lack that certain something when in the hand. For guitarists with a lighter touch these are a must try – after seeking them out you may very well conclude they're a must-buy!



Simon & Patrick Showcase Rosewood CH HG A6T

PRICE: £1,199 (inc TRIC case)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Concert Hall-shape electro-acoustic
TOP: Solid spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 107mm tapering to 86mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 379mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 630mm (24.8")
TUNERS: Gold-plated high-ratio with 'butter-bean' buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, small m-o-p dots, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony with compensated Tusq saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: B-Band dual pickups (UST and AST), A6T preamp with volume, 3-band slider EQ, UST/AST mix, onboard tuner, phase switch, notch filter with depth and Freq controls
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.2/4.85
OPTIONS: No. The acoustic version costs £1,049
RANGE OPTIONS: Other available electros include the Concert Hall CW GT Cedar A3T (£729) and the Songsmith Concert Hall A3T (£499)
LEFT HANDERS: No
440 Distribution
0113 258 9599
www.godinguitars.com

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: A sophisticated instrument with fine attention to detail: an exciting guitar to play



Seagull Maritime Concert Hall SWS SG Q1T

PRICE: £699 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Concert Hall-shape electro-acoustic
TOP: Solid Spruce
BACK/SIDES: Solid mahogany
MAX RIM DEPTH: 105.3mm tapering to 86mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 379mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Chrome-plated Seagull logo'd enclosed
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/45.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, large pearloid dots, 406mm (16") radius
FRETS: 21, small
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated Tusq saddle/54mm
ELECTRICS: Under-saddle transducer with Godin Q1T preamp featuring volume, treble and bass rotary controls and onboard tuner
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 1.9/4.18
OPTIONS: No. The acoustic version costs £599
RANGE OPTIONS: Also available is the S6 Cedar Concert Hall Q1T £529
LEFT HANDERS: No

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

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

Guitarist says: An affordable guitar with a lot of potential. Well worth paying extra for the pickup

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WAS
£1499

Gibson Explorer 120
120th Anniversary model w/Grover tuners.
£1099 or £82.43p/m (12 mnth, 0% APR)



WAS
£1299

Gibson Firebird
2014 model w/Steinberger tuners.
£999 or £74.93p/m (12 mnth, 0% APR)



WAS
£2699

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Memphis series w/figured maple body
£2199 or £164.93p/m (12 mnth, 0% APR)



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ISSUE

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FEATURED
IN THIS
ISSUE

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WAS
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LOTS MORE GEAR INSTORE AND ONLINE!



OM-Gee!

Seagull and Simon & Patrick may be late to the table with an OM-style, but the market offers plenty of options...



Sigma 000M-1ST £278

Once Martin-owned, Sigma is now an independent brand – albeit, in style, heavily Martin-influenced, aside from the price. We've been very impressed with the detailed Chinese build of numerous Sigmas we've tested. This one pairs a solid spruce top with laminate mahogany back and sides and is a great intro to the 000/OM style.

Yamaha LS16M ARE £658

The long-running L series was updated in 2014, and the 'small body' LS is close to a 000/OM in size. All solid woods, in this case spruce/mahogany, the new range features the SRT Zero Impact passive under-saddle pickup, while ARE (Acoustic Resonance Enhancement) is a wood-treatment process intended to make the top wood sound 'older'.

Martin 000-15M £1,099

Although it's the scale length, nut width and 12- or 14-fret neck joins that historically differentiate the classic Martin 000 from the OM, the body sizes of the two styles of acoustic remain the same. This all-solid mahogany beauty netted our *Guitarist* Gold award back in issue 328, which says it all. There's a song or two in this one...



Martin OM-21 £1,899

With classic spruce/rosewood construction and slimmer Performance neck profile, here's an absolutely classic Martin that's updated for the modern player. This model was actually introduced back in 1992 as a result of player demand. Within two years, it was the biggest selling non-dreadnought in Martin's range. Go figure.

Larrivée OM-3 Silver Oak £1,199

Originally made in Canada, like Godin, and now built in California, Larrivée's guitars bridge a gap in the market between Taylor's modernism and Martin's classicism. Superbly made, this OM also features solid Silver Oak back and sides: which also happens to be Jean Larrivée's favourite tonewood. If you play one you'll find out why.

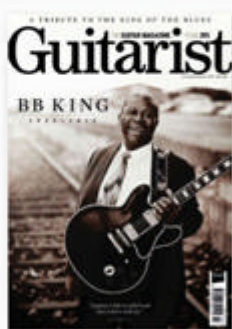
Collings OM1AV £5,699

If you've won the lottery, then step this way. This is one of the finest modern updates to the classic OM recipe that we've ever played. Collings' notorious attention to detail is second to none, and this one features an Adirondack spruce top paired with Honduran back and sides, creating a hugely dynamic guitar for life. And more...

Guitarist

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The Danelectro Cool Cat Drive is a good-looking, retro overdrive pedal that responds just like a valve amp would – low-end/mids increase with gain, saturating and fattening the overdrive. Knock back the drive, keep the volume up, and the sound cleans up to a driving rhythm sound that's good and solid for those nice crunching chords. Beside the usual controls, the Danelectro Cool Cat Drive has an Input Sensitivity trim pot that allows you to customise the drive to suit the output of your guitar – match it to single coil or humbucker output levels for optimum response. It also has a 'Lo Fi' DIP switch so that you can choose a second frequency range for an increasingly raw and unrefined drive tone.

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JHS Pedals

£145-£309

Not to be confused with the UK distributor, JHS Pedals is a purveyor of boutique effects from the US of A

WORDS **Trevor Curwen**

PHOTOGRAPHY **Simon Lees & Adam Gasson**

Based in Kansas City, Missouri, JHS Pedals is a US boutique company that has made rapid progress since its beginnings in 2007. Founder Josh Scott started out by repairing and modifying pedals, but his own designs soon followed, leading to a comprehensive range that are all handmade. Unusually, rather than running off expensive and lifespan-limited nine-volt batteries, all the pedals run off nine-volt adaptors (18 volts for the Colour Box) instead. They're also solidly constructed with robust footswitches and metal jack sockets. Let's meet the stompboxes...



JHS Colour Box

PRICE: £309

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Preamp pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Master, Pre-Vol, Step Gain, treble, middle, bass, Hi-Pass, Hi-Pass switch, -20dB pad switch, inst/XLR switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Combination input/XLR, output, XLR output

POWER: 18V DC adaptor (US adaptor supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 94 (w) x 119 (d) x 50mm (h)

Andertons

01483 456777

www.jhspedals.com

Many well-loved recorded tones have originated from a guitar being plugged directly into a mixing desk. Now, we're not talking any old mixing desk here, but something classy with a well-designed preamp and EQ section. Something like a vintage Neve console. The all-analogue Colour Box is based on vintage Neve circuitry and designed to deliver those direct-recorded tones. For cleans, it works brilliantly to give you a full sound that can be shaped by the three-band EQ, but driving a console has yielded many classic guitar sounds – the most celebrated likely being The Beatles' unruly *Revolution* tone. You can drive the preamp here for thickening and eventually that kind of fuzzy harmonic distortion... which could also be handy in front of an amp.

Verdict

Over £300 is a big outlay, but then this is no mere pedal. If you do a lot of recording with a variety of sounds, it is something you'll want to keep handy.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: A go-to tool for direct guitar recording



JHS Firefly

PRICE: £159

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, EQ, Bias, Fuzz, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 56 (w) x 109 (d) x 38mm (h)

The Firefly is a souped-up Tone Bender. More specifically, JHS says that it's a tribute to the three-knob MKIII from the late 60s and is based around a trio of hand-matched germanium AC128 transistors. Where the original had controls for Fuzz, volume and EQ, JHS has added a Bias knob to fine-tune the power to the transistors. All the knobs are interactive – tweaking one influences another – but it's the Fuzz and Bias knobs that are the real tone shapers. With the Fuzz knob fully clockwise, it's all smoothness and fatness, but wind it back and you'll lose the low and midrange body for a real trebly, sharp-edged ripping fuzz. The Bias knob lets you focus further, and turned clockwise, delivers a more edgy rasp. By juxtaposing the knobs, you get an extremely wide range of fuzz tones.

Verdict

If you're looking for a fuzz box but are worried about being stuck with one sound, the versatility here may solve your dilemma.

GUITARIST RATING

★★★★★

Guitarist says: Fine fuzz at your disposal in a variety of tasty flavours





<http://bit.ly/guitarist395>



JHS Charlie Brown

PRICE: £145

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, drive, presence, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (Not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 56 (w) x 109 (d) x 38mm (h)

The Marshall-in-a-box style of overdrive/distortion pedal is becoming a staple of many makers, and different companies opt to emulate different vintages of Marshall. JHS says that the Charlie Brown is voiced to replicate the tone of a mid-60s JTM45. There's plenty of output here to offer a useful boost to your amp from about midway on the volume knob and turning up the drive knob yields degrees of dirt from grittiness, through increasing levels of raunch to the full overdrive you'd get running an early Marshall at full whack, all usefully controlled with guitar volume. The tone knob covers a wide range that will get you in the right ballpark, but it's the presence knob that lets you fine tune the top end to complement your amp.

Verdict

This is a fine overdrive pedal anyway, but if you have a hankering after a Marshall tone, it can give your amp that overdrive/distortion voice with a distinctly British flavour.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Vintage Marshall-style mojo in a box



JHS Twin Twelve

PRICE: £149

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Drive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Volume, drive, bass, treble, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 56 (w) x 109 (d) x 38mm (h)

While the Charlie Brown is in a pretty crowded field, the Twin Twelve is perhaps the first pedal designed to replicate the sounds of a Silvertone. The Silvertone 1484 60-watt amp, produced between 1963 and 1967, has cult status owing to its use by the likes of Beck, Death Cab For Cutie, Jack White, Vampire Weekend and Coldplay. The Twin Twelve is designed to replicate the amp's preamp/overdrive tones, albeit without having to crank it like you would with the original non-master volume amp. While juxtaposition of the volume and drive knobs can give you clean boost, the magic lies at higher drive settings where the saturated harmonic character of the overdrive and its fuzzy edge comes to the fore.

Verdict

The Twin Twelve provides overdrive with a different flavour in front of your amp, but it's also a great standby for studio work where the sound of a different amp could make a track.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Garage-rock amp tones in handy stompbox form





JHS Alpine

PRICE: £199

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb pedal

FEATURES: Buffered bypass, trails (reverb dies away naturally when switched out)

CONTROLS: Reverb, Depth, Highs, Length, Shift, Bypass footswitch, Shift footswitch, internal dip switch for EFX loop mode

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output, EFX loop socket

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 119 (w) x 94 (d) x 30mm (h)

JHS seems to have been thinking about how people use reverb when designing the Alpine, as its two footswitches allow two levels of reverb to be instantly available: one set with the Reverb knob, the other by the Shift knob and brought in with the second footswitch. There's also an effects loop so you can insert another pedal to be used either with both channels or just the Shift channel. This opens the way to adding, say, a delay for huge ambiences or a pitch shifter for a 'shimmer reverb' effect. The reverb sounds excellent and is amply editable for size of the space, tone and length of tail so you can get a nicely versatile range of ambiences including spring reverb emulations.

Verdict

It's a nice-sounding reverb by anyone's reckoning, but it's the thoughtful design of the Shift channel and loop that makes it a practical choice for the player who wants to go from 'reverb as essential component of the sound' to 'reverb for effect' in an instant. Very cool!

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: A reverb pedal that makes practicality its priority



JHS The Emperor

PRICE: £219

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Chorus and vibrato pedal

FEATURES: True/buffered bypass (via internal switch)

CONTROLS: Volume, tone, speed, depth, chorus/vibrato switch, Waveform selector switch, tap tempo & bypass footswitches

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output (stereo possible using a TRS splitter cable), Tap/Expression socket

POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 119 (w) x 94 (d) x 30mm (h)

Using Bucket Brigade circuitry, The Emperor offers both chorus and vibrato, like a modern version of the Boss CE-1. Six different sounds can be called up by using two toggle switches: one chooses chorus or vibrato, the other offers a choice of three waveforms – sine, square wave or triangle. The modulation speed is controlled with a tap tempo footswitch on the fly, or with a standard speed knob. Alternately, you can connect a TRS Expression pedal for speed control or an external tap tempo pedal. Chorus tones are all that you could wish for, with sounds reminiscent of classic 80s pedals. The on/off square wave chorus is a bit of an odd one, but it can be effective if you set it in time with the music using tap tempo; likewise, the square wave vibrato. Pitch vibrato is more of an acquired case, but it makes some nice effects available, not least some fast shimmers.

Verdict

A very cool way to add chorus and vibrato to your pedalboard.

GUITARIST RATING



Guitarist says: Two analogue modulation types in a single box





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What you need to know about...

Reverb Pedals

Whether you want to sound like you're playing the Albert Hall, or you're after some 60s surf sounds, reverb helps you capture a real sense of space...

WHAT EXACTLY IS REVERB?

Reverb (shorthand for reverberation) is the sound of the environment you are in: the sound in a tiled bathroom will be different from that of the Albert Hall. It is created by sound waves bouncing off surfaces and all those reflections coming together to make a dense overall sound rather than distinct echoes. How this relates to guitar is that the sound coming from a guitar can be enhanced by some artificially created reverb to give it a sense of space, or make it more epic-sounding as notes linger in the air. The first reverb for guitar was provided by spring reverb, an electro-mechanical device that uses the vibrations of several springs suspended in a metal tray (the reverb tank or pan). With digital technology now allowing different types of real space to be simulated, digital reverb pedals are today's norm... although just about all of them offer simulation of the still-popular spring reverb sound.



HOW DOES REVERB DIFFER FROM DELAY?

While both delay and reverb pedals can do a similar job for your sound, the difference is that you can hear the individual repeats with a delay and set the time between them. However, with really short delay times you can dial in a sound where you won't be able to discern the individual repeats and get a metallic reverb-y sound, sometimes called bathtub reverb.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT SPRING REVERB?

Spring reverb has been associated with the electric guitar ever since Fender brought out a standalone spring reverb unit in 1961. Starting with the Vibroverb in 1963, the company incorporated reverb into their amps, where it's been ever since. That original unit has become indelibly associated with the reverb-drenched sound of surf music, but spring reverb can be subtle, too. There's something about the way a guitar interacts with a spring that differs from the sound of a specific space: there's a certain shimmer and twang.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER TYPES OF REVERB USED IN PEDALS?

Some are self-explanatory as they replicate sound in a particular size of space: room or hall, for example. Plate reverb is the type of reverb you get from an electro-mechanical device first seen in 1957 which has become a staple of many studio recordings, while chamber, similarly, is a studio reverb based on sound generated in a tiled space (a chamber). Reverse reverb puts the envelope back-to-front, and you'll also find reverb combined with modulation or pitch-shifting.



Reverb pedals

Fender '63 Tube Reverb £862

The king of spring

Fender's first reverb, the 6G15, is now available in as the '63 Tube Reverb.

Valve powered, the Tube Reverb sits between guitar and amp with a remote footswitch to turn the effect on and off. The Mix knob dials in the reverb, Dwell drives the springs harder, turning up the intensity/length of the reverb, while the tone knob takes the sound from dark to ultra-tinkly – all giving a great level of control. Those huge surf sounds are here, but you can tone them down for sounds to complement any guitar music.

Verdict

The real deal – a proper, classic spring reverb with all of its shimmering nuances.

Fender '63 Tube Reverb

PRICE: £862

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Valve-driven spring reverb

FEATURES: Brown Tolex covering

(Tweed also available), footswitch

CONTROLS: Dwell, Mix, tone

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: Mains power (captive lead)

DIMENSIONS: 479 (w) x 190 (d) x 267mm (h)

Fender GBI

01342 331700

www.fender.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The daddy of them all is still potent, even half a century on

Carl Martin Headroom £229



A real spring reverb for your pedalboard

The Headroom is about the size of two Big Muffs.

It runs from a nine-volt supply so it wouldn't be too obtrusive on a 'board, although you can also sit it on your amp and use remote footswitches. Two different reverb sounds (A and B) are offered, each with their own controls, plus selection and bypass footswitches. The spring pan is quite small, about the size you'd find in the smallest Fender amps, and delivers a similar reverb: not quite as expansive or dense as the '63 Tube Reverb.

Verdict

Two levels of real spring reverb are instantly available at the touch of a footswitch.

Carl Martin Headroom

PRICE: £229

ORIGIN: Denmark

TYPE: Spring reverb pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass,

CONTROLS: Tone A, level A, tone B,

level B, reverb select footswitch,

bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input,

standard output, remote bypass,

remote select

POWER: 9V DC from battery

(supplied) or adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 260 (w) x 140 (d) x 70mm (h)

First Line Distribution

01626 853876

www.carlmartin.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: This pedal sets the bar if you're looking for that vintage experience

Reverb pedals

Wampler Faux Spring Reverb £219

Digitally generated spring 'verb

Using a real spring is not always practical, so the Faux Spring is a digital pedal designed to deliver a faithful recreation of the sound. It features an all-analogue dry signal path, so your basic tone doesn't get messed with, and cloaks your sound with authentic spring-like ambience. The three knobs do pretty much the same as those on the Fender: shade is tone, depth is dwell, and the sound comes pretty close, too, albeit lacking some of the randomness of a real spring.

Verdict

If it has to be spring reverb and the real thing isn't doable, this may be as close as you'll come in a practical format.

Wampler Faux Spring Reverb

PRICE: £219

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass,

CONTROLS: Level, Depth, Shade, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V DC from adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 75 (w) x 125 (d) x 56mm (h)

First Line Distribution

01626 853876

www.wamplerpedals.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: As spring-like as you'll get in a small footprint

DigiTech Polara £109

Seven spatial sounds in one handy box

The newest pedal on test, the Polara works in the same vein as the previous HardWire RV-7. It boasts seven reverb types from associated Harman-owned company, Lexicon: the first name in studio reverb. Besides the reverb level, you get adjustable liveness (treble content) and decay (reverb length) and have a choice of whether the reverbs will linger naturally when you kick bypass in or be cut dead. Room, plate, hall, spring and reverse reverbs do the basics, but for some extra fairy dust, the halo adds shimmer, while modulated mixes in some swirl.

Verdict

An ideal, affordable pedalboard choice if you just want a variety of easily accessible 'verbs.

DigiTech Polara

PRICE: £109

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Digital reverb pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, 7 reverb types, Stomplock knob guard

CONTROLS: Level, liveliness, decay, reverb type selector, tails on/off switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard inputs (L and R), standard outputs (L and R)

POWER: 9V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 65 (w) x 110 (d) x 48mm (h)

Sound Technology

01462 480000

www.digitech.com



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A practical pedalboard reverb that balances versatility against affordability

Reverb pedals

Strymon Big Sky £429

Comprehensively spacey

If you just can't get enough reverb and you have the money to spend on the ultimate digital reverb pedal, the BigSky is a fantastic option. On board we have 12 different reverb types, from basic reverbs through to esoteric evolving ambiances, all with loads of parameter adjustment available. It's just as well, then, that you have 300 preset slots onboard to save your favourite edited sounds. These presets are all accessed from three footswitches that, in their most basic function, give you instant access to three sounds.

Verdict

It's a lot of anyone's money, but if you're serious about ambience and onstage control of it, it's the way to go.

Strymon Big Sky

PRICE: £429

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Digital reverb pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, 12 reverb types, 300 presets, software librarian
CONTROLS: Decay, pre-delay, mix, tone, Param1, Param2, mod, value, reverb type, cab filter on/off switch, 3x footswitches

CONNECTIONS: Standard input (L and R), standard output (L and R), expression pedal, MIDI in, MIDI out

POWER: 9V DC from supplied adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 171 (w) x 130 (d) x 68mm (h)

MusicPsych

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www.strymon.net



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: All the reverb sounds you'll ever need in a reasonably sized box

TC Electronic Hall Of Fame Mini £62

The answer when your 'board lacks space

TC's original HOF is fairly compact, but if your space is limited, the Mini could be a better bet, putting the same sounds in a much smaller footprint, albeit with much less hands-on tweakability. On the surface, it's as basic as it comes, with just one reverb sound and a single knob to turn it up. But the Mini is a TonePrint pedal, so you can load any reverb sound from TC's library or create your own with the TonePrint Editor. An analogue dry-through signal keeps the sound natural.

Verdict

How many reverb variations do you actually need onstage? A set-and-forget pedal like this could be ideal for many of us.

TC Electronic Hall Of Fame Mini

PRICE: £62

ORIGIN: Thailand

TYPE: Digital reverb pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, TC Toneprint-enabled

CONTROLS: Reverb, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output, USB (for Toneprint)

POWER: 9V DC from adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 50 (w) x 92 (d) x 45mm (h)

TC Electronic

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GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Spacey sounds for tight spaces



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Meet *your* maker

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If you've got top-flight guitars but cheap cabling, you may be throwing away half your tone. We meet Niall Holden of VDC trading – suppliers of Van Damme instrument cables – to learn how to unlock extra tone from your rig, and receive a step-by-step guide to building your own cables into the bargain...

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Chris Vinnicombe

It's a chilly day in London and we're sitting in the office of Niall Holden, which he shares with a vintage Vox AC30, a Charvel solidbody and a Gibson J-200. By his own admission, Niall says he set out to be a "rock God" like his hero Jimmy Page at the age of 10, but along the way, ended up supplying pro-grade cabling to artists such as Jeff Beck, Muse's Matt Bellamy and Coldplay, as well as PRS and Marshall. However, when Niall recalls how he started the business with bassist Marcus de Figueiredo back in the heady late 80s, you'd have to say it doesn't sound like the kind of launch that'd make a bank manager brim with confidence.

"We borrowed some money off the bank," Niall recalls. "So the first thing we did was go on holiday to Rhodes for three weeks. We were only going to go for two, but we had such a good time we thought, 'Oh, well, let's stay another week.' So then we came back and we bought some cars... and after that, we only had £128 left because we'd spent all this money," he laughs. "It's not what I'd recommend to any budding young business people, but we got away with it: the first invoice we did was for Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox," he adds, tellingly.

Since that hedonistic start, the company has become one of the biggest and most trusted names in the business, supplying a bewildering variety of pro-spec cables for everything from Abbey Road's nearfield monitors, to super yachts. All the same, Niall's heart is still in the world of guitar tone. He's an avid collector of vintage

guitars, and has 'Blackguard' Teles and '54 Strats in his enviable arsenal of instruments. So why should guitarists care about cable? And what makes the difference between a good cable and a great one, tonally? "I've got Chris Rea's '59 Esquire that he used on *The Road To Hell* on and *On The Beach*. It weighs five-and-a-half pounds and you get some volume on it, the whole guitar just comes alive," Niall says. "But if you start with the right tone, the last thing you want to do is plug it into a cable that's instantly going to start bleeding it away."

One of the key points for guitarists to take into account is capacitance, Niall says. Capacitance is the electronic phenomenon that sees increasing amounts of treble robbed from your tone as cable length increases, with curly 70s guitar leads being the classic culprit behind woolly tone. Increasing awareness of that problem has led to 'low capacitance' cables being marketed as a panacea for all your tonal ills.

Treble Trouble

However, it's actually more useful to weigh up what amount of capacitance suits your rig best. After all, if you have a treble-rich setup – as you might if you used a Fender Esquire with a 'Silverface' Fender Twin, for example – you might actually want a cable

that has relatively high capacitance to smooth some of the sibilant edge off those sharp high frequencies. This was the idea behind Van Damme's Silver Series cables, as used by Jeff Beck and Gary Moore, which come in three levels of capacitance to suit different guitars, as Niall explains.

"With something like a Strat, you might not necessarily want all the treble that's on tap, because it can be quite shrill. So actually, if you use that guitar with a high-capacitance cable rated at 125pf [picofarads are the standard unit of measurement for capacitance], it can sound rounded and fantastic, like instant Stevie Ray Vaughan. If you were to plug a Les Paul into that same cable, it wouldn't sound right at all, of course. But, conversely, if you use a low-capacitance cable – a 55pf cable – with your Les Paul, it will sound louder and more alive and you'll get more tone out of it. We also make one that's in the middle, with a 90pf capacitance – which, because we're from the North, we called the 'flat cap'."

Jacked Up

The other major points guitarists need to be aware of are the basic quality and structural integrity of their cabling. The apparent 'bling' of some cables with gold-plated jacks can be misleading, Niall argues.

"If you start with the right tone, the last thing you want to do is plug it into a cable that's instantly going to start bleeding it away" **Niall Holden**





"A lot of the cables you get down the market have these nasty jacks that are gold-plated. But it's microns thin, so the gold's not actually that good – it probably needs to be nickel. Neutriks [used alongside hefty Switchcraft jacks in Van Damme's range] are great – you can't really beat a Neutrik connector and especially the 'Silent' right-angle ones. They're about as good as it gets," Niall adds, referring to connectors that feature a spring-loaded sleeve that defeats the signal the moment it's unplugged from the guitar, thus preventing unwanted buzzes and pops from the trailing jack.

"And, of course, then you've got things like handle-ability – you've got to be able to coil it," he adds. "You don't want to be moving across a stage and find the cable is kinking because it's got 'memory'. He says the company's standard XKE instrument cables are designed to be easy to use and sound good in typical gigging and studio applications. But as you move into the realms of specialist high-performance cables, there are some handling trade-offs to consider. "With the low-capacitance cables, because of the physical nature of the design, it's quite a thick cable. That's why

"A lot of the cables you get down the market have these nasty jacks that are gold-plated. But it's microns thin, so the gold's not actually that good – it probably needs to be nickel" **Niall Holden**

we call it the Van Damme Silver Series 'session grade', because it's primarily designed for someone sitting in the studio, not someone like Angus Young running up and down the stage. So it's all about the play-off between supple handle-ability, coilability, and how they sound."

Damme Fine

But he acknowledges that many players like to decide exactly what that balance of attributes should be themselves, and to that end, Van Damme offers a free service that allows players to customise every detail of instrument cables ordered from the company's website.

However, while Van Damme puts a lot of research into optimising its cables' tonal qualities, Niall isn't personally convinced by

the merits of so-called 'directional' cabling for instruments – cables marketed as being designed to sound better with signal flowing in a specified direction from guitar to amp. Pete Cornish, Evidence Audio and other respected, high-end cable firms do make such cables, but Niall argues that it's more relevant to hi-fis than guitar rigs.

Speaking of high-end hi-fi gear, Niall acknowledges that the one-upmanship of the audiophile world can take people down some pretty exotic rabbit holes, where even the basic principle of getting maximum bang for your buck is rather turned on its head. "One of the biggest complaints that we get on hi-fi forums about Van Damme cabling is that it's not expensive enough!" he concludes, with a shrug. 

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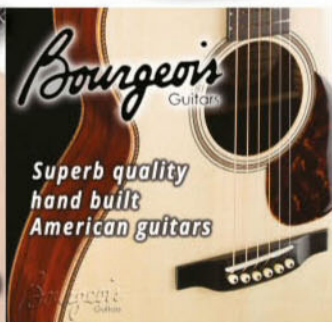


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Soldering On

We sat down with VDC Trading's production manager, Paul Marchesi, who gave us a step by step guide to soldering up an instrument cable accurately and securely

Inside the workshop where Van Damme cables are built to order, teams of technicians are busy amid the reek of solder and trays of components. The common instrument cable that connects guitar to amp is one of the simplest types that's made here, but there's still an art to doing it right.

"This is Van Damme classic instrument cable," says technical director Nick Chmara. "There are 10 different colours, but in the interests of being able to see what we're doing, we've picked a red one here. We've been evolving this cable since the company began," he adds, before handing over to production manager Paul Marchesi at the workbench, who has an assortment of tools and components at the ready to guide us through the process of building a cable. Here's how the pros do it...

1 Paul begins by showing us the basic set of components used in making a Van Damme cable. "This is the connector that we're putting onto the cable itself," he explains. "It's a Neutrik MP2X jack connector. It's a mono signal, so the insulating screen will connect to the sleeve of the connector and the [signal-carrying] 'hot' conductor will activate the tip of the connector. The black ring is an insulator between the two. There's also a boot [the plastic collar at the base of the connector jack] for strain relief."

2 "First of all, you put the boot on, because if you solder it up first and you've forgotten the boot, you'll have to take the connector off again to get it on. And then with the strain-relief component, you can either pull it on before or afterwards. Without that, anyone yanking on the cable is going to put the strain on the solder itself."

3 "Next, we strip back the outer jacket of the cable. We find using a craft knife is the best method. You only want to strip

back as much outer jacket as you really need: about a centimetre-and-a-half should be plenty. I hold the cable jacket between my finger and thumb and then apply a little bit of pressure with my finger on the back of the blade, rotating the cable at the same time. What you don't want to do is cut too deep and sever any of the strands of the screen," he explains, referring to the sleeve of braided wire that surrounds the core and shields it from electrical interference, which is connected to earth at each end of the cable by a solder joint to the connector's sleeve.

4 "I'm going to twist those strands of screening together, nice and tight, so you get a good connection [to earth]. The inner core, the 'hot', has got an outer, as well as an inner, sheath of insulation. So you want to strip that outer sheath away from the hot. You can strip it all the way back, but we leave a little bit showing for neatness' sake. I've really lightly scored it, and then you just pull it off."

5 "The twisted-together wires of the screen and the exposed 'hot' conductor are going to be staggered in length, because the screen wire – the earth – is going to be soldered here [points to the sleeve] and the hot is going to be soldered here [points to the terminal for connecting cable to jack]."

6 "The cable has a stranded centre-conductor, containing seven strands – three of silver-plated copper, four of ultra-pure, oxygen-free copper. And I'm using the correct-size stripper to remove the final layer of insulation, so we can solder the centre conductor to the connector."

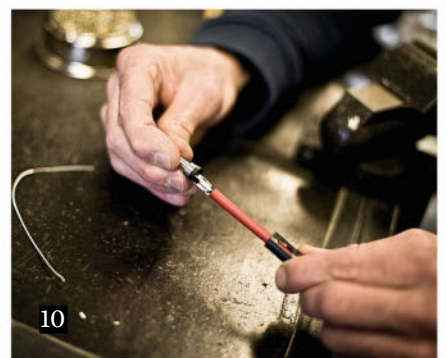
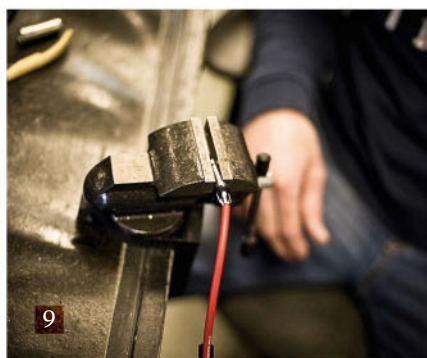
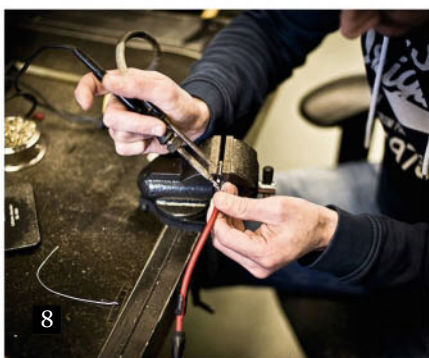
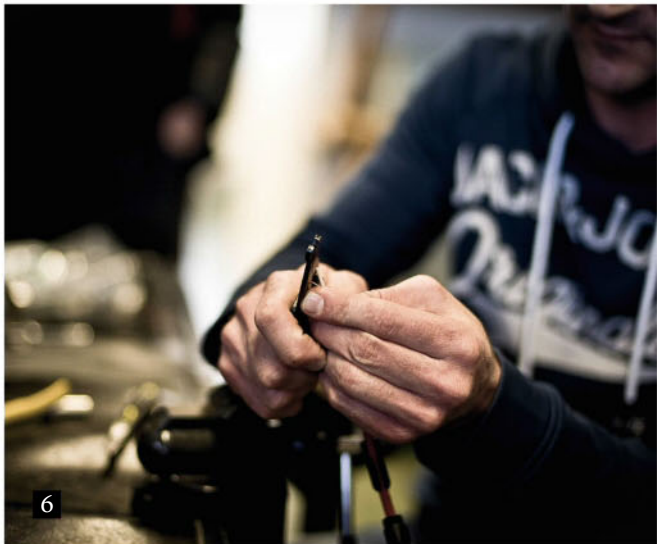
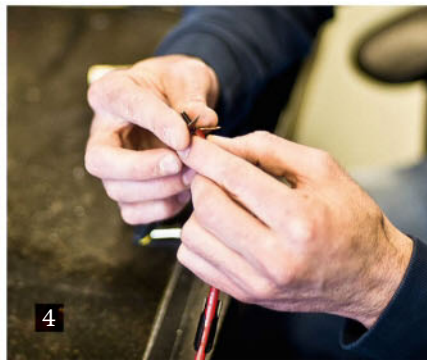
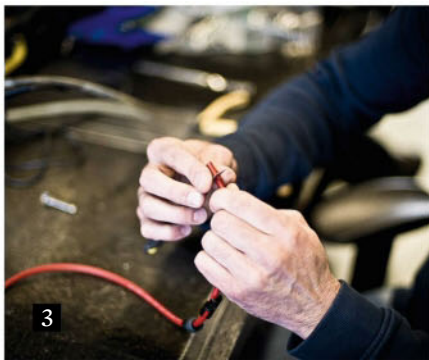
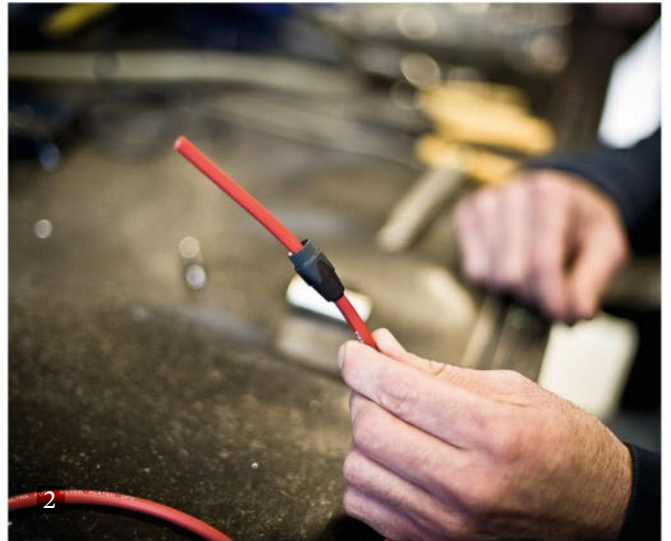
"You don't want to hold the iron on so long that there's shrink-back of the insulation, which opens up the potential for interference" **Paul Marchesi**

7 "Next, I need to 'tin up' the connector with solder and then tin the wires themselves," Paul explains, referring to the technique of applying a layer of solder to components prior making a solder joint. "Always make sure your soldering iron tip is free of old solder. We use metal mesh cleaners rather than a wet sponge, because a wet sponge tends to cool down the tip a bit. I've left some of the screen wire unsoldered to give it some flexibility. You don't want to go mad with the solder – you just need a nice little blob. And then when you solder the 'hot', you want to fill up the bucket [the terminal where the solder joint is made] with solder nicely, so there's no air gaps."

8 "So first, we solder the earth to the connector sleeve and we try and get the wire to lie nice and straight in place. And you can see I've got a nice shiny finish on the solder joint, rather than a misty-looking one, so it's nice and solid."

9 "Soldering the 'hot' centre-conductor correctly is all about timing and control. You want it to be a great joint but you don't want to hold it on so long that there's shrink-back of the insulation, which opens up the potential for interference and loss of signal."

10 "So now, we're gonna pull up the strain relief, everything's nice and straight and the shell will go over, making sure that the connector comes through fully. Then you pull your boot up and it pushes down on the parts of the strain relief and they bite down on the cable, keeping it secure." 



Daniel F., product manager

A man with dark, wet hair and a wide-eyed, shouting expression is shown in profile. He is wearing a black leather vest over a dark shirt. His left arm is heavily tattooed with colorful designs, including a large red and white flame-like motif. He is standing on a stage, and bright green spotlights illuminate the scene from above, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The background is a solid green color. The overall mood is energetic and intense.

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Quicktest

Laney L20T 212 combo £869

Boutique tone from the Black Country

CONTACT: Headstock Distribution PHONE: 0121 508 6666 WEB: www.laney.co.uk



VIDEO DEMO



<http://bit.ly/guitarist395>

Whenever someone mentions the words 'boutique guitar amp' to you, what location springs to mind? We'd bet it probably isn't Halesowen in the Midlands... Nevertheless, Laney's Lionheart series consistently surprises us every time we plug into one. The range continues to grow, with the recent addition of the L20T 212 combo, which uses four EL84s wired in parallel single-ended to provide around 20 watts. For this particular amp, Laney has returned to the 2x12 combo format with a twist: there are two different loudspeakers. Celestion's Vintage 30 and G1230H are sonically very

different, so having both in the same cabinet is a cool concept, giving players a choice of two distinct tones when mic'ing up.

Like all Lionheart amps, the L20T is built to a very high standard, with top quality PCB-mounted electronics, including a bespoke digital reverb. Laney's trademark toroidal mains transformer helps reduce pickup hum, keeping the audio as clean as possible. With two beefy 12-inch loudspeakers, you can probably guess the L20T is no lightweight, but a solid pair of grab handles make it less of a chore to cart around. There's also a handy built-in tilt bracket on the cabinet base.

Sounds

The L20T is remarkably quiet in operation, thanks partly to the doughnut-shaped mains transformer. The two-channel preamp features a shared EQ with separate volume controls and a gain knob on the drive channel. Another unique feature is the master tone control, sat right at the very end of the preamp, shaping the amp's response.

The clean sounds have a bell-like clarity, with a seductive chime that turns into an edgy bite as the volume rises. Meanwhile, the drive channel's wide-ranging gain control caters for most tastes, from

blues to classic rock and more. There's no particular bias to single coils or humbuckers – we tried a selection of different guitars and the L20T flattered them all, with a touch-sensitive vocal distortion that made it easy to pull out some authentic classic rock and blues tones, which can be aggressive or soulful with a twist of the master tone knob. The mix 'n' match loudspeaker idea works really well; each driver complements the other and no noticeable volume mismatch.

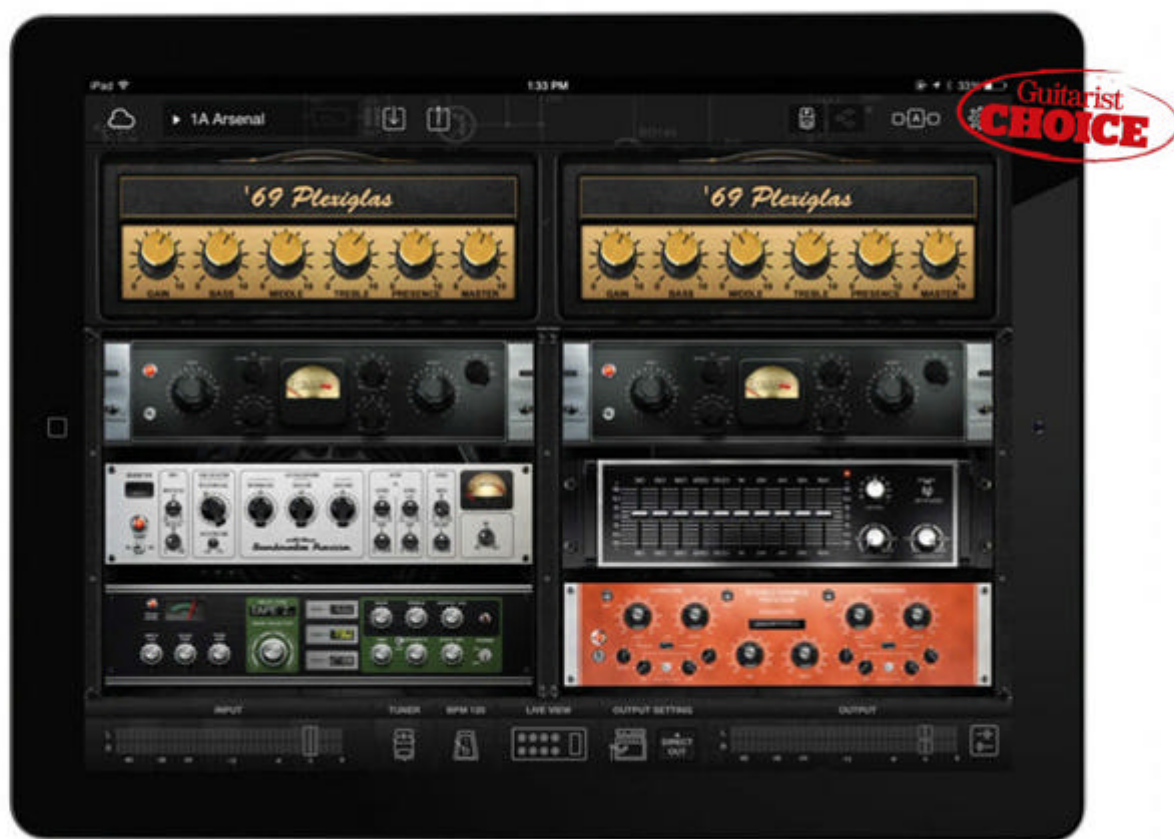
Verdict

The L20T is a serious boutique amp with more versatility than many and a price that's almost embarrassingly affordable. We can think of a few well-known competitors that cost three times as much, and are frankly struggling to keep up with the sonic excellence here. It's built like a tank, and should handle anything that pro touring can throw at it. The blue vinyl won't be to everyone's taste (perhaps Laney should offer a few limited-edition colour choices), but we can't fault anything else. If you're in the market for a big combo, check out the L20T – it's true boutique tone at a price that won't break the bank. **[NG]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: The colour scheme may be polarising but the sounds aren't: world-class tone at a very affordable price





Positive Grid Bias FX £22.99

Latest version of BIAS amp sim app adds effects

CONTACT: Positive Grid **PHONE:** N/A **WEB:** www.positivegrid.com

Positive Grid describes Bias FX as “the world’s first cross-platform, amp-and-effects processor”. While the plug-in version for computer DAWs is released later this year, for now, it’s the iPad version that has been released first, in a similar way to how the original Bias amp designer (now called Bias Amp) was rolled out.

Where Bias Amp offers amp simulation only, Bias FX in some ways has more in common with the company’s JamUp multi-effects processor, which has always offered amps and effects. However, the company says that this new app is a different beast, designed from the ground up with the emphasis on professional sound quality using its latest algorithms. Bias FX offers a full dual-path guitar signal chain derived from models of 12 amps,

25 effects pedals and five rack processors. There’s also full integration with Bias Amp, which means that you can import any Bias Amp amp models and move any of the 12 Bias FX amp models over to Bias Amp for the detailed editing/amp building that it offers. Bias FX also features Inter App Audio compatibility, which will let you insert other IAA apps in any place in your Bias FX signal path, creating more complex tones.

In Use

Using very clear and detailed graphics, Bias FX offers two main viewing options: one showing the signal path, the other a pedalboard. It’s easy to move pedals and amps around and add/delete them from the signal path with drag-and-drop moves. Adjustment of any

parameters is easily carried out by tapping on any pedal to maximise its size and then just swiping your finger along to move the knobs. Dual signal paths with two amps running in parallel are easily set up with a ‘Splitter’ modules at one end of the parallel path and a ‘Mixer’ at the other to set up wide stereo sound if desired.

Your sounds are stored as presets in banks of 32 and you get one factory preset bank and any amount of user banks. The content of those banks can be expanded by taking advantage of Positive Grid’s ToneCloud, an ever-expanding user library of edited virtual pedalboard rigs to be shared. Using headphones for practice or recording (with Bias FX inserted into a DAW app) is an obvious role, but there are various options to optimise the output sound to suit a guitar

or power amp. This makes live use a possibility, especially as there’s MIDI control and a Live View mode for recalling presets and toggling effects with a single tap.

Verdict

With a nice variety of amps and just about all effects genres represented with some based on classic pedals, Bias FX gives you a great set of tonal options if you want to get into iPad-based guitar playing/recording. For those who may have already bought Bias Amp, it’s a very practical Bias add-on, bringing a complementary set of effects for a fuller tonal palette. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Quality amp and effects app for your iPad that’s packed with tonal options

Cordoba Mini O £233

When you don't have room for a full-size nylon-string guitar, you need a Mini...

CONTACT: Selectron UK **PHONE:** 01795 419460 **WEB:** www.cordobaguitars.com

You don't need to be a guitar enthusiast to see the current and still-building popularity in small guitars. Some might have four strings – ukes, tenors, cavaquinhos and the like – but many, helped by Ed Sheeran, Taylor Swift et al, have six. It seems like the 'mini' guitar is becoming just as 'in' as the nano-sized pedal phenomenon.

We recently looked at USA-brand Cordoba's uke-meets-classical six-string Guilele, and earlier this year the company took the wraps off of the Mini in three acoustic-only solid top/laminate back and sides versions: spruce/mahogany (Mini M, £167), spruce/rosewood (Mini R, £208), and, here, ovankol. While the Guilele has a 435mm (17.125-inch) scale length and nut/saddle widths of 46mm/50mm (pretty cramped, in other words), the Mini shoots with a longer 510mm (20-inch) scale and nut/saddle widths of 50mm/63mm. With that comes a larger, non-cutaway body, mahogany neck, and flat classic-style rosewood fingerboard – the neck joins the body at the 14th fret, not the classical position of the 12th.

Equally unusual is the use of a steel-string like pin bridge, rather than classic style tie-block bridge that requires you to knot the end of the string before fitting. You could use nylon strings with bullet ends, but that's not commonplace. Incidentally, the Mini comes factory fitted with Aquila 96C strings featuring 'Nylgut' trebles, a white synthetic gut.

Cordoba's Chinese build quality is pin-sharp and this lil' Mini is no different, not least the understanding of a classical style neck shape – 'U' shaped, intended for thumb-behind

classical-style positions. The thin matt finish is beautifully applied, too. The black bound edges are left rather sharp and the bone saddle leans forward slightly, but it's not only well-crafted but good looking, too.

Sounds

While the Mini can be tuned to standard pitch, on a scale that's so reduced from the typical classical scale of 650mm (25.6 inches), things are relatively floppy but far from unplayable. In the factory-designed A to A tuning, however, things feel remarkably classical-like, and the wider spacing makes it surprisingly easy to fret. There's reasonable projection, too, but it's as a practice tool or even a songwriting partner that the Mini feels a lot more 'serious' than many smaller instruments. Of the three Minis, the O veers on the uke side, with more 'plunk' to the tonality, while the spruce-topped R and M give a more classical voice, which we suspect would record rather nicely, too, especially with these Aquila strings.

Verdict

It's not the most compact 'travel' guitar out there, but it is a more-than-usable practice instrument tuned to standard pitch, thanks to the near full-size neck width and string spacing. When it's up-tuned as designed, it also makes a great accompaniment to a standard-tuned guitar, albeit veering into the uke tonality – which could be a good or bad thing depending on your taste. **[DB]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: A quality mini classical travel guitar. Now, can we get a cutaway electro version?



IK Multimedia iRig 2 £34.99

Easy mobile guitar connectivity

CONTACT: IK Multimedia PHONE: N/A WEB: www.ikmultimedia.com

When the original iRig was introduced in 2010, it was one of the first interfaces to allow guitar players to plug into an iOS device, connecting via the iPhone or iPad's headphone socket and offering its own mini-jack headphone socket for monitoring. This new version still plugs into the headphone socket of your device (iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, Mac or Samsung Professional Audio compatible Android device) and offers its own headphone socket, but it adds a useful full-size jack output complete with an FX/Thru switch that lets you select the dry sound or the sound through your app to send

to an amp, monitoring system or maybe a tuner. Also new is a knob to control input gain, plus a belt clip and Velcro loop so that you can attach the iRig 2 to a microphone stand.

In Use

A plug-in-and-play device, the iRig 2 is easy to use. We tried it with the included AmpliTube Free software, but also several other apps including GarageBand and BIAS. Overall, it works well at getting sound in and out of your device, but you have to be a little careful when using high-gain amp sim apps because it's easy to conjure up howl-around feedback.



Verdict

You won't get quite the quality of sound that you would from an interface that doesn't plug into the headphone jack (such as IK's own £89 iRig HD), but this is a decent budget buy. [TC]

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Cheap and cheerful no-brainer plug-in-and-play unit, just add headphones

Fishman Platinum Stage Analog Preamp £139

Need onstage DI and EQ for your acoustic guitar or bass? Call Fishman

CONTACT: JHS PHONE: 01132 865381 WEB: www.fishman.com

As good as Fishman's Platinum Pro EQ/DI is, at £289 it's a serious investment. At just less than half that price, this Platinum Stage Analog Preamp is a viable alternative, especially if you don't need the tuner or compressor of the larger unit. With its smaller footprint (143mm x 85mm x 30mm), it can be placed in your pocket or on your belt. The base of the unit has a belt-clip but also a rubber surround, so if you place it on flat surface, it's level.

The front face sports a guitar/bass mode switch and five low-profile rotary controls for volume, treble, bass, mid and

mid-frequency. Around the edges there are phase, DI pre/post and low cut (40Hz, 80Hz or 160Hz) switches, plus input trim, power adaptor in (it can be phantom or battery powered), in and out jacks, XLR DI out, and input clip/low battery indicator. Finally, on the left edge of the unit is a large push switch to engage boost, with a flush roller control to adjust its level from 3dB to 12dB.

Sounds

Its small size and numerous edge-placed switches mean you'll probably need to set it up prior to gig time. If you're going

for on-body placement you'll be battery or phantom powered, and where you place it is crucial if you need to engage that level boost.

Verdict

Placement and setup aside, it all works superbly, delivering a very clean signal to a PA and/or acoustic amp. Not least with its phase switch and sweepable midrange, it could be life-saver, especially on those gigs that require fast setup and no soundcheck. [DB]



GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Portably sized and well-spec'd EQ/DI that's ideal for the stage musician


<http://bit.ly/guitarist395>

TC Electronic Viscous Vibe & Helix Phaser

£99 each



Vintage modulation for today

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

TC is taking its inspiration from the past with its latest pair of pedals: the Viscous Vibe is designed to deliver distinctive Uni-Vibe tones, while the Helix phaser offers a more broader range of phasing. They might have sounds that were originally minted in the late 60s and early 70s, but these new pedals are decidedly 2015, with the modern accoutrements of true bypass, analogue dry through signal, choice of stereo or mono operation and, of course, TC's TonePrint facility. This means that you can load each pedal with a custom-made tone, either by TC and its roster of artists, or yourself by using the TonePrint editor software.

Sounds

Described by TC as a 1:1 digital recreation of the legendary Shin-Ei Uni-Vibe, the Viscous Vibe offers both of the selectable options found on the original (chorus and vibrato) via a three-way switch, as well as whatever TonePrint you have loaded into it. There are small knobs to set the intensity of the effect and the output volume, but a nice touch is the large Speed knob that stands proud of the rest, allowing you to adjust it with your foot. Sound-wise, TC has got it just right with those familiar vintage Uni-Vibe tones.

The Helix Phaser has three sonic options: besides the TonePrint sound, you have a choice of Vintage or Smooth phasing. Speed and Depth knobs shape the basic effect, Feedback knob turns up the resonance, and a Mix control adds just a frisson of phase shifting to your dry sound, or gives you 100 per cent. If your

previous phaser experience is with the classic 70s single-knob pair of the MXR Phase 90 and EHX Small Stone, you'll find a lot more to play with here, but careful positioning of these knobs will get you very close to the sound of both those two. You can dial in plenty of vintage phasing, too, like EVH's sound on *Eruption*. The Helix goes beyond those classic sounds, not least by filtering in a little metallic weirdness with the Feedback knob.

At the time of writing, TC had no available TonePrints for either pedal, and neither were they recognised by the editor software, but this will no doubt be sorted shortly, opening the way to exactly tailoring the sound to suit your purposes.

Verdict

As long as there are Hendrix and Trower fans out there, there will be demand for Uni-Vibe tones. Likewise, the phaser remains popular, not least for those who wish to recreate classic rock tones. So, how do these two stack up? Extremely well, we'd say, as both are big on the twin virtues of practicality and versatility. These pedals are 'board- and wallet-friendly, and they can nail the vintage tones, but it's the open-ended nature of the TonePrint facility that gives them an edge over their more conventional rivals. The familiar vintage-like tones are here, but you will always have a creative alternative. **[TC]**

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★

Guitarist says: Vintage sounds in a practical package with plenty of potential for sonic creativity





Laney A1+
Rob Laing



**Gibson Custom CC #18 1960
Les Paul 'Dutchburst'**
Neville Marten



**Strymon
BigSky**
Gary Walker

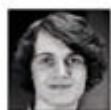
Longtermers

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

Matrix Elements Vintage British 800

Michael Brown

NEW PRODUCT Our deputy reviews editor is after a lightweight rig to take to weekly gigs: enter the Matrix



There are many things I love about living in a city centre, but a lack of

affordable parking is not one of them, which has resulted in my living without a car for the past few years – and playing live does not lend itself especially well to public transport. Nonetheless, my covers band has established

enough of a reputation for our consistently entertaining live shows, or at least our willingness to play for relatively small fees, to land a weekly residency. And via an incredible stroke of luck, the venue is a mere 0.2 miles around the corner from my humble abode.

My dilemma is thus: the distance is too short to hassle my

bandmates for a lift every week, yet too far to make lugging my usual 20kg Laney valve combo anything other than an absolute backbreaker – especially at midnight after two-and-a-half hours of playing and a full day's work. Fortunately, not long into these sciatica-inducing tests of endurance, the Matrix Vintage British 800 and Neolight NL12

cab burst into this fair organ's reviews section, and a solution presented itself.

Weighing in at 1.8kg and 7.7kg respectively, this is a rig I can plausibly lug back and forth down the road with relative ease. The VB800's 150-watt power rating means there should be ample clean headroom for my drive pedals, and while I hesitated a little at the lack of a valve power amp, I was barely turning my Laney 30-watter past one on the volume knob, anyway. So, it's with high hopes and a considerably lighter load that I head out to the first of my Matrix-fuelled gigs...



Matrix Elements Vintage British 800



First reviewed: 390

Price: £549 (NL12 cab, £336)

Type: Valve preamp, solid-state power amp and rectifier

Output: 150w into 16 ohms, 300w (8 ohms), 420w (4 ohms)

Valves: 2x 12AX7

Dimensions: 80 (h) x 304 (w) x 185mm (d)

Weight (kg/lb): 1.8/4

Matrix Amplification

0845 108 5449

www.matrixamplification.com



**Fender Road Worn
'60s Jazzmaster**
Josh Gardner



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



**Victory V40H
The Duchess Head**
Jamie Dickson



Laney A1+

Rob Laing

INTERMEDIATE Our acoustic-amp newcomer has had his headstock turned by Laney



In my first report, I explained how I was entering uncharted waters as far as acoustic combos were concerned. Wading in due to the necessity of needing to be heard, and needing to hear myself in an acoustic band with a rock drummer and second guitarist who alternates between Weissenborn lap steel and six-string. But it wasn't long after plugging my Taylor GS Mini into the A1+ in our cramped rehearsal space that I started to realise what I'd been missing.

As I began experimenting with the gain, three-band EQ and the

parametric mid and tone shape controls, I started to discover a vitality and earthiness to my sound that just wasn't getting through before. And the subtle but consistent ringing mid feedback I'd been hearing in some chord positions with the GS Mini was gone. My tone sounded more reflective of my guitar than it had ever done. Even the rhythm section's heads were turned.

I run the Taylor with a Takamine Tri-ax soundhole pickup (essentially a Takamine-branded LR Baggs M1 with active and passive options) through a small pedalboard, including a Fishman Spectrum Aura. This was

previously my main source of EQ control on the fly, but also offers a choice of 'sound images' (that are based on mic'd acoustics) to dial in a more organic element to the sound and smooth out piezo 'zing'. I began to appreciate its advantages more when paired with the A1+: the sensitivity of the sound image's presence was noticeably enhanced. I'm still getting over the shock that an acoustic combo could be this, er, exciting. So the next stage in this Laney liaison is to take it out into the wild for the real test, a gig, and maybe even try the direct-out XLR connection for some live band recording. Stay tuned.

Laney A1+



First reviewed: 389

Price: £279

Type: Acoustic guitar combo amplifier with kick-back cabinet

Output: 80 watts RMS into 8" bass driver and 1" dome tweeter

Channels: 2x identical instrument/mic w/bass, mid sweep, treble EQ. 16 preset digital effects

Dimensions: 348 (h) x 387 (w) x 312mm (d)

Weight (kg/lb): 12.5/27.5

Headstock Distribution

0121 508 6666

www.laney.co.uk



Strymon BigSky

Gary Walker

FINAL REPORT Is it good night to the BigSky, or will this costly love affair endure?



Four months have passed since the BigSky assumed pride of place on my pedalboard, and rigorous testing at home and in rehearsals has led to what was probably always an inevitable conclusion: I'm going to have to buy one. I've put the Strymon through its paces with some home recording, running my Fender Starcaster via an M-Audio Fast Track interface into Pro Tools. As in the rehearsal room, its enormous textures, high-definition clean sounds and feature-packed usability saw the BigSky stamp its name all over our fledgling demos. The cab

clone output, too, proved useful, eliminating the need to lug my Line 6 DT25 stack to the studio.

Back in the practice room, with Gun Vs Head now expanded to a five-piece, I've been liberated from restrictive rhythm duties, giving me freedom to deploy the BigSky's Swell setting for glacial lead lines. As an experiment, our new strings-and-keyboard player plugged her LR Baggs pickup-fitted violin into the BigSky. She selected the Cloud algorithm, and the results were enough to reduce the rest of us to a moment of misty-eyed silence. Perhaps one BigSky isn't enough for this band?

So, to the elephant in the room. Is the BigSky worth £429? Can I afford it? Does anything else do the same job, or at least come close enough? The short answers are respectively yes, probably not... and no. The final realisation that the BigSky is irreplaceable came during a run-through of a new song, as crystalline arpeggiated notes pierced through the heady noise filling the room. It, simply, is 'my sound'. However, such is the nature of the perpetual process of gear improvement, that while the Strymon has completed my pedalboard, and I'm happy with my Starcaster and a humbucker-

equipped Tele as backup, the critical spotlight now falls on the Line 6 amp. Can this humble modelling amp deliver the necessary headroom and clean volume to convey the Strymon's strident beauty in the live arena? I'm not convinced, so an upgrade is on the cards. Now, what price is a Fender Twin? Arrgh!

Strymon BigSky



First reviewed: 377

Price: £429

Type: Digital reverb stompbox

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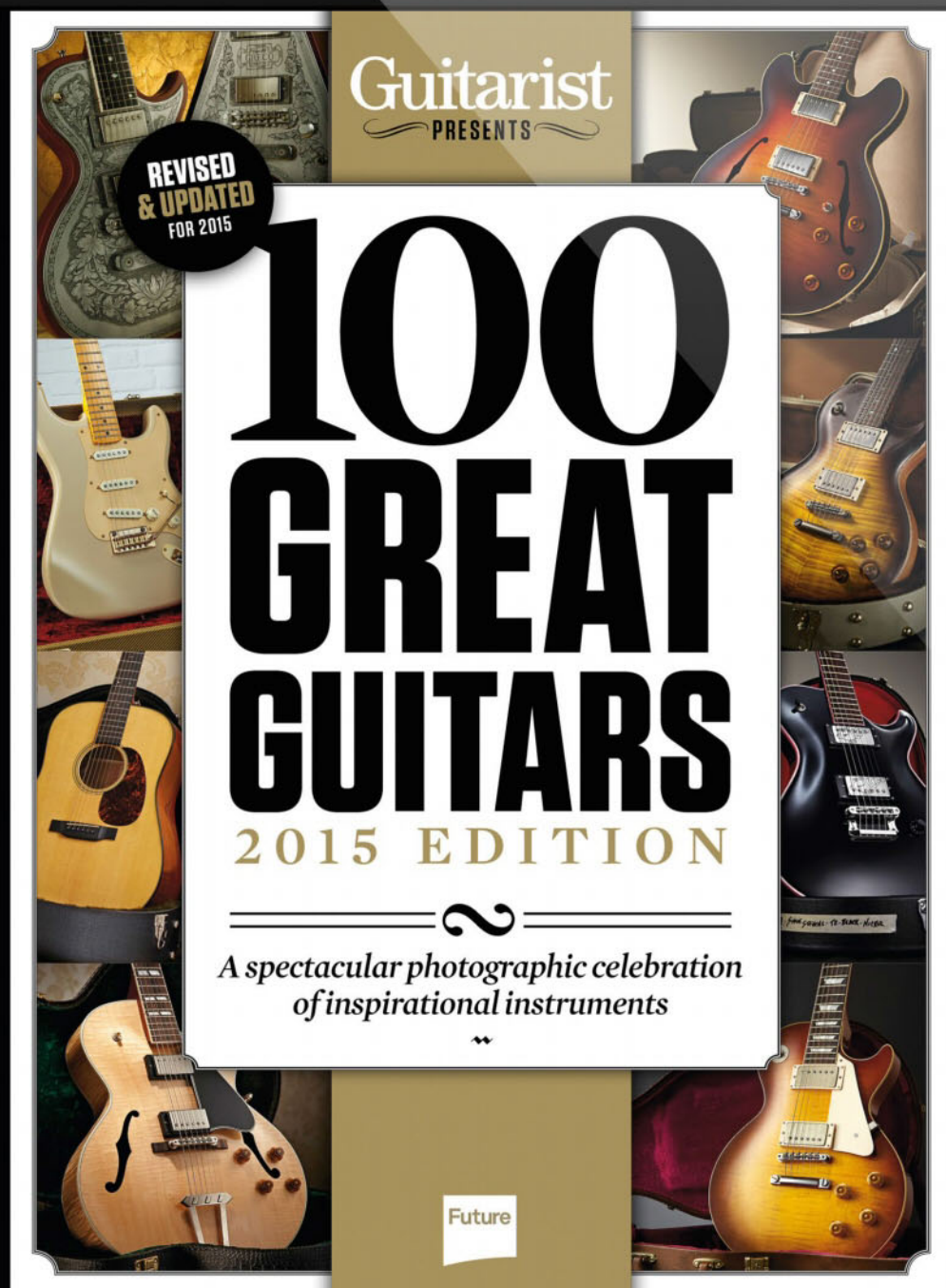
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Collings I35 Deluxe



Guitarist
PRESENTS



New updated and revised 2015 edition,
available now in print and via the App Store



Coils, dummies, plugs and using two at once are just some of the topics in the month's 50 shades of Q&A...

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 fettle six-string.



Mick Taylor

ex-editor of *Guitarist*, has wielded Allen keys, screwdrivers and sandpaper and from an early age; he also has a worrying obsession with pedalboards.



Neville Marten

edited *Guitarist* for 13 years, after working for both

Fender and Gibson as a repairer. From desirable Les Pauls to dream Strats, he's owned and worked on the lot.



Nick Guppy

is *Guitarist's* amp specialist with a wealth of experience gained from

collecting, repairing and restoring all kinds of guitar-related audio.

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com or write in to *Guitarist* magazine, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. If you can include photographs of the problem area, so much the better!



Has Denis come up with a simple way to solve Les Paul intonation problems?

Can't get no intonation

I'm surprised that a company such as Gibson has failed to address the problem that affects virtually every Les Paul I have set up (I am a guitar setup tech). Intonation! The bridge doesn't allow enough saddle movement to be able to intonate the G and bottom E, and one has to remove the saddle and turn it around to achieve it. This could be solved by simply placing the bridge 3mm further away from the neck. It would cost Gibson nothing, other than resetting the jig. What do you think?

Denis Robinson, via email

Hmm, presumably then the first string placement would be too long for certain gauge strings, Denis? Also, the

Nashville Tune-o-matic variant has more saddle travel than the vintage ABR-1 type, so alleviates the problem you're describing somewhat. Turning some saddles around seems like a good compromise and has worked to get guitars accurately intonated since the 50s – numerous wrongly positioned 70s bridges notwithstanding! Other opinions will be very welcome on this...

Coils for dummies

I'm thinking of fitting a dummy single-coil pickup inside my Strats to buck the hum. I obviously need a reverse-wound pickup, but do I need to have it wired straight to the input jack or wired into the pickup circuit some way?

Lee Ruscoe, via email

Interesting idea, Lee, and for anyone unfamiliar with this, it's what Thomas Blug (among others) does in his Strats and Strat-style guitars, not least his beloved original '61 model. You have an additional single coil wired in series with your other pickups under the pickguard for the sole purpose of hum cancellation, similar to how it works in a 'normal' full-size humbucker. The big difference is that the extra coil is mounted away from the strings, and has no magnets so it can't create any sound. Just like in a 'normal' humbucker, the dummy coil needs to be reverse wound (RW) relative to the other coils, as you say. Reverse polarity (RP, important in humbucking pickups) is not an issue because the magnets are gone.

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com or write in to *Guitarist* magazine, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. If you can include photographs of the problem area, so much the better!

What Should I Buy

Rockin' Mid Price S-type

Q This may well appeal to many readers of a certain 'vintage'. For the most part I play 'normal' rock and blues, everything from a bit of 60s-type Stones and Hendrix through to Gary Moore, Lizzy and on to Whitesnake and American rock. Lately, I've been finding myself drawn to the flamboyant end of rock, remembering Van Halen and DLR's *Eat 'Em And Smile* especially. So I'm after a Stratocaster or similar that's beefed up at the bridge pickup and, yes, has a double locking whammy. Maybe even a reverse headstock. What would you choose, £500 to £700 ish?

Mark Hammond, via email

A Mark, you're not alone. Even the most mild-mannered *Guitarist* staff and alumni can often be found pining for divebombs, pinched harmonics, spandex and wind machines. Ability notwithstanding. Ahem. There's something vaguely animalistic about a modded Strat; we think they have more personality and attitude than many overtly stylised modern rock axes. So option one might be to get a Squier or Mexican Fender and take a chisel to it in the spirit of Edward. Floyd, humbucker, erm, nails... If you can't be bothered with all that, however, try these...



2. Chapman ML-1 Hot Rod £529

This is a recent name on the block, the brainchild of internet star and Dorje guitarist, Rob Chapman. The ML-1 Hot Rod uses a swamp ash body with a bolt-on maple neck and rosewood fingerboard. Oil finish, Seymour Duncan JB Trembucker, Floyd Rose silly bar. Oh, and a reverse headstock!



3. Charvel Pro Mod SC-1 HH £754

Something would be entirely wrong had we not mentioned Charvel, it being the brand of Vai's seminal *Green Meanie*. This is close-ish, featuring an alder body, bolt-on maple neck, compound radius 'board, Floyd Rose and a brace of Seymour Duncan humbuckers. Slime Green does it for us every time.



1. EVH Tribute Striped Guitar £682

Why not go straight for the jugular with this cost-effective rocker inspired by Edward Van Halen's *Frankenstein*? Basswood body, maple neck, no tone control or other pickups to get in the way – just turn it up to 12 and rock. You do get a handy D-Tuna for the sixth string, however.



The HumDinger will sort your twin-amp issues

Now, anyone who's still awake at this point will have spotted that a dummy coil won't work in all positions on a RWRP pickup set. That's because the middle pickup in a Stratocaster is already RWRP with the neck and bridge.

As for the dummy coil itself, ideally it will have relatively low resistance so that it has a minimal effect on tone. Consensus of opinion suggests around 1k, which may mean unwinding the coil somewhat. Much more than that and you'll experience a loss of the glassy, airy high end that's so fundamental to the classic Stratocaster tone. For many people, that's no problem at all, of course!

As for wiring it in, a quick Google search will return the most popular approaches. A common one is with the coil in series across the volume pot hot input lug and the pickup switch. That also enables you to add a switch to turn it on and off as required, such as a push-pull on one of the tone pots.

Which wire is which on the dummy coil? You'll find out when you wire it in and test for noise – if it creates more noise than before, swap the wires. It's as simple as that, but clearly, do this before you put it all back together and string up.

We'll conclude by saying that a lot of people pooh-pooh the whole dummy coil thing, and point to other solutions such as stacked single-coil pickups and the Suhr or Lindy Fralin backplate-mounted approaches. If you have the inclination, though, and you're happy modifying your guitar, it's a good learning experience to give it a go. Good luck.

Jonny Two Amps

I am considering using two valve guitar amps together to get a bigger, more full sound. I notice that many famous players that I admire do this – people like Stevie Ray Vaughan, Philip Sayce, John Mayer and Mr Bonamassa. I'd like to ask, what are the main advantages and pitfalls of using two or more amps together, and what should I look out for? My two amps are a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe and a Marshall Class 5 combo.

Jonny One Amp via email

Do it, Jonny! You have a bit of a volume mismatch between the Hot Rod Deluxe and the Class 5, but that all depends on how loud you play. There are various ways to use two amps – stereo is perhaps the most common – but the players you mention are essentially using each amp in mono to do what



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it's best at, and not have to compromise on that. So in Bonamassa's case, he tends to use a slightly more mid-scooped, Marshall-type overdriven tone as the base of everything, then switch in a more mid-humped, shall we say 'boutique' drive tone on top for lead tones. SRV at his most amp-excessive was doing a similar thing with various combinations of Fender Vibroverbs, Super Reverbs, Dumbles and (gulp) a 200-watt Marshall Major!

The potential benefits are wonderfully massive and full tones, being heard clearly in solos, and having the exact textures and feels you want for different gain levels and volumes. The downsides are the logistics of carrying all that gear around, getting the two amps matched, dealing with excessive volume and, more prosaically, phase cancellation and ground loop hum.

The last two are the main things to watch out for: phase is simply a matter of making sure each amp's speakers are moving in and out on the same phase; ground loop hum can be eliminated by making sure one amp is electrically isolated from the other. There are various devices that deal with both issues, at the simplest something like the Humdinger from TheGigRig. If you want to add A/B/Y switching into the equation, look at the Radial BigShot ABY or Lehle Little Dual. As we said at the top: do it!

Noiseless nonsense

I read your previous issue with great interest, containing the write-up on the new Fishman Fluence pickups [issue 394] and also the accompanying demonstration on YouTube. Over the years, I've searched for a solution to the Stratocaster single-coil hum problem, and while it's true that getting rid of the hum seems to be easy part, making the pickups sound and feel exactly like vintage units seems to evade the various designers. My question is

perhaps politically difficult for you, but what is your opinion of noiseless single coils? I'm not asking for the benefits; I'm asking if any of *Guitarist*'s writers actually use them, and if so, which ones?

Geoff Atkins via email

You asked, so we'll ask...

Neville Marten: "I've never really understood the fuss about noiseless pickups. I've played on big stages under all kinds of lights with all kinds of Strats for the last 30-plus years, and if I have a hum problem, I just move, or use the guitar's volume pot to turn down when I'm not playing. You can't hear the buzz when you're playing, so no, I don't use them."

Dave Burrluck: "'Noiseless', 'active', 'ceramic', etc, are all emotive words, but the question really should be: Do you like your sound and does it work for you? Yes, I have a Strat with DiMarzio Area 58 and Area 61 pickups that are hum-cancelling. It sounds like a good Strat to me, especially when swapping to and from a twin-humbucker guitar. At a gig with some odd 'stage' lights, I was the only one that wasn't humming. Weird that!"

Mick Taylor: "I grew up with noisy single coils and it's just become second nature to deal with it, with physical position and the guitar's volume pot. Everything about the way I play and the gear I use has evolved around vintage-style Strat pickups and while I've heard some good noiseless units, nothing has moved me like the best of the vintage-style pups. It might be all in the head, but I'm long past trying to argue with my brain."

Stereo no-no?

Since the 1990s I've played my Ibanez JEM 7V through a Peavey Transflex Pro head with two Marshall 4x12 cabs, or one stereo cab if a small venue. I need the full stereo as I use a Boss RPD-10 to recreate Brian May's *Brighton Rock* solo, which is a stage speciality of mine. My problem is



that I know this amp won't last forever and I need a replacement. I cannot, however find any stereo head or combo with stereo sends and stereo returns into separate channels. My only thought is two separate amps and hope the footswitch will be able to operate them both simultaneously to change channels.

My Transflex has been fantastic, but the card reader is faulty and Peavey no longer keep any parts for it, and I panic before every gig now so I think the time has come to retire the Peavey to the studio. Any ideas please?

Ken Stuart, Barnsley

Interesting dilemma, Ken, as stereo guitar amps with stereo effects loops are very thin on the ground as you say. One option would be to look at the Fractal Audio Axe-Fx, which has a stereo effects loop. You'd have to get a separate stereo power amp as well, of course.

Another option would be to run two heads and have their switching – and all your effects switching to boot – controlled by an external switching device. The current king of the switchers is TheGigRig G2. It does MIDI, it does pedal loops, it does amp switching, stereo, etc. It's modular and can grow and change whenever you need it. One switch, all the changes: bliss.

If that's too much of an investment, you could get a simple footswitch made up for next to nothing that would enable you to change channels on two amps easily, even if it were just two switches very close together so you could hit them with one foot stomp.

Stopping popping

When I change guitars during my band's set, I have the annoying problem of the noise it makes when unplugging one guitar and plugging the other one in. I could walk over to my amp, turn it down and make the change, but we try to do it as quickly as possible, while the singer is doing the banter with the crowd. Do you have any simple solutions to this, or have you tried any of the silent plug leads?

Phil Vickers, via email

The easiest solution and the most useful addition to your rig would be a pedal tuner, Phil, such as the Boss TU-3, Korg Pitchblack or TC Electronic PolyTune. Step on it, and it'll mute the signal, enabling you to make silent changes. You'll also be able to quickly check tuning before you un-mute.

As for cables, the Neutrik Silent Plug is excellent – we've used them on Mogami and Cleartone cables for years with absolute reliability. 🎸



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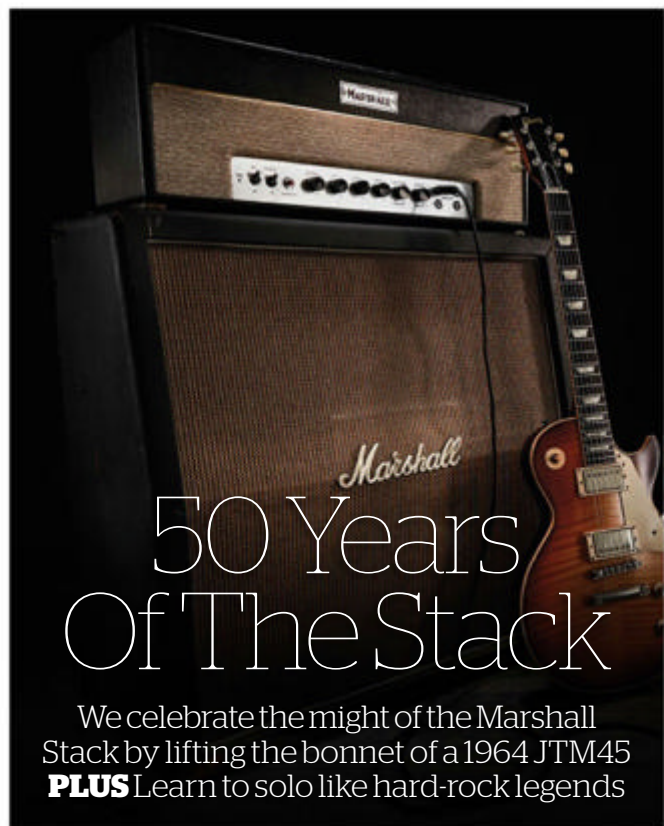
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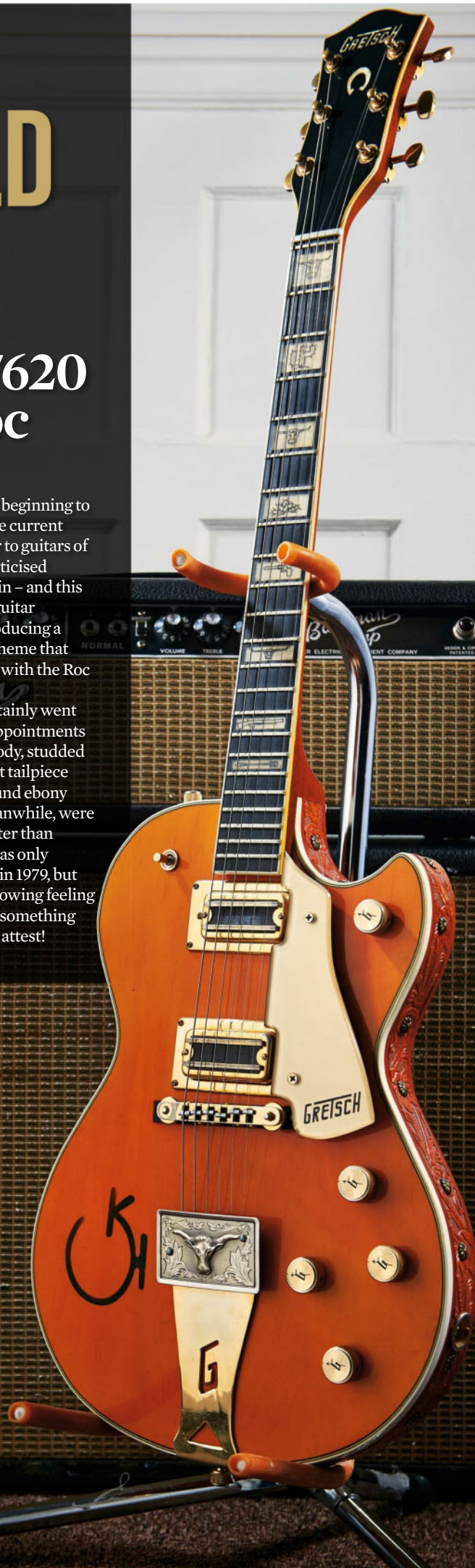
OLD GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY **JOBY SESSIONS**

'74 Gretsch G7620 Country Roc

In the late 60s and early 70s, guitarists were beginning to feel disgruntled with their lot. Many felt the current production models of the day were inferior to guitars of the 50s and early 60s – partly owing to widely criticised buyouts of Fender by CBS and Gretsch by Baldwin – and this spearheaded what we now know as the vintage guitar movement. Gretsch picked up on the trend, introducing a number of new models with a distinct Western theme that evoked the Round Up models of the 50s, starting with the Roc Jet in 1969, then the Country Roc in 1974.

This 1974 Country Roc shows that Gretsch certainly went all out in re-embracing cowboy culture. Visual appointments include a 'G' brand on the top of the semi-solid body, studded leather around the sides of the guitar, a 'G'-cutout tailpiece with belt buckle, and even horseshoes on the bound ebony fingerboard's inlays and headstock. Pickups, meanwhile, were Super'Tron humbuckers, which were a little hotter than Gretsch's usual Filter'Trons. The Country Roc was only around for seven years, with production ceasing in 1979, but its introduction is significant, highlighting the growing feeling of nostalgia for the electric guitar's 'golden era' – something that has only escalated in the years since, as we'll attest!



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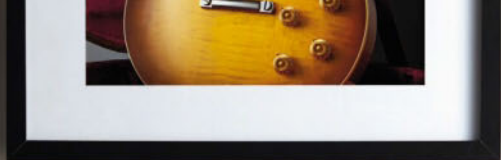


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Tutor: Neville Marten | **Gear used:** Fender '56 Custom Shop Stratocaster, Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

LAST issue, we talked about 'feature' licks, where certain players have devised runs that represent a real moment within a solo. So strong-sounding are these ideas that you can't really use them all the time, or things would become predictable and tedious.

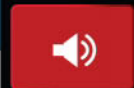
Here, we're going to examine four more feature licks. This time, though, they comprise small repeating 'cells' of three or four notes and can be played almost endlessly, should the mood take you. Licks like these are heard a lot in blues and rock by players as disparate

as Gary Moore, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Mark Knopfler, Johnny Winter, Dave Murray, and Allen Collins and Steve Gaines of Lynyrd Skynyrd. Indeed, it was hearing the latter's *Free Bird* on the radio recently, that prompted this lesson. At the end of the song, Collins and new boy Gaines commence a fiery guitar battle that culminates in repetitious lick after repetitious lick.

In many respects, this type of lick is much simpler to play than it sounds. In fact, often the hardest thing with incorporating them

into your soling is mustering enough stamina to get through them! And yet, because the longer licks are made up of these smaller groups, you can keep adding cell after cell, keeping it going for as long as you like. Or indeed cut things short after just a few rounds. There are so many ideas like this, so once you've tried mine see if you can come up with some of your own. In fact, I might even do a few more next month. I used a mixture of pick and pick and fingers, but fingers-only works great, too.



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Example 1

THIS is a really impressive-sounding lick, but it's surprisingly easy to play. Once you've isolated each cell – notice there are three slightly different variations – you should find that, when played up to tempo, they form a lovely 'three over four' feel and take on a syncopated life of their own. Can you fit such a lick into your regular repertoire?

♩ = 110 *8va*

Em D A B7

E B G D A E

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

Em (8va) D A B7 Em

E B G D A E

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

15-12 14-12 15-12 17-12 15-12 14-12 12

BU 15-17

Example 2

THIS is my 'Knopfler-meets-Clapton' lick. I think of it as running down three stairs, going back up one, down another three... and so on. As it's in pentatonic shape 1 it's actually a doddle to play, but sounds pretty impressive. You'll hear similar ideas on live Cream albums and in Dire Straits' work, too.

8va Em D A Loco B7 Em

E B G D A E

15-12 15 15-12 14 12-15-12 14 14-12 14 12

14-12 14 14-12 14 12-14-12 14 12 14-12 15 12

Example 3

THIS lick combines two common four-note cell ideas and puts them together for something rather more standout. It's easy to play, since, apart from the second bend in each cell pair (the first being on the second string and the second on the third), the notes are identical. Stamina and keeping in time might be your main worries, but tie the underlying pulse of the lick to the backing's rhythm and you'll be okay.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel. It includes a guitar part (top staff) and a bass part (bottom staff). The guitar part features a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The bass part features a bass clef, the same key signature and time signature. The guitar part includes chord names (Em, D, A) and fret numbers (12, 15, 17, 14, 16). The bass part includes chord names (BU) and fret numbers (12, 15, 17, 14, 16). The score is divided into two systems, each with a double bar line. The first system contains measures 1 through 4, and the second system contains measures 5 through 8. The guitar part includes a final measure with a whole note chord (A) and a final measure with a whole note chord (A).

Example 4

WHILE the previous ideas were all shape 1, here, we move up to shape 2 for a tricky cluster at the 15th to 17th frets. It starts off in time, but then becomes syncopated. This is all about hammer-ons and pull-offs with a single pick stroke for the start of each four-note cell. I found this the hardest to play of all, and my main tip is to barre the top two strings with your first finger and pivot the remaining notes off that.

The musical notation for the guitar solo in 'Sweet Home Alabama' is shown in standard staff notation. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The solo consists of two measures, each containing four groups of triplets. The first measure is marked with a 'Solo' sign and a '8th' note value. The second measure is marked with a 'Solo' sign and a '16th' note value. The solo is played on the E string, with the fret numbers 15, 17, 15, and 16 indicated below the notes. The solo is played with a pick, and the notes are beamed together in groups of three.

Hear It Here

Lynyrd Skynyrd

Skynyrd's Innyrds

As well as featuring this Southern rock band's best-known track, *Sweet Home Alabama*, various album selections and other Skynyrd gems, it's also noted for the unedited version of their stadium show-stopper, *Free Bird*. On this amazing version, we get to hear the full deal, with no fade-out, thus ensuring we don't miss a lick of that epic guitar battle.

Cream
Wheels Of Fire

As well being a must-have album that features some of the band's best-known tracks – *White Room*, *Politician*, *Born Under A Bad Sign*, etc – this is also notable for a 15-minute version of *Spoonful* and the amazing live *Crossroads*. Both are littered with repetitive licks, ripe for stealing. In *Deserted Cities Of The Heart*, you'll also notice a lick similar to example 4 – although Eric's fantastic solo is sped up for effect.

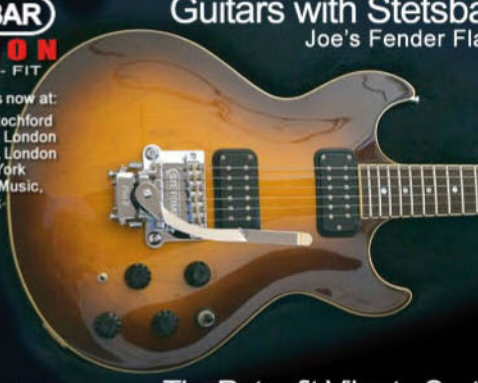
Gary Moore Back On The Streets

If you want to hear a player with finger stamina, then look no further. Gary's blues-rock solo debut album, as well as containing what I believe is the definitive version of *Don't Believe A Word*, is also notable for Gary's machine-gun-like opening salvo on the title track. It's a simple enough lick in its own right – effectively a repetitive four-note cell – but try it at this tempo, for this long, and it takes on a whole new dimension.

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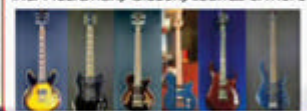
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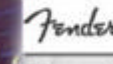
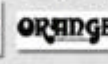
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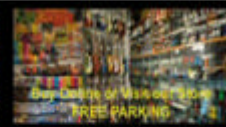
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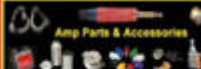
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Fender Custom Shop USA Deluxe Stratocaster, aged Cherry Sunburst with Custom Shop case, not a mark on it. £1,499. Call John on 07836 673626 or email hoppysmail@talktalk.net Warwickshire

Fender Road Worn Strat in Olympic White. Two Tokai Goldstars, one original, one customised. Fender Hot Rod Deville amp. Handmade Les Paul copy. £3,000ono. Can split. Call Rob on 07920 482261

Fender Telecaster, Custom '62 Japan, Candy Apple Red, rosewood fretboard, bound edges. Never gigged, absolutely as new. £450, no offers. Call Paul on 01494 533452 or email paulcurtis1@btinternet.com

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Gibson 1998 Les Paul Standard Double-cut in Trans Red with AAA top, chrome hardware, good condition, inc Gibson case. £1,295. Call 01386 861873 or 07979 793681

Gibson Chet Atkins Country Gent, 1989, Walnut finish, Gibson at its best, beautiful curly maple top and sides, ebony 'board. £2,650ono. Call Barry on 07790593731 or email bknot@sky.com Bath/Bristol

Gibson ES-135. 1998 from new. Gorgeous Cherry Red, excellent condition, never gigged. P-100 pickups, Gibson padded gigbag. £850. Email Brian at btrousers@yahoo.co.uk Rochdale, near Manchester

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Gibson S-400 CE, Natural, 06100769, new TKL case. Recent setup by Knight guitars. £8,500. Call Eric on 01590 645508

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Gordon Smith GS60 Custom. Gorgeous light blue, tiger striped, carved top. Maple neck. HSS pickups with coil tap. 2009 from new. Excellent condition, never gigged. £450. Email Brian at btrousers@yahoo.co.uk Rochdale, near Manchester

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