

BEAUTIFUL NEW LOOK | FINE GUITARS | LEGENDARY PLAYERS

Guitarist

Issue 396

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ARTIST INTERVIEWS

RICHARD
THOMPSON

SONNY
LANDRETH

JOE
SATRIANI

Masterclass Edition

JAMES TAYLOR

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with a songwriting legend* p54



REVIEWED

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Nik Huber Dolphin
Surfmeister on test



Booker White's '33
National Duolian



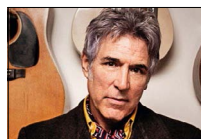
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Review Section



Marshall Silver
Jubilee Reissue



Ibanez Scofield
and Benson semis



Jim Campilongo's
Telecaster mastery



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A **HANDMADE** ORIGINAL



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A HANDMADE ORIGINAL

Fender

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Welcome...



They say good things come in threes. As you may have noticed, we've given *Guitarist* a beautiful new look this issue: we put heart and soul into it, so we

hope you like it – but the path to guitar nirvana that we'd like to take you on doesn't stop there. Over the next three issues we'll be introducing a host of brand new features, and it's all been led by you.

You told us you loved the gear reviews but wanted to get more techniques under your fingers. That's why, from this issue, your favourite players will be sharing more of their techniques with you in these pages. Over the two issues that follow this one, you'll also see new monthly columns from top guitarists and gear experts, all lending their six-string wisdom to the blend. We'll also be introducing a guide to the best gigs and guitar events, a bigger, better Music section and much more.

And it all starts here, in issue 396, with a very special acoustic masterclass with James Taylor, the legendary songsmith who wrote *Fire And Rain*, *You've Got A Friend* and more. Although James is an acoustic player primarily, there's plenty any guitarist can learn from his eloquent style, especially the sophisticated interplay between bassline and chords in his playing. The left hand is always active, with bass notes suggesting directions for the chords to go moments before the move is made, leading the listener's ear effortlessly through the song. It's a spellbinding skill and there's no better person to show you how to do that than Mr Taylor.

Enjoy the issue and stay tuned for more pleasant surprises over the next three months of *Guitarist*.

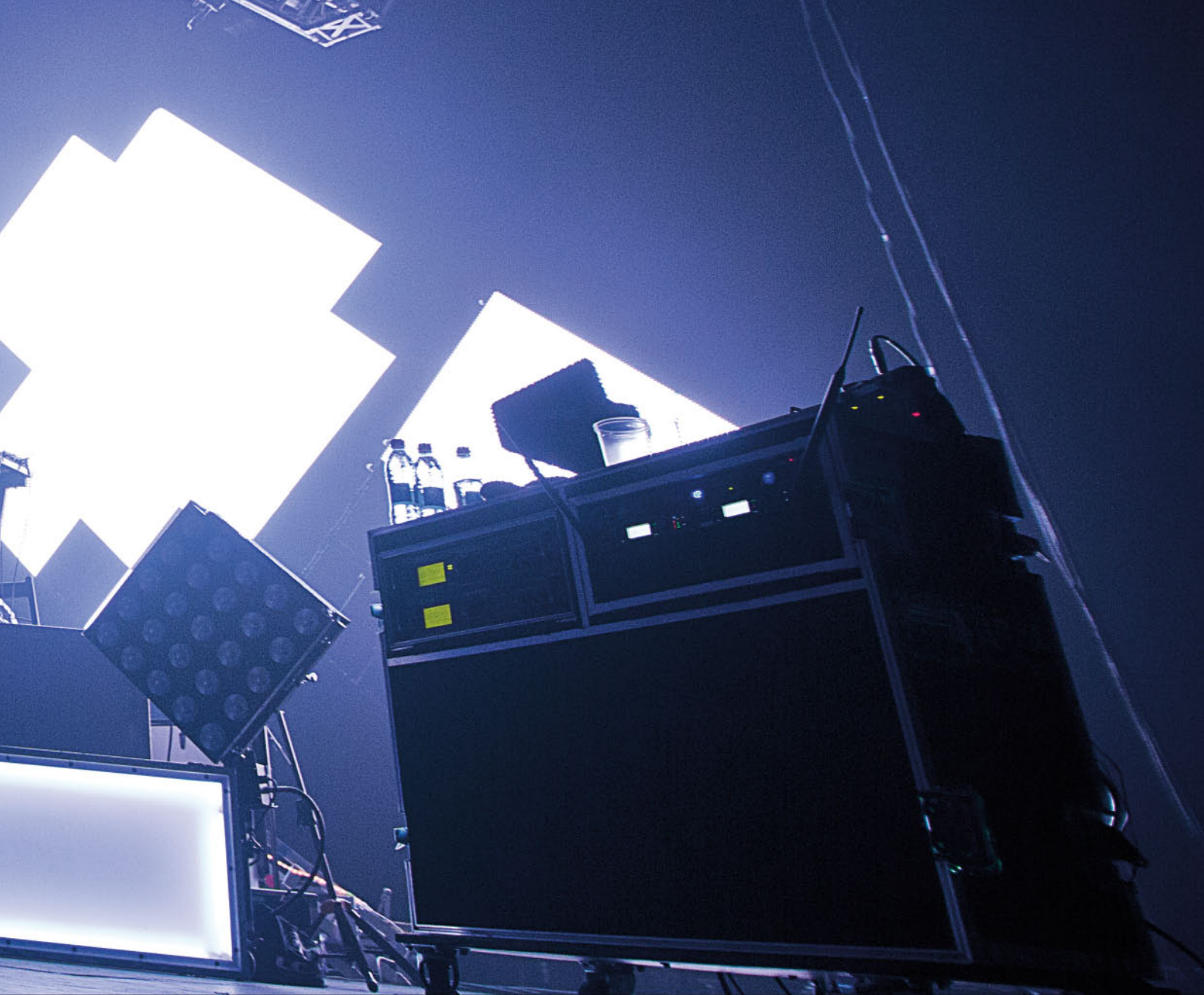
Jamie

Jamie Dickson Editor



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





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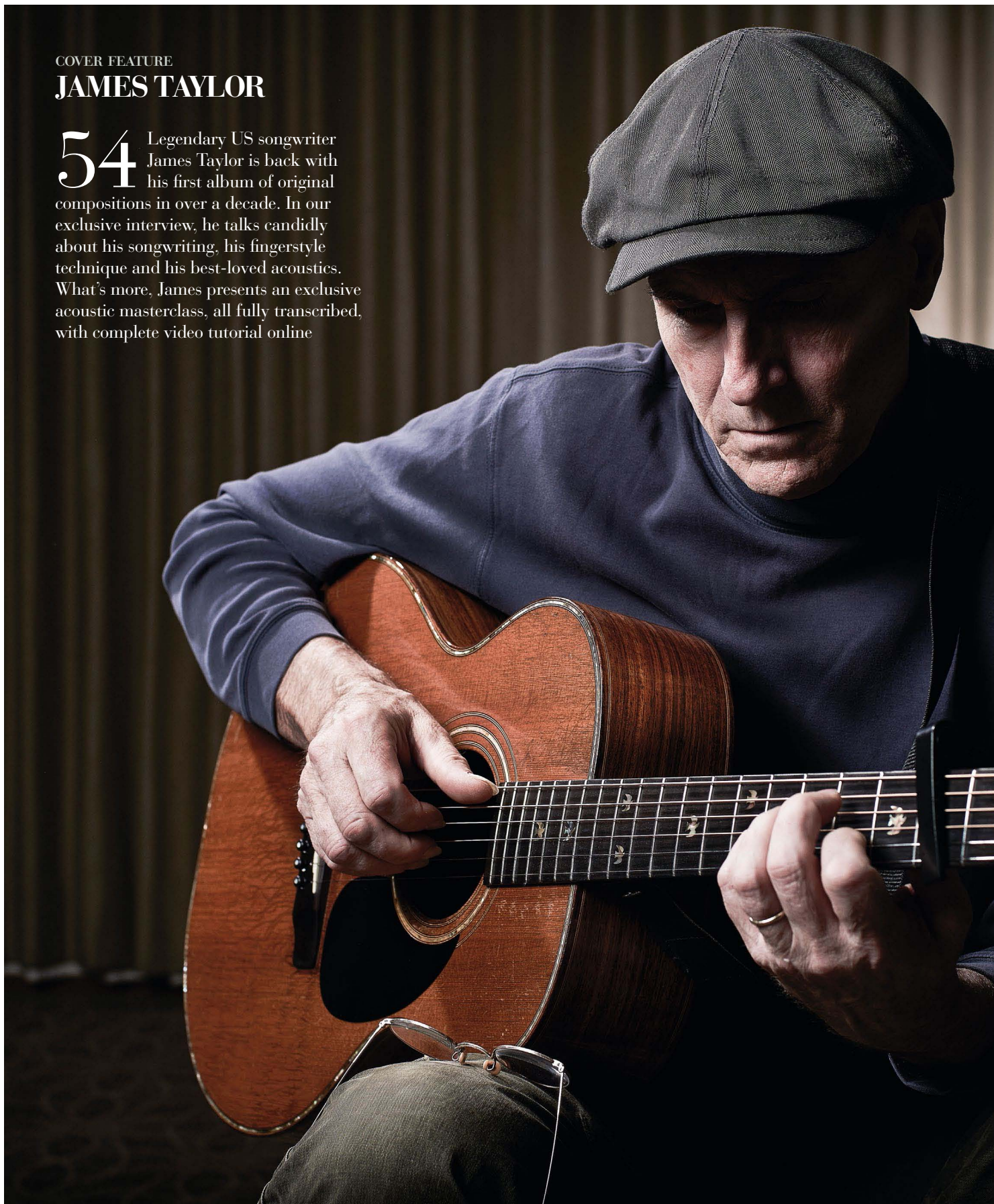


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JAMES TAYLOR

54 Legendary US songwriter James Taylor is back with his first album of original compositions in over a decade. In our exclusive interview, he talks candidly about his songwriting, his fingerstyle technique and his best-loved acoustics. What's more, James presents an exclusive acoustic masterclass, all fully transcribed, with complete video tutorial online





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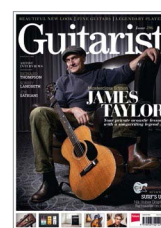
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COVER PORTRAIT BY
Joby Sessions

FIRST PLAY



**NIK HUBER DOLPHIN
SURFMEISTER**

£3,699

WHAT IS IT? Ultra-cool semi with Filter'Tron-style pickups and a Bigsby

CREST OF A WAVE

Words
Neville Marten

Photography
Joe Branston

Fancy a sumptuous, mega-cool high-end guitar but tired of the same old names? This superlative Huber has the potential to tick all the boxes

We guitarists are inundated with boutique guitars, amps, pedals – anything that can be ‘upgraded’ in order to tempt us out of even more cash. But it’s not *just* about quilted maple, point-to-point wiring or whatever. Musical instruments need to connect with us on a visceral level, too.

But it’s harder than many imagine to reinvent the Strat, Tele, 6120, ES-335 or Les Paul; these things are already perfect for their role and, truth is, we don’t need much more than we’ve already got. Yet they keep coming, even though some makers can’t quite make the distinction between what we might require, and what we might desire.

One manufacturer who gets it perfectly is Nik Huber. Since 1996, Huber has been crafting stellar guitars from his small factory south of Frankfurt. They’ve always been superb, but his recent instruments are hitting the bullseye with remarkable regularity. Sure, they owe inspirational elements to other great brands, but Nik’s designer’s sensibility and musician’s understanding means his guitars contain enough of his own DNA to satisfy even the most critical eye.





There's a darker element that works almost innately with a Fulltone OCD

The Surfmeister is his latest creation. Essentially a semi-hollow Dolphin model, the prototype appeared at last year's NAMM and debuted properly at Frankfurt in April. Huber calls it his "rock 'n' roll" guitar and you can see exactly what he means: it brims with cool.

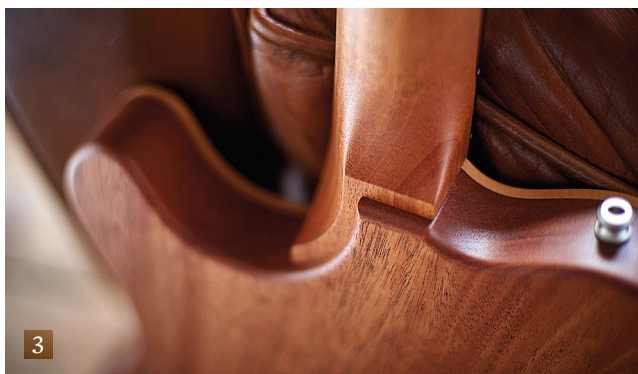
Ours is a stunning see-through metallic Ice Blue semi-gloss on a flame maple cap with matching headstock overlay. Body and neck are mahogany, blown over with the thinnest whisper of matt nitrocellulose – Huber calls it "open pore". Nickel hardware has been aged to look not unlike pewter, and includes a Bigsby vibrato, tune-o-matic bridge and Harry Häußel's 'TroneBucker' Filter'Tron-style pickups. Tuners are Schaller's high-end Grand Tune open-gear tulip-button style, and the same German company's Straploks complete the picture. The metal even extends to real silver fret marker rings. The overall picture is one of natural beauty; the design is new, and yet pleasingly familiar.

Feel & Sounds

Running our hands over the medium depth, slightly V-profile neck is a drag-free experience – in every respect. It's remarkable in that it's not remarkable at all. You don't



1. The Bigsby is a full-blown antique but for light shimmer, not to mention a subtly more open-sounding tonality, is there anything better?
2. As you'd expect from a guitar of this price, every small detail has been meticulously chosen for quality, functionality and of course, look
3. Huber's heel curve is almost architectural in design – yet another detail that adds to the effortless cool of his guitars
4. Harry Häußel's 'TroneBucker' humbuckers use Gretsch's Filter'Trons as their start-point. Superb sounding



really think about it, you just get on with playing, and we can't think of a better recommendation than that. With a 305 to 355mm (10- to 14-inch) compound radius the rosewood fingerboard and 22 perfectly finished frets offer everything the bluesy, surfy, rockabilly player might want in the way of string bending, vibrato, upper-fret access and so on.

The Surfmeister's weight is kept down due to the bulk of the mahogany being machined away inside, with just a centre block remaining to provide rigidity and strong string-to-body contact. The Bigsby, never the most responsive of vibratos, does its subtle job commendably – and looks fabulous in this context.

With a German guitar what better amp to fire it up with than a Hughes & Kettner Puretone, one of our favourite EL34-equipped combos? A guitar like this is all about tone, so big clanking chords, dark 'clean but slightly dirty' riffs and smooth controlled leads is what we're after. We are consistently floored by what a great pickup the Filter-Tron is, and Harry Häussel's take on it is superb.

Although you can get away with really clean lead tones since the sound is so big and bright, there's a darker element that works

almost innately with a Fulltone OCD pedal or similar. Another thing that would suit it is to leave something such as an Xotic EP Boost permanently on, so you can ride the volume pot for infinite clean-to-crunch gradation. Balance is perfect between neck and bridge pickups, and each has a sound that's personal and distinctive – Huber calls it "smacking and bellied". Matching our 'control' ES-335 for volume and fatness, the Gretsch-like twang adds that something extra that might tempt you to use it over the Gibson on a recording date – especially since the tone control's push-pull coil-tap adds another layer of twang to this already resonant guitar.

Verdict

Yes, it's expensive, but our bet is that Huber is one of the few non-mainstream makers whose guitars will hold their value and even appreciate over time. Given its stunning quality, fabulous looks and effortless operation, we'd say it's worth every penny. From form to function we can't fault it, and if the idea of something a little different floats your boat, too, get saving because every one of these beauties that hits our shores will be snapped up like there's no tomorrow. **G**



NIK HUBER DOLPHIN SURFMEISTER

PRICE: £3,699 (approx, inc case)

ORIGIN: Germany

TYPE: Semi-hollow single-cutaway electric

BODY: Mahogany, routed out with solid centre section

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Polished bone/42.4mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 305-355mm (10-14") compound radius, Sterling silver 'ring' inlays

FRETS: 22, medium jumbo

HARDWARE: Bigsby vibrato tailpiece and milled brass tune-o-matic bridge, Schaller Straploks, Schaller Grand Tune open-gear tuners (w/ gold-plated gear-wheel); all nickel-plated in aged 'pewter' finish

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 49mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Harry Häussel

'TroneBucker' pickups with mixed material polepieces and magnets, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone (with coil-split)

OPTIONS: As all the guitars are hand-built, the range of options is almost limitless

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, at no charge

FINISHES: Ice Blue (as reviewed), Atlantic Blue, Hierbas Yellow, Tigereye, Charcoal and Ruby Red. Other colour options are available

World Guitars

01453 824306

www.nikhuber-guitars.com



9/10

Guitarist says: Expensive, but you get what you pay for; not just for surf players, it's a brilliant all-rounder and drop-dead gorgeous, too

FIRST PLAY



GUILD STARFIRE IV ST
£829

WHAT IS IT? Modern take on Guild's classic twin-cutaway semi, with a stopbar tailpiece



GUILD T-50 SLIM
£789

WHAT IS IT? A reissue of Guild's popular 1960s non-cut archtop hollowbody guitar

Street Ahead

Two new takes some American classics from the golden era of electric guitar

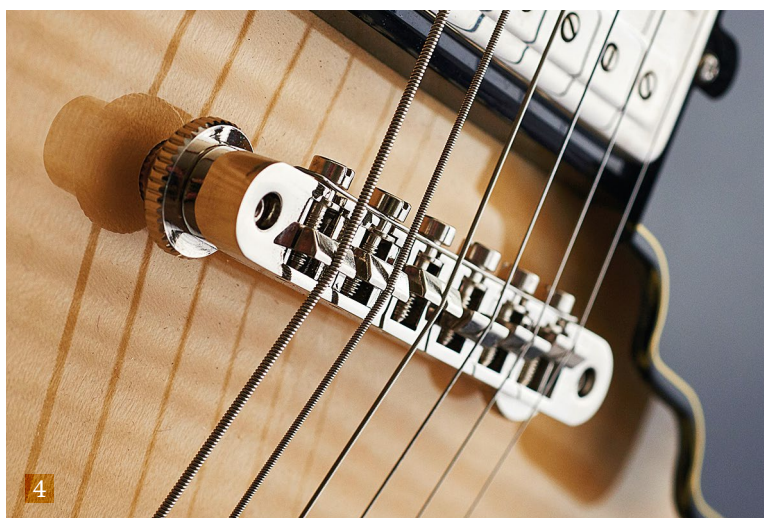
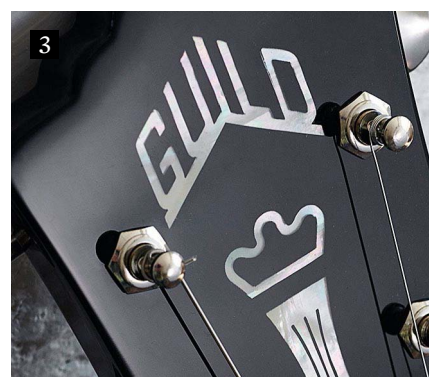
Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Joby Sessions

After almost two decades on the fringes of Fender's catalogue, Guild is now under new ownership, and the signs are that the legendary American brand is set to return to the top. Purchased by Cordoba Guitars in 2014, the deal also means new distribution for Guild in the UK, and the return of the Korean-made Newark Street range of instruments, which faithfully capture the look and style of many classic Guild models from the marque's golden years. As if to emphasise that things are definitely looking up, the Newark Street range has recently seen two new additions in the shape of the Starfire IV ST and the non-cutaway T-50 Slim, both now available in the UK.

The Starfire IV ST changes the traditional Guild 'harp' tailpiece for a more contemporary stopbar, intended to add sustain and give the Starfire a bigger voice for solos. Sitting nicely beside the standard Starfire IV and the tremolo-equipped Starfire V, the ST is available in four colours, including this







eye-catching flamed maple Natural finish, featuring a three-piece laminated maple neck with a mahogany centre stripe.

Meanwhile, the T-50 Slim is an update on the original 1960s T-50, coincidentally later named the Cordoba. The only non-cutaway model in the present Newark Street range, the T-50 Slim has a 45mm-thick laminated maple body, married to a two-piece mahogany neck. A solitary single-coil pickup connects to a volume and tone control topped with period-correct clear control knobs – much more of a hardcore jazz/blues vibe perhaps, compared with the Starfire's dual humbuckers and conventional three-way toggle switch, with separate volume and tone controls.

The standard of finish on both guitars is practically flawless, with a deep gloss on the Starfire showing off the movement in the flamed maple, while the T-50 Slim has a particularly attractive dark Antique Sunburst top combined with a deep red brown-stained back and sides. There's a single layer of ivory plastic binding on the T-50's top, while the Starfire's more upmarket look features ivory with black and white purfling to the top and bottom edges, and a single layer of ivory around the fretboard. Visually, both guitars strongly evoke the classic Guild look, with vintage-correct details such as the round-head

pins used for control knob pointers, and open-back Grover Sta-Tite tuners.

Both necks, however, have a more modern vibe. Guild describe the profile as a vintage soft U; we'd say it's more of a D, with less meat on the shoulders than many vintage necks. The other contributor is the relatively high fretwire, which is around three- or four-tenths of a millimetre taller than average. That may not sound like much of a difference, but most players easily detect this small variation. This neck and fret combination is complemented by the 0.011 to 0.049 gauge strings supplied as standard on both guitars, adding extra meat for an enhanced tone with the benefit of better tuning stability.

While the Starfire's neck joins the body at the 16th fret, the T-50's at the 14th, the other big difference here is the body construction. The Starfire is a semi-acoustic, with bridge, tailpiece and pickups all mounted onto its maple centre block, while the T-50 is a proper hollow acoustic, with bracing under its laminated arch top and a tune-o-matic bridge mounted on rosewood feet.

Feel & Sounds

Both guitars feel immediately comfortable to play. Frets are nicely finished with no sharp corners, while the slim neck profile favours

1. The LB-1 humbuckers are reproductions of the smaller humbuckers used on original Guilds. They're relatively low output and quite bright in character
2. Both guitars have the classic raised-centre machine head design, with the correct logos and Grover Sta-Tite open-backed tuners
3. After a mini renaissance under Fender ownership in recent years, Guild's resurgence continues with new owner Cordoba
4. With a stud tailpiece now accompanying the tune-o-matic bridge, this is the most 335-like Starfire yet
5. The T-50's DE-1F single-coil pickup is Guild's equivalent of the P-90, a powerful single coil with a distinctive bite
6. The T-50's rosewood bridge base (shown overleaf) affirms its jazzy visual credentials



5

players who hook their thumb over the top of the fretboard to grab bass notes. The slightly higher fretwire makes bending and vibrato easy, even with Guild's standard issue strings, while the slim body dimensions are easy to play seated or standing.

Plugged into a Tweed-voiced amplifier, the Starfire IV has an aggressive, fast attack to chords and picked notes, which overshadows the guitar's sustain a little. The relatively low output LB-1 'Little Bucker' humbuckers are typical of those fitted to original Guilds, with DC resistances of 7.5k ohms and 5.5k ohms for neck and bridge respectively – a little odd, as we'd normally expect to see the higher resistance pickup in the bridge position. There's a distinct 'quack' from the bridge pickup, a fat edgy bite from the neck, and a sweet middle position with both humbuckers on: perfect for blues, rockabilly and country picking, as well as big jangly rhythm chords, with a tone that's anchored in the 1960s.

Meanwhile, the T-50 Slim's hollow body makes a huge difference. It's acoustically much bolder, with less of the 'pinginess' that often affects new instruments until they're properly played in. The DE-1F single-coil pickup is punchy and has a nice balanced tone that doesn't favour highs, mids or lows, making it easy to use the T-50 for almost any playing



6

style. String choice can make a big difference; the round-wound strings supplied are great for blues, rock, slide and country, while players who want authentic jazz or rockabilly tones should try it with a decent set of pure nickel round-wounds or flatwounds.

Verdict

Both Guilds add something new to the Newark Street range. The Starfire has the characteristic bite and twang of the originals, with a dose of extra sustain and a stunning flamed maple finish. The T-50 Slim has plenty of character and presence; non-cutaway guitars are in vogue right now, and this fits the niche perfectly. It's an ideal tool for the lead singer who doubles on rhythm guitar, with great looks and tone to match. Jack up the action, and it also makes a killer slide platform with a little compression and overdrive.

The build quality and finish on both guitars more than justifies the price, which is especially reasonable when you consider that a quality hard-shell case is included. Above all, it's great to have Guild back in the UK – guitars this good shouldn't be ignored. **G**



GUILD NEWARK STREET STARFIRE IV ST

PRICE: £829 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Thinline semi-acoustic with maple centre block
BODY: Laminated flame-maple top, back and sides
NECK: Laminated maple with walnut centre stripe
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: 42mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound Indian rosewood, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 22, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar tailpiece, Grover Sta-Tite tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Guild LB1 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tones
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3.4/7.5
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: The standard harp tailpiece Starfire IV costs £829, the Bibsby-equipped Starfire V is £869
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Natural (as reviewed), Emerald Green, Cherry Red, Vintage Sunburst
Selectron UK Ltd
01795 419460
www.guildguitars.com

7/10

Guitarist says: The stud tailpiece gives the Starfire even more ES-335 credo. Usable, pro-spec, retro – excellent



GUILD NEWARK STREET T50 SLIM

PRICE: £789 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Korea
TYPE: Thinline f-hole acoustic
BODY: Laminated maple top, back and sides
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 628mm (24.75")
NUT/WIDTH: 42mm
FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, dot inlays, 241mm (9.5") radius
FRETS: 20, medium jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel tune-o-matic bridge on rosewood base, Guild 'harp' tailpiece, Grover Sta-Tite tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: 1x Guild DE-1F single coil, volume and tone
WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.7/5.9
OPTIONS: None
RANGE OPTIONS: None
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Antique Sunburst (as reviewed)

7/10

Guitarist says: Highly evocative slice of history with jazz credentials, or maybe roosty style. Looks great, too



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FIRST PLAY



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WHAT IS IT? A 12-fret parlour acoustic with solid African Mahogany top



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£499

WHAT IS IT? A 12-fret slope-shouldered dreadnought with a solid Sitka spruce top





Working Artists

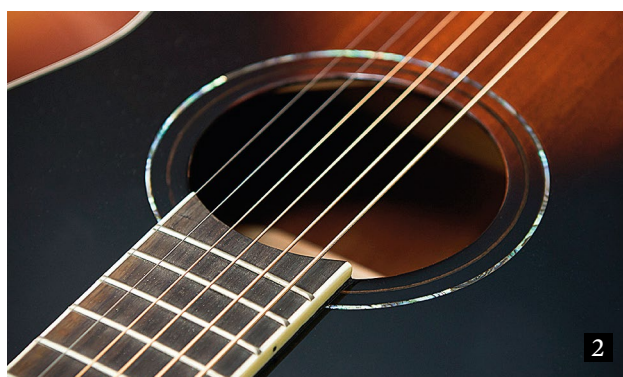
It's not always the big names that provide excellent value for money. Never heard of Alvarez? Time to change that...

Words Isobel Morris & Jim Kimberley **Photography** Joe Branston

Alvarez celebrates a big birthday this year: 50 years of producing instruments played by a diverse range of players, from Joe Bonamassa to Jerry Garcia and Ani DiFranco. The brand's USA parent company is St Louis Music, but for the most part its instruments are manufactured in China. However, since February, Alvarez has been distributed in the UK by Blackstar – one of the world's biggest amp brands – so we're expecting to see a lot more of these guitars in our shops.

We last caught up with a couple of Alvarez Masterworks series guitars back in issue 377: two mid-range electros we were suitably impressed with to award them *Guitarist* Choice awards. Here, we have two lower priced, vintage-flavoured acoustic 12-fret guitars from the Artist range: a parlour and a slope shoulder dreadnought that celebrates Alvarez's 50th year. The question is, do they live up to their celebrated label mates?

Our parlour guitar is a fairly conventional small size, comparable to Martin's 00, not too deep but not over-shallow either. It certainly has a vibe, with a solid African mahogany top, deep Vintage Sunburst, cream binding and abalone ring around the soundhole. The finish is pretty glossy and not exactly old-school authentic, but you can't help be attracted to its 'Depression-era' style. The laminate mahogany



If you play on
your sofa, the
parlour is a cosy,
even comforting
instrument
to get your
arms around



back and sides are pleasantly figured, too, and overall it's very nicely put together.

The three-piece mahogany neck has a comfortable C profile, which is not exactly slender but still inviting to the thumb-over player. It's topped with a nicely inlaid slotted headstock with open-backed Waverley-style tuners in keeping with the old-time style of these guitars. Neatly fretted, the rosewood fingerboard is fully bound, and we only have side-placed dot markers leaving the fingerboard face clean aside from a 12th fret inlay that seems, stylistically, at odds with the rest of the instrument.

Numerous details are shared by these two instruments. For example, they feature Alvarez's 'bi-level' rosewood bridge. The saddle is elevated above the level of the bridge pins creating a sharper break angle, ensuring

good contact and downward pressure of the strings over the saddle. With attention to the bass end, the tops have been constructed with forward shifted X bracing. The axis of the X is pushed closer to the soundhole than traditional patterns creating a larger exposed soundboard that is strengthened by a solid maple bridge plate.

The nut and saddle are real bone, too, a significant addition in our experience. We've replaced plastic saddles with bone on some of our own boxes in the past and heard a noticeable improvement as a result.

Moving onto the dreadnought, it follows pretty classic dimensions, but is obviously bigger bodied and deeper – by 25mm at its maximum – than the parlour. Here, the solid Sitka spruce top has been given a caramel-hued Sunburst and is positively bling-y with

1. Nicely detailed slotted headstocks with individual open gear nickel-plated tuners. Classy stuff
2. Liberal use of abalone inlay on the headstock, soundhole and 12th fret inlay gives both of these instruments a real visual pop
3. Neither guitar has any fretboard markers, just a 12th fret inlay – it feels slightly incongruous on such retro-vibed guitars
4. In Alvarez's upper ranges this bi-level bridge is actually two pieces. Here the more simple design still guarantees good downward pressure over the saddle



4

abalone purfling all around the body edge and soundhole. The laminated acacia back and sides contribute to a whiff of rhinestone about this cowboy and it's a very handsome one at that. To be fair, there are a couple of minor imperfections to the finish but these instruments are easy on the wallet so super close scrutiny is bound to reveal a blemish or two. On the upside, the dark binding along the fingerboard edges, which gives a very tidy edge to the 'board, is so sharp we have to get the magnifier out to see the join.

Feel & Sounds

Both instruments are supplied complete with strap buttons at the heel and base (unusual for pure acoustics), allowing you to easily strap on for performance. If you play sitting or you slouch into your sofa, the parlour is a cosy, even comforting instrument to get your arms around – the dread not least with the body depth is an entirely bigger proposition.

Fans of 12 fret guitars believe (and many makers would agree) that they tend to have 'richer' tone than 14-fret designs because the bridge sits more centrally in the lower bouts. And while any acoustic is a sum of its design and parts, the dread pretty convincingly demonstrates a tubbiness of tone that could be attributed to its shorter neck and different



bridge placement. The low end is engagingly dark and chunky, particularly for heavier strumming. Staccato rhythms on barre chords feel meaty and there's a proper bump to the front of notes when picking with the pads of the fingers, a result of that forward shifted X bracing, maybe? The mids are well balanced so lead lines, though bright and lively, retain a good thickness even on the plain strings.

Understandably, with the parlour's smaller, shallower body, the '12-fret effect' is less noticeable, but then again it has a hardwood mahogany top to factor in. The midrange often defines the voice of a guitar of this size and here we're invited to country blues voicings or slide, but without the barking resonator-like projection of some. It's actually a sound that's very at home, at home.

Being picky, it's in the top end where both – especially the parlour – lack a little sophistication. When strumming gently with a pick, some of the richness falls away leaving both instruments sounding a tad shrill. Intonation, though, on both is excellent and each handled drop D tunings without fret buzz although the power and low-end definition of the dread suffered down in C. The tuners handled themselves pretty well, too, but by the end of our test period one tuner had become creaky and stiff and another a little loose. Still,

5. Both guitars are 12-fret designs: the neck joins the body at the 12th fret meaning the neck is shorter and stiff, and the bridge sits more centrally in the lower bouts

6. The bright caramel Sunburst finish of the Arda is a stark contrast to the more restrained, vintage look of the Artist 66 Parlour





The dreadnought's low end is engagingly dark and chunky, particularly for heavier strumming

with open backs like these you can at least lubricate and tighten them.

Verdict

These guitars are enormous fun. The styling cues don't come with *too* much baggage by way of tonal expectations and the ARDA 1965, particularly, manages to stand out while evoking a vintage aura. It also excels at softer-attack playing.

We couldn't help but feel that they are astonishingly good value for money, too. Sometimes, as punters, we all look at the prices and the specs of instruments and make a conclusion: these not only tick the spec-versus-price box nicely, but they feel and sound as though they're punching above their price. In such a crowded market, that confidence makes them stand out and could be a very strong reason to augment your collection. **G**



ALVAREZ AP66SB ARTIST 66 PARLOUR

PRICE: £329

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: 12-fret parlour acoustic

TOP: Solid African mahogany with FST2M forward-shifted, scalloped X bracing

BACK/SIDES: Laminate mahogany

MAX RIM DEPTH: 101.5mm

tapering to 94mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 361mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 610mm (24")

TUNERS: Individual Wilkinson open-gear, nickel-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44.6mm

FINGERBOARD: Cream-bound rosewood, 12th fret abalone inlay

FRETS: 18, medium/small

BRIDGE/SPACING: Bi-level rosewood with compensated bone saddle/52.5mm

ELECTRICS: No

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 1.8/4.1

OPTIONS: An electro version, the AP66SBE (£TBA) will be available later this year

RANGE OPTIONS: Other parlours currently available include the AP70 acoustic, also £329, and the electro version at £429

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISH: Sunburst gloss front, Natural back, sides and satin neck gloss (as reviewed)

Blackstar

01604 817817

alvarezguitars.com

7/10

Guitarist says: A sharply styled instrument that's just what a parlour of this price should be



ALVAREZ ARDA1965 DREADNOUGHT SLOPE SHOULDER

PRICE: £499

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: 12-fret slope-shouldered dreadnought

TOP: Solid A+ Sitka spruce with FST2M forward-shifted, scalloped X bracing

BACK/SIDES: Laminate acacia

MAX RIM DEPTH: 125mm tapering to 103mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 401mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

TUNERS: Individual Wilkinson open-gear, nickel-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45.1mm

FINGERBOARD: Brown-bound rosewood, 12th fret abalone inlay

FRETS: 19, medium/small

BRIDGE/SPACING: Bi-level rosewood with compensated bone saddle/53.5mm

ELECTRICS: No

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.14/4.7

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Dreads proliferate in the Alvarez Artist series range starting with the AD30 (£199). More will be available later this year

LEFT-HANDERS: Not in this model but the AD60 Dreadnought Left Hand costs £249

FINISH: Sunburst gloss front, Natural back, sides and satin neck gloss (as reviewed)

7/10

Guitarist says: Different looks and a sweet tonality, especially for fingerpicking



(Actual size)

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The new PolyTune 2 Mini is the tiniest big thing to hit your pedalboard!

With its ultra-bright display, groundbreaking polyphonic tuning mode, insanely fast and accurate strobe tuner and unfathomably small enclosure, this pedal will serve as a massive upgrade for your rig. Pure PolyTune Win!



Frontend

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



Fender Presents The American Standard Tour 7 July-18 August 2015

Fender will bring a celebration of its heritage on a tour of these shores this summer, with a series of presentations, workshops, hands-on events and concerts at iconic music venues all over the UK and in Dublin. Fender's evening events will focus on classic models including the Stratocaster, Telecaster and the Precision and Jazz, with demonstrations, Q&A sessions with the Fender team, live performances from Fender-affiliated artists and, of course, the opportunity to play a range of USA-made instruments. The events are free to attend, with tickets given away on a first-come, first-served basis, and each attendee will be entered into a draw to win an American Standard instrument of their choice. For tickets, venue details and further information, see the Fender website.

www.fender.com/uk-tour



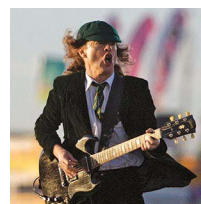
Michael Schenker's Temple Of Rock

20-30 January, 2016, various UK venues

Tickets are on sale for Schenker's Temple Of Rock UK tour in January. Expect new tracks, MSG, UFO and Scorpions hits. See thegigcartel.com for tickets.

The Monkees 4 September 2015, Hammersmith Eventim Apollo, London

For their first UK date since 2011's Albert Hall gig, Micky Dolenz and Peter Tork will return as The Monkees for an evening of music and multimedia. See www.eventimapollo.com.



AC/DC 28 June, 1 and 4 July, Glasgow, Dublin and London

AC/DC bring their evergreen riffery to these shores for three dates in Glasgow, Dublin and London. The line-up will sadly be without Malcolm Young, but sees his nephew, Stevie Young, on rhythm guitar.

IGF Guitar Summit 23-26 July, Kings Place, London

The IGF Guitar Summit sees David Russell, Antonio Forcione and other great players convene in London for a festival of classical, jazz and flamenco gigs and masterclasses. See www.igf.org.uk for info.





Round-Up: Modern Retro

Here are some recent electrics with one foot in the past and one eye on the future

PRS Vela £1,289
www.prguitars.com

PRS's relatively affordable USA S2 line's Vela could just be the company's coolest model yet. Vintage Cherry finish, dots instead of bird markers, and a Tele-esque plate-style bridge contrast with the advanced electrics, which include a new Type D single coil, treble-bleed cap and coil-split switch on the bridge Starla Treble pickup.

We said: "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"

Peerless Retromatic 131 £899
www.peerlessguitars.eu

Aesthetically, it appears to owe a debt of gratitude to the styling of retro favourites, Duesenberg. But the Peerless Retromatic 131's archtop hollowbody combines with a P-90 neck and humbucker in the bridge to capably cover all the rock 'n' roll bases, while turning its hand to more blues/indie-rock duties. Plus, you'll have fun while you're doing it, too.

We said: "Loads of kitsch, Art Deco fun for jazz, rock 'n' roll, blues, or for exploring more evocative tonal textures"

Fender Classic Player Triple Tele £826
www.fender.com

For many, Fender's Telecaster is perfect as it is. Yet for a design so seemingly resistant to change, Fender has done an admirable job varying its tone for different musical styles on this triple single coil model with five-way, Stratocaster-style pickup switching that's a viable alternative to the Cabronita.

We said: "A lightweight 50s-vibe Tele with three Tele bridge pickups. Daft? Not at all – a great 'Strat' for the Tele player"

Gibson 2015 Les Paul Studio £899
www.gibson.com

Gibson always risks alarming the purists with updates to its ranges. But rarely has so much Les Paul been dealt out by the company to so many, for so few pounds. The new 2015 take on the low-end Lester retains the model's aura, but incorporates single-coil voicings via 'tuned coil-taps', medium density weight relief and the G Force automatic tuning system.

We said: "Excellent value, quality sounds – including the single-coil voices – this will sell by the truckload"

Collings 360 LT £3,525
www.collingsguitars.com

At this price, you'd demand flawless craftsmanship and pro-quality tone. But unlike many boutique creations at this lofty strata, the 360 LT practically begs to be gigged – from its offset body to its TV Jones pickups and Bigsby, this feels built for rootsy rock crunch from a classic valve amp.

We said: "If you like the idea of modern boutique guitars but don't care for fussy styling, give the 360 LT a whirl. A seriously professional-feeling rock 'n' roll guitar that really gets the heart pumping"

Case J2 Semi-Hollow Double Cutaway £3,500
www.caseguitars.co.uk

This UK-crafted laminate maple-top thinline may take some of its inspiration from semi-hollow classics of yesteryear, but in practice, the J2 has a thicker, less snappy tone than a vintage ES-335. It's perfectly capable of classic-rock raunch from those Bare Knuckle Rebel Yell humbuckers, too, alongside smooth-as-silk Larry Carlton lead tones.

We said: "Its tone is astonishingly good – woody, resonant, touch-sensitive and wailing... Simply a superb modern semi-solid"

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The new McCarty has vintage-voiced PRS 58/15 pickups

The P245 has a shorter than usual 24.5-inch scale

PRS Triple Whammy

Maryland guitar maker releases a new McCarty, a piezo-loaded P245 and a limited-edition SE Ace signature model

PRS is releasing three new models in time for summer: a revamped version of the McCarty, a P245 Semi-Hollow with a piezo, and an SE signature-model Singlecut for Skunk Anansie guitarist, Ace.

The original McCarty, released in 1994, was a significant breakthrough for Paul Reed Smith. It was named in honour of his early mentor and inspiration, Gibson's legendary ex-president, Ted McCarty. The 2015 model sports new vintage-voiced 58/15 treble and bass pickups designed by Smith, a push-pull tone control, a three-way pickup selector, bound rosewood fingerboard and stoptail bridge, which will all set you back £3,079.

Next up, the PRS P245 Semi-Hollow is a single-cut model with a shorter 24.5-inch scale (hence the name) and 22 frets. It's also equipped with the 58/15 treble and bass pickups, promising clarity and midrange focus, and an LR Baggs/PRS piezo system for acoustic tones via a separate output. Electric and acoustic tones can be combined through

a single output by using a separate blend control. The P245 has a figured maple top and mahogany back and sides, plus volume and tone push-pull tone controls and a three-way pickup selector. Again, all this don't come cheap, and the SRP is £3,575.

Finally, the company has released its latest signature model, for Ace from multi-platinum Brit rockers Skunk Anansie. The new Black-only SE Ace model is limited to 180 instruments and is available exclusively to European customers. It was created in conjunction with the Skunk Anansie star and is based on the customised Singlecut models he's used over the past 15 years. The PRS SE Ace has a mahogany body, a bevelled maple cap, SE 245 pickups and a 25-inch scale, 22-fret mahogany neck with PRS's Wide Thin carve, and bird inlays. The guitar has a PRS tremolo, comes with a swallow-in-flight sticker based on the design Ace sports on his own Singlecut and an SRP of £749. See the PRS website for more information on all the new models.

www.prsguitars.com

Books

Huey Morgan's Rebel Heroes

Huey Morgan

Octopus Publishing £18.99



Join Fun Lovin' Criminal, actor, DJ and all-round wiseguy Huey Morgan for this informative polemic on the subject of why music needs heroes and rebels. Each chapter picks out hell-raisers from rock history, and it's an even-handed selection, too, with its fair share of female rebels and a chapter devoted to guitar's wilder stars, too. The prose is fast-moving and funny, blending well-told anecdotes and Morgan's experiences to create a compelling argument for why today's musicians need to find their edge.

AC/DC FAQ

Susan Masino

Backbeat Books \$24.99



AC/DC's remarkable career began back in 1973 as a bar-room band, and over the 40 years since, they've had an at times complex and tragic story that's in marked contrast to the good-time simplicity of their music. Their primal brand of blue-collar rock may have remained mainly unchanged throughout their career, but what about the band themselves? Author Susan Masino has known them since 1977, and from the gorilla suits to the gear to Malcolm's retirement, she takes fans as deep into the facts as possible, with a fan's genuine love for the band.

Getcha Rocks Off

Mick Wall

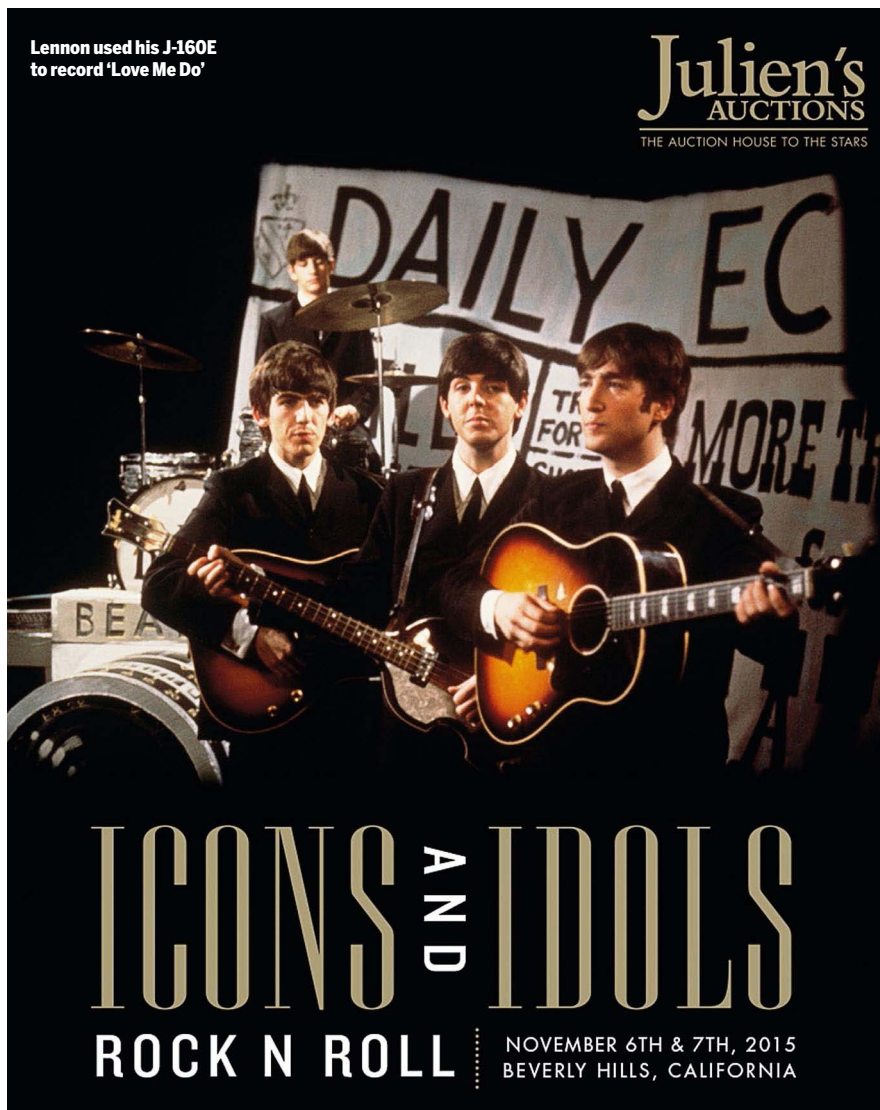
Orion £18.99



Mick Wall, journalist, TV presenter, ex-magazine editor and now author of a series of well-written biographies, takes a break from telling others' tales to tell his own. Its subtitle, 'Sex And Excess, Life And Death On The Rock 'N' Roll Road', gives you the idea, and Wall's exploits from his time spent hanging out with Zeppelin, GN'R, Sabbath, Van Halen et al reveal what life was really like during rock's 80s zenith of excess and debauchery. If you ever wondered what it'd be like to enter the inner circle of rock royalty, you're likely to enjoy Wall's vivid account.

Lennon used his J-160E to record 'Love Me Do'

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Lot Me Do

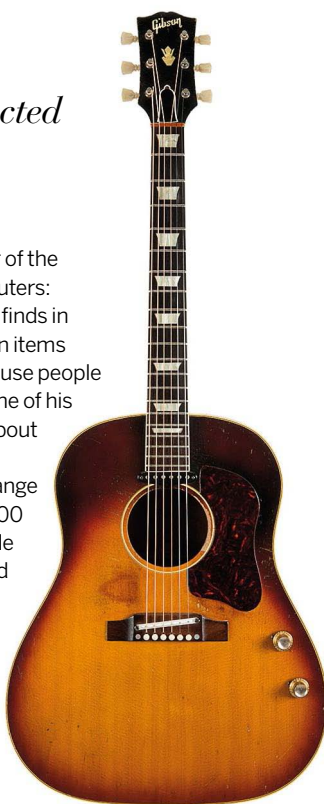
Long-lost John Lennon acoustic expected to fetch record price at auction

Beverly Hills-based music memorabilia specialist Julien's Auctions is to auction a historic Gibson acoustic owned by John Lennon, on 6 November 2015. According to Beatles historian Andy Babiuk, the Gibson J-160E is the one used by Lennon to record *Love Me Do*, and for live performances and writing sessions.

The guitar was lost in 1963, during The Beatles' Finsbury Park Christmas Show, and was purchased 50 years later from a US second-hand shop by John McCaw. Babiuk verified its authenticity by matching its serial number and identifying marks to archive film and images.

Darren Julien, owner of the auction house, told Reuters: "It's one of the biggest finds in music history... Lennon items don't come often because people keep them. This was one of his favourites; he talked about wishing he still had it."

Auction estimates range from between \$600,000 and \$800,000. The sale may yet rival the record price paid for a guitar at auction, which was the 2013 sale of Bob Dylan's 'Judas' Fender Stratocaster that sold for a whopping \$965,000. juliensauctions.com



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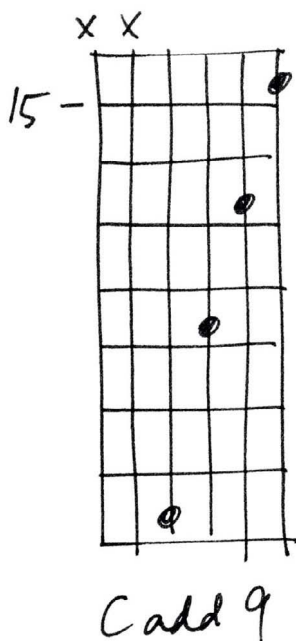


www.heistercamp.co.uk

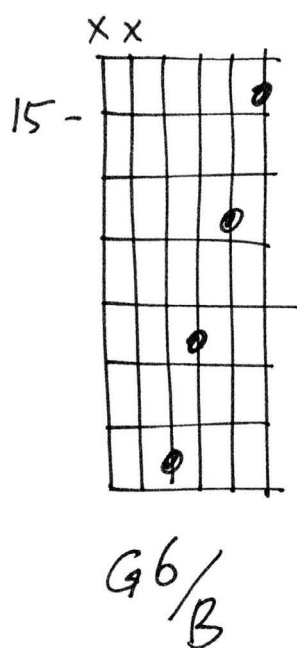
Substitute

Tired of using the same old chord shapes? These substitutions will freshen up your playing in seconds. **This issue:** *Shimmering stretches*

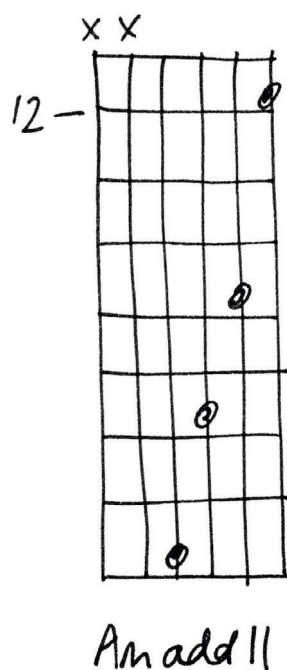
Chords with very small gaps between the notes are known as 'close-voiced', and they sound lovely, but they're mostly not suited to guitar. But if we play high on the fretboard and do a bit of stretching, we can enter the mysterious world of pianos and harps. Deep breath, now...



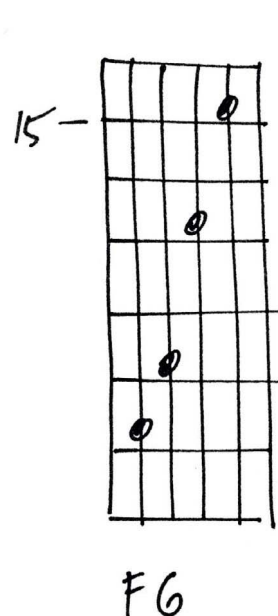
It gets marginally easier with the next chord. Keep your first three fingers in place and bring your 4th finger down to the 21st fret. The usual advice applies here... sitting down or wearing your guitar quite high will help with the stretched shapes. And don't force your fingers!



Sorry, this is another big stretch for your tired fingers. All of the chords presented here fit together, giving you a tinkling, shimmering alternative to a standard C G/B Am F progression.



This is the least stretchy of the four. As an alternative fourth chord (perhaps leading to a new progression) you could also play an E7#5 by taking the previous Amadd11 chord and lowering your 4th finger by one fret.



Warning: these chords can hurt. Only attempt them with extreme care, especially if you are of a nervous disposition or have small hands.

& Also...

RIP Steve Smith

Guitarist saddened to hear of the passing of luthier Steve Smith, who died in May. Steve was an expert guitar maker who made Heart/Heartwood Guitars and worked with other companies including Antoria. He was also the bassist in 1960s R&B band, The Cops 'n Robbers.

It's All Too Much

A 1963 Maton Mastersound guitar played by George Harrison during The Beatles' 1963 UK tour sold for £312,000 at auction in May. The guitar was bought by an anonymous bidder at auctioneers Julien's Auctions in New York. For more information, see www.julien'sauctions.com.

And Finally...



Toby Lee – a 10-year-old guitarist and blues fan from Bloxham – posted a video tribute to BB King which became a huge viral success on social media during May, attracting over five million hits, and messages from all around the guitar community. The video of Toby's cover of *The Thrill Is Gone*, which was originally posted as a get well tribute to the late King Of The Blues, features some fantastically soulful string bending and an equally amazing tiger-striped outfit. The video has led to sponsorship offers as well as a personal message from BB King's daughter, Rita King Washington, and Joe Bonamassa – one of Toby's favourite guitar players – told his Twitter followers: "This is what it is all about. My favourite blues song being played by one of the future superstars of the blues." To hear the performance, find Toby at www.facebook.com/tobyleeguitar.



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Joe Satriani

He's the virtuoso's virtuoso – but will Satch fumble the 10 questions we ask everyone?

1 What was your first guitar and when did you get it?

"A Hagstrom III. I came home one afternoon after finding out that Hendrix had died. I had quit the football team, and I announced to my family that I was gonna be a guitarist. And my older sister, who had just started teaching at a local high school, stood up and said, 'I'll give him my first pay cheque.' There was this white Hagstrom in the local music shop, that for some reason, to me, looked like what Hendrix played. I was so naïve then, I didn't know what a Fender Stratocaster was. It was \$124 – that price sticks in my mind."

2 The building's burning down: what one guitar from your collection would you save?

"Oh, what a horrible thing to think about. I wouldn't think for one second about any material object. I'd think about any human beings, then animals, then myself. All the rest is replaceable. But to play along with the fantasy, I'd probably pick the guitar I played most in that last week. I'm in my studio right now, and I'm seeing the original orange prototype [Ibanez JS2410] that we put out a year or two ago. I'd probably grab that one."

3 What's the oldest guitar you have?

"Currently, it's a 1948 Martin 000-21. I used to have a ton of vintage guitars, but they started to really bug me. I don't like being a collector. I don't want to be a guy that's surrounded by all these mouldy things. So I've gotten rid of about three-quarters of my vintage stuff. I'm down to about four old Strats, old Gibsons, old Martins. It's less than 20 vintage guitars, as opposed to, let's say, 50, like, 10 years ago."

4 What song would you play on acoustic round the campfire?

"I'd play every Rolling Stones song that's in an open G tuning. It's like, that material and that tuning, they were just made for each other. *Led Zeppelin III* has a lot of beautiful stuff that's very down-home, too. Y'know, you can play it out in the middle of a field and it still translates. Some of the fancier stuff like *The Rain Song*, I was never really attracted to it – it just sounded too worked-out for



me – but *Friends* was something that always appealed to my core personality."

5 When did you last practise and what did you play?

"Well, I've been practising for the last couple of weeks, ready for Acoustic-4-A-Cure. It's a benefit concert for the children's cancer hospital here in San Francisco, with Sammy Hagar and James Hetfield, and Linda Perry and Chad Smith are gonna drop by. The guys at Ibanez made me a JS 12-string acoustic, so I've been playing Jefferson Airplane songs, Led Zeppelin, Chickenfoot..."

6 When did you last change your own strings?

"Man, I hate changing strings. There should be some sort of iPhone app. I only ever do it when I have to. Very often, my engineers will go, 'What the hell guitar was that and why does it sound so funny?' And I'm like, 'Well, the strings are four months old, and I didn't bother changing them before I played that solo.' But new strings can be a problem. They can be too bright. You know what? I haven't changed my strings since December 2014."

7 What advice would you give your younger self about guitar if you had the chance?

"I'd tell myself, 'Turn off the metronome and stop trying to play your scales at 220

beats per minute.' All those anxieties you have when you're young and you're practising, y'know? It takes a long time to get over that, but eventually you grow up and you go, 'Oh, what an idiot. I've been spinning my wheels. I should have just been writing songs.'"

8 If you could change one thing about a recording you've been on, what would it be and why?

"There was one thing that I remember was just too damn loud, which was the first guitar solo on *Big Bad Moon*, from *Flying In A Blue Dream*. I remember thinking that when we finished mixing it, but [producer] John Cuniberti said, 'That is so exciting.' I remember, right after I mastered the record, I went over to Steve Vai's house, and we're playing it, and that solo came on, and Steve's hand couldn't have reached any faster for that volume knob."

9 Is there a guitar, or piece of gear, that you regret letting go?

"That Hagstrom III, I wound up selling to a student of mine who used to take lessons with Steve Vai. The pair used to come together and pool their money to take lessons. But a few years ago, when I was on tour with Chickenfoot, a fan had heard the story and presented me with a perfect replica of that guitar. Somehow, she had found the perfect example of the right year and model."

10 What's the closest you've come to quitting music?

"Every night, when I play the last note, I feel so played-out. I'm crawling onto the tour bus and I'm thinking, 'There's got to be something else, so that you don't kill your hands and body with this travelling and volume.' But then, eight hours later, I'm dying to jump on stage again. So it's a short-lived little moment of desperation, where I'm like, 'I could be making croissants in the south of France,' or 'I could go back to school and become an astrophysicist.' But, no. It's hopeless. I'm a musician. That's all there is to it." [HY]

Joe Satriani's new album, *Shockwave Supernova*, is out on 24 July. He tours the UK in November – for info, see www.satriani.com



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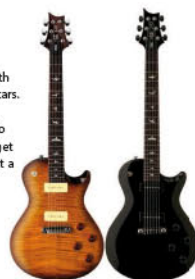
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Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

Star Letter



BOB'S JOB

Dear *Guitarist*, first up, I want to congratulate the entire *Guitarist* team for bringing us what is undoubtedly the best guitar magazine in the world. I have it on subscription, and every time it pops through the letter box, I'm as excited to get it open and get reading as I was when I first started reading it 394 editions ago. The writing, photography and reviews truly are second to none, and it just seems to get better and better.

Nic James's 'Lost Love' letter in issue 394 reminded me of a traumatic experience I had in 1979, when I decided (in my wisdom) to get my 1976 Les Paul Custom refretted. Being brave – and thinking it was the right thing to do – I headed off to London and took in to a guitar 'expert' who worked just off Oxford Street on Rathbone Place. The guy, who we shall name Bob, lent me his 335 copy, so I wasn't too concerned. Initially.

A few weeks went by and I hadn't heard anything from Bob. Starting to get slightly worried, I packed up the 335 copy in its case and headed for Rathbone Place. When I went in to the shop they told me, 'Oh, Bob doesn't work here any more.' Did they have contact details or any idea where he lived, I asked? 'No', came the reply. My heart sank.

To cut a long story short – taking in weeks of detective work and lost sleep – I eventually tracked Bob down to a basement workshop in Denmark Street. When I walked in he was as happy as Larry (Carlton), and totally unconcerned about anything, least of all a hard-up trainee journalist/wannabe rock star who thought he'd lost his much-prized LP after only having had it for a few months. The refret had been done, he said, but he'd had 'a few problems'. Oh Christ. He'd had to refinish the guitar, which he had done pretty well, but, unbelievably, he'd covered over the serial number.

Now, if that had happened at any time since I would have A) broken down in tears, then B) applied a large soldering iron to a sensitive area! But, being young and stupid, I was so relieved I took my Les Paul and got out of there as fast as I could.

Anyway, the happy ending to this is that I still have my lovely Les Paul, which has been joined by several friends. It's been bashed and battered through hundreds of live appearances, recording sessions and wayward drummers' cymbals, and



it still sings like a bird. I'm not bothered about the resale value (as I was for the first 20 years I had it), as I am going to pass it on to my guitar-playing son when I eventually head off to the great gig in the sky.

Mick Sharp, via email

A letter sent in by reader Nic James in issue 394 – regarding a Les Paul that he sold a few years ago and that he wishes he still had – clearly resonated with a lot of our readers. Seems we've all been there. With that in mind, we've devoted this month's Feedback to stories of other 'lost loves'...

Mick, we're relieved to hear you love the guitar just as much today as when you bought it, despite what sounds like rather over-zealous re-fretting from mystery man 'Bob'! We're wondering quite what difficulties 'Bob' encountered that led him to conclude the most prudent step was to refinish the guitar?! All the same, it's really heartening to hear that it's a different, more personal, kind of connection to the instrument that makes you cherish it – rather than slavish devotion to factory-spec condition. Thanks also for your kind words about the magazine, we do our best to please.



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NEVER SAY DIE

Dear *Guitarist*, the letter regarding the guitars we let go but wish we still had [issue 395] reminded me of one such guitar I had in 1975 that I had to let go after a freak accident in October 1976 damaged my left hand, resulting in me losing the end of my first finger to the joint and being told I would never play again. The guitar in question was a 1962 left-hand Fender Stratocaster in a tweed case that cost me £60, that I had flipped over in order to be able to play it. Bearing in mind my wages at the time were £12 per week at the factory where I worked, it was, to me, a lot of money. I advertised the guitar in *Melody Maker* that came out Thursday, and on Friday I had Bill from the Shetland Isles knocking at my door. He had driven non-stop to Yorkshire overnight to buy my Strat and promptly turned round and drove back. I always wonder what became of the guitar and would love to see it again. The good news is, I did learn to play again with dedication and perseverance, and armed with a '69 SG and encouragement from Bernie Marsden, Tony Iommi and John Verity, I founded Saxon with Steve Dawson.

Graham Oliver, via email

Many thanks for writing in, Graham. Like the great Django Reinhardt you clearly weren't willing to be beaten by injury, or to let it stop you playing. We doff our hats to your grit and determination, sir.

FIT TO 'BURST

Following on from the 'Lost Love' letter in issue 394, I bought a Tobacco Sunburst Les Paul Standard from Andy's in Denmark Street around 1976. I think I paid £600 for it then and sold it three years later for £400 (some business man!). I would love to know what year it was made, just so I can kick myself even harder. Nobody cared about that stuff in those days. It was just about how well a guitar played when you picked it up. Still, can't help wondering if it was one of the early ones...

William Weinstein, via email

Our commiserations, William. In fact, 1976 marked the return of the Sunburst Standard to the LP line, though with some historical inaccuracies such as a laminated 'pancake' body and maple neck. If it was one of those then a pang of regret is in order, but not perhaps the abject despair that might result from having sold an actual '58 to '60-era 'Burst!

MIND OVER MATTER

Dear *Guitarist*, the June 2015 issue's 'Lost Love' letter from Nic James in the Feedback section really struck a chord with me. He

strongly associated a particular guitar with a significant event and person and having sold it is now looking to get that exact same one back again. To me, this is a mistake – someone might have customised it, dented or scratched it. It won't be the 'same' instrument as when you had it and you are basically searching for something that now only exists in the past, which is futile.

Having worked through a lot of heartache myself in this area I wanted to suggest an alternative way of looking at the problem. You are better off getting a brand new instrument and re-associating it with the past. I see three key steps in this:

1. Really celebrate getting the new instrument. Don't just buy equipment over the internet from a warehouse for postal delivery because you saved an extra £10. Doing that is a false economy and a missed opportunity – a musical instrument is about life, the heart and mind, and not the wallet. Take the day off and visit the shop in person – you need to experience the new purchase. If you normally drive try taking the train instead, maybe get it from a music shop in a town you have never been to. Celebrate afterwards with a pint in a nice pub or go for a meal or something. The key thing is to create an historic event that you will remember.

2. Secondly, have something with you that is associated with the person or event you want to remember from the lost instrument when you buy the new instrument. Take a photo of your loved one that is in your hand or wallet when you buy the new instrument, and maybe buy it on an anniversary such as a birthday, so the event has special relevance.

3. Thirdly, buy one of those tall pillar candles and light it exclusively every time you play the new instrument, possibly with a special photo or some memento next to it. You will really have a physical sense of the passing of time with the candle lowering as you break in your new instrument.

You very soon deeply associate the new instrument with the person you want to associate it with, and the unique bond you had with the lost instrument is broken and replaced. You have to zone in and not be defeatist, thinking it is a lost cause. I hope that helps.

David Carpenter, via email

Thanks for your interesting letter, David. We venture here upon the wilder shores of psychology – or even mysticism. Is it possible to transfer nostalgia for the past to a new guitar? If your ideas could help some players bond with a new instrument, then why not?

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Wish List
|||||

Photograph by *Simon Lees*





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To mark a quarter-century of collaboration with the mercurial Joe Satriani, Ibanez Hoshino has taken the unique step of commissioning the guitarist to personally decorate the bodies of just 50 special JS25ART guitars. Our pictured example is the only one to land in the UK and although 50 were illustrated, a small number were damaged in the build process, which makes the actual number even smaller. Each design is unique and every single one has been designed and applied by Joe himself, with some featuring simple lines and others offering a more involved image.

His menagerie of weird and wonderful creatures has appeared on his signature straps and picks over the years, and the design on our example – number 15 – is an ideal snapshot of the JS25ART collection. The remainder of the spec should be familiar to most Satch and Ibanez fans: DiMarzio Mo' Joe and Satch Track pickups, a basswood body, and a one-piece JS Prestige neck has been deemed by

Ibanez as the thinnest of the series yet, which is saying something.

Instruments like this blur the line between something intended for use and a piece of artwork that's more suited to hanging on a wall and, as such, the JS25ART is likely to engender as many moans as it will plaudits. We feel that the concept is a truly imaginative one and, needless to say, if you can't stomach the undeniably wallet-crushing £5k price tag, you can grab hold of a production 24-fret Satch for a great deal less.

That's not really the point of the JS25ART series, though. They're as worthy of attention as any other collectible guitars and, while the sad truth is that most of the 50 models available worldwide may well find themselves pushed under various beds to quietly accrue value, any fan of the genuinely unusual should at least track one down to lustfully gaze at.

"I hope you enjoy owning and playing these guitars," cajoles Joe. "And, yes, they should be played!" We couldn't agree with him more. 

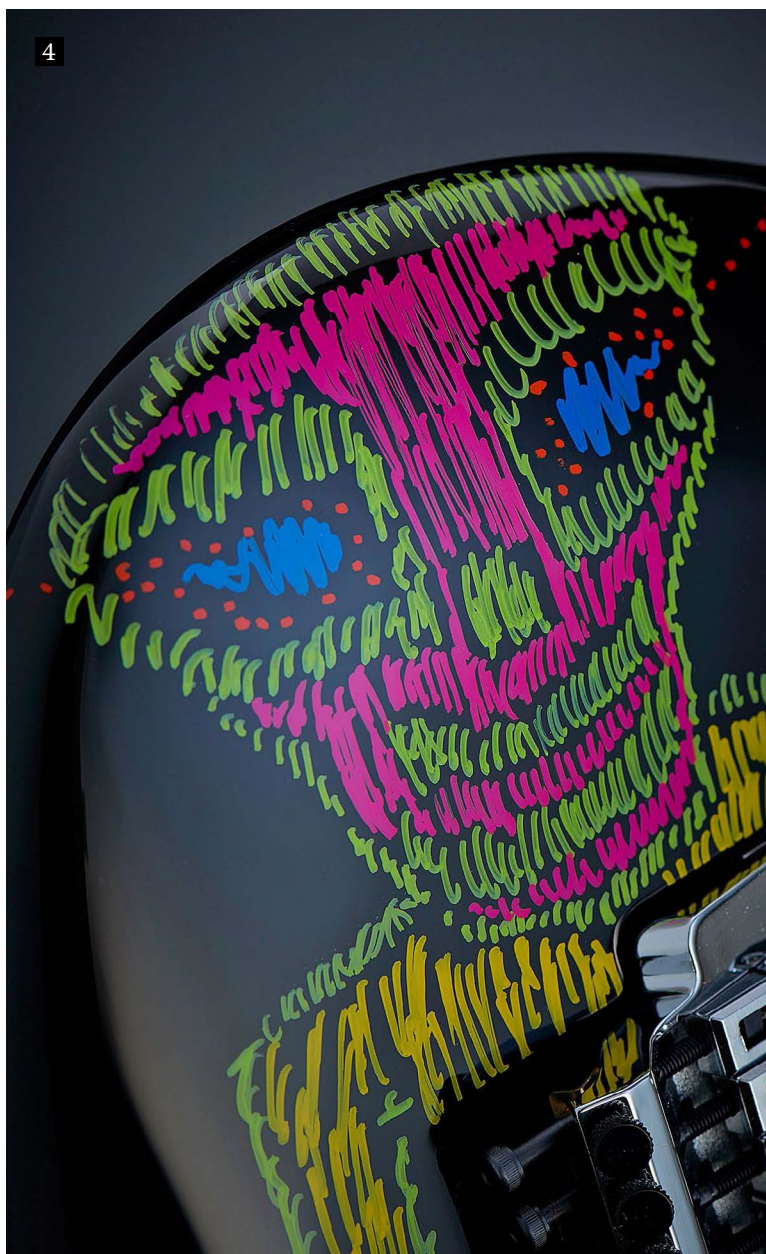
Wish List

1 Pickups on the JS25ART comprise Joe's favoured combination of DiMarzio humbuckers: a Mo' Joe and single coil-sized Satch Track. Meanwhile, the vibrato, a double-locking Edge, is Joe's own choice and includes the new Ultralite arm

2 To add more exclusivity, each guitar is hand-signed by Joe on the rear of the basswood body

3 The one-piece maple neck is mooted to be the thinnest JS Premium Ibanez has ever produced, while the fingerboard features 24 hand-rolled W6105 frets and is topped off by the classic Ibanez pointy headstock

4 The designs on each guitar, all hand-drawn by Joe himself using coloured pens, are wonderfully garish. Joe spent a week at the Ibanez Custom Shop in LA decorating each guitar, and this example is #15 out of just 50 instruments available worldwide



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Music

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Joe Satriani

Shockwave Supernova (Sony Music/Legacy)

7/10



For his 15th album, Satch is revving his hyperdrive and taking us back to the future of instrumental shred. More of the same?

Well, yes and no – the biggest change here is in Satriani himself. We've often wondered if he's been possessed by some guitar demon, but after an experience he had on his recent tour, he now apparently believes it, too. "I found myself playing guitar with my teeth an awful lot," says Satch. "I thought, 'Why are you doing this?' It's as if something else, or somebody

else, was driving me to do it." This was an epiphany for Satriani, who channelled this extroverted alter ego in the studio.

For the title track, Joe's inner show-off is in full futuristic soundtrack mode, with a relentless hammer-on riff interspersed with dextrous lead breaks, and a completely enormous drop D slide-riff section. *A Phase I'm Going Through* is a muscular rocker with a looser live feel, and sees Joe take flight with a controlled yet wonderfully flash solo section torn from his Ibanez. For the last pair of tracks, *Stars Race Across The Sky* and *Goodbye Supernova*, the irregular

time signatures summon the anthemic streak in his playing – the former with a gigantic melody soaked in effects, and the latter with a beautiful fluttering sustained harmony section.

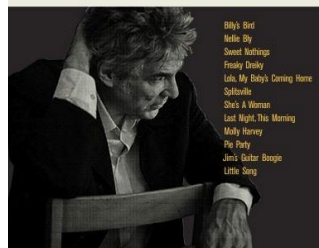
There's more typical Satch fare on show, too, with mid-tempo ballad *Lost In A Memory*'s amazingly accurate legato single-string melodies and the loping jam *Crazy Joey* contrasting a pinched, stinging main riff with some insane pedal-note lines.

Overall, this is a welcome reinvention, with enough that's familiar to satisfy the fans. It's hard to think of a recent instrumental album, with the exception of Steve Vai's recent double-live CD, that can match it for attitude and technique. **[BW]**

Standout track: *Goodbye Supernova*
For fans of: Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert

On the Record

JIM CAMPILONGO & HONEYFINGERS
LAST NIGHT, THIS MORNING



ALBUM: *Last Night, This Morning*

STUDIO: The Bunker, Brooklyn

PRODUCER: Jim Campilongo,
Aaron Nevezie

“Some of the things
I played I wish were better –
and yet they were live, and
they had a great energy that
was of-the-moment”

© JOE FERRUCI



Jim Campilongo

New York's premier Tele-meister gives us the inside story on recording with Western Swing outfit Honeyfingers

THE SESSIONS

“I love country music that's based on the principles of Bach: I mean a Buck Owens ballad, or the Texas Troubadours. It's just beautiful. And a couple of years ago, I went to see Honeyfingers and I was knocked out by how great they were – they were doing music that I thought that only I knew! And not doing a 'historical' presentation of it, either – there was kind of a newer vibe to it, where people were being themselves but still adhering to the importance of the melodies and the harmonies and the right groove and so on.

“Luca Benedetti [Honeyfingers guitarist] was just a wealth of ideas, and the rehearsals for this record were so much fun. We had this regular gig at a vodka distillery, in the lobby where people wait to go on tours and drink. But we got paid a tiny bit and there was an audience and we'd do it every week. And we really pushed it: we'd do a song three times

in a row, we'd stop in the middle and go, 'Hey, maybe you ought to go up a third...' So, we ended up basically rehearsing a lot together and so when we did go into the studio, it was 99 per cent live, because of that.

“We recorded it at The Bunker Studio in Brooklyn, which is a great studio a few blocks from where I live. It was a great room and I had eye contact with everybody – I felt like we were playing together. Some of the things I played I wish were better – and yet they were live, and they had a great energy that was of-the-moment. So because the engineer, Aaron Nevezie, was so proficient and the session had such a great vibe, I kept 99 per cent of my stuff, although initially I had no intention of doing so.”

THE GUITARS

“Basically, I played my '59 Telecaster through a Silverface Princeton Reverb, and because I

thought that I was gonna end up overdubbing things later, that was it. I never thought I was gonna bring, like, 40 guitars, because that isn't my style – but that was it. So we spent some time on my sound and, as usual, we mic'd the back of the amp and the front of the amp and I got the amp in a good space. It wasn't in a closet, it was in a nice-sized room, so there was also a room mic. Afterwards, when we mixed the album I re-amped it, which I always do. I always get a direct line out of the original sound and put it through an amp that I'd probably never play through: some big old, heavy amp. I think it was a Fender Super [an 18-watt, 6L6-equipped evolution of the Dual Professional model]. And so we'd add a touch of that if we needed it.”

THE TONES

“The Silverface Princetons are cheaper but the classic Princeton Reverb sound, for me, is a Blackface with a 60s Jensen goldback speaker, specifically the C-10N. I almost hate to mention that because they're getting so expensive! The more advanced the speaker alphabet as in Q versus N, the less wattage capacity [efficiency] it had, so the C-10N is a really robust speaker. But the Q sounds good, too. For affordability, I'd always go for



Jim's new album is a collaboration with Honeyfingers, and they rehearsed it by playing songs to the crowds at a vodka distillery

“Silverface Princetons are cheaper, but the classic Princeton sound, for me, is a Blackface with a 60s Jensen”

the Silverface, although I'm not enthralled by those blue-back speakers, so I actually put Celestions in and I bias them really hot, so it's like a different amp. It's more overdriven – I've used Silverfaces set up like that on *Dream Dictionary* and *Orange*. And you can really hear it on *Blues For Roy*. On *American Hips* and the others I used the Blackface, and it's a little bit more of a traditional sound. It's funny, about a month and a half ago, I switched back to the Blackface and I'm kinda enjoying the intimacy of it.”

THE MIX

“We mixed 15 tunes in four days and I always pretend I can do that – but then it takes, like, one day to do 90 per cent of one song! But Aaron Nevezie, the engineer, is a guitarist and he was really musically educated, so I could say, hey, at the end of the 'B' section when the diminished lines comes in... and he'd be like, 'Yeah, I'm there.' There was no translating to do. Not that I was there like Nelson Ridell going like, 'On bar 152...' [laughs]. But in the past, I've been frustrated by engineers who didn't know what I meant when I said, 'That part where it goes to the minor chord.' So mixing went quickly, too. It was great.”

THE LESSONS

“At first, I actually wasn't sure if I should make this album, because it was a bit of a departure. But then I thought of Bill Frisell, who I have a lot of respect for, and how he's always doing something different, so I like that – and this is my 11th record. But then I thought, 'I don't know, jeez it's gonna be strange – there's so many soloists,' and I didn't know what to expect. But now I'm super-happy with it.”

THE VERDICT

“I really have enjoyed the project – it was easy, it was fun, there was humour and commitment – everyone really cared. And I'd say I've listened to this record more than any record I've ever made, which I rarely do with my own music. There are a few things we did that are about as pretty as anything I've ever done. *Sweet Nothings*, for example, is a really nice song. I couldn't have done that as a trio. And I loved what Luca played, what Gianni played and what Roy played. One of my favourite parts of the record is a tune called *Splitsville* and I play a pretty good solo and then Roy does this solo on gut-string and it's just great! I'm kinda like waiting for my solo to end so I could hear his!” **G**

Last Night, This Morning by Jim Campilongo & Honeyfingers is out now on iTunes and Amazon.

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Albums

The finest new guitar music committed to wax this month

Jason Isbell

Something More Than Free
Southeastern Records

8/10



Americana's troubadour continues his roll

Isbell's acclaimed *Southeastern* album brought him to a lot of new ears in 2013, and this has all the songwriting ingredients to continue that great work. Reuniting with backing band The 400 Unit and Nashville producer Dave Cobb (Rival Sons, Beck) adds a grittier vintage 70s texture to proceedings here, as does the peppering of tasteful electric slide work. The former Drive By Truckers is now in a league of his own in country with his evocative lyricism, but the acoustic chord work and plaintive delivery of *Children Of Children* is also worthy of his hero Neil Young. Steve Earle would nod approvingly at *Speed Trap Town*'s compelling storytelling, too. [RL]

Standout track: 24 Frames

For fans of: Ryan Adams, Steve Earle, Neil Young

Slash Featuring Myles Kennedy & The Conspirators

Live At The Roxy 25.9.14
Armoury

8/10



Back on Sunset, Slash burns

This double-live CD is also released in DVD format, and sees Slash and his killer band, featuring Myles Kennedy on vocals, playing the Roxy Theatre in Hollywood. Recorded just before the release of his last solo album, *World On Fire*, the set list is a winning mix of his solo catalogue plus a generous smattering of GN'R classics, ably handled as ever by the Alter Bridge frontman's Axl-esque tonsils. If any doubt lingers in your mind over Slash's mythologised status as a true icon of rock guitar after all these years, then just listen to the extended 17-and-a-half-minute version of *Rocket Queen* here – it's a breathtaking edge-of-your-ripped-leather-pants ride stuffed with every ingredient that makes his playing so great, from out-and-out doublestop sleaze to fluid, dynamic-sounding legato runs that only he could hammer on and pull off. [OB]

Standout track: *Rocket Queen*

For fans of: Guns N' Roses, Aerosmith, Alter Bridge

Megan Henwood

Head Heart Hand
Dharma Records

7/10



Folk and beyond from British songwriter

The second album from 2009's winner of the Radio 2 Young Folk Award finds her striding even further away from the traditional idea of the genre. But the unaffected intimacy of her fingerstyle and vocal is unmistakably in the British lineage. *Chemicals* and *Painkiller* are standout showcases of Fylde player Megan's heartfelt, disarming style, but the expanded band arrangements elsewhere offer welcome surprises, too. Tom Excell's electric Afrobeat work in the second half of *Grateful Ghost* switches the mood, and *Puppet And The Songbird* even offers jaunty gypsy-jazz rhythm work. The result is lyrically darker record than her debut, but with inventive musical twists and time changes to add plenty of promising scope for Megan's musical path ahead. [RL]

Standout track: *Chemicals*

For fans of: Joni Mitchell, Beth Orton



Scott Henderson

Vibe Station
Self-released

9/10



Thrilling, mind-bendingly virtuosic fusion workout

This masterly fusion player is on thrilling form here, kicking down boundaries all over the fretboard but somehow keeping an intense musicality and feel at the core of it all. Opener *Church Of Xotic Dance* sets the tone: Grissom-like, greasebucket blues licks somehow sit comfortably alongside virtuosic flights into the abstract. Meanwhile, on the title track, radio-friendly funk gets warped like a vinyl record left out in the sun. Henderson shows off outrageous chops throughout but there's real artistry at its heart. Dazzling. [JD]

Standout track: *Church Of Xotic Dance*

For fans of: Oz Noy, Larry Coryell, Guthrie Govan

Richard Thompson

Still

Fantasy Records

8/10



Shrewd songcraft with a witty nod to guitar's masters

Richard Thompson jokes that he called the album *Still* because he's amazed to still be serving up his edgy and impassioned brand of folk-infused songcraft decades on from his Fairport Convention days. We're sure glad he is, because there's plenty to savour here – from the piratical electric balladry of *Long John Silver* to Thompson's witty homage to his musical mentors on *Guitar Heroes*, which sees him take solos in the style of everyone from Les Paul to Django before confessing that 'I still don't know how my heroes did it'. [JD]

Standout track: *Long John Silver*

For fans of: Mark Knopfler, Fairport Convention, Martin Simpson

Muse

Drones

Warner Bros

6/10



The guitar's back, but is it a revelation?

Compared to 2012's *The 2nd Law*, this is a more guitar-driven affair from the Teignmouth trio. Clunky political themes still abound though, as does the creeping U2 balladeering, this time with the delicate cleans and delayed lines of *Aftermath*. Matt Bellamy unleashes his inner Van Halen on *Reapers' Hot For Teacher*-aping tapping and *The Handler* nods to the neoclassical-meets-sci-fi glory of old. But they slip into Queen harmonies on *Defector*, and it doesn't quite hold together. Ditto the 10-minute *The Globalist*'s descent into mawkish classical piano. Even with Mutt Lange on board, this isn't quite the statement it could have been, but it's a step in the right direction. [DH]

Standout track: *The Handler*

For fans of: Queen, U2, My Chemical Romance

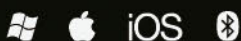
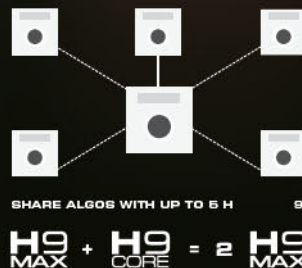
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Headstock

SONNY LANDRETH

As he returns to his roots with new solo album, *Bound By The Blues*, the Louisiana slide man shares his wisdom on oddball techniques, the magic of mistakes and the joys of jamming with Clapton

Words Henry Yates Photography Robley Dupleix

It's just an ordinary glass cylinder. No more, no less. But when Sonny Landreth inserts his little finger and applies it to the neck of a Fender Strat, magic happens. In any discussion of the slide guitar's greatest exponents, Landreth's name must surely be near the top, his inimitable 'slydeco' style powering everything from his sideman role with Clifton Chenier in the late 70s, to the solo career that began with 1981's *Blues Attack*.

Even now, the sleeve of rootsy new album, *Bound By The Blues* – a close-up of the Louisiana bandleader's near-mythical fingers – confirms that Landreth is happy for his fretwork to take the limelight. "I don't even think about celebrity," draws the 64 year old, in the first of many pearls of wisdom. "If you're serious about music, that always comes first."

Every maestro was once a novice

"My first attempt at slide was ugly, my friend. It was rough on my family. Sometimes, I'd throw the slide across the room. Because slide is hard. It's a different animal, in the fact that you're not even using frets in a basic sense. Then you have this

thing on your finger, and it just feels totally awkward. At first, I couldn't get any sounds, because I had too light-gauge strings and the action was too low. I was obviously too stupid to know the difference, and it took a while to figure that out. It would have been real easy to quit right then and there. But like anything, you keep at it.

"It starts with falling in love with the sound of slide in the first place. If you really love it, you hang in there."

Broaden your horizons

"It's always good to listen to other kinds of music, and at least try your hand at them. Then, when you go back to your 'thing', it's more enhanced. That's also true if you tackle another instrument. I actually played trumpet first, so when I got my first guitar three years later, I was really approaching it like a wind instrument player, in terms of phrasing, in particular. With a wind instrument – be that a trumpet, sax, clarinet, flute, whatever – you have to take a breath, and I think that gave me a different take on guitar and really helped me out a lot. Where some of my friends went 90 to nothing into rock 'n' roll, I already had some sensibilities about dynamics."

There's no such thing as a mistake

"Improvisation can go wrong. Oh, yeah. But you have to be willing to take the risk to achieve the reward. When you're firing on all cylinders and it's all clicking, it's like nothing else. There's such a sense of freedom. I would even go so far as to call it bliss. On the other hand, when it doesn't work, it's not. But then, sometimes, the mistakes will lead you into an area you wouldn't have gone otherwise. The great jazz trumpeter Clifford Brown was known for that. Back in the day, he'd make mistakes, and it would catapult him into a completely different area. All this cosmic playing would come from a mistake. People would love that about him, and it made it more real."

It's all in the fingers

"Fingers are extraordinary things, how you can elicit and coax different sounds with them. It's not always about changing an amp or changing a channel. It's not always about stepping on another pedal. There's a whole lot going on organically with the sound as it comes off the guitar. There's a

lot of things going on with my technique, but mostly it's the fingerstyle approach, and with the right hand, there are other things going on [like slapping] in addition to the usual chores. Also, just moving the hand up and down the strings completely changes the timbre and tone. Then, with the left hand fretting behind the slide, it becomes a more dimensional sound. I guess it's polyphonic – melody, harmony and rhythm, all at the same time."

Don't be afraid of the deep end

"Oh man, playing with Clifton Chenier in 1979 was my real education in music. I always say it's not unlike if I'd been in Chicago and Muddy Waters had taken me under his wing. That's how important Clifton Chenier was. Just an incredible musician, a visionary, with a powerful sense of the blues and how to fuel-inject that and many other things. I've never learnt so much about rhythm and syncopation. But he kept me on my toes. We'd play songs in a different key every night. Y'know, he'd call a blues tune and it might be in E_b – you just never knew. And I swear, every night, he'd pull out a song that I had never done. He was like a walking repertoire. And he was a big fan of Elmore James. That's why he liked the slide so much. He loved having that as the counterpoint for the accordion."

Meet your heroes

"When you play with Eric Clapton, you'd better bring something to the table. At the second Crossroads Festival, he said, 'Oh, I want to come out and play with you.' So we were playing *Hell At Home* and all of a sudden, here's Eric Clapton, blowing a guitar solo, just like this possessed man. My God. That's when it really hit me. Like, 'Is this really happening? This is like a dream for me.' He was just so into it, and the whole band's energy went up a couple of notches. And you go, 'Oh, yeah. That's why [he's so famous].' He's unique. It really doesn't get any bigger or better than that for me."

Blues is an ocean

"With *Bound By The Blues*, I wanted to get back and do a blues album again. It had been a while. Some guitarists think the blues format is limited? That's what I call a prejudiced perception, and if that's what you think then that's all you're gonna get out of it. Tell that to Ornette Coleman. Tell that to any of the great jazz musicians who would always go back to the blues for inspiration. Use that as the foundation and then take it to a different place where the sky's the limit. That was sorta the idea with

this album as well. I think, like anything, the blues is only as limited as your imagination."

Three is the magic number

"I've had big bands with keyboards, accordions, horns – we've done all that. But I love the trio format. There's a lot of things that I do texturally, and I think for my style, a trio gives me the space and freedom. Any time you add another instrument, it's a give and a take. The cool thing about a trio is you're down to the bare bones and everything counts. A song might be more of a production in the studio, so then you have to think, 'Well, how do I crystallise all those elements into a singular voice?' That forces you to become more creative. You might look at it and be like, 'Well, it's only a three-piece band.' But there's this greater reality behind all that. There's a lot of moving parts."

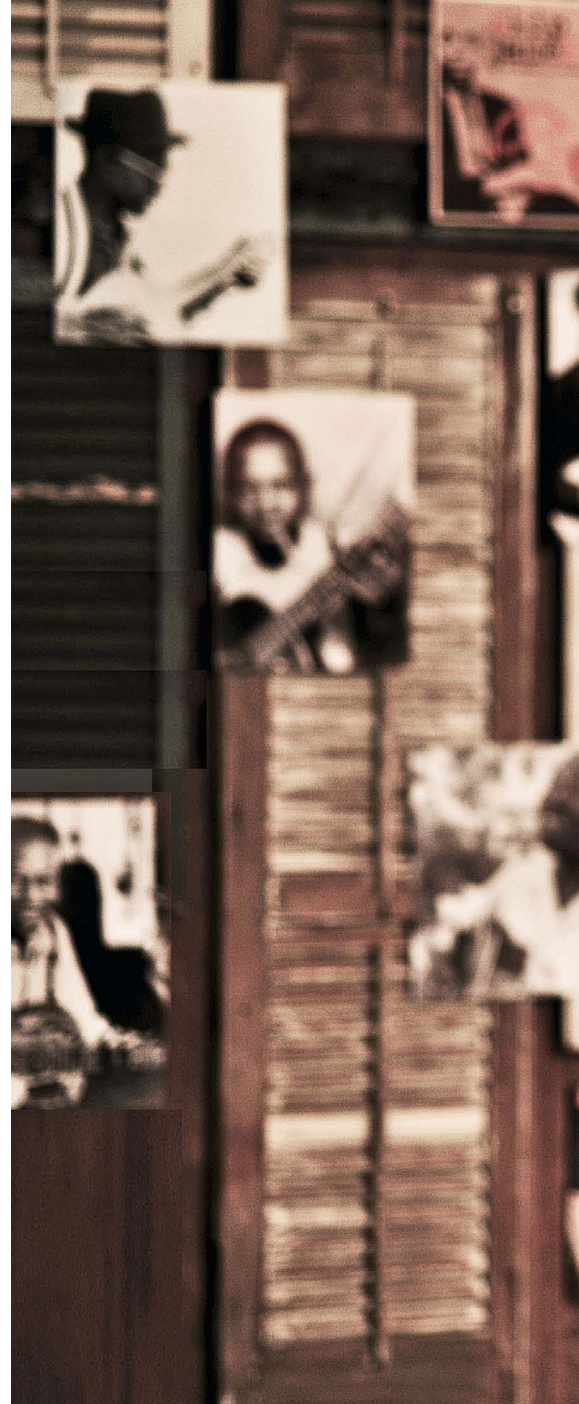
Cover, don't copy

"I'm fascinated by how a really good song can be interpreted in different ways. With a cover, you want to pay homage to the song and recognise the significance of the history. But it's important to find a fresh perspective. There are some songs on the new album that I've been playing for a long time, and they've evolved so much. And then I realised that I had evolved, too, y'know? *Key To The Highway* is very different to the way I was first playing that song, many years ago. We actually recorded it on the *Blues Attack* album, back in '81. It was in the key of E, I played a resonator and it was a totally different arrangement. Some covers you just play, but other songs become much more personal. They can inspire you to evolve and develop new techniques."

The kids are alright

"Derek Trucks is my man. I heard him when he was a kid. I saw this clip on the news, this little kid playing slide. With everything being so accessible on the internet, it's chops galore, so here's another cute kid playing guitar. But it was a whole different thing with him, right from the get-go. I remember, me and my bass player Dave Ranson, we looked at each other and said, 'Yep, that kid's got it. That's an old soul there.' He's done nothing but expand all these years. He stretches the boundaries."

"If you think about it, Derek Truck's challenge was greater, because he was close to the Allman Brothers. Everyone tried to emulate Duane, so that's just where it started with him, but he's taken it above and beyond. He's amazing. On top of that, he's just a sweetheart."



“Improvisation can go wrong. Oh, yeah. But you have to be willing to take the risk to achieve the reward. When you're firing on all cylinders, it's like nothing else”



"Melody, harmony and rhythm": it's all in the fingers, says Sonny

Get your priorities straight

"In the past, I used to get home, then I'd go out with my friends, have a meal and go dancing. Music and food are a big deal down here in Louisiana. But these days, just to be home and sit on my couch, hang out with my dog and have a glass of wine is a pretty big deal. As you get older, there are so many things in life that you've got to deal with. Everything from your ageing parents to losing friends. I literally have to fight for the time to practise the guitar. But I have to make that happen – if I get past three days of not playing, it's just not good for me."

Every guitar has a song

"Guitars all have their own personalities, especially if you use a lot of different tunings. You might pick up a guitar and go, 'Ah, I don't like that.' But then you start changing the tension and turning the tuners

and that guitar might be perfect for 'F', so now that's a whole different range that you maybe never played in before. That's cool, but you can have too many guitars – and I think that I do. For me, these days, it's more about having a 'commando' combo rig, where you can go anywhere, anytime, and you're ready to go."

Slide goes with everything

"A long time ago, a friend of mine came up the term 'slydeco' to describe my playing, and it stuck. It says a lot about the potential for slide guitar. I've always felt that slide has the ability to expand into a lot of different sounds and musical styles. That's part of the beauty of slide. There's a vocal quality about it that lifts up anything. There's so much you can do to create sounds and textures and phonics, in addition to the big three – melody, harmony and rhythm. It creates a really complex sound."

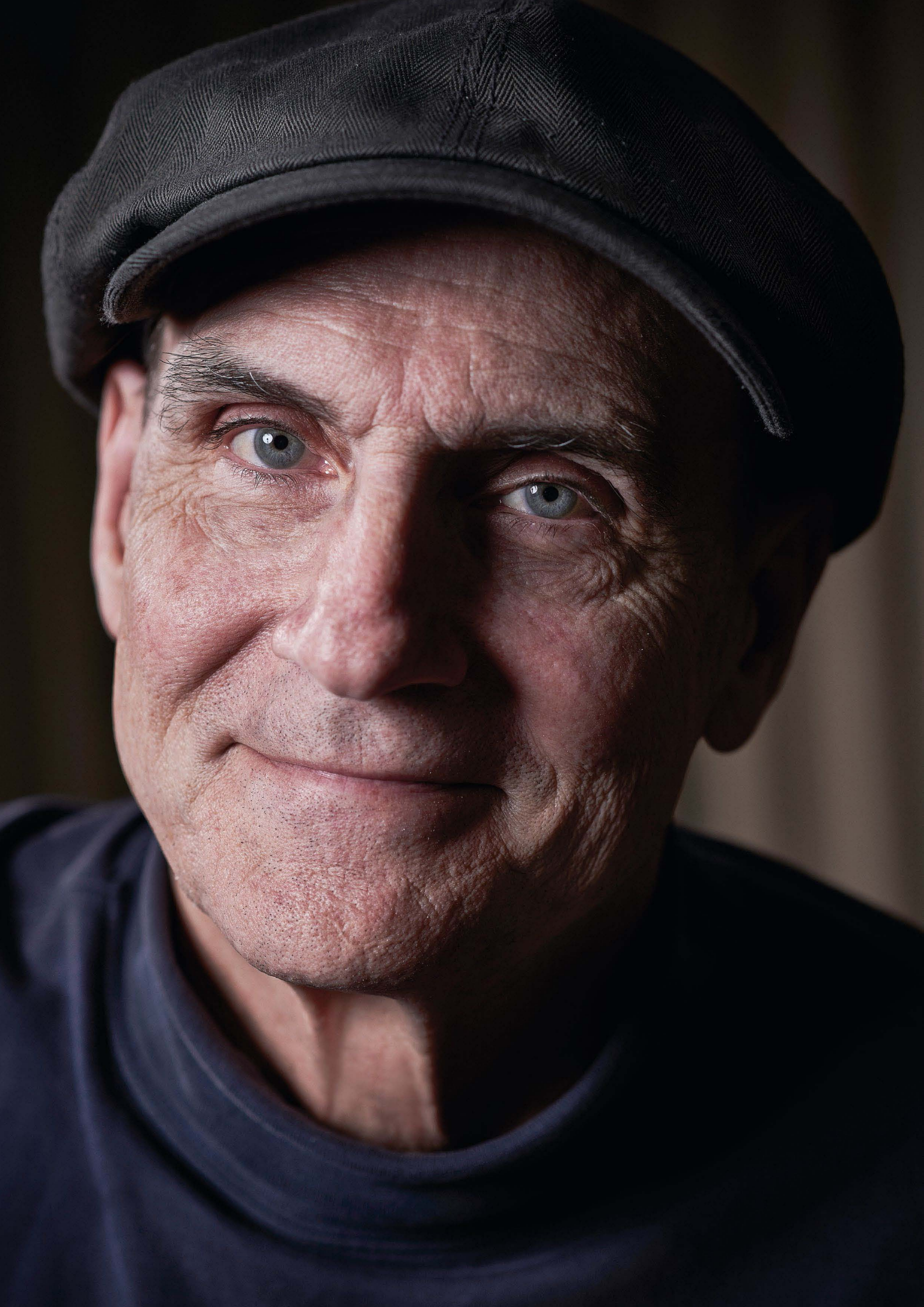
Art doesn't come easy

"I've learned that the best thing to do with writer's block is just to let it go for a while. You can hit a slump with anything, and sometimes you just need to get away from the guitar, stop thinking about it, do something completely different, and just have faith that it's all part of the process. I mean, everybody goes through that. I think it's important to hold yourself to high standards with an album, but maybe I get a little too carried away with it sometimes. But I'm really happy with *Bound By The Blues*. It's good when it all aligns, y'know? It all comes out and you get that affirmation of pulling it off." 🎸



Sonny Landreth's latest album, *Bound By The Blues*, is out now on Mascot/Provogue.

www.sonnylandreth.com



INTERVIEW

JAMIES TAYLOR

With his first album of original compositions since 2002's acclaimed *October Road*, James Taylor is back on form—vocally, as a great fingerstyle guitarist and as composer of deeply personal songs. James talked exclusively to *Guitarist* about the new record, his stunning band, and what it's like for an erstwhile acoustic minstrel working in the digital age

Words Neville Marten Photography Joby Sessions

It's rare for an artist to define an entire genre, but when it comes to guitarist-singer-songwriters one man stands apart. This quiet, self-effacing minstrel from Boston, Massachusetts came to prominence when the 60s were all but done. The joyous pop of the decade had given way to self-indulgent blues-rock, deafening stacks of amps and 15-minute guitar solos. Even Dylan had gone electric. The time, it seemed, was ripe for a subtler, more introspective style.

While Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, Judy Collins, Carole King and a host of others were plying their trade in the coffee shops of New York and Los Angeles, it was Joni Mitchell and the tall, quietly spoken intellectual James Taylor that defined their respective genders' role in this new singer-songwriter movement.

A famously troubled individual, Taylor's life and music would be informed by bouts of depression, psychiatric institutions and chronic drug abuse. Yet his lyrics and music, while deeply personal and often cryptic, connected with a generation let down by hippy promises and hedonistic excess. His music was sophisticated, too: while Dylan and Donovan played straight major and minor chords, Taylor's fingerpicked guitar style brimmed with major and minor 7ths, slash chords and intricate trills and figures that stamped their mark on every song. It sent a million wannabes scurrying for that old flat-top under the bed.

Man Of The World

With over 100 million album sales to his credit – his *Greatest Hits* sold over 12 million copies in the US alone – Taylor has been selling out concerts for over 40 years now. Attracting the world's finest musicians like moths to a street lamp, his band is always populated by the finest players of their era. His 1997 Grammy Award-winning *Hourglass* marked a new high both writing and production for the artist; its follow-up, 2002's *October Road*, was similarly well received, but Taylor has not released any original work until now.

Continuing the tradition of fine song construction, state-of-the-art production and fabulous playing, *Before This World* tackles personal and world issues with equal care. But how does James Taylor go about creating an album in these digital days?

"I'm a bit nostalgic for analogue, but I doubt I'll ever go back," Taylor begins. "It's all going to be digitised eventually. Recording digital gives you much more editorial capacity to manipulate things afterwards, and it's just too good from the mixing point of view. The point about analogue is that the microphones, the speakers, the amplifiers, and all the things that manipulated the signal evolved together. And then

when they made this divide, where there was the analogue side going to digital, it took digital a long time to integrate. But with faster sampling rates and higher bit rates, it's getting so much better."

“A song either hits you or it doesn't... That's why music is empirically true, that's why it gives us the release”

Born In A Barn

Taylor now records in a studio in his barn at home on Martha's Vineyard, an island off the Massachusetts coast near Boston. "*Hourglass* was the first album we made on available home studio machinery," he elaborates. "It was totally revolutionary. About \$20,000 bought you an entire studio, so from that point on I've always tracked in my own space. That sense of the meter running in the old studios was a drag, so it's nice to be able to relax into it and feel as though you have all the time you need. The barn is one I used for storage and rehearsal, but it turned out sounding so good that we've used it more and more."

Is a James Taylor album a layer-upon-layer affair, or do he and his band play largely live?

"I tend to want to track with as many of the instruments playing as possible," he reveals. "The other way is to write everything out and ask everybody to 'play the ink', or put down a drum machine, guitar and voice and then selectively layer things on. But my kind of recording is the consensus approach of teaching the players the tune and seeing what happens when they bring their own take to it. They get to use their musical choices and it turns out to be far more interesting. But it takes musicians

who are willing to listen to each other and maybe let somebody else have the reins."

Taylor teaches the songs to the band a number of ways. "Sometimes I make a demo, and the guitar suggests the expanded arrangement," he continues. "Other times I'll cut demos with just Steve Gadd and Jimmy Johnson, to make a good first iteration of a song. They take notes and write their parts out in whatever form they can most readily read and remember it. It's been a long time since I wrote out chord charts but I used to chart out the songs, make copies and pass them out to the band and they would play it and we'd discuss it."

On bigger shows Taylor takes out as many as 13 musicians, including four backing vocalists, brass and percussion. But the nucleus of the production is a quartet of A-list virtuosos.

"It's amazing," says Taylor, as if in disbelief at his own pulling power. "We have Jimmy Johnson and Steve Gadd playing bass and drums, Larry Goldings on keyboards, and Mike Landau playing guitars of all stripes. That's the basic group, and I have my four singers, plus percussion and horns. I did the *Covers* albums [*Covers* in 2008 and *Other Covers* the following year] because I wanted to record those 13 people live. *Before This World* has those four main players and myself. We cut a track a day for 10 days and that's 90 per cent of what you hear on the record."

Even once they're learned, Taylor likes to refine the songs further before they're committed to 'tape'. "Well, you're recording the song for all time, but this is the first time everyone's played it. If you could tour a batch of songs for 20 or 30 gigs I'm sure that things would settle. In the studio you're trying to do that first time, so we tend to do a lot of takes – 20 takes or so for each song."

As Taylor is so involved and knowledgeable about digital recording, the writing process surely involves laptops, iPads or even mobile phones?

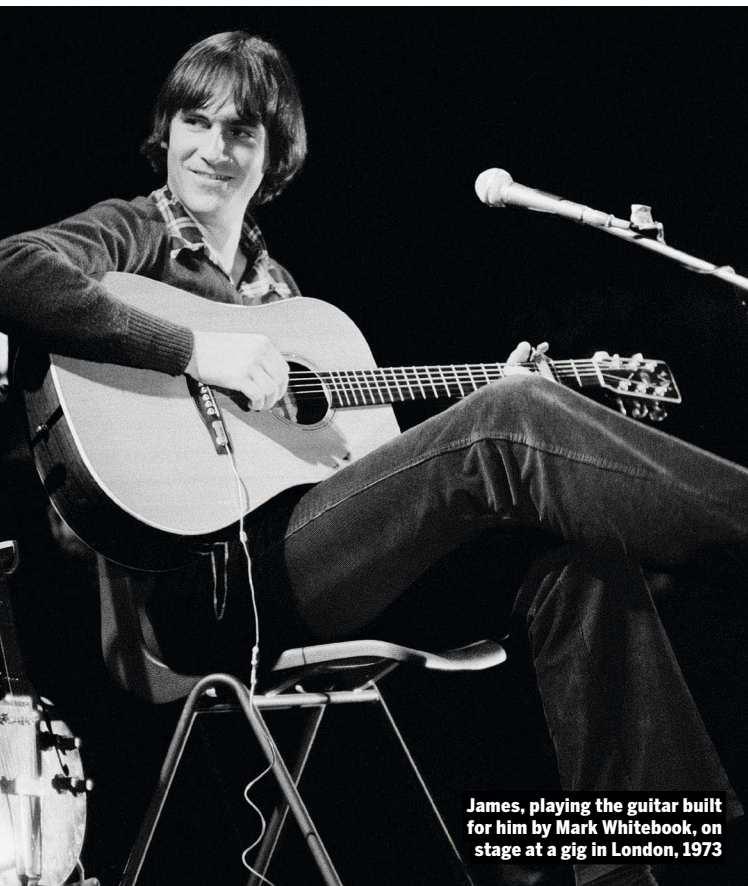
"No, no iPads," Taylor states emphatically. "I buy a notebook for every song I write, open it up so there's a blank page to my left and to my right, put down what I've got now and then start making changes on the left-hand side. I use lined paper, and on the line opposite I'll put an alternative, then flip the page over and do it again. Eventually, you can see the song develop; how the form of it has changed and how I've edited the lyric together."

"Things will have a working title," Taylor continues. "*Far Afghanistan* was called 'Irish Heroic' – I was thinking more about Ralph Vaughan Williams than anything else there. The working title of *Montana* was 'Three-Four Folk', and *Angels Of Fenway* was called 'G Nation', for some reason. So I'm aware of what the character of the song is going to be."

Star Power

A staggering roster of celebrity singers has joined Taylor on his records over the years, from various Beatles, Joni Mitchell and Carole King, through to his ex-wife Carly Simon, Stevie Wonder, Bonnie Raitt, Simon, Garfunkel, JD Souther, Crosby, Nash, issue 392 cover star Mark Knopfler and many others. Sting





James, playing the guitar built for him by Mark Whitebook, on stage at a gig in London, 1973

“I’m a bit nostalgic for analogue, but I doubt I’ll ever go back. It’s all going to be digitised eventually”

contributes vocal harmony on the new album’s title track. Taylor becomes uncharacteristically animated when talking about singers and singing – harmony vocals in particular.

“I worked with Graham Nash and David Crosby on two albums – *In The Pocket* and *Gorilla*. They sang on *Mexico* – and that sounds like Crosby, Stills & Nash with those three voices, even though Stephen Stills’ voice has such a strong character. The surprising thing is that people in a stack of vocals will glue it together in a way that you wouldn’t expect. Carole King is a great person to have in a stack of vocals, as is [renowned backing vocalist] David Lasley. I’ve worked with a lot of great singers – George Jones, McCartney and Harrison – and that’s a great part of my thing, arranging vocal choral music. I spend a lot of time at it.

“These days I tend to sing all the parts. I use a pitch shifter to drop the key down so I can sing the high parts, then shift it back up so it’s in key, then we’ll re-record it [using the backing singers]. Actually, on *Angels Of Fenway* I kept a lot of my Melodyne vocals to build that harmony stack. It’s a great tool to be able to sing all the parts, even beyond your own range.”

World Guitars

Over his long career, James Taylor has used a variety of guitars to shape his sound. When he first came on the scene in the late 1960s, his guitar of choice was a sweet sounding but light-toned Gibson J-50. He’s remained faithful to just three main acoustic guitar brands since then, but has been playing instruments built by luthier James Olson of Circle Pines, Minnesota since 1989.

“I used my Gibson J-50 for the first 12 years or so, then John McLaughlin introduced me to a guitar builder called Mark Whitebook [the jazz-fusion guitarist worked with Taylor on his 1972 album, *One Man Dog*, on which he played a stunning acoustic solo on the track *Someone*]. Mark built two guitars, one for me and another for my then wife [Carly Simon]. Hers was actually a little better than mine so mostly I played that one. But when we got divorced, understandably she wanted it back.”

Then in 1989, after a gig in Minneapolis, Taylor arrived back at his hotel only to find a surprise on the bed – a guitar made for him by James Olson.

“He had gotten this guitar into my room, and when I picked it up and played it I knew I had a great new guitar. It’s slightly wider at the nut than normal so it fits my hand better. It has a cedar top and rosewood back and sides. It rings and has a very bright sound but it’s balanced, which means you can get a good bass note out of it. The action is low. I like it just on the clean side of buzzy.”

Fingerpickin’ Good

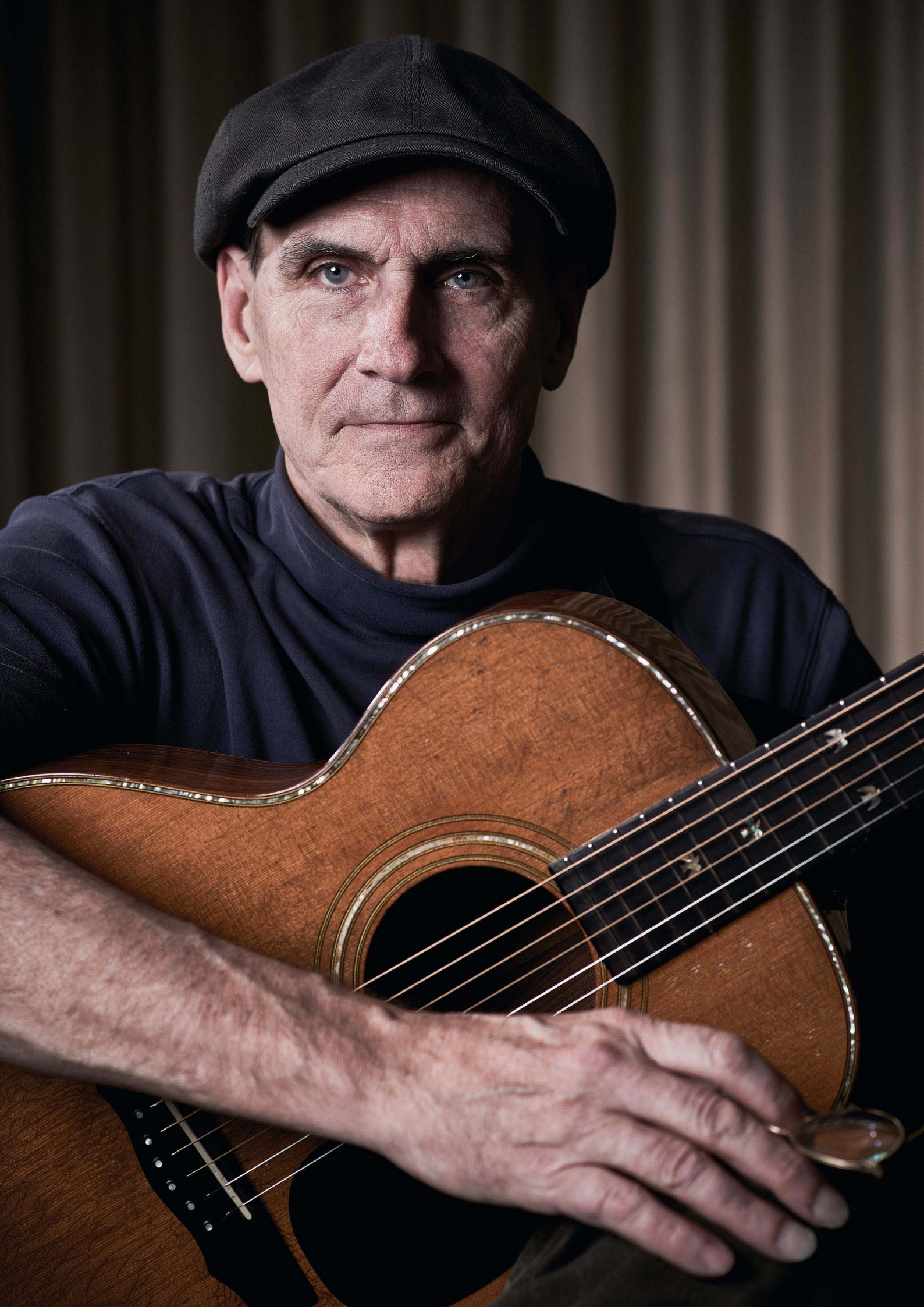
We know Taylor to be a fine acoustic fingerpicker. But he also plays electric. Could he surprise everyone by knocking out a stinging solo on a track like *Steamroller Blues*?

“No, probably not. Sure I can play a solo, but it’s just a slightly punched-up version of what I’d play anyway. I’m not a virtuoso guitar player; I’m an accompanist, not a soloer. I play a bassline with my thumb and play internal lines with my index and middle fingers. I’m basically bracketing the arrangement on the guitar and using it to accompany myself.”

But what about strumming – would he ever grab a pick and bash out a tune?

“Again, no. Thumb and strum is what I tend to do. I very seldom





“Thumb and strum is what I tend to do. I seldom actually strum – I use my thumb in that ‘flailing’ type of style”

actually strum – I’m always using my thumb in that ‘flailing’ type of style.”

Apart from the occasional drop D, Taylor is not known for open tunings, either...

“I have written a few songs in G tuning – which to me is really an A tuning but down a whole step,” he reveals. “*Love Has Brought Me Around* [from *Mud Slide Slim And The Blue Horizon*] and a couple more. So I tend to stay with regular tuning, but I do like the drop D. Occasionally, I write on piano – I can’t play it, but I can write on it. Then I show it to a keyboard player and he works out how to play it properly. *You And I Again* on this album was written that way.”

Cutting The Chords

Since his very early days, Taylor’s chords and progressions have been marked by a harmonic sophistication uncommon in ‘folk’ styles.

“You find that if you play a V chord over a I, that is a I in the bass and a V chord on top – say, a D chord over a G bass – you get a major 9. I love that sound. I also like playing a II chord over a I bass – say, an A chord over a G. It’s a sound that really wants to resolve and you really hear the thing drop into place when it does.

“When I learned to play the guitar, I learned some of my chords from other people, but some of them I’d just construct – like I knew I needed this note in the bass and I needed a chord above it. Also, I don’t play a D or A chord like anybody else; I play the 3rd in those chord shapes with my index finger, so you can really pull off and hammer on strong. So, from a very early time I was simply constructing what I wanted to hear, chord-wise. It wasn’t unusual for me to play an F chord and take the ring finger and put it over on the G bass note to create a IV over V [or 11th]. The other thing is that my playing is very ‘straight 8ths’, in that it has almost no swing at all. That ‘straight-up-ness’ means I have to really hammer on strong – as on *Fire And Rain*.”

Take It To Church

Taylor’s list of influences ranges from Cuban and Brazilian to... English Church music?

“I’m a folk player, which means I’m sort of drifting and responding to a lot of different sources,” he points out. “A Cuban ‘tres’ player – that’s a six-string guitar with three pairs of double strings – called Nadar Arsenio Rodriguez was a huge influence on me. Then

there was Jobim; that sound of the bossa nova guitar was also a huge influence. Then Kootch [Taylor’s guitarist friend Danny Kortchmar] taught me blues and gave me a really strong sense of that stuff, exposing me to it in a major way. So these things come along. But I’d say at the base of it all is the Church of England standard hymnal – *Jerusalem, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, Once To Every Man And Nation*. That very standard Western sound was the first thing I played – Christmas carols, too. I was also exposed to a huge amount of show music – Broadway music – when I was a kid; my parents listened to a lot of that and our record collection was very rounded.

“*Angels Of Fenway* reminds me of that loping ‘trot’ type meter of *Surrey With The Fringe On Top* [from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!*]. It has a simple melody line and the first iteration is in the key of G; it then has the same melody in the relative minor [E]. That’s a trick I use a lot – the same melody line with different chords underneath. The opening song, *Today Today Today*, uses the same melody line when it falls into the bridge but over very different chords. If you had to play that melody over and over again it would drive you nuts, but it’s a vocal vehicle.

“*Far Afghanistan* reminded me of a Vaughan Williams *Fantasia On Greensleeves* or something. How it ended up being a song about a soldier preparing to go to war is because it’s something I just can’t stop thinking about, what it must be like to be in that situation. So, influences come from far and wide.”

World Class

While chatting to one of the great songwriters it seemed obvious to ask Taylor what, in his view, makes a great song, and which tracks on *Before This World* stand out to him.

“A song either hits you or it doesn’t,” he suggests. “A song can be really carefully prepared and balanced; the lyric can be offset by a contrast in the harmonics beneath it. It can be like Cole Porter’s *You’re The Top*, that’s just a delight to listen to, or it can break all the rules and still work. But you can’t decide ‘I’ll like this or I won’t’. That’s why music is empirically true; that’s why it gives us the release that it does. It’s of the real world; it’s a human language but it follows the laws of physics; and what is harmonic to us, while somewhat culturally determined, in the end I think is more about mathematics.

“On this album I’d say my best songs are *You And I Again*, *Far Afghanistan* and *Snowtime*. But *Angels Of Fenway*, *Stretch Of The Highway* and *Before This World* surprised me also. The thing I like to think about it is that this is the thing I’m meant to do. To write, record and perform music. And I just want as many people to hear it as possible. Not to force it down anyone’s ear but to make it available. For some reason I still find that compelling.”



James Taylor’s new album, *Before This World*, is available now on Concord Records. Visit James’s website for more information.

www.jamestaylor.com



A MASTERCLASS WITH

JAMIES TAYLOR

Join one of the greatest singer-songwriters of all time
for a personal lesson in magical unplugged playing

Words Adrian Clark Photography Joby Sessions

James Taylor's acoustic guitar style has been instantly recognisable since the early 70s, and has influenced countless singer-songwriters since. He might not be a virtuoso instrumentalist – always using the guitar to accompany his voice – but there's a lot you can learn from his style.

In contrast to the more pattern-based fingerpicking styles (often blues-derived) of the more folky acoustic songwriters, Taylor's style has a more pianistic approach – think about how a pianist uses the sustain pedal to add suspensions and create smooth transitions between chords. This requires careful note choice and a certain amount of control over your picking hand. Every note can be selected or avoided, depending on the sound you want to make.

Here's our brief guide to the James Taylor sound, transcribed from the examples he played for us in the accompanying video.

EXAMPLE ONE

James starts by showing how he might fingerpick a chord progression. Notice how he'll introduce notes from the next chord to add interest, such as that first A to Gadd9 change, where the F# prepares us for the new G bass note and the open B gives a suggestion of the new chord. "These are lines that are happening all around each other rather than all at once," James says. "They're independent. It's very different from a strumming technique. I often lead with a bass line and then break it up rhythmically, so it has an internal back-and-forth."

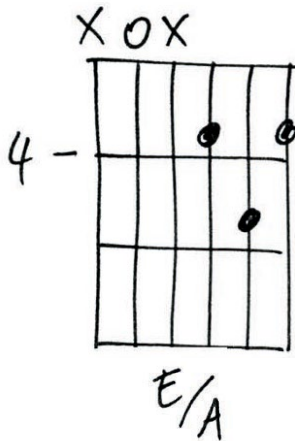
♩ = 77

Chord progression and fret numbers (measures 1-17):

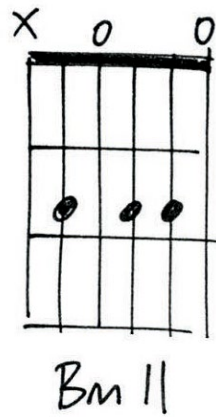
- Measure 1: E/A (E: 2-3-0, B: 2-4)
- Measure 2: A (E: 0-1-2, B: 0-2-2, D: 0-2-0)
- Measure 3: Gadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 4: Em9 (E: 0-4-0, B: 0-4-0, D: 0-0-0)
- Measure 5: A (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 0-0-0)
- Measure 6: E/A (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 0-0-0)
- Measure 7: A (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 0-0-0)
- Measure 8: Gadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 9: Bm (E: 3-2-0, B: 3-2-0, D: 4-2-0)
- Measure 10: A (E: 3-2-0, B: 3-2-0, D: 4-2-0)
- Measure 11: G (E: 3-2-0, B: 3-2-0, D: 4-2-0)
- Measure 12: Em9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 13: G (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 14: A (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 15: E/A (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 16: A (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 17: Gadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 18: Bmadd11 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 19: Eadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 20: G (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 21: Bmadd11 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 22: Cadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 23: D/F# (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 24: G (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 25: Bmadd11 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 26: Cadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 27: Dsus2 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)
- Measure 28: Eadd9 (E: 0-2-0, B: 0-2-0, D: 3-0-0)

EXAMPLE TWO

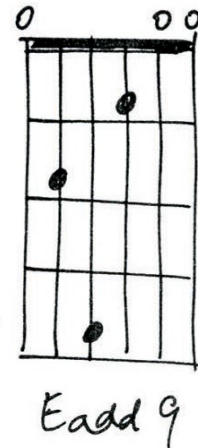
Below you'll see a list of chords, all of which James considers to be typical of his sound. Let's get stuck in and examine them properly, in a sort of mini Substitute special!



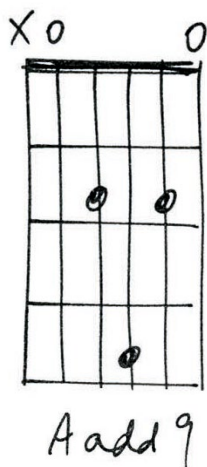
1 You can look at this in two ways, either as an E triad over an A bass, or as an Amaj7 variant. The major 3rd (C#) is replaced with a B, so it'd be Amaj7sus2.



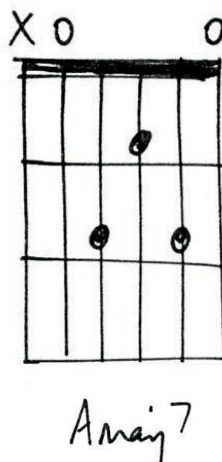
2 This is always a great alternative to a standard Bm or Bm7. It also has a hint of ambiguity, with that A major triad on the top.



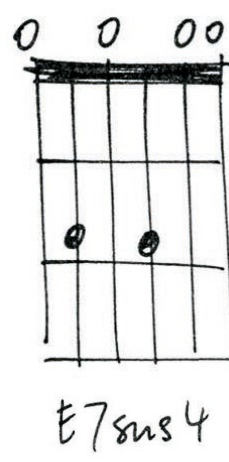
3 This is the sound of *Every Breath You Take*. The shape is less painful to play in open position, and this is an alternative to pretty much any E major.



4 This is the fifth string root equivalent of the previous chord.



5 James plays these two chords as a progression, joining them with a nice walking and alternating bass line.



Temper Temper

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Taylor's technique is his approach to tuning the guitar: he tunes all the strings flat but by very specific, microtonal amounts.

"In Bach's time they came up with the tempered tuning that allowed you to play in different keys but still stay in tune," he explains. "I do the same thing on the guitar. If I'm playing in A440 [standard concert pitch], the first string will be an exact E, but the sixth string will be 10 cents flat – 10 cents being 10 hundredths of a half-tone – 10 cents lower than an exact E, so it's a wider tuning. But because I use a capo so often

and because the capo itself pulls the guitar slightly sharp, I actually tune the first string to minus three cents.

"Because the second string is always such a devilish thing, it gets minus five; then I do minus four for the third, then it's minus eight, minus 10, and minus 12. So that compensates for the capo pulling it sharp, but also because the bass strings ring sharp because they're getting tighter as they vibrate. So as you play up the neck, this wider tuning is very forgiving; you don't get the same problems with the 3rd in the chords ringing sharp. So that's how I temper tune the guitar."

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EXAMPLE FIVE

Finally, James demonstrates his 'pick-and-strum' approach. Basically, you're picking the bass notes with your thumb as normal, but strumming the high notes both upwards and downwards with your fingernails. You can, of course, also play regular fingerpicked single notes, as in bar 6.

C Ex 5

♩ = 152

Capo 2nd fret

1 3 V ■ 3 2 V ■ V V ■ V 3 3 2

4

8

12



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ANT LAW

Ant Law's love of guitar was kick-started by SRV, bolstered by The Beatles and Stones, then shaped through classic blues, and the stadium rock and virtuosos of the 80s. It's an unconventional route to jazz, but one that has imbued the composer, touring artist and author's playing with a rare and captivating feel

Words Denny Ilett Photography Will Ireland

The recent release of his second album, *Zero Sum World*, confirms Ant Law's place as one of the most original jazz-guitar voices in a generation.

Aside from writing, touring and recording with his own group, Law collaborates with a who's-who of the UK contemporary jazz scene and is also a published author. *Guitarist* caught up with the 32-year-old London resident to find out more about this rising star of jazz guitar.

How did you first become interested in guitar playing?

"I was born in the Middle East. Both my parents are English, but they were teaching in Saudi Arabia, and I lived there until I was 16. Growing up, I remember spending lots of time watching a video of Stevie Ray Vaughan's *Live At The El Mocambo*. I used to watch it every day."

Was he your first influence?

"Absolutely. I remember hearing *Scuttle Buttin'* for the first time and thinking, 'Wow, this is the best thing that exists in the universe!'"

Hearing you play, one could be forgiven for being surprised that SRV would be an influence on you...

"Well, I feel that whenever I listen to Stevie Ray, whatever he plays, there is serious intention and force behind it. You really feel that he means something with every note. I don't get that feeling as much with some other players."

So, for you, it's beyond 'genre', it's more about an attitude to playing?

"Yes. Of course, if you really analyse SRV's music – with the exception of, say, *Lenny* or *Riviera Paradise* – you wouldn't call it jazz in terms of chord progressions and so on, so there isn't much 'parallel' with my music there, but as I said, his honesty and intention while playing was, and is, a huge influence. Also, his sound was so instantly recognisable. So many of us jumped on the bandwagon of Strat and Tube Screamer after hearing that tone, so that's also a factor that's important to me – having your own sound."

"One thing that occurs to me about jazz guitar playing is that it can, sometimes, initially seem quite cold and sterile."

I remember listening to a jazz guitarist playing a melody [Ant plays an excerpt from the jazz standard *It Could Happen To You*, dead straight] with every note really clear and straight. By that time, I'd been listening to Steve Vai play [Ant plays the same thing *à la* Steve Vai, with slides into the notes and vibrato] and it made me wonder: 'Why wasn't the jazz player doing something with the notes to make them interesting?' But eventually I realised you can give the melody space. As in, it's okay if the melody isn't highly embellished – it's still a nice melody!"

Is that something you think guitarists struggle with due to the very nature of the instrument, as opposed to horn players who, naturally, have more scope to manipulate notes?

"I think the guitar falls somewhere between the piano and a horn. If there's a harmony competition, the piano is probably going to win. The instrument layout allows them to play far more chords and far more [laughs] 'expensive' chords than the guitar. But on the flipside, they can't get as much variation in the articulation of the notes."



Horn players, however, can bend and manipulate single notes to a much greater degree, but they can't play chords. So guitar is somewhere in the middle – you can play chords, but you can also vary the way you play notes. Oz Noy is a really intriguing dude; he plays very jazzily but there's also loads of cool guitaristic stuff going on. He mixes Thelonious Monk's piano style with Hendrix's phrasing and use of effects – you know, bending notes, lots of sustain, and such. But I do also like the sound of a really clean melody without any distractions."

In those early days, what else were you listening to apart from Stevie?

"I'd like to be able to say I grew up with jazz, but I didn't. My parents were listening to rock and pop, the Stones and The Beatles. My dad was really into blues and he'd tell me about John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters. I've yet to meet a guitar player who doesn't enjoy blues. It's built into the instrument, I think. I was at a club in New York recently and the bandleader introduced the music, saying, 'We play jazz from the time when it still had blues in it,' which is an interesting point. Maybe some of it doesn't any more.

"After a while, I got really into Queen and Guns N' Roses. Then, being the 'geek' that I was, I got into Satriani and Vai. Listening to Steve Vai's playing, he does a very similar thing to John Coltrane. The textures that Vai creates with tapping were, to me, the same as Coltrane's 'sheets of sound' approach. That was my route into jazz."

How long had you been playing at that point, and were you taking lessons?

"I'd been playing since I was about 10, but at 14, I decided I wanted to be a 'real' guitar player. When I got to about 18, I had a jazz lesson and started to learn about the different kinds of chords and scales that jazz musicians use. I wasn't really listening to jazz at that point, but I thought if I learned it, it would make me better at rock! I guess I was trying to learn it without really listening to it. I soon realised that was a stupid idea. Then, after I started listening to Miles Davis and John Coltrane, I found I really liked it. If people don't like jazz, it's their loss. It's such a huge, rich tradition."

You've mentioned horn players as early jazz influences. At what stage in your development did you start listening to jazz guitarists?

"Around the same time. Someone said, 'Check out Joe Pass and Wes Montgomery,' and I remember thinking it was all magic. At the back of my mind, though, I still wanted that Coltrane 'sheets of sound' thing on the guitar. Some guitar players like Allan



Holdsworth or Tim Miller are doing that. It's something I'd like to develop more."

Listening to your new album, *Zero Sum World*, we're struck by your very modern approach to the guitar yet you play with almost an old-school classic jazz tone...

"I'm playing these days with saxophone, acoustic piano, upright bass and drums. Finding an electric guitar sound that blends with that has been a huge issue for me. I've recently got a blend pedal, which means I can run my clean sound alongside my distorted one – which has given me a more natural overdrive sound. Before, when I'd opt for a heavily distorted sound, it would feel like I was on a completely different wavelength from the rest of the band with all their lush, natural acoustic textures."

Do you think that's a hangover from the 'classic' era? The feeling that, if it's jazz, it has to be that Wes, Joe Pass clean tone?

“ Steve Vai does a very similar thing to John Coltrane. The textures that Vai creates with tapping were, to me, the same as Coltrane's 'sheets of sound' approach ”



Have guitars, will jazz – Ant and Denny trade licks and chew the fat

“There are examples of contemporary players who do adhere to that, even guys that are playing really modern music, like Lage Lund or Adam Rogers, but you have other players like Kurt Rosenwinkel who seldom use a completely clean tone. I think we’re at an interesting point now, but yes, there is definitely a way of thinking that says, ‘I’m playing jazz so I have to have an archtop and play really clean with a little reverb.’ One problem for jazz players is if you’re playing really lush, full chords, they can sound bad with even a little distortion, so the clean sound is more of a necessity to facilitate the extended harmony.”

What’s your go-to guitar and amp?

“I have lots of guitars and they’re all great. But I’ve recently had a piezo pickup fitted to my Gibson ES-175, which I’m really excited about. My 175 is *the* guitar for me right now. On the album, I used it into a transistor amp and a valve amp in stereo *à la* George

Benson. I had my Henriksen Jazz amp, which is really lush for that clean archtop stuff, and we just placed some ribbon mics in front of that. Then, at the studio, there was this small Marshall valve amp, which we were able to wind up to get a nice natural distortion out of.”

A Marshall’s probably the last amp you’d expect a jazz guitar player to plug in to!

“[Laughs] Well, it happened to be there, I tried it and it and it sounded nice. What I like now is to use my Polytone alongside a Fender ‘65 Twin reissue, then take a direct line out from the piezo. I also clip a DPA mic onto the guitar to get a bit of the room sound. That’s how I would set up, in an ideal world.”

You’ve got quite a combination of signals going on there...

“I think that’s the way to go, because when you watch someone play live in a jazz club,

for example, you hear much more than just the amp tone. You can hear their fingers on the guitar, which you don’t get if you only hear the sound from the mic in front of the amp. You hear the guitar sound from the room itself. I try to capture as much of that as possible.”

The big question: flatwound strings or round-wound strings?

“They’re both great! It depends on what I’m doing. I love playing funk or Motown stuff on my ES-335 with flatwounds. Maybe that’s what those guys were using back then? I like to change between flatwounds and round-wounds, it keeps it exciting. And it depends what tone I’m after at the time. I love the tone produced by the Dunlop Jazz III picks I use, the Ultex ones.”

What do you feel is your voice on the guitar? What distinguishes you from all the other great guitar players out there?



Ant's Gibson ES-175 has a piezo pickup fitted, and is his go-to guitar

“I’m not trying to be a guitar hero at all. I’m just trying to play nice melodies. I am interested in weird rhythms... rhythms that aren’t prevalent in any Western music”

“Oh, man! That’s a tough one. Well, I’m not trying to be a guitar hero at all. I’m just trying to play nice melodies, most of the time. I am interested in weird rhythms like quintuplets or septuplets, which may, I hope, be an identifying feature of my playing. These are rhythms that aren’t prevalent in any Western music – including jazz – but they’re rudimentary in Indian music. My curiosity led me to study some of those rhythmic concepts. In fact, the fourth track on my album, *Mishra Jathi*, means ‘sub-divided into seven’, and the first track on my first album, *Kanda Jath*, means ‘sub-divided into five’.”

You tune your guitar in perfect 4ths, leaving the top two at E and B with the rest tuned down a semitone – G $\flat$, D $\flat$, A $\flat$ and E $\flat$. How did you come to settle on that setup?

“Of course, you could leave the bottom four as they are and tune the top two up to C and F, which also gives you perfect 4ths across the neck. I guess I was searching for something. I had some jazz lessons and was given a stack of arpeggios to learn, and it frustrated me that I kept having to shift position and alter the fingering between the G and B strings.

“It’s obviously quite ironic, but I read something on Steve Vai’s website that said, ‘Be an individual,’ which inspired me to start experimenting with tuning. One thing is, it makes things easier because all the chord and scale patterns stay the same across the neck. I realised that, with a 4ths-tuned guitar, I only had to learn 33.3 per cent of what regular tuned guitarists have to learn!”

That sounds like a huge advantage! Are there any disadvantages?

“The ‘open’ CAGED chord shapes become really difficult. I should say that you get a great set of different open chords, though, D $\flat$, G $\flat$, B and so on. But if you’re playing those classic open-chord pop songs, or riffs in those ‘white-note’ keys, it’s a pain. I was in a situation like that on a function gig, and someone called *Long Train Running*. That hammer-on minor 7th thing is pretty impossible with 4th tuning. *Sweet Home Alabama* also becomes the most virtuosic piece ever when you try to play it in D, in my tuning! But you’ll actually find that there is a load of common repertoire that people get in the habit of transposing – *Superstition*, for example. Aside from that, having a ‘uniform’ neck with 4th tuning makes music on the guitar far more logical to me.”

You’ve written a book on the subject – *3rd Millennium Guitar: An Introduction To Perfect 4th Tuning*...

“Yes, I wrote it about five years ago and Mel Bay published it in 2011. I was on tour with the show *Thriller Live!* and spent some of my free time during the day putting the book together. As I said, 4th tuning makes things easier, and I thought it might catch on. Tom Quayle uses this tuning as does Stanley Jordan and many others. If you’re curious, don’t worry – it doesn’t take that long to rewire the brain!” 



Ant Law’s latest album, *Zero Sum World*, is available now on Whirlwind Recordings.

www.antlaw.co.uk



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RICHARD THOMPSON

The one-time Fairport Convention lynchpin and full-time national treasure told us about *Still*: a new release driven by mistakes, murder and madness

Words Henry Yates Photography Vincent Dixon

There's prolific – and then there's Richard Thompson. At 66, the British songwriter's 40-strong back catalogue lands with a thump, a metric ton of music that just got one album heavier with the release of this year's *Still*. Ask the lynchpin of 60s folk why he hasn't gone the way of his peers – semi-retired, creatively spent, coasting on royalties – and he gives a wry shrug. “I don't know. Am I underpaid? Am I underappreciated? Is it just that I can't think of anything else to do? That title, *Still*, means whatever you want it to. But to me, it means, ‘Is he still making records after all these years? Is he still going through this strange process? Is he still alive?’”

Are you pleased with *Still*?

“I think so. I haven't heard it for a few weeks. You need a bit of space. I find it very hard to be satisfied with one's own work, especially on a record. A record is this cold thing. You can't change it. That's what you did, and it's there for posterity. Whereas, with a live show, you can think, ‘Well, damn, I missed it tonight, but I'll play it better tomorrow.’ It's quite unforgiving, a record. Also, I leave on some mistakes, because I don't want it to be super-slick and polished. I could go back and get it all absolutely perfect. But I find that tends to come out quite sterile. So I leave a few warts in.”

Richard Thompson makes mistakes?

“Oh, I make lots of them. But I consider that part of my style.”

After 40 albums, how important is it not to fall into patterns of playing guitar?

“It is important. Inevitably, you repeat things in your guitar-playing style. You could almost say, as a guitar player, you kind of have your own clichés. But as long as your clichés are yours, rather than somebody else's – or rather than just being generic blues licks – I think you're okay. The way you have to think is, ‘Okay, these are my clichés, but now I have to keep developing them, keep subtly changing them, keep expanding, make something broader.’”

We heard that you tried to keep *Still* as spontaneous as possible?

“Oh, absolutely. That's the reason there are mistakes on this record. It was kind of imposed upon us anyway. We had a fairly small recording window. We basically had nine days to do everything. I think we were able to get most of the tracking done in four days, so then that left us a bit of time to do some overdubs and fix a few things. Y'know, it was a bit quick. But I think records made faster sound better, more spontaneous.”

Do you have any favourite memories from the sessions?

“Let's see. *Earthquake*? No. I remember that it was freezing. We recorded in Chicago, and it was like -10 degrees, really cold. Just the journey from the hotel to the studio every day was far more of an adventure that I would have liked. I can hear on the record that I never actually really got warm. Because I can hear that my

vibrato is kind of slow. Maybe because my fingers aren't quite there. So I'm not sure I ever really warmed up.”

You recorded with Wilco's Jeff Tweedy on production. Did you push each other?

“I hope so. In a gentle, caring way. We're quite different. I think of myself as fairly quiet, but I think Jeff is actually quieter than I am. He's also a fairly roots-based musician, but his musical experiences are different from mine. I think that's a good thing. I think our styles overlap, but our music is different, which is what you want, really, from a collaboration. Sometimes, it's nice to bring in an outside producer. It was great working with Jeff. He was tremendously helpful, had great suggestions about all kinds of things. He was an invaluable set of ears to have.”

Did you discuss how you wanted the album to sound?

“We talked about the way we were going to record, which was basically analogue 24-track, and then throwing that into Pro Tools. Once you've got the basic warmth from the analogue tape, you can then transfer to digital, and the process gets faster. We intended to record with a small core of musicians. And pretty much everything was live, we just fixed a few things later. It sounds live. It sounds spontaneous. It's the way music should be. If you're not doing that, then you have to spend time and effort to go back and recreate it.”

The finale, *Guitar Heroes*, is a pastiche of your favourite players, from Django Reinhardt to Hank Marvin. How hard was it to nail their idiosyncrasies?

"It was a challenge, and I'm not sure I succeeded. Django was the hardest to replicate. If I'd spent more time, I could have come closer to reproducing the exact records. At Wilco's studio, which is this very large loft space in Chicago, they had hundreds of guitars, hundreds of amps and basses, countless pedals. It's stuffed with instruments. So I was thinking, when it came to the Chuck Berry section, 'Well, what's hanging on the wall? Ah, there's a Gibson Super 400, I'll use that. That should sound like Chuck Berry, because that's what he played.' For the James Burton section, I thought, 'I need a mid-50s Tele,' and there you go. There was one right there. It was like being in a sweet shop."

Won't you have to pay a lot of royalties for that track?

"It's been a real problem, actually, trying to get the clearances. There's about 15 composers on this thing."

What were the real guitar treasures in Jeff's studio?

"He had a nice old Gibson Melody Maker, which sounded fantastic. A really good amp called a Morgan, which I hadn't seen before, but it was kind of like a Vox. A couple of nice Fender Princetons: a lot of this stuff was vintage. But the core stuff on this album is probably mine, all the stuff I usually use."

"I've got a kind of pink Fender Strat, which is a bit beaten-up and sounds really good. It's not old, but it's assembled from various parts and it's got weird pickups in it, Rio Grandes or something. That was going through Jeff's amps, mostly. The Morgan was very good. I think that I used the Princeton and Deluxe on some stuff. I used a lot of different things on it, some of which I've forgotten."

Do you have a lucky guitar that gifts all your best songs?

"Well, to look at it another way, I think sometimes you can pick up a guitar, in a shop or round somebody's house, and you might think, 'This is a really horrible guitar.' But maybe there's one thing you can find on this guitar that sounds good. Maybe it plays one tune really well, or it's good for one kind of accompaniment. I think, inside every instrument, there's a song somewhere."

I heard that Jeff put a million effects pedals on *Broken Doll* in your absence?

"[Deadpan] Well, I'd say probably no more than 10,000. I think that track turned out really well. It's mostly this thing called a Marxophone: it's a sort of Victorian instrument, but it sounds like a dulcimer. Then there's an organ as well, swirling in the background, which I think is good, because the song hints at a kind of insanity. I don't stand a chance of remembering which pedals we used. So many pedals were used in the making of this record, a lot of which I'd never seen before, and was unaware of the existence of. So even if I was able to visualise them, I'm sure I couldn't remember the names. I'm sorry."

Do you find it hard to relinquish control to a producer?

"Yeah, I do. So one of the things I did when I was working with Jeff was to sit on my own opinions, to some extent. I know what I think, and I know what I do. I've made a lot of records. I know a certain way of making records. But if you invite someone else into the process, to produce and to lend their skills to a project, you want to hear what they have to say. So a few times, I'd just step out of the room and think, 'Okay, I'm gonna leave him for an hour, I'll just go away and do something else, and I'll come back and see what happens.' And it was usually a very positive experience, and I was usually really impressed."

Electric Warrior/Acoustic Troubadour

Richard Thompson on his split musical personality: "Am I a very different player on electric and acoustic guitar? Yeah, I think so. If you're playing acoustic, then the role you're usually filling is to be all of the accompaniment. As opposed to playing electric guitar, where you're usually playing as part of a band. So somebody else is playing the bass, someone else is keeping the rhythm going. On the electric, you don't have to do so much, you can play more single lines, be more frugal with your playing. Whereas with acoustic, you've got to keep a few things going. You've got to keep the rhythm, keep the harmony going. If you're lucky, you can play some lead fills or whatever, but basically, you're accompanying a song. Or I am, anyway. I'm in that position where it's all about accompanying the vocal."



“ I find it very hard to be satisfied with one's own work. A record is this cold thing. You can't change it. That's what you did, and it's there for posterity ”





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“I like the fact that people will stick on a vinyl album and listen to it with more of a reverence than they would on their iPod. They take it more seriously. Which is a good thing”

Let's talk about the lyrics. What's *Dungeons For Eyes* about, for instance?

“I was at a charity function, some years ago, and I was asked to meet someone. This person was a fairly well-known political figure. And I knew that in his past, he'd been responsible for having people killed. Or actually killing them himself. So the dilemma was, 'Can I actually go up and shake this person by the hand?' Y'know, it's a fine dividing line between freedom fighter and terrorist: it depends who's writing the propaganda. And there isn't any question that this person – whatever the political motive – was responsible for people dying.”

You're releasing *Still* on 180-gram vinyl. Do you think there's a magic to vinyl that downloads don't have?

“I do, yeah. I think vinyl sounds better. I like the fact that people will stick on a vinyl album and listen to it all the way through, with more of a reverence than they would to a download on their iPod. They'll take it more seriously. Which is a good thing.”

Do you think you're technically better at the acoustic than the electric?

“It's probably equal. I can always think of better electric guitar players and better acoustic guitar players than me.”

Who are your favourite all-rounders?

“Someone like Ry Cooder is a great electric and acoustic player. But he's kind of playing the same style on both, so that's obviously cheating [deadpan chuckle]. There are probably others. But it's interesting: a lot of electric players are not good acoustic players. A lot of what you'd call, y'know, your 'rock guitar heroes' are often quite mediocre acoustic guitar players. And we certainly will not be naming names here.”

Most songwriters dry up. Why do you think you're still so prolific?

“I'm not quite sure what it is that drives me. There's demons in your past, or something that keeps you doing something. I think you have to love music. And to some extent, you have to love the lifestyle. If you couldn't stand the lifestyle, then you couldn't really survive as a travelling musician. That's just part of the job, and a lot of people wouldn't be comfortable doing that. It's a life of insecurity as well. Y'know, this is not working for the bank!”



Richard Thompson's new album, *Still* is released on 29 June 2015 on Proper Records.

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'Van The Man

Pioneering folk-fusioneer Donovan sits down to chat about penning classic songs, influencing The Beatles and sidling up in the studio with Jimmy Page

Words: Matt Frost Photography: Rob Monk

When you start chatting to Donovan – arguably one of the greatest singer-songwriters this nation has ever produced – you instantly pick up on the passion, fervour and musical intelligence that have helped guide him through five decades of ever-evolving songs.

His new compilation album, *Donovan Retrospective*, is a two-CD anthology covering the first five years of his career (1965 to 1969) where his effortless genre-hopping and thirst for sonic fusion and experimentation shout out loud and proud throughout. Acoustic folk, blues, psychedelia, heavy-edged rock, Eastern-tinged balladeering, West Indian grooves, funk, soul, baroque pop, fuzzed-up garage – Donovan was dabbling in it all from almost the first moment he stepped into the 60s pop limelight.

From a guitar perspective, the man is definitely underrated. Just take a listen to his sublime fingerpicking on *Summer Day Reflection Song* or the Bert Jansch-esque *Oh Deed I Do* and you'll start to at least get a feel for Donovan's six-string prowess. This is, after all, the guy who taught The Beatles the clawhammer.

On top of all that, what do Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, Rod Stewart, Danny Thompson, Big Jim Sullivan, Aynsley Dunbar, Jack Bruce and John Bonham all have in common? Yep, that's right, they've all played (or sang) on a Donovan recording session. That's some backing band.

Absorbing Everything

The final song on the first CD of *Donovan Retrospective* is a brand-new bounding reggae-pop composition, *One English Summer*, cut in Kingston, Jamaica with producer and old friend Wayne Jobson. Now 50 years on from his debut single *Catch The Wind*, has Donovan's general approach to songwriting changed in any significant way?

"Basically, I use the same things I'd learned by the age of 18 or 19," he explains. "I'd mastered a certain set of musical forms, a set of chords and a set of rhythms and a set of tempos. The original forms of traditional ballad are every songwriter's roots so when you master the traditional four-line stanza and you play them enough, it will become second nature. I did it, Dylan did it, Joni Mitchell did it, Leonard Cohen did it and The Beatles did it when they were a skiffle band.

"My dad, mum and the family in Glasgow spoon-fed me these Irish and Scots ballads, but then there was Frank Sinatra – my mammy called him 'My Frankie' – and I was absorbing his phrasing. Then, my father gave me Billie Holiday, so there was jazz, too. Then there were all the other styles. All these things were going in.

"By the age of 17, I was absorbing and practising bossa nova, Latin, Greek, Gypsy, American country blues, city blues, New Orleans jazz, 1920s and 30s big band, modern jazz, calypso, 50s and 60s pop songs, rock, bluebeat, ska and even fado, that Portuguese kind of blues.

"I absorbed all those forms and I've got them all in me. So, has my songwriting changed and developed? Yeah – but I use all the same forms, and when I pick up the guitar, the song kind of tells me what phrase I should use and what chunky style I should use for my guitar playing."

Roots Manoeuvres

At the age of 10, Donovan's family moved from Glasgow to Hatfield in Hertfordshire and it was here that the budding jazz fan's musical aspirations began... as a drummer. But, by the age of 14, the guitar had taken over and he acquired a Zenith archtop from a mate's girlfriend. But his initial dalliances with Gene Krupa drum patterns would still come in handy once he hit the beatnik road.

"She never got that Zenith back!", Donovan enthuses. "It had f-holes, a removable bridge and it was really worn out and really scratchy all over the surface. It was like the early country blues players had and I loved it! I actually recently saw that McCartney's first was the same one.

"When I hitchhiked away with Gypsy Dave [guitarist, close friend and future tour manager, Gyp Mills] at 16, the guitar was perfect and I realised later that those patterns I'd learned as a drummer made my guitar tempo patterns as steady as a rock. I was able to play all the needs of a band in those six strings. Inside the guitar was my band. I was damping, picking, hammering on and off with the left hand, and then playing patterns and styles with the right. A drummer does the same. In the left hand,



LEFT Donovan used a Sunburst Gibson J-45 from 1965 to 1970, and while the original has been misplaced, Gibson has produced a tribute version: the 1965 J-45 The Donovan Model

RIGHT While not a great guitar collector, Donovan has plans to auction off some of his instruments in the near future

Hurdy Gurdy Twang

“One of my favourites was my little [Gibson] J-45. I bought it on Sunset Boulevard in 1965,” says Donovan of the guitars he cherished most. “I used it to write, record and perform every song from late-’65 through to 1970. I’ve always thought it was nicked, but I’ve now got this feeling that it’s going to be found somewhere in one of my stores. My first custom guitar was the ‘Blue Moon’, made by Tony Zemaitis in 1970 or 1971. I said to Tony, ‘I’ve got a problem because when I’m playing with Danny Thompson, the low end of the J-45 modulates and reverberates with the strings of Danny’s double bass.’ Tony said he could fix that by reducing the hole and I said, ‘Well, I would like a moon hole!’ and he did that for me.

“Later, I was introduced to Danny Ferrington in California and I played him the ‘Blue Moon’. I said, ‘Keep the sound pretty much the same and I also like the thin neck on the Zemaitis’... and he said, ‘Well, I’ll put a bit of my magic in there, too!’ and he made a guitar called Kelly, because of the *Book Of Kells*, which is a manuscript in Trinity College, Dublin. I wanted to celebrate how Ireland had been so important to me. I gave Danny a photo of the manuscript and he copied the Celtic symbols from it.”

you’ve got the one stick, in the right hand, you’ve got the other stick and you start with the patterns. That’s what I did with the guitar.”

‘Hammer And Songs

The vibrant folk scene in St Albans, which was centred around two pubs – The Cock Inn and The Peahen – played a significant role in Donovan’s development as a guitar player. It was at The Peahen that he first encountered legendary figures such as John Renbourn, Bert Jansch, Martin Carthy and even Ramblin’ Jack Elliott. Local “master of the picking” Mac MacLeod took Donovan under his wing and taught him to play tunes by Big Bill Broonzy and Reverend Gary Davis, but it was an altogether more mystical figure who gifted the teenage picker the clawhammer style of playing.

“It wasn’t Mac that gave me the clawhammer, it was a guy called Dirty Hugh,” laughs Donovan. “He came into St Albans one day and he was a very tall, very dirty, very smelly beatnik with a long coat, a long beard, long hair and a guitar case. This one really was the great unwashed... but he opened the guitar case and in it was a Martin dreadnought. I mean, I’d never seen one before! He took the guitar out and played flawless clawhammer. I went up to him and I said, ‘Will you teach me?’ and he said, ‘Okay, bring a bottle of wine to the graveyard tomorrow morning at 10:30 and I’ll teach you, but it’ll take a few days!’ The next morning, we sat down, we opened the wine and he told me thumb and third finger on fifth string and second and now it began

and he said, ‘After a while, you won’t be able to remember the third move because the brain has got to teach the fingers what they’re doing.’ He was a good teacher. It took three days and, after a while, I got it. Then before he left town, he said, ‘Now you’ve got it, don’t forget to pass it on!’”

Indian Takeaways

And “pass it on” Donovan certainly did. A few years later, the Glasgow-born songsmith had established himself as a major star on both sides of the Atlantic with a string of musically versatile hits such as *Mellow Yellow*, his version of Buffy Sainte-Marie’s *Universal Soldier*, and *Sunshine Superman*, which even hit the No 1 spot on the US Billboard charts.

In February 1968, Donovan, Gypsy Dave, The Beatles, Mia Farrow, Mike Love and a few others ventured to India to study transcendental meditation under the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Donovan, Lennon, Harrison and McCartney all took acoustic guitars with them and spent hours on end sitting around and jamming the time away.

“I was playing something really fast and I remember John [Lennon] saying, ‘How do you do that?’” says Donovan. “So I slowed it down and began teaching the clawhammer to John. He got it in two days. We were sitting face-to-face for two days, looking at each other. It was enlightening for John and he wrote *Dear Prudence*, *Julia* and *Crippled Inside* with that picking pattern. Paul was walking around with his left-handed Martin, but he was listening because it’s

“ A beatnik called
Dirty Hugh gave me
the clowhammer.
He said, 'Bring a
bottle of wine to the
graveyard tomorrow
morning at
10:30, and I'll
teach you' ”



“George Harrison later said, ‘Donovan is all over The White Album’ and I did hear all those patterns...”

also in *Blackbird*. Dirty Hugh was right – ‘Pass this on!’ George was fascinated with the minor descending gypsy patterns that I was playing. He said in the Beatles anthology, ‘Donovan is all over The White Album’ and I did hear all those patterns... the famous song that George would develop out of an A minor descending pattern was *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*.”

Six-string Winners

There are simply so many supreme guitar moments across Donovan’s 1960s recordings, whether played by the man himself or delivered by some of the most impressive session guys in the business. When it comes to his own rich pickings, Donovan has a few personal favourites.

“One that immediately comes to mind is *Summer Day Reflection Song* with the hammering on and hammering off,” he explains. “My bongo player ‘Candy’ John Carr and me would sit around and play and we’d also sit around with rastas as well in Portobello Road. *Summer Day Reflection Song* was one of those guitar parts that actually sounded like there were bongos playing as well. And there was kind of like a mantra, too, what we would call raga rock. The engineers were using compression and limiters and it made me play in a certain way when I was listening on my headphones [and over-earbuds]. I just started hammering on even more.

“The other one I immediately think of is *Get Thy Bearings*. It’s sampled continuously by people and there is something about the actual way the acoustic guitar enters that blew me away. Then, when my producer Mickie Most said, ‘Go and play something else’ over that extraordinary playing out by the sax. I started playing an Arabic part or what you now might call Arabic-Celtic.”

While Jeff Beck contributed some stunning rhythm and lead work across 1969 long player *Barabajagal* – check out his deliciously funky riffing on *Barabajagal (Love Is Hot)* – Jimmy Page also regularly turned up as a session guitarist on Donovan’s early recordings. 1966’s smash hit *Sunshine Superman* is a case in point.



© DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS

“[For *Sunshine Superman*], I wanted a strange new jazz, Latin, baroque, folk, pop and poetry variation with that three-chord blues fusion,” explains Donovan. “The jazz sound on Jimmy’s guitar was perfect. You’ll notice it’s not distorted and it’s not what you’d call rock or slide guitar or anything to do with the blues. It was just a very clean jazz guitar sound. One of my best electric moments would have to be Page on *Sunshine Superman*.”

The majestic *Season Of The Witch*, also released in 1966, is notable for the fact that it signifies the first time that Donovan ever played electric guitar on record, plugging into an echo-laden white Tele that he’d just picked up for \$300 on Sunset Strip.

“I was playing in a very unusual way, doing that drumming thing with damping,” recalls Donovan. “I liked the echo on the amps so I gave it a lot of stick with the echo.”

The Donovan track with arguably the most impressive electric playing is 1968’s *Hurdy Gurdy Man*, but the exact identity of the guy pumping out the heavy overdriven riffs and licks still remains something of a mystery. Donovan had originally planned to give the song to his friend Jimi Hendrix, but producer Mickie Most talked him out of it. He then wanted Jimi to play on the session, but he wasn’t available so some other unknown session man stepped in to the void. While it was long mooted that the

guy in question was Jimmy Page, this has now been denied. Donovan himself can’t remember, but still has an inkling that the player might have been Allan Holdsworth. John Paul Jones, who arranged and played bass on the session, has been quoted in the past as saying the mystery man was actually Alan Parker. One thing that can be confirmed is that whoever was responsible deserves a damn good pat on the back.

Piece Of The Action

After chewing the fat with Donovan for a very enjoyable couple of hours, we ask him whether there’s anything else he’d like to add. It seems you may want to crack open that old piggy bank in the very near future...

“I may not have 300 guitars like Jimmy Page but I do have 13!” he laughs. “It’s my 50th anniversary year and I want to scale down to just a couple of guitars. All my guitars are going up [for auction] and a portion of the money is going to teach transcendental meditation to students of the future. My website will be showing lots of my guitars and soon people might be able to own one or two.”



Donovan Retrospective is out now on Union Square Music. For tour news, visit his website.

www.donovan.ie



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Rock Of Ages

How did a guitar owned by Booker White, one of history's most influential bluesmen and an early inspiration to BB King, come to rest thousands of miles away in the North East of England? We meet its current guardian, photographer Keith Perry, to find out how an unlikely friendship carried this iconic instrument all the way from Memphis to Newcastle

Words Jamie Dickson Photography Joe Branston

The letter, written in a flowing hand on fading yellow notepaper, is dated 10 May 1976. Its contents may be brief, but mark an extraordinary moment.

"Mr Keith Perry, I am fine and hope you are. Most of all, I hope you have received the guitar by now and I hope you will like and enjoy it," the letter read. "You will have to tune it up, as I had to tune it down to send it. I will be looking to hear from you and [so] I will know if you got the guitar. Have a nice time in music and thanks a whole lot and let me continue to hear from you and Hard Rock."

The words are those of Booker 'Bukka' White, the legendary Delta bluesman whose slide playing inspired the young BB King to take up guitar. They were written to Newcastle photographer Keith Perry, who has carefully preserved the letter to this day. And little wonder, because Booker sent the note to confirm that his guitar, a 1933 National Duolian resonator that he affectionately called 'Hard Rock', had arrived at Keith's home. This was not the result of some reluctant sale, but a remarkable gift made in honour of the unlikely friendship between these two men from vastly different backgrounds.

Booker White was one of the great Delta blues guitarists, who wrote songs such as *Fixin' To Die Blues*, later covered by Bob Dylan, and *Po' Boy* that powerfully evoke the hard lives and soul-piercing musicality

of black bluesmen in America's Deep South during the 1930s.

By contrast, Keith Perry was a press photographer from Newcastle – where he continues to live and work today. They met when a lost generation of great American blues guitarists discovered an enthusiastic fanbase in Britain during the 60s, reviving their music and their fortunes in a new land. With a Rolleiflex roll-film camera in hand, Keith Perry documented the shows these players gave to packed auditoriums around Britain.

"These guys weren't appreciated back home, they were playing in folk clubs, wherever they could get work," Keith recalls. "But they came over here and they got huge audiences. The reason they started touring was because [Piedmont blues guitarist] Brownie McGhee went to see Big Bill Broonzy in hospital. He was dying of throat cancer at the time and he said to Brownie: 'You've got to keep this European touring thing going. There's a great audience over there.' So Sonny and Brownie, to fill the void, started touring with Chris Barber. And, of course, they were selling out everywhere. It was incredible."

Captivated by the music, Keith found himself photographing and, later, becoming friends with some of these heroes of the blues, as they passed through the North of England on tour.

"Over time, I got to know many of them really well," Keith explains. "Brownie McGhee was a superb guitarist and he came over with the American Blues Festival

again in the mid-60s. But this time he was with Booker White and Son House. I met Brownie at the stage door and he said, 'I want you to come and meet a real legend of the blues.' And that was the first time I ever saw Booker White, who was sprawled on a piano stool. There was a friendly handshake and I just sat and chatted. I was in absolute awe. This was a guy who'd seen Charlie Patton, and was inspired by him. Son House was in another room at the time and he was a link to Robert Johnson. So, I took a few photographs and then they moved on, touring again."

On The Line

The story might have ended there, but for a chance conversation with Brownie McGhee that inspired Keith to get back in touch with Booker White a little later.

"A couple of years later, Brownie was across [in the UK] again – they came across quite regularly – and he said, 'Have you heard anything more from Bukka?' I said, 'No,' and he says, 'Why don't you write to him and send him some photographs?' Brownie had this huge book: everybody who was anybody in the blues was in this book and he had an address for Booker. So I put a few photographs together and sent him a letter. I got a letter straight back thanking me, which I still have. I was astonished, but enclosed with the letter was a phone number, so I thought, 'Well, why not phone him from time to time?'"

"So I called him and he was over the moon that I'd actually phoned him in Memphis.

So I said, 'Have you got any of your old records?' and he said, 'No.' He didn't have any of them, which was quite amazing really. So I said, 'Right, I've got a couple of LPs.' And so I sent him over a tape of all his early recordings and again he sent another letter back, saying how happy he was to receive the tape, and that he had sat up to the early hours listening to it and it brought back a lot of memories. So I kept phoning perhaps every three or four months."

Soon the phone conversations became a regular fixture. Keith had a thirst to learn more about blues history and Booker had not only lived through those times but had recorded some of the most powerful blues guitar ever committed to vinyl. Thus Booker was able to give Keith unique insights into that world, recalled from direct experience.

"When I called, his wife used to say, 'He's in his office,'" Keith recalls. "And you could hear him huffing and puffing on the stairs. His office was a seat just round the next block and he used to sit there all day drinking whisky and playing his guitar and fans would come by and chat to him, but that was 'the office'. He just sat there all day talking to people. But as soon as I phoned, he was straight up the stairs. We'd talk about all sorts: the old days, the blues. Brownie McGhee was very much influenced by him. He loved his playing.

"I once asked Booker, 'Did you ever come across Robert Johnson?' and he said, 'No, I heard about him. He travelled in different circles to me. But the king of the Delta blues, for me, was always Charlie Patton.' He said some people had suggested that he'd never seen Patton. But Booker said, 'No, I definitely saw Charlie Patton.' He told me how he watched him and how Patton not only played the guitar, but put it on the floor and danced on its back."

The hard times, of course, were etched just as starkly in Booker's memory as the good. His famous song *Parchman Farm Blues* refers to the severe privations he experienced as an inmate of Mississippi State Penitentiary, after being jailed in 1937 for killing a man during a bar-room altercation. Booker always maintained it was an act of self-defence, but the memory of it was not something he chose to dwell on, Keith says. "I asked him once about the murder rap and he was a bit evasive about it. He just said, 'If I hadn't have shot the man, he would have shot me.' But he'd had a hard, hard life, hadn't he? I can't imagine some of the scrapes he must have been in in Mississippi. It was a very violent place."

Booker and Keith's correspondence continued in this way for many years until one day, just a few months before he died, Booker did something remarkable.



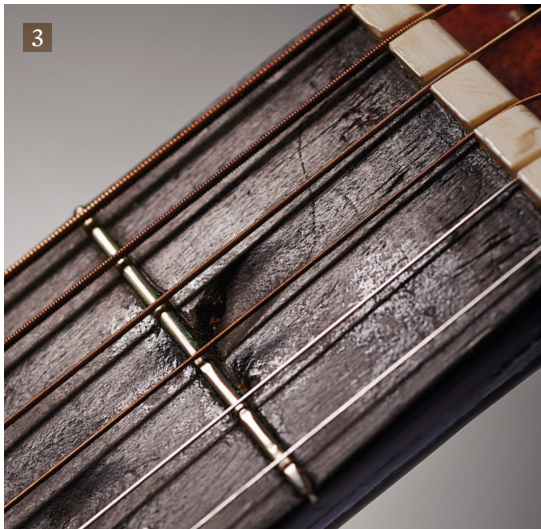
Booker in full flow with the guitar; note the thumb and finger picks

© GEORGE PICKOW/MICHAEL LOCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Apparently on impulse, he offered to give Keith his National Duolian resonator, which he affectionately called Hard Rock and which had been a companion for much of his eventful life. "There was one phone call I made to him and I said, 'I'd love to get a hold of a guitar, a National, like yours.' Because you never saw them for sale in this country," Keith recalls, clearly still awed by the gesture. "And he said, 'Look, you've sent me tapes, you've been a friend... if you send me a couple of hundred dollars for the postage and packing you can have my old guitar.'" And of course, I was completely blown away. "I was a bit strapped for cash at the time, because I'd just bought a house," Keith adds. "But I had a word with my bank manager, and he said, 'Yes, we'll arrange something.'"

A few weeks later, Keith got a call from Customs officials at Newcastle airport, to whom he duly delivered the princely sum of £17 in import duty that had to be paid before the irreplaceable guitar was allowed into the country, as Keith recalls. "I said, 'By all means, yes, that seems very fair.' I couldn't get out of that airport quick enough."

“He said, ‘Look, you’ve sent me tapes, you’ve been a friend. If you send me a couple of hundred dollars for the postage and you can have my old guitar’”



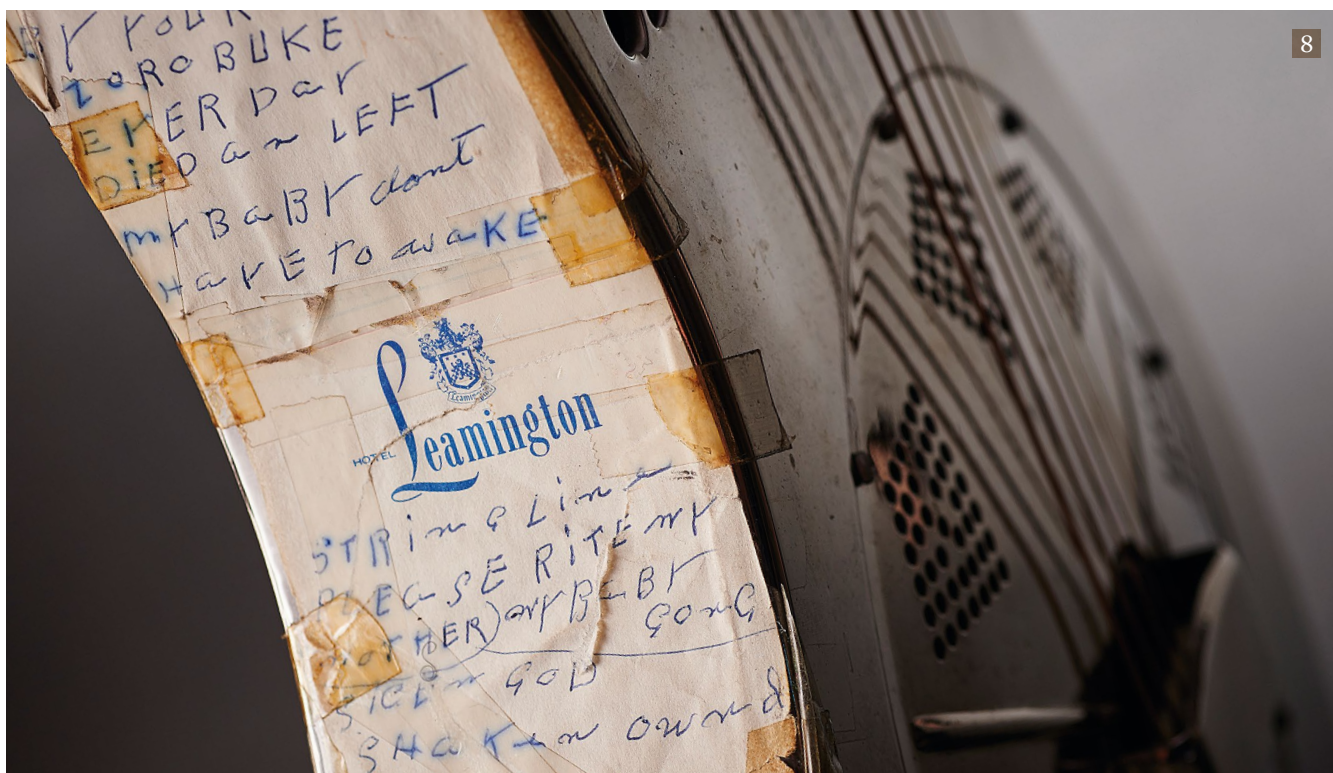
1 The guitar shows signs of extensive wear and ad hoc repair, but every blemish speaks of the hard-working life the instrument has had

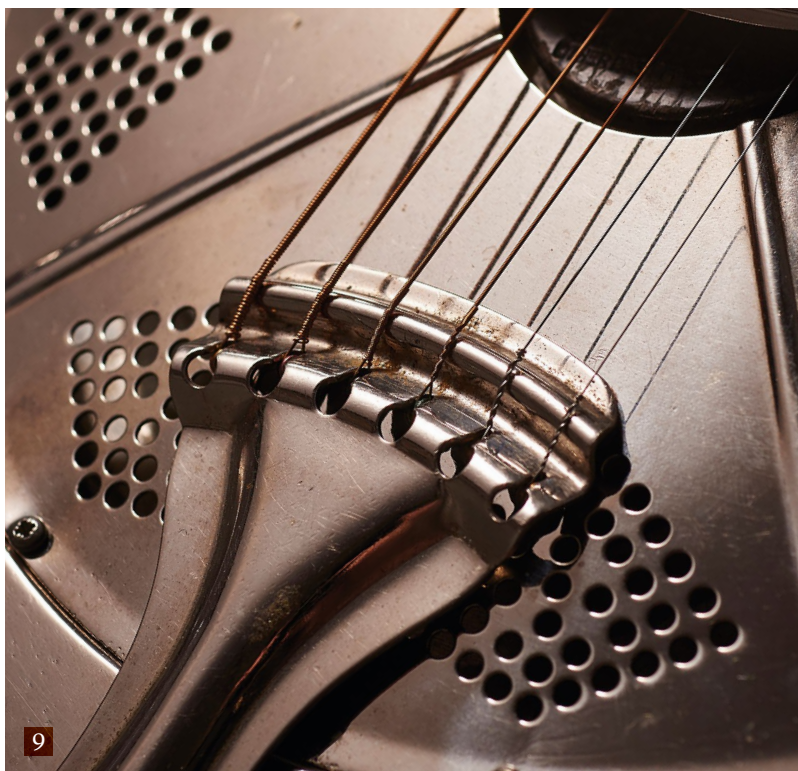
2 The 1933-spec Duolian model was a steel-bodied single-cone resonator, made in relatively large numbers by National, in standard round-neck and optional square-neck versions. Its serial number can be clearly be read on top of the headstock as C7094

3 "Booker had huge hands and he used to slap the guitar at both ends of the neck, a technique that he called 'spanking the baby'. It's an incredible technique but Brownie

McGhee said it was just to impress the ladies! He was a very strong, very powerful man," Keith Perry recalls. The visible dents on the fretboard are probably the result of accidental hard knocks, however

4 The stamped Duolian logo on the headstock replaced the earlier decal logo of the 1931 model, eventually reverting back to a decal logo in 1934. The unique embellishing trinkets attached to the headstock, however, were Booker White's own additions





9

5 The f-holes of 1933 Duolian-model Nationals had rolled edges, as opposed to the more industrial, straight-cut f-holes of earlier 1930-spec Duolian guitars

6 The case's address tag still bears Booker's former street address in Memphis on it

7 "Booker used a metal slide and a thumb pick," Keith Perry says, indicating an array of slides that live in the guitar's battered case

8 "The guitar still has Booker's setlist taped to one side. There's some strange little augmentation on the top half. I've no idea what he put that there for – it obviously meant something to him," comments Keith Perry. "You can make out the song titles of *Gibson Hill* and *Aberdeen* further down, though"

9 The guitar has been kept largely in its original condition, but some fettling has been done to ensure it can be played and enjoyed. "Steve Phillips made some adjustments to the bridge," says Keith Perry. "That was quite a complex little job, because it was very uneven at the time. I think you can appreciate the hammering it has had over the years – but Steve evened out the action on the guitar and made it playable again"

10 The guitar's current guardian, Newcastle photographer and Booker's friend, Keith Perry

National Treasure

The following February, Booker died of cancer at the age of 67 at his home in Memphis. And while Keith mourned the loss of a player who had been first a hero and then a friend, he resolved not to shut the guitar away but put it into the hands of musicians whom he felt would appreciate its true value, including Mark Knopfler, Don McLean and one of Keith's first guitar heroes, Lonnie Donegan. On one special occasion, he showed Hard Rock to Booker's cousin BB King at a hotel in Gateshead, who remembered it from the time when he lodged in Booker's Memphis home, at the very outset of his own career in music.

"BB said he remembered it being kept on top of the wardrobe at his place in the 40s because he recognised the décor around the top straight away. As soon as BB saw that guitar, he kissed it. That's what he was like."

The magic of the guitar also bewitched latter-day bluesman Eric Bibb. He ended up recording a fine album, entitled *Booker's Guitar*, with the instrument, which was loaned to him for the purpose by Keith. But as Keith recalls, it took a bit of nudging from his son before he decided to approach Eric with the guitar. "Eric played a concert [in Newcastle] and he was signing CDs afterwards and so my son Richard said, 'Mention the guitar to him.' I said, 'No, he's one of the new generation, he won't want to know.' But as we got closer to him, my son insisted. He said, 'Please, mention the guitar.' So we got there and Eric was signing away but I said, 'Are you into the music of Booker White at all?' and he said, 'Yeah, I love Booker White's music.' I said, 'Well, I've got his guitar at home, if you'd like to



10

see it and play it before you leave town in the morning. I'll bring it to wherever you're staying.' His glasses slid down his nose and he said, 'You have Booker White's guitar at home? I've got to see this.' So he said, 'Give me your phone number.'

"Sure enough, he rang at eight o'clock the next morning. 'This is Eric. Can you bring the guitar? I'm at some hotel in Gateshead.' So we shot straight over there because he was due to climb on the coach in about half an hour. He opened the case and he just said, 'I feel a song coming on.' And in fact, the first song he wrote was *Tell Riley*. Then he said, 'I'm going to come back and record with this.' And he did. He took a break from touring and he got the coach up here. He said, 'It's too valuable to send to me, so I'll come there.' So he hired a studio in Gateshead and I think he did about six takes. Eric Bibb is one of the nicest people you could work with," Keith adds. "He's become a good friend as well."

It's clear that there is some power of union in this instrument. It connected Keith, who has never visited America, with one of the greatest blues guitarists of the Mississippi Delta. Today, he's still making friends with musicians drawn to the guitar's heritage – while Hard Rock is still being used to make sweet, soulful music. It's hard to imagine its former owner being unhappy with that outcome. **G**



Read more about the guitar and the life and music of Booker White in a new book, by Peter Daniels, who worked with Keith Perry to produce *The Legend Of Booker's Guitar*, available from Lulu Press for £10.99



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Stack To The Future





One of the most requested amp reissues in history arrives to take centre stage.
Has Marshall captured the Silver Jubilee magic all over again?

Words Nick Guppy Photography Neil Godwin



MARSHALL JCM 25/50 2555X SILVER JUBILEE REISSUE £1,199

CONTACT **Marshall Amplification** PHONE **01908 375411** WEB **www.marshallamps.com**

What You Need To Know

1 What's an LED clipping circuit got to do with this amp?

Lots of pedals use a simple two-diode circuit to create a clipped overdrive effect – quite a few amps use the same idea, too. Marshall refined it on the 2555, using LEDs for a softer, more rounded clip effect that's key to the Silver Jubilee's tone.

2 Doesn't Slash come into the story of this amp somewhere?

Marshall's first signature amp was the JCM2555SL Slash Signature, released in 1996 and a replica of the original 2555 amps he used on *Use Your Illusion*. Only 3,000 units were sold worldwide. The amp has been a mainstay of Slash's live rig more or less ever since.

3 What's the deal with the pentode/triode thing?

The EL34 valve that powers most Marshalls is a proper pentode – it has five elements: a cathode, an anode (often called the plate), and three grids to control the flow of electrons between them – control, screen and suppressor. Connecting the screen grid to the anode changes it to triode operation, with lower power and a sweeter, warmer tone.

Way back in 1987, Marshall celebrated 25 years of production, and founder Jim Marshall celebrated 50 years in the music business, by releasing a unique limited-edition head called the 25/50 Silver Jubilee. Clad in silver vinyl, with an eye-catching chrome control panel, the 25/50 was only sold in its special finish during the anniversary year. Consequently, silver-vinyl originals are now very collectable. Marshall re-visited the 2555 again in 1996 for its first-ever signature amplifier, the 2555SL Slash, limited to just 3,000 units before once again disappearing from the catalogue. All of this just served to stoke the demand for 2555s even more – and it's never really faded. After months of rumour, Marshall finally announced a reissue of the original silver 2555, with the model designation 2555X, earlier this year. And here it is.

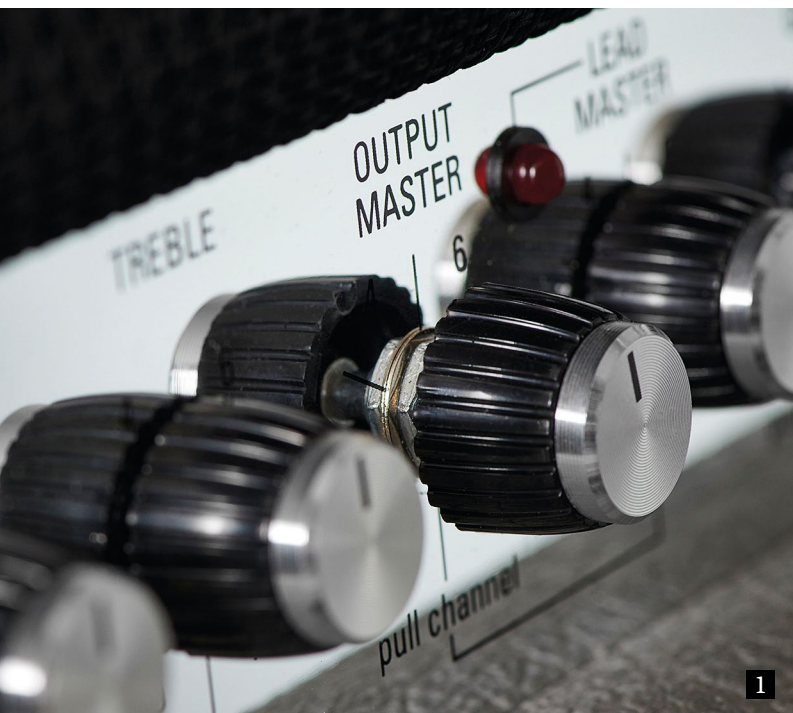
The 2555X Silver Jubilee reissue has the same silver vinyl covering used on the originals, and looks just as handsome. The amp is made in the UK and built to regular UK specs, with a birch ply cabinet and a heavy-duty welded steel chassis. The chassis has to be heavy because it supports two enormous transformers, which are the main contributors to the 2555X's 22kg kerb weight. Externally, very little has changed – the carry handle end covers are now chrome, and Marshall has chosen to do away with the rear panel rotary switches used to select speaker impedance and input voltage. Instead, there are five speaker sockets wired to cover practically any

combination of speaker enclosure, and the amps are permanently wired for the voltage of the country they're sold in.

Inside the chassis, the electronics are mostly mounted on one large high-quality PCB, including all the valve bases. There isn't much in the way of wiring, but what there is has been neatly tied and routed in typical Marshall fashion. It's difficult to see how much of the layout has changed because the PCB is covered in black, but the infamous LED-based clipping circuit is certainly still there.

The rest of the amp looks pleasingly familiar, with a simple front panel layout featuring controls for bass, mid, treble, presence, together with a preamp gain and two master volume controls – one for lead and one for rhythm. A push/pull switch on the output master volume changes channels, while another on the gain knob flips the 2555X into rhythm clip mode, changing the clean channel into something a lot more aggressive. The other item of note on the front panel is the third rocker switch, which changes the output stage mode from pentode to triode, dropping the power from 100 down to around 50 watts, and softening the attack a little.

The sparse rear panel also features a series effects loop, a fixed-level frequency-compensated DI output, and a jack socket for a single-button footswitch, used to change channels. Overall, the 2555X is built to last and look good for a long time, with Marshall's typically high build quality and attention to detail.



1. Push/pull switches on the output and gain knobs change the channel and activate the clean's rhythm clip mode, respectively

2. The 2555X weighs in at a whopping 22kg, so you won't want to lift it on that single carry handle if you can avoid it...

3. The clue's in the name – the Jubilee is covered in vintage-correct silver Tolex, giving it a look unlike any other Marshall



Sounds

Apart from its association with Slash, Joe Bonamassa, and various other high-profile users, the main reason why 2555s are so sought after is their sound. Originals were darker and heavier than the contemporary JCM800, and generally more consistent from one unit to the next. The diode clipping circuit, which Marshall developed using a pair of LEDs, adds a big dose of very controllable distortion with greater harmonic depth. This made the 2555 everything that the JCM800 was trying hard to be, right out of the box. There was no need to plug in a stompbox for extra drive – the 2555 effectively had one built in – along with a dual mode clean/crunch rhythm channel and almost noise-free channel switching.

We're pleased to report that the reissue amp is tonally as accurate as it possibly could be, with perhaps a touch more gain and low-end punch than the original. The overdrive channel will turn even the politest of Strats into a fire-breathing

The diode clipping circuit adds a big dose of very controllable distortion, with greater harmonic depth. There's no need to plug in a stompbox for extra drive

THE RIVALS



MATRIX ELEMENTS VB-800 £549

For all of the tone but none of the weight, check out this Brit-made newcomer. It does a creditable job of reproducing the classic 80s NWOBHM sound. It's so light you can lift it with one finger – not something we'd recommend with the 2555X.

www.matrixamplification.com



ORANGE THUNDERBOMB 100 £1,499

Announced earlier this year and already reviewed, it's a seriously loud amp with a clever built-in attenuator and power switching to tame its huge power for smaller venues – and it's available in black as well as orange.

www.orangeamps.com



PRS ARCHON 100 £1,999

The Archon range has put PRS on the amp map. Already the hot ticket for many modern rock and metal players, it combines huge clean tones with a blistering, mid-rich lead voice: from Slash to pristine country cleans, it's all here.

www.prguitars.com



HUGHES & KETTNER TRIAMP II £2,700

This is a monster three-channel 100-watt EL34-powered head that offers Californian, classic Brit and high-gain voices. Watch out for the new Mark III version, which lets you programmably mix and match groups of power valves from 6L6s to KT88s.

www.hughes-and-kettner.com





Even on the low-power setting, the 2555X is still ferociously loud. It's unlikely you'll ever go beyond the halfway point

monster, but if you really want the Jubilee to sing, then a Les Paul with a good pair of PAF-style humbuckers or active pickups is the way to go. The clipped rhythm channel is equally powerful, while the clean channel is possibly a touch brighter, but without the foil-on-teeth fuzz that some Marshalls from this era can produce. Just as the AFD Slash signature amp released in 2010 mimics the modified amps used on *Appetite...*, the 2555X absolutely nails the later classic GN'R sounds, although, unlike the AFD, it doesn't have the luxury of built-in power scaling and has to be cranked way up for the magic to fall into place. Even on the low-power setting, the 2555X is still ferociously loud; unless you regularly play outdoor festivals, it's unlikely you'll ever go beyond the halfway point on the volume controls without an attenuator.

Verdict

While the stack format may not be very practical for amateurs and weekend warriors, there are many who still choose

to carry a 4x12 and head to gigs, and of course the stack will always have its place in the professional end of the market.

The 2555X accurately reproduces the original tone – and with a few minor exceptions, the look – of the original, at a price that's very reasonable compared with the competition, especially for a UK-made product. Tonally, it doesn't quite have the massive bass response associated with today's modern rock and metal amps, but that genre reached saturation point years ago, and as a result, the Jubilee sounds just as fresh and relevant today as it did back in the heady days of 1987. As one of the most successful and coveted amps in Marshall's long and illustrious history, it was inevitable the 2555 would eventually be reissued – we're only surprised it's taken so long. Given the Silver Jubilee's significance for Marshall and the rock-guitar pantheon in general, we think the 2555X is likely to become one of Marshall's biggest sellers. Something to celebrate, indeed! **G**

4. The mirrored control panel is another area where the Jubilee varies from the classic Marshall recipe – perfect for checking your top hat is still looking sharp mid-gig, too

5. The 2251 4x12 cabinet is the choice for that full Silver Jubilee effect

6. While modern amps might offer reverb, effects loops and shoe shining on their footswitches, the Jubilee keeps things simple – you can change the channel and that's it



MARSHALL JCM 25/50 2555X SILVER JUBILEE REISSUE

PRICE: £1,199

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Hybrid valve preamp, valve power amp, with solid-state rectifier
OUTPUT: 100 watts RMS, switchable to 50 watts RMS

VALVES: 3x 12AX7, 4x EL34

DIMENSIONS: 290 (h) x 745 (w) x 220mm (d)

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 21.5/47

CABINET: Birch ply

CHANNELS: 2, with switchable clean/crunch rhythm mode

CONTROLS: Gain, bass, mid, treble, presence. Output master volume, lead master volume

FOOTSWITCH: 1-button footswitch changes from rhythm to lead

ADDITIONAL FEATURES:

Switchable clean/crunch rhythm modes, half power (pentode/triode) switching, series effects loop, speaker emulated fixed level line out

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: The matching 2551AV & 2551BV cabs cost £899 each



9/10

Guitarist says: A great reissue of one of the most coveted Marshalls – we'd love to see a 2554 combo version, too. After the perfect Slash tone? Time to live the dream...





IBANEZ LGB30 & JSM10 £849

Renowned for its shred axes, Ibanez is equally at home with f-holed guitars. These two sub-£1,000 signature jazzers are a case in point

Words Jason Sidwell Photography Joe Branstorn

What You Need To Know

1 Both of these guitars look a touch familiar...

They should do; both are based on each musician's signature guitar (the LGB300 and JSM100), which cost more than twice as much as our review samples.

2 How come these guitars are so much more affordable?

They're made in China, not Japan like the high-end versions. There are also a few areas where less expensive components have been used, most noticeably hardware.

3 Will these jazzboxes limit what I can play on them?

No, although the LGB30 is a more traditional jazzier, so combining lots of distortion with screaming bends at the 22nd fret is not advisable, nor indeed possible!

Whenever Ibanez is referenced, it usually evokes thoughts of 24-fret whammy-equipped rock axes. There's a good reason for this, of course, as Ibanez has had numerous shredders on its books, including Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert and Frank Gambale. That's not the whole Ibanez story, though, as its first big-name signature guitarist was actually George Benson, whose GB range has enjoyed close to a 40-year lifespan. There's a similar story with funky fusioner John Scofield, who, having played a 1981 Ibanez AS200 for years, introduced the similar JSM guitar to the world in 2001.

As good as these GB and JSM guitars are, though, costly signature models are out of reach for most guitarists. Thankfully, Ibanez recently introduced two lower-priced versions: Benson's LGB30, based on the LGB300, and Scofield's JSM10, based on the JSM100. The origins of these guitars are quite obvious, with the LGB30 being reminiscent of Gibson's hollowbody L-5 CES and ES-175 and the JSM10, Gibson's much-loved, centre-blocked thinline ES-335.

Benson's Baby

The LGB30 (LGB means Little George Benson) sports a laminated spruce top with laminate maple back and sides. The maple's flame is subtle and looks cool and classic under the Vintage Yellow Sunburst finish. There's cream plastic binding

around the gently curved body, and the f-holes complete the quite sumptuous vibe. Comparing dimensions with the top-line Japanese-made LGB300, the LGB30 is slightly smaller, with a body length of 495mm (19.5 inches), width of 400mm (15.75-inches) and a maximum rim depth of 92mm (3.62 inches). The 'Florentine' cutaway is substantial – more ES-175-like-pointy than L5-like-rounded, allowing good access to high frets.

Powering comes from two Alnico-loaded Super 58 humbuckers, with a standard Gibson-style four-control layout, each with rubber-ribbed Sure Grip knobs. Aside from their function, as with many jazzboxes, the bridge and tailpiece are eye candy, too. The tailpiece is made from ebony with an ornate acrylic/abalone inlay that passes the strings (flatwound 0.012s) to the ART-1 bridge, which has an ebony base that's topped with a choice of either a gold-plated tune-o-matic-style bridge (with height and intonation adjustable) or an ebony top, which is included in the case, if you want to swap it for a more old-school sound.

The set neck is a three-piece laminate – two outer mahogany strips and one inner piece of maple – that's topped with a bound ebony 'board, with Gibson-like 305mm (12-inch) radius, acrylic/abalone block inlays and 20 well-fretted medium-gauge frets. Topped off with a bone nut, gold tuners and a regal GB logo below the brand name, the guitar's aesthetics suggest a price that's considerably higher than it actually is.

THE RIVALS



EPIPHONE ES-175 PREMIUM
£699

For many, the definitive jazzier is a Gibson ES-175. This affordable option features a laminated maple body and a mahogany glued-in neck with a 20-fret rosewood fretboard. Sonically, it's powered by two Gibson USA '57 Classic humbuckers.

www.epiphone.com



EASTMAN T486 THINLINE £999

The T486 features a popular dual-pickup combo: Seymour Duncan's Jazz (neck) and 59 (bridge). The laminate maple body has a full centre-block and ivoroid binding. With a maple neck, ebony 'board and stud tailpiece, it's impressive.

www.eastmanguitars.com



GODIN 5TH AVENUE CW KINGPIN II £1,099

For something a little different, try the Kingpin II, with an archtop body made from laminate Canadian wild cherry and a silver leaf maple neck. Unlike the others here, the pickups are single-coil P-90-style, which can provide rich, brighter tones.

www.godinguitars.com



PEERLESS JOURNEYMAN JAZZ
£1,249

If you hanker for a big-body jazzier that's a little different to a ES-175, try this Peerless. With a solid spruce top and solid maple sides, it looks appealingly vintage-like. It has 22 frets, and a rosewood fretboard with a maple neck.

www.peerlessguitars.eu



1. The LGB's fetching tailpiece is made from ebony and finished with a stylish art deco-style abalone inlay
2. Both guitars make use of Ibanez's tune-o-matic-style ART-1 bridge, though the LGB30 mounts it on a vintage-appropriate wooden foot
3. The Ibanez Super 58 humbucker is the choice for both guitars, and it competently covers all your jazz and blues bases
4. As befits a guitar that owes a lot of its heritage to the ES-335, the JSM10 sports Gibson-style speed knobs

Scofield's Squeeze

No prizes for guessing the influence here: if the LGB30 comes over all Gibson ES-175-like, then the JSM10 is obviously inspired by Gibson's groundbreaking ES-335. It certainly looks just as impressive as the LGB30, again in the Vintage Yellow Sunburst, perhaps even more so, because laminated flame maple is used for the whole body. With subtle arching to the top and back, the high-gloss body is a marvel to look at.

The laminate construction of the LGB's neck is swapped for sapele, again with a bone nut and bound ebony fingerboard, this time with 22 medium-gauge frets. Coupled with the slick C profile and similar radius, it's great to play. Indeed, like an ES-335, the body cutaways make for an almost SG-like experience with such easy access all the way up.

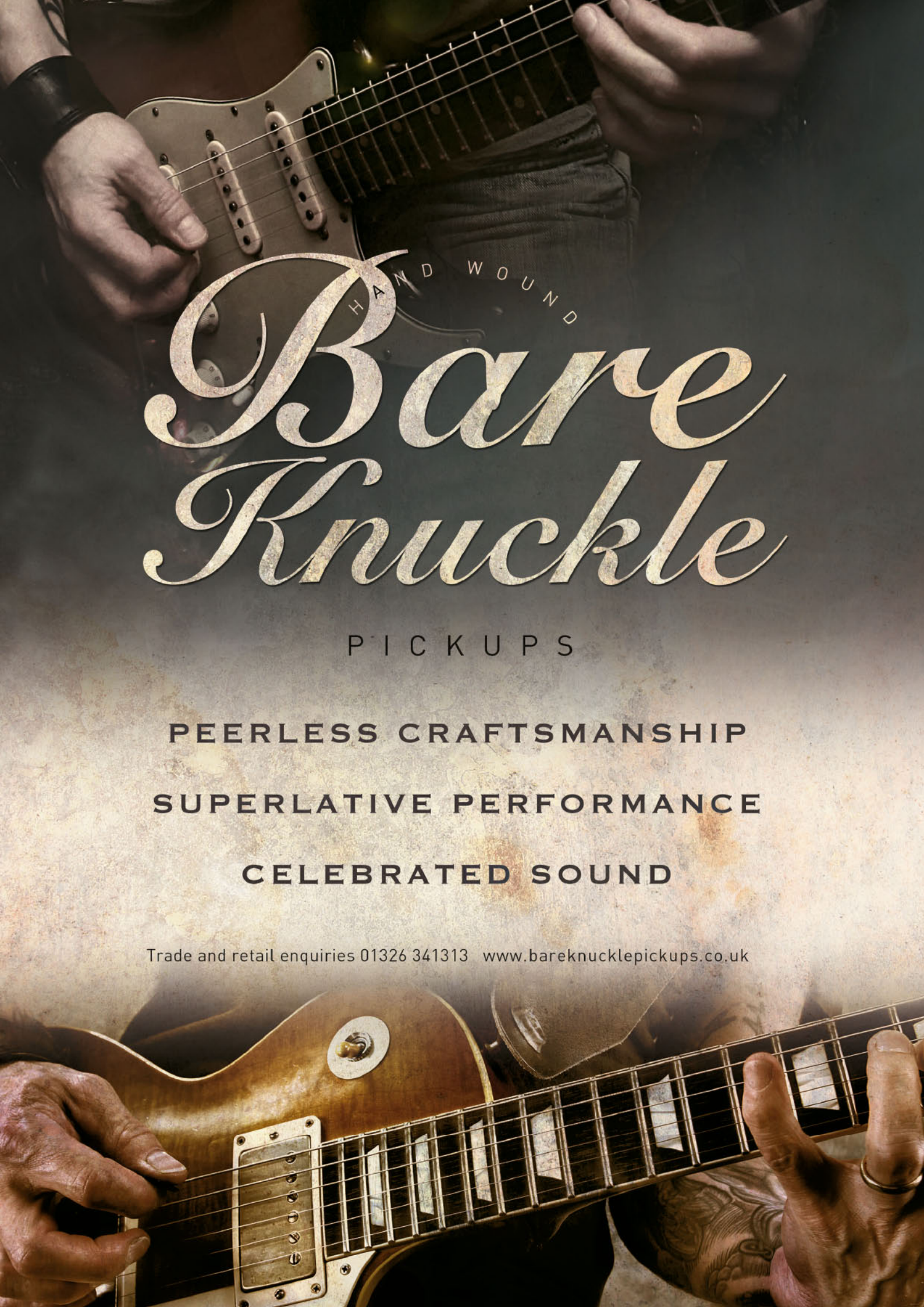
The electronics are identical to the LGB30 with the exception of an additional three-way mini toggle Tri-Sound switch that works on the neck pickup only, offering series or parallel humbucking, plus single coil voicings. The three-way toggle is positioned near to the treble-side f-hole and we have more standard control knobs with (again) an ES-335-like output jack position on the top of the body, not the



side. Strings are lighter, too, 0.010s, and we get the ART-1 bridge with Ibanez's Quick Change III tailpiece, which makes for a subtly faster string-change experience.

Sounds

Unplugged, the JSM10 is typical of so many centre-blocked semis, chime-y and bright, while the LGB30 is at least twice the volume, courtesy of its bigger body and no centre block. Plugged in (we used both a Fender Blues Junior and AER Compact 60), it's interesting to see how the Super 58 pickups get on, because they feature on



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both guitars. Starting with the LGB30's neck pickup, there's a rich warm tone, undoubtedly enriched by the flatwound strings. With volume/tone knobs maxed, there's plenty of clarity for chime-y chords or stinging single notes – a fine voice for all manner of jazz and blues. Wind back the tone control to various degrees and a roster of jazz legends springs to mind, from Wes Montgomery and Grant Green to (of course) Benson and modern Lee Ritenour. Pedals work nicely, too: vintage-style phaser or analogue chorus is perfect for early 70s fusion or early 80s R'n'B pop.

Slightly down-sized from its ES-335 origins, the JSM10 feels more compact not least due to its thinner body. Its more electric-like response is enhanced by that Tri-Sound switch that, aside from offering standard series wiring of the neck

The LGB30's neck pickup has a rich warm tone, undoubtedly enriched by the flatwound strings. A fine voice for all manner of jazz and blues

humbucker, offers parallel humbucking for a lower output, vibrant, brighter tone, almost like a smoother neck single coil with a little bite when digging in. Middle position is single coil mode, which has a similar tone (and volume), albeit with increased noise. The standard series-wired humbucker, of course, is the loudest and thickest voice and at lower volumes, and is very similar to the LGB30.

Selecting the middle position on either guitars' toggle switch puts both pickups on. Depending on your amp settings and playing approach, there are appealing Les Paul/ES-335 tones to be had, as well as almost Tele-type, honky ones, too. This is especially true if you explore the parallel and single-coil options on the JSM10, but there is a slightly different throaty tone with the LGB30 that is very appealing.

As for the bridge pickups, the only choice is full-on humbucker (no coil-splits included). Being a rock-biased pickup, the joys of overdrive are more realistic-sounding on the JSM10, not least because bridge-humbucker-into-a-loud-Vox AC30 is Scofield's core tone. It's easy to spend considerable time exploring playing dynamics here. Moving to the LGB30, the bridge pickup sounds great clean, either raw or processed; add a touch of phaser and



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5. The JSM10's ebony fingerboard is ornamented with classy, retro-looking abalone/mother-of-pearl block inlays

wah, and Watson's hollowbody playing with Herbie Hancock's Headhunters springs to mind. Roll back the tone knob and there's a warmth that's well suited to more intimate playing (think Daniel Lanois or Marc Ribot). Moderate overdrive also works well at lower volumes – just remember that it *is* a hollowbody, however...

Verdict

There is no shortage of f-hole guitars on the market, especially at sub £1k prices, and there's been quite a 'semi' trend over the past few years. For many, the centre-blocked semi is the do-all guitar, but that said, the LGB30 holds it own: it's simply a great hollowbody with classy 'expensive' looks and has plenty of potential in jazz, blues or Americana styles. A one-trick pony this is not.

Perhaps less evocative, the JSM10 is no doubt the more versatile guitar: the centre-block helps to tame feedback at loud volumes, and the neck pickup's mini switch offers very usable options that put it ahead of most other semis. Like the LGB30, the neck is a dream to play, with admirably smooth fretwork that makes playing almost effortless. If you're in the market for reasonably priced jazz/blues-orientated guitars, these two come highly recommended indeed. **G**



IBANEZ LGB30

PRICE: £849

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Hollowbody cutaway electric

BODY: All-laminate spruce top with flamed maple back and side

NECK: 3-piece mahogany/maple, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony with acrylic/abalone block inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 20, medium

HARDWARE: ART-1 tune-o-matic-style bridge on wooden foot; LBG30 tailpiece with abalone inlays, enclosed tuners – gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Super 58 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.9/6.40

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Other similar models include the AKJ95 (£429), AF200 Artstar (£1,599) and LGB300 (£2,599)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Vintage Yellow Sunburst (as reviewed)

Headstock Distribution
0121 508 6666
www.ibanez.com



9/10

Guitarist says: An outstanding hollowbody for jazz and old-school blues fans, which looks and sounds exquisite



IBANEZ JSM10

PRICE: £849

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Double-cutaway semi-hollow electric

BODY: All-laminate flamed maple

NECK: Sapele, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound ebony, m-o-p/abalone block inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium frets

HARDWARE: ART-1 tune-o-matic style bridge, Quick Change III stud tailpiece, enclosed tuners – gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Super 58 humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, volume and tone for each pickup, 3-way 'Tri-Sound' mini switch to switch neck pickup into parallel humbucking or single coil

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 3/6.6

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Other similar models include the AS153 (£689), AS200 (£1,650) and JSM100 (£1,700)

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Vintage Yellow Sunburst (as reviewed)



9/10

Guitarist says: It may be endorsed by an iconic jazz-fusion player, but blues-rock guitarists will find much to love here

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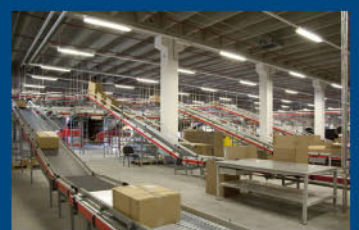


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YAMAHA SLG200S & SLG200N SILENT GUITARS £515

Featuring digital SRT technology, Yamaha's Silent Guitar has been upgraded for 2015. The ultimate practice tool, or is there more to it than that?

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Neil Godwin

What You Need To Know

1 A 'silent' guitar? What's the point of that, then?

With virtually zero acoustic volume, you can play/practise anywhere without annoying your spouse, neighbours or bandmates. Via the headphones output you can enjoy a good sound, with or without the onboard digital effects, and play along with your mp3 player, too.

2 But they're toys, right?

No, both steel- and nylon-string versions are full-scale instruments with extremely realistic 'SRT Powered' sounds. You can plug into an acoustic amp or PA for live work, too, and because of the solidbody design there are no feedback issues.

SRT: what's that?

3 Yamaha's Studio Response Technology: a digital convolution processing system that emulates a real studio-mic'd acoustic guitar.

Yamaha's Silent electro 'acoustic' guitars – both the steel- and nylon-string models – have been featured in our pages before. And not just as practice instruments, either. Thanks to a solid body – and no acoustic chamber – they are entirely feedback resistant: one reason why more than one big-name guitarist has used one for an amplified acoustic interlude in a loud rock band setting.

A major feature of the Silent Guitar design is its highly modernist appearance: aside from the neck and centre section, a laminated guitar-shaped frame is all you get for the 'body'. The bass-side frame can be removed and the whole thing packed up into a supplied gigbag, which looks more like a slim carry bag for a rifle rather than an acoustic guitar. It's not a travel guitar, per se, but packed up it's a lot more compact than a traditional acoustic.

For 2015, the upgraded SLG200S (steel-string) and SLG200N (nylon-string) will replace the existing range, which consists of three models: the 634mm steel-string SLG110S and two nylon-string models, the more classical-styled SLG130NW with 650mm scale, wide neck and ebony fingerboard, and the SLG110N with the same scale and a rosewood fingerboard. The same steel/nylon scale lengths are retained in this year's range, so the primary difference between the two is the wider nut and flat fingerboard of the nylon string model, its classic-style slotted headstock, and the strings, of course.

So, what's new? Firstly, the actual shape has been altered – for the better – with a slightly rounder bass-side shoulder and a less pointed wooden horn on the treble side frame that flows into the central frame in a simpler, classier curve. The central body-block is now mahogany, instead of maple, which is gloss-finished in either Natural, Brown Sunburst or Slack along with the solid treble horn. The previous 110s used a plastic frame; the more expensive 130 used wood, as with both the new models. The outer facing of the laminate frame is still rosewood but the lighter maple inner laminates have been stained a darker brown – all in all, the 2015 models look more like orchestral instruments.

Both new models feature glued-in mahogany necks (with adjustable truss rods) with a very thin, slightly open-pored matt finish. The thinner steel's neck measures 43.1mm in width at the nut, and 55mm at the 14-fret body join. Depth-wise, it's 20mm at the 1st fret, 23.2 at the 10th with a subtly V'd, C-shape profile. The nylon measures 50.2mm at the nut, and 59.7mm at the 12th-fret body join. Depth-wise, its similar to the steel at the 1st fret but shallower in the higher positions – around 21.8mm at the 9th fret. As a consequence the profile has a broader, flatter-backed C shape, not as flat or U'd as many classics but very different to the steel. Both also use a similar rosewood bridge: the nylon has a broader string spacing and strings attach in classical-style; the narrower-spaced steel



Even without any effects, and minimal EQ, the SRT 'mic' sound is extremely natural. There's good balance and it's not overly hi-fi or crisp

bridge, which has a compensated saddle, anchors its ball-end strings at the back of the tie-block. Another difference is the radius'd curve of the steel-string 'board over the flat face of the nylon-string. Frets are the same medium gauge on both, but the 12-fret join and longer scale of the nylon means we have fewer frets and the bridge sits lower on the body. Both have a rigid, black plastic pickguard or finger rest, too.

More commonality includes the electronics module that screws to the underside of the central body. Whereas the previous SLGs have a fairly conventional under-saddle piezo with preamp and effects, the 2015 models add Yamaha's Studio Response Technology (SRT): a digital system that emulates the sound of a real guitar, studio-recorded with a high-class microphone. While other Yamaha SRT-equipped electros offer different 'mic'

options, here we just get one that is blended over the SRT (piezo under-saddle) pickup. Along with an onboard tuner (another new addition), we get treble and bass EQ, three digital effects (one less than the prior models), plus an aux input for an mp3 player with its own level control so you can play along with practice pieces or backing tracks, and monitor either on headphones (earbuds are included) or PA/acoustic amp via the standard jack output.

Sounds

Both guitars are lightweight, about the equivalent of a lightly built steel-string, for example, and although strapped on there's a slight neck pull, it's easy to adjust

to. Played seated it's more comfortable, like a thinline electro or electric, really.

By design, acoustic volume is slight albeit enough to practise in a quiet room. But plug in a set of headphones and the experience is considerably expanded. Obviously, the quality of the 'phones will dictate what you hear, but with a pair of Sennheiser HD 380 Pro over-ear monitoring 'phones, what we hear is exceptional. Even without any effects and minimal EQ, the SRT 'mic' sound is extremely natural; compare it with the more direct 'pu' (piezo) sound with its zingy attack and you'll hear how good it is. There's good balance and it's not overly hi-fi or crisp. The reverbs – reasonable size hall and larger by the sound of it – add to the studio illusion and even the stereo chorus has merit. There's no level control for the effects, but the effects control is divided into three sections, one for each effect. As you move through each section, the effect level increases: fully anti-clockwise the sound is completely dry. What we do hear, however, is the longer sustain you'd expect from a solid, as opposed to acoustic, instrument: it sounds like you have a pretty impressive compressor squeezing a longer note tail.

Switching over to the nylon-string, the effect is pretty similar. There's more classical authenticity with full SRT mic setting, but pulling it back a little gives a piezo snap that's more akin to Yamaha's NTX/NCX nylon models.

Amp'd though a Line 6 StageSource, and stage pedalboard with LR Baggs' Venue DI, we first plug in a USA electro-acoustic worth around five times the price of the SLG200S. Does it sound five times better? No. If we're honest, the Yamaha holds its own and actually sounds a little more 'produced'. If we were blindfolded and just listening, it sounds like a nicely EQ'd, medium body acoustic. We compare the nylon-string to a well-gigged Yamaha NTX900FM. Again, the SLG200N doesn't

Rivals

This type of guitar is pretty niche, but **Frame Works Guitars** (www.frameworks-guitars.com) currently offers a big range of steel and classical, seven-string, eight-string, baritone and even double-neck headless designs. The high-end German company only builds limited numbers and sells direct. In the USA, **SoloEtte** guitars, designed by **Rossco Wright**, are more affordable starting around \$850 (factory direct, www.soloette.com). The design is licensed to **Aria**, which produces a more affordable and easily available version in the form of its full-scale **Sinsonido AS-101** (steel- and nylon-string, from £416) and the **AS-105** (steel- and nylon-string, from £475), both of which use an unusual stereo mic-in-tube pickup design. The AS-105 comes with volume, treble, bass, reverb, chorus, tuner and mp3 input; both are headless designs with tuners at base and three removable rubber-shrouded aluminium frames to form the outline. They also come with a carry bag and headphones



1. The biggest change for the 2015 Silent Guitars is the presence of Yamaha's SRT technology, which gives a much more realistic sound than the onboard tones of previous models
2. The Silent Guitars are more than just practice tools – you can plug in to an acoustic amp or PA and use them as feedback-free live 'acoustics'
3. All the hardware you need is contained within the centre block, which is now made of mahogany, rather than maple
4. The headstock is the most obvious difference between the steel- and nylon-string Silent Guitar models. The nylon packs a classic slotted peghead to go with the classical-style bridge

'SRT-Powered' Versus SRT

The full-blown SRT system is available on Yamaha's A-Series, L-Series, APX, CPX, but how does that differ from the 'SRT-Powered' version here? We asked Yamaha's Julian Ward to explain...

"The fundamental technology is the same," says Julian, "but the way it's implemented and occurs to the player is totally different because the likely use for a Silent Guitar is different to that of an A-Series. Like comparing a smartphone camera to a DSLR, it's horses for courses. A-Series is designed as a tool for recording or gigging, so the full SRT features a lot of options to get the right sound.

"The SLG, however, is designed primarily for practice – much more of a personal enjoyment thing – and is something that's much less likely to be used in a setting where finding the ideal transient response or low frequency resonance to fit into a mix is really needed. We've got one clearly defined job and setting for this – to make it sound great through headphones – so it's easy. The SRT Powered preamp uses an SRT 'sample' and convolution DSP to create a single sound, which is mixed into the dry pickup tone.

"As for that SRT sample, the SLG200 uses a Yamaha LS26 with a Royer R-122 mic recorded in East-West Studios, LA. The SLG200N uses a sample of a Yamaha GC42S recorded with a Neumann U67 in Avaco Studios, Tokyo. SRT isn't used for synthesis [to make a parlour sound like a jumbo, for example], but because SLG doesn't have an inherent sound as such, there's no benchmark and no 'does it sound like the original?' question. We're certain of one thing: it just sounds good."



As practice tools, these are superb and a noticeable upgrade to the existing Silent Guitars, thanks to that realistic-sounding SRT technology





5. There might not be much wood, but you still get finish options – in addition to the Translucent Black here, you can also have Natural or a very handsome Tobacco Sunburst, as seen on the SLG200N

6. The guitar-shaped frame can be removed so the whole thing can be stowed in a very compact gigbag

7. The rosewood 'boards may look the same at first glance, but they play very differently thanks to the SLG200S's curved radius contrasting the 200N's classical-style flat radius

8. The Silent Guitars can run off battery power, but you can also run off a mains adapter. The aux in also means you can play along to an mp3 player or other external sound source

sound worse by any means. With the SRT 'mic' voiced fully, it's a well balanced sound, a shade more treble giving it the matching 'bite' of the acoustic nylon-string. It sounds more even, too, and again that sustain tail is noticeable.

Verdict

As practice tools, these are superb and a noticeable upgrade to the existing Silent Guitars, thanks to that realistic-sounding SRT technology. With headphones on, not only are your practice sessions very private, but with quality sounds such as these, you're inspired to play. For DI recording, too, the sounds are certainly more accurate than under-saddle or even soundboard transducer-based systems. Unlike other SRT-equipped Yamahas, or a Fishman Aura-equipped instrument, you just have one 'voice', but that's certainly enough to sketch ideas to a high standard.

Live, through decent gear, you really shouldn't have a problem either: both produce very credible tones that belie both the price of the guitars not to mention their appearance. The subtly longer sustain can certainly work in your favour and the total absence of feedback means not only can you play at much higher levels if you have to, but you can easily engage lots of outboard effects and really blur the gap between the electric and amplified acoustic guitar.

So, should every practising, performing, songwriting guitarist have one? As surprising as it may seem, the simple answer is, yes. **G**



YAMAHA SLG200S

PRICE: £515 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Full-size, solidbody, steel-string electro-acoustic with effects

BODY: Mahogany centre core with rosewood/maple laminate frame

MAX RIM DEPTH: 85mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 356mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 634mm (24.96")

TUNERS: Individual die-cast enclosed, chrome-plated

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/43mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, small m-o-p dots, 400mm (15.75") radius

FRETS: 22, medium

BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with compensated saddle/55mm

ELECTRICS: Yamaha SRT (w/ under-saddle piezo) pickup and preamp featuring, volume, aux volume, bass, treble, effects rotary (to select reverb 1, reverb 2 and chorus), tuner, SRT/piezo blend. Battery or mains adapter powering, mini-jack in, standard jack out; mini-jack stereo out

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.07/4.5

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: SLG200N

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Translucent Black (as reviewed), Natural and Tobacco Brown Sunburst

Yamaha

01908 366700

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10/10

Guitarist says: The ultimate practice tool? The new Silent Guitar is better than ever



YAMAHA SLG200N

PRICE: £515 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Full-size, solidbody, nylon-string electro-acoustic with effects

BODY: Mahogany centre core with rosewood/maple laminate frame

MAX RIM DEPTH: 85mm

MAX BODY WIDTH: 356mm

NECK: Mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")

TUNERS: Nickel-plated classical-style with amber-coloured buttons and black rollers

NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/50mm

FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, flat (no radius)

FRETS: 19, medium

BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood with uncompensated saddle/55mm

ELECTRICS: Yamaha SRT (w/ under-saddle piezo) pickup and preamp featuring, volume, aux volume, bass, treble, effects rotary (to select reverb 1, reverb 2 and chorus), tuner, SRT/piezo blend. Battery or mains adapter powering, mini-jack in, standard jack out; mini-jack stereo out

WEIGHT (KG/LB): 2.07/4.5

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: SLG200S

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Translucent Black, Natural and Tobacco Brown Sunburst (as reviewed)



9/10

Guitarist says: If you've caught the nylon bug, this is the place to start. A lot of guitar for the money



A Digital Future

Yamaha's SRT digital technology is the latest to provide us with credible, studio-quality sounds from our electro-acoustics. Is it set to become the norm?

While the digital-versus-analogue debate continues to polarise us musicians, we'd wager more and more of us are accepting new-fangled technologies, even while we hop on equally retro obsessions such as the vinyl renaissance. The thing is, in our fast-paced modern world, digital is undoubtedly bloomin' handy.

Line 6's Variax was a big slap in the face for traditionalists. "It's not real; it's fake!" we shouted while certainly some of us happily used, and still use, the Variax for demo recording and more. Why? Because if we stop listening with our eyes and use our ears, it can actually do the job. Peavey took a punt with an Antares Auto Tune guitar. Laughable? Not quite there, for sure, but Auto Tune and plug-ins such as Melodyne are used on the majority of modern demo or master recordings. Sorry, we all – well many, many of us – use it. If you do a great solo or vocal take and there's just one lil' wayward note it can be fixed. No one will know. Recording technology is 99.9 per cent digital today, like photography. Be honest: when was the last time any of us used tape to record on, or film in our cameras?

Fishman's digital Aura technology has been with us for some time now and many of us have used it not least where the opportunity to mic a guitar isn't possible – those home demos, perhaps, or live. "Fundamentally, and technically, SRT and Aura are actually quite similar," says Yamaha's Julian Ward. "Both systems use convolution processing, but the implementation is, we

think, different enough to be meaningful. This kind of technology is just a means to an end and the end is a great sound, which inspires you to write, record or perform a great song, or just enjoy playing.

"Some would argue that a 'modelled' instrument will never sound the same – which is often confused for, 'as good' – as the original, but that's only part of the point," he continues. "The experience of playing a '52 Tele, or recording a record on a two-inch tape machine, or shooting medium format film is about a lot more than just the final result. But likewise, the sounds you can get from Variax, or the record you can actually make with Cubase, or the pictures you can actually take because you have your iPhone in your pocket might be a little more than a poor cousin to 'the real thing'. In terms of absolute quality, convolution processing is seriously capable: way beyond a half-arsed simulation analogy of an iPhone to real Kodak film. It's widely used for high-end reverb processing, and can accurately simulate real rooms."

This writer can certainly attest to that. While recording and mixing a number of projects over the past few years, things like Universal Audio's Ocean Way Studios Plug-In (which simulates the space of a very famous studio) has been used to give acoustic guitar parts a sense of realism, even if they were originally mic'd. We'd have loved to record there, or in a big expensive studio, but in the real world, how many of us get that chance? Digital is very much here to stay. **G**

ABOVE The likes of Line 6's Variax guitars have made digitally modelled sounds in a guitar a real option, even if the concept has struggled to capture the mainstream player's imagination



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PEDALBOARD

From boutique overdrives to painstaking recreations of classic fuzz boxes, we test the effects that matter in an all-new section



p130



p128



p124



p122



p126

There's more on the floor than ever before. That's why we've introduced a dedicated stompbox review section, called Pedalboard – although you'll also find everything from multi-effects to high-end switching units here over the next few months, too. Everything you need to fettle your effects, in other words. We're kicking things off with a (carefully bottled) bang, with **Laney's** 'desktop preamp' the IRT-Pulse (p122), which promises authentic valve tone that plugs straight into your studio setup.

We also have a bevy of stompboxes from one of the original 'boutique' tone-tweakers,

Robert Keeley on test, including small-footprint versions of his well-liked Red Dirt overdrive and Katana Boost (p124) – there's always room for a little one, after all. Staying with super-compact effects, if you're into tweakable takes on classic tones in a small package, check out the quartet of **Valeton** pedals on p130. Finally, we were caught off guard, in a good way, by the quirky but unexpectedly usable **DigiTech** Trio Band Creator (p128), which promises to banish toy-throwing tantrums or arguments over 'artistic differences' among your fractious bandmates. Where do we sign? **G**



LANEY IRT-PULSE DESKTOP PREAMP £199

The Brit amp maker gives you another way experience its Ironheart tone with this stompbox-size valve-powered desktop preamp

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Neil Godwin

Space, or the lack of it, is a major consideration for many home studio users. Sometimes, a few square inches of desktop real estate is all that's available, and while there are many mobile-phone/iPad-based apps that do a half decent job of getting a guitar sound onto hard disk, they're sonically often quite limited and don't do much else.

With exactly this niche in mind, Laney's excellent IRT range of amps and recording tools has just had a small but significant addition in the shape of the IRT-Pulse desktop preamp: a stompbox-size gadget that adds real valve tone and a host of features and possible uses, all in a footprint that's about the same size as a mobile phone.

Laney has also raised the product design bar, giving the IRT Pulse a solid trapezoidal alloy case with charcoal metallic paint, and a very cool 'black on black'

Laney logo. Three red LEDs recessed into the base of the enclosure add yet more coolness, with a subtle red glow giving the impression that the Pulse is hovering a few millimetres over the desk (and kinda makes you feel like it might be powered by a micro fusion reactor instead of boring ol' DC). Underneath the girder-shaped cut-out, more LEDs illuminate the Pulse's two ECC83 valves. However, there's a lot more to the Pulse than just good looks.

To begin with, the IRT-Pulse uses the same USB recording interface as other products in the IRT range, so it can hook up to a PC or Mac-based digital audio workstation and supply real valve-powered overdrive and distortion with an exceptionally low noise floor. The Pulse's USB interface is bi-directional and sends a dry signal to one channel and an amped signal on the other. There's also a very clever and time-saving re-amp

ABOVE The Laney's mean-looking metal grille protects a pair of ECC83 valves, which let you add real valve-powered distortion tones to your recording with minimal noise or fuss



feature, activated by a small push-button on the front edge, which can take a dry un-effected track from your DAW, process it through the Pulse and then return it, without the need to plug in any extra leads.

Alongside familiar gain and volume rotary controls, other features include a balanced main output on a TRS jack socket that also accepts unbalanced connections, headphones output with level control and an aux in, along with a remote footswitch jack that puts the Pulse into bypass mode. Push-button switches on the Pulse's top control gain boost and bypass, together with three tone options called bright, dark and EQ: the first two are self-explanatory, the latter applies a pre-set EQ curve, boosting bass and highs while slightly scooping midrange. There's also a speaker emulation function like that on the IRT Studio, ideal for connecting the Pulse direct to a PA or other occasions when there's no access to cab emulation software or hardware.

The Pulse can also happily function as a very powerful valve overdrive pedal with four gain stages. There's no built-in footswitch, but a handy remote jack makes it easy to hook one up.

Sounds

In use, the IRT-Pulse is simple to integrate, working happily with Windows, Mac, iOS and Android operating systems. The noise floor is very low, even on higher gain settings, and while the re-amping feature needs occasional reference to the manual, it quickly becomes second nature, especially on GarageBand.

The Pulse's range and quality of tone is excellent: cleans that can be crystalline or vintage warm, and mild bluesy overdrive to full-on shred are all available at the touch of a button.

We have tried the Pulse with a variety of guitars, bass and keyboards to record and edit a simple backing track. The lack of conventional bass, mid and treble EQ knobs actually works in its favour, while dialling in different tones with the push buttons is enough to cover most needs. Also, the usable gain range is very impressive, going from fat chunky Strat neck pickup rhythm to Billy Gibbons-style mega saturation with a deft twist of the gain pot and a couple of button presses.

Verdict

Recording is often about spontaneity, capturing something quickly before the moment of inspiration disappears, and in this context the Pulse is a very powerful asset with all the features you need to get great tone quickly, and nothing superfluous to get in the way of your creative process.

Best of all, the IRT-Pulse costs under £200, less than the cost of a high-end overdrive pedal, which is, of course, another function it carries out superbly. It's one of the best desktop preamps we've used in a long time and it's nice to see – and hear – some real valves, instead of another digital facsimile. Job well done. **G**

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China
TYPE: Desktop preamp
FEATURES: 2x ECC83 valve-driven 4-stage overdrive, USB interface, re-amping, speaker emulation
CONTROLS: Gain & volume; Bright, Hot, Emulation, EQ, Dark, Re-Amp and Bypass buttons. Phones level
POWER: 9V adaptor (supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 120 (l) x 95 (w) x 80mm (h)

Headstock Dist
0121 508 6666
www.laney.co.uk



Guitarist says: A one-stop-shop desktop preamp with a great selection of features and very usable tones at a bargain price

9/10

1



2



3



4



1 KEELEY AURORA £135

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Reverb pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Decay, Slapback, Warmth, Blend, Hall/Plate/Room switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x 112 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitar Guitar
0800 456 1959
www.rkfx.com

The **Aurora** offers a choice of hall, plate and room reverbs with four knobs to control the action. The Blend knob adds reverb to the 100 per cent analogue dry signal, while Decay determines the length of the tail that seems to go on forever for some cool shimmery effects, especially with the Warmth knob at minimum – turn it up to dampen the top end and calm things down. Slapback sets the pre-delay (zero up to 100ms), allowing separation rather than immediately swamping the dry signal.

Two possible deal-breakers are that there's no spring simulation, although we didn't miss it because some of the room settings come pretty close, and that bypass cuts the reverb dead – which won't suit those who'd like the 'trails' option of it decaying naturally.

Verdict

This is a great sounding reverb with some very clever instant tweaks on board to get your sound just right. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: Cool parameter adjustment makes this not your standard reverb pedal

7/10

2 KEELEY RECINO £135

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Digital delay pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

CONTROLS: Repeat, time, level, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 66 (w) x 112 (d) x 50mm (h)

The **Recino** (Latin for echo) is a digital delay pure and simple, complementing the Magnetic Echo, a tape echo emulation pedal, already in Keeley's roster. With just three knobs and no other tricks up it sleeve, the Recino is basic compared with some of its tap tempo-endowed rivals, but perhaps makes up for that with an emphasis on sound quality based around a Spin FV-1 chip. Delay time spans a very practical range from a short metallic reverb-y slap through to a full second. Keeley seems to have pitched how the repeats sound and blend in with your signal to appeal to a wide range of players (while the timbre isn't as dark as some BBD analogue delays, neither is it clinically digital); you get out an unadulterated version of what you put in.

Verdict

An all-singing, all-dancing multi-faceted digital echo this is not, but the Recino's simplicity and sound is endearing. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: No bells and whistles here; this Spin FV-1 chip-based digital delay is all about simplicity

7/10

3 KEELEY MINI KATANA £89

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Clean boost pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, 4 modes of operation

CONTROLS: Boost, internal DIP switches (treble cut, hi gain), bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 42 (w) x 92 (d) x 50mm (h)

The **Mini Katana** puts Keeley's dual-class A JFET-equipped Katana clean boost into a mini pedal, while adding a pair of internal DIP switches that can be combined for a choice of four sounds. With neither switch engaged, the Katana adds a pleasing hint of extra treble and ran from a unity gain point at about 10 o'clock through to boost levels that took our small Fender amp from clean to full-on raunch, albeit with an inevitable increase in hiss. The hi-gain switch adds an extra 10dB, which effectively turns the Katana into an overdrive pedal, while a hi-cut switch takes a carefully wielded scalpel to treble frequencies for a more transparent boost, which could be useful if you want to take the edge off bright single coils.

Verdict

An excellent tone-conditioning boost to take your amp or pedal up a notch. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: A practical 'more' pedal that you can slip into your signal chain

7/10

4 KEELEY RED DIRT MINI £125

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, 4 modes of operation

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, level, internal DIP switches (distortion, overdrive, crunch, amp), bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied) 7.5mA

DIMENSIONS: 42 (w) x 92 (d) x 48mm (h)

Robert Keeley has been modifying Tube Screemers since 2001, and has seen Steve Vai and Joe Satriani, among others, use his modded pedals. His own Red Dirt put all of those mods into a single pedal and added a JFET input buffer for a more dynamic sound, and now it's available in mini-pedal format. With a large knob for drive and smaller ones for tone and level, it follows the standard TS configuration. Tucked away under its four-screw baseplate, however, are two DIP switches that allow you to change the clipping diodes for four different modes – distortion, overdrive, crunch and amp – each cleaner than the next and all delivered with great string clarity. It's a classy take on a TS-style overdrive with practical added options.

Verdict

A tasty overdrive that naturally complements your sound, with versatility galore inside. **[TC]**



Guitarist says: Robert Keeley designs a better mousetrap that's red not green

8/10

5



5 KEELEY COMPRESSOR PRO £219

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Compressor pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass, threshold LED, compression LED ladder

CONTROLS: Threshold, Ratio, Attack, Release, Output Gain, Hard/Soft, Knee switch, auto on/off switch, bypass footswitch

CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9V adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 119 (w) x 97 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitar Guitar
0800 456 1959
www.rkfx.com

If there's one Keeley pedal that has captured the imagination of musicians, it's the Keeley compressor, itself based on modifications to the classic MXR Dyna Comp/Ross grey compressor circuitry. Still available in both two-knob and four-knob versions, the Compressor now has a sibling in the shape of the Compressor Pro, a larger pedal with a lot of control, designed not just for guitar but to accept a range of input signals for studio work.

The pedal's top panel is laid out like a studio compressor with a set of knobs taking care of Threshold, Ratio, Attack, Release and Output Gain. You can also select hard or soft Knee operation to set whether the compression comes in hard at the set threshold or eases in more gently. There's also an auto mode that takes away the responsibility of setting the Attack and Release knobs,

instead adjusting the envelope automatically and naturally in response to program material – what you are playing.

Setting up for when compression kicks in is easy, because there's a green LED that lights up red when your guitar signal exceeds the threshold that you set with the first knob. The actual amount of gain reduction (compression) going on is likewise shown on a seven-segment LED ladder. While the knob array may seem overly complicated to anyone more familiar with a typical two-knob guitar compressor, it's fairly straightforward – the Ratio knob sets how strong the compression will be once your signal exceeds the threshold, and the Attack and Release knobs can shape your note to make it snap (if desired) and

adjust any added sustain. The Gain knob sets the output and can be used as a boost (with a ratio of 1:1 dialled in you get no compression and can use the pedal as a pure booster).

Overall, this is a compressor that will take care of all typical guitar compressor tasks – level consistency, sustain, chicken picking note definition and so on – whether you are looking for transparent subtlety or an obvious effect.

Verdict

If you want underfoot onstage simplicity, you may be better off with a two-knob compressor, but with the Pro you get a versatile compressor offering not just plenty of options in sculpting guitar and bass sounds, but also many practical applications in the studio. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: Tremolo, reverb and dynamically controlled modulation in a comprehensive pedal

7/10

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DIGITECH TRIO BAND CREATOR £149

Lacking a rhythm section when you need it? DigiTech presents your own virtually responsive backing band in a stompbox

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Neil Godwin

Any guitarist who's played in a band will know how brilliant it is when a drummer and bass player mesh together to provide a solid foundation to the music. But getting there takes a lot of work. So, how about a rhythm section that gets it right first time, is always in time and always hits the right notes? Well, forget about hiring some top session pros – for a lot less money, and 24/7 availability, there's the DigiTech TRIO Band Creator.

The TRIO is a stompbox that will automatically generate bass and drum parts, dependent on what you play into it. All you have to do is press the footswitch, play a chord sequence at your desired tempo then press the footswitch again to hear the generated backing track, which you can then play along with. Once you have played your part you can decide on the nature of the backing track. You can select one of seven music genres (Blues, Pop, Alternative, Country, R&B and Jazz), and choose one of 12 song styles that are available for each genre with options for 4/4 and 3/4 time signatures. You can also speed it up or slow it down and set the relative levels of bass and drums against your guitar. For practice, it may suit you to have one chord sequence to loop indefinitely, but if you want to build a song section by section, the TRIO has the capacity to learn three different song parts that can be recalled on the fly, although this involves button presses unless you add an FS3X triple footswitch (£25).

In Use

The TRIO can be used with your guitar amp, connected to a mixer, or both. There's also a headphone output. Each genre features an optional built-in guitar tone with a touch of ambience, some overdrive/distortion, and speaker emulation for the outputs. You'll also find a rhythm or lead option, which work just fine in context.

Like a looper, you have to hit the footswitch on the beat at the start and end of your playing, but it's not hard. Playing a bog-standard 12-bar in E, we're surprised how it translates to so many genres and styles. There are options for everybody with rhythms featuring straight eighths or 16ths or some swing, and thoughtful musical basslines that can be sparse or busy. More complex chord sequences works equally well: if you stick to major/minor and 7th chords, play simply, clearly and in time, the TRIO will always spit out a complementary backing track.

Verdict

DigiTech's direct expertise in looping and pitch detection technology has paid dividends with the TRIO, creating an invaluable practice and songwriting tool to suit players from beginners to pros. **A**

Guitarist says: Tell the TRIO what to play and it will almost always get it right

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Multi-use bass and drum creator

FEATURES: 7 Genres, 12 Song styles, Tempo adjustment, Half Time/Double Time, Onboard effects

CONTROLS: Genre, Style, Tempo, Bass, Drums, headphone volume, Guitar FX switch, Part 1, 2, and 3 buttons, Alt Time button

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, amp, mixer and headphones output, USB port

POWER: 9V adaptor (supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 136 (l) x 82.5 (w) x 63mm (h)

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01462 480000

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6



7



8



9



6 VALETON TUBE ENGINE VINTAGE OVERDRIVE £39

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

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

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9VDC adaptor (not supplied) 15mA

DIMENSIONS: 50 (w) x 93 (d) x 46.5mm (h)

Zoom UK

08432 080999

www.valeton.net

Several of the pedals Valeton's new Coral series have Modern or Vintage as a prefix, including two overdrive pedals. The Tube Engine Vintage Overdrive colour and name, of course, allude to the fact that it takes its cue from the Tube Screamer, being based around the same JRC4558 chip. In use, it delivers familiar TS-808-style mild overdrive that will add a natural increase in dirt to your amp. The differences between TS clones are usually subtle and centre on the midrange, but this one has treble and bass knobs offering more variability than a single-knob design, particularly in getting away from a TS's natural bass roll-off by fattening up the bottom end.

Verdict

We've seen Tube Screamer clones such as the Joyo JF-01 that sell for less, but this is good value at £39, not least for its extra EQ options. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: A cute amp driver with more tone tweaking than many clones on the market

7/10

7 VALETON LA' CHARGER MODERN CRUNCH £49

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Overdrive/ distortion pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

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

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9VDC adaptor (not supplied) 15mA

DIMENSIONS: 50 (w) x 93 (d) x 46.5mm (h)

It's interesting to see a pedal labelled Crunch rather than overdrive or distortion, but that's explained by the fact that this is based on the MI Audio Crunch Box, which ranks alongside Kylie and AC/DC as one of Australia's finest musical exports. Both acts have built a career on Marshall amps (well, maybe not Kylie), as has the Crunch Box in delivering Marshall-like high-gain tones – and the La' Charger does that, too. While it will do a slightly dirty boost, the pedal doesn't come alive until you start turning up the crunch for chunky riff and rhythm sounds right the way to a full-on harmonic-laden raunch that's tailor-made for lead playing, all cleaning up very well with your guitar's volume.

Verdict

Okay, it's another Marshall-in-a-box pedal, but we think it's rather a good one for its less-than-50-quid price. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: Marshall JCM flavour in a versatile dirt-deliverer for a more than reasonable price

7/10

8 VALETON LAZARO MODERN FUZZ £39

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Fuzz pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

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

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9VDC adaptor (not supplied) 7mA

DIMENSIONS: 50 (w) x 93 (d) x 46.5mm (h)

Valeton describes the Lazaro as a Modern Fuzz, which, for a company that isn't shy in saying what its pedals are based on, means that it's not a slavish clone of a vintage classic (although we have to say that it can sound a lot like a Big Muff on certain settings). What you are getting is a pretty versatile fuzz with tone knobs that can make things sound nasty if that's your thing. With Fuzz up full and tone controls fairly neutral, the tone is fat and squidgy but with a nice crisp edge: great for digging in for single note solos that will sustain for ages. Roll back your guitar volume and it'll seem more like overdrive. At lower levels of the fuzz knob you'll find harder fuzz sounds suitable for taut riffing and chording.

Verdict

If the flavour suits you, it's a lot of fuzz for minimal outlay. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: A compact fuzzbox that will cover a lot of options for your preferred sound

7/10

9 VALETON DARK TALE VINTAGE DISTORTION £39

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: Distortion pedal

FEATURES: True-bypass

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

CONNECTIONS:

Standard input, standard output

POWER: 9VDC adaptor (not supplied) 10mA

DIMENSIONS: 50 (w) x 93 (d) x 46.5mm (h)

Taking its inspiration from a Pro Co RAT, the Dark Tale's circuitry is based around a LM308 chip, but unlike the RAT's single tone knob, you get separate control over bass and treble. With the volume up high and the distortion down low, the Dark Tale delivers a crunchy cranked amp overdrive that many would find useful. Advancing the distortion knob adds more harmonically-rich dirt until you get into full-on saturation with loads of sustain, albeit retaining a sharp edge and not getting mushy – definitely in rodent territory.

If anything, the Dark Tale can get more extreme than a RAT – where a RAT's Filter knob works on the treble content and retains body, the bass knob here can thin the bottom end for a leaner sound.

Verdict

The Dark Tale is a rodent that delivers big distortion in a small package. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: The heavier end of distortion from the Rat school of dirt – at a lighter price

7/10



|||||

Audition

We test the best of the rest
of the month's new gear

Photography Neil Godwin & Joe Branston

|||||

VINTAGE GEMINI PAUL BRETT SIGNATURE BARITONE £399

CONTACT **JHS** PHONE **01132 865381** WEB **www.jhs.co.uk**

While Vintage certainly contributes to the over-population of regular-style acoustics within its capacious range, in recent years we've seen some interesting input by the likes of Gordon Giltrap and collector Paul Brett. Brett's signature range is inspired by the past of the steel-string. On paper, the new Gemini is the most radical yet: a 628mm (24.75-inch) short-scale baritone that's also a standard-tuned rootsy electro.

With all-solid wood construction, Fishman pickup system and a gigbag, the Gemini certainly ticks the value for money box. But it's also decidedly left-field, not only in concept but appearance, too. "The idea came from a 1930s Kalamazoo KG 11," Paul informs us. "I had one strung with baritone strings and although the wood and bracing didn't warrant prolonged usage in that genre, I got a really great and tight sound from the low end. I thought it would be of benefit if a dual usage could be achieved with a simple change of strings."

In the flesh, it's a tidily made, heavily braced small body guitar, similar to Taylor's shorter-scaled GS Mini with a 440mm body length, a max width of 371mm across the lower bouts and max side depth of 105mm. Back and sides are mahogany, and the top is spruce, although both are given a unifying brown-stain 'vintage' finish. Then there is the unusually shaped high-contrast pickguard – this little 'un stands out a mile.

If the pickguard has Marmite appeal, so too does the mahogany neck, topped with a clean, nicely small-fretted rosewood 'board. Its profile has a very angular V shape with serious depth – 24.5mm at 1st fret, 26.8mm at the 10th. The slotted head is in keeping with Paul's sense of style. Likewise, the chrome-plated Waverly-style tuners.

A nod to the present is the Fishman Acoustic Matrix under-saddle pickup with Natural I active endpin-mounted preamp and soundhole volume and tone controls.

Sounds

To clarify, to move from baritone to standard tuning you have to restring the guitar. We requested our pre-production prototype with standard 0.012 to 0.053 strings in standard pitch, and its acoustic

fingerpicked sound is quite parlour-like, with a kick in the mids and sufficient low end, though far from huge – unlike the neck, which is. To be fair it actually proves more comfortable than we initially thought, but it kind of suits the quite primitive, rootsy, bluesy character that is certainly very bottleneck friendly. Tuning down to open G, with pick and fingers, the Gemini takes off with more depth, more kick. Our contributor Jim Kimberley tunes the Gemini down C to C, and while there's that slight 'the record's too slow' sound to the slack strings, it's decidedly dark yet more contemporary at the same time.

Restringing with baritone 0.016 to 0.070 strings isn't straightforward; we have to modify the low string bridge pin and even then we can't get it to fit properly and open out the nut grooves. It will ship with baritone strings, so doing the reverse re-string shouldn't be a problem, we're told.

By design, it doesn't have the sparkling piano-like voice that a Taylor baritone creates, for example. This shorter scaled, lower tension baritone is a more muted affair; played fingerstyle, the bass strings struggle to make themselves heard over the trebles. While there's again a sort of slowed record tonality, once tuning has stabilised we begin to enjoy the very bass guitar-like low end and full-bodied treble, even if the low tension does take some adjustment. Amp'd up, the Fishman system translates all this in a clean, direct and balanced fashion. There's a lot to consider here.

Verdict

The Gemini reminds us of finding a dusty ol' guitar that's seen better days but sounds really authentic for older bluesy styles. Yes, the neck is huge but so is the potential. If you're bored by the same old acoustics, the Gemini could well be your antidote. **[DB]**

7/10

Guitarist says: A baritone that can be used as a standard-tuned electro just by changing the strings. Sounds bonkers, but isn't



ZOOM Q8 HANDY VIDEO RECORDER £319

CONTACT **Zoom UK** PHONE **08432 080999** WEB **www.zoomcorp.co.uk**

If you play in a band or are a solo artist, there are more opportunities than ever these days when it comes to self-promotion and making money from music – posting videos on YouTube, selling your music on iTunes and more. Of course, you need technology to make that happen, and a new product from Zoom seems to tick a lot of the relevant boxes. The Q8 is a portable video and audio recorder that offers high-definition video and quality audio recording (up to 24-bit/96kHz), so could be a great choice for recording the visuals and music together at a gig.

Light and easily portable, the Q8 can be hand-held but lends itself to being in a fixed position on a stand courtesy of the tripod mount on its base. The unit runs off a rechargeable lithium-ion battery and records to an SD card (not supplied).

Four channels of audio can be recorded simultaneously with or without video. There's a stereo track that can be recorded using the attached X/Y mic (Zoom has an interchangeable mic capsule system with a range of other mics available), and there

are a pair of XLR/jack combo inputs to take mic or line inputs for the other two tracks, which can be configured as a stereo pair or separate mono tracks. A built-in speaker and stereo headphone/line output jack take care of audio monitoring. Four different recording modes are selectable: video with audio, video with separate audio files, stereo audio, or multi-audio.

Setting up is a relatively straightforward process, using a rotatable touchscreen that also serves as your video monitor, although anyone blessed with fat, podgy fingers might initially find negotiating the menus a bit fiddly.

In Use

Once set up, recording is initiated with a press of a single red button. Physical controls are, in fact, kept to a minimum – just the necessary buttons for playback and to arm the tracks, and easily-adjusted input gain dials for the mic and the two inputs.

For the video, you get a 160-degree wide-angle lens with digital zoom and a choice of formats up to 2,034 x 1,296 pixels

(3M HD), with frame rates of up to 60fps at 720p. There's a HDMI output for video monitoring. A USB connection transfers all .mov files and .wav files to your computer for editing. It also supports live streaming and allows the Q8 to be used as a webcam or USB microphone.

Verdict

So, is it for you? Well, in a band you can be videoing the gig while recording the audio in the room with the mics and recording a feed from the mixing desk onto the other tracks – all time stamped and synchronised for editing later. A solo performer could record the stereo sound in the room alongside separate tracks of acoustic guitar and vocals. There's also use as a pure audio recorder for capturing song ideas and the like. Overall, the Q8 is a creative tool that could expand your musical horizons. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: A practical addition to your gigbag to record both audio and visuals

7/10



ONE CONTROL MICRO DISTRO £109

CONTACT **Zoom UK** WEB www.one-control.com

Pedalboards come in all shapes and sizes, but with the amount of quality mini pedals on the market, there's the potential these days to miniaturise a 'board for easy transport and ease of placement on the sort of cramped 'stages' that many of us find ourselves playing on. Of course, you'll still need a power distributor for all of those pedals but you can keep things small with the One Control Micro Distro, which is the same size as your average mini pedal.

In Use

Featuring eight standard centre negative nine-volt DC outputs plus one that supplies between 12 to 18 volts via a sag knob, the Distro is a smart-looking 100 x 25 x 37mm black box that's available as the All In One Pack, which includes the EPA-2000 high capacity AC adaptor, capable of supplying 2000mA, plus nine connection cables (one at 150mm; three each at 300mm and 500mm; two at 700mm). Two Distros can be linked together if you need more outputs (A Distro without adapter costs £99).

While the individual outputs aren't isolated, we manage to run a full nine pedals with no ground loop or hum problems. These pedals include several high-current digital pedals, but powered by the EPA-2000, the Distro's 1,950mA total capacity makes sure we don't run out of juice.

Verdict

Smaller than its rivals and competitively priced, the Micro Distro has plenty going for it, especially if you want to keep pedalboard space for pedals. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: Compact pedal powerer that performs admirably

7/10

RODE NTR RIBBON MIC £589

CONTACT **Source Distribution** PHONE **0208 962 5080** WEB www.rodemic.com

In past issues of *Guitarist*, we've recommended various dynamic mics for mic'ing up speaker cabinets, and large diaphragm condenser mics for acoustic guitars and vocals. But another type of mic out there could do all of those jobs: the ribbon mic. Rode has just released one, the NTR, which has been designed and built to address various criticisms that can be aimed at ribbon mics. One of those criticisms is that a low output means that a ribbon mic usually needs to be paired with a high-quality preamp. No such problems here: the NTR has a healthy output and will work with most preamps that can supply phantom power.

In Use

The NTR features a figure of eight pattern, which means that it picks up sound equally from the front and back but rejects it from the sides. This means it can add some

natural ambience to your sound, but also means you can get good results from clever placement in a situation where you need to focus on one sound while rejecting others – useful, say, for a singing acoustic guitarist where you need to optimise separation between guitar and voice. Sounding full-bodied and natural with a very smooth top end (which isn't overly bright like some condensers can be), the NTR also lends itself nicely to mic'ing up guitar cabinets.

Verdict

Okay, it's a substantial investment, but if you are serious about your recording and have the money to spare, the NTR is a very useful mic to have. **[TC]**

Guitarist says: Rode revamps the ribbon microphone for everyday use

9/10



Longtermers

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



Victory V40H
'The Duchess' head
with Jamie Dickson



Writer

JAMIE DICKSON
Editor, *Guitarist*



In his second report, our editor takes the Victory V40H Duchess, a capable but compact 40-watt head with plenty of tone-tweaking potential, out on its first gig: a Sunday lunchtime set in a busy pub venue. But will it cut through the roast-dinner fug?

"Chalk one to the Duchess – it responds so well to picking dynamics"



When it comes to gear, it's the practical stuff that you have to live with every day that matters in the end, not the buzzers and bells. I'm thinking this as I pull up to a pub in Bristol's harbourside area. Like many venues amid the winding streets of the city, parking is limited so the usual 'put hazards-on-and-mount-curb-to-unload' procedure comes into play.

A chap sitting outside on the picnic benches who's had a little too much to drink sees me unloading gear from the back of the car and rises to lend a hand. His attempt to hold the pub door open is welcome, but between us, we somehow manage to make this more difficult than if I'd done it on my own! Once inside, the landlord urges me up some grotty stairs bedecked with beer crates. I've got to store my gear on the first floor until gig time, it appears, so I'm glad the Victory V40 comes in a soft case that you can wear on a strap on your shoulder – and that its accompanying V112 cab is relatively lightweight, too, with a grab-handle on the top. Otherwise, squeezing past these boozy obstacles would be quite a challenge right now.

An hour later, we're ready to step on stage. It's a varied set and I'll be using the amp in its comfort zone: as an effects-friendly platform

for a variety of soundscapes, a job it was designed to excel at. I've set the amp up to operate on full power in push/pull mode, in other words, functioning as a non-attenuated, conventional modern amp. To give my Tele a bit of extra grunt, however, I've engaged the amp's 'Mid Kick' switch. A smidge of reverb is applied to flatter the tone a little and the gain controls are set up to crunch if I dig in hard with the pick, but remain juicily clean for the quieter sections. As usual, I'll be relying on a duo of drive pedals to provide outright dirt when required: a Free The Tone Red Jasper for a bit of boost and a Providence Red Rock OD for the solos.

As we start the set with a cover of Bowie's *Sound And Vision*, I'm aware the partially open-back V112 cab is a little more directional than some of the combos I typically use, but not laser-beam directional like a closed-back 4x12. That's handy, as monitoring in pub venues varies from great to non-existent – and the other guys in the band usually rely on a little spill from my amp to hear where I am. All the same, Stef the drummer motions for a little more guitar, and I duly oblige: at 40 watts, there's headroom enough on tap to keep my on-the-edge clean tone intact even as the volume increases.

The first real 'Eureka' moment with the V40 comes happens during a track where I normally step on both drive pedals to get the required amount of gain for a short, punchy solo. With the V40, however, I found I needed only the low-gain Red Jasper plus some extra pick attack to achieve the nicely compressed, singing tone I'm after. So, chalk one to the Duchess – it responds so well to picking dynamics, and has such a wide, accessible graduation from clean to dirty, that it's made a pedal redundant and brought some more natural dynamics into play.

A few nights later, I'm given pause for thought. In the spirit of experimentation, I take the V40's sister, the 6L6-equipped V30 Countess, along to another pub gig to see how they compare. I'm struck by how much more penetration and focus it has in a noisy room. It's got more abrupt, pointed cleans and less graduated drive tones, but boy, does it cut through. It's less flattering and forgiving, though. In truth, the easygoing, organic vibe of the V40 Duchess is much more my kind of thing (the high-gain V30 was designed to suit Guthrie Govan's formidable precision and articulation), but the drummer sure isn't having any trouble hearing me. Further testing beckons, it seems... **G**

Reviewed 391 **Price** £829 **On Test Since** February 2015 **Studio Sessions** Not yet **Gigged** Once **Mods** None

www.victoryamps.com



Gibson Les Paul 1960 Collector's Choice 'Dutchburst' *with Neville Marten*

Writer

NEVILLE MARTEN
Editor, *Guitar Techniques*



Guitar Techniques
editor and Blues
Headlines writer
Neville Marten

debates the pros and cons of the Dutchburst and his own Les Paul Goldtop as 'sofa' guitars, and ponders which of the beasts he'll use to play *All Right Now*

Since the Dutchburst's debut at one of Aynsley Lister's shows – he kindly invited me up when he played locally – I haven't used it in anger. But I have played it a lot at home, through a variety of small amps. My 'home' amp is a Fender Blues Junior 'Woody', which is a great looking 'cosmetic' reissue of an early Fender classic. But I've also tried it through a little ZT Lunchbox, my own Hughes & Kettner Puretone combo (albeit at very low volumes), and a recent acquisition, a Morgan SW22R combo, which, they say, is

a sort of 'Dumble-ised Deluxe Reverb'. Also, quite interestingly, I've had time to judge it alongside my own Les Paul, which is a '56 reissue Goldtop with P-90s.

Even though I've played literally hundreds of Les Pauls in my time and owned a good many, too, it never fails to amaze me that they are all subtly different. Even ostensibly identical models have little quirks that separate them, making you prefer one over another. Or perhaps (if you're lucky enough to have a few!) use one for this and another for that, based on tone, power, playability and so on.

I said in my review and demo that I like the lightness in weight, openness of tone and slender neck for playability of the Dutchburst at the upper frets. And I still do, as it makes it a great noodling guitar for nights on the sofa. The Goldtop, on the other hand, has a "big old lump of a neck", as Peter Green once described his famous 'Burst to me, and that typical P-90 tone, which is clear but dirties up beautifully when cranked a bit.

This Dutchburst is a wholly darker beast. We often talk about certain guitars being good

for this or perfect for that, but in reality, you can do anything on any guitar: Reggie Young played the intros of Dusty's *Son Of A Preacher Man* and Elvis's *Suspicious Minds* on a Super 400, apparently, as just one example. But if I had to choose between the Les Pauls, I'd say the P-90s model is more versatile – it'll do great John Mayer- or Hendrix-style neck-pickup fills and excels at low-drive blues lead. Dutchburst, for me, is an out-and-out Brit blues or Brit rock monster; it wants to be cranked and, even at home, it tends to be that guitar I reach for when the distortion pedal gets plugged in.

So if I had to choose, which one would it be? Actually, I'm going to leave that decision until next time, as I have a rehearsal this weekend for a work summer party a few days after, and this will be the first time I get to try the two, playing everything from *All Right Now* (yes, yawn!) to Paul Weller's *You Do Something To Me*. I've already got a good idea which guitar will work best on those two (as I'm sure you have, too), but I'll give you the full battle rundown next time! **G**

Reviewed 392 Price £5,799 On Test Since March 2015 Studio Sessions Not yet Giggled Yes Mods None

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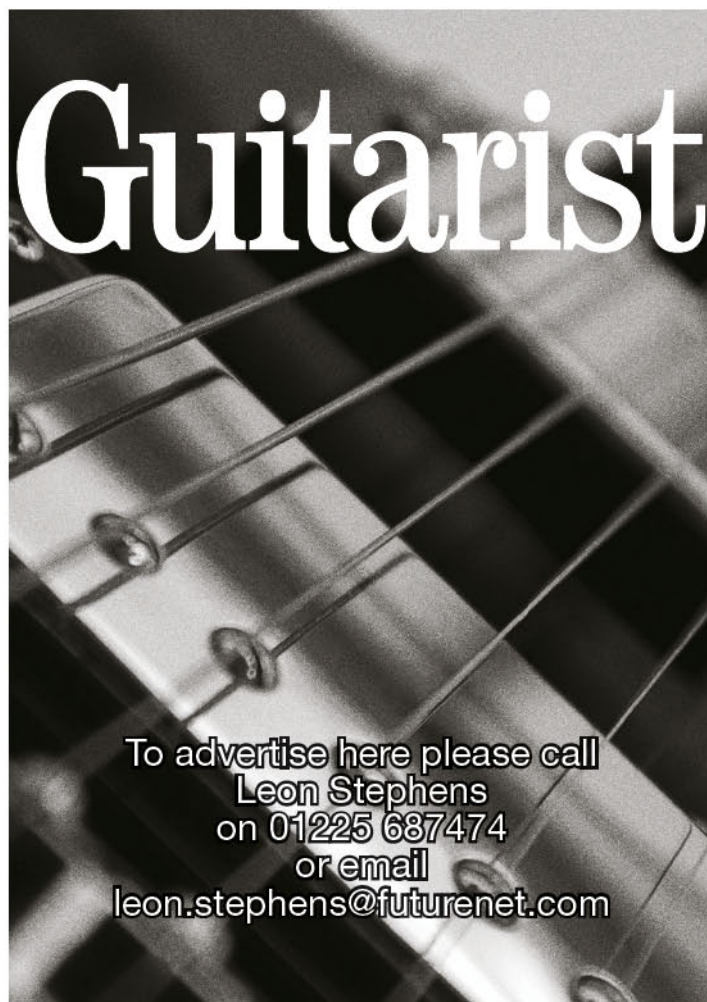
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Jamie Dickson

Guitarist editor Jamie is as happy with steel wool in his hand as he is with Steely Dan in his headphones, and loves vintage-gear restoration and ambitious signal chains.



Dave Burrluck

Guitarist's assiduous reviews editor is also the author of numerous guitar books. Very handy with a fret file and indeed any aspect of a finely fettled six-string.



Mick Taylor

Ex-editor of *Guitarist*, Mick has wielded Allen keys, screwdrivers and sandpaper 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

Guitarist's amplifier specialist has built up a wealth of experience gained from collecting, repairing and restoring all kinds of guitar-related audio.

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Charlie is considering setup options for a twin-amp rig

TWO AMPAMASSA?

I'm in the process of setting up a rig similar to the one Joe Bonamassa uses on his *Live At The Borderline* DVD (2013), but obviously smaller and on a budget. I'm planning to run a Marshall DSL 50 and a Vintage Modern 2266 50-watt into a stereo 2x12 cabinet. I was wondering if you guys could suggest a stereo cab that could handle a pair of 50-watt head, and I would also welcome any advice on an amp switcher: the Radial Big Shot ABY and Fender ABY are my current options. My pedals are a Boss TU-3, Dunlop Hendrix Fuzz Face, Ibanez TS-808 Tube Screamer, along with a Line 6 DL4 (in the loop).

Charlie Bolland, via email

We've touched on this quite a bit in recent months, Charlie: we love using two amps. As you're no doubt aware, Joe

tends to use one amp as the base, 'rhythm' tone that tends to be EQ'd relatively light in the midrange. The second amp will have more of a mid hump to give clarity and cut to solos and single-note stuff.

Marshall's own 1936 cabinet can be used stereo and handles 75 watts per side. There are various other 2x12s that offer the same functionality, our favourites include the Mesa Recto 2x12 (compact but it sounds massive) and the custom options offered by Zilla cabs. As for switchers, it all depends how much functionality you want. The Radial you mention will get the job done and has everything you need, including switching phase and eliminating ground-loop hum – two essential things to consider when using two or more amps. Lehle also makes excellent switching devices – check out the Little Dual.

Getting more involved, you might want to check out TheGigRig's range of switching devices. The all-singing-and-dancing G2 enables you to handle your amp switching and effects combinations with single-touch switching.

OCTAVE FOR WES

I need a good octave pedal for Wes Montgomery-style playing: plain and straightforward, no 'bells and whistles'. I don't need simulated dive-bombs, whatever they are, and nor do I need the detune of doom or a pedal emblazoned with skulls. I've tried a Mooer Octave pedal but it sounds a bit 'synthetic' to me. I just need a straight-ahead octave-up. If I don't get one soon, I shall have to resort to improving my playing to the point where I don't need one. At my age, I ain't gonna live that long...

Nigel Whiting, via email

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com

What Should I Buy?

Amp for good ol' rock

Q 20 years ago this would have been a very simple answer, I reckon! I'm looking for a simple amp for classic rock. There are so many amp brands on the market these days, I'm now very confused. I play a Les Paul most of the time, with a Strat on hand when the mood takes me. I like Southern rock, ZZ Top, Thin Lizzy – all the usual suspects where there is a singing guitar solo and a chunky riff. I've been using a Peavey Valve King and a few pedals with my band, but it's not simple. You see what I want, don't you? Simple!

John Monk, via email

A We hear you, John. You haven't given us much of idea of budget, but you're in a band so we can leap straight to 50 or 100 watts. As to which works best, we find it's less about volume and more about feel. If you want plenty of compression, harmonics and more spongy power delivery, go for the former. If you want bolder dynamics and more headroom, go for the latter.

It also sounds like you're craving a full-on classic rock experience, so we'll have no messing about with small cabs: it's a 4x12 or nothing...



Laney Lionheart L50H £1,099

This two-channel amp really surprised us when we reviewed it back in issue 353. It runs five (yes, five) EL34s in single-ended class A operation for super-smooth tones spanning bold cleans to classic rock drive. It's a unique design that rewards touch-sensitive playing: well worth a serious demo.



Friedman Small Box Head £2,299

This is stepping into American boutique territory with a name that's the current hot poop among many rock players. Channel one is all about Marshall Plexi-style sounds, while channel two heads off into the higher-gain modded-Marshall-style sounds on which Friedman has built his name. Lots of money, lots of amp.

Marshall 2555X Silver Jubilee £1,199

Head to our YouTube channel and watch Mick basically wetting his pants with this. It's a long way from modern boutique, it has its quirks... but there are precious few amps that balance power and usability with drive and clarity like this. Just add a 4 x 12 and wind it up for instant rock satisfaction.



Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com



Tronical's auto-tuning system has plenty of options for different models of guitar

Come on Nigel, we encourage you wholeheartedly to improve that technique, no matter how old you are! Playing a basic octave pattern across two strings isn't beyond anyone. Also, the sound of the thumb stroking across the strings (with the muted string between) is every bit as important in creating the Wes sound as playing the notes themselves; we suspect that's what you mean about the Mooer sounding 'synthetic' because you're just getting an extra octave-up note with none of the other character of the sound.

How do you do it? Look at the neck in groups of two strings. Your groups are: low E and D; A and G; D and B; G and high E. Start with the low E and D, put your first finger on the 3rd fret of the low E string, and your fourth finger on the 5th fret of the D string (you should be fretting two G notes at this point). Now brush your strumming thumb across the strings, making sure your index finger is damping everything except the E and D strings. Once you've got that, you can start moving that position up and down a few semitones to get used to moving the shape as one. An hour will really get you going.

Then over coming days, try moving on to the other groups of strings, to the point where you can start picking out some basic intervals, perhaps a major scale – do a half-hour per day for a month and you won't believe the progress you'll make. A little tip: sliding from a semi-

tone or tone below to the target pair of notes will make you start sounding very Wes-like.

So, sorry Nigel, this is tough love. An octave pedal is a cheat too far for us. We sincerely hope you live long enough, and the work will pay off in no time at all. Happy Wes-ing!

AUTO-TUNE DILEMMA

I would like to know if any of the TronicalTune-type systems will fit a Fender Stratocaster-type Big Lou guitar headstock? I've asked Tronical and Big Lou but had no reply. I need a wide neck guitar that I can fit an auto-tune system to, as I find it very hard to tune a guitar. I'm okay once the guitar is in tune and just needs retuning, but if I restring it, I'm lost. If it won't fit the Big Lou, could you suggest a solidbody guitar with a very wide nut and string spacing (1 7/8-inch ideally)?

Ron Preece, via email

There are many different mounting options for the retrofit Tronical tuners, Ron, and there are corresponding templates available as a download from the company's website. It's a single mount for all six tuners, so the spacing between them is set. It's therefore crucial that the tuner spacing/mount matches the position of the headstock's ferrules. We contacted Big Lou who told us that its first-to-last ferrule measurement (centre-to-centre) is 123.2mm, and that each ferrule is 24.6mm apart (again, centre to centre). Tronical makes two options



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RIGHT Paul asks whether Blackstar's excellent ID:Core Beam practice amp would make a good recording companion

for Stratocaster-type necks and its Type C option looks like it might fit the bill with a centre-to-centre headstock ferrule gap of 24.4mm. It's there or thereabouts, so while we wouldn't say for certain that it would fit, the dimensions suggest that it *should*.

Failing that, in a move that surprised us, Gibson increased its fingerboard width for many 2015 USA models. The SG Standard, for example, has a 45.9mm width nut (1.79 inches), although the string spacing hasn't been increased to the same extent. They're really worth a try, however, not least because they come with the latest Gibson G Force automatic tuning system built in. We should also mention that custom parts suppliers such as Warmoth will build an extra-wide neck and help you make the right decisions throughout the whole process.

START RECORDING

I've been reading *Guitarist* magazine since the mid-1980s and for the first time in about 20 years, I find myself cast adrift and bandless. I saw your recent review of the Blackstar ID:Core Beam and noted that you said it could be used for recording guitar. As someone with almost no knowledge of recording, I don't want to get into the whole software and complicated (as I see it) recording technology I'm used to seeing in your magazine. I also don't want the expense of interfaces and microphones.

I'd like to try recording, however, and am looking for an easy route in. Initially, perhaps, I would like to record over some purchased backing tracks but hopefully with a good (CD quality-ish) result, possibly

adding a microphone for vocals and so on. Would something like the Blackstar enable me to do this? Obviously, I'd also use the Blackstar for practice and as a media player.

Paul, Leeds

We'll try and keep this as simple as possible, Paul, so apologies if any of it is too simplistic. If you want to record, you need two things: first, something to create the sound you want to capture and; second, something to record that sound to. The Blackstar ID:Core Beam will do the first thing but not the second: it can't record anything in itself.

You have a few options in terms of what to record to. You can either mic up the speakers and send that signal to a recording program on your computer, or use any kind of standalone recording device (such as a Tascam Portastudio or similar). Using your computer would mean you need a mic, a cable and some way of plugging it in to the computer (an interface). Using a standalone recorder means you can plug a mic/direct output straight in with no need for a separate interface. However, you don't want to get into mics and so on, so the next option is to use a compatible computer program and connect the ID:Core Beam with a USB cable, where it essentially becomes its own audio interface, enabling you to record direct. You're also not keen on that route, but it's the least problematic.

You can also connect digitally to an iPhone, iPad or other tablet/smartphone and use whatever app you like to make the recording: GarageBand for iPad/iPhone is extremely popular and extremely good.



Today's software has an initial learning curve, but is so much easier to use than that of old

Lots of people tend to choose the computer-based systems because the big screen makes things simple to understand, plus you have all the options for mixing, adjusting EQ and of course outputting to whatever format you like. There is an initial learning curve, but today's software is so much easier to use than that of old. So if there's already a computer in your home, that would make most sense. If you don't have a computer and are considering a standalone unit, be prepared for lots of buried menus and navigating a tiny screen: not for the faint-hearted!

BRIDGE POSITION, SLIGHT RETURN

I read the question in Q&A [issue 395] about 'incorrect' Gibson Les Paul bridge positioning with some interest. If the pickup routs and bridge positions are CNC cut – which they almost certainly are on a modern USA Gibson – the bridge *can't* be in

the wrong place. Hypothetically, however, there's a small margin for variance with exactly where the neck ends up in the pocket when set. And because the fingerboard is fretted before it goes on the neck, there's another tiny margin for variance when it's glued on. Those two variances together could be enough to mean the nut – and therefore the bridge – are now in the 'wrong' place. Which is to say the bridge is theoretically in the right place as per the CNC rout, but the neck and fingerboard positioning have thrown it out enough to make the guitar un-intonatable. In order to ensure it never happened, ideally, you'd set the neck first and not site the bridge until the fingerboard and nut positions were set in stone. That's my opinion – I'd be interested to hear if anyone has more to add.

Anonymous, via email

Thanks Anonymous – do any other Les Paul lovers fancy weighing in on the LP setup and intonation debate? Let us know.

Email us your questions: guitarist@futurenet.com

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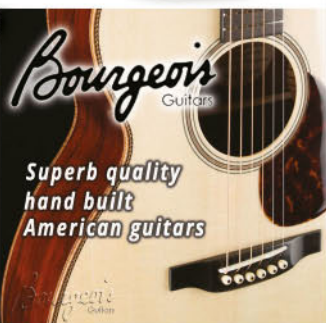


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Old Gold

'55 Gibson ES-350T

Photography *Joby Sessions*

When it was launched back in 1955, the Byrdland had the distinction of being Gibson's first ever Thinline model, featuring a body depth of 2.25 inches as opposed to the L-5's 3.38. The slimmed-down design proved a hit with guitarists of the day, bridging the gap between solidbody playability and archtop tonality. Accordingly, the ES-350T – the T denoting Thinline – was quickly developed as a more affordable offering, owing to the guitar's laminated maple top, rather than the Byrdland's carved spruce.

This example from Guitars: The Museum in Umeå, Sweden is taken from the first year of ES-350T production – at this point, the guitar featured P-90 pickups, but these were replaced by humbuckers in 1957, while the Venetian cutaway sharpened into a Florentine in late-1960. Although it has the same 597mm (23.5-inch) scale as the Byrdland, it retains some visual appointments from its 350 forebear, including the split parallelogram inlays and the crown that adorns the headstock.

In the mid-50s, you could snag an ES-350T in Golden Sunburst (as shown here) or Natural finishes for \$395 in contrast to the Byrdland's \$550 – although by today's money, that 'affordable' ES-350T works out as \$3,487 (£2,281), a reminder that, price-wise, things weren't always better in the golden era!



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Blues Headlines

Neville Marten is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks available to download online



The late, great BB King, holding the audience in the palm of his hand

The Blues Boy

Difficulty ★★★★★

15 mins per example

Tutor: Neville Marten | Gear used: Gibson 1963 ES-335 50th Anniversary Reissue, Vox AC15



ALTHOUGH not unexpected due to his poor recent health, it still came as a shock when BB King recently passed away.

Within the blues world there has been no more titanic a figure since the giants of the early-to-mid-20th century – Lonnie Johnson, Robert Johnson, Sonny Boy, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bill Broonzy, Son House, Memphis Minnie, T-Bone Walker, and so on. BB ranks alongside them all with an influence that can be heard in the playing of virtually any current guitar player – in any style.

I mention T-Bone and Lonnie since this issue we will focus not on the legendary

'BB Box' that dominates almost any BB King lesson, because that became his favourite area of the neck in later years and made him instantly recognisable. Instead, I'm going to delve back to the 50s years where the Lonnie/T-Bone influence was clearly heard.

Back then, BB played mainly around shapes 1 and 2 of the minor pentatonic scale, bringing in major tonality by adding the major 3rd directly after the minor, as a pianist would do. He developed T-Bone and Lonnie's use of the 6th and 9th to create, along with major 3rd and 5th, an 'uber' blues scale. His vibrato, too, was far less developed and less distinct than the strong wobble of the 60s and beyond.

Sonically, his mid-50s work made use of the Gibson ES-350 (as Chuck Berry also did) and even a Fender Esquire. So, his tone mixed the sharpness of those guitars with a darker edge that came from using 'tweed' Fender amps.

If you think these four licks don't sound very BB (and I'm not saying they are carbon copies), go back and listen to old tracks such as *Early In The Morning* or *You Upset Me Baby* from that era and I hope you'll at least hear a similarity – and notice how his approach evolved since those days.

The guitar world is most definitely a poorer place without this great ambassador. BB, you will be greatly missed!

Example 1

THIS doesn't sound like modern BB at all! But he'd often play repetitive, 'shape 1' licks like this in his early 50s songs. You really can hear T-Bone in all of this issue's examples – none of which will present problems, although there might be a few moves you haven't tried. If that's the case, make sure that once you've learned mine you tweak them – just as BB did with T-Bone's.

Example 2

NOTICE how this lick follows the change from the I chord to the IV by broadly outlining an A shape CAGED idea at the 5th and 7th frets. I like the move across the ♭5 and back, which makes the lick sound quite jazzy and a little more Lonnie Johnson in style. It would sound great in a rock 'n' roll solo, too – so it's quite likely that Scotty Moore drank from the same influence pool as BB!

Example 3

HERE's that ♭5 in action again. Also note how the major 3rd and 6th are brought in – you could view this lick as being broadly built around an E-shape CAGED figure. That 6th note (the F#) is a sound the jazzy blues players such as Lonnie Johnson and T-Bone used a lot; you can also hear it in Chuck Berry and others – Chuck was a huge fan of T-Bone's, too.

Example 4

PICK up a Strat, pile on the distortion and this is not a zillion miles away from Stevie Ray! The little trill works well either on the 7th or 6th fret (so a 9th or a 9th – B or B_b). Notice how the whole lick strongly outlines that E major shape with added 6th at the 5th fret, and how the major 3rd is almost always preceded by the minor 3rd – as adopted by Clapton, Green and many others.

Hear It Here

Lonnie Johnson

A Life In Music

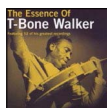


A lesson in guitar history – not just blues history. Check out the early acoustic work, recorded before Django Reinhardt

switched from violin to guitar and hear where the Belgian got it. All four discs in this set show just how hugely influential he was.

T-Bone Walker

The Essence Of T-Bone Walker



This album shows the direct link between Lonnie, T-Bone and BB. His fluent style mixed the licks of Charlie Christian and Lonnie

Johnson into a captivating, instantly 'gettable' electric guitar style. Ever wondered where Chuck Berry got his licks? Look no further.

BB King

The Best Of The Early Years



Both the tracks I mentioned are on this record, which is more about the songs and the playing than the showmanship and collaborative work, which did take over during BB's post-70s career. It's where Clapton, Green and others got their licks.

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Spector Custom Bubinga 6 string active bass. Home use only. £600. Call Simon on 07966 556056 or email simon.willies@ntlworld.com

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TC-Helicon Play Acoustic FX pedal, as new in box, unwanted item. £220ovno. Call 07590 231195 or email mikemorgan_54@msn.com Hull

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